

Beast Master 631

Chapter 631 General Drath

Overlord Drath looked toward the students, then to Karl's beasts, who were doing their best to teach them new things, explaining theory even during the lunch break.

"How hard do you think that you can push those new Elites without damaging their potential?" He asked carefully.

"We have a potion for the five orphaned volunteers that might immediately push them to Awakened, but then they will need significant time to recover. The ones with bonded beasts will grow closer to the growth rate of their partner, though. The System will help them grow faster, but pushing the Elite to advance will only create an imbalance where one side is stronger than the other. It happens to me constantly, and I'm constantly working to keep both myself and all the members of my team in balance.

So, there is only so fast you can push them, and they will eventually need practical experience to help them grow." Karl explained.

Drath sat silently as he mentally calculated something. "So, Awakened by autumn, then Ascended by second year is realistic for most of them?"

Karl nodded. "If their growth rate holds, or whoever takes over after my team is reassigned keeps them on the same training regimen. I can't speak for other methods, but Ascended by the end of the first term shouldn't be a problem.

We've got some clerics over there taking scientific notes on everything that we're doing so that they can try to replicate it with others. Some of the advancement is directly due to my own skills and my team, though. So, I would expect limited gains from a repeat."

Drath chuckled. "Like following the same diet and workout plan designed to maximize gains, but having the second group do it without steroids."

Karl nodded. "Something like that. The real issues won't start until Commander Rank, though."

The Overlord sighed.

"Oh, I am well aware of that. What I was hoping was now that I've got some system equipment from the Dungeon, I might be able to boost some of my Sergeants.

They're already established in the army, so if I can grant them a system and smash them up to the Ascended or Commander Rank in a matter of months, I can give the units a champion to maintain morale."

"Not the officers?" Karl asked.

Drath shook his head. "The officers make plans and give orders, the Sergeants carry them out. We don't need powerful combatants giving orders, we need them fighting."

Cara laughed and nudged Karl. [Promoted past the point of usefulness.] Drath noticed the exchange and waited for a translation.

"She says they have been promoted past the point of usefulness."

"In a battlefield sense, that is true. The Lieutenants still lead larger teams, but beyond that, they're rarely on the front lines, other than the Commissars."

The Commissars in question were a Special Forces team from the Church, part of the Inquisition in charge of military morale. They were all insane, as far as Karl could tell, but they made the Red Dragon happy.

"I take it that they're making plans to spread this rapid training method as soon as possible?" Karl asked, knowing that the Overlord in charge of Military Strategy as the First General of the nation was not here on a whim.

Overlord Drath sighed and nodded. "There are two competing plans right now. One wants to make a potion that will boost freshly tested Elites to Commander directly, burning their potential in the process.

The other group believes that we need to find a way to use your rapid training methods on more soldiers."

Karl nodded. "Actually, I think that I have a solution for that. I have been thinking about it for a while, and if we can find a number of young beasts like the Cerro Hatchlings, I believe that there is a way to bond them to those with the potential to become an Elite.

I had a System Quest for it, and it had a sixty percent success rate among the Special Forces students, as you likely already knew. I believe that with Runic Talismans, I could initiate that mental bond, and those with the potential would gain a Class. Most likely Beast Ranger."

"And why didn't you mention this to anyone?"

"Because the rest would probably die. The Elite Program has a roughly one percent fatality rate. Initial numbers for this method are twenty to thirty percent rejection, with a ten to twenty percent fatality rate. The outcome is significantly better, but you can likely reach those numbers with the equipment testing this year. It's just that they will mostly have the basic classes, and not an advanced one.

The First Advancement Trial that is now happening at the Cathedral Temple for Commanders and up allows us to upgrade classes, and from what I can tell, Beast Ranger would normally be an option then, to upgrade Rangers." Karl offered.

Drath took out a binder of papers and began to flip pages.

"Yes, that is correct. We have observed a small number of them who have advanced to Beast Rangers after entering the Commander Rank Dungeon. It is listed as a Commander Rank minimum requirement, but it appears that your method might be able to do it early.

That would be a huge bonus for our forces. Cerro Knights charging to break enemy lines before the infantry follows behind them is a bit primitive as a military tactic, but if they're Lightning Cerro, and the Knights are the Sergeants, they can defend their units as they charge."

Karl laughed at the thought of lines of Cerro with infantry running behind them on the attack.

"You know, they're actually better on defence. Mine likes to pair with the Red Dragon High Priestess, and they work together on the unit buffs, while the Nature Cleric does the majority of our healing."

Drath smirked. "You haven't told her that you can give her a chance to have a monster as a pet, have you? The Nature Priestess I mean. We might not have any left if they knew."

Karl shook his head. "I don't think it would work. They're already claimed, their class won't change so easily. They didn't get an option to change even when the rest of us were doing our Advancement trials. But if I learn to create a skill that will let them talk to monsters, they might never get anything productive done again."

"Is there another way to reliably create specialists? The random assignments are great for Elites, but I need uniform training regimens for hundreds of soldiers at a time. We can do that with warriors, at least the ones who have their whole Skill Tree active, which I'm not certain will be true of all the new Elites. Lack of data, you understand."

Karl looked through his skills, using the restrictions listed by [Skill Book] to determine if there was anything that he could give them all to create some sort of uniform class.

The problem was that most of his skills were either specialized for beasts, or usable by more than one group of Elites, so there was no guarantee that those who used it would awaken the same class.

"I think that most of them should have a fully active System. All five that I awakened with items had the skill tree. It's mostly just the Serum that was incompletely activating the Elites. Well, that or something has changed with the appearance of the higher rank active dungeon. That was when the majority of my inactive features were awakened.

But if we want to activate only one class, that could be an issue. We could narrow it down to Warriors and Rogues, or various casters. But I don't see a way to only get one type."

Chapter 632 Alternate Solutions

Remi was in full agreement with Karl's thoughts on the grand solution for their problem. [Why not have like three different specialties? As far as battle tactics go, there really are just warriors, mages and others.] She offered.

"My partner Remi, the Naga Queen over there, has a suggestion.

Why not increase flexibility? You can have teams led by warriors or mages, and then the others can fill in, since there are far more mages and warriors than anything else."

"And how do you guarantee that we will have enough of them if we try bringing them up among our ranks?"

Karl smiled. "That's the easy part. Plead with the Blue Dragons to give them skill books."

The Overlord gave Karl a look that said two things.

First, he wanted to strangle Karl for suggesting it.

Second, he had already tried it and had been not so politely told that they would not be making thousands of skill books for him.

After all, they had to be handwritten by a suitably powerful user, and the number of Blue Clerics and Inscriptionist Mages was limited.

Karl relented when he realized that the plan was already rejected. "I joke. No, send them all to the trial at the Cathedral and order them to pick Mage or Warrior if they are given the option. If they're compatible, the trial ground should awaken System users now."

Drath sighed. "We tried that too. It only worked to awaken Clerics. However, it is a great advancement resource for Elites who have reached Commander Rank."

"It seems that military efficiency and the System do not mingle well. However, I do think that it would be best to just go with it. Train everyone in the same combat techniques so that they can fight together as needed, and then let the units work it out at their end with the ranged and close combat attackers. From a practical standpoint, it doesn't matter if that enemy at a hundred metres died to a magic missile, an enchanted arrow or a battle cannon on a mobile artillery piece."

Drath chuckled, looking younger than he had when he arrived. "That was my suggestion as well, but the President and the other Generals voted it down as too chaotic. That's why I have been looking for a better proposal.

Count yourself lucky that you didn't get roped into a political position. It's a giant pain in the ass, and when you actually use the power you are given, you end up stepping on well-connected toes, and making your next effort harder than it has to be."

Karl tried not to laugh. Most of the problem was that the politicians were still a generation or three behind. Tactics had been evolving rapidly over the last decade with the introduction of the Elites, but most of the senior politicians and military officers had been serving for thirty or forty years already.

The Archbishop was over a hundred years old, the President was nearing seventy, and most of his senior advisors were close to sixty. "You're thinking that we're all fossils and behind the times, aren't you?" The General asked, with his eyes flashing bronze as his draconic instincts sensed a challenge.

"For a Dragon, you're quite young. But for humans, most of the others in charge are ancient. As I understand it, a Bronze Dragon is too attached to the letter of the law to bend the rules yourself, and that's why you're looking for a solid reason to adjust the regulations, right?" Karl replied.

"Precisely. And technically Elites are outside my purview, as they are no part of the Church Armies. But we need the firepower, and we have a procedural handbook to follow.

I did consider just eating them all so they stopped saying no to all the good ideas, but there are laws against that."

[If you taught them all Offensive Adaptation, they could likely bond with Bloodbath Spiders.] Rae suggested.

An army of giant spiders and Karl clones would be funny.

"Well, once we have these ones trained, you will have enough data to prove one way or the other whether entire units of System users within the army is a viable tactic. It might take an amendment or

two so that they're actually soldiers and not just attached to army units, but it should be easy enough to get a regulations addendum passed if we get a huge influx of new System users."

Drath's eyes shone with amusement as Karl finished his sentence. "You know, if it wouldn't collapse society, we could just have everyone we meet put on a system linked item until they're all depleted or everyone has tried. It would be the greatest challenge that a Bronze Dragon could ever face."

His tone was a bit manic as he envisioned the challenges of maintaining law and order in an entire nation full of workers who had suddenly gained a system class. You couldn't be an 'Elite' if everyone were one, or even if the majority of people were. He would never willingly allow the collapse of society to actually happen, it was completely contrary to his nature. But like a kid dreaming of becoming a superhero, Karl was beginning to understand that Bronze Dragons fantasized of bringing order to chaos and implementing rules and regulations to keep everything orderly.

Then the dragon sighed. "I think it is time for you to use that potion you mentioned. Try to advance your students to the Awakened Rank today, even if just the five with classes that aren't beast linked. You need to make your method stand out as superior to any other if things are going to change. Giving that level of resources to every student in the next intake will be a massive cost. Unless senior Elites empty their stockpiles to provide all the resources, it might not even be possible. But even then, the cost will exceed the entire year's revenue.

Convincing everyone that it is worth it will take results so far beyond anything that we've seen so far that the senior staff will believe that it would cost us more not to."

[Yes, potion time. I've had them ready all day long. These will be great. Trust me, I can make humans into proper Elites.] Remi cheered.

"Alright. They're on lunch, and we've been feeding them Commander Rank meat to overload them with energy for the afternoon training already. That's a worthwhile attempt, by the way. The progression just from sufficient nutrition has the clerics in a frenzy."

Drath chuckled. "If we had that many edible Commander Rank and higher monsters, I would consider it. Edible monsters are rare in the spawns, and it's not like we're farming them at that sort of power level."

Remi used [Blizzard] to make snow so that she could turn the potions into smoothies.

Nobody said no to berry flavoured smoothies.

While Remi was confident, Thor had been listening to the parts of the conversations which related to ruining someone's potential with too much of a good thing. He trusted his little sister, but she got too enthusiastic about her projects, and she didn't study humans much. There was a risk that like the first day's Royal Rank soup, this was going to overwhelm them, but because this was a potion forcing them to gain power, it might cause permanent damage.

[Just wait, you will soon see that I know what I'm doing. It's even in the book as a safe advancement formula for baby Elites.]

Karl examined the potions that she had made, and while they did have some Commander Rank ingredients, they were in minimal doses, and heavily watered down. The potions could be considered Awakened Rank, at least after they were mixed with the ice to make a smoothie, so they should be safe enough.

[Potion of Advancement] was what the System called them all, though Karl knew they had been tailored to each individual student. Fortunately for everyone, Remi had labelled all of the potions before she mixed them into smoothies, so there was no confusion as she began to pass them out to the students.

Much to the dismay of the rest of the trainees, and the suspicion of the recipients. They hadn't forgotten what the cleansing drinks had done to their insides.

"What is with this unfair training bias? We get extra work on our combat skills and mental fortitude, and they get smoothies." One of the Rangers complained.

Karl shrugged. "If it helps, I gave the Cerros and the Moor Cats a special treat."

The all looked to where one of the cats was happily nibbling at a bowl of Commander Rank meat, and the beast covered it protectively.

"That does not make it better at all." Pat, the Ranger bonded with the cat in question, remarked.

Karl could have sworn that the cat laughed at him as it resumed eating. The humans had gotten a pretty decent lunch, specifically chosen by the Clerics with the help of the apartment kitchen to include some higher rank ingredients to spike their energy in what Lotus assured them was a safe way.

But the cat got an entire bowl full of the good stuff. No filler, no nonsense. Just meat.

Remi did have mercy on the Rangers, and Nikki The Tiger Monk, and she passed them out similar smoothies as well. But that was part of the plan to distract the other five from their suspicions about being suddenly given treats.

They had already gotten a fancy lunch, and now a fruity drink that wasn't served with the meal? That was suspicious. But when everyone had one, it was less likely to be some sort of nefarious plot. Or so they assumed until the potions started to take effect.

{The system is showing me something weird.} Appeared in Karl's vision, thoroughly confusing him until he realized that there was a name tag before the words, indicating that it was sent by Sybil.

How had she done that?

Karl searched for the option, then focused on the words and realized there was a function button beside them with no label that he had simply hidden as useless.

"What do you see, Sybil?" He asked out loud.

The Rogue's eyes lit up in excitement. Someone had seen her message!

She had tried to use the mind talk thing that Karl and Lady Rae used to make their plans, and it worked. Well, mostly. It was supposed to go to Rae, but Karl got it instead.

{It says Warning: Experience increase effects have a cumulative detriment modifier.

Chance of Success $\geq 98\%$

Chance of Failure $< 1\%$

Chance of Critical Failure 1%

Modifier 0%

Karl read that twice, then nodded at her. "Go ahead, that's as safe as it gets." Karl informed her, but Sybil was already finished the smoothie, not connecting the message with the beverage until it was too late.

Slowly, her power began to grow, the same as Karl's had when he used growth resources at the Academy. Her power was steadily increasing in quality, and Karl was nearly certain that she would make it to Awakened Rank with just the one boost.

[POWER JUICE!] The Cerro Hatchlings began to cheer once they realized what was going on. [Why doesn't it work for our pack? Is it just for the other pack?] The Cerro began to wonder.

[We didn't give it to everyone, just in case it didn't work right. Instead, you got the good feed and your partners got juice.] Thor explained through the Cerro mind link.

That made sense to them. You had to share when there were only so many good things. The big Cerro always gave the good treats to the littlest ones, just like Karl had done for his pack's hatchlings.

Aaron and Jaime advanced to Awakened at the same time, with Joan and Owen only a few seconds behind them.

{Now it says Modifier -20% } Sybil updated them.

That was a dangerous category. The first one was basically guaranteed, but if there was a cumulative detriment to using that sort of resource, even a few of them would nearly guarantee a negative outcome.

Or it might have something to do with the strength of the concoction.

Overlord Drath might know.

"Commandant, I don't suppose that you have one of those potions that they give to the bottlenecked Elites, do you? I would like to inspect it with a skill that I have. I suspect that I might be able to deconstruct it into a more effective form." Karl asked.

"The Overlord Potion? No, I don't carry that with me, but I can have some sent here if you need to study it. That potion of yours is brilliant. All five of them reached Awakened Rank in a single shot with no visible side effects." He gushed.

"Oh, there is a side effect, just not visible. Every time a System User takes one of those types of potions, there is a cumulative chance of critical failure."

The Overlord winced. He knew exactly what that entailed. Some who took the potion to break the bottleneck between Commander and Royal simply died, while others had their powers crippled. It was a low chance, but only a few had ever actually become an Overlord directly, and most of the successful attempts ended up barely bumped over the bottleneck into Royal Rank, with little to no growth ability left.

Now that they knew more about the System, and with Karl's input, it could be presumed that was the result of a failure or critical failure of the potion effects.

That would also explain why some in the lower Ranks who tried to push too fast ended up crippled from overuse of resources. They had pushed their luck too far without ever knowing the odds.

The Bronze Dragon took out a magical communication token and sent a message.

"Someone will bring you a copy of the potion soon. If you can even tell us a few things about changes that will increase the odds, it would be an enormous benefit to the nation." He explained quietly.

"I will let you know what I can find out. With the ability to identify the odds, my alchemist can at least experiment on the potion until there is an improvement." Karl agreed.

[Then we can feed it to a new Commander and see if they explode.] Remi agreed.

[Your sisters are corrupting you.] Thor lamented.

[Become powerful.] Remi amended with an apologetic look at her big brother.

Chapter 634 Overlord Potion

The Overlord Potion, as Commandant Drath had called it, was hand-delivered by a Royal Rank Bishop of the church, along with twenty Elite Church Guard and a pair of Inquisitors.

"First-General, I have brought the potion as you requested. Who might the blessed one be?" The Bishop asked.

Overlord Drath looked a little sheepish and rubbed the back of his neck.

"Bishop, my apologies, but there has been a misunderstanding. You see, Monarch Karl wanted a sample to study.

His team managed to come up with a potion that immediately advanced these five cadets to Awakened Rank only two days after they gained their system.

However, we learned a troubling fact during the process, and I believe his skill can shed some light on why the Overlord Potion malfunctions."

All of the cadets and Acolytes stopped what they were doing when they heard that. They didn't know what sort of super powerful potion warranted this sort of escort, but it had to be something incredible.

"May I touch the potion, Bishop? It is necessary for the skill to function." Karl asked.

He would only see the odds once he had it in his hands and at least considered using it.

The Bishop passed Karl the potion, and the guards moved to surround him, protecting the potion, as they were facing away from him.

As Karl focused with [Identify] on the potion, a few things became clear. First, this was a much better thing than he had expected. Second, altering the ingredients probably wouldn't help much.

{Overlord Potion}

{Grade} Totem

[Immediately upgrades the power level of the imbiber by a set range of levels. Maximum Rank of Overlord may be achieved.]

{Warning: Experience increase effects have a cumulative detriment modifier.

Chance of Success 0.3%

Chance of Partial Success 10%

Chance of Failure 2%

Chance of Critical Failure 87.7%

Modifier 0%}

{Success Grants 3 Ranks of advancement}

{Partial Success Grants 1 Rank of advancement}

{Failure Causes 1 Random Permanent Debuff}

{Critical Failure will result in death with no resurrection possible}

[Warning: Full Success Not Possible] Maximum Rank of user exceeded.

Now Karl understood why the potion had to be taken by a Commander. Nobody else could get the full use of the effect, as it was either one or three Ranks of advancement. But those odds were dismal. Surely, there wasn't a ninety percent chance of death for the regular users, or they wouldn't have started using it on Commanders at all.

So, Karl inspected the potion more closely, trying to find the default values.

{Overlord Potion}

{Grade} Totem

[Immediately upgrades the power level of the imbiber to a set range. Maximum Rank of Overlord may be achieved.]

Chance of Success 4%

Chance of Partial Success 40%

Chance of Failure 54%

Chance of Critical Failure 2%

{Success Grants 3 Ranks of advancement}

{Partial Success Grants 1 Rank of advancement}

{Failure Causes 1 Random Permanent Debuff}

{Critical Failure will result in death with no resurrection possible}

That made more sense. The people using it were already at the limits of their potential, so they would have a heavy modifier, but if the chance of actually dying from it was only two percent, and failure was a permanent debuff, many would be willing to risk it when they didn't know their personal odds.

The Bishop cleared his throat. "What do you see with your System Skill, Monarch?"

"The system calls it an Overlord Potion, with a four percent chance to take a Commander to Overlord, or a forty percent chance to take one to Royal Rank. However, other resources you've used in the past will modify that.

For me, it is impossible, as I'm already a Monarch, and the potion doesn't grant a linear amount of power, but a set effect instead.

However, you could theoretically use it on Elites below Commander Rank to grant them the same four percent chance of gaining three Ranks. About half would end up with a one Rank advancement, and half would take permanent injury, according to the potion's description."

The wince that the Bishop made when Karl mentioned giving it to people below the Commander Rank said that this was not a cheap or easy potion to make. But that should be expected from a Totem Rank potion of any sort.

"Is that all you can learn about it with your skill? Not that I'm complaining, knowing the odds and exact effect is incredibly valuable." The Bishop asked.

"Give me a while and I might be able to discover how to tweak it for more success, but I wasn't expecting it to be Totem Ranked. One Rank over myself isn't too difficult, but two is pushing my luck." Karl explained.

That made sense to the Bishop. Many had tried in the past to improve the formula, and just as many had failed.

Karl tried to look deeper into the potion's construction when a notification caught his attention.

{Skill Master 4 Activation: [Identification] has improved by 1 Tier. Skill [Analysis] gained.}

That was the first time that the Skill Master Ability had advanced one of his own skills by a Tier, and Karl was startled that it was a utility skill and not one of the ones that he used constantly.

Perhaps he simply wasn't pushing hard enough to force the evolution of the others? Or he might just need inspiration to cause them to evolve.

With Analysis, both Karl and Remi could tell much more about the potion. First, the primary ingredient was Totem Rank Holy Power, in liquid form. So, these potions were personally made by the Archbishop, or another nation's strongest cleric.

There was a list of plant names there as well, none of which Karl had ever heard of. Then he noticed something floating in the potion that he hadn't seen before.

It was glowing, and Karl couldn't seem to figure out what it was. The system wasn't being any help at first, but after a few seconds, Karl realized that it was a rune. There were solidified magic runes in the potion.

[Runecrafting Compound Sigil Recorded] Power Surge

Remi's excitement filled Karl's mind, but it was Rae's mental laughter that caught his attention.

[That one really will make them explode.] The spider cheered.

She was right. The rune was nothing but a pure power transfer, as much as the user wished to imbue into it, but without form unless it was combined with others into a proper sigil or phrase.

If Karl used it alone on anyone but the Overlord, it would just drain every bit of his energy and overload the target. That much raw mana would literally make them explode.

Fortunately, with Runecrafting, Karl should be able to combine that compound rune into a sentence to empower a runic inscription that would otherwise have little to no effect. In a way, it was a new word. A more precise way of describing what he wanted to happen when writing with runes. It would take work, but he had been planning to practice his Runecrafting anyhow.

But the fact that there was no other sigil with Power Surge in the potion was a clue on its own. The flow of power was uncontrolled, which was what was likely damaging the users. If he modified that, it could improve the success of the potion.

"How mad would you be if I modified this potion?" Karl asked the Bishop.

"It takes the Archbishop sixty hours to make one." He replied simply.

Well, that changed the risk to reward calculation.

Chapter 635 Runecrafting

Karl stared at the potion for a little longer. He was going to modify it. He could apologize to the Archbishop later if it didn't work.

Or maybe run away with Lord Nacht. Whichever seemed safer at the time.

Fortunately, the runes were simple for what he wanted to do. So, he moved the potion to Remi's space and carefully portioned a little bit into another beaker. One third of maximum power flow for three times the duration was one complex compound rune that attached smoothly to the Power Surge rune. Karl took that as a sign that he had done something right, and carefully modified all the runes in the smaller vial.

As the last one was completed, Karl got a notification.

{[Vial of Overlord Potion] Part 1 of 3}

Interesting.

So, he made two more, and watched as he got the notification two more times. Then, he carefully mixed them into one larger potion bottle, though still half the size of the original.

{Runic Overlord Potion}

Chance of Success 4%+5%

Chance of Partial Success 40% +5%

Chance of Failure 54% -10%

Chance of Critical Failure 2%

{Warning: Runic Potions are incompatible with some species.}

Karl considered that for a moment. It didn't say what species, so this might either be flat out better, or totally useless to the GDN if it didn't work on humans.

He opened his eyes and realized that everyone around him was sitting and eating dinner as the sun went down.

"How long was I out of it? I lost track of time." He asked.

"About six hours?" Tessa guessed, and Overlord Drath nodded in agreement. n/o/vel/b//in dot c//om

"Well, at least I have something to show for it. Here, the modified potion. It should have a five percent better chance of both one and three Rank increases, with ten percent less failure chance as a result. However, the system says that some species can't use it, and I have no idea what ones." Karl informed the Bishop.

Before he could move, the potion vanished from his hand, and Lord Nacht was beside him, staring at the bottle.

"Oh, this is good. We should test it." The Ancient Black Dragon announced.

The Bishop who had brought the original potion looked like he was going to argue for a moment, then thought better of the notion. Fighting with a Totem Rank Dragon wouldn't end well for anyone.

"Oh? Do you have a baby dragon in mind?" Karl asked.

"Why in the seven hells would I give this to a dragon?" Nacht asked.

He had a point. Dragons didn't need it, and they weren't worried about growth rate.

A portal formed near Nacht's left hand, and he pulled an old woman in black robes through by the neck.

One clawed hand tilted the woman's head back, and the dragon poured the potion down her throat.

Slowly at first, then with increasing flow, power began to gather in the area. The disturbance had caught the attention of every powerful Elite in the city, and Karl could sense people running their way, as well as a half dozen portals opening nearby.

This had better work, now that they had so many onlookers.

Karl spun the [Ring of the Beast Lord] on his finger. It increased his Luck stat, and that had to help somehow. Avoiding embarrassment was a form of luck, right?

The black robed cleric gasped and collapsed to her knees, surrounded by a mist of dark power that had every bit of Rae's attention. But the process wasn't over, more power was still flowing into her body as her magic reacted wildly, restrained by Lord Nacht so that it didn't kill all of the lower ranked Elites in the area.

"Hmm, it appears that you did it right. She's not dead." Nacht noted, sounding dismayed.

The Cleric rolled over on her back, twitching in pain as the power flowed into her. She managed a single second worth of glare at the dragon before she was wracked with pain again, and the power gathered by the process began to merge with her body.

"Your god has an odd way of showing their favour." Karl noted as the woman's power grew.

"Divine Favour? I was betting on the two percent chance it would kill her outright, and I wouldn't have to listen to her whine again." The black dragon replied.

Rae giggled quietly, while everyone else in the area looked horrified. He had picked her because he didn't mind if she died? That was unexpected.

As the effect faded, the cleric passed out. It didn't matter to the onlookers, or to Lord Nacht. They could all sense the Overlord Ranked aura coming from her.

"Nine percent chance of success, her luck is pretty good." Karl noted.

The ancient dragon nodded. "Yes, it was thoroughly satisfying. Now I have a new Bishop for the Black Dragon."

"Who is going to hold a grudge." Karl added.

"Irrelevant. She's from here in the city, and I will be headed home once my business is done."

The Archbishop came over with a smile. "Is it true? The potion's effectiveness could be increased?"

Karl nodded. "Not the effectiveness, exactly. But the chance of success increased by five percent for both stages of success. Now the base success rate is over fifty percent before modifiers and luck."

"A week well spent, then. Come with me, we need to discuss this in private."

Karl didn't even have time to react before Nacht was shoving him through a portal, followed by the two Totem Rank leaders, and the unconscious Bishop.

"Start from the beginning. What did you do to my potion? At your Rank, you shouldn't have even been able to mix in a single ingredient without it fading." The Archbishop began.

"I actually didn't add ingredients, or remake the potion itself.

There are magical runes in the potion, but they were incomplete. No, that's not the right word. They were unregulated. I added a runic phrase to slow the effect. That way, the users were less likely to explode, as my friend Remi so eloquently put it." Karl explained, then drew the rune in the air with his finger.

The Archbishop took him to a large oak desk and sat him in the plush leather chair in front of golden writing tools and a stack of paper. He had pens, pencils with various cores, paint brushes and various paints and inks to choose from.

But he wasn't making a skill book, it was just a rune, so he chose a small paint brush and plain black ink, which the Archbishop appeared to have ground from an ink stone and not purchased as a liquid.

"This is the part I added, and this is the compound rune that I formed." He explained a few seconds later.

Nacht leaned over the desk. "Oh, I see. And you said that this additional part was already in the potion?" Both Karl and the Archbishop nodded in unison, and the Archbishop gestured towards a wall full of runic writing.

"It's one of the power runes for holy items of all sorts. This potion is my own creation, but my Runecrafting skills are limited. I know the language fairly well, but I don't have it as a System Skill."

Karl considered that, then pulled a jar of silver ink and a stack of paper over.

"We might be able to fix that. I have the skill, and a skill for creating Skill Books. Let's see how this goes." He suggested.

Lord Nacht laughed, and the Archbishop sighed, then gestured at the book case. "I already considered that. But I won't turn down a spare copy."

Karl saw that there was a [Runecrafting] book on the shelf, but it was ancient and damaged. Not an active Skill Book.

Chapter 636 Cramped Hands

Karl got right to work on the book, as the necessary inks were already on the table. Runecrafting was more of a dictionary than anything else, and every rune that Karl wrote slowly etched itself into his mind, an unused language that he had never paid attention to.

Sure, he had the skill to use them, but it was a bit like using Rend for the first time when he was on the train. It was possible, but he had not trained any sort of mental or muscle memory for it, so it was somewhat like following a guidebook for something that you had never seen in person.

Just writing out the book was giving him ideas. If he had better crafting skills, he could make weapons and add Runes to them, turning mundane items into quality magical weapons.

[Making toys for fun and profit.] Remi agreed, paying close attention to Karl's work.

[Can you use this skill?] He asked, wondering how many of the beasts shared his more esoteric abilities.

[I can, but not the others. Probably because I'm the only one that reads for fun.] Remi agreed.

Writing out a whole dictionary of Runes took time. A lot of time. But eventually Karl had a massive bound tome in front of him that put the one on the shelf to shame.

It was easily a thousand pages long, and Karl guessed that he had missed at least an entire day while he was working, even with the increased hand speed that he had to restrain just enough not to splatter the ink.

There were no windows in the office, and the room was soundproofed, with no clock in sight. That made it exceptionally easy to lose track of time, and actively using a System Skill seemed to keep you locked in, so you didn't notice outside stimuli as much.

"And here we are. One skill book of Runecrafting." He announced, waking the Archbishop. The old man was napping on a divan in the corner of his office, which was well-equipped with blankets, suggesting that this was a regular occurrence.

The Archbishop slowly got to his feet and came over to the desk, where he ran a reverent finger over the tome.

"It's beautiful. If I had to guess, I would say that it is an Epic Grade skill, just going by the cover. But I suspect that it's actually something much more difficult to obtain than that." The old man rambled.

More uncommon than an Epic Skill?

Reverently, the Archbishop opened the cover of the tome.

And nothing happened.

At least, until Lord Nacht burst into laughter.

"Oh, that is grand. The greatest Rune master on the continent can't use the Runecrafting skill book. Do you perhaps already have a basic version of the skill?" The black dragon taunted his counterpart.

The Archbishop shook his head. "I don't have a skill for it. I know most of the language, though. It would seem that I still have much to learn, with the size of this tome, but I am considered fluent in Runic."

The Dragon inspected the tome, and then a slow smile spread across his face. "Why don't we call the Librarian? I bet that the head of the Blue Dragon Clerics would love the opportunity to learn the most complete form of the Runic language."

It only took a few seconds for the Librarian to enter after the Archbishop called for her. She came through a side door, and Karl realized that their offices were attached.

That was incredibly convenient when there were questions. Or when Lord Nacht was visiting and wanted to troll someone.

"Librarian, we have a rare skill book for you to try. None of us can use it, and we have some hope that you can learn its secrets, then make a duplicate." The Archbishop requested.

The Blue Dragon carefully put on a pair of white cotton gloves as she approached, and delicately inspected the entire tome, making mental notes before doing anything else.

"Beautiful. It will be a shame to remove such a beautiful book from circulation, but once I have learned it, I will immediately endeavour to make another." The Librarian announced, then carefully opened the cover.

Her eyes widened as the book vanished and a flood of information entered her brain, filling in all the details of the Rune Crafter's trade.

"This is wonderful. There is so much to know, so many things that were lost to time. I can fix the wards on the bookshelves, and rebuild the automatic staircase. Oh, I do need to get another copy made as soon as possible.

The Juniors can do all of that while I study the rest of the knowledge hidden in here."

She was clearly rambling now, but the dragon was happy, even if her subordinates were about to become very unhappy.

The Librarian ran out of the room without even acknowledging that the Archbishop was waiting to ask her questions.

Lord Nacht patted him on the shoulder. "Well, you win some and you lose some. She will answer all your questions eventually. It's good that she was the one that it worked for because all the teachers in the Cathedral are Blue Dragon Clerics, and your Weaponsmith Students are sure to want access to that knowledge as soon as possible."

The Archbishop nodded. "Not just the students. Everyone is going to want to learn a bit more about magical runes."

Karl thought about that and shook his head in dismay.

"There are Runes and then there is Runecrafting. Anyone can write the runes if they've seen them before, but making a magical item that can properly harness them is an entirely different matter."

The Archbishop didn't quite understand, but Karl had an easy way to explain.

He picked up the paintbrush and some plain ink, then wrote the rune for [Shock]. It was easier to recreate skills that you already understood, and he knew lightning pretty well.

"If you would kindly activate that Rune, I can demonstrate." Karl informed the aging Cleric.

The Archbishop just looked confused, but Lord Nacht tapped the paper and infused it with a bit of mana that made electricity crackle over the page like a stun gun.

The paper was destroyed by the electricity, so Karl wrote another with the same ink, then activated it to create a [Shock] effect on the Black Dragon.

After all, the Archbishop was old and somewhat frail.

A small amount of electricity crackled over the dragon's barrier, and the Archbishop nodded in understanding.

"I see now. It's the difference between the Rune doing what it says, and the Rune doing what you will it to. There is so much more that I could do if I had that skill. But, alas, I will have to leave it to the Blue Clerics and their students.

Perhaps the skill will soon spread through the Alchemists and the Smiths, bringing us back to the glory days of item creation."

The old man was completely on a tangent now, and the Black Dragon was trying hard not to laugh at him.

"I should probably tell you now. Runecrafting won't work for anyone under Royal Rank, and only one in a hundred at best will be able to learn the trade skill. Don't get too lost in big dreams just yet, old friend." The dragon warned him quietly.

"And you had to ruin it. Fine, I'm going back to sleep. See the Monarch out, would you?"

Chapter 637 Age Brings Wisdom

Karl followed Lord Nacht out of the office, and did his best not to laugh at the expression on the Dragon's face.

"You know something that I don't about the skill book, don't you?" Karl asked quietly as they walked through the silent halls of the Cathedral at night.

Nacht smirked at him. "At my age, I know more about nearly everything. But what you mean is that I know that the old man already has Alchemy as a trade skill, and the System won't let you take another."

"So, I'm a Runecrafter by trade? I wasn't expecting that." Karl replied.

"It seems so. I would assume that it was a quest reward of some sort, but Runecrafting is a particularly fine lost art. Which discipline have you chosen?"

"Discipline?"

Nacht shrugged. "Gnomish Engineers, Dwarven Runemasters, Onmyoji Demon Slayers, Ward crafters, Rune Mages and a few others I have long since forgotten all rely on the Runecrafter trade skill for their art. Normally, you would choose one of the disciplines, but it appears that you simply got the Rune library without having to make a choice.

So, eventually, you will have to choose a specialty if you're going to truly master the craft. No matter how many Runes you know, only tireless practice will make you an actual master at using them."

"I was thinking of using them to make useful charms, but not as a trade, just as a parlour trick to make life easier. But I've been to an ancient Dwarven city near the Frost Giant border, as well as that trial that we both entered. They had runes on every wall, and when they were active, they could do so much. Remi, my Naga partner, recorded the Runes in the forges." Karl began.

Nacht nodded in agreement. "That is part of the Runecrafter's art. You could rebuild that sort of magical forge, and even the weapons that they turned out from it.

The Cyclops Forge Masters used a variation of the same art. They're much more like the Dwarves in their crafting skills than either species would be willing to admit. They both have their own style, but they both craft rare items with incredible powers and beautiful details."

Karl sighed. "Why does it feel like all the progress we made with technology is quickly becoming irrelevant?"

The Ancient Dragon laughed. "Not all of it. Many things in life are easier with technology, but it will never compete with magic for raw power and versatility. It's not impossible to mix the two, there are some nations who raise Technomages. But the interaction is limited. They have the most wonderful magical guns. And it only took them a century to recover all the ones that were stolen from them during the civil war. Now they self-destruct if anyone other than the intended user tries to activate them."

That made sense. It was the same thing with any powerful magical artifact. A magical bow that could do massive damage from a long distance was a prime target for theft. Especially if the user could be discretely killed.

"I take it that they don't bond?" Karl asked.

"They're incompatible with the System. I've seen the ancient records, and there were Technomage armies then. But they were seen as being at a disadvantage because they could be disarmed by theft or magic and couldn't call the weapons back to themselves.

Disarming them to capture the soldiers became the standard method of dealing with the tactic. Well, that or casting a spell to amplify fire magic and making all their guns misfire."

Karl nodded in understanding. "The Hill Giants plug artillery barrels with Earth Magic if they get close enough."

Nacht smiled. "The giants surrounding your nation make life much easier than you know. They're a nuisance, but if the old man had to fight off a dozen nations of humans and the hundreds of sub-factions, the Church would have never managed to unify the nation.

You come from the mines, don't you? You've got the look. That whole southern region between the capital and the Beastkin Nation used to be part of the Wilds, a no man's land that competed with monsters for survival.

Without strong magic or the blessings of the World Dragon, the whole of the Golden Dragon Nation would have been the same way if the Giants didn't keep competition out."

Karl frowned. "It's strange to hear it that way. Is that perhaps the perspective of your god?"

Nacht shrugged. "The God of Death doesn't care about species all that much. But Black Dragon Clerics are sensitive to the balance of life and death in the same way that the Nature Clerics are, only we focus more on the higher beings than the plant life.

I think that learning to make something of your Runecrafting could be exceedingly valuable, not only to you but to your partners. Take your friend Remi as an example. As a shaman, she would benefit greatly from runic jewellery. It would improve her elemental magic, you could boost her mana regeneration and casting speed as well.

Or make armour for the Cerro, perhaps a muzzle for the Void Badger."

Karl laughed. "I don't think that she would go for that one. There are still too many species to taste test."

Nacht laughed. "Of all the species that you could have picked, why that one? Where did you even find one? It's not like there are a lot of them."

"I had a quest to find what the System called 'the perfect companion'. I was headed across the Neia continent, towards somewhere far to the east of my location, then suddenly, that quest target disappeared, and the quest retargeted Cara. The System said that she was the best companion, and bonding her completed the quest, so that is what I did." Karl explained.

"That makes more sense than you probably realize. The system's idea of perfect does not usually mean most powerful, fastest growing, or the current meta skill. Instead, it almost always means most a little bit of each of those, but also the most entertaining for the gods to watch. And it's hard to argue that anything but a Void Badger would be quite as entertaining at the Monarch Rank."

"She's not quite there yet." Karl reminded him.

"Give her a few more days. With three of the five already advanced, plus yourself, it won't be long before the others either advance or hit a bottleneck. But a Naga Queen and a Void Badger shouldn't have any issues.

Now, you should sleep, there will be blue dragons coming to see you in the morning, I can almost guarantee it."

Chapter 638 Sharing is Caring

Karl returned to his apartment, and sighed as he realized Cara had already stolen the spot next to Dana, right in the middle of the bed.

[What is this? Are you trying to steal my Dana Mage?] Karl demanded with amusement as he realized that Dana was sleeping with Cara half draped across her.

[You are part of me, I am part of you. We are basically one person.] Cara replied.

[Really now?]

[Yep. So it's not your Dana, it's our Dana.]

[There is definitely something wrong with that logic. If she's our Dana, you should be on the other side. So we can share properly.]

Cara considered it, then used a wing to pull Dana across the bed with her, so the mage was in the middle of the bed.

[Much better.]

Karl woke up the next morning with Cara's head on his chest and Dana against his side. The sun was already well above the horizon, and he was a bit shocked that nobody had woken them up earlier, until he heard splashing in the hot tub.

If there were multiple people soaking in the morning, they must not have anything planned.

Karl got out of bed and noticed that the closet door was open with a lot of new clothing in it. He was headed to pick something out when Rae's voice called out to him from the other room.

"Put on pool shorts and come soak with us. There are bubbles."

That made Karl wonder what they were planning for the day. He couldn't see any of them willingly getting out of a bubble bath early.

Karl put on a pair of shorts from the closet while Dana tried to escape Cara, who was not ready to get out of bed yet.

After a few seconds, the mage had convinced the reluctant badger to go back to the bed in her own space, where she could rest comfortably, then Dana began to search the closet for a swimsuit.

"Shoo. Go play with your spider. I will be along in a few minutes." Dana admonished Karl as he lingered hopefully outside the closet.

"Spoilsport. Fine, I will see you there."

All of the others, plus Rae and Sybil, were already in the hot tub, which was overflowing with bubbles.

"Oh, are we not training today?" Karl asked as he settled in next to Rae, letting the hot water relax his muscles.

Ophelia smiled. "The next two days are off days, then it's exam week for the students. Most people take the week off, as it finishes with the Divine Injection Ceremony. We decided that the cadets can have this last weekend, then we will train them all week before we put them on the train to the Academy to join their peers on the first day.

The train is an important experience for all the students, even if they awakened a few days in advance."

She had a point. That was where Karl had first met Dana, where he had competed to be the first to the school to pick his dorm, where he mentally adjusted to Academy life.

"So, they're discharging the Special Forces group for training?" Karl asked.

Ophelia shook her head. "Not them, they will remain with the military for training. Officially, they want to keep the fact that there are so many new beast affiliated Elites quiet. But our five young Acolytes will be departing after next week."

Karl smirked and ruffled Sybil's hair. "Are they going to be ready to rejoin society after only one more week in our tender loving care? I could likely ask the Bureau to send them back after the first few days."

Sybil's look of panic made everyone laugh. Rae had been intensively training her since they first met, and the young Rogue hadn't been out of the spider's sight for more than a few minutes at a time, with the exception of one night in the dorms.

Rae didn't even let her go home, she kept her tied to a hammock in the spare room as part of her training.

Rae smiled happily. "I think she will be ready. I remember how we were when we were young. She should be at least that good by the time that I'm finished. At least she's already Awakened, so she won't be too weak to train."

Tessa smiled. "Rae is in a good mood because she got to train with Overlord Niall again last night. The second training room is out of commission, by the way. They did some damage during their training."

Rae smirked, but kept her thoughts about the training to herself.

Sybil smiled as she signed and Tessa translated. {Brother Hawk promised to come out for training next week to help me learn fire attacks.}

[You need to combine a flaming sword attack for her before we go back to training. I don't want to start from the basics.] Hawk added from the nest in his space.

Now Karl understood how this system would work. He made the skill, then Hawk and Rae would teach her to use it properly.

"Did I miss anything while I was out for the day? The Archbishop asked for a Runecrafting book." Karl explained.

Dana sighed, then replied. "More than a day, actually. I guess it's easy to lose track of time while you're working on a skill. All five of our students have made progress now that they're at the Awakened Rank. The warriors have both mastered [Shred] and [Guard], and Joan is coming along well in her healing training. Owen learned [Barrier], and he's made great progress on his mana. But it's Sybil that's the star of our show."

The little Rogue blushed, then squeaked as Rae pulled her into a surprise hug from behind.

"Sybil has Backstab, Shadow Step, Silent Movement, Lacerate and Poisoned Blade in her repertoire now." Rae informed them.

"That's quite the list. How did you manage to teach all those?" Karl asked.

"She got some skill points when she advanced, and she picked [Poisoned Blade] as her first chosen skill. She's waiting to get a few more to get the second stage of it instead of getting the other introductory skills." Rae explained.

"As long as it doesn't interfere with her versatility. Mages can have a specialty spell, but Rogues need to be good in every situation." Karl reminded her, though the warning was also for Sybil.

Chapter 639 Day Off

With time off, Karl decided that it was likely best to just focus on personal improvement. He still had Remi and Cara at Royal Rank, and while the spaces were pushing them upwards, they hadn't managed to break through yet.

It would only take a little longer to force them to advance, and if he could do it during the days off, they could have a party.

[Party?] Cara asked.

[Yeah, a little celebration for you reaching a new Rank. Since we have a day off, we could do something fun, possibly order a cake.] Karl suggested.

Cara considered it for a few seconds, then began to roll around on the bed. [Maybe later.]

Cara must be feeling lazy today, if even the offer of a party wasn't enough to get her motivated. But Karl continued to work on the energy levels and quality in the spaces anyhow. Soon, they would all need to be at the same level, and preferably before the students went to school and the team was reassigned.

"Oh, you need to keep doing whatever that is. It's so good." Lotus nearly purred, pulling Karl from his meditation for a moment.

Dozens of thoughts, each more lewd than the one before, were going through his mind, but when he opened his eyes, Lotus was frowning at him.

"No, don't stop. You were leaking power into the tub, and it makes it both warm and tingly." She explained.

Sybil nodded in agreement, still trapped in Rae's arms, but not trying to get free, as she was enjoying the extra bubbly hot tub.

The cleaners were likely going to hate them for this brilliant idea, but for the amount that Karl was paying for the suite, they could suffer the occasional mess.

For a few hours, everyone just relaxed, enjoying their time off. Then Rae called for room service, and that was everyone's cue to get dressed for the day.

Karl noticed that before she even started to stand up out of the bubbles, and without even attempting to dry off, Sybil changed into a black silk martial arts outfit that had to have been made by Rae.

For one, it was bonded. Secondly, it was Monarch Rank silk, and Rae wouldn't let her baby Rogue wear someone else's silk.

It was an excellent gift, and now Sybil wouldn't have to replace her training and infiltration clothes for most of her lifetime, if ever. Most likely, it would become her most prized possession.

"There are towels over there. You don't need to get dressed while still wet." Karl informed her, in case the Rogue had simply missed their presence.

Rae giggled. "Sybil is body shy. She got into the tub fully dressed as well, and only after the bubbles were in place."

Sybil nodded frantically, then grabbed a towel and ran to the bathroom to dry off and cycle her outfit so that it would come back dry.

Karl got out of the tub, and everyone was drying off when Sybil came back out of the bathroom, then covered her eyes, squeaked, waved her hands, then ran away.

"She's easily embarrassed, isn't she?" Dana laughed as Rae vanished to go recover her Rogue.

[The Sybil is funny. She's ashamed to not be all muscles like the rest of you.] Rae explained a few seconds later.

Karl considered that. With all the walking and travelling that they had been doing, they were all pretty ripped, even with the good eating. Despite what Cara thought about his backside.

[Bring her back for breakfast. We're all dressed now, no visible abs to make her self-conscious.]

For the first time since he entered the Golden Divine Academy, Karl found himself with downtime in front of a television, and time to watch the daily morning news. Of course, it would all be only a fraction of the truth, but there might be something on that would entertain him as he worked on forcing the energy in the spaces past the point where it would force Remi and Cara to advance.

Both of them might have just been slow to grow, as they were the newer arrivals, and Remi was still quite young for a Naga Queen.

Cara might be young for a Void Badger as well, but Karl couldn't actually find enough information on them to tell him if they were supposed to get larger, or how fast they grew.

They weren't native to the GDN, so the data in the public records was limited.

The news reports of the day were unexpectedly boring. They must be in a slow news cycle because it was all about a plumbing issue in the Capital that would take all week to fix. There was no mention of war, or monster spawns, or anything else that might be threatening.

So, Karl changed the channel to replays of sports highlights for background noise as he worked.

Dana was doing the same thing, with her head resting on a pillow in his lap, building her mana pool.

Most of the day had passed when Karl began to feel resistance. One of the two spaces was resisting his attempts to advance it, and Karl had a sneaking suspicion that he knew which one.

[Cara. Stop messing with the space. You can only hang out at Royal Rank so long.]

[Nope, I'm not done yet.]

[Name your price.]

[...]

Fine, you make good on the promise of cake, and we have a deal.]

[Hazelnut chocolate fudge cake?]

[With strawberries and whipped cream.]

[Rae, could you order that? My lap is occupied.]

Rae laughed and went to the phone to order the cake. The kitchen wasn't completely certain that they understood what she wanted, but they assured her that they would make a suitable party cake for them, along with an assortment of other snacks to arrive with dinner.

Once Cara stopped being stubborn, a sixth space started to form, and the quality of both her space and Remi's began to undergo a rapid qualitative change.

As soon as the change started, Remi transformed back into her Spirit Snake form, using the logic that the smaller she was, the higher the density of energy she could pack into her body when she advanced.

If she was a tenth the size, that should make the process ten times easier, in the mind of Remi.

Hawk woke up from his extended nap as the new space formed. [Oh, are we getting ready for a new friend? Epic mission to steal a baby dragon? We could make it a black dragon to pass on Nacht's Legacy.] He sleepily suggested.

Thor chuckled at the idea. [I believe his exact words were you cannot have a baby dragon.]

Chapter 640 Chaos Void

Now that she wasn't holding back, Cara was the first to advance of the remaining pair. Not much seemed to change at first, her body wasn't changing, just the energy. Maybe that was why she didn't have the motivation that the others did. If she had learned or instinctively known in advance that she wasn't getting a new skill, she might have lost motivation to be stronger.

Then, as her space stabilized and Remi's began to surge in power, Karl got an unexpected notification.

[Racial Skill {Chaos Void} has improved shared skill {Nullify} to Overlord Rank.]

[You have a hidden racial skill?] Karl asked.

[I do? Oh, I do. Haha, all the Nullify. This is going to be so fun.]

That was going to be absolute chaos. But for the sake of their enemies, at least it wasn't Disintegrate that went to Overlord as soon as she advanced.

Cara waited to come out so that she could show off with Remi once they were both done. The process had already begun, so it could be said that they advanced at the same time, but Remi's Monarch Rank advancement was going to be a good one if the disruption of her space was anything to go by.

All of the elements were swirling around, making a mess of everything except the safe spot on her altar where the Queen in Spirit Snake form was meditating.

Hellstorm vortexes littered the landscape, and a flaming Blizzard filled the air while a hail of stones rained down from above. The unfortunate plants of her space were not faring well, and she would lose a huge number of resources, but it appeared that she was learning a new class skill as she advanced.

After a few minutes, the spell faded, and the flames vanished, leaving charred plants all over her swamp, but Remi had transformed back into a Naga with a pleased smile on her face.

She was larger than before, and more similar to her warriors, with four muscular arms, but a more mature look than she had before. It was hard to say why it looked more mature, other than the size, and the fact that for some reason Remi's form had what appeared to be breasts over the upper arms' pectoral muscles, despite being a reptile. But she definitely looked like a young adult now in Karl's mind.

Her armour spell was fancier as well, with more gold and jewels, as well as dangling bone decorations and a belt full of potions.

[Congratulations, ladies. Looking good.] Karl congratulated them.

[You finally got a skill that isn't evil.] Hawk agreed. Remi nodded. [It's even got a great name. Apocalypse.]

[That is an outstanding skill name. We will have to find a spot for you to show it off.] Karl agreed.

Both beasts came out of their spaces at the same time, appearing in the middle of the living room in front of the sofa where Karl and Dana were resting.

{Tada!} Remi cheered in serpent.

"Ooh, ooh, is that a Queen Remi? Extra strong hug arms!" Lotus shouted as she vaulted over the back of the couch and into the Naga's waiting arms.

Cara laughed as Lotus realized mid-flight that she had only seen one of them from her vantage point, but both had advanced.

Now, she was caught in a dilemma. Remi had her in a tight hug, but there was a soft and fluffy Cara at ground level who had also just advanced.

Remi knew exactly what she was thinking, and lowered her upper body, so Lotus could reach down to pet Cara. But stopped ten centimetres short, so she couldn't quite reach.

"Karl, help! They have learned new torture techniques." Lotus complained.

The ladies laughed as they realized the situation that Lotus was in, and how much fun the two beasts were having with it. Especially when Rae sat down on the sofa to smirk at the Nature Priestess and pet the Badger.

"Did you learn new skills?" Tessa asked as she settled down next to Rae.

Remi nodded happily, and motioned for Karl to explain.

"Remi got a new skill called Apocalypse, that appears to be a fiery blizzard with Hellstorm multiplying vortexes and meteors. While Cara had her Nullify skill advanced to Overlord as soon as she made Monarch." Karl informed the group.

Tessa sighed and looked between the two proud beasts. "I'm not sure which one of you to congratulate first. Those are both remarkable advancements. The pure destructive ability of a skill that is literally called [Apocalypse] versus the usefulness of Overlord Ranked [Nullify]. Just trying to get past Cara's defences will be a national security threat level event. If she can mess with the Overlords most potent abilities, then it will just come down to the group's ability to deal with them." Tessa congratulated them with a smile.

Remi put Lotus down, and the Nature Priestess ran over to hug Cara, then back to hug Remi, then back to Cara again, like a hyperactive pinball of celebration.

"Now that you have the whole team at Monarch, you must be able to accept a new team member, right?" Dana asked, looking up from Karl's lap.

"Technically, yes. The space has formed for another partner, but I'm not in a hurry. It's honestly not going to be easy to find a beast that has Overlord or higher Rank potential, or one that I have the confidence to improve to that level.

If we knew more about how to trigger evolutions for beasts, it would be so much easier.

Look how far Hawk has come from the humble Windspeed Hawk to a Ghostfire Thunderbird. Or Thor becoming a Divine Thunder Cerro. There is no formula or data on that, so the only sure options would be a Dragon or a Phoenix, and I've been warned not to abduct the children of either on this continent. There should be stronger beasts on the other continents, though. When I was sent to the past, they warned me that there were regions with Second and Third Advancement beasts, meaning there should be species peaking at Overlord strength if I interpreted the danger level correctly.

Perhaps, like Cara, I might get lucky finding new friends there again." Karl suggested.

"You could try for an Elemental. I don't know if they count as beasts, but they certainly have a peak strength that is high enough. There are Totem Rank water Elementals in the ocean, and I heard a rumour that there is a Totem Ranked Magma Elemental in one of the coastal nations." Tessa offered.

"Well, we can sort that out when we find the right partner. For the next week, we've got young ones to train, and we need to civilize Miss Sybil enough for her to successfully attend the Academy."

Sybil smiled at the mention. She was getting better with people, she was certain of it. It helped that people didn't try to bully her anymore.

Once that had changed, she found it much easier to get along with people. In fact, being a deaf Elite was almost like a cheat code. So few people could speak sign language that they rarely bothered her, and instead went to others to get answers, but still gave her the level of respect that Awakened Rank Elites were seen to have earned.

That was not much compared to Karl's group, but it was way higher than what she was used to.