

The First Legendary Beast Master #Chapter 111 Go Around - Read The First Legendary Beast Master Chapter 111 Go Around

Chapter 111 Go Around

The group headed out toward the next likely spot that Hawk had discovered, which turned out to be on the far side of a swampy riverbed. The river itself was shallow and slow moving, but the marsh didn't look like a pleasant place to cross, and it would be the home to at least a few monsters.

[Hawk, how far is it to go around to a better spot to cross.] Karl asked as Hawk detailed the route.

[Far, but there is another good thing over there. It is further, but you can get it then come to this one.] Hawk suggested.

[Alright, lead the way.]

"Good and bad news, everyone. That marsh doesn't look fun to cross, but Hawk found another spot. It will be a fairly long detour, and then we will come back for what he found here. Were there any other resources on your list that you absolutely need? We can make them a priority." Karl announced to the group.

The warriors shook their head. "The moss was the essential one for us."

Dana smiled and touched the Holy Stone that she had tucked in an amulet on a chain around her neck.

"The mages found something much better than they came here for. The Holy Stone can replace the original resources."

"Excellent. I noticed that this next stop is near the train tracks, so we can pick it and then return to the Academy. There's no need to go overboard when we can just apply to go out again. If the results are good, they should approve our second trip to the same area, and this is remote enough that not many will travel through here before we can get approval." Karl suggested.

"But next time, we bring large sacks for all the extra loot. I'm already considering using my coat or the rain cover for my backpack to get more storage." One of the warriors agreed.

The mages were a bit more reserved. They didn't have supernatural strength. Even if they wanted to carry more, their packs were heavy.

The prospect of applying for another trip as soon as they returned, as a group which included proper leaders, was appealing, though. With Karl and Dana on the list, they might get approved to head out in the next few weeks for a second mission to get what they couldn't this trip, and that would give them an enormous advantage over students who were still waiting to find a chance to head out on a field excursion.

That was the hardest part of arranging a mission as a Common Rank Elite. You needed an escort, and the escorts all had better things to do. Most of the Awakened Rank students would be looking for Ascended Rank students to lead them on more dangerous missions, while the Ascended Rank students would be petitioning to go out with teachers on their own training exercises.

Even if that failed, entire missions of Awakened Rank and higher students were an option, so the chances for the Common Rank students to get a leader were far lower than the number of students looking to go on an excursion.

The most common reason one would agree was because they wanted something in the area, and didn't want the competition of a stronger group. Not out of altruism or a fondness for the new students.

It left all the junior students scrambling to find a senior in a good mood, or who needed something near the things that they needed. Sometimes there was an overlap, as some resources would be useful to nearly anyone, but that was fairly uncommon when viewed across the entire population of the Academy.

Karl followed an animal trail toward the next location, where Hawk was flying overhead, scanning for threats.

[I see some small creatures, but not mice. Nothing big and nothing powerful so far.] He informed Karl.

[There's not going to be a bunch more of the small things hiding in tunnels, is there?] Karl asked, thinking about the Earth Mice and their hiding tactics.

[No, these are tree small things. Furry, kind of fluffy.] Hawk replied, as he didn't have a name for them.

Some things, like the Earth Mice, his genetic memory instinctively knew, but these were unfamiliar, and while they were the same size, they certainly weren't mice.

"Careful now. There are monsters in the trees, small ones, possibly squirrels." Karl warned the others.

Normally, the magic enhanced versions of squirrels were like Earth Mice, and not a real threat to anyone, as they weren't that hostile. But those were the ones near the towns, who were accustomed to humans. These, who might not have seen a human in

generations, could be a different story. Like the common grade lap cat, who was known as a great house pet, but the feral versions were deadly.

They came up to the spot that Hawk was pointing out, and Karl couldn't help but to smile. There was a single memory fruit tree here, heavy with ripe fruit ready to be plucked.

"Good news everyone. This is the memory fruit tree. I have seen this one before. You can only use these a few times in your life before they start losing effectiveness, but they allow for the perfect recollection of everything that you know for a short period of time.

As I recall, you can dry them for longer-term storage, but they should be used within six months to a year, even if dried and stored." He informed the group.

"What use would that be? I mean, do they just let you remember things, you know?" One of the warriors asked.

The group's druid thumped him on the back of the head with a smile. "Idiot. Yes, they bring back the memories of everything that you learned and then forgot. Do you know how valuable these things will be for the end of year written exams?

We might coast through the first semester exams, but the end of the year is both physical and written. If you want a good placement in second year, you need to ace both.

And if you have one of these fruits conveniently dried and stored away, you just need to cram study for a week before the test and then eat the fruit, and you'll ace the written portion."

The rest of the students looked somewhere between reverent and horrified. That plant was definitely cheating on the tests, a performance enhancing drug, but that wasn't something they tested Elites for. In fact, you were silently encouraged to take things that helped you perform and grow.

Or not so silently, in the case of Karl and the other students on a curated training path.

That also made the other students wonder if there was some secret distribution system for bits of this fruit, to help the students who were chosen as the top of the class.

Karl and Dana were the top of the first year already, and they didn't need this, but they were going to have it anyhow. It was almost enough to make the other students cry at life's injustice, giving all the good stuff to those already fortunate, but today they got to piggyback off that good luck and get something exceptional for themselves.

"One a piece, as there are thirteen fruits. We will leave the last one here for any lucky person who happens to come along behind us." Karl instructed.

The cleric girl laughed. "Can you imagine? Just walking through the forest and finding this, with one last lonely fruit on it, waiting for you. It would seem like a miracle, and they will never know that we were here and took all the rest."

"But in a way, it is a miracle, isn't it? Wouldn't anyone else have just taken them all and sold the last one?" One of the mages laughed as she took a fruit off the tree.

Chapter 112 To The Tracks

Once everyone had their loot safely stowed away in one of the many pockets of their packs, Karl ordered Hawk to find them a good route back to the train tracks. They had a long journey ahead of them, since they had gotten so off track, but they could likely make it to the tracks before dark, which meant they could catch a train in the morning.

At least Karl hoped there was one coming the other way in the morning. He didn't know how busy that track was, but it should be the route that the daily supply delivery for the Academy took. That one was going the wrong way, but in the worst-case scenario, they could take it to the next town and then switch to go back.

Their rations were still holding out, so Karl wasn't worried about staying an extra day to wait for the right train, but it would be nice to get back to civilization and get a proper shower.

Maybe they would have the good pumice soap. It didn't smell as nice as the stuff the Academy had, and normally, he didn't need it there, but after a few days in the wilderness, he felt like he could use a good scrub and a cup of thick black miner's coffee.

He could see the squirrel type beasts as they walked through the dense mass of ash trees, just watching the group silently from their perch in the branches, and trying to avoid attracting the attention of the humans. But something told him that there was more here. Something that Hawk couldn't see from the sky.

The woods just had a feeling like that, as if he was being watched, and Rae agreed, though she hadn't found the source either.

The others seemed unaware, so it might be a creature with its attention directly on Karl, but it could just be his heightened senses giving him an advance warning of danger.

The beasts couldn't always explain how they knew that there was a threat. They just sensed it, and now Karl did too. Then, a kilometre from the memory fruit tree, he found the first signs that there was something large enough to threaten them.

There were claw marks on a tree trunk, over a metre above his head.

Anything that could leave claw marks up there was bad news, even if it was something that could fly. Karl would have said, especially if it was something that could fly, but they had Hawk with them to help with flying predators.

He didn't need to warn the others about the chance to be attacked, the claw marks were enough of a warning, and their progress slowed even further as the group did their best to move in a defensive formation, so they weren't ambushed.

But there was no sign of whatever made those marks.

At least not for the next twenty minutes, before they saw even more of them, and a few downed trees that spoke of a conflict between two huge creatures that were likely Awakened Rank or higher.

"It looks like the intelligence on the area missed a few things. While they might have just been passing through, most Common Grande Monsters can't take down an ash tree the size of my torso." Karl remarked as they passed the destruction.

"Thanks for the reminder." One of the warriors replied sarcastically.

Unlike Karl, he was at the Common Grade, and he couldn't take down a tree like that either. At least not without using [Slash] as an axe to hack away at it. The trees they were seeing on the ground had been knocked over by a single brutal impact.

Something that was either massive or moving very fast had hit the tree and broken it off.

Then there were torn up chunks of ground and more signs of combat, including burn marks that had to be from an ability, and some random slice marks on the branches overhead.

"What in the world happened here?" Dana muttered as she looked around, instinctively pulling her Golems closer to her.

One of the other mages moved up to scan the area, touching the broken stumps and making gestures toward the slashes as she moved about.

"My guess is that this was an Elite battle. It's not fresh, see that bit of moss growing in the broken tree stump? It's at least a week or two old. The slashes on the tree suggest that it was a warrior type class, and the broken trees say that whatever they were fighting was significantly larger than human sized.

So, they might have cleared this area of the real threats before they reported it to the Academy as a lower risk gathering area for resources." She suggested.

One of the warriors rolled his eyes at her determination. "And you determined all that by what? Dancing around the area a little?"

She shook her head. "Come over here and bring out your sword. We don't really have anyone big enough to be the opponent that was fighting here, who could leave claw marks three metres in the air, but follow my lead."

She placed him where she wanted, then began to reenact the first few moves of a fight scene, stopping to point at marks on the trees as she went.

"Then he was forced back, and there are those slices in the branches. My guess is that he was knocked over and attacked upward at the beast. It matches with the torn up earth right there. Then, a few more attacks, and he sent the beast flying into that tree." She explained.

"Never underestimate a detective drama nerd when they say that they can recreate a crime scene." One of the other mages laughed.

Karl smiled and nodded. "I believe she's right. It matches, and if Thor was bigger, I think that we could see just how close it would be. The creature was likely fighting in a bipedal manner though, a bear or something similar."

"Yeah, I was happier not knowing that." The warrior who did the reenactment commented.

"Well, at least now you know what to look for. We're halfway to the railroad tracks, so just keep moving and stay alert. Once we're there, we can rest and wait for the train to come." Karl reminded him.

"The sooner, the better." The warrior agreed as he got back in line and everyone prepared to move again.

Now they were barely making any progress, as everyone was so nervous, but Karl and Dana kept pushing them forward, preventing them from stopping for every noise in the forest. If there was something the size of whatever broke the trees, Hawk would have seen it, and he was only reporting fun facts about the tree monkeys and other small random creatures he was seeing.

But as they got closer to the tracks, the strange sense of being watched continued to grow, making Karl increasingly nervous, despite the forest seeming otherwise peaceful.

The reason for that eerie feeling became obvious when Hawk finally expanded his search far enough to reach the railroad.

[There are people here. Lots of people in white. They look very angry about something, and they're just standing around the metal road.]

That didn't sound good, but they might be the rescue party that had come for the High Priest.

[Stay out of their range, but return to the beast space if they've seen you. They might be looking for the beetle, or any other monster in the area. I will call Thor back in as well.] Karl replied.

[I am on my way back. They definitely see me up here, they just can't reach me.]

Chapter 113 They Weren't Alone

Karl tried to focus on Hawk's memories of the people at the railroad tracks, but he couldn't get a clear image. Their communication was more verbal than imagery, and Hawk had described them as being in various forms of white clothes.

That sounded like clergy, but he couldn't be certain.

"Alright everyone, the clergy group up ahead may or may not actually be clergy, and they might be here with ill intentions. Hawk got a weird vibe from them, so we should be cautious approaching.

They are at the railroad, though, so unless we make a large detour and stay back in the trees, they will see us waiting." Karl informed the group.

"They shouldn't have any reason to be hostile to us." The cleric boy reminded them.

One of the warrior boys frowned. "You mean, other than the missing High Priest? I know it's not your fault, and so does everyone else here, but the question is if they're going to listen to a bunch of trainee Elites when one of their own is missing in the area. One of the High Priests had his carriage robbed while he was in my town, and the church was not happy with anyone."

Put like that, it would be best to be careful how they phrased the first interactions with the group up ahead.

Everyone turned to Karl, and Dana smiled at him.

"Well, good luck, Team Leader. We're counting on you to make a good first impression." She announced.

"Fine, I will go talk to them. Everyone else, wait here for me to return." Karl sighed.

Karl walked the last few hundred metres to the tree line, and then out into the open, covering the last half kilometre to the railroad tracks, where roughly fifty men in clergy uniforms were gathered.

There were two High Priests that Karl could see, and four young boys, about the age of the two students that they had rescued, along with the fifty clergy guards. Hopefully, this was the group from the Seminary Academy that had been out gathering resources.

The closest of the guards raised his fist in a silent greeting, which Karl returned as he walked. If he recalled right, that was done by guards and soldiers so that their voice didn't attract monsters or the enemy.

Once he got close, the guard began to speak.

"Who might you be, all alone out here in the woods?" The middle-aged guard asked.

"Not all alone, just cautious. I take it you're with the Seminary Academy, out to gather herbs?" Karl replied.

The guard nodded, and his gaze turned curious. "You met with the missing team, or you wouldn't know that. Are they alright? Where did you see them last?"

"Their escort has been killed by an Ascended Rank Giant beetle, but I brought the students with me on our mission for safety. We happened to discover a Holy Relic, and when one of our team touched the crystals, we were pulled into a World Dragon Trial Instance, as the guardians of that place called it." Karl explained, skipping most of the details to get the important part out.

"A Trial Instance? What did it look like?" The closer of the two clerics asked eagerly.

"A forested space with a gigantic golden pyramid temple in the middle. There were stairs up the four sides, testing your strength, magic, willpower and fate. We remained there for four days, until it kicked us out, but I got the guardian Golem to tell me that it opens at the will of the World Dragon, so it's not broken or anything, just waiting." Karl explained.

"Before you two go on a tangent, where are the students?" The guard asked.

"And did you find the body of the High Priest?" The other cleric asked.

"I found the body, partially eaten by the beetle. I have it with me so it could be given a proper burial. The students are with the rest of my group, I can go get them." Karl replied.

"Why so cautious?" The second cleric asked.

"Not to sound rude, but we are trained to be cautious of everything out here in the wilderness, and we couldn't be sure that you were really from the church just going by the fact you wear white. I didn't want to put my team at risk." Karl replied quietly.

"Understandable. But your badge says you're still an Awakened Rank student, wouldn't that put you at risk?" The first cleric asked.

"Better one than all. I am the Team Leader, it is my duty to keep them safe." Karl replied with a shrug.

The guards nodded in appreciation for a good leader, though their attitude seemed a bit insulted that he appeared to think that he could take them all at once, even if it was just long enough to escape. Even if as an Awakened Elite, he was one, and they were fifty with Holy Magic from the clerics.

Really, Karl was just trusting in his physique and Lightning Shield to make a break for it if things went wrong.

"If you would please go get the rest of your team, there should be a train here in the next two hours. We were going to return and call a search team, but if you have them with you, we can all return home." The closer of the two old clerics suggested.

"Of course. I will go get them and I will be right back."

Karl turned to walk away, and sensed both Thor and Hawk in their spaces, watching the group as he disappeared back into the trees.

[They're not following you, but they're watching closely.] Hawk informed him.

[Alright, that's normal. They're expecting me to come back with their students.]

Karl walked back to the group and gestured them forward. "There are two more clerics, I think they're High Priests, as well as four boys about your age. They have fifty guards with them, and they're waiting on the train to go back to the school."

The two young cleric trainees gave each other a high five.

"Did you explain about the Holy Relic? Because they're going to be able to sense the Holy Magic as we approach." The girl asked.

"I did. I didn't go into much detail, but I told them that it existed and that you two were safe." Karl explained.

"That should be enough. Are we going now?"

Karl nodded and turned back to the tracks. "Everyone, follow us, same formation as usual, keep the mages and clerics in the centre of the triple file. We're heading toward a group of career soldiers, so try not to make yourselves look like the brand-new students that you are."

The team laughed at the notion they might look like anything but a bunch of first year students out on their first mission. Sure, they had grown in power a lot since they arrived at the Holy Relic, but that didn't make them any more experienced about being out in the world.

They exited the trees with Karl in the lead, and he could see that the clerics were actively looking for the two students. Then, as they got closer, the two priests got a strange look, and began to search around in every direction.

"Is there something wrong?" Karl called, and motioned for the team to stop.

"I sensed Holy Magic, there is someone else here." One of the clerics called back.

He was clearly nervous that someone was following them, so perhaps they had come across something good as well and didn't want another claiming the credit for their discovery.

Chapter 114 Marked

Karl waved to the cleric as he got the team moving. "False alarm. It is probably the students. We had an encounter with a Holy Relic, remember? They've grown much more than expected in the last few days."

"They're from our school. Those two are professors, not High Priests, but strong with Holy Magic. I don't know the guards, but the other students are familiar faces. I didn't know that they were out here as well. The High Priest only told us we were leaving, not anything else." The cleric boy with them explained.

"Well, at least we can confirm that they're really clerics. Let's get there and get settled in for some storytelling. They are not going to let us just silently board the train without giving them all the details. I hope that you are ready to relive the dangerous parts." Karl whispered back.

"I think so. It's not my favourite memory, but I doubt that I'm going to panic if I happen to remember it." The boy replied.

The guards moved to encircle them once they got close to the group. They were all facing out, alert for some sort of danger, and definitely not threatened by the students. But Karl still had that creepy feeling, like something was wrong.

Only now that he was close, he could tell that it wasn't coming from this group of people, just from this area in general.

So, he didn't relax, and he prepared to bring the Refreshing Lightning barrier up as soon as he sensed a threat. Calling the beasts out would be a last resort, as he would have

to explain to all the soldiers beforehand, but keeping the barrier up shouldn't be too much of an issue.

Everyone expected the Elites to have some sort of supernatural powers.

The two clerics came over to the group and began examining the students they had rescued, while the other four students looked on in envy. Even they could sense the power from the two newly arrived students, and it was obvious that they had been gifted with magic by the trial.

"This does pose a bit of a dilemma. It is holy magic, but so much of it might make the Government believe that they are Serum Awakened, and not just common clergy." The older of the two sighed.

"Is there a distinction within the church?" Karl asked, hoping it wasn't rude.

"There is. The ones who awaken cleric marks with the divine injection are sent to us, while the ones raised by us that awaken other marks are sent to the Academy. There weren't any last year, only one got a mark, and it was a cleric, but our group does not have many students to begin with." The priest explained.

The other four boys nodded in unison.

"There are only eight of us in our year for the whole region." One of them offered.

That made sense, the Seminary Academy was normally raising selected orphans as priests and nuns to help keep the church running, not to become elite magic users. The main orphanages were in the big cities, where there was the most need. The fact that some of their intended helpers did gain exceptional levels of holy magic either from the Serum or from their faith was just an added benefit.

"If I didn't know better, I would say that you were awakened by the Serum. Have either of you gotten a mark on your body after the trial?" The cleric asked.

Both of them carefully took off their gloves, revealing the mark of a bishop's sceptre with a dragon wrapped around it.

That wasn't the mark that the cleric in front of them had, Karl noticed. His was a simple ankh, a cross with a looped top on the back of his right hand, but these two were much more ornate and detailed. They were also larger. Much like Karl's claw marks, they took up an entire forearm.

But the cleric knew what they were right away.

"You, Team Leader, do you have an emergency phone?" He asked.

"Of course. Do you need to make a call?" Karl replied.

"Dial 777, and when they pick up, put us on speakerphone." The cleric instructed.

Karl did as he requested, and the phone only rang once before being picked up.

"Speak." The person on the other end replied.

"Cleric Class Professor 8675309." The priest replied as soon as Karl hit the speaker button.

"Verified. What is your emergency?" The bored voice asked, sounding nothing like it was an emergency.

"Two Dragon Priests found. Awakened at a Holy Relic before the Serum injection." The priest replied.

"Eight minutes." The voice informed them, then hung up.

Karl looked at the group, who mostly seemed as confused as he was.

"They're not really talkative, are they?" Karl asked.

"It's better if they're not. Remember that number in the future, it is the direct line to the Holy Inquisition. They're the church's version of special forces, and a number of especially devout Elites work with them to prevent damage to sacred sites or attacks on travelling clergy." The priest informed him.

"Well, it looks like we will be separated very soon, so let me be the first to congratulate you both on your awakening. From the response, I would say that your class is a good and well-known one, so your futures should be secure." Karl congratulated the two students, who had kept their awakening to themselves this whole time, though everyone had known that their magic was growing more powerful even before their eyes first glowed with golden light.

"Do you know what dragon?" The priest asked the students, who shook their heads.

Dana raised her hand. "I think that we do. Their eyes glow golden in the dark."

The guards looked reverent at those words, and shifted their defensive postures, as if they were ready to guard the two students even against the other clergy.

"Then thank the gods we called the Inquisition. I was not looking forward to facing the Academy Matron, or worse, the Grand Priestess to report that by myself." The second priest muttered.

Karl and a few of the guards couldn't help but laugh. Some things were truly universal, and one of them was the aversion to being called out by your superiors. Even if you hadn't done anything in particular wrong.

They were beginning to relax and count down the minutes until the reinforcements arrived, when the creepy feeling that Karl had been getting intensified, and now even the clerics and mages were feeling it.

"There really is something else out here. Everyone on guard, I feel a disturbance in the mana flow." The leader of the guard troop announced.

"In position, circular formation." Karl ordered, and the students moved to surround the clerics, with the mages inside the ring of warriors, behind the front lines of the guards.

"Are you not moving inside the formation?" The older priest asked Karl, who had moved to stand with the guards in the outer ring of the defensive line.

"Guards, I have three tamed beasts with me, as part of my class skills. A Lightning Cerro, a Windspeed Hawk, and a Bloodbath Spider. If I have to call them out, I need you not to attack them. They are not a spell, they are living creatures." Karl called out, and got a sharp response from the guards.

"Understood, Sir." They called in unison, and Karl settled into his place among the guards, next to their team leader.

If there was an attack, it would be easier if the two of them could coordinate their orders.

Chapter 115 Drakes

For a few tense moments, everyone waited for something to happen. Then, the cause for the alarm became clear. There was a flight of drakes inbound, with riders on their backs.

"One full wing of Drake Riders, 140 degrees low on the horizon." The guard Sergeant reported.

That was nearly behind Karl, but the guards on his side of the formation didn't turn away just yet. Training told them that an attack rarely came from just one direction, and if it was a flying enemy, they could easily circle the team to attack where it looked weakest.

"Once they're in range, odd numbers turn to face the threat." The guard leader announced, getting back a wordless noise of confirmation.

Karl had no experience with that sort of group training, but the students were willing to follow the church guard's orders and when Dana whistled, the mages all turned.

"They're nearly in spell range now. Call it when you want the attack to begin." Karl informed the guard leader.

"Hold fire. They might not be hostile, but the drakes would have sensed the presence of Dragon Magic a while ago if they've flown this far inland. That's the only reason the Drake Riders are ever willing to leave their borders." He replied.

Karl struggled to remember geography, but he was reasonably certain that the Drake Riders were from a nearby island nation, so they must have flown hundreds of kilometres across the Golden Dragon Nation without being intercepted, looking for the magic that had awakened these two new clerics. That was an impressive feat for twenty of the giant flying lizards.

"I will ask for details later, but what are the chances of attack?" Karl whispered to the guard leader.

"If they've come this far and haven't found what they're looking for, I would say ninety percent. They view themselves as the rightful heirs of the Dragons." He replied grimly.

Drakes didn't use magic or breathe fire. At least, Karl hoped that they didn't. But the riders on their backs most likely did, unless they were going to dive into melee combat and use the beasts the way that Karl would have Thor and Rae fight on the ground.

The flight of drakes circled the group once, as if verifying their targets, then as one, they dive bombed the group.

"OPEN FIRE!" The guard leader announced.

"Guards up!" the Sergeant added, causing the team to raise barriers all around them.

Thor didn't have a ranged attack, but Karl called out Rae with a simple mental instruction.

[Tie their wings and make them crash.]

Karl was in the odd numbered position, and as the team rotated to face the flight of Drakes, he joined them, waiting for the beasts to get close enough for their claws to rake across the [Guard] set up by the warriors before unleashing [Shred] into the belly and throat of the two Drakes closest to him.

The beasts roared in pain, and the whole flight circled up into the sky, except for one unfortunate soul who was caught by Rae's web and thrown from his saddle when the drake flapped its wings, tearing the web.

[Web isn't that strong, they won't crash.] Rae muttered.

[That's fine, just pull the riders from their seats.] Karl replied with a smirk.

The drakes were trained to obey orders, and without a rider, they should lose their organization.

Thick black blood dripped on Rae's head, and Karl felt the surge of energy from her link, as well as the joy as she absorbed it.

[If we kill one, I will take it for you.] He informed her, as it was clear the drake blood was better than anything else he had been able to feed her.

The damages from the mages and Karl weren't enough to deter the Drake Riders, and a flurry of flaming arrows flew through the sky to impact against the mage barriers in the centre of the group. The barriers began to waver, but Dana focused, and they stabilized again, while the Golems glared up at the Drakes.

Her Nullification Barrier seemed to be up to the task of stopping the arrows, but it would drain her energy reserves quickly if she was the primary defender, instead of spreading it between the five mages.

The clerics were quick to help, and a faint golden glow of Holy Magic covered her body, refreshing her mana and strength in preparation for the next attack.

That reminded Karl that he was slacking, and he brought up the Refreshing Lightning around himself, hoping for a bit more energy recovery, then gave in to Hawk's complaints and let the beast free.

Even as grand as he was, larger than a Condor, Hawk was tiny compared to the drakes. It was a small blessing, as nobody would mistake him for one of the enemy, but it was concerning, as he was going to be at a major strength disadvantage if he were caught.

Instead of facing them head on, Hawk treated it like training. He gained altitude quickly, getting above the attackers, so he could strike down at them, and aimed for the riders.

[Now.] Karl ordered as the attack wave reached the defenders from the church again.

Rend attacks flew down at all the drake riders, while Karl threw Shred up at the drakes bellies again, targeting the same pair. Pained screams filled the air as the two beasts crashed to the ground, one bleeding heavily from the neck and the other with a wing nearly severed.

Three more broke off the attack as their riders died, but the remainder of the wing crashed into the barriers again, shattering the [Guard] encirclement, and tearing apart the soldiers opposite Karl.

The rider of the drake with the slit throat hopped free at the last instant and charged at Karl, who took his head from his body with a Rend attack, and tried not to gag at the sight of the decapitated corpse falling to the ground.

It had been instinctive. Hawk's instincts telling him that the best place to strike was always the neck, but he hadn't really been prepared for what came after.

A quarter of the wing of Drake Riders had been killed, but the soldiers were struggling to get their [Guard] back up, and the holy magic that was flowing into them to reinforce their spells was still not enough to face off against fifteen drakes.

"Mages, extend the barrier. Warriors fall back into a double rank." The guard leader ordered.

That was their best chance of survival, as the Elites had more individual power than the two clerics, and there were ten of them to the two Professors.

"Warriors to the outer ranks." Karl ordered, as that would let them mingle their [Guard] abilities with that of the soldiers. The ability was short ranged enough that despite their reluctance, the boys moved up.

Not to the front rank, but to the second, sandwiched between the professional soldiers. That was good enough for their spells to cover the perimeter, and they should be able to take a few more hits before the group would be in trouble again.

Two drakes broke off from the formation to chase Hawk as they realized their wing was under attack from above, but they didn't have the altitude to close on him that easily.

A wire thin Rend from Karl took one of the riders from the saddle, while Rae pulled the other free, sending them both tumbling fifty metres to the ground.

They managed to cast spells to soften their landings a little, but they were too close to the tracks, and the clergy guards were on them with [Slash] attacks instantly.

That made five loose drakes, who began to fly away, trained to return home in the event that their rider was lost, and two more that were downed by attacks.

The drakes dove again, but this time the mages didn't counterattack when the arrows flew. They focused on their barriers, keeping the vicious claws off them while Hawk attacked the drakes from above, and Karl coated the flying web being sprayed out by Rae with [Rend], turning the sticky silk into razor wire that tangled around two of the drakes, shredding beast and rider alike, before pulling them to the ground with a sickening sound that was definitely going to haunt Karl's dreams tonight.

Then, the most glorious sound in the world reached their ears. A helicopter was inbound, and the drakes turned to flee, unwilling to face the Elite forces equipped with military heavy weapons.

Of the twenty Drake Riders that had attacked, only ten were going home, and a few more beasts would survive to take a new rider.

"Move forward. Check for survivors. The inquisition will want to interrogate someone." The older of the two clerics ordered.

Rae raced through the long grass, pulling one of the dead drakes into her space before anyone noticed or had time to count, then she began checking the bodies.

[There are no living ones. Well, that one is kind of living, but not for long.] She amended.

[How so?] Karl asked as he moved forward, and the cleric hurried to join him.

The man was one who had been pulled from his seat by Rae, and his body was twisted in an unnatural way, with blood bubbling from his lips as he struggled to breathe.

The cleric got right to work, casting a healing spell on him, and then forcing a potion into his mouth to stabilize his condition.

Karl hadn't realized that the clergy could do that. Bringing a man back from that close to the edge of death was worthy of being called a miracle, and it was happening all over as the other Cleric and the students were working to save the clergy guards who had been mauled by the drakes or who had taken a magical arrow.

Chapter 116 Recovered

The drakes were faster than the helicopters, and both were rapidly fading into the distance as the clergy did their work, saving one attacker and most of their guards.

Then they waited. And waited some more until the special forces team gave up the chase and returned a half hour later.

From the look on their faces as they stepped out of the helicopter, it was not a triumphant return, and the Drake Riders had escaped their pursuit, but it was still good to see them.

"Priests, students, and who might these be?" The large man leading the Inquisition team asked.

"A gathering team from the Divine Golden Academy, led by the Awakened students Karl and Dana, here to gather herbs, sir." Karl replied, as he was the closest of their team members.

"Two Awakened Team Leaders for a resource gathering mission?" The Inquisitor asked.

"Yes, sir. We're all in our first year, so they sent an extra Awakened member on this Common Grade mission to make up for our inexperience." Karl explained.

That seemed to be enough to mollify the Inquisitor, who just nodded in satisfaction as he looked over the team.

"It looks like you're all the leaders of this year's class. Congratulations on your acceptance by the Divine Serum." The Inquisitor replied.

"The World Dragon smiles upon us." Karl agreed.

The two cleric students who had been with him nodded enthusiastically, and even the Inquisition smirked at that reverent response. The group had discovered two Dragon Priests, more correctly, a Priest and a Priestess, as the Inquisitors began to realize. If that wasn't proof of the World Dragon's favour, then he wasn't sure what qualified.

"We will need to extract the entire team at this time. Notification has been sent to the Divine Golden Academy, and they will come to recover their students once we have had an opportunity to speak." The Inquisition team leader announced with a gesture toward the helicopter.

The clerics looked nervous, which made everyone else nervous as well. What did they know that nobody else did? The team hadn't done anything wrong, so surely there was no need to be frightened, Karl thought as he called Hawk and Rae back into their space for the trip.

Both had stolen Drake bodies for later, which someone would certainly notice, as the scales were incredibly valuable, but that could be discussed once they got back to the Academy, as they could also be counted as a strengthening resource.

Many scaled beasts used potions with the scales of Dragon type beasts to help their growth, and Karl had Thor, who might be able to get something from the exchange.

"Can you show me the marks?" The leader of the rescue team asked, looking at the two newly awakened Clerics directly.

They both pulled up their sleeves and the man smiled, then gestured toward the helicopter. "Everyone in. We've waited here long enough."

As soon as everyone was in the large, twin bladed helicopter, it began to move, not even waiting for them to get buckled into their seats.

This matter must have been a bigger deal than what Karl or any of the others had suspected, and they hadn't even been asked about the Holy Relic yet.

They only flew a few minutes, before they landed at a large cathedral surrounded by low stone buildings that were built in the middle of nowhere. This was the Seminary Academy, where the clerics trained their new clergy, and raised orphaned children who were left in their care. Only a promising few would get the preferential treatment that the six students in the helicopter had, but they would all be given the Divine Serum when they came of age, to determine if they would continue a mundane life or start moving on to bigger things.

"It is unorthodox to have students awaken outside the ceremony, but with the presence of Holy Relics, it is not unheard of. There is one in this school as well, and it is known to grant boons to those who the World Dragon favours.

That is the first place we will be going. The response of the World Dragon Temple will tell us much about you." The leader of the Inquisition team informed them.

They were led out of the helicopter and toward a small golden building, with ramped corners that reminded everyone of the stairs at the trial site.

"Is there something familiar about this place?" The inquisitor nearest to Karl asked.

"The stairs. The trial instance that we were in was a Golden Pyramid temple with staircases up the four sides like the ones on the corners of the building here." Karl quietly answered, trying not to disturb the peaceful vibe of the area.

The man didn't say anything more as they were led into the small temple, and the two newly awakened students immediately began to glow with golden light, before their robes changed from student uniform robes to more ornate cleric habits in a gold over black double layered fashion.

Karl felt a weight around his neck, and found that he was wearing a simple golden dragon - shaped pendant, but when he tried to touch it, he discovered that it was some form of illusion, and not solid at all.

The inquisitors moved through the group, looking them all over for some sign of the World Dragon's favour, and then quietly escorted the other four students out of the room. They weren't taken anywhere, just left by the door, which was closed in front of them without a word.

Only when the doors were sealed and the priests who had been in the temple had moved to guard them did the Inquisitor speak.

"It appears true that you all did undergo a trial in a Holy Relic. Those pendants are a mark of lingering favour, and the design tells us how you did in the trial. Congratulations to you all, and we do hope that you enjoy the rewards granted for your hard work.

Now, we will be bringing you individually to speak of your experiences so that we can get a clear picture of what the Holy Relic is and how it functions, or possibly when it might open again. A team has already gone to secure the location, and they will verify your stories." The Inquisition team leader informed them.

That explained why the others were sent out. They weren't with the team, and they didn't have the rank of the priests to stay in the room and hear such sensitive information.

"Who would like to go first?" The Inquisitor asked.

Karl raised his hand. "I will go first, if there are no objections."

The students looked nervous as Karl was led into the other room, where two large men, shirtless in black leather pants, were standing on either side of a metal chair with arm rests.

Karl wasn't an idiot, he knew that this was an interrogation room, not a 'friendly meeting with new friends' room, but as long as he explained clearly, he didn't see any reason for there to be a problem.

Most of the intimidation of the room came from the knowledge that you had something to hide, and Karl really didn't have many secrets. At least, he assumed that was why it was supposed to be horrifying, as the room was immaculately clean with no signs of prior use, other than the scuff marks on the floor by the chair.

The man who escorted him in gave Karl a friendly smile as he settled into a folding chair facing the metal one Karl was led to.

"Alright, let's start at the beginning. I mean the very beginning. Who are you, where are you from, and what was your life like before you found out that you were compatible with the Divine Serum?" The inquisitor began.

"Well, my name is Karl. The working people of the mines don't customarily give family names. I am in the first year at the Academy now, from the most recent batch of Serum candidates.

I was going to school on the standard four-day schedule and working six quarter shifts in the mine a week, as the rules allow for students.

I can't say things were all that bad, my mother was a good cook, and my parents hadn't run up any debts that I know of." Karl began, then paused, unsure what else the man might want.

The inquisitor nodded. "You don't hold any resentment against the mine owner?"

Karl shook his head. "I've never even met the man. Or perhaps it's a woman? The foreman is a good guy, though. His daughter was in my class, but she didn't have the compatibility."

"How has your time at the Golden Divine Academy been? Are you making friends?"

Karl smiled. "Very much so. I've been advancing faster than most, so I keep getting moved between training programs, and everywhere I go I meet more good people."

"Why do you think that is?" The Inquisitor asked, taking notes on a paper pad.

"I have a theory that everyone who gains the favour of the World Dragon has something in common. Have you noticed that there are suspiciously few douchebags in the first year classes? Maybe not. I don't know if you were a student. But the truly cruel and the bullies don't seem to have made the cut." Karl explained.

The Inquisitor looked like he was about to laugh at Karl's seemingly naive response, but as he thought about it, it was true of the first years. They came in decent, and only really devolved as the year went on, and the power differences began to appear, which caused resentment, bitterness and envy.

By the second year, the cliques had fully formed, but at the start of the first year, as Karl was experiencing, his classmates would all still be somewhat starstruck and hopeful.

"Now, I need every single detail of your mission. The wording, everyone involved in its assignment, and anything else you can think of." The Inquisitor demanded, turning serious, but softening his voice enough that it didn't sound like a threat.

Chapter 117 Questioned

Karl thought about the question. Who all had been involved?

"I proposed to my personal tutor, Sergeant Rita, that it would be better for my development if I could get out for some practical training. There is only so much I can do in the limited environment of the Academy, and she discussed it with the agents from the Bureau of Elite Development, who agreed to the mission, and picked the one I was assigned to."

The Inquisitor looked confused. "What was a Bureau Agent doing there?"

Karl shrugged. "There are two of them assigned to me. One is there all the time, either a mage or a warrior. They took me on the trip to find my second and third beasts, then approved this as my first student mission."

The Inquisitor looked like he was getting a headache.

"Back up a step. When did the Bureau first start showing an interest in you?"

Karl shrugged. "A few weeks ago? At least that was when I noticed because they sent Colonel Valerie to escort me and Dana to a training day on the Saturday."

One of the two goons left the room for a moment, and the Inquisitor waited, not asking any more questions.

A few minutes later, the man came back in with a picture in his hands, and a man in a business suit.

"Do you know who is in that picture?" The Inquisitor asked.

Karl looked over and smiled. "That's Jodi, one of the Bureau Agents. Real playboy vibe, but he's actually a good guy. He was on the mission to find me the additional pet and at the training course."

The man in the suit pocketed the picture, while the shirtless man returned to his position.

Then the door opened again, and a familiar face entered the room. Overlord Drake walked into the room with an expressionless professionalism, letting his powerful aura fill the area, which made the others visibly shrink back a bit.

Not Karl. He had nowhere to go in the metal chair, but he already knew that the man was simply intimidating, and that had nothing to do with his mood.

"Overlord." He greeted politely.

"Oh, it's you again. How is that skill working out for you? Got you all powered up and looking to join the Inquisition in your first year at the Academy?" The powerful man asked, unaware of the situation.

"We called you down here to use your skills to help determine truthfulness, as the Bureau of Elite Development has gotten involved with a first year student." The Inquisitor announced.

The burly man looked a bit sheepish. "That might be my fault. They were the talk of the Academy when I visited with the Prince, which led to us teaching them a couple of new skills, and probably attracted the attention of the Bureau."

The Inquisitor definitely looked like he was getting annoyed now.

"Alright, it appears that there are numerous details left out of your recounting of your time at the Academy. It's only been a little over a month, I thought that we had covered everything. Now, let's start over.

What did you learn as an additional skill? Where did they take you looking for pets, and what did you pick?" The Inquisitor asked.

Overlord Drake perked up a little at that. Karl could see the curiosity in his expression.

"I learned Shred as an additional skill from a skill book provided by Overlord Drake. The team from the Bureau took me south to get pets, and I picked a Lightning Cerro and a Bloodbath Spider. There is an official report made." Karl explained.

The shirtless man went and got a laptop computer out of the cabinet at the back of the room, and the Inquisitor tapped away as he logged in and opened the report.

"You had quite the adventure. Alright, that should be enough of the background. What happened on this mission? Where is the High Priest's body, and how did you find the Holy Relic?"

"I have the body stored. Do you have something? I had to put it in a bag to store it with my beast, and it's a bit undignified."

The Inquisitor looked mildly horrified, but gestured to the floor. "Is it intact and whole? Place it there."

"It isn't. The Giant Beetle that killed him ate part of the body." Karl replied, then placed the blood soaked bag on the floor.

Overlord Drake cursed, and made the symbol of the dragon, with his thumbs crossed, and his fingers spread to imitate the wings of the World Dragon.

The Inquisitor seemed unfazed, and didn't bother to open the bag. So, it wasn't the thought of blood that had horrified him, but more likely the idea of being eaten alive by a Giant Beetle.

"Thank you for recovering the body. Now, details."

Karl recounted everything from getting off the train to meeting the clerics, and then stopped when they got to the part when they were pulled into the trial instance.

"Astounding. Now, the rest of the details."

Karl spent over an hour answering questions about the trials, his experiences, and what he thought they meant.

"And the reward that you got was a Class Skill? You're certain that it said Class Skill?" The Inquisitor asked.

"It called it a Tamer Skill. Which I assume is the trial's name for my abilities. It wasn't just a regular skill, or named like an offensive or defensive skill." Karl explained.

"Interesting. But not my department. Possibly, Overlord Drake's." The Inquisitor replied.

Then they asked what he knew about the other students' rewards, before a group of six men showed up with an ornate metal casket.

"Uhm, you'll want to clean him first. I didn't want to mess with anything." Karl explained.

A flood of golden magic flowed from the men with the casket, and the blood vanished from the bag, which stretched out to human proportions before lifting off the ground and vanishing into the casket, which was closed and then sealed shut with some sort of solder and a torch.

"Alright, I think that we're done here." The Inquisitor announced.

Overlord Drake raised a hand to stop him as he went to stand. Karl realized that he had no idea how the Overlord was supposed to have verified his truthfulness, but not all skills could be seen, so maybe he was like a lie detector.

"First, I want to see how the pets are doing. You said a Lightning Cerro and a Bloodbath Spider, as well as Hawk, right?"

Karl nodded. "Yes, sir."

He called the three out, with Hawk appearing on the back of the chair and Rae in his lap, covering far more than the available space, so her front four legs were standing on the ground, which put her face perilously close to the other chair.

Thor stood between Karl and Drake, giving the man a pleading look that Karl recognized as a desire to have his head rubbed, completely oblivious to the normally serious mood of such an 'interview'.

Drake smiled and scratched at the ridge between his upper horns, which brought a soft bugling noise of pleasure from the Lightning Cerro.

"Well, aren't you just the most lovely big boy. But Hawk has gotten huge. The newer two have some growing left to do, but for what it matters, I approve of your choices. They look loyal, and they're well-balanced to each other's strengths.

I would ask more about the matter, but the Colonel would cause a fuss if she thought that we were interfering with your training. Now I will go see that mage. Excuse me, gentlemen." Drake announced, walking out of the room and leaving Thor looking to the Inquisitor to replace his source of attention.

"I believe that we have enough here. Thank you, Karl. I will escort you back to the waiting room."

Chapter 118 Satisfactory Answers

The waiting room was full of terrified students, huddled together for some sense of safety. They looked up when Karl returned, then got confused when he didn't seem to be bothered by the situation, and that he had Thor next to him, who was headbutting the Inquisitor, looking for affection.

The man gave Karl a look of annoyance, and Karl patted Thor on the side before sending him to the beast space. The little show of escorting him back was probably intended to either intimidate or pressure the other students, but Thor had messed up the impression that the Inquisitor was going for with his innate sense of who was actually a threat.

"That is everyone, except student Dana, who is still speaking with the Overlord and will be back momentarily. Once she arrives, we will settle you into rooms for the evening. It might not be at the plush standards of the Golden Divine Academy, as the Church takes vows of poverty, but I can assure you that they will be warm and there will be dinner served soon." The Inquisitor announced as Karl moved to join the others.

Dana was only seconds behind them with a smile on her face and an Inquisitor beside her.

"That's everyone then. Let's get a move on, I have things to do." The leader of the Inquisition team announced.

The Inquisitor led them out the door, and then a group of clerics in simple grey robes, marking them as Acolytes, the common workers of the churches, led them to a large dorm room.

"This is for the males, other than the one called Karl." The Acolyte leading them announced.

The boys filed in, with another of the acolytes stepping in to explain everything to them.

Then the remainder of the group turned down a corridor where the trim on the wall turned from blue to orange.

"This room is for the women other than Dana." A female acolyte announced.

The girls waved goodbye to Karl and Dana, leaving them with just one female Acolyte.

"Your rooms are upstairs. You have both been registered as Awakened Elites already, and that means you stay on the second floor." She explained apologetically.

"That's fine. As long as there is food and a bed, I'm satisfied." Karl agreed.

"It is quiet here, which is a pleasant change from the Academy. It's always so loud with everyone training." Dana agreed.

The room was a small cloister room, just a bed with a symbol of the World Dragon on the wall and a small desk that used the bed as a chair, due to the limited space. But it was a private room, which was something.

With the thick stone walls of the Seminary Academy, it was even properly private, to some extent. The window in the wall had no shutter, so if there was someone outside looking in, it wasn't all that private, but the natural light was a blessing in what would otherwise be a stuffy stone cell.

Karl relaxed on the bed for a while, until a knock at his door informed him of a guest.

"Awakened, Karl. Your presence has been requested." The man informed him simply.

"Lead the way." Karl replied, unsure what this was all about.

He had a sneaking suspicion that this was going to be some sort of turf war between the church and the Bureau, or possibly the military, that he was getting dragged into. But when he reached the destination and the Acolyte stopped and gestured for him to go through a large door arch, there was nobody inside what looked like the Seminary Academy's library.

It might be some sort of prank common with the clergy, a form of hazing, but Karl doubted it. Even if they ditched him here, he knew his way back, and there was no actual door in the archway to lock him in the library.

After a few seconds, Karl heard voices up ahead, so he moved forward to see who had called for him. It was clearly an argument, but the content of the argument was quite interesting to Karl, causing him to pause for a moment before entering.

"It's not possible that there would be two Reigning Dragon Priests at the same time. I am telling you that the oracle wasn't wrong. One of them is not going to take over the Church. The other has another fate, serving the World Dragon's interests." One soft female voice was insisting.

An angry male voice replied. "Do you think that we can just let someone of that potential wander around outside the church's supervision? No, they must both be raised as the heir to their Patron. That is the fate of all Dragon Priests."

Karl sensed that one of them had noticed him, so he knocked on the bookshelf closest to him, and stepped around the corner.

"Apologies for intruding, I was informed that I was summoned." Karl informed the two people sitting in the padded chairs at the back of the library.

"You were. Please, come sit. I have questions for you, that only you might be able to answer." The woman in fancy layered robes replied with a smile.

Karl took a seat to the side between the two, settling into the soft leather with a sigh of pleasure.

The woman paused to gather her thoughts, then turned a brilliant smile at Karl that had both Hawk and Thor hissing in displeasure, while Rae took it as a personal challenge, and nearly charged out before Karl could stop her.

[Calm down, she's not going to attack us here.] Karl informed them.

The smile seemed friendly enough, but the beasts had all taken it as a threat from a predator, and that put Karl on guard, though he did his best to keep a neutral smile.

"I am told that you gained a Golden Chest from the trial instance, that you were the only one who gained that level of recognition." She began.

She seemed sincere, and Karl wondered whether he had mentioned that Dana had as well. It didn't seem to have come up in conversation, so perhaps nobody knew.

"I got a golden chest, yes." Karl agreed.

"Two Dragon Priests were awakened there, and yet, the Trial Instance didn't give them a level of recognition as great as yours. Why do you think that was?" She asked, while the man sat silently, still brooding about their previous argument.

"I believe it was because the rewards were based on power. If there was someone of Commander Rank or higher in the group, we likely would have seen a fourth type of box generated." Karl replied.

That seemed like the most probable cause to him, anyhow.

"Three ranks would suggest that you were at the Ascended Rank and not the Awakened Rank." The man spoke slowly.

Karl shrugged. "I am on the high side of Awakened. I don't presume to know how the Holy Relic sorts or rewards its visitors, I was just guessing based on who got which types of box."

"A very political answer. It appears that the Bureau has been training you well. Let me rephrase that. The skill that it gave you, you described it as a way to teach beasts. If I brought a beast here, could you teach it a skill?" She asked.

"If it was compatible with one that I know, it should be possible. That is what the skill said. I haven't had a chance to test it." Karl agreed.

The man whistled, and a Nekomata, a two - tailed magical cat, came over and stood in front of Karl. It must have been listening to their conversation to have gotten there that quickly, and it looked intrigued by the topic.

"I want you to teach her a skill. Any skill you know. As you may be aware, their innate skill is stealth, so it won't interfere with your options." The Priestess demanded, and her eyes turned as grey as her hair.

"How about Rend? You have lovely claws, do you think that you could learn to rend?" Karl asked, addressing the cat directly.

It looked confused, so Karl focused on his new skill.

Magical runes appeared in his vision, and a few seconds later, Karl began to understand what he had to do. The ability was cast on the animal, then you had to show it the skill you wanted it to learn, and have it practice for a period of time, unless you knew the skill well enough that the teaching ability would let you transfer the knowledge directly.

But the only way to know if you had that level of expertise was to try, so when the cat made an affirmative noise, Karl tried his best to activate the skill with Rend attached.

It worked, in a way. The magic seeped into the cat, who looked perplexed about what was going on around it and stared off into space for five solid minutes, while nobody said anything.

Then, suddenly, it raised a paw, and a faint light surrounded the four short claws.

[That is the saddest excuse for Rend that I have ever seen. Even the first day that I taught it to you, you did better.] Hawk laughed in Karl's mind.

"That is Rend. I am certain of it." Karl offered, while the two clergy members stared at the proud Nekomata.

They were silent for a few more seconds, as the cat swung its paw about, testing the ability. It was an Awakened Rank beast, but the skill was definitely not. It was barely there, a Common Grade skill that would need much more practice or instruction to be truly useful.

"So, it is not instant? That is a shame." The man finally replied with a sigh.

That seemed like a lot to expect of a single skill from an Awakened Rank Elite. Maybe they thought it was like a reusable Skill Book, and Karl could just stand there and teach hundreds of beasts a new skill in an hour?

Chapter 119 Good Intentions And Bad Ideas

The look that the Nekomata was giving the two High Priests promised violence. It was very proud of the fact that it had learned a new skill, and the fact that it could activate it after one day was extremely impressive in the Demon Cat's mind.

The new clerics took years to start using a new skill, and it had done so in a single hour. But these two still had the nerve to look down on its learning rate? If they weren't the ones who fed it, the cat was seriously considering clawing their eyes out to show them just how impressive its new skill could be.

Karl cleared his throat and nodded politely to the Nekomata. "It's a brand-new skill. The beasts that I teach will know the skill itself, but it's not an innate ability. Just like with students, even if they know it, it takes time to do it properly. It's a bit of a shame that I can't grant them that experience instantly like a skill book, but it's still pretty impressive, I think, and with practice you will have the first of a kind Nekomata with Rending Claws."

He might have actually made things worse, as now that the cat realized that someone was on its side, its glare at the two clergy members was even more intense, but the man just dismissed it with a wave.

"You can go now, fur ball. Yes, it is actually quite impressive, but not what we were hoping for. Thank you for your time, you can return to your room."

Karl took that as a dismissal, and turned to walk out of the Library, where he found Overlord Drake standing outside the archway.

The Overlord quietly gestured for Karl to accompany him, making it quite obvious that he wanted to talk, but not where they would so easily be overheard by the pair that were sitting in the Library's back room.

Whether those two would be able to actually hear them was a mystery to Karl. They weren't Elites, but the Mage's Professor back at the Academy did have hearing that was well beyond anything that he would associate with normal human senses as a result of

his magic. So, it would not only be prudent, but also polite to move away from the Library before they began to talk at all.

They turned into a nondescript hallway, and the Overlord smiled down at Karl, doing his best to make his smile reassuring and not intimidating.

"They're a pleasant pair, aren't they? Don't mind them too much, they've got very little affinity for living things and much prefer historical scrolls. I was speaking to the Colonel while you were in there, and she's got a much higher opinion of your potential skills, and a plan to make them work for you, not some grand plan to supplement the clergy guard."

Karl took a moment to take in what he had heard, while Drake nodded reassuringly.

"I take it they didn't mention that part. They wanted to add a tamed animal for each guard, like service dogs or the old war dogs, but magical beasts. But there is a reason that neither of them is on the security council, and they don't have the patience needed to train new soldiers, much less new soldiers who can work together with magical beasts." Drake chuckled quietly.

"Then they should have been looking into faster ways to get the animals to bond, not faster ways to improve their power, shouldn't they? I mean, the hard part is getting the magical beasts to like people." Karl suggested.

"Exactly. But there are promotions to replace a few aging Bishops coming up, and those who have a shot are all scrambling to do something impressive enough to earn a seat. But you didn't hear that from me." The Overlord rank warrior explained as he led Karl down a series of hallways.

"Dinner is this way, but you and Dana will be pulled away from your team for the evening. There are people here that you should meet, and who you will likely be working with in the future. All the clerics come from this school, and they're an invaluable asset to every major mission team, as well as the emergency response events.

Since the two of you are both Awakened Rank, with a solid chance of reaching Ascended by the end of the year with the good fortune that you've had, I thought it best that you meet some potential party members." Drake explained.

"I appreciate it, sir. But might I ask, what brought you here? I thought that you were attached to the Prince in a way?" Karl replied.

"You brought me here. Or rather, your team did. I was called to the emergency response to secure the Holy Relic as soon as it was reported, and we were on site before the team even made it back here with you.

We searched the area while you were being questioned, and the Bishop that we brought with us confirmed the intense concentration of Holy Magic right where you later said it would be. The cavern is now under constant security, and will remain that way until we determine when it will open again.

The find has been attributed to a combined effort of the Seminary and Elite Academies, but you all will probably get another reward when you get back, just so that nobody gets ideas about making the matter public or trying to claim individual glory." He informed Karl with a knowing smile.

There was always someone who was more eager for fame, and it might have been Karl if he hadn't seen the outcome of that choice on the Fate stairs.

"I didn't expect the church school to have so many levels of politics going on." Karl whispered as they walked, and the big Overlord burst into laughter.

"Oh, your Academy is just as bad, they just put on a better front. The clergy are terrible at poker, and they can't hide their intentions from anyone with eyes. At the Golden Divine Academy, the real heavyweights of politics do their scheming. I thought that you would know that by now."

Karl smiled and shook his head. "I knew that. I just didn't expect it here. You know, white robes and virtue, all of that."

Drake kept laughing and patted him on the back. "It's mostly harmless. You see, if they go off the rails, they lose their powers. Which brings us to the next thing you should know. When they begin a formal dinner with other ranked clerics, they will all glow for a second. They're checking each other for corruption, or an inability to activate Holy powers. It's like a failsafe, the way that we check our weapons at the door."

That was an amusing thought. Even without a weapon, they were weapons. But it was the thought that counted, Karl supposed.

They stepped through the door into a mostly filled dining room, and a grey robed Acolyte announced their presence.

"Overlord Drake and Awakened Karl." He spoke simply, causing a few heads to turn and nod politely before they all registered that the man had said Overlord.

Being so far up the rankings, above even the Royal and Monarch Rank Elites that came after the Commanders who made up the professors of the Academy, Drake was owed a lot of respect.

To the Clergy, he was on par with one of their Bishops walking into the room, but the way he behaved was without all the expectation of formality that normally accompanied

his position. He was so informal about his power that even Karl had nearly forgotten that the man could physically level this entire Academy in under a minute if he so wished.

"You're over there, with the other Awakened. I'll be up on the stage with the Headmaster. Good luck, and make good friends. Just like you, they need parties to go out on missions, but they're not the fighting sort, so if they can call on Elites, it's better for everyone." Drake whispered, then gave Karl a gentle shove toward his table.

Dana was already here, at a different table, and Karl hid a smile at the way that the clerics had arranged themselves. Her table was almost all boys, with only one other girl, while Karl's table was entirely girls.

There were far more female clerics in the room than male, Karl noticed. Nearly four to one, in fact. Some of them would have been raised here and then shown an aptitude for Holy Magic but not the Serum, but the vast majority would have awakened to Cleric type classes in the Ceremony.

A very short blonde girl stood up to greet Karl as he approached the table with his nameplate hanging from the back of a chair.

"Karl! Welcome, please, come and join us. We were just discussing the opportunities to gather more herbs in the area around the new Holy Relic. We talked to the students you saved, and they said that there were more locations you didn't get to, and that you were careful not to destroy the ones you harvested.

You have no idea how amazing that is. Even most of our students still manage to ruin the resource patches they find, and we're reminded before every mission to harvest sustainably."

Karl smiled back at the vertically challenged cleric. "We're not the only group that needs those resources, and most of them will grow back in just a few months if we're careful. It's better not to ruin them so that we can return."

Chapter 120 Formal Dinner

Karl didn't miss the disapproving look that Dana gave him as he took his seat, with the bubbly blonde sitting next to him and discussing the difficulties of arranging a mission for clergy students.

"You see, since we're not fighters, we have to wait for a Professor, or a group of guards to be going to the region that we're looking to visit, and convince them to help us with what we're after. Greed isn't encouraged among the church members, so it has to be for a good reason, and even then, it's up to the goodwill of others.

Mostly we only go out once or twice a year unless there is an Awakened Rank or higher mission for the Elites, and they call on the clergy for a healer." She was explaining.

"So that's how it works. My power grew faster than my knowledge of the wider world, you see. It's one of the side effects of reaching the Awakened Rank in the first year, but it is good to know that I can just call the school and request that they send out a healer." Karl replied with a polite smile.

One of the girls across the table from him took out a sheet of paper and passed it across to him.

"You can ask for us personally. Most of the active Elites, the ones who volunteer to go on higher ranked missions, have a preferred team. Obviously, we're still students, and we're not on one yet, but other than the end of semester social events, we don't get many chances to meet people from the other Academy.

It's not easy to make that sort of connection in a crowded hall with loud music and half the students drunk on some illicit punch." She explained, rolling her eyes so far that they were almost entirely white.

"While that does sound like it might be interesting, and like it might lead to a number of adventures, it doesn't sound like the sort of event to pick a quality party member." Karl replied, making one of the girls choke on her water, and the others struggle to keep their laughter from interrupting everyone's dinner.

Karl flipped the paper over, and found that it was a diagram of the table with everyone's names on it. That would be useful later when he was trying to remember who was who. The names were on the back of the chairs, so he couldn't see any of them while he was sitting, but with the sheet in front of him, he could cheat.

"Aren't you afraid of monsters? I heard that there are some terrifying ones out in the wilderness." The little blonde asked in a coy voice that had all her classmates wondering if she had forgotten that the professors could hear them.

"Oh, my specialty involves beasts. I have the most adorable pet named Rae." Karl suggested.

[Do it. Let me out.] The spider demanded, eager to tease these strange new humans for a moment. Her thoughts were filled with the shock and horror that would surely ensue if someone as magnificent as her appeared in their world.

It was rather dark in the dining hall, with a single overhead chandelier, but that was perfect for the dinner ambience. Unfortunately for the students, it was also perfect for Rae.

"Can we meet them? I heard that you have pets, but I didn't realize that they were monsters. They won't attack, will they?" The blonde asked, and Karl noticed Dana smirking at him from her table.

"Of course not. Rae is a very gentle and shy girl. She wouldn't harm a soul. Hawk is more solitary, but Thor, he likes to cuddle a bit too much, and his enthusiasm can overwhelm people."

[I'm not going out if I can't fly around the room.] Hawk warned Karl before he could be involved in this game.

"Please let us see. It's not a common thing to see magical beasts here, other than the Nekomata that prowls the grounds, looking for students out of bed after hours." The blonde pleaded.

Karl called Rae out behind him, forgetting just how large the Bloodbath spider had gotten. There was no way that she was going to hide behind the chair without falling flat to the ground and changing her coloration, but she didn't intend to do that.

Instead, she moved right to the girl's chair and stared at her, wondering if the girl had the nerve to stroke her head the way everyone did to Thor.

There had to be something to it, or the big softie wouldn't keep demanding it. But she had never tried it herself.

"EEEEKKKK!"

The girl's squeal of horror drew the attention of everyone in the room, and a number of clerics shot out of their chairs, preparing magic.

"It's not a threat. Rae is a pet, and they asked to meet her." Karl shouted, calming the clerics, while Overlord Drake laughed himself to tears at the front of the room.

The student in the second chair from Karl caught the blonde as she passed out, and tilted her upright to wait until she recovered, but Rae had a better idea, and tied her to the seat with a single strand of silk, before looking at the rest of the students.

The dark-haired girl on Karl's left got up out of her seat and walked over to the spider.

"She's beautiful. I had a tarantula at home, but nothing like this. Is she intelligent? Or do you have to give explicit orders? Rae, right? What a lovely big girl." The student crooned as she approached the Bloodbath Spider, doing her best not to alarm her.

When she was close enough, she gently stroked Rae's head, and the spider sent Karl a confused thought.

[I don't see the appeal.] She commented, confused about why Thor loved it so much.

Then Rae studied the cleric, tapping her with her legs as she circled the girl, and most of the room watched on, unsure if they should be horrified or amused.

"She won't be injured, right?" One of the other students asked cautiously as the spider circled her classmate as if staring at her next meal.

"Of course not. Rae is just curious, as she doesn't get to interact with people much. After they have properly met, I will return her to her resting area so she doesn't freak out the entire dinner party."

Rae ran the side of her leg over the coarse woollen robes in dismay, not impressed with the quality.

Then she aimed her head high, and spun out a large, thin sheet of white silk a metre wide and three metres long. The girl caught it as it fell to the ground, unsure what to do in this situation.

[Tell her to stop wearing ugly things, and thank her for satisfying my curiosity about head rubs.] Rae announced, then returned to the taming space.

"She says thank you for satisfying her curiosity, and to make clothing from that silk. She doesn't like wool." Karl explained with a smile.

A man at the front of the room tapped a spoon against his glass, catching everyone's attention.

"Now that we have all had our fun, the Matron is about to arrive. Please inform our new guests of the protocols." He announced.

The spider lover took her seat after carefully folding the cloth into a small square, and leaned over to whisper to Karl.

"Stand when she enters, and don't sit until she sits. When the food is served, she takes the first bite, and then we eat. Don't leave the table until she is finished, and then we all leave together. That's the basics of it, along with no talking above a whisper.

She has very sensitive hearing, and she doesn't like loud noises while she is eating." The girl explained.

The sarcastic one across from Karl smirked in a way that said the Matron just didn't like overly talkative people, so she had ordered everyone to shut up during dinner. But rules were rules, and if she was in charge here, she set the rules.

If Karl wanted to get a regular supply of healers for missions in the future, it would be best to stay on the good side of those in charge at the various monasteries and especially the Seminary Academy.

Everyone rose as the woman walked in, and was pulled into a friendly hug by Overlord Drake, then they all sat after the two of them took their seats again, and the food was

brought out. Large platters were placed in the middle of the tables, and then the servers retreated to a side room, where Karl could hear them taking more platters back to their own tables.

It was most likely a chore rotation, and not the same students every day, a duty that reminded them that service was part of their oath, but it worked well enough, and within minutes everyone in the building would be served.

Karl noticed that the Matron waited until the sound of platters hitting tables in the other room stopped, and then she took the first bite and the dinner started. So, she really did have enhanced hearing. Karl's was much better than the average human, and the sound of the trays been quiet even to him, while she was on the far side of the room, not near the side door to the other dining hall.

That made him wonder how many people here actually understood the timing, and how many thought that she was just randomly making them wait, like some test of patience, before they could begin to eat.

Karl knew the reason now, but it was obvious that the students didn't, and he wasn't entirely certain why it hadn't been clearly explained to them in advance.