

## Beast Master 641

### Chapter 641 Breach

A knock at the door caught Tessa's attention, and she opened the door to let a group of clerics in.

"Monarch, We have an urgent issue. There has been a line breach." The first cleric in the door exclaimed, only to pause in confusion as a server with a large cake on a cart pushed past him into the room, completely ignoring his panic.

"Continue, sir. There has been a line breach where? I take it that you need an Elite of my Rank, or you wouldn't be here in such a tizzy."

[Tizzy, that's a fun word. I like it.] Cara noted.

The cleric nodded rapidly, then a black robed figure appeared at his left.

"Overlord Niall." Karl greeted him.

More boots were stomping down the hallway, and Dana gave Karl a 'WTF is going on' sort of look.

Overlords Tabitha and Ahmad both burst into the room, skidding to a stop so they didn't bowl over the slower reacting clerics.

Karl cleared his throat. "First off, the advancement of my beasts didn't trigger a false invasion alarm, did it? There are a total of five Monarch Rank beasts with me now." Ahmad's fluffy blonde cat ears perked up as he smelled cake.

"Is that hazelnut and chocolate with strawberries? Oh, no, it wasn't you who panicked everyone this time. The Mountain Giants are pushing across the border at Soutle."

The Mage noticed Karl's confused look and continued.

"That's under a hundred kilometres west of here. We're hoping to stop the advance before we have to scramble the entire Capital Defence Force. We have portals." The Mage explained, holding up a parchment scroll that was most likely the portal spell in question.

Karl sighed. "Cara, Remi. Grab the cake. We will have to party later. Sybil, do we need to take measures, or will you behave while we're gone?" Sybil gave him a thumbs up and sent a message using the system's chat function. {I will go hang out with the others for the rest of the day. They were talking about wanting to learn to work as a team, and Lady Rae says to give them a chance.}

Karl nodded, and the Rogue ducked under the table, then vanished.

Tabitha, the Warrior Class Overlord, looked startled.

"You taught an Awakened Rank Rogue to Shadow Step already? You've only been back a few days."

Rae smiled at her. "Not only did I teach her, we also awakened her after activating her class. She's a good protégé."

The Warrior gave Rae an impressed look. "Which one were you? I studied the portfolio on the way over, but it didn't mention a humanoid beast."

"Lady Rae Bloodbath. I learned how to mimic humans when I became a Queen."

Tabitha nodded and gave her a wink. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Lady Bloodbath. I look forward to seeing what a Spider Queen can do in combat."

In his space, Thor sighed. So much for their days off.

Niall made a 'get on with it' gesture to Ahmad, and the mage opened the portal, floating over the floor of the apartment.

"If any of you have obligations, you may remain, but we always appreciate more hands. We're stretched a bit thin today. Everyone else was called out last night." Niall explained as he double-checked the fastenings on his clothing. It was the outfit Rae had made for him, so Karl knew that it wouldn't have worn or torn, so it was likely a routine to focus and prepare himself.

Karl's team changed into their armour, and Cara vanished into her space with the cake.

Keeping the cake fresh was priority one.

They stepped through the portal, and Karl called out the bodyguards, who were still Monarchs, but felt somehow stronger now that Remi had advanced. The skill was a shared one, and it must have improved in some way when the Naga Queen became a Monarch.

Remi came out with all three of her bodyguards, while the others came through the portal behind them

"Careful. The intelligence was wrong." Niall warned, a half second before trees came crashing down around them, and an entire platoon, or whatever the Mountain Giants called their military units, came into sight.

Six Overlords, ten Monarchs, and twenty Royal Rank warriors. "We should have brought more cake." Rae muttered as the last of the team came through the portal, and Ahmad closed it behind them.

The leader of the Mountain Giant team stepped forward and began to speak in crude Common.

"Surrender now, and we will grant you a swift death." He demanded.

"I don't think that is going to work for us." Tabitha laughed as she brought out a massive two-handed blade.

The Giant nodded. "Then we will pin you to the city walls as your Capital falls, so you can watch the end of your pathetic church."

Karl noticed a shiny thing on the ground, and casually scooped it up into his inventory, then picked up a small stone.

"Hey, Tabs. What do you think the odds are that I can brain him with a rock?" Karl could see the vein pulsing in her forehead at the nickname, but the Mountain Giant was literally spluttering in rage.

Karl activated all of his buffs and coated the stone in Disintegration, then Nullify. His hand shot forward with the sharp crack of supersonic travel, and the stone rocketed towards its target.

Unfortunately, Karl was never a professional ball player, and even with his improved physical abilities, his aim wasn't quite up to that standard.

The [Nullify] spell on the stone shattered the Giant's defensive barrier, which then crashed into his helmet, sending the golden armour piece flying.

"Good thing we didn't bet." Karl muttered as the Giant staggered.

Niall snickered and winked at him before vanishing, then the fight was on.

The Giants surged forward as Tabitha recovered, and the Thor came out to defend the back line in Cerro form.

Behind Karl, Rae laughed. "They are so going to kill you for that. You should slap one to death while you have the chance. We didn't get to do it last time."

"Did nobody ever teach you the negotiation tactics of Giants, you psychopath." Tabitha muttered as she met the Giants' charge.

"We are negotiating. I learned this tactic from the Troll Emperor himself."

Chapter 642 Gigantic Ambush

The situation took a drastic turn as the wind began to howl and embers of fire filled the sky. Clouds gathered, turning the noon sky dark, except where it was punctuated with lightning. Then the Hellstorm Vortexes formed, and a keening noise began far above them.

The first Meteors rocketed down through the clouds as Hawk came out to add his own Hellstorm Vortexes to the chaos.

The ethereal blue fire was an odd counterpart to Remi's bright orange flames, and the Overlord Rank Giants began to swear in their own language.

{Where is the Shaman? Make him cancel that.} They were insisting.

Only, there was no Shaman to be found. Cara had exited her space to a spot at the edge of the trees and had crept up on him, Nullifying his counterspells until she could ambush him amidst the confusion.

One of the Giant Overlords swept his blade towards the sky, dispersing a huge portion of Remi's spell, and creating a swathe of clear sky.

The Naga Queen was already exhausted from the spell, and had retreated to her space to recover, but half the spell was still going, and the attack had missed Hawk, who was still actively raining fire on the battle.

Niall reappeared to lodge a blade in the back of the unarmoured head of the leader, then Rae vanished, only to reappear in spider form with all eight limbs stabbed through gaps in a Monarch Ranked Giant's armour.

"Showoff." Karl heard the Rogue mutter as both assassins vanished again, using their skills and movement to find targets that couldn't defend against them.

Dana's Golems marched forward as the Giants tried to reach the core formation, where Karl and Tabitha were forming the front lines with all three of Remi's bodyguards.

Karl took out his blade in one hand, with the Haint Claw on the other, and prepared to delay the Overlords until someone could deal with them.

Ahmad was a Golem Mage, with four Legionnaire styled golems, and they were standing just behind Karl, waiting for the chance to attack around him.

Ophelia had moved to the back of the group, defending against the attempts to encircle them, but Remi's initiative had effectively dealt with the majority of the Royal Rank targets that the berserker would normally be responsible for.

[LOOT!] Cara cheered as she made her way through the back of the Giant force.

[Bring some back for me. I need a nap.] Remi pleaded.

This new spell was great, but it was a one and done sort of deal. She could keep it active for a while, but there was no casting it twice. At least not at early Monarch Rank.

Karl was fighting on the defensive, using his enhanced speed to keep a pair of Overlords at bay as Ahmad and his Golems slowly wore them down.

Tabitha was in a similar situation, but with Niall helping her. That left Remi's bodyguards holding off one more between them. Despite the early casualties, the Giants were beginning to close in on the human force, and even Hawk and Remi's bombardment wasn't enough to completely stop them.

"Any brilliant plans, Beast Master?" Tabitha asked as she was nearly knocked to her knees by her opponent.

"Give me a moment, they're running out of reinforcements." Karl called back, hoping to distract one of his targets for long enough to take advantage.

Between Rae and Cara, they really were running short on reinforcements. The Giants had no way to deal with an invisible Bloodbath Spider that was incorporeal and immune to brute strength.

They had attack skills that could hurt her, but they had to find her first.

Suddenly, the target to Karl's left howled in pain, then gurgled as his throat filled with blood.

He downed a healing potion, then turned to attack behind him, looking for Rae. The spider had stabbed him in the throat then run away, giving Karl a chance to attack.

The blade was replaced with his Maul, and five stacks of Monarch Ranked Disintegrate slammed into the Giant's hip, where the armour was already damaged.

The Overlord collapsed to the ground, missing a leg, and Cara mentally whistled at his durability.

Even on an Overlord, she had expected half his torso to be gone after that strike, but it had only gotten enough of his hip to sever a leg.

However, that made him an easy target for Overlord Ahmad's Golems, and the creature was decapitated only seconds later.

Then Niall was on the other, and Karl found himself free of an Overlord Rank target for the first time in the battle.

He couldn't go far, this was his spot on the front line, but he could switch to his bow and fire [Ghostfire] arrows into the remaining Monarch Rank Giants.

It was the lowest energy cost attack ability that he had, and the arrows left a ghostly string back to the Haint Claw, which was adding a soul leech effect to the flames.

It wasn't immediately fatal, but every bit of bleeding and burning damage added up. The sound of truck horns behind them brought relief to Karl's group, marking the arrival of reinforcements. However, the truck seemed to have stopped a few kilometres away.

[Hawk, what are they doing?] Karl asked.

[They can't get close. We're fighting in a circle, and the shockwaves are travelling most of a kilometre. Then there is Remi's spell, and my flames.]

That was right. Karl hadn't thought about the fact that they had barriers to defend against the attacks. The ground did not, nor did the truck bringing the reinforcements.

Reinforcements who had no idea what spell effects would turn on them.

[Remi, you can take down the spell now and get some rest. There will be more fighting soon.]

The horns of the trucks had alerted the Giants as well, and they were beginning to regroup now that the area attacks had ended. They had no intention of fighting to the end. Instead, they would rejoin the rest of their forces and push again.

And, it would be harder than ever to stop them.

Half of the Overlords were still alive, and they were covering for the others as they backed away, forcing Karl and his team to advance to keep pressure on them.

Then, as one, the Giant Overlords used a ground slam ability, sending a wall of stone rushing at Karl's team. The sides were separated, and by the time that the ability had been blocked and nullified, the Giants were long gone, hundreds of metres away.

That wasn't dampening the spirits of the Overlords, though.

"That has to be a new record. Three permanent Overlord Kills." Ahmad cheered, his ears flat against his head in contrast to his happy words.

Rae transformed back to humanoid to give him a confused look.

"Normally, the engagement breaks off earlier than this. Neither nation can afford to lose Overlords at any sort of regular rate. So, if you're losing, you take your casualties with you and retreat.

Speaking of which, I don't see the bodies. Did they manage to recover them? I thought that we had them secure behind us."

Rae gave him a toothy smile.

"That's my loot. I'm not giving up my bath water."

Overlord Tabitha gave a very undignified giggle. "Right, Bloodbath Spider. In the most literal sense."

#### Chapter 643 Churned Earth

Karl took a moment to look around them, checking for bodies that needed to be looted, and any sign of additional attackers.

But what shocked him was the pure devastation that had occurred during the battle.

A swathe over five hundred metres per side had been razed by [Apocalypse]. There were deep furrows in the ground from attack skills, the earth was churned as if someone had been tilling it for planting, and the entire stand of trees where the Giants had been hiding no longer existed.

There was an excellent reason that the army did their best to keep the fighting to the border regions, and this was part of it.

Nothing survived a battle at this level, and if it happened in a resource rich region, or over top of growing crops, it would be difficult to recover from.

[All this mess, and we were just getting started. If they had more than one shaman with them, they would have been able to hold out much longer, but Cara killed the dumb one as soon as the fight started.] Rae noted.

[You might have just been getting started, but over on my end, I was doing all I could to keep them from killing the squishy people.] Karl reminded her.

[Good thing you're not squishy. You took plenty of hits.] Cara reminded him.

[I am going to be sore tomorrow for certain. But I suspect that we're not done fighting yet. They wouldn't have scrambled us for this when they weren't expecting us to be attacked the moment we stepped out.] Karl offered.

That got Cara and Rae excited. This had been a great fight, but it wasn't nearly long enough. With the area attack that Remi dropped on the Giants, plus Cara busy attacking from behind, Rae only had to fight the Monarchs and the Overlords. But the Monarchs were already taking constant damage, and the Giants were ill-suited to dealing with a being as glorious as herself.

In contrast, Cara would happily maul the weaker Giants so she could loot their bodies. She had given away almost all the trinkets that she had collected when she went on a birthday gifting spree, and now she needed more stuff to fill her loot box.

Good stuff, broken stuff, shiny stuff. There was a place and time for it all.

Overlord Ahmad cleared his throat to get their attention, and smiled as Cara came over to nuzzle his hand. [This one smells like cat. It's pretty good. I might have to trade sleeping spots with someone.] Cara noted.

[I am fairly sure that he sleeps alone.]

[Even better.]

"The target we were intending to find is five kilometres west of our location, and currently engaged by another strike force. The message just came through. We have planes scouring the area for Giants that might have evaded our patrols, but the strike team will need our assistance if they're going to survive without casualties." The Catman mage informed them.

Rae waited patiently for them to be ready, while Cara took the chance to check the ground one last time for loot. They had grabbed many of the bodies as they ran away, but there was a chance that there would still be valuables on the ground, as the Giants were not system users, so they didn't have a storage space.

The Clerics climbed up on Thor's back once the saddle Rae had made him was equipped, then Rae placed Dana on one Golem and Ahmad on the other.

That should cover everyone who didn't have supernatural strength, and they were ready to move.

"Is this how you usually travel?" Ahmad asked, bemused by the actions of the Bloodbath Spider.

"Yeah. Mages and Clerics can't run as fast as the rest of us, so we let them rest and have either Thor or the Golems provide transport.

That way they're fully rested when we arrive, and we don't have to slow down for them." Karl explained.

The Overlord Rank mage smiled and nodded in agreement, though he had spells that would let him keep up with the group, and knew that Dana did as well.

Now that she was a Murim Battlemage, her physical skills were rapidly increasing. The martial arts aspect of her class was strong, and she had already possessed wind walking abilities.

But riding on the Golem was certainly easier. Plus, with eight legs, the ride was very smooth, you weren't jostled around like you were on a horse, or on a Cerro, who swayed as he walked.

The jogging pace of a group of high ranked elites was fast enough that the vehicle convoy was falling further behind them on the rough terrain that used to be a main road.

Someone would have to bring equipment out and grade the road back to smooth gravel, but that could take a few days, and wouldn't start until after the battles in the region had ended.

Until then, the vehicles would do their best, and Elites with suitable skills would level a route for their own teams.

Overhead, Hawk had already spotted their targets.

[Turn a bit northwest. They're fighting in a valley to keep the damage contained.] He instructed.

[Got it. How is the battle going?]

[The humans are outnumbered two to one, but there is only one Overlord on our side, and four Monarchs.]

That would make it a standard strike team, Karl assumed. Five people was fairly normal for responses, and his own team was normally set up the same way.

Compared to that, the team he had come with was akin to swatting flies with a hammer.

"As soon as we're over this ridge, we will be on them. Hawk says it's two standard patrols on their side, versus one on ours." Karl informed Overlord Tabitha, who was running beside him.

"Alright, I will take the left side, you take the right. We will drive forward to our team, then spread out to give them a free side to retreat to our clerics."

[Hawk, we're coming in. You can start clearing a path for us now.]

[About time. These Giants need to learn that fire is better than Earth Magic.] Hawk agreed.

[They've been throwing stones at you again, haven't they?]

[Constantly.]

## Chapter 644 Rescue The Overlord

Karl led the charge down the hill, hoping that the Monarch Ranked [Eternal Lightning] barrier that was over the whole group would trick the Elites into thinking that it was just a large group of Monarchs that were coming to the aid of the outnumbered force.

Normally, the extra Overlord with the fancy armour that the Mountain Giants were wearing, would be enough for them to still have the advantage, but with three new Overlords on the human side, this would be a short and messy battle.

Tabitha's plan was to surround the force, making them fight in both directions, and preventing them from retreating, which would prevent them from reaching a healer who could resurrect their fallen.

If it worked, they would rack up two more confirmed Overlord kills for the day, bringing them to five. Battles between Overlords rarely ended in permanent death, so it would be a huge change in the balance of power at this end of the battle.

Others had told Karl in the past that the Overlords were generally only there to keep the peace, but that didn't seem true of the Mountain Giants, who had more of them than anyone else, on an individual national basis.

As they charged into battle, one of the Mountain Giant Overlords held up a talisman made of what looked like pure diamond, then a pair of portals began to form, allowing reinforcements to arrive.

"Crap, they tricked us. It's an ambush." Niall noted, his voice more amused than concerned.

Rae shifted back to her humanoid form without breaking stride and smiled at him.

"Do you want to play a game?"

The Overlord smiled back at her and both of them vanished, while Tabitha cursed them out.

"We've got an entire battle ahead, and they've already run off to play?" She complained.

Karl focused on Rae's position, and realized she had gone through the portal, but he could feel her magic only a few kilometres away, and she was keeping a kill count as she worked.

"Don't worry about it too much. Those portals only go a few kilometres. They're in a Mountain Giant army camp causing chaos now that all the Overlords are gone." Tabitha shook her head in dismay, then Hawk swept across the battlefield, throwing out Monarch Ranked [Hellstorm] vortexes that were rapidly spawning smaller spells through the newly arrived Giants.

"If there is one thing that we're good at, it's area suppression. Go pick your Overlord, and we will deal with the rest."

There was only one with the reinforcements, making it three on three, counting the Overlord that was with the team they were relieving.

"Thor, charge into the middle with the clerics and relieve the defenders." Karl ordered.

Ahmad's Golems were hacking a path through to the newly arrived Overlord, and Karl's team was moving to join the encircled forces, forcing a gap in the attackers, while Karl hung back and used his bow to keep the path clear.

[Disintegrate] was incredibly effective on the arrows, and punched through armour like cloth. The golden plate was absorbing most of the energy from the spell, but the arrows were finding their marks, deep in flesh, even if they weren't carving holes in their chests.

Karl smiled as he saw the Giants trying to deal with Ophelia, whose fully buffed Dire Bear form was nearly as tall on all four feet as the Mountain Giants were on two. They clearly were not expecting that sort of foe, and the Berserker was handily herding them to where Dana and Cara were waiting for them.

Remi was halfheartedly casting spells, but it was clear that she was still exhausted from trying to keep up such a large spell at full power.

Ophelia slammed her front paws down, using [Gravity Slam] to knock a row of Giants over for Dana and her Golems to deal with. [Oh, that's it. I get it now.] Thor cheered, and then a tail slam took another group of Monarch Rank Giants to their knees.

[Isn't it kind of them to kneel in respect for the might of a Cerro?] Karl joked.

[Wait, what are you guys doing there? It sounds fun. Eighty-seven, eighty-eight.] Rae interjected.

Whatever they had found at the camp, Rae was going on a rampage.

A group of Giants charged Karl, who was now isolated and standing by himself, a bit further up the hill where he had stopped when the reinforcements arrived.

It was a great spot to shoot from, but nobody would be able to get to him in an emergency unless one of the beasts returned to their space.

Karl charged into them as fast as he could, forgetting that his physical stats had been pushed so far beyond normal by the Packmaster Class, and the [Bestial Champion] skill that buffed him even further when the pack was in danger.

The Blade of Champions buried itself to the hilt in the chest of a Monarch Rank Giant, who simply stared at Karl in shock for a few seconds, unable to comprehend what had just happened.

Karl followed up using [Rend] coated in [Nullify], aimed at the throat of the beast on his left.

Blood sprayed into the air, and something tugged at Karl's sword arm.

A sharp tug pulled it free, and Karl saw a spectral image of the dying Giant being forcefully ripped from its body by a string attached to the Haint Claw.

The weapon was getting thirsty, and while the Giant's body was healing as it tried to retreat, the Soul Siphon was stubborn.

The others were shouting something in Giant, but Karl couldn't make it out as he used [Rend] to parry the attacks coming his way.

The Giants in the back were horrified by the attack, so Karl decided to take advantage.

[Ghostfire] coated on four arcs of [Rend] hurled from his fingertips barely grazed the Giants, but it set them on fire, and established the soul damage to give the weapon a link.

Oddly, that made it easier for their Shaman to free the mortally wounded fighter. There must be a limit on how much Soul energy the Haint Claw could steal, and when it was pulled from multiple targets, it was easier to deal with.

A flash of his blade, and the judicious application of Nullify over Disintegrate, took the head off another Giant, right before Karl was hit by the flat of a blade and sent flying.

He twisted in the air to keep his eyes on the Giants, and landed on his feet, sliding a few more metres before he came to a stop, unharmed.

[Oh, they're in trouble now.] Cara laughed from the far side of the battlefield, where she was helping Thor and Tessa push the Giants away from the defenders on that side, to give everyone a break.

Karl braced his feet and pushed off to jump back into battle, then threw a flurry of [Rend] attacks ahead of him to put the defenders off balance.

Another Soul was grabbed by the Haint Claw as Karl took an arm off the Giant, then followed up with a slash across the back of its legs as it turned to defend the weakened side. This time, the Giant was too close to death, and the Haint Claw ripped its energy free of the body, causing the Giant to crumple dead on the ground.

Then, a roar went up through the Giants as an Overlord fell to the combined efforts of Rae and Niall. The Giants were surging in their direction, but the feeling was different. They were not looking to overrun the humans, they wanted to recover the body and retreat.

[Let them have that one. It will make them go away.] Karl instructed Rae.

[Fine. I've done pretty good today. They can have one to bring back to life. We will just kill him again later.]

## Chapter 645 Lady Othello

With the death of the Overlord, the Giants had realized that things were not going their way, and began to retreat towards the portals.

They were in for a shock when they got there, as Rae and Niall had killed anything that moved in the camp on the other side, and then had returned here to ambush an Overlord together.

It was good to see Rae making friends with similar interests.

Karl rejoined the others as the Giants ran away, but didn't let down his guard.

"Keep ready. They're going to find a massacre on the other side of the Portals, and they might come back." He warned before Niall could.

The Monarch leading the other team came over to shake his hand with a smile. "I've already greeted the others. I am Lady Othello, Head Knight of the Silver Blades." She introduced herself.

"Karl, The Beast Master."

She smiled. "I gathered that much from the Cerro. I must say, young Thor is quite the cavalry unit. I don't think that I've ever seen a breaching charge quite so effective."

Thor stomped his feet and wobbled his head in pleasure at the praise. Gravity Slam and Earthquake worked amazingly well to put the Giants off balance for him to charge into the defence lines.

"I appreciate the rescue. Even with a paladin of my power, we were having issues. But what is that combat power you have? Not your beasts, which are an unfair advantage to start with. But your personal combat power." Lady Othello asked, an excited gleam in her eyes at the chance to gain new knowledge.

"I can share some of the skills and physical stats of my beasts. With five of them at Monarch Rank, I would estimate that my base physical abilities are twice what an average Monarchs are. Mostly, I only use a few of the most efficient attack skills, though there are more."

"Like Soul Chain?" The Overlord Rank Paladin asked.

Karl shook his head. "I have a weapon with Soul Steal and Soul Damage on it. That's the effect you're seeing, not one of my personal skills."

She shrugged. "Either way, you should have seen how terrified they were when you literally ripped the soul essence out of a Monarch Ranked Giant."

It makes a bit of a spectacle, and I do hope that you have a plan for when they start to focus on you to eliminate the threat."

Karl nodded silently, while Rae transformed back to human and rode one of her Golems over to the conversation.

"Are we making plans to deal with the Mountain Giants? I vote genocide." Lady Othello looked confused at the new arrival, but Niall just laughed.

"Lady O, meet Queen Rae Bloodbath. One of Karl's bonded partners, and a Monarch Rank Bloodbath Spider." He explained with a wink toward his counterpart.

Othello smiled at Rae. "I saw your handiwork today, and I have no doubt that it is an actual possibility."

Tabitha came over and cleared her throat. "I hate to break up the happy fun time, but the Giants have clearly advanced past our lines. We need to scout them out and find the advance strike force teams that have made it past the defenders."

That brought everyone back on task.

Karl nodded in agreement. "Right, we found the first group nearly five kilometres from here, closer to the Capital. They were waiting next to where we entered by Portal. They seemed determined that they would raze the Capital with this offensive, so they won't be alone."

[Hawk, what do you see? Any more targets?] Karl asked.

[Sure. Do you want weak ones, lots of weak ones, strong ones, or lots of strong ones?]

[How many groups do you see that aren't fighting?]

[Maybe fifty?]

Karl cleared his throat to get everyone's attention back on him. "Hawk says there are at least fifty groups of Mountain Giants past the defenders, and that's just the ones that aren't fighting anyone right now."

[Only four that have big ones stronger than you.]

"Four of them with Overlords." Karl added.

This portion of the border near Lake Chiptonrith marked the closest spot for the Giants to cross their border and head to the GDN Capital. It was a long way from any Mountain Giant population centre, as far as anyone else knew. So, it was normally a safe route for travellers to pass through to move between the Golden Dragon Nation and Newbon.

"Should we split up?" Lady Othello asked.

The other Overlords nodded, and then Tabitha sighed. "I think it's for the best. I will go with your response team, and the other two will stay with the Beast Master and his team.

Most of the Giants should be operating with one Overlord at the most, and this will give us the advantage."

Karl frowned. "There are a few large groups as well. Should we deal with them before we split."

Othello looked at him like he was insane. "You want to get into a fight where you know you're outnumbered?"

Karl smiled at her.

"More loot from the loot god. Besides, we specialize in it."

Othello hummed to herself as she thought about the answer, then realized that Cara was wearing a gaudy golden chain around her neck.

"Wait, I don't remember that. When did the Void Badger start wearing bling?" She asked.

Karl inspected the chain, then laughed. [Chain of Disruption] Grants the wearer's crowd control and interrupt type abilities a five percent greater chance of success.

"It looks Cyclops made, and it's Monarch Rank, so my guess is she got it sometime in the last hour. It looks good on her, though. Very fashionable."

Karl definitely wasn't going to mention that it looked like a cat collar made of gold.

Dana reached down to pet Cara's head. "It increases her chance to disrupt enemy attacks. You know, the fact that the Giants' equipment doesn't bond or vanish with the dead makes them a pretty good target for upgrades. My own gear could use a bit of a refresher, but nothing that they wear is suitable for a Battlemage who needs mobility."

Othello shrugged. "Most of the Cyclops made gear does bond to the user. However, bonded gear that is in use remains on the body when you die. It can be claimed by anyone after you're gone. It's just the items that are put away that remain locked away."

## Chapter 646 Large Group Hunting

Tabitha sighed as the group got sidetracked. "So, what first? The big group, or hunt another Overlord? We have three permanent kills today, and if we had claimed the body, it would have been four."

Niall shrugged. "It was better to encourage them to leave than to make them fight for the body. Besides, we can get another when we hit a group with only one Overlord."

Overlord Ahmad nodded in agreement. "We should hit the largest groups in the area first, so they don't reach the city, then go hunting Overlords. Four on one, they won't even be able to run away."

Who knows, maybe our young friends here will manage to get an above Rank kill at Monarch. Wouldn't that be something?"

The others laughed and Karl smiled at the Catman Mage.

"Now, we just need to find a way for you to get one at Overlord and shake the world." Karl offered.

The mage laughed. "Now you're pushing it. Totems are just built different. Literally. Their attack power is usually only half again as much as a peak Overlord, but the Totem advancement does something to them, and they take a tiny fraction of damage from anyone who isn't a Totem. I don't know what sort of defensive skill they all get, but even the Archbishop has it, so it's not a warrior type ability. That's why they're so important to their nations."

If you had to go fifty on one with Overlords to take on a Totem, even a healer specialist would be impossible to beat. Perhaps it should be, especially a healer would be impossible to beat.

[Three kilometres north, there is a huge group passing by us soon. Not strong, mostly Dana Mage level.]  
Hawk updated.

"We have a target. There is a large group passing three kilometres from us. Nobody has intercepted them, so they'll be headed straight for the city if we don't." Karl informed them.

"Alright, we trust your scout. Lead the way."

Hawk was suspiciously happy, like 'I just found water magic users to torture' happy. Normally, he was only bloodthirsty in specific situations, so Karl wasn't sure why this was different, until they topped a hill, and saw the army arrayed below them.

Mountain Giants, Hill Giants, Frost Giants, Ogres, Ettin, Cyclops and others that Karl had no name for were marching in formation towards the Capital, nearly two thousand strong.

Most were not at Royal Rank. There were hundreds of Ascended and Commander Rank Ogres and Giant subspecies at the back, working in the supply section. The number that were actually at Royal Rank or higher was closer to a quarter of the total.

That should make the start quick and bloody.

"Where are the leaders?" Niall muttered, not seeing the Overlords that should be with them.

"In the scouting groups all around the army, clearing the way for their advance. Our last fight let them move past us, and now we're behind their lines." Karl quietly replied, relaying Hawk's scouting intelligence.

Lady Othello turned to face them with a questioning look.

"What's the plan?"

"We fight. The Overlords hold back for now. You can tag team the reinforcements when they try to stop us. Put the bodies in your inventory, or call for one of my beasts to do it. They can't take them back to resurrect that way." Karl suggested.

"You're going to try to solo an army?" Tabitha asked in disbelief.

"I have a team. Besides, look how happy the War God is."

Tessa was literally glowing red with divine energy, and the army in the valley below them would notice it soon. "I called for reinforcements. If you can hold them here for five minutes, we will have hundreds of Elites and an entire regiment of cleric led infantry on site." Othello informed them.

Dana rolled her eyes at Karl, then sighed in resignation.

"Don't worry, Cara will look after you. If anything happened, it would mess up her sleeping arrangement." Karl joked.

Remi woke up a little from her nap. [Are we fighting again?]

[And it's a big one. We will need your spells again. But don't go too hard, they're going to have clerics trying to Counterspell them.]

Remi came out with her bodyguards, and Karl prepared for the charge.

"For the record, this is a terrible idea." Overlord Ahmad reminded them.

"Noted. But I'm going to do it anyhow. Remember, don't get too involved in the battle at the start, you'll need to be free to deal with the Overlords when they arrive."

The Catman Mage smiled. "Go, enjoy your personal flavour of crazy."

Karl started the charge down the hill towards the back of the convoy, where the Commander and low Royal Ranked Giants were pulling the supply carts. Every army moves on its stomach, and while they were only a few hours from the Capital at a Giant's marching speed, destroying their food and gear would make a siege much more difficult.

Plus, there were other advantages.

[Hawk, Remi. Area suppression, if you would.]

Dozens of [Hellstorm] vortexes spawned in the rear of the army, demolishing wagons and tearing apart the Commander Rank Giants and weaker support team members before they could even understand what was happening.

The Royals fared a bit better, but everyone was so distracted by the attack that they didn't even notice Karl's team until Tessa led Thor past him and into their lines with her golden spear levelled.

Thor knocked an entire column to the ground with [Gravity Slam] then trampled them as Tessa spun her spear and slit throats as they passed.

[The Tessa really is one of us when she gets feisty, isn't sh?] Cara laughed.

Normally, she was on defence with Thor, but a War Cleric in combat was a fearsome sight. Especially when she had a long spear and a Monarch Ranked Cerro mount.

Karl sent his Lamia bodyguards to the right, towards the main force with him, while Remi went left with hers to finish the back of the supply column.

Karl laughed as the Giants hurled stones, ice and spears at him, all of which simply bounced off his barriers, doing too little damage to get past the reduction of [Void Body].

[Skill Master 4 Activation] Skill: Rampage has improved by 1 Tier. New skill [Rampage 2] gained.

[Rampage Tier 2] Every time any enemy is damaged by the Packmaster or a bonded beast, increase the damage done by the Packmaster and all bonded beasts for one minute.

It was a one word change from the original version, but a critical change. Every bit of damage they did would increase everyone's damage, not just their own.

The damage caused by the Hellstorm Vortexes wasn't only increasing the damage done by Remi and Hawk anymore, but the entire team.

Karl returned fire, using [Disintegrate] covered [Rend] attacks for area coverage. He was mildly horrified by the way that the first rows of Commander and Royal Rank Giants were simply eviscerated, split in half by the attacks as the damage continued to stack.

Over and over, Karl hurled the flat arcs of power into the Giants, cutting the weaker members down as if he were harvesting wheat.

That was sure to get someone powerful's attention, and then he could really test the extent of the new [Rampage] upgrade.

In his mind, Rae was laughing hysterically as her legs punched through armour like warm butter. All the blood was hers. She didn't even particularly want this flavour, and she could have it with just a casual stab. So, instead of keeping them for herself, she started hurling the bodies into the air. The severed limbs detached as they flew, causing the bodies to rain blood over the battlefield as Rae wove her webs and made the killing fields an impossible maze of sticky silk.

This was the single greatest day of her life.

## Chapter 647 5 v Army

In the distance, the Overlords watched in horror as Karl's group went wild through the back ranks of the army.

"You know, if the reinforcements don't get here soon, he really is going to solo an army." Overlord Niall noted.

"He's certainly efficient at removing targets below his rank. But what is up with that spider. That is the most gruesome thing I have ever seen." Othello agreed.

"What you fail to realize is that she's not even serious yet. She is a Night Hunter, and I taught her to use [Vibrating Blade]." The Rogue Overlord laughed.

The Paladin frowned. "You're saying that she could be invisible, incorporeal, and immune to physical damage, but she's just running around enjoying herself? No wonder the old generations tried to exterminate her species."

"Oh, you knew about them?" Niall asked, surprised at her recognition.

"History buff, what can I say? But the first Overlord led group of Giants is on the way. We should get going."

Niall nodded. "I will move us all with [Advanced Shadow Step]."

Below them, Karl had finally reached the first of the Monarch Ranked Giants that had come to intervene. Fully equipped with Shaman barriers, they had charged through the vortexes to reach him. Karl opened his fingers and hurled Disintegrate coated in Nullify at them, shattering barriers and cracking armour with the first strike.

The power of his improved skills was a heady thing, and combined with [Void Body] Karl was beginning to feel like an invincible god of battle.

Then the counterattack hit, and he realized that he might have overestimated his immortality.

Ten [Cleave] attacks from the Monarch Ranked Giants hit him at once, shattering [Eternal Lightning] and carving deep lines in his armour, then the flesh underneath. His body began to rapidly mend itself, but the point was made.

Ten percent of his life reduced from every attack by [Void Body] was no small amount, but all ten of them were at the same Rank as he was, and Cleave was a slow casting, high damage skill.

Karl charged into their ranks as he reactivated [Eternal Lightning], getting too close for them all to attack at once.

Three Frost Giants fell in the first ten seconds, hacked apart with [Ghostfire] laced attacks that targeted their weakness to heat. But the Mountain Giants had Cyclops forged armour, and they were smart enough not to fall for simple tricks.

Karl spun and parried for a few seconds before the Bodyguards made it to him. The Lamia pair sliced into the Giants with [Rend], allowing Karl to break free of their attacks and target one to take down.

[There is a cap on the stacked damage. It's not growing anymore.] Hawk complained.

[It says one minute.] Karl reminded him.

[Not the whole minute. It stopped before that.] Hawk amended.

So, there was some hidden soft cap to keep him from using an army of small creatures to stack millions of miniscule attacks for the skill effect.

[Well, now we know how strong we can be. Is it enough?] Karl asked as he defended the Lamia pair, allowing them to land constant attacks.

[It should be.]

Karl threw up an [Earth Barrier] between himself and the rest of the battle, and realized the weakness in his new skill.

Rampage only increased damage, not overall power. His defensive skills weren't getting any better with time, only his offensive. So, in a way, he was becoming a glass cannon.

Assuming that he was fighting something of similar skill, that was. These Monarch Ranked Giants were good, but nowhere near his increased speed, even if they were nearly equal to him in strength.

The stone barrier came down only seconds later, hacked apart by the earth magic of the Hill Giants, who were trying to pelt him and the Lamia with magical stones. The size that they could throw without risking hitting the Giants he was in combat with was not large enough to make it past [Void Body], so Karl wasn't too concerned.

However, the constant pelting made it hard to keep his balance, so he had to split his attention to avoid the majority of them.

Progress was down to a crawl for the moment, but the fight behind Karl was close to over, and then Remi and Hawk would be able to focus their attacks on the main force of the army.

Behind Karl, Niall popped in and dropped three Overlord Rank Giant bodies, then vanished again, going back to his team.

Karl tossed the bodies in Rae's space, knowing that the Giants would be hurting badly after that day's fighting.

[Overlords are here for Lotus. The Cat Overlord died.] Thor updated him.

[How did that happen? Did they get there fast enough?] Karl replied, trying not to get too distracted from the fight.

[Fast enough. He's standing again, but Lotus is tired. Tessa is tying her to my back.]

Well, that was a start. At least they had managed to save their fallen Overlord, while collecting three more from the Giants.

By Hawk's early scouting reports, that meant there was only one more Giant Overlord nearby, so the strike team could afford a moment to rest and recover.

[The other weak groups are coming this way. Rae, can you warn the Tessa?]

[On it.]

That was another two hundred Giants, by Karl's estimate of Hawk's reports. They were going to need reinforcements of their own soon because the number of Hellstorm Vortexes was falling, and there were still enough Giant Shamans that they were only up for five or ten seconds each, before being dispelled.

Even [Eternal Lightning] couldn't refresh energy fast enough to keep up a full assault, and as a result, the stacked damage would soon start falling when the total fell below the cap.

Karl was sent flying by a strike to his side that shattered ribs as it cut through his armour, and then the Lamia were in trouble. They were frantically parrying the Giants' attacks, but they were more of a caster type than melee combatants, and they didn't have the brute strength of the Naga Warriors.

Karl focused on refreshing his armour spell and waited a few seconds for his regeneration to heal his ribs, then called a fresh pair of bodyguards beside him, giving up some ground, but gaining time to recover some energy.

[How long has it been?] Karl asked, trying to time the arrival of the reinforcements.

[Ten minutes.] Remi replied grimly. She had also been keeping time, and the reinforcements were well overdue. Or not coming at all, depending on whether any of the Giants' forces had reached the Capital's security zone.

## Chapter 648 Too Slow

The Giants approached carefully, waiting for Karl to make a move. They knew that they couldn't afford to be reckless against his speed, but this strange human also appeared to heal unnaturally quickly, despite being separated from his healers.

Karl was using [Rend] with [Nullify] to get past the defensive abilities of the Giants and force them to parry the skills, which kept them at a distance.

The fight speed had slowed to a crawl, and the whole battle was falling into a lull as the humans' stamina ran low.

Thor's efforts would have them recovered in no more than five minutes, but that was a long time in combat. The Giants backed off a little, and a horde of Ogres advanced. They were only Royal Rank, the leaders of their species. But fighting them would burn more energy, and the Giants didn't care about expending them as cannon fodder.

They had put stronger barriers over the weaker species, but when [Nullify] hit them, the barriers put up no real resistance.

But, another wave stepped over the bodies of the fallen, then another, and another.

[We're done at the back, you can retreat to our position, and we will prepare to attack again.] Thor informed Karl, who was alone with his bodyguards, fighting the seemingly endless tide of Ogres.

One full force backwards leap disengaged Karl from the attackers, and showed him that the Ogres were nearly depleted, and the remainder were being forced forward by the Giants, as they weren't willingly fighting anymore.

The move put the battle in a tense standoff, with the two sides thirty metres apart and staring at each other, waiting for some sort of trigger to continue.

More groups of Giants were joining the survivors, but they wouldn't make much difference in the short term. What they needed was someone who could challenge Karl one on one, and keep him from sweeping through their ranks.

"What's the news?" Karl asked as he reached the others, while Tessa cast a small healing spell and a refreshing ability on him.

"We weren't fast enough to respond. The Capital is under attack by the Giants' allies. Right now, it's Ogres and Goblins. We've got the Giant armies slowed down enough that they haven't engaged yet.

But there should be more forces in the area, which may or may not have been engaged by the other strike teams and the border guard.

There is nothing on the radio at all. We think that they might have a spell that is blocking the signals. Even trying to communicate between groups we can see doesn't work." Niall explained.

"So, we finish up here and then hunt? Or do we return to the Capital to defend the city walls?" Karl asked.

The four Overlords looked at each other. Without orders, it was their call. Ahmad looked to the sky, as if for inspiration. "Well, we're all on the stronger side of Overlord, so we're needed in both spots. I don't know which would be better, but now that I've recovered enough, I will mount a full assault against the remainder of the army. My skills, like yours, are not great against single targets, but highly effective against large groups, though the energy drain is incredibly high. I'm a Rank over the strongest of the remaining forces, so I should be able to wipe them out if I can last long enough, we just need to keep them from running away until I finish.

With your Thor here, I will recover quickly enough to be ready for the next battle, I hope. Then we can follow the scouting reports of Hawk to see if we're still needed here."

Karl nodded in agreement. "I will have Hawk and Remi assist you so that there are too many spells for the Giant Shamans to effectively dispel them all. It will save you some mana, and hopefully allow us to clear this group."

Overlord Othello smirked. "You know, after this, they are going to make us suffer through another of those godawful award ceremonies."

Niall winked at her. "That's if they find out. We can just tell them that we were busy wiping out the Overlords and the smaller patrols all day, and pretend that this force never existed."

The Overlords looked over at Karl's group, assuming they would want the fame and glory of such a feat. After all, even with the presence of the Overlords, they were still outnumbered by more than a hundred to one. If it wasn't for the completely broken skill that Karl had, which allowed his beasts to tear through the weaker portion of the army, they would have been almost immediately overrun.

The Overlords were still trying to work out what sort of skill that was, but Karl wasn't saying anything.

[It's a good thing that we have the vortexes to start the fight. It gets the skill all stacked up before we have to actually fight.] Hawk noted.

[How is your range? You're not going to get stones thrown at you when you try to attack, are you?]

Currently, Hawk was hiding among the thick clouds overhead, out of sight from the ground, even with his prodigious size.

[It will be fine. I know where they are relative to you, so I don't even have to come down for this one.]

Right, he had Soul Sight now, so he didn't need to rely on his impressive natural sight to find the enemy.

"Overlord Ahmad, whenever you are ready, my team will join you with the Hellstorm vortexes." The Catman mage took a deep breath and began to focus. Spears of lightning formed overhead, dozens of them. Then hundreds. Then thousands.

The Giants were charging, but Hawk and Remi had started with the Vortexes, which were cloning with every strike, creating a wall of spinning fire for the Giants to run through in order to reach the humans.

Then the first volley of spears lashed out, taking down an entire row of Giants. Then another, and another, and another.

The Giant army was falling in waves as the vortexes chased them across the battlefield, and spears tore through their retreating bodies.

Then Hawk switched his vortexes to the far side, blocking the retreat as the last of Ahmad's spears cleared the survivors.

[Cara forward, LOOT!] The badger shouted to herself, before racing off with Remi and the bodyguards to double tap anything that might have survived and clean out the bodies.

"What are they doing?" Tabitha asked, watching them moving silently across the battlefield.

"Checking the corpses. We don't want them regrouping with the others and telling anyone what happened here."

Rae was making Ahmad a hammock hanging off Thor's side opposite Lotus, who was just beginning to wake up after over exerting herself with a Resurrection during the battle.

The mage was out cold, but with Thor's barrier over him, he was in no real danger. His energy would recover, and a bit of food when he woke up would have him right as rain.

"Alright, what is the call?" Karl asked quietly.

"Let your beasts finish, then we will clear this area and head back for the city. They won't have sent the majority of their troops on foot, this was probably intended to be a sneak attack, while the forces arriving by Portal would have been detected." Niall instructed.

[Hawk, find us more targets. Let's make it a full clear.]

## Chapter 649 Multiple Targets

[Head Northeast, there is a group that will be crossing behind us on a path to intercept where this team should be.] Hawk instructed, then remembered to add details.

[Three teams, led by the Monarchs and made up mostly of Royals.]

Karl didn't set a fast pace, so everyone would be mostly rested when they made it to the target, but this shouldn't be a hard battle. The numbers were very close to even, and Karl's group was much stronger than their adversaries.

[I can take care of this with Hawk. They will never even know what happened to them.] Rae suggested as Karl and the others casually jogged along.

[I won't stop you if you want to play. Hawk can find us another target after.] Rae vanished in spider form, followed by Overlord Niall, who was more interested in what she was up to than staying with the group.

[Turn further East, towards the city. There is a Monarch led group that way as well, but only five Giants.] Hawk suggested, and Karl quietly altered the route.

Nobody asked where the two assassins had gone, they just accepted that they were doing sneaky things. The Inquisitor frequently vanished to take care of some secret objective, and the other Overlords were used to it. So, when Rae did the same, they just assumed that it was part of some established plan.

A minute later, the group came into sight, and Karl chuckled as he realized what Hawk had done. These were all Frost Giants, and the water hating bird had sent everyone else to deal with them while he played with the Mountain Giants.

He hated water magic, but not enough to willingly expose himself to it.

There weren't many things that Hawk could do now that would actually surprise the group, and sending them all to deal with the parts that he didn't like was no shock at all.

What was surprising was that there was a Monarch Ranked Frost Giant here.

As Karl had been informed, the Frost Giants were the weakest of their kin, so there shouldn't be many Monarch-Ranked Giants in the entire nation, and now to see one here with five Royals was certainly a surprise.

Perhaps he should talk to them for a moment first.

At least long enough to satisfy his curiosity.

"I want to try to talk to this giant before anything else happens. Something is off if we're finding Monarch Ranked Frost Giants coming from the west." Karl informed the group as they advanced.

"Monarch Frost Giants? I wonder which one? I might have met them before." Lady Othello suggested.

That about settled it. If he didn't want to talk to them, someone would.

Karl slowed as he came into sight of the Giants, then raised a hand in greeting and stopped twenty metres from the group, who were all facing him with weapons drawn.

"Greetings, I am Karl, and this is Overlord Othello. We have a few questions and a request for you." Karl informed the leader of the group, a Frost Giant Shaman woman wearing long white robes.

"The human wants parlay?" The Giant seemed confused.

"Why are you invading from the west, so far from your borders, when your presence is needed at home?" Karl began.

The Frost Giant looked annoyed. "The Mountain Giants rallied all the Giants to their great benefactor. Today, we conquer the humans and claim the System for ourselves."

Well, as a reason, that made sense. But Othello had a question.

"A great benefactor, not the Mountain Giant Sage?" She asked.

"Old Sage is dead. Titan benefactor wants the system. We know that the humans have it in their capital. You, Beast Man, why do you work with the humans?" The Shaman demanded, gesturing to Karl.

"I was born here. The human nation is my home."

That was a good enough reason for the Giant, and she just nodded before turning back to Othello.

"You, I know you. You should leave this place. The Great Benefactor will kill all humans once he has System Stuff for the Giants."

Othello sighed. "Turn around and go back. If you continue, we have to fight. You came, you did your duty to the great benefactor and delayed us here. Now go and return home."

The Giants might not be very bright, but they could do enough math to know that Royal versus Overlord equalled dead. If there was a fight, it would be a very short one.

The Frost Giant Shaman took out a delicately carved magic stone from her pouch and opened a small portal, then led her people through. It wasn't as good as dead, but they weren't on the attack anymore.

More importantly, Karl had many questions about who this benefactor was that appeared to have killed the old Sage that led the Mountain Giants.

That wasn't the Mountain Giant Totem that Karl had met, or so he assumed. But it had to be a strong Totem Rank creature, perhaps even a second Mythical Rank creature had appeared on the continent.

"I think that we need to go back to the city. Right now." Othello whispered.

"I will call the others back. Rae can lead Niall back to us." Karl agreed.

[I heard the conversation. Niall knows now. We're just cleaning up our mess and we will be back.] Rae agreed.

That made life easier for everyone. Two groups reduced, plus the army of reinforcements, but if there was a new force driving the Mountain Giants to hunt in the GDN for System Relics, this war would not be ended easily.

"Let's go, they will catch up if we just jog. I would assume that Ahmad is the one with the portal spells, so we're not going to be getting an instant trip back until he wakes up, and that's not going to be any time soon." Karl suggested.

Tabitha sighed and began to jog toward the city, leaving everyone else to catch up. [Hawk, how far are we?] Karl asked.

[About seventy kilometres? Two hours at a jog should be enough.]

Maybe a bit more than that, as Thor's jog was a bit slower than others so that he didn't dislodge his passengers. But given a couple of hours, they would be back at the city walls, and they would be able to pass on a message.

[Wait, turn right. There are trucks stopped on the road. You can steal those.] Hawk corrected.

"Overlord, this way. There is a convoy on the road."

A convoy that was definitely not expecting to have their vehicles commandeered. Tabitha didn't even wait for them to get out, she just threw the driver into the passenger seat and turned a truck around with a shouted order for everyone else to follow her.

"There has been a thing. We're going back to the city. The Overlords will explain once we're there." Karl offered, as the others climbed into the back of a munitions truck, and Thor transformed into his humanoid form to keep them company.

Karl climbed in the passenger seat, while a very harassed looking driver flinched at the glare Lady Othello was giving him in the mirror.

"I suggest that you follow them as fast as humanly possible. Plus a few, if the truck is up to it. Trust me, it's that important." Karl instructed.

## Chapter 650 Back To The Capital

The ride was rough, and the engine was screaming as the cargo truck did its best to follow Tabitha down the gravel road, with the other vehicles falling further behind.

Rae and Niall had found their way to the lead vehicle, only appearing among the troops sitting in the back with one perplexed cleric once they were already comfortably settled on the floor.

"Can you tell me what is so important that we had to turn around? We were expected to be the reinforcements for a group of Overlords who were fighting a large invasion force. They're going to be pissed that we're not coming." The driver asked timidly.

"That was us. That fight is already over. But we learned what is happening and why. It's crucial that we get the information to the Cathedral so that they can properly protect what needs to be guarded." Karl explained.

The man's eyes briefly flashed pure black, and his scent changed just a little. A transformed spy, Karl was certain of it.

[Rae, check all the humans in your truck to see if they're actually human, or something else disguised as human. I think that my driver is a spy.] Karl instructed.

That put all the beasts on high alert, and overhead, Hawk began to scour the auras of all the soldiers.

[The driver of yours and the driver of one of the other trucks don't match the rest of the soldiers. They're not the same thing.] Hawk updated.

That was good enough for Karl.

"Incoming on the left." Karl warned his driver, who turned to look out the window, right as Karl hit him in the back of the head with a [Disintegrate] attack.

The head vaporized, and Karl was about to throw him in the passenger seat when the body began to grow.

So, he threw him out the passenger window.

[Hawk, tell me what that dead driver turns into. The body should be far enough from the road that the other drivers don't see it.] [Some sort of Giant. Four arms, blonde body hair.] Hawk updated, then swooped down to grab the body and toss it into his space.

It was a young Giant, still with the perfect skin of one who hadn't seen a life of combat or exposure to the elements, but already at the Commander Rank. Whatever species that was, it had to be a powerful one if it could hit Commander before it had even finished puberty.

[I killed the truck with the other suspect in it. He also turned into a Giant.] Rae updated.

Karl wasn't sure what she meant by killed the truck, but dead was dead, and it looked like they had removed the spies from their convoy.

Overlord Othello climbed out of the canvas covered bed and into the passenger side through the window.

"Care to explain what that was all about? And do you even know how to drive?" She asked.

"I can drive a mining truck, and it's kind of similar. I've never taken one above five kilometres an hour before, though."

The Overlord laughed. "Change seats. I will drive, you explain why you threw a body out the window, and where the driver went."

Karl gave her an overview of what he had found and suspected, then waited for her to process it.

"So, there were spies passing information, dressed as regular soldiers from the supply department, where they would be able to see our deployments just by what we needed for the area. Insidious. We're going to have to get the Inquisitors to do a full search of the service after this to root out all of the others.

To think that there are so many spies that they sent two in the same convoy. It might have been deliberate, as they were coming to aid us, but it could well have just been coincidence.

If it was just by chance, we've got a real problem." She muttered, mostly talking to herself, while Karl had Rae relay her thoughts to Niall.

[I'm a super secret Inquisition spy asset.] Rae giggled.

Really, she was just whispering what Karl was hearing to Niall, but if it were arranged, she really would be an incredible spy.

The trucks were making good time back to the city, bouncing along the gravel road, which was in surprisingly good condition, considering that the nation typically didn't improve roads that went to the borders.

It would take them under an hour to get to the city limits, but well before that, they were starting to see signs of battle, and Hawk had picked out defence patrols in the distance.

[There are battles on the North Side of the city. I think that they're trying to force the humans into the water.] Hawk noted with disdain.

That made a cruel sort of sense. The Giants sounded like they didn't want survivors after they took the city, so they would want the residents backed into the lake, and not able to flee out the far side in trucks and buses.

Most likely, they would try to surround the city, once the rest of their forces arrived.

A frantic message from Sybil using the System's message function caught Karl's attention.

{Mister Karl, they say that we're being activated to defend the city, and we're all in a bus, but they're talking on the radio, and nobody is signing, and there are no clerics on the bus.} {What direction are you headed? We're coming back from our mission with information, but we're not in the city yet.} Karl replied.

{North. The others are talking about Goblins now, but I'm not with the rest of the trainee group. They split us all up into different buses with Ascended Rank team leaders.} Sybil explained.

No clerics, and they split up a team that hadn't even made it to the Academy yet, to send them out on patrol against Goblins, and whatever other small monsters the Ogres had managed to force to join them.

What a mess.

{I will send people to you as soon as I can. Let me know if your bus stops, and where it is when you stop.}

{There are so many people in the street, the bus can barely move. I will tell you when we get somewhere, or when someone starts talking where I can see them.}