

Interlude - Fight

Three figures rose, and Ryun saw their eyes. A black substance, almost alien to the Essence that his eyes could see ordinarily pulsed beneath their skin. The lines interacted with the Essence of their bodies, making it denser, more powerful. At least that was the conclusion Ryun got to.

He pushed himself to his feet, got ready. This was going to be a fight, and the Dome Leader was still there, waiting, looking at them with black tendrils that came out of the ground surrounding him. The amulet on his neck was glowing and burning with heat, and its temperature was rising. He assumed that it was protecting their minds, and that it wasn't going to last long.

"They are taken," Selia sent to him.

"We need to hurry," Ryun sent. **"Get to the Dome Leader, kill him before the others can stop us. The amulets will not last for much longer."**

He pulled out a potion from his storage and downed it quickly, feeling at least slightly better. The three took a step, their weapons ready to fight. Hlyanis glared at them, two spectral hands appeared at her side, made out of will. Two swords appeared in them, and she pulled two more for her regular hands before pointing them at all of them.

He saw Selia glance at the Empire's Ethereal expert, Anashi, and then speak to her.

"Anashi, can you get us out of here?" She asked.

Anashi looked shell shocked, for a moment she just stared at the three and then looked back at Selia. She closed her eyes and focused, then winced. "No, something is blocking me from opening a way to the Ethereal."

Ryun knew that they couldn't let this get drawn out, and since they had no way of escaping... They had to fight.

Selia understood his sentiment.

"Everyone up, Erdania slow the three down, the rest are with me, we hit Hastur with everything that we have," she told them.

Everyone stood and took a few steps back, getting some more distance from the three.

Ryun took a deep breath and let his mantle envelop him. Vryull held his staff tightly in his hands, Maleatus had two daggers in hands, Erdania hit her fists against each other and Anashi stood uncertainly among them.

The only one missing was... He saw Zach and Nahamassa, standing next to each other, not moving. He heard their words, and didn't understand. Zach raised his head, glanced at the three, then met Ryun's eyes. Something was wrong, he could tell in the way that Zach was standing, holding himself. If he didn't know that it was him, if didn't see him just sensed him, he wouldn't have thought that it was him.

He tilted his head and whispered Ryun's name.

Then the three moved. They attacked the group and before Ryun could react, others did. Vryull blocked a wave of fire with a wave of void. Anashi caught in some kind of a stream, Hlyanis somehow made her turn around and exit back where she started her dash. Selia sent a dozen spears at Gentle Touch as he fired a wave of green light at them.

A quick exchange and then they separated again, staring at each other from a distance. Zach and Naha spoke all the while, his words not making any sense. Then Erik spoke.

"Surrender. Join Hastur, there is no point in struggling, you already lost. Hastur can give you whatever you desire. Can make it so that you never fear anything again."

Zach looked at the three and then frowned, before anyone could answer he stepped in front of them.

* * *

Zach

He looked down at the woman, Naha. He remembered the things that he had carved into stone, long ago. She was important, she knew about the dream of his childhood. He needed her to learn, he needed her to make sense of the first steps of his existence, the origin that he didn't remember.

“Zach? What is wrong?” She said.

“I know your name, I don’t remember you. You will help me learn what I’ve forgotten,” Zach said, even the sound of his own voice strange to his ears. Everything around him was filled with noise, there was no silence. The flaws were not so... hard to take in now, but they were still there. It was in a way... exciting. He did not remember feeling this way before. So much was happening, so many things that he had never experienced before—or didn’t remember experiencing—only read on stone walls.

He looked at the others and his eyes paused on one of them. Just like with Naha, he had a feeling that he knew who it was.

“Ryun,” he whispered. The two of them, Ryun and Naha, they were important. They knew him, he needed them to tell him.

And then a fight broke out. He followed it, saw the three people that had black lines stretching beneath the skin. It reminded him of the wall that had kept him imprisoned. He turned his eyes on the being in yellow, Hastur, enemy.

“Zach, we need to help, to fight. We are here to kill Hastur, do you remember?” Naha spoke behind him.

He didn’t, but he remembered the words he had carved. It was the same thing.

“We are going to die if we don’t fight.”

Zach frowned, death was not a concept he was familiar with. He never died, no matter what he tried. But... that was in the world of the Mind. This here... perhaps there was a danger of this thing called death. He only knew what he had written about it, what was mentioned on his screens, an end.

But dying, no. They couldn’t die. Not before he learned what they knew.

Hastur, King in Yellow, that was who imprisoned him, and the three were linked to him now. The lines of black made it certain.

“Surrender,” one of the three, the one with red hair and blue fire on his hands, said. “Join Hastur, there is no point in struggling, you already lost. Hastur can give you whatever you desire. Can make it so that you never fear anything again.”

Zach frowned, they wanted the others to give in to the... Zach remembered the Wall around his mind, the perfection of the Mind prison, the endless solitude and existence that was... No, never.

He stepped in front of the three, glared at them.

“You,” the one with four arms, two wrought with will, and four swords in her hands spoke. “There will be no glory of Hastur for you. You will die, go silently, and it will be quick.”

Zach would never accept anyway. **He did not break.** That was one thing that he knew deep down, one thing that was at the core of who he was. He was battered, he was bent, his mind confused, and his life an existence of agony. But he did not **break.**

He looked at the three, the light was dim, the night overbearing. His **|Darkness Sight|** not enough. He leaned his will on it, forced it to be more. The Framework obliged. **|Perfect Darkness Sight|** let him see more, see better, he saw their flaws. The one in the middle, the being with four hands and four swords was the one with the least flaws. Her stance nearly perfect, a thing of glory that he would be hard pressed to replicate, but... impatient. He saw them come to a decision and spring into motion.

Blue fire enveloped one of them, and then he was to Zach’s right. His hands extended, two gems set into his palms, held by straps burst with light and then blue fire surged forward, straight at Zach.

He let his will out, searched for the tools for what he needed. He had forgotten much, but his screens were one thing that had been always present, which had been a solace in the silence. He knew them intimately. There was no thought, he acted. His perks activated, **Phantom Avatar, Lord of Grace and Woe, Last Sovereign of Terra.** The voices, the whispers came, as they had in the Mind realm. But now... he knew that they were real, the others had been just an imitation, flawed. These guided him, and he felt as if a thousand hands moved with his own.

He activated one of his items, a barrier of light surrounded him. *Not enough.* It broke as the fire surrounded it, as it flew down its sides before breaking through. He already blinked away. Instincts of the spirits inside of him guided him, helped him remember battle.

He didn't have the time to react, the blademaster found him. She arrived low, her attack already heading for his head, her will layered over the edges of her blades. He saw her flaws, but still, he was too slow. His hand morphed, changed into a blade, even with the knowledge of the thousands in his head, he was too slow.

A blade through the neck, another pierced the armor and found his heart, third pierced through the visor and the eye, fourth in his thigh.

REWIND

His will billowed out. He wasn't fast enough, second chance wouldn't matter. More, he needed more.

|Perfect Phantom Train—NO; |Perfect Phantom Comb—NOT ENOUGH; |Perfect Phantom Mome—NO; |Perfect Training Solu—NOT THIS ONE; |Perfect Mind Training Analysis|—THIS ONE.

Mind Essence ruled. Time stopped, he slipped into the world of his mind's making. What he saw of her he remembered, an image of her appeared. She came at him, he saw her flaws. He moved, saw how her flaws would make her react. *Dead. Again, move, react, dead. Again, perks, dead. Again, no, dead. Too slow, no matter what.* He looked through his screens, his new Skill perk, chosen by Framework not him. *Again, dead. Again, move faster, acceptable.*

Mind Essence left him, time resumed. She came, and he used **Telekinetic Armor**, a layer of will shrouded his body. Strikes came, slowed, just enough. His Time Strikes protecting what he planned to do.

He moved his head, the blade pierced through his will, he moved enough—a glancing hit drawing blood; a scratch. Second attack, his blade rose and blocked, a whining sound of metal scratching metal. A gash from chest to shoulder. Third missed the head, fourth pierced his thigh. He grimaced, no time to waste. Her will shook the air, she was trying to overpower his blade, turn his edge against him. His will was greater.

A moment of hesitation when she failed. He twisted his leg, trapping the blade pulling her with it and off balance. Blade to the neck, a sword block. *Change form, Frost Blade.*

He pushed forward, two attacks, two blocks. Frost spread over her limbs. Slowing, frozen liquid and air, more weight to throw her attacks off, but not enough. He focused his will.

|Technique Set: Temporal Tempest, Three Fold Strikes|

Three movements always required, all else malleable through will. His will billowed out, striking three times, she blocked two strikes that came at the same moment. Four hands, one trapped, three free to defend—*annoying*. Last strike arrived and she let go of her sword, danced away with frost on her limbs, not fast enough. He carved a line through her armor and skin, a line on her hip.

The moment she was free, fire arrived. Heat singed his body through the holes in his armor before he blinked away. He glared at the man in the air and reached out with his hand.

|Perfect Telekinesis: My Will, Made Manifest|

He grabbed him as if with an invisible hand wrought of will, and smashed him to the ground.

He turned around saw the blademaster near the last one, a touch on her shoulder, the wound mending. Shapes moved around him, over him. The others heading to attack the figure in yellow. He ignored them for now, none were attacking him.

A shadow moved behind the blademaster and healer, two daggers stabbed into the healer's back. He roared and the blademaster moved, her will billowed out. Zach took a step, he saw what was going to happen. Naha wasn't fast enough. He needed her, she couldn't die before telling him what he needed to know.

He reached out with his will as he had against the fire user. He grabbed Naha, with a hand made out of will and pulled her back. She flew through the air as swords nearly ended her.

He grabbed her from the air and put her on the ground. She opened her mouth to speak but he ignored her. There were threats near. The ground shook as tendrils around Hastur defended him from the others attack, and Zach blinked.

Ancient Heritage.

He raised his blade as the blademaster dashed for him, her will billowing out as he swiped down. Her sword raised to block, and found no purchase. His blade passed through hers. She paused, then evaded at the last moment as his real attack came delayed. A scratch across the shoulder. He pushed her with **Temporal Fighting**, spreading frost across her body, slowing her down. She got the rhythm of the battle quickly, and he switched his blade to Blood Form.

She tried to block, but metal did nothing to liquid. Blood splashed over her shoulder, the wound he made, piercing through, burrowing inside. She screamed, a light enveloped her, the healer healing her. *Unfair.*

He blinked away.

The healer raised a staff, Zach blinked again, behind. Blood to Windsong, he stabbed into the healer's back—*Mental? No, Hastur's influence, could probably resist.* He triggered the attack.

SHATTERING SONG

The body started falling apart from the inside, vibrating, tearing to pieces. A green glow enveloped the healer, keeping the body together. The blademaster was coming, her swords stabbing around the healer. He twisted his blade and pulled with all of his willpower, breaking through.

Greater Rift Tear.

The space ripped apart, blowing the healer to pieces. Wind exploded out sending both him and the blademaster flying. He laughed as he let the wind carry him, slashed the air again and used **Unleash Arsenal**. A gust of wind smashed the blademaster mid-air and he laughed with joy. *No more silence, no more... nothingness.* He hurt but not of hunger and thirst, there were others and he did not know what they would do. It was everything. He twisted and landed on his feet. She smashed against the ground and rolled across the stone.

The fire user landed near her, one hand crushed to paste, both glared at him. He looked around, saw a battle against a massive monster of clawed tendrils and gaping maws. Eyes upon eyes and insanity. He turned his sight away.

Have to hurry. Couldn't let Naha and Ryun die. They were the only ones who knew.

Kill them.

They came for him first. Fire came and then Zach's armor turned to slag. His hand was burned nearly to the bone. A blade came from the fire, he blinked away, pain in his shoulder. Fire followed, he unequipped the armor, the burning stopped, but the wound remained, left hand was useless.

The fire user flew above, sending blasts of fire at him the size of houses around the square. He ran, the wind carried him away. The blademaster followed, he turned and slashed with his blade, sending a blast of telekinesis that staggered her, a moment of time wasted, fire gathered above him. A shadow rose from the ground beneath the fire user before he could release it. He saw a dagger flash and the fire user get surrounded by blue flames. She screamed and he blinked into the air, just next to him.

Couldn't let her die, it was the only thing that mattered.

He swung his blade, focusing his willpower into a sharp blade. Fire too annoying, too destructive. Had to stop him.

|Greater Sealing Crescent—NO; |Perfect Nullifying Slash|

The attack passed through him, and the fire was gone.

The look of surprise and shock on the fire user's face as he fell to the ground, hitting hard. Zach blinked, caught Naha, her hand burned. He blinked again and left her on the ground as she pulled potions out of her ring. She saved him, and nearly died. *End it quickly.*

The attack came.

He turned and twisted. **|Perfect Spatial Evade|**.

He kicked, enforcing with telekinesis, sent her flying back even as he swords carved two lines along his leg.

She landed and glared, focused, her swords pulled back then. Will raged around her, a thousand blades made out of will appeared around her. She whispered to herself.

|I CUT A THOUSAND TIMES|

He saw the flaws, the room to escape, the blades that had to be blocked.

He raised his hand, focused his will. His skill buckled, it wasn't enough, not nearly enough to contain his will. He pushed, no time to choose, only improve.

|Perfect Greater Parry|

His hand flashed parrying blades as he walked, following the flaws, the safe areas in the onslaught. The ground around him ripped and churned, the air cracked, and space bent. His body was cut, shallow and deep cuts, those that he couldn't stop.

A long moment, and one that had to come to an end. It stopped and he was in front of her. He saw her shock, moved before her.

First, **|Perfect Telekinesis: My Will, Made Manifest|**, to hold her in place. A hand gripping tightly. Next, Blood Blade. He stabbed her in the chest, through the holes in her armor.

Arsenal Infusion— Soul; into Sanguine Burst. Blood exploded out of every hole, her body destroyed from the inside out. She slipped to the ground, the soul dead.

He raised his eyes and saw that the other battle was nearly done too. He walked toward it.