

Beast Master 731

Chapter 731 Looking Good

It took a few minutes for the changes to sink in, but once Dana finally got a good look at Karl, she was stuck staring at him in shock.

"You changed. Did something weird happen? Not that I mind, this is a much better look than super muscled. But it's a rapid change." She asked.

Thor and Rae already knew, but they hadn't warned anyone. Or, at the very least, they hadn't warned Dana.

"The extra bulk was from a new skill that hadn't properly activated. [Bestial Form] is that same sort of massively muscled." Karl explained.

Dana smiled, and Lotus ran over with an expectant look. She was not missing the grand reveal.

Karl activated the skill, and Dana gave him a secret smile while Lotus clapped and cheered.

"Now we have a tiger and a bear. Nap time will be spectacular." The Nature Priestess cheered.

The others had more subdued reactions, but some of the guards had conflicted expressions. Built so wide that your shoulders brushed both sides of a door frame was a life goal for a few of the more muscular ones. Nobody got past you in a hallway if you took up the whole hallway. Being massive was the ultimate passive defensive build.

Karl was going to settle in and watch a movie, but the excitement level in the suites was too high, and even Overlord Othello was eager to see him keep working on the project that had been disrupted with the destruction of the labs.

But that reminded Granite of one important oversight. "Should we have destroyed the Ghostfire Forges before we left?" He asked.

Karl shook his head. "No, I think that they will make a new entrance to the lab soon, and then you will want to have your forges intact. We sealed the roof with earth magic when we left, so it's not going to fill with water or anything, and most of the spells are still online."

That was enough to assure the workers that they weren't permanently unemployed, and with heavy encouragement, Karl sat and brainstormed Runic Inscription ideas with the Acolytes and the workers from the lab all through the afternoon. They only stopped long enough for dinner, and then called it a night when it got dark outside.

The Acolytes had all been taught the [Talisman] spell, which would let them create a paper version of a spell that they knew. But it could also be used for more creative magical effects, such as a custom rune string.

They had quickly mastered the basics, such as locking a door shut with the talisman when it had no lock, and creating a barrier of silence to prevent eavesdropping.

But a [Talisman] didn't have to be paper. They could also create a single use wooden or other type of Talisman. It was only the temporary nature of the spell that made paper the best idea. For the Acolytes, it only lasted a few hours after activation. For Karl, the spell had lasted half the day. However, that meant neither was suitable for engraving on a permanent object, and none of them had mastered the art of simplifying runes to make Runecrafting as easy as creating a Talisman.

Karl suspected that the simplified nature and reliance on the caster's will was the reason they were temporary, and that it wouldn't be possible to make them permanent. But they had already been able to get a good grasp of the spell's possibilities, and using the Runic Language was much more compact than writing in common.

Just after dark, a messenger came from the Royal Family. "Elites, Nobles and gathered employees of the Crown. The Coronation ceremony has been moved up. King Axel will be crowned by the Queen Dowager tomorrow at noon. Please be in attendance.

Also, attendance at breakfast has been requested for the Elites. Not for the King, but for Totem Ahmad, who will be arriving in the morning." The messenger announced.

Then he handed them a formal announcement card, addressed to the residents of their suite as a group.

That was a change. From what Karl had heard during his brainstorming session today, the ceremony was normally exclusive to the ones closest to the King, and then there would be seven days of public parties which he would attend, so the people could see him. Or her, if the new leader was a Queen.

This was incredibly quick, though. Especially with the city mostly destroyed, and heavy damage to some portions of the Royal Palace. But perhaps they wanted to get it out of the way so that the new King could focus on fixing things. Bright and early the next morning, Melanie tapped at the door to wake Karl up. Not that it was necessary. Lotus and the other Nature Cleric had been experimenting with new coffee blends since before dawn, and they had enlisted the Blue Dragon Acolytes as their taste testers.

Few beings could sleep through that.

Karl put on a casual outfit of slacks and polo shirt made by Rae, then gathered both teams of Elites and headed for the dining room, where Ahmad was waiting for them.

Being a new Totem Rank Mage, it wouldn't do to keep him waiting. Plus, Karl had a gift for him.

The Catman's ears perked up when they entered, and Karl smiled at his excitement.

"Lord Ahmad, it's an honour to get a breakfast invite." Othello greeted him with a slight bow, which Karl copied with a wink that made the mage laugh.

"I've known the two of you for how long now? No need to stand on ceremony. Welcome everyone. I wanted to see you all before the ceremony, and I have some news for you after." He explained.

Karl nodded and patted him on the shoulder to transfer [Meteor Swarm] the combination spell that he had modified for the staff originally intended to be his gift.

Then he held out the bracelet with the [Life Link] gem on it.

"A combined effort between myself and the research team. Congratulations on your advancement."
Ahmad slid a magical bracelet off one wrist and put the new one on with a surprised smile as it bonded, allowing him to see the stats on it.

"This is... amazing. Life Link to my Golems? All of them, it seems. Now that's a cheat code for a Mage.

And the extra skill power as well. I have never seen a Monarch Ranked created item before, but if they're all at this level, I can understand the context behind the news I have for you much more clearly.

But that's for after the ceremony. First, let's eat."

Chapter 732 Coronation Begins

Breakfast took nearly to lunch with all the interruptions and people showing up to talk to the ranking Elites.

After the first hour, everyone but Karl, Othello and Ahmad managed to excuse themselves. The Monarchs with Othello's team didn't make it far before they were caught by someone with propositions or a history with them.

But at least they got to try.

The Coronation was exactly at noon, so Ahmad ended up leading them directly to a VIP box in the throne room, above floor level. The rest of the teams would be in the crowd below, and Karl spared a moment of sympathy for the Guards who had to maintain security with so many active skills in one room.

After the recent events, nobody who had the power would agree to go without defensive spells. Especially not here in the Throne Room, where the resident members of the Royal Family were killed.

The cause hadn't been officially announced, but both Rae and Niall were certain nobody went in or out. Even the guards outside the door survived the battle.

Niall had questioned them, but the door remained barred from the inside, and they hadn't heard anything thanks to the silencing spells on the Throne Room.

Ahmad smiled as Karl extended [Eternal Lightning] over him. A Totem was nearly impervious to the attacks of those below his Rank, but activating a Totem Ranked barrier would be an incredibly oppressive force for the unawakened humans in attendance, as well as most of the Elites.

Trumpets began to play a marching tune, and the room fell silent.

King Axel looked exhausted, but his back was straight, and his expression was grim as he entered the room with a pair of familiar Overlords walking behind him.

One was Overlord Drake, who had been travelling with him when Karl first met them, and the other was a female Bishop from the Church that Karl had seen multiple times before, but never officially met.

The King stepped up in front of the throne, and his grandmother came out with the crown on a pillow.

Then, the silence of the room was shattered when King Axel extended his hand and led the Bishop to the throne on his left. The Queen's Throne.

Ahmad whistled softly. "Oh, things are going to get spicy now. The King has always been a secular force in the nation, but it appears the rumours about King Axel's love life were true. He has taken a Bishop as his Queen."

Karl didn't even pretend to understand the politics, but they made a cute couple. Both were in their late twenties, so they both would be considered prodigies of the Elite Program, assuming they were both awakened that way. While Karl was distracted, the speech by the elder Royal had begun, and Karl snapped back to attention partway through.

My dear grandson, it is with great pride and admiration that I address you on this momentous occasion. You have shown extraordinary courage, wisdom, and compassion in your ascension to the throne. Your father would be proud of the man you have become - a leader who understands the importance of serving others, a monarch who recognizes the weight of his responsibilities.

As we bid farewell to an era and usher in a new one, let us remember that our kingdom has faced trials before, and each time, we have emerged stronger. The loss of your father was a devastating blow, but it is now up to you, King Axel, to lead us through these dark times and into a brighter future.

"... You King Axel, beloved of the Gods. With the admiration of the entire nation, from every region, every caste of society and every Rank of Elites who defend our sovereignty. It is that unwavering spirit that makes you the most suited to stand here in this hallowed chamber today."

Karl wondered if there were some form of contest for the throne that he wasn't aware of. But then realized he really should be paying attention to the old Royal's speech. "As we bid farewell to an era and usher in the age of the Elites, let us remember that our Kingdom has faced trials and betrayals before. Each time, we have emerged victorious and stronger than ever. So shall it be again in these trying times.

The loss of the King was a blow that devastated the hearts of the nation, but there is no doubt in my heart that The King will once again lead us through these dark times to a brighter future than any could have foreseen.

In this time of sorrow and change, let us be reminded of the words of our ancestors. 'The strength of a nation lies in its unity. The power of a king is measured by his ability to serve his subjects.' May you, King Axel, embody these principles as you lead us forward.

As we move forward toward vengeance and retribution, the nation stands behind The King and supports him with all our might. The path will not be easy, but with Faith and determination, the Golden Dragon Nation will overcome any challenge put in our path."

King Axel knelt and the Queen Dowager placed the crown upon his head. From beside him, the new Queen raised her voice.

"To King Axel, may he reign forever!"

The room burst into shouts and cheers, accompanied by a stomping that shook the stone of the throne room.

The entire coronation ceremony had taken less than fifteen minutes, there was nearly no pageantry, and while the Throne Room was decorated, it was no more than would have been done for a Royal Banquet. There simply hadn't been time.

But to the new King and the Elites in attendance, it didn't matter. The old Queen had been right. What was coming was vengeance and retribution on those who would dare to launch such an audacious attack on the nation.

Karl could hear the murmurs among the Elites, plans to exact revenge, sharing evidence of the specific forces that had been found dead in the Capital after the battle. None would escape their wrath.

Chapter 733 Depths of Truth

Once the coronation was over, Ahmad took Karl's hand and used an air spell to deposit them both, along with Overlords Othello and Niall, in front of the throne.

A few other Overlords were in attendance, and they were filling the path to the throne behind them, while everyone else waited for their turn.

{Take out your gift for the King. You did make one, right? Not just something for me?} Ahmad asked with a System message.

{Yes, I made him a custom bracelet with Trollish Regeneration on it and some warrior buffs.}

Ahmad was the first to the throne, where he refrained from taking a knee, but bowed deeply before the King.

"Your Majesty, on behalf of the Elites, I present Monarch Karl with a custom crafted gift to begin your reign."

Oh, that was devious. It saved the rest of the Elites from needing to turn over a particularly valuable gift of their own. They could rely on the one given on behalf of the Elites as a group. Karl moved forward at the Totem's direction and bowed in the military manner, left knee down so that he could easily get at his blade if necessary. Not that he was openly wearing a weapon. There was no need with an Inventory.

Karl held out the bracelet on a small black pillow that got nearly as much attention as the actual gift. Rae had made it of her silk, and it was a precious treasure on its own.

But once he saw the bracelet on the pillow, the new King's eyes went wide, and he quickly picked it up to place it on his wrist.

That wasn't protocol, he should have recognized the gift, and then had a maid place it to the side. But King Axel surged with power as he put it on and [Trollish Regeneration] took effect, along with the other buffs that Karl had put on the item.

"This is a most wonderful gift. The Crown thanks the Elites for their generosity."

Then he motioned for a maid to take the pillow, and Karl hid his smile.

They were giving him two gifts today, it seemed.

The four of them stepped aside, and Karl noted the relief on the faces of a number of Overlords behind him. Now they only needed to give something worthy of being a personal gift to the King, a much lower standard than trying to come up with something that would be noticed and prove goodwill from King Axel's fellow Elites.

Mostly, they were giving him dungeon gold and magical gems. A practical gift to help rebuild the Royal City of Wenmouth.

Such gifts were considered a standard form of goodwill, and the city was going to need a lot of them. But Karl did notice a few of the mages had scrolls in their hands.

{Work Pledges. They are volunteering to help rebuild the city with Earth Magic. Those are mostly mages who have a link to the city.} Ahmad explained with a System Message as he led Karl away.

Karl gestured to the other members of the team that he was fine, and then asked Rae and Thor to hand out treasures to the others to give to the King.

Rae made small bags and pillows, since the King liked the pillows so much. By the time they were all done, he would have a whole pile of them for his bed.

Ahmad led Karl to an extremely fancy suite not far from his own, then dismissed all the maids and put four layers of barriers over the room.

Karl double-checked it with Soul Sight, and with all of his various vision abilities.

"It appears clear to me. I don't sense anything living within your barriers." Karl explained.

Ahmad nodded in relief, then sighed as he sat down.

"Well, I suppose that I should start from the beginning of this shit show. First off, the King was assassinated by one of his brothers. But what the idiot didn't know was that the magical device he obtained wasn't targeted, and it killed everyone in the room. No, that's not the start. Recent events in the war with the Giants have raised concerns in the other nations of the Continent. Firstly, because the Archbishop's power is beginning to fade. There is a successor among the bishops who is likely to gain enlightenment soon, but possibly not soon enough. So, the other nations all saw that as an opportunity to split our territory between them.

Strangely, Newbon and the Divine Beast Nation sat it out, but there were forces from every other nation in the Capital. All three Giant Nations, every human nation, even a few Overlord Rank Divine Beasts from the Wilds came to join the chaos and attempt to claim parts of the south as their own afterwards.

It was my Ascension that prevented the complete collapse. The other Totems didn't dare to push their luck when I was here alongside the Archbishop. No matter how bad his health is, he's not dead yet, and between us, we're one of the strongest forces on the continent.

But on a more personal note, I don't think you are aware just how much danger you were in."

Karl waited to see if Ahmad would continue, then explained what he knew.

"I was informed by Overlord Niall that there was a rather large bounty on my head. I personally dealt with a total of four Overlords from two different forces who had come for me."

Ahmad nodded. "And that is the root of the problem. Your powers are viewed as too great of a threat to be allowed to roam free. I don't know how, but it has become common knowledge among the Totems that you have the ability to elevate a skill above your Rank.

When you hit Overlord, that means you will have a chance to elevate a skill to the Totem Rank. And they are not willing to allow that to happen. If you could threaten the Totems, that would be as good as a third Totem in the Golden Dragon Nation, and nothing short of a declaration of war in the minds of the other nations.

You see, there is a reason that each nation only has a few Overlords and a single Totem, two at most.

When blessed ones, the ones that can threaten the balance of power, are found on this continent, they are either killed or exiled.

That is what the Totems are demanding now. That you are sent off the continent, or that I turn you over to them for execution.

Obviously, that second option isn't going to happen, but keeping you active on the battlefield will not be an option either.

Now, I get what the Archbishop was hoping for, that you would advance quickly enough to replace him. But now that I have advanced, with a strong likelihood that a new Archbishop will advance when the old one passes, the timeline doesn't work.

But the two nations most likely to take you in also already have two Totems a piece. Newbon and the Divine Beast Nation both suggested that you be transferred to them, as an alternate solution."

Karl needed a few minutes to take that in.

The Archbishop wasn't really a people person, and he was somewhat aloof. But the Church had always sent Karl to wherever the greatest opportunity was, and now the reasoning began to make sense.

The Church knew there was a chance that every other nation would team up to try to kill him, but if he gained power fast enough, he could be protected until he was the Golden Dragon Nation's next totem.

But that had relied on the Archbishop being the only totem in the nation. Now that there was a thirty-year-old mage at the Totem Rank, with a century of likely good health in front of him, things were different.

Nobody was willing to risk the Golden Dragon Nation gaining an expansionist mindset with the power to back it up.

Chapter 734 Path Of Exile

Karl was slowly accepting that things were getting bad for his personal situation, but there were other concerns as well.

"So, what will we do? I know that you have the ability to Portal, and that should be enough for our purposes. If I'm sent away somewhere like the Neia Continent, what happens to the rest of my teammates? Are they going to become a target of the other nations thanks to all the damage that we did as a group?" He asked.

Ahmad sighed. "I can't guarantee that. I can put them under my protection, but I know that the Giants have a vendetta against them. The other nations don't view them as nearly as high of a threat level as they do you, but that might only be because you're there to dim their light. If you weren't around, then Dana, and likely both the Clerics, would be viewed as shocking prodigies for the speed that they are growing.

But if I'm right, they probably wouldn't be growing as quickly if you weren't there, so it might be a moot point."

Karl nodded. That made sense, as a lot of their combat power was the beasts, and the System seemed to reward acts of massive excess to a greater extent than the average soldiers.

"If I asked, and they agreed, would it be possible for us all to go into exile together? I know it would be a lot to ask of them, but we do work very well as a team."

Ahmad frowned. "It might be possible, but asking an entire team to give up their lives to join you in an indeterminate exile is big. It's not a year or two. You may never be able to return, and the only likely scenario that involves you coming back is one of the nations losing their Totem Rank Guardian, and you being the first one back with the ability to claim it.

Now, those odds aren't zero, as you would have me on your side supporting you. But there are likely to be other exiled geniuses who might have reached Totem Rank, with the desire to return.

I don't really know. There are countless details that I haven't caught up on yet since I advanced.

But there is also the matter of where you will be sent. Neia is a possibility. There are more than enough Overlords and Totems there to not cause a major disturbance when you advance. However, there is also a push to have you sent to the Dragon Isles. It's actually four subcontinents grouped together, but the danger level there is immense, to put it kindly.

The Dragon Isles have the highest mana concentration of anywhere on the planet, and I am not aware of any human nations at all. It's all monsters, dragons and subdragons.

There will likely be humans, but as slaves. I don't know how your team will handle that, or if they will be in danger of slavers during their stay. In fact, we don't really know much about the Dragon Isles at all. They're not particularly welcoming to outsiders of the power level to safely travel around them.

The Dragon Clerics might be alright, as they are slowly becoming dragonkin. But you do have two humans in your team."

That could definitely change the plans. He wouldn't want to put them in that sort of danger, and needing to rescue the Princess from slave caravans was a bit too cliché.

On the other hand, Karl felt like he had always been with his group, and he was reluctant to leave them behind, even if he knew that he should, and that his selfish desire for companionship was likely to ruin everyone's life.

"Would you have time to explain the dangers to them for me? I have never even heard of the Dragon Isles before, and I know precisely zero about them. If it is Neia, I do know a bit about how it was ten thousand years ago, but nothing current." Karl asked.

Ahmad nodded. "I don't have a problem with that. After all, you did give me that most wonderful meteor swarm skill plus the bracelet.

That skill might seem like a trivial thing to you, just a modified meteor spell. But when it's used by a Totem Rank Mage, it can wipe an entire city off the map in a matter of seconds. Something like mutually assured destruction in spell form, as I can cast it through a portal anywhere on the Continent."

When he planned to use it that way, the [Meteor Swarm] spell was absolutely terrifying. Threaten Ahmad, and he could just take three seconds to wipe your capital off the map out of annoyance? That should keep anyone from seriously challenging his leadership of the Golden Dragon Nation.

But that sort of thinking was probably a large part of the reason that Karl was being exiled in the first place.

There was a disturbance in the energy of the area, and Karl preventatively prepared [Nullify], while Ahmad frowned at the attempt to intrude through his barriers.

"It seems that the other leaders are impatient. I will call your teammates to us, and you can decide as a group. But you might have to do it quickly if we're going to avoid a fight."

Karl nodded. "Let them in. Unless they're willing to go all out in an enclosed space, I'm not particularly concerned about a few eavesdroppers."

In his mind, Cara laughed. Between the two of them, they could just spam [Nullify] while the Golem Cat slapped the intruders around like disobedient children.

The thought made Remi laugh, but Thor agreed with Ahmad. They enjoyed causing trouble far too much. Letting them be humbled a bit might be good for his sisters.

Ahmad let down his barriers, and a group of six Spellblades in different coloured robes, plus the General from Newbon appeared through a portal.

Karl waved to the one Totem that he knew, and the Naga General smiled back before shaking Ahmad's hand. "Totem Lord Ahmad, have you made your nation's prodigy aware of the situation?" One of the Spellblades asked.

"Indeed I have. We are just waiting for a few others to arrive. They may wish to enter exile together."

The foreign mage gave a vicious chuckle. "Oh, I don't think that they will be so enthusiastic when they hear the verdict."

Ahmad nodded at Karl. That was what he had expected. It would have been better if there was time for them to discuss in more detail, but the others appeared impatient to send the young prodigy away.

Chapter 735 Sent Away

The rest of Karl's team entered, then stopped at the door when they felt the power of the gathered visitors.

One of the mages turned to them, and his evil smirk turned to an honest smile. "Well, this is unexpected. Yes, this works very well. I approve of sending them all together." He announced.

Dana turned to Karl, who motioned for them to move to a side room.

"I will keep it short because they're getting impatient.

I am being exiled as a threat to the power balance. They haven't said where to yet, but it's unlikely to be somewhere nice, and the danger level will be high enough that if I do reach Totem Rank, it won't even make a ripple in their local power balance.

The problem is that it's almost certainly not going to be somewhere human-friendly. You all have the choice if you want to go with me, and possibly never come back, or remain here under the protection of Totem Lord Ahmad."

Karl couldn't remember if that part had been explicitly stated, but he was certain that the mage could be counted on for at least that much. Dana understood right away what the danger was, and Ophelia wasn't far behind her. Both looked vaguely horrified, but Tessa had a placid look, as if she had made peace with her decision, whatever it was. In contrast, Lotus looked outraged.

"You're not taking all the beasts and leaving. Nope, no way. If you go, I go."

Yeah, that was about what he should have expected.

Ophelia sighed. "You know it's impossible for me to say no now. If you had left without saying anything, I would have made peace with your choice. But given the option, I can't just abandon my friends."

Karl patted her on the shoulder. "I know, and I apologize for putting this sort of pressure on you all. I also understand if you all want to wait here for me to return one day. It's not like I will be alone, and Lotus will still have a cuddle bear even if you all stay here."

Lotus calmed down a bit when she realized that. One cuddle bear wasn't a total loss. Plus, Ophelia was probably the most risk-averse one in the group when she wasn't raging.

Not that it was a high standard.

Dana straightened a bit and nodded to herself. "If it's not human-friendly, we can use disguise spells. I'm coming with you."

Tessa nodded, as did Ophelia, which left Lotus to shrug. "I guess we're going on an adventure, then." The Nature Priestess agreed.

They walked back into the main room with grim looks, and the Totem Rank Naga General of Newbon nodded happily. The eldest of the Spellblades nodded politely to the group before he began to speak.

"Prodigy Karl and friends. We have decided on the location of your exile. We have signed a magical contract not to interfere with your lives after you arrive, and to keep your location secret from anyone not involved in this negotiation.

You will be sent to the Kingdom of Drodh in the Dragon Isles. It is a primarily demon inhabited nation, with a much higher population density than anywhere on this continent. As per the General's insistence, you will be deposited on the outskirts of a city to give you a chance to understand the local culture before looking for a more permanent home. In order to make the story of your disappearance more compelling, we will not allow you time to gather any personal items, and you will be leaving right now." The Spellblades worked together, and quickly opened a portal that showed some sort of altar on the other side, then motioned for Karl to enter. "It is considered rude to hold the portal more than thirty seconds at a public station. Now, go." He complained.

Karl did a quick double check to ensure everyone was in their space, so they didn't get left behind on the wrong continent, and then activated [Bestial Form] and stepped through the portal.

If he had been thinking ahead, he would have tried to teach the others that skill in advance, but Ophelia had already changed to Werebear form, the same as she did in Newbon.

Karl heard the startled sound the mages made when he transformed with his [Bestial Raiment] armour spell active, but the guards on the other side of the portal didn't seem bothered by Karl's appearance.

They were also all Overlords, and all demons with large black leathery wings.

"Welcome to the city of Drodh. The entry fee is one silver coin each." The guard blocking the path toward the city announced.

Karl took out a gold coin and flipped it to the guard, who took out five silver coins and handed them to Dana, who had just come through the portal.

The others followed close behind, with Ophelia going last, right before the Portal closed and another opened to let a group of Demons pulling large carts through.

In front of them were masses of simple wood buildings, looking both aged and hastily constructed at the same time. It appeared that the portal area was in an outlying, impoverished area past the city walls.

At least, they all hoped that it was going to get better once they got in the city itself.

Karl brought up the System Interface as he walked toward the city, away from the busy portal. Nearly everyone here had a name visible above their head, showing that they had a class from the System. Warriors made up nine out of ten, but there were Rogues, Mages and a few Shamans visible as well. Clerics were rare, and Karl hadn't seen any yet, but there were a few other colours that he didn't immediately recognize.

There didn't seem to be any restriction on skill use in the city, other than damaging spells, and most residents had some sort of defensive magic active. So, Karl brought out the Guardian to spread [Void Body] to the whole group, along with the [Eternal Lightning] barrier. That should be safe enough for now.

Everyone was giving them a wide berth, despite the busy street. That seemed a bit odd, as there was no shortage of Overlord Rank Demons and Monsters in the crowd. It wasn't as if he were an overwhelming force here, and even the weaker adult residents were mostly Commanders.

Then Karl realized what the issue was. Everyone had a system active, and when a stranger in a black and white tabard bowed to him as they passed, it reminded Karl to see what was visible from his own status.

{Monarch Karl} In the deep red colour with black trim distinctive to the Packmaster.

{Grand War Champion of the Darklight Host}

He was wearing a Guild War Champion tabard openly in the city.

Chapter 736 Laughing Dragon Inn

When they turned down a narrow alley, Karl refreshed his armour, and sighed in relief when the tabard vanished, replaced with simple black dragon scale and metal plate armour.

That also deactivated the Guild Tag on his name, but when they came out the other side of the alley, they were still getting a clear zone around them. Lotus pointed down the street. "Oh, an Inn. Should we get a room and see what we can learn at the tavern on the main floor? If nothing else, we can try the local food."

Strangely, for all the power of the residents, and the artistry of the stone construction of the majority of the buildings inside the city walls, the city of Drodh appeared to be on a nearly primitive level. There were beast drawn wagons in the streets, no sign of technology, and the interior of the Inn, visible through the open doors, used magical lamps, and smelled of wood smoke.

It wasn't strong, and a few seconds later, Karl located the source. There was a magic-powered smoker outside the Inn, which must be burning wood for the authentic smoked flavour.

So, perhaps the city wasn't as primitive as it looked, even if most of the buildings were simple wood and plaster or stone block constructs with slate tile or thatch roofs.

The Inn, labelled as the Laughing Dragon, was simple inside, but immaculately clean.

Karl led them to the counter, and the Innkeeper bowed politely. "Lord Rakshasa, how may I be of service today?"

As Karl recalled, that was a type of tiger demon. That must be what people here thought he was in this form.

"A room, or rooms for five. Then dinner and drinks for the evening." Karl replied, hoping that whatever the System translated his voice to sound like in the Demon's language wasn't too strange.

"Of course. Did you need to deposit anything in the rooms before dinner?" Karl shook his head. "No, but we will check them first, if you don't mind."

The Innkeeper motioned for a serving girl, who had small wings on her back and curled horns on her head, with an adorable little heart - shaped tip to her tail, to lead them up to the rooms.

"So, what brought you to the laughing dragon? I know we're a bit off the beaten path, but I am certain you will enjoy your stay." The barmaid asked.

Karl chuckled. "Well, we took a shortcut to get out of traffic for a moment, and then our Nature Priestess saw your sign. What could be a better omen than a happy dragon?" The Demoness shook her head in dismay. There were many reasons that a Dragon might laugh, and the answer was rarely happiness. In her experience, dragons tended to be cruel and egotistical creatures.

But there were two Dragon Clerics in the guest's group, and those sorts of Dragonkin tended to have something of a hero worship complex for the full-blooded dragons, and an even more severe one for the dragon gods.

The room was simple with bunk beds for six people, all oversized for Demons, who were often over two metres tall. "That will be perfect, thank you." Karl announced once he had searched the room's corners and windows with a quick visual scan.

"Was there something particular you were looking for?" The barmaid asked.

"Rodent signs. I can see their footprints, filthy little creatures." Karl explained.

The Demoness did a double take, then nodded in understanding. If you could see that there had previously been rats running across the floor, it must be incredibly hard to find a good hotel. But here in Drodh there were enough Demons with the ability to create repulsion charms that rodent infestations were only for the lowest of the low-class establishments.

Karl took out a notepad from his inventory and scrawled a few runes on it. If he did it right, that should be the simplest of security Talismans. It would inform him of the basic description of anyone who entered the room, then fall inactive. Just enough to know if the room was not secure while they were away.

"What sort of charm is that?" The Demoness asked as Karl finished, her tail instinctively reaching toward the paper.

"Well, I had considered some fun protective charms for the room. You know, Divine Lightning, or uncontrollable orgasms. But I went for a simple intruder detection charm." Karl joked.

The Demon froze, her eyes going huge as she stared at Karl.

"Don't joke. Can you really do that?" She gasped.

"Create a protection charm? It's right there." She shook her head. "No, uncontrollable Orgasms. I would pay very well if you could make one of those for me to... donate to a friend."

Lotus burst into a giggling fit. "Can you imagine the aftermath? Wait, it's not a male friend, is it? Because Eww. So messy."

Dana sighed and bonked the cleric on the head. "We're getting sidetracked. But yes, he probably can. I don't think that we should be making a reputation for pranks and trouble making on our first day in the city."

The Demoness stared at her, confused. "Oh, I guess I didn't explain clearly. My friend is also a Succubus, and her husband is a little, you know. Not talented."

Now Karl was the one confused. Was this some sort of medical treatment she was asking for? Fine, he would make it, and then if there were problems, he would deny everything.

Karl wrote the Talisman, and heard a faint laughing voice in the back of his mind, not from one of his beasts. He pointedly ignored the divine sign that he was about to do something dumb, and handed over the Talisman.

"It's single use, but it should last a few hours. Remember to focus on the target when you use it. Or when your friend uses it."

The barmaid tucked it in her inventory and gave him a happy thumbs up. "Let's head back down to the tavern. I will cover your first round of drinks."

Now they were making progress. And new friends, Karl discovered once the other Demons in the tavern saw that the server was bringing them free drinks.

Making friends with the staff tended to make you friends with the regulars as well, and Karl's group was odd enough to get a lot of interest from the early afternoon crowd.

Chapter 737 Drinks With Demons

"So, Karl, was it? What brings you to Drodh? If you're transiting between ships, I am looking for a few more hands. Nobody minds an extra cleric or two on board, and it looks like your group can take care of themselves." One of the men, an aging Demon with one missing eye that still radiated curse damage, asked.

"Nah, we were thinking of going inland and finding somewhere comfortable to relax for a season." Karl replied with a shrug.

"Not comfortable in the city? Can't say that I blame you. But I always end up here for the Dungeon between voyages. You've got a good group for it with a mage and a Berserker plus two healers. It might be a bit dull, but it's a decent living if you sell off the excess loot.

A couple of extra gold coins for the month never goes wrong."

The man beside him, a lithe violet skinned demon with four arms, chuckled and tilted his chin to the kitchen.

"Never goes wrong, indeed. It goes here instead. Old Jared takes one run a month from here to the city of Lared, and when he's back at the end of the week, he goes to the dungeon and then drinks away his pay, hoping that Beth will give him a bit of attention."

The barmaid turned at the sound of her name, then realized that it was just mentioned in passing. The old sailor was old enough to be her grandfather, and contrary to popular belief, even a Succubus has standards.

The group around Karl started to tell tales of the dungeon, the city, the sailing routes off the coast, as Drodh was both the capital of the nation and a major trading port thanks to the fertile farm lands inland of them.

A few hours later, a whole team of guards came in and flopped down in seats, taking up half the room.

They had to be regulars, as the bartender started pouring before they had even finished adjusting themselves in their seats.

But Karl noticed that he pulled from a different keg, and whatever he was pouring them didn't smell nearly as good as the ale that Karl's team had been drinking.

The sailors were drinking wine and taking shots of Rum, but this new drink smelled almost rancid. The Captain of the guard team pounded down an entire pint of the drink, then motioned for another. "Having a rough day?" Beth asked, gently rubbing against his shoulder, which immediately relaxed the angry guard, whose eyes went vague under the effects of whatever hypnotic suggestion she had hit him with.

Now that was a useful skill for a waitress.

"The Ghol Regiment is back from their mission. Ten thousand strong, with a dozen warships, and no respect for the local guards. Can you believe that the city Governor let them take over our posts? Said that we weren't competent, and now we're all being sent for additional training." The Captain complained.

He was an Overlord, but most of his team were Monarchs, so they weren't on the weak side for basic law enforcement. At least, not based on the people Karl had seen in the city.

But the new Regiment must have earned themselves a lot of prestige.

Karl listened to the guards complaining about their lives for a while, then realized they were a temporary force, promoted from the army reserves to guard status. Not only were they being relieved of their posts, but they would return to reserve status, and their pay would be cut back to what it was before being activated.

They had a good reason to be bitter today.

But Karl learned a valuable bit of information about the city as well. Drodh had nearly a hundred and eighty thousand people living in it, mostly various sorts of Demons. Just like it was in Newbon, they freely mingled with various intelligent monster species, and magical beasts ran wild all over the wilderness areas.

You would have to get a way from the city to see much wildlife, as the farms were protective of their crops. However, it sounded like there were some incredibly dangerous beasts once you got too far from the major cities.

Cara was excited to meet them.

They also learned another fascinating fact. Drodh, both the city and the nation, was the original Orcish name for the region, though it had been centuries since the coastal regions were under Orcish control. There were still large Orc tribes inland, and majority Orcish cities, but while Drodh still held to a lot of hold traditions, it was definitely a demonic city these days.

After a half dozen rounds, the guards were starting to get morose, and Karl could sense that they were looking for a reason to lash out. Fortunately, there were a few tables of sailors between him and the guards. If the ladies were right next to them, things might have gone downhill quickly.

But Karl's luck was not with the guards today, and after a bit of an argument spilled out into the street, dozens of uniformed soldiers rushed in.

"Well, what do you know. Drunk and disorderly in public. Just what you would expect from a bunch of untrained reservists." The leader of the guard patrol began.

Karl sighed, and Tessa facepalmed as she realized what was about to happen.

The battle started out as an unarmed conflict between the guards and the soldiers. Then someone knocked over a freshly loaded table of drinks, and the Sailors were pulled in, throwing punches indiscriminately.

Beth appeared unconcerned by the chaos as she brought a tray of cheese and bread to Karl's table, along with a fresh pitcher of ale.

"I'm going to be cleaning for hours. But at least we get to close early." She joked as Karl watched half the tables get destroyed in the melee.

Lotus popped a cube of curiously blue cheese in her mouth. "I can help you fix the tables. If there's one thing that a Nature Cleric is good at, it's fixing wooden tables."

The barmaid laughed. "I would appreciate it. We have a repair amulet with a mending spell on it for the tables. We have to repair furniture at least twice a week."

Karl was out of his seat in a flash as a soldier came flying at their table.

He set the man down on the floor, and the soldier swung around, ready to continue the fight, until he looked up and saw Karl's face. He instantly turned and grabbed one of the sailors who had been knocked out, which let him drag the man out of the tavern.

Chapter 738 His Better Nature

Karl sat back down, and Old Jared, the one eyed sailor, laughed. "You should have seen his face. I think he might have wet himself when he realized he had run into you." The extremely drunk sailor laughed.

"I'm not that scary. I'm not even an Overlord." Karl reminded the sailor.

"Does that really matter, though? He's an Obsession Demon, and the tigers are known for their strength. You could likely rip his arms off and hurl the rest out the door from here."

The sailor was clearly on the verge of passing out from excessive drink, but Beth agreed, and even Ophelia was doing the mental calculation on whether you could throw someone out the door from here with the roof beams and the pillar in the way.

Beth smiled at Karl as she refilled his drink. "Plus, you can teleport."

To someone with normal eyesight, it really might look like he had teleported out of his chair. But Karl was actually just very fast.

After a few minutes, the soldiers had dragged almost everyone out of the tavern, leaving only a few tables along the wall still drinking.

The Innkeeper sighed and put up a closed sign on the door, which was still miraculously intact. Then he brought out a pair of brooms, and got to work cleaning up the mess with Beth starting at the other side, so the rubble could be swept out the door in the middle.

Lotus got up, a bit drunk, but fairly stable on her feet, and began fixing the legs back to the tables.

She wasn't trying too hard to match them to the right table, and if she got the wrong one, she would just regrow the leg until the table was steady.

It was actually quite efficient, and she had the tables all back upright before the mess was even swept up off the floor. Then she started on the stools, fixing them as she did a very Bohemian dance around the room, waving her hands like she was dancing to a song only she could hear.

The bartender picked up one of the chairs and shook it, then nodded in satisfaction.

"If they're not up to standard, you can just fix them the normal way." Karl called from across the room.

"I'm more worried that she might have made them too durable. The chairs are supposed to break instead of the skull that they're smashed over." The Innkeeper explained.

Ophelia winked at Karl. "You know, this place isn't half bad. I'm regretting this choice less by the minute."

Of course, the Berserker would approve of that plan. The only reason she didn't get involved was because she didn't know what it would take to get her back out of the brig, or county jail. Wherever it was that they took drunks after a fight in this city.

Once the bar was cleaned, and the rubble swept out the door, the Innkeeper changed the sign back to open. "It's still early, might as well give them a few hours. Sorry, Beth. No going home early tonight."

A few minutes after they reopened, a ridiculously buxom woman with long pointy ears and a tail just like Beth's with the same heart shaped tip came running in, excited about something.

She grabbed the smaller woman and shook her while smiling.

"Is it true? You are the one who found a talisman for Ramona? I can hear her from my room. They didn't even close the windows, and it's totally working."

Beth gently freed herself from her excited friend's grasp. "Yes, I found the spell, but it's a single use, not a long-term solution."

"Still, what sort of genius alchemist did you locate? Can we get more? Do they also do fertility charms?"

Lotus looked up. She did fertility charms. She did excellent fertility charms.

Dana sighed. "Why do I get the feeling that we're going to be getting into some sort of sketchy business venture?"

Karl shook his head. "No, I think that we will skip this one. At most, maybe we will let Lotus do a few Fertility charms."

The two demons came over, and Beth introduced her friend to them. "Sir Karl, this is midwife Musa. She runs a clinic in the Palace for Demons of the Royal Clans who have issues with fertility."

The older Succubus made a hurt look. "And again, she casually pretends she's not my daughter. But as a midwife, my job is to help brides with the little issues preventing an heir to the families from being born. I know how most species look at us, but in the name of medical science, I would appeal to your... never mind. I have money."

Tessa laughed and Dana poked Karl in the side. The demon had gotten halfway through the sentence, then decided that Karl probably didn't have anything resembling a kind nature or a sense of empathy.

"Well, we do have a Nature Cleric with us, and she can do a Fertility charm, but we're not going to be in the city forever. However, for the right price, I think that I can provide you with a magical item that will help. It won't be available until morning, though."

The midwife nodded. "I can wait. In fact, I will come back at breakfast, if it will be ready by then."

Karl nodded. "I think that should be possible."

Really, all he had to do was to carve a stone with the effect he wanted, then have Lotus cast [Blessed Item] and her fertility charm on it to give it the Nature God's blessing.

But for safety, he would make sure that you could only use the item on yourself. The potential for misuse was simply too high otherwise.

Just then, Karl sensed that someone had attempted to enter their room. The spell warned him that someone was attempting to force the door, as it just gave him a hint of their presence.

"One moment, someone is attempting to force their way into my room. I should go deal with that before we do anything else."

Chapter 739 A Charmed Life

Karl ran up the stairs with the Innkeeper right behind him. Getting caught breaking into a travelling Demon's hotel room was the sort of thing that got you disappeared, and there was a chance that this was one of his patrons.

Karl stopped at the top of the stairs and resisted the urge to laugh at the sight that greeted him. One very drunk sailor was using both hands to carefully insert the key for room number nine into the door for room number six. Then he cursed, kicking the door, and repeated the process when it didn't work.

That was what had triggered Karl's spell. He must have put his shoulder into it at some point, before he realized that it just wasn't working.

The Innkeeper rushed past Karl.

"Sir, is there an issue with the door? Here, let me check. Oh, see, that's the problem. You're holding it upside down. It's for room nine and this is room six. Follow me just over here, and there we go."

The Innkeeper escorted the drunk to bed, and the man was snoring before the Innkeeper had even closed the door.

"So sorry about that, Sir. It happens now and then."

Karl waved his hand, dismissing the man's concern. "It's fine. I thought it might be something serious, as we've had a few incidents in the past. You know how it can be, travelling with a whole group of lovely ladies."

The Innkeeper nodded in agreement. "Yeah, that Werebear has some gloss to her fur. I'd imagine that you'll have issues now and then with amorous suitors."

Strangely, he was right. It always seemed to be someone going after Ophelia that gave them relationship related issues.

But with the problem solved, Karl quickly recreated the talisman, and slapped it on the inside of the door to return to the tavern.

"False alarm." He informed the others as he returned to the main room, only to be grabbed by a desperate looking man in expensive clothes.

In the most literal sense. There was actual gold woven into the cloth.

"So sorry, Sir. Midwife Musa, you're needed back at the Palace. Oh, hello, Beth. Sorry that I can't stay. My wife has gone into labour." The man announced, then dragged the older Demoness out of the tavern.

"I like this place, it's lively." Ophelia laughed.

"Will you really make an item for my mom? I know it's rude to ask someone to work the day they arrive in the city, but we could really use it. The King just had triplet sons, and every single Clan Chief, Demon Noble and Monster Lord is trying to create an eligible bride for them. It's tradition that the Prince will pick a bride not more than two years younger than himself on his fourteenth birthday, and they will be married when she reaches eighteen. So, we currently have pandemonium in the maternity ward." Beth explained.

Lotus raised her glass in a cheer for the Demoness.

"Fluffy baby Demons!" The rather drunk Nature Cleric toasted, accompanied by Old Jared at the table beside them.

Karl sighed and relented. "I will make your mother an item to help with her work. It will be ready in the morning, and I will explain how to use it."

The Innkeeper rolled his eyes as the barmaid did a little happy dance. Fortunately, Karl's team and one drunk sailor were the only ones in the tavern.

It was starting to get dark, and the night crowd would be there soon to start drinking. But Karl had no intentions of still being downstairs when that happened.

It didn't take much to get the half drunk group up to the room, where the talisman informed him that he was the first to enter the room.

Rae was awake now, and planning to keep vigil from within her space unless something interesting happened to be nearby. There were powerful things in this city, and she didn't want to steal their food before she knew what they liked best. It was common sense for a Bloodbath Spider to let the strongest take the things they wanted first.

Unlike Karl, who could vaguely sense the power of the residents, she could clearly tell that there was at least one something stronger than a Totem in this city. There were Totems as well, and those were dangerous, but whatever that last thing was, it was bad news.

She suspected that it was a Demon, but her genetic memory didn't have a lot of information about them, and it didn't feel like any of the others they had met today.

The city of Drodh appeared to be a well regulated place, though. Once the sun went down, and the last of the drinking crowds went home around midnight, the city streets were silent, with magical lamps on each corner, giving pedestrians a sense of safety.

Many of the demons were nocturnal by nature, Rae noticed. Though they were primarily active during the day, and the city slept at night, there were many glowing eyes that marked so many nocturnal predators. The other species in the city weren't all so lucky. Rae saw that many of the Dragonkin struggled in the dark, as well as various lizardfolk and Ogre species. It looked somewhat similar to what she had seen in Newbon, but the power level was much higher.

She wasn't sure how to feel about that. She had just been getting comfortable in the Golden Dragon Nation, and now she was somewhere that the prey would be able to fight back again, and they even had dozens or hundreds of Overlords just wandering around a city with boring jobs.

On one hand, there were so many flavours of Overlord Blood. On the other, she liked stabbing prey, not being stabbed by prey.

She had even seen one who was carrying a stack of flyers for his carriage making business.

What sort of Overlord sold primitive wagons?

By morning, she understood. There was no fuel here, they didn't make it. So, there were no buses or cars. Because there were no buses, they had to use carriages and wagons for everything. But the majority of Demons had functional wings, and there was nearly as much air traffic as ground traffic. That meant you had to watch for someone about to land on your head, but mostly, people would land in the road with the wagons and then step to the sidewalk.

She should get Karl to find a flying spell for her. It looked fun.

Chapter 740 Better Part of Valor

Morning light woke the group, and Rae updated Karl on the state of the city, as well as the fact that there were Royal and Monarch Ranked people dressed like labourers going to jobs before dawn.

If they were expecting special treatment for their power level here, they were going to be greatly disappointed.

Making gifts for the important people might be their best option.

In her estimation, if they started to develop a reputation for being valuable craftsmen and healers, they would have a level of worth to society and wouldn't be seen as deadbeats or freeloaders.

But she had seen people in armour headed for a temple building not long ago when she was observing from the roof of the Inn. That should be the Dungeon that they were told about. It was mostly Royal and Monarch Ranked fighters going in, so they could make a living just off the Dungeon.

Everyone headed down to breakfast, which was a thick stew served with fresh bread and fried eggs. It was pretty good, even Lotus had to admit. Not fancy fare, but definitely worth adding to their menu. Beth wasn't on duty for the morning, and there was a large Orcish woman working the front desk. But she seemed to know who Karl and the others were, so the Innkeeper was organized enough to at least brief morning shift on their guests.

After eating, they returned to the room to plan their day, and to make the item that Beth's mother, the midwife, had requested.

"Alright, I am going to inscribe this with runes for virility, fertility and pleasure. You add a Holy Item blessing as I enchant the runes, and we should have a Nature Dragon enchanted fertility treatment." Karl suggested to Lotus.

The little Priestess gave him an enthusiastic thumbs up as Karl began to carve the egg - sized green stone. The process went much more smoothly than Karl had expected, as if the stone was willingly accepting the power, instead of passively having the power forced on it. The finished product had violet glowing runes, and the entire stone shimmered with the green of nature magic. Lotus examined the stone. "It looks good. I think we need to give it away to test it, though. Testing it ourselves would be... unwise." That was an eloquent way of putting it.

So, Karl went down to the front counter to get directions. "Miss, I am looking for Miss Beth, or her mother, Musa. They had requested an item to help with Midwife Musa's work last evening, and I have it completed." Karl explained.

The Orcish woman gave him a huge smile, and Karl realized that the System had translated to Orcish for her. He didn't know if it didn't do that for everyone, or if it was just that his accent translated well, but Orcs seemed to be fond of him.

"The Barmaid is off until lunch. But I can draw you a map to her mother's work. You only need to go straight down this road until you get to the castle wall. Then go to the west side, closest to Frostfire Gate, or ask any of the guards to take you to her. They will all know who she is, she has been the midwife at the Castle for most of a century."

Karl thanked her, then went to check with the others. "I think that we will wait here for the morning. The streets are packed with the morning rush, so we can check out the city after everyone is at work." Ophelia suggested.

"Alright, that works for me. Rae will wait here with you, and I will be right back after I deliver the item." Karl agreed.

[Let's fly.] Hawk suggested.

It wouldn't be the strangest thing that they had seen this morning out the window. So, Karl went down the hall to the back patio, where Hawk exited his space and Karl hopped on his back. It was a shame that

he didn't have a harness like Thor to help him stay on, but Hawk just used a [Ghostfire Body] barrier to hold him in place.

The Ghostfire Thunderbird spread his wings and lazily circled up to a hundred metres in the air, above the morning commuters, but closer to where longer distance flying traffic was.

Most of it was winged demon species, but there were some Manticore riders, and a few messengers riding giant eagles. [I like this place too. I can fly around in the city without anyone freaking out.] Hawk informed Karl as he scoured the Castle for their target.

[There, on the second floor balcony, west side of the castle, just like the Orc lady said.] Karl spotted the Midwife at what was likely her office.

Hawk circled and swooped down outside the Castle gates, a mere dozen metres from their target.

He vanished into his space just before he reached the ground, letting Karl make a dramatic entrance in front of the guards.

The man was suitably impressed.

Of course, he thought that Hawk was a transport skill, but an Epic grade and Monarch Rank one. "Captain, I have a delivery for Midwife Musa. It's urgent for her work." Karl informed the guard, after noting that there was a lineup of workers waiting to get into the castle.

The Guard nodded, then motioned for someone to escort Karl.

When they got to the balcony of the inner building where she worked, Karl gestured up.

"Would it be too rude to just jump up?" He asked.

"It's your head." The Guard shrugged.

"In that case, let's go knock on the door."

The young soldier chuckled and led them down a corridor, then up a flight of steps to a door marked with the sign of a healer and a bassinet. He knocked politely, and an exhausted young woman opened the door.

"This had better be important, we've been assisting labour for the last fourteen hours." She whisper shouted at the guard, who flinched away from her wrath.

"Maybe I should have jumped up and faced them alone." Karl whispered, to which the guard smiled softly.

"Midwife, I have a courier with an urgent delivery for your mistress." He explained.

"Then send him in and piss off. What are you still standing here for?"

The guard did just that, and Karl stepped inside, closing the door behind him.

There was an old saying in the Golden Dragon Nation. "Discretion is the better part of valour". Nowhere was that quite as clearly exemplified as the moment that the guard turned and ran from a woman a third his size and half his Rank.

Truly, he was a man of great wisdom.

Musa was resting on a rocking chair, but her eyes lit up with bright pink light when she saw Karl.

"Did you have the thing my daughter mentioned? What do I owe you?"

Karl took out the stone. "First, you should test it to make sure it works. I haven't actually made one like this before. But once you have verified it, we can negotiate."

It was only after he finished talking that he realized everyone in the room was staring at the glowing green egg.