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Chapter 291: Joyce's New Goal

"By the way, there is one thing that I am confused about," Gravis said.

"Yes?" Joyce asked.

"You saw that I had had a Will-Aura in the Body Tempering Realm, so why did you help me? You should've known about the Heaven Sect's ways," Gravis asked.

Joyce sighed. "Well, to be honest, I never expected you to pay me back."

Gravis lifted an eyebrow. "You didn't?"

Joyce shook her head. "I was sure that the Heaven Sect would kill you. The only reason I helped you was that I felt bad for you. Such a fate seemed too tragic in my eyes. But hey, good thing it didn't come true!"

Gravis smiled. "It sure is. So, anyway, the whole resource war thing is a no-go?" he asked.

Joyce showed an uncomfortable look. "Well, not completely."

"How come? Your teacher said that you never intended to partake in the war this year," Gravis asked.

"It's not that I decided against it, but that my father and teacher decided against it," Joyce explained.

"My will is already very powerful, and the resource war has a 90% death-rate. They said that the risk is too high for me. If I had a weaker Will-Aura, they would've let me go, but my will is already powerful enough. Only a little bit more, and my will would be powerful enough to ascend. They said that I don't need to go through such a risky adventure. Safety is more important."

Gravis lifted a brow. "Depends on what your goal is."

Joyce looked with confusion at Gravis. "Obviously, my goal is to become powerful."

"Yeah, but how powerful exactly?" Gravis asked.

Joyce furrowed her brows. She hadn't thought about this before. The highest power that everyone in this lower world knew was the power of an ascender. They knew nothing about the path after that, so they also couldn't imagine how it would be in the higher worlds. Many people even believed that ascenders would ascend to the kingdom of God and live forever while watching over this world.

"Could you tell me more about higher worlds?" Joyce asked.

Gravis shrugged. "Sure. The world that ascenders go to is basically the same as this one, but with a higher power ceiling. Imagine an even lower world where there are so few resources that people would take over 50 years to reach the Magic Gathering Realm. Not many people are able to reach that Realm in that world due to the resources, but when they do, they appear in this world, as Magic Gathering Realm cultivators."

"Basically, as soon as you ascend to the next world, you can't be considered as being at the bottom, but you also can't be considered to be powerful. You basically get flung into a world while being at the lower-middle of the world's power," Gravis explained.

Joyce looked at the floor in uncertainty. "So, the higher world is no different from our world? There are still fights for resources and life and death tempering?"

Gravis nodded. "Exactly. The only difference is that you live longer and see a bigger mountain and higher Heaven in front of you. It's like when the strongest person of an isolated village goes to a town for the first time, thinking that they are mighty only to be beaten up by basic guards."

Joyce sighed. "And every other person in your Realm has also managed to ascend from their world, and therefore, could all be considered geniuses."

Gravis nodded. "Yes. The higher world only gives you the opportunity to see a new goal for your power. It isn't easier or more peaceful, but only crueler. Imagine the destruction that two fighting people at the Unity Realm would cause to the surroundings. The mortals have it even worse in the higher world than here since any random fight in their vicinity could annihilate them."

Joyce wasn't happy right now. She had thought that the next world would be kinder. After all, everyone had already reached the Unity Realm, so why would there even be a reason for fighting? Yet, she hadn't thought about the fact that there could be more Realms after the Unity Realm.

"Why does the world have to be so cruel?" Joyce asked herself more than Gravis.

"Because Heaven wants Energy," Gravis said.

Joyce was a little taken aback. "Heaven wants Energy?"

Gravis nodded. "I don't know the specifics, and I can't tell you everything I know about this, but Heaven wants powerful humans. The more powerful the human, the better."

Joyce sighed. "Is there ever an end to that?"

"Yes," Gravis said, surprising Joyce again. She hadn't expected that Gravis had an answer to such a profound and mystical question. "There is the highest world with the highest Heaven that has created every other world. If you manage to reach the peak there, only two beings are more powerful than you, and both of them don't care about you and basically let you do what you want."

Joyce looked with widely opened eyes at Gravis. She was absorbing the knowledge like a dry sponge. To her, it felt like the secrets of the universe were revealed before her eyes. "Two beings?"

Gravis nodded. "One is the highest Heaven, and the other is the Opposer, the strongest human who has the same power as the highest Heaven."

Joyce looked with wonder at Gravis. "A human with power equal to the highest Heaven? Do these two beings rule over the highest world?" She asked.

Gravis laughed dryly. "The opposite. They absolutely despise each other and fight regularly, but only the weak suffer from these fights as far as I know. The peak powers rarely get involved. There are exceptions, of course, for example, when Heaven schemes against the Opposer directly, but as far as I

heard, those situations only happen, at most, every couple of million years, and the last one only happened about two years ago."

Joyce furrowed her brows. "How do you know that? You've been here for three years, so how could you know what happened two years ago?"

Gravis noticed that he forgot to explain something. "Oh, it's two years in the time of my homeworld. There is a huge time dilation between my homeworld and this world. While I have stayed three years in this world, only about a day has passed in my homeworld. If I were to calculate according to the time of this world, the incident happened about two thousand years ago."

Joyce couldn't completely wrap her head around these numbers. Millions of years between fights? It was possible to live for that long? Did their world even exist for a million years? She had no idea! No one knew how old the world was.

"So, how strong do you want to become?" Gravis asked again. "If you only want to have a nice life, I would suggest to stop cultivating at the Tree Stage. Your will is already powerful enough to reach that. Like this, you only need to wait to become one of the strongest people in this world. You can live in relative freedom and have enough power to protect those dear to you. Because, if you ascend, you are weak again, and your survival can be decided by thousands or millions of cultivators more powerful than you."

Joyce remained quiet as she thought about this. This was a serious choice, and she finally had enough knowledge to make an informed decision. Gravis told her about how her journey would eventually go in the higher world and what would await her. If she weren't ready to go through the same pain she had felt until now for many more times, it would be better for her to stop cultivating now.

Joyce thought for a full minute about her decision while Gravis remained silent.

"I can't stop now," Joyce said with motivation. "My brothers and sisters gave their lives to pave my path forward, and no matter how difficult it will become, I must continue, until the bitter end." Joyce took a shaky breath. "Even if I will be in pain for thousands of years."

Gravis smirked. "Alright, then you must never stop going forward. Everyone else in the lower worlds only sees the ascension and only temper themselves up to that point. You have the advantage of knowledge, so you know that any tempering you do now won't go to waste. Never stop tempering, and always remain ahead of the curve. Only like this can you become powerful."

Joyce heard this and wholeheartedly agreed. "Yes!"

"We will partake in the resource war, no matter what my teacher or father say!"

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Chapter 292: Heaven's Trial

"I meant to ask, but what is this resource war even? I have not heard anything specific about it," Gravis said. "It seems to be quite a big deal with what everyone has said so far."

Joyce was quite surprised. "You don't know what the resource war is about? Then why did you intend to help me?"

Gravis shrugged. "Lasar said that when I return to repay my debt, asking for my help in the resource war would be the likeliest scenario. It also plays perfectly into the old man's plan that I take part in it. Apparently, I am safe from the Heaven Sect in that period."

Joyce looked with confusion at Gravis. "Old man?"

"Old Man Lightning. That's what everyone calls him," Gravis explained.

"Oh, yes. I should've known that you meant him," Joyce said. "The resource war is not a traditional war. In actuality, calling it a war is pretty inaccurate since we won't be fighting against other groups."

"Oh?" Gravis asked with interest.

"Yes. We will go through many different trials," she explained.

"Trials? Who decides these trials?" Gravis asked suspiciously.

Joyce was first confused at the question but then realized that Gravis didn't even know the basics. "A couple of thousand years ago, an incredibly wealthy ascendent created an inheritance for the worthy. As soon as he reached the Unity Realm, he started building this massive area full of trials and treasures. He was also an unprecedented master in Formation Arrays. With all of this, he created an inheritance. Of course, he doesn't want to give his wealth to everybody, but only to those who manage to pass his trials."

Gravis furrowed his brows. A suspicion slowly rose inside his mind. "And ever since then, the inheritance opened every ten years?"

Joyce nodded. "Exactly!"

"And the winners always got some treasures out of this inheritance?" Gravis asked.

Joyce nodded. "Yes. That's impressive, right? Even thousands of years later, his wealth hasn't been used up. He must have been incredibly rich."

When Gravis heard that, his eyes narrowed in coldness. "Is there a place where I can be alone for a couple of minutes? I need to think about something," Gravis said evenly.

Joyce was surprised by Gravis' sudden change in attitude. Nevertheless, she complied.

Clank.

A key appeared in Gravis' hand. "This is a key to a guest room. It's down the hallway to the right. It's the key to the fifth guestroom. You can't miss it," she explained.

"Thanks," Gravis said and then left the room. "I will be back in about ten minutes or so. Please wait for me until then."

Joyce smiled and nodded. "Sure!"

Gravis quickly walked along the hallway and found his room. He entered and didn't even look at the décor. He wouldn't be staying in this room for long, so the looks of the room didn't matter. Gravis directly walked to the window and looked at the sky with narrowed eyes.

He also checked if any Spirit kept watch over him and saw that he was alone with no one watching. "After hundreds of groups of people passing the ascender's trial, there is still so much more wealth?" Gravis chuckled dryly. "Who are you kidding, Heaven?" Gravis asked.

Of course, there came no answer.

"Is this your last stand against me? You want me to take part in a Heaven's Trial?" Gravis asked with a smirk.

BZZZ!

Gravis saw a lightning bolt shoot across the sky. It was so fast and so silent that no one would have noticed as long as they didn't pay attention. When Gravis saw that, he knew that he was right. This was a Heaven's Trial.

"You really are full of yourself," Gravis said as he looked at the sky. "You actually have the audacity to create a Heaven's Trial in your lower world. You should know full well that those are rare even in middle worlds and only common in higher worlds. Yet, here you are, creating one in a lower world. I bet the highest Heaven also isn't the biggest fan of that, huh?"

Gravis didn't see it, but the highest Heaven had also snorted in disdain when it had noticed the Heaven's Trial in this lower world. Yet, it was just another failure in the highest Heaven's eyes. This lower Heaven had made so many miscalls and wrong decisions that the inclusion of a Heaven's Trial made no difference.

What was a Heaven's Trial?

A Heaven's Trial was an artificial inheritance disguised as an actual one. Heaven would create another High Priest, but that priest wouldn't show their status as a Heavenborn. This secret High Priest would then cultivate like every other person and accrue a lot of wealth. As soon as this High Priest reached the Unity Realm, they would create an inheritance and then ascend.

Of course, this was all only for show. In actuality, the High Priest only went through the motions in creating the inheritance. And ascension? As if! The High Priest would just silently be killed off by Heaven. Like this, everyone in the world would believe that an incredibly rich ascender had created an inheritance. Powerful cultivators would search for wealth and enter.

The difference between a Heaven's Trial and an inheritance was that an inheritance wasn't remotely controlled by someone. After all, they weren't part of this world anymore. Yet, since this "inheritance" was administrated by Heaven, it could be manipulated and changed at any time. The wealth could also be refilled whenever necessary. Basically, the whole thing was a testing ground under the control of Heaven. It had the final say in everything in there.

Yet, why do all this work? Why would a Heaven work so hard to produce something like this? What did it gain out of this? The answer to that was two-fold. One was powerful cultivators. The other was Energy.

It worked like this:

Everything, be it a cultivator or treasure, had Energy, and there was only a finite amount of it. In this explanation, the effects of treasures will be converted to Energy Points.

Let's say that one Seed Stage cultivator is equal to one Energy Point.

They would enter as groups of five, and twenty groups in total would enter.

Like this, 100 Energy Points would enter the Heaven's Trial. The winning group of the Heaven's Trial would get a reward equal to about 15 Energy Points bestowed by Heaven, which was an incredible reward for such a group. Theoretically, with the reward added, the group that initially only had five Energy Points would exit with 20 Energy Points. Obviously, they would exit stronger than when they entered.

Yet, what about the remaining 95 entrants? Well, they were dead. Their corpses would decompose, and the Energy would return to Heaven. This would be equal to 95 points of Energy. If one subtracted the reward of 15 Energy Points, it would still be a net gain of 80 Energy Points.

If one looked only at the result, then one would see that 100 Energy Points entered, while only 20 Energy Points returned. Yet, these 20 Energy Points were distributed among five people. If the reward were distributed equally, those people would have entered with one Energy Point and returned with four. So, one could say that their strengths had quadrupled.

With that, 100 average people would be "refined" into five very impressive people while the leftover Energy could be used on the world by Heaven.

Yet, why was it stupid for this lower Heaven to create a Heaven's Trial? With that explanation, it only looked like a net-gain for it.

The issue was that this world was at the bottom. Numbers were still very important at this stage. The more people ascended, the better. One could say that it was not this lower Heaven's job to filter the cultivators to this degree.

On top of that, 99% of all cultivators never went through the tenth Stage of Energy Gathering. Therefore, nearly everyone that ascended from this world could be considered as a mediocre piece of trash in the middle world. What does it matter if those people were incredibly outstanding and powerful? Due to their weak foundation, they would never reach a higher world.

Heaven didn't care about powerful people in the middle world. It only cared about powerful people in the highest world since one peak cultivator in the highest world brought more Energy than several higher worlds combined.

As long as someone wasn't able to reach the highest world, they would remain a piece of trash in Heaven's eyes. Theoretically, even if they could fight three major Realms above themselves, which was impossible, they would still be trash in Heaven's eyes. Due to that, having two pieces of trash instead of one powerful piece of trash was better. They could, at least, still function as tempering for the talented cultivators.

Another issue with powerful pieces of trash was that they could kill cultivators that actually went through the tenth Stage of Energy Gathering and had the talent to reach the highest world. Like this, a cultivator that would never achieve another ascension would kill someone that could. This could be compared to a fertilizer killing a plant.

So, all in all, with this Heaven's Trial, this lower Heaven created powerful cultivators with no promising future while reducing the numbers of ascenders. This was the complete opposite of what it was supposed to do.

"As soon as I enter this Heaven's Trial, I will be completely under your thumb," Gravis said. "You can give me the hardest trials and even create completely new ones. This wouldn't even go against the rules. Like this, you can go directly against me again, even if the highest Heaven is watching. You probably already have a lot of insane ideas, like, making me fight a priest, or forcing me to kill my own team and similar things."

Gravis wasn't sure, but he could swear that he could feel Heaven's nervousness. This had been its best plan until now, and Gravis had noticed it already. There was still the tribulation of when Gravis would reach the Unity Realm, but at that point, Gravis would be powerful enough to put up a fight against Heaven. Right now, he still couldn't put up a fight. Heaven needed to stop him before he was powerful enough to directly resist.

And for the first time ever, this lower Heaven became genuinely afraid of Gravis.

If Gravis didn't accept, then the next time they would fight, Gravis would have a chance of actually killing it!

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Chapter 293: Mundane Conversation

Gravis smirked. "But you know what? As soon as I reach the Sapling Stage, I can become powerful enough to fight against people in the Self Stage, and I am absolutely sure that you can't make trials on the level of the Unity Realm, so I will join your game."

Heaven grew elated as it heard that.

"But!" Gravis shouted. "Only under one condition! You will not make me kill or fight against my own team!"

No answer came.

"Showing no answer is not good enough anymore. Either you directly communicate with me now, or I won't go! You will promise me that you won't pit me against my team."

Gravis looked at the sky and waited for an answer. Heaven no longer had the option to remain silent if it wanted him to participate in its trial. Yet, no answer came.

"It agrees," the Opposer's voice appeared inside Gravis' mind, giving him a pleasant surprise.

"How come you are telling me that, father?" Gravis asked.

"It is still against the rules to communicate with cultivators, and the old bastard is enforcing that rule. Therefore, the old bastard informed me since I don't fall into that rule. After all, I can speak with you as long as the old bastard isn't against it. You won't be pitted against your team. The old bastard and I will make sure that this lower Heaven keeps to its word," the Opposer explained.

Gravis smiled wholeheartedly. "I'm happy that I got to hear your voice again, father. Just watch me! I'll directly confront this lower Heaven's scheme and kill it after that!" Gravis shouted with motivation.

"Heh, I'm looking forward to it," The Opposer said.

Gravis was sure that he had heard mirth in his father's voice, which was nearly unprecedented to Gravis. His father was always distant and cold. Hearing mirth from his father's voice made Gravis happy.

In front of his father, Gravis still felt like a child. Every child wanted to make their parents proud, as long as they still had a familiar bond. His father hadn't directly shown any love for Gravis, which made him appear more like a distant boss than a father, but his father had always supported him on his path after he had allowed Gravis to cultivate.

Gravis also realized why his father was so against him cultivating when he was young. If Gravis didn't wholeheartedly yearn for power or freedom, this path would have only ended in tragedy and regret. Of course, what he hadn't known at that time, was that his father would have still bestowed him incredible strength, even if Gravis decided against cultivation.

He had heard those details from Orpheus back then. Apparently, when one of the Opposer's children wasn't suited for cultivation, the Opposer would bestow an incredible amount of power to that child. The person would then be at a Realm of new ascenders that reached the highest world. Orpheus had called that Realm only by its title and not its actual Realm name. The title was Immortal Emperor.

Yet, since that child didn't go through any of those Realms themselves, they would never be able to make even one step of progress. They would be weaker than every single other Immortal Emperor. If they still wanted to cultivate, they would need to temper themselves against weaker cultivators in life and death battles for millennia. This was humiliating, frustrating, tiresome, and difficult. Even if they succeeded, they wouldn't have forged their own path, making it even harder to progress.

Only by going through all the Realms step by step with one's own power would one be able to progress steadily. The Opposer only bestowed the cultivation for longevity purposes. Those children were also still under the protection of the Opposer. After all, they didn't need to temper themselves.

Like this, those children could live out their lives in peace without danger. Yet, they would never have true freedom since they were still reliant on their father. They could also still be killed on accident by two very powerful cultivators fighting in their general vicinity. Of course, the Opposer would kill the killer after that, and everyone knew about that, but accidents still happened.

After Gravis got the okay from this lower Heaven, he left his room again and went back to Joyce. "I'm coming with you," he said.

Joyce grinned in happiness as she heard that. "Great! I already talked with my father, and I got the okay!"

Gravis laughed dryly. "Because he has listened in on the conversation. I felt his Spirit," Gravis said with a smirk.

Joyce went a bit red in the face and scowled. "Yes! I was so angry when I heard that he listened in on my private conversation! After all, I can't feel his Spirit since I am two whole Stages below him. Hmph! If I had a Unity Will, I would be able to feel his Spirit!" Joyce threw a small temper tantrum and stomped

around. "Grrr! I'm so frustrated with him! I'm already an adult, and I'm also quite powerful! Yet, he still looks at me like I am his innocent little treasure!"

Gravis only smirked awkwardly.

Joyce pouted as she crossed her arms. "At least, teacher didn't listen in! You should have seen his shocked face when I told him that I would partake in the resource war! He tried everything to get me to stop, and it took my father to calm him down. My father first wanted to keep it a secret that he listened in on our conversation, but my teacher's adamant refusal to let me go forced him to confess. Hmph!"

Gravis rubbed his head in awkwardness. Joyce had been very cold and direct before, but now she acted like a spoiled little girl. If he hadn't seen her willpower and conviction earlier, he would believe that she was nothing but a child. Maybe that was her way to distract herself from her pain.

Joyce's eyes widened as she remembered something. "Oh, right! We need to talk about the specifics!"

Gravis perked up again. "Which are?"

"First of all, you should take a seat! I haven't offered you any tea yet!" Suddenly, Joyce quickly walked to Gravis and shoved him backwards. Gravis knew that this wasn't an attack, so he let it happen.

Plomp!

Gravis fell into a comfortable chair, and a table appeared in front of him out of thin air. Another chair also appeared on the opposite side of the table. Joyce sat down in the chair and smiled at Gravis.

"I'm not sure if shoving a visitor into a chair is considered polite," Gravis said with a lifted brow.

Joyce waved her hand dismissively. "Stop whining! How did you put it?" Joyce asked with a smirk. "Is your self-confidence so fragile that you need pleasantries? You said something like that, right?"

When Gravis heard that, he genuinely laughed. "Alright, you win." Then, Gravis looked at the table and chairs. "Are you actually using your Spirit Space to store such useless things?"

Joyce pouted again. "These are not useless! I can summon them whenever I want to entertain a guest. Also, you do not honestly think that I take those with me when I leave my Clan to temper myself, are you?"

Gravis smirked. "Who knows? Maybe you do."

Joyce sneered. "Oh, shut up! You know exactly that I don't take them with me. You're just trying to get a rise out of me."

Knock, knock, knock!

"Come in!" Joyce shouted with mirth. After that, a maid walked in with some fresh tea and some cups. First, she placed one of the cups in front of Gravis and filled it.

"Thank you," Gravis said politely.

The maid did a small bow as a thank you and then filled Joyce's cup. "Thank you, Anna."

The maid made another small bow and left the room.

When Gravis looked at the tea, he remembered something. "By the way, do you have coffee?" he asked. Joyce furrowed her brows in confusion. "What's coffee?"

Gravis sighed. "Nevermind."

Gravis stretched his hand to the tea, but it suddenly floated towards Joyce. "What's coffee? Tell me, or else you won't get your tea!"

Gravis knew that she was only playing, but he was a bit unused to that. He wasn't smitten by her beauty like the first time they had met, but he was still inexperienced in talking with women. "It's a drink from my homeworld. I've never seen it in this lower world. The tea reminded me of that, so I asked if you had any."

"Oh? How do you make coffee?" she asked in interest.

And like that, the whole conversation derailed. Joyce started asking about coffee, which then extended to asking about beans. Then it went to how his homeworld raised plants and culminated in a discussion about his homeworld's general society.

Usually, Gravis wasn't interested in talking about unimportant things, but for once, he actually enjoyed the conversation. Maybe it was the good tea, or maybe it was Joyce's genuine attitude. Every longer conversation that Gravis had had in this lower world was with serious people and always only covered topics relevant to the leading of an organization or cultivation in general.

Like this, they talked for hours. Gravis gained nothing useful out of the conversation, but, for a change, it felt nice to just talk about mundane stuff. Anyway, for the first time in a long while, Gravis spent some hours where he didn't think about his cultivation.

To him, it was kind of relaxing. He had been under constant pressure ever since he had arrived in this lower world. If it wasn't about a current predicament, then it was about his progress in cultivation. He had only taken one break during that time, which had been when he had just reached the Spirit Forming Realm.

Now, for the first time since he had arrived at the Core-Continent, Gravis "wasted" his time without thinking about cultivation.

His will was powerful, and the constant pressure and stress didn't affect him that much, but he realized that he actually needed a break. Something that doesn't bend will only break. Gravis quickly realized that some hidden fatigue he had never noticed started leaving him as the conversation continued.

Apparently, this conversation wasn't just him wasting time, but him taking a much-needed break.

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Chapter 294: Big Family Argument

After several hours of conversation, Gravis finally managed to steer the conversation back to its original topic. It wasn't that he didn't enjoy the conversation, but after several hours, he started growing bored.

"Oh yeah, the specifics," Joyce said with surprise. "I totally forgot about that! Sorry!"

Gravis closed his eyes and shook his head gently. "Don't worry about it. The conversation was pleasant while it lasted."

Joyce smiled genuinely. "That's good to hear! Anyway, the specifics. There are one hundred open spots for the inheritance, and every spot covers a group of five. So, theoretically, 500 cultivators could enter at a time. Of course, those spots are never fully used up. There just aren't enough powerful cultivators willing to risk their lives like this. After all, the maximum number of groups that survived at one point was two, and some people in their groups had also died. That's a pretty terrifying ratio of deaths."

Gravis nodded.

Joyce lifted a finger. "On top of that, there are different options for every trial. Every trial takes the cultivation of the most powerful person into account and adjusts the difficulty."

Gravis frowned. "Then, wouldn't you be forced to partake in a trial for the Sapling Stage? After all, I will directly break into the Sapling Stage as soon as I enter, while you will remain in the initial Stage."

Joyce's eyes widened. "You are already ready to reach the Sapling Stage? That's incredible! You're really fast in your cultivation!"

Gravis waved his hand dismissively. "Yeah, but what about the difficulty of the trials?"

Joyce smiled. "You don't have to worry about that. The trial also takes the number of cultivators into account. You can go solo while our group will go together. Like this, you have a solo trial for the Sapling Stage, while we have a four-man trial for the initial Stage."

When Gravis heard that, he released a sigh of relief. With this option, his enmity with Heaven wouldn't involve the other group. The highest Heaven didn't like it when the lives of cultivators were wasted. This lower Heaven would be forced to make it fair for the group, while it would do everything to kill Gravis. Though, just to be sure, Gravis had to do one more thing. If he wanted to give Joyce a better chance of finishing the trial, he would need to increase her worth to the highest Heaven.

"There is something important that I need to tell you. This thing might secure your survival in the inheritance," Gravis said.

Joyce was surprised and intrigued by Gravis' claim. "Oh? Do tell!"

Like this, Gravis started explaining the situation in the middle worlds and how Heaven only cared about people that could continue ascending. Everyone that didn't reach the Unity Realm via the Self Stage would only become fertilizer. He didn't tell Joyce about Heaven's need for Energy or similar stuff. After all, Heaven wasn't the biggest fan of having its ways exposed.

When Gravis finished explaining, Joyce looked with devastation at the ground. "I... didn't go through the tenth Stage of Magic Gathering," she said. "Does that mean that I will never achieve my goal?" she asked.

"Destroy your Spirit," Gravis said, making Joyce look at him with shock. "You are only at the initial Stage of Spirit Forming. At most, you will lose three years of progress in exchange for actually having a chance of reaching your goal. Your will will remain just as powerful, so your tempering will not go to waste. Destroy your Spirit, get to the tenth Stage, and condense your Spirit again."

"Are you mad!?" came an aggressive shout as Marvin, the Patriarch, and also Joyce's father, broke through the door. "Destroy my daughter's Spirit? I won't let that happen!"

Gravis wasn't surprised by that since he had felt Marvin's Spirit for a long time. Meanwhile, Joyce grew angry at her father again. "Stop listening in on my private conversation! This has nothing to do with you!"

"This has everything to do with me!" Marvin shouted angrily. "You are my daughter, and your well-being is the most important thing to me! Do you even know how hard it is to ascend while going through the Self Stage?"

"Shut up!" Joyce shouted as she stood up aggressively. Her chair and table got destroyed while Gravis' cup of tea hovered before him. He had already expected something like that.

"Shut up?" Marvin asked with shock like he couldn't believe that words like this came out of her mouth. "I'm your father! I only want the best for you, so how dare you to talk to me like that!?"

Gravis kept drinking his tea. This thing had nothing to do with him. Joyce needed to fight for her own future. It was her life, and she needed to show and have an independent cultivator's power and conviction. If he involved himself, Joyce would maybe start relying on others.

"But you don't know what's best for me!" Joyce shouted in anger. "You have heard Gravis and what he said! It makes perfect sense! My goal isn't ascension, but becoming genuinely powerful! If he hadn't told me about the ongoings of the higher world, I would've run into a dead-end! At that point, I would need to fall two majors realms instead of only one Stage! Not even that, I will regain my old cultivation in just a couple of days!"

Marvin gnashed his teeth. "And you believe everything he says!? He said he came from a higher world but is that even true? What if everything he says is a lie."

"I don't lie," Gravis said nonchalantly, not even looking at Marvin.

"You might be a lightning cultivator, but that doesn't make it impossible for you to lie! That's not proof enough!" Marvin shouted with anger.

"Shut up, daddy! Don't shout at my guest!" Joyce shouted back.

"What's going on here!?" came a shout from Reginald as he also arrived.

Marvin quickly informed Reginald, and he immediately took Marvin's side. Like this, everything devolved into a shouting match between Joyce, Reginald, and Marvin.

Gravis finished his tea and put the cup to the ground. After all, there was no table anymore.

Then, he walked to the wall, leaned against it, and waited. It was awkward to be the only one sitting in a room of shouting, standing people.

The argument went on for many minutes. The shouting intensified as Joyce wouldn't relent. Her refusal to accept her father's orders was something that hadn't happened yet, at least not to this extent. After some minutes of shouting, Marvin usually got his way. Yet, this time, Joyce wasn't relenting.

"This is all because of you!" Marvin shouted as he pointed at Gravis. "You have poisoned my daughter's mind!"

Gravis sneered. "You're not angry because of Joyce," Gravis said with disdain. "You just can't accept that your dream of ascension is broken. You can't accept that you will be a doormat as soon as you-"

"SHUT UP!" Marvin shouted with fury. "You don't know me, and you don't know what you're talking about! You are just a child!"

Gravis' eyes narrowed. "A child that can flatten your whole clan in a matter of seconds," Gravis commented dryly. "Don't forget that."

Marvin and Reginald gnashed their teeth in fury, while Joyce frowned at Gravis. She didn't like it when people said that they could destroy her family.

"So, let's stay civil in this discussion, alright?" Gravis said and then remained silent.

After some seconds of silence, the three started arguing again, but this time, they didn't involve Gravis in their arguments. Marvin and Reginald tried to convince Joyce that she wouldn't be able to get a level two Unity Will with their method of will tempering. Starting at the Unity Will, the deaths of companions weren't strong enough to temper one's will anymore. Like this, she would never ascend.

"So? Then I will put myself through life and death tempering!" Joyce shouted.

Reginald became incredibly angry when he heard that. "Are you insane!? If you do that, there is a huge chance that you will die!"

One had to know that people who cultivated Life Lightning wouldn't involve themselves directly in fights. They were always in the back and only healed the injured people. If something went south in the fight, they were the furthest away and could flee while the enemy cut through the front line. After all, even if their lightning didn't have destructive capabilities, it still had its magnetism. The cultivator could use that to flee from a fight with a very high probability.

"So? Our method of tempering will only go to the Unity Will! What am I supposed to do as soon as I reach the Unity Realm? At that point, I can only temper myself in life and death fights! When I start now, I, at least, become already used to it! And don't forget the resource war! I'm pretty sure that I won't be able to stay in the back and only watch everyone else!" Joyce shouted.

With this comment, it became difficult for Marvin and Reginald to find reasons against that. Reginald started becoming neutral, while Marvin only grew even more furious. "You're my daughter, and you will do what I say!"

"You're my father, and I love you, but I won't let you control my life!" Joyce shouted. "I am an adult, and this is my life! This is my decision, and I have decided to go through with it! You can't stop me!"

Whoosh!

Marvin released his Will-Aura and made Joyce unable to move. "I won't allow this."

Joyce was shocked and had a heartbroken look in her eyes. Her father had never attacked or suppressed her with his Will-Aura.

This was not the father that she knew!

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Chapter 295: Joyce's Path Forward

Gravis watched as the discussions broke down and force was used. Would he get involved?

No.

Why should he get involved? Just because Joyce was a woman? Cultivation didn't take gender into account. The cultivation world was different than the mortal world. In the mortal world, one person couldn't have enough power to overthrow whole nations, Clans, or family heads. People needed help from other people in the mortal world since one person just couldn't reach overwhelming power. For mortals, the cooperation between humans was necessary.

Yet, in the cultivation world, this belief would break down. When there were no rules to stop someone from committing all sorts of things that mortals would consider "atrocious crimes", the strength of a single individual became more important than the strength of a group.

So, all in all, Joyce needed to deal with this problem herself. Her father wasn't an enemy of hers, and he also wouldn't kill her. If Joyce wasn't even able to handle something like that, she might as well stop cultivating. Even though her father was way more powerful than her, she wasn't helpless right now. If one didn't have enough power, then one had to get creative. Gravis saw multiple ways which would give Joyce an upper hand.

"Marvin, are you sure about that?" Reginald asked unsurely.

"It's what's best for her," Marvin said evenly.

Marvin also saw how Gravis didn't react at all, which gave him even more confidence. The fact that Gravis didn't get involved showed that he didn't care about Joyce at all. If Gravis wanted the best for Joyce, he would step to her side and help her. This only strengthened Marvin's belief that Gravis was trying to manipulate Joyce.

"You..." Joyce managed to utter through clenched teeth. She was suppressed by Marvin's Will-Aura, but not completely. She could still talk, though it was hard. "You!" she managed to shout through clenched teeth.

"Be silent!" Marvin commanded. "I know what's best for you! As soon as you calm down, you will also realize this."

Joyce's emotions were raging inside her. Frustration, rage, helplessness, hurt, sadness, loss, and many similar emotions all mixed together. She gnashed her teeth so hard that blood started flowing out of her mouth.

This was her father! He had always helped her, and he had always shown his love for her. Her mother had died, so her father was the closest person to her. Her father was the most important person in her life, but now he stood between her and her cultivation.

She involuntarily remembered what Gravis had told her. She remembered that Gravis had said that there might come a time in the future where Heaven might use all his companions to threaten him. At

the time, she had said that this situation sounded too cruel to be real, but wasn't something similar happening right now?

Was she forced to decide between her father and her cultivation? Could she even do that? If she went against her father, she might lose the entire Freya Clan. Like this, she would become homeless and lonely. A life without her family just didn't seem worth living.

Joyce violently shook her head through the suppression of Marvin's Will-Aura. 'What am I thinking!? Didn't I just say that even if I go through a thousand years of pain, I will continue cultivating?' Joyce thought with frustration and rage. 'Am I really that weak that I will break down now? No, I'm not!'

She glanced to the side at Gravis. 'He doesn't get involved. Right! If I can't even get through this, how will I ever reach my goal? This family argument is nothing in comparison to the pain I will feel in the future! My path has been made, and I will walk it to the end, no matter who stands in front of me! If I have to choose between my family and my cultivation, I will choose my cultivation!'

WHOOOOOM!

Joyce's Will-Aura, which had been helplessly fighting against the Will-Aura of her father, started expanding furiously. Her fully compressed Will-Aura stretched out and wouldn't stop until it reached a radius of several hundred meters.

Nearly every member of the Freya Clan in that vicinity lost consciousness. Only the people in the Spirit Forming Realm were able to resist. Meanwhile, her Will-Aura pushed her father's Will-Aura away until she could finally move again. She was still slightly suppressed, but not that much.

The mouths of Reginald and Marvin fell open as they saw this. They knew what this meant. Joyce had condensed her Unity Will! She had been very close to it for a long while, but they hadn't expected that she would achieve a breakthrough right now!

Marvin knew how a will was tempered, so he knew what this meant. Joyce had just made a decision that filled her with incredible pain. This could only mean that she had decided to abandon him as her father. She was about to walk out of his life forever.

Marvin's face blanched as panic, terror, and guilt took hold of him. 'What have I done?' he thought.

'Huh, well, that's also a way to solve the issue,' Gravis thought in surprise.

"Father, if you stand between me and my cultivation, then you will no longer be my father," Joyce said with an icy voice, though one could hear her emotions behind it. She was afraid and nervous.

Marvin's arm stretched to his daughter from a distance, almost like he tried to catch her before she left. "No... please..." he said in terror. "I'm sorry! I'm so sorry! Please, don't leave!" Marvin said as tears started rolling down his eyes. "I made a mistake! I'm sorry! You're the most important thing in my life, and I don't want to lose you!"

By now, Marvin was full-on crying, surprising Gravis quite a bit. Gravis rubbed his chin in interest. 'Interesting. This emotional reaction shows that his motive wasn't selfish, but that he genuinely believed that he knew better. If he didn't love his daughter that much, he wouldn't have shown such weakness in

front of Reginald and me. He genuinely doesn't care about his dignity right now. He was ready to throw away all his face to keep his daughter.'

Gravis sighed. 'Many people might find this display to be pathetic, but I don't think so. It requires strength to humiliate oneself like this to not lose a loved one.' Gravis looked out of the window as Marvin continued begging. 'Would I be able to do that? Would I be able to throw away my dignity and self-respect to keep a loved one? I honestly don't think so. I don't think that there is such an important person in my life.'

Wham!

Joyce jumped into her father's chest and hugged him tightly. "Thank you for understanding, daddy!" she shouted as tears also fell from her eyes. "I'm sorry that I've hurt you, but you just wouldn't listen. I'm sorry, daddy!"

Marvin was first shocked but then cried even harder. He tightly hugged his daughter as all the pain was forgotten. "I'm so sorry, pumpkin. I didn't want to let my little treasure go!" he shouted. "I saw how you started changing and how you decided to go against tradition! I felt like you were about to leave me! I'm so sorry for what I have done, pumpkin!"

Like this, the two continued crying in each other's embrace. Gravis and Reginald left the room.

"Thank you for not involving yourself," Reginald said with relief.

"If she can't even handle that, she might as well stop cultivating," Gravis said directly.

Reginald sighed when he heard that. "When you put it like that, it sounds so cold and distant. Why don't you just say that you believe that she would make the right decision?"

"Because I didn't," Gravis said directly, eliciting a disgusted look from Reginald. "I don't know her enough to judge that. It could be that all of her previous words were empty promises. As soon as someone gets pushed into a corner, their true personality will show."

Reginald wasn't happy with Gravis' cold outlook. "What would you have done if she didn't manage to convince Marvin?"

"Nothing," Gravis immediately answered. "If she weren't able to get through something like this, it would be genuinely better to not cultivate anymore. This is a lesson my father taught me. If you don't want power and freedom with all your being, it's better not to cultivate at all, and I agree with that."

Reginald didn't say anything, and Gravis looked him in the eyes. Then, Gravis started smirking. "I didn't completely understand what that meant when I was younger, but I think I do now. Your will to move forward helps you in tempering your Will-Aura. After all, if you are not willing to risk your life, you won't be able to temper your Will-Aura."

Gravis continued explaining. "Then, with a more powerful Will-Aura, your will to move forward gets strengthened, which, in turn, makes it easier to further solidify your Will-Aura. It's a circle of mutual benefit that is the basis for every cultivator. Without that, you will give up at some point."

Reginald nodded in praise. "That's an excellent explanation. You know quite a lot for your age."

"Age has nothing to do with it," Gravis said. "A ten-year-old child that receives education might already know more than a sixty-year-old farmer that never left his village. Age only becomes relevant if both people have a similar lifestyle."

Reginald frowned. "Am I the farmer in your analogy? We are both cultivators, you know?"

Gravis looked at Reginald evenly. "I am 19 and am close to reaching a level three Unity Will."

"Are our lifestyles really similar?"

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Chapter 296: Group Composition

The days came and went.

With her father's and teacher's acceptance, Joyce destroyed her Spirit. After that, she started refilling her Spirit with Energy until it was 99% done. With the help of a lot of Energy Stones, she reached the tenth level of Energy Gathering and immediately condensed her Spirit. All of this took only a couple of hours.

Like this, her path was set. She would go through the Self Stage in the future. She would also have a lot of time to get used to fighting in life and death tempering. After all, it was nearly impossible to speed up the progression through the Spirit Forming Realm. She would require 40 years of accumulation to reach the Self Stage. By then, she should have already been able to condense a level two Unity Will.

If everything went according to plan, she would be able to train her battle capabilities and spend time with her family for 40 years. After that, she would leave her family forever. They would never see each other again.

This was the cruelty of the cultivation world. Everyone that wasn't able to keep up would get left behind. Due to the time dilation difference between the middle world and the lower world, everyone she knew would be dead in a maximum of 30 years after she reached the middle world. Thirty years in the middle world would correspond to 300 years in the lower world, the absolute maximum of longevity for Spirit Forming experts.

This thought was quite harrowing, but Joyce knew that there was no way around it. She would spend a lot of time in her Clan in the next 40 years because that would be the last time she would have a family. She decided that she wouldn't have a family until she reached the highest world, which would take an incredibly long time. If she even managed to survive until then.

Joyce also sent out a lot of invitations to her friends. After all, they needed five people for a group. Entering with less than five was impossible, for some reason. This was probably one of Heaven's restriction that would minimize the wastage of Energy for trials.

In the following days, many of Joyce's friends would arrive. She always greeted them and informed them about why they were invited. A lot of them weren't happy when they heard the reason. After all, the ratio of deaths was just too terrifying for the Heaven's Trial. Yet, others were thankful for the invitation.

When Joyce wasn't entertaining guests, she was taught by Gravis how to fight. Many people have fought more battles than Gravis, but no one had been through more life and death fights. After all, what worth did sparring and harmless fights have?

Gravis taught her how to take advantage of the terrain and that everything could be considered a weapon. He even said that the fact that she was a woman could be considered a weapon. There were still a lot of cultivators who held onto the traditional belief of mortals.

Yet, Joyce wasn't this shameless. She would never want to take advantage of the fact that she was a woman, even if it could be useful. She wanted a fair fight, where gender didn't play a role. Gravis didn't mind. After all, it was her decision.

She also felt really uncomfortable when Gravis told her about how he had managed to kill stronger demonic beasts when he was younger. Even though she had a powerful will, she couldn't imagine stabbing a beast into the behind or cutting off its genitals. In her mind, this seemed kind of disrespectful, and not even her enemies deserved such a fate.

Gravis never forced her to fight his way. Everyone had their own way of fighting and their own philosophy. If she didn't want to use these things, it was up to her. Forcing her to follow his example would only dirty her own fighting style.

Three days before the Heaven's Trial would open, Joyce, Gravis, and her friends gathered inside a hall. Reginald and Marvin weren't present. If it had been before this whole family drama, they would have wanted to attend, but they realized that they had to give Joyce more space. She was an adult, and she would need to make her own decisions from now on, and when those decisions were wrong, she had to live with the consequences.

Everyone in the hall was at the initial Stage of Spirit Forming, except for Gravis. After all, the four chosen people would be fighting as one team. If there were someone on a higher Stage, the difficulty of the whole trial would change. Something like that couldn't be considered life and death tempering, but only suicide.

Joyce had also informed her friends about how the middle world would work and that it would be best to destroy their Spirit and reform their Spirit after going through the tenth Stage of Energy Gathering. Yet, not everyone was as determined as Joyce. Nearly all of them weren't willing to waste their years of effort just to start again.

Though, there was one person who agreed. One had to know that Joyce had friends from all over the world, and also from nearly all the Sects. The person that agreed was, surprisingly, a darkness cultivator.

The guy had been pretty nervous and afraid while he was in the presence of Gravis. He knew Gravis' face and saw what had happened back then. After he had seen the actions of his elders and Sect Master, he had decided to leave the Darkness Sect.

After Joyce had explained everything to him, he had gathered all his courage and asked Gravis if what she said was true. Gravis confirmed it, and the cultivator decided to go through with it. Like this, their group had two people at the initial Stage of Spirit Forming while having gone through the tenth Stage of Energy Gathering.

The remaining seven people were all willing to accompany them since those who weren't willing had left a long time ago. Now, it was up to Joyce to decide the last two spots.

After a long debate and going through all the people's strengths and weaknesses, Joyce made another decision. The fourth member was a disciple of the Wind Sect. His Will-Aura was above average, and his speed would also be quite useful. That was what made Joyce decide on him.

Yet, filling the last spot was quite difficult. None of the remaining candidates had any outstanding talents or powers. All in all, they could be considered supremely average. After nearly an hour of debates, she still wasn't able to make her decision.

"Whom would you choose?" she asked Gravis with a voice transmission.

"None. They're all too weak and wouldn't be able to pull their weight fully," Gravis answered directly.

Joyce released a frustrated sigh. "But we don't have any other candidates."

"Yes, we do," Gravis sent back directly.

Joyce perked up and looked at Gravis. "What?"

"Why is it necessary that they are your friends? Just go ask the Lightning Sect. They won't take part in this year's resource war either way. I'm sure you'll find someone," Gravis transmitted back.

Joyce's eyes widened as she realized that Gravis was right. She still felt a little bad for her remaining six friends, but her life was more important. Like this, she said that she wouldn't take anyone else from the group. The group wasn't happy at all about this. Most of them cut off their friendship with Joyce and left angrily. Only two people remained on friendly terms with Joyce.

Joyce felt terrible about the leaving of her friends, but her cultivation was more important. Even if those people managed to ascend too, they would just become fertilizer for other cultivators. After all, they didn't go through the tenth Stage of Energy Gathering. Maybe it was better this way.

On the same day, Joyce left for the Lightning Sect to get the last member. A day later, she returned with quite an outstanding cultivator. When she had announced that they needed one last member at the initial Stage, many disciples started vying for that position.

The reason why Joyce's group was so popular wasn't because of Gravis or the fact that she cultivated Life Lightning. It was a matter of group composition. Most groups were made up of only one power, and powers were mostly formed according to the cultivators' elements. Therefore, most groups only had one element.

A four-man group of cultivators with different elements would be even stronger than a five-man group of cultivators with the same element. After a lot of shouting and fighting, one person managed to stand out. He had a nearly fully compressed Will-Aura, which was very impressive for someone at the initial Stage. This person was very close to being an Ascender's Talent.

Joyce was incredibly happy with the last person. Like this, they would have a very balanced team. The wind cultivator could scout, evade, and distract foes. The darkness cultivator could stay hidden and deal a fatal strike to any enemy. The lightning cultivator was a mixture of both. He could deal incredible damage but was also fast enough to evade attacks.

And Joyce would be the backup. As long as the fighters didn't immediately die, she could heal them in a matter of seconds. Like this, the fighters could fight more aggressively and trade injuries for injuries.

After everyone assembled, everyone said their goodbyes and left for the resource war. If they were lucky, they wouldn't return for many years. If they were not, they would never return.

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Chapter 297: Old Acquaintances

The group traveled for a little over a day. The "inheritance" wasn't very close, but also not very far away. It just so happened that the inheritance was pretty close to the Heaven Sect, which was located in the absolute middle of the Core-Continent.

They stopped and looked at their goal. It was a gigantic mountain chain without any trees on it. It actually looked kind of artificial if one looked closer. The stones that made the mountains were a little too uniform, and the fact that there were no trees, grass, animals, or beasts in the surroundings confirmed the feeling that the mountains were artificial.

Yet, Gravis was still pretty impressed by the mountains. Those were the tallest mountains that he had ever seen. After all, in his homeworld, he had never left the city. They even stretched into the space above the world where no Energy was located. Gravis guessed that the mountains were probably way over 15 kilometers tall, but he couldn't estimate their whole size.

He also couldn't see the top of the mountains with his Spirit. It hadn't been relevant until now, but Gravis' Spirit was unable to continue after it reached a height of around twelve kilometers. 'This is probably where the boundary of the world lies. Heh, it's actually quite funny that this world is so vast but so flat.'

The group also wasn't alone. A lot of groups had already arrived before them and waited in front of a gate leading into one of the mountains. He saw 13 waiting groups, and when Gravis looked closer at the groups, he was quite surprised. It wasn't because of the number of people, but because of their cultivation.

Six groups were from the Elemental Sects, and every member of those groups was at the peak of the Seed Stage. On top of that, all their Will-Auras were powerful enough to reach the Sapling Stage if they wanted to. 'Does that mean that there are, at least, five cultivators who could become elders at any time? That's pretty frightening.'

But Gravis quickly realized the reason for that. 'Well, most cultivators probably aren't very interested in taking up the position of an elder. After all, such a position came with a lot of work, and becoming an elder basically already means that they won't continue on their path. I think all the Sects take this Heaven's Trial very seriously. They are even keeping so many disciples at the edge of the Sapling Stage.'

Yet, what surprised Gravis, even more were the other groups. They either came from some Clans or were just wholly comprised of loose cultivators. He felt a great mix of different elements in those groups, and he even saw some groups that completely lacked an element.

Gravis scratched his chin in interest. 'I've never seen loose cultivators in the Middle- and Core-Continent. I've heard about them, but I've never really come into contact with them. I wonder how they fight. Well,

Byron said that they use Battle-Techniques similar to the Rakshasa Saber that he gave me. Hmm, if their Will-Aura is powerful enough, they might even be able to fight disciples from Sects, though there probably aren't many of those.'

'They would probably also have trouble fighting from a distance. If they fight against someone from the Wind Sect, they would have huge issues. The cultivator from the Wind Sect could just continue throwing storms or wind blades at them. Well, to be fair, that would be true for most cultivators, even if they had an element. I just don't have this problem due to my quick acceleration. But hey, there are still the disciples from the Fire and Water Sect. They also have some nice long-ranged attacks.'

Poke, poke!

Gravis turned to his right as he felt someone poke him. "Gravis, everyone's looking at you," Joyce said quietly.

They had just arrived, and Gravis just stopped moving and looked with intense eyes at the groups. Many of them already felt nervous, while some were even afraid. To them, it felt like Gravis was contemplating how he would kill them. His killing intent and will were vastly superior to everyone present, which intimidated them.

Most of them had already heard about the Lightning Calamity, Gravis. A monster that had eradicated the whole upper echelon of the Darkness Sect by himself, for seemingly no reason. No one knew about Byron's scheme against Gravis, and Gravis also hadn't bothered to explain himself.

In their eyes, Gravis was a mad slaughterer. They had also heard that the Heaven Sect wanted to kill him due to his crimes, but Old Man Lightning protected him. Yes, the Lightning Tyrant, Dorian, also called Old Man Lightning, could be considered insane and bloodthirsty, but he hadn't eradicated a whole Sect by himself, though he had tried.

Was the Lightning Calamity taking part in this years' resource war? Wouldn't that break all forms of competition? Yes, nearly all of the trials were against the trial itself and not against other teams, but if two or more teams reached the end, the chances were high that the winning teams would clash with each other. Only on rare occasions would more than one team return alive.

Would the Lightning Calamity even have issues in beating the trials? The trials were, after all, appropriate to the Realm and Stage of the cultivator. The Lightning Calamity couldn't be judged by his Realm. He had already eradicated a whole Sect while being at the Seed Stage. What if he reached the Sapling Stage inside the Trial? Wouldn't he be able to even fight cultivators at the Self Stage?

Step. Step. Step.

One person stepped forward from one of the groups, and Gravis recognized him. "Manuel," Gravis said in greeting.

Yes, this was Manuel, the Ascender's Talent from the Wind Sect. Gravis had fought Manuel and an elder, but their fight had been interrupted by the Wind Sect Master's arrival. Gravis still felt a little bad about the fact that he had almost killed Manuel and kind of killed the Wind Sect Mater by proxy.

"Gravis," Manuel said with neutral eyes, which quickly transformed into a genuine smile, surprising Gravis. "Thank you for taking revenge on Byron," he said with a polite bow. "Byron has killed master. I

wanted to take revenge myself, but it would have taken at least another decade, and that was considering that Ancestor Darkness wouldn't interfere."

Manuel sighed. "To be honest, I am kind of frustrated that it wasn't me who killed Byron, but if it had been me, he would have survived for, at least, another decade. After thinking about this, I decided that I would rather prefer a swift death performed by someone else instead of a delayed one performed by me. So, thank you."

Gravis sighed. "You don't need to thank me," Gravis said. "I didn't do it for you or your master, after all. It was a personal enmity with Byron. He has used me to kill your disciple brothers. I am also sorry for your master's death. When your master arrived at our battleground, he didn't kill me indiscriminately but actually saved me from Byron's influence. I honestly regret his death."

Manuel smiled a sad smile. "Thank you. You know, I was angry at you for a long while, but the more I thought about it, the more I realized that all of this wasn't your doing." Manuel chuckled a little. "And to be frank, our fight has given me quite some tempering. Though this is also a bittersweet feeling."

Gravis looked at him. "Because, if your master hadn't died, it would have become very difficult to temper yourself in the future, right?"

Manuel nodded. "Yes. Getting saved by someone in a fight is a big issue. If he had survived, my path forward would have become way more challenging." Manuel sighed again and looked at the horizon. "Sometimes, I even think that he had already realized Byron's scheme when he arrived. He probably knew that he would die, yet, for my path forward, he sacrificed his life."

Gravis sighed when he heard that. It actually made a lot of sense. This made Byron's scheme even more terrifying. It was not only a hidden scheme that was difficult to see through but also an open scheme for the Wind Sect Master. Byron's scheming and planning ability had been really terrifying.

"So, you taking part in the resource war?" Manuel asked.

Gravis nodded.

Manuel looked at Gravis' group. "Their cultivation is a Realm lower than yours. On top of that, their cultivation isn't even at the peak. I'm guessing that you are splitting up?"

Gravis nodded, but before he could answer, he was interrupted.

"Hey, are you one of Gravis' friends?" Joyce asked with interest. Then, she offered her hand. "Hi! I'm Joyce! Nice to meet you!" she chirped.

Manuel looked at Joyce with a smile, but deep in his eyes, one could see shock. This person had a Unity Will! That was incredible! "Hello, Joyce. I am Manuel," his eyes also shone with another light of recognition. "You have gone through the tenth Stage of Magic Gathering?" he asked.

Joyce nodded. "Yes! Gravis has told me many secrets that made me change my mind."

Manuel's eyes shone again. "So, you hadn't gone through the tenth Stage before you met Gravis? Why is that?"

Joyce scratched the back of her neck. "I'm not sure if I'm allowed to tell you those things. You should ask Gravis," she said.

Manuel turned to Gravis. "Would you tell me?"

Gravis sighed. "Alright. Take it as my repayment for almost killing you," Gravis said.

And with that, Gravis told Manuel about the Middle-World and how it was imperative that every cultivator that wanted to go there needed to go through the Self Stage.

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Chapter 298: Small Incident

Gravis explained to Manuel how important it was to go through the Self Stage. Of course, he only did that via voice transmission. First of all, that method of communication was faster and more efficient since he could directly send concepts into another person's mind instead of translating them into language first. And second of all, this knowledge wasn't for everyone's ears. Other people's cultivation had nothing to do with him.

After Gravis was finished, Manuel's emotions were riled up. He hadn't gone through the tenth Stage of Energy Gathering. On top of that, he was ready to break into the Sapling Stage, which meant he had already invested 20 years into his cultivation. Hearing that he would be a doormat in the future and that all his work had been meaningless shook his confidence.

Manuel sighed heavily. "I don't want to believe it, but everything you told me makes perfect sense. Someone who went through the Self Stage is obviously more powerful than someone who only went through the Tree Stage. I might be a genius now, but will I still be considered a genius in the future? Even if my strength keeps increasing, at some point, I will only see people that went through the Self Stage. What then?"

"It's completely your decision what you make of this knowledge. I only told you because I feel bad for nearly killing you back then and indirectly killing your master," Gravis said.

Manuel sighed again, and Joyce looked with pity at Manuel. She had already felt bad for wasting around two years of her cultivation, but what was that in comparison to 20 years? Yet, who was Manuel? He was an Ascender's Talent that was close to condensing a Unity Will. That's what made him an Ascender's Talent. Would he be distraught by that? No!

Manuel's eyes narrowed with fiery motivation. "I will recultivate!" he said with fervor.

Gravis smirked when he heard that. He had already expected as much. Even though he and Manuel hadn't talked much, he had learned a lot about him in their fight. Manuel was able to jump a whole Stage even without going through the tenth Stage of Energy Gathering. He was incredibly talented. It would truly be a waste if he only went through the Tree Stage.

Manuel turned to the wind disciple in Joyce's group. When the disciple saw Manuel looking at him, he felt incredibly nervous. His idol was looking at him! Manuel was the most impressive genius and cultivator in the whole Wind Sect. Everyone looked up to him.

"Are you willing to give me your place for a fair trade? I will make it clear that I am not forcing you. You can decline, and I won't hold a grudge," Manuel said.

Everyone in the group was surprised. "But, what about the Wind Sect's group?" Joyce asked, stunned.

Manuel waved his hand nonchalantly. "There is another person in our Wind Sect that wants to join but was just short of qualifying. He can take over. We still have around two days until it fully opens."

The Wind Sect disciple was incredibly shocked. "O-Of course!" he stuttered in reverence. "You can just take the spot. I wouldn't dare to accept anything from Senior Brother!"

Manuel turned to the disciple. "I won't accept that! I will trade a high-grade Spirit Weapon for your spot. Is that okay with you?"

The Wind Sect disciple took a deep and shaking breath. "That's too much, Senior Brother!"

"Nonsense!" Manuel shouted and retrieved a longsword. Then, he threw it to the disciple. "Accept it right now, or you won't be my junior brother anymore!" Manuel said with dominance.

The Wind Sect disciple was very nervous. A high-grade Spirit Weapon! Only incredible talents at the Seed Stage would have the honor to accept such a weapon! He was getting one just like that? Was he dreaming? He shakingly touched the longsword and looked at it in reverence. "Th-thank you, Senior Brother!"

Manuel nodded with a smile and patted the guy's shoulder. "When I return, I will talk more with you! A friend of Gravis is a friend of mine!"

'I don't even know the guy's name. How is he suddenly my friend?' Gravis thought.

Then, Manuel turned to Joyce with a smile. "You don't have anything against it, right?"

Joyce beamed when she heard that. "No! Not at all! It would be an honor to have you in our group!"

"Recultivate right now. I won't let you join with your current cultivation," Gravis said directly.

Manuel smirked at Gravis. "I've already planned that," he said with a smirk.

Whoom! BANG!

All of Manuel's belongings were placed beside him, and then he immediately destroyed his Spirit. His face didn't even twitch from the pain. Then, he turned to the Wind Sect's group. "Get Julien here. I bet he will be thrilled at this development," he said.

The people from the Wind Sect's group grimaced a little. Manuel had been the most powerful of their group, but he had abandoned them. Yet, he was still their idol. They had seen his resolution, and instead of getting angry, they looked up to him. Manuel had abandoned 20 years of cultivation like it was nothing. They doubted that they could do the same.

They nodded at each other, and one person left for the Wind Sect. It wouldn't take long to get the last member. Was it a betrayal? No! Joining was voluntary, and the Wind Sect didn't force their disciples to join their Sect's team. The Wind Sect hated restrictions. Wind cultivators always searched for freedom, and the rules and atmosphere in the Wind Sect reflected that. Every disciple had their own path. They

wouldn't even get angry when their disciples decided to forsake the wind element to cultivate a different one.

Manuel went through his belongings and took out several Energy Stones. Apparently, he carried enough with him to reach the tenth Stage of Energy Gathering. Yet, while Manuel was recultivating, something else happened that no one had expected.

WHOOM!

Gravis' activated his Will-Aura as five people suddenly jumped at him. He had noticed those five people glancing at him from time to time, and judging by what Sect they came from, Gravis was pretty sure what they had planned. Those disciples were from the Earth Sect.

They had jumped him out of nowhere, making Gravis activate his Will-Aura. His Will-Aura enveloped them and made them unable to move. The disciples that were here were all outstanding. Therefore, Gravis' Will-Aura wasn't powerful enough to make them lose consciousness. But that didn't matter.

BANG!

Gravis didn't even look at them as he released 50% of his lightning, distributed over all five people. Before the disciples could even react, they had been turned to ash. They all exploded into loot, which Gravis quickly pocketed. The whole thing hadn't taken more than five seconds. The disciples hadn't even had the chance to break into the Sapling Stage.

All the groups looked at Gravis with horror. Had he just killed the group of the Earth Sect? They saw that the group of the Earth Sect were the aggressors, but directly annihilating them? Wasn't this going too far?

Gravis' group also looked at him with shock, including Manuel. What just happened?

"Ignore them. It's just another suicide squad," Gravis said evenly.

"Gravis! What's going on!? Why did they attack you? Why did you kill them?" Joyce asked in panic.

"The Earth Sect has an enmity with me, and you know how the Earth Sect is. Most of them would rather die than disobey their leaders," Gravis explained. "The Earth Sect has put a hit on me, and every disciple of the Earth Sect attacks me when they see me. As soon as I appear, they only have the option of dying or breaking their belief. Sucks to be them, I guess," Gravis explained neutrally.

"But why did you kill them!?" Joyce shouted. "They obviously weren't a danger to you!"

Gravis looked at Joyce. "So, when I have enough power to defend myself, I am not allowed to defend myself, but when I am weaker, I can? According to your logic, I might as well just kill myself right now."

Deep inside, Joyce knew that Gravis' words made sense, but Gravis had killed them too directly and coldly. He didn't even show an ounce of regret or hesitation. Those had been five lives! Joyce knew that Gravis was logically right, but emotionally, she just couldn't accept it. Those five people had families, friends, loved ones, and a Sect behind them! Gravis had just killed five people, leaving five families without their strongest support!

"If you don't get comfortable with killing, sooner or later, you will hesitate and lose your life," Gravis said to Joyce. "If you value your life and your loved ones, then don't hesitate to take a life. Imagine the pain your family would be in if you died an unnecessary death."

Joyce's breathing grew heavier as her emotions fought against her logic. She knew that Gravis was right, but her emotions didn't agree at all. Even though she had a Unity Will, she had never killed a person herself. Her group mostly fought against beasts, and when they fought cultivators, she always stood at the back.

"What would you think if your father spared an attacker and the attacker returned later with a more powerful force that decimates your entire Clan? Would you think that he was noble, in the right, or better than the attacker by sparing their life?" Gravis asked.

Joyce didn't answer as she clenched her teeth.

Gravis turned away from her. "If you think so, then be proud of your belief. I'm sure that everyone will look up to your noble attitude as you lie in your own blood beneath the boot of your killer," Gravis said with a sneer.

"Fuck you, you cold, arrogant prick! I can't believe I looked up to you!" Joyce shouted with a shaking voice as she ran into the distance. Gravis didn't react to that. The earlier she realized this cold truth about cultivation, the better.

She might be in emotional turmoil now, but better now, where there was no danger, than when she was in actual danger. If she hesitated in a crucial situation because of this belief, she might die. Gravis didn't want her to die.

'Wait, I don't want her to die? Why am I going out of my way to teach her something like that?' Gravis asked himself in his mind with uncertainty. 'I have no obligation to do that, and I even feel bad for hurting her even though I know that it's necessary. This is so unlike me.'

Gravis' brows furrowed. 'Is it possible that I am attracted to her?' He asked himself as he looked in Joyce's direction with unsure eyes.

[Lightning Is the Only Way](#)

Chapter 299: Wall

"You're really bad at talking to girls," Manuel said from the side, eliciting a side-eye from Gravis. "Hey, I don't mean it like that," Manuel said with a smirk. "I know that you only try to help her by showing her the cold, hard, uncensored truth of the world, but sometimes, the direct way isn't the most effective one."

Gravis' furrowed his brows. "Why not? If I don't tell it as it is, it won't be as effective or descriptive."

Manuel sighed in helplessness. "That's true, but only for people that have a strong grip on their emotions. Not everyone is able to keep their emotions completely in check and think rationally even when they are riled up."

Gravis' brows stayed furrowed. "But cultivators with a Will-Aura can control their emotions."

Manuel scratched his head. "Normally, I would agree, but Joyce is a special case."

Now, Gravis lifted an eyebrow. "How would you know that? You have just met her," Gravis said.

Manuel had a helpless expression on his face. "Well, it's kind of obvious," he said helplessly. "I haven't met her, but I've heard of her. I know that she is from the Freya Clan and know that she cultivates Life Lightning. If you want to get through to her, you should talk to her like she's a mortal and not a cultivator."

"That would be considered talking down. Why should I talk to cultivators like they are inexperienced mortals? That would just be needlessly disrespectful," Gravis asked evenly.

Joyce's group just looked at the back and forth with helpless smiles. They decided to keep themselves out of the conversation.

"That's where you're wrong," Manuel said with a serious expression. "You say mortals are inexperienced, yet most mortals manage to live a life without regrets. Isn't living a life without regrets what we all seek? Isn't that the whole point of cultivation? We want to be free and seek our own destiny," Manuel said.

Gravis scratched his head. "Hm, maybe in that sense, you're right. But mortals don't know how the world works for us cultivators. Of course, they won't have as many regrets."

Manuel smirked. "True, but that doesn't change the result. More mortals lead fulfilling lives than cultivators. That's the truth. You can't change that fact."

Gravis wanted to argue, but he realized that he had no counter-arguments. It was true that he couldn't change that fact. If he couldn't find a counter-argument, it probably meant that he was wrong. Gravis scratched his chin in interest. 'Interesting. Maybe Manuel is speaking the truth.'

Then, Gravis looked at Manuel with an interested look. "Tell me more," he said.

Manuel was a little surprised by Gravis' quick change of mind, but he quickly recovered. Manuel's smirk changed into a genuine smile. "I think the problem why many cultivators are so stressed out, cruel, and serious all the time is because we are required to suppress our emotions. After all, if we didn't, we would feel pity for every enemy we killed, would cry for days when our close ones die, or make a wrong decision in a fight. We can't allow ourselves to be emotional because emotions could cost us our life."

Gravis thought about this and nodded. 'Makes sense.'

"So," Manuel continued while lifting his right index finger. "We feel less anger, less sadness, and also less pity. Yet, we can't just choose which emotions we want to suppress. It doesn't work like that. Because of this, we also feel less happiness, less excitement, less love, less friendship, and less closeness in general. So, all in all, our outlook on life becomes result-focused and grey. The world lacks color. We channel all of our positive emotions into a goal, and if we can't reach it, we feel immense regret."

Gravis thought about these words and also thought about himself. 'Is that true? Well, I felt happy for the old man's breakthrough, but not that happy. When Joyce condensed her Unity Will, I also wasn't particularly happy or excited. When I saw many disciples of the Lightning Sect condense their Destruction Lightning, I also didn't particularly care.'

Gravis scratched his chin in thought. 'Progressing in my cultivation or winning a fight makes me happy. Though, the only time in the Core-Continent where I was happy that didn't directly relate to my cultivation was when I joined the Lightning Sect.'

Gravis continued thinking, and as time passed, his brows furrowed. 'That was literally the only time in the Core-Continent. What about the Middle-Continent? I was happy when I met Skye. I was also happy when I accompanied and talked to Skye. I also enjoyed Aion's company, even though I knew that he would become an enemy in the future. When I took a break, I also felt happier than normal.'

By now, Gravis was frowning. 'In the Middle-Continent, I had more times where I felt happy than in the Core-Continent. What about the Outer-Continent? It wouldn't be wrong to call me an emotional mess at the time. I felt anger, frustration, and hatred, but even small things made me feel excited. I was excited when I met Joyce. I was excited when talking with the bandits. I wouldn't care about such things today.'

Gravis sighed as the others watched him with interest. Gravis' face grew progressively sadder by the second. 'The further I progressed, the less emotional ups and downs I felt. When I saw the corpse of Skye's parent, I thought that I didn't even feel anything. Though, is that really true? Did I honestly feel absolutely nothing?'

Gravis searched deep inside himself and looked at his feelings. Yet, at some point, he felt like he touched something dangerous. It was like a wall or a dam that was blocking something. This wall looked black to him, and he didn't want to look at it. For the first time in a long while, Gravis was afraid of something. He didn't want to touch this wall. He felt like, if he touched it, he would fall into hell.

Gravis took a shaky breath. 'Do I really live without regrets? Am I really not bothered by being alone? Yes, I have the Lightning Sect, but do I really feel like I am part of that? Officially, yes, but the only people in the Sect that I have a connection with are the old man and Lasar. What if one of those two die?'

Gravis remained silent as he was deep in thought. 'Would I feel bad if they died? I would like to believe that I wouldn't but is that truly the case?'

"Gravis!" Manuel shouted, taking Gravis out of his thoughts. "I know what you're going through right now. I went through something similar about a year ago. It happened in the days after my master died. I was surprised at how little I felt when my lifelong master and mentor died, and I fell into deep thought for a long time. After a while of thinking, I realized that I actually felt incredibly terrible. Not only for my master's death but about many many other things too."

Manuel walked over to Gravis and put a hand on his shoulder. "Now is not the time. Save it for when you have time and when no enemies are around," Manuel said with compassion.

Gravis took a deep breath and took hold of his emotions again. In basically no time, he was back to his usual self. He turned to Manuel and nodded. "Thank you, truly," he said with sincerity.

Manuel clapped Gravis on the shoulder. "Don't mention it!" Then, Manuel smirked. "So, if I directly told you the cold, hard, uncensored truth, would you have immediately believed me?"

Gravis sighed. "No," he admitted.

Manuel's smirk intensified. "See? Sometimes, to make people understand, you need to guide them to the truth slowly. Just explain it to them slowly in terms and feelings they understand. Try that when you talk to Joyce. After all, you need to take her feelings into account when you want to have a chance with her."

Gravis frowned at Manuel. "It's not like that."

"Yes, sure, sure," Manuel said dismissively as he walked back to his spot. "Joyce wears her emotions on her sleeve. She doesn't have the same strength, but also not the same weakness as you. Everything has its advantages and disadvantages. Ever heard of that phrase?"

Gravis laughed bitterly. "Yes, I use it quite a lot."

"Good! Try to remember that. Judging by your will, you might have gone through a lot more than many of us combined, but it's not only quantity that counts. Different people go through different experiences, which teaches them different things. A different outlook might not be a weaker one." Manuel said with a smirk and then continued absorbing his Energy Stones.

Gravis sighed again as he remembered these words. Yet, he didn't answer. There was no need to.

With the conversation over, Gravis focused on his goal and upcoming fight again. This Heaven's Trial could be considered a direct showdown between him and Heaven. If he wanted to win and survive, he had to be in his top condition.

Like this, several minutes passed.

And then, Joyce returned.

[Lightning Is the Only Way](#)

Chapter 300: Splitting Up

Joyce and Gravis looked at each other with uncomfortable expressions. They remained silent for a couple of seconds.

"I'm sorry," they both said at the same time, eliciting a look of surprise by the other.

"What are you sorry about?" Joyce asked in surprise. "You showed me a truth about the cultivation world. I should be the sorry one since I let my emotions guide my actions." Joyce was a little red in the face due to embarrassment. "I also didn't mean what I have said previously. Those words were uncalled for."

Gravis sighed. "Don't worry about it. I didn't take them to heart. Also, I should apologize for saying it that directly. I didn't take your cultivation path into account. After all, everyone's experiences are different."

"Hey, don't steal my line!" Manuel grumbled.

Gravis only smiled slightly. "Your wisdom is my wisdom now," he said with a smirk.

Manuel rolled his eyes, but inside, he was happy. He felt proud of himself. After all, not everyone was able to teach the Lightning Calamity something.

Joyce looked with confusion at both of them but then turned to Gravis again. "Anyways, I'm sorry for my words. I know that you only wanted to help me."

"Water under the bridge," Gravis said with a dismissive wave.

Joyce smiled happily, and, for some reason, Gravis also felt a bit happy when he saw her smile. Yet, he quickly caught himself. 'I might actually feel attracted to her,' he thought. 'This could become dangerous. If I get too close to her, I might have doubts about my future path. I don't know how I will act in such a situation. I can't take the risk into account that I might decide to not leave this lower world. I can't get too close to her.'

Joyce was quite confused about Gravis' involuntary changes in expression. For a second there, she could've sworn that Gravis showed a genuine smile, but it had quickly vanished. Now, he only looked troubled. 'I really don't get him,' she thought.

Manuel watched them while cultivating, and he could only muster a troubled smile. 'I think I know what's going on with Gravis. No matter what he chooses, he will lose,' Manuel thought. 'For once, I'm happy that I'm not him.'

Who didn't want to be a powerful genius? Just imagining the possibility to fight two Stages above oneself would elicit feelings of longing. Yet, everyone had their own problems, even powerful people like Gravis. Nearly no one had an easy life.

Like this, time passed.

A couple of hours later, Manuel reached the tenth Stage of Energy Gathering and immediately broke into the Spirit Forming Realm. When someone's body was powerful enough, they wouldn't need a strengthened dantian. Manuel's and Joyce's bodies easily fulfilled that requirement.

Some more hours later, two disciples from the Wind Sect arrived. One of them was the person that went over to fetch the new person, while the other, obviously, was the new person. The new person quickly went over to Manuel and thanked him for this opportunity. If Manuel hadn't left the Wind Sect's group, the new person wouldn't have been able to join.

Manuel waved him off. He saw his actions as more selfish than selfless, so he didn't really feel comfortable with accepting the new person's gratitude.

For a full day after that, nothing of note happened.

Brrr!

Suddenly, the door to the mountain started opening slowly, creating an uncomfortable sound of stones grating together. The groups all stood up and readied themselves. Many people retrieved their weapons and moved into different formations. A couple more groups arrived, but there was still no group from the Lightning Sect.

Many of the groups had been confused about the Lightning Sect's absence, and only Joyce's group knew that no group from the Lightning Sect would come. After all, in order to not force Gravis to fight against his disciple brothers', Lasar decided against sending a group to the resource war.

Yet, there was something else of note. Even though some new groups had arrived, the total number of groups didn't increase. That was because the groups from the Water, Light, and Darkness Sect had left. They decided against taking the risk of fighting Gravis. Even if they survived all the trials, fighting Gravis at the end was just suicide.

Since the group from the Earth Sect had also met an untimely demise, only a total of two Sects took part in this year's resource war. One was the Wind Sect, while the other was the Fire Sect. The Fire Sect was comprised of battle-hungry maniacs, while the people from the Wind Sect were rather carefree. Whatever happened, happened. They wanted to temper themselves, so why shouldn't they?

When the gate fully opened, one group after another charged in until only Joyce's group remained.

"Let's go," Joyce said with motivation as she pointed forward with a long and thin sword.

Manuel chuckled a little when he saw that. "That pose would look better if you were on a horse," he said with a smirk.

Joyce turned to him and pouted. "Hey! Don't ruin my moment!"

Manuel chuckled a little and then walked forward. "Let's just go," he said.

Gravis also walked forward and passed Manuel. Without a word, he entered the Heaven's Trial. The rest of the group quickly followed. A long, dimly lit corridor greeted them, and only some lit torches created some light. Without these, everything would be in total darkness.

They followed the path for several kilometers. Surprisingly, the path wasn't straight. The path went up and down, left and right. The construction of the corridor resembled the body of a snake more than an actual hallway. Who would build such an uneven corridor?

Gravis checked the path with his Spirit and noticed another surprising thing. 'The walls block my Spirit. On top of that, I can't see further than a kilometer with my Spirit. On a straight path, I could see further with just my eyes,' Gravis thought. 'Well, it actually makes sense. If everyone could investigate the paths, they would be able to ready themselves for the trials.'

After walking for a while, the group reached a small hall. Two braziers stood in the middle, illuminating the surroundings. The stones were brownish, and the design reminded people of an old temple or the ruin of one. Two old gates stood before them. Above each gate was a sizable stone tablet, which was inscribed. One had a giant '1' while the other had a giant '4'.

"Weird. I don't see the other groups, and those gates are also weird," Manuel said with narrowed eyes. "This doesn't fit the info I got from my Sect."

The others also nodded. "Same here," the lightning disciple said. "All groups are supposed to meet in a gigantic hall with a lot of gates. In the hall, most of the disciples would break into the next Realm before entering their respective trials. I can't possibly imagine that everyone already achieved their breakthrough."

Gravis listened to their discussion and quickly found the answer. 'No wonder the hallway was so crooked. After the other groups entered, Heaven quickly changed the path just for us. The other groups are probably really confused about a sudden wall appearing behind them. If we went in first, the same

thing would have happened, and if we entered in the middle, we would probably just get shoved into a new path by a wall.'

Gravis didn't know what the numbers above the two gates meant, but he had a suspicion. "Let me guess. The numbers above the gates say how many people are allowed to enter," Gravis said.

Manuel nodded. "Exactly, but there should be a lot of different paths available. It is also incredibly strange that we don't have an option to choose. We are forced to split up. This is so strange. Normally there would be hundreds of paths with all kinds of numbers."

"Well, nothing we can do about it," Gravis said as he walked to the gate with the big '1'. "This is where we part ways," Gravis said as he looked at his group. "I hope we'll see each other again."

"Wait!" the darkness disciple said. "Aren't you taking this a little too casual? Something is seriously wrong here! Let's first talk about this before we continue!"

Gravis shrugged. "What are we supposed to do? We wanted to split up like this either way. As far as I see, this just makes it easier."

The group looked at each other in helplessness. Gravis was right, but he was taking the situation a little too well.

"Let's go!" Joyce shouted and walked to the other door. "Why are you hesitating? Aren't we here to temper ourselves? So the trial composition is a little weird. Who cares? We can't change anything either way. We are in life-threatening danger anyway. This won't make a difference."

The remaining three people sighed and then followed Joyce. Now, all people stood before their respective gates, four people at one, and one at the other. The two groups looked at each other. "See you later!" Joyce shouted to Gravis with a wink.

Gravis smirked a little. "See you later!"

Brrrr!

Joyce pushed open the gate and stepped inside. Manuel followed her, but not before throwing a thumbs up to Gravis as a sign of companionship. The other two people also said their goodbyes to Gravis and followed Manuel.

BANG!

The doors closed behind them violently.

With this, Gravis was alone again.

After waiting for a couple of seconds in silence, Gravis cracked his neck.

"What a nice contrast, Heaven," Gravis said. "One group is comprised of three people that went through the tenth Stage of Energy Gathering, making them very valuable to you, while the other is your most hated nemesis."

"One group has a trial tailor-made for their needs. They probably have an incredibly high chance of passing all trials. And then you have me. You probably did your absolute best to make my trials as disgusting and dangerous as possible."

Gravis laughed a little.

"Anyway, time for me to reach the Sapling Stage!"