

Beast Master 851

Chapter 851

Now that the rush of a large custom order was finished, Karl got to work on the items for the city's purchasing agent, and started to plan what he should do with his [Tiny World] spell.

There were so many options, and it could be used for dozens of different purposes, but each of them would require that he set up the interior in an entirely different way.

The best option seemed to be a hybrid living space. While he could enter it, that didn't seem like the most productive way to use the space when he was already advancing faster than everyone else.

With everyone but Thor at Overlord Rank, Karl was already moving steadily up through the power growth range, and the rest of the team had just reached Monarch.

So, the best thing that he could do was to create a training and living area, with water, trees and a large open area for training, plus a house. Most of that would be real, but Karl fully intended to use [Illusionary Domain] to build the house. Bringing someone other than Jones, who was still sleeping off his advancement, to build a house in a separate space would raise far too many questions.

Not only that, but if the space collapsed, it would also dump the house out into the open wherever they were, and that would be incredibly awkward. Not to mention the damage that it would cause.

He needed something that would help them grow. Something like the beast spaces, which pushed his bonded partners forward. They already had a spell like that on the house, so he could do something

similar to the [Tiny World], along with runes for potential increases and growth rate, like he had done on the bracers. But that really seemed like something that should wait until he reached Totem Rank, as it would be such a large difference in power. However, the basic space could be created right away, and the team was eager to help.

They all had their own ideas on what they wanted in the space, they just needed the room and the opportunity.

Karl thought of the instances he had been in before. They were basically the same as the [Tiny World], but some of them had extended for multiple kilometres. Karl didn't know what the limits were to his spell, as nothing was listed. So, he could only hope that it was going to be large enough for his needs, at least as large as the Beast Spaces.

The plans for this shipment were simple, so Karl did them first, and then set the collection of weapons to the side for Davis to collect.

That left him free to focus on the new space.

[It's just like forming a new Beast Space, right?] Hawk pondered, not sure why this seemed to be such a big deal.

Now that the beast spaces were at Overlord Ranked, they were dozens of kilometres across, with plentiful plant life, their own climate and everything.

Karl used that optimism, and began to build the outer boundary of the [Tiny World], expanding it as he went so that he could check the limits of what the spell could maintain.

Inside, the world was just simple flat ground, with bare dirt for now. But the process of creating the space was even simpler than Karl had imagined. He just added more mana to the spell, using all that he could channel, plus his internal reserves, and the space smoothly increased in size, slowing as the volume per metre of expansion increased.

The first few kilometres in diameter went rather quickly. But the space was spherical, and couldn't be made any other shape, as far as Karl could tell. He had tried to shape it like a puck, round and flat, but that hadn't worked at all. The sphere simply refused to change.

Once it got to ten kilometres in Diameter, every bit of extra distance required immense amounts of power. So, Karl changed his focus from expanding to reshaping the space.

He inserted a large lake off on one side, a swampy area, a hilly region which could become a forest, flatlands where they could train, or set up stone pillars if Thor was expounding upon the joys of smashing posts, and even a small mountain, with steep cliffs and one gently sloping side to walk back down.

Then Karl added kilometres of tunnels starting at a cave entrance, to form a whole underground city. Now, all it needed was life.

The [Tiny World] spell didn't allow the formation of trees and grass the way that the Beast Spaces had, but Karl continued to keep the spell active as everyone pitched in and added some spare materials. Once they were inside, things changed drastically. Karl felt that he could cause the plants to grow with his will and added mana, cloning themselves to spread over the space. The new ones were not real plants, more like a magical illusion with the potential to be plants, or a guideline for where the plants would be able to grow in the future.

Even the lake got some water plants in the shallows. It would take time before all of that was grown in with real plants, but the visual effect would be there, the same as it was in the Trial Instances.

Then, Little Butterfly added the illusion of the Guild house, with its stone walled courtyard, and Karl felt it become an integral part of the space, no longer a separate spell.

That was wonderful news. All it took was enough imagination, and he could create all sorts of nonliving things in the space. He just needed to know how.

The dozen plants wouldn't do much to keep a group of people alive inside, but he could always keep the space open a little, as Jones had informed him. He would just have to be careful of intruders.

The living plants that he had used as examples could be removed now, but Karl chose to keep them inside. The donors didn't need them, they had many more in their own spaces, and a bit of real plant life made this space feel more vibrant.

The fake plants didn't have a scent, so the whole space smelled sterile, like the house after Caretaker Jo went through with her cleaning magic.

But it was now complete, and he had a fully functional home away from home.

Chapter 852

As Karl finished creating the space, he opened his eyes and realized that he had moved. He was now in bed, with a Dana in his arms, and it was pitch-black outside.

It had been relatively early in the morning when he had started, and he was in a chair in the second floor work space, but he must have lost track of time at some point.

It was somewhat concerning that he didn't notice he was being moved, but he was fairly safe inside the house, and the beasts would have reacted if there was any actual danger.

Dana snuggled her face into his furry chest as she slept, and Karl noticed that the catlike behaviours remained, even after she had changed forms back. The biscuit kneading was adorable.

But he didn't want to wake her up, so Karl remained as still as he could until he finally fell asleep. The next thing he knew, the sun was up, and the smell of breakfast on the stove was making his stomach rumble. The noise of his stomach woke Dana, who laughed at his reclined position.

"Sorry, I think that I drooled on you. You were completely out of it with whatever spell you were casting. Thor said that it was an internal thing, and moving you wouldn't disturb it, so we moved you to bed. But I didn't expect that it would take nearly an entire day." She explained.

"Neither did I. But it's all finished now, and I will show off the results later. First, breakfast."

Karl equipped a pair of pants, and Dana put on what looked like one of his shirts. That had to have come from Rae, as the clothing bound to its wearer, but he had to admit that it looked good as the headed down to the second floor, where Karl could hear breakfast being set up.

"Oh, good morning, sleeping beauty. Did you finish what you were working on?"

Karl nodded. "Indeed I did. It was a gift from Jones, the Magma Dragon, and I know that you're all going to love it once you see it."

From across the table, Rae nodded enthusiastically. "I've been waiting a long time for this."

Then she left it at that, so everyone got to wonder what she meant as they finished eating.

"Alright, spill. What did you cast?" Dana demanded.

Before Karl could answer, Rae grabbed her and dragged her into the Tiny World.

"Tada! It's a Dana space!" "A what now? Tell me that you didn't find a way for him to bond me as a pet." Dana replied suspiciously.

Rae shook her head. "We're still working on that part. It's a separate space, like our Beast Space homes, but all in one. See, we have a forest, a lake, a swamp, grasslands, the Guild House, even a mountain for Hawk to perch on."

They didn't notice when Karl had brought everyone else in the house to the space, but they were all standing on the grass outside the courtyard of the replica Guild House, staring around in awe.

"You made a separate space? That is incredibly rare magic. This isn't an illusionary domain, like the Library in the Guild House, is it? It feels different." Ashbringer asked.

Karl shook his head. "No, this is an actual stable separate space, though the principle is similar. If someone damages this place, it will not shatter. I will just have to rebuild what's inside of it. The Library Space does exist in the Library here, though. It's made the same way, so I don't know if it's actually an illusion here, or part of the Tiny World.

But I think that it turned out rather well.

I was thinking that it would be a safe space to rest as we travelled. Remember all the attention that we got while we were crossing Newbon? Now, we could appear to be a lone traveller, or even just a beast, if I were in here with you.

That would raise far fewer questions, and this place is designed to help whoever is in it grow their strength and potential."

The Demonic Blacksmith sighed. "It's a legendary treasure, and you treat it like a resort property."

Karl patted him on the shoulder. "In a way, it's both. But the Guild is going to need more materials on a regular basis in the future. That means travelling to hunt. And being able to do that without drawing a lot of attention will be essential once we start hunting outside the lands of Drodh.

We're in good standing with the Lord here. But what if we need something from Lared, or Ekh, further south? Or even from the Dwarven lands of Nabibun, on the Northeast Island? Gaining a reputation as a distinctive group of beautiful women with some Cat Demon is bound to cause trouble eventually."

Ashbringer chuckled. "And once you get away from Drodh, there is a higher likelihood that you will run into less civilized sorts that would be willing to kidnap travellers. At least in Drodh, we have relatively strict social norms. Lared is close to the same, as they're almost all Demons. But if you get to Ekh or Unzatharb, things are much different.

Ekh is almost all Orcs, and they have their own ways.

But Unzatharb is absolute chaos. They call it a Kingdom, but the King doesn't control much. The old Immortal has passed it all down to his descendants in sections, and they have made war with each other in the name of total control for longer than most can remember.

I recommend that you stay away from there, unless there is no other option."

Karl nodded in understanding. The Orcs respected power, so that would be alright. But a nation ruled by ancient lineages of warring family members? That didn't sound like fun.

Lotus transformed into her [Beast Form], a tiny green dragon, and began to fly around the space. This was nice. It was private, with lots of room to fly, and no worries that someone would capture her, thinking she was a lost hatchling that might have a reward for its return.

Chapter 853 Jones Is Back

Sitting in the separate space, the Darklight Host Guild had no way to know of the chaos that was unfolding in the city of Drodh. For their newest Ascendant resident had just returned to his home. Jones was back from his private island.

The aura of a Totem Ranked Dragon was impossible to miss, as he lived in the suburbs, which were still rather densely populated, even if they weren't as packed as the Sprawl.

Plus, his species had changed along with his advancement, so while he still felt somewhat familiar, none of the neighbours knew if it was Jones, or some powerful family member who had shown up at his house unannounced and then refused to take visitors.

Finally, the arrival of Domesk and Rashid, the Totem Ranked Overseers of the Stone Chapel and Forest Gate districts of the city, had prompted Jones to answer his door.

"Good afternoon Gentlemen. I didn't expect your arrival so soon. Please do come in for tea." Jones greeted them, as if he hadn't just been ignoring them standing outside his door for the previous ten minutes.

The two demons, one red skinned Wrath Demon, and one feathered Magic Demon, took seats in the ancient recliners across from the aged sofa covered in knit blankets where Jones was lounging with a plate full of sandwiches and tea.

Domesk broke the tension with a smile. "It seems you have had a fortunate opportunity, old friend. To have evolved from a Magma Dragon to reach the Totem Rank is something worth celebrating. I don't suppose that you could let us in on the method, could you?" Jones smiled. "I traded Ancient Treasures with one favoured by the World Dragon, and he gave me the last piece of the puzzle needed to refine my bloodline. A most curious sort of exchange, I admit. But it has worked out wonderfully for me.

In a hundred years, when I reach the peak of Totem Rank, perhaps I will try to find another similar opportunity and make it to the Mythic Rank."

A hundred years was not so long for a Totem Ranked Demon or Dragon. In fact, it could be said to be incredibly fast to reach the pinnacle of Totem Rank, even if you had the potential to go past it and into the realm of Myth.

"So, what are you planning to do now that you have reached the Totem Rank?" Rashid asked cautiously.

The Frostfire Gate district, a suburban area outside the city walls, didn't technically have an overseer. It was split between him and Domesk, whose areas of the inner city bordered that portion of the suburbs.

Jones smiled languidly, relishing the fact that these pillars of the city now had to be nice to him, as his potential and power was no worse than their own. Dragons had an innate advantage over most species at their own Rank, thanks to their immense mana reserve and affinity for their elements. "You know, I was thinking. It's such a long ways from your house to mine. Why don't I just look after these neighbours of mine, and you can look after yours inside the wall?"

The Demons chuckled softly at that. Outside the wall was a larger and more highly populated region than the affluent south side of the city inside the walls. What Jones was proposing was to give himself dominion over the largest district of the city.

Domesk shrugged and slightly bared his gleaming white fangs. "Unfortunately, that will have to go before the Lord and the full council of Totems. The two of us alone don't have the authority to change the borders."

Watching the trio of Totems walk through the city gates and down the main street towards the castle naturally caught the attention of everyone on the south side of the city, and by the time that they had made it to the City Governor's office, the word had already spread all the way across the Sprawl.

Jones was a familiar face to everyone, with some slightly shady connections.

He was the sort of dragon that could get you anything. For a price. There were some things that he flat out refused to take part in, like trafficking people and weapons. But for anything else, it was just a matter of how difficult it was for the old Dragon to get it for you.

It was widely rumoured that it was Jones who kept the Frostfire Gate suburbs from becoming the next Black Shade Slum. Not because he brought money to the region, he was notoriously stingy. But because he wouldn't tolerate criminals on his territory, so there were no gangs oppressing others on the south side of the city, which let them send money in and out, along with goods by merchant wagon.

Domesk and Rashid weren't blind to it. However, as Jones was capped at the Overlord Rank by his bloodline as a Magma Dragon, he wasn't previously a threat to the higher authorities, and they could treat him like any other crime boss in the city.

However, now that he was a Totem, ostensibly one of their group of powerful leaders, things would have to change.

They could overlook most of what he was doing, as he wasn't directly doing anything illegal. But there were a few aspects of his influence that would need to be curtailed if they were going to keep things running smoothly. Like his illicit trade in Skill Books that were supposed to be going through the Library.

There was an excellent reason for that practice. Keeping track of who had rare and powerful skill combinations, who was making more Skill Books, and more importantly, who had the ability but was not making or selling skill books, were all important things to know for a capital city.

If he was just handing out dangerous skills to unknown parties, what sort of chaos could it cause in the city?

Jones was well aware of their reservations about him. But it took the Ancient Dragon real effort not to let slip that the whole reason he had reached Totem Rank was because he had the ability and willingness to part with the sort of rare and powerful hidden skills and treasures that others did not.

Chapter 854 Equippable Item?

Even when everyone came out of the separate space and began prepping to set up the shop for the day, they didn't know that anything had happened. All of the excitement was focused on what was likely happening now in the Castle, and that was a fairly normal thing for the residents of Drodh.

Only when a customer came in looking for potions and talking about Jones the Magma Dragon returning as a Totem did anyone in the shop find out that there was anything going on in the city at all.

"So that's what you did that let you get a new spell. You helped a Dragon advance to Totem Rank." Dana whispered once the customers were all out of the shop again.

"I claim no knowledge of these events. But aren't you pleased with the new spell? It will make long journeys so much more comfortable." Karl replied.

Dana smiled. "Did you know that Rae calls it the 'Dana Space'?"

That made Lotus laugh. "That's a great name for it. But why isn't it the Lotus Space?"

Dana shrugged. She wasn't sure why she had been nominated. Was she secretly Rae's favourite? Did they see her as Karl's pet? Or did Rae just view her as an equippable item? The possibilities were many and varied.

While the city was freaking out about the new Totem Ranked Dragon in town, the atmosphere at the Darklight Host Guild House was quite relaxed. Sales had calmed down to a more reasonable rate in the last few weeks, and they could actually keep items in stock now. With two Commander Rank apprentices, they were doing quite well on standard stock items. But the Professors from Lared Academy were going to have to return to their school soon, and that would put the Alchemy side in a bind.

The two that were doing Runesmithing were mostly making experimental pieces based on assignments that Karl gave them, but the other two were helping Remi with her day-to-day potion making.

Once they were gone back to their regular jobs, she was going to need new assistants, unless she could convince Little Butterfly to make her some solid illusions to do the grunt work for her.

They wouldn't be as good as actual Alchemists, but they could do a fair bit of the drudgery. The portioning, cleaning and chopping didn't need any magical skills at all.

[Should we put up an ad? If people knew that we needed an apprentice, I'm sure they would send us one.] Remi suggested.

[We sell plenty of potions, we should take more than one.] Thor added.

Karl turned to Davis. "It seems that we should look for at least two Alchemy Apprentices. We're about to lose ours, as they have jobs to return to at the Academy. Without them, Remi will be short-staffed."

The black winged Demon smiled. "I will put up notices both in the shop and at the hiring board looking for them. Would Remi prefer them with or without a trade skill chosen?"

Remi mentally shrugged, which Karl relayed the same way. Davis nodded in understanding. It didn't really matter, as most of what they were making was still Alchemy potions, just with new recipes. There were only a few special recipes that would be impossible for the average Alchemist.

Ophelia took the notice when Davis finished writing it, and tapped the side of her head. "I know just where to find Alchemist Apprentices eager to learn and loyal to their employer." She declared, then walked out the gate to tack the hiring notice to the notice board outside the gates.

When she came back in, she had a smug smile on her furry face.

"Now Remi can just go out when the guards stop an applicant. I asked them to save the kids the silver and just shout for us to come out, since we're right here."

Remi smiled, an unnatural expression for a Naga's Serpentine head.

{That's brilliant. But we can put it up in town as well if we don't get good candidates. We should get some good ones from the outer suburbs, though.

They're constantly looking for good jobs, and the pay here at the Darklight Host shop is significantly better than most other places in town, since we give apprentices a cut of the profits.}

Karl didn't know that the other shops didn't give apprentices a profit share, and just paid them a base salary. The products that their shop sold were incredibly expensive, for the most part, and it just didn't seem right to give them no part of the windfall.

The Guild had already amassed a sizeable fortune in the store's branch of the Guild Bank, and that was after they had paid all their workers.

The Guild Bank wasn't one monolithic storage area. Instead, it was separated into a main bank, a branch bank, and individual store storage. Karl hadn't used the main bank for anything, in case there were

others who could access it without his knowledge. But the branch and store storage were strictly 'authorized users at this location' only, so they felt like a safe enough spot to keep money and items stored.

He couldn't see any other branches active, and there was nothing in the main Guild Bank, but that wasn't really unexpected after ten thousand years of inactivity.

What he was more concerned about was some ancient Dragons noticing that he was active and coming to look for the interlopers who had gained access to the Guild.

They might not be so understanding when he explained how he had become a member during a trip to the past. Dragons were territorial, from all that Karl knew about them, and they could view the Guild as their own. Especially if they were from the main branch.

But he didn't have long to focus on that, as there were already applicants waiting outside the wall, hoping to become the new Alchemists for the Darklight Host.

[Remember, you can't just pick the cute ones. They need skills and motivation.] He reminded Remi as she headed out of the yard with Lotus right behind her.

[If they're here first, and not being forced, they obviously have motivation, right? That's halfway there.]

Karl sighed. [Just remember that it's your own days that you are making harder if you don't get good ones.]

Chapter 855 Let Her Choose

Karl knew that things were going to go sideways the moment that Lotus followed Remi out to vet their candidates.

The candidates that had gathered were mostly nerdy demon children in their early teens, too small for a heavily physical trade, and too timid for business.

But Karl had some hope that they would make a reasonable selection, even if it was mostly based on who could get to the posting the fastest. It had been up less than an hour, which didn't seem like much time for good candidates to find out about the job. Especially if they were already in the city working day labour.

But luck was part of the requirement when it came to getting the best jobs. The ones who were in the right spot at the right time were the ones who got the opportunities.

With the assistance of the Guards, they quickly formed two groups. Ones who had seen Alchemy done before and ones who had not.

The first group was very small, and under the most perfunctory questioning by the gate guards, they were all moved over to form one group again.

So Remi decided to sort them another way. Ones who were willing to wear black and white uniforms every day, and ones that were not.

For Alchemists, that was just a splash resistant lab coat, but it did remove a few who didn't really want to be there.

Then Lotus asked them random questions about plants that were used in the Alchemy process, followed by more common-sense questions about handling dangerous liquids. Simple questions, ones that you could have learned in a kitchen as well. But that gave them ones with quick minds.

This was the point where it became arbitrary, as they had half a dozen candidates still, and they only needed two.

But Lotus and Remi had a dilemma. Two of them were small and fluffy, two of there were brilliant and knew a lot about plants, and the other two had answered all the safety questions right.

So, they brought all six back on a temporary basis, intending to give them a few days of temp work to see if they were qualified.

Dana laughed as Remi led the procession back into the city. "What do you think the odds are that they picked only cute girls?" She whispered.

"Not as high as expected. The Satyr is a boy, and that's a young incubus, not a succubus." Karl noted.

"I'm proud of them, they might have taken their jobs seriously for a whole ten minutes." Dana whispered.

"And then brought back three times as many employees as they went looking for." Rae agreed.

That was a minor detail. But Karl didn't honestly expect that any of the young Alchemists would actually be fired.

Remi led them straight inside the house to the second floor, where she had them pick rooms and change into the outfits that Rae had made for them.

Only a few minutes later, an angry young Incubus came stomping back out of the house, ignoring Karl and everyone else as he left the city.

[What happened?] Karl asked Remi.

[He was mad about the Lab coats. Apparently, it's insulting to tell an Incubus that he needs to cover up at all times while working.] Remi laughed. [He tried to flirt with someone, didn't he?] Karl guessed. [Yes. And he didn't take it well when Lotus shot him down without a second thought.]

That brought them down to only five new Alchemist apprentices, but Remi had them all changed into white lab coats and was herding them into the illusionary city outside the Library for their first day of study.

[It's a good thing that we got all those books. I've got the textbook that they need to get started right here. Oh, I need a teacher outfit. Maybe Lotus can make me glasses. Teachers always look smarter with glasses.]

Karl laughed a little at her enthusiasm for teaching. Two of her new students were newly advanced Commanders from strong Demonic bloodlines, but the others were going to struggle to ever make it to that standard.

That would make for an interesting dynamic in the alchemy shop, as they would now have three lead potion makers. Once the students learned alchemy, that was.

Commander Rank potions were good enough to sell, and as the new hires grew up, the pair of them shouldn't have any problem becoming Royals or even Monarchs. And then there were three more who could work as assistants, portioning, chopping and prepping ingredients for Remi and the stronger Alchemists. Naturally, they would split into pairs, working with one person more smoothly than with the others. But for now, they all needed to learn the basics, and Remi wanted them to study for a while before she resorted to cheating and having Karl just teach them Apprentice Runic Alchemy as a reward for their hard work.

According to a teaching book that she had found in the house's Library, that was the proper way to instill discipline and order among students.

Cara and Rae both disagreed, but for different reasons. Cara didn't believe that mental discipline was necessary, as long as you had time management and creativity. Rae thought it was just more effective to make them too terrified to misbehave.

They debated it for a few minutes, and then Thor suggested that life was about compromise. Some hatchlings needed a good tail swat to the head, and others just needed encouragement. It was better not to set your limits too strictly, in case something more, or something different, was needed to keep them on the right track.

Honestly, Thor didn't know much about raising hatchlings. But he had read a book in the Library about it one day.

That left Karl to work on inscriptions on the second floor, while the Professors finished their last few projects and prepared for their trip back home.

"You know, I could have Hawk fly you back, it would save days of travel." He suggested as Moira finished a template for the latest challenge he had set.

"I appreciate the offer, but we are to accompany a bulk order back as part of the security detail. With all the trade disruptions lately, the Academy wanted to be extra sure that they got their orders."

Chapter 856 Small Oversight

The next morning, the four educators had to return to the Lared Academy. The departures left the Guild House feeling oddly empty, even with the five new additions, who Tessa was teaching basic writing lessons that morning.

It was an oversight in the selection process.

While they were all hard workers, and smart, none of them had attended a formal school, and their grasp of both the Demonic and Human Common languages were shaky at best.

They could read the textbook, but mostly by word recognition, and that simply would not do.

But the Red Dragon Clerics were good at taking care of kids of all sorts, even if their specialty was war orphans. So, she had brought out her old lesson books, and began teaching them more of the human common tongue this morning, as that was what most of the coursebooks were written in.

How and when that tongue had spread across the world was a mystery to Karl, but it seemed that for textbooks, it was still the standard.

He had a suspicion that he might know the answer, though. The Common language was the one that Dragons chose to speak in humanoid form, as so few other species could speak Serpent, which didn't have a written language at all, other than the old magical runes.

So, as this was called the Dragon Isles, they had most likely maintained it as their tongue here, and the humans were the ones getting presumptuous by claiming it as their own common tongue.

Karl was sitting on the porch, enjoying the early dawn light and the smell of dew on the grass, when the first visitor of the morning came into the yard.

A ragged looking catgirl, mostly human, but with ears in the same white with black stripes as his bestial form, crept through the gate and then flopped down in the grass with a sigh of relief as the healing spell pulsed from the altar in the backyard.

Karl looked out toward the city gates, and caught the eye of a guard, who gestured toward the city, indicating that she hadn't come from the outside to see him.

It was still a bit cool outside to be wearing a tattered tunic as an outfit, so Karl brought over one of the knitted quilts Rae had made in a spiderweb pattern, and wrapped up the sleeping beastkin, then moved her to the other veranda swing in the sun.

They were still there, on opposite benches, when the first clients of the dawn came.

A pair of Wrath Fiends with a group of six Orcish warriors behind them came into the yard, where the Orcish folk promptly began fighting over who got to fill their canteens from the well first.

The Demons looked like they were going to apologize, but Karl just laughed and waved them inside. "Appraiser Davis isn't in yet, but Mick can help you with anything you would like." He informed the duo.

"Actually, we wanted to make a custom order for our next trip. You see, we're going around the southern tip to see the Orc King in Ghedg, and the Orcs lack most sorts of advanced crafting.

We wanted to bring them an assortment of magical items, but they can't be combat related in any way." The larger of the two Wrath Demons explained.

Karl nodded. "Orcs don't accept weapons from others, only what they make among their own Clans.

But that's not a problem.

We actually have a wide variety of patterns for useful domestic items. Cleaning, filling canteens, bathing. We've got waterproof war paint, I can make many of the items using stone, bone and rough gems as well. I know that some clans prefer not to use the most refined of metals or intricately cut gems."

The Demon looked startled by Karl's words. "You know a lot about the tribal lands of the Orcs. There aren't many left who feel that way, most of the Clans are now becoming more metropolitan, with their tastes aligning to fancy clothing and almost human tastes in items. But there are still many in the deserts of Ghedg that are hard to shop for."

Karl smiled and gestured to the far wall of the shop behind him.

"We also have a wide variety of silk in multiple qualities. If you want to trade them raw silk so they can make their own fashions, I'm sure that most clans wouldn't turn it down.

I met a few clans in my homeland that wouldn't take much more than food in trade, but I suspect that most aren't that restrictive." Karl offered.

The merchant winced, then smiled. "This will be a hard trip on our pockets either way. The potential profits are high, bringing magical items and silk down the coast. But the cost to load a trade ship, even a light Schooner like ours, is immense."

Karl got up from his seat in the sun. "Let's go inside, and we can discuss what you need. I am certain that we can work out a bulk discount as long as you don't need massive amounts of higher grade trade items. Commander Rank and under, we have Journeyman tradespeople to assist with. But as a smaller Guild, our Overlord Ranked Master crafters are very limited."

The second Wrath Demon, who had been silent until that point, spoke with a gentle lisp.

"I will be honest with you, Overlord. We don't have the sort of funding that would be required to purchase even a handful of Master crafted items to trade. One or two, possibly. But even that would cost more than the average load for our ship."

Karl thought about that for a second. They had a good point. The one or two Overlord Ranked weapons they sold every month brought in more revenue than all the Commander Rank and lower items combined.

"Alright, there is no need for me to pressure you to break the bank. How powerful did you need? Ascended and Commander? I don't think that we have any Awakened Rank apprentices at the moment, but we might have some old stock Awakened Rank Silk."

The two Demons silently conferred using System Messages. "Ascended and Commander Rank is fine. We would like to purchase three tonnes of silk bolts in varying colours. Also, if you can custom-make one roll at Commander or Royal Rank in the pattern that the men outside are wearing, I would like to gift them new tartan as a new year's gift."

Karl waited for Rae to confirm that much weight was viable.

"Alright, we can have that ready by morning. Now, let's talk about the rest of the shipment."

Chapter 857 Not Enough Staff

After they finished discussing the items that were required for the shipment to the Desert Orcs, which involved a thousand of the rings that could create water, Karl realized that two sculptors and himself were not going to be nearly enough for the Runecrafting section of the shop either.

They required someone like Lotus on the team, who could mass produce basic item templates.

Fortunately, for this shipment, the Orcs had suggested that most of the items were made of bone and wood. The desert Orcs adored those two materials for fashion, and Karl's team had literal tonnes of Monster Bones that could be cleaned and polished for the purpose.

Once the monster was eaten, there was no need to throw out the bones. They were still a magical crafting material in their own right, a minor treasure, so both Hawk and Rae had collected them.

Hawk put them in a pile out of the way, while Rae mostly used them for decoration in her nocturnal forest.

Ghostfire burned away everything undesirable, leaving the bones a nice charred black. And the runic string for creating small amounts of water to fill a canteen took only seconds to write. It was the energy draw of doing it hundreds of times over that would be the limiting factor.

So, Karl had requested that the group come back in four days, the day before they had intended to depart, and pick up their order.

That was still cutting it rather close, so Karl prepared yet another 'employee wanted' sign, then realized he already knew someone who might be able to make a reference.

"Loros, Wendy, if you can get started on this stack of bones for water creation, I will be back as soon as I can. I'm going to try to recruit someone who can make us more wooden items." Karl explained.

"Alright, boss. See you soon." Wendy agreed, while happily carving runes into the small bones.

It might not be sculpting, but practice made perfect, and carving runes into this whole pile of small bones that Hawk had provided would be excellent practice.

Her dad would be proud of her skill gains.

As soon as he left the room, Karl headed straight for the Dryads. He could hear someone in the back workshop, so he turned down the alley and cried out to the younger crafter.

"Rain, is your mom awake? I'm hoping that you two can help me find a new employee." Karl called from two buildings away.

The younger Dryad affixed her head through the vines around the workshop and smiled. "She's still asleep, but what can I help you with?"

"I need a full-time nature magic user to make wooden item blanks for the shop. If they don't have a Trade Skill, I can teach them an apprentice Runecrafting skill as well. But they need to be powerful, as we get plenty of requests for Royal and Monarch Ranked items.

Royal Ranked wood is good for Monarch Ranked items most of the time, but if they're still a Commander or even a strong Ascended, they will be able to make the bulk items that we need." Karl explained.

"So, the prerequisites are essentially that we have someone with the artistry to make ring blanks, and strong enough with nature magic to make the items you're shipping out in bulk, which are Commander Rank?" She clarified.

"I suppose that someone with the same qualifications and Earth Magic, who could make permanent stone and metal items, would be alright as well." Karl agreed.

"Creation type Earth Magic. Well, I do know one of those, but I'm not sure how that request would go. It's one of Jones' sister's grandkids."

Karl chuckled. "I am certain that our resident Nature Priestess would treat a young Dragon very well."

That made the dryad giggle loud enough that the neighbours affixed their heads out to see what was going on.

"I have no doubt that you are telling me the truth, but that might be precisely the problem. She has always been protective of her whelps, and seeing them take to new people might be too much for her to bear. Her partner is a Stone Dragon, one of the non-flying sorts of earth sub-dragons. But that means their children all have exceptional earth talents, and an affinity for fire, which would make them strong crafters.

You would have to talk to Jones about that, though. I don't know if you can get to him, but I know that me trying to visit is difficult these days, with all the Totems taking up his time. Now that he's advanced, he's got new responsibilities, and they want him to be in meetings all day while he learns their rules."

Karl nodded. "Yeah, that is a hazard of advancements. Once you have power, you get stuck with all sorts of new rules on how to use your power."

As they talked, Misty came outside with a smile.

"Overlord Karl, my daughter says that you require a full-time worker to create items for your shop's sculptors. I know exactly the right person for the job if they are willing to agree. Would you like to take a little trip with me?" The Dryad asked.

"Of course. Rain was suggesting one of Jones' relatives, but if you have someone else in mind, I can talk to both. You can never have enough artisans in a shop, as I have come to realize."

The dryad nodded in agreement. "It's a bit of a journey to Gazdri, but with your Ghostfire Thunderbird, we should be able to cover twelve hundred kilometres in a day. We just need to follow the river northwest, then where it ends, go straight west and we will find the city. That route would be faster than following the main road."

That sounded like a great idea to Hawk. Over that much distance, there had to be all sorts of new things to see. They had been all around the City of Drodh already, and a little bit outside it for only a few trips. But this one should take them almost to the western border of Drodh.

Hawk remembered someone saying there were Orcs there. Were they going to hire an Orc Shaman to make them items? That would be different. Maybe he could watch someone get shot down while flirting with Ophelia again.

Chapter 858 Dryads Don't Like Heights

Karl dispatched a message to the Guild, letting them know that he was going to travel for a few days to check on some potential new hires, and received immediate indignation in return.

Neither Dana nor Lotus was pleased that he was going on a road journey without them, but they both had tasks left in the city. Even Thor and Rae were going to be remaining behind, in case Karl was slow to return. The only ones who would be coming with Karl on this trip were Hawk and Cara, as well as the reclusive Little Butterfly, whose trauma regarding the outside world left it unwilling to go outside its space.

No matter how curious it was about the world. After all, it could create illusions to interact with the world, and the illusionary Library would be fine, even if it were thousands of kilometres away. It had crafted the space to fuel itself, so it wouldn't run out of mana, as long as it wasn't heavily damaged. "Are we all going? Or just one?" Karl asked.

Rain vanished back into her workshop, and the older Dryad smiled at Karl. "It's just us today. She is in the middle of a project, it would take more than curiosity to drag her away."

Hawk exited his space to circle above them, and Karl picked up the petite Dryad before leaping into the sky to board the giant bird.

He sat with her between his legs, securely in place, as she belatedly realized that she was actually terrified of heights.

"Don't worry, the protective magic won't let you fall. It will be a longer flight, though. Likely five hours as we follow the river to the end and search for the appropriate city. But we will fly high enough that we don't have to fear being attacked from the ground." Karl consoled her.

"And what about flying beasts?" She asked. "Unless they are Totem Ranked, they won't bother Hawk as he flies past. If it makes you more comfortable, I can make us invisible." Karl offered.

The terrified Dryad nodded, and Little Butterfly extended her Totem Rank [Invisibility] over the group. Now, there wasn't much that would be able to detect them during a rapid, high altitude flight. Indeed, while they were perfectly safe, the Dryad refused to detach herself from Karl to even turn and face forward. Though, after the first hour, looking out over the skyline didn't seem so bad.

They were so far from the ground that falling wasn't an immediate threat. She couldn't even see the small details of the ground from here, and for a large part of the flight they were above misty swamplands, until the sun burned the morning fog away.

They traversed over the main force of the Leg Regiment, which was engaged in a immense battle with undead, and then a number of smaller battles either between local beasts and monsters, or between two villages' militia forces.

Karl didn't hear anything about a full-blown civil war going on, so these issues must be fairly common, or considered to be isolated. Or at least limited to the two villages' personal grudges. But it did give him a lot of understanding about how unstable the rural regions actually were.

But as they flew, the nature of the region began to change. The land grew more arid, and the small villages gave way to larger farming communities along the river, and finally a massive city made entirely of log buildings.

"That must be Arurd. We're a bit over halfway there. Arurd is the first of the Orcish cities that we will come across.

If you follow the road from here, it isn't much different in distance from the river, and it will be impossible to miss Gazdri. It's the second large city after leaving Arurd, but it's still three hundred kilometres away." Hawk changed course, ensuring that they wouldn't have to search for their target across open grasslands. But also so that he could see what sorts of animals the local farmers raised. The power level in the wilderness towns was at least as high as in Drodh city, and Hawk could sense at least four Totem Rank beings in Arurd, even though it was well under half the size of the capital.

Even the farmers were mostly Monarchs out here, and each of the clusters of houses had an Overlord with them. Then, as they made their way down the road, Hawk sensed even more Totem Rank guardians among the small villages.

This place really was a dangerous one to be casually travelling. But it had to be, as they raised Royal Rank oxen for food, and there were Overlord Rank Giant Tigers in the forested areas.

[We might have to come here to find our next friend. Or even further west. They are strong.] Hawk praised the local wildlife.

[I'm sure that we can find a suitable friend somewhere. But there is no rush. Thor isn't even at Overlord yet, and we just gained Little Butterfly.]

Karl felt Hawk's voice shift, as he focused on speaking privately. {You know that Thor is going to need the [Evolution] spell, right? He made Monarch based on the new spell, but there is no way that he can make it to the Overlord Rank bottleneck. Even with the treasures we've found him, it's not enough.}

Karl patted Hawk's back. {Yeah, I will help him when we get back. He's struggled long enough, and we don't want him falling behind.}

Hawk mentally smirked. {You know if he got to stay with the Tessa, he wouldn't mind. As long as he was one Rank stronger than her, that is.}

Karl laughed at the thought. The bird wasn't wrong. Especially after she learned [Beast Form] to turn into a fully scaled Dragonkin, Thor had been smitten with their War Cleric. Everyone cheered on their romance, but nobody said it openly, for fear that they would find some nonsense reason that it wasn't acceptable. Another medium-sized city passed beneath them, and Hawk spotted their target on the horizon. "Under a hundred kilometres to Gazdri. We will be there in half an hour." Karl informed Misty, who was sleeping fitfully in his arms.

Too many hours of being terrified had mentally exhausted her.

Chapter 859 Gazdri

Once they received close to the cluster of farms around Gazdri, Karl got the Butterfly to cancel the invisibility spell around them, and led Hawk down out of the clouds, to a decrease altitude where guards on the ground would be able to see that there were riders on his back.

They didn't want to alarm the city or make them think that an Overlord Ranked flying beast was attacking the outlying areas.

Karl had Hawk land fifty metres from the large platform outside the city gates, which was being used as a portal platform. It wasn't a permanent portal by any means, but it was the designated spot where merchants travelling by portal arrived and departed.

Karl memorized the surroundings so that he could easily return. Having seen the whole region from above, it was much easier than expected, and Karl knew that he could open a portal here again without any issues.

A burly Overlord Ranked Orc gazed over Karl's furry form, and the sleeping Dryad in his arms, as Hawk vanished into his space.

"It's a silver each to enter the town if you're not here to trade." The guard notified them.

Karl passed him two coins and awakened the dryad.

"Misty, it's time to get up. We're on the ground again and in Gazdri." He whispered.

Her eyes opened, and the Dryad immediately grew vines that stretched to the ground from her feet.

"Ground!" She sighed happily, then settled to her own two feet as the Orc laughed.

"I take it that the nature Elemental is not a big fan of flying?" He queried Karl.

"Afraid of heights." Karl agreed.

Misty took Karl by the hand and led him into the city. "Oh, this will be so much fun. You're going to adore her when you meet her."

Karl was led through the winding streets of Gazdri at a jog as Misty received more excited by the stop, finally stopping in front of a small log cabin with a sign out front that represented healing.

Or at least that was what Karl assumed the crescent and the bandage represented.

Injury or Communicable Disease? The tiny Gnomish woman at the reception desk asked.

"Lonely best friend." Misty responded.

The Gnome just stared at her for a few seconds. That wasn't something that you came to the healers for. Maybe to a psychologist?

Then a massive green woman with spikes down her back burst out from the back room, and pulled the Dryad into a hug before spinning her in circles.

The Gnome smiled as she understood that the lonely friend was her boss, and waited while the two of them caught up on recent events in a full duplex conversation, where both spoke at the same time.

Once they calmed down, Misty did the introductions. "Karl, this is Beth, my childhood best friend. The potential new hire that I wanted to suggest was her little sister, but it appears that she has a daughter that I didn't know about. They've received the same powers, strong nature magic and earth magic mixed."

Karl nodded. "That is exactly what we were looking for. Perhaps we won't have to ask Jones about recruiting his family members."

The healer laughed. "You're brave, daring to ask Jones to hire the precious princess of his family. She's nearly thirty years old already, and I don't think that she's ever been allowed outside the house unattended."

The healer paused for a moment while she sent a message, and seconds later, light footsteps came running down the stairs.

"Mom, you said there was someone who might hire me?" A light feminine voice asked, right before a small girl, less than a metre tall and covered in bright-green fur, came around the corner.

"Not you. Where is your big sister?" The healer asked.

Karl raised his hand. "This one is adorable, can we keep her too? I have a High Priestess of the Green Dragon to keep happy."

The big woman laughed. "I think not. At least not until her class awakens in five or six years. Now, where is that bookish brat of mine?"

The little one ran back up the stairs, and the healer sighed.

"Sorry, she's been excited about getting a job ever since she found out what money was used for. She wants to get a pet cat, and I told her that she couldn't have one until she could afford to take care of it."

Karl smirked and the healer chuckled. "I know what you are thinking. She is a pet cat. But that's part of why she wants something smaller and cuter to distract her older cousins."

A moment later, a slightly larger girl, roughly Lotus sized, but with a long tail and a clearly Orcish face, came down the stairs.

"What is it, mom?" She huffed, with a book still open in her hand.

"My old friend came with an Overlord looking for a Guild Crafter, and that's the best greeting you can muster?" The healer demanded.

The girl curtsied to Misty. "Sorry, Guild Master. I apologize for my rudeness."

Then she turned to Karl. "Are you Dill's father?"

Karl laughed, and Misty hid her face behind a veil of branches.

"It's the other way around, actually. I'm the one looking for an Earth and Nature Element creator, and Misty is your mom's childhood friend." Karl offered.

The girl blushed a very dark green, and bobbed multiple curtsies in apology.

"I am so sorry, Sir. I misunderstood. I thought that ... never mind."

Karl dismissed her fears with a pat on the head. "How about you tell me about yourself and your abilities?"

"My name is Dora, I am eighteen years old, recently advanced to Royal Rank, with Monarch Ranked bloodline potential, and a full skill tree as a Rebirth Shaman. I specialize in Nature and Earth Element Creation spells, as well as some minor healing. I studied first aid under my mother, Beth, for four years, but healing never called to me as a profession."

Karl nodded. "So, you can create plants and stone materials that do not disperse when the spell ends?"

Dora nodded. "Exactly. But not just plants and stone. I can do wood, metal, even gems. They're not magical materials, at least not innately. But I can strengthen them to my current Rank."

"Do you have time for a test? I think your skills might be a perfect fit for our Guild."

Chapter 860 Dora

Dora grinned and nodded. "What would you like for me to make?"

"The tradition is for new crafters to make their first item for an employer for themselves to use. So, make an item that you would wear daily while working, and I will enhance it for use. Assuming that you can create an item of the required standard, that is." Karl explained.

Dora nodded, and crafted a simple silver hoop bracelet, about two centimetres wide, with a scaled pattern on the outside and a smooth interior.

Karl examined the item carefully. "Can you create complex carvings? I see that this is a repeating pattern."

Dora shook her head. "That is pushing it for my skills. Normally, I would create them with a smooth surface."

Karl shrugged. "That is fine. We have skilled sculptors on staff, and most of the items will be getting visible upgrades anyhow. But before this, I have a work contract for you.

Just the standard stuff. Weekly pay rate, commission on the fully finished items you produce for sale in the shop, and the basic expectations and rules of the Darklight Host Guild."

Beth's eyes went wide at that reference, but Dora didn't appear to recognize the name, and instead studied the contract carefully.

"This is quite generous, and it includes both food and lodging in the Guild House? Is it mandatory to remain there? Once I find a partner, I do intend to get married and have a family." Karl shook his head. "Not everyone lives in the Guild House, but it is a standard benefit. Our Chief Appraiser, Davis, lives with his mother in the Drodh Castle."

Beth acknowledged in understanding, then read the contract again, and then Karl stopped her before she signed it. "I will confirm the item first, and then we can complete the process."

Karl carved the same set of bonuses that the other crafters were after. Increased crafting success chance, mana storage, Skill Power and Luck. That was good for a test item, and easy to write on the inside of a bracelet.

Karl began to add mana, and the item seemed to absorb the energy as eagerly as the Nature Stone had absorbed the Fertility Charm. That was an excellent sign, and this material should have impressive levels of mana compatibility.

All the way through the Royal Rank, it absorbed the power without restriction, and then through the Monarch Rank it showed slowly increasing resistance.

Karl continued for a little longer, and pushed the runes to Overlord Rank. He could feel that the material was at its limit as the runes changed to a ghostly green, a paler shade than her skin. But it successfully made it to the Overlord Ranked item standard.

{Circlet of Crafters Luck} Epic Quality. Increases success chance while crafting with a Skill, Increases Skill Power, Increases Luck by 50, 2x standard mana storage amounts.

Karl nodded in satisfaction.

"I would call that more than a pass. The material is much more mana compatible than expected, and our smith will be glad to have you on the staff as much as the sculptors are.

Now, equip that and sign the contract, so we can return to the Guild House and you can meet the team." He insisted.

Misty looked confused. It was already late in the day, and she had no intentions of making that flight in the dark. Especially with an extra passenger, which would make her too awkward to wrap herself around Karl again.

Dora signed the contract, which disappeared as it was registered with the System, and then affixed the new item around her wrist, which was already adorned with a half dozen metal bracelets in different colours.

It vanished, and then Dora's hand went to her throat, where a bright silver choker now set softly against her scales.

Her mother began to laugh, and the Gnome at the reception desk giggled. "Did it just adjust its designed position because you already had magical bracelets on, and you can only wear two?" The Gnome gasped between giggles.

Dora scowled at her, and pulled at the choker, which seemed to stretch, expanding to cover her whole neck, then shrunk back to its normal shape when released.

"That is the strangest metal I have ever seen." Karl noted.

"I don't know what I did wrong." Dora complained, her eyes shining with suppressed tears.

"I think it's fine. Epic items always have some quirks. At least it didn't make a hard metal collar around your neck. People would get the wrong idea."

Beth snorted with laughter, and Dora smacked her with her book.

"I blame you, mother. You are the one who made a half dozen new species with your odd taste in men."

Beth couldn't even argue with that. She was mixed Dragon and Orc to begin with, but the father of her older daughter was a Green Dragon, which had led to a very Orky dragonkin. She was still a bit small, but Beth was sure that she would grow in time, as she was already properly violent when agitated.

An excellent trait in a young Orc.

It had certainly blended better than the Kitsune who had fathered her younger daughter. Orc green and fluffy was cute, but she was tiny.

"Are we not staying the night?" Misty asked when it appeared that Karl was about to say goodbye to the healer.

"Did you want to stay the night and go back in the morning? That's not a problem. I was just going to open a portal home to introduce Dora to the others, but it's not a rush. She can meet them all tomorrow." He offered.

"Wait, you can use the [Portal] spell? We're not flying back?" Misty asked.

"We only flew here because I'd never been here before. The next time you want to visit, just ask, and I'll send you here with an escort if I have time." Karl explained.

That was a huge relief. "Why don't you get a room with your new Guild Crafter, and I will catch up with my friend for the night?" The dryad suggested.

Dora smiled. "I know the perfect spot. They've got great food, and it's only a few blocks. Mother, we will see you in the morning."

That would also give Karl a private moment to impart the [Apprentice Runesmithing] skill to their new hire. It was less embarrassing if they didn't freak out in public the first time that [Follow Me, Little One] was used on them.