

Beast Master 941

Chapter 941 Over the Ridge

Once they left the restaurant, Dana nudged Karl and gave a deliberate look at the crowd near the outer ledges. They couldn't open the Tiny World there and risk

someone thinking it was a portal.

Common courtesy was to allow people travelling to the same area when you happened to open a portal to pass through, and it would be awkward to explain that it was actually a separate space, capable of supporting life.

That was not a common sort of skill, and there were still enough powerful people around that Karl couldn't rule out one of them trying to kidnap him to force him to teach them the way of making the [Tiny World].

He hadn't been too concerned about it with the Dragons, as they only had to ask the Blue Dragons at the Libraries if they wanted to know the answer. But others would not have that same level of access to information that an Ancient Dragon of the Dragon Church had.

Karl turned them down a narrow alleyway, and opened the Tiny World across an archway, so they could walk through without looking suspicious.

Once everyone was inside, Karl closed the portal and kept walking down the alley, as naturally as possible.

If someone had been watching, it would be a mystery where the others went. Unless they thought there was a hidden entrance to something in that alley. But if there wasn't, it would just look like an outsider taking a shortcut to get to the light of the mountain's surface.

Karl made his way through the side streets and to the outer ledges, where the crowds were even heavier. That could be a bit of an issue for departure, but Hawk had a plan. He simply appeared a hundred metres from the mountain in the open air, and circled, while Karl used [Swims Through Air] to walk over to him and take a seat.

"Oi, now that's just cheating" Karl heard one of the dwarves complaining as he walked off the ledge.

"Looks like fun, though. Can you imagine the look on my wife's face if I just walked off the ledge and didn't fall?"

"Aye, pure disappointment."

Karl missed the rest of the conversation as Hawk turned west and gained speed.

The warning that the server had given them the previous evening became relevant instantly. In front of them, only a few kilometres to the west, was a spine-like ridge of mountains that extended to the ocean, and then off past the horizon.

[Hawk, go south along the shore line, and follow it until we're past the mountains. Then we can come back northwest to the course we had planned.] Karl instructed.

It would be a few hundred kilometres of extra distance to cover if they simply went around the mountain range's southern edge, but Hawk was fast, and they could still make their destination by dark.

[I can fly that high, it's not a problem. The air gets a bit thin, but my flames will keep us warm.] Hawk offered.

[Alright, then let's take the direct route. Maybe we will see something interesting in the mountains. Those hills are pretty steep, and with no roads running over them, there might be some hidden treasures out there.] Karl agreed.

Hawk climbed as they approached the mountain pass, a portion that was only a little lower than the rest of the visible ridgeline. But by the time that he was over the peaks, the elevation was making it hard for even him to keep climbing.

Karl quietly buffed Hawk with [Swims Through Air] to make his flight smoother as they passed through the wall of clouds that were being pushed over the peaks, and their altitude finally began to increase again, putting them safely over the hills.

How and why there was such an impressive range of mountains in the centre of an island was a mystery to Karl. They weren't heaved like volcanic mountains, and there was no visible fault line like a mountain range formed by plate tectonics.

But as Hawk passed over the other side, Karl saw that the wall was nearly vertical, and there was a deep slash in the ground, where a river flowed.

If he followed the double ridge of mountains, and then the river, the answer became clear.

The entire five hundred and some kilometres of steep mountains were caused by a single powerful strike at the ground. Something of unfathomable power had split the ground past the horizon, and bent the land upwards.

The scar had cut so deeply that the upper layers were mostly shale and sandstone, but the river bottom was filled with volcanic rock. If Karl's understanding was correct, the cut must have been kilometres deep when it was first made, and then the majority of it filled with magma from whatever underground pocket had been hit.

Hawk listened in to Karl's logic, and examined the ground.

[That's impressive power. One day, we will be able to do that. Make our own mountain range.] He bragged.

Karl smiled and patted the feathers beside him. [I'm sure we will make it there one day. But that sort of power has to be a Demigod or something. I don't think that even the Chaos Dragon could make a mountain range in one hit.]

The second ridge wasn't quite as high as the first, so Hawk began to descend to an altitude where it was easier to fly, but Karl kept the flight skill active to make it easier. [Swims Through Air] wasn't a fast movement skill on its own, but for a flying beast like Hawk, it was a boost to his already impressive flight abilities, and once they were under four thousand metres, the Ghostfire Thunderbird could really show off his prowess.

In under an hour, they were coming up on the Narabar river, where Hawk spotted the most glorious sight that he had ever seen.

[There are Mice. Whole armies of MICE!]

Karl laughed and leapt up off Hawk's back to float in the sky.

[Go hunt for your lunch. Start with the ones that are harassing that farmer. I can see that he's trying to defend his fields against them.]

Chapter 942 MICE!

Hawk dove towards the farm, and the Dwarves working the field looked up in horror at the massive flaming bird coming for them and their livestock.

Then he banked hard and let loose a stream of blue fire through the Giant Stone Rats. Fur burned away, and anguished howling filled the air, even thousands of metres away, where Karl was watching the scene.

The beasts put up earth barriers to defend themselves, or tunnelled underground. But the farmers were ready for that tactic, and an [Earthquake] type spell collapsed the tunnels and forced the rats back to the surface.

The Giant Stone Rats were a Royal Ranked menace to Dwarven society with their earth magic and voracious appetite. But they also left networks of tunnels near the surface that were a threat to livestock, who often stepped on a shallow tunnel and fell through. That could cause broken limbs, or even trap young animals.

That alone was enough to put the species on the most hated beasts list for farmers everywhere.

However, as Karl watched the battle, he realized that calling these things 'rats' was more of an epithet than a description. They were quite furry, with no tails. More of a hamster than a rat.

Not that Hawk cared. They were still a form of mice to him.

He was collecting bodies by the dozen as he roasted them from above, and he had put out a few [Hellstorm] vortexes on the road so that they wouldn't damage the crops.

Cara was laughing in her space as Hawk went wild, trying to hunt as many of the Giant Stone Rats as he could before they all ran away.

They had already started to scatter, and Hawk was having to hurl fireballs further by the second, but the farmers were celebrating the surprise intervention by a passing bird monster.

They hadn't noticed Karl still floating in the sky, they were too focused on Hawk, so they were under the impression that Hawk was just a wild beast passing by.

Plus, Karl was so far above the battle, that he was only a black spot in the sky, which any normal person would assume was some sort of bird, and not a flying humanoid. [That's as many as I can get. The rest are hiding too deep.] Hawk decided, then collected the last of his snacks and turned back to the sky, where Karl was waiting for him.

[Do you have enough to last you a while now?]

[At least two weeks. They're only Royal Ranked, so they're not very filling, but the taste is superb. I can use them as snacks between meals.]

Karl moved himself into position in front of Hawk's wings as the bird passed underneath, and they were off on their mission to the west again, passing over the Narabar river.

With the mountain range giving way to craggy hills, the number of farms and wild beasts increased, but most of them were no threat to the farmers. Eliminating all the wildlife caused more problems than it solved, so the Dwarves only dealt with the most destructive or dangerous of them, and let the others live their lives.

Sometimes with encouragement to stay away from the fields and pastures.

The stone houses of the locals dotted the landscape, though Karl saw very few fences, with most of the Dwarven Goats being free-range. Only the pigs were usually penned in.

Most of an hour later, they passed to the north of a stone monolith of a city that intrigued Karl. It looked like the Dwarves had fully carved out a mountain into a city, but it wasn't positioned anywhere that a mountain belonged, so it was most likely an entirely magical construct.

The map said that it should be the city of Bundin, and he made a mental note to come see it if they flew back this way again.

As lunch approached, Karl and Hawk started a new game, where Karl would hurl one of the Giant Stone Rats into the distance in front of them, so Hawk could attack it and get his meal without stopping.

Rae was thinking that it wouldn't hurt to have Hawk miss a meal or two. The bird was getting pudgy under his flaming feathers. But he was doing all the hard work, so there was no harm in snacking while he exercised.

As they moved further west, the ground became more arid, and the temperature steadily increased, creating a headwind as well as an up draft that Hawk could glide

on.

It wasn't a full on desert yet, but Karl could see in the distance that they were leaving the lush tropical regions behind them.

[I see bears.] Hawk happily informed Karl not long after the land had begun to change. [Lower your altitude, I think that city down there should be Barukth.] Karl instructed.

By his best guess, it was about thirty thousand people, and Karl could see many animal ears among the mostly Trollish heads working the farms between them and the city.

[Should we let the others out?] Hawk asked.

[When we're a ten-minute walk from the city. You know that we will get distracted by something if we let them out too early.] Karl joked.

Hawk landed on the road in front of the last farm before the city, outside of the area that the city guard was patrolling, and Karl whistled into the Tiny World to let the others know that they were at their destination.

"Give us ten minutes, we're finishing a game of cards!" Tessa shouted back, not realizing that Karl could hear everything that went on in the space if he wanted to.

"Alright, I will ask the guards about incidents in the area, and I will let you know when we're inside the city. Do you want me to get a room right away? Or should we check out the market first?" Karl replied.

"Call us before you enter the city. Lotus wants to see the beastkin."

Chapter 943 Cautious Bunnies

Karl flagged down the first group of guards that he came across and stopped to ask them a few basic questions.

"Sorry to delay your patrol, I just came in from Bara, and my group will be looking to hunt the overflow from the creature spawns." Karl greeted the massive man leading the group.

A small, lop eared beastkin man behind the guard team leader poked him and leaned forward to whisper in his ear.

{That man is dangerous. Something he has is an imminent threat.} The rabbit-kin man whispered.

Karl shrugged. "I have that effect on some people, but I assure you that I'm not here with any bad intentions."

The whole guard team gave him matching doubting looks.

"Alright, I can see how my assurances won't really settle your minds. But I suspect that I know what your team member has sensed. Might I bring a few of my team members to our location? The link between them and me is likely what is causing the sense of danger." Karl offered.

"Nice and slow, no sudden movements. The rabbits have impeccable danger sense. If he says you're dangerous, you are dangerous."

Karl carefully removed Lotus and Rae from the space, and the Cleric immediately squealed in joy.

"Bunny! You found a bunny!"

"AH! Green Dragon Cleric!"

"Wait, come back!"

The rabbit had much more powerful legs than Karl had expected, and the man had vaulted over a dozen metres backwards when Lotus appeared, but now that he was out of immediate danger, his eyes were locked on Rae.

"That is the danger. That's not anything that should exist in this world." The rabbit man insisted.

"Sister Rae is really nice, though. She makes hammocks for us to nap in." Lotus insisted, while the guards tried not to laugh.

"So, the danger was a Green Dragon Cleric and a goth Demoness?" The team leader asked.

The man on his left shook his head. "No, the threat is definitely that man and the woman in black. They have some sort of aura ability. Do you not feel it?"

The burly beastkin shrugged. "Nothing unusual for an adventurer"

Rae snapped her fingers and gave a sharp toothed smile as she realized. "It's the passive aura. We both have a bloodline suppression passive effect available, but currently not in use. Those with significantly lesser potential than we have will feel a sense of oppression. It's not active, but I don't think that it turns all the way off."

The rabbit man nodded. "I think that's it. The one called Karl is absolutely terrifying, and the one named Rae isn't much less oppressive, but the aura of danger that she gives off is much higher.

I think that might be because she is a predatory species which cats rabbits, though."

Rae shrugged. "Food is food. But I don't generally eat rabbit people, just rabbits and other things that get stuck in my web!"

The team leader gave her a confused look, and Karl shrugged, while Rae pretended to be oblivious, as she was enjoying their terror.

"Lady Rae is a Blood Destruction Demonic Spider. The aura is innate to her species, so anything that couldn't reach at least. Totem Rank without the System will feel the effect to some degree." Karl explained.

"So, she has Totem Ranked potential?" The team leader asked.

"She should be able to make Mythic Rank without too many issues. I'm guessing that your Lieutenant is from a less predatory species than you are?" Karl tried.

The leader nodded. "A fox. Compared to a Grizzly Beastman, they're certainly less dangerous without the System, though they are still predators."

Everyone was so concerned about Rae that they had completely forgotten about Lotus, who was creeping up on the rabbit man with a cookie in her hand, as if approaching a skittish animal.

The man turned to stare at her, as if he was looking at an idiot.

"You know that luring grown men with cookies doesn't work like it does on small animals, right?" He asked.

"They're cranberry oatmeal." Lotus replied, slowly making her way forward.

The guard paused, clearly tempted, then reached out his hand.

He took the cookie, and Lotus petted his ears before he gave her an annoyed look and retreated again.

The rest of his team was definitely working hard not to laugh now, but the man was very pleased with his cookies, and Lotus had gotten what she came for. In her mind, the adventure was complete, no more adventure needed until they found more beastkin.

Karl brought the rest of the group out of the separate space, so there were no surprises for the local city guards, and the rabbit's attention snapped in his direction

again.

"Oh, false alarm. I thought we were being attacked, but it's just a black dragon. Everyone else here is good, boss. Only those two auras are giving me the creeps. The green-haired Paladin definitely isn't a threat." The rabbit man insisted.

That made everyone in Karl's group laugh.

"You have a point. Thor is probably the least threatening person that I know. He's good to have in a fight, though" Karl agreed.

"Invincible Bulwark Behemoth." Thor clarified.

The team leader did a double take, and looked Thor over again. "That is quite the interesting group that you have assembled. As we've generally confirmed your safety, I believe that you wanted to know about the monster spawns, correct?"

There haven't been many around the city so far, the issues are worse in the centre of the nation and the north. But fifty kilometres north, there have been reports of insane

Goblins.

Imagine that, Goblins with enough courage to attack farms?

They're not strong, but plentiful, and the farmers are willing to pay a bounty for each

left ear that you bring them.

Other than that, you'll likely have to go further north a couple of villages to get a

better report."

Karl nodded. "Thanks. With a group like this, it might be a bit of a waste to take out a bunch of Common and Awakened Rank monsters, but I can certainly see how they would be a menace to the farmers.

After all, everyone needs to sleep at some point, and they work long days."

The guard team leader nodded. "Exactly that. Welcome to Barukth. I will give you a clearance token for your group now, it will get you through the gate without a secondary inspection."

Chapter 944 Barukth

The token turned out to be a small stick with the number of party members and rank written on it with ink, and then a brief shorthand note that Karl assumed was their descriptions in a local code.

But when the bunny girl at the gate began to giggle, Karl realized that it was most likely a warning about Lotus, and not anything to do with their actual threat level to the city.

Now Lotus was much more calm as they entered the city, as she had already gotten a dose of fluffy bunny ears to calm her down, and she could happily admire everything within the city.

Interestingly, it turned out that there were far fewer Trolls inside the city than on the farms, and the population was a little over half Dwarven, with the rest being almost all beastkin.

Fortunately for Karl and the others, that also meant that the city was sized for larger bodies, as the larger beastkin species were often close to two metres tall.

But it also meant that Ophelia's bad luck streak was back, and she was getting all the attention of a supermodel in the slums, with heads snapping to watch her go by. "This is ridiculous." She muttered as Lotus dragged the group into a pastry shop.

"You could transform back. With a hat on, nobody can tell a human from a beastkin except by smell." Lotus suggested.

Ophelia growled softly. "I would if I could, but every time I get annoyed, I just switch back to bear form."

"You're having problems with your transformations?" Karl asked.

If there was some sort of drawback from remaining transformed, he should make sure that Thor was aware, as he was the one most often in humanoid form.

Ophelia shook her head. "It's a berserker thing. Before I rage, I instinctively transform. But when I'm in a bad mood, it doesn't take much to trigger the automatic rage, which triggers the passive transformation.

Basically, having someone stare at my ass like that makes me change into bear form, which only encourages them."

Karl chuckled. "I remember once that before the awakening, you wanted to be a magical girl idol. Who would have thought that you're still the idol of the group, even as a Berserker?"

The hostess at the bakery giggled at their exchange while she waited to seat the group.

"He has a point. I don't know how you thought that you would escape that fate, your bear form is absolutely stunning. It's almost like you have a charisma charm active, but I don't sense any magic active on you, other than some sort of regeneration spell." The cat - cared beastkin woman joked.

That would be [Void Body], active thanks to the Epic Guard, who was currently lounging in the Tiny World, waiting for something interesting to happen.

Since the spell passively granted its protection to the whole group as long as it was active, Karl never really dismissed the advanced Golem, and just let it do whatever it wanted while they were not working.

Sometimes it would shadow him, sometimes it would lounge in the Tiny World. But both were enough to keep it immediately at hand if there was trouble.

The waitress brought them out an assortment of fruit juices and baked goods, which caused Lotus to give her a confused look.

"No fancy coffee?" She asked.

The waitress laughed. "We only have unsweetened Hill Dwarf Coffee. Trust me, you do not want that. If you would like, we can put Dwarven Rum in the fruit juice to make a punch?"

Tessa made a dismissive gesture. "No, it's better that we do not get the Green Dragon Cleric drunk before dinner."

Lotus looked at the plate of pastries, jams and spreads in front of her. Was this not dinner? It looked like dinner to her.

"We have meat pies as well, if you want to have a full meal." The waitress offered, then handed Tessa a menu with expertly hand drawn pictures of everything they sold.

"In that case, bring everyone a meat pie or two. We will sort out which ones we like." Tessa insisted.

The staff brought out dozens of small meat pies, fresh from the oven, only a few minutes later. That was a meal that should keep everyone happy, including Tessa's instinctive need to stop Lotus from eating nothing but sweets for dinner.

While they ate, Karl checked the Guild Store, and found that he could still reach the inventory from where they were. He couldn't reach the Cyhosasa branch from here, though they were on the same island.

They were close to halfway between the two, but the scale of the maps wasn't precise enough for Karl to tell exactly where the halfway point was. What they had wasn't one large continental map, but a stack of smaller regional maps, and all of the scales were either different or not specified at all.

Once they had eaten, Karl led the group out towards the city's market. According to what he had overheard, there were few retail store type shops here. Instead, the Dwarves preferred to work in a private workshop, then bring their goods to the market when it was time to sell.

That way, nobody bothered them while they were working, and they could make the most of their time, with the market day being a form of day off from their actual work. It was a different system from what Karl was used to, but it seemed to work for them. The setup also meant that the market changed day by day, so they could find new things every time they visited the city. That was an opportunity for the Darklight Host, if they did eventually want to expand to new markets.

Spreading their goods across the Dragon Isles would help build up a reputation that would ensure that they were welcome, no matter where they went. A hidden benefit of being a crafting guild as opposed to an adventuring one, which the locals would only remember the existence of when there was trouble.

Chapter 945 Good Friends

While Karl had thought that exploring a new city would be a relaxing experience, he had forgotten one vital factor.

Who he was travelling with.

Moments after they entered the market, Rae was gone, off to haggle with a dress merchant, using cloth as a tool for barter.

The people here would most likely accept the Bara Gold Coins that they had gotten from the Dungeon, but for Rae, it was more efficient to offer the dressmaker fine silk in exchange for mundane clothing with new styles that she did not already possess the patterns for.

And she was not afraid to drive a hard bargain.

Karl could see that the Dwarven woman running the stall had an iron hard expression on her face, and the crowd was avoiding the area, as Rae was letting her aura slip.

But their words were still civil as they argued about the relative worth of the dresses made of regular cloth versus the value of fine silk.

There really was no need for Rae to go so hard on the woman, as the final price was likely to be one bolt of silk either way. But Rae was determined to get one more dress out of the bargain.

When the old woman began to get annoyed with her haggling, Rae relented, and the deal was finalized, then she moved on to a stall selling leather satchels and purses.

The man running the stall gave the dressmaker a pleading look, but the old woman simply smirked at him and left him to Rae's tender mercies.

Karl suspected that he was not going to get off as easily as the first vendor had, but he had no use for silk, and they were arguing over the price in gold and silver coins.

"Rae is going to traumatize the vendors." Dana noted as the rest of the group went to look at stalls selling bulk stone for crafting, as well as rare magical herbs that Remi could use, or Thor thought might be tasty if he grew them in his space.

A disappointing amount of the product was dried, but some was fresh, and many of the plants were harvested with flowers in full bloom, and still had their seeds.

The seeds themselves were part of the medicinal value of the plants, but for Remi and Thor, they were also the best way to regrow the rare herbs and plants.

Butterfly nudged Karl's mind, indicating a lonely stick set aside in the vendor's stall and labelled {Branch of Rejuvenation Bush}.

"How much for the branch, plus these six Underdark Roses, and the death cap fungus?" Karl asked, picking items that he thought Butterfly might approve of

The Death Cap fungus was one of the plants that she had picked from the Bara Dungeon, but there wasn't much of it there, so another cap full of spores might be valuable to her.

The roses were just pretty, jet black with blood-red rims on the petals.

"You have much less expensive tastes than your Naga friend. Sixteen silver for the lot." The shopkeeper insisted.

"She is an Alchemist. I am a gardener. Our needs are somewhat different." Karl joked, then passed over the coins.

The shopkeeper frowned when he saw that Karl gave him dungeon silver, not local currency, or even Bara coins. But he didn't argue about the value of the metals, and just let it go.

As they moved through the market, Karl caught a bit of conversation between a pair of dragonkin mages that immediately captured his attention.

"Stay away from Azil. The whole area is crawling with undead. They're not attacking the city, just spreading out inland. I don't know what they're searching for, but they still kill anyone who gets close." One of them quietly warned the other.

The second mage nodded. "I just brought a group here from the southern tip, and they're there as well. Nobody ever sees them land, but there is dead grass, and multiple sightings of Necromancers.

The Trollish Shamans said that they think someone put the fear of the gods into the Necromancers, and they're hiding. But I think that they're hunting for something." Another mage, wearing similar robes to the two dragonkin, but with his hood up so Karl couldn't see the species, stopped beside them and shook his head.

"I managed to overhear a group of Necromancers the other day. They're not searching for something. They've already found it, and they're mapping the extent of the effect. I think it's a System Related change or item. But they were being all cryptic about it." He added.

"Well, that's not creepy at all. Do you think that it might be something that happened within their nation?"

The third mage shook his head. "I think it's continent wide, and they're looking for the epicentre. The undead are sensitive to life magic, including the system. If my guess is right, they're trying to find the lost System Stones, or something similar."

That tidbit was enough to intrigue many sensitive ears nearby.

Finding the System Stones, or something else that could boost the effects of the System, would get them the sort of power and recognition that the average person could only dream about. But it might also boost their growth to unprecedented levels. The Death Cap fungus was one of the plants that she had picked from the Bara Dungeon, but there wasn't much of it there, so another cap full of spores might be valuable to her.

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Karl kept moving, and didn't hear any more about the undead, or the monster spawns. But the general mood in town was somewhat depressed. The crops had been poor last year, due to lower than usual river flow, as everything needed to be irrigated.

With the river levels low, most of the canals wouldn't flood. That meant the crops didn't get watered for months at a time, and nothing grew.

And that was a money making opportunity for Karl and the Darklight Host. All he had to do was task the crew at the Guild House, and he would have the means to make a fortune in a matter of minutes.

Chapter 946 Dwarven Goods

After a few hours, everyone gathered again, and plans were made to spend the evening, then set up shop the next day so that they could peddle a large number of water creation items to the local farmers.

The ladies were busy making statues for Karl to inscribe, as they needed a spell effect added to them to create enough water to do entire fields or irrigation canals. But they already had a load of Commander Rank [Water Creation Rings] made, which could fill a large water barrel in minutes, which would be enough to water a garden or small field manually.

That meant finding a place to stay, and preferably one with adventurers from the region staying there as well. If they could get some more local news and updates, they might have a better idea of where they should be looking.

Other than just heading northwest into the middle of the country, where nobody had been clearing the spawns, for lack of local population.

The problem was that nobody that they could find was travelling further inland, except to the next few cities on the road.

It wasn't just that there were no major cities in the region, there was apparently no travel at all in the interior. The desert was inhospitable at the best of times, and then that gave way to a monster filled wilderness for only a short distance before turning into swamps and thick jungle.

The problem that Karl's team had with that was that the description of the interior of the continent did not even vaguely match what was on the maps that they had.

There should be some swamp in the northeast of the country, where the Lizardfolk were living. But it should not take up nearly half the country.

Nor should the desert be so large that it nearly reached the swamps.

In short, the information that they were getting from the adventurers in the Barukth taverns and Inns was completely useless, as it was quite possible that none of them actually knew what was there, and if it was changing, they didn't go often enough to see the changes in real time.

So, Karl and company settled on an Inn by the market that had a good nightlife, and a helpful Innkeeper.

"Do you know how I get a stall for tomorrow? Is it possible on such short notice?" Karl asked.

"Not a big deal, there are usually a bunch unbooked. I will send Wilma over to book a table for you with the guards. They'll give you a number card to find the booth to set up in the morning.

What were you selling?" The ginger bearded Dwarf asked.

"Water charms. We heard that there is a bit of a drought going on, and our crafters at the Guild House in Drodh make rings to create water, as well as some statues that can create a flood to fill irrigation canals." Karl explained.

"Exactly how much water can you get from the rings? Enough to fill a soup pot? Purifying water for the stew and ale making is one of the most time-consuming parts of our day." The Innkeeper asked.

"For a Commander Rank ring, it will make about a hundred litres a minute, unless you have good affinity with the Water Element. If you just stand there, you can fill an entire brewing vat eventually, but it wouldn't be a fast process. Unless you're making a small batch every day to refill the barrels that come empty.

Do you make your own ale in house or buy it from the local brewery?" Karl replied. "We make ours. There is a small brewery in the basement that makes all our ale and wine. But I buy the hard liquor. That's never been our family specialty.

Most of the Inns in town buy their ale and wine, but we're one of the oldest, and it is tradition. We have some imported as well, for those who like a particular flavour, but it's more expensive than the house barrels."

The Dwarf considered the options for a few minutes, then nodded. "I don't suppose that I could buy two of those rings in advance, could I? One for the Inn, and one for my sister. She lives at the edge of town, with a large garden that hasn't been getting any rain all summer."

Karl nodded. "That's not a problem. How does ten gold coins and one barrel of ale per ring sound to you?"

The Dwarf considered his funding, and his supply of ale.

"I can work with that. That sister of mine had better be appreciative, ten bloody gold coins spent on a present for her. That's a thousand dinners I have to serve to make it up." He grumbled, but Karl could tell that he wasn't actually mad about the situation.

Karl chuckled as the dwarf placed the gold on the table, then went into the basement to bring up two barrels of ale.

"Why are you trading him for ale?" Ophelia whispered once the Dwarf was out of sight. "Because these lands are largely Dwarven, and Dwarven Ale is supposed to be the best you can get. So, if we're going to make friends and host guests in our camp, it's best to have some liquor for them.

Getting ale from a trade for goods is a steal for us, and it saves on haggling" Karl explained.

Ophelia nodded. "So, it's just a matter of hospitality. That makes sense, as we're going into unknown lands. If we do meet any locals, it is clear that they don't do a lot of trading with this region."

Dana patted Ophelia on the shoulder and smiled. "Besides, we could use a nice barrel of ale for movie nights. I talked to one of the butterfly's illusionary Dwarves today in the Tiny World, and she's willing to put them on for us."

Ophelia smiled. "She will have all sorts of new stories soon, with us all travelling together. Butterfly does an incredible job of them."

Chapter 947 Vendor's Booth

The rooms were clean enough that nobody considered just going to the Tiny World for the night, and the team was up bright and early to head for stall 808, their

assigned spot for the day.

The stall was one near the core of the market, a prime location next to a number of magical reagent vendors and other high-value goods. That had to be deliberate, as the city guards had chosen the stalls for everyone, so they had caused this grouping.

Or, perhaps there were designated sections based on the trade goods you had. But either way, it worked out well for Karl and the ladies, who were already attracting attention even before they had started setting out the actual goods.

Rae had made a black silk cover for the rough wooden stall table, and then hung a thin white silk sheet over the top and sides, so they would have plenty of light, but less direct sunlight.

She didn't want anyone getting sunburned.

Rae knew full well that they would all heal instantly from sun damage, but it still seemed wrong to leave them standing in the sun all day. She had made hanging chairs, support poles, a nice stretched top coffee table. The booth was fully decorated, and ready for a comfortable day sitting around waiting for customers.

But that elaborate setup had caught the attention of the other vendors, and they were eager to find out where they could get some of this finery.

The booths were standard sized, other than the larger ones for the bulk food sales. So, if it worked in that booth, they could make it work in the others as well.

"Ladies, gentlemen. Might I ask if you are advertising these most lovely silk chairs? I could use a few of them for my booth." A mage from the alchemy stall beside them asked.

Rae shrugged. "They're not actually what we came to sell, but I can make you a few." She held out her hand, and webs spun in front of her, creating two Awakened Rank silk hanging chairs.

"There you go. No charge, just be comfortable." Rac insisted.

The alchemist bowed to her and hurried to go hang the chairs in his booth, which the apprentices were working to decorate.

Rae's work on their booth had upped the standard for the magical goods section as a whole, and as more of the booths put out decorative storefronts, the rest were forced to do the same, or risk looking shabby in comparison.

Normally, they didn't put much work in for a single day sales exhibition, but that was not Rae's way. Even if they were operating a travelling market, she would still put up a proper booth for the day.

Karl placed a dozen of the rings and two of the [Flooded Canals] statues out on a wooden tray, and then placed a barrier over them and the table so that they couldn't be stolen without great effort.

It was still early, so there weren't many shoppers in the market, but the other vendors had sent apprentices around to scope out the competition. If there were someone selling identical goods for less, they would either try to buy them out, or adjust their own pricing to match so that they didn't lose out on sales.

With that tactic, it didn't take long before every magical goods vendor was aware of the shop that was advertising [Water Creation and Assorted Magical Accessories], courtesy of the Darklight Host.

Karl had set out a few other items to go with the water creation rings. Cleaning charms carved from magical wood, a small stack of paper talismans that he had made to set off an alarm if a door was opened, and four [Gentle Childbirth] stone statues that had been made with the help of the two Orcish Druids back at the Guild House. At least, Karl assumed it was them, as the items were Commander Rank, and Dora could have done them at Royal Rank if she had made them herself. The fact that they were shaped like a seated pregnant Orc woman didn't give him much of a clue either way.

"Are we taking wagers on what sells first?" Lotus asked as she swung herself in one of the chairs.

"Winner gets to pick where we get lunch from." Tessa agreed.

That was a winning bet, no matter who actually won, and Lotus was in immediately.

"I think that it's going to be the Childbirth statue. Those ones sell out so fast once we put them on the shelves. Even the farmers like them because they work on livestock." She insisted.

Tessa shrugged. "I think it'll be one of the alarm talismans, simply because they're only a silver a piece, so they're an impulse purchase for browsing mages."

Dana shook her head. "We're in a desert. I think it will be the water creation rings first."

Rae and Karl looked at each other, and Karl motioned for her to go first.

"I will choose the cleaning rings, then. Which leaves Karl with the flooded canals statues, and everyone else out of luck."

Ophelia chuckled and shrugged. "Next time, we will have to put out enough different items for everyone to get a choice. But we trust you four to pick something good for lunch, and I already know that Lotus is going to pick ice cream and pastries."

Lotus frowned. "That's not what I had in mind at all. Well, maybe. There is a shop we passed by yesterday, just after eating, which sold all sorts of pies. They have a sweet potato and shredded pork pie that I have to know the taste of."

Which naturally meant that she would also be purchasing pies of the sweet and fruity varieties. So, while Ophelia wasn't completely right, she wasn't actually wrong, either. In the distance, bells began to ring, and Karl saw that all of the shopkeepers around them were suddenly at attention, now in business mode, and the casual atmosphere of the setup period was gone.

The market was open, and the bell seemed to have set off a tidal wave of housewives, as middle-aged female dwarves and beastkin filled the area.

Lotus was feeling good about her chances.

Chapter 948 First Sale

The outer areas of the market were the first to be swarmed, as they were the ones selling fresh produce, which the locals would want for their daily meals. Before anything else, the daily shopping needed to be done.

Then, as the initial wave of produce buyers and meat shoppers began to head back home, the other locals in need of goods began to spread through the market.

It was still quite early in the morning, so most of them would be doing their shopping before starting work for the day. But that was the best sort of customers for the market.

If you came before work, it was likely because you actually needed something, not because you wanted a break from work, and were browsing the market during lunch. A few shoppers passed by their stall

with curious looks, off to find healing herbs or other alchemical supplies. That was annoying Remi, who was working in the lab in the Tiny World.

They could be selling potions too, but they weren't.

That seemed somewhat unfair to her. She had plenty of stock. But they were only selling like four different kinds of items today, just testing the market.

The annoyance didn't last long, though. She had planted some of the new plants she had gotten at their last stop, and they were growing quickly in her space. With those, she could begin to experiment with new potion combinations, just to see what came out.

The anti-aging cream had been a brilliant failure, and Remi had high hopes that with a bit of runic infusion, she could come up with another item that would revolutionize a market.

Finally, someone stopped at the stall, and Lotus internally celebrated as she realized it was a very pregnant young feline beastkin with fluffy grey ears.

"What species does that birthing charm work on?" She asked quietly.

"All of them, excluding the undead and some spectral or elemental species. It works on Dwarves, beastkin, beasts of most sorts, including livestock and pets." Karl replied evenly.

"So, it should work on the Dwarven Mountain Goats?" She asked.

Karl nodded. "Indeed. It is Commander Rank, and even if the beast is much more powerful than that, the charm will work to prevent injury during childbirth."

She dug into her pocket, and Lotus was about to get up from her chair. Ophelia knew that she was going to offer the item at an extreme discount, both because the pregnant woman had fluffy ears, and because it would win her the wager. So, the berserker put a hand on the petite nature cleric and kept her seated.

There were price tags on everything, already reasonable, but Karl waited to see how steep of a discount the locals would start haggling at.

The market prices for such items might be very different here than what he was used to, as they had Trollish shamans all over the farmland. The trolls could use all sorts of magic, so they might be able to do the same sort of spell, which would greatly reduce the value of the items.

The only ones that Karl could guarantee were going to be highly valued were the water creation items, as there had been so much talk of drought.

The woman gave him a faint smile that showed the level of exertion just walking through the market took in her current state, even as an Awakened Rank beastkin.

"And how much water can these rings create? Enough to fill the farmhouse's reserve tank?"

Karl frowned. "I am not from the region, how large is the reserve tank?"

The woman shrugged. "About four barrels?"

So, about eight hundred litres.

"Yes, it will fill that in under ten minutes. Under five if you have some water magic of your own. Magical items work better when you already have an affinity for them." Karl agreed.

"Ten minutes from empty? Or from yesterday's use?"

Karl had no idea how much they used in a day.

"From empty. If you're not emptying it every day, then you will only need a few minutes for a partial refill every morning"

The customer nodded, making her ears bounce. "That is perfect. The tank is enough for a whole week's water, and we usually take the tank cart to the river to refill it if we don't get any rain. How pure is the water from the ring?"

Lotus giggled and Karl smiled. "One hundred percent pure. You see, it actually takes more magic to introduce impurities into magical water. The spell is purely water element, and it won't create anything but pure water."

That comment gave Rae a great idea. She could have them make an assassin's ring. Water Creation with an Overlord Ranked lethal toxin. Just a splash into a drink would be enough, or you could sip from a canteen, then poison it before passing it to your

target.

Diabolical, but effective. As long as they didn't sense the activation.

Maybe the idea needed refining.

The cat woman reached into her pocket and placed a small selection of uncut raw gems on the counter, then added one more.

"I can offer you this for the two items. She insisted.

Butterfly got excited about a clear gem, though it was only emitting a Commander Ranked magical signature. If it made the butterfly excited, it was probably an Illusion Elemental Stone of some sort, and that was incredibly rare.

Most likely, the woman didn't know what she had, or assumed that the stone was no more valuable than others of similar power levels. But to Karl, it was worth far more

than the trade.

The others were mostly Commander Ranked earth gems, but there was a single nature stone in there as well. That could be carved into a spell gem for a healing item. "You have a deal," Karl agreed, and took the purchased items out of the case.

The pregnant beastkin waddled away, and Lotus cast a long duration healing spell on her for good luck. She didn't look like she was going to make it out of the market without it, much less all the way to whatever farm she lived on.

But that left them with a small problem. There were two items in the first sale, so how did they decide who picked lunch?

Chapter 949 Bargaining

While Lotus and Dana argued over who would get to pick the spot for lunch, Karl attended to the next shopper to stop at their stall.

It was an elderly Dwarf with age worn boots and no shirt under his coveralls, exposing his bare arms, while his beard hid his upper chest.

"How can I help you this morning? We have a variety of items available, and more in our Guild Bank, if you need something that's not on display." Karl offered.

The Dwarf looked the items over, and smiled as he read some of the runes.

"Water. I want a spell that makes water, as much as you can." He insisted.

Karl gestured to the Overlord Ranked statue on the counter. "That's about as much water as I can make for you, without causing property damage, that is."

The filthy dwarf laughed. "Well, I suppose that would be a consideration if you were making enough. How much is that spell intended to make?"

"A thousand litres a second for one minute per activation. It takes a fair bit of mana to make it work, but it's designed to fill irrigation canals without causing them to overflow their banks.""

The Dwarf nodded, then smiled. "And if I asked you to make something that would be much more water, could you do it?"

"If you wanted to fill an entire lake behind a dam or something equally insane, I could personally create you about seven million litres a minute. But I don't have any material available that would stand up to a spell of that magnitude." Karl explained.

A few passing shoppers stopped to stare at Karl. "Did that translate wrong? I heard that as millions of litres. One of them commented.

The Trollish shaman beside him nodded. "I heard it that way too."

Karl smiled and focused on speaking directly to the Troll. "Yes, as an Overlord, the [Thousand Year Flood] spell creates seven million litres a minute. It would be more impressive if I were a Totem, but that's what I can do with it."

The Troll smiled, and the Dwarves nodded in satisfaction.

"You really did mean millions. Now, I can't afford that, but I wasn't expecting such a large number. Hell, you would probably need to make the statue out of pure Dwarven Mythril so it didn't shatter under the effects of a spell that powerful." The shirtless Dwarf replied.

"What does a kilo of Dwarven Mythril go for?" The Troll asked.

"About a hundred thousand gold coins?" The Dwarf beside him replied, then burst into laughter.

The Troll shrugged. "Guess I can't afford it either. We might could trade you the city for it?"

They all burst into laughter, along with a couple of the nearby vendors. Realistically, it would be about two gold coins for every resident of the city to buy the materials, but the majority of the people in town made less than one Gold Coin a month from their jobs.

Purchasing such a ridiculous item was simply out of the question, even if they had somewhere to store all that water.

"Spare me some coins, and we can split the use of the statue." The shirtless Dwarf suddenly demanded of a passing farmer, who was giving a newly purchased pitchfork a loving expression.

"The what now? What are you on about." The farmer demanded.

"Water creation statue. It's enough to fill the irrigation canals between your farm and mine. I can't flood them without flooding your side as well, so shouldn't we share the cost?"

The loud voices were drawing a crowd, and a large Troll in silk pants pushed past the crowd to stand behind the Dwarves, who he could easily see over.

"That is the good thing? I heard from the shaman that there is a water thing here." The brute insisted.

"We have two kinds. Enough for a farmhouse, and enough for a few square kilometres of fields. Which one do you want?" Karl replied.

"Fields. Got seventy kids. Need more water for the fields."

Seventy children? The man needed a new hobby.

"Alright, this statue will keep the irrigation canals between your fields filled all the time." Karl agreed.

The troll made to snatch the statue, but his fingers hit the barrier, and he cursed in pain.

"Money first, then I will give you the goods. That's just common sense." Karl reminded him.

He was clearly used to simply taking what he wanted. But that was not going to work today.

The Trollish Brute frowned, then motioned for someone to come over.

A group of Trollish women in patched dresses scurried over to the stall.

"Yes, father?" One of the women asked.

"He won't give me the thing. He says pay first. Can't take it without money." The brute complained.

The young woman had the grace to look embarrassed on his behalf, then turned pale when she saw the price of the statue.

"Father, that's a thousand Gold Coins. We only brought fifty silver to town for the shopping." She explained.

The big Troll harrumphed, and then took a chest from his inventory and dropped it on the ground in front of her.

"Give him things, get the treasure."

Karl wondered just how Troll genetics worked. There was a good chance that he had met houseplants smarter than this man, but all of his daughters seemed to be articulate and intelligent, though shabbily dressed.

Maybe it was a side effect of the Brute class? Or the Brute Class was a side effect of his lack of brain power?

The women began to sort quickly, and handed Karl a whole bag full of Commander Ranked rough gems, with a few Overlord Ranked Earth Gems on top.

They had to be sitting on a natural gem vein here, as that was the second time in a row that he got paid with the same items, and these ones weren't even clean. They were also worth much more than a thousand gold coins in Drodh, so Karl accepted the payment and handed the statue to the daughter who had paid him. The Brute roared in victory, then snatched up his chest of valuables and stomped away, while the ladies bowed apologetically to the crowd.

The shirtless Dwarf sighed. "Well, it was a nice thought."

Then Karl placed a new statue where the last one had sat.

"Wait, you have more?"

Beside Karl, Rae smiled at the crowd. "Of course we have more in stock. Our Guild makes them, after all. We are also happy to accept high grade crafting materials in lieu of gold as payment."

Chapter 950 Material Trade

That got the Dwarves excited. They had all sorts of good materials stored from their farms, and they weren't worth much here in town.

When everyone had the same things, the value plummeted. Water was worth more than anything else to most of the farmers, as the supply was greatly limited.

They called it a river that they filled the water wagons from, but it was hardly more than a small stream from a natural spring. With the amount that they used, it only ran for a few hundred metres before soaking into the ground and vanishing.

The rest of the water was all taken away to keep the people alive.

The Sand Trolls needed very little water for themselves, but the crops needed it. Normally, they relied on rainfall, but that had been getting more scarce by the year, to the point that many had already begun to abandon the higher areas.

They would move to a lowland, in hopes that it retained more moisture, or just move to the coast and start over from nothing.

The shirtless Dwarf had managed to find more neighbours, and between them, they had come up with a large pile of black veined Overlord Ranked Mana Jade.

"What about this? The striped Jade comes from the quarry as well, and it should be good for making statues." One of the Dwarves asked.

"How much do you want for it?" Karl asked.

"Ten Gold Coins a Kilo."

Karl tried not to smile as the Dwarves around him burst into laughter.

"Oi, shut it, you bunch of jackasses. It's called negotiating" He insisted.

"Ten Gold a Kilo" One of the others mocked in a singsong voice, which made the others laugh even harder.

"If you want the scrap jade from the mines, I'll trade you for half that price." Someone in the back shouted.

"You live in the city, what do you even want a water statue for?"

"I don't, but I'd pay just to see the look on your face."

Karl let the Dwarves argue among themselves, until finally the shirtless Dwarf moved closer to whisper to him.

"There's five hundred Kilos of stone on the ground there. I'll trade you for the statue while they argue."
He whispered.

"Pass me the stone, and it's a deal,"

Tessa rolled her eyes as the stone vanished, then appeared in the Guild's Branch Location inventory. That was even more shameless than taking the mana jade countertops from renovation sites, like they had last time.

The Dwarves realized that the stone was gone, as was the statue, and turned on the shirtless Dwarf.

"You shameless bugger. What did you bribe him with? You'd better not have promised him your daughter, you know my boy is sweet on her." One of the men demanded, then glared at Karl's group.

Ophelia burst into laughter, and Dana covered her mouth to hide her amusement.

"I'm not collecting a harem, it just happened this way when we formed a travelling group." Karl offered, but the Dwarf didn't look any less suspicious.

Karl set out another statue, and the spectators paused.

"Just how many of them did you make?" One of the Dwarves asked.

"A half dozen or so. That should be enough to fill all the canals around the city, so I figured that it would be enough for today's market."

The others, who had been arguing about the value of their trade goods compared to huge amounts of pure water, began to plot together.

They could definitely come up with enough to trade for the statues if Karl was willing to be this flexible with payment.

But Karl noticed that not all the faces in the crowd were pleased ones. There were a few suspicious individuals who were looking increasingly angry as the chance that more farmers would obtain the water statues improved.

Rae was the first to take action, as she used [Night Hunter] to turn invisible and incorporeal, before asking Butterfly to cast a better [Invisibility] on her.

Then she stalked off to see what the suspicious ones were saying to each other.

They were most likely planning to rob the farmers to steal the water statues and keep water scarce. But if they were planning to go after Karl to keep him from selling more down the road, she would take action.

{The Lord will not be happy. What use is the curse if someone starts passing out water magic? These Dwarves are stubborn enough that even a few of those rings will keep them on the land for a generation. If they can water their crops, who knows how long it will take to get rid of them.}

Rae smiled. Just a few more words. As soon as they threatened to go after the group, she had all the justification that she needed.

(Forget that, if they bring back enough water, they're going to break the curse entirely. With those damned shamans working against us, all it will take is one major storm front for the entire curse to start crumbling.

How long until we can get Lord Bomgon to start sending us some of those Necromancers? They can't stay and curse the coastline forever.} The other man

replied.

That changed Rac's plans. [Karl, make up an excuse and work with Remi to make the largest thunderstorm that you can. Like, cover everything all the way to the horizon.] [Is there a good reason for this?] Karl asked.

[Of course. Plus, I need a soundtrack as I work.]

Karl chuckled and let Rae go about her business. The crowd in the market barely noticed as the two men simply vanished, and there was nobody working in the warehouse where they reappeared.

They were all taking the day off to sell their ware

"Gentlemen, it is a pleasure to meet you. Or I should say Gentleman? The other was a bit too frail and he's already dead. Now, I have a few questions for you, and I do hope that you can answer them in an honest and prompt manner.

There is no reason that this has to be a painful process."

The terrified spy looked upward at the much taller form of Rae in heeled boots, then over her sharp toothed grin to her blood-red eyes, as Rac increased the effect of her aura to its maximum. Then, he promptly wet himself and passed out.

"Fine, I guess we're not doing this the easy way." Rae muttered, then slapped the man to wake him back up.