

Beast Master 751

Chapter 751 Sell The Trash

They waited a while and made sure that everything worth taking had been collected, including any possible hidden treasures that might have been in the dungeon itself, and not on the monsters.

There was an unspoken agreement that they wouldn't leave immediately so that their actions didn't arouse the attention of the guards outside.

Plus, the beasts were enjoying their time frolicking in their natural forms for a while. It would be a shame to make them rush back to their spaces just because they were too efficient at clearing the dungeon.

"Did we all get enough coin to cover our expenses?" Karl asked once the beasts had gotten bored and returned to their spaces.

Lotus did quick mental math and nodded. "This should be enough for two weeks of afternoon cake and coffee."

That mostly covered her priorities, as she had a place to stay and could make her own food if necessary.

Tessa nodded. "It split the coins evenly, so we all got about six gold coins. That's pretty impressive, far more than the guard said that we would get, and it doesn't even include these mediocre magical items.

I think that I saw a wholesale vendor for them just across the street, so we should be able to make at least a little bit more."

Karl nodded in understanding. "That works out perfectly. We will ask them about the trash items, in case they want them for raw materials, but we won't bring them this time, just in case they don't want them at all. Then, we can return here every day or two and let the team stretch their wings."

The magical trash loot was transferred to Tessa, as she had just nominated herself as their spokesperson to deal with the shopkeeper, and then the War Cleric led the group back out.

"That was a quick trip. Just testing the waters?" The guard outside the portal asked.

"Quick? I suppose it's just due to our combat power with two summoners. We cleared all three bosses." Tessa informed the man, then handed him her gold coin fee.

One after another, they handed over their portion of the fee, while the guards stared at them in doubt. This group didn't look that tough, and they were much faster than expected for a full clear. Could they have really eliminated all three bosses?

They were headed for the wholesaler for common magic weapons and trash drops in the dungeon, though. So they didn't miss out too badly. The guards would just have to ask the vendor once they finished their sale.

Tessa smiled at the dainty lizardfolk girl who was working the counter. The woman looked like a Gecko in a dress, standing upright, and even shorter than Lotus. But she had a professional smile, so she wasn't just someone's kid let loose in the shop. Telling the age of Lizardfolk women was very difficult for most humans, as unlike the men, they were unlikely to amass combat scars. So, every time they shed their skin, they looked as good as the day they reached full growth.

She was only Ascended Rank, though. Not a high-ranking person in the city, which appeared to prioritize power. But well-dressed in what was likely a shop uniform.

"Good morning. Did you finish the dungeon already?" She asked as Tessa took a seat on a high stool across from her.

"Indeed we did. I am informed that your shop buys the magical items we are willing to part with." Tessa replied.

"Exactly right. Everything that comes from the dungeon is a commodity. Magical items, trash items, magical plants if they happen to spawn. We will purchase it all and find buyers for a modest markup."

Tessa laid out the stack of magical weapons of Uncommon Quality, all things they didn't want.

"Oh, wow. You really had good luck. Did you clean it out entirely, or just these items?" She asked.

"Just these. We left the rest laying where it fell. If we couldn't find a buyer for common trash items, we didn't want to litter or have to barter with a smelter to get rid of them." Tessa explained.

"That's quite alright. Many teams go in specifically for the higher quality items and don't bother with the rest. The money goes straight to your inventory if your system is fully active.

It looks like yours is, anyhow.

Now, we have a standard rate chart up on the wall, so you know that I'm not being arbitrary."

Karl looked over, and while the rates were not great, they offered three gold for a Royal Rank Uncommon Quality weapon. Two for an armour piece, and progressively less for other items.

There was a note that higher quality items, or accessories, would be individually appraised by the proprietor.

So, it was a simple matter of counting the loot.

Seventeen weapons. Well, I think that's a weapon, the four rings thing. Then eight pieces of armour.

The girl didn't appear to be too bright, or perhaps she was very young, Karl decided. It was hard to tell, with her only vaguely bipedal form and petite stature.

Her method of payment was to stack coins beside each item, then pick them up. It would have been much faster just to do the mental math and hand them all the money at once.

As she finished and put the last of the items, a set of brass knuckles with a slight increase to stun effects, into the bin of received items, Tessa shook her hand and rose to her feet.

"It was a pleasure doing business with you." The Cleric informed her in a gentle tone.

"Thank you for the business. Please come back soon!"

Karl's group headed for the boardwalk for a little after breakfast treat, and one of the guards went over to talk to the wholesaler.

"Hey Moira. Is your dad still sleeping?" The guard asked.

The girl nodded happily. "Yep, passed out drunk from last night. Did you want to buy something?" The guard shook his head, and pulled a cookie out of his inventory. "How many items did they trade to you?"

Moira stole the cookie with a rapid flick of her extendable tongue. "Thirteen and eight. All the Uncommon magic drops. Look at this one. It's pretty like rings."

She pulled out the brass knuckles, which had skulls engraved on them, and slid it on her hand with a smile.

"Just don't hit your dad too hard with those. They'll put him right back to sleep." The guard laughed.

"Work is more fun when he's sleeping anyhow. Look how clean it is."

Chapter 752 Dungeon Induced Gains

As they walked down the boardwalk, Karl analyzed the changes in Dana's aura. As a Mage, it was easier to guess her power level than anyone else just by touch, and there was a noticeable change from this morning. The trip to the dungeon had done them all a lot of good, and if that sort of progress kept up, it might only be a few weeks or a month of regular visits for her to level up.

Their trip down the boardwalk brought them to a small restaurant operated by Gnolls, a form of beastkin that looked like hyenas, and tended to bark at each other to accentuate their shouted orders.

This one was closer to the docks, and seemed more popular with sailors than locals. But the smell of fried seafood had drawn Lotus in, and even if the wine was cheap, the food was excellent.

Likely, they should have ordered a bottle of rum, as it was likely to be drinkable. At the other tables, the smell of the Ale was somewhere between stagnant seawater and pickle juice. The wine had seemed like a better option at the time.

They had a whole platter of fried food and a bowl of peeled prawns on the table, along with the bowl of spicy mixed pretzels and nuts that was on every table. Maybe they were the secret to making that ale drinkable?

As they were deciding whether to switch to Rum or go looking for better beverages, a whole ship full of sailors stumbled through the door, still getting their land legs and cracking jokes with pouches of coin in their hands.

"Drink up lads, we've got two days, and then we're out again before the Kopji fleet gets here." One of the men shouted to his fellows.

Karl turned to one of the sailors. "There's a Kopji fleet coming?"

The sailor picked up someone else's drink and drained it. "Better believe it. After the beating that the Ghol Regiment put on their Sharakzah Port, they're out for blood. Had it coming to them, they did. What sort of fools try to blockade a Demon Fleet in port for ransom? But that doesn't matter one way or another if they show up here." The sailor replied.

Karl threw a silver coin to the waitress and motioned to the man and his friends.

She brought them a whole tray full of Rum bottles, and the Sailors raised a toast to Karl.

One of the other sailors in the restaurant laughed. "It's just a Kopji Fleet. The lizards will put on a good show out in the bay, then go away after they have proven to whoever hired them that they made some effort to attack the city.

They're both the best and worst mercenaries in the world. Great fighters, but the laziest bunch of louts you'll ever meet."

One of the men in the back spat on the floor and gave a bitter laugh. "Perhaps they'll do us a favour and burn down the slums in the Black Shade. The captain put us at the north dock, and I can smell their filth from the mast watch."

The man beside him gave him a disgusted look. "And where do you think we'd get deck hands from if it wasn't for the Black Shade? Half the bloody crew comes from the slums."

The sailor shrugged, clearly drunk and not noticing the other man's anger. "At least get them from the sprawl. Closer to the river, they will at least know about bathing."

The waitress laughed. "Didn't you get the undead rot from the ladies of the Sprawl last time you were in?"

The drunken sailor threw his mug at her.

The other sailors burst into laughter, and started to tease him about his poor judgment.

"Come now, you've got to tell us. How did you not notice it was a zombie? Or did you go for a plague demon?"

Karl was worried that there was going to be a fight, but the sailor at the next table shook his head when Karl tensed. "Don't worry. Even drunk, he knows that he won't be let back in next trip if he starts a fight inside. They're just having a bit of fun with him. Most of these lads are from the worst slums of their hometowns. Wouldn't have ended up as deck hands on a trade vessel if they had any other choices at all."

Sure enough, the drunk staggered outside, swearing at everyone and everything, including the sun in the sky.

Lotus looked over at the sailor, then poked him in the side when she realized he was still looking at Karl over her head.

"How bad is it on the other side of the river? Redwood Sprawl, they called it, right? Then the Black Shade?"

The sailor gave her a sad look. "The Sprawl isn't too bad, all things considered. It's just the poor side of town. You know how that goes, even cheaper taverns, brothels that the Succubi won't accredit, and countless crowded apartments. The Shade, outside the north wall, is one of the worst sorts of slums anywhere in the Dragon Isles. You see, the west side of the river is on a hill, and they seal the wall when the river floods to keep the city dry. So the Shade is always a swampy mass of clapboard shacks that survives mostly by day labour and scrounging the scraps that fall from the docks."

That question felt a lot like a mission question from her Goddess, Karl thought. The determined look on the Green Dragon Cleric's usually carefree face said the same.

Lotus looked up at Karl. "I think we should take a trip there this afternoon. Maybe not all of us, but me and you for sure."

Ophelia smiled. "How about the three of us head to the Inn after a bit of shopping? We will meet you there later."

Bringing four young women to the slums was practically begging for trouble. But bringing one Nature Cleric with a strong bodyguard shouldn't make anyone feel too brave.

The Sailor seemed to understand what Lotus was planning, and he patted her gently on the shoulder. "I recommend that you go back toward the ocean, then take Daggerwind Bridge across the river. That road leads straight to the only gate into the Shade. You don't want to get lost in the maze of the sprawl. It wasn't planned when it was built, so there are many dead ends, and no guarantee that even the guard patrols are safe from ambush if they've angered someone."

Chapter 753 The Black Shade Slums

The group split, with Rae following the ladies, on the off chance that someone would attack them, and she would get to play within the city. She had been carefully observing, and as far as she could tell, the aggressor was always in the wrong.

It was never some misguided soul playing hero. At least, not here.

Karl led Lotus across the bridge, and found that the front row of buildings was actually well maintained, but immediately behind it were crude earth magic built apartments with poorly fitted wooden doors and bars over windows with no glass in them.

There were people everywhere, crowded into the available space. Multiple children lounged on nearly every balcony, which made Karl wonder if this was an off day, or whether there was no mandatory schooling here.

But they were staying on the main street, which was busy, but moving smoothly.

The crowd gave them a fairly wide berth. Or, they gave Karl a fairly wide berth, while many people shouted out attempts to lure Lotus off into alleys or particularly dilapidated apartments.

Lotus rolled her eyes and sighed at Karl. "You know, I think that they don't understand about Nature Clerics. We're not just the greatest appreciators of fluffy things and cake. We also understand the dark side of human nature. Do they really think that I would follow them alone into a basement to 'help their friend'? Morons."

Karl chuckled. "You know, cake is also a fluffy thing."

Lotus laughed, the musical tone drawing the attention of everyone nearby. All of the adults eyes here looked either exhausted from long hours at work or malicious.

They might normally prey on locals to a smaller extent, but a pair of moderately powerful obvious outsiders was a payday in the making for the local criminals.

Then they stepped across a line of red paint on the street, and the whole vibe of the Sprawl changed. The streets were still full of the same exhausted workers, but the ones in the shadows were less slender and sinister, and more muscular. Plus, they were better dressed.

Not well-dressed, but Karl saw an Orc in a cheap suit guarding the door to a brothel, and a three-metre tall winged demon in a partially buttoned silk shirt at the door to what sounded like a casino.

They must have moved between the territories of two gangs, and Karl could already see the outer wall from where he was standing. The whole sprawl was only maybe five hundred metres long, merely a short walk in the Golden Dragon Capital, but with the people packed so tightly, he guessed that close to a third of the city's two hundred thousand official residents were crammed in here.

They got to the gate to the Black Shade, which was open, but guarded by a pair of Royal Rank Orcs in full armour. Given that this whole area was Awakened and Ascended Rank, that was an impressive show of force.

Karl nodded to the guards. "The Priestess' deity calls her to the Shade for the good of the people."

The Orc frowned at Karl.

"It's a silver piece each to come back in." He insisted.

Karl nodded. "We will see you soon."

Lotus led the way into the slums, and wrinkled her nose at the smell of rot and filth. Then she pointed at an open spot where an old stone building had crumbled, and whatever was built there afterwards had burned, leaving only some charcoal and ash on the pile of stone in a roughly square pattern.

Lotus walked carefully, keeping her feet dry. Eternal Lightning would protect them, but it was a force of habit for the Priestesses, who spent much of their time in the woods.

"Can you get people for me?" She asked.

Karl nodded. In this form, he could roar, and his voice would carry quite a distance through the slums, which were built in rows around the standing water.

Karl raised his voice. "Royal High Priestess Lotus, Servant of the Green Dragon God, has arrived to provide free healing. Those with the ability, bring those in need to the shade of her branches for treatment."

The deep feline voice rumbled through the slums, and Karl saw a few heads poke out through the door into the city.

It might cost them a couple of silvers for the trip, but even in the sprawl, there were those in need of healers. The city likely had free clinics, but even in the Golden Dragon Nation's Capital they were always packed, and the truly ill couldn't wait in line for hours to get treatment.

Here, it was certainly worse, as he had still yet to see a cleric that was not part of his group, and even the Shamans were uncommon.

Lotus transformed into the Tree of Life, and a rich green glow began to emanate from her trunk, mingling with the golden dust of her healing spell.

Quickly, the slum residents began to run, walk or stumble over, pox marks and various small injuries visibly fading from their bodies under the effect of a Royal Rank Epic Healing spell.

From one of the hovels, an old demon woman was carried out on a litter by two younger lizardfolk women who hadn't bothered to even put on clothes to cover their scaled bodies, as they were so covered in filth.

As they approached, the demon on the litter became visibly younger. The wrinkles on her face faded, and vitality returned to her body. She was still filthy and exhausted, but no longer dying of whatever curse or disease had been afflicting her.

{Put out a large cloth.} Lotus insisted in a message to Karl.

Karl used a large piece of Ascended Rank silk, one of Rae's oldest blankets, as the ground cloth. It was immediately covered by a mountain of dry rice and beans, which Karl motioned to.

"The gift of sustenance from the Dragon Gods. Take enough for your family." He told the desperate crowd. Many fell to their knees, bowing down to worship the Tree of Life and the Nature Goddess. In return, Lotus shook her branches, sending a shower of golden dust down over them, and making the illusionary birds circle in the air.

From the city gates, a massively injured and dying Orc stumbled out. He held a bandage around himself to hold his insides in, and he was visibly bleeding from every limb, with only one eye remaining.

The guards didn't stop him, but they did sneer at the stumbling man, who was struggling to cross the ground to Lotus.

Karl was about to move, but Lotus stopped him. {Don't. If the Goddess wills it, he will make it to me. If she doesn't, he will die on the way.}

That was surprisingly brutal for the softhearted Cleric, but the Orc's soul was nearly as black as Karl's aura when viewed through Soul Sight.

It might be a chance at redemption if he could make it under his own power. Karl knew it was better not to question the will of the Gods. The questions without answers would just make his head hurt.

The Orc collapsed with a smile as he reached the golden dust, and one of the blue illusionary birds dove into his body, giving him a burst of extra healing.

The Orc lay there on the ground for a few more minutes, absorbing the healing, while the locals walked around his body.

Then, he pulled a small bag from his inventory and crawled over to fill it with rice and beans.

But when he got to his feet, he didn't turn back to the city, he simply walked away, north out of the slums.

That was the Orcish way. He would accept food and healing, but he wouldn't go back to the city and beg for charity, even if they would let him back in. He would go find his own way to rebuild his life.

Chapter 754 Redwood Market Park

The crowd was only growing as the word that there was food spread.

Lotus had already topped off the mountain of dry food once, and hundreds more people were still coming their way.

{We have ten minutes left before the spell wears off. I could refresh it, but I think that's enough for one day.} Lotus informed Karl.

"Ten minutes remain in our visit. If you wish for the blessing of the Nature God, be here before then." Karl shouted over the noise of the crowd.

That encouraged them to pack around the tree, and anyone who had already gotten food and healing was dragged away by the crowd.

A few more severely ill people had come from the city, and Karl could hear running as those inside realized that the tree would only be up for a total of one hour.

Still, one hour of free food and Royal Rank healing was far more than anyone else had done for the slums in years.

There was a rumour that the Dragon Nations did this much more regularly. But the Demon Gods were not so altruistic. They believed much more strongly in the survival of the fittest.

Once Lotus had transformed back, Karl lifted the corners of the blanket and poured out the last of the food onto a cloak that one of the residents had brought.

"That's it for the day, everyone. If the Gods will it, we will be back again." Karl informed them.

That was enough for them. Most of the residents of the slums had their diseases cured today. Now that they were healthier, and had a few days worth of food, they had a fresh chance to change their fortunes. Maybe even get a few tips at the docks doing day labour.

They might not be able to put on a presentable front, as they couldn't pay the gate fee and had to swim around the wall, where it extended into the ocean. But once they made it to the docks, a healthy body would get them a bit more appreciation.

Karl led Lotus back to the gate, where the Orcs waved them back in with a sly wink. No payment needed for the Healing Tree.

Karl noticed that the streets felt much more friendly as they passed through the territory of the first group or gang.

Whatever they called themselves.

But when he got to the territory of the Demons between them and the river, there was an increased sense of hostility.

The word had spread to them that Lotus had gone to the Black Shade to heal and feed the people, but had completely passed them by like they were invisible. The group closer to the wall had been able to send their seriously ill out for treatment, even if it cost them to get back in. But many in this zone couldn't pass through that territory thanks to their known allegiance.

Karl saw a market square down a side street on their right, and turned Lotus off the main road.

The street wandered a bit, but it looked like the market was a neutral zone between the territories of five different factions. Possibly more, but Karl was only going by the colour of bandanas hung from pockets or tied around limbs.

As they approached, a thug stepped from the shadows between two buildings. "This isn't a spot for outsiders. Flag up if you want to enter." He insisted.

Karl shrugged, and activated [Bestial Armour], which formed with his usual gold trimmed Darklight Host tabard.

The demon took two steps backwards and raised his hands in surrender. "Sorry, I misunderstood."

Karl just nodded and led a confused Lotus into the market.

{Put up the tree again, and make some food. It will make you incredibly popular with all the baristas and ice cream stands in town.} Karl knew all the magic words.

Lotus moved to a grassy area in the middle of the square, where a statue used to stand. She didn't know who or what it was dedicated to, but some of the nearby buildings showed signs of having used it as repair materials.

Her tree of life formed again, and Karl laid out the blanket for her to make a mountain of Rice and Beans on.

"By the will of the Green Dragon Goddess, free healing and basic nutrition will be provided for the next hour. Bring your ill and wounded, all are welcome under the light of the Tree of Life." Karl shouted, his words amplified by some unseen magic to echo through the market.

The vendors nearest the green space inwardly celebrated. The light extended past the first three stalls around the green space, so visitors could shop for their wares and still gain the benefit of the healing.

Many would be too proud to openly approach for the alms from the Dragon Church, as even an impoverished demon still had their pride. But many noticed that the Orcs, Lizardfolk and Beastkin had far fewer reservations about politely approaching with a bowl or pot to scoop up a measure of food.

Many even left small gifts for Lotus.

Handmade dolls, knitted socks, things that cost very little but time to make. All were perfect in the eyes of Lotus and the Nature God. They could even be redistributed on a holiday if they were in passable or better condition.

Half an hour in, a large procession of people on stretchers, escorted by a group of Demons in white coats and nurses, arrived around the tree.

These were the ones that basic healing and medicine couldn't cure. The magical diseases and cursed wounds that were resistant to low level healing magic.

One after another, the birds flocked down to the patients. The diseases retreated from where the birds landed, and while a few needed a second bird, they were all beginning to recover.

Karl's silent presence kept the locals under control, even when the number of seriously ill on the grass made it hard for others to get to the pile of food or to get through the outer rings of the stalls where the healing was active.

It wasn't clear whether closer was better, but those with lingering illness and injury weren't taking any chances.

There was only one group that was visibly upset about the situation. The Plague Demons couldn't approach. Lotus' healing effect was an Epic Grade damage spell when applied to them, and even walking down the street too close to the tree might kill them.

Chapter 755 Walking With Lotus

When the hour was up, Karl did the same as last time, and dumped the remaining food into the cloak of the closest person who had one, then bowed politely to the crowd as Lotus transformed back.

"That is all for today, Goddess willing, we will be back again." He informed the crowd.

With an entire hour of healing, almost all of the most seriously ill in the Redwood Sprawl had been treated, and even the clinic doctors had stopped bringing patients to them for treatment.

Karl could see the river down one of the side streets, so that was the direction that he led Lotus after she picked up the donations from the ground. They ended up walking some distance west down the

river to the nearest bridge, which conveniently put them in front of the bakery where they had stopped yesterday.

"Go ahead, you've earned it. I won't even tell you not to get caffeine." Karl agreed after Lotus gave him a pleading look.

They returned to the maid café and Lotus was instantly swarmed by the staff.

She was passed around between the hugs of a half dozen workers, and Karl did his best not to laugh as he was completely forgotten.

Again.

Even when he took the seat across from her, everyone was gushing about how she had helped all the people across the river as Karl sipped on a matcha latte that had been placed in front of Lotus.

"What possessed you to go to the Sprawl on your own to heal the masses? Weren't you worried that someone would try to abduct you as their personal healer?" One of the servers asked.

Lotus laughed and gestured across the table. "There aren't many people in the city that could take me away with Karl there. But everyone was so happy to have me show up and heal that they didn't even try to make trouble."

The staff seemed to finally notice that Karl was sitting right across from her, then did a double take as they noticed his armour.

"Wow, that's... something. No wonder you're not afraid of being stolen."

Karl chuckled. "I take it that you've seen something like this before?"

The server nodded. "Yeah, I don't know that pattern, but Guild War Champions all have the same sort of design to their tabards. Silver for regular and Gold for Elites. But, you're a Monarch. Doesn't that mean that you defeated an Overlord in battle?"

Many more than one, actually. But Karl just winked at the server and made a shushing gesture. That made her laugh, and turned the conversation back to Lotus' healing skills.

While everyone was distracted, Karl quietly changed back into regular day clothes, pants and a buttoned shirt, but kept [Eternal Lightning] active on both himself and Lotus, just in case someone from outside the café tried something stupid.

"I got a message from my mom earlier. Dad's leg grew back in only fifteen minutes after he started sitting under your tree. Now, he'll be able to go back to work, and Mom won't have to stay home to care for him." One of the girls mentioned.

Karl remembered the one, as the man looked a lot like her. They had arrived just after the second location had been picked, so they must have lived nearby.

Karl sipped the sweet beverage, and watched as Lotus held up a cup to her hair before changing the hair colour to match the pale shade of the iced coffee, but with green tips.

"What are you doing?" He asked.

"I've had the same for too long. It's the [Pleasant Appearance] spell, one of the early ones that all Nature Cleric Acolytes learn from the senior students. Mostly it's used to do our makeup, as the Sisters don't let the Acolytes have such luxuries." She explained around a mouthful of cake.

Karl slipped a few slices into the beast spaces for Cara and Remi, then nodded in understanding.

"I wondered why your hair colour continues to change, but if it's a common spell for Nature Clerics, it makes sense."

Lotus laughed. "Oh, it's all Priestesses, and most of the Priests as well. Even Tessa knows it, but she never uses it anymore. Once she picked the War Goddess, she said that she didn't have to worry about it anymore, and she just went for the same boring brown braid every day with no makeup."

Karl smiled at the thought of Tessa with actual makeup on. It would be completely out of character. Even Lotus rarely had visible makeup, she just randomly changed her hair colour.

"Why not try to link the spell to your mood? You could have hair colour that perfectly suited your day?" Karl suggested.

Lotus shook her head vigorously. "That's been tried. Our hair just fades back and forth between forest green and bubblegum pink, depending on what we're doing. The emotional link doesn't work at all."

No, that sounded like it worked perfectly. It just didn't match any outfit that they would wear.

Once Lotus was wired and too full to eat any more, they got up to go, and were escorted to the door by the servers, who were insistent that they didn't need to pay today after helping so many people, including family members of the staff.

So, they were in a great mood as they made their way back to the Inn, where everyone else would be waiting for them.

Including a number of the people that Lotus had healed, as they learned the moment the crowd in the tavern began to cheer for her.

The rest of the group came down when they heard the commotion, and took a table in the back corner closest to the kitchen, where they could chat with everyone at the same time.

"You know, you could get properly wealthy with a skill like that." One of the sailors pointed out.

Lotus shook her head. "I'm a Priestess, remember? We take a vow of poverty. Plus, Karl is properly wealthy, and he's my security, so it all works out in the end."

The Sailor laughed. "Properly wealthy, but staying at the Laughing Dragon and not at one of the Royal Inns in the Stone Chapel district?"

Lotus scrunched up her face into an overly dramatic disgusted expression. "Eww, pretentious Nobles and harp melodies about chaste handholding under the moonlight."

The whole room burst into laughter. There were certainly no songs about chaste handholding in a bar full of sailors, that was for sure.

Chapter 756 Incoming Fleet

The next morning, when they came down for breakfast, the city felt unnaturally silent and empty. Tense, as if it was waiting for something that Karl had missed the signal for.

"What happened last night? The city feels different." Karl asked as an unfamiliar barmaid brought over their breakfast, a scramble of eggs, potatoes and onions sprinkled with cheese.

"The fleet deployed three hours ago. They're going to engage in a sea battle against the incoming fleet. The Governor decided that it was too much of a risk to let them storm the docks with the Lord otherwise engaged." She explained.

Karl looked around at the rough wooden walls of the tavern, well-worn everywhere that saw regular contact after decades of use.

"Surely, they wouldn't have sent someone at that level to the city by ship." Karl asked.

The barmaid shrugged.

"Beth and the boss both took the morning off, and even Old Jared is geared up and waiting at the docks, so this time might be something serious. I know you're travellers, but are you going to stay for the fight if the fleet lands, or are you going to head out of town? I'm that grumpy old bastard's sister-in-law, I can check you out of your room if needed."

Karl shook his head. "We were originally going to take a short trip to the Dungeon today, but we wouldn't want to come out to find a fight in the middle of the city, so we should likely hold off. Maybe we'll go visit Jared at the docks. If nothing else, I can stand on his blind side so nothing sneaks up on him."

The replacement barmaid laughed at Karl and shook her head. "I wouldn't worry too much about him. He can handle himself in a fight. But the militia bonus will cover his overdue tab, so if you could keep him alive, I wouldn't complain."

Tessa smiled at the woman, who obviously had some personal attachment to not only the regular staff, but to Old Jared the sailor.

"Well, then that settles it. After breakfast, we will go wait by the docks and have a cookout. Keep everyone's spirits up while they wait." Karl decided.

The barmaid smiled. "There is a butcher three doors down the main street towards the docks. Tell them that the Laughing Dragon sent you to them, and they'll get you a proper discount on meat for a cookout."

The parties traditionally come after the battle, but we've had more than enough warning this time, and they might not make it to shore anyhow."

Karl stopped in at the butcher, who was about to close up the shop for the day first thing in the morning, in case the attack did make it into the city. They were on a main road from the gates to the docks, and it would be a priority for an invasion force to take and hold, so they could block the gates and prevent reinforcements.

"Butcher, can we get a hundred kilos of meat before you close? I want to have a cookout on the docks while we wait for the invasion fleet. A morale boost for the militia." Karl called, stopping him from locking the shop.

"That's not a bad plan. I will bring the barbecue wagon. It's made for special events." The butcher agreed, a joyous smile wrinkling his leathery face.

Karl grabbed the wagon when the demon pulled it into the street, then Thor came out in Cerro form with an expectant look.

"You're right. If there are wagons to be pulled, you definitely get first dibs." Karl agreed before hooking the massive scaled beast to the leads.

"That's quite the skill. He looks like he would be a brute in a dock charge as well." The butcher joked.

Tessa smiled as she hopped up on Thor's back. "Between the two of us, I doubt that any enemy could remain on the dock if we charged."

Thor's initiative served as motivation for the others, and they all came out of their spaces in beast form, though Rae was using [Night Haunter] to be invisible and incorporeal.

If they got the people at the dock used to their presence early, there wouldn't be any misunderstandings if the fight really did reach land.

The beasts got some strange looks when they arrived, but some of that had to do with the barbecue wagon that Thor set up in the cargo staging area by the port authority building. The wagon was ten metres long and had a large black barbecue drum on each side, making it an easily identifiable sight.

Karl reached into the pits and wrote a fire rune in the ashes of the charcoal that had been burnt for the last roast.

There was more in the bottom of the wagon, but the magic brought the drums up to temperature immediately.

"Just adjust the spell power to set the temperature. It should last until you move the cart or mess with the ash." Karl explained.

The butcher smiled and adjusted the temperature, then began to load the racks with meat.

"Someone is confident." An aging soldier with a cutlass on either hip chuckled.

"Preparations for the victory roast need to be made in advance, or we'll get hungry.

Is there some sort of order here? I have a Ghostfire Thunderbird in the sky, and I would like everyone to know he's friendly." Karl replied.

"I'll see to it that the Dock Master understands. He's responsible for the defence of this section. Don't worry about the locals, they'll figure out that your friends didn't come off a boat quickly enough."

A few of the locals, Demons in partial armour over casual clothes, laughed at the assertion. It was hard to miss a massive Cerro in the crowd. But there also wasn't likely to be a Naga Queen among the attackers, and they would probably all be in uniform anyhow.

The morning wind blew the smell of roasting meat from the staging area across the docks, and the tension began to leave the militia on the docks.

If someone was already preparing for victory, they must know something that the others didn't. Or so the common logic went.

Chapter 757 Fleets Engaged

[Hawk, what do you see offshore?] Karl asked once the roasting was tuned for a late lunch. It might not be as tender as an all-day roast, but by the time that the ships could get back, it should be good.

Besides, the butcher had brought sausages as well, and one of the bakers said he had plenty of buns. Those could be cooked quickly if the timing were off.

[The two fleets have engaged. The locals are outnumbered at three to one, but they're stronger, and the evil invaders can't break their barriers.]

[Evil invaders?] Karl asked.

[They use water cannons.] Hawk replied, as if that explained everything.

It made sense. It was a naval fleet, of course it would use water magic at sea, where the water element was strongest.

Hawk continued to circle far overhead, tracking the battle, where the two sides clashed with broadside magical attacks, instead of technological weapons.

With Overlord Rank barriers, technological weapons wouldn't do much anyhow.

[The first ship is down, one of theirs.] Hawk updated.

They were still so far over the horizon that even Hawk, thousands of metres above them, was out of sight.

The battle was taking them straight south, parallel to the coast, so the fleet was no longer approaching as a vicious naval battle took place out of sight of the waiting militia.

Karl felt Hawk's motivation as he decided to intervene and bombard the invading ships with meteors of Ghostfire. As an Overlord Rank skill, the flames battered the already strained shields over the ships even as they were engaged in a brutal battle with the Drodh defence fleet.

As the stacks of [Rampage] built up, the battle was rapidly swinging in Hawk's favour, with the flames of the Demons forcing the invaders into a defensive position until their fleet turned and began to flee back north.

They had only lost one vessel, but the others were in bad shape. The only real advantage they had left was stronger wind and water magic, which let them flee while slowing the Drodh fleet.

But once they were a few dozen kilometres away, they stopped and began to regroup. With their faster vessels, they had a level of safety from the Drodh defensive fleet. That let them engage and flee repeatedly, with the hope of sinking some of the defenders' ships, with a proportionately larger impact on their combat capability.

[There are more ships on the horizon. I don't think that the ships from our dock see them, they're close to land.] Hawk updated.

[What do the sails and flags look like?] Karl asked.

[White sails, the flag is black with a diagonal white stripe with three red dots.]

Karl relayed the message to the Dock Master, who was standing nearby, waiting for updates, as Hawk was furthest out of the flying scouts they had active. Many demons could fly, but not nearly as fast as Hawk, so they stayed closer to shore in case there was an attack.

The demon ran up a set of stairs outside his office, then rang a bell in a staccato pattern, sending a message down the docks for whoever understood.

It would ring through much of the city, and the word would spread quickly, but Karl wasn't sure what the issue was yet. It might be reinforcements, a foreign envoy that might be in danger from the situation, or even enemy reinforcements.

"That's the Bomgon flag, the Undead Fleet. I don't know what they're doing here, but they're pirates, not known to be friendly to anyone, and they're a scourge in the straits between the southeast island and the northeast."

Karl nodded in understanding.

[Those new ships are fast. Far too fast for ships.] Hawk updated.

Only minutes later, the ships came over the horizon, and Karl could see what Hawk was talking about. The ships appeared to be ethereal, gliding through the water with no resistance at the sort of speeds that a bus on a smooth road could only hope for downhill.

And the occupants really were undead. Karl could see the damaged souls on the ships.

The lead ship had an immensely powerful being on the deck, most likely a Mythic Rank Undead of some sort, but beside him was an Overlord or Totem Ranked Undead who looked like nothing more than a human mage, if you didn't have Soul Sight.

The mass of undead energy crowded into the vessels made it difficult to tell precise power levels from this distance.

The dock master ran back up to his elevated platform and took out a sight glass to get a better view of the incoming fleet.

"Guards, get the Lord. Lord Bomgon is here with the fleet. Tell him that he's riding with Captain Komolos the Lich Lord."

A team of three squires in Castle Guard livery ran off, and the demon shook his head. "This is guaranteed to get messy. The wights don't die easily, and even if we eliminate them entirely, they'll just be born again in their home fortress. You're new here, but we have a process for this. They're linked to the ships, they can't go this far from their home without them. Teams will aim to destroy the ships while we hold them on the shore. If they break through, they'll loot the city, and it will go back with them when they respawn. Bloody evil bastards."

Karl focused more closely on the incoming undead, and saw that the rank and file Royal Rank fighters on the deck all had the same placard over their names in the system interface. {Wight} Royal Rank. Enslaved to the Bomgon Fleet.

Karl wasn't sure what the powers of a Wight were, but just the fact that they were undead and difficult to truly kill would give them a major advantage in most encounters.

Like raiding a city.

But the fleet was not small. Drodh City had 20 dock spurs, capable of accommodating nearly eighty ships for unloading. But the Undead Fleet would take up almost all of them.

Compared to that, the attacking fleet offshore was a joke. Not only was it weaker per ship, it was also significantly smaller.

The Dock Master came down from his perch with a grim look on his face. "Regretting your choice to stay yet, traveller?" He asked Karl.

Karl shook his head, and Ophelia gave a toothy Werebear smile to the demon.

"Just wait until the fighting starts. The Undead don't feel pain, so there is no such thing as too violent of a way to kill them."

The nearby militiamen laughed. That was certainly one way of looking at it.

Chapter 758 Bomgon Fleet

The Bomgon fleet turned when they were five kilometres offshore of the city, and spread out in a wide line, two rows deep.

"They're lining up on the docks." Karl noted.

The demon beside him, who Karl was nearly certain was a prostitute with a baseball bat, nodded grimly.

"They do that. Because they're undead, they can just charge the docks. Water Magic won't slow them down, and they don't rely on the wind."

She took her ridiculously high heels off and carefully placed them on the porch of the Dock Master's warehouse. Then she equipped a patchwork set of stiffened leather armour and a wide brimmed hat with a large purple feather in the hatband.

Remi looked over at her. {That's a pretty good hat.}

The Demoness smiled at her. "Thank you. I'm quite proud of this hat. I don't know what possessed me to volunteer for the Militia instead of running, but if there is such a thing as a perfect time for a good hat, this is it."

Rae gained a great insight from this odd Demoness. She was right, today was a great day for hats.

Unfortunately, she hadn't made custom hats. She would have to fix that for next time.

That was when Karl realized they might have an issue. "Are there any Plague Demons in the crowd? My team uses a lot of area effects that are Holy or Healing based. Deadly lethal to the Undead, but also to the Plague Demons." Karl asked the Demoness.

She shook her head. "They won't come across the river, so they're all at the north docks. You can feel free to use your area effects, none of the rest of us should suffer from them. Well, some might, if you cast a Consecration spell, but that's just based on their personality."

The ships weren't slowing at all as they approached the docks, and Karl realized that was part of the strategy. The front row was planning to run aground and use the momentum to throw an army of Wights into the defenders.

The other defenders had realized that as well, and they were backing up while raising a pike line to impale the first wave of bodies. The pikes glowed with golden energy as Tessa cast a [Holy Weapon] enchantment over the entire militia. It wouldn't last forever, but it would make a difference at the start of the battle when the odds were at their worst.

The second rank of ships abruptly slowed, as the first rammed into the shore, hurling agile undead into the air with blades at the ready.

Dana stepped up into the air to engage the undead while they couldn't do anything but continue flying past, enabling her to slice them apart from above while they were mostly helpless.

Karl looked left to see Tessa glowing with red light as she sat on Thor, marking the attention of the God of War on this conflict. If that was the case, this should be a serious battle, and he might as well go all out.

Karl took out the Sword of Champions, then quickly created a half dozen Ghostfire imbued [Hellstorm] vortexes along the shore as the Wights flew over. Then, when they managed to partially dissipate them, he cast six more, and another six to cover all three docks in their section of the shore.

Hundreds of other spells flew from the defenders, while the Wights hurled black balls and arcs of magical power in return.

But the vortexes had the desired result, and the undead did not fly over the pike line, but landed on it or between it and the vortexes.

The entire deck of the ships had been covered in undead when they hit the beach, and more were pouring out of the lower levels of the ships now, along with the occupants of the second rank of vessels.

One after another, the larger vortexes were destroyed by the more powerful Undead on the ships, but the smaller ones lingered until they too were destroyed by skills from the Undead Horde.

But massive damage had been done, and the Epic Guard was practically glowing with power.

Or more correctly, the Haint Claw that it was equipped with was glowing with soul power siphoned from dozens of sacrificed undead in the immediate vicinity.

Karl created repeated waves of the vortexes, forcing the enemy leaders to focus on getting rid of them before they duplicated. It also pulled the undead off balance with the suction of the vortex, and the front line of pikes pushed forward, driving the Undead back into the wall of swirling flames.

But the Wights didn't care. They hacked and slashed at the pikes, cutting them to pieces as they pushed forward.

The battle was quickly turning into a melee battle, and Karl could see dozens of Golems, including Rae and Dana's being ordered into the fight.

The timing of this attack was immaculate. Even if the army won the battle offshore right now, they still wouldn't be able to make it back to the port for well over an hour, giving the undead fleet more than enough time to battle the defenders who had been left behind.

Magic crackled and clashed all over the battlefield, with Demonic spell casters and undead competing for superiority. Few spells were completely forming at this point, only those by the strongest Monarchs and Overlords could force their way through before being collapsed by contact with a hostile spell effect.

That too was part of the undead fleet's battle strategy. If the target was not a group of physically powerful Demons and Monsters, but humans or another species, they would be largely defenceless without the ability to activate ranged attacks.

The Undead were beginning to push a breach on his right, at the southern dock of their section. So, Karl shifted to push into the surging mass of bodies with the Blade of Champions in his hands, and his Darklight Host tabard glowing around the edges with golden light.

Tessa and Thor were right behind him, as was the Epic Guard, while Rae had gone to the north edge by the river to hunt, and the others were holding position by the barbecue pit with Dana overhead among the flying Demons with ranged magic.

Karl's blade flashed with fire as it cleanly hacked through the armour and bodies of the undead, and then the souls were grabbed by the Haint Claw and forcibly ripped from their eternal prisons.

From one of the rear boats, a massive roar of rage sounded, and a Demonic bellow replied from the Castle, as the City's Governor took action, along with the Lord of Drodh.

Hopefully, they could all fly. Because the city wouldn't fare well in a battle between the two groups' leaders.

Chapter 759 Duellist

As Karl hacked his way through the Undead, the crowd in front of him parted, and a group of black armoured undead Knights joined the fray.

Thor's joy at getting to fight against real knights, even if they were undead knights, was infectious, and Karl found himself smiling behind the visor of his helmet.

They were all strong Monarchs, except the leader of the squad, who was clearly an Overlord.

Karl pointed his sword at the leader, and saluted him with the hope to signal a duel and give them some space to fight.

The gesture worked remarkably well, and the Wights simply ran away, creating a twenty-metre circle for their duel.

The Epic Guard went to assist Thor, who had been blocked by the Wights, with Tessa on his back spearing the creatures, using her new shield to guard Thor's flank.

The squad of undead Knights fell in around Karl and their leader, waiting for the outcome with unnatural stillness, a pond of calm in the chaos of battle.

The Knight used a broadsword as well, and when Karl lunged forward, shattering the air with the speed of his attack, the Knight managed to parry, knocking his attack up and away. Karl followed up with a knee, and the Knight spun to the right, then launched his own attack at Karl's neck.

Flames met unholy light as the two blades met again, and the circle shifted so that they remained in the centre.

That appeared to be a tactical decision, as Karl noticed that the aftermath of their basic attacks was stopping half a metre from the encirclement. Those shockwaves were nothing major to either of them, but if they hit the Royal Rank Wights, there would be casualties.

Both blades danced in a flurry of strikes, probing for weakness, and a sound like rapid fire thunder rolled over the battlefield as the two Champions tested each other.

Karl saw the trick to the Undead Knight's defence. It wasn't that he could keep up with Karl. He had a skill that let him automatically parry with a certain level of success.

A few strikes made it through, and if Karl followed with a secondary attack, it almost always landed. But the Knight's counterattacks were not nearly as fast as his parry.

So, when they engaged again, Karl coated his fist in [Nullify] and [Ghostfire Body], and the moment that the Knight's blade was out of the way, he simply punched it in the face, collapsing its mask and causing the undead to collapse to the ground as a pile of inanimate armour.

Then, the others were on him, but Karl knew how to deal with them now. With the duel ended, Thor and Tessa moved back to Karl's side, letting the Epic Guard protect the other flank.

Karl noticed that they had a system worked out, and Tessa was watching Thor's back, telling him when to swipe, when to smash, and when to use [Gravity Slam] with his tail to keep enemies off them.

That let Thor fight violently with his front feet and horns, while Tessa's long spear defended his vulnerable areas.

Karl dropped two of the Monarch Ranked Knights, and noticed that the undead were pulling away from the front line.

Not in defeat, but because Lotus had transformed, and the Holy Light of the Tree of Life was anathema to the undead.

They could not stand within the light to hold this position any longer, so they shifted the lines out of her range.

But that also made Lotus a target.

Hundreds of attacks flew her way, only to be shot down by the Militia, Remi and Dana. Demon fire, Lightning and waves of Arcane Energy met balls and arcs of black unholy energy, creating a crackling storm of energy overhead.

The flying defenders were forced to either place themselves in between the horde and Lotus or retreat further into the air, which made it harder for them to effectively block, as aiming down was at their own troops if they missed.

For the troops on the ground, now that there was a safe spot to retreat and recover, the defenders began to cycle the wounded to the back. They moved into Lotus' light to recover for a minute or two, then traded with someone at the front, and let them catch their breath and get healed.

It made the whole battlefield fluid and constantly shifting, but casualties were very low, and the ones retreating were dragging the severely wounded with them for treatment.

Karl held his position with Tessa and Thor, letting the defenders surge forward past him.

That gave them a moment to recover and take stock of how the battle was going.

The City Governor and the Undead Mage, a Lich Lord named Komolos, according to his System information, were fighting a few hundred metres out to sea, while the Lord and the Undead known as Bomgon, after whom the fleet appeared to be named, were holding a massive battle thousands of metres overhead.

It was still shaking the city, and Karl wondered how the lower Ranked residents were doing. That sort of magical backlash and shockwaves could be incredibly dangerous to an average body. Karl could see that the Lord was trying to move the battle, but the Undead leader was dead set on fighting directly over the city. Likely so that he was close when it came time for the final strike.

The battle overhead was getting more fierce by the second, but the Undead Horde on the shores did not appear to care at all.

Watching the two sides fight at the docks, one thing was becoming abundantly clear. While the Ranks of the militia and the undead were easy enough to sense, the species difference could make a massive difference, even with the same maximum energy output.

For example, there was one huge Demon over by Rae at the river. He was shirtless and simply shrugging off anything that hit him. He didn't have a barrier active that Karl could detect, but the blades of the

Wights didn't even penetrate his skin, and he was just smashing his way through the Undead with a massive club.

So, while he was Royal Rank, and the Wights were Royal Rank, they were nowhere near his match in combat. It was an issue that was much more obvious here than it had been in the Golden Dragon Nation, where the Giants didn't really use much magic. When both sides were using similarly powerful magic, and one side simply didn't take damage, the whole equation changed.

That reminded him. Where was Cara?

Chapter 760 Cara Unleashed

Cara, uninterested in the horde of undead, had made her way down the docks to the rear rank of ships which had not rammed into the shore.

The Wights had much greater concerns than some sort of furry creature wandering between their feet as they charged at the docks, and none of them even tried to stop her advance as the curious Void Badger hunted for something interesting to do.

After entering through one of the open cannon flaps on the side, Cara found herself in the bowels of the ship, where huge piles of shiny things had been stored for her to find.

This was much better than fighting against the undead.

Not everything here was good stuff. Someone had put large rocks in here for no reason that she could tell. But there were coins and gems and even fancy pillows.

One after another, items were piled into her space, and then Cara hopped out the port and went to see what the other boats had.

This second hold wasn't empty, there was a pair of guards standing at the ladder to the upper levels.

Cara hit them with [Nullify] to take down their barriers, then stared in confusion as the undead collapsed.

That was strange.

But it was also not too important, unless the undead got back up again.

There was a fancy coffin in here, covered in human bones, but made of solid silver with red velvet and pillows inside. Cara flipped the lid open and climbed in to test the experience. The pillows were comfortable, so Cara pulled it into her space and went about inspecting the rest of the free treasures.

She found a bunch of cursed magic weapons, soaked in void and death energy. Those went straight into her space.

Once all the interesting things were gone from the ship's hold, Cara went over to inspect the bodies of the undead.

Strangely, they were just piles of bones with equipment. Dispel must have hit them hard enough that it dispelled the spell that was keeping them active.

But that meant they weren't undead - undead, right? They should be summoned undead.

Sister Remi would know for sure.

Cara moved on to the ships at the front, but there was nothing in them. So, she moved along to another dock.

On shore, the battle near the warehouse was beginning to turn against the undead horde, and they were quickly being pushed back to the water.

Karl couldn't tell if the other portions of the shore defence were doing as well, but in his portion, it was all but over.

Dana's swarm of magical blades were shredding the Undead who got too close to her section, while Rae and the big demon who may have [Limited Invulnerability] had pushed the northern edge of their section all the way from the river back to the first dock.

The deciding factor of the battle would mostly be the other fronts and the battle over their heads, which the Undead Lord was pushing closer to the surface by the second.

Karl vaguely noticed that something was changing in Cara's space, but he was busy firing arrows into the Wights, keeping them pushed back from the lines as the Militia worked to contain the attack.

He took a short break, and Loros ran over with an armload of water bottles. "Here, grab a drink. I gave all the jewellery to your friend the spider just a minute ago. You know, in case something happens." The pale skinned little Demoness announced.

"Thanks. No matter what, you can't be accused of not following through on your word." Karl agreed.

It wasn't being killed she was too worried about, but the city was taking increasingly large amounts of damage, and the stone carvings were rather fragile before Karl enhanced them.

Then, a blinding golden light changed everything.

Thor and Tessa began to glow, and the Undead began to disintegrate to ash, blowing away on the wind as their ships faded from sight at the three central Drodh docks.

Cara grumbled in annoyance as she nearly fell into the water when her final target vanished, but she made it to the dock without getting wet and carefully made her way across a drop line between the two docks to go see what Thor was doing that was so bright.

{Skill: Circle of Protection has advanced 1 Tier} Monarch Rank skill [Consecrated Ground] has been learned.

{Consecrated Ground} Epic Grade Holy Defensive ability. Reduces damage taken by 30%. Increases all damage done by Holy attacks by 30%. Deals constant holy damage to targets in range.

The light faded after a few seconds, and no undead within fifty metres of Thor remained on the battlefield.

Karl winked at Loros as the few remaining Demons on the south end of their section of the battlefield began to flee in fear.

Thor charged south at a full run, not even waiting to see if the undead he trampled were actually dead as he ran. [Consecrated Ground] was still active around him, and they would burn soon enough.

The southern dock area had seven docks at it, and therefore many more attackers, but also more defenders, including almost all of the Castle Guard and city defenders who weren't deployed on the ships.

Karl hopped down from his perch atop the warehouse to follow Thor, then leapt onto the back of one of Rae's Golems as they rushed past.

Standing on the Spider Golem, Karl could fire skill freely into the Undead at the south docks. Karl had expected Rae to join them, but he could feel her headed north with Dana on her back, aiming to clear the other set of docks in the Redwood Sprawl.

That left Lotus a bit confused. There were no more injured nearby, now that the Undead were dealt with in their immediate vicinity, but she was needed in two opposing directions at the same time.

After a few seconds, she gestured north. "Remi, let's go join Sister Rae. The Sprawl is short on healers all the time."

Remi picked up the healer and headed for the park. The streets here were narrow and winding, a maze that would make it nearly impossible to find them otherwise, and the battle was no longer on the shore.

The undead had pushed at least a block or two into the city, but everyone who lived in the sprawl would know where the park was.

Her bodyguards accompanied them, clearing the way as Remi raced over the ground faster than Lotus could run, thanks to her larger body.

"Healing Tree is back in the market." Remi shouted as she deposited Lotus on the grass where Karl had set them up last time.

Lotus transformed, and immediately, a flood of wounded came their way from the alleys and rooftops, appearing from everywhere, or sliding down fire escapes.

Rae should have left the Dana Mage with them, Remi thought. She was going to have way too much fun chasing undead through buildings and alleys to be carrying a Mage instead of going incorporeal.

But Dana had thought the same thing, and she was already flying overhead, just above the rooftops, so she didn't become too much of a target. That left Rae free to hunt now that her cargo had been delivered.

Next to the barbecue pit, Ophelia transformed back into her usual sized Werebear form.

"It looks like I get to watch the food while they're gone." She laughed.

Someone had to make sure that nothing tried to circle their position from the other landing points.