

Beast Master 651

Chapter 651 Bad Traffic

Karl turned to Lady Othello. "I just got a message that the traffic in the city is at a crawl, we won't get far with vehicles. I don't know where you need to go, but they are deploying the lower ranks to the North Side to defend against a Goblin and Ogre attack."

"You sound personally invested in that." The Overlord noted.

"In a way. My group was working on a way to rapidly boost trainees, and we had gotten a group to advance to Awakened within a week of training, they haven't even started at the Academy yet, and won't for another week. But they've been split up and sent to the city walls with random Ascended Rank team leaders.

I know the policy is that Awakened Rank and up are ready to fight outside the training environment, but this is a bit different." Karl explained.

Othello looked impressed. "You managed to help them skip the entire Common Rank grind? That is impressive just by itself, but I can see how it would be an issue if they were at the Cathedral today.

Is there one in particular that you're concerned about?"

Karl nodded. "There is a Rogue with them who is deaf, and the message she sent me says that she's with a group that doesn't have a cleric, or anyone else who knows sign language. So, she can't understand any of the orders coming over the radio because nobody is speaking them out loud."

"A message?" Lady Othello asked.

"Oh, right. There is a System Function for that. Sybil, the baby Rogue, found it."

Karl sent Othello a message, startling her so much that she almost swerved off the road.

"Sorry, I didn't think that it would be that obtrusive. It just appears at the edge of my vision." Karl explained.

"I see how you sent it now. But it appeared in front of me like the System Alerts inside a trial. I will have to find a way to change that. Maybe if I just focus on moving it, and perhaps making it a little transparent. Yes, that's better."

Othello sent him back a brief message. {I will circle to the north of the city, and enter from the north gates. That is closest to the Cathedral anyhow.}

So, their convoy took a turn, following the edge of the city towards where it was becoming clear the battle had nearly reached the walls. They were under five kilometres away, and Karl could see the fight when they came over a hill.

"Would you be particularly mad if I jumped out and left you to deliver the message? My team would surely be a morale booster along the line, since the leaders there are mostly Commanders, the same as along the Frost Giant border." He suggested.

"I don't mind. Do you need time to tell your group?"

Karl shook his head. "No, they know already. Thor is in humanoid form, so he just told them directly. I don't know if you can hear them over the wind."

Othello shook her head. "No, my senses aren't as keen as yours. But I hear that you might be able to change that. There was talk of an Elite passing out strange skill books, and my guess is that was you."

"If there is time after the battle, I will see if there is a sensory skill that you can use. I don't really have one specialized for Paladins, but there might be something. Even passive night vision might be possible, if I can find a way to isolate the change to make it into a skill book. I got it as part of a package upgrade when I first got my class." Karl explained.

"Good enough for me. I've made it to Overlord without it, after all. But every little bit counts, and not relying on Presence Sense when fighting blind would be a huge advantage."

Karl spotted familiar faces in one of the buses headed for the battle, and gestured out the window.

"There are four of the five trainees."

[The Dana says that she will go to them.] Thor informed Karl, a second before Dana was flying out of the truck towards the slow-moving convoy of buses.

[Take everyone else and go help her, and whatever section that they're assigned to. I will go find Sybil.] Karl informed the Cerro.

The others hopped out of the truck one after another, leaving only Ahmad in the back, still protected by [Eternal Lightning] as he recovered.

He was somewhat conscious now, and they had fed him, so he would only need a few more minutes before he was in fighting form again.

[I sense my baby Rogue. She is about to come out of the hole in the wall.] Rae announced.

The gate was only a hundred metres ahead, so Karl prepared to exit the vehicle.

"This is my stop, the last of them is just ahead. We will help organize this end of the battlefield and take over from whoever got pressed into the duty. Assuming they don't outrank me, that is. You can let the Cathedral know that we're not slacking." He informed Othello.

"Send Ahmad up front, we will have to park the trucks here anyhow. See, Tabitha is about to pull over, and then I'm betting she's going to run into the city. She's impulsive like that. Absolutely hates when things aren't going her way." The Paladin laughed.

Sure enough, the truck in front of them was pulling off into the grass between the road and the wall, and the Warrior Class Overlord was out and running into the city, looking for whoever needed their intelligence.

"Good luck. We will likely see you soon." Karl joked as he got out of the truck.

With a full assault from the Giants incoming, it was almost certain they would see each other within the next few days, as they would be assigned to fight some of the same groups of attackers.

Rae had already stolen Sybil from the bus she was in, and was standing next to the truck with her.

"Hey Sybil. What group were you with? I'll explain the situation, and then you can be my assistant while we start to organize the lines. Without the radios, it is chaos all along the line. But we know how to send System Messages now, and we can use that to organize without the radio." Karl informed the panicked young Elite.

She gave him two thumbs up, and Karl relayed his intentions to the rest of the group, both in person, and with a System Message. He included the four Overlords in the communication, and saw Niall and Ahmad pause as the incoming message startled them.

This was going to make battle planning so much easier once they had met all the section Commanders.

Chapter 652 North Side

Rae picked up Sybil and ran off to join the others, while Karl headed for the bus she had been taken from.

"Monarch, how might we help you?" The driver asked as he approached the door.

"I have collected Awakened Elite Sybil, on orders of the Inquisition. She is part of a specialty training program and should not have been separated from her team. It interferes with the training data.

However, I will be leading a group to guide battle tactics for the region, so please find a replacement for her position until one can be assigned to your unit." Karl informed the driver.

"Yes, Sir. Did you just arrive in the Capital? We were informed that there were no Ranking Elites available for the North Side Defence."

Karl nodded. "My team returned with intelligence from the border, and I saw the situation here. Now, I need to go. My scout is already sending data, and I need to get in contact with some of the regional leadership."

Karl sprinted off to the section where Hawk had indicated that the line was being tricked out of position, looking for the Commander in charge.

There was a Commander Rank Mage, most likely female, with her hood up, looking over a table full of maps. That seemed like the best choice.

"Commander. My scout reports that there is a group of eighty, led by an Ogre and a team of Hobgoblins, waiting in the valley here for your troops. They're being pulled off course for an ambush." He announced, gesturing to the map, before he looked up at a familiar face.

Danni Mackenzie, the Golem specialist of the Mackenzie twin sisters.

"Oh, Danni, good to see you again. If you tell your people to pull back and hit the Goblins here and here, you can fight them without reinforcements, as the stronger team will be stuck waiting for you. Hawk is overhead giving updates to everyone." Karl explained.

"Monarch? Karl?" Danni Mackenzie stammered.

"It's been a minute, hasn't it? It's good to know that I wasn't totally forgotten."

The other leadership team members, none of them Elites, just strategists and army officers, chuckled at her baffled expression. They hadn't expected to see anyone of his rank here, but now there was not only a Monarch, but a Monarch with what sounded like a flying scout.

[We have followed the team members to their spots. We're spread out to be with all four zone Commanders for the north now.] Cara updated Karl as he was about to send more directions.

[Do you have a way to pass on Hawk's scouting messages?] Karl asked.

Rae and Thor could be human, but Karl had never seen Cara do it.

[Of course. I just asked the silly bird to send the others a message directly.] Cara informed him smugly.

Karl could feel Hawk rolling his eyes, but he didn't refute it, so he must be able to send messages.

[That had to freak everyone out.] Karl laughed.

[They all think the messages are from you. This will be so much fun later.]

No, a disaster is what it was going to be if a mischievous Void Badger started sending people messages in Karl's name.

Once he knew to check, Karl realized that the messages had both his name and Hawk's on them, so at least it wasn't just tagging all messages as having come from Karl directly.

Hawk sent enemy positions and movements as he saw them, and the team relayed them to the Commanders on the ground.

[Who paired up?] Karl asked, as Cara had said there were only four zones.

[Tessa is with Thor. Ophelia is with Rae and her baby Rogue. I am with Dana and Lotus watching the other four cubs, and Remi is napping in her space.] Cara explained.

That worked out well. The combat power might be a bit imbalanced, with Thor and Tessa together, but they would have the strongest buffs out of anyone for the Church Soldiers.

Karl turned left to observe the fight, and saw a towering tree in the middle of the line, which had to be a transformed Lotus. He could clearly see the birds flying around in the branches, as well as the golden dust sprinkling down from the branches to the line.

They held the spot along the road where the buses were unloading, which would naturally be where the injured were sent to for treatment and removal, so having a Tree of Life there would greatly reduce the number of casualties that had to be evacuated.

[Does everyone have enough Red Dragon Clerics for their soldiers?] Karl asked.

There were three here that he could see, one of them a Commander.

[We have a Commander plus some.] Cara agreed.

[We have the Orphanage Matron, plus two other High Priestesses.] Rae added.

[I have my Tessa plus two Commanders.] Thor cheered, and Karl sensed that the Cerro was greatly enjoying the Chivalrous Knight act, while also working to understand the [Humanoid Transformation] spell that Rae had already mastered.

He had even found time to carve a picture of a Cerro on his shield. [Rae did it for him. Thor can barely colour inside the lines.] Remi quietly joked.

[I'm not that bad. It's just that Sister Rae is too good.]

With the constant stream of updates from Hawk, Karl had resorted to using coloured stones on the map to update positions and group sizes in real time.

Hawk could see much further than a regular scout could, and for some reason, there were no planes flying patrols in the area. It took Karl a few seconds to realize that it was because the radios weren't working, so they couldn't report back.

That left Hawk as the only aerial scout in the region, and a much more valuable asset than even Karl had expected.

[There are portals in these five spots. The ones on the East and West have Giants gathering at them.]
Hawk updated.

Karl immediately relayed that to the Overlords he had been travelling with, so they could update command, and got a swift reply from Niall.

{You can send them directly to Tabitha, she is with the Archbishop and his assistants planning the defence. Keep her in the loop as much as you can.} The Rogue explained.

{No problem. I will send her updates every five minutes on the status of the battlefield if it's significantly changed.}

What Karl didn't know was that the two were standing side by side in the room with the Archbishop, and Niall's smug look had not gone unnoticed by the Warrior Overlord.

Chapter 653 Coordinator

Overlord Tabitha didn't realize right away what it was that the Rogue had done, but she was immediately certain that he was messing with her in some way.

It was only when she received the next message from Karl that she realized that the scoundrel had told the Beast Master to send all updates directly to her as the liaison to the Archbishop, to keep everyone updated on the battlefield situation.

"Did I do something in particular to you?" She asked, before relaying the message to the Archbishop and his team.

"Not at all. You were simply standing in the wrong place at the wrong time, and he only knows so many people who are here to pass on the status updates." Niall replied with his most sincere smile.

The Archbishop and Nacht both chuckled as they realized what the Overlord had done, right before Niall excused himself from the room by simply vanishing. That didn't stop anyone's planning, as he was only there to provide intelligence confirmation anyhow, and they had already discussed the majority of what had happened while the Overlords were out with Monarch Karl's team.

On the North Side of the city, Karl had his hands full with the constant new arrivals. Not just of Elites and soldiers to replace the ones who had been wounded in combat and brought into Lotus' radius for healing, but also the constant arrival of the Giants' allies. They were appearing from portals in the distance, in numbers that suggested they had cleared out the majority of the three nations.

Strangely, they had not brought many higher ranked monsters to this side, and were attempting to flood the city with weaker ones, instead of softening it first by defeating the most powerful Elites.

There must be more to their strategy that Karl wasn't understanding, he was certain of it.

[Hawk, remember how the Frost Giants were scouring the area in a search pattern before the First Advancement trial spawned. Do you think that they could be doing the same thing here today? Something is off with their tactics, and they aren't sending their strongest, just loads of cannon fodder.

They can't be expecting us to send all our strongest and tire them out before the real fight starts, there has to be a deeper motive.] Karl suggested.

[If there is, I don't see it. They're attacking in nice ordered lines, working together, but there are only a few of the strong Giants in the back guiding them. It doesn't look like some fancy search pattern.] Hawk replied, uncertain whether he too was missing something about their attack.

It looked perfectly normal to him, but deeper motives were the Karl's department, not his.

{The numbers are increasing too fast. We're going to need Commander led teams on the next bus full of reinforcements.} Dana noted as her central defence point repelled another attack wave.

This time it was mostly Ogres, with some Hobgoblins, but they were beginning to get more Commander Rank Beasts in the mix, and the defenders couldn't easily keep up, even with the High Priestesses blessing their weapons.

{Overlord, Please inform the Archbishop that the attackers have stepped up the assault by a Rank. We are now seeing many more Commanders among the assault groups.

The Command Officers on the North Side request higher Rank reinforcements.}

{Understood. We will send who we have. They are pulling Elites from the border via portal, but we don't want to reduce our capability too far, in case this is a diversion for a major border assault.} Overlord Tabitha replied.

Karl relayed the message so that the teams fighting could have some hope. What they needed were more wide area defenders. The blessing of the Red Dragon Priestesses made a decent armour barrier over the troops, but it was a one and done sort of spell. They didn't have the mana to keep refreshing it as everyone took damage, they could only get it active and hope for the best.

With hundreds of soldiers for every capable priestess, and a thousand or more for every High Priestess, they had to do the best that they could with what they had.

Karl looked down at the map in front of him, taking stock of where all of the enemy troops were, and briefly wondered where the Commanders who would normally be doing this went.

Were they with the reconnaissance planes that couldn't send radio signals, or possibly stuck in town? Worse, had his attempt to rescue his trainees simply rendered them obsolete, so they went back to their offices?

{Monarch. We have an update for you. There are Commanders on their way to the North Side, but not as many as you might hope. The East and West walls are straining our higher Rank capacity.} Tabitha informed Karl.

He could sense the grim tone behind the message, even though it appeared as text. A glance at the stones for troops that were not part of his battlefield, the ones he had simply updated from Hawk's messages and forwarded, showed Karl that things really were that bad. The western front had nearly six thousand Giants above Commander Rank facing it down, and that was taking most of the higher Ranked Elites in town to deal with.

Whereas on the Eastern Wall, they were besieged by an Ogre army, assisted by Frost Giants, and that would need every Commander led Ascended team that they could get.

{How is our artillery looking?} Karl asked.

{There are only forty units stationed in the city for point defence.} Tabitha replied simply.

{We will make do with whatever you can spare. If it comes down to it, I will activate a large area spell over the North Side to improve our odds.}

{Do what you have to. If they send a challenger over to contest your actions, deal with it however you see fit.}

That worked well enough for Karl.

[Hey Remi, how large can you make a Thunderstorm at Ascended Rank? We don't need to kill everything, we need to make them think that we have a way for lower ranked mages to work together on one huge spell.] Karl suggested.

[I think that I can do that pretty well. If I make it high Ascended, that's under five percent power output. I can spread that out large enough to almost make it look like a natural storm.] Remi agreed.

[Do it, but stay in your space when you do so that the enemy can't trace it back to its source. I've noticed in the past that others have a hard time finding the source of spells from the space, unless they are visibly leaving from our location.]

Chapter 654 Make It Rain

Remi prepared her spell to cover the entire area around the north side of the city, with a special bit of focus on not destroying the plants. Most of them had already been smashed by travelling armies, but if anything could be saved, that would be best.

The other sides would hardly notice an Ascended Rank Thunderstorm spell, but with it forming over the whole north side of the city at the same time, it would look more like it was cast from within the walls, where they couldn't easily get at the target.

For the mechanics of placing the spell, Remi was relying on Hawk's mental imagery, but she was fairly certain that she knew what to do, and even if it rained on the city, it shouldn't hurt the buildings or the humans.

[Thunderstorm] was also fairly easy to keep active, as it was channelled and didn't have a huge upfront cost. Remi could just keep it going until the Giants' Shamans dispelled it.

The advantage she had was that, while the spell was being used with minimal damage output, the low cost would make it easy for her to keep the sections that weren't being actively dispelled active.

Compared to most casters, the Naga Queen had excellent elemental control, and a focused dispel effect wouldn't cause the whole spell to collapse.

That would help them sell the idea that it was shamans inside the city that were messing with the weather. If they were in the city, then the storm would be nearly impossible to stop until the battle was over, and the enemy would have to work to deal with it, or send their troops into battle wounded.

The second was the more likely case, as the Giants didn't actually care at all about their allies. Especially the weaker ones here on the North Side, who they would happily sacrifice just to soften up the Capital City before the final invasion force arrived.

Overhead, the clouds began to shift and darken as the wide area spell took effect. At first, Remi wasn't facing any sort of resistance, and the Giants driving the horde forward seemed to think that it was a sign that they were on the right path, as Hawk was reporting that some of them were celebrating.

They were in for a rude awakening.

When the first bolts of lightning hit, the Giants laughed them off, uncaring about a few Ascended Rank lightning streaks.

Even when the rain started, they were mostly unconcerned. The troops could march in the rain, and bad weather would not stop them from toppling the capital today.

But when they realized that the rain itself was eating through their gear and supplies, and that the lightning was spreading all through the hills north of the Capital region, covering a dozen kilometres of land on this side of the city, they began to worry.

[That's impressive. I didn't think that you had that much coverage in you.] Karl congratulated.

[I'm borrowing energy from everyone, since we're not fighting. Just enough that we can all recover what I'm using.] Remi explained.

Karl hadn't even known that was an option. He didn't know how to draw energy directly from the team to use abilities. Perhaps it was a Remi exclusive ability?

On the North Side of the city, where the Giants' weaker allies were attacking, the situation was becoming dire for the incoming monsters. Most of the terrain sloped upwards towards the city from a river valley, meaning that they had to charge up a muddy hill in a thunderstorm to get at the defenders, which was slowing their advance.

The rain was burning through their clothing and their hides, leaving welts and blisters that were quickly turning to deep wounds.

The best that they had managed was to shelter themselves with cloth. If they weren't touching the cloth itself, the rain wouldn't eat through it. But every time they tried, the Lightning had an uncanny way of finding them.

In contrast, Karl's hasty move to a Command tent with the sides rolled up, so they could see the army as they worked, but still remain dry, had worked out perfectly.

Rae had simply made a shelter for her people with Earth Magic and silk, while Thor had managed to obtain a large parasol, the sort families would use for a beach day. He was sheltering Tessa and the command table with it, while the soldiers worked to raise a tent similar to the one Karl was using.

Of them all, Dana had it both the best and the worst.

The large branches of Lotus' Tree of Life form sheltered them from the rain, but Lotus had to be regularly reminded not to dance in the rain, or everyone under her got soaked.

Dana would have to get a tent soon.

"Monarch, we have supplies for the line." Someone shouted from behind Karl.

"The receiving area is to your left."

"Sir, they are specialty equipment sent by the Archbishop." The voice replied, and Karl turned to see a young Acolyte of the church, thoroughly soaked from the rain, holding a wooden box for him to inspect.

{Ice Cleats ⇒ One Size} The box read.

That was a brilliant idea.

"How many are there?" Karl asked.

"They were dispatched to all four stations in the north. There is a whole truckload of them." The Acolyte explained.

"Get them distributed to the front lines. The second rank can put them on, then rotate forward. Officers, pass the order." Karl insisted.

Danni Mackenzie smiled at him. "Ice cleats to give them better traction in the mud? It appears that the seers approve of your tactic."

Karl nodded. "I wish that I had thought of it. That is a brilliant tactic. I wonder if they were available when I was on the Frost Giant front? We were always scouts and never on the lines, so I never really got a chance to check out the supply rooms."

Danni shrugged. "They were available, but nobody really used them. With the line holding in the same spot for so long, the ground was already torn up, and the traction was good.

We really do need to find time to catch up after the battle."

Karl smiled. "Are the rest of your siblings here?"

Danni shook her head. "Donni is over by the tree, but Bob and Doug are on the Hill Giant lines right now. You said they're calling some of those ones back, so we might see them, but they weren't stationed in the Capital."

Chapter 655 Fight In The Rain

Karl waited as the battle wore on, and the Giants made no attempt to get rid of Remi's storm. They were saving all their energy to attack the walls once they were past the defenders.

No, that wasn't quite right, Karl realized. They were disguising their Shamans. If they made themselves stand out from the other Giants in the back ranks, they would make themselves targets for assassination.

The Giants only had one type of caster. They didn't have separate Clerics, Mages and Shamans. So, if they lost the Shamans early, they would be in grave danger once they reached the walls and the real siege began.

Danni leaned towards Karl and whispered a question. "Do you know what triggered this? Why the full assault on the Capital? Why now? Another six months and we would have been much weaker."

Karl winked and tapped his head before sending her a message.

{Not necessarily. They have spies all over the Capital, reporting on everything that we do. The next influx of Elites is going to include awakenings with System Linked items, and we expect the success rate to exceed thirty percent.

I also managed to push a group of new Elites from Common to Awakened in two days. They'll be there for a while as they adjust, but the Giants don't know that we can't just keep doing that. Their scouts will have told them that we found a way to force awakenings and advancements, or something close to that.

But when we first fought them, they said that they would take the System Item from us and crush the Church. They think that we have an equivalent to System Stones in the city.} There was a brief pause as Danni took that all in, then Karl got a message back.

{Holy wall of text. This feature is wonderful. Mine activated when you sent me a message.}

So not everyone could use it. That was valuable information.

There was a pause, and then the Mage sent him another private message.

{What if the item they're referring to is the Trial Temple? I heard it changed lately, and new Clerics were awakening faster and stronger than ever.

If I heard, then whoever is spying surely did.}

That made a lot of sense. The Giants likely didn't know that the temple was only awakening Clerics, even if they had success with sending in people for benefits to other classes.

But depending on how connected the spies were, the Giants might also know that it worked to give Commanders advanced Classes, which would give them a whole new set of skills to work with.

{Well, we can let that be the Archbishop's issue. I will include it in my next report to him.}

Danni laughed out loud, then began to speak as they finished the confidential part of the discussion.

"You're already thinking of your next report, but we're in the middle of a battle. Such dedication. Are you sure you're not an Inquisitor?" She teased.

Karl chuckled. "I'm sure that Sister Rae wouldn't mind. Inquisitor Overlord Niall lets her stab people."

Danni shook her head in dismay. "To think that our adorable spider friend is now a Monarch. How much has she changed?"

"Not much, actually. Her appearance is close to what it was at Commander. She didn't grow too much more, but now she knows a skill to transform into a humanoid. Her skills are obviously improved, but that's a discussion for later."

{There may be transformed Giants among the supply group. I will give details in private.} Karl warned.

It wouldn't do to have the detailed skills of his team revealed to the enemy in advance.

Rae's mental voice interrupted Karl's train of thought.

[Ooh, I win! They sent someone to challenge me to a duel. An Ettin Mage Monarch.] She cheered.

[Do you have this?] Karl asked.

There was no response for a few seconds, then Rae began to sing.

[I've got a lovely bunch of coconuts. There they are hanging in a row.]

Karl was baffled for a second until he got a message from Ophelia.

{Can you talk to Rae about terrifying the soldiers? She's arranging the pieces of the Ettin on pikes behind the line.}

[Rae, this is not the place for an art exhibition. You're scaring the humans.]

[Just the heads?]

[Fine, you can leave the heads up. But please don't hang dry your food in public.]

Ophelia messaged a few seconds later. {Thanks, that is much better.}

Then Thor had an update.

[I get one too. A Monarch Ranked Ogre Lord. This is going to be so much fun.]

[Have you got this?] Karl double-checked, the same as he had for Rae.

[I have a couple attack skills, and all your buffs. I can beat up some silly Ogre without even turning back into a Cerro.]

Overhead, Hawk was laughing.

[What is brother Thor doing? He's in human form challenging an Ogre Lord. Oh, he can use Gravity Slam like that, and Eternal Lightning on the blade. That works pretty good. You're missing out.]

The Ogre Lord rolled back to his feet, bleeding from one arm after being knocked over by a shield slam from this strange Paladin.

He was clearly the bigger one, and he should be stronger, but the Paladin had tossed him to the ground like he was a child. His pride couldn't handle such an insult.

The Ogre Lord parried Thor's blade, but the real attack was with the edge of the shield that slammed into the Lord's ribs. [Crushing Blows] and [Shatter] activated, sending vibrations through his body that had the Ogre Lord spitting blood.

None of this made sense. They were both Monarchs, how could this stupid Paladin be so much stronger than an Ogre?

Thor activated [Brutality], increasing his height from just under two metres to three. That put him eye to eye with the Ogre Lord, who instinctively backed away a step to put himself at the edge of Thor's reach.

A stomp of his foot activated [Earthquake], and the Ogre Lord stumbled, lurching to the left where Thor's blade was incoming.

A twist of his arm parried the blow, but Thor was charging with his shield forward.

A fully buffed [Gravity Slam] flattened the Ogre Lord's body and warped his armour, then sent him flying a dozen metres backwards into his forces.

For a few seconds, everything was frozen except the silent torrent of rain, then the Ogre Lord gave a wheezing gasp and collapsed with blood pooling around the joints of his armour.

Thor had won his duel.

[Playing Knight is fun. We should do this more often.]

Chapter 656 Niall's Cleaning Routine

While Karl was busy on the Northern defence lines, Niall was busy within the city.

He had to find as many of the spies as possible before the Giants reached the walls. That would be the natural time for them to start causing chaos, giving false orders and starting trouble within the supply lines.

With the incident on the trucks, he had discovered the trick to detecting them. He couldn't normally see through their disguises, which appeared to be created by a Totem Rank disguise item. But once he had gotten his hands on one of them, he could clearly see the disguised form of the others.

With [Shadow Meld] active, he raced through the streets, invisible to the population that he was protecting. Then, a most horrifying sight caught his attention. Three Generals were planning the deployment of the western lines, and all three of them were disguised Titan infiltrators.

They had been deploying the troops this entire time. The Archbishop was going to be devastated to know that so many of their trusted leaders were actually spies.

The Inquisitor was about to attack when a subtle difference caught his attention. One of them was not a disguised Titan at all. The spell wasn't as good, and the power he could sense through it was that of a beast.

So, quite possibly a disguised spy, but possibly not today's enemy.

Niall made a mental note of the Divine Beast Nation spy, and then launched two [Ambush] enhanced throwing knives into the base of the skulls of the other two.

For an instant, he let the surviving General see him as he collected the bodies so that he wouldn't raise an alarm. But the dead Titans were already transforming back to their natural shape, and that should be enough for him to understand.

With a quick activation of [Advanced Shadow Step] the bodies were deposited in the Inquisition building, and Niall was back to continue his work.

With the positions of the defenders on the western lines mostly ordered by the enemy, there was too much to do.

"General, I want a full redeployment of the western lines. The enemy knows the location of our assets. Scramble your reserves and cycle some strategic assets out. It needs to be done before the next push." He explained as he returned to the site of the ambush.

Then he was off hunting again. It was a shame that he didn't have Sister Rae with him. She would love this game.

Deep within the Cathedral, seated around a table in the war room, the Archbishop and his advisors looked at the Scryers' projections of the duels happening all over the battlefield. The North was holding well, but the same could not be said of the champions on the west, and the lines there were being forced to retreat after two Overlords were lost, and their bodies claimed by the Giants.

"Your Holiness, the visions are changing. Someone has altered the odds on the western front in our favour. I can't see what is happening, but when I look at the Command Group, two of the three Generals have changed." One of the seers explained.

"Understood. That should be the work of the Inquisition.

Have we found what they're looking for yet? It can't be the Temple. The Mountain Giant Great Sage already knew about the change. So, whoever took over from him after his death should know as well." The Archbishop asked his advisors.

"No, Your Holiness. We have been searching the city with every skill that we have, but there is no sign of a Holy Relic that we didn't detect in advance."

The old man sighed. "What do the fates say?"

An aging cleric on the Archbishop's left sighed. "The fates are a tangled mess. Many heroes will be made, and many names will fall to shame today. But there is one clear tangle above the others, shining bright with the favour of the Gods.

The closest member of the group is right here with us. Overlord Tabitha, as well as Ahmad, Niall, Othello, and that Beast Master's team are all entwined together. I believe that most of what they were going to do to affect our fate is already done, but their dominance suggests that there will be something else for them to do, either individually or together."

Tabitha suspected that her part in the ordeal was finished, as she had been tricked by that bastard of an Inquisitor into being the Liaison to the Northern Front.

That was the only front that they had reliable communication with. But once she gained access to the System Function, Tabitha had sent Othello to the Eastern Front to do the same as Karl was doing in the North.

Ahmad was still recovering, but he should be ready soon, and then he could head to the western wall and relay orders and Intelligence from the Cathedral.

At Karl's station, a proud Hill Giant was marching through the ranks, with four Hobgoblins holding up a tarp over his head, keeping him out of the rain.

It was clear that his chance at a challenge was coming to him, and Karl had moved out to the front line, where the battle had parted around him as he waited for his opponent.

The Giant stopped fifty metres from the line, then raised a hand, and a portal opened.

Out stepped a fifteen-metre tall, four-armed monstrosity of a Titan. There was no doubt that thing was at least a Totem Ranked Giant, and likely the new leader of the Mountain Giants.

As one, the entire Giant Army on the Northern Front knelt facing the new arrival, even the ones who were in combat backed away to kneel.

The Giant glared down at Karl, who returned his energy with an unblinking stare. This fight might only last half a second, but there was no need for him to embarrass himself before his inevitable death.

"You." The Titan rumbled, clenching his fists in rage.

"Me." Karl agreed, utterly baffled about how this creature might know him.

Unless it had been a vision that revealed his identity, Karl was absolutely certain that they hadn't met before. Not even ten thousand years ago. The Giant was about to say something, when a portal opened behind Karl, and a small girl with white hair and white scaled ears stepped through.

"Bishop Misty." Karl greeted her, then stopped and did a double take as a second figure exited the portal.

Karl stared at himself, five metres tall and radiating power, with a grizzled version of Cara sitting on his shoulder, her face pulled in a permanent smirk by a scar across her muzzle and grey in her fur.

The visor was down on his helmet, and his Cara was smaller than the one on this man's shoulder, but if there was anyone in the world that Karl would recognize just by their aura, it was himself.

Chapter 657 Titanic Challenge

Nobody was sure what to do as the two powerhouses stared at each other. The size difference was vast, but the power they were radiating was making Remi's Thunderstorm churn, and they hadn't even used a skill yet.

"It's too late." The second Karl announced, staring at the Titan, who spat on the ground, while glaring at him.

"It's never too late." The Giant declared, and began to surge with power, pulling the mana out of the area into himself.

The skies went clear, every barrier collapsed, and even the barriers over the city walls fell under his power. The might of the Archbishop was nothing compared to whatever this thing was. But the other Karl and Bishop Misty looked unconcerned as the transformed Temporal Dragon waved her hand. "Let's take this back home. You know better than to meddle with things that must be." The Dragon insisted as white fog filled the air.

"NO!" The Titan shouted, as a black bolt of lightning raced from his hand toward his nemesis.

The second Karl casually swatted away the bolt of power that would obliterate Totems with a glancing blow. The power streaked off into the sky, vanishing out of sight. Then the fog closed in on them, and the trio was gone.

Karl staggered as the world seemed to shift. All of the mana had been taken, used for that insane skill, and everyone under Royal Rank was unconscious, unable to defend themselves.

The Monarch Ranked Giant who had come to open the portal simply stared at Karl for a second, then took what might be his one chance, and attacked.

From within her space, sheltered from the mana drain, Remi channelled [Chain Lightning] into him, a steady stream that fried the Giant's body even as it twitched, suspended off the ground by the magnetic field of so much electricity flowing through metal armour.

The Giant's body collapsed, nothing more than a scorched husk, and Remi nodded in satisfaction. That had taken a lot of power, but with no energy to defend himself, and his armour weakened by the powerful one, the attack had been quite satisfying.

Hawk picked himself up off the ground and shook the dirt from his feathers. He had been kilometres away from the incident, and the effects had still knocked him from the sky.

But from here, he could see the most wonderful sight. There were shiny treasures in the sky.

With a streak of fire, he went to claim them before anyone else could get to the good stuff.

The attack by the Titan had to have passed right through this spot, and whatever spells had been protecting the treasure had shattered, leaving the shiny thing to fall from the sky.

He swooped close just as portals opened all around it and attacks lashed out. But they were all too slow and stupid to challenge him. Hawk pulled the item into his space, then vanished from the area as he followed it home to examine his treasure.

He hadn't managed to get the box. The attackers had covered it with danger, but it was already open, and Hawk was happy to just take what was inside.

As disappointing as it might be.

It felt like holy power, but it was just a silly tiny dragon scale. It wasn't even a good one, it was cracked, and dull, and most of its power had been drained.

He was keeping it anyhow.

If someone was willing to attack him to steal it, that just meant that he didn't know how good it really was yet. So, he would keep it hidden with his other treasures until he found the answer.

[Good work, everyone. Status report. How are our cubs? Did anyone get injured?] Karl asked.

[My baby Rogue is good. She's already waking up and coherent. Ophelia looks tired, but Thor's barrier is back up already.] Rae agreed.

[The other ones are waking up too. The Lotus Tree has everyone around us recovering quickly.] Cara agreed.

[I protected my team. Tessa is good to go.] Thor added proudly.

Half a second later, Overlord Niall was next to Karl, blades out and looking for danger.

"Relax, they already left. Bishop Misty, the Temporal Dragon, threw them through time to fight it out." Karl explained.

"That's not what I'm concerned about. Our reports from interviewed detainees say that the Titans thought they had located a fragment of the original System Stones, but the box was open and empty.

I am looking for signs that it might have been stolen by one of the three creatures that were here fighting.

If there really was a surviving fragment in that chest, and the attack destroyed it, the System might collapse entirely."

[They can't have my treasure.] Hawk pouted.

Karl frowned at the Inquisitor. "There is definitely no sign of the System Stones here. Nor the chest or what was in it. I think it was already gone before the portals arrived."

Niall smirked.

{Fine, but know that I'm keeping an eye on you until we have verified that statement.} He sent as a system message, not trusting Karl's honesty.

They were friends, but when it came to trying to keep a Divine Relic secret, silence was your best option. Lottery winners had enough problems when people found about their ticket, and that was just a bit of money.

{If I had something with that much power, we would likely have a lot more visitors right now, wouldn't we?} Karl joked.

Niall wasn't so easily swayed. The item was gone, despite every Totem on the continent trying to grab it. There was a chance the box was always empty, but as an Inquisitor, it was his job to explore every possibility until the Holy Relic was recovered.

However, it was no wonder nobody could find it in the past. The relic wasn't on the ground, it was thousands of metres in the air, hidden in a separate space. You could fly right through it and never sense its presence.

It was a brilliant hiding space, and logically, there would have been some sort of clue or guide to finding it when it was first placed, but that was lost before any recorded history that they possessed.

Niall shrugged as he sent one last message. {If it is found, we will find another safe spot for it. The question is if the Giants or anyone else will be able to determine where it is before we can recover it. If they think it stopped existing, we're good. If they think that someone in the Capital might have it, all hell is about to break loose.}

The armies of the Giants and the Golden Dragon Nation seemed unsure what they should be doing now. Everyone was exhausted, and something big had happened, but they had no way of knowing who won the exchange.

Karl sent a message to Tabitha. {Let everyone know that our side won the exchange between leaders. I will explain the details later.}

Then Karl messaged the rest of his team. {Once the armies are rested, prepare for another attack. There is no telling how the forces that could see the incident are going to respond to the battle.}

Chapter 658 Regroup

Compared to the chaos that was gripping the advisors and seers within all the cities of the nation, the chaos on the battlefield was nothing.

For one brief glorious moment, they had all seen the greatest divine treasure in the world appear. Then mere seconds later, all the visions ended. Their premonitions vanished as if the trigger had never existed.

The Archbishop and Nacht shared a concerned look as the seers began to panic. All of their abilities had been triggered by the event, and then it was over, gone, vanished without a trace.

"Do you think that it might have been taken through time by the mystery combatants?" The Archbishop asked.

The Seers slowly nodded in agreement. "That seems like the most likely outcome. We don't recognize the aura of either of the parties involved in the attack on the hidden holy relic, but Bishop Misty was present, and sided with the one who was not a Titan. The most likely scenario is that she will have taken it through time, but the current her will have no knowledge of the event, as she has not done it yet." The two Totems sighed. Dealing with Temporal Dragons was tricky. You never knew what they actually knew. They liked to hide things from themselves so that it would be a surprise when it happened. A little treat that kept their lives interesting.

Nacht frowned. "I will send a message to the temples to keep an eye out for her so that we can ask her what she knows about the incident, but I strongly suspect that she's not going to know anything except what we know from after the change in the timeline.

How and why she interfered is unclear, but we can start with Monarch Karl and his team, who should have been close enough to get some information about the situation."

That was naturally assuming that they would survive the battle. The Beast Master's team had the World Dragon's own luck, and they were on the weakest side of the offensive, with considerable area attack abilities. If they weren't concerned about drawing the attention of and provoking stronger foes from the other fronts, they could clear the entire North Side themselves with relative ease, from what Nacht and the Archbishop had learned of their skills.

After a few minutes of staring at the monsters while the troops on the line caught their breath, and the last of the soldiers equipped the ice cleats, horns began to ring out in the distance, signalling the invading army to retreat.

Starting from the back, they turned and left, while the front slowly retreated. Not fleeing in panic, but an orderly withdrawal of forces designed to minimize casualties.

They had already suffered heavily, and the walk back to the portals was over the bodies of their fallen comrades. But they were alive, and today, that was all that mattered.

"Are we not going after them?" Danni Mackenzie asked as they watched the enemy retreat.

"And send our soldiers down that muddy hill, where they will have to face an enemy line with decent footing in the riverbed? No, there is no need for further casualties today. Let them leave and regroup, and we will deal with them later.

I suspect that the losses they have taken will keep them quietly in their own borders for at least a few days." Karl explained.

He didn't know how the other sides of the city had gone, but the Overlords who were with him earlier had taken numerous bodies from their Overlord Rank kills, so the Mountain Giants would be at least a bit weaker than they were yesterday.

Overlord Niall chuckled. "I don't know about days, but they will stay put for at least one. The Mountain Giants are a chaotic bunch, and with everyone so worked up to follow them into battle, they'll have everyone in a frenzy soon enough."

He made a slight gesture with his head towards Danni and the other Command group members who were in earshot, reminding Karl not to say things that should be public, like the change in leadership, and how the Frost Giants had already realized they were being used as fodder, but didn't dare to disobey orders.

Those things were better left unsaid, and knowing them would only earn a trip to the Inquisition for the officers here, to ensure that they were absolutely loyal.

The Mackenzie Sister was well vetted, and not really a concern, as she was on Capital Security. But most of the others were either reserve soldiers, or noncombat officers who had been brought to the line to compensate for the lack of radio communication.

"How long do we wait before I can start telling those in back to pack up the supplies in preparation to move back to the city?" Karl asked Overlord Niall, who hopefully had more experience with this sort of thing than he did.

"I really don't know. I say we give it thirty minutes. By then they will be off the adrenaline high, and they should be thinking clearly again. It will make for better packed supplies." Niall suggested.

He knew that there was a guideline for this, he had just never cared what it was. He had been an Inquisitor since he became an Elite, so he had never been the one who had to make the decision, only pass it on.

A few of the officers looked like they wanted to say something, but they were not brave enough to question the judgment of a Monarch and an Overlord, so they simply stayed silent for the half hour while Karl silently updated the troop deployments on the map until everything was gone, and the last of the troops on the west side were reported by Hawk to be getting close to the border.

"Alright, have everyone pack up. The battle is over, there is nothing left to fight." Karl announced.

Orders were shouted down the line, but Karl could hear that the radios were crackling to life again, restoring normal communication.

Then, a System Message appeared in Karl's vision.

{City Defence Successful}

{Calculating Difficulty}

{Calculating Rewards}

{1x5 Skill Points Awarded for successful completion at Monarch Rank}

{20 Bonus Skill Points for Successful Command Role}

Chapter 659 Just A Little Skilled

With the system notification, Karl checked his stats to see how he was doing on points. For the longest time, he was either just saving enough for a skill, or completely forgetting that they existed because it was so far to the next Skill. But now it seemed that he was getting a rather significant number of them all at once.

But before that, there was something to test.

{Whoever currently has care of the little ones, can you check if they got Skill Points from the battle? I got a reward for completion, so there is a chance that all the System Active combatants on our side got a point or two that they can use for skills.} Karl messaged to the team.

{I got two points. That's enough for a whole skill. Sister Rae said that she would talk to me about them later, once we're finished packing.} Sybil agreed.

{The others all got two points as well.} Dana responded after a minute's pause.

That was a good sign. If they were all getting the same achievements that Karl was, then they should all have fully active systems, and not flawed or partially active ones.

Karl looked at his own numbers, and found that he had actually been racking them up at a rather prodigious pace.

He had received points from the Graska Trial, the Cathedral Core Upgrade Trial, and a few of the fights that they had along the way, totalling twenty-eight points, on top of the twenty-five that he had just received.

He only had three skills available, though.

{Packmaster Skill Tree}

(50 Points) [Follow Me Little One] Directly teach a known skill to a compatible target.

(50 Points)[Pack First] Removes the usage and targeting limits on {Evolution} but adds an increasing materials cost every time it is used on a bonded beast.

(50 Points) [Territorial] All attacks by the Packmaster have a chance to cause {Intimidation}

Pack First wasn't a priority right now, as he didn't need to evolve any of his beasts, much less much than once where the skill would supersede the limits on Evolution.

Territorial was a useful skill, as intimidation would put him at an advantage in nearly every fight. However, in his current situation, the unfortunately named [Follow Me Little One] was the skill that he needed the most.

That skill felt distinctly like the System was trolling him, but Karl had so many skills that were along the same lines, that it only made sense that he would get something of that sort. Especially with Skill Merger available, he could create a whole new skill, and then just teach it to someone.

It would be brilliant, and he could save an immense amount of time in the training process.

But even better, he could teach advanced skills to a beast of a similar or identical species. He already knew that they would be compatible, all he had to do was teach them, and they would gain the prerequisite to pass their next growth bottleneck.

Karl looked over at Niall and realized that the real cheat code was not training baby Cerro, but helping the older Elites who had grown without complete Systems. They were slowly reaching full activation now, but they would be so far behind the new generation that would be able to upgrade their Class at Commander Rank and gain all new powers, as well as picking all the Class skills along the way.

As formidable as Niall was, he was likely a dozen useful skills short of where a Royal Rank Rogue would be in the future, and who knew what sort of skills an Overlord Ranked advanced class that started as a Rogue would be.

The man in question obviously noticed Karl giving him an assessing look, and waited expectantly for an explanation.

{Skill Learned} [Follow Me, Little One]

[Skill Points Remaining] 3

"I got a bonus of Skill Points, and used them to learn a new teaching skill." Karl explained quietly.

"What sort of class build are you even going for? Teal Dragon Cleric? Blue and Green mixed together." Niall joked.

"The skills are intended to help me train my beasts, though they're also useful to help train beasts for others, and in certain cases, other Elites."

Karl focused on Niall, and a skill that he would definitely want to have if it would work on him.

[Offensive Adaptation] Is incompatible with humans.

[Void Body] is incompatible with the target.

{Skill Teaching Request} [Limited Invulnerability]

Niall got a confused and offended look on his face, then it turned to joy after a few seconds, and he pulled Karl into a hug.

"What's with that response?" Karl asked.

"Nothing. Just a strange System Message."

{Pack Master Karl Offers Knowledge} Skill [Limited Invulnerability] will be transferred to the loyal hatchling Niall.

No way was the Overlord willingly repeating those words out loud.

"Did it transfer properly?" Karl asked.

"Indeed it did. This skill is absolutely broken. No wonder you act like you're immortal in combat. For most purposes, you are." Niall agreed, then his eyes went vague.

He was clearly pulled into a system menu of some sort, so Karl waited for him to finish and come back to reality.

It took nearly five minutes before the Rogue came back to consciousness with an amused smirk.

"Well now, isn't that interesting. I just learned one of the most fundamental secrets to the System, and it was entirely accidentally."

Karl chuckled. "That it unlocks hidden class options if you get an oddball skill that's capable of becoming more powerful than your current Rank?"

Niall nodded. "My new class is Stalker, and apparently, I have a vast wealth of Skill Points that I could never access before."

"Sister Rae will be overjoyed. You will be able to play together even more effectively once I manage to teach her a similar skill."

The Rogue winced. "Perhaps not making the Immortal Bloodbath Spider invincible as well would help people sleep better at night."

"I can't even guarantee that it would work. I tried and failed twice with other skills before I found one that you could learn." Karl paused as he saw Niall waiting for an explanation.

It didn't seem like something he couldn't say in front of Danni, so Karl continued.

"First, I was going to teach you [Offensive Adaptation], the skill that Sister Rae has that increases her damage permanently every time she hits a target of a certain type. For an Inquisitor, that skill would be outstanding. But apparently regular folk can't learn it at all.

Then I tried to teach you [Void Body], a combined invulnerability and healing skill that was improved from Cara's [Limited Invulnerability] and [Trollish Regeneration]. But that's incompatible with you in particular. I don't know who it might work on, though.

Then the third option worked." Karl finished.

Niall nodded. Limited Invulnerability was already good enough. Combining that with the insane self-healing of Trollish Regeneration? That was just disgusting. "Wait, do you have all of those skills?"

Karl nodded. "Not all of them are active anymore, as I've improved some of them. But yes, I know all three."

Karl got another brilliant idea. {Invalid Target} [Night Hunter] is a species exclusive skill.

Well, it was worth a shot. If they had a Rae equivalent Elite on the Inquisition, the Church wouldn't have to ask for Rae in the future.

Chapter 660 The Whole Gang Is Here

Their presence seemed to be drawing Overlords to them, and before the line was ready to move out, Niall had been joined by Tabitha, Overlord Joram the Ranger, and Overlord Drath, who came to them from the Eastern Front, covered in blood and looking rough.

"Inquisitor, did you find anything?" Drath asked as he arrived.

"Nothing. There is no sign of the Relic. No residual energy, no trigger from my tracking skill. It's like it simply vanished.

The Archbishop is absolutely certain there was something in the box, but now it's gone without a trace. I'm sure we all have theories, but as far as hard evidence, I haven't found anything yet." Niall explained.

Tabitha stared silently at Niall for a few seconds, then pointed at him.

"Your class changed." She accused.

Instantly, Niall realized what that must look like to the others, who didn't know what had happened since he arrived. "That's an unrelated issue. Monarch Karl learned a new skill that helped me trigger a class change." He offered.

Karl nodded in agreement, and the Overlords waited for a more detailed explanation.

"I got a skill intended to teach my beasts new skills that I already knew. However, it came with a loophole. It's not limited to just my bonded beasts. If I can find a skill that is compatible with others, I can use it to teach them as well.

The only real restriction is that I know a limited number of skills, and many of the ones I know are intended for beasts, and not humans."

Overlord Joram looked confused, while Drath and Tabitha seemed to understand better, as they had spent a while around Karl.

"For example, I wanted to teach Niall [Trollish Regeneration] because what would be funnier than a Rogue that self-heals? But it's incompatible." He explained.

"Ah, that makes sense. You gain all your skills from your beasts or books, right? You don't get the same sort of skill tree that other classes do."

Karl shrugged. "Well, I do get a skill tree. But it's all utility skills, buffs and such. I could have picked a different path and learned a load of attack skills, but at the time, this seemed the better path."

"We need to get you into the Library and start teaching you new skills. Well, what ones you can. We have still only managed to turn a few dozen skills into actual skill books.

The requirements on knowledge of both the skill and Inscription is too limiting for the first book creation." Tabitha sighed.

"Do you know Inscription?" Karl asked.

Overlord Joram snorted in amusement, and she glared at him.

"No, I didn't pick Inscription as a trade."

Karl patted her kindly on the shoulder, and activated [Follow Me Little One]

{Skill Teaching Request} [Sharpness]

[Sharpness] Slashing, Stabbing and Disintegration type abilities increase in damage by 10 percent per Rank of the user. Tabitha's cheeks went bright red as she stared in shock at Karl, and Niall began to laugh.

"Oh, it must have given you the same message that it gave me."

The Warrior cleared her throat and put on a stern expression.

"I don't know what you mean." She replied calmly.

"He just taught you a skill, didn't he? Which one did he pick? It has to be something that is compatible with your skills as a warrior. I don't know what Karl has that would qualify that you don't already know, though." Niall explained.

"Sharpness. He taught me a skill that increases the damage of slashing and stabbing attacks. Perfect for a Greatsword user." Tabitha informed him with a sigh.

Then she turned on Karl. "What is with that message anyhow? Since when am I an adorable kitten?"

Karl nearly choked on his tongue, and Niall had tears in his eyes.

"It called me a Loyal Hatchling. I think it's System generated, and the skill is intended to be used on new pets." The Rogue laughed.

Karl looked at the skintight latex bodysuit she wore with armour plates over the vital areas and firmly decided that while Adorable wasn't quite the word he would have picked, he was going to take a page from Sybil's playbook and not say a single thing.

Unfortunately for Tabitha, Overlord Drath was not so restrained.

"Well, I think that you're adorable. Look how cute you blush when you get mad." He teased, winking at the embarrassed warrior.

The soldiers were ready to head back to the city, and Danni was waiting with the Command Group for Karl or someone to give them an order to move.

Karl turned her way, changing the topic from exceptionally curvaceous 'adorable kittens', and nodded to the Mage.

"Send out the orders. The North Side is secure, all troops can return to the city." Karl instructed.

"Thank you, Monarch. We will be off." Danni replied, but Karl stopped her before she could go.

"I'm in the Monarch apartments, if you want to come by with the siblings. My whole group is staying there, and I'm sure they'd love to catch up."

Danni smiled. "Donni already sent me an invitation from Dana to come visit you all. I will let you know when we have time. We've both got regular guard shifts this week."

The rest of the team was making their way over, along with the Acolytes and Donnie Mackenzie. They were all in high spirits, though the young ones looked more than a little traumatized after their first time seeing battle.

Karl was fairly certain that they hadn't actually taken part, as Awakened Rank had little chance of doing anything more useful than the common soldiers on the line, and they were even less trained than the Privates in the Church Army.

At best, they might get a bit of experience, but more likely they would just be in the way and get others injured as they tried.

Once they arrived, the young cadets all came over to greet Karl, who took the time to listen to their stories and the things that they had noticed about how the senior Elites fought during the battle.

He wasn't training them, that could wait for later. But it was clear that the little ones were fond of him, and after the next training session, that sentiment was almost guaranteed to increase.