

Beast Master 901

Chapter 901 Chief Snakebite

"Champion Karl, I am Sub-Chief Snakebite of the Bhakh Clan. Welcome to our village. We follow the old ways, so there might not be much that we can trade between you and us. But it is a pleasure to meet you." The huge Ore greeted them.

"I am certain that there is something, even if it's not what you expect. We have bone and wood runic items to help with crafting, mana storage, cleaning, creating water, and even improving luck with the opposite sex. Plus, the lovely ladies of the church are always willing to help your people keep their pantries stocked with their signature rice and beans. Karl offered.

The Chief smiled back at Karl.

"Now, that is something that we can all agree on. However, as we do not trade much, we also do not have much coin."

From Thor's back, Nachtia laughed.

"You know, we have a Red Dragon High Priestess here, and I am reasonably certain that her Goddess would be offended if we charged you for food when there is war at your doorstep." The black dragon insisted.

Tessa nodded in agreement. Provisioning the civilian villages before an invasion was an important part of any war, and the Red Dragon God took a dim view of war profiteering.

Or, at least she did when it came to non-combatants. The Red Dragon didn't mind at all if you got filthy rich making weapons for both sides of a righteous conflict.

The ladies climbed down from Thor's back, and he transformed back into a humanoid to better protect them and explore the town.

Karl had noticed that he was becoming more and more protective of Tessa now that she had a fully scaled transformation, but she didn't seem to mind, so he wasn't going to say anything about it.

"Would you like us to fill a cellar for you? Or do you perhaps have a storage silo?" Tessa asked.

"You can make that much?" The Chief replied, startled at her request.

"I am a Monarch Ranked High Priestess. I can make enough to feed an entire army with every casting. It's not uncommon for all of a dragon army's vegetable-based foods to be magically created. Only meat needs to be hunted." Tessa explained.

Chieftain Snakebite patted her on the shoulder, then gestured to a tall, round building off to his left.

"That granary is empty. We can clean it out to prepare it for your dry food, and then the people of the village will have real cause to celebrate. With all these attacks across the border, there is a high chance of blight destroying the crops, and we've already lost much of our livestock.

The attacks last week passed by us, and a group of Revenants broke off to attack the cattle in the night," he explained.

Nachtia frowned. Revenants were a nasty sort of creature, and the Black Dragons killed them on sight. They weren't technically undead, but living creatures whose souls had been ripped out, trapping them halfway between life and death, driven insane by the missing piece of themselves, and ravenously hungry, trying to fill the void where their soul should be.

But worse, they often retained some of the skills and powers of their initial species. That made them among the most dangerous residents of Bomgon, and an atrocity that the Necromancers often committed upon fallen villages.

After all, why would they sacrifice their own to make Revenants, when they could capture villagers and rely on the unholy magic to turn them into soldiers?

But if they were using Revenants, the battles against the Bomgon invaders took on a whole new level of disturbing. With every village overrun, they would have undead much stronger than the usual zombies and skeletons.

The Orcs were quickly sweeping out the grain bin, and putting down a ground cloth, made of higher grade cloth that the average rodent couldn't chew through, to line the bin and keep unwanted occupants away from the food.

Once everything was prepped, Tessa climbed the bin and secured the top of the cloth at the ceiling vent hatch. Then she began channelling the creation spell and slowly filling the large round building with dry food.

Over the course of the next five minutes, the wooden building creaked and groaned softly as it was loaded, and then Tessa finally dropped the top of the cloth and closed the top vent that she was loading through.

In the Golden Dragon Nation, that would be the usual loading point for an auger, But the Orcs didn't have anything of the sort, and instead they had a moving ramp for bulk wagons, which could be dumped down a chute into the bins.

The setup looked pretty sketchy, but it must work, or they would have come up with something else by now.

With under a thousand Orcs in the village, a whole bin full of food would last them months while under siege. Holding out that long would be much more difficult than keeping up the food supply, and if the undead were really outside that long, then the village would most likely be lost to the blight for many years afterwards.

Karl looked around the village, then caught the Chief's attention.

"Where is the village well? I am a Runemaster, and I can enchant it to always stay full of clean water. With a fresh supply of food and an upgraded well, the village should be stable until the situation with the enemy force buildup is settled." He asked.

"There is a well in the centre of town. But we have rain barrels on all the buildings, in case the undead try to poison the groundwater"

Karl hadn't considered that. If that was the case, then he would just upgrade one of the storage tanks to always be at least half full. That way, it could still catch the rain water, and a dry spell wouldn't run them out of water.

He went off to do the work, with the Chief following him.

"What do your people want in exchange? This is a lot of benefit for my people, and you haven't made any requests yet." He whispered, not wanting to alarm his people if Karl's request was too much.

Karl smiled. "Well, we could consider it a favour, but I know that the Orcs don't like dealing in favours. Instead, we can settle up today.

The food is from the Red Dragon, I can't charge you for that during a war. But two gold coins worth of whatever you would like to trade for the water barrel upgrades is a

fair price.

Expensive now, but in the long term, they will pay for themselves."

Chapter 902 Orcish Crafting

Chief Snakebite handed over two coins and shook Karl's hand. "It's a pleasure doing business with you. Though I suspect that going to a village in person and doing upgrades isn't how things usually work."

Karl laughed and took an item from the Guild Bank.

"This ring creates water. Up to five gallons at a time. That is our usual sales pitch for water creation. But as magical wood at Commander Rank, carved and inscribed with Runes, there is a lot of time that goes into its creation, and the price is about the same as me placing the runes on your water barrels." He explained.

The Chief nodded. "You could sell a lot of those in Bhakh, the next major city, if you go to the main road. We're all part of the same Clan, but they are more progressive after living among the Demons so long. They buy and sell anything they can get.

The farming communities don't really buy much. Well, we don't actually have much money anyhow, a true Ore doesn't need it. But I think that our people should have some items to trade with yours."

Karl smiled. "We can always use items made of quality materials, as our Guild has Runesmiths. Even if we get good wooden musical instruments or tools, we can upgrade them with magical effects and resell them.

It's not a high dollar trade, but what your people will want isn't all that expensive either. Trading them for items that help their crafting, or store mana, so they can work longer, should be fine, even by your traditions, right?"

The massive Ore nodded slowly. "That should be fine. It's not fighting, just household help. Our villagers make musical instruments if your people are interested. Flutes and drums, mostly. They're the best for Orcish war and working songs."

That could be an interesting addition to the store. Limited edition Orcish war drums with magical effects would intrigue many of the purchasers, and they wouldn't be considered actual combat items by the Drodh Lord's rules.

Chief Snakebite passed the word around the village, and soon after they started to come out with their trade goods. Most were wood, some were carved from bones, and the drums had well cured monster leather heads on them.

The craftsmanship was extremely impressive, even if they had no real adornment or carving on them. Instead, they were perfectly fitted, properly tuned, and the various types of pan flutes that they produced were similarly well-fitted.

An old orc came up beside Karl with a smile on his face and a smouldering tobacco pipe between his teeth.

"You know you're not leaving any time soon now that you've had them bring the instruments out." He muttered as he leaned against the wall of a nearby building. Karl nodded. "I rather suspected that when the Chief said your village makes instruments. You can't just show something like that to a Green Dragon Cleric and then leave. She would never stand for it, even if we were in a hurry.

But there weren't any undead close enough to be a threat today, and I still have one team member scouting up above. So, there's no harm if we spend a day listening to stories and songs."

In fact, there weren't many things that he could have suggested that would have made Lotus happier than telling her that they were going to spend a whole day singing and eating before purchasing a bunch of instruments to send back to the shop.

The bards in Drodh City would be happy to see the new additions to the market, Karl presumed, but mostly it was just to help the Orcs relax for a day.

They were constantly under threat here, and large portions of their crops had been repeatedly destroyed. So, a granary full of supplies and a day of leisure would do them a world of good.

Every adult Orc was a combatant when they were threatened. So, the fact that they were hiding behind a sturdy wall was strategic, not cowardly. They all could and would fight against the invaders, so they had surely earned a day of rest.

Or perhaps two, the way that they were going through barrels of a potent wine that the Orcs called Grog. Or perhaps it was a fruit infused Rum? It was hard to tell with the potency level that it had.

But as the day wore on, and more of the villagers finished their work for the day, the party only increased. It even got to the point where the singing and war drums were enough to bring scouts from the nearby military units to see if something had happened.

They sang of battles past. They sang of bumper crops and lean years as nomads after crops failed. Then, as the sun was setting, they sang of the one true dream of the Orc Clans. To recover the lost Dragon Scale and nurture the system back to full activation. In Hawk's space, Karl could see that the fragment of dragon scale that they had was reacting, glowing a bit more brightly golden, but still looking tarnished and depleted. Perhaps the goal of the Orcs wouldn't be possible with the World Dragon Scale fragmented, but the fragment that was with Karl's team was beginning to awaken to their devotion, and the magic of the Orcs music.

Well after dark, the party was still in full swing, and the sound of drums carried across the grasslands, telling the world that the Orcs were not afraid of a fight.

A fight that the Undead were glad to give them. The forward scouts of the Bomgon force heard the Orcish War drums and began to move toward the village, drawn by the challenge sent out by the villagers.

So, it was well after midnight when Rae was the first to discover that the Undead were sending troops through portals into Drodh.

She transformed into her humanoid form and went to the town square to get

everyone's attention.

"The Undead have heard our challenge, and they are coming!" She shouted, while the

entire village filled with cheers.

Orcs loved a good fight. Drunk Orcs really loved a good fight.

Chapter 903 Follow Rae's Lead

The Orcs took Rae's words as gospel truth, and fired magical flares up into the sky, lighting up the portals and the incoming army. The locals were staggering and laughing as they ran to grab weapons and don armour, but the children were tasked to stay by Lotus.

Not for their safety, or at least not entirely.

Their job was to keep up the songs so that the party didn't have to end while the adults fought a glorious night battle.

Remi came out to confer with the village shaman and her assistant, then began preparing large spells to handle the threat.

Instead of remaining inside the city walls and casting out, Remi had transformed into Spirit Snake form with the decrepit old Orc Shaman on her back, so they could both see what was going on.

The Orcs were up on the wall, and Lotus had the perfect spell for this situation.

[Field of Vines] was primarily an entanglement ability. But she could just make the vines perfectly straight and stiff, while the Orcs cut them off to hurl them as spears toward the undead.

The vines regrew instantly as the Tree of Life appeared in the middle of the village, and Tessa mounted Thor, ready to leap over the wall the moment that the charge was sounded.

Staggering drunk, and from a hundred metres away, the Orcs were missing far more throws than they hit, but they were certainly having fun competing for kills as they laughed.

Karl was a bit more pragmatic, and much more sober, so he took out his bow and began to target everything that wasn't a zombie.

The mindless undead were not the weakest in the army, but they were the least threatening if the leadership group was eliminated.

So far, the only thing that had come through the portals was a horde of zombies and a few Demonic Necromancers, who had been no match for the might of [Void Blast] on Karl's arrows. It made for a chaotic situation outside the walls, as the zombies were drawn to the signs of life, but they were left without guidance on what might be an important target.

Then Cara realized that there was a better way to annoy the undead.

[Sister Remi, cast Apocalypse through all the portals and see who comes out to play.] She insisted.

She was circling over the battlefield, waiting for someone to play with, but they weren't sending anyone.

The shambling horde was almost to the town walls now, and more of the spears were hitting their targets, leaving a swathe of undead corpses in the fields as the horde approached.

Nachtia unleashed a wall of her black mist breath weapon, which caused the undead who entered to simply crumple to the ground, lifeless. In the dark, the zombies didn't even know that they were walking into danger.

Chief Snakebite stood beside Karl, hurling spears made of Lotus' vines, and laughed as Thor created a coating of ice along the ground with [Blockade], and the undead began to slip and stumble.

It was like they were staging a comedy show, enraged, but completely incapable of making it to the city across the ice.

Then the amused behemoth created a second wall above them and smashed the undead between the two walls.

The barriers shattered as the undead lashed out the moment they sensed danger. But hundreds were crushed, and the aftermath left giant boulders of ice in the field that the zombies had to navigate around.

Then Rae joined the battle with [Blood Destruction], and explosions rocked the battlefield, shredding zombies, while sending a mist of filthy blood into the sky.

The flaming vortexes of [Hellstorm] easily cleaned the worst of the mess as Hawk passed by and left presents before bombarding the newest arrivals to the region.

The sound of the drums was pulling more and more undead toward the village, faster than the combined efforts of the villagers and even Karl's team's area attacks were taking them out.

But still, there were no signs of leadership, other than the handful of Necromancers that Cara and Rae had killed. Even having Remi cast [Apocalypse] through the portals hadn't drawn out anything fun.

Chief Snakebite looked over the battlefield as a fresh round of flares went up, accompanied by fireworks.

"Do you think that they realized that it was a trap?" He asked idly, then took a long swig of Grog.

Karl shrugged. "It seems like it. Either that, or they simply don't want to send any more troops to us. It looked like they were building up for something big, and we know they use portals to attack, so it could be anywhere." The Chieftain laughed and tossed another spear out into the horde, impaling a zombie's forehead.

The zombie horde was almost to the moat now, though Thor was likely to drive them back with [Blockade] so that they would be properly clustered for the fire spells to incinerate them.

Zombies burned especially well, especially under the effects of Ghostfire. The creatures didn't have a soul to damage, but the flames seemed to burn through the link that the undead had to this world, destabilizing them long before their bodies were charred to the point of destruction.

The eerie quiet of the battlefield took some getting used to, though.

The War Drums continued, and occasional whoops of celebration among the villagers could be heard. But the undead horde didn't make a sound as they approached. Nothing when they were caught in the barriers, and only the vague crackling of fire in the distance as they died.

That began to change when the undead began to send different troops through the portals.

Wave upon wave of zombies gave way to screeching banshees, insane Revenants, and fast-moving ghouls, which kept stopping to pick through the zombie corpses on their way forward.

Chief Snakebite chuckled and took another swig of the grog. "Well, here we go, boys. I hope that you have a way to deal with banshees because it might be game over for us." He muttered.

Karl chuckled as Rae ripped the first one apart, leaving nothing but ethereal mist floating in the air. Then, the presence of another attracted the [Hellstorm] vortexes, which lit the entirely soul-based

undead on fire in the most peculiar way, burning in an incorporeal way that didn't affect the undead around it, and couldn't be put out.

"I think we might still have a shot."

Chapter 904 Totems Lead The Force

The revenants and the ghouls were nothing like the zombie horde. Not only were they much faster and stronger, they were also vaguely intelligent.

They didn't mindlessly lumber forward into traps or into Thor's [Lightning Zone]. They were smart enough to go around the visibly dangerous areas at the very least. Plus, they had good enough senses that they did at least attempt to defend themselves against the thrown spears.

The silent battlefield became suddenly deafening as the Revenants began to leap the moat and clash with the Orcish defenders. Blades met claws or the corroded blades left from the Revenants' past lives, and Lotus increased the radius of her Tree of Life effect to spill out over the moat.

Like Thor's [Consecrated Ground] ability, simply standing in the aura was enough to damage and destroy the invaders, who were not all durable enough to endure.

While there were countless Overlords in the undead army, the majority of the numbers were made up of Commander and Royal Rank undead. Those died in droves, but they provided cover for the stronger undead behind them. Chief Snakebite watched the flames sear the souls of the incorporeal undead away with a smile. "You are a good man to have in a fight. Your team can fight with anything. Normally, we need to call for more Shamans when they send Ghosts and Haints. But how does a spider stab a spectre?" Karl just shrugged. "She believes that it can be stabbed, so it can be stabbed. But she can also make herself incorporeal, so there might be some sort of interaction there."

The Orc nodded in satisfaction. That was good enough for him. Much of the world's magic worked because you believed that it did. At least, in the opinion of an Orcish Chieftain that wasn't particularly magically inclined.

The density of undead near them was increasing, so Karl began to use a larger radius explosion on the [Void Blast] infused arrows to keep them off the walls.

Remi and the local shaman were working together to create a flame storm around the village walls, a burning blizzard with stronger than usual winds. They had started it twenty metres from the moat so that it wouldn't affect the spear throwing, but even with Remi's power level, that wasn't enough to stop any but the weakest of enemies.

If they wanted to do that, she was going to have to use [Thunderstorm] or [Apocalypse].

Naga Swamp was a great spell in the proper setting, but it only created a radius around Remi, and the shape couldn't be altered. While defending a village, that would just make a mess.

But today, the undead were surrounding the village, though no more portals had opened since the first batch, and repeated casts of [Hellstorm] through the existing portals only slowed the influx for a few minutes.

Karl looked out over the battlefield and saw a pair of Overlord Ranked Necromancers marching through the portals with an escort of Death Knights, and a black robed demon of some sort.

No, that wasn't a Demon, that was Rae, walking between them like she was part of their team, and the Necromancers hadn't realized that their formation had been infiltrated yet.

They stopped and raised their hands, bringing a wave of magic to the battlefield with a grand spell that was melting the flesh from the dead zombies, and slowly raising them as skeletons.

Rae watched silently as the Necromancers got halfway through the spell. Then, with a Dagger in either hand, she stabbed them both through the heart, killing them both instantly, which caused the half formed skeletons to crumble to ash, while the Death Knights stared at her in shock for a second, then kneeled before her.

"Did the spider just gain a retinue of Death Knights?" Chieftain Snakebite asked.

"I think so? They look like they intend to follow her, don't they?" Karl agreed.

"So much for loyalty among the undead." The chief laughed.

The battlefield was suddenly full of burning embers as Remi decided that a full [Apocalypse] was needed to deal with the number of undead on the battlefield.

She was burning through an immense amount of magic to cast that at full output, but she was only going to need a few minutes to clear out the survivors of the invasion force, then she should have time to recover.

She wasn't just burning through her own mana, though. The Orcish Shaman had some sort of magical device or spell that was feeding more mana to Remi, adding to the amount she was regenerating.

The Naga Queen was loaded with Mana Storage and regeneration items, but for an Overlord Ranked area attack the size of a battlefield, no amount of mana regeneration would be able to keep up.

Rae sent the Death Knights back through the portal with a wave of her hand, and Karl waited to see what she was up to.

A few seconds later, the Death Knights escorted another trio of Overlord Rank Necromancers, all black winged Magic Demons, onto the battlefield. Where they were promptly assassinated by Rae.

[And people say that I'm the one with the best sense of humour.] Cara joked.

Whoever was still alive on the other side of those portals was going to lose their minds when they realized that they had just sent three Overlords into a trap because they assumed that all the Undead should be on their team.

But for some reason, the flow of undead had stopped.

Rae went invisible and stuck her head through a portal to see what was going on.

[Oops, we broke the schedule. All the skeletons collapsed when I killed the last ones. I think that they know we're messing with them. Yeah, they definitely know that we're messing with them. They're totally sending a Totem over here.

Hey Cara, it's a bone dragon.]

Chieftain Snakebite was waiting for Karl to say something, as the battle was rapidly ending.

"They are sending a Totem Ranked bone dragon to come attack us. I think that if you can get to it before it starts flying, it should be a good fight. If not, I will have my team try to bring it back to the ground for you." Karl explained to the Chief.

Snakebite was the only Totem Ranked fighter in the area, but just in case, Karl sent a message to Prince Stephen, the Totem Ranked Cleric.

[We are at the village led by Chief Snakebite, near the border. There was an attack through portals tonight. Suspected Totem Ranked Bone Dragon attack coming soon. If there is a military unit nearby, please advise.] Karl messaged.

[Understood, there are two units already en route to your location, both with Totem Ranked leaders.]

Well, Karl supposed they had made a bit of a spectacle in the dark with all this fire, and the Orcs constantly setting off fireworks along with the flares to illuminate the battlefield.

Chapter 905 Delilah

Portals opened inside the village seconds later, and a whole team of Dragon Clerics in white robes came through, led by a red robed Totem Ranked woman. She looked like she should be in her mid-thirties, a rather ageless motherly look that Karl was certain was a transformation spell.

Snakebite simply waved at her, and the Priestess nodded before turning to watch Tessa firing attacks from her perch on top of the behemoth's head, which was resting on the village wall, so he could send spells out more easily.

It also had the added benefit of encouraging the Orcs to rub his head whenever he wiped out another wave of undead.

The Red Dragon Priestess seemed to glide through the air as she leapt from the centre of the village to land beside Karl. It was similar to how Dana could walk on air, but somewhat more graceful. Or, her legs might be strong enough that she could actually jump that far, and she only used the magic to land more smoothly.

"Chieftain, Overlord. I got a message that there was a proper war going on here. It looks much more calm than expected." She greeted them.

"There is a Totem Ranked Bone Dragon coming through the portal momentarily. The black robed one is on our side, and she's recruited the Death Knights to taunt the enemy." Karl explained.

The Priestess looked impressed, and motioned for her retinue to join them. "What was your plan to deal with it? I see that you have a Void Badger, so you could have closed the portals already." She asked.

"Well, we wanted to hold it on the ground for the Chieftain to fight. We have a Totem Ranked Void Blast skill which will do damage without the reduction of [Totemic Protection], so we can damage it. But Lady Rae, the spider, is greatly looking forward to stabbing it."

The Priestess looked around at the situation. "Well, with your abilities, you might be able to take it out. That defensive ability that your team has is quite effective."

Karl nodded. "I will extend it to Chief Snakebite for the duel as well. [Limited Invulnerability] should make up for any undead draconic nonsense."

The woman patted Karl on the head. "How about you put it on me instead? Dragons should be the one to deal with an undead abomination like a Bone Dragon."

Karl extended [Void Body] and [Impenetrable Bulwark] to the Totem Ranked Dragon Cleric.

She laughed and transformed into a battle-scarred red dragon with a wingspan so massive that it nearly covered the entire village.

Through the portal, an equally massive skeletal dragon head appeared, followed by the rest of the bone dragon.

Rae didn't hesitate. Chips of bone flew as she stabbed wildly at the dragon's back with her limbs, and even called her Golems onto his back to add more damage.

The dragon pulsed with power, and Rae was sent flying across the battlefield, over Karl's head and the village, then she went incorporeal and skidded along the ground for a few dozen metres before coming to a stop.

[Satisfying.] Rae sighed as she waited for her body to heal.

[Tastes terrible, though. Like that cheese with the blue mould in it. 2/10 do not recommend.] Cara agreed.

The red dragon took to the sky, where it was met by the bone dragon. A massive plume of fire met a cloud of black energy similar to the one that Nachtia breathed. The black dragon and Hawk had both retreated from the battle, as dragon breath was indiscriminate, and nothing was likely to survive this engagement.

The two dragons crashed into each other, snapping and snarling as they clawed at scales and skeleton.

Bones shattered as the red dragon's claws tore into the undead monstrosity. But in return, the bone dragon clamped its jaw down on her shoulder. Only, it had no effect. The [Impenetrable Bulwark] skill reduced damage taken by twenty percent, plus one point per day of age, and this particular red dragon was truly ancient. The undead creature's maw spewed black mist over her body, but the priestess continued to tear it apart, shattering bones and throwing them to the ground.

It was a one-sided beating, as a flurry of spells exploded ineffectually against the red dragon. The frantic death throes of a bone dragon which had realized that mortality applied to everything, including it.

Chief Snakebite whistled in appreciation as the other clerics watched in awe.

"I have never seen anything like that. It's like she's got a whole Rank on the undead, it can't do anything to her." One of the Clerics that had arrived with the Priestess noted quietly.

"It's a small advantage granted by having an Impenetrable Bulwark Behemoth in the group." Karl whispered to them.

The group looked over at Thor, who was watching with intense interest. If he were that old, he would be able to beat up ancient dragons as well. It was literally just a matter of time.

Two massive claws hooked through the eye sockets of the Bone Dragon's skull, and the glow of power faded from the undead beast's body with a crack of shattering bone.

Rae Shadow Stepped forward to grab a large red gem that fell from the corpse. That would look pretty in her space, and she wasn't going to let anyone else claim it. Even if she hadn't been the one to kill the dragon.

{New Shared Skill Gained} [Army Of The Dead] Creates a retinue of undead guardians suited to the summoner.

[Dammit, I forgot to move my undead.] Rae noted sadly.

The Death Knights had been standing under the battle, and they were now a pile of ash and bone, destroyed by the aftermath of the clash between dragons.

[You can summon new ones later. Just not now. We don't want anyone to think we're still under attack.] Karl suggested.

Rae was worried that the spell wouldn't summon anything as cool as those Death Knights had been, but if the system didn't want to give her more Golems, she would take these ones instead. Maybe she could get an army of bone spiders. The team didn't have nearly enough spiders.

Chapter 906 Strategies of the Red

The portals faded with the death of the Bone Dragon, and a huge cheer went up from the villagers. Today was a resounding victory, not a single Orc had been lost, and the village walls hadn't been breached.

The Red Dragon flew back to land in the village, then transformed back into her human form.

Tessa came down from Thor's back, still wearing her [Dragon Armour] skill, and in Dragonkin form, fully scaled with a long red tail.

She clasped her hands in a formal military greeting and bowed to the dragon. "Avatar. It is an honour to meet you."

The dragon smiled at her. "You may all call me Priestess Delilah. I was never one for formality outside of combat. Overlord Karl, thank you for that defensive skill. It made today's work a particular joy.

Sister Tessa, you have the most wonderful mount as a companion. Don't let him escape you.

Now that I have everyone's attention, I will brief you all on the situation. Lord Bomgon recently suffered a defeat at the hands of the Lord of Drodh, which cost a huge portion of their fleet's wealth, as well as the permanent death of more than one of the senior Lieutenants under him.

Following that, there was an incident where a Totem Ranked Lich Lord was defeated and his Phylactery destroyed.

Now, with repeated defeats along the border, the intensity of the battles has been increasing by the day, and it is suspected that the Bomgon nation is gearing up for a full invasion.

Your strategy of having them sacrifice as many of the lower undead as possible was a brilliant strategic move, as without the bodies, it will be difficult for the Bomgon Army to replace their losses, but the size of their amassed hordes is still staggering."

Dana smirked at Karl, and Ophelia rumbled with laughter as Tessa cleared her throat. "Priestess Delilah, I believe we might be somewhat responsible for this situation. We were at the defeat of the Bomgon fleets in Drodh. The Lich Lord whose phylactery was lost was also us. Now, I can't claim that we were more than a drop in the bucket of the undead lost along the border, but we are still here." Tessa explained.

The ancient red dragon let out a very undignified giggle. "No wonder the Goddess favours you. Your companions have the Laughing God's own luck when it comes to being in the right place at the wrong time.

But, it is good that I found you now. There will be a massive increase in attacks beginning later today, driven partially by the loss of the Bone Dragon and his armies.

What many don't know about the undead nation is that while their numbers seem limitless, with the ability to keep creating more undead, that is only true for the hordes. The zombies, the skeletons, the wights, and the ghouls. For the stronger creatures, and the spiritual undead, the numbers are much more limited. So, every loss of a powerful Necromancer, or greater Undead with the ability to summon or create an undying plague, is a great blow to their ability to sustain their numbers during a prolonged conflict.

They lost at least a few Overlord Ranked Necromancers here today, I saw the bodies. That means they're going to be out for revenge, and they've got a whole army staged nearby where they can open portals with minimal effort."

Karl had forgotten about that little detail. Sure, you could open a portal to anywhere that you knew, but the amount of mana increased with the size and the distance. So, it was more efficient to keep the army near the border that you were attacking, and then only send them fifty or a hundred kilometres to attack.

"So, what do you want us to do? I'm hoping that you have some sort of plan because ours was just 'fly to wherever there are undead', and I am beginning to suspect that isn't going to cut it." Karl asked.

The dragon gave him an indulgent smile, which only enhanced her motherly appearance, but something behind the smile triggered all the warning bells in Karl's head that said this was an intrigued predator. That was a new experience for him. Normally, there wasn't much in the world that would give him a sense of threat, and certainly not such a motherly smile. However, her next words reminded Karl that this was a red dragon, a Totem Ranked follower of the Dragon God of War.

"You know, that's not a bad plan either. We could just fly over to them and start a fight instead of waiting to see where they show up. With those combat buffs that you have, we could probably hold out for at least two hours. It would be glorious." She agreed.

Cara landed beside Karl and stood up on her back legs to assume a boxing stance, which made the dragon priestess laugh.

Her tone was as amused as the smile on her face as the dragon continued. "Well, that's another vote for just going over and punching them in the face. However, that could just make things worse for everyone else. The Undead aren't all centralized in one location. They have been found stocking hordes of lesser undead in four different locations, one of which suffered heavy damage during the battle tonight, as someone from this battle repeatedly cast some sort of flaming tornado and a meteor swarm spell on the other side of the portals.

The undead were not expecting an attack on their own base, and they were tightly packed when the counterattack started. By the time that they organized defences, they had already taken heavy casualties, according to our scouts."

Lotus shook her branches in celebration, causing a shower of golden dust to fall from her canopy.

Priestess Delilah chuckled and looked past Karl out into the night. "If my estimation is right, we don't need to go anywhere. They are about to come to us, under the impression that we are gathering a strike force to go after one of their warehousing locations. Once the reinforcement military units arrive, I give it two hours before the next attack."

Chapter 907 Bhurk Regiment

The reinforcements that came for them turned out to be two Battalions of infantry from the 7th Bhurk Regiment. Both were made up almost entirely of wrath Demons, and they marched with heavy shields in a phalanx formation, ideal for preventing hordes of zombies and other lesser undead from getting into their ranks.

They even had specialty shields made, which intrigued Karl.

They had a pin and barrel latching system, with a pin on the left, and a hollow tube on the right, so that when the soldiers were shoulder to shoulder, the large shields could be interlocked to form a defensive wall that the taller Demons could attack over.

That was an advantage that the Wrath Demons had on most other species. With the average soldier standing well over three metres tall, they dwarfed the undead army, and even the vast majority of the Orcish locals.

"Avatar of the Red, it is good to see you again. We were told that there is a Dragon Favoured warrior here, who will draw the undead with their mere presence." The leader of the first battalion to arrive greeted Priestess Delilah.

"Battalion Commander Daleth, I believe that it might be a whole group. Red Priestess Tessa has much favour of the gods on her, and her mount is certainly destined for greatness, despite his racial limits.

But it is the one known as Karl who has far too much destiny swirling around him. The Old Gods favour him." She replied.

The Demon gave Karl an appraising look, and Karl shrugged. "That's what the clerics keep saying. But mostly, I just have incredible luck."

The Totem Ranked Wrath Demon smiled. "That's all the favour that you really need. You still look young, though. Perhaps their favour extends to an increase in your growth rate as well."

Karl nodded. "My class has definite advantages over most when it comes to growth. I grow as my beasts grow, and the separate space skill that I have for them increases their growth rate." "What do you have for beasts? So that I can inform my men." "There is a Blood Destruction Demonic Spider, a Winged Void Badger, a Naga Shaman Queen, a Ghostfire Thunderbird, and the Behemoth that Priestess Tessa is riding is one of my bonded partners as well." Karl offered.

The Demon frowned. "Your luck must be insane to have stumbled across such an interesting variety of beasts."

Karl shook his head. "It's a side effect of my class. It helps them evolve as they obtain new skills and treasures. Hawk, the blue streak up in the sky, used to be a Common Rank Windspeed Hawk."

"You named your Windspeed Hawk 'Hawk'? Why not just call him bird?"

Remi laughed as the Demon clearly judged Karl's lack of naming skills.

{I am fairly sure that Hawk was the only one of us who was named by Karl without any input into his own name. There is actually one more, a Glasswing Butterfly, but she's still in her early growth phase, and won't interact with the outside world.} Remi added.

The Commander nodded. "That should be enough information. I have a general idea what each of those species is capable of, and what a Naga Shaman can do, so a Shaman Queen should be the same, but on a larger scale."

Remi nodded. {I have specialized in large area attack spells. It burns a huge amount of stored mana every time, but I can just about clear a battlefield.}

Having the beast spaces, plus the mana storage staff that Karl made for her, was a blessing. It would be so boring if she could only maintain a full output [Apocalypse] or [Meteor Storm] for half a minute or less.

The other battalion's leader, a Totem Ranked Wrath Demon named Ligo who could almost have passed as Commander Daleth's brother, came over with news.

"I have a report from the staging area scouts. The portals are opening now, and we can expect attackers along the border within the next ten minutes."

The sun was just coming up, and they had been fighting most of the night, so the villagers were mostly exhausted and already in bed. They wouldn't be able to stay there long if the invasion came to the city walls again, but the two battalions were staged outside, where they could make best use of their trained tactics.

[We could just not fight them now, if we wanted.] Cara suggested.

It wouldn't take much to just keep closing the portals until the undead got annoyed and went somewhere else.

[We will let the villagers sleep as long as they can. Did you want to have a quick nap before more fighting?] Karl replied.

He had been on the wall for most of the night, firing arrows, but he wasn't so tired that he couldn't join the next wave of the battle.

[Eternal Lightning] recovered stamina with ease, especially when you were just waiting around for the next wave of attacks, and the constant healing of Lotus in Tree of Life form negated any chance of a hangover, though most of Karl's team had gotten at least a couple of hours of sleep before the attack started.

While they waited for the attack to begin, Hawk returned to his scouting pattern, watching for signs of portals opening in the grasslands around them. If the red dragon was right, they should be receiving a rather large force to their location soon, and he had learned to trust the instincts of the clerics. If Tessa got a vision of battle, there would be battle. If Lotus saw snacks or a new friend, there would be snacks or a new friend.

Now, at first, that skill had seemed somewhat flaky. But knowing who was a friend and where the food was were both extremely valuable survival skills.

[Portals are opening. All around the village this time, about a kilometre out. Not large, mostly under two metres. But there are at least twenty of them open right now.] Hawk reported as the Bomgon attack began.

"Twenty portals in a full ring around the village. How do you want to deploy?" Karl asked.

Commander Ligo gestured out towards the troops. "We brought enough soldiers to surround the village. We will let the villagers hold the wall, while we hold outside the moat. Daleth's men will take the north, I will take the south.

You can array your team with the villagers for the start of the battle, but kindly hold off on charging out until the initial shield wall is broken. After that, it will be more of a melee, and everyone will recognize your people as allies."

Chapter 908 Surrounded

Zombies poured from the portals in an unending wave of rotted flesh, immediately turning the air fetid in an unnatural way. The magic of a black dragon was that of death, but it had a sense of finality to it, almost a lethal cleansing feeling. But the zombies in this group were powerful. Almost all Overlords, and they had a half dozen Totem Ranked Necromancers with them already.

That was not a good sign for a battle that was just starting.

There were three Totems with the group right now, leaving them outnumbered two to one. However, Karl had a good feeling about this fight. Rae had been learning all sorts of fun new things lately, and there was a good chance that one of the beasts would trigger [Skill Master 5] soon, and advance a skill by a Rank.

Even one more Totem Ranked attack skill would be a huge boost to their combat abilities. The Necromancers had spread themselves evenly around the village, but were hanging back behind the undead horde, guiding its progress while ensuring that there would be no escape from the ambush.

Priestess Delilah sent a message as she flapped her wings and took to the sky.

{Kindly cast that most wonderful defensive spell again. I am going to deal with the Necromancers.}

Karl chuckled as he cast the full suite of buffs over the three Totems. [Impenetrable Bulwark], [Limited Invulnerability], [Brutality], [Haste], [Terrorize], and [Sharpness]. Then, just for fun, he cast [Behemoth] on the ancient red dragon, bringing her overall length close to ninety metres when stacked with [Brutality].

It was impossible to miss the rapidly expanding red dragon as she circled the battlefield, even if she wasn't glowing red with divine favour. And that was precisely what the Priestess was after.

The looks of absolute terror on the faces of the Necromancers when the massive dragon came for them were priceless. Karl could see that they were ready to flee the moment that they saw the dragon double in size, but they managed to hold together long enough to start shouting something through the portals.

Most likely begging for reinforcements.

The first gout of dragon fire turned a human looking Necromancer to ash instantly, and Hawk made a note of the trick for future reference.

[She is using holy magic on her flames, and the Necromancers are coated with Unholy power.

It's almost like she doused them in acid before setting them on fire. It's beautiful.] The two Necromancers closest to Delilah began to bombard her with spells as the undead horde slammed into the shield wall, sliding the soldiers backward nearly a metre before the second rank hacked down enough of the zombies to stall their momentum.

A horn blew, and the demons sent out a wave of attacks that shredded the front ranks of Undead, and gave the shield wall time to return to their positions. It was all very methodical and practiced, a direct contrast to Karl's team, who were just happily throwing skills into the horde.

Or summoning golems into it.

Rae was particularly proud of her new [Army of the Dead], which had made a dozen Overlord Ranked zombie spiders for her, each about the size of a house cat. They were built much like Rae was at that size, and their sharp legs showed no mercy on the undead horde as they pushed forward with the group of Golems. They were headed for the spot where Delilah was fighting the Necromancers, with the intention of forcing a clearing in the horde so that Rae and Cara could move to engage. They had been instructed to hang back at the start of the fight, and they were enjoying destroying zombies, but they really wanted a Totem Ranked kill for the day.

It wasn't fair that the Dragon got to have all the fun.

Delilah wasn't going to be the only one killing fun stuff for long, though. Through the portals, the zombie horde was being replaced by a wave of skeletal knights in piecemeal armour, carrying swords and buckler shields.

Then, spectres began to arrive, floating above the melee. Karl changed his focus to the spectral undead, as not all combat skills could harm them. Void Blast had no problem damaging spiritual beings, and Hawk's Ghostfire was similarly effective. But the regular flames of the demon army didn't touch them, and that was the primary elemental attack of most of the wrath demons.

For the first few seconds, the spectres didn't understand the threat posed by the arrows, and simply assumed that they would fly through their bodies. But while the [Poison Arrow] base spell wouldn't do anything to them, the [Void Blast] was truly devastating.

Fortunately, there weren't many, and the Spectres were mostly cleared before the skeleton knights made it to the front lines.

The skeletons crashed into the shield wall in a cacophony of steel on steel, then the rank behind began to climb over to leap into the defenders.

"Charge!" Commander Daleth ordered, and the shield wall abruptly separated as the Demons pushed forward, toppling the skeletons.

"That's our signal." Karl announced, letting Rae and Remi loose on the battlefield.

Rae called her Golems back to herself, along with a fresh set of zombie spiders to clear a zone in the battlefield.

Remi followed Karl as he vaulted off the wall and into combat. Between them, they had a rather considerable number of guardians, as well as the pair of Dire Bears that Karl had chosen for golems.

Tessa, Ophelia and Dana were working together, with Thor using [Bulwark] to bulldoze a path for the army to move into the undead horde.

The Totems weren't trying to close the portals, or at least, they weren't trying to yet. They wanted the undead to send as many of their forces to this location as possible so that they could deal a devastating defeat to the Bomgon hordes and not have to face them again tomorrow.

The way that Priestess Delilah was going through the Necromancers, it didn't seem too farfetched that they really would crush the Bomgon army here. She had already killed four of their Totem Ranked leaders and mutilated their bodies beyond resurrection.

Only two more Totem Ranked invaders remained, and the dragon's superficial wounds amounted to no more than small damaged sections on her scales, which were already mending themselves.

Chapter 909 Rampage Through the Skeletons

As [Rampage] began to get fully stacked, Karl found that the Skeletal Knights stood no chance before the Blade of Champions. Even when he simply swung it to create an arc of [Rend] to weaken a swathe of undead, most of them would be crippled, or their armour would be severely damaged.

Of course, this did not go unnoticed. A pair of Overlords and their summoned supporters should not be able to cut through an undead horde that was keeping an entire battalion at bay.

It simply didn't make any sense. But like Karl and his team, the Skeletal Knights also had damage reduction, so the actual damage done to them by the average attack was minimal. It wasn't that they were immensely durable, they simply reduced all damage done by enough that they were hard to kill.

But with [Rampage] in effect, the damage reduction was more than offset, and they were no more than skeletons in crude armour, a mediocre form of undead.

The demons of the 7th Bhurk Regiment pushed out to follow Karl and Remi as he moved toward the portals, intending to let Remi bombard the other side with [Apocalypse] once they had a clear view of the situation there.

The two Battalion Commanders had reached the remaining Necromancers, which had allowed Delilah to join Hawk and Nachtia in bombarding the battlefield from above. With Hawk plus two dragons, the amount of aerial bombardment was insane, even though Remi didn't use her larger area spells during this battle, just in case they targeted friendlies.

Making a spell hit certain targets but not others wasn't always easy. When everyone was in your group, it would happen automatically so that you didn't damage party members, but the system didn't intervene if you should happen to cast a spell that would hit noncombatants, other teams, or hidden allies.

Karl noticed that the Lamia bodyguards had fallen back to let a pair of wrath demons take positions at Karl's shoulders. While the Lamia pair did have blades, they were better as a second line fighter, not the one most likely to be attacked, and the wrath demons were much larger than they were.

Karl attempted to include them in [Rampage], but found that the spell couldn't be targeted at anyone but his own group. That was unfortunate, but if he explored the System later, there might be a way to include more people in your team of allies. You could include the whole Guild, and a bunch of strangers to do a dungeon run, so there should be a way to add a military commander and their unit.

If there was one thing that the System favoured on a reliable basis, it was group activities.

"Whatever damage increasing skill your class gets is ridiculous." One of the wrath demons joked as he cut down a pair of skeletal knights that Karl had wounded.

{It's the power of friendship.} Remi joked, and the demon spared her a confused glance.

{The damage buff is based on a percentage of group damage done during the last minute.} She clarified.

The demon laughed as he cut down one more of the skeletal knights. "The power of friendship it is."

The Skeletal Knights began to pack together to stop Karl's group from advancing on the portals, forming a wall of bones that was rapidly being refilled even as [Void Blast] knocked holes in it.

Karl cast [Consecrated Ground], Thor's new favourite anti-undead spell, and Remi cast a [Hellstorm] vortex in front of them as they paused to let the area damage do its thing.

"Should we really pause our progress?" The Demon on Karl's left asked.

"Give them a moment to swarm into the area effects, and then I will deal with them all at once." Karl replied confidently.

The demon didn't look convinced, but Karl could see Priestess Delilah coming their way overhead. With a row of [Hellstorm] vortexes pulling the Skeletal Knights together and away from the soldiers, it was a perfect target for a draconic strafing run.

But only because the vortexes multiplied. The Skeleton Knights seemed particularly inept at destroying them, as it didn't even occur to most of them that the fire was a thing they could attack to dissipate the magic, now that their mental link to the Necromancers was gone.

The red dragon passed overhead, and a massive gout of flame engulfed the Skeleton Knights, burning bones to ash and leaving the path clear between Karl and the nearest portal.

"Everyone, forward! We will push to the portal and separate the undead." He ordered.

Technically, he had no authority over the Demons, but they didn't hesitate to follow him and his group forward.

However, Karl did not find what he was hoping for in the view through the portal. The staging grounds on the other side were dead, barren, and completely empty.

Not a single undead was held in reserve at that location, so there probably wouldn't be any more coming. But he could see multiple other portals in the vicinity.

"Lamia, you're up. Let me know where those other portals go." Karl instructed out loud, for the benefit of the Demons.

It might be a trap or an illusion. However, if he sent the two Bodyguards, they should be able to tell him the truth of the matter.

The Lamia duo passed through and entered the Bomgon Army staging area, where an immense wave of unholy energy threatened to overcome them. However, with [Void Body] active on the whole group, thanks to the skills of the Epic Guard, they were regenerating faster than they were being corrupted.

[The portals all lead here. We can see every angle of the battlefield.] Their explanation was both reassuring and disappointing. Remi wouldn't get to bombard an unsuspecting army, but the portals were all accounted for, and there were no more undead in the area.

"Let your boss know not to send anyone through the portals. There is some sort of Necromantic spell there that is trying to corrupt the summoned creatures. If he sends an army unit through, we will be fighting against them in a few minutes." Karl informed the demons beside him.

"On it. We will make sure that nobody goes through. Can you tell us where the staging area is?" One of them replied.

Karl shook his head.

"I can say that it's northwest of here by more than a hundred kilometres, and likely less than two hundred. But I can't say exactly, and there are no real landmarks, it's dead grass and withered trees all the way to the horizon."

The Demon shrugged. "Good enough for me. We have a general description to send to Military Intelligence, and they can reference the description against what they already know. Might as well bring your creatures back, and we will work on finding a way to close the portals."

Chapter 910 Excess Energy

Karl gave the demon an amused smile. "Oh, I am already on it. They might have created twenty portals, but we have a Cara."

Cara looked up from beating a skeleton's face in with its own shield when she sensed her name being mentioned.

[Is it time to close the portals now?] She asked.

[Yeah, there's nothing there. Not even loot.]

Those were magic words, and the first three portals were closed within a second of each other. That served as a signal to the mages of the two units, and they began taking down the rest of the portals, while Karl [Nullified] the two closest to himself, then resummoned the Lamia pair, so they didn't accidentally bring a curse back with them.

He might not know what a Totem Ranked Necromancer was capable of, but a lingering curse didn't seem unrealistic. In fact, he wouldn't be surprised if they spent weeks cleaning the lingering curses and unholy magic from this battlefield, even with Delilah, Tessa and Lotus working together.

{Leave one portal. It is feeding the Undead. If we close them all, we leave a reserve of power for the Necromancers to draw on.} Delilah shouted as Cara was about to close the last of the portals.

The Void Badger was starting to like this dragon. She knew what was important. You didn't just defeat the enemy, you had to remember to troll them and extract maximum amusement value before you finished them.

Delilah would have been somewhat horrified to know that was how the Badger thought of her. The decision that she made was purely strategic, with the larger nationwide war in mind. The psychological effect of having drained their reserve of mana wasn't even a consideration when the act was already a strategic necessity.

Now that there was only one portal open, Karl could clearly feel the flow of power from it to the undead army, as well as to the area over the battlefield, where it lingered like a miasma, except for four distinct areas.

Over the village, where Lotus was set up as a healing tree to provide treatment for the injured.

Over Thor and Tessa, who were wielding Holy Magic like a rampaging force of divine justice.

Under Priestess Delilah as she passed above the battlefield.

And finally, around Karl, who still had [Consecrated Ground] active.

But the way that they power was building, if they didn't spread this effect, there could be real issues as it began to corrupt the soldiers. There might be something that they could do, Karl thought. {Hey Tessa, take Thor and your group to the last portal. Your Holy Magic auras and spells should help cleanse the miasma that is coming in with the Unholy Power. Even just keeping [Consecrated Ground] cast over the portal area should be fine.} Karl messaged the War Cleric.

They were the closest to the final location, other than Cara, who wasn't capable of casting the spell that they needed this time.

Standing on Thor's back, Tessa didn't bother trying to move her group, which currently included both Tessa and Dana. Instead, she began drawing a huge magical circle in the sky of glowing red power. Her new spear was shining golden with Holy Light, and then Tessa pointed at the portal, and the whole spell moved over to centre on the portal.

Glowing golden light covered the area, and the flow of Unholy Power began to mellow as the miasma dissipated.

Karl couldn't be sure what sort of purification spell had been cast over the portal, but it clearly hadn't stopped the flow of power. It only removed the curse from it, which was perfect.

Not in the minds of most of the soldiers, who had realized that the mana was empowering the Skeleton Knights to keep them at Overlord Rank. But in the larger strategic sense, it was a victory.

Karl used [Gravity Slam] to knock down a section of the Skeletal Knights, then bulldozed them with [Bulwark], copying Thor's tactics to push them into a tighter formation, where more would be hit with every spell, and fewer soldiers would be needed to contain the now separated section of the undead Horde.

The wall only lasted a few seconds before the undead hacked it apart, but that was long enough to rearrange them for the soldiers.

Overhead, Hawk was glowing with an immense amount of ghostly green flame, a second sun in the sky, too bright to look at as he prepared.

For something.

[What are you planning, buddy?] Karl asked, as Hawk's thoughts were silent in his mind. If they had to wrestle an undead Thunderbird to the ground and cleanse, then resurrect him, Karl would not be happy.

But Hawk's link to Karl was perfectly intact, whatever he was doing. A massive fireball launched from the sky, causing the demons to cuss and run from the target zone, while the undead froze in place, staring up at their impending doom.

{Skill Master 5 Activation} [Fireball] has evolved to the Epic Grade skill [Purgatory Flames]

[Purgatory Flames] launches a maximum 20m x User Rank fireball at the target. Damage is dependant upon the user's current mana pool. Depletes all remaining mana on use. Deals double damage to spiritual beings, undead and water element beings.

All the bonded partners saw the message, and Remi had some serious questions.

[How exactly does purgatory flame relate to extra damage against water element? It's a soul-based attack that purges undead.] She asked, while Hawk preened in pride.

[That's why it's Epic.] He insisted.

[That's not how logic works. Karl, Hawk is picking on me again.] Remi pouted.

Karl laughed to himself at their bickering. [Did you not just learn a skill that creates a raging river anywhere you happen to be standing? I think a Ghostfire fireball that targets water is only fair.]

Purely out of spite, Remi created a [Naga Swamp] under the nearest group of skeletons, who promptly sank in the mud, except for the first rank, which was fighting the Demons.