

## Difference

Zach walked through the forest, feeling the wind on his skin. It surged around him, almost dancing. With every step, it surged, following in his footsteps. The Wind was many things, but most of all it wanted to be free. It was playful, and it was terrible when roused. At least, those were the things that Zach associated with it. It was... harder than it was with Time, he could feel many different ideas, many different beliefs about the Wind.

His was just one small piece of it. Perhaps he could overpower the others with his will, he did think that the Wind liked him more. It was such a different experience than it had been with Time, it had fought him. Wind felt more welcoming.

Zach continued his walk, his mind crafting the world around him. His **|Perfect Mind Palace: My World, My Rules|** made everything around him, yet somehow he could still feel the Aspect of the Wind, even though what was all around him now was made out of Mind.

The Mind Aspect was the hardest one to feel, even though he had the most experience with it. It wanted to be too many different things. It was the superiority of intelligence, and it was the imagination of a child, it was trickery and it was truth and enlightenment. Zach did not even know what he wanted it to be yet. Crafting a Way for it would be the hardest out all his Aspects, he felt like.

He had spent the last few weeks in his room, practicing and deepening his connections with his Aspects. Preparing his skills for evolving further. It had been going well, he thought.

Then, he felt a tremor in his world of dreams. He tilted his head, and at the edge of his hearing perceived something, a voice, calling him. It was so hard for him to pull himself away from his studies. The workings of Essences were important, but he had made a promise to Naha to always answer when she called.

Slowly, he pulled himself out of the dreamworld and into reality.

“—Zach!” She was shaking him.

“I’m here,” he said slowly, still waking from his stupor. More sounds were assaulting him now, a ringing in the distance.

“Something is attacking the city,” she was pointing at the window. It took Zach a few seconds to comprehend her words.

He looked at the window, then stood and dashed over, looking out into the city stretching below them. He saw smoke rising in the distance, and a monster towering over the buildings. Bells were ringing and he saw sect warriors marching out of the gates of the palace.

“Come,” Zach said, and Naha fell into his shadow.

He stepped out of the room onto the balcony and the wind picked up around him. His **|Perfect Wind Control: My Steps, Carry the Wind|** making it an instinctual affair.

He stepped jumped into the air, and used **[Arsenal Wings: Wind]**. Two wings spread from his back made out of wind, and then it picked him up, sending him flying toward the monster. His mind worked fast, looking at the monster and the fighting. He took in the details quickly, seeing that Hiro and Kri were there. He saw the monster attack Kri and her dodge then lash out with her spear, barely scratching the monster’s hide. Hiro was attacking from the shadows, unseen, but spatial tears opened up every few seconds, attacking the monster’s head, aiming for the eyes of its three heads.

He saw it get a solid hit on Kri that sent her to the ground, its arm raised to deliver a finishing blow.

**Aspect Blink**, brought him to the ground. His hand shifted into a blade and he swung. He saw the flaws in the being, realized that something about it was wrong, but he didn’t have the time to investigate. Wind coalesced around his blade, then he used **Unleash Arsenal**. The blade of Wind carved a line across the ground, the Wind whistling as it

passed. The monster's back was turned to him and he saw the shell on its back flash then a shield popped into place. His attack sliced through it, one of its heads screamed and the monster slipped to the side, almost as if it was in two places at the same moment. Instead of cutting the monster in half, its arm was sliced off, flying through the air to land on a construction nearby, crushing a half built wall.

Zach grimaced and took a step forward. Then everything around him twisted, light flashed beneath his feet and his **Ripples of Time and Space** alerted him of the trap. His blade switched to Time as the light rose to envelop him, as his shadow deepened and lashed out at the light.

### **Rewind**

The light moved back for a moment, but then something pushed through disregarding his ability. The cage of light trapped him, and he felt space wrench around him.

**Telekinetic Armor** surrounded him, his mind expanded with **True Link—Nahamassa Plainrunner**. His eyes gazed at the cage as space trembled, as he was being pulled somewhere else. He opened himself up to the Aspects, to Time and pulled. The cage trembled and he felt it when it was no longer able to take him where it wanted. Instead, the teleport ended early, dropping him somewhere else. He had been moved, transported elsewhere, but now he had the time before whoever just tried to kidnap him arrived. He was not where they wanted him.

**[I Focused And Saw All Flaws]** showed him the weaknesses in the cage. He felt the space trembling, the teleport trying to activate again.

He saw a flaw line, it was tiny, barely there, but it was the largest one in the construct around him. With his free hand he pulled out his **Sealing Blade of Learning**, then triggered **Exploit Flaw** and **Arsenal Infusion: Wind**.

He dashed forward with the **[Arsenal Whirling Wings: Ethereal]** slashing at the cage and smashing out of it. The wind around the cage roared, a whirlwind raged around the cage, with Zach at its center. The

ground heaved as he rose into the air, as the trees around him were pulled out of the ground. He floated higher, keeping his attention on his senses, he couldn't see far from the dust and debris swirling around him.

Then, he felt the space tremble near him and he launched at the spot. Wings of wind blasted and the whirlwind changed direction, following him like a tempest. A shape stepped out of a line in space, an armor glowing with symbols, behind each shoulder six rods spread like wings.

Zach swiped with a hand and used **[Arsenal Binding Chains: Wind]**. Chains lashed out wrapping around the shape, its armor glowing breaking a few chains. But Zach was fast, he flew by the shape and pulled them with him, twisting and throwing them against the ground. The gale around him followed hitting the ground in a devastating explosion of dirt and trees, a shockwave of wind exploded outward, clearing the forest for miles in all directions.

As the dust settled Zach noticed the familiar mountains, he wasn't far away from Consequence. He turned back to the crater, walked to its edge where he saw the shape in the center stir.

“Stand still,” Zach said. “I will not warn you again.”

Whoever had done this had great strength, Zach could tell that the cage was very powerful. He had to subdue them quickly, then return to help with the monster.

The figure turned as it straightened, letting Zach see a silver and black armor that covered all of its body. It was smooth and covered in symbols. The wearer was tall and wide, more so than anyone Zach had met before. The body shape suggested a human, as he did not see a tail or horns.

“Oh?” The figure spoke as it saw him. “Well, this is a surprise, I did not expect you. I see that you have grown much, little visitor.”

Zach frowned. “Who are you?” He asked. Everything that he knew told him to run, he could feel the Essence around that armor trembling as it was forced to obey it.

The armored figure tilted its head. “Ah, it seemed like my gift was useful to you, beyond just being my ride back. I must thank you for that, I would not be here if not for you.”

Zach narrowed his eyes, his fingers tightened on his sword. Something about that voice was making him nervous, he felt an itch in the back of his head. He sensed Naha’s trepidation through their link.

Then the armored figure walked out of the crater, keeping its distance, and Zach didn’t move to stop them, he couldn’t.

Once they were out, the armor’s faceplate rippled revealing a face covered in white fur, wide lips and smile, big eyes with countless rings in them.

Flashes passed through Zach’s mind, fragments of images. A hole, chains, a sword being taken apart. Memories of so long ago.

“Ra’azel,” Zach whispered, the yeti, the enemy. The monster that had tricked him, that had used him.

The yeti smiled. “It seems like I need your help once more, little visitor.”

Symbols on his armor flashed, giving off an ominous light. Before even knowing what was happening Zach jumped out of the way, just in time to evade chains surging toward him.

The yeti laughed, and Zach got ready.