

Lightning 311

[Lightning Is the Only Way](#)

Chapter 311: Weird Tree Stage

The group continued insulting Heaven for days. One of them even had taken spirit wine with him, and after some days, they sat together in a circle, drinking wine and insulting Heaven. Gravis ignored them after a while and continued training.

At the end of their lives, the group started becoming closer. They transformed from comrades into close friends. All their inhibitions about status and such were eradicated as they even started sharing embarrassing details. Of course, no conversation would end without some insults thrown at Heaven. They even started telling Heaven that the shaking was doing wonders for their stiff muscles.

They were unrestrained, and their enthusiasm exploded when confronted with their inevitable end.

The get-together continued for over a week until someone stood up. "Alright, boys. It's been a pleasure!" he shouted. "I'll be the first one to leave! Don't let me stay alone for too long!"

BANG!

He exploded into a shower of blood as he concentrated his wind element with his Spirit inside his body. Only Gravis could concentrate his element inside his body since he was one and the same with his element. Others didn't have that ability.

The group shouted a loud and cheery farewell to their brother. As he exploded, his belongings were scattered across the floor and surroundings. Like this, the first of the heroic men met his end.

After another hour, the second one stood up. "Gravis! Kick Heaven's ass for me!" he shouted at Gravis. He dusted off his clothes and made himself presentable.

Gravis opened his eyes and looked at him with a smile. "Will do!"

The man grinned, shoved his middle finger into the air, and shouted one last, incredibly loud, "FUCK YOU!"

BANG!

He also exploded. Like this, only three people remained. A couple of minutes later, they also said their goodbyes to Gravis and told him to kick Heaven's ass. In the end, they were not too hung up about their ends. They had insulted the unapproachable, omnipresent, omniscient, and seemingly omnipotent Heaven for over a week. Who else could replicate that feat? In the afterlife, they could brag to anyone.

"Yeah, you are a God, but were you able to insult Heaven for over a week? Oh, you weren't? That sucks," they would say with laughs. Such an end was something that they could accept. That was unprecedented bragging material!

BANG! BANG! BANG!

The last three exploded, and now, Gravis was alone again.

When he saw that he was alone again, he sighed, but with a smile. "You tried to humiliate and enrage me with these last two trials, but you continually failed," Gravis said. "Even though you have full control over this Heaven's Trial, you still can't win. What have you managed to achieve? You gave me incredible tempering in the first one, basically did nothing in the second one, and got insulted in the third one. You're really a failure. Even with full control, you can't do anything right."

Heaven had long grown used to Gravis' scathing remarks. It never reacted to his remarks, but that didn't mean that it didn't get angry at him. The second trial already proved as much.

After saying all this, Gravis looked at the belongings of the group. Surprisingly, they had a lot of body tempering pills. When Gravis saw that, his smirk intensified. "So, your motivation to enrage me is even stronger than stopping me from growing more powerful. Yet, look at that. Not only did you get insulted to no end by five heroic men, but you also gave me enough pills to temper my body to the Self Stage. I already thought you were useless, but that has reached a whole new level now," Gravis laughed.

Gravis quickly gathered all the belongings and put them away, except for the body tempering pills. When he saw the massive pile of pills before him, he chuckled. "Oh yeah, that's good stuff! Heaven has bestowed this amazing feast to me, so I should be thankful," Gravis said as he turned to the ceiling. "Thank you for your blessing, Heaven!"

And like that, Gravis ate pills for some days. After he had finished nearly all the pills...

BANG!

His body released some kind of explosion as it broke through something. This hadn't happened in the last couple of breakthroughs, and it probably meant that his body was at its absolute maximum. Gravis ate some more pills but saw that they had zero effect. Without reaching the Unity Realm, it was probably impossible to increase the power of his body further.

'Body at the Self Stage, Spirit will soon be in the Tree Stage, and lightning at the Sapling Stage. Spirit is the least of my worries, but my lightning will be hard to increase. I should think of a way to increase that before I reach the Unity Realm,' Gravis thought. He didn't want to share this particular worry with Heaven.

After testing out his new body, Gravis went back to training, but not for long.

Only 19 days later, Gravis stopped training. It was time for him to reach the Tree Stage. When Gravis felt that he was close to reaching the next level, he summoned all his belongings and placed them beside him. Who knew, maybe his belongings would get destroyed if they remained in his Spirit Space?

After entering the Spirit Space, Gravis looked at the Growth. By now, its tendrils stretched to the membrane. It looked rather frightening, actually. After admiring the Growth for a while, Gravis shoved his lightning into his Spirit.

BZZZZ!

A ton of lightning entered the membrane and then the Growth. After that, the Growth started pulsing, and with every pulse, it became bigger and then smaller again. With the pulsing also came incredible pain, and this incredible pain was the reason why someone needed to have a fully condensed Will-Aura. Without that, people would either not have the willpower to get through the pain or die trying.

To Gravis, it was nothing more than a hassle. The pain he had felt when he had reached the Spirit Forming Realm was way greater, and back then, his Will-Aura had also been way weaker than now. He only had to get through this.

The pulsing intensified, and after about an hour of that, the Growth exploded.

BOOOM!

All the Lightning expanded and filled the whole Spirit Space. The same thing had happened when Gravis had been close to reaching the Seed Stage. Back then, his lightning had also filled his whole Spirit Space. Yet, Gravis had many times more lightning now than back then. Due to that, the lightning wasn't able to travel around anymore inside his Spirit Space.

The lightning inside his Spirit Space was so incredibly dense that it even seemed solid. Even Gravis' own body felt pressure inside his Spirit Space. Yes, he was lightning, but there was so much lightning that it was hard to move around. He tried to move around and felt like he was back in the treasury of the branch of the Heaven Sect. His movement couldn't even be considered swimming. It could only be described with digging.

"Well, that certainly doesn't look like a Tree. There is even another issue! The size of my Spirit Space didn't increase!" Gravis said with surprise. "Though, I feel that my Spirit has become way more powerful. It's just weird that my Spirit Space didn't increase."

After a while, Gravis sighed. "Well, I created my own cultivation path, so of course, stuff will be different. Hmm, I wonder..."

Whoop! BZZZ!

Gravis summoned one of the weapons of the dead group into his Spirit Space and willed his lightning to not attack the item, yet there was just too much lightning, and the weapon immediately got incinerated. When Gravis saw that, he frowned. "I can't even store stuff anymore? What is this shit!?" he complained.

After that, Gravis thought some more. "I wonder what will happen if I move more lightning into my Spirit Space?"

By now, most of Gravis' lightning had already recovered, so he shoved more of it into his Spirit Space. Yet...

"What the fuck? I can't infuse my Spirit with more lightning?" he shouted with shock. "My Spirit Space is absolutely full and can't accommodate more lightning? What is this shit!? I refuse to accept that! Make space!"

WHOOOM!

Gravis went to one wall of his Spirit Space and used his will and Spirit to shove as much lightning away from his position as possible. The pressure inside his head increased as Gravis created an empty area. Then, he shoved the lightning from his body into his Spirit. This time, it managed to enter, but only from the empty side that Gravis' body occupied.

Gravis stopped suppressing the other lightning, and it returned to its previous form. Like this, he managed to shove more lightning into his Spirit. The added lightning also wasn't pushed out. Apparently, his Spirit Space only allowed lightning to enter but not exit.

Gravis saw this and nodded righteously. "See? Was that so hard?" he asked himself.

After that, he left his Spirit Space, and after waiting for his lightning to regenerate, he condensed the lightning inside his body more. By now, his lightning comfortably fit inside his dantian. There was even some empty space left.

Starting from that point on, Gravis returned to his Spirit Space every two hours to shove all his lightning inside. He would have to suppress the lightning manually every time.

After around a month, Gravis noticed something. Actually, he noticed several things.

When he noticed these things, he smirked.

"The good comes with the bad, and the bad comes with the good. That phrase rings true again!"

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Chapter 312: Incredible Opportunity

What things had Gravis noticed?

Gravis had always felt pressure inside his mind as he shoved more lightning into it, but at some point, the pressure didn't increase anymore. In the beginning, he hadn't been sure since it was always just a small increase in pressure, but as it stayed constant for multiple weeks, he realized that he was right.

Why didn't the pressure increase, even though he had shoved more and more lightning into his mind? The reason for that was that his Spirit Space slowly grew. Apparently, when the pressure reached a certain threshold, his Spirit Space would be forced to increase in size.

He saw that his Spirit Space had already grown by some meters. These couple of meters had already doubled the volume of his spherical Spirit Space, which was incredible. He wondered how big his Spirit Space would become after a year.

Yet, this discovery was unimportant in comparison to another one. Gravis had found something way more amazing!

The suppression of the lightning required Gravis to use all his Spirit and will. Due to the continued growth of his Spirit Space, the density of lightning didn't increase inside his Spirit Space. It just became more. So, after two weeks, the density hadn't grown anymore.

Yet, Gravis had noticed that he managed to suppress his lightning more and more. The compressed area slowly got smaller. How was that possible? With some logic, one could find the answer.

The suppression of his lightning required his Spirit and will, right? Yet, his Spirit didn't increase during cultivation. It would only increase when he reached the next Stage, so, that only left one thing.

Yes, this forceful suppression of his lightning increased Gravis' will!

After Gravis had realized that, he quickly checked the compression rate of his Will-Aura and found that he had reached 3.4%! That was an increase of 0.6%! An increase of 0.6% in only one month was incredible!

As soon as Gravis saw that, he dropped everything else. Nothing was more important than the will! He might also only be able to temper his will while being in this Stage! Gravis knew how the Self Stage looked, and he was sure that his own Self Stage would look identical to the Self Stage of others.

The Self Stage was called Self Stage because the Energy in the Spirit Space would completely fuse with the Spirit and would become another self. At that point, if a cultivator entered their Spirit Space, they wouldn't see their Energy anymore. They would enter the Self in their Spirit Space and see an empty Spirit Space before them, except for their own body.

Compressing a Self? That didn't seem possible, even with lightning. Yet, compressing this massive amount of lightning was possible!

'I need to use this time! Fuck, I already wasted a month!' Gravis thought with a mixture of rage and excitement.

Starting this day, Gravis spent all his time inside his Spirit Space. Even if he didn't have any lightning to shove into the space, he continued suppressing the lightning inside his mind. Gravis' eyes became red with fiery motivation! "COMPRESS! COMPRESS! COMPRESS!" he shouted inside his mind.

Meanwhile, the lower Heaven started getting nervous. It couldn't look into the mind or Spirit of cultivators in the Spirit Forming Realm, so it had no idea what was going on. The only thing it saw was that Gravis' Will-Aura continued increasing without reason! What was going on!? Wasn't Gravis' Will-Aura already powerful enough? Did he need even more!?

Gravis' crazy suppression also expanded the Spirit Space even without adding new lightning. After another two months, half of the whole Spirit Space was just empty. Under Gravis' insane training madness, his Spirit Space was growing much faster than he could shove lightning into it.

This insanity increased for a total of nine months. Gravis had been a total of ten months inside the third trial now, and today was the day when he stopped for the first time. Why did he stop?

The door to the fourth trial was still closed, so that was not the reason.

The reason why he stopped was that he had to stop. His Spirit Space had reached a diameter of 50 meters by now, and it had hit some kind of wall. On this day, Gravis felt like his Spirit Space was tearing. A sense of danger also appeared inside his heart as that happened. He felt like if he continued suppressing his lightning, his Spirit Space wouldn't be able to withstand the pressure anymore and would explode.

Gravis felt unwilling, but he was rational enough to stop. Even though he wanted to continue more than anything in the world, he had to stop himself. With a sigh, he released the compressed lightning for the first time in nine months.

BANG!

The lightning expanded again until it filled the whole Spirit Space, but it was not nearly as dense as before. Gravis could even walk through it again. Gravis looked around and sighed in lament again. "I guess when the lightning regains its old density, I will reach the Self Stage. This should take around a year. A little longer than I had initially expected, but that's not an issue."

Gravis left his Spirit Space and shook all the accumulated dust off his body. He had remained unmoving for nine months, after all. He stood up, and as soon as he did, many of his bones started cracking. His muscles also started aching a little.

Gravis stretched himself and did some training to get rid of the stiffness, and after everything was resolved, he was hit with a wave of tiredness. "Man, I'm exhausted, but first of all, let me check my Will-Aura."

WHOOOM!

Gravis concentrated his Will-Aura to the maximum and felt elated when he saw it. He immediately broke into wild laughter. "0.2%!" he shouted with excitement. He had easily reached the threshold for a level three Unity Will and went way beyond that.

1% and 0.2% didn't seem far apart, but the difference was immense in relation to each other. In terms of diameter, 0.2% was only a fifth of 1%! In terms of volume, it was many times smaller. These ten months of training were equal to the tempering Gravis had gotten from his fight against the priest, times three!

With this Will-Aura, Gravis would even be able to stop someone at the Self Stage from moving. If it were a priest, Gravis would be able to suppress their power and speed heavily. Now, Gravis was the absolutely undisputed number three in the world. With his body and Will-Aura, he would even be confident to fight all four priests simultaneously.

Yet, Gravis wasn't stupid. He knew that he would still be helpless in front of the High Priest. In fact, he would still be helpless, even if he reached the Self Stage. The gulf between the Self Stage and the Unity Realm was just too vast.

All three Realms had a significant gulf between them.

But wasn't the Unity Realm the fourth Realm?

Yes, it was, but the three Realm rule didn't start at three but at one. The Body Tempering Realm was the first Major Realm. There was an incredible gulf between mortals and someone at the Body Tempering Realm, after all.

Like this, the Body Tempering Realm would be considered as a Major Realm. The Energy Gathering Realm would be a Minor Realm, and the Spirit Forming Realm would also be a Minor Realm. The next Major Realm would then be the Unity Realm.

There was a reason why cultivators ascended to the next world after they reached the Unity Realm. Their Energy and power would grow incredibly, and it would put quite some stress on Heaven to keep multiple of them in its lower world.

Gravis was also sure that the High Priest hadn't even taken a single step forward from the moment when he had reached the Unity Realm.

After thinking about his new power, Gravis went to sleep for a couple of hours and then continued with his regular training. Sadly, he couldn't train his evasion anymore due to the new form of the lightning in his Spirit.

After another two months, the door opened.

Gravis had been inside the third trial for a full year now, and he was quite happy that he could get to the next one. He had become rather bored by now.

"Well, I'm 21 now. Only one more year of waiting. Then, I can kill you, Heaven."

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Chapter 313: The Five Heroic Men

Gravis quickly exited the third trial and made his way to the usual hall. After around an hour of walking, Gravis reached the hall and saw his group. Everyone was still alive, making Gravis smirk. Everyone's Will-Aura had increased, and Claude had also condensed his Unity Will.

The darkness disciple also had a fully concentrated Will-Aura now. Joyce was well on her way to reaching a level two Unity Will, but that would still require some tempering. Manuel had also started to slowly concentrate his Unity Will, but he was still a long way off from a level two Unity Will.

When the group saw Gravis, their eyes opened in shock. Gravis had already reached the Tree Stage? Wasn't that a little too fast? His will also felt much more powerful, but by now, the strength disparity was just too large. They couldn't judge Gravis' Will-Aura anymore. It just felt incredibly powerful.

"Congratulations!" Joyce shouted with a smile as she clapped into her hands, excitedly. "Now, no one below the Unity Realm can fight with you anymore!"

Gravis nodded with a smile. "Thanks. I should be able to reach the Self Stage in another ten months. Then..." Gravis trailed off as his smile transformed into a smirk.

Gravis didn't need to finish his sentence to make the group understand. They knew exactly what his goal was. After two more trials, Gravis would reach the Self Stage and then the Unity Realm. At that point, he would fight against Heaven, something that had seemed unimaginable to them a couple of years ago.

"I want to see it when it's time," Manuel said with a smirk as he stepped closer.

Instead of smirking back, Gravis' face transformed into a frown. "Manuel. There's something I need to tell you," he said.

The group noticed Gravis' change in tone and grew serious. Yet, how did Manuel react when he heard that?

Manuel only sighed.

"I think I know what you want to tell me," he said with helplessness. "Since humiliation didn't work, Heaven probably wanted to make you regret and rage. My disciple brothers are dead, aren't they?" he asked.

Gravis nodded solemnly.

When Manuel saw Gravis nod, he closed his eyes and took a deep breath. "Tell me how it went down," he said with a calm tone as he sat down in the middle of the hall.

The others looked at Gravis and Manuel with a mixture of disbelief, frustration, anger, and pity. Heaven was really taking it too far. Gravis walked closer and sat down opposite Manuel. The remaining three people also walked closer. Claude was just about to sit beside Gravis when...

Bang!

Joyce shoved Claude to the side, surprising him. Then, she sat down beside Gravis. When Claude saw that, he laughed a little and sighed again. Helplessly, he sat down beside Manuel. Gravis was more preoccupied with Manuel, so he didn't pay this display any attention.

"It all started when I entered the third trial..." Gravis started as he told the group about everything that happened.

In the beginning, the mood was still somber, but after a while, it turned to laughter. While the thought of their deaths was still harrowing, their antics and the heroic end to their lives made the situation much easier to accept. The group from the Wind Sect had been able to insult Heaven however much they wanted.

"So that's why we felt the earth shake for such a long time," the darkness disciple chimed in.

Gravis raised an eyebrow. "You also felt that even though you probably were multiple kilometers away?" he asked.

The whole group nodded. "Yeah, we were surprised why the earth started shaking out of nowhere," Claude said and then laughed. "I would have never guessed that the earth shook because the Wind Sect's group was insulting Heaven. It must have been really angry if we felt that from so far away."

Gravis smiled slightly. "It sure was angry," Gravis said. Then, he continued telling the tale of the five heroic men from the Wind Sect. Their inevitable deaths elicited some laughter. The five men had been heroic and defiant to the bitter end.

Manuel had already started smiling for a while with closed eyes. He had closed his eyes to better imagine that scene. He knew all five of these men, so he could very well imagine how everything happened.

"So, in the end, even though they were about to die, they had the opportunity to insult this world's ruler and captor," Manuel said slowly. Then, he laughed. "This is a better death than nearly all cultivators will ever experience. While everyone had been caged, these five had managed to break out of the cage and spit on our captor. This is an unprecedented honor for my Wind Sect."

"They went out how they lived, free," Gravis said, and Manuel nodded to that.

"Thank you, Gravis," Manuel said, "and don't feel bad. It's not your fault. Even though they have died, they had been able to show their disrespect to Heaven, something we won't be able to ever do, well, except for you. Thank you for giving them this chance, Gravis."

Gravis sighed and shook his head. "I didn't do anything. I only told them why they were in this situation. Everything they did after that had been their decision."

After that, the group started talking for a couple more hours. Apparently, the group had been fighting a mixture of the first two trials in their third one. They had fought solo and in groups, always outnumbered two to one. Yet, surprisingly, even though the trial could objectively be called harder, subjectively, it wasn't harder at all. According to what the group had said, the third trial was just as hard as the second one.

What was also surprising was the fact that the enemies had strengths tailored to the individual. For example, the enemies that Manuel had faced were way stronger than the enemies that Claude had faced. If the enemies' power were uniform, either nearly everyone would die, or the strongest of the bunch wouldn't receive tempering.

They had been fighting for a long time. In fact, the door to the fourth trial had opened only a day after they had passed the third one. This also showed the progress that everyone had made in the trials. One could even say that their battle-strength was skyrocketing.

Due to Manuel falling down a full Stage, his total strength was still weaker than when he had been in the Seed Stage. Yet, instead of being a full Stage weaker, Manuel was now only about half a Stage weaker. He had made a lot of progress. Previously, he had been able to win a one-on-one fight against someone a full Stage higher, but now, he could fight around three of them.

Joyce, on the other hand, only had average Battle-Strength if one ignored her Will-Aura. Yet, that was still impressive. After all, she hadn't really participated in fights before this Heaven's Trial started. But if one compared her to the rest of the group, her Battle-Strength was way weaker. One shouldn't forget that this group consisted of the absolute elite.

After some hours of talking, Gravis stood up and wanted to walk to the door, yet he stopped when he noticed something. Meanwhile, the group smirked at him. They had already noticed this peculiarity earlier.

Gravis didn't see two doors, like the previous times, but only one door. On top of that, the single door also had a big '5' inscribed above it. When Gravis saw that, his eyes narrowed. "What are you planning this time, Heaven?" Gravis asked out loud.

The group was a bit surprised that Gravis had talked to Heaven. Wasn't that useless? After all, Heaven didn't answer. Wouldn't this be considered as talking to oneself?

Gravis continued thinking for a while, but he couldn't find any reason why it would do that. Killing the group would be ridiculous. The highest Heaven would, obviously, not accept that. Yet, if Gravis entered the trial, shouldn't it get tailored to his power then? Like this, the others wouldn't be able to temper themselves, which would also be a colossal waste.

Pack!

Two excited arms grabbed Gravis' shoulder. "We're staying together from now on!" Joyce said with an excited grin. "You can teach me more fighting now!"

Gravis looked helplessly at Joyce. Wasn't she taking this situation a little too lightly? Yet, when he looked into her eager and excited eyes, he could only sigh and accept it. How long has it been that someone had been this excited to spend time with him?

Yes, friends liked to spend time with each other, but it felt different. Excitement like this wasn't part of something like that, mostly. The only time he could remember when someone had looked at him like that was when he had spent some time with his childhood friend, Stella. She had looked at Gravis with a similar look.

Gravis fell into thought and started thinking about his childhood. The days had been without any real worry. Even though Gravis had wanted to cultivate, it didn't have as much of an impact as he had thought back then. After all, Gravis had still been able to forget every worry in his life, as long as he had spent his time with Stella.

Was something like this possible today? Gravis was really not sure. The world looked greyer now.

Poke!

An aggressive poke shoved Gravis' head to the side. "Hey! Stop spacing out!" Joyce shouted. "I just told you how excited I was to spend more time with you, and you immediately looked like you were in for a lifetime of bitter torment!"

Gravis shook his head and sighed. "Sorry, I was just lost in thought. I was thinking about a childhood friend who had died." Then, he turned to Joyce and tried to smile, but he wasn't in the mood. His smile looked very crooked and forced.

When Joyce saw this weird smile, her face transformed into disgust. "Ew, what's with that smile? Stop that! It looks disgusting!"

Gravis' eyebrows shot up in surprise.

BANG!

Joyce kicked the door open before Gravis could say anything. "Onward!" she shouted as she pulled Gravis along.

The remaining group looked with helpless smiles at each other and followed.

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Chapter 314: Guide

The group traveled for a couple of minutes before they arrived at the fourth trial. The area of this fourth trial looked different than all the previous ones. Before this, Gravis had only seen big arenas or just small rooms, but this one was a fusion of the two.

A one-kilometer wide, lowered arena was in the middle of the trial ground. Around the edges were benches, low-quality weapons, and even training dummies. The arena took up 90% of the area, surprising Gravis a little. Why wouldn't the arena just take up all of the trial ground? What was the point of this side area?

"Oh, cool," Joyce said with a smile. "It's just like the earlier trials."

Gravis looked at her with a lifted brow. "This is how your earlier trial grounds looked?" he asked.

Joyce looked at him with a questioning look. "Yeah, did your trial grounds look different?"

Gravis nodded. "Yes. The second trial was a small hall, while the other two were just an open area. There wasn't a specific area dedicated to fighting."

"Well, it wouldn't make sense to create a dedicated arena for only one person, would it?" Manuel interjected as he stepped forward. "How did you think we decided who would fight which enemy? In these kinds of trials, enemies will appear one after the other inside the arena while we wait outside. As soon as the enemies spawn, a sign appears that tells us which cultivator should fight."

BANG!

In the middle of the arena, a stele appeared. The group looked at it and read the inscription. "The four cultivators at the initial Stage of Spirit Forming will temper themselves against the appearing enemies. The cultivator at the Tree Stage will act as a guide and teacher for fighting," Joyce read aloud.

She smiled and turned to Gravis. "So that's why we are together in this trial. Gravis, you will teach us how to fight! Isn't that great?" she shouted with a smile while waving at him from beside the stele.

Gravis rubbed his chin in thought. "Is there really no trap here?" he mused to himself. "Am I really only supposed to teach them?"

Gravis narrowed his eyes and looked at the ceiling. "Did you actually learn from your mistakes? Did this really just happen?" he asked with genuine surprise. "Have you realized that you can't suppress me anymore? Are you actually intending on not making it hard on me in this trial?"

No answer came.

Whoom!

After a couple of seconds, the stele vanished. In its place appeared a small sign. "The cultivator at the Tree Stage will give a one-time demonstration of his skills. One enemy at the Self Stage will appear with an equally strong dantian and body. In order to demonstrate his Battle-Strength properly, the cultivator will not use his Will-Aura, Lightning Crescent, or Lightning Bomb. The enemy will have a body that surpasses the Self Stage," Joyce read.

Gravis lifted an eyebrow while the others furrowed their brows. The enemies that they had fought in their previous trials had also been a Stage higher than them. If one only looked at the two opponents, one wouldn't see any difference compared to their trials.

Yet, Gravis was not allowed to use his Will-Aura. One had to know that the Will-Aura was the main reason why the group could fight above their Stage. Without it, they would be weaker in everything. The cultivators thought about how a fight against such an enemy would go, and they all concluded that they would have no chance. Even Manuel was sure that he wouldn't be able to win.

Gravis sighed. "Wow," he said with surprise, eliciting worried gazes from the group. "Heaven actually learned from its mistakes. Color me surprised," he said. Before the group could react, Gravis walked forward.

Bang!

Gravis jumped into the arena, and a Formation Array appeared around him. Gravis looked at it and was pretty sure that it was only there to block the shockwaves from exiting the arena. Joyce looked with

worry at Gravis as she still stood inside the arena. She was worried that this fight might be too hard for him.

Gravis gestured to the outside of the arena with his head. "Leave. This is not a problem for me," he said.

Joyce was still worried, but she nodded and jumped out. The Formation Array didn't stop her.

Whoom!

A puppet appeared a couple of hundred meters away from Gravis. It had the form of a middle-aged man, utterly grey in color. His whole body was grey, including clothes, skin, hair, and eyes. He carried a large saber that looked less like a saber and more like a knife. It was over two meters long and nearly half a meter wide.

BANG!

The person shot forward while readying the humongous saber in one hand. His other hand was close to his body and pointed at Gravis. When Gravis saw that, he immediately realized the opponent's element.

BANG!

Gravis exploded forward as lightning exploded beneath his feet. Gravis' ridiculously fast acceleration made the puppet nearly unable to react. The huge saber immediately slashed down while an incredibly powerful fireball appeared in the puppet's free hand.

The saber came closer and closer to Gravis' head, but he didn't even look at it.

BZZZ BANG!

A Lightning Spear shot out of Gravis' right hand, and it quickly hit the fireball inside the puppet's hand before it could fire off. The fireball exploded, destroying the puppet's hand in the process. Gravis had noticed that the fireball had been compressed with Spirit, which made it dangerous even to the user.

The shockwave also washed over Gravis, but most of its power had been stopped by the puppet's hand and the Lightning Spear. Yet, the explosion was still powerful, and heavy burns appeared all over Gravis' body.

BANG!

While the puppet had been thrown back by the sudden explosion, Gravis, who had already expected the shockwave, used another lightning explosion to accelerate through the shockwave. He quickly reached the puppet, lifted his saber high, and slashed down with both hands.

CRK!

The saber struck the puppet's head but didn't kill it. Instead, it stuck out of the head of the puppet, its edge barely inside.

BZZZ!

Gravis used the saber to infuse the puppet with lightning, shocking and paralyzing it in the process. Due to the required realism, the puppets worked the same way as humans. Gravis' lightning might not have

been powerful enough to shock the puppet under normal circumstances, but it was different when the lightning had a direct way into the puppet's head.

Gravis pulled down, still holding the hilt of his saber, pulling the puppet's head down with it.

BANG! BOOM!

Lightning exploded under Gravis' foot. The explosion created an incredible force that propelled Gravis' leg upwards, and his knee exploded into the puppet's chin. Gravis' knee wasn't able to handle such an impact, and his leg was reduced into bloody chunks.

SHING!

Gravis kept the puppet in place with his saber and then pulled it back. The saber left the puppet's head, and Gravis readied it. Due to the massive impact on its chin, the puppet's brain was scrambled and shaken, making it unable to move.

SHING!

Gravis lowered himself and stabbed through the puppet's chin, right into its brain. The skull had stopped his attack before, showing that he wasn't strong enough to break through the bones' defenses. Yet, there were no bones between the underside of the chin and the brain.

BZZZZ!

One more infusion of lightning right into the brain sealed the deal. Even if it had survived the previous attack, it was definitely dead now.

BZZZ!

Gravis used around 20% of his Life Lightning to get back to his peak condition. After that, he pulled his saber out of the puppet's head. Something like this couldn't even be considered tempering. He had been in full control ever since the fight had started.

Gravis cracked his neck and then turned to the group.

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Chapter 315: Teaching

Gravis jumped out of the arena and looked at the group evenly. The group was actually quite shocked at how quickly the fight had ended.

"Gravis! Are you alright? Are you hurt?" Joyce asked with worry as she ran up to him and looked at him closely.

Gravis could only sigh at that. "No, obviously, I'm not. I can heal myself by converting the inherent Energy in my body into Life Lightning," he explained simply. Then, he turned to the remainder. "Since I am supposed to be your guide, I'll start explaining the backgrounds of the fight now."

Joyce was a little annoyed that Gravis just brushed her worry off and immediately went to teaching, but there was nothing she could do.

"Gravis, why didn't you unleash your preloaded weapon into the puppet's head as soon as you struck it?" Manuel asked. "This seemed like a way better way to win the fight."

The rest of the group also had this question. Why didn't Gravis unload his saber?

Gravis laughed a bit. "You're right. That would have been a cleaner and better way to win the fight. I would have done that if I could."

Whoop!

Gravis summoned his saber. "This saber has been forged specifically for me, and it has different Formation Arrays. The Formation Arrays allow me to store my most powerful attack, the Lightning Crescent. Sadly, the good comes with the bad, and the addition of the new Formation Arrays makes it impossible for me to store a normal loaded attack."

A light of recognition appeared in the group's eyes. "But you could have unloaded it anyway. After all, such an attack would probably not have broken the rules," Manuel said again. "Simply unloading your weapon should be okay, even if it had a Lightning Crescent inside."

Gravis smirked a little. "Yeah, you're probably right, but that's not the reason why I didn't unload it," Gravis explained. "I am pretty sure that the restriction on my Lightning Crescent wasn't there to make it hard on me but to protect you guys."

Joyce frowned. "But the arena is protected with a powerful Formation Array. Nothing is able to leave the arena."

Gravis shook his head. "The Formation Array can probably block an attack at the Self Stage, but my Lightning Crescent is actually more powerful than just an attack in the Self Stage. The Formation Array would break, and you all would die."

The group was taken aback but still skeptical. "That sounds unrealistic," The darkness disciple said. "We know that you're powerful, but it should be impossible to unleash an attack above the Self Stage."

Bang!

Gravis jumped back into the arena and then used 1% of his Spirit to summon a will-sphere. Instead of explaining, it would be easier to show them. He infused his lightning into the will-sphere, and it exploded.

BOOOM!

Before anyone could process what was happening, a huge lightning explosion happened. Gravis' will had become many times more powerful, as well as his Spirit. This 1% of his Spirit ate up about 5% of his lightning before it exploded.

The Formation Array immediately activated again, and nearly the whole arena was filled with lightning. Together with his more compressed lightning and his stronger will, this one percent of his Spirit created a force that would have been equal to around 30% of his Spirit in the Seed Stage.

Yet, the Formation Array was easily able to block this little bit. After the explosion, Gravis jumped back to the group. "That was 1% of my Spirit. My preloaded Lightning Crescent is filled with 100%. You can imagine the rest," he said.

The group took a deep breath. They wouldn't even have been able to withstand this explosion. That was only 1%? That's insane!

"Anyways, back to explaining the fight," Gravis said, claiming the attention of everyone. "As soon as I saw the weapon and fighting position of the puppet, I knew immediately that it had the fire element. The puppet fought rather smartly by keeping one of its hands free. With that free hand, it could summon a fireball if something went wrong."

The group now listened to him.

"By knowing the plan of the enemy, you can plan around it. The puppet didn't expect that I would take the initiative to trigger its backup plan. That surprise also stopped its main plan. Remember that the enemies try to anticipate everything you do, but they often don't pay attention to what they are doing. After all, why should someone get attacked by their own attack?" Gravis said.

"I understand that, Gravis, but why did you force yourself through the explosion, even though you knew that it was coming? This seemed like a waste since you got heavily injured by the explosion," Joyce asked.

Gravis looked at her evenly. "I could have retreated after exploding the fireball, but then what? Yes, I would not have been injured, and the hand of my enemy would be damaged, but that wouldn't end the fight, would it?"

Joyce understood where Gravis was coming from, but she still wasn't wholly convinced. Wasn't the point in winning a fight not to die or not get injured? Why do that on purpose?

Gravis saw that she was still a little confused, so he sighed. "Think of it like this. The fight starts, and I have a 50% chance of dying and a 50% chance of winning. By injuring the hand of the enemy, the chances of winning would rise to 60%. Yet, doesn't that still leave a 40% chance of dying? Why take that risk?"

Gravis looked at the arena. "The puppet fought safely without taking any risks, and that was why it died."

The darkness disciple was confused now. "But fighting safely is, as its name says, the safest."

Gravis smirked a little. "Except that it isn't. By fighting safely, you don't put all of your strength forward, but if your opponent does, you will get overpowered. Think of the puppet. It was superior to me in every single way. It was faster, had more stamina, had a more powerful body, more powerful Energy, a more powerful Spirit, yet it hadn't managed to hit me even once. Why is that?"

The group remained silent. Seeing that no one was answering, Manuel stepped forward. "Because you never gave it any chance to make use of its strengths," he said with a slight laugh. "Just like back when we have fought."

Gravis smiled and nodded. "Exactly! The strength of the opponent is unimportant if they can't use it. If I had retreated after destroying its hand, its fighting style might change. Maybe it would unload one powerful ranged attack after another. By that point, it would become nearly impossible for me to close in on it, and I would run out of Energy first."

Gravis looked at the darkness disciple. "My hesitation in going for the kill would have brought me into a disadvantageous position. The safest way to win was to go all-in. The moment when the puppet didn't immediately unload its loaded weapon was the moment when it had lost."

Now it was Claude's time to speak up. "That all makes sense, but why did you injure yourself to that degree? Your leg was completely destroyed, and your body was full of burns. Couldn't you have won without injuring yourself?"

Gravis rubbed his chin. "Maybe, but that's exactly the issue. The fact that I just said maybe and not yes shows the issue. Isn't it more logical to take the sure path instead of the unsure one? The best way to win was to exchange injury for my opponent's death. An injury can be recovered, but you can't revive someone."

The group, except for Manuel, felt a little uncomfortable. Wasn't this fighting method too masochistic?

Gravis shook his head in helplessness. "What's the point of having a powerful will if you don't take advantage of it? Pain is nothing to us, so why hesitate? This bit of physical pain is nothing to us."

Some of them were still a little unsure, but Manuel laughed a little. He had the most fighting experience out of everyone here.

Manuel turned to the group. "Don't look at your body as if it is you," he said, confusing everyone. "You are the brain, mind, and Spirit. Your body is just another weapon. So what if it gets damaged? You can just repair it."

"Know what happened when I fought Gravis back then?" Manuel asked. "Gravis' leg had been injured by us. It had been severed at the knee. Know what this madman did with that? He used his saber to cut off more of his own leg."

The group was shocked when they heard that. "Why?" Joyce asked in confusion and shock. Why would someone injure themselves on purpose?

Manuel snickered. "He cut the stump of his leg diagonally. With that, his femur poked out of the stump, and with the diagonal cut, it had been sharpened into a blade. His next attack had been a faint from his weapon and an actual strike with his sharpened femur."

The eyes of the group opened wide. Who could even think up such a thing? Yet, as they thought about it, it actually made a lot of sense. If one ignored the feeling of abnormality that such a thing came with, one would be able to see the advantage that a sharpened femur would bring. It was an incredible ultra-short ranged weapon.

The group learned a lot of things from Gravis' teaching. Many of the things sounded very logical, but they would also have not seen these possibilities themselves. Gravis fought with such icy and neutral logic that it already transformed into creativity. No normal human would fight like that, even if it made a lot of sense.

Gravis smirked while rubbing his chin in thought. "Know what's really interesting?" Gravis asked.

The group looked at him again.

"The preconceived notion of what element is made for fighting and which one is made for support can be turned on its head," Gravis said as he looked at Joyce. "From all of you present, due to her element, Joyce actually has the necessary element to become the strongest fighter."

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Chapter 316: Power of Life Lightning

The group looked with questioning gazes at Gravis. What was he talking about? Someone with Life Lightning wouldn't be able to use their element offensively. This gave them a severe disadvantage over their opponents. Someone like that could be the strongest fighter? How would that even work?

Joyce waved her hands defensively. "No, no, no!" she said quickly. "How would I be able to win against the others? Their elements suppress me, and I would be on the defensive the whole time!"

Gravis smirked while rubbing his chin. "Let me explain," he said. "First of all, why didn't you upgrade your body to the Seed Stage already?"

The group got even more confused as they furrowed their brows. What's it with this stupid, obvious question?

Joyce also furrowed her brows. "Because my own body would hinder my element, and if I wanted to release it, I would probably spend over double the cost. My element would be weakened significantly like this."

Gravis nodded. "Yes, but that is only a disadvantage if you wanted to release it to fight, right?"

"That also counts if I want to heal someone else. If I don't use my Life Lightning to heal others, what would be the point of having it in the first place?" Joyce asked with skepticism.

Gravis wasn't deterred by her question and only chuckled a little. "But can't you still heal yourself?"

Joyce scratched her neck. "I mean, sure. The healing of my own body wouldn't be hindered. I would only need to use more Life Lightning to heal it since a stronger body requires more Life Energy."

Gravis continued smirking. "Right. Now, let's think logically about this. You can probably heal yourself to your peak condition from a near-death state about 20 times, right?"

Joyce nodded.

"With a body at the Seed Stage, you would still be able to heal yourself around ten times, right?"

Joyce nodded again.

"Alright. So, if you fight as you are now, you can probably take down one enemy one Stage above yourself thanks to your Will-Aura, right?" Gravis asked.

Joyce nodded.

"Then, how many enemies at the Seed Stage would you be able to take down with a body at the Seed Stage?" Gravis asked with a smirk.

Joyce thought about this, and her eyes widened. "A lot," she said slowly.

Gravis nodded. "Right! The other elements can't increase their body above their current Stage because of their element's detriment, but your case is different. After all, you don't fight with your element, do you?"

Joyce fell into thought. "I guess not," she said after a while. Her mind was going crazy right now.

"Now," Gravis continued. "Think about fighting someone at the Sapling Stage. Your Will-Aura would be able to bridge the gap of two Stages. Both of your Will-Auras would get canceled out, leaving you both with your base strengths. Everything besides your body would be two Stages lower. Yet, with only your body, you would still be able to, at least, injure that enemy, right?"

Joyce was still in thought. "Yes, but I would only be able to injure my enemy once before I would die to them."

Gravis shook his head. "Wrong. Try to change your goal from not getting injured to not dying. You would be able to stab the enemy's body once, but the counterattack would be swift. Yet, thanks to your Life Lightning, you only need to protect your head and dantian. As long as one of these two things isn't destroyed, you can immediately heal yourself to your peak stage."

Joyce was growing agitated and excited as Gravis continued explaining. "Yes, I would," she said.

Gravis' smirk changed into a sly smile. "And since you can heal yourself ten times, you can stab your enemy ten times, right? Wouldn't that kill them?" he asked.

Joyce nearly couldn't believe it. This was too unreal. Fighting one Stage above herself was already like a dream to someone with Life Lightning. Yet, Gravis was saying that she could fight two Stages above herself?

But the more Joyce thought about it, the more logical it seemed. The others also started realizing the implication of this.

"Though," Manuel started saying while in thought. "A loaded wind blade from me could sever the connection between her mind and her dantian since it would bisect her." Without noticing, Manuel wasn't looking at Joyce as a weak girl anymore, but as an actual opponent.

Earlier, he wouldn't even need to think about how he would fight her. Yet, now, he needed to actually plan on how to win. The revelation of this possibility completely changed his perception of Joyce. She would transform from a weak enemy into a dangerous one if they weren't friends.

Gravis nodded. "Yes. That's why having the element isn't enough. Only by knowing the weapons of the enemy would she be able to counter them. If you two were to fight, she would need to keep herself as low to the ground as possible. Like this, a horizontal slash would be more difficult for you to perform."

Manuel thought about this. "Yes, and an enemy that doesn't know how she fights would, instead, use a vertical slash. Normally, to evade a vertical slash, a cultivator needs to move their body around a meter to the side. But in Joyce's case, she only needs to move a couple of centimeters. As long as it doesn't hit

her head or dantian, the connection won't be severed. This also lowers the speed requirement to dodge an attack."

Gravis nodded. "And after the slash, the opponent would be open to a counterattack. Imagine yourself in the enemy's shoes. You just used your most powerful attack, but your enemy wasn't even injured. You would have wasted your most powerful attack for basically nothing. Like this, without her even doing anything, she would have robbed you of your most powerful attack."

"Wait a second!" Joyce interjected. "Don't talk like I'm not here! Yes, that way of fighting sounds very impressive, but one mistake and I would lose my life! I would need to fight perfectly."

Gravis turned to her with even eyes. "Isn't that already the case? One hit to your dantian or head, and you would die. I see no difference."

Joyce wanted to refute that, but she couldn't.

Seeing that Joyce remained quiet, Gravis walked closer and put a hand on her shoulder. "If you want to reach the top, you need to unearth all your potential. You need to get comfortable with injuring yourself to slay the enemy. If you can't even do that, then your dream of reaching the top would only remain a dream."

Joyce clenched her fists while looking at the floor. Gravis' words hurt her, but she realized that he was right. If she couldn't even beat the people around her, how would she be able to reach the top?

"Joyce," Gravis said as he shook her shoulder gently. She looked into Gravis' eyes as he looked back. "You have the perfect element to become incredibly powerful, but in order to truly use that potential, you need to completely change the outlook for your temperament."

Joyce looked with unsure eyes into Gravis' eyes. "But, my temperament is defined by my element. I can't change my temperament as easily as this."

"That's why I said you need to change the outlook of your temperament, not your temperament itself," Gravis said. "Life Lightning is compassionate, but against an enemy, it isn't compassionate. With a more powerful body, you will still be able to heal others, just not as good as now."

"Yet, as long as you remain compassionate to yourself, I see no problem. You will still use your Life Lightning to heal, but instead of focusing on healing others, you are focusing on healing yourself. You can heal injuries without any problem, so what's so bad about receiving them? Wouldn't absorbing the injuries meant for your companions be even more compassionate than healing them?"

Joyce absorbed every word coming out of Gravis' mouth. It was like he was opening a new door for her future. Her worries about the future seemed so distant now. Even though she hadn't talked about it, she had been anxious about the time when she would ascend.

When she ascended, she wouldn't have any friends or family anymore. Together with her weak element, wouldn't she just be wild prey? All her security from this world would vanish, leaving her alone to fend for herself.

Yet, Gravis' words had made these worries unimportant. If others were able to get through their lives alone, why wouldn't she be able to? She had a powerful Will-Aura and an incredible element.

Joyce closed her eyes for a short moment and then reopened them. Yet, instead of uncertainty, they shone with battle-intent. "You're right!" she shouted. "I need to depend on myself! Additionally, if I absorb all the injuries, my close ones won't suffer anymore! I can take the injuries, so why not take the initiative!?"

The group smiled at Joyce. This was how a cultivator should be! Strong and able to fend for themselves! Having companions was great, but it was not a necessity. Even without them, a cultivator could still reach the top!

Gravis smiled a warm smile when he heard that. Meanwhile, Joyce's face became a bit red, and she retreated a little from Gravis.

"Great!" Gravis shouted. "That's what I want to hear! Now, we only need to get you comfortable with injuries!"

Joyce nodded. "Yes! I need to jump over my shadow!"

Gravis nodded. "Good! Then get ready!"

"What?"

BANG!

Gravis threw her into the arena, eliciting shocked looks from the group.

"Heaven! Send her an enemy one Stage above her, including Energy and body!" Gravis shouted.

"Joyce," Gravis shouted. "You are not allowed to kill your enemy until you've received, at least, five injuries that would kill a mortal! If you ignore my words, I will use my Will-Aura to stop you from moving, and whatever happens, happens!"

Whoom!

A grey figure appeared in the arena, looking at Joyce evenly.

Joyce was in panic, but the figure didn't wait for her to get her bearings before charging at her.

"FIGHT!" Gravis transmitted aggressively into Joyce's mind, waking her from her shock. Her instincts took over, and she evaded the attack.

Right now, her feelings could only be described as complicated. She was happy and excited about how Gravis encouraged her, but she also felt a bit hurt and sad that he was "helping" her this directly without any kindness.

Nevertheless, Joyce regained her bearings and entered battle-mode. She needed to jump over her fear of getting injured!

Meanwhile, Gravis looked at the others with an icy gaze. "Oh, you will wish that this trial didn't include me. Prepare to go through hell!"

The group shivered.

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Chapter 317: Increasing Battle-Strength

Joyce managed to fulfill her task. With her Will-Aura, she would have won against the puppet either way, but Gravis' requirements had made it way harder for her. The first attack had nearly killed her, but the ones after that had become easier to avoid.

In total, Joyce had taken three stabs and two slashes to her torso, which nearly bisected her. Luckily, by barely moving her body around, she managed to not get bisected. After the fifth injury, she had managed to kill the enemy.

"Immediately send another one, no pause," Gravis shouted, shocking Joyce and the group. Wasn't this a little too brutal? At least give her some time to breathe!

Another enemy appeared immediately.

"Joyce!" Gravis shouted. "Kill this enemy without taking more than one injury. Prove to us that you can take advantage of your Life Lightning!"

Joyce was a bit panicked, but her mood quickly recovered.

"Remember, initiative is everything! Don't let your enemy take advantage of their strengths!" Gravis shouted.

The enemy quickly shot forward. Joyce gritted her teeth and also charged forward. The enemy used an overhead slash to kill her, but with an iron will, Joyce managed to move her body slightly to the side. The left third of her body was cut off, but her long and thin sword managed to penetrate the enemy's dantian.

All its Energy left the puppet, and with another hit, Joyce ended it. Joyce was no longer using her Will-Aura constantly but kept it hidden until the enemy attacked. The short stun that the Will-Aura created would allow her to evade. Of course, a tactic like this only worked once per enemy. After that, the enemy would be prepared for that.

Joyce healed herself for the sixth time.

"Another one!" Gravis shouted, eliciting worried glances from the group. "Joyce, this time, you are not allowed to unleash your Will-Aura. Look at this as a test for someone two Stages above you. In such a fight, your enemy won't be slowed."

Joyce felt some stress, but her mind was burning. The nonstop battles roused her battle instincts. She was no longer thinking about herself but only about how to end her enemy.

She killed the next enemy in a similar way. The evasion of the attack had become harder, but she still managed it.

"Another one! Same restrictions as before, but you need to evade the first attack fully! Only when the enemy uses their second attack are you allowed to strike them!" Gravis shouted.

Another enemy appeared, and Joyce did as instructed. Yet, the slash of the enemy was swift and powerful. Seeing that she couldn't evade that slash, she blocked it with her sword. The slash threw her across the arena, but she was mostly uninjured.

The enemy saw its chance and immediately charged forward. The enemy's attack was pretty reckless since it thought that its enemy wouldn't be able to recover that quickly. Joyce took the slash and finished the enemy.

"Good! Taking the initiative is important, but if someone gets too eager, they will attack recklessly. Evading this attack should have been easier for you than the attack from the earlier opponent," Gravis said.

"Heaven! Send two of these enemies!" Gravis shouted.

The group took a deep breath. Wasn't this going too far? Yet, instead of growing afraid, Joyce only gritted her teeth with burning eyes.

"Survive! No restrictions!" Gravis shouted.

Two enemies appeared, and Joyce immediately charged at one of them. The second one spawned a couple of hundred meters away, so it still needed to come closer. The spear of the first enemy penetrated her chest, but Joyce didn't even seem to notice. Her sword completely decapitated the enemy.

Before the second enemy even arrived, Joyce already charged at him. "The second enemy knows about your strengths now, so it will take you more seriously! Your most powerful weapon is unveiled, so act accordingly!" Gravis transmitted to her.

Sure enough, instead of using a simple slash, the enemy unloaded its weapon in an arc. Remembering what Gravis told her, Joyce jumped to the side so that her body was also horizontal. The slash destroyed nearly half of her body, but her dantian and mind were safe.

Joyce immediately healed again and charged forward. The most potent weapon of the opponent had been used up, so it had to improvise. It started running away and sent multiple wind blades at her. Joyce always barely evaded these strikes, and in a couple of minutes, the enemy was out of Energy.

With one more trade, Joyce managed to win.

"Heaven, spawn one more enemy, but make it have Energy at the Sapling Stage!" Gravis shouted, and another enemy appeared.

"Hey!" Claude shouted aggressively. "Do you want to kill her? Don't you see how exhausted she is? Give her a break!"

Gravis looked coldly at him. "Just watch," he transmitted to him so that Joyce couldn't hear him.

The enemy spawned and charged at her. The enemy used a slash, and Joyce once more traded an injury for its death.

When Claude saw that, he took a deep breath. Joyce had killed such a powerful enemy that easily?

Gravis only smirked. "Good job, Joyce. You're done. Come out," Gravis said.

"I can continue!" Joyce shouted.

"Calm down, Joyce," Gravis said. "You are in a battle state, and that is good, but if you lose yourself in that state, it will transform into recklessness and maybe also rage. Your state has become progressively more aggressive, and your current state is perfect for battle. Don't become too lost in it."

Joyce wanted to continue, but her trust in Gravis stopped her. Even though she wanted to continue fighting, she suppressed that feeling and left the arena.

The group looked at her with shock. She had just managed to kill an enemy that had Energy two Stages higher than herself, something that was even incredibly hard for Manuel. In one series of battles, Joyce went from being the weakest to being one of the strongest.

Gravis smirked. "You have just killed an incredibly powerful enemy. How does it feel?" he asked.

Joyce took some deep breaths and then calmed down. After that, she furrowed her brows. "He didn't feel that powerful. In actuality, he felt just as powerful as the previous enemies."

Gravis laughed. "Because the enemy didn't have the chance to use its superior Energy. If they can't use their strongest weapon, it's the same as not having that weapon at all. This is the importance of killing your enemy as quickly as possible. If you hadn't managed to kill it in one strike, you would have entered an incredibly bitter and prolonged fight."

Joyce closed her eyes and reviewed her battles. She had killed multiple enemies that would have been challenging fights before this trial. She had also killed an enemy that knew her fighting style and strengths, and the last enemy was the most powerful one she had ever killed.

"Do you feel it?" Gravis asked. "Your Will-Aura has increased, but only by a minuscule amount. This means that the fights haven't even been really that dangerous."

Joyce felt it and furrowed her brows. "So, tempering my Will-Aura has become harder since my Battle-Strength has increased," she said.

Gravis laughed a bit. "Yes. The good comes with the bad. Now you know how I feel. I need to constantly search for tempering because if I progress to a higher Stage, I won't have any opponents left. But with this newfound Battle-Strength, there are way fewer enemies in this world that can kill you. You are less restrained, and you can earn more money more easily."

Joyce took in all of Gravis' words and drew a deep breath. After that, her eyes opened, and she looked at Gravis with excitement. "I did it, Gravis! Are you proud of me?" she shouted while shaking his arm.

And like that, Joyce was back to her usual, cheery self. Gravis laughed a bit. "Yes, I'm proud of you," he said.

Joyce clasped her cheeks in happiness. "Thank you so much!" she said.

Gravis thought she meant his training. "No problem."

Then, Gravis turned to Claude. "How powerful are you?" he asked.

Claude felt nervous when he saw Gravis looking at him. Was it his turn now? "I can fight two enemies at the Seed Stage," he said.

Gravis nodded and gestured for him to enter the arena. Claude sighed and complied.

"Heaven! Send him a copy of the priest I fought in the first trial, but adjust his strength so that everything about him is in the initial Stage, except for his body. Don't give him the Jade Tokens, though," Gravis shouted.

Everyone furrowed their brows in confusion. Claude just said that he could take two Seed Stage cultivators, but Gravis only sent him one, and that opponent was even only in the initial Stage? Wasn't this a little too easy?

A two-meter-tall puppet with a gigantic shield appeared. "Earth element?" Claude asked with interest.

Yes, the earth element was the best counter for the lightning element, but Claude could work around that. This fight shouldn't be an issue for him. With his speed, he would surely be able to take the puppet by surprise.

Meanwhile, the puppet looked at Claude like he was its most powerful, mortal enemy. No sign of hesitation or ridicule appeared in its eyes.

Manuel saw those eyes, and he stopped looking with confusion at the puppet. He had fought many powerful people, and he was incredible in judging a person's personality.

"This fight will be difficult," he whispered.

The group looked at him in surprise.

"Are you sure?" the darkness disciple asked.

Manuel only nodded. "Yes."

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Chapter 318: Claude's Test of Mindset

"Claude, let me give you a fair warning," Gravis said. "This is a battle of mindsets. You need to look at your enemy like he is the most powerful one you have ever faced. If you don't, you will die."

Claude was a little surprised and furrowed his brows. He had killed several enemies in the Seed Stage, so how could someone like this be dangerous? He had heard that this was a copy of the priest Gravis had fought, but wasn't Gravis underestimating him too much?

BANG!

The puppet charged forward with its colossal shield. Since it didn't have its Jade Tokens, it readied its spear in the other hand. Claude saw this and saw his chance. As soon as the puppet would strike with its spear, he would be able to counterattack.

Claude also charged at the puppet. Since he didn't have Gravis' ridiculous method of acceleration, he used his Lightning Movement in tandem with his physical body. With the help of his lightning, he was a bit faster than the puppet.

When they met, Claude immediately stopped and started circling the puppet. Yet, the puppet always pointed its shield at him. Claude waited for the spear attack, but even after several minutes, it didn't come. Claude grew a little worried. Using his Lightning Movement cost some Energy, and the puppet wasn't using its Energy. If that continued, he would run out of Energy first.

Claude retreated, but the puppet kept close to him. 'This is annoying!' Claude thought in frustration. He didn't feel any danger from the puppet, but it was still troublesome. He started circling the puppet again, but it still wasn't using any attack. Slowly, Claude became nervous. He was wasting his Energy while the puppet wasn't.

A plan formed in Claude's mind.

BANG!

Claude kicked the shield and jumped to the side. This should disturb the puppet's balance or bait it into an attack. Yet, contrary to expectations, the puppet only blocked the attack, but the shield remained stationary for a bit.

Claude's eyes shone. He barely managed to push his spear at the puppet from the side. He also saw the spear of the puppet moving at him. He had expected such an action and had been prepared for the spear strike.

Whoop! BANG!

The shield and spear vanished suddenly, surprising everyone but Gravis. The shield immediately reappeared in the puppet's other hand, and therefore, in the way of Claude's spear. Claude gritted his teeth and went through with the attack, but he didn't unload his weapon since the shield was in the way. He would get a better opportunity to unload it later.

The shield pushed against the spear and remained stalwart. Meanwhile, the spear bent to a ridiculous degree. Claude was ready for the puppet's counterattack with the spear. It would surely attack since this was a prime opportunity for it.

BANG!

Instead, the puppet's other hand went to the shield, and with all its power, it shoved the shield forward. Claude couldn't keep pushing with his spear since it would break if it went through even more stress. Like this, the shield hit Claude's whole body, and he got thrown into the distance.

Some of his bones cracked, but nothing broke. Claude immediately stood up again and saw the puppet charging at him with its shield. Claude's eyes shown. The puppet would surely become more confident and use a reckless attack. He was ready for that.

Yet, it stopped before him and only pointed its shield at him. Claude, who had been ready for a strike, remained stationary.

BANG!

The shield shoved forward again, and Claude barely managed to protect himself with his arms. His arms received some injuries, but they were still mostly fine. The fight was just at the beginning, and he still had plenty of chances to bait an attack.

The puppet closed in again with its shield, and Claude circled it again. The shield continued pointing at Claude.

Whoop!

The shield moved forward, and Claude saw his chance. He immediately used most of his lightning to move in the other direction. Yet, the shield immediately halted. It had been a feint. Claude's eyes widened as the shield pointed at him again. Seeing that another shield bash was coming, Claude blocked with his arms.

The puppet's eyes transformed into fervent motivation.

BANG!

Its Spirit shattered as the bang of its breaking Spirit resounded throughout the trial grounds.

"Oh no," Manuel shouted in panic from outside the arena.

250% of its Energy went into the shield, increasing its weight to a ridiculous degree. With a mighty shove forward, it hit the blocking Claude.

BOOOOM!

Claude's body was reduced into many bloody chunks as they splattered onto the whole arena in an arc behind him. It was like a high-grade Spirit Beast had slapped him with its full power. There had been no way for Claude to survive that attack.

The puppet vanished, and the trial grounds were silent except for the occasional sound of wet meat landing on the ground. The eyes of the group were wide open in shock. Someone from their group had died, just like that?

"I told him that he should look at his opponent like it will be his hardest fight," Gravis said coldly. "When he dodged the shield at the beginning, he should have unloaded his weapon. The impact would have thrown the shield away. At that point, he would only have needed to unleash all his lightning into the puppet. Sadly, his mindset wasn't fitting for a cultivator."

"How can you say something like that!?" Joyce asked with a bit of rage and sadness. "One of our friends has just died!"

Gravis turned to her with an even gaze. "It was a fair fight. Claude had the power to win, but because he took his opponent lightly, he died. I have warned him. I have also told you all in detail how the priest has fought me. They were at the same Stage, except for the body, and Claude knew the puppet's fighting style."

Joyce was angry and clenched her fists in frustration. Yes, everything that Gravis said was true, but she was emotionally riled up because one of her closest friends had died. They had been in this Heaven's Trial for over two years, and they had fought together during that time.

Manuel sighed. "Gravis is right. We shouldn't forget that this is a Heaven's Trial. We get tempering and training. Death is a genuine possibility. He had a chance to win."

Gravis nodded. "Think of your previous fights. Nearly every enemy has taken you lightly because you were a Stage lower than them, and you took advantage of that fact. Yet, this weakness, which we look down on so much, can also happen to us. If we get too lost in our own power, we will be the ones to underestimate our opponent."

The darkness disciple had been shocked at the beginning, but he had realized that Gravis was right. He had remained mostly quiet, but he had learned a lot during the trials. He had also been very close to Claude, even though their temperaments had been nearly opposites of each other. He won't ever forget this death.

Joyce unclenched her fist, closed her eyes, and released a deep sigh. "I'm sorry, Gravis. I was just very riled up about our friend's death."

Gravis smiled a little at her. "I know. It's always difficult to see a friend die. A death like this also hits me a bit, but it's important that we learn from him. If we don't, his death will become truly meaningless. Remember, not everyone can reach the top."

"I know," Joyce said quietly. "I know that it was a fair fight, but it just hurts to see a friend die. I want to become as confident and strong as you, but it's just so hard when someone dies."

Gravis sighed. "I know. Cherish the sadness so that you won't forget him. You might think I am powerful because I can shrug the death of a companion off, but that might not be a strength of mine, but a weakness."

Joyce had some tears in her eyes. "I don't think that's a weakness," she said. "Different people have different ways, and I will remember Claude forever."

"Make this your strength," Gravis said warmly. "Become the shield for your companions, but don't hinder their growth. Companions can only be companions when you are of similar strength. If you protect them too much, they will lose their edge."

Joyce engraved these words into her heart. "I will," she said thoughtfully. "I must become stronger so that my companions won't die meaningless deaths."

The group remained silent for a minute to honor their dead comrade. Heaven had already cleaned the arena so that the training could continue.

"It's your turn," Gravis said to the darkness disciple.

The darkness disciple took a deep breath and looked with motivation at Gravis. "Let's go!" he said and jumped into the arena.

"You are probably outstanding in attacking from a hidden position," Gravis said, "but if your first attack fails, you will be in trouble. So, from now on, fight every opponent I send at you without hiding yourself. You need to learn how to fight directly against the opponent because there will be enemies in the future that will see you before you strike."

The darkness disciple nodded. "I will! My hidden strikes can't always hit."

Gravis nodded. "Heaven, send an opponent with everything at the Seed Stage!"

The opponent appeared, and the darkness disciple immediately charged forward. It was time for him to prove that he wasn't just some unimportant background character!

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Chapter 319: Different Darkness

The darkness disciple fought head-on against his foes, and he fought rather impressively at that. He had said himself that direct confrontations were his weakness, but it was hard to see why he thought that.

"Nero has always been impressive in fights," Joyce said.

'Nero?' Gravis thought but then realized that he had never asked for the darkness disciple's name. That was probably his name.

Initially, Gravis didn't expect much from the darkness disciple. Their temperament didn't agree with him, so he hadn't paid much attention to him. Yet, Nero's impressive performance garnered Gravis' attention.

Normally, darkness cultivators stabbed both of their loaded weapons into a target to kill them instantly. The first dagger would sap the target of all their Life Energy while the second one turned them into a lifeless husk, but Nero fought differently.

Even when he had the chance to hit the opponent with both daggers, he only used one. After that, he fought defensively. Without Life Energy, the body couldn't regenerate. Normally, cultivators had no issue to shrug off an injury that would kill a mortal, but without Life Energy, they would slowly succumb to their injuries.

Nero would stab the enemy and then cut down to create a huge gash. After that, he would jump away while retrieving his used dagger into his Spirit Space. The fight would then become a defensive match. Nero easily dodged and parried attacks while always keeping his distance.

Even when he got another chance to hit the enemy, he would only use his already unloaded dagger to add another cut. Usually, Gravis would think that such a fighting style was bad. After all, it gave the enemy more time to win.

Yet, Nero never made a mistake. He controlled his opponents just right. None of the opponents even managed to hit him, even if it was a two-versus-one. To top it all off, since the fights took longer when he fought, he nearly recovered all his Energy when the enemy died.

When Gravis saw that, his eyes narrowed. 'He's really good. I think he also has a chance against him.'

"Heaven!" Gravis shouted. "Summon the priest that killed Claude again. Same strength, but fully healed."

Joyce got a little nervous when she heard that, but she trusted Gravis and Nero. Even though Nero was a darkness cultivator, and darkness cultivators tended to be selfish, Nero was different. He had a wholly different interpretation of darkness' temperament.

The copy of the priest appeared with its massive shield, but Nero's eyes remained cold. His eyes showed that he wasn't taking the enemy lightly, but they also showed that he was in full control.

The puppet charged at him with its shield raised. Nero leisurely closed in on it. The puppet didn't stop charging, and they were about to hit each other.

CRRR! BANG!

Nero crouched down and kicked the shield at the bottom, making the puppet nearly fall over its own shield, but it recovered quickly. It increased the weight of its shield and pushed down.

BOOM!

With one hand, Nero grabbed the side of the shield and pushed himself to the side while the shield hit the earth behind him. His eyes remained icy as he easily climbed above the shield.

Puchi! Puchi! Puchi!

The priest's spear penetrated Nero's chest, but Nero buried both of his daggers into the arm that held the shield. Before the puppet could destroy Nero's body, it lost all its strength. Its whole body shriveled up, and Nero twisted his body to pull the spear away from the puppet's grip.

Nero jumped back, and the weapons, as well as the puppet, vanished. The fight had ended.

Joyce applauded in ecstasy while Nero took a deep breath to calm down. The spear had been quite massive, and it had created an enormous hole in his chest. Such a wound would severely impact his fighting strength, but it wasn't deadly.

Nero looked at Gravis, and Gravis looked back. Then, Gravis nodded. "Impressive," he said. "You're done."

Nero jumped out of the arena and was healed by Joyce's Life Lightning. Gravis walked up to Nero and put a hand on his shoulder. "You are patient without underestimating your enemy, but you can be decisive when it's necessary. Your temperament appears similar to the priest I have fought. That's a very powerful temperament."

Nero nodded. "Thank you."

Nero wasn't very talkative, but Gravis could feel his sincere emotions.

BANG!

Nero's Will-Aura changed as it expanded. He had just condensed his Unity Will. Even though the fight had seemed simple, it had been pretty risky. One wrong move from Nero and he would have died. The direct confrontation had been quite a test for him.

"Congratulations," Gravis said with a nod.

"Yay, you also have a Unity Will now!" Joyce shouted.

"Well done," Manuel said with a laugh.

Nero looked to the side. "Thank you all," he simply said.

His reply had appeared taciturn, but Gravis could see his face getting a bit red. Apparently, he was embarrassed. Gravis laughed when he saw that.

"I have something that I want to ask you," Nero said suddenly as he looked at Gravis.

Gravis raised an eyebrow. "Ask away," he said.

"What do you think of darkness' temperament?" he asked.

Gravis furrowed his brows. "I haven't had a nice meeting with someone from the darkness element. Everyone I have met only showed ridicule and greed."

Nero's eyes shone. "You're right. That's how darkness cultivators are, but the temperament can change with a different outlook, right?"

Gravis nodded. "Yes."

Nero looked at his daggers. "Darkness is inherently greedy," Nero said slowly. "It wants to possess everything and become the only remaining thing. When the world is bright, you can see the trees, the water, the earth, and the air."

Gravis wasn't sure what Nero wanted to say, but he grew interested.

Nero turned his gaze to Gravis. "In darkness, you can't see anything. It appears like it consumes everything and nothing remains. That's how the temperament of darkness is. It wants to be the only thing you can see."

Suddenly, Nero's even gaze changed into a slight smile. "But isn't that wrong? Aren't the trees, the earth, the water, and the air still present in darkness? Everything is still there. You just can't see it. So, instead of saying that darkness consumes everything, why not say that it protects everything by hiding it?"

Gravis blinked a couple of times. He thought about this and came to the conclusion that it actually made sense. "That's your belief?" he asked.

Nero nodded. "A cultivator can reach the top alone, but is that a worthwhile life?" Nero asked. "Why not connect with everything on the journey. Like this, the trees become obstacles to others, the earth grows unsteady, you can't see the air coming, and water can become a trap. I think darkness is best utilized by working in harmony with the other elements."

"After all," Nero said slowly, "a world in darkness without anything in it is not darkness, but just emptiness."

Gravis felt himself resonate with that sentence. He was strong and could control his emotions, but didn't having friends feel better than being alone? He might be able to deal with the loneliness, but that didn't mean that he wanted it.

Gravis put his hand on Nero's shoulder again. "I misjudged you," Gravis said. "I'm happy to have you as a friend."

Nero smiled calmly. "Thank you."

"See?" Joyce said as she shoved Gravis lightly. "You always looked at him like some unimportant person that just accompanies us, but there is a reason why I'm friends with him. Do you really think I would be friends with egotistical and selfish people?"

Gravis smiled bitterly. "I guess not."

The group talked for a couple of minutes. Then, Manuel jumped into the arena. Gravis looked at him but shook his head. 'He is already very experienced. He has his own fighting style already, and every additional teaching from my side might tarnish it,' Gravis thought.

"Heaven," Manuel said, eliciting surprised expressions from everyone else. Someone else was talking to Heaven now? "I want to use this trial as a tempering opportunity. Please send whatever you feel is the best tempering for my current self."

Gravis nodded. For once, he and Heaven had the same goal. They both didn't want the others to die and to increase their strength. Leaving the enemies up to Heaven was a good decision.

Three cultivators at the Seed Stage appeared, and Manuel summoned his spear.

"It's my turn now!" he shouted with determined eyes.

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Chapter 320: Talk

Manuel fought against the three enemies in quite an impressive manner. Sure enough, he was the most powerful one in the group. He was not only using his attacks as attacks but also as distractions and feints.

His fighting style was different from Gravis' but nearly as effective. Maybe his fighting style was even better for him. After all, he had a different element with different strengths and weaknesses. Nero had also shown a different fighting style that had worked very well.

When Gravis saw that, he rubbed his chin in thought. 'My fighting style might be the best one for Destruction Lightning, but maybe not the best one for other elements,' he realized. The others learned from him, but he also learned from the others.

"Hey, how can I find you in the higher world?" Joyce suddenly asked Gravis while Manuel was still fighting.

Gravis turned to Joyce and sighed. He had already realized that she was romantically interested in him. Sadly, he couldn't accept that. He had already told her the possibility of Heaven using his loved ones to force him to stop cultivating. She should know that Gravis couldn't risk entering a romantic relationship due to that.

"I won't enter your higher world," Gravis said, surprising Joyce.

"You won't? You can choose which world you go to?" she asked.

Gravis nodded. "Others might not, but I have the ability to choose my world. I have already learned enough about the elements, and my core-path is set. Remaining in elemental worlds would not allow me to see a wider horizon."

Joyce looked with complicated sadness at Gravis. She was very interested in Gravis, but she also knew that Gravis would never accept a confession from her side. Just like Gravis knew that she was interested in him, she knew that Gravis wouldn't accept her.

It wasn't that Gravis didn't feel anything for Joyce. Actually, the complete opposite was true. If he didn't have any feelings for her, he wouldn't be so careful with her. If he had no interest in her, it would go down similarly as with the twins. Gravis would just say no, and everything would be done.

Yet, Gravis was a bit afraid about the eventual time when Joyce would directly confess her love. He really didn't want to enter this situation.

"You know," Joyce said after a minute. "I know that you will leave us very soon. I also know that there is basically no chance of us ever meeting again. I know all that, yet I still talk and try to get close to you. Do you know why?" she asked.

Gravis didn't answer.

"It's because we only have a limited time together," Joyce said. "I want to make the best of our limited time before you leave. Yes, the parting will be painful, but I think I would regret it more if I didn't spend these couple of years with you."

Gravis' insides shook a little, but he didn't show anything outside. "What of your path forward? Are you not afraid of stopping because of these feelings?" he asked.

Joyce shook her head with a gentle smile. "Something like this won't stop my path. Yes, I will cry for a long time, but after that, the world looks different. That's what we call grieving. You feel incredible pain for a couple of days, but then you accept the situation. My path won't be stopped that easily. What about you? Is your path stopped that easily?"

Gravis remained silent, but deep inside, some kind of pain appeared. Grieving? The last time that happened had been with Gorn. Ever since then, no matter who died, Gravis never grieved. He just swallowed all the emotions and told himself that he was cold and didn't feel for anyone else. Yet, was that true?

Gravis quickly shook his head. Now was not the time to come clean with his emotions. He was still inside the Heaven's Trial, and the fifth trial would probably be another really dangerous one for him. He would have all the time to come clean with his emotions when he returned to his homeworld.

Joyce saw that Gravis didn't answer. Normally, Gravis would say something along the lines of that his goal was most important and nothing else mattered. Yet, Gravis remained silent. For the first time, Gravis didn't appear like the all-powerful, always decisive kind. Now, he was showing uncertainty.

Joyce, who was very in tune with her emotions, had some tears come out of her eyes because of Gravis. "Why?" she asked slowly. "Why are you so uncertain of your path as soon as emotions come into play?"

Manuel's fight had been entirely forgotten by the two of them by now. Gravis was not sure how he should explain the situation. He wasn't even completely sure if he understood his own emotions right now. "I don't know," Gravis said.

Joyce, who had way more experience with emotions than Gravis, looked at him with pity and hurt. Gravis remained even, while Joyce looked hurt. It was almost like she was feeling Gravis' pain for him. "You're actually hurting deep inside, aren't you?" she asked warmly, taking Gravis' hand into her own.

When Gravis heard that, he pulled his hand away involuntarily. Joyce didn't feel bad for herself, but for the pain that Gravis was suppressing. Many more things made sense now.

Gravis wasn't acting cold because he didn't care about others, but acting cold was the only way for him to not get hurt. Humans were not unthinking machines. Sure, there would be some humans that genuinely didn't feel for others, but Gravis wasn't such a person.

She understood that the shy boy she had met back in the Hunting Guild was just an innocent kid. Afraid of going through the pain of more close ones dying, that kid shut itself away from the outside. It built a wall so that no one could come close.

"But why? Why suppress all the pain? Why don't you just accept it? I swear, it will be better after that," she said.

Gravis was entirely out of his element here. In terms of fighting, intelligence, and many other things, he was at the forefront, but he was inexperienced when it came to his emotions. "Maybe, maybe not. Honestly, I don't know, but I don't have time for that right now. I will deal with all of this when I return to my homeworld."

Joyce didn't wholly agree with that answer, but she could understand. "I understand, but please, go through with this. You might not notice it, but I think by suppressing it, you feel worse than if you just accept the pain."

Gravis sighed again. "I don't like running from my problems, but I honestly think that it's the best for now. My foundation is too unstable right now." Then, Gravis looked at the ceiling with narrowed eyes. "First, I need to finish my fight. Then, I can think about it."

Joyce still felt for Gravis, but she retreated. Maybe it was for the best right now.

"So, what did you think?" Manuel said as he walked to the two of them.

Gravis and Joyce looked at him and then remembered that he had been fighting all this time. "Sorry, I wasn't paying attention," Gravis said.

Manuel frowned a bit, but he noticed the weird atmosphere between Joyce and Gravis. He knew that something had happened. Manuel could only sigh. 'Here, I wanted to appear impressive, but they didn't even watch.'

Gravis shook his head again to regain his bearings. "Let's continue! We should fully take advantage of this trial."

Everyone nodded when they heard him. Joyce also regained her bearings and focused on her power.

"Yes!"