

## ~ Day 65 ~

< Illesandre Ardent >

From the plateau of a hill overlooking the land beneath that led up to the Glades of Mordria, stood I, a grim but determined glint in my eyes. It was dawn and the twin suns on the horizon were reflecting their morning splendor on the armor of hundreds of soldiers and knights organizing themselves in neat and ordered formations.

To my side, the heavy hoves of another steed could be heard pulling up to my side.

"It's almost time, the ranks are forming. We will soon march." - Garret

A rough and gravelly voice said.

Even though his tone of voice and way of speaking portrayed almost no emotion or thought, I still easily picked up on the slight hesitancy hidden well in the general's words. Turning my head to look at the stocky and heavily armored man that also was my third uncle, I wiped the look of grim determination from my face and gave him a confident grin.

"What's wrong old man? The old bones not up to killing some greenskins anymore?" - Me

Sighing at the utter lack of decorum from his niece, he just shook his head, causing the metal plating of his armor to rattle subtly.

"This greenskin settlement is small and will not take any great amount of effort to cull, but our numbers are too few. It will definitely cost a few of our own soldier's lives since we won't

be able to secure a completely decisive victory. It might also not be such a wise choice to march into the wastelands with this army, however, small." - Garret

"I know you're used to commanding the country's armies, third uncle. But it was your own brother who assigned you to look after me even though I don't need a guardian anymore. I'm 22 for crying out loud, and he still treats me like a little girl!" - Me

"You're still young and inexperienced. You've gone unheeded by the fact that we've just a lost a squadron of thirty abled scouts. Why are you hasting into all of this? We should retreat and regroup with the rest of the family's army." - Garret

Hearing the overly protective middle-aged man, I scoffed loudly. Utterly ignoring his concern and his so-called-experience that my father always liked to prattle on about for some reason.

"No, I was the one who was put in charge. This is my chance to prove myself, and I won't back down just because you're afraid of some club-wielding barbarian monsters." - Me

Breaking eye contact with the man that looked like he had just aged a few decades, I glanced at the lithe woman on a black steed to my left. I couldn't help but smirk condescendingly upon seeing the bitch's troubled expression.

"Oh, what's wrong dear? You still won't spill the beans on what you're so desperately hiding? Once we subjugate this tribe and find out whatever happened here, I will drag both you and that pompous familia of yours through the mud." - Me

"Your arrogance and blind ambition will get you killed, sooner rather than later. This petty vengeance you have for me, seemingly for no real reason, isn't it tiring? Just be because you lived in my shadow at the academy, unable to surpass me. You've, for all these years, constantly been out for my neck, but for what end?" - Lily

"Shut it bitch! I didn't bring you out here for you to mouth off some bullshit at me, but to see your own world crumble before your very eyes." - Me

She didn't respond, only shaking her head exhaustingly, now looking out into the distance with a listless gaze.

"The troops are in position." - Garret

"Good. We march, now." - Me

Sending off the courier to his side to ride ahead and relay the order, we all rode down to join the army. However, we didn't even reach halfway to the treeline of the glades before the just shy of a thousand soldiers, including us, all halted to a stop.

From the treeline of thick foliage, it seemed that the morning light that shone upon the trees started to be swallowed, dimming and leaving only the cold embrace of darkness. It was like the forest was at nighttime while the whole world outside was in the daytime, creating an oddly mesmerizing phenomenon.

But before I could voice any orders or questions, another change occurred. Fog-like jet black shadows slowly streamed out of the forest, like sinister tendrils consuming light where they went. The whole scene was disconcerting, to say the least, and no small amount of the battle-hardened soldiers looked extremely apprehensive.

The rustle of tree crowns and the creaking of wood being pushed to the side sounded out, heralding the approach of something very large. Looking to my side, worry clear on my face, I looked at the now very serious Garret; intently staring at the forest.

"Blasted magic..." - Garret

Hearing that we were possible against a magic-user, and one of a scale that could produce these effects, my worry reached new levels. The very next thing that happened proved that they weren't unfounded at all.

Pushing trees aside, snapping them like twigs, emerged probably the most horrifying creatures I've ever laid my eyes on. It was three huge and bulky gelatinous crimson creatures. All quadrupeds, occupying the same figure as Scalehide Gorillas, just many, many times bigger. However, their heads were anything but those of a Scalehide Gorilla, instead having what seemed to be the skulls of some horse creatures. But even the skulls were made of the same red gelatinous substance that their bodies were made of.

From each head, or rather skull, huge and broad antlers extended in each direction. With the sinister darkness that seeped from the forest itself and the beastly abominations, it set at an ominous atmosphere. But what really made it all culminate into a horrifying sight, were the dozens of decapitated human heads dangling off the crimson abomination's antlers like some twisted decoration.

"T-the scouts..." - Me

Sitting casually upon the thick neck of one the abominations, flanked by the crown of its antlers, were a startling beautiful man. His looks even causing me a moment of forgetfulness of the dire situation before I managed to snap out of it.

Standing in between the middle and left-most monster abomination was a stunning cute and mesmerizing obsidian-skinned beauty. Form-fitting black leather armor, elongated ears, and most notably, ruby eyes.

"A d-drow?" - Me

I had never seen a drow before since the Mordrian kingdom was very far away from their indigenous home. I had only read about them and seen illustration before, but never in my wildest dreams had I thought I would see one.

The other figure of notice was a hulking grey-skinned orc. To be honest, he was like an orc, with its lean and cut figure, but inhabiting an ogre's mass and size. From just looking at the massive greenskin, or whatever it was, it felt like he radiated both pure unadulterated life while simultaneously also a potent sense of death. If not for the sense of vigorous life from the hulking monster, then I would though it an undead minion of a blasted necromancer.

As the precession of this both motley and horrifying group approached, I saw the languid smile on the handsome man's face, causing a deep shudder to run through my body. Stopping not far from the now dark treeline, the man jumped elegantly off the monster he was riding. Turning stiffly, I asked the gruff-looking Garret, all notes of petty childish arrogance and egotism completely gone from my voice.

"What do we do?" - Me

"Those smaller monsters should be high E-rank, closing in on D-." - Garret

"Really?" - Me

Hearing this, I was suddenly relieved. I had thought that their ominous appearance was promising a lot more power than that. I had only reached a ranking of D- myself, but I had no talent in being able to sense the aura of other creatures to determine their power by that alone, or at least accurately. And from this distance, I had no hope of it. However, the apparent proclamation that two of six monsters weren't all that powerful didn't warrant Garret to lower his guard as he still had a very serious expression plastered on his gruff face.

"What's wrong? (Gasp), don't tell me that the other monsters are higher rank than you uncle?!" - Me

Having somebody like my uncle, Garret Ardant, take you seriously was no easy feat. He was one of the three generals of Mordria, leading armies of thousands upon thousands. He stood at the pinnacle of Modria, being one of the eight D+ ranked humans in the whole country. While he definitely wasn't the stronger of the eight, being one of the weakest among them, he was still a D+ ranked human. One wielding strength that anybody under the D-rank couldn't even fathom. The only reason he was here to babysit me being because he was looking to retire from the military before long.

But he was still taking this man, seriously...

"No, they aren't. Those huge crimson goliaths should be weak D- ranked monsters, and I don't think he's higher ranked. Maybe closing in on D, but I'm not sure." - Garret

Now utterly confused by my uncle's words, I stared incredulously at him. If the highest monsters here were only of the D- rank, then why was he acting so cautiously? Although I didn't wield the power of somebody within the D-rank, I knew the power difference between D- and D+ was like H to D. They simply weren't comparable.

But before I could voice my confusion, my uncle spoke first.

"Those big crimson monsters aren't actually monsters. They're summons of magic." - Garret

With the realization hitting me like a truck, newfound wariness sprouted within my heart whenever I looked at that dangerously handsome man. A D- ranked magic-wielding monster, could only mean one thing. It was at least at the 4th-tier... making it exponentially more dangerous than any other monster of the same rank.

Seeing that the man was approaching alone, Garret suddenly jumped off his steed.

"What are you doing uncle?!" - Me

"Stay here, he obviously wants to talk." - Garret

"B-but uncle, what if-" - Me

"Stop it, this isn't the time for games. If worse comes to worst, then retreat. This is an order as your general." - Garret