

~ Day 73 ~

Letting the billowing winds coursing through the canyons and mountains run through my hair, I took in the marveling sight laid out before me. It had been five days since we took off from the tribe, and we had managed to get quite away from our previously docile and unimpressive rocky hills. Plunging directly into the wastelands, delving deep into its depths, we all were impressed by simply how much more the surroundings become awe-inspiring the deeper we went.

But, although Lily hadn't ever traveled so far into the wastelands, she could confirm that we were still simply at the outskirts, the wastelands actually being an incredible expanse that hugged the borders of thousands of countries and other territories.

"So why exactly was is this place called the wastelands? It definitely doesn't seem devoid of life and barren, in fact, the quite the opposite of that." - Me

I was asking the lithe Lily who was approaching from behind to stand beside my side as I gazed down into the massive canyon that laid by my feet. But the reason my question was because ever since I had been abducted and managed to travel through a tiny bit of the wastelands, I had realized that these supposed wastelands were actually brimming with life, not barren and dead.

Only in the rocky hills, the outskirts that hugged the Mordrian and Cealmor borders was the vegetation sparse. But even that place was infested with all types of life, no small amount being the insect beasts and greenskins that inhabited it. And now, where we've traveled so far that the scenery had taken a complete turn, my thoughts have only been proven further that the wastelands weren't actually barren wastes.

The sky swallowing mountains and huge rifts in the earth that was canyons were all filled with lush and vibrant vegetation. Not even mentioning the numerous beasts and monsters native here, their surroundings were filled with life. As if the heavens heard my ruminations and wanted to prove them, a cry that rang through the sky sounded out, eliciting a sigh from me.

Circulating my mana, I prepared my magic. If anything, the troubles we faced in traversing the wastelands wasn't really the terrain, but instead the inhospitable beasts and monsters that would constantly throw themselves at us. Soaring out of caverns, nests on cliff faces, and various other dens, huge overgrown eagle-like creatures were coming out in droves, flying towards us with no small amount of malice in their beady eyes.

-Appraisal!-

Appraisal - Acryan Eagle					
Information		Attributes		Traits, Titles, and Skills	
-Name-	"???"	STR	15	Skills	5
-Race-	Acryan Eagle	VIT	23	Traits	2
-Sex-	Female	AGI	32	Titles	0
-Rank-	F	DEX	25	Resistances	
-Level-	12/35	INT	4		
Health	191/191	CHR	4	Physical Resistance	6
Stamina	85/85	WILL	6	Magical Resistance	2
Mana	0/0	MAG	0	Mental Resistance	4

While these birds were in no way a danger to me or most of my followers in a head-on fight, they were actually the cause of no small amount of annoyance on my side of things. Their attributes and fighting capabilities were nothing to speak home of, however, they held two massive advantages that had already managed to reap fifty of my greenskins.

Numbers and flight.

These Acryan Eagles were extremely territorial, so without even a shred of concern for their own lives, they would dive head-first to meet any trespassers. Initially, I had lost quite a few hobs by a sudden ambush attack after we had first entered this region of the wastelands, unbeknownst to us that it was actually the territory of these kamikaze birds.

In droves of hundreds at a time, they would mindlessly attack us. And while two or three hobs could definitely take care of one of these eagles in a head-on fight, my greenskins actually stood almost no chance of averting their assault. That was mostly due to the fact that these damnable creatures were swift and agile aerial birds that would swarm above the greenskin army, doing sweeping and diving attacks.

The advantage that gave them wasn't to be underestimated, evident by the serious loss of greenskins. As such, it was up to the strongest of my force, including myself, to take out these overgrown birds. With all the greenskins already having become accustomed to the occasional attack from the skies, they all huddled together in defensive positions, allowing Me, Mia, Bob, Lily, and the orcs to take care of them.

By the dozen, feathered carcasses fell to the ground, dead or dying. I was using a barrage of **Rend** to widdle them down, occasionally flickering to the side of a hob that wasn't doing particularly well in staying alive. But I wasn't the only one causing havoc in the birds' assault. Mia was using her bewitching magic to confuse and bewilder many of the eagles, some she had even taken control over as they fought their fellow brethren.

The first time I had seen that she had found some way to influence even non-sapient beings, I was surprised. But after going over how she had managed it, I was stumped for well over a day by the magical theory behind her magic. I had apparently severely underestimated Mia's talent for magic, and simply the way she thought was on a whole different dynamic than that of my own.

It wouldn't be surprising that she before long would be even more adept at magic than myself. Although my innate magic power was overwhelming by ordinary standers and its domineering potency would have Mia hard-pressed to match it, she would undoubtedly at some point be able to utilize and control magic by leagues greater than whatever I could ever dream of.

Farther away, another menace to the birds could be seen. The massive Bob and his enormous crimson cleaver were taking down birds with each of his air-rending swipes. The bellow of laughter and enjoyment that came from Bob as he slaughtered his way through the pesky birds was contagious, and I couldn't help but smile myself.

With Lily also doing her part, seemingly sometimes even taking the opportunity to occasional flirt with my eyes as she would flutter right by me, consumed in a captivating dance of blades that tore through swathes of birds, we quickly fought the assault off.

Taking stock of the aftermath, I could confirm that we had lost only two hobs this time around. Getting the greenskins to regain their bearing and tend to the wounded, I informed everybody that we were going to set camp up here for the night. Since we had just slaughtered the inhabitants of this area, there shouldn't be any further birds attacking us until we ventured further inwards.

"So, about that question." - Me

"What?" - Lily

"Why this place is called the wastelands, I mean, they definitely aren't barren." - Me

I said as I gestured to the hundreds of feathered corpses lying strewn about, some already being carted off by other hobgoblins to preserve some as food.

"It's mostly because of legends and conjecture. Supposedly, the wastelands were actually once devoid of life and barren of anything even remotely resembling it. For millennium even. This runs back to an ancient legend of how the wastelands were actually formed. There are many theories and other legends attempting to explain the oddness that are the wastelands, however, a country as small as mine isn't privileged to such information." - Lily

"What do you mean not privileged? Weren't you from some big shot family? And doesn't your country talk and exchange with other neighboring countries?" - Me

"It doesn't work that way. Power is everything, and in comparison, my small country of Mordria is merely an ant in the face of true hegemony that lay beyond our borders. If I were to put it in perspective, in the whole of Mordria, not even a single map exists depicting even a tenth of the entire wastelands. In truth, we barely know anything outside our immediate borders, even our own small kingdom has so much land that we have swathes of unexplored lands." - Lily

Staring with incredulity at Lily, I tried to wrap my head around what she just said. Although I was no historic or geographic expert, even in medieval times such a lack of information was stunning.

Just how big is this world?

"Well, okay. But really? Not even a tenth? Doesn't you have some extremely powerful and influential king? Shouldn't he possess at least such information?" - Me

"I can't speak on his behalf of something he might know or not know, but I know for a fact that a map depicting the entire wastelands would cost more than the entire country's coffers, capital, and the royal palace, combined." - Lily

"What?! Seriously? But how does that even make sense? It's just a map." - Me

"You underestimate the forces outside of Mordria and those residing within the wastelands. For example, you already know about Cealmor, and how they're an overwhelmingly stronger force than Mordria, but then what about those who are above Cealmor? A third-rank country. If was to show how much difference there is between them and us, then take one of Mordria's strongest warriors as an example. Garrett, the general you killed and one of the strongest humans within Mordria were a D+ ranked human. He's among the pinnacle of what my country could offer. However, warriors of the D+ rank in a third-ranked country are said to be as common as foot soldiers, mere fodder." - Lily

"Damn..." - Me

Although I had already experienced the sheer power another being could possess in the visions of my possible advancement paths, the realization that a man who forced me to go all out, even risking the possibility of my death, was nothing more than worth a foot soldier in other places and countries.

A third-ranked country? But then what about above that?

The thought made me shiver with both horror and anticipation.

"So, about this legend?" - Me

"Oh? Yeah, went off-track. Legend says that the wastelands weren't caused by some natural disaster or change in the world's magic, instead, it was actually the cause of a single being. The mythical monster, the dragon." - Lily

I honestly wasn't sure what I had been expecting, but a dragon? Ever since coming here, I've been faced with magic, monsters, and every other conceivable fantasy element, so I didn't doubt the possibility of dragons also existing. However, the way she spoke of dragons, even to her, someone who has lived in this world her whole life, a dragon seemed to be nothing more than a myth or a legend.

"A dragon? You mean to tell me that a dragon caused this endless expanse of land?" - Me

"Yes, the legend is vague, however, it is believed that a wounded dragon once grazed this plane with its presence, and as it flew through the air, the blood from its wound dripped onto the earth. Creating the wastelands." - Lily

Baffled by the unrealisticness of the legend, even by this world's caliber, I tried to wrap my head around a creature that could accomplish such a thing with merely its blood.

"I mean, how the hell can a dragon even turn seemingly huge swathes of land into barrens devoid of life with simply its blood?" - Me

Casting me a confused gaze, Lily seemed to look at me as if I was an idiot.

"You do realize in legend, although they come in all shapes and sizes, dragons are creatures whose bodies generally are at least the size of an entire city of millions, right? They are supposedly monsters on the level of gods, even considered as actual gods by many." - Lily

"Oh..." - Me