

Inspiration

Ryun sat across from Tali, both gazing at each other intently. She was healing, albeit slowly. Her scars had retreated, her eyes regenerated. She was stronger now, some of her passive powers had been returned to her. She just... carried herself better. She looked healthier, though her face was still somewhat scarred. To Ryun's eyes, the Essence inside her body was getting... *healthier* too.

Tali was many things to him. A teacher in some ways, an example or perhaps even a warning in others. He did not deny that she had done a lot for him. That she had shared a lot, that she had taught him many things that had ultimately helped him. Yet he did not agree with her regarding a few things, perhaps even with most.

He was so tired from having to defend his views. Everyone seemed to think that his way of advancement was somehow wrong, as if they were the greatest experts on the topic just because they had reached a destination beyond his. Because they had done it in a way that differed than his.

Ryun knew that there were countless roads to the same place. He did not need to walk in their footsteps. In fact, he didn't want to. His Path was his own, no one else's. He would rise on his own, or not at all.

"You are going to do what?" Tali asked.

He doubted that she hadn't heard him the first time, but he indulged her and repeated himself.

"I am going to attempt the inspiration for the Evolved Realm," Ryun said calmly.

Tali's single functional eye bore into him, and he could almost see her disapproval.

"That's a mistake, it is too soon. You've barely been an immortal for a handful of years and you don't know what you need to do. You will cripple yourself."

And there was the crux of their disagreement—time. She believed that time was something that he needed, as if it was some magical currency that made people greater. No, Ryun didn't believe that. He was... disappointed in

those who did. It was as if someone had taught them that time was so precious when they were children and now they preached about what they had been taught long ago, without really understanding the matter themselves. Time was important, but no more than all the other things that made a path. Talent most definitely, understanding of what you wanted to do and be. Will to persevere and push oneself forward with no regard to what anyone else said. Ryun advanced through strife, through battle, through his sheer inner willpower. Through his own understanding of his Path. It was what the Framework was made for, to give shape to actions, feats, understanding, and instinct. A Class changed based on what one did in the world, a Path changed based on what one accomplished with their body, and a Skill changed based on understanding of it.

Time might be of use for that, to some. But it was not a requirement, not by a long shot.

“I disagree,” Ryun said simply.

Tali narrowed her eyes at him. “Do you think that I know nothing? That I would try and hurt you somehow? Do you think that my wisdom is worthless?”

Ryun laughed, surprising her.

“You laugh at me,” Tali said slowly.

Ryun shook his head. “Not at you, Tali. At what you said.”

“Can you enlighten me then? What was it that you found so entertaining about my words?”

“I trust you Tali, with my life, with my advancement,” Ryun placed a hand over his chest and smiled at her. Then he took a deep breath and shook his head. “Everyone seems to think that somehow age equaled wisdom. That time makes people smarter and better. It doesn’t. It is a lie, a delusion that most seem to take for the truth. It was the same on my old world, on Earth.”

Ryun remembered how it was, before the Framework, and even after. It was a human failing, the fact that they took the words of their elders as truth. He didn’t disagree that they could have wisdom, he trusted Tali after all. But that wisdom of theirs had to be taken carefully. For their wisdom was tempered by their understanding, their learning, the things that they had experienced. A man that was brought up in a world that shunned all

technology would obviously not be able to give advice on its use. Tali had grown in a world where time and careful advancement was accepted as the only way.

But Ryun didn't agree. He didn't think that it was the only way.

"How so?" Tali asked, her voice tense.

"Do you know how many wise and old people there were on my world? People with positions of power, who guided the world and made its rules? Countless. But in truth, most of them were just old and stupid. People left behind by time, making decisions for generations coming after them into a world that they didn't understand. What was their wisdom? Experience and age? Fuck that, they were not better equipped to tell others what to do just because they were old," Ryun said, heat entering his tone. "They believed in things that they were taught as children, the things that shaped their growth to adulthood, and rarely did they change enough in their age. A man that had lived a long life filled with many experiences was somehow supposed to be wise, but in truth, he was just a man set in his ways. Preaching advice based on things that he knew. Do you know how many such *old* and *wise* people I met in the core? How many times I had someone look down at me without even knowing who I am or what I had done simply because they were old and wise. They do not look with their own eyes, they do not seek to learn more, but make judgments based on things that they believe to be true."

"You think that I am the same as these people?" Tali said slowly.

"No, Tali. I do not believe that you are like them. I am sure that some people are truly wise, but not because of things that they know. Because they are open to things that are not in their experience."

"Yet, you don't want to listen to anything that I have to say," Tali told him almost triumphantly.

"I listen to everything that you say Tali. I take all of your advice; I just do not act on all of it. I am not a follower; I will never just do something because someone else told me to. I walk *my* path, no one else's. Wasn't that exactly what you yourself had done in the past?"

She leaned back at that, almost as if she hadn't considered it. "What I did, works. We refined the process over a long time. Why are you so against just listening?"

“To what? How many of you had reached the final Realm of a Path? You all have gotten your own inspirations in your own unique ways, and then you pushed that onto others. Showed them things, let them take their time to figure it out. I don’t need time. I never did. It is not about time for me, it is about something that I cannot quite put into words,” Ryun closed his eyes and tried to find the right words to explain. Finally, he sighed. “It is no use, I cannot explain it to you. It would be as if I was trying to describe colors to a blind person. I understand what they are, I can use words to describe it, but ultimately the blind person has no concept of color in the first place.”

Tali looked pensive for a few moments and then sighed as well. “I just worry that you will do something that will cripple your advancement. You don’t even know what you need to do for the next—” She paused as she saw Ryun’s smile. She had refused to tell him what he needed to do for the next advancement. But Ryun had a pretty good idea about it. Each Realm’s inspiration followed a certain logic. It was all about improving one’s path, about improving Cultivation.

“I don’t need your hints Tali. You think that everyone should have them, yet you did not have someone teach you what you needed to do. You did it on your own. I have it easier, your presence alone is enough for me to understand.”

She looked at him and then he saw her face twitch. “You are that confident that you understand what the next step is?”

“I *know* my Path,” Ryun said. “Cultivation is my life.”

Tali nodded. “Do as you will. It isn’t like I can change your mind or stop what you from doing anything,” she paused, then her expression turned grave. “You have a lot of talent for Cultivation Ryun, more than anyone I have ever met. I know that you listen, that you take what you think is useful and discard the rest. I just worry that a day will come when you disregard something that is important.”

“If that day comes, I will not despair Tali. I will follow my Path in my own way, no matter what.”

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Ryun floated inside of the Void. Tier 9 of the Void was still enough to hurt him, even now, though it happened very slowly. He focused inward, his **|Divided Mind|** active. He was still in the Mid Immortal Realm, but inspiration could be done any time, even before a Realm it was necessary for. Regardless, he felt like he had gotten all that he could as far as benefits for his core were at this stage. And he planned on advancing to Peak Immortal soon.

He had given much thought to inspiration and what it meant. Each inspiration had two parts, one an action that had to happen, an improvement on the Cultivator's Path. For Foundation Realm it had been proficiency with using techniques and willingness to use them to further the precept of one's Path. It was a simple inspiration, though some might struggle with it. For Ryun it had never been an issue. Advancement to Lord Realm required cycling and changing at least 1 technique. It was a demonstration of willingness to devote oneself to a Path, to understanding the small pieces of it. Each person did so in a different way, which was why inspiration was different for every person.

Monarch required changing all techniques by oneself. A demonstration that one wanted to understand and improve upon the Path. That they wished to leave their Path greater than it was at the start. It required one to believe that they had something of worth to add. Again, it was something that Ryun had always understood.

Heavenly Realm had required forging of conduits, improvement on the way that one used the Path. Improving one's ability to utilize their Path, and accepting who they were.

Immortal had been about forging a body, about tempering it in the Aspect that shaped the Path. And for him, it had been about what his power was to him.

And now, he believed that he knew what the inspiration for the Evolved Realm was all about. In the core, he had been around people who were in the Evolved Realm, Selia and Erdania. And here he had Tali who hadn't told him what her Realm was, but he was fairly certain that she was at least Evolved.

But there was a certain logic to all inspirations, and in the order in which one gained perks. Peak Heavenly forged a body and aspect. It changed

the way a person lived, in preparation for the Immortal Realm, when one became ageless and difficult to kill.

What had changed for Ryun was simple. His body was now made out of the Aspect of Void. It only pretended to work in the way that his old body on Earth did, it didn't truly work that way anymore. Here in the Void he couldn't breathe, he couldn't feel anything and yet he survived. And that was what he believed the Evolved Inspiration to be. Acceptance, coming to terms with the fact that his body was no longer anything like his mortal self. He had no need to breathe, it didn't do anything for him. He had no air inside his blood that fueled his cells, he had none of those anymore. The air didn't help anything to him, it was just... a habit. In battle, he had found himself breathing deeply, but that was just a symptom of his body getting tired, getting more air into his body didn't do anything.

And so he focused his mind, trying to accept the fact that he was no longer mortal. He forced his body to stop feeling the need to breathe. Pushed at his mind, bending his willpower to it. He focused on the second small core inside his body, the one that he filled with Void as sustenance. He tried to replace the sensation of need with it, because that was what his body now ran on, not air or food or anything else like that.

He had known about this ever since he had changed his body with his forging perk. And he had tried to improve on this aspect even before the tournament. Though, he had only really given it more effort after he had returned to the sect three years ago.

None of the other Evolved Realm Cultivators that Ryun had seen at the tournament needed to breathe. Oh, they pretended, it had taken Ryun a while to see it. But in battle against the monsters in the arena, he had felt them fight. And Tali was the same, she pretended like she needed to do it, but she too had no need of it. She sustained herself some other way. He didn't know how exactly, but it felt similar to the way that Erdania had done it, which made him think that her Aspect had something to do with Gravity. Though he didn't have a lot of time to truly investigate.

He felt like that was the key to evolving further, entering the next realm as a being that was evolved beyond what he had been before.

Time passed and he lost any sense of it. A part of his mind was aware that he had long since passed the point where he usually felt like he was suffocating, but he didn't stop. He continued sitting inside the Void, pulling Essence inside his core as he focused on feeling the Void inside his body.

But he also tried to focus on what the rest of his inspiration was, because it wasn't just an act it was also more than that. And that always came down to something about a Path. He had decided that it was going to be about witnessing the End of things, waiting for that one moment where all things came to an end. It was about... survival, about enduring until all else met its end. Witnessing it all.

And he was Void, and Void endured.

All things have an end — nothing lasts forever

All things will return to oblivion — Reality is all, and it is nothing

He could feel it clicking into place. He was Void, and even if all things came to an end, they would just return to oblivion, a nothingness that had been there before and will be there after.

A moment later, he felt as if he could truly feel his body for the first time. There were deeper secrets there, but he didn't understand them yet. A notification flashed in his vision.

Body and Aspect Boundary Overcome
Congratulations, you've overcome the body and aspect boundary.
Reward:
-Gain +50 to intelligence
-Gain -50% to sustenance consumption rate.

He smiled as he read through the notification and then he started pushing himself out of the Void.

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Ryun sat high in the air, just outside the Void boundary. He felt the cold air on his skin, but it didn't touch him the same way as it had before. His body had been pretending to act like it had been before, but now... the cold was something that he mentally noticed but it no longer bothered him. He wasn't breathing, and he had found that it didn't make him feel weak or as if he was suffocating. He had achieved what he believed to be his inspiration for the next Realm. Now, he only needed to test that out. His core was full with Void Essence and he triggered his advancement.

The Essence in his Core trembled and pushed at his core, improving it and the quality of his Qi. As soon as the change finished, a notification showed up.

NEW PATH PERK AVAILABLE	
Greater Swift Mind (Path Perk)	Your mind is swift. Your thoughts travel at increased speeds, gain +500% to thought speed. Increases the ability to alter the perception of time by 200%. Gain +15% to intelligence.

Like stamina and core perks before it, this one too had no choice. It was the result of his previous perks. But he was satisfied with what he had gotten. It improved his passive thinking speed and buffed his other mind perk. Being able to increase his thought speed and basically slow down time for himself had saved him countless times. It wasn't a flashy or greatly powerful perk, but it was exactly what he needed.

Once he had finished reading the new perk, he pushed the window away and then pulled out his full screens. He moved through the windows until he reached his Cultivation. He made his way to his primary path and looked at his core. There, he saw what he had been looking for. The prompt to advance was there, though not available now of course, since his core was

empty. But its presence meant that he could advance to the Evolved Realm. He had been right about what the inspiration for the Evolved Realm was.

Now, all he needed to do was cycle and improve his core as much as he could. And then... then he could enter the next Realm.