

The First Legendary Beast Master #Chapter 41: Low and Slow

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Chapter 41: Low and Slow

The first thing that Karl noticed about the centre of town was how clean it was. There was no sign of battle here, no indication that there had been a last stand to defend this place. So, logically, the majority of the inhabitants must have simply left, or fought to the end in another part of town.

Reluctantly, Karl checked the large stone building nearby, whose doors were left open to the elements, and found that while the interior was a bit messy, there was no sign of a battle here either. So, either they left in advance, or the attack happened at night when nobody was at work.

If the battle did take place at night and made it past the perimeter security that every village should have, it would make sense that there was very little to see in the streets. The Goblins would have invaded homes, and by the time that the alarm was raised, most of the town would have been killed in their sleep.

The government building still had power to the computers, so Karl whistled to catch Dana's attention and gestured for her to come inside.

"Do you know how to work this? I've never seen that operating system before." He asked.

"Oh, no problem. We used the same one at school. It's even still logged in. I wonder why their computers don't have a time-out feature when you're gone too long?" She asked.

She tapped a few keys and then clicked on the home button and smiled.

"It looks like they did leave us a message. There is a text file in the middle of the home screen."

[Dearest explorers and salvage teams. The residents of this village intend to return within thirty days of the posting of this notice, making the town's property ineligible for salvage. A surprise Goblin attack with the threat of ongoing invasions forced us to evacuate to safe point Alpha, as designated on the government maps for this location, and once the region is deemed safe and the Elites have finished their work, we will return.

Mayor Dingwall.]

"That's dated this morning. We were likely already gathered for the morning briefing when this was posted, but I think that a lot of the blood we saw was a fair bit older than that." Karl noted.

Dana thought about the timing of the message and its implications, and then looked back outside.

"They said that it was likely there would be continued attacks. We only found a handful of stragglers, plus whatever Goblins Hawk killed inside the houses. That doesn't really constitute an ongoing threat, does it? I think that tonight they are likely to come back again, looking for survivors and loot."

"I think that you're right. They are going to come back, not just the small scouting squad that they left here, but a whole Goblin tribe looking for supplies. The book I read on monster biology says that they don't like being outside during the day if they can avoid it, so it will probably be after dark.

That gives us about seven hours before they might start to arrive, assuming they attack with the twilight. But what can we do to fortify and prepare for them?

This building is solid stone, with a stone roof, so it's not too bad. We could lock all the shutters and wait here, or we could barricade this place and return to it after we hunt Goblins in the town.

They won't be expecting someone to be hunting them while they're scavenging for food." Karl suggested.

"The problem with that is I can't see in the dark. Maybe you can, but I definitely can't. I would be working blind, and I'm not a close combat fighter, so I can't really stay behind alone with my skills." Dana reminded him.

"Why don't you create a huge fog bank that hides the entire town? It will make the Goblins easier to hunt one at a time, so I can send Hawk to ambush any of them he finds out in the open, and then we can fight whichever ones manage to make it here.

They won't realize their companions are under attack right away if they can't see them, and the shouting won't lead them straight to us, so we can fight them in smaller groups.

Unless there is a better building here in town, but it looks like the rest of them are mostly made of wood, and I wouldn't trust that the Goblins won't burn them down to get us out if they're desperate."

"Alright, that plan works. I will start building the fog now, since it lasts until I want it to dispel. Once it hides the whole village, we should be a little more safe. How well can Hawk see through the fog?" Dana asked.

"Keep it closer to the ground and it's fine. If you can see for ten metres in the fog, that means that if it ends at ten metres in the air, Hawk can see through it just fine. Even five metres off the ground should be enough to blind the Goblins and still leave them visible from the air."

It was a devastating advantage to attacking from above, and the Goblins wouldn't be expecting a monster attack on their raiding party. Not many monsters would attack Goblins, as they weren't edible. They would only attack if their territory was invaded, or the Goblins made the mistake of getting greedy and targeting them.

"We should prepare a fire as well. Lanterns, something that will allow us to light the room so that we can see properly around the entrance once the fighting starts. The power might go out at any time if they're attacking, Goblins are pretty smart, so some torches would be a good idea." Dana added.

"There is an auto repair shop just down the street. I will get a bunch of oil and rags, then tie them around branches. That will work for torches to light the area, but I will look for an oil lantern as well. I'm not sure that they will have one here, but they were pretty common in the mines."

Chapter 42 Well Rested

The mechanic's shop was just down the block, and Karl approached as silently as possible, in case there were still goblins inside. Hawk said that he hadn't found any, but he was also under orders to either stay high in the air or out of sight so that he wouldn't get attacked before the real battle started.

The building was an old cinder block building, darkened with years of soot all around the three bay doors, with a small office to one side. What he needed would likely be in the shop itself, but he also wanted to find a proper lighter and some food that wasn't just roast meat.

There should be a vending machine inside, and if anyone came back to see it broken, they would just assume it was the Goblins, since they trashed everywhere else in town. But strangely, the glass doors were intact, the windows unbroken, and the shop itself seemed undamaged.

That could be an issue if it was all locked up, but when Karl tried the side door to the actual shop, it opened smoothly, revealing a dimly lit set of three bays, each with a car parked in them.

Karl went to the first, and found a cigarette lighter in the cupholder, which went to his pocket, then he noticed a grease barrel on a two - wheeled dolly.

That was perfect. It would burn slowly, it stuck to the rags for torches if the power went out, and there was a whole drum of it here on wheels. Karl loaded a large bag full of

rag on the grease barrel, then went through the door to the front of the shop, where the distinctive smell of a workshop faded, and a pungent odour of herbs prevailed.

Maybe that had something to do with why this place wasn't trashed? It was worth a shot, and Karl quickly found the source of the smell, bags of herbs soaked in fuel, giving off a rather obnoxious odour.

There were spares in the front office, ready to be assembled, so Karl grabbed two and a small can of fuel to activate them. Then he made his way to the vending machine, which was unlocked and open, seemingly prepared for the likelihood that someone would be here before they returned. So, he grabbed a few bags of snacks and stuffed them in his coat, just in case they were here all night.

"Hey, is anyone here? We're elites from the Academy, here to deal with the monster issue." Karl called, just in case someone was hiding in this well protected shop.

There was no answer, and the room was deathly silent, so Karl returned to his work. He needed at least a few long sticks for the torches, and those should be found in the parts department. Any long metal or wooden rod would do, and as luck had it, they stocked cargo bars for securing freight inside trucks. Two metres long, made of light metal and easy to disassemble to shorten them up a little.

They would make great torch bases, so Karl grabbed four and brought them to the grease bin along with the scent buckets. There was a large length of chain nearby as well, so Karl added that to his pile of goodies and headed back out the way that he came in, carefully closing the side door so it didn't make a loud noise.

Dana's fog was already spreading out from the government building, covering most of a city block and pouring down the streets. Given a few more hours of work, and she would certainly have the whole town covered, making Hawk's work easier this evening.

"I've got what we need. Snacks, torch materials, and even a couple of bags of herbs that should get soaked in fuel to keep monsters away. The shop was completely untouched, so I'm pretty sure that they work. We can set them up in the entryway to the building and see if they keep the Goblins away for the night." Karl explained.

"Perfect. Once I finish with the fog, I will need some sleep, so if you want to rest now, I will wait for Hawk's signal that something is coming. It's going to be a long night." Dana reminded him.

"Good point. Hawk's warning should wake me up, but if it doesn't just poke me or something. I'll rest on the couch at the back of the lobby, out of sight of the doors, in case something passes by."

He had left the door open a crack, the same as they had found it, and there were only a few lights on in the lobby, but there was still a chance that a monster passing by the door would notice them.

"Wait, first put the herb bags where you think they need to be. It will be too late to mask our scent if we do it later in the evening." She reminded him with a grim look.

Karl was still hoping for the best, that there wouldn't be anything coming back tonight, but Dana was prepared for the worst, and that was a full goblin tribe arriving to clean out the town tonight, and finding them holed up in this one stone building.

The bags were quick to prepare, and the scent rapidly filled the lobby, making Dana's nose twitch in irritation at the pungent odour. But if it kept monsters away from their resting spot, it was a good thing, and they might actually be able to rest until Hawk gave them the signal that something was coming.

He was resting in the Beast Space right now, preparing for his night of activities, but he would come out once Dana was finished with the fog, or the evening approached. Some foods could only be hunted at night, and the Windspeed Hawks, as a species, had a great sense of when the transitions would be, as that was the point when the nocturnal animals would be active, but groggy and not quite as alert as usual.

But he didn't get to sleep that long. Dana woke them both up around six in the evening, an hour before sunset, to let them know that the fog was finished, and it extended out past the edge of town. Now, she was going to rest until the attack started, while Karl and Hawk could take over.

[You know what to do. Head up into the sky and make sure that nothing is going to sneak up on us. Let me know if you see anything moving out there.]

Chapter 43 From Above

The hawk took off into the afternoon sky, making a larger loop around the town to see if there was anything approaching, while watching for anything that might take the opportunity of the fog to move about.

He was pretty sure that he hadn't missed anything during the day, but there were always ways to hide from him, so maybe like a mouse in a hole there were hiding monsters in the town just waiting to come out.

He had gone ten kilometres out, moving in a spiral pattern as he circled the town, when he found what they were waiting for.

[I found it. A whole bunch of Goblins are headed to the town now. They're just putting out their fires and starting to move. Do you want me to follow them?] He asked.

Karl frowned. That was close to the worst-case scenario that they had imagined when they prepared for the evening.

[Keep tabs on them, but make sure that is the only thing coming our way. We can likely deal with a pack of Goblins, but if there is something stronger than a Common Monster, we could be in trouble.] He replied.

Karl had an impression of where Hawk was in relation to himself, so he knew that that Goblins weren't too close to the town yet, and he had some time before they arrived, but not enough that he could count on making any real fortifications.

What he should do was call the Academy and make sure that this was part of the plan. Since they didn't know if the teachers were aware the town was empty when they were sent, it would be best to make sure. All he had to do was find the academy's phone number somewhere. Assuming that it was even listed.

Contacting the Elites wasn't something that a regular person could just do casually, so the number might not be easily available even with the computer here in the lobby. They should have most of an hour before the Goblins reached the town, so he would wake Dana up in half an hour to get freshened up and have something to eat before the fighting started.

[The Goblins are splitting up. They will be going all over town, but not in a big pack.] Hawk did his best to explain the situation as the Goblins got closer to the town's low wall.

[Alright, you can start working once they are in the fog and separated. Just don't get hurt. I will wake Dana now.] Karl replied.

He gently shook the mage awake and gestured toward the break room in the back of the lobby.

"There are washrooms back there, if you want to get clean and grab a drink before the fight starts." He whispered.

"How long do we have?"

Karl listened to Hawk's running updates and did his best to calculate.

"I would say about five minutes until they're actually in town, and fifteen or twenty before they reach this side of town. They're about to reach the outer fog now, and they have slowed to a slow walk as they search."

Dana disappeared into the back room and came back a few minutes later with a lunch box in each hand.

"They're still good. Or at least they smell like it. They were in the break room fridge, but I'm sure that whoever's lunch this was will forgive us."

"Do you know the Academy phone number, or how to find it? We should probably call them to make sure this is part of the plan." Karl suggested as he finished the container of leftover spaghetti and the two sandwiches. Whoever brought this had a serious appetite.

"I can try finding it, but I'm not sure that it's a public number. Let me know if anything is getting close." Dana agreed.

She sat at the computer to search for the Academy's contact information, and Karl moved to watch the outside of the building on the monitor at the other desk. There were only a few security cameras, but they circled the building, and there was an extra one at the entrance.

"Wait, we forgot to check the other doors. Give me one minute and I will make sure that none of the side doors are unlocked." Karl hissed as he realized that they had missed an important step in securing their base.

There was only one other exterior door, a fire exit at the back of the lobby, but when Karl reached it, he realized that it wasn't and couldn't be locked. But he had some supplies, so there was a chance to barricade the door.

He went back to the front and got one of the cargo securement bars and the length of chain he had taken from the auto repair shop. The bar could be set across the hallway, and the chain looped around it and through the handle on the door. The hooks on either end of the chain would hold it in place, and the handle looked solid enough, bolted through the thick metal fire door.

Karl didn't know for sure how strong a Goblin was, but there was no chance that he would be able to pull that door open, even if he had someone along to help him.

It took a few tries to get the bar in the right spot across the hallway walls, but once he had the chain pulled tight, the door was very secure, and they no longer had to worry too much about anything sneaking in behind them.

[They're in the fog. I will start to eliminate the Goblins now.] Hawk reported.

"They're in town. Hawk is starting to work now, but we've got a bit before they reach this side of the city. They're probably going to try to loot the houses as they go, so it might take quite a while before they reach us." Karl whispered.

[They're not all stopping. A bunch of them are running further into town through the fog. They could be near you soon. Do I scout or do I hunt?] Hawk asked.

"They're not doing a methodical search, they're spreading all over town and coming our way. Get ready."

[Try to give us a warning when anything gets close to us, but hunt as much as you can.]

Chapter 44 Night Fight

Karl checked the placement of the scent bags in the lobby, making sure they were going to fill the room to deter goblins, then put another one out in the back near the lunchroom, in case they had to retreat. Making it harder for the Goblins to pick up their scent would make it easier to ambush them, and the more that they could kill before the tribe realized anything was wrong, the better.

[They are coming right for you. Maybe they can smell you?] Hawk asked a few minutes later as he watched the Goblins headed directly for the middle of town, next to the government building where Karl and Dana were hiding.

[Thanks. We're on it.]

"Dana, climb up on that desk and open the window above you. You can fire magic missiles from there, right? That should give you a better angle on the Goblins that are coming for the town square. I am going to step outside and close the door behind me, so I can attack them properly." Karl whispered.

Dana didn't approve of that plan, but if they were going to fight the Goblins, it was better if someone drew their attention away from her. If Karl was inside the building, he couldn't do it. But if he was outside and her scent was blocked from the Goblins while she attacked, it could work well enough for them to clear out most of them with little risk.

The real danger would be that they would get tired from the exertion of multiple spell castings. They would be restraining their powers, so the exponential mana cost as you approached your limits wasn't as much of a hindrance, but there were still limitations on how much they could do.

Even Hawk couldn't hunt all night long without a break, that wasn't in his nature at all.

What Dana needed to focus on was making the magic arrows more like actual arrows. Normally, they were glowing spears of magic. But she didn't want them to glow tonight and give away her position.

The first Goblins came as a pair, skulking through the streets searching for something that they would never find, as Karl's [Rend] tore them both apart at the same time. Their bodies fell into a bush along the side of the road, next to the building that they thought would hide their presence, and Karl returned to waiting.

The smell of Goblin blood would certainly bring others to him, which was precisely what Karl wanted at the moment. They were all spread out across the town, so they wouldn't arrive in a group, but if they arrived a few at a time, they would be no match for him and Dana.

Given his physique, even if he were just to fight them, Karl was fairly certain that he could take one or two Goblins at a time without using skills, but there was a serious risk that he would be wounded, and neither of them knew any healing skills.

Karl heard the rustle of a branch, when there was no wind in this fog, and turned to find another trio of Goblins trying to sneak up on him. A streak of faint light hit one in the back, punching a hole through its chest, before Karl tore the other two apart with [Rend].

Even at a quarter power, which put virtually no strain on his body or energy, the four streaks of light shredded the Goblins with ease. They might be strong for their size, but they were soft, and their hide was no match for his attacks.

In the sky above, Hawk had realized the same thing. He used only the bare minimum of power to take out his targets all over town, saving as much as he could for later. Karl always gave him a reward for doing a good job, and it had to be an excellent reward if he managed to keep up the battle until all the Goblins were gone.

Unlike Karl, who simply fought where he was, Hawk had started his battle on the downwind side of the town. That way, the scent of Goblin blood would be blown back across the areas he had already cleared, instead of wafting over the village, as Karl's kills were doing.

Not that the Goblins were all that concerned. Most of them were still focused on loading large bags of stuff from houses, and Hawk just had to wait to kill them until they came back out. But as they moved through the houses and didn't hear their fellow tribesmen anymore, they were becoming concerned, and that was causing more of them to move toward the smell of blood.

[You have more incoming. They can smell your fight.] Hawk warned as he took out both a Goblin and an Earth Mouse at the same time.

Karl probably hadn't banned him from eating his kills. At least Hawk didn't remember him doing it, so he happily ate the mouse before looking for more Goblins. It was a good night. There was work, but there were also mice, and a promise of rewards later. Maybe he could even convince Karl to give him a whole vial of that blood juice that was so good for his strength.

Dana tapped on the windowsill to get Karl's attention and pointed through the fog to where a group of four Goblins was trying to sneak up on them. It was a terrible effort, as their eyesight was not good, and through the fog, Karl could see much further than they could.

What they were going by was the smell of blood, but there was none on him, or in the building where Dana was hiding, so they were on the wrong side of the square, out in the open when Dana's spell took two of them out before they even noticed they were in danger.

Karl was about to attack when instinct told him to move, and he sidestepped while turning, barely avoiding being hit by a flying dart fired from a Goblin blowgun.

Using his full strength, [Rend] killed the creature and three of its companions at the same time, slicing them into pieces that fell into the grass.

Dana took out the other Goblins across the park, and Karl gave her a thumbs up in approval.

He would have to be extra careful of those darts, in case they had some sort of poison on them. They didn't look like they would kill if they didn't, and that made them his largest concern in the increasing darkness.

Chapter 45 Easy Pickings

The darkness was also a benefit to Karl, as he could hear the Goblins running into various things around town, where the lights in the houses had been broken or turned off. They might have a sneaky dart gun, but if they couldn't see him, then it wouldn't really matter what sort of weapons they had, they wouldn't be able to hit him.

With that in mind, Karl shifted into the shadows of an alcove and waited for more Goblins to be attracted by the noise and the smell of blood.

He could hear Hawk hunting in the distance, the short shrieks of Goblins as they were assaulted from above, cut off before they could get a full word out, but Hawk's narration said that he was still high in the sky, using the dark to his advantage while attacking down into the fog.

The Goblin tribe didn't stand a chance tonight, and they were so easy for him to kill that Hawk was barely trying, just using multiples of very low powered attacks to eliminate the pests without tiring himself. Bird type monsters were the reason that Goblins lived in caves, and they had no real way to deal with an irate bird whose territory they had invaded. They could only wait for it to swoop, or run and hide until it calmed down.

Another pair of magic missiles from Dana took out two more Goblins on the edge of the central square, while Karl saw another scurry into the corner by a set of stairs.

It had seen its comrades fall, but couldn't see the attacker, so it was hiding and waiting for its chance. He couldn't afford to let it warn the others, so Karl crept up to the stairs and then tossed himself into the air using the railing so he could see down at the hiding Goblin.

The height shocked him. Karl wasn't really used to the additional strength of his body, and he had thrown himself nearly three metres in the air, but it gave him a good view of the target, and his [Rend] took it out with ease.

Then Karl caught the edge of the roof beside him to slow his fall, and carefully dropped to the ground, limiting the noise he made on the sidewalk.

The soft thump didn't seem like it would carry far, and Karl returned to the shadows in front of the government building to wait for more Goblins to approach. Their eyesight might be terrible, but their hearing and sense of smell weren't, so they had to know something was up by now.

The stench of Goblin blood was all that Karl could smell, and he didn't even have any on him.

Then, the sound of bare feet slapping on the concrete as they ran in his direction caught Karl's attention. There was a larger group coming for them, and as they reached the square, they started to shout, calling for reinforcements as they searched for the culprit.

Karl stepped out into the street and cut down two of the closest Goblins from a block away, where they were barely visible through the fog, even to his eyes. Dana hadn't started firing magic missiles yet, so she probably couldn't see them, but the Goblins understood which direction they were under attack from and turned to run toward Karl, waving rusty blades and clubs as they screamed.

Swinging his arm in a wide arc, Karl sent out a three-metre wide quartet of attacks which scattered the Goblins, with some leaping to the side, some dropping to the ground, and an unfortunate few being torn to shreds.

That made them stationary targets as the first Magic Missiles hit them, and Karl picked off a few more with smaller attacks that would be harder to see in the dark.

More bare feet were running toward them in the fog, and a shrill screech of Hawk hunting came from overhead as he followed his targets back toward Karl.

It took a moment to activate Rend, and Karl couldn't do it as fast as Hawk could, but for a moment, the Goblins were held at bay, creating a mess of bodies in the middle of town, and covering the blood in black blood that stunk of rot and metal.

Then, the Goblins were too close for Karl to keep them away with Rend, and he decided to switch tactics. He drew his blade and chopped at the closest one, breaking its arm and knocking its crude wooden shield aside before the blade cut deep into its neck.

Dana focused on the Goblins closest to him, keeping them from surrounding or bypassing Karl and heading for her, while Hawk worked his way in from the back.

It was impossible to tell how many were left in the fog as Karl traded blows with three more Goblins, trying to get an attack in without leaving himself open. They were surprisingly strong for their size, but not strong enough to be called Awakened Monsters, as they were learning as they failed to stop Karl's counterattack.

A wave of sword light in the form of [Rend] sliced through the Goblins in front of him, giving Karl some breathing space, but the larger attacks were hard on his stamina, and he wouldn't be able to do that too many more times.

Instead, he retreated toward the government building, using smaller Rend attacks as he went, and the Goblin pack began to falter.

"I can't keep this up." Dana warned from the window above him as Karl reached the door to the building.

"That's fine, you don't need to. Lock the window and take a break, I will defend the doorway while Hawk works outside. I think he has a bit more in him." Karl wheezed, winded from the exertion of fighting a larger Goblin pack.

[I have been going easy on them, small attacks is all it takes, and they're too dumb to fight back.] Hawk gloated.

[Just keep it up and get rid of the rest. Don't let them find a way into this building.]

Chapter 46 Don't You Listen?

Hawk circled the square, targeting the Goblins who tried to leave the area in other directions, while seeing Karl standing in the doorway of the building, under the lights, drew more of them forward.

Dana slumped as she climbed down from her perch on the windowsill, and went to sit in one of the chairs in the break room to recover and get some energy back.

The snacks weren't much when you were used to roasted monster meat, but there was some of that left as well, and the break room was well supplied with energy drinks and a free coffee maker.

The Goblins were hesitant at first to approach Karl, after seeing him kill so many of their own, but mostly they were waiting for more numbers. Numbers were strength to Goblins, and once they had enough, their courage was unbreakable.

Karl leisurely cast Rend at the best targets, forcing them to keep moving or become lumps of meat, while Hawk gave him steady updates.

[We are down to less than ten of them now. Most are in the square, but there are some on the other side of town who are running away.] Hawk informed Karl after five minutes of the cat and mouse game with the hiding Goblins.

[Don't let them get out of town. If we're going to make the area safe for the locals to return, we can't have them sending survivors back to wherever they came from. I will keep fighting these while you're gone.]

Karl sensed Hawk turning to find the cowards, and looked for a clean shot at the remaining attackers near the building. They were trying to sneak up on him, staying in the bushes around the other buildings, but that wasn't hard for Karl to pick out. What he didn't want to do was to attack too fast and tire himself out before they made a large push toward the door.

Hawk said that there were less than ten, and with the one he had just killed in the rose bushes, that should be less than six, but he didn't know how many were still hiding somewhere nearby and how many the Hawk had found running away.

The bird was too distracted with his hunt to give updates, but there was nothing moving near Karl right now.

So, he waited, and then waited some more, until finally, one of the Goblins came sneaking around the corner of the building, and tried to jump him. Karl didn't even turn his head as he flicked his finger and sent a blade of energy to cut the creature's head off, dropping it on the steps with a thud.

Hawk finished his work and began to circle the town, looking for more targets, but there were none to be found. Everything in town was either dead or in hiding, which meant that all that remained was for the local police force or militia to do door to door searches and clear all the houses before the residents went back in.

Hawk landed on the roof, and Karl opened the window for him, so he could come inside when he was ready.

"I'm going to close the door and rest for a bit. Hawk, keep a lookout at the front of the building so nothing surprises us. Dana will switch with you in an hour or two." Karl informed the bird, making sure that Dana could hear his side of the conversation.

They both needed the rest, and though they wouldn't be getting much sleep today, just relaxing and meditating would help a lot. That's precisely what Karl had planned. Some roasted Monster Meat to get the energy flowing through his body, and then meditation to refill his and Hawk's energy storage.

With a bit of luck, they would feel refreshed again in a few hours, and they would be ready to face the next day, after calling someone to come find them.

For the next hour, Karl rested and meditated, regaining most of the energy that he had burned through, while Dana did the same, then they both got up to check in with Hawk and make sure that nothing had been happening around town.

[Make one more flyover of the place and if there isn't anything changed from last time, you can return to the beast space and sleep for the rest of the night. I think that we've gotten through most of the threat now, and I will take care of getting us back to the Academy in the morning.] Karl informed his feathered partner.

Hawk flew off, making his rounds over the town, while Dana went to search the computers in the office to find a useful phone number and Karl guarded the door.

"I've got something. There is a government emergency line here, direct dial red phone. Do you want to make the call, or should I?" She asked.

"You can make the call. Let them know that we're students sent out on a mission, the town appears to be clear, and that we could use a ride back to the Academy."

Karl listened to the one-sided conversation and tried not to laugh as Dana struggled to get anyone to believe her.

"No, we are students from the Academy sent here to clear the Monster infestation.

Of course, I know the town has been overrun, and it was evacuated, that's why we're here.

We are elites from the Academy.

Yes. No.

Let me try this again. Sergeant Rita and Professor Mills sent us here on a mission, using a transport spell. We have finished clearing out the Goblin tribe, and we need a ride back.

Just contact the Academy, don't make me take this to your supervisor.

Oh, he's right there, is he? Put him on the phone.

This is the Awakened Rank Mage Dana, assigned with the Awakened Rank Warrior Karl, to do monster control of this town. The Goblin tribe has been eliminated, and we need you to contact the Academy to pick us up, our phone was damaged.

Yes, over fifty Goblins were found and killed, the entire tribe is dead, unless there are some that left the area entirely. There are no more signs of Goblins here.

Yes, I understand very well what making a false report and impersonating an Elite could mean. But as I'm not doing either, please send for an Academy transport.

Fine, sending for a military police unit works just as well. I will remain on the line until they arrive."

At that point, Karl couldn't hold it any more, and he began quietly laughing, using his arm to stifle the noise.

Not for long, though. The sound of helicopters in the air alerted Hawk to incoming visitors only a few minutes later.

[Return to the Beast Space, I don't want any misunderstandings. They're all idiots, and they're not listening to Dana.] Karl instructed.

[At least it will be light soon, so they won't be dumb and blind.] Hawk replied.

Chapter 47 Incoming Troops

Dana sighed over the phone and dissipated the fog so that the helicopter could see to land.

"Yes, I know there is an unnatural fog here. I created it and I am dissipating it now. They will be able to land in under a minute." She was explaining over the phone.

"I will send Karl out to flag them down with a torch, that should be pretty recognizable, right?"

Yes, we prepared for a power outage, should the monsters be smart enough to cut the main power.

You're not all that bright either, but you're right here on the phone with me, aren't you? Don't underestimate the monsters."

Karl laughed as he grabbed a pole and tied a rag around it, then dunked it in the grease and lit it up. The torch created a bright flame with thick black smoke as the excess grease burned, but it was impossible to miss in the rapidly thinning fog.

The helicopter didn't land, it just dropped a group of ropes, and a team of men in black uniforms with rifles in hand dropped into the town square and formed a defensive ring. They seemed a bit too paranoid by Karl's estimation, they should have been informed that the threat was already gone, but they seemed to take their jobs very seriously.

"Academy warrior Karl?" The team leader shouted over the noise of the helicopter.

"That's me. The helicopter can land over there, we already cleared the town, so there shouldn't be any more Goblins here." Karl shouted back.

Instead of landing, the helicopter moved to a higher altitude and away from the landing zone, flying in a circle around the town, presumably looking for more threats.

"Let's get you to safety. Where is the mage?" The team leader asked.

"Inside. But as I've told you, it's already safe. Look around you, there are no more living Goblins." Karl repeated.

The team leader hustled him back inside, but most of the team remained outside the building, searching the square, which was covered in dead Goblins from an evening of battle.

"I need you to put your index finger on the scanner for me." The team leader insisted, and Karl complied, scanning his identity the same way he had a thousand times before, clocking in and out of the mines for his after school shifts.

[Identity verified. Golden Divine Academy Elite student, Karl. Awakened ranking assessment under review pending formal exam.]

The man looked between his identity scanner and Karl, then at Dana and back again with a surprised expression.

"See, we told the guy on the phone what was happening, but it looks like nobody actually believed it. You are welcome to explore the town, though. It will still need to be swept to make sure that there isn't anything hiding in the houses that we didn't detect, and someone will have to clean up all the Goblin bodies in the streets. I'm reasonably sure that's not part of our job description." Karl explained.

"There are more coming. We were scrambled in advance from the base when we got the report that there were some kids pretending to be elites in the town, but they were already scheduled to be dispatched here to clear the village and find the Goblins.

It should be two hundred men, so they can scour a town this size on their own. Now that we have determined that you two are who you say you are, is there any coffee?" The team leader replied.

"Right here. There is a free coffee maker in the lunchroom. We weren't sent with overnight supplies, so we owe a couple of people for a lunch, but other than that, everything in the building is still mostly intact." Karl informed him with a smile.

"Oh, that's an easy fix. You don't have them yet, as you're still students, but once you graduate you'll get a code generator app for your phones. Just write out the redemption code for anything that you need to use in the line of service, and they can apply for

reimbursement from the government. I will put in for it today, it will make their overall damage claim easier to process with one preapproval code in place."

The team leader grabbed a couple of napkins from the counter, and wrote down a string of numbers and letters on each of them before stuffing them into the empty lunchboxes. Then Dana put them back in the fridge where they found them, and the rest of the team started to enter the building.

"Sir, the area is clear. No sign of life anywhere in the area. We will secure the building now." One of the soldiers informed them in an extra serious tone.

"You can relax, they're real elites from the Academy, not kids playing pretend where they shouldn't be. I'm not sure why we didn't get the message, but when they say that they killed off the Goblins, I believe them." The team leader informed his men, who began removing their face masks and lining up at the coffee machine.

"Best news I've heard all day. I can't believe we got chased out of bed at five in the morning because some pencil pusher didn't know what to do with Academy Elites who don't have an authorization code yet." One of the men grumbled.

The team leader set his mug down and nodded in agreement.

"You have to understand, they're minimum wage assistants. The ones who answer the phone, that is. They live off the minimum subsidy for Elites, and answer the phones at the call centre for elites and government officials, but they're not Elites themselves. They don't have much else, so they like to go on a power trip at work.

Just give them your student ID number the next time they ask, and it will automatically transfer you to one of us. Their job is to deal with local bureaucrats requesting assistance, but when we call, they're just the receptionist.

I'm assuming that the two of you are starting your final year, preparing to go into the military?" The team leader asked.

"Actually, we're in our first year, and they were preparing her to become an Idol. We are both in the practical skills special class, since we're a bit ahead of most, and they sent us here for training without any explanation.

I would assume that they thought that there was still someone here to greet us, since the town was evacuated only a few hours before our arrival, but it is what it is. The situation is dealt with now."

Chapter 48 Special Forces Inbound

The special forces team all turned to look at Dana with smirks on their faces.

"Oh, they're preparing for the next Archmage are they? An Idol's career is notoriously short, and her attitude is shit, so they're going to have to replace her sooner than expected. Don't get me wrong, her power is top-notch, and she will be one of the top Elites for a long time, but as an Idol, you can't be that horrible to your fans forever." One of the special forces team members laughed.

"Does everyone just know everyone, then?" Dana asked as the soldiers laughed.

"Well, there is only one Academy for the Elite students, you see. Other than the Team Leader, who is a bit older, we're all about the same age, so we were in school together. Once you're through the first year of crammed classes, you'll find that there is a lot of time to socialize and get to know each other.

The most popular people in school become famous outside school as well, and there are only a hundred or so of us per year who graduate at Ascended or higher. You're both reaching Awakened in your first year, so you're almost guaranteed to be part of that group, and you will know a lot of soon-to-be famous people, that's just how it is as an Elite."

That made sense. Only one Rank above Ascended was Commander, and they were the sort of powerful people that everyone in their hometown would know by name. Either because they became politicians, or because they were so fantastically wealthy that they owned half the town.

The Lithium Mines had a Commander Rank warrior who took the experimental treatments during development of the Serum as the Mayor, but most towns only had a few elites stationed there for security. Between the government stipend for powerful elites and their connections, it wasn't hard for them to get wealthy in only a few years and live in luxury wherever they had been stationed.

Other than the two that were on duty at the door, the rest of the special forces team gathered to 'secure' the two young elites and drink coffee while they waited for the main force of the army to arrive.

"Did you find anything stronger than a Common monster here?" The team leader asked as he got up to pour another cup.

"Just one Irontusk Boar that was clearly awakened. If there was a leader among the Goblins that wasn't at the Common Rank, I didn't notice. They're a bit difficult to tell apart in the dark, especially with the fog, but I don't recall any of them surviving a direct hit." Karl replied.

"Why did you choose to cover the town in fog anyhow? Wouldn't that just make your job harder?" One of the special forces team members asked.

"Not really. It makes it harder for the Goblins to see where they're going, so they're attacking blindly until they're almost on us. But I've got a Hawk as part of my Class skills, and he's great at hunting in the fog. You see, if it stays close to the ground, he can see down into it, while they are looking forward and unable to see much." Karl explained.

"Oh, so it is like the Druids that have an animal companion instead of a beast form?" One of the others asked.

"Sort of. It's a Windspeed Hawk, and he's just made Awakened Rank."

"An actual magical beast, not just a Hawk? Now we're talking. That would explain your confidence in hunting in the dark. Those things are a menace." The man grumbled, remembering a time when his team was attacked by one.

They all sat and waited until the team's radios announced that the trucks were reaching the town limits, and the army was spreading out to do a full search of the town.

"Well, that's the end to happy fun time. They will want us all on standby in case they find something. They've got rifles, but they're not Elites, so they will call for us if they find anything more than a lone injured Goblin." The team leader explained.

Then he led them all out into the open area in front of the building, what Karl had deemed to be the town square, which he now realized was actually used as an open air market, but all the stalls had been packed away until its next open day.

Today was Sunday, the usual off day for most labourers, so it would have likely been opened, if there were anyone left in town. But the empty space had made it much easier to fight last night, and eliminated most of the good hiding spots for the Goblins to sneak up on them.

[More Goblin corpses here. Requesting sanitary cleanup.]

[Goblin cleanup at sixth and main as well.]

[And at seventh and main.]

Karl smirked as the reports of bodies strewn all over town came in, and the special forces team tried not to laugh.

"You really did just set a Windspeed Hawk loose in the fog, didn't you? There are dozens of them here, which makes sense for two elites fighting together, but there are random bodies all over town, one at a time. You would have to be pretty sneaky to get them like that without alerting the others." The team leader commended them.

"It was an excellent tactic. With Dana's fog, not only didn't they see Hawk, they didn't see the bodies of their tribesmen either, so they just kept doing what they were doing until he had time to get to them."

A few minutes later, the Command Vehicle, an armoured sedan car, reached the centre of town, and promptly ran over a goblin corpse, spreading the stinking blood all over the undercarriage.

"I hope they don't want us to get in that. The smell is going to linger for days." Dana muttered.

"Don't worry about that, you will be returning with us to the Academy. I already sent for approval from your teachers." The team leader whispered.

Chapter 49 Streets Swept

A sharply dressed officer in his formal uniform stepped from the sedan car with a grimace on his face for the smell of dead Goblin that his driver had just run over.

"Greetings, it is a pleasure to meet you both on your debut mission. I am Base Commander Colonel Ryan, in charge of the purge of the town today." He greeted them, sounding much more enthusiastic and less professional than either Karl or Dana had expected.

"Greetings, Colonel Ryan, but this isn't our debut mission, this was a training mission from the Academy, we're not up for graduation this year." Dana replied with a sweet smile that seemed to relax the officer even more.

"Not a debut mission? Well then, I guess there is no need to plead for tickets to your inaugural event. But to have sent just the two of you for an incident of this magnitude is incredible. To think that a pair of Elites in training could be this powerful." He gushed.

Karl didn't miss how the Special Forces team all rolled their eyes at his flattery, but with the enhanced peripheral vision, he didn't have to turn his head to see them clearly, so the man didn't notice that Karl's attention wasn't on him.

"I have two hundred men scanning the town now in pairs. They shouldn't take long to do a door-to-door sweep and search every home, then we can return to the base to wait for one of the older Elites to come pick you up." The Base Commander informed them.

"Sorry, Colonel. There are already arrangements in place to bring them back with our team. We will be extracting them to the Academy as soon as we have verified that the mission is complete, and the town is safe for residents to return to.

Unfortunately, there will be no time for photo shoots or any publicity events this time, but I'm sure you understand. Security is paramount for the Academy, after all."

That was when Karl realized what the Colonel was after. He was trying to make friends among the younger elites, networking to expand his connections in the future. It was probably part of his job as a base commander to be in the know about everything that was happening at higher levels, but it was a bit strange for both Karl and Dana for someone with that sort of influence to have an interest in them.

With so many soldiers moving through the town, it almost felt like things were getting back to normal. There were people in the streets, hurrying about their business, workers with wheelbarrows cleaning up, even a fire truck had been pressed into service to clean the streets of Goblin blood, as the stench was becoming unbearable in the sun.

But in the minds of the common soldiers, it only reinforced how terrifying the Elites were. These two were still students, and already they were tearing through entire Goblin Tribes that would have taken their whole unit to safely deal with. Everywhere they went, there were more Goblin bodies, and even Karl hadn't bothered counting how many of them Hawk had dealt with since they arrived here.

All that really mattered was the number that were still alive, and when they could be finished with this assignment and go home to a proper meal.

In the distance, at the town's garbage dump, a filthy fire was sending thick black smoke into the air as the soldiers used diesel fuel to ignite the bodies of the Goblins, purging them so they wouldn't spread disease through the area, and eliminating the worst of the evidence that monsters had actually overrun the town.

From what Karl could hear on the radio in the Base Commander's car, they were instructed to clean up as much as possible so that the residents would feel safer when they returned, as if the disaster had been mostly prevented, not dealt with after the fact.

It was one of the small political niceties that helped the people feel confident that they were being looked after, and in this case, it could have been much worse. If they had waited for the army, the Goblins would have looted the majority of the houses and caused massive amounts of property damage during the overnight hours.

The Special Forces team leader observed the progress with satisfaction. "They will send a cleaning crew through in the afternoon, as it appears that the town really has been cleansed, but the soldiers will remain for most of the week, just in case. We can start getting ready to head back. Was there anything else that you wanted to make a note of before we leave?"

"Yes, these herb packs, I want to either know what is in them, or bring one with me to analyze at the Academy. They seem to be an effective monster repellant, and it kept the Goblins from trying to go straight for us in the government building." Karl noted.

The team leader opened the bag in question, sniffed, and then nodded. "I have the recipe for this. It's a pretty common pest deterrent, but the herbs for it only grow in a few

areas of the country, this being one of them. I didn't know that it would work for Goblins, but it works very well on insect type monsters, as well as regular bugs."

The local mosquito repellent deterred Goblins? Perhaps it just masked the scent of humans so that they didn't realize the area was inhabited. But if it worked, it worked, and Karl gave the team leader a thumbs up to signal that he would want that recipe later.

"Excellent. Then we are off to the Academy. Base Commander, we will return this evening with a full report for you." The team leader announced.

"Thank you, Major. I will look forward to the detailed exploits of these two outstanding trainees."

The helicopter returned as they were speaking, and landed on the roof of the building, which was accessible through an internal stairwell that was marked "Smoking Area".

"You look more excited now than you did when we arrived." One of the team members noted.

"I've never been in a helicopter before." Dana and Karl replied in unison, then burst into laughter at their synchronized thoughts.

"Well, we can change that. Hop in and fasten your harness. The Academy won't forgive us if you get injured on the ride home." The team leader informed them with amusement clear in his expression.

"Yes, sir!"

Chapter 50 Career Paths

The helicopter lifted off and turned toward the east, flying high over the treetops, and roughly following a river.

"It's beautiful from up here." Dana spoke into the microphone, nearly drowned out by the noise of the helicopter.

"It's like nothing you'll get to see on the ground. You two did good down there. I don't know what the Academy originally sent you to do, but I'm pretty sure it wasn't for the Goblins. I checked while we waited, and the other teams of students all went to take out a handful of magical beasts and then called for a ride home the first afternoon." The team leader informed them, now that there were no more curious ears around to overhear them.

"I thought that might be it. There was a group of wild Irontusk Boars near the town. That was a nice light start to the day, and at first, we thought that might have been it, but then

we realized that all the houses were empty, and they hadn't just brought everyone inside to wait." Karl agreed.

"So, you just started to scout the town for Goblins and then killed them all until we showed up?" One of the other special forces soldiers asked.

"We thought that we might have underestimated the teachers, so we cleared out all the Goblins and then called in on the hotline in the government building, but they didn't believe us and threatened to send the military police.

That ended up being you, and they asked that we stay on the phone until you arrived so they didn't have to put out a search warrant for us." Dana laughed.

The soldier rolled his eyes in amusement. "They're a bunch of idiots. I'm sure the boss went over proper protocol already, but calling them is usually a last resort. Getting in contact with a military unit or the Academy directly will make your lives a lot easier.

Do you think that they're going to give you a promotion after this? I see you've still got the first year Common Grade badges on, but there's no way that either of you is still Common Grade. We saw the fog and the bodies, that is definitely beyond the skills of two Common trainees."

"We will see. If they do, it will be great. You know how it is at the Academy, power gets respect. So, if we can get them to give us the black badges, we will at least be able to show off to our fellow first year students." Karl agreed.

The special forces team laughed at their own memories of school. They were also among the first to advance, so they knew very well that there were plenty of social benefits that couldn't really be quantified about being the first with the black badges.

Then later, when you moved up to the Bronze Ascended badge, usually in your second year, you were among the real powerhouses. With the body enhancements of the warrior classes, Ascended Rank brought about huge changes to their physique, and it was at that point when they could be called truly superhuman.

Karl could already jump up onto the roof of a single story house, but that was still plausible, by Elite standards. When you could throw someone over the house, then you were getting into the feats associated with the Ascended.

"We're not far from the Academy now. It will be about another half an hour before we arrive, but you should prepare yourself for a lot of questions from the students. It is the off day today, and you're returning in a special forces helicopter. I wouldn't call that subtle, so your friends will want to know what you were up to." The pilot laughed as he gestured to a spot in the distance that should be the Academy.

The helicopter wasn't flying particularly fast, and the side doors were open, allowing the team members to let their legs dangle out the side while they were held in by a safety lanyard. Normally, that would be concerning, but Karl had seen them rappel down ropes from that same position, so it couldn't be too dangerous, no matter what it looked like.

As they got closer to the Academy, they could see all the students out in the yard relaxing and studying, and Karl could see all the heads turn as they noticed the sound of an incoming helicopter. It wasn't the sort of noise that you would hear every day, so it attracted a lot of attention, especially when it started to set down on the helipad next to the main building.

The doors were open, so everyone could make out the two white and gold student uniforms among the dark green special forces outfits, and the innate need to know all the school's gossip kicked in.

"The teachers should be out here soon. They want a statement from you on what happened during the mission, so I wouldn't count on keeping your day off." The Pilot informed them as the rotors began to slow to an idle.

"Yeah, I was afraid that would happen. But hey, if you guys put in the good word for us, maybe we can get those black badges right away." Karl joked.

The men at the door unhooked themselves and stepped down to offer a hand to Karl and Dana as they exited the aircraft, while Sergeant Rita and two teachers that Karl didn't recognize were jogging across the field toward the helipad.

"It looks like we're in for it right away. Sergeant Rita is my personal tutor." Karl informed the team member beside him.

"She's not all bad. But if I recall, she really loved her physical fitness, so as her student, it might be difficult to see." The man joked.

"She is pretty good, honestly. But I've got a class that nobody has seen before, so she's always pushing for every bit of new information. This report will be a long one." Karl explained.

Dana seemed to recognize the other two teachers, so they must be from the mage classes, and they were gesturing for everyone to come meet them, not just Karl and Dana.