

~ Day 66 ~

Sitting in the covers of numerous animal furs, with a very naked drow girl snoring softly away to my side, I smiled. It had turned morning by now, and the hustle and bustle outside told me that most of the tribe had already started preparing for the migration.

Ever since the fight with the human general, I didn't get much time to go over the notifications and gains as a lot of things had to be done before I could. First was the meeting with the glade guardian, then escorting the tribe back and informing them about our plans, and just when I thought I was done and had time to rest, I was assaulted by an obsidian-skinned beauty.

Pulling up the notifications I had been putting off, I quickly scanned through them.

[Skill - **Appraisal** has reached LVL: 11]

[Skill - **Blood, Shadow Magic** has reached LVL: 9]

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

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

[Skill - **Onyx Body** has reached LVL: 3]

[Skill - **Obscurement** has reached LVL: 9]

[Skill - **Greater Paralyze** has reached LVL: 4]

[Skill - **Silent Flying** has reached LVL: 7]

[Skill - **Swift Flight** has reached LVL: 9]

[Skill - **Infusing Slash** has reached levels 4-5]

[Skill - **Spell Formation** has reached LVL: 9]

[Skill - **Blood-Born** has reached levels 4-5]

[Skill - Lesser Eldritch Vitality has reached LVL: 4]

[Skill - Shadow Manifestation has reached levels 5-6]

[**Advancement Path**]

[ALERT - You have reached the threshold of two attributes and can now choose an **Advancement Path!**]

[**Advancement Paths** available - **Vitality, Magic Power, Vitality/Magic Power**]

[WARNING - You can choose a combination advancement path with a maximum of two attributes, and choosing only one attribute will permanently lock you into the chosen advancement path. Choices are permanent.]

[Do you want to choose an **Advancement Path?**]

[Yes/No]

As I had expected, the recent fight was enough to push me over the attribute threshold for magic power.

-Status!-

Status					
Information		Attributes		Traits, Titles, and Skills	
-Name-	"Xavier Tal'chor"	STR	26 ⇒ 28	Skills	25
-Race-	Strigoi (Blood Fiend)	VIT	115 ⇒ 122	Traits	8
-Sex-	Male	AGI	90 ⇒ 94	Titles	3
-Rank-	D	DEX	32 ⇒ 33	Skillpoints	9 ⇒ 13
-Level-	8/50	INT	32 ⇒ 33	Resistances	
Health	872/872	CHR	34 ⇒ 35	Physical Resistance	23 ⇒ 24
Stamina	280/280	WILL	38	Magical Resistance	26
Mana	311/311	MAG	96 ⇒ 102	Mental Resistance	20

I didn't know what to expect from choosing an advancement path as no other information was forthcoming. I had even broached the subject with Lily on our trip home, however, to my surprise, she simply said she couldn't tell me. But it wasn't just because she didn't want to tell me, I knew that from her tone alone.

Instead, it appeared that while she knew of it, she didn't know anything in particular about it. Her own parents and elders had apparently already gone through this **Advancement Path** ordeal themselves, but it was a wide-known fact that those who have gone through one, physically couldn't speak about it. It was rather ominous that some unknown power or entity kept the lid closed on the information, but one thing was for certain from Lily's words; They all came out more powerful.

Looking at the three choices before me, I already knew which one I wanted to pick. I had already made myself firm on my stance about this, the first time I was introduced to these so-called **Advancement Paths**, and just because choosing a combination path with two attributes instead of the easier single attribute path would mean more hardships down the road, that wasn't going to make me back down.

Taking a deep breath, I chose.

-Advancement Path, Vitality/Magic Power!-

[Choice confirmed]

[Sending consciousness to the spirit realm]

"Sending consciousness to the spirit rea-? OH FU-!" - Me

Reading the prompt out loud with confusion in my voice, I was suddenly buffeted by a boundless pressure. While it was worlds beyond that of what my own aura could ever dream to produce, it didn't utterly shatter mine, but instead just enveloped it. The pressure's grasp was warm and relaxing, however, it had an unshakeable grip around my aura, not allowing

for even the slightest budge. Those were the only thoughts that managed to run through my head before everything went dark.

Opening my eyes, I was met with a sight wholly alien to anything I've seen before. For an endless stretch in each direction, nothing was to be seen. No horizon, no hills or uneven ground, just a slightly opaque and reflective surface was the only thing that separated the ground from the cloudless azure-blue sky.

The surface I was standing on was like that of an undisturbed surface of a lake, however, my steps only caused slight ripples that quickly died out before they spread out far.

"Spirit realm, huh?" - Me

I was confused as to what was happening, but I panicked upon suddenly realizing that I could neither use my skills nor conjure my mana. Even my supernatural strength and speed was utterly gone. I felt like a human again. The fear and worry quickly turned to unbridled fury, the unwavering flame within my soul that was my will flared with radiant indignation of being stripped of my powers.

It felt like I had once again been put in shackles and everything I had fought for had come to naught. Hatred exploded with unbridled intensity, and the flames of my soul could be seen flickering in my eyes. The air started shuddering and large ripples spread out through the reflective surface, undulating to create even bigger ripples as they went.

With this formless pressure exuding from me, strength slowly returned to my body. However, this was distinctly not the strength of my attributes and various powers, but instead the pure conviction of my will and soul.

"Argh- sheesh, calm down already. Nobody is stripping you of your powers, you simply can't use them in the spirit realm. You aren't in your physical body." - ???

Whirling around on my feet, I locked eyes with an entity that was slowly emerging from the reflective surface. It was a beautiful blue-skinned woman with translucent wings on her back like those of a fairy. She would've been mesmerizing to any ordinary man, but I didn't lower my guard and instead took a fighting stance.

"Stop it, it's futile. You have no power in this realm. I'm not a simple existence like you morta- KLEUK!" - ???

She was suddenly cut off as I disappeared in a blur. She seemed to expect my action and could easily track my movements with her eyes, however, she was still just standing there with her hands on her hips and a smirk on her lips as she prattled on.

She was acting like I wouldn't even be able to touch her, but her eyes widened in shock and incredulity when I had in one swift motion grasped tight around her throat and lifted her into the air. She was lifted high off the ground as I was a great deal taller than her, but I simply raised her directly to my eye level without any effort.

"H-how?!" - ???

Looking at me wide-eyed like I was some kind of abomination, she struggled against my unflinching hold. It was obvious that I had done something beyond her expectations, yet, I had no idea what it specifically was.

"Your w-w-will! Y-you've manifested i-it?! " - ???

"Shut up." - Me

I clenched my grip on her throat, punctuating my words. I looked around warily, making sure that no other sudden appearances would happen before I lessened the strength of my grasp around her throat, causing a coughing fit from the woman.

"What is this place, who are you, and why exactly am I not allowed to use my powers here?"
- Me

"Let go of me, you filthy mortal!" - ???

I just sighed at the false bravado as the glint of fear in her eyes was unmistakable to my experienced gaze.

"I suggest you stop with that snarky tone." - Me

It wasn't intentional, but I actually growled the words out. But it definitely had an effect as she suddenly paled a shade lighter.

"T-this is the spirit realm, and I'm the c-curator for your advancement path s-selection." - ???

Scrutinizing her with my predatory eyes, I simply nodded for her to continue.

"It isn't because your power are being restrained here that you can't use them, but it's because you aren't in your physical body right now. It is only your consciousness that is currently present here, meaning that you can't affect the spiritual plane that is the spirit realm." - ???

"Then explain why I'm currently holding your life in my hands. This realm doesn't seem all that insubstantial as you're letting on." - Me

There was obvious anger in the blue-skinned woman's eyes, but also a slight wonder hidden behind the emotion as she scoured me up and down. Sighing exasperatedly, she locked eyes with me.

"You've manifested your will, i.e. meaning that you've essentially substantiated your presence here as an actual entity. Since your will is an extension of your consciousness and soul,

you've forcibly made yourself tangible with just the strength of your will. Here, you're as strong as your will is, but for some reason, you will is beyond that any mortal of your power should wield..." - ???

"Alright, then. You still haven't told me who you really are." - Me

Extreme reluctance was written all over her face, but the sudden tightening of man grip was all that was needed to make her spill the beans.

"Stop! Fine, fine, I'll tell you. However, I shouldn't even have made myself known to you in the first place... urgh, I'm going to be in so much trouble.

"Get on with it." - Me

"Calm down already. I'm Elimendrea, an aetherborne." - Elimendrea

"Okay Eli, what the hell is an aetherborne?" - Me

"Hey! Who said you could call m-?" - Elimendrea

She suddenly croaked her last word as I shot her a look.

"Eli. Eli is fine." - Eli

"I'm a spirit, a lesser one to be exact. But that's as much I can tell you!" - Eli

I shot her another look, my patience obviously thinning.

"I serious! I literally can't divulge this information. It goes against my very soul, so if really want to find out you'll have to do some digging on your own." - Eli

I wouldn't have believed that if not for already being told of how the information of Advancement Paths was restricted by Lily.

"Alright. What happens next." - Me

"How about you let g- ouch!" - Eli

I simply dropped her from my grasp for she finished speaking, letting her fall to the ground on her ass. As she was rubbing her ass sorely, I shot her a questioning look.

"Aren't you supposed to be a spirit, like do you even have the sensation of pain?" - Me

"Of course I have. I'm a living being just like you! My realm is as physical to me as your own realm is to you. It's just that generally if either of us were to visit each other's worlds, then we would be intangible as we have no actual substance." - Eli

"Hmm, interesting. Well, let's get on with this. Is there some trial or something similar I have to pass?" - Me

"Humph, stupid mortal pretty boy." - Eli

She mumbled.

"What was that? - Me

She wasn't only mumbling in a low voice, but I still easily picked up on it.

"Nothing!" - Eli

She was now blushing, embarrassment clashing with anger.

"There's no trail, you just have to choose from the available options." - Eli

"What options?" - Me

Instead of answering my question, Eli instead made a swish with her arm out to the side. With this action, black silhouettes of figures suddenly started emerging from the reflective surface as Eli originally did. Although the scene was ominous, my danger sense didn't alert me to any potential danger, so I just kept calm with my senses peaked and guard up.

There were hundreds upon hundreds of these silhouettes that all encircled me as the center, all ordered in seemingly random positions that spread outwards. They were all facing me, and I could feel their hollow gazes trained upon me. While it was disconcerting as I couldn't distinguish their features, they all somehow felt familiar. A bit too familiar...

"What are these?" - Me

"They're all paths, and you'll have to choose one." - Eli

"How?" - Me

"Find the ones that aren't locked, meaning those who aren't silhouettes. Approach them, and you'll find out the rest. This is as far I can help you, I have to return now." - Eli

I just absentmindedly nodded at her, but just before she disappeared into the ground, I called out.

"Thanks for the help Eli." - Me

The only response I got was a haughty harrumph, but the slight blush on her blue cheeks that she tried to hide didn't escape my senses.

Looking around amongst the various silhouettes of all sizes and figures, I suddenly found a grouping of figures in the distance that weren't silhouettes. Approaching them, I saw eight figures of varying appearances, however, they all shared one distinctive feature that stunned me.

They were all me...