

## Lightning 41

### [Lightning Is the Only Way](#)

#### Chapter 41: Posturing

Gravis continued on his way to Body City. He didn't keep what happened in mind. Even though he had learned much and now knew more about Heaven, that didn't change a thing. He was still without luck, and he still had to create his own lucky chances. He could know as much as he wanted about Heaven, but he couldn't do anything without enough strength.

"Stop!" Another bandit jumped out from a nearby bush. Why were they always hiding in bushes?

This time, Gravis actually stopped. He was interested in how this whole thing worked. He looked at the bandit with a curious glint in his eyes.

"I have paved this road! I have planted these trees! I have watered this grass! I created everything here! Pay a toll to pass or receive judgment!" the bandit shouted loudly and imposingly to the heavens.

To be honest, Gravis was a little impressed by the sheer magnitude of the bandit's boasting. Many of the trees were at least a hundred years old, yet the bandit was only a young man. He wondered if anyone would actually believe that.

"How much is the toll?" Gravis asked. He wondered how expensive all those tolls actually were that the bandits always wanted.

"I see that you are a man that follows the law. I am also a man that follows the law. The toll is the same for everyone. The toll is 50 copper coins," the bandit narrated.

Gravis was really surprised. 50 copper coins? That was only half a silver coin. That was way less than he had thought. No wonder, the merchants were still walking the streets. Gravis thought more about it and realized that, due to all these bandits with tempered skin, the road was actually rather safe. What ferocious beast would dare to run around this road?

The more Gravis thought about it, the weirder it seemed. Bandits, which normally extorted poor helpless merchants, were keeping the main trading road clean with only a little money. No wonder, the guards didn't do anything about them. The bandits were a huge help for the merchants.

The bandit waited for Gravis to answer, but Gravis didn't react. Slowly, the bandit lost some of his drive. "Hey, is 50 copper too much for you? 40 would be alright, as well," he sounded more sympathetic now.

Gravis focused again and looked at the bandit with narrowed eyes. He wanted to see how that other thing would go, that the earlier bandit told him. "No, I will not pay," Gravis simply stated.

The bandit first furrowed his brows. "Oh," then he looked like he understood something. "Oh!" now he cleared his throat. "How dare you to disrespect my life's work! I have cared for the trees for many years. I have watered them every day with at least ten liters of water! How can you be so heartless?" the bandit was back in his heroic, overbearing self.

"I won't pay," Gravis said. He was not good at this whole posturing before a fight thing.

The bandit was waiting for Gravis to say more, but nothing more came. Suddenly, the bandit deflated. "Really? That's all you have? Way to kill the mood," he groaned and rolled his eyes.

Gravis felt a little embarrassed. "Sorry, it's my first time doing this," he explained.

The bandit groaned in helplessness and nonchalantly waved his hand. "Ugh, don't worry. It happens sometimes. It's normal. Do you still want to try?" he asked, concerned.

Gravis nodded sheepishly. "Sure, let's just fight!" he said.

The bandit quickly held up his hands. "Wow, wow, wow. Stop! We can't just go without some fore-play. How about this? You try to pass me, then I stop you and say another phrase, and you just say no. Then we fight. How does that sound?" the bandit asked.

Gravis nodded. He walked forward and tried to pass the bandit, who quickly jumped in front of him.

"Stop! You've violated the law! Pay a fine or serve your sentence!" the bandit shouted imposingly.

Gravis simply did as instructed. "No!" he shouted.

"Then pay with your blood!" the bandit shouted and drew his sword. With a heroic jump, which was full of openings, the bandit slashed at Gravis' shoulder. Gravis just stood there, and the bandit slowly grew panicked when he saw that Gravis was not moving. The bandit didn't want to cripple the poor guy.

CLANK!

The sword hit Gravis' shoulder and chipped. Gravis just stood there, not caring. On the other side, the bandit looked at his chipped sword in shock. He quickly jumped back, now, more panicked. "What are you?"

Gravis furrowed his brows. "What do you mean?" he asked.

The bandit pointed at Gravis with a shaking finger. "Even the strongest tempered skin would have, at least, been split. You don't even have a scratch on you! You're not a human!" then the bandit gasped loudly. "You must be some strange kind of demonic beast! No wonder you didn't know how to posture!" the bandit grew more afraid and started fleeing down the road.

Gravis honestly didn't know how he should feel right now. He had been mistaken for a demonic beast. Should he be angry? Should he be embarrassed? Should he feel proud? He wasn't sure. After a while, he just sighed. "I think I'm not cut out for this whole posturing thing," he concluded and continued down the road. "What's even the point of that?"

Gravis continued running leisurely, and soon, he started to catch up with the bandit, who was talking to another bandit by this point. They noticed him, and the earlier bandit blanched while the other one gripped his spear firmly. The bandit jumped at Gravis and used all his strength to stab the spear into Gravis' abdomen.

CRACK!

The spear couldn't withstand the force, and the shaft broke in the middle. Though, this time, Gravis' skin had a slight poke-mark. It didn't draw blood, but it was, at least, visible that something had hit him. Spears were harder to wield, but if they connected, they had an enormous destructive force.

The bandit looked in pure terror at his broken spear. Then he quickly turned around and continued running down the road, together with the other bandit. Now, Gravis felt a little amused, and for the first time in a long while, he felt a little mischievous. He continued down the road, making sure that the bandits were just a little faster than him.

He wondered how this would go.

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#### **Chapter 42: Increase in Strength**

Gravis continued running after the bandits. Along the way, the bandits picked up lots of other bandits. At the beginning, the new bandits didn't believe the old bandits and attacked Gravis. Yet, after their weapons broke, they immediately joined the makeshift bandit caravan.

Now, every bandit that saw the caravan immediately joined them in running away. Gravis smiled while watching the bandit caravan growing bigger and bigger. Chasing those bandits was a lot of fun.

Suddenly, a cold shudder went through Gravis. He nearly fell for Heaven's trick. He had started enjoying the feeling of superiority. If he hadn't noticed Heaven's intentions, his will would grow weaker. Gravis realized that he could not relax. Heaven was treacherous and used every kind of scheme to stop him from growing.

"Even this innocent bit of fun could be weaponized by Heaven," Gravis clenched his teeth. "You really won't allow me any kind of happiness," he muttered to himself as he continued running.

"Why are we running? We are over 20 people by now! With that many people, we can even take down a low-grade demonic beast!" one of the bandits shouted to the others.

"Are you kidding?" one of the first bandits of the caravan shouted through intermittent pants. "My full power spear thrust didn't even break its skin!" Gravis had already been degraded to an 'it'. "If we can't even break its defense, then how are we supposed to kill it?"

"There must be something we can do! I'm not sure I can hold out much longer!" the same bandit who proposed the attack said.

"Quit whining. I've been running way longer than you, and I can still keep going," shouted the very first bandit. "You're going to be impressed when you see how far your body can be pushed in this chase. We only need to run! The closer we get to Body City, the stronger our fellow brothers get."

"But it's so far," one of them whined. "Why don't we just scatter?"

"And get picked off one by one? Are you insane? There is safety in numbers," another one immediately shut down the idea.

"Hey! You just said that our numbers don't matter, so how is there suddenly safety in numbers?" the bandit seemed annoyed.

"Have you ever seen a swarm of fish? They can't do anything about their predators, but due to their numbers, many of them survive. I doubt the monster will kill every single one," one of them explained.

"Fuck you, I'm taking this chance!" another bandit shouted as he left the street and ran to the right into the forest.

"Tch, idiot," a bandit spat on the ground.

They watched how the monster chasing them would react to the fleeing bandit. Surprisingly, the monster seemed to ignore the bandit. When others saw how it ignored the bandit, they immediately took their chance and also scattered in all directions.

"You idiots!" cursed the first bandit, and continued running along the path. "Who will warn our brothers, if you all run for your lives?" he shouted at them, heroically. It seemed like this bandit had quite the loyal heart. Even if it might cost his life, he would still warn his brothers on the street. Luckily, he was not completely alone. Another Bandit followed him.

"Ignore those selfish bastards! We'll warn our brothers!" he stated heroically as they pitifully continued running.

Gravis tried to ignore everything. If he were to attach any emotions to this situation, it would only help Heaven. After all this running, Gravis finally decided to take a break and slowed down. Also, he started getting hungry. He didn't bother to bring any rations since he could just hunt any wild animal or ferocious beast.

The two bandits grew ecstatic as they saw Gravis giving up the chase. Yet, they continued running. They had to get away as far as possible. After some minutes, they ultimately left Gravis' vision. He didn't care and just rested for a couple of minutes.

After he had rested enough, he ran into the forest to get some food. He searched for some minutes until he heard a loud roar echoing throughout the forest. "Interesting," Gravis muttered and ran to the roar's origin.

When he arrived, he saw a big clearing in the middle of the forest. There were no animals and no grass. This seemed unusual. Gravis also saw the origin of the roar in the middle of the clearing.

It was a sizable badger. It was probably around two meters high, and its grey fur was glistening in the sun. It calmly lay in the middle of the clearing.

"Low-grade demonic beast," Gravis quickly concluded. After all his fights, Gravis developed a certain feeling towards beasts. Just by watching a beast, he could roughly gauge its strength. "Just what I needed," he muttered. Finally, something that could put his new tempered skin to the test. On top of that, low-grade demonic beasts in the wild always loitered around natural treasures.

There was a difference between low-grade demonic beasts in the wild and the ones near human settlements. The target monsters of the Hunting Guild's missions always stayed close to human territory. Those monsters were using humans as a food source to keep growing. Yet, the monsters in the wilderness always took the best spots.

Gravis walked to the badger but didn't activate his Will-Aura, while carrying his saber in his right hand. The badger noticed him and slowly rose to its feet. Normally, it would just roar to scare anything away that was coming closer. Yet, this time, there was a difference. It had started getting hungry.

The badger didn't stand on ceremony and charged at Gravis, and when it reached him, it swiped one of its claws at him. Gravis wanted to try out his tempered skin and blocked the claw with his free arm.

CRSH!

The claws left some shallow gashes in his arm that bled. It didn't use its full power, and its claws were not its primary weapon. Gravis knew that and concluded that a normal attack would not injure him heavily. That was a significant improvement to the past. If he got hit by anything in the past, he would be severely injured. In the past, he couldn't allow for any mistakes. He always had to be perfect.

It seemed like, with his tempered skin, he only needed to evade the really strong attacks from low-grade demonic beasts. The pressure had lessened immensely. Yet, everything had its advantages and disadvantages. While surviving grew easier now, the tempering of his will grew harder. If the pressure lessened, his will could not increase that quickly anymore.

Additionally, Gravis was absolutely sure that he still couldn't take on a middle-grade demonic beast. Their attack power and speed was just too overwhelming. Tempered skin or normal skin, it literally didn't make a difference. He would get severely injured or killed either way. This left him in an awkward spot. Tempering his will grew severely harder by fighting low-grade demonic beasts, but middle-grade demonic beasts were definitely too strong for him.

When the badger finished its attack, Gravis instantly released his Will-Aura, which had grown stronger by killing the centipede. The badger immediately stiffened. It felt like a mighty beast was close and would kill it at any moment. If its enemy weren't so close, it could react properly, yet the sudden shock made it unable to move.

Gravis had already guessed that his Will-Aura would stun the badger, so he immediately jumped for its head and buried his saber into one of its eyes, as far as he could. The badger couldn't react in time, and the saber cut through its eye, right into its brain. The badger panicked and swiped one of its paws at the saber. Gravis simply retreated, leaving his saber stuck in its head.

BRCK!

The full power of its swipe struck the saber. It didn't matter from which side it struck the saber. The cutting edge was angled to the inside of its brain. If it hit it from the inside, the saber would cut through its brain, and if it hit it from the outside, the saber's blunt side would shake or destroy its whole skull.

As for breaking the saber? That was impossible for a low-grade demonic beast.

The swipe hit the saber's inner side, and it cut deep into the badger's brain. The badger immediately seized and fell to the ground. Its muscles and limbs were spasming out of control. Gravis jumped to the saber and moved it around in the badger's brain. Shortly after, the badger completely stopped moving.

Gravis looked at the dead badger and started thinking. "My Will-Aura has substantially increased after killing the centipede, and I can use it as a surprise attack. My skin allows me to block most attacks of

low-grade demonic beasts. As long as nothing unforeseen happens, low-grade demonic beasts should not be any threat to me anymore."

He sighed.

"I've grown stronger. Enemies that always required me to execute a nearly flawless plan perfectly, can now be killed casually." Gravis didn't feel excited. He didn't know why. In the past, he always imagined him being incredibly excited or happy when his strength increased. Yet, it felt like he didn't care. Why was that?

Gravis had already realized the reason, but it was hard acknowledging it.

It was because he was alone.

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#### **Chapter 43: Origin Melon**

Gravis knew exactly what Heaven had planned. It forced him into a life of isolation and showed him what he was missing out on by continuing to cultivate. Sarah, Anthony, the whole Hunting Guild, Joyce, her teacher, and even the bandits were all nice people. A vast majority of the people that he met were kind people with good hearts.

Was this coincidence? Of course not! In a cruel world, where everyone desired higher power, there were bound to be many selfish people. Yet, Gravis had met too many good ones on his journey. They all showed kindness to him, even when he acted cold and distant. They tried to include him in their circles, yet he always had to reject them.

Weak enemies and friendly people. Heaven really tried everything to destroy his motivation. Gravis knew what Heaven wanted! Yet, it was so hard to resist. It was slowly grinding down his drive.

The only things that kept Gravis going were his family and his eventual return to his homeworld. He only had to grow powerful enough, and then, he wouldn't be alone anymore. He had to keep going! If he stopped now, what would Stella say? What would his father say? Well, his father would probably say that it was alright, but Gravis was sure that his father would still sigh in sadness.

His father surely hoped for one of his children to grow to his level. Gravis was sure that his father had a good reason to fight against Heaven. His father had probably lived for a very long time, with no one but Heaven standing on his level. In some weird way, he was perhaps also feeling alone, even if he had a family.

Gravis gritted his teeth. He couldn't stop now! He wanted to go back to his family! He wanted to make his father proud! He wanted freedom! He wanted to take revenge on Heaven! Heaven was constantly emotionally torturing him. Instead of losing his drive, Gravis' hatred toward Heaven only increased.

Gravis looked upward at the sky, with hate-filled eyes. He transformed all his loneliness into hatred and rage. At some point in the future, Gravis would make Heaven pay!

With newfound motivation, he quickly looked around the clearing. There had to be a reason for a low-grade demonic beast to stay here. After searching, Gravis promptly found out. In the middle of the

clearing, behind the spot where the badger had been sleeping, he saw a lone melon. When Gravis saw it, he immediately realized several things.

There was no vegetation in the clearing because this plant had absorbed all the life force in its surroundings. Due to all the theoretical lessons in his homeworld, Gravis also knew what this plant was.

"An Origin Melon," he sneered.

An Origin Melon was called as such because it symbolized the start of cultivation. Yet, what was generally considered the start of cultivation in this lower world? It was skin tempering. One melon would completely temper one's skin, no matter what. It didn't matter if the person required one or ten Skin-Pills. One melon would fully temper their skin.

Gravis had been looking forward to what he would find by killing the low-grade demonic beast. Yet, he had completely forgotten about his 'karmic luck'. If he had had this Origin Melon before, all his difficulties in tempering his skin wouldn't have happened. Yet, he found one just when he had tempered his skin. Heaven really was cruel.

"Well, it should be worth at least something," Gravis said as he pocketed the Origin Melon. Now that all his sadness and curiosity was gone, Gravis remembered that he was hungry. He dissected the corpse of the badger and cooked it.

After a satisfying meal, he went back to the street and continued on his way.

Surprisingly, Gravis had not seen any bandits after traveling for several hours. It seemed like they had all been warned. Like this, Gravis traveled without any interruptions.

That was until he grew close to Body City. Just a couple of kilometers away from Body City, Gravis saw a big bunch of bandits standing behind an imposing man. The man was nearly two meters tall and carried a humongous sword made of bone on his back. He stood imposingly in the middle of the road, and it seemed like nothing could shake him.

Gravis had a prediction, who the man was, based on all the context clues.

"A bandit with tempered muscles," he concluded. This would be interesting.

Gravis stopped about 20 meters away from the bandit and looked him in the eyes.

"So, you are the demonic beast in human form," he harrumphed. "You don't seem that impressive,"

"I'm not a demonic beast. I'm here for the entrance exams of the Elemental Guilds," Gravis stated. He didn't want to entertain any misunderstandings anymore.

"Bullshit! We couldn't even pierce your skin with a full-powered spear strike! No human can have that hard of a skin!" the first bandit shouted.

Gravis furrowed his brows. "My skin is just very hard. It took me 20 Skin-Pills to temper it. Of course, it's hard!"

The bandits looked shocked, but the first bandit continued. "20 Skin-Pills? As if! Where would you even get enough money to buy all those!"

Gravis sighed. "I cleared all the missions of the local Hunting Guild of Wilderness Town. It took me a while, but I managed to get enough money." Gravis didn't want to tell them about the middle-grade demonic beast. They would not believe him, and he would look even more like a liar.

Some of the bandits started talking with each other. Some of them lived near Wilderness Town, and something like that couldn't be kept secret. After a while of discussing, one of them walked forward. "I've heard that the Demon from the Hunting Guild was able to release a frightening aura. We don't feel any of that from you," he said.

"Oh, do you mean this?" Gravis asked as he released his Will-Aura. The surrounding temperature plummeted, and the bandits felt an immense pressure coming down on them. They had trouble breathing, and cold sweat was running down their bodies.

Yet, just as quickly as the pressure appeared, it vanished again, and the bandits looked around in shock. They were not sure what just happened. At one point, it felt like death itself was coming to get them, and then everything returned to normal. What was happening?

Even the bandit with tempered muscles had felt terrified for a short while. He took a deep breath to calm down, and his expression of disdain vanished into one of interest. "What is this aura?" he asked.

"If you go through enough life and death battles, your will increases, and if it reaches a certain threshold, you can manifest it. That's called a Will-Aura," Gravis explained.

The bandits looked around, unsure about the truthfulness of it. This seemed too magical. Something illusory like the will can manifest itself?

The bandit with tempered muscles, on the other hand, seemed very interested. He went through some life and death battles in his life, and he kind of had a feeling for the enemy's will. Yet, only after he heard Gravis' explanation was he able to connect those two. The difference between his prior enemy's will and Gravis' was like Heaven and Earth.

"Interesting," he shouted. "I believe you!"

Everyone looked at the bandit, but their fear slowly vanished. He was the strongest bandit on this long street, and he had seen many things. If he believed Gravis, then it was probably true.

Gravis nodded and continued walking forward.

SHINK!

Yet, the bandit unsheathed his giant sword. "How about we spar a little?" he asked. "Of course, we'll stop when it gets too dangerous."

'Now, this is interesting. I wonder if I can take on someone with tempered muscles,' Gravis thought.

Gravis nodded. "Alright!"

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**Chapter 44: Fight With Jeros**



"My name is Jeros. What's yours?" Jeros said as he readied his humongous bone blade. He did a couple of small jumps to warm up and swung his sword to the left and right.

Gravis saw how gracefully and quickly Jeros moved his sword and realized that this fight would not be easy. "I'm Gravis," he said.

"Gravis, a good name! Alright, let's start. Be careful!" Jeros shouted as he shot forward and chopped at Gravis.

'Fast!' Gravis shouted in his mind. Jeros was faster than a low-grade demonic beast. Gravis always had to preplan his actions against such opponents, because his own speed could not compare. Yet, this time, he fought a human with such speed and power, not a monster.

Gravis wanted to test his opponent's strength and blocked the humongous sword with his saber.

BOOM!

Gravis' whole body shook, and the power of the strike buried him up to his knees into the ground, the street breaking in the process. His entire body ached, and he felt like his whole body was churning on the inside.

"Oh, that's impressive," Jeros said with surprise. "I didn't use my full strength, but you still managed to block my strike." Jeros jumped back. "Your muscles are definitely not tempered yet, but you could still block a casual strike from me. That's really impressive."

Gravis jumped out of the hole and limbered up his stiff muscles. After some seconds, where Jeros just waited for Gravis to finish, Gravis readied himself again. "Alright, we can continue." Gravis' eyes narrowed. "Now, this fight will become different."

Jeros laughed loudly. "I'm looking forward to it," he shouted as he shot forward again, doing the same chop as before. Gravis was prepared and raised his saber again in a block. Yet, this time, he was not blocking but parrying. A parry was more challenging to pull off than a block. Gravis had to redirect parts of the enemy's strength to change the course of the attack.

With all his prior battle experience, he managed the parry pretty easily, and the sword missed him, hitting the ground. Gravis' saber, which was raised slightly due to the parry, immediately shot forward in a counterattack towards Jeros' face.

Jeros didn't grow panicked and simply slapped the saber to the side with a hand. Jeros' arms moved very quickly, and even though they were further away from his face than the saber at the beginning, they quickly closed the distance.

Gravis didn't lose his focus and went with the flow of the attack. His whole body angled to the side sharply. Just in time, Jeros' other arm swung the sword diagonally upwards. Even though Gravis' body was already angled very strongly, the sword would still take his arm if this continued.

CLANK!

Gravis' knee hit the side of the rising sword, changing its trajectory slightly. While it continued swinging, Gravis crouched under the sword, and stabbed his saber forward again. A slash would take too long. Only a stab would be quick enough.

Just like last time, Jeros slapped the saber.

SHINK!

Yet, this time, things were different. Gravis was sure that Jeros would do the same block again, so he angled the saber in the last moment. Jeros had slapped the saber's sharp edge, and even though he managed to block the attack, his hand bled strongly.

Jeros looked at his bleeding hand in shock.

"Don't pull the same moves twice," Jeros heard Gravis shout, who had jumped back again.

The bandits looked shocked at the exchange. Someone without tempered muscles had injured their boss. This was unreal. They had seen how the fight went down, so they quickly figured out why. Gravis was moving like he already knew what his opponent would do. Just when Gravis' opponent started an attack, he was already moving as if he already knew.

Jeros looked at his hand, then laughed loudly. "Hahaha! I believe you fully now! The way you move is very strange, yet it's incredibly effective. With my experience, I can tell that this is not some martial art. Those moves were created by yourself in multiple serious fights. You definitely have more fighting experience than me," he shouted in happiness.

'More fighting experience than the boss?' the bandits asked themselves in shock. Their boss was already in his thirties and had fought a lot of battles. His fighting experience was extensive. Yet, a young boy, around 16 years old, had more fighting experience than him? How was that possible?

Gravis was surprised that Jeros could glean so many things from two simple exchanges. Gravis knew that Jeros probably had a lot of fighting experience. A lot of fighting experience together with tempered muscles. This was a formidable opponent.

"Have you learned martial arts before?" Jeros asked.

Gravis furrowed his brows. "I don't think so. I have only been taught the absolute fundamentals of weapon usage. Ever since then, I have only fought. If you asked me how I would train, I wouldn't even be sure how to answer you. I never trained anything regarding my weapon specifically. I only fight." Gravis narrated. He had just noticed how weird that actually was. Weren't cultivators supposed to swing their weapons in training daily?

Jeros grew really interested. "This is astounding. Your fighting style is basically untouched by human guidance. Now that you say it, it also feels more like I am fighting a beast. This is interesting! Want to continue?" he asked in eagerness.

Gravis nodded. Maybe if he fought more with Jeros, he would learn more things about himself. An opponent who didn't want to kill him and had enough fighting experience was rare. Gravis was using Jeros as a mirror to analyze himself.

"Be careful, Gravis! I didn't use my full strength before, because I was afraid you would get seriously injured. Now, I'm going to use my full power," Jeros shouted and then shot forward. He swung his humongous sword in a horizontal slash.

Jeros was even faster than before, and without Gravis' extensive fighting experience, he would have been hacked in two. Instead of falling back, Gravis ran into the swing. He blocked it with his saber and jumped a little. The swing of the sword pushed the saber along, as well as Gravis. Gravis just flew along with the sword.

When the sword slowed down, Gravis quickly pushed himself under it, using his saber as leverage. From a crouching position, Gravis pushed upwards on the side of the sword with the full power of his body, transforming the horizontal sword's trajectory to a diagonal one. Jeros' eyes widened, as his sword completely left his control and swung upward.

In one fluid motion, Gravis laid his saber on the closest edge of the sword, and moved it towards Jeros like he was grinding the sword. The big bone sword didn't have a guard at its handle. Guards on sword-handles were explicitly created to prevent a scenario like this.

Jeros' gritted his teeth. If this continued, Gravis would sever his hand.

BANG!

Instead of changing his sword's course, Jeros swung it further. Because of this, his body also rotated further. Gravis lost his leverage on the sword's edge, and suddenly an elbow shot towards him. The elbow came too suddenly, and he couldn't react. The elbow hit Gravis in the shoulder, and Gravis flew away for nearly ten meters.

Gravis landed and used his momentum to get back on his feet quickly. Gravis bitterly smiled. His shoulder was broken. He had lost. How could he win with a broken shoulder?

Jeros calmed down slowly. Gravis' maneuver was brilliant, and Jeros had nearly lost his fingers. If he didn't have so much fighting experience, he wouldn't have been able to make this split-second decision to further move his sword. Yet, Jeros knew that Gravis probably wouldn't have severed his fingers. This helped him calm down. They were only sparring, not fighting to the death.

"Truly impressive," he said. "You made my heart boil in fear and adrenaline. It's been a long time since I felt that."

Gravis smiled bitterly. "No, you're the impressive one. You countered every attack of mine perfectly. The only time I injured you was because you underestimated me. I've truly lost."

Jeros furrowed his brows. "What are you talking about?"

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#### **Chapter 45: Farewell to the Bandits**

"What do you mean with you lost? You haven't even used your, so-called, Will-Aura. I've fought with my full strength, yet you didn't. It was obviously my loss," Jeros announced loudly.

The bandits were shocked, but soon they realized that Jeros was right. They had felt Gravis' Will-Aura before, and they knew how oppressive it felt. One didn't have to have extensive fighting experience to know how strongly it would suppress them. In the end, the bandits agreed with Jeros. The fight would have gone completely different if Gravis released his Will-Aura. Like this, their astonishment for Gravis only increased.

Gravis smiled bitterly. "This was a spar, not a fight. If you fought for your life, you would have also fought differently. We can't determine a winner through a simple spar."

"You're wrong," Jeros sighed. "Not everyone is as used to life and death battles as you. I can say with certainty that I have used my full strength. Spars and true fights are the same thing for me," Jeros looked bitterly at the sky. "Maybe that's the difference between you and me. I've lived in peace for too long and have forgotten how it feels to be close to dying."

Gravis was astonished. It was hard to accept that someone else was stronger. Gravis was really impressed by Jeros' strength of will. Jeros had lots of fighting experience and didn't shy away from acknowledging his own weak points. All in all, he was an impressive fighter.

Gravis sighed too. He saw himself in Jeros. If Gravis ever lost his drive, would this be what he would become? A person with a lot of fighting experience, yet crippled of the drive to move forward? Someone who lived comfortably and was okay with where he currently was?

However, Gravis also saw longing and regret in Jeros. Jeros obviously wanted to become stronger, yet he lost the drive to risk his life. Gravis felt the regret in Jeros and wished to never arrive at Jeros' position.

'I must not become complacent!' Gravis shouted to himself in his mind. There was no easy way of gaining strength. If Gravis weren't prepared to risk his life, he would be fine for a while, but eventually, he would find himself in a weaker position than people who lived on the edge of death. He would lose his advantage, and it would be incredibly difficult to regain it.

Gravis' goal was the peak. He might live longer if he didn't risk his life, but he would never reach the peak like that. "It's all or nothing! Either I die, or I reach the peak!" Gravis swore to himself.

"By the way, you should look into Martial Arts when you reach Body City. Having your own fighting style is important and impressive, but don't neglect your ancestor's teachings. They have lived for much longer than you and have accumulated more fighting experience. You should buy some," Jeros advised Gravis.

Gravis nodded. He knew that many people would have created fighting techniques that he couldn't create himself. It would help him immensely in furthering his own fighting style.

Jeros sheathed his sword again and walked to Gravis. "If you ever need a place to return to, you can always come to our Bandit Guild," he said with a smile.

"You have a guild?" Gravis asked in astonishment.

Jeros raised an eyebrow. "You didn't know? Of course, we have a guild! How else would we be able to enforce all the rules that a bandit should follow?" Jeros laughed lightly. "You're a strange one." With that, Jeros extended his hand to Gravis in friendship.

Gravis nearly accepted the hand out of instinct, but he stopped himself. He felt like he saw the shadow of Heaven behind Jeros. If Gravis accepted his invitation, he would either have to stop moving forward, or Jeros, and maybe even the whole Bandit Guild, would die. Gravis clenched his teeth and his fists in frustration.

"I'm sorry. I can't," he said through gritted teeth.

Jeros furrowed his brows. What's the issue with accepting a friend?

"I'm really sorry," Gravis said again.

Jeros only sighed. "You probably have your reasons," Jeros took his hand back. "I see genuine regret in your eyes. I might not understand, but I believe that you have a good reason," he said with a bitter smile.

Tears nearly came down Gravis' face. "Thank you," he said sincerely. Gravis couldn't look Jeros in the eyes, and he felt ashamed. Rejecting heartfelt feelings was difficult, and Gravis wished he could accept. With the return of his loneliness, his hatred for Heaven also returned. 'Heaven will pay!'

"What are you all still doing here? Get back to your posts! The merchants won't extort themselves!" shouted Jeros suddenly to the bandits. They quickly perked up and started running away in different directions. All of them sent one last glance at Gravis and left. Jeros only winked at Gravis.

Gravis felt grateful because he realized that Jeros had helped him out of his current bitter and embarrassing predicament. "Thank you," Gravis said again.

"Don't mention it," Jeros smirked. "I'm looking forward to how far you can go." And with that, Jeros also ran down the road.

Gravis' eyes followed Jeros' back, and he saw Jeros waving at him as he ran down the street. Even though it hurt, Gravis was still happy that he met him. Gravis felt a bit regretful as he remembered all the bandits he had run over while he stayed in Wilderness Town. They always jumped out of bushes and started posturing, but he just ran them over. Today, he had learned that not all bandits were cruel murderers.

Gravis quickly shook his head, and with renewed motivation, he continued to Body City. He still had a lot of time until the entrance exams started. In that time, he could research different kinds of martial arts and include them in his fighting style.

Gravis grew excited as he came closer to Body City. Only a couple more kilometers, then he would be able to explore a whole new city. He was sure that the city also offered Bone Tempering Pills. The Martial Arts were surely also extensive.

Gravis couldn't wait.

### [Lightning Is the Only Way](#)

#### **Chapter 46: Body City**

Body City was big. Its walls were made of solid metal and had a height of about 20 meters, and as Gravis stood before the city, he felt like a gigantic wall was splitting the world in two. The walls extended several kilometers to either side, and Gravis could not estimate the city's size behind them. This was an impressive fortress that no one in the Body Tempering Stage could damage.

Gravis walked to the city entrance, where he could see a queue forming. Obviously, it would take a while to get into the city. Gravis simply stood at the back of the line and waited for his turn. It took nearly two hours until he could enter.

"One silver entrance fee," a guard told him with a bored expression.

Gravis fumbled around in his pockets until he found one silver. It was surprisingly hard for him to find one silver since all his bags were full of gold coins. After a while, he found it and threw it to the guard.

"Alright, you can enter," the guard continued narrating boringly.

Gravis was a little surprised since he was still carrying his saber. "Weapons are allowed in the city?" he asked in surprise.

The guard let out a snort like he heard something amusing. "Weapons don't matter. Every city guard has tempered muscles, and our City Lord has a fully tempered body. The only people that can act out of line in Body City are people in the Magic Gathering Realm. And what would someone in the Magic Gathering Realm want from our city? Now, go in!" the guard explained and then shooed Gravis to enter.

'Magic Gathering Realm? This seems to be the name for the Energy Gathering Realm in this lower world. I wonder why they call it magic,' Gravis thought.

Gravis didn't wait any longer and just went into the city. A city really was different from a town. All the guards had tempered muscles, which meant that, theoretically, Gravis couldn't do whatever he wanted in the city. In Wilderness Town, there was no one with his strength, but here, every guard was able to put up an intense fight.

Gravis felt happy because all this pressure of constant weaklings attacking him was vanishing. Now, there were enough people at his level in the city. If someone wanted to fight him, they surely wouldn't be weaklings that he could just ignore. Just thinking about all the potential opponents made Gravis' blood boil.

As Gravis walked down the busy main street, he looked around the city. Every single building was made of stone and had at least two floors. Many shops, guilds, and even arenas littered the side of the main street. Though, what he didn't see, were stalls on the streets. It seemed like the city forbade stalls from opening in the streets.

"Come here, come all! Anyone able to take on Big Barry? 15 wins with no defeats! You only need to pay ten silver to fight a strong opponent! Where else could you find such a good deal?" one man shouted from beside one of the arenas. Apparently, fighting in arenas was also a way to make money.

Gravis ignored the arena and continued. He was excited for potential enemies, but that did not mean that every fight could help him. A battle in the arena was, obviously, not a fight to the death. It was more like a sparring match. Sparring from time to time was okay, but if he sparred a lot, his will and his feeling for danger would weaken. This was one of the reasons why Jeros had become stagnant.

Sparring was entertainment and learning. Fights for life and death were tempering. In Gravis' current position, sparring with someone might help him learn a little, but it was not worthwhile. He had learned a lot from Jeros, and before Gravis had consolidated his newfound knowledge with martial arts, he did not intend to spar. His killing intent had to remain sharp.

Gravis quickly arrived at a big plaza. He was quite surprised by the sheer size. It was a square plaza, and it was over a kilometer wide. In comparison, the central plaza of Wilderness Town was only some hundred meters wide. On top of that, in contrast to Wilderness Town, there was not a single stall to be seen.

Gravis found a familiar building in red that had a big sign above its entrance. It was another Medicinal Pavilion. Apparently, this kind of shop existed in multiple towns and cities. Gravis quickly walked to the pavilion. He had a lot of money, and he intended to buy something to temper his bones.

If he managed to temper his bones, then only the muscles would be left, and due to his incredible foundation of tempering everything else first, his muscles would become unfathomably strong.

Gravis entered the store and was immediately assaulted by a variety of smells ranging from herbs to pills. Just by the smell, Gravis could tell that this Medicinal Pavilion was superior to the one in Wilderness Town. Many customers roamed around the store, talking with different employees. Gravis didn't care and walked to a free counter, where a middle-aged man stood.

"Hello, young man, how can I help you?" asked the middle-aged man with a smile.

"Hello, I have an Origin Melon that I would like to sell," Gravis said. He first had to see how much money he had exactly, so he could estimate how much he could spend.

"Oh," the man said in slight surprise. "Would you mind showing me? We need to estimate the quality of the melon," he asked.

"Doesn't every Origin Melon temper a skin completely? Why is the quality relevant?" Even though Gravis asked that, he had already taken out the melon and placed it on the counter.

"Even though the tempering will be successful, the advantages of tempering the body with a natural treasure, compared to pills, is that children can also successfully refine them. That's where the quality of the natural treasure comes into play. The higher the quality, the earlier it can be refined, and the more its worth," the man explained, while he inspected the melon.

After a while, the man finished his inspection. "Alright, the melon has around 80% natural quality. That's not bad. Sadly, it seemed to have been thrown around in your bag recently, which damaged it a little. Looks like you had a good fight while that was in your bag," he explained while laughing a little.

Gravis sighed. He was moving around erratically and with his full power when he was fighting Jeros. He had totally forgotten about the Origin Melon in his bag. "So, how much for the melon?" Gravis asked.

"With the added damage, the inherent quality gets reduced to 70%. This means that a seven-year-old child could refine it. That's still pretty good. We sell Origin Melons on that level for around 25 gold," the old man explained and laughed lightly. "Though we have to make a profit. So, how does 20 gold sound?" he asked.

Gravis was surprised since that was way more gold than he had anticipated. He had thought he would maybe get ten gold. One Skin-Pill in Wilderness Town was worth 7.5 Gold, and not everyone needed two of them. Ten gold seemed like a fair price, yet they were selling for 25 gold in this city.

"How come Origin Melons are worth so much? I only expected it to be worth around ten gold," Gravis asked.

The man continued smiling as he had already expected the question. "If we only consider the tempering, then the melon would only sell for 7.5 gold since one Skin-Pill costs five gold. Yet, many strong families, who are afraid of their enemies and want to give their heirs a good start in life, are ready to spend a

fortune to temper the skin of their young heirs. A 100% natural quality Origin Melon even goes for 50 gold."

Gravis was surprised due to multiple reasons. First of all, the amount of money that families were willing to spend on their children, even though they could just wait for them to grow older and take a Skin-Pill. The second reason was the price for the Skin-Pills, the man had quoted. He had said five gold. In Wilderness Town, a Skin-Pill went for 7.5 gold. Gravis had thought that the prices would increase with the city's size, but it decreased instead.

"Alright, deal!" Gravis said.

The man took the melon and wrapped it in some kind of paper. Then, he smacked his table twice, and a young girl quickly ran over and took the melon. "5, 19, 7, 70," the man spoke. Gravis was confused about what the man said, but the girl nodded and ran to the back of the store with the melon. The man took out a bag of gold and counted. When he had finished, he laid the bag before Gravis.

"Anything else I can help you with?" he asked with a smile.

Gravis looked over his finances. He had around 135 gold in total.

"How much for a natural treasure that tempers bone?"

### [Lightning Is the Only Way](#)

#### **Chapter 47: Martial Hall**

The man grew excited when he heard Gravis ask about natural treasures for tempering the bones. "Do you have any?" he asked.

Gravis felt a little confused. "No, I am looking to buy," he explained.

The middle-aged man deflated and sighed. "Sorry, out of stock," he confessed.

"Out of stock?" Gravis asked in surprise.

The man sighed again. "Yeah. About a week ago, a fire broke out in one of our storage rooms and ruined all the natural bone tempering treasures. The other treasures were fine, luckily. No one knew how the fire started, but when we noticed, it was already too late. On top of that, we normally get like three of those treasures per week, but for some reason, we have not received any since the fire. This is really some bad luck."

'Bad luck, eh?' Gravis thought. About a week ago, Gravis had killed the centipede. It seemed like Heaven's plan fell flat with the centipede's death, and it immediately used its contingency plan and destroyed all easy ways for him to temper his bones.

Heaven saw everything, and it knew that Gravis would go to Body City for the entrance exams of the Elemental Guilds. Of course, it also knew that Gravis would want to temper his bones. Heaven was really showing its ruthless side by destroying all easy ways to temper one's bones for an entire city.

Gravis clenched his fist again when he thought about Heaven's actions. He could probably also forget about finding any of those treasures anywhere else in the city. Heaven would not allow for such an oversight. He had to take the hard path, yet again.



"Okay, do you, at least, have pills for tempering bones?" Gravis asked.

The man waved nonchalantly. "Of course! Even if they burn down, we can just make more. You don't have to worry about that," the man explained in confidence.

"Okay, how much for a pill?" Gravis asked.

"One Bone-Pill is ten gold," the man said, his smile back on his face.

Gravis did some math and realized that he could buy about 13 pills. Gravis was absolutely sure that he would need just as many Bone-Pills as he needed Skin-Pills. "If I buy more than ten, could you reduce the price?" Gravis asked, hopefully.

First, the man was shocked. Who would buy so many pills? Then, he grew excited. This was a big customer. "Sure. We can reduce the price to 9.5 gold if you buy more than 10," he offered. The supply of Bone-Pills was endless, so it was no issue to give such a big spender a discount. They wouldn't run out, even if Gravis bought hundreds.

Gravis did some math and realized that he could buy 14 now and still have around two gold left. Though he also wanted to look into Martial Arts, so he decided to buy 13 instead. "Alright, I'll buy 13 then."

The middle-aged man grew excited. "Alright, 13 pills cost 123.5 gold," the man said with a delighted grin. He knocked on the counter again and told another set of confusing numbers to his assistant, who quickly ran away to fetch the pills.

Gravis took out 123 gold, and searched for the remaining 50 silver, but couldn't find any. "You got change for a gold?" he asked the man.

The man just waved him off. "Ah, let's reduce the price to just 123 as a thank you," the man declared magnanimously. He took the gold, just as the assistant came running back with a wooden case. The assistant opened it, and Gravis saw 13 pills inside the case. The assistant closed it again and placed the case on the counter. Gravis took it and stuffed it awkwardly under one arm since his broken shoulder had not healed yet.

Gravis nodded. "Thank you!"

The man just smiled. "No, thank you!"

Gravis turned around but stopped. "Do you know where I can buy Martial Arts?" he asked.

The man pointed to the exit. "Across the plaza is a big dark-blue building with lots of ornamental weapons. That's the Martial Hall. You can find all the Martial Arts you need in there."

"Thank you," Gravis said and left the Medicinal Pavilion. When he came outside, he could already see the Martial Hall even through the crowded central plaza. The building was just as big as the Medicinal Pavilion, and it was surrounded by many stone and metal ornaments in the form of different weapons. A big sign showed the words "Martial Hall" written in aggressive and overbearing strokes.

"Hm, argh!" Gravis heard from behind him. He turned his head just to see a man trying to pull on the wooden case from under Gravis' arm. Obviously, the would-be thief didn't have enough strength.

Though, Gravis was really surprised since he hadn't noticed the guy until he made those noises of exertion.

Suddenly, a guard bodied the thief and held him down. 'Huh, maybe that's why the city is called Body City,' Gravis snickered to himself. The poor thief was on the floor and tried to take out a dagger. Yet, another guard came and kicked the dagger away, and the guards started kicking the guy. "Stop resisting!" they continued shouting as the guy cowered in a fetal position.

"Come on, man. That's enough," Gravis said to them.

The two guards looked at him, saw his pill-case, and, surprisingly, stopped. "He was resisting arrest. We were only fulfilling our duty," the guard spoke with confidence, and then looked at the poor thief. "Well, he stopped resisting now. Boys, let's get him to HQ," he shouted to the newly arrived guards. One guard lifted the thief above his head and ran off.

Gravis was not sure how he should feel about this. Thieves were a problem in a city, but the guards went a little too far. Gravis sighed as he realized that might truly made right. Weak people were often suppressed by stronger ones, just because they were weak.

Though Gravis felt pity for the thief, he didn't intervene. The thief had tried to take out a dagger previously, and he was still alive and not injured too much. The guards, apparently, held themselves back. If they were serious, just one kick from the guards would distribute the thief to different parts of the surroundings.

Gravis continued walking to the Martial Hall, now, being more careful about his case of pills. He quickly arrived and entered.

The inside of the Martial Hall looked different than the Medicinal Pavilion. It had a long wooden floor, and Gravis could not see any display cases. There were also no counters. The only thing of note that Gravis could see were multiple people comfortably kneeling on cushions at the opposite wall. Some others were sitting before those people and spoke to them. This was probably how the Martial Hall conducted business, and it surely was different than Gravis had imagined.

He quickly went to a free spot and sat before a vigorous young man with sharp eyebrows. The young man opened his eyes. "What do you require?"

Gravis wanted to say Martial Arts, but that seemed kind of obvious. "I'm not sure how you conduct business around here. It's my first time in a Martial Hall. I'm looking for different kinds of Martial Arts to supplement my fighting style," Gravis explained.

The young man immediately stood up in fury and shouted: "HOW DARE YOU?!"

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#### **Chapter 48: William**

The whole Martial Hall fell silent as everyone got startled and looked at the angry young man, who had just shouted. Gravis was just as startled as everyone else. What was wrong with what he had said?

"Who do you think you are? Are you trying to blaspheme our ancestor's teachings?" the man shouted, his head already reddening by all the anger he felt.

"Silence!" an old, yet imposing man walked in. He wore rough brown robes, and his muscles showed through the opened front. He had a long mustache, which extended beyond his face and fell down to his chest.

"This is not a place where you can lose your control!" The man roared loudly with anger in his voice and pointed at the young man. "You still require more training! Go to the Tranquility Pools and stay there until I call you!"

"But master-"

"Silence!" another imposing shout shook the Martial Hall. "Go!" the old man ordered again.

The young man wanted to protest, but clenched his fist and walked away. He, obviously, was very unwilling.

"I apologize for this interruption, everyone," the old man continued, now with a friendlier voice. "You can all go back to business," the man said friendly, while he bent down to remove the young man's pillow, which he replaced with his own. Then he comfortably kneeled on his cushion and looked at Gravis with a neutral look. "Now, what did you say that made him so mad?" he asked.

Gravis quickly shook his head to get his bearings. "I told him that I am not knowledgeable about how you do business around here. Then I asked for different kinds of Martial Arts to supplement my fighting style. Did I say something wrong?" Gravis asked, concerned.

The old man listened, and when Gravis finished narrating, he understood why the previous man got angry. He looked into Gravis' eyes and then sighed. "What you have said could be interpreted as cursing our ancestors," he explained.

Gravis was shocked. Was the young man actually justified in getting angry? "I'm sorry. That was not my intent," Gravis quickly apologized.

The old man sighed again. "I know. I can read it in your face. By saying that you have never visited us, you have basically said that you don't need Martial Arts. This, by itself, is not bad. Yet, with your second sentence, you have said that you want to use Martial Arts as a supplement for your fighting style. By saying this, you have proclaimed that all our Martial Arts, which were created by our ancestors, were below your self-taught fighting style," the old man explained with patience.

Gravis now understood why the young man had gotten angry. Though Gravis also truly believed that many Martial Arts were worse than his fighting style. He might have accidentally let his prejudice show itself. "I'm sorry. I did not intend to disrespect your ancestors," Gravis slightly bowed.

The man waved him off. "Actually, I would also feel a little insulted if someone else said those things. Yet, it is different coming from you."

Gravis narrowed his eyes. "Why is it different coming from me?"

The old man laughed lightly. "I was drinking tea with an old friend of mine in the backroom when all this happened. He told me about the fight you had with him and also told me that you would probably come to visit."

Now, Gravis understood. "Are you speaking about Jeros?" he asked.

The old man laughed lightly and nodded. "Yes! He couldn't stop talking about your fight with him and how you seemed to have your very own fighting style created by only fighting for your life. He also said that your fighting style was very effective and something he had not seen before. Of course, that has also piqued my interest. Yet, before I could think about how I should meet you, this incident happened," the old man narrated with a smile.

Gravis rubbed the back of his neck in embarrassment. "Jeros is incredibly strong. I still believe that he had not shown his true strength, even though he said that he had gone all out," Gravis scratched his chin in thought. "How should I put it? There was a certain absence of pressure I felt while fighting him, even though he was the strongest human I ever fought against."

The old man smiled bitterly. "The pressure you are describing is the intent to kill, and also, the readiness to be killed," the old man sighed again.

"Sadly, Jeros and I have lost this intent. We have grown complacent, and we have lost part of that will. We may still have our intent to kill, but we have lived for too long. We are no longer willing to risk our lives because our lives have grown too important to us. So, I am sad to inform you, but that was truly Jeros' full strength," the old man narrated with regret.

When Gravis heard that, he also sighed in regret. Two mighty people whose drive had been crippled. He swore that he would never let that happen to himself. Gravis quickly changed the topic. "So, about Martial Arts..." he started and waited for the old man to continue.

The old man smiled again. "How about we spar a little? With that, I can judge your fighting style and might find a suitable Martial Art for you. If you win, I will also let you choose another one for free. If you want more, you have to buy them," the old man proposed.

Gravis thought about it but nodded. Even though he wanted to avoid sparring as much as possible to not dampen his killing intent, this spar was against a strong opponent and also someone who could show him the right direction. "Okay, where?" Gravis asked.

The man smiled. "Follow me to the back," he said and stood up. Gravis also stood up and limbered up his legs. He was really not used to kneeling like this. "What's even the point? Sitting is more comfortable," he concluded.

They both walked through a door and followed a hallway into another room. "Do you want to watch?" the old man spoke into the room.

"Watch what?" Gravis heard the voice of Jeros coming from the room. When Gravis entered the room, Jeros grew surprised but then grinned. "Of course!" Then he also stood up and followed the two through another door. "I can't wait to see your ass getting handed to you, William." Then Jeros turned to Gravis. "Kick his ass, Gravis!" he shouted, and Gravis just nodded awkwardly.

They had just gone their different ways, yet he met Jeros again after such a short time. Gravis still felt awkward about how he had declined Jeros' invitation. Yet, by the looks of it, Jeros didn't seem to mind.

They soon reached a sizable garden, filled with trees, plants, flowers, and different ponds. The birds chirped, and bees were collecting nectar from all the flowers. A twenty-meter-wide, clear meadow was

in the middle of everything. It was flat and could be used as a make-shift arena. At one of the ponds, a young man sat cross-legged with closed eyes.

When the young man heard the footsteps, he opened his eyes, and when he spotted Gravis, his fury reignited. It was the same young man who had gotten angry earlier. Yet, when the young man saw his master's strict eyes, he averted his gaze.

"Alright, this should be a good place," said the old man, William. He slowly unsheathed a one-handed sword from his side and looked at Gravis. "My name is William," he stated.

Gravis took out his saber and warmed up. "I'm Gravis," he answered.

Jeros had found a spot to the side and watched with a grin on his face. The young man, on the other hand, was surprised, but also happy. This disrespectful brat was fighting with his master?

He couldn't wait to see Gravis getting beaten to a pulp!

### [Lightning Is the Only Way](#)

#### **Chapter 49: Fighting a Beast?**

"In this spar, I will try one Martial Style after another. In case you don't know what a Martial Style is, let me give you an explanation. Martial Arts have one or several different attacks, while a Martial Style encompasses the whole way you fight," William explained.

Gravis thought about it and nodded. Fighting against different styles would help him get used to various enemies. He had fought many beasts before, but he had never really fought a human who was an actual danger to him in a real fight. If Gravis didn't have experience against humans, then that could spell his doom when he fought one.

William smiled. "Alright, I'll start with the Flowing Crane Style." With that, William changed his sword's hold so that his sword arm looked up like it was imitating a crane's neck. His sword drooped down like it was mimicking the long beak of a crane. "You can start whenever you want."

Gravis looked at William's stance and didn't see any opening. William could reach and block every direction easily. Gravis was also sure that William had already tempered his muscles. If he hadn't, then how could he have gotten his position inside the Martial Hall? So, overpowering also fell through.

Gravis decided to directly attack him with a slash. He charged at William while lifting his saber. When Gravis got close, though, he realized the best way to counter his attack would be a single stab forward. Gravis would not be able to complete his slash before the hypothetical thrust took his life.

CRRRSH!

Gravis rammed his feet into the ground to stop his charge. He was still about three meters away from William. Even though this seemed to be an excellent opportunity for William to attack, he didn't take it, and instead, continued watching Gravis.

Gravis watched William's stance again. Any kind of slashing was a no-go since a counter stab would arrive faster than a slash. Stabbing was also a no-go since the opponent probably out sped him. On top of that, sabers were not made for stabbing. Gravis felt like he was actually looking at a low-grade demonic beast crane.

'Then why not fight like I would fight a crane?' Gravis thought to himself. In his mind, he pictured a crane. Three meters tall with a long slender neck and thin, fast legs with sharp claws. If he neared it, it would stab him with its beak, and if he attacked it from its side, it would stab its claws at him.

'Yet, there is one major difference between a crane and a human,' Gravis concluded. Now, he had an attack plan.

Gravis ran at William and lowered himself to the ground while keeping his saber horizontally close to him. He reached William's range, and William stabbed towards Gravis' head. If Gravis couldn't defend, William could stop the attack. He didn't want to kill the young man.

CLANK!

Gravis lowered his head further, and he pushed the sword upwards with his saber. This had required perfect timing. Yet, due to his combat experience, Gravis had felt the perfect timing.

William grew shocked at the accurate block. One wrong move would have killed Gravis. Not everyone was ready to go all-in right at the start of a fight. Yet, it had worked.

Gravis quickly went closer and readied his saber for a slash. William suddenly lifted one of his legs for a kick, but what he saw next shocked him immensely. Gravis was not targeting his body with his slash, but the place where William's leg would be. From an outsider's perspective, it looked like William was kicking right into Gravis' slash. 'NO!' William screamed in his mind.

CLANK!

The blunt side of the saber hit William's shin. His leg was not hurt too badly. It only spouted a slight red bruise, yet if Gravis had used the sharp side of his saber, the leg would have been severed. Both of them jumped back.

"How... How is this possible?" asked the young man to the side to no one in particular. "This is one of our highest fighting styles. How can it lose to someone without any martial training?" All the thoughts in the young man's head were swirling around. It was incredibly difficult for him to form a coherent sentence.

Then, the young man shook his head. 'It was luck!' he shouted to himself in his mind.

"Ahahaha!" everyone heard a lough laugh from Jeros. "You lost only after a single exchange!" Jeros shouted while continuously hitting the floor in hilarity. "Fuck, this is so good."

William couldn't bother with Jeros right now. "How did you know I would use a kick?" he asked Gravis, intense interest showing in his eyes. He had intended to show Gravis the mistakes in his fighting style, but William now realized that he could maybe use Gravis to further his own Martial Arts and Styles.

Gravis scratched the back of his neck. "You looked like a crane when you fought, so I thought about how I would fight a crane. I realized that a crane has his beak and his claws as a weapon. Yet, the difference between a human and a crane is that humans do not have claws on their feet. It was kind of obvious that you would try to kick me."

William's eyes widened. This was definitely not obvious! The kick was the secret weapon of the Martial Style, and it always caught people by surprise. When people with weapons fought, they mainly focused on the weapons and were not prepared for such an attack.

"Interesting," William muttered. "Would you mind going for another round, while I use a different technique?" He asked.

Gravis shrugged his shoulders. "I want an additional free Martial Art," he simply said.

"Sure!" William agreed without hesitation. Who wouldn't accept this trade? William would have to pay Gravis' expenses, out of his own pocket, but gold could be found anywhere. Yet, an opponent that helped to better his fighting style was rare.

William changed his stance. He grabbed his sword with both hands and held it in front of him. His muscles swelled, and he looked like a tiger ready to strike. For some reason, Gravis had immediately seen a tiger-image when William changed his stance. 'So, it's a tiger now?' Gravis smirked inside.

Gravis had the most experience fighting big cats. The lion and the tiger popped into his mind. This would be easy.

This time, William was the aggressor and charged at Gravis with unbelievable speed. Gravis felt like he was fighting the tiger from Wilderness Town again. William lifted his sword and chopped down, imitating a bite coming from a tiger.

Gravis also ran forward and slid on the ground again, just like when he fought the lion in the last practical test. He timed it just perfectly and wasn't hit by the chop. Without losing his cool, Gravis simply lifted his saber to his left side.

SHINK!

William's right knee had immediately moved to the left, imitating a claw-strike from a tiger. If that had hit Gravis, he would fly for several meters since all of William's weight was behind that knee strike. Yet, William had only hit the sharp side of the saber, which drew blood. Gravis had not held the saber in place, and it flew away. If he had actually resisted with his power, William's knee would have left his body.

Gravis couldn't do what he just did, against a tiger. Ducking under its bite would leave him open to a claw strike, and those were dangerous. Yet, humans didn't have claws.

The young man's eyes widened again, and his thoughts transformed into static.

"Ahahaha! 2:0," Jeros shouted from the side. "Man, you can't even put up a defense against him. You always lose in one exchange. I'm so happy to see that," he continued slamming the ground in hilarity.

William still couldn't bother with Jeros. He looked down and thought hard. "Is it the same reason again?" he asked Gravis.

Gravis simply nodded, and William continued thinking. His thoughts swirled around in his head, and he was trying to understand the reason why his Martial Styles didn't work against Gravis.

"Actually," William heard Gravis say and looked up. "I have a question," Gravis stated.

William nodded for Gravis to continue.

"Why are you fighting like a beast, even though you do not have the beast's weapon?" Gravis asked. "You don't fight like a human. You imitate beasts and their strengths, without having their strengths. Yet, you don't make use of your strengths as a human. You don't use the flexibility of our upper body. You don't make use of our ability to crouch very low. This really confuses me," Gravis spoke his thoughts.

Suddenly, William felt a light go up in his head. He was fighting like a beast without having the Beast's weapons. This was the reason why it was so easy for Gravis to counter him. Yet, without extensive fighting experience against beasts, this would be impossible. "Maybe, you're right." William sighed and looked at the sundown on the horizon. It was already evening. "What have I been doing all my life?" William asked himself.

### Lightning Is the Only Way

#### **Chapter 50: Demonstration**

"See? That's what I've been telling you all this time," Jeros shouted from the side at William. "Your Martial Styles might be strong against inexperienced opponents, but their weaknesses get quickly exposed by an experienced one!"

"Shut up!" The young man couldn't take it anymore and stood up. "You don't understand the strengths of Martial Arts!"

"Be quiet!" shouted William and looked at the young man with narrowed eyes.

The young man lost some of his drive. "But Master! They are insulting our Martial Arts," he continued.

William took a deep breath and sighed. "That might be true, but they have the right," William said between deep breaths. "I am the strongest person in the Martial Hall, and they have both defeated me," William bitterly smiled now. "If I, who has mastered most Martial Styles, lose to two people with their own fighting styles, it only shows the weakness of our Martial Styles."

Gravis was impressed by William. William was an old man and had, probably, practiced Martial Arts and Martial Styles for his whole life. Renouncing his own experience and ideology required a strong heart and will. Being able to do that was very rare, and Gravis felt like he had met another incredible man today. The young man, on the other hand, went silent and continued watching.

"Yet," William turned to Gravis. "Martial Styles might be useless to you, but Martial Arts could still improve your fighting strength." William's eyes were blazing. "Martial Styles mostly imitate the strengths of beasts, but Martial Arts take advantage of the human body to increase their power. Watch!"

William took out his sword again and turned so Gravis could see his side. "This is a normal chop with my full power." William's sword slashed downwards with incredible speed. Gravis could hear the wind being cut from several meters distance, and he realized that he couldn't block this attack. His arms would break, at least. William's body was way stronger than Gravis'.

"And this," William lifted his sword again, and Gravis felt a peculiar sensation emanating from William's body. "Is the Wind Splitting Chop!" William shouted as his body bent slightly to the back, and his sword



cut down with even more speed than before. Yet, this time, Gravis could not hear the wind getting cut. The attack was completely silent.

To Gravis, the second attack felt more dangerous than the first one. The first one looked like it would break anything it hit, but the second one felt like it could cut the world itself. Of course, William didn't have the strength to do that, but just the change in aura was tremendous.

"The Wind Splitting Chop makes no sound and uses the whole body's power to elevate its killing potential beyond a normal attack," William looked back at Gravis with fire burning in his eyes. "You might not have the muscle strength to hurt a middle-grade demonic beast, but if you used such an attack, you could break through such a beast's defense," he said with confidence.

Gravis grew excited but calmed down quickly because there was a problem with this attack. "It might raise the killing power of your attack, but the wind-up time is longer too. If someone took advantage of that time, you have no way to defend," Gravis explained.

"Exactly!" shouted William loudly. "That is where Martial Arts and Martial Styles differ. Martial Styles encompass a whole fighting style, while Martial Arts are singular attacks with impressive strengths, but also with weaknesses." William smirked slyly. "But you are not required to use it every time you attack. Wait for a chance, where the enemy is not ready for a counterattack and use it. Martial Arts may have weaknesses, but all weaknesses can be made up by timing!"

Gravis' eyes lighted up, and he pondered more. If he timed an attack right, he might be able to even injure middle-grade demonic beasts. Having a slight possibility to deal damage was better than having no possibility at all. "Show me more!" Gravis shouted.

William smiled. Martial Arts were still useful because they were based on the human body. "Attack me with a chop! Be serious, and try to kill me with that! As long as you don't follow up with another attack, nothing will happen to me. I will lower my strength to be just as strong as you," he shouted to Gravis and readied his sword.

Gravis trusted William and gripped his saber. He charged with his full power and released all his strength in a chop. William blocked it, but his legs buckled, and his knees shook. "If we were in a real fight, I would lose the initiative, and you would overwhelm me with your attacks. Blocking is the worst way to stop an attack in a fight. Now, attack me again!"

Gravis lifted his saber again and slashed. William angled his sword and parried, but he still got pushed to the side, Gravis' eyes following him. "Parrying is a better way to block an attack, but it requires better timing and better control of your power. My parry could be considered ok, but it was not perfect. Now, Attack again!" William continued explaining.

Gravis was not sure what William wanted to show him. He already knew all that. Yet, he attacked again. This time, William jumped back. "If I retreat from your attack, you will keep pressing the advantage and eventually overwhelm me."

"As you already know, the last way to stop an attack is a dodge. Yet, without perfect timing, this could end very badly. Yet, there is another way. Attack me again!"

Now, Gravis grew excited. He wanted to see what William would do. Gravis used another chop, but suddenly, William vanished from his sight. Gravis was shocked because he couldn't find William with his eyes. Yet, he somehow felt William to his left and turned his head. Sure enough, William stood to his left with a grin.

"You might not believe me, but I have only moved as fast as you," he explained with a grin.

Gravis really wasn't sure if he believed him. That was just too fast. He even lost track of William. "Please explain."

William jumped back to his position. "Look at exactly how I am standing. At first glance, it looks like any normal fighting stance, but all my weight is actually concentrated on my front foot. This means," William's other leg, as well as his whole body, rotated on the front leg and he quickly rotated 90°. "If I rotate like this, and you attack from the front, I will quickly stand beside you while only moving one leg."

When Gravis saw it from a distance, it didn't look special. Yet, just earlier, he had seen its effectiveness with his own eyes. "Of course," William continued, "this only works on straight attacks from the front. A side-ward slash would make this whole thing useless. Yet, with the right timing, you can surprise your opponent."

William stood up straight and mightily puffed out his chest. "If you have a Martial Art for every possible situation and use them at the right time, your whole strength will multiply! You dodge faster! You attack faster! You attack stronger! Every Martial Art is designed to elevate one key component of your strength while sacrificing another. With timing, you can ignore the disadvantages and make full use of the advantages!"

Gravis was impressed by William's performance, and he saw that Martial Arts could elevate his fighting power to the next level.

"Show me!" Gravis shouted, and William and Jeros grinned. They wanted to see how far Gravis' strength could increase.