

Lightning Is the Only Way

Chapter 19: Tastes like Chicken

Gravis and the bird looked at each other, one in smugness, the other in fury. Gravis had no intention of leaving any time soon. He would stay in here until he had completely healed.

"Just you wait, shitty bird!" Gravis shouted at the bird, who just squawked back in rage. The bird kept squawking incessantly, trying to taunt Gravis out of the lava. But the more it showed its anger, the better Gravis felt. "Yeah, go die of frustration, shitty bird! Just wait until I'm healed, then I'll whoop your ass!"

The bird didn't understand human language, but it understood that Gravis was provoking it, so it only got angrier. It tried several times to reach him but had to stop each time. A couple of times, some feathers even caught on fire, and the bird had to put them out. With time it was slowly losing feathers, but it also managed to come closer.

"Yeah, go pluck your feathers, shitty bird. Then I don't have to do it myself when I cook you!" Gravis continued his provocation. Even though it didn't understand what he said, the bird got angrier. Its fury could blow up the sky. By now, the lava chunk had cooled slightly and had melted a several meters deep hole. The lava looked like a small glowing pond now.

Gravis' head poked out of the top of the lava pond, like a growing watermelon.

After a while, the bird couldn't take it anymore and made a major decision. It landed and started plucking out all its feathers. Every plucked feather hurt, but its anger suppressed the pain. "Yeah, go on, you idiot chicken! While you're at it, come over and cook yourself!" The provocations never ended.

This only fueled its rage, and it increased its speed. After a couple of minutes, the bird was clear of feathers. It plucked the feathers on its head with its talons, leaving some gashes along the way. Its determination was astounding.

The naked bird now walked over to Gravis, getting closer and closer. The air was still scorching, but at least the bird didn't catch on fire. The bird stopped in front of the lava pond and glared into Gravis' eyes. Gravis still had a smug look on his face. They continued looking at each other for some seconds.

PECK!

The bird pecked, and Gravis head immediately sunk. The beak of the bird didn't touch the lava. Being close, and actually touching it, was a huge difference. The bird had missed, and Gravis' head poked out again, still looking at the bird with a grin. The bird pecked again, but Gravis' head dodged.

This continued for a while, like a variation of whack-a-mole. The bird started pecking faster, giving its best to catch Gravis, but he always dodged easily.

Suddenly, when the bird pecked again, Gravis caught its beak. "Got you!" and he pulled down. He could control parts of the lava, and when he started pulling, it wasn't just his strength, but the whole lava pond that pulled it down. The bird immediately splashed into the lava and screamed. The lava ran down its throat and burned its insides and outsides. It died very quickly.

Some turtles hunted birds similarly. When a bird got too close, they would snap and grip a part of its body. Then, they would pull the bird underwater and drown it. Gravis said he would be the turtle this time, and he stuck to his word!

When Gravis noticed that the bird had died, he immediately threw it out. He didn't want to burn his meal. He couldn't eat the center due to the swallowed lava, but the outside was still ok. Gravis sighed. Finally, for the first time in this world, he had time to relax. He looked around and noticed that he was in a forest... which was on fire. Many trees had ignited due to the lava rain. In the distance, he could see the smoking remains of the volcano. It seemed like he had flown for multiple kilometers.

He couldn't see or hear any more animals or beasts. They probably fled from the natural catastrophe. The sky had darkened from the smoke, and ash was starting to rain down.

The dark sky, the ash rain, the burning forest, the lava pool, and the, otherwise, quiet forest reminded Gravis of the environmental challenges in the practical test. This would probably be how a fire challenge looked. His nerves relaxed more and started cooking the bird above the lava. Its feathers were already plucked, so that saved him a hassle.

After a sumptuous meal, he went back into the lava pond and slept. He preferred the lava's safety instead of the open forest, even though the forest was burning all around him. Nothing else of note happened when he slept.

Gravis opened his eyes after a good sleep and noticed that it was very tough moving in the lava. It had started to harden into obsidian. He poked his head out and saw that only ash remained around him for several hundred meters. The floor and the sky were black. It looked like a world of fire and brimstone.

"Man, Heaven really doesn't care about collateral damage when dealing with me," Gravis noted as he looked around. His body had healed to around half of its peak condition. He decided to stay here for another day. It was safer in this hellscape since no beast would want to come here. When Gravis looked back at the hardening lava pond, he got an idea and jumped back in.

He tried to control the lava as well as possible and saw some success in his plan. Since he had to wait for his body to heal anyway, he might as well waste some time on his idea. Only his head remained above the surface, and he stayed in that position for the whole day.

Night had arrived, and a team of four people was walking through the remains of the forest. They wore green clothes and carried bows. Obviously, this was a party of hunters, looking for resources. The party consisted of three men and one woman. The men were probably in their 30's, but the woman looked young. She only hit her 20's recently.

"Are you sure we'll find something here, Sarah? There's only ash as far as the eye can see," one of the men commented. "Maybe it'll be better if we hunt in an actual forest and not this ash-land." The man didn't sound rude but concerned. He wanted to find some beasts to hunt.

The woman, Sarah, smiled slightly. "After a natural calamity, the elements will be in disorder. If we're lucky, we can find an opportunity in this wasteland, and this opportunity might finally turn our luck around. Even if we find nothing, we can at least say that we've tried."

The other men sighed and continued looking. After walking for some time, they arrived at a clearing with fewer remains of half-burned trees. The clearing was exceptionally flat.

One of the men raised his eyebrows. "What is that?" He pointed at the center of the clearing. The others looked over, and their eyes widened. A solitary head was sitting in the middle of a flat black platform. Its eyes were narrowed, and it felt like it was looking at them. When they looked into its eyes, they felt a cold shiver.

"Why is there a head in the middle of a black platform in the middle of a forest?" One of the men commented while looking at Sarah. "Is this the opportunity you spoke of?" He asked unsurely.

Sarah narrowed her eyes. This was too strange! This couldn't be natural! She hesitated, but finally gritted her teeth and started walking towards the head. The other men nervously looked at Sarah but followed with courage.

The closer Sarah got to the head, the more she felt as if its eyes followed her. She arrived at the black platform and-

"Stop!" the head shouted before they could step on the platform.

The party jumped back and felt like their spirits left their body. The head had spoken! What was going on? Sarah's heart raced, and her fight and flight instincts were screaming at her. Yet, she didn't retreat. It took all her courage not to flee.

"What are you?" She asked.

The head spoke in an imposing voice. "I'm an earth spirit!"