

Beast Master 931

Chapter 931 Waiting for Bomgon

For the next two days, Karl and the others relaxed in the fort, or in the Tiny World, where the two Totem Ranked dragons were still sunning themselves, and most likely avoiding responsibilities, as outsiders were unlikely to discover them while they were inside.

Fortunately, it did not appear that anyone was actively looking for them. Or for anyone else in the group, for that matter.

The undead armies weren't attacking, they had retreated to a city over a hundred kilometres from the border, and the army was more concerned with properly purging the last of the undead and any infected items from the city.

The death toll of the attack had been catastrophic, and the port city of Bagaandormen could hardly be called a city anymore.

Demons weren't truly helpless, even the ones that weren't soldiers. But with so many undead literally dropped on their homes, over half of the city had died during the attack, and many more were infected with various undead curses and viruses.

The Drodh Army had declared it a quarantine zone, so even Lotus could only stand near the wall in healing tree form to help the residents, she could not go inside to let them get the full radius of her aura.

But after a few days, the situation appeared to be mostly under control, and only a few lingering undead or survivors were being found under rubble.

"What do the most recent reports among the clerics say, Priestess?" Karl asked Delilah as the red dragon transformed back to human for lunch on the fourth day after the battle.

"A whole lot of nothing. The undead armies have retreated further than usual this time, and they're not launching any attacks along the border at all. If anything, the attempt to expand the borders might have ended.

There doesn't seem to have been a good reason why, as they've still got plenty of troops left, but Lord Bomgon likes to test the waters now and then, so he might just be changing his target to the border along the Unzatharb side.

The two share a border nearly the same length as Bomgon and Drodh, but a bit more mountainous than the rolling hills around us." She replied casually as she inspected the lunch buffet.

"Well, at least that makes it decidedly not our problem. But trying to understand why the Undead are so insistent on expanding the blight is beyond me." Karl agreed. Joel, the white dragon, currently in the form of an old man, smiled at Karl's admission. "It's really quite simple. They thrive on unholy energy of a particular variety. The blight radiates it, and the larger the area of the blight, the stronger the energy is. Much like moving from a lower mana continent to the Dragon Isles, this is something that helps their growth.

The Undead might not be fully functional in the brain capacity department most of the time, but the ones who did retain most of their mental faculties understand well enough that they need territory if they're going to create an undead horde strong enough to keep themselves from becoming a nomadic threat on other nations' territories."

That was a valid concern. Nobody really cared for the Undead, and none called them true allies. A few species, like the Vampires, had managed to get along well enough with others to integrate, but the chances that the Necromancers would accept such a setup, or that zombies and skeletons would ever be capable of it, was laughable.

"So there really isn't much chance that they're going to stop trying to expand? I would imagine that's frustrating for everyone living near the border." Karl sighed.

The white dragon shrugged. "They work on a much longer timeline than most, so a major push tends to be more of a once in a decade situation than an every year issue. It makes it less dangerous to live near the border, or the whole border region would likely be a militarized zone.

Now, with so many lost here in the city, they might wish to turn it into a military fort, but normally the villages live fairly normal lives. But the rural villagers are mostly Orcs, and the Orcs enjoy the fights more than most species, so they don't retreat.

Unfortunately, I cannot continue to relax here forever. There are threats to the other islands as well, and I have been called.

I do hope to see you all again soon. But under better circumstances." Priestess Delilah brushed her robes clean. "I should also move along. The threat here has faded, so it will be some time before the undead attack this border again. If you want to keep hunting them, that is your choice. But you can head home for a break." Karl turned to the others for their opinion, and received no objections. "Alright, we will all head out. Rae, please take down the fort, unless you intend to leave it for the locals."

Definitely not, Rae decided. This was a great fort, completely unsuited to being left for a bunch of random demons with no creativity. They would never appreciate the pure brilliance of her designs.

But Rae didn't want to just return to the boredom of Drodh City.

"Why don't we all go play in the Dwarf lands? I know that the problem is too many Totem Ranked monsters, but there have to be others that are a problem, right?"

Everyone can help clear the extras.

Or they can go shopping while we clear out the Bara Dungeon. That would be good too." She suggested.

"You ran out of new and fun things to do at home, didn't you?" Karl asked.

Rae nodded emphatically, and the ladies did their best not to laugh.

"But you're also stronger now. We should test your combat capabilities before you have to face off against another Totem Ranked something. That way, you can be sure of what you can do with this extra vitality and mana." Rae added.

That was actually an excellent point. Testing under controlled conditions would be much safer than finding his limits while in an actual battle.

Chapter 932 All Aboard For Bara

"Would you all like to go to Bara?" Karl asked.

Dana shrugged. "It sounds interesting. A whole city full of Dwarves might be fun for Lotus. She might actually find people her own height."

Lotus stuck out her tongue at the mage, but Dana had a point. If there was a city full of people her height, it was most likely going to be in the Dwarven territories. It might be interesting to not be a full head shorter than everyone.

Rae quickly disassembled their resting spot and the butterfly ended the illusion that was hiding it in the forest.

"Well, it looks like this is farewell for now. Unless you want to use our portal to Bara." Karl informed the dragons.

Both shook their heads, so Karl opened the way to the Dwarven city, and stepped through while Lotus gave one last round of hugs.

Karl had brought them to the platform by the dungeon, and today was especially crowded within the Dwarven city. From the chatter Karl could hear, the city was preparing for an upcoming holiday, so everyone was at the markets stocking up in preparation for family coming to visit.

"Oh, meat wraps!" Lotus cheered as she ran away from the group.

Karl smiled and waved at the Dwarf, who immediately began setting more kebabs over the fire.

"How many might you need today, young Miss?" The Dwarf asked.

Lotus was going to complain about his nickname, then realized he was at least a century older than she was. From his point of view, the name was perfectly reasonable.

"One for everyone in the group here. Then two more." Lotus decided, as Hawk and Cara had both returned to their spaces, while Thor and Rae were in humanoid form and Remi was out to see the city.

It was heavily earth element, but there was a lot of shamanistic power in Bara, and Remi was loving the feeling. Plus, with the Dwarves all being so short, even at her current size, she could see so much more through the crowd than she could in Drodh, with all the oversized Wrath Demons and wings in the way.

They were waiting for their food when a familiar white bearded Dwarf came stomping in their direction.

"Overlord Karl, good timing. We have collected your payment." Slate Petros, the Totem Ranked Shaman from their political delegation, greeted them.

"Shaman Petros, it's a pleasure to see you again."

The Dwarf took out a large stone chest and placed it on the ground. "That's everything that we owed you for the weapon, and some other incidentals. I see that you've got the spider with you again, her portion of your payment is still nice and fresh."

Rae curiously opened the chest and found a five gallon pail with a lid sealed on it, but she could smell the blood and feel the power coming from it as she transferred it to her space.

"Thank you. That will do wonderfully." She informed him with an elaborate bow.

A whole bucket full of Mythic Rank blood couldn't have been easy to get, but the Dwarves had done it. The fact that the rest of the chest was filled with magical gems and rare metal coins was irrelevant to her.

She had gotten the part that she wanted.

"Are you here to do the Dungeon again? I hear that the last one went much more smoothly than expected." Petros asked.

"We might. Most of my guild members are still Monarchs, but I think that we can make it work with a few extra Overlords to fill the numbers. But that will be tomorrow at the earliest. Today, we're going to explore the city a bit and sample the food.

Priestess Nachtia also wants to hunt some of the excess monsters in the inland region, so we will be headed there in the next few days." Karl explained.

Petros nodded. "If you go straight west through the pass, you'll find a number of the problematic beasts. I don't know if you will want to keep one for your collection, but the number of them is out of control."

Lotus turned away from watching the food to question the Shaman. "What sort of beasts are they that Karl might want to keep them?"

The Dwarf chuckled, knowing that Lotus would be even more interested than Karl. "Most of the overpopulation issue is with Owlbear type monsters and Sand Yeti. The Owlbears are native to the region, but overpopulated. The Sand Yeti tribes have been driven south by the wet summer north of us.

The sand has been flooding, and collapsing their nests, so they moved into the mountains to stay dry.

They're quite the pest, but their fur is soft, and their potential is good." He explained.

"You had me at soft fur" Lotus agreed.

Nachtia frowned. "Aren't Owlbears also soft?"

Lotus nodded happily. "Very soft. But they're feathered, not furry."

That was apparently an important distinction, though nobody was under any illusions that Lotus would not try to cuddle the Owlbears just because they had feathers instead of fur.

Karl smiled at the Dwarven Shaman. "Perhaps we should head for another sector of high population beasts. Asking this particular team to go after the cutest and cuddliest of monsters is a bit of a challenge."

Petros and the food stall vendor both laughed at the insinuation. Indeed, it was hard to get teams to control the Owlbears, as they were generally good-natured, unless you got too close to their young, and they were good about keeping pests away from the livestock.

The Sand Yeti population, on the other hand, was far from beloved.

"Why don't you head further up the river towards Nulnalgat? Then you'll be out of Owlbear territories, and the only powerful monsters you'll find in excess are the Sand Yeti? That should be a solid compromise." Petros offered.

Lotus shrugged, so Karl nodded in agreement. "Alright, I will ask the city guard for an incident map tomorrow. Today, we will explore the city and take a rest. I hear that Dwarven Hospitality comes with ale soaked brisket and roast potatoes."

Chapter 933 Strange State Of Events

That was how Karl and the others ended up in a Dwarven Tavern deep within the mountain, drinking ale and sitting around a seemingly endless supply of meat and potatoes that the server just kept adding dishes to.

{How long has the weather been wet that it's pushing so many monsters south?} Remi asked as she picked a potato out of the pile.

Petros shrugged. "About three months now. The wet season has been much heavier than usual. They'll likely go back when things dry up, but there is more food down here than in the desert, so we might have to chase them off."

A dwarf at the next table over laughed. "I don't think it'll be that hard to get them to leave. It's almost winter, and they're Sand Yeti. Once the snow starts flying, they'll bugger off right quick"

The other dwarves began to laugh at the thought of Sand Yeti in the mountains over the winter.

"We're not the only ones that have it hard this year. Gabil has had a population boom among their beasts and feral monsters. They have been getting monster spawns for the last year, and the monsters that come out of those are all insane, even when they should be intelligent.

But now, they're breeding, and half the country is overrun.

Not that it was highly populated to begin with, but the danger level there is so bad that even Bomgon stopped attacking. If the Undead think that you aren't worth attacking, things have gotten bad.

But I heard that they've got Undead roaming as well, looking for the lost System Stones." The dark-haired Dwarf laughed.

"Looking for the System Stones?" Karl asked.

"Oh, do you not know the story? Get Elder Petros to tell it, he's good with the old stories."

Petros chuckled and a number of the dwarves turned to face him, while the waitress brought a refill for his ale.

"In the distant past, before the last resurgence, it is said that the land of Dragon Lord Gabil, southwest of Naraledum Lake, a circle of stone pillars once stood. The centre was made of solid gold, imbued with the power of the World Dragon.

Any who stood upon the holy altar would be blessed with his luck. Some would activate a System Class, despite lacking the compatibility, others would advance their class, or gain a new skill.

For thousands of years, pilgrims would come to the site to receive the blessings. Then, tragedy struck. Lord Gabil was killed by an unknown assassin, and the entire mountain where the System Stones once stood vanished as if it were never there.

The Pilgrims waiting to visit lost all memory of the location, even with the ones who had already visited telling them it should be right in front of them. So, the System Stones were lost.

None know where they went, but some say that they are simply hidden, disguised behind a barrier. Others say that they are lost to time. But no matter which it is, the search for the lost System Stones continues to this day."

Petros told the story with dramatic tone changes and elaborate hand gestures, drawing the viewers in.

Rae tilted her head. "The Stones weren't made of gold, though. They're just shiny stones."

Everyone turned to stare at her.

"You've seen the System Stones?" Petros asked.

"Not those ones. A set in the Golden Dragon Nation. They were definitely just carved from stone, not made of solid gold. But the effect was right. There was even one girl who accidentally turned herself into a Worgen by letting the System Stones randomize her."

Karl laughed at the memory, and Petros frowned at him.

"You were there, weren't you? At those stones?"

Karl nodded. "They're not permanent, they appeared along with a Monster Spawn, and vanished just as suddenly. But during the day or two that they were active, they worked exactly as you were describing.

If there is a set still active in Gabil, it would be a huge benefit for anyone who could find them."

"Or for the ones who could destroy them. That's why the Undead are looking for them. Like the Giants and some others, they don't want anyone to have the System. They believe that it disrupts their natural advantages. Petros explained.

"And because the Giants want them destroyed, we won't let them. Just on principle." One of the other Dwarves laughed.

That made perfect sense to Karl. Anything that the Giants wanted to happen was likely to be a disaster for everyone else, so it was better to oppose them just on general

principle.

Plus, the Giants were just generally hateful and violent sorts of creatures to begin with.

Cara laughed to herself at Karl's logic. The Giants surely didn't see it that way, but there was just enough Dwarf in him that the instinctual hatred for the Giants bled through into his thought processes.

"Finding the lost System Stones actually sounds like a fun side quest." Nachtia suggested.

Tessa nodded. "If we're going to go out and help deal with the over population of monsters, including some from the Monster Spawns, who are generally insane anyhow, it wouldn't hurt to search around for signs that the stones might be hidden behind a spell."

Petros chuckled. "A proper adventure instead of a simple quest to reduce monster populations? That sounds like the sort of thing that makes the Dragon Gods happy."

You shouldn't find too much resistance there if you want to clear the insane monsters. There are a lot of monster populated villages in Gabil, but the majority of the cities are Dwarven. Just ask around, and they'll be happy to tell you what is what."

Karl nodded. "Hopefully nobody minds that we've changed plans to go to an entirely different nation to do our hunting"

The Totem Ranked Shaman just waved off his concern. "One hunting party more or less won't change much. I think that the council is more worried that you might change your mind and start abusing the free pass into the dungeon you obtained to mine it clear every day. The lost revenue might have made them cry."

Chapter 934 PUG Problems

Karl smiled. "Coming here every day for lunch and a dungeon run is tempting, but we're a busy Guild."

The dwarves laughed at his assertion. The Darklight Host certainly didn't look too busy, out wandering around other countries looking for quests to fulfil, even though they were certainly not short on money.

If anything, they almost felt like a mission team from the Dragon Church, just out to make the gods happy. The blue dragon with their creations, the green with healing and maintaining natural balances, then the Red and Black in the battles along the borders with Bomgon.

If they started mediating disputes, the Dwarves would suspect that even the Bronze Dragon was favouring them.

It was only natural, when they had three Dragon Clerics in the same group. Travelling with a cleric was a luxury for most Guilds and adventuring groups. They served their Gods first, so it was uncommon for them to remain long-term with one group.

It was beginning to get late, and Karl was about to suggest that they find a room at an Inn somewhere when Thomas, the peak Overlord Ranked Paladin that led his last run through the Dungeon here in Bara, came in looking like he had been through hell.

"Thomas, what happened to you, man?" Karl called before he could take a seat.

"Karl! You're a sight for sore eyes after today's run. We took a group of five through the dungeon, only to find out that they had stealth amulets that made a bunch of Monarchs feel like Overlords.

Just like that, we found out on the first pull that none of our damage dealers could actually deal damage. At least not decent amounts of it. I spent nine hours just to get them past the first boss, so I didn't lose money on the run, and we nearly died more times than I can count." The dwarf ranted.

No amount of extra fee to do the run would truly make up for a day like that.

"Why don't you go with my team tomorrow? There are six of us, but I can show you something cool once we're inside." Karl suggested.

Thomas looked at the group of Clerics and Dana with a hint of horror in his eyes. "No offence, but after today's experience with Monarchs in the Dungeon, I don't think that I'm up for it. And my team is all taking the day off to rest."

Karl shrugged. "Understandable. I might take my team through tomorrow before we leave. But I can just grab a few extras to fill the numbers. With three clerics, and my buffs, I'm not too worried about the completion."

Thomas gave a dry laugh that turned into a hoarse cough. "Well, we've seen what your beasts can do against the final boss pull, so I don't doubt that you could clear the dungeon even without any more Overlords."

How about. I recommend a friend of mine and his sons? They're all Paladins, and I'm sure they'd be happy to take up front-line duties for you. With the Hawk and Spider, the damage should be more than enough.

Karl winked at the Dwarf. "I've got the whole team here today, so we've also got an Impenetrable Bulwark Behemoth for tanking duties. With a War Cleric on his back and his [Bulwark], he makes a mighty shield wall."

Thomas whistled in appreciation, and Petros stroked his beard as he came to a realization.

"You know, I used to think that the classes were somewhat balanced by the system. There was something that they were all lacking to make up for the areas where they were strong. A built-in team building exercise, forcing us to work together."

But that's not true, is it? There are simply grades of classes, and we're all in the Common or Uncommon Classes. You pulled a Rare Class, and it can work on its own, but still has some limitations based on the beasts that are chosen.

Perhaps the stories of the Godly Classes aren't so farfetched." The old Shaman suggested.

"The Godly Classes?" Dana asked.

Petros nodded. "Almost everyone knows about the Golem Mages, and the Golem Crafters, who can make Golems with Runes. But the old stories say that there were once Golem Masters, absolutely overpowered champions who could even summon duplicates of people they had met. Duplicated, right down to the skills that they could use."

He paused there to let that sink in. If Dana could summon clones of herself or Ophelia, how powerful would her class be? Or if she could do something like Ahmad and summon four copies of Rae or Remi, what could survive that?

Even compared to Karl's powers, that was an unfair advantage. They wouldn't even need to hold back in combat, as they were just summons and could be replaced if they were killed.

Summoning multiple copies of an Immortal Rae with instant respawning abilities, and all her own skills? That was the sort of class that sounded too ridiculous to be real.

Petros chuckled. "I see that you can understand the implications. If there really were someone alive today with a class like that, what could stop them? Karl can already challenge most Totems in single combat. But a class like that? They could just duplicate their enemy and beat them with numbers."

[Note to self. Find a way to let Karl summon more of me.] Rae joked through their mental link.

[Why you? Imagine how much {Apocalypse} I could make with a half dozen of me.] Remi laughed.

[Why am I suddenly a summoner?] Karl asked.

[You're asking that now? You've already got Lamia and animal Golems, what is wrong with gaining a few higher quality summoned beasts?] Rae countered.

The Dwarves noticed Karl smiling to himself and assumed that he was just imagining the possibilities. But they weren't wrong. With [Skill Master 5] there was no reason that he couldn't advance Golems to whatever came after Greater Golem, and a full

Rank above himself.

It was just a matter of luck.

Chapter 935 Planning

It was late in the evening when Karl led the group out into the dim light of the tourist district of Bara to a hotel that Shaman Petros had suggested.

It was set up for large groups, as it was near the dungeon, and the sizing was multi species friendly, unlike some of the inns that were deeper into the mountain, where most of the rooms were sized for Dwarves.

While a few of Karl's group members might be alright with that, most of them would be incredibly uncomfortable on a Dwarf sized bed,

The next morning, they all gathered at breakfast to make a proper plan for their excursion, now that they had additional information about the threats.

"I've got a copy of the day's mission requests from the Innkeeper, but it's not a big list, as it only covers the region immediately around the mountain. Even if we want to go deal with the Sand Yeti issues, they're not on this list." Karl explained.

Tessa shrugged. "We can't get lucky every time like we did in Drodh, with their nationwide threat assessments being passed out at the guard station."

"Why don't we skip over the Sand Yeti groups, as they're going to go back soon enough on their own? We can start with the monster spawns, as they're an invasive threat." Lotus suggested.

To the Nature Goddess, the invasive threats would always be the priority.

Nachtia shrugged. "That works for me. They all need dealing with."

Ophelia nodded in agreement before speaking. "We should go see the dungeon first. Not just because I want to see how Karl's combat ability improved after that last incident, but to see if we can get anything good out of it.

It's Overlord Ranked, so it might give us something unexpected. As I recall, Thomas was going to bring some friends of his by this morning if they agreed. At the least, we should give them a couple of hours and leave after lunch if they aren't coming."

They didn't have to wait long, as the Dwarves were already outside the restaurant when they finished eating, and already geared up for the dungeon.

"You're going to join us today, Thomas? I thought you were going to take a day off." Karl commented.

"For your group, I'll skip the day off. Hell, I might even make up some of the lost revenue for the week. It's been a rough one all around, and we've had to abandon more than one attempt after the first boss." The Paladin explained.

That was barely a break even day for the group with the entry fee. It might be half the dungeon run, but it was far less than half the total loot at the end.

"Did everyone have what they need? Other than packed lunches, we can get those from the restaurant now." Karl asked.

The restaurant had them premade and sitting on a counter for the adventurers, so it only took Lotus a second to get the food and return.

"Good to go. Now, let's go see what's in the Dungeon. I want to see Rae bully the Spiderlings." The little cleric announced.

The three new Dwarves looked around to see who she was talking about, but with so many women, it was impossible to tell who Rae was.

"She's in her separate space right now. If the beasts are out, they will count as members, and we don't want that, as there are already ten of us." Karl explained.

"So that's how you get around the restrictions on group numbers. We will take a moment to introduce the boys to the team once we're inside. We might as well get ahead of the lineup. Do you have your token?" Thomas asked.

"Indeed I do."

The guard at the dungeon smiled as he saw Karl's token, and nodded to Thomas. "I see that you found your new friend again. Go ahead, hope you have better luck today." The gate guard greeted them.

"It can't be much worse than yesterday. But this group is stronger."

The guard wasn't sure about that, as half of the group wasn't trying to hide the fact that they were Monarchs. But they did have a black dragon and the Karl with them. That cat demon was already a minor celebrity in the city guard community, as they had all seen the Artifact axe that he made.

The three new Paladins were nearly vibrating with excitement when they finally got into the Dungeon without paying any fees.

"This is going to be a good day, I can feel it already. I'm Charlie, and these are my sons, Greg and Gary." The oldest of the three unfamiliar Paladins greeted them.

"From Left to right, we have Nachtia, Ophelia, Lotus, Dana, and Tessa. If you didn't already know, I'm Karl. Now, the beasts that just appeared are Thor, Hawk, Remi, Rae and Cara."

Hawk had already reduced his size to the same one that he was using the last time that he was here, and the sight was highly entertaining to Remi. A tiny, indoor sized Hawk was a novelty after being used to him taking up the whole roof of the workshop. "That's quite the team, and they're all strong Overlords. I see why Thomas said we would be fine even with the Monarchs in the group today." Charlie announced as he carefully watched Cara.

"She's friendly, you don't have to worry about her biting." Karl offered.

"I'm not worrying about being bitten. I'm worried about being robbed. I keep regularly used items in my pouches instead of my inventory. The Paladin complained.

[They all assume the worst of me.] Cara complained.

Remi hissed with laughter. [But he's not wrong, you were going to see what was in his pouches. Leave the poor man alone, he's here to help.]

Thomas distracted them by going over the basics for the run.

"My fellow Dwarves all know the dungeon routes by memory. So, we can do it again the same way as last time. We will get in position, and then Hawk and Rae can pull the

mobs to us.

Be careful not to use area effects that go outside the current battle so that we don't accidentally attract more monsters than we can smoothly handle at once. I have no doubt that some of you can deal enough damage to pull more than one group at a time, but trust me. It is faster to do them in order." He reminded them.

Karl nodded and took out his bow. This was going to be a fun run, and watching Hawk hurl Spiderlings like baseballs was always great entertainment.

Chapter 936 Guild Dungeon Run

With that final warning, Rae leapt forward to engage the first group of the dungeon, and Karl let an arrow loose into the Spiderling nests.

The amount of mana that he used was the same as usual, but the damage done by the explosion was significantly higher than usual. It was hard to quantify what the difference between a special constitution and an Epic Grade physique was, but when he saw it in action, there was no denying that there was a hidden modifier in there somewhere.

Not only that, but the mana that he used recovered nearly instantly.

Karl wasn't sure that he had judged it correctly, but when he fired the next arrow with the same result, a lot of dead Spiderlings, he was certain that his status had been elevated.

[I get it now. The Karl has become a boss monster.] Rae realized as her next group of potential targets vanished to a single arrow.

She hurried off to grab another group, and Karl carefully picked off the Spider Rider from the pack.

Beside him, Dana laughed. "Are we going to do anything at all? Or do we just watch the Karl and Rae show?"

Karl chuckled. "The first few pulls are easier, the number of mobs increases once we get to the intersection. That's when everyone will get a real chance to fight."

Karl wasn't joking. Once the additional dark elves started to join the groups, there was more than enough for everyone to do. Especially as they couldn't use any of the larger scale attacks, which would pull more groups to them before they were ready.

Unfortunately for Thor, the way that the dungeon was set up, there was no good way to use Bulwark. I is new signature spell was rendered redundant by the enthusiasm of the enemy, and the narrow streets where Thomas chose to fight.

But not all was lost. He did get to stand behind the Dwarves and smash the attackers with [Gravity Slam], while Tessa threw spears at them.

That was fun.

"Rae has a particular affinity for the spider Priestesses, so we will let her deal with them. The rest of the damage dealers can take on the Spider Riders, and I will deal with the Spiderlings." Karl explained as the group dynamic changed during their approach to the first boss.

It was an easy shift for the group to make, as the majority of them had hardly been doing anything to start with. But it did leave Rae in a bit of a conundrum.

There was only one Spider Priest with each group.

ONE.

That was not nearly enough.

So, once she was finished with her target, she started in on the spider riders, helping the rest of the team finish them off so that they could keep moving once Hawk brought them another group.

He was getting extremely accurate with his Spiderling tosses as well. Direct throws, bouncing them off a wall, sliding them on their backs to trip someone in the next group, he could do it all.

Dana laughed as a quick flip of Hawk's body sent a wounded Spiderling directly into the face of a Dark Elven Warrior, who signalled his group to charge into combat.

Hawk laughed happily as the elves charged, then squawked in annoyance as they started throwing attack skills at him.

Seeing how frustrated Hawk was, Rae waited a few extra seconds before launching her attack. Let the silly bird suffer for a bit if he wasn't going to retreat far enough to make the enemy engage the Dwarves.

"The beasts aren't even taking the dungeon seriously, are they? Everything dies so fast that they are just playing around." Charlie asked.

Thomas shrugged. "Whatever shared skill they have is incredibly overpowered. The faster they clear, the more damage they are doing. That's why the bird pulls monsters before the last fight finishes.

But we are almost at the first boss now, and it's only been a little over an hour. We will take a quick break before the boss fight, and then continue."

"The boss needs to be kept on the ground so that we can fight it properly. Lady Rac will help with that, as she did last time, but I will ask that everyone avoids using skills that encourage the boss not to step on the ground.

There are many area skills that do great damage, but if the boss takes flight, none of the melee classes will be able to do their job effectively, and it will start going after the weaker members first." Thomas explained.

With a whole group of Monarchs among them, it was pretty obvious who the first ones challenged would be.

"How intelligent is the boss?" Dana asked.

"It's a Dark Elven Warrior, smarter than average among sentient species, and it's got a vicious sort of cunning. If you leave yourself open, it is prone to switch targets to go after wounded or vulnerable members instead of the highest damage dealers.

It's particularly fond of going after the healers as well." The Paladin explained. Lotus frowned. She wasn't the fastest runner at the best of times, and these Elves had all been extremely agile. If things started going bad, she was definitely hiding behind Ophelia.

That seemed like the best choice. If the boss couldn't see her, it couldn't attack her, and Ophelia was the biggest one who couldn't fly,

But then Thomas nodded to Rae, who sent out a net of webbing, and Lotus realized that the boss had more things to worry about than a Green Dragon Cleric.

Like a Karl. And a Black Dragon Cleric, who had realized that her breath weapon did not melt Rae's webs.

It was putting up a valiant fight, though. Hacking at webs, throwing out skills that sometimes even broke the [Eternal Lightning] barrier that Thor had over the group. A few times it even broke free and went after Karl, who had been repeatedly shooting it full of arrows.

That led to an epic fist fight, and Lotus was beginning to regret the fact that she didn't have a way to record that and watch it again.

No, she did have a way. Somewhere in its space, the Butterfly was watching, and it could put on a reenactment when they got home.

Chapter 937 Utter Confidence

Instead of letting the boss' attention go back to Thomas, who was ostensibly the group's main tank, Karl kept the attention on himself to test the changes to his body. With Cara, they could nullify the strongest of the Boss attacks, but the ones that were hitting Karl were still enough to take down his barrier in a single strike.

He wasn't in a hurry to bring them back up, though. He had to see what would happen if one actually hit him, with [Void Body], [Impenetrable Bulwark], and his new constitution.

The first strike that hit without a barrier up slid Karl back by over a metre, but only left a thin gouge in his armour spell, and what was likely to be a nasty bruise underneath.

That was a pleasant change, those hits were taking most of his effort to keep everyone protected through last time. If Karl had to guess, he would say that he was very close to on par with the Dungeon Boss as far as durability went, but with faster regeneration.

While his armour might get beat up, if the armour broke, he would still recover from the wounds inflicted in a matter of seconds, where the boss would not.

Rae wrapped the boss up to keep it from flying, while Karl traded blows with the twin scimitars of the Dark Elven Warrior.

Karl's speed was enough to keep the boss tied up while the rest of the group pummelled it with skills. But the real star was Rae, who had the timing of the boss's power explosions down to an art.

Cara couldn't cancel them, and they broke the web every time. But Rae managed to get the web back on the boss right away, even in its enraged state, which allowed Karl to capture its attention before it turned on anyone else.

With that alone, the fight was destined to go smoothly, and they didn't have to worry about Lotus or Dana, their physically squishiest members, being targeted for attack by the boss.

The boss fell with little fanfare, and the group gathered to try the bagged lunches from the hotel.

"Good work so far, everyone. We're making great time, and even with the level disadvantage, the damage from the ladies is still commendable. I don't know what sort of group buff that is, but I would say that it more than makes up for the fact that you're not Overlords.

At least, it does when we're clearing the trash mobs.

Now, the rest of the dungeon is about the same, but with larger numbers of everything, increasing until we get to the final boss area, which will be a courtyard surrounded by military barracks.

Karl and the other area damage dealers will pull everything to the centre of the platform and let the area damage wear it down.

We will only need to fight if they start getting too close to us, where they can see us through the storm.

That tactic saves at least an hour in the dungeon, so we're going to make the very best of it." Thomas explained to the group.

The other Dwarves looked skeptical, as did every one of the ladies. But Karl knew that. it worked, and with the entire group here this time, it should work even better than the first time.

The increased number of mobs only increased the speed that [Rampage] stacked at, and after the first minute, the beasts were practically walking through the dungeon.

With Cara throwing around [Void Blasts], Remi using [Chain Lightning] and Hawk throwing [Fireballs] at anything that moved, the dark elves really didn't stand a chance.

Eventually, it got to the point that they weren't even waiting to pull groups anymore. As soon as the numbers got low, Hawk would go and get more.

So, they usually had two groups in combat at any given time, with Thor reinforcing the front line of Paladins using his massive body.

As Thomas said, 'he made a much better door than a window, and the Behemoth practically plugged the street, leaving the Spider Riders to go around one side of him or the other.

Both sides had Dwarven Shields waiting to stop them, as well as multiple ranged attackers, while Karl and Dana were both standing in the air above Thor's back height so they could rain spells down on the battlefield.

Karl could feel that the others were already well into the Monarch Rank, despite how recently they had advanced, but it would be quite a while before they could make it to Overlord.

By his guess, it would take close to a hundred runs through the dungeon, with their current ratio of damage and healing, to move through the full rank. So, perhaps eighty more from where they were now.

But there was no way for him to tell if that faint increase in power level that he was feeling from them would happen on every run, or if it was an advantage from the first visit to Bara Dungeon.

Finally, they made it to the final pulls, and Karl explained the plan to both Hawk and Remi to ensure that there was no miscommunication.

Karl and Remi would start up the [Apocalypse] spells, blanketing the area. Then Hawk would pull all the mobs into the spell. At that point, everyone who could use it would start casting [Meteor Storm] or an equivalent spell into the chaos.

It was going to be one of the most insane spectacles that the Dwarves had ever seen, but it should get rid of all the Elven warriors at once.

Thomas lit a tobacco pipe as the show started, and the other Dwarves gave him matching confused looks. They were clearly about to be swarmed with Dark Elves, but the main tank was stopping for a smoke break?

What level of confidence was this?

Then, the meteors began to fall on the courtyard, and a massive [Lightning Zone] appeared on the ground, while a Lightning Element [Blockade] hid them from sight, as well as giving them an extra layer of defence, should any of the soldiers make it this far.

"And that is how you clear a courtyard. Now, let's get the pillars up and prepare for the boss."

Chapter 938 Full Clear

Half an hour later, the group stood victorious over the body of the final dungeon boss, checking their loot.

Lotus frowned at the assortment of random Overlord Ranked Uncommon and Rare items in her inventory. It wasn't her fault that there was nothing for her to do, she was the healer, and nobody was taking damage. But still, she didn't get a single cool thing out of the whole dungeon.

Dana did. She got a tiara. A good tiara, Epic Grade. But Ophelia had struck out as well, so Lotus was somewhat assured that the Dungeon wasn't only picking on her.

Thor and Tessa got matching rings with [Life Link], which allowed the one with less health to share the health pool of the more durable partner. It was an ability that Karl could add to items as well, but Thor looked adorable putting the ring on Tessa's finger, so Lotus thought it was better this way.

The rest of the group, including the Dwarves, had tactfully decided not to say anything about what appeared to be a proposal from a behemoth to a War Cleric. Karl wasn't sure how Tessa had taken it, but he didn't doubt that if she took it as a marriage proposal, Thor would be fully on board with that.

"Did anyone get anything that they would like to trade? Sometimes it does give items that aren't suited to your class." Thomas asked.

Everyone shook their heads. The loot today wasn't great, so nobody in the group would actually need it.

But Rae transformed into her humanoid form and handed Thomas a pile of black cloth.

"To make you less shiny. A gift from me." She explained.

Thomas shook out the item and found that it was a pure black tabard, with short sleeves and a spider web pattern in dark grey. It was also a Rare Grade Overlord Ranked item, and had bonuses for self mending and stealth.

"Did you make this?" Thomas asked, startled.

Even before he had equipped it, the item was clearly made for a Dwarf.

Rae nodded happily. "I made it while we were on lunch break. Try it on."

Thomas tossed the cloth over his head, and it equipped instantly, covering his shining plate in black cloth to mid-thigh. He twisted and turned to check his appearance, and realized that his armour no longer clanked and creaked.

Nor did his footsteps thump when he walked.

Rae smiled happily. "Much better. All the Paladin, none of the extra noise."

Charlie and the other Dwarves began to laugh.

"Stealth Dwarf!"

That made Thomas snort in amusement, and confused Rae.

"Dwarves are never sneaky, you see. We have a surprisingly low number of rogues and thieves among the mountain folk because we're so bad at sneaking around." Thomas explained.

Rae smirked at the Paladin. "Now you are the sneaky Dwarf, in the name of righteousness and good ale!"

The dwarves cheered, while Tessa rolled her eyes.

The beasts returned to their spaces, and Karl led the group out of the dungeon.

The Guard gave them a startled look as they left. "That was a quick one. Did it not work out with the Monarchs?"

Thomas patted him on the shoulder. "On the contrary, we are already done the day's run. We even had the Beast Master call out an army of illusions to mine out the surface ore. Today was a good day."

They had let Karl keep the ore, but the guard didn't need to know that.

Karl had sent all the ore back to Ashbringer, whose storage piles in the Guild Bank were nearly full again. The shop's Guild bank vault apparently wasn't intended to be bulk storage for an ore mine. It had more than enough for a full Guild to craft for a month at a time, but not enough to be loading multiple ships with ore for export. They would have to get a warehouse if they were going to collect that much.

"Are you in a hurry to leave and go look for monsters? The dinner pot should be on at Nona's." Thomas suggested.

Karl shrugged and looked at the others for their response. "I think that should be fine. One day of delay isn't going to make a huge difference."

The Dwarves led them deep into the mountain, where they found a solid stone Inn, obviously one of the original structures of the city, as it was carved straight from the mountain, and not built inside an artificial cavern.

It was clearly made for Dwarves, but once Karl transformed back to his natural state, and Ophelia returned to human, they all fit well enough.

Thomas rubbed the back of his neck and blushed slightly. "Sorry, I might have forgotten that you're all so much taller than we are. But the food here is spectacular, it's totally worth it, even if you're a bit cramped at the table.

But I have to say, it's surprising to see everyone looking human. Much different than your usual appearance."

Ophelia nodded and flexed her fingers. "It feels weird to be a human. My fingers are all wrong. But I fit in the chair, and that's the important part."

Thomas chuckled. "I take it that you don't use your human form often? That's uncommon for a Werebear."

Ophelia shrugged. "I'm also a Bear Totem Berserker. The bear is the source of my power, so I rarely bother to leave that form. Plus, it blends in better when I'm among the Demons at home in Drodh."

Thomas was about to say something in response, when the conversation of a group walking in got everyone's attention.

"Looks like Lord Bomgon is probing for soft spots again. First he went after Drodh, now he's going after Unzatharb and the ships in the channel. If I didn't know better, I would think that he lost something, the way that his fleet is spreading out." The Dwarf was loudly informing his partners.

"Aye, they've been all over the coast of Gabil as well. Not attacking inland, but sailing the coast and attacking ships. If I didn't know that they were thousands of years old, I would think they were a new civilization, mapping the shoreline for the first time." His partner agreed.

Karl frowned. What could the undead be up to?

Chapter 939 Spawns Here Too

The Undead were definitely up to something, that much was clear to anyone who had been offshore in the last few weeks. It didn't appear to be about loot, they were still striking at whatever came close to them, not hunting high-value targets.

And it didn't appear to be about numbers, as they weren't taking excessive numbers of prisoners either.

So, the mystery of their goals faded into the background, and the conversation turned to what could be done about the increasingly high numbers of monster spawns.

While that was a threat that the Golden Dragon Nation had been used to for many years now, it was new to the Dragon Isles, and the nation of Gabil, or the Gabilese Theocracy, as the Dwarves in Bara jokingly called it, was in bad shape.

They were already a low population area, with most of their cities and major roads running along the coast. So, there were many instances where they didn't even know there was a problem until the number of monsters got high enough that they started to spread out and threaten villages hundreds of kilometres from their starting point. At that point, the original portal was long since closed, leaving the monsters behind with no actions to be taken except to minimize the threat.

But while Gabil was mostly a Dwarven nation, there were entire villages of monster species living there as well.

To say that the Ogre villages were less than pleased when insane Ogres showed up and started to attack them without listening to reason would be an understatement. But it also created friction and distrust between the monster villages and the Dwarves that they were used to trading with.

If the vanguard of the convoy wasn't someone that the guard personally recognized, they would be on guard against attack, and everyone's first response was to treat them with suspicion, despite having been neighbours for decades or centuries.

Some groups got over it, others took it very personally.

Oddly, the Naga Tribes, who were not known for their hospitality or social nature to begin with, were among those who took it the best. 'A sane Naga and a crazy Naga look the same from a distance' they had said.

There were some suspicions that a few of the Monster populated villages had used the monster spawns as an excuse to settle old grudges, but so far, nobody had managed to prove anything of the sort.

"So, if we just wander around the inland areas, and stop to talk to the villages, we should be able to find the worst of the problems?" Karl asked as the waitress brought out a skillet full of honey soaked cornbread for them to snack on.

One of the Dwarven locals nodded. "That would be the easiest way. There are roads, of a sort, connecting them, so it's not hard to get from one to another. But where you find damage to the roads, you'll most likely find a monster spawn.

They seem to have something against all forms of development."

Karl nodded. "The monster spawns are known to attack buildings as well. And it's not always monsters. I have heard of some that were magical beasts as well, but just as insane as the rest."

The Dwarves shrugged. "It's hard to tell unless we actually see them appear. There are plenty of things in the wilderness that can drive the animals insane. Including the Undead."

Dana chuckled. "So basically, it's hard to tell if the root cause is the spawns, or if there are other creatures driving them insane, so for the most part, the beast attacks get written off as a general threat, and not part of this phenomenon?"

Thomas nodded. "Exactly. But if you head towards the middle of Gabil, you will find plenty of Trolls and Satyrs living in small villages. They're easier for most groups to get along with than the north.

The closer that you get to the lake, the more lizard species you'll find. You have a Naga Queen with you, so it might not be bad, but they aren't big on sharing their troubles with outsiders.

They believe that it makes their warriors look weak, and weakness means invasion. So, if you ask them about trouble, you'll just be told that there isn't any, or that their people have taken care of it already, even when that is clearly not true.

It's a bit of a running headache for their Nation's armies, I'm told.

But you will also find more dragon clerics there, and you can ask them. To the east, taking up most of the middle of this island, is Sholaha, and it's run by the dragonkin. Mostly full of the various monster species, but usually affiliated with one of the dragon gods."

"I recall that there were tournaments there as well." Karl noted, and the Dwarves all began to laugh.

"Ah yes, the tournaments. That's all Totem and Mythic Ranked, for entrance to their dungeons, though. Even if you might be able to win, you don't qualify to enter yet." The Paladin explained with a huff of laughter.

Karl shrugged. "It sounded tempting, I'm not going to lie. But I can wait until I reach Totem Ranked. That shouldn't be a problem for me to do in the next year or two."

Charlie slapped his sons on the back. "See boys? That's the sort of attitude you should have. Surpass your old man and make it to Totem Ranked. None of this being satisfied with your power level, even if you're happy with your Rank in the Holy Order."

Tessa gave him a curious look. "You're paladins by religion and not just by System Class? That's surprising"

The four Dwarves all nodded. "Followers of the great god Thorin, lord of the Mountains. The only remaining Dwarven God, so far as we know. The rest all joined one of the other pantheons, and over the years the Dwarves forgot about them.

But not the Indomitable Lord.

You know, it is said that he once walked beside the World Dragon, back when he was a mere Immortal, before he ascended to Divinity. So, perhaps the Dwarves and the

Dragons were destined to be connected."

Tessa smiled. "And not just because both dragons and Dwarves like to live in mountains."

Chapter 940 Darklight +1

Late that evening, Karl and the others had returned to the same Inn that they had stayed at the previous evening, for one last night of rest before leaving.

"How do you plan to go west? The road runs northwest into the city of Khizdila before you'll find a secondary road running west into Gabil. And that is a four-day journey, all the way up to Nulnalgat." The waitress asked as they made plans for the journey.

"We have the services of a Thunderbird, and there is a black dragon among us. So, I was intending to simply fly straight west until we saw signs of our target." Karl suggested.

The stout young Dwarven woman nodded. "Just be sure to dress the ladies nice and warm. If you're going to fly high enough to get up above the mountains, the air will get mighty cold.

Once you get to the Narabar river valley, the mountains will mostly end, giving way to the craggy hills of the west country. If you're going straight west, the border shouldn't be far from where the hills flatten out to badlands and desert."

"Who named these places?" Ophelia muttered, struggling to pronounce half of the words that the Dwarf was saying.

The waitress chuckled. "They're in Hill Dwarf. It's a rough sounding tongue, a creole of Dwarven and Serpent with a bit of Orcish thrown in for spice. But, as they're still all over the island, nobody ever tried to mess with their city and river names.

Besides, they picked names that the locals could pronounce, and many of them are lizardfolk or dragon descended.

Tessa took out a map of the region and showed it to the waitress. "Is there anywhere here that you would recommend that we go to check in with the locals and ask about the targets we want to hunt?"

The woman pointed at the icon for a medium-sized city near the border, close to the southern shores of the island.

"Don't stop there. Shatholaled, better known as the Sheit Hole, is a filthy place full of bandits and merchants. As you're flying, you could stop in at Barukth. That's a hundred kilometres north, but about the same distance by air from Bara.

That one is mostly Hill Dwarves and beastkin, so it's a bit rowdy, but they'll give you good directions on where there has been trouble.

If you run into issues, stop at the Weaponsmith and ask for Iggy. He's an old Royal Guard, and he won't send you astray." She insisted.

"A friend of yours?" Ophelia asked.

The waitress shook her head. "Not personally. But I have met all his sons. They're Royal Guards as well, on deployment in the west country at the moment."

"Are there any names I might be able to pronounce?" Ophelia asked with a smile.

The waitress smirked and gave her a conspiratorial wink. "Aye. If you go west down the road from Barukth, you will get to Banar. Now, either of those can be pronounced with a Werebear's huff and roar, so you should be fine on that front. But after that, it will start getting harder again.

Where are you stopping the night? The border is close to six hundred kilometres from here."

Everyone turned to Karl, who simply shrugged. "If we don't get distracted, that's an easy day for our ride, as well as for Nachtia here. I don't see why we can't just go all the way to Barukth for the night."

The black dragon snorted in annoyance. If she had her choice, she would be napping in the sun in the tiny space, not flying through the frigid air of a five thousand metre high mountain pass.

But that wasn't information that the waitress needed.

The waitress went to serve another table, and Karl turned to Nachtia.

"Before we go, I have a question for you. Would you like to officially join the Darklight Host? You are a skilled team member, and a valuable asset to the Guild, so I would like to formally ask you to join us."

The dragon smiled, and her eyes flashed black as her draconic instincts took over for

a moment. Even Black Dragons, who were so often shunned and lived alone, yearned for a place to belong.

"Yes, very much yes. It would be an honour to join your Guild,"

(Guild Member added) Nachtia

Lotus pulled her into a celebratory hug, and Ophelia laughed. "You'll never escape from the cuddle monster now."

Nachtia's soft laughter had a haunting echo that caught the attention of many of the morning diners.

"A small hazard of living with green dragon clerics. But at least I am safe for her to cuddle. After all, their most common cause of death is trying to pet things that they should not." She insisted.

Karl could see that. While Lotus was more than a little flaky, even Doug seemed like the sort that just might try to pet a Dire Bear to see what happened. Possibly while stoned.

"If anyone needs to send goods or collect anything from the Guild Bank, I recommend that you do it now. We'll be getting further away every day, and I don't know how far the range extends." Karl reminded them.

Mostly, that would be an issue for him and Remi, as they were the ones who were usually interacting with the shop inventory every day. But the Guild Shop had plenty of items ready, and Karl had already made an Epic Grade sword with [Holy Item] and [Flaming Body] on it to give to the Auction house this month.

A holy flaming sword was suitably impressive looking, and with the issues Drodh had been having with the Undead, it would probably be in high demand.

That should be enough to get them by, as long as there were no custom orders while they were out of range of the shop.

But that also raised another question in Karl's mind. At what point would they move far enough northwest that they would be in range of Supreme Lady Matilda's Guild House in Cyhosasa?

Once they were, they should be able to access the main Guild Bank again, and then Davis could transfer the items to the Guild Shop's inventory.