

Runes

The world stilled as the rune came into existence, written on the tapestry of the world itself, inked with a piece of Kael's own soul and will. The name of the rune was not important, it was just a mental trigger, Vhrom was not a language that had power. It was something that Ra'azel's ancestors came up with, names for the natural laws and effects in their universe. What mattered was the script, the written rune. It had to be written with will and soul, pieces of the world that stood above everything else. In a pattern that resonated with the world at its basest form—Essence.

When the rune settled into the world, its command spread, resonating with the power of Kael's soul and will. As the terrible ideal attack descended from high above, heat and light falling on top of him, the rune ordered all Essence into a simple direction—protection.

Kael saw air twist, the ground around him surge; space and time and most everything else surrounded him into a protective shell. All except for light, fire and heat. Even with the rune, those were Heor's domains, too deeply under his power for Kael to touch. The shell met the attack, and everything shook. Protected inside the shell of Essence, Kael moved. He stabbed his claws and wrote, his soul leaking through his fingers, his will focused on a singular goal.

The first thing he wrote were a line and a cross, the **Sa** rune—to mark, or set a place. He carved it in the rock beneath him. Next he wrote with both hands, a series of runes. Vhrom again, as the anchor, then he added the other runes.

<Vhrom—Ka-Wior-Rem—Silr>

Protect, contain force and bind, then silence. He didn't have the time to think of anything else, nor could he spare any more of his soul. Already

he felt drained, his **Soul and Spirit** helped him regenerate his soul, but the first Vhrom rune had taken too much from him in order to protect him.

The shell around him cracked like crystal, and Essence returned back to its natural place. Heor stood above, looking down at him with a frown on his face. Kael didn't hesitate.

He carved another rune, directly over his chest, <**Dor**>—strengthen. The Essence of his body obeyed. His teacher had warned him about doing this, it wasn't just draining, it was dangerous, and he was no where near as proficient at it. But Kael had no choice, and even though one such rune upon him was his limit, he had to do it. His stats rose, his scales hardened, and he was filled with power.

With the speed of his **Ascended State**, he surged up to meet his foe. Kael's ideal was still active, so Heor couldn't use his powers, though he still burned with the heat of a sun. Kael reached him and struck with all the strength of his **Evolved Form**. Heor blocked, but even though his stats were high as well, Kael pushed him back. He executed a series of attacks, as Heor pulled out a shield and blocked. Each strike stronger than the last, his **Weight of a Mountain** and **Wrathful Claws** fueled his advance.

"It is futile," Heor yelled over the sound of Kael's fists hitting the shield. The heat and the light assailed Kael constantly, but under the effects of his ideal, the form of Infraag was enough to endure. He pulled his hand back mid sequence and cast another rune—<**Ka**>—force. Then he punched at Heor and his shield. The air broke and Heor was sent flying through the air far into the distance, to the edge of the territory.

Kael turned and flew away, running as fast as he could. Less than half a minute was left on his ideal, and then Heor was going to catch up to him. He needed to put as much distance between them as he could.

Several minutes later, what he predicted came to pass. A wave of light and fire gained on Kael, sending blasts of heat in all directions that scorched everything in the way. The territory beneath him was burning, but Kael

didn't dare slow down. Heor followed him across two territories, leaving wildfires spreading in all directions, before he came close enough to attack.

"You will not escape!" Heor roared from behind him.

And then a hundred rays of light pierced the air. Kael twisted, his Qi fueling his body past all limits as his techniques burned inside of him. He evaded most of them, but two struck him. The ray of light pierced straight through his shoulder opening a hole from one side to the other. The second ray singed his hip. He grimaced, but didn't even slow, the wounds cauterized immediately, and he couldn't afford to miss a step.

A moment later the air in front of him twisted and Heor stepped out of a blast of fire, still glowing like a sun taken a shape of a man. He swung his fist and before Kael could react struck him across the face. The heat washed over Kael, singeing his scales, melting them at the impact, but the physical force of it dissipated—the first physical attack against him during the day, he was immune to it. Kael twisted, grabbed Heor in a hold while he was distracted from the lack of effect, then placed both his feet on the man's chest and kicked him down.

Without even looking to see if Heor hit the ground he was flying, putting more distance between them. He flew for minutes, or maybe hours, he couldn't tell. He focused his all on running faster.

A roar of rage filled the air behind him, and then light grew brighter, so much so that it nearly blinded him. He glanced up and saw six suns instead of the one. He blinked, confused, but then realized that those weren't suns, or rather not like the one behind them. High in the air above him where six smaller orbs, glowing with light and heat. And then they exploded, waves of light and heat came down, bisecting everything they touched. Kael burned through his Qi, settling into **{Tranquil Dream}**. His aspect resisted for a moment, but then the calm settled on him, letting him see and squashing his panic.

He twisted and flew, danced in the air as he tried to evade. A ray of light burned through his right side, taking a chunk of his ribs along with it.

Two rays punctured his wings and cut long lines through them. Another cut of his leg at the knee, and a third one sheared off one of his antlers. Kael finally managed enough will and reason to unleash his **Domain**. The light calmed and settled as Kael's realm came into being, an open blue sky, with a reflection in the calm water below. Kael fell and splashed into the ground, the thin layer of water sending ripples through his realm, threatening to collapse it.

He felt his body trying to regenerate, but it was slow, his rune use had left him weakened. Heor dropped next to him, looking down his expression getting calmer as the domain influenced him.

“Now you die, at last,” Heor whispered. “For my blood.”

He raised his hand and pulled out a weapon, a spear, out of his storage. Kael moved with all of his speed and might, his will focused on a single thing, a combination rune.

<Ka-shi>

Part of the rune that his teacher showed him before sending him back. Force and transport. The Essence obeyed, space twisted and Heor's eyes widened, his will expanded trying to stop it, but he didn't understand what Kael was doing. He was pointing his will in the wrong direction. The space snapped and Heor was gone, transported back to the prison Kael shaped, territories away. Kael's Domain shattered and he groaned, then picked himself up, his cut wings barely able to keep him in the air, but he kept going.

He didn't know how long the prison was going to keep Heor. Kael might have hours, or he might have days or months even. He had never used his runes on another in this manner. What he knew was that setting it up had drained him, diminished his soul. He wasn't going to attempt anything like that any time soon. For now, he just kept going, putting more and more distance between them.

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Fucking monster—Kael cursed inwardly. Heor had done so much damage to him, if he didn't have his rune knowledge... He shook his head and pushed those thoughts away. He trapped Heor days ago, and he hadn't seen any sign of him returning, so he finally relaxed enough to take stock of everything. His absolute mastery of his body allowed him to channel his regeneration where he wanted, so at least he had managed to heal his wings enough to fly at full speed again.

Then he had used a few small runes—which had nearly made him pass out from the strain—to analyze himself. He found... something, clinging to his soul that he hadn't noticed before. He didn't know what it was, but the purpose was obvious—it was the way that Heor tracked him. It had to have been a perk or an ability, maybe even an item that Heor used to mark him somehow without him noticing. He wondered if his teacher noticed. He never said anything, but Kael suspected that he had to know. Sometimes, Ra'azel had a strange sense of humor. Or perhaps he just didn't think it worth mentioning.

And worse, to remove the mark he had to burn that part of his soul out, weakening himself further. He needed to get to his people, to heal his body which would fuel and increase his soul regeneration. He was completely unprepared to fight Heor again. No items, no grasp of his full power. He needed time to improve his techniques, to rebuild his armory, to train and improve himself.

And time was something that he didn't have as much as he needed. He needed his people, his team, they had always been more dangerous together. And just as he had gone on a trip to find opportunities to gain power, so had they gone on their own journeys. It was supposed to be a split of only a handful of years, but fate interfered. Still, Kael wondered just how much more powerful his people had gotten. He was eager to find out, and he knew that they wouldn't disappoint him.

So, he headed Northwest, toward their hidden home.