

Beast Master 1121

Chapter 1121: Big Backed Sorts

[Are you two idiots done arguing yet?]

[He Started it.]

[She started it.]

Karl shook his head in dismay, but the overkill area effects stopped, and the rest of the team was able to join the fight without having to squint through a snowstorm to find the enemy.

"They actually did quite a bit of damage to the Myceloids alone." Don noted as the healers moved into position to top off the Undead Army.

"Yeah, those spells use a huge amount of mana, but the burst damage is unparalleled. Not many classes can output area damage that will keep up with Epic attack abilities." Karl agreed.

The Cleric sighed. "If only more damage dealers had skills on that level, we might not ever have to struggle with enrage timers again.

But speaking of that, we've got another one on this boss, but it's a progressive enrage timer. He gets more powerful every five seconds. But there is one special mechanic. He will target someone for elimination, and once he focuses on them, they have to run or risk getting squished in a single shot if they're not the tank.

Even if they are the tank, it's better to run because the boss deals a huge amount of bonus damage to the targeted member.

If that one dies, or the timer expires, he will pick another one, but it resets the enrage timer, so that's something. However, he won't pick summoned creatures or Golems. It has been tested."

Karl nodded. "I think that we might be able to deal with that more easily than even the spores. Not that Hawk isn't having fun burning spores. I haven't seen him this happy in quite some time."

The rest of the group wasn't sure that happy was the word that they would use. The bird was attacking the spores as if they had personally insulted his mother. But Karl knew better.

That was happy Hawk.

"Alright, Karl, you're up. The boss hits like a truck, and it is an area attack, so only one tank in front of him is best." Steve instructed.

"Don, Reggie, are you ready?" Karl asked.

"Go on, Monster Man. Let's see you work."

Karl transformed into the Avatar of the World Dragon and charged into combat, then choke slammed the boss and began punching him in the face.

"He learned that from the badger, guaranteed." Don laughed.

"One hundred percent. Deve's wife did it to me one time." Reggie agreed.

Cara smirked. She was going to be good friends with this badger woman, she was sure of it. It was just a shame that she hadn't had more time to taunt Deve.

The boss rolled over with surprising agility and strength, then began to glow with a bright red light.

[NOPE!]

The boss' enrage effect faded, and Karl wasn't sure who was more confused. The group or the boss.

Cara was flying overhead laughing. Mythic Ranked [Nullify] was so much fun. More damage would have been great, but an extra Rank of [Nullify] was the all-around most entertaining option.

The warriors might not understand why the boss wasn't enraged, but they weren't going to question good luck, and they joined Karl in his efforts to dismember the massive Myceloid before it could reactivate its effect.

But it wasn't in a hurry to enrage.

Instead, a beacon appeared over Cara's head, and the Badger laughed as she flew straight into the monster's face and clawed it before flying away and letting Karl block its advance.

"If I didn't know better, I would say that the boss was actually mad. Not enrage effect affected, but MAD." Reggie whispered to Cindy as Karl wrestled with the boss, holding it in place as Cara taunted it from ten metres away.

The other cleric nodded. "For a shambling pile of mushrooms, it looks positively murderous. I wonder if that is some sort of special ability of the Chaos Badger species?"

Cindy and Don considered that. No, they didn't think that it was an actual skill. The Chaos Badger's personality was just perfectly suited to making people want to murder her. They could only imagine what it would be like trying to live with her after you got on her bad side.

There was a chance that Karl could keep her under control, but he didn't seem all that interested in stopping petty squabbles and practical jokes until they actually interfered with someone's work.

With a mighty heave, Karl tossed the boss to the ground, and the floor shook.

"Aren't bosses supposed to be immune to status effects?" Cindy asked.

"Normally, yes. But it looks like if you use a big enough dragon, it is actually possible to knock them down. Look, it's already getting up, though. It still totally ignores the other attempts to keep it down or stun it."

"Maybe it's not about a skill. What if you need the raw physical strength to overpower the boss?" Cindy suggested.

The Clerics considered that.

Smaller bosses usually had a skill or mechanism that triggered when you tried to trap them, and they always found a way not to get pinned, but there were some that you could knock down. They just didn't get the status effect from being stunned or frozen that you would normally suffer when you were knocked down by a skill.

"We can study that later. First, increase the attack rate, or our allies are going to accuse us of slacking."

Just as Reggie spoke, the boss suddenly glowed red and changed targets, creating a targeted enemy effect on one of the warriors.

The boss moved shockingly quickly, now that Karl wasn't between it and its target, and the warrior took an overhand blow that knocked his axe from his hands and crushed him to the ground.

Rae turned a leg and flung the wounded warrior across the room, out of the way of the next strike. It bought enough time for Don and Reggie to heal him back up, but the man was still groggy as the boss chased him and shrugged off Karl's efforts to restrain it again.

But it was nearly dead, and with a [Shadow Step] relocation of the targeted warrior to the other side of the boss fight area again, Rae bought the group enough time to finish it off.

{Dungeon Complete} Calculating Rewards.

Chapter 1122: Totem Dungeon Complete

Karl smiled at the message, and the group breathed a collective sigh of relief.

"Good work everyone. One near miss, but that's unavoidable, we got sloppy toward the end, like we forgot that the boss can change targets." Steve declared.

The Jackalope Group members were in high spirits now that they had finished the dungeon without any issues. Until the Nara Group had agreed to help them out, they had thought that they wouldn't be able to go in for the next two weeks.

"Mister Karl, will you available for the upcoming trips through the Dungeon?" Steve asked hopefully.

{I'm not sure yet. I was a last-minute replacement, as the other Tank had a bit too much fun last night, and he wasn't in any shape to work today. I'm actually head of a crafting Guild, so I'm normally at work at this hour.} Karl explained, still in Avatar form.

The Warrior looked around at Karl's bonded beasts, then back at the massive dragon.

The math wasn't mathing.

"You're a crafting guild leader? As in, you yourself have a trade skill?" One of the other warriors asked.

Karl nodded. "If you look carefully at the equipment my lovely companions are wearing, you will see that all four of them are wearing robes made by myself and the Lady Rae."

Cindy and Marcus gestured to the spider symbol on their robes, and the two clerics turned up their sleeves to show the matching maker's mark.

"Life really isn't fair, is it? I bet you've even got a pretty girlfriend and everything." The warrior grumbled.

The four from Karl's group began to chuckle, while Cara held her belly and rolled with laughter.

{His wife is a Divine Fox beastkin.} Remi explained, as nobody else was in any shape to speak.

"You know what? I won't even be mad if we have to deal with a lesser Tank next time. This guy is just too enviable." The jealous warrior complained.

Cindy nodded in agreement. "It only gets worse from there. She's an Overlord Ranked Battle Mage of some sort, and her Golems have Auto Parry. Her Guild Alliance group managed to do the Elemental Dungeon with zero damage taken on the first boss.

They even got a System Achievement for it."

"Isn't that loot ready yet? They're trying to make me cry now." The Warrior jokingly pouted.

There was nothing for a few seconds, then the system sent them a message.

{Rewards distributed.}

Everyone sorted through their loot, looking for something worth celebrating.

"Oh, here's a Rare drop, and a couple of good tradable items. Not a bad day." Steve noted.

A few of the others nodded. "Yeah, the drops today are pretty decent."

Cindy smirked. "Epic talisman. I win today, boys."

The others groaned, and Karl gave her a questioning look.

"Oh, it's a Dungeon thing. We bet the first drink of the night on who gets the best drop item." She explained.

Karl nodded and checked what it had given him. A bunch of random Rare Quality items, and a lot of Alchemy materials.

"If the contest was for bulk Alchemy materials, I would have it for sure. But that's about it." He offered.

"Oh, right. I forgot that Remi has Alchemy skills. So, by proxy, you have Alchemy skills, so you will get the related material drops. The Dungeon mostly gives things that it thinks are relevant to you, so none of us get much for crafting materials." Cindy explained.

Karl sighed and shook his head. "What a waste. If it did give them to you, a group this large would pull enough materials out of a single run to keep an Alchemy shop stocked for a week."

Cindy shrugged. "That's how the Alchemist Guilds do it. They only send in members with the trade skills, so they can maximize their gains. We mostly get weapons and armour, sometimes an accessory. But that's good as well, as it helps us gear the newer members, and we can either sell or recycle the rest."

Karl nodded. So, the loot was more dependent on who was here than on the dungeon itself. That was different. Normally, groups in other regions picked the dungeon by what it dropped, and how easy it was to sell what they didn't need.

Here, the system was tailoring the drops to the group that cleared the dungeon, and that meant your usual loot could change as your needs changed.

It also meant that it might not be a bad idea to try to convince Sapphire to come with him for a trip.

She might be a blue dragon and a Librarian, but she was a Cleric by class, and she could heal. Now that she had Runecrafting as a trade skill, it should give her materials that were useful to the trade, most likely various sorts of magical stones.

Those were always in high demand.

"Alright, that's it for the day. We're off tomorrow, but we will message you the morning after to make sure that the arrangement still stands." Steve insisted, addressing Cindy.

"Of course. Even if we can't get Karl to come again, we will have another tank lined up. If the worst-case scenario comes, perhaps we can borrow the lovely Lady Rae and her Golems, or Sir Thor."

Thor snorted and stomped his foot in enthusiastic agreement.

Either of them would have made a viable tank for the dungeon, as long as Rae's Undead had [Intimidation] like Karl's did. Though, they just felt more like damage dealers than tanks. Something about them just had that aura of aggression.

"We will be looking forward to it. And if you happen to have any inventory for your crafted gear..." Steve began.

Karl laughed. "We're currently on backorder, as the Darklight Host just joined the Alliance. But if you want to make a custom order, swing by the complex later, and we can work something out. As long as you don't mind the wait, that is."

"I was afraid that you'd say that. But I will let the Guild Master know. There are a few pieces he's hoping to have commissioned before the next round of Dungeon Challenges."

Karl nodded. There seemed to be some misconceptions about how long his waiting list was, but he wouldn't tell them that.

Chapter 1123: The Path Forward

"What do you plan to do when you're back home for the day? Catch up on some of the backlog of orders?" Cindy asked as they walked through the city, now accompanied by the transformed figures of Rae and Thor, who were admiring the city as they went.

"While there certainly will be plenty of that, and I do need to go over many of the tricks of the trade with our new members, I am also going to be spending some time working on my own power.

One of my skills increases my abilities as I improve the Power Matrix, the mental focus array thingy. So, I need to train that, work on my mana density, and then get started on the comprehension of Fundamental Rules." Karl replied.

The other Totems all laughed.

"If it was that easy, we would all have made Mythic by now, but we do wish you luck learning the fundamental rules of reality." Cindy replied.

Marcus, the other mage in their group, frowned and nodded in agreement.

"What fundamental rule were you going to go after? I only recently got the System to recognize that I had a minor affinity to Arcane Magic." He asked.

Karl shrugged. "The System says I have compatibility with Fire, Chaos and Mana Manipulation. I was thinking of starting with the third, because it works with all spells in some ways, but it will also help my crafting."

"That is quite the rule to have any compatibility with. The Fundamental Rules are not only core to reaching Mythic Rank, but I am told that only the complete understanding of one can be used to reach immortality." Marcus replied.

Cindy smiled. "And I am working on the Fundamental Law of Fire. If I could speak Hawk, I might actually make some progress this year."

In his space, Hawk laughed. If it was so easy for others to learn the true glory that was fire magic, everyone would be using it. But he liked her enthusiasm.

"Well, if we happen to work together again, you can spend some time watching him work. There was plenty of fire to go around today. But I don't suppose that the other Totem Ranked Dungeons are like this one."

Cindy shook her head. "No, this isn't one that we usually do. The Jackalope group has the agreement to work in this one, and we were joining them. The Totem Ranked Dungeon that we control is another Earth Elemental one, similar to the Overlord Ranked open Dungeon that the rest of your Guild went to.

Except that instead of Elementals, it's got Rock Giants and Mountain Boars."

Hawk's happiness flooded Karl's mind at those words.

"I don't suppose that the Mountain Boars are an edible species?" He asked.

Cindy nodded, but looked confused. "Well, yeah. But nobody eats Totem Ranked meat except the Dragons. Even for Dragonkin, that's just brutal on the stomach.

Oh, right. Beasts. I don't know how I forgot about that."

Thor laughed a little at her confusion. "Most of them, anyhow. I am strictly vegetarian. Rae likes meat, but prefers blood, while the others love good meat. Well, not Opal, but she mostly sustains herself on mana, so that's a bit different."

"Oh, there is a great coffee shop here, run by vampires. Did you want to stop in? I think that both Thor and Rae would enjoy their offerings." Reggie suggested.

The moment that the cleric opened the door of the coffee shop, Rae began to smile.

"Oh, I am going to like this place." She muttered as she ignored the group and made her way to the counter.

"Rae takes blood very seriously. Give her a moment to pick her favourite, and then we can all order." Karl explained.

Reggie chuckled. The Lady Rae, as everyone called her, was an open book. There was very little subterfuge to her attitude, she just said and did what she wanted all the time.

She was shockingly sneaky, though. He was sure she hadn't been using any active skills, but every time he looked at her, she was in a different position than he expected.

"I will try the Forest Hind Wine cider, mulled and served lukewarm, not hot. Sir Thor will take a Macha latte, and Karl will take an iced milk tea." Rae ordered.

Cindy waved from behind her, and the clerk waved back, then rang in four more drinks.

"We're here enough that we have a usual order. But it's one of the few places in town that the vampires can get a good drink, and one of the big group's main tanks is a Vampire Druid. It's a weird combination, have you met him yet?" She explained.

Karl shook his head. "No, he hasn't come by to request anything, and he wasn't at the show."

"Oh, right. He was out visiting his kids. I will send him over later. We're both part of the same Guild, and our rooms are just down the hall from each other."

Rae smiled. "Send him to me when you get back. I have all sorts of druid fashion made. They usually like natural materials, not metals."

The mages laughed at Rae's eager expression.

"I think that he would love your fashion sensibilities, Lady Rae. He shares your taste in fashion, and you even order the same drink here." Cindy joked.

"Oh? Perhaps there is someone worth talking to this evening. So few understand true fashionability."

Cindy smiled at the memory of a certain Mythic Mage in an idol dress, showing off for the crowd at the Guild house when she returned. Rae's version of what was peak fashion was definitely different than most people.

But her personal outfits in humanoid form were very similar to what the Vampire in question preferred. If anything, they might be more flamboyant, with an even greater love for lace and ruffles, than even Lady Rae.

"Oh, I am certain that you two will get along famously. I will get him a drink to go, to encourage him to stop being a shut in and go visit. It's not like he needs to go all the way outside if he's just going to your Guild's villa." Cindy laughed.

Chapter 1124: Nilla

Once their drinks were empty, Cindy went and ordered one more mulled blood wine to go, and the group returned to the Alliance compound.

Rae visibly relaxed once they were out of the direct sun, as she could [Shadow Step] nearly anywhere in the compound, thanks to the directional lighting used. The others thought that she was just happy to be back home, but those with more attuned senses knew her happiness was that of a predator back on its own territory.

Rae spotted the vampire in question looking out his window and sniffing. He had clearly noticed that someone was bringing him a drink, so Rae went to recover him.

The startled squeak that he made when she [Shadow Stepped] into his room and then grabbed him to bring him outside made Reggie laugh, but Cindy was struggling not to facepalm.

"Nilla, this is Lady Rae, the Leatherworker and tailor who is making everyone's new armour. She has the same favourite drink that you do." Marcus offered, as Cindy was fighting hard not to drop the drink.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Lady Rae. I must say, your movement skills are exceptional. I didn't even notice you enter until you grabbed me.

But Marcus, how many times have I asked you not to call me Nilla?"

The mage shrugged. "You smell like cookies."

"That's not something that a man wants to hear. And now the Lady Rae is looking at me like she would like to taste me."

Karl shrugged. "She probably does. Cookies and blood isn't a terrible combination."

The vampire laughed and shook his head. "You guys are the good kind of weird."

My name is Naxxaramous Orovious Dante, Totem Ranked Druid from the Dante Vampire Lineage."

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Naxxaramous Orovious Dante. I too shall call you Nilla." Rae replied, then grabbed his hand and the coffee from Cindy.

"Come along, we have wonderful things to do today."

The man was clearly confused, and a bit afraid that he was about to be taken to a private place and killed, but the others were laughing, so he had some hope that his Guild Alliance wouldn't do that to him.

"Somehow, I should have known that the spider and the vampire would be instant friends. We should all be getting back inside, though. There is planning to be done, and the boss wants all the Totem Ranked and higher members to be involved." Cindy explained.

Karl nodded. "It's best to have everyone on board for the planning phase of what I'm assuming is a business venture. With the fees that they took to enter the dungeon, I know it's not cheap living here, and even the coffees were on an entirely different price scale than I was used to in Drodh."

The group broke up, and Karl returned to the Manor, then went to the basement to head for Drodh, so he could visit with the crafters there.

The minor detail that Karl had forgotten was that there were not many Totems in Drodh, and that the appearance of a new one was cause for alarm if they entered the city without notice or at least greeting the guards.

So, only seconds after he entered the Library, the city guard entered the shop, wondering who had come to visit.

"Greetings, Gentlemen. I know I've been away for a bit, but I thought that I should come in and check on the Guild members. The Darklight Host has recently joined the Nara Group Guild Alliance in Sholaha, and we've been working hard to introduce them to the level of luxury that our members produce."

The Guard laughed as he realized it was just Karl, at Totem Rank, who had set off their alert. This was his home, and everyone knew that they had the ability to use portals, so it wasn't shocking that he would just go straight home.

"Welcome back, Totem Karl. Did you bring Miss Lotus? The shops have all been asking how she is doing." The Guard Captain asked.

Karl chuckled. "You mean the coffee shops and bakeries? No, she's not with me today, we have some new apprentices in Sholaha, and she's working with them. Our Guild Alliance brought us apprentice bunnies."

The big demon's laughter shook the room. "Oh, they do know how to bribe her. Well, tell her that her friends here are starting to think she forgot about them."

Karl sent off a message, reminding Lotus to come back sometime and visit everyone in Drodh, then waved to the staff, who were poking their heads out of the kitchen, where they were having lunch.

The guard smiled at the staff, then went outside to smoke, clearly waiting for someone to arrive. Most likely Rashid or Domesk, as their territories within the city were closest to the Guild House. Unless you counted old Jones, the Magma Dragon whose home was on the outskirts.

His territory ended on the other side of the fence, so he was close as well.

But it was Governor Shin who arrived moments later, still folding his wings and panting from the exertion of flying over.

"Abbies, would you kindly make us some tea? I believe that the City Governor requires refreshment."
Karl instructed.

"Of course, Guild Leader." The three demons replied in unison.

But they sent Mick out with the tea, as Karl and the Governor were still standing in the shop, which was looking somewhat bare to Karl.

He would have to remind them to keep the shelves stocked before they set items for export.

"Mister Karl, it's a pleasure to see you again. I had heard that you made it to the Totem Rank, but seeing it in person is quite something." Governor Shin declared, extending his hand to Karl.

Karl shook his hand and gave the Governor a friendly pat on the shoulder.

"A lot has happened since I left to go please the Dragon Gods. Would you prefer to sit inside or outside? We have a lot to discuss."

Governor Shin flexed his wings and tapped his chin. "Outside, I think. The benches in the backyard by the statue would be private enough with a sound barrier over them."

Chapter 1125: City Leaders

As they stepped outside, all of Karl's other guesses about whom the visitor might be arrived at once. Domesk, Rashid and Jones all followed them around the back of the house, and Jones erected a privacy spell over them, while Karl inspected his Golems.

They were all Overlord Ranked, and he could certainly make better ones now. But they looked comfortable on the walls, right at home and familiar with their surroundings.

No need to change what wasn't broken.

"First off, congratulations. Secondly, more congratulations on joining one of the Sholaha Guild Alliances. Tell me, have you managed to get a spot on one of their Dungeon teams yet?" Governor Shin asked.

Karl nodded. "Indeed. Not only have I gotten a spot, but the ladies are all Overlords now, and in high demand for large group dungeon raids. The combination of skills with multiple talented healers seems irresistible to the locals."

The Governor nodded in agreement. "I can't argue with that. They're an excellently balanced group, and they don't have three or four warriors like most others would. I swear that the imbalance of warriors has to be a cruel prank by the Gods.

But it seems to be getting better recently.

That's not why we're here, though.

Now that you're a Totem Ranked resident, there are some considerations. I'm sure that you're well aware, as you were here when Jones advanced.

Did you wish to claim a portion of the city for yourself? Or perhaps an honorary title?"

Karl shrugged. "Honorary titles are fine. I am not so interested in the management of more people than just my Guild members, and we've already got a Guild Villa in Zilaz as well, with more crafters being recruited.

There is a Totem Ranked blue dragon among the new arrivals, so you might be getting another powerful visitor soon.

She will be leading a large part of the training team once she's fully settled into her new skills, but the focus will be on equipment for the Totem and Mythic Ranked adventurers in Sholaha.

The Dungeons there have terrible loot, for the most part, and the crafting skills of the Darklight Host are in high demand.

We even sold out of soap."

The demons laughed at the complaint. The scent nullification soaps and cleansing soaps, that prevented getting dirty for the whole day, were hugely popular in the city. They were quickly becoming the Guild's signature item, as not only wealthy adventurers could afford them, and they were used daily by an increasingly large portion of the city's population.

The fish markets might riot if the supply stopped.

"So, if we just slap a polite title on you, that's all you're after?" Jones asked.

He was more aware of Karl's personality than the others, and knew that the Monster Man really didn't care about such things. As long as the city didn't interfere with him and his Guild, they would just continue doing as they pleased and using Drodh as a crafting base.

Karl nodded. "We might need to recruit a few more people soon, with all the added demand. But mostly for the Drodh market. With the powerful Dungeons, Sholaha, and especially the Zilaz region along the shores, wants Overlord Ranked and higher craftsmen to make what they need.

So, for the bulk products, I might recruit another half dozen junior Alchemists. Powerful gear is best as a limited supply item, and the Immortal Regent has asked me not to go overboard with it.

So, it's mostly the little things and housekeeping items that are in huge demand.

There are millions of people gathered around Lake Naraledum, and with the head tax, it's impossible for them to get affordable help. Therefore, everyone we meet wants the simple things, like rings that can clean their house in minutes."

"So, you are looking for more staff for the Darklight Host? Well, we can't really object to that. It's clear that while your members don't really live extravagant lives, they are clearly very wealthy.

We heard from Davis' Grandmother that you give them all a share of profit on their products, and they have been buying up bulk reagents lately to supplement what they are obtaining elsewhere, or growing somewhere." Governor Shin noted.

Karl nodded. "We are going to have to obtain either a large space for reagent farming, or trade deals for everything that we need soon. Buying them really cuts into profits, but it's simply not viable to continue to produce all our own materials with the way that demand has grown."

They did grow a lot of it in the illusionary city, on the roof of the Alchemy Lab, but what they needed was another [Tiny World] set up for them just to farm.

Karl's was filling with resources already, and that was a good start, but he kept leaving the Guild House.

Karl had thought about loading them all into that copy of the Guild House, but it would be rather empty in Drodh if he did. Now that they had the Guild Alliance link in Sholaha it wasn't so bad to move around, anyhow.

Either he or Remi could send materials back home every day, and the Tiny World was growing them at a remarkable rate.

"Perhaps a handful of farmers, druids or nature clerics as well. We need someone to tend to the resources and ensure that they are growing to their potential in the space we have." Karl added.

Jones chuckled, as he knew what Karl meant. At Totem Rank, the Tiny World was only Tiny in comparison to an actual planet.

The amount of space inside was far larger than any farm or even a small city.

"Alright. We can find suitable applicants for you if you would like? We have connections, and we have a decent idea of what you need. Powerful, without trade skills, and suitable for either Alchemy or taking care of precious resources." Governor Shin agreed.

"That would be wonderful. Make sure that you get ones that don't have strong ties to family or others in the outside world, as they will be rather isolated as they work, and I will bring them back here on their days off." Karl explained.

"Got it. No kids who need to support their families with more than money." Jones replied, giving Karl a sly smirk.

Families who mostly needed money were the majority of people on the outskirts, outside the walls. They didn't have the power to get decent treatment inside the city, but they could definitely live well where they were if they could just get a bit more money.

Chapter 1126: Ambitions

"Are you planning more upgrades for the Guild House?" Governor Shin asked as he looked around the yard.

Karl shrugged. "I might. The place is nice, and it's got almost everything that we could need. But with the workload, I suspect that Ashbringer could use a larger forge and some more apprentices.

So, I might upgrade the outdoor workshop to give them more space.

Now that I'm at Totem Rank, and so is Miss Opal, we can make rather powerful Illusionary Stones, and those can be used to set an Illusionary Domain in the workshop.

That would give them all the space that they could need.

It would also give us more storage space because I expect that soon we will have a lot more loot coming in. The ladies are all Overlords, and they get a cut of the trash loot, which we sent back home for the crafters to rework."

The sector leaders of Drodh sighed enviously.

"Perhaps we should have been more ambitious and joined one of the Raiding Guilds near Lake Naraledum. But I never wanted to move too far from home." Governor Shin lamented.

Karl shrugged. "Things are different there. Everything is combat focused, everything is a competition. The tax to live in the area is so high that unless you're doing Totem and Mythic Ranked Dungeons as part of a Guild, you can't afford to stay.

There are mercenary camps outside the city, but even at Totem Rank, they're mostly struggling to find decent groups.

The Warrior Phenomenon is too strong."

The Demons all laughed, and Governor Shin gave Karl a wry smile. "I feel that on a deeply personal level."

Karl frowned. "Oh, Drodh has it good. There are actual classes other than Warrior here, naturally. It's so bad there that they have to recruit from the outside to get anything else. Every Totem Ranked group is over half warriors, not counting the advanced classes, just warriors.

And that is after their efforts to get other classes in and recruit Dragon clerics.

From what I understand, out of over six hundred Overlords in our Alliance, there are fewer than twenty healers. It's so bad that they literally kicked people out of a group so that ours could join, and they didn't even ask if they were any good at their jobs first."

The Demons chuckled. "Is it really that bad?"

Karl nodded. "The group that they went with had fifteen warriors in a twenty-five-person group. It's insane.

Especially for poor Ashbringer, who has to make all the metal armour that they're requesting. We need more Master Smiths.

More than just the ones he's already hired, that is. Because he's got at least two different forges hired to make armour for us to upgrade with runes already."

Jones chuckled. "So, that is what is going on. I've seen every forge on the south side of the city suddenly ramped up to full production, and I couldn't figure out where it was going because nobody had any stock to sell to the trade caravans.

They must all be using the higher grade materials you sent back to make armour for you to sell to Sholaha."

"Only to my Guild Alliance. The Immortal Regent asked us to keep to similar restrictions as what we maintain here." Karl clarified.

Governor Shin winked at Karl. "So, even the Immortals know that your entire existence is created to break the comfortable balance of the world. But he's also an old friend of that dragon. So, he knows better than anyone what disruptive existences look like."

"It was his Seer who said that we were going to be become so wealthy that even our common members would be able to crush Guilds who irritated them. That's the reason he put the restriction on.

He doesn't care if we get too powerful, or build up the power level of the region. He just doesn't want us strutting around swatting Raid Guilds like flies and putting bounties on anyone who bothers us." Karl elaborated.

The Governor frowned. "Kindly don't do that here, either."

"And mess up our reputation at the pastry and ice cream shops? Never."

Rashid fluttered his brightly feathered wings and clicked his beak. "I think that I know just the people that you need for your Guild. There is that ruined temple out by Kebun, formerly run by Nature Clerics and druids of the non-draconic sort.

They're mostly Demons, but they're all powerful, and they're struggling to find buyers for their crops."

"Why is that?" Karl asked.

"Because their House Matron turned down a marriage offer from the local Orcish Chieftain, and he ordered everyone else not to deal with them, or his people won't sell to them anymore.

The Orcs in North Drodh are more civilized and live mostly in cities, like the Western Border.

So, selling to the temple, or buying their goods, would make you a virtual pariah." The avian featured Magic Demon explained.

Karl nodded in understanding. "So, they stood on principles, even though it made them outcasts. I suppose that they're worth talking to at the very least."

"Wonderful. That will solve one problem for the Lord. The locals want them gone because their presence annoys the city bosses." Jones agreed.

"Ah, the guild of misfits and outcasts. But as long as they have the power, I can find them a suitable home to continue farming and please the Nature Gods. Then, we can make potions and soaps out of the crops.

I would say food, but with nature clerics, the edible crops are the smallest concern. It's the more difficult to grow magical resources we need them for." Karl joked.

"Alright. Well, now that we know it's you, and we've sorted things out, I will go talk to the Lord about making an announcement that you've reached Totem Rank, and he can pick some sort of honorary title for you.

It should be finished within the week, and it would be good if you could come back for the announcement.

There will be at least a few days notice of the exact time so that you can plan time off to return." Governor Shin agreed.

"I will make time. I have easy travel from city to city, so it won't put me out to spend a day closer to home."

Chapter 1127: Dwarves Like Dens?

Rashid stood. "I will go talk to the members of the Nature Cleric's farm, and see if they're willing to meet with you. Your reputation is a good one, so I don't think that it will be a problem, and they're already becoming quite unhappy with their current situation."

Karl nodded. "Thank you, that would be wonderful. I've got a portion of farmland that I believe they would enjoy, and a need for more of the magical herbs that grow there."

"We should all let you get back to your work. I know that you've been busy lately, and we can come by again if we want to place a custom order with you now that you are Totem Ranked." Governor Shin agreed.

The town leaders all left together, leaving Karl alone in the garden. The statue in the garden was happily pulsing, healing someone either in the house or in the front yard, so Karl decided to go check on that before he got back to business.

A group of merchants were in the front yard, slumped against the wall and looking relieved.

"Is everyone alright? I can call for a proper healer." Karl asked as he realized it was every member of their party that needed the healing.

The Merchant gave him a weak thumbs up gesture.

"We should be good now. We thought that with the attacks by Bomgon no longer focusing on the Drodh border that everything was sorted, but we came across a group of zombies, and the crew caught something from them that our zombie curse breaking potions didn't cure.

We had Commander Rank healing and cleansing potions, but they didn't last long." He explained.

Karl frowned. "Where is your caravan now?"

"Outside the outer city. The guards stopped us and escorted us here for quarantine while they inspected and cleansed the cargo."

Karl sighed in relief. At least they hadn't brought a contaminated caravan of goods into the city.

"Alright, they can do their jobs out there. You should be alright in a few minutes, I think. You're already looking better. Where are the guards that escorted you?"

The Merchant smiled and gestured at the shop.

"They went in to flirt with the vampire."

Karl looked over his shoulder. "No hitting on Mick, you old lechers."

Soft laughter came from inside. "Don't chase away all the cute Guard Recruits, boss."

Mick waved at him from the door, and Karl saw that the pair of guards who had come with the merchants were clearly still teenagers, fresh out of training, and probably no older than Mick was.

Come to think of it, they were likely no older than Karl was. It was just that nobody could tell his age in this transformed state.

"Fine. I won't scare them away. Just make sure that they're fully cleansed before they touch you. We don't need a plague spreading through the Guild House."

Mick nodded, then her red eyes flashed with mischief. "I have an idea. Gentlemen, this is our new signature cleansing soap. Take a bar and go wash both yourselves and your uniforms. Davis, I'm going on break."

The Fallen Angel laughed at the vampire and the two blushing guards that she was dragging up the stairs.

"Is that even allowed?" One of the guards on gate duty asked, standing at the entrance to the compound with a smoking pipe in his hand.

Karl shrugged. "I'm sure they'll be fine. Even if she bites, the totem will heal them in a few seconds."

The Gate Guard puffed a smoke cloud and laughed. "Those two are not prepared for the attentions of a hormonal teen vampiress. I will pray for them on my break."

The Merchant in the yard was already looking much better than he had been, and he gave Karl a suspicious look.

"Is that any way to run a shop?"

Karl frowned at his rude tone. "We're right next to the gates, all the guards are friends to our staff. It's not like she's flirting with strangers. Besides, I don't hear any complaints from the involved parties."

Probably because the shower room was soundproofed.

The noise brought Ashbringer out of his forge between projects.

"Oh, Karl. Welcome back. What brings you in today? How are things in Sholaha?" He asked.

"Excellent. We've got the Manor House all set up there, and we just got some new staff. So, I wanted to talk to you about how we were going to balance things. We really do need more full-time smiths, leather workers and sculptors.

The Runecrafting team includes a number of Royal Ranked apprentices now, and Remi is working on a gift for everyone that will help your growth.

That will bring a number of you close to the point where you can make what Zilaz needs. But we're still nowhere near the number that we need. The Immortal Regent said that we can sell Overlord Ranked gear to Zilaz without too many issues, so I was thinking of expanding the forge and sculpting workshop."

Ashbringer nodded. "I have found a group, but they've got some conditions that only you could fill. They're all Dwarves, you see."

He subtly glanced at the guests in the yard, meaning that he didn't want to detail it in front of them.

"Alright. If you bring them over tonight, I will work it all out for them. How is the outbuilding working for you? It's not too much trouble being in a secondary building? I was going to expand it for the purpose." Karl asked.

Ashbringer knew that he meant with an illusionary Domain, not a larger building, so he just shrugged.

"Even in the rain, it's good to get outside for a few minutes a day. It keeps you grounded in the world when you're getting lost in your work. Expanding this building should be just fine."

[I can make a basement level to the workshop as well. Dwarves like dens, don't they?] Tian suggested.

[That is a wonderful idea. We might not even need to make an illusion. But we're right on the ocean, I don't think that basements work here. They would just fill with water.] Karl replied.

The little fox extended his senses out. Karl was right. Only a few metres beneath their feet, there was water in the stones. Not a good spot for a crafting den.

Sister Opal would have to help with this one.

Chapter 1128: Expanded Forge Building

Tian inspected the building that they had to work with, and conferred with Opal, who showed him dozens of illusionary design ideas, each more fantastical than the last.

[Putting the Dwarves in the mountain in the Tiny World would be better, wouldn't it? But then they would travel everywhere with the Karl, instead of being here where they could put stuff in the shop.] Tian asked, replying to an idea Opal had shown him.

[Keep the ideas to what will work here in Drodh. These people have families and lives in the city, we can't be carting them all over the world with us.] Karl reminded them before they got too off track.

Opal flashed an image of turning the main building into a ten-story tall stone Keep. Tian could do it with the magic that he had.

[Focus, just an illusionary upgrade for the forge building, with new work spaces inside.]

Opal lost interest for a moment, then began flashing images too fast for Tian to understand them.

[That's too fast, I don't know what you want.] He complained.

Then Opal settled on one. The inside of Bara, with the mountain exit being the door of the workshop, and everything else arranged like the Dwarven City in a mountain. There were workshops, forge buildings, a few houses, an Inn with a tavern on the main floor, and a small market square.

It would all fit in the space she had imagined, and if Tian coated everything in stone, you would have to actually dig to damage the core illusion to break the world.

[Oh, that is wonderful. I like it. That is a beautiful den for Dwarves.] The little fox realized.

Opal found a Totem Ranked Illusion Stone among the belongings her siblings had dropped in her space. That would be a suitable core for the Illusion. Then, once it was a shell, Tian could build the core structures, and she could make it pretty with illusions for everything that wasn't stone and metal.

"I think that we have an idea. Can you grab the rest of the staff out of the workshop? Tian and Opal will begin the process right away." Karl explained.

Ashbringer raised his hand to his lips and whistled, which brought Loros and Wendy running out of the workshop.

"Time to upgrade your working conditions. The area will be closed for the next few hours, so take a break." Karl explained.

Wendy laughed. "There is a fresh list of sundry items from the Guild Alliance, and our shoppers should be back soon. How about I take Loros with me? We can make the deliveries and then have something to eat?"

Karl nodded. "Bring snacks for Lotus. She should be around the house in Zilaz today. At least, I didn't hear about them planning a Dungeon visit."

Sending her more short people would also make Lotus happy.

Now that the workshop was empty, Tian and Opal both came out of their spaces to work on the upgrades. Opal had the stone ready, and her plan was to have Tian bury it under the workshop, so it would be harder for anyone to find the core of the Illusion.

Then, they could work on making the illusionary city real.

The Guard on break at the entrance made a pacifying gesture to the gate, letting them know that it wasn't more random Totems showing up, but Karl's bonded partners.

Seconds later, the floor of the workshop had been replaced with Totem Ranked stone, and the Illusion Stone was buried, with the spell activated.

[Karl, we need you to make a recharging stone and put it on the door. The spell shouldn't take much to keep active, but Opal can't make it recharge itself.] Tian translated from the images she was showing him.

Charades were more fun than making his sister speak out loud.

Besides, even if he was wrong, it was still a good idea.

Karl set a small arcane stone in a metal amulet and linked it to the charging stone the pair had placed underground.

"Ashbringer, this is for you. It keeps the illusion they're building charged with mana. It shouldn't take much to keep it going, according to them. The stone will constantly channel mana to it, but if it needs more, someone will have to top it off." Karl explained.

"What all are they putting in there?" Ashbringer asked.

"Oh, I think that you'll be happy when you see it, but it's a surprise for now. The question is whether we're going to be able to get enough crafters. It's the obsession Demons with carving obsessions, or anyone else with sculpting talent, that I'm worried about finding.

Dwarves are a great option, but I think that we're stealing enough of them to work the forges, so we might not be able to find enough to just work with stone."

The Demon at the entry laughed. "I don't think that will be a problem, but you might have to ask some to relocate. There are plenty of Dwarven Sculptors with what the Dwarves consider mediocre skills in Bara. You could recruit them to bring them here."

Karl sighed. "I should have known that trying to stock a workshop would turn into an international excursion and hiring fair. But I have connections. Give me a moment to send a message and I might be able to find someone."

Karl thought about what to send for a few seconds, then sent a message to Slate Petros, the Totem Ranked Shaman from Bara.

{Shaman Petros, I am hoping that you could help the Darklight Host find a group of sculptors for our workshops. We will provide accommodations in Drodh for them and their families, suitable wages, and benefits. Their power level isn't important, only their skill with sculpture to create base items for our Runecrafting teams.} Karl sent.

There was a short delay, then the Shaman replied.

{Karl, congratulations on your advancement. I can contact the Sculptor's Association on your behalf. They represent all Dwarven Sculptors. They will want to review the work contract and living conditions before they agree to send anyone over. Let me know when they are prepared, and I will have a portal mage bring me to you.}

{Everything will be ready within the hour. I have a Totem Ranked Stonefur Divine Fox working on the accommodations now, designed to mimic the homes of Bara City.}

That assertion intrigued the Shaman. How was the odd cat Demon planning to mimic Dwarven living conditions in the Demon city by the shore? Had he bought a high-rise apartment and modified the interior?

He wouldn't put it past Karl to have done exactly that.

Chapter 1129: Sculptors

Slate Petros wasn't a cynical man by nature, so he took Karl's word as truth and went to look for a representative of the Sculptor's Guild.

"Council Member, what brings you by today? Looking to redecorate?" The Guild Master asked.

Slate shook his head. "A Totem Ranked Demon is looking to hire sculptors, and he believes that he can house them properly and pay them well in Drodh. I don't know how many he needs, but I would say at least ten, possibly twenty.

He also said Rank doesn't matter, as they will be using a Runemaster to upgrade the items. But you know how that goes."

The Sculptor's Guild master nodded. "Rank doesn't matter, but it would be best to send him a master sculptor and a bunch of Apprentices or new Journeymen. Demand for a true masterpiece is less common, but a workshop needs many good apprentices to finish bulk orders.

I know one who is looking to move.

Do you remember Karrack? He just got divorced, and his wife's father is on the council. I hear that he's had it hard, and he would like a posting outside of Bara."

The Shaman smiled. Indeed, he knew the one in question. Their marriage had been an arranged one between wealthy families, and once their kids had grown and moved out, things began to get ugly.

He had personally repaired some of the damage from their public fights.

A message was sent to the troubled Master Sculptor, and a group of Apprentices on the job board, informing them that negotiations were ongoing for a permanent placement in Drodh so that they could turn it down if they didn't want to move.

Many of the Apprentices did, but they got more than enough positive responses, including from Master Karrack.

"Alright, let's go inspect what this Demon thinks would be suitable housing for a Master craftsman." The elderly Sculptor insisted.

He motioned for a mage to open a portal for them, but Slate held up his hand to stop them.

"Not to the main platform. Bring us to the south side of the city, to the western Frostfire Gate. The destination is just inside that gate, and I don't want to walk all the way across the city." He explained.

The Mage nodded, and then opened the portal.

The Guards nodded a greeting as the two Dwarves walked through.

"Council Member, what brings you here today? Should I send for a carriage?" The Gate Captain greeted them.

"No need. We are off to visit the Darklight Host about an employment matter. Do you know why there are so many Dwarves already in their courtyard?" Slate replied.

"Oh, they're hiring blacksmiths and sculptors. Those are the Blacksmiths from the Frostfire Gate region outside the gates. They are negotiating a long-term deal between their forges and the Darklight Host."

Slate nodded, then walked into the city.

The Gargoyles on the wall waved to him as he approached, and the Shaman began to wonder what sort of strange magic had been used in this place. Gargoyles normally only cared about threats.

"Oh, I see. They have a mana supply rune in the house, so the Gargoyles are active all the time, and not just when the house is threatened. That's why they're so interactive." The Sculptor realized.

Slate smiled. So that was it. Just a matter of active time, so that they were fully aware of their surroundings. That was less disturbing than thinking Karl had modified the Gargoyle spell.

"Ah, Council Member, and I believe you are the Sculptor's Group Representative?" Karl greeted the new arrivals.

"Sculptor's Guild Leader, yes. Crafting Guilds are a long tradition, like a worker's Union." The old Dwarf replied.

The Blacksmiths in the yard turned in shock. That was an important person to be here in person. They had just arrived to see what Karl had in mind for a new working space that would be secure for them. But, this was a bigger deal than they had thought if the Dwarven Guilds were involved.

None of them even qualified to be members.

"Well, let's not delay any longer. The workshop is finished, and the artists have returned home for a nap, so we're free to enter." Karl instructed, then opened the door to the workshop.

From their position, the outside was dark, but not impenetrably dark, just the way that the Dwarves liked it. Bright lights were only for use as necessary, not everywhere. But it was still bright enough to be comfortable for Ashbringer.

They followed Karl through and found themselves inside the upper levels of Bara. Only, all the buildings were wrong. The whole north side was a row of forges, three levels high, while the cavern was smaller than the real city, and the southern side was all crafting workshops with a conveyor system in place to move raw materials directly to their destination, instead of having to push carts up rails.

In the centre, the duo had created housing, shops and a market, complete with Fox Beastkin girls that the older Dwarves immediately recognized as illusions.

"We've got housing for three hundred, one large Tavern, a small market for workers, stocked from the Guild Store, and work spaces. It's not too elaborate, but you can just walk out and be in the city, so I didn't think it needed much more." Karl explained.

"Oh, that looks just like my parents' house back home." One of the smiths noted.

Karl nodded. "They were designed to replicate the houses in Bara. They're a bit bare now, lacking furniture, but we can furnish them when we know how many residents we will have.

Now, let's tour the space, then sit down with a drink to discuss numbers."

The Dwarves nodded eagerly. The facilities here looked spectacular, far superior to their forges in the suburbs. All that was left was for Karl to come through and use his skills to empower the forges themselves.

The actual stone was already Totem Ranked, and everything that Tian could make was in place.

Chapter 1130: Explore The Workshop

"Let us start with the sculpting areas." The Guild Master insisted.

Karl nodded. "Smiths, you're free to explore. I will upgrade the forge fires if you decide to move in. Just let me know if you don't like the layout, and I can alter the setup easily enough."

Karl led the remaining pair over to the first of the workshops.

"What do you think?"

The Sculptor Guild Leader looked around the inside of the shop, taking in the tables, the adjustable height chairs, the pegboards to hang commonly used tools up instead of putting them in toolboxes, and the small coffee station in the corner of the room.

There was a single box of biscuits and a coffee carafe waiting, and the old Dwarf smiled.

"You're so confident that you've already put the coffee on?"

"That's actually full of Dwarven Ale from Bara." Karl clarified.

The old Dwarf laughed. "Oh, you might be their new favourite employer if you provide ale and oat biscuits in the break room."

Karl smiled. "I can always buy more. Good ale isn't cheap, but it's far from the most expensive item in the room once they start working."

The Guild Leader nodded, but didn't say anything as he inspected the rest of the room, then moved down the row of identical workshops.

The tables could all be moved as needed, and the chairs were adjustable height, so either Dwarves or taller Demons could work at the same tables comfortably, or the Dwarves could work standing up.

"Well, I can't complain about the working conditions. The raw materials conveyors are a nice touch, and the temperature is just right. Let's go look at the housing, but if it's as good as it looks from the outside, I

don't think that it will be an issue signing a work contract between the Sculptors' Guild and the Darklight Host.

We have plenty of workers looking for full-time employment, and while it will take time to get them all moved to a new city, we can finalize the agreement tonight."

Karl led him to the closest of the housing blocks. "There are private houses for Masters and families, but these are the basic units we set aside for Apprentices and junior Journeymen."

The unit wasn't large, only forty square metres, but the bedroom was soundproofed, courtesy of Opal, and there was a proper kitchen, complete with an ale keg rack.

"Not bad. I don't know how many of the Apprentices can actually cook, though. They normally stay with their masters during training."

Karl smiled. "That's what the Tavern is for. The Guild does three meals a day for everyone who lives here, but I thought it might be inconvenient to have them all go to the main house for meals, when the dining room is on the second floor.

That's where the other apprentice rooms are, but they're much brighter, made for Demons.

They can stay there if they prefer. But we will have kitchen staff for the Tavern, so there will always be food available as part of their compensation package."

"I like it. Let's formalize details."

While Karl and the Dwarves were busy in the Tavern inside the workshop, Dora, their half dragon Shaman, plus Larry and Darryl, the Orcish Druids, had come to inspect the new work space.

This was much more spacious than the last workshop had been, and they might even consider moving all their work to the second building, and not just the part that made a mess.

"Who are the Orcs?" The Sculptor's Guild Leader asked.

"Our Druids, and a Shaman. They are all skilled in Earth and Nature creation magic, so they make the majority of the Royal and Commander Ranked crafting materials for bulk items.

It's easy to make a flawless branch to carve, but much harder to make it into something worth selling. They're all close to advancement, so we will have a lot more Royal plus some Monarch Ranked materials soon." Karl clarified.

The smiths from the suburbs already knew them all, as the trio often went to pick up the orders they had completed. The easy familiarity calmed the old Dwarf, who hadn't been sure if Orcs and Dwarves would get along well, given the Orcish reputation for savagery.

"Does your Guild do other crafts as well?" The Sculptor asked.

"Alchemy. But they have a separate workshop, as their art is one of silence and focus. Putting their potions in the forge didn't seem like a great idea."

The Dwarves both laughed at the idea. It would be a terrible idea, even just for the fumes.

Karl placed the standard work contracts on the table, and the Dwarves both went into professional mode, inspecting every clause.

But Karl used the standard template from the System Interface because he wasn't interested in any sort of fancy legalese trap. He told the system what he offered, the terms he wanted, and it made the contract for him.

Two pints of Ale later, the contracts were signed, and the tavern was beginning to fill with Dwarven Smiths from the suburbs.

"Master Ashbringer already signed off on our work agreements. Thank you for the Opportunity, Guild Leader." A smith from the next table informed Karl as the barmaid brought him over their lunch of the day, beef and potato stew with bread and carrot cake cupcakes.

"Why cupcakes?" One of the Dwarves asked.

"Half the crafters have a sweet tooth, and we may have let Lotus write suggestions on the menu."

That made the local Dwarves laugh, and Petros explained to the Guild Leader.

"He's talking about a Green Dragon Cleric. She's practically a walking sweet tooth, and every bakery in town knows her name." He whispered.

Karl nodded. "We're looking to get a few more, but they will be working on a farm that the Guild controls."

The Sculptor waved his hand. "As long as it doesn't affect the contract with the Sculptor's Guild, I don't mind what other endeavours you're into. If it makes food like this, I doubt that any of the workers will either."

Karl laughed. "The Druids and Clerics made most of this. But we hunted the meat in Gabil a while ago and stored it. The advantage of System Storage."

The old Dwarf sighed in satisfaction as he ate. "I will make sure that you get a proper master sculptor to certify your other workers. Then I will talk to the Blacksmith's Guild.

None of the Smiths here is part of the Guild, or certified by the Dwarven Masters, but there is no requirement that they live in a Dwarven City to get certified, only that they study under a Dwarven Master and get Certified."

Karl raised his drink in a toast. "Tell the Smith that I can teach him the Dwarven Runecrafting Techniques to him if he agrees. I managed to obtain an introductory Tome from the last resurgence, and it will elevate his smithy skills to a whole new level."

He placed the tome on the table to show the old man that he was serious, and Slate gave the book an envious look.

"It's true, I've seen him use Dwarven Runes in his work. If you know a Master willing to come certify Journeymen, he won't lose out." The Shaman agreed.