It Ends

The world he crafted fell away, and with it his connection to the plane of the Mind. Zach focused all of his remaining will on Time, opening up his connection fully and letting it flow into his body, enhancing his powers and Soul.

In front of him, time started to flow again.

Anrosh roared, a blast of frigid air expanded in a cone in front of her, hitting the frozen roots surrounding Ra'azel. The blast shattered them like glass, sending shrapnel flying in all directions, a hail of ice. Ra'azel's armor cracked, his hand flashed and a bright orange orb appeared then detonated.

A blast of heat expanded, boiling the ice to steam in an instant, turning everything around him to ash. Anrosh's armor rippled, its protections adapting to the Essence and protecting her, the blast still sent her flying back, her domain and power dispelled. The ground around the yeti turned to glass, and the Air was on fire.

Then it was done, and yeti remained there in the center of the blast. His armor in ruins, falling apart from his body.

Zach's body still felt like it was on fire, but he knew the feeling now. Now was the moment, Zach blinked getting close to Anrosh as the yet turned his eyes on them, glaring.

"The two—" he started, then paused. Zach's heart dropped. That wasn't what was supposed to happen. The yeti tilted his head, then frowned.

"The two of you I don't need," he said finally.

Zach relaxed, a small deviation, not a concern. The yeti raised his hand a rune carved into the world. Black lightning lashed out, tinted with red, it struck at Ender and the redheaded man turned to petals, evading the attack.

"A Runesmith?" The voice from Zach's sword said. *"A Ra of my people."*

Orbs appeared all around the yeti. But Zach had already switched to **Wind Song** Blade, he unleashed the **Shattering Song** a split second after. Vibrations ripped through the air, the orbs exploded.

The ground rumbled as Ender caused trees to rip out of the ground and grow all around the yeti, shielding them from the sun. The yeti frowned again, and Zach stepped forward, he focused full on his connection with Time. The **Aspect of Time** and **Sage of Time** bolstered him, and he activated his time related skills, knowing that he would need them.

Temporal Fighting, **For Every Second, Two.**

Anrosh's armor rippled to copy the Essence of the lightning, realizing the threat of the attack. Zach dashed forward, and Naha followed slipping into his shadow. He surged across the glassed ground, time trembling around him. He came within ten paces of the yeti and braced, his Time Blade ready for him to use **Time Stop** and deal with the constructs he was about to summon.

No construct appeared, the yeti stood frozen, his head tilted to the side.

What? It shocked Zach so much that he froze too, standing a few steps away from Ra'azel, looking at him. This wasn't supposed to happen. A thousand predictions, analysis, the might of an entire Essence plane

filling him. He was certain that he had predicted with great accuracy. What was happening?

Instead of fighting, Ra'azel spoke, breaking with the script again.

"What is that?" The yeti whispered, almost as if he wasn't addressing him. "It is so familiar."

Zach shook himself out of his shock, he had to continue, keep the yeti on track. He dashed forward, Naha attacked with spikes fashioned out of shadows from all around their target. Zach anticipating it continued on, he whirled, swiping with his sword and blade as three shield constructs appeared. Zach already knew their flaws, a strike against each, and they broke apart.

 Ra'azel snapped out of his reverie, and reacted. Nine out of ten times, his armor would blast them with an expanding wave of force. One time in ten he would blink back—his body flashed and he blinked back, putting distance between them. Ra'azel frowned again, then pulled out a small green orb and put it against his chest.

Zach recognized it, he had used it before, in the future that will never be. Zach's analysis told him that it had something to do with Time. Ra'azel had figured out what Zach was doing faster than he had projected.

Zach didn't let him the unlikely reaction throw him this time. Naha's image started to deepen the shadows around them, roots rose from the ground and frost spread across them, creating blades of ice on their tips as they stab at Ra'azel. Objects appear, some exploding, shattering the roots others fire lasers to cut them down. Zach dances through them, avoiding attacks just as constructs appear, as if he knew where and when they would attack.

The yeti watches. A giant sword made out of Ice appears above the yeti and he reacts as he was supposed to. He carves a symbol and black lightning lashes out at Anrosh. It hits her in the side, her armor ripples and whines, but it holds. Timing was off, Ra'azel had less time to craft the attack, it was weaker. Anrosh survived with almost no injuries this time. Zach pushed forward as a sphere of light protected him from the sword and Naha's shadows. Naha's ideal went off and shadowy hands grabbed hold of the yeti within his sphere of protection.

Zach knew and waited. Ra'azel's shield flickersedas he changes it. Zach already moved through. **|I Arrived, Always On Time|** let him step through Space and Time in that tiny instance. Inside Ra'azel's shield he moved, constructs appeared but already his sword was swiping, echoes in Time and his projections let him know where they will arrive. He cut through three constructs in the moment of them appearing.

Ra'azel's armor lit up, runes turning bright. Zach triggered **Time Stop**. The world froze and he jumped forward getting close to Ra'azel. There was only one thing, in all of the versions of this fight that made Ra'azel retreat. It was fear of death. Injure him enough, and he went scorched earth. Pull back too much and he captured Zach, Naha, or both, killing the others. So it had to be a balance, an attack that he would clearly recognize as a threat, but which didn't injure him enough.

Zach had to time it perfectly. He focused his will, time shuddered around him as he let himself use it fully as he had never done before, as he stepped fully into the shoes of the **Sage of Time**.

He raised his blade, let the time continue, and swiped with **|I Strike Through Time|**.

* * *

What was it? What was I feeling? It was so familiar to Ra'azel, but he couldn't quite place it. He watched the little visitor, the human chosen, as he walked through all that Ra'azel had thrown at him. Some of his constructs bursting without even a chance of activating, some firing and missing as if... as if...

Oh. Ra'azel pulled a sphere of coalesced Essence of Time then slammed it against his armor. The armor absorbed, runes flashed and then he saw his opponent clearly. What had a moment before been strange movements and bursts of speed became a smooth perception. He moved in the moments between moments, gaining more than others had. Interesting, but not enough. There was more, it was not just utilization of Time it was mastery.

Then he recognized a feeling he had not felt in ages. A sense of being in the presence of an embodiment of an Aspect. Not quite, but close. Quickly, things snapped into place, the vision of this Infinite Realm. Why his universe was stripped clean and why there were no more embodiments of the Aspects. His suspicions were proven right. He would've laughed if he had the time.

They came at him with powerful attacks, roots of trees and frost, shadows and blades. Ra'azel reacted, defending himself, buying time to think. This was not just power of skills, this was beyond all three focuses. This was the culmination that was the ultimate goal. A nascent Aspect fought through Ra'azel's countermeasures, moving through his might as if just taking a stroll.

The gift Ra'azel gave him raised high, the Essence of Time filling it. Then he attacked, his blade coming down with the full weight of his will and skill. Ra'azel's eyes widened at the might of it. He felt tried to dodge

but knew that it wasn't going to be enough, that he couldn't escape in time no matter what he did.

He stepped back anyway, trying to avoid the attack and the sword came down. His armor cleaved over his chest, Ra'azel managed to avoid the worst of it by just a hairbreadth. Still it was terrible, the runes on his armor were splitting apart and detonating as they were thrown out of alignment by the ripple of Time coming from the attack.

Ra'azel was wrenched back then thrown across the field until he hit a tree and roots enveloped him in an instant, and started to squeeze. Ra'azel's mind was firing at full speed, in awe, in confusion. The attack should've cleaved him in half, activating his contingencies. Forcing him to expend more of his Soul. It didn't. As his bones started to groan from the roots trying to squash him, he snapped out of it. With an effort of will, he pulled out a device and it fired. The tree binding him turned to ash and Ra'azel fell to the ground, standing and looking back at his opponents.

They paused too.

"You feel like an Aspect," Ra'azel said slowly. That was too dangerous, but he had managed to avoid it in time. Suddenly he grew vary of his plan. This was a power that he did not understand. And if he could pull on the power of an Aspect, what else did Ra'azel not know? *Had he made a mistake?* Ra'azel wondered. Yes, this was too dangerous he had to escape. He prepared his emergency teleport, his hand raised to summon and activate it. Then he stopped, things clicking into place. The fight had changed after the two arrived. His old friend had started cutting through Ra'azel's constructs and avoiding his attacks with ease. *Why?* "Why did you miss?" Ra'azel asked.

That got a reaction, Ra'azel saw fear in his eyes, and confusion in others. He couldn't understand. There was no reason for him to miss that strike, not if he could pull on the Time. Unless.

"We went through this already, haven't we," he said slowly. Discreetly, as his words distracted, Ra'azel pulled a device into his palm, out of sight, and activated it.

His opponent stiffened at Ra'azel's words. *Yes,* that made more sense to Ra'azel. So why miss then? This was why Ra'azel hated not knowing. Why he didn't like going against people that could hurt him without knowing everything that he possibly could.

How many times had he fought me? Ra'azel wondered, in the distance he felt more people coming from the city. He couldn't stay, his mission was a wash.

"Why are you not attacking?" Ra'azel asked, his opponent didn't answer. Then Ra'azel smiled. "Ah, not just Time," he said as he remembered all of their battle. "You simulated this, didn't you? Mind then, or something else. I did something different this time, didn't I?"

Ra'azel glanced at the others, who were looking at them both with confusion in their eyes. He turned his eyes back on his old friend. "Do you want to know a secret, about why I never project or simulate my battles? Because it gives you a false sense of confidence. Because you can only know what you know. And you couldn't have known that once I held Aspects in the palm of my hand. That I would recognize the throne you are aspiring to sit on. That I had once used powers like yours."

Ra'azel grinned, his Soul aching from use, prepared for more. "You win," Ra'azel said, but his pride as Ra welled up inside of him. He had tried to trick him, to cause an outcome that he wanted. "I leave you with this, a gift."

He triggered the and pulled out a hundred constructs, the ground exploded as roots and shadows reached for them. A good distraction. His old friend blinked toward him, but Ra'azel knew he would do it. The

illusion device he activated exploded as his old friend stabbed Ra'azel through the chest, or at least what he thought was him.

The ground around them exploded, trees shattered, the air cracked, as his devices fired and the four tried to block. Invisible, Ra'azel moved. Not the two, he would have them in time, study their skills eventually, but perhaps first he would start with someone weaker. Not the wolf, the armor somehow could nullify Essence, and he had seen his Obliteration cast be ignored. The other one, then. Remembering what happened the last time, he got behind the plant user, he raised a hand and carved three runes, bolstering his **Obliteration** cast.

He activated the runes, and black and red lightning came into being. He triggered his teleport, and vanished.

* * *

Zach dashed away from an attack that would've blasted a hole in his chest, with a swipe he sent a blade of wind to cut up the construct in the air. All around him was chaos, a hundred constructs were firing at them, and Naha and Ender were doing the most to take them down. Roots and shadowy hands grasped them and crushed them, while Zach and Anrosh took down a couple at most.

This wasn't what he had projected, so he searched for the yeti. He had cast an illusion somehow, something that had fooled them all. He had either retreated or he was still here. Zach didn't know, and that terrified him. He hoped that Ra'azel had decided to leave, that he had only used a different way to do so, one that Zach hadn't known about.

His skills were barred from him, he could no longer use them for a while. They couldn't continue this fight. Then he felt the space tremble nearby and he turned, seeing a black lightning blossom into being just behind Ender. He tried to blink and something prevented him from getting close, his blink ending before he reached his destination.

NO! Zach reached for his Aspect and used **Slow Time**, the lightning crawled through the air, faster than Zach could reach even with Time slowed. He ran, but knew that he wouldn't get there in time. It was as thick as his arm, and Zach reached for the power deep within him.

—Arcadia—

An expanding sphere of light exploded out of him. Stifling the powers of all that opposed him, bolstering his allies. It hit the lightning and it started to shrink, but it still continued on. Zach ran and pushed everything into his Ideal, all his willpower, all that he had left.

The lightning faded, until all that was left was a single prong, the size of Zach's finger. He wasn't fast enough, it touched Ender's back and his clothes blasted away, his skin peeled apart before Zach in slow motion. A hole opened up in his chest, then it spread outward, obliterating his shoulder sending his hand flying away into the distance. Zach's Ideal stifled it, stopped the spread of all wounds. And then his ability winked out, time resumed.

Ender fell on the ground and Zach was there. He looked at the man he didn't know, who was a cultivator of nature. He looked up at Zach, his eyes wide and disbelieving. The right side of his chest was gone, as was his arm, the wound was crawling, expanding further, it reached his neck.

The only thing keeping it from spreading was Zach's Ideal, and he felt the weight of trying to hold on.

Zach turned around, saw Naha and Anrosh rushing to him, the constructs released by the yeti long gone.

"Naha, to the city, we need a soul potion, a healer, something," he spoke quickly, knowing that time was not on their side. Anrosh turned back into her human form and ran to him, she pulled out a vial from her storage and poured it down his throat. "It's a Great Potion of Soul Healing and a Complete Restoration Potion," she said, looking at the man. "Why isn't it working?" She turned to look at Zach.

He sensed the potions working, felt the Soul strengthen, and falter immediately. It wasn't enough. "We need a Healer," he said instead.

"We don't have any in the city, his family back north might have someone strong enough," she responded as she turned her head back to Ender.

Ender groaned beneath them. "Oh. This is my end," he said, Zach could feel his soul tearing apart. He went through everything that he had, all that he knew. There was nothing that he could do. *Kill him?* He bowed his head, already he knew that it was too late. The wound to his soul was too great. More than likely it had destroyed that which had anchored his powers. There was no immortality, no nothing.

"No," Zach whispered. "This wasn't what was supposed to happen."

Ender looked at Anrosh. He motioned with his remaining hand and she got close. He whispered something to her, and she nodded putting a hand on the side of his face. "I will," she said.

Ender smiled, then put his palm up, Anrosh helped him keep it steady. He focused and Zach saw his Soul start to tear apart as he activated something. His Soul too damaged to handle it. Zach felt the man's will grow then focus on his hand. A tiny light started to grow, and then as his Soul tore apart, a small seed manifested.

Ender sagged and a deep breath left his lips, his life leaving him. Anrosh took the seed and stored it, then slowly reached up and closed his eyes.

Zach pulled back into his mind. He ran projections, his will shook the world around him as he tried to find a way to change things. This wasn't what was supposed to happen, it wasn't supposed to go like this. He had strength for a reason, to prevent things like this from happening.

He lost himself in the past, he reached to the river and raged against it, trying to pull it back. It continued on, not caring about his desires. This was his fault, his mistake. The yeti had come for him. Others were not supposed to die for it.

No, no, no, no, I am supposed to protect them! I am supposed to be better than—

In his head he crafted a world. And then he ran through loops, looking for the moment where he could change things. For the moment where he made a mistake. Losing himself in his mind.