

Beast Master 1291

Chapter 1291 Announce Your Presence

The suburbs near the day's Dungeon were much more peaceful than the city centre, where the Nara Group Alliance's house and the Arena were.

Here, there were acreages, towers with expansive gardens, and estates that showed off the power of the Mythic Rank Guild Leaders, but without the crowds of the city. It was almost peaceful, if you could ignore the power emanating from every direction.

It wasn't anything that would bother Karl or Dana at Mythic Rank, but certainly different from the common practice in the city, where everyone restrained their auras unless they were in an argument. Out here, they used the aura to show off their status. Even the white dragon let his aura loose as soon as they exited the portal.

He gave Karl and Dana an odd look as they followed behind.

"Are you not going to announce your presence?" He asked.

Dana smirked as Karl let loose his aura, a disturbing presence that combined predatory danger with the unnatural 'otherness' of Chaos. The feeling made the dragon frown, and everyone nearby turn to look at them.

Karl's aura was not the warm and welcoming sort of aura that most Guild Masters had. Guild Leaders usually had a presence that would draw people to them. But Karl's aura felt more like a declaration of war until he muted it to a third of its usual intensity, and it just felt bestial and confident.

"I see what the problem is. Your aura is too intense. I take it that you don't do much recruiting?" The dragon asked.

Karl shrugged. "I am good at recruitment. I just don't try to impress them with my aura. If we need that, I have a Dana Mage."

Dana let a bit more of her aura slip, the gentle and alluring aura of a Divine Fox, coupled with the crackling intensity of a powerful mage.

"Oh, yes. That is much better for recruitment. No wonder the blue dragons flock to you, such an interesting couple. But the Dungeon is right here, we can enter at will."

The crowd chatting near the dungeon entrance parted as Karl approached, then began to gossip as they saw who was with him.

"Oh? It looks like the fool found someone to test his theory. Do you think that they can even survive?" One of the bystanders whispered, not quite low enough that Karl and Dana couldn't hear him.

"Didn't you sense his aura. That man is terrifying. The intimidation effect of the Fallen Seraphim won't mean anything if he's immune to it. That might be what they're planning." Another whispered back.

Karl smiled, realizing that the major issue with the dungeon was an effect that he was immune to.

With his resistance, even without adding buffs, it was nearly impossible to intimidate him. And if he activated an intimidation effect of his own, or had Rae active, then the two would counteract each other.

They had this one in the bag.

Karl checked that he was the group leader before stepping inside the dungeon, only to be met with a most interesting message. {Group Size Invalid. Split Group into a Solo and a Duo Challenge?}

The dragon looked shocked, while Dana smiled. "It looks like we get our wish. New dungeon time it is. You go solo, I will take our new friend through the duo challenge." She suggested.

"Are you sure that is wise? It might not make the dungeon easier just because it's a smaller group." The cleric stammered.

"It most certainly won't. In fact, it might increase it. But I am confident that with a healer at my side, I can take on the challenge. Though I might be the better-looking half of our relationship, I'm no slouch in combat." Dana joked.

[Tian is fluffier.] Cara informed her.

Dana rolled her eyes at the badger's mental teasing. "If you're sure..." The Cleric slowly agreed.

"Then it's done. System, I will go solo, they will do the duo challenge." Karl announced.

Then, he was alone in the Dungeon, looking out at a hellscape of scorched buildings, boiling pits that appeared to be full of blood, and black winged Seraphim.

{Rewards Degrade Every 10 Minutes} {Begin}

Karl called out the whole team, and Rae immediately began to celebrate. These pits really were full of boiling Mythic Ranked blood. Both Light and Dark element. It was like a hot spring resort in here.

If you were a Bloodbath Spider.

She called out her Golems and Undead Army, while Karl called all his summons, choosing Carnage as his Epic Golems. The big Demon would be a great choice for fighting Fallen Seraphim, and he didn't object to having Cara sit on his shoulder as he charged into combat. She was like a furry chaotic mascot, who would fly off to find him more things to fight.

[You're going to have to run, or he's going to get away from you.] Remi laughed from her alchemy lab.

Indeed, Carnage didn't need directions, he knew just what to do in this situation.

Kill everything that moved.

The dungeon monsters looked horrified as the pair of massive Demons charged at them with two dozen Spectral Knights behind them, and a small army of Golems struggling to keep up.

"I need to make a new bow." Karl realized.

There were so many summoned beasts now that it was nearly impossible to get into close combat. Even Rae had taken her team and gone ahead to get more monsters to fight, as they couldn't all fight in one spot.

So, Karl focused on [Frozen Apocalypse], to bypass the fire damage reduction that the Fallen Seraphim had.

Hawk appeared from his space, and flew off to the side, inspecting the flaming stones and the bubbling blood pools, while collecting samples for Rae.

He might not be Mythic yet, but he could still help his sister, so she didn't have to take time out from fighting.

However, there was something about this place. A feeling of rightness. There was fire, but not pure fire. Fire with a little something extra, and that extra was calling to Hawk on a primal level.

Chapter 1292 Environmental Advantage

Karl grabbed the Epic Guard, and let the Haint Claw teleport them both to an open space, where Rae and her team were finishing with a group of Fallen Seraphim.

That gave him a clear line of sight to the next two groups, and Karl shifted [Frozen Apocalypse] to get their attention and move the monsters their direction so that Rae and Carnage could keep fighting.

The spider and the wrath demon had a friendly rivalry going on, and Carnage was actually laughing as Rae used Blood Destruction to cause a particularly wounded attacker to explode before it could reach them. They were both here purely for the enjoyment of making things die in new and innovative ways, and that had forged an instant bond of friendship between them.

While Karl was focused on the fight, Hawk was busy understanding the world. He was so close that he could feel it. However, there was something holding him back, and he couldn't seem to break past the limitation.

That was it. He was still a Windspeed Hawk, in some ways. But as much as he had grown, there was no room left in his development path for the baby bird that he had once been. He needed to purge it from himself, and come back as the Hawk that he knew he could be.

The question was how?

No, he knew how. Sister Rae did it all the time. A long gout of fire lit one of the blood pools into a raging inferno of unholy energy and life essence, just as Hawk dove headfirst into the raging inferno.

There was no hesitation, no reason for Karl to be alarmed, until suddenly, he felt Hawk's energy being violently ripped apart, as if his body was being immolated by an impossible fire.

It shouldn't be happening. Even if it was a Mythic Rank flame, Hawk had been incorporeal when he entered, and his immunity to fire was nearly complete even when he wasn't. Plus, this was a fire that Hawk had set himself. His own flames wouldn't hurt him, even if the secondary fires from something he burnt theoretically could. Hawk's joyful cry echoed through the dungeon as the inferno of vital energy he had ignited seared away his body, leaving only condensed soul energy and Ghostfire.

Then, he found himself back in his Ghostfire Tree, in his space. Everything was blurry for some reason, but when he sucked in the vital essence and other energies from the Dungeon, he could feel his body reforming, so he had not failed.

The power imbalance was enough to alert everyone, including the Dungeon Bosses, that something was seriously wrong in this place. The four winged Fallen Seraphim Secret Keeper nearest them left the designated boss platform and flew over, desperate to stop whatever was happening. But Hawk was in his space, inaccessible to anyone else as he completed his reformation process.

Karl didn't miss that Hawk's space was shifting. The bird hadn't just drawn in the vital essence of the blood lake that he had set on fire, he had drawn in everything. The soul energy, the unholy nature of the Fallen Seraphim whose blood had formed the lake, and the innately unholy flames of the dungeon setting itself.

He was currently a ghostly blue egg in his favourite tree, surrounded in black miasma that swirled as the egg continued to pull in as much mana as it could get.

Then, the egg cracked, and with a screeching keen, Hawk emerged, soaring into the sky of his space, trailing a cloud of energy behind his ghostly black flaming body like a comet.

{Evolution 3 Activation Complete} Ghostfire Thunderbird ⇒ Dark Flame Phoenix

{New Skills Gained} [Dark Flame] [Rebirth] [Unholy Corrosion]

[Dark Flame] Unholy elemental fire. Deals fire and soul damage, deals extra damage to Holy targets.

[Rebirth] When the Dark Flame Phoenix is destroyed, it is reborn from the core feather left at its nest

[Unholy Corrosion] Passive Skill. Fire attacks cause lingering damage immune to holy element healing.
{Hawk} Fundamental Rule Comprehension: Fire ⇒ 80%

Hawk burst free of his space, and began to absorb as much energy from the Dungeon as possible, using the dying Fallen Seraphim as fuel to finish his evolution and advancement.

He was at the Mythic Rank now, but it was still settling into him, as his body was still unstable in its new form, freshly hatched and reborn.

Sister Rae's method had been right all along, Hawk realized. He just needed to burn the water out of the blood so he could get at the trapped energy.

The Fallen Seraphim boss took to the air, intent on destroying this profane monster that was attempting to drain their home of its essence. But Hawk was fast, and he wasn't the only one that could fly.

Cara and Karl both leapt into the air to meet the boss, giving Hawk a few more precious seconds to adapt to his new body before he had to help them deal with the boss.

Sparks flew as the Sword of Champions met with the Unholy Blade of the Fallen Seraphim boss, and Hawk became a low-priority target.

First, the Secret Keeper needed to deal with the Monster Man who had challenged him.

Flames surrounded the boss, and Eternal Lightning crackled around Karl as the two clashed in an explosion of conflicting elements. Holy and Unholy couldn't exist in the same space, and the backlash of the two attacks meeting was destroying the buildings beneath their fight, to the point that the Haint Claw voluntarily chose to merge with Karl, just so she didn't have to deal with flying bricks anymore.

The extra damage and attack speed from the Haint Claw merger was enough to give Karl the advantage in physical skills, and the boss found that it could no longer escape to go hunt that damnable bird.

But that was fine. It would deal with this man first, and then it would go find the bird. It had no idea what had happened to attract this menace to its home, but it was not going to allow this insult to stand.

Chapter 1293 Freed Boss

The Fallen Seraphim huffed as Karl kicked it in the chest, gaining a bit of space to attack from a new angle.

The others were quickly clearing the additional fights beneath them, while Karl's fight with the boss seemed ready to tear the dungeon itself apart.

Something about the restrictions on the dungeon had changed, as the other Seraphim only flew enough to launch themselves into combat, but the boss had not only left his platform, but he was fighting in the sky, and damaging the actual dungeon.

That was not normal.

The visitors to the dungeon could damage it, but the occupants never did.

"You, Monster Man, I will end you today." The boss promised.

"Big words for someone who hasn't even faced the Chaos Badger yet." Karl joked, panting with exertion from the extended fight.

Cara had joined him in the air, but other than firing off a few attacks at the back of the boss to keep him distracted, most of her work had been to supplement Hawk's role of aerial bombardment on the main force's fight.

{Rewards Degraded} The dungeon informed them.

That meant they had been in here ten minutes now. Not long, but longer than Karl had expected to be facing the first boss.

Further down the dungeon, Hawk lit an entire street with eerie black fire that made the wings of the Fallen Seraphim glow. The beasts were almost to the final boss now, and it was behaving perfectly normally.

As long as Karl could hold this one in place, they could finish the run and then come back if he hadn't completed the fight.

The boss realized the same thing, and began working his attack angles so that they would be closer to the group with every engagement, but Karl's speed was enough that the progress was minimal. The best that the Fallen Seraphim could do was to break away and dart below Karl's range of attack, gaining a few dozen metres before Karl was on him again and forced the fight to the ground. Now, their skills were even more evenly matched, as the boss had lost the advantage of skill with three-dimensional fighting. [I really need to get Dana to write me up a combat style book at some point. There has to be one that I can use.] He thought, while Cara laughed in his mind. There was no way that Karl could fight like the Dana Mage. For one, his leg wouldn't even lift that high, he couldn't do most of the kicks. Plus, it was made for someone with [Auto Parry] and Karl didn't know that skill either.

[Ooh, we could get a new sister who fights like a human. That could work.] Rae suggested.

They already had the Haint Claw, and the Epic Guard, but her fighting style wasn't a skill. Well, maybe they just weren't proper sisters? One was a weapon, and the other was summoned, so they might not count.

The Haint Claw did try to help Karl understand fighting styles, but his body wasn't built like the Haint was, and the weapon's fighting style required limbs that bent in multiple directions.

The boss was slowing as the number of injuries added up, but the rest of the group was already on the other boss of the Dungeon, and it was falling fast under the immense weight of their combined attacks.

The Greater Fallen Seraphim, as Karl dubbed the four winged versions, were lightning quick, and incredibly skilled fighters. Even Carnage couldn't get the upper hand on them in battle. Not even two on one. But there were two dozen other Golems involved, as well as three beasts, and that left no escape.

The death of the last remaining target brought a shift in the energy of the Dungeon, as if its resistance to Hawk's efforts to drain it had been removed.

All that was left was Karl and one battered Fallen Seraphim, in a hellscape where not a single building was left standing, and the life essence of the blood pools was rapidly draining into the freshly evolved Dark Flame Phoenix.

"You fought well." Karl commended the boss as Cara approached from the back.

"As did you." The creature replied.

Then, its power soared, and erupted as the boss sacrificed itself with an Immolation style attack, blanketing the entire dungeon in Unholy Fire.

Eternal Lightning fell under the force of the attack, and Karl felt the Bestial Raiment armour spell beginning to melt before he got the defensive spell back up over the group, and his healing kicked in to mend the blistered and charred flesh under scorched fur.

[2/10. Fun to watch, smells awful. Do not recommend.] Cara commented as the last ashes of the boss floated through the air.

{Solo Challenge Complete.}

{2 Time-Based Penalties Applied}

{Calculating Rewards}

Karl sighed in relief, then focused on Dana, who was currently fighting monsters on the way to the second boss. She was doing well, with the healer keeping her from needing to expend excessive amounts of mana on her Golems.

She was also taking the opportunity to take on a role as a front-line fighter, which she very rarely got to do. It was a good opportunity to work on her stamina, and keep up with her combat skills so that they didn't get rusty from disuse.

She might be too strong for the arena, but that didn't mean that there was no more need for her to train.

{Reward Granted} [Skill Book of Unholy Beast Transformation] Beast Master Subclass exclusive. Grants an Epic Grade Beast or Beastkin form, of the Unholy Element.

Tian frowned at the book in Karl's hands. That was the exact opposite of what they needed.

But, it was an Epic Grade skill, so it would give an Epic Grade body to the transformed user, even if it was just a crappy unholy beast.

[Try it out, let's see what the Karl can turn into.] Cara suggested.

Karl used the skill, and activated the [Unholy Beast Transformation]

{Determining Form}

{Beast} Demon Crow

{Demibeast} Tengu

The Tengu species were a form of crow demon, as Karl recalled, with large black wings. So, the two forms were related, with one being the beastkin form of the animal.

Which made him wonder. If he gave this to Dana, would it let her turn into a Demonic Fox? Small and black and fluffy? That sounded rather cuddly.

Tian frowned. That did sound cuddly. But Unholy was still the opposite of what they were going for. She should be a Divine Fox, not a fallen fox.

Chapter 1294 Evolved and Equipped

Karl let the beasts argue about the merits of Holy versus Unholy beasts, while Hawk tested out the new skill.

His natural form was now a thirty-metre-long Phoenix covered in black flames. But the skill turned him into a Demon Crow, only a little larger than his original Windspeed Hawk form, with a two-metre wingspan.

That would be incredibly useful inside of dungeons, or even just out in public.

It also gave him so much more room in his Ghostfire Tree to perch.

Overall, 9/10 from him on this skill. It was just a shame it was a crow and not a Hawk.

"Should we head out and wait for the Dana Mage to finish her work?" Karl asked the team.

Rae was carefully inspecting the dungeon, and Cara was clearing the space of anything that resembled loot. But after Hawk had drained all the latent energy for his advancement, there wasn't much worth taking.

[Good to go, boss.] Cara agreed, then returned to her space.

The others followed, and Karl exited the dungeon, where a few dozen Mythic adventurers were waiting for the results of the day.

"Well, I can't claim that I was the one to find it, but I might have been the first to complete it. This dungeon has a challenge mode. Single person, or pairs. The dungeon is exactly the same as it was before, but the reward drops every ten minutes. I got a bunch of random Totem Ranked items and materials, heavily biased toward the Unholy Element, and one Skill Book, which I have already used." Karl informed them.

The nearest of the Myths nodded. "That's pretty good. Not easy, but getting a skill book as a reward is better than any piece of gear. Just the amount of money you can make by leasing the book to the Blue Dragons is totally worth it."

There was a chorus of agreement from the crowd, and finally, someone asked what skill he got. The important part that everyone had forgotten about.

"It's an Epic Grade transformation skill, into an Unholy Element Beast. It appears to be random and assigned the first time that you use it because it's not specified within the spell description." Karl offered.

A few of the warriors grumbled in discontent. That did them precisely zero good. An Epic Grade physique was great. But having to fight as a beast? What were they, Druids? That wasn't the sort of skill that they wanted at all.

So, the value would be limited, but it was still an Epic Grade skill.

"I wonder if the other pair is doing alright?" One of the spectators pondered.

"They're a few minutes behind, but they'll be out soon. I can see that at the very least my Guild Member is fine." Karl replied.

"But if you go in alone, you should be able to challenge the whole dungeon, right?" Someone in the back row asked.

"That's right. Who wants to give it a shot?" Karl asked.

Deve stepped up to the front row with a smile on his face, and Karl chuckled.

"You got Golems, right? Or an equivalent of them?" He asked.

Deve nodded. "That's right. I got Spirit Guardians, similar to the ones that Nilla has. With the three of us, it might be tough, but I've got some new gear, and being a druid, I have a lot of self-healing."

Karl patted him on the shoulder and transferred [Unholy Beast Transformation] to the Druid, who winked at him, then paid the gate guards to enter the dungeon.

"See you all in a few minutes." He announced, then walked through the gate.

"That druid is insane." Someone muttered.

"He's a tough sumbitch, though. If there are more people who can solo a dungeon boss, he's probably one of them." A burly warrior countered.

In the Dungeon, Deve immediately activated his new transformation to see what he would turn into.

{Unholy Beast Transformation} Underworld Primal Tiger

The tiger form was two metres tall at the shoulder, but close to six metres long. The raw power in his enhanced body was truly impressive, and Deve rumbled happily as he called for his Spirit Guardians.

{Rewards degrade every 10 minutes} {Begin}

Just after Deve entered, Dana came back out, looking exhausted. The White Dragon was muttering to himself, but looking vaguely pleased.

"Are we the first out?" He asked.

The warrior closest to him shook his head, then gestured to Karl, who was tossing chunks of meat into the air for Hawk to catch.

Dana stared at the scene for a second. It was utterly wrong, but somehow right.

"Wait, that's Hawk. When did he get small?" She asked.

"New skill. You'll see his upgraded true form later." Karl explained.

"Good work, buddy. I knew that you'd find your way around the bottleneck sooner or later." She congratulated the happy bird.

Hawk landed on her shoulder and danced back and forth for a moment, then took off again.

It had seemed like a good idea, but Dana's shoulder wasn't as big as Karl's.

"What's with the bird? Is it like a Ranger pet on steroids?" One of the warriors asked.

"Actually, its a Dark Flame Phoenix, transformed so he doesn't get in trouble in public." Karl replied with a sly smirk.

"You're joking, right?"

Karl shook his head as Hawk swooped further into the sky and transformed, letting his body erupt into unholy flames, and dense black miasma trail behind him.

He flew in a loop to make a giant heart in the sky, and then transformed back into the Demon Crow, so he could snag another bite of meat from Karl.

Dana whistled in appreciation. "Hawk really went all out with this transformation. But not pure fire? I'm surprised." Karl shrugged. "He was a Ghostfire Thunderbird before, so it wasn't pure fire either. But it was the nature of the Fallen Seraphim dungeon during his advancement that helped him find this form.

Advancing inside a dungeon is really the best choice for some beasts."

Chapter 1295 Deve Challenges

Dana bumped against Karl's side. "Are we ready to head back?"

Karl shook his head. "Deve went in to challenge the dungeon."

Dana frowned. "That's probably a bad idea. The first boss needs a lot of damage to take out. Deve is tough, but he's not a high damage build. He might end up stuck at the first boss until he exhausts himself, and then it will be up to his instincts whether he can survive to the exit."

Karl nodded. "Well, it was his choice to enter, and I wasn't going to stop him. We will just have to see how he does. If you're in a hurry, I'm sure that we will find out later."

"Not so big of a hurry that we can't wait thirty minutes to see how Deve fares in a solo challenge. Especially since it's Deve. Are there any others in the dungeon now?" She asked.

"Not that I know of, but there might be some regular teams inside."

The gate guards shook their heads. "Everyone was waiting for your group to come back out, so they could find out if there really was a hard mode. But none of us expected that it would be another challenge mode."

"Yeah, that's a bit of a tough one. But if you send one challenger and a healer who can do some damage, they can do the duo mode, and it isn't quite as insane as the challenge against Carnage." Karl suggested.

Dana chuckled. While it was true that the Fallen Seraphim were terrifying with their dark energy attacks and intimidation effect, Carnage was an absolute beast in single combat, and that was what she had deployed to deal with the bosses.

"So, is the Darklight Host a Mercenary Guild, then?" One of the Mythic Warriors asked, seeing potential in the ability to hire rare specialty classes.

Dana shook her head. "We're a crafting guild, and we run a combat arena near the city centre, on the outskirts. We're better known for our crafted items than for our Dungeon skills, but we have gotten lucky with a few and found hard modes embedded in them."

Karl took off his bracelets and held them up so that the crowd could see that he had made them.

They were both Totem Rank, Epic Grade items, and clearly informed anyone who inspected them that they were made by Karl.

"I can see why that is what people would remember about you. Those stats are drool worthy. Do you sell them?" The warrior asked.

Karl shook his head. "The good stuff doesn't go on the open market. The Immortal Regent asked us not to go too wild with the crafted items. But we make them for our Alliance members."

A voice in the back laughed. "That's just what he wants people to think he's best known for. The Monster Man is going to terrify some challengers during next year's Dungeon Duels. He's just hit Mythic Rank, and he's already one of the strongest duellists on the continent."

That voice was familiar, Karl realized just a moment before Jerome stepped out of the crowd.

"Ah, Guild Leader Jerome. Good to see you again." Karl greeted him.

"No longer Guild Leader. The Guild stripped my position after our duel."

A few of the other warriors stared at him in shock. "Wait, you're saying that this man, the craftsman, is the one who defeated you in an above Rank duel?" A voice in the back asked.

"That's right. The Monster Man lives up to his name. I hear that he also defeated Carnage in a solo duel against the Dungeon Boss, and you just saw him complete a single challenge of the entire Fallen Seraphim Dungeon.

I heard a rumour that the reason we can't challenge for multiple Mythic Dungeons next year is because he reached Mythic Rank, and the Mayor was afraid that he would simply take every dungeon that was within walking distance of his Alliance House." Jerome agreed.

Karl considered pointing out that the decision was made by the Immortal Regent, but that likely wouldn't help his case. Some of these guys would not be happy about the 'no second chances' policy.

Many suspected that Jerome's words had more than a bit of truth. Anyone who could duel Carnage would be a real threat to the Dungeon Challenges. However, faced with such a large crowd, and the chance that they might not win the challenge if they did want to do anything to Karl, nobody was going to air such grievances today.

It was a little over half an hour before Deve came back out again, covered in sweat and still healing, but looking pleased with himself.

"Two Epic items in a single run. Good ones too." He declared.

Nobody but Karl and Dana were from his Alliance, so they wouldn't ask him about the details. Just knowing what sort of loot you could get was enough.

Two Mythic Rank Epic Grade items in a single day was enough that anyone who could do it would consider doing this dungeon alone at least once a week. But what they didn't realize was that Deve had an Epic Grade Immortal Rank weapon, and ever since Karl arrived, he had been swapping out his equipment to maximize damage, as he had [Limited Invulnerability].

He might be a tank specialized build, but his actual equipment was pure damage.

Even then, he had struggled to do enough damage to the bosses that he could get them down in a reasonable amount of time. For an average five-person group, this was a fifteen-minute run. It had taken him three times that. The fact he managed it was impressive, but it still meant that his damage output was only twice the average Mythic damage dealer's, even with all his gear.

He was going to need to find a few more specialty skills to bump up his damage so that he could keep doing these challenges.

Relying entirely on gear wasn't going to do it, and he had gotten a few excellent skills from Karl now. But that still wasn't enough.

However, he did owe a rather large favour for the Epic Grade Tiger transformation. Those claws really tore the Fallen Seraphim up.

Chapter 1296 No Cure For Shameless

"Now that you are back out of the dungeon, why don't we head to the Darklight Lounge at the arena for dinner? My treat." Karl offered Deve with a congratulatory pat on the back.

"Is that a fancy new place?" One of the Myths who had been waiting for them at the dungeon asked.

"Indeed it is. You should come along and check it out. We've got cooks on staff with Mystic Cooking as a trade skill, and the food is supposed to be excellent. I haven't had a chance to sample tonight's special, but there is no way it will be bad." Karl agreed.

Fortunately for Karl, the staff at the Arena were all linked to him by the artifact, and knew the moment that he invited a whole group to the restaurant.

The place was packed, but there was the option for a private room to be opened at the side for VIP guests. Karl might have only recently met most of these people, but it was the only spot that they were going to get without waiting, so the Priestesses prepared the private room for them.

Hawk transformed when they walked through the portal, and took a perch on Karl's shoulder. That was much better than Dana's, as he actually fit. "If you wanted food, you just had to ask, you didn't have to come out to beg." Karl reminded him.

{I need snacks} Hawk insisted, and Karl realized that he could understand the Demon Crow's speech.

As could everyone else.

"Did the crow just speak?" One of the Mythic Warriors asked, following behind Karl as they approached the arena.

"Indeed. That's a new one for him, but the crow form is a transformation spell. That's actually a Dark Flame Phoenix." Karl corrected him.

"Ah, that explains it. Phoenixes are smart, and Demon Crows can all speak, at least a little bit. Somewhat like Parrots, they can express dozens of words, all in Demon tongues. But if he's actually a Phoenix, his intelligence shouldn't be lacking." The warrior realized.

"It didn't cure his shamelessness, though. He's still out here on my shoulder to beg for food, when I could have just ordered for him." Karl joked.

Karl led the way in the door, while Dana stayed back a few steps so that she could get a better view of everyone's reaction.

"This is... impossible. Wow, the decor, how did anyone manage to build this?" One of the guests asked.

Deve smirked at Dana. "Just wait until they realize that the restaurant is nearly as large as the actual main floor, but there were other shops and an arena entrance on this side."

From the outside, the arena was impressive, but for people who were used to the best of the best, that wasn't enough to truly impress them.

However, this restaurant that was decorated with what looked like a lifetime worth of wealth, was an instant mind breaker.

Out of respect for the other diners, most of whom looked just as shocked and enthralled by their surroundings, the Myths remained quiet until they were in the private room and seated. Then the questions began.

"Is there some major powerhouse backing this restaurant? I swear those were Mythic Rank Holy Stones used as lights in the chandelier." One of the men asked.

"They are. But they're not real. The decor is done with an illusion. So, even if the Guild runs into the strongest of enemies, we don't have to worry about vandalism and theft costing us a fortune. We can just repair and replace the damaged interior items with a spell." Karl explained.

"Then the hostess, is that an illusion as well?" Karl chuckled. "Unfortunately, no. That is a very real High Priestess of the Spider Goddess. There are a number of them working here. They like the ambiance."

That left the Myths completely baffled. There wasn't anything that you could offer a Spider Priestess that would make them willingly serve others, but there was more than one in this restaurant. Could it be that they were the ones who bankrolled it?

If this were their place, it would make sense that they were here to supervise.

"Is this an Elven restaurant, then?" One of the others asked.

Karl chuckled. "Not at all. Though the Dark Elves do eat meat. The chef is not an Elf at all, and the specials of the day might surprise you. I asked them to bring us a bit of everything, served family style."

The food was out only moments later, and the guests stared at it in awe.

"Now, this is business advertising. I haven't even seen the arena floor yet, and I'm excited about it." One of the women joked.

Dana chuckled. "Well, the Arena isn't for us. It's a Mythic-Ranked artifact, but that means it's meant for Totem Ranked and lower fighters. It can make Mythic opponents and barriers, but someone will have to reinforce them during the fight so that they aren't damaged by the backlash."

The woman just shrugged. "Some of us prefer to watch the fights, and not start them. Totem Ranked arenas are quite the spectacle. Tell me, does your alliance form the majority of the performers?"

Dana shook her head. "You misunderstand. The arena is designed so that you can pick from a variety of monsters, golems and even dungeon bosses. It's not a staged show, it's an open combat and training arena."

That was almost enough to make them stop eating.

Almost.

But not everyone was so eager to leave. Hawk had found himself a perch on the back of a chair, and the staff had brought him a plate, with everything portioned to be bite sized for his Demon Crow transformation.

It was like being back in his Awakened Rank glory days, where he could just show up in the cafeteria and people would feed him.

Being small was definitely better at meal time.

"What is this skill called? Is it something that can be learned?" One of the warriors asked.

"It is Mystic Cooking, and it can definitely be learned. But we don't have a school to teach it, so finding a mentor will not be easy. Nearly everyone with the skill is already employed by the Nara Group Alliance as a chef." Karl explained.

That raised more questions than it answered. Like how did they find out about it, how did they find the people who had it, and most importantly, how could they poach one of the chefs?

Chapter 1297 How Is Drodh

Once the dinner was finished, the group split up, and Karl went back to the hotel so he could work on new items in peace, and still watch the fights. "Will you be joining me?" He asked as Dana finished her meal.

She shook her head. "No, I'm going back to the Guild House in Drodh. I promised Sapphire a few more rare skills for her library, and then someone needs to check up on the people there. The crafters should be doing well, but we've also got the orphanage, which might need something that they're too shy to ask Davis for.

We really do need to give him a raise as well. He's doing so much more than just being a floor manager for the shop these days."

"You've got a point. Since we got busy with everything else, he's been left with the management of the Drodh Guild House, and that can't be easy when we've overrun him with blue dragons." Karl agreed.

Dana smirked. "I think that the blue dragons are the only part that is making it manageable. They hate to be disturbed with their work, so they keep everything organized.

We are getting a lot more visitors there than we used to, though."

Karl sighed. "You have a point. I should be over there. I've got so many skills that need to go to the blue dragons as well. Sapphire won't forgive me if I keep skills from her. Plus, I can more efficiently help with her experiments."

Follow Me, Little One was not a skill that any of the others had been able to use, so they had to actually write out the skill books to teach them to the test subjects.

The librarians didn't really mind the work, but if there was a more efficient way to spread knowledge, they would prefer that.

And that was how Karl and Dana both ended up at the worktables in the tavern of the workshop area, being lectured about being absentee managers by a centuries old blue dragon.

"Once you start a project, you need to see it through, you can't just be running off every few days to start on something new." Sapphire complained.

"We have quite a lot going on, though. There is the Warrior Project, the Dungeon Project, the regular funding raids, the materials raids, the arena, new gear for the teams, then the political meetings to build alliances for the Darklight Host." Karl explained.

"That's exactly my point. Stop starting new things!"

Dana winked at him. "You forgot that we also need to sort through caretakers from the Red Dragons to run the baby dragon orphanage. It's not going to be long before they start hatching, and there are still too many applicants."

Sapphire waved off her concern. "I've got that handled. The blue dragons will be sending a few teachers, the white is sending a dedicated medic, the silver dragons have assigned one magical researcher, and they will mediate the arguments between the red dragons over who gets to watch the hatchlings."

[Chaos!] Cara cheered.

"Oh, that reminds me, I've got a new skill. I don't suppose that you have any chaos element aligned volunteers? I've got a Chaos Dragon Constitution skill that is epic grade and might be quite popular if anyone can use it.

There is also an Elemental Wrath Totem for the Shamans, Dark Flame, for the Unholy and fire aligned, which should be most Wrath Demons, and Unholy Beast Transformation at the Epic Grade." Karl added.

"Oh, is that all?" Sapphire asked in a snide tone.

"No, but it should do for today." Sapphire sighed, then nodded. "We have volunteers for most of your skills, but finding someone compatible with a Chaos type Constitution will not be easy. We could try with some of the beastkin, but it might cause unintended evolutions and unpredictable results."

"You could give it to badgers." Dana suggested.

The old blue dragon gave her a look that suggested giving badgers a stronger constitution was the very last thing that she would ever want to do.

But Dana was right. The badger type beastkin were the ones most likely to be able to use the skill.

"Alright, I will arrange for someone compatible to learn your constitution skill. I also have a Shaman here who can learn the totem form, and more than one suitable Demon. In fact, Ashbringer should be in on his way to work. He usually stops to get a snack to go." Sapphire agreed.

Dark Flames might not be perfectly matched to the Demonic Grandmaster Smith, but they were very, very close. They were also stronger than the demonic fire that he already used.

But now that he thought about it, Karl realized that adding the Elemental Wrath Totem to the workspace would likely give them bonuses while crafting elemental weapons as well. Technically, it only added damage to elemental attacks, but when you were crafting items that added elemental damage, having the effect active should transfer some portion to the item that you were making.

Ashbringer poked his head in the door, having heard his name. "Someone was calling for me?" He asked.

"Perfect timing. The Karl is going to teach you a skill." Sapphire explained.

Ashbringer simply walked over and waited, not surprised by much of anything that Karl might come up with at this point. Even if they told him that Karl had grown wings and learned to fly faster than a dragon, the Demon would just nod and accept it as part of the abnormality that was his Guild Leader.

{Champion Karl Offers Knowledge} Skill [Dark Flame] will be transferred to the Devoted Blacksmith Ashbringer.

The Demon lit a black flame over his hand that seemed to suck the light out of the room, and then snuffed it with a smile. "Oh, that is absolutely perfect for Wrath Demons. Fire and Unholy Element combined will make the most wonderful weapons for Demons. All I will need to do is attune the bonuses and materials to the type of fighter that they are, and send it off to the Runecrafters."

Karl chuckled and the smith shrugged. "Do you have any idea how much time it saves me having them here? Instead of spending days beating the bonuses I want into the weapon, I can just have them draw all over it and call it a day."

Chapter 1298 Wendy Loves Magic

Wendy, the teen Oni Demon from the Runecrafting team, came over with a hug for Dana, who spun her in circles, laughing. "You know, we should get a gift for you too. I know how you love new spells. Now, what sort of spell do you need?" Dana teased the diminutive Demoness.

"I want the flames too! I'm a Demon, a real demon. There is no reason that I can't have a cool new fireball."

Karl shrugged and activated the skill again.

{Champion Karl Offers Knowledge} Skill [Dark Flame] will be transferred to the inquisitive sorceress Wendy.

Wendy's expression went blank, and Karl realized that she had been sent into the class change interface. She was only a Royal Rank Mage, and recently advanced, but it appeared that the new spell was enough to grant her a new class choice.

Sapphire watched carefully with her notepad at the ready. It might not be part of her planned experiments, but it was a skill triggered advancement, and it needed to be documented for their reports. If Dark Flame, a spell that a huge number of Demons would be compatible with, was an advanced class trigger, it needed to be prioritized right behind the Golem spells.

The sound of crashing behind him distracted Karl just in time to catch Mage Jones, who had sensed the change in his daughter and came running through a portal too fast to stop.

"Oop, there you go. Relax, she just got a new spell and it activated the class change menu. There is no danger to Wendy." Karl explained as he caught the Oni Demon, who looked very human with his magical wig on.

The Mage shook his head. "I think that it changed something. I can sense the imbalance in her power, turning away from pure arcane magic."

Karl frowned. "The new spell she requested is a form of Unholy Fire. It's very suitable for Demons of all sorts, but more to the Wrath Demons than most others, as they're already so fire friendly."

Wendy's dad nodded. "Then it shouldn't be harmful, I assume. But Oni Demons aren't innately Unholy aligned, we're a form of Magic Demon, so we're Arcane aligned. However, Wendy spends too much time with the blue dragons and Hugo, that Guild Master from Zilaz. They've all been teaching her random new spells every week, and I can't keep up with it anymore."

Dana laughed and gave him a consoling pat on the back. "Your little girl is growing up. But Wendy has an insatiable lust for knowledge that the dragons can't resist helping her with, and Hugo just wants someone to nerd out about spell theory with."

The mage chuckled at Dana's description. That did sound an awful lot like his Wendy. She was incredibly good at making friends, when she got a chance to, but if you gave her a chance to discuss magic, she wouldn't stop.

Slowly, Wendy's eyes fluttered open, and Karl realized that she was finished with the screen, but immersed in her new skill options, and spending any saved skill points that she had.

She had Runecrafting as a trade skill, and making items could give her skill points, he knew. So, she might actually have quite a few of them saved with how hard she worked to show off her skills.

"Well, what did you decide on?" Karl asked once the young mage was finally finished with all her advancement related decisions.

"Well, it gave me a whole bunch of class options, but most of them are basic mage related ones. Now, that is fun, and I love new spells. But they were kind of similar to the spells I already know, you know?"

So, I decided on one that was a little different. The class is called 'Demonic Array Master', and it lets me use my Runecrafting to write spells in the air with Dark Flames to create spell circles.

Big flashy spells with long-lasting effects, like making magical items, but without the item."

Wendy was clearly proud of her class choice as she took out a wand and wrote out a defensive ward in the air, surrounding herself with a black barrier.

"See? It's even stronger than my usual barriers because I know so much about Runes, and I can just write out the effect I want." She declared.

Her father nodded. "They're a bit slow, but very impressive. At the Royal Rank, there shouldn't be many that can overcome your array."

Of course, she didn't have to stay at the Royal Rank forever. Remi had potions that would help her advance once she was closer to the bottleneck. But she had already used one to get past Commander Rank, and she was still a growing girl. Even Remi didn't want to risk messing up her progress too much. It might make her grow too fast and stop being small and adorable.

That was not the part that her father was concerned about. Now that his research obsessed daughter could just write arrays in the air, wouldn't that encourage her to spend more time wandering off with that oversized mage instead of coming home for family dinners?

She was supposed to be living two minutes from his house, where she could come home for visits whenever he wanted, not on the other side of a Portal and halfway across a continent with a Mythic Mage backing her up.

How was he supposed to compete with that?

Though Karl didn't truly understand the man's dilemma, he could clearly see the concern in Mage Jones' face.

"Why don't you invite Hugo over one day? He's quite friendly, and I'm sure that he'd love to meet his new friend's family." Karl suggested.

Wendy clapped her hands excitedly. "Oh, we can show him the new dishes that we have found. There are so many options now that we have Mythic Cooks in the kitchen, and not everyone likes the same stuff that the Demons and Dwarves do, so he might not have tried it yet."

That sounded like a dangerous proposal to Karl. Who knew what sort of dishes the kitchen had cooked up when left unsupervised. Or worse, when supervised by Lotus.

Chapter 1299 Here For The Eggs

The spectacle had gathered a number of the off-duty workers from the cavern, and everyone wanted the chance to congratulate Wendy on her advancement.

Fortunately for Karl, that also brought over all the people that he needed to talk to on this visit.

"Davis, don't run away. I have good news for you." Karl called when he caught sight of the overworked Fallen Seraphim.

Davis gave him a suspicious stare. "When you say that there are good things coming for me, it always means more employees, more Guild Members and more work, even though the shop now does five times as much business through the Alliance store as it does through the main shop.

If it wasn't for the restricted level of most of our crafters, we would be selling even more, and the Alliance is still talking about expanding further." Karl felt a sense of embarrassment for the extra work that he had piled on Davis, who was only supposed to be the store manager. Technically, the Alliance purchases were still part of the store, but his duties had gone far beyond what he had signed on for.

"I'm not going to make more work for you this time. Instead, I've come to give you a raise. You've been doing far too much work for your pay grade, and you've led the Guild Store to fame and profits far greater than expected. The craftsmen all earn on commission, a portion of the sale price of their items.

But you have been on salary, based on the cost of living here in Drodh. If you were employed in Zilaz, your pay would be significantly higher, as are the prices for the goods that you manage.

So, we will be adjusting your pay commensurately." Karl declared.

{I'm more shocked that he knew the word commensurately and used it somewhat properly.} Sapphire muttered to herself, which made Dana giggle.

Davis, who had not heard the dragon's snide remark, simply smiled and bowed to Karl. "Thank you for your consideration. Should I prepare the budget numbers for a new pay package?" He asked.

Karl shook his head. "No, I will declare the raise now, and then you can work out the numbers along with next pay period's sales."

Davis smiled at the answer. It was basically a 'not my problem' from Karl, but Davis knew that there was far more revenue than would ever be declared in a pay package.

Even if he earned ten times what any of the smiths did, it still wouldn't put a dent in the Guild's monthly profits.

Karl had the system upgrade the pay package of Davis' work contract, which could be done without signing a new form, as it was a pay raise, and the system had no problem letting the Guild Branch Leader hand those out.

Docked pay, or a lower pay package, the member would have to sign their agreement to, but not pay raises.

"There, all done. If you're using the automatic transfer between the Guild House balance and the Guild Members, it should go automatically to you." Karl informed the overjoyed Demon.

"Indeed, and it will be enough to make my mother proud of me for once." Davis joked.

Wendy laughed. "What do you mean 'for once'? That old woman doesn't do anything but brag about you all day long. I don't think that I've ever seen a parent quite as proud of her child as she is of you."

Karl noticed a red dragon cleric passing by and waved her over.

"You are new, were you here for the orphanage?" He asked.

"I am one of the new arrivals, preparing for the dragons that the Guild apparently has ready to hatch. Bertie is my name, in the human tongue. We started to gather a few days ago, and you must be Karl, the Guild Branch Leader." She replied.

"Wonderful to meet you, Bertie. The eggs still have a bit of time, but having everyone in place first would be best. I will need to gather everyone who is going to be moving to the separate space so that I can confirm that they understand the nature of the assignment. The eggs can't safely be moved for some time, but the separate space they are in is linked to me, so it may change locations, and the entrance might not always be accessible, so you will need to work with the druids and nature clerics to ensure that you are producing everything that you need." Karl explained.

Bertie nodded. "I hear that there is enough room there to fly freely, and that you have created a biome for each type of dragon egg. That is wonderful news, and much better than the average orphanage."

Sapphire smiled indulgently at the young red dragon. "There is more than enough room to fly. It is a Tiny World spell, not just a hidden space. Karl, how large is it now?"

Karl shrugged. "I have been expanding it since I reached Mythic Rank, and while I didn't bring it to maximum size, it's hundreds of kilometres across now.

Enough that there is not only room to fly, but it has become nearly necessary to fly to get around efficiently. The nature clerics have broken themselves into groups so that they don't have to travel so far every day. But we have added teleportation platforms in the space that let you get to major landmarks easily."

Dana frowned at Karl. When had he done that?

About five seconds after he said that he had. That is when he added them, with one marked platform a few hundred metres from each of the camp locations, and then one near the mock Guild House and the underground city.

The Tiny World was feeling much more complete now that Karl was getting ahead on his understanding of the Mana Manipulation Fundamental Rule. It wasn't at the point that it could be considered a fully independent space yet. But it was getting close, and Karl could use it as a test to measure how his progress toward immortality was coming.

Though at this rate, both Cara and Hawk might beat him to full understanding of a Rule.

Chapter 1300 Scaly Caretakers

Bertie silently called over the rest of the orphanage workers, including the Matron Blackclaw from the Orphanage at the Drodh Guild House. She wouldn't be leaving, as her charges were going to be productive citizens of Drodh once they grew up. However, that didn't mean that she would accept being left out of the loop when there were big things happening to her fellow Clerics.

"Well, that was quick. Do we have everyone gathered? I see dragons from at least half the aspects here." Karl began.

"We have all the important ones for an isolated Orphanage and Dragon Temple here. Red, blue, white, silver, bronze, green." Matron Blackclaw agreed, speaking as the ranking Priestess present.

An orphanage counted the same as a temple, library or academy. The one who led it had the highest position in the hierarchy of dragon clerics.

"Well now, that is surprising. But it should work out well for us, as we've got dragons of every sort waiting to hatch. Have you all been briefed on how they came to be where they are?" Karl asked.

Matron Blackclaw nodded. "Everyone has the details, and it has been accepted that these eggs are all orphaned, even if their actual parents might be alive on another world, or roaming wild on another continent.

They were abandoned and not handed over to the church in a proper manner, so we will raise them all equally, without any intentions of giving them back to their parents at adulthood."

Dana smirked, and the red dragon winked at her.

"Go ahead and ask. The one known as Lotus has been begging us to allow her to raise one as a new best friend for weeks." The matron informed her.

"That was actually what I was thinking. I overheard Lotus and Button plotting ways to get a baby dragon to play with." Dana laughed.

The Matron sighed. "Right, I almost forgot about the Forest Dragon. While she's not technically an orphan, and she's being raised by the Nature Clerics, she will be among the first that enter the educational system. The blue dragon adherents will lose their minds to see her running wild without any form of educational plan."

It would take some devoted efforts to find her and keep her in one spot all day. But Dana assumed that they had a plan for that, which would be suitable for a forest dragon who already knew the basics about plants and who had a 'job' to do.

If you could count gathering chicken eggs while resisting the urge to stop and eat them as a job.

Not that Button would do any such thing. The chickens would attack her if she did.

"Since everyone already knows what is going on, I thought that I could introduce you to the Tiny World today. It will take some stress off poor Davis here, and it will give you all time to get situated before the hatchlings arrive." Karl began.

Immediate excitement spread through the crowd. This was what they had been waiting for, their new assignment. Or, for many of them, their first assignment.

The Church had decided to send only a few senior dragons to the Tiny World, as they knew that the mana, there would be incredibly dense, and that would benefit young dragons who were still growing into maturity much more than it would the older ones.

The primary goal was to help the young ones grow into proper adults, but helping the young adults grow into powerful elders of the church was also an important goal.

Their only major concern was that the red and blue dragons who worked in school and orphanage duties were overwhelmingly the women, while the men mostly volunteered for either combat duties or library research positions.

So, they had tried to balance them out with a few men from the silver and bronze dragons, but ultimately, they had only found four men in total out of the twenty who were going to raise the dragons.

"Is it just me, or are there a lot more dragons than I was expecting?" Dana asked, doing a quick head count.

"Twenty in total. Hatchling dragons are a terror, far worse than you might have experienced before. Especially when they're from mixed species and all want to show off and argue about whose innate powers are best." Matron Blackclaw insisted.

Hawk, who had chosen to circle overhead, chirped a laugh, and the dragon looked up at him.

{Fire. It's obviously fire.} He insisted.

The red dragon laughed. "See, that is exactly what I'm talking about."

Then she tossed a chunk of dried meat up to him, and Hawk cheered as he retreated to a rafter to enjoy his snack.

"You know, the Beast Master class might actually be very suitable as an option for red dragons. You're a natural." Karl commended her.

"I've had over a century of experience. If I couldn't guess what keeps young ones under control, who could?" She retorted.

"But as I was saying, the Church has chosen these twenty for your brood. These two fine young men are Rashid and Oban, the assigned arbiters from the Bronze Dragon god. That is Raist, he will be representing the Silver Dragon of magic, and then we have Axel, the Patron of the Orphanage, who will be working with his wife Aliah." Matron Blackclaw explained.

Karl didn't miss that the Matron didn't introduce all the ladies to him, though many of them were standing closer than the bronze dragons, who had chosen to watch from the back.

Whether that was because she didn't trust him getting too friendly with them, or out of consideration for his status as a married man, he didn't know.

It could be both.

"Well, if the kids are off at work already, you can accompany us to the tiny world for a tour." Karl offered.

Matron Blackclaw shook her head. "No, let the new Matron and her partner lead this group from the start. They don't need me looking over their shoulder."