

Beast Master 791

Chapter 791 Butterfly In Distress

Karl reached down and picked up the chrysalis. It was heavily damaged, but hard and smooth as steel.

He still couldn't see it, but with it in his hand, he could feel the magic. Whatever was evolving must have cast invisibility on itself.

"What did you find?" Lotus asked.

"A crystal of some sort. I think it might be a cocoon. It's definitely the distressed creature, though, and there are bite marks in the hard shell." Karl explained.

The creature was still in agony, but Karl didn't know what to do.

Lotus had some ideas, though. First she cast a healing spell on it, then transferred it some mana.

That gave Karl an idea. He took out one of Remi's mana and stamina potions and dropped the crystal in it.

The crystal became visible and began to glow with power as it absorbed the potion at a rate that defied everything Karl knew about how volume and physics worked.

Then the whole potion bottle vanished, and Karl felt a new presence in his mind. A tiny, terrified presence.

[Did we get a new brother or a new sister?] Thor asked.

[I honestly have no idea. It's not hatched yet.] Everyone watched the newly occupied mental space as it began to transform. An entire stone city with an ethereal beauty began to form in the space, and the crystal in a bottle was lifted off the ground with a small stone altar.

Moments later, the bottle shattered as the crystal began to melt and then reform itself into a new form.

A butterfly with transparent wings a metre wide, and an impossibly blue body shaped like a crystal.

The creature was curious about where it found itself, and why there were others in spaces like the one it was in, staring at it.

The green one seemed friendly, so the butterfly made it a flower and sent it through the barrier between the spaces.

[Oh, it's an illusion. A solid illusion. Beautiful, thank you.] Thor thanked the butterfly.

Karl examined the creature's stats

{Glasswing Illusionary Butterfly}

{Evolved Stage} Newly hatched

{Rank} Overlord

{Evolved Stage} Newly hatched

{Rank} Overlord

{Innate Talent} Illusionary Domain

{Known Spells} [Invisibility] [Illusionary Domain] Creates a solid illusion near the caster, or in a separate space no larger than 20 metres in diameter per Rank of the caster. Damage to the illusion destabilizes the effect.

Lotus was staring impatiently at Karl, waiting for an explanation.

"It moved itself to my mental space. Or perhaps I did it subconsciously? Either way, it's there now. The System says that it's a Glasswing Illusionary Butterfly." He explained.

Lotus stared at him for a moment. "You... now have a butterfly?" "An Overlord Rank one that can use illusions." Karl agreed.

{Skill: Skill Master 4} activated

{Skill: Invisibility} has improved by one Rank.

Rae smirked as she saw that message.

[I think that me and this little butterfly are going to be good friends.]

Thor wasn't sure about that. [I think it's absolutely terrified of the outside world.]

It also didn't have any combat abilities. No attack spells, no venom, no limbs. It didn't even eat meat, it was eyeing Thor's plants with a growing sense of hunger.

Thor passed the butterfly a few long grass blades it had been staring at, and the Butterfly slowly began to nibble. Well, in a way. The plants seemed to just soak into the crystalline body, which had no visible mouth parts.

Lotus frowned. "There is only one problem. Have you considered the lifespan of a Glasswing Illusionary Butterfly?"

"What do you mean?"

Lotus frowned. "Well, they're immensely powerful, but twelve hours after they evolve, they run out of energy and die. They breed as caterpillars."

That was... inconvenient. Karl had no idea what happened if a beast in one of the spaces died of old age. But for now, the butterfly was happily eating and the fake city in its space was beautiful.

Karl couldn't see any reason that the butterfly should be dying so fast. It looked healthy and happy, eating in its space, soaking in the power of the space, and it was practically brimming with vitality. Nothing about it screamed 'twelve hours to live'.

Karl got a mental image of the Black Elf Grass that the butterfly was eating, and wondered if that was just an expression of happiness or an explanation.

Was it possible that the only food it could digest as an adult was extinct? Thor had brought this back from a dungeon instance that was set in the distant past.

Not long after, the butterfly fell asleep on the long blade of grass, and the illusionary realm of its new home began to get a bit unreal.

There were two copies of Thor wandering around, an illusionary Remi was making potions while reading a book, and a Winged Void Badger flew the skies, which were now full of multicolour swirling smoke.

"Hey, this is private property!" Someone shouted from behind Karl, who was fully distracted by the events in the spaces.

Suddenly, the world in the space was all around them, and the terrified butterfly had created two Hawks and a Rae for defence.

"Little Butterfly, calm down, he's not going to hurt anyone. You can bring your illusion back inside your safe space." Karl whispered.

The illusion quickly faded, and the butterfly fell asleep again, dreaming of its illusionary city.

"Sorry about that. Illusion Element pet got away from me. We will get off your beach right away." Karl apologized.

Then he cast [Invisibility] over the group, leaving the homeowner to stare at nothing. That skill was going to be a lot of fun in the future. As it turned out, invisible targets could see each other, but nobody else could see them.

Karl led the group back into the city before the irate Demon who owned that portion of land could stop hyperventilating. For a few seconds there, he thought that he had been sent instantly to the afterlife as the world changed and monsters appeared.

By the time that he recovered, they were gone, and he realized that he hadn't gotten a good look at the group. If he knew who they were, he would go have words with them for scaring years off his life.

After he found backup.

They walked to the busier streets and Karl hastily released the spell before someone got run over by a pedestrian five times their size. The Dungeon could wait, they had things to do now.

Chapter 792 Glasswing Illusionary Butterfly

Davis was startled to see them back at the house so quickly after leaving. That wasn't long enough for a full clear of the Dungeon at all.

"There is a Guild Cooldown timer, and the beasts trigger it as well. So, we had to wait. But we made a little detour, and found an interesting thing." Karl explained, not going into detail, as there was a customer in the shop, a young warrior with some sort of badge on his shirt.

Karl guessed that it was an employer tag, marking employees of the company. The boy didn't have a Guild Tag, but he did have the look of someone who had seen things that most teens didn't.

That was a look that Karl was familiar with. He was doing mental calculations, so it was likely to afford one of the cheaper rings.

Karl noticed that there were now Ascended Rank wooden rings in the case, as well as Commander. But Loros had gone in a very different direction than what Karl had been teaching them yesterday.

Instead of combat runes, she had made functional inscriptions that had translated surprisingly well to system stats.

[Ring of Cleaning] Creates a vortex around the ring that draws in loose debris and dust from up to five metres away.

Alright, maybe she had just gotten frustrated after dropping a small piece, or constantly cleaning her space.

But there were other functional ones after that.

[Ring of Refill] fills a container under one litre in size with water

[Ring of Cleanliness] rinses the user with a veil of water from head to toe

They were expensive for people who made Ascended Rank wages. But for an adventurer or caravan guard? Some of those would be fantastically useful.

She wasn't a powerful Demon, and nobody in the city really needed combat skills at Ascended Rank. However, those useful items would make life so much better that keeping a few of them for employees or on a trip was worth it.

A young mage came in, in Academy robes, and ran over to the case where the young warrior was standing. Then he smiled and pointed at the [Ring of Refill].

"Good Sir, how much for that ring?" He asked.

"The Ascended Rank functional items are two gold coins each." Davis explained.

That really was a lot for an ordinary worker. But the student smiled and nodded.

"If you would, please. I will take that ring."

The boy placed out stacks of silver coins on the counter, and Davis slid two back to him.

"You miscounted, dear customer. Thank you for your patronage."

The boy noticed Karl looking at him and smirked. "I'm an Earth Elemental Mage, and we're not allowed to carry anything with us around the Academy but a wand. I can't cast water magic, but now I can make myself a drink while studying."

Karl smiled. "You will be popular very soon."

The boy looked confused until Karl elaborated. "You're not the only one who can't use water magic, right? But you can make cups and fill them now."

The student smiled and ran out of the shop, headed back for his school to show off his new item.

Presumably, the restriction on items was intended to make the students work together, but self-sufficiency was always an option if you had enough resources or skills.

Karl headed up the stairs with the ladies, and settled on one of the many large cushions in the third floor's lounging room. Rae had made so many that they didn't even try to decorate in here. All that fit was the cushions, pillows and the bookcases along the walls, which were still distressingly empty.

He would have to order a shipment of books for the house.

"Well, you said that there is a butterfly. Since they don't last long, can you show us the Glasswing Illusionary Butterfly?" Lotus asked hopefully.

A fluttering creature appeared before her, and darted around the room, then settled on Lotus' outstretched hands.

Karl could see, by the lack of Soul Energy, that it was an illusion. But by thermal imaging and every other standard, it truly did appear to be real as Lotus gently stroked its crystalline body.

"So beautiful." She whispered.

The illusionary butterfly sprinkled a sparkling dust over Lotus, which its wings spread around the room, and Karl sensed the real Glasswing Butterfly's annoyance as the energy level in its space dropped but everyone else's energy level increased.

[Indeed, your evolution is troublesome for you.] Karl consoled the beast as it calmed down again.

Not only was it hard to find food, but when it got excited, it leaked its limited energy away. If it hadn't been in his space, able to regenerate itself, just that dump of energy would have left it crippled at this early stage after evolution.

As such, Karl was beginning to suspect that it was not that the butterfly had an innately short lifespan, but that it had evolved in a strange way, and it simply wasn't suited to life in the outside world. It needed a huge amount of mana input and specific foods to survive after emerging from its crystalline shell.

It could feel the contact with its clone, though. Having the Priestess stroke its back was very comforting, and soon the butterfly was sleeping again, while the clone wandered around the room, letting out a small waft of mana infused dust every time it found something exciting.

But the mana dust wasn't entirely a negative aspect. The mana level in the room was rapidly rising as the dust dissipated, and it wasn't dispersing into the atmosphere.

Instead, it was making a perfect resting room for the growth of magical creatures, and System users who could absorb magic from their surroundings.

For example, Karl. Whose beast spaces were rapidly increasing in quality now that the newest member had joined them.

Dana and the others were also growing rapidly, infused with mana far more powerful than their own. Most likely, this ability had been intended to create a nest, a safe spot where the Glasswing Illusionary Butterfly could rest without deactivating its [Illusionary Domain] ability.

Chapter 793 Making A House A Home

Karl watched the illusionary domain in the Butterfly's space as it slept, and the others whispered encouragement to it, so it would grow up big and strong and not have a short life as Lotus' studies said it would.

Well, most of them. Rae was whispering fun ideas to it because they influenced the dream world.

Currently, the Rae clones in the Butterfly's world had a crystal attached to their back, from which giant butterfly wings sprouted, allowing the spiders to fly.

The Glasswing Illusion Butterfly could create solid illusions, but Karl wasn't certain that something as large as Rae could fly in the nimble manner that she did in the dream world.

He was one hundred percent sure that it would give children nightmares, though.

Intermittently, the room would flicker with illusions as the butterfly dreamed of strange and fantastical things, based on the limited amount of the world that it had seen.

Then, an hour into its nap, just as Lotus was certain that she would finally catch the bright pink Cara which had been created in the small library, the small room transformed into a sprawling cityscape, with their mound of pillows in what looked like the tower of a castle.

There were windows all around them, and Karl could feel the breeze on his face.

The mana level in the room was nearly stifling for the others, and Karl could sense their unease, though Lotus was still happily chasing illusions around the altered room.

So, he thought he would explore a little, and see what the Illusion Domain could do.

There was only one door to the room they were in, but when Karl swung it open, he found the hallway to the Guild House outside.

Davis was speaking with a customer, the apprentices could be heard working in the shop, and the guards were chatting idly at their station outside. Nothing about the situation said that anyone was aware of the changes that had been taking place in this room, and none of them even seemed to sense the immense amount of Overlord Rank power that was in use.

{Location Significantly Upgraded. Use Class Skill: Home} Y/N

[Home] One Time Use Skill. The Packmaster may designate a target location as their permanent home, granting various bonuses as the location is improved. The [Home] Location may be periodically changed, but never deactivated.

Karl stared at the message for a few seconds before making a decision. They were here now, and while they planned to travel, this place did belong to them. It was home, at least for the foreseeable future.

[Home] Location selected.

{Upgrade Made} Expanded Illusionary Space

{Upgrade Made} Registered Guild Shop with Guild Bank Access

{Upgrade Made} Basic Security System

{Bonuses Applied}

1 ⇒ [Improved Recall] Recall Spell will activate with a shorter delay when returning to the Home location.

2 ⇒ [Recreation] The addition of an Illusionary Space for recreation improves mana recovery within the Home location by 20%

Karl felt the changes take effect, most noticeably the mana recovery, which made all the beasts sigh in pleasure at the influx into their spaces.

The spaces improved slowly, as the beasts used the majority of the mana that was provided to refine their own power. But with an extra twenty percent, the space itself was receiving a significant boost.

Karl stepped downstairs, and realized that he couldn't sense the Illusionary Realm at all. Except for the fact that he could feel the Butterfly's unique magic signature. He watched quietly as the two in the store finished with their customers, then Mick took a broom and began to clean the floor, though it was already nearly spotless.

Caretaker Jo would be proud.

Speaking of which, where was she? Karl extended his senses and found the cleanliness obsessed demon hanging from a rope, polishing the outside of the windows clean. The ones at the east end of the house, facing the Castle, did not open, so she had taken it upon herself to polish them by hand instead of asking Remi or someone with better water magic to clean them for her.

[Hey, there is room to fly.] Cara cheered in Karl's mind.

That didn't sound right. Karl jogged back upstairs, and found that the Void Badger had flown out the window of the illusionary room, and out into the fake city. Lotus was right behind her, and she had climbed out the window of the tower to slide down a vine ladder she had created. There was a whole magical city to explore, and Lotus wanted to know what every magical plant was.

The fact that it was all an illusion and none of it was real didn't matter to Lotus. It was all new things.

But Cara had discovered a limitation to the spell. They couldn't be more than seventy metres apart, or you would hit an invisible barrier, past which you couldn't proceed.

That was the maximum radius of the spell, and while it appeared that you could explore the whole city, only a small portion of it could be active at one time.

That was a disappointment to Hawk, as his body was already considered huge. Seventy metres around himself would be fine if he was flying alone, but with others in the space, it wasn't enough room to really even take flight.

However, with everyone else distracted by the illusion, it was a perfect excuse to sneak out for a little flight. Hawk knew that the farmers hated rodents nearly as much as Hawk liked eating them, and he had yet to sample the delicacies of this continent.

Maybe once he flew out of the city a few dozen kilometres, he would be able to find something tasty?

Karl sensed him leaving, but the guards wouldn't hassle Hawk. He had been sitting on the roof right next to their station for the last few days, he wasn't a stranger. They should also know that he wasn't an invasive threat either, as he hadn't bothered anyone in that time.

Stepping back into the room reminded Karl that he had things to do to finish the project, and he immediately turned to go back downstairs.

"Davis, do you know where we can find books, just regular books, to fill the library space upstairs? We've been upgrading it, and it's feeling a bit empty." Davis nodded, then turned to Mick. "Go fetch a runner from the gate and give them three gold for a mass book purchase from Grimoire's Bookstore. Tell them that we don't mind if they're used, and we don't mind some duplicates, we're stocking a full library in a new Guild House."

He handed the assistant the coins from the store vault, and the Vampire ran outside with a fancy silk and lace umbrella, created by Rae to match her work uniform, and to protect her from the afternoon sun.

The uniform dress that Rae had made her, black on one side and white on the other with long sleeves and frilly skirts, was cute, but the sleeves were loose, so her arms might have been exposed, and it didn't protect her face.

Chapter 794 Home Library

The response from the bookstore was incredibly fast, even given that it was only up the street a few blocks.

Within the hour, workers were showing up with wheelbarrows full of books, and being ushered through the shop, past confused customers.

"Right in here. This room is the library, pardon the chaos, we were just tweaking the illusions." Karl instructed.

All the curtains had been drawn, and Cara had returned to her space when the guests arrived, so there was no indication that the room wasn't actually shaped this way, though it would be a waste of interior space, as the illusionary space was round.

It was also two stories tall, and Karl noticed that there were bookshelves all over the second floor, which was only accessible with a small spiral staircase.

That had to be a nightmare for the workers, but they didn't appear to mind.

Karl was concerned that he might have to restrain Remi, though. The Naga Queen was interested in every title that entered the house, even though there were thousands of them for the workers to place.

The problem was only solved when Remi found an Alchemy textbook among the titles, and settled in on a cushion along the far wall to read.

"Where did all these come from, it's quite the wide range of books that you've found for us." Karl asked as a worker loaded the shelf beside Remi.

"Oh, everything here is a return. They're all used novels from the Castle, the Academy, or the lending Library that were retired and repaired. The shop has a whole basement full of boxes of books that were fixed and never made it back for sorting and resale.

Now, they have a bit of space in the basement again, as we will have delivered nearly ten thousand titles to you by the time that we're finished with these last shelves.

A lot of them are fantasy and Romance titles from the ladies of the Castle. They tend to be voracious readers, and the Noble ladies like variety, so we have a contract to replace their selections once a year.

Most of those books end up in the basement, and now here.

We went all along one wall, though. So you don't just have recent arrivals, some of the books that made it to your shelves have been in that basement for nearly a hundred years, preserved by the shop's magic." The worker explained.

That was great news, as they would have the chance to get some forgotten knowledge in the mix with their random selection. Remi had noticed there were an awful lot of educational tomes as well, so they actually had a rather large training Library now. "Were they sorted in any way?" Karl asked as the workers finished the shelf and began loading another.

"Yes, as well as we could. There are four sections upstairs. Educational, historical, skill knowledge, and Magical knowledge. On the lower floor, we have fiction, romantic fiction, modern affairs, and that final shelf will be full of introductory training tomes from the schools. We have found that acolytes and assistants from the Guilds like to sneak into the Library, and they make a smaller mess if they think that they got lucky and found the introductory tomes that they were searching for on the first few shelves."

The worker loading that bookshelf smiled and winked at Karl as he put a leather-bound tome labelled "Introduction to Water Magic" on the very bottom shelf, against the edge, where it would escape sight from the door.

Someone looking for it would notice it quickly, but it would appear to have been forgotten at the bottom of the shelf, where dust would normally accumulate more quickly.

Not that Caretaker Jo would tolerate dust. Hopefully, her magic was suited to gently cleaning the ancient tomes and well-worn schoolbooks.

The book dealer's workers finished, then looked around the room. "I know that you said there were illusions in play, but this room is spectacular. I think that most Noble Homes would be envious of the Library that you have amassed now. Enjoy your space, Sir. We have been informed that the bill was settled in advance."

Then they were all gone, and Remi began to pull the curtains open again to reveal the view of the city.

Karl heard a commotion downstairs just after they left, and the sound of someone drawing a sword.

He raced down to the shop, Ophelia and Tessa right behind him, and found a man in the black and white tabard that he had seen the first day he entered the city standing with his sword tip down, lodged in the floor.

The tabard wasn't halved, it was two thirds white, but other than that, it looked very similar to Karl's.

"Who is in charge here?" The man demanded.

"I am. What seems to be the issue?" Karl asked, noting that the man was an Overlord Rank warrior.

"Our Truelight Host challenges your Imposter Guild for possession of this Guild House and rights to remain in the city. The loser will be expelled from the city, or exterminated." The man announced.

{Guild War activated}

The man's name immediately turned red in Karl's sight, and an alarm sounded at the guard station.

"Did you wish to settle this by Champion, or by a full Guild War?" Karl asked with a smirk slowly spreading on his face.

The man whistled, and six more warriors in matching tabards marched into the yard, all Overlords.

Karl activated his armour, the Gold trim of the Guild War Champion tabard shining in the light.

The man's glare faltered for half a second, but he continued.

"War."

Karl activated [Invisibility] and the full suite of buffs at the same time that he drew his sword with the Haint Claw on his other hand. Then he moved two steps left with [Silent Movement] and attacked.

The warrior hadn't even located him yet when a sonic boom shook the walls of the shop, and Karl's blade pierced through the challenger's armour, while a shoulder slam carried them both out to the yard.

Karl reappeared so that the others could see the soul being torn from the Overlord's body.

Rae and Cara were out, ready for battle, when Karl called his summons out with Remi's.

[Hey, I can see glowing red people in the city.] Hawk noted.

[Avoid collateral damage.] Karl warned.

[No problem. I can see their house.]

The warrior in front of Karl spun to face behind his position and lashed out with a skill that tore half the roof of the workshop off as it passed through Rae's incorporeal and invisible body.

She only solidified her limbs as she tore into the warrior, targeting the weak spots in his armour.

Unfortunately for him, his first instinct had been to use [Slash], which was fast activating, but a physical damage skill. Physical skills did nothing to the [Night Hunter] incorporeal form, and before he could recover, it was too late.

Karl went after the man closest to the building, distracting him for an instant before Cara ran between his legs and cast [Disintegrate] straight up. The groin of most armour sets was the weakest spot, as the warrior needed to move his legs freely. But that meant that attacking from below was especially brutal.

It didn't cause the sort of deadly damage Cara had expected, but by the pained howl the man made, it had gotten through his armour.

Karl didn't let up, driving him backward and onto his back, where he was struck by a massive bolt of lightning that left him twitching until Thor's massive foot came down on his skull.

Tessa was on the Cerro's back, and Lotus was in tree form behind the house, where she couldn't be seen by enemies approaching from the street.

Whistles were sounding all over the city, and Karl turned to face the gate as a squad of Guardsmen ran inside.

"Halt! Public Guild Wars are prohibited in the city!"

Chapter 795 Truelight Host

They had been fast, but not fast enough. In the minute it had taken them to realize that this was more than just a fight in the yard and organize a full squad, three of the seven Overlords were dead, and Hawk had begun the mass bombardment of the enemy Guild house, as well as their members in the streets.

Karl didn't relax his guarded position, though the surviving warriors of the Truelight Host Guild were lowering their blades.

"They came and challenged, then refused a duel by champions, insisting on a full-scale Guild War to annihilation." Karl insisted.

"And who called for reinforcements?" The Guard Captain demanded.

"I don't know what you mean. We've all been here since the start of the fight." Karl replied, and the four Overlords nodded in agreement.

None of them had called reinforcements, and the fight was on Guild House property, not in public.

[Hawk, stop the bombardment, I think we broke a rule.] Karl warned.

Hawk mentally shrugged and flew close enough to return to his space.

The Guard didn't reply for a few seconds as he used a communication spell.

"A group of Truelight Host's junior members was ambushed by an unknown assailant in the Fool's Walk boardwalk area. They were incinerated by an Overlord Rank ability, and heavy damage was done to the surrounding area.

Then a group of them was seen firing spells in the Forest Gate district, upward toward the Ghostfire Thunderbird who is often perched here at the Darklight Host Guild House.

Both are violations of the city code on Guild Wars, which restricts battles to Guild Properties." The Captain explained.

"So, the attack on their Guild House was fine, right?" Karl confirmed, as Hawk had done heavy damage to that building.

The closest of the four surviving Truelight Host Overlords took off their helmet, revealing a vibrant red Demoness with her horns filed to nubs.

"What do you mean, the attack on our Guild House?" She asked.

"I had one of my bonded beasts bombard your Guild House with Ghostfire. It's gone, along with everyone in it. Well, most likely everyone. The house is still on fire, but Ghostfire isn't easy to put out."

The Demoness went so pale her face faded to pink, and she collapsed to her knees.

"No, there is no way that they could know where our Guild House is." One of the others muttered.

"The one with thirty of your people in it, to the west of Forest Gate?" Karl asked.

The guard verified something with a communication gem, then shook his head and sighed.

"The Guild War is over. The Guild Master of the Truelight Host is dead." He announced.

With that, the red highlight on their names faded, and the four Overlords faces morphed to expressions of horror, visible only as widened eyes under their helmets, except for the one with her helmet off, who was openly weeping.

"How could the Guild Leader die?" She mumbled, with a hopeful look at the Guard, begging for it to be a lie.

"Some sort of Overlord Rank flaming tornado. He tried to rescue the wounded from the flames, and ended up trapped in the spell."

That made sense. It wasn't easy to escape [Hellstorm].

The Guard Captain patted her on the shoulder. "He was a bastard, but he was your bastard. We will allow you twenty-four hours to gather the Guild's belongings before you are escorted out of the cities as the defeated party."

Tessa raised a hand to stop the guard before anyone left. "As a High Priestess of the War God, I have to know. Why? What possessed you to start this Guild War that took so many lives in minutes?"

One of the warriors took off his helmet, letting it vanish into his storage. "The tabards. The Guild Leader was upset that your colours were so similar to ours, and he demanded that we run you out of town.

Ormeth should have accepted the challenge, where the guards would have supervised and stopped him from being ambushed, but he was always prideful."

Ormeth must have been the first one to die.

Tessa shook her head. "Foolishness. Pure foolishness. There are few things that the Red Dragon Goddess despises more than senseless wars." The other two Warriors picked up their traumatized member, then moved the bodies to their inventories.

Much to Rae's dismay.

The man with his helmet off turned to the Guard Captain. "We will be out of the city within the day. Where were the wounded taken?" "Into the care of the Guard's healing department. If they're too injured to move, they will remain in our care until they are discharged, so don't plan to move too quickly."

The four left, and the Guard Captain turned on Karl.

"The only suspect for the damage to the boardwalk is your Ghostfire Thunderbird. Do you require a payment plan for restitution?" He insisted.

[Sorry.] Hawk apologized, as he realized they were being made to pay for the damage to the ground around the red targets.

"How much is it? I will pay in gold."

The Guard Captain nodded, and a soldier behind him handed him a sheet.

"These are the itemized damages. The Guard will distribute payments to ensure they are made."

Karl passed it to Davis, who nodded and brought out a small bag of gold from the store's vault. "Restitution, with the collection fee and city levies added." He declared.

The Guard smiled. He liked it when they came across smart people. A little lubrication kept the wheels of bureaucracy moving smoothly.

Karl sighed. "We might need to reconsider our magical item selling operation if it's going to put noncombatants in danger."

Davis chuckled. "I think you misunderstand. This fight will be the talk of the city for months. One major Guild War a year is already a lot. But targeting the same Guild multiple times is unheard of. They lost four Overlords today, and it's our word against speculation by the shopkeepers down the street on which side rejected the offer of a duel.

I don't think that anyone will be eager to challenge the Darklight Host during the next decade, and now that we've been challenged, the Guild House will have the option to [Recall] a Champion if we are challenged again, so there is no need to keep a powerful member on call at all times."

At least someone knew how the system worked.

Chapter 796 Gossip Spreads Fast

Within the hour, word of the Guild Battle had spread through the city, and the timeline had already gotten blurred by gossip.

The rumour going around the city was that someone had attacked the Thunderbird while he was scouting, and the beast had retaliated by wiping out a group of Initiates while they were shopping.

The thought was horrifying to the people, but not as horrific as the storm of swirling flames that had eaten the Truelight Host Guild house. There was so little chance for them to defend themselves, even when the attack had come so long after the alarms signalling a Guild Conflict had been sounded.

That had to mean that the attack had started at the Darklight Host shop, and they hadn't been given the chance for a challenge.

Under normal circumstances, you would not openly attack and try to take over a shop if you didn't have overwhelming strength. Not only did you need to win the property, you needed to convince the City Governor that you should be allowed to keep it. The full activation of the System was relatively new, even here, and the old rules were still in place. Those rules said that whoever the owner had designated as the inheritor got the property, and if they were permanently dead with no heir, it went back to the city. The rule of law did not support taking over shops by force.

However, the Guild Function allowed the victor of a Guild battle to force the other Guild's members out of the city. It would remove their Guild House designation from the property, and make the members physically unable to enter it after 24 hours. So, the city generally took over the loser's property, and gave them the net proceeds after it was sold.

Already Guild Alliances were forming, so that entire regions would be pulled into a larger battle, which essentially prevented wars from starting, but both parties involved this time were independent of such alliances.

The guards were still waiting in the yard, so the kitchen staff brought them out tea and snacks while they waited. The guards had called over a repairman for the roof of the workshop, but Karl suspected that just fixing the roof tiles would not be enough to calm the two unfortunate sculptors who came metres from being bisected.

Somehow, the whole thing felt like a loss, even though it was objectively a crushing victory for their side.

"Davis, if you can get a hold of the mage who did the barriers, some of them were damaged during the battle, and we will need stronger ones for the workshop made. I know it was an afterthought, so we didn't put much of a barrier on it last time, but now it appears that we need to prepare for a much more violent future for the property." Karl instructed.

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"Of course, Sir."

The guard Captain turned to Karl. "Were there any casualties on your side? We can bring over shamans to resurrect."

Karl shook his head. "There were no casualties on our side, but we have Lotus. She can resurrect."

The Guard blinked slowly, as he realized that the fallen Overlords could have been resurrected right where they were. Well, in theory, as the Priestess was unlikely to bring enemies back to life even if her Goddess agreed to it.

Loros and Wendy finally came out of the ruined workshop, allowing Tessa to check them over.

"We're alright, really. The barrier on us never broke, even though the workshop did. Who creates that, by the way? It's a really comfortable barrier." Loros explained.

Thor stomped his feet to get her attention, and lowered his head to accept her praise.

"Oh, it's Thor, right? Thank you so much. I thought that we were in real trouble, but when the roof tiles collapsed, they hit the personal barrier, and nothing hurt us at all."

She was loving on Thor, leaning against his head to rub the good spot between his upper horns. The Cerro was having a great day.

Thor settled on his belly, so his scales could be more effectively rubbed, and decided to ignore the commotion outside the gates, where someone was shouting.

The City Guard had stopped someone from approaching, but the shouting caught Karl's attention. An unfamiliar woman was screaming at the guards and threatening to kill someone, so Karl went out the gate to see what was going on.

"You! The War Champion. I demand satisfaction. You killed my husband!" The woman screamed.

Karl and the Guard Captain stared at each other in confusion. Of course, he had, that was how Guild Wars worked.

But the woman wasn't done.

"The Shaman Can't bring him back, his soul is damaged. You bastard, what did you do to him?" She screamed, as the neighbours came out of their shops to watch the shows.

"It's divine punishment for stupidity. He refused to accept a Challenge and demanded annihilation. That's what he got." Karl explained calmly.

"The gods have nothing to do with anything, you Murderer!" Karl didn't even know how to argue with that. He had used the Haint Claw for extra damage, knowing what would happen. But did he regret it? Surprisingly, no. Not even a little bit.

Now, everyone on the street understood what had happened. The losing side hadn't been able to resurrect all their Overlords. That was a tragedy for the family, but the Demons generally didn't get too worked up about such things. If you tried your luck and ended up becoming the year's Find Out Champion, you deserved it in the minds of the majority here.

The major concern that they had was what that Darklight Host War Champion had done to him.

Karl's Tabard now had two golden rings around it, marking two above Rank defensive victories, so this was not a new feat for him. Whatever hidden Skill he had must amount to an instant kill assassination technique.

But Karl was also getting incredibly close to the Overlord Rank, they could all feel it in his aura. So, while this one did count, he was just generally a monster in combat by any standard below Totem Rank.

It was probably best to make friends with his people, as they had the secret to crushing a numerically superior force in less time than it took to drink a coffee.

Karl shook his head in dismay. "I'm sorry for your loss, but he refused the challenge. Safety isn't assured during a Guild War, and it was his choice."

Then he walked back in the gate and motioned for everyone to head in the house.

Chapter 797 Overlords and Butterflies

Once they were back inside, the change that had overcome his beast spaces with the addition of the little butterfly was much more obvious to Karl.

It hadn't spoken yet, so he had no idea if it was a brother or sister, but it was curious about everything, and the influx of power that it brought to the previously empty space made a huge difference to the power flow in the spaces as a whole.

Some of that would be because the new addition was an Overlord, but it wasn't putting any pressure on his mind the way that Karl had expected from a beast above his own Rank. That might be because he was already close, but the amount of power flowing in and out of the butterfly's space was at least twice what anyone else's did.

It was also aggressively increasing.

The sparkling dust that the butterfly gave off coated the surface of the space like glittering snowfall, and as it dissipated it was absorbed into the space without being able to escape, which forced the power level and mana density even higher.

Davis looked up as he felt Karl surge with power, and smiled. "It seems that our large demonic friend is going to break the Overlord Rank bottleneck in one go." He noted.

"Seriously?" Tessa asked.

"Can't you feel it? Just a bit more of a push and he will soar past the breakpoint. I don't think that he will get stuck at all with the way that his aura is surging. His weapons absorb soul energy, and he just killed an Overlord."

That alone might be enough to push him through. That's how most of the Carnage Demons do it, and some of the Obsession Demons as well. But his magical power is increasing as well, and that's how the Magic Demons do it. They build up power in either their bodies or a storage item, then let it flood them to force all of the old mana out and break the bottleneck."

Dana blinked slowly as she realized that was an option.

She was close to Monarch Rank, as were the others. If she concentrated mana in a few items and her body, then released the pressure, she could definitely break the bottleneck.

It was a bit annoying to realize that every Demon in Drodh City knew such things, while the Golden Dragon Nation was still in the dark.

But that also gave her a brilliant idea.

{Tutor Ahmad. I don't know if you can receive messages from this far away. I learned something new from the Demons today. If you concentrate high-grade mana in an item or your body, then release it as a flood, you can force all the existing mana out of your body and break a Rank bottleneck.

Instead of trying to upgrade the existing mana, let the foreign mana strip every bit of the essence of your magic away and replace it. Hold that mana until your body adapts, then use it up and let your body replace it with new mana at the increased Rank.} She sent.

Thirty seconds later, a response came.

{I didn't think that anyone of lower Rank could send or receive a message across continents. It is very faint, and I had to use magic to recover it. It is good that you are not in trouble. I will try the technique with other mages who are stuck. If it doesn't kill them, we will owe you a huge debt of gratitude.}

That was something that Dana hadn't considered. The reason you didn't strip away all your mana to replace it with outside mana was because it was equivalent to a massive magical attack on the body, like trying to bathe your insides in an [Arcane Missile] spell.

Perhaps Demons were better suited to it? But if she was really in danger, she could always let the influx of mana flow through her. Plus, she could do the whole process with [Void Body] active, as Karl had never deactivated the Epic Guard after the battle.

Hers was still active as well, and it had taken a liking to Loros, who looked very similar to the pale violet construct, though Loros was a rich ivory colour with only a hint of purple undertones.

"Karl, can I get you to make something for me?" She asked.

"Of course. What do you need?"

"I need the largest mana storage item that we can feasibly create. I'm almost at the Monarch Rank bottleneck, and that should help me break through." She explained.

Lotus perked up as she said those words.

"Oh, that is a great idea. I know just the thing. I will make it in the yard, and then Karl can put Runes for Mana Storage on it, and make it a Blessed Item." She insisted before running back into the yard through the kitchen.

Karl wasn't sure what she planned to make in the backyard, but he could feel Lotus going all out with her magic.

Remi transformed from Naga Queen to Spirit Serpent form and raced through the house to go see, then sent back a mental message.

{Oh, she's making a Lotus Tree. I know just the thing. Under the Laredian Alchemy Tome on the altar, there is a loose piece of paper. That should be the runes to create a [Healing Totem] effect with Runecrafting. If you put that and [Blessed Item] along with tons of mana storage on the tree, wouldn't we have a real Lotus Tree statue?}

Karl wasn't sure how well that would work. But now that he had activated [Pack Affinity] he could use the Totems.

[Pack Affinity] The Packmaster has an affinity for all skills that any of his bonded beasts have an affinity for, and may learn them as normal.

In theory, it should be possible to inscribe that spell like any other. So, Karl dug out a Monarch Ranked Nature Stone from Hawk's space, a green stone the size of his fist, and began to carve the spell.

Chapter 798 Lotus Tree Altar

Carving the Totem spell was easier than Karl had expected. Unlike other spells, which were a complex set of System designed mana flows, the Totems were pure Elemental force given direction. When carved on a Nature Stone, getting the healing effect felt natural, and the process was finished even before Lotus called to announce that she had grown her tree statue.

Or perhaps it was an Altar to the Nature Gods?

When Karl walked out back, he realized that it was definitely an Altar. A face had been carved in the tree, and a small platform for offerings had been grown near ground level.

But that was perfect.

"Lotus, open the mouth a little, I need to put this inside." He instructed.

She complied without question, and Karl placed the carved stone in the tree statue's mouth. The face looked clearly draconic, partially emerged from the statue's surface, but there was no spot there for runes.

Instead, Karl went to the back of the tree and began his work.

He hid the activation runes in a long poem about the Green Dragon that appeared in his mind as he scratched the runes into the wood. Most of the focus was on the ability to store mana, and the [Blessed Item] spell that was added to the main runes.

The Totem Stone was linked to the tree's magic, and then Karl began to upgrade it.

Bronze, Silver, Gold, Amethyst, then Ruby red. The runes progressed smoothly, and Karl kept going, intending to create them to the maximum of either the tree's or his own personal capacity.

Then, his aura soared, and he felt a sense of joy from the little butterfly.

The runes turned from rich red to a ghostly green, shifting from Monarch to Overlord along with their creator.

The leaves on the statue turned from wooden carvings to vibrant green ones that looked absolutely real, except for the fact they didn't flutter in the wind, while both the eyes of the face on the tree and the interior of its mouth glowed with a soft green light as Karl loaded the tree with mana.

Karl could hear the guards running into their compound for the second time today, having jumped over the walls, as the gate was closed. But he wasn't concerned. Nothing about this statue would harm anyone.

Quite the opposite, actually.

As Karl finished the work, the statue pulsed with healing power, and a wave of healing energy spread from the tree through the courtyard, stopping at the walls and not spreading through the streets.

"Monarch." Someone called, then the voice hesitated.

"Overlord Karl. Congratulations. We sensed the power and thought your Guild might have been attacked again. But what is this? The weariness is gone from my bones, and I'm feeling like a young Demon again." The Guard Captain greeted them.

"A new addition to our home. A healing totem Altar, courtesy of the Green Dragon Goddess." Karl explained.

The group of Demons stared at the tree statue in shock. That was clearly an Overlord Rank healing spell, though it was a minor healing spell, with a healing over time effect.

One of the Guards came forward and dropped to one knee in front of the tree, then smiled and placed a sandwich on the altar before standing.

As soon as he did, the sandwich vanished, and the guards chuckled.

The Green Dragon was easy to please, your offering just had to be appropriate and heartfelt. Offering her your lunch was better than gold and jewels.

But even as they celebrated, the Guard Captain had a conflicted look on his face.

"This isn't to become a Temple to the Dragon Gods, is it?" He asked carefully.

Lotus shook her head. "No, it's just the home of Dragon Clerics. Naturally, we would have an Altar at our own home."

The Captain breathed a sigh of relief. "Thank the Dark Gods. Drodh is a Demon City, after all. Temples, except to the Demon Gods, are prohibited. However, everyone is free to worship as they will. The Demon Gods like the conflict."

The tree pulsed again, and Karl heard Loros laugh from the second floor. Someone must have injured themselves with the carving tools, and triggered the totem.

Karl saw a notification in his sight, hidden at the bottom corner, where he had moved all the other notifications so they didn't distract him in combat.

{Requirements for Next Class Advancement}

⇒ Reach Totem Rank

⇒ Fill All Beast Slots or combine spaces to remove redundant areas.

⇒ Visit any Dungeon, Instance or Relic with System integration

Karl considered that for a second. Shouldn't the Class Advancement come at Overlord Rank? He was quite certain that was the case.

Was it something with his class that he had to advance later than others by a Rank? Perhaps because his class was more advanced from the start?

But there was one more notification appearing in his messages.

{Home Upgrade Made} Healing Altar

{Bonus Applied} Pacifism

[Pacifism] Causes Holy Damage to hostile targets within the Home and calms their minds.

That should help Davis deal with the worst customers. Karl didn't think that anyone other than the attacking Guild had dared to get physical with the staff so far, but the new effect should prevent any such incidents in the future. Or at least mitigate them.

Karl also noticed that he was now back over fifty Skill Points again. Thanks to the successful defence of the Guild House, he was at 68 points, and would be able to choose a new skill from among those in his Skill Tree.

The obvious choice was [Pack First] which would remove the usage and targeting restrictions on [Evolution], at the cost of increasing materials cost every time that it was used on a bonded beast.

He was also interested to see what skills might be hidden behind that one. The second tier was directly related to the skill chosen before it. So, once he improved Evolution, what skills would reveal themselves? It certainly wouldn't be anything weak, even if it wasn't the most urgent of skills.

Chapter 799 Pack First

Karl considered using up his skill points, and quickly gave in to temptation.

{Skill Learned} [Pack First] Removes the usage and targeting limits on {Evolution} but adds an increasing materials cost every time it is used on a bonded beast.

{Remaining Points} 18

{New Skills Available}

(100 Points) [Benevolent Elder] Unbonded beasts Evolved by the Packmaster gain the ability to form a [Contract] with eligible targets before the target's initial Class Selection

(20 Points) [Limitless] Passive Skill. Beasts Evolved by the Packmaster have an increased chance of surpassing milestones in development.

Karl stared at the options in shock. The second one was in line with what he had expected from Evolution. Evolved beasts having an easier time growing was precisely the sort of skill that you would expect.

But that [Benevolent Elder] skill? That was wild. It was like gaining the power to just directly select an advanced class for someone else. Not only that, but they would be forming a contract with an Evolved beast, with immense potential.

Everyone else noticed the faint smile on Karl's face and waited for him to finish whatever he was doing and explain to them.

It took him a few minutes to come back to reality and realize that he had become the centre of attention.

"Ah, sorry about that. I selected a new skill after advancement. But it unlocked the path to two new skills, and one of them is incredibly interesting. Not at all what I expected." He explained, but Lotus and Dana were not going to let it go that easily.

"The skill I unlocked is one that helps me allow my beasts to Evolve and grow stronger. However, the skill that it unlocked targets beasts that I have evolved but not bonded to. It allows them to pick a partner, like the System Quest Tokens that helped create the Beast Rangers." Karl elaborated.

Lotus giggled. "So, it lets you evolve magical beasts, then let them pick a pet partner? That sounds like fun."

Karl could see that she had grand plans for this ability already.

"Only ones that don't have their Class active yet. Sorry, Lotus."

The Nature Cleric seemed to deflate. "First it's a shy butterfly, now a skill that won't let me pick my own fluffy friend. Your skills are no fun at all today."

Karl shrugged. "Well, I guess they just didn't make it with Green Dragon Clerics in mind. Or, they might have thought that you would get too focused on your new friend and forget that you were supposed to be doing Priestess type things."

Tessa laughed. "That second part. Definitely the second part. Life is full of disappointments for the Green Dragon Clerics, simply because all they really want to do is spend more time with animals, and they would never leave their rooms if more beasts kept coming to them."

Lotus sighed in longing. That sounded like the perfect life. Just sitting in a room full of pillows, with new friends visiting every day. If she had the Glasswing Illusionary Butterfly as her bonded partner, it would be even better because they could use that solid illusion skill to make different scenery every day.

"Why don't we stay closed for the rest of the day and relax? No need to tempt fate while the angry families of the defeated Guild are still in the city." Karl suggested.

Lotus smiled at him. "Definitely. We can also make some fun new stuff for the shelves. We've got plenty of the basic items because we closed early. But I bet if we made some orbs with mana storage, the mages would love us. Or we could make weapons for the warriors.

Hawk could make a nice forge in the workshop once we get the roof fixed." Davis nodded. "I will speak to the mage when he arrives to repair the workshop. It shouldn't be difficult to get a basic forge made in the corner of the room."

Then Hawk would upgrade it. It would also give them a place to get rid of the trash items from the Dungeon, which were mostly Commander and Royal Rank, but contained very little innate magic. The materials should still be good for crafting other items, though. Unfortunately, that meant hiring another employee, if anyone was still willing to come work for them. They didn't have a blacksmith among the team. It would have to be a fairly powerful one as well. The base stock of the weapon relied upon the Rank of the artisan creating it.

Davis nodded. "If that is the case, I will return to my home. Mother will surely be happy to have me around for a bit more of the day than usual."

Karl patted him on the shoulder. "Take good care of her. Family is important. And if you know of a Royal or Monarch Ranked blacksmith in need of work, send them our way tomorrow. We will start gathering materials for them and cut them a good deal on the profit sharing."

The Fallen Angel bowed slightly, a motion that always caused his wings to spread, and then headed out into the streets under the watchful eyes of the City Guard.

They had seen enough trouble for one day, they didn't want any more.

Plus, who knew what sorts of dangerous weapons an employee of a magical items shop might be carrying.

The butterfly seemed to be all in on the idea of a relaxation day, Karl realized when everyone sat down for an early meal, so the kitchen staff could clean up and call it a day.

It was enthusiastically showing him images of scenes from a book that Remi was reading, played by actors on a stage.

The book was wildly inappropriate for public consumption, but there should have been a number of proper plays and storybooks in the collection that could replace Remi's beloved romance novels.

However, in a city full of Demons, there might actually be a market for such scandalous performances. If they were travelling in the future, little butterfly could put on a very convincing minstrel show for them, telling folk tales and acting as a bard to retell recent events in a fanciful way.

Karl could feel the butterfly considering that, then the scene in its space changed, and the romance was replaced with a flamboyant rendition of the battle at the south docks, near where it had been washed up on the beach.

Yes, that would work perfectly, Karl agreed. The realism level was incredible.

Chapter 800 Theatrical Performance

So, with the assistance of the butterfly, a new evening hobby was born. In the theatre of the illusionary city, just below the window of the library tower, everyone gathered to watch a live action play, based on one of the many books that had been brought into the illusionary space.

The butterfly turned out to be just as voracious of a reader as Remi was, but it had a distinct advantage. It was aware of what happened in its illusion, so when it made an illusionary clone of a person, it could have that illusion read various books to prepare for the evening's show, or even just teach the butterfly a bit more about the world in general.

The lead actor of the show looked out at the crowd and bowed. "For tonight's presentation, we have a classic saga, Hans and Greta." The man's deep voice boomed through the space, and Karl had to do his best not to laugh. He had noticed that book earlier, when the workers were bringing it in, and it was most definitely a children's storybook, complete with pictures.

Perhaps that was why the butterfly chose it first? Because it had an idea what the cast should look like?

The backdrop of the auditorium changed to a dark and misty forest, where two young demon children were being led along a path by their parents. The couple ditched the kids in the woods then went home to a swingers party, and Karl began to suspect that the butterfly's mind had been corrupted by age inappropriate reading material.

But Remi disagreed. She had already read this one, and the Demonic version of children's tales were much different than human children's stories.

The children were discovered by a benevolent witch with a grudge against their parents, who trained them to be assassins and take vengeance on the couple who abandoned them. Parents who were brutally murdered at the end of the show.

The moral seemed to be to guide your children well, or someone else will raise them to their own ends. The Demons in the room were all cheering as the final scene of Greta throwing her parents' corpses into a pool of magical magma ended, and the actors came out to take a bow.

"That was absolutely incredible. I've never seen a show that good before. How does this place do that?" One of the cooks asked, and Karl realized that he didn't know any of their names.

They were... One, Two and Three? That couldn't be right.

"Do you mind if I ask about your names?" Karl replied curiously.

The head Chef, conveniently named One, sighed and shrugged. "We were sold by our parents to the owner of the Abalone Casino as children to pay off a debt. The owner renamed us, and when the System granted us classes, they stuck. At Ascended, we petitioned the city to have the debt discharged, and the City Governor agreed that we had paid long enough. But the names won't change, no matter how we try to give each other nicknames."

The demon known as Two smoothed the white hair between her curled horns. "It's convenient sometimes, though. People think that it's a disguise skill, and nobody wants to anger a potential assassin."

Karl smiled as he remembered that when his System was only partially activated, when he disabled the display, it would turn off the visibility of his name to others as well. That had caused a lot of suspicion that he was an infiltration type class.

"What would you like me to call you instead?" He asked.

"Abbie." They replied in unison.

"All of you?"

They nodded, all determined that they wanted the same name. Karl suspected that the reason that they couldn't get the System to change their tag was because they couldn't agree on unique names. But it was also possible that you couldn't change it at all.

Mick's name tag still said Michelle, even though the vampire never used her full name.

A few minutes after Hans and Greta ended, a new group of actors appeared on the stage.

"Please join us for our rendition of the defence of Arurd River Crossing by the Leg Regiment during the Drodh-Laredian War." The man, dressed as a Noble courtier, announced.

That sounded like it could be interesting, Karl decided. It was local history, a war between Drodh and their neighbour to the south, and the Leg Regiment was well known within the city. They were stationed up the river a few hundred kilometres, and often escorted riverboats to the docks with crops.

This one was a military docudrama, and the special effects that could be made by a Glasswing Illusionary Butterfly were better than anything Karl had seen on television at home. You could even feel the thumping of spell explosions as the battle was replayed, ending with the dramatic duel between the two regimental Champions, both Mythic Rank Demons. Nearly ten thousand acres of forest and cropland were completely obliterated during the fight, which ended with the Leg Regiment Commander victorious, but his Regiment almost annihilated. Fewer than a thousand of his fifty thousand men survived the siege.

Dana fell asleep in Karl's arms during the second show, and most of the others were rousing themselves to go to bed once they realized it was over.

[Thank you for the shows, little butterfly. You did an incredible job.] Karl congratulated the newest team member.

One of the actors reappeared on the stage and bowed to Karl in response, then vanished again.

Perhaps that was how the butterfly preferred to communicate? Not directly or through a verbal mental link, but with their illusions representing them? That might actually be easier to interact with than some of the others. At least you knew when the butterfly was paying attention. Cara could be staring right at you and still not listening.

That made the Void Badger laugh. [It's not my fault that life is boring. But this place is fun, I like it here. I think I will nap here today.]