

Beast Master 681

Chapter 681 Sequential Learning

"Let's move on to the next page and see what the book has in store for us. We now know that the standard mass-produced weaponry can be enchanted to Commander Rank with these runes without failing in the short term, and that a silver flute can sustain the Royal Rank.

But there is so much left to learn, as we're only on the second page of this Dwarven Crafting book, my brothers and sisters." One of the clerics was explaining to the new arrivals.

They had originally thought that the trick was a new skill or lost art that Karl was employing, but those closest to the workspace had already realized that they were testing knowledge from a book.

Karl flipped the page again, and began to read the runic writing and make notes of the translation as he understood it, while a half dozen clerics made exact copies of the book, to be able to more effectively spread its wealth of knowledge.

[I would assume that you have either learned the basics as a child, or tested the earliest pages of my tome, so I will continue in sequence. Now that you know how to create an array of Runes that spreads the effect evenly over an item, remember one simple fact. No matter what else you write, it must not be contradictory to the intent of the primary Runes. Even if the phrase is used in a different context, words that counter the active Rune will reduce its effect. As such, many of my peers have taken to writing positive affirmations on their work, as asinine as such a practice might be.

Now, our next lesson is to compound the effects so that you can build upon the original effect.

There are three basic categories of Runic compounding. First, is using effects that may be compounded into a single rune. Simple concepts like 'Giant Wall of Destruction' and the modifying Rune for 'Strength' or 'Expansion' flow smoothly into one coherent Rune.

The Second category are linked Runes. Ones that would logically be spoken after each other. Done that way, you can create a complex rune without worrying about excessive failure rates when the item is used by amateurs or inferior minds.

The third, and most controversial, are the decorative arrays. The ones that are designed to make a specific effect that doesn't flow with the nature of magic. These are normally the most complex, and are viewed as masterpieces due to the versatility of their use.

We will cover those much later in this tome, or perhaps in another. What Runecrafter wishes to duplicate human or Elven magic anyhow? Preposterous.

Included is an example of the first stage. I will have to assume that if you are going through this book, you do at least read Dwarven properly. If you do, this should be simple enough. Just make a compound phrase and place it on your target.]

Karl examined the runes on the other page, and found that what the Dwarf had included was a variable output light source. That was useful, but they had electricity here, so it was not at the top of Karl's list of useful items the way that it would have been for any other nation.

Remi giggled. [Oh, I get how this works. See, this symbol means Giant Ball of Fuck That Thing In Particular. Put that on a blade, I want to see what happens.]

From her spot on the training field, Cara chimed in with her opinion. [I don't know what Sister Remi is making, but I approve this message. Come show me later.]

Karl chuckled. [I'm not certain that you're supposed to use modern human slang to modify the runes in Dwarven. But, the way that Remi wrote it, the phrase also means to make the target cease to exist. That should be a viable spell effect.]

It wasn't quite a destruction or disintegration effect. In fact, it wasn't really specified. But intent was a large part of the activation of a spell. "I will test this theory with a different rune than the one in the book, unless someone needs a magical flashlight." Karl informed the Clerics.

"That's fine. We can keep to the theme of weapons. Do you read this language well enough? Or is the Runic part different enough from the written that your skill covers it?" The leader of the original Blue Dragon research team asked.

"The Runecrafter's Runic Language is different from the tome's written language, but it shares the majority of the alphabet, as it were. So, I'm much more confident in the actual work than my translation of the descriptive contents." Karl agreed.

Remi's rune ended with an arrow shaped symbol, so Karl arranged them down the length of both sides of a dagger, then activated the silver blade's enchantment until the runes turned Amethyst.

The clerics immediately realized that they had made a mistake. They needed to test it in the training room, as it couldn't be done in here. But they had already given up the room, and now there were too many of them to conveniently watch.

Karl smiled. "Send a small group down for testing, and you can have them report back. You only need one person at Royal Rank to use the weapon at its full potential. If the warriors are still nearby, you can call them back."

Acolytes were sent running to retrieve the warriors, who were out in front of the building, smoking and talking quietly about what they had seen.

"We will report back on the results. Do we get to know what to expect in advance, or is this a blind test?" The oldest of the White Robed clerics asked.

"That's a fun idea. We should do a blind test. I will make another at Commander rank. Do not tell him what it does. But give this note to the Royal Rank Warrior so that he knows.

Do we have someone who can create a strong enough barrier, or am I going to have to go down with you?" Karl asked.

The old cleric shook his head. "I will borrow a friend from upstairs. He's napping now, but he's an Overlord Ranked Spellblade."

That should be a strong enough barrier for any sort of testing that they might do.

[I will accompany them. I want to see what my Rune does.] Remi insisted.

"I will send Remi, my Naga Queen, to accompany you as well."

Remi transformed into her larger form, as she had been sunning herself on a rock in snake form, watching her home regrow, and prepared to head out.

She even had a notebook with her to make detailed notes in case it was relevant to her own advancement.

She had been stuck a while on the development of new totems, or improvements on the ones that she had already made. Her library survived her advancement intact, but none of the books she had gone through so far had been able to help her in her search. Something would trigger a breakthrough eventually, and Karl's Runes might be just the thing, even if they weren't the same language as the ones she used.

Chapter 682 Blind Test

Karl flipped the page as the group headed out to obtain the assistance of the Spellblade, and found that the next page was more examples of the same concept. If they had flipped the page first, they could have just copied the ones here, as many were intended for weapons. But testing Remi's creativity was also an important aspect.

She was working on upgraded totems, and for that, she needed to expand her knowledge of Runes and Shamanistic Magic.

The clerics were dutifully copying everything, while Karl made notes of the different ways that the same words were being used and linked between the various examples.

The master who had created this really knew how to make things easy to understand, and Karl was already getting the hang of how the Runes should be best compounded for the effects that the Dwarf was trying to explain.

Some of that was surely his Runecrafting skill filling in the blanks with the knowledge that it contained, but the tome was making no attempt to be condescending towards the reader, or unnecessarily complex.

If the author knew that it would be read by humans, he would have certainly been much harsher with his words.

The team was down in the basement now, with the same two warriors. Both were overjoyed to get to test more weapons, even if this blind testing was strange. They didn't know if it was intended for newbies to use the weapon without introduction, or if it were to prevent the weapons from being used by their enemies. But the Commander, who had been given no instructions except to use the blade to attack the barrier, was ready to start.

He lunged forward with a thrust and sent power surging through the Commander Rank dagger. On contact, a two-metre explosion of magic erupted, throwing him backwards across the room with its force.

Remi doused him with a [Healing Splash] spell, and the warrior spluttered as cold water was tossed in his face.

"Thanks, I think." He muttered as he got to his feet.

Remi nodded happily, and continued taking notes.

The mage that they had recruited was doing his best not to laugh. "Well, we can say for certain that it is likely intended to be a ranged ability. My guess is that it's some sort of arcane blast. It felt like [Slash] does when a warrior uses it. That same sort of converted energy, not raw mana. But the explosion engulfed the entire target." He noted.

{Yes, it worked exceptionally well. There was very little wasted. Just enough to cover the whole target.} Remi agreed.

The mage nodded in agreement, while the Clerics turned to him for translation, as Remi was speaking Serpent.

"It's in my notes." The mage shrugged. He was here for the barrier and his curiosity about the new weapons, not to translate for clerics who failed foreign language class.

The Royal Rank warrior treated it as a short ranged attack, and flicked the dagger out in a thrusting attack to send the attack forward in a piercing motion.

The attack didn't have a visual effect between him and the target, but the same explosion occurred, shaking him on his feet.

The Commander stared at the target in confusion. It really did just look like [Slash] had hit the target from all sides at once, then rebounded off the shielding to create the blast.

It wasn't innately an explosive effect, that was a side effect of failure. If it worked, the target should be obliterated from all directions.

The clerics motioned to the Royal Rank warrior. "Please see if the weapon is damaged by continued usage. We don't detect any signs of flaws or damage from the first strike."

The mage held up his hand. "First, I would like to see what happens when a Cleric uses that dagger. I know it's among the weapons your god approves of."

A High Priest was tasked with the duty, using the Commander Rank dagger with a dismissive flick, as if slashing across the face of the target from a distance.

The effect this time was a golden glow that rebounded off the barrier with a glare of holy light, instead of a physical force.

"Fascinating. The effect isn't defined, only the outcome. So, it appears the way that the user thinks of it. Or perhaps a certain way, depending on the class of the user. We will have to do more study on that later. I don't suppose that you would be able to provide a few of those for my tower to study?" He asked.

"Probably not today. But in the near future, we certainly will be able to include your Spellblades in the research process. In fact, we will soon have Runecrafting books available, and you might be able to get one of your people included in the test group." The aging cleric agreed.

The Spellblade nodded. "I have a few disciples within the tower who have not yet taken a crafting skill specialty. They're still Awakened Rank, but that gives them time to grow. Much better than teaching us old folk, I suppose."

The old cleric smiled. "It's a tradeoff. We all want the strongest results right away, but how many of our people make it to Commander Rank without having picked a specialty? Every new thing that we learn from the System disrupts centuries of practice and the balance of skills that we have accepted as optimal."

The Spellblade chuckled. "I heard from Prince Corbin that the Runecrafter who made these daggers is a monster in every sense of the word except his personality."

The old cleric shrugged. "This is the first I have met him. But he seems quite agreeable."

The Royal Rank warrior frowned. "You say that he's a monster, but he also seemed like a friendly sort of person to me."

The old mage just shook his head. "That's not what I mean. He's barely sixteen years old. He made Monarch in two years after the injection, and I have it on good authority that he managed to knock out a Tortollan Monk in a fist fight during the challenge for the new Commander Rank Dungeon."

The Commander Rank Warrior laughed. "I heard about that as well. I was sent there later in the day, but it was the talk of the camp. Plus, the Naga Queen, Remi I believe he said her name was, is part of his team of bonded beasts."

Remi nodded, and made a note for them, as only the mage spoke her language. [Don't tell him. He's already got an inflated ego. But when it comes to fighting, there aren't many who can match his power. Even if you disregard the fact that he's basically immortal.

It's probably better that nobody ever taught him martial arts or blade skills.]

The team did a double take when they read that.

"Immortal?"

Remi nodded happily. [Trollish Regeneration and Limited Invulnerability, so he doesn't burn.]

The Spellblade whistled in appreciation, while the warriors shook their heads in dismay. "That's just unfair. I swear that the rare classes are actually a cheat code."

Remi wholeheartedly agreed with that. At the same Rank, she could probably beat up either of these warriors, and she was just one part of the team. Plus, she wasn't even the scary one in combat. That was Rae, or maybe Cara. Depending on how you looked at it.

Chapter 683 Runic Writing Styles

While the research team in the basement was pounding away at the barrier, load testing the weapons to ensure their stability, Karl was moving on to the next pages in the book.

The page full of examples of compound runes was dutifully copied, and the listed options were giving Karl ideas on how to make more useful sorts of items, things that would improve on what technology was already doing and make life easier.

For example, it would take very little effort to inscribe a flat rock with proper runes to make it into a heating element, in place of a camp stove. They could even do it with a thin piece of aluminum for a lightweight camping stove that didn't require carrying fuel or finding firewood.

There were magical options already, but they were all unaffordable for the majority of young Elites.

"I would like to test something if we have a moment. Reading the page gave me an idea.

Can someone please bring me the roll of tinfoil from the kitchen, or a similar lightweight metal sheet."
Karl requested.

The Clerics looked confused, but they brought him the tinfoil without asking any questions. Karl folded it over a dozen layers thick, then pressed it into a flexible, but somewhat durable sheet.

[Earth Barrier] made a stamp with the runes he wanted to be arranged on the sheet. Then Karl carefully made the negative of the stamp and squished the sheet between them.

A light pulse of mana as he focused on the ability to make a variable heat source activated the runes in a light bronze colour, while the clerics watched in wonder.

"Please place that on the stove and activate it to a medium cooking heat. I want to see if tinfoil is durable enough for the spell." Karl explained.

The foil cast a bronze glow through the kitchen as the lucky cleric started the test, and Karl could feel the heat growing in the room.

After a few minutes, the cleric let it fade, and the clerics began to cheer.

"That is brilliant. It's a travel stove. If a Runecrafter can stamp that out of a proper metal sheet, we can eliminate the fuel canisters from the standard travel kit, and save nearly two kilos in weight.

Well, that's not as vital now that more are getting access to an inventory, but still. It's two kilos of weight that we don't need to carry, and it won't run out on the fifth day." The tester announced.

One of the white robed Clerics turned to Karl with a notebook and pencil ready. "Your group spent long durations on the road. Did that hardship inspire this development?"

Karl chuckled and shook his head. "No, I have [Flaming Body] as a skill, so I just use it on my sword and use that as a grill. We haven't gathered firewood since I was Ascended Rank."

The cleric sighed. "You really do have it easy. Is there anything that your group can't do?"

Karl shrugged. "We don't have portal, or an equivalent skill yet. Other than that, we're pretty well-rounded. You should see some of the dinners that we come up with both a Red and Green Cleric along. They can both use advanced food creation spells, it's positively gourmet compared to travel rations."

"And you have multiple kinds of golems to keep guard at night, so you can all sleep. Is it true that your Bodyguards are sentient? That would make things so much easier." One of the other white robed clerics asked.

"Yeah, they're remarkably intelligent. Both mine and Remi's are capable as night guards, as they can all see in the dark. With no need to sleep, they aren't even groggy on night watch.

But the real benefit to a good night's sleep is Rae. Her hammocks and tents are the best."

The blue dragon clerics were giving meaningful looks at the book Karl was ignoring, urging him to get back on track and read through now that they were finished copying the pages.

The next page covered the use of the Runic Phrases, the runes that would flow naturally into each other when spoken out loud.

That was actually easier than coming up with runes that would naturally link with each other and create a coherent effect. But as Karl read through the description page, he realized that was not the goal of the Dwarves when they made items. They didn't deliberately give the items a specified effect. Their usual was closer to Remi's idea of simply expressing a desire for the outcome. Trying to make a specific effect would fall under the third category of unlinked Runes, which they looked down on. But doing it this way, he could make an equivalent of the Giant Strength rings with very little trouble, or use some of the ambient mana to boost spell effects.

There were a few examples on the page, and more on the following two, when Karl checked them.

One of them was to create and amplify an impact ability. It was similar in function to [Crushing Blows] but apparently intended for forging difficult metals that couldn't be rendered too close to liquid without destroying the properties of the alloy.

In fact, the phrasing in the example even mentioned that it was going to be placed on a hammer. "Does anyone have a war hammer, or a mace of some sort?" Karl asked.

One of the white robed clerics handed over a war pick, a long handled hammer with a spike on the back, and Karl began the process of deciding how to wrap the Runes properly around its head.

It was just a Common Grade magical weapon made by the church, with a mild dose of holy energy, so Karl decided to incorporate that into the Runes. Amplifying the holy magic flowing through the weapon should improve the effect with minimal input.

After a few minutes of careful carving, the process was complete, at the Commander Rank, and Karl passed it back. "Please take that downstairs and test the effect. I am quite certain that the god of knowledge is eager to see how it turned out."

Chapter 684 Hammer!

The cleric sighed as he realized that he had just been volunteered to make reports for the Librarian and her assistants, but this was his personal weapon, so he didn't see a reason he couldn't keep it when they were done, even if it was now enhanced to a level well above his rank.

The next few dozen pages were all descriptive ones, describing techniques for using the Runes. The translation was questionable, as many of the words appeared to be Dwarven technical terms, but they were faithfully copied to the duplicate tomes.

Karl was quite certain that he was missing the majority of the depth of these descriptions, but every page brought new revelations, and the Dwarven Runes were getting easier to read with every passing page. By noon, he was rarely needing to refer to his knowledge of Runecrafting to guess what a word meant, but he was the only one who was improving at that sort of speed. The scribes were falling further behind his comprehension of the translations with every page, and Karl was beginning to hope that he would find a new technical section again soon, so he could make an item and let them rest before they drove him insane.

His translations were making the clerics increasingly excited about the new knowledge, and they had many ideas on how this could be used to improve the weapons that they were already making with basic runes on them.

They didn't have Runecrafters in their ranks, but some of the Runes were used in other enchanting processes, including the ones they used to make weapons for the Church.

Karl turned another page, and found that the topic had taken a hard turn somewhere, as if the author had gotten bored with the previous explanation.

[Improvised Runecrafting.

Not all Rune crafted items need to be permanent. The most obvious case of this is the spirit shamans of the various species. The Cleric types who specialize in using Runes to cast their magic and drive off troublesome evil forces.

But there are other options as well.

For example, painted on runes will work as well as carved in many cases where you are not concerned about them being damaged, though without the third dimension, the effect is far weaker.

Alternately, those with Elemental Magic, such as the Forgemasters, or the Earth Shamans, can create the Runes with their Elemental Magic, and add a more profound meaning to their spells.

An Earth Shaman might engrave the rune of destruction into a mine wall to carve away the rock between themselves and the next vein. A Forgemaster might create the runes in the ash pile of a makeshift forge to bring it up to the needed standard. Or they might place the rune in the foam of cheap tavern ale to increase the liquor content and improve the taste to a tolerable level.]

That caught the interest of everyone who read the translation. None of them had considered that was even an option. Would that be a sort of creation spell? Perhaps a transmutation? And what element did that even fall under?

Every traveller had suffered nearly inedible local beverages in the past, but the Dwarf seemed to mention it in passing, as if it should be common knowledge.

Once the pages were copied, Karl moved on, and found that the comment really had been in passing, as the examples that were drawn and described were simple single compounded runes.

The Destruction Rune for carving rock was given with four different variations, depending on what sort of blasting work you intended to do with it, while the provided heating rune for the makeshift forge was similar to the one Karl had used for the portable stove, but with modifiers for much higher intensity.

Writing the rune in the ash was brilliant, Karl decided. Normally, you worried about heat damage to the object, but ash was already burnt, and the forge wouldn't harm it. So, you could create intense heat with a seemingly unimpressive pile of ash to the point that the limiting factor was the construction of the forge itself.

Presumably, the Forgemasters would have magic for that as well. But it was the versatility of these temporary Runes that was getting the clerics all worked up.

If you could just write the effect you wanted, wouldn't you be an instant Archmage?

Karl knew that there was going to be some sort of limitation on complex runic phrases, like when he tried to compound advanced skills with [Skill Merger], but for simple effects, there was no real reason that he shouldn't be able to use Runes to activate them at his current power level if he wasn't worried about destroying the carrier.

[Oh, that is a brilliant idea. I will try it with an icicle.] Remi insisted as she heard Karl's thoughts on the matter.

[How did the testing go?] [The warriors are tired. You should have cast a Thor barrier on them. But they will be fine soon, and the weapons are both undamaged. We also tested the higher grade weapon with the weaker warrior, and it makes a difference, but not enough to call it a Royal Rank effect the way that our advanced skills were when we were Commanders.]

A few seconds later, Remi giggled. [The clerics look funny waving around an icicle like a wand. But the rune works. For some reason, it makes the icicle melt, even though it's not fire magic. I will have to work on that.]

Karl tried not to laugh at the words nobody else in the room could hear. [I think that it's using up the mana from the icicle to activate the spell. How is the power output compared to their Rank?]

[Oh, you're right. It's better than expected. I made a Monarch Rank icicle for the task, and it melted, but if the extra mana is going to the spell, it makes sense.]

That also made her wonder if she could make a higher density item, with more mana, to make the item more useful to lower powered creatures. Like a portable smashing post that would transfer some stamina to the user on impact. Brother Thor would love to have that for his trainees.

Chapter 685 Commotion

Across the park, at the training grounds, the beasts and their trainees were causing quite a scene. Though, it wasn't really fair to blame it on the beasts.

Firstly, the Lightning Cerro group had all grown to the size of large dogs, while the Moor Cats were already the size of a mountain lion, weighing well over a hundred kilos after only a week of quality feed and hard training.

The regenerative sprints were doing them all worlds of good, and the physique of even the mage class trainee, Owen, was phenomenal.

But more importantly, the Overlords had joined them to help with the trainees, passing along as much of their knowledge as possible in the few remaining days that they had.

The majority of the team from the Special Forces Cadets was very close to reaching the Awakened Rank, thanks to their beasts, and Nikki the Tiger Monk was already there.

Today, they had gathered over two hundred soldiers who wanted in on the training, and Thor was happy to help them with his barriers as they ran laps up and down the bleachers.

They weren't Elites, and they would not advance, no matter how much training, but they were rapidly gaining muscle mass and physical stamina that would save countless lives on the battlefield.

The same Red Dragon High Priest that had met Karl after he altered the trial instance had come to watch as well, and assist Tessa in training Joan, their new Acolyte.

It had been agreed that instead of the Seminary Academy, she would go with the old man to the Academy, where he would train her personally, and they would do the duties of the church for the students.

Healing, support spells, guidance. The natural roles of the War Clerics.

"You know, Sister Tessa, the number of skills that these students have already learned is incredibly impressive. Not just from using the points they gained in battle, but the ones that they have learned through hard work.

To think that just a change in teaching methods would make such a large difference." He whispered, not wanting to stroke the ego of the students.

Tessa smiled at her senior. "It's not just a teaching method, but a teaching skill. Or, rather a group of skills stacked to help them learn, along with a load of high-grade resources for the beasts.

But I had an idea the other night. You know how the Drake Riders have a huge advantage in combat due to their mounts, even without the system? We should implement the same program on a limited scale. The Lightning Cerro forces will be essential to the defence of soldiers and Elites, but if we had a group of Gryphons or Manticores, we would have flying scouts with high ranked combat potential as well."

The High Priest smiled. "And where do you suggest that we find these volunteers?"

Tessa winked. "I hear that there are numerous Rangers who lost their bonded partners in battle. It's a common occurrence for them, and they can bond a replacement.

So if we can find a way to bond them to a flying magical beast, or evolve a regular animal into a flying magical beast, wouldn't we have a shortcut to trained flying troops?"

The High Priest smirked. "Well, it's not possible for them to bond a magical beast in a conventional way, but I have considered that there might be a shortcut.

It's not as glamorous as a Chimera, but are you familiar with the Giant Redwing Butterfly? It comes from a common caterpillar that is exposed to the right stimulus during its evolution period. I suggested it once before, but the army shot down my idea as pointless, as the Giant Redwing Butterfly has no attack or defensive skills. But if it can cause a class advancement, and the Rangers already have skills that let their pet use attacks, wouldn't that become a small issue?"

Tessa chuckled at the mental image. "I think that it would help if we had more Elves. But I suppose that we could ask the ladies because I can't see many of the men willingly choosing a butterfly as their bonded partner."

The High Priest gestured toward Overlord Joram, whose evolved bird, Dave, was happily perched on his shoulder. The bird had already reached the Commander Rank, and while it hadn't evolved any more than it had the first day, it was showing incredible potential as its power grew to match its partner.

Tessa poked the old Priest. "What if we gave them a way to make the birds huge? Someone has to have a proper skill for giant growth. We know how to evolve Falcons already, we just need to make them big enough to fly on."

That idea might actually make it past the scrutiny of the leadership. The evolved Hawk had already shown Commander Rank potential, and it was still growing. Plus it had [Flaming Body] which was both offensive and defensive. The High Priest snapped his fingers and smiled. "I know just the thing. It's a Paladin skill called Divine Mount. If we can teach that to a Ranger, or a Beast Ranger, then they can have their giant flying mount. It increases the size of the beast to become rideable."

Teaching it to the Cerro would likely be easiest, but they would soon be large enough to be ridden by their partners anyhow. Finding other beasts or Rangers that were compatible with holy magic would be much harder.

Tessa nodded. "I will let you handle it. You will be at the Academy, and around a lot more veterans."

The High Priest nodded. "They intend to cycle the Commander Rank Elites through to do training courses for the newbies, as we are expecting so many of them. They might even call on some of the stronger ones, if things calm down a little."

"Oh, I would imagine that they will be calling on as many of the strong ones as they can after today's practice. You see, Karl's training skill works better when the user's knowledge of their skills is more profound. And who has better knowledge of the intricacies of their skills than the Overlords?"

I suspect we will be seeing some real progress by the end of the day."

Chapter 686 Shade Of The Lotus Tree

The day's training was taking place in the shade of Lotus' [Tree of Life] form, which was standing in the middle of the training grounds, overseeing everything so that she could heal the inevitable injuries and strains that would come from such extreme exertion. Most of the time, the injuries had healed before the soldiers had even noticed that they had been wounded, but Thor was keeping barriers over everyone, so none of it was too major, other than one broken leg which had to be set after a bad fall during grappling training.

Such accidents were to be expected with hard training, and there were plenty of clerics on hand to take care of the issue, even if they didn't have Lotus in tree form in the middle of the training grounds.

But that was a minor setback for him, and the soldier was back to regular training again within a few hours. So, with everyone so focused on training, they were caught completely off guard when a horde of reporters descended upon the training grounds.

"High Priestess, can you tell us anything about your feelings on today's announcement from the President's Office?" One of the reporters shouted to Tessa, who was near the edge of the sand.

Tessa gave her a confused look, and walked over to see what they were on about.

"I'm not sure what you mean. We haven't seen the news, as we have been here training all day." She explained.

"The President's Office announced that all active duty Church Soldiers would have the chance at a second awakening for their service. Is this true? What are the odds for the soldiers to gain Elite status? Does the War Goddess have any thoughts on the matter?"

The questions were asked all at once by different reporters, and Tessa put on her best public relations smile.

"These soldiers here have already been given that opportunity. As I understand it, close to one in ten soldiers was moved from the standard unit to a special training force, but I am not privy to any more details than that.

The War Goddess is naturally pleased that there are more capable combatants, but it will take time for them to be ready to serve as Elites, much like the students who were awakened with the Divine Injection.

Unfortunately, for any more details than that, you will have to go to the Strategic Planning Office." She explained.

"Are these young Elites not freshly awakened soldiers?" One of the reporters asked.

Tessa shook her head. "No, these ones were awakened early as part of a separate project. They are not soldiers of the Church, or at least they aren't yet. However, they are performing quite admirably, and I am sure that they would not object to being the backdrop for your daily news articles.

However, I must insist that you do not interrupt their training, as this is a crucial time in their development before they officially join the Academy later this week."

That was good enough for the reporters, who were happily clicking pictures for the news of the intensive training program for the next few minutes, as well as taking short videos of the young Elites practising their skills.

It was all great footage for the news, and the faces of the cadet Elites would be blurred if the content was deemed sensitive, as they hadn't been officially inducted or signed any waivers for the use of their likeness.

The chaos that the videos would cause when they were leaked later that day was not even part of their calculations. After all, how were they to know that the presence of the handful of obviously inhuman and unknown trainers in the group would cause an uproar among every nation that found out about them?

Thor could be passed off as a human Paladin. But only if he had his helmet on. With his extended ears and green hair, there was no doubt that he was not a human. Rae was much less human, while neither Cara nor Hawk were even trying.

Hawk was just using System Messages to give instructions on the proper use of fire magic, while Cara enjoyed the show and occasionally volunteered as a training partner.

The Overlords were already well known to everyone else, so the respect that they showed to the new inhuman arrivals was a sign that they were not Commanders or other mundane trainers.

Then there were the skills that they were teaching. The warriors were practising a shield bash to overhand chop with [Slash] combo that just seemed to be off somehow.

Shield Bash, the skill, had a distinctive motion and glow on the shield that this skill didn't have. But the effect was clearly intended to be the same.

Compared to that, the fact that the young mage was using a Golem and magic missiles to train in defence against multiple attackers was much less concerning.

The Rogue, on the other hand, was incredibly concerning. Everyone who was anyone knew Niall was the head assassin for the Inquisition, and the fact that he was training a young prodigy in public with an unknown foreign assassin was extremely concerning to the leadership of every nation on the continent.

The first thought was that this was a subtle flex by the Golden Dragon Church, showing off one of their new killers in training. She was obviously young, but her combat skills were far beyond the average.

Sybil was highly motivated that day. Lotus had discovered that there might be a way to fix her hearing. Her eardrums had grown in wrong, a developmental anomaly. But it was how her body thought that

they were supposed to be, so healing spells didn't change it. Lotus' plan was to let Cara precision disintegrate the inner ear, while Lotus regenerated it. If her theory was correct, unlike damaging it and healing it, completely disintegrating it should cause it to grow back in the way that Lotus understood ears to work, not how Sybil's body had grown it the first time.

It was definitely not a Church approved method, as a small error would cause permanent nerve damage, or obliterate a portion of her brain. But Cara was confident that she could do it.

Chapter 687 Recruitment Day

Three days later, Karl was ready to deploy himself back to the border just to escape the Blue Dragon Clerics and their never-ending quest for knowledge.

But today was a special even that they simply couldn't miss. It was time for the annual Elite Recruitment, and this year was expected to be a huge spectacle.

The Bureau of Elite Development had been teasing the reporters for weeks that the success rate would be going up, and the Injection Ceremony would have minor celebrities, in the form of Karl and his team. Normally, it was done by doctors with a few Commander Rank and lower Elites on guard.

Karl looked down at the suit he had on, freshly made by Rae for the occasion, then smirked at Dana, who looked uncomfortable with the amount of gossamer fabric among the layers of her cream and gold coloured Hanfu style dress.

Rae was particularly proud of that creation, and she wouldn't take no for an answer when Dana had suggested that she should maybe change into something less flashy.

As Dana had repeatedly mentioned, it was a recruitment for students, not a red carpet event.

"I have already told you. You're a Princess Mage. You need to look like one." Rae insisted again.

"How about a coat?" Dana compromised.

Rae considered that. She had seen mages in long coats that split up the back before. They would hide the majority of her masterpiece dress, but if their Dana really did want to be covered up, she could make her still look like a Princess.

[Hawk, lend me some white fur. I'm making a coat.]

Minutes later, Rae had a long coat made for Dana, woven a bit heavier than necessary for the weather. It would be good for winter events this way, and it would encourage Dana to take it off once they were inside.

Rae wasn't giving up on showing off her work that easily.

Besides, Tessa and Lotus hadn't agreed to let her dress them up, as they had formal wear for the occasion, and Ophelia flat out refused to wear a dress, so she was in a similar suit to the one Karl was wearing, except that Rae had made the shirt a bit more flashy and ruffled, and the cut much more flattering.

The one thing that she had done for Karl was to give him an extra fancy fur trimmed cape in place of a coat. All kings needed capes. She had seen it in a book.

Plus, it was part of the official uniform for Monarch Rank Elites, though nobody ever wore it.

While she hadn't gotten to do all the decorating of the humans that she had hoped, she had managed to get the honours of delivering the weapons that Karl had stayed up all night making for their students. They were simple ones, just a Commander Rank weapon suited to their preference, mostly short swords, with daggers for Sybil and spiked gloves for the monk. But getting to sneak into the dorms at the Cathedral to deliver the weapons, all gift wrapped for their new owners, had been great fun while it lasted.

Nobody had even seen her do it.

Librarian Kelithuza came to meet them at the apartment to escort them to the meeting. The Librarian wouldn't willingly miss out on the first chance to see a mass recruitment, so she had nominated herself

to accompany the group that the Archbishop had sent to assist with passing out the System Linked items for the first round of testing.

"Lady Keli, it's a pleasure to see you again. Hopefully, we are properly dressed for the event." Karl greeted her.

The dragon's slight smile told him that even though she resisted the nickname at first, she didn't actually dislike it.

"You are worried about being underdressed while wearing a suit that would buy you a house in the suburbs? I believe you will be fine. Lady Dana looks exquisite, and Princess Ophelia is quite dapper today as well."

There was no need to mention the clerics, as they were wearing their formal robes, so the Blue Dragon simply gestured for everyone to follow her out.

"There is a bus waiting for us. I had suggested a limo, but policy says that outside vehicles are a security risk and shouldn't be used to arrive at the awakening ceremony." She added.

The bus was one of the plain white church transports, empty except for the cleric who was driving.

Once they were moving, the Librarian began to detail the plan.

"Once we arrive, the mages will open the barrier so we can access the floor of the auditorium. Then there will be the customary tearful speech from the superintendent of schools, followed by the acolytes passing your group items to have the students try on.

Once the first batch of successful students is identified and removed from the auditorium, we will proceed with the usual injection process, using doctors. Unless you believe it would work better with one of you performing the process."

Rae smiled. "I don't have any objections to stabbing people."

The Blue Dragon gave her an indulgent smile. "I have no doubt that is true on many different levels. But it would set the students' minds at ease to see a friendly face during the most stressful moment of their lives."

Rae shrugged. "Well, keep me in mind. I can see every vein from across the room."

While that was a useful skill in many different situations, the Divine Injection was given as an intramuscular injection. They didn't need to find a vein.

The security teams parted the crowds who were still waiting for entry to the auditorium, and the bus passed smoothly into the loading bays, where a group of white robed acolytes were waiting to escort the team inside.

"This way, please Sir and Madams. The Minister of Education is waiting for you."

Karl bent his arm for Dana to take as they walked through the corridors, which were lined with paparazzi once they were past the loading area.

They made quite the spectacle entering together, looking like Nobles from a storybook, followed by the Priestesses and a Lady Knight.

The hushed whispers made Dana self-conscious, but Karl could hear that it was almost all praise for her dress, or speculation about who these dignitaries were. Some of them were familiar faces, but it seemed that they didn't immediately recognize Karl and Dana in their formal best and with their hair styled. The Minister fell in step beside Karl with a polite nod, and silently guided them to the barrier around the auditorium floor, where the mages opened the barrier a little for them to enter.

As soon as they walked onto the hardwood floor, the crowd fell silent. [Please welcome our special guests for the day. Minister of Education, Davies. Overlord Kelithuza, Chief Librarian of the Cathedral Library. Monarch Karl, with his partners, Lord Thor and Lady Rae. Princess Dana. Princess Ophelia. And finally, the Royal High Priestesses Tessa and Lotus.] The announcer stopped after every name for them to make a polite bow or curtsy, and then wave to the crowd.

Then the Superintendent began his speech, and Karl realized that many of those in line would not get to hear the opening ceremony. Schedules were schedules, and everyone was eager to get the process underway.

Chapter 688 Long Winded Speeches

The speech was just as dull and long-winded as the one that Karl remembered, and he wondered if the local school superintendents all read from the same prepared speech.

Keeping a straight face and professional stance while the bureaucrat droned on was an art of its own, and Karl mostly entertained himself watching the various expressions on the faces of the students.

To think, it had only been two years since that was him. Finally, the main speech was over, and the Superintendent gestured towards Karl's group.

"The Elites will now begin the first round of the induction ceremony. This year, we have an improved process, and we have high hopes for an increased intake of students. Please be patient as they work, and an official statement will be released after the ceremony."

Karl and the others spread out so that they would each get a row of seats to pass the items to.

[You're totally going to cheat, aren't you?] Cara asked, but her tone was more of a demand. She wanted entertainment.

Karl didn't answer her as he passed the ring to the first student. The Acolyte accompanying him had gathered enough of them for the entire row of students, and the teachers behind him would explain the process to the students before the soldiers escorted them to the secure waiting room.

But since these students would be fully conscious, they would get to wave goodbye to their parents in the crowd.

The boy was sweating nervously as he slid the ring on his finger, and it fitted to him. His eyes went vacant as he went into a system notification, so Karl moved on.

Nothing happened to the second boy, who looked confused. But the third boy in line was muttering the word [Slash] over and over, evidently trying to manifest a warrior class.

[Do it. Come on, you know you want to.] Cara insisted, while Karl pointedly ignored her.

The ring equipped to him, and Karl moved on to a terrified looking girl who reminded him of Lotus. She smelled like dirt and flowers, and Karl could see that she had been playing outside right up to the start of the ceremony, without time to even wash her hands.

{Skill Teaching Request} [Bestial Regeneration]

Karl handed her the ring, while Cara gloated in his mind.

[Good call, that's the skill that all Lotus type creatures need. They're prone to self-inflicted injuries.] The Void Badger congratulated him.

Karl moved on, passing out the rings to the students. Well over half were able to equip the rings, and the guards were quickly getting overwhelmed with the escort missions. They had started taking them three at a time because it was a long walk to the waiting room, but they were still having to run back to get the next batch.

The kids were a bit disoriented after the class selection screen, or whatever notice they got, and they still needed the escort, so Karl couldn't just have them walk to the exit. But he was almost at the end of his line, and the last few students were just as nervous as the first few had been.

Behind Karl, the nurses had started with the injections, hoping to get a few more Elites out of the process. The second wave was renewing the hope of the students still seated, as well as their parents sitting in the crowd.

The Clerics had an area healing spell active, hoping to give the ones who were minimally compatible with the injection a better chance of success when injured by the power.

That was normal in the Capital, and other large cities that had powerful clerics present, and it greatly reduced the number of lingering injuries that the students they sent to the train would have.

It wasn't looking too hopeful for the students, but the success rate was generally not great with the injection to start with, and presumably most of the successes would have awakened with the first method.

Karl finished with one final success, and turned back to watch the nurses make their way down the line.

There was a success in Rae's line, then one in Ophelia's. But that was it. Karl could see that a few were having bad reactions to the injection, but the healing spell in effect was keeping them stable while the power passed through their bodies.

The mood in the crowd was jubilant, with the overjoyed parents outnumbering the defeated ones for the first time in history. Normally, Karl assumed the crowd would be congratulating the lucky few, but now it was a mix between sympathy for the parents of the students still sitting, and congratulations given to the parents of the ones who had been led away.

The rest of the ceremony was supposed to be focused on the students who would be going on to further classes, or looking for work, so Karl and his team retreated to the back of the podium, so they wouldn't interfere with the inspirational speeches and songs that were coming.

Fortunately for everyone, those would be given by someone other than the Superintendent. Karl turned when he heard someone enter, and watched as the crowd followed his gaze. It was an amusing sight, watching thousands of people all turn in unison because he had heard footsteps, but it worked out perfectly as a young Elite in an idol's short frilly dress waved to the crowd and strutted up to take the stage.

Only, once she got into the open, all her attention was on the gathered guests.

Nobody had warned her that things were changing this year, and she had been expecting a few school officials, plus the nurses. Not a whole group of Royal and Monarch Ranked Elites, plus the head Librarian.

The idol was probably someone famous in the Capital, but Karl had no idea who the Ascended Rank girl was. The feeling was mutual, but she was well-trained and managed to keep to her routine as she took the stage.

Not even the massive number of empty seats on the auditorium floor was enough to throw her off her performance.

"Good morning everyone. Congratulations to all of our new Elites and their families. But for everyone else, today is still a very special day. For today is the Capital Job Fair..."

Chapter 689 Job Fair

Once the sales pitch for the job fair was open, the announcers declared that the students could come up and meet with the Elites. There was no need to do that for the others, they were about to become the Elites, but for those left in the auditorium seats, this was a big event for them.

Karl came down from the stage to meet with the kids, who looked shocked that someone was actually coming down to talk to them, not just answering questions from above.

"Mister Monarch, is it true that you led the soldiers to defend the north side of the city?" One of the kids asked, eyes sparkling with hero worship.

"Not just me. My whole team spread out along the north side of the city so that we could coordinate. With so many brave soldiers on the line, we had to do our best." Karl agreed.

A group of the kids immediately swarmed him to hug him, reminding Karl that many of these people had family in the army.

The rest of the team remained on the stage with the school officials, though Lotus was sitting on the edge to talk to the students.

The kids were mostly chattering to each other as they formed another question, then one of the girls pointed at Karl and gasped. "I know who you are. You were on the news with the Lightning Cerro. I think you were still a Commander or a Royal then, weren't you? Did you just advance? Can we see the Cerro?" She asked.

Karl smiled. "Thor is standing up on the stage right now. Green hair and shining armour. It's a transformation spell that lets him look human. He will be glad to hear that you're a fan, though.

However, I do have one more friend that could come out to say hello. Cara, would you like to meet the students?"

Cara came out to stand on the edge of the stage, looking down at the students, then spread her wings to hop over to Karl's shoulder. She leaned down with her paws on his chest to get a closer look at the kids, then nose bumped the girl and licked her cheek.

Cara revelled in the attention as the kids began to praise her, and Karl sensed Thor mentally rolling his eyes. Were the kids not praising him and looking forward to seeing the Cerro only seconds ago? That shameless sister was just happily stealing all the attention.

But Thor was fine with watching over his pack while they were among so many strangers, and not many things in the world could harm Cara.

Not that the kids were trying. They seemed to think that Cara was some sort of domestic pet, and she had no problem basking in the attention for a few minutes.

[We have a plan. Remi and Lotus and I are going to go find the baby Rogue and fix her ears before she leaves. Make sure that the humans don't try to stop us.] Cara informed Karl as the attention began to die down.

[I will get you an escort.]

Karl gestured for one of the soldiers to come over, and briefly explained the situation. Remi would come out once they were in the back rooms, so they didn't terrify the public with a Naga Queen appearing out of nowhere.

Rae thought it would be great fun. But she was also considering just turning back into a spider for a bit to make people stop asking her dumb questions.

Cara was happy to communicate with System Messages, so that Sybil knew they were coming, and Lotus didn't misunderstand what they were up to when they started using destructive magic on the Rogue.

It took them a few minutes, but after carefully examining the inside of Cara's ear and comparing it to Sybil's, Lotus was certain that she could shape her healing magic to recreate the destroyed tissue into a properly functional inner ear construct.

Sybil was still quite leery of this whole idea, as it did involve using [Disintegrate] to destroy her entire inner ear, then a healing potion and Lotus' [Regrowth] healing spell to rebuild the missing portion of her head.

Lotus patted the Rogue gently as they finished their preparations. "Relax, and sit perfectly still. We will have you fixed up in no time at all. Remi has done extensive research on the topic, and she made custom potions to help you recover. The odds are excellent that you will be able to hear as well as anyone else in the group before we leave this room." The rest of Sybil's team was watching in tense anticipation as she reluctantly nodded, and Remi took out two small potions before nodding at Cara.

The Void Badger focused intensely, then activated [Disintegrate] a half second before Remi splashed the potions in both of Sybil's ears at the same time, and Lotus began her healing spell.

For five long seconds that felt like hours to those watching, blood trickled from Sybil's ears, then slowly vanished. When the process was over, her ears had changed shape, getting slightly pointy instead of small and round. But other than that, Lotus was certain she had done the spell properly. It was probably just because she thought pointy ears were cute. That had to be it.

For a few more seconds after they finished, there was silence in the room, then a squeak from Sybil, followed by a wince of pain.

{I can hear heartbeats. You did it wrong. Hearing is painful, make it stop.} She complained by message.

"Oh right, there is no earwax to dampen sounds. Here, put these in." Lotus' voice pained the Rogue, but once the earplugs were in place, she breathed a sigh of relief.

She shaped her mouth, and let out a series of squeaks before frowning and sending a mass message to her team.

{I don't know how to make the mouth noises.}

Collective facepalms ensued.

"I didn't think about that. Do you even understand what people are saying?" Lotus asked quietly, not wanting to hurt her delicate ears.

Sybil nodded and gave them a thumbs up.

{I think that the System translates for me like Mister Karl said it does for Orcs because I understand perfectly without even seeing you talk. I've never heard words before, but I believe that you have a beautiful voice.}

Lotus hugged Sybil, who was laughing silently at how happy the Priestess was to get a compliment.

[Is the world supposed to be this loud? Is there a volume control? I can hear people talking in the auditorium, and it's distracting.] Sybil asked, messaging everyone in the room.

The rest of the team of recruits looked at her like she was crazy, but Cara just shrugged. {Sounds right. Our Dana has candy in her pocket, I can hear the wrapper crinkling.}

Joan snapped her fingers, catching everyone's attention, and making Sybil wince again.

"You used Cara as a pattern. Cara doesn't hear like a human does. You made her hearing far too sensitive. I can't hear heartbeats, or anything outside this room with the door closed. If Cara can hear candy wrappers from fifty metres away through a closed door, that is definitely not human hearing." The young cleric explained.

Cara and Lotus stared at each other for a moment, then Cara shrugged. {Echolocation should work really well now, though. Right?}

Sybil sighed as she realized no help would be coming from the beasts, who viewed the mission as a success, now that she could hear. Fortunately, she had some points available, and there was one which she could use to solve her problem.

[Silence] dampens all sound within a specified area.

If she just cast it on her head, she wouldn't have to listen anymore.

Chapter 690 Project Planning

After fifteen minutes of chatting with the Elites, the job fair was officially beginning. The booths were set up in the park outside the auditorium by employers who were looking for workers and apprentices, with the first hour dedicated to the new graduates and then the rest of the weekend for the general population to job hunt.

It wasn't just companies in the Capital, but those in the surrounding regions as well, and many of the positions would be filled by the university educated and lower ranking Elites.

The Librarian nudged Karl with her shoulder. "Are you going to go look for a full-time job? You know, something to build up your public image and reputation with the people? If you wait for Overlord Rank, you'll be too busy for such leisurely pursuits."

Karl shook his head. "I already have a plan in mind. I just didn't expect things to change so quickly. But that reminds me, I need to talk to a certain banker to speed up the plans."

Librarian Kelithuza nodded, then turned to join some of the University Researchers who were pitching projects looking for workers.

Dana poked Karl in the ribs. "You have a project planned?"

Karl laughed. "Sort of. Originally, I was going to sponsor a large office tower or something with my name on it. But I have a better idea now that we know how to awaken Beast Rangers.

I think that I should start a compound for raising potentially beneficial beasts. Once we have a spot for the compound, I will have to figure out how to actually get residents, but it shouldn't be too hard with the proper application of bribes."

Dana laughed and Tessa gave Karl a curious look. "Are you planning to take in Orphaned beasts, or a wandering Cerro pack or something?"

"Both, I think. That's a great plan. I need to work on my Runecrafting, but it should be possible to grow crops to keep them fed, the way that the beast spaces do. Then, we can take a commission when Rangers who are advancing come looking for a new partner."

There were also a number of other advancement options available that weren't Beast Ranger, but would allow the Rangers to pick a magical beast.

"And what if they don't come flocking to your farm to find new friends?" Tessa asked.

"Then we advertise it as a petting zoo for Green Dragon Clerics. We will be rich."

Tessa and Ophelia burst into laughter, while Dana sighed and leaned against Karl's side.

He wrapped his arm over her shoulder and smiled at the mage. "See, it's a brilliant plan. Plus, if we bring in Cerro, we know that they're not going to object to people coming to give them attention and head pats every day."

That sounded good to Thor. In fact, he wondered why nobody had thought of that before. No need to travel to find the good food, and nature cleric head pats? Pure luxury.

Rae thought about reminding him that it came with a loss of freedom, and that they would be stuck within a compound, but quickly realized that the Lightning Cerro wouldn't see that as necessarily a bad thing.

They would just become territorial and protect the compound where the food was. The fact that there was a wall around it was a bonus in their minds.

Karl kept Dana under his arm as he left the auditorium, leading the group. If he was lucky, he would be able to find someone from the Roth Savings and Loan group.

The banking conglomerates had set up a very professional group of stalls for the hiring fair, but they were staffed by juniors from the Human Resources department. If he was going to talk to Nathan Roth, he would have to wait or call for him.

It was still the early access period for the students, so this whole area was mostly empty. They wouldn't be hiring middle school students for a financial group unless they needed janitors. But once the others arrived, they would surely have a lineup.

"Is there anyone that you would like to meet with before we go?" Karl asked, directing the question to everyone else in the group.

Then he wondered where Lotus had gone with Cara and Remi, now that they were done with the experiment on Sybil. It felt like they were still in the auditorium building, but he wasn't getting much information from Remi or Cara's thoughts.

Everyone shook their heads in confirmation that they really didn't have anything that they wanted to do here at the job fair, but they wouldn't be able to escape quite that easily.

"Monarch, Monarch. A moment of your time, if you would." A voice was calling.

Karl turned to find a young woman in blue robes waving while jogging his way, and briefly considered running away before the blue dragon clerics could catch up to him again.

But, he decided that it was better to deal with the curiosity now, instead of after he got home, when he wouldn't have anywhere to escape to.

"How can I help you today, Priestess?" He asked.

The cleric stopped uncomfortably close to Karl, ignoring the look that Dana was giving her, then lowered her voice so that she wouldn't be overheard by others.

"Is there any chance that I can get the new [Lightning Zone] skill? I know your daily usages are limited, but my sisters are being stingy with the copies we have available, and being able to copy a new tome would really help my grades." She whispered.

Of course, she was an Awakened Rank Priestess, so she was way down the list of candidates for limited edition skill books, but Dana sighed in relief that the question was a perfectly normal one for the blue sisterhood.

Karl smiled and poked her on the forehead as he activated the skill, and then the Priestess pulled both him and Dana into a hug.

"Thank you so much. I need to get to the Library. My next assignment is due in only eight days. Thank you again, Monarch Karl. I won't forget this kindness."

Then, she was gone again, and the bystanders were left utterly baffled by whatever had gone on between the two.

It wasn't often that the Blue Dragon Clerics asked for favours, or were even seen outside their classrooms. But that one sure was excited.

"You're like a walking Solstice present to them, aren't you?" Dana joked.

Tessa smirked. "The Green Dragon Clerics get all the flak for being crazy, but the Blue Dragon's followers are just as excitable once you're on the right topic."