

## The First Legendary Beast Master #Chapter 31: Stress Induced Learning - Read The First Legendary Beast Master Chapter 31: Stress Induced Learning

### *Chapter 31: Stress Induced Learning*

They managed to study smoothly until mid-afternoon, when they were both too hungry for more research, and they headed down for an early dinner.

"I should practice my stamina training and then meditate for the evening to improve my mana, but can I come visit again?" Dana asked with a gentle smile.

"I would love to have you over anytime." Karl agreed.

Studying was much more pleasant with her around, and she knew the strangest things. It was good to have a friend here at the Academy, and the more that he learned about the way that Mages advanced, the more ideas Karl got about how he could expand his own skills.

Meditation sounded like it might be worth something as a technique. The crystal ball in the train car said that it could look into his beast space, so there should be some connection between that and the method to improve it. If everything was driven by the monster inside, it would be totally contrary to the other elites, whose whole goal was self strengthening in some way.

[What do you think, Hawk? Is meditation the way to improve the space you're in?] Karl asked.

[Dunno. But if it can be bigger, with trees, and mice, that would be good. Don't forget the mice.]

Karl was not about to put mice in the space alive, as he was worried it would bond them to him, and he would end up with a tortured Earth Mouse as a companion, right until Hawk killed it. That would be unfortunate, to say the least.

So, when he returned to the garden after lunch, he lay down in the hammock in the shade of the pair of coconut trees, and closed his eyes to focus on the beast space.

At first, nothing seemed to happen as he tried to envision a pine tree for Hawk to rest in. The space was just there and empty, but Karl could feel that it had the potential to be more, he just didn't know how.

The next thing he tried was focusing energy into the space, like when he wanted to use [Rend]. Adding energy while meditating might improve the space somehow, the energy had to go somewhere. Or so he assumed.

It felt like that was doing something, but even after an hour, the changes weren't visible.

[It feels better in here. Keep doing that.] Hawk encouraged.

That led to Karl channelling energy and meditating on the image of the tree that he wanted to create for Hawk to live in.

During hour two, there was a sprig of a tree growing from the ground near the nest, a single pine branch in the darkness. It really was working, just not instantly as he had hoped.

At the end of the night, the tree was almost as tall as he was, but Karl was feeling refreshed and empowered, as if the improvement had granted him some extra energy. That would be easy enough to test, today was a class day again, and his first lesson was in skill control with the mages.

The weekend seemed to have done them all a world of good, and they were all looking much more fresh and ready to practice today than they had been the last time he saw them on Friday.

"Welcome back everyone. We have an extra defender with us today. Along with Karl and Hawk, we will have Tori from the graduating class here to help motivate you all." The teacher announced with a smirk.

Tori was a tall blonde girl around eighteen years old, the graduation age for the Academy, Ascended Rank, according to her bronze badge, so she would be stronger than any of the students in this class individually, and wore her hair in fancy ringlets, along with the short pleated uniform skirt that was somewhat rare among the students, as almost everyone preferred the pants.

She looked like the sort of girl that should be extremely popular in school, but from the looks on the faces of the students here, either she was one of the "Mean Girls" or she was hated for some other reason.

Of course, it could be because they struggled in their classes that made them resentful. But she was graduating as an Ascended Mage, so she wasn't some super prodigy that made everyone feel inferior about their skills.

"Now, are we all ready? Excellent. Begin when you are ready."

Karl called Hawk, who flew up into the air, while Tori began to form small blue spheres, one after another, which floated around her in a circle. It was fascinating to watch, she just formed them in her hand, then let go, and they hovered around her, slowly orbiting.

Then the attacks began, and Karl realized why everyone in this class disliked her.

The orbs released small bolts of magic that intercepted the spells and knocked them off course, or in the case of the weaker mages, nullified them entirely.

But the orbs didn't dissipate, they kept slowly sending out more attacks, and the number of them increased as she worked to form more spheres.

Karl quickly noticed that they did very little to the fire and water mage attacks, but the solid attacks and the magic missiles had a terrible time trying to stay on course after she intercepted them.

The water attacks were fine, Hawk had a personal vendetta against them for flowing around his [Rend] and that left Karl to deal with the Fire mages.

After a dozen spheres, Tori stopped making more, and had to focus on just maintaining the spell. It would only be a matter of time before she was exhausted, or the spells needed to be refreshed, but currently, a solid three quarters of the attacks made by the class were being intercepted.

Karl was working on pacing himself as well. He didn't need to overpower the spells to block them, [Rend] tended to split apart attacks and destabilize them even at lower power outputs. That allowed him to use far less than full power and still accomplish the blocks.

With Super vision and a bit of practice, he was getting very good at defending against attacks, but Hawk was improving even more quickly. The small bird was making a mockery of the water mages' attempts to land a hit, and they were starting to get creative in how they used their magic.

Finally, one of the Mages managed to turn his water bullet into a collection of small raindrops, which hit the target like a shotgun after the [Rend] attack only took out a third of them.

The mage had mastered a new spell entirely on his own out of pure frustration.

### *Chapter 32: Efficient Nutrition*

After lunch was combat training, the physically taxing counterpart to the mental workout that the morning's skill training was. Karl was certain that if they kept this up for much longer, he would be completely exhausted and just operating on autopilot within a few weeks, but Sergeant Rita didn't seem too concerned.

"Isn't it a bit much to have high intensity classes all day long? It's only four in the afternoon, and I'm so sore that I can barely move." He complained once the training was done for the day.

"Fortunately, you have the garden on your balcony to help refresh you until your body adapts. Give it a few weeks and this will be completely natural to you." Rita insisted.

"Is that even how it works?"

The Sergeant sighed at his whining and helped Karl to his feet. "That is precisely how it works, and the harder that you push yourself during the first few weeks, the faster you will adapt to the training schedule. Short-term suffering for long-term gains."

Karl sighed. He couldn't actually prove her wrong, but he had a sneaking suspicion that as he got stronger the training would get harder, so he would never actually get to adapt to the training level.

"Alright, I'll go meditate and get some dinner then. It seems to help with the mental space where Hawk stays." Karl reluctantly agreed.

The Sergeant didn't argue with him any further, she just took out her notepad to write down her observations about his practice, and the remark about meditation helping. Karl knew that it would likely make it into his routine now that she knew, but it was for the best, as he was going to need it to keep the Windspeed Hawk happy in his living space.

Compared to that, the extra effects of growth were just a bonus, as the Hawk was very vocal in his mind when it needed or wanted something, so letting it get bored would be a disaster for his mental health.

The cafeteria food seemed to be a bit different today. He had ordered the pasta special with a side salad, but the meal tasted a bit different than he remembered, and the energy content was definitely higher. Only a few bites in, Karl was feeling like someone had electrocuted him and energy was pouring into his body.

He finished the meal, and was going to go for a jog to burn off some energy, but it seemed like it would be more worthwhile to meditate and try to integrate some of this energy into the taming space. Hawk was the main source of his power and advancement, so the more that he could do to help the beast grow, the better off he would be by the time that he graduated.

But Karl was beginning to understand why some classes never managed to advance or even unlock their skills. If he hadn't picked up that egg and found compatibility, would he have ever guessed that petting monsters was the answer? Probably not. You would have to be an idiot to try, and the Academy certainly wouldn't have given him the opportunity to touch a living monster, just on the off chance that it worked, and he didn't get killed.

Once he settled down in the hammock, his preferred meditation spot, and began to focus the extra energy in his body toward the upgrades for Hawk, he found that the excess was transferred very quickly, and in only an hour he found himself hungry again.

He could meditate as usual, but the tree was growing quickly in that mental space, and there were some blades of grass around it now. If he just kept loading up on energy, he could probably do much better now than he had before.

What had changed wasn't clear, but he could ask the kitchen staff if the menu changed. It might just be meat from a different monster that was more compatible with him. If that was all that it took, he could request it all the time.

The kitchen worker looked at him a bit strangely when he returned so soon after a heavy meal, and Karl gave her an apologetic shrug.

"It seems that with the breakthrough in my abilities over the weekend, I've got some catching up to do. Even an hour of practice leaves me starving, so I hope you don't mind if I stock up on food to go." Karl explained as he began to load plates.

"Just tell me what you need, and I will bring it up in the service elevator." The older woman informed him with a smile.

"Did you change the recipe of the pasta special? It seemed different than I remember." He replied.

"Nope, same ingredient batch as last week, we didn't get anything in for that dish. Did you want to try a selection and see what works for you? I know that some of the classes get a taste for new things as they train.

The Berserkers in particular like extra spicy foods, and the more powerful they get, the spicier they want it."

"That sounds like a great idea. If you can give me a bit of each of the specials to start, I will pick the ones that seem best." Karl agreed.

She began to load a plate with a little bit of everything, and Karl took it back to an empty table, where he began to work through them one at a time. The effect was the same as the pasta, his body was just absorbing much more energy from the food than it had been before, and the excess was building up for him to channel into Hawk's surroundings.

Karl smiled at the cafeteria lady as he returned his empty plate.

"I think that the pasta and the meatloaf are the two best specials of the day, but whatever changed in my body, they're all better for my training efficiency."

"How much do you need for the evening?" She asked, lining up plates on her counter.

"Two each should be enough for the night. I'll come early in the morning so that I can have a heavy breakfast as well."

### *Chapter 33: Heavy Eating*

The food arrived outside the room at the same time that Karl did, on a small cart pushed by one of the staff members. They had covered the loaded plates with foil to keep the heat in, but Karl could smell it following him down the hall, and Hawk was getting increasingly excited about the idea of both more food and an improvement in his living conditions.

"Thank you for that. I will return everything in the morning." Karl informed the kitchen staff worker.

"Just set the cart in the hall with your dishes, and we will come pick it up when we clean the halls." The worker explained.

Then she walked back to the elevator, and Karl took everything inside so he could focus on eating and meditation. The food smelled delicious, and even the first serving, which had filled his body with energy to be burned off, wasn't enough to actually sate the hunger.

Once he was settled into a comfortable meditation position in the middle of the bed, Karl began to focus on the improvements to the Taming Space.

The excess energy was pouring freely from him into the space, causing the tree to grow, and the patch of grass underneath to slowly, but steadily, expand.

Once that burst of energy was gone, Karl paused to pick a plate from the pile. The obvious choice would be the pasta dish, as he knew for sure that it was a good one, and he had it devoured in a matter of minutes, while briefly wondering how much he was going to regret his over indulgence in the morning.

The energy flowed into him just as smoothly as it had the first time, and Karl poured it all into the taming space, then repeated the process with the meatloaf special.

As he finished transferring the energy from that one into the space, a feeling of fullness, like he wouldn't be able to transfer much more energy, appeared in his mind. That was a good sign that this was not some bottomless pit where he was throwing energy with no end in sight, but the space itself was far from complete.

As the space began to resist more transfer, Karl carefully moved the nest up into the tree, so Hawk could have a more natural spot to sleep, and looked at the small grass patch at the bottom. At this rate, it would take months to even fill the rest of the space

with grass, much less add a sky and everything else it would need to feel like its own little world.

But the feeling of power in his body was being influenced by the abundance of energy both in his body, leftover from the meal, and from the beast space itself. Maybe he could get Sergeant Rita to test his strength next weekend, after he had more time to adjust. He might really have made it to the Awakened standard, and not just based on the attack power of [Rend].

Now that the beast space was fully sated for the moment, Karl focused on seeing what he could do with the leftover energy. First on the list, since it was food-based, was to try giving the excess directly to Hawk.

The bird's body happily accepted the power, but Karl couldn't tell if it was making any appreciable difference. It made Hawk happy, though, so it really wasn't a loss. They were partners now, and a happy partner was never a bad thing.

For the rest of the night, Karl focused on using all the energy that he could muster to empower Hawk, who had finally reached the end of his growth phase, and had started to increase only in power, but not in size.

Karl managed to finish the remaining two meals at breakfast, as Hawk was feeling hungry again, and wanted the filtered energy in addition to its meat and the daily allowance of berries to flavour his food. With the amount that Hawk ate, Karl felt like he might have restricted the consumption of junk food too much. It made a good seasoning for Hawk's meals, and it didn't hurt his appetite, so there was no real reason not to let him use them all the time.

On the way back to the room from the patio to wait for Sergeant Rita, Karl went and picked another three Mountain Gooseberries.

[Now that you're fully grown, you can have more of the berries. They won't make you stronger, but I know that they taste good.] Karl informed the overjoyed Windspeed Hawk.

[Mmm, good stuff. I will put them on everything.] Hawk agreed.

That gave Karl an idea. The meat that Hawk was eating was just plain meat. Normally, the discount cuts that his mother bought would marinate in a sauce overnight. If he squished the gooseberries into a bowl of water and threw the meat in with them, it would coat everything, just like Hawk wanted, without running them out of berries.

He would set that up tonight, so Hawk's meals would be ready for tomorrow.

A knock at the door let him know that it was time to get to work, and when he opened it, he noticed that Rita was giving a curious look at the cart full of empty dishes.

"Something changed in my appetite yesterday. It seems to be back to normal now, but I was just ravenous, and my body was taking in all the energy that it could get." Karl explained.

"That's relatively normal. It usually happens to warriors when their body advances a Rank and needs to adapt to a new power standard. I suspect that you actually made it to the Awakened Rank in body last night, or Hawk did, and the energy needed to come from you.

One of those two answers is most likely the correct one. How is his growth coming?" Rita replied.

"He looks fully grown for a Windspeed Hawk. He was growing quickly again last night while I was feeding energy into him and the space in my mind, but then it seemed to settle."

Karl called Hawk out onto the bed, and Rita crouched to get a better look at the proudly preening Hawk.

"He looks more mature now. The softer feathers are gone, and the pin feathers are larger and stronger than the last time I saw him. Your skill is brilliant. One week to bring a Windspeed Hawk to maturity. Even if your ability was just to train combat birds, I can guarantee that the Academy would still rate it as a top-notch success."

#### *Chapter 34: More Resources*

Karl smiled at the Sergeant. "If it's a great success, that means there will be more resources, right? We're still finishing the ones you gave us, but now that Hawk has reached full maturity, his growth is slowing to a crawl, and it's going to take more than just my efforts to keep him growing at this sort of rate."

Sergeant Rita laughed. "If you can keep growing at that rate, what would the rest of the elites call themselves? I think it's natural that you would have to slow down at some point and consolidate your powers, but if you can keep feeding Hawk extra energy, he should progress toward the Ascended Rank from Awakening in a relatively short time.

I will find you what resources I can, though I'm not sure what the Hawk can use now that we've tried the two that seemed the most beneficial to it."

"Well, if there is an upgraded version of the strength stone, or some more powerful infused blood, that would be great. I don't know if the air stone will do much. He's still digesting the second one he ate, and the first was so powerful that it caused a huge breakthrough. But if there are other air type resources, maybe they will help him as well?

Every time that he improves, my body improves as well, I just need to train my skills and stamina to keep up, so resources for Hawk seem to be the most effective way for me to grow." Karl suggested.

Hawk was definitely a fan of that plan. He didn't mind if Karl got strong, they were a team, but if the plan was to make him the most powerful Windspeed Hawk, then it was definitely a good idea.

Their next stop was back at their usual training grounds, and Hawk was looking forward to being able to show up the mages of the class with his new skills. Now that he was fully grown, and his power was getting better, he could block many more shots to protect the targets.

Karl could tell that it wasn't actually about the target, it was more about Hawk wanting to show off his skills and get praised, or cursed, by the mages. Both were fine in Hawk's mind, as long as they were recognizing his might. That was the important part in the Hawk's mind, reminding them all that he was the predator here, and all the mice were his.

"I swear that Hawk is picking on us. It gets better by the day, just to remind us all that we're beneath it." One of the mages announced, sweaty and exhausted at the end of the class.

"It's a Windspeed Hawk, do you really think that it has some innate grudge against mages?" One of the others scoffed.

Everyone turned to look at the Water Mages, whose fluid attacks drove the bird particularly crazy, and then back at the questioner.

"I mean in general. It's pretty obvious that the Hawk has a hatred for water attacks. But I doubt that he hates mages in general."

Karl smiled. If only they knew that Hawk really did see himself as innately better than humans, who couldn't fly, could barely see, and didn't even hunt their own meals.

The fact that Hawk himself didn't hunt his own food was a matter of luxurious living in its mind, so that didn't count. At least, to him, it didn't.

Instead of returning to rest, Hawk decided to circle in the sky for the afternoon while Karl trained his martial arts skills. His great hope was that he would finally find something that was able to be hunted in this Academy. Unfortunately, there were no rodents, no pests, nothing at all wandering around the grounds. The spells that the mages had put on the Academy, and the constant use of powers had long since scared everything away from the academy itself, and he didn't have permission to go out in to the fields around the grounds to hunt for a snack.

Karl's words had been "Be where I can see you" and that didn't extend out into the fields on the far side of the wall. If Karl had told him to stay where the others could see him, Hawk might have just given up and gone back to rest inside.

But while the hunting didn't work out as he had hoped, Hawk did find a few good things. There was a nice tree along the side of the strength training grounds, where he could rest his wings in the shade. There was a carving on one of the buildings that almost looked like him, there was an old lady who kept taking pictures of him, and finally, the truck docks.

Once he could figure out how those things worked, he would be in for a treat. Even from up in the sky, he could tell that the buildings behind the docks were just packed full of good stuff.

Karl mostly ignored Hawk's adventures, and only occasionally reminded him not to make trouble for anyone, or take food from strangers. Not everyone would know that he was Karl's Hawk, so some might try to poison or attack him like he was a wild monster.

Sergeant Rita had another book full of information for them to study, this time on Monster Biology, in hopes that they would stumble across something that might help Hawk continue to grow at an accelerated rate.

Every Elite wanted to be famous, powerful, or both. That was the whole point of the training regimen here. So, her job as a private instructor was to do what she could to help Karl keep advancing and live up to the potential that the senior staff believed he had when they observed him on the train.

If the final result was intense early growth, leading to stagnation and a growth plateau, that just meant that they didn't understand the next step in his training. But the next time that they saw a class like this one, they could use his experience as a baseline and start growing the new elite from there.

### *Chapter 35: Efficient Casting*

Karl sat on the balcony of his room with a stack of textbooks, trying to determine if there would be some surefire way to help Hawk advance from the Awakened stage to Ascended without a large delay.

From what he knew of the Windspeed Hawk, their progression usually came from improved skills with [Rend] along with an increased ability power level. The mana infused monster blood should help with the second part, and they were doing daily training, which no wild Hawk would ever have a reason to do.

Mostly because they hunted for food, not for sport, so they wouldn't use their skills a hundred times a day. That gave them some sort of advantage over the wild growth rate, but there had to be more that he could do than just grind their skills over and over.

Hawk had already learned the [Wind Barrier] from the Headmaster's Wind Beads, so the Windspeed Hawk could absolutely learn new things from mystic resources, he just had to get his hands on them.

A knock on his door distracted him from his confusion, and Karl went to open the door, finding Dana with a smile and a bag full of books, plus a small plate of food.

"I brought a gift for Hawk. Someone told me that they had them around their house in the farmlands, and the Hawks really liked these, so I asked the kitchen to find one." She greeted him.

That caught Hawk's attention, and he flew in from the other room to land on her shoulder and check out the plate.

It was a small animal, skinned, but intact and raw, but to the Windspeed Hawk, the smell was divine.

"It's an Iron Jaw Mole. They're farmland pests, as they dig huge holes for their nests. They've got great jaw strength, as you would expect, but that's it. Unfortunately for them, they're even weaker than the Earth Mice in the fields outside the Academy, and they've got no ranged attacking power at all."

The trio walked back to the patio and Dana set the plate on the table, where it was immediately attacked by Hawk.

"Mind your manners, I don't need you getting blood splatter on the textbooks." Karl reminded him.

In response, the Hawk pushed the plate to the far side of the table, but didn't slow his pace, happily tearing the small animal to bits.

"What are you working on today?" Karl asked as Dana set out a pair of notebooks, but no reference text.

"Mana control. According to the teacher, I still use too much for every spell, and that inefficiency is why I'm having trouble with multiple spells and my channelling speed. For now, they've asked me to just focus on Magic Missiles and Fog, and not to expand my spell repertoire yet, or I will ingrain bad habits into new spells.

So, I want to get my efficiency increased as quickly as I can." Dana explained.

Hawk looked up with interest. That topic sounded like it would be useful to him too. He could kill more water balls that way, and taunt the mages. Taunting mages was way more fun than Hawk had expected it to be, especially when they weren't allowed to attack him directly.

"That sounds like good advice. I need to find a way to keep Hawk progressing now that he's reaching full growth. All this good food and the handful of special items they could find that were suitable for Hawks have brought him up to full-grown in record time, but he is going to hit his natural bottleneck soon, and then it's up to training whether we can make the leap from Awakened to Ascended before the first semester is over."

They studied in silence for a few minutes while Hawk finished eating, and then the bird flew up into the trees and brought them back a single pear, perfectly ripened.

Karl remembered this one from the guidebook. It was supposed to help refresh the body and remove stress. A common enough effect for magical plants, but useful when studying.

Karl cut it into thin slices, and Hawk took one small bite before ruffling its feathers and turning away.

The pear smelled incredible, but it was too sweet, not at all to Hawk's liking. The humans could have it.

Karl laughed at the Hawk's disappointed look and cut the pear into slices for them to snack on. Then, Hawk stepped across the table and directly onto Dana's notepad.

"What are you doing, little man? Have we ignored you too much?" She asked, and stroked his head gently.

Hawk preened at the attention, then shook himself and focused.

He raised one claw, and created a [Rend] blade in front of him, then decreased the intensity to almost nothing, before bringing it back up again. Then down until it was almost invisible.

[Tell her about the waste.] Hawk demanded.

"He wants you to understand that the harder you push yourself, the more mana you waste. Try what he's doing with your Magic Missiles, and I think you'll see, hold it in place and keep decreasing the power. The mana cost drops exponentially." Karl explained.

Dana looked skeptical, but she did what he asked. The first few Missiles nearly fired out across the Academy Grounds, as she had never before tried to hold them in place, but after a few minutes, she could hold and guide them where she wanted as she slowly reduced the power from the default full activation to barely a glow of light.

"How did you know to do that?" She asked as she mimicked Hawk's cycle through the power range.

"It's instinctive for Hawk, and he taught me. By the logic of a Windspeed Hawk, you should hunt with just enough power to take out your prey, so you don't waste more energy than you get back." Karl explained.

"So that's it. This is a huge breakthrough. I can see where I was going wrong, I was just focusing on the spell activation sequence, and letting it go. I thought that I was doing well by controlling the direction, but if I focus on the mana flow, I can do so much more with it.

There are likely so many things that we can learn from magical creatures that we have never thought of ourselves. The teacher's directions aren't even this detailed, and I've never seen another student actually reduce the power of their spells. They just increase their endurance and cast everything at full power every time, but with better control as they grow."

Karl thought about that for a moment and shook his head.

"No, the senior students have learned to control and split the power as well. I guess they just thought that it would be too difficult for a new mage? But it makes casting spells way easier. Even if you do it at half power, you should be able to cast at least five missiles for every one that you could before."

#### *Chapter 36: Practice Makes Perfect*

Dana and Hawk spent the rest of the evening practising their skill control together, while Karl focused on finding more about the growth cycles and power increase triggers of various magical beast species.

There were so many, but Karl was certain that if he worked on it, he could find some sort of pattern to the triggers. It should be either something to do with their skills, their body's alignment to an element or some sort of environmental factor. He didn't believe that it was completely random and that it was all up to luck, with study, they should be able to trigger the advancements deliberately.

The meditation and movement of energy to Hawk was certainly going to help, though he couldn't tell how much. But every meal since the advancement had given him a surge of energy, as he was absorbing the nutrients and embedded mana much more efficiently than a regular human would.

That should be something normal for the Elites, as the kitchens did deliberately prepare that sort of meal for every student, so the real difference should be that he could share the excess with Hawk, instead of wasting it.

Once it started to get dark, Dana finished making notes on what she had learned, and then returned to her room for the night, while Karl prepared to eat one more late night meal and meditate on transferring that extra energy to Hawk to help him grow.

The only problem was that they would have to wait until there was a noticeable change to find out if these methods were working, and even then, they wouldn't necessarily know for certain which of the methods were the ones that had the largest impact.

There was no exact measuring method, which was why they had just loosely grouped monsters into categories based on their power rankings, but that also meant that near the boundaries of those rankings there could be some uncertainty, unless the body or power went through a notable change.

For example, when a Devil Cat went through the process of moving from awakened to Ascended, it grew a second tail. That was a pretty simple and surefire way to tell. Many birds would gain a distinctive pattern on their feathers as they grew more powerful, and most mammals would increase in size in a sudden growth spurt.

Windspeed Hawks didn't go through most of that, they kept their appearance, except for the claws. Once a Windspeed Hawk reached the Ascended level, their claws would turn from a dull black, to a translucent obsidian, and that claw material was an exceptional resource for elites learning similar skills. It could be ground up and mixed with monster blood in the same way as the strength stones, and drinking it would increase skill understanding.

[Haha, yeah, make them eat my claw clippings. They grow back quickly.] Hawk giggled in Karl's mind, equating the broken claw parts to human toenail clippings. Just a shed waste product that it no longer cared about.

[Well, if we can help you grow to that level, we can help the others out then. We will show them how far ahead you are, just by being yourself.] Karl joked, stroking the bird's ego for a moment before he began to meditate.

In the morning, they both felt refreshed and a bit better than they had the day before, so that became their routine. Mornings with the mages, afternoons of martial arts training, and then evenings of book studies, while Karl worked on learning all that he could about magical beasts and the triggers that could cause them to advance, while Hawk worked with Dana on their mana control.

His rate of growth was incredible, and while he had an advantage to begin with, thanks to his species, Hawk was rapidly outgrowing anything that could have been expected of a juvenile Windspeed Hawk.

Normally, they wouldn't need to use the [Rend] attack more than a handful of times in a day, as it was primarily for hunting, and occasionally for self-defence. But by the end of the week, he could keep it up for hours at a time.

Dana was also progressing at a crazy pace with his help, and she now had full control over her magic missiles. It was quite impressive to see her hold them in place, or move them around the room with her mind. The process still drained her much faster than she

would prefer, but it was a vast improvement on the first day that she started working with Hawk, when she didn't understand at all how she was supposed to control the mana flows.

So, it was with greatly improved confidence that they headed for the meeting spot for the next practical skills meeting.

The same group of fifty-four students were gathered in the field, waiting for the teachers to arrive, and Karl took his spot next to the other team leaders.

Sergeant Rita arrived a few minutes later with the two mages, driving one of the Academy's cargo buggies filled with gear.

"We have something new and fun for everyone today. These are the new experimental products from the weapons development department at the Golden Dragon National Research University. What you all are going to do today is go on a little field trip. The danger will be a bit higher than usual, as you will be leaving the Academy Grounds entirely, and not just going to the outskirts, but the University has asked us to test whether these new weapons with their fancy technology can actually improve the user's strength by a whole rank." Sergeant Rita announced.

The mages were more than a little skeptical, as their powers were based on mana flow and control, which were both internal factors, they didn't use weapons in the same way that the warriors did. If it was just for the warrior classes, it would be a great safety measure for Elites in general, but not specifically for them.

However, when they took the tarp off the cart, there was a box with everyone's name on it. The University really had come up with something for everyone, and the students began to become excited to see what it could do.

### *Chapter 37: New Claws*

Karl made his way to the stack of boxes, where Sergeant Rita was organizing everyone into a single file line to get through the stack more efficiently. She handed him a large box, and he stepped aside, trying to decipher how to open a box with no visible latches.

The answer turned out to be a fingerprint scanner in the middle of one side, hidden beneath the paint. To students who grew up in the city, it was obvious, but the small towns didn't have any need for such high-tech security in their daily lives, they just taped the boxes closed and called it secure.

Inside the box was a new set of gauntlets, similar to the ones that he already had, at least in external appearance, but they were lighter than the training units, and the claws on the fingers seemed to be made from some sort of actual monster claw, instead of alloy.

What sort of difference that was supposed to make to his [Rend] attack was a mystery, but there might be something else hidden under the nondescript black metal upper glove that covered his arm nearly to the elbow which would help with mana channelling, or serve as some sort of amplifier for his skills.

The only way to know was to test them, so Karl stepped away from the crowd, where the warriors were happily beginning to wave their new swords around, and gave them a flex to send a claw attack into the air.

The power activation feels much more natural, even than when he is doing it barehanded. The gauntlets weren't strictly necessary for the skill, unlike a sword skill. He had fingernails of his own that would do the job, but with these new gauntlets on his hands, the power seemed to flow to the monster claws and form much more smoothly than he could manage on his own.

It didn't feel like it was more powerful than usual, and the energy he put in was the same, but his recovery felt like it was faster than usual, as if the weapon was returning some of the expended energy to him.

With these gauntlets, Karl was certain that he could fight all morning with ease, and not have to take nearly as many breaks during the defensive training with the mages. It would certainly drive his classmates insane to have that many more skills coming up to block their attacks, but they were getting better anyhow, so it could be good for them.

It only took a few minutes to get all the weapons handed out, and for chaos to spread through the field where they had gathered. There were sword attacks and spells flying all around, a large stone golem standing to one side, and the ground was trembling from someone's magic.

It was insanity, but the teachers were content to wait until the students had all begun to calm down before they said anything else.

"Alright, calm down, everyone. You know what's coming next. But this time there is a twist. This week, we will be putting you in pairs. There are two of each number in the bag, pick one paper and find your partner for today's exercise. You will all be working individually in a large region, so don't expect backup if there are issues." Sergeant Rita explained, while the two mages looked excessively pleased with their ingenuity.

The device that the University had made for the mages varied from person to person, but mostly, they were in the form of a small rectangular frame full of crystals and tubes that could be hung from the user's belt.

Aesthetically, they were a strange choice, but better than the hooded coat with the wires running all down the inside that one of the mages was wearing.

Dana had one of the boxes, a flatter one that was a little larger than a paperback novel.

That gave Karl a great idea. If they were allowed to keep these prototypes, he could suggest putting a regular book cover over some of them so that they blended in with the academy's usual apparel a bit better. That should also protect them from damage and dirt, which clearly wasn't a concern for the design team working on magician enhancing tools.

"Sergeant Rita, what are these gauntlets made of? Do you know?" Karl asked as she approached him with the bag of numbers.

"Just various monster parts combined, as far as I know. It's supposed to be something about combining the aspects of magical beasts to create magic items." She replied with a shrug.

Karl took a number from the bag, and waited for the rest of the students to choose.

He had drawn number seventeen, but the look on the teachers' faces said that simply shouting your number to find your partner would not be tolerated. Or at least not before the numbers were all passed out. So, Karl decided to wander and check numbers with the others who had received their cards.

He was at the edge of the group to begin with, and his path simply followed the Sergeant through the crowd. The others were doing the same, but in an organized manner. They were beginning to line up based on the number of their paper, with number one moving over toward where Karl had been standing in the beginning.

Karl caught on quickly and moved to roughly where he thought pair seventeen should be, and found himself standing next to Dana, who was holding a card identical to his.

"Well, that makes it easier. We already know each other's basic skills, and they should work well together. You take the lead, Hawk scouts, and I will deal damage from the back." She informed him with a smile.

"That works for me. How is your new tool? Is that mass of stuff really better than what you were using earlier?" Karl asked.

"It seems to be, but we will find out once we actually have to use them. The box is a focusing device, and you use it when you're casting the spell to intensify the effects. It's a bit difficult to use properly at first, but with some practice, it should increase my magic power by quite a bit." Dana replied.

"Now, we just need to find out what we're going to test it on."

*Chapter 38: Are We There Yet?*

Once everyone was sorted, the Mages began their spell casting again in preparation to transport the group somewhere. This version seemed far more complex than the first

time that Karl had seen it, and the effort was visibly draining on the two mages. That must mean they were going quite a bit further than the outskirts of the Academy, which had been a simple and effortless spell for just the elder teacher.

But they appeared in the target location just as smoothly as they had the first time, and Karl found himself standing next to Dana in a ruined warehouse, still stocked with bags of dry goods and one slowly leaking barrel of honey that had attracted a huge number of bees.

"We should move before we anger them. I don't fancy being stung by bees today." Karl whispered as Dana took in their surroundings.

Hawk was eager to get out and see what was going on, but until they knew what sort of danger level they were facing, Karl didn't want to send him up blindly.

Dana gestured toward a large hole in the wall that seemed to lead out to a main road, and the duo began to move, making their way out into a ruined village.

"This just happened. I can still smell fresh blood and gunpowder." Karl whispered.

Both smells were unpleasantly familiar after a childhood of helping at the mines, and with his enhanced senses, courtesy of Hawk, he could pick them out much more clearly than ever.

"What do you mean?" Dana replied softly.

"This village was attacked in the last day or two. That's probably why we are here, to help clean out the monsters that have tried to move in. I will send up Hawk now, so we know what we're up against, and then we can come up with a plan.

It's a good thing that you have been working on your mana control because I think that you're going to need Magic Missile far more than the fog today."

This would be a brutal crash course for the first year students, even if they were the handpicked best of the batch. They had only been at the Academy for a few weeks, and they were mostly working with one or two abilities that were still at the Common Grade.

That should mean that the threat level here wasn't too high, but if it were just Common Grade monsters, the townsfolk should have been able to chase them off. Perhaps the response hadn't come quickly enough and the elites had dealt with the stronger monsters too late, leaving just the dangerous local wildlife for the students to clean out.

[There are angry pigs. We're killing them, right? Then eat them?] Hawk reported.

[Tell me exactly where they are in relation to me, and how many. I also need to know how strong each is, or how many of them are Awakened or higher.] Karl replied, training the Hawk how he wanted the scouting reports to be structured.

[Nine pigs, all injured. One with awakened power. Two hundred metres in my direction from the building. Oh, there are more monsters south. If you go that way, there are six Goblins, none awakened. They're lazy, making a campfire.]

[You know the routine, work first and then eat. Lead us to the Goblins and keep an eye out for more monsters. The book said that Goblins travel in large bands, so there are likely more of them around.] Karl replied.

"There are some wild pigs that Hawk wants to eat, but there are Goblins on the south side of town. That would explain why things went so badly here. Even if they're weak, they're smarter than most wild magical beasts, and they come in large numbers.

We are going to have to clear out the six that are left here first, and then we can look for more stragglers and anything else."

Anything else, meaning survivors, but it would be uncouth to say that out loud so early into their mission.

Dana nodded grimly, not really ready to see a true monster in person and in the wild with just one other student beside her, but she knew that this was the training mission, and they had been sent here specifically to take care of this threat.

Hawk circled the town, looking for movement and anything else that the other two might find. Work first, and then eat, so the faster he helped them get all the work done, the better. That meant that he couldn't miss any of the targets.

[I found more Goblins. In a house, four doors up from you and across the street. I can see two of them from my perch.]

Karl relayed the message to Dana in a whisper, and then kept walking.

"What are you doing?" She hissed.

"If they know that we have seen them, they will call for assistance instead of trying to ambush. Hawk has his eyes on them, he won't let them actually ambush us, just stay close to me and when they rush, you cast Magic Missile." Karl whispered back as he walked.

Karl crossed the street, watching the building that Hawk had marked with his enhanced peripheral vision without turning his head. The Goblins didn't have great eyesight, so they would assume that if he wasn't looking at them, he hadn't seen them, and sure enough, as soon as he passed, they charged out with a battle cry.

It was just three wounded Common Grade Goblins, and two of them fell to Hawk's [Rend] before either Karl or Dana could respond. Karl took the last with a flex of his fingers, and the town fell silent again.

[Hawk, keep searching, that cry might have alerted the others.] Karl directed.

The Hawk flew away, and Dana gave it a look of admiration.

"He's got great reflexes." She muttered.

"He's definitely a good friend to have on a day like this. He's gone to scout for more Goblins, in case something heard and responded to that battle cry."

### *Chapter 39: Goblins*

Karl kept them moving south toward the edge of town, even when he felt the occasional pull of exertion, as Hawk took out lone Goblins that had been hiding in town. He was not happy about the situation, as they smelled terrible and were inedible to him, but there was the promise of Iron Tusk boars in the distance as soon as he found and eliminated them all.

"They really prepared a brutal test for us today. Hawk has found five more wandering Goblins so far, and we're still not to the larger pack of six. Take out whichever ones you want when we arrive. Your spell is slower to cast than Rend, so I will let you lead off the attack, and then I will keep them from getting to us.

How are you doing on the multiple missiles' effort?" Karl asked.

"I can still only control two at a time, but once I get the spell started, it should be much faster to send the next volley. Are there any awakened rank Goblins in the pack?" She replied.

"According to Hawk, they're all Common grade followers, there is no sign of a stronger leader. The Elite who came here first likely dealt with the stronger foes and then left the rest, or they ran and came back." Karl replied.

Karl caught a glimpse of flames in the distance, on the outskirts of town, and put a finger to his lips to signal silence from here forward. The goblin camp was loud, preparing for something, and they didn't even have a guard out when Karl led the way to the edge of the clearing where they had set up. Once they were close, he crouched, getting low to the ground so that his uniform didn't stand out quite as badly, and did his best to move silently.

It was clear that there had once been many more Goblins here, but presently only six remained, easy prey for the two Elites.

Dana focused and put a pair of Magic Missiles into the back of two of the goblins near the fire pit, while Karl took out the one closer to them. Then he aimed for the one who reacted the fastest, and another who was trying to run.

Dana got the last of them in the back, and Karl rose to his feet to go make sure they were really dead. There would be nothing worse than having what they thought was a defeated enemy come from behind and ambush them, but as he made his way through the camp, Karl immediately began to regret moving in for a closer look.

He had forgotten what Goblins eat, which was mostly the flesh of the villagers they slaughtered, and the stench was overpowering. But after motioning for Dana to stay put for the moment and watch for reinforcements, he checked all the bodies, giving them all a quick stab with a pilfered goblin sword before moving back to their hiding spot.

"They're finished. Let's move back into town and take care of the rest of the targets, then we can kill the pigs and have some lunch before waiting to see what else we are supposed to be doing here. I think that this should be it, but I was expecting a bit more guidance." He explained.

"So was I. When they said that there wouldn't be much of a chance that we would be meeting the other students, I didn't think that they meant we wouldn't even be in the same town. What does Hawk say about the situation?" Dana replied.

[Nothing else is moving. I even went up high, and there was nothing else around but the pigs. I even stopped at the houses, and there was no sound of heartbeats or movement inside. Does that mean that we're done, and we can have lunch now?] Hawk replied, hopefully.

[Meet us before we go deal with the pigs. There is an awakened one there, and it might not be safe for you to go alone. Who knows what sort of ability he might have.]

The wild Iron tusk Boars were happily rooting through the town's garbage pile when Karl arrived, with Dana right behind him and the Hawk circling overhead.

The largest of them was Hawk's target for lunch. It was newly into the Awakened rank, and gave off a sense of power that Dana recognized long before Karl did.

"It has magic. I'm not sure what, but it can use some sort of magical spell." She whispered.

"Alright then, we ambush it. All three of us at once will attack the largest boar, and then we will deal with the others. How is your stamina holding up? Have you rested long enough since the fight with the Goblins?"

Dana nodded. "I held back, so the expenditure wasn't nearly as high. I am ready to fight."

She moved to Karl's left, then climbed up on top of a small stone shed and lay on her stomach to get a good angle of attack. That should keep the boars away from her for a moment, until they could knock down the wall, but she wasn't so high that she would get hurt jumping down.

[Hawk, your dinner is served. Attack the big one when Dana does, with as much as it takes to kill it. I will deal with the others.]

Dana fired a pair of Magic Missiles into the Awakened boar, and six streaks of [Rend] came down to meet them, converging on its neck as the beast reared back to block the missiles with its tusks.

Then Karl attacked, throwing Rend attacks into the closest two boars and moving forward to attract the attention of the remaining three. They were all close to Awakened in power, and their hides were beginning to toughen, but it wasn't enough to keep his attacks from penetrating.

Then Hawk arrived, sending out two more attacks into the back of the charging boars, while Dana targeted the last survivor, a greedy one who hadn't stopped eating as soon as the others had.

"Well, that was anticlimactic. I thought that it was going to be a much harder fight." Dana noted.

"Don't jinx it, we are still not back at the Academy. But I will cut up these boars so that Hawk can get a fresh lunch, and we will bring them back with us."

How he was planning to do that was a mystery to Dana, but after Karl pulled a textbook from his coat for reference before beginning to butcher the pigs, she assumed that he had some actual plan.

Then, the first of them disappeared, just vanished in front of her eyes, and Karl moved on to the next.

#### *Chapter 40: Not A Day Trip?*

"What the heck was that? Where did they go?" Dana gasped as an entire hundred kilo boar vanished for the second time.

"There is a mental space granted by my powers. That's where Hawk stays when he's not out playing. I can store things in there, like meat, and it doesn't go bad. There is only one small issue that I've found. Only food can go in there. I tried to put my textbooks in, and it wouldn't work. But meat can go in and out no problem." Karl explained.

"What a strange restriction. But it is for your pet, right? So perhaps it's only things that are good for the pet that can go in and out. Why don't you try with a resource that you know he can't use later and see what happens?" Dana suggested.

"That is brilliant. Perhaps the magic of the beast space will help me learn what will be best for Hawk. Trying to find a way to help him advance more quickly is my current topic of study, other than the basic training." Karl explained.

"Glad I could help. But shouldn't someone have shown up by now? It's getting close to lunch, and these practice missions usually only last an hour."

Karl shrugged. "Well, technically, they've got us all day. So, I suppose it's not a big deal if we have lunch here at the nearest house. No, scratch that, I heard from Hawk what is inside, let's just eat out here."

Karl used his sword to cut some sliced pork to grill over a fire, using branches as skewers, while Dana prepared a fire.

"Give me just a second. I know the spell to create a small flame, I just haven't mastered it yet. We don't have to make fire the hard way, or go rummaging through houses looking for a fire starter." She explained.

The village had been ransacked by Goblins, so whatever they found inside the houses was not going to be pleasant. Dana was aware of the stories about Goblin atrocities, but she really was not intending to find out first hand what it looked like up close.

It took three tries before she managed to get sparks to form and the dry branches to light, but after that, the fire started to burn quite well, and the duo waited for the heat to build so that they could begin to roast the meat.

"Do you think that this could be some sort of surprise survival test? Tomorrow is the day off, and we don't have classes for another day and a half, so there wouldn't be any delay to our learning if they had us stay here to hunt for an overnight trip." Karl suggested.

"I hope not. I don't know about you, but I didn't bring any sort of camping equipment." Dana joked.

There was a whole town behind them, but without any sign of survivors, and no visible battleground, being able to search the town itself for supplies was questionable. There was no telling how much was left in town, and how much had been taken with the ones who fled.

"Well, if nobody comes for us by dinner, we will have to go looking for supplies to get through the evening. I don't know if we want to stay in town, as the ruined town will draw more monsters searching for food."

"That is a good idea. We should get settled in as if we were waiting for a conventional pickup after a mission. That seems like the best option, since this class is intended to prepare us for rescues and missions after we graduate." Dana suggested.

The three of them settled in around the fire, waiting out the time until the meat was cooked, and deliberately ignoring the fact that there was a ruined and abandoned village right behind them. They would have to face the fact that numerous people likely lost their lives here in the recent past, but for now, they would focus on their lunch and the possibility that they didn't get all the monsters that were nearby.

But two hours later, after they had finished eating, and Hawk had searched the town twice over, going into every open house to make sure that there were no survivors or other hidden monsters, but there was nothing. In fact, there were very few bodies at all, though there was quite a bit of blood in some of the houses, according to Hawk.

"Should we go back to where we started, in the middle of town? Perhaps there is some sign there that will let us know what we're supposed to be doing. I feel like we should have gotten some message by now, and that maybe we weren't supposed to be sent to an empty town.

I mean, think about it. We're both technically still Common Grade, though I am already at Awakened in peak power. They shouldn't have sent us out into the unknown unsupervised for too long, it would make more sense if we were here to deal with the Iron tusk Boars.

Maybe there was supposed to be someone here to meet us, but they were gone before we arrived because of the Goblin attack."

"So, you think that someone was supposed to let them know that we were finished? That makes some sense, since it is sanctioned by the Academy. Perhaps we could find something that would let us contact them? I mean, even a cell phone would do the job, and there should be a working landline in some of the buildings." Dana suggested.

Karl got to his feet, and sent Hawk back up to scout the town, in case there was anything coming for them, while they walked back to the town square. It was an eerie feeling, now that there was nothing around and moving. No birds, rodents, nothing at all. The town was just completely silent.

But there were lights on, so it hadn't been completely destroyed, just left uninhabited.

Just as when they arrived, the centre of town was empty, but now, Karl wasn't looking for monsters, but signs that someone knew they were coming and might have left behind a message for them.