

Test

“So, how does it feel?” Tali asked as the two of them walked along the edge of a chasm somewhere outside the borders of their territories. They had to go pretty far to find what they were looking for.

Ryun shrugged. “I am still getting accustomed to it. Everything around me feels... more real.” Ryun put a hand to the side and pulled. Essence of Air answered, flowing toward his palm to enter his conduits and find its destination in his Core. With an effort of will and intent he stopped the Essence before it could enter his body, he made it shape into a pattern of a simple **{Burst}**. The oldest and most basic form of his branch technique. As he was about to release the technique, it shook and started falling apart, instead of a large burst of air, a tiny gust of air fizzled in the direction he was pointing at.

“Ooohhh, very impressive,” Tali clapped. A series of loud roars came from the chasm beneath them. Through his sense he felt many feet pounding across the dirt and stone.

Ryun turned and glared at her. “It’s still difficult, but I can shape the Essence outside of my body now. It is as if I am just now fully in balance with the world.”

Tali tilted her head. “I guess that it makes sense, considering all that we know about the Eternal Realm and what is required to reach it.”

Ryun nodded. “You shouldn’t wait too long,” he told her.

“Soon, I’m getting the last of the things we spoke about ready,” Tali assured him. “I’ve waited three hundred years, I’ll survive a few more months. The Grey Horde’s dome was without issues, we have the time.”

Ryun winced as he felt stone rend in the chasm through his sense. It reverberated through his body, making a... strange sensation.

“Still having issues?” Tali asked.

“I feel... raw, I guess. Like all of my senses, skill or physical, are brand new.”

“Probably something to do with your body being completely reforged now. Soul and body together,” Tali added.

Ryun agreed, it also felt like he had gotten through to what Zach was talking about—being able to feel Essence with his Soul.

“I’m still adjusting,” he said finally. A growl and the sounds of a scuffle below them filled the background.

“Yeah, can’t wait for it take you all of two days,” Tali grumbled.

Ryun rolled his eyes. “Will you be ready for the dome?” He asked.

“I am certain of it,” Tali said. A loud crash bellow them made her glance at the chasm, but then she turned her eyes back to him. “Speaking of the dome...”

Ryun tilted his head. A pain filled scream rose from the chasm. “Yes?”

“Sigmund asked me to join his dome,” she said slowly. “After ours, obviously. In two years.”

Ryun frowned. "I thought that participants were decided based on factions."

"They are, he just wants additional support," she said, but Ryun knew her.

"What is it really?" He asked.

"Why do you think that there is any other reason? Can't I just want to help him, make sure that he is safe?"

Ryun turned his head to look at her, he opened his mouth, but paused as a loud impact shook the chasm and the sound of falling rocks rose from the bottom. Once it subsided, he spoke. "Those are all valid reasons; they are not the reason though. I can tell that you were... hesitant to say anything, which means that you are hiding something from me."

"I hate you," Tali grumbled.

"No, you don't my friend," Ryun smiled.

"No," she sighed. "I don't."

"Well?"

Tali didn't answer immediately, they walked along the edge as the sound of battle came from below. "I... Awirren will be there."

That made Ryun's eyes narrow. "What are you planning?"

"You know what," Tali said.

Ryun opened his mouth, then closed it, unsure how to respond. Carefully, he found the words to voice his opinion, hoping that she would hear him.

“You are still set on that course?”

“Of course,” Tali told him. “Nothing is changed. She betrayed me and nearly killed me, robbed me of three hundred years of my life.”

Ryun grimaced.

“What?” She saw his expression and rounded on him. “Wouldn’t you do the same? Haven’t you already?”

She was right, of course. But it wasn’t about him, he reflected on him and Zach, and wondered what would’ve happened if he was like Tali. They were not the friends they once were, yet somehow they found themselves on the same side, together.

“The past is the past,” Ryun said slowly. “Awirren had stood with us against the dome when many others have fled. She had fought and bled for the world.”

Tali’s expression darkened. “And so what? I should just forget what she did?”

“Forgiveness does not mean forgetting.”

“Forgiveness? You tell me to forgive? Have you ever forgiven anyone in your entire life? You kill everyone who you perceive to have wronged you. You don’t think that it is a bit hypocritical of you?” She demanded.

Ryun looked away. “Maybe I am trying to be better? Change is not hypocrisy Tali. We all grow and change. What we believe to be the best course of action, might not suit our future selves.”

She glared at him. “Is this about the Warden? Zacharia?” She asked after a while.

“He has reasons to hate, more so than you do for Awirren,” Ryun started. “I... do not believe in regret. What we do in our past is the past, it cannot be changed, there is no reason to dwell on it. All we can do is walk forward. But... there are things that I did that I don’t even remember, in my rage. Perhaps I would’ve changed some few of them,” Ryun shook his head. “It doesn’t matter. What matters is that you can see us now. We are not friends, but you could call us allies perhaps. You see how his strength adds to ours, don’t you? Awirren was clearly not as she once was. She might still be insane, but you can see the limits she put on herself are working, she functions. And in time, perhaps she could be helped fully.”

“You ask too much,” Tali whispered.

Ryun sighed. “I ask nothing,” he said. “I merely comment. The decision is ultimately yours. I will not stand in your way. You should just ask yourself if this is justice, or vengeance.”

They settled in an uncomfortable silence. A few moments later it was broken by a loud roar followed by the sounds of flesh tearing.

Tali glanced down at the chasm. “Should we help?”

Ryun tilted his head, focusing on his sense. “No, it’s just an arm.”

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Hiro screamed in pain as he felt the jaws of the monster clamp down on his left arm, the teeth puncturing his skin, tearing flesh, turning bones to dust. He yelled and stabbed his sword into the monster, straight through its eye. It twitched, trying to get away in its death throes, and as Hiro moved to get away the resulting momentum tore his hand off at the elbow.

He nearly blacked out, the world turning dim, but the sound of more monsters running toward him woke him up, made him pull himself up and run.

He was going to die, he had no doubt about that. He didn't even know how he had gotten here. One moment he was training in the yard, and the next his two masters arrived with Zach in tow to start his *real training*, as they had called it. And that included having Zach seal his Class completely. At the time, Hiro didn't think that there was anything strange with it. The Wardens would often have him train while they blindfolded him or tied one hand up. He thought this was the same, just to prevent him from trying to rely on his Class.

He was so wrong. Again, he tried to reach his Class, and found himself only scratching against the wall that stood in between it and him. He glanced back, seeing the monsters running after him. The chasm was filled with slender four-legged beasts with sharp jaws and claws. Their backs had almost rock-like plates that made it nearly impossible for his sword to get through, and they were fast. He hadn't even had the chance to remove his filter and look at them, to see their names and tier. It didn't matter ultimately, he had to get away from them, his only salvation was at the end of the chasm, where his masters were supposed to be waiting for him.

They had dropped him off at the entrance to the chasm and said that his task was to get to the end. It had seemed so simple then, but now, losing blood and in agony, all Hiro wanted was to get away. Without his Class he couldn't survive any of this. He had tried screaming, calling his masters for help, but none came. He didn't even have the time to think as to the reasons why. He had to put all of his focus into surviving the monsters.

His skills still worked, though they had never been that powerful. His **|Analysis|** worked overtime, his willpower draining from him as he failed to find a way to outpace the monsters, they were faster than him.

Three of them remained, and he had no hope against them. Killing just one had cost him an arm. He kept his **{Focused}** technique up and he knew that the only reason why he wasn't going into shock was because of his **Greater Mind of the Survivor**. His Qi was starting to regenerate faster now as he got lower and lower with his supplies, it wasn't going to be enough.

His mind was moving at a rate faster than anything he had ever experienced. He pushed his willpower to its feeble limits, using **|Analysis|** in conjunction with **{Focus}** to try and find a way out.

He had already tried using his other techniques on the monsters. His sword had a **{Spatial Ward}** on it, which didn't seem to make any difference when he attacked them. It made his sword harder to follow, the movements strange. When looked at from outside it appeared as if his weapon was sliding across space. It was a hard thing to explain without actually seeing it. The monsters might not be able to follow it, but it didn't matter as he couldn't cut through their plates. He had tried to increase his stats with **{Onslaught}** but that hadn't worked either. And his **{Spatial Sword Storm}** had barely scratched them, it was too wide of an attack, unfocused. If he could somehow make it focus on the exact targets he wanted...

A monster leapt at his back, and Hiro dashed to the side with **|Evade|** as he pulsed his **|Mental Blast|**, his willpower dipped, and he felt his mind slow. The monster's swipe missed as he attacked its mind and he managed to slide under it, then continue running. He had been taught much about Cultivation, he knew the theory, but he had never done anything on his own.

He looked ahead and knew that he wasn't going to reach the end before they caught him. He had to survive, and the only way to do that was to kill them. In a moment, a path focused itself in his mind. He didn't have the power to kill them, which meant that he had to get it.

He had to change his technique, to shape it into a weapon that could help him survive.

With an effort he pushed his **{Focus}** technique to its fruit form, settling into the single-minded focus of the **{Azure Mind}**. It was do or die, and Hiro was a survivor.