

Beast Master 481

Chapter 481 Wrestling

"Would you like to watch the Orcs show off their fighting power, human? We don't mind. There are no greater fighters in this world than the Orc tribes, and the Yellow Tusk are the greatest of tribes." The Chieftain who called himself World Smasher announced.

"I think that my team would enjoy that. Perhaps we might even earn the favour of the gods with a pair of their clerics watching." Karl joked.

The burly orc laughed. "You might just be on to something. Bring your passengers out, and we will set up a wrestling ring."

The others were more than a little skeptical of Karl's plan to keep the Orcs right next to the anomaly as a scapegoat, but after hearing that he thought they might be able to claim it as a divine favour to the Orc tribes, even Dana had to do her best not to laugh.

It sounded somewhat like blasphemy, but it was a temple that sent them on this mission, and they had two clerics, plus a Naga Queen who had shown the favour of the Beast Gods in the past, so perhaps it really was the will of the gods that they stabilized this dungeon.

On one hand, having an active dungeon in the monster kingdoms might be a bad idea. They didn't need any more strength, as far as anyone else was concerned. So, providing them with access to more power was a long-term negative, even if it would draw the attention of all the other nations away from attacking the Golden Dragon Nation.

On the other hand, watching the Orcs wrestle sounded like a lot of fun. They were not as barbaric as everyone had feared, despite their appearance, and they seemed to be honestly excited about a chance to show off their muscles.

The ring was quickly assembled, just a large circle of rope for the wrestling matches to take place in. This was also one of the few Orcish hobbies that didn't involve much bloodshed.

They had frequent trials for rank, and some would likely follow this set of wrestling matches, but today, all would be peaceful until the anomaly opened.

That was the part that Dana feared. They were far too close to where the Anomaly was going to open, and if they couldn't get out of the way in time, they would end up fighting the Orcs for the chance to go inside the dungeon.

Nobody would pass up that opportunity, and it would seem extremely suspicious if they did. So, the Orcs would most likely want to chase them off, and there was no spot further than their next life.

The first few Orcs to volunteer for the wrestling matches were growing teenage boys, and the Orcs were very loudly enthusiastic about the chance to watch them go at it.

They left space around the ring so that Karl and the others could watch, but other than that, they seemed to be ignoring the presence of outsiders in their midst, except for the occasional glance to make sure they were still watching the glory of the Orcish children.

Then, they moved on to the adults, starting with the smallest, so that the most powerful would have the honour of going last, as if this were a ranked event or championship.

Ophelia was feeding snacks to Cara, who was sitting in Lotus' lap, as a new pair of contestants took the ring. It was a young Orcish woman with decorative scars all down her arms, and a young man who stood a full head taller than her, but clearly bore some sort of grudge against her.

The woman moved to the centre of the ring and raised her hand to make an announcement.

"The Dragon Gods have sent their clerics here to watch over our matches today. So today, in the sight of the Gods themselves, I will prove why you are unworthy of proposing marriage to me." The woman declared.

Tessa smirked as she cast a softly glowing golden barrier around the arena. It was barely an Awakened Rank Holy protection spell, but it would serve as a deterrent to interference, and work as a wall so that the contestants couldn't step out and have the match declared a draw.

A few of the Orcs had already done that to let their opponent save face.

The goal was to complete the match inside the ring, and stepping out was a failure to achieve that victory, so the match was considered a draw to the Orcs.

But with the wall up, unless they put in the effort to break the spell first, there would be no accidental departures.

The two Orcs squared off, and the Chieftain whistled to start the match.

The female darted forward and put her rejected suitor into a leg lock that sent him to the ground, but he quickly broke out of it with brute strength and went for an arm bar.

She was a slippery one, and he couldn't seem to get a proper grip on her before she had escaped back to her feet. They circled for a few minutes, grappling and releasing as they failed to get the advantage.

Then, when he finally thought he had gotten her with a spear that would let him pin her, she twisted around and managed to get his back, with her arms locked around his neck.

He wasn't giving up, and slammed her repeatedly on the ground as he pried at her chokehold, but after fifteen seconds or so, he was out cold, and she let him go as the Chieftain whistled to mark the end of the match.

That was when the Anomaly appeared, as if someone had been waiting for the perfect moment.

Perhaps they had.

"Oi! The gods have given you a second chance to get your girl. Get your lazy ass in there and complete the challenge!" The Chieftain shouted as the unfortunate Orc slowly blinked as he regained consciousness.

"Boss?" He asked in confusion.

The Chieftain picked him up and forcibly hurled him into the Anomaly.

"Well, that's one way to do it." Karl laughed, right before the Orc was hurled back out.

"What did I just tell you?" The Chieftain asked.

"It's not my fault, Boss. It said minimum group size ten people." The Orc replied, holding his hands up in a defensive posture.

Chieftain World Smasher tapped his chin as he contemplated the answer.

"Send the humans and four more children. You're all about the same size." He decided.

Size was strength, strength was everything. Therefore, a small Orc was nothing. They just had to train him until he was big enough, and he would earn the right to propose to his intended bride.

The female Orc stepped over beside him.

"Chieftain, send me with him. It's only fair if he's trying to match me." She insisted.

"Alright. Then you three as well. That's better. The humans are still kind of puny, but it will do, they're as grown as a human gets."

The Orcs he had picked were all various stages of Ascended, with the strongest being mid Ascended. Sending them in with Karl's group could be an interesting dungeon experience, depending on what the power level was set at.

It could be a massacre or a massacre. With the victor being the difference.

Karl patted the disgruntled pair of Orcs on the shoulder and led them into the dungeon.

There was only one way to find out how this was going to go, and it didn't involve waiting around outside.

Chapter 482 Dungeon

The rest of his team followed close behind Karl and the two Orcs that he had dragged with them, leaving the last three chasing them to catch up.

Inside, the area looked much like the underground dungeon that Karl had seen in the mountains near the frost giant border. It was full of ruined black towers and strange fungi the size of trees, but there were no signs of Dark Elves, and instead some sort of shadow slime monsters had taken over.

To Karl's senses, they appeared to be at high Ascended and low Commander, similar to the dungeon in the Golden Dragon Nation, but this one required ten people to enter.

As the Orcs considered their options, Karl took out the device and activated it, hopefully stabilizing the dungeon so that whoever showed up next would see it as a done deal. The device vanished as it was activated, so he could only hope that it worked properly, but that was not his responsibility. He had done what he agreed, and activated the device in the proper location.

With his entire team inside the anomaly with the Orcs, there might be questions about what had happened to stabilize the dungeon. But that was a minor inconvenience, and the Chieftain already thought that it was a sign from the Gods, and not mortal tampering.

"Do you know these creatures?" The defeated suitor asked, looking to Karl for answers.

"No, but I know a few things about them. They're stronger than you are, some of them by quite a bit. They are also going to be aggressive, but won't be likely to swarm us unless we get too close to them. They will stay near their spots unless we antagonize them, other than the roaming patrols.

Other than that, I know nothing about their skills, so be sure to remember how they fight so that you can tell the Chieftain. If he has to hear it from me, he will have your hide for a trophy."

The Orcs laughed as they realized that Karl was exactly right. The boss would not be happy if the human was the one with answers for him.

"Alright, we should find out what they can do. What sort of fighters are your people?" The Orcish woman who had just beaten her potential suitor asked.

Her voice was smooth, and her tone more eloquent than expected, closer to what Karl had heard from the older Orcs, and far from the tone and language she had used during the challenge.

It seemed that she had been hiding her intelligence from her dimwitted friends, perhaps to avoid being called the Orcish equivalent of a nerd.

"We can call some Golems, and we've got a mage and a berserker in addition to the clerics.

Don't worry, if you get injured, we will heal you. This place is meant for ten people to work together, not for two groups of five to fight with each other and the mobs." Karl explained.

"Thank you. That will make our lives much easier. We have shamans with the clan, so we will treat your mage like that, fighting from the back. The Werebear looks like she can fight, so she can come up front with us. What sort of fighter are you?" She asked.

"I'm somewhere between a mage and a warrior. But I usually rely on my beast friends to help out. They're pretty tough. But we can do without them today, and let them rest."

At least they could rest until the group ran into trouble, anyhow. It would be less difficult for the Orcs' pride to accept.

The woman nodded and motioned for her comrades to join her as she advanced on the first group of the shadow slime monsters.

The woman nodded and motioned for her comrades to join her as she advanced on the first group of the shadow slime monsters.

Ophelia joined them, as she was the only Commander Rank fighter on the front lines, and sending Karl against Ascended Slimes was just rude.

Even sending Cara or one of the other beasts would obliterate the threats in a matter of seconds. But for the rest of the group, it was a good fight.

Thor extended [Eternal Lightning] over everyone, startling the Orcs. But they were happy to get defensive magic on their side for an unknown fight, and they happily charged into battle.

The fact that they managed to do it without a war cry seemed like it required great effort for them, but they didn't want to make so much noise that they would pull everything to them at the very start.

The slimes turned to engage the Orcs as they approached, and their bodies shifted shape.

They were using their innate ability to mimic what was sent at them, taking on the appearance of both the Orcish team and Ophelia in her Werebear form. It was quite the spectacle, and Karl was glad that they hadn't sent any of the spell casters closer to the group.

There were only five slimes, and Karl assumed that they shouldn't take too long for the melee attackers with Ophelia's help, but the Orcs that had been chosen seemed to be having a particularly tough time doing any damage.

"Dana, mind helping them out?" Karl asked.

Everyone needed the experience, especially the young Orcs, but when Dana started to attack, it became clear that the issue was the opponents, not the attackers.

Her spells weren't doing much damage at all, only leaving small damaged craters, and the slimes were fighting on, undeterred.

Curious, Karl hit one with a [Rend], and cut off an arm, but the creature kept fighting as black ooze poured from the wound like blood.

It wasn't regenerating, and it fought like it was dying of slime loss. That was a good start, but the amount of damage that it took from attacks was ridiculously low.

Not like him or Cara, who ignored a base amount, but as if they were three times as durable as they should be, at the same power level.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we have found the perfect training ground for Orcs. They're not too powerful, but they can really take a beating. Do you want me to start going all out, or should I hold back and let you fight?" Karl asked.

"Let us fight. The wimps need the help." The Orcish woman laughed.

"Alright. We weren't in a hurry anyhow."

It was easier not to argue with the Orcs on that one, even if it was going to start getting dark soon.

The rest of the Orcs chuckled, and Dana moved forward so that she could attack more effectively, while Karl threw attacks at the slimes that might have gotten around the Orcs defences and put them in a bad position.

That way, Lotus and Tessa could mostly relax, though Tessa had cast a weapon blessing on everyone to increase their damage.

By the time that the first group fell, they were beginning to all work well together in a group, and Karl was ready to start joining them in the fight. While he wasn't in a particular hurry, they didn't want to be here all night, and these slimes could take a beating, even if they didn't do much to [Eternal Lightning].

With that in mind, Karl led the way to the second group and began the attack as soon as the slimes started to change.

They took on the appearances of the attackers, but they didn't take on the skills. At least not as far as Karl could tell. At the very least, they didn't take on the ones he got from his beasts, or he would have made the second encounter a very dangerous one for everyone involved.

The second group did have a mage of sorts, though. It was a blue slime monster, and it cast water bolts at them that had Hawk nearly in a frenzy, wanting to come out and punish the creature for existing.

[Relax, we will let you all out to fight the bosses if the Orcs aren't doing a good job.] Karl consoled him.

[Like that will happen. Once you and the Dana Mage start going all out, the boss won't stand a chance.]

Karl smiled inwardly at the petulant bird. Hawk wasn't wrong, though. If he really went all out against a target two full Ranks below himself, even the boss monsters would only last a few seconds.

As fun as it might be to get loot, the Orcs were here for a different reason.

Chapter 483 Enraged

The second and third groups both had a mage with them, copying Dana in appearance, but they could only use a water bolt spell.

That made them manageable, but they were still doing fairly impressive damage to the barriers.

"Your barrier ability is too strong. They can't hurt us at all. How are we supposed to be learning anything?" The female Orc asked.

"Do Orcs learn best with pain and not practice?" Karl replied.

They all nodded, as if that should have been obvious, and Karl had Thor take the barrier off them, while leaving it on Dana and Ophelia.

There was no need to make his team suffer just because the Orcs were stubborn.

The next group fight actually went better, as after they had taken a few hits, the Orcs began to adapt their tactics and deal damage more efficiently to the monsters.

It was a fascinating change, even if it did start an argument between Cara and Rae as to whether an entire species could be masochists.

The eventual consensus was that the evidence supported the hypothesis, and the Orcs might actually need the pain in order to function, which might be directly related to the reason that they were constantly looking for a fight. Without it, they weren't at their best, so casting a numbing spell, or using a numbing poison, on them might be the equivalent to torture in addition to crippling their combat skills.

Then, they were at the first boss, or what passed for it in this dungeon. It looked just like the other slimes, but when they stepped on the platform, a timer started.

[Enrage in 1.00.00]

[Enrage in 59.00]

"One minute to burn the boss down." Karl explained, in case the Orcs couldn't read.

He finally took his maul out, and stacked [Disintegrate] on it to deal with the threat.

The boss was mid-Commander Rank, and as durable as the monsters here had proven to be, there was a good chance that the thing might actually survive a regular hit with Bone Crusher or another ability that wasn't stacked.

Karl's hit caused the boss to splatter, and an announcement appeared above the platform.

[Member Karl has completed the challenge.]

[9/10 members remaining]

The Orcs laughed and lined up for their turns to attack the boss. It was the most ridiculous thing that Karl had ever seen inside a dungeon, and he wondered if his attempt to help had broken something within the system.

If the clerics had to deal with an enrage timer, they might have a very hard time defeating this creature. Well, maybe not Tessa, who could actually fight quite well, but Lotus wasn't known for her offensive output.

She did have a [Thorned Vines] spell, thanks to Karl, but she rarely used it, and he didn't even know how much damage it did. The spell was primarily used for crowd control, to keep enemies from running around.

The female Orc valiantly hacked at the beast for the full minute, while also needing to be healed four times, but didn't beat the timer. The creature increased in strength and size by about a quarter, and now she was struggling to fight it alone.

"Maybe we just need someone to get the killing blow on it?" Ophelia suggested as she realized that the boss had hardly taken any damage.

"Good idea. Everyone help her out, and I will reset the timer if needed by killing the boss again." Karl offered.

That seemed to work, and there was no penalty applied when fifty-eight seconds later, the female Orc got the killing blow.

The boss reformed seconds later, back at original size, and Lotus wrapped it in vines.

That did the first bit of damage, and the rest of the team, save for Karl, went back to work on it, killing it before the timer.

[Member Ophelia has completed the trial.]

That settled it, they just needed everyone to get a last strike.

So, they all rejoined the fight against the boss, then stopped just before it was defeated to take turns finishing it off.

The only one who struggled was the youngest of the Orcs, who was having a terrible time landing a strike once the others had backed off. The boss was faster than he was, and stronger. It even made it past the enrage timer before the unfortunate Orc finally managed to get the last strike in.

"Good work everyone. Now we know how to do it, and we can warn the others about who to send in. You're going to need a healer, but one that knows how to fight, or they're not going to have an easy time of that one." Karl announced.

"Who knew that it would make us work as a whole team? That's not how a normal fight works." The Orcs' complaint made sense, logically. But in a dungeon, almost anything was possible, even if it was interspecies cooperation and doing things that were not the normal role of your class.

The boss' body disappeared, and a chest formed in its place, waiting for someone to open it.

"You go ahead, human. You are strongest, you get the first choice." The Orcish woman announced.

Karl flipped the lid open, and an announcement appeared both in the air over the chest, and in his System display.

[Loot has been auto-assigned to eligible members.]

That left five weapons in the chest, and Karl's whole team stepped back to see what they had gotten.

"That's all for the five of you. The rest of us have had experience with this sort of anomaly before, and it just gave us what it wanted us to have." Karl explained.

"It can do that?" One of the Orcs asked.

"Apparently. I've never seen it do that before, but this sort of Anomaly isn't a regular occurrence. Have any of you been in one before?"

They all shook their heads.

"Then maybe next time you come in, it will for you as well."

If they equipped a piece of gear, that was virtually guaranteed, but Karl couldn't give away the fact that he knew for certain this place could awaken at least some features of the System for them.

The Orcs were sure to have some legends about it, and this could become a holy site to the tribe once they did realize. That would be amusing, but more amusing if he wasn't around to see it firsthand.

The Orcs were less eager to prove anything with the fights that came after the first boss, as it was clear that Karl was massively overpowered with that Maul in his hands. It made the Orcs more eager to work as a team and less eager to prove themselves.

That alone was hopefully going to be enough that they could get out of here before dark, and before all hell broke loose outside.

They moved on to the next groups, and Karl realized that this was actually a very small instance. There was only one more platform, and then they would be finished.

"Let's hope that the next one isn't as annoying as this one was." Karl muttered as he led the group through the slime monsters. The groups were still the same, copying his own team, so there was no need to change tactics, just keep pushing and try to get out of here as soon as possible.

Or at least before everyone was exhausted and ready to sleep.

Chapter 484 Final Slime

The combined group hesitantly approached the last platform, where one large slime monster stood. Unlike the previous boss, which had looked normal, while needing to be defeated ten times, once by each group member, this one was massive.

Not even the Hill Giants could measure up in size, and its strength was on the low to middle side of the Commander Rank.

For the mid Ascended Rank Orcs, this was not going to be an easy fight.

"Everyone, be careful not to get killed with one hit, and let's go find out what this boss can do." Karl joked as he led the team forward.

The team spread out to encircle the boss, which was just standing still, apparently watching Karl.

But if it wasn't going to attack, they were. The rest of the team launched their attacks, and the boss sprung into action, whipping out tentacles toward them and firing water bolts.

This was what Karl expected of a slime monster. None of that silly mimic nonsense, but an amorphous blob, violently attacking everything in sight.

Thor brought the barriers back up over the Orcs, but not at full strength because the Orcs fought better when they were taking damage. This way, when they took a direct hit, the barrier would break, and he would bring it back up, but they wouldn't take so much damage that it was difficult for Tessa and Lotus to keep them healed.

The beasts were following Karl's direction to stay out of sight and let the Orcs think he was just some sort of warrior mage, so that news of his unique abilities didn't spread through the tribe.

He had given away too much already by letting the team eliminate the bandits, and there was a chance that the monster nation would put the puzzle pieces together and realize who he was before he could get out of the country.

Having Thor out to pull the cart was a calculated risk, but Cerro were fairly common creatures, and pulling a wagon didn't show off his powers, only his unique coloration. One merchant with a tame Cerro wouldn't be the strangest thing that they were likely to see along this trip.

Karl smashed his maul into the core of the beast, which set all the tentacles flailing as the body quivered and [Chain Lightning] burned a large chunk out of it.

The Orcs cheered in victory at the spectacle, and the boss slime monster contracted, reforming in a much smaller body.

"Cut chunks off. I don't think that it will reform." Karl instructed.

Of course, that was easier said than done. The tentacles were rubbery, and it was hard to get a good hit in on them when they just bounced away. But Ophelia had moved forward to attack the body while the

beast was distracted, and Dana's blade style was having decent luck removing tentacles, which were lying around the boss but not being pulled back in.

Each removed tentacle was making the boss smaller, and Lotus was slowly wrapping the core in Thorned Vines, which restrained its movement and tore deep grooves in the surface when it tried to move.

"How long is this thing going to take to die?" The Orcish woman complained as she hacked off yet another tentacle.

"As long as you want it to. If you're done with it, I will kill it." Karl replied.

"You say that like it's so easy," one of the other Orcs laughed.

Five stacks of [Disintegration] on the maul made the head vibrate with power, and Karl could have sworn that he heard the amorphous blob of a boss sigh in resignation even before he started to move.

That feeling was confirmed as it contracted and flattened itself to the floor as he began the swing.

Karl was almost certain that the boss defeated message came before he had hit the slime, but the stacks of [Disintegration] were gone, so he must have made contact at some point. While he was lost in thought, the Orcs were staring at him in shock.

"What in the name of the Laughing God was that?" The rejected suitor shouted.

"It's called [Disintegration]. Pretty nifty, isn't it?" Dana replied on Karl's behalf.

The female Orc smirked at the man she rejected. "All that big talk from you, and he could defeat the boss in one casual swing. You have a new bar to reach."

"Oh, come on! How is that fair? Nobody but the Chieftain could kill that thing in one hit!"

She gave him a vicious smirk. "Then you'll just have to become Chieftain, won't you?"

The young man gave Karl an angry glare before his shoulders slumped. At this rate, he would never get the girl of his dreams, the bar kept going up.

Karl let his buffs expire as the fight ended, and the Orcs all pointed to him.

"I knew you got big! You've been hiding your power level!" One of them gasped.

At Royal Rank, [Brutality] increased his size by fifty percent, so he was bigger than any of the Orcs present. But they hadn't noticed until now, when their brains tried to adjust their mental impression of his power level as it related to size.

Karl winked at them. "Well, I couldn't just stay small with so many impressive Orc warriors around, could I?"

The fact that everyone else had shrunk as well seemed to escape them, as they were all looking at Karl. But the boss chest had appeared, and that brought them out of their reverie.

[Level 0 members detected. Compensating.] Appeared in the air above the crate.

"What's that mean, human?" "It means that you've never been exposed to the system, and now you have. It's going to give you an extra reward for doing this with just your own power. We won't get that bonus because we got it once before." Karl explained.

The Orcs cheered and slapped each other on the back in celebration as the Dungeon calculated their reward.

Their eyes went vacant as they entered the system interface for the first time, and seconds later, they were all back with smiles on their face.

"I am officially a Warrior!" One of the men cheered.

"Me too!"

"And me!"

Dana facepalmed as she realized that they likely all chose warrior without even looking at the other options that were presented to them.

Then the lone female in the group blinked once and her outfit changed to a more primal fur and leather set, with black metal plates.

"Silly warriors. You didn't even look at the rest of the menu, did you?" She asked.

They all shook their heads while staring at her.

"There is a random option for a chance to make you a better warrior." She declared.

The ladies in Karl's group all looked at each other, trying hard to hide their horror, while Karl openly laughed.

"That random option is dangerous. It can change anything about you, including your species. The last person I saw use it was turned into an Elven child.

There are other classes, though. You could have picked Shaman, or Berserker instead and not risked turning into something other than an Orc." He explained.

The woman's eyes went large as she realized how close she had come to disaster.

Karl nodded as he saw that she understood. "What did it give you?"

"I am a Death Knight" She announced proudly.

Karl didn't know what that could do, but it should be a magic using warrior of some sort, with unique skills.

"Alright, I will give you a bit of advice, from one champion to another. Focusing on the words 'Status, Inventory and Skill Tree' will allow you to access system functions.

You might have a skill available, as you're all Ascended Rank already.

Don't forget those words, as you'll need them in the future as you gain power." They all muttered the words and got distracted for a few minutes, then the female Orc's armour turned to a full black suit of plate mail with a new Greatsword.

"Death Knights get unholy equipment. This is pretty cool. I even got special attack skills." She explained.

"Good, good. If you've got a few skills from your class, and new gear that you can just summon back when it gets damaged, you should become a great champion of the tribe. Even if the others become warriors, few will be able to compete with the powers of a Death Knight."

The other Orcs were too busy celebrating their new powers to even notice her outfit changed.

So, Ophelia used a claw to flip open the reward crate.

[All loot has been auto-assigned to eligible members.]

The chest disappeared, and Karl smiled at the Orcs. "Check your inventory, there should be a reward there. You can show your friends or keep it a secret, the dungeon gave it just to you. There is likely money as well, but I don't know how your tribe deals with that."

The Orcs laughed. "What do Orcs need coins for? Orcs share food, but the only other items we are allowed we must earn ourselves with our own effort, or make with our own hands."

Lotus gave them a curious look. "So, you don't trade for anything but food?"

The Orcs nodded. "Getting strong by buying goods that the other species make is cheating. That's not real strength. But these dungeon rewards, we earned that ourselves. Even if the hidden powers warrior helped.

We get it now, why you didn't just fight everything from the start. You wanted us to earn a reward, so we had more to go home with. You are a wise man, Warrior Karl."

Behind Karl, four sets of eyes rolled at the same time. He wasn't being brilliant, he was giving them time to practice their skills because the dungeon was the best place to gain power.

Chapter 485 Too Loud

Karl led the group out of the dungeon, and immediately wished that he had put earplugs in.

There were now dozens of monsters surrounding the Orcish tribe, which had encircled the dungeon entrance. It was a good thing that they had parked the wagon well out of the way, as it was still intact, but the others were trying to force their way in, and Chieftain World Smasher wasn't going to let them do that.

At least not before his team came back out, and perhaps not before his whole Clan had gone inside.

Chieftain World Smasher smiled at Karl when he saw the team come out.

"Was it worth it?"

Karl nodded and moved to whisper to the Orc. "It will activate a system interface for everyone who completes the dungeon, but you need at least one or two powerful Commanders and a healer to actually do it."

The Chieftain nodded, then began shouting something in Orcish. Groups of ten began to back away from the defensive lines, running into the dungeon entrance, while the other forces howled in rage.

"Should I talk to them? I think we can arrange for everyone to get a shot." Karl offered.

"After the Yellow Tusk Clan. We earned this place. If it is going to close, we will be the ones to use it."

Karl nodded and took his place beside the Chieftain with the others who had finished their run, then stepped forward to be in between the Orcs and the leaders of the other factions.

"The Yellow Tusk Orcs received this anomaly as a Divine Blessing from the gods after an appeal for mercy. Once they have sent their warriors, the Dungeon will be free for anyone else to enter. Chieftain World Breaker gives his word that he won't block access after all his people have entered." Karl announced.

The three Demons and an Ogre that were standing closest to him gave Karl a skeptical look, but the Orcs were already pouring into the dungeon portal ten at a time, giving the portal only a short break between entries.

"That Anomaly won't last forever, why should a tribe full of stupid Orcs get it. Let us in, or we will let ourselves in." The Ogre demanded.

"If you could do that, you wouldn't be here facing off with the Chieftain. One hour is all that it will take, and the Orcs will be back out."

"Get out the way. We're gonna kill anything between us and the dungeon." One of the Demons insisted.

"Human, this is an Orc fight. If they want to try, let them try." Chieftain World Breaker insisted.

"Alright. I will take my team back to our wagon, and we will be out of the way."

That was perfect. Karl could retreat without it looking like he was abandoning the Orcs, and they had already sent most of their people inside, so it was only the Chieftain and a small group of warriors, including the ones that had just come out, that would be fighting.

The battle would be long finished, one way or the other, by the time the others completed the dungeon run.

The crowd parted to let Karl and his team out, and then began to form a circle around the Chieftain and his challengers.

Unfortunately for World Breaker, he had missed one vital detail. With his warriors in a circle around the contest, and most of his clan inside the Dungeon, there was no longer anyone guarding the portal, and sneaky groups of ten were beginning to make their way inside before the fight between champions had even started.

Soon, the others would realize that the dungeon was not collapsing, as the device appeared to have worked to stabilize its existence, and the entrance looked nearly identical to the one in the Golden Dragon Nation.

The only question was if there was some sort of limit on daily use or number of people inside, as this dungeon had no problem with multiple groups entering.

It was distracting enough that nobody tried to stop Karl as they went to the wagon, and nobody said a word as he hitched Thor back up and prepared to leave.

In fact, by the time that he was ready, there were so few people outside that Karl wasn't sure that anyone had even noticed. The few that were still outside were watching the duel between Chieftain World Smasher and one of the Demons, which was still apparently in its early stages, as the two were close to evenly matched when fighting without weapons.

That couldn't be a coincidence. If they had actually wanted to kill the Orcs and take over the Dungeon, they could have with the numbers they still had outside, but they were fighting an unarmed duel for the dungeon, while both of their forces were already inside it.

The whole thing was a bit ridiculous, Karl thought as he turned Thor south towards the city. Once they made it to Halsearing, it would be unlikely that anyone would associate them with whatever was going on with the anomaly, if anyone even cared to look now that it was stable.

They had a few hours of travel by wagon to make it back to the city limits, but already Hawk was seeing groups of monsters headed their way.

A group of trolls turned their way, led by a massive Mountain Troll, four metres tall, with skin that looked like cracked granite. They all looked like they were from the same clan, but some were much smaller, near human sized, and some were hardly larger than Cara, but didn't seem to be children.

Perhaps they were, Karl wasn't an expert on Troll biology, but the size didn't scale with their strength. Some of the small ones were Commanders.

A roughly human sized troll with the granite skin of this tribe stopped in front of Thor as Karl brought the wagon to a stop.

Everyone was on edge, and they all had weapons out, but it was obvious that the trolls wanted to talk.

"Did you see a Dungeon?" The troll asked, struggling with the human words.

"No. But there is a big fight behind us. Follow our tracks and you will see it. That might be the dungeon, if there is one in the area." Karl suggested.

The troll nodded once, then the whole group started running. They even picked up the little ones so they could make better time.

That was a signal for the groups behind them, who took off running after the trolls, and the ones behind them, who thought those groups had discovered something.

After an hour of follow the leader, another of the groups, made up of violet skinned demons, ran up to the wagon to talk to them.

"Did you pass by the dungeon?" The Demon asked.

"I assume so. There is a huge fight going on a couple of hours back. Everyone is going wild about whatever is there, and honestly, I want nothing to do with it. If it's still there next week, I might come back and take a look."

The Demon laughed. "If it's still there next week, we can count ourselves fortunate, but I doubt that the situation will have gotten any better. Have you got anything to trade?"

Karl shook his head. "The last we had was a bunch of dried salmon that we traded to the Yellow Tusk Orcs. How much further to the city? With all this chaos, I don't want to be out here tonight."

"It's a half hour away, but the sun has already set. The gates are locked for the night. There is a campground outside the city, but I would stay here. It's safer."

Chapter 486 Overnighter

As they weren't following a trail, there was no reason to pull off or move anywhere, except next to a stand of trees to block the wind and give them somewhere to hang hammocks.

The weather was warm here in the afternoon, but it was getting cold quickly in the evening, and Karl realized that perhaps just setting up in the trees might not be the most comfortable option.

He had [Flaming Body] to keep himself warm, but it was still better to create a tent and have a proper sleep.

There was one in all the supplies that the Elves had gathered for him, and Karl considered taking it out, but Rae was already on her way to the trees to make them something.

She wasn't going all out today so that they could easily pack it up in the morning and not leave one of her glorious constructs for strangers she didn't even like. So, what she came up with was a ring of silk wall around a group of trees and a hanging sheet over the top, with fresh hammocks hung inside around a fire pit.

That would be more than enough, and they could have roast meat in the morning.

Cara was right, it really was the best way to have it, and it wouldn't take long. The wagon was left beside the clearing, and Thor returned to his space to nap in his pond and recharge for the high chance he would get to meet new people tomorrow. That left the others to gather firewood, while Rae set up a perch in the trees to observe anything that might attempt to approach them.

She could still see that there were groups headed towards the dungeon, even now that the sun was down, and it was almost fully dark. There weren't any more leaving the city as far as she could see, and the ones that were moving were already set on their path, so she had high hopes for a quiet night.

There were a number of small creatures that she wasn't familiar with, so she had also set up weak webs through the stand of trees to catch some for examination. Just a little something to help her pass the time as she waited for the sun to come back up and the clerics to make breakfast.

However, impatience won out in the end, and when Karl woke up in the morning, there was a freshly stoked fire going, with skewers full of meat arranged around it, and an excited Cara running between them to rotate the sticks, so none of the sides got overcooked.

Lotus smiled at the scene. "I guess that's our cue to make the breakfast side dishes. Thank you, Cara, and whoever else helped with breakfast."

[There are more trolls coming our way. I think that they see the wagon.] Rae informed Karl as he stood to stretch his muscles.

[How long do we have?] [Ten minutes or so. The meat should be ready before then.] Rae replied with an overtone of pleasure that nobody would be trying to steal her hard work.

"We've got incoming in ten minutes. It shouldn't be any trouble, but be prepared." Karl warned the others.

[Thor, you might as well make your way out of the trees to your wagon. We will hook you up later.]

The Cerro had already eaten, but he grabbed the pile of magically created feed that Tessa had set aside for him and tossed it into the pile in his space as he went to wait by his wagon.

He would have plenty of time to dump it on the ground and snack while he waited, and if he were right, it would help build the image of them being a normal merchant group, who actually had to set camp, carry feed for their Cerro, and worry about night attacks.

Karl had just finished his oatmeal and roasted tree lizard, courtesy of Rae, when Thor gave him the two-minute warning, to make his way out to meet their guests.

Most creatures would be able to see the incoming monsters now, so Karl didn't have to worry about giving away his abilities when he walked out to greet them.

He noticed that the Trolls carried their weapons openly, perhaps because they didn't have any sort of access to the system to let the weapons bond. But like the others, the leader of the group drew his weapon even as he waved an otherwise friendly hello.

It seemed that was some sort of tradition among the locals, so Karl took out his maul and slung it over his shoulder as he moved twenty metres toward them and waited.

That was far enough that they wouldn't easily be able to reach the others, who were still finishing their morning meal.

"Greetings merchant. Do you know the way to the Dungeon? It should be in this direction." The leader of the group asked.

"Go straight north, following the trails. There were dozens of groups last night headed that way. When we went by, there was a huge fight at the three standing stones on a hill. That should be where the dungeon is.

We kept moving, but when you get close, it should be impossible to miss that many people.

Nobody has come back at all, so it has to still be active. If it wasn't, they would have given up by now."

The troll's face twisted into a grim smile. "Or them they all dead."

Karl chuckled. "At least one fast runner should have come by last night if that was the case. One sneaky sort always gets away."

The troll shook his head. "Not like that. It could be that everyone goes in, and nobody comes out."

Karl nodded in understanding. "That could be. But some groups had champions stronger than I am. If it's that dangerous, then isn't it a really good thing?"

The troll made a genuine laugh, as did his teammates. "Good things only count if you live long enough to enjoy them. If whatever is in the dungeon is strong enough to kill a Monarch Rank Champion, the big bosses will tear everything apart fighting over it.

All them Overlords fighting over a dungeon? We won't have a city left. It's too close to the fight."

It was nearly forty kilometres away, but the troll had a point. If it was an Overlord rank Dungeon, every nation on the continent would be here tearing the country apart to claim it for themselves.

The opportunity to have even a few trips through and load up on Overlord Rank equipment was far too valuable.

Even being low Commander Rank, like the one in the Golden Dragon Nation, they would be going insane soon trying to get Commander Rank items and awaken system users.

"You're still going to go, even knowing that everyone will be fighting over it?" Karl asked.

The group leader nodded and smiled. "Trolls work together. If there are more trolls, we will join them."

"Oh, I should have thought of that. There was a large group of Granite Trolls, maybe? Rock Trolls of some sort, anyhow. They passed us near dark last night. They should be there now, assuming nothing happened to them."

The Troll gave Karl a sloppy salute and then motioned for his team to get moving again.

Tessa waited for them to leave, then came out of the camp. "You know, I expected monsters to be more... I don't know. Monstrous, maybe?"

Karl nodded. "I know what you mean. Perhaps it's because we've been meeting Orcs and Trolls? The Ogres and Giants that we have such an issue with at home could just be that much more violent. Or perhaps there is something different here in their own territory?"

Chapter 487 Last Leg

The others quickly packed the camp and piled it in the wagon to use later. If nothing else, they could use the cloth as a prop to make it look like they were an average travelling group.

It was obvious now that being able to store items in a separate space was a rare ability, and travelling without large amounts of supplies made them stand out.

That might change soon, with the Dungeon here. But for now, they would have to be careful.

They also didn't know who could be awakened by the Dungeon. They had heard from the Beast Clerics that the last time this happened, the continent was left behind because they only got Common Grade dungeons with the system active, and that wouldn't awaken the system in anything powerful.

This one could also come with caveats, even if it was Commander Rank. If it didn't want to awaken every species that went in, there could be unintended side effects and a massive power struggle.

But Tessa also remembered that the ones awakened by the Dungeons weren't able to advance past that point last time. There was a chance that species with higher potential might get very little out of it, if it didn't give them anything more than an inventory and skills that were worse than what they had already.

It would be insane to stick around and find out, though. "What are we going to do in Halsearing once we get there?" Tessa asked Karl as they watched the trolls run off into the distance.

"I say that we pick up some trade goods and turn ourselves into proper merchants. We can claim any destination that we want for you and Lotus, and if the wagon is loaded with trade goods, we have an excuse to go to any city we want." Karl suggested.

"So, no hiding or elaborate schemes, just trading random goods until we get to a safe border?"

Karl nodded. "I think it's going to work. See how everyone has reacted to us so far? As long as they thought that we were merchants, they didn't really care what we were doing."

"It would be better if we could actually disguise the rest of the team. Travelling with so many women in a nation that keeps slaves is a dangerous proposition." She sighed.

"Do you think that we should hire more guards? Like, actual hired guards." Karl asked.

"And have to hide who we are and what we're doing all the time? No, thanks. Hopefully, Remi's bodyguards are enough. If yours had come out the same, it would have been better, but with you calling a pair of lamias, that's just more females."

There was laughter from behind them as Ophelia came out of the camp with an armload of cloth. "He's got that sort of luck. I'm surprised that the bodyguards didn't come out as smaller copies of Remi, to be honest. We've got most of the camp packed now, so we can leave whenever. Do we have a plan?"

Karl nodded. "We're going to sell the gear we got from the Orcs, then reload the wagon with trade goods and head out of town on one of the major roads. I don't think that it matters much, one runs east, one goes northeast, and they both head near a safe border.

We just need to trade where we stop to keep up the appearances, and we're good to go."

Ophelia nodded, then loaded the supplies in the wagon.

"Alright, we will trust you. How long do you think that it will take to get out of the country that way?"

Karl thought of the map, and the distances that they had managed to cover each day with Thor pulling the wagon.

"A full week of travel, so likely close to two weeks with trade and rest days. It looks suspicious for a merchant group to be in too big of a hurry if the town is safe, so we will likely stop at a few of the towns along the way.

If we go up to Berwickham, that's two or maybe three days. Then we can go east into Northesia, which is human controlled. Then east across their territory to take a short ship ride to the south coast of home, sailing past the Wilds.

Or we could take a bit of an overland detour and go through the beastkin nation, headed for Whiton temple.

There are no roads for that route, but with the lake, it would be very hard to get lost."

Ophelia frowned, and Tessa took out a small map as Karl described the routes. "The other option would be to head north after Berwickham, and go cross-country to the Divine Beast Nation, where we would have to circle around the Mountain Giants to go home.

Or, I suppose that we could go to Lutonade and try to pay off a Captain to take us all the way home, but that is even more risky than walking across a nation of monsters."

The look on everyone else's faces said that was the very last option that they were willing to try, and only after every other option had failed to get them out of the country. The Captains had already tried to capture them once, so just turning up at their home base didn't seem like a great plan.

"Alright then. We've got cash from the bandit clearing, so we at least have local currency, and the items from the Orcs to trade. Does anyone want to stay here a day? Or do you want to get on the road as soon as we've finished our business?" Karl asked.

"I think that we should get on the road today. We can take a bit of time for lunch, but we should get out of town before more nations come for the festivities. Orthos warned us that they would be there not long after the event, and they are likely to be looking for us on the description of those who were there. They might not know that we stabilized the dungeon, but they are likely to guess that we gained a treasure from being the first group through, especially if the Orcs are dead and no treasure was recovered." Tessa suggested.

Dana frowned under her mask. She hadn't thought about that. Dungeons usually gave a big reward for the first clearance, but they hadn't seen anything notable.

Or perhaps they had gotten it, but because it went straight into their inventory, they just hadn't paid enough attention. She could almost guarantee that Karl hadn't even looked at what was in his inventory after they left.

Karl realized that everyone was looking at him, but he wasn't sure why. They were all on the same page with the plan, so why was he getting that look?

It didn't matter much. They were all loaded up now, and he just had to hook up Thor so that they could head out.

"Alright, everyone on board and in position. Let's get this show on the road."

The Golems moved to the back, and the pair of bodyguards took their place on the sideboards, while everyone else entered from the back as Karl and Rae finished the work with Thor's harness.

It was wagon time, and Thor hardly let Karl get on the wagon, much less seated, before he was on the move, headed for where Hawk said the road into the city was.

Chapter 488 Halsearing

The mood in Halsearing was clear even as they pulled up to the gates an hour later.

It looked like the entire city was in the streets, and Karl's sensitive ears could hear the dozens of species of monsters talking about a new anomaly outside of town. Word was that the town's prophet has foreseen that the Nomadic Tribes would bring a war band to the location, which had put the whole city into a panic, thinking that the Nomadic Tribes were going to go to war against the region in order to claim the dungeon for themselves.

They might, but somehow, Karl couldn't see the Orc tribes working well together, much less with other species of nomads. If he had to guess, what they had seen was most likely just Chieftain World Smasher and his clan meeting with him at the dungeon.

Karl pretended that the reins were actually for controlling, but actually used them to rub the Cerro's back as they pulled to a stop in front of the gate guards.

"Welcome to Halsearing. What is your business?" The guard demanded.

"I have armour to trade, purchased from the nomads. Then I need to supplies to take to Oakhamping." Karl replied, referring to a Troll controlled city about a day up the main road, headed northeast.

"Alright. Be careful not to run anyone over. There are many children in the street today with all the chaos."

"What chaos? News of war, or famine?" Karl asked.

That was a relatively normal question for a merchant. It would change what they wanted to buy here, as the value of their trade goods would change based on where and when they sold them.

"Something is going on north of town in the wilderness. The Big Troll's office says that there might be a fight."

So, this city was also troll controlled. That explained the number of them headed out toward the dungeon.

They didn't appear to be the majority of the population, though. There were humans, demons, dozens of smaller species of monsters, and even a few beastkin visible in the crowd.

Most of the misshapen bodies were impossible for Karl to identify, as there was no listing of them in the books he had read. But at least some of them were familiar.

The lizard species made up nearly half of the monsters in town. Naga, Lamia, Lizard folk, Crocolisks. Those were all species that were in his textbooks when he did his familiarization with monster and beast species.

There were some that preferred to be on two feet, some on four or more, and a few human headed chimeras that everyone was giving a wide berth.

Karl led Thor through the street at a slow walk, giving everyone time to get out of the way.

It wasn't working well.

The kids kept running up to pat the Cerro before being grabbed by parents to avoid being trampled, and the Naga Warriors had been propositioned at least a dozen times in the first two minutes.

Karl was not an expert in Naga physiology, and he didn't speak serpent, but apparently the warriors were considered the peak of their species.

In his mind, Remi was laughing hysterically. The bodyguards were intelligent, and could answer back, but they were mission-driven just as much as the Golems were. They wouldn't even consider leaving their post, and it was breaking hearts left and right.

[The four armed Naga are the Royals and the most powerful of warriors. Having a child with one of them would strengthen the bloodline of lesser lineages for a dozen generations.] Remi explained after a few minutes of watching the locals hit on her guards.

Karl eventually found an armourer with a hot forge and mostly empty shelves. That seemed like a good spot to start trying to make a sale.

"Wait here, I will go talk with the armour smith." He explained as he moved Thor to the side of the road.

Dana and Ophelia moved to stand on the front corners of the wagon with their weapons at the ready, hung from their hips. Only the occasional local gave them more than a single look. Guards protecting a merchant wagon was possibly the most normal thing that they had seen or heard today. It was a relief to everyone, and almost made them forget that this was a city full of monsters that were far from being on friendly terms with their home.

The armourer was a Lizardman, and Karl realized that he might have made a mistake. He didn't know if that species could speak the common language.

"I have a number of armour items for sale, traded by the Yellow Tusk Orcs. Are you interested?" Karl asked.

The lizardman hissed in response.

[He says he doesn't give a damn where you got them, it won't improve the price.]

"Fine, do you want to buy armour? All awakened and Ascended Rank magic items." Karl replied.

The armourer looked shocked that Karl had understood him and gestured for him to bring it in.

Karl stepped back out and grabbed the loot, which he dropped on the counter.

The lizardman's eyes lit up with excitement, a faint glow of magic as excess power flowed to them as the monster focused.

He spoke and Remi translated. [He wants to know what you want for them.]

"I will take coins, or trade items that the Trolls of Oakhamping need. What do you have in stock?" The armourer nodded, then vanished into a back room.

He came back out with a bundle of tools and crystals that Rae was instantly interested in.

[He says they're the favourites of the trolls. The crystals help them use magic, and the trolls aren't good at tool making.]

"Three more of the earth type crystals, and we have a deal." Karl offered.

The lizardman frowned and held up two fingers.

"Fine, two more."

He brought out two more, and greedily scooped up the armour to take back to his forge to alter for use by other species.

Karl scooped the gems into his inventory, then picked up the bundle of tools.

"It's been a pleasure doing business with you." The tools took up most of the centre of the wagon, making them look like proper merchants again. Karl hopped up into the driver's seat, and Ophelia returned to the wagon, taking a seat at the back, while Dana sat beside Karl in the morning sun.

"What do you think? With all this chaos, should we get lunch before we go, or should we grab something to eat outside the city limits?" Karl asked.

"There is a street market between us and the other exit from town. We should drive through there and pick up a few things. It might be a security risk to get out of the wagon, but it should be worth it to spend a bit of time shopping." Dana suggested.

"Alright, let's head over. I will wait with the wagon, you all take the security with you. Hawk and I should be plenty to guard the goods."

Karl called Hawk out, so the sudden appearance of the bird didn't startle people at the market. The addition of the Royal Rank Dragonhawk should be enough to discourage all but the boldest of thieves, even if they weren't afraid of Karl and Thor.

The monsters should be able to sense general power level the way that Karl did, even if most of them discounted him as human and attributed the power they felt to one of the others.

Chapter 489 Market Stop

The entrance to the market was a wide street, enough for six wagons to pass, or four with two rows of them parked near the buildings.

That was where Karl stopped Thor, at the edge of the market, in a quieter section close to a small group of clothing vendors surrounded by baked goods. That would distract the ladies for a while, and they wouldn't have to go too far from the wagon, so if either group got in trouble, they could send reinforcements.

If Karl sent over Remi with her last bodyguard, the two Lamia and Rae's Golems, they shouldn't have any trouble at all dealing with whatever was bothering the ladies. Thor was too nervous to let them out of his sight without a barrier anyhow. [You say that like I'm being paranoid. But what if they get tired, or sprain an ankle, or the straps from the shopping bags dig into their hands?] Thor countered.

[You have a point. It's better to be safe than sorry. Just keep the barrier at a low level so they don't alarm people with a powerful active skill while they're shopping.]

The Cerro needn't have worried about the shopping because only a few minutes later, one of the Naga Warriors was headed back with a whole load of baked goods. It just silently dropped the goods on the seat beside Karl and rushed back to its position, clearly unhappy about having been made a messenger.

It did relax the clothing vendors that were closest to Karl. Sending back loads of shopping before going on a long trip was expected. With a group like theirs, they would go through a lot of food, and a merchant had enough money not to have to survive on base travel rations and jerky.

They had been gone half an hour when sudden movement caught Karl's attention, and a plume of fire burst from the back of the wagon as a cursing homeless man went running down the street with singed gloves.

He must have reached into the back of the wagon to steal the pies and earned Hawk's ire.

Karl heard the laughter from the merchants closest to his wagon, and the jeweller who had stepped out of his shop to have a smoke.

A merchant wagon stopped on the street beside Karl, and a small group of guards got off to do their shopping while the wagon blocked a bit more of the road, as the curb was all full already.

"Morning." Karl greeted the wingless green demon.

"Morning. I don't suppose you have a buyer for an entire barrel of cooking oil. Decent quality, but not premium. My buyer rejected it." He asked.

"I will trade you a barrel of low-quality Rum for it. It was supposed to go to the coast, but they turned it down as well."

Karl actually had a few barrels left, but nobody in his group really drank alcohol.

"I will make that deal. Barrel for barrel. Where are you headed next?"

"To go see the Trolls." The other merchant nodded in understanding, and nodded at the barrel in his open wagon.

"Once the guards get back, they can give us a hand."

Karl chuckled and grabbed the rum barrel. "Here. I'll trade you."

He handed it over and grabbed the oil to take its place.

Who would need fifty gallons of cooking oil, he didn't know. But it seemed like the sort of thing that he should be able to sell.

The demon looked suspicious as he grabbed the barrel, then confused as he failed to lift it.

"Yeah, it's a bit hefty. But I'm stronger than I look. You can sample a bit if you'd like. The rum isn't terrible, but it's not fit for a sailor." Karl suggested.

The Demon smiled, and pulled the top bung to dip a long handled spoon inside and take a sip, then wheeze a little as his eyes watered.

"Well, it's not too weak for a sailor. The flavour also isn't the worst I've tasted. I could likely sell that to the Naga. They aren't as picky about liquor as long as it's strong. Pleasure doing business with you."

The scent that it gave off was harsh, and Karl wondered if it was actually intended to be paint stripper, not an ingested liquid. But if he had a buyer for it, that was fine.

The ladies came back with full arms and two very annoyed looking Naga Warriors, who were still attracting ladies from all the lizard species. "One more stop to look at new clothes, and we will be ready to go. We've got all the supplies we need for the week." Tessa explained as they unloaded.

"Why does it smell like burnt hair?" Ophelia asked as they moved goods to the back of the wagon.

"Hawk caught someone trying to steal the pie."

The merchant ladies laughed at Karl's deadpan answer, and relayed the story to the shoppers who were currently at their stalls, with a much more entertaining plot than the original.

In their version, it was nearly dragon fire erupting from the wagon, scaring away the other wagon animals and lighting the jeweller's pipe for him. The thief had also been an evil looking man with his hair on fire, not a middle-aged homeless guy with his gloves scorched.

Tessa and Lotus both picked out a few items, and Ophelia found a long coat that she could wear in Werebear form. Staying in that form had to be annoying, as she was hiding her true self, but it was safer. She looked good in the coat though, like a proper bodyguard, and the merchants were very impressed with the look.

"You are a long way from home, why don't you try these as well? If you're going to be in the south, you should try everything the south has to offer, right?" One of the clothing merchants suggested.

They must think that she was from the north side of the country near the Divine Beast Nation, which would put her over a thousand kilometres from home, which was a rare thing in a nation without motor vehicles.

By the time that they made it back to the carriage, Tessa and Lotus both had multiple new outfits, and Ophelia had a new coat, pants and an ornately tooled weapon belt with bears worked into the surface, made of some sort of Commander Rank hide.

She almost looked like one of the Pirate Captains, minus the hat. But it suited her, and she blended in with the locals much better now that she had most of her armour hidden under cloth.

Karl just hoped that the items bonded, or they would not last through the first battle. A berserker was hard on clothes at the best of times, and she wouldn't always have time to strip her decorative clothes off before fighting.

Rae was thinking the same thing, and already making plans to decorate Ophelia later.

This outfit looked good, and if it was made of her silk, it could be equipped over her armour, so it would vanish into her storage with a thought. Regular clothes had to be taken off before they could be stored, and that was far too much of a hassle.

Come to think of it, she could decorate Karl as well. Maybe everyone could have matching coats to show that they belonged to Rae.

That would be good. Her Dana liked her outfit.

Chapter 490 Leave Town

Rae started to plan her next round of creations as the rest of the team got ready to move out. The wagon was nearly full now, with just enough room to comfortably sit as Karl got Thor moving, so the other wagon could take their spot along the curb.

"This is a different keg. Did you buy something?" Dana asked as she settled in to watch the road ahead.

"Yeah. I traded Rum for cooking Oil. Apparently, the Naga will drink what the beasts sent us. The trolls should need cooking oil, and if not them, someone along the way will need cooking oil."

Dana shrugged in acceptance. The deal was made, and it didn't actually matter what the goods were worth, as they were only trading as a cover to get across the country.

The guards didn't even look at them as they left the city gates, headed northeast. It would bring them rather close to the site of the battle, within ten kilometres. But they would be on a well travelled main road, and at least this portion was an actual stone roadway.

That shouldn't raise any suspicions.

The clerics changed into new dresses, colourful ones in the local style, but still predominantly in their god's colours. Now the rest of the team blended in, but Karl was wearing the armour from [Bestial Raiment] which came complete with a Darklight Host tabard.

That wasn't exactly subtle or nondescript.

Everyone that they met would probably be able to describe him and Thor, so if they didn't want anyone to be able to track them back to the incident, it would be much better if they could disguise him somehow.

"Hey, I have an idea. Why don't we disguise Thor and Karl? There should be a good way to make Thor less noticeable, and Karl is easy." Lotus suggested.

"Oh, how do you plan to disguise me?" "We will have Rae make you a coat, and then you can keep Brutality active to make you big. You're bigger with that skill active than Ophelia is as a Werebear without it. You have to be two and a half metres tall with it. Nobody would question you if you said you were half troll if you hid your face."

Remi had just the thing for that. [I can make you a mask, and Hawk can cure the clay and melt metal over it. Then with one side of your face hidden, and your beard growing, you should look more like a monster.]

"Remi thinks that we can do something about hiding the face. If I have a coat to go over my armour, it should be enough to hide my identity from casual glances. But how will we disguise Thor? He's a Lightning Cerro." Karl reminded them.

[I can do that too. I have all the ingredients.] Remi announced proudly.

"Never mind. Remi thinks she can disguise him as well, somehow." Karl laughed.

Dana giggled, "I'm looking forward to finding out what she thinks will hide Thor."

Karl thought about the abilities that he had, wondering what he could use to disguise his usual fighting style.

He didn't want anyone linking their presence to the Royal Rank Elite named Karl from the Golden Dragon Nation, even if he hadn't been thinking far enough ahead to make up a road name.

Disintegration would only be well known to the Pirates, so that should be fine. But he hadn't done much fighting here, so even the Orcs wouldn't know much.

As long as he avoided the Chain Lightning and Blizzard combo that him and Remi were famous for, or made it look like it was all Remi, even most of the government sorts wouldn't put it together, as everyone had her recorded as a Spirit Snake, not a Naga Queen.

"Oh, we can make you look like our group's tank! I think I have a shield in here, and you can use that Maul one-handed, or a sword." Ophelia added.

"You all seem to be enjoying this a lot." Karl chuckled.

[I have a coat for you.] Rae agreed.

It was black silk, woven to be rough like leather, and full length like a duster, but double-breasted like the Pirate Captain coats, split up the back for mobility, and she had even woven wind element shiny stones into it to emulate the silver buttons on the Captain coats.

Karl put the coat on, and his armour immediately adjusted. It gave him a visage mask for his helmet that looked like a black demon face, and Karl found that he could remove the helmet and keep the mask.

"That skill is so handy, always adjusting to the appearance it thinks I need." [Now I don't get to make you a mask, though. That's fine, I will start on makeup for Thor.]

That was a disturbing thought, but Remi was really into it, mixing ground plants, clay, some dirt and crushed magical stones into a paste.

It was turning into a consistency that looked like boot polish, but Remi kept referring back to one of her books, and she looked incredibly proud of herself.

[Ha, I did it. This should work. Shadowbranch paste. Take some of that and draw war paint on Thor's face.]

Karl stopped the wagon and did as instructed, drawing wide fingered stripes down Thor's ridge and across the side of his face. Then he stepped back to admire his handiwork, as Thor now had war paint.

Then the effect spread until Thor was completely black, not glossy but flat black and non-reflective.

"That's impressive. Where did that come from?" Dana asked.

"Apparently it's something that Remi can make. I can see the instructions when I examine Shadowbranch plants in her space. It should make him look like this until he washes it off, or until he returns to his space, as it is unlikely to go with him if he doesn't want it to." Karl explained.

He had the [Identification] skill, but there were so many plants that he had never bothered to go through them all, looking for possible combinations that might make something useful. Remi was better with his skill than Karl was, he was quite certain.

But it was just a Common Grade disguise spell, not some powerful mixture to help them advance, which was what Karl had been trying to find every time that he had gone through their stuff before.

It was possible that he had missed all sorts of little things because he simply didn't know to look for them. When they got back, he would leave Remi with Morgana for a while to see if she had a knack for Alchemy. She did like making things, and it wasn't just sculptures for her totems.

Rae wasn't particularly impressed with the versatility of the paste, her adaptive silk could hide you much more effectively. But being able to just turn Thor black was a great disguise. Now he didn't look like a Lightning Cerro at all, just some sort of regular Cerro.

"Alright, now we're mostly disguised. This should be good enough for now, though I'm not certain that I can get the same mask back again after I dismiss the armour to wash." Karl informed the group.

[So I do get to make a mask. Hawk, find some metal, I will make something out of clay for you to coat.] Remi cheered.

[Alright. You could likely just paint it, though.] Hawk reminded her.

[Maybe. We will see when I'm done. But I want you to bake it with fire.]