

~ Day 91 ~

"So, you're the Master of Bob's tribe?" Ruela asked confusedly.

"More or less, but yes," I replied, taking a swig of the drink I had been given.

By now, we were all sitting at the low-rise stone table, feasting on some surprisingly delicious dishes and drinking some rough but sweet alcoholic beverage all brought to us by an assortment of beautiful orc maids. Although I had never been one for drinking alcohol for the pure taste of it, I didn't really have a choice anymore as my overabundant vitality was literally cleansing the alcohol from my body the instant I drank it.

And that was saying something as this alcohol was apparently some kind of crazy-potent alcohol as great orcs like Ruela face similar problems to me as they grew stronger. As such, they needed ever-increasingly potent alcohol to keep them tipsy or the like.

But this was also as evident by the extremely drunk drow sitting across the table, swaying unsteadily, pink cheeks, hiccupping, and slurring her words. Although I didn't know how they could make such potent alcohol, Ruela off-handedly mentioned something about magical fruits.

"Y-ees, Mwaster is strong... he's.... he's the strongest!" She proclaimed proudly, raising her mug high in the air.

Rubbing the back of my head awkwardly, I looked at Ruela was smiling amusedly at the petite and very drunk drow.

"I'm sorry, but I don't think she's ever had any spirits before," I apologized.

"Ba-ha, no worries." Ruela laughed merrily. "It makes me happy to see my guests enjoying themselves in my home."

"Well, are you sure I shouldn't send word for Frenn to come and greet you all?" Ruela asked before shooting Bob a sly gaze. "She's especially looking for to seeing you~"

As Bob heard this, a visible shiver went down his back, but I once again didn't know if it was from either fear or excitement of the prospect.

"No need, we won't be here for long and we'll already have departed before she would arrive," I answered, taking another swig.

"I see..." She muttered thoughtfully. "Then why is it you've come to my clan? I doubt it was simply because you wished to indulge in my hospitality."

"That's correct," I said, putting down the mug, facing the large and muscular woman. "We've come for answers to our many questions and guidance to how our tribe can survive in the lowlands. If possible, we would also like to set up a friendship between our factions, if not also an alliance."

"Oh?" Ruela said, now looking much more interested. "Did your tribe find a place to settle or are you still migrating?"

"No, no. I killed the Great Orc Mage and took the basin for myself." I said simply.

Looking dumbly at me, Ruela just stared.

"Y-you - did what?" She asked incredulously, her voice raising an octave.

"He zoomed in thwere went boom! bang! and off wive the dumb orc's head!" Mia exclaimed suddenly, before falling back to half-sleep across the table, mug still in hand. "Mwaster is amazein..."

"Masta is strongest." Bob nodded sagely at her intelligible words with a huge piece of meat in his hand.

Coughing awkwardly, I looked back at the still very much incredulous Ruela.

"Yes, I killed him."

"Just how strong are you?" She asked slightly apprehensive. "Not only was a he a mage, but he could also contest my warchief in a duel..."

"I might've not been as strong as him, but I had certain advantages," I said dismissively, not really wanting to go further into detail than necessary.

Scrutinizing me with dubious gaze for a moment or two, Ruela relented, sinking back into the cushion.

"So... what do you want to know?" She asked, sounding a tad defeated.

"As of now, both Bob and I are woefully inexperienced in running a tribe or any semblance of a faction, but not only that, we're also sitting on a veritable paradise of resources and wealth. However, we simply don't have the hands to make use of any of it." I explained.

"We're in a desperate need of more workers and fighters, but mostly workers." I continued. "So the first thing I wanted to ask you about is; how do we go about getting more hands here in the lowlands?"

Adopting a thinking expression Ruela tapped her chin thoughtfully.

"You would either have to conquer another clan or bring in others from outside the lowlands." She said. "Those are the primary ways to grow the size of one's clan in the lowlands."

"But wouldn't that mean rousing the ire of whatever warchief they have vassalage to?" I asked.

"Certainly," She replied. "They would definitely be angry if you went and stole their people, however, not in the way that you might think."

"How so?" I asked curiously.

"In the lowlands, everything is pretty much under greenskin rule," She explained. "And as such, everything is under greenskin conduct."

"Although we're a tribal society," She continued. "Everything is under the strict rule of honor and glory. If any greenskin were to cross these ancient rules and rites of conduct, they would instantaneously acquire the ire of every single greenskin in the entirety of the lowlands. Ousted as dishonorable and traitors. As such, while a warchief would most definitely be displeased if you took over a clan under their rule, they wouldn't be able to do anything about it if it was acquired fairly by greenskins conduct."

"I see, but what do you mean about acquiring another clan under greenskin conduct?" I asked curiously, finally seeing the possibility of a viable option coming up.

"You can simply challenge them for their clans, through whatever type of duel you might prefer. Whether or not they accept your challenge and wager is up to the challenged party. If you win, you win. If you lose, you lose. It's that simple."

"Is that really it?" I asked slightly confused at how such a system would work.

"Of course there are a few other formalities, rules, and so-on, but other than that - yes, it really is just that simple." She said.

"Well, there are other things to take into consideration. That being the warchiefs and the instructions they've given to their vassals. A lot of different elements of honor and strategy culminate into the way that the warchiefs hold power over their vassals and keep them from being continuously taken away by others, so might not be as easy as simply walking up and challenging another and expecting them to accept."

"That makes a lot more sense then..." I muttered.

"I can help you." She said suddenly, bringing me out of my pondering.

"Wait what? How so?" I asked curiously.

"I can give you five thousand workers to help you establish your settlement." She said simply. "Frenn will certainly also offer some or even more, if not to only get into Bob's good graces."

"Really?" I asked bewildered. "We barely know each other, and I don't really have anything to offer in return other than an alliance and a friendship."

"You're underestimating the worth of your alliance and friendship." She said simply. "Not only do you sit on a prime location of wealth and resource, but you're also a person of considerable power. Your aura says that alone. Trade and other relations would prove immensely beneficial for us both, properly much more than you realize."

Nodding, I had to admit that I hadn't really realized that rather obvious fact.

"I can only provide labor force as I don't have any professed or specialized workers and craftsmen that I can give up. They're sparse as is already in the lowlands, and if you seek some, you'll have to go outside and visit a real monster city."

"Yeah, I had guessed as much," I said agreeably. "That's why our destination after here is Ebongrave."

"I see, wise choice." She said. "They're a relatively open place for any monster race, with no specific race really holding all the power. Plus, they're the closest from here."

Appreciative of the veritable gold mine of information that Ruela was giving me, I stopped to consider.

Did I truly have nothing to offer? I wondered for a bit.

Looking into her eyes, I pondered my words before speaking.

"Ruela, what's your goal?"

The question seemed to apparently catch her off-guard, as she froze mid-drink, casting me an odd stare.

"I hadn't been expecting that... but okay." She said, taking one long and a deep swig of her mug before her face turned into the image of determination.

"I wish to be warchief."

Recognizing that fervor in her eyes, my opinion of her just rose by quite a bit.

"But you'll need power for that, right?" I asked, feeling out the waters carefully.

"Indeed," She said simply, sighing. "As of now, both Frenn and I are all too weak to compare to even the weakest of warchiefs."

"Then... what if I granted you the possibility of acquiring such power?" I asked.

Stunned, Ruela scrutinized me for any deceit or mischief but seemed to find nothing as her posture straightened, looking directly into my eyes.

"Do you truly have such capability?"

"Yes, but it doesn't come without a price," I explained.

"What price?" She asked apprehensively.

"I can give you potential, but equally as so, it would give me power over you."

Pausing, Ruela had a clear conflict of emotions on her face. It was obvious that they dreaded the idea of trading away her freedom, however, she loathed the idea of turning away power even more.

"I agree, under one condition." She said suddenly, surprising me.

Why did she so readily accept it? Was she really that desperate and determined, or does this maybe have something to do with my charisma? I mean, ever since I got that massive boost in it after becoming a Strigoi, everybody seems quick to falter to my words alone...

"What's the condition?"

"Show me that you truly hold such power," She said resolutely, getting to her feet. "Best me and my champions in combat, and I'll agree."