

Beast Master 1111

Chapter 1111: Regional Agreements

Karl considered the options for a few moments, then made a proposal for the Immortal Regent.

"What if we restrict items to open access by the Alliance, as per our Alliance agreement, and then hold a once monthly auction for select equipment? We do that in Drodh, and the Lord sends someone to vet the items, to ensure we don't sell anything that will be too problematic.

That way we can at least maintain some level of reputation among the other Guilds in the city, and those with money from all over the Dragon Isles will have a chance to snatch the items away and remove them from the region?" Karl suggested.

Azov smiled. "That is not a bad option. You see, my major concern is not the power level of the items that you are selling. If you equipped the whole city, things would balance themselves out again.

What I am concerned about is an alliance so obscenely wealthy that they use that clout to upset the balance of power.

If your Alliance is making enough that they can simply buy out or put bounties on entire Alliances for displeasing you, how am I supposed to keep things relatively peaceful and stable?

I won't stand for that level of chaos in my territory."

Cara laughed quietly in her space. He was definitely talking about Supreme Lady Matilda right now, and extending his opinion of her to Karl.

Karl smiled, "Fear not, the Drodh branch is somewhat less chaotic than our Guild Elder's branch. We're not actually big on causing trouble for others most of the time."

The Immortal laughed. "That implies that you are for chaos and trouble some of the time."

Karl shrugged. "Well, we do have a Chaos Badger. But mostly the issue is that some people just deserve to be troubled."

Azov frowned. "A Chaos... badger?"

Cara came out of her space and stood up to wave at him.

"Oh, that is brilliant. If that old witch was this cute, she might actually have friends."

Cara snorted with laughter, then began to fly around the room, checking to see if anything changed during her nap. It all looked the same, except for the piles of things that Rae had been working on.

Boring.

So, she went over and landed on the new person. He had an interesting aura, and she was keenly interested in what about it made it different from anyone else that she had tasted before.

"Cara." Karl warned.

The badger gave him what the Myths took as a cheeky smirk, then gave Azov a nose bump and a subtle taste test.

[Not bad. Different spicy, like well aged Dwarven Liquor.]

Then she settled back on his lap to investigate the peculiarities of his aura, while Azov stroked the fur on her back.

"Well, it appears that she is quite friendly. Not at all what I expected." He noted.

"She's a people person, just commonly misunderstood."

But, back on topic, is the Auction a suitable limit on the growth rate of our wealth? We can accept sales limits on the items that we put up every month. It will all be stronger items, though. I put up an Overlord Ranked item or two in Drodh every month, to keep the bills paid at the Guild House, so this would be all Totem Ranked."

Azov sighed, and his expression went vacant as he messaged someone.

"The Seer says that should keep the rate of growth to a level that won't cause undue levels of imbalance. Whatever that means." He agreed a few moments later.

Karl shrugged. "Perhaps it's inevitable that the power level and wealth of the region is going to rise? As long as we don't get so far ahead of the curve that our members are tempted to cause trouble, I don't see it being an issue."

Azov nodded. "Alright, that works for me. Your crafting skills are really incredible, though. Perhaps you would be open to taking a few more apprentices? Even on a short-term training program."

Deve tried and failed not to laugh. Everyone wanted to load Karl up with apprentices.

Karl shrugged. "I don't see the harm. They are something of a trade secret, but we do have both Guild spots and work space available. We could take in a few more students, if they have suitable personalities."

"Wonderful, I have just the right ones for you." Azov announced, then activated an item in his hand.

It created a glowing spot of light, and then a few seconds later, a portal opened on the spot.

[Oh, that is a great toy.] Cara cheered.

"It's just a marker beacon so that the people tracking me know to open a portal." He explained to the badger, who was intently eyeing the device in his hand.

[It's a magic stick of 'be here'.] Cara laughed.

Karl chuckled and relayed her thoughts, which made the Immortal laugh.

"Oh, I see how that would be appealing. Perhaps I have been using it all wrong."

A young mage with glowing silver eyes stepped through the portal and bowed to Azov.

"Your Majesty, you called?"

Azov nodded and gestured to Karl. "I have confirmed that this man does indeed have both a lost crafting skill and rare spells, as the Seer had predicted when she saw that his finances could cause disruption to the balance of the nation. Can you please summon one of the trainee study groups from the Library?"

A moment later, three blue-haired clerics approached the portal, then stopped as they realized they were expected to leave the Library.

"Come, take a seat. We have rare knowledge for you." Azov explained.

Those were magical words, and two nearly identical androgynous figures rushed forward, followed by a more stately old Blue Dragon, at the Mythic Rank.

"Is the study group only three?" Azov whispered to the Silver Dragon.

"They were next on the list for new knowledge." He replied.

"Runelord Karl, meet High Priestess Sapphire, and her grandchildren Bobby and Jo." The silver eyed dragon introduced them.

The older blue dragon smiled eagerly.

"Runelord?"

Karl nodded. "The Runemaster skill. Do you currently have a trade skill?"

Sapphire shook her head. "I have been holding off for a new one. I have researched thousands, but I have not yet found one that was worth my time."

Karl took out a small blue water stone and wrote a simple inscription on it.

{Near this stone, no liquid will dampen the surface of a book or scroll.}

Then he buffed the water stone to Totem Rank and tossed it to her.

"A welcoming gift suitable for a Blue Dragon." Karl explained.

Sapphire stared at it for a few seconds, then began to mouth the words, which were written in ancient Dwarven, not the proper Runic Language.

She smiled as she translated. "Does it really work?"

Karl nodded. "Even a Monarch Ranked flood spell wouldn't dampen a single page with that stone active. It doesn't prevent other damage, though."

"Just the thing to keep active at all times in the Library with youthful apprentices running around. Tell me, do you have more apprentices?" She asked.

Karl nodded. "A dozen more at this house, and half as many, plus Alchemy Apprentices in Drodh. No more blue dragons, unfortunately, but we have bunnies, demons and dragonkin."

Chapter 1112: Elder Sapphire

Sapphire chuckled. "Let me guess. You have an acolyte of the Green Dragon with you, and they made it impossible not to keep the beastkin around?"

Karl winked at her. "She's also fond of Obsession Demons. They make up most of the Runic Alchemy team."

"And where is the young nature lover now?"

Karl smiled. "In the Overlord Ranked Dungeon, working as a healer for a twenty-five-person team from the Guild Alliance. She has the [Tree of Life] transformation, and quite enjoys the job."

"Do you have other clerics in the Guild?" Sapphire asked, and Deve chuckled.

The dragon turned a curious look his way, and the Druid shrugged.

"I think that the Darklight Host is collecting them. They've got one from the Green, one from the Red, one from the Black, and now it seems there will be Blue Dragons as well."

{I should have sent them one from the Bronze.} Azov muttered to himself.

Sapphire chuckled. "It's not too late. You know that most of them don't have trade skills other than being insufferable know it alls."

The pair smirked at each other, and one of the younger blue dragons raised his hand.

"Should I go request for one? I am certain that they would love the chance for a new legal case study."

Sapphire patted him on the head. "No need. They will send someone on their own if they think that we need one here."

Then she turned on Karl. "How long do you think that it will take to learn the basics of the skill?"

Karl winked at her. "I have a special skill granted to me by my Class, and it is very dragon-friendly."

Deve nodded in agreement. His skill was practically perfect for dragons.

Karl shook the Totem Ranked Dragon's hand, and activated [Follow Me, Little One].

{Champion Karl Offers Knowledge} Skill [Runecrafting] will be transferred to the curious maiden Sapphire.

{Champion Karl Offers Knowledge} Skill [Runecrafting] will be transferred to the helpful assistant Bobby.

{Champion Karl Offers Knowledge} Skill [Runecrafting] will be transferred to the mischievous whelping Jo.

The three Dragons cheered and threw their hands in the air in celebration, while Azov stared at Karl.

"What sort of skill is that?" He asked.

"It's intended to train my bonded beasts, but with a few upgrades, I found that they just have to be friendly and not part of my bonded team. So, I can teach all sorts of fun skills to compatible dragons." Karl explained.

Sapphire's eyes glowed with Divine Favour as the God of Knowledge was intrigued by the possibilities.

So, Karl did it again.

{Champion Karl Offers Knowledge} Skill [Lightning Zone] will be transferred to the curious maiden Sapphire.

Karl smiled as he remembered the first time that he had taught a Lightning skill to the Blue Dragons, and how frustrated they had been that nobody else could use [Refreshing Lightning].

Sapphire winked at Karl.

"Thank you, but the Goddess says you're still holding out."

Karl shrugged. "Of course I am. If I showed you all the fun things at once, what would we do tomorrow?"

{Champion Karl Offers Knowledge} Skill [Refreshing Lightning] will be transferred to the curious maiden Sapphire.

The familiar blue barrier surrounded the dragon, and her eyes flashed once, then faded. It seemed that was enough amusement for her Goddess for one day.

But it had only confused the rest of the group.

"Blue Dragons are very compatible with a Lightning Barrier type skill that I know. It's the one that normally belongs to the Lightning Cerro species. But you need to have quite a bit of Lightning affinity and beast blood for it to work." He explained.

"So, you can't just teach skills to anyone?" Azov asked.

Karl shook his head. "No, I can only teach skills that you are compatible with. In fact, my team members all have entirely different skill sets because they're not all that compatible with the specialties of the others.

For example, only Dana managed to learn Cara's Nullify. None of the others, and none of the other beasts, even though both Remi and Tian are skilled magic users.

Plus, Tian and Remi can't even use each other's healing skills."

Karl remembered that most of the group here didn't know who he was talking about, so he elaborated.

"Remi is our Runic Alchemist, and a Naga Queen by species. While Tian is a young Stonefur Divine Fox."

Azov smiled in understanding. He had the briefing on the members of the Darklight Host, but they hadn't had names for the beasts, or many of the lower members. It was only the ones more likely to be entangled with the web of fate that had caught the notice of the Seers, so they were the only ones researched.

He should have known that more members of that Guild meant more trouble. How many tens of thousands of years had he known that old Chaos Dragon? Of course, anyone that the System pulled into her Guild was a potential catastrophe.

They weren't even in her branch of the Guild, so Matilda hadn't recruited them, the System had done it, at least for the first one.

Idly, Azov inspected Karl's system information, then paused when he got to one particular line.

"Would you care to explain how exactly you came to be the City Lord of Bunga and when? As far as I know, the Bronze Dragon Orthos has held that title for thousands of years." Azov asked, his tone only slightly accusing, and mostly curious.

"Oh, that's a bit of a long story, but Bishop Misty sent me for a little journey into the past, to the last resurgence, when Orthos was still young. I just happened to be at the city gates when a Guild War started, and ended up as the champion for the Darklight Host.

That's the first of the gold rings on my Guild Tabard."

The Immortal Regent sat silently for nearly a full minute, while everyone else tried to make sense of what Karl had said. They were definitely missing some information here.

Like exactly how old was Karl, and where was Bunga?

Chapter 1113: Overlords Return

That was the moment when the entire Overlord Ranked team burst into the front doors, laughing and joking as they celebrated the immense amount of loot that they had gotten from their day's work.

They all came to a stumbling halt as they realized that there was an important meeting of some sort going on in the main floor's main room.

"Our apologies, Your Majesty. We weren't expecting Guests." Quinn stammered, but Azov just smiled and waved off his concern.

"It's nothing so serious. I take it you had a good day?" Azov asked, now much more interested in what the Overlords had gotten up to than the minutia of the Darklight Host's likely future troublemaking.

"Indeed, Lord Regent. You see, we managed to trigger a special event today, for taking zero damage during the first boss. It gave us an extra boss, and then enhanced bosses for the rest of the run. Plus, we got nine Epic Grade items from a single run, all Overlord Ranked." The Warrior explained.

"Zero damage during the first boss fight?"

Quinn nodded in agreement. "The Golems took the lead, and Miss Ophelia has limited Invulnerability. Apparently, the dungeon doesn't count damage done to Golems. So, when we finished the fight, nobody in the group had taken any damage at all."

The Immortal Regent frowned, then tapped his chin in thought, which made Cara complain that he was no longer stroking her back. His aura was nice, like you could get lost in it forever, and she didn't want to get up yet.

But he got up and handed her to Deve, who laughed as Cara tentatively stared at him, considering her options, then sat on his lap to face the group.

Being closer to where the Immortal was seated was still best, and Deve already smelled like badger.

"Whose golems were used for the primary tanks?" Azov asked.

Dana raised her hand. "I am a Mystic Blademaster, and my main Golems have Auto Parry, as well as increased attack speed. They don't excel at holding the attention of the boss, but they are good at intercepting attacks."

Azov nodded. "That makes sense. I wonder if it has happened before, and the Guilds simply kept it to themselves? With that much better of a result, I can see why they would want to keep it as an Alliance secret.

And for that reason, I won't spread the news.

It's just an Overlord Ranked Dungeon, and if your Alliance has what it takes to keep triggering the event, then they can reap the rewards."

The Overlords looked relieved. If the Regent wasn't going to mess with their new strategy, they would make a fortune in the next few months, and they would have all the gear they could ever need.

The portal was still open, and Azov began making his way over.

"I will leave these fine folk with you for the foreseeable future. It has been a pleasure meeting you all, but I do have work to return to." He explained as he walked away without looking back.

That left Cara without hope for more exposure to the strange Immortal Aura. So, she rubbed herself all over the front of Deve and returned to her space to look for a blue stone, the same colour as the new dragon's eyes.

Deve paused, then began to curse.

"Dammit, I know why she was so happily sitting in my lap. She wanted to send me home smelling like a strange badger." The Druid complained.

The other Guild Masters laughed as they realized what Cara had done, and how Deve's badger beastkin wife would take it if he walked in smelling like another badger woman.

"There is a shower at the end of the hall. You can wash and change before you go home." Karl suggested.

Dana laughed, "Don't you think that she would notice just as quickly that he came home smelling of someone else's shampoo with wet hair?"

Deve frowned. "Give me the badger, I'm bringing her home with me to explain."

Actually, that sounded like a lot of fun, Cara thought. Baby humanoid badgers.

So, she gave up on her stone search and came out to bump the back of Deve's legs, encouraging him to get going.

"I feel like I've been bamboozled. But alright, let's go. Once she knows you're an actual badger and not a mistress, I will have much less to worry about."

Deve led Cara out of the house, and Karl saw Lotus sneaking around the edge of the room to inspect the new people.

"They're blue dragons, you don't need to sneak up on them." Karl informed her with a soft chuckle.

The younger one who had been introduced as Jo laughed and took down her hood, revealing a girlish smile, missing a front tooth.

"No, she definitely needs to sneak up. It's the only way to keep Green Dragon Clerics quiet in the Library." The young dragon joked.

Bobby took down his hood as well, and Karl noted just how much they looked alike, even for twins. But Karl's fears were unfounded, as Lotus didn't do anything crazy, she just grabbed her fellow small people in a hug and welcomed them to the Guild.

"What is Karl going to teach you? Will you be joining the bunnies and the boys? Or did you want to do Runic Alchemy?" Lotus asked.

The pair both turned to their grandmother, who smiled at Lotus. "We all will be joining the bunnies and the boys. I promised their mother that I would train them up in my chosen trade skill when we picked one."

Lotus nodded. "That will be helpful. We needed another Totem Ranked crafter in the Guild. These two will also fit in well with the others. They might be Monarchs, but the others are Royals, so it's not too big of a difference."

Nachtia shook her head in dismay. "Dragons born on the Isles really do have an advantage. I was nearly grown before I reached Monarch Rank."

Bobby and Jo hid behind Lotus as they noticed the Black Dragon, but Nachtia was used to the response the first time people met her.

"This is Nachtia, part of our Overlord Ranked team, and she will have a room right by your grandmother. Perhaps next to you, if you don't want to stay in the basement with the other crafters for safety."

Sapphire winked at Karl. "And am I not now a Guild Crafter who needs protection?"

Karl patted her gently on the shoulder. "I am not fooled by the appearance of your transformation. There isn't anything weak about a Mythic Ranked Dragon. Especially one who can make acolytes behave in the Library."

Chapter 1114: How Best To Decorate

Sapphire thought that this assignment might actually be more fun than she had expected. There were other dragons around still, and not just dragonkin.

Not that there was anything wrong with the Dragonkin, but they tended to have this weird hero worship thing going on for full-blooded dragons, and when there was nobody else to distract them, it could get tiresome.

Sapphire had taught school for centuries as a young blue dragon, and she was more familiar with most how youngsters looked up to old dragons in positions of authority. But lately, she just didn't feel the need to be that person.

"I would imagine that I am going to be expected to create equipment now that I am here, and you are a crafting guild." The blue dragon sighed.

She was great with the theoretical, and loved to study. But having to actually practice a skill was part of the reason she had held off so long.

"You can practice on this lovely set of accessories. They're all carved with dragons around the outer edge and a flat centre for easy engraving. How familiar are you with the runic language after the knowledge transfer?

I could write out examples, or you could just free-form it and make what you like.

There are two basic options. Linking the runes into the largest possible combinations for efficiency to add stats, or using poetry to link everything and make it flow. Both generate excellent results, though poetry can have some surprising additional effects." Karl explained.

Sapphire was silent for a moment, then smiled. "The Goddess has granted me a comprehensive understanding of the language, and even a bit of knowledge about your oddities.

Is it true that you often write in Dwarven because you started out with very little knowledge and a Dwarven Rune book?"

Karl nodded. "Indeed, that is true. But it won't work for everyone. Many of the Dwarven Runes and poems need a bit of Dwarven blood to work, and I have barely enough. As for you, I have no idea how that would work, given the Dragons' affinity for magic of all sorts.

Did you have something in mind? It is a Guild custom to make the first item for your own use."

That was a curious custom, Sapphire thought.

"So, your crafters just make a random thing that they want as their first training item?" She asked.

Karl nodded. "I will write the runes on the chalkboard if they need a guide. I believe that it helps build confidence, and many choose an item that will help them in their work. The acolytes downstairs mostly chose to make rings that gave a greater chance of a higher grade outcome when crafting."

Sapphire nodded in understanding, while Bobby and Jo began to get excited. That was a brilliant idea for a first item.

"That sort of luck item is not my style." Sapphire began. "Instead, I would think that an item that would reduce the mana expenditure or increase my regeneration might be more appropriate."

Karl smiled. "Both are possible. Mana storage is one of the most commonly requested benefits of our equipment at the higher Ranks. Especially for the armour pieces, as they have enough raw material to hold a truly outstanding amount of mana, where a small ring struggles."

The dragon slowly blinked her glowing blue eyes as she thought about the answer, but Rae solved her dilemma for her.

"I have Library blue robes for you. If you want to start with those, you can have all the benefits without jewellery jangling as you work." Rae offered.

She held up the robes, which were a bit fancy, but well suited to the fashion sensibility of the old blue dragon.

"Those are lovely. Is that all silk, with a lace shawl? You have lovely taste, Madam Spider."

Rae stood a bit straighter, enjoying the praise for her work. Making clothing was a very rewarding endeavour, people sang her praises everywhere that she went.

Now she knew how Remi felt when they went to the Naga Temple.

"There are two options, either decorate the outside of the robes, or turn them inside out and do all the rune work on the inside of the clothing. Once it is activated, you don't need to worry about it wearing off." Karl explained.

"Inside it is. Now children, pick a bracelet, that will give you more room to work on." She instructed Bobby and Jo.

"How about a staff? Shouldn't a working cleric have a walking staff?" Jo asked, which made Nachtia and the other clerics laugh.

"You've been around old people too long. The walking staff is just a prop to remind people that they're old and dignified. It has nothing to do with location. Besides, you need both hands to work, you can't hold a staff all day." Nachtia explained.

"Oh, right. Bracelets it is. Thank you for your wisdom, High Priestess."

Sapphire rolled her eyes, and Karl handed them both a pair of Overlord Ranked bracelets. They couldn't upgrade them that far, but they were made from some sort of dark blue translucent stone that would go well with their robes.

A knock at the door distracted everyone, and the Gargoyles happily opened the door to let Guild Master Raj back in, with a Totem Ranked mage following him.

"Sorry to interrupt when I know that you're busy, but one of our teams has a minor emergency. They were supposed to provide a Tank for a mixed Alliance run, but he's missing in action, and the other tanks ran this morning, they can't enter again today." The big man explained.

Karl frowned. "Technically, I'm not a tank."

Raj gave him a disbelieving look. "With your skills, you don't think that you're suitable as a tank?"

Karl considered the answer. It was true that he was suitable as a Tank. In fact, he had no intention of taking the hits himself. He would just appropriate Rae's skills and let them do the tanking for him.

Chapter 1115: Totemic Dungeon

"Alright, I will join you for the run, as long as someone tells me where to go." Karl agreed.

Rae smiled as she prepared to return to her space.

"You're coming as well? I thought that you were going to be busy making decorations for the Alliance." Karl joked.

"Even Remi stopped working to join us. It's been too long since we were in a Dungeon. We should call Cara back, but she's having fun." Rae replied.

Raj frowned. "Did Deve really take her home with him? That's an even worse idea than showing up smelling like her."

Rae laughed. "She's playing with his children now. They like flying around the lobby."

The Mythic Warrior sighed. "There should be a law against that. Flying badgers is just excessive. Cruel and unusual punishment to the cleaners should apply in this scenario."

"Deve has experience with them, he took all the crayons away before he let them near Cara. But she's being careful not to crash into the walls or decorations, and the lobby of their Guild Manor has been childproofed, since their members have so many kids staying there." Rae added.

Karl turned to the mage. "What is our part of the group like?"

"We're supposed to provide the main tank, two healers, and two mages. We've got everyone but the tank waiting."

"Alright, let's go join them. It's annoying when people keep you waiting for a run. I take it this is a ten-person run?" Karl replied.

The mage shook her head. "No, it's a twenty-five person, they were just short a few people with members on vacation. Their alliance isn't as large as ours."

"So, they have twenty, we bring the five. Alright, that works. Just let me inform Cara that we're headed out, and we can leave."

The moment that he said that, Cara returned to her space, then came out to wave at the mage.

"Oh, it's you. Deve's new friend. I saw him chasing you around the garden earlier."

Karl gave Cara a suspicious look and she shrugged.

[The kids wanted to fly outside. It was fun, and landing on grass is softer. Plus, my claws won't damage the floor.]

Then she returned to her space, and Karl motioned for the mage to lead the way.

"Thanks for the invite, Guild Master. If you want a snack, I believe that the ladies have some baked goods going in the kitchen." He offered.

As one, the four Lala bunnies poked their heads out of the kitchen. They had been preparing for the ladies to return from the Dungeon. Who was this new man invited to the celebration?

Karl gave Dana a one-armed hug, and he whispered in her ear. "I will be back in a few hours to hear all about your trip. Don't let Lotus overdose on popcorn."

Dana smiled up at him. "If anyone can make it possible to overdose on popcorn, it would be Lotus."

Karl followed the mage out of the manor, then extended his hand. "I believe that we missed this stage. I am Karl, Beast Master Champion, and it's a pleasure to work with you today."

"I am Cindy, Fire Mage. It's a pleasure to meet you properly. We didn't have an opportunity to talk when everyone was shopping for new clothes. Lady Rae has become something of a legend among the Alliance."

Karl nodded. "I can understand that. She's gone all out making clothes and armour. Our Grandmaster Blacksmith has the disadvantage in creation speed, so he hasn't gotten the same level of recognition yet."

"I suppose that it doesn't help that he's still in Drodh either."

Raj split off when they passed his Guild's Manor, but Cindy led Karl out the front of the outer building, and into the city.

"You know, since I arrived, I haven't even had an opportunity to see the rest of the city? This is the first time I've been outside in days. It's kind of bright out here."

The mage laughed. "The great complaint of crafters everywhere: seeing the sun."

Karl inspected the shops as they passed through the commercial district, headed for the Myceloid Dungeon, according to the signs at every street corner.

They stopped at a coffee shop, and Cindy gestured to the other members of the team.

"This is Marcus, an Arcane Mage, and these are Don and Reggie, our Clerics." She explained.

The Arcane mage was wearing black robes, made by Rae, while both Clerics had Rae's signature Cleric Robes on, in thick white silk.

"It looks like our fashion line is becoming quite popular. Though, it is odd not to see the trademark spider logo on the white robes." Karl joked.

The dragonkin man known as Reggie rolled up his sleeve, revealing that there was a small white spider embroidered into the robes.

[I put them in hidden spots on the cleric robes, so it doesn't upset their Gods.] Rae explained.

"Mister Karl. What form will you take to Tank the battle? Will you be in Dragon Avatar form? Some of the Myceloids are pretty big." Reggie asked.

"I was intending to have my summoned creatures do the work of tanking for us. Spectral Knights are excellent tanks, and they come equipped with shields and heavy armour. If they do the heavy work on the front line, we shouldn't have a problem holding the enemy back for the damage dealers." Karl explained.

"That's unconventional. But do they have life leech or regeneration? I need to know what the healing strategy will be. That's why we insist that if they require both healers, we also provide the main tank." The balding dragonkin explained.

"They have both available to them. They heal when they deal damage, and I will have a Trollish Regeneration level self-healing effect on them, as well as an [Eternal Lightning] barrier.

Honestly, I don't expect them to need much healing at all, it is the rest of the group that you'll have to focus on.

I have a skill called [Territorial] which causes [Intimidation] on hit, which should keep the attention on them. But they don't have a proper taunt ability." Karl informed the healers.

[Bestial Champion] would double the effect of all buffs that he cast on his himself or his bonded partners, but he wasn't sure if that would apply to buffs on the [Undead Army] spell constructs.

"If they have problems, I will step in, and I can roar in dragon form. It's pretty effective." He added, just in case.

Chapter 1116: Karl Can Tank?

What Karl didn't realize, because he had never been with a group that stood a chance of pulling the monsters away from him, was that [Intimidation] was a form of taunt effect, that increased the likelihood that the target would focus on you.

Ophelia had a lesser version of it on all her attacks, and it had made it nearly impossible for her not to be the main tank. But Karl could activate it at will, he just never bothered.

He also had [Overwhelming Presence] which would cause a [Terror] type of effect, and freeze enemies in place for a few seconds. So, between the two, Karl was fairly certain that he would be alright.

"Do you have a lot of combat buffs?" Cindy asked.

"I've got plenty of buffs, and a varied selection of combat skills from my beasts. I suppose the biggest ones would be Shatter, Sharpness, Crushing Blows, Devastate, Rampage, Pack Tactics, Territorial, Limited Invulnerability, Trollish Regeneration, Bestial Champion, Brutal Pugilist, and Avatar."

The other four simply stared at him as he listed skill after skill.

"And, all of those are active?" Reggie asked.

Karl nodded. "I don't always use them all, but Territorial will be essential for my role as Tank, and the rest all increase damage for my whole bonded team. Well, for the whole team if I extend some of them over everyone in the Dungeon. But the majority are passive skills."

"I don't even know what some of those skills do. Like, what even is [Devastate]?" Marcus asked.

Karl laughed. "Skills that do more than ten percent of the target's health do double damage."

"Of course they do. Because you weren't strong enough already. I think that our employers for the day will be pleased with the group that we chose. I know that the healers will." The Arcane Mage joked.

Reggie and Don nodded. They were very pleased with this setup.

They finished their drinks and got up. "Alright, the others should be at the entrance to the Dungeon. Let's go show off."

Karl tried not to laugh. Their whole group, himself included, was wearing the latest fashion made by Rae. He wasn't in armour, he was just wearing a casual outfit with a polo shirt and slacks, but they were still Totem Ranked items made by Rae.

City guards stopped them when they reached the staging area, and waited for someone to introduce them, so they knew who was entering.

"Five members of the Nara Group Guild Alliance joining twenty members of the Jackalope Group." Cindy explained.

"On your left. Entry fee, please."

Cindy handed over a bag and the guard ushered them through to meet the rest of the group.

Much to Karl's dismay, there was one visible mage, four Rogues, and the rest of the team all showed the same basic brown of the Warrior Class, with no advanced classes among them.

They were all Totem Ranked, so they weren't doing anything strange, but the fact that not a single one of them had managed to advance was somewhat depressing. He was going to have to start hiring Inscriptionists to make Skill Books so more of the Alliance members could trigger advancements.

"Gentlemen, Cindy. Who is the new tank?" A muscular Dragonkin Warrior named Steve asked.

"This is Karl. He's an unconventional one, a Beast Master. He tanks with bonded beasts and summons, but he's got Intimidation on hit, so just give him a couple of seconds to grab the Myceloids' attention and it'll be fine.

Bear with us for a few pulls, it's his first time here, he just moved from Drodh when his Guild joined our alliance." She replied.

The warrior sighed. "Well, a tank is a tank. If that's what your healers want, we won't argue."

He led the way into the gate of the Dungeon, with Karl right beside him. Once Karl was sure that everyone was inside, and verified the head count, he called out the team, and then began adding summons.

Bodyguards, Epic Guard, Haint, Dire Bear Golems, and then the Undead Army.

"Thor, you're responsible for positioning the bears and the undead to tank for the group. Be sure to listen for instructions." Karl instructed.

Thor nodded happily and bugled in joy at getting to smash giant mushroom people.

They looked tasty.

"That's... not what I was expecting. Also, I think that your partner just robbed one of my warriors."

"Cara, give him back his sword."

Cara shrugged and handed the weapon back. She was just taking a look, it was a bonded weapon anyhow.

"Are you sure that these beasts are all suitable for combat?" Steve asked.

Karl nodded. "Don't underestimate her, the Chaos Badger is a monster in combat."

But Steve was looking at Hawk, who had gotten Thor to shrink him so that he was the size of a large bird, but he was in [Lord of Destruction] form, so he was an ethereal blue form, like a lesser Fire Elemental.

"Oh, he's been reduced in size for the fight. A thirty-metre long Ghostfire Thunderbird isn't exactly Dungeon friendly. It doesn't affect his power, only his mobility." Karl explained.

"What did we get ourselves into?" One of the warriors asked as Rae summoned all of her undead and Golems, then moved them to the side, so everyone knew they weren't the tanks. They looked similar, but hers blended into the background as she activated [Perfect Camouflage] on them.

"Alright, what do I need to know about the first few pulls? Thor looks like he's going to run off and eat someone if we don't let him at the mushrooms."

Steve laughed. "One of the major loot items at the end of the battle is a magical resource called mushroom steaks. They're a Totem Ranked food that grants combat buffs, though. So please don't let him just eat everything."

Thor nodded.

[Got it. Leave the loot items alone, eat the bodies of the mushroom men.]

There were even some tasty looking new herbs growing off to the side of the path that he was going to need to pick for his space.

Chapter 1117: Do You Know

Once he was satisfied that everyone was in position, Thor bugled and started the charge, with the Dire Bears flanking him and the Undead Army taking up the outside of the formation.

It wasn't nearly as fun without his Knight, but when he collided with the first Myceloid warrior and trampled it to the ground, Thor decided that maybe this Dungeon wasn't going to be too bad.

The Warriors were right behind them, only waiting a few seconds for the Undead army to get in position.

Thor instructed them to go past the Myceloids so that the Warriors could attack without passing through the line. That seemed to work pretty well, and they were even considerate enough that they didn't try to interfere with his stomping.

Cara was disintegrating bits of it, but other than that, everyone had picked another target.

Naturally, that was because the massive behemoth was standing over top of the fallen monster, using [Earthquake], [Lightning Zone] and [Consecrated Ground] as he stomped on the Myceloid.

Nobody dared to get too close and risk being squished by his enthusiasm.

"Hawk, go grab another group and get it over here. We're almost done with this one." Karl shouted, loud enough that all the warriors could hear him.

Cindy frowned. That was not how this was normally done. But the monsters had died more than twice as fast as usual, and the healers were looking bored, with nothing to do.

"Have you even cast a spell yet?" She asked Don as the cleric lit a cigarette.

"What one? Nobody is taking any damage. The Undead have full control of the Myceloids, and these ones don't have any area attacks that strike behind themselves. Only in front.

That Monster Man's damage reduction is absolutely insane.

I understand that he's the one who makes the gear, so naturally he has the best, but this is beyond that. I don't think that he listed all of his own defensive abilities, only the ones that he thought we would recognize as important." Don explained.

"How so?" She asked as she cast [Rain of Fire] over the Myceloids.

"He said he's got Limited Invulnerability, but I think that he's got at least another twenty or thirty percent damage reduction from a skill, plus what is on his gear. Which isn't actual gear, as far as I can tell.

He's got an Epic Grade armour spell, and I can't tell if he's wearing armour underneath it or just accessories. But normally, only spell buffs spread to summoned creatures, and those Spectral Knights are regenerating more damage than they're taking."

That made sense to the mage. The Behemoth species were all known to have immense amounts of damage reduction, and that skill might have been shared with Karl.

However, Thor wasn't taking any damage, as far as she could tell. His stomping had so badly mangled the Myceloid Warrior that it couldn't even fight back at this point.

Hawk used [Meteor Shower] to get the attention of the next group of Myceloids, who were intercepted and pulled away from each other by the Spectral Knights before they reached the group. The undead had to shift their position a little to get on the far side of the new arrivals, but the transition was nearly seamless, with fresh enemies replacing the old ones as they died.

"I like his style. Smooth and efficient. No messing around or waiting between groups for the tanks to get their act together, no waiting for them to get the attention of the whole group and not just one or two.

If we can teach someone else this skill, I recommend that we put them in consideration for the off tank position on future runs." Reggie noted.

Cindy frowned. There weren't any Necromancers or Warlocks in their Alliance, though.

So, who could even use that spell?

"Patrol, pull the group away from the road." The leader of the Jackalope group called.

"There are only three, I will hold them until we're ready for them." Karl declared, then put his bow away and grabbed the Sword of Champions before he activated [Avatar] to make himself large enough to handle three Myceloid Warriors the size of Ogres.

Just like Ophelia's weapons did when she transformed, the weapon vanished as Karl shifted, but the buffs it granted remained. Including the life force transfer.

"So, he really is a Tank." One of the warriors muttered as Karl swatted two of the patrol members to the ground, then flapped his wings and blocked their sight of the rest of the group.

Cindy smiled fondly at the memory of the show his Guild had put on, dramatizing his Guild War duel against Jerome.

"Yeah, he's a wonderful Tank, he just doesn't seem to need to do it much." She laughed to herself, as the warrior wouldn't be able to hear her over the battle.

[You weren't joking, Thor. These things do smell wonderful. Have you gotten to taste them yet?] Karl asked.

[Every bit as good as I had hoped, and then some. I hope that we can grow more mushrooms with the steaks that drop as loot after the run.]

Cara laughed. [I grabbed some of the small ones growing along the road. Don't worry, I made sure they weren't going to be a sentient thing before I took them to storage.]

Thor's sisters really were kind-hearted girls.

The fight here wasn't too bad, so Thor sent the Bodyguards and the Haint to go assist Karl, ensuring that he didn't have to fight alone. Just Karl's bodyguards, though. Remi's bodyguards were too mixed up with the warriors to get away easily.

[Do I go get more?] Hawk asked as the second group was about to die.

[No, let the group finish them off, and then they can work on the patrol before they take a break and get a drink. We're not in a rush, we can casually walk through and snack as we go.] Karl replied.

Thor smiled as he tore another piece off his new target. This dungeon was really kind to him and Hawk. Not only did the enemies roast well, they were vegetarian snacks.

Chapter 1118: The Mushroom Man

Once the patrol was down, Karl curled his tail under his feet and settled down on the pathway with his wings tucked and Cara sitting on his head.

"Did you know that dragons could loaf? I've never seen a dragon sit like that before." Steve laughed.

"Probably because Karl isn't a dragon, it's just a transformation, and he's a Cat Demon." Cindy shrugged, taking up the role of spokesperson for her group, since the Tank was in dragon form.

"We've got two more groups, and then the first boss. If we deal with them in the same way, we should not have any issues. How taxing was that extended fight on the healers? Is their mana holding up?" He asked.

"We ain't done shit. I've been standing here chain-smoking and waiting for someone to screw up badly enough that they need me." Don replied.

Steve laughed. "Well, if you put it that way, should we pull both groups at once, and use the extra targets to save time with area damage effects?"

He was assuming that the healer was just putting on a brave front, but in combat, he was too busy to keep track of the health information of the group members. So, he didn't realize that the man was

completely serious, or that the life steal of the Spectral Knights was so high that the healers really didn't have anything to do.

Karl joined the lead group when they were ready to move again, and Thor reassigned the bears and the Haint to join Karl. They would pull the second group back to where the rest of the tanks were waiting, and then get them turned around so that the damage wasn't hitting the whole group.

That was what the Jackalope Group considered the hardest part of the fight.

You needed to get them to the right position and get them turned around, or get the melee fighters behind them without anyone taking too much damage.

Karl led the team forward, and let out a huffing draconic laugh as he saw the targets. One group of five, and one group of three.

So, they could put the Undead two to one on the first group, while Karl and the Dire Bears each took one of the others. They were significantly larger than the Spectral Knights, so it all worked out evenly, and the spot where the first group was standing was large enough for everyone.

[Hawk, go bring that second group to us. We will grab them and put them at the exit.] Karl instructed as the team edged around the clearing, waiting for Thor and the undead to charge.

Thor charged, and Hawk darted off to go get the second group, while Karl shifted the bears into position.

The Myceloid Warriors came running, and Karl bombarded them with [Void Blast] spells, but for some reason, they were intent on charging right past him and into the other melee.

One massive claw stopped the one closest to the defenders, and Karl slammed the Myceloid down on its back as the bears brought the others to a halt. A few solid hits were all it took to change the monsters' focus, but the initial targeting concerned Karl.

It looked like they were smart enough to realize once they saw the rest of the team that their allies were in danger and not from the closest enemies.

"Did he just choke slam a Myceloid Warrior?" Don whispered to Reggie as they watched the fight.

"Pretty cool, wasn't it? I heard that their Overlord team has a Giant Dire Bear Berserker, five metres tall. I bet that she could do it as well." Reggie agreed.

"The day that the Darklight Host has a whole team of Totems to work together, the Dungeon Bosses will cry tears of blood." Don joked.

This group was already bad enough, and there was just one Darklight Host Totem in the group.

Wherever they had gotten their extra skills, it was clear from the stories of the Overlord Ranked teams going on in Guild Chat that there were no unexceptional members in their Ranks.

"You know, having oversized tanks in this dungeon is definitely the way to go. See how much easier it is for Karl and the bears to deal with the Myceloids than it is for the Undead?

None of them are being overwhelmed. The three big guys can simply slap the Myceloids around and keep them from doing anything effective, while the Undead block and parry like normal.

The next time they're doing an intake, let's ask Raj if he can find us a Bear Totem Berserker." Reggie commented, only halfway joking.

"Or maybe a Red Dragon. A Red Dragon Paladin would be an outstanding tank in this dungeon." Don agreed.

The warriors spread out to attack everything, sacrificing individual kill speed for easier constant damage when they weren't interfering with each other. They could all see that the healers were slacking, and they weren't injured, so all of the usual tactics were ignored for the fight, in favour of maximum overall damage.

The barrage of skills rapidly whittled away at the life of the Myceloids, and as they began to fall, Thor herded them into a small circle, where the warriors of the Jackalope Group could hit everything with area attacks.

"Conserve mana. Don't wear yourselves out before the boss fight." Steve warned as the group began to get a bit too enthusiastic about the fight.

With so many Golems to keep the Myceloids off them, they didn't have to worry about targeting secondary opponents, or being attacked unexpectedly. It was the most enjoyable fight they had engaged in for years, and they had gotten a bit carried away early in the Dungeon.

The last of the creatures fell, and Karl shifted back to talk to the team leader about the boss fight.

The System could translate Serpent to Common just fine, but it was easier to speak face to face, than to look down on the person you were talking to.

Chapter 1119: Spore Dodging

Steve gestured toward the boss. "Alright, this is what will happen, for the new members. It's strange saying that, as nobody takes newbies here.

But the boss will send up puffs of spores with every attack and movement.

They are toxic, so don't let them touch you, and don't step in the patches where they land and bloom. But we will also assign four people to destroy the blooms on the ground, as the boss will heal when he steps on them.

There is a small safe spot behind the boss's back, which is where most of the melee will stay. The Tank needs to be in front of him and keep him from turning, until he moves to go to a healing patch.

Then the melee scatters until the tank picks him back up again.

Once he gets to his chosen spot, he will call all his spores back and heal. For that reason, it's urgent that we destroy all the spores on the floor.

After that, it's rinse and repeat.

Karl, we're counting on you to keep him as still as possible. Don and Reggie will keep you cleansed, so that the poison of the spores doesn't get too intense. You're pretty durable, so they shouldn't suffer too badly. Some tanks need nearly constant cleansing, or it's a pain to keep them alive.

Got it?"

"Don't knock him over, don't let him turn, make sure the team has cleared the floor." Karl agreed.

"You lead the way. Turn him if you can, if not, we will circle the edge of the platform." Steve agreed.

Remi was looking forward to this boss. Toxic spores were always good for something, and she fully intended to collect some for her future experiments. She had plans for a potion that would increase the imbiber's poison attack damage, but she was missing some ingredients.

And where better to get them than from Totem Ranked sentient fungi?

Karl shifted back into dragon form and charged the boss, while Hawk circled overhead, waiting for the spores to start to fly.

[The healers don't look happy about this fight.] Remi noted after transforming into Spirit Snake form so she could just float over the battlefield and not worry about weird squishy things touching her scales.

Thor nodded. [The spores must be a real problem. But we've got Brother Hawk. If Ghostfire doesn't take care of the spores, nothing will.]

Rae just laughed and used [Night Hunter] to make herself incorporeal.

She also wouldn't have to worry about what she stepped in.

The Myceloid boss was so large that even in dragon form, Karl was still the smaller combatant. But deep blue ichor poured from rapidly healing wounds when he clawed at the creature, and it turned to face him without hesitation.

Karl heard the others coming behind the boss, and then noticed that the spores which flew from the splatters of blue blood had a puffy top, like a dandelion seed.

That let them float across the battlefield, and while that also made it easier for the mages and clerics to shoo them away with a wave of their staff or wind magic, it also meant that they could land anywhere in the combat area, including among the melee fighters, who were actually doing quite well at using skills to destroy the ones that got too close.

[Rae, we need to stop making him bleed. We're making it worse.] Karl realized.

They had both been using Hemotoxic strikes, and the boss was bleeding freely, though he was healing a third of the total damage that they were doing.

That number would surely go up once they stopped him bleeding, but half the area was on fire thirty seconds after the fight started.

Karl caught one massive fist of the boss and punched him in the face with a closed draconic fist.

Yes, that worked well.

And it didn't make him bleed any more than necessary.

Most of the warriors didn't have any such option, so the back of the boss was bleeding much more than the front, but they aimed their skills up, so the spores from the blood floated well away from them.

Though Karl couldn't see it, as he was on the other side of the boss, the warriors were beginning to get concerned by the amount of fire on the ground. Hawk had been burning all the spore spots as soon as they hit, but there were so many in this fight that there was fire everywhere.

Then, the boss began to shift.

It headed for a spot where a spore had just landed, and Hawk's fire was failing to stop it from growing.

[I think it's part of the dungeon effect. Just work to destroy all the others, and put out the extra fire, so the warriors have somewhere to go.] Karl instructed as he followed the boss.

Its health made a small bump as it absorbed the one spot that wouldn't burn, then plummeted as it called all the burning spore patches to itself and got covered in Ghostfire.

"Well, that's a new one. I never thought about leaving the patches on fire." Steve laughed as the boss smouldered.

"It's dying fast, too. Why did we never think of this before? It's brilliant." One of the others laughed as they got back in position, while Karl attacked from the front, keeping the boss from trying to swat out the Ghostfire that was ravaging its body.

It was nothing more than a gigantic walking spore colony, and now that it had pulled Ghostfire inside its body, the boss was already doomed.

It just hadn't realized it yet.

"Everyone, go all out, we can drop this boss before it moves again." Steve ordered.

They could also rest after, if they were out of mana or stamina. The mages and healers looked fine to Karl, and those were the only ones he was worried about.

There was no way for the damage dealers to completely avoid the spores in this fight, but area healing was also one of the most mana intensive spells that any of them had.

If things got too bad, he would ask Tian to help with healing, and not just fire magical stones like a machine gun.

Chapter 1120: Patience Is A ... Waste Of Time

The boss collapsed into a pile of burning fungus, and the Dungeon team celebrated.

"Good work everyone, let's keep moving on. From here on, the Myceloids will all spray spores when they attack, so if we can get Hawk to keep burning them, it will save the healers a lot of aggravation.

Karl, same routine as before. The Undead can grab them and turn them away from the group to limit the damage. Just try not to turn them toward the next group.

If you use the far side of the path, it will point away from anything we have to walk through, and the majority of spores can be ignored. That way lets everyone focus on damage, and avoids exhaustion.

This dungeon is short, only the two bosses, but the exertion levels are pretty high with the durability of everything." Steve explained.

Karl nodded.

"In that case, I will remain in humanoid form, so I can use my bow and not crowd up the front lines of the fight." Karl agreed.

The Warriors chuckled. They had no choice but to be within five or ten metres of the fight, as that was the maximum range of most of their skills. So, the more people who could move back and fight from a distance, the better.

"Alright, let's get this show on the road. Is everyone rested and at full mana?" Steve asked.

Karl nodded. He had never been anything but at full mana, due to his increased regeneration rate.

The undead army charged forward, this time mixed with Rae's copies, and began drawing the Myceloids to the far side of the road, where they could be pummelled to death in peace.

"Did we really need more of them?" Reggie asked as he cast an area healing spell over the fight.

Karl shrugged. "Probably not. But Rae was the first one to get the spell, so it's only natural that she wants to show off her own. Functionally, they're identical to the ones that I use, since almost all our buffs are shared."

The balding dragonkin cleric chuckled. "Well, at least we have job security. With all that damage output, you will need at least a couple of healers in your party. I can see why you had three of them in your Guild when you arrived."

Karl laughed as he sent [Void Blast] arrows in to the fight.

"Actually, that was more coincidence than anything. We started out with two, then I got a Rank ahead of them, and I met Nachtia in the Bara Dungeon area when I was finding a group.

I am a friend of her Uncle, and we worked well together, so she agreed to join us.

Now, the Darklight Host is slowly becoming home to a whole pantheon of dragon clerics. We've got nearly half of them, I think." Karl joked.

"You'll just need silver, gold, white, bronze and blue, and you will have someone from each of the major Dragon Clans." Steve agreed.

"We've got Blue Dragons now. The Immortal Regent recruited them for us. Once they get settled in, we will have a second Totem Ranked Runecrafter and more apprentices for the less powerful utility items." Karl explained.

"That's just unfair. Most of the top Guilds can't even get a meeting with the King, and you got a personal visit from Immortal Regent Azov?" Cindy asked.

"He had some concerns about a vision that his Seer had which involved our Guild. The other Guild Masters brought him over."

If the warriors at the front could hear how the ranged members were casually chatting as they struggled to take down the massive Myceloid Warriors, their mood would have quickly changed. But they were too busy, and Karl's arrows flying overhead gave them the impression that everyone was working hard.

Only when it was time to move between groups did the melee group that the ranged combatants were in a much better mood than would be considered reasonable for a group that was in a dungeon.

Sure, it was going faster than usual, but weren't they a bit too casual?

There were still just as many spores being tossed out for every Myceloid killed, and they were coming out faster than usual, which normally stressed the ranged group to the extreme. But today, they were laughing and joking.

That was when they noticed all the Ghostfire.

Those slackers of the ranged team weren't doing any spore control at all. They had left it to the bird, who was happy to just set the entire dungeon on fire if someone let him. So, they were just attacking the group without a care in the world.

No wonder they weren't stressed out.

Only the melee group had to protect themselves, as Hawk couldn't light up the spores landing near them without setting the melee group on fire as well. His fire wouldn't affect them, but the burning spores inflicted damage of their own, separate from the attack that set them aflame.

"Keep it moving. We're almost at the second boss, and then we can finish this run with a nice clean kill." Steve instructed.

Karl chuckled as the Undead Army followed Rae's group to the next Myceloid location and began hacking into them, not waiting for the rest of the group to catch up.

They had enough healing that they could survive a few minutes without any intervention. Plus, they would switch out and let the regeneration abilities heal them if they got too low.

Remi floated over to the edge of the group and began to cast [Frozen Apocalypse] for the first time. It was the perfect counterpart to [Ghostfire], she thought. Hawk would set everything on fire, and she would freeze it.

The warriors paused as they saw the snowstorm start, and then the frozen vortexes filled the area, while Hawk screeched and began bombarding the whole area with Ghostfire and Meteor Strikes.

"Maybe give them a minute, they're having a discussion." Karl suggested.

"A what now?"

"You know, water versus fire magic. They do that from time to time, and I think that they forgot the rest of us are here. The spells won't hurt you, we're all in the same group. It will just be hard to see until I tell off Remi for taunting her brother." Karl explained.

Don and Reggie, the clerics for the group, began to laugh.

"Remind me to send someone responsible to babysit if we're having a family event at the Darklight Host." Reggie joked.

Karl winked at him. "Fear not, we have a Red Dragon High Priestess."

"The badger would be less likely to traumatize the children. I still have nightmares about the Orphanage Matrons catching me sleeping in."