

Beast Master 661

Chapter 661 Dealing With Reporters

Back inside the city, things were even more chaotic than they were on the battlefield, with people panicking about the attack, about how they had just realized that the Capital was a target, and that it was far too close to the Mountain Giant borders.

Never mind that they had been there their entire lives, and this was the first time that the Giants had dared to threaten the city directly, now that it had happened, the reality had sunk in for the Capital residents who were used to their luxury and safety.

Karl would have liked to say that it was understandable, just a matter of threatened civilians and bureaucrats, but shamefully many of the sedentary lower ranked Elites were involved in the chaos.

They had never really taken the threats to the nation seriously, even when they were in the Academy. Now, they regretted every action that they had taken which delayed their own growth or passed up potential for political power or wealth.

[We should have gotten the fear aura skill.] Rae complained from her space as they slowly made their way through the crowds in the streets.

Fortunately, the majority of the crowd didn't recognize them, only that they were Elites by their armour. So, nobody stopped them to ask questions.

However, when they began to approach the street that led to the higher ranking Elite's apartments, the crowd was absolutely packed, looking for someone who could give them answers.

The apartments were all empty, everyone who lived there was called to battle, and they were the first ones back. The other fronts had taken much worse damage than the North Side did, thanks to Remi's intervention with the Thunderstorm.

The first to recognize them was a reporter, and his shouts turned hundreds of concerned citizens around to swarm the group of returning Elites.

"Please, can you tell us what the current situation is?" The reporter pleaded, while his team worked to keep the crowd from pushing into the shot.

"The armies of the Giants and their allies have retreated. There is currently no direct threat to the city, but we have not been privy to the casualty counts or merit awards that might come from this battle." Niall informed the reporter in a monotone voice.

That wasn't how he usually talked, so he was deliberately making his interview as boring as humanly possible, hoping to end it soon.

"Which portion of the city were you defending?" The reporter asked.

"The Inquisition cannot confirm the location of its members. However, I can confirm that a Monarch and four Royal Ranked Elites took command of the North Side of the city. Their direction led to zero line breaches, while the Tree of Life form of High Priestess Lotus, servant of the Green Dragon God, was instrumental in reducing casualties."

[If all else fails, throw someone under the bus and run.] Remi laughed.

[I will drag him back if he tries to run.] Rae agreed.

Niall hadn't made any gestures to indicate who was who, so the reporters had to guess whether the Nature High Priestess in this group was the one named Lotus.

The reporter turned to Karl, who was standing near Niall, while the other Overlords had formed a protective ring around the junior members, in case there were still disguised infiltrators or other traitors in the crowd.

"Sir, can you provide any additional details?" The reporter asked, and Karl watched Niall smirk as the attention was diverted from him.

But two could play this game.

"I can provide a few. The Thunderstorm during the battle was indeed a magical effect, created by our Golden Dragon Nation's Elites. Also, the battlefield appears to have been segmented, with the North Side receiving the majority of the combatants under the Commander Rank. That allowed the Giants and their weaker allies to work together without the weaker creatures getting caught in the aftershocks of a Monarch or Overlord Ranked battle.

Finally, we have identified a number of traitors and transformed spies from the Giant Nations inside the city. If you should be caught in the middle of a police action to apprehend them, we cannot guarantee your safety if you are protesting or crowding the streets."

Behind him, Drath and Tabitha groaned, and the crowd began to shout in panic.

"Sir, can you confirm how many spies might have been found?" The reporter asked.

"Obviously not. However, you are live broadcasting this, so there is a chance that they will attempt to go underground or join the cowards fleeing the city for the anonymity of a rural community."

A giant wouldn't take the indignity of living like a peasant or common worker, so if the rural population was suspicious of everyone with powers who entered the village, it would help keep the cowards in the Capital.

At least, that was Karl's logic. The villages didn't want politicians rolling in with their wealth and taking over, they already had enough issues with the large business owners acting like they owned the world. A few words to help discourage the relocation was the least he could do for them.

"Can you provide any other details?" The reporter asked hopefully.

This Elite was more forthcoming than most, who would make asking questions feel like pulling teeth.

"Only one that is relevant to the situation. With the help of a new potion breakthrough and an advanced, science-based training regimen, I am pleased to inform you that the old record for time taken to reach Awakened Rank for an Elite has been broken. Research is ongoing, but the early signs are very encouraging, and we can expect a grand announcement of success after the Divine Injection Ceremony in the coming days."

{What exactly is science-based about the torture routine that you had Sister Rae come up with for me?} Sybil asked.

Karl smiled back at the little Rogue. {Human biology is science. She was very careful not to push it so far that you died. Besides, isn't it getting easier now?}

The reporter looked around the group, and realized that everyone else was studiously ignoring him, so there would be no more questions.

Karl cleared his throat. "Now, if it's not too much trouble, we would like to return home to shower and rest after the battle."

Chapter 662 After Battle Snacks

The crowd parted as the interview ended, leaving them a path to the apartments. The crowd was already beginning to disperse, as they had gotten the basics of their questions answered by someone in charge.

Normally, they would get political non answers, and then it would be a day-long protest until people gave up, but today someone had just told them what happened, and then gave them gossip to share.

Everyone who had kids, especially ones whose kids would be undergoing the ceremony in the next few years, was excited to find out what the big news after the ceremony would be, as well as speculate on what the new record for advancement to Awakened was, and whether they knew someone who might be able to suddenly increase in power.

The Elite had said that it was a potion, so that meant anyone might be able to use it. Not just children, but perhaps their cousin's spouse who had been stuck at Awakened since the Academy might suddenly begin to make progress and bring pride and wealth to the family.

Little did they know that the Elite program was about to become a significantly larger portion of the student body.

Once they were all in the lobby of the apartment, and the crowd was safely on the other side of a soundproof wall, the Overlords turned on Karl.

"Did nobody ever teach you how to deal with the reporters?" Drath demanded.

"Relax, General. None of what I told them was an actual secret. If they had two functional brain cells, the reporters watching us train in public would have noticed the advancements to Awakening happening in real time. In fact, they likely have it on film, and don't even realize it because they were more focused on the Cerro pack in the background playing with the smashing posts during lunch." Karl laughed.

"Did you have to tell them that there were spies in the city? That's confidential." Drath demanded, defaulting to his duties as First General.

"I'm fairly certain that they're all dead by now. Our friend Niall's comrades at the Inquisition should have taken care of that during the battle.

But the important part is that it kept the wealthy losers in the Capital instead of letting them scatter to all the small towns where they could mess up the economy or buy out a huge portion of the local small businesses.

I don't mean to be offensive, but the rest of the country is happier not knowing that they exist."

The Overlords all began to laugh quietly.

Joram, the blonde Overlord Rank Ranger, smiled at Karl. "You've got a point. None of the smaller villages are ready for what would happen if they suddenly got an influx of bankers and influence brokers building vacation estates in the hills where they hunt and clear timber.

The cultural conflict would be an absolute disaster."

Everyone piled into the elevator to head to Karl's apartment, where the staff had helpfully already sent an assortment of snacks and drinks.

The Overlords all headed for the shower at the same time, then paused and laughed. If it was just the guys, they didn't care, they had all trained together and used the same shower room in the gym. But as they approached, they realized that Tabitha was with them today.

"Overlord Tabitha, there is a shower in the ensuite if you would prefer. It's not as large as the one in the sauna and hot tub area, but well stocked." Karl offered.

Tabitha nodded, then changed directions to the master bedroom, while the others went to use the shower heads all along the walls of the hot tub room.

Karl had assumed that they were mostly there for the steamy ambience when you had the sauna going, as one of them pointed straight at the sauna heater. But they did work as actual showers.

In his mind, Rae came to the same realization. They had just turned them on to get the air nice and humid before their bath. The showers even had a timer on them for that purpose. But she could use them for so much more.

Nobody took long. Three minutes later, everyone was back out in fresh clothes with wet hair.

Overlord Drath took charge of the conversation once they were all seated, with a nervous group of Acolytes sitting at the table behind Karl, next to the kitchen. The snacks and drinks were on the coffee table, so they were hoping that they would just be ignored. What was about to be said was likely super secret, and while they knew they shouldn't be hearing it, they couldn't resist.

"Alright, I will start with the obvious parts. Bishop Misty of the Divine Beast Nation arrived with two unknown Totem Rank or higher creatures. What do we know about them?" Drath began.

Karl considered his answer. "One was a four armed Titan, he arrived through a portal opened by a Monarch Ranked Giant. He was the first to arrive, and then Bishop Misty arrived with the second Totem, who I believe was a human. Possibly, a beastkin. But close to human."

[Technically not a lie.] Thor allowed in Karl's mind.

Karl was possibly a human. And possibly a beastkin. Or something that was neither of the above. But they were all still options until they had a definitive answer.

"And the attack that revealed the treasure?" Drath asked.

"The Giant launched it, and the other swatted it away. I think he was just aiming to send it into the sky, but there wasn't time for much after that. Bishop Misty sent them all through time. If I remember right, I believe she said that they were taking it home. That makes me think that they were all transferred through time, and the Temporal Dragon was working to restore a timeline. Or prevent additional damage to it. I don't really understand how that works." Karl explained.

"Did they take anything before they left?" Overlord Joram asked.

"I don't think so. But the dragon's time spell creates a thick white mist. I couldn't see the treasure location until after."

The Overlords nodded in understanding. "Great, more mysteries." Joram sighed.

Tabitha frowned, then her expression brightened, and she snapped her fingers.

"That location is directly above the Cathedral, right? Didn't there used to be a huge tower there? If I remember the history books, there were the ruins of a massive white stone tower at this location when the city was settled. That's why they picked the spot. The stones had a bit of lingering magic in them to improve durability, so they used them to build the Cathedral and the first few buildings."

Everyone else just shrugged, and she sighed. "Never mind. I will ask someone who has actually read a history book."

A knock at the door drew their attention, then Sybil opened it to let Lady Othello, Overlord Ahmad and the head Librarian from the Cathedral enter.

Karl smiled at Tabitha. "Ask and ye shall receive. If anyone has read a history book, it's the Librarian."

The Blue Dragon smiled at Karl. She had questions for him as well. Especially about that Runecrafting book that he had apparently made for the Archbishop, and why it didn't give the user knowledge of any of the relevant crafting specialties associated with the trade.

It was simultaneously the most useful and dysfunctional learning experience of her life.

Chapter 663 Capital History

The Overlords nodded to their comrades, then took seats, with Ahmad settling in next to Dana to whisper in her ear. Karl gave him a suspicious look, but the Overlord sent him a system message.

{Magical theory developments. The Battlemage will gain from them.} That was good enough for Karl, but the fluffy cat ears of the Overlord Rank Mage were entirely too tempting, making the mage a natural ladies' man.

Tabitha turned to the Librarian. "Am I right about that location being somewhere directly over the Cathedral that was built on the ruins of an ancient tower?"

The blue dragon nodded her head. "That is right. My theory is that the object was a prize for winners of the tower. We don't know what was supposed to be in it, or if it was claimed and that was why the tower's magic faded. But the location matches, though the tower must have been thousands of metres tall.

What isn't common knowledge is that the foundation of the tower was never dismantled. The Cathedral wasn't built there simply because there was a lot of stone, there is an active trial in the catacombs under the temple. There are fifteen levels below ground, through the actual base of the defunct tower. The magic of the World Dragon is strong there, and that is why the Cathedral was actually placed on the site.

The basement trial is only good for one group of people, though.

Nobody can enter it except Bishops and Avatars of their Gods. That is the Overlords and Totems aligned with the Church. It is similar to the trial instance in the grounds, but at a much higher level.

That trial temple on the Cathedral grounds used to rely on the power of the underground temple, but after the incident the other day, it is generating its own power, and the usage is no longer so limited."

The last was said while the Librarian stared at Karl, who had made the new core for the trial next to the Cathedral. But in Karl's opinion, that wasn't really his fault. It wasn't going to let him out until he provided a new core, so one way or another, it was bound to happen.

Karl smiled at Tessa and Lotus. "So, you've got an extra fancy trial waiting for you in the future. What do you think? Two more years should do it? Or do you think it will take three to reach Overlord?"

The other Overlords laughed, while the dragon rolled her eyes.

"You say that so casually, as if everyone else in this room didn't use a massive number of resources or enjoy a string of exceptional luck for over a decade to reach their current status."

Karl shrugged. "Well, we've got both of those on our side. Plus, the System is awakening. Once it's fully active for everyone, steady progress will be much more common. As far as I know, the only real challenge to their growth will be bypassing the bottlenecks."

Tabitha took out a map and refolded it so that the area around the Cathedral was on top. "So, there is a trial here, and here. Then there are Holy Relics here, here, and here? It looks like there is a whole village buried under the Capital."

The Librarian nodded. "That's right. As far as we can tell, there is an entire city under the city, buried by more than a hundred thousand years of time, and thirty metres of sandstone, formed in the years after the time when this area was on the edge of the desert."

Ahmad finished explaining his idea to Dana, and joined the conversation.

"You know, one of the groups of Giants that we fought said that they were going to take the System Relic that was in the city and crush the church. Do you think that they mean the System Stones, or one of the other Relics?" He asked.

The Librarian winced. "Well, technically, they could mean any of countless items. We have been stockpiling System Relics in the catacombs for centuries. The hope was that the resonance would help activate other System Relics."

"Did it work?" Karl asked.

"That is debatable. But if nothing else, it seriously slowed the decay of the stockpiled items, to the point that some of them were still active during the last annual inspection, though in a very precarious state.

They couldn't be moved, or used for their intended purpose, but when we tested them with holy magic, they still showed signs of the system, even after all that time. It's part of the reason that the Church was so confident that they would be able to get the Divine Injection to work once they found the ruined System Stones. They were designed to liquify holy power with the system integrated, and the study of them allowed the development of the serum.

But I'm rambling, we didn't want to talk about that, we were talking about the treasure over the city that might have once been in the tower that was here, and whether that was the item that the Giants were after.

Well, if that new leader of theirs knew something in advance, perhaps having been informed by the time traveller that Bishop Misty sent away, it is possible that they know much more than we do.

In fact, it's possible that we still haven't discovered what they came here to find, and that might be why they're so desperate to force us all out of the city.

I get that they hold a grudge against the World Dragon, but they seem much more determined than in the past to stamp out the church."

Everyone let her ramble, thinking of the possibilities, as well as the likelihood that the Giants would be coming back for whatever they had failed to obtain with this attack.

Or, in the case of General Drath, what his troops were going to have to do to actually win the next confrontation, if they did come back and try to force their way into the city.

If they made even a small breach, the destruction that the Giants could cause to the civilian population with a single Overlord was immense. A few minutes loose behind the walls would cost tens of thousands of lives.

Chapter 664 System Favouritism

After a few minutes of letting the Librarian ramble about the past and the possible targets of the attack, Overlord Drath decided to change the topic to something a bit more optimistic.

"This isn't strictly on topic for right now, but we would like you five to help with the ceremony here in the Capital next week. We know that you all have fully active systems, and the Government will be providing System enhanced items for the testing.

That is why we would like you to assist. You see, there is no guarantee that the items will have the same reaction to being handed from a Nurse to the student as they would when being passed from one of you to a student.

We are hoping to maximize the number of successes in the Capital region, and we will have nearby Elites help with as many of the other locations as possible.

If nothing else, it will at least improve the Morale of the new students to have met a few working Elites before they reached the Academy."

Karl chuckled. "The guards on the train were the first experience for me, and they were remarkably helpful."

The General nodded. "They are typically chosen from the Elites that are good with kids, but not really good at much else. I have heard that it makes them easier to relate to because they're all Common and Awakened Rank Elites, the closest thing we have to just sending other students to pick them up.

We did consider that, by the way. As a sort of reward for senior students."

Karl chuckled. "That could be interesting this year, as so many of the students who are about to become Seniors have spent the last year on the Hill Giant border. At least, I assume they're still there."

Drath nodded. "They've been moved a few times, and cycled back to the Academy for rest, but they've spent at least half the year on the border, and they're stationed there right now."

Karl nodded. "I don't think that any of my people would have an issue with the plan to attend the ceremonies. How many middle schools are there in the Capital?" Drath thought about it for a second. "There are sixteen in the city, but they all do the injection ceremony at the opera auditorium so that their parents can attend and see the new Elites one last time before they go."

I believe that the smaller towns do it at the school, don't they?" Karl nodded. "Yeah, but not with parents present. We did it in the classroom, as there was only one class in our year. But the Lithium mines aren't all that large, so many years we have under two dozen kids in a year. Mine was larger than usual, but even then, there were only a few of us at the Academy. Possibly, only two. Unless I missed someone."

The Librarian frowned as the two talked. "How much do you have left to do in the city before then? I seem to recall that we were getting training updates from some students under your supervision."

Karl nodded. "We have these five lovely young Elites in our care, and they're making great progress. But we also have five Beast Rangers and a Tiger Monk from the Special Forces cadets training with us. We are going to try to advance that group in the next few days, as well as imparting some more skills and combat training to prepare these Acolytes for their time at the Academy."

I have been informed that the Army will be taking over the training of the Beast Rangers."

General Drath nodded. "Yes, they are already cadets assigned to the Special Forces, so we will take on their basic training, as we had already planned to when we thought they had no System access."

The other Overlords chuckled. It was clearly a power play by the Church Army, but it wouldn't hurt anything, and they were going to be overloaded with students at the Academy anyhow, so letting the special forces students have special attention would help them immensely.

Plus, it would give them an excuse to foist similar talents on the army for training, in the name of boosting the skills of the Elites.

They were already short on teachers, and that problem was only going to get worse with the next influx.

Anyone who could and would teach students was going to be needed very soon, but the Librarian was beginning to suspect that Monarch Karl was going to find a way out of that, somehow. Likely by becoming a vital asset somewhere else, where there were no Elites to train. Or at least no freshmen for him to train.

Overlord Joram snapped his fingers. "I get it now. There is a reason that you didn't have those young Elites fighting on the North Front. They're not just under your care, they're still waiting to go to the Academy, so they haven't been inducted as proper Elites yet, with all the responsibilities."

Karl nodded. "Exactly. Three training days and a potion doesn't make a proper soldier, and it definitely doesn't make an independent Elite. Untrained fighters on the front lines are a nightmare."

The Overlords looked like they were ready to retire to their own units for the night, but the Blue Dragon Priestess had more to talk to Karl about before he managed to escape from her.

"We can all discuss the motivations behind the attack later. Elite Karl, I have a request for you. You have a talent for teaching, and a number of rare skills. I would like to make a formal request for you to transfer those skills to the Clergy scribes for distribution." She announced.

Karl smiled and placed his hand on hers.

{Skill Teaching Request} [Lightning Zone]

The Librarian's eyes opened wide in shock, and she read the system message quietly, but audibly.

{Pack Master Karl Offers Knowledge} Skill [Lightning Zone] will be transferred to the alluring Priestess Kelithuza.

"Hey, why does it mess with me, but flatters her? This is clear System favouritism." Tabitha complained.

"A whole new skill, and a zone effect. That is lovely." The Librarian sighed happily, before a sudden sense of dread spread over her.

"What are the restrictions on that skill book?" She asked, recalling the debacle of the [Refreshing Lightning] barrier.

Karl smiled. "That's the fun part. I have no idea who can use it."

Chapter 665 User Friendly Cheat Code

Karl inspected the option with Skill Book and realized that it was nearly exactly the same as [Refreshing Lightning] except that it included mages with high Lightning Affinity in the list with Lightning Element beasts, Clerics and Shamans.

They already knew that limited it to mostly just a few beastkin and the Blue Dragon Clerics as well as Shamans, but if some of the mages could use [Lightning Zone] as well, it would be a little less frustrating for the Librarian and her people.

The blue dragon sighed. "I suspected that it might be another of those evil spells. But it's a good one again, so I will endeavour to teach more of our people to use it."

"If you give me more time, I can come up with something more user-friendly. Honestly, I should spend more time in your Library trying to learn skills myself so that I'm not completely limited to beast friendly skills." Karl replied regretfully.

Overlord Joram smiled and brought out a small Peregrine Falcon, his bonded pet as a Ranger. It was just a normal beast, as Rangers couldn't bond with intelligent creatures or Magical Beasts. But with Karl's skill, he saw an opportunity.

"You said that you raised a bunch of Beast Rangers, right? With Magical Beasts for partners? If my friend Dave evolved, do you think that I could become one?" He asked.

Karl frowned. "You want to change your class?"

Joram shrugged. "My system has been fully active for a few weeks now, and I have all the Ranger Skills. There is nothing left in my tree, and the temple didn't help me pick a new class."

Karl nodded slowly. "You likely still only get the one friend. However, it shouldn't be hard for me to get him to evolve. Maybe."

If Karl remembered his book learning properly, many species of magical beasts started as regular animals who ate a magical resource. Surely, Joram would have tried that already, if he was looking to have the bird evolve. But it was best to check.

"Have you tried giving him resources?" He verified.

Joram nodded. "Ever since I was a Royal, six years ago. Nothing changes him."

[Make him a baby Hawk. It will be funny.] Cara suggested.

Hawk was intrigued by the idea. [A baby me?]

[Yeah, teach him Flaming Body. Baby Hawk.] Cara suggested.

She hadn't known Hawk before he could do that, and Cara herself was a baby at the Commander Rank, so she hadn't really considered that the others started off much lower on the power scale.

If Karl had picked the skill to remove the restrictions on Evolution, he could just use that directly.

No, by the wording, he might still be able to. [Evolution] Cause any bonded pet to evolve into a form one Rank Higher than when the skill is used. Usable once per beast, some materials may be required.

The wording didn't say that it had to be his bonded beast. That part was implied, and should be completely obvious. But it wasn't explicitly stated. So, he tried anyhow.

{Nice Try} Invalid Target

Well, that settled it. No blatant cheating. Fine, he would bypass the evolution skill, and try to do it manually.

[Hawk, can I get an Awakened Rank fire stone?]

Hawk dropped the stone into his hand, and Karl brought it over to the bird, whose eyes lit up with greed.

Even if it didn't trigger an advancement, the bird still wanted it.

That seemed like a good sign, so Karl fed the bird, and then stroked its head and activated [Follow Me Little One] to transfer [Flaming Body].

The small bird suddenly lit on fire, then began happily rubbing up against Karl's hand, thoroughly ignoring everyone else in the room.

"Dave, congratulations. Come here, buddy." Overlord Joram informed the bird with a pleased smile.

Dave turned to chirp at him, then rubbed possessively against Karl's hand.

"I know you made a new friend, but you need to come here, so I can inspect you."

The bird chirped what was obviously a 'no' and remained in position.

"Did something go wrong?" The Librarian wondered.

Karl shook his head. "No, it's still bonded to him, I can see it in the system interface. Dave is just being stubborn."

Joram took out a few small berries, and the bird turned away from Karl, then looked back to rub his head on Karl's arm before flying back to his partner.

"That's better. Welcome back, buddy. His thoughts are much clearer now than they were before he evolved. Oh, I see a system notice." Overlord Joram informed them.

Everyone waited patiently for him to finish what he was doing. If he could change his system at Overlord, he should have a load of points available to pick all the skills, and then he could guide all the Beast Rangers through their class. Assuming that was what he got.

Slowly, he opened his eyes. "There were five other options available when I got the advancement menu. But Beast Ranger really is the best of them. It also appears to have skills to help me benefit from the beast's abilities to a greater extent than a Ranger does.

I will have to train to find out exactly how much, but I never gained physical abilities from my partner before, other than eyesight."

Karl nodded. "Well, the others gained large amounts of strength and stamina, or strength and agility, from their partners at Common Rank, so I would suspect that you'll get a percentage increase as well, though Dave has a ways to go to catch up.

Flaming Body should take him through to at least Commander Rank, maybe into Royal Rank, so try not to send him anywhere too dangerous while he's still advancing." The bird was still a Common Magical Beast, but that was changing quickly with the influx of energy from his partner. It was quite noticeable at this level, but only time would tell if that growth rate held as he got stronger.

[And just like that, we have a volunteer to help us with our training regimen.] Hawk laughed.

[And a strong one, with lots of scouting and combat experience.]

Chapter 666 Mark Of The Beast

Now that Overlord Joram had a few seconds to adjust to his new class, and to the enhancement of the bond with 'his Dave' as Hawk called the bird, he was zoning out again, looking at all the skills that he had available to him.

"You know, starting out with this class might not actually be optimal. There are so many introductory attack abilities, utility skills and hunting buffs with the Ranger Class, that simply aren't part of this class.

A lot of the skills that Beast Rangers get are for improving the stats of our beast, or our targeting with ranged attacks. There is very little for actual attack skills within the tree." Joram explained.

"Well, that is a bit of an issue. Nobody likes a one-trick pony. So, they will have to learn skills another way." Karl sighed.

"There are a few, just not nearly as many as there are in the Ranger Class, and they look like advanced versions of base attacks. I'm not sure that skipping the Ranger Class will actually be best for everyone." Joram explained.

The other Overlords got concerned looks. The Ranger had a point. If they missed out on the simple and easy skills, the ones that they would use every day, and only got the ones that were intended to buff them after they already had the basics, they would be in real trouble when it came to building their power base.

They could only rely on their beast for so much before they were going to have to get into combat themselves.

But there were options. Like the Special Forces Cadets that had been chosen for the first group, they could continue to train conventionally, and learn the basic skills from the Academy.

It might lead to an imbalance in their abilities, but it would be better than nothing.

But to Tabitha and Niall, the most offensive combat focused of the group, there was another issue that was becoming apparent.

The class was only part of the issue. The real problem was going to come with what beasts they chose.

Lightning Cerro had a versatile barrier that could also be used for melee offensive attacks. The Moor Cats had stealth on their side, and the bonded partner would have speed to help them. But what if a different beast was chosen?

That girl who had gotten the small bird, for example. Or someone who picked a less impressive beast out of fondness for the species. Both would be at a huge disadvantage in their growth. Like Karl's Beast Master class, they relied too much on their beasts, and didn't have a base of skills from multiple powerful beasts to get them through.

"We could just assign a curriculum to them that focuses on learning skills from the start. Rae and the others learned quickly when they were young, and they're still innovating. I think that if we have the right teachers in place, we can help the students master at least two or three basic skills at the start, and then they can work from there.

Speaking of which, how is the skill Library coming along?" Karl asked.

"We're up to twenty-seven different skills, but limited by what our Inscriptionists can learn well enough to make a tome. I really do need to steal you in the near future, and get you to put more down on paper for us." The Librarian insisted.

Karl nodded. "I expected that there would be something like that in the near future. It's not a problem, but I'm hoping that you will have a few skills that I can use as well. I will even replace the copies if I can learn them."

"What skill books can you even use?" Tabitha asked, curious about the particulars of Karl's class.

"Honestly, I don't know. I've only really gone for ones that were useful to one of the others in the team. I haven't tried to see the extent of what I can use. Likely no other trade skills, except maybe Dwarven Smithing, as I've already got Runecrafting.

As far as magic and combat skills, I suppose nearly anything is possible with the team composition that I have right now."

Lady Othello smiled at him. "Perhaps I can work with you and Thor, teach you both some Paladin type skills. It would make you both better in human form combat, and who knows what Thor can do with them in Cerro form."

Thor was definitely up for that. "As long as you help us with our warriors and the monk, I have no objections at all. More teachers are better for everyone, and if we're all training together, my training skills will affect all of you as well." Karl offered.

That was an enticing offer. The beasts had some unique skills, and if they could get a chance at learning them, it would be well worth the effort.

Of course, Karl would happily teach them a skill if he was able. Making powerful friends had been hammered so deep into his psyche by Thor's instincts that Karl didn't even notice that it was an outside influence anymore.

Danni gave Karl a smirk that said she would also be pressuring him for a skill before the night was out. But the relaxing with the Mackenzie sisters part would have to wait until the Overlords went home for the night.

The Librarian snapped her fingers and nodded. "Yes, that is the right way. We will gather a copy of all the skill books that we can spare, and bring them to a training session downstairs. Say, first light tomorrow, so that we can see which ones work, and what other skills can be passed on from the Overlords? Then we can all go to train the youngsters and the young beasts. Say, I don't suppose that you have a growth serum for Cerro, do you? If the beasts were Awakened Rank, they could learn much more."

Karl laughed. "We're already feeding them better than even Thor was able to manage in the early days, so they will grow quickly. But you'll have to give them at least a month or two if you want full-grown Cerro."

The blue dragon sighed. That was still a huge improvement, as Cerro normally took two years to get past the adolescent phase to adult, but she knew that this project would go off the rails the moment that the controlled environment was gone.

Chapter 667 Dave's Not Here

Overlord Joram looked down at the flaming bird sitting on his lap with fondness. "I am going to retire for the evening. Dave wants to fly free and explore his new abilities."

Karl nodded. "Do you want Hawk to look after him? There are many scary things in the world for an Awakened Rank magical beast."

Joram shook his head. "I think he will be fine. He has been flying around as a common bird all his life."

Karl got up and opened the balcony door. "He can join you back home when he's done. I'm sure he's not going to get lost."

Before Joram could say anything, Dave was rocketing out the door, leaving a streak of fire behind him as he tested his newly enhanced wings. His species was already among the fastest of birds, and now he was even faster.

His happy calls could be heard circling the building, as Karl left the door open, knowing that there were dozens of other magical beasts in the area, including the Blink Cats, who wouldn't likely care that he was claimed now that he was a viable food product.

Catching him would be hard. Defeating his defensive flames would be harder, but Blink Cats were crafty, and they had a particular love for hunting low-flying birds.

As a common Falcon, he wasn't worth more than a bit of harassment, but that was different now.

Karl turned to the Librarian. "Do you mind if I just shorten your name? Draconic names are terribly hard for me to pronounce, and I always get the z sound in names like Kelithuza wrong."

The blue dragon gave him a curious look. "And what did you want to call me, other than my title as Librarian?"

"How about Lady Keli?"

Half of the Overlords choked on their drinks, while Othello giggled and Lotus nodded in agreement.

The Librarian gave Karl a suspicious look, so he decided to elaborate.

"Lady is properly formal for your Rank, Keli is easy to pronounce, and it's got the sort of energetic and enthusiastic ring to it that I associate with a desire to learn."

[Because you are around Lotus and Cara too much, and you associate learning with curiosity.] Thor noted.

[They do learn many things, though.] Rae agreed.

Overlord Othello slung a companionable arm over the blue dragon's shoulder, and ruffled her hair. "Besides, you're a young dragon still. No need to sound all stuffy and professional all the time."

The Librarian actually smiled at that. "Little girl, you were born in the hotel room above my thousandth birthday party."

Karl smiled. "See, a positively svelte young Debutante."

The Librarian snorted in amusement. "We need to get you away from Nacht and Orthos, they're messing with your sense of draconic age progression.

However, if you can complete my learning challenge, I will agree to your nickname."

Karl nodded. "I will warn you, unless it is written in Runic, I'm not actually all that strong with fancy words."

Karl could sense the Librarian's urge to facepalm, and the amusement of the other Overlords, as most of them had also finished formal education after middle school, where the Librarian had spent centuries as a University professor.

The dragon took out a thick, ancient tome and placed it on the coffee table.

"If you can unlock and learn that relic skill, then make a copy, I will allow you to give me a nickname." She insisted with a smirk.

The book was so old that the name of the skill had been worn off the cover, and Karl could sense only the barest flicker of System energy still active in it, sporadic and failing.

If he couldn't use it, or if someone else didn't in the next few months, it would fail entirely.

Remi stared at the book with undisguised greed. [I have no idea what that is, and I must know.] She insisted.

[Maybe that's why you're blue?] Thor pondered.

The colour of the scales should say something about the person. He had gone from simple green, to plain green and gold, to shimmering, showing how magnificent he was. So, Remi's blue and black scales should have something to do with her love of knowledge, logically.

Neither Karl nor Remi was sold on that logic. Only dragons were colour coded by their Gods. But Remi did love knowledge.

Karl placed his hand on the book's cover and felt a tingle in his hand as it pulled a bit of energy from him. Karl activated [Analysis] and the name of the tome flickered in front of his eyes, then stabilized as more power flowed from his hand to the tome.

[Book of Epic Guard]

Karl stared at the notification for a moment. Was this an epic version of the warrior's Guard skill? Was it a form of Golem or bodyguard? It seemed too large to be a warrior skill, but it was Epic, according to the title.

Once the name of the book settled in Karl's vision, he waited a few more seconds before trying to tamper with the ancient tome. He didn't want to break or destabilize it at this point, when it was finally telling him something.

Fortunately, he didn't need to.

[Learn Skill: Epic Guard?] {Skill Learned: Epic Guard}

{Epic Guard} Golem Class Conjunction. Creates one Epic Grade personal guard.

That gave Karl a most brilliant idea. He reached out and tapped both Dana and Ahmad on the foreheads, then activated [Follow Me Little One] to transfer the skill.

Overlord Ahmad chuckled, and Dana blushed, making Karl wonder what sort of messages this skill was giving people when he used it. So far, it had come up with a rather unique description for everyone, and not everyone believed that Karl wasn't picking them himself.

The Librarian waited impatiently for Karl to say something.

"Why don't we head to the basement training ground, and we can activate the skill? I would like to see how it turns out for everyone." Karl suggested.

"Everyone?" The Librarian demanded.

"It's an Epic Golem type skill. I don't know what it's going to create." Karl explained.

"And you taught others already?" She asked, confused.

"Ah, yes. I used my daily teaching skill attempts to pass it on to Dana and Ahmad. They should both have an additional Golem of the Epic variety now."

Chapter 668 Epic Guard

The whole group made their way down to the first training room in the lower levels, where they lined up against the wall, waiting for the trio with new skills to show off for the group.

"So, how do we do this? The mages first, or the mages second?" Karl asked.

Othello smirked at him. "I say we do the mages first, in case you come out with something ridiculous as a Golem. We already know that they got something normal for their first ones, but your friend Rae got spiders made of wood that evolved into something else, and then there are your Bodyguards, who appear to be real living monsters."

Dana nodded and Ahmad shrugged. "She has a point. Giving all of us the same skill does not guarantee similar results, given your track record."

Karl stepped back to let them work, and the two mages began to focus on the desired form and attributes for their new summon. Naturally, they would get the same one every time after the first, so this particular summoning was the most important.

Ahmad finished his focus first, and summoned his new Golem. It was similar to the four he had from the main Golem spell, in that it appeared to be a human in ancient Legionnaire armour. But this one was different. It crackled with magical energy, and had a barrier spell active.

Ahmad didn't say anything to disturb Dana's focus as she called forth her own creation.

Her first ones had come out like Stone Karl statues, but this one was shorter, and much more slender. The Golem was wearing form fitting black armour with black plates over it, very similar to Tabitha, but the head and hands were different. Her golem was not human, but a violet skinned Demoness with a scimitar in both hands. When Karl looked closely, he could see that it was not living like the Bodyguards,

but a stone facsimile of an actual Demoness. But its weapons were coated in black energy, and Dana was smiling.

"It can use my skill [Disruption Blade] as well as the [Windwalker Combat Style]. I believe it's an Epic Grade agility type summon." She explained.

Compared to Dana, the Golem was still huge, over two metres tall, but that put it a full metre shorter than the standard summon for the other Golems. It was large enough to block for Dana, and presumably fast enough to intercept most attackers.

It wouldn't be Epic Grade if it wasn't at least that fast.

Ahmad nodded, and then his Golem duplicated itself. "Mine can use my [Duplicate Summoning] skill, as well as [Arcane Barrier] which serves as both an offensive and defensive skill."

The Librarian snorted in amusement. "Of course, it can duplicate itself. Such a cheat code for the man who already has four Golems."

The Mages didn't dismiss their Golems, only moved to the side of the room with them, so that Karl could come forward and see what he would get now that he was performing a proper summoning of his own.

Karl knew that he likely could come up with something great if he really focused. Dana had created a golem that mimicked the basics of her own combat abilities, which was incredibly impressive.

[Alright, group effort. I have no idea what we're summoning anyhow. So, everyone focus on what they want out of the new Golem and let's see what happens.] Karl suggested.

[Oh, this is fun. I like this game.] Cara cheered. [SCALES!] Thor insisted.

[And Stabby.] Rae agreed.

[Let's do this.] Hawk and Remi insisted at the same time, focusing on their desires for the Golem's appearance.

At first, the creation didn't make any sense as it formed, surrounded by a black cloud that was making it difficult to see properly. The other Golems had formed properly, but this one seemed to be taking its time deciding on what it was going to look like, even as Karl focused on making a functional humanoid Golem.

For a moment, Karl lost his focus, wondering if he was the problem, as everyone else was focused on entirely different visions of what the spell should create, and they were all linked by their minds.

Once he did, the black cloud began to contract, and the new Golem formed.

It appeared to be a Dryad, but mostly black, and shifting in appearance, as if trying to blend with its surroundings. It had long branchlike fingers, flattened into massive talons, scales over the portion of its surface that wasn't covered in bark and long flowing white hair that reminded Karl of the stripe down Cara's back.

But more concerning to everyone else in the room, the lingering black aura around it was [Disintegrate] and it kept vanishing from sight if they weren't directly focusing on it.

Karl used [Analysis] to get a full overview of the Golem, and found that the skill could actually give him a comprehensive description of his new ability.

{Epic Guard}

{Type} Shadow Drake Treant

{Skills} [Perfect Camouflage] [Disintegrate] [Rake] [Life Link] {Rake} Improved Rend, causes higher levels of bleeding damage

{Life Link} The Shadow Drake Treant's Healing, Regeneration, and Life Steal effects apply to all Party Members. Allows the Golem to absorb a percentage of damage done to the summoner.

It could be buffed with Void Body, or Trollish Regeneration, which would spread healing to everyone, but if Karl knew some sort of healing spell, or a life steal dedicated ability, he was certain that the Golem would gain much more utility.

Remi had [Healing Splash] and her rarely used [Healing Totem]. That might work if Karl learned it himself. But there should be some other form of healing that he could manage.

"That's... unique..." The Librarian muttered as the rest of the group stared at the Golem.

"It's a collaborative effort. You see, we've got sharp claws, scales, stealth, disintegrate, and life link. That should cover everything. At least once I manage to learn a healing skill for it to share, it will."

Lotus frowned. "Now you want to be the healer, too?"

"Life steal on hit would be just as good." Karl allowed.

That was a little more reassuring for the Cleric. She couldn't have some random summon coming along and stealing her spot on the team.

Chapter 669 Equipped Guard

Ophelia got an excited look on her face. "You know, if you gave the Golem a blade with Life Leech, wouldn't it heal you pretty well as it fought? The ones I have are kind of low quality at this point, and I was going to pass them on to the newbies, but I'm sure we can find some new ones for you."

Karl nodded. "That's a great idea. Maybe short blades, given that the golem has stealth and high agility."

Othello took out a long blade and handed it to Karl. "That has life steal on it. Why not see how the Golem can do?"

Karl nodded in thanks, and handed the blade to the Golem, who held it in its hands awkwardly, unable to make a fist to hold the blade with such long finger claws.

Othello facepalmed. "Alright, I can see how this could be an issue. I'm used to Golems that have human hands, but this one and the Spider Golems are different."

The Golem carefully handed back the blade, but Karl still had an idea to boost its combat performance.

He equipped the Haint Claw on the Golem, which actually looked a little like an all-black and scaly version of Overlord Leafa. Karl smiled as the weapon melded with the Golem, which now had ghostly glowing eyes, and leaked Ghostfire smoke from its mouth.

"What sort of weapon is that?" Niall asked, shocked at the transformation.

"It's a Haint Claw. I obtained it in Newbon. It doesn't have life steal, but it's got a Soul Leech effect that's particularly nasty, and it adds Ghostfire to all attacks, including skills.

Normally, it's a weapon that I would use myself, in combination with my bow particularly. But for the moment, I think it works quite well with the Epic Guard skill."

"Should we see how it does while sparring against Ahmad's Golems? If it's an Epic Rank skill, it might be able to hold off his regular Golems for a while." Niall suggested.

Karl shrugged. "No better way to test it. I don't know what sort of combat instincts it inherited, since I don't have an actual combat style skill."

Ahmad summoned his four standard Legionnaire Golems on the far side of the training room, and Karl gave instructions to his new summon.

[Show us how you would defeat these targets. They're golems, so go full force.] Karl thought.

The Golems took a combat stance, and the Guard vanished. It reappeared in a swirl of Ghostfire in front of one Golem, then leapt into the air, kicked it in the crotch and stabbed all ten long claws through the Golem's eyes.

[One Hundred Percent, it learned to fight from Cara.] Rae noted.

She would have appeared behind the Golem.

The Guard was already moving, raking at the leg joints of the Golems and dodging attacks with an alarming level of agility, then periodically vanishing in a puff of pale blue-green fire. It would reappear behind another Golem and try for a new target.

First, it tried to rip their throats out, then stab through the neck of the armour to their hearts. But the Golems weren't living things, and going for the vitals of a Golem didn't work.

Finally, the Golems caught it, and sliced it to bits, causing it to dissipate and return the weapon to Karl's possession.

All four of the Overlord Rank Golems had taken significant damage during the battle, and Karl was impressed. Even Ahmad was shaking his head in shocked dismay. "Well, for a Golem that didn't come with a trained fighting style, I have to say that one is particularly vicious, and learns fast. If those had been living creatures, I suspect that your Golem might actually have been able to fight above its rank."

Tabitha chuckled darkly. "I just can't get over the fact that its first instinct was to kick the golem in the balls and claw its eyes out. What sort of fighter are you, Monarch Karl."

The last was said with a bit of a sneer, and Karl threw up his hands in a placating gesture.

"That's not really on me. I enlisted my team of beasts for suggestions, and their suggestions helped shape our new Golem. I believe that Cara's fighting style is the dominant one. She would definitely start a fight that way. I'm surprised that the Golem didn't lick him as well."

Ahmad laughed. "I think it might have. Being so close, the smoke of the guard's breath was surely touching my Golem, and your Guard doesn't have an actual tongue."

Cara smoothed her fur in pride, like she was styling her hair. Karl laughed at her expression, and summoned the Guard again, with the Haint Claw equipped.

It flexed a little, as if it remembered being dismembered, or wanted to do a systems check before combat. Then it turned to Karl for instructions.

[Just wait here. There are no threats.]

Rae giggled. [You don't need to be so detailed. Golems get what you want instinctively. If you focus, you should be able to tell where it is, the same as you can with us and the Bodyguards.]

[I got that part. Well, at least we know the new spell works.]

Rae considered it. [I need to learn that one later. I could have a third Spider Golem.]

Karl used [Follow Me, Little One] to transfer the knowledge.

{Incompatible Target}

Rae sighed. [Boo this system. I can use Golems, but not more golems? How does that make sense?]

Dana nudged Karl. "Mind having your Guard spar with mine? I want to see how it does. I thought it was odd that the only skill yours was using was that movement skill. So, they might need time to adapt to using all their abilities."

"Sure. Let me remove the weapon overlay. It doesn't need the extra damage to keep up this time." Karl agreed.

The Haint Claw was put away, and the Guard went from animated to calm, waiting in a ready position for orders.

Dana summoned her Guard, in its black leather and plate armour. Then, with a mental command, the two Guards were on each other.

Dana's Demonic looking Guard fired off a flurry of blade energy at its Dryad looking opponent, which dismissively swatted them away with [Disintegrate].

"Is it just me, or did its combat style completely change?" Ophelia asked, as the two Guards locked in combat, right before Karl's began to use Rake to systematically dismantle its opponent into small pieces.

Niall nodded in agreement. "I think it did. Maybe it was the influence of the Haint Claw? The additional skill? Or perhaps the merger with the weapon grants it a bit more cognitive function? It fights very methodically now, in the most efficient way." Dana sighed. "I have to say, with or without the weapon, that Guard is brutal in combat."

She called back her Guard again, and the violet Demoness shook herself out in the same way as Karl's had, as if checking for damage. It had to be a function of the spell, remembering previous fights to improve.

"Alright, we have our answers. Now, we really can go to sleep. I'm sure there will be far too many questions for us all in the morning. Librarian, you can stay in my spare room if you would like." Lady Othello offered.

"I will see you all tomorrow." The Librarian agreed, then left with the Paladin, headed back upstairs.

[Now we have a new sparring partner for the trainees.] Rae cheered.

[I don't think they would survive that.] Thor reminded her.

[We could put pool noodles on her claws.]

[That's terrifying in a whole different way.]

Chapter 670 Could That Be Why?

Back in the apartment, the Mackenzie twins were eager to catch up with the ladies, while Cara stretched out across their laps, taunting Thor with her ability to get her head rubbed while indoors.

As everyone chatted, Karl got to work turning [Epic Guard] into a new Skill Book.

The Librarian had made him promise her that he would, and he knew that the Dragon wouldn't want to wait for him to make good on his word. Plus, he was looking forward to the look on her face when she remembered that she had agreed to let him use a nickname for her if he did.

As he worked, Karl checked in on everyone. Thor was very pleased that he had managed to give the new summon scales, while Rae and Cara were laughing about the fighting style when it was merged with the Haint Claw. They had a theory that it was actually Leafa's default fighting style, as the Haint Claw had come from her, and the thought of the distinguished and ancient Overlord clawing someone's eyes out was highly entertaining.

They were going to have to ask her about it the next time they met.

"So, have you met any cute guys yet? Possibly snag yourself some hunky boy toy?" Ophelia was asking the twin mages.

Donni scoffed. "Do you have any idea how hard it is for a female Elite to find a good man? We already know the true faces of the politicians and the power brokers, so the truly wealthy men are out.

Our powers intimidate most of the civilians, though they wouldn't openly admit it. So that cuts out the vast majority of the population. Finally, half of the Elites are batshit crazy from too much time alone in the woods.

No offence to those present, but you do realize that Ophelia holds Lotus like a teddy bear, and Karl talks to himself?"

She gestured to where Lotus was sitting on Ophelia's lap, then to Karl.

The whole group began to laugh, and Tessa decided to explain. "Ophelia likes to sleep in bear form, with Lotus as a teddy. I will admit, it's odd, but it keeps her from wandering. Karl isn't talking to himself, though. He's talking to the beasts, and forgets that the rest of us can't hear them."

Karl nodded. "It's easier when everyone is out, then I can just talk to them normally."

"What are you even writing? The complete encyclopedia?" Danni asked, cutting off her sister's answer.

"The copy of [Epic Guard] for The Librarian. If you want to know the skill, I will try to transfer it to you."

The looks on their faces said it all. They wanted the skill, and they wanted it now.

Karl activated the transfer, and sighed as the message came up.

{Minimum Requirements Not Met}

{Minimum Requirements Not Met}

"Looks like we will have to wait on that. It says that it's not possible yet."

Both mages eyes went to the freshly written skill book, and Karl made a reluctant welcoming gesture. Sure, it took hours. But that skill was so good, that he couldn't bring himself to deny them.

Danni went first, as the Golem Specialist of the pair. No matter what she did, she was unable to get the cover open. It was as if the book were a single block of steel, unyielding and solid.

After a minute, she gave up. Donni traded her places, and suffered the same fate, but with much less surprise after her specialist sister had failed.

"It only said you didn't make minimum requirements, but Dana can use it. So, you might just need to be a Royal." Karl offered, as a form of sympathy.

"Well, it was worth a shot." Danni assured him, visibly annoyed by the situation.

If he couldn't teach them the cool golem, there were still other Mage type abilities that he might be able to share from Remi to them. Technically, Remi was a Shaman, but a lot of the abilities appeared to be transferrable. But first, he could start with the simple ones.

{Skill Teaching Requests Pending} [Mental Fortitude]

Both Mages gave Karl a raised eyebrow look that was somewhere between intrigued and offended, then relaxed as the skill took effect.

"Oh, this is a wonderful skill. It actually increased my mana regeneration to nearly double its base." Danni noted.

"Odd, that's not a listed effect. Could it be a side effect of Mental Fortitude? Just a second, I will pass it around." Karl offered.

{Skill Teaching Requests Pending} [Mental Fortitude]

One after another, everyone appeared to accept the skill. The beasts carefully watched everyone's expression, wondering what it had called them.

The first to break was Lotus, who was in a fit of giggles. "How did I become an adorable healing tree? What sort of title is that? I mean, I'm flattered. But does this mean that the System is actually more impressed with my skills as a tree than as a human? I should have spent more time practising my rain dance." She laughed.

Ophelia laughed. "It calls me the friendly rage bear."

Dana frowned. "You all get cool and cute nicknames. It gave me: {Pack Master Karl Offers Knowledge} Skill [Mental Fortitude] will be transferred to the Dana Mage."

Hawk nodded in satisfaction. He knew he had her name right.

Karl shrugged, then patted her on the back. "I don't pick the names, the System does that. Remember that it called Overlord Tabitha a kitten?"

Danni and Donni laughed, but Tessa had gained a unique insight. "Alright, I don't feel so bad now. I wonder if this is how the World Dragon sees us all? Like it just picks some aspect of our personality and assigns us a nickname. I wonder if the best nicknames go to the ones with the most favour?"

Ophelia drummed her fingers on the coffee table as she thought about it.

"You know, that is possible. The World Dragon is a God, but he's also a Dragon.

They don't really see humans as equals most of the time, and with that much power, a psychic Dragon would probably see the entire world at once. Keeping track of everyone's preferred names and titles would be a lot of trouble.

In fact, it might be possible that the entire System interface is just a divine notebook, so the Gods can keep track of us all."

Karl laughed at the thought, then realized there was a greater than zero chance that she was right. There was no real reason that the System had to record and display names or Classes for others. But it did.