

Beast Master 1041

Chapter 1041: If You Ask Politely

The Orcs were just about to leave when portals began to open in the distance, encircling both them and Karl's group.

Totem after Totem stepped through the portals, then a flood of undead followed them onto the battlefield.

Karl smiled at the Chieftain. "It looks like you get your fight after all."

"The Gods smile upon those who ask politely." The Orc agreed.

Karl had no doubt that the Orcish Chieftain had done exactly that when he got in contact with his deity. It was likely the very first thing that he asked for, followed by a request for information about the Orcs quest.

A Totem Ranked bone dragon stepped onto the grass and roared, shaking the air with its fury.

"Looks like I have my first target. Pick the one that you want, but you should know that the Chaos Badger is definitely going after the Necromancers." Karl informed his eager ally.

"In that case, I will take the Unholy Paladin. He looks like a worthy opponent. Do you have strong enough barriers to protect your ladies? The undead are looking quite intently at them."

Karl nodded. "I have a setup for them. Fight your heart out, my people can hold their own."

As if to prove his point, Tian layered a Totem Ranked earth barrier over everyone, including the Chieftain. It gave Ophelia and Cara the same sort of stone fur that Tian protected himself with, while the others gained a simple metallic sheen of liquid metal barrier.

It mostly made them look wet, but Nachtia looked particularly majestic with metallic black scales.

Karl took two steps away from the group, then activated [Avatar]. The mighty form of a Totem Ranked World Dragon filled the space between his group and the Orcs, and the undead began to charge.

"The Beast Man really lives up to his name. To think that he fights as a dragon. Very impressive." The Chieftain laughed, then charged into the undead to find his target.

Karl left his bodyguards, summoned as Dire Bears to blend in with Ophelia, and flapped his wings to charge the Bone Dragon.

His first blow shattered a portion of the Bone Dragon's skull bone, as [Brutal Pugilist] buffed the damage that Karl did with a [Disintegration] coated claw.

Going after the enemy's weakest resistance was far more cruel of a technique than even the massive amount of bonus damage that the skill did.

The two massive dragons lashed out at each other, and Karl's tail sent dozens of smaller undead flying as he twirled to keep the Bone Dragon from getting at his flank.

The Orcs cheered and laughed as four Totem Ranked battles began at nearly the same time.

Rae, Cara, the Chieftain and Karl had all picked targets, and the other Totems were on their way to try to restrain the rampaging dragon.

Karl got a grip on the Bone Dragon's sternum and twisted, flipping the undead dragon over his body and slamming it into the ground.

The cloud of dust and debris shaded the battlefield, while the shockwave of the Totem Ranked skills threw entire hordes of Zombies off their feet. The creatures weren't intelligent enough to brace themselves against the impact, they just let themselves be toppled, then got up again.

Opal and Tian teamed up to create an army of Dwarven illusions with stone shields and hammers. The illusions couldn't take much damage, but the weapons could. So, they could face off against the undead hordes as a shield wall, and the others could fight over and around them.

The Illusions moved into place to stop the first rush of wights toward the Orcs, then took a knee as the undead collided with them at a run.

The Orcs leapt over the shield wall to tear into the undead horde as it piled up and ground to a halt. Then, the second rank attacked over the illusionary Dwarves, and allowed them to push forward and regain their original position.

That let the first group of Orcs retreat to heal, while another group advanced past the shield wall.

Keeping all these barriers and items intact was the hardest that Tian had ever worked in his short life, but brother Thor was keeping his Eternal Lightning barrier up on most of their team, including the Orcs.

If Thor could do that much as an Overlord, a few dozen physical items shouldn't be impossible for him, Tian decided.

Claws screeched on scale and bone as Karl and the Bone Dragon grappled with each other. Three Totem Ranked undead warriors had come to join the fight, leaving the Lich Lord and the Necromancers on the far side of the battle, far outside Karl's target priority.

They were learning fast, Cara decided as she snuck up on a Necromancer.

But they hadn't noticed when she tore apart the first one, as they couldn't see over the taller forms of their swarm of undead.

They had at least had the decency to keep powerful summoned protectors near themselves, but the badger had a plan for that. All she had to do was sneak up, nullify the barrier, then Void Blast and claw the squishy living caster apart before his friends could react.

Rinse and repeat for the others.

But the Undead knew that she existed, and when she tore the first one apart, she was immediately besieged with Totem Rank unholy attacks that forced her on the defensive.

She couldn't even finish off the Necromancer in one smooth strike, as she planned. She had to dive and weave through the Undead army until she could get a chance to take down his barriers again and leap on him to deal with him using pure physical fury, as all her power output was being used to keep herself alive.

Cara celebrated her victory and retreated when the Necromancer gurgled his last breath.

But the victory was short-lived, as only a second later, a pale shape darted out of the crowd and wrapped around him, then the Necromancer was back on his feet, looking groggy, but alive.

[Consumption] was necromantic magic that transferred life from summoned or controlled Undead back to the Necromancer, an emergency survival spell, and it had triggered when he temporarily died, like a mobile first aid kit.

These Undead really were getting annoying. But maybe Sister Rae was having better luck.

Chapter 1042: Beasts Unleashed

Indeed, Rae was having better luck than the others.

With her Undead Army spell and her Golems, she had massacred three Totem Ranked warriors already, and she was currently incorporeal, watching a terrified Necromancer plead for mercy.

The unfortunate spell caster could obviously see her, but Rae simply stepped through his ring of Zombies and let him see the pure hunger in her many eyes as she stared down at him for his last few seconds.

[Night Hunter] was WAY more fun when the target could see you.

The Zombies collapsed as Rae killed their master, then used [Entangling Vines] to make a pole to impale him on. Even if they tried to regenerate him, they would have to tear him down first with the vines spread through his insides.

Karl let loose a [Void Blast] and everything within fifty metres of him simply ceased to exist, except the Bone Dragon he was fighting.

The pair crashed to the ground of the newly formed pit, and Karl used his strength advantage to smash the other dragon's skull off the knee of his rear leg.

The Unholy Magic lashing at his body briefly dimmed as the dragon lost consciousness, then stopped entirely as Karl liberated the dragon's head from its body, shattering the spell that animated the creature.

He pulled the large red core gem free from the Bone Dragon so that it didn't simply reassemble itself in a few minutes, then checked the battlefield.

The Chieftain was on his second target, Rae was running wild through the enemy Totems, but Cara was in a bad way, fleeing through the undead as an enraged group of Necromancers and a Lich Lord chased her.

The Chaos Badger was laughing, but she was sending out three [Nullify] spells a second to keep them from getting to her.

[Sister Cara really knows how to push people's buttons, doesn't she?] Tian asked as they watched the battle for a second to ensure there was nowhere else they were needed.

The fight under Totem Rank was solidly under their control, with the Orcs and the ladies working together to herd the Undead away from the wounded, who were guarded by Remi's team as Lotus operated her healing station.

[There is nothing that Cara loves more than making enemies mad, and these ones are really mad.] Opal agreed.

Cara got a split second of reprieve, and a [Void Blast] exploded directly against the crotch of the Necromancer's barrier.

[Good point. She's not even trying to kill them, just keep them too mad to realize that Rae has almost reached their position.] Tian realized.

Karl took flight and formed a massive [Holy Blast], Tian's Holy Element attack skill.

It would heal the Orcs where it touched them, so there was no chance of collateral damage, and the amount of mana that he was pouring into the glowing ball of golden light in his claws was drawing the attention of every surviving Totem.

The group chasing Cara changed their focus and hurled counterspells at Karl, aiming to nullify the spell with Unholy Damage.

Karl threw the spell at the ground, and the skills collided, creating a massive explosion that tossed him further up in the air, and vaporized a large portion of the Undead Horde's reserves.

Not quite what Karl had hoped for, but effective enough.

The three Totems who had been chasing Cara rose into the air to engage Karl at an altitude that wouldn't make the rest of the battle into collateral damage, and the Void Badger sighed.

Up there, she couldn't hide at all.

Instead, she turned her attention to the undead horde, and the ones near the Orcish Chief. He was having a glorious two on one battle, and she wouldn't interfere unless it looked like he was going to lose.

But she could give him room to fight.

Hawk was forced to retreat as the battle came into his airspace, and Karl told him that he could scout to ensure there were no hidden reserves.

The bird had never gotten the hang of the humanoid transformation, and if they were going to fight over the main battle, that put Hawk in an impossible position.

Unable to fight properly on the ground, unable to attack from the air.

He even had the [Lord of Destruction] transformation that ignored most damage types.

Maybe he could get away with that and a request to be shrunk? If he was the size of a regular bird monster again, he could fly close enough to the battle that he wouldn't be targeted by the Totems.

Karl gave him an assist with [Unobtrusive Behemoth], and Hawk transformed into the ghostly fire elemental that was the Lord of Destruction.

As hoped, the Totems weren't interested in the Overlord Ranked bird. They had Skeletal Mages on the ground to deal with flying and fast-moving targets. Compared to the bird, this World Dragon hatchling with its crazy damage reduction and massive strength was a much greater threat.

"You're finished today." The Lich Lord informed Karl in a dry tone.

{Perhaps if you had all come at me together, that might be true. But probably not.} Karl disagreed.

The Undead prepared their spells and Karl hurled [Holy Blast] out in a wave in front of him.

The two elements were a hard counter to each other, and the match at first appeared to be a stalemate. Only, right behind the first wave was a second, and then a third.

The second wave of holy power crashed into the shields of the Undead, which the third wave collapsed before beginning to burn their bodies.

The Totems recovered quickly, regenerating themselves as they brought up their barriers and used skills to counter the barrage of [Void Blast] attacks that Karl was hurling their way.

{You can run now and inform your Lord that you failed. I am sure that he won't hold it against you.} Karl suggested as the power around the Undead visibly dimmed.

"Your skills are impressive, but not nearly impressive enough." The Lich Lord countered.

He had a magical device in his hand and a smirk on his face.

"Say goodbye, you filthy creature." He chuckled.

[Goodbye, you filthy creature.] Cara agreed.

Right before she nullified his barrier and stole his magical Orb, which she took immediately to her space for further inspection.

Chapter 1043: Some Losses

The Lich Lord stared blankly at his empty hand, unable to comprehend what had just happened to him.

Then, the Void Blast hit his chest and his corporeal body was disintegrated, returning his soul to his phylactery even as the other two Totems immediately fled the battlefield.

That was a sure kill item, procured for them directly by Lord Bomgon, and certain to do enough damage to bypass the damage reduction of even the Monster Man of Drodh. They came here knowing that he was nothing ordinary, and that he had beasts to support him, but the threat was on a whole other level.

If they were going to eliminate him, it was going to take a Mythic Rank team leader.

The problem with that was that you couldn't just move a Mythic Ranked asset around the continent without a good reason or some preparation. Even in a region as unstable as Gabil, they would attract far too much attention.

Worse, the Monster Man was rumoured to be connected to the Chaos Dragon.

If those two monsters started openly working together, nobody could stop them from doing whatever they pleased.

There weren't more than a few dozen Immortals living full-time in the Dragon Isles. Most of them moved to the Immortal Realm and only came home to visit every few years when they recruited promising candidates for their Clans in the Immortal realm, or were called upon by their families.

The mana here was getting stronger, but the Immortal Realm was already strong enough to support steady growth to the Demigod level if you could manage to stay in the most desirable regions.

Meanwhile, in the Grand Palace of Homorvi, the Capital building of Bomgon, the newly reformed Lich Lord stared at the Lord of Bomgon with pure terror in his eyes.

"Let me get this clear. You brought ten Totems, with their armies of undead, and you failed to kill even one member of the Monster Man's team? Did you even manage to kill any of the Orcs that they were standing beside?

Perhaps you managed to eliminate some burrowing rodents that were nearby?" The Lord asked in an emotionless tone that sent chills through the Lich Lord's spine.

There was soft laughter from the nearby Nobles, and Lord Bomgon turned his attention to the Seer.

"Care to elaborate, what is so funny?"

The blind vampire woman smiled in his direction. "They certainly killed more than one underground rodent. I have seen it. The aftermath of the battle between the Bone Dragon and the Avatar of the World Dragon obliterated the battlefield for nearly a square kilometre.

Soon, there will be a new watering hole where the battle raged, as the crater formed by the battle between them is fifty metres deep."

The Undead Lords shook their heads in dismay. Seers were always a bit off, as they lived the world through visions, without their natural sight. But that one in particular was ancient, and long since tired of living, so she had no fear of retribution for her attitude.

Whoever thought that turning a cursed Seer into a Vampire was a brilliant idea had a sick sense of humour.

"Did the army manage to kill anyone at all? A single sentient being?" Lord Bomgon asked.

He had a faint smile on his face that terrified his Lords, but the Seer could only go by the dry monotone that he asked the question with.

"No. The only sentient casualties were our Totems. Though, we did recover most of the corpses, so you could say that there were no permanent casualties, except the bone dragon. The Monster Man stole its core gem before it could be recovered.

As far as the group accompanying him goes, forget having killed any of them. None of them sustained any injuries. Perhaps they are immortal? I don't know, they simply don't get injured when they are hit.

You should invite them here.

It might make the court a bit less insufferable if we let him rampage in the Palace."

Lord Drodh actually laughed, and the majority of the Undead Lords knelt and bowed before what they assumed was his rage.

"You don't get to die that easily, old woman.

Besides, even if I brought him here, he has an uncanny connection to the Chaos Realm, and he would most likely just ignore your presence.

But it appears that his trip has granted him far more than expected. Advisor Fell, inform the Generals to focus on the coastal regions. If the World Dragon had left his treasures in the core of the nation, the Avatar would have found them by now.

Now, get out of my throne room. All of you."

Once the throne room was empty, Lord Bomgon turned to the Seer, who was still standing in her position, lost in a vision.

Once she returned to the present, Lord Bomgon cleared his throat.

"What did you see?"

"The end of the last resurgence. I know where the System Stones were then, but they are not there now. The Temple is gone." She replied casually.

"Destroyed?" Lord Bomgon asked.

"No, simply gone. I didn't see where it went, but not so much as a stone remains in the region. It was indeed where the Monster Man of Drodh was standing. You weren't wrong to send the Army after him right there. It was simply a few thousand years too late."

Then, she turned and left as Lord Bomgon considered the possibilities.

The God of Death had never failed him in all the years of his life. But against this particular pest, nothing worked quite right. He suspected that it was interference from the Chaos Element, what many would call 'Luck'.

But as he searched through his memories, Lord Bomgon knew exactly where the Seer had seen the battle take place. He had been there before, a few centuries after the System failed, and there was indeed a Temple at that exact spot. One run by an old crone from the Supreme Lady's Guild. However, he didn't recall there being System Stones there.

Perhaps she had taken them before he had arrived?

He might need to change his tactics. If he was going to find the method to alter the System and exclude the food species and chattel from the System, he couldn't keep relying on the advice of the Gods.

The God of the Underworld wasn't the only one willing to manipulate probability, and the most likely locations always had others on 'Unrelated Missions' set by the other Gods present. The other Gods might not want him to find the System Stones, but he would find a way to obtain them without relying on the advice of the Gods.

He just needed more time.

Chapter 1044: Feel More Personal

Cara was immensely pleased with her new acquisition.

She had no idea how it was supposed to work, as she had failed to make it do anything but glow faintly with Chaos energy, but as that was all she could make it do, it had been repurposed as a rather beautiful decorative night light over her bed.

That might seem like a small thing to others, but they didn't understand how difficult it was to make Chaos Energy glow.

Dana flopped down on the grass beside Karl as Thor and Hawk finished cleaning up the battlefield. The others had retreated into the Tiny World to rest, but the afternoon was clear and warm, but not scorching hot as the desert had been.

"Well, that was quite the battle. Do you think that it's something personal between Lord Bomgon and us?" She asked, unsure what to make of the situation.

"Yes and no. I am reasonably certain that he despises me, but I have the feeling that he's not deliberately targeting us, but the locations we're standing at.

As I recall, his goal was to remove the System from humans and others weaker than the Undead.

But we're standing on the former location of a full set of System Stones.

If I'm not mistaken, we've become a recurrent foil to his plans. We keep ending up at the best possible locations for advancements and System benefits, but those are also the locations that the Undead Army is trying to find so that they can destroy them." Karl mused.

"So, we just keep getting attacked everywhere that we go?"

Karl shrugged and rolled over to kiss her forehead. "That's not really up to us, is it? If we keep ending up in the locations where System Relics are, it's likely that we will keep getting attacked. But there are only so many of them to be found, so it might be months or longer before we run into another one.

And by then, Lord Bomgon might have come up with a better idea.

If it becomes a real issue, we can start exploring a different region for excessive numbers of monsters. The Undead Army is focusing on just this one region, so if we switch nations, there is a very low chance that we will keep having trouble with them."

Dana was skeptical of that plan. She knew that no matter where they went, strange and unexpected outcomes would follow them, and the Lord of Bomgon might not be the biggest troublemaker that they attracted into their tangled web of fate.

"I will talk to the others about what they would like to do. There has to be some sort of solution that doesn't lead to the Undead Army sending stronger and stronger opponents at us until we're all dead." She quietly informed him.

"It will all work out in the end, you'll see." Karl agreed.

Karl and Dana simply lay beside each other in the grass for a while, enjoying the afternoon sun, until a disturbance in the distance caught Karl's attention.

"Something is coming, and it's not the Orcs coming back." He whispered, not wanting to alert whatever was coming their way if it hadn't already noticed them.

His aura was strong, and he wasn't trying to hide it, so if it was wild monsters, they should have realized that there was a Totem Ranked threat in the grass here. Leaving his aura fully exposed was practically setting a warning flag on his location to chase wild beasts away.

The group wasn't slowing, and they had adjusted their course to approach Karl directly. Definitely not an accident, and possibly from a monster spawn.

So, Karl got up out of the grass and watched the group of Naga as they approached.

They slowed down a hundred metres away, as if confused, and began casting some sort of spell. Not an attack, Karl decided. They were looking for something.

"Is there something I can help with?" Karl called, loud enough to be heard by sensitive ears.

A Totem from the group slid over and nodded politely to Karl.

{We detected a Queen nearby. A strong Overlord, nearly a Totem. The Goddess demands that she be brought to the temple before her advancement. It is unconscionable for a Queen about to ascend not to introduce herself.} The Naga warrior insisted.

Karl smiled and Dana chuckled. Remi would definitely introduce herself. She loved making new friends. And then using them as experiment volunteers.

"She is in a separate space right now, that is why you haven't detected her properly. Let her finish her alchemy project, and she will come out to properly greet her kinsmen." Karl explained.

{The young Queen is a skilled Alchemist?} The Totem asked hopefully.

"A master Runic Alchemist." Karl agreed.

Dana poked him in the side. If these Naga insisted that Remi stay with them, there would be real problems for the group.

The Naga didn't react, other than to coil his lower body into what looked like a comfortable resting position. Clearly, he had nothing more to say, and no intention of moving until he had met Remi.

Karl opened the Tiny World's entrance, and Dana retreated to join the others and pass a more detailed version of the situation than the System Chat had been able to convey. But Remi was already finished her potions, as she had just been making healing potions to trade with the next location they visited.

The Orcs didn't buy them, but everyone else should, and she might be able to get more species of plants for her recipes.

Remi slid out to greet the Naga Chieftain, and the whole delegation bowed down, laying flat on the grass.

{Your Majesty, it is a pleasure to meet you. The Goddess requests your presence at her Temple.} The Chieftain insisted.

{These are my people, we will all have to travel together. How far is it to the temple?} Remi asked.

{Five hundred kilometres. Not more than ten days travel.}

Remi chuckled. It was so strange to hear someone describe travel in days when they had Hawk, Thor and Karl.

{I think that we can make it there faster than that. If you join me in the carriage, the rest of your team can rest in the separate space, and we can make it much faster.} She insisted.

The Naga looked vaguely insulted.

{Your Majesty, it is an important part of the ritual to travel to the Temple under your own power. We can let your people come to the city, but they cannot enter the Temple with you once we arrive.} He explained.

Remi shrugged. {We will sort that out once we are there. But ten days travel on the grass, is that really necessary?}

The Chieftain tried not to laugh. The young Queen really was a born regent, even if she was raised among other species.

Chapter 1045: Afraid of Heights

The Naga considered Remi's position.

{How about we travel by other methods until we reach the swamps? If we travel the last day on our own, that should be enough to please the Goddess.}

Remi nodded happily. {Invite the others over, and I will show them a good spot to rest as we travel. How are you with heights?}

The Naga looked confused. {Heights, Your Majesty? I don't understand.}

{I was going to ask one of the others to let us fly on their back, as my Spirit Snake is not fast enough for the purpose. Riding on their back, we can make it five hundred kilometres before it gets dark.}

{We're headed to Khathar in Nulnalgat. Or, into the swamps just east of the city. It's not that far.} The hopeful tone said that he was definitely afraid of flying, but didn't want to say it out loud.

Karl cleared his throat. "We can have Thor pull the wagon, and spend the next few days going over land instead. It's simply more efficient to get there on wings."

Thor perked up his ears when he heard the word wagon. It sounded like they would have things to do again soon.

The rest of the search team came over, all Overlords.

They showed signs of recent battle, with damaged and stained gear, but their wounds were all healed. Naga had some natural regeneration, and while it wasn't on the level of the Regeneration Skills, it was still good enough that minor cuts and such would heal in a matter of hours.

There was a shaman among them, a young boy. He was giving Remi a most reverent look, like he had just seen a movie star.

Karl was keeping an eye on the young Naga, and Remi tried not to laugh. The Karl was worried about her virtue, but the young Shaman was far too cute and naive. He grew up among Naga, while Remi had a much more interesting group of siblings.

She knew how to deal with strangers who were too forward. Sister Rae taught her.

{Follow me. There is a swamp area in the separate space that should be comfortable for everyone. I have built resting platforms, but do try not to overfish the waters. The numbers are limited, and they are part of a breeding experiment.} She explained, then motioned for the others to follow her through.

The mana level in the Tiny World was increasing with Karl's power, he noticed.

He had tied it to his power instead of letting it feed entirely off the outside world so that the others could get higher quality mana. But feeling it now reminded him that he could start to expand the space again.

His mana pool was many times what it was when the spell was created, so he shouldn't have any problems increasing the Tiny World by at least a third.

But he also noticed that it was lacking in the Fundamental Rules that the System had enlightened Karl to when he reached Totem Rank. If nothing else, he should use the Rule of Mana Manipulation to enhance the space. Everyone used it to meditate and increase their internal energy levels, and that Rule would help the process.

However, that would have to wait until they didn't have guests.

The Chieftain inspected the section of Swamp that Remi led them to, and smiled at the young Queen. Her hospitality was impeccable, and there was a whole set of platforms and thatch roofed shelters in the swamp for them to rest as they travelled.

But even more importantly, the mana was thick, there were fragrant plants all around, and no predators, so they could rest peacefully.

{You have a wonderful home.} He insisted.

Remi shrugged. {It's more like my garden. I mostly live in my Alchemy Lab, and that's over there in the stone building. You can't have the outside elements interfering with the process.}

{I understand. It is important to have the right environment to work. Now, would you prefer to rest first, or shall we take out the carriage and have the Shaman summon an Elemental to pull it?}

Remi laughed. {We have a Behemoth with us who greatly enjoys pulling the wagon. We also have the ability to summon large beasts when he needs a rest, so don't worry about the carriage.}

Remi led him back outside, where Thor was already set up, with his size reduced to suit the carriage.

{Oh, this is nice.} The Chieftain insisted, then climbed up into the cargo area at the back.

He was rather large to be sitting in the front, though it wouldn't be a problem for both him and Remi to fit, as the carriage typically seated eight comfortably.

Being in the back, with the cover off, he could rest his upper body on the roof of the carriage and see everything that was going on around them, as well as giving Karl directions and serving as an extra guard.

Remi called her Bodyguards, who took up their usual spots on the running boards of the carriage, and then settled in the front while Karl urged Thor to start heading east.

Like a proper Queen being escorted to a new city.

The route that they took at the start didn't matter as much, as there were no mountain ranges between them and their destination, so all they had to do was find the easiest path in the right general direction, and then adjust when they were close.

{Will the rest of your companions be staying in the separate space?} The Chieftain asked Karl once they were moving.

"Yeah, it's easier if they all remain there. We have enough room for them to join Remi up front, but they only usually do when they need to be ready for something, and Remi would normally be in her lab.

The carriage itself is a distraction, as it's easy for the monsters from the spawns to see, and that was why we were out here. Removing excess threats, you might say." Karl explained.

{What an odd mission. We rarely concern ourselves with issues beyond the swamps, but you have come so far. Your Guild Title says that you are from Drodh.}

"Well, we have some time. How about we share stories?"

Chapter 1046 Toward The Swamp

The Naga seemed enthralled by the experience of riding on a carriage pulled by a behemoth, and Thor was moving much more quickly than his people could constantly move across the grass.

Naga were extremely fast in burst movements, like the snakes they resembled, but for long distances, they weren't all that impressive.

They were faster than many of the bipedal species, but compared to the Behemoth, who was casually jogging along with the carriage, they were far slower. This speed would be nearly as fast as they could sustain for a few minutes, not a casual all-day pace.

"How have things been in the swamps? I know that Gabil is a special case, and we have information to relay to them about exactly what seems to be happening. But how much of that has been spreading east across the border?" Karl asked, striking up a conversation with the lounging Naga.

{Things are pretty good in the swamp. The Shaman Goddess protects the swamps, so most of the spawned monsters stay away, unless the incident started in the swamps themselves. But sometimes that is a good thing. We had a Crocolisk spawn not long ago, and that will be food for many months. It's not the most common outcome, but when the monsters or beasts are an edible species, it is a huge windfall for the tribes of the entire region.

It's not just Naga, you see. The Lizardmen have many tribes in the territories around ours as well. Then the various Fae tribes. Many types of Fae like to live in the swamp, especially the Wisps and the Witches.}

Karl was confused. "I thought that the witches were a System Class? Like, not their species, but their specialization?" The Naga laughed. {Oh, yes, those are witches too. But I mean the various types of Fae Witches. Water Witches, Swamp Witches, Forest Witches. There are more, but those three all live in the swamps. Mostly the Swamp Witches, who are the only Dark Fae out of the three.

They're a nasty piece of work, but they've got powers that can really help if you find a way to negotiate with them.

Usually, we find a Witch Doctor among the Trolls and send them to do it. The Swamp Witches and the Witch Doctors seem to have an understanding, and they can usually work out some sort of deal that isn't open-ended or with surprise payments due.}

Karl chuckled. "I know a human Witch Doctor. She has her whole body covered in tattoos of power. It's quite the sight."

The Naga chuckled. {The Trolls only wish that they could use such an ability. It's part of their class skills, but you can't tattoo or scar a Troll, so none of them can practice it.}

"That has to be frustrating. Such a powerful skill, and they can't even use it. But can you imagine a passively buffed troll that has twice the usual strength and stamina? They would be unstoppable." Karl laughed.

The Naga shook his head in dismay. {Don't go giving them ideas, they might just find a way.}

Karl was reasonably sure that he knew the way already. Instead of tattooing them, you could paint it on, and just refresh the ability when the paint wore off. The Trolls probably already did it, as he had seen them wearing war paint in the past.

They idly chatted through the day, and when the sun started to go down, Thor stopped the wagon to be swapped out for a giant Dire Bear, who would pull them through the night.

{This really is efficient. By morning, we might have to switch to something aquatic. Our destination is actually on the east side of the Swamps, so if we're going to take the most direct route, there will be many muddy roads along the way.}

"That's alright. We're already making good time, I'm sure nobody will be too upset about a slower rate when things get muddy. Are there actual roads, or would we be needing a boat? I have the ability to make a flat-bottomed boat to take us through the swamp." Karl suggested.

The Naga considered that. {If we alter our course a little, we can reach the headwaters of the Gund Fork long before we reach the swamp. Then we can follow that almost all the way to the Temple. It's only a few kilometres from the river.}

[Hawk, do you see a river in front of us somewhere?] Karl asked.

[Northeast. The road doesn't go anywhere near it, but it should be easy to get to.]

"I can turn the carriage northeast toward the river now." Karl offered.

{Northeast? No, it should be east, past the road, closer to the village of Nararam.}

Karl shrugged. He didn't know any of the river names.

[Oh, I see it. That's still a hundred kilometres away. You will be there tonight sometime.]

"My scout says that he found the one you mean, it's a hundred kilometres away. Your group must have been searching for some time." Karl explained.

The Naga nodded. {We were sent out over a month ago, expecting trouble in locating anything within the wilds of Gabil.}

Karl sighed. "That's quite the adventure. I can only imagine how many times you had to double back, searching for a target that kept moving. We've been all over the place in the last month or two."

The Naga laughed. {Fortunately, we have the seers linked to us, so they can give updates. They tell us where we're most likely to find what we're looking for, and we adjust our position. But until we met Queen Remi, we didn't know exactly what we would find.}

Karl nodded in understanding. "Remi is an interesting one, and it would be hard to expect someone just like her, even if you knew that it would be a Naga Queen her age. She's gone through a few major changes as she advanced as well. Some of that is the new skills that I have taught her using the talents of my class, most of it is her own hard work and dedication to studying."

The Naga looked impressed. {She is remarkably studious for a young Queen. It is somewhat more common for them to live a few decades as a spoiled debutante after they rise from the rank of Princess. But then, even the Princesses are notoriously spoiled, as they are expected to become the next leaders of their tribes, even if they can't advance and become true Queens. Though our people have advanced past the state where we were unable to deny the will of our leadership Caste, they innately hold a huge amount of power and respect among the Naga, simply for what they are. Leading us is literally ingrained in their genetics.}

Chapter 1047 To Nararam

The bears carried them through the night as Hawk rested, and by the time that the sun came up, they were at the lone road that ran north up the eastern side of Gabil.

"Nararam should be just south down this road. Do you want to go through the city, then to the river, or continue east and pick up the river in the wilderness?" Karl asked once the Naga woke up.

{You're still awake?} The Naga asked, surprised to see Karl.

"Sort of. I prefer to meditate, so I don't have to leave my spot. The Golems give me enough input to keep us out of trouble. That's why I used my own Golem." Karl explained.

The Naga nodded. {That's a good idea. Not many have the skills to do that, but your class is a unique one.}

Karl shrugged. "I'm technically in my third class now. I started as a Beast Master, and then advanced. Each has been better than the one before, so no complaints."

{Oh, what sort of class comes two advancements after a Rare Class?}

Remi laughed from inside the carriage. This should be entertaining.

"It's still a Beast Master base, but Beast Master Champion. It helps advance both me and my beasts, but primarily the changes were that it designated me as the Avatar of the World Dragon, and granted a new transformation and some related abilities." Karl explained.

The Naga stared at him in silence, unsure how to answer that.

Avatar of the World Dragon as a class skill? What sort of broken skill was that? And what sort of related skill would even come with a power like that?

{So... you can transform into a dragonkin?} He tried.

Karl shook his head. "A Totem Ranked World Dragon."

The Naga slowly blinked, first one set of eyelids, then the other.

Karl shook his head. "A Totem Ranked World Dragon."

The Naga slowly blinked, first one set of eyelids, then the other.

{Well, that's unexpected. So, your skills are all focused around being a dragon?}

"No, my skills are all focused around improving both myself and the beast team. New skills, higher combat power, even the option to add more group members. The dragon transformation is more of a flex on enemies than a core skill of the class." Karl explained.

Remi and the Naga Team Leader both laughed. Transforming into a Totem Ranked Dragon was an immense flex on any enemy that you might be facing. Especially to a Naga, or any other scaled species. As far as scaly creatures went, dragons were the pinnacle of performance.

The morning passed smoothly as they headed for the river, but when they finally arrived, the Naga realized that there might be a problem with this plan. You couldn't put something as large as a carriage in your System Inventory unless you had a special skill for it. Plus, they didn't appear to have a boat.

The first problem was solved when Karl helped Remi down from the carriage by letting her transform into a reduced form of her Spirit Snake form and drape herself over his shoulders. Then Thor took his carriage back into his space, and Tian created a large metal flat-bottomed sailboat.

Karl jumped over to land in the boat, then let Remi use her basic [Elemental Control] to create a gust of wind to push it to shore.

"Climb in, and we will head down the river. The current is flowing with us, and Remi can make a steady wind, or use water manipulation to push us along faster."

Both Naga looked happier now that they were on the river, and the older Naga chuckled as they started to move.

{Normally, we have someone stick their tail in the water to push the raft, but this is fancy. I like it. But will it be alright when we get to overhanging branches?} He asked.

"We can switch techniques when it comes to that. I can also choose aquatic beasts as my Golems, so we could have them pull the boat if we needed to."

Remi paused. She hadn't thought about that. There were some excellent fish monsters. Not particularly powerful, but if they were summoned as Golems, they would be Totem Ranked by default. If Karl summoned something like a Silver Catfish, a Commander Rank river monster, it could swim at nearly fifty kilometres an hour. Hawk had found a few of them while scouting in Drodh.

[You should call the water Golems. It will be fun, like a water wagon.] Thor suggested.

The concept of a wind powered floating wagon was just too weird, in his opinion.

Remi hid her dismay at his lack of enlightenment. Even on land, you could push a carriage with wind if you wanted to. But such a concept was anathema to Thor's Cerro developed mindset.

Strong legs were far better than letting something as soft as air try to do the work.

The Silver Catfish had no good way to hook up a harness, but Rae solved that by creating a bit to go in their mouth, like the ones you used to guide horses.

The fish could pull the boat that way, and it wouldn't interfere with their fins.

She passed the custom crafted rope to Karl, who hooked it to the boat and passed it to the Golems. Then, they were really off to the races, skimming along the water at breakneck speed as Remi laughed in joy.

With no natural wind, the surface of the river was glass smooth, perfect for high-speed boating.

"Now, we just need to keep this speed up for half a day, and we will be close to the temple." Karl announced.

The Naga laughed. There was little chance that would actually happen. Even with four Totems in their group, they were sure to be either accosted by offended monsters, or questioned by the tribes whose territories they were passing through.

A major river was an important part of many territories, and they wouldn't allow just anyone to go down it without at least checking them out. His group of investigators had been stopped dozens of times before they had made it to the Gabil border, and some of the stops took entire days to settle passage rights through the territories of tribes they had no agreements with.

If the sky wasn't so terrifying, he would have suggested that they fly over and avoid this part.

Chapter 1048: Lizard Checkpoints

The first signs that the Naga's fears would come correct came half an hour later, long before they had even reached the swamps, where he was concerned about the tribes.

Their way was barred by a pair of Lizardman warriors, each with a team behind them, stationed on both sides of the river, with a net stretched across the width.

Karl had the fish slow them to a stop, but waited in the middle of the river.

"Good morning, what seems to be the issue today?" He asked politely, while the Lizardmen stared at him.

"There is a toll to pass. You have travelled through our territory without a permit." The Lizardman demanded, but Karl could hear the fear in his voice.

For amusement value, he let an aura leak using one of his less used Packmaster Skills.

[Dominating Power] The Pack Master's Aura gains a {Mental Domination} effect at will, requiring weaker minds to submit to his will. Hypnosis type ability.

He wasn't giving the Lizardmen any sort of intimidating look, but he could see them begin to cower under the power of the oppressive aura.

The leaders of the two groups managed to stand firm, holding the net across the river, as Karl reached into his inventory and took out a handful of gold coins.

"How about I pay the fee in Gold? Two coins for each of us should be fine. That's three for each of you." He insisted.

The Lizardman bandits were about to remind him that this was a robbery, and that his way down the river was blockaded, but after careful consideration, both nodded.

It was better to let this one pass.

They caught the coins Karl threw at them and lowered the net as the Lizardmen behind them complained.

It was only three people in a fast boat. Even with a pair of Totems, they weren't a threat to a whole Clan, so they should have been grabbed and forced to turn over their valuables before they were killed.

At least, that was the consensus of those too far away to feel Karl's aura.

But the boat was already past the net, and moving faster than they could run. Not that Karl would make it far. They weren't the only bandits along the river, and the next tribe wasn't welcoming to outsiders.

Karl found that out in person only an hour later.

This time, the tribe had placed a raft in the middle of the river with a pair of Overlord Ranked warriors on it, waiting for them to arrive. If that was intended to fight them, it would be laughable. But Karl could

feel that there were Totem Ranked warriors in the village nearby, and these were just the border guards.

So, again, he pulled to a stop, and wondered if there was a better way to deal with Lizardmen.

"Good afternoon. We are headed east to Khathar, might we get passage through your territory? We have room for an escort if you want to send one with us." Karl called.

"Disembark. Our chief needs to speak to you. End any transformation spells, and lower your barriers." The border guard insisted.

The Naga team leader got worried when Karl smirked and Remi began to giggle, but there was nothing he could do when she transformed back from her minimized Spirit Snake Form and Karl splashed into the river as an enormous dragon.

The Lizardmen were utterly baffled.

"What do we do now?" One of them whispered.

"Well, they did it, so I guess we take them to the chief? I don't know. Nobody ever complied before." His partner whispered back.

Remi turned to their escort. {You know, this might be easier if we let you rest with the others until we're close. The Karl is superb at dealing with other species.}

The Naga rolled his eyes. {That remains to be seen.}

Karl pranced out of the river in a way that reminded Remi of Thor when he was happy. A bit too bouncy to be casual. But she turned the wind to blow the boat to shore so she could get out and put the boat in her space after everyone had disembarked.

No need to risk it getting damaged.

"Why the fuck is there a dragon on my lawn?" She heard someone yelling, then winked at the Naga beside her.

{See, all as planned.}

Karl's amused voice replied to the village Chief. {Your guards insisted I should come in this form instead of my travel disguise. I can change back, it's much more convenient for conversation, even though your grass is soft under the feet.}

By the time that Remi got to the centre of town, Karl was back in Cat Demon form, and the Lizardman was looking tense.

"Now, you were here to request passage through our territory?" The Chieftain asked.

Karl nodded. "Yes, we are going east down the river, and my friend is afraid of heights. So, we decided to go down the river."

The Lizardmen weren't sure what to make of that, but the embarrassed look that the Naga was giving made it clear who Karl was talking about.

The Lizardmen of the tribe began to gather, in case this stranger was a threat.

They had their pride, and just letting strangers show up and move through their territory without so much as a formal request to the Chief made them territorial.

Karl couldn't have made an advance request, as he had no idea their territory existed. But telling them that would only make things worse.

The Lizardman chief didn't know how to respond. They couldn't stand the Naga, but that was a World Dragon. Lizardmen worshipped the dragons nearly as much as the Drakes, though they didn't claim to be descended from Dragons themselves.

"I will grant you permission to pass through the territory one time. Your boat is fast, so I request that you are gone by evening." The Chief decided.

That was enough to keep his people happy. Make the intruders leave by the end of the day, and don't let them linger and hunt the tribes resources.

Chapter 1049: Forget Boating

Once they were out of sight of the village, and Karl had ensured that there was nobody trying to follow them, he turned to the Naga.

"I will transform and bring Remi with me to the city of Khathar. This is becoming too much of a nuisance, and if we don't change methods, we're guaranteed to get into an unnecessary fight." Karl insisted.

The Naga sighed, then nodded. "I won't argue. The Lizardmen control the first part of this region, and they hold a grudge against the Naga, so they won't make it easy for us."

Karl opened the Tiny World's entrance for him, and called for Thor to escort him to the others, as they were spread out through the swamp area in the Tiny World.

Then he transformed and went for a swim in the river as Remi climbed on his back and put away the boat. Once that was done and the golems were dismissed, Karl flapped up into the air with Remi stretched out flat on his back.

Water Control let her create a loop to hold herself in place, though the World Dragon form had ridges on its back that would make for a fairly sturdy grip, even without [Eternal Lightning] over them both, keeping the wind off her.

Karl didn't go as high as Hawk usually did, as the air got cold up there, and Remi wasn't a fire element creature. But flying lower gave them an excellent view of the territories that they passed over, and let Karl memorize a few new spots to add to his list of possible Portal destinations.

Every few minutes, he could see that someone had noticed them and pointed up at where he was flying overhead, but Karl was moving so fast that none of them put in the effort to try to intercept him.

It simply wasn't worth it.

{This is so much better. Wandering around the swamp on a boat was not only slow, but there were annoying people everywhere. Flying over populated areas is better.

Look, they're even waving hello at us.} Remi narrated as they flew.

{I think that they're actually trying to cast a spell to knock us out of the sky, but they don't have the range to make it this high.} Karl laughed.

They were definitely using magic, he could feel it, even from this distance.

{Should we go tell them to behave?} Remi asked.

She could probably hit them with a potion from here, but she left all the randomly exploding ones in the Tiny World, not in her own space, where she could more conveniently grab them.

What Karl could not have known was that the mere presence of an Avatar of the World Dragon was enough to influence the System, and that they were not casting hostile spells at him, they were casting celebratory blessings on the children who had just awakened their classes.

Some of the waving was hostile or annoyed, but only when they hadn't linked his presence to what was happening in the villages.

Karl followed the river to the border, then circled for a moment when he saw the ruins of an ancient wall.

It would have once been a mighty defensive fortification between Gabil and Nulnalgat, but now, it had gone thousands of years without maintenance, and most of it had collapsed or had been deconstructed to reuse the stones for housing.

That was what Mira had feared would happen to the Temple when she was gone, but there was no sign of the temple at all when the change happened.

Not even a foundation was left, and none of the houses nearby were ancient or made of stone.

Then, Karl continued east down the river for a few hundred kilometres until the road crossed at a grand stone bridge, and headed east to a city of around sixty thousand people.

That had to be Khathar, as it was the only large city in the region, according to the map that he had.

The rest were all small villages and tribal camps of the Naga, Trolls and Lizardmen.

So, Karl descended from the sky to land near the west gate and let Remi down. She chose to remain in Spirit Snake form so that she could float near his shoulder instead of landing in the muddy street.

"You know, for a Naga, you really are a clean freak." Karl joked as he transformed back.

Remi wiggled in what he thought was a shrug. {Swamp water is like a herbal bath, but I can smell the nastiness in that mud. Dirt roads are just gross.}

So, Karl walked up to the city walls with Remi floating near his shoulder. They were met by a large Mountain Troll, close to four metres tall and broad shouldered, with thick gray skin and curious green eyes that sparkled like gemstones.

"State your name and business." The troll announced in a bored voice that contradicted his clear interest in the answer.

"I am Karl and this is Remi. We are stopping here on our way to the Naga Shaman temple."

The guard nodded. "Do you have an invitation to the Temple? They don't accept random visitors."

Karl smiled. "They sent a request for us, yes."

The Guard smiled, showing obsidian black teeth. "One silver coin each to enter the city. If you wish to enter the auction, seats are for sale on your left, and items can be evaluated at the building on the right."

"Oh, in that case, I might enter an item for the auction. I should have something worth selling to recoup the cost of the trip." Karl agreed.

He still hadn't had time to make anything Totem Ranked, but he had a number of Overlord Ranked items with him.

So, he paid the toll and led Remi into the auction's evaluation house, where a young Naga warrior stood staring at them in shock.

"Good morning?" Karl tried, as the man wasn't moving.

"Uh, good morning, Sir. Good morning, Your Majesty."

[I like these people. They're all so polite.] Remi giggled in Karl's mind.

[I get the feeling that their shock at seeing a Queen is going to lead to something troublesome.] Karl countered.

[How much trouble could they cause? I have a Karl with me.]

Chapter 1050: Khathar City

Karl took out an Overlord Ranked sword, created with runes for sharpness and skill damage amplification, and placed it on the counter between them.

"I would like to have an item evaluated for auction." He explained.

The Naga nodded rapidly, breaking himself from his shocked stupor.

"Of course, sir. That is... certainly to be acceptable to the Auction House. Even with the Dungeons producing more gear lately, there isn't much Overlord Ranked gear circulating."

That was only natural. Most people who had the power to do Overlord Ranked or higher dungeons didn't spend all day grinding out gear for sale. They could afford to live well after only a few visits.

Lower Ranked dungeons often had lineups to enter, but that was seldom the case for more powerful ones.

Those were more likely to have local bounties for their completion and the resources inside.

The Naga called out a supervisor, while Remi contemplated how he was speaking Common. Naga mouths were not made for that, but while he had an accent, he was definitely speaking common.

The Supervisor was an aged Demon with light violet skin, but agile movements Karl didn't expect from someone as wrinkled as he was.

"Now, what do we have here that my man can't price? Oh, that is wonderful, a crafted weapon. Tell me, where did... No, you made that one personally. I can see the maker's mark in the System Information.

This is most excellent work. Are you certain that you want to put it up for auction? There are no reserves, and no withdrawing after bidding has started." He asked.

Karl nodded. "I can always make another, and I collected more than enough Elven Steel from the Dungeon at Bara for our Guild's Master Smith."

The Demon looked curious. "You have a true master smith? A dwarf?"

Karl shook his head. "No, a Demon named Ashbringer."

The auction house representative nodded, not knowing the name. He had been hoping it was a Dwarven Master, as their work was known as high enough quality that it would demand a higher price simply because a Dwarven Master had created it.

"The auction is tomorrow morning, and runs until later in the afternoon, depending on the number of items presented. As a contributor, here is a pass for you and your plus one in the back rows, so you can watch the sale."

They shook hands and Karl headed into the city with Remi floating at his side.

{Ooh, they have new forms of cake. You have to stop there. Get at least three of each.} Remi insisted.

"Three of each?"

Remi nodded. {One for me, one for Lotus, one as reference to make more.}

The beastkin girl working the counter gave them a tired smile as they entered.

"Sir, Madam. Welcome to Annette's bakery. Do you know what you would like, or would you like me to explain our offerings?" She asked, clearly a rehearsed line.

Karl smiled back at her. "Actually, I need one of every flavour of cake that you have, sliced for twelve. Then I need three of each of the squares and puff pastries. I have a large group who would like samples."

The girl looked panicked. That was half of the goods in the store.

"Sir, that will be quite expensive..." She began, but Karl set a small sack of gold coins on the counter and she gulped.

"I see... Very well, sir."

Remi silently celebrated as the worker packed up box after box of treats. Lotus had gotten new food related skills when she changed classes, and one of them was to recreate simple baked goods that she was familiar with.

It wasn't perfect, so she still had to make most things from scratch, but she could just conjure the puff pastries and then make the fillings, which was so much faster when they needed sweets.

Puff pastries were the peak treat in Remi's mind, as they were bite sized, no matter what form she was in. She could just pop them in her mouth intact, and that was much better than having to cut bits off to eat.

In fact, in this greatly reduced Spirit Snake form, they would completely fill her mouth.

It was just a shame she couldn't make herself even smaller.

The baker came out as the girl was packing up the last of the food, which Remi quickly moved to her space for safekeeping.

"Dammit." The woman muttered, looking at all the sparse shelves.

"Sorry, if we had known that we needed so much, we would have sent word ahead of time, but we just entered the city." Karl apologized.

"That's alright, Sir. I have extra help coming in tonight anyhow, as the Auction day tends to be one of our busiest."

Karl and Remi left the shop and headed into the street, looking for a spot to stay the night.

Well, somewhere to safely pretend they were staying for the night, as there was no need to bring everyone out of the Tiny World into separate rooms.

There weren't many inns in the city, and it looked like most of the merchants were staying in their carriages, parked in the street. Even the beasts pulling them remained in place, and were mostly still hooked to the carriages, with feed bags in front of them.

"We might have miscalculated. Perhaps we should have brought out the carriage and had everyone exit from there." Karl muttered, then spotted a sign with a picture of an ale mug on what looked like a three-story Inn.

"Never mind, we should be in luck."

He stepped inside the dingy tavern, and the heads of two dozen beastkin briefly turned toward his feline form, then turned back to their drinks.

Karl nodded to the waitress, who gestured to a table.

"What can I get you, handsome?"

Karl smiled at her and the catgirl purred. "I was hoping you have a room for rent for the night. I have a few friends waiting to be called through a portal, and we need a spot to stay until the auction is over tomorrow."

The waitress nodded. "Indeed, we do have rooms, for beastkin and Dwarves."

It was clear that she meant only for beastkin and Dwarves, and not because of size issues.

Karl frowned. "If you count Dragon Priestesses as beastkin, then we're in luck."

The waitress smirked. "I will pay you to stay here if you have one who can create rice. The blight beetles got almost the whole crop this year."

Karl winked at her, then reached into the Tiny World and grabbed Lotus, opening the space just enough to pull her out.

"Hey I was... BUNNY!"

The locals began to laugh as one unfortunate man panicked. But Karl kept a hold on the excited Priestess, who thought that she was being given a present.

"You're not here for bunny ears. I called you to help this lovely lady with her kitchen inventory issues. Take Remi with you as well, she has treats for you to try."

The waitress took the odd pair into the back of the tavern, where the smell of stew and fresh baked bread wafted through as the door was opened.

"You're going to have to plead for mercy when the old woman comes out here." The fox-kin man beside Karl whispered.

"Probably. High Priestess Lotus is a bit intense, especially in a confined space."

The beastkin snorted in amusement. "The Matron of the Inn is from a family of Mice."

Karl wasn't sure where that stood in relation to the fluffiness of bunnies, but he suspected that the old woman would not be happy with his volunteer "Helpers".

