

The First Legendary Beast Master #Chapter 91 They Need Exercise - Read The First Legendary Beast Master Chapter 91 They Need Exercise

Chapter 91 They Need Exercise

The button, as it turned out, was made of blackened brass, and after poking at it for a few seconds and then rubbing her mandible against it to see what it felt like, Rae gave up on the button and returned to her space to avoid the attention that she was getting while out in the open.

"Once she's fully grown, I think that she will be more open about being outside, but for now, she is much more comfortable in places where she can camouflage herself, especially dark places." Karl explained.

"We won't force her out where she's uncomfortable then." The leader of the mage training agreed, while he rubbed Thor's head.

One new and friendly pet was good enough for the teachers, but Rita had brought Karl here for an actual reason, and not just to talk about how his weekend went.

"Are you healed well enough to begin full training schedules again? The notes said that there had been some mental damage, and there is no good way to quantify that." She asked very seriously.

"I feel better, but the only way to know for sure is to actually start training again and see if the pain returns. The two new spaces have advanced enough now that I am getting feedback from the pets, and not needing to constantly feed the spaces to keep them contained, so it should be alright. I'm not sure how much training I will be up for, though. I am going to need a lot of time to work on mental strength just to keep ahead of their growth rate." Karl explained.

"Alright, then we can go to the morning classes as scheduled. The afternoon classes will be changed starting today, as the decision has been made that there is not enough training for your pets now that there are three of them.

Sending Thor out to get his head rubbed is not officially training, no matter what the other Professors tell you." Rita reminded him.

What exactly they were going to teach Thor was a mystery to Karl, but as they finished their breakfast and headed for the training field for Hawk to practice, Rita got a much better idea.

"Thor is a growing boy, and he needs his exercise, so what we're going to do today is to have you sit and meditate while Hawk blocks the attacks, and I will bring some mages from the early Ascended class who are working on barriers to help Thor practice his skills."

As soon as he heard the word barrier, Thor's head perked up in the beast space. He loved the barrier game, and it would be even better with more barriers.

"Won't that be a waste for the other students?" Karl asked.

A few of the nearby mages laughed and Rita shook her head. "Taking full force Awakened Rank attacks repeatedly will burn through their mana faster than you might suspect. The goal is for them to keep the barriers up as long as possible, while Thor rampages through the field building up his muscles."

"Normally, they have the students from the Awakened Rank warrior classes smash at the barriers all afternoon. Setting them up for Thor won't be any different. But who is that? A new pet, I take it?" The mage student beside Karl asked.

"Yeah, a Lightning Cerro that I just bonded. The teachers are all in love with him, and he adores the barrier game. Once you see him play, you will feel thankful that you got Hawk instead." Karl joked.

The students got set up, and Hawk took to the sky for his daily training. It only took a few seconds for Rita to grab four of the students who were working on barriers, and to instruct them to set them up at different angles around the field, making a cube of sorts.

[Go, have fun.] Karl instructed, and Thor ran out of the space at his best stumbling run, still a bit uncoordinated, in the way of newborn animals everywhere.

But when his horns hit the first barrier, and it wavered slightly as he bounced away, the mages knew that this training would not be easy on them.

There was no rhyme or reason to the attacks, he charged at whatever one he saw, as long as it wasn't the one beside him. That was too close to get a run at, and he wanted to run as much as possible.

In actual combat, that would rarely be the case. They would sweep and spear with the horns to tear apart their enemies, but there was just something satisfying about charging at the glowing magical walls.

The mages that were attacking the moving targets below Hawk had to work hard to pay attention and not laugh as Thor trumpeted happily, a long warbling note like a military war horn, and continued to charge at whatever barrier managed to come back up first.

It had only taken him twenty minutes to smash them all, and the first break wasn't scheduled until the half hour mark.

But if they weren't up, he would wait until one was. The students could all see his disappointment when he had to wait, and that silent judgment, that they weren't good enough to even be a long-term play toy to a monster like him, was wearing on them.

They had thought that the barriers they had made were exceptionally impressive, and they were a Rank above him, but when there was no offensive power to deal with the threat, it didn't take long for him to smash through their mana reserves.

The lightning barrier only stabilized his body and prevented him from breaking his horns. It had collapsed multiple times already, but even without it, a Lightning Cerro had incredible raw power.

Thor lay down in the grass when the break was called, and a few of the warriors from the group of warriors that was training on the Ascended barriers came over to get a better look.

"You know that technique has some merits. We use skills and swing our weapons, but he's basically throwing a hundred kilo dinosaur coated in lightning at them. I bet if I grabbed John and swung him at the barrier, we could do even more damage." One of the boys laughed.

"Don't even think about it. Just be glad that they didn't send him to us to test our Guard ability because someone would have gotten seriously injured." The other boy laughed, while Thor panted in the grass, replenishing energy for the next round.

"He has to be tired, right? He's been running wild for half an hour." One of the Ascended Mage students asked.

"You would think so, but no. His natural recovery means that by the time the break is up he will be ready for another round of the barrier game, and you had better be ready to play, or he will be very disappointed." Karl informed them.

Thor perked up at the mention of play, and the mages all groaned to themselves as they realized that trying to contain a monster was not as simple of a task as they had expected it to be. If it were an attack, they would have to keep the barrier up and attack at the same time, without letting the barrier fail, or they would be in trouble long before reinforcements could arrive.

Chapter 92 Teamwork Makes The Dream Work

Thor was almost tired when the morning classes ended, and he returned to his space for lunch, but Hawk was having a glorious time. Without Karl there to take up half the work, he got to just freely attack anything that he wanted, and according to the students,

he had an uncanny talent for picking off the ones that were actually going to hit the moving targets, while ignoring the ones that would miss.

Even when they sent out a cluster of attacks, he would just knock a portion of them out and let the others fly past the target. It was incredibly energy efficient on his part, and it wouldn't have been possible with the stationary targets, as the mages would rarely miss those.

They were even beginning to take note of who Hawk seemed to totally ignore because their aim was so bad. Those mages were going to have to improve quickly because the rest of the class wouldn't let a giant bird make a mockery of them forever without joining in on the fun.

It was after lunch when things took a drastic change. Sergeant Rita, as well as the duo from the Bureau of Elite Development, had decided that martial arts training, now that he had sufficient proficiency to deal with minor threats without resorting to skills usage, was no longer the most efficient use of his time.

Instead, the afternoon would be a group training exercise for Karl with the pets.

Coaxing Rae to come out and play might be difficult, but today's practice was on the basics of working together against a target that was stronger than they were.

It was a situation that would inevitably happen in the future, and with three of them in the team, they could now easily work on group tactics.

"We have enlisted a small group of volunteers, and they will be your targets today. The goal is to intercept the three infiltrators and disable them without seriously harming them. These are all guards, so they know how to fight, but they are all at the Ascended Rank, so you can't just go all out with the attacks like you did against Tank and the barriers." Alice was explaining.

That got Hawk's attention, but Thor was disappointed. If he couldn't just smash them, it would be much less fun. But Hawk's explanation that these exercises were practice for being an adult was enough to get the growing young Cerro on board.

Rae considered the situation for a few moments, and then came out to climb up Karl's back and look at the battleground from relative safety.

"Alright, everyone is on board. The targets are instructed to take it easy on you, but they will be attacking in your direction with actual attacks. They are wearing training armour, but they are not going to be magically shielded so that you can take them down naturally.

I will step in if someone looks like they will be seriously injured." The mage instructed, while the volunteers smiled at the sight of Thor prancing around in the grass, eager to play.

They got into position, out of sight around the corner of a building, with Karl as their target. They would try to grab him, as abductions by foreign agents were a real threat, while he and the beasts would work to prevent that.

The idea was to give them limited response time, in as realistic of a scenario as they could concoct within the school grounds, which meant the volunteers were close, so that Karl didn't have large amounts of time to prepare.

It didn't make much difference, though. The three beasts could communicate with each other, and since Hawk could see the attackers, as soon as the practice team was given the order to begin, and charged, the beasts were right on them.

Thor held back on the full force charge, and instead shielded himself with lightning against the lead warrior's [Slash] and then threw him into the air with a horn between the legs that had Alice bringing up a barrier to soften his fall. Thor turned on the other two, who had raised their [Guard] to deal with Hawk's [Rend], while Rae had launched herself off Karl, and hit the barrier at a tremendous speed, which allowed her clawed legs to tear right through it.

She landed on one of the men's legs, and he panicked as he realized that she was a Bloodbath Spider, which let Hawk's attack hit him without resistance, pummeling him unconscious through his helmet.

The last man didn't fare much better, as he could only parry Thor's attacks for the next second as the Cerro flailed its horns at him, and then Rae was there on his back, tearing into the armoured coat with gleeful abandon.

"BREAK! That's a victory for the defence team. You know, you don't have to take down the strength of your defensive abilities, just the attacks." Alice announced.

"We didn't. The Hawk and the spider combined tore through them faster than we could bring them back up. I've never seen a rending attack shatter a [Guard] barrier like that." The winded man who had been pummelled on the back by Rae announced.

"The training that Hawk has gone through so far has done wonders for his attack strength, but Rae is a very fast learner, and her Offensive Adaptation innate ability makes deleting barriers a breeze. Just wait until she's fully grown, barriers a Rank above her won't even slow her down." Karl praised his shy teammate.

"Can we test that, so we can make a better strategy?" The one who had been thrown into the air asked as he limped over, nursing an injury to the groin from Thor's horn, despite the armour.

He stabbed his sword into the ground in front of him, and activated [Guard] which Rae took down almost instantly with a strike from her mandibles and both front legs in unison.

The pure smugness of her attitude was clear to everyone, and Karl couldn't help but smile.

"Do you have a stronger defensive ability?" He asked.

"No, we trained as covert bodyguards, we don't usually use powerful defensive abilities, but parries and sudden strikes. Maybe we should try the next one without the pets already deployed? It will be good training for everyone." He suggested.

Also, that would give them a few more steps before they were noticed, and perhaps his testicles wouldn't have to meet the horn of a Lightning Cerro again today.

Chapter 93 Ambush Practice

The team came at Karl again, spread out and sneaking up on him through the dorm building, with one even leaping out of the window.

[Now.] Karl ordered the beasts, sending them into the battlefield.

Hawk moved to intercept the flying target, while Rae spit out a large mass of web to trip another, and Thor went with his signature charge, throwing another man high into the air with a flick of his thick neck.

The three of them crashed to the ground at the same second, and Rita blew her whistle.

"Karl, how did you know that they were coming?" She demanded.

"A side effect of bonding Hawk. I have fantastic peripheral vision, and I can focus on any spot I can see without moving my head. I had all three of them located before they attacked." Karl explained.

"Then was it necessary to throw me again?" One of the men wheezed, climbing to his knees.

Thor had gotten the same target twice in a row. Although he didn't spear the man between the legs this time, the two upper horns made for an excellent tossing platform, and he had peaked well over five metres in the air.

"He didn't injure you this time. I mean, with the hit. The sudden stop at the end looks like it wasn't much fun." Karl amended.

"Are they aware of what is happening around you before you call them out?" One of the men asked.

"Probably more than I am. I don't know how much they can actually see, but they do have a solid awareness of their surroundings." Karl explained.

"Alright, so it's not easy to sneak up on you either. We should check on Agent A, he looks a bit rough." The wheezing man replied, referring to the one that Hawk had intercepted.

Alice rushed over, and noticed that the man was conscious, but having a deep moment of personal introspection as he stared at the sky and began to question his life choices.

"Is anything broken? I have healing potions from the Witches." Alice offered.

"Just my pride. Can you fix that?" He asked, and Alice noticed that there were six deep scratches in his training armour.

Not only had Hawk knocked him out of the air, his attack had broken the man's Guard and Hawk's claws tore up his armour before dropping him on the ground.

"It feels like we were the ones who got ambushed." The third man agreed, nursing a twisted ankle.

Rita and Alice both sighed, but it was Rita who spoke first. "I can already see that this will not be a viable training method in the long term. They already understand basic strategies and their response time is fast enough that it will be very challenging to actually ambush Karl even if they are resting. We will have to come up with another method of preparing them for combat."

Rae gave her a pointed look, which the Sergeant returned for a moment before shaking her head.

"Even I can tell what that look means. The only way to truly train for combat is to be in combat. Karl knows enough martial arts that he should be alright in a fight, but the Academy wouldn't approve of putting you all in danger just to get better training results." She reminded the spider.

[Hawk would agree to let us go outside.] Rae pouted.

Hawk's mind became curious, and the spider beamed the mental version of a smile at him.

[If we were hunting outside, you could eat them after you killed them.] She announced.

[This is not a democracy, majority rules don't win here.] Karl informed them in his best stern tone.

Rae had already found Hawk's weak point. As soon as she mentioned food, the Windspeed Hawk would be on board with whatever she wanted to do, and Thor would go along simply because that's where everyone else was going.

"You look like you're having an intense discussion." Alice noted as Karl talked to the beasts.

"They all want to go outside to train. I don't necessarily disagree with them, as our training options are limited here, but it is safe here, and safety in numbers is a good thing." Karl replied.

Thor bobbed his head happily as he heard those reassuring words from the boss, and the instructors did their best not to laugh. They had been brutally bested by the Lightning Cerro twice in as many hours. But still, it didn't feel like the creature was a threat, he was just too friendly.

"Let us discuss that for a few minutes. There are groups of students looking to go outside on missions, and we might allow you to lead one of them, as long as there is a second Awakened Rank or higher member, as you are still a first year student and untested in the field." Alice explained, earning herself a glare from Rita.

Daniel wisely sat at the back of the field, as he had been doing all day, and avoided drawing attention to himself as the two argued over the appropriate course of action. The student training missions were normally not dangerous, certainly no worse than the Goblin Tribe had been, and Karl was much stronger now than he had been even that recently.

With the addition of the two new pets, he alone would rampage through a Goblin Tribe. Nothing that they could do would significantly injure a Lightning Cerro unless they managed to swarm it and pin it down. That seemed unlikely with Hawk and Rae both in the fight, even if you didn't count Karl himself as a combat asset, as he would be mostly watching out for the other students.

The outcome seemed inevitable, and after twenty minutes of discussion and a few tersely worded phone calls, the ladies returned with a smile on both of their faces.

"You will be allowed to lead an away mission. Student Dana will be going with you, along with eight of the Common Grade first years. It is a herbal resource gathering mission in a lightly monitored area, and there will be emergency assistance available on a ten-minute helicopter ride, should you activate the emergency beacons." Sergeant Rita informed Karl.

"Understood, Sergeant. Thank you for this opportunity." Karl replied as seriously as he could while trying to ignore the excitement of his beasts.

They were finally getting to somewhere that there might be mice, and Hawk was overjoyed at the prospect.

Chapter 94 Student Led Mission

The mission was to start the next morning, and they would be delivered by train to the location. There was no road near where they were going, but the train tracks ran only twenty kilometres from the location of the suspected magical resources.

That would be close enough for them to hike in, and it would be up to Karl and Dana to make sure that the team didn't get lost.

With Hawk on duty, that should be a simple matter, as he could see where they were going from above, so Karl didn't have too many concerns about the situation.

There were also no reports of major beasts in the area, only some of the ever present wild boars and a few small monsters that liked to live in the forest. That could become an issue for most teams, but it would be a great test for them, Karl thought.

The small monsters were all Common Grade, and he could deal with them in a matter of seconds, but they would be a good opponent for the students who were still struggling with their early growth.

Also, having Dana along with her pair of Golems would be enough security against the larger creatures that very few things would dare to attack them. The golems didn't take much upkeep, and by now she should be able to get them to follow complex orders without much distraction from her other casting, which would make them excellent guards.

They all called it an early day, as the supply train arrived at three in the morning, so that supplies would be sorted and ready for pickup by the time that everyone started to wake up. But that also meant that if you wanted to catch the train out, you had to be at the tracks by half past three in the morning, or four at the very latest if they were slow unloading.

The train didn't wait for groups to come to them unless it was an urgent mission, so being on time was a major part of your responsibility.

That was how Karl found himself waking Dana up at two in the morning, much to the protests of both herself and Rae, who was sleeping above her in the rafters of the Gazebo.

"It's time to go. I'm going to water the plants quickly, and then we need to grab breakfast and get on the train." Karl reminded her.

Rae disappeared back into the web in her space, while Dana got up and ready. They both met their team at the cafeteria, with the lone night shift worker on staff for occasions such as this. But there weren't enough of them, they were still missing two people, and it was getting close to three in the morning.

"Does anyone know what rooms the other two are in? We should go wake them up." Karl insisted.

"I do. They're just a few doors down from me." One of the others agreed with a vicious smile that said she would enjoy waking them up much more than most.

Three students came back down ten minutes later, and the girl who went to fetch them settled back down with her breakfast, while the two boys looked rather lost and half asleep.

"Cook, can we get some food for them, and some lunches to go? We've got ration packs in the gear that the school provided, but I think a nice fresh sandwich would be better." Karl asked as he finished eating and got the last two stragglers settled.

"I will get them something to go. The train is already here, so you should be going if you want to make it before they're unloaded." She reminded him with a smile, then handed over a tray full of brown bags, two of which were much larger.

Dana worked to usher everyone out as they finished their meal, for the kilometre walk from the school grounds to the train stop on the ring around the Academy.

"Did anyone bring a light? I can't see a thing." One of the warriors complained as they left the academy grounds and began to walk down the road.

Everyone looked to Karl, who was leading the group, and he shrugged. "Sorry, I forgot for a moment that I'm the only one who can see in the dark. I've got a flashlight in my pack, and there should be one in everyone else's as well."

The packs were issued to them by the supply room, dropped off in their dorm after they were approved for the mission. So, they should have everything that the Academy thought the student needed for the trip, as they weren't expected to plan out their whole gear set during their first year.

One by one, the students brought out their flashlights and spun the cranks to charge the batteries. The Academy knew that they would forget to bring spare batteries, so even the camping lantern that was in Karl's pack as team leader was powered by a hand crank charger.

The lantern also had enough battery storage to charge the emergency phone, which served as their lifeline to civilization.

"Ten of you, then?" The train's usher asked with a gesture toward the passenger car.

"Yes, sir. I've got the mission order right here." Karl replied.

The man looked it over, then picked up a phone mounted to the wall and confirmed the dropoff location with the engineer.

"Alright, climb aboard and stow your bags in the overhead compartments. We have a few more stops before yours, so you won't be there until lunchtime."

Karl settled into a seat at the front of the train car, where Dana promptly fell asleep on his arm, and the rest of the team did their best to get a few more hours of rest while they travelled the morning away.

They napped, meditated and played games until the conductor gave them the warning that they had one more hour before dropoff. That was when Karl decided it was time to get them all ready to move.

"Alright everyone, have your lunch early, use the washroom, double-check your gear and make sure that you have your weapons ready. Not in your bag, but on your hip and available for use at a moment's notice. While it isn't likely that there will be monsters next to the stop, we will get off in the wilderness, and there won't be anyone there to clear the area." He warned them.

"Got it." The team agreed, while the Conductor nodded in satisfaction to see that the team leader of this first year mission was taking things seriously.

Not all of them did, especially an easy mission like this one was supposed to be, but it always made his life easier if there were no injured students when the train stopped to pick them up again.

Chapter 95 Off The Train

The train pulled to a stop in the middle of nowhere, and the students rose to their feet.

"Good luck, young Elites. Just flag down any train you see passing by in the other direction, and it will take you back to the Academy, or close enough for you to walk in." The conductor explained.

"Got it. We will see you soon." Karl agreed, and led the others out the door.

Dana brought up the rear of the group, making sure they were all off the train, and when Karl called out Hawk to scout for them, she called her pair of Golems to guard the back of the pack.

It was quiet out here, other than the sound of the train beginning to move again, but that didn't necessarily mean safe, just that they hadn't noticed any threats yet.

The students were all incredibly nervous, flinching at every sound of their teammates moving in the long grass, but as Karl led them into the trees toward where they should find the magical plants they needed, they became almost petrified with fear.

That couldn't be natural, they had been so excited a moment ago, but when Karl searched the area, he couldn't find a reason for it. The feeling seemed to fade quickly as they walked, until finally, one of them pointed out a small weed growing near the tree trunks.

"Terror weed. The pollen causes a mild reaction that causes a fear response. It's the plant's natural defence mechanism, someone must have stepped on one in the grass." He explained.

The students all felt a little foolish when that was mentioned. The first thing that the warriors learned was to watch where they put their feet. They needed a solid footing for their sword skills, so the ground under them was as important as the enemy.

But someone had still stepped on a common toxic plant.

"Everyone, put your masks on. Who knows if there are other dangers like that in the area, and we don't need anyone poisoned on the first day of the trip. Do we have a healing class with us?" He asked, while mentally going through the students' descriptions he was given.

"I can do a minor heal and a poison cleanse." The lone Druid in the group mentioned.

"And I have healing potions, but we're here to get materials for more." One of the two witches added.

"Perfect. We will save the potions for as long as possible, as the warriors will mostly heal pretty quickly. As I discussed on the train, if we are attacked, fall back to form a ring, with the casters in the middle.

No, that's not because they're weaker, but because they're squishy. The warriors are the shield, while the casters are the primary damage. The Golems will back you up, and my beasts and I will range outside the defensive circle." Karl reminded them.

He would have liked to actually practice the manoeuvre, but according to Hawk, the first plants that they were searching for should be only a few hundred metres away. There

was another spot marked on the map, many kilometres away, but Hawk was certain that he had found them just up ahead.

Once they got the first target, the mission could be considered a partial success, and everything that came afterwards would just bring them closer to completion.

[Definitely found it. Bright blue flowers shaped like shoes.] Hawk informed Karl, with a mental impression of where they were.

[Keep an eye out for threats. I don't want you getting ambushed as you fly over.]

Hawk laughed a little at Karl's concern, as he was hundreds of metres above the trees, but he appreciated that his human cared enough to make sure he was safe.

Karl adjusted their course, pretending to follow the map, and within minutes they were standing next to a field full of beautiful blue flowers.

"These are the ones, right?" He asked.

"Yes, but everyone, please stay out of the clearing. Only one in ten blossoms has the magical properties of the plant, the rest are all decoys. If someone breaks the wrong one, we will have come here for nothing." The witch pleaded.

"You heard her, stay here while the witches gather their ingredients. Hawk will be watching from above, and I will be right here at the edge of the clearing in case something is hiding in the flowers."

The two witches moved delicately through the field, avoiding stepping on any of the flowers as they picked the ones they wanted. The plants weren't going without a fight, though. Multiple times, the witches stopped right as they were about to pluck and grabbed a different one, then continued on their way.

Once they had a few dozen in total, they returned to the others with careful steps.

"That's enough. You can't pick too many, or you will kill the patch, and we hope to come back here again soon. The plants are smart, and when they sense that they're going to be damaged, they will pull their essence back to their roots, which renders the flowers worthless for potions. That's why we had to be so careful." The more outgoing of the two witches explained.

"Alright, on to the next one." Karl agreed.

[It's not far, one hundred metres south.] Hawk informed him.

The next should also have been much further, but if Hawk had found some that weren't on the map, that was even better, as their collection wouldn't remove a listed herb from the directory for the other students who wanted to do a mission near here.

"Hawk thinks that he has found another of our goals already. Move as silently as possible so that we don't disturb the wildlife." Karl reminded the others in a stage whisper.

The students began to move, but a whistle from Hawk drew Karl's attention. He had seen something dangerous, and it was close.

"Everyone hold position, Hawk sees something." Karl whispered as he raised his hand in a gesture to stop.

[White cloth, two figures, running your direction. Possibly human, but maybe not.] Hawk warned him.

Humanoid monsters were rare, but poachers, aggressive hill folk, and foreign soldiers might not be. They didn't have enough information about the area's human population in the data to be certain.

Chapter 96 White Robes

Karl's keen vision caught sight of the white cloth moving toward them at a run through the forest, a full second before he managed to associate the clothing with its most likely owner.

"Those are clergy robes. No more than 150 centimetres tall, I think that they're students from one of the Seminary Academies." Karl informed the others, then moved to intercept the two running figures.

If he was wrong, he had all the advantages, and if they didn't want to stop, he could just have Rae tie them up until they calmed down.

The two came barrelling through the trees, then paused when they saw the Academy uniforms, and began to gesture wildly.

"You have to get out of here. There is a giant monster in the sky." One of them shouted.

"Three metre wingspan, kind of brown with a creamy belly and red streaks on its legs? That one is trained, he's with us." Karl informed them, and the two clerics simply stared at him as if he had grown another head.

"A what now? That sounds terrifying. But no, there is a giant beetle flying this way. It killed our lesson proctor, and he was an Ascended High Priest." The young boy exclaimed.

"How far have you been running? We are all Elites, and we are hunting for magical plants in the area. There are ten of us, with two strong Awakened Rank leaders." Karl tried to calm the pair.

Clerics weren't known for their combat power. They would empower the weapons of warriors and their healing magic was remarkable, but as far as actual fighting abilities, they were just humans with swords if they were even carrying them.

These two weren't.

"That might be enough? Can you fight an Ascended Rank beast?" The boy asked hopefully, while the girl beside him did her best to hide her face.

"I can confidently say, yes. We can fight a lone Ascended Rank monster. If there were a bunch of them, we would lead you away with us, but one is something that we can defeat." Karl replied with a gentle smile.

Hawk was getting excited as well. Most beetles didn't fly well, they only flew a short distance and then landed. His genetic memories told him that beetles were crunchy and nutritious, though he wasn't sure that this one was a species that could be eaten.

Rae was likewise excited about the prospect. To the Bloodbath Spider, all insects were prey.

The sound of crashing through the trees brought another trill from Hawk, who had spotted a large black figure headed their way, covered in blood and reeking of death. That had to be the beetle, and it was tracking the two humans.

"Everyone in position, get the clerics to the middle of the circle." Karl ordered, doing his best imitation of Sergeant Rita.

He did it so well that even Dana responded, ushering everyone into position, while her Golems remained outside, ready to face whatever threat Karl had noticed.

The crashing through the trees was hard to miss as the beetle chased after the escaped prey, so Karl called out the other pets in time for the students to get used to their presence.

"These two are Thor and Rae. DO NOT attack them." He warned the others.

The students stared in confusion at the sudden appearance of the Lightning Cerro, who was already the size of a small bear or a huge dog, but it took them a few seconds to find Rae, who had appeared in a tree and instantly hidden herself.

The beetle came in sight, and Lightning flashed around Thor's body. That caught its attention, and the creature began to charge, keening in a way that made Karl feel like the creature was starving and desperate for food.

"Wait for my signal. Thor, block the initial charge, then move out of the way for the students to retaliate." Karl called.

The beetle flapped its wings to fly at Thor, then crashed to the ground as Rae tied them together above its back with a spurt of spider silk.

The muscles that moved the wings weren't particularly strong, and it couldn't break free as Thor charged into it, flipping the creature on its back with a jab of his horns.

"Now!" Karl ordered as Thor moved away, sending his own attack to join the combined spells of the mages.

They wouldn't actually do much damage to the Ascended Rank beast, but as his Shred tore apart the chitin, and the wings were held up, exposing its vulnerable sides, even the Common Rank magical attacks proved relatively effective.

With a screech, the beetle tore its wings free of their confinement, and charged at Thor again, drawn to the largest threat.

The students paused their attacks, waiting for an opening, while Karl moved in for the kill.

Thor's lightning wavered and flickered out of existence for an instant as the two beasts clashed, and the beetle began to celebrate its impending victory, a split second before Rae landed on its head and began to stab its eyes out with her clawed feet before tearing into the chitin of the beetle's skull.

Karl helped that along with a condensed [Rend] to the back of the creature's neck, and the Bloodbath Spider moved in for the kill, tearing through the hole to sever the muscles.

The giant beetle fell to the ground with one last desperate flail of its wings, trying to dislodge Rae, but it was far too late. The strength left its body, and the spider began to tear the shell open to get at the good bits inside.

"Don't go getting yourself covered in bug guts, there's no river nearby to clean off in." Karl warned her, just as Rae was about to take a dive directly into the carcass.

She grumbled out a complaint and pulled the head into her beast space, while Thor gave it one last kick for good luck.

"Problem solved everyone. We will keep an eye out for more dangers, but the beetle threat is gone.

Where are the cleric students? How far did you run, and how many more were in your group?" Karl asked.

They both just shook their heads. "There was just us and the High Priest out gathering herbs. I don't know how far we ran, we just ran."

Karl nodded. "I will have my Hawk go look for the scene of the battle. I know that the church has some formal burial rituals and such, right?"

The two young clerics nodded numbly, not quite sure how to process what was going on.

"Well, then we will get it all sorted out so that the High Priest is taken care of. Don't worry, we won't just leave the body here in the wilderness." Karl informed them.

There likely wouldn't be a body to leave in the wilderness, but a little white lie wouldn't hurt anything, and if there was a blood soaked keepsake that the beetle didn't eat, it should be enough for their purposes.

It would make both the cleric students and the other Elite students feel a bit better about the situation, Karl decided, then wondered when he got so casual about death.

[Meat is meat.] Hawk replied, unconcerned.

Rae wholeheartedly agreed, but Thor just shook his head. Fragrant leaves were better than meat any day.

Chapter 97 Cleanup At Tree Three

With the responses of his pets, Karl began to realize how much their way of thinking was influencing his own. He should be horrified by the situation. But the calmness of his pets affected him just as much as their excitement did, and he just couldn't bring himself to be suitably agitated about the situation as Hawk searched for the site of the original battle by following the beetle's trail through the woods.

[I have found it. It didn't finish eating, it just took the good bits and then chased the others. I think I can fit it all in this bag they brought.] Hawk informed him helpfully.

That was a disturbing thought.

[Pack him up and bring him to the Beast Space, we will make sure that he makes it to a proper burial. No, wait, I will ask the clerics if he should be buried right there first.] Karl replied.

"What is the burial ritual for High Priests? Should I have Hawk preserve the remains of the body, or should he be buried on the land?" Karl asked.

The older of the two clerics took out a small book and began to flip through it.

"I'm not sure, that isn't supposed to happen. I mean, this is a safe zone, there shouldn't be anything stronger than a weak Awakened beast here." He mumbled as he flipped through the pages.

"Oh, here it is. Yes, he should be brought back to the church for a burial in state, thanks to his high station. There will be three days of mourning for the clergy surrounding the funeral, and some other things that don't really involve you, but please preserve the remains." The student replied.

Karl relayed the message, and Hawk did his best to get all the bits into the large herb gathering bag that they had brought, and began the flight back to Karl. Once he was close, Hawk shifted the bag into his beast space, while Rae claimed the beetle body, leaving the area strangely empty.

"What just happened?" One of the Elite class students asked.

"My beasts have a separate space where they can store food for later. Rae put the beetle away, and we will strip the good parts of chitin for trade to the Academy. They pay for monster parts, since they can be used in armour and weapons, as well as some magical items." Karl explained.

"Oh, that's right. Will you ask Rae if I can have one of the horns? Beetle horn is on my list of ingredients, but I never thought about keeping it from the giant beetle."

Rae broke the horn off with some effort, and ejected it from her space. It was just a solid lump of chitin, and completely inedible. Therefore, it was worthless to her.

The student stared at the horn in reverence. "You know, it died so fast that it never really sunk in. That was an Ascended Rank beast, wasn't it? I can feel the power in the chitin, but it died so easily."

Karl smiled. "That's partially thanks to Rae's specialty. She's excellent at finding ways through chitin. Plus, my attack power is high, and with its wings lifted, the less armoured sides were exposed."

The students were making mental notes, in case they had to fight something like that again. The shell that covered the wings was the strongest part of the giant beetle's body, so normally you wouldn't attack its back. But with the wings lifted by the spider silk, that left it vulnerable to attack, and Karl's ability had left an open wound for them to target.

"Now, we're near the next herb that we came here for, so let's keep going. My apologies to our new friends, but we still have a mission to complete. I will make sure that you make it back safely, though if your pickup point is further afield than we're going, I will bring you back to the train tracks instead." Karl added.

"That's good enough for us. I don't know where we were supposed to be picked up, The High Priest was responsible for that. But there are other groups from the Seminary School out here somewhere. The train dropped us all off only a few minutes apart, so we might find one of them before you go." The young cleric replied.

One of the warriors smiled at the boy. "But in the meantime, we're counting on you and your Holy Magic."

The boy nodded, and the shy girl gave them a thumbs up. Holy Magic was the one thing that they were confident in. They had been out with the High Priest mostly to serve as pack mules as he picked herbs, and not as much for training as the warriors of the Elite Academy were. To the Church, obedience and subservience were more important than combat skills, and serving the High Priest on his mission was good training for their future works of service to the community.

"What is next? Didn't Hawk say that there was something nearby before the emergency happened?" Dana asked.

"Just this way. Hawk is already back up in the air looking for more threats, so we will just follow his path toward the next set of herbs, and then we will move on to the third marked location." Karl agreed.

Technically, he would be skipping the third location marked on the map, since it was either at or very close to the battle site, but if they couldn't find that resource elsewhere he might lead them there at the end of the trip.

The way that he had planned to bring them would go right past the battle, but with Hawk's discovery, he could change the route to make a big loop around it and end up back near the tracks as they finished. If that covered everything that the group needed, then they could skip a few potential resources and head back satisfied.

Though, if the clerics needed some of the others, he would gladly bring them around to help gather. They had enough trauma for one trip, so putting a good memory on top might help.

Karl seemed to recall hearing that somewhere as a kid, perhaps from the school counsellor after one of the many incidents down below in the pit.

Chapter 98 Tree Apes

If anyone had felt relaxed about this easy mission when they arrived, they didn't feel relaxed any more. The whole group was on high alert, searching the woods for anything that might be a danger.

Karl let Thor lead the group on the ground, following Hawk's guidance, while Rae hid in the beast space with the remains of the giant beetle that she was carefully dissecting to improve her understanding of exoskeletal species for [Offensive Adaptation].

Minutes after they started moving again, an angry grunt caught Karl's attention, and the crashing of a large animal through undergrowth drew the attention of everyone else.

[Three tree apes. Common Grade. They don't look tasty.] Hawk reported as the creatures approached.

"We have a small pack of apes in the trees incoming. Group, you know what to do. It is up to you if you want to attack them or let them pass." Karl informed the others, which made Dana smile at him.

They could attack anything that moved, but that would anger everything else. So, if it wasn't hostile, she would prefer not to make it hostile.

One of the mages shook his head. "They normally don't attack people. They just like to shout at them from the trees. If they don't attack, we should keep moving, since they will scare off any other small monsters with the noise they make."

The group patiently waited, and moved in a triple column, putting the warriors on the outside with the mages and clerics between them and the Golems at the back. But the tree apes behaved just as the mage had anticipated, and they remained in the upper branches of the trees, screaming at the humans, and occasionally throwing nuts and berries at them.

The monkeys thought that the whole thing was hilarious, and they laughed as the warriors swatted aside the projectiles, but they didn't come any closer, and they didn't do anything that would provoke an all out attack.

[The spot is just ahead. Should I scare the monkeys away?] Hawk asked with a hopeful tone in Karl's mind.

[Sure, go ahead and get your snack.] Karl replied, likening the monkeys to junk food.

[I told you they don't look tasty.] Hawk replied indignantly as he folded his wings and dove out of the sky.

He hit the monkey at well over a hundred kilometres an hour, nearly shredding its body as he pulled it away from the branch in his claws and returned to the sky. That was what a normal bird of prey would do, as they had all the advantages when they were flying.

Some of the students didn't realize that was Hawk at first, and they began to panic at the presence of another powerful attacker, but that only helped the tree apes make their decision. The humans were afraid of that thing too, so it would likely attack them next if the ape tribe left.

Hawk peeled the ape apart and took one tentative bite before discarding the body, which bounced down through the branches as the rest of the tribe scattered.

[Good work, they're still running.] Karl congratulated Hawk, just as the bird speared down to get another of the tree apes and bring it into the sky to use as a projectile. But this time, it wasn't on the apes.

Instead, he found a lone Black Mane Bear and circled up to an altitude of five hundred metres before diving hard and releasing the corpse. A flap of his wings sent him on a glide path over the forest, and the bear roared in anger as the body smashed down right where it had been standing a second earlier.

[Why are you angering the bears?] Karl asked as he heard the noise.

[Why would I not anger the bears? You should have seen it, it was hilarious.] Hawk replied.

[I hate that I can't argue with that. It probably was hilarious. But the others are already freaked out enough without an angry bear coming their way.]

[Do you know how a Windspeed Hawk usually learns to fly? I mean, not me in the space, but other ones.] Hawk asked.

[Don't they just flap their wings in the nest until they can take off?] Karl asked.

[Nope, they'd remain in the nest forever that way. Once they're grown enough to fly, their mother pushes them out of the nest. They either learn or they hit the ground.] Hawk replied.

Karl's smile caught the attention of the warriors at the front, and they were suddenly very worried about the safety of their "low risk" training mission. Did they get two awakened leaders not because Karl and Dana were both in their first year as well, but because they were going to need more than one?

What was out here that was making the monster man so happy?

He was already so much more powerful than anything that should be in the area, perhaps he forgot that the rest of them were not looking forward to actually meeting monsters on this trip to get resources?

The sound of the angry bear retreated into the distance as it moved out of the territory of the annoying bird, but the group's tension level didn't drop any lower until they made it to the next spot, a section of fallen trees where an Awakened Rank moss grew abundantly all over the dead fall.

"This is what we are here for, the best of the resources in the region." One of the warriors quietly cheered.

Karl's confused look let them all know that he hadn't had time to study the properties of the resources here, only their locations. So one of the warriors helpfully filled him in.

"The moss is dried and then lightly roasted to create a tea that supplements the strength stones for classes that have physical enhancements. I don't know if it will work for your class, but a kilo each of that moss will keep us for the entire school year.

You can't use too much, it will just be a waste, but a cup in the morning will make nearly as much of a difference as a strength stone twice a month." The warrior explained.

That was more often than Hawk was going through strength stones mixed with blood as food seasoning. So, it should be a good resource for the pets, and Karl would have to get some.

[It looks good.] Thor agreed, letting a bit of drool slip out of the corner of his mouth.

"Alright, do the mages need this resource? Or should we split it between the people who can use it, stopping at a kilo each, so it doesn't go bad before everyone can use it?" Karl asked.

"Mages can't use it, it won't do anything beneficial for us unless we're weakened. But the Witches can use it in recovery potions, so they will need at least as much as the warriors." One of the warriors explained.

The pair of witches looked grateful that he had stood up for them, and the resource intensive needs of their potion making.

"Is there anything else I should know before I harvest this? Parasites, dangerous creatures that like to live under it?" Karl asked.

The group all reluctantly shook their heads, and Karl drew his short sword from the scabbard at his hip. The rest all thought it was a bit odd that he didn't take the sword out to fight, but he carried it anyhow, though they didn't say anything.

The Team Leader was responsible for loot distribution, according to Academy Regulations.

Chapter 99 Moss Tea

Karl looked at how the moss grew, down the top of the logs, and the one side, but not the bottom or the other side. If he wanted it to keep growing, he had to leave enough in the right spots that it didn't ruin the moss bed too badly.

So, he cut diagonal stripes across the log, removing thin strips amounting to half of the moss on each log, while leaving the rest securely attached. That should grow back over, he assumed, and then it could be harvested again.

"Where did you learn that?" Dana asked as Karl cut the careful strips from the moss.

"I'm actually just guessing here by the way that it grows. But I'm only taking half, and leaving the other half in the way that looks like it will grow back the fastest. Moss spreads from the edges, you see, and only grows well on the sunny side. So, if I only take half and leave as many good edges as possible, then it looks like this.

That should be the fastest pattern to grow back, and by my guess, I've cut nearly twenty kilos of wet weight moss from this one tree. I haven't even touched the other ones yet, and we've got enough to fill all the warriors and the witches requests. I just need to grab a little for Thor here, and we can be on our way to the next spot." He explained.

"I don't suppose we could spare a bit more... There is an awful lot of it growing here." One of the warriors suggested.

The witch closest to Karl nodded in agreement. "The Academy expects you to provide for your own when it's not a standard part of the growth plan, and it's not like they accept these items as a trade in, at least not from the first years who are supposed to be looking out for themselves first, but normally, we would never see so much of an Awakened Rank resource in one spot.

If this was up on the market, we would be rich. Well, until we all got arrested for trafficking controlled substances to the masses, but you get my point. We could earn plenty of favours from the other students in class if we had a bit to trade them, you know?"

"Alright, I will harvest another log." Karl agreed with a smile.

He cut the same stripe pattern on one log, and then had Thor quietly move the log hidden behind where he was working into the beast space. A beast his size would need a lot of the moss to equal out to a cup of tea a day, and a bit added to his usual diet every morning would help him grow big and strong.

But even the Lightning Cerro realized that the herb should be rationed. He ate a lot of higher rank plants as his general diet, but this one was special, and the effects were limited, so it was more of a treat than a basic staple of the diet.

The second batch was spread the same as the first and stuffed into backpacks, while Karl looked at the map to see what was up next. They were going to go around the battle from earlier, and that would bring them to one of two spots. Either a spot that might have another strengthening herb, or one that was known to grow crystals that helped focus and increase the mana pool growth rate.

Karl decided to lead them to the crystals first, in the interest of fairness. If anything went wrong later, at least they should all have gained something from the trip that way. It would also help the clerics that they had rescued, so they wouldn't go home empty-handed.

The signs of monsters got more prominent the further that they went, and Karl began to question whether the intel was wrong, or if this was actually what they considered a low-risk area in the wilderness.

He knew that there were countless monsters in the wild areas, and that large portions of the land barely held any humans, but he was seeing signs of magical abilities and trees that had been downed by something powerful enough to claw through them.

That was no Common Grade monster, and most of the marks were too far up to have been the giant beetle.

Even Thor was becoming nervous with all the signs and scents of predators, but he had a large pack with him now, and he wasn't as concerned as he would have been if he were alone. He trusted Hawk to find anything really dangerous, and the bird was currently circling their destination, making sure that nothing was hiding around the cave.

He hadn't checked the inside, but the surroundings were clear of any large animals, and a few more of the small ones as well, as Hawk was feeling a bit hungry after all that flying.

"The crystal cave is just ahead. Remember, we haven't checked the interior yet, so I can't say if the crystals are there, as the report said there would be, but I can say that Hawk found the cave right where they said it was." Karl reported.

The mages shared an excited smile, while the warriors prepared their minds for the charge into an unexplored cavern system. If they found the crystals near the entrance, they wouldn't have to go far in, but if not, they would need to explore, and that brought a whole new realm of danger with it.

"Hold up." Dana warned them as they approached the clearing outside the cave entrance.

"I saw some unique plants in the clearing. They're not on the list, but I recognize them from the botany books that I had to read." She informed the team.

Karl looked carefully, and began to smile. One of the plants was a Winter Berry bush. Not powerful, but he would have to pick some for Hawk, who loved the flavour.

[I already got some.] The smug bird informed him. Karl checked the mental space and found that there was an entire bush there, planted in the ground as if it would keep growing.

Maybe it would. Karl didn't really understand how the spaces worked, but he was feeding them magical energy, so it wasn't impossible that a magical plant might survive in there, although the majority of the ground was just a mental image.

Dana addressed the group. "There are plants with narrow spiny leaves. Collect the leaves without letting them touch you or your clothing. We will want as many as possible. I need four warrior volunteers."

Four hands went up, and Dana sent them out, then she pointed to another plant. "These are tiger leaf weeds. They're exceptional for fire magic training. All the mages should gather at least a few of them. They are eaten one at a time just before you try to learn fire magic, so dry them and save them."

The mages began to move out, so Karl gathered the rest of the warriors. "We are on guard duty, but as you move, keep your eyes open for these purple and white berries. They're delicious. Not much of a magical effect other than slightly refreshing, but they're a great seasoning for oatmeal."

That made the warriors smile. Oatmeal was not only a staple of the breakfast menu at home, but it was also in the breakfast pack of all their travel rations. Being able to flavour it with some fresh berries would make their first morning in the wilderness much more enjoyable.

Chapter 100 Crystal Chamber

The team made their way carefully across the field, grabbing everything that they thought might be valuable, while being careful not to kill the plants, even when they needed a portion of the roots for their training.

It was a bit odd seeing these strong warriors being so delicate with flowers and weeds, but if it meant that they could come back here in a month or two and harvest the same resources again, it was well worth the effort.

Although they had met up with a group from the clergy, it was rare for people to head this far into the wilderness, and with so much ground to cover, and only an aerial scan

to indicate that there might be resources, the chances were that nobody else would return here after the report was filed that they had harvested in this region.

It took them nearly an hour to finish their work and make it to the cavern, where all the team members realized that they had a real problem on their hands. They had found so many other resources that they had filled their bags already, and they were only at the third stop. Well, technically the second stop, as the first one hadn't been one of the intended map points to harvest resources.

"If we pack the moss a bit more tightly we might make room for one more stop, but if it's a large leafy plant, or a flower that shouldn't be crushed, we will be really short on space." One of the warriors noted.

They had loaded up with the moss, but the mages had filled their bags with the flowers and leaves here in this field, where they had actually come to gather crystal from the cave.

"Alright, same formation as before. I will keep Hawk in reserve, but here in the darkness, we will have Thor and Rae." Karl explained.

He felt Rae's amusement at the thought of Thor stomping around happily smashing all the crystals that they were here to gather.

"On second thought, I will keep Thor in reserve as well, and Rae will help me with the scouting duties on point. The golems will take up the rear, and the rest of you mingle your ranks, warrior then mage. You all know the drill." He amended.

The group adjusted their positions and prepared their flashlights with a rapid round of cranking the chargers, just to make sure that the batteries were absolutely, completely charged.

Unlike Karl, who had very little reason to be afraid of the dark, the others were much more comfortable in the light. Rae decided that was the perfect excuse for her to scout ahead, so she would be out of the range of the lights, and vanished into the cave.

[It's shiny in here. Oh, pretty stone. That's for me, and a bit of glowing moss for my nest, and a mushroom.] Rae happily narrated her scouting mission.

[Just remember that we're here to help the others level up so that they can catch up to us, so don't loot everything before they get there.] Karl laughed at the Bloodbath Spider's excess.

[They're not valuable, just pretty. You can come in now, the entrance doesn't have anything scary in it.]

Karl stepped inside, and for the first time noticed that there was something strange about his night vision. It was never truly dark in the Academy, with the lights in the yard, the dim lighting in the hallways and all the other light sources around.

But inside the cavern, before the others entered with their lights, Karl could see in a whole new way.

Not how Hawk saw in the dark, as that still relied on some level of light being present, but how Rae saw in the dark, through a combination of thermal imaging and echolocation. Each footstep made his surroundings seem more vivid, and he could see the difference where there was cold water running over the warmer stones.

It was no wonder that Rae liked it in the dark, she was perfectly in her element.

Then the group followed behind him, lighting up the tunnel with their lanterns and flashlights, and Karl's night vision naturally shifted back to the more detailed low light resolution that he had inherited from Hawk.

Rae had been correct, none of the students were interested in the remains of the interesting objects that she had found, and the spider carefully led them down to the first chamber of the cavern system.

"There's one. I see one of the crystals." A mage whispered.

One wouldn't be nearly enough, but it meant that there were, or had been, some here.

"Leave the first as a marker that they are still here, and let's move further into the cave to check for more. Rae, do you see what that one looks like? That is the type of crystal that they need." Karl commented.

[On it.]

[There is another good room up here, but something is in it. There is a pond in the middle, and I can sense something moving under the water.] Rae reported.

[Stay back, and we will approach it as a group.]

"There is a cavern up ahead, with something living in the water. Rae doesn't know what it is, so prepare for a fight." Karl reported.

He moved slowly to the entrance, where Rae was hiding directly above his head, blended in with the stone of the wall, and followed her gaze to the softly glowing waters of the pond. It was magnificent, giving off a dim glow of magical power, and the bottom was lined with crystals.

There were hundreds of them in this room, but something felt off, like taking any of them would bring about a backlash.

"Wait before you pluck any of the crystals on the walls. I have a feeling that they're related to whatever is in the lake." Karl warned the group, who were about to go into a frenzy at the sight of so many resources.

They paused for a moment, but it was obvious that they thought he was being overly cautious on nothing more than the word of a spider.

One of the warriors used a stick that he had brought in with him and splashed the surface of the water, waiting for a response, but there was nothing, just ripples in the placid surface.

The mages hesitated for a few more seconds, then one of them used a knife to pop a crystal from the wall. Still no response from anything, and the others smiled in victory.

The mage took off his glove to examine his prize, and a flash of light filled the room, engulfing and blinding everyone, as well as forcing Rae back into the beast space.

[I told them there was something here.] She muttered as she waited for her eyes to adjust.

The first to adapt was Thor, who had been sitting with his eyes closed as he chewed, and he relayed the situation to Karl.

[There are things here. Dangerous things, I will go out and chase them away.]

The Lightning Cerro took action as he spoke, and his bugling call to arms echoed through a much larger space than Karl had expected. They couldn't be in that same cavern, unless it had collapsed, it sounded more like they were outdoors, next to a mountain valley.

The noise was enough to hold whatever was there at bay for the few seconds that it took Karl's eyes to adjust, but what he saw was nothing he could have anticipated.