

Beast Master 591

Chapter 591 Back Home

Rae woke Karl as they approached the city across the lake just before dawn.

[I think that we're going to land soon. We talked about it while you were asleep, and we want to come out and be welcomed with you.]

Karl chuckled. [I don't see a reason why not, as long as there is space.]

Rae seemed excessively happy with that answer, and Karl wondered what she had in mind and how badly it was going to terrify the locals.

Fortunately for Rae's plan, someone had notified the media that they were coming, and there were dozens of press members, bleary-eyed politicians who had been dragged out of bed before the crack of dawn and corporate reps waiting in a large field for their arrival.

[Oh, that will be perfect.] Rae cheered.

Karl refreshed his armour and got a new version in black with a Darklight Host Tabard under a blued steel chest plate. It was almost knightly, if you ignored the part where everything but the chest was leather and chitin or cloth. He skipped on the helmet, and waited as the helicopter approached the ground. Nobody else had changed, so Dana was in her cargo pants and hoodie with the armour underneath, while Ophelia had her heavy plate armour on. The Berserker was in her human form, though. That was a change, and it took Karl a minute to remember that she was normally a human and not a Werebear. She had spent so much time in her transformed disguise that everyone had gotten used to her being twice the size of the other women, and not just slightly taller than Tessa.

Even Karl had deactivated most of his skills for the flight, and the group only had [Eternal Lightning] active on them.

"Ready to face the press?" Colonel Valerie asked.

"I feel so short." Karl replied with a smile.

Ophelia laughed. "You feel short? I'm freezing. How did I ever survive winter without fur?"

Colonel Valerie chuckled, though her expression didn't change from its usual resting frown of general disapproval. "Good thing we're sending you all for a combat mission check after this. You need a few days to acclimatize to civilized life again.

But we will do this the standard way. As the host, I will exit first, then you follow by rank. How you sort that is on you."

There was a fair bit of space in the cargo hold of the helicopter, so everyone else arranged themselves in a double file line. Dana and Ophelia behind Karl, with the clerics at the back.

Then Rae came out in human form to stand between the mage and berserker, while Remi transformed back into Spirit Snake form to hang herself around Karl's shoulders for the best view.

Finally, A shining silver and gold knight with a horned helmet on appeared between Tessa and Lotus.

"Thor? Is that Thor in human form? Your armour is beautiful." Tessa greeted him.

Thor nodded and gave her a shoulder bump that made the cleric laugh. He always did that as a greeting, but she had been trying to get him to speak.

Hawk's voice in humanoid form was strange, while Rae's was beautiful and haunting. So, she wondered what Thor would sound like.

"We will escort the ladies out, and then we will join you." Thor informed Karl in a deep masculine voice that closely matched his mental voice.

Out of everyone, he was apparently best at the transformation.

Tessa poked him. "It is customary to take your helmet off to meet people."

"But my horns are attached to it in this form." Thor complained, suddenly sounding much younger.

Tessa smiled and took the helmet off, revealing a handsome young man with long green hair, long ears and shining golden eyes.

He almost looked like an Elf, but twice the size that any Elven man should be. Thor was nearly as tall as Rae was, but burly to the point that he could nearly block both Tessa and Lotus from view by standing in front of them.

Lotus ran a hand over his armour. "We need to get Thor a shield. When we have time, we should take him to the armoury with Karl's credit. He is basically a Paladin, right? A Holy warrior. He can do all the Paladin things."

"We will work on it." Karl agreed.

The helicopter touched down, and Colonel Valerie stepped out as soon as the back ramp was open.

Karl didn't know why these things had side doors. Nobody ever used them.

Karl led the way out while Remi checked out the crowd of people in front of them, and Hawk eagerly awaited his opportunity to make a grand entrance. Unlike Rae and Thor, he didn't intend to transform into a human. Cara didn't either, so they would both show up later, once the first impression was made.

Karl took his first step onto the grass and realized that their grand plan had completely confused the crowd. They had no idea who Rae and Thor were, and wondered what Nation they were visiting from, as both were clearly inhuman.

If they didn't know what nation they came from, they didn't know all the proper formal courtesies, or how to properly address them as a Royal and a Monarch.

Colonel Valerie cleared her throat. "Introducing the Beast Master Monarch, Karl. With him are the Princesses Remi, Ophelia, and Dana with the Lady Rae Bloodbath. Then we have the Royal High Priestesses Lotus and Tessa, with King Thor of the Cerro."

[Lady Rae Bloodbath, I like it. Soon, I will be Queen Rae Bloodbath, and it will be glorious. But I need to ask a favour first. I've got all these great flavours of bath products, but do you suppose that I could have just a bit of Karl? Maybe a shampoo? That new skill smells wonderful.]

Karl mentally chuckled at her request. [I will see what I can do. With my regeneration, I'm sure I can spare you some blood.]

Karl led the group to a spot three metres in front of the gathered dignitaries, and Rae stepped back from her spot between Ophelia and Dana. She joined Thor at the back of the group just as the cameras were getting set up, and the assistants were ushering the others into position.

[Now is good.] Hawk decided, then appeared behind the group in all his glory, with his wings spread over the team.

Cara came out to stand beside Karl, as she was too short to be seen over the group, while Thor and Rae returned to their original forms. Remi remained around Karl's neck, satisfied that she would be prominent in all the photos without being large.

Screaming filled the air, and nearly half of the assembled civilians either fainted or ran away, leaving Hawk and Rae congratulating each other on their brilliant plan, and Cara laughing hysterically, rolling on the ground and pointing at the terrified humans.

"Karl! Dammit, did you have to do that? We have a schedule to keep." A deep voice boomed in the distance.

"Overlord Niall! I didn't see you back there." Karl shouted back, impressed at the man's stealth skills. It wasn't easy to hide an aura that powerful from him, especially now that he had Soul Sight.

The Rogue smiled behind his mask as he stepped into sight, his black Holy Inquisition uniform standing out among the business suits of the dignitaries. His presence brought most of them to their senses, but

Karl noticed that one camera operator was dutifully snapping photos, oblivious to the chaos all around him. He was so focused on getting the perfect shot that Karl was certain he hadn't even registered the fact that those were real Magical Beasts in front of him.

Chapter 592 Pressed Conference

The dignitaries began to return to their spots now that the Overlord from the Inquisition was in sight, while Colonel Valerie glared at Karl, and the ladies did their best not to laugh along with Cara, who was slowly regaining her composure.

"If you've finished having your fun..." Valerie began.

"Of course, of course. Group photos. How are we arranging this? Meet and greet style, or with a large group pose?" Karl agreed.

Overlord Niall chuckled. "Can you ask your friends to stay near their current position, and we can set up a photo shoot? There are mobile bleachers to lift your team up for the photo."

Rae dipped her head, while Cara wandered through the crowd to examine the Rogue.

He stopped to look down at the Void Badger, who flapped her wings to help balance on her hind legs, which put her closer to his height, though still less than shoulder-high.

"Well hello there." Niall greeted her.

Cara licked him.

Niall laughed as he wiped drool off his face. "Now I am wondering if you simply wanted to taste test Overlord Rank human, or if that was some sort of greeting among Winged Void Badgers."

Cara balanced on her hind legs and made a noncommittal gesture.

"Yeah, that's what I thought. A bit of both. But we should get into position for the photos."

Cara dropped back to all four feet and rushed over to stand on top of Thor, so she could see over the gathering. The dignitaries were standing in two rows, short then tall, while a long folding bench had been placed for Karl's team, with the beasts standing behind them.

It would be a brilliant photo, and Cara wanted a copy as soon as possible.

The photographers got to work, focusing on various people, then Karl's team was cycled through the back rank so that they could get close up shots with all the dignitaries.

Karl was actually surprised how restrained Rae and Cara were being. He thought that the pair would prank someone, but they were behaving fairly well.

Except that point when Cara stole someone's hairpiece and had to be bribed to give it back.

It did look good on her, though.

"Monarch, might we have just a few minutes of your time? We are with the DuBois banking conglomerate." A short man in his fifties began.

"I'm very sorry, Sir. I am not currently booking any collaborative efforts or accepting employment offers. But if your offer is not about that, please, continue."

The banker bowed politely. "I understand, Sir. You have been on an extended assignment and require time to decompress. I will check with you again in the future."

There were a few others who had the same idea, but as Karl was less approachable as a Monarch, they were much more interested in going after the two new Royals who might be much more amenable to their ideas.

Monarchs normally already had solid plans, and while Karl was young, it was generally assumed that it would be the same for him. There were rumours that he was working with the Roth Savings and Loan

company on a major property deal, but such a project normally took a year or two before the details were finalized.

Plus, it was likely to involve an exclusivity clause so that the Elite didn't end up as the face of a competing company or project in the meantime.

The only ones who were moving away from him were the ones who were only here as business representatives. Most of them were here to make friends with powerful Elites, or as Government or Military representatives.

Karl found a familiar face in the crowd and went over to say hello.

"Director Jones, of Military Finance, wasn't it?" He asked.

"You have an impeccable memory, Your Majesty." The bureaucrat replied.

"The whole Your Majesty thing is a bit excessive." Karl laughed.

"Certainly, Lord Karl. I heard that you were on quite the adventure and missed most of the chaos of recent days."

"Indeed. But not all of it, I got to see some in person while I was out of the country. But I'm more interested in your job. How is the finance and supply situation with all of the additional anomalies and monster spawns." Karl asked.

"How did you know that the spawn rate was up? We hadn't made that public yet."

"I know a little about how it started and why. So it's only natural that it would increase here as well. At least we haven't been inundated with new Dungeons.

If that had been the case, we would have been in much more trouble than even Newbon with their Commander Rank Dungeons and newfound influx of monster spawns.

I won't bore you with all the details, but it was quite the shock to them."

Bored wouldn't be the word that the Director would choose, but he was an accountant, not an Elite or any sort of soldier.

Karl caught a blur of motion in his peripheral vision just before he felt something bounce off his armour. It hadn't made it past [Eternal Lightning] but it was clearly an attack, and Karl turned to see who would be so brave.

The situation almost looked calm and normal, but Soul Sight revealed Overlord Niall dragging someone out of the crowd while invisible.

On the ground, Karl found a small metal needle that radiated magic. That must have been the projectile weapon, so he picked it up and put it in Remi's space, wrapped in a large leaf, so she didn't get poked accidentally.

As soon as he stopped focusing on it, the needle disappeared, marking it as the creation of a skill, not an enchanted object. [Oh, someone is brave. Do you think that there are more of them?] Rae asked in his mind as she realized what had happened.

[Where there is one, there are three. Well, that is about Earth Mice in the house, but I think it works for other sorts of vermin as well.]

[How do we know which ones are which? Can I just kill them all for safety?]

[No, some of them are important and useful. The Inquisitor should take care of the situation, but don't let any sketchy people near the ladies.]

It took all of three seconds for Cara to take that literally.

A rather sleazy looking businessman was getting too handsy with Ophelia for her liking, and the Void Badger grabbed him by the legs, spun him in a full circle, then body slammed him.

The whoosh of air leaving the man's body, then the pained wheeze, had a few people laughing discretely behind their hands, but the ones who hadn't seen the start were concerned that Cara had gone feral.

But the way that she was rubbing his face in the dirt made it clear after a few seconds that this was personal.

"Cara, you can let him up. I think he will promise to keep his hands to himself."

Cara got off him, then wandered over and took something from a nearby woman's purse.

The wealthy executive was shocked at the fact she had just been so casually mugged by a Royal Rank beast, but Cara gave back the purse and only kept one small item in her mouth.

"What have you got there?" Ophelia asked.

"It's ... a barbecue sauce package? No, you can't barbecue him. I don't think that he would even taste good." Ophelia laughed.

That was the last straw for the humiliated pervert. He bolted out of the meeting and began running for the questionable safety of the nearby buildings.

Chapter 593 Misunderstood Beasts

The event lightened the mood of the meeting, though some were highly concerned about the actual safety of having the beasts around. After all, Cara had threatened to eat someone, and even Thor was large enough to accidentally crush someone to death.

Sure, he had Elites loving on him and rubbing his scales, but a casual collision with him would be like walking in front of a car.

Overlord Niall returned after a few minutes of socialization, smelling faintly of human blood, and motioned for Karl to join him.

Karl followed him to the edge of the green space and into one of the signature marble buildings that were all over the Capital, and realized that this one was actually familiar. It was identical to the Inquisition holding building in design, but not in interior decoration. It might serve the same purpose, but the upper level looked more like the lobby of an upscale hotel.

"Monarch, if you don't mind a short chat." Niall began, with a gesture to a door labelled [Conference Room C].

Karl followed him in and felt a spell activate as the door closed. Then Niall barred it with a steel beam, which made Karl laugh. The door was made of solid oak, but he could kick it clear across the lobby, so the bar wasn't for either of them, just to keep nosy people out.

"First off, welcome back. It's good to see you again, and quite the shock to see how you have advanced. But more pressing is not the known fact that you are a savant, but the fact that your entire group are now Royals. You have no idea how much of a stir it caused among the leadership when the Archbishop returned and casually informed everyone that your group were all now Royals. Of course, he's so busy with other duties that he was most likely never informed that they were all Ascended a year ago. But for those of us with more time to be familiar with such things, it has raised plenty of questions. If there is some sort of technique to speed progression to that level, it is of national security level critical importance that we know. Your misadventures have raised more Royal Rank Elites this year than the rest of the nation, and nobody understands why."

Karl took a moment to fully appreciate what the Inquisition's top Assassin was saying. Overlord Niall had a point. There were so few Royals that they would normally all know each other. He was the outlier, as he didn't really know anyone, and he was never around others. But now he had blown past that milestone and advanced to Monarch Rank, while the rest of his group was also progressing insanely quickly.

There was nothing in his skills that would explain that, and other than Dana, the others had been growing at a perfectly normal rate before they met with him. Could it be that he had some hidden skill to help his group grow? He could for his beasts, but that was linked to their space. It didn't really apply to the rest of the group members.

"I think that it is more closely related to luck and the favour of the gods than any level of skill that I possess. The number of exceptional opportunities that we have been encountering is higher than most

other Elites could claim in years of training. We have been in two separate opening events for Commander Rank dungeons and what might be a Demigod level trial in the last season alone."

Niall shook his head. "The trials alone don't explain it, unless the last one actually forced the advancement. But as I understand the reports, you were already exhibiting well beyond Royal Rank firepower before your Rank had officially advanced, according to the system."

Karl thought about it for a few minutes in silence, then decided to share a small tidbit about his powers with the Inquisitor.

"I have a skill called [Skill Master] and I believe that it takes effect on my entire group, and not just the beasts I am bonded with. It lets them learn new skills more easily and improve the ones that they have. I suspect that the improvement in their skills might actually be driving their progress.

Most people advance as their skills improve, right? Well, with Skill Master, the skills can be advanced to a Rank over the user. It's never happened to another group member that I know of, but it does work for the beasts. I have had skills at Monarch Rank for a while now, and that is a large part of my excess combat ability." Niall took a chair off the stack by the wall and sat down at the large boardroom table.

"What you're telling me is that there is a possibility that you will have an Overlord Ranked skill while you are still a Monarch?" He asked.

"Not a possibility, an almost certainty. How far through my progression will I manage it is the real question. It might be one of the beasts, and it may or may not be shared with me, but it will happen." Karl agreed, taking a seat across from the Overlord.

Niall took a small object from his storage bag, or perhaps his inventory. Karl couldn't tell how active the man's system was.

"Squeeze that for me. I want to test your raw physical strength." He instructed.

Karl shrugged and picked up the resistance scale. It had a D shaped hand grip on one side and a scale needle on the other, so Karl just squeezed it and watched the needle smoothly spin in circles, three times around before the lever bottomed out.

Niall chuckled. "Well, that defeats the purpose. But it is an answer in its own way. Your strength isn't on the human scale anymore, even for warrior classes.

Do you think that there is a way you could help a few of our promising recruits advance as well?

What I was thinking was to send them as apprentices to your group."

"Did they do something to upset you? Sending children to accompany a group like mine is basically a death sentence. Heck, even our protection couldn't hold up when Overlord Leafa and the Emperor got into an argument over her vacation plans." Karl replied.

Niall stared at him.

"Come again? I know all those words, but I'm not sure that I understood what you were saying."

"I'm sure the reports will make it back to you soon. The Overlord decided that she was overworked and decided to go on an unapproved vacation. It led to an exchange of blows with the Emperor of Newbon. Neither was seriously injured, but there was a lot of property damage." Karl explained.

"That did not make it back to our reports, but I believe that I know the incident you mean. It simply wasn't explained the same way, and was passed off as an anomaly related natural disaster.

It is actually less concerning to know that it was just a dispute between powerhouses. At least that way, it's unlikely to happen again."

Karl wasn't sure he would go that far. Eventually Leafa would break free again, but trying to explain the whole situation would just lead to a never-ending set of questions he didn't know the answers to, and probably someone wanting to study his weapons.

He was quite fond of his weapons.

Chapter 594 Niall Needs To Know

Overlord Niall took out a notepad and placed it between them.

"Now we can move on to the reason I actually called you in here. I interviewed the failed assassin, and it appears that you have made the growing threat list of at least one foreign nation. The toxin from the spell scroll should have been potent enough to kill a Royal Rank Elite if it had landed.

If he hadn't missed, we would have had only seconds to prevent your death." Niall explained.

"He didn't actually miss. Thor keeps Eternal Lightning, his defensive barrier skill, active on the whole group at all times. He doesn't like any of us being in danger. So, the attack hit a Monarch Rank barrier skill and simply fell to the ground. I thought it was a poisoned needle, and tried to collect it, but it vanished after a few seconds." "Do you have any idea what group might be after your life?" Niall asked.

"I didn't get their names, but a human nation that uses Spellblades with black robes and red armour would be my first guess. They seemed a bit upset that we rejected their attempt to force their way into the trial that the Archbishop met me at. Of course, it could be the Giants. They have more than enough reasons to want me dead, especially after Lord Nacht trolled them during that same event. It's probably not the Divine Beasts or the mages from Staptonbia. We all had a rather cordial relationship as of our last meeting, and the mages of Staptonbia were very pleased with our arrangement and the fact that we didn't argue with their price.

The potions that they provided were an excellent base for an upgraded potion using resources that we obtained from the monster spawns.

One of them gave High Priestess Lotus a [Tree of Life] healing form, an Epic Grade spell, and the other allowed Thor to evolve into his current Divine Thunder Cerro form."

"Thor has Thunder abilities?" Niall asked.

"Only one stomp ability. But he has a couple of Lightning-based skills, so it fits with the general theme of his progress."

Karl thought about his new skills, and realized that while he could make skill books and use [Skill Master] to help others learn skills, he would soon be a great asset to Elites in general, simply because he could teach them random skills.

Maybe he should try to get the Overlord to help him learn a few more skills before he left the Capital again.

"Back on topic, we are concerned about the risk that someone is sending assassins after you, but the leadership is also determined to see if your luck will extend to a larger team.

Obviously, they're not going to be able to spare an entire team of Royals to follow you around when you've already got four of them on contract.

I will look into the issue of the assassination attempts personally while your team is being debriefed and assessed after your deployment, then the apprentices will be sent to you."

Karl drummed his fingers on the table as he considered ways to make that work.

"Can you send us Acolytes? You know, the ones who are going to go for the Divine Injection at the end of the school year? I can test them personally for compatibility, and then we can take five of them with us to train." He suggested.

"You want Common Rank kids who are still in middle school?" Niall repeated, ensuring he hadn't heard it wrong.

"Maybe from the Orphanages. That way there won't be a fuss if things go wrong during training. Plus, I don't want some politician's snobby brat. I'd end up feeding them to Remi the first week."

"You wouldn't." Niall countered, but Karl could see that he wasn't convinced. Niall was a good judge of character, so he shouldn't take long to determine that Karl wasn't joking.

"Fine, maybe you would. I will see what we can find for your team. How long do you think that it will take to test them?" He added.

"We should be able to sort them in a day or two. I have a trick for it now. The Cleric classes might be a bit harder, but the acolytes for me, Dana and Ophelia should be easier. I can probably verify their compatibility right away."

Niall made a note for himself, then gave Karl an expectant look.

"What can you tell me about what happened to you and Lord Nacht in the trial? The black dragon was... somewhat less than forthcoming with details."

Karl chuckled. "I can see how that would happen. He's not the greatest fan of humans in general."

"But he seems to be fond of you."

"I'm possibly the least humanish human that you will ever meet, though. But I can tell you that there was an evolutionary resource in the version of the trial that we got. It gave me a special constitution, and that was a major factor in being able to reach Monarch Rank.

His details are his own, and as much as I like to prank people, I'm not going to give out the private details of a Totem Rank black dragon." Karl explained carefully.

"Understandable. Some Inquisitors would take that personally, but the Totems are said to be able to sense betrayal, and I would rather that he didn't come barging in here."

Karl chuckled. "We would likely be gone before he made it here."

Overlord Niall shook his head. "He's still at the Cathedral. If he sensed betrayal, he could fly here in under a minute."

But the Inquisitor had asked anyhow, Karl noted.

"What are you going to tell the debriefing officers about your time abroad? Have you discussed it with the others?" Niall asked instead of continuing his questions about the trial.

"Not yet. I think everyone understands what part shouldn't be spoken out loud. But most of the journey was eventful in one way or another, so there will be plenty to give them without looking like we're stonewalling the investigation.

Besides, the Archbishop knows most of it already, and that's the important part. Whether anyone else needs to know is up to him."

Chapter 595 Flash Photos Are Evil

Overlord Niall made a few notes and then put the notepad away.

"Alright, I will arrange for proper Acolytes to join your team while they are in the city. I am looking forward to great results from you, and I will try to keep the annoyances away while you're all settling back into the civilized life for a bit.

Is there anything else that you're going to need right away, other than somewhere to stay? That has already been arranged, of course. The Archbishop wants your team close, so he has arranged rooms at the Cathedral."

Karl laughed. "It's always the Cathedral when we come to the Capital. If I was there any more often, I would end up with my own room."

"That can likely be arranged. There is a separate building for high-ranking Elites, next to the Inquisition dorms. You're a Monarch now, so it wouldn't be unusual for you to rent a room there to always have a place to stay in the Capital. Even Johann and Ahmad have rooms there, though they also have houses nearby." Niall explained.

"Oh, that does sound like a good plan. I will have to find out the costs and arrange something. The dorms in the Cathedral aren't terrible, but the lights out policy is a bit strict."

The Rogue laughed at Karl's complaints. Indeed, the Cathedral did shut down very early so that the pious could pray in silence for a few hours before sleeping. But if you weren't on a pilgrimage, it was an extremely early bedtime.

"Why don't I call them over now? There should be someone on duty."

Karl nodded, and Niall went to the phone on the wall to make a call, requesting an agent for the Ranking Elite dorm, as well as accommodation for two new Royal High Priestesses, who would be confirmed later in the day and the two visiting Royal Rank Elites.

Lotus and Tessa would get permanent rooms here by default, as well as wherever they were assigned when they were no longer travelling with Karl. Karl suspected that nobody was in too big of a hurry to make them quit that mission, as they had gained so much already, but eventually, they would all want some downtime with no violence.

[No violence?] Rae asked in Karl's mind.

[Minimal violence.] He amended.

[Still sounds boring. Can we leave yet? These people are annoying.]

[Return to your space whenever you want. I will make excuses for you when I'm done here.]

That was all the motivation that they needed, and everyone but Cara was back in their space within seconds. Even Thor.

That part was surprising, but the Cerro looked harassed and ready for a nap.

[You alright buddy?] Karl asked.

[Flash photography is evil.] Thor replied as he sunk his head into the pond lined with Holy Stones.

That explained a lot. Thor loved people, but like all beasts, his eyes were sensitive, and if they had been taking constant photos in his direction with the flash on, he would have a terrible headache by now.

The real question was what Cara was up to, and why was Karl so certain that it involved Lotus.

But he didn't have long to consider what sort of chaos those two might be causing. The representative from housing had already arrived, possibly from outside with the welcoming committee.

"Monarch. It is an honour to meet you. I am informed that you would be interested in renting a unit at the Ranking Elite apartments." The slim man greeted Karl, before adjusting his poorly fit budget suit and taking a seat to spread out an array of diagrams and pictures.

"We have various options starting with infrequent visitor residences at under one hundred square metres, or if you are to be stationed here in the Capital, we do have some options in the five hundred square metre range."

Karl did his best to hide his dismay at the opulence visible in the photos of the units. Even the smallest of them was far larger than the house he had grown up in, and at five hundred square metres, the largest would require cleaning staff even if he had his whole team staying there.

Though, if the beasts were in human form, they would take up a lot of space, so a floor plan with more common area might be best.

Overlord Niall gestured at one of the plans. "I think that this one might be a suitable option. There are three bedrooms, including the master bedroom, but there is a large sitting room.

It's normally for the sort of Elite who has a lot of informal business meetings at home, but with your friends around all the time, it might be a good choice."

The agent nodded. "Yes, this one is suitable for task force teams when they are in the Capital, and it has easy access to the rooftop helipad, should you be on rapid response duty. But fear not, the soundproofing is excellent, and the noise won't unduly disturb you."

Karl chuckled. "I can hear your heart beat and the shifting of your coat against your shirt. It takes much more than some basic soundproofing for me to miss a helicopter landing. But I am certain that it doesn't take much to get used to those interruptions, and I don't intend to be in the Capital the majority of the time."

"Oh, are you working on something?" The agent asked.

"I am in the middle of a deal with Roth Savings and Loan to build a facility for magical beasts that can be raised as assistants to the Elites." Karl explained.

"Fascinating. I know that many of the Ranger classes struggle to find just the right partner. However, as I am not one myself, I am not privy to all the details." "That's fine. It's not really relevant to this deal anyhow."

[Oh, get the one with the huge bathroom with the hot tub. I want that one.] Remi insisted.

[Yes, a gigantic tub is what we need.] Rae agreed.

Karl gestured to the floor plan. "Do you have an option with a large common area, and the oversized bath area with the hot tub?"

"I have this one. It's slightly smaller overall, but still has three sleeping rooms, a large common room and the spa. However, it lacks a formal dining room, and instead only has a smaller table and dining counter in the kitchen."

[Hot tub!] Rae cheered.

"Can we go see the unit?" Karl asked.

"Of course, Sir. However, it is customary to put down a deposit first, as a show of sincerity, as the units are rather expensive."

Karl nodded. "How much?"

"The deposit amount is fifty thousand credits, which will be deducted from the two hundred and forty thousand credit total annual fee for the unit, should you choose it."

"Give him shiny rocks. I got a whole bunch of useless ones from the grave." Remi suggested.

"Can you do conversions? I have no idea how many actual credits I have." Karl asked.

"I can bring an appraiser from the supply department."

"Wonderful, I can wait. Also, if they can send someone for the rest of my people, it would make life easier. I'm sure they are wondering where I went by now."

Chapter 596 Apartment

The ladies came in with the appraiser, who was an Ascended Rank Elite with a crafting specialty class.

[Remi, did you pick useless stones?] Karl asked.

[Yeah, and give him some of this grass I picked. There is too much of it here, and it's in the way.]

The appraiser bowed a full ninety degrees, while Overlord Niall chuckled at the show of deference, or more likely at Karl's discomfort around it.

"Sir, I am told that you require a conversion for some items you have obtained?"

Karl set the fistful of delicately cut gemstones and the large bundle of magical grass on the table side by side. "This should be enough, I think. If you can convert that to credits for me, I would like to rent an apartment and maintain a balance in my account for incidentals."

The man just stared at the pile, while Overlord Niall picked up one of the gems, a faintly magical garnet, low Ascended Rank by Karl's estimation.

"You know, a Fire Garnet of this quality and cut is worth a year's rent. You didn't need to make the man go through so much work." The Overlord was staring at the gem with what looked like lust, and examining it with the practised movements of a jeweller.

Or perhaps a jewel thief. Many Rogue Class Elites had a questionable past.

Karl shrugged. "I never exchange anything, I didn't know. But if that's the case, you can keep that one for your assistance, and we can convert these two for credits, plus the pile of herbs."

The appraiser looked at the pile of herbs with great concern. "Are you certain that you wish to trade all of this?"

[Make them go away. Those are the trash stalks that I pruned so much better ones would grow, or to clear space.] Remi agreed.

"Yes. Those are the lower grade castoffs that I don't need anymore."

The man seemed to freeze, and began breathing too fast for a few seconds before Lotus cast something on him.

"Panic attack, he should be alright with a calming spell on him." She explained.

"Sir, those stalks are all Commander Rank, and they're worth nearly twenty thousand credits each." The appraiser stammered.

"Do you regret picking the gem now?" Karl mock whispered to Overlord Niall.

"Not at all. I don't need Spirit Grass for anything. But magic type classes like the appraiser go all googly over it. You should see if you can get some potions made with the portion you kept. Your girlfriend would benefit from them."

Karl stared at the grass with his system interface up. [Moderate quality feed for Thor]

[Mild Intoxicant for Hawk]

[Combines with Sage Spirit Herb to make minor Soul Strengthening potions for Hawk]

That last line was a new one, but there were no other listed uses with Identify, so it was no real use to his beasts.

"Good idea. I will look into that later. I have the ingredients needed, I believe."

The appraiser carefully examined every stalk and made notes, while the group milled about and Lotus tried to teach Cara how to play Cat's Cradle with a piece of string.

When he got to the last of the stalks, Karl stopped him, realizing that the total was an astronomical sum.

"That one is for you. A gratuity for your prompt service."

The appraiser stared lovingly at the long piece of grass. "Are you certain, Sir?"

"Of course. There are how many of them in that pile? One is no loss. The conversion of those plus two stones should be more than enough for my immediate needs."

Tessa shook her head in dismay. "You know, I tend to forget that while your stockpile of random stuff is useful in the field, you're actually insanely wealthy if you convert it to money."

Karl laughed. "Thor eats that grass as a snack."

The appraiser and the real estate agent winced in pain at the cost of letting a giant beast eat such a valuable resource.

"The total will be transferred to your account, and these two garnets will be sufficient to cover a year's rent on your chosen unit. Thank you for your patronage, and the Cathedral Resource Warehouse appreciates your generosity."

Overlord Niall watched the appraiser call for security as he loaded the grass into a secure cargo box on a dolly and hand the real estate agent a card on his way out.

"Now, should we go see that unit? As long as there is nothing wrong with it, I would like to get settled in. I have a long day of debriefings tomorrow." Karl suggested.

"You have debriefings tonight as well. But tomorrow will be even busier, so we should get ahead of the others." Niall agreed.

Karl sighed and gestured for everyone to follow them out of the room.

The apartment building was actually a high-rise tower that Karl had thought was part of the corporate district. Fifty stories tall and as large as a city block, there was certainly plenty of room for the apartments. Lotus spun in a happy circle as she saw where they were going. "This is perfect. I can just invade your space when the dorms at the Cathedral get too boring."

The housing agent gave Karl a look that said, 'should I show you a unit with a spare room for High Priestesses?' But Karl motioned for him to keep walking.

"I am sure that we can make space. Or we can look at other units if there might be a similar unit that keeps the large hot tub. That part is essential." Karl assured her, with a nod to the realtor to let him know the response was for him as well.

Dana winked at him and Karl smiled. Rae and Thor weren't the only ones looking forward to getting time to soak.

The elevator took them to the tenth floor, and a pristine white walled lobby area with thick red carpets. There was a gold and crystal chandelier hanging from the ceiling, and Tessa whistled in appreciation of the luxury.

Red Dragon clerics spent most of their time in Orphanages or combat training facilities before they graduated, and often after as well. They didn't see much luxury.

"There is a secure training facility on basement level two. It's not actually under the building, but under the courtyard and park. It was reinforced by the Archbishop and a group of Overlord Rank mages, so there is no danger that it will be damaged as long as you pay the energy cost to enter.

There is a public pool on the second floor, and a gym on the basement floor one. But the residential floors all look similar, with different layouts based on apartment sizes. There are six units on this floor, only two of which are currently occupied."

Karl decided he didn't want to think too hard about why there would be so many empty units in the building. Sure, it was expensive, but all the more powerful Elites were regularly required to be in the Capital for one reason or another, so it made sense for them to get an apartment somewhere in the city.

It wasn't like they couldn't afford it. If Karl had checked his balance before asking for a conversion of resources, he likely would have had enough for the rent just off his Elite payments, and those would be going up now that he was a Monarch.

Chapter 597 Luxurious Living

The agent opened the door and Karl stepped inside the apartment, which was decorated in what he understood to be the latest modern style, all white and stainless steel with hardwood floors in a light grey.

Upon seeing the luxury, Rae came out in humanoid form and immediately wandered away before the sales pitch could even begin. The important parts of the tour were the bath and making sure that nothing here could rival her hammocks for comfort.

"Where did she come from?" The property agent asked, confused by the new arrival.

"She's sneaky. Don't worry about it. Now, it looks like this place is fully outfitted, I see cups hanging from the racks." Karl replied.

"Yes, a full set of kitchenware is included, as well as daily maid service, so there is no need to do your own cleaning. If you are hosting parties or don't wish to cook for yourself, there is a restaurant on the main floor exclusively for residents and their guests. They can prepare your meals to be delivered on request or on schedule."

Dana looked impressed. "So, a top professional chef on call at all times for dinners? Now this is swanky."

Overlord Niall chuckled. "Of course. Elite is more than just a title saying that you've got magical powers. There is another building nearby for Royals, if you would like to take a look. Three of them, technically, as there are more Royal Rank Elites than there are Monarchs and Overlords."

"Would you like to view one?" The agent asked hopefully.

Dana shook her head. "No, this one looks good, thanks."

The agent blinked once as he realized the situation, then continued the tour, showing them around the kitchen, the balcony with sun loungers for summer use, then the huge living room with seating for at least a dozen.

"This is nice. There is room for everyone at the same time. But where did Rae go?" Lotus asked, unable to find the spider.

Normally, losing a Bloodbath Spider in the house would be a cause for concern, but Karl could sense that she had already finished exploring the other rooms and had gone to the kitchen to see what the strange smell was. It turned out to be a fully stocked spice rack, and she was collecting tiny samples for Hawk and Remi so they could add variety to their cooking.

"She's in the kitchen. Finish the tour and you can play with the Rae."

[The ceilings are high. I can hang hammocks over the spare beds. Lots of room for sleeping.] Rae informed Karl as they checked the remaining rooms.

The hot tub was in a cedar room with a steam generating heater and a bench along the far wall. It should be great for relaxation, and the bedrooms were plenty for the group if Rae was going to hang hammocks.

"I think that this should be perfect for my needs, thank you." Karl informed the agent.

"Wonderful. I will take care of the paperwork, and I believe that the Overlord had some more business to finish with you."

Niall nodded. "Not me in particular, but the Inquisition, plus the Bureau, and the army's strategic intelligence agency would all like to have a nice chat with you tonight, while the details are still fresh in your mind."

"Alright, you might as well send them all in. We can split up and everyone talks to someone at the same time. Or do we need to do this in the secure rooms?" Karl asked.

"No need for that. Once you are over Commander Rank, almost all of this becomes a formality. Even if they suspected that you were likely to go rogue, it's not like they would try to imprison you.

They'd just send me after you."

[I want a chance to play with the stabby Overlord.] Rae demanded.

[Maybe later. He lives nearby so we can try to convince him to train with you in the gym to help you learn new combat skills.]

Niall noticed the puppy eyes attempt that Rae was making from the kitchen, and turned to Karl for answers.

"I don't get what she's pleading for. I'm not going to let her torture the representatives." He whispered.

Karl chuckled. "That's not it. She wants to train with you in the gym before we have to go. It's a great way for her to learn new skills if I'm there to supervise and use my skills on her directly.

It's so rare that we see someone who has compatible skills that are an improvement for her, but you're an Overlord Rank Rogue, you have to know at least a few." Niall laughed. "Alright. I would like to see just what I could teach Rae, and what she might be able to teach me. She has some rather unique skills, and I still don't understand how exactly an ambush predator learned to use Golems."

Tessa nodded in agreement. "That is a mystery that baffles us all. But somehow, after seeing multiple different ways of casting Golems, she came up with a way that works for her.

It's brilliant, and terrifying. But it's an incredible sign of what she might be capable of in the future. She already knows how to Shadow Step, create Earth Magic barriers to create her own portable shadows for better mobility, summon Golems, and use Lacerate, to increase the bleeding, so she has a constant supply of blood.

There really aren't all that many more things that a Bloodbath Spider could need for her perfect arsenal, except a few high output ambush attacks, and possibly a form of invisibility that is better than her natural camouflage skills."

Rae snuck over from the kitchen. "You are taking too small of a view of things. I have almost mastered this skill to become bipedal now, and once I do that, I will need skills to pretend to be other people."

Niall smiled at the ambitious beast. "Oh, and why is that?"

"Nobody will ever expect it if their friends and family are the ones that walk up and dice them into snack sized cubes." Rae announced proudly.

Niall nodded. "I agree. We took too small of a view of things. Why hide, when you can stand beside them like a friend in the darkness until it's time not to. That's actually a common infiltration technique for some of the intelligence service Rogues. If you don't mind that they aren't as powerful as you are, perhaps we could invite a few of them over to help you master the art of disguise?"

"Nope, I don't see any way that this could end badly." Ophelia muttered to herself.

Rae nodded. "Exactly, all the outcomes are good."

Chapter 598 Still Roommates

By the end of the evening after the basics of everyone's current skills and combat status, as well as the major details of their recent adventures had been relayed to every applicable agency, and all of the same questions had been answered five times, everyone in Karl's group was thoroughly ready for a nap.

Overlord Niall had gone to his apartment hours earlier, leaving them with Colonel Valerie and the representatives of the Government and Military.

Neither of them was particularly annoying on an individual basis, they just had to individually verify all of the reports, separate from any influence by the other party members.

That meant that they were spread through every room of the house to get their answers, and everyone had to repeat everything for their assigned interviewer, then as a group, in case they missed something that might be important.

Of course, they had all come to a silent agreement that there were some things they wouldn't talk about. If it wasn't public knowledge and the people involved could squish them like a bug, it got ignored.

If it was embarrassing to a group member, it got ignored.

But other than that, they gave a fairly complete report of the events as they remembered them. The real saving grace was that Lord Nacht had brought a report from the Divine Beast Nation with him when he arrived nearly a day earlier than they had, and that outlined the parts which had happened in the Bruse Temple.

At least in a vague way.

So, while the interviewers were confused about the part where they were providing what sounded like daycare services for the acolytes, at least Karl didn't have to go into great detail about how that had come about, or why they had agreed to be sent to the Newbon Empire in the first place.

They simply said that it was an order from the Archbishop, and nobody questioned that fact.

Colonel Valerie put her pen down as she finished summarizing all of the notes that she had collected. "Alright, I think that we have everything that we need from you today.

I have been informed that you will be receiving a visit from the mental health professionals tomorrow, and that there should be some acolytes brought to you for a training program being overseen by the Inquisition. Those students should arrive later in the day, and I am looking forward to seeing what sort of results might come from the partnership." She declared.

"You and me both. I think that letting them spend time training with the team should have significant effects on their growth, and there is some hope that we might be able to trigger a system awakening for them naturally, without the use of an anomaly like the Orb."

The Colonel sighed and rubbed the tension out of the back of her neck. "Don't remind me of that nightmare. It was open for four entire days before it ran out of energy and the ruins vanished.

Nearly every Elite over the rank of Ascended was sent there to attempt to advance their Class Marking by the time that it had vanished, and the more we sent, the more confused the situation got.

Most of the stronger ones could advance, but few of the weaker ones. Even with the same skills, different Ranks didn't get the same options, and now we've got dozens of new class markings to collect data on."

Karl shrugged. "At least the new classes will have more of a system interface, so they can tell you all about the Class Skills, the Skill Tree and any other benefits that they get. It's a huge victory for the record keepers, as they now get to file data for the next group of young Elites, so there are fewer cases of unknown markings."

Tessa winked at the haggard Colonel. "Plus, you can pass it all off to the Blue Dragons and let them do all the recording and analysis, then just read their summaries to guide next year's training.

The Academy should be nearly through the school year, right? We lost some time in an anomaly, so I'm not quite adjusted yet."

Colonel Valerie nodded. "Yes, the next intake is coming soon. They will advance at the end of the standard school year, and that's in just over a month. But this round will be somewhat different from the previous ones, as we have a new technique."

"A new trick?" Karl asked.

"Yes, we have numerous System imbued items from the dungeon. We will have each student attempt to wear one that our analysts think will suit them, and then if they awaken the system with the item, they don't need the injection.

It should increase our success rate, and greatly increase the number of new students.

In fact, they are so enthusiastic about it that they're building another dorm building for the purpose. There is some speculation that this year's intake might be as large as the entire student population.

Both current and before the early graduation filings that were done for student soldiers who have been serving on the front lines."

Karl had almost forgotten about that. There would have been many casualties on the line, and the students who had grown significantly stronger would have been graduated early.

That sort of practical combat experience helped many of them advance, so they might actually have many more Commanders now than they had when Karl and his team had last checked in with the Academy, even after combat losses.

"Will you be back tomorrow to check in on the new arrivals?" Karl asked.

Valerie shook her head. "No, I will give you a few days worth of training before I start directly monitoring your progress, assuming that there is some. However, it will be my agents who bring them to you, so you might see some friendly faces, depending on who is back from their mission in time."

"Then I will be looking forward to it. I will send you a message if there are developments."

Colonel Valerie laughed, and Dana pointed at the wall. "We're in the city now. No need for radio phones, magical messengers or anything fancy, you can just call her office."

"Right. Totally forgot about that. I suppose that means I should likely be expecting to start receiving calls soon. I'm not going to need a secretary to deal with spam calls from business reps, am I?" Karl asked.

"Doubtful. All calls to the building go through the switchboard downstairs, and they will pass you the messages from anyone who doesn't have either prior authorization or the clearance to call.

If you had spent more time in the Academy, most of the calls would be coming from your fellow Elites, but nearly everyone you know is already in this room, unless the two High Priestesses are going back to the dorms tonight in preparation for their formal rank testing tomorrow morning."

Lotus emphatically shook her head. "Not a chance. I will have breakfast early and go over before they miss me, but I'm not sleeping on those rock-hard cots when there are perfectly good beds available."

Karl doubted that the beds for a Royal Ranked High Priestess were that bad, but Rae was going to make hammocks in the spare room, and those were hard to beat.

Chapter 599 A Trying Morning

The next morning, when Karl woke up, he was completely disoriented for a moment. It was far too warm, or possibly too cold, if he had slept in, and this large soft bed was quite comfortable with Dana in his arms. But it took his brain a few seconds to remember that he had rented an apartment, and that he was home right now.

Strangely, it wasn't the comfort that had thrown him off, it was the temperature control.

The Divine Beast Nation and Newbon didn't use any of the human technologies, so everywhere just fluctuated with the natural temperatures, unless it was getting cold enough that they had started a fire in the fireplace.

But that felt different, as the heat came from a direction, where the apartment building had vents all through it to keep the perfect room temperature.

The sun was just coming up, but the High Priestesses had a formal testing and advancement ceremony this morning, while everyone else would likely be tested at the Cathedral as well, but without the strict requirement.

He could smell the food, and that was enough to rouse Dana from sleep and send her scurrying to the ensuite bath to get ready for the morning.

Karl followed her into the shower, and ignored the fake cries of protest that he was going to make them late. Two people could shower as fast as one with that massive overhead shower head and the side jets, while teasing Dana could wait until later.

They both dressed in the Commander Rank suits and went out to see what had made it here for breakfast.

"Ah, good morning, sleepyhead." Tessa greeted them with a smile.

"Are we, though? I don't see Lotus or Ophelia." Karl retorted.

"In the shower still. I had the kitchen send up some food before our test. We have pancakes, eggs, battered fried toast, an assortment of toppings and meats."

The way she said the last was with great disappointment, and Karl realized that the breakfast meat was just regular sausages and ham slices.

While they were very high-quality meats, they were not the Commander and Royal Rank meats that the group had gotten used to. The energy content would be a small fraction of the usual, and mostly it would just be filler.

"Do we have time to cook more? Or should I just have Hawk roast something?" Karl asked.

Hawk's flame control was impeccable, and it wouldn't be hard for him to fry them something to eat.

"We can have a heavier meal later. We need to eat fairly quickly if we're going to make it over to the Cathedral on time. I asked the staff when they brought the food, and there is a shuttle that can bring us there instead of walking. However, it looks like it's just a golf cart, and I'm not sure whether that's faster than going on foot."

The other two came out still wet from the shower and in their best formal clothes, Lotus' High Priestess robes and Ophelia's Commander Rank Suit.

"You know, we really should have Rae make us something fancy for future engagements. Fortunately for the three of us, we will be changing to the white visitor robes when we get to the Cathedral." Karl laughed.

"Or we can go shopping. We're in the Capital now, and there are all sorts of high fashion shops around. Even if we each bought an entire wardrobe, it would come to a fraction of what it cost to rent this apartment for the year." Dana reminded him.

Rae's sense of disapproval was strong in Karl's mind. Many of those outfits, especially suits and shirts, were made with someone else's silk.

That was not acceptable.

"Anything that's not silk. Rae wouldn't be happy about that." Karl explained to the others.

"Got it. So, we have an advancement trial, then likely a meeting, and then we can go shopping before they bring over our new Acolytes.

Remind me again why we thought that was a good idea?" Dana asked.

"Because there is a chance that I can teach them skills and help them awaken the System more fully. The Inquisition is intrigued by the possibility that having experienced Elites train Acolytes might help them grow faster, the way that the private tutors in the school do for promising students.

It will help build bonds between generations of Elites, and build the strength of the nation.

But mostly, it's because my skills are so odd, and they already heard from Nacht that my training is exceptionally helpful to young beasts." Karl explained.

Tessa finished a mouthful of pancake. "So, because you can train young beasts and beastkin, they think you might be able to train human children? Do you even have a plan for that?"

Karl smirked. "Of course I do. I believe that I can teach each of them at least one skill that will suit their personality. And then we can test them to see if they really will advance faster right from the start with our help.

There were numerous options when I went to advance. Like nearly a dozen. So, even if they wanted to be bonded to a beast, it might not make them like me. But it could be a ranger, or a beast warrior type class. If they can make friends with a good boy like Thor, think of how highly desired they would be in any young adventuring group. Every team at the Academy would be clamouring for a student who could maintain a Refreshing Lightning barrier. Especially if they trained as a front-line warrior, while their Cerro defended the mages."

Tessa nodded. "I see where you're going with this. If you can teach them a skill book, they will gain the skill and a class, and then you are hoping that at least one will get a class which can bond a beast, who will speed their growth.

They get the power every kid craves, the nation gets another Elite, and they will quickly reach at least Ascended or Commander, depending on what beast they got, with a chance to grow further in the future using their class skills."

"Precisely. And if they can't learn to bond a beast, we can teach them other skills and spells to help them gain other classes. It will also be a great test of just how many people can actually gain power, and how many are simply incompatible with the serum."

Chapter 600 Royal High Clerics

The trip to the Cathedral was a short one in the electric cart, which did turn out to be faster than walking, but not faster than riding on Thor would have been for the Clerics.

The Archbishop himself was there to greet them in front of the Trial Temple, along with Lord Nacht and an elderly High Priest from the Red and Green Dragon factions.

"Welcome High Priestesses and honoured guests. It is such a pleasure to have you here today. We have gathered to express our most sincere wish that the Gods recognize the ascendancy of two Royal High Priestesses today, and show them their favour." The Archbishop began.

"The morning entrance to the temple will begin in ten minutes, and we ask that the guests make way to allow the Priestesses to enter first."

That was when Karl noticed that they weren't the only ones here today, just the only ones who had taken this path into the Temple area. There were dozens of young Acolytes on the Cathedral side, all kneeling on the stone floor out of respect for the Archbishop, and so that the ordained Clerics behind them could see.

There was a brief round of polite applause for Tessa and Lotus, who the Archbishop motioned forward as the first signs of the Temple awakening for the morning began to show.

The stones inside were building power that Karl could feel in his bones, and it wouldn't be long before the trial was activated, and the two clerics could go in.

"Would you like to follow the High Priestesses in to have your advancements officially verified?" One of the Cathedral staff Clerics asked Karl quietly.

"I think that we will wait a few minutes. We don't want to come out overlapping them, so let the kneeling kids go first, then we will enter." Karl whispered back.

The cleric went and informed the others, and they began to get the kids into double rows, ready for a smooth entrance once Tessa and Lotus had entered.

The temple's magic activated, and the two Priestesses entered without hesitation, confident in their respective Goddess' favour and their ability to pass the trials.

Then, the kids were escorted in, leaving only the remainder of Karl's group and the senior clerics.

The elderly Red Dragon High Cleric addressed Karl with a faint smile. "Monarch, Princesses. Welcome to the Capital Cathedral once again. Your new acolytes will be chosen from the Orphanage training programs, in the hopes that their drive to improve themselves will give better results. It doesn't actually affect the outcome rate of the injections, but the Red Dragon does hope that it will improve your success rate in training Acolytes. At the very least, they should be motivated to try hard, and not lazy or unambitious."

Karl nodded. "At the very least, we can try to teach them a few different skills to see if they can awaken the most common classes if their first option doesn't work out. But I think that if they show promise, we might be able to awaken a few unique skills just by teaching them the things that we already know."

The old man in red robes smiled. That was the greatest goal of the Orphanages that the Red Dragon Clerics operated. If they could bring up a generation of heroes who managed to change their fate, they would give hope to every orphan that came after them.

The Orphanages were filled with tragic backstories, but with just this, they might be able to give the kids hope that they could be more than hourly employees or infantry for the front lines of the army.

Assuming that they weren't one of the lucky few who was compatible with the injection, anyhow.

The Archbishop gestured to the Temple. "Please, enter and confirm your Ranks. The High Priestesses should be out soon, and then we have a short ordination ceremony before they will be available again." Karl simply smiled and stepped through the doors of the temple, letting the energy engulf him and pull him into the trial.

Once again, he found himself standing at the foot of a World Dragon pyramid temple, but this one was incomplete, still under construction, with a gantry and earthen ramps all around it to facilitate the movement of massive stones.

There wasn't anyone here, and the temple felt like it was missing something.

Without anyone to guide him, and the beasts trapped in their spaces, the obvious answer seemed to be to go to the top of the Temple and see what had been holding up the progress. An unfinished temple should mean waiting for materials, so perhaps the test was for him to declare allegiance, or provide an offering to the gods?

That might make sense for the Cleric classes at the very least. This was a temple trial, so perhaps it was for everyone who attained his Rank.

So, he made his way to where the construction was ongoing, using the smooth ramps that had been made to move the stones, and examined the ongoing construction.

He wasn't a mason, but he'd spent enough days in the mine to know what good stone looked like, and what was flawed.

And the core stone was definitely flawed.

There was a tall square obelisk in the centre of the temple, and there were visible inclusions in it, which would certainly crack when the construction was finished and the stone was expected to carry weight.

He could fix that, though.

[Earth Shield] could make stone, or reshape existing stone to make the shield. So, that was what Karl did, and removed the flaws along the way.

Now, the obelisk was perfect, and the temple was ready to be completed. But it was still missing something.

There was a small hole through the obelisk near the top, with an engraved platform for some sort of holy relic to sit on. It would be buried within the temple, but it would serve as the core for the sanctified ground effect.

Every temple had one, though it was normally in a case behind the altar, where visitors could admire the holy relic.

The great question was: What did he have that might qualify as a holy relic for a temple?

He had some Holy Stones in Thor's space, but that likely didn't qualify.

Maybe it should be something system related?

He had a number of System linked reward items.

But he could do better than that, he was certain of it.

He had [Skill Merger] which would let him make a whole new skill, and [Skill Book] to write it out. So, if he made the very best skill that he could manage, and put the book there, it should count as an Epic Grade, Monarch Rank System Blessed item.

That had to be better than picking stuff from his inventory.

Karl did hope that this wasn't expected to be a short process, though. Because making a new skill could take some time, and then learning to make one that could be made into a skill book with the materials that he had available would take even longer.

Perhaps this wasn't the right way forward, given how long it would take. But it felt right, and if it felt right, then it most likely was right.