

~ Day 65 ~

[System Sanctioned Duel has commenced!]

[Defeat your enemy]

Calling my three behemoth blood puppets to my rear and two flanks, I grinned at the stocky general. My blood puppets had taken a qualitative change over the course of my little training expedition and encounter with the army scouts. I had finally managed to bump my blood puppet magic to the 5th-tier, adding a new rune called **Transmogrify**.

It allowed for my creations to be much more varied and morphed. The blood puppet naturally just seemed to adhere to a humanoid form, going farther from only costing more mana and putting a higher strain on the magic. But with **Transmogrify**, my toils had become a lot looser, allowing me to create such beastly and powerful creations.

I was able to now summon three D-ranked blood puppets, but that wasn't all. These weren't like any ordinary D-ranked monsters. While wielding the power and strength of D-ranked monsters, the puppets themselves are much sturdier than their rank would suggest, almost reaching a whole rank higher in terms of defense and constitution.

With the tension in the atmosphere growing ever thicker, a deathly still silence so all-encompassing the drop of a needle would be heard for miles. As my nails grew to extend into lethally sharp weapons, I unfolded my aura, causing my eyes to swirl with mana and the very air to shudder.

Opposing me, the stocky man also unleashed his aura. However, his was much more refined, pointing to years of experience and training. Instead of causing the air to shudder, his aura seemed to become attuned with the world itself, the only physical perception of his aura being a shimmering haze around his body, like heat waves.

The second our auras met the air crackled and the silence was shattered. Springing into motion, we both become blurs. A clang that resounded and the screech of metal was the first thing to be heard. My claws meeting his claymore. I didn't block his strike, instead, parrying his blade.

I had no grand illusions of blocking his blade with merely my own body. By parrying my claws took a lot less damage than absorbing the full strength of the strike. But even while I had already enforced my claw-nails with pushing mana into **Onyx Body**, and that I was parrying the strike, offloading a great amount of its power, I was shocked to find out that they were barely holding against his blade.

Conjuring a weapon from **Blood Shaping**, something I already knew would produce sturdier equipment than my nails provided, had been an option. However, I simply had zero skill with any semblance of weapons other than my nails and teeth. Suddenly prancing into a deadly fight with a weapon and fumbling like some moron would most likely not end well for me.

The fight didn't move to a standstill after the first strike, only increasing in intensity from thereon. Translucent blurs from an activated skill and the sparks of friction illuminated our fight, our attacks and movements so fast that no ordinary human eyes could perceive, causing our battle to look like a light show rather than a fight to the untrained eye.

Not gaining any ground, even with my blood puppets pitching in from the sides, I dropped attempting to out skill the master sword-wielder. Conjuring my magic, I went through my easy-cast spells such as **Stagnation** but I had to touch his body for it to work. Pretty sure that his claymore wasn't his limb, although he wielded it like it was, I forsook using **Stagnation**.

Instead, I conjured forth the tried and true method of turning my enemies' own blood against themselves.

**Rend.**

[Garret has taken 25 damage!]

His eyes went wide from the sudden internal damage and his movement slightly staggered. But he quickly shook it off and continued his onslaught. The damage notification was disappointing, to say the least, that **Rend** even already being a super-charged one. The mana drain from that one rend costing nearly a tenth of my total, combined with the steady trickle used to keep **Onyx Body** enhanced and my mana reserved for my blood puppets, it was clear I couldn't keep using that to outright kill him.

I was tempted to just recall the blood puppets and take back what mana was left in them, but the support they gave was invaluable. The extra pressure caused by them, allowing me to barely hold on against his ever-increasing onslaught. But I soon realized that it wasn't just because he was adapting to my fighting style over time that I was losing my ground.

His attacks were actually becoming stronger for each strike, and although only very slightly, it was quickly adding up. It was another skill. A single strike that evaded my guard proved just how deadly it was overtime.

[You have taken 43 damage!]

Slicing a deep cut into my shoulder like it was any common meat to a blade, I was shocked. But that wasn't all that was to the attack. Added with the slashing power, an unstoppable kinetic force was added, presumably by his ramping power skill, which took an additional small chunk with it. When the wound closed with a visible speed, it obvious in even the stern general's eyes, that he was shocked to see a mage with such defensive and regenerative powers.

Realizing that this battle was turning into one of attrition, both of our general power being about equal, we finally launched into the final stage of the fight. It was clear that neither of us had used our triumph cards or had gone full out, these first rounds of exchanges being more to test out the waters.

The sudden shift in the fight caused our auras to flare, even causing hazy apparition of our auras clashing in the air. Sword light and skills that made his claymore hit like hurling boulders were mirrored by the flashing of crimson light and sanguine mist rising to the air.

A cacophony of both sounds and damage notification flashed through my head, but I simply discarded them to the side, wholeheartedly indulging myself in this exhilarating fight. Suddenly, we both exploded away from each other, returning to a distance of a dozen meters between us. The blood and wounds that stained both our bodies told of the nature of our heated battle.

While the general was staring me down with a troubled gaze, I was grinning like a maniac; completely suffused in battle lust. However, this wasn't the same mindless savagery that had ailed my mind under the clutches of the Mistress. While it was a wholly primal desire to battle such a powerful foe, it was controlled, guiding my skills and mastery to achieve a whole new level.

One of my blood puppets were destroyed while the two other weren't much far off either from that. My mana was close to spent and my health was the only thing steadily ticking up, however, my energies were running low, meaning that **Lesser Eldritch Vitality** and **Mana Mending** won't keep me alive for much longer.

But that was not to say that the general was faring any better.

-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	222/653	CHR	???	Physical Resistance	???
Stamina	107/422	WILL	???	Magical Resistance	???
Mana	0/0	MAG	???	Mental Resistance	???
Class				Tier	
-Main Class-	Highlander			5	

His wounds were severe and he had lost a ton of blood which I had been steadily stealing with **Blood Shaping** to activate **Blood-Born**. Somehow, he had another skill that seemed to allow him to be liberated by the hampering of his wounds and move just as if he was completely unharmed.

But such a skill should definitely have a time limit or cost meaning that he won't be able to keep it up forever. Wanting to take advantage of that, I burned more of my blood and shadows suddenly coalesced from everywhere.

Encasing us both in a thick mirage of shadows, the general lost all vision. I could still easily see through the shadows as they were conjured directly from my very own mana. Now having to defend from a blind position against my sudden attacks, the general was pushed into a corner.

He attempted to escape the shadows, however, not only did the shadows move with him, an occasional swipe from the remaining blood puppets would shove him back into the darkness.

The only reason why he managed to block some of my attacks while being utterly blind, was because his aura control and expertise were much greater than that of my own; being able to sense my presence just before I attacked even though I was shrouding it with my **Shadow Magic**.

But lethal sneak attacks weren't what I was going for. I was slowly but surely wearing out his skill, promising an inevitable death. The grim regret in the general's eyes was the only precursor to the sudden worsening of his wounds and him falling to his knees; the skill having worn off.

I dissipated the shadows to reveal the stocky man, barely hanging on by a thread. Grizzly wounds and blood riddled his body. The sight caused the humans to gasp and stare in shock at the sorry state of their leader, while the greenskins hollered with wild abandon.

"Thank you for this fight. I learned a lot." - Me

Smirking self-deprecatingly, the general locked eyes with me.

"I accept my fate. But, don't hurt my people." - Garret

Glancing at the many humans in the distance, I simply nodded. This man had completely earned my respect, this fight giving me insights that I never even thought possible.

"Rest easy, so long as they don't go against me, I will not lay a hand on them." - Me

Sensing the sincere tone in my voice, he just nodded, surprisingly satisfied by my promise. I approached him and kneeled by his side. As I plunged my deadly sharp claws into a crack in his armor, I pierced his heart. The only thing he let out was a small grunt from the pain, his life quickly fading from his eyes.

[LVL: 80 - **Human "Garret Ardent"** has been slain!]

[You have been rewarded with 132054 points of EXP]

[Congratulations! You've reached levels 5-8]

[You've been rewarded with 3 skill point for reaching levels 5-8]

[**System Sanctioned Duel has ended!**]

[Victor - Xavier Tal'chor!]

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

But as he fell to his side, a shrill scream sounded out, accompanied by the gallop of heavy hooves.

"NO!" - ???

I had already sensed her approach when I kneeled before the defeated general, but I paid her no attention as she only wielded the power of a weak D- human. Conjuring some shadows beneath her speeding steed, I simply tripped it, causing the wailing woman to suddenly bolt forwards and crash heavily to the ground.

Coming to a halt before my feet, I crushed her aura beneath mine, not even allowing her to raise her head. I was surprised that the obvious aggressive act of the woman seemed to prompt no breaking of the non-aggression pact that I had just gotten, but the instinctual information prompted into my head told me that I wouldn't be breaking my pact if I decided to kill her either.

Picking up the stricken woman by her throat, I stared into her eyes. It immediately became obvious to me that she was related to that general, making it clear why she so stupidly attempted to attack me. Grief and hatred in her eyes, signaling that she was in no calm state of mind. I was just standing there, scrutinizing her, not sure if I should kill her or not.

I respected to geezer I had just fought and didn't want to spit on his body by immediately killing off one of his blood kin. But before I could make a decision, another rider approached, calling out.

"Don't, it's not worth it!" - ???

Raising my brow and casting a curious eye at the lithe figure that approached, I grinned.

None other than Lily the guild master was charging through the planes, towards me.

Stopping some meters away, she had a look of extreme uncertainty, but behind that, a hint of hope.

"Why not?" - Me

"She's the daughter to Modria's commander and niece to the Justicar and two of the generals. Besides her uncle you've just killed, if you hurt her, you will incur the wrath of this country's three strongest warriors, non-aggression pact be damned." - Lily

"And why are you telling me this?" - Me

She was looking even more uncertain now, a stark contrast to the confident and charming woman I originally met.

"Y-you... are... him, aren't you?" - Lily

"I sure am. Nice to meet you again, Lily." - Me

I said, a sly smile tugging at my lips.