

## Cold

The monster loomed over her, raising its hand, ready to cut her down with claws as long as she was tall. Kri pushed all of her Qi through her body, increasing her stats with her **{Absolute Mantle}**. She pushed off the ground, but realized immediately that she wasn't going to be fast enough. Then a blade of Wind carved a line across the ground, the Wind howling. She saw the turtle shell on the monster's back flash and shield of glowing light appear around it. The attack cut through it, and one of the monster's heads roared in pain. Then the monster moved, slipping to the side, and Kri had to blink as her mind played tricks on her. For a moment, it was almost as if it was in two places at the same time. The blade of Wind missed, instead of cutting it in half its arm was sliced off, sent spinning through the air to crash on a construction site next to it, its weight cracked the wall and support beams, which collapsed and brought the whole thing down.

Kri got to her feet and saw Zach there, getting ready to attack again. She knew that everything would be all right and looked around to see if anyone else needed help. Then, before she had a chance to do anything, light surrounded Zach, it pulsed and then winked out, taking Zach with it.

For a moment, everything froze, and then the monster roared again. Kri didn't know what had just happened, but she realized that the monster was still a threat. She jumped to the side as the monster turned in anger. All three of its mouths were open wide, releasing a screech that made her ears hurt. She saw a group of Sect Warriors, that had approached from a street nearby, fall to their knees and grab hold of their heads.

Kri knew that she had to act, and quickly. The monster swiped with its remaining arm, destroying another building. Arrows started to rain down on it from a distance, fired by Sect Warriors, but they did nothing. Slits

in space opened up and blade attacks from Hiro hit it all over its body, but they barely did anything.

Even without its arm, bleeding everywhere, the monster didn't seem to be slowing. She had to end the fight quickly, she didn't know what happened to Zach, or if anybody was coming to help.

She walked toward the monster. Hiro was keeping it occupied, it turned and started attacking any shadow nearby, trying to find and kill him. Kri let her **Absolute Cold Aura** out, she filled the area around the monster and herself with cold. The temperature started to drop rapidly as she pushed her Qi out and through her body, shaping her fruit technique. With a thought and her **Marz—Embodiment of Winter** she leaned on the cold around her, dropping the temperature faster. Her power rose as **|Perfect Winter Touched Body: My Body, Stronger in Winter|** made her stronger.

The cold assaulted the monster, and she saw it turn in her direction. She unleashed her **{Cold Area}** technique around it, and frost started to spread over its body. It screamed as the cold penetrated through the wound in its side, the blood turning to ice and expanding, crystals puncturing through its veins and expanding into its flesh. It stumbled and fell, then turned its heads in her direction. The main face opened its mouth, a pale light glowing in its maw. A moment later it fired. Kri marshaled her will and used both **|Deflect|** and **|Enhanced Dodge|** to try and get out of the way.

She failed. The beam of pale light cut through her shoulder, obliterating her arm. The cold around her deepened. Her connection to the Absolute Cold opened. She landed on the ground hard, before the monster turned she pulled out a potion from her storage and downed it as she climbed to her feet. Unyielding let her ignore her wounds, ignore what the potion was doing to her body, it let her walk forward while pain soared.

The wound and the potion did their work, cold seeped out of her core, into her body and a part of it she used to shape a technique, the rest she

allowed to flow out of her. An expanding mist of Qi spread from her as she got closer to death, **She Knew The Absolute Cold** thrummed inside of her.

She was moving forward at a snail's pace now, barely able to take a step, the monster was the same. She saw frost spreading over its body, but the wound was the worst. The cold was seeping in through that opening in its defenses, freezing its blood as she guided it with her will. Liquid freezing meant expansion, it meant crystals that pierced the veins, that ruptured sacks and thin membranes of organs. The monster opened its mouth to fire again, but closed it immediately as the liquid in its mouth froze. There was no keening and roaring anymore. Then cold around her intensified suddenly as she felt the potion hit a wall, as she was about to die. Her spiritual tool activated, the talisman of **Inheritance of Death's Embrace** triggered, preventing her soul from leaving her body. The Winter came, and she pulled some of it to regenerate her Qi and will. Despite the cold, the monster managed to get close to her, it raised its hand in an attempt to slash at her. From the corner of her eye she saw a shadow ripple, and then a mental screech passed her by, not directed at her but at the monster. Its eyes rolled back and it stumbled on its knees before her. With her **|Enhanced Resonance Sense|** she knew the moment when Hiro blinked away. She finished channeling a technique through her talisman, and then let the **{Frosted End}** out.

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Hiro used **Shadow Blink** to get out of the streets. His clothes were stiff and frozen, his breath was coming out in a plume that fogged his vision. His skin felt like he was being bitten by thousand little ants all over beneath his fur. His eyes burned. He shook his head as he got out of the range, he saw Sect Warriors retreating as well, creating a perimeter around the circle where the cold spread.

Hiro was on top of a tower close enough that he could see, and still feel the cold. It was a visible thing, a spherical area where Essence was dense and frozen. The monster and Kri was standing in the open street, moving at a crawl toward each other. The monster's body was frozen over, a crackling sound came to Hiro's ears as he saw its movements breaking the ice on its body.

It got close to Kri, and he saw it about to attack. He reacted immediately. He **Shadow Blinked** close, and released a **Shadow Screech** at the monster from the shadows nearby. Each of his attack with the blade before had lessened the monster's mental resistance, his **Mindrend** attunement made it so. The cold was biting, and he knew that he had to get out of the area, but he used **Mental Lag** on it to buy Kri more time, then he blinked away.

From the distance he watched and saw Kri release a powerful technique. An expanding sphere of Qi blasted out of her and froze everything. He saw the air form crystals all around her, the ground get covered in ice, the buildings, rime ice formed everywhere as all the liquid in the air froze.

The monster stopped, frozen in place like a statue, its eyes ruptured as the liquid in them froze and exploded into a mangled frozen mess in its eye sockets. The entire area turned to a frozen landscape where nothing could live. Yet Hiro's **[Analysis]** quickly told him that the monster was still alive, somehow. He saw its shell glow, and then its entire body. Light spread in cracks beneath ice and he knew that the only thing that made sense was a suicide attack that would destroy everything.

Hiro acted, he infused perks, layering them over his blade as he channeled his fruit technique. **Old Heritage**, to increase his stats. He focused **Shadow Infusion** on his blade, filling it with Shadow Essence. He could feel the strain on the blade, knew that it wasn't good enough to handle this for long. Then, he used **True Link — Arsenal Blade**, infusing it with the Essence of the Blade itself, making it stronger. Then

as the monster in the distance started to glow brighter, he unleashed his technique.

He swiped with his blade and **[Aspect Strike—Shadow]**, space rippling in front of him as it sent his blade somewhere else. In front of the monster space folded, and a black blade covered in Shadow emerged.

It struck the monster in the chest and the ice cracked, then splintered. The monster fell apart into pieces, the deep parts of it that hadn't been frozen before turned to ice instantly in the area around Kri. Ice chunks rained on the street, the glow disappeared, and Hiro's blade shattered.

The monster was dead.