

Beast Master 891

Chapter 891 A Spear For Tessa

Indeed, that was not enough for Karl. After all, he had cheated heavily. Not only was it a pure mage-type undead, subject to [Nullification], but it was also deprived of its phylactery, unable to restore its power, and the single best target for Karl and Cara to gang up on.

Against any other enemy, things would not go so smoothly, he suspected.

"Nothing so far. It might be as much as an hour before the next attack is reported. The undead have been adjusting their deployments, and splitting larger groups to deal with multiple defensive forces at the same time, depending on our deployment." He explained.

Karl nodded, and checked in with the team.

Everyone was in good shape, with no lingering injuries. Most of them were ready to continue if they needed to, though Lotus and Nachtia were currently distracted, as the Nature Priestess chased the black dragon around the sky.

She was limited by her tiny transformation, but Nachtia was having fun, and every so often Hawk would give Lotus a boost, shoving her forward with a [Wind Barrier] so that she could catch up again.

After a few minutes of playing, the two Priestesses transformed back, and returned to the group to get an update on the situation.

"We're waiting for news on the next point of contact. I will bring us there the same way again, and we can move along the line, keeping everything in order." Karl suggested.

That sounded great to Nachtia and Tessa. Their patrons were pleased with their performance here so far, but they would be even more impressed if they did it again. While they waited, Karl selected an Overlord Ranked spear that Ashbringer had created when the ore was first brought back from the Bara dungeon. It was in the Guild Bank, along with a number of other items waiting for upgrades or custom orders.

Karl only knew a few abilities that would be suitable for her use. But if he combined [Smite] with [Blessed Item] he found that he got [Holy Spear], and that sounded like something appropriate.

It took a while to work out how the runes would go, but they were still waiting when Karl started to carve them into the weapon, with additional runes for multiple targeting. The idea he had was hurling a whole wave of spears from Thor's back into the crowd of enemies.

The Demon Prince watched Karl working, first with confusion, then awe as the weapon was completed and handed to Tessa, who had come to see what Karl was doing.

"That should be more effective from Thor's back than your current weapon." Karl offered as Tessa examined the spear.

Overlord Rank, Epic Grade. A unique spell [Holy Spear] and bonuses to holy damage, with mana cost reduction? Yes, that would be a wonderful weapon for her. She would be able to use that in any situation, and for quite some time, as it was a Rank above her.

"You're a crafting Guild?" Prince Steven asked, utterly baffled by the situation. "Mostly. We do have some combat capabilities, but we're best known for our shop at the western Frostfire Gate, in the old Guard Barracks. The Darklight Host Guild House sells all manner of potions and crafted items, from Commander to Overlord Rank. Though, by order of the Lord, we don't sell combat items over Commander Rank without special order and quantity limits.

If you're in the capital sometime soon, you should drop in. We've got a number of mana storage items on sale that are quite popular among tradesmen, shamans and clerics." Karl explained.

He held up the Overlord Ranked totem that he had been using during the last battle. He hadn't bonded it, and it was currently depleted, but slowly recharging itself. The Prince sighed. "With as many children as my father has, do you think that he gives us all enough allowance to afford such luxuries? Plus, I am a cleric of the God of Magic. Unlike the Demon Gods, my God does not encourage his adherents to hoard wealth. Instead, we spend it all to obtain new knowledge, much like the adherents of the blue dragon do."

"Oh, that makes sense. I suppose that is also why you specialize in healing magic. I was under the assumption that the Demon God Clerics were less healing focused." Karl realized.

Prince Steven nodded. "Exactly. Some of them cannot heal at all, while others specialize in damage transfer instead of healing. It's a drawback of having a whole population dedicated to one type of God, but there are still some of us who followed other paths."

They continued to wait until mid-afternoon, before deciding that might be the only probing strike of the day. The undead of Bomgon were rarely on an urgent schedule, as they literally had forever to accomplish their goals.

So, when they suffered a heavy setback, like the loss of a Totem, they could take time to regroup and make a new plan.

"Alright, I will take my team back to Drodh for the evening. There is no need to sleep out in the wilderness when I can open portals." Karl decided.

"I will send you a message if there is another attack here. With the Dragon Gods involved, your team will most likely want to return for future battles." Prince Steven

agreed.

Tessa and Nachtia both nodded, confirming his guess, while Karl opened the portal back to the open ground outside the gates by the Guild House.

The Guards were startled for half a second when the portal opened, but when they saw who was coming through, and then the Prince waving to them from the other side, they didn't make any complaints about the proper location for portals.

After all, the Guild House was right there, and they were outside the secured inner city, so the wards wouldn't trigger.

"Welcome home, Darklight. Host. Did you have a productive day?" The guard on duty asked, while the other made a discrete trade of chocolates for a bag of herbal cigarettes from Lotus.

Karl recalled that the Lord had warned them about that, or maybe it was smoking them at work? But as long as she wasn't caught, it should be fine.

"Indeed we did. We helped eliminate a Totem Ranked Lich Lord and his skeleton army. Prince Steven says that there will likely be future attacks, so we asked him to contact us through System Message. The Dragon Gods are interested in the outcome." Karl

explained.

"Oh? Well, that does make things feel a bit more serious."

Chapter 892 Weapon Upgrades

Karl spent the rest of the afternoon making assorted items for the shop, in case someone with too much money came in while they were away, and then turned his attention to the equipment of the rest of the group.

Dana used a narrow, straight blade, Ophelia liked axes, though the form didn't matter as much as she usually fought transformed if it was serious. Lotus could use an upgraded healing staff, and Remi could use one for extra spell power, or lowered casting costs, as she liked to go all out with stacked area effects, which rapidly drained her mana pool.

It was extremely impressive, but in a longer battle, she really did struggle with her mana levels, and simply played it off as reducing the area output as the number of enemies dwindled.

That worked most of the time, but there was no telling what they were going to face in the near future. Especially not when they met with a Totem Ranked Lich Lord today. If that was the standard of all the attacking groups, they would have to hope that there were more combat oriented city leaders along the border.

It would make sense for most of them to be strong combatants, as they were bordering not only a hostile nation, but one full of undead, where the spread of their cursed energy could render land barren for years after they had occupied it.

In conditions like that, even occasional losses would be catastrophic, and recovery would be a generational process, not a simple matter of defeating the enemy next time, unless that next time came soon enough that the land hadn't lost its life force to the undead horde.

Even just passing over on their way somewhere would begin to wither the plants, so Karl assumed that even a few months would be enough to cause irreparable damage if the undead lingered in the area.

Karl started with the easiest, a new healing staff for Lotus. He had already made her multiple healing items, so he knew the basic rune clusters pretty well.

But this time he added a spell to a Nature Stone, to increase her healing output.

[Healing Totem] was a Shaman Spell, but the requirements to activate a spell on an item were much less restrictive, and Lotus had an unfathomable affinity for the nature element.

If anyone other than the Shamans could use a healing totem, it would be the Green Dragon Clerics.

Then he added runes for immense amounts of mana storage, reduced casting costs, increased healing effects, and stamina regeneration.

The Monarch Ranked wood held an Overlord Ranked inscription at Epic Grade very well, and the runes were a happy leaf green colour all along the dark brown wood. Karl called Lotus over and handed her the new item.

"Here, try out the spell and let me know if it works properly. It's originally a spell that appeared for Remi, but I think that you can use it." He explained.

Lotus picked up the staff, which began to hum with power in her hands, then activated the nature stone.

Four wooden totems, all shaped like Remi, appeared evenly spaced around her, and pulsed with healing energy.

"Oh, that works very well. It's nearly as much healing magic as the healing tree, but I can put them further away so that I'm not always the target." Lotus realized.

Doubled area healing that could be cast on an infirmary staging area to even if Lotus needed to change locations or transform to perform other tasks? That would change the flow of any battle.

They also had a much longer duration than the Burning Venom Totems that Remi usually used. They didn't vanish after half a minute, they just continued to sit there and pulse with magic until she finished her inspection of the item and retracted them. "Thank you. Are you making new poking sticks for everyone?" She asked.

"Only you, Remi and Tessa. Dana will get a sword, and Ophelia will get an axe. I'm not sure what weapon Nachtia would prefer, as she was fighting in dragon form."

Lotus smiled at Karl. "Alright, I have my mission. I will go find out what her favourite shaped weapon is and tell you before you finish with the others."

Karl moved on to an axe for Ophelia, as there was a two-handed war axe in the Guild Storage, Ashbringer was making a new blade for Dana, in the same style as the one she was using, but it wasn't ready yet. So, her turn would have to wait.

Karl used a Fire Stone to imbue with [Flaming Body] and then added skill power, strength and life steal on hit to the runes of the weapon. The combination made for a wonderfully deadly weapon, and it would let the berserker self-heal as she fought, reducing the need for a cleric to be nearby if she went on a rampage.

Karl left that one out on the table, and began on a staff for Remi,

Mana storage, mana cost reduction, spell power, elemental damage, and a nice Overlord Ranked Lightning Gem with even more mana and mana collection embedded at the top of the staff. Just what Remi needed.

That brought Karl to Dana's blade, still hot from the forge. To compliment her fighting style, Karl gave the gem in the hilt [Swims Through Air], which was a passive, so she didn't have to use mana to walk on

air anymore, and then enhanced the blade entirely for skill power and reduced mana cost, to the Epic Grade.

That would add to her combat longevity, while increasing the damage done by her Golems.

The new Greater Golem was a beast in combat, easily tearing apart skeletons at its own Rank when it was fully buffed by Karl's skills.

So, giving it even more damage would solidify its role as Dana's Guard Dog, while her Epic Guard was free to work as her wingman, as they shared the same primary attack

spells.

Nachtia wasn't around to answer, so Karl went for a simple choice. She was a cleric, so she got a staff with Skill Power, mana storage and mana regeneration on it. That should let her do whatever she needed, while a spell gem of [Haste] would let her do it faster.

That would also increase her flight speed, making her breath attack cover a larger

area.

With all the new Epic Grade Overlord weapons, the group would be in an excellent spot for the next battle. But Rae had plans as well. It wouldn't be fast, art took time, but she could make full new suits of clothing to replace the old ones.

She was an Overlord now, but only their work wear had been upgraded. That needed to be remedied.

Chapter 893 Choose Your Adventure

Once the weapons were done, Karl just had to locate everyone to pass them out.

Some were easy to find. Ophelia was training guard candidates out in the yard, and Karl could bring her the axe whenever he wanted.

Remi was in her alchemy lab in the library space, but he just put her staff in the Naga Queen's space, against a bookshelf on her altar.

The hard ones were tracking down Lotus, who had vanished as soon as he had finished talking to her, and Tessa, who had run off with Thor and Nachtia.

Actually, that made it easier.

[Thor, pass this to the black dragon, would you?]

[Done. Oh, she's delighted with her new stick.] Thor agreed.

Karl went out to the yard with Ophelia's axe in hand, and the whole training group stopped to see what was going on that involved weapons being drawn.

"Ophelia, test this and see how it feels in your hands. I had Ashbringer make this with you in mind, and enhanced it to complement your fighting style." Karl called as he walked over.

The big Werebear grabbed the two-handed axe from Karl and hefted it easily, then gave it a spin around her hand to check the balance.

"Not bad, though I wouldn't expect anything that comes from Ashbringer's forge to be less than amazing."

Then she transformed into a Dire Bear and made a casual swipe of her paw at the air before transforming back to a Wercbear.

"It bonded perfectly, and works properly with the Dire Bear transformation. Having two smaller weapons gives a wider variety of buffs, but this is a much more powerful weapon, and it should add much more to my attacks than the others did.

Thank you, Karl. And Ashbringer, who I know is listening from in the forge."

Karl laughed as the sound of hammering paused for a moment, then gave two ringing taps, clearly of the hammer directly on the anvil, before returning to an intermittent working pattern.

Now they should all be ready for the next battle, with Overlord Ranked armour and weapons. Karl couldn't say how long it would take them to advance in battle, but they had won some significant battles in the recent past, and the System recognized them as a party, so they were presumably sharing bonuses.

There was some sort of standard to the advancements, but Karl didn't know if it was deliberately unclear how long it took to move up a Rank, or if the method to judge it had simply been lost to time.

Most likely, there was supposed to be a progress meter of some sort in the System Interface, and they had all just forgotten how to turn it back on.

Once someone did, that would be a turning point for training methods. Being able to clearly see what was working, what was not, and what only worked a few times before stopping, would revolutionize training for everything.

But there was not going to be a lot of time to be training for anything this week, as true to his word, Prince Steven sent them a battle update at the end of the day. There had been six possible engagements located for the next day, and they had all been forwarded to the City Guard as well, to be put on the morning's sheet.

Some of the battles would begin early, some later in the day, but those six were the ones that the military were the most confident were going to happen.

Karl waited until they had finished eating to bring up the information.

"We have six locations identified for battle tomorrow. There are two that look like they might be above our pay grade, with multiple Totems and hundreds of Overlords, but there are four that should be at our rank or casier.

One of them is just Awakened and Ascended Rank skeletons, so we can likely skip that, unless someone wants to go charging through them for fun.

These three are the most likely choices. None has a reported Totem Rank leader. One is a group of Lich Lords with their summoned undead. One is zombies, and one is a mixture of Wights and skeletal hounds.

Does anyone have a preference?" He asked, then waited for the others to think about the answer.

Rae was obviously going to go for the zombies, as they were the only non-skeletal option. Her new skills worked best on the living, but zombies should be close enough that her blood destruction skill would destroy them with ease.

But fighting against new types of enemies was good as well.

There was no summoned type of monster specified with the group of Overlord Ranked Lich Lords, so it could be something unknown, and perhaps worth fighting.

She knew that she could destroy most types of things, but what if they came up with something new that would put up a real fight?

Wouldn't that be great?

After careful consideration, Nachtia pointed to the Lich Lords.

"You and Cara specialize in nullifying magic. I know that it might not be the most glamorous fight when you don't let them do much of anything, but going where we are the most able leaves others free to deal with the rest of the challenges, where they might also be the most able.

So, we should take out the Lich Lords as quickly as possible in the morning, and then wait for other magic users to present themselves for culling." She explained. Tessa shrugged. The undead were undead, and they were at war with them all. The Red Dragon didn't care which target they chose, only that it was strategically important, and against the enemy, not civilians.

"Alright then, if there are no objections, we can take on the Lich Lord horde in the morning, and then either camp out near the border, or return here again for the evening."

Dana smiled. "Why don't we have Lady Rae make us a tree fort again? We haven't done one of those in a while now, and it would keep us near the border, where we would be on hand if there were unexpected enemies."

Chapter 894 Head In The Game

A tree fort sounded great to everyone. They were comfortable to sleep in, and being near the lines would help keep them in the right frame of mind.

Being here in the Capital at night removed the sense of danger and urgency, allowing them to talk about picking targets at random, instead of defending areas of land. Fighting was fighting, in a way, but the determination to protect could make all the difference when it came down to morale and combat results. If they knew nothing about the area and its inhabitants, they were unlikely to fight as hard as they could. That sort of casual approach to defence would make the locals fight that much harder when something unexpected happened, and there were too few forces nearby.

As much as they might like to think that they were giving it their all in battle, if they were only showing up to fight and then leaving, they were never going to have that sense of commitment that would drive them to the greatest feats.

It wasn't proven that those were what helped you advance the fastest, but there was strong evidence that harder fights were more likely to help break a bottleneck if you were at one.

Logically, the two should be related.

One last night in the Guild House, catching up on work while they were away, and quietly listening to the buzz of the city, then they would leave at dawn.

Many of the people were talking about the fights at the Bomgon border, as so many of the troops had been mobilized to help deal with it, but the reason for the attacks wasn't clear.

The Undead raided, pillaged and were a general blight to the world. But they were rarely organized across more than a single group. Now, there were multiple groups attacking at the same time, and no obvious reason for it.

That alone was enough to be concerning.

They had just suffered an attack by the pirate fleet, but now they were facing intense attacks from the undead horde that lived inland? Did something happen to change the undead? Or did something happen in Drodh that was drawing them to the Demon Nation?

That was the great concern of many. The pirate attacks had been increasing for most of a year before the invasion attempt, affecting shipment lanes and travel times, when the goods did finally make it to their destinations.

So, it wasn't as if the extra activity came out of nowhere, just that it now had a focus, and they couldn't see a reason that they had been picked.

First thing in the morning, Karl put on the leather over silk armoured pants and jacket that Rae had made for him.

Not that he really needed the extra armour.

Karl suspected that she had made him a new set so that he wasn't always wearing a skill instead of smelling like her silk.

When he was in battle, the armour skill would be in place, so most of the time the fact there was armour under it wouldn't change much. But it made Rae happy to have everyone in her armour, and wielding Karl's weapons.

Except Karl himself, who was still using the Blade of Champions and the Haint Claw.

Both of the items were Artifact Grade weapons, and both were perfectly suited to his skills, so there was no real reason for him to change to something that he had made himself.

However, he did have a number of elemental gems in his armour set for skill power, mana storage and physical enhancement. Those were too good to miss out on, and he couldn't always rely on [Rampage] to increase his damage enough to put him above his opponents in direct output without exhausting himself.

"Nachtia, will you be airborne again today, or will you be on the ground with the other clerics?" Karl asked as the group prepared to leave.

"Unless I am needed on the ground, I will be in the air with Hawk. It's safer to have two flying targets so that the enemy can't focus on one of us without being vulnerable to the other. We don't know if there will be a full legion there today, so there may or may not be air support."

The black dragon's reasoning was solid. The safety in numbers mattered, and she didn't have any abilities that needed her to remain within a short range of the target, other than her attack abilities, which would be much more useful in dragon form.

"Did anyone else have a request for changes in the deployment? If not, I will open the separate space, and we can travel to the battlefield."

Nobody raised any concerns, so Karl opened the way to the [Tiny World] and let them all in. Then he opened a portal to their last battle location, which was a short flight from where they were expecting to find the group of Lich Lords this morning.

At least for Hawk, it was.

[I see the defenders in the distance. Should we go greet them and let them know that we will be here? Our group is a little odd.] Hawk suggested.

[That would be for the best. Who knows how they might react when we show up? We don't want them thinking that there are enraged beasts defending their territory here. Those would be a threat to both sides, and the reaction might be unexpected.] Karl

agreed.

Far below, the Commander of the 19th Border Legion watched the Ghostfire Thunderbird descending with a cat demon on his back. That was one of the most. insane combinations that he had seen in his life, but the man was waving at him, and the bird wasn't attacking, so he was willing to take it as a good sign. "Commander, I have brought a team to assist in the battle with the Lich Lords. I am a Beast Master, so don't mind the species diversity, but I also have dragon clerics and a black dragon with my team, as well as a mage and a Werebear Berserker" Karl declared the moment that he landed.

"What is your team specialty? Or are you a new group for the border war?" The Legion Commander asked.

"Myself plus one other anti-magic specialist, then two flying artillery. The Thunderbird and the Dragon. The others are a short range combat unit, with a Green Dragon Cleric specializing in area healing. I recommend putting them near the centre of the line, where troops can be brought to the healing tree for recovery"

The Commander smiled. "Glad to have you, then. Might I ask, where are these others you speak of?"

Chapter 895 Picking On The Mages

Karl opened the Tiny World and let the others out, which brought a startled noise from the Commander.

"So, you fly to the battle, then bring the others in with a portal. Very efficient for moving long distances. How long will you remain in the region?" He asked.

"As long as there are appropriate targets for us. If you are quiet in this zone for the day, we will likely move to an active battlefield so that we can make the most of our presence along the line while we are here.

You have a region to defend, but not every portion of the border will see action every day."

The Commander nodded. "Excellent news. The Lich Lords are behind their army, with ten kilometres distance between us. You said that you specialize in that sort of thing, so I will have you join Delta Force for the morning, and move with them when the enemy has engaged.

They are our Overlord Rank specialists, and I will be dealing with any unexpected Totems, as well as unit organization."

"Wonderful. I saw them from the sky on my way in, and I didn't sense any Totems with them, but you can never be too careful."

Lotus grabbed Dana and split off to join the healing group, a motley bunch of Trollish Shamans who were setting up cots and some sort of shrine that Karl couldn't identify. That was better than he had feared. Many demonic armies didn't have proper healers, but the Trolls were easy to get along with, and as soon as Lotus and Dana had arrived, they began adding their personal touch to the shrine, which turned out to be no shrine at all.

They were arranging skewers in advance so that they had fried fish to snack on during the battle.

Dana probably wouldn't stay with them for the whole battle, but she normally sent her Golems forward to fight, while she kept the Epic Guard near her toward the back of the battle, keeping the enemy from getting too close to the healers.

Thor and Tessa were with Ophelia, not far from where Lotus was setting up for her healing tree performance, so Karl left to go join the Delta Force team, as the Commander had named his elite unit.

"Greetings, gentlemen, and ladies. My name is Karl, and this is Cara. Oh, we have Remi with us as well. Are you sure you didn't want to go with the healers and mages this time?" Karl began.

Remi nodded. {I can fight and heal, so we will join your team this time.}

Karl smiled. "Alright, Remi here is a Shaman Queen, so she has some healing abilities

as well as her fighting skills and her bodyguards. The totems have a limited range, so if you're injured, retreat in her direction.

Cara is an anti-magic specialist, so she will be doing her best to stop the larger spells from the Lich Lord group."

The army today wasn't made up of all skeletons, there were ghouls, wights and zombies as well, representing the differing specialties of the various leaders present. Lich Lords were normally among the hardest undead to deal with, as unlike so many other species, they were the elites of their magical disciplines before their death. A vampire could have come from anyone, zombies and skeletons were morons, but a Lich Lord could only come from an incredibly powerful mage, and retained their intellect.

However, they weren't all military geniuses, even if they were brilliant mages. That was proven true the moment that the army approached, and Karl realized that the Wights and the ghouls were at the front, leading the charge.

It should have been the zombies and skeletons, to soak up the first wave of damage, so that the more capable fighters could face less cohesive defensive lines.

But the extra intelligence had them charging forward, while the shambling hordes lumbered along behind them, just trying to keep up.

Battle strategy appeared to be the last thing that the Lich Lords were concerned with, and they were simply driving the undead forward, intending to use the weight of a massive numbers advantage to deal with the defenders.

The five Lich Lords would be able to not only bring their Undead back to life, but turn the defeated Demons into undead to replace the ones that they had lost, potentially increasing their army with every battle.

For that purpose, they had brought along a small group of supply wagons holding the relics that the undead army was tied to.

Defeated skeletons could easily be raised again, wights reformed from their essence, leaving only the ghouls and zombies susceptible to permanent mutilation.

But even if they were defeated in that way, they could still return as skeletons, as a blow to the head was not enough to keep the animated bone monsters from reforming, as long as the source of their power remained intact.

"Once the armies are fully engaged, we will move to take on the Lich Lords. We don't want them turning the army away to surround us, so don't jump the start." The leader of the special forces team, a burnt orange demon with four wings and a bird's head, warned.

"How should I address you? Your nameplate is hidden." Karl asked.

The Demon smiled. "I am an old man, though I suppose not everyone is good at guessing ages. I was born long before the System started to reactivate, so I don't have an interface of my own. But you can call me Delta."

'Delta Force! Karl had assumed that was a phonetic thing for the fourth group in a series, but it turned out to be someone's name.

Perhaps they could fix the Demon's system status after the battle. If he could lead a strike force as he was, he was certainly not a weak opponent, and his species was well known for their magical abilities.

Karl heard the Demons cheer as Tessa used [Holy Weapon] as a group spell, enhancing their blades and spears with holy damage that would tear through the Undead like butter. From Thor's back, she made a brilliant red target, standing over the demonic army like a figurehead, and glowing with holy power that was anathema to all things unliving.

But she was also behind the lines, protected from the initial charge, which would surely be headed directly for her once the Lich Lords realized that she was a Dragon

Cleric.

[Hawk, as soon as the two sides make contact, you can lead Nachtia down into battle. Happy hunting.]
Karl announced as the charging undead reached the fifty-metre mark from the defenders.

[Happy Hunting. Bring me back something shiny.]

Chapter 896 Teamwork Makes The Cara Work

The two sides crashed in a flurry of blades, and holy light shone from all over the battlefield as the enchanted weapons activated on contact with the undead.

That immediately caught the attention of the Lich Lords, and they began to glow with power as they ordered their troops to adjust and target the Red Dragon Cleric.

But that was not to be.

As soon as the undead horde began to shift attack angles, Hawk and Nachtia descended from the sky to drown the army in fire and a thick black smoke.

The power of the God of Death seemed to call to them, and the undead visible began to disintegrate around the edges under the onslaught, even while the animating magic of the Lich Lords regenerated the damage done to them.

With the two sides now fully engaged, Delta ordered his troops forward, and the team began to circle the battlefield.

"Take the short route and take point. Keep them from casting while we charge." Delta quietly ordered, hoping that Karl wasn't joking about being an anti-magic specialist.

Cara leapt from Karl's shoulder, and Remi moved beside him as Karl used [Gravity Slam] to toss the few intervening Undead out of the way as he approached the Lich Lords.

Unfortunately, one or more of them was aware of the horrors of a Winged Void Badger on a mission, and all five turned their focus to Cara, who was ready to dive at them.

Both Karl and the badger focused their efforts to [Nullify] the spells, while a [Disintegration] based shell around Cara absorbed the worst of the other three attacks.

Nothing hit her hard enough to cause actual damage, but it bought them some time, and before they were ready to cast again, Karl and Remi would be in melee range.

The ground turned marshy under their feet as Remi activated the [Naga Swamp], drawing the attention of the undead leaders only an instant before her Bodyguards appeared behind them.

Then Karl called on the Naga Bodyguards, as well as a pair of Dire Bear golems, to attack from the front as the Delta Team charged through the swamp.

Rather, half of the team charged through the swamp, and the other half simply flew over it, avoiding the delays of the swamp's soft ground.

There didn't appear to be any sort of power difference between the five Lich Lords, which didn't seem right to Karl. Even if they had advanced at the same time, there should be some sort of difference.

So, his first thought when his attack was blocked with a casual wave of the Lich Lord's hand was that they were all sharing a power source.

This wasn't a group of regular Overlords, it was a situation more like his own, where multiple powerful beings were linked together, and the ones that were in the most trouble were able to draw on the reserves of the others to save themselves.

That meant that breaking their barriers would mean breaking all five at once, as trying to target down a single Lich would only result in them using the power of the others to defend, leaving four on the offensive side.

Fortunately, they had an entire team coming to them, and the Lich Lords would all be engaged at once, but the threat of one of them using an overpowered attack and taking out a Demon in a single strike was very real.

Of course, there was a chance that they could also do that to Karl or one of his teammates, but with [Void Body] active on the team, the chances were lower that it would work.

Instead of engaging, Karl stayed back from the battle and let the summons do the heavy work, while he focused on assisting Cara in nullifying any attack that felt like it carried a dangerous level of power.

But with five Lich Lords, and only two of them, it was proving impossible to get them all.

Cara nullified an overpowered fireball, then had to dodge as Karl took out an area spell that was raising skeletal hands from the swamp, but couldn't cast fast enough to deal with the Unholy Fire that another of the undead mages sent her way.

Their casting speed was ridiculously fast to begin with, and for the first few seconds, their barriers were having no issues keeping the melee warriors at bay.

That changed quickly when Delta began to cast some sort of channelled incantation. The barrier around them began to destabilize, first letting bits of attack abilities through, then failing entirely.

The Lich Lords tried desperately to bring it back up, but with Cara and Karl working together, the process was proving impossible.

They had to use all five of them to make it as strong as needed, as the effects of [Rampage] were beginning to stack up, and the damage done by each strike of the Bodyguards was enough to take down a lesser barrier with every blow.

The Naga were fighting seriously, with grim expressions on their serpentine faces, while the Lamia bodyguards that Karl summoned were clearly smirking at the Lich Lords, even as they rapidly hurled spells at them.

They were holding back, limiting their output as the effect of [Rampage] began to near its time-limited peak, and Karl didn't have to guess why. Once the barriers on the Lich Lords fell completely, they would exert as much pressure as they could, and force the undead to buckle so that the Demonic special forces team could finish them off.

Only, the Lich Lords did not appear to be weakening. Like Karl and his team, their mana reserves seemed to be limitless, and while they were taking damage without their primary barrier, they were not showing any signs of reducing their mana usage to conserve energy, even when they were fighting five opponents at a time. "They have a mana battery here somewhere. It must be in the wagons." Delta shouted to Karl as the battle began to drag on, and the Demons were beginning to reduce the frequency of their attacks to save stamina.

"Go, take care of it. I will hold them here while you deal with whatever traps and trickery they have in store." Karl insisted.

[Hawk, bring Nachtia and find the mana battery that the undead are using. Destroy it if you can, we're having trouble doing any real damage to them. If we can't destroy their power source, they're going to escape once they lose their armies.] Karl quietly instructed.

With five Lich Lords, there was no way that none of them knew [Portal] or a related escape spell.

Chapter 897 Protect The Wagons

The moment that Hawk and Nachtia headed for the wagons, the Undead changed their tactics. They immediately stopped pushing forward, and all five Lich Lords moved to encircle the small supply convoy in a defensive perimeter.

That alone would have made it incredibly obvious what the source of their unusually potent power was, even if someone hadn't already guessed, but it raised the more important question of what could they do about it?

Karl and Cara had managed to keep the Lich Lords from bringing their area barrier back online, but Hawk was having no luck trying to get attack spells into the convoy that they were defending.

[We need to learn the trick to their casting speed. I want to be able to throw spells that fast.] Remi noted as she adjusted the position of her totems.

[If anyone can figure it out, it's you. But maybe we will get lucky, and they'll have a Grimoire or something on them, and you can stock up on spells after we win this fight.] Karl suggested.

Remi began plotting new and innovative ways to make the Lich Lords vanish without destroying the caravan, just in case there were good things in there to loot.

But that was not actually too difficult, wasn't it?

[Cara...] Remi began.

[On it. Butterfly, a little help?]

Cara vanished, and Karl doubled down on the counterspells so that the Lich Lords didn't gain any headway while the Void Badger did what she did best.

For a moment, everything was coated in a black mist as Nachtia passed overhead and unleashed her breath weapon on the Lich Lords. That was Cara's cue to move.

Everyone was distracted, and she was invisible, so she went directly for the core of the Lich Lords' formation, aiming for the supply wagons.

The Undead were giving everything to protect them, even calling back their armies to defeat the special forces group. But the stealthy badger simply pranced past their defences and began searching for the treasures.

[Food, why do they need food? They're all dead. Spare bones, bodies, weapons. Oh, there we go.] Cara narrated as she searched.

The final wagon contained a large glowing gem locked within a metal box that had swung open the moment that Cara used [Nullify] on the lock.

[Yoink!]

[Yoink?] [Karl, it won't move. I can't even take the full wagon into my space.] Cara complained.

[Then I guess we just have to deal with the Undead first. Unless you're willing to blow it up.]

Cara considered her options for a half second. On one hand, a huge shiny stone. On the other hand, it was a stone that she couldn't keep.

[Void Blast] solved that dilemma rather easily.

The wagon vanished in a mushroom cloud of stored energy, and Cara retreated to her space for a half second to avoid being caught in the epicentre of her handiwork. The metaphysical blast shook Karl's brain, and dropped most of the nearby Demons to their knees.

Even Remi was dizzy from the blast. But standing right next to the destruction, the Lich Lords were completely out of it for the last half second of their lives, before Hawk and Nachtia swooped in to blast them to pieces.

However, luck was not on their side today, and the moment that the Lich Lords' power failed, the bodies of the undead mages faded from sight, returning to whatever safe point they had designated as their fallout shelter in the event of an untimely death.

Worse, the Undead Horde that they had brought were still fighting, even if it was mindlessly without the Lich Lords there to guide them.

The plus side was that without guidance, Thor and Tessa were absolutely wrecking the zombie horde in a rolling wave of crushing gravity and holy lightning.

Using [Blockade], one of Thor's new racial abilities, with [Gravity Slam] and Tessa's spear made for a brutal charging attack.

The [Gravity Slam] knocked everything over, then the wall of lightning swept them all up and pushed them forward in front of Thor, while Tessa launched Holy Spears into anything that looked like it might still move.

With that tactic, they were scooping up entire segments of the undead army, and pushing through them like a bulldozer with its blade down, driving forward and depositing the mulched bodies to the side.

"Well, that's not terrifying at all." Delta joked as he saw the tactic that the massive behemoth was using.

"Just wait until he realizes that he can use it like a flapper wheel, and tilt the walls down on them to crush them as he passes by." Karl agreed.

Thor laughed in Karl's head. [We tried that. The Undead just get pounded into the ground and then dig themselves back out.]

That was something that Karl should have expected. They were Overlord Ranked undead. Expecting them to be less durable than compacted grassland soil was a bit too optimistic.

The new weapons appeared to be a big hit with everyone in the group, and even Remi was enjoying her newfound bonuses, even if she wasn't going all out with the area spells today.

Just being able to keep up all her other spells at once, including both types of totems and a constant barrage of [Chain Lightning] was enough to keep her happy now that she knew the undead weren't hiding any good stuff among the supply carts.

She had collected the few remaining bits of the stone that Cara had destroyed, just in case they were useful, but nothing else in the whole supply caravan stood out to her.

It appeared to be nothing but spare parts for making more undead.

The army unit was forcing the Undead into an ever tightening circle as they crushed the disorganized force, and Karl simply watched and made mental notes as their years or decades of training showed him the most efficient way to completely surround a disorganized enemy.

It was a work of art, and with Thor's [Bulwark] holding one side, it was as good as driving them up against a cliff. The hapless undead couldn't even effectively damage the Lightning wall, as without the

Lich Lords to give them directions, the skeletons and zombies didn't think to use skills, and the smarter Undead had been the first ones eliminated.

Chapter 898 Environmentally Friendly

Once the Undead were truly dead, the work of cleaning them up to prevent the spread of plagues or even the Zombie Virus to the surrounding ecosystem began.

The worst thing that you could do, in the minds of the soldiers, was to fight a Zombie in running water. The moment that you began to damage it, the undead creature would leak infected fluids into the water, and there was no telling what life form downstream might ingest that in enough concentration that it would turn them and begin an outbreak.

Towns along the rivers had detection magic to ensure that nothing of the sort, or any other magical toxin, would make its way through their territories, but a zombie monster could spread the plague just as easily as a zombie farmer or dockworker.

Fortunately, they were Demons, and they had plenty of fire magic to help them fully sanitize the area and eliminate the possibility of the virus spreading, as well as thorough sanitation procedures in place to ensure that none of the disease was passed on.

That was made easier by Lotus, who had her four new totems spread out in a ring around her, expanding the effect of her [Tree of Life] form's healing aura.

All they had to do was stand nearby for a while after they had cleaned themselves, and the effect would kill the zombie virus, even if it was already starting to take root in their system.

But with barriers up and fire magic at the ready, most of the soldiers didn't actually come into contact with the blood, and could just burn it off themselves if they did.

Once they were finished, Delta marshalled his troops and brought them to the Command Group, who were preparing to set camp for the evening and send out scouts.

Karl nodded politely to the group's leaders. "We will remain in the area for a while, in case there are more attacks coming. Would you like me to have the Thunderbird scout? Hawk has excellent eyesight, even from thousands of metres in the air, and won't have any trouble tracking the movement of other

enemy forces in the region." "We will take any and all help you can offer. Will you be staying with the unit? Or somewhere nearby?" The Commander asked hopefully.

Karl looked around the open grasslands. "I'm not certain. We usually prefer an elevated position, to let the Blood Destruction Spider make us a fort, but we can settle at ground level if necessary."

The Demon nodded in understanding. Sleeping on the ground wasn't anyone's favourite hobby. However, it was safer to have everyone together, and close enough that they could all be behind a communal barrier to keep out any uninvited guests during the evening hours.

Realistically, Karl didn't need to pick a tree to build a fort in. He had the [Tiny World] and an entire underground city worth of tunnels there, plus the recreation of the Guild House, with a comfortable bed, silk sheets and fresh air.

That somewhat defeated the purpose of staying with the Demon Army, though. They wanted the connection that being on the line would give them, so retreating to a separate space would be counterproductive.

Well, for most of them. Remi was already in the alchemy lab of the [Tiny World] and working on the potions that she had missed out on making while they travelled.

Once the area was fully cleared, and Hawk had reported that there was nothing within a twenty kilometre search radius, the army began to plan their evening camp location.

One of the junior officers gestured off into the distance. "Why don't we move east to the village? They'll be happy to get the sales of bulk goods to the army, and the presence of a whole unit will give them some peace of mind.

Things have been tense along the border with all these attacks, and public relations are important."

The Commander thought about it, then shook his head.

"It's too close to the attack. They will only worry that we're hiding a threat. They must already know about the battle, and they will have seen the aftermath in the distance.

If we go there now, they'll think that they are the next target.

Set up a perimeter wall with the Earth Demons and make a fort. We will camp a kilometre toward the border, away from the aftermath of the battle." The Commander decided.

"Leave some space for us. I will have my team set up a large tent for the evening. Then we will scout again in the morning." Karl insisted.

The Commander gestured to the junior officers, and within minutes, the Demons were building a large perimeter wall in the distance.

Rae quickly joined them to make a proper tent for her people, with [Earth Barrier] posts to hang the hammocks from, and double layered silk cloth, with a sticky inner layer to catch any sneaky sorts who might try to creep in to spy them.

She didn't really think that any of the Drodh Army soldiers would be stupid enough to try to intrude on them, but a girl could dream. Just the potential of catching an attempted peeping tom was enough reason for her to put in the extra work.

Thor transformed back into humanoid form, and Hawk returned to his space for the evening, but Cara decided to stay out and make the most of the hammock that Rae had made for her.

Anyone who saw how happy she was, laying on her back, feet in the air, gently rocking herself in a hammock, would find it hard to argue with the strategy. But she was secretly hoping that if she was nearby and not in her space, she might be the first one to notice if someone tried to sneak into the tent.

Once everyone was inside, the army unit set patrols around the outside of the stone barrier wall, and Karl noticed that there were no active defensive measures in place, just the one stone wall. Once it was created, it didn't give off an aura of magic at all, and that gave the whole unit a rather low-key presence. Much like a powerful monster pack, they simply existed in the plains. In a way, it was both more and less

secure than Karl's usual preparations. There was no barrier active, but its absence made it less likely that anything would notice their presence in the first place.

Chapter 899 Honest Soldiers

Rae watched carefully all night, but none of the Demons seemed interested in coming creeping into the tent.

Honest people were boring.

So, first thing in the morning, she brought out some of the Royal Rank whale meat for the soldiers. They were stationed near the inland border, so they wouldn't have had a chance to get any of it when the whales arrived, and the meat would be a change for them, where the boar monsters were every day sorts of meals.

"There was a flying whale herd not long ago in Drodh. Here, fry this up for the unit's breakfast. If there aren't any threats during the morning scouting, we will likely move along, so this might be the only chance to give it to you." She explained to the cook. "Oh, flying whale? That will be a change. Let me find a nice spice combo for that, and I will save some for soup tomorrow." The cook agreed easily.

The soldiers brought back meat regularly, and while whale was a different flavour set than usual, the unit's chef had enough spices to keep the soldiers from getting too bored with their meals.

The smell of frying whale meat drew out the soldiers who were lingering in bed until the last minute, as well as Karl's team, who were enjoying the cool, dry air of a morning in the inner steppes.

It was more like home than the constant humid warmth of Drodh, and a pleasant change for the team.

Hawk took off to scout, hopeful that they would find something close enough for this unit to fight. Delta and his group were good, and easy to work with. Fighting on a team with people you knew was better. They wouldn't do strange things, and they were already aware of the tricks that the Karl's team could pull.

But when he got to search altitude, just below the cloud cover, he found that there wasn't anything for hundreds of kilometres. He could see multiple smaller villages, two other army units, and a river. But no undead or any other obvious threats.

That wasn't what he was hoping for. There was a whole invasion going on, but there were thousands of kilometres of border, and he couldn't wander too far, or they would have to find a new group to work with.

Even as far as he had scouted today, they would have to switch units if the attack was on the outside edges of his range.

[Nothing to attack. But there is a village not far away full of Orcs. Maybe they want some stuff?] Hawk suggested.

[Not a terrible idea. The Orcs should at least be entertaining, since we can't find anything to fight. Take a tour closer to the border and see if they are just staging for an attack in a few days, and we will prepare to move to the village when we get your report.] Karl agreed.

Hawk flew for another half hour, making a serpentine pattern into the territory of the Undead.

[I found their city. All the undead are here. So many zombies. Just zombies everywhere. The city has vampires and some living things, but there are at least three cities worth of zombies outside.]

Karl mentally calculated where Hawk was, as it was certain that the Army would know the location of the cities, and it was important that they knew what one was preparing for an invasion.

So, he went looking for the unit Commander to explain the situation.

"Almost directly north of us, across the border of the dead zone, there is a city half the size of Drodh, full of undead. Hawk says that there is a zombie horde three times that city's population gathered and waiting for something." Karl explained.

The Commander took out a map and gestured at a city marking.

"That is called Ekh-Bhor. It's the only city of that size in the direction you indicated. It's not far from the border, but if they start to march, they'll only be two days to Bhakh, and there are ten thousand people there.

I will send a message to have the units in the area send a scout to verify the numbers. But you're saying that there should be hundreds of thousands of undead gathered outside the city?" He asked.

Karl nodded. "That's what Hawk reports. You can verify it, as he relates the number of undead outside the city to the number of people inside the city. But it should be close enough if you know how many are in the city."

The Demon focused for a moment and sent a System message to someone, then frowned.

"Military Intelligence already knew, they just didn't relay it, as it's not in our zone. I still don't know what they're planning to do about that. But so many zombies is more than the border force will be able to deal with.

Even if the Leg Regiment finished their engagement today, it might not be enough to deal with that many zombies.

Honestly, what I'm more worried about is them using portals to send them somewhere else. Sure, they're gathered at the border now. But if they've got necromancers and Lich Lords with them, they don't have to just march across the plains. They can attack wherever they want.

The cities all have barriers over them to prevent unwanted portals, but a whole army appearing just outside of town isn't any less dangerous."

The Commander rubbed his temples, then took out a flask from his inventory and took a long swill.

"There is a good reason why I don't think too hard about all the possibilities. It's best to just focus on what is going on around us, and leave the rest to someone else.

For all we know, this could be one huge feint. Gathering the armies at our border makes everyone else watching the Undead think that they're about to invade Drodh. But they could be planning to use portals to hit Unzatharb, Gabil or Nabibun.

Sending a whole fleet across the channel to the last two is implausible on the scale they would need. But portals would work just fine."

Chapter 900 Tactical Decisions

Karl nodded in understanding. Sending three hundred thousand zombies somewhere to attack would be a logistical nightmare, even though they didn't need to eat or sleep. With only two nations bordering the Undead Kingdom of Bomgon, and two more immediately across the channel, the options were limited, but a ground invasion was not a foregone conclusion.

"Say, do you know if there is a reason for this surge in violence from the Undead? They don't appear to be overcrowded within their nation. In fact, with so few monsters, there is a lot of open space for them.

Did something happen that set them off? Like turning away the attack on Drodh City?" Karl asked.

"That could be part of it, but they have always been aggressively expansionist. I believe it's mostly the result of the Necromancers and their death cult.

The magic invades and corrupts their souls. It makes them hate all forms of life, and traps them somewhere between life and death, tethered to the netherworld by their own dark magic, until one day they become the Undead themselves.

They're a true nuisance, and they've been driven out of almost everywhere in the world. Even the Dark Elves of the Underworld disdain them and treat them as slaves.

So, being on the border of their last remaining territory means suffering their attacks every time that they build up enough of a force to spread their influence a little further."

The Commander's tone was sombre and resigned. It wasn't something that anyone could change, and Drodh didn't have enough of a military force to completely wipe out the entire nation of Bomgon if that was even possible.

So many of the powerful undead had ways to resurrect themselves if their body was destroyed that the prospect of completely eliminating them was laughable.

Karl shrugged. "Then I guess that all we can do is wait to see what happens. If there are no threats for the day, I was thinking of taking my team to the nearest village to trade with them.

There is always something in demand in a farming village, and we are a crafting guild." The big Demon smiled. "They'll be happy to see you. The trade caravans have been sparse the past few months. They don't want to take the risk to come this close to the border with all the unrest, while the villages closer to the coast are getting larger, and demanding more of their goods."

While Karl talked to the Commander, the others packed up the tent, and then passed it to Delta and his team. They would appreciate the hammocks, and the tent could be assembled with Earth Magic poles, so there was no complex process involved.

The rest of the unit was clearly envious that not only were they getting a fancy new tent designed to set up in seconds, with a full unit worth of hammocks to keep them up off the ground, but it was Overlord Ranked monster silk, and even if the camp came under attack, it would be able to take a hit or two, and they wouldn't have to worry as much about being ambushed in their sleep.

Hawk continued his scouting passes as the camp's defensive wall was retracted, and they prepared to go on patrol again.

Staying in one spot made it too easy for the enemy to avoid them or alter deployments to counter their numbers. So, they patrolled an erratic pattern, making their location less predictable, even though their territories were somewhat fixed.

The ladies all climbed up on Thor's back after he transformed back into his four legged behemoth form. Even Rae was riding with him today, while the rest of the beasts returned to their space, except Remi, who was in the [Tiny World] alchemy labs, making stock for the shop.

They were still close enough to access the Guild Bank, so she could transfer materials to the other Alchemists from her space, where most of them were growing. Plus, she could bring over potions they had put in stock, so they could treat themselves as a travelling branch of the shop when they visited.

Making their way to the village was simple enough, it was only half an hour away, with Thor walking and Karl jogging beside him.

Hawk was scouting the region, and didn't see anything, but Karl didn't want to get tangled in a mass of limbs if there was a sudden attack. But he knew that Thor would look after everyone, so there wasn't any risk to letting them all ride.

The village itself was like none that Karl had come across before. Not only was it surrounded by a high wall, but they had also dug a moat and filled it with sharp metal spikes and oil, a flaming barricade should an undead horde approach their home.

There were also endless fields in the kilometres surrounding the farms, but no farmhouses. There were outbuildings, storage sheds and so on, but not a single house to be seen.

Logically, they must all live in the village's protective walls and only come out to work. But that seemed like a rather extreme living situation, even this close to the border.

But once they got through the gate, things began to make sense.

The Orcs didn't live in traditional family homes, the way that you would expect from the word "Village". Instead, there were a number of long barracks style houses, and dozens of other facilities within the walls, and everyone was going about their day as usual.

As usual, if it were a travelling Orc camp.

"Demon. What brings you here in this time of strife?" An aging Orc with a notepad hanging from his hip asked as Karl led the group into the village.

"We were assisting the regiment with some Undead, but there were no more close enough to be a threat for the day, so we thought we might come by and visit.

We're a crafting guild, and we've got a small group of Dragon Clerics with us, if you should need anything" Karl explained.

That got the Orc's attention, and he whistled for someone else to join them. A very large someone, Karl realized. The Clan Chief of the village was a monster of a man, even by Orcish standards.