

Beast Master 351

Chapter 351 But Is She?

The longer they sat at the table with the Generals, the more people they gathered, mostly Professors, but some of the Commander Rank Elites from the army unit who came to scope the kitchen for leftover barbecue, and a few High Priests, who were pretending they hadn't come for the exact same reason.

That took a lot of the weight off Karl and Morgana, who now rarely had to answer questions for the Generals, but they were at the table with them, and there was no polite way to excuse themselves for the next three hours as they finished their question session.

Then the Generals finally excused themselves to go to the line and check the veracity of the answers they had gotten, and Morgana could finally begin her lessons. But by then it was almost time for Karl to go on duty at the line, and it was time for lunch.

So, she wasn't happy to have lost a large portion of her already reduced teaching time to the questions of the Generals, but the other students who hadn't had to study today didn't mind in the least.

Karl headed to the line for his afternoon shift, and spent most of the first two hours trying to decide if Tessa had actually advanced to Commander Rank. It felt like she had, but the beasts were split on it. She felt more dragon, and that was messing with Hawk's ability to tell how powerful she was, while Remi thought she just smelled fantastic, so it was down to Thor and Rae's opinions that she had advanced to Commander Rank.

It was certain that something had changed after that last surge of divine energy, though.

There wasn't much else to do along the line that day. The Hill Giants had pulled back to the point that the artillery was only sporadically firing, and the weather was mild, so everyone just sat around watching the horizon for signs that something was about to happen.

That was the opposite of what was going on along most of the line, where the Hill Giants had renewed their push and even sent extra troops forward to see if they could cause a breach and push the Elites back, forcing them to regroup further into the formerly human held territories.

They weren't normally as aggressive as the Frost Giants had been with their cloning program in place, but the Hill Giants had the power advantage, with so many of the powerful Elites dealing with the Mountain Giants.

The Mountain Giants had a comparatively miniscule population, and a much smaller territory, but their absolute power made sure that none of their neighbours would dare to mess with them.

It was a strange situation for Karl and his team, who had gotten so used to being behind enemy lines in the Frost Giant nation, with constant targets to attack, that they didn't really know what to do with themselves in a situation where the order was to hurry up and wait.

But it was a bit like a vacation, just leaning back against Thor, who was napping in the sun. Dana was leaning up against his side while Lotus had turned Thor's head into a sun lounger, resting against his crest and between his horns, while Tessa lay on Thor's back, watching the horizon.

"You look mighty relaxed for a combat deployment." One of the other students noted. "We can still see the horizon. But you are right, this is much better than standing around doing nothing. In fact, if I don't go too deeply into meditation, I can even work on my mental focus while we wait for the Hill Giants to decide what they're doing." Karl agreed.

"As long as you're not actually slacking when the attack comes. We've all got bets on how many giants they're going to send at you after you taunted them yesterday." The warrior laughed.

Lotus looked over from her resting spot. "The average from the battle reports says that in two days, four Royal Rank Giants will be sent to test us again.

That's how the Hill Giants usually operate, they double their force if an attack fails. But we've been getting smaller attacks than most other portions of the line, so perhaps they will leave us for a while longer."

"That doesn't sound like a solid answer, Priestess." The warrior joked.

Tessa looked down from Thor's back and laughed. "She's a Nature Priestess, if she makes a prediction, it will likely come true, simply so that she's not made into a liar. Do you want her to give a solid answer?"

The warrior shook his head. "I forgot to factor in Divine Favour. What do we have to kill to get an entire week off?"

[All of them and a couple of humans who are a bit taller than average for good luck should do it.] Rae suggested.

Karl laughed quietly, and the Priestesses turned to him for answers.

"Rae says all of them." He explained.

"For one week off?" The warrior asked. "Yeah, I think that she's underestimated the efficiency of the Clergy. They'll have us filling out reports in no more than three days if we actually manage it. No way will we get an entire week off." Karl replied.

Lotus glared down at him. "You know, you still owe us for getting stuck with all the paperwork at the Cathedral while your arm was healing."

"That was not my fault. They could have gotten me to write it in the hospital, as my pen arm was still working."

Tessa laughed. "Did you forget that you had a venomous snake in your sling? Half the staff were afraid to come into your room in case Remi bit them."

Dana smiled as Remi slithered out of her space to see who was talking about her. She could tell what was going on around them just fine from inside, but with her own eyes out here in the sunshine was better somehow.

She climbed up Karl and across Thor's rough scales to wrap around his horn, where Lotus could pet her head.

Hawk was slowly soaring above them, and Rae was happier in the darkness of her space than out in the direct sunlight, so that was how they remained until dinner, when the shift changed again and the first night shift took over from them.

Dana sighed as Karl helped her to her feet. "You know, that was actually more productive than expected. I got a lot of meditation done."

Karl nodded. "Yeah, it has been a good day for energy building. We don't get enough time to properly meditate and build mental strength these days, and that's most of what is holding back the beasts' progression. Just a bit more and we can get little miss Remi up to Commander Rank and balance the team. She's the newest member, so she's had the most work to do to catch up to the others. But she's got good potential, I think she can catch all the way up." Remi nodded happily from her spot around Thor's horn before sliding down to vanish into Lotus' robes and appear again from a hip pocket.

"Remi, what are you doing?" Karl asked out loud.

[It's warm here, and I didn't want to get all dirty going over to you.]

[You know, you could have stayed on Thor's horn.] [He's going to nap in his pool soon. He always does after a shift.]

It wasn't like Lotus minded. She hadn't noticed that there was a hole in her pocket, but it was a pleasant surprise now that she realized it let Remi escape her robes and find a spot to hang out.

But the Spirit Snake didn't stay there long. She had forgotten one vital fact. Lotus was very short. From her waist, Remi couldn't see anything but everyone else's legs. So, she moved back up the robe to drape herself over Lotus' shoulders, with her head on top of the Nature Priestess'.

[Better. Still not as good of a view as Morgana, but Nature Priestesses are kind of warm in a different way than Witch Doctors.]

Karl wasn't sure what that meant. They were both the same temperature, so it had to be something to do with their magic.

[Well, I'm glad you found a good spot.] Karl teased the fickle snake. She didn't enjoy riding on Karl, as the view was the same as being in her space, which was pointless in her mind. She could already find out what he was seeing, so it was much better to see what other people were looking at.

Chapter 352 Remi's Habits

The next day was an off day from the line, and an off day from classes as well, which left everyone a bit confused as to what they should be doing. Both Tessa and Lotus were assigned to Karl's team and not to the healers' corps like the other clerics were, so they didn't have duties, and that was a new feeling for them all. It was a bit like being back in the hospital, sitting around and waiting for something to happen, with nothing actually happening to keep you entertained. Very dull for someone used to being constantly active.

Instead, they all spent most of the morning in meditation, while Karl worked to push the energy level in the focuses back to peak, so he could spread another layer over the spaces.

The progress was going much more smoothly than it had the first few times that he had done this, and the extra practice was likely going to save him days per cycle once he had it fully mastered.

Every little bit was an improvement on his growth speed, and Karl was feeling optimistic that this time might be the one that was going to yield actual results for him.

He managed to finish the layer just after lunch, and stabilize the new focuses before dinner.

The first sign that things were going right was Remi's change of habits. She made herself a cleansing scrub out of coarse sand and bits of the crystalline plants from her space, then soaked in a bath of monster blood, which was normal for Rae, but out of character for the cleanliness obsessed snake.

The blood softened her outer skin, and a few minutes of rolling around in the cleansing scrub had it all peeled off and her new skin nice and shiny.

Then, she began to expand, the same way that Hawk had when he ate all the magical resources as a juvenile.

Remi had been living on that level of resources so far, as everything that the others had collected was a valuable resource in its own right. But until now, there had been no large changes, and she had just slowly progressed from a tiny snake to a small snake.

Energy was surging around Remi, and Karl noticed a sudden imbalance in the space as the other beasts began to push more energy into her portion of the mental construct, flooding the excited Spirit Snake, and allowing her body to continue to grow as she eyed a morsel that she had been saving. Someone had given her the heart of the Royal Rank Frost Giant, and while the organ resembled a blue crystal, it seemed to be flexible enough that Remi could squish it into a tube with her coils so that she could eat it whole.

It would have been easier to cut it into chunks for her, but it seemed important to her that it was intact, and her body began to swell as the lump moved down her throat and began to rapidly deflate, being digested in a matter of minutes.

Remi still looked like Remi, but her power level was certainly at the Commander Rank now, and she had grown so much that Karl wasn't certain anyone else would recognize her immediately. She certainly wasn't going to fit in Lotus' pocket anymore, and Karl wasn't certain the dainty Nature Cleric would even be able to carry her anymore.

Remi might only weigh twenty kilos, but she was three metres of solid muscle now, and as thick as a baseball bat. Karl got the feeling that she was still far from fully grown, and that she would keep increasing in size, but she didn't show any signs of evolving into a Naga, and remained as the same blue and gold Spirit Snake that she had always been.

But some things had changed. For example, she was now playing with ice balls in the air above her head, blowing them around with controlled gusts from [Blizzard] while the crystal trees in her swamp glowed with power.

It became obvious that she was working on something when she brought out her totems to cast fireballs over the surface of the swamp, keeping the water warm. At first, Karl thought that she was trying to create a new skill by combining Fireball with Blizzard, but what she was actually working on was much different.

The totems expired, and Remi made a new set, this time three instead of the two that she could create before, and with two Lamia back to back, looking around and firing in different directions.

That was an impressive increase in the effectiveness of her totems, but it was a side effect of reaching the Commander Rank and not the actual goal of her experiment.

It was the fog at the boundary that she was trying to create, the melted snow and ice from the blizzard, infused with all of the water magic, but none of the cold. Then, she began to cast chain lightning into the fog.

It wasn't doing anything much at the start, or even for the next few hours before Karl began to get ready for bed. But when she did finally make it work in her space, Remi had proudly created a brand-new skill for herself.

[Thunderstorm] would dump magical rain that ate through everything that it landed on, using water magic to penetrate and tear it apart, while random lightning bolts descended from the cloud.

Hawk was not impressed.

[Why more water?] He demanded, certain that she had been planning to make a proper firestorm out of her Blizzard.

[Water makes the lightning happy. Look how well it spreads over the wet things.] Remi replied, wishing that there was somewhere that she could test this properly.

But nothing had attacked them in the past few days, and it would just seem silly to be creating a storm cloud in the middle of nowhere.

So, she contented herself with making it rain in her space for a while. All night, in fact, while she practised changing the temperature of the water, so it could be an ice bath or a comfortable shower.

The next morning was very similar, other than the fact that they had a shift on the line. They were still meditating and working on stabilizing their power, only now, they did it in a nice grassy spot, where everyone could lean against Thor.

Technically, they were still in position, as the Cerro and the Clerics were in the middle of their formation, so nobody gave them any trouble about it while Hawk was circling in the sky to see where all the Hill Giants had gone.

Karl had ordered him not to lose sight of their group, so he couldn't go too far, and there were no Hill Giants anywhere in his visual range, other than the ones that were attacking dozens of kilometres down the line.

He could go help, but they wouldn't know who he was, and the Academy wouldn't let Karl move thirty kilometres or more just to join another military unit's fight. So, he had to content himself with sightseeing, and stealing the occasional rodent as a snack when he saw them on the move.

Remi finally got to try out her new spell that evening. Minus the Lightning. It was an exceptionally hot day, and a few of the water mages had set up a sprinkler for the off-duty students and teachers to cool off. That seemed like an invitation to her, so Remi exited her space, startling Morgana with her size as she landed on the Witch Doctor's shoulders.

"You've gotten big. Is this a Commander Rank Remi that I am seeing?" The Witch Doctor asked.

Remi nodded happily, and then cast her new [Thunderstorm] spell, with the lightning suppressed, to create a rain cloud fifty metres in the air, which dumped rain over the small area where everyone was playing in the sprinkler.

The students laughed as the event turned into a full-fledged shower, and one of the Earth Mages quickly turned the area into a stone pool with a sand bottom, approximating a beach.

With the way that it was raining in Remi's spell, even suppressed as it was so it didn't hurt anyone, the pool would quickly fill, and then they would have somewhere to relax out of the heat.

Morgana was just about to join them, not afraid of getting wet, when a high-pitched, girlish scream nearly shattered her eardrums.

"Snake!" The boy shouted.

[Hey, it's the 'afraid of snakes' guy. I think he peed.] Remi informed Karl, too amused to be disgusted by the display of terror.

[Don't scare him too badly, they still need him to work.] Morgana stroked Remi under her chin as the snake extended forward to get a better look at the boy, who was again cowering in terror. He froze in panic, and then Remi darted forward to bump her head against his nose, before retreating to Morgana's embrace.

[I tried giving him a friendly boop, but I don't think it worked.]

Chapter 353 Remi's Expressions

For a moment, there was chaos as everyone worried that one of the students had been attacked by the Spirit Snake, but those who were close enough had seen Remi carefully boop him on the nose and knew that he wasn't actually injured, just panicked and hyperventilating.

"False alarm, everyone, the snake just headbutted him and made him panic." One of the students called out as the Elites began to run over to see what the danger was.

One of the other teachers stared at Remi for a moment, as the snake stared back at her.

"Is that Remi? I recall that she was much smaller than that. Or is she under the effects of a skill?" The mage finally asked.

"She advanced to Commander Rank, and wanted me to show her around for the afternoon, apparently. At least, that's the impression that I got when she appeared on my shoulders." Morgana explained.

"I know that you're Karl's advisor, but you don't have to carry his pets around for him." One of the teachers joked.

Remi circled Morgana so she could see who was talking more clearly, and the teacher laughed. "It's like she's judging me for questioning her choices. I can see why she doesn't want to travel in the dirt, but still, isn't she getting a bit large to be carried around on your shoulders?" He asked.

The student beside him laughed. "That look is definitely offended. I think she took that as you calling her fat."

The students laughed as they realized that was really what Remi was going for, and that the snake had no idea how much more she weighed now than she did when she was a third that length.

"Well, we should thank her for the rain, at the very least. It's been so hot here that I'm beginning to wonder what's wrong with the weather." One of the students added.

That was a good point, Remi thought. She knew that it was supposed to be close to winter now, or perhaps in the middle of the winter. She didn't actually know how long seasons lasted.

Plus, they were in the hills, and the weather should be cooler here than it was in most places. It was much better than the Frost Giant nation, but they weren't that far from their borders, so it shouldn't be this warm, she thought.

The problem was that she had no way to express that without going through Karl. She was beginning to enjoy learning new spells, but learning to communicate with random humans still seemed like a lot of work for very little result.

There should be a Morgana specific way, she thought. She only really wanted to talk to people in the group, pretty much ever, and only wanted to talk to Morgana right now, so why did she have to learn a whole written language?

She had learned to read the letters, and she had seen Karl making them before, but she didn't have arms, and while her innate water control was good enough to hold a spear, it was not going to make legible letters.

Plus, she only knew the runes for so many words. Certainly, not enough to properly express herself.

What Remi didn't realize was that the only books she had been reading were spell books and other arcane tomes related to skills and history, so none of them were written in the much easier modern common language.

Their relaxing evening was shattered by the sudden thumping of the artillery, which had been silent all day with no targets in range. Then, the attack alarm blared, and Morgana turned to the line, prepared to bring Remi back to Karl so they wouldn't be shorthanded for the battle.

Not that they would be far apart, as Morgana was stationed with him for battles, but Karl could give his beasts orders to work together, so she assumed he would want them all back.

Remi was getting excited about the battle, as she would get to try out her new skill and her Commander Rank attack powers for the first time. Everyone had been excited when she made it rain for the pool, so they would definitely be excited when she made a full thunderstorm for the battle.

But she couldn't see the Giants. Not even with her head extended up above Morgana's.

"I don't know where they are either, but they should be coming." Morgana assured her, mistaking her excitement to show off for eager anticipation of the battle itself.

Morgana also had no way to know that the wave of disappointment that followed was because Hawk had reported that the Hill Giants weren't coming to this end of the line, but moving past them to attack the artillery and the group beyond the students. They had gotten close enough to make it look like an attack, but they hadn't slowed their movement, and they were already past this flank.

"She's sad that she won't get to show you how cool her new Thunderstorm ability can be. The Giants were only passing by this end of the line, and they're going for the artillery and the far flank." Karl explained as Morgana comforted the dejected Spirit Snake.

"That's the worst kind of disappointment. She was so excited to show me the skill, and now there is nothing to cast it on." Morgana agreed.

But they didn't stop their advance to attack the artillery either, they circled around, searching for something.

They didn't get closer than artillery range, and didn't come into sight of the line, so if it wasn't for Hawk's scouting, Karl would have thought that this was a false alarm, as many of the others did.

It didn't take long before the other students remembered that Karl had a scout in the sky, who should be watching the action while dodging artillery shells.

"How long until they arrive?" One of the warriors asked.

"That's a fine question, they passed across the line, as if they were coming for an attack, then they doubled back, looking for something. I have no idea what they're up to now." Karl explained.

"Do you think that they can sense something that we can't?" The warrior on Karl's left asked.

"Most likely. But normally, my beasts would sense it as well, and they haven't noticed anything out of the usual in the area. If there was some hidden treasure, we should have picked up some trace of it by now."

[Treasure?] Hawk asked as he soared above the Giants.

He didn't sense any treasure, though. He was pretty good at it, but there wasn't anything to find. The Hill Giants didn't even leave their dead behind, so there were no loot filled corpses either.

The Hill Giants appeared to making a crude grid pattern as they moved back and forth across the territory at the edge of the artillery bombardment. They were definitely searching, but neither Karl nor Hawk could determine for what, and nobody else had any clue, even after he tried to explain.

Then, the guns fell silent as the Hill Giants retreated out of range.

[Hawk, scout a little longer and see if there was anything hiding underground while they were here. Maybe it's a hidden ruin, like the Dwarven Village.]

[If it's like that, there won't be any mice.] Hawk reminded him.

Karl's smile let everyone know he was talking to Hawk as he replied.

[Not everyone is as good at pest control as the Dwarves. There might be mice.]

Chapter 354 The Giants' Search

The search proved fruitless both for Hawk and the Hill Giants, as they returned every day for the next week, stopping before they could get in range of the artillery, and searching different sections of the line every day.

One day, while sitting on the line, watching the empty horizon, Tessa looked down at Karl from her spot on Thor's back. "Do you think that it's actually possible to interrogate a Hill Giant? I really want to know what in the world they've been looking for this past week. There has hardly even been an attack, they're so busy looking for whatever they're looking for." She asked.

The teacher closest to them burst into laughter. "Well, they are capable of speaking human common, but the odds of getting them to talk are pretty low. Hill Giants don't feel pain the same way a human does, so you can't really torture them for information, even if you have a way to restrain them."

Karl sighed. "Well, that is unfortunate. I really do want to know what is driving them to search this whole area like that. But if they're doing it just to troll us and drive us insane, I'm not certain that I could take the truth."

Tessa chuckled. "I don't think that Hill Giants would do that, but I can definitely see you doing it just to mess with them."

She had a point. They could all see Karl doing it if he got bored, and the nature priests would help him.

It was two more days of waiting before they would find out what the Hill Giants had actually been up to.

Karl was sitting in a history lesson with Morgana when the attack alarm blared, along with a secondary tone that indicated this was an urgent incoming attack. If they had failed to detect it at the usual distance, that would be extremely odd, given that they hadn't been distracted by anything, so that more likely meant that they were already charging, and would be here sooner than anticipated.

Karl switched from his more comfortable uniform suit to his armour as he rose from his chair, and the mages in the class began to scatter to their various assigned locations.

Karl let Hawk loose as soon as they were out of the classroom, and immediately, excited chatter filled his mind. [It's a buffet! A mobile buffet coming our way. There are huge mice, and angry Thors and meat with horns, and even pigs.] [Angry Thor? There are Lightning Cerro in the stampede?] Karl asked.

[No, scaly, but on two legs and angry, they keep attacking things that get near them.]

When Karl arrived at his spot on the flank, the true terror of the advance became clear.

The Hill Giants pretending to search the area yesterday had dropped bait bags all over the place, and the monsters were racing from one to another, trying to get to them. But once they were close enough, they would smell the humans, and that would be the final bait bag of the lure that had caused the monsters to stampede.

How they had managed to wrangle so many into one place was a mystery, but it most likely involved a lot of work, given how few Giants they had seen recently.

There were thousands of monsters, perhaps tens of thousands. As far as Hawk could see, there were monsters on the horizon, charging toward the human lines.

It wouldn't just be the Academy portion that was hit today, but everyone within fifty kilometres of them. Compared to this influx, every one of the previous attacks looked like child's play. But worse than that, once they were done with the monsters and exhausted, they were very likely to see a full offensive from the Hill Giants.

[Got it. I will be on Morgana. She brings snacks to battle.]

The artillery corps was firing furiously, taking out many of the weaker monsters and inadvertently creating more bait to draw the monsters forward.

But Hawk had more bad news for them. There was an enormous swarm of flying monsters at the back of the ground-based influx, picking off the weaker ones. They were enraged as well, and acting much more aggressively than Hawk thought should be natural.

"Morgana, tell them to make sure they save ammunition for the anti-aircraft guns. There is a massive swarm of flying monsters at the back of the stampede." Karl whispered as they took their positions.

All of the teachers had radios with them, and served as the unit leaders, as they were stationed within earshot of each other along the line for an attack like this.

She nodded silently before sending her message, and Karl considered what sort of tactic might be effective against this sort of enemy.

[Remi, time to try your new skills. Can you cast it all the way back where the monsters are?] Karl asked.

Remi exited her space and crawled up Tessa, who had the best view from the back of Thor.

[Maybe. I'll make it big and far.]

The storm cloud began to grow, and the first few bolts of lightning hit the ground as the rain fell on the leading edge of the monsters.

[Perfect, we want them all to have to run through it, so if you can keep it there the whole fight, as wide as you can, that is all you need to do.] Karl instructed.

[Got it. I will be on Morgana. She brings snacks to battle.]

Hawk was definitely a bad influence on the no longer small snake. But she would soon realize that tiny pocket snacks were not enough to sate the hunger of a grown Spirit Snake, and the appeal would likely be lost.

But Morgana was prepared for Remi's arrival, and she had her staff already planted in the dirt, ready for Remi to crawl up so she could get an even better view, and not put all her weight on the Witch Doctor for the battle.

The monsters were getting close now, past the point where the Giants had placed bait, and they had noticed the massive number of humans who could sate their magically stimulated appetites.

They were ravenous from the bait bags, and enraged. The perfect combination for overcoming their common sense and getting them to charge at the Elites.

Chapter 355 Brace For Impact

"Pikes up. Brace for impact." The section Commander ordered.

The warriors brought up their pikes, and Thor brought up his barrier over his team, including Morgana and the group under Colonel Wilkes, who were his team by default, as they were right next to him, and attached to the same unit.

The larger beasts were closer, as the smaller carnivores had chosen to stay behind the hyper-aggressive giant lizards and beasts, who naturally treated them as food.

Tessa activated the Holy Blessing on the pikes, in time with the other battle Clerics along the line. The metal heads glowed with golden light, prepared to cut through the thick hides of the attackers, but the monsters didn't care.

"Ranged attackers, begin." Karl raised his bow and fired [Chain Lightning] into the front ranks. The lightning arced between the attackers, and dozens of the smaller beasts went up in flames as the Commander Rank ability hit their Awakened Rank bodies.

The Hill Giants didn't care what they sent this way, they just herded everything, so there were many strong beasts, but also a horde of weaker ones that would slowly wear down the more powerful defenders once they reached the human lines.

The first wave of attackers fell easily to the combined attacks of the defenders, and most of the weaker beasts were already severely injured from Remi's Thunderstorm.

The damage from the rain wasn't extreme, but it was a Commander Rank skill, and against Awakened Rank monsters, even half a minute of exposure was enough to nearly cripple them.

Then, they had to pass through the area attacks of the other mages, many of whom had the same idea that Remi did, and spread their attacks over the largest possible area so that they injured everything before it made it to the line.

The air in the distance crackled with lightning, fire swirled along the ground, and razor sharp gusts of compressed winds tore through fur and scales.

Thor bugled his challenge to the closest of the giant lizards, who raised his head to chomp down on the Cerro's back. But that was where Tessa was sitting, and as Thor charged forward, she brought up her spear and stabbed upward through the roof of the beast's mouth to impale its brain and send holy light bursting out of its skull.

The enormous predator fell, and Thor crushed the ribs of another with his armoured tail while Tessa lashed out with her spear, and the pike line pushed the other attackers away from them.

Karl continued to fire, switching to [Flaming Body] for more effect on the Commander Rank beasts, who were starting to pile up against the spears, running over the bodies of the fallen first ranks.

The mages put up solid barriers, halting the advance of the monsters for a split second before the warriors charged through again.

The goal was to keep moving forward so that the bodies didn't stack up and give the monsters the chance to jump the defenders. Retreating would do the same thing, but that would eventually lead them back to camp, so it wasn't really an option in a battle this large.

Karl remained a few steps behind the pike wall as they moved forward, pushing the beasts back so that he could continue to fire arrows toward the thicker clusters of strong beasts.

Unlike the Hill Giants, most of these beasts didn't have any defensive magic, so the ongoing attack spells were devastating to them, especially in their enraged and starved state, where they were stopping inside the attack zone to feast on the bodies of the fallen.

But Karl knew this fortunate state wouldn't last forever. The mages were burning a lot of mana to keep the area spells up, and once they started to get tired, things would become much more difficult.

Remi left her place with Morgana when the Witch Doctor didn't understand that the refreshing spells were moving forward with the offence team. It didn't take the mages long to understand that the warriors had gotten priority for the stamina spells from the clerics, as they were the ones in immediate danger if someone faltered due to exhaustion.

That led to the whole line pushing forward, holding their positions, while Remi slithered along at Karl's side, doing nothing but keeping her [Thunderstorm] active.

Only when the monster density began to increase again did she start creating her totems on top of Morgana's staff. They were now designed to look like two Lamia back to back, instead of just one, and the firing rate had doubled, while the totems themselves were lasting closer to two minutes than their original ninety seconds.

The poison was slower acting, but the fireballs had an immediate effect on everything that they hit, and their flank of the line was holding strong, even as the others were calling up reinforcements from the army.

They weren't Elites, but there were more than enough Clerics here to give them blessings and send them into combat to reinforce the students, the same as they would do on any other battlefield.

The Academy had been trying to avoid it, but the pure weight of numbers was dragging down some sections of the line that didn't have as much area attack ability.

"The strongest monsters are falling. Front line, hold position and let them come to us." The Section Commander ordered, giving the students a bit of a chance to catch their breath between fights.

Not that they were going to get completely out of combat, as the mages' reduction in mana meant that they had to cut the power of their spells back to the mana level that they could sustain in a longer time period, and that was bringing monsters to the front with less damage than at the start of the battle.

The pikes were beginning to falter, and the warriors in the front were being forced to change to shorter ranged weapons, while the second rank used their pikes to keep the largest of the monsters from crushing them as they fought.

That was Rae's cue to switch tactics. Now, instead of sending the Spider Golems after the most dangerous targets while she spat silk to trap ones that looked like they would make good snacks, she had the Spider Golems switch to the mass clearance tactics that they had used in the last battle with the Hill Giants, just murdering as many small monsters as possible.

Chapter 356 Great Golden Lions

The "kill everything that moves" tactic was working well for the spider golems, and the line was actually able to push back the monsters in a few spots, but there was much worse incoming. The smarter monsters hadn't been completely consumed by rage due to the spell that the Hill Giants had put on the area using the bait, and they had remained behind the area attack spells for as long as they could resist.

But now they were coming forward, charging through the weakened mage spells, intent on tearing the humans apart and sating the magical hunger that was consuming their thoughts. They had resisted as long as they could, but now, their reasoning had been overcome, and they were rampaging the same as the others.

There was a large group of massive feline predators, and for a moment Karl struggled to recall their names from the study books.

Great Golden Lions, that was the name of the species, he realized. Then he realized that there was a much larger problem. Unlike the other monsters in the horde so far, this was a proper magical beast, and it had abilities beyond strengthening and melee attacks.

The Great Golden Lion could breathe fire, and if that pack made it to the front lines, things were going to get brutal for the defenders. The mages' barriers wouldn't hold up for long, and the Holy Light blessing that the Clerics cast on the warriors wouldn't take many hits from the fiery breath.

"Morgana, those things breathe fire. I need to move forward to keep them away from the line." Karl shouted back to the Witch Doctor.

"Take your ten-person team if you can even get ahead of the lines. We will do what we can to protect your back." Morgana replied.

Colonel Wilkes' group wouldn't be too impressed by that answer, but the extra bodies would help, and when Thor charged, the monsters would spread to avoid being rammed. It was instinctive, and their enraged minds didn't understand battle tactics.

"Just follow the Cerro. Everything else will back away from our fight when the flames start to fly. But those lions breathe fire, and they will tear apart the warriors who don't have Thor's barrier on them." Karl explained as he prepared to push the group forward.

Seamus still looked terrified, but Tessa pulled him up on the back of Thor, and the bard took out a small pan flute, which he could play with one hand while he held a shield in the other.

That was far better than he had been during the first battle he had seen on this front, and Karl was impressed with his bravery. It took a lot of courage to face that level of fear, and to not only go forward of the line, but to do it on a Cerro with a War Cleric.

Of course, he might not have realized what he had volunteered for yet, so it could be excused if he panicked later, but Karl had a good feeling about him.

Thor smashed the ground with his tail, sending an [Earthquake] forward into the monsters, then charged behind it with Rae's Golems protecting his flanks.

They didn't have far to go, not far enough that he would lose the slower moving members of the squad, but the monsters parted around them when they saw that the Cerro had a target in mind.

Karl took up the back of the formation, preventing anything from coming up behind them as Thor parted the monsters in front of them. And the monsters didn't take long to close ranks behind them, but it was the weaker and more opportunistic ones that came first.

"You go forward, we will hold the back." Colonel Wilkes instructed as he summoned his Fire Elementals to support Jimmy and Ali at the back of the team. Dana and Rae's Golems were split between the sides of Thor, so as long as the group stayed close, they only had to cover a small area with actual warriors, leaving Karl and Thor free to fight the Great Golden Lions in front.

The five beasts roared in unison, and a blast of flame washed over the group, causing everyone to glow in an odd combination of blue and gold as the barriers created by Tessa and Thor worked together to prevent the damage from reaching the Elites.

[Give me a boost, big buddy.] Karl instructed as he ran onto Thor's tail with his maul in his hand.

Thor flipped his tail up, sending Karl flying over the heads of Tessa and Seamus. The startled Golden Lions looked up in shock and sent a gout of flames toward Karl as he descended.

The flames washed over [Flame Body] with no noticeable damage, then the maul hit home, crushing a lion's skull and sending Chain Lightning out through the group.

Tessa's spear flicked out above Karl's head, slashing the throat of another Golden Lion before it could recover. Hot golden blood flowed from the wound, setting the grass on fire as Karl switched to the two-handed blade for easier close quarters combat.

The flaming breath came for him again as Karl sidestepped, making use of his enhanced speed to pull the attack away from the rest of the group. That spread it over the monsters on Thor's right flank, and the stench of burning fur filled the air.

The Golden Lions didn't care, the other monsters were nothing but competition for food, and they had dared to try to eat the ones who had insulted the Lions by fighting back.

Claws raked down Karl's barrier as he parried another set with his blade and moved another step away from Thor.

That was the perfect position, and While Karl was burning a lot of energy to keep his barrier up, he now had the closest of the Golden Lions facing away from the Lightning Cerro.

Two massive horns tossed the beast in the air, where it was helplessly impaled by Tessa's spear before being torn apart by multiple [Magic Missiles] and [Fire bolts].

Chapter 357 Regroup

That left only two more Golden Lions, and a frightened horde of monsters, who were now giving them as much space as possible, as Karl rolled to Thor's left flank and evaded another gout of fire breath, which burned even more of the unfortunate horde.

They were forced too close to the battle by the press of bodies, and they were suffering as badly from the Lions as they were from the humans.

The Great Golden Lions were forced to their hind legs as Ophelia joined Karl with a furious roar.

They were still larger than the raging Werebear, but not by enough that they could discount her raw strength.

Unfortunately for them, that opened their vulnerable bellies while they swatted away the Berserker's axes, and another one fell, gutted by Tessa's spear. That left only one, surrounded by Karl and Ophelia, fighting desperately for its life.

Karl got a solid hit on one shoulder as the Lion twisted out of the way, and its leg suffered a grievous wound from the axe, but then it was gone, leaping off into the crowd of monsters on three legs, and putting a half dozen bodies between it and the humans as it retreated.

The monsters were just letting it run, but they were closing on Karl and the others now that the threat of flame breath was gone.

"Back up to the line, fighting retreat." Karl shouted to be heard over the din of the battle.

They had done their jobs, and the flame breathing Commanders were out of commission, leaving only targets that the line could reasonably be expected to deal with.

Thor and Karl both needed a breather, as they had expended a lot of energy to keep [Refreshing Lightning] active, but the Golems and Fire Elementals were happy to cover for them as they backed away.

Karl swept the surrounding area with [Rend], creating a wide path for their retreat. That got them back to the line in under ten seconds, and gave the line a moment to regroup after they had passed by.

"Good work." Morgana congratulated them as they stopped between the warriors and the mages. Karl just nodded in reply as he focused on recovering energy, and Remi crawled up the Witch Doctor to get to her favourite viewpoint on Morgana's staff and set up new totems.

"Will the other Lion be back?" Morgana asked, while holding the radio microphone in her hand, ready to inform battlefield command of the outcome.

"Not any time soon. It has a broken leg and a mangled shoulder. I don't know how fast they heal, but it shouldn't be back today at the very least." Karl replied.

Morgana sent their report, and the group spread back to their positions, returning to their duties against the rapidly diminishing wave of monsters.

All that was left was the very worst of it. The wave of flying monsters that had followed the others to the battle.

Fortunately, they had a plan. First, the [Thunderstorm] to soak and electrocute the incoming birds.

Then [Blizzard] to freeze the water.

And finally, they would have Thor hurl Mick's tiny Sand Golems at them with his tail.

That last bit was an impromptu addition by Thor himself.

The other portions of the line would have to fend for themselves, but as long as [Refreshing Lightning] was active, Remi was sure she could keep the area spells active long enough to make a difference.

The thunderstorm would be spread over the largest possible area, as it needed time to reach maximum effect, and then the blizzard would be a narrow final line.

There were a few other area spells in their section, including Colonel Wilkes' [Flamestorm] spell, but its casting range wasn't nearly as far as Remi's.

Why he couldn't cast it as far away as she could use her area spells was a mystery, but the Flamestorm spell naturally wanted to be centred on the caster, and just moving it out into the monsters was an effort, while Remi only had to be able to clearly see and visualize her target.

That was true for many of the mages' area spells. They were primarily defensive, and while they could create a gap large enough for their unit, the area spells were usually centred on them, not hurled hundreds of metres away. With the obvious exception of explosions, which had been a constant counterpart to the day's battle.

The flock was chasing the last of the beasts forward, herding them into the Academy lines, right until they hit the rain, and found that it was seeping into their skin and tearing their feathers out.

That was enough to make most of them turn around and give up on the battle, overcome by the pain and shaken free of the effects of the rage that they had been under.

But the beasts on the ground were closer to the bait packs all the way in, and the effect was much stronger. They weren't turning back, they were intent on eliminating the humans, and even more now that they were wounded.

[That works better than I thought it would. The damage is alright, but the deterrent effect is totally worth it.] Remi noted as she watched the first of the rain soaked monsters reach the [Blizzard] and get flash frozen.

They were monsters, and they could break the magical ice easily enough, but it was sharp, and it cut into their flesh, making them bleed and slowing their movement. Then they were into the spells of the other mages, and being cut down so fast that the warrior lines were only doing cleanup on the last few who struggled through in a desperate attempt to get some form of vengeance.

But their incredibly effective defence only extended so far, and the sections of the line further down toward the artillery were still having issues, and even with the reinforcements from the regular army, they were in for a hard fight.

The problem was, that if they changed anything here, they would only move the problem back in their direction.

Chapter 358 Meat Aisle Stocked

The first group, the ones who had been ending their shift when the attack started, were rotated off the line to get some sleep, as the battle wasn't showing any signs of ending in the next few hours, but Karl's side of the line was at the point where you could call it under control.

That let them all rest a little, as they were mostly using the largest scale attacks they could at greatly reduced power to deal with the stragglers of the monster attack on their flank. Remi had cut back the power on her spells to the point that the monsters were actually making it through, but only the Ascended Rank ones. That was low enough draw that she wouldn't burn herself out before it was time to nap, as long as she still had Thor and Lotus's help with their refreshing skills.

"Having such a large area spell is a blessing in battle. I think that Thunderstorm is even larger than the Blizzard she was using before." One of the warriors noted as he stepped back from the line, letting the second rank rotate forward.

"She's a Commander now, instead of Ascended. So, the Blizzard will have expanded as well, but her abilities definitely lean toward the dispersed damage effects over exceptionally large areas. I see that there is a Shaman further down the line using nearly the same spell, but we could have used several more of them." Karl replied.

"Are there so few shamans?" One of the mages behind Karl asked.

Morgana nodded and turned to the student. "There are right now. There are only five at the Academy, including the instructor. There are many more from previous years, but the last few haven't had many shamans among them."

One of the mages chuckled. "Eighty percent of the student body is either a cleave base warrior, or a wand marked wizard. It's like we got all the repeat draws the last few years."

Mick, the bald Golem Mage, laughed. "It's like gambling. You get a streak of nothing and then something big. Our year burned up all its luck with Karl and Dana. Mostly Karl. No offence to Dana, but she did start as a basic Mage with exceptional talent. He got the broken overpowered super mark."

Karl laughed as he sent a wave of [Rend] through the wounded monsters.

"It's not that the mark is overpowered. It's the beasts. If I didn't have such a cool group of teammates, the mark would be nearly worthless." Karl informed him, making Thor stomp happily.

Remi jabbed her head repeatedly toward the blizzard until one of the mages reached out to stroke her scales. "You are doing a wonderful job, Remi. Every bit as impressive as Thor's shield, Hawk's scouting and Rae's Golems, wherever they went." Karl laughed and gestured into the distance with his next [Rend] attack. "They're over that way, hunting for things that are stronger than a wounded Ascended Rank pig.

The camp will be eating good for a while after this battle, and I'll be sure to pull a few extra beasts into my storage space so we can do another roast in case we run out of fresh goodness before the next event." He added.

"What's the next event?" The mage petting Remi asked.

"Dana and Lotus both have birthdays coming up in the next couple of weeks, only a few days apart, so we were going to celebrate them together with another barbecue. It looks like we might not have to do much begging, though. There are hundreds of dead pigs out there." Karl noted.

"Are those safe to eat?" Jimmy asked as he stood in the front row with a pike in his hands.

"The ones in the thunderstorm are. That's just lightning and water magic. They'll be fresh and clean when we go to gut them, even if they are a bit charred. I'm sure we can save at least a truckload of meat from our section of the battle."

Morgana considered Karl's words. "You have a good point. I will see if they have an insulated trailer nearby. If we can get them butchered and on ice, perhaps frozen with ice magic, we can have fresh meat instead of canned for months."

The meal rations included canned pork. Or as the Elites called it, "Stuff Posing As Meat", but it was mediocre at best. Fried and slathered with mustard it wasn't too bad, and a number of the students liked to eat it with eggs, or drowned in a cream gravy. But Morgana was not a fan.

One after another, the mages took turns petting and encouraging Remi, as it was her wide area spells that were making life so easy along this section. The range that she had with her magic was ridiculous compared to what most of the students could manage, and as a result, they were mostly just standing around, waiting for something to make it through the blizzard so they could finish it off.

But that was becoming increasingly rare, and the flying beasts had never come near their portion of the line, though they could surely have just flown over the spell effects. The thunderstorm clouds were only a few hundred metres in the air, and Hawk was flying over them constantly, looking for targets stupid or brave enough to challenge his air superiority.

The birds had mostly fled as soon as the thunderstorm went up, and the only powerful flying things were all the way down at the anti-aircraft guns, ten kilometres from their location.

But there were some Gryphons among them, and Hawk thought that might make a good companion, as it could fly, use wind magic, and walk on four legs. It was a versatile sort of monster. And it didn't use water magic.

That was why Hawk wasn't dive-bombing the overgrown mice right now. The water magic wouldn't attack him, but he would get soaked with every pass, and that was simply unacceptable.

Chapter 359 Rotate The Lines

They were about to rotate a second group off the line when the signal was given that the monsters had been defeated, and a temporary stand down order was in place.

That meant that while they were relieved of the official need to fight, everyone should remain nearby and prepared to fight, even if they weren't on shift.

So, Karl moved his group back, as they were in the third group, which would go on shift in half an hour, and lay down against Thor for a quick nap.

There were still a few monsters coming their way, and Remi still had her [Thunderstorm] up at further reduced capacity, but what made it past the storm was nothing that a small group of warriors and mages couldn't handle.

The rest of the line was slowly managing to chase off the flying creatures, but Karl could sense the envious eyes cast in their direction. The storm and Hawk were enough to chase off all of the flying monsters at their end of the line, so the right flank was just resting while everyone else finished the fight.

Karl's team took over their shift right on schedule, but there wasn't anything to do with Hawk already clearing out the monsters from above once they left the storm.

The smart ones had already died or run away, so now it was mostly just the slower moving rodents and scavengers who didn't have the brain power to realize that it was the water causing them damage.

[So many dumb mice. They just keep running back into the rain.] Hawk complained, unwilling to chase them into the storm.

[You have a fire barrier, you won't really get wet.] Thor reminded him.

[Not the point.]

Despite his complaints, Karl could tell that the Hawk was actually having fun, circling around the edge of the storm and chasing the rodents back in to their deaths. Once the storm ended, they would all be freshly washed and ready for him to collect, so it was better that they stopped in the rain than running out through the mud.

After another hour, even that had stopped. There was nothing coming out of the storm anymore, and only a few stragglers were still being found by the rest of the defensive line.

That was when Karl fully expected the Hill Giants to attack, and thanked his luck that he was on shift for it.

Remi dropped the storm so that Hawk could clean up the beasts that he wanted, and the Academy started to send teams forward to gather beasts to be butchered for the kitchens.

"Do they have a trailer for the meat?" Karl asked Morgana as he watched the recovery teams work.

"They will in an hour. It's on its way here now. Well, more than one. They're assigning teams everywhere that got hit with beasts today to gather meat to help reduce the load on the supply convoys.

The less that they have to send to us, the better. We have also taken low casualties lately, so the clerics have been going all out with the rice and beans, which cuts down on the requirement for shelf stable rations even further. I know it's a bit dull for most of the Elites, but it's free and plentiful, so the supply staff loves it." Karl chuckled at Morgana's description. "It's actually better than a lot of the things that they serve in the cafeteria. I've grown quite fond of the rice and beans base for dinners with the Nature Priest grown fruits and vegetables plus monster meat.

We eat better in the field than we do in camp."

Morgana sighed. "Well, hopefully this conflict will be sorted sooner than expected. The Frost Giants are already in bad shape, and with one border only needing minimal forces, the army has managed to transfer more to the other lines."

Karl shrugged. "It doesn't look like the Hill Giants are going to give up so soon. But you never know what they are actually thinking. It could all be over tomorrow, but it could run until one side completely collapses. I don't pretend to understand what the Giants were thinking with this invasion."

The Witch Doctor nodded. "There has to be some reason for the Giants to start working together. They hate each other, but they're all forming a coordinated offensive against us, when they don't even want

the territory. So, it has to be about something else, and nobody really knows what. But should we really be worrying about that right now?"

"Why not? It's not like I've got anything else to do. Unless they're going to let me take a team to go scout behind the lines, all we can do is gossip and speculate while we sit here." Karl reminded her.

Dana laughed and poked him in the side. "You're as bad as an old woman, looking for gossip."

"Inquiring minds need to know."

Tessa looked over at them from on top of Thor's head. "Yeah, if we don't get to do fun stuff, at least give us something to think about. Like, do you think that unique scent that Hill Giants have is natural, or is it some sort of soap? They kind of smell like dirt and plants, not sweaty like Ogres or Goblins, so I've been wondering."

That was an excellent question.

Everyone quietly pondered it for a while, and even Hawk began to wonder. None of them had never found signs of soap in their belongings, but they all smelled the same, so it was possible that it could go either way.

Hawk had a small mountain of corpses in his space now, and then a large mountain built off to one side.

[What's with the segregated piles?] Karl asked as he inspected the rapidly filling space.

[This is the really good stuff I want to keep, and that is the good enough to eat stuff that I'm willing to part with. We can put it in the Morgana's trailer once it arrives.]

Karl laughed at how Hawk still didn't get the concept of names. He treated everyone as a separate species. So it was The Dana Mage, The Morgana, and so on. Rae got names a bit better, but it was hit or miss who she considered worthy of a name. "What's the good word?" Dana asked once Karl was paying full attention to his surroundings again.

"Hawk has separated the piles into things he likes to eat, and things he thinks that humans will like to eat. So, he's got a massive pile of beasts in stasis, waiting for the personnel to be available to butcher them after the trailer arrives.

But looking at it, we might need more trailers. There is a mountain of beasts in there, and that's just the good tasting ones." Karl explained.

Dana laughed. "That sounds like Hawk. Let me guess, there are no pigs in the pile for the humans?"

Karl looked at the pile and found a few of them that had been scorched and damaged in the mountain of donations.

"I wouldn't say that there are none, but none of the ones that died cleanly are in that pile. He's got years worth of food in the other pile though, so once we start running low, I will have him start sorting it out. He's not going to need most of that once he makes it to Royal Rank, so he will be able to part with the vast majority." Karl explained.

Morgana gave Karl a curious look. "Sometimes I wonder just what all you have hidden in those spaces. You've pulled out all sorts of natural resources so far, and some truly rare ones as well. So what all can go in those spaces?"

Karl shrugged. "Anything the beasts see as a resource. So food, shiny objects, broken magical weapons but not intact ones. However, they can take gems, plants, and those sorts of things."

"So, the stones and feathers in your fort are all things that someone thought would be useful?" Morgana asked.

"They were on bodies that Rae collected. She likes using them as decorations, but she will take them with her when we leave. The silk is free, her treasures are not." Karl explained.

Morgana nodded. "And some of those stones are actually valuable magical resources. They're just not useful to any of your beasts. If we could convince her to part with a few of them, we might actually be able to make some new resources for specific warriors."

Chapter 360 Rae's Treasures

Rae gave Morgana a curious look that would have made most people recoil in fright, but Morgana just smiled. "If you have a few more of those glowing orange stones with the yellow streaks in them, and the perpetually cold bones that aren't Giant bones, we could use both of them to make fire and ice potions for the Church Guards and regular soldiers. It makes them more attuned to Holy magic, but for some reason, it doesn't work on the clerics who can actually use Holy Magic." The Witch Doctor explained.

[Ask her how much she needs. They're kind of bright, so I buried them in a hole.] Rae replied.

"She is wondering how many you need. She has a few tucked away."

Morgana considered that for a few seconds, counting on her fingers as she looked out at the infantry units as far as the eye could see.

"To cover all of the soldiers here for the next three months, before the potion wears off, we would need at least twenty of the stones and a kilo of Ice Element monster bones that aren't Frost Giants." She decided.

Rae pulled the cover off her pit full of glowing rocks and began to sort out the ones that Morgana wanted. They were incredibly common in Frost Giant jewellery, and every Commander Rank warrior usually had at least ten of them woven into their accessories. So, she had quite the pit full of them, but she still carefully counted twenty of them before weighing the bones.

Karl wasn't certain how accurate her guess of the weight was, but when she was ready, she retreated from her space to rest by Thor and left Karl to pass the loot over.

"This should do it. This is what Rae found for you." Karl explained.

She had moved a large wooden shield over the pit again, and covered it with stones that didn't shine, so the glow didn't mess with the ambience of her space, which was nearly dark, with a few glowing blue stones strung up high to imitate stars in the sky.

Morgana took the large pile of materials from Karl into a spare bag, and happily patted Rae on her leg, being careful to touch only the side, and not risk her fingers on the sharp edges.

"Thank you, Rae. It will take me all night to make enough potions, but the whole army will benefit from this."

That was all the thanks that Rae needed. Someone needed her shiny loot, and that meant that they all owed her a favour. The Witch Doctor ran off from the lines and sent another teacher over to fill her space, leaving the newly arrived staff member thoroughly confused. "There is a latrine right over there, where is she going?" He asked as he took Morgana's spot next to Karl's group.

"We got her some loot to make holy magic attunement potions for the army. It should last them for ninety days, so she's in a hurry to get it made and distributed." Karl explained.

"You found the orange sunstones? That is excellent news. I will gladly take the extra shifts if she can get those potions made. I didn't even know that we had someone here who knew how to make the potions. They're a pretty obscure recipe, and the materials only come from the Frost Giant nation.

Ah, you all were stationed there, weren't you?" He realized.

Karl nodded. "Not those four, but the other six of us in this team were."

The teacher pulled a spear from his inventory and stabbed the blunt end into the dirt so he could lean against it. "Well, there are always advantages to having veterans on the line with the students. I know most of you are still students, but the difference in experience has been far too obvious since we got here.

If I had to say, sending students out more would actually be better for their development. The gains that everyone has made since they got here have been incredible. It feels like we're about to have another Commander in our ranks as well. Possibly two."

He was looking at Dana and Ophelia, who were both a bit nervous at his gaze. The status difference for Commander Rank would be huge, but they didn't think that they were there yet. They weren't close to Karl's power, or even any of his beasts, except maybe Remi.

But none of them had really considered the fact that Remi had advanced to Commander already, and they were still at least equal to her in maximum power. Most of the issue was just that Thor and Rae were throwing off the perception of what a Commander Rank beast meant.

Thor's [Refreshing Lightning] was such a versatile skill that it made him seem much more powerful than he was, and Rae had her Royal Rank Golems which just tore through everything that they touched.

[They're coming.] Hawk informed Karl after another half hour of patiently waiting for something to happen.

"We've got incoming. Hawk is in the air, scouting. He says there are more threats coming. I will get more details in a second." Karl relayed.

[About five big teams coming our way, then about the same for everyone else. Maybe a hundred big teams?] Hawk guessed.

A big team was ten, so there were about a thousand Hill Giants coming for them.

"Hawk says we've got a hundred coming to our section, and there are about a thousand in total that he can see." Karl relayed.

The teacher grabbed his radio and passed the message to the other units, which didn't immediately get an attack alarm sounded, as they were already on standby, but the artillery started only a minute later, when they got positive confirmation on the Giants' positions.

That was enough to inform everyone that their day wasn't over, but Karl didn't get up from his resting spot, nor did Dana, who was leaned against his side, trying not to fall asleep as she meditated to regain her mana.

The Hill Giants were already charging, despite being over ten kilometres away. It wouldn't take them long to get to the human lines, but the attack alarm was still waiting for them to get in sight so that the students could get a bit more rest before they were scrambled into position.

It was only after the Giants were in sight and everyone was getting to their feet that the troops were sent back to the line, preparing to engage the rapidly incoming enemy lines. That barely gave them time to get half the mages in position before the Hill Giants' bombardment began. But once they were in range, the Hill Giants didn't keep advancing, they stopped and used Earth Magic to create barriers in front of their lines so they could bombard the lines and remain out of sight to the direct attacks from the students.

Golems were charging across no-man's land now, while being bombarded by boulders and sharp spikes of stone. But as fast as they were falling, they were being reformed, to charge from the caster's maximum range again.

"Karl, can you have Thor hurl my Sand Golems again? That worked really well, and they have short legs." Mick asked.

"Happily. Rae, can you make a catapult basket for Thor's tail?" Karl requested out loud.

She made a quick mesh net, and the first golem got inside, while curled into a ball.

Thor hurled the small golem, which impacted with a boulder in the sky, sending both the stone and the remains of the golem to the ground.

"Next! Fire!" Karl cheered as another Golem loaded itself.

This one flew right over the Hill Giant lines, but it could attack from behind, and Mick gave him a thumbs up, signalling that the Golem had survived its landing.

One after another, they were hurled, with most of them dying in the process. In fact, it took so long to get them there alive that Rae had sent a second set of Spider Golems, with Dana's Stone Golems on their backs, to the line before Mick finally had all six alive on the line.

"Well, I can't say that it's more time effective, as they can dodge the artillery if they're on foot, but it sure is more fun." Karl noted as Thor finished his work.

"You never know until you try, right?" Mick laughed.

Even though they had made it to the line after much effort, they didn't last long, and Mick sent the next group running across the battlefield with the other Golems and the Fire Elementals from Colonel Wilkes.

If the Giants weren't going to advance, this was going to be a very annoying fight.