

Beast Master 1081

Chapter 1081: Reenactment

The Guild Leaders pulled Dana and Karl to their seats at the back, while Rae spun a hammock to hang from the corner of the ceiling, her preferred angle to watch from.

The other beasts preferred to watch from inside their spaces, as they could get a better view there than from any spot in the room.

An announcer in the form of the King of Nulnalgat appeared on the stage, which transformed into a view of the arena, where the seating area of the Manor was just a small portion of the stadium, as Opal activated [Illusionary Domain] to make it possible to have a life-sized show.

“Welcome everyone to the recreation of the Guild Challenge Duel between the Mythic Warrior Jerome and the Totem Ranked Beast Master Champion Karl.” The illusion spoke, and ten thousand illusionary voices cheered from the crowd.

The two champions took their places and began to taunt each other, which made the Alliance members chuckle at the audacity.

“He didn’t, did he?” One of the warriors asked when the illusionary Karl declared that he would take the Mythic Dungeon as compensation if he won.

The Guild Leaders laughed, confirming that it had actually happened.

Everyone present had a general idea how this would end, as Karl and his guild were now members of their Alliance, but the confident trash talk leading up to the duel had been enhanced slightly by Opal’s retelling.

As had the size of Karl’s Avatar form.

From here, it looked even more majestic than the Guild Masters remembered it. But the way that the overflowing power still slammed into their chests had been perfectly recreated by the butterfly by using air pressure changes.

The sound of claws on steel and steel on scales was deafening, and the scent of blood and ash filled the impromptu auditorium as the duel continued, drawing the crowd from tense to excited, and then to roaring with laughter as the Haint and Karl taunted the Mythic Warrior.

Karl's paw slashed at the warrior, and the sound of warping steel and breaking bones filled the room as Jerome bounced off the barrier surrounding the arena, then took another dose of Ghostfire to the face.

Karl tried not to laugh as Opal had him posing grandly as he recalled the Bodyguards and Golems to beat Jerome down for the final time, and the crowd gasped as he activated his final buff skill to increase his strength and speed.

For a few moments, it actually looked like Karl was going to lose, and everything was splattered with dragon blood, which Opal had made to dramatically drip down the barrier, though in reality it didn't stick at all and simply fell to the ground.

So well done was the reenactment that by the time that Jerome dramatically collapsed to the ground as [Heroic Intervention] ended, it almost felt anticlimactic.

The King of Nulnalgat rushing over to save Jerome's life as his soul was visibly leaking toward the Haint was the final high point of the battle, before the scene changed to Karl alone in the arena.

The assembled Alliance members cheered and clapped as the Avatar form of Karl spread its wings and made a slight bow in their direction. Though, Karl did notice that it was looking directly at him.

[Excellent work, Opal. I daresay that they've never seen a show this impressive before.]

"Are these shows a regular thing for your Guild?" The Mythic Mage in the Idol dress asked as the chaos after the show died down.

“Yeah, we have movie nights a few times a week. Either recreations of historical events, stories from storybooks, or an original series that Opal is working on.” Karl agreed.

A few of the guests got up and were going to walk down the stands, either looking for an exit, or exploring the area.

“I wouldn’t go too far. If Opal ends the illusion, you’ll land in the living room on the first floor.” Karl informed them.

The warriors laughed, but continued off into the stands.

“I’m more interested in this illusionary space. This is absolutely brilliant. It has to be a Domain level spell, right? An illusion strong enough that it can warp space.” He asked.

Karl nodded. “That’s right. It’s her species’ racial specialty.”

The Warrior sighed. “I had hoped that it was a skill your mage was using. If that was the case, there might be a chance to learn it. I could use a training arena like this.”

Karl nodded. “It’s not the best for that, as damage will break the illusion. But layered with a few other spells, it would theoretically be possible.”

“If you do happen to research the possibility, I would be glad to help you test it. Though, you could likely do that yourself. Anyone who can toss a Mythic Ranked warrior around like a rag doll certainly doesn’t lack the power to test their own defensive artifacts.”

Deve chuckled. “The real fight was insane. They actually had to constantly reinforce the Mythic Rank barrier over the arena because neither of the fighters cared where their missed skills landed. If we hadn’t gathered so many powerful spectators, they likely would have broken the arena protections.”

“What sort of skill even lets a Totem take hits like that? Watching it felt like two Mythic warriors going at it.” A warrior in the crowd asked.

Everyone turned to Karl, as none of them had the answer to that question.

“I’ve got an advanced version of [Limited Invulnerability], plenty of damage reduction, and then another twenty percent off all damage taken thanks to a Class Skill. So, I’m only taking around half as much as normal, and I ignore a large base amount of damage.

Enough that against most enemies, I don’t even take damage until they go all out.” Karl offered.

“And with skills like that, you chose to make weapons for a living?” The warrior asked, confused.

“Oh, that’s really just a hobby to keep the Guild’s funding afloat. I do a little bit of whatever keeps life interesting. The group from the Darklight Host who are here now were all out hunting excess monsters from the spawns to please the Black Dragon God and keep their population under control.”

The Warrior shook his head in dismay. “That’s nuts. If I could make this much money in an afternoon, I would never leave the house again.”

Karl chuckled. “You might never get the chance if you could. You see, it’s very difficult to stop once you get started with advanced crafting. So few crafters advance in Rank due to making the same thing all the time that higher Ranking equipment is in demand all over the world.”

“So, if you don’t run off to do something far away, you end up in a workshop all day every day for the rest of your life.” The Warrior realized.

“Exactly.”

Deve chuckled and patted Karl on the back. “Well, you’ll be stuck here for a while. We’ve got plenty of custom orders and bulk item requests to catch up on what an Alliance as large as ours would like to have in stock.

But once we’re fully stocked, I promise to help you keep doing interesting things at least once in a while.”

Chapter 1082: The Show Must Go On

Opal gently pulled everyone back onto the area of the illusion that would be over the actual floor, and returned the space to its natural look. That revealed that the chairs were set on the stepped stages, but they were quickly reorganized so that groups could talk more smoothly.

Illusionary maids brought snacks and drinks around, keeping everyone happy while they discussed the short viewing of the duel.

Then, twenty minutes after the duel viewing ended, the stage shimmered, as Opal brought up a new illusion.

{For those interested, we will begin a viewing of the adventures of the First King Droth in ten minutes.}
The stage announcer declared.

This was one that she had done multiple times before because the story was one of the great epics from the last resurgence, and at this point it was basically a fairytale, despite being based on verifiable historical events.

Many of the guests migrated back to the main floor to chat and drink, while over half settled in for another show.

If the Darklight Host was going to do a full movie night for their meet and greet, nobody was going to argue. It was much more interesting than most of the welcoming parties they had been to, where you just stood around chatting with the same group of people that you'd seen at the same fifty events before.

While that was also true of this one, as they were all Alliance members, they had seen a reenactment of a Mythic Rank duel and the mages had new gear to show off, so they had something new to discuss, even if they were around the same small group of people.

The gear was as much a talking point as the duel itself was. The fight between the two powerhouses was almost too fantastical to believe, as if they were at the same Rank, and not as if one were fighting with a 90 percent damage reduction handicap.

So, discussing the powerful, but clearly visible new outfits on the mages was much more interesting.

Especially when the ladies were suddenly so fashionable.

"You know, this will be a Cultural Revolution for the Alliance. Now that the mages look so good, it's going to be difficult for the rest of us to keep up the 'but it's the best drop' mismatched fashion statement on our way to the Dungeons." One of the Rogues laughed.

A warrior chuckled. "Right? We all look like hobos, and now they're practically a uniformed force in Totem Rank robes. Maybe we should all start actually wearing our Guild Tabards, just to give us a bit of uniformity."

The Rogue chuckled. Fighting in a tabard was a pain. It always got in the way, flapping around when the more agile fighters were performing acrobatics in combat. Nothing was worse than flipping over an attack and having a loose bit of cloth flip in your face, blocking your view.

In that way, Rae's fashion for the Mythic Rogues made perfect sense for them. There were loose or flapping ends on the sleeves, no loose sashes, as many used for fashion, and some slack in most of the tops, but they were all secured at top and bottom, so nothing would move around when you were fighting.

"I just think that we might have larger issues if we start letting the mages dress like Idols. They're already a bit strange, who knows what they'll do if they are encouraged to cosplay in their daily life." One of the Warriors joked.

There was some quiet laughter, but not from the mages. They looked like they were seriously considering it.

The Rogue snorted in amusement. "I am pretty sure that is a one-off sort of outfit. It wasn't among the options that the Totem Ranked mages got. But I wouldn't be surprised if the tailor made more of them if the mages requested it.

I don't think that most of them will, though. Can you imagine Jennestra willingly wearing a short, frilly skirt in public?"

The others nearby laughed quietly at the thought. Jennestra was currently wearing one of the most traditional mage robe style outfits Rae had offered, and she was a notorious buzzkill.

She didn't even approve of public displays of affection of any sort, or any sort of provocative outfit. She made the matrons of the Red Dragon Orphanages seem relaxed and forgiving.

In contrast, her younger sister, a Royal Ranked mage apprentice with the Guild, was notorious for the number of warriors who had been through her bedroom. Not just men, but always Warriors.

Karl went downstairs to join the guests who were more interested in new gear than the show, and was immediately swarmed with excited adventurers.

"It's first come, first served, right? I mean among the Totems. Obviously, the main Raid Team will get their gear first." One of the Warriors asked.

Karl nodded. "For custom orders, to an extent. Some things are easier to make in batches, so when we get to an item on the list with numerous requests, multiple people who requested the same thing will all get it at once.

For other orders, we will go through them as they were ordered, so the waiting time is somewhat reliable."

"That's a relief. At least that way, we won't have to wait ages for our equipment. Well, some of us, anyhow. I know that some of the flashier sorts are going to request that you make something extremely ornate.

Does your Guild even do that? The clothing so far has been very high quality, but the plate armour was really distinct, not engraved like most Warriors request." He asked.

"We actually have a number of sculptors and artists on staff. They might not be high ranking to finish all the items they work on, but there is no harm in letting them do the artistic portions, and then letting the master craftsmen finish the enchanting." Karl explained.

"Oh, that is a good point. You can upgrade a nonmagical statue or a partially completed armour piece if the material is right. Perfect."

His relieved tone earned him a companionable pat on the shoulder from one of the warrior women.

"But can you do heavier armoured versions of the Rogue leather? I am an Agility type fighter, but I need more protection than that, and a brigandine isn't going to work for my fighting style."

Karl nodded. "Lady Rae can do you some hardened leather, chitin or similar armour, or we can do plate over a leather or cloth base for mobility. Just put in the order for what you would prefer, and we will do our best to fill it.

The Masters know multiple styles as well. So, not just the knightly armour plates that are more common, but also the layered plate exposed brigandine and lamellar that is more traditional in Drodh, or the other Demonic fashions.

You can also request specialty materials, but in most cases, you will have to provide the materials plus a crafting fee."

Working with new materials also helped crafters expand their skills, and unlock new abilities related to their trade. So, letting people give them exotic materials to work with was a win for everyone.

It also saved Karl from having to take on random missions to find rare materials.

Chapter 1083: Bulk Orders

The revelation that he would work with their materials if it was something that his people didn't have in stock was enough to get many of the Alliance members motivated to make new gear.

Totem Ranked Crafters often had multiple requirements before they would make a custom piece, but the Darklight Host had agreed to very lenient terms with the Alliance, which would surely keep them busy for months.

That was part of Karl's plan, though. Hawk and Thor needed to advance, if possible. Then someone would need to motivate Cara, if being behind her siblings wasn't enough.

He thought that it should be. She was already the last sister to advance, so she should start working on a way to bring herself to Totem Rank soon.

The Warriors came forward with interest, and one of the stronger Totems was pushed to the front as their spokesperson.

"Does that offer to make custom items extend to the Blacksmith in your Guild? We have many rare materials that have aspects we would like to imbue into an armour set." He asked.

Karl nodded. "I can't make guarantees that you will get everything you hope for out of an item combining multiple rare materials, but I can ask him to craft it with the desired outcome in mind if you make a list of bonuses and effects you would like to see.

Do keep in mind that forging an entire suit of armour takes multiple days, and that's all he would be doing for those days, so if he's going to make thirty sets of armour for the warriors of the Alliance, it will be three months or more before he's finished with the Totems. And that's without additional delays from specialty processes for rare materials.

So, you will have to be patient, and the simple bulk orders may be pushed ahead of the custom work to get more of the Warriors' orders filled.

He is also the one doing the metal weapons."

The Warriors grimaced as they heard that last bit of news. The Darklight Host's smithy team was simply too small. Didn't he even have an apprentice?

No, he likely did, but the Apprentice would be filling lower Ranked requests, while only one Master Smith would be able to do what the Totems needed.

"Are there any options that aren't as backed up for Totem Ranked equipment?" One of the Warriors asked.

"At the Totem Rank? We're basically out of stock, so everything is being made to order. However, I can make you simple amulets, rings and totems in short order, as they're quick to upgrade, and I can make a few every day." Karl offered.

The Warriors nodded. They could all use accessories, and they were fast to use. But they were not the most important parts of their gear.

"What is the armour you were wearing during the battle scenes before you transformed made of? It looked pretty cool." The Warriors' spokesman asked.

Karl smiled and shook his head. "That is an armour skill. It's not a physical suit of armour."

The Warrior sighed. "That's too bad. Though if it looks cooler than your actual armour, I guess it makes sense."

"It's actually an Epic Grade skill. It gives me Epic Grade Armour level stats. So, there is no need for me to have real armour. Though, I do have a lot of fashionable clothing for when I'm not in armour."

"Can't you make better gear than Epic grade, though? You could improve your stats with proper armour." One of the mages reminded him.

They had seen the Totem Grade items that had been turned out today, so it wouldn't be outlandish to think that the creator would have a full set of items at that level.

"That is true. The real advantage is that if the armour spell gets trashed, I can just refresh it, and it will come back at full durability. Some days I can be very hard on my equipment. But I do have excellent accessories."

That was true, in a way. Superb, for the day that he had created them.

A bit outdated now.

"A lot of what drops in the Mythic Dungeon is metals and gems, but the Totem Ranked Dungeons that can be done weekly are heavier on the leathers and scrap weapons.

Most of those get smelted for metal as well, but it just feels wrong for a warrior to go to battle in leather armour." One of the men explained.

Karl shrugged. "I know a few agility focused warriors who fight in nearly nothing. But that's why we did the brigandine. It's not as metal intensive as most armour, and the outer leather coat provides a lot of protection on its own.

Alternately, we could do something with hard chitin, but our stocks of that are limited as well."

One of the female Rogues giggled, drawing attention to herself.

"Seashell bikini armour."

"See, now you're talking. But I suspect that it might be difficult to find anyone to battle test it." The Warriors' spokesman joked.

The Rogue pulled a bundle wrapped in canvas out of her storage, and placed it on the table by Karl.

"If you can make me a suit of armour out of that, with a focus on negating fire and poison damage, I would appreciate it. Those are the major elements in the dungeons that I do." She explained.

Karl nodded. "I can do that. I would assume that most of you are going to need those same resistances, with different bonuses?"

The Warrior nodded. "Those plus physical damage reduction for the Warriors, especially the tanks."

Karl made notes, and then tapped the pencil on the notepad in thought.

"How many Tanks do we have in the group? If you don't mind giving up offensive capability, I can fully stack up defensive bonuses for you. In a duel, that's not great. But in a group, that should be precisely what your teammates need.

Plus, the healers will thank me.

If you want a full defence set of gear, raise your hand, and bring me your supplies, or tell me what sort of armour you want.

Then I will sort the damage dealers by class."

Chapter 1084: Imbalanced Class Assignments

Two hours later, Karl had notes on all the fighting members of the Alliance at Totem Rank or higher, and a better grasp of just how lopsided the System's assignment of classes was.

Even before the adventurers chose their specialties.

There were only six tanks among the sixty-four Totems who had been present for the party, and fourteen healers.

The other forty-four members consisted of thirty warriors, eight Rogues and a few of each other class. The imbalance was huge, even worse than it was at the Academy with the young Elites.

According to the Totems, it was even worse at the Overlord Rank, as many of the Totems had been handpicked to fill roles on the teams. Those at lower Ranks were mostly filler to the Guilds here, and while they contributed heavily to the Alliance, they filled vacancies with mass numbers, and not targeted recruitment.

Of the estimated two hundred Overlords in the Alliance, there were over a hundred and seventy Warrior and Rogue class members, with a coven of Druids who had come to study under Deve making up almost all their healers.

Deve looked over Karl's shoulder as he stared at the notes he had made, and then patted him gently on the shoulder.

"We simply don't have the resources to pull mages to us. Any Guild Alliance can do the same runs we do, and the lack of competition was enough to bring in the Totems for our teams, but the Overlords prefer to study under Guilds who have more Mages at the top." The Druid sighed.

"Well, perhaps I can do something to help that balance. I have a Dana Mage with me, and she's got some impressive skills as a former Murim Battlemage who advanced to a Mystic Blademaster.

I don't know if she will be interested in taking on more responsibilities, but we might be able to bring in a batch of weaker mages and bring them up through the Ranks with a bit of time." Karl suggested.

Deve considered that. An Overlord Ranked mage might have the skills with an advanced class, but it would be a hard sell, when so many other Guilds had Mythic and Totem ranked Mages in their top Ranks who were actively recruiting.

"I think that you can save your Mage the trouble, unless you're going to do something extreme and take in the outcasts and failures from other Guilds.

I know some go that way, hoping for the diamond in the rough, but there is a good reason that they were kicked from their old Guilds in the first place. Losers stay losers, and they'll just end up chewing through resources for zero results, as their potential is trash." Deve explained.

Karl nodded. "That's a problem everywhere. So few have an easy time advancing, and the resources to push them higher get increasingly expensive, with ever higher side effects. There is a potion that I heard of used in the past, to push someone from Commander up to Overlord in a single shot.

But then, they would be stuck at the start of Overlord forever. But worse, nine out of ten times it failed, and they instead got stuck at some point in Royal Rank instead."

Deve looked horrified. "What level of desperation is that? I can see some of the Demons doing it, with their bloodline limitations, but that is insane."

Karl nodded. "People will do anything if they think that there is a chance that they can actually get out of a desperate situation. Those potions that Remi made have much smaller side effects, but I still wouldn't use them more than once unless the progress in between was smooth, and it was a time constraint that was causing the desperation."

Deve frowned as he thought about that.

"What about crafters? If you can teach them crafting skills, you'll get many more mages and magic using classes. They tend to love knowledge the most. Is the Darklight Host planning to take in new crafting team members?"

Karl smiled. "Of course. Probably not at as high of a level as the immediate demands would like, but they'll get there."

By the time that they make it to Overlord Rank, anyone who wanted to be a crafter likely already has a Trade Skill, and that makes it hard to train them, as they will be limited by the skill they have, while our techniques can be considered a specialty trade skill for the most part."

Deve nodded. "I will come by tomorrow with some potential members for the Darklight Host. I think that I know just the members that you want, and while they're rejects from another Guild, they might be a good fit for your Guild of interesting characters."

Then Deve left before Karl could ask just what sort of 'interesting characters' he had in mind.

It was already very late in the evening, and the last of the guests were headed out to their own homes, leaving the Darklight Host members alone in the new house.

"Well, this place is nice, and Rae went and set up some extra furniture for us. But what are we even going to use this place for? A staging area for more difficult dungeons? Maybe a second store?" Dana asked.

"The Alliance can buy straight from our other store using the System Interface, so I don't think that we need a second store. But yes, a staging area for Dungeons. Deve also thinks that he's found more crafters for our Guild."

So, I will see what he brings in the morning, and we might make this a second crafting house. If we can pull a few skilled individuals, we can leave them mostly unsupervised. Or, we can keep moving back and forth.

Remi does most of her instruction remotely, but we should check in on the Guild more often.

I'm thinking that we should set up a permanent portal between the two houses, so members can just walk back and forth. Then, they can sell and shop wherever is better for them." Karl suggested.

Chapter 1085: Deve's Recommendation

Karl considered the options, then headed for the safe rooms in the lower basement.

Those were intended to protect the weakest of Guild members, but they would also be the best of the workshops and labs for the Darklight Host.

Karl looked at the small and dingy rooms of the first basement level and frowned. It was more like a dorm than anything, similar to the second level of the Drodh Guild House, but even larger, as it apparently extended the entire distance under the courtyard.

There was enough space here for a hundred people, and while it was brightly lit and well decorated, it still felt like a cramped budget motel.

"I think that we can make some updates here, but that can wait. The lowest basement level will be the most important, and that's where I want to put the portal." Karl informed Dana, who had followed him downstairs.

The lowest level had a safe room, complete with thick metal door, and then a large open area, with a few glass walled lab rooms. Already set up for just what they needed.

The labs could be observed from outside, but had powerful barriers on them, and Karl could see that someone had set mana crystals into the walls by the doors as storage for the barriers.

That was an excellent start, and it would allow the Guild to work in safety on experimental projects.

"I think that we can place the portal array right here." Dana suggested, with a gesture toward what Karl would have called the reception area for people who had come down the stairs.

"What about at the back of the room, so that we can put security at the door? I can give it a Gargoyle or two, in case someone tries to mess with the building." Karl suggested.

"Oh, that's not a bad idea. Having them near the stairs, and then we can put a few more upstairs as well. But inside the building, so that the other Alliance Members don't think that we're threatening them."

Dana moved to stand where Karl was, and looked around the room. Most of the labs were visible from that location, but not the entrance to the Safe Room, which was set around a corner.

That would keep it out of the direct line of fire if the enemy came from the portal.

"Alright, I think this spot works. Though, we could put it in one of the storage rooms, so it could be locked down."

Karl chuckled. "I am going to put the other entrance in the Illusionary City of the Library. If they can get that far, it will be extremely impressive."

"In that case, there isn't much to worry about. Nobody will even know that it exists. Are you going to have Opal set an Illusionary Domain here as well?"

Karl shook his head. "No. I'm going to set one with an Illusion Element Stone. We can have the Gargoyles set up in a manicured garden area, with a hedge maze. The three exits will lead to the three ways out of the main room, and back into reality.

It will give the researchers and crafters a place to relax as well, without having to be far from their labs. I'm thinking that a second illusion to expand the crafting area would be good as well. There isn't a lot of room to have dozens of workers down here."

Dana nodded, then yawned.

"You work on that. I'm going to bed."

Karl laughed and swept her up in his arms. "No, we're going to bed. I will take care of the space in the morning. It's not that big of a rush job."

Lotus woke Karl sometime the next morning by poking him repeatedly in the face while pacing in place.

"What's up? You're awfully excited this morning." Karl asked, while adjusting Dana in his arms.

"Deve says that we've got guests coming soon." Lotus explained.

"And that has you so excited?"

Lotus shook her head. "Tessa is making chocolate chip raspberry pancakes for breakfast."

That made more sense.

Now that he was awake, Lotus ran out of the room, headed for the kitchen on the main floor, so Karl carried a drowsy Dana to the shower to get ready for the day.

They were ready just in time, as it happened. Deve was knocking at the door as Karl came down the stairs, chasing the smell of pancakes.

"Ah, good morning. Have you eaten? We have breakfast ready."

Deve shook his head, and a small pair of fluffy ears poked past him, sniffing the air.

"Oh, you're evil." Karl laughed, as he realized that Deve had brought him a Royal Ranked Bunny-kin girl. Plus, whoever else was outside the door.

"These are the rejected potential crafters I told you about.

They couldn't raise the tax fees or their Ranks fast enough to stay in the Guilds that they applied to, and they've been doing odd jobs around the city.

I hired them to do a deep clean of some of the houses in the compound last month, but I think that they're perfect for your Guild, as they were all hoping for crafting jobs." Deve explained, then chuckled as the girl poked past the other side of him, still sniffing the air.

"Come in, there should be plenty for everyone, and we can keep cooking once the chaos ends."

Deve smirked, but the girl didn't realize the danger that she was in until a squealing green missile grabbed her and spun her in circles.

"You're here to join our Guild? That is wonderful! What trade skill did you want? Do you have a Class? What class? Oh, we're going to be such good friends."

Lotus' excited rambling, and the sudden manhandling, caught the girl off guard, and she wasn't sure how to respond. But after a few seconds, Ophelia picked both of them up and physically separated Lotus from the applicant.

"We discussed this. What did we decide?" She asked the errant cleric.

"Even if they're adorable, no manhandling without asking permission." Lotus sighed.

Then she looked at the girl. "Do I have permission? You're so fluffy and small."

The girl looked terrified as she turned to Deve.

"Where did you bring us?"

The Druid laughed. "It's just one Green Dragon Cleric. She will calm down in a minute. This is the Darklight Host, the new Crafting Guild who has joined our Nara Group Guild Alliance.

They are willing to take in young members without trade skills, train them, and help them advance. They don't care that you don't bring any existing marketable crafting skills to the Guild, they'll train you from the ground up."

The Bunny nodded. That was an incredibly rare thing in Zilaz, where everyone wanted instant gratification at the very highest levels of skill. Investing years into an apprentice whose loyalty and progress you couldn't guarantee was a lot to ask when space was this limited, and the head tax was so high.

Chapter 1086: Lala's Cool Skill

Ophelia put the girl down, but kept Lotus in her arms as the Cleric took out a rolled pancake and offered her a bite.

"Please, do come in. We will meet everyone over breakfast. But first, do we have any idea what skill everyone hoped to gain?" Karl asked.

"The cool one!" They all replied in unison.

Ophelia laughed as she munched on the pancake, then licked Lotus' fingers clean.

"It looks like you've got your work cut out for you then, Monster Man. You've got the cool skill." She joked.

"Better question, who has a class or skill that can create solid objects permanently?" Karl tried.

Again, all their hands went up.

Karl activated the nameplates in his System Interface and tried not to laugh.

Every single one was in a pale yellow colour, and when Karl inspected them, they were listed as "Phantom Path Rogue".

"What is the skill that creates something solid and permanent?" Karl asked.

The Bunny held out her hands and two items appeared.

A kitchen knife and a broom.

"Really?"

The girl nodded. "It can be any sort of nonmagical tool. I can even make daggers and short swords or bows."

Well, that wasn't as terrible as Karl had feared.

Plus, it should have remarkable synergy with the skills of a Runemaster if the addition of the Runes didn't cause problems with the created tools. But the fact that she had thought of household tools first told Karl that this group was not made up of people who should be sent into a Dungeon.

Deve led everyone inside, while Karl took count of the new applicants.

There were twelve in total, all Royal Ranked. They all had the same class, which was odd, as it was an uncommon subclass, but more importantly, they were all small for their species, and young.

None were full-grown adults, and most were dragonkin boys, but there were four bunny girls that the others seemed protective of.

Tessa had heard the chaos, and was already working on bringing out more breakfast for everyone. She kept food stored in her inventory, so most of it just needed heating for a short notice meal.

Even when it was for a dozen starving students.

"Alright, everyone, meet our new students. Everyone, introduce yourself." Karl insisted.

And they all panicked.

Deve chuckled. "Welcome to part one of the 'why they have issues in a Guild setting' show. Every single one of them has major social anxiety."

Karl smiled at them. "That's alright, I can actually see your names with the System Interface. Though there are some issues. I don't know if some of these names are a joke of some sort, or if I don't get the pronunciation.

There are four girls, all named variations of Lala, and eight boys named variations of Ahmed."

The bunny girl who had been brave enough to peek around Deve nodded happily.

"Lala is the name of our Goddess, and Ahmed The Third is the current King of Sholaha. There are plenty of boys named after him because it's supposed to bring good fortune and strength." She explained.

"Alright. We will find individual nicknames for everyone as we go. But first, get a good breakfast because I'm going to introduce you all to Runecrafting and start your training while I renovate the work area." Karl insisted.

Deve smiled as he took a seat at the table.

"You don't mind if I hang around for that, do you? I'm intrigued both by your confidence that they can learn a trade skill, and by what you might do to your Villa." He explained.

"Not at all. Normally, I would call it a Guild Secret. But as we're in an Alliance, there's no harm in you knowing, as long as you know not to spread it too far." Karl agreed.

"Now I'm definitely not leaving. What could you possibly do that would shock me to the point that it would matter to other Guilds?" Deve asked.

Karl stood up and reached out to tousle the hair of all four bunnies, then activated [Follow Me, Little One].

{Beast Master Champion Karl Offers Knowledge} Skill [Runecrafting] will be transferred to the fluffy bunny Lala.

Deve gave Karl a confused look as the Bunnies leapt up and hugged him while crying but smiling.

"What did you do?" He asked.

"Taught them the basics of Runecrafting and gave them the trade skill. These are my bunnies now." Karl replied, then stuck out his tongue at Lotus, who rolled her eyes at him.

Of course, the Karl would steal all the bunnies.

Then Karl moved on to the others, and taught the Dragonkin the Runecrafting skill, preparing them all for their first lessons of the day.

Deve sighed. "If I had known it was that easy to learn a crafting skill, I would have done it ages ago. Just to have a little something on the side."

Everyone in the room except Karl laughed at his mournful tone.

"It really isn't that easy. I actually have a specific skill that lets me teach Guild Members a single skill that I know." Karl explained, then belatedly sent Guild Invitations to the dozen recruits.

The shock on their faces doubled, as they were being invited as full members, and not just apprentices hanging around hoping for scraps.

"Are you that confident that you can make them into valuable crafters for the Guild, that you would take them as full members right away? It's considered a great shame for full members who are forced out." Deve asked.

Karl chuckled. "I am confident in their skills' growth. And if they're slacking, I can set a bodyguard on them to keep them training. Or I can just assign them to the task of keeping Lotus from getting bored.

But their growth should be smooth enough as well. As long as they make it to Overlord in the next few years, they can do ninety percent of what the Guild needs.

And I know that we can make that possible with the appropriate application of Alchemy and mana overloads."

Deve chuckled. There were likely more than a few workers rights laws abuses involved in his plan, but Karl was certainly confident it would work.

Chapter 1087: Renovations

"I will ask two of my companions, Tian and Lotus, to stay here and watch the new arrivals for a moment after I get them started. Deve, I am headed to the second basement to do some renovations, and I think that you will want to see this part." Karl announced.

Lotus cheered, while Tian laughed, having seen through Karl's thoughts.

He could make all sorts of basic items, and while he wasn't a master at fancy decorations, they also weren't common grade nonmagical tools.

So, he could make the base items for the new arrivals.

Karl took out a notepad and wrote down a string of runes for enhanced sharpness and physical damage.

"Everyone, inspect these runes closely. You should be able to read them now with the skill that I have given you, and I want you to write them down on a blade of your choice. It doesn't matter if it is a dagger, a kitchen knife, or a sword.

It really doesn't matter. These are just practice, so don't be too hard on yourself if they don't work out quite right the first time.

If the ones you can make yourself don't work, Tian will help you get them right."

The beastkin and dragonkin apprentices looked doubtful that the little ball of fluff being affectionately mauled by the Green Dragon Cleric could actually help them. But when Tian flicked his tail, a dozen flat-sided daggers appeared on the table.

"Alright, start with his creations. I am going to prepare the workshop."

Karl motioned for Deve to follow him downstairs, into the second basement level, where the labs were.

"Oh, this one is more of a secure facility. Ours was set up as an open floor plan textile factory with dozens of tables where they had sewing machines set up." Deve noted.

"That's not a terrible idea. We could give them individual work tables. But I have something more interesting in mind."

Karl hummed to himself as he focused on the vision of the garden and began to inscribe an Arcane Element gem. It wasn't as good as an Illusion Gem for the purpose, but they were short on those, so he left them all to Opal, who could make the best use of them.

The Arcane Gem was sort of a catch-all for any sort of spells, and while it didn't give any sort of boost to what was written on it, it also wouldn't interfere with the spells.

He had picked a larger stone, as the illusionary domain was a complex ability, but it didn't have to be powerful to just give the appearance of an outdoor receiving area.

Then, he took out a Totem Ranked Earth Stone and inscribed it with the [Gargoyle] spell.

Deve watched in silence as Karl covered the two stones in runes, wondering what sort of defensive array the Monster Man was setting up for the workshops.

Then, Karl activated the two spells together and placed the stones inside an Earth Magic created plinth by the door to the stairs. Unless someone actually destroyed the plinth, or the illusion, they would never find the core of the spell.

But the area appeared to be massive, compared to what Deve knew it to be.

"How does this work? Do we just run into the real rooms and then feel around for the doors?" He asked, admiring the garden, where a group of twelve small Gryphon shaped Gargoyles were playing.

"If you exit the garden from one of the three openings, you will find yourself in one of the hallways, in the actual room. Then you can move freely through the actual basement. You just need to pass through the garden to get to the real room.

But I'm not quite done yet. There is one more addition to make this room perfect." Karl explained.

Then, he went to the back of the garden, where a small open area was surrounded by curved benches.

Karl created a replica of the System Stones using [Earth Manipulation], but covered in the runes for [Portal]. The spell was directly linked to the Illusionary Domain in the Library of the Guild House, so as long as it remained active, you could just walk from one to the other.

Emma, one of the Alchemists working in the labs nearby, came out and waved at Karl.

"Welcome back, Master Karl. Is Miss Remi coming back to train us for a while?" She asked.

Remi came out to visit her students, now that someone had reminded her.

{I will visit for a while. The portal is going to remain open to the new villa that we acquired. So, we can move back and forth as we need. I have so much to teach you, and the Karl has new students again today, so he can do a skills class with the Rune people.} Remi explained.

"Oh, more crafters? That's a good thing. They're working us to the bone here. No matter how fast we finish things for the market, they just get bought out instantly. We had to delist most of the stock for the common items from the Guild Store so that we actually had stock for the in-person customers." The Alchemist explained.

Karl smiled at her. "Sorry for the trouble. They were a bit short on craftsmen here, but we will get caught up soon enough. There are only a thousand Alliance members, plus some associates, so they'll all get the essentials soon."

Deve, who had been standing silently to the side, stepped up and looked through the portal.

"That should be an illusionary world as well, right? Where did you link the portal to, and how long do you plan to keep it open?"

Karl nodded. "It's an Illusionary Domain at our Guild House in Drodh, and I was going to just make the Portal self-sustaining, so that anyone who stepped on the platform could open it at will. Give me a moment and I will make a matching set on the other side, so that the portal from here will have a security system."

Deve looked confused, so Karl explained.

"If either side is blocked or the activation sequence is locked, it will stop the portal from activating if they're linked. So, either side can just put the magical equivalent of a lock on the door if there is trouble.

Then, we don't need to worry about intruders invading from the other house, while Guild Members can just move back and forth."

Deve smiled in understanding. "Brilliant. And if intruders want to get in, they have to get past these Gargoyles, who I suspect aren't as friendly to strangers."

The little Gryphons seemed to take after Thor, and they were begging for head pats from the Druid.

"I think it's your nature affinity. The Gargoyles are normally much less interested in strangers. It will be difficult to keep the Green Dragon Cleric out of here, though. So, they won't get bored."

Chapter 1088: New Work Space

While they talked, Karl was quietly using [Earth Manipulation] to add tables and benches to the labs outside the illusion, filling the workspaces, so that the new group could split up to work on the projects that they needed.

"That is magnificent. The level of versatility that your class and crafting skills give is beyond anything that I have come across before." Deve sighed as Karl let the portal close so that Remi could get to work with her students.

"It really is. When I was young, I used to hear the phrase 'Jack of all trades, master of none'. Normally, it was used as a derogatory for someone who couldn't hold a job. But in a way, that is what my class is, except it's good at nearly everything." Karl agreed.

Deve shrugged. "Every Guild Master has a little something that sets them apart. For you, it's got to be the fact that you have an answer for every situation. Most of us protect our Guilds with pure brute force, but you pull them in by having something to offer everyone.

It's brilliant, really. All the advantages of a larger Guild, but with that small guild family feeling.

When you've got two hundred official members in a branch, plus apprentices, employees and hang-arounds, it's impossible to know everyone on that level.

So, the big Guilds feel more like an employment contract, even though technically, they all are."

Karl led Deve back up the stairs, followed by one of the Gargoyles. He hadn't specifically limited them to the illusion, and the spell caused them to want to protect the property in general.

Lotus watched the small creature fly around the main floor, inspecting its territory for the first time.

"Did you make, tiny flying Gargoyles?" She asked, verifying what she was seeing.

"Cute, aren't they? They're set to guard the basement area, where I put a protective Illusion, but they'll keep guard on the rest of the house as well." Karl agreed.

The Gryphon had perched on the banister at the top of the stairs on the third floor, where it could watch everything happening in the common areas of the house, and Lotus was giving Karl a suspicious look.

"You made them fly so that I can't catch them, didn't you?"

Karl put a hand over his heart. "I made them feathered and furry with fluffy tails and shiny beaks, and still, you're suspicious of my motives."

Deve smirked as he watched their interactions. Karl really had mastered handling a Nature Cleric. His didn't even look like she was high all the time, and Deve hadn't even known it was possible to stop them from getting bored and stoned when they didn't have anything to do.

Maybe that was the trick? Just plan far enough ahead, and you could keep them from getting sidetracked.

For example, Lotus had already gotten past her dismay and was creeping up the stairs to go inspect the Gargoyle, who was currently watching her with great interest.

They were guardians of the house and the people who belonged in it. It really had no reason to run away from her.

If she was right next to it, the Golem could be sure that she was safe.

What it did do was back away from the railing, so that the enthusiastic Cleric didn't fall down the stairs.

Deve tapped his chin and nodded in satisfaction at some internal thought.

"Since I'm here now, I don't suppose that I could get bumped to the front of the line for a new set of gear? I've had terrible luck with armour, and while I've got a number of excellent accessories for my class, the armour sets that you made for the others would be a definite upgrade for me." He asked suggestively.

"Oh, so there was an ulterior motive, beyond bringing me the new apprentices.

But fear not, you were actually at the top of the list for new gear anyhow, as Rae was already working on a design that a Druid would like before she got sidetracked making cute things for the other Myths."

Rae nodded in agreement. "It's a good suit. I know that you're a bear tank, like our Berserker, but the armour was intended to look good for casual wear. I have it finished already, we just need Karl to do some upgrades and then hit it with a spell stone to make it really shine."

Karl wondered what the Druid might actually need.

He had Limited Invulnerability and Crushing Blows already, and Karl had taught him Bestial Regeneration. Those were the core skills of any tank.

So, Karl decided to go with something that would give him a bit more enjoyment out of battle.

[Gravity Slam]

When he was finished, the armour was completely enhanced for damage reduction, avoidance, strength, agility and regeneration speed increase. The only part of the set of armour that wasn't purely defensive was the spell on it.

That way, it would do the most it could to boost the Druid's tanking ability, while leaving him the versatility to use accessories to decide if he needed to take less damage, or do more of it.

{Item Created} Totem Rank, Totem Grade, [Protector's Armour of Dominance] Adds 1050 points to Damage Reduction, 20 Percent bonus to Agility. Increases Strength by 5 Percent per Rank of the wearer. [Additional Effects] Self Repair Level 2, [Gravity Slam]

Deve stared at the armour with an awestruck look on his face, and even Rae hummed in appreciation.

"You should call your wife over so she can see this before you equip it. I'm sure it will set her mind at ease knowing that you're so well protected." Rae suggested.

Deve snorted in amusement. "And have her show up with all our kids? I'd never get her back out again. I swear I love that woman to bits, but she drives me insane some days."

Rae shrugged. Letting a family of humanoid badger children meet Cara seemed like a fun idea. At the very least, she could wear them out for the evening, so the mother badger could sleep.

Chapter 1089: Backlog of Requests

Deve shook Karl's hand and then equipped the armour before he set out payment on the worktable. Then, he headed out to go show his family his new equipment. He would look for more pieces later, but for now, he had something to show off to his wife.

That left Karl and the new apprentices without supervision for the first time, and he could really start training them. More than the simple examples that he had them working on while he did the illusions in the basement.

"Will we be able to do things like that one day?" Lala asked.

Karl smiled. "If you can't, I would be disappointed. But I don't expect that to be any time soon. You've got learning to do, and some of those abilities won't be available until you're an Overlord or Totem.

So, you've got some time, and we can start getting you on the basics that the Guild Alliance has been requesting.

I know that it's a bit of a rapid transition, but we've got a thousand people clamouring for new items. The faster we can get through the first rush of requests, the better."

The bunny nodded. "That makes sense. Like when you do a deep clean of a house. You don't start with the corners and closets, which need the most work, you start with the common areas and bedrooms so that they notice your work faster, then you do the hard parts when they're in a good mood, so they can see you working hard at the difficult parts."

Karl chuckled. If you did the hard parts first, they would think you were lazy or incompetent. But if you did the easy parts first, they would have something to compare it to.

"Alright, since you're Royal Rank, we will have you make items for the Warriors at the Overlord Rank. They're the most requested items, and I've already messaged the Drodh Guild House to let them know that I will be having you make the simple items, so they can focus on the more ornate ones.

You're at the same power level, for the most part. Some of them are still Commanders, and most are Royals, just like your group. But they're mostly sculptors who were trained in Runecrafting."

Karl created a chalkboard and drew a picture of a bracelet, then the runes for Skill Damage and Strength increase to the largest possible degree.

That was what would make the warriors happiest, and they could wear one on each arm. That meant they were going to need a huge number of them, but they didn't have to be particularly decorative.

Then Karl drew a second bracelet and the runes for Self Repair and external focus. That would approximate the [Mending] spell that the Clerics could use to fix gear.

"The second one is for you to keep for yourselves. It is used to patch damaged items and gear. Not as good as a professional, but it will keep them together well enough. You don't need it today, but you will soon. Once you have one, you're on the Warrior Bracelets.

Royal Rank equipment is low for Overlords, but with this set of runes for skill damage and stacking strength, it should come out as an Epic item, and that will make the bonus enough that they will take it anyhow." He explained.

Then, Tian created a whole pile of silver bracelets in the middle of the table for everyone to pick from.

In theory, Karl could let them do the writing, and then upgrade the items himself, as the metal was capable of holding Totem Ranked enchantments. But that was a higher price point than what the Overlords could easily afford.

"What are these directions?" One of the Dragonkin asked.

"The stroke order. Instead of having someone show you directly, the number and arrow tell you the order."

He smiled as he understood, then began to carve the metal to begin his first attempt.

Then, Karl turned to Ophelia, who had her arms around Lotus to keep her from interfering with their work.

"Why don't we have Remi help everyone past the bottleneck today? Then we can find out about the Overlord Ranked Dungeons and let you all get some battle experience a Rank ahead?" He suggested.

Nachtia frowned. She was still too close to the start of Overlord for this to be likely to work for her, but she wanted the potion anyhow.

Just in case she could be a Totem already.

Remi came out with a whole tray of potions that had everyone's names on them, as well as a pair of activated healing Totems.

Just in case.

Dana stared suspiciously at the tray. She had not forgotten how this went for her, but she couldn't be sure that this wasn't the same potion, as she had been half awake and hadn't really examined it.

{I'm sure that this version is fixed. Definitely more gentle than version Dana. No worse than a mana flush from the shrine at the Guild House.} Remi promised.

The major difference was that a mana flush was voluntary, and you could stop it if it got too intense. But the potion came with the advantage that it would help train your body in more powerful mana, instead of having to understand it in advance, as was needed to break through with a mana flush.

Ophelia patted the little cleric. "I say we have Lotus go first, in case something goes wrong with the rest of us. She's the only one who can resurrect, but we've got more healers ready for her."

Tian stood up and fluffed his tail, making the workers laugh.

But Lotus had faith in him. The little fox had incredible healing skills.

"Alright, let's get this going." Lotus decided, then grabbed her own potion off the tray and downed it in one long gulp.

"Good volume, questionable flavour. Tastes too much like herbal medicine." Lotus noted with a bitter look on her face.

Remi shrugged. There was nothing she could do about that. Added ingredients would alter the potion's effects.

Then Lotus surged with gentle power, and began to glow green and gold.

That was new.

Chapter 1090: Overlord Lotus

Lotus glowed more brightly by the second, and her power began to grow rapidly before pausing at the bottleneck to Overlord.

Then, it pushed right past, and the glowing effect began to fade.

The work had stopped completely, and everyone was staring at the Cleric. Nobody had warned them that the Darklight Host could do crazy things like that. If they had known it was an option, they would have asked to be Alchemists and learned how to make that potion for themselves.

Lotus sat down on the floor, staring at nothing, but with a huge smile on her face as she recovered from the effect.

Tessa cleared her throat, and Lotus gave her a thumbs up, but didn't say anything.

"I think she's just overwhelmed. I will go next." Nachtia declared, and grabbed the potion with her name on it.

She began to leak a dark black mist as the potion took effect, and her power soared, but it was clear that it was going to end far short of the Totem Ranked bottleneck. It just didn't have the aura of Totem Ranked energy that would be necessary for the breakthrough.

Remi frowned. {I think that the ingredients simply aren't powerful enough to go from Overlord to Totem this way. Maybe if you were right at the bottleneck. But I might need better ingredients.}

Nachtia shook out the tingling feeling from her arms, then cast a cleansing effect on herself after the effects of the potion ended.

"That's fine. I can feel the increase in my mana pool and spell power. When I transform to Dragon form again, I suspect that I will be more powerful than I was before."

That reminded Karl: He had a Guild item to equip.

{Eternity's Blessing} Artifact Grade. Mythic Rank. Equips in Guild Inventory. Activates the Guild Skill [Eternity], granting Guild Members the physical stats expected to be present at the peak of their life, at their current Rank.

He had gotten it as part of the settlement of the Duel, but he had completely forgotten about equipping it in the Guild inventory.

He pulled up the interface, and placed the item, then frowned at the System Notice.

{Authorization lacking. Guild Skill active for members of the Drodh Branch only.}

Well, that ruined his plan to surprise Supreme Lady Matilda, but it was good enough for his people. Not that they actually had any old and decrepit members, or small children. The new assistants were young, but not young enough that it would be a huge change in their stats.

Ophelia and Tessa took their potions, and Tessa began to glow red, while the Berserker just gave off an aura of powerful oppression. So, the glowing effect wasn't a new feature, it was a side effect of using it on dragon Priestesses.

One of the Lala bunnies pulled at Karl's sleeve as the girls recovered from the potion.

"Sir, is it possible that we will be able to buy that later?" She whispered.

Karl nodded. "Remi just needs to grow a new batch of ingredients. She only had enough for these few potions. But once she has the materials, you will be with the other crafters in line to get your Ranks advanced before we offer it to anyone else."

Well, if someone found out about it and brought Remi the ingredients, she would make them one, then keep the rest of the batch for the Guild. But that was unlikely. Many of these plants were effectively extinct, as rare as they were in the real world.

The new apprentices cheered, even though they knew that if they went in order, they were like twentieth in line. That was still relatively soon.

It was also motivation for the Commanders to work on their own growth in advance so that they could be Royals before the potion was ready. That way, they could be Monarchs right away, make really good stuff, and get some respect for their work.

They got right back to work, turning out bracelets to prove that they had the skills to be worth the Guild using a rare and powerful potion on.

Because if they had to buy a Totem Ranked advancement potion at retail prices, they would be old by the time they could afford it.

"Should we call someone over to find out about the Dungeon options?" Ophelia asked as the potion effect ended.

Tessa gave her an incredulous look. They had literally just finished reaching Overlord, and already the Berserker was thinking of ways to go find a fight. That was devoted to battle, even for her. Did the advancement or the potion trigger some level of her Berserker Rage?

Really, Ophelia was just eager to test out her skills, but there was no space in the house for her to transform.

Dana smiled. "I will contact Hugo. He said that there are options for Overlord Ranked Dungeons, and he can explain them to us. I would ask Deve, but I think that he will be busy for a while now that he's finally returned to his own house."

In her space, Cara laughed. Deve had been hiding from a whole house full of badger chaos for too long. He would definitely be busy for the day.

Dana paused as she sent the message. "Hugo will be over in a few minutes with members of his Overlord Ranked team. They are apparently short on healers, so they want to make a proposal for us to go with a larger team.

The dungeons that allow larger teams give better rewards, so they would like to invite us to do a few of those with the Alliance before we go to do the individual runs on our own.

Though, I suspect that the Clerics will get at least daily requests to join Dungeons now that the Alliance is about to find out that they're all Overlords."

Nachtia snorted in amusement. Tessa and Lotus surely would. But most people weren't nearly as comfortable hanging out with a Black Dragon as the Darklight Host was.

Nobody here seemed to even notice the Black Dragon's Death Aura that she naturally gave off.