

Beast Master 441

Chapter 441 Quest Objective

Karl took a moment to check the location of the quest objective, hoping that the System would give him some sort of hint. But it only gave a direction, with no distance.

That wasn't going to help much. All he could do was follow the general direction and hope that it wasn't too far. There was no time limit on the quest, he just had to find the perfect pet. Karl wasn't even certain that such a thing existed, but if it did, he would certainly go looking for it.

Not just for the power, but because he wanted to know what the system thought was the absolute peak pet for him. It was likely something so impressive that he had never considered it on his own, but the method of taming it was unlikely to be an easy one.

He was imagining what it would take to tame a dragon when the kids began to surround him, demanding that he bring Thor back out to be a climbing obstacle for them.

The older Elves had no idea what a Thor was, but when Karl called him out, they seemed enthralled with the strange Cerro.

"I have never seen anything like that before." The Mayor noted.

"He has been evolving as he grows in power. A normal Lightning Cerro where I'm from doesn't get this powerful. It's my class that is helping him grow. But he came across a holy resource and it helped him learn new skills.

A Lightning Cerro that can use a Circle of Protection is unheard of, at least in my homeland. So, he's one of a kind. Now that he's begun to change, I think that he's got even more advancement potential ahead of him, and he won't get stuck at this level.

Some of the others had more potential from the start, so I'm not too worried about them, but I've got a Naga Spirit Snake who is about to hit the advancement bottleneck."

The Mayor nodded. "So, she will have to decide if she's going to stunt her powers and remain a snake, or if she will evolve in a different direction. What is her class now?"

"Naga Spirit Snake Shaman Princess" A number of the Elves turned to stare at him.

"Did you say that you have a Naga Princess with you? A Shaman Princess?" One of them asked.

[Remi, come out and say hello.]

She appeared on Karl's shoulders, so nobody attacked her, and bobbed her head happily as the Elves smiled at her.

"She's beautiful. I've never seen one so young that they hadn't evolved yet. How did you get her?"

In Karl's mind, Hawk laughed, while beside him Remi turned to headbutt his cheek. [Don't embarrass me. They think I'm cute.] Remi insisted.

Karl smiled at the Elves. "I got her as an egg from a Dungeon. There was a Naga Shaman and a Naga King boss, and the egg was among the items piled around the boss platform. One of my other beasts rescued the egg, and shortly after, Remi hatched. She's got a real gift for elemental magic." "So, she's been with you her whole life? That explains her tame personality." One of the women realized.

"No, Remi is just a friendly small snake. She has always wanted to make friends who know new and interesting things, as opposed to Thor, who wants friends to play with. The class doesn't change their personality. They all still have their own minds, but they have someone who understands them and can translate, so they're no longer left alone and misunderstood."

The Elves had some doubts about the friendly small snake part of the explanation, as she was clearly a three-metre-long venomous spirit snake, and there were no truly friendly venomous species. But the rest they would accept as a quirk of the system.

An aging Elven woman with bright silver hair stared at Remi and cradled her fingers under her chin.

The two stared at each other, both trying to learn something about the other.

The proximity was making the others nervous, but the kids weren't scared of Remi, as she had been on Thor's back early in their trip.

"Well, she could go the storm snake route, but she would lose most of the powers she has now. Storm Snakes can't be shamans, after all.

But if she goes the Naga Shaman route, she won't have as easy of a time doing the adorable act. Naga shamans are considerably larger than average humans, and it is hard for them to act cutesy." She explained.

Remi's sad expression made a number of the Elves coo at her, like you would with a sad child. They understood her much better than humans did. Most humans didn't even understand her basic mood, much less what she needed to feel better.

"There is one more option. She could try to focus on her Royal Lineage. She could become a Naga Queen. They have many powers as well, and they're slightly smaller than Shamans. But more importantly, a Naga Queen can change back into a Spirit Snake when she wants. They usually use it as an ambush technique, but if she wants to use it to be cute, that's an option as well."

Now all of the beasts were laughing at Remi's expense. You couldn't choose your progression path just because it let you be cute. The whole point of evolving was to become more powerful so that you could defeat the enemies that would come your way.

Remi was already behind the rest due to her youth and slow growth.

Karl thought about the options. "I take it that the Queens are the most powerful, on a raw power level, but not among the usual group of combatants?"

The Elf nodded. "Most of them remain home with their broods, as they are the only ones that can make the whole variety of Naga Eggs that a clutch will need. The others can only make baby versions of themselves."

[But does it come with a new hat?] Remi asked.

She hadn't made a new crown in a while, but she had good materials in her swamp for one.

[I think it can come with a new hat. Or I can get you one.]

"You seem distracted." The Mayor noted.

"Remi was wondering if the Queen position comes with a new hat. She doesn't always come out decorated, since it's hard to make anything stay on a snake's body, but she's a big fan of bling." Karl explained.

The nearby Elves chuckled at the explanation, and the eager look that Remi was giving them.

"Well, I don't know if a crown is part of their skills, as Naga Queens usually wear many gold necklaces instead. But if anyone had the right to wear a crown, it would be them." That settled it. Remi had to look into becoming a Naga Queen. It would be the best of everything. New powers, still being a cute snake, and a crown.

What more could a girl ask for?

"I suppose that we just need to find her some information on the topic. She's been with me her whole life, so we don't have all the information that a regular Naga Queen would have grown up with." Karl sighed.

"Why not ask the Nature Gods? Not the Green Dragon, the Storm Gods. They govern shamans, so they should know how to get a Shaman Princess to evolve." One of the Priests suggested.

"Oh, that is a wonderful idea. There is a temple nearby. You can go pray there and ask them in person. They shouldn't ignore a devoted Royal Adherent. Especially as they are Beast Gods."

Chapter 442 The Lives Of Elves

The meal was more conversation than it was actually eating, but that worked for everyone present. Karl was learning all about the beasts and the political situation in the region. The Elves were intimately familiar with both, as most of them had been watching them for hundreds of years already, all while living in this village.

The remote location made a lot of sense for the species. A city like the Golden Dragon Capital changed far too much for them to adapt to, and only one or two buildings in the entire city would outlive them.

In a place like that, there was no sense of permanence, everything would feel like it was in a constant state of flux.

Karl knew the feeling from living in a camp during the war, and a life like that was no life at all in the long term. You needed somewhere to go home and relax, a familiar place to centre yourself.

"What is your next goal? Will you be going back to where you came from now that you have finished your quest here?" The Mayor asked.

Karl shook his head. "No, I have one more quest left here. I need to find a new pet. It's a quest reward, but it only gave me a general direction and no actual details."

The Mayor laughed and patted Karl on the shoulder. "Welcome to the club. All the best quest rewards are just the Gods looking for amusement. So they're never easy, but they're always worth it in the end. Just put in the work, and you'll find that what they give you will be one of the greatest finds that you could have managed.

At your power level, it could be anything from a baby dragon or phoenix to an extra planar creature like a Reaper or an Oath Breaker. Though that one might not count as a beast, they're more of a demihuman type demon. But if they rewarded you with a Tree of Life sapling or a Vorpall Bunny, that could be just as good."

"Can you even count a tree sapling as a beast type pet?" Karl asked.

"I don't see why not. The Tree of Life can walk until it sets permanent roots, it has rudimentary intelligence, and it is from the wilderness.

I think that the Vorpai Bunny would be the best option behind your own dragon, though. They have the most ridiculous attack ever. It's not much to look at, but their bite attack has barrier bypass, armour ignore and the Instant Death debuff. They can just kill anything that offends them."

Karl's eyes went wide at the Mayor's comment. He gained the core ability of his pets. If he could add [Instant Death] to his attacks, it wouldn't even matter what they put him up against. If he could hit it, it would die.

He was also significantly more durable than the average bunny.

The question was: How did you catch a creature that ignored barriers and killed with a single hit?

One of the young mothers rolled her eyes at the Mayor. "You know that isn't realistic. The reward is always something that is matched to the recipient's personality. If he was the sort that wanted to make an entire Blizzard spell a one hit kill, the gods wouldn't have favoured him to start with."

No, that sounded both horrific and incredibly useful. Perhaps she could revisit that topic, he wouldn't mind that sort of skill.

"More likely it would be something that smoothly pairs with his existing beasts. If he's lacking in an area, he will likely get something that will fill that gap. Quite often these rewards give a holy beast of some sort, but he already has one. So, if he doesn't need a Circle of Protection, or healing, or burst damage, I would think that he's being led to some sort of unique support skill. If he's favoured enough, he might even get an aspect reward from the World Dragon or the Old Gods." She suggested. "An aspect reward? I am not familiar with the phrase." Karl asked, wondering if it was an odd translation from Elvish.

"Oh, it means a skill that is similar to the ones that they are known for. A bargain bin version of a Divine Skill. You could get something like [Armament] from the war god that lets you just create weapons on demand, or you might get one of the food creation skills from a nature god. You might get something truly wild as well. I heard that a few thousand years ago, there was an Elf that got the [Companion] skill from the World Dragon."

Karl tried to recall something about that from his history classes, but came up blank. It might be his nation's patron deity, but he had no idea what the skill was.

The Elf didn't seem to notice, and just assumed that everyone knew what that skill did.

The name was fairly self-explanatory, but Karl couldn't see why it would be so special when there were Golems everywhere.

One of the older Elves nodded. "If it gives you a skill, it's guaranteed to be at least at the Epic Rank, and if it's for a particularly difficult or deity aligned quest, it's not unheard of for the reward to be a Legendary Skill."

Karl's Epic Ranked beast armour was already a massively overpowered skill. His armour was many times better than anything that he could buy at home. So what would a Legendary Rank skill be like?

Or even more importantly, what would a beast that was obtained from a Legendary Rank quest reward be like?

If it was a beast that had a legendary rank skill, it was certain to be an insanely powerful beast to begin with, but what sort of form would such a creature take? The school curriculum didn't cover beasts with Legendary skills, just divine beasts and Legendary threats to humanity. For all he knew, it could be something as cute and non-threatening as Remi.

"Well, maybe I will get lucky and receive a Legendary reward from the quest. With the lack of details and just a direction to go by, they're keeping me in suspense. But it is a beast, so perhaps the best one is relative, and it can't be so easily defined."

One of the younger Elves laughed. "Have you tried befriending Aspen? She's a Forest Dragon, that should be a pretty good pet."

There was a growling from the edge of the gathering, and the boy went pale. "A good pet, you say." The young female voice roared, before a shaggy green dragon covered in leaves leapt into the sky.

Karl patted the boy on the shoulder. "I suggest you run."

The boy nodded and sprinted for the opening to what looked like a cellar. But far too slowly to escape the wrath of a dragon that felt slighted.

The boy's mother looked panicked, but Karl sat her down with a gentle pressure. "Relax, she's not going to seriously injure him. If she were actually mad, she wouldn't have roared or flown up where he could see her."

The woman didn't look like she believed him, but a few seconds later, the dragon came back out with a puppy in her arms. "See, no harm done. She just turned him into a pet for a few minutes so he knew what it was like.

Apparently."

The Elves in the area were laughing as the dragon berated the puppy, who she had tied a string collar to before placing him on the table so he couldn't run away.

The mother went to rescue her boy, and the Mayor sighed. "You say that now, but she holds a grudge like the trees hold the scars of the past. She likely wouldn't turn him back at all if his mother didn't plead his case."

Karl laughed and shrugged. "He's an Elf, he's got a long time for her to get over it. But can we take Miss Remi to the Storm God's temple quickly? Perhaps she will get some insight."

The Mayor smiled. "It's right there, that cave. Just let Remi go say hello, and the Storm God will answer eventually. Like good thunderstorms, their answers take a few days to brew."

Remi excitedly slithered off to check out the temple cave, and Karl turned to make sure that the kids weren't taking advantage of Thor. The Cerro was too kind to say if they were being annoying.

Chapter 443 Nice Scales Lady

Thor was mostly ignoring the kids using him as a piece of play equipment as he watched the Forest Dragon berate the puppy.

[Shaggy scales are pretty good too.] Thor noted as the Elf's mother worked to calm down the dragon so she would turn the boy back to his natural form.

[Now you're aiming for dragons?] Karl asked.

[All scales are good scales. Plus, those wings. Scales and wings are a good combination.] Thor agreed.

The dragon turned in their direction, and Karl felt a nudge at his mind. He focused on letting it in, and a gentle female voice entered his mind. [Remind your friend that I am a Forest Dragon, and I can hear him.] She demanded.

Thor perked up. [I have grasses here that are very good for supple scales.] The dragon glared at Karl, and he patted the eager Cerro on the head. [Sorry, buddy. You had your shot, but she's not interested. You'll have to try again another day on a different dragon.]

Thor was a bit sad that his chance at romance wasn't coming to him from the dragon with the shaggy scales, but he understood. You couldn't get every female that you found attractive, or there would be no available females to find attractive in the first place.

The dragon smirked a little as she heard Thor's thoughts, and dismissed him as a horny teenager who still saw his best chances at finding love to be simply trying for every single female he met.

At least, every one of them with scales because Thor had standards. The kids were still climbing all over him, and that included the other Elven children from the village now. So, it was clear to Karl that they wouldn't be going anywhere soon, and he should likely start looking for a space to spend a night, as it would be rude to let Rae just make a random fort on the edge of an established town.

"Well, it looks like we're not in a hurry to leave. Do you still have the rooms for travellers that the waypoint was designed for? Or a hotel of some sort?" Karl asked.

"Of course. I doubt that they will take your money, as you brought back the children, but there will definitely be a spot for you to stay the night. What direction is your quest sending you from here? West into the forests?" The Mayor replied.

"East Southeast. I'm not sure what is in that direction, but that's where it says that I will find what I'm looking for."

The mayor looked concerned. "I hope that it's not sending you too far. That region is dangerous, and it's all controlled by wild beasts and the Monstrous Tribes.

It's technically part of the Miviascan Empire's territory, but you won't find a civilized village in that direction all the way across the Empire. Even Southeast, you would be hard-pressed to find civilization. That's why the road runs northeast of here before going east again.

But you are searching for the perfect magical beast, so that might be precisely the sort of region that you're looking for, no matter how dangerous it is. Just remember that it is their home territory, and try not to pick fights, or it will draw in every ally and every potential challenger in the region. It won't matter who wins, they will want to attack when the victor is weakened."

Karl nodded. "I hope it's not too far as well. Being lost in the wilderness without my teammates to make dinner and help keep watch sounds like it won't be much fun."

The Elf nodded. Karl had said the same thing before, and it was clear that he was used to travelling with a group, and not solo. Perhaps this was the reason that the Gods had deemed that he needed to go on a quest for his reward instead of just receiving it. They liked independent champions, not ones who relied on the powers of others to support them. So, a nice long trip to get used to being alone and self-sufficient might be just the thing that he needed.

The actual quest reward would be secondary to their goals.

But the Mayor had seen many things in his centuries, and he wasn't going to spoil it for the young human, who might actually have fewer years under his belt than the children that he had returned. The Elves of their tribe aged at half the rate that humans did in their youth, and then their appearance paused when they were grown. So it was possible this young human would only have been a child himself by their estimation if someone had been rude enough to ask and remind him of how very mortal he was.

"How about I show you to a room at the inn for the evening. Is it safe to leave your beast unattended?" He asked instead.

"In a way, yes. He's not hostile, and he doesn't eat any form of meat. But he's liable to flirt with the dragon if he thinks she might reconsider, and that could end in disaster."

The Mayor's laughter drew the attention of half the village. "She's already in a bad mood. Perhaps we should send the kids away and let him rest. I assume that your class grants him a separate space with the others?"

Karl nodded, and the Mayor began to chase off the kids.

Once they were off, Karl called Thor back into his space, and the Forest Dragon briefly looked confused, before she realized that the Cerro had disappeared. She could sense that he was an actual beast, not a summoned illusion or false creature. So, normally, his thoughts would only vanish if he died. But she quickly realized that it was just in a separate space so that the children would sleep at some point. If that friendly beast was left with them, they would still be playing in the morning after sneaking out of their homes the moment their parents went to bed.

She didn't say it out loud, but Karl was thinking the same thing. Elves and Lotus had too much in common. It was not safe to leave unattended beasts around them if they needed to be ready to do things later.

The room actually turned out to be quite luxurious, despite the back to nature rustic look of the village. It had been maintained at the standards that the Darklight Host kept for all its waypoints, and hadn't been renovated to match the rest of the village. It was also among the only buildings that were at ground level. There were a few workshops down here, but most of the town lived further up the trees, presumably as a defence against wandering beasts who couldn't or didn't climb trees.

"We will see you in the morning, if you are staying around long enough for breakfast. I am usually here at the inn for morning tea, and many of the villagers like to drop in. We also have provisions if you need to stock for a trip. We have access to the Darklight Host Guild Bank, so we can get you all the essentials."

A Guild Bank? There was some sort of magical bank that had supplies in it, accessible from here? Now Karl was beginning to envy the luxuries that these people enjoyed.

"Thanks. I will arrange supplies for an extended trip in the morning. Sleep well, Mayor."

Chapter 444 Lacking Common Sense

Karl woke up with the dawn the next day, not because he set an alarm or had anything urgent to do, but just out of habit.

That was when the Giants usually started to scout for attacks, so that was when he needed to be ready, and he didn't want to lose that routine when he might be finished this quest in a few days and back home to the rest of the team.

He briefly wondered what they were up to, and if they had gotten to stop in at the Lithium Mines, where he was certain that they would be the stars of the town.

Even the less famous and military Elites were like idols to the small-town youth, especially the ones not yet old enough to have gone through the serum injection.

As he sat down for a morning tea, as they didn't have any coffee in the dispensers set up along one wall for the hotel guests, Karl noticed that he was still the centre of attention.

He looked up at a man who was trying to subtly observe him, enough to let the man know that he was caught, and that Karl was willing to talk to him. With that, the Elf switched seats to join him at the table.

"You're going east into monster territory for a quest, right? Now, I know it's a quest, and it's giving you directions, but that's still a terrible idea. There isn't anything in that direction that is weaker than you are. Even if you tag team them with your Lightning Cerro, it's not going to be an easy fight. I am a woodcutter by trade, and even I don't go east of town, much less across the border."

Karl nodded. "I agree that it might be a terrible idea, but I am a Beast Master. Monsters are part of the deal."

The woodcutter chuckled. "Well, do you at least have a portal scroll with you for an emergency escape?"

Karl didn't even know that was a thing, so he shook his head.

"Yeah, that's what I thought. I don't know where you came from, but your common sense certainly didn't grow up here. I will get you the supplies that you're going to need. How much room do you have in your inventory?" "Two slots." The man looked confused. "You only have room for two more items?"

Now it was Karl's turn to be confused. "Perhaps there is something off with my inventory arrangement? Each slot is a metre cubed, roughly. I can just load them with stuff until they're full." Karl explained.

The woodcutter gestured out the window at someone, and the dragon came inside, looking suspiciously at Karl, as if he was going to try to match make her and Thor first thing in the morning.

"Can you tell me about his System? There is something wrong with it. All his inventory space has merged into two slots the size of Guild Bank vault cubes." The man explained.

The dragon stared deeply at Karl, then shrugged. "Yup, it's broken. But I don't know what to do about it. Maybe it's supposed to be that way? It looks like it works just fine, and I can see his class just fine. It might be a quirk of his class, giving him bulk space for raw materials. You know, like how the crafter classes get a bag for reagents and materials."

The woodcutter snapped his fingers. "Alright, now it all makes sense. The Beast Master must be some sort of hybrid crafting and combat class. I will go get the travel supplies ready with the space limitations in mind."

Then he left the room, leaving the dragon and Karl sitting at a table together.

"Tea?" Karl asked, prepared to get up and pour another cup.

"No, thank you. I already ate. I'm sure that they already warned you that your path would be dangerous, but I think that you might be alright. You don't smell like a human. You smell like a strange beast. As long as the ruler of the territory doesn't see you as a threat, you should be able to pass through with only minimal competition. Just keep moving and try not to go snooping around nests or dens, unless you're absolutely certain it's the one you want."

"Got it. That should be easy enough in theory. But we both know things never work out that way once you're actually in the woods." The dragon laughed at Karl's joke. The woods were her element. Even if

the beasts were much more powerful than she was, they wouldn't attack a Forest Dragon in the forest. It just wasn't in their nature.

The Mayor sat down to join them, and then a few men dressed as Rangers, one of which was holding a tiny blink cat.

"Your bonded partner?" Karl asked.

"Actually, no, my wife's new best friend. But he insisted on coming with me today to see you. They're wicked smart, the Blink Cats are. My bonded partner is a timber wolf to grant me the increased eyesight and sense of smell that canines are famous for. He's currently napping on my front porch.

Bonded animals might not age and die like their unbonded counterparts, but they get just as lazy in their old age."

Karl could only imagine how lazy and grumpy a hundred-year-old wolf would be.

"So that's how Rangers pick their partners. I gained the same from my first partner, a Windspeed Hawk. My eyesight is incredible for a human." Karl explained.

"Lucky bugger. The rare classes always get all the good stuff for themselves, and the rest of us just get left feeling inferior." The second Ranger complained.

"Rangers do have some benefits, though. My only class skills are for enhancing the damage that my beasts do. The attack skills I had to train separately, or gain from my beasts."

All four at the table laughed that time, and the Dragon smirked at Karl.

"You're not making him feel better. Being able to gain skills from a whole group of magical beasts is practically a Ranger's wet dream. I suspect that your class might actually be an advanced version of their class, or perhaps the druid or shaman class. Sometimes it takes a crossover between them to come up with something new, but if it let a Ranger bond and gain skills from beasts in addition to their archery and woodcraft skills, it would be completely worth it." She explained.

"Do Rangers not get sword skills?" Karl asked.

"Superb ones, actually. But their attitude is that if they have to draw their sword, things have already gone wrong."

Karl chuckled. "I am the opposite. I start with the blade if things are going right. If I have to use my bow, it's normally because I was caught too early by something that can fight back."

While they joked, the woodcutter gathered the items that Karl would need, and came back with two large bags, nearly the size of the inventory spaces, along with an itemized receipt.

"Now, this might be overkill, so I can return some of it if you'd like. Here is the list, and the total is seventeen gold pieces, four silver, eight copper."

Karl focused on his Status screen and had it withdraw eighteen gold pieces. He could get used to that ability.

"There you go. Keep the rest for your assistance."

There was food, as predicted, but not in the way Karl expected. The bag contained a magical lunch box that could be activated to create a meal once a day.

Most of the rest was filled with various potions, tinctures, lotions and scent blockers that will help him through the wilderness without drawing too much attention to himself, along with an enchanted water bottle, and a few enchanted repair kits for weapons and armour.

Karl had never seen anything like them before, but they weren't all that expensive, and he definitely wanted to bring them home with him.

"I know that this might sound odd, but do you have a skill book library available?" Karl asked.

The Mayor shook his head. "We can get skill books, but they need to be custom-made and sent to us. It takes a week or two."

"Yeah, I suspected that might be the answer. But it was worth a shot. Perhaps the next time I'm in a real city, I will have time to visit the library. I wanted to get a proper shaman healing spell for my partner, to go with her healing totems and splash heal." Karl explained.

If they didn't have a full-time healer, that role was on [Regeneration], [Eternal Lightning] and Remi. Having a proper healing spell would have been nice.

But come to think of it, if he had more points, he could get [Trollish Regeneration], the upgraded version of Bestial Regeneration.

Chapter 445 Miviascan Wilderness

Once they were finished with breakfast and Karl's inventory was loaded with as much stuff as he could possibly hold, which appeared to be a normal situation for the locals when they headed out on an extended trip, he prepared to get on his way.

He would be headed away from the road, following the directions from the quest reward. The fact that there were supposed to be no villages at all for the entire northern region of the nation next to them seemed very odd to Karl. Perhaps they meant no Elven or Human villages, but the complete absence just didn't seem like the sort of thing that would normally happen.

There wasn't anything that Karl could do about that, though. The supposedly perfect beast was in that direction, and he wasn't about to pass that up. He had a space ready, and they were just waiting on Remi to pick an evolution direction so she could break through to the Royal Rank. Then they would be able to continue progressing, hopefully with a powerful new friend.

Everyone in the group was excited about that. They had become a close family, and the process of adopting a new family member was the greatest group activity that they could think of right now. They were all present, there was no particular pressure, and no restrictions on what they could look for. There might never be a better chance to find a new friend.

The first few hours in the forest were calm ones. There weren't many strong monsters near the village, the dragon chased them away or convinced them not to bother her, but as Karl got further from civilization, he began to see signs that there were monsters in the area.

The most obvious were the claw marks five metres up the bark of a tree. It might have been a full-grown Dire Bear, or something the same shape, or it might have been a shorter creature that normally stood upright.

Karl didn't want to call anyone out and risk attracting more attention, so he just focused on not being ambushed with his aura turned inward, the way he had seen others do it to hide their power level.

Thor would be ready instantly with the barriers, and Karl had Royal Rank armour on, so he wasn't exactly vulnerable, but it was an extreme change from his usual "Always ready" travel method.

[Watch your step and protect your neck.] Rae sang in his mind as they passed through a dark section of the forest where Karl could feel that something was watching them, waiting for an opportunity to strike.

[You're in a good mood today.] Karl noted. Rae nodded happily as she swung in a hammock in her space. [This place feels like home. This is where a Bloodbath Spider belongs, not in those wimpy forests back home. These forests are ancient, and they're just leaking power. It just feels like home.]

Remi looked around. [It isn't bad, but it's too dry. These trees though, I like the trees.]

As they continued, the sense that they were being stalked became undeniable.

[Does anyone have eyes on the target?] Karl asked, knowing they could look out of their spaces directly and not just through his eyes.

[Whatever it is, it is hidden too well.] Rae complained.

Then Karl saw a shimmer headed their way through the trees and turned to face it, hoping that just proving he could see it would scare it off.

The creature seemed to pause for a few seconds, then Karl realized that it wasn't alone. There were other shimmers in his peripheral vision.

One of them launched itself at him, and Karl sidestepped, bringing up [Eternal Lightning]. The moment that he used a skill, the shimmers scattered, running off into the woods. But he could feel attention from something stronger in the distance.

As a precaution, he stopped using the barrier and returned to as close to stealth as he could manage.

That stopped the stronger creature from caring that he was nearby. [The beasts here feel strange. They're not particularly powerful, not more powerful than me, but they don't feel the same.] Rae explained.

They would have to wait on that, as the arrow that led them towards their new partner hadn't changed directions at all, so it probably wasn't close yet.

They could all feel when they passed between the territories of two powerful beasts, and the team began to realize what the difference in feeling was. Certain portions of the woods were claimed by the beasts. They had imbued their power and essence all through them for years, and that gave the beasts' territories a distinctive feeling.

But now that they knew what it was, they could also use that feeling to skirt along the edges of a monster's claimed territory.

That made things a little easier for Karl. The monsters that avoided the territories of other beasts were generally not strong, and would avoid him as well, thinking that he was a wandering predator. That allowed him to make decent progress during the daylight hours, but as the sky began to darken, Karl had to make a decision.

Where would they sleep for the evening?

The obvious answer was in a fort that Rae made, but the issue was finding a spot where they could put it that would actually be safe enough to let him sleep, and not attract monsters to his location.

The best that Karl could come up with was further up in the trees, but even that was a risk, as there were monsters that lived above the ground as well as on it. [Do we think it's safer up high or down low?] Karl asked, hoping for useful input.

[High is always better.] Hawk replied.

Rae made an agreeable noise. [Smaller branches support smaller predators.]

[Yeah, the good snack sized things should be in the small branches.] Remi added.

That settled it. They would go all the way up a tree and deal with whatever they found up there, which hopefully wouldn't be a whole flock of flying monsters.

[There, that tree looks good. There is some noise, but no sense of strong monsters, so there shouldn't be anything hiding in it. It's outside a major territory, so we should be safe to settle in for the night.] Rae suggested.

[Alright, lead the way. You can keep watch from in the fort, or in your space, if it is less likely to cause trouble. We will fight if we have to, but I don't want to start something big.]

Hawk and Rae both happily agreed to those terms. They wouldn't start anything big, but there were new types of monsters in the area, ones that were much weaker than they were, and they might be tasty.

It wasn't much, but they hadn't gotten a chance to properly hunt in quite a while, so they were looking forward to taking the chances that they could get and replenish their supplies.

Even Remi sensed some possibilities, but it would be better if she had Hawk or Rae get the food for her. Biting and squishing it might ruin the flavour and texture. Being a snake had serious downfalls. All the best food was ruined when you had to catch it yourself.

Chapter 446 Unconcerned Beast

Rae made a small fort at the top of a suitable tree, and Karl climbed up to see what she had provided. It was just an enclosed hammock, little more than a cocoon of the sort she would create for prey, but it was enclosed, and there was sticky Royal Rank silk all around it to catch the unwary intruders.

That would do the job. Most of what Karl wanted out of the sleeping arrangement was just to not be detected by monsters, and this would work wonderfully for the task, as it would hide his scent, keeping the wind from revealing his location, and it would keep enemies away for long enough that Karl could prepare himself and Rae could come out.

It was going to be a long trip through the wilderness, Karl was certain. Even with the beasts watching for threats, there was no way to safely get a deep sleep, so he would be mostly meditating and resting, which was good for a while, but he might have a significant distance to cover, and eventually, he would have to find a better solution, or a safer area.

Not everywhere was going to be heavily populated with monsters, that just wouldn't be feasible with the available food, but when Karl woke up in the morning he was already looking forward to it.

There were three small creatures on the web when Karl got up. They were common grade monsters, not a threat, and not worth keeping for snacks, so Karl simply freed them once he was out of bed and settled on a branch for a breakfast of hard travel biscuits and soup.

A light meal was all he needed, and Karl dunked his biscuit in the soup as he watched the squirrel that he freed last run away in terror, afraid that it would be on the menu if it remained.

This morning, the area felt more relaxed and natural than it had when he arrived, and Karl gently dropped to the ground to continue following the directions that were given to find the quest reward.

That meant a casual walk through the woods all morning, as moving faster just attracted inordinate amounts of attention. Wild beasts didn't run without a good reason, so Karl didn't run either.

At noon, he came to a large grassland area that extended as far as he could see. That was a nice change, as he could actually see threats from a distance now, and make a bit better time without causing himself trouble.

Karl moved up to a jog as the open plains extended in front of him, keeping to a pace that [Eternal Lightning] could regenerate his stamina for. That wasn't quite a run, but it was definitely a fast pace, which would cover over twenty kilometres an hour with his strength lengthening his strides.

[I want to stretch my wings.] Hawk complained.

[Go ahead, I don't sense anything nearby, it should be safe to come outside.]

Everyone but Remi took that invitation, and then after a few seconds, Remi also came out, settling onto Thor's back to bask in the sun.

Hawk soared high in the sky, looking for snacks, threats and signs of civilization.

By the time that it got dark, there was nothing. They saw a few herds of buffalo sized Commander Rank herbivores, and Rae claimed two of them, just in case they tasted good, but the day was deceptively calm.

When Karl decided to call it a night at midnight, Hawk and Rae had both been in bed for a few hours already, but there were no signs of life larger than mice visible to Karl's borrowed version of Rae's thermal vision.

This time, he didn't wake her up, he just found a small stand of trees that didn't have anything sleeping in it and slung his hammock before waking Rae to keep watch.

The next morning, Hawk took to the air again, scouting for any sign that they might be close to their target, but it was just grass, hundreds of kilometres of open plains.

Karl was jogging along late that evening when suddenly the arrow made a hard right.

[Recalibrating. Target lost.] The system reported.

"What in the world does that mean?" Karl muttered.

[Do you think that something ate our potential cute little sister?] Remi asked.

Karl frowned. That seemed far too likely.

Rae nodded. [You may have a point. The best possible option should have been a Monarch Rank infant. So it might have been eaten, or perhaps it advanced and became an Overlord before we could get there to claim it? Then it wouldn't be the best anymore because it was too strong to be safely bonded.]

[Oh, the new arrow is moving, I think that it is close.] Thor noted.

It wasn't much, but the arrow had moved just a fraction of a centimetre, and then another.

Karl turned to face the new direction, and hoped that this time he would be able to reach his target before something happened to it.

[There is something in the distance. Big green people are attacking something black.] Hawk reported.

[Do you think it might be our target?] Karl asked as the bird raced away into the distance.

[I am pretty sure it is. I don't know what it is yet, though. It's surrounded in black.]

He sent a mental image of what he was seeing, and Karl couldn't figure it out either. The Orcish children were just attacking a ball of black energy that Hawk was unable to see through.

It was slowly moving along, as if it was sluggish or unconcerned.

No matter what they did, it kept moving. Then they swapped out the Commander Rank adolescents with one of their high Royal Rank warriors.

Karl could see him coming, then Hawk got distracted by something moving in the grass.

It turned out to be no threat, but when he looked back, the warrior was simply gone, and there was black ash floating on the wind.

"Did it just one shot a Royal Rank Orcish warrior?" Karl asked himself.

[Possibly. Maybe it teleported him, though? He's definitely gone.] Hawk reported.

Now that was interesting. If there was something that could one shot a Royal Rank Orc, it was definitely powerful. But whether or not it was going to be something that Karl could bond with was another matter.

They hadn't tried to pull a living thing other than Dana into the space, and that hadn't worked. There wasn't an extra space for her at the time, but Karl suspected that it was more that she wasn't classified as a valid beast to be brought into the system's link.

It took nearly an hour of fast jogging to get to the point where Hawk had tracked the black ball to after the Orcs gave up on it, or maybe the Orcs had chased it away, though it didn't seem to have cared all that much about their efforts, as it never changed course.

It didn't seem to care much about him, either. Karl made his way a few hundred metres ahead of the small black half orb trundling along through the grass, and tried to see what was inside.

The arrow from the quest log was tracking it, pointing down at the top of its head, but Karl had no idea how to get it into the space.

He certainly wasn't going to try to pick it up, at least not until he knew what it was and if that was safe. But for the moment, it wasn't reacting to his presence at all.

[Should we just follow it?] Rae suggested.

[We might as well. But why don't we try feeding it? Maybe it will drop the barrier if we give it something to eat.]

Chapter 447 Cara

Karl set a bit of Commander Rank monster meat on the ground in front of the beast, but slightly off to one side, so he could see if it was going to adjust course.

For the first time since Hawk had spotted it, the beast paused, as if sniffing at the food, then continued along its way.

But Karl had many tricks to lure beasts to him. He extended [Flaming Body] and roasted the piece of meat, to let the wind waft the scent toward the slowly moving creature.

It immediately doubled back, leaping into the air to show that the barrier extended below it to make a full sphere, then opened slightly to allow the food to safely enter without being destroyed.

Karl cut and roasted another piece, and tossed it between the beast and himself.

This time it didn't jump, but ran to the spot. [It must be a new friend for Hawk, the way it loves to eat.] Thor joked.

Karl chuckled and prepared a few more pieces, tossing them progressively closer, but holding the last one in his hand.

The creature accelerated as it snapped up the food, then stopped right in front of Karl. It bounced a few times, as if demanding the last bite, before he dropped it toward what he assumed was a waiting mouth.

The black barrier dissipated as the food fell, revealing what looked like an average Honey Badger.

That was not at all what Karl was expecting.

But when he roasted another bit of meat in his hand, thin wings, a fleshy membrane like bat wings, extended from under the protective fur on its back, and with a flap, it was snagging the food from Karl's hand so fast it wasn't even finished cooking yet.

The beast gave a strange expression as it landed with the half roasted meat in its mouth, then swallowed and looked up at Karl.

[Meat?] He heard a gentle girlish voice ask in his mind.

Karl nodded. "You have to be patient, it takes a few seconds to cook."

[What is a cook? MEAT!] It pleaded.

Karl roasted the meat and handed a much larger piece to the badger, which it promptly used its black energy skill to cut into small cubes that it ate with a dainty claw, now that there was enough food that it wasn't worried about starvation.

That must have been why it was unconcerned and sluggish before. It was just hungry and stumbling along looking for something to eat, or lost in daydreams of food.

Orcs didn't look tasty, and the creature seemed to prefer roasted meat to raw, but didn't appear to have any fire skills of its own, as it didn't know what cooked was.

Once the food was finished, it established a large black dome over both itself and Karl, and promptly went to sleep. Karl had the food, so he couldn't be allowed to escape.

Karl shook his head at the logic of the small creature, and stroked the top of her head, before focusing on the spare space and transferring her in.

[Quest Complete: The Perfect Pet] [Calculating]

Calculating what, Karl had no idea. He had finished the quest, he had his reward sleeping soundly in his newest beast space, and she was powerful.

[Name] Cara

[Species] Winged Void Badger

[Juvenile]

[Royal Rank]

[Skills]

{Disintegration} Monarch Rank: creates an area of pure destructive energy. {Nullify} A disintegration-based counterattack. May completely cancel skills of equal or lesser energy.

{Rapid Flight} the Winged Void Badger is an agile flyer, even when fully grown

{Limited Invulnerability} the Winged Void Badger ignores all attacks that deal under ten percent of its total health, and an equivalent amount of all attacks stronger than ten percent of its total health.

Karl read the stats of his new partner with a sense of awe. It was no wonder that it didn't care about anyone attacking it. Not only did it have a protective dome spell, it could simply ignore any weak attacks that were sent against it.

Karl's new bracelet was good, but not that good.

[Maybe that was a normal skill for this place, and the invulnerability isn't the part that makes her a good partner?] Rae suggested, seeing a pattern in the loot they had gained.

[I suppose it's possible. The disintegration did seem to be powerful, the way it eliminated that Orc.]

Karl waited patiently inside the dome for Cara to wake up. He could likely walk through it now that they were partners, but it did allow him to rest while she slept. From what he could tell, only the Orcs would dare to attack the dome, and that was just the kids who might not have known better.

In a region where Monarch Rank was among the strongest residents, this impervious black dome of nonchalance was a menace to society.

It was only three hours later when Cara woke up in the mental space and began to look around in confusion.

[Hey, where did everyone go? I swear I put the food vendor right here.] She mumbled to herself.

[I moved you into a mental space for safety while you rested. We're going to be very good friends.] Karl insisted.

[Friends with a food vendor? That sounds alright. Oh, there are more people. Hello spider lady, and snake, and bird, and giant puppy.]

Karl laughed at her description, then Hawk roasted an entire Ascended Rank boar and moved it to Cara's space.

[We're having a pig for lunch? You know, you guys aren't half bad.]

The barrier over Karl vanished, and he rose to his feet. There was nothing in the immediate area, but in the distance, Karl could see that there was a large dust cloud coming his way. That sort of cloud meant either huge and fast moving, or a large group kicking up dust, like an army on the move.

It was too wide to be from just one truck, even if there was a dirt road in the region, but there was no realistic way to hide and wait for the threat to pass by.

[Should I go scout?] Hawk asked. [No, wait here for a moment. I don't know if they're even trying to find us, but I don't want to be easy to spot. I will just walk away from their path.]

Karl began to jog, putting the current path of the dust cloud to his right side, and watched as it came close enough that he could begin to make out the cause of the dust cloud.

It was a cavalry charge, but the riders were on some sort of two legged giant lizards.

Thor recognized them as a predator, but not one that he was familiar with, and not one that was native to the Golden Dragon Nation.

The fact that someone was riding them was surprising enough, but when Karl saw that it was actually Orcs riding the giant lizards, he was momentarily stunned.

Since when did Orcs have a civilization that advanced? From what he recalled, they were barely considered sentient, much less civilized enough to be taming monsters.

Whatever was going on in this place, it was beginning to feel like Karl had missed some critical historical information about the world. It couldn't even be that he was lied to this time because he had met Orcs before, and they were definitely primitive compared to these ones in quality armour and riding mounts with complex saddles.

Chapter 448 Orcish Army

Just when Karl was getting his hopes up that the Orcs were going to bypass him entirely and head to the village, the whole column turned in his direction.

[Everyone ready, but don't come out until I give the signal.] He informed his partners.

Rae was busily whispering details of their usual strategy to Cara, so the new team member knew what they would be doing. However, the Void Badger was not the least bit concerned about these cavalry fighters. Or, perhaps, she was simply born without a sense of fear.

Karl stopped trying to hide his presence and brought up [Flaming Body] and [Eternal Lightning] while Thor cast a [Circle of Protection] over him.

None of the skills were threatening ones, and he had no weapon in his hands, but it would alert the incoming cavalry that he wasn't a target they could just run through.

The charge stopped fifty metres away, and one lone Orc dismounted and came jogging towards Karl with a sword in his hand.

The Orc stopped five paces away and Karl waited to see if he was going to say something, or if he could even speak the human common language as the Elves had.

"Human, declare your allegiance. Your kind has no part in this war." The Orc spoke in a surprisingly refined accent that hinted at higher education.

"I have not come to fight. I was sent here on a quest, to find a particular beast. Now that I have, I will be returning to the west to get a portal home." Karl explained.

The Orcish General snorted in amusement. "I suppose that you would. But that does not answer the question of your allegiance. What side are you on?"

Karl sighed. "I don't even know who is fighting."

That single statement caused the entire Orcish Army to burst into vicious laughter.

"The Orcish Tribes against the Miviascan Slavers, of course." The Champion chuckled.

"Well, I just finished returning a group of Elven children taken by slavers, so I must say, when it comes to Orcs versus slavers, I will side with the Orcs."

The Orcs laughed even louder, and Karl waited for them to get over whatever was so amusing.

"You hear that? The teeny tiny human would stand up to the Giants and their allies in order to reclaim the slaves. What do you think, boys? Will he manage to kill one or two before they eat him?" The Orcish Champion asked.

Karl smirked, and Hawk tossed a Royal Rank Hill Giant body out on the ground.

"I would start with at least two because I've got more trophies with me." Karl informed him.

The air filled with noise as the Orcs bashed weapons against metal armour and whooped in pleasure.

"He got you there, boss. I say we bring him with us." One of the men in the front rank shouted.

"What do you say, human? Want to raid a village with us?"

Karl considered the Orc champion's question for a few seconds. Telling the massive green man 'no' didn't seem like it was the sort of answer that would prolong his life. But the Champion was a Monarch Rank fighter, as were some of his officers, so anywhere they were going wouldn't be an easy fight. Plus, he wouldn't be able to bring the team out without risking them getting injured. He had already seen the Orcish children attacking Cara as she looked for something to eat earlier.

Karl picked up the Giant body, and the Orcish Champion smiled. "Good answer. Join the infantry at the back and we will keep moving. The raid starts with the night as the Giants go blind."

That made sense to Karl. The Giants never attacked at night because their night vision was terrible, so if you were on the offence, then attacking them at dark would be the best time, as you would have all night to fight before they could see properly.

Though a few hours after dark would likely be better, when they were already settled into bed.

Karl nodded at the Champion, who had taken his retrieval of the body as a sign that he was on board with the battle, and then moved to join the back of the line, where smaller and younger Orcs, along with many of the female warriors, were gathered.

There were some women at the front, but these ones were smaller, the size of the juvenile males, and not massively muscular like the female warriors up front riding the giant lizards.

"No mount? You're an odd one for a human, aren't you?" One of the younger Orcish men asked.

"I have a mount, but running is good for the body. Besides, I was hunting, not in a rush to get somewhere." Karl explained.

"What would you possibly be hunting here? This isn't a place for humans."

Karl laughed. "You're the second one to tell me that in the last five minutes. But I was looking for a Winged Void Badger."

"Well, then we showed up at just the right time. If you had found one, you wouldn't be here to join us on this adventure." The young man laughed.

Cara rolled her eyes. [Stupid Orcs. It still hasn't occurred to them that if they would stop poking people with sticks, they would stop getting killed for being annoying.]

Rae laughed, and the little badger rolled on her back to stretch out in the grass.

[Is that how it works? You can just kill the annoying ones?] Remi asked. [I'm pretty sure. At least, some of them. Some of them are dangerous and annoying, or annoying, but also have food. I would have to ask the Elder how that works.] Cara replied.

By Elder, she meant Thor. Karl fell under the category of friendly person with food, but the others all seemed a bit young and unreliable to be called Elders.

[You only kill that ones that need killing. Otherwise, you end up wasting all your energy starting fights.] Thor informed them.

Cara kind of liked starting fights, though. It was great entertainment when you were bored.

Karl ran along with the Orcs, whose longer legs were still strained to keep up the pace behind the beasts. But that didn't slow the meet and greet session between the beasts.

[If you have wings, why do you walk everywhere?] Hawk asked. Flying was obviously the superior method of transport.

[Oh, those? Wings are for getting high enough to punch things in the face and chase flying food. You can't relax while you're flying, you have to keep beating your wings. Walking is much more relaxing.]

[So, you like to just relax?] Thor asked hopefully. He liked floating in his pond.

[Yep, relaxing is good when there is nothing to eat or fight. But now there is food right here all the time, and it doesn't even smell like it's going bad.]

Rae rubbed her mandibles happily. [Good, I had worried that you were the lazy sort, and we're always doing fun things. I don't think that we're going to get to go out and play tonight with all the strangers around, but you can attack things from inside here. It's hilarious, and I like to send my Golems out while I watch from my nest.]

[Oh, I did that one time with Nullify. Some silly shaman kept trying to make a rain spell while I was enjoying the sun, so I cancelled it every time he got close to finishing.] Cara replied excitedly.

[That's the spirit. You're going to fit in very well here.]

Chapter 449 Village Raid

The Orcs had impeccable timing. The sun had just gone beneath the horizon when the village full of Giants came in sight to Karl's enhanced vision.

"Is there a challenge or a goal to the raid other than just killing the Giants?" Karl asked the man running next to him.

"For you, there are three. First, try to kill a Giant. Second, try to free at least one slave. Third, and most challenging, try to do better than at least one of the women." The woman beside him laughed and

smacked him on the head. "Shouldn't that one be for you as well? Because I'm already crushing you in the kill count this campaign."

Then she turned to Karl. "Do you even have proper attack skills, human? Something that can deal with the Giants?" "I have [Bone Crusher] and a big hammer." Karl offered.

The Orc laughed. "I don't know if you mean that as a combat appraisal or a pickup line, but I like it."

Karl laughed along with her. "Could be either. But we can save the pickup lines for after the fight."

The front ranks spurred their mounts forward, roaring into the darkening skies as the Giants prepared their defences.

[Oh, I see a good spot, just to the left of the front lines, see that tower with only one Giant in it?] Rae suggested.

[Take me there.] Karl agreed.

It was dark out now, meaning that there were few limits on [Shadow Step], but Rae dropped Karl five metres above the tower, where the torchlight didn't properly reach.

As he fell, Karl drew his Maul and put five stacks of [Bone Crusher] on it as he slammed it on the head of the guard.

It was a glorious direct hit, and the giant had never seen it coming. But he had overdone it. The Guard was only low Commander Rank, and the maul carried on through the head to hit the wooden tower, which crumbled under the force.

Karl twisted to land on his feet as Cara laughed in his mind.

[You guys were right. Watching from in here is hilarious. Oh, watch this. POOF, no more Champion barrier.]

The Giant's leader had a split second to be confused before the Orcish Champion's spear buried itself through his chest. Even the Orc looked baffled, unable to comprehend what had just happened, but he hopped down from his mount, which moved up to fight beside him as the Giant choked to death on his own blood with a spear completely through his chest.

Karl turned to the village as Rae sent out her Golems, and Cara cheered.

[CHAOS!] Karl shook his head in dismay, then slammed another Giant in the chest, tossing it back against the wall, spitting blood for a second before an Orc cut its head off.

The Orc grunted in dismay as he realized that the Giant was already dying. "That one is yours. Good kill, human."

Karl followed him and the Golems inside, quickly scaling the wooden wall to attack the defenders.

There was a second wall between them and the village itself. The Golems were currently occupied fighting with a Monarch Rank Giant, and the fight was brutal enough that nothing wanted to get close to them.

That gave Cara a chance to cast [Disintegration] over the Golems legs, increasing their damage. A spear bounced off Karl's armour, hurled by a Commander Rank Giant. The return strike with [Chain Lightning] by Remi staggered the warrior, and Karl leapt forward with [Flaming Body] layered on his maul.

The smell of burnt flesh filled the air as the Giant collapsed, giving Karl an open path to the Golems and their target as he buffed himself.

[He got big. How did he get big?] Cara asked.

[A skill called Brutality. He has others too, ones that make us hit harder. The sharpness one should even work with your disintegration attack. You will be much more powerful with him around.] Rae informed her new friend.

The Monarch Rank Giant swung both clubs, knocking the golems to the ground. Rae called forth a fresh pair, attacking it from behind and turning the Giant away from Karl, who was waiting for his moment.

Karl charged forward between a burly Orc and a Royal Rank Giant, using them as a distraction so he could get close, and aimed the maul for the Monarch's back.

Instinct made the warrior turn and raise a barrier as Karl's strike was about to land, but Karl was prepared for that. Five stacks of [Flaming Body] got through most barriers. However, today he had Cara putting her all into Nullify, and the barrier shattered like glass under the combined attack.

The Giant's armour dented with a shriek of abused steel, and the leather straps holding it in place tore and popped, letting it drop to the ground. There was a deep purple bruise on the Giant's chest, but more importantly, it was now unarmoured at the torso, and facing attacks from three directions.

Karl saw a blade coming at his left as one came down at him from above. There wasn't time to evade both, so Karl went for a compromise and parried the first with his maul, letting the momentum throw him out of the way of the Giant's other hand.

He rolled through the dirt and skidded to a stop on his knees, then rushed forward again as the Golems attacked.

The Giant turned to defend itself, but took a spiked leg to the shoulder right before Karl smashed his maul into its knee, sending the Giant to the ground on its stomach.

Others came to rescue their fallen comrade, and the Golems moved to intercept while Karl went for the kill.

A stacked strike aimed at the back of the neck nearly took it out, before the giant rolled over and parried.

It was large enough to finish the fight from a sitting position, and it intended to do exactly that.

More Giants rushed towards Karl, and the beasts sprung into action. Rending Fireballs, Chain Lightning and black Disintegration spheres rushed out to intercept the reinforcements, and the Golems glowed a little brighter as Thor activated [Circle of Protection].

A small stone fired with Earth Magic bounced off Karl's armour, and Cara laughed.

[The Karl is invulnerable too? Oh, this will be funny.]

Low powered stone attacks weren't doing anything at all to Karl, but [Limited Invulnerability] didn't fully negate the side effects of their momentum, so Karl was fighting to move forward as repeated stone attacks hit him and turned him back and forth.

They didn't last long, with the Orcs rushing in to claim glory and the beasts casting constant spells from their spaces, while Karl focused on using Chain Lightning to keep the Monarch Rank Giant on the ground and injured while the Golems fought.

It was beginning to smoke from the scorched areas where the Lightning was landing, and the reinforcements no longer dared to come near their champion. The Lightning arcs were too dangerous.

Karl approached as the ranged attacks faded, and the Monarch's eyes narrowed in hatred. [3, 2, 1 Kill the Ugly Thing!] Cara cheered, leading the attack.

Karl laughed and struck the ground with his maul, sending all five Chain Lightning charges into the Monarch as a barrage of spells slammed into it from the others.

Then the Golems were on its back, stabbing and tearing chunks out of its flesh.

[That thing just doesn't die.] Rae noted, impressed at its durability.

[Its leg has already healed. It thinks we can't tell.] Cara agreed.

Sure enough, when Karl moved a bit closer, it launched forward, intending to choke the life out of him.

But Karl was the faster of the two, and his maul slipped between the Giant's hands, smashing into its face while [Eternal Lightning] kept the massive hands from crushing his body.

The Monarch collapsed with a rattling wheeze through its broken face as the Golems finished their work, but one last spasm sent Karl flying through the air.

[I'll catch you.] Rae laughed as Karl felt himself floating. He had been thrown nearly straight up, and now he was motionless in the air for a moment as he began to fall.

[Don't bother, let's use this time to find a path to the inner wall. We will see if we can free some slaves as well.]

[Straight ahead is best. The Orcs are everywhere now, and they outnumber the Giants by a lot.] Hawk informed him.

But there was one strange sight as Karl fell. One Orc was not fighting. The scarred warrior was standing on the wall with a clipboard, taking notes.

Orcs certainly took their score keeping seriously.

The Golems jumped to slow Karl's descent, though Cara's shared skill would have prevented him from taking any injury, and the trio began to look for targets.

Chapter 450 More Points

Karl and the Golems began to run for the inner wall, slashing at anything that came close enough to reach, but deliberately not killing targets that were already engaged, only tipping the balance in favour of the Orcs.

There was a defensive line on the inner wall, using [Boulder Toss] to knock the Orcs away from the vulnerable members of the village. But that was where Karl needed to be. He didn't care at all about the elderly and children of the Giant village, he was there for the slaves that he could smell, and that he had seen locked in cages along this side of the wall.

The Giants seemed to know that as well, and they didn't really care about the slaves. They were just free labour until they were food, but they could always get more, and they had crops stockpiled.

As long as they didn't lose the village entirely, they wouldn't miss the slaves.

If the Orcs were willing to waste warriors to steal them, the Giants would only put up a token fight.

So, when Karl swung at the wall, breaking logs and opening the back of the cage that held the prisoners, none of the Giants tried to stop him, or even kill the escaping slaves.

They would only slow down the Orcish attack, and keep powerful warriors distracted during the fight. If the Orcs wanted them, they should have taken them at the end of the battle, if they could actually win it.

Karl got his first good look at the battered and downtrodden people inside the cage.

They came from at least four different species, none of which were human. There were some weak Orcs, looking deliberately starved. There were Elves, a blue skinned species with hooved feet and horns on their heads, and some sort of plant people, whose skin had vines growing up it.

Those ones were nearly stationary, only glancing around a little.

Karl realized that they had put down roots to gain nutrition from the soil, and the late night attack had come during their sleeping hours. It would take them a bit before they could move again, but the others were moving away from Karl, worried that the blood covered warrior might not care about their species or their status.

With the smooth metal helmet covering his face, the slaves had no idea what species Karl was, only that he was built like a male and too slender to be an Orc. His skills increased his size proportionally, and Orcish men were much more muscular than humans were.

Karl flipped his visor up so they could see that he was a human, and gestured to the hole in the wall.

"If you will kindly follow me out of the city limits, we require this space for the ongoing battle. Once you are outside, you are free to go." He explained.

One of the Orcish women, nearly starved with her ribs showing clearly through her skin, laughed at his explanation.

"You heard him, time for us to move. We can't be underfoot when the masters need this space to be slaughtered in." She declared.

The other slaves gave weak cheers and jokes as they picked themselves up and helped the ones who were rooted to the ground become mobile again.

That was when the Giants inside the wall decided to take action to prevent Karl from stealing their slaves.

The door of the cage was opened, and three teenaged Giants ran inside with clubs, swatting people aside to get to Karl.

Most of them managed to dodge, but of the horned blue people had his head crushed.

"Pathetic." The boy snarled as he advanced on Karl.

That word seemed to trigger something in Cara, and suddenly, she was outside, attacking the boy's face while Rae called her Golems to deal with the others, so Karl could hold the opening in the wall to secure their exit.

[You like that? Huh? I'll show you pathetic.] The enraged Void Badger was shouting.

Karl looked back and saw that she had the Giant's shirt in one front paw, while the other fed [Disintegration] coated punches into his rapidly evaporating face.

When the young Giant collapsed, Cara didn't stop. She just opened her wings and started tearing apart the weaker Giants who were hiding in the city.

[Everyone, go help her out. We can't have our new friend injured.] Karl instructed.

[I like this one. She's pretty stabby.] Rae laughed as Remi began to form a [Thunderstorm] over the inner city.

[Not onto the slave cages.] Karl reminded her.

[Got it boss.]

As the storm started, a number of the Orcish Infantry raced through the gap Karl had made.

"Is that you?" They asked, gesturing upwards.

"Yeah, that's my team. The beasts are with me." They looked around, and then paused at the black ball of rage tearing apart a building that had offended her for being in the way.

"You really did find a Void Badger. The others were laughing about it, and I thought you were joking with them."

Then he turned to the slaves.

"Alright, let's go. There are more Giants coming from the other villages, it's time to leave. Gather as many slaves as you can and get moving." Karl passed on the instructions, and Thor put his freedom plan in motion.

It was a simple plan. Cages were made of smashing poles, so he just had to charge through them, and everyone could follow him out of the city.

Once Thor had broken the cages all the way back to the breach in the walls, Karl called everyone back to their spaces.

Cara and Rae were laughing, and the Void Badger was rolling happily in the grass, celebrating a lot like Thor did when he was happy.

[Oh, you're like that.] Rae joked with their new sister as she laughed and mimicked a punching motion.

[She's got a real temper.] Hawk laughed as he recalled the scene.

[I don't like bullies.] Cara replied, rolling around on her back to scratch an itch she couldn't reach.

[You know, if you're itchy, you can just have Karl groom you. He lets people polish Thor's scales all the time.] Remi suggested.

[After the fight. There are still stupid Giants around. Besides, I can see more from in here.]

While they were talking, Remi was deep in thought.

[What has you so distracted?] Thor asked quietly, so he didn't derail her train of thought.

[If I had arms, I could grab people too. Just wrap them up and punch their face, or pat their head, or spin them in circles. Or maybe eat them.] Remi replied.

[Don't let them make you another violent sister.] Thor pouted.

Remi giggled and waggled her head. [No, not like that. I just don't get to eat enough random creatures. I have no idea what most of them feel like in the mouth. But I have noticed that some of them are really annoying. Nobody would mind if I eat the annoying ones, right? But why are there always Giants? Nobody can eat them in one piece.] Now she was just ranting, but Thor could tell that she was actually thinking about all the things she could do with arms, and the rest was just her mind getting sidetracked.

[Think how envious Lotus would be if you got to cuddle Elves before she did.] Thor suggested, doing his best to keep one nonviolent sister.

[Oh, that is great. It would even make being big worth it. They could ride my back like they ride yours, and we could go on adventures.]