

Beast Master 721

Chapter 721 Trapped

The Guardian grabbed him and the world went blue for an instant, then Karl found himself standing inside the lab, and the Haint Claw on the Guardian.

Rumbling outside the blast door and a sense of loss told him that the area had collapsed, crushing the Bodyguards, which he immediately summoned to his side.

"Monarch? Thank the Dragon Gods, you're alright. Have the security teams rescued us from the intruders? Wait, how did you get in without opening the door?" Fizzspark demanded.

Karl patted the Guardian on the head, and felt the pulse of energy from the Haint Claw. It wasn't awareness, more like a preset safety mechanism. The Haint Claw could inhabit the Guardian, and in that body, it could use its ethereal form to move between targets, the way that it had in combat against Overlord Ahmad's Golems.

"Secret skill. Is everyone in here alright?" Karl asked.

The Gnome smiled. "Yes. As soon as the alarm was sounded, we activated the full lockdown barriers, preventing portal openings and reinforcing the lab. I can still feel the shaking, what did you do out there?"

Karl sighed. "I got into a fight with a foreign Overlord. We might have caused the tunnels to collapse."

Fizzspark gave Karl a confused look.

"Tunnels? There are no tunnels, at least not in the conventional sense. The whole area is one huge underground building, and the part by the university is constructed for fifty floors before it reaches ground level. If it collapsed..."

If more than just the last section collapsed, then the entire research wing of the University lab complex collapsed in on itself.

[Rae, what is happening at your end? I broke the University.] Karl asked, while motioning for the Gnome to wait a moment.

[Nobody is in the Palace yet. But we can see the fight in the city. Four portals and a lot of combat. No, five portals now. I think that three of them are our team. It's hard to tell from here, the buildings are in the way. But I promised that Guard Captain jerk that I would wait and help him defend the Palace.] Rae complained.

The barriers over the lab shook, and Karl instinctively traced the attack to the surface. Someone was trying to blast their way in.

"It looks like the enemy isn't contained yet. Only the ones that were in the hallway outside the main entrance." Karl reminded the others.

"Right. Everyone, Breach Protocol priority one! Destroy everything." Fizzspark shouted, followed by Forgemaster Granite.

There were pained wails from somewhere in the back, and Karl recognized them as coming from Duke Ambrose.

"No, you idiots. If we destroy it all, they will kill everyone. You have to stop, don't you understand. I've already..." The human researcher stopped, but everyone was staring at him.

"You've already what?" Forgemaster Granite asked in a deadly tone.

"It's just, they're going to get in, and if we can't give them what they want..." Ambrose stammered.

"Lie." The Guardian standing beside Karl muttered.

Granite was thinking the same thing, and in a split second, he had his smithy hammer in his hand, and Duke Ambrose's brains were on the wall.

"Well, that's one traitor down. Anyone else? It will hurt less if I find out now." The Dwarf insisted.

"Dwarves really hate traitors." Fizzspark whispered.

Karl saw a couple of others panic and try to run before the other researchers turned on them. But even with that issue solved, it didn't stop the pounding on the barriers, and their energy storage wouldn't last forever.

"I'm going to the energy storage crystals. It will buy us some time for them to solve the issues overhead." He explained as he jumped over the railing and down to the main floor.

Between him and Remi, they should be able to greatly slow the process of entry, and buy the researchers enough time to destroy everything that they had already produced. The smiths were already slagging down the weapons that they had in stock, with pain etched on their faces at the loss of hundreds or thousands of hours of work.

The archery specialists soon joined them, dumping armloads of wooden weapons in unused forges, letting everything burn to ash.

For fifteen minutes, Karl poured energy into the process of reinforcing the barriers while they worked. Then, the sound of destruction fell silent, and the Forgemaster came out of the back rooms smelling of smoke. He must have gone to destroy the paper records made by the traitorous Research and Development chief.

"It's done. Everything is destroyed, and I used [Forge Fire] to destroy his room, as well as the hidden enchanted storage spots he had placed in it.

There is nothing left for them to find. You can let down the defence now, and we will face whatever comes our way.

The Blue Dragons have provided us with an emergency measure. Worse than death, as they put it. A memory erasing potion. Their last resort if captured."

For a Blue Dragon Cleric, that was a fate worse than death. But if someone was going to try to torture them for information, it would be incredibly effective. Karl nodded. "I am only putting in mana at the rate I can regenerate it. I am at full capacity for what might come next. Let them wait a little longer."

For a few minutes, the pounding at the barrier paused, and the mana storage began to recover. That didn't last long, and the attacks soon resumed, but with a much lower intensity.

Whatever group of mages had been attacking the barrier before had left, or lost members, and now they weren't doing enough damage to defeat Karl's efforts to sustain the defences.

The pounding continued as Karl checked in on the others. [Any fun yet, Rae?]

Rae's mental voice was amused. [We're playing hide and seek. There are invisible mages all over the Palace. They sent Niall here to help me play.]

[Are you winning?] Karl asked.

[I don't know yet, we took different wings. Thor has a whole herd of maids and a Guard team in the suite to help him and the others. But they haven't been attacked yet.]

Chapter 722 Details Incoming

A message came in from Inquisitor Niall, filling Karl in on the details, as far as he had managed to decipher them.

{Monarch, there are Spellblades from three different nations attacking today. A bounty has been put on the heads of a number of ranking Elites, as well as the King. I must say, if we weren't friends, the amount that they put on your head is enough to tempt even me to take the reward and go into retirement.}
Overlord Niall joked in a System Message.

{Oh, that good?}

But the Overlord replied to Karl's sarcasm in a serious manner.

{Whoever issued the bounty is making the continued survival of the northern nations contingent upon the completion of the list. But more personally, they have also offered the equivalent of a hundred million credits and four hundred acres of fertile river bottom farmland for your death.}

Karl sighed at the revelation. {I don't suppose you know who is attacking the facility right now, do you? I took out some black robed Spellblades who were trying to break in earlier. However, now the building has collapsed, and someone is attacking the barriers from above.}

At least if they were going to claim a bounty on him, they would have to have an intact body to show their boss. Karl was almost absolutely certain that was how it worked. Or, at the very least, his head. But could he regenerate from just a head? [Void Body] didn't specify how much of you could get blown up before you couldn't regenerate anymore.

{The ones above you now would be the Spellblades from Linia, with a group of Overlord Ranked foreigners backing them up. The team under Overlord Othello is there dealing with them. Coincidentally, her name is on the list. So are Ahmad and Tabitha.}

The invaders had a serious abundance of confidence if they were willing to put those names on the list.

For a few minutes, the damage being done to the barrier was minimal, and Karl wondered if Othello and her team were winning the battle above him.

Then a massive lance of power smashed clean through the barrier and into the floor of the lab in front of him.

Three Overlords in pale blue robes floated down from the hole in the ceiling, smirking as they stared at Karl.

"Ah, we have found you, little rat, hiding in his hole. To think that it would be our team who gets the bounty on the Beast Master." The mage on the far left, an elderly man with liver spots on his bald head, chuckled in a sinister whisper.

Karl smiled and stacked five layers of [Obliterate] on his maul, which made the Overlord laugh even harder. But when Karl fired the five stacked spells layered in [Nullify], the Overlord Ranked skill shared by Cara, the mage's barriers shattered like glass and his body simply vanished.

Karl turned to the other two.

"You seem to have fundamentally misunderstood something." Karl began.

[We're not stuck in here with them, they're stuck in here with us. I heard that one in a movie.] Remi cheered in his mind.

The Spellblades stared at the spot where their ally had been for another half second before recovering.

"You were never going to live long enough to see the reward." Karl finished, while Remi booed him silently for not going with the cliché.

The two Overlords charged for him, Only to have the Bodyguards throw themselves in between, grabbing with their serpentine bodies and sacrificing themselves to buy the time for Karl to recharge his spells.

Karl sent out another stack of [Disintegrate] coated in [Nullify], and the younger of the two Overlords vanished in a puff of ash, along with the Bodyguard wrapping him.

The Overlord died at the exact moment that a flash of purple magic blinded Karl's eyes, and he winced as a blade ran through his stomach, bare steel stripped of its magical enchantments by the barriers it had broken.

"You were saying?" The last Overlord asked, his sword buried to the hilt in Karl's body as he prepared another spell.

Karl grabbed the sides of the mage's skull, shattering his barrier with [Nullify] before physically removing the man's head from his body.

Karl slumped to the ground, and Remi left her space to douse him in [Healing Splash] while activating both of her healing totems.

{Oh, that's not good. It destroyed most of your insides. Are you sure that the Cara healing can fix that before you die?} She asked.

Karl didn't have the energy to even make a mental response, but his body was surrounded with black smoke as he regenerated.

Forgemaster Granite ran up the steps and dumped a potion in Karl's mouth.

"Stamina and mana potion. It helps with regeneration type spells." He explained to the confused Naga Queen.

Remi made a mental note that she would have to add that step next time, but Karl was still in rough shape even after his body had healed.

Then power began to flow from the Haint Claw to him, restoring the metaphysical damage that healing his body could not repair.

Karl gave the Dwarf a weak fist bump and carefully sat up to inspect himself.

"Well, that sucked about as much as expected. But aren't they too weak for Overlords?" He whispered.

The old Dwarf laughed. "They're researchers from a tower somewhere, not trained assassins. They've likely never cast a spell with intent to kill in their lives. See the talisman that was on this one's neck? It's a translation amulet. The sort that the Blue Dragon Clerics use to help with books they can't read."

Above them, Karl saw a familiar face. Overlord Othello's polished silver armour was shining in the sun as she looked down into the labs.

Karl called up to the Overlord. "We're alright down here. How is your team doing? I have limited healing here, and a Resurrection capable cleric in my suite at the Palace." "We're not dead yet. But I don't think that we can get you out of there. I can't fly, and the University is rubble. The entire complex is gone." She shouted back.

"I can get out with [Earth Barrier]. Do you want to retreat and rest?" The Paladin nodded, and gestured to someone near her on the surface.

Karl began building a stone stairwell to the surface, a narrow spike of stone with thin runners in a circle around it, made using the stone that had tumbled down as the barrier was breached.

Othello, along with four Monarchs, made their way down the stairs, then slumped down in the chairs of the ruined clean room.

"What a mess. There are hundreds of attackers in the city, half of them are invisible, and they brought Overlords with them. How much do you know?" Othello asked.

"Overlord Niall gave me the rundown. What do you need? I've got a whole group of researchers here to protect. Though, it sounds like they're not a primary target, and we've already destroyed all the research material here."

Othello blinked in shock. "You did what?"

"Standard practice. Nothing for the enemy to steal." Karl replied with a shrug.

"Right, you didn't know that they weren't here for it. Or perhaps they are? They are after you, and we can't say for certain that they're not under orders to take certain targets alive.

The Inquisition had a friendly chat with a spy, and that's where the little information and the target names we have come from."

Chapter 723 Through The City

The mage with Othello sealed the ceiling with a barrier, and Karl closed it completely with the [Stone Barrier] spell, locking them all back inside.

Then the mage cast a spell that brought the main barrier back online, though it was nearly out of mana storage.

"We can open the barriers again when it's time to leave. But for now, we all need to rest and recover before we make ourselves a vulnerable target." He explained.

Karl shrugged. "That's fine by me. But isn't this a bit too much? It sounds like a full invasion of the Royal Palace and surrounding area. Nevertheless, they're so confident that they're not even trying to hide their identities. I get that we're not exactly the most feared nation on the continent, but they've got some serious guts."

The group with Othello nodded in agreement, but the Paladin frowned. "Some of the bounties say that the claimant will get a large plot of land in return. Now, I don't know about you, but unless it's the leader of a nation, doesn't that sound a lot like they're planning to completely topple the Golden Dragon Nation?"

Karl paused while he considered that. "I think it is possible. If there was some rumour spreading among the other nations that the Archbishop was in poor health, would that not embolden them? Without our Totem Rank strength, we're even less organized than other nations, who have Overlords in Towers all over their maps."

Othello chuckled. Karl might have slightly misunderstood the actual politics of the other human nations, but it was true that most of the Towers were headed by Overlords, and they were spread fairly evenly over the nations, with each of them controlling a section of farmland and surrounding villages as their own semi-autonomous region.

"Speaking of which, where are the other two? Did they get away?" Othello asked.

Karl shook his head, and Remi hissed an answer. {We didn't permit them to leave. There just weren't any bodies left.}

That reminded her. She was getting sloppy, and she needed to clean up the last one for Sister Rae's bath.

The Monarchs gave her a strange look as she used a tiny [Cyclone] to wash the floor and made the body vanish, but when she was done, it was like no battle had ever happened.

Karl passed out fruits and roast meats from Remi and Hawk's spaces, so everyone could recharge as the waited, and Othello began to draw a map.

"The communications are out again. There is a Mana Storm forming over the city, and it's interfering with all sorts of electronic signals. We can talk to others in the city still, but even contacting the Capital was sketchy. They had to try three times before we could understand that they needed us to send teams here. The storm is getting stronger as well, so we should try to either regroup or clear an area of the surface before the actual storm part of the mana storm begins."

"Too late. I can hear the drops falling on the barrier above us. It looks like we will be fighting in the rain." Karl sighed.

Othello shrugged. "Better than fighting in a basement."

On the other side of the city, back at the apartments in the Palace, Dana slowly removed a dagger from her arm as she stared down at the body of a Palace Guard.

The man had suddenly attacked her, and he had died just as quickly. Dana's spell had hit after he was already dead, executed by his former comrades for his apparent treason.

But she wasn't bleeding. A waft of black mist extended from her arm as the dagger was removed, and it healed before Lotus even had a chance to see if it was poisoned.

"What was that?" She asked, shocked at the sudden assassination attempt.

Cara knew it instantly. [Thor, tell her that she's got Void Body active. Remember how Karl said that the new Scaly Leafa Golem heals the whole team? Well, he's got Void Body active all the time. We just didn't notice because nobody is dumb enough to stab one of us.]

Thor relayed the explanation to the rest of the team, while the Guard Captain stared at Dana in awe. Then he snapped out of it.

"You need to cleanse her anyhow. That dagger is poisoned. When whatever healing spell she has active wears off, the poison will take effect." He insisted.

Once that was done, a tense situation began to build in the room. One of the Guards was a traitor, which meant that there might be more traitors among the Palace Guard, both in this room and elsewhere in the Palace.

But they had no way to tell who was and who wasn't. It wasn't like they were disguised Giants, just humans with different loyalties. A foreign spy didn't see himself as a traitor. He was loyal to his actual employer, and possibly even a noble person, so his soul wouldn't look suspicious with Soul Sight.

And they had hired far too many foreigners for the Royal Guard.

Outside the room, the storm was raging. The air crackled with lightning and magic, while the wind howled and the rain poured down.

It was getting stronger by the second, and the gardens outside were already starting to flood.

The radio calls had mostly fallen silent, as the constant thunder made it too difficult to get a clear signal through, and the battle was beginning to wind down. The attackers had begun to retreat, either after completing their assignment, or when the danger level got too high for their power.

The declining battle hadn't reduced the fury of the mana storm building over the city, and Tessa could feel the power crackling on her skin as the events in the region drew the attention of her patron deity.

In contrast, Lotus was nervous, as the storm was not a natural phenomenon. Something was happening, and all of her training as a Priestess hadn't covered anything like this.

Especially when the power in the clouds began to rotate, creating mana tornados in the upper atmosphere.

That was the signal for the last of the attackers to flee the city before it was no longer possible. The storm would interfere with any sort of spell casting, and soon it would be nearly impossible for a mage or magic type class to do even defend themselves.

Chapter 724 Mana Storm

In the lab beneath the ruins of the University complex, there was not much that Karl could do about the storm other than wait for it to pass. There were no more sounds of nearby battle, and Othello's entire team was exhausted after battling the allies who had arrived with the Overlords that Karl had defeated.

The fact that she had held the foreign Overlords off four on one before they had separated and broken in to attack Karl was truly impressive, but it had taken a toll on her team's stamina levels, even with [Eternal Lightning] now active on the five of them.

High above the city, the final battle of the day still raged. But not as an assassination attempt, or for control of the city.

Overlord Ahmad stood on the shoulders of a Wind Elemental conjuration, facing off with Overlord Kenichi, whose black Drake mount was lazily flapping its wings, hovering in place. But both of them were wary of the third arrival to their party.

"Gentlemen. You might as well go home. This opportunity is mine." The arrogant young Overlord sneered.

"Ah, Reginald. So good to see you again. Did you know that your entire family was just killed by a Naga Queen who didn't even understand what they wanted?" Overlord Kenichi taunted.

The young Overlord did his best not to rise to the provocation.

"You won't get me to leave the eye of the storm on a fool's errand." Reginald replied in a tone much more calm than the seething hatred on his face.

Overlord Ahmad smiled. "Actually, he's not lying. Well, probably not lying. I felt all three of their souls vanish only seconds apart, and they were nowhere near a portal."

There was a pause as all three of them looked at the massive floating mana crystal between their positions. The battle in the city had formed it, bonded with the souls of the deceased, and it represented one of the greatest opportunities that any Mage could ever hope to see.

Each of them would willingly fight to the death to get their hands on it, and from what they could tell, there was nobody else willing and able of challenging them for it.

The problem was, it was a single use item. The massive amount of mana and soul power that it contained would be transferred to the first user, and only to them. Nobody had expected this particular outcome when the battle had started, it was a one in a million freak chance. But so many Overlords had died today, and so many more of their Acolytes, that the gods of War and Death had both been intrigued by the power play and granted their blessing.

Suddenly, Reginald surged with power, and the other two immediately reinforced their barriers.

But it was not them that the Spellblade was aiming for, but Kenichi's mount.

Of the three, his personal skills were worst suited to flying, and the Overlord tumbled away from the stone as Ahmad attacked Reginald.

This was a fight that the Spellblade was sure he could win. Ahmad was a Golem Mage, and his golems were not a flying type. So, he had to rely on a simple conjuration or air magic to fly, and neither was his specialty.

Lightning struck his armour, tossing him backwards as Ahmad worked to drive Reginald away from the mana stone, which was now nearly done forming.

A barrage of magic missiles formed in return, met by an identical spell from the Catman. The two Peak Overlord area suppression spells shook the ground far beneath them as they collided, sounding like thousands of concurrent peals of thunder. But the match was not even.

When it was over, Reginald gave a victorious laugh, while Ahmad spat blood and held a large wound on his right shoulder to staunch the bleeding.

"Sorry about your luck. Maybe next time, beastkin." He crowed, mere metres from the stone as it solidified in this world.

Then Ahmad smiled. "Yes, perhaps in your next life."

{Niall, I need you in the air. Bring the spider.}

The two assassins appeared in the dim light between lightning strikes before both going incorporeal. Reginald began to panic, reaching for the Mana Stone, only to see his arm falling away toward the ground.

Piercing pain shot through his back, and the black masked face of the Golden Dragon Nation's chief assassin appeared before him.

"Too slow." Niall chided as he began to fall from the sky. Once he was below the waist of his opponent, he struck straight up, using [Vibrating Blade], so it didn't hit Rae, who had stabbed her legs through the mage for balance.

Reginald's flight spell failed as the life left his body, and Niall grabbed Rae's spider form. [Advanced Shadow Step] took them both to the courtyard outside Rae's suite, and both returned to their incorporeal forms, leaving the rain behind as they entered the relative safety of the Palace.

Dana jumped as the two appeared in front of her, sitting on opposite sofas with pencils and paper.

"Five points for each Overlord, three for Monarchs, two for Royals and one for a Commander." Niall insisted.

Rae nodded and began making tally marks on her paper.

"Are they doing what I think they're doing?" The Guard Captain whispered to Tessa.

"It looks like it. The question is, who will win? At three points for a Monarch, pure volume could easily sway this count." The War Cleric explained.

There simply weren't enough Overlords in most battles for them to change the outcome of this contest.

After twenty agonizingly slow minutes of room by room tallying with a map of the castle, they were finally finished. The pages were handed to Tessa as their neutral arbiter, as she would verify their math and make sure that they didn't both count kills in the same room without a good reason.

"The final score is in and verified. The verdict is that Rae is terrible at keeping a legible kill count. You can't measure kills in millilitres for this contest. The big ones don't count for more, only the powerful ones.

However, after some recalculation, we have a total of one thousand eight hundred four points for Rae, and with a decisive victory, thanks to an explosive device through a portal, Overlord Niall has scored one thousand nine hundred and twelve points."

Rae sighed and shook her head. "That portal was a lucky find. But I learned a valuable lesson today. I need to work on the speed of my humanoid form. It takes too long to move around the castle on only two feet."

Chapter 725 Distinguished Guests

While the battle appeared to have ended, the chaos in Wenmouth was far from over.

Two thirds of the city had been damaged or destroyed, large portions of the Palace were rubble, and the University complex had collapsed, trapping an unknown number of students and employees.

But that was not the largest concern for Karl and the others in his suite.

There was a growing sense of power overhead as the storm began to fade, and the auras of at least a half dozen Totem Rank powerhouses had surrounded the city, while something stronger was flying overhead.

Their best guess was that whatever had happened here had attracted the attention of the Mythic Rank Black Dragon that held the unofficial title of overseer of the continent.

Karl and Niall had a general idea of what had happened, as Rae and Niall had gone to assist Ahmad in the fight. But the storm was interfering with any attempt to observe from the ground.

There was no way that they could have guessed the monumental nature of the events that were occurring in the sky above Wenmouth.

Overlord Ahmad surged with power as he stood on the shoulders of his summon. His back was bent in a deep bow, welcoming the Mythic dragon, but his attention was entirely on the process happening inside his body.

Once the stronger challengers had arrived, he had immediately used the Mana Core of the storm. A missed opportunity was worthless, but to the gathered Totems, the Mana Core was nearly as valuable intact as it was to him.

"You have gained quite the opportunity today." The dragon intoned, speaking slowly, the human language unfamiliar and difficult from his draconic form.

"Indeed, Mythic Lord." Ahmad agreed.

The dragon's passive look turned to a faint smile. "Perhaps from now, we shouldn't call the Golden Dragon Nation the largest human nation anymore, but the Northern Beastkin Territories." It suggested.

Ahmad shook his head. "You flatter me. The Archbishop is still the leader of the nation."

The Mythic Dragon snorted in amusement. "For how much longer? A year, two at most? Lord Nacht has been keeping vigil over him for months, ready to step in if he should go earlier than expected. But in a few more minutes, the Golden Dragon will have a new heir to the nation. To think that so many Overlords among the humans would have thrown their lives away in one battle for greed and power. But their sacrifice birthed a new Totem, and over the next days new Overlords will rise to replace those who have fallen. Such is the will and blessing of the God of Death."

That was when it really began to dawn on Ahmad what he had done. He had taken the chance to gain the greatest of powers, and had pushed himself past the brink and into the Totem Realm. Already, the Totemic Blessing was settling into his bones, and his power was skyrocketing as his magic and his very soul merged with the world in new ways.

But the power came with a cost. There was only one other Totem in the Golden Dragon Nation, and he would soon be on his deathbed, leaving Ahmad as the leader of the country by default.

Surely, that young Monarch was laughing at him now.

Everyone had assumed that his astronomical rise to the top would have marked the next Totem Rank powerhouse on the Continent, but instead he was comfortable in his Palace suite while it was Ahmad up here, trying to digest the implications of his own actions.

Karl wasn't actually at the Palace, but in the labs beneath the city, but Ahmad didn't know that. Ahmad couldn't sense him there, but he had felt the familiar presence of Thor and the ladies.

Not only had he done this to himself, he had literally killed for it. Well, ordered someone killed for it.

He should have made Inquisitor Niall use the stone. That smug bastard deserved to be stuck with a desk job.

As his advancement took hold, Ahmad realized that he no longer needed assistance to fly, he could simply control the mana in his body to hold himself aloft on the natural mana currents.

So, he dismissed the Elemental, and let himself hover. "Good, you are learning quickly. Congratulations on your advancement, young Enlightened One. Now, I have whelps to oversee, new to their training." The Mythic Dragon announced, before simply vanishing.

Ahmad smiled as he realized how the Ancient Dragon was doing it. He knew both teleportation and Portal, so he opened a tiny portal, then simply teleported through it to the other side, bypassing the limits on the range of the teleport spell.

He was simply so good at it that the process was complete before even an Overlord Rank mage could tell what he was doing.

With the Mystic Dragon gone, the other Totem Rank leaders approached to introduce themselves or make sure that the new Golden Dragon Nation Totem was who they thought it was.

"Welcome everyone. Why don't we move this to my place for a bit of tea?" Ahmad suggested.

His house in the hills outside the city, obviously. Bringing all of these people to the Capital was a terrible idea.

The storm cleared as they left, and the Palace started to give out damage reports. No casualties in the visitor wing, fourteen in the guard barracks. Seven guards were killed at the train station, two in the east wing. Fifteen died in the underground areas, where Karl assumed the dungeons and storage areas were.

But the true extent of the attack became clear in the last line.

[Fifty Guards, two Overlord Rank Protectors, five princes, two princesses, the Queen Consort and The King slain in the Throne Room region.

A King is Dead

King Axel inherits the throne by birthright.

Long Live The King]

Niall and Rae stared at the message that had been handed to the maid. "That shouldn't be right. We cleared that area." Rae insisted.

Niall nodded in agreement. "And I killed four other Overlords with their retinue just over here, only one turn down the hall. They were on their way in, not out."

Rae vanished and started counting bodies in her space. She had collected all the Overlords once they met up, and nobody had tried to steal any of them before she got to them.

"There are still seventeen. We didn't lose any of them." She explained when she returned.

Niall sighed. "It looks like my work is not over yet. The Church will want answers to this."

Chapter 726 Leaving The Lab

In the labs, Karl and the others were fully recovered and ready to face the chaos of the city.

Overlord Othello was on her feet already, motivating the rest of her people to move.

"Is the train station collapsed? Most of these people are not combatants. And we destroyed all the spare weapons anyhow." Karl asked.

Forgemaster Granite took the first blade they had made, and the war maul, out of a hidden storage spot under his forge with a conspiratorial wink.

"If they never find them, it's as good as destroyed. These were too good to give up."

The other smiths laughed and one of them pointed to his forge.

"We all saved the raw materials. Give it a few days, and we will have a fresh batch ready for upgrading. Or give us six hours, and we will make enough for the Overlord and her team." One of them suggested.

[I think we should stay and make at least one more weapon. The fight is over, and Rae says that cat mage is likely going to be a Totem now. He got a good thing that didn't look tasty.] Remi suggested in Karl's mind.

"Remi says that the fight is over. We can wait here and make a round of weapons, which was our assigned task to begin with. Others will search for survivors and clear rubble, they won't miss us for a single night." He explained to Othello and her team.

"You prioritize weapons at a time like this?" The Paladin asked.

"I know, it's a strange response. But we're on a project to make Monarch Ranked weapons for the Overlord Special Forces members. I will make one for you tonight, and a few more as gifts, as well as for the Special Forces members. My source says we might have a new Totem, and a new King. Both of them will need gifts."

Othello had a good idea who his source was, as only the Naga Queen was here with him today.

Forgemaster Thorin smiled. "Well, you heard the man. Forget the scrap of the past. We need a fresh batch of the most mana compatible weapons we can get. Does the lady have a preference? I will make the weapon for you and the VIP gifts." Othello silently held up her current broadsword, and Granite looked at the one that was currently in his possession. It was a most excellent blade, and Monarch Rank, but they could do better, he was sure.

Plus, it could be precisely designed for a Paladin. Surely, the lady would want a more elegant blade.

Othello turned to Karl. "Are you sure that you can turn out a weapon suitable for Royalty with this team? Normally, you would need multiple Monarch Ranked craftsmen for that sort of work."

Karl patted her on the shoulder. "You will see. What really matters is the alloy and the craftsmanship. I have Runecrafting as a Trade Skill, and it is designed to upgrade compatible weapons to my level.

These five lovely young acolytes are learning the ways, and they have gained the Runesmith trade skill. Have some faith, they're blue dragon clerics, they learn fast."

The Clerics looked dubious about his assertion, but with Karl here, they only needed to get the job ninety percent done, then he could take over the end to activate their perfectly carved Runes.

It wasn't a perfect system, but even with the transfer in intent between creators, Karl was fairly certain that he could still get the weapons up to a decent standard.

If nothing else, it would be a good training lesson.

All the crafters scattered, getting to work so that there would be a weapon of every type available. But it was a very smug nature cleric that finished first.

"I left a spot for an elemental gem. I think that any mage would be proud to have that gnarled black ironwood walking staff. It's incredibly mana-compliant and as hard as steel even without upgrading." He declared proudly.

Remi reached into her space and handed Karl a large stone. Not a gemstone, a rounded chunk of meteoric iron rock that she had extensively carved with Runes.

Karl turned the rock until he found the start of the inscription and read it as it wound around the rock.

She had inscribed the [Meteor Storm] spell effect's description on the practice piece a few days ago, and it seemed ironically perfect for this purpose.

"Thank you Remi. Now, let's see what we can do with this lovely staff."

It would be a nightmare trying to get the runes placed properly for such an oddly shaped weapon, but that was part of the appeal of a true work of functional art.

Karl made plans to increase the spell power, but split the effect into eight times as many smaller stones, with increased coverage area. The damage per meteor would end up being less than half of the original, but the meteors would fall like a hailstorm of head - sized boulders.

An enchantment to trigger more mana flow through the weapon from the outside would go well with that, and naturally an increase in the durability of the staff. Just in case the mage had to resort to beating someone with it.

It took Karl nearly two hours to complete after the Nature Priest had set the engraved stone, which was now glowing with deep red runes, and looked like a small ball of magma from a distance.

"That is incredible. Do you do that for every weapon you make?" Othello asked.

"Well, I usually add a spell stone to weapons for Overlords, but this was overkill. It should only take me half an hour at most to do a blade or axe."

The Nature Cleric looked sheepish as he realized that his beautiful staff had actually made a lot more work for someone else. But it just looked so spectacular that he couldn't bring himself to grow out the base and cut it into a staff or bow.

Fortunately, that had given the Forgemaster time to make a blade that he thought was suited to Overlord Othello. It matched the theme of her armour and shield, and when Karl was finished with it, it would definitely be superior as a combat weapon.

Karl smiled as he made up a poem to inscribe on the weapon, which didn't actually need a highly detailed buff for a Paladin. First, he would put on runes for increased skill effect, physical strength and radiance. That part was mandatory because a Paladin should be a shining beacon of Holiness in combat.

Thor definitely approved of that message.

Then he borrowed one of Thor's Holy Stones and enchanted it with the [Blessed Item] spell before having Forgemaster Granite mount it in the hilt. Linking that to the main inscription would make the whole sword a Holy Relic, continually blessed by the Holy Stone. Then he added the masterpiece.

[In polished armour, shining so bright, a paladin stands, a beacon of light.

With a sword in her hand, she fights for what is right.

Never will others wish her to leave, but watching her go will make their night.]

Remi and Granite both laughed quietly as Karl finished engraving the blade, then began to pour power into it. For some reason, this one enchanted much more easily than the attempts that Karl had made before, like it was actually eager to reach maximum power. But when Karl touched the blade, it burnt his fingers.

Not that it did actual damage with Void Body active, but he could still feel it burning his hand.

"Alright, it is ready. Once you bond it, you should be able to see the System Status of the weapon." Karl announced as he finished.

Chapter 727 A Blade For Othello

Othello stared down at the glimmering silver blade, with its blood-red runes and golden hilt. It was beautiful, and the runic inscription scrolled down the blade like a Gordian knot of power.

The moment her hand touched the blade, Karl could see it bond with her, and a smile slowly spread across her face.

[Blade of the Avenging Angel] Adds 20% Skill Damage. Adds 40% Physical Strength. Deals 150% additional weapon damage as Holy Damage. Deals double damage to targets with impure intentions toward the wielder. Not usable by {Unholy} or {Male} wielders.

Granite stared in shock as he inspected the weapon.

"I can't believe that worked. And it worked well. Double damage to targets with impure intentions? That has to be an Epic Grade bonus. The others might not make the Epic standard, but that one for certain should, even if it's limited." The Dwarf announced.

"Is it a random effect? Or did you specifically try for an effect that would keep a female Paladin safe from unwanted attention?" Othello asked Karl, who put on his best innocent expression while Granite sat down on the floor, holding his belly as he laughed and tears rolled into his beard.

"Aye, lass. A very specific inscription. The bottom half of the inscription is a poem about how nice your arse is." The Dwarf crowed.

"You didn't" Othello gasped.

Karl shrugged. "It is the outcomes that matter, right? Besides, there are fewer than ten people in the country who can read those Runes, and even fewer who will have the chance.

The Holy Damage should stack on all of your attacks, the same as Ghostfire does when I use the Haint Claw. So, that's a significant damage increase, or the equivalent of a moderate powered Overlord Ranked skill without expending any of your own energy.

When it is endurance that matters, that much extra damage will make a real difference in your expenditure."

Mabel, one of the blue dragon acolytes, raised her hand. "Overlord, might we ask for a favour?" She inquired politely.

Othello nodded, and the cleric smiled.

"Can you turn around? Uhm, it would seem that the shape of your posterior is relevant to our notes on the effectiveness of targeted poetry in inscriptions."

Othello turned to face Karl, inadvertently doing what the Cleric asked.

"See what you have started? You have a whole team of ladies at the Palace, are you so affection starved that you need to be fantasizing about other women?" She demanded.

"See what you have started? You have a whole team of ladies at the Palace, are you so affection starved that you need to be fantasizing about other women?" She demanded.

Karl held up his hands defensively. "It's not like that. You see, if you put a rant about how bad human craftsmanship is on a human made weapon, with the rune to strengthen it, the effect is amplified.

So my logic was that if I put a cheeky poem about the virtues of a female Paladin on a weapon specifically for you, it should increase the other effects. I didn't know that it was going to add a whole other spell effect. The intent was to increase the other three effects."

Then Karl gestured at her shield. "Can you hand me that for a moment? I can see that it's just a Commander Rank Holy Item, but I think that it can be improved if you're fond of it. I promise, no weird inscriptions on this one."

Overlord Othello's trust in Karl's Runecrafting, not in his skill but in his intentions, was evidently low. But she handed over the shield, and Karl quickly sketched a set of runes on the back, not going for a full coverage runic inscription.

"There you go. More durable and better at channelling skills like shield bash."

Othello smiled as she picked up the shield, then giggled when she saw that Karl had added {Property of Othello} in at the top. It was all in Runic, but the translation for the name tag appeared before her eyes, thanks to the System.

Forgemaster Granite came over to inspect the shield, now that he had mostly stopped laughing, and grunted in approval.

"That's a fine piece of armour. It should be able to take a proper hit, even if you don't have a skill on it. That will save you some energy in battle. I don't recommend that you just let the shield take everything, but if you can't get a skill up in time, one hit shouldn't destroy it." The Dwarf decided.

Unfortunately for Karl, he didn't know a rune combination that would actually lead to a self repairing piece of armour, which would limit the value and longevity of defensive items much more than a magical weapon was limited. Returning them to storage in your inventory often repaired small damages on items, though. So, there was some hope that stronger magical items would be able to ignore small amounts of wear and tear without needing to go to a forge regularly.

The rest of Ophelia's group stared at the weapon in envy. "If she gets something that excessive, I can only imagine what the consolation prizes are going to look like." One of the warriors joked.

Karl chuckled and gestured to the weapons that the other smiths had been making. "Pick your favourite style and I will enchant it for you. Those blades will all handle Royal Rank power, and with a standard inscription on them, they will be quick to upgrade. It might not be as glamorous as what the Overlords get, but I can do the work for all four of you in under an hour."

The mage looked concerned for a moment, but the Nature Cleric had him covered, and there were freshly made compound bows assembled from spare parts that the Ranged Weapons team was now working to upgrade.

The Ranger in the team looked torn. His class often needed both, but asking for two weapons to everyone else's single gift seemed like it would be pushing his luck.

His blade was a strong Commander Rank one with Life Steal on it, so he kept that one, and went for a new bow. He had no idea what Karl could do for archers, but a Royal Rank bow could be enough to swing many battles.

Chapter 728 Upgrades By Proximity

Karl looked at the bow that was brought to him, and the simple staff that the Mage had chosen. "Alright, I know what to put on both of these. Give me a few minutes, then I will do the blades for the warriors." He explained.

He would have to do a few for his own team as well. They had yet to reap the benefits of having a craftsman in their group.

Karl kept the staff simple, with skill enhancement percentage increase, Blessed Item for bonus damage and strengthening abilities for the staff itself. At Royal Rank, that was already enough to make it an exceptional weapon, and it had the advantage of only taking ten minutes to write the runes and cast the Blessed Item spell.

The bow got a short poem about unerring aim and swift arrows, along with a Blessed Item Spell, but it also got a small stone inscribed with the [Poison Arrow] skill.

Since Karl had gotten new spells from the clergy, he might as well use them all when he had the chance. Plus, adding Poison Arrow removed the need to have an arrow creating skill or carry physical arrows.

That was the best part about his own bow, other than the fact that it helped target.

He was tempted to do more, but if he tried to overload the less capable alloy with too many Runes, it would either shatter or simply fail. They didn't have the time to be wasting weapons today, so this would have to do for the Royal Rank weapons.

The mage smiled as he held the staff. "I must say, it's a bit odd having a holy weapon in my hands. But even more strange to think that it was made by Karl from the Capital, not some Bishop."

Othello chuckled. "That would be Karl from the Lithium Mines. He's still not adapted to being a Capital Towers resident."

Karl sat down at a surviving table in the ruined clean room and began to meditate before he worked on the next few weapons. He needed some mental clarity before working on new runes so that he didn't make any mistakes.

As he focused on the flow of energy within his body and the circulation through his veins, Karl began to feel something shift within him. {Requirements Fulfilled}

{Skill Unlocked} Bestial Form: Allows the Packmaster to join his beasts in front-line combat.

Karl maintained his focus on the process of clearing his mind and recovering his energy, but the collective gasps of the people in the room, as well as Remi's clapping, brought him out of his meditative trance.

"I unlocked a new skill. Did it do something visual?" He asked.

Remi nodded happily, and one of the acolytes cast a spell that created a large mirror out of water magic.

{The Dana Mage is going to love you.} Remi insisted as Karl stared in shock at the mirror.

His body looked similar to the way that it had for the last month or so, massively muscular in a way that would make the most avid steroid enthusiast blush. But now it looked more balanced, as he was close to two hundred and twenty centimetres tall, and completely covered in white fur, with black stripes.

His head was a bestial muzzle, and he had fluffy ears on top.

He had become... a Weretiger? That was the best guess that he had for what to call this Beast Form transformation.

His hands were still functional as human hands, but he had retractable claws of black metal that leaked magic, as if always covered in [Disintegrate].

His feet were paws, and his legs had an extra joint, the same as cat legs did. It made standing a strange experience, but he instinctively understood how to move in this form, and the sense of power from the increased strength was addictive.

Karl chuckled, a deep rumbling feline sound in this form, and then deactivated the skill.

"Hey, you shrunk." Fizzspark gasped.

Karl looked at himself. He was still a bit bulky and muscular, but he was definitely smaller than he had been this morning.

Hopefully, not shorter. He was already short enough.

Fizzspark held out her arms, and Remi picked her up in both of her right arms, so the Gnome could inspect Karl more closely.

She had a small magical device in her hands as she happily poked Karl with a finger.

"I don't think that it was a backlash. I suspect that the skill didn't activate properly the first time, so he has just been slowly expanding until it became fully active, and now he's back to normal-sized.

Well, I think that he's normal-sized. He's still kind of muscly. Gnome men are sort of pudgy and squishy, much more pleasant."

Rae's voice filled Karl's mind with enthusiasm. [Cara and Dana both approve of this change. They say that you were taking up too much bed.]

[Tell Cara that Remi can carry her gnome like a baby in just her two right arms, and it's adorable.]

If they were going to joke about his size, he could at least taunt the Badger back.

Rae laughed at Cara's response to Karl's words, but the badger had an idea.

[If we're both furry, we can turn the heat all the way down in the room, and Dana will never want to get out of bed. So we can just sleep all day.]

It was brilliant, in a way. Nobody wanted to get out of a warm bed into a freezing room. But they might need Remi to use ice magic to make the room that cold until next winter.

Karl sighed and waved Remi back a step so that he could get started on the blades. Two more for the team that was here, then weapons for his own team, and finally, he could make something for the new

King. The fancy staff for Ahmad might not be as cool as some of the other things he would get, but it was as good as Karl could do.

Unless...

Runes didn't have to go on weapons to be useful. He could make the new Totem some jewellery. Surely, Forgemaster Granite knew how to make more than weapons.

That would be an exceptional gift for him, as Monarch Ranked accessories were even more rare than Monarch Ranked weapons. Especially ones that were tailored to the user.

Chapter 729 Appropriate Gifts

Karl quickly finished the blades for the Monarchs in Othello's team, and turned to Forgemaster Granite.

"I have an idea if you're up for it. Weapons are fairly common, and everyone looks for one, so our new leaders will already have something. But what they might not have is some quality jewellery.

How are your skills as an artist?" He asked.

The Forgemaster smirked and looked at his forge, which was currently glowing bright with Hawk's Ghostfire.

"Oh, I think that I can come up with something. I didn't get the title of Forgemaster for nothing, and Dwarves are well known for their artistry."

Granite nodded to himself and went to his forge, where he pulled out a sheet of alloy from a side storage cabinet while Karl got to work on the weapons for the warriors in Othello's team, plus a pair of axes for Ophelia, which would get Life Steal stones in them, though they were only Royal Rank capable materials.

Fizzspark laughed as Remi turned her to watch Granite's work. "Oh, he's serious this time. He's using the rare materials. There are some very suitable materials for mana transfer, but they're so rare and expensive that we don't have much to work with and can't use it to make weapons."

"How much room do you need for Runes?" Granite asked as he heated the metal.

"That depends on the material. But my eyesight is good, and my hands are steady. If the material is up to it, I could make a proper enchanted item out of a hoop earring."

Karl's joke made the Dwarf laugh, but inwardly he was sighing in relief. He only had the one small sheet of this material, and if he was going to make two masterpiece quality items from it, he would have to conserve.

But if he could just make a pair of small bracelets, he would have enough for a dozen or more additional items.

So, that was what he did. Wide Dwarven bangles, with a flat rear surface to give Karl more room to work without interruption. It would also give him more than enough spare material to replace mistakes, and an excuse to add a decent sized gem for a spell ability.

Remi handed Karl a deep green stone, nearly the same shade as Ahmad's eyes, and Karl frowned as he tried to determine what sort of spell would go well with a Nature Element stone.

He didn't really have a lot of nature spells at his disposal. But Life Link was close, in a way. It was blood magic, but Karl could make it with his own blood as a medium to get the stone to work with the spell.

Karl borrowed a magnifying glass from the ruins of the work area, and began to carefully carve everything that he would need for the spell. Then, he pricked his finger and focused on letting a drop of blood fall, then another, so that the gem was coated with the black metallic sheen.

A flood of mana activated the stone, and the blood seemed to be absorbed into the stone, leaving shimmering black runes behind. No matter how much Karl advanced the stone, and he was certain it should be at Monarch Rank now, the runes remained black on the polished oval emerald.

"Forgemaster. I have the spell stone for the first item."

Granite mounted the stone, and then used a System Skill to finish his carving, creating what looked like the skyline of the Eastern Border Mountains around the outside of the bracelet. Karl couldn't be sure, but it certainly looked similar to the view southeast of where he was stationed along the Frost Giant border.

Carving the inside of a bracelet was a real pain, but Karl had meticulously planned the layout, and all that he really wanted to add to this item was an increase in Skill Damage, and the Life Link skill from the stone, modified to specify that it would link to all of the wearer's constructs.

Ahmad was a Golem Mage, and the golems were much more durable than he was. But Karl was also careful to specify that the link only went one way. From the Golems to him, never from him to the Golems.

It seemed a bit simple, but as far as jewellery went, he didn't think that there was likely to be a better replacement.

The second one that Granite created was a city skyline of the Royal Palace from the University, or so Fizzspark insisted.

That should be a proper heirloom item for the Royal Family.

"Uhm, does anyone remember what class Prince Axel was?" He asked the others.

"Warrior." Granite replied with a shrug.

"Well, then that is easy. Warriors are easy to please."

Karl smiled and the Forgemaster chuckled.

Remi handed Karl another green stone, deliberately choosing ones that only one person would want in their team, and not elements that were more versatile.

Karl began to inscribe [Trollish Regeneration] on the stone, and Remi suddenly realized that green stones were actually quite useful.

They needed to give one to the bear, and the Lotus, and maybe even Tessa.

Karl put the same basic inscription for Skill Damage increase, but Trollish Regeneration was easier to link, so Karl used some extra space to add a physical strength buff before boosting the power level.

The material appeared to be somewhat translucent, and when Karl inscribed it, the whole bracelet glowed with red light in the background, highlighting the outline of the Royal Palace like early morning dawn.

"Excellent work. Now those are proper gifts. Even if they never wear them, we don't have to be ashamed of our present." Forgemaster Granite insisted.

Karl nodded in agreement. "What do you say we all go to the Palace now? The guest area is nearly empty, so we can find spots for everyone before the other visitors start to show up.

There will be all sorts of chaos with a new King's coronation and with whatever advancement party that they're going to have for Totem Lord Ahmad."

Othello looked up at the ceiling. "Well, it should be safe enough to go out there now. It's a shame we can't use the train, but everything collapsed, so we can't get to it, and we will have to walk across the city."

Chapter 730 Plenty Of Beds

Once they had everyone to the surface, Karl realized that making it all the way across the city was going to be easier said than done. Everything was destroyed, and while they were in the middle of a park, Karl could already smell the death mixed with the fresh rain. Most of the city was levelled, and the civilian casualty rates must have been horrific.

Othello noticed his unease and patted his shoulder. "There was an emergency alarm at the start of the fight. Casualties won't be too bad, I don't see any smoke signals from breached civilian emergency shelters."

Karl didn't even know that was a thing. But in a city that expected disasters or attacks, it did make sense to get everyone who couldn't take a hit out of the way.

The buildings could, eventually, be replaced. Well, most of them. Rebuilding the University and its labs was not going to be an easy feat, even after they had dug through all of the hazardous materials and damaged experiments to remove the rubble.

Fortunately for them, there were no major injuries, and everyone was in good shape for a long walk. Well, Remi was carrying Fizzspark, as the Gnome's legs were very short. But the others were capable of a brisk walk.

The bodyguards surrounded the convoy of researchers, with Othello and her team in the lead, followed by Remi, and Karl in the rear with the Guardian.

The dust had mostly settled after the rainfall, and an eerie silence had fallen over the city after the enemy had retreated.

Karl could sense, and sometimes see, Elites in the distance. But with Othello leading their group, the others recognized them as friendly right away.

Even with a decent walking pace, and minimal damage to the road they were walking down, it still took them three quarters of an hour to walk from the lab to the Palace's servants entrance. The Palace itself was on a hill, and the servants entered from the bottom levels after passing through the gates in the outer walls. The entrance was heavily guarded, and Karl waved as he recognized Guard Captain Scruggs among the soldiers on duty.

"Guard Captain, this is Overlord Othello and her team, as well as the researchers from my lab at the University. It appears that our facility was one of the targets today, and the University has been destroyed. Would it be possible to get suites for everyone?" Karl asked, raising his voice from the rear of the group.

The Captain sighed.

"We're already being flooded with requests, thanks to the damage in the city. But if you're willing to share space with the Overlord and her friends, we can find room for the others in the lower visitor quarters."

Othello nodded. "That works well enough for me. We will sort out sleeping quarters when we arrive. Karl, bring the whole team with us until we can get rooms sorted out for everyone. They will need to be kept abreast of developments."

Guard Captain Scruggs, if possible, do not put the others too far away. If you do, the acolytes will drive you crazy trying to get to the leaders."

The Guards brought out a haggard looking maid, and gave her some quiet instructions. She nodded, then gestured for Karl and the others to follow her.

"I will deliver Monarch Karl and the Overlord's team to their suite first, then we will find quarters for everyone else nearby. Unfortunately, all of the Noble Suites are booked, but we have some other quarters available that are nicer than bunking you all in a room in the servant's quarters." She explained in a dry tone.

One of the Blue Dragon acolytes laughed at the thought. The Servants' quarters in the palace were likely more luxurious than their rooms in the Cathedral Library's residences.

Not only were the rooms simple in nature, there were usually so many books and random items packed into them that you could hardly move from the door to the bed.

There were only twelve researchers in total, not an excessive number, excluding the five acolytes and the green dragon cleric. If they could find decent rooms, then this would practically be a vacation for them, as there was neither a forge nor a woodworking shop here in the Palace.

Halfway to the suite, they were joined by Melanie, Karl's assigned maid here in the Palace. She silently stepped up beside him, then produced a wine skin and a stack of plastic cups.

"Beverage? I heard that there is heavy damage to the city after the attack, so your mouth might be dry." She whispered.

Karl nodded, and the maid began to pour drinks for the group, starting with him.

The scent from the large soft bag was not wine, but fruit juice. Better for refreshment, but stored in a soft bag slung over her shoulder, with a push button on the cap for easy pouring.

The closer that they got to the suite, the more guards they were seeing, and Karl could hear a lot of chatter from the area ahead.

"Did something happen in the suite?" Karl quietly asked the maid.

"One minor issue involving a traitor. No injuries that I'm aware of, but the entire guest wing guard contingent is gathered nearby, except those on patrol and on courtyard duty." She explained.

They arrived at the suite a few minutes later, and Othello whistled in appreciation. "All this room for the five of you? That's not even half full without shared bedrooms, and I know that most of you probably are bedfellows." She joked.

Karl shrugged. "While that is true, and it's much more space than we need, I believe your team is much less cuddly than mine."

Othello's teammates snorted in amusement.

"Can we trade? We will share rooms with your team." One of the warriors joked.

Ophelia gave him a dangerous smile. "I don't think that you thought this one through. I sleep in Werebear form."

That left the clerics and the mage, but one of them was likely involved with Karl. Unless he was sharing his bed with the Void Badger.

"I think that there should be enough room for everyone here. I believe the servant quarters are taken by the maids, but if the researchers aren't too particular, I believe that we can make just one suite work."

Melanie cleared her throat. "Actually, there is an entire personal guard dorm at the end of the hall. We've just been using it because the beds are more comfortable than the standby room."

She swung a painting on one wall and revealed a small room with two triple rack cots and no window, but a small magical light on the ceiling.

Karl frowned. "I think we can still make this work. What are the other rooms like? The ones on the ladies' side."

"Two large beds, two dressers and vanity stations with an ensuite privy with a shower. Very much like a standard hotel room.

If we put your sleeping group in one of the large rooms and Lady Othello in another, that leaves five of the seven double rooms open, and one of the larger. Or did you want to change rooms and keep the segregated wings?"

Karl shook his head. "Free for all is fine."

That was a signal for the others, and the maids quickly moved to block the two rooms that the ladies had been using. "I'm at the end of that hall." Karl informed Othello, who looked in the first room and nodded with satisfaction.

"That works for me. Why don't we put the Forgemaster and Chief Engineer in the room between us? Or do they have someone they prefer to share with?"

Fizzspark shrugged. "I'm fine with that. Granite doesn't snore."

The researchers had gone all the way down the hall, and Karl could hear them laughing in the far room, where the maids had been sleeping.

"There are bunks for like two dozen people here. We're not even close to short on beds. Plus, it has a divider." Someone shouted from the dorm. Karl shrugged. "Well, if they are happy, it's good. The maids can share one of the other bedrooms if they're not returning to their own beds. I won't blame them if they don't want to be alone for a few days after all this chaos."

The maids silently cheered at the upgrade, as the standby rooms were awful. Even if the four sleeping shared double beds, they had more space in a real room.

It took a few minutes of shuffling, but eventually all the rooms were filled, with the male researchers taking the dorm and the ladies of the research team sharing a pair of rooms.