

Lightning Is the Only Way

Chapter 4: Research Assistant

Everyone looked at Gravis as he opened the door and walked in. All the chatter that was just going on instantly stopped. The young people in the room never expected someone like him to come here. This place was not a location where nobles would frequent. This was a classroom. Specifically, a classroom for the preparation for a job that only 'low born' people normally took. Was the prince actually intending to become a research assistant?

A research assistant was an occupation that allowed people with a poor background to make it big if they survived. Family's with an, at least, average standing would not need to send their children to this death camp, where only a tiny portion of attendees survived. There was no reason for the prince to become a research assistant. A single fart of the Opposer could make anyone become a God.

Gravis felt a little embarrassed when everyone looked at him like that. Keeping his head low, he dodged the shocked youngsters and quickly found an empty chair and sat down. He kept his head low, not wanting to meet the eyes of the others.

"Damn, everyone looks at you like you just killed a guy. What did you do?" Gravis heard a voice from his right. He looked at the youngster that just talked to him. He was an about 15-year-old boy with brown hair and brown eyes. Even though he looked clean, one could see his family's financial situation by the cheap clothing he wore. His hands were rugged and filled with calluses.

"Hey, you deaf? I'm talking to you." The boy continued with an annoyed tone, seeing that Gravis had not reacted yet after a couple of seconds.

Gravis quickly perked up. "Oh, sorry, sorry! I was just not used to people speaking to me like that." Gravis rubbed his neck in embarrassment.

"You mean speaking like a normal guy? You're a weird one." The boy said while boringly looking at Gravis. "Well, if you want to keep secrets, go ahead."

Gravis wasn't used to talking like this. "No, it's nothing like that. It's just, where I'm from, people always talk indirectly and very formal. So..." Gravis nervously twiddled his thumbs. "I'm not sure how to talk with... normal people." Gravis dodged his eyes.

"Man, what's up with you? Are you a stale soup without any backbone? A man needs to be like a good soup. He needs to have a backbone, lots of meat and has to be refined to perfection. Speak up, will ya?" The boy shouted.

The other people in the classroom looked at the guy with pale faces, while Gravis was just confused by his strange metaphor. "A man... needs to be like soup?" He asked.

The boy slammed his desk loudly. "Yeah, like a well-made soup. Strong, flavorful, hot, well prepared! That's what makes a man." The boy looked at Gravis with intense eyes.

Gravis was confused, but he also felt as if he kind of understood the guy. Gravis tried to sound more confident. "Yes. You're right!" Gravis looked around the room at the staring eyes. "Let them stare! I shouldn't feel uncomfortable because of others."

The boy laughed and heartily patted Gravis on the shoulder. "That's it! That's how a man should be." He then extended his hand to Gravis. "Hey, I'm Ballor. I like to befriend all hot-blooded men. Hot-blooded men don't need to know each other to form a brotherhood. Our hearts are already connected!"

Gravis looked at the hand and then grinned. "Yes!" He slammed his hand into Ballor's and gave him a firm handshake. "My name's Gravis! Let's be brothers!"

Ballor grinned uncomfortably. "Yeah, that's great. Hey, could you maybe let my hand go? I think it's about to break."

"Oh!" Gravis quickly let go of Ballor's hand. Ballor pulled it back and shook it vigorously.

"Damn, what did you eat? Your grip is really strong."

"Oh, I'm so-"

"Okay, quiet down, everyone!" Just when Gravis wanted to apologize, a young man, maybe in his 20s, shouted into the classroom and walked to the podium at the front. The class immediately went to their desks, and obediently sat down, still glancing at Gravis from time to time. Gravis looked quietly at the front, but after he saw Ballor sitting with a straight back, muscles puffed out, he remembered the talk they just had. Gravis also sat up straight and crossed his arms.

When everyone calmed down, the man spoke up. "I'm research adept Forneus. This means I successfully completed my mission as a research assistant. I've been assigned to guide you for the next year, so that you will be well prepared and, hopefully, survive." Forneus looked around the room. "Now, let me just give you a summary of what a research assistant is."

Forneus cleared his throat. "Research assistants are people who will be sent to the lowest worlds, where the energy and its inhabitants are the weakest. The goal behind this seemingly mindless task is to research the cultivation techniques of these worlds. Even though the people might be weak, their techniques might not be. Every world is different, and every world has its own cultivation path. Some cultivation paths may lead to a dead-end, but others may have huge potential. Without testing, we can't know."

"That is the reason why we only accept people who either have not cultivated at all or have only tempered their organs and blood. If you already used a cultivation technique, then what's the meaning of sending you to a lower realm?"

Forneus looked around the room and spotted Gravis. He then looked at the ceiling and thought for a while. Then, he continued. "For those of you who have no idea about cultivation, let me just briefly summarize the first four cultivation realms and what they're all about."

Gravis grew excited. Everyone was forbidden to talk about the specifics of cultivation around him. He never even heard the name of any realms. His father made sure of that. Finally, he got to know about cultivation.

"The first realm is called Body Tempering. Just like the name says, you need to temper your whole body, one piece at a time. It has five stages: Organ tempering, blood tempering, bone tempering, skin tempering, and muscle tempering. It is important to note that you can theoretically temper your body in any order you want. Though, to get a good foundation, you first need to temper your organs and your blood."

"For example, if you temper your muscles first, what would happen?" Forneus looked around the room.

One of the only two girls in the class raised her hand, and Forneus nodded. "You will explode when you use all your power because your skin and bones are not strong enough to support your muscles." The girl answered in confidence.

"Wrong!" Forneus shouted. The girl flinched. "Your body isn't stupid! It would never allow such a time-bomb to exist in itself. What actually happens is that the body would only allow the tempering of the muscles to go as far as your skin, bones, and organs allow. That means that your muscles will be weak in relation to cultivators that tempered their muscles last."

"Now, I will tell you the best order to temper your bodies! First-" Forneus stopped speaking when he saw a boy in the front, Ballor, in fact, had raised his hand. "What?" Forneus glared at Ballor.

Forneus' death-glare did not deter Ballor. "How do we know that your method is the best? My father said that you first need a strong skin to survive and strong muscles to win. If you can't survive, what's the meaning in going 'the correct way'?"

Forneus' eyes showed a mixture of annoyance and boredom. "First, if your body is not tempered perfectly, you will have immense issues starting at the fourth major realm. You need to achieve unity in the fourth realm, and if not every part of your body is equally perfect, you will find it very hard to achieve unity."

"Second, your case is only relevant if you do not have the resources or are in constant mortal danger. We do have the resources, and there is no danger here, yet."

"Third, because, his exalted grace, the Opposer said so." Forneus glared at Ballor.

Under Forneus' intense glare, Ballor finally crumbled and sat back down, not saying another thing.

Forneus continued. "So, first, you need to temper your organs and your blood. Your organs must be first because they produce your blood, and all nourishment your body receives originates from them. Your blood must be second because it carries the nourishment. It would be a shame if your organs produced great nourishment, but your blood can't transport any of it properly. Also, your strength continually improves with time just by having tempered your organs and blood. That increases your upper limit for future tempering."

"Next, you need to temper your bones and your skin. It does not matter in which order. Bones have no relation to skin and vice versa. Lastly, you need to temper your muscles. Only when you tempered everything, does your body allow the perfect tempering of your muscles. You will be sent into the lower realms with tempered organs and tempered blood. The reason for that is that it's the most difficult to temper the organs and blood. It's tough to acquire the quantity or quality of nourishment in the lower realms for those two stages."

Out of nowhere, some fingernail-sized pills appeared in the air and flew towards the youngsters. "Eat these, and your organs and blood should be tempered by tomorrow."

Gravis looked down at his desk and was confused because he did not receive any pill. Gravis raised his hand. Forneus beckoned with his head. "Excuse me, why did I not receive a pill? I have never cultivated."

Forneus slyly grinned. "You don't need a pill. You already have tempered your organs and blood."

Gravis' eyes widened. "What?"

