

Beast Master 531

Chapter 531 Guard The Farm

Once Remi and her bodyguards were in position, with two on Karl's left, guarding the side of the house, and one on his right, making sure that the escorts for the General didn't get overrun by a single Giant Boar, Karl was ready to begin.

[Alright, it's safe to come out now. Cara and Rae, I would like for you to stick together with Rae's Golems. Clear the area beyond what the Minotaurs and Satyrs can see, and loot as much food as you think we might need in the future. These all appear to be Commander Rank boars, and there should be Royal Rank Cyclops with them. That means plenty of high-quality blood for Rae.

However, if you find a Monarch, inform me before you start fighting it, and I will join you.

I know that at least Rae needs the Monarch Rank blood for her personal grooming, and if it's an edible species, it could be good for everyone's development.] Karl instructed.

[Monarch Rank Giant Boar...] Hawk was almost drooling at the thought.

He was already looking for one, but the Boars didn't appear to come in anything but Commander Rank. Being a spawn situation, there were no young ones with them. But it was also incredibly rare to find a Monarch Rank Cyclops. Hawk had scouted most of the way to both cities down the road now, and he had only seen three of them, two of which were at the fortress. The Overlords would take care of those in a few minutes, so there was only one that was an actual option, and even that one was over twenty kilometres away.

[We might have to wait for tomorrow's spawn to get a good one.] He informed the others.

Karl chuckled at his depressed tone. [What makes you think that we're going to still be here?]

[There are thousands of Commander Rank boars. They're overrunning farms almost as fast as the farmers can flee, and the city is full of them. We did alright walking through the Hill Giant lines, but these are stronger.] He replied with pride.

It was strange to have pride in what he viewed as a food supply that he didn't even raise himself, but Hawk's mind worked in its own special way.

Karl could hear him mentally calculating the food supply from multiple days of harvesting the boars, and how much space he had to store them in. If he processed them and got rid of the parts that weren't tasty, he should have enough for at least a week's harvest in the space he dedicated to boar type animals.

Rae came out of her space, and Cara appeared on her back as the Bloodbath Spider summoned her golems in the distance.

[Forward trusty steed. We shall clear a path of destruction through the boars. Delicious, delicious, destruction.] Cara insisted.

Karl stared at the strange spectacle for a moment and then realized that Cara was much bigger than he remembered, She had gone from badger to large dog sized, and when she spread her wings for balance, she had a wingspan as wide as Rae's standing posture.

[Are you getting close to advancing?] Karl asked her, curious about the change.

[Nope, I don't think I'm even halfway there. I'm just getting big. I'm working on a skill to adjust my size, but mostly I think I've just been eating too well. I need to start exercising.]

Why she wanted to adjust her size was a mystery, but Karl suspected that it had something to do with punching Drakes in the face. She kept facing big things that didn't respect her because she was small.

They vanished off into the darkness with a barrage of [Disintegration] and [Boulder Toss] attacks at the handful of nearby boars.

Then they were on the surprised Cyclops, whose night vision was apparently terrible because it hardly reacted until the Golem was liberating its head from its body.

Karl looked around the farm and realized that he might have miscalculated. With the dynamic duo going crazy on his side of the property, he didn't actually have anything to do.

He could hear the others fighting, and one of the Naga Warriors had gone to assist the Satyrs, who were losing their fight with the Giant Boar.

Karl heard huge rushing feet and saw one of the massive beasts coming for his left side, where the other Naga Warriors and Remi were stationed. Then Thor was on his feet and charging at the armoured challenger. This was his yard, and nobody was just running inside.

The Cerro hit the side of the boar, and his upper horns punched through the armour plating as the beast was thrown from its feet.

A shake of Thor's head freed his horns from the twisted metal, and a Naga Warrior rushed over to wrap the beast's neck.

It gave him a steady base to attack from, with the side benefit of cutting off the creature's breathing as the boar reared up to try to hit Thor with his tusks.

Thor was quick on his feet, and the charge only reached open air as Thor rammed his nose horn up into the Boar's belly, then slammed his tail into its head with [Earthquake] charged.

The boar's skull shattered, and blood ran down its face as it staggered. It wasn't a lethal blow, but there was definitely brain damage behind that stunned effect. Then the Naga Warrior's blades slid between the broken skull bones and the boar collapsed.

That one they would have to leave in the yard, as everyone would notice it going missing. But they could use it for breakfast and lunch, or leave it for the farmers, whose crops had taken a lot of damage.

Karl noticed that a Cyclops was getting close to the outlying vegetable patch, so he moved to intercept. The farmers might have lost a lot of their crop, but he could save at least a bit of it.

The two Royal Rank opponents met on the road, and Karl quickly realized that the Cyclops was almost blind. It had no depth perception, nearly tripped in the drainage ditch, and couldn't see Karl standing 5 metres away in the dark.

That wasn't even a fair fight.

Not that it was going to stop Karl, as five stacks of [Disintegration] on the head of his maul removed most of its torso.

He quickly dragged the body back into the pasture on the other side of the road and looked for another target.

Rae and Cara were on a rampage, and Cara had taken to the air so that she could dive bomb and maul the Boars from the air.

That was way more fun than just throwing orbs of death at them. Her [Disintegration] was a Monarch-Ranked skill, and the damage that it did to Commander Rank boars, and their makeshift armour, was devastating.

It was so much more satisfying to go for the terminal velocity dive bomb into their back.

Karl saw a group of heat signatures racing his way and prepared for battle. But as they spread out a little, he realized that it wasn't more Cyclops, but a larger than average Minotaur and his family.

"This way, everyone. We have a Royal Rank team of guards to protect the farmyard." He shouted, loud enough that everyone would hear him.

"Is the yard holding?" The man yelled as he turned to approach Karl directly, and not the house.

"Yeah, we're in no danger of being overrun. We've got a Commander Rank Golem Mage and Royal Rank Naga Warriors among the other guards in the yard. There are clerics with us as well, if you are injured."

"Thank you, traveller." The big Minotaur replied, then let out a deep rumbling bellow that would echo through the distance to the other farms.

It should be a signal of some sort that it was safe to gather here, but it startled the farmers in the yard, who definitely didn't feel safe.

"If you can fight, talk to the Red Dragon Cleric after you are fed and healed. We were selling weapons made by and for Minotaurs. They will hook you up, and you can trade them loot from your kills for the cost if you're short on cash." Karl informed them.

The big Minotaur smiled and patted him on the shoulder as he ran by.

"Thank you. I don't know what happened, but it's good to see that someone has the good sense to set proper defences."

With the route being so safe, most groups didn't set night guards, they just went to bed in the farmyards after dinner.

Chapter 532 Food Supplies

After the bellow by the farmer, more groups began running in their direction. The farm houses were fairly well spaced, but each family could only farm a few hundred acres at the most. Even with Rae and Cara on the loose out in the dark somewhere, there were still hundreds of Giant Boars nearby, terrorizing the other farm houses.

The pair had been prioritizing clearing the area around this farm so that they would have as much left as possible. But there were just so many creatures spawned this time that they couldn't eliminate them all.

[Is it just me, or does this not follow the pattern?] Remi asked.

[What pattern?] Thor asked, as he hadn't been paying attention the first time.

[It was supposed to get weaker and lower density as we moved away from the dungeon, right? Well, we're a long way from the dungeon now, and this is the strongest one so far, with the most monsters.] She explained.

Hawk considered reasons, then came upon a good one. [What if it's a present? We haven't had a good food influx for a while, so maybe we're being rewarded with thousands of boars? They appeared centred around us, that has to mean that they're ours.]

That was a somewhat horrifying thought. What if a thousand square kilometres of land had been overrun by giant boars and Cyclops because Hawk was feeling peckish and the Gods wanted him to have a new flavour of snack?

As much as Karl wanted to say that was ridiculous and impossible, he had a sneaking suspicion that it might actually be a plausible answer.

But the fact that this one appeared to be centred on them, while the last was only a few kilometres away, did make it seem like they were somehow involved in the generation of these anomalies.

If they were, wouldn't it be a disaster if they went home and brought the spawns with them?

Karl had plenty of time to think, as it was only farmers headed their way at the moment. For a moment, he wondered where Prince Corbin and his Spellblade clan were. They should be well west of this incident, and hopefully out of danger. But they were faster moving than the wagon, and had a day's head start going in the same direction, so they might have already been close to the Fortress.

It would have been nice to know for sure where they were, but there was no way of verifying that in the middle of the night. During the day, Hawk might be able to scout them out if he could see through their disguise, but even that was questionable, as it was most likely being created by Prince Corbin, so Hawk wouldn't have a power advantage when trying to detect flaws in the spell.

The influx of farmers from the surrounding homesteads didn't come without its own dangers, as the movement was drawing the attention of the Giant Boars, who were leading the cyclops toward the gathering. The giants' eyesight was terrible, but their hearing was decent, and they seemed to realize what was going on, even if they were struggling to find their way with the fences constantly tripping them.

If they followed the boars, it was better. The beasts smashed through the wooden fences without hesitation, and they had no issues finding the farmers in the dark.

[You have more coming to your side. Cara and Rae are over on the far side right now.] Hawk informed Karl, who was distracted watching the farmers coming their way.

Karl moved away from the farm house to intercept the boars, which were running towards a group of small Minotaurs.

The parents must have been at their home farm because these ones were all children.

One solid swat of the hammer killed the beast, but Hawk was not impressed with the use of [Chain Lightning] which internally cooked them and made them hard to prepare for later consumption.

[Alright, I will use Disintegration instead. That will only take away a small amount of them, and if I hit the head, it won't even be a tasty part.] Karl conceded.

Rae laughed at their argument. She was using Lacerate, as were her golems. There was still plenty of blood left inside after they died, so a little mess wasn't a major loss. The clean cuts left the entire beast usable, but neither Rend nor Shred were as powerful as Disintegrate.

They were suitable options to stack five deep on the hammer, though. Karl could release them without contact, so he could just use it to build up a charge of concurrent casts. But he really didn't need to do that for the Commander Rank beasts. Even just attacking normally two or three times would be enough for most of them.

Karl tried that on the next boar that was coming for the children, and the first strike with Rend cut into its skull, but didn't stop it. Karl had to hurry to intercept the beast before it could reach the Minotaur children.

"Sir, is there a safe spot? Dad and Uncle are fighting at the house." One of the children asked, gesturing behind them.

"Keep going straight towards that house with the fire in the yard. We lit it to help people find us. There are others there already. How far is it to your house? I might be able to help your family leave." Karl asked.

"I don't think that they will. Uncle Lu is a Colonel in the army and a Royal. They plan to hold the yard and keep the house safe so we can return in the morning."

"And they sent you away anyhow?" Karl asked.

The Minotaur girl nodded. "Yeah. They said that it's safer to be with a whole herd. We heard the bellow indicating a safe spot, so they sent the children."

"Good luck, I will make their lives easier for a few minutes."

The kids started running, and Karl headed for their house to clear the area. If there was a Royal Rank soldier there with someone to watch his back, they should be fine.

There were still three boars in the area, not attacking the house. The Minotaurs were teamed up to deal with a Cyclops, and Karl could see that they both had proper weapons and armour.

So, a few minutes to clear the boars should be enough to give them a rest.

[Rae, when you guys make your next loop this way, clear around the farmyards that still have someone fighting in them. We can start expanding our radius if the battle slows down.]

[Got it. We're getting pretty well stocked already. These boars take up more space than expected. I don't know what we're going to do with a hundred tonnes of bacon, but it's going to smell wonderful when we smoke it.]

Karl laughed as he finished the boars near where the Minotaurs were still dealing with the Cyclops. That didn't seem right. There were two of them, and the Cyclops was only using skills on the lower side of Royal Rank.

Karl turned to help them out. There might have been a reason other than safety in numbers that they had sent the children away while they defended the farm.

Chapter 533 Old Soldiers

The Cyclops never stood a chance as Karl leapt across the yard and smashed it in the back with [Disintegrate]. It was already heavily injured, and its armour was compromised.

"Thank you merchant. Were you at one of the other farms? Are they alright?" The older of the two Minotaurs asked.

They were both heavily bandaged, and one of them had only one arm, an old injury that had long since healed. No wonder they had sent the kids away to make their final stand. They were so heavily injured even before the fight started that they were in no shape to fight, but they didn't want to burden anyone else with more wounded to care for.

That was a soldier's pride talking for them, Karl assumed. No soldier wanted to drag down others when they were likely to have to relocate in the middle of the night. Instead, they had sent away the ones that could run and remained behind.

[Remi, do you have healing stuff in your space?] Karl asked.

[The blue ones in the round bottles with the long neck. Those are the new healing potions.]

Karl took two of them out and handed them to the Minotaurs. "Healing potions from my personal alchemist. This incident is huge, and if you're not too attached to the farm, we could use the extra fighters.

They're holding out well for now, and we had a watch set, but they will get tired eventually." They nodded, understanding what Karl meant. Part of the reason for the Minotaur's welcoming bellow was so that they had reserves when the front-line fighters got wounded or tired, allowing someone to switch them out.

"We have Dragon Clerics there, who can do more healing for you as well. Did you want to come back that way with me, or are you remaining here?"

The pair downed the potions, and Karl made a note of how their wounds closed and their stance improved. Remi would want that information later.

"We will join your group. I will just tell the kids that I wanted to get the last of my armour out before we joined them." The older soldier chuckled, with a gesture to a pile of supplies near the door.

Karl picked it up and slung the oversized bag over his shoulder. "Is that everything you need? With nobody here, the invaders are unlikely to smash apart the house as long as you don't have a large food supply inside."

The farmer gestured to one side. "The pantry is concrete with a steel door and underground to keep the temperature stable. It should be alright."

Karl took off at a jog with the soldiers behind him. There was nothing in the area, but they were both on guard, and hesitant to move so quickly.

"I can see heat signatures in the dark. There is nothing along this path, I killed it all on the way here after making sure your kids made it to the farm." He explained.

"They made it safely? Thanks be to the gods. Alright, we will trust your eyes. Lead the way."

Karl stopped fifty metres from the house. "It's right there. I'm on duty to protect this side, so I will let you go ahead. Tell them Karl sent you if they ask, but I doubt they will. Half the people there are your neighbours."

The Minotaurs laughed. "If old man Davos can't recognize us by firelight, we have bigger issues than a few questions."

They clapped Karl on the shoulder as they passed, and a few seconds later, happy voices greeted them as they passed the Naga Warriors and came into the light of the bonfire.

Lotus' voice joined the chaos as she explained that she would heal them, and that everyone else here was still in fighting form, so they were the backup line. They had a bit of time to eat and catch their breath, then they could change spots with Ophelia, who was watching that side along with one of the other farmers.

The battle near the farm began to fall silent as more farmers came to join their group, and as Rae teamed up with Cara to slaughter everything that moved and wasn't a farmer.

That was a surprising level of restraint for that duo, but Karl didn't see any small creatures or Minotaurs coming into the piles in their spaces.

Two hours later, they were getting bored with the lack of powerful targets and variety, so Karl called them back. [You can rest in your spaces. We've secured the area well enough. There should only be a few issues before dawn, and the others can take care of that. How did your collection efforts go?] He asked.

[Pretty good. I think we got all we need, but there are no Monarch Rank Cyclops close enough to fight. If we could have gotten one of those for Rae's bath products, it would have been better.] Cara replied.

One of the Satyrs came over with a bowl of oatmeal and some roast pork slices for Karl, and then joined him for breakfast, taking a seat on the woodpile.

"You've done an outstanding job on this side. Do you need anything else? We can send someone to assist you? Or you can pull your Naga Warriors back. They're covering two sides of the house already, and they've taken a lot of the load off the rest of us.

I don't think that our patrol would have made it through the first attack without his help, and it appears that the army isn't coming." The Satyr sighed.

"This incident isn't just on us. It's at all the farms as far as the farmers can communicate with each other for three relays. By my guess, that's at least fifteen kilometres in every direction that is under attack, and likely more. How many army units are in the area? Even if they sent them out right away, they could take a while to make their way here." Karl suggested.

He couldn't tell the guard that the issue extended past the next city, or all the way to the Fortress. At least not without explaining how he learned. They would find out soon enough, and it was going to be a nasty surprise.

It was better not to spring it on them in the middle of the night when everyone was panicked and exhausted.

"I see that they went with raspberries today. That's a change from the usual." Karl noted as he started at the plain wooden bowl full of oatmeal.

"Apparently it's a specialty of the local farms. They have whole bags of dried berries here, and they go well in the oats." The Satyr guard agreed.

"I will have to buy a few bags. Monster invasion, war, or emergency, goods still need to move." The Satyr nodded. "That they do. Fortunately for us, it will be dawn soon, and then we will be able to see trouble signals and find out what is going on in the distance.

But I've never heard of a surprise invasion this deep into the nation. It should have been stopped near the border, not allowed to get to the Overlord Council's doorstep."

"I am sure that the council will get it all sorted out. We just need to get enough rest that we don't get overwhelmed."

They ate quietly for a few minutes until Karl saw Minotaur shaped heat signatures in the distance.

"Go let someone know to bellow that this is a safe spot. There are more refugees in the distance and they look lost." He warned the Satyr, who informed one of his teammates with hand signals.

"They're on it. They'll likely call every hour or so, just in case there are others in hiding."

Chapter 534 Dawn Reveals Destruction

The hours until dawn passed quickly, with sporadic attacks two or three times an hour, as the farmers from the surrounding area, and those who had been on the run in the area, had all come to them after the second bellow by the Royal Rank Minotaur.

His effort seemed much more effective than the first attempt, and Karl wondered if there was something about the voice of Minotaurs that changed with their Rank.

Now, they had nearly a hundred Minotaurs in place and as the sun came up they were making plans to fortify this farm, so they could fall back to it as an emergency resource in the future. "A trench line with a rake fence of spiked poles would slow down even a Giant Boar for a few minutes before it smashed them all apart." One of the farmers was suggesting.

"And where would we get thousands of trees to make it from? We could do a low wall of dirt and stones with a trench on the other side, but that would still mess with the runoff for the fields, and we would risk drought on the farm. Or we could do just the yard." The Matriarch of this farmyard insisted.

That would be a pain for them going to and from the fields, but they could put bridges over the wall, and pull them in if there was danger.

The defensive fortification didn't need to stop an enemy forever, much less actually hurt it. It just had to slow it down enough to give the defenders the advantage.

As the sun came up and everyone could see properly, the extent of the devastation became clear. Hundreds of house fires poured black smoke into the air, while Karl could see ten different red smoke streams, similar to the green ones that had been deployed when the patrol unit called for reinforcements against the Orcs.

But worse, there was a massive plume of black smoke to their east. A pillar of smoke that marked a freshly sacked city on fire. The size of the column made the source unmistakable.

No matter where they looked, there were signs of destruction, and the further into the distance they looked, the worse it got.

The Naga General gestured at Dana and a Satyr guard. "Mage, how strong are you? Can you use that air walking to carry a guard into the air where they can see further? We need to know how far this extends and if there are others we might need to help."

Dana nodded. "It's not a problem. At my rank, carrying a Satyr with me as I [Wind Walk] isn't a problem. I will take them a hundred metres into the air to scout the area, and we will report back in a minute."

She picked up the smallest of the Satyrs and stepped up into the air, running as if climbing stairs.

That was the great drawback to her skill. She still had to walk, so climbing into the air took a lot of physical effort, like running up a flight of stairs or a hillside. But she had been practising hard, and while she was slowing a lot at the end, [Eternal Lightning] gave her enough stamina regeneration that she made it to her chosen viewpoint with enough reserves to run in a circle and scout.

The Satyr looked shaken as they reached the ground, but Dana had already known what was going on. Not only had she been attacking from the air, but the fact that it was a monster spawn was much less unthinkable to her than to the farmers.

"General, I have your report." The Satyr informed them in a shaky voice.

"Go ahead, Sergeant. What did you see?"

"The fortress is under siege, though the battle appears to be close to finished. There are more than ten emergency calls for overrun units active, everything in sight from one hundred metres elevation was either destroyed farmland or hordes of Cyclops and their Giant Boars.

At least fifty kilometres in every direction.

The city of Mitford appears to be lost. The whole city is on fire, and there are hundreds of groups of Giants and boars moving away from it to attack nearby farms, which appear to have already been attacked last night.

At least two thirds of the force from the Fortress is deployed in the area, but there is no sign of the guard force from Mitford. There are a few visible groups of farmers still fighting, but unlike our area, which has been fairly well cleared of threats, they are not faring as well." His voice was as neutral as he could make it, clearly trying not to cry.

Then it dawned on Karl. They were visiting the Fortress and returning to Mitford. His family was likely from Mitford, and the city appeared to have been lost in a single night after the attackers appeared inside the walls.

Lotus was faster to the important parts than Karl was, and by the time that he realized, she had already pulled the small man into a hug, so he could hide his goat-like face.

All the beasts were back in their spaces now, except Thor, who was napping near the gate. Only the two bodyguards were left outside, so that the soldiers and farmers didn't notice anything was off when morning came. However, they were all rested now and ready to fight as soon as they were needed.

The General looked stunned by the analysis of the situation. There was nothing in his training or protocols that covered this situation. He didn't have enough of a force to even try to make it to the city. And he certainly didn't have enough allies left to rally a force to take it back if it was being occupied. It might not be, as the smoke cloud suggested that most of the city was on fire at the moment, but that didn't change the fact that he was half a day's travel away, and had no resources.

While the General was unsure what to do, back in the fortress, the Oracle had a much better idea of how to handle this situation.

He was seated on a cushion in his scrying room with a stack of notes on one side and a nearly empty bottle of rum on the other.

"His arrival marks disaster and great danger for the Fortress. Gods dammit." He muttered, casting bleary eyes up at Leafa, the Haint tree woman Overlord.

"Do you think that he's cursed? Could it be a side effect of pulling a System User through time? He has a powerful presence, far beyond his Royal Rank. It is possible that these incidents are occurring near him simply because he exists." She suggested.

"So, we send a team to kill him?" The drunken Oracle asked hopefully.

"And leave the focal point of the anomalies permanently located next to the fortress? I think not. If he is the focus of the instability, it's best that he takes them somewhere else.

But there is another possibility. We have reports that he might have been with the Yellow Tusk Orcs when the Dungeon outside Halsearing first opened.

We know that he speaks Orcish, so the reports are plausible. It might be a side effect of that anomaly, in which case we have to worry about the Orcs and every other person who entered the Dungeon that first day spreading the instability."

"Aren't you just a ray of fucking sunshine?" The Oracle slurred.

"I do try. But I can confidently say that he does not know. He didn't have the aura of malice on him when he was here. If he had known that his presence could trigger this disaster, I would have seen it."

The Oracle finished the bottle of Rum. "Just be thankful that it happened after he left. If not, we could have been Mitford, with our walls full of enemies and an army surrounding us at midnight shift change."

Leafa nodded. "I will check the reports to see if there have been more incidents in the west that we have not had an opportunity to review yet."

They normally only went over the important parts of the reviews, so small attacks, or incidents in rural areas might not have been noticeable enough to form a pattern in the reports yet.

Chapter 535 Council Planning

The conversation between Overlord Leafa and the Oracle quickly spread through the ranks of the Council members, who had been spread through the region all morning, frequently crossing paths.

Many of them agreed with Leafa's assessment. If they had been somehow marked by the opening of the Dungeon, it was better that they just go away and take the troubles to someone else. The Mountain Giants, for example.

However, there was another thought on the matter, shared by Sslyth of the Naga and Tink, the Faerie Overlord.

"What if we take him back to where he started. Tell him to stay next to the Dungeon until the incidents calm? Then we would be able to prove if they were centred on him or just expanding in a shockwave pattern away from the dungeon.

This last incident suggests that they are not all going to be milder aftershocks of the event, so controlling the location seems like the best option." Tink explained.

"And what would a bunch of rural farmers out in the western lands do about Royal and Monarch Ranked monsters appearing in their area?" Council Head Arnold asked.

His trolls were the predominant people in the region, and he didn't want them obliterated.

"The same thing that my Minotaurs did. They can call for help." Morrisa grumbled.

They had all been in the field for the morning, going from hotspot to hotspot, rescuing who they could. Now, the magic users in the Fortress were too exhausted to open another portal, and they had all had to make their own way back to the fortress, or to the city of Mitford.

That was where Overlord Thrax, the Chimera, and Sslyth the Naga were right now. They had been too far off on their last deployment to return to the Fortress, so they went to get a start on clearing out the devastated city and helping get the fires put out.

Both of them had water magic, though Thrax couldn't do much more than make it rain.

In this case, that was precisely what they needed. A good rainfall would put out many of the lingering fires, started when lamps and fireplaces were knocked over by Giant Boars rampaging in the city.

"Do we have any word on how much of Mitford is still standing?" Arnold asked, while slumping down into one of the padded chairs of the council room.

"The Temple still stands. Mitford had a combined temple, an ancient one where our people could go to worship freely, with statues of most known gods present.

That served as a disaster shelter for the people, and the guard gathered there, along with the clerics, who used their magic to support the people willing to fight.

So, that building still stands, and most of the governor's mansion still stands, though the town's governor is dead. He was found beside the bodies of a pair of Monarch Rank Cyclops, an apparent mutual destruction." The Oracle explained.

The Troll sighed and shook his head. "No wonder it went so poorly for them. With the Governor under attack the moment the battle started, there was no time for him to relieve anywhere else.

I will call the advisors to start on a plan to repair the farms, send out aid and collect casualty numbers.

Were there any areas in the fighting that took light enough damage that we might be able to stage soldiers there for the relief effort? I would like to set a temporary portal circle, to be kept open to move supplies."

The Oracle's eyes went white, and he frowned at the vision.

"There is an area roughly five kilometres in radius where none of the farm houses were too heavily damaged. It appears that they mostly evacuated early in the battle, so the monsters followed them to a well defended position and left the houses alone.

From what I can tell, the largest damage is to homes that had large food supplies inside, or whose residents didn't get any warning. Those with underground pantries were largely undamaged, though there are still giant beasts foraging in their fields.

Roughly one quarter of the number of Cyclops and Giant Boar teams are still active. The rest have been defeated or are missing." He informed the group.

"You look much less happy than I had expected, given the news that such a large area was saved from devastation." Arnold noted.

"Right in the middle of that space, surrounded by farmers and their families, is a very familiar black Cerro and a half troll holding a pig roast on an improvised spit."

Overlord Leafa began to giggle, pale blue smoke puffing from her mouth and retracting as she drew breath.

"Of course he would be fine and taunting them with a cookout. The Karl Troll isn't wired right in the head. Everyone else might be terrified of them, but don't forget that he is a system enhanced War Champion from the last resurgence. Nothing that a Royal Rank Cyclops could do to him could even scratch his armour if he has the usual set of warrior skills and Limited Invulnerability along with Trollish Regeneration.

For all we know, he might be fireproof as well."

Arnold began to laugh at that. A Troll that was fireproof really was immortal. Burning their body was the only way to stop them from regenerating. Even if you put them through a wood chipper, they would eventually come back to life. If he could keep himself from being burned in combat, he would be a juggernaut.

If any of them knew that Karl could grant that level of regeneration to all of the beasts under his control, or even that he had such a team under his control, they would have been terrified.

"So, we send an army unit to his location to work on stabilizing the situation? He's two thirds of the way to Mitford, so it's not a bad spot. When the others finish in the city the portal there will be set up again, and then we can start bringing soldiers in to deal with the issue." Arnold asked.

A wave of panic flowed over the Oracle.

"NO!" He shouted, startling everyone.

"We must not bring anyone else in. I know what happened, I can see it. The shockwaves of the Anomaly are following the ancient lines of power. The Fortress is built on one, which explains why it happened near us. But the actual intersection of the lines is under that farm house.

It is the number of powerful people in the area that is making the situation worse. If we call in reinforcements, we will trigger another incident, even stronger than this one. The best thing that we can do is spread the council out. It is too dangerous to leave that Bad Omen group unattended, but we can't all be in the same spot until this anomaly settles."

Arnold frowned. "So, it will happen again? Or only if we call for more soldiers?" "It will happen again for the next two nights. But the strength will go down, now that most of Mitford is dead. I can't see the exact location, only the aftermath. But if we spread the Overlords out, so we're not all in one spot at midnight, it will make the attack less intense." The Oracle clarified.

Arnold nodded. "I will go to the source, to the Dungeon. That will put me away from tonight's incident, but close enough to an existing portal that you can call for me if you need it."

Tink flitted around the room. "The two in Mitford can stay, they won't fully offset the casualties there, and the survivors need them. I will fly north past the edge of last night's incident. I can cross the whole journey from here to Mitford in under two hours on my wings, and I've already marked all the locations I was at this morning, so I will know if they're in trouble."

Morrisa nodded. "I will stay here with the Oracle and command the Fortress Guard. What are you doing, Leafa?"

The Haint's wooden face twisted up in a gleeful grin. "I am going to go visit our lucky visitor. I suspect that he has more surprises for me than ancient snacks. He's in the middle of the fight anyhow."

She didn't wait for anyone to say anything, she simply turned to smoke and vanished, a species exclusive version of [Shadow Step] that could bring her anywhere she knew, and she knew every farm in the region after three hundred years living in the Fortress.

Chapter 536 Surprise Guest

Karl instinctively drew his maul as a shiver of ice-cold energy pulsed in the air behind him.

"Calm down, old man. It's just me." Leafa laughed as Karl spun to face her.

"Overlord Leafa? I must say, I wasn't expecting company in the middle of the day. We were just about to have lunch, would you care to join us?" Karl asked.

"Oh, that sounds lovely. I have a small update for you all, as this compound appears to hold the entire population of the area, plus one of our Generals.

The Overlords are going to spread out over the region, assisting with the cleanup, but also because of a vision the Oracle had last night.

There will be another appearance of the Cyclops and their minions tonight at midnight, and possibly for the next few nights. The fewer powerful people in the region at midnight, the less dangerous the incident will be. So, I will remain here, while two Council members are in Mitford, and the others are spreading across the country to take care of other duties.

This isn't the only spot which is having similar issues, but the dates are sporadic, and sending soldiers in advance only makes them worse." She explained.

"So this is happening all over?" One of the Satyrs asked.

"There have been incidents nearly every day, somewhere in the country. Most of them are not major incidents, but they appear to be influenced by the strength of the residents, as if they were a test of some sort. This one was the strongest reported so far, and a large part of the city of Mitford was damaged last night. However, the residents took shelter in a number of secure facilities, and the casualties were not as bad as we had feared. The unified Temple still stands, and there was a Shaman God High Priest there to put a barrier over the building while the guards rallied to help survivors make it there.

This spot was nearly the exact centre of the battle last night, which makes it unlikely to be outside tomorrow's spawn, even if the boundaries do move a little.

What do we have for barriers?" Leafa replied.

Karl gestured as he answered. "We have Tessa, the War Cleric, with her weapon and armour buffs that can spread over the whole group. Dana, our battle mage, knows some barrier spells, and the best boy in the whole world knows how to spread his defensive barrier to his closest friends."

He reached down to rub Thor's head, and the farmers laughed. Thor had saved many lives last night, and his massive bulk made him a formidable force. Even in the face of a charging Giant Boar, he could stand his ground.

Nothing else here, not even the Royal Rank Minotaurs could take that charge and not be knocked over. They had a few suitable boar spears from Karl's supplies, but not nearly enough for all of the farmers who had come to them last night. None of the other farms had suitable weapons either, and most had shown up with at least some sort of tool in their hands that could be enhanced by Tessa's blessing.

At the very least, she was a High Priestess of the War God, and her blessing would put a Commander Rank edge on the tools. That was more than most of the others were going to get.

After a moment of silence, Karl clapped his hands for attention. "Alright, it looks like we know what we've got to do for the evening. Get this pig roasted and carved. Make up plenty of rice and oatmeal, so everyone has meals ready when they rotate off the line, clean and mend weapons. Then everyone needs to get to sleep early except the watch so that we're all rested at midnight when the next group appears. That's when the last one did, so it will most likely be the same tonight.

One or two more days, and it should stop. Then everyone can start rebuilding their lives."

The farmers nodded grimly and got to work on all the tasks that needed to be done before midafternoon if they were going to get any sleep before midnight.

With so many children and not enough beds, they had to set up tents out in the yard with the help of the tarps that Rae had made for the wagon, and a half dozen others.

The beds were hay, and the blankets were shared, grabbed from every spare that could be found in the nearby houses that were safe enough to go to alone. But it was enough to get all the kids somewhere they could sleep.

Most of the adults would be sleeping anywhere they could find, and then fighting all night. Keeping the kids asleep as long as possible was the goal of the evening, as a horde of terrified children would just make everything more difficult, and if they were exhausted it would be even worse.

Overlord Leafa just watched in amusement as everyone ignored her presence and got to work setting up for the night. Normally, everyone was so formal when a Council member was present that they came to her for every little thing and didn't do anything without her approval.

But with Karl barking orders at them and the war cleric marshalling people to balance the workload while the Nature Priestess looked after the kids, it was moving more smoothly than even the Fortress staff managed on most days.

She had been right in her assumption. There was something different about that Karl, and it became more obvious by the minute, but she couldn't see why. He wasn't using any sort of skill, he wasn't even more powerful than the strongest of the Minotaurs here. But when he gave directions, everyone just followed them.

There was something else to it, and she would figure it out soon. Her species was skilled with soul magic, as a form of possessed Treants, and borderline undead. So, Overlord Leafa was confident that if he was directly manipulating their minds, she would have seen it.

It would only be a matter of time until she learned what his secret to natural leadership was.

Chapter 537 Not Huggable

That evening brought a surprise that Karl had never thought to see in this lifetime. Lotus had found a creature that she simply could not cuddle.

Leafa was made of hard and sharp bark, and without Karl's Limited Invulnerability, even touching her caused instant cold damage. The nature cleric learned that the hard way when she shook the Overlord's hand before the other woman could stop her.

The Haint didn't sleep, so she sat up with all the watches, and seemed to take great joy in the fact that she could shake Karl awake.

Normally, she wouldn't be able to touch anyone without a barrier in place, as her very nature drained body heat to a lethal extent. But it was a damage over time effect, so it was never more than ten percent of his health at once.

The Satyrs were already getting ready, and the farmers were waking up, while trying to be quiet to keep the kids who were in the tent behind the house asleep.

"How are we going to arrange this?" Leafa asked quietly.

"Right, we didn't go over that. Last night I was on the side of the house where the kids are, along with the Naga Warriors and a pair of Summoned Lamia Bodyguards, as well as two Golems.

The Satyrs took this side, along with the Cerro and the two old Royal rank soldiers. The two younger Royal Rank Minotaurs took the right side of the house, and the rest of the force filled the final side and sent reinforcements as needed.

We did it that way based on who can see and fight best in the dark. I have thermal vision, so I can see nearly as well at night as in the daylight.

How well do you see at night?" Karl replied.

The tree woman chuckled and patted him on the shoulder, still not over the novelty.

"I can see souls and magic. I don't see light in the first place, so there is no difference between day and night to me."

"Alright. Then you can be wherever you like. As the strongest of us, you will likely be moving around a lot. Well, either that, or your presence will scare them away, and you won't need to do anything at all.

That was how the second half of last night went. We got a little bit Stabby at the start, and then they just stopped coming this way."

One of the Minotaurs standing behind Karl laughed.

"You will understand once he starts fighting. He's got a maul that lets him stack power on it, and he can one hit a Royal Rank Cyclops."

Leafa stared at Karl for a few seconds. "You can one hit kill a target of your own Rank?"

Karl nodded. "The maul was a dungeon reward, and it lets you stack five copies of the same skill on it. I'm already a bit of a beast in combat, but that weapon is just unfair against less intelligent opponents like boars."

"What about against smarter targets?" Leafa asked.

Karl chuckled and took out his maul, then stacked five copies of [Disintegration] on it.

Leafa smiled. "Oh, I get it now. They have to be stupid to not do their very best not to get hit by that. So smarter targets go on the defensive and make you work for it."

"Exactly."

Karl let the skill dissipate and put the weapon away.

"We don't have long to midnight, we should get something to eat and pick a position." He offered.

A Satyr ran over with plates of food for them as soon as Karl mentioned it, and Leafa smiled.

"It looks like the honour guard has been nominated to be the message runners tonight. They are more of a fast-moving scout unit, not a frontline combat unit. With proper weapons, the farmers would do better." She whispered to Karl.

"Yeah, They've all grabbed what they could from my supplies, but it's not high grade military weaponry. That's why we have Tessa, the Red Dragon Cleric, working all night to keep them enchanted. With that sort of help, they can launch Commander Rank attacks. Not with full Commander Rank strength, but at least the weapons will cut through Giant Boar hide."

It wasn't hard to guess that particular moment was exactly midnight. Even if they hadn't sensed the pulse of power, it would have been impossible for Karl to miss the fact that there was a massive Cyclops standing right in front of him.

"I don't suppose that this is a great time to point out that my species isn't well known for our combat abilities, is it?" Leafa joked as she looked up at the Monarch Rank Cyclops, then into the distance, where two dozen Royal Rank Giant Boars had appeared.

"Are they known for discretion?" Karl asked.

"Yes. When we give our word, we keep it." Leafa replied in an offended tone.

"Will you promise not to tell the rest of the Council what you see here tonight? Or at least not the parts that involve me." Karl asked.

"Alright, but I don't see why you're so worried about the Council. I'm only here to make sure that the spawn doesn't overrun this farm."

[Everyone, come collect the pigs for your pantry. I will work with the Lamia pair to deal with the Cyclops.]

The beasts appeared in behind the one - eyed giant as Karl hefted his maul and called the Lamia Bodyguards.

Leafa began to laugh. "You're him. Oh goddess, Morrissa will never let me live this one down if she finds out. You're the champion she has been searching the continent for, only she didn't recognize you because she thinks that you're a human."

That's why nobody figured it out." She gasped as she laughed.

[Five. Four. Three...] Remi began to count.

"No! You're not a troll at all, you have Trollish Regeneration as a skill, along with Limited Invulnerability and something that makes you big." Leafa realized.

[And there it is.]

The cyclops seemed to think that they were plotting against it, and pre-emptively lunged at Leafa, going for the greatest threat first. But the Bodyguards were faster, and its attack was smoothly parried while Karl dropped a [Disintegrate] loaded maul on the Cyclops' back.

"That's one down. Watch the children, I will go help out with the boars and come back for the lecture."

Chapter 538 Night Two Begins

One Royal Rank Cyclops was far from their only issue for the night, and there were more of the giants headed towards them everywhere that Karl looked. It was almost as if their location were a beacon to the attackers, and they were determined that they would take out the threat which had stopped the last wave so effectively.

With dual blades, the Lamia Bodyguards made great partners. They had [Flaming Body] to enhance their weapons, and [Rend] for ranged attacks, so they could just follow Karl's lead as he turned to meet the strongest opponents that he could find. [I think that there are more Monarchs on their way to us right now than there were in the entire spawn last time. That doesn't seem right. The monsters show up in different spots, but the spawn is usually the exact same group every time that it activates.

That's how it was when we fought it at home.] Hawk noted.

[Is it possible that there are more powerful ones still hiding from last night, or that they were at the Fortress, and they got eliminated before we could scout them?] Karl suggested.

[Possible. But they're all coming for us today. Also, tree lady doesn't have to fight, she just needs someone in front of her.]

Karl turned back to see what he was talking about, only to find that Leafa's primary method of attack was to suck the life out of a target directly. It took about five seconds, but she could do it from at least twenty metres away, and the Royal Rank boar that the farmers were fighting simply crumbled to dust after.

That power was a nasty one, and it appeared that there was no easy defence against it except a full barrier. But she was an Overlord, and her power would tear through even Thor's mighty barriers in the first few seconds.

Only the fact that it took time to build up the effect prevented her species from being declared a menace to society. Unless they were known for their friendly demeanour or something similar.

Karl spotted another Monarch Rank Cyclops, and turned to engage it, but Remi was faster.

She was headed that way with her third bodyguard, the one she reserved for her personal protection, and Cara was flying overhead.

That left Rae and her Golems working with Hawk, and the two groups were circling the farm in opposite directions. After an hour or so, they should have finished a full sweep, and the farm would have a breather, like they had the evening before. Karl knew that it was a tried and true plan, used by fortresses everywhere, even if he had only studied base defence strategies for a few weeks while they were on the Hill Giant front.

[Hold up a minute, boss. I think that I have an idea.] Remi insisted.

[Alright, let's see what you have in mind.]

Remi started to charge a spell, while Cara dodged in front of her and spread her wings wide, as if she was aiming to stall her forward motion.

Then the badger tucked into a ball, holding a steel farm tool, and [Chain Lightning] hit her in the backside, propelling the ball of fur and steel into the Monarch Rank Cyclops at Mach Void Badger. The thunder of the spell was nothing compared to the sound of Cara hitting the Cyclops' armour after her [Disintegration] wall broke, and then she was in attack mode, all claws and teeth as she tore the hapless and winded creature to bits.

[At Commander Rank, Chain Lightning does less than ten percent of my health.] Cara announced proudly.

Thor snorted in mental amusement. [You're both idiots, and that broke Cara's Eternal Lightning barrier, so be careful. But I'm happy if you're happy.]

[Oh, there are more. Do you think that we made someone mad last night?] Cara asked as she flapped her wings to gain altitude and pick another target.

Karl turned to face one of the new arrivals, and gave his team a warning.

[Don't get too far from the farm. We don't want anyone sneaking past us while we're busy. There isn't a defensive force on our side other than the pair of Minotaurs who are watching the kids.]

[Stampede!] Cara warned as she sent an image of what she was seeing to Karl.

Her night vision was strange, grey scale, but extremely clear where something was moving.

What she saw was hundreds of boars herded by a group of Royal Rank Cyclops to charge directly down the road in their direction. There was no way that would miss the farm, but there were Monarch Rank threats on both sides that shouldn't be allowed to reach the yard, either.

[You guys keep fighting. I will stall the stampede. Advance apologies for the wasted meat.]

Cara giggled. [Even Hawk is running out of space for more boars. I don't think anyone will mind.]

Karl smiled at the thought his gluttonous bird could ever have enough of a food stockpile, The majority of the boars were on the weak side of Commander, so they shouldn't be too hard to take out, but there were simply so many of them that trying to keep them from running around him would be a nightmare.

[Hellstorm] vortexes spread across the battlefield as Karl used the flaming tornadoes to herd the Giant Boars down the road, keeping them from scattering. Six, then eight, and finally ten were active at the same time, and Karl began to pant with the effort of keeping all those Royal Rank skills active at once.

"Bodyguards, forward. Hold the line while the smaller vortexes stop the stampede." He instructed as he took a knee.

That way, even if the exertion was too much, he would only fall a little, and not all the way down.

Within seconds, there were over a hundred smaller vortexes active and Karl was sitting to meditate in the pasture. That was the only way to keep his mana level high enough to keep the spells active until the fight ended.

The battlefield glowed like a forest fire, and the wind howled with the conflicting air currents from so many vortexes in one spot.

Thunder rumbled as the vortexes merged and split every time a target died, and two serpentine forms danced through the flames, slitting the throats of panicked beasts who saw no way out of the fire.

Most animals were instinctively afraid of fire, and being surrounded by it with the smell of burning flesh was a living hell for the boars, but it was impossible to find a way out. Everywhere they turned, vortexes would appear, herding them to the centre of the road.

But the Cyclops team was smarter. While Karl and the Bodyguards were distracted with the boars, they had escaped the chaos and were moving around to the side of the house, where Cara and Remi were already fighting a Monarch Ranked Cyclops.

[You can drop the vortexes now. There are not many.] One of the Lamia bodyguards Karl had summoned informed him.

The light faded as Karl released the spell, and then he caught the panic of Remi as she was ambushed by a whole group of Royal Rank Cyclops.

[Go to her.] Karl ordered, then dismissed the Lamia bodyguards to summon them next to the Naga Queen.

He was already exhausted fifteen minutes into the fight, but the Bodyguards didn't require any ongoing effort to keep active. So, all that he had to do was handle a dozen scorched and panicked Commander Rank boars.

That should be possible.

Chapter 539 Well Forged

Karl struggled to his feet and felt [Eternal Lightning] slowly refreshing the stamina that he had burned through to keep all those [Hellstorm] spells active.

As long as he didn't go overboard, he should be fine.

But with that in mind, he switched to his two-handed blade, which was already humming with the stolen energy of hundreds of slain enemies.

He didn't need to hold it for the sword to do its work, but he did need to use it for the ability to transfer energy back to him.

The influx of power sent a pleasant tingle through his body, and Karl launched himself into the boars. Many were blinded by the fire, their vulnerable eyes scorched and destroyed.

So, what followed was not the sort of vicious battle that he should expect, but a one-sided slaughter, basically harvesting the boars.

The blade seemed almost happy today, soaked in the blood of the Giant Boars. But when another of the Monarch Rank Cyclops came for him, the blade was nearly thrumming with excitement.

The cyclops held out a hand and a massive blade appeared in its hand. It was beautifully crafted, and covered in some sort of magical runes that Karl was unfamiliar with, but the blade in his hand seemed to take it as a personal challenge, a fight between champions.

The Giant was half again as tall as Karl was, even with his skills enhancing his size, and not as night blind as most of his kin.

His first strike was remarkably swift and deadly accurate, aimed to take Karl's head off.

[Flaming Body] pulsed as the two blades met in a shower of sparks, and the Cyclops twirled his blade with a flick of his wrists, as if the massive weapon weighed nothing.

Three more strikes arrived in the next second, forcing Karl onto the defensive.

[Chain Lightning] forced the Giant back, and it roared in pain, but its attacks didn't slow.

The Cyclops' blade began to glow with blue energy, creating a bubble where the giant could see clearly, and where Karl noticed that nothing cast a shadow.

The light came from every direction, not just from the weapon, rendering Shadow-based surprise attacks useless.

Against Rae, that would be inconvenient. But against the average Rogue, that would be lethal. An inability to hide and launch sneak attacks eliminated nearly all of their most dangerous skills.

But that wasn't Karl's specialty, and after sending a [Disintegrate] at the Giant's face, forcing it to protect its lone eye, he went for the legs, cutting deep into the left knee and nearly toppling the stronger attacker.

"You're a tricky one." The Cyclops grumbled, using the common language.

Then his body surged with power, and a suit of golden armour appeared on his body, replacing the crude leather armour that the giant had been wearing.

Karl backed up a few steps to plan, and the Cyclops smiled.

"The Cyclops Clan are the finest smiths in the world. You won't be making it through my defences." He boasted.

Karl was certain that claim was highly disputed, but with Monarch Rank armour on the Giant, this battle had just gotten exponentially more difficult.

The Cyclops moved forward and the two exchanged blows while the Lamia pair circled to look for an opening.

But his back was covered in a chain link cloak with a hood that was down, but protected his neck.

In short, the Cyclops had turned himself into a walking tank. One whose movement wasn't hindered by the mass of magical metal.

Karl cast [Disintegrate] over his blade, as it was the only Monarch Rank skill he had, and went for the lower stomach joint, where hard plate met chain.

The cyclops was slow to parry, but twisted just enough that Karl's blade skated along the abdominal plate, leaving a deep groove in the golden metal.

Then Karl was forced to roll to the side as a massive blade came for the top of his shoulder, glowing brightly with blue light.

It glanced his left arm and [Eternal Lightning] shattered, while [Flaming Body] was forced aside.

But there wasn't enough power left to harm his armour, and the barriers were recharged in the next second.

Against a direct hit, Karl would not be so lucky.

The Lamia pair hurled [Rend] attacks to distract the Cyclops while Karl charged again, going for the armpit joint, which was always a vulnerable spot for practical reasons.

The Cyclops got its arm down in time, and [Disintegrate] cut another deep score in the plates.

It snarled in anger at the fact that Karl was destroying its hard work, but the Cyclops species had poor peripheral vision and even worse depth perception, so dealing with three attackers at once was forcing it to constantly move to keep everyone in sight.

"Stupid snakes." It mumbled, and Karl smiled behind his visor.

The creature was thinking out loud, and the Lamia pair had already realized it was about to turn on them, so they backed off a few more metres.

Power surged in the Giant's feet, and Karl recognized it as [Earthquake]. So, he jumped to avoid the incoming strike, but that wasn't something that a Lamia could do.

They could launch themselves in a direction with their long body, but it was not easy for them to get entirely off the ground.

One of the two took a series of stone spikes to the belly, which left it punctured and bleeding as it retreated. Trollish Regeneration would fix that in under a minute, but the Cyclops was pleased with the result. Normally, that would be a lethal blow to a Lamia spell caster, and this giant seemed to have the experience to know it, as it completely stopped paying attention to that side for a moment.

Karl attacked, pulling energy from the blade to empower [Disintegration]. He attacked high, aiming for the throat, and the Giant lifted his blade to parry.

Karl went for the knee kick, hoping to strike the blind spot, but the Cyclops shifted its weight and Karl's kick met a golden shin plate.

"I know that trick as well." The Cyclops chortled.

"It's always worth a shot." Karl agreed, and the giant smiled, just visible through the slats of its helmet's visor.

They circled for a few seconds, trading testing blows.

Karl was a Rank lower, but faster, and [Disintegrate] on his blade had no problem parrying the Cyclops' attacks.

After five minutes of testing each other, both sets of armour had taken multiple strikes and were showing their wear, but the Cyclops was beginning to slow, while Karl was maintaining his energy with [Eternal Lightning].

If he couldn't take the enemy out with overwhelming power, he would rely on teamwork to grind it down until they could force it to make a mistake.

Karl twisted a strike to go for the wrist, while the Cyclops went for the base of his blade, sending both blades flying out of their wielder's hands.

Neither hesitated, and [Disintegrate] on Karl's fist was met with the glowing blue gauntlet of the Cyclops. Neither skill faltered, and the backlash of the strikes sent both of both combatants flying backwards.

They rolled to their feet in unison and called their weapons back to them, then summoned them to their hands.

The Cyclops attacked to its left, and sent a Lamia flying. The bodyguard was twisted and broken, clearly dead. But Karl just summoned them again to appear behind the Cyclops, where the enemy wouldn't be able to tell if they were healing or preparing to attack.

Karl plotted his next move for a second, then movement behind him and a surge of power in front of him made him momentarily forget that there was a Cyclops present.

Overlord Leafa appeared at his shoulder, glowing with ethereal blue power, at the same instant that an enormous portal opened behind the Cyclops.

A four-armed Titan stepped through the portal and glared down at the Haint, then sniffed and turned to face the Cyclops.

"You are coming with me." He announced, then grabbed the startled Cyclops and pulled him through the portal, which immediately closed behind them.

"What the hell was that?" Karl asked.

"That was a Cyclops Forge Master. Or if you mean the other one, that was Overlord Chronos Maximus the eighty-fourth. He's a major pain in our ass, and now he's abducted a Forge Master to make weapons for the Mountain Giant armies."

That was not good at all. Who knew how many of the Forge Masters were going to appear in this monster spawn, but the Mountain Giants would likely get a chance to claim another before it was all over. The Golden Dragon Nation was having enough issues with the Mountain Giants without giving them weapons armour at the quality that Cyclops had been using.

Chapter 540 Unusual Allies

"I don't suppose that you saw another one of those last night, did you? The Forge Master, that is." Karl asked Leafa, who was still staring at the location of the now closed portal.

The Haint nodded. "Yes, we killed one near the fortress last night. We also had the Oracle and Trouble Seers search for more, but only one appeared according to their visions.

I was confident that you would win the battle, or I would have come earlier. I never expected that the Giants would find out about the situation so fast and try to abduct him."

Karl nodded. "I think you should likely be more concerned with how they found out about that very specific Cyclops among the entire horde of Cyclops. That seems like a difficult thing for a foreign seer to pick up, but a much easier one for a spy to relay to the enemy."

Leafa tilted her head. "You consider the Giants as an enemy?"

"Doesn't everyone? They're just generally unpleasant to be around. Plus, they keep attacking me."

Their conversation was interrupted by the giants that had come to support the forge master, and Karl's sword was suddenly thirsty for blood again. He used the maul most of the time, and the blade seemed dissatisfied with receiving life force secondhand.

"Are you good on this side? Your Lamia friends should be recovered by now, right? They're not dead, are they?" Leafa asked.

"No, they're alright. I am more concerned about the other beasts. They are circling the farm now, clearing the area so that the defenders get the occasional breather. Some of the fights have been intense, but they're managing." Karl explained.

"Alright, I will return to the farm. My hearing is good, just yell if you need assistance. The farmers take comfort in my presence." With that, she was gone, back to the side of the farm house where the children were beginning to make a fuss as the fear and noise kept them from sleeping.

Karl was fighting well away from the farm, but the noise would carry, and it was coming from every direction. The general spawn density tonight didn't look any worse than it was yesterday, or at least not significantly worse. But there were many more powerful beasts at their location than there were in the previous days.

Rae was in heaven. She had gotten a literal bathtub full of Monarch Rank blood already, drained from Cyclops bodies, and her thoughts were already on how much she was going to enjoy her grooming routine now that she had such wonderful bath products.

The current wave was mostly Commander Rank boars, with high Commander and low Royal Ranked Cyclops leading their packs. That was an easy target for Rae, who could just [Shadow Step] and assassinate the Cyclops, then deal with the boars while Hawk bombarded them in the darkness.

The boars couldn't see or hear him, the only warning that they got was when the skills were coming at them, and by then it was already too late.

It wasn't significantly harder for Remi and Cara. They were leaving the corpses in much less recognizable condition, but the intruders were dying just as quickly.

Only Karl was left without much to do, as his job was to hold a side of the house and not scout out new targets. The two teams of beasts had just passed each other on the far side of the yard, and they were moving a bit further from the farmyard to ensure that they had something to fight. They were still letting a trickle of monsters make it to the defenders stationed at the farm, but they picked out any of them that had a decent power level for themselves.

The dispersion pattern of the monsters was much different today than it was last night. The farmers weren't at home anymore, they had all gathered with neighbours, rightly believing that the incident wasn't likely to be over, even if their houses were still standing.

There were far fewer burning houses tonight, which was a good sign for the farmers, but from his vantage point, Karl couldn't tell if any of the fires were homes that had been guarded.

He was waiting for something to come into range while the two groups of beasts came back to meet each other in front of him.

Karl could feel that there was something unstable with Remi's bodyguards, and through that, the Lamia that he had summoned with the same skill.

[Is your skill advancing?] Karl asked.

Remi wiggled happily, shaking her shoulders in a little dance as she inspected her bodyguard.

[I think so. Your new Skill Master is a good skill.]

Thor grumbled. He had good skills, but he couldn't get them to go over his rank. It might be a potential issue, as even with his changes, the Lightning Cerro suspected that he was reaching the extent of his ability to grow.

He was already stronger than any Lightning Cerro known, as they usually only made it to Commander Rank. But if he couldn't make it to Monarch, he was going to run into trouble very soon.

[Don't worry, buddy. If you get stuck, we will use Evolution on you, and then find a new way to keep you going the next time that you reach your limits.] Karl assured him.

Thor had a point. He had reached equilibrium with his pool full of Holy Stones. It was comfortable, but it wasn't really helping him advance anymore, and he wasn't advancing on his own.

They would have to find something to help him grow if he was even going to make it to peak Royal Rank. Constant practice and dedication had taken him this far, way beyond his species' limits. But there were limits.

Remi, on the other hand, had more potential. She had not been born as a low Awakened Rank being, but a Commander. As the process completed, the armour on the Naga Warriors turned to a deep black that seemed to absorb light around them, and their size increased by a third, making even the largest of Minotaur Men look mediocre.

The Lamia, on the other hand, gained light red edges on their bone white scales, and the red dresses that they wore gained silver embroidery.

Rae glared at them in annoyance. If anyone was going to be upgrading their summoned creatures, it should have been her Golems. Spiders were clearly superior to Naga, they should be easier to upgrade.

Karl could hear the chaos behind them as the Naga Warriors suddenly grew in size while fighting a small group of boars, but most of the Minotaurs were taking it as a skill they used, as they didn't know the Naga were a summoned creature.

Now, they were at the same level of advantage that they had when Rae had Royal Rank Golems at Commander Rank. With defenders a Rank above them, Karl wouldn't have to worry much about facing stronger opponents for a while, and the skill's advancement was a strong sign that Remi would be able to follow them once the spaces were maximized again.

The two teams of beasts continued on their routes, but Karl noticed that Remi's side was much more smug, while Hawk and Rae were working double time, trying to grind hard enough to force an advancement.