

~ Day 65 ~

< Xavier Tal'chor >

Casually strolling through the open plains, I eyed the stocky man in heavy armor similarly making his way towards me. Although my languid expression told of disregard, I was anything but underestimating this middle-aged man.

His well-controlled aura restrained to not wildly flail about told me all about his militant and orderly poise. But underneath it, was an overwhelming power.

-Appraisal!-

Appraisal - Garret					
Information		Attributes		Traits, Titles, and Skills	
-Name-	"Garret"	STR	162	Skills	???
-Race-	Human	VIT	120	Traits	???
-Sex-	Male	AGI	82	Titles	???
-Rank-	D+	DEX	85	Resistances	
-Level-	80	INT	???		
Health	653/653	CHR	???	Physical Resistance	???
Stamina	420/422	WILL	???	Magical Resistance	???
Mana	0/0	MAG	???	Mental Resistance	???
Class				Tier	
-Main Class-	Highlander	5			
-Sub Class-	Master Leader	4			

This human was the single most strongest human, I had ever met. His status alone was shocking, but I knew better than to base his power off that alone. The true danger laid in his skills and mastery, not attributes.

Stopping halfway between both my forces and his, I scrutinize the stocky man who was still approaching. Short cut black hair. Stern and cut facial features with a bit of stubble that had splashes of grey hair mixed in. Brown eyes that radiated a sense of calm and order, like any true leader. Thick plated mental armor that protected his entire body except for his head, and one large intricately designed claymore strapped to his back.

The man simply screamed army general.

He stopped once we were less than a dozen meters apart, equally scrutinizing me with his own gaze. Slight confusion suddenly appeared on his weathered face before he broke the silence.

"An elf? With damned monsters?" - Garret

Hearing his words, I shook my head self-deprecatingly.

"Really? Just because of these ears and everybody suddenly thinks I'm an elf... it's honestly getting quite annoying." - Me

There was an obvious surprise on the stern man's face when he heard that I was speaking fluent Mordrian.

"What are you then? If you're not of the enlightened races and associate with monsters, then you must be from the monster society. But you're overqualified for these parts of the wastelands, what is your kind doing here?" - Garret

There were quite a few interesting nuggets of information in what this man called Garret had just said, however, this wasn't the time for a lecture.

"What I am doesn't matter, what *you're* doing here, does." - Me

He scrunched his eyes, evaluating what to say next.

"We're here to investigate the outer reaches of the Wastelands the Glades of Mordria." - Garret

"That's where our conflict of interests emerge. I will not allow you into my territory. I do not wish any further dispute with you humans, however, I will not remain passive if you decide to have my warnings go unheeded." - Me

His eyes turned cold.

"We humans do not see kindly to negotiating with monsters." - Garret

"Well, neither do monsters when human armies invade the domain of monsters." - Me

This was something I had learned from the four captive humans that we had found escaping from the Dusk Swamps. There was a reason why the human countries surrounding the wastelands didn't just perform large-scale raids and invasions on the monsters and vice versa. There was a very thin balance between the humans and the monsters, so when regarding such sensitive subjects, both parties had to be careful not to escalate things further.

While either would occasionally wander into each other's territories to hunt and kill, that was only in very small numbers. But if a full-on army was to make an incursion into the lands of either, then it would mean a full-blown conflict between all parties of both sides. Something they'd rather avoid.

For a long silent moment, we just stared at each other; unbridled battle lust in my eyes and an unwilling glint of hesitation in his. While I had proclaimed that I wished no more conflict

with the humans of Mordria seeing as I've already made this mistake two times, and didn't want a third time. Possibly pulling the entirety of the whole country against me. My desire to battle such a capable foe wasn't something that I could easily hide.

The monster side of me was telling me to test my metal against this powerful human, but I still restrained myself since at my current level of strength, I was unsure of my ability to face an entire country of humans. But I hoped I could use this opportunity to amend the conflict between me and the humans.

I was loathed to give up on an exciting fight and all the EXP bags in shiny armor, but I had to restrain myself before I had the power to stand against the powers behind them. I did not want to keep repeating the same stupid mistakes I've been making since coming to this world. I was just a 19-year-old kid trapped in the body of a trial and flimsy little mosquito, disorientated by being thrown into a completely alien world of magic and monsters, making rash decisions and bad choices.

But that's not me anymore. I've grown, obtained power, found others that are worth me sharing my power with. I was no longer human, nor some reckless kid anymore.

It is truly only now that I've taken the first step on the path of my journey.

"Fine..." - Garret

The stocky man suddenly said after thinking over something with an uncertain expression on his face.

"Huh?" - Me

"We will back down, and not invade into the wastelands." - Garret

Simply giving the stocky man a curt nod, I turned on my heels and started walking off, rather surprised that he conceded that easily. But I didn't manage to take two steps before the next words the man said stopped me in my tracks.

"However, we won't allow you to leave either." - Garret

A sneer suffusing my face, I spat back.

"I've already said, I wish no conflict with you humans. Just leave us to our devices, and we'll leave you to yours." - Me

"That would unfortunately not be possible. Letting you monsters leave would be tantamount to letting a wolf back into the mountain after having caught it eating your sheep, only to have it return later. I have a responsibility to root out any dangers to my race as general, especially from you filthy monsters." - Garret

"Even if you have the power, how many of your men will die in the process?" - Me

I smirked at him. I could easily see the firm determination to keep his soldiers safe, so I very much doubted he would expend their lives just like that.

"I will personally deal with you all." - Garret

He said with absolute and unwavering steel in his voice.

"You seem very confident in your ability to take us on. Well, let's even the waters then. Maybe it'll... *persuade* your decision." - Me

Turning inward, I touched upon the connection of the **Sanguine Plague**. As hundreds upon hundreds of threads was sending one singular command out towards the glades, the air started humming with power from the transgression of mana flows.

Garret was unsure as to what was happening, so he drew his large claymore from his back, preparing for whatever was going to happen next. Entering the ears of everybody, the sound of hollering and howling sounded out inside the dark glades, causing many startled birds to take to the air from the tree tops.

One by one, hundreds of hobgoblin, dark-green and crimson, started appearing behind the huge blood puppets I had conjured. The small army of greenskins, most in the low F-ranks and the occasional E-rank orc, my blood doing wonders to exceed their natural capabilities and evolutions.

"You're still sure you can keep all of your precious fellow humans safe?" - Me

While the amount of greenskin outnumbered the human army, they were all better trained and of better quality. However, it would still only be an extremely pyrrhic victory for either side if they were going against each other without the interference of me or the human general.

Realizing the power dynamic between both sides had taken a massive hit, Garret visibly struggled with what to do. He obviously hated the idea of letting me back out into the wild, but he couldn't bring himself to squander his own soldiers' lives like that.

"So, what is it going to be, old man? Do you wish to see which side comes out looking the worst? Or simply allow this conflict to be amended, and we go our separate ways? Your choice." - Me

He glanced back, taking in the sight of the scared but determined soldiers behind him. Nodding to himself as some form of self-affirmation, he locked eyes with my predatory gaze.

"I challenge you to a sanctioned duel." - Garret

[System Sanctioned Duel]

[Garret Ardent, general of Modria, has challenged you to a sanctioned duel!]

[Reward: 10-year non-aggression pact - (Mordria)]

[Non-aggression pact: If the benefactor breaks the pact, then the system will enact divine retribution upon them. If the receiving party breaks the pact, then the pact will be dissolved]

[Prerequisite for winning: Death of opponent]

[Participants: Garret Ardent, Xavier Tal'chor]

[Do you accept?]

[Yes/No]

"Oh?" - Me

With collective gasps of disbelief, many of the humans adapted stricken expressions. They all had their eyes glazed over, seemingly reading the same prompt. But apparently, the humans weren't the only ones, as Bob, Mia, and every other of my greenskins were reading a prompt of their own. Although I didn't know if their prompts were different from mine, it seemed that these sanctioned duels were something that was broadcasted to all of the members of both parties.

As I read the prompt, a predatory smile found its way onto my lips.

No further conflict or retaliation, and a crucible to truly test my new powers in served on a platter?

This was exactly something I needed, however, but I didn't accept just yet. I was no longer a single entity, and I was responsible for my only living true friend, my woman, and a host of followers. I could no longer just recklessly head into things, so I sought their counsel.

I looked both at Bob and Mia. It was no surprise when looking at Bob, who simply gave me a battle-hungry gaze with an excited nod of approval. But when I locked gazes with Mia who had worry plastered all over her face, I hesitated.

"Do you think you will win?" - Mia

"I don't think. I know I will." - Me

With a predatory smile mirroring mine, she beamed at me with her ruby eyes, causing my heart to flutter.

"Correct answer." - Mia

Turning around, I locked gazes with the human; bloodlust in my eyes.

-Accept!-