

Beast Master 1151

Chapter 1151: The Art of Mana

"Welcome back, my love. Did you ladies have a good trip?" Karl greeted Dana as she walked up the stairs.

"We did. The wedding is set for one month from today, well, 29 days. I see that you were busy while we were gone. You found all sorts of new members and employees." Dana replied.

Karl held his arms open wide, encouraging Dana to sit on his lap while they talked.

"I did. The employees are formerly from a village in Drodh that was having issues with their neighbours. They're taking care of the magical plants in the Tiny World.

The extra Guild Members are all sculptors, tailors and blacksmiths.

Most of the tailors didn't become Guild members, they're employees, but we did add one to the Guild Roster, just for the chance to learn more from Rae.

I will have to get her to go see them now that you're all back.

Are you happy with how all the plans went? Still need to change anything?" Karl asked as Dana settled down on his lap and leaned against his chest.

"No, we covered everything to perfection.

I know that you weren't there for it, but we had Rae, Remi and Cara, so it still felt like we were getting your input.

They know you pretty well."

Karl laughed at her response. Not only did they know him well, they could check his thoughts to see if he objected to random ideas. Despite the distance, they weren't cut off from their link.

"You all returned just in time. The Winter Social is in a few days, and the Guild Alliance is eager to get to show off.

I've made you ladies some new decorative accessories using the materials from the monthly delivery of goods that the last challenger's guild dropped off. They came out very well, and the master sculptors put in some overtime so that they would be ready when you all returned." Karl explained.

He smiled when Dana squirmed in his lap, turning to face him properly.

"You didn't do anything crazy, did you?" She demanded.

"Of course not. I only created a new set of accessories. Totem Rank, Epic Grade. They're impressive, but I have made dozens more necklaces at that quality since you've been gone.

Most of the Mythic Team will be wearing them to the social to show off the fact that the Alliance has master crafters, but I'm told that it is as much a fashion show as it is a social event, so Rae is going to love it."

Dana smiled. It had been a good month to be Rae.

"Is there anything in particular that you would like for me to make you? I know that Rae has plans for all of the major events, but not every event needs to be perfectly designed to Rae's taste." Karl suggested.

Dana winked, then kissed his chin and whispered in his ear.

"The events I'm thinking of don't need clothing. I've missed you."

Karl disagreed. Unwrapping his Dana was half the fun.

He wrapped an arm under her thighs and stood up, then opened a portal to their bedroom.

"Ladies, we will see you all tomorrow. Lotus, the Tiny World's entrance is open in the Gargoyle Garden, not far from the portal to Drodh. If you want to meet the rest of the employees, that is."

Dana laughed as Karl's hand began working the buttons on her top before they were even through the portal, and then she sighed in relief as they were finally alone again.

Soft silk slid down her arms, then vanished into her inventory as Karl removed it from her body.

She had always been weak to his touch, but today the effect was on an entirely new level. Every touch sent shivers through her body, and the moment that his tongue caressed her skin, making gentle swirls as Karl kissed his way from her neck downward, her mind went completely blank.

Dana mewled in pleasure as Karl showed her just how much he had missed her presence, but her mind betrayed her before she could tell him the same.

Just as she opened her mouth to speak, the pleasure washed over her, and her consciousness faded. The next thing she knew, she was under the covers, draped across Karl and the sunlight was streaming in their window, meaning that he had brought her to the Drodh Guild House, not to their room in the Alliance house.

"What exactly was that last night?" She muttered to herself, blinking the sleep out of her eyes.

Karl rumbled in amusement beneath her. "Well, if you don't know, then I've been doing my job all wrong."

Dana swatted his chest. "Not that, you big idiot. It was like my whole body was electrified, and my mind went blank, then I just passed out. I've never felt anything like it before."

Karl paused, carefully reviewing everything that had happened the evening before.

He had been meditating to improve his understanding of the Fundamental Rule of Mana Manipulation when the ladies returned, so maybe that had something to do with it?

A moment of focus brought him back to that post meditative state, with energy flowing through him, but Dana had no response.

However, when he ran his hand across her belly, she moaned in pleasure, and Karl felt the energy in her body shift. That was it! He was unconsciously altering the mana in her body to follow his will, but the effect was stronger than she could handle.

So, if he was going to continue using the trick, he would have to practice.

[Does this count as learning a new Technique?] Opal asked from her space.

[That depends on whether he can turn it into a named skill, or if he just turns Dana into a puddle while trying.] Remi replied.

Karl tuned the pair out. If they wanted to be nosy, he would just ignore them.

Besides, turning this into a skill just might make him the most popular man on the planet if he taught it to others.

Chapter 1152: Missed You

By lunch, Dana was pleading for mercy, and beginning to lose control of her [Beast Form] transformation.

The instincts that had been imparted to her from the Stonefur Divine Fox magic used in her advancement demanded that she transform and dig her claws into Karl to make sure he didn't escape, but her human mind knew that he wasn't planning to go anywhere.

Not when he was having so much fun tormenting her in all the best ways.

"Stop, stop. Let me rest and eat.

Your dedication to training is commendable, but we're not all superhumans." Dana complained, then nipped at Karl's chest before transforming back into human form.

"Fine, but I'm warning you, I will perfect that technique before our wedding night."

Karl carried her to the shower, then realized that her legs would not support her, so they were going to have to shower in this position, then he would carry her down to breakfast.

"You know that the bride needs to survive until the wedding, right? She looks exhausted, and she's only been back for half a day." Tessa joked when Karl carried Dana down to lunch.

"I will work on that. Training mana control got a bit out of hand." Karl agreed.

Tessa smirked, then gestured for the kitchen staff to bring out the food.

"Well, you're right on time for breakfast, anyhow. The bread just cooled enough to cut."

Ophelia made a vague gesture. "There is a lot of new equipment in the Guild Storage, what's that all about? Like a lot of new equipment."

Karl chuckled. "Check out the workshop in Drodh. I did some renovations, and we got just a few new workers. Sculptors, blacksmiths and tailors to go with our Runecrafters."

"So, we've got more people working? Now, that makes sense. At least there is a chance that the gear orders will get fulfilled.

I see that Sapphire has been busy as well. She has made quite the variety of accessories, all with slightly different enhancements.

But I do notice that they're all blue.

She's only upgrading blue items." Ophelia laughed.

Karl checked the inventory and chuckled. "Indeed. Some robes and armour, mostly accessories. Fortunately, we have lightning, water and fire gems in blue for her to work with. It shouldn't limit her range of enchantments too much if she wants everyone to know that a blue dragon made them."

Karl also noticed that all the items were Totem Ranked, despite the dragon being at the Mythical Rank. She was actually focusing on what they were intending to sell, and not just testing the limits of her skill.

She might have kept a few other pieces for herself, but what was in the inventory was all appropriate for sale.

"I should put these up in the Guild Alliance listings, so that members know that we've got them for sale." Karl sighed.

Dana turned on his leg to look up at him. "I think it's time that I got a trade skill as well. All the new hires are becoming experts, but the core group has still been holding out, and I'm not sure that there is a good reason for that."

"Wait, wait! We have an idea!" One of the Lala bunnies shouted from the back door of the house.

"What's up?" Dana asked, patting the girl's head as she ran up.

"I have a cooking trade skill book. You can do the twirl whoosh mish mash thing and make a new skill, right?"

Ultra-Mega Super cooking!" She exclaimed.

[Give me that book.] Hawk demanded.

[You want to cook?] Karl asked, shocked.

[It is the art of using fire to turn mice into better mice.] Hawk replied in a sage voice.

He had a good point.

But what he actually wanted to master was the art of barbecue, not the entire discipline of cooking.

"If I use the book, it's gone. But I can teach others. So, let me pay you. How much do you want?" Karl asked.

The bunny smirked. "Four advancement potions!"

"Just enough that the bunnies get ahead of the boys by a Rank?" Karl confirmed, and she bobbed her head happily.

"Well, I guess it would encourage them to work hard to catch up to their bunnies. Alright, I will give you four advancement potions as soon as Remi can make them."

The cooking skill book vanished, and Tessa gave Karl a confused look.

"Who wanted to be a cook? Cara? I can't see it being Thor or Opal. Maybe Hawk?"

Karl smiled. "Yes, Hawk. Cooking is a fire - related skill, after all."

But now that Hawk had cooking, Karl saw what Lala was talking about. If he combined [Runecrafting] with [Cooking], he got [Mystic Cooking].

"Did anyone want to be a special sort of cook? Unfortunately for the Lala bunnies, they've already got a trade skill, so it can't be them. Perhaps our new Chef?"

The Obsession Demon gave a fist pump in celebration. She was obviously not going to say no to an advanced version of her obsession.

Karl held out a hand, and she came over to put her head under it, while Karl activated the [Follow Me Little One].

{Champion Karl Offers Knowledge} Skill [Mystic Cooking] will be transferred to the culinary connoisseur Callisto.

"Yes!! First person with the new cooking skill." She cheered.

Then she held out her hand, and a new cookbook appeared in it.

"Alright, ladies. Let's start getting prepped for dinner. I have new recipes to work with." Callisto announced.

Dana laughed as the cook ran back to the pantry and started grabbing stuff out.

"Hey, I want to cook too!" Lotus complained.

"You're sure? No changing after you pick." Karl reminded her.

"Me, change from a specialty in making pastries and sweet things?" Lotus asked in a sarcastic tone.

"You're right. That answer should have been obvious."

{Champion Karl Offers Knowledge} Skill [Mystic Cooking] will be transferred to the healing tree Lotus.

"YES! Oh, so many ideas. You can add short-term buffs to food. I can have healing buff pie." Lotus cheered, then ran to join Callisto in the pantry.

They were going to be eating well this week.

He should teach this skill to the Abbies in Drodh as well.

Chapter 1153: Ophelia Likes Leather

Dana shook her head in dismay at Lotus' excitement. The Alliance members weren't going to know what hit them when they came to ask for healers for the Overlord Ranked Dungeons.

If they thought that Rae making them change clothes was extreme, just wait until they had to taste test Lotus' new baking experiments.

Though... that was probably still less extreme than letting Remi test experiments on them. At least Lotus was going to be making things intended to be edible.

"I will take the Runemaster skill. That way we can work together." Dana insisted.

Karl nodded, and granted her two skills. Runemaster and Skill Book. Both of those skills were going to be useful to her in the near future because they were planning to sell skills to help others advance.

Plus, she had skills that Rae wanted, and those would have to be taught by book.

Some of the skills, Rae was going to be incompatible with, but she had high hopes for [Greater Golem] and a few of Dana's new sword skills.

Golem Duplication was a wonderful skill.

Karl quickly double-checked that he had given the skill back to Dana, and made a new mental note to give her the extra copy of the book.

Though, now she could make a copy for herself.

"Anyone else want a trade skill? We can probably arrange the majority of them." Karl suggested.

Nachtia shook her head, as did Tessa. But Ophelia looked like she had a plan.

"I think I want to try tailoring. Well, leatherworking. There aren't nearly enough female berserker clothing options on this continent. If we increase the fashionability, we could get more berserkers." She decided.

Karl chuckled. "Well, it's easy enough to create berserkers from warriors with a skill transfer. We might even be able to make more Bear Totem Berserkers if we do it right.

If we teach them Beast Form and then Berserk Terror, they should get an animal Totem berserker that matches their beast form."

Ophelia chuckled. "That sounds like a lot of fun. Making all the Warriors holy sorts is just too boring, and it will lead to another version of the same issue, where everyone has the same skills. Just slightly better skills.

But if you make some of them berserkers or Rangers, it should cut down on the issues a little."

{Champion Karl Offers Knowledge} Skill [Runic Leatherworking] will be transferred to the Cuddle Bear Ophelia.

Ophelia smiled as she accepted the skill. It wasn't master Tailoring like Rae had learned, and she could put her own Runes on things, but she would be more limited in the items that she could put bonuses on.

That still wasn't bad.

She wanted to make more items for berserkers, and there was nothing more 'Berserker' than leather pants and furs. Heavy armour was a good defensive measure, but it really cramped your style.

Rae smiled at Ophelia. There were spider tailors in Drodh now, and an Ophelia in Zilaz. She could go back and forth, working with both to turn out a wonderful new line of clothing for the Guild.

"Well, now we've got new skills, but the same issue. We need to get everyone ready for the Winter Social event. It's a huge party, and the Alliance will be using it to show off." Karl reminded them.

Ophelia nodded. "Plus, we get to show off. Forget that we're making all the accessories, the world should know that the Darklight Host really is an enviable Guild to be in."

[Matilda will send her Vampire to join us for the party. She's busy doing things, but Tiffani isn't.] Cara added.

[Just remind her that we will be decorating her Vampire to match. I know that the old dragon likes to tease her.] Karl informed her.

[Got it. It shouldn't be a problem.]

Rae already had most of the outfits that she wanted everyone to wear to the festival prepared, they just needed accessories.

But the Winter Social wasn't just one night, it was three whole days of an extended weekend, and they would need different outfits for all of them. At least, Rae assumed that they would.

The Alliance wasn't putting on an official party of their own, like so many others did, but there was the big party in the middle of town, and then she was sure that someone would invite them to events on the other two nights.

The first one was the most important, as the Alliances introduced their top members and there was a judged fashion contest.

The rest were all networking.

While that wasn't the most important aspect to the Darklight Host, it would increase the Alliance's popularity, and set them up for fewer challengers when the next round of Dungeon control contests came.

"We're not going in Darklight Host Guild colours theme, are we?" Ophelia asked.

Rae shook her head. "No, that wouldn't work with everyone's complexion. It works well on the vampires because they're already so pale. But a black and white outfit with brown fur? I can do so much better."

Karl smiled as the two began discussing Berserker and Werebear fashion, then bounced Dana on his knee.

"Should we get to work as well? Rae has given me a list of fashionable accessories needed for the Totems and Myths, but there are plenty of accessories waiting to be made from Overlord Ranked materials as well.

If you want to make a statement with your skills, now is the perfect time to start." He suggested.

"Oh, that is a wonderful idea. How about doing necklaces and amulets first? They're the most visible, and having a big bonus on them would be the first thing that others notice.

You can take care of the big names, I will do a bunch for the Overlords in the Alliance who are already waiting." Dana suggested.

Karl smiled. Sapphire was already doing most of the ones for the Totem Ranked members, but the accessories fit for the Myths would all be the Totem Rank, Totem Grade items, and those took far longer than average to make.

"There are premade gems from the other Runecrafters that you can set into accessories. Making skill gems is taxing, but Sapphire has decided that it's the best way forward for most of the others, as the

gem decides the peak quality that the skill can be used at, as long as they don't energize it when they finish.

You just insert the premade gem into the item, then complete the whole thing as one item." Karl explained.

With thousands of tiny characters put on every gem, it was possibly the best handwriting training that any of them could get. And with the elemental creation abilities of their Sculptors, there was no longer a shortage of Overlord Rank and lower elemental gems.

Chapter 1154: The Dana Crafter?

Karl and Dana were seated at a crafting table that afternoon, while Dana went through the basics of her new craft, and made accessories for the other Overlords in the Dungeon Raiding teams.

"All they really need is more damage. That was the first thing that all of us noticed, anyhow. The gear they had was mostly mediocre, but when compounded by the fact that they don't have all the extra skills that come with an advanced class, they really suffer.

It's like, the advanced class skills do much more damage per strike at the same level, even though they're not at the Epic Skill level of damage."

So, Dana was focusing on adding Skill damage, Attack Speed and Strength to the items. For the warriors, even when they were using Cleave or Slash from a distance, the power behind the sword increased the damage done by the attack, so they still gained from increased strength.

It was a strange combination, but who were they to argue with the System's math?

The accessories were understated, at the request of the Warriors. Mostly simple silver and iron coloured bracelets, rings and necklaces.

But the sculptors of the Guild had come up with the perfect warrior accessory.

They had made a sand cast to create skull rings that were black gold on one side, white gold on the other. They were cast small, as the material was Totem Ranked and valuable, but the sectioned black and white was very obviously Darklight Host, and the skull ring motif was incredibly popular with the Warriors.

It was a bit of a waste to use them to make Overlord Ranked enchantments, but Dana was putting in the effort to make them all Epic Grade items, so at the very least they were more valuable than the materials.

Plus, a single apprentice sculptor could turn out a hundred of them in an hour, including buffing them out for use. So, after the cast was made, it was more of a side project for the sculpting team, to keep the others supplied while they worked on the real masterpieces.

Even Karl was wearing one now, but he had given his increased luck and mana recovery to such an insane degree that the System decided it was a Totem Grade item with only two stats.

Even inert, the eyes of the ring seemed to absorb the light.

On the other hand, he wore the Life Link ring that matched Dana's.

Not in appearance, his was a simple Mythril ring covered in black runes, but the two spells were linked, so you couldn't wound Dana without damage transferring to Karl.

At least, when they were in range.

"You know, turning out hundreds of these skull rings really is boring." Dana sighed as she poured mana into another item.

"That is true. The drudgery of making bulk items is way worse than the complexity of making custom items. But think of how happy all the Warriors will be.

First, we upgraded their tanks, and now we're giving them rings that will increase their damage and attack speed. That's what they needed to get through the improved bosses now that they've unlocked hard mode in the dungeon.

All that extra loot will be well worth the effort.

Have they invited you guys along again?" Karl replied.

Dana nodded. "Yeah, they want us to be part of the hard mode group every week now. The Alliance is skipping this week, because of the Winter Social. But the week after, we will be back at it again."

"Perfect, lots of time for everyone to get prepared. There is no holiday in Drodh this week, so they'll get all stocked up. I just hope that the new tailors survive Rae's affection.

As I understand it, they're all descended from weaver spiders, who specialize in silk production and tailoring. But they're not an aggressive species like the Bloodbath Spider, so Rae probably terrifies them." Karl joked.

Dana frowned. "I never thought of that. The majority of the beastkin are only a little terrified of Rae, and that's perfectly normal. But as fellow spiders, it's likely much worse for the tailors."

Rae looked up as she sensed Karl talking about her.

She was overseeing the clothing production lines in Drodh, who were making winter themed gowns for last-minute sales in the city tomorrow. The Alliance members all had pretty dresses for the event already, so it was time to start spreading her outfits around the city.

But Karl had misunderstood the nature of Spiders.

Weaver Spiders, and their beastkin offspring, were not prey to the Bloodbath Spiders.

They made huge, beautiful webs that caught all sorts of prey, and naturally offered it to their powerful protectors as tribute. The instinct extended to the beastkin, who turned instantly compliant and submissive when Rae gave them instructions.

She had managed to turn the process into a smooth and efficient sweatshop within an hour of arriving, but she was a benevolent mistress. She would only ask them to work a half day.

She wasn't too picky about which twelve hours they worked, but overnight was better for sales, so she could take orders and make deliveries while the other species were awake.

That also worked for the tailors, as they were nocturnal by nature.

They were also being paid very well for their work, and the quality of life here was much better than at home, where the more physical spider species tended to bully them.

Not that Rae didn't. But she bullied them as their boss, not for fun.

Plus, the only thing that she demanded they do for her was work with the most beautiful, high-quality silks. They might not be obsession Demons, but their love of crafting silk was nearly as intense.

When she was finished tonight, Rae was certain that she would have at least fifty new dresses completed, with only a few in each style, as she had assigned each tailor a different project.

She loved it when a plan came together.

The blacksmiths and sculptors hardly even noticed that there were tailors taking over two of the buildings, one for living and one for working. The Drodh Cavern, as they had taken to calling it, was still over half empty, even with all of them present and the orphanage brimming with kids.

Two buildings full of beastkin who only came outside once a day was hardly noticeable.

Chapter 1155: Better Nilla Flavour

By the time that the day of the Winter Social came around, Dana's fingers were thoroughly worn out and ready for a break.

But the Guild Alliance looked wonderful.

Everyone was rushing about the complex in their finery, looking for final personalized touches, reclaiming items that had been lent out, or meeting friends for a trip into the city.

Karl waved as Rae appeared in the room with a smug smile and began dumping a pile of clothes on the table.

"Did the morning's sales go well?" He asked.

Rae clicked her teeth the same way that she clicked her mandibles when she was happy.

"Yes, they paid extra to get just the right outfit this morning. I'm nearly sold out. But I don't know what to dress Nilla in. He says that he's not going out, so he hasn't let me style him yet." She explained.

"Have you informed him of this yet?" Dana asked.

"Multiple times. I informed him that it was non-optional, and I've even made him a more manly umbrella, since he objected to the lace parasol. Now, come help me pick the right suit to compliment my dress.

I am taking him for coffee." Rae explained.

From the other side of the room, Ophelia laughed. "What's this? Rae is feeling romantic."

Rae snorted in amusement. "He has a skill that I want. It hides his presence without hiding his body. But he won't come out so I can learn it. Today I will make him."

"So, you intend to make him so uncomfortable that he hides his presence to make people stop noticing him, and then you can study the skill?" Ophelia clarified.

Rae nodded. That was exactly it.

"Shouldn't you give him a present for helping?" Ophelia asked.

"What do you think that this is?"

"That's just decoration. You wanted to decorate him anyhow. How many of the others dress like you? Why don't you get your Karl to make him a skill book in exchange for the training?" The Werebear explained.

"Oh, bribery! Yes, that would work too. Karl, do you have a skill book?"

Karl chuckled. "In fact, I do. We've been making them for all the Totems, and he's a Druid, so he's near the top of the list. Give him this book of [Terrorize]. Ten percent more damage per Rank is a lot of bonus damage for a Totem. That should be enough to bribe him to teach you the skill you want."

Rae plucked the book from his hands and did a happy twirl.

"Thank you. Now, ruffles, or cobweb lace?"

Karl turned to Dana for the answer.

"Cobweb lace sleeves. That one there. He will have a shirt under, so the outer coat can be purely decorative. Then give him the red tie that matches his eyes. And these boots. There, that is perfect. Good luck."

Rae waved, then gathered all the clothing on the table and vanished.

"Why does it feel more like Rae has adopted a puppy who didn't know that he was up for adoption than that she's gotten a boyfriend?" Ophelia asked.

"Because I'm certain that is how she sees him. Don't forget that Bloodbath Spiders usually kill their mates so that they don't mate with any other female." Karl replied.

"Oh, right. Forgot about that."

A few houses over, a girlish shriek shattered the calm as Rae appeared in Nilla's bedroom holding a pile of clothing and a skill book.

"Good morning. I brought you an outfit for our coffee date. Put that on, and then I have a business proposal for you. I want your ability to hide your presence, and in exchange for learning it, I will give you this book of [Terrorize]."

"How did you even get in here? I put up a barrier." The vampire demanded.

"Using [Night Hunter], of course. I can just walk through the wall, there is no point in blocking the window and the door. Now, I think that your dungeon team will love it if you learn [Terrorize]. That's eighty percent more base damage on every attack. It really does add up quickly."

Rae held up the clothing and gave it a shake, encouraging him to get moving.

"The coffee had better be worth this. Do you know what time it is?"

"Eleven in the morning. That's why I brought the modified umbrella. It's going to be bright on the way to the coffee shop."

"And that didn't strike you as too early to wake a Vampire?" He asked.

Rae shook her head. "I even let you sleep in this morning. Five whole hours after the sun came up because it's a holiday."

"We are going to need to have a long talk about biology one of these days." Nilla muttered as he equipped the outfit Rae brought.

Then she handed him the book, and Nilla began to bounce on the balls of his feet in excitement. This was going to be a huge change for him. A passive skill that would nearly double his base damage output.

Then, his eyes went vacant as he used the book. He had been pulled into the class change interface, and there were actual options there for him.

He had gathered ten other skills that weren't part of his skill tree, mostly warrior skills that could be used by Druids. But this was the first time he had options.

Blood Druid, Woodland Warlock, Forest Guardian.

Oh, that last one was good. It was an advanced druid, and it was tanking focused. Plus, it had Spirit Guardians. That sounded like Druid Golems to him.

Take that mages.

With his new class selected, Nilla returned to Reality and found Rae waiting for him with an expectant smile.

"Forest Guardian. A tanking Druid with Spirit Guardians. Should we go and see what they are before we leave?" He asked.

Rae grabbed him around the waist and moved him to the lawn. "Yes, let's see what it gives you. Oh, we should hold betting first. Did you want to tell the others?"

Nilla laughed at the excited spider.

"Yes, let's call them outside and give them a chance to wager on what a Vampire Druid's Spirit Guardian will be."

He couldn't predict what the System was going to give him, even if he followed the advice the mages got and focused on what he wanted.

Chapter 1156: Winter Social Parade

The Guild had already heard their conversation, as neither Rae nor Nilla was trying to be quiet. Even Dana and Karl had come out across the street to see the show.

They were actually making sure that Rae wasn't abducting the vampire against his will, but from her perspective, it looked the same.

"Everyone, the Vampire Druid tank, Naxxaramous Orovious Dante, has advanced his class today.

He is now a Forest Guardian.

One of his new Class Skills is a Forest Guardian. We are now accepting guesses and wagers on what it will come out looking like." Rae declared, loudly enough to be heard over the crowd.

The crowd cheered for him, as a Totem Ranked Tank advancing was a big deal.

Especially when it was an advancement from Druid.

Karl waited for the guessing game to end while Dana played with the ring on her finger. She had transformed into Fox beastkin form today, and the ring felt strange on her hand, though it still fit perfectly.

She wasn't originally going to go out as anything but human. But the dress looked so much better against her fox fur that she couldn't resist.

"Alright, we have our guesses. Now, Nilla, please show us the Guardian Spirit!" Rae shouted.

"She's a surprisingly effective hype person." Dana laughed as Rae made a theatrical reveal gesture toward the vampire.

"Right? Who knew that was part of her skill set?" Karl agreed.

"And the winner is ... BEARS!" Rae called as a massive red ethereal bear appeared beside the vampire.

Karl was reasonably sure that was not the natural state of a Spirit Guardian, but as he was a vampire, it had been altered by his affinity for blood.

It was definitely impressive, though.

Dana laughed. "You know, we can do the same thing for you and Rae when you reveal your Greater Golems for the first time."

Karl chuckled. "You know that Rae's are going to be bigger, better spiders."

He had a point.

Rae would be very disappointed if her extra Golems were not spiders.

The entire population of the Zilaz Guild House came out to join them, and Karl led the procession out of the house to join the gathering in the market, where the first selections for the day's fashion shows would be held.

The other guilds quickly joined them, as everyone was preparing to head out anyhow.

It made for a truly impressive group, nearly a thousand strong, all walking together, with most of them in Overlord and Totem Ranked formal wear, and exquisitely made accessories.

They were attracting attention with every step, and people were coming out of the stores to stare at them, as if the Guild Alliance was a parade.

In a way, they were, Karl decided.

They were almost all wearing something made by Rae, with accessories that the Darklight Host had enchanted. So, they were basically a walking billboard, or a parade of trade goods.

"Look at that. They've done up the whole Alliance for the show. Even the staff members are wearing luxury dresses. And trade skill accessories."

"What the hell?"

"What sort of Guild Alliance is that?"

Karl chuckled as he heard the spectators gossiping about the Alliance.

The first thing that he had all the Runecrafters do was make something for themselves. But the most popular items from Drodh were the utility items, and that included cooking, cleaning, and other basic tasks.

But those weren't items that a normal guild would have here.

So, seeing all the simple magical rings on the Royal Ranked staff members of the other Guilds was a shock. They couldn't be combat members, there were no Dungeons here for them to fight in, and no wild monsters of their rank.

So, the accessories had to be profession related.

A few of the members had even decided to show off a little extra, and they had unequipped items that they were wearing, to use them as a show of wealth.

With the item worn openly and not equipped, anyone with basic identification skills could see what Stats it had.

Here, where the System was nearly fully active, that meant everyone.

It didn't take long for the crowd to recognize that all of the displayed items were made by the same person, and that the person in question was standing with the Guild Alliance, escorting a team from his Guild in exquisite fashion through the city.

"Damn, the Nara Group managed to get an actual crafting Guild on their side. The next round of challenges are going to be brutal." One of the other Myths sighed.

"I heard a rumour that they're changing things next year. Perhaps they'll cap it so that a few of the big guilds don't get all the best dungeons?" One of the others, a white dragon cleric, suggested hopefully.

The warriors laughed. They couldn't see the King caring enough about what they were doing here on the shores to do that. All that really mattered to him was that people kept coming, and the money kept flowing.

If you didn't try to take a dungeon entirely off the market, he wouldn't care.

"Well, if they don't, I can guarantee that the Nara Group is getting at least one or two extra Dungeons. In a duel, both Hugo and Deve are monsters. If they're fully decked out in custom tailored Epic gear, they can definitely snag an extra victory." The warrior retorted.

Karl smiled as he heard the news. He already knew that would not be an issue this year.

The formal announcement was going to be during the festivities tonight, when the King of Sholaha came to greet the people and give them a blessing for the upcoming year.

Hugo led the column through the city, showing off at all the best spots so that they could say that they were seen, and then join the party. But they didn't even have to finish their tour to get noticed.

"Miss, would you and your partner be interested in joining the judging? We have a category for most stylish Gothic outfits, and I believe you would both be contenders." A woman with a clipboard asked.

Rae grabbed Nilla and pushed him forward, almost moving him out from under his umbrella as he flailed to keep his balance.

"Of course we will join the judging. The world needs to see this fashion." Rae agreed.

"Might I get your names?" The volunteer asked.

"Naxxaramous Orovious Dante, and Rae Bloodbath." Rae replied.

The volunteer froze. "Did you say Dante and Bloodbath?"

Rae nodded happily. "That is us. Easy to remember."

Chapter 1157: Beasts and Bookstores

What Rae didn't know was that the woman had only now realized that she was a transformed magical beast. So, while Nilla's heritage made him Vampire Nobility, declaring herself as a Bloodbath Spider, at the Totem Rank, was absolutely terrifying for the average citizen.

"Of course, very easy to remember. Thank you. I will see you at the judging centre later. Here are your entry cards, just show them at any of the contestant entry points, and they will show you where to be.

Goth, Emo and Rogue class judging starts at dark. Arriving half an hour early is advisable, as the event can be quite crowded." The volunteer explained, recovering from her shock.

Rae patted Nilla on the back. "We're going to be a big hit. Now, are we done walking yet? The coffee is on the next block."

The vampire laughed. "We can break away from the group. It's not a rule that we all have to stay together, it's just the boss wanting to show off."

With that new information, Rae wrapped an arm around Nilla and activated [Perfect Camouflage] to step away from the group without being noticed.

Some of the Totems and Myths could surely still see them in the bright daylight, but it didn't disrupt anything as they moved away from the group and into the crowd. Then, she deactivated the skill and led the way to the coffee shop.

"What was your plan for after coffee?" Nilla asked, resigned to spending a whole day outdoors.

"How do you feel about people watching from somewhere up in the tree branches? I can make swinging chairs and an awning." Rae suggested.

Nilla laughed. "It is prohibited to climb the trees in the park. Otherwise, the drunks would break half the branches while showing off for the girls."

Rae sighed. "In that case, we can just find somewhere out of the sun."

A squeaky voice from beside them caught her attention.

"Miss? Sir? If you would like to be out of the direct sunlight, our winery is doing an afternoon tasting event today? It is held in the aging cellar, and the temperature is just right." The mouse beastkin suggested.

The vampire and spider smiled at each other.

"That would be perfect." They agreed in unison.

Thor saw Rae drag her living mannequin off, and it gave him the same idea.

"Tessa, why don't we stop for a juice as well? There is a lovely shop there by the beach." He suggested.

That started a mass exodus just as they had reached the market, and there were thousands of shops and stalls for the members to visit.

Karl nodded to Deve and Hugo, then motioned to a grand stone building, marked with magical sigils that Karl knew were supposed to approximate the Runes of Runecrafting, but which were drawn by someone without the skill.

"I believe that my lovely bride may enjoy that store, so we will part ways here." He explained.

"The Mage Tower? Yes, if you've got the budget, it's the best place on the continent to get skill books and rare potions. Other than the Blue Dragon Libraries, that is." Hugo agreed.

Karl led Dana to the store, where a Totem Ranked guard stood at either side of the door, vetting their potential customers.

"Champion, Miss. Welcome. Please enter, we were hoping that you would visit us today." The guard greeted them.

That was a bit startling, as they had only just walked out of the Alliance complex half an hour ago.

Inside the shop, the lighting was dim, but magically even, with no shadows or unreadable covers on the displayed tomes. Each of the most valuable tomes was set into a glass pillar with its own light, creating beams of light in the shop, while the less valuable ones were set along the walls.

There was an excited commotion at the back of the shop, and a young Demoness came running up to Karl.

"War Champion! You are earlier than expected. Would you like to join our contest?" She asked.

"Contest?" That wasn't what he was here for.

"It's an Inscription contest. We're making Skill Books, winner takes all. I heard from my cousin Ashbringer that you can make them." She explained.

"That makes sense now. But we had actually come in to shop." Karl replied, and the Demon visibly deflated.

The shopkeeper cleared his throat, and Karl nodded politely for the Mythic Rank blue dragon to speak his mind.

"If you would like to join them, I can accompany Miss Dana around the shop, and then lead her to the reading area. It has a view of the contest tables, and if she should find something interesting, but not a usable skill book, she will be able to read while your challenge is ongoing.

In order to make them both interesting and punctual, we have put a one-hour time limit on the contests.

It prevents grand magic from being transcribed, but it also allows for rematches." He explained.

"What are the judging criteria?" Karl asked.

"The most valuable tome copied within one hour wins. However, if you can transcribe one that we do not have in stock, it is an automatic round win. No repetition is allowed, but more than one contestant can do the same tome during a round.

In that case, first to finish wins." The dragon explained.

That sounded like a very blue dragon god approved challenge.

Dana waved her hand at Karl. "I will let the Librarian show me the store, you go play with the Inscriptionists."

Karl nodded. "Alright, let's see this contest list. Is it a full list of what the store has in stock for Skill Books?"

The Demoness nodded. "It is. There are only so many available skill books, after all."

Right. Karl had forgotten that even here, they struggled to get copies of most skills in written form. If you got a rare one, you could make a fortune just lending it to an Inscriptionist to make duplicates before you used it.

Karl scanned the list, and then nodded in satisfaction. [Force Slam] the Haint's telekinetic ability, was not on the list, and it was nearly as easy to write out as Cleave.

Not a particularly complex or powerful skill. But a rare and versatile one.

Chapter 1158: Easy Win

Karl took a seat, and then looked up and saw a writing desk suspended in a glass orb above them. It was covered in incredibly ancient magical runes, and from what Karl could see, it was intended to make all the materials you needed to create a Skill Book while working at it.

That was brilliant.

Force Slam wasn't too hard to create, at least for Karl. But his skill wasn't [Inscription], it was [Skill Book], and it had far fewer conditions for creation, but far stricter ones on what books he could make.

So, he got out suitable ink from Remi's supply stash of plant extracts, and grabbed a stack of paper from the middle of the table.

"On the count of three, you may begin." The Demoness announced.

Karl noticed that she wasn't participating, she was the store staff serving as referee for the event. He should have known that a Wrath Demon was not suited to be an Inscriptionist.

The first time that the pen dripped and ruined a page with an ink blot, they would lose it.

Karl quickly began to write out the small booklet that was [Force Slam], and then sent a surge of mana through the papers with [Skill Book] to form the cover and activate the tome.

"Finished." He spoke quietly, and looked up from his work.

One of the others was already finished, and Karl smiled as he saw [Rend] on the table in front of them.

"You only win if you finish in an hour." The dragonkin mouthed silently.

So that was the trick. He was wagering that anyone who picked a skill book more complex and valuable than Rend would not finish on time, and would therefore lose by default.

Karl checked his watch. He had taken nearly forty minutes just to write out [Force Slam]. If he had chosen anything more difficult, he really might have gone over.

They sat silently, browsing the magazines on the table as the others worked.

When the last pen was lifted, the hour was long past, and the last few to finish were more than ten minutes past the timer. But nobody stopped them, as the contest was a 'winner take all' format, and nobody needed a half finished skill book.

They had all chosen basic warrior and mage skills. Cleave, Rend, Lightning Bolt, Magic Armour, and a copy of [Stomp] that must have had an error somewhere, as it failed to activate.

The blue dragon came out from the sitting area, where he had been waiting with Dana.

"Excellent work, everyone. We will fix the error in Stomp for the winner. Now, let's see what the pricing chart says." He announced.

"We have one copy of Magic Armour that was finished over the time limit, as well as Stomp, which has failed to activate. So, in third place, we have Rend. Then Lightning Bolt and Magic Armour tied in value, with Lightning Bolt being completed first.

However, our winner for this round is [Force Slam], which is not currently in the store's inventory.

The spell is part of the druid arsenal under certain skill builds. But I have no record of it having ever passed through our stock." He announced.

The other Inscriptionists cheered, and an older dragonkin rushed out to begin flipping through the Stomp book, looking for the error.

They cast some sort of spell that erased a portion of the page, and then wrote a new paragraph. That let the book successfully complete, and the final Skill Book formed.

"Now, would the winner like to keep his winnings? Or perhaps trade them for store credit?" The blue dragon asked.

It didn't take a genius to see that he was hoping for store credit as an answer.

"Dana, did you find anything good?" Karl asked.

She nodded. "I did. I found a whole collection of Mystic Cooking cookbooks for Lotus, and an Alchemy book for Remi."

The shopkeeper looked a bit sheepish. "As it happens, her advancement through multiple mage related classes has given her a much larger repertoire of skills than our shop stocks."

Karl politely didn't mention that she could make skill books just as easily as he could.

That wasn't information that anyone else knew, outside the core of the Darklight Host. So, if it could be kept secret, he wouldn't have to worry about people bothering Dana about it.

"That is a pretty impressive haul. Finding just one new tome is difficult enough, but to find them for two different specialties, this truly is the best stocked shop around.

Shopkeeper, I will trade my winnings for store credit. It should cover our purchases here today, and anything left over we will save for the next time a Guild Member needs a new skill." Karl replied.

"That is excellent news. A new spell for the shop is a huge accomplishment. To prevent unfairness, winners have to sit out the next round. But you are welcome to peruse our shelves.

Not everything is a Skill book. We also have fiction, history, theory, education and many other books available." He offered.

"Oh, that is a good idea. Our Guild Library is pretty good, but I bet that we don't have some of these. Now that we've got Sapphire looking after it, we should work on expanding the inventory." Karl agreed.

Even if her presence was giving the Nobles of Drodh heart palpitations.

"The Mythic Librarian Sapphire?" The blue dragon in charge of the shop asked.

Karl nodded. "She joined our Guild recently, after accepting a trade skill. She is currently at our Drodh Guild House, doing inventory on the Guild Library there. We loaded it with surplus books from a historic bookstore, and the variety is somewhat unusual."

As were the notes written in some of the educational tomes.

Most of them were good advice, but according to the dragon, some of the students making the notes had clearly been failing their classes, and it was better for everyone if the books were scrubbed of bad advice before anyone else read them.

But Mick said that she spent most of her time with a romance book in one hand as she sorted through educational tomes using a magical skill.

Chapter 1159: Diversified Guild Library

Over the course of the next hour, Karl and Dana followed the shopkeeper around while sending messages to Sapphire about books that she wanted for the Guild Library.

He had no shortage of them, and there were multiple floors of more mundane titles, away from the main showroom floor, which was reserved for the skill books that the vast majority of his patrons were here to find.

"Is it your intention to start a Library of your own? A public one, I mean." He asked as the list of titles neared five hundred and the store credit for the traded skill books was running low.

Karl shook his head. "No, we were thinking that we would reserve the Guild Library for the Guild Members and their children.

That way, they have somewhere that they can go to gain knowledge, the dragons have reference material, and we can stock skill books for them to advance their classes. As a blue dragon, you may or may not have already heard about the success of our experiments."

The shopkeeper nodded eagerly. "The Librarians at Totem Rank and higher all share a group chat. Lady Sapphire already shared the success of the Paladin progression project, and the confirmation that it can work for other classes.

If that really is all that is needed to unlock advanced classes for all these warriors, the research in that project will revolutionize the world itself.

It is wonderful, brilliant new knowledge."

The man was nearly vibrating with excitement, a state that they saw Lotus in nearly every day. But, it was unavoidable for dragons and dragon clerics when their divine aspect was mentioned in conversation.

"Indeed it is. We're going to be doing more experiments later, both with base warriors, to see if there are other suitable classes to advance them into, and to other classes, to improve their versatility and damage output.

It is our theory that the difficulty of many of the dungeons is not so much due to the gear limits, or they would give better loot.

Instead, we have a theory that the dungeons are only difficult because of poor group composition. If the Totems entering had a properly diversified set of skills, it is possible that they would have a much easier time passing the obstacles." Karl explained.

The shopkeeper smiled. "Oh, you have a point. Like the Corrupted Naga Swamp. The monsters are all under the effect of a zombie curse, and it affects the members of the raiding party as well.

It is nearly impossible to even enter without a Shaman, as their area purification totem poles are the only effective countermeasure against the corruption.

Well, unless you have someone with [Consecrated Ground] or another holy magic purification area effect."

Karl chuckled. "And that's not common outside the upper ranks of the Dragon Clergy. We do have a member who has it. Well, at least two that I have seen use it. But with its limited radius, I can see how it would be difficult to do a dungeon fight like that."

The old dragon turned and plucked a book from a shelf nearly two stories above their heads. .

"Add this to your Library as well. It's advanced totem crafting for Shamans. Not a skill book, but if they're talented, they will be able to make multiple new types of them with the lessons in this book."

He wasn't even finished speaking when Remi appeared in her shimmering golden ballgown and stretched out all four arms for it.

"Librarian, this is Remi, one of my bonded partners. And a Naga Shaman Queen. Like the blue dragons, she also has an insatiable thirst for new knowledge. And this book is perfectly suited to her class." Karl explained.

The dragon smiled and let her have it, then smiled as Remi cheered and raced off to the reading area with her new treasure.

"Looks like we've lost Remi for the day. But she did make it outside, and that is an accomplishment for her." Dana noted.

"She is not a social person? Usually, Naga Queens are quite outgoing." The dragon asked.

Dana shook her head. "She loves people. But if you get her focused on shaman spells or alchemy, she will lose entire days at a time. Naga don't actually need to sleep, you see."

The shopkeeper nodded. "Blue Dragons are known to sleep only once a century, resting for a few years at a time. However, most of us prefer to keep to a daily schedule so that we don't miss years worth of news."

"Do you have a warded reading room? I suspect that she will want to test totems as she learns them, and that might not be safe with a whole table full of Inscriptionists sitting nearby." Karl asked.

"Of course. There is a practical learning area at the back with private rooms and comfortable chairs. I do believe that the serpent friendly one is unoccupied." He replied.

Dana giggled. "Serpent friendly?"

He nodded. "With large warming beanbag chairs, which are better suited to serpentine bodies and cooler body temperatures."

One of the staff members was already leading Remi in that direction as the distracted Naga read the intro Chapter to her new educational tome.

"The shop is a twenty-four-hour establishment, just let us know if your friend is needed for something, and we will go fetch her." The blue dragon whispered.

"You really do know your clientele well. Thank you, Librarian. Perhaps we will come back later with another new skill book or two for you. Everyone loves new skills."

"You are both welcome any time. Thank you for your patronage." He agreed.

Karl led Dana back out of the mage tower, leaving Remi to her own devices for the day.

"Would you like to sight see? Or perhaps get a snack? Rae has dragged Nilla to the coffee shop, with plans for a wine tasting. Cara and Lotus are at a bakery with Ophelia, and Thor has taken Tessa to the beach to sunbathe." Karl asked.

"They let a Chaos Badger in a bakery? Willingly? With a Green Dragon Cleric?" Dana replied incredulously.

Karl laughed. "Actually, Cara arriving with an Overlord Ranked Green dragon priestess makes it somewhat more believable, don't you think?"

As much as she hated to admit it, he was right. Seeing Lotus and Cara together was like a self-fulfilling prophecy. The presence of one explained the presence of the other, no matter where they were.

Chapter 1160: Wrong Door?

Dana smiled up at Karl. "I have an idea. People are certain to notice soon that you are the one who made the vast majority of what the Guild Alliance is wearing. So, if we stay in the market, you're just going to get swarmed by people wanting to make an order.

If we go somewhere a bit more private and exclusive, then only a few people will be able to get to you, and we can lounge around for the afternoon.

I think that a day of people watching is what we need.

Both as a way to show off Rae's fashion, and just to see more of the residents of the city. There has to be something here that we haven't seen before, and they can't all be dumb enough to start trouble."

One of the bookstore workers looked up at them, alarmed. "Are you expecting trouble?"

Karl shook his head. "Not long ago, someone challenged to try to forcibly claim members of our guild as their own. I don't think that anyone will be so brazen today during the festival."

The clerk looked immensely relieved.

"That is true, very few people would challenge during the winter social for anything less than a direct and unforgivable insult. The Immortal Regent is in the city today, and he takes a very dim view of such duels.

Especially ones that don't have an excellent reason." She explained.

"Thank you. That is good to know. I will avoid doing anything hot-tempered." Karl replied with a wink.

He didn't look like the sort that would start trouble to her, but then the young Magic Demon wasn't an expert on all things Totem Ranked and higher. The people with that much power had their own set of rules, and they didn't always make sense to anyone else, especially to Demons who spent most of their life in Libraries with the blue dragons.

Karl led Dana out the door and found himself in the lobby of a restaurant, instead of in the street, as expected.

"Well, that is new. Did we use the wrong door?" He muttered.

"Lord Karl and Lady Dana? This way, please. Your companions are waiting." The host informed them.

The man was clearly a dragon of some sort, but in his humanoid form, Karl couldn't tell what sort. Which was unusual on its own.

Perhaps he wasn't one of the chromatic dragons? It would explain his lack of the distinctly divine aura that they gave off.

The host led them through the posh restaurant, filled with guests in their Winter Social finest, and sat them at a table where two elderly powerhouses were glaring at each other.

"Immortal Regent, Supreme Lady Matilda. It's a pleasure to meet you both again." Karl announced with a slight bow for the duo.

Dana curtsied politely, and Matilda giggled. "You should stay in that form more often, you are absolutely adorable. But for your wedding, definitely human. That's the way to go. Both of you. The kiss scene won't look right if you don't. Beastkin kisses are all sloppy, not at all photogenic."

Azov rubbed his temples, and Karl felt a pang of sympathy for him. He had been dealing with Matilda for tens of thousands of years, and he was the only friend she could possibly have who might understand her frame of reference.

After a second, he forced a smile onto his face. "Congratulations both of you on your upcoming wedding. It appears that my attendance is assured, no need for an RSVP invitation."

Matilda smirked, and the Immortal sighed.

"Please join us for lunch. There is a fashion show here at the restaurant for high society, and I thought it would be best to invite the both of you, as there are both male and female categories, and the artist herself is preoccupied." Matilda explained.

Her chaotic aura was remarkably subdued today, nearly as low as Cara's. It felt off to Karl, but to the others in the room, it was surely a kindness.

A passing waitress heard her words and paused. "Is the lady intending to join the show? I can take your details now. Just your name, Guild, Guild Alliance, and the name of your designer, with any affiliation that they might have."

Having a Divine Fox among the contestants would be a huge bonus for the show, and her boss would definitely give her a bonus for signing Dana.

"Dana, of the Darklight Host. Part of the Nara Group Alliance. My dress was made by Lady Rae Bloodbath of the Darklight Host, and the accessories by Karl of the Darklight Host, who is standing beside me."

The waitress blinked slowly, mesmerized by Dana's voice, then pure joy spread across her expression.

"Wonderful, thank you, Lady Dana. Sir, were you wishing to enter as well? Or will you allow the Lady to represent your brand?" She asked.

Matilda clicked a fingernail on the table. "He will enter. I want to start sending out wedding invitations today, and only a few people truly understand who the bride and groom are."

"Understood, Supreme Lady." The waitress squeaked, then scurried off.

Matilda sighed. "I have done so much to restrain my aura, and still, my identity terrifies people. Such a shame. But after the show, I can guarantee that the celebrity portion of our guest plan will be taken care of."

"Is there a particular reason that we need to be famous?" Dana asked as Karl adjusted her seat for her, then joined her at the table.

"Of course. You'll be... no wait, I can't tell you that part yet. It would ruin the surprise. But yes, it's important that you be considered famous in Sholaha before you get bored with being here."

Azov sighed. "What she's trying to say is that she intends to meddle in your future, for better or worse. For your sakes, I hope that it ends up for the better, but there are no guarantees with Chaos."

Karl gave the long-suffering Immortal a pat on the shoulder. "Don't worry too much about it. I've gotten fairly used to chaotic influences on my life."

Azov shook his head. If Karl thought that the Chaos Badger was a chaotic influence, he had only begun to grasp the true nature of the Chaos Dragon. But at least he was an Avatar of the World Dragon.

The [Planeswalker] ability would let him come home if he accidentally ended up in an adjacent reality. It might take him time to get enough skill points to acquire the skill, but he would be able to return one day.