

Deals

Ryun remembered being blind. Or at least the hindrance that he experienced back then. He had never truly been without *sight*. When he didn't have his sight, his sense had filled in the gaps. So much so, that he had never felt like he couldn't *see*. Now, it was different.

The world seen through his eyes was hard to describe, he could barely discern what was what. Thankfully, living things were easier to see at least. They stood out against the bleakness of the Ethereal Realm. Spirits were bundles of the Essence they were tied to, easy to distinguish, as were souls. Everything else was the issue, he had trouble navigating the world, he and Nayra attempted to explore a cave in the side of the mountain, and Ryun had managed to walk into a wall three times and trip over rocks at least twice that.

He could barely walk without her being there next to him to help. Out in the sky, where there was little for him to worry about it was easier. Tight spaces were obviously an issue.

“Are you sure that you want to keep doing this?” Nayra said from right next to him.

Ryun nodded. “It’s training.”

He could feel his own Soul clearly, and hers as well. It was taking a lot of him to keep his sense narrowed down to just his immediate surrounding and on solely the Soul Essence, but it provided him at least with a frame of reference in his own body and hers next to him.

The cave they were in was just large enough for them to walk side by side, though it was rough terrain. But, as they continued he was getting better at using his eyes to see the difference in the amount of Essence present. The density of the Essence did help somewhat with what figuring out what was solid walls of the cave and what was not. His **|Enhanced Adaptation|** was working overtime on it, his will was filling him fully, and he could almost feel the skill pushing the confines of its boundary within him.

It had been so long since he actually had to look where he was going that he had forgotten how. He always just knew where everything around him was, having to look was strange now.

“I don’t know if coming here was smart for you,” Nayra said. “You can’t fight against any threat like this.”

Ryun chuckled. “Of course I can,” he said, turning his head to look at her. Her Soul was bright in his eyes, one of the stronger Souls he had seen. Almost bulging with something within. He wasn’t quite sure, but he suspected that what he was seeing was the actual Framework within her soul, or at least the Soul parts that were connected to it. Nayra had the most amount of perks of anyone he had ever met, and each perk was a power directly tied to her Soul.

Though, he was also pretty sure that he could see it straining, her Soul could not take much more. Her **Ferry the Soul** perk had no limit written in its description, but Ryun suspected that there was a hidden one. Most perks had such things. The Soul was the last and most important limit for all of them. He understood that more than he ever had, after all his body was his Soul now.

“Oh,” Nayra raised an eyebrow. “And how exactly are you going to do that?”

“I doubt that there is anything here that can kill me in one shot,” Ryun said. “And the moment something attacks I can just destroy everything around me.”

Nayra opened her mouth, then closed it. “Right.”

He smiled. He had trained a lot on how to be more precise, on getting more control. But his old ways still worked, when in doubt destroy everything, way of doing things had done well for him for a reason.

“We should head back, I’m sure that the others have finished their conversations with the dragon,” she said.

“So eager to seek out power, are we?” Ryun asked.

“It is the reason why we are here, isn’t it?”

“You should not rely on what others can offer for power Nayra,” Ryun answered. “These Grand Spirits might be powerful, but there is much that we can do on our own. I am here because I am weakened in this place, because going through this is a struggle, and overcoming it is what will give me more strength.”

“So why are we still here then? You said that you want to come with me to the Afterlife, what do we have to gain from these spirits?”

Ryun didn’t answer immediately. He had come here because he had heard stories of this dragon from both Zach and Ereclaw, because he knew that the dragon was powerful, just as powerful as the yeti is. And because the dragon had been able to shut down the entire Ethereal Realm.

“I have never met the yeti,” Ryun started. “All I know of him comes from accounts of others. I know that he is powerful, and a danger beyond any that we have faced, but that knowledge is second hand information.

I have not seen anything myself. If, as Ereclaw had said, the dragon and these Grand Spirits are the yeti's equals, then I want to see them for myself. Measure their power against mine. I need to know how much I am lacking."

Nayra hummed to herself. "And what do you think so far?"

"The dragon definitely has the strongest Soul I have ever seen. I don't know what he is, exactly, he doesn't feel or look the same as people in the Real Realm, but that was to be expected. I can tell that he has a lot of willpower, and that makes sense if he is a skill user. If I am understanding correctly, he is the result of an immortality perk of some kind. But I cannot properly measure his power without fighting."

"What's your guess?" She asked.

Ryun grimaced. "I don't think that I, that we, are that far away from him, or the yeti for that matter."

Nayra tilted her head. "Really?"

Ryun nodded. "From what Zach and Anrosh said, they had hurt the yeti in their fight. What we lack is knowledge about his power, and experience. He is supposedly older than the Infinite Realm by a significant margin. But I want to meet these Grand Spirits."

"Have you decided which ones we are going to approach?"

Ryun glanced in her direction and smiled. "We? Not going straight to the Afterlife after all?"

"You can barely find your way through a cave on your own, I'm not leaving you alone. Anrosh would kill me if something happened to you," Nayra answered.

“Well, rest easy. I don’t plan on taking long. We’ll meet with the three Grand Spirits that wish to enter the Real Realm and fight the yeti. Having them as allies in our quest to find and defeat the yeti will be worth more than anything that they can teach us.”

“Look at you,” Nayra returned his smile. “Seeking allies. Where did the brooding Ryun go?”

“He realized that he cannot do everything by himself, and he has far too much to protect to be able to do it on his own,” Ryun said, then shook his head. “Let’s hurry, use your aura around us, low intensity please.”

Nayra tilted her head, and did as he asked. The Aura of the Scorching Mist spread from her, Essence drawn from her core, it blanketed everything around them, at such low intensity that it didn’t really harm anything. To Ryun’s eyes, the world was suddenly filled with another Essence, one that filled the gaps in the world. With that change, he focused on his **|Enhanced Adaptation|** and quickly he could see the world in between the two Essences.

“Ah, that’s better,” he said. He had tried this with his Qi too, but Oblivion passed through all Essence unlike Nayra’s that operated differently. What his tests proved was that the Ethereal had rules that he didn’t understand yet.

Now, being able to see, they made their way out of the cave quickly, then they headed back to the top the quick way—through the air.

* * *

Ryun and Nayra stood on the summit as the Ethereal Realm twisted and the dragon returned. The dragon had just returned from taking Zach and Nahamassa to one of the Grand Spirits. Now, it was their turn.

“You have decided then?” The dragon asked.

“We have,” Ryun answered.

The dragon tilted his head. “The young hunter is not coming with you?”

Ryun shook his head. Ereclaw was down at the base of the mountain, hunting. “No, he will ask to meet with a different Grand Spirit.”

“Ah, of course,” the dragon said.

“I wanted to ask you something, if it is okay?” Ryun said.

The dragon inclined his head. “One may always ask, answers on the other hand are not always guaranteed.”

Again, Ryun felt a touch of something that he couldn't quite place from the dragon. As if he was trying to remember something that he couldn't quite recall. There was a familiarity that he sensed in the dragon. Perhaps it was just the result of Ryun and Ereclaw's link. “Why are you helping?” He asked. “The yeti is no longer in the Ethereal Realm, he isn't a threat to you at all.”

The dragon turned his eyes to look in the distance. “He is a threat to all, I do not know his plans and intent. But I have seen into his eyes and I know that there is only malevolence in that one's Soul. I am not a Grand Spirit, but I love this Realm and I love exploring it. I will not stand aside. The yeti is dangerous, and he is like a perversion of what a Skill user should be.”

“How so? I did not think that his power has anything to do with Skills.”

“I do not know what his power is, I have no knowledge of it. But the way that it works is by binding the world to his word, by branding it with his soul and touch. That being has no regard for the world around him. He demands obedience from the world, but does not offer anything in return.”

“Isn’t that what Skill users do, just in a different way? Use willpower to force the world to bow to their will?”

“Some might,” the dragon said. “But those do not understand the path of Skills. To use your willpower to bend something to your will is to waste its potential. Skills are the bridge between you and the world, how you treat the world reflects back through how your skills manifest. The world wants to change, and never is that more apparent than here, in this realm. The Ethereal changes on a whim, it changes with emotion and thought, it listens. The Real Realm is the same, the Ethereal is after all the reflection of it. It only takes more will and understanding to make it listen, coax it out of its slumber.”

Ryun blinked. He had never heard anyone speak about skills in that way. He frowned, wondering just how much he really understood his secondary focus.

“Why don’t you try to leave the Ethereal Realm then? Go after him?” Ryun asked.

The dragon shook his head. “The yet is old, and his power is not fully tied to the Infinite Realm. He can slip through the cracks in the rules. I on the other hand am bound to this Realm. I cannot ever leave. That is the price I paid.”

“You seem to know a lot about the Real Realm,” Ryun said. “I was under the impression that you yourself never went there?”

“I...” the dragon paused. “I remember a dream, sometimes. Or perhaps I was the one that was dreamt.”

Again, Ryun was struck with the sense of familiarity. “You don’t know anything about the life you had in the Real Ream?”

“I remember only the places I explored, and feelings I felt when I gazed upon them. Why do you ask?”

“I...” Ryun paused. “There is something familiar about you that I cannot place.”

The dragon tilted his head. “You think that perhaps you knew me?”

There was only one person that Ryun could think who the dragon could be. “How long ago did you, awake I guess?”

“Thousand of years,” the dragon said.

Ryun blinked, he hadn’t expected that answer. “The Infinite Realm isn’t that old.”

The dragon chuckled. “The Ethereal is ancient. Time here weaves and twists around itself, it loops around and sprints ahead, then slows to a crawl. It does not matter in the end. That other life had its time, and now it is mine.”

Ryun nodded, accepting the answer.

“So, where do you wish to go?” The dragon asked.

Ryun met his eyes and spoke. "Send us to the Grand Spirit of War."