

## VIPER

Eerv watched as the swarm thundered toward the walls, with Ryun and his avatar standing in front of it. Eerv tightened his grip on his golden spear the swarm reached him and Ryun jumped toward it. The swarm and the ranker met in an explosion of violence and power. Eerv felt his heart speed up at the display, at the intensity. Hundreds of monsters were surrounding him, and Ryun fought as if it was nothing. Eerv himself wouldn't have been able to survive that. His power was not meant for such displays of might. But seeing Ryun fight in such a manner only reminded him of the reason why Eerv had surrendered to him. That man was power incarnate, unrefined and untrained as of yet, but incredible to behold.

Then, a blast of dark and violet Qi exploded out of both Ryun and his avatar and the monsters surrounding them disintegrated from his power. The frontline of the swarm faltered, and their charge slowed. But while a large amount of them was halted, others ran around Ryun and his avatar, heading toward the wall.

Their plan was for Ryun to stem the tide, to kill as many as possible in front of the walls, to lessen the attack on them. His abilities were not suited for defense of the wall, his powers damaging to the area around him. He was best suited to fights where he was surrounded by enemies, not holding a wall with allies.

*"Such power,"* Eerv said inwardly.

*"But little control,"* a voice of his awakened weapon answered him. Ressav had been with Eerv for a while now. An awakened weapon suited for him was the reward for him claiming this territory. And while he didn't talk often with his weapon, they had a good relationship. They were of similar temperament, for which he was grateful, he had heard stories from his parents about people who did not get along with their awakened objects. Ressav was a treasure worth more than his entire sect to some people. But to Eerv he was a friend.

*"He has too much power, he never had need for control,"* Eerv added.

Ressav only grunted in agreement. Eerv watched as Ryun fought hundreds of monsters, surrounded and with little room to maneuver, it was inspirational to see.

Eerv forced his eyes away from Ryun and back to the monsters rushing at the wall. Their charge was chaotic, filled with holes and wounded monsters that Ryun hadn't killed. Even with him holding some of them back there were hundreds charging at the wall. The wall itself wasn't that high, not even three meters tall, and it didn't need to be. With everyone having powers, walls weren't always the best defense, especially if they were not filled with formations or arrays. But they provided higher ground, which was enough for most purposes.

A command went out from one of the Twilight Melody Sect's newest Lords, and everyone started firing at the swarm. Arrows, throwing spears, and powers. There was no order for the attack, no real strategy. Sects did not fight in that manner. They didn't have powerful armies that could fight together and protect each other's weaknesses while enhancing their strengths. To be a part of the sect was to rise alone, to focus on personal strength. The leaders of sects were all so powerful that their might alone could hold off their enemies, with just the threat of it being unleashed.

And that was clearly apparent in their defense of the wall. The Emberhorn started using his techniques, and pillars of fire spun in the middle of the charging monsters, and a moment later they blossomed into turning wheels of fire, burning any monster close enough. That was the might of a powerful cultivator. And while Eerv hadn't taken the same path as Emberhorn in developing his build, he had ruled a sect. And one did not do that without being able to hold many just by the threat of their power alone.

Eerv raised his spear in one hand and focused, his Qi moving through his body as he prepared a technique. Then, he activated his **Technique Charge—Overwhelm**, charging up his technique and increasing its effectiveness.

Even with the waves of arrows, spears, and powers coming down from the wall, the monsters were still coming, climbing over the bodies over their own dead in a mad rush forward intent on destroying everything in their path.

A large bear-like monster with horns smashed its head into the wall, shaking it, and then several smaller but no less powerful cat-like monsters jumped on its back, throwing themselves up at the wall. Their claws bit into the wall as they started to climb, and Eerv stepped close to the edge. He pulled his spear back and then released his attack.

**[Transferring Viper's Strike]** shimmered around his spear as he released his **{Rapid Attacks}**. His speed soared far above his stats, and his weapon attacked down the side of the wall in quick succession, his skill transferring his attacks further than they could ordinarily reach. The blows of his attacks ripped the monsters climbing up the wall to pieces, the force smashing into the ground below and ripping the back of the monsters there, breaking the earth apart.

A step next to him, a monster reached the edge and clawed its way up. But before it could attack, a large two handed sword cleaved its head from its body. Eerv nodded to Anrosh and continued firing off attacks at the monsters close to the wall with his skill.

The fire from the walls was intense, thousands of warriors firing at the thousands of monsters that were coming at them. Only a few hundred or so could reach the wall at one time, but the tide was endless. Even with Ryun's interference, Eerv could tell that they wouldn't be able to keep this up for long. Already the monster corpses were accumulating at the base of the wall, and soon the monsters would have a much easier access to the top.

His spear was stabbing forward at an incredible rate, his attacks flying off the wall and hitting the monsters below. With his **[Burst Step]** he moved over the wall, helping where there was a need. The battle quickly turned deadly, the air filled with smoke and heat from the Last Ember warriors attacks. Most of the fire had been created by the Emberhorn. Eerv glanced at the old man, seeing him manipulating fire with his skill. It was known that he had a powerful skill, probably a tier 6 one that allowed him to do that. And all of his other techniques generated fire in some way. It was a perfect synergy. His skill didn't create fire, but it could manipulate it, and Eerv saw large monsters made out of flames hunting on the field, smashing into other monsters and entering their bodies through wounds or orifices, burning them up from the inside.

The Emberhorn lived up to his name, his entire body was smoldering, the embers in his horn glowing brightly and his skin turning red. Eerv could see that the field in front of the wall was filled with areas of intense fire as well as walls of fire, funneling the monsters toward the wall in a way that made them easier to deal with. The fires seemed to be positioned carefully around the battlefield, some even further in the distance near Ryun. And from them periodically, monsters made out of fire jumped up to kill the monsters made out of flesh.

Eerv lost himself in the combat, killing monsters as they climbed to the wall. A few managed to break through their defense and get into the city, but the warriors posted there made quick work of them.

And then, a blazing lance of fire split the sky, followed by a thunderous boom and then a cry. Eerv's eyes saw the lance, and knew that Ryun had attacked the swarm leader. He saw the storm clouds up above them open and the swarm leader appeared. It was a massive creature, a bird of yellow feathers and lightning shining around it. Ryun's spear hit it with so much power that everything went white. And then, Eerv saw the javelin sticking out of the monster's shoulder. Eerv had seen Ryun train, he knew how much stats he could gain with his powers, and in the middle of that monster swarm his stats had to be far higher than they had been during his training. Stats that high should've made the impact enough to blow the monster apart, instead it seemed pissed off but not hurt too much. Ryun had told Eerv that he suspected that it had some kind of a defensive skill. It seemed that he had been right.

He saw Ryun stand on a platform made out of Qi, a haze of red mist surrounding him in a sphere that encompassed the monsters on the ground, his wounds healing rapidly. Even from this distance he could see that he had destroyed his arm. Eerv glanced to the side and saw Emberhorn staring at Ryun with narrowed eyes. The old Sect Head wouldn't miss what Ryun's attack and state meant. If Eerv knew a way, he would've done this much differently, without letting the Emberhorn see Ryun at his full power. It was a terrifying sight, seeing someone with such incredible power. The Emberhorn would either be so frightened that he would honor their deal, or decide that a rival sect lead by someone so powerful was too much of a threat.

Ryun evaded the monster's counterattack and then prepared for another throw, and Eerv watched intently this time. The javelin flew out of Ryun's hand and at the swarm leader. Air burst into fire as it passed through it and reached the monster. The air around the target twisted and the javelin was thrown just a bit of course and hit the edge of the wing, ripping feather, flesh and bone apart. The monster screeched and started to fall, wind around it moving erratically. Ryun healed again, the red haze disappeared and then he summoned his sword. A moment later he jumped into the air, flying toward the falling monster.

His plan had worked, and Eerv had no doubt that if Ryun managed to close the distance he would be able to kill the swarm leader. Eerv turned back to the wall, seeing the monster attacks intensify. He saw the reason immediately, the Emberhorn's fires had stilled, and he turned to look at the Sect Head.

The Emberhorn's eyes weren't on the swarm, but instead on Ryun, following him as he climbed toward the monster. Eerv was about to use his **[Burst Step]** to snap the man out of it when he shook his head, said something to his son next to him and turned his attention back to the ground.

Eerv sighed in relief and returned to the fight.

## RYUN

His body was burning, feeling as if he had just gone through an intense workout. Ryun tried to ignore it as he climbed toward Avariel, as the monster was falling. He could see its wound closing. Far slower than his own wounds had closed, but still fast enough. It was righting itself, and Ryun was still too far away. He extended his hand and focused, a moment later he swung Kagehime forward cutting into the space in front of himself. **[Perfect Cut]** cut out of the space next to the monster, the blade traveling toward its neck. Avariel noticed the attack, and Ryun saw the white flash in its head that signified an activation of a skill. The air around it twisted and pushed against his attack.

Ryun grimaced, but didn't stop climbing. The monster had been among the clouds, but it had fallen significantly since then. They were still hundreds of meters above the ground, too far for his **Eternal Hunt** to reach other monsters, so his stats were only boosted by his **{Null Mantle}**. He was so close now, a hundred meters at most, but the monster recovered. Its wing half healed was enough for it to right itself and hover in the air. Its beady eyes turned in his direction and it screeched. Ryun had trouble breathing from all the smoke that was coming from the ground, but his sight allowed him to see better through the grains of smoke, as they too were nearly translucent, like air. But it was his **|Resonance Sense|** that made him see everything clearly. Up here, away from the *noise* of the battle, he could see far more. The battle beneath him was so chaotic, so filled with powers, fire and smoke, that he could barely make out anything. His avatar was still down there, a part of him that was killing the monsters, but Ryun knew that it wasn't going to last for much longer. He couldn't see clearly enough, and the avatar was getting too damaged.

Making a decision, he ended his **{Avatar of the Reaper}** technique, hoping that the amount of stats he had gained through **Vampire** was enough. Knowing that those stats wouldn't last for long, he decided to finish the fight as fast as possible.

He leapt from cube to cube, heading straight at the monster. He saw the channels in its body light up as it attempted to use a power. Lightning flashed up above them from the storm, and then a bolt of lightning hit the monster and flew out of it straight at Ryun.

He jumped to the side dismissing his sword and shaping a wall behind him with one hand as he shaped a cube with the other. He caught himself and swung around the attack cracked his wall, and he saw the monster readying for another attack. From what he could see, it didn't look like the lightning came from it, but from the storm itself. It probably created and moved the storm, but it couldn't create lightning. That made things a bit easier, he could anticipate the attack better, and it took more time for it to fire as Avariell was below the cloud at the moment.

Ryun continued forward, leaping from cube to cube, narrowing the distance between them as Avariell prepared another attack. Kagehime

snapped back into his hand and he swung sending another **|Perfect Cut|** at it. Avariel stopped its technique and the air around it twisted again, pushing against Ryun's attack.

He didn't know what kind of a skill it was, but it seemed to be something connected to the air. The only thing that mattered was that it was strong enough to resist his attack. He was barely fifty meters away from Avariel when it started summoning lightning again. Ryun let Kagehime disappear and pulled out a javelin. In an instant he moved his stats around and threw it at the monster. The bird smashed its wings forward and a wave of air pushed his spear aside, but it distracted the monster enough that Ryun got closer to it again.

He reduced the distance to twenty or so meters, and Avariel pulled lightning from the sky. Immediately, Ryun jumped to the side and shaped a wall around him, but the attack didn't come. Instead, a moment after he had enclosed himself to protect himself, his wall shattered as two claws the size of his torso smashed through them, followed by a bird as large as a fighter plane. Ryun tried to evade, **|Enhanced Pounce|** twisted his body, but the monster was too fast. One of the claws grabbed hold of him, and only his higher dexterity allowed him to avoid a killing blow. Instead of crushing his spine, the claws bit into his side, and Ryun immediately burst apart into his Cloud state. His vision went out, and the claws snapped closed around the cloud of Void Qi. His **|Resonance Sense|** told him that his cloud state was hurting its body, but he had no time to think of a response.

Not even a moment after he switched to the **Void Cloud**, lightning coursed through the monster, dancing over its skin and sheathing it in it. And since its claws were in the middle of his cloud body, the lightning touched him, and pain filled him. His **Cloud** state made him take more damage from special sources, and the lightning counted.

The monster hadn't released the lightning it had summoned, instead it had used it to defend itself. Ryun hadn't known that it could do that. He had no choice, he switched back to his solid state, his body smoking as it reformed. He started falling immediately and Avariel gave chase.

Its claws nearly closed on him again, but he managed to form a stepping stone and push himself aside. He still didn't manage to escape, the monster's body smashed into him and they were tumbling to the ground.

He sensed the monster's beak snap down toward his head, intent on ending him and he twisted his head and body, the beak closed on his shoulder and nearly bit through. But his stats were high enough that his bones held. He screamed and summoned Kagehime stabbing up. His sword hit the tough feathers protecting Avariel's throat and slid off them. The monster twitched its head and pulled Ryun with it, away from its body. Pain stabbed through his body, radiating from his shoulder, but he still managed to focus enough. He raised Kagehime and **|Perfect Cut|** appeared around it, a spectral blade superimposed around it. He swung and Avariel responded. Air twisted before he could reach the monster's body and Kagehime was wrenched from his grasp, tumbling down toward the ground.

Taking a deep breath, Ryun focused on his perk, and pushed as much Qi as he could through it. A moment later a powerful and focused **Void Aura** blasted into existence around him. Avariel's beak snapped open as it was being disintegrated along with its body. The monster screamed so loud that Ryun was sure that he could feel blood dripping from his ears, his hearing damaged.

With some room to breathe, Ryun focused his attention on his opponent above him. They were in the air, both falling, separated by a few steps at most. Both wounded and in pain. His aura was hurting it, disintegrating its feathers slowly, too slowly to kill it in time. With a moment to catch his breath and think, Ryun started attacking again. He blasted the monster with his **Reaper's Aura**, and saw its eyes fog for a second. A moment later his Qi cycled through his body and he shaped a spike in the air above him. The monster smashed into the spike that was anchored to the air, and impaled itself. It screeched as it ripped through its body, leaving a gaping hole in its torso.

Ryun focused on his skill as his summoned Kagehime back. Using the moment of the monster's distraction he cut again. **|Perfect Cut|** hit its neck and bit into it, parting the feathers, but not enough to cut deep inside. He cursed, his attack hadn't been strong enough. Avariel's body was powerful,



even while it was weakened. It was doing damage, but he needed more, he focused again. Felt Kagehime vibrating in his hand and head as he tried something else. When he had first gained his skill, and then again when he had regained it, it had manifested differently. He had cut apart his bonds with his nails, and then he had cut his opponents into pieces. His cut hadn't been a single cut, but many, too fast to counter or even see. If one attack wasn't enough, then maybe many would be.

He remembered the feeling that he had back then, when he let the World Ender lose. He felt that sensation fill him again, his bloody face twisting up into a wicked smile. For a moment, everything seemed sharper, clearer, and then he swung his sword. He did not want to just cut, he wanted to part its body apart, like what he had done before. To end the threat in front of him like it was nothing. He pushed forward, never allowing himself to be chained or pushed down, allowing none to stand in his way. He didn't want to give those that stood in his way an easy way, a single cut to end their lives, no. They needed to be made an example of, a hundred cuts that parted their body into strips of flesh and bone. To turn them into a mound of flesh and blood beneath his feet. That was what he wanted.

Kagehime flickered and then a dozen cuts appeared on Avariel's body, each biting deep into its body. He felt a notification ping inside his head, but he ignored it.

The monster screamed again, beat its wings, but it didn't have the strength to halt its fall. Thunder and lightning flashed above and he knew that the monster was going to attack again.

He prepared his next technique and his skill, ready to finish it before Avariel could attack. Only his training saved him. His constant use of his **|Resonance Sense|** for every activity in his life. He sensed the change down on the ground, the surge beneath him and he moved.

He fashioned a wall beneath himself halting his fall and letting the monster smash into him. A moment later he shaped another step and pushed off it, turning himself and the monster around so that he was on top and it below, closer to the ground. The attack came like nothing he had ever experienced before, and Ryun knew that his decision was right. A pillar of fire exploded out of the ground, a hundred meters in diameter, and rising up

into the air to consume him and Avariel. It smashed into Avariel's back and burned, the bird screaming in pain. The fire engulfed them, burning both of them. Even though the main impact hadn't hit him directly, he still felt it. His clothes caught fire, burning to cinders in minutes. His **Mantle of the Undying** held for longer, but it too burned to ash after a while. He pushed all of his **{Null Mantle}** stats into his endurance and vitality. He would've drunk a potion, but he knew that opening his mouth wasn't a good idea. He couldn't breathe, lest he burned his lungs. So instead he suffered. The monster beneath him provided cover, but the hole that he had made in its body let fire blow through and scorch his own leg. He felt the flesh melt off and fall, his bone turning to ash.

And then the fire was gone, and still he kept his face buried in the monster's body, using it for protection from the scorching air. A few moments later they smashed into the ground with enough force that Ryun bounced off the monster and then smashed to the ground next to it. Immediately he pulled out a healing potion and downed it.

His burnt skin started to heal, and as he was lying on the ground, he tried to focus on his surroundings. **[Resonance Sense]** painted a picture of chaos, and it was so hard for him to see what was what. But he managed to piece things together. He and Avariel were on the ground, surrounded by ash and scorched earth. The monster swarm was all around them, but not inside the scorched area, and they were going insane. The wall was broken, a massive hole letting the monsters into the city. He couldn't tell what was happening there as there was too much happening. But one thing was clear to him. The Emberhorn's betrayal had come sooner than either Ryun or Eerv had expected.

He had seen the chance to take care of both Ryun and the swarm leader, and the old Sect Head had taken it. Ryun grimaced at that, but he didn't dwell on what he could've done differently. He used his **Rapid Regrowth** and grew back his leg, then stood shakily.

Avariel twitched, its body was a ruin, its back flayed by fire and its insides cooked, but still somehow it was alive. It was a testament to the monster's power. Ryun looked at it, and saw it staring at him with its remaining eye. He walked over to it and knew that it wouldn't last long.

“It was a good fight,” Ryun said. “I wish that we weren’t interrupted, but life rarely gives us what we want.”

The monster didn’t react, it probably couldn’t and Ryun stopped over it, as its life was leaving it he raised his hand and used **[Reave]**. He killed it and felt its Essence fill him. It was the least he could do for a good opponent. He sighed and then turned his attention to the city that was on fire. His people were dying, both from monsters and treacherous scum.

Emberhorn and his sect shouldn’t have betrayed them. Now he was going to need to make an example of them. He took a moment to gather himself, his clothes were gone and his body still healing from the burns. He glanced at his notification and pulled it up while he waited for the healing potion to finish its work.

New Skill quest available—My Foes, Torn Asunder:

Beyond Understanding **|Perfect Cut|** — Cut to pieces 10,000 different types of monsters with a single use of skill.

The next evolution of his skill, the requirement for it seemed insane. He put the notification away and turned back to the city, he didn’t have the time to think about that now. He took a step toward the city and then leapt into the air, heading straight toward where he sensed most people.