

## Unexpected

Zach cut down another of the yeti attackers as Naha rushed away, the spirits of the old masters were singing inside his head. He had never felt more in-tuned with them than he had now, as if he could breach the gulf of time between them, their old lives and the now. He danced, one hand holding a sword almost as long as he was tall, and the other changed into his Fire Blade. The yeti's were flying above, dropping troops, but he could see already that his actions on the wall were not doing much. The defenders were doing more than he did, thousands of them on the walls, firing at the sky and fighting on the walls. More of them on the rooftops behind them, in the airships above them. Without flying into the sky, Zach was fairly limited in what he could do. He debated using the ability that gave him wings to fly and attack faster but... There were so many of them, and even if he killed them quicker than the sect warriors... he wasn't changing much. This side of the wall held.

In the distance, where Naha was heading, he felt something. A force far more powerful than anything else he had felt since Hastur. Something that had breached the walls and entered the city. A part of him had wanted to go with Naha, to help and keep her safe. Another trusted that she could fight her own battles. And he feared, three walls and three Great Forgotten. There were powerful people around him on the wall, fighting alongside him, but two of the Great Forgotten were yet to show themselves.

Far behind him, the sky was filled with fire as drakes battled dragons. This was a response to his actions, even if it wasn't his fault. People were dying, and he needed to prevent as many of them from falling as he could. He was... slow, he understood that. In battle he could react quickly, but that was instinct, he acted before he thought about what he was doing. His mind didn't think fast enough to make decisions in any type of reasonable time-frame. So, he cheated, and bought himself time.

### **|Perfect Mind Training Analysis|**

The world shuddered around him. Wyverns flew above him, the battle took shape. The sect warriors acted in unison, individuals rose above the others, stronger and better, but the rest supported them. It was a strange way

of combat to him, but he saw how it would play out. The sect would hold this wall, if things remained as they were. Behind him, the sky would fill with fire, but the airships and winged warriors of the sect would prevail. He could see the flow of battle. The last part of the wall, where Naha had been sent would... one of the Great Forgotten was there, he had no doubt. He couldn't tell what would happen there, he didn't have enough information for it. But he knew things. There were millions of people in this city, tens of thousands of warriors on the walls, and even those who were not warriors could fight.

The city would not fall, they were fighting to save lives.

More things changed as he ran through different scenarios, as he did different things. Then, he introduced two variables that he had no information about. He could speculate only. Two shadows appeared in the skies above the two walls. The two remaining Great Forgotten. One had destroyed the wall and let his forces enter the city, he could only assume that the others would do the same. The walls falling would mean more fighting in the streets, more people dying.

His goal was to prevent as much death as possible. His course of action was clear. The world returned to the present, and he stepped up to the edge of the wall then took a step off it. He fell down the mountain side, then used his **[Aspect Wings]** to fly down, searching for the enemy. There were only a few hundred wyverns still flying up, thousands had already reached the top, but he guided himself in their direction. Hoping to find the gate that brought them here, and perhaps the Great Forgotten.

He didn't even attack them as he flew past them, too fast for them to react. He punched through the clouds and there in the distance he saw a glowing light, and headed in that direction. On a small plateau he saw a bright ring, a gate. He landed near it and looked up the light. There were no monsters coming out of it, and he assumed that all of them had already gotten through. A thin mist hugged the ground, spreading the cold over the nearly empty plateau. There were a few boulders around him, but no life, no trees or grass, just stone. The mist was knee high, and swirling around the gate.

In a sudden burst of movement, he blinked across the plateau and attacked with his sword. The great sword cut through the air, and a sound

reminiscent of breaking glass echoed all around him as what appeared to be empty air cracked into a thousand pieces of clear ice. Something moved out of the way, too fast for him to react. A sudden sensation filled him with unease. The way that power felt... It was alien to him.

A chuckle filled the air as the shape landed on a nearby boulder.

“I am surprised,” the being spoke. “Seeing through the mirror is impressive. Granted, such tricks aren’t really my field, but still.”

Not his field, the monster said. The only reason Zach even noticed anything was because of the mist hugging the ground. He had only barely noticed the tiny flaw where this... mirror met with the mist. If he hadn’t been on guard, hadn’t been paying as much attention... he never would’ve known that he was standing just a few steps away from the monster.

He, and Zach was pretty sure that it was a he, was a yeti. Pure white fur could be seen peeking out of the bulky armor that was the color of the night and looked like it was made out of some kind of shells, maybe carapaces, strung together in a rough but clearly masterful way. A thick fur cloak was draped over his shoulders the air cooling around it.

Zach bent his knees, ready to attack, but the monster raised his hand up in the air. “Hold, chosen, there is no need to fight.”

Zach narrowed his eyes. “No need? Every moment I let pass me by, another dies in the city that might’ve otherwise lived.”

“Ah,” the yeti started. “But I am not killing them, am I?”

Zach paused, and the yeti continued.

“I have not attacked the city,” the yeti said.

“You sent your forces to do it,” Zach said.

The yeti turned his eyes above, at the clouds that hid the city. For a moment he nearly attacked, but something told him that the monster’s attention wasn’t at all occupied.

“My forces,” the yeti said his tone almost... sad. “They are not mine, my armies died a long time ago, their usefulness not enough for them to be preserved like I had. They are just... memories, fabrications of the gods. They have no choice in what they do. They are like those who you encounter in your dungeons, the ones that die and live again. Alive and yet not.”

“And you do have a choice in what you do?” Zach asked.

“Do I?” The yeti asked, and Zach got the feeling that he was asking himself more than he was Zach.

“You are a monster,” Zach said slowly. “Are you not bound to the Framework, unable to disobey its will?”

The yeti chuckled. “I am a monster, not in the way that you use that word though. I am not like them, and while yes, you are correct, I cannot disobey. I do have... a much greater leeway. Come,” he gestured at another boulder nearby. “Sit with me, if we must fight, let us not rush into it.”

“The event is clear,” Zach said as he raised his weapons. “We need to survive your attacks, I will not let you delay me.”

The yeti shook his head. “Do you wish for your death that much?”

A threat, Zach focused on everything around him, looking for anything amiss. “If fighting is inevitable, I would rather not waste time. Do not mistake me, I don’t want to fight you, I don’t want to kill you. Death is such a... waste. But I have a responsibility to protect as many as I can.”

The yeti smiled at Zach. “Well, we might—”

The sky turned black, all light above them disappeared, only the light of the gate next to them remained. Zach’s **True Link** was still there, but he knew that this could only be Naha. She used her item, the **Piece of Night**.

“Ah,” the yeti spoke. “And there he goes. Faster than I thought, but it seems like his plan worked. Good for him.”

Zach frowned, and then checked the event window. One of the Great Forgotten was dead.

*Naha.*

He readied himself to fight, readied himself for the yeti to turn angry, but... it never came. Then, he paused. He had just lamented having to kill the monsters above. The fact that they had no choice but fight, and here he had a monster willing to talk. A part of his hesitation, he knew, came from what he had written on the mountains in his prison. Yeti, Ra’azel Equinar, untrustworthy, enemy.

Yet... there were so many things that he didn’t understand about the monsters and how this world worked.

“You are not distressed that one of yours is dead?” Zach asked slowly.

“He is not one of mine,” the yeti answered. “We are more like... acquaintances that shared a prison.”

“Prison?” Zach asked slowly.

“We are souls that had died long ago, but were deemed... worthy enough to preserve for future use, such as this one,” the yeti said.

“But why would you agree to that?” Zach asked, not really expecting an answer. Naha had told him about the monsters that could talk like this one, the intelligent ones. They all hated the chosen, those like him, and even if they wanted to talk they couldn't. The Framework wouldn't allow it.

“You assume that we had any choice in the matter. All that we can do now is choose to do the gods bidding or to remain imprisoned. Cursed to watch the world through mirrors and smoke without being able to do anything.”

Zach frowned, this monster had seemed able to speak more than what he had been led to believe was possible.

“How can you even share this with me? I was led to believe that you were all limited, obstructed in some way.”

The yeti laughed. “Even the gods make mistakes. We were never part of the Framework. We lived and died long before they created it. Our power was magic unlike this orderly and bound thing. We lived and breathed raw chaos, and we mastered it. The gods forget, we made a soul pact with them, but we are not part of this Framework, it cannot enforce its will on us beyond what we have agreed to. And we did not agree to stay silent.”

“So why are you here then? You agreed to fight on the Framework's behalf, to kill.”

“Just agreeing to do this had granted our people a reward. They were chained by the Framework, forced to be monsters for your kind. With this one act they will no longer be bound by that agreement. They will gain freedom. Blood spilled to save entire races from a fate worse than death? It is a good deal, even if they do not know me. I was but a story to my descendants, and even then half the things they told of me were myths that never happened or distorted stories. Still, they are my people.”

Zach didn't quite understand, but he took the information in anyway.

“What did you mean when you said that... the other Great Forgotten’s plan worked?”

“We were promised rewards based on our performance, but... any prolonged fight is a risk for us, a chance that we encounter something that could cause our True Death. Glarr’ad’s plan was to strike at the city, do as much damage as he could and force the defenders to kill him quickly. He is a bloodthirsty one, but most of his attack was... theater, an act to provoke anger. Make them take him down before they could set up or do enough damage to kill his soul.”

Zach blinked, and then before he could a roar echoed from above and the clouds that had been dark turned orange.

“And there goes Fill’aragor,” the yeti said. “He intends to try and win, I doubt that he will succeed, not if the city has people like you running around.”

Zach grimaced, if the second Great Forgotten attacked the city, he should be there, but... He looked at the one in front of him, then removed his filters.

Ancient Forgotten: Ra’vallim Helinos—  
Master of Change; Lord of Winter and  
Spring; Grand Magai of Enefa (Tier 24)

“And you, what is your plan?” Zach asked.

The yeti grinned.

“I did intend on staying hidden, survive as long as I can, get a better reward that way. I did not anticipate that someone would come looking for me,” the yeti said. “Hopefully do enough to be granted a new life, free, along with my people once they gain the Mark. Though I do not relish losing my power and being bound by the Framework, but... we must all sacrifice.”

There was so much that he learned with just this short conversation, things that Zach didn’t understand and couldn’t understand. He was just... too ignorant on too many things. In time he might learn more, but for now... But he did wish to learn. The more he talked with this... yeti, the more he felt himself wanting to continue talking, even with the people dying above him.

He realized that it was his madness, rearing its head again. Learning about the Framework, about the power that this being had, it was... He shook his head, trying to pull himself back. He couldn't stay here talking, the people above were fighting, he needed to go back to—

He forced his mind to stop, his will reached around him and touched... Time. He could feel the river halt, for just a moment, but it was enough to center him. And then an idea occurred to him, a way that perhaps he could learn more.

“You said that you lived and died,” Zach started. “Then you were imprisoned.”

The yeti nodded. “My soul was.”

“But you have a body?”

“The gods created a new one for me, they even created my old armor, it is so perfect that I can't even tell the difference,” the yeti chuckled to himself.

“Would you be willing to make a deal?” Zach asked.

“What kind of a deal?”

Zach told him.

“That is... worse than what the gods will do to me.”

“But it would be your choice,” Zach added.

The yeti's cold eyes flashed with... things that Zach couldn't interpret. And then the yeti gave him his answer.

They moved at the same time, and the battle began.