

~ Day 80 ~

< Dramien >

Alarm bells blared in my head. Conjuring a cocoon of roaring flames, I retreated away with blinding speed. Practically flying across the ground as I used my flame conjuration to propel me away, all I knew was that I had to get the fuck away from those shadows.

Who had attacked me, and why did they attack me? Was it the beastkin? - No, she definitely doesn't have the means for this, then... who? - Were the thoughts tumbling through my head right now.

No matter... - it was an enemy and one that I couldn't underestimate.

Summoning forth my **Cauterizing Flames**, I mended the torn flesh of my shoulder. However, instead of my magic forcibly mending my flesh, as it had always done, it suddenly started to act up against my control, making me spend even more mana on infusing the spell. I didn't know exactly why the spell and gone awry, but it could only stop the bleeding at the least.

Feeling the wound with my sense, I notice that there was something... *wrong* about it...

But I didn't have time to wonder about that for now. Wounds could be tended to later. I needed to figure out who my opponent was and how I was supposed to handle the situation. But after recalling what had just happened, my blood ran dead cold.

Wait... those shadows... could it really be?

-A Shadowmancer?!

How? Did someone of the Artruis merchants hire a god's damned assassin from The Order?!
I wondered with horror and worry gripping my mind at the mere thought. The Order was an organization of assassins in Ebongrave, however, they weren't just any ordinary assassins.

They were mage assassins.

With each of their members equipped with a **Shadow Core**, they were truly killers of the greatest magnitude.

Cursing my bad luck, I surveyed the situation. I knew that I couldn't keep this defense up as I was only giving the assassin time to prepare and my already low reserves of mana were being spent by the second.

Stopping the channel, I let the cocoon exploded in every direction, searing the surrounding air and ground. With **Radiant Flames** at the ready, I scanned the surroundings for shadows. But once again, my heart took an ice bath when I saw not one collection of shadows, but four.

The assassins of The Order weren't mages as a main profession but instead used magic as an auxiliary tool to enhance their already deadly assassin capabilities.

That meant that I was either facing four different assassins or one of their elites. To be able to affect and conjure that many shadows, it could only be that.

However, as I looked closer, confusion started to cloud my assumption. Although the signature of magic within the shadows bore great magical power, it seemed... amateurish. Like someone had great power at their fingertips, but lacked any experience or knowledge to properly utilize it.

Almost as if it was an... novice?

This could not possibly be someone of The Order, utterly lacking in finesse and skill. Even if it's just an auxiliary practice for them, the practiced ease with that they control shadows, which even the lowest of their ranks are able of, is miles beyond what I was seeing now.

And if I had truly been faced with an elite of the assassins, I would've already been long dead before I even knew it. As my face turned into a scowl of perpetual anger, my flames reflected my emotions, flaring with a burning intensity.

A mage of my prestige, my experience, my power; how dare they... - I've been terrified by a mere pretender, a weakling, a god's damned novice!

"REVEAL YOURSELF, COWARD!" I bellowed, enraged by having been tricked to fear by someone wholly inferior to me. "Who dares attack me!?"

"Sheesh, and I thought *I* was starting to turn pretentious..." A voice sounded out as the shadows suddenly moved together to merge in front of me.

"Who goes there?!" I demanded.

With only being able to see the outline of a figure, I scrutinized closer as the swirling shadows slowly died down only to reveal an... *elf?*

"Elf! - What is an enlightened like you doing in the lowlands!?" I screamed, infuriated by the fact that not only one powerful enlightened had dared settle in the wastelands but also this damned jokester.

"Goddammit..." The elf simply muttered in response, looking as if he had just been affronted by my words. I couldn't help but wonder what exact part of my words had hit a sore spot, but it apparently did...

"Ugh, does literally no other race have ears like these? - Nevermind..." He continued, monologuing to himself, his disregard of me clear.

Fury boiling deep in my heart, I shouted.

"What are you on about you bastard?!"

"Ah, don't worry about it - I'm just stalling long enough fo-" I didn't get to hear him finish his sentence as a massive crimson fist came crashing down on top of me.

With my honed danger sense barely alerting me in time due to my guard having been lowered from losing my cool, I erected explosive shields of fire that cracked one after one as the enormous force of the blow bore down on them.

Since I didn't have enough time to react, I couldn't infuse the shield with enough mana to bear the attack, so covering my head with my arms I could only let the crimson fist smash into me.

[You have taken 20 damage!]

With air being forced out of my lungs, I was hurled more than a dozen meters away. But with my experience in battle, I managed to conjure a bed of fire that cushioned my fall even through the haze of shock and pain clouding my ability to think.

Rolling to the side, I coughed up a mouthful of blood. If not for having the **Fire Constitution** trait and my [**Amulet of Fire Resistance**], my own magic would've singed the flesh right off my bones. However, using my **Fire Magic** to form solid matter was extremely draining for my mana.

Even my shields weren't solid but used the concept of explosions to veer off attacks whenever touched.

Scrambling to my feet, I finally got a see my sudden assailant. Charging at me like a raging bull, it was a huge crimson monstrosity of what looked to be almost gelatinous but solid blood.

A construct?! I thought as my eyes widened at seeing such old magic here.

With my mind going overdrive, I realized there must also be a Golemancer or something similar in the vicinity. Of course, this shadow-wielding novice wouldn't dare attack me if he was alone, so it only made sense that he had an accomplice.

This time, having more than enough time to mount some resistance, I conjured a massive arc of fire that spumed from my hands to block the monstrosity's charge.

Hitting the shield headfirst, a massive explosion rocketed the surroundings, utterly incinerating and destroying the construct. But just as the blinding light faded and vision returned to me, the Shadowmancer elf appeared out of thin air - or shadows, so to speak.

Feeling my guts being pierced, I let out a muffled groan. The same three blades that had previously pierced my shoulder, were now embedded in my abdomen.

But instead of screaming out in pain, I locked gazes with him. As my expression turned from one of shock to maddening glee, my hands flashed in a flaming blur to grasp down on the offending arm of where the claw-like blades were attached.

"Geeee~ ke-ke," I couldn't help but titter creepily.

With my hands clasped around the bare flesh of the elf's arm suddenly turning aflame with blue fire, I whispered menacingly.

"Got you."

With that, I activated **Pyrrhic Flames**.

Violent blue flames erupted from my hands like a firestorm, the top half of the elf's figure now wholly consumed by fire. These flames were no joke and even harmed me as they not only burned my hands but also consumed a portion of my health as fuel.

But expecting to hold nothing but bones and ash once the spell faded, I was horrorstricken to see the elf emerge mostly unharmed. His flesh was singed and scorched, hair burned off, but other than that, just looked thoroughly pissed off.

However, it wasn't meant to happen like this. Even if I myself were to be bathed in the annihilating powers of the **Pyrrhic Flames**, I would be left as nothing but ashes and burn flesh!

Then how?! My mind screamed.

"No - *I* got you." He hissed through seared lips causing my heart to sink into a deep abyss.

His words were the only precursor to the sudden flaring pain that overwhelmed even the agony coming from my burnt hands.

[You have taken 158 damage!]

It felt like my insides were torn apart, and think they might very well just have...

Falling to my knees as he pulled his weapon out of me, I looked down at the numerous spots all over my robes that were becoming soaked with blood.

Looking at my would-be killer, I was horrified at the sight of his skin slowly regenerating itself to a pristine unblemished

"Goddammit, why is it always my shirt that ends up being ruined..." He sighed. "People might start to think I'm becoming a perv if I keep going around topless..."

Unable to reason with this elf's mad ramblings, I desperately swung my arm, unleashing an arc of pure flames. But he just effortlessly dodged my attack by disappearing and preparing a few steps away. Seeing this, I began throwing all I had at him.

With the air shuddering under the heat of my magic, the surroundings heated to a fever pitch as emptied my already dwindling mana.

As the last vestiges of my magic fizzled out before even producing more than a spark, I fell to all knees; my head swimming from the sudden mana loss and sweat pouring down my face as the heated air caused me to perspire.

"Wha- bleurgh," I croaked around a mouthful of blood. "A-re you...?"

Closing the distance, he crouched and looked me dead in the eyes.

"Your worst nightmare..." The elf said adopting a serious gaze only moments before breaking into poorly withheld laughter. "Bwahaha - sorry, sorry. I couldn't help myself, that was way too corny not to..."

Does he have a screw loose? I thought despairingly... This truly is my end; killed by an insane elf... what kind of damn fate was that?

"Whooo... ah - My bad, let's get on with this." The elf said, wiping away a stray tear from his laughing.

"W-what do you wa-nt from me...?" I croaked, barely able to keep myself conscious at the blood loss was too great.

"Your head." He said simply like he was asking for something trivial.

Showing my bloodied teeth and tusks, I growled at his disregard and jovial attitude.

"It's unfortunate really, I could've really used a minion like you." He said shaking his head sadly. "But a promise is a promise, and I'm not one to break my honor."

As he rose from his crouch, clearly about to finish me off, I threw one last attack at him.

Not having any mana left, I used the last thing within my possession still going strong; my aura.

It had already been long clear that this elf was from no powerful or developed place as all his abilities and powers were crude and untrained. So it stood to reason that this youngster had no training or effective utilization in aura manipulation, meaning that it should crumble under mine if his were left unguarded in a sudden sneak attack.

Unleashing my aura on full blast, it stormed into a bolt surging towards him.

I was hoping to stun him, and as he was left undefended, I could rip off his head. However, how could I have known that as soon as my aura even touched the hem of his, instead of suppressing it, it would crash as if it had just hit an indestructible wall?

Incredulousness filled my mind accompanied by the sudden backlash of having my own aura torn apart.

"NOOOO- KRUEK!" Was the last thing screamed before everything went numb and darkness consumed my world...