

Beast Master 1031

Chapter 1031: Temple Tour

Inside the temple, Karl walked beside their escort, while the Orcish Chieftain was a step behind, with Tessa at his side to whisper translations and notes about things that the locals didn't notice anymore.

When you saw a carving every day of your life, it was nothing remarkable. But when the carving was dedicated to a God that a Dragon Cleric, who had spent years learning about the various pantheons, couldn't identify, it was important to them.

"This was once a temple to the old gods, the ones forgotten by time, or replaced by the younger Gods. Many of their stories were said to be brought to this world by the Outreach Programs of the Darklight Host when they spread through the world, but from what I can tell in the Temple, the Guild didn't actually have any connection to the faith, unless there were members of the faithful among the Guild Membership.

See here? This is a statue of the God of Magic, Karl. The one I would assume that you were named after. It shows him in simple black robes, almost as if he were a follower of the Black Dragon, but the placard underneath is Mythril, unaffected by time, and clearly details a simple prayer to the God of Magic." Their guide explained.

Remi called her Bodyguard into her space and had them make notes of all the inscriptions and other writings that they found in the Temple.

Even if they couldn't read it right now, it could be valuable information later. Like for brother Tian. He would probably want a temple to the Beast Gods, but he had a lot of magical power, so there might be some merit in saying nice things to the God of Magic.

It wasn't just human gods, either. There was a beastkin Death God with wolf ears, and a man in a faceless mask listed as the Laughing God.

Well, that one might be human, though as they were supposed to be the god of luck, practical jokes and fate, their appearance might be ambiguous.

A happy squeal let them know that they had lost Lotus, as the Priestess was rapidly disappearing down a side hallway, as Mira laughed.

"Oh, she must have noticed already. We would have gotten there in a few minutes. The hallway that the Green Dragon Cleric vanished down leads to the altar to the god of life and fertility. A Bunny."

Tessa laughed out loud, then translated for the Chieftain, who gave an indulgent look as he turned toward the hallway Lotus had taken.

Nachtia motioned for them to keep going. "I will keep the little one out of trouble. The presence of the Dragon Gods is also strong here, and I am certain she won't damage anything."

"Thank you. We will be along in a few minutes." Karl agreed.

Mira gave him a curious look. "You and the other Clerics I can see, as you represent the Beast and Dragon Gods, but how did your entourage end up travelling with a whole Clan of Orcs? Are they here to represent the War God?"

Karl shook his head. "We were actually just finishing a fight alongside them, a challenge to see who could eliminate more of an anomaly afflicted and overpopulated Sand Howler tribe when there was a magical distortion. It deposited us here. We weren't travelling together before that."

Mira sighed and twisted her hair up into a loose bun.

"Things have gotten strange since the system started to recede. I have heard that many regions have been troubled by insane monsters in the past few years, but that's more of an urban legend.

The fact that you're here describing the issue firsthand means it's true, doesn't it?

But more concerning is that I have heard many of the younger Guild Members have failed to access the Class Change menu on time. They're getting stuck at their base class." She explained.

"When did the translation feature stop working in this region?" Karl asked.

"Translation feature? You can read these inscriptions?" Mira asked, startled.

"Well, yes. But I meant spoken. You clearly don't speak Orcish, and they can't understand you. However, they can understand me." Karl explained.

"That's because you speak Orcish." Mira reminded him.

Karl shook his head. "That's the System. It's helping me with the translation. I have never studied Orcish a day in my life, but I still understand them, and they understand me. Does that mean you hear it as me speaking Orcish when I talk to them?"

Mira nodded. "And Serpent when you speak to the Naga Queen or the Black Dragon. Though Lady Nachtia answers in human Common, which is strange, as you spoke to her in Serpent."

Tessa frowned. "We have run into this before. When we were travelling through Newbon. The Trolls and Orcs understood you just fine, but everyone else had issues."

So, they were facing the opposite of what he had seen at home. The system was receding, and they were losing access to everything, one feature at a time.

"Back on topic, has the system never translated for you?" Karl asked.

Mira shook her head. "No, everyone just speaks the Common language to each other. The Darklight Host and the Dragon Gods both run schools to teach the language, plus literacy skills, to children.

What branch are you from, anyhow?"

"The Drodh City branch." Karl replied casually.

Mira nodded. "Oh, on the southeastern Island. That makes sense. Though, I was shocked to hear that you had been to other continents. Or is there a Newbon somewhere in the Dragon Isles?"

Karl shook his head. "No, it is on the Kabtumia Continent. As far as I know, there isn't another nation by the same name."

Mira snapped her fingers. "That's it. I just realized why you travelled so much. The portal is still active between the Demon Temple in Drodh City and the Beastkin Temple next to the Great Lake, isn't it? So, you can just use the platform to move between continents."

Karl smiled. "I can also use the Portal spell. So, I can move between continents once I have been there once."

Mira sighed. "That must be nice. Being the only one stationed here gets so lonely. There were supposed to be replacements coming, but I've been having issues with the System Messaging Function lately, and I don't know when they're going to arrive."

Chapter 1032: Contact The Guild

Karl pulled up the System interface and looked at the Guild interface.

{Guild Members Active} 999+

{Guild Rank} War Champion

{Full Guild Privileges Granted}

{Guild Branches In Range} 12

"What branch are you from? If they're in range, I can send a message for you and hope that someone receives it." Karl suggested.

All the others silently checked their interfaces at the same time. They were all Darklight Host members, but they hadn't thought to see if they could interact with the Guild in a while, since the only members were them plus Supreme Lady Matilda and the two under her branch, which now included Tiffani and one other.

[We've been here before. This timeline. This is just before I met you for the first time.] Cara announced.

She had been watching random events in her Precognition spell mirror, and just happened to see their current activities, which came with a basic time reference.

It might be off by a few years or a decade, but it should be close.

[Well, this should be interesting. Everything really was shutting down at this point, and it would be a very long time before they came back online again.] Karl informed her.

[Yeah, Spicy Dragon agrees that it's going to be fun to have us here.]

[Wait, what?] Karl asked.

[Oh, I messaged her once I realized we found a fun place. We keep each other up to date on new developments.] Cara explained.

And, as they were thousands of years into the past, this would have been the first time that the two had spoken to each other. But apparently Supreme Lady Matilda had just rolled with the flow, and didn't question what Cara was talking about.

Or, she might have already foreseen this event, and wasn't shocked.

It was hard to tell with the Chaos Dragon.

Karl sent off a Guild Message, hoping that someone would reply. {I am at the 42nd Narazir Zone way station. There is only one Guild Member here, waiting for replacement members who are overdue. Does anyone know their status?}

There was a long pause, then a return message came to him.

{Who is this, and how did you reactivate the Guild Messaging function? Tell Mira to retreat to the Khizdila Guild House. The outposts have been abandoned, and the Guild functions are failing fast.

Narazir is completely lost, she is the last active member there as far as we can tell. But tell her to stay away from the Troll Armies. They're waging war to take Narazir as their own, and the Dwarves have retreated below ground.

World Dragon be with you, War Champion. This might be the last message I can send.}

The name on the message was corrupted, showing as incomprehensible symbols and there were multiple corrupted characters, but Karl managed to translate it well enough.

Well, hopefully.

If they meant somewhere other than Khizdila he might be sending Mira on an adventure in the wrong direction.

{This is War Champion Karl. Be safe, and keep trying with the System Functions. There are still many Guild Members who have no idea what is happening.}

After a minute, there was no reply, so Karl had no way to know if the message had even been received. But he had gotten enough information to at least relay to their guide.

"Mira, I got a message through. I don't know who sent the reply, but they said to go to Khizdila. Apparently the Trollish Armies are taking Narazir as a Trollish Nation, and the Dwarves have moved underground.

The Guild Functions are apparently failing fast, so they're calling everyone to the Guild Houses. As far as they can tell, you're the last Guild Member in the region."

Mira laughed. "A thousand kilometres through the wilderness, while the Trolls are at war? Not only that, but I'll have to cross the East Wall, and that means the active war zone unless I go way out into the wilderness and stay away from the cities.

I think that if the System is collapsing that fast, it might be better if I just stay here. I might not be much of a Cleric, but I am a Cleric, and the farmers rely on the Darklight Host for emergencies.

If the Armies show up, the farmers should protect me.

I've been here for five years now, and I know everyone. The trolls don't need much healing, but I help with childbirth and nature magic for the crops."

If Cara was right, and this was the same time when he found her, the System was still going strong close to home. The Divine Beast Nation had no problem keeping Guild functions active, but that was halfway around the world.

So, it might not be long before the issues spread.

Karl considered sending a message to Orthos, the Bronze Dragon. But if it was before he became the War Champion of Bunga, that might just cause unnecessary confusion.

Orthos was on his list of {Friends} in the System interface, and showed as active, so the dragon was definitely alive and a member of the Guild. Karl wasn't sure when or how anyone got added to the Friends list, but there were a startling number of people on it.

City Lords, Generals, some Innkeepers and people they had gone to Dungeons with. Most were showing as inactive, but the members of his group and the two Ancient Dragons were all showing as available for messages.

Mira gestured further into the Temple. "Now that we've sorted out my future plans, should we finish the tour, and go rescue the Black Dragon from the enthusiasm of a Green Dragon Cleric who just found a shrine to the Bunny God?"

Karl nodded. "Yes, let's see the rest of the Temple. There is a lot of history hidden in here, and my team is making notes, so that none of it is forgotten if something should happen to the building during the unrest."

Mira laughed and shook her head. "I can't see the army caring about the building itself. If anything, the locals might tear it down to do home improvements once I am gone. The Old Gods aren't the Troll Gods. Or, most of them aren't. There are some shrines to the Troll Shaman Gods in here."

Chapter 1033: So Many Shrines

Mira led them through the temple, pointing out each of the small rooms, or sometimes just a vestibule, that was dedicated to each god.

"Whoever built this was very unification minded, weren't they? They went out of their way to ensure that there were shrines to every species' Gods on the main floor." Tessa noted.

Mira laughed. "It was made by the Darklight Host, of course. The top two floors are made for guest rooms, the basement is a reinforced shelter, and there is an outbuilding for giant species.

Most of the way stations are nothing more than an overnight stopping point, with some nature aligned Guild Members to provide food and water for travellers. But this one is truly ancient, and it was built around the existing temple.

As the historical records go, they found the statues dumped here from a destroyed shrine, or a lot of them. So, they stood them up, found out who the more obscure ones were, and built a new temple to all of the Gods who look over this world.

At one point, this was part of a Royal Retreat, and it was supposed to have a strong enough connection to the Gods that it could help with System Class advancements. But if my Guild Messaging isn't working, I would say that time is long past.

Personally, I suspect that the removal of the Royal Treasures is the cause.

There was a rumour that they had a set of relic stones in the treasures, and that was the source of the Temple's divinity. But I suspect that it was something more incredible than that because the Relic Stones are actually still in the basement floor, and they've been inactive for the last thousand years.

I read the caretaker's journal entry from the time when they went inactive."

Karl and Tessa turned to stare at each other.

They had found the lost System Stones entirely accidentally.

Tessa whispered the translation to the Orcish Chieftain, who looked pleased but not too concerned about the stones. Those weren't the goal of the Orcs.

{Ask her if she knows where the treasure went.} He whispered.

"The Chieftain would like to know if you are aware of the new location of the Royal Relics. He believes that there might be a relic of the Orcish Clans there, and they would like to trade to get it back." Karl explained.

Mira nodded. "They're at the Royal Temple of Shash, under the supervision of the Divine Fire Dragons. The Kingdom that they belonged to no longer exists, but the Dragons like to protect historical relics of value.

So, they collected them, and put them into stasis storage."

Tessa relayed the message and the Chieftain smiled. This was the closest that his people had come to finding a solid lead on where the lost scale piece was. It was a long way to Shash, but it was on this island, so they could walk there eventually.

The question was whether they would manage to get there before whatever strange anomaly had brought them to this place ended. It might be range limited, or time limited. If it only lasted a few days, there was no way that they could walk thousands of kilometres to the Grand Temple.

"Can we see the floor with the Relic Stones? I would like to sketch it." Tessa requested.

"Of course, follow me down the stairs, and I will show you. They're on the floor of the main basement room. Surprisingly, they haven't worn down at all in the time they've been inactive. They look as good as new, they just don't function." Mira explained.

She led them down the stairs, and into a large meeting room, where hard wooden chairs were arranged around a circle of golden stones on the floor.

Karl smiled as he realized that he knew all these runes. At least the ones that were on top of the System Stones.

It wasn't some grand magical spell, it was the words to a prayer to the World Dragon to grant them their heart's greatest desire.

[What do you think will happen if you speak the words? I mean, you got Avatar of the World Dragon for your skill thingy, right?] Remi asked in Karl's mind.

Karl's attention was drawn to his system interface, just in case he had read the message incorrectly during his advancement.

{Patron Deity Detected} [World Dragon]

{Skill Bonus Confirmed} [Avatar] The Avatar of the World Dragon may walk freely anywhere within the World Dragon's influence. Increases resistance to Negative Statuses that impact movement and thought. [Portal] spell range limits increased.

Yes, it was the World Dragon that the System had identified as his patron deity. And the prayer was to the World Dragon. So, in theory, he might be able to make the System Stones work again.

The repercussions of actually reactivating them after centuries of inactivity, and during a downturn of the System, when war and destruction were spreading wildly, could be extremely unexpected.

The Monster species were asserting dominance now that the other species were losing access to the System, and with it most of their power.

Over the next few decades, as the shorter lived species aged out of combat ability, the Monster species would gain utter dominance of most of the world. Karl knew that from history, both at home and from this continent.

Most species still had some magic, but a lot of it was System linked, and without the assistance of the System, only a fraction of the population was capable of gaining enough power to defend their people.

In the Golden Dragon Nation, and the other human nations, it was the mage towers. But even then, their influence was limited, and most humans lived in hiding.

The Dwarves had retreated into their mountains and locked the doors behind them, but that wasn't unexpected. When all the problems were on the surface, the subterranean species would naturally want nothing to do with it.

What Karl really wanted to know was if there was more magic hidden in these stones that he could replicate.

If he could make a whole new set of System Stones to send home, or place in the courtyard of the Guild House, he would become a living legend among the World Dragon's followers.

The man who granted Class advancements as soon as you were qualified.

Chapter 1034: Activate The Stones

[Why don't you use that Avatar skill and see if you can activate the stones? At least then we will know if there is more magic on them.] Remi suggested.

[Did you forget what the Avatar looks like? A Totem Ranked World Dragon will not fit in the basement of the temple.] Karl reminded her.

[Oh, good point. Without the skill, then.]

"Do you mind if I cast a spell to examine the stones? I would like to make a full record of the magic on them, if possible." Karl requested.

Half a continent was searching for these in his time. It was really only the Orcs and the Dragons who weren't trying to find them to either use or destroy them.

But, come to think of it, it was quite possible that the Dragons had them in their possession the whole time, and simply refused to tell anyone.

Mira shrugged and gestured at the floor. "If you think that you can actually examine those, you're welcome to it. The magic on them is under a divine seal. Many over the years have come here and tried to inspect them, but none have managed to learn anything about their usage.

I won't allow you to pull them up, but anything you can do with them in place and undamaged is fine."

Karl looked over his notes, and rearranged the activation prayer a little so that it flowed better. It wasn't written in Common, but some ancient language that used the Runecrafting Runes.

However, Ancient Dwarven also used most of the same runes, so Karl decided to go for the prayer in the Dwarven Runic language, instead of the original language.

{Mighty World Dragon, Creator of Worlds, Overseer of Might, Patron of Righteousness, grant us insight into the wisdom of the ages.} Karl began, following the inscription.

An amused voice echoed in his mind. {A wise Dragon once said, "You should use all your skill points before begging for more power."}

Karl burst out laughing, and stopped the prayer as the stones pulsed with golden power.

"Something happened." Mira gasped.

"Well, explain." Tessa agreed.

"I started what I thought was the invocation prayer, and got chastised for not using all my skill points before praying for more power." Karl explained as he tried to control his amusement.

Mira smirked, while Tessa and the Orcish Chieftain facepalmed.

"Well, do that, and start over. I think that it was working. Whatever invocation you used was enough to activate some of the power of the stones." Mira insisted.

She had lived here for years, and knew all about the temple. So, she was just as invested in seeing a new feature as the others were.

"Give me a few minutes and I will use my skill points, then try again. I think I understand how they work now." Karl agreed.

Karl opened the Skill Tree and stared in awe at the options presented.

{Destructive Beast Master} 0 Points Invested. Increases Bonded Beast Skill Power by 1 Percent per point invested.

{Invulnerable Beast Master} 0 Points Invested. Increases Bonded Beast Damage Reduction by 1 Percent per point invested, up to 20 Percent.

{Blessing of Skill} Creates one Random Skill. Cost varies based on Rarity. 1 Point for Common Skills, 5 for Rare, 25 for Epic Skills, 50 for Artifact Grade Skills, 500 for Legendary Skills.

{Blessing of Family} 50 points. Creates one additional Beast Space.

{Planeswalker} World Dragon Patron Exclusive Skill. 100 Points. Allows portals to open between adjacent Realms the user is familiar with.

Compared to many classes, it was a very short list. But what it could do was incredible. Choosing random skills with very limited Skill Points was a dangerous pastime, but depending on what it gave, it could be incredibly valuable.

He didn't have five hundred skill points, but another Legendary Skill like [Thousand Year Flood] would be insane. The spell scaled to an incredible level. While Remi could create seven million litres a minute at Overlord Rank, Karl would be able to create eight million cubic metres a minute, more than a thousand times what she could. At Mythic Rank, it would be nine Billion cubic metres of water a minute, and after that, things would just get insane.

But what if it was a Legendary Defensive or Attack skill? What sort of insane scaling would a skill like that have? Even [Apocalypse] was only considered Epic.

Though, Karl did have enough points to get a single Artifact Grade Skill...

Twenty Percent more damage reduction would be the logical place to start, as it would spread to the whole group and make them even more invulnerable. Two Epic Skills was also tempting. Or Damage Reduction to the cap and one Epic Skill.

The others could wait, this decision needed a minute.

Now that he thought about it, fifty percent more damage, using all the points that he had saved up, wasn't bad either. Well, fifty percent more for the beasts, which would likely transfer a portion back to himself.

A fifty percent buff to Rae's damage would be insane, and even Thor's mostly defensive skill set would be a good match for the bonus.

There just wasn't a bad option, even if he didn't currently have a use for Planeswalker, as he didn't know any "Adjacent Realms" to his world. Unless Tiny World and similar spells counted? He would have to find out once he got the skill, but that wouldn't be today.

[You know, you could just get 50 common grade skills, and then we could do everything.] Cara suggested.

That alone was an insane idea. But somehow it was suitable to the Chaos Badger.

Just learn to do absolutely everything, teach it to the beasts, teach everything that others could use, and you would have the best rounded group in the world.

But Common Skills weren't all that great, and might not be a game changer, even if they did learn nine new ways to attack with fire. Ten Rare Skills might be a better way to spend fifty points.

Greater Golem was a Rare skill, as were Offensive Adaptation and Disintegrate. All of them were staple skills of an adventurer, so there was little chance that they would go wrong by getting ten more of them.

In short, he was stuck. There were too many suitable options, and people were waiting.

Chapter 1035: Brutal Pugilist

Karl did have to make a decision, though.

Reluctantly, he went with a compromise. He would get the 20 points of damage reduction, as that was indisputably the group's specialty at this point. Then he would go for one Epic Skill, and hope that it turned out to be a good one.

{Points Used}

[Max Level] {Invulnerable Beast Master} 20 Points Invested. Increases Bonded Beast Damage Reduction by 1 Percent per point invested, up to 20 Percent.

Karl crossed his fingers for luck and chose again.

{Random Epic Skill Book Chosen} 25 points deducted.

{Skill Book Obtained} [Brutal Pugilist]

[Brutal Pugilist] Increases unarmed physical and skill damage by 15% per user Rank. Unarmed strikes target the opponent's weakest resistance.

Karl chuckled as he read the deceptively simple skill. For him, it was a decent, though not overwhelming, skill. But for Rae? That was absolutely devastating.

A spider didn't need and couldn't hold weapons. So all her strikes were unarmed. 120 Percent more damage at Totem Rank, on top of her [Predation] increased damage, and targeting the weakest resistance of the enemy, would tear through armies like paper.

Many enemies were strong against certain elements, or had great physical defence. But [Brutal Pugilist] simply ignored that, and targeted their true weakness.

Karl quickly learned the skill and shared it with Rae, then returned his attention to the stones after confirming that none of the other beasts could use it.

"Give me a moment and I will formulate a slightly different method. I think that I can find out what I need, even though the stones are unlikely to activate." He explained to Mira and the others.

Karl continued to use the ancient Dwarven Runic Language, as he knew that the others wouldn't understand it. It wasn't one that the System translated, and only a Dwarven craftsman would be familiar with the words.

Or a Runecrafter, like Remi.

{Oh, Mighty World Dragon, I seek not power. I seek understanding of how these stones work so that I might spread the knowledge in my own time.} Karl began.

The System Stones began to glow faintly, and Karl saw the hundreds of layers of runes imbued inside the stones, forming a massive combined spell when the stones were placed in their correct locations.

The knowledge burned itself into his mind, and Karl continued focusing on the stones as the world faded around him, and a memory filled his senses.

An ancient dragon, large enough that his shadow would cover a small city, descended from the sky. But just as he was about to touch the ground, he transformed to a rather disturbing looking creature, twenty metres tall with tentacles on his face and his left arm replaced by a massive tentacle.

But the creature was in exquisitely crafted robes, and the tentacle arm twisted gently as it opened a portal and brought a brown haired woman through.

There were iridescent feathered wings on her back, and she gave off the sort of solemn air that Karl associated with High Priestesses.

"Is this the place?" She asked.

The creature nodded. "Yes. I thought that something different would be appropriate this time. A more natural progression. So, I made them a new System, and granted it to every species willing to accept it."

The winged woman laughed. "You know that will just upset them again."

The creature shrugged, then set her on the ground and shifted appearances again, back to the golden form of the World Dragon, but smaller now.

The world dragon flexed his wings and waved one front claw to create the round platform of the System Stones. Then a massive black tower rose from the ground beneath them, enclosing the stones at the top, and the Dragon nodded in satisfaction.

"Yes, a Trial Tower to obtain the knowledge of the System for the first time. That will give them all a chance to compete for dominance on this world."

He plucked a single scale from his forearm and casually tossed it at the tower, where it seemed to melt into the stones.

"And now, it has a power core."

Should we retire back to the house? The children will be causing chaos for the caretakers by now." He joked.

The woman gave him a smile that showed true affection, and flapped her wings to fly to his back.

"First, we go for a ride. Let me see this world you have created, and then we can return home."

The vision ended, and Karl realized that the location he was shown was not here. It was the Golden Dragon Nation's Capital. The very spot where he had recovered the scale fragment.

That meant the first set of System Stones on the planet were right there, and now likely somewhere under the Cathedral.

But he also had valuable information about the World Dragon himself. The Dragon Gods were viewed as more of an aspect of their powers, unfathomable beings of immense power. But the World Dragon had shown up at the world he had just created with what appeared to be his wife.

They were taking a break from watching their kids to explore, and Karl was intensely curious about who those children might be, and what happened to them.

There was no mention of the World Dragon's offspring in the Pantheon.

They might be there, among the minor Gods and Immortal Demigods. However, no knowledge of them being born of the World Dragon had been recorded by the people of this world.

Tessa snapped her fingers in front of his face, and Karl shook his head.

"Sorry, I was immersed in a vision from the World Dragon about the creation of the first set of System Stones, when the world was first created."

"So, you know something about how it's done?"

Karl nodded, then considered what was needed to make them. "I do, but I don't at the same time. The process involves immense amounts of Divine Power. So, while I could place the base spell, or push to activate these ones, it would be entirely up to the World Dragon whether the prayer was answered, and it actually worked.

It's not something that a Mortal can do under their own power."

But now that he thought about it, he had learned something else as well. He had seen how the Trial Towers were made.

That was something that he could actually do, though to a much less impressive standard than the one that the World Dragon had made.

It was a form of [Tiny World] spell, combined with solid illusions, inside a physical stone building.

Whether that knowledge was relevant or not was questionable. But when they got back to Drodh, he might be able to create an upgraded training ground for the Guild House. That would be a huge attraction for the City Guards and other visitors.

It was also valuable information for Opal.

The process of creating the System Stones and the Trial Towers both contained illusion and alteration magic. Things that she could use to upgrade her own magical abilities.

Once she reached the Totem Rank, she was fairly certain that she could imbue her illusions with the Totemic Blessing to improve their durability and create durable illusionary opponents at the Overlord Rank or lower.

Someone of her own rank would cut through them with ease and shatter the spell, but below that, they would seem just like the real thing.

Chapter 1036: Mira's Decision

While Opal was lost in thoughts of how to make her illusionary world better, Karl was focused on the stones.

Their power was still present, undimmed by time. But they had gone inactive, and he couldn't understand the reason why.

The whole world was losing access to the system, and the power of the stones was dormant, but it wasn't losing any potency. It was more like it had lost its purpose, and was simply waiting for someone to wake it up again.

Mira sighed in resignation as she stared at the stones. "Well, if there is nothing to be done, then I suppose that's all there is to it. But it's good to know that this relic is genuine."

Karl nodded. "When you are ready to advance your class, or in need of something that the System should be able to do, try giving a prayer to the World Dragon while standing on the stones. If my guess is right, that should be the easiest spot in the world to access System features even as the System retreats from the world."

"So, it really is collapsing? The functions are becoming inactive?" She asked.

Karl made a noncommittal gesture. "For a time, it will be inactive. Then it will return again. But the process is slow, like the aging of dragons. It might be hundreds of years before the retreat is complete, and then thousands before it comes back to full power.

But as long as the stones here remain in their positions and undamaged, they should be fine for all that time."

Mira nodded. "In that case, when I am likely to be leaving the Temple unguarded, or it is going to fall, I will be sure to hide the stones somewhere that they won't be damaged or disturbed. That level of power is still well within my capabilities.

Do you think that I will start losing my powers as the System functions fail?"

Karl tried to remember what he had heard from Orthos and others.

"I don't think so. You should keep your powers for your whole life, but you might not be able to advance once the system is dormant, assuming that you live that long." He offered.

Mira looked concerned, then realized that Karl had said it could take more than a century. As a human, that would still put her well into her elderly years, and with troubled times coming, the elderly didn't often last.

Happy Lotus noises from upstairs distracted everyone, and Karl led the group up the stairs to make sure that the little Cleric wasn't getting herself in trouble.

The last one out was Mira, and out of caution, she locked the door to the stairs. Then, as she removed the key, the doorway simply vanished.

Nothing in Karl's vision indicated that there was a door there at all, or even a hollow spot behind the stone. At first, he was impressed by the Cleric's illusion. But the look on her face said that Mira hadn't done anything to change the entrance.

"The basement door is gone..."

Tessa gave the confused cleric a look that immediately snapped her back to coherence.

"Right, the Gods have hidden and protected the Relic, and I definitely don't remember any such room being in the temple. It looks like the door to the basement is over there." Mira amended.

There was another door to the basement down the hallway, but Karl suspected that if you followed it that the main room, where they had just been, would not be found.

Karl led the group over to the sound of Lotus' voice and found that she was sitting on the floor, playing with rabbits. By the dirt and debris on their fur, they were not summoned creatures, but wild animals from somewhere nearby.

But that didn't matter to Lotus. She was at the Bunny God's temple, and she had fluffy rabbits to play with.

Nachtia just shrugged as the others approached, indicating that there was nothing she could do about the situation, and that she wasn't all that concerned about it. The god whose shrine they were at was one of healing and fertility, and if Lotus hadn't been chosen by the Green Dragon, they would have been a good fit together.

"Did you find what you needed?" Nachtia asked while they waited for Lotus to finish.

"Yeah, I got some very interesting answers, and a bit of ancient world lore. That alone makes it more than worth the effort of coming here. Now, the problem will be going back to what we were doing before." Karl replied.

Nachtia chuckled. "What if we're not meant to? We didn't try to revert the last change to the region, why do it this time? I say we just keep up our mission, hunt the excess creatures in the region, and anything from a Monster Spawn, then wait for it to change again."

"What god asked you to clear out the excess monsters? That's just an impossible task. Between the Dungeons and the Outdoor Spawns, there will never be a shortage of wild beasts and monsters." Mira asked.

"The Black Dragon. The number of insane monsters from the Spawns was getting too high, and upsetting the balance of life and death in this part of the world, so we took up the mission." Nachtia explained.

"For fun and profit." Karl agreed.

Mira shook her head in dismay. Karl was most likely insane, she decided. It was a side effect of the System on some people. They got power, and forgot what it meant to be a normal person.

Or it could just be because of his class. Even the Rangers got a bit odd, talking to their hounds and bears, and those were just animals that couldn't truly talk back. With a bunch of predatory monsters in his head, who knew how far his version of reality had been warped?

She had often met with adherents of the Beast Gods in the past, and they were always tricky to avoid offending. It wasn't a stretch to think that Karl might be somewhat the same.

Chapter 1037: Pulse Of The World

Calling the creatures that Lotus was petting mere rabbits would be a disservice to the less powerful creatures who had to face them. They were actually a nest of Commander Rank Assassin Rabbits, what would have been considered a deadly species at home.

But with [If Not Friend, Why Friend Shaped], Lotus had no fear of rejection, and the Bunny God's offer had been gleefully accepted.

The creatures naturally wouldn't attack Nachtia, as their instincts screamed that if they approached, the Dragon would eat them. And that wariness spread to the rest of the group when they entered.

But they only stayed around for a few more minutes, and after that, they returned to their den near the temple, leaving Lotus satisfied with her day's accomplishments.

"Everyone, take a moment to find a shrine for a prayer of your own, and then we can make plans for the rest of the day,

It wouldn't be right to stop at a way station with a shrine to all the gods and not at least offer a few prayers." Karl suggested.

He made a good point, and they had seen the shrine for the Red Dragon as they passed, though they hadn't stopped there on the tour. If that was the case, Tessa assumed that all the Dragon Gods were likely represented.

Karl had already done one of his own, at the System Stones, and he had even gotten a proper response from the World Dragon, or a System affiliated Deity.

An insult to his intelligence, but a direct response from the Gods.

The others spread out, and Karl smiled to himself as Dana stopped at the altar to Karl, the Ancient God of Magic.

Karl waved at the statue, then continued down the hall, checking the last few altars that they hadn't seen yet. They were more obscure and less followed Gods. But there were a few familiar faces.

Karl saw the Shaman God whose statue Remi had, and the shrine to another God of Rebirth that he had seen engraved on some of the ancient temples in the Golden Dragon Nation.

It had been an incredible history lesson for him today. Not only had he learned about a lot of new gods, but that revelation of how the first System was formed, and confirmation that Hawk really did have the actual World Dragon scale that was used to form the core of the System, was huge.

It also explained why the scale was so small, not like one from an adult dragon. The World Dragon had reduced his size to more easily interact with his human sized wife.

Karl inspected the scale in Hawk's space, which now had a small shrine beside his nest, resting on a bed of branches, on a pile of fire element stones.

Hawk's favourite, naturally.

Eventually, he would have to make a plan to either reveal the scale to the world or find a proper caretaker for it. Keeping it locked away in a separate space while they awakened it was one thing, but the scale was the core of the system, and he could only imagine the benefits for humanity if he were to bring it back fully restored.

Well, not just the benefits. Having it back at full strength could well touch off another interspecies war across the planet.

And there were already plenty of those going on, but on a smaller scale than the one that was likely to result from that particular decision.

Karl absently sat down in a shrine to think, and then looked up and realized that it was the shrine dedicated to the World Dragon. He had expected it to be somewhat grander than the others, given the importance of the World Dragon to the System and the Darklight Host in particular.

But this altar was different.

It had the feeling of ancient power, as if it had always been here, and wasn't part of the reconstructed temple that was turned into the way station by the Guild.

"You wouldn't believe how strange things have gotten on this world since you were first here. Or perhaps you would, and you knew all along that a smooth ride wasn't ever going to be part of the experience.

How does that old saying go? Strong stone does not make a skilled miner?

But I really could use a bit of advice on how to deal with the scale you left behind. It has recovered enough now that I couldn't just put it back where I found it. The power that it leaks would draw enemies far too powerful for the Golden Dragon Nation to survive.

But it doesn't feel right to just keep it to myself when it's the core of the System."

Karl felt a rumbling of amusement in his mind.

{Who said that it is the core of the System? My scale was just a power source for the trial tower.}

Karl froze in shock, but the voice was gone.

"So, the scale is only the core for a trial tower? Did you want me to make another? I think I know the method." Karl asked.

Nothing answered.

But if the scale wasn't the core for the System, what did they mean in the vision that he had?

Was the System here the whole time, and the issue was just accessing it?

Karl sat lost in thought for a while, then an idea occurred to him. The key was in the name. The creator of the System was the World Dragon. The System must be part of the world that he made.

Why would he make an incomplete world?

No, the System itself hadn't been affected when the tower was damaged. That was simply an access point. The System was innate to the world, and the tower was made to show people how to access it for the first time.

But then why the fading and resurgence?

A flicker of knowledge came to Karl's mind from Remi. The ley lines, the underground lines of mana that ran all over the world, pulsed slowly, moving up and down. They were currently on an upward trend, and her Shamanistic training books had told the Naga Queen where to look for the places that they were most accessible.

So, they should be the reason.

When the Ley Lines were near the surface, or even above it, the touch of the world's mana could awaken all sorts of powers naturally. But when they were deep, accessing the System took special tools or knowledge.

Both had long since been lost, so when the world's power retreated into the depths, the System became harder to access, or nearly impossible.

That also explained why the Dwarves had managed to keep so much of their power, even when they lost the vast majority of their knowledge over the ages. They buried themselves a kilometre beneath the surface of the world. They were closer to the source of the world's power.

Chapter 1038: Night Visitor

Armed with new knowledge, Karl considered whether it really would be a good idea to make a trial tower.

On one hand, it wouldn't really be necessary, as the power would be surging now for a thousand years or more. But on the other hand, if the tower lasted that long, it would help people remember how to access the System and maybe the next downturn wouldn't be so bad.

Karl felt that amusement in his mind from the shrine again.

The World Dragon had a point. Even if he built the trial tower now, in a thousand years, nobody would remember how it was made, and it was more likely that they would either believe it was cursed or inactive, depending on if they could still remember how to use it.

So, they would probably tear it down, as the first one had been.

That was the thing about time. Even the Bronze Dragons, with their infallible memories relegated irrelevant to the back of their minds, and if nobody thought to ask them, they would never think to go looking for those memories.

Karl suspected that nobody had told most of them to begin with, but even the Bronze Dragons weren't immortal. As generations passed, those irrelevant memories didn't get passed down.

Karl blinked, and a vision appeared in front of him.

The skies were filled with colourful wings, and the ground was filled with giants.

Between them, a million Totem and Mythic Ranked skills exploded at once as the Dragons and Titans went to war with each other. Spells shredded wings, dragon fire melted bodies, but just as fast as they died, they were brought back by the clerics of their respective species.

Then the vision moved upward, looking at the world from a great height.

All over the world, fires of destruction burned, and the bones of slain species littered the ground. Only small pockets of life remained, hidden from the great war between the Titan Gods followers and the followers of the Dragon Gods.

In those havens, humans, elves, Dwarves, beasts and monsters coexisted in peace.

They had no other choice, the rest of the world was uninhabitable.

Then the vision was gone, and Karl knew how the memories of the System's creation and essential access methods were lost. A great war had killed entire generations and destroyed every repository of knowledge in the world, except what little had been brought by the survivors.

There were few children, no elders, and only a handful of males of most species.

They had evacuated in the traditional manner, women and children first. But the war had spiralled so far out of control that none had returned, leaving only the chosen guards behind to protect their people.

What had caused such a battle, where two sides fought each other to the brink of extinction, was not included in the vision that Karl was gifted with. But it had most certainly happened in this world. Karl recognized the landmarks when the view had retreated up into the stratosphere.

Karl heard his name being called and got to his feet.

"Thank you for the knowledge. I understand things so much more clearly now. I don't know what to do with that knowledge yet, but I will work on that." He informed the shrine, then stepped into the hall and found himself in front of the shrine for the Silver Dragon, the Dragon God of magic, counterpart to the human God of Magic.

"Where did you go?" Tessa asked as Karl joined them in the hall.

"I went to offer some well wishes to the Dragon Gods. Are we all finished here?" He asked.

Tessa nodded. "The Chieftain found a shrine to the Orcish God of Cunning, and he's finished his prayer, or whatever that was. His Clan is stopping outside for the night. I suggest that we take rooms upstairs, in case something happens tonight."

She had a good point. Everywhere that they went in the interior of this nation, things got more and more dangerous with every change.

Mira led them upstairs, and Karl smiled as he saw that the rooms were dorm style, designed for a whole travelling group to bunk together. It was both the safest way to protect vulnerable members, and the best way to prevent incidents between groups.

In individual rooms, some might get ideas about causing trouble. But not nearly as often when their target would surely have backup.

There was nobody else in the building except Mira, but Rae still took the spot nearest the door, just in case someone tried to visit them. The window was her first option, but there were bars on it, and she could still see it from her top bunk position.

They were settled in for the night when a lone traveller showed up at the front of the temple in simple black robes. Mira was asleep, but the man seemed happy to wait, so Rae went to greet him in humanoid form.

"Hello, traveller. The caretaker is asleep, what can we help you with?" She asked, wondering where she had met this man before.

She definitely knew that aura, but this Overlord Ranked Cleric was unfamiliar.

The man bowed politely. "Lady Spider, I have come to the shrine hoping to commune with my God, might I spend the night in contemplation?"

Rae shrugged. "I'm just a visitor as well, but the place isn't locked, so I don't see any reason that you can't go visit the shrine of your God. That's how temples work, right? If you want to sleep in a room, the empty ones have their doors open."

The cleric nodded, and Rae activated [Night Hunter] so she could follow him and try to determine where she knew him from.

The strange Cleric made his way through the hallways with ease, not frightened by the dark, and not needing light to find his way through the silent temple. He clearly had no idea where he was going, only a vague direction, and had to double back a few times, as the halls weren't neatly arranged and often simply ended at a larger shrine.

But when he found the shrine to the god of the underworld, he went inside, and Rae felt the attention of the Divine on him, and on her. It didn't seem hostile, but somewhat wary of what she might do to introduce the cleric to his god directly.

Not that Rae had any particular animosity towards the man, just on general principle.

As he began to chant, Rae returned to the room. A death cleric talking to the Lord of the Underworld wasn't interesting, and she still couldn't figure out why the aura he gave off was so familiar to her.

Chapter 1039: Incurable Curse

The next morning, they went down to invite Mira to breakfast, and the Cleric was sitting on the front steps, staring at the sun and contemplating the clear morning sky.

"Stuck on a thought?" Karl asked, as he took a seat beside the cleric.

The man nodded. "Yeah, I've been searching for the key to immortality. You see, I've got an incurable curse on me, placed by a Demigod. Nothing in this world can break it but intervention by the Gods.

Only, the Lord of the Underworld told me that there was a way to avoid it and live forever."

Karl nodded. "A curse to die young, that can be avoided forever? I am likely going for the obvious here, but isn't that just a curse of Undeath?"

The cleric stared at Karl as if he had just dropped legendary lore on him out of nowhere.

"I don't think that you're wrong. But wouldn't I lose my humanity?"

Karl shrugged and gestured out at the Orcish tribe. "You might lose your humanity, but not being human doesn't mean that you can't be a decent person. The Orcs barely understand human sensibilities, but once you understand how Orcish culture works, you'll find that they're not a bad bunch, and they are living their best lives.

It's the same with the Dragons.

They have their own ways of doing things, and it has little to do with how humans do things.

I also know a few vampires, and while one is batshit crazy, the other one is a really sweet girl. She works at our guild house in the store."

The Cleric was lost in thought for a while, then stood up. "I will go speak to my God. Perhaps he can help me choose a path. Not many of the undead are suitable for an eternal existence, but if anyone knows how to achieve it, the God of the Underworld will.

Thank, you, Beast Man."

The Cleric returned to the shrines, while Karl stared out at the sky in his place, wondering what sort of chaos might come during the next few days. The changes had been short so far, so Karl didn't expect to be in this region for long.

But if they made the best of their time here, they might be able to head off some of the early issues in the region, or they might gain a greater understanding of the myriad Divine Beings who were worshipped by the various species of this planet.

Eventually, Karl got up and went for a short walk around the Temple, mirroring the path that Rae had taken earlier looking for trouble.

There, in the middle of a hedge maze in the backyard, he came across the most curious platform.

The fact that it was there wasn't surprising, he had been following a stone walkway through the maze, and there were many sitting areas, like the hedge maze at the Academy, which brought memories of his first few days with Dana.

Karl was so lost in the pleasant memories that he almost missed that this sitting area was not like the others. There were no benches, and there were actual magical runes written on the stone, not just the poetry and historical messages like the others.

"Is this a portal platform?" Karl wondered as he deciphered the runes.

He could tell that [Runemaster] was translating for him, as this was no language that he knew or had seen before. But it was no normal portal platform, the spell was much too complex.

But many of the runes were similar to the Portal spell that he knew. So, it was a transport platform of some sort, but not a portal.

Could it be a form of long-distance teleportation?

While he was standing there, recording the runes from the spell, Karl sensed a presence as someone joined him.

"Good afternoon." He greeted absently, only to be met with the surprised face of a pixie appearing in front of him.

"You knew that I was there?" The creature asked in shock.

Karl nodded. "I sensed you there, but I couldn't see you until just now. I thought that you were behind me."

The tiny woman, no more than ten centimetres high, rubbed her chin in confusion.

"Interesting. I wasn't in this world until you said hello."

Now it was Karl's turn to be confused.

"Then where were you? I was examining this platform when I sensed you." He asked.

The pixie laughed. "It's a gate to the Fae Realm. A mirror of this world, but not for humans. I was looking out of it to see what sort of strange thing had happened to this Realm lately when you said hello."

Perhaps it was a side effect of [Planeswalker]? The skill was supposed to let Karl move between Realms, but he had no idea how to actually operate it. Or, more correctly, he knew how to operate the skill, but he had nowhere to go.

Only, now that he thought about it, he did have somewhere to go. The Fae Realm was adjacent to this world, and it felt like it was one layer above.

Then, there should be a layer below.

Karl focused on the skill, and found that he could feel the cleric from this morning communing with the lower layer. That meant it was most likely the Underworld, the land of the dead.

A definite asset, should he end up there.

But he could also sense another place, immensely and overwhelmingly powerful.

The pixie poked him on the forehead. "Don't just go looking into the Immortal Realm like that. They don't like people spying on them, and we're both far from Immortal.

Until you gain immortality, they don't even consider you a sentient species there, and even the weaker Immortals usually live like slaves. Kind of like what happens to the humans who can't access the System in the Monster Nations, or the Dark Fae Kingdom."

Karl withdrew his mind from the Immortal Realm, which appeared to be a collection of massive continents floating in a void.

"Thanks. I just gained the skill that made that possible, and I hadn't tested it before."

Because he hadn't known it was possible.

Chapter 1040: How The Changes Work

The pixie tilted her head as if listening to something Karl couldn't hear, then bowed politely.

"It's time for me to go home. Dinner is ready and mom will be mad if I come back smelling like the Mortal Realms. Have a good morning, Monster Man."

Then the pixie was gone, back in the Fae Realm and flying off at hundreds of kilometres an hour.

Karl tried not to laugh at being named the Monster Man by the Fae, who likely didn't even know what his class was. Most likely, the tiny creature was going either by smell or appearance, and Karl spent all his days looking like a Cat Demon.

He really should start spending time as himself again, instead of remaining in this form. But it was so much more comfortable this way. The fur of the transformation was temperature regulating, and he didn't sunburn. So, he was always comfortable whether it was hot or cold.

Plus, Dana liked snuggling with his fur.

Karl finished making notes on the spell to access the Fae Realm, in case that was needed for a related spell later, and moved on to finish exploring the area.

As he returned to the front, the cleric was outside again, and in a much better mood.

"Did you come to a conclusion?" Karl asked.

The cleric nodded. "My father is cousin to the King of Sholaha, and I was expected to spend my life in service to the crown. That is not what I wanted in life, so I became a Cleric.

But now that mortality is catching up to me, my thoughts on life have changed somewhat.

And while I was in contemplation, I saw souls moving south to the nation of Bomgon. I intend to follow them and learn the arts of the Necromancer, but not with the aim of raising the undead.

Instead, I aim to transform myself and, as you said, try to become undead. While holding on to the values that matter most to me."

The Cleric had just started walking away from the temple when the scenery changed, and Karl found that he was standing with the rest of the group in an open field again, next to a perplexed Clan of Orcs.

Lotus looked around, then snapped her fingers in realization.

"I get it. I know how the changes work. Who here did something important just before the change?" She asked.

Everyone else shrugged. They were just relaxing after breakfast, and Ophelia was in the gym, in the middle of a set.

Karl raised his hand. "I was talking to that cleric, and when he made up his mind to head south to Bomgon to try to find his own path to immortality, the world changed. Literally five steps after he left, we were gone."

Lotus nodded. "I think that I know how it works. There were many unresolved issues in the past of this region. Now, time fluctuates here. So, every time that an unresolved event ends, it changes again. This time it ended early, and I could feel the change focused on our location.

I think that weird cleric guy is actually going to become someone important during the years between resurgences. Well, either that or he does something different now that we talked to him and the issue was fixed."

From Lotus' shoulder, Remi laughed. {If you just convinced the future Lord Bomgon or his mentor to become an undead, you're never going to live it down.}

His soul didn't look or feel like the Undead Lord's. But thousands of years and a change of species might have changed that. It was more likely, Karl thought, that he had just met the man who preceded the current Lord Bomgon.

Perhaps even his father.

The Orc Clan's Chieftain came over to them for answers, and Karl realized that they were back at the same spot where they had been before things changed. The Orcs camp was still here, and Orcs never left a mess behind when they moved on.

The Chieftain smiled at Tessa and Karl. "Not as impressive as I was hoping for. There was no fighting at all."

Karl smiled back. "We can't win them all. But it was a good history lesson for everyone else. We learned a lot about the various gods. Did you gain any knowledge from the shrine to your Orcish God of Cunning?"

The Chieftain nodded. "It gave me advice on how to search for the lost System Relics. Which seemed strange at the time, as there was one in the other room. But now that we have returned here, it seems like much better advice."

Tessa gave him a curious look and the Orc elaborated.

"He said that the stones didn't remain in one spot after they were hidden away. They are in a pocket dimension, and we just need to find it so that we can claim it for the Clan. Once it is found and opened in our present time, it should stay open at the will of the Great Chieftain that finds it."

That might not be as grand as the search for the scale fragment that the majority of the world's Orcs were on. But searching for a set of System Stones would certainly make them one of the most powerful clans in the world if they actually found them.

Just being able to advance classes at will as their Clan advanced would be incredible.

Plus, they could trade the other Clans for access.

There were dreams of becoming the most prestigious Orc Clan in the Dragon Isles running through the Chief's mind. Nobody was likely to find the scale piece in the immediate future, so there was a chance here to elevate his Clan for an entire generation or more.

Not only that, but if they could advance their classes, he would have the roughest, toughest Orcs anywhere, and they would make a whole generation of more powerful children. What more could a clan ask for?

Tessa could see that there was much more to the message, or to the Orcs' interpretation of it, but she let it slide. That was their own business, and they were already starting to pack up in preparation to move on to another location.