

Beast Master 1251

Chapter 1251: Extensive Testing Needed

Suggesting to the assembled Guild Masters that any of the members who had done the improved Mythic dungeon once might be able to activate it again turned out to be a brilliant move.

Especially as the very next morning started out with all twenty Guild Masters assembled at the entrance to the Alliance compound again, ready to form groups to head into the Dungeon for extensive testing.

Paul nodded politely to Karl and Dana. "I hope that you don't mind breaking up the dynamic duo. We need all eight of you to make enough groups with a chance to activate the effect."

"Alright. Make sure that they're the group leader. That might be important, as the system mentioned it before we chose the difficulty last time." Karl agreed.

Dana shrugged. She would be fine going on her own, with a good group. She might not be compatible with the Spectral Knights, but she had a solid force of Golems on her own.

The Soul Bond was a wonderful thing, and Dana knew that her raw power level was exactly the same as Karl's, and they just had different specialties. If she wanted to lead a group, there shouldn't be any more problem with her power level than with his.

Besides, everyone here was a Guild Leader, and in Zilaz, that meant something.

Not always that you were the best Raid partner, though. Just that you were competent as a duellist.

Karl motioned for everyone to come inside, away from the increasing gossip. This was not the first time that so many Guild Masters had gathered at the Nara Group Alliance recently, and while not everyone had heard the gossip about the dungeons, the power of the visitors was suspicious.

"Now, who wants to go with whom? Did you already make groups before you came over?" Karl asked.

Paul nodded. "We did. Just so that we didn't have to worry about not having the right combinations among the Guild Leaders. If we can actually choose the difficulty, and reliably get Epic Grade rewards, then we can do it with a standard group, and just stay under the timer.

We've made sure every group has Golems and at least one area damage specialist.

That was what everyone agreed would be needed for a standard group."

Paul handed Karl a list of names, and Karl laughed as he saw the descriptions.

"It looks like I have a fan base." He joked.

His group was four blue dragons. One War Cleric, and three Shamans.

The Dragonkin Warrior shrugged. "That's just how it worked out in the end. The group should be solid, as they're all competent damage dealers, and the War Cleric causes an area healing effect on hit."

Tian perked his ears at that news. That sounded like a fun skill. He wouldn't mind learning it. He could cast it on Sister Rae, and they would all get healed every time that she stabbed something.

It was a win-win proposition.

[I think that my brothers are getting more and more lazy by the day. Hawk likes to soar around and slack, Thor is addicted to hot springs, and now they've taught Tian to offload his healing onto the hard work of his sisters.] Remi complained.

Thor laughed at the offended Naga.

[It's not that I'm lazy, the hot water is just too good. Don't pretend like you weren't there until ten minutes ago.] He joked.

Thor had a point. The new hot springs that Karl had put in the Tiny World were good. Whenever she had to wait on a potion to be ready, she would go soak in the heat and scrub her scales.

It wasn't like it was busy. The only ones who used the hot springs on the mountain were Thor and Tessa, and they didn't mind if she used one of the other ponds.

The four blue dragons assigned to Karl's group came over, eager to get things started.

"The War Cleric can tank, and the rest of us will do our best to deal damage. Blue Dragons are Lightning Element, so our affinity for offensive magic is strong. Especially with a Shaman Class." One of the dragons explained.

"Alright, that works for me. I will have my Epic Golems work with him in the front lines against the enraged apes, and then the rest of them can deal with the extras that come from the sides.

That's a new feature, so don't just go by what you remember from the last time that you were inside." Karl reminded them.

"Got it. Now, let's go see what the dungeon has for us. Do you think that we can still do a high difficulty rating with this group? I heard that the secret to success was all the Golems."

Karl patted him on the shoulder. "Fear not. We might not have the Dana Mage this time, but we've got a Mythic Ranked Rae today, and she's got some constructs of her own. Plus, she's an absolute powerhouse in combat."

"Oh, one of your beasts advanced? Which one is Rae?" The War Cleric asked.

"The Blood Destruction Demonic Spider. Being favoured by the Spider Goddess, she's got incredible damage output, we will be alright." Karl explained.

The dragons were practically vibrating with energy at the chance to try something new, so Karl skipped the intermediate steps and simply opened a portal near the entrance to the dungeon, which unfortunately put them right in the middle of the gathered reporters and spectators.

"Is it true that you did find a way to improve the loot in this dungeon? Is it repeatable? How much did it improve? Any comments on your secrets, Sir? Is it true that they call you the Monster Man because of your bedroom skills?" The reporters shouted, all at once.

One of those questions was not like the others.

"Yes, yes, it improved by half a Rank, no comment on our secrets, and maybe." Karl replied, then took one long step toward the dungeon, while the dragons all laughed.

"His wife is a Divine Fox." One of the dragons quietly informed the reporters.

That started a whole new round of gossip because everyone in the media circle knew who the dragon was talking about. There weren't a lot of Divine Fox girls around.

Dana had been in the Winter Festival's Fashion show recently, at Overlord Rank. But she had returned under a month later at Mythic Rank. So, she was married to Karl, who was also Mythic.

Which meant, it was a soul bond. Or something similarly permanent.

There was simply no other plausible way to explain how she had advanced by two Ranks in under a month.

Chapter 1252: This Time With Dragons

Karl stopped when he entered the Dungeon and waited for everyone to come out.

Even Thor had joined them today, a rare change as of late, as he was quite enjoying his peaceful alone time with Tessa.

Soon, Karl would have to talk to the Cleric and the Behemoth about matters of marriage, or where their relationship was going. He might not be the most responsible leader in the world, but he wasn't going to end up with a deadbeat father among his partners.

Thor snorted in amusement at the thought.

There was no way that he would abandon his hatchlings.

The dragons entered just before Rae summoned her Spectral Knights and Golems. From what Karl could see, the advancement to Mythic Rank hadn't caused any major changes in her skills or constitution, but with her improved power level, it should still be a huge jump in her damage output.

"What difficulty do you want?" The War Cleric asked.

Rae gave him a look that made his blood run cold. Spiders might not have expressions in the traditional sense, but he was quite certain that she intended for there to be carnage.

Karl chuckled as Cara came out to stand on Rae's head in solidarity.

"Well, that's two votes for all the difficulty. Did you all eat a big breakfast? If we do that, then the last boss will be Immortal. But so will the best loot."

The four blue dragons shared excited looks then nodded. "If you think that we can do it, then we will go with your plan."

[DUNGEON LEVEL 6 ENGAGE!] Cara cheered.

{Invalid Team Member} The System informed her.

Cara glared at the message. It worked when she was messing with Deve. Why couldn't she upgrade the maximum difficulty now?

Karl laughed and scratched her head.

"Level five is fine." He began, but Rae glared at him.

No way was she missing out twice.

"Fine, Dungeon, maximum difficulty." Karl agreed.

{Safety Limits Overridden At User Request. Difficulty Level Six chosen.}

The dragons stared at Karl in concern.

They had said difficult, but what sort of option did you have to pick to get a safety warning in a Dungeon? They all came with a risk of death.

Rae cheered as she charged forward, leading the Golems into combat, and leaving only the Bodyguards with Karl and the dragons.

Then, she began to test her new abilities, while Karl motioned for the dragons to wait.

"Give her ten seconds, it's her first fight since her advancement. Give her the chance to see how her power is before we get involved." He explained.

Rae pulled everything to the first enraged group, and then engaged [Blood Destruction]. The Totem Ranked apes exploded nearly instantly, then stood back up again as [Blood Golems] thanks to Rae's [Queen of the Damned] ability.

They were cannon fodder against the enraged Mythic Rank apes, but she sent them forward to pick a fight with the other Totem Ranked apes.

Then, Karl and the others charged into combat, hurling ranged skills at the apes, while the War Cleric activated an upgraded version of [Consecrated Ground] around himself, exploiting the vulnerability to Holy Damage.

That caused a steady stream of healing to flow to the group, and Tian giggled happily as he studied the effect, attempting to learn how to replicate it.

It was just as good as he had hoped. But he hadn't thought of [Consecrated Ground]. He could use that skill too, and it would share the healing to the whole group without shamelessly piggybacking off his sisters.

When the next batch of Totem Ranked apes were becoming severely injured, Rae [Shadow Stepped] away from combat and used [Blood Destruction] again to kill everything, and double the number of Blood Golems she had.

"That skill is broken." The War Cleric laughed as he realized what Rae's plan for the Dungeon was.

She now had fifty Blood Golems, and five of them were Mythic Ranked.

Then, the team cut down the first group, and charged into the second, while the Blood Golems used the Epic Golems as blockers to bypass them again, going for the last trash mobs between them and the boss.

"The difficulty rate is going up way too fast. How long do we even have to complete the dungeon?" The War Cleric asked, confusion in his glowing blue eyes.

Karl checked his interface.

"We've got twelve minutes left of fifteen."

As Karl recalled, it had taken them longer than that the first time. The final boss was a nightmare to defeat. But the dungeon hadn't mentioned a fail timer this time, so perhaps simply completing it got the reward and doing it in time got you a bonus?

That would be great for Rae's Mythic Debut.

With Rae in combat, [Predation] was quickly adapting to give steadily increasing bonus damage along with [Rampage].

The extra damage from so many attacks was stacking to an incredible degree, and without all of Dana's Golems here it was even more noticeable.

Even Thor's attacks on the Mythic Apes were doing noticeable damage already.

The only issue was that it only lasted a minute, so when they got to the boss, most of the stacks would fall off.

[I'm going to send everything to charge the boss as soon as I clear those Totems.] Rae informed Karl.

"Drive the mobs backward! We're taking them to the Boss platform, and we will finish them as we start the boss fight." Karl relayed.

The Haint mentally nudged Karl as it fought. A merger would boost its damage output. It might look like a Treant, but it was actually a living weapon, and most of its combat ability came when it was wielded.

"I will join." The War Cleric agreed.

"You stay here. I will tank the boss in Dragon form. Watch and you'll see the trick to keeping it from hurling stone attacks at the group on top of the stone spike waves." Karl explained.

With the Haint Claw merged, Karl activated [Avatar] at Immortal Rank using the Amulet of Destruction.

A flap of his wings was enough to fly over the fights and onto the boss platform to beat Rae's Blood Golems to the fight. Three minutes in, and they were already at the first boss. Rae's tactics really were effective.

Chapter 1253: The Elves Approve

Karl swiped at the boss, and rivers of blood poured down the Ape's chest as it turned to face Karl, and away from the others.

It was the standard tactic for fighting bosses with ranged attacks, and was normally very effective, but this one still had its area stone spikes. That was the difficult part to deal with, but having the boss in the corner of the available space gave the team as much time as possible to react.

Then, the Blood Golems arrived, and Karl realized that he had greatly underestimated the effective damage of Rae's ruthlessness.

They didn't raise their fists to attack the boss, they simply leapt onto its back and self-destructed, dealing a portion of their life as damage to the boss.

Wave after wave of undead crashed into the boss, chunking away at its health until they were all gone, and the Golems could join the fight, led by the laughing form of the Dark Elven Kings.

{Lord Karl, you are a wonderful friend. Look at this most magnificent daughter of the Spider Goddess.} They joked as they danced in and out of combat, aiming for the shoulder and elbow tendons of the boss.

Karl had forgotten that both Rae and the Dark Elves served the Spider Goddess.

[Skill Master Activation]

[Skill: Chaos Beast Constitution] has advanced.

[Chaos Beast Constitution] ⇒ [Chaos Dragon Constitution]

Karl felt power surge through his body as the skill adapted, then felt the ground tremble beneath him as his next strike caused an explosive release of Chaos Element energy on contact.

The power output of his skills began to resonate with the power matrix that Karl had built in his mind, patterned after Matilda's dragon form.

Before Karl could analyze the changes to his power level, chaotic energy was flowing through the Dungeon, and Cara was cheering as her body began to crackle with black and white lightning sparks.

They weren't actual lightning, Karl realized. Just unstable chaotic energy.

The advancement of the shared constitution skill had forced Cara to evolve, and now she was reaching the Mythic Rank, simply because her new form was incompatible with anything as weak as a Totem Ranked beast.

[How is that even fair?] Hawk complained.

This was the second time in a row that she had simply cheated to advance.

Someone needed to have a serious talk with his sister about the proper way to do things. Why wasn't he first to advance? He was the oldest brother.

Plus, he had fire. FIRE. What could be better than that?

Tian laughed at Hawk's complaints. The bird was very certain that it was the element that determined advancement, but Tian knew that wasn't it. Most of the difference between Totem and Mythic was the body's compatibility with the increased energy quality.

And while Hawk had an excellent understanding of fire, and the Fundamental Rule of Fire, his body had gone through many evolutions to get to where he was, and it would likely take another triggered evolution to let him reach Mythic Rank.

He was already the strongest Windspeed Hawk in the world, and possibly ever. He had come so far from the Common Rank egg he had been, when he had only hoped to make it to reach Ascended Rank so that he wouldn't be weaker than the instructor who made him work, but didn't bring snacks.

Hawk squawked happily. He had long since surpassed the evil woman. Now, he just needed to find a way to advance again so that he could stay ahead of his water loving sister.

Karl tuned out their nonsense as the boss sent out another wave of stone spikes, forcing everyone to dodge. Its health was falling fast, and they still had nine minutes left on the timer.

That should be plenty, if they could find a way to take down the final boss in good time. That Immortal Rank advancement was going to be the worst part of it.

The first boss fell, and the team was released from the boss platform, allowing Rae to rush off and make more Blood Golems.

"Same routine as last time, let her build up her Blood Golems, and we can use them to bomb the final boss. It's going to be Immortal Rank, and even with the stacked skills that I have increasing our damage, it's a nasty fight." Karl explained.

The first wave of apes exploded, and the group charged forward to join Rae's team.

With the practice from the first half, everyone knew to focus on the enraged mobs while the Totems charged forward. However, the durability of the mobs had greatly increased already, and Rae was actually losing Blood Golems, even with Thor mostly focused on keeping [Eternal Lightning] active over the group.

It wasn't easy with so many people, and he was still Totem Ranked.

However, the Karl was busy attacking, and didn't have time to keep track of every golem that was losing its barrier.

Karl was also back in cat demon form so that he could fight without blocking the whole path, and that limited his line of sight much more than Thor's as he was still in Behemoth form, though minimized a little so that he didn't run into the same issue.

The loss of the Blood Golems would reduce their boss damage, but it was also slowing down their advance, as the fight was dragging on and clogging up the pathway.

The area damage was quickly clearing them, and Rae was using Blood Destruction to regain as many Golems as she could, but by her [Predation] math, these enemies were Immortal Rank in everything but the defensive damage reduction.

They were far beyond what anyone would call Mythic Rank.

So, half-step Immortal?

Unascended Immortal?

Slightly more tasty Mythic?

The Common language needed a better word for what these things were.

Finally, the boss's Enrage Timer ended as the last few apes fell, and he turned jet black as he reached the Immortal Rank.

"Well gentlemen. Here is the fun part. Give it everything that you've got. If it does holy damage, even better. They're weak to it." Karl reminded the blue dragons.

Chapter 1254: As Expected

The three Shamans gave a matching war cry as they followed the War Cleric up onto the platform, then were nearly thrown back off when the boss stomped on the ground, and suddenly duplicated.

{3 Minutes Remaining on Timer} Bonus Difficulty activated.

Everyone stared at the floating words of the System Message, then at the second Immortal Demonic Ape.

"Oh, this is some bullshit." The War Cleric sighed.

Cara landed beside him and patted him on the leg, as if consoling him after a loss, but with a toothy grin on her face and making her happy chainsaw purring noise.

The dragon gave the badger a curious look. “The chaos badger has a good point. It is new knowledge, even if it’s knowledge that we would rather not have gotten firsthand.

We now know what happens when you reach the final boss under the time limit on level six difficulty.”

“Alright, we will split up. I will tank one, the Epic Golems will tank the other. Everyone, focus damage on the one that the Golems are holding, and then come for mine when it’s down.” Karl instructed.

That was just what Rae wanted. A good boss to fight, and no Karl to mess up her data collection. He was the only other one that would hit as hard as she did, and having his strikes in there made it impossible to tell just how much she was doing.

Now, if there was some sort of chart, listing damage per hit, that would be perfect, but it didn’t appear that the System was going to give them that sort of detailed analytics data.

Was that because the Gods didn’t like math? She wouldn’t blame them.

The only things that math was good for was counting bodies and calculating blood volumes. Anything more than that was just unnecessary.

Hawk disagreed. He was learning math lately so that he could make better roasted meat. The measurements were precise, and needed to be adjusted to the amount of meat that you were roasting.

It was all very mathematical.

Tian laughed as he placed his [Consecrated Ground] spell, and then retreated to a comfortable spot on Thor’s back, next to Cara.

There was plenty of room for them both, and the boss was so busy with the Golems that it wasn't even facing their direction. If he had to retreat, he could rely on his sister to fly them both away, but Thor's barrier was pretty good. It could take at least one hit, even from the boss.

Thor wasn't so sure about that, as this boss had massive physical strength and was two ranks stronger than him. But his brother's encouragement helped him focus on working with the others.

[Happy, Happy Happy... Stabby, Stabby Spider] Rae sang as she got to work on the boss, punching the ape full of holes as Predation optimized her damage output.

There was just one factor that she had forgotten to account for.

A ten-metre tall ape held a lot of blood, and the floor was getting slippery for everyone who didn't have spiked legs.

That wasn't even a factor that the others had considered a possibility, but the enhancement to her bleeding effects, as well as [Blood Destruction] which was constantly trying to make the ape explode, had combined to turn the Immortal Rank ape into a veritable fountain.

Hawk considered burning it off to restore their footing, but Rae was using a skill to absorb it off the ground to improve her strength, so he just left it alone until one of the shamans actually tripped while moving out of the way of a giant fist.

Thor had to intervene to avoid having the fallen shaman smashed to a pulp, and the fists easily beat their way through his barrier before the pair of Elven Kings could draw the beast's attention back.

Then, Hawk finally intervened and burned the floor clean again.

Sister Rae could live with a bit less blood to absorb.

While they were fighting against time to kill the boss before it did anything unexpected, Karl was focused on simply trying to damage the boss faster than it could heal.

He had the Haint Claw merged with him, and the Sword of Champions active under his Draconic transformation. But the beast's health had hardly moved.

The first boss was down to a quarter life, but the one that he was fighting was still close to ninety percent health, and Karl had already put out a [Mana Pylon] so that he could dump extra mana into [Void Blast] attacks layered over [Holy Blasts] in an attempt to get ahead of the healing factor.

He really needed some more powerful attack skills.

Cara laughed at his annoyance. [Now you understand my pain. Think of it this way: If you were Immortal, you would have the boss dead by now, because of the difference in damage reduction. But Predation also reduces their damage reduction, so both you and Rae are already doing three times what anyone else is to the bosses.]

The badger made a good argument. Predation really was an overpowered skill. Without it, he wouldn't even be damaging the boss faster than it healed.

But that reminded Karl that the badger was slacking.

She was Mythic, as of halfway through the Dungeon when his constitution had advanced. And, that meant that she was also one of their primary damage dealers, not just a Totem Ranked spectator like Tian, who was sitting beside her on Thor's back.

Karl considered changing tactics, and using the amulet to make the Epic Golems Immortal Rank so that they would bypass the damage reduction like any other spell. But that would mean that he would drop back down to Mythic Rank, and take an increased amount of damage for Tian to heal.

It was a dilemma, but the timer was gone, so they weren't against the clock for the final fight.

He would save that tactic for next time.

When he didn't have to share the loot and crafting materials with members from other Guild Alliances.

Remi wholeheartedly agreed with that logic. She needed all the Immortal Ranked materials she could get, especially if it gave plants as crafting materials.

Chapter 1255: There Are Other Settings

While Karl and his team fought their way through the level six difficulty dungeon, Dana had gotten a much more conservative group, and they had chosen to do level two.

The logic was that it was still harder than usual, and should give much better loot, though not as good as the highest option. But it might also be significantly easier to complete than the higher difficulties. If it was, then the risk to reward might work out exceptionally well for them.

So far, nobody in the previous groups had gotten an outstanding item, at least not in relation to the other rewards. So, the question was whether this route would give them a chance at an outstanding Mythic Rank item, or whether it would just scale in volume, and give them three or four Epic Grade Mythic Rank items spread between the group.

There was only one way to tell, and they were reasonably sure that none of the other groups who had gone today would take that route.

They would do the hardest difficulty that they could.

The logic was solid, as every other group really was doing either difficulty three or five, except Karl's who had gone for level six again.

Dana had a suspicion that he had chosen that path, as she had just felt the surge of power as he had received a new constitution skill, and the Soul Bond had equalized their power level again.

She did hope that it wasn't dragging him down, being tied to her when he was advancing at such an insane rate. But the fact that she had just gotten a noticeable bump in her mana level and spell damage in the middle of a dungeon said that the limitation shouldn't be too extreme.

Or if it was, it might be for the best. Twice what she had gotten in one bonus might be too much for anyone to handle.

What sort of skill had he gotten anyhow? Being in a separate dungeon, she was cut off from the mind link to the rest of the team, like their thoughts were muffled through a closed door.

Her Golems were tanking for the group, and their assigned tank had taken on a full damage dealing role, but there was no lack of bodies, even without all the extras that Karl and Rae could summon.

At difficulty two, they only got ten Totem Rank extra apes, and two more Myths.

That was a small enough number that they could pull them to the main group and fight them all at once with area effects.

As far as efficiency, it was definitely the way to go.

They still had forty-five minutes on the timer, but with the reduced number of additional apes, they shouldn't have any trouble making it in time.

Dana briefly wondered how Karl's group was doing as her team started the first boss. They had started well before her team did, and they might be nearly done by now, given Rae's Mythic advancement and damage output.

There wasn't anyone in Dana's team that could kill as efficiently as Rae. Perhaps not even Dana herself.

Karl sensed Dana's confusion for a moment just before the team switched to the second boss, but didn't have a chance to message her when he was locked in combat with the Immortal Rank ape. The death of the first boss had reactivated the enrage effect, and it was getting stronger by the minute.

"Definite mistake in tactics. They both need to die at the same time." The War Cleric noted.

Karl laughed. "Aren't you glad that I'm the one tanking this time?"

“I am glad that it’s anyone but me. That thing hit like a meteor even before it was enraged.” The War Cleric quipped as he joined the fight.

Fortunately, enrage only really increased healing and damage, not damage reduction, and now that everyone was on one boss, the combination of long duration effects was really starting to stack up.

“Just hold on a bit longer, we’ve got this.” One of the shamans assured Karl as a particularly solid blow sent him sliding dozens of metres backward, dragging his claws through the loose ground.

Karl charged forward again as the two Dark Elven Kings moved to prevent the boss from squishing anyone with a massive fist.

And, it would squish them.

With the extra damage from the enrage effect, the Eternal Lightning barrier might as well be glass, hardly slowing the strikes at all.

The War Cleric would surely be able to resurrect a fallen group member, but nobody really wanted to have a near-death experience in a dungeon. No matter how good the loot was.

Minute by minute, the boss weakened, until it finally fell, and the lighting in the dungeon brightened, marking the completion of the event.

{Bonus Rewards Calculating}

The System Message made everyone sigh in relief, and Karl stretched sore muscles as he shifted back into his usual form.

“Well, I’m not sure that I would recommend that version of the dungeon. However... The loot will make all the difference in whether it is worth doing.” He declared.

The four blue dragons nodded in unison, and took out their notepads, ready to record everything that had happened after they entered.

It took the System some time to pick rewards, presumably because it was randomizing them based on some sort of table based on the dungeon.

[How close is everyone else to the bottleneck? Fighting in tough dungeons like this should be a good boost for your skills.] Karl asked.

[Getting close.] Remi replied.

[Almost there. Something about the energy change is confusing me.] Hawk added.

Thor mentally shrugged. [I've got a ways to go, but I'm not stuck yet, I'm still growing.]

That was a good sign. He had to rely on a bit of luck to get past the bottleneck last time, and it might take another evolution to get him to Mythic.

But that was somewhat expected. Not every beast grew at the same rate, and even with Karl's assistance, it wasn't reasonable to expect them to.

[I am almost to the bottleneck. But my body is small, and it's hard to get enough good energy in.] Tian complained.

It took a lot of energy to challenge a bottleneck, and in his juvenile state, he hadn't fully developed his species' innate capacities to the needed extent.

Opal flashed happy colours at Karl, which he took as meaning that she too was near the bottleneck. Her energy felt very close to the peak of Totem Rank, but only the butterfly would know if she was actually at the bottleneck.

{Rewards Calculated}

Chapter 1256: Risk Vs Reward

{Congratulations on your successful completion} The system informed the group with glowing golden letters in the air above the bosses' bodies.

The dragons smiled as new items appeared in their inventories, and Karl chuckled as he saw what it had given him.

[Greater Consecrated Ground] Epic Grade Holy Defensive ability. Reduces damage taken by 50%. Increases all damage done by Holy attacks by 50%. Deals constant holy damage to targets in range.

He already had the base version of the spell, and Tessa had a version of it that had been upgraded by Skill Master. But even the original had been Epic Grade, so Karl wondered if the range might be significantly larger on this version, or if it was just a mediocre upgrade.

But it wasn't the only reward that he had gotten. There were a number of Rare Grade Immortal Rank armour pieces, and some mythic rank crafting materials.

"Did you get an Epic Immortal item?" The War Cleric asked.

Karl shook his head. "I got an Epic Grade Holy Skill instead. Greater Consecrated Ground."

The dragon sighed in disappointment. "Don't tell me that you've already used it."

"Do you have Inscriptionist as your trade skill?" Karl replied.

The War Cleric nodded and Karl patted him on the shoulder as he used the Skill Book and activated [Follow Me, Little One].

The dragon's eyes went wide, and he staggered back a step, pointing at Karl.

"What did you do? I know the skill! You taught me a skill that you know?" He stammered.

"You see, I am a Beast Master Champion, and the gods are relatively loose with their definition of what is a beast. Dragons count, Guild Members all count, even most of the beastkin are valid targets. In fact, the limiting factor appears to be that you need to be compatible with the skill." Karl agreed.

The War Cleric activated the skill, and a circle of holy light extended out from him into the trees surrounding the boss fight area.

That was significantly larger than the original, for sure.

The damage reduction and extra holy damage were better as well, but that extra range would be incredible in a large-scale battle.

"I got some Rare Grade Immortal armour as well, but that's not the big ticket item." Karl added.

Then the System popped up another notification.

{Damage Calculated. Bonus Rewards Granted.}

These didn't appear in their inventory. Instead, they were granted a loot chest. It appeared at their feet, a simple silver chest at Karl's and a bronze one at everyone else's.

"Well, it looks like we didn't really impress the dungeon. None of us earned a gold prize." One of the Shamans laughed.

Karl shrugged. "Free prizes are never a bad thing."

He carefully picked up the silver box, and lifted the lid to see what was inside.

The content was a simple crystal flask, a potion of some sort.

[Potion of Understanding] Immortal Rank. Permanently improves the imbiber's affinity to a Fundamental Rule they are compatible with on use.

Remi stared at the potion in envy. It was beyond her ability to analyze with her Alchemy skills, even if she had a sample to work with.

She did wish that she could learn the secrets of it because it would not only help the Myths on their way to Immortality, it would also help the Totems with a latent affinity of a Fundamental Rule but no understanding of it to advance toward Myth status.

Even her potion that could help people advance to Overlord status wasn't worth nearly as much as that one.

The other boxes all contained an Immortal Rank Epic item, which immediately drew the attention of the dragons back to the potion that Karl was holding.

The lure of new knowledge, of what the System could deem to be worth more than an Immortal Rank Epic item, was irresistible. None of them had any ability to analyze the contents of the potion, though the System was happy to tell them what the effect should be.

So, the real data collection would be when Karl drank it.

"That's probably not something you should take out of the Dungeon." The War Cleric noted.

The other three nodded in agreement. Super rare consumables were best used immediately so that you didn't bring envy or robbery attempts down on your Guild Alliance.

Being able to remove that risk, while still providing the knowledge to the Blue Dragons, was the epitome of perfection in this situation. At least in their minds because the followers of the God of Knowledge despised the fact that most of these situations ended with them never finding out.

Karl nodded and tipped the potion into his mouth.

{Fundamental Rule Comprehension} Mana Manipulation ⇒ 50%

But the power didn't stop with Karl.

It flowed through his mind, and through the beast spaces in it, and then echoed back to him as the beasts improved.

{Fundamental Rule Comprehension} Fire ⇒ 20%

{Fundamental Rule Comprehension} Divinity ⇒ 11%

{Fundamental Rule Comprehension} Order ⇒ 1%

That last one made Cara laugh. The potion was completely incompatible with her, anathema to the whole concept of Chaos. But that rejection had helped her understand Chaos a bit better, even as it helped Karl understand a bit about order.

It also helped Karl realize that he really should have checked his compatibility rates before taking the potion, so he would have exact numbers.

That was alright, he would make some up for the dragons to keep them happy.

"The effects definitely feel like knowledge from our God. They have the unique aura of the blue dragon to them." One of the Shamans noted.

The others nodded in agreement and added notes.

Karl had been too busy trying to sort out the new understanding that was still scrambling his brain, looking for a proper place to be stored.

The echo from the beasts had been an unexpected bonus, and much of the knowledge overlapped with what the potion had initially granted to Karl. So, it was fading more slowly than usual, but none of them knew that.

They just assumed this was how the potion usually worked.

Chapter 1257: Know The Rules

Karl shook the lingering tingle of a powerful potion from his muscles, then prepared to explain the effect to the dragons.

“The potion gave me an extra twenty percent understanding to the Fundamental Rule of Mana Manipulation. But it also spread through my beast spaces, and gave me ten percent better understanding of the Fire and Divinity Rules, which I already had compatibility with.” He informed them.

That should keep the dragons happy.

“So, it also worked on your bonded partners? Then I wonder if it worked on your Dana Mage?” The War Cleric asked.

Rae transformed into a humanoid and began to laugh. “We’ve infected them all. Soon, the entire world will know that she’s your Dana Mage.”

The dragon frowned. That wasn’t how he had intended to phrase his response. In fact, he had never heard the Divine Fox girl described that way before. Was it possible that the Beast Master’s mental link to all things beast was subconsciously influencing the dragons around him?

That definitely needed study.

Especially when he had hundreds of dragon eggs in his separate space.

They had heard about it from the Red Dragons, who had gotten word from one of their Orphanage workers during the wedding. If his thoughts and values were influencing the dragons around him, what would happen if vulnerable minded young dragons were exposed to him?

It didn't appear to harm the dragonkin clerics, or the Forest Dragon known as Button.

But that might be because the tiny dragon was a single-minded force of nature, and simply never considered anyone else when she made decisions.

So much to learn, and not enough researchers.

Which seemed rather ironic, given that there were already twenty of them at the Darklight Host Guild House in Drodh, working on ways to solve the imbalance between the base Warrior Class and other classes.

"You all look distracted. Did I not explain well?" Karl asked.

The dragons shook their heads in unison. "No, you described it well, but it led us down another train of thought, and we got caught up for a moment. We believe that we need to talk to Dana so that we can find out if it also affected her, and then we will ask our kin to gather some accessory details about how your affinity for beasts might be affecting the beasts who are not bonded with you."

Karl nodded. "I can see how that would happen. Every time something new and unexpected happens, there is a lot of other knowledge that needs to be gathered."

The dragons sighed in relief. They hadn't been sure that he would truly understand their concerns about the complete set of knowledge that was necessary.

But if he was going to cooperate with the researchers, that would make everything easy.

They would message Sapphire now and have her put it on the list.

Karl was about to continue speaking, but the War Cleric held up his hand for him to wait.

“We have the full notes on the dungeon, on the difficulty selection, the warning, the extra boss, the rewards, the potion, the note is sent to Sapphire to study the side effects of Karl and his unique class, we have the notes on the relative increase in reward.

Alright, we can leave now.” He explained.

Ah, he wanted to double-check that they hadn’t forgotten anything, before it was no longer fresh in their minds.

Karl led the way out, and then laughed as the reporters counted on their fingers, only to come up with too many people to be in the instance. Rae, Remi and Cara were all still out of their spaces, which brought the count to eight, or seven for most of them, as they didn’t count Cara as a group member, but a bonded partner.

Slowly, they realized that Remi and Rae must be Karl’s bonded beasts, with Rae transformed into humanoid form.

Rae sighed as she realized she missed the opportunity to come out as a spider and scare the sense out of the reporters for a photo opportunity.

She would have to remember next time.

“How was it? Is the increased difficulty really repeatable?” A reporter shouted from behind the group of Myths that was guarding the area.

Karl waved at her, calling the Succubus over.

“The increased difficulty is repeatable, at least by my group. I don’t know how the others have done. But you need a specialized group to make the most of it.” He informed her, then returned his attention to the other Myths.

“We did the same setting as the first time, and the rewards were similar.” Karl offered, enough to let them know what had happened, without giving away anything too detailed while there were so many gossiping voices around.

“You’re the first ones out, but you also entered first. You made excellent time.” The Warrior at the gate informed them.

“None of the others are out yet?” Karl confirmed.

The Warrior shook his head.

The blue dragons smiled. That meant they could wait here for everyone else and ensure that they had a representative from every group to give them details firsthand.

Perfect timing.

The next group out was the one that Dana was leading, which was a bit of a surprise.

They hadn’t been the second to enter, they had been a much later group. Though, they only entered five minutes apart, just enough to be sure that the groups were not interfering with each other.

Or interrupting media photo sessions.

“We did a lower, but still improved, difficulty version. It went as smoothly as hoped. The rewards were good, I will help you with a report back at the Guild House.” Dana informed the curious dragons before they could ask.

Being linked to the beasts as a huge advantage in this situation. She had known what was coming for her as soon as they finished the dungeon and the restriction on outside mental connections faded.

Curious blue dragons were mostly harmless, and completely harmless when you weren't trying to hold back knowledge from them. Dana's mind equated them with a more responsible version of Lotus, which made Rae laugh.

But Cara thought that she might be on to something.

Chapter 1258: Everyone's Out

The rest of the groups came out every few minutes, as they had entered evenly spaced and all picked the same difficulty. That made for quite the spectacle to spread gossip about, and by the time that they were all ready to return to the Nara Group's Alliance House for a debriefing on the test, a huge crowd had formed.

It seemed unbelievable that something like increasing the difficulty in a Mythic Dungeon could actually be possible, but there was no reason that so many people from multiple different Guild Alliances would be gathered here at this mediocre dungeon if it wasn't at least partially true.

If they were doing some sort of wager, surely they would have chosen a dungeon with at least a decent chance of giving a suitable reward to compare.

But this one, it rarely gave more than a single Mythic item at all, and most of them weren't even Epic Grade.

Now, for the Nara Group, that was still plenty. Totem Ranked drops kept the bills paid, even with infrequent trips.

But when Alliances challenged each other to contests, they tended to go all out.

It wasn't like they would lose out by paying to enter someone else's dungeon for the day.

However, none of the reporters had a chance to ask any more questions before another portal opened, and a group of Sholaha City Guards, all Mythic Rank, walked out and made a walkway for the King and the Immortal Regent to exit.

Karl stepped forward with a smile on his face, while everyone else looked incredibly nervous.

"Immortal Regent, Highness. It's a pleasure to see you today. Would you like to accompany us to the Alliance house for afternoon tea? We have been training additional staff with the Mystic Cooking skill to ensure that the hospitality is up to your standards." He greeted them.

Azov sighed and rolled his eyes, while the King looked moderately confused.

"You aren't satisfied with simply stirring the spot, are you? You have to lick the spoon as well." The Immortal Regent replied.

"In this particular case, yes. But in matters of Mystic Cooking, always." Karl agreed.

Cara waved at the annoyed Immortal, who glared down at her and placed a hand on her head to prevent her from getting close enough to check his pockets.

Cara licked his hand, and the Immortal chuckled, then ruffled the fur on her head.

"I should have seen that one coming. But first, let's get the gossip under control. Is it possible to repeat the increased difficulty settings for the dungeon?" Azov asked directly.

Karl nodded. "Indeed. All you need is someone who has successfully completed an increased difficulty clearance of the dungeon. If they're leading the group, they can choose to increase the difficulty up to the setting that they have completed.

And, as it's going to be your next question anyhow, only the final boss becomes an Immortal on the highest difficulty setting."

Azov shrugged. "That's better than nothing. Immortal Rank gear is certainly rare enough to make the difficulty worth it."

The others frowned at Karl. Announcing all that in public was going to cause chaos for every member who had completed a dungeon today.

Then, the expressions shifted as they realized what Karl was doing. They were only a few months into the year, and his Guild Alliance controlled the Dungeon. They were going to become obscenely wealthy from the influx of new visitors to their dungeon.

Assuming that anyone was willing to take guest runs through.

After a moment, the King smiled. "And what difficulty setting might be the most efficient for an average group?"

Karl looked at the battered and exhausted members all around, then at Dana's group, who were all still in good shape.

"I would say option two of five. That one is hard enough to give good rewards, but not so difficult that an average group couldn't complete it without specialized members.

Golem Mages make everything better, or perhaps a Necromancer or Warlock who can summon." Karl decided.

That startled more than a few of the reporters. Nobody ever actually thought to mention the more obscure classes when they were thinking of group composition.

"Shamans with area damage are a huge help as well." Dana added.

That was more mainstream, and assured many of the groups that they might be able to do the run with the members they had.

Then Dana dropped a bombshell on the crowd.

"We will be donating three advanced summoning type spell books to the Blue Dragon Libraries for copying and distribution by the end of the week."

She knew perfectly well that very few would actually be able to use all of them, but most mages should be able to at least use the Greater Golem spell, which would double their options for summoned protectors.

Though, if she gave the dragons the [Golem Duplication] book as well, they would make countless new friends.

For a moment, Dana wondered where that thought came from, then realized that it was actually Thor's influence, as the Cerro was intently focused on how to turn this entire crowd into new friends.

The King looked shocked, but Azov just sighed. "You are right, we should finish this at the Alliance house before all hell breaks loose. I assure the rest of you that I will hold the Darklight Host to their word, and ensure that they do provide the promised spells to the blue dragons in a timely manner."

Dana smirked, and Karl realized that there was a blue dragon mage standing right next to her, having snuck over when she started talking about new spells.

The unfortunate fellow didn't realize that he had just volunteered himself to be the one to deliver the spells to the Library for duplication.

As soon as she could drag him to Karl, that was.

The guards who had come with the two national leaders shifted to make a path toward the Alliance house, and the crowd rapidly parted, creating a respectful path for the Immortal Regent.

Karl moved to walk beside him, a confident move that shocked the spectators, while Dana dragged her volunteer with her to walk behind them.

That left one perplexed King standing with the guards, who were doing their best not to laugh as Cara stuffed cookies into every fold of his ceremonial robes.

She had found another guy so poor that all his pockets were empty.

Unfortunate soul.

Chapter 1259: Azov's Headache

Back at the Alliance House, Azov called a meeting of the Myths to order, all forty of them who had gone into the dungeon today.

Opal had arranged the amphitheatre in the upper loft for them, using illusions to make it look like an ancient marble building once you came up the stairs.

The sight reminded Karl that he hadn't made time to make the arena plinth yet, and he mentally moved it up his priority list.

"What are you plotting?" Azov asked, startling everyone who thought that he was going to start with questions about the dungeon.

But instead, he was looking directly at Karl, as if this was all his fault.

"Nothing, we set a record, and what happened, happened." Karl replied.

"Not that. Just now. I sensed the chaotic aura around you, and it is too much like that old woman. What are you plotting?" Azov replied.

Of course, the ancient Immortal would be well attuned to the Chaos Dragon. And now that Karl's constitution had improved, and had evolved in her direction, it made it even easier for Azov to guess when he was thinking of something new.

"Oh, I was thinking that with the skills I have, I might be able to make an artificial trial ground, an arena where combatants could go to fight it out with safeguards in place." Karl explained.

"And why would you want to do that?"

"To help them advance, of course. Dungeons are the best way to advance, but an artificial trial ground, like I made for the Golden Dragon Nation, is a close second.

However, I could also make it into an arena, with single challenges, or combat between visitors. Doesn't that sound fun? It even allows me to set safety protocols, to remove the injured combatants from the arena and heal them." Karl explained.

Azov sighed. "Well, that's actually sensible. I apologize for doubting you. I thought that you might be thinking of ways to use [Illusionary Domain] as a trap spell in combat."

Cara smirked, and Azov winked at her.

[He said that so that we didn't guess what he was actually worried we were thinking about.] The badger noted.

[If it is worse than badger filled illusionary worlds, he's got an excellent imagination.] Dana agreed.

[We could make it a Naga Swamp filled with Illusionary snakes that have the Elemental's Wrath transformation.] Remi suggested helpfully.

[And bugs. Everyone hates bugs.] Thor agreed.

[I'm starting to understand why the Chaos element drives Azov to drinking.] Dana joked.

Azov cleared his throat. "Alright, with that out of the way, I am going to need a full outline of everyone's future plans for the Dungeon. As most of you know, I have a monitoring spell that senses social disturbances, and this one was strong enough to register.

Partially because you are all Myths, and near the peak of the power level on the continent. But mostly because the upheaval caused by a rapid change in item quality won't go unnoticed."

Deve raised his hand. "Sir, isn't that a good thing? It's been nearly impossible for us to get good gear. Now, we have a reliable source of strong Mythic and low Immortal Rank gear to bring our raiding teams up to a new standard."

Azov sighed, and the King pinched the bridge of his nose, attempting to stave off a headache.

"If it was just the Guilds of the Zilaz region who have a good relationship with the Nara Group Alliance, it would be fine. But nobody else has a source of better gear either.

They are all going to want access.

And then, during the next trial, how many challengers will there be for control of this dungeon?" Azov replied.

Deve shrugged. "I am not convinced that the number of challengers will matter. We've got a Karl."

Azov hated to admit it, but Deve had a point. Karl's power level was so absolutely ridiculous that in an open challenge format, it was unlikely that he would lose. No matter who was sent at him.

Half the challengers would give up just facing Cara, and by the time the challenges came around, most of Karl's team should be advanced to the Mythic Rank.

Though, realistically, most of the challengers wouldn't be able to even harm Rae.

They simply lacked a skill that could harm a non-corporeal being.

But that was part of what the blue dragons were working to eliminate. Even if they advanced the warriors to Paladins and Crusaders, the least versatile class would gain Holy Skills that would harm her in Night Haunter form, and other creatures of similar nature.

"That might not be true by the next challenge. With Immortal Rank gear going out, there are going to be some exceptional new skill effects available. The whole challenge standard will change next round, and that is something that I would like to keep from getting out of hand.

We've already changed the rules once this year, and I don't intend to change them again, but I will be watching for rising stars, especially at the Totem Rank." Azov reminded them.

Karl chuckled. "Loading up a Totem Ranked champion with Immortal Ranked gear and a bunch of Epic skills will throw the entire challenge system for a loop.

Fortunately for you, they can only pick one dungeon to challenge."

The King frowned. "What if we have them head to other dungeons to see if it happens again? If it's not just this one dungeon, the imbalance will be more widespread, all over the region. That should limit the infighting for the right to access one specific dungeon, and make more of them targets for powerful champions."

Azov looked at him like he was wondering if he dropped the boy on his head as a child.

Making the problem a regional issue instead of a localized issue didn't actually solve the problem. But the King wasn't thinking beyond his own borders. The entirety of the Dragon Isles were going to want to at least give the improved dungeon a try to see if it was worth the effort.

Chapter 1260: Rae Concur

Rae smirked at the Immortal Regent. "I concur with your King. Letting us challenge more dungeons to see if we can give them all improved difficulty settings is a wonderful idea.

The more of them, the better.

They can't all be apes, and I've got plenty of ape blood stored already."

Azov tapped the podium as he considered her proposal.

“Would the other Guild Alliances be willing to volunteer their dungeons as a test to see if the Darklight Host can help unlock improved difficulty? It may be the next natural advancement of the System Awakening, and with their deep connection to the planet’s past, they might be the key to accelerating the possibility.” He asked.

That actually sounded good to the others.

The Nara Group Alliance had enough good things already. Letting them be the only ones with the ability to do hard mode in two different dungeons was simply unfair.

If Karl and his team could improve other dungeons, they could all share in the wealth.

Paul frowned as he listened to the conversation. “I have one question before we agree to this plan to increase the difficulty in more dungeons. Why is the Darklight Host agreeing to this? Their dungeon is already upgraded. What is in it for them?”

Azov snorted in amusement. “I’m ninety percent sure they’d do it just to troll me. But what everyone else has failed to consider is that while the Nara Group has a Dungeon at both the Mythic and the Totem Rank, the Darklight Host themselves do not.”

Karl shrugged, and Rae smirked.

“Plus, my damage increases as I learn how to efficiently kill more types of creatures.” She added.

Paul nodded. “I thought that it might be something like that. Every dungeon that does see an upgrade is at risk of being taken by a stronger duellist during the next challenge.

So, we can guarantee most of a year of wealth before we really need to fight for it. But after that, it could go to anyone.”

Azov's voice was unconcerned as he replied. "That's the same every year during the challenges. The only difference is that you will be fighting for higher stakes if your Guild's Dungeon does improve. And, you will have a head start on the challengers, who don't have the same sort of access to the best gear."

That calmed the dragonkin a little.

"Alright, I will agree to this. We can work out a schedule to make the attempts, but does anyone know what will actually trigger a harder difficulty?" Paul asked.

Azov shrugged. "No idea. If nobody else has done it, then the answer is almost certainly a record of some sort, or a feat of strength.

Really, it could be nearly anything, but given the nature of the dungeons, doing something that seems impossible would be the most likely answer.

So, you can all think of what the hardest accomplishment in your dungeon would be, and then tailor a team to attempt it, with one or more of the Darklight Host members in the team.

They are certain to be the key because Supreme Lady Matilda is so strongly attuned to Chaos."

As one, everyone turned to look at Cara, who was delicately eating chicken wings from a bowl at the end of the table.

Then eating the bones separately.

The badger smirked. They weren't wrong, she was also a force of Chaos, and likely to be able to trigger changes in the Dungeons by influencing the Fundamental Rule of Chaos.

Now that Karl was also walking around with what the system called a Chaos Dragon Constitution, he should have some chance as well. But an attuned constitution was nothing on being an actual Chaos Badger.

Karl tapped the table to bring everyone back on topic. “How do we want to organize this? I’ve got many projects to keep up with, especially as we’re a crafting Guild who just got two new Myths.

But the abundance of Golems is one of the stronger advantages in most dungeons, other than the bonuses that I have to damage and durability.”

Paul ran his fingers through his hair. “Why don’t we arrange them from short to long? That way, we don’t feel too bad about asking the pair of you to go to a dungeon nearly every day, and you’ll have the most possible time to do your crafting work.”

Dana smiled as she sent a mental message to Karl and the beasts. [That will also give us as many different sorts of bosses as possible. If we try each one once, then move on if we can’t find a trick, we will pick up a new Epic Golem build with every attempt.

After a dozen of them, we should be able to tailor our summons to the dungeon.]

Rae nodded in agreement, and Cara gave her an enthusiastic thumbs up.

[That’s so many more things to taste test. These mango hot wings are fantastic. Can someone ask Lotus to make more of them?]

They had been prepared as part of the snacks for the guests, but everyone was so enthralled with the way that Cara ate them that nobody had tried to take any from her.

Thor gave her a thumbs up as he went into the kitchen, and Karl responded on behalf of the group.

“That works for us. Most dungeon runs don’t take very long, so if we try one a day, we will have enough time to keep the shop running and still make the attempts.

Just save the super long ones for special occasions. I heard that some of them take all day,” he agreed.

Paul laughed. "None of us have a large raid dungeon. There is only one ten person raid among the Guilds here, and it is only three bosses. No more than two hours. Likely less with all the new gear that we got.

That dungeon with the apes seems to favour weapon drops."

"Alright, then whoever has the shortest Dungeon can remain here overnight. Your Highness, Immortal Regent, would you care to stay for the evening? I will have the staff use Mythic Cooking to prepare a full meal." Karl offered.

The King looked up from sampling the snacks. "I don't object. The food here is amazing. I should have some staff members apprentice under your chefs."

Then he pulled a slightly crumbled cookie from his robes and took a bite, while Azov tried not to laugh.

The Darklight Host had found the King's weak point.