

Endings

Zach and the dragon glared at one another. Things were wrong. He could move his eyes and his mouth, he could even move his feet and the fingers on his left hand, but everything else seemed frozen. His right hand was in the Time blade form and was suspended just above the Elder Dragon's head.

Somehow, the dragon had the power over time, they had both used their powers at the same time and they had interacted in a way that had done this to them. Both frozen and not. He could feel the time around them fluctuating, tensing up at whatever they had done.

He hadn't expected this, he had thought that he knew what the dragon was capable of. Elder Dragons always had two Aspects under their command, it was one of the things that made them dangerous. Zach had thought that it held the aspects of wood and some toxic cloud, but now... perhaps he had been wrong. Perhaps wood and the noxious breath that it used were one and the same. The Infinite Realm was filled with strange and unique Aspects, it could've been one aspect with different applications.

Zach pushed that out of his mind, the dragon and him were in a stalemate for now, but Zach's blade was hanging above the dragon's head like the sword of Damocles. The moment this frozen effect ended, his blade was going straight through the dragon's head, and he could feel the time around them trembling.

"You will die, chosen," the dragon spoke, its words echoing strangely in the Ethereal Realm. "The great crime will be avenged, wherever we find you, we will hunt you."

Zach looked at the dragon, at the pure venomous rage and hate in its eyes and tone. What he knew about the Elder Dragons was little; he knew that they were intelligent, that they could talk. But he also knew that they were monsters in truth, that they were greedy and bloodthirsty, and that they hated people. They compulsively gathered anything of value, items, gems, ore and even the bones of powerful monsters. They created their hoards and protected them violently. He

had met many intelligent monsters; shades in the Ethereal and others in the Real Realm. Now... he wondered, were the dragons another race like the shades and those others that most people thought were only monsters?

“You hate us, why?” Zach asked.

“Little pest,” the dragon sneered. “We hate you, we have always hated you, we always will. Because you are fragile and unworthy, because we wail at the promise that was broken. Because they let us all remember what they had done, because you were chosen over us. I know the pain and the suffering of those that came before, and if we cannot strike at them, we will do the next best thing.”

It was the same thing that he had heard before, although... He looked over the dragon, and he saw now what he hadn't before. It wasn't as large as most Elder Dragons were supposed to be and he remembered the way its scales were two different colors. A fully grown Elder Dragon was supposed to have scales of only one color. It wasn't fully mature. True, with its size that still meant that it was probably hundreds of years old, but... it shouldn't remember the things that happened before the Infinite Realm.

“That might be why your people hate us, but why do you?” Zach asked.

The dragon released a noise that took him a moment to recognize as laughter. “You kill us, is that not enough?”

“Perhaps. The Framework had made you monsters, the fuel for us, the chosen, to use and grow. But... you are not without blame; you kill people too. You, personally, had killed adventuring teams—they I could understand, survival and all that—but you've also attacked caravans that posed no threat to you. Still...” Zach said slowly.

He had some concerns with killing intelligent beings, ever since he realized that they had been just like the other nine races once in the Ethereal Dungeon. He had known about it before, of course, but it has been just a thing in the back of his head from when he met such monsters on Earth. The yeti had changed the way he saw things. He felt... sadness for the races that had come before, that hadn't been

chosen. But the yeti had also taught him that just because the former races had been wronged, it did not mean that they deserved special consideration. On the whole, the other races hated the chosen, and they always wanted to kill them.

But maybe... “We don’t need to kill each other; we might be able to come to an agreement.”

The dragon laughed again. “My kind are born with the memories of our line, I remember all. Back to the beginning when we were born in the fire of the stars. When we spread to other worlds and ruled lesser races. I remember the Framework’s arrival and all that came to pass after. I remember your kind hunting mine. There can never be agreement between us little pest, even if I wished it. The promise was broken and replaced with a contract that none of us can break. All that is left for us I to serve it and kill you in hope that something of what we once were can survive. I see it in your eyes, you think that you will win once this is over, you will not. I will sink my teeth into your weak flesh and drink your life’s blood.”

Well, that was that then. Zach met the dragon’s eyes, a being that had the memories of its ancestors, and saw a being ruled by its nature, bound by the Framework. He pitied the dragon, pitied the fact that it was trapped by the Framework. But it was not he who had done this to it, and he had his own goals to achieve. Once, he would’ve balked at something like this, but not now. He and Naha had a goal that they wanted to achieve. Enough power to live their lives in a way that they wanted to live them. Enough power that they could stand before anyone who tried to get in their way. Power to protect things that were important to them.

Unfortunately, the dragon was another stepping stone in his path toward that goal. It was going to die.

“I am not an adventurer,” Zach said to the dragon. “I didn’t come to hunt you for a contract or for your hoard. I am sorry for what I am about to do to you, but I think that neither one of us has much of a choice.”

The Infinite Realm had changed him, it changed everything. The world was not what he imagined it to be, nor was it ever going to be fair. He had lost people, and he had lost those that he loved, and he had watched others waste away and die. No more. There were horrors in this world that had to be fought, that had to be stopped. The things that he had fought in the Tournament City were on his mind constantly. He had seen the people running from them, had seen people's souls get ripped apart. He had fought those monsters, and he had seen how people ignored the threat. Even the Wardens had been forced to focus on other things that they deemed more important. It had... disappointed him to see that. But he knew that alone, he couldn't do anything. He needed power, and the monster in front of him was the way for him to gain that power.

The dragon growled and the effect that kept them frozen trembled again, Zach felt more of his body unfreezing. "You are weak and I am a Dragon."

It said nothing more and neither did Zach, there wasn't more to be said. The world wasn't kind, or fair, it was what it was. Zach had to come to terms with that, he didn't hesitate anymore.

The dragon was injured, but the others had aimed at non-critical areas. He didn't know if it still suffered from other effects still, but it didn't matter.

Most of Zach's perks were down, his **Old Heritage** had run out. But he still had a few that he could use, though whatever effect was holding him seemed to prevent power use so far. He got ready to act as soon as it was done.

His **Phantom Avatar** was active, and **Planar Mantle** gave him an additional boost since he was in the Ethereal Realm. In the time he had left, he planned his attack.

The freezing effect shattered, and everything happened in less than two seconds. The dragon unleashed his breath attack and Zach used **Spatial Evade** to flip midair. The branches from the dragon's armor grew, spikes growing toward him to entangle and stab him through, Zach ignored them. He activated his amulet, the **Shield of Elor**

burning through all of the charges at the same time, with his left hand he snapped forward as some of the wooden spikes shattered against his shield and others punched through. He released a wave of force from his bracer, a powerful cone attack that hit the dragon in the side of the neck.

The dragon was thrown off balance, but it managed to recover in an instant then throw itself at Zach—which was what he had been waiting for. Once the dragon was committed to a full-on attack, Zach blinked.

He appeared behind it Qi surging through his body and his right hand raised high as he switched his blade to Frost form and a sharp rapier shaping in his left hand. His right hand punched forward through the wood as he released **{Lightning Strike}**, stabbing the dragon through the neck just beneath its head. He felt it twitch from the lightning Qi entering its body, then he heard it gurgle as blood spilled into its throat chilled from his blade. He could hear the cracking as the blood froze and expanded, rupturing blood-vessels and creating more havoc in the dragon's body. He pulled himself close and wrapped his legs around the neck, using his blade as an anchor keeping him close to the dragon. The wood that protected it grew toward him, spikes broke through his armor in places, but Zach's other hand was already moving.

With **|Rending Strikes|** he stabbed his **Ethereal Sword** down toward the opening around the dragon's remaining eye. He threw in a **Dazzling Strike** for good measure, and his hand blurred as he stabbed a dozen times in less than a second. Blood exploded out of the wound as he pierced through the soft eye and through the thinner bone at the back of the socket and into the brain.

The dragon twitched, something hit Zach in the back, but then the monster collapsed to the ground.

Zach twisted his sword inside the wound for good measure, then he rolled over to the side and groaned as some of the wooden spikes broke off inside his body. All damage that one suffered in the Ethereal also deal damage to the soul. Zach was very grateful for his soul

resistance and regeneration right now. He remained on his back for a few moments before he got up and started removing the spikes from his body and then downed a healing potion.

He looked over at the dragon, seeing its body losing its physical form as the body couldn't survive for long in the Ethereal Realm, the soul however remained. He moved quickly and cut off its horns, then put them into his storage. The wooden armor was no more by the time he was done, and Zach could see the dragon, looking as it did in life, but with damage to its soul. His quest was finished, it didn't require true death, but the Zach doubted that the dragon's soul would survive for long like this. Still, he stood up and walked over, raising his blade and then slamming it down several times until he destroyed the soul. He had learned his lesson about allowing dangerous shades to go free.

He watched the soul fade away, and then turned around and walked through the rift that he had created.

He returned back to the Real Realm to see Basthec and Kethosi ready to enter, Naha stood a bit behind them. She had known that he was alive, both of their **True Links** were active.

"Is it dead?" Basthec asked.

Zach nodded his head. "It is."

The four of them stood inside the cavern, looking at the hoard. It was... bigger than Zach had thought. The floor was dented, and treasure was filling that dent and creating a mound above it.

"This is so much," Kethosi said.

"It is," Basthec said, then turned to look at Zach. "Our contract was for everything to be split equally between the five of us."

Zach nodded his head. "We will need to look through it all, and Naha and I have first pick on everything." They had made a contract for the mission, of course, but it didn't cover anything quite like this.

The two of them exchanged looks, and then nodded in agreement.

Kethosi took a deep breath. “Varia’s immortality will take a few years. We can leave her cut with the Guild, I suggest that the four of us cover the price for them holding her part.”

“We can do that,” Zach said, it was the least they could do.

“It was a good fight,” Basthec said. “It would’ve been much different out in the open. Dragons are terrifying if they manage to get into the air.”

Zach knew that the drake was just making conversation, none of them were quite ready to start exploring the hoard. But he was slightly surprised at how the fight went. He knew that adventurers knew their stuff. They had hit the dragon hard from the start.

Naha took a step forward and spoke. “We should get to it then.”

Zach was rummaging through the hoard, all of them were looking through different parts of the treasure. Zach had found a chest filled with Essence Crystals, although the bottom was ripped apart and the chest itself only half filled. There were items spread all over the hoard, in between the chests and pieces of rock and minerals. Not all of it was useful, some things were just shiny that had no real value, but there was a lot of stuff. They had literally discovered a treasure. Basthec had mentioned that the older Elder Dragons had greater hoards, but even this was incredible.

It was if he was being honest almost too much. An item caught his attention in the pile, and he reached down to pull bones the size of tree trunks away and pull it out. It was an axe, looking as if it was made out of black stone with red crystal running through it.

Great Axe Of Savage Strength	+400 to Strength Once per day you may activate Savage , increasing
-------------------------------------	--

	your base strength by 1000 and making you immune to pain.
--	---

It was a relic rarity item, and it wasn't the only one in there. He hadn't found anything that was useful for him, other than one storage ring that was about the size of a room and filled with a bunch of alchemical ingredients that he could probably sell for a lot of Essence.

He looked around, searching for more interesting items. He found a few Legendary daggers that weren't all that good, or at least weren't useful for him or Naha. He also found a bag that used to be filled with potions and elixirs. Only one elixir had survived while the rest had been broken and their contents long gone. The elixir was a strange one, it granted someone the ability to think on several things at once for a few minutes. Then he found something really interesting. It was in a box that was half crushed beneath a large glowing gem, but somehow the contents had managed to stay whole.

It was an elixir.

Elixir of Improved Power	Drinking this elixir will grant the user the ability to upgrade one Class Perk. Based on the Class rarity and level, the perk will be upgraded by 1 to 3 tiers of power.
---------------------------------	--

This was something very interesting that could help him. He had a few perks that were... a bit underwhelming if he was being honest.

"You found something?" Naha said from just over his shoulder. He had known that she was there as he had kept his **True Link** active. They had defeated the dragon, but... it wasn't that they didn't trust their companions, but he felt better being able to feel where Naha was at all times.

"Yes, here take a look," he showed her the elixir.

She took it in her hand and looked at a window that only she could see. “You should drink it after you level up.”

“You think that we should claim it?” Zach asked.

“Of course, perk upgrades come only on Class ups and on rare occasions such as this one. Its value is great, especially for a main Classer like you.”

Zach nodded his head and took the elixir back, placing it in his storage. They would go through all the loot together with the others once they had seen all that was there. Then they would decide on who got what.

Naha tilted her head at him. “You didn’t evolve your Class yet,” it was not a question.

“No, I wanted... privacy,” Zach said. Evolving a Class required a lot of reading and thinking about the direction of the evolutions. He had enough Essence to probably hit the next Class Evolution, though he didn’t plan on going beyond 15 or 30 levels into his next evolution. Not immediately, at least.

Naha smiled at him, then glanced at the others behind them, both were hunched over, looking through the treasure. “You should do it,” she told him. “I’ll watch over you and make sure that nothing happens.”

Zach made one last glance at the people on the other side of the cavern and then settled down on the ground and pulled his screens up.