

Concept

Ryun arrived at Wolf's Grove just before midday. It had been a... frustrating trip. He had changed, far more than he had initially thought. He never really realized just how much his Qi affected everything. Now that it he no longer had Void or Stillness, he was left more lost than he had been when he upgraded his body. Some of his perks had changed slightly, his aspect ones more dramatically. His Qi was the most frustrating part, he just didn't understand it. Tali had tried to help, to try and guide him, but all her attempts failed miserably. Her Bond Aspect was not an Elemental one, but a Law, she had tried to apply lessons that she learned from her Aspect to his. It failed miserably, the only thing apparent was that their two Aspect were nothing alike. They didn't manifest in the same way, nor could he use his how she could use hers.

The worst part was that he couldn't really see his Aspect, not in the same way as he could all other Essence. It was... an emptiness inside of him, a connected nothingness, while all other Essence looked like grains of sand to him. It was as if the world around him was shaped in the desert, out of sand in a reality that knew no other material but sand. And he was water, whole and connected, completely alien to it. When he used his Qi outside of his body with his techniques, he could see it, for as long as it lasted, but the way he saw it changed significantly from technique to technique. Sometimes even the effects of his techniques changed.

They had tried to test it, but... neither one of them really understood what was happening.

One of the tests they had done was of his damaging techniques. He used his branch technique on a stone and it cut through with no issues, even better than Void would. Oblivion just straight up deleted Essence. With his eyes, he could see the grains disappearing as a beam of nothing pierced through them, all that it touched was just gone. He didn't see any reactions like what Void does, where it consumes other Essence with a physical reaction, damaging other Essence and burning through it. This was just... Oblivion touched Essence, and it was gone. Though that also

meant that there was no lingering effects of the Void, no damage that lasted after the technique was done. It was slightly different in the execution too. The range was... instant, he could reach across a territory with his beam, cutting through everything probably into infinite distance, but the drain would increase to that height too. The further he wanted his beam to reach and the more Essence was in its way, the more Qi he needed. They had figured out that what mattered was the density and a tier of Essence. He could still send it out in a beam that traveled, by using a previous version of the technique where he was doing a constant stream of Qi to his hand, not charging it for a flicker.

He had practiced a bit, so he knew how much Qi was required for what distance. The issue was... Tali. They had tried to test the technique on her too, to see how damaging it was. The result was... painfully weak. He could barely scratch her when she used her strengthening techniques. Though that didn't matter, even when she wasn't using them, the result was almost exactly the same. He had tried his beam on her arm, with her techniques, the result was a tiny layer of her skin removed, which was easily healed, without her technique it was a web of scars. Again, not hard to heal. And that was with his fully powered beam.

After that, they hunted monsters, experimenting. He had no issues with any of them, even with monsters that had higher defense than Tali's base was. They've even tried on one of his Eternal Armor copies; he obliterated them all in an instant. His flicker cutting through even Eternal armor like it had no resistance at all. When he used his **{Final End}** a big sphere around him just... deleted everything. He charged his technique and then... there was no wave of Qi, just a flash around him and everything was gone. Well, not everything.

They noticed, or rather Tali noticed first that his technique didn't touch light, sound, air, and some other Essences. It deleted only material stuff, so from her perspective, one moment he stood among trees and the next he was floating in the air having removed the influence of gravity on his body. His Qi was invisible to her sight and most senses. The strange thing was the next time he used his technique. That time his Qi deleted everything, all Essence around him, that he could see that is. Tali said that

to her that time it looked like a pure black sphere just flashed into existence, a hole filled with nothing, which then slowly faded away to reveal him in the center.

It didn't destroy all Essence, though, but it did make him see more clearly what was there. Essences that were usually lost in the noise of everything else. Space most definitely, time, perhaps, others that he didn't know about.

What was apparent was that he had no idea how to use his Aspect effectively. He couldn't even change it like he could Void, he couldn't crystallize it or change its state at all it seemed. It acted more like Stillness except far worse. He couldn't make his platforms, which forced him to... leap across the land after Tali. True, he could still go fast, but... it was the principle of the things.

Tali was surprised at the fact that he had even gotten a new Aspect and not just a hybrid version of his two Aspects. Ryun hadn't know that that would happen either, or how. And yet, a lot of his perks had Oblivion mentioned in them. It seemed... inevitable.

Regardless, he needed to talk to someone who might know more.

He had his cloak up as he walked through the main parts of the town, heading toward the area where he sensed his target. He entered the school and made his ways down the halls and then into the courtyard behind the building. He was noticed before he arrived, and he saw one of the two people turn in his direction before he rounded a corner, ready for anything. Ryun stepped into the yard and pulled back his hood.

The man blinked in surprise. "Ryun!"

"Hello Vryull," Ryun greeted the cthul. "I apologize for not greeting you sooner, I had a lot of things to take care of."

"No worries, Selia and Erdania mentioned things," Vryull said as he stepped forward and offered his hand. Ryun shook it and glanced in the direction of his conversation partner.

"Sect Head," the other cthul bowed at her waist.

"Valthua, how's the school?" He asked.

"Things are progressing as planned," she answered after straightening.

Vryull tilted his head as he looked at Ryun. “Something changed about you,” his eyes narrowed. “This isn’t just a friendly visit?”

“No, unfortunately,” Ryun inclined his head. “As you’ve noticed, something changed, I was hoping that you would be able to help me get a handle on it.”

“Your Aspect, did you take another? Join them? I’ve heard that Cultivators can do that,” Vryull said.

“My Aspects merged under a... unique circumstance. I’ve gained a new Aspect that... doesn’t act in the same manner. It is making things difficult.”

Vryull nodded. “What Aspect, if I may ask?”

Ryun glanced at Valthua next to them.

“Apologies, Sect Head. If you wish it, I can leave you alone to discuss. But, if you permit me, perhaps I may offer some insights?” She asked.

He was about to refuse, but then he remembered her research. Ryun hadn’t looked into it too much, he had only learned of the woman when Anrosh brought her to his attention. And she only did that because accepting her into the Sect could’ve made issues with her previous organization, Seekers of Knowledge. Ryun didn’t care about that, so he accepted her, on the condition that she didn’t break the rules of the Sect in pursuing her research. He had checked in on her from time to time, without her knowing of course. She had kept to the agreement.

“Your research Essence, right?” Ryun asked.

“Yes Sect Head. One of the reasons why I moved here was because I thought studying Cultivators could help my research,” she answered.

Ryun wasn’t quite sure, but Vryull spoke up before he could say anything.

“Valthua is very knowledgeable, her thoughts are brilliant,” he started. “We’ve had many discussions on the topic of Essence, discussions that had helped me further understanding of my own power.”

Ryun turned to look at the other cthul, thinking. In the end, he was... desperate. And he trusted Vryull’s opinion, plus she was part of his Sect. That meant something.

He made a decision. “Very well, let us head somewhere more... private.”

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They moved outside of the town, into the forest. He found a small clearing and led them there.

Once they’ve reached it, he had them stop and told them what happened. He didn’t skip anything. It wasn’t like he was keeping something a secret, the only thing that they might learn was about Grand Perks, but... Vryull and a member of his Sect in charge of shaping the next generations of his Sect weren’t people that he would keep that from.

“Oblivion...” Vryull said slowly. “I’ve never known anyone with that Aspect, obviously I’ve heard of it but... I can’t remember if I read about it in the records of old Worlds or if it was somewhere else. Still, based on everything that you’ve told me... Like all Essence, it should be shaped by your understanding of it. Though I’ve never witnessed Essence that can’t change state.”

“It is a Concept,” Valthua interjected.

Ryun turned to her. “I’ve heard of concepts before, I thought that Void had elements of a Concept too. A lot of my understanding of it came from that.”

“No,” she shook her head. “Void is an mainly an Elemental Aspect, perhaps it has slightly higher meaning which might make it seem like an Concept, but it has Essence that has form, that has... In my research about Essence I’ve discovered many things, but to explain this I think that you need to know the basics. First, though, could you show me your Qi?”

Ryun put his palm up and channeled his **{Twilight Cutting Void Flicker}** outside of his body, keeping the Qi inside a ball of Oblivion, then held it there. Valthua leaned down and pulled out a pair of thick glasses. He saw her tap the side and the Essence of the glasses moved.

“Ah... I see. This is a Pure Concept,” she said.

“What does that mean?” Vryull asked.

Valthua leaned back and put her glasses away. Ryun released the technique and it shot to the side, making a hole in a small tree. He didn't channel that much Qi into it so it didn't go far. The two of them looked at the tree and then turned back to Ryun.

"As I was saying," Valthua started. "Essence is made up out of tiny little particles, individual Essence pieces if you will. And each one of those has two parts, a shell and meaning or a core. Shells interact with one another and make up the larger Essence. The shape of the shell dictates what state an Essence is in. Elemental Essences have shells that can be in three different states, solid, liquid, mist, Laws are all unique, their shells and meanings different than all other Essence types and other Laws. And finally, you have Concepts, which have no shell, only meaning."

Ryun immediately understood. The grains that he saw were... clumps of these particles, or maybe particles themselves. His eyesight wasn't sharp enough to see them clearly, no more than his eyes on Earth could've seen the tiny crystals in grains of sand. "No shell," Ryun said slowly, realizing why he couldn't use Oblivion Qi in the same way. "That means that it can't change state."

"Exactly," Valthua nodded. "A Concept interacts with the surrounding Essence through meaning only. It impacts the other Essences *meaning* directly."

Things were starting to click into place inside of his mind, but he continued to listen as she spoke.

"I don't know what the Concept of Oblivion is, or what it does, other than as you've said that it is related to Void and Stillness somehow. But what you should try to think about is the concept itself, your understanding of it. What it does is tied to its *meaning*."

"My body is made out of it, Oblivion that is, why do I then have this hard shell? My body," he touched his hand, the skin on his forearm.

Valthua leaned down and looked at it. "It is still Oblivion," she said.

"How? It doesn't act like how my Qi does," Ryun said.

"Because, a body is a vessel. You are a Soul, and the meaning of your Soul impacts the appearance of your body and how it manifests," Valthua said

“My soul is Oblivion too,” Ryun added.

“It doesn’t matter. A Soul can be made out of other Essence, it is like a hybrid Essence in a sense. Soul of Fire, Soul of Air, Soul of Water, Soul of Oblivion, it changes it but at the core of it, the Soul is all three types of Essence at once. What is the most important is that it has a core of *meaning*, and that is who you are. That meaning is what guides your body and controls the Essence it is made out of. *Meaning* is... reality given form, it is the breath of existence. Your Soul sees you this way, and so the Essence of your body forms into the closest thing it can be. Oblivion doesn’t have a shell, but The Essence around you does. This surface of your body? It is made out of the Essence around you changed by the meaning of your soul.”

Ryun blinked, that... was going to take some time truly digesting. He glanced at one of his perks, at one that had been changed. His aura, now **Oblivion Aura**. Her explanation made him remember, but it mentioned *meaning*.

Manifest your Qi in the form of an aura around you affecting the meaning of Essence that your Qi touches based on your will and understanding. Gain 20% to wisdom. Oblivion endures.

Will and understanding...

“So, you are telling me that my Qi can interact with other Essence, based on what my Aspect is capable of, which is guided by my understanding of it,” Ryun said slowly.

“Yes,” Valthua said.

“I’ve tried to use one of my techniques, an attack, I had no problem with it against the environment and or monsters, but when I used it against another person it barely had any effect.”

Valthua thought about it for a few seconds.

But then Vryull spoke up. “If your Qi affects meaning directly now, that attack that you just showed us, it didn’t hit the shell of Essence, which is what usually creates effects and reactions. It just... made the Essence where yours passed disappear. Like what you told me your understanding of the Void was, yes? An absence of something.”

Ryun frowned as he thought about it.

Valthua nodded eagerly. “Yes, if you use it against the Essence around you, then your Qi just needs to overcome the meaning of what you are hitting. I would assume that none of this Essence here was anywhere close to high enough tier to oppose your Qi’s meaning. Perhaps your will too?” She said slowly. “Yes, that might also play a factor. If you are affecting the *meaning* directly, and Oblivion is an Essence that brings this nothingness without causing a reaction of Essence shells... then perhaps your will has a role to play too.”

And then... Ryun realized a few things. When he had used his **{Final End}** and didn’t hit Air, Light, or Sound but then next time he did. His will could influence what his Qi interacted with. It wasn’t a physical thing, it had no shell, it was just... meaning. When he attacked Tali... he never really wanted to hurt her, perhaps his Qi just didn’t damage her because he didn’t want her. Just like with Air, Light, or Sound when they were unaffected by his fruit technique. And... if it was *meaning* against *meaning*, then her Bond Qi had to have an impact too. It held her body together, the bonds between the Essence that made her body were far stronger than most other things. Tali might be the worst type of an opponent for him if that was the case. They would need to test things out again with him really trying to hurt her.

But for now, he turned back to the two cthul, there were more things that he wanted to ask and learn about.