

Roles

The three warriors of the Zenshuen sect left the Twilight Melody Sect compound. Ryun kept his eyes on them as they moved out of sight, and then his sense beyond.

“Well,” Ryun glanced to the side where Anrosh, Nayra, and Lesamitrius stood. “That was interesting.”

Lesamitrius had an awed expression on his cat-like face, while Anrosh and Nayra looked more apprehensive.

“To just be known by such a great sect is an honor, Sect Head,” Lesamitrius said. “That they had actually sent a message... it is incredible.”

Ryun wasn't sure about that, but then again, he hadn't lived in the Infinite Realm from the start. One sect was the same as any other to him. He looked at the scroll in his hand, it had elaborately shaped pieces, and he was almost certain that it was colorful and impressive, too bad that it was wasted on his eyes.

He unfurled it and then looked at the sheet inside. Immediately he frowned as it was blank, he turned the other side and found it blank too. Like before, whatever it was made from incorporating ink and writing surface in the same item, meaning that he couldn't read it, it was uniformly one type of essence and his resonance sense told him that it was perfectly smooth.

Ryun grimaced and then offered it to Anrosh. “Can't read it, again,” he said as she carefully gathered the scroll from his hands. He almost laughed at her gentle touch. “What is this stuff made of anyway?”

Nayra cleared her throat and pulled her eyes from the scroll to meet Ryun's eyes. “It is made through an ability most often, some perks could probably do it too. It is common for administrator classes.”

Ryun blinked. “Huh, I guess that makes sense,” he said, it hadn't occurred to him that it was possible to do something like that. He wondered what that would do for the advancement of science in the Infinite Realm, what it had already done. There were so many things that were already different than they had been on Earth, add to that classes that could replace

technology and he was pretty sure that the future of this world would look incredibly different than anything he could imagine.

He shook his head and focused on Anrosh. “What does it say?”

Anrosh cleared her throat and then answered. “It is a party invitation, a masquerade party, for you, one guest, and one escort. It takes place in three days, at the Zenshuen palace.”

“Huh,” Ryun said. He wasn’t really a party person. “Any reason why we should go?”

Everyone turned to stare at him.

“Pardon, Sect Head,” Lesamitrius bowed his head as he stepped forward. “This isn’t really an invitation that offers a choice. Refusing a great sect would have grave consequences.”

Ryun looked at the others, seeing that all of them agreed with him. He sighed, realizing that this wasn’t the same as the situations he had gone through before. “Very well then, Anrosh, Nayra, the two of you will come with me.”

Nayra grimaced and then shook her head. “Uh, it might be better if I don’t go,” Nayra said.

Ryun blinked and tilted his head. She glanced at Lesamitrius and then back at Ryun.

“Can you do your,” she waved her hand in a circle, and he understood what she meant.

“Step back Lesamitrius,” Ryun said.

The ravzor immediately followed the instruction and Ryun raised a box of Void walls around them.

“What is this about?” Ryun asked.

“I don’t think that I should go,” Nayra repeated herself.

“Why not,” Anrosh asked.

“I have some protections, a formation that hides one of my titles which would betray where I come from if it is seen. But...” Nayra shook her head. “A gathering such as that will have a lot of really powerful people, some might be able to see through my protections. Of course, I doubt that anyone would waste the effort to do it on me, I am no one, but... We shouldn’t risk it.”

“Very well,” Ryun said and then lowered his walls. As soon as they were down he met Lesamitrius’ eyes. “Change of plans, you are coming with us.”

With that done, Ryun turned and walked away, first things first he needed to look through the auction, perhaps even visit some shops to see how expensive core improving elixirs were.

Ryun stood inside a shop in the merchant district. Riordan and Lesamitrius stood behind him as he looked down on the three elixirs that the shop owner presented to him. He found no core improving elixirs on the auction, since apparently they sold immediately. The reason why this shop had them, was simple, these were the most common elixirs which were cheap and easily reproduced. Like with the stat increasing elixirs, one could only drink a core improving elixir of a certain type a few times before it lost its effectiveness. Which was why anything new that came up at auction was quickly picked up by someone who could use it.

“As you can see these are the basic core improving elixirs that any self-respecting Cultivator must consume, depending on the quality of your core you may be able to drink one of each type up to three times, with at most 20% loss with each next consumption.”

Ryun grimaced, each of the elixirs would increase his core capacity by 1%. With diminishing returns, assuming that he could drink one type three times, he wouldn’t even get 10% increase, or perhaps he would, with each drink his total would increase slightly, but he wasn’t that good at math to know for sure. Regardless, the truth didn’t change.

The one good thing was that the type of elixir he had consumed before wasn’t anything like these ones, so he could definitely use them. He had spent nearly one million Celestial Essence since they arrived here, with his own and Anrosh’s advancement—the Essence he bought for both of them as well as the method for her body forging. The aspect removing elixir and the few items he bought were nothing compared to that, plus he had sold some of his items, not all just yet since he was waiting for the big auction. Regardless, he

still had roughly a million and half Celestial Essence. His year of traveling had been profitable, he had used Reave as he had been able, which wasn't always on cooldown. Battles weren't that clean, sometimes he couldn't risk it, other times the monster died before he could do it. But he had done it a fair amount of times. With everything else he encountered, he had been sitting at around two and a half million Celestial Essence. And already he was down to nearly half that number. He shook his head as he realized just how expensive everything was.

“How much are these?”

“100 Celestial Essence each,” the merchant said.

Ryun looked at the elixir in his hand then back at the merchant. “Do you have any stronger ones?”

“Sadly, stronger elixirs of this type are hard to make. Alchemists prefer to sell them on the auction.”

Ryun understood why, Cultivators would pay great sums for such items.

“How many do you have in stock?” Ryun asked.

“I have a couple dozen of each type, honored lord,” the merchant said, his tone turning more respectful than it had been just moments before.

Ryun didn't care, but both Lesamitrius and Riodan bristled at that.

“Sect Head,” Lesamitrius whispered. “If you wish to buy in bulk, I am sure that we can get a better deal by going to the alchemists themselves.”

Ryun blinked, he hadn't thought about that. True, he had planned on buying more of them, some for Anrosh and Nayra, and the rest for them to use for the sect.

“I'll take three of each,” Ryun turned back to the merchant, and he saw the man's expression falter for a moment before he nodded his head disappointed.

As the merchant walked into the back room to retrieve the elixirs, Ryun turned to Lesamitrius. “Find an alchemist willing to sell us these common core elixirs in bulk, and inquire into any who are free to work on a stronger version. I want to know how much it would cost.”

Lesamitrius inclined his head and immediately left the shop, too fast for Ryun to tell him that he didn't mean right that second. He shook his head in surrender.

“The boy only wishes to please you, Sect Head,” Riodan whispered.

Ryun turned around to look at the older ravor. From Anrosh he had learned that the man had served Lesamitrius’s father for a long time. He had come along when Lesamitrius returned to keep his word.

“He has proven himself useful to the sect, he doesn’t need to hang on my every word,” Ryun told him.

The ravor grinned. “If you had known him before, you wouldn’t not have said that. He is greatly changed, and it is thanks to you.”

“How so?”

“Young Master had grown up with the best trainers the Green Rain Sect could offer, surrounded by people hoping to gain his favor, and by extension that of his father who is a Sect Leader,” Riodan’s expression softened. “He had... grown accustomed to being important, to having everything that he wished for. And he did have talent, his father had seen it and he pushed him to grow. But... as often happens in the sects, children of Sect Leaders come to believe that they are better than others, simply by virtue of others telling him that is so. His father is a Peak Heavenly Cultivator, close to the Immortal Realm, and Lesamitrius had always assumed that would be his path as well.”

“What does that have to do with me?” Ryun asked.

“He did not think that your sect was worthy of having someone like him, after you returned. Well, serving directly under an Immortal Realm Cultivator, especially one such as you is a great honor. And I am grateful that you had allowed us in your inner circle, Lesamitrius has learned a lot from you.”

Ryun blinked, he hadn’t been under an impression that he had been teaching anything, aside from perhaps a few suggestions during their training sessions.

“From watching how you present yourself, Sect Head,” Riodan clarified. “How you speak to others.”

Ryun didn’t know what to say to that, so he remained silent. The merchant came out and with a box and one of those small interfaces. Ryun transferred the funds and they left, walking in silence. Ryun spent the time thinking about what Riodan had said. He had never really considered himself a role model, but apparently he was one.

“They are something that any strong person should have,” Riodan whispered as the two of them looked down at a box filled with rings.

“How effective are they?” Ryun asked.

Riodan shrugged. “They are not going to stop someone who is extremely powerful, some perks are greater than others. But... if a person was that strong, then I doubt that they would have a need to read you in the first place.”

Ryun nodded his head, it made sense to him. He picked up three rings in his hand and read their screens.

Ring of Privacy	+10 to Intelligence The Ring of Privacy prevents people from reading your screens. Works on Powers up to and including tier four.
Ring of Greater Privacy	+50 to Intelligence The Ring of Greater Privacy prevents people from reading your screens. Works on powers up to and including tier five.
Megor’s Ring of Privacy	+360 to Intelligence Once per week you may change the wording on one of your perks or titles, change lasts for 1 hour. Obscures your screens from prying eyes. Will prevent readings from all but the most powerful powers.

“I can’t tell how good any of this is,” Ryun said.

“Reading powers and items are rare, so any one of them is good I guess. Although, chances are that you will encounter someone in the tournament that does have a power or an item that can do that. Though I doubt that it will a higher tiered power or item. Most combat specialists would think that taking a reading power at a high tier was a waste when they could take a more powerful perk.”

Ryun grimaced. His **Reaper’s Aura** was more conditional it seemed. A lower tier perk would still work on him if the one using it was on a higher tier of power than he was. He hadn’t felt the need to have protection so far, he wasn’t important, no one was going to go out of their way to read his screens. But now that he was past the first round of the qualifiers, and when he had somehow attracted the eye of a great sect. Well, now he thought that he should have something.

He sighed and gestured for the merchant to come, he made his decision.

A day after his small shopping trip, Ryun headed out of the tournament city, alone. His first fight had gone well, but he was more aware now that he needed to watch his Qi. True, during that fight he hadn’t really been conserving it. He had flooded the stage with threads of his Qi, making points all over it so that he could raise walls quickly. It was an expense that he wasn’t going to repeat again.

The elixirs had helped somewhat. He had taken three of each common elixir, and gotten a total of 7.2 percent increase on his core size, a bit over that if one accounted the cumulative increases. A higher grade elixir order would cost him 500,000 Celestial Essence, which he wasn’t sure was worth it. The alchemist that Lesamitrius found promised at least 15% increase, which would be great for Ryun, but it was only one elixir for that amount of Essence. It might be better for him just to advance his second path and upgrade his perks.

Although he didn't really want to do that. The longer he waited, the more things he did before advancing it, the better his upgrades would be. He could see now why immortals didn't advance, why rush to gain power when you can spend a few hundred years training and accumulating achievements, then get something truly powerful.

It was... a tricky situation.

Still, Ryun put the thought of advancement out of his head. He didn't need to do it now, and so he would wait.

Once he was far enough away from the city, and the night had fallen he jumped and started shaping steps. Flying high toward the end of the sky, where Void called to him. He pushed himself in, and settled into the seventh layer, where he could survive comfortably. He started to draw in Essence, then split his mind and focused once more on trying to figure out his ideal.

His understanding of an ideal was that it needed to be something that tied all the things inside of him together. And yet, he got a sense that there was room there for him to guide it, to make a decision, to force himself into a direction. The only problem was that he didn't know what that direction should be.

My word, is my bond.

My power, is my right.

My word grants me a path.

My power grants me a purpose.

All things have an end.

The words echoed inside of him, the words that he had already discovered. His entire being held within it several different forces, similar enough that they could fill the roles for each other. His Path was that of the Final End, a destruction of everything. The pieces that he had inherited from the Aspect of True Death were about the ultimate death, something that had no remedy. His Void Qi was annihilation of everything that was other than it. His Class was of a thing that consumed everything in its path. His secondary path of a thing that was unwavering, unbreakable.

He was sitting inside the Void, an emptiness that had form—Essence. The emptiness that contained everything.

He felt like it would be so easy to allow all those influences to guide him, to make him into something that wanted only to destroy everything around it. But he was not just those parts of himself, he was a person, and he got to choose.

His *word* was important to him, it was his *bond*.

His *power* he had earned, paid for with blood and tears, it was his *right*.

His *word* to other was what guided him, what propelled him forward in life and granted him a *path*.

His *power* was what enabled him to do what he wanted, to grow stronger was part of his *purpose*.

He knew that all things had an *end*, everything would eventually come to a halt.

He knew that ultimately, everything was fated to return to the *emptiness* which existed before, from which all that now existed was born. And perhaps, after this thread reached its final end, something else could begin.

All things will return to oblivion.

But it was there that he saw beauty, in the moments that had happened and that were fleeting. At the end of a life, he could look back and see its worth. A man that had lived a life in service to others, and then died after he committed horrible would have the worth of his life diminished. And a man that had lived a life full of horrible acts, and then died doing something good would have his worth increased. One could never know the final tally before the end. Ryun had done horrible things, yet, by the time his end came, perhaps he could do enough things that others considered good that the scales would tip.

He didn't know what good was, not really, he looked at those around him to show him the way. Anrosh, Nayra, now Lesamitrius, who for some reason looked up to him.

And so he tried to think about what his ideal should be.

With the Void burning through his conduits, he let his mind flow free, thoughts flashing through his minds. To see the final end appealed to him, he was immortal, perhaps he could survive until that moment came. To look at other lives and see the glory and tragedy in them. To witness them, to see their final end. From his understanding of what the Void was, of the knowledge that everything had to have come from nothing, existence from oblivion, he felt through to something new.

The End is the beginning.

His thoughts resonated within himself, and he felt like he was close. When someday, all returned to oblivion, it would herald the possibility of something new, something that he couldn't even imagine. It resonated, and started to build up deep inside of him, feeling as if it would burst.

I am—

His line of thought burst apart. And then whatever had been building settled back down again, deflated, and Ryun lost the thread. He sighed, frustrated, and yet elated that he had made more progress. He shook his head and then started his descent out of the Void.