

The First Legendary Beast Master #Chapter 131 Free Flowing - Read The First Legendary Beast Master Chapter 131 Free Flowing

Chapter 131 Free Flowing

As the log jam began to crumble, Karl threw the hook again, pulling another log from the edge of the pile furthest from his reach. The extra effort helped dislodge a bit more of the blockage, and widen the gap that the water had to escape from the flooded area.

It was turning into a whole new riverbank at this point, but at least it was roughly following the original course now, and not trying to detour through a different valley.

Thor had dropped his Lightning Shield so that he could bask in the feeling of the rain on his glossy green scales, and the golems remained silent beside Karl as he stood and watched the raging floodwaters begin to diminish as the downpour turned into a more manageable light drizzle.

He had left most of the logs that were near the hill, trying to prevent the water from cutting the hill out from beneath him, and it appeared to have worked for now. Much of the sloping hillside was gone, but beside him, there was a solid barrier of logs that they could pull out later to make an improvised bridge to cross the worst of the damaged areas.

The idea had come to Karl as he watched the way that the logs held up to the force of the water and the other debris that was smashed into them. Even if they were going to pack dirt on top of it to make a proper road, putting a row of logs out would make for a much more stable base than packing deeper mud.

They even had plenty of Elites with slicing type skills that could split them lengthwise, making a flat surface for the bus and giving them more to work with.

So, instead of clearing more of the blockage, Karl set about pulling more of the largest logs from the river and up along the bank. It prevented them from piling up again further downstream, but more importantly, it left them nearby for him to work with when it came time to move the bus.

All the students wondered what Karl was doing with his huge pile of logs by the time that the rain finally ended, but the Driver understood very well. In fact, he would have asked them to go hunt for some eventually because they were going to need them to get across that flood plain.

But he wasn't going to send anyone out into that downpour and risk someone sliding down into the waters. There would be plenty of logs available once the water went

down, no matter where they looked. This area had been heavily forested, and they would naturally pile up everywhere that the waters were forced to divert by a hill or other obstacle.

As the rain stopped, Karl sent Hawk up to scout the area and survey a path forward for them.

[Good news. If we go from here across the spot where the blockage was, we can be on mostly flat land for at least the next ten kilometres, then the metal road comes back and there is one more crossing, but its bridge is high and it is still standing.

After that, the river and the metal road go in different directions.] Hawk reported.

[Good work. It will take some effort to cut a road town the hill and across the other side, but we can do that easily enough with all of us. As long as that other bridge is as good as it looks, we should be home in time for lunch.]

[Now we are talking. Drake doesn't taste as good as it smells.]

Once the waters began to slow, Karl called Thor and Hawk back into the beast space and returned to the bus, to be greeted by the energetic applause of his classmates.

The driver addressed the group. "We will stay here on the hill overnight and set a watch. Get as much sleep as you can because there will be shovelling and log splitting in the morning. Awakened Karl, did you find a route home?"

Karl nodded. "If we cross where I was working, and make a road up that hill, we can drive across a high flat spot until the road curves back to meet us. Then Hawk says there is a tall bridge that is still standing, and after that, the railroad and the river go different directions."

The driver took out a map and turned it to face the direction that they were.

"I see where he means. That is a railroad bridge, but there are runners for the vehicles to pass as well. It is nearly sixty metres long, and sits atop a deep coulee, so the water would have been far below its base.

Yes, that should work. Normally, that route would be considered impossible because of the hills, but if we cut them and make a new bridge to cross the river, we should be alright. It won't be a pretty bridge, but with those big trees, we should have enough to span the stream once it calms down, and the rough boards will let us get up the other side once it is cut into a slope." He explained to the students.

None of them had anything even resembling bridge building experience, other than the driver, who had to improvise to get across rivers more than once in his career, so they were trusting him on this one.

When it wasn't flooded, this wasn't a big river, so they had high hopes for his plan, as well as Karl's collection of logs.

Hawk's voice interrupted Karl's thoughts.

[Let me out, let me out.] He shouted, and Karl realized that he had actually ordered them to stay in for the night, something that he rarely did.

[Go ahead.] Karl agreed, and the Windspeed Hawk appeared on the roof of the bus, then gave a mighty flap of his wings and streaked off into the darkness. Then he dive-bombed something on the ground and returned to land on the roof with the body of a massive snake.

[Snek snek snek, chomp chomp chomp.] Hawk sang happily to himself as he began to portion it into manageable pieces.

Most of it, he took back into his space with him, but about half he left on the bus for Karl and the others.

"Hawk brought us breakfast meat. Who wants to go up on the roof to go get it?" Karl laughed as he realized what had gotten the bird so excited.

It wasn't a mouse, but Windspeed Hawks loved to hunt snakes as well. Rends easily cut off their heads, and then they were left with a long tube of food.

Sister Betty sighed as she looked upward at the metal roof. That was going to be a slippery trip, and the roof was sure to be bloody now with monster offal, which would draw even more monsters to them with its smell.

"I will. Driver, do you have a sprayer to clean the roof? Monster blood will draw more of them." She asked.

"Don't worry about it, there is a bit more rain on the way, and it will rinse us clean. There are so many dead minor monsters and animals in the area that chances are nothing will notice.

I do have a scent blocking spray, but I don't want to waste it with more rain coming tonight." The Driver explained.

"Alright. I will see you in a minute."

Chapter 132 Night Watch Lizards

Not long after the Priestess came back in with a large bundle of meat, far more than they would need for just one meal, the skies opened up again, and a steady light rain

began. Not enough to cause more flooding, but enough that it was quickly rinsing off the bus.

Then the wind picked up, which seemed to relieve the driver.

"The winds will push the storm away, and help dry out the ground faster. At worst, we might be stuck for one full day, but no more than that before the ground is dry enough that we can move again." He explained, then tilted his seat back and pulled a blanket from the overhead bin, signalling that he was done with conversation for the night.

Bus seats wouldn't be the most comfortable night's rest, but they were dry. So, they split the group into four, giving each of them a three-hour night watch, and everyone did their best to sleep.

Karl's seat put him on the last watch of the night, but he knew that Rae was watching what happened around them with keen interest. This spot might not be a bad one, she had decided, once Hawk got a chance to go out hunting.

Snakes were a pain, as they just slithered through and under the web, but there should be other things to hunt soon, and she hadn't been ordered to stay inside. The night was her time, and if there was prey foolish enough to approach her den, who was she to say no to their kindness?

She got her chance just before Karl's shift started at four in the morning. A small group of Venom Fang Lizards had swum across the receding floodwaters and were diverted from their path by the presence of warm bodies on the bus.

They were each about the size of a domesticated cat, and once they hit her web, they would be so completely tangled that they would never get free again.

The students on watch were startled and nearly shouted in fear when Rae landed outside the bus, but they quickly recognized her body, and that she was weaving a dome of web all around the bus.

It almost seemed like she wanted to cocoon it in the strings of spider silk, but once she had a loose net, she settled down under the bus and blended herself into the mud and darkness to wait for her prey.

The lizards didn't have great night vision, so they never saw the thin strings of spider web running from the bus to the ground. So, when they ran into it, just as Rae predicted, they panicked and began to flail, tying themselves up even tighter with every movement.

Their poison fangs would do them precious little good when they were trapped in the web, and Rae waited until she was certain that she had trapped them all before she darted out in a streak of inky black motion and punctured their skulls to pull them into the beast space with her.

"Did you see that?" One of the students on watch gasped, waking Karl and a few others nearby.

"No, and that's the part that frightens me. One moment they were in the web, and the next they were just dead and gone. I've never seen anything move that fast." The boy beside him whispered.

"What's happening outside? Should we wake the others?" A newly awoken student asked.

"No need. Rae, the big spider of Karl's was outside hunting lizard monsters. I think that she's back under the bus now." The boy replied.

Karl smiled. They wouldn't understand that the mental space could be accessed from some distance away, so they wouldn't have understood how Rae simply disappeared once she had her loot. From their point of view it had to be absolutely terrifying to have seen the Bloodbath Spider launch out to kill her prey then simply vanish.

[It was impressive, if I do say so myself. I got perfectly blended while I waited, and I doubt that most of the humans could even see me, they just saw the lizards being pulled from the web.]

[The apex predator of the night.] Karl agreed.

"She's definitely making fun of us for not being able to spot her. You can always tell by the look on Karl's face when the beasts are talking to him." One of the students on guard duty whispered.

Dana's soft laugh caught the boys' attention. "Of course she is laughing at you. She can camouflage herself, and it is dark outside. I bet you didn't even notice right away that the lizards were gone. Rae is extremely fast, and in the dark, even I have a hard time spotting her, and I'm fairly used to looking for her."

The boys chuckled, thinking that Dana was actually afraid of spiders. It would never cross their minds that the mage and the Bloodbath Spider both liked sleeping in hammocks on Karl's balcony.

Karl wasn't sure how much longer that would be feasible, though. Rae was growing rapidly, and once she got close to two metres long, it would be hard for her to create a large enough hammock out of her web inside the Gazebo. It needed room to swing and attach at either end.

Karl could feel the pride in Rae's mind as Dana praised her. But what was more amusing was that half of the students hadn't even realized that there was a spider web built over the bus. They had turned the interior lights off so that they weren't a beacon

on the hilltop, and for that reason alone, the very minimal evening light made the strands impossible for most of them to see.

But the sky was beginning to lighten in preparation for the impending dawn, and the students would start to notice soon. Hopefully before one of them stepped outside and got entangled in the sticky webbing, but it was tempting to just not say anything and see what happened.

Karl took his place by the window of the bus and waited for the sun to come up enough that he could send Hawk out scouting again and check on the flood water levels. As long as the levels were receding as expected, they could probably start digging the ramp to their makeshift bridge, to make up for what the flood had washed away.

But there might also be a better way than the first one that Hawk had found. Once the water went down, it would be easier to see what areas were stone or gravel, and therefore more likely to be solid enough to support the bus until they could get back to the high ground.

Hawk and Thor were both still asleep, and Rae was just about to doze off when the sun came up, marking the end of the night watches, and the beginning of the long wait for the sun to dry out the ground enough that it would be safe to move from the well-based roadway.

The last thing anyone wanted was to spend all morning working, then get the bus stuck five metres from where it was now.

Chapter 133 Aftermath

Once the sun did come up, the surrounding area of hilltop began to change rapidly, seeming to come alive, and bursting with life and colour. Plants rapidly grew and absorbed water for later consumption, flowers bloomed in a matter of minutes, and the standing pools of water all but disappeared, except down in the river bottom, where it was simply too saturated and most of the plant life was destroyed by the raging waters.

But even there, the change was noticeable, as the ground was mostly visible now, exposing rubble and debris that had been carried downstream last night.

It was a mess down there, and the layer of silt that had built up turned large portions of the area to slowly drying mud plains, from which scattered plant life was struggling to break free.

Despite the ferocity of the storm, what hadn't been destroyed was thriving, taking advantage of the situation to get ahead of the competing species.

The same was true for the wildlife. Karl could see in the distance that there were numerous small scavengers and rodents out searching for their prize. Many burrows

would have flooded or collapsed, and this was a prime opportunity for them to eat something that they couldn't normally hunt.

Hawk was thinking the same thing, but he was still a bit sleepy, and the animals would be active all day long. He had time to go hunt when he wanted to.

"How long do you think that it will take before it's safe to start moving about and preparing to get back in motion?" One of the warriors asked the bus driver, who was scanning the horizon with binoculars.

"Later this afternoon. The ground where we need to go is still saturated, so you won't be able to dig that ramp at all yet. I know you young folk are all energetic to keep moving, but sometimes you just have to sit and wait."

He had a point, but while Karl did have to just sit here for a while, he didn't have to idle around and just wait.

[Hawk, do you want to go scout the area? If you can find us a nice dry route, even if it is a bit further around, that would save time. Also, check for monsters who have moved along our intended path and any new obstacles we might encounter.] Karl suggested.

[That is fine. I could use some time to stretch my wings and just fly.] The Hawk agreed.

It wasn't a sentiment that the other two beasts shared. Rae liked her web, and Thor preferred to be where everyone else was. The concept of just flying around by himself all day seemed very lonely to the Lightning Cerro.

Rae thought that he was a bit of an idiot, constantly wanting to be around others when he could be peacefully alone, but with his energy level, he needed people to play with.

Karl looked around at the bored students sitting on the bus.

"Why don't we send someone out to see how the ground is? I think that everyone could use a little stretch, and the thick grass should have kept the ground stable." Karl suggested

The driver nodded as the students began to get to their feet, taking Karl as the voice of authority here, as long as Sister Betty didn't object.

The look that the nun was giving him said that she would like to see Thor again, so as the students went out, Karl sent Thor out to meet them.

The ground was a bit springy under his heavy footsteps, but it wasn't muddy, just uncompacted and thickly layered with roots. Last night it had been worse, and there was water squishing up as he walked, so this was an improvement.

He was the heaviest of them, and though he was far from comparable to the bus, Thor's rapid growth had brought him to nearly two hundred kilos of solid chested Cerro. If they were back in the pack, he would be treated as one of the most promising youngsters with his healthy build and high energy levels.

The group of students spread out around the bus, cutting away the remains of the web that Rae had created last night, and enjoying the way that the morning sun began to heat everything.

You could feel the moisture in the air as the sun evaporated it, and watch as the last of the floodwaters receded, leaving new wetlands among the mud plains that were beginning to dry out and crack at the top as their moisture was siphoned away.

"This side of the hill looks pretty good. The waters washed away the dirt, and it's all shale stone. If that stone layer continues, then we might be able to make a durable road, but it's going to take a lot of work." One of the students announced as he examined the hill down toward the blockage Karl cleared last night.

"Would you like to examine it more closely? I can toss the chain down the hill to help you get back up, in case it's slippery or soft." Karl offered.

"Sure, I can see that you saved plenty of logs to make a bridge, so we should at least check the condition of the hillside." The boy agreed.

Karl thought about it for a moment, and out of everyone here, he was the one who likely knew the most about rocks. Especially the shale stones that were common in the higher levels of the mine. Further down, the mines had been comprised of thick lithium clay and coal veins between granite layers, but the upper levels had a lot of oily shale that had been left as intact as possible because it made the roof unstable if you dug underneath it.

Unlike that stuff, this didn't have that thick crude oil smell, but the grey stone was similar both in texture and composition.

"I will go with you. There's plenty of shale in the mines, and I know far too much about stones." Karl explained with a laugh as he went to recover the hook from where he had left it by the bus last night.

Sister Betty opened up the belly box of the bus and pulled out a pickaxe and a shovel.

"They're part of the recovery tools, so that's what we will have to work with to form the road if you need to." She informed them as Karl and the other student caught the tools with comfortable familiarity.

"And go easy on them. They're just wood." The driver shouted from inside the bus.

"No problem. We will be gentle." The warrior laughed as he shouldered the shovel, but the driver was right. They were both incredibly strong, and Karl's strength would shatter a pickaxe handle on the first strike, as well as burying the head so far in the ground as to make it a pain to get back out.

The hill was a gentle slope for the first few metres, then a steep descent down the stone cliff until they got to the river. They descended the chain, checking the surface as they went.

"It looks like it's all soft stone, all the way down. That is going to make an excellent road base." Karl noted.

"Yeah, we can cut it away and pile it here at the bottom to make a smooth ramp to the river. If we put the log bridge five or ten metres above the water level, it should last a little while before it is washed away again. That sort of rain happens every few years, but not often enough that our improvements won't last the summer." The boy agreed.

"You're from the area?" Karl asked.

"Yeah, about fifty kilometres that way." He replied, pointing across the river.

As Karl remembered the map, there was no road from here to there, and it was in the wrong direction to get to the Academy, but the weather would be similar enough that he wouldn't be wrong about the frequency of such storms. In fact, it had likely gotten hit by this very storm late last night.

They walked the few metres across the logs to the river crossing, as the other boy needed to be closer to see that the far bank was made of the same shale as this one. It was also a more shallow angle, as there hadn't been much dirt for the water to wash away.

Karl examined the situation with satisfaction.

"Alright, if we cut away this side, and clear that side, we only have a short dig to get to solid stone. Then we will break the stone here, to make a better ramp angle, and run it out as far as we need to make the logs reach." Karl informed his teammate, who smiled back and nodded.

"Then, let's get started. Has Hawk verified that this is a good route to get back to the Academy? The route mentioned last night sounded decent." The warrior asked.

Karl nodded. "Yeah, this is the route. He will check the next bridge, but it looked good last night, and it's all high ground until our route comes back and meets up with the existing road. We will be making a big loop, where the road was nearly straight before, but it should all be drivable, even if I need to hook Thor to the recovery points on the bus and have him help pull."

The Lightning Cerro thought that was an incredible idea. The wide bus wheels didn't seem as reliable as his own feet, but between them, they should be able to pull the load of students across the grass. In a way, he was exactly right. The extra pulling force would help keep the wheels from spinning in low traction areas, and make it much easier to get where they were going.

Chapter 134 Corps Of Engineers

"It looks like it's all shale underneath the surface. If we cut the top layer away, we can make a nice ramp to the bridge." Karl called up to the others.

Hawk left his space and took off into the sky to survey their intended path, now that Karl seemed certain that this way would bring them across the river.

"Well, the remains of the blockage are a good height above the water now, so should we set a temporary bridge?" One of the students suggested.

"Not yet. We want it to be further from the water so that it doesn't wash away in the next rain. How many pickaxes and shovels do we have?" Karl called back.

"There's a whole bundle of each. I think that they were prepared for all the passengers on a trip to help out." Sister Betty called back.

"Sister Betty, you lovely, gentle and kind soul. Do you suppose that you could enchant these tools for us to help keep them from breaking when we work at full strength?" Karl asked with his best pleading voice, which had sometimes worked on the teachers at school.

The muscular cleric laughed and rolled her eyes.

"Of course I will. Divine Tool is one of the spells I am best with, and as I'm stronger than any of you with magic, you shouldn't be able to break the enchantment while digging." She replied.

The warrior began climbing the wire back up to the top, but Karl just took two running steps down the log and launched himself up the five metres to the point where he could walk safely.

"That is so cheating. Do you want a pick or a shovel? They will both cut through stone once I enhance them." The cleric asked as Karl made it back to her.

"I will keep the pick. Now, we just need to map out the route, so everyone knows where they're working toward." Karl explained.

Hawk circled back, and sent a pair of [Shred] attacks into the grass, leaving deep furrows in a straight line to the crossing.

"That works too. Turn that into a smooth slope, ending at least five metres above the water level as it is now, and it should be good. I think the water is still higher than normal, thanks to the storm, so it should be enough for the bridge to survive awhile."

Sister Betty took out the two bundles of tools and activated her spell, which made them glow with the same holy light as the guards' weapons during the battle at the railroad.

Karl moved near the edge of the cliff and swung the pick, shattering the stone and tossing it down the hill.

"That's too easy. I should take one of the larger shovels." He called back to the group, who smiled in impending victory.

Unfortunately for them, they didn't all have Karl's strength, so while he dug out large amounts of stone and the ground shook with every hit, most of the warriors didn't move much more than a shovel full.

They tossed it with ease, like loose cotton, but Karl's strength was making short work of the job while the others stood beside him.

"Wait, I have an idea. I know another spell called [Impact]. It sends vibrations through things, and I use it to knock targets over. If I use it on Karl's shovel, he can turn the whole slope to gravel." Sister Betty offered.

"Alright, everyone, please step back. I will see how well this works." Karl agreed.

The cleric added the spell, and Karl felt the possibility in the shovel as he hefted it. The vibration was directional, and proportionate to force. So, when he focused and put all his strength behind the hit, it should break up a large area at once.

Karl stepped halfway through their intended path, and carefully angled his strike.

The shockwave carried through the stone, and the hillside slid away, turning to gravel and piling up at the foot of the cliff. In a single strike, they were half done the work of creating their route.

There was just one problem. To create the slope they wanted, they would have to create far too much broken rock. The bus wasn't some extreme adventure vehicle, despite its wide and thick treaded tires. Steep angles didn't work for it, and Karl's second strike created a large amount of gravel with nowhere to go.

"Well, now we just need to move this gravel to the far side of the pile and finish the ramp. It should be a decent slope when we're finished." He informed the group.

"Well, Karl and Betty did the worst of the work, now it's our turn." One of the mages laughed.

A large grey golem formed out of the loose stone, then scooped up an armload of rocks like it was a backhoe.

"Gravel Golems aren't the strongest in combat, but they can change shapes, a little like the Sand Golems. It's limited, but flattening the arms into a bucket is no problem. Since it's all gravel, I just need to add more magic, and he can move all of this.

If it were dirt or mud, it would be much harder, since it's not the Golem's element." She explained.

The Golem scraped a path through the crushed shale rock and pushed it off the far end, giving the warriors the right idea. They moved up with shovels and piled the gravel in the middle of the four-metre wide path for the golem to move to the river.

They finished with a steep slope that ended four metres above the river when the gravel was gone, but they had a smooth slope to that point.

"Now we just need to cross the river and build up a bridge footing on the far side." Sister Betty reminded them.

Karl jogged down the slope and jumped. The flying leap put him on the far side of the river with ease from his elevated start, but the bank here was much more shallow, so they would have to build something up and not just pile loose rock.

As he was considering it, Karl heard laughter from the far bank.

"You lot are fast workers, but not exactly the corps of engineers, are you?" The driver asked.

"What do you mean? It's sturdy, we shook the rock to settle it, and it's not going anywhere." Karl shouted back.

"Have you ever seen the spout of a jug when you tilt it? That's what you created here. As soon as it starts raining, the water is going to pour down that ramp you cut into the hillside in a glorious waterfall." He laughed.

Sister Betty began to giggle. "I see the problem now. Alright, we need to cut ditches on both sides of this ramp so that the water has somewhere to flow that isn't the road itself. If we are going to leave this here for others, they should at least be able to use it."

She got the others back to work, digging through the stone to make deeper spots at the edge of the ramp, and sloped sides so that they didn't collapse on the road. While they did that, Karl looked around for his options.

He had plenty of logs on this side as well, and that gave him the idea.

[Thor, come here and work. I want you to toss a bunch of logs from this shore toward the bank directly opposite the ramp. Then I will dig a pit in the hill for material, and fill the gaps with stone. Once it's high enough, we will make a bridge deck.]

The happy Cerro came vanished into his space, then came back out with a happy trot, and immediately ran over to push a broken log toward the jam with his two upper horns.

A flick of his head tossed the broken log on top of the pile, though it strained his prodigious strength.

"I will get you the chain so you can pull them." Karl laughed, as he realized that his plan underestimated the weight of a full tree.

Thor shook his head, and went for smaller logs that had been shattered before their arrival. They would make good filler, Karl thought, and picked out a spot to begin digging gravel to throw into the pile.

The two of them worked well together, and after a while, even Rae came out to lend a hand, in her own way.

She made a silk harness for Thor, and then attached the logs to it with thick ropes of spider silk. The initial effort was exhausting for her, but once it was done, she just cut the rope, and then sprayed spit on the end, which caused it to liquify and mend around the next log.

Within the reach of the Bloodbath Spider, its web was a versatile magical tool, not just sticky silk.

That let Thor move some longer trees into position, accelerating the process, as Karl threw gravel at it from a spot upstream. It took them under an hour to have the ramp sorted out, and then it was time to work on the bridge deck.

Sister Betty clapped her hands to get the attention of the others as they finished making what she thought was a sturdy enough footing for the bridge.

"I have picked out four trees, all of them long enough to cross the river. Now, you need to do the hard work, gentlemen. Plane off the top third of each log, so we can place them to create a flat driving surface, and then we have to drag them into position."

"Got it sister. We're ready." The warriors called back, sweating with the exertion of digging ditches and reinforcing the gravel slope as much as possible for the last hour.

Chapter 135 Bridge

With the chain and hook, they dragged the four chosen logs up the hill, where the warriors got to work planing the logs to roughly the same thickness with their shovels.

It wasn't the most precise use of tools ever, but the logs split well enough when the enchanted tools hit them, and Sister Betty had managed to pick out four that were long enough to span the gap between the two hills without the need for any fancy joinery or a brace in the middle.

They were well over a metre around, which the driver assured them would be enough to drive the bus over, as long as he was careful not to give them too much of a jolt. But he had plenty of practice at that, since not everywhere that he had to go to recover teams was on a proper and improved road.

Karl worked to get the far bank ready as they worked, creating a ramp out of a spare log to roll the bridge deck into place. The plan was simple. Once they finished working the logs, they would attach a chain to either end and toss the other end to Karl, who would pull the log across the river, and let it float to the foot of the road.

Then, with Thor on his side and the warriors on the other, they would pull the log up and into place. Repeat that with all four logs and it would be done.

In theory, it was simple, and they could have it done in an hour or two.

"Ready for the fun part?" Dana called once the warriors had the first log chained up and ready to move.

"Toss it over, and we will see if the plan is good. Just remember, send it a bit upstream so that we don't have to drag it against the current." Karl called back.

The chain came sailing over to his side of the river, and Karl pulled it tight, with the eager help of Thor. The log slid smoothly into the river, and the two of them moved a bit further upstream, keeping it on course until they had their end on the shore, and they were ready to pull it up their makeshift ramp.

"Alright, shift positions, and we will pull together. We have to keep it squared up between the two sides, or it will fall back into the river." Karl called as he prepared to shift the log up the freshly created hill.

"Got it. We will adjust to match your side, just keep it nice and smooth." Dana called back.

The warriors had nominated her to be the spokesperson for the team, since her Golems were the strongest and would be doing the majority of the work.

The two sides moved, and the chains pulled tight again, moving the heavy log into place, then dragging it across the footing that they had designed into the gravel ramps.

The log was about four metres longer than necessary, but with a bit of adjustment and some digging, they had it in place, and they were ready to do the second one.

"This one will be easier. We can just take a short chain and pull it across the other log. I recommend the Golems do it, in case something goes wrong, and they fall in the river." Karl suggested.

"That should be fine. With my two, and then the gravel Golem, we should have plenty of power to get the log moved. We measured them all when they were here, so they're all the same length. Is the other side ready for it?" Dana replied.

"It will be before they get here."

The three Golems easily dragged the log over and dropped it in place, then assisted Karl in getting it rotated with the flat side up and level with the other log.

Now, they had a foot bridge two metres wide, and the third and fourth logs went into place with ease.

All that was left was to bury the ends and drive a few posts into the road base at either end so that they didn't shift apart when the bus drove across it.

They didn't have any spare rope, nails or anything else to fasten them, but with the flat of the shovel, Karl had plenty of strength to hammer a fence post sized log into the ground on either side of the bridge deck. That would have to be enough to hold them, at least until a crew with more equipment could come and make a better bridge, or fix the main road.

The driver walked down to admire the handiwork once Karl was finished the process, and whistled in appreciation.

"You know, for such an amateur endeavour, you lot actually built one of the better field bridges I have ever seen. Just the fact that you had the strength to move those huge logs instead of using smaller trees makes all the difference." He informed them with a pleased smile.

"Well, Hawk and Thor say that the ground on the other side is pretty good, how does it look up there? Can we start moving the bus?" Karl asked.

"Yeah, we can. I will ask that all the students take their bags and cross first, then I will drive the bus across with the tow cable attached to the front.

Even if the bridge collapses, Thor and the Golems should have the strength to pull the bus back to shore, and we might be able to drive home." The driver explained.

"Good enough for me. The Gravel Golem says the base is sturdy, and I'm choosing to trust its expertise. We will see you on the other side. Then, we will hook Thor to the tow cable, and he will walk in front of the bus until we're back on a proper road bed.

That will give you warning if the ground is soft, and he can give you some extra forward motion when needed."

It would also help tire out the Cerro a bit more. He didn't get outside nearly enough, and the beast space was refreshing. So even if he played with the bashing pillar in there, he didn't really get tired.

Keeping Thor exhausted from play was good for his development, or so Thor insisted. His logic was that you had to work muscles constantly to make them grow big and strong. Now, that sort of logic also held true for humans, but with the Serum, they were all growing big and strong without the extra help, so it likely wouldn't stop Thor from growing if he didn't put in the work.

Hawk, on the other hand, believed that you just needed to stay active to avoid being lazy, and Rae maintained that just waiting in your web for prey to play with was better than wearing yourself out for no good reason.

So, Hawk floated in the sky overhead, Thor got ready to pull the bus around all day, and Rae cut up pieces of the lizards that she had caught in her web last night to see if she could find out how they managed to inject venom into things without making everything they ate taste like poison.

For purely scientific reasons, of course.

Karl went back to the bus and grabbed his gear to rejoin Thor on the far side of the river where the other students were waiting, and the driver began to make his way down the rocky slope.

The ground was still a bit soft beneath his tires as the bus made its way over, but the thick mat of roots was enough that the bus wasn't going to get bogged down, and the rocky decline provided ample traction, though it couldn't be good for the tires.

The driver stopped when he reached the bridge, and the recovery cable was run out to be held by Dana's Golems and Thor.

He carefully moved forward, but the sturdy tree trunks didn't budge at all as the bus rolled onto them. There was a slight flex as the back end reached the middle, but Karl thought he might be the only one who could see well enough to tell.

It was no threat to the bridge's integrity, and the driver had no problem making it back up out of the river valley to the high ground to reload the students and begin their trip back to the road.

"That's the hard part done. Everyone, please get back on the bus and settle your luggage, I will be ready to go in five minutes." The driver instructed once he was parked on level ground again.

"Is having Thor out front going to slow you down? I know the Lightning Cerro isn't renowned for their walking speed." Karl asked.

"We don't want to be going at a high speed anyhow. With a bus full of people, even five or ten kilometres an hour is enough that it will be a rough ride in here over the open fields. We should be just fine with him as our guide." The driver assured Karl, with a thumbs up for Thor, who had the chain from the tow cable looped around his chest and in front of his legs like the walking harnesses that people put on small dogs.

Karl took a seat near the front so he could communicate with Thor, and the small procession began its crawl across the fields, with Dana's two golems flanking the bus to help keep away stray monsters.

Hawk keened out a relieved cry as they were finally moving again. He had circled from the bus to the bridge four times already, and checked for every sign of soft dirt that he knew. There were some signs that the rodent tunnels had flooded in some areas, and he was ready to lead them around those spots, but they would be on top of the ridge the whole way to the second bridge.

Chapter 136 Home Stretch

Thor happily trotted along the route that Hawk was giving him, avoiding the puddles, likely soft spots and anywhere else that the Hawk thought looked sketchy.

But the Cerro leading a bus was gathering a fair bit of attention from the residents of the grasslands they were passing by.

Most of it came from the semi domesticated buffalo beasts, which were a primary source of monster meat for the Elites and raised by the ranchers in the area, while the rest came from the small animals who felt the vibrations in the ground from the odd combination.

Their first thought was that the Cerro had stolen a bus.

They were pack animals, and left alone, as the other monsters thought this one had been after the flood, they would try to return to their pack as soon as possible. The bus was large and shiny, just like his scales, so the local wildlife thought at first that the Lightning Cerro had just adopted the mechanical contraption as part of its new pack.

Then they noticed that it was full of people who felt like power. The Cerro wasn't alone and vulnerable, it had taken a pack of magic using humans, and it was leading them across the hills.

They were carefully making their way around a wetland area, where long reeds grew up out of the mud, when Hawk suddenly dove into the long grasses, and came back up with something long in its claws.

[Haha, I got another one. Oh, this is going to be so tasty.] He cheered as he contemplated the snake caught in his claws.

To a normal Windspeed Hawk, this was not a target it could hunt, the snake was much too large. But at his current size, the three-metre-long python was no match for him. It had an ability to harden its scales as armour, but it was still a Common Grade monster, and no match for Rend at the level that Hawk could use it.

[Toss it in the space for later. No playing with your food when you're scouting.] Karl reprimanded his partner.

[Fine, fine. But I'm not stopping.] Hawk pouted, before decapitating the beast and throwing the body at the bus, where it vanished a few metres from the window, pulled into the beast space.

"Care to explain what that was all about?" Dana asked carefully as she watched Karl staring out the window before Hawk threw a snake at him.

"Hawk is pouting because I told him not to play with his food." Karl replied.

Dana smiled and shook her head. "Is this his teenage rebellious phase?"

The other students hid their smiles at the thought. Hawk had always been an independent sort of beast, but they had never thought of it as a teenager rebelling against its parent's control.

Hawk was back to patrolling the area to keep the bus from getting bogged down, and though there were some soft spots where Thor was definitely helping pull them through, they hadn't had to stop once yet, and the map said that they should be getting close to the road.

[There are enemies on the horizon.] Hawk warned them just after lunch.

"Hawk says there is danger on the horizon. It's still too far for even his eyes to make out the small details, but I trust his judgment." Karl informed the bus.

He leaned out the window to see what the Hawk had found, and the sight of large wings in a V formation caught his attention. It looked like Drakes again, and they were a little closer now, enough that he could see the riders on their backs.

They weren't heading for the bus, they were flying toward the Holy Relic and the region where his group had been gathering that day.

He pulled out the Academy issued phone, and checked the list of emergency numbers, then recalled that he already knew the one that he wanted.

He dialed 777 and waited for it to ring through.

"Speak." The voice informed him.

"This is Awakened Karl, 95988. Full flight of Drake Riders spotted headed toward the newest Holy Relic from the south. The distance is roughly sixty kilometres." Karl replied.

"Understood."

Then the line went dead, and Karl put the phone back in his pocket, satisfied that he had done his duty.

"So, do you think that they're drawn to the location by the Dragon Magic?" One of the mages asked.

"That's my thought. At first, I thought that they were after the clerics, but this time they're headed the same way, so it has to be the lingering energy in the area that they have noticed. It might not be safe to go gathering there again for a few months, but we can always go look for another spot.

With the gains that we got this time, and our lucky charm amulets, we might be able to find another good patch of resources before these run out." Karl suggested.

The other students smirked at the reference. They had gotten so much this time that they wouldn't run out for quite a while, and some of the resources, like the holy stones, would last the mages for their whole training and beyond. But that only made them want to go out again once their strength had improved, so they could come a little closer to keeping up with the leaders of the class.

An hour after the Drakes were gone from sight, Thor pulled them up onto a gravel roadway, and Karl called him to a stop. The bus was back on the road now, and they could make better time, so it was the end of his guide duty for now.

He had gotten a solid workout, with the intermittent need to pull the bus through the soft spots, and Thor was happy to return to the beast space as Karl packed up the chain into the bus' belly boxes and Hawk landed on the roof to survey from a perch for a while.

"The bridge should be less than a kilometre ahead. We will stop when we get there and inspect the footings to make sure it is in good condition, and then we will be on the home stretch to the Academy." The driver explained once Karl was back in the bus and Thor was snoring away in his Holy Stone lined pond.

[It looks good. I searched over and under it, and it doesn't look broken.] Hawk informed Karl in a distracted voice as he considered whether to fly over and eat one of the Earth Mice for nostalgia's sake.

He had gotten his fill of snake before throwing it into storage, so he wasn't actually hungry, but they were mice.

If the mice had known what he was thinking, they would have been terrified. But their eyesight wasn't good enough to notice that he was sitting on top of the bus, whose vibration was hiding any presence that the Windspeed Hawk might have given off.

The drive to the bridge was remarkably smooth compared to bumping over the tufts of grass in the grasslands, which had been irregularly packed by the buffalo.

"Ah, the good life. I will never insult the quality of the gravel roads again." One of the warriors laughed as they drove up the bridge.

The driver looked up in the passenger facing mirror over his head. "It's all about life experience. The field saved us days of waiting or working, and now we're almost at the bridge. I will need to check it out quickly before we go, to make certain that there was no damage, but that's the last river crossing before the Academy."

The driver pulled the bus to the side of the road, but Karl didn't see any sign of other traffic anywhere, and hadn't seen any all day long. If this road was regularly travelled, the traffic wasn't out today. Most likely it was used by the farmers and trucks going to the villages in the area, but with the floods, everyone else would be stuck and waiting for road repairs.

The driver's inspection only took a few minutes, as he walked the length of the bridge and looked over the sides with a mirror on a stick.

"Hawk is right, there is no damage, and the water didn't cut away the base under the concrete. We are good to go." He announced as he returned.

Hawk gave a self-satisfied noise, as if questioning why anyone doubted him to begin with, and settled down on the cargo railing he had chosen as his perch atop the bus.

Once they were across, it was like the storm had never happened. The roads were bare and dry, with no signs of washed out shoulders, and an increased amount of wildlife. None that dared to approach the bus, but every few minutes Hawk would spot something and relay it to Karl.

"And this is the last corner before the Academy. Might as well start getting your gear ready and packing up the dishes. We will be there in ten minutes." The driver reminded them an hour after they passed the bridge.

The students groaned as they realized that it was their duty to clean up after themselves again, but Sister Betty had already started packing away the leftovers, and had packed the rice and beans into their usual squares, then fried them in the pan until they would hold their shape.

Who she planned to feed them to was a mystery, but she had the traditional snacks all ready should she happen to meet a horse here at the Academy.

"It has been a pleasure travelling with you all. Good luck on your next mission, and don't forget about my brothers and sisters at the Seminary Academy." Sister Betty informed them as the bus rolled through the gates.

"Best of luck on your mission, and may the fates favour you with all the resources that you need." Karl replied.

Chapter 137 Home Sweet Academy

The group were in high spirits when the bus parked in the front lot and the professors came out to meet them and see how their mission had gone.

"Team Leaders, how were the results? Not the confidential portion, but the advancement resources." Colonel Valerie asked as Karl and Dana stepped off the bus.

"We ended up with some improved alternate resources, thanks to Hawk's keen senses. We've got our entire packs loaded full, and I've got some plants in my beast space for the witches to make potions from. Can we get a wheelbarrow, or a cart, or something? There is a lot." Karl replied.

Dana nodded her agreement, and opened the top of her pack to show the Colonel the amount of loot stuffed inside.

"Did the others do this well?" Sergeant Rita asked as she saw the densely packed resources.

"We split things evenly, based on what everyone needed. The warriors and mages have different loot, but all of our packs are full, and we all have some of the aloe plant numbing and healing gel." Karl explained.

"You really did have good luck, considering that you also got a present from the church for helping their students." The Sergeant replied with a warm smile that startled the students who didn't know her.

It was rare to see teachers that honestly happy, especially when they hadn't been part of what had happened.

The Colonel pulled Karl and Dana aside to make a proper report, and the professors in charge of the other students took them in to get their version of events, or as much as they could tell. They all knew that something had happened involving the church, and they wouldn't ask too deeply or risk getting their students in trouble, but they still wanted details on how they ended up with ten loaded backpacks after leaving to look for a handful of rare plants.

"Oh, before we go, the stuff for the witches. I will leave it on the ground here." Karl announced.

The girls cheered as Karl unloaded the large fern plants, and the teachers stared at them.

"Did you clear an entire glade of them or something?" One of the professors asked.

"Nope, we took about every fourth one, and only the smaller ones whose stems fit in the jars. There is way more of it still growing, and we cut these off well above the ground, so they should grow back without too many issues.

Sustainable harvesting, as the clerics called it.

We did the same with everything else. There is more where this came from for everything that we brought back." One of the witches proudly announced.

"It's like you've got the World Dragon's own luck." The teacher sighed, then glared around the parking lot as the students began to laugh.

The closest student held up her hands in surrender. "They're not laughing at you, Professor. You see, our reward from the church was a Dragon Scale Amulet, the good luck charm. Then they gave us a skill book of our choice, but random choice, as they gave us books with no names on them.

It worked out perfectly, though, and we all learned a new skill, except the team leaders, who already had a brand-new skill, so they got an item."

Karl shook his wrist, showing off the plain gold bracelet, and the teacher's eyes went wide in surprise.

"You got a Holy Item as a reward? Are you a bishop's secret love child or something?" The professor asked.

Colonel Valerie snorted in laughter at the old mage's response. She already knew the basics of what had happened, thanks to her position, and that their level of luck was far higher than what they had revealed so far.

Karl followed the Colonel and Sergeant Rita away as the Professors gathered around the pile of ferns to admire the perfectly preserved state of the delicate plants. If they were lucky, they might even be able to replant these and get a sustainable source of the gel for the Academy.

Of course, the Witches would get them all if they wanted them, but the Professors would willingly substitute credits or other resources for them in this condition.

Normally, students came back with jars of gel, or dead and drying plants after days of travel, but these were still fresh with morning dew and trying to regenerate.

"Get these to the hydroponics bay. I want them alive." The professor was ordering as Colonel Valerie led Karl and Dana into the main school building.

They took seats at desks, while the Colonel paced in front of them, and Sergeant Rita lounged on the teacher's desk, waiting for her turn to speak.

"Well, you lot really broke the system this time. Congratulations on your results, and the gains you have made. I have been instructed not to dig into the matter, both by my superiors in government and the upper echelon of the Elites.

But I do need some details. What sort of skills did you get? The rest can be kept private, but I will need to at least know the details of your skills to continue your training." The Colonel explained.

Dana spoke first. "I got a new barrier spell that does a better job of nullifying energy that hits it. Karl got a new skill that makes it easier for him to teach skills to animals. I heard that he taught the Seminary Academy's Nekomata the basics of the Rend skill."

Sergeant Rita tried and failed not to laugh at that.

"You taught a Nekomata how to use Rending Claws? What were you thinking?" She blurted out.

"They actually asked me to. Well, they asked me to teach it a new skill, and that was the easiest one. It can't really use it well, but once it has a few months or a year to practice, it should be able to use the skill at its own level.

If I had more time to train it, the time would reduce." Karl explained.

Sergeant Rita sat up straighter.

"You're saying that there is a chance that the beasts can learn new skills in a short period of time?" She asked.

"Not just a chance, a virtual certainty. The question is just which skills. The compatibility of the target and the ability matters. The more compatible they are, the more easily they will learn it and the more powerful the skill will be when they do activate it.

For example, teaching Rae a stealth skill should be dead simple, but teaching Thor to fly would probably never work."

The thought of a flying Thor was highly entertaining, though it might be scientifically impossible. The Lightning Cerro was still growing fast, and in a few more weeks he would be shoulder to shoulder with Karl, and weigh closer to five hundred kilos.

That was not the sort of creature that was well adapted to flying.

"Are there any other resources that aren't on the list and that might not have made an official report that you brought back? We can help you prepare them if you think that they will be good for your pets' development." Sergeant Rita offered.

Karl reached into his beast space and brought out a handful of scales from one of the drakes, freshly plucked, and still dripping with a bit of blood.

Sergeant Rita blinked once slowly, then turned her attention to Karl.

"I'm not going to ask how you got Drake scales, since that was omitted from the official report, but congratulations. Now, what did you think you could do with these?" She asked.

"Well, they're scales, and Drakes are tough. Thor has scales and they're tough as well. Is there something that can be made with Drake scales to help him improve his durability?" Karl suggested.

Colonel Valerie smiled as Sergeant Rita carefully picked up the scales.

"Yes, there is something that can be done with these to help his growth and durability. Just don't tell the warriors that you found these, or they might cry. Wait, they don't have any, do they?" Rita asked.

Karl shook his head. "I don't think anyone else collected any. They probably know that I have some, but nobody said anything about it with all the chaos at that moment."

"Alright, we will handle that when it comes up. I swear, you two always get involved in the least likely scenario possible. Do you have any idea how rare it is for the church and the Elite Authority to both classify the same incident? Now, how often do you think that first year students are involved in that scenario? I can't think of another time it has happened." Sergeant Rita sighed.

Dana smiled at her, and winked at Dave and Jill, her personal trainers, who were waiting outside the door.

"Well, this time it wasn't just us. All ten team members were there for it."

Rita rolled her eyes, and the other two came in, followed by Daniel and Alice, who must have been waiting out of sight.

"Hey, did you guys know that one of the team members got a dragon scale pendant? I saw the flash of gold as I passed them." Alice asked as she closed the door behind her.

Karl smirked at him. "We all did. They were a gift from the church directly, not a random find in the woods. You might want to take a seat, and we will tell you what we can."

"Start with telling me about the drake scales. If you don't want them, I will buy one off you." Dave suggested.

"I have enough to give you each one if you want it. I'm not sure what all they can be used for, but if they're good, they're good. So, you see, this is how it went." Karl began.

Chapter 138 Barriers!

Half an hour later and a number of interruptions later, Karl had finished catching everyone up on what had happened, without mentioning the Holy Relic, or going into details about the attack by the Drake Riders.

He hadn't known that part was supposed to be secret, but Colonel Valerie had warned him, and then sent a message for her team to make sure that the other students didn't go spreading the story around campus.

Tales of foreign invasion teams would just cause tensions, and discourage missions at a crucial time for everyone's growth. The Colonel had a bit of insight into what they were up to, enough to assure her that they weren't going to attack at random all over the nation anyhow. But she didn't seem happy about all the extra work.

Colonel Valerie finished taking notes and nodded in satisfaction. "Alright, with all that you two have gained, we are going to have to work on your new skills and test your growth before we do too much more. I will go with Dana's team, and Sergeant Rita can do the report for Karl's growth. I have paged Jodi to come get the scales and have them processed for use. If Karl has some extras, you lot can have them processed for yourselves as well."

Karl smiled and passed over another handful, as well as a small vial of Drake blood.

He didn't want to give too much of it away, as Rae really liked the Drake blood, but the scales weren't really useful to anyone as they were.

"Is that all of them?" Rita asked as Karl finished piling up the loot.

"No, is it not enough?" Karl replied.

The Sergeant just shook her head. "Never mind. That's enough for today. We will process more of them for you later if you still need them."

Dana and the others split off to go test her abilities, and Sergeant Rita gestured for Karl to follow her to the training area.

"I'm not quite sure how we are going to do this, but first I should ask if your pets have learned any new skills yet." She asked as they reached the field.

"Nothing yet. I didn't have an opportunity to help them as they observed new skills yet. But we had an opportunity to grow our strength and understanding, so we're all a bit better than we were when we left. With the resources that we gained, and the extra growth time, everyone is coming along fairly well." Karl replied.

"That's fine. I don't think that your new skill is one that can be easily shown off, unlike the new shield spell. So, we will start with a strength test. Rae was still growing fast when you left, so why don't we start with her?

Just the simple test of how long it takes to remove the shield spells is enough to give us an idea where you're at." Rita suggested.

Alice set up the barriers, and Rae came out to examine them. Over the next few seconds, she went from shiny and black to a dull green that matched the grass, but her curious black eyes were fixed on the barriers.

Alice nodded when she had them set up, and Rae launched herself forward, shattering the first three in the first second, then tearing apart the fourth and starting on the fifth.

That one took some time to get down, so the spider backed away to consider how best to destroy the sixth barrier.

The three elites stared in shock at the Bloodbath Spider. The level of absolute violence from her mandibles and armoured front legs was outstanding among Awakened Rank beasts, but it clearly wasn't her limit. The great ability of her species was to adapt their attacks, and once she had thought of a way, she might be able to take down the sixth barrier as well.

Karl activated Skill Master, and let the magic flow into Rae as she worked on a way to adapt to the barrier. Curiously, she didn't seem to be trying to learn a whole new skill, she was just improving the one she already knew. But when she attacked, the sixth barrier fell in a matter of seconds, and the proud spider did a little spinning victory dance in celebration.

"Good job, Rae. You got that barrier down in record time." Karl congratulated her.

Of course, that might only be because she went first, but he doubted that even Hawk would be able to take down the sixth barrier today, and Thor wasn't really offensive focused.

"Well, we can say that given time, Rae can build up to the borderline of Ascended Rank attack power. Her body isn't quite there yet, but with her adaptation skills, her offensive power is far ahead of the average." Sergeant Rita noted.

Thor nudged at Karl's mind, asking to be let out to play with the barriers.

"Who's next?" Rita asked.

"Definitely Thor. He will drive everyone insane if we make him wait for last to play the barrier game." Karl laughed.

Hawk also came out of his space to glide around the field.

[You know, the outside is better. There is so much more room to fly. I could go for a whole hour, just flying around.] Hawk sighed wistfully.

[Don't worry, buddy. We will be back outside soon. We just need to work on our skills and power so that we're ready for what we might find out there.] Karl replied.

The Hawk waited until Thor was about to hit the first barrier, then shattered it with a Rend attack and laughed as he flew overhead.

[Stupid bird, those are my smashing barriers.] Thor pouted as he charged for another.

He wasn't going through them in order, but Hawk took them out in an orderly manner, shattering the first four and leaving Thor to smash into the last two until he wore himself out a little.

"They make quite the team." Daniel remarked with amusement clear in his tone.

"Thor gets a bit too excited when there are barriers involved. When he's actually in the field, he's much more serious and professional." Karl replied quietly, so he didn't distract the happy beast from his play time.

Rita smiled. "It's easy to forget that they're all still very young. They're not adult monsters, they're still children, and they need to play and grow."

"You should have seen him pulling the bus along through the grasslands. He was right on top of things, pulling the chain tight when the ground was soft so that the bus didn't spin out. We managed to make it all morning without getting stuck thanks to Thor's help.

But now that he's had a nice long nap, he's ready to play again." Karl agreed.

Thor pranced around the open field, catching the attention of the students practising nearby. Everyone had heard about the Lightning Cerro's love of smashing into barriers,

but none of the classes who were out here right now were working on that, so they just watched as he ran around and charged at the two remaining barriers Alice had set up.

Hawk could easily break the weaker of the two remaining barriers, but if he did, then Thor would have no second target for his game, and they were set up a few dozen metres apart, just enough for him to get a good run at them.

"Alright, we have the basic data for the beasts now. It's not precise, but we can set up a training plan from there. What sort of skills did you want them to learn? Stealth for Rae, but what for the others?" Sergeant Rita asked.

"I think that if we can get Thor to learn a secondary attack spell, that might be best. Lightning would obviously be the first option, and I'm thinking of trying to teach him a lightning breath type attack." Karl suggested.

"Like he was a Kaiju from the movies? Breathing Lightning and stomping down buildings? That makes sense, and it should work with his skills. What about Hawk?"

Karl shrugged. "That's the part I'm stuck on. The skills he has are precisely what he needs. If he's going to learn something new, it would have to be to grow in a different direction because he already knows the skills that are best for a Windspeed Hawk."

Rita smiled. "Then we can work on that. What direction do we want to help Hawk grow in?"

Chapter 139 Direction

Karl considered the direction that would be best for Hawk. The bird was happy simply soaring around and scouting, and that was what Karl needed him for, but there really wasn't anything that he needed to continue that role.

"Well, Hawk is our scout for now, and he's got incredible senses, plus long ranged attack power. I'm not really sure what sort of direction he would even be able to grow in that wouldn't be contrary to his nature." Karl replied, stumped as to the answer.

"Well, there is more to being the team's scout than the actual scouting, I am certain that we can find something that will suit his talents.

So, until then, we can start with the obvious ones. There are Rogue Class Elites in training here with various stealth skills. Why don't we take Rae there to observe them and try to learn their skills, while we wait for the potion to be made of the scales you provided?

She should have a natural affinity for those sorts of skills, and if your new ability is as impressive as it sounds, she might even be able to pick up the basics in a few days instead of months. Stealth skills are normally some of the hardest to master, so most of

the Rogues who don't start with them only learn the basics and prefer to hide in plain sight instead." Sergeant Rita suggested.

Karl felt Rae's amusement in his mind. She was good at hiding in plain sight as well, so visiting these Rogue people could be a very educational experience.

"Maybe she can learn invisibility. Just think of it, an invisible Bloodbath Spider." Daniel suggested wistfully, while Alice and Rita looked horrified.

Karl had to admit, that would be a truly terrifying experience if Rae wasn't your friend. Already she was becoming incredibly powerful, and if you couldn't even see her when she got close, there would be very little chance of surviving an attack.

Rae's thoughts said that she was a big fan of the invisible Bloodbath Spider idea, but there was just one problem.

"There isn't anyone here who knows actual invisibility." Alice reminded them.

"We have a few who can hide in shadows, which seems just about perfect for Rae's style. It's not perfect, but even a bit more of an advantage with her adaptive coloration, and she will be able to ambush nearly anyone." Daniel suggested.

Rae eagerly agreed in Karl's mind.

"She thinks so as well. Should we try that for today? I haven't found a skill to try to teach my partners yet, so while Hawk thinks up the perfect skill for himself, and we work on the Drake Scales, Rae can learn to blend into the shadows even more effectively." Karl agreed on her behalf.

Sergeant Rita nodded in satisfaction. "Then that is where we will go now. The cultivation of the three beasts will be ongoing at the same time once we get the resources in place, so your schedule will be a bit frantic, but I think that the advantages that your unique Class Marking provides are becoming very obvious to everyone.

The more that you can spread your skills around, the better, and after everyone is grown, we can focus on finding ways to help them break through their natural limits."

That seemed like it was getting a bit ahead of the curve. Rae would probably be a Commander Rank beast when she was fully grown, and it would take a lot for Hawk and Thor to even catch up to that standard.

But perhaps that was the point. Hawk was already stronger than most members of his species, who hadn't had a fortunate encounter with some special resource. So, they would have to arrange more such meetings for him, to allow him to leave the standard of a Windspeed Hawk behind completely.

And, when he thought about it that way, Karl realized that simply growing Hawk until he couldn't advance anymore was likely not the most efficient method. If they could change his course early, he might have an easier time growing up to match his more naturally powerful partners.

Sergeant Rita led them into one of the buildings on the south side of the compound, and then down the stairs into an underground training area.

The moment that they stepped inside, the room was pitch black, and the others hesitated, to let their eyes adjust, not realizing that there was stealth training going on, and not a single light anywhere in the area.

Not that it was a problem for Karl, but everyone else seemed frozen in place for a moment, until one of the students seemed to sense them, and launched himself forward in an attack at the side of Alice's head with his training blade.

Karl quickly shifted in between the two, and caught the student in a smooth hip toss, as he had been taught in the martial arts class.

The boy hit the ground with a harsh thud and a wheeze of escaping air, which triggered the teacher to turn the lights back on.

Not much, it was still very dim, but the practice must have been to see who could land the first strike.

"I think I'm going to die." The boy moaned as he lay on the ground, gasping for breath.

There was no blood underneath him, and all his limbs were functioning, so Karl assumed that he would be alright soon. The ground was covered in a soft mat that allowed the students to move silently, or close to it, so he hadn't expected to be intercepted, much less grabbed and thrown like that.

"Unfair advantage to the visiting team. Good morning Sergeant, Student Karl, and I'm afraid I don't know either of you." The teacher greeted them.

"Agents Daniel and Alice of the Bureau of Elite Development." Alice explained.

"I see. Now, what brings you here today? I don't recall our class prodigy having stealthy tendencies before today. That was a beautiful throw, by the way. I assume you have a way to see in darkness?" The teacher replied.

Karl smiled. "I do. It's not perfect, but it works well enough."

The only flaw to Rae's combination of thermal vision and echolocation was the fact that it didn't have the ability to see colour, but it was still true that it wasn't perfect.

The stealth class students looked jealous of his ability to see in absolute darkness. If they could do that, this class would be so much easier, and they might even get to move up to the more advanced classes.

Sergeant Rita filled in the details for the confused professor. "We believe that one of his partners might have the ability to learn stealth related skills. She is already superb at moving silently, but moving unseen through shadows would improve her ambushing abilities by a large margin."

"Partners?" One of the students blurted out.

"He raises pet monsters, remember? It must be that giant spider that they mean." One of the other students whispered back, loud enough for Karl's sensitive hearing to catch.

"Yes, it is Rae. Would it be too much trouble to have that sort of skill demonstrated for us? She will happily play along with stealth games in exchange."

The teacher's smile put all the students on edge. They weren't sure that they wanted to play stealth games with a carnivorous spider the size of a small car. Because really, how tame could something like that be? Triggering her hunting instinct seemed like a terrible idea.

"Really? If she's fine with helping us train the students in low light conditions, I would be grateful. There are only so many ways to set up the equipment that we have." The teacher readily agreed.

[Afraid to tease students in the dark? Do they not know that I am the thing that stalks the night? The monster under the bed that parents use to scare their children into behaving?] Rae asked, thinking of all the fun ways she could taunt the students.

"You go a little vacant eyed when you're talking to your team. Mind sharing?" Sergeant Rita asked.

"Rae says that she is the monster in the dark that parents warn their children about, and she would love to play with them." Karl repeated.

The students cast furtive glances between themselves, and the teacher chuckled.

"I think that her and I will get along famously. Alright, if you can call her out, I will have the students try to move stealthily in the dark. Does she easily create webs? If she could create an obstacle course for them out of the strands, it would make this more interesting." The teacher suggested.

Rae stepped out of the beast space and immediately faded from her natural shiny black and red to a dull soot black that perfectly matched the room.

"Alright, she will set the obstacle course up right away."

Chapter 140 Rae's Game

Rae sent out a maze of webs as she darted around the room, terrifying the students whose eyesight was good enough to keep track of her.

"That should do it. She built an obstacle course around your existing course, made of sticky spider silk. If they catch one strand, it will ring the bell in the middle of the room, and if they catch a bunch, they will just end up tangled." Karl explained, with a gesture toward the bell, which was now the focal point of dozens of strands of silk.

"How much light do you need to track movement?" The teacher asked.

"Zero. I can detect movement decently well even with absolutely no light, but in this room, and in their uniforms, it would be nearly impossible for me not to detect them unless they were truly invisible." Karl explained.

"Jeff, activate your stealth skill." The teacher instructed, and one of the boys seemed to simply vanish into the shadows.

Even thermal vision seemed to have a hard time finding him, so the skill was magical and not just a simple trick.

Karl nodded. "I should be able to track him, but not easily. Rae might do a bit better because she's got the superior senses."

"Alright, Jeff, you're up first through the obstacle course. Everyone in the class has a button, they press it when the student in question activates the button at an obstacle. If they get it right, it means they have seen through the skill. It's how we work on our stealth." The teacher explained.

The dark-haired boy began to creep through the obstacle course, focused on keeping his stealth skill active as he approached the first obstacle with a button. But his eyesight wasn't as good as Karl's and just before his hand reached the platform, a soft jingle echoed in the room as his leg bumped one of the web strands.

He had to resist the urge to cuss and give his position away, but the effort he was putting into his skill was giving Karl high hopes that his [Skill Master] technique would allow Rae to learn it by watching it fairly quickly.

With visible relief, Jeff made it past the first buzzer, then immediately turned and stepped without looking and found himself stuck immobile in the spider web. The boy cursed as he struggled to get free, and only got himself more stuck. That made his stealth skill fail, and now the whole class could clearly see his predicament.

"Alright, I will cut him free, and we will keep going. Remember, there are spider webs, and you have to watch for them, not just run the route by memory." The teacher admonished his stealth class.

The reason for the dimmed lights became obvious with the second student. His ability let him blend with the darkness, but not as well as the first, though his footsteps were rendered almost silent. Not enough that Rae had a problem following him, but enough that the other students would.

He was also agile, and doing a decent job of evading the spider webs as he made it to the first button, and then the second. Karl briefly wondered if any of these students knew their skill well enough that Rae might learn anything, but all he could do about it was to just watch and hope that something in Rae's mind clicked and let her understand the trick.

Learning something new was usually down to the quality of the instruction that you received, but the teacher wasn't showing off skills here, and honestly, the students weren't much better at hiding themselves than Rae already was with her ability to change her exterior coloration.

But even though the stealth training might not be as helpful as Karl had hoped, the Bloodbath Spider was having an incredible time making security traps out of her web for them to try to move through.

It was a great exercise in tactical and practical thinking for the young spider, and as she kept adjusting it to replace the strands that were broken as the students kept running into them in the dark, she was getting better at placing them in just the right spot that students would unwittingly step into ones that should be easily avoided.

The teacher was nearly laughing by the time that the last student stumbled as she made her way over a low web, only to get another across the face, and then fall into the tangled web attached to the room's central bell.

The bell jingled wildly as the girl flailed in the webbing, and the others began to laugh softly.

"Rae, would you mind going to help her out?" Karl asked, as the girl was now fully cocooned in the sticky silk, after rolling over in a vain attempt to escape.

The spider stalked across the room, nimbly avoiding her own webbing, while blended perfectly to the colour of the flooring. Half of the students couldn't even see how she was avoiding the webs as she went, only her main body, which was large enough for them to keep a close watch on.

Once she got to the struggling girl, Rae cut a bit of the webbing free and picked her up with her front legs to consider how best to get her free of the tangled mess.

This, predictably, caused the student to panic at being millimetres from the vicious mandibles of the Bloodbath Spider, and flail even more, which only increased the entanglement.

But Rae had a simple solution. If she couldn't easily pull her free, she would cut her free.

"I suggest that you do not move for this part, or you will end up having your uniform cut off you along with the webbing." Karl warned her, and the student went completely still in Rae's grasp.

The other students also fell silent as they realized that Karl was serious, and that this was an actual Bloodbath Spider, fully capable of cutting through them and not just the sticky silk they had all gotten caught in today.

But once the student was immobile, Rae easily slit the silk and let it fall down around her legs, before returning the student to her professor, carried on the armoured front legs like a gift package.

"Thank you, Rae. You did a fine job." The teacher laughed as he accepted the delivery and lifted the girl out of the spider's embrace.

With the class finished, they took a break for lunch, where Sergeant Rita looked expectantly at Karl, who had called Rae back into his mental space, to keep her from teasing the students.

Karl shook his head. "I don't think that they're good enough with the skills for Rae to learn them that fast. The better the teacher, the faster the results. I have a much better than usual grasp of Rend, and I could barely teach it to the Nekomata. So, I think we will either need the advanced class to teach her, or one of the professionals."

[The problem is that they're not better at hiding than I am. What am I supposed to learn from them? They can't even properly blend into the surroundings, just cloak themselves with magic, which I can smell.] Rae complained, making sure Karl knew this was not her fault.

"Alright, we can work on something else. There isn't any particular rush to get them improved, but in a way there is. The Bureau is looking forward to a return on investment, and that essentially means proof that your class can advance a magical beast beyond what it would normally be capable of.

Not just by feeding it resources, but through some innate part of your class skills." Rita explained, while Alice nodded in agreement.

The mage smiled at them both as she began to explain. "The results are already excellent, and the beasts have already proven themselves superior to Golems, as well

as proving their rapid growth speed. But in order to reclassify your marking, they want proof that it can do the exceptional, like the handful of off brand class markings that have led to Overlord Rank Elites in the past."

That sounded like a big goal to Karl. There were only a handful of Elites above Royal Rank, and even the Royal Rank Elites who were out to the public were celebrities. Just suggesting that they would want him to make it to that level put a lot of pressure on Karl, but for some reason, Rae and Thor didn't seem all that concerned.

Hawk knew he was already well beyond what most Windspeed Hawks would reach, it was just difficult to prove that wasn't the result of the resources they had gotten. But with so little available for the other two, it would soon be clear that they were going to be greater than any other of their kind.