

The First Legendary Beast Master #Chapter 51 Safe And Sound - Read The First Legendary Beast Master Chapter 51 Safe And Sound

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"Karl, Dana, it is good to see you back in one piece. The mages said that they were monitoring your vital signs, and you weren't heavily injured, but we got the message that the town was overrun after we sent you. Tell me, what happened after you got there?" Sergeant Rita demanded the moment that they were far enough from the helicopter to speak somewhat normally.

"We found a pack of wild boars on the edge of town, so we hunted them and packed them up for meat, then we went to take care of the Goblins that were around town and the group that they left on patrol.

That part was easy, as it was almost all Common Grade monsters.

We had Hawk clear the ones he found looting in the town, and then we went to the government building to see if they had left us a message or something. It's not like we're sent anywhere at random, so they should have known that we were coming.

But we didn't find anything, so we assumed the mission wasn't over, and we set up a fog trap for the Goblins that would return that night. We managed to eliminate the entire Goblin Tribe by morning, and then we called these fine gentlemen for a ride home."

The Special Forces team leader smiled and nodded along, then gave Karl a gesture of approval.

"Short, succinct, but covering all the major steps of the plan. I approve, excellent summary." The soldier chuckled.

"I will expect a full report by tomorrow morning. But before that, we all need to have a meeting. It appears that the Base Commander has some fine things to say about you all, and it has raised some questions here at the Academy." Sergeant Rita informed them.

"And that is my cue to retreat. Have a good afternoon, Cadets." The Special Forces leader laughed.

"Oh, no. You're coming with us. We need a full report from your team on what they found when they got to the town, body counts, the state of the students' combat readiness, and anything else that the mages come up with. Since the students claimed

to be Awakened Rank when they reported to the phone operator, we need to determine if they lied to a government official."

The soldiers smirked at her assertive manner, as the Sergeant didn't actually outrank them, she was just the messenger passing on the bad news that they would not be returning home so easily.

"Well, we've got just the thing for the testing, then. We have an entire Special Forces team of trained officers at the Commander Rank who are willing to test the two students right now if necessary.

I believe that not even the stuffiest of bureaucrats will question our judgment if we can show the results." He replied.

With that much of a power gap and their level of experience, it wouldn't be a problem for them to somewhat accurately gauge the performance of the attacks made by Karl and Dana, but this particular team had their own estimation method.

"I will have Lieutenant Keyes set up a series of barriers, each one at ten percent increments of his total power. There is no doubt that he is in the middle of the Commander Rank, but there is a big jump between Ascended and Commander, the power nearly doubles.

If they can make it to fifty percent of his barrier at full capacity, I would say for certain they can put out Ascended level damage. If they can make it to twenty-five percent, it should be at least Awakened level damage.

That's straightforward enough, and then we can just have them repeat it to prove they have the stamina for a fight. I don't think that will be an issue either, after seeing that they could cover an entire town in magical fog and kill Goblins all night long."

The teachers from the Mage department were much happier than expected with that plan. They were around the same power level, and they would have used the same general testing method, but having an official examination done by the army would remove all questions about bias in the testing.

They were the instructors of the students in question, after all. If someone thought that they had passed too easily, it could hurt the teachers' reputations.

Sergeant Rita pointed to a building at the side of the compound. "Let's do this in the practice gym. It's set up with all sorts of protective walls so nothing gets damaged, and we don't have the whole school as an audience."

Karl shrugged, not concerned one way or the other. He knew that he could pass this test. But Dana was happy to get out of the public eye, just in case the teachers were not convinced that her magic missile was up to the standard for an Awakened Mage.

She had been holding back quite a bit all night long, but the Goblins were pretty soft targets, and they were easy to kill even with a third of her total power.

Getting away from the crowd just wasn't going to happen, Karl realized once they made it into the gym. There were viewing boxes up on the second and third floors, and with the scene that they had made, arriving with soldiers and going straight to the gym with a group of teachers, they had gathered numerous curious students that were anxious to find out what was going on.

Normally, only the senior classes would be off campus at this point in the year, so seeing two new students coming back from somewhere was gossip worthy all by itself. Seeing them coming back like this, and getting a full welcoming committee from the school that wasn't the disciplinary committee, was even more juicy of a story.

"Alright, who wants to go first?" The mage known as Keyes asked as he set up a row of glowing squares along one side of the room.

Karl stepped forward. "I will go first. I will do it alone first, then with Hawk, since we're a team, but the testing is supposed to measure the elite."

Chapter 52 Awakened Exams

Keyes nodded toward the barrier squares that he had set up, and two of the other team members set up cameras, while the teachers took out a set of sensors.

"These measure energy disturbances. They will give us a pretty good idea of how much power you are using on each attack. We would like you to use all your power on each strike, even if you know that it will break the barrier. There is a sensor dummy behind that, made of armoured plate, and it will measure the residual impact if your attack isn't dissipated." The teacher explained.

"That should be simple enough. I will send a full strength Rend at each of them, and we will see what the barriers say." Karl agreed.

As soon as he stopped speaking, Karl sent the first attack at the barrier that should be ten percent of the mage's total power. The barrier shattered without any hesitation, and the plating behind the barrier lit up with the impact.

"Not bad. Keep up the pace, and then we will have you continue your attacks on the barrier that you can't break to test your endurance." The teacher reminded him.

The second attack likewise shattered the barrier without issue, but the third left the Rend attack visibly dimmed.

The fourth barrier seemed for an instant like it was going to hold, but it also flickered and collapsed, nullifying the attack the same way that Karl had been nullifying attacks against the school's mages during practice for the last two weeks.

After seeing that, Karl knew that a simple Rend was not going to take out the next barrier, no matter what he tried to do, and the teacher wouldn't call multiple concurrent attacks a win for actual attack power. So, he held the Rend on the claws of his new gauntlets, and slashed at the barrier with his hand.

The brute force did what the ability alone could not, and the fifth barrier cracked, but held together for two attacks, and only collapsed when Karl hit it a third time.

Karl coated the claws on both gauntlets and fiercely attacked the sixth barrier, leaving claw marks on the magical shield that quickly reformed to a smooth surface. For ten minutes, Karl beat on the magical barrier with no sign of it collapsing, then he stepped back to catch his breath.

"That's what I've got." He informed the professors and the gathered Special Forces team.

The Special Forces team leader nodded in satisfaction before speaking. "Impressive, combining the skill with a physical attack noticeably increased the total damage output, and you've still got your pet in reserve. There is no doubt that you are at the Awakened level. Being able to reliably break the third barrier until you are exhausted would be enough for that.

If you could have gotten through the fifth in a single attack every time, we would call it the minimum for Ascended, but you're not quite there yet, even with the physical and magical combined. We allow the warriors to enchant their swords, so the methodology is sound. You have our certification that you are indeed an Awakened Rank Elite."

The teachers and Sergeant Rita conferred for a moment, and then the longer haired of the two nondescript teachers cleared his throat.

"The teaching staff is in agreement. You are promoted to the Awakened Rank." He declared.

"Student Dana, please step forward to begin your test." Sergeant Rita requested as the Special Forces mage recast the spells.

The team leader leaned over to whisper to Karl as Dana mentally prepared. "The reason it has to be one attack is that if there was an actual mage on the other side of that barrier, they would be reinforcing it constantly to keep their defences up. If you can't break it in one shot, you can't hurt the mage."

That made a lot of sense. The Commander Rank mage on the Special Forces team had just put the barriers there, he wasn't doing anything to upkeep them. But a magical beast with a barrier ability wouldn't let you just keep attacking without even trying to defend itself.

Unfortunately for Dana, Magic Missile wasn't well suited to this test, or to combatting creatures with magical barriers. It was more of a multi target, dispersed damage type of ability.

But it could be condensed to fire all the mana she could gather into a single spell. It would be best if she held back a bit until she knew what she needed to break the barrier, though. Unlike Karl, who had an easy time using multiple Rend attacks, her magic drained her stamina rapidly at full output.

But she focused her Magic Missile into a single full power bolt and shattered the first two barriers in rapid succession, then the third, which nearly nullified her missile, but which shattered smoothly enough that the teachers gave a satisfied nod.

"You can split it into multiple missiles, and we will still count it as one casting. We understand the limiting nature of the spell." The professor encouraged her.

So, the fourth was a barrage of five missiles, the last two of which made it through the broken barrier, but the fifth remained solidly intact, only glowing briefly the same way that the sixth had for Karl. She tried multiple attacks, long sustained barrages, heavy single attacks, but nothing worked.

The fifth barrier simply wouldn't break for her.

"That's good. We have seen enough to know that you can sustain Awakened Rank magical output. Congratulations, Student Dana, you have been promoted to the standing of Awakened Rank Mage."

Cheers went up all over the waiting rooms, as the two first year students were officially promoted, and the teachers handed over the black embroidered student badges to go on their jackets.

"You're not free yet. I still want those reports done, and that means you too, Mister I'm Special Forces now and too cool to call my family on the holidays." Sergeant Rita added, looking at one of the team members with a hard glare.

The entire team burst into laughter at that, and Karl marvelled at the twist of fate that must have been for their relatives. Having two successful awakenings in the same family was incredibly rare, from what Karl knew. But then it could just be that there weren't many big families in the mining town, so it just hadn't happened to anyone he knew.

It was quite possible that certain families had much more luck than the average in awakening their talents. The so-called blessed families, as the Nobility referred to themselves, but for a compatibility with the serum, and not their relation to Royalty.

Chapter 53 Mission Report

Sergeant Rita led them all out of the gymnasium and into a classroom, where the computers had already been brought to the screen for an official mission report.

"I want everything, the General insists on no less than a thousand words, and then you can leave." She announced, and closed the door behind her, leaving Karl and Dana with the bemused special forces team inside.

"So, that's the infamous cousin that you're so afraid of, is it? You know that you're stronger than she is now, and higher ranked, she can't bully you." The team leader joked.

"What does strength have to do with anything? That woman holds a grudge like no other." The man muttered, making his team members smirk.

They had obviously been over this before, though they hadn't met her in person, and the air of friendly camaraderie set Karl and Dana at ease as they sat down to begin their reports.

The tapping of keys filled the air as everyone got to work, ignoring the previous conversation in favour of getting the unpleasant part of their day out of the way as fast as possible. The warriors had a clear advantage here, Karl included, in that their bodies were enhanced, so even if they were not the greatest typists, their hands were so fast that they could still easily type out the entire report as fast as they could frame it in their minds.

The reports from the Special Forces team were more detailed and structured, as they had done them a hundred times before, but Karl and Dana did their best to not forget anything that they had done or seen after they had arrived in that town.

"You two got quite the first mission, didn't you? I can't think of the last time I talked to someone who got to do something as amazing as a pair mission against an entire Goblin Tribe for their first time out." The team leader announced once he was finished his writing.

"Unless you count Jenny, but I think that we all know her story isn't quite as verifiable as this one." One of the others added with a short burst of laughter.

Karl looked up in interest as they joked, and the team leader filled him in.

"She was a student a few years younger than us at the Academy. She was with a four-person team, looking for herbs in the forest for her first mission. According to her, she ended up meeting with a mystery man that she said was one of the local elites, who was in the woods for the same reason.

Long story short, she was pregnant when she returned to the Academy. She only found out two months later, when she started getting morning sickness." He explained.

Karl avoided the mental math that told him there was something wrong with that age gap, but since he didn't know exactly how old Jenny or the Elite in question were, he decided to keep silent. For all he knew, it could have been a cover story for a relationship with someone else entirely.

Dana looked up from her work. "Jenny Starpepper? She's from my hometown."

The team leader nodded. "That's the one. Have you met her kid? I heard he's adorable."

Dana shook her head. "Calling him cute is being extremely kind to him. He's just going into elementary school now, and they have to put mittens on him to keep him from clawing at people. The word around town is that his father was a Berserker, and the rage skill got passed along to their kid, who can't turn it off.

But that's mostly just gossip. She's married to one of the bankers now, and their younger two really are adorable."

They all quickly finished their reports and chatted while they waited for Sergeant Rita to return. They could have gone looking for her, or simply left, in the case of the Special Forces team, but when they got back to base they would have to work again, to do the report for their own Commander, who would expect something other than a copied and pasted version of this report, and they were in no hurry to do that now that they were comfortable here.

"Can we meet your Hawk? You've been talking about him, but I haven't seen him since we arrived. Is he flying outside somewhere?" The team leader asked.

"Actually, my class created a separate space for him. Hawk, come out and say hello." Karl replied.

The bird appeared in the air in front of him, then settled onto the top of one of the monitors and warily stared at the new people.

Dana gave him a slice of jerky from her pocket, and Hawk's mood immediately improved. He would gladly meet more people if there was food involved.

One of the team members nodded his head and whistled in appreciation. "Awakened Rank Windspeed Hawk, Male, and my ability says he's under a month old, but that's far too young for him to be fully grown."

Karl nodded. "My skills helped him grow much faster than usual. I hatched him on the train on the way here, so that's as old as he is. We're just hoping that I can keep him growing at this rate so that he can become a true Elite among magical beasts."

The soldier nodded. "Well, it's not impossible with a bit of energy and some resources. All beasts grow based on what they eat. It's not a precise science, but what I do know, as a Hunter, is that they will instinctively search out stronger creatures or plants to eat, and if they don't get them, their growth will either stagnate or they will get weak from starvation."

The more powerful the beast, the more powerful the food source must be. That's why there are a limited number of truly powerful beasts, there simply isn't enough food for more of them in most regions."

"Oh? That's a useful class skill." Karl noted.

"Yeah, my talent is to know where and how to hunt things that I have seen before. I can see the Hawk, so I know where one would usually find them, as well as some of their habits, and I built up the rest of the knowledge through observation and practice." He shrugged.

"Well, it's still useful to me. I was going to request some higher ranked foods for him, to try to force progression. I started absorbing nutrients much more efficiently a few days ago, so it should be good for both of us." Karl suggested.

"Just don't overdo it. If the difference is too great, you won't be able to absorb anything. It would be like going back to your first few days, before your body adapted, when you couldn't absorb proper nutrition from the foods."

Chapter 54 Quality Kibble Is Needed?

Karl considered the information that the Special Forces team had presented him with. If it was true that the quality of the diet limited a monster's growth, it made perfect sense that most Windspeed Hawks never made it past the Awakened Rank.

Their favourite food was the Earth Mouse, a Common Grade monster. Eating that every day would give them a steady source of nutrition, but of a limited quality. If they were going to advance further, they would need higher quality food, but their usual hunting targets couldn't provide that.

They were capable of hunting larger targets, but larger bodies would bring scavengers and other predators, which would interfere with their usual hunting grounds and force them to move.

So, they would end up trapped in a vicious cycle where they could only rarely eat higher quality meals, and they would slowly grow to Awakened Rank as they got older.

Hawk was certain that he would make it to the Commander Rank, just like these Special Forces men, but that was largely wishful thinking on his part, and unless Karl could provide the diet he needed, it wasn't realistic in the time they had at the Academy, much less in the short term to overtake Sergeant Rita like Hawk wanted to.

But the Academy should be able to provide him with at least that much assistance. If the food in the cafeteria was Common Grade monster meat, then just increasing it one rank should bring about a new growth spurt for the Hawk.

That would be the first thing that he requested, other than more of the mana infused blood with the strength stones in it. Hawk loved that stuff, like Karl had loved ketchup on chicken nuggets when he was little.

Though, the bird's actual dietary requirements had slowed a lot since it hit maturity. Now, it was relying more heavily on the energy provided by Karl, and not eating multiple times its own body weight in a day. Hawk was still a little glutton, but when the total amount was under a kilo of meat a day, it was much more reasonable.

At the rate that they were going, the Awakened Rank boar meat would last Hawk for months, and it seemed that the meat left in the space would not spoil. Or at least it didn't spoil as quickly as it would in a refrigerator.

"Since we're here at the computers, we should send a letter home. I can send it to the mayor, and he will print it for my parents, since they don't have a phone or a computer." Karl suggested.

"You know that almost everything about your life is currently confidential, right? They will censor any information that outsiders are not supposed to have, like the location or layout of the Academy, plus any details of your training." The team leader reminded him.

"That's fine. Just a little update to let my parents know that all is well is enough. I know that some of the other students are more eager to get away from home, but I was just eager to get away from the mines." Karl laughed.

The shortest of the team members reached over to pat him on the head. "That is understandable. I came from an island fishing village. There are no options there but the fishing boats or the cannery, you work on one or in the other. The day I left was the happiest day of my life, but I still send a little something to my parents now and then."

The others nodded in agreement.

"There are money transfer limits, but we can still send them enough to be doing well. My dad is an accountant in the capital, and he still loves his job, but he's one of the most boring people I know. My mom always tries to convince him to agree to going somewhere fancy for dinner when I visit, but he likes roast beef and potatoes so much he'd have them for every meal." One of the others laughed.

Dana smiled as she wrote a short letter home, not directly referring to her rank or class, but letting her parents know that she was doing well, and that the Academy was treating her well, with a beautiful room.

She omitted the part about it being so loud that she preferred to study on Karl's balcony, but her parents would take that the wrong way, no matter where she was.

Karl kept his nice and simple, telling them that he had finally gotten a proper growth spurt to catch up to the height of his classmates, and that he was making friends and meeting plenty of new people.

The soldiers thought that was hilarious, given the circumstances, but it was the sort of letter that could be sent home entirely unredacted. Most would want to include details of their training or their rooms, which would be scrubbed by the Academy staff before the message was sent.

While they both knew that they wouldn't be getting a letter back any time soon, as the Academy wanted them to focus on their studies, not the life they had left behind, it was still comforting to know that their parents didn't have to worry about them.

Karl looked over his letter with satisfaction, then hit send and clicked the button that confirmed the message would be viewed by Academy staff before being sent to an outside address, even if it was a government email address in his hometown.

"Alright, that should take care of the important parts. Now I just need to talk to the Kitchen to work up a new diet plan for Hawk and I can start on the next phase of my studies." He informed the others, then sighed in relief.

The team leader gave him a comforting pat on the back. "That is always the fun part. We were the third year of Serum injections, so when we were here, nobody knew anything about how to keep progressing. They hadn't even had any graduates yet the first year that we were here.

But it's all about going with what feels right. For the mages, it's mostly focus and practice, for the hunters, druids and rangers, being at one with nature is a major part of their growth. I think for Karl here, it will be mostly about keeping Hawk growing.

The official position is that the Serum is the future, but we've learned something interesting in the last few years. The Classes can be passed on. Some of them can be taught to older people who never got the injection but have potential, and others can be inherited by children. I don't think that it will be long before they start looking for ways to optimize the serum to give the best classes to those with the most potential."

Chapter 55 The Prince and the Overlord

Dana gave them an excited look. "You think that is possible? I mean, if they could make a whole corps of Golem Mages, it would be huge for both the army and for major construction projects. I heard that was what they wanted to try to teach us all, just to see if we could learn the spell."

"More than just that. I think that they want to find an option that can be taught to people who aren't compatible with the Serum. I know there have been some attempts to teach sword skills to students who don't have the compatibility with the serum.

They've been a failure so far, the same as trying to teach them magic, but that could just be a lack of mana. Who knows, maybe they will happen upon something good, but that's in the future, and you two are too young to be worrying about your children's future." The team leader laughed.

Their laughter was cut short when Sergeant Rita returned with the Headmaster of the Academy, as well as the old mage who worked the transportation magic and two men in expensive looking suits.

"It is good to see everyone in such high spirits. We were just in a meeting about the incident when your reports came through the system, so these fine gentlemen came to speak to you all before they left." The Headmaster informed them politely.

If the headmaster was sucking up to them, these two had to be someone important, but Karl had no idea who they might be. There were too many important people in the world, from Elites to government officials and even Royalty.

"Royal Prince Axel, Overlord Drake, it is a pleasure to meet you in person." The Special Forces team leader announced, while everyone else gave a hasty bow for the Royal.

Karl did his best to follow along, but he had no idea if he was doing the formal bow properly. It wasn't exactly the sort of thing that came up in class as a kid.

The burlier of the two men, with his long black hair in a tidy braid, smiled back at them. "No need to stand on formality. We're here on business, not in our official roles. I wanted to see the promising newbies, and to hear firsthand how they feel about seeing the real threat to the nation."

That must be Overlord Drake, as Hawk felt the man's power and warned Karl that he was dangerous.

"Overlord Drake, it's an honour. I must say, seeing Goblins for the first time was more disgusting than anything. They smell terrible, especially when they're dead." Karl replied.

Dana nodded her vigorous agreement, and the two men smiled back at them.

"That wasn't quite the response I was expecting. Weren't you terrified to have come across real monsters?" The Overlord Rank warrior asked.

"I don't think that it even occurred to us. The first group we found was only the six of them, and we were confident enough of taking them out, so by the time things got dangerous, we were already past the initial shock." Karl replied.

Dana nodded her head and added. "Goblins are horrifying creatures, but they're so filthy and disgusting that it kind of overpowers any sense of fear, you know?"

The Prince, with a slight smile on his delicate features, shrugged his shoulders. "I wouldn't know. I have seen many things since I graduated, but I have never met a Goblin in real life. I am told that the smell of them is somewhat revolting."

[Why does he look like he's in charge? The big guy is way stronger than he is.] Hawk asked Karl, unclear about the human hierarchy.

[His family rules this whole area, so he gets respect as a future leader, not for the personal power he has now.] Karl replied mentally.

[Oh, like the cub of a big predator. I understand.]

That was close enough for Hawk to guess where everyone's proper spot in the rankings was. It was critical in his mind to know what was prey, what was not, and what looked like prey but could bring a very dangerous threat your way if you tried to eat it.

"Was there anything that we could do to help the two most promising students of this class grow?" The Prince asked the Headmaster, preparing to leave now that he had made his determination of the character of the people they had been speaking about.

"Well, Dana is a standard mage, her first spell was Magic Missile, the same as yours, so anything that you can tell her about your own advancement might help. Or perhaps the Royal Library has a useful spell that might assist her? But Karl is a unique Class. He has a deadly pet Windspeed Hawk that imparts power to him as it grows. That could be more difficult, your Highness." The Headmaster replied.

"What spells do you know now?" Prince Axel asked Dana.

"Magic Missile and Fog Bank."

The Prince thought about it for a moment and then held out a hand behind him, then realized that he hadn't brought his assistant into the room.

"If you have some time, I will give you a spell tome. It's a talent hand behind him, then realized that he hadn't brought his assistant into the room.

that I learned when I strengthened my inscription skills. In theory, if you are compatible with them, you can read it and immediately learn a new spell to a proficient level." He explained.

"I have all the time in the world, Your Highness." Dana chuckled.

"Right, first year student. You won't be going far, or at least you won't be gone long if you are. I will have my assistants deliver the spare one I brought to your room later."

Drake reached into the inner pocket of his coat and held out a small red book. "It looks like this, but likely thicker than this one. This is the attack skill that we have been trying to teach all our warriors. It's a wide area attack skill, great for clearing groups of monsters. Perhaps Karl would like to try?"

Karl looked at the cover of the book, which was just blank red leather.

"What is it called?" He asked.

"Rend. It's not a difficult one, but it is powerful, thanks to the bleeding effect that it has on targets that survive the initial hit, and we are hoping that all the warriors can learn it by the end of their second year." Drake replied.

Karl sighed and shook his head. "Rend is the basic skill of the Windspeed Hawk. It is currently the only skill that I do know."

Chapter 56 Shredded

"In that case, I think that I might have something good for you. After Rend, there is an advanced version of the skill known as Shred. They're similar in function, but Shred is much more deadly at the same rank and leaves jagged wounds that make it difficult to stop the bleeding if they lack magical healing.

I will get someone to bring you a skill book to see if you can learn it, or teach it to your Hawk. If either one of you knows it, you shouldn't have too many problems fighting above your level as an Awakened warrior." Overlord Drake announced.

[Better than Rend? Is he being silly? Rend is the greatest skill in the world.] Hawk complained.

[It's an improved Rend used by more powerful creatures. Trust him, it's a good thing.] Karl replied.

Then he bowed politely to the powerful warrior. "I would appreciate any help we can get. I don't know what the limits of this class are, but if we can learn some more powerful attack magic, it would be incredible."

The Headmaster reached into a bag hanging from his side and pulled out a book that looked the same as the one for Rend, but with a bit of silver trim on it.

"I have a spare copy with me, just send the new one to my office and I will give this one to Student Karl." The Headmaster suggested.

"That is much easier. My assistant should still be waiting there, and he has one with him. It looks like the lull is over, if these two are anything to go by. It has been a few years since any really outstanding students began their training, and we were beginning to worry that it was only luck that brought us a flood of geniuses in the first few years." Overlord Drake announced.

The Headmaster handed over the book, which was warm and soft in Karl's hand, and everyone stared at him expectantly.

"Go ahead, try to open it and see what happens." The Headmaster insisted.

Karl gently flipped open the manuscript, and a flood of power flowed into his body.

[Skill Learned: Shred]

[Pet Skill Learned: Shred]

Hawk popped out of the Beast Space and landed on Karl's shoulder to show off, making sure that everyone could see the blood-red feathers streaked through the cream colour of his legs.

"Wow, I was not expecting that. But where did the book go?" Karl asked.

"It vanishes if someone who can instantly learn the skill uses it. I have to tell you, that was a shock to the Inscriptionist teams when they first learned of that little bit of information. They cried for a week when they found out that the books they were making would just vanish to strengthen others, since they couldn't use them themselves." Drake laughed.

"So, there are limitations?" Karl asked.

The Prince nodded. "Very strict ones, though we don't really understand why. Certain books can exclusively be used by those with certain types of mark, but it varies from

skill to skill, and even ones that are similar might not work for the same person. But when there is one that works like this, it saves so much time, and the user will be able to activate the skill at full force, the same as they could for their first skill, with none of the failures or half - power activations in the learning phase."

Dana was beginning to get excited about the prospect. "And the Elites that have an affinity for Inscription can just make these? That is incredibly powerful, even if they're not a combat class."

The Prince shook his head. "They need an original copy to work from. The only ones they can make are ones that we have managed to find an original working copy for, or that were created with the help of an Elite that has mastered the skill well enough to teach others. The total number of spells that we have tomes for right now can be counted on my fingers, But Rend, Shred, and Golem are the ones that we focus the most on, since they are all advanced skills, and are harder for Elites to learn on their own.

Things like Guard and Slash we don't need to use a book for, you can just teach the warriors the skills."

Dana nodded in understanding, and the Prince got a curious look on his face before he took out another book from his pocket.

"How about you try this one? It's not one that I can use, and our Marks are the same, but I haven't actually had anyone else try it since it was copied out." He suggested, passing her the book.

Dana focused, and flipped the cover open, showing an intricately detailed set of notes and diagrams.

"That's what I thought would happen. It's a Vine Whip spell that we found in some ancient Ruins. We gave the Headmaster a copy for the Library here as well, but we haven't found any class but the Druids, the ones with the animal paw mark, that can actually use it."

Karl examined the book, trimmed with the same silver the Shred tome was before speaking. "That makes sense. The one working as a guard on the train said that his powers didn't activate until he touched a tree, so their bonds to nature would make them the perfect candidate to use a vine spell. If there are others that are animal related, I might be able to use them, while the mages should be able to use ones that are related to their first spell, right? I'm not sure what the mages limits are, but from what I have seen, everyone has their own niche."

The Prince nodded. "Exactly. We all have our niche, but nobody knows exactly how to tell what the limits are. If there was some way to accurately define the powers of the Elites, or tell what skills they would be able to use without having an identical class mark

test the ability as a reference, it would save us so much time and effort. Too many of us have wasted months trying to learn a new ability that was simply impossible for our Class."

He was going to continue, but a knock on the door interrupted them, and a group of men in servant uniforms stepped inside.

"Your Highness, there is an urgent matter at the Capital, we need to go." The first man to enter announced.

"That is fine. Pass this young mage a copy of the Golem spell so we can see if she can use it. Then we can leave."

Chapter 57 Golem

Dana accepted the Golem spell book and hesitantly stroked the cover, hoping that she would be able to use this one the way that Karl did [Shred].

After a moment of hesitation, she flipped open the cover, and the book vanished. Prince Axel and the other mages didn't look surprised, but Dana was nearly vibrating with joy as she learned the spell, improving her repertoire to three spells in total.

"Now cast it, and we can see how it turns out. Each mage has a different Golem, based on their proficiencies, and it's the best way to tell the forward path for them." Prince Axel explained.

Dana cast the Golem, which came out looking more like an ancient statue, white marble and distinctly lacking clothes, other than a loincloth. As soon as she saw it, she blushed bright red, and she was about to dismiss it, but the teacher stopped her.

"It will come back the same way every time. But a stone Golem is a good one, second only to the Iron Golems in versatility. Most of the students get a clay, wood or sand Golem, which aren't as strong, though the sand Golem is quite difficult to damage.

The clear visualization of the human form is actually a sign of superior mana control, which improves its agility, and it should be as physically strong as a monster at your Rank, so it won't be weak in battle." The professor explained.

"Once you learn the [Mage Armour] spell, you can dress it in proper clothing." The Prince whispered in a teasing tone.

Karl examined it for a few seconds, wondering why it looked so familiar, even though he had seen numerous golem spells cast by students since he arrived, and one of the other team leaders in the Saturday group had a large mud Golem among his spells.

Then his mind went to the training Golems in the rooms that the other two members of his team on the first day chose. That was where he had seen this sort of detailed Golem before, but those were both armoured, and not in some sort of semi nudist classical art style.

The teacher smiled at Dana's embarrassment, but his satisfaction was immense. Not only had two of their first year students made it to Awakened Rank this week, but the senior Elites saw fit to grant both of them and the school some new abilities to teach the students. Nothing was going to bring him down off that high today.

"How well can a stone statue stand up against a magical attack, though?" Dana asked, as she had never personally fought against one before.

"The stone is magical as well. Though it looks like a simple statue, hacking at it with a regular sword will do nothing, and hitting it with an Awakened Rank spell will only do minor damage most of the time." The professor explained.

"It appears that I no longer have the advantage in numbers or in power." Karl joked as Hawk gave the statue an evil glare.

Every Hawk knew that stones were hard, and it probably wouldn't break easily if he attacked it, so the big stone guy was a threat to his position as top pet. It was just a good thing that it couldn't fly, so it was unable to steal his scouting spot.

Sergeant Rita patted Karl on the shoulder as she consoled him. "Just wait. Once we find a suitable target pet, we will try getting you to bond with another monster. But the advantage that you have in growth rate is definitely way above most of your classmates."

Drake, the burly Overlord Rank Elite that arrived with the Prince, smiled at Hawk and then sighed.

"I always liked birds. I will make sure that the Academy gets approved to try feeding him some special resources to see if he can either learn some new skills or advance faster. If nothing else, we can at least spare him some of the Ascended and Commander Rank monster blood to mix with the strength stones.

That concoction should keep him growing at a steady pace for a little while, until his body has reached the limits of its natural potential. The labs have tested that already, and it works on almost all monsters." The big Elite explained.

"I would appreciate it. The faster he grows, the faster I grow, which helps both of us keep going. I think that once he has reached Commander Rank, it might be difficult, but Hawk has confidence that he can make it there with just a little help." Karl replied.

Drake nodded in satisfaction. "Good, keep up that confidence, it's key to become strong. Once you lose confidence, you start becoming more cowardly. Once you start down that path, it's difficult to turn around, and you have to spend time undoing the mental damage you did to yourself."

So the aura of dominance that all the stronger Elites gave off wasn't just the arrogance of the strong, but a mental trick to keep themselves from falling off the path to greater strength? That was not going to be an easy attitude to emulate, but keeping a certain level of confidence shouldn't be too difficult.

The Prince's assistants were tapping their wrists, indicating that he needed to hurry up, so Karl and Dana both bowed politely and looked toward the door, hoping to excuse themselves from any more formalities now that they had gotten all the benefits without upsetting anyone.

"Yes, we should all get back to our business. Don't forget to dismiss the Golem, they're not allowed in the hallways." Prince Axel agreed, then gestured for his assistants to hand over the information that they had brought him and walked out of the room.

Sergeant Rita smiled at the students as the senior officials left. "Well, I must say that went better than any of us could have hoped for. If you're done socializing with the soldiers, you should get something to eat and then meditate or practice to consolidate your gains. New spells and skills can be tricky the first few times even if you have used a Skill Book to learn them, so don't overestimate yourselves."

The Special Forces team leader chuckled. "Not that we would know, none of them were publicly available when we were in the Academy."

Chapter 58 Interrogated

Karl and Dana headed back for the main floor of the dorms, where there should be dinner served right now, and silently hoped that the other students had not noticed who got out of the helicopter.

That hope was in vain, as the moment that they entered the cafeteria they were surrounded by other students that they trained with, including all the others from the special training class.

"Alright, spill. What happened to you two that you came back a day late in an army helicopter? That is badass, by the way, but our mission barely took an hour." One of the other first year students asked, while the girl beside him nodded.

"Well, you see, it was just a minor lack of communication. The town we were sent to, with the intention of having us eliminate a group of Irontusk Boars headed by an Awakened Rank beast, had been overrun by Goblins an hour before we left. It was too

late for the Academy to see the update, so we were delivered to an empty town with no idea what we were supposed to do.

We just killed every monster that we could find and waited for someone to come get us. They didn't seem to be in a hurry to do that, so we called in the morning when we were sure that the Goblins were all dead." Karl explained.

"And how does that relate to you both having Awakened Rank black badges now?" One of the other students asked.

"The Special Forces team that came to get us vouched for us, and they let us do the test when we got back instead of waiting until the end of the semester or having to beg a professor. We both passed, so we got the badges right away." Dana informed him with a smug smile.

"That's just not fair. If we had been the ones to get sent there, we could have been the first to get our badges." One of the other students complained.

"We nearly got killed by a single Shadow Cat, and it hadn't quite reached Awakened yet. If we had to face off against a whole tribe of Goblins, we would be missing persons right now." His partner reminded him.

"It wasn't that bad." The boy defended himself.

"Other than the seventy stitches, the broken hand and the loss of your sword?" One of the other students asked.

"It was just a little mistake, the cat caught me by surprise."

The students laughed as Karl and Dana made their way to the counter to grab a meal, and quickly rearranged their seating pattern so that the two of them would be placed in the corner, where everyone could see and talk to them.

"It looks like you two are famous today, so you might as well enjoy your time in the limelight. Now, tell us more about the fight with the Goblins." One of the students insisted.

By the time that they were done, it had been nearly two hours of giving every minute detail of their overnight adventure, and Karl was becoming increasingly certain that they had narrated the details of each action that they had taken more than once.

If Hawk could talk, they might have dragged it out for another hour, since the students wanted a blow-by-blow recounting of the entire fight on a level that not even Sergeant Rita's official reporting required. But it felt good to be popular for the moment, and with the Black Badges, they would be entitled to some extra credits from the school every week to upgrade their rooms and lifestyle.

Dana's first thought was to get some soundproofing for her bedroom so that she didn't have to hear the neighbours training at every hour of the day, but Karl was stumped.

They were going to bring him resources for Hawk free of charge, and he wasn't sure what he needed. Plus, his room was perfect the way that it came. Sure, he could redecorate, but that wasn't really necessary, and they had to be in uniform on campus, so even if he was a fashionista it wouldn't matter. He could get some more notebooks, and maybe a tablet so he could digitize all his information, but that was about it.

When they finally escaped the cafeteria to head to their dorms, the sounds of explosive attacks were echoing through the hallways. The noise was coming from the two doors on either side of the stairs, where the large square rooms for warrior training were.

Dana sighed in resignation at not being able to sleep, but Karl had a better idea.

"There is a hammock on the balcony if you'd like. It's quiet, and the only one likely to wake you up out there is Hawk, unless it starts raining. I don't know if the spell around the greenhouse balcony actually stops rain, since it hasn't happened since we arrived." Karl offered.

As soon as he said it, Karl realized that he should likely get an award for the most awkward way to invite a girl to spend the night in your room ever, but she clearly needed the sleep, and even when they got to his door, he could still hear the first year students frantically training on their day off.

The news that two of the students had made it to Awakened Rank had spread like wildfire, and everyone who thought they had a chance to be next was working hard, as well as those who were a long way from the goal, who realized that they might be the first to be shunted to the slow progression courses.

Nobody wanted that.

It was a necessary part of the Academy's curriculum, and they weren't really the slow classes, they were the regular classes, but as time went on, the top third of the class would be moved up to special training, leaving the others behind.

Karl was among that group for all of his training, while Dana was already there in the Saturday classes, with a good chance that she would be gaining a personal tutor in the next few days. They were already way ahead, and only gaining more ground on the rest of the class as they got the sort of special treatment that the true Elites enjoyed.

But while the special treatment that the most powerful got was enviable, the fact that they seemed to be together as a couple was enough to provoke jealousy in the hearts of many students.

Chapter 59 Contact and Contacts

Karl woke up the next morning to the sound of laughter, and stomping feet. It wasn't a combination that he associated with his room, which was normally silent, and for a moment, he was completely disoriented.

"Hawk, he's not a perch, I am trying to train the golem to fight." Dana's voice laughed.

The sense of confusion faded, and Karl hurried to get dressed before heading out to the balcony, where a nearly naked statue was doing some sort of Kung Fu, while Hawk sat on its head and chirped directions that neither the Golem nor Dana could understand.

"He says that the foot is too high, and it makes you vulnerable to leg sweeps." Karl informed the mage as he stepped outside to meet them.

"Oh, good morning. I hope you don't mind, I used the shower first. The plants are all watered as well, and I think that hammock is enchanted. I might not have slept for long, but I haven't felt this refreshed in a long time.

I was meditating, but Hawk was bored, so we started to water the plants, and then I thought I should try out my new spell. The Golem is good at smashing, but I think if it's used by someone who actually knows martial arts, it will get better.

The Golem responds to mental commands, but I know almost nothing about combat in that sense, so all I can tell it to do is basic attacks." She rambled as she adjusted the Golem's movements, so its steps weren't as high.

"If it works that way, you'll have to get the teachers to let you sit in on some of the fighting classes I attend. I use clawed gauntlets to fight, so it's almost the same as martial arts, even when I'm armed." Karl suggested.

"Or you can help me teach the golem. Once I understand the basics, it should be enough to get started." Dana suggested, with a determined look at her summon.

"Alright, let's start with the three basic combat stances, and then we can move to the guarding positions, since he already understands the basics of punch and kick from the spell."

Dana led the Golem to mimic Karl as he moved, and the Golem caught on incredibly quickly. They weren't intelligent in a true sense, but the spell allowed the Golem to be slightly adaptive, and the more it fought, the better it would do the next time that it was summoned.

The understanding was mostly the mages, but either the System or the spell itself enabled it to retain skills it had gained when dismissed and resummoned.

After about ten minutes, Karl and the Golem began to shadow box, holding back their powers so that they didn't actually injure each other, though they both had Awakened Rank physiques, at least in theory.

Karl hadn't had to test that yet, but he hadn't been injured during training since the day that his absorption of energy from food had improved, despite taking just as many hits in training.

However, kicks from sparring partners and a full power punch from a stone fist would be an entirely different experience, he assumed.

"Alright, now that I've had a morning workout, I need to shower, and then we should go get some breakfast before classes start. Will I see you again after class?" Karl asked.

"I'll be back after dinner to study. I suspect that we're both going to be busy today, with all that happened this weekend." Dana agreed.

She was completely right. By four in the afternoon, Karl was completely exhausted from the upgraded training regimen, and Sergeant Rita still had more plans for his day.

"Now that you have been promoted to the rank of Awakened, you are considered somewhat of a proper Elite, though you are still in school. Normally, this class comes up in the second semester, but we need to start going over the duties and responsibilities that come with the position of an Awakened Elite, and the chances that you could be called to assist with attacks whenever you are off campus.

Well, theoretically you could be called to them when you are on campus as well, but there are plenty of senior students to go through before it would be your turn, as we award credits for outside duties, and there is a waiting list." Rita explained.

"Wait, there is a waiting list for the emergency responses around the Academy?" Karl asked.

"That's the part that caught your attention? Yes, the senior students all want to have them to pad their resumes, and for the extra resources that they can get. Especially if they're graduating at Awakened or barely into Ascended Rank.

But right now, it is important that you know the basics, like how to send a message to Elite Operations, the emergency contact numbers, and a few other things that would have helped you out on your last trip.

I'm sure you're aware that the phone call could have gone more smoothly if you knew to give them your Student ID number as an introduction, so you would be transferred to someone with a functional brain, but you could also have contacted the Elite Force stationed at the airbase directly and saved some time.

Also, there were other Elites in the area that you could have called on if things went wrong, they just didn't respond because the Mayor sent the signal that they had all evacuated safely. With the civilians gone, the military could take their time."

While the Sergeant's explanation made a lot of sense, as it was undoubtedly safer to hunt for the Goblins in the daylight, it would have made more sense to do the whole job the first day and not wait until the second day to deal with the rest of the Goblin infestation, after the homes had been looted overnight.

But, Karl assumed that this wasn't the only thing that they had to do, so he wouldn't hold it against the soldiers for showing up when they were ordered to.

"Alright, let's see that data. I will start memorizing it before dinner, then keep working on it after class until I have it all down." Karl replied, resigned to the overload of data that was coming his way.

Chapter 60 Orders From Above

The information turned out to not be all that bad. He had a few dozen items and protocols to memorize, but once he had seen them, they were mostly common-sense items, and they wouldn't be difficult to remember at all.

He wrote down the emergency call numbers and essential protocols for meeting Elites with high positions on a cue card, and took it down to have the supply room laminate it on his way to dinner, but other than that, there wasn't much that he couldn't remember on the first day.

"The top of the class has finally graced us with his presence. How does it feel to be the most elite of the first years?" One of the second year mages from his morning skills training joked when Karl entered the cafeteria.

"I'm not sure, you will have to ask Hawk." Karl joked as the worker passed him the daily special, a fried noodle dish with large chunks of monster meat in it.

"That's probably true, his skills are insane. I heard that they're going to move up your studies again, does that mean you're not going to get to practice with us in the mornings anymore?" The blonde boy asked.

"I don't think they are planning to take me out of that training so soon. I heard from Sergeant Rita that they will change my close combat training partners, but they were already preparing to do that. Part of my abilities seems to be faster learning speed, so I'm doing really well in the mixed martial arts class, but I still can't block magical attacks fast enough or in large enough numbers that the morning class needs to change."

Karl's reply made the other mages in the room laugh. If one Elite could block all the attacks from two dozen of them, did they really deserve to be assigned the same rank?

Even if he could block half of them, it was already an unfair advantage at the same peak power level. But the nature of his skill, that the Rend could separate into multiple parts with a single cast, made it much easier to hit multiple targets, and the mages had to admit that both Karl and Hawk had impeccable aim.

Again that evening, when Karl went up to his room after dinner, the hallways echoed with the sound of students furiously practising, and he knew that Dana would be waiting for him to let her in. He didn't even have to wait after knocking on her door, she answered instantly, as if she had been standing right behind it, and had her school backpack at the ready, packed with her books and a change of uniform for the morning.

"I asked about a soundproofing measure for the room, but it's not cheap. We would need to take on at least one more mission at the same level as the last one to afford it." She apologized as she closed the door behind her.

Karl winced at the sound of echoing attacks from the neighbouring rooms. "It's still a good place to practise, and once the others calm down it shouldn't be too bad. I can see why all the senior students like to spend time outside, though. Even here in the hallways it's loud, so in their rooms it must be terrible."

On the far side of campus, in a meeting room facing a wall of security camera feeds, the school administrators watched the two young students walk into the second floor greenhouse room.

"Are you certain that this won't lead to a premature pregnancy? I feel like we should separate them, for the good of their planned career paths." An older woman insisted.

"Despite the appearances, they're two pure souls. I think that even if they were sharing the same bed, we wouldn't have to worry too much about it. Besides, there are prophylactics available for free, and we can have their individual counsellors recommend long-term birth control injections for both of them." The Headmaster replied with a shrug.

"They're advancing much faster than the others, despite not having the strongest starts, should we put a camera in the greenhouse room to see what sort of training they're doing?" One of the other board members suggested.

The Headmaster made an annoyed sound and shook his head. "Feel free to ask them, but I will not allow cameras in the students' dorm rooms. There are standards here, and I won't bend on that one."

Every one of the Elites had some secrets of their own, and when they were exposed, they could expose weaknesses of their Class and abilities, which could put the Elite in danger from the human sort of enemies.

It was better that the students could keep those weaknesses to themselves, the Headmaster had decided when he was appointed, and for ten years, it had been working very well for everyone.

"Which one should be reassigned, or are we going to separate them into career training paths as planned?" The leader of the Elite Career Training Oversight Board asked.

"The Beast Master is going to become a strategic asset if he can bond more than one pet. I say that we allow them a bit more flexibility than the other class leaders. Let them practice together, a solid bond between the two will help reduce his reluctance to go along with the testing later." The board's lead researcher suggested.

The first old woman to speak gave a derisive snort. "You think that having a friend is going to make him more likely to go along with your plans to throw him into danger and study the growth rate and reactions of the bonded monsters? I know that young men can be hormonal, but he's not an idiot, he will just run away from any real threats, and you'll never get your data."

"And if we send the cute idol girl with him?" The researcher asked.

"Absolutely not. I have over seven thousand hours of work already planned for her, including three albums, hundreds of public appearances, and an advertising campaign for whatever the cause de jour is in five years after she has graduated." The Celebrity Development Officer of the board insisted.

The lone military officer in the room just rolled her eyes. "She's a mage, and a powerful one if she keeps growing at this rate. Just like the Archmage, there is no reason that she can't have actual missions rolled into whatever song and dance nonsense you had planned because of her cute face. You are going to have to adjust your expectations. If she makes it to Commander Rank before she graduates, she will have too much authority for you to pressure her into showbiz anyhow."