

Beast Master 921

Chapter 921 Kept in Suspense

The rest came out of the Tiny World for a late dinner, in preparation for setting night watch in their silk tree fort.

This definitely was not a safe region for anyone to be setting up camp, even as close

as they were to the additional army units, and Delilah was not ready to just take Karl's word that Rae could take care of the night watch duties.

"Why don't we keep watch in shifts? I will take first watch with Rae, and then Lotus can keep watch with Ophelia, while you can take final watch with Nachtia? Then we will cycle the others in, so everyone gets nights off?" Karl suggested to the Red Dragon.

Karl called out the Lamia bodyguards, as well as the Epic Guard, who was looking more like a living creature every day.

The last battles had left the guard invigorated with power, and the energy sharing of the Haint Claw appeared to be subtly enhancing the creature, which looked much like an all black version of Overlord Leafa.

But as the Epic Guard increased in power, it was subtly changing to be less like the wayward Haint. The bark on its body was beginning to separate, giving it the effect of a ghostly woman in a humanoid tree, and less of a bark covered humanoid like a

dryad.

Karl wasn't sure if this was a form of evolution, or an armour skill, where the bark was the ablative armour. But the Epic Guard was becoming increasingly distinct.

"That is a curious creature you have summoned. Tell me, do you usually equip it with weaponry?" Delilah asked.

"If anything, I will give it a Haint Claw. It makes the Guard exceptionally combat capable. The Haint Claw itself has skills imbued on it, and the Epic Guard skill is capable of putting them to good use." Karl explained.

That was a bit less than a fully detailed description of what happened when the two things were combined, but they would get fully sidetracked if he started describing that.

"Interesting. And her presence activates a group buff. I can see why you activated that Guard for the night shift."

Karl smiled. "She also doesn't need to sleep, so the three of them can keep night shift company. The Lamia pair knows the basics of making tea, if you should get thirsty."

Once they had finished eating, and showered with the pleasantly warm water, courtesy of Remi, Everyone but Karl headed for bed. Even Dana went up to sleep, with Cara following her.

Remi giggled. "I hope that Sister Rae snore proofed this place. Cara talks in her sleep." Then she borrowed the [Unobtrusive Behemoth] skill to shrink herself down to a tenth of her normal size, which made her small child sized, but without the toddler's chubby body. She was still as lithe as ever, but now fit conveniently in Karl's lap as he reclined in one of the hanging chairs.

"Oh, this isn't bad. I'm going to have to try this for breakfast tomorrow. Food will be huge."

Karl took out items from the Guild Bank to inscribe with Runes as they listened for approaching enemies, or signs of disturbance at the army camps.

Rae was outside somewhere, keeping watch, and setting more traps in the woods, just because it would be fun to see what got caught.

The two most likely attack times would be just after dark, or just before dawn. There was some chance that the enemy would come during a random point during the night, but in Karl's mind, that was lower than the strategically advantageous all-night battle, or the twilight hours, when every species had trouble adapting their sight to the changing light.

It didn't come during Karl's shift, and by Rae's update, it didn't arrive during Lotus and Ophelia's either.

So, it was with great confidence that Remi followed Tessa to the kitchen in the morning to start making breakfast. She wanted to know what food looked like at a tenth of her usual size. Her memories of being a hatchling were fading, but she could be small again.

Tessa, not being privy to the inner workings of Remi's mind, simply thought that the eccentric Naga had decided that there was some advantage to being one tenth her normal size while helping in the kitchen.

They finished with all the usual breakfast foods, and Remi took a carefully curated plate to the counter to test whether eating while in a shrunken state was superior.

Only two chunks of fried potato in, it was decided. This was definitely the superior way to eat. It might not be best for helping in the kitchen, as more body would make it easier to move around. But for purely eating? So much better.

The smell brought the watch team in, and woke the others. Even Ophelia was up and out of bed on time today.

Priestess Delilah took a plate with a polite smile at Tessa, and settled cross-legged on the floor to cat with her back against the tree trunk.

"There is no sign of movement from the army yet. Whatever attack they are waiting for isn't here. However, I can feel the gods' anticipation, so something big is going to hit here soon. I would recommend that everyone takes it easy today, instead of going into the city to do their shopping.

We don't want to be separated when the attack begins, as they will lock down the city to keep spies and traitors from escaping, and it would cause chaos if we started attempting to exit at that point."

Karl shrugged. "That's not a big deal. We can spend a day crafting and mending gear. There's always something to patch, and if we run out, we can go assist the army camp. Did you need anything made while I'm at it? I will be making items for the Guild Shop, but there should be time for a custom piece or two."

The red dragon shook her head. "No, I am fully equipped. Just focus on anything that your guild needs so that they're not left hungry while you're on the front lines."

Chapter 922 Odd Group Composition

Karl got started on the list of things that Loros had made for the day, starting with the requested higher rank items that nobody in the shop could make. Now that they had Dora, they could make some higher quality items, but there were a few requests for Overlord and Monarch Ranked noncombat items as well.

Those were the first ones that Karl made, followed by one of the weapons that Ashbringer had prepared.

"Is that made of Corium and Elven Steel?" Delilah asked as Karl prepared to begin adding runes to the scimitar.

"Possibly? I'm not a blacksmith, so I don't know all the metals and alloys. I just have an arrangement with our smith that he will make a number of high-quality weapon blanks for me to finish. The difference between a master crafted weapon and a Runecraft weapon is enormous, so it's good for our guild budget to make a few a month for auction.

Remi made a bunch of potions yesterday while everyone was relaxing as well, so the shop is pretty well stocked. They are just lacking some of the Overlord Grade supplies I usually provide.

I see that we have mostly utility magical items on the list for today, though. So, our clientele must be adapting to what is regularly available instead of demanding specialty or combat related items all the time." Karl explained.

The dragon chuckled as she ate. "Once you start making weapons, you can never stop, they will always want you to make more. It's better to get into something where the demand will one day dry up so that you don't end up making the same exact thing for the rest of your life.

So many of the clerics fall into that trap, and end up making simple healing potions or rice and beans for decades."

Karl finished the blade, and then took out a bag full of Royal Ranked gems that Dora had made. They were uncut, and just roughly polished into the shape of an egg, but that was perfect for carving spells into them.

It made them easier to hold as you worked, and the surface could be polished without damaging the runes.

The most common requests that they had were water creation and [Fireball], but water creation could be done without a spell. So, Karl started with the fireball spell gems that could be added to other items that the crafters made.

It was a relaxing start to the day, but their little fortress of solitude in the trees was slowly gaining more attention from the leaders of the army, who could sense the group of powerful individuals inside, but had no idea what Karl's group was up to. Or, Delilah's group, as they assumed it to be. The dragon was a Totem Ranked cleric, so it was only natural that the leadership of the group would go to her. But she saw herself as a lone individual, simply camping with Karl's team for convenience.

And for the large sunny cliff in his [Tiny World] where even an adult dragon could bask without anyone bothering them.

The fact that people kept moving in and out of the [Tiny World] only made the camps even more wary about what might be going on in the woods. To them, it felt like a small group of powerful combatants coming and going repeatedly, but without any updates as to where their allegiance lay, or what their mission was.

However, when enemy movement was spotted, they still send over a team to inform Karl's people that the invasion was imminent.

Ten ships of the Bomgon fleet, along with three entire Regiments of soldiers, coming from inland.

Hawk flew out to see what was going on, and then began reporting back increasingly disturbing messages as he approached.

[One in every ten is a Necromancer. The rest are Not Dana Mages. I can smell the dead, but I don't see any zombies or anything.] He reported as he passed over the approaching armies.

No undead? Did that mean they had something like Karl's separate space to store them in? Or were the Necromancers planning to animate the dead once the battle started? If that was the case, then something drastic was about to happen to the city. Killing enough soldiers to tip the scales at the start of the battle, even if the army was almost all Golem Mages, would be difficult. But if they attacked the civilians? That would cause chaos in the city.

"You look disturbed." Priestess Delilah noted.

"They have an army that is one in ten necromancers, but with no undead. I'm more than a little concerned about where they plan to obtain them from." Karl explained. Delilah frowned. He was right. If you were going to bring that many necromancers, you would expect at least fifty undead per necromancer, even if they were at the Royal or Monarch Rank.

To have an entire military company worth of Necromancers and no undead practically screamed that they were planning to do something horrific to procure their army after arrival.

"The Droth Army should have realized that by now as well. They've got plenty of flying scouts. Let's see what the new arrivals have to say."

The group from the army was already within the Illusionary Domain, avoiding the traps that Rae had set on everything but her one designated path in and out.

"Hail to the camp" One of the soldiers called from outside, unsure who was in charge here.

Delilah motioned for Karl to answer, so he moved to look down from the floor entry.

"Come on up. What is the status at the camps? Our flying scout has reported general army numbers for the incoming Bomgon soldiers and fleet, but that's it so far." He greeted them.

One man came up, leaving the other four on guard around the base of the tree.

"Overlord, I am Captain Kirche. The Drodh Army will be moving to intercept the Bomgon army as the city guard intercepts the fleet. There are no ships on defence here, they were lost in an earlier battle, so the naval battle will take place in the harbour.

Fortunately, the city is set back from the water, with only the docks outside the walls, so it won't be easy for the Wights to breach the city, if that's what they sent in the ships." The demon explained.

"And the fact that the army brought Necromancers, but no undead?" Karl asked.

"Currently, the working theory is that someone in that army has a large storage item, and they will dump a mountain of bones when the fight starts, to create an army of Skeletons too close for us to redeploy our troops.

It's not the only option, but command has deemed it the most likely."

Karl nodded. It wasn't impossible.

"We will move to join the battle from this flank. We have clerics with us, both for buffs and healing, so we will have a triage centre set up once the fighting starts." The Captain nodded his golden horned head. "If you could stay near the triage centre,

it would be appreciated. Or at least some of you, as I see that we have an Avatar of the Red Dragon with us today. I wouldn't dream of telling the War God where to deploy a dragon."

That man's sense of self preservation was impeccable.

Chapter 923 Undead Engagement

Karl led the group down from the fort, and Rae sealed the entrance with Overlord Ranked sticky silk, so they didn't have unwanted visitors before they came back at the end of the day.

The armies were already moving into deployment positions, so Karl led them to an open position on the left flank, just behind the front lines, and had everyone call all their summons, while Lotus transformed into the Tree of Life.

Their presence brought over multiple doctors and nurses, who set up in the area of effect under Lotus' branches. But not everyone was as happy to see them.

"You do realize that the Undead will take the presence of that tree as a giant 'fuck you' to them, right?" One of the Sergeants near their position asked.

"They forgot 'and everyone who looks like you', but I will take the sentiment. Having a powerful dedicated healing station here will help prevent the flank from being overrun. Don't worry about it too much, we will send our golems to assist the line." Karl replied.

A few golems were not going to be equivalent to all the extra attention that they were going to draw, especially with a whole army of mages incoming.

Mages who were likely to be using Golems themselves.

Tessa and Delilah were practically glowing with energy already, and the battle hadn't even started. If anything, that was not a good sign. But when Nachtia began to shimmer with a faint black mist, it didn't take a genius to realize that someone, very near to them, was completely and immeasurably screwed.

The battle started in the bay, with the ships bombarding the city walls as they approached, and the Demons flying out to meet them.

The mages summoned tens upon tens of thousands of golems, and the attack on land began, but the energy around the war and death gods' acolytes was only growing,

[Can I start yet?] Hawk asked, circling high above in the clouds.

[Not yet. Something is about to happen. Once it does, then we attack.] Karl replied.

Seconds later, a massive portal opened over the city, instantly dumping seawater and undead into the walls of Bagaandormen.

Karl and Cara were both ready for the sneak attack, but their attempts to dispel the power of the portal were no more than drops in a bucket to the power that was being deployed to keep it open.

Delilah and Nachtia both burst into dragon form and channelled energy into the efforts to close the portal, but even then, they could only make the edges waver a little as seawater and zombies poured into the city from fifty metres in the air.

"The one spot nobody ever looks for an enemy? Deep underwater. The perfect spot to hide an entire army of undead." Dana muttered.

With the basement bunkers of the city mostly flooded, the civilians would be forced out into the streets or the upper levels of their houses, where the undead horde could find them. And the horde was no small threat.

Every undead that could be controlled by the thousands of Necromancers in this army should now be inside the city, and the screams echoed over the battlefield, even as the first plumes of smoke from a city being ransacked began.

It threw the armies into chaos, and Delilah roared in rage.

The Red Dragon hated attacking noncombatants and children as a battle tactic. It didn't matter if it was effective, it was cowardly. War was for warriors, not terrified children.

Karl wasn't sure what he should be doing. They would need the healing station to be defended, and he couldn't leave Lotus alone, especially now that the armies were likely to collapse before they could reform their ranks.

[Hawk, Rae. Begin the attack. I don't care how much mana you burn.] He commanded.

[Boss, did you know that you're glowing?] Remi asked through their mental link.

Karl looked at himself, but he couldn't see anything glowing. Not like he saw the power radiating off the dragon clerics.

{Skill Master 5 Activation} Skills [Rampage], [Pack Affinity] and [Brutality] have formed a combined skill.

{New Skill Learned} [War Banner]

[War Banner] Artifact Grade Large Area Spell. Spreads Combat buffs across an entire allied force. Usable only during times of war.

Karl let the power flow through him, and a massive Darklight Host banner appeared in front of him, on a pole five metres tall. Karl instinctively stabbed the banner pole into the ground, and a pulse of power spread over the battlefield.

[War Banner Active] {Combat buffs [Haste], [Terrorize], [Brutality], [Rampage] are applied to all allied soldiers, by the grace of the Death Gods}

[War Banner Active] {Combat buffs [Holy Weapon], [Holy Armour], [Consecrated Ground] are applied to all allied soldiers, by the grace of the War Gods}

Karl was quite certain that it was either Delilah or Tessa who had cast the holy buffs, but they were active on Karl, as was Consecrated Ground, as he was standing in Thor's area of effect.

And now they were active all over the battlefield, where the Demons were beginning to rampage.

However, the spell had one minor side effect. A three-metre radius column of holy light that extended from it to the heavens. There could be no doubt as to where that buff was coming from, and the entire Undead army was turning to engage them. [Oh, you pissed them off this time. They were ignoring the Lotus Tree, but they're not going to let this one slide.] Cara laughed as she landed on Karl's shoulder.

No, they were definitely not going to ignore the fact that the banner in Karl's hand was spreading a Totem Ranked [Holy Weapon] spell to the entire army, courtesy of Delilah, who was currently roasting large parts of the army as Remi and Karl activated [Apocalypse] all over the battlefield.

(I hope that you have a plan.) Nachtia called as she also took flight.

"Of course I do."

[Meteor Storm]

The massive flaming boulders hurtled from the sky to crash into the mages who were charging at their position. They detonated around shields, carved massive craters in the soft earth, and shook the battlefield like an artillery battery.

Chapter 924 War Banner

Karl let go of the banner to draw his sword, and it immediately moved to be attached to his back, fluttering over his head.

From somewhere in front of Karl, a Totem Ranked Obsession Demon with four arms and impossible speed laughed hysterically.

"When the Darklight Host goes to war, they sure do it in grand style, don't they?"

{Battle Alliance Request} Oathbreaker requests to ally his force with the Darklight Host. Duration, 1 battle.

{Battle Alliance Request Accepted}

Karl wasn't certain what sort of difference it would make, until he realized that he could see all the names of the Demon's squad in gold, as if they were fellow Guild members. If the banner hadn't already extended the buffs to them all, they would be covered now.

But the real benefit was that they no longer needed to fear friendly fire from

channelled spells. If it wasn't an explosion or other indiscriminate effect, it would not hit friendly targets.

The swarm of violet skinned demons charged right into the [Apocalypse], ignoring the [Hellstorm] Vortexes and the flaming blizzard to engage the enemy mages. With their speed, the enemy mages could hardly see the Demons coming, and hundreds died in the first few seconds.

Karl moved forward to engage, while the others remained to hold the defensive position around Lotus, where a steady stream of wounded Demons from their flank was approaching.

Karl charged forward, and the air shattered with a resounding boom as he equipped the Haint Claw and Sword of Champions for an overhanded strike into a mage's skull. Four Golems collapsed the moment the sword made contact, and the excess energy of the [Void Blast] threw a half dozen more away from Karl's approach.

A stomp sent [Gravity Slam] in a wave in front of him, clearing more targets for Karl's wrath.

But compared to the Demon beside him, his efforts were somewhat feeble.

The Totem Ranked Demon who had called himself Oathbreaker was one that Karl had faced a lesser version of before, and every strike he landed affected every enemy within fifty metres. A single blow of his sword shattered barriers through an entire army unit, allowing his subordinates to charge in and massacre under the effects of [Rampage].

But the mages weren't without their own tricks.

Waves of black energy dropped entire waves of demonic attackers, who the Necromancers raised to fight their allies. One such wave came at Karl, only to be dismissed with a wave of Cara's paw.

[Are you not going to fight?] Karl asked the medium dog sized badger still lingering on

his shoulder.

[I suppose. Or at least fly up for a better view.]

[They have spell gems and treasures for spell casting.] Karl taunted her.

That got Cara moving. Not directly to attack, but [Pilfer] had a particularly high success rate on the Necromancers and mages. In the limited instance where she chose to use it instead of knocking them out and turning out their pockets, anyhow. Karl sent [Rend] into a group of mages whose barriers were shattered by Oathbreaker, and then followed with a [Void Blast] as they struggled to defend themselves and get their barriers back up.

That cleared another group of enemies, but more were coming for them by the second, including one massive bone creature in a black robe with a scythe. It looked like the portrayal of the Grim Reaper in children's books back home, and at Totem Ranked, it was certainly no slouch in combat.

Oathbreaker smirked as he let the undead pass by, headed for Karl.

"Seriously?" Karl shouted at the constantly vanishing demon, whose primary attack skill was a teleport-based ambush.

"It's only right for champions to fight champions. Have fun!" The Demon laughed as his troops spread to leave the two alone behind the battle lines.

The undead went incorporeal as Karl hit it with a [Void Blast]. The spell crackled over its surface, burning at the robes, but even with [Rampage] stacked to its cap, it still wasn't enough to do serious damage.

A set of spirits emerged from the creature's scythe and glided toward Karl at a deceptively high speed.

Ghostfire lit them up and stopped the attack, which fed the Haint Claw.

Three swipes of the sword made a star shaped wave of void energy headed for the reaper, who cancelled them with a wave of soul energy.

Again, their battle was beginning to create a miasma of energy around the fight. Not nearly as intense as Karl's fight with the vampire had, but still unstable.

Only this time, Cara was nearby, and she had a plan. The chaotic energy seemed attracted to her, and simply flying through it would make it stick to her fur. She sparkled like the night sky as the chaos magic danced over her body, but that was only stage one.

Once she had enough of it collected, she focused and pulled it into a ball in her hands, then lobbed it at the enemy like a shining black snowball.

The ball detonated against the incorporeal undead like a snowball as well, simply shattering into dust on contact, with no visible effect. Until a half second later when a million small explosions detonated around the reaper where the chaos energy destabilized.

Karl found himself thrown from his feet, and the reaper was smoking, with parts of its body solidifying, while others were remaining ethereal. The Chaos magic had destabilized its transformation spell, and now it was stuck halfway between forms.

That didn't slow down its barrage of soul attacks, though.

Karl was forced onto the defensive, blocking the soul strikes, as the Haint Claw positively glowed with energy that was seeping into Karl.

The reaper swatted away Karl's return attacks, causing massive explosions on the ground near them, and Karl briefly recalled the collateral damage that had been

caused by the battle between Leafa and the Emperor.

If they were in the air, the destruction would be much worse. But as they were on the ground, it was mostly limited to the hundred metres around them, where the

deflected spells were landing.

But if you ignored the sound of explosions and the horrible shrieking that soul attacks made when they were dispersed, the battle had an eerie silence to it, with both sides maintaining their distance, where they could use larger scale attacks.

Chapter 925 Overload

Eventually, the reaper moved further into the air, looking to bombard Karl from above. That forced him to use [Swims Through Air] to join the creature in the sky, where their battle became the focal point of both sides of the fight, despite not being the highest powered or most intense ongoing fight.

That honour went to Oathbreaker, who was methodically tearing apart a pair of Mythic Ranked Mages who fought as a duo.

Soul attacks shrieked through the air, a dozen ethereal blue skulls racing towards Karl, who hurled [Void Blasts] at them. The mutual destruction rained black and blue energy down on the battlefield, where both unfortunate Demons and mages burst into a

hellish version of soul fire that no amount of water could put out.

Karl tried to move the battle away from the armies, but the reaper was having none of it, and preferred to fight directly over the front lines.

[Cara, can you help with the fallout?] Karl asked as he formed a plan to deal with this undead menace.

[Got it. I will put out the fires.]

Karl varied his attack patterns, sending a second wave right behind the first, and finally landed a strike on the reaper. Not much as far as damage, but the Haint Claw immediately latched on, and began stealing power from the undead, which howled in rage, but appeared helpless to stop the siphoning of its life force.

That turned into a battle of wills, with Karl channelling mana into the Haint Claw to increase the siphoning speed, and only putting in the minimum effort to defend himself against the reaper's attacks.

It was becoming weaker by the second, but. Karl could feel the sense of expectation growing from beneath him, where the Necromancers were watching the battle. Something was off, and he didn't know what it was.

A final [Void Blast] dissipated the Reaper, and a massive surge of power flowed into Karl.

(Negative State: Overload} Soul Energy and Mana increase uncontrollably

[Do we dispel that?] Cara asked.

[Not yet.]

The Haint Claw was already saturated with power, unable to take more, and the Blade of Champions surged with Ghostfire a hundred metres long as [Ghostfire Body] attempted to channel all the excess energy that Karl couldn't contain.

It was invading his mind, and Karl could feel his memories fading until he closed his eyes and focused on his sense of self.

That brought him to the mental space that Monk Chen had trained him to use to meditate, the one with the ghostly golden dragon scale. That was where Karl focused on putting all the excess energy that he was receiving as he floated in the air above the battlefield, a beacon of golden light and ethereal Ghostfire.

The scale absorbed the power as fast as Karl could pour it in, but the faster he transferred it, the faster it arrived. So, this was the final strike of the Reaper. An uncontrolled power surge that would destroy the mind and body of anything that dared to go against it.

Karl was so focused on dealing with the influx that he hadn't even noticed that Cara was frantically trying to dispel the effect, with no luck at all. In fact, the spells only seemed to add to the influx.

Far beneath him, Delilah landed next to Tessa and slumped down with her massive draconic head on her front paws.

"Will he survive that?" The War Cleric asked the ancient dragon.

{Probably. The favour of the gods is strong on him. Besides, look how terrified the undead are. They're already fleeing the city, and the Ghostfire hasn't even touched the city walls yet.}

She had a point. The whipping tendrils of fire from Karl's overloaded spells were tearing furrows in the earth and lighting up the sky, but even the heat from the flames seemed to tear the souls from the undead and add them to the growing ball of power that was Karl.

"What happens if that spell succeeds? Are we in range of whatever explosion will follow?" Dana asked.

Delilah patted her on the head with a claw. {It won't explode, it will implode. His mind will shatter under the power, turning him into an instinct-driven brute. Then his body will be destroyed, and he will become some sort of undead. Most likely an impressive one, given the amount of power that will be condensed into his new form.}

"You seem rather calm about that." Dana complained.

{Well, this is war, and I've only known you two days. I like you all, but war is not without casualties, and nothing I do can stop that spell.} The dragon replied.

"Damned practical answers." Dana muttered, while Rae patted her.

"Have faith. The Karl isn't that easy to kill. Besides, there is so much free power for us, how could we say no?" Rae consoled her.

Dana wasn't sure which was the more disturbing outcome. An undead Karl, or an overloaded insane Totem Ranked living Karl. Both were terrifying outcomes, and a Karl without allies meant a whole team

of beasts who might not maintain the same alliances either, as his new commands bled through their link.

{Skill Master 5 Activation} [Mental Fortitude] has advanced.

{Skill Master 5 Activation} [Mental Fortitude] has advanced.

Karl focused on keeping his thoughts intact as the power flowed through him. He shared it to the spaces, the golden dragon scale in his mental space, and then let as much as he could overflow.

[Ghostfire Body] was completely out of control, and the effect was beginning to spread to other spells. [Demonic Oppression] was surging, and the [Oppression] effect was hitting everything on the battlefield except Karl's team and the small group of Demons that had a Battle Alliance with them.

Both sides were beginning to retreat now, unable to stand the side effects of the overloaded War Champion.

Far in the distance, Lord Bomgon watched the scene with amusement. It had been millennia since he had seen anything like this spectacle. If it wouldn't have drawn the Lord of Drodh, he would have gone to get a better view. But even from his current position over a hundred kilometres away, he could pick out the smallest details of the situation.

Perhaps he would have a new War Champion at the end of the day. Or perhaps the overload effect would force the War Champion to adapt. That could cause absolute chaos within the living, especially those greedy Necromancers who still thought that they were the masters of the undead, and would see it as an opportunity.

In short, there was no way that he lost out.

Chapter 926 Welcome Back

Karl felt the excessive mana beginning to burn his body, but with [Void Body] and [Impenetrable Bulwark] active, it wasn't enough to actually harm him yet.

The power was still growing, though. It didn't make any sense to Karl, the power had to be coming from somewhere, but the enemy was dead. If the enemy was dead, and the spell made his mana go out of control, shouldn't it just be a buff of his own regenerative abilities?

No, because there was a massive influx of soul power coming to him as well, so it was most likely stored somewhere else, or linked to another location.

Perhaps this could be an opportunity? The power had an indescribable sense of eternity to it, as if he couldn't see the limits of it. What if the issue wasn't that the energy was limitless, but that it was so much higher quality than his body that it simply felt like it?

Just a casual swat of an Overlord's power could do something like this to a Common Ranked Elite. Could this be a curse or blessing of an Immortal or Supreme that was placed on the reaper? If that was the case, he could use this power to advance.

The problem was that Karl was not a beast himself, and the knowledge of how to integrate power with your body to advance was not part of his genetic memory. Cara and the butterfly were trying to explain it to him, but how did you explain a basic bodily function?

It was like telling someone how to move their fingers. The first step was to just do it, and if you didn't know how, it was impossible to explain.

The Bomgon Lord felt the shift in the power as Karl tried to internalize it and smiled. Yes, that was precisely the way. Take it in and embrace the route to immortality as an undead.

But the more of the power that Karl channelled through his body, the more that the Bomgon Lord became concerned that this strange creature might know something that he didn't.

He wasn't dying.

If anything, his vitality was skyrocketing.

With the retreat of the Bomgon army, and the defeat of the undead in the city by the town guard, who had circled to the south side of the walls to avoid the oppression of Karl's aura, the battle was officially over.

All that was left was for him to stop doing whatever he was doing.

The mana began to grow faster than Karl could adapt, and then more than his damage reduction could handle, to the point that his body was beginning to burn, then reform with [Void Body].

There was still one thing that he could try, though.

[Purgatory Flames], Hawk's new fireball skill, used every bit of your available mana.

In theory, that should reset his mana levels to zero, and even if it didn't deactivate the skill, it would at least buy him some time.

Karl began to form the spell, with the intent to hurl it at the village in the distance, where the Bomgon army had retreated. If they wanted to curse him with overloaded mana, they could have it back.

The energy condensed, and then suddenly Karl was standing in the void again, floating in space, the same as he had been during the battle with the vampire.

"Shit. Death and Void Magic make Chaos. But this was Soul and Ghost flame, I should have been fine"

In the distance, a haunting chuckle began, coming closer by the second.

Supreme Lady Matilda appeared in front of him with a curious look on her massive draconic face.

{You show up here entirely too often for a mortal, do you know that? What did you do this time?} She asked.

"I was attacked by a reaper, and when he died, he cast some sort of spell that made my soul power and mana overload uncontrollably." Karl offered.

Lady Matilda watched him for a moment as the effect began to grow again, and nodded her head.

{Interesting. You're not supposed to kill the reapers, they belong to the death god. You should have banished it.}

"I will remember that for next time. Is there a way to stop this effect?"

Matilda stared at him for a few seconds, then nodded. (Just give it a minute or two, and it will wear off on its own. It's not like the effect is permanent.)

Well, that was reassuring.

"Can you transfer me back when it ends? I'm quite sorry that I keep ending up wherever this is."

Matilda sighed. {I suppose that I can. I will just call the entertainment factor enough payment for the spell.}

The power was growing even faster now than it had been at the start, as if purging the mana from him had not affected the spell's progression at all, and had only emptied the excess from his body.

Again, he focused on using the power to strengthen his body, the way that Cara and butterfly were trying to explain to him. They were both doing the same, attempting to demonstrate to help Karl's comprehension rate as they increased their own power.

Or, in the case of the butterfly, stabilized it.

The influx of power had done wonders for her stability and evolutionary state, as well as the mana level inside her space, which was exponentially denser than the mana in the spaces of the others, though it was close to the same quality.

{Skill Master 5 Activation} [Void Iron Body] → [Chaos Beast Constitution]

[Chaos Void Constitution] Epic Grade Chaos Element physique. Removes physical limitations on development. Enhanced compatibility with Chaos and Void Element magic.

Karl wasn't certain what that meant, exactly. But he did know that the influx of mana and soul power no longer hurt, and it wasn't triggering his damage reduction skills. {Not bad. You managed to adapt to being overloaded. Now, you just need to learn to absorb all that excess energy, and you'll be able to advance properly.} Lady Matilda congratulated Karl.

Cara came out of her space to examine him. He was still glowing with power, but it wasn't destroying him anymore, so he should be safe to land on.

(Oh, the badger is back. Hello, tiny creature.)

Cara waved at the Chaos Dragon, then got busy inspecting Karl. There was something odd about him still, and it wasn't just the excess power.

Chapter 927 Stabilized

Matilda lost interest in the pair, now that the spectacle was over, and banished them back to the material plane, where Karl found that no time at all had passed, and the power was still flowing from his body at the rate it had been when he left.

Then, the flow reversed, as his adapted body began to suck it back in and bring the overloaded spells under control.

His body was vibrating with power, and the spaces wouldn't accept any more, but the situation had stabilized, and Karl was no longer in danger of exploding, or accidentally lashing out with an out of control skill.

Slowly, he returned to a stable state, and in the distance Lord Bomgon sighed in disappointment. That was far less spectacular than expected, and the War Champion appeared to have found a trick to deal with the overloaded energy without any of the expected outcomes.

The undead lord closed his eyes, about to turn away to take care of business, and then realized that Karl still shone like a beacon, both because of the spell he had active, and the immense amount of soul energy on his body.

Undead and spiritual beings from hundreds of kilometres away would be drawn to him, and most likely stripped bare of their power in order to fuel whatever he had done to survive the overload.

He would have to keep a close eye on that to see if it faded, or if Drodh was going to have a walking beacon of potential salvation, drawing every undead in Bomgon to him just by existing.

The demon army kept a wary distance from Karl as he descended into the clearing closer to their camp, and then dismissed the [War Banner], ending the beacon of light on his location.

The only ones that came over to him were Dana and Delilah, but the beasts could all hear what was going on through their link with Karl, and most of the team was busy with treating wounded Demons.

The ancient red dragon didn't bother to transform as she inspected Karl for damages. {It looks like you survived that well enough. It might take some time for your energy to stabilize, though. I don't know why you are holding so much power, but it might just be a matter of time before your body absorbs or releases it.

Excellent work out there, especially with that War Banner. Very impressive.} She declared.

"Thanks. The [War Banner] is a new skill, and surprisingly effective, but it will only work during a declared war. It's one of the restrictions on the banner. Still, I was startled that it didn't just spread my buffs, but all the buffs that had been applied to me across the whole battlefield.

That sort of utility seems out of place for even an Epic Skill.

It was something that formed by my skill advancement ability, merging multiple abilities." Karl explained.

{Interesting. I wonder if the advancements are situational? Exposing yourself to new things and high-stress situations might trigger more new skills to form. But you do need to work on absorbing that excess energy before it draws an entire army to your location.

Perhaps you would like to retreat to the camp and move to the Tiny World? That should stop the energy from leaking out and attracting the undead.} Priestess Delilah suggested.

"That's not a bad idea. It might take a while, but if the Bomgon army stays away for a few days, I will do my best."

[You can go back now, and we will wait here for the healing work to be done. I will make sure nobody bothers you at the fort.] Rae insisted.

"Alright, I will retreat now, before it causes more of an incident. I can see that the Demons are somewhere between uncomfortable and upset with my presence, and I don't know how much destruction that overload event caused, so it's better that I vanish for a bit. Let me know if there are any issues with them holding it against my team, and we can move further from here." Karl added, for the benefit of the others.

Once he was back in the fort, Karl left the entrance to the [Tiny World] wide open, so the others could enter freely if they wanted to, and so that he could extend his senses outside, to be sure that there were no threats sneaking up on the fort.

There was no real guideline on what he should do with all this excess energy that was stored for him, but Karl had an idea that he was hoping would work.

In the dungeons, there were boss monsters. Epic Grade versions of the other creatures trapped there. They were still usually at the same Rank, but they had strength, vitality and mana pools that were many times what a normal creature could claim.

That was what he was hoping to attain with the transformation of his body. The Chaos Beast Constitution skill said it removed physical limitations on development. So, in theory, he should be able to condense all that power into himself and let it settle into a state something like a dungeon boss.

Cara thought that it was a great idea.

Adapting to the excess mana was easy enough. With focus, it blended seamlessly into his body, simply increasing Karl's mana pool without the need to change his recently elevated power level. The change was gradual, but Karl was fairly certain that he could have himself and the beast spaces fully adjusted in the next few days. A week at most.

It was the excess soul energy that was the issue.

The Haint Claw and Blade of Champions had collected so much of it that it was simply impossible for him to adjust with any method that he knew.

Instead, he focused on meditation and filtering it through the golden dragon scale in his mental space. At the rate that he could process it, that would take him years or even decades to finish, but it was the only thing he knew that made any difference at all.

What he really needed was a way to store all of that excess energy until he could process and adapt to it all.

Chapter 928 Where To Put Power?

The solution to Karl's issues came in the form of one tarnished Golden Dragon Scale. Not the image of it in his mental space, but the actual treasure that Hawk had looted.

Karl took it out and held it in his hand as he meditated, then watched as the depleted scale began to rapidly absorb both soul energy and life force at a rate that dwarfed anything Karl could manage.

The way that it managed it was simple, the same way that Karl had been attempting to integrate the energy with himself. But the rate was so far beyond what he could manage that it was almost embarrassing.

However, Karl didn't just give all the stored energy to the scale, which was rapidly regaining its lustre. He still wanted as much as he could absorb for himself, as the combination of soul and life energy caused his own power level to skyrocket.

If he had a few months to simply sit and work on it, Karl was certain that he could force himself to the Totem Rank just with what he already had.

The qualifier was mostly that the weapons were both oversaturated and leaking power, and he needed to get them below that point so that they could continue to function properly during the next battle and not cause another overload situation. The Haint Claw had begun to change, Karl noticed. Like Overlord Leafa, it was developing a personality of its own. Karl could sense the smug superiority radiating from it when he complained to himself about how long it would take him to adapt to all the excess power that the Haint Claw had stored.

If it was as efficient at transferring the energy to him as it was at taking it in, they wouldn't be in this situation.

But then, if it could reinforce his soul at such an insane rate, he would probably stop being human entirely. The stored soul energy was stripped of most of the aspects of the creature that it came from, but not all of it. There was always a bit of lingering influence left over, the innate aspects that couldn't be removed without destroying the innate stability of the soul.

In contrast, the life essence from the Blade of Champions was a simple and direct upgrade. More powerful vitality was more powerful vitality. As he absorbed it, his body became increasingly more durable.

Only, with the change in his constitution, he no longer progressed steadily toward the next rank, but he became more and more monstrous with every bit of stolen vitality.

The Ore he took the blade from would be proud.

With little choice, Karl focused on the energy from the Blade of Champions, attempting to deplete at least one of the weapons before the next battle. The stream of Soul Energy from the Haint Claw didn't

change much whether he focused on it or not, so he simply let it passively filter while he infused his body with the powerful life force of the defeated Bomgon army.

The life force of a Totem Ranked undead was absolutely immense, and the weapons had shamelessly taken the majority of the leaked life energy of the Overlords who had been killed in battle as well.

The entire time that Karl was being overloaded with power? They were stocking up. After an unknown amount of time, Karl felt a new presence entering the Tiny World. Priestess Delilah had come to visit, but she had brought a stranger into the space with her.

Karl opened his eyes to see who was so important that the Totem Ranked Dragon would bring them here. Even bringing strangers to the fort was unusual, but Karl was fairly certain he had been clear that the Tiny World was not a public space.

Beside the red dragon was an older man with white Dragon Church robes on, and golden light shining from his eyes.

"High Priest, I wasn't expecting visitors. Forgive my appearance." Karl greeted them. The old man nodded silently, and continued to stare at Karl for a few seconds before speaking.

"I can see what the War Avatar meant, whatever change you underwent is a most curious one. You are progressing toward Totem Ranked, but not at the same rate that you're progressing towards something else.

I wonder if that constitution skill can still be called Epic Grade? It feels like it should be stronger than that, or perhaps because your baseline was something inhuman the multiplicative effect is stronger?

Ah, forgive me, I have forgotten the basics. I am Joel, Avatar of the White Dragon."

Karl nodded his greeting and continued the process of transforming the energy in the blade into power for his body.

"Do you have a particular goal with this process?" The aging white dragon asked.

"Are you familiar with the Dungeon Bosses? How they're far superior to a regular creature at their Rank? That is what I'm hoping to accomplish with my own body. I already have damage reduction and healing abilities that put me on par with nearly any living species. So, if I can increase my health by enough..."

Karl trailed off, and the white dragon hummed curiously.

"It should be possible. When dragons are chosen as Avatars of their Gods, they also increase in durability by a significant amount, signifying the favour of their patron. The precedent is solid, and I would be curious to see what it would take to even damage someone with the skills that you are reported to have after you reach Totem Rank."

Karl smiled. "Surely, you didn't come all this way just to see how my recovery was going? I don't recall sensing you on the battlefield"

The dragon sighed. "I could only wish that it was so simple. No, the church is more concerned about your relationship with Supreme Lady Matilda. We can sense her power on you, and one of your companions.

The Chaos Dragon is a casual menace to society, and we had to be certain that she hadn't done something that was going to create issues on another island.

Again."

That made Karl chuckle. "So, you were concerned that my advancement might be a practical joke that she was playing on the world?"

Karl briefly thought that, in a way, it might be. But one that she allowed to play out, not one that she started.

Priestess Delilah smirked and winked at Karl. "It might not be bad for you if she did. I recall once when I was a child, she cast a curse called [Alternation] on a hatchling that caused them to cycle between their current state, and their state on their final birthday at random.

You never knew whether it was a toddler's tantrum, or if you would get a Mythic Rank Green Dragon throwing a fit. The cursed one matured remarkably quickly, with the memories of being an adult, but removing the curse took nearly ten years."

That spell had possibilities. The chance that you would just burst with power and rise half a dozen Ranks at once whenever you were frustrated or facing a challenge? It might not be reliable, but when it worked, it would really work.

"I can see why you would be concerned about that. After all, I have already seen myself as an Immortal." Karl agreed.

Chapter 929 Embrace The Chaos

The white dragon nodded. "I heard about it from Bishop Misty's handler:"

"She has a handler?" Karl asked.

"Of course. The time dragons make the green dragons look reliable and responsible. If we didn't assign someone to her, we would never know what she had gotten up to, as she never remembers to tell anyone.

She didn't even tell us about the incident with you, and still insists that she hasn't done it yet, but the Golden Dragon Nation has many of our people embedded in it, as it follows the Dragon Gods." Avatar Joel agreed.

He ran his fingers through his short white hair, then sighed, and took a book from his robes.

"Here, why don't you try this? It's a power matrix textbook. Most species wouldn't need it, but I suspect that you will."

Karl took the book and flipped it open to the first page. It was a newly written tome, and directed at monks, who needed to fortify their mental strength, as inner strength, not mana, powered many of their attacks.

It gave them an edge in some forms of battle, as inner strength regenerated even when cut off from mana. However, it wasn't so much the alternate form of energy, which he wasn't even certain that he could use, that was the priority. It was the way of storing it.

Karl flipped a few pages until he got to the part that he already knew, the basic focal point. That had formed a dragon scale when he focused, instead of the candle that was recommended. But it was enough of a similarity to follow the directions to the next step.

Karl began forming the pattern to turn the single focal point into a triangle, the next recommended shape. The moment that he clearly imagined it, the two new images of the dragon scale snapped into existence, and the flow of Soul Energy into his body tripled.

{Skill Master 5 activation} [Mental Fortitude] has improved. Maximum level reached.

The new images of dragon scales were solidifying smoothly, and the intensity of the influx began to stabilize, so Karl moved on to the next image on the page, the five pointed star.

Shifting the scales from their spot wasn't easy, but the new focusing array formed as easily as the last one had, and the influx of soul energy increased again.

There was a skill in his skill tree that Karl could see becoming incredibly powerful with these changes. It came after [Follow Me, Little One], and it was based entirely on mental strength.

(50 Points) [Dominating Power] The Pack Master's Aura gains a {Mental Domination} effect at will, requiring weaker minds to submit to his will. Hypnosis type ability. It wasn't really his style, but with this much soul power and capped out [Mental Fortitude], it would be effective on nearly anything. However, the other two skills waiting for him under [Pack First] in the skill tree were still more interesting.

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

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

[Limitless] would be great for Thor, whose new species were typically invincible Overlords, but never Totems. While Benevolent. Elder was a curious sort of skill that looked like it was better suited to a leader looking to build an army.

For now, he held off on picking any of them, though he had plenty of skill points available. They were useful skills, but he couldn't afford to get distracted from the task at hand.

From the five pointed star, the next step was a nine pointed focal design that was supposed to represent the shape of a dragon's head.

[The important part of forming the dragon array is to focus on the image of the dragon's skull to attain the perfect placement. The clearer the vision of the dragon's head in your mind, the more closely aligned to the dragon gods your array will become.]

Karl read the text three times, then realized he had a dilemma. Each of the dragon species had a slightly differently shaped head.

If he was going to align the array to a dragon, to increase and shape his mental strength, he would have to pick one of them.

The adorable, childish chubbiness of the hatchling that Lotus turned into when she was in Beast Form made Karl smile, and the two dragons watching him realized that he was making real progress on the mental exercises.

They didn't say anything, so as not to disturb his practice. But they watched carefully as the level of soul energy that his body was absorbing increased again,

This was not the final stage in the process. The next three detailed steps were representations of constellations, but they were 27 and 128 points, respectively.

It felt like there should be something in between those, but that was what the textbook was showing him, and Karl hadn't read the details yet.

Karl flipped the page to read the descriptions about the dragon shaped array. There should be guidance in there for him to absorb, and perhaps a good reason to pick one dragon over another.

[The dragon need not be one that you know well, but it is important that the dragon represent an aspect that resonates with your personality. The visualization of the dragon the points represent is integral to the practice and future growth of the Monk following the path of the stars, and a poor choice or visualization may lead to a crippling reduction in growth speed.] The book informed him.

Karl opened his eyes for a moment as he considered the best path forward.

"You look lost. What stage are you at?" Delilah asked.

"The nine-star dragon's head representation. I'm not sure what dragon to visualize to optimize my growth speed!" Karl explained.

The red dragon shrugged. "As long as the visualization is good, you should be fine with any dragon you know."

[I know the perfect one.] Cara offered.

[The Chaos Dragon? I think that might be more you than me.] Karl reminded her.

[Your new growth skill disagrees. You too are the chaos.]

Chapter 930 Visual Impact

Karl considered it. He knew what Supreme Lady Matilda looked like well enough. It was hard to forget the visual impact that a massive, Supreme Ranked Chaos dragon made.

Plus, Cara wasn't wrong. Chaos did follow them around like an eager puppy, somehow just showing up everywhere that he went.

So, Supreme Lady Matilda's face was the one that he envisioned as he arranged the stars for the array. But only after he finished did he realize just how specific that image was. Unlike most draconic heads, Matilda wasn't symmetrical. She had two horns on one side and only one on the other.

So, when Karl arranged the stars to represent her, they weren't the same sort of perfectly balanced image that was portrayed in the diagram.

However, they felt right, and the flow of soul power through the array was vastly increased over the five pointed star. Whether that was as much as a Monk was supposed to get from the array was something that Karl had no reference for, but going by the impressed look that the white dragon was giving him, it shouldn't be too bad.

"Alright, I have finished visualizing the dragon's head, and organizing the focal points in my mind. Do you think that is far enough, or should I keep working on the others?" Karl asked.

Avatar Joel chuckled. "Just the fact that you managed to arrange nine points in under a day is a monstrous feat. Many Monks take years to get to that point, and some never move past it, due to lacking mental fortitude.

How much pain are you in, on a scale of one to ten? The arrangement can take a rather heavy toll on the mind."

Karl shrugged. "I'm good. I heal fast, and my head feels fine."

The dragon nodded in satisfaction, and cast a spell that settled over Karl, but didn't appear to change his body, so it was most likely for monitoring something that the dragon couldn't see directly.

"Not bad. Transformation speed is solid, you have a good grasp on the appearance of the dragon for your focal points. Tell me, what do your focal stars look like?" Joel asked, his wrinkled face creasing with excitement.

"Golden dragon scales. They glow softly, but I used that instead of the simple candle flame that was suggested during my basic training." Karl explained.

"Oh, that would explain things. Using dragon scales as a focal point would make this part of the process much easier. Now, soul strength isn't a major factor for you yet, but it will be. It matters in the Totem Rank advancement, and the Mythic Advancement, but at the Immortal threshold, there is nothing more important.

All Immortals have to undergo a tribulation, and while it is partially a test of power, it is mostly a test of Soul integrity and mental fortitude. The mind normally shatters long before the body, and then the failed progression will be the last attempt that they ever make. The white dragon explained.

"Well, at least I've got an advantage when I make it to that point, now I just need to make it through two more Ranks, and I'm home free, right?" Karl joked.

The two dragons laughed. "You make it sound so easy. But who knows, perhaps for you, it will be. Especially now. We will have to see how you do in an actual battle, but my guess is that you won't be losing any mental battles in the near future.

Karl smiled at the pair. "I don't intend to lose many battles of any sort in the near future. But how are things outside? How long was I out of it?"

Delilah shrugged. "All night. It's almost morning now. The locals were surprisingly understanding about the situation, and your overload, which they took as an attack by the enemy mages.

Having a healing station on site helped their mood considerably.

Everyone else is in the fort, as they didn't want to interrupt your progress in here, or risk injury. If you're settled enough, you can go let them know."

Karl nodded. "I will let them know that they can come in. I'm sure that someone will want to sun themselves on the beach, or the cliffs."

Delilah laughed. "That's not a bad idea. I will be here for the afternoon. The Undead are not showing any signs of attacking, according to the other clerics in the area."

While Karl had spent the day recovering, and the team had spent the day helping with the wounded, all over Drodh and Bomgon, the System was undergoing a subtle shift.

More residents were getting fully active systems, with features silently appearing to anyone who checked, and many youngsters were gaining system access for the first time.

The extra power that had been added to the dragon scale might still be hidden from the world inside of Karl's inventory, now that he had recovered the damaged relic from Hawk's storage, but the effects were not contained.

To most, it was a nearly invisible background process. But to Lord Bomgon, who had the soul bound devotion of every undead creature within his realm, as well as most of the living ones, the change caused a visceral reaction.

Causing the system to become fully activated was the last thing that he wanted. His Necromancers were powerful without the System, there was no benefit to him of making them just a little stronger when it would be making every Demon and Monster species around his borders gain power even more rapidly.

It wasn't clear what had caused the change, or where it was centred, as so few of his spies had noticed any anomalies, even at home in Bomgon. But it was clear that the world was changing, and it most likely had something to do with the Dragons.

If it were the Orcs who had found the relic they had been searching for, the whole world would know by now. Orcs were lousy at keeping secrets.