

Act II - Ryun

They stepped onto the surface of another world, the night was dark the sky barely shining. There were so few stars left, the wolf knew. All was dying, the heat death of the universe was upon them. The end of all things, a True Death.

The wolf followed the scythe as they walked to a ring of stone where others already stood, waiting.

An Aspect greeted them, she brought the fists of all three sets of her hands together over her chest and bowed her head. "Scythe, Reaper, welcome. I wasn't sure if you would accept the invitation."

"Zha Miya," the scythe greeted the other Aspect in return, while the wolf only growled.

"There is not much else to do," the wolf said.

Zha Miya, the Aspect of Space sighed. "I understand your reticence, but this is our only hope."

"It is not—" the wolf started.

"—what we were promised," the scythe finished.

"It is reality," Zha Miya said.

The wolf shook his head as he and the scythe moved into the circle of stone, they found a spot away from the others, preferring the isolation to the company of other Aspects. There wasn't that many of them left, only the most powerful of Aspects still lived. The laws, concepts, and the few elements that still existed, like Light and Dark. But the wolf could see that they were ragged, dying as they lost the sources of their power. The end was coming for them all, and only a few of them were still at full power. True Death, Space, Time, the others... they would not last long.

The Aspects were talking amongst themselves as Zha Miya stepped into the center of the gathering.

"I thank you all for coming. I will not draw this out, you all know why we are here. The end of reality itself is near. You have all been given an offer by the Dealmaker, I wish only to convince you to take it."

The wolf growled softly and then opened his mouth. “The Three are capricious and vain. This was not what they promised when they breathed us into existence,” the wolf rasped.

Zha Miya turned her head and met the wolf’s eyes. “The offer comes from the Dealmaker, not the three.”

“The Dealmaker is the extension of the Three,” the scythe spoke with her melodic voice. “Is his will not also theirs?”

“His offer comes independent of what the Three desire,” Zha Miya said. “We are too insignificant to them now.”

“He wants to change us, to make us less than what we are,” the wolf warned.

“That is preferable to death,” Zha Miya said.

“No, old friend. We were made to embody the Grand Laws of the Three,” the scythe started. “We are tiny pieces of their reflection. Our very existence reveals the truth. We are the Aspect of True Death, and that means that all things have an end. Even the Three.”

Zha Miya grimaced, looking away uncomfortably. But she and the other Aspects had never really been comfortable with the idea that they would one day die. And now they were looking for anyway to prevent that, even if it meant changing what they were. “Regardless, the Dealmaker made an offer, and I believe that we should accept.”

The wolf shook his head, looking around and then he—

Ryun woke up. *Another dream...* he thought to himself, even as the memory became less and less clear inside his mind. Another remnant from the Aspect of True Death whose power he had taken. He didn’t understand what he was seeing most of the time, and he wondered how long it was going to last. He shook his head and got up from the bed that he had dragged up onto the roof. He had gotten a lot of strange looks when he did that, but no one said anything, a perk of being the leader. Since he had to wait for Kri to wake up before they could continue with her improvements he decided that he didn’t want to sit on hard tiles. So, the bed. He had been practicing his |**Resonance Sense**| skill, working on his quest.

Judging from the intensity of the sun, he had slept for not even an hour. He didn't need much in order to get rest, a couple of minutes every few weeks or more. But that meant that he still had time before Kri woke up. He focused on her sleeping form directly beneath him, in Anrosh's room. Kri was sleeping in the bed, and Anrosh was sitting on a desk that had been brought into the room and worked, a pile of papers on one side of the table. Eerv was down in the office, talking with the two Territory Leaders. And Tali was in the training hall, apparently meditating.

Ryun sighed and decided to practice some more. He had gotten pretty good at excluding everything and focusing just on a single source of resonance. But he had barely scratched his quest, as it was a lengthy one. Which was why he had been trying to evolve the skill without the quest. If he was correct, he only needed understanding of the skill. So he was going through mental ideas and theories, trying to broaden his understanding of the skill.

He focused on a source of resonance, a nail sticking out of a piece of wood on the roof. It made a resonance every time the air touched it, but also from vibrations that were transferred from the wood it was nailed in.

He tried to figure out how the skill worked. His range was incredible, beyond even the walls of the town. In its basic form, the skill let him sense vibrations, waves that occurred when two things interacted with one another. A foot hitting the ground, expelling of air, air hitting a solid object. The more his skill advanced, the more depth and precision his sense got. But he was certain that he wasn't sensing the vibrations themselves, or at least not in how an ordinary person might. Everyone could feel vibrations, if they were strong enough, loud music with high bass would be easy to be felt, something heavy hitting the ground as well. But in all of those cases, the vibration had to reach the person in order for them to sense it. Which wasn't the case for Ryun. He didn't need to wait for the wave to reach him, instead he felt everything at the source.

He tried to think of how that was possible. Obviously he wasn't using any of his human senses, the skill was adding a new sense to him. One that apparently sensed vibrations instantaneously at their source. Then, a new thought appeared inside his head. *Or it just appears like it is instantaneous,*

Ryun told himself. He could also be sensing something that was moving faster than the speed of the waves.

Inside his head, he was focusing only on the nail, to the exclusion of everything else. He could feel the air hitting it and resonating. It did feel like a vibration, but also not. And then he had another idea, perhaps he was sensing the disturbance in space itself. Everything had its own frequency, its own resonance, and he could feel all of them. It was what made him able to discern different objects without his eyes.

Finally, he tried to compile everything that he knew. His skill worked on something that was either instantaneous or far faster than the speed at which the wave was propagating. Possibly faster than light, which meant that he was probably sensing the resonance in the space itself.

He felt his skill shake, something coming over him as he broadened his understanding. He could feel a pressure inside his head, as his skill neared evolution.

And then... he lost it, and his concentration with it. His mind started taking in all of his surroundings and he sighed. He felt like he had been so close to evolving it then, but it just slipped through his fingers. And he lost his focus, failing to keep it on a single source of resonance for a full hour.

Ryun grimaced and shook his head. He didn't know what would be a better idea, to push the quest or try and gain understanding. Finally, he refocused on the nail and continued with the quest.

The next day, found Ryun, Tali and Anrosh inside a room with Kri, a bathtub filled with alchemy potions in front of them. There had been some discussion about allowing Ryun inside, since Kri would need to take her clothes off. But in the end, Tali and Anrosh decided that it was alright. He didn't really know what the problem was. His senses had already allowed him to sense the shapes of everyone's body around him. Their clothes didn't hide anything from him. Of course, he knew enough now not to tell them that.

Kri disrobed and entered the tub. She would need to soak in it for several days, in order to gain the most stats from it. They had already had her

drink enough to get the **Alchemical Tester** title, since using the lowest quality potions wasn't all that wasteful. They had used a lot more resources for the bath, Eerv wasn't exactly happy that Ryun had raided the sects vaults for them, but he didn't object much. Still, they were investing a lot in Kri, and Ryun wanted to do everything right for her.

Kri shivered as the potions sizzled around her, none were really all that high grade, since the really powerful potions were extremely rare. But they were sufficient.

"Calm, endure it," Ryun told her. "This will make you stronger."

He sensed her nod her head, but she didn't respond out loud. Ryun hoped that she would gain enough stats to offset the lack of a class. They had focused on giving her stats that she would need the most, which were wisdom as her main one and endurance so that she was a bit tougher. But, now was also a time for her to show them her screens and for them to see her perks. Kri had just woken up when they hustled her into the room with the tub waiting.

Ryun and Tali sat on chairs next to her tub, and had Kri take both of their hands into hers and make her screens notifications visible so that they could see her choices. It took a few tries for her to get it right, they had to guide her through how to do it in the first place. And then Ryun saw her choices inside of his head.

Path Perk available: Body Enhancement	
Body of Cold	Your body is touched by cold. Damaging effects of the Cold have 50% less effect on you. Your body is filled with the essence of the cold, strength and endurance increase depending on the temperature around you. Strength of effect depends on wisdom stat.
Body of Iron	Your skin is harder to pierce, your bones harder to break, your flesh harder to part.

	Strength of effect depends on endurance stat.
Body of the River	Your body's movements become more fluid, your reaction speed increases. Strength of effect depends on the dexterity stat.

Two of her first perk choices were the same ones that he had. But she had the one tied to her aspect, which was the only real choice for her. He knew that she would be able to upgrade it later when she got the second path. Her cycling was going to make her techniques stronger, but it wouldn't impact all of her perk choices until after Peak Lord. According to Tali, she would get better choices for perks tied to her Qi aspect only. He moved to the next perk choice.

Path Perk available: Mind Enhancement	
Fortified Mind (Path Perk)	Your mind is fortified, able to resist mind altering effects. Strength of effect depends on intelligence stat.
Quickened Mind (Path Perk)	Your mind is quickened, able to think faster than an ordinary human. Strength of effect depends on intelligence stat.
Perceptive Mind (Path Perk)	Your mind is perceptive, able to see through illusions and stealth effects. Strength of effect depends on intelligence stat.

Again she got some of the choices that he had, but he knew that the **Fortified Mind** would be the most useful. She didn't have the perks that he had, and protecting one's mind was the most important thing. Ryun had encountered monsters that could mess with his mind, it was incredibly dangerous.

Then, he turned to her last choice.

Path Perk available: Core Enhancement	
Grand Core (Path Perk)	Your Qi core is reforged, you can expel your Qi out of your core faster. +20% to core size, +10% to wisdom stat. Strength of effect depends on wisdom stat.
Bottomless Core (Path Perk)	Your Qi is a bottomless well. Increase core capacity by 250%, reduce Qi replenishment rate by 90%. +20% to wisdom stat. Increases Essence draw in rate based on wisdom stat.
Cold Forged Core (Path Perk)	Your Qi core is forged by the Essence of the Cold. Increased core capacity by 40%, increased core density by 20%, -20% to Qi speed, +20% to wisdom stat. Using techniques lowers the temperature in the air around you.

His path required something with greater amount of Qi, since all of his techniques were extremely costly. And seeing her choices, it seemed clear what they should have her pick. But he wanted to check how her techniques had changed before making the final decision. Ryun asked Kri to show them the techniques and the screens changed.

Cold Mantle	Increase all stats by 37.5% (30%) of their total while technique is active. The bonus stats increase gradually depending on the temperature around you, up to additional 25% (20%).
Cold Breath	Send out a wave of cold Qi from your mouth, dealing Absolute Cold energy damage equal to 4.75x (3x) your wisdom. The wave freezes anything that it touches,

	dealing frostbite damage equal to quarter total damage dealt over the next fifteen seconds.
Cold End	Unleash a sphere of Absolute Cold energy all around you, the energy deals Absolute Cold damage equal to 5x (4x) your wisdom. Anything hit by the attack takes one quarter of the total damage dealt as frostbite over the next fifteen seconds.

All of her techniques were generic upgrades of the techniques that he had developed, just flavored by her aspect. It was interesting to see how different aspects give different effects to techniques. Each aspect had a different effect of course, so her **Cold End** wouldn't destroy everything around her, instead it would probably freeze everything. There were some interesting things that they could do with that. But first they had to choose perks.

“Do you have any ideas, Kri?” Ryun asked.

The girl was still shivering in the tub, and Ryun wondered what the potions felt like. They weren't damaging her skin from what he could tell. But they had to have an effect.

“I—I trust y-you,” Kri said.

Ryun nodded his head and asked Tali for her opinion. For the most part, they agreed, except for the mind upgrading perk.

“She needs to have something to help her protect her mind,” Ryun insisted.

The demasi woman snorted. “People with such powers are rare, and there are other perks that can do the same thing, better perks.”

“I disagree,” Ryun said. “You had the luxury of having a better perk to protect your mind. There is no telling if she will have the same fortune. And just because people with such powers are rare, it does not mean that they are not dangerous.”

To illustrate, Ryun flashed his [**Bringer of Sorrow**] focusing on Tali. He felt her wince at his attack, and then stiffen as she turned her head in his direction. He figured that she wanted to glare at him, but the gesture was pointless since neither one of them could see.

“Fine,” she said in the end. “It isn’t a bad choice, I would’ve just made a different one.”

Ryun understood that she had a great well of knowledge, experience even. But he had some as well. Protecting the mind was the most important thing. He would know, since he spent a big chunk of time with a mental barrier in his head.

They told Kri what to choose, and she followed their instructions. In the end she picked **Body of Cold, Fortified Mind, and Cold Forged Core**. With that part of her advancement done, Ryun stood up and turned around to face Anrosh who was standing there and looking. He could feel her discomfort, but she knew that Kri had been given an incredible thing.

“You should go and gather the others, we should have the meeting now,” Ryun told her.

Anrosh shifted uncomfortably. “I’d like to stay,” she said.

“Tali can watch over her, she will need to stay in the tub for a few days. You are not planning on standing there all that time?” Ryun asked.

Anrosh didn’t answer.

“Mom, g-go,” Kri said. “I’ll be fine.”

Anrosh sighed and then nodded. She turned and left the room, and Ryun tracked her as she headed in the direction of the office to find Eerv. Ryun walked out after her, heading in the opposite direction to find Nayra. There were things that he had to inform the others about, and there were changes to be made.