

SUPREME MAGUS

Chapter 15 Changes

After resolving the morning snack incident, Selia prepared the working table for the remaining game.

"The birds you caught are called blinkers, because they get scared easily and are very quick to fly away. Usually you need luck and skill to take them down from a distance. Whatever magic you performed, it made a clean kill. Aside from the broken neck, both the feathers and the body are unscathed."

Lith accepted the compliment with a small bowing.

"It's just a matter of finesse in using air magic, nothing special."

Selia's curiosity was far from being satisfied, but she decided not to pry further.

"Scalding is easy and quick. You only need to throw the poultry in the cauldron for about 45 seconds. Is better to gently stir the water in the process, to clean the birds from dirt and external parasites. It also helps loosening most of the feathers. Never scald too long, or the meat could start to boil. Not to mention the risk of rupturing the organs, ruining the meat."

Lith took charge of the scalding process, waving his right hand to take control of the water in the cauldron, stirring it and adjusting the force of the current according to Selia's directions.

"Dammit, kid. You are really starting to make me regret to have never given a damn about magic or learning it."

"You don't know how to use magic?" Lith was astonished.

"No, and before today I was proud of it. I consider chore magic a simple parlour trick. Why waste my time learning how to do things with it when I get faster and better results by using my hands?" Selia shrugged. "Now get the blinkers out of the water, time to get serious."

Beside the scalding and the plucking that replaced the skinning process, gutting poultry resulted really similar to his previous experience with the squirrel, except he had also to remove to crop, the neck and the oil gland.

Once they finished, Lith's eyes enjoyed the results, noticing that aside from the blinker's skin being a little more porous compared to a chicken's, it was just a roast away from what he would purchase back on Earth.

"How do I cook it?"

"Still hungry even after two squirrels?"

"Yes, very." The previous meal was just an appetizer, he was far from satisfied. "Please, let's use the outdoor campfire. I need to get used to not using a fireplace."

Selia slammed her hand on her forehead. "Right, right. I almost forgot about your family issues."

After instructing him how to choose the right spot for a campfire, she showed him how to improvise a kebab with wood sticks. The final lesson was about how high to set the kebab to avoid burning the food and how to recognise when it was ready to be eaten.

After memorizing everything, Lith imbued his eyes with fire magic, activating the Fire Vision spell, that granted him an improved version of thermal goggles.

He then started to weave together fire and wind magic, keeping the heat stable with no hot or cold spots, while using air currents to cook every nook and cranny of the meat evenly.

Such fine control required for him to move both his hands and feet, to watch his meal from different angles and adjusting the mana flow.

His movements were akin to a combination of martial arts katas.

Selia was about to mock him about how performing a victory dance for a single blinker was a little extreme, when the delicious smell reached her nose.

The blinker was getting roasted with a speed visible to the naked eye, the skin turning into a crispy crust, releasing the fat that was masterfully spread evenly.

The smell was so good that her stomach started grumbling, despite she had consumed her breakfast less than two hours ago.

Lith lifted the skewer with spirit magic and after lowering the temperature to avoid burning himself while eating, he started wolfing down the meat ripping it apart with his bare hands.

First the drumsticks, then the breast and lastly the wings.

It lacked salt, and the meat wasn't as tender as a roasted chicken since they had not let the meat undergo any maturation. Nonetheless it was the best meal Lith had ever had.

"I can't believe it, I cannot feel the hunger anymore." Lith fell to his knees from the happiness, his eyes wet on the verge of shedding tears.

But that moment passed quickly.

"I need more! I can't allow the hunger to cripple me again." Lith looked at the sun, there were still a couple of hours before noon, he had still time for more hunting.

"Master Selia, I need a favour. I need a place to hide my own game, the one I am not willing to share."

"Just call me Selia, hunters do not waste time with honorifics, we are practical people."

She waved her hand dismissing the need for a title.

"As for your request, I don't make favours, only deals. What about this: from tomorrow onwards you will come here every day and clean my house, and maybe from time to time cook something for me with that silly dance of yours.

In exchange, I will keep your personal meat safe and sound, and whenever you cook for me, we will share the meal evenly. Deal?" Selia offered him her hand.

It was still a rip-off, but it was his only option.

"Deal. I have only one rule. I don't do laundry."

In the next days Lith's house resounded with much more laughter and joy than usual. Him bringing game home had raised some questions, but nothing he couldn't explain easily.

The food helped everyone to relax and let go of the stress of the past. Even Lith and Orpal started to smooth over their relationship, limiting the glares and insults to a couple every day.

But more importantly, Lith could finally start practicing martial arts again. His routine was very simple, hunting in the morning, magical training in the afternoon, martial arts at night.

Thanks to the Invigoration breathing technique, Lith was now able to stay up for almost a week before being forced to rest.

He would sneak out of the house as soon his Life Vision spell confirmed that everyone was asleep.

Once outside he would create mud dummies with earth magic to both practice martial techniques and temper his body. His first priority was the footwork.

Maybe it was because he was only four years old, or maybe it was the lack of activity due to the previous constant hunger, but his body was embarrassingly clumsy and lacked coordination.

Whenever someone threw anything at him, even a chestnut from a meter away (3 feet), he would either miss it entirely or dunk it on the floor.

Lith knew that despite his spellcasting was very quick, especially spirit magic, it was not instant. He could not afford to become a sitting duck as soon as someone closed in too much.

Learning magic was powerful, but not omnipotent. What good could possibly do to him being able to topple mountains only to get killed by a random thug that managed to snuck up on him.

Even back on Earth Lith had always thought that considering mind and body as separate entities was dumb. Exercise had always allowed him to relief his stress and relax his mind. Exactly like studying always allowed him to perform at his best, be it at work or martial arts.

Brute strength was just violence, pure intellect just ideas with no substance. Only when mind and body were trained together the body could perform as the mind required.

About a week after Lith had begun training, something happened.

He was alone at night, practicing footwork by circling around the dummies, when he felt that something was wrong.

Pain burst from his mana core and quickly spreaded to his whole body, accompanied by a head-spinning nausea like he had never experienced before.

"What's happening to me?" He screamed inwardly. "This can't be a bottleneck, the last one resolved just yesterday, and no bottleneck ever felt like this."

Soon he started gasping for air, incapable to stand up anymore and writhing in pain.

"I can't die! I don't want to die again, not after enduring so much. I refuse to become some slave in a distant galaxy or an old man waiting for death. I had enough! I refuse to die!"

He used all his willpower to convert every iota of his mana into light magic, fighting off the affliction that was tormenting him, but to no avail.

The pain got worse and worse, his power incapable of keeping up.

When he surrendered, the burning sensation was finally free to rise all the way up to his mouth.

Then he started puking lumps of a black, sticky substance that looked like tar but smelled like something had died and rotted for weeks under the summer heat.

They were the size of a nut, but the strain he felt was akin to have barfed two elephants walking side by side.

The stench was so bad that even in his incapacitated state he found the strength to summon some dark magic to destroy them without leaving traces.

Lith spent the next minutes spitting, drinking, even eating grass to get rid of that revolting taste in his mouth.

When everything returned normal, Lith was too exhausted to practice, so he had to use Invigoration to return his body to peak condition.

As soon as Lith started executing the breathing technique, he discovered that he was now able to sense his mana core with much greater clarity.

While absorbing the world energy with Invigoration, he could feel and manipulate the mana flowing through his blood vessels and his organs to the point of visualize even the residual magic in his hair.

Despite his eyes being closed shut, Lith could see inside his body as he was observing a state-of-the-art full body scan 3D.

Still dizzy, he tried performing the footwork exercise again. Lith's movements were still far from perfect, but he no longer felt like having two left feet.

"It's an amazing improvement considering that until a minute ago my goal was stop tripping on my own feet. I wonder..."

Lith stretched forward his right hand opened, applying spirit magic to the head of the dummies.

"The best I could do before, with so many targets at once, was to squeeze them a little. And now..."

He clenched his fist, faster and harder than ever before.

The dummies' heads popped like balloons.