

Lightning Is the Only Way

Chapter 16: Will

Forneus didn't arrive too early or too late. He looked at the youngsters and announced loudly, "It's time for the last test. The enemies will appear after a fixed interval of 45 seconds. It doesn't matter if the previous enemy died or not. After 45 seconds, you have to fight the next one. If you haven't defeated your opponent by then, you will have to fight two enemies simultaneously. Environmental changes will be kept up for three minutes and do not count as enemies. Be prepared to fight your enemies in unfavorable environments." Forneus narrowed his eyes. "Also, there will be no breaks until the test is over."

The youngsters narrowed their eyes. This would be hard. In comparison to the others, Gravis didn't react. He went through harder tests by now. He didn't even know why he was required to attend. This test held no meaning for him.

As the portals appeared, the youngster's eyes narrowed, and they walked forward. "Gravis, stay here," Forneus suddenly said. The others were too preoccupied with the preparation for their test, to care about Gravis right now. When all youngsters vanished, Gravis looked at Forneus and waited. He kept looking in Forneus' eyes, with his, by now, usual cold look.

Forneus grinned slightly. "That's a good look you have there." Forneus' eyes also narrowed, and suddenly, Gravis felt cold. Gravis felt like a blade rested on his throat. "But don't get cocky," Forneus coldly remarked and went back to his usual bored self.

Gravis released a sigh. This woke him up. For the first time, he felt utterly outclassed. Just Forneus' aura alone reminded him that, while he was the strongest in his class, he was still weak in the world. For the first time in a long while, Gravis restrained his aura. With a deep breath, he calmed himself down.

"Do you think it's a good idea to curb someone's Will-Aura right before a battle, Forneus?" An imposing voice appeared from the entrance of the hall, and Orpheus entered. He looked at Forneus with a sharp look. Just like Forneus curbed Gravis' Will-Aura, Orpheus destroyed Forneus' Will-Aura.

Forneus gulped deeply, but he didn't falter. "So what? He provoked me by releasing his killing intent while looking at me." Forneus got some courage back and spoke louder. "You would do the same in my case."

Orpheus narrowed his eyes even further. By now, cold sweat was flowing down Forneus' back, and his breathing became heavier. But surprisingly, Orpheus did nothing further. This was an excellent opportunity to teach Gravis.

Orpheus turned to Gravis. "He is right, you know. You were constantly unleashing your battle-intent. That's what we call a Will-Aura, or killing-intent. Normally, the Will-Aura is only released when someone wants to fight someone else. By openly showing your battle-intent, you basically shouted at him to fight with you."

Gravis closed his eyes and sighed. Orpheus was right. By always killing weaker opponents, he forgot that he was still at the bottom. Gravis turned to Forneus and slightly bowed. "Thank you for the reminder, Forneus. And I apologize for my disrespect," Gravis said politely.

Forneus harrumphed, looked at Orpheus, and left grumbling. Orpheus watched Forneus leave and turned back to Gravis. "Your test will be different than the other's."

Gravis narrowed his eyes, and his battle-intent was building again.

"Your test will be difficult."

Gravis' Will-Aura rose further.

"We've never done this before, but I believe that you can manage." Orpheus smiled.

Gravis looked into Orpheus' eyes, and his aura reached his peak. "What will I fight?"

Orpheus' smile changed to a smirk. "You'll fight a low-grade demonic beast."

Gravis' will slightly shook, but returned even stronger. He had learned a lot in the last months, and wild beasts were among those things. He had only fought against ferocious beasts until now. The strongest among them could theoretically, still be killed by people in the mortal realm, or with tempered organs and blood.

Yet, low-grade demonic beasts were not ferocious beasts anymore. They were a grade higher, and people of the earlier mentioned stages were just food for them. With luck, someone with tempered skin could kill a low-grade demonic beast. Only if someone additionally tempered their muscles or bones, could they securely win against such an opponent. Gravis knew this would be difficult.

Orpheus nodded. "Good! Your will didn't falter and became stronger instead. Only like this can you hope to defeat your opponent." Orpheus took out a saber made of void-stone and threw it to Gravis. "You won't have time to pick up your weapon."

By now, several youngsters already returned, exhausted beyond belief. They didn't even notice that Forneus wasn't here and just collapsed onto a wall to catch their breath. Orpheus and Gravis ignored them. "Go!" shouted Orpheus, and a portal opened.

Gravis tightened his grip on his saber and walked silently through the portal. The scenery changed, and Gravis was back in the red cave. In front of him stood a two-meter high, golden lion. Its head looked down at Gravis, sizing him up. Gravis felt its pressure. None of his earlier opponents felt this powerful, yet his gaze did not falter and looked back into the lion's eyes. His will-aura erupted and slammed into the lion.

The lion felt threatened and roared. While Gravis was physically weaker than his opponent, his will-aura was superior. The opponent didn't even have one. The lion had fought for its meal, but never fought an opponent that could threaten its life. Inside its forest in the lower world, it was king. None dared challenge it! Its mane stood up to intimidate its opponent, but it didn't work.

Gravis knew that the initiative was important, so he immediately shot forward. The lion roared again and swiped with a claw.

'Fast!' Gravis thought and raised his saber to block. The paw smashed into the saber, and Gravis flew back for about five meters. When he hit the floor, he rolled off with his back and managed to stand up again, before he even finished sliding. Gravis' arms shook. There was immense power behind that swipe, and the lion didn't even use its full body weight for that attack. He could not contend with its strength.

The lion, encouraged by its own attack, ran to Gravis and swiped again. Gravis wouldn't fall for its speed another time and ducked under the attack while moving forward. He quickly raised his saber and slashed the lion's neck.

CLANK!

His saber bounced back, and his hands shook from the impact. Its mane felt similar to a steel wall. Gravis quickly rolled forward to dodge a paw that smashed down. Then, the lion tried to hit him with its back leg, but Gravis sidestepped easily while half-crouching. He gripped his saber with both of his hands and stabbed upward, towards its torso.

His saber only left a shallow cut. There was just some blood flowing out, but not much. Yet, the lion screamed in pain and jumped away, trying to hit Gravis in panic. Gravis had no issue evading such uncoordinated attacks and kept close to the lion, like a leech. The lion swiped again, but Gravis kept low to the ground and went under its elbow. With a sharp blow, he hit the inside of the lion's elbow, while it was still swiping. The lion's attack's added power made the saber go in deep and even cut its tendon.

The lion roared again and tried to jump back, but the cut tendon in its elbow only made the lion stumble back. Gravis didn't let up. He learned in his many previous fights that having the initiative was important. While the lion was recovering, Gravis stabbed his saber in its left eye. The lion seized and only managed to close its eyes before the saber penetrated it. The saber had destroyed the eye, but a saber was not made for stabbing, so it didn't majorly injure the brain behind the eye.

The lion completely panicked and swiped its claws everywhere. Gravis kept his cool and kept himself to the blind side of the lion. He chopped into its side a couple of times and left some additional cuts. The lion realized in its panicked mind, that no matter how fast it turned, it wouldn't be able to get Gravis in its sight like this. So it turned the other way. Gravis was just waiting for that and looked at the tail coming towards him, stretched by centripetal force.

Gravis did a simple chop and severed the tail. Blood spilled, and the lion jumped away from Gravis, but in its panic, it forgot that its front paw was injured. It crashed to the floor and rolled onto its side. Gravis didn't pause and slashed the spot where front-leg met torso. For humans, that would be the armpit. The fur was soft on that spot, and a lot of important blood vessels gathered there. More blood gushed, and after he did that, he jumped over the lion. Just when it stood up again, he stabbed its other eye from the side.

The lion screamed and just fled into any random direction in panic.

BOOM!

It blindly ran into the cave wall and bounced back, its mouth now broken. While lying on its side, it tried to roar but only managed a whimper. Gravis quickly jumped to its front and stabbed his saber through a mutilated eye-socket, right into its brain. The lion seized up, and Gravis finished the fight with a kick into the handle of the stuck saber. The saber cut deep into the lion's head, and the lion lost all its strength.

Gravis watched the corpse, while his breathing was only slightly quicker than usual. 'This was too easy,' he thought. The lion outclassed him completely in speed, defense, power, and probably also stamina, yet it died so quickly. After thinking for a while, Gravis finally realized the reason.

"The lion was inexperienced," he concluded. It had not bitten him a single time. It didn't even try to bite him. If it tried to bite him at the beginning, Gravis wouldn't have been able to get beneath it that easily. If he were to slide beneath its head, the lion could just swipe him with one of its paws. He wouldn't be able to evade that attack and would probably crash into the side of the cave. Some of his bones would break, and deep cuts made by its claws would appear.

The fear the lion had, stopped it from bringing its head anywhere close to its enemy. The head was the most important part of its body and needed to be protected. What if the enemy stabbed its eyes? Yet, those seemingly logical thoughts were the lion's downfall. It should've realized that its enemy would forfeit their life if they were to stab its eyes in that situation. A more experienced lion could have wiped the floor with Gravis.

Gravis looked up to the ceiling. "Was this what brother Orpheus wanted to show me? That will and fighting experience could close the gap of realms?" Gravis muttered to himself. Gravis was right, but will and fighting experience could only close the gap to a certain extent. If an opponent's body were so hard that he couldn't even break its skin, all the fighting experience in the world wouldn't help him. Yet, it dramatically increased his power in a fight.

His will-aura had suppressed the lion and made it act more cowardly. Without his battle-intent's intimidation, the lion might've decided to bite him. Then, only death would've awaited Gravis.

Gravis sighed again, and in a purple flash, he vanished.