

~ Day 116 ~

Letting go of the magic apparatus, Mia spared not a single of the thousands upon thousands of gazes directed at her even a glance as she walked across the stage.

It had only been five minutes since she initially poured her mana into the testing device, but seeing as her mana reserves and overall magical power was quite limited, just having evolved barely more than a week ago, it wasn't surprising that she couldn't keep up with most of the elite competition.

However, making all spheres consistently float alongside each other simultaneously had been more than enough to get the message of her talent and skill over. That was especially so since each additional marble you separately infused mana into would increase the mental strain and difficulty of the test exponentially.

As a testament to this, even the cowled figure had completely foregone her own test in favor of watching Mia. Although she definitely had a top-tier score, it was clear to anyone that she could've continued even longer. But still, she cut off her own mana to watch Mia's display.

The stares became quite uncomfortable as Mia returned to the booth and my side, but to my relief, Tahl the minotaur broke the awkward murmuring that had befallen the plaza.

"Now... that's was quite the display," He admitted. "But we still need to resume to test, so I implore all challengers to continue!"

With the magic test resuming in full swing, the rest of the challengers quickly finished up without too many more upsets. While there were a few who came close to the arachnid's and the cowled figure's result, none did manage to surpass it.

Mia herself only managed to come very near the arachnid's result by a minuscule amount seeing as the length of time she could hold the sphere afloat was abysmal in comparison. And she wouldn't have gotten second place if not for the cowled figure interrupting her own test.

Not that it really mattered who got the first places in these initial tests. It was simply important that with these scores that you had enough to advance to the second stage of the tournament and then have enough combined with the result of the first and second stages to advance to the third.

"Send out your challengers!" Tahl announced for the fourth time today, looking at the many contestant's booths all around the stage.

This was the fourth and last test of the first stage - the endurance test.

Without skipping a beat, I conjured three massive behemoth blood puppets with the help of some monster corpses stored in my **[Ring of Holding]**. Being ridiculously durable for their level of power, it was a no-brainer that the constructs would flourish in this test.

However, I would've loved to just fuze all their powers into one overbearingly resilient and sturdy blood puppet. Unfortunately, it was a requirement that I entered the contest with five followers, so I had to split them up into three to fill the gaps with capable fighters.

But even so, I was more than certain that these constructs would easily qualify our group for the second stage, not even considering that Mia and Bob had already assured us of that fact with their own impressive performances.

But just as I was about to send the constructs up onto the stage, I could feel two piercing gazes borrowing into the back of my neck.

Casting a glance back at the two cowled figures who had escorted us to the tournament, I raised a curious brow.

"What?" I simply asked, wondered what the hell had got them so engaged all of a sudden.

There was no response...

It wasn't hard to tie their unexpected reactions to my magical constructs, but as to exactly why their sudden appearance did so, I had no clue.

Seeing that this was going nowhere, I ignored the two mutes in black leather armor as I watched the three blood puppets make their way onto the scene. Shortly after inspecting the three constructs that was beginning to draw a lot of attention from the all the spectators and challengers around, a short beastkin made their way down to our booth.

"Greetings, sir..." He bowed. "My name is Eror, and I was informed to oversee you and your constructs for the duration of the tournament; pleased to meet your acquaintance."

I simply nodded in acknowledgment as I inspected the magical fluctuations emanating from the rather unassuming Fealas. Although was not all that impressive, he was decent a mage who definitely had training inside the field.

"Xavier." I introduced myself simply.

"I hope you won't mind my intrusive scanning?" He hesitated, clearly not wanting to step beyond his bounds.

Even though he was a decently strong mage on the cusp of 4th-tier, monsters would naturally be wary of any who greatly outmatched them in terms of power. Not to mention that he had suddenly been assigned to one of the few dark horse factions in this tournament.

"No problem, you go ahead," I replied, almost immediately feeling his perception beginning to inspect the fluctuations of mana surrounding and emanating from me.

Although this was usually considered a great offense if you did it to someone stronger than yourself, I really didn't care and this was one of the things that had to be done if I were to be allowed to use my blood puppets. Making sure I didn't tamper with the tests or fights in any way shape or form, otherwise, I would be disqualified.

This test went by much easier than the other three. While there were some interesting monsters such as the undead abomination construct like the three of own magical creations, the results weren't as awe-inspiring as the previous tests.

Enduring various attacks from guardsmen, mages, archers, and other harmful elements that could be cast at the challengers, it simply depended on how much each could take before tapping out.

The blood puppets did however score quite high, but that was mostly because of the magical part of the test. Seeing as those constructs were of my magic and very much alike in myself in the fact that they were nigh-impervious to any magical attack of decent strength, they had hogged up an inordinate amount of points for merely that part of the test.

But that wasn't to say that they were able to compete with some of the real D+ monsters who specialized in being indestructible to any attack.

"My honored spectators and patrons from far and wide," The large minotaur host once again captured everybody's attention. "I am both regretful and delighted to announce that the first stage of Lord Nosferas' tournament has officially concluded."

"We've seen some genuinely spectacular display of ability and skill," He continued. "And we've even had many new dark horses arrive in our city to take part in this age-old contest of ours."

"For this, I must thank you all." He bowed.

Letting the crowd roar in approval, Tahl smiled.

It was clear as day this minotaur knew how to sway a crowd, and I did wonder why such a formidable monster like him might have acquired and developed such skill. I wanted to know more about this, but my internal musings were cut short by his next words.

"Now, I will announce today's top contestant leaderboard!" He exclaimed, taking out a piece of parchment lodged in the pocket of his clothes.

"8th-place, Al'zat Morgraine." He began announcing, gesturing to the booth where a group of undead sat, including that one wight I saw in the magic test. "7th-place, Maldrak. 6th-place, Zev'ev Sinlore. 5th-place, Caelin. 4th-place, Xavier. 3rd-place, Kairenn Gorefist. 2nd-place, Asethh K'or. 1st-place, Iliia Menethil!"

I still hadn't given my last name to anyone seeing as they clearly held some importance that I've still yet to understand. Inquiring others about it hadn't been productive unfortunately seeing as while monsters of this city clearly understood that having a last name almost certainly meant that you were a part of the aristocracy in the city, they hadn't the faintest idea as to why.

As such, I've decided to keep it under wraps as best as I could. But that was not to say that this regent or others didn't already know of it since if I had a divining skill, why wouldn't select others not also have it? I've never been subjected to one yet. Or well, not one that I've noticed. So I still don't know if others are aware of the fact that I possess the name of Xavier Tal'chor...

During my many newfound questions and thoughts, our group had already made our way back to the carriage and were now rolling down the cobbled street of Ebongrave.

Throughout the course of this time, from all the way back when I had initially summoned my blood puppets to now, those two cowled escorts had been seriously on edge and rigid. And it even got to the point where I began to sense a foreboding sensation come onto me.

Senses alert, I pretended not to notice, letting my presence ever so discreetly take in the surroundings of our carriage and the streets outside.

For a good hour, no threat did ever present itself... except one glaring red flag.

I hadn't the faintest where we were, and we most definitely weren't been escorted back to the quarters of the palace that had been prepared for us during the tournament.

Through our mental connection, I alerted both Bob and Mia to possible danger. Although I couldn't specifically explain why they had to be on guard, they instantly went on guard without question.

Knowing even if we were about to meet some kind of trouble, we'd have absolutely zero chance of escaping seeing as these cold figures that appeared to be all over the city was plentiful, I decided to take it head-on before we had been shipped off to only-god-knows-where.

Sitting up straight, I looked directly at one of our escorts.

"Where are you taking us?"

Although I had mostly expected nothing but silence like always, this time there was in fact a response.

Lifting one gloved hand, the escort had spoken to removed their cowl to reveal coal-black skin and long pointy ears.

Exactly like Mia.

"To see the Matriarch," The drow answered in an oddly androgynous voice not aligning with their otherwise male visage.