

## Anrosh

“You remember what we talked about?” Anrosh asked.

Ryun nodded his head. “Of course I do,” he answered.

“You have everything stored and ready?” she asked. She was aware that she was being annoying, but sometimes Ryun had the tendency to forget the simplest of things.

The two of them were standing beneath the arena, just in front of the entrance to the gathering hall for the contestants of the Free for All event.

“I believe that I have everything stored, yes,” he answered, indulging her worry.

She couldn't help it, the High Division matches were different than the others. There were no tokens that could teleport an immortal out of the arena if they sustain enough damage inside their bodies, and many could and do die during these matches. They did have small tokens as items, nestled somewhere with skin contact. But they couldn't teleport them out unless their bodies were destroyed without a hope of being repaired. There were also people with powers that might interfere with that. At best, once someone was considered dead, the token would teleport the body and soul before it had the chance to leave for the Ethereal Realm or wherever the person's immortality would take them. At worst they would die and move on. Of course it was rare, there were formations beneath the arena that would catch any soul in case their bodies were destroyed completely and send them on to the Healer, where their bodies could be recreated. But resurrection powers were rare and costly. Some of those who died during the match and whose souls couldn't be caught would just trigger their immortalities, but that brought a price of its own.

Ryun wore a legendary combat robe, a recent purchase. He didn't rely on equipment for the most part, so his items were all support based. She knew that the robe increased his Qi regeneration by 20% of his base. It wasn't much, but in matches such as this one, it added up.

He also wore his **Megor's Ring of Privacy** which protected him from appraisal powers. The only other really powerful item that he wore was his

**Lifedrinker** ring, which had three charges which allowed him to heal rapidly. It was one of his stronger items, on the higher range of legendary items.

Seven of his other fingers held epic and rare rings that gave small stat boosts mostly to intelligence for Qi regeneration and wisdom for power, and small passive boosts to regenerations and some resistances. The last finger held his storage ring, which held 10 weapons of common, uncommon, and rare rarity. Most of them came from the shipments that Nayra's people sent as payment for their passage through the Twilight Melody territory. They weren't really great weapons, but they were useful for his needs. As per the rules of the match, he was allowed ten potions of whichever type he wanted. Ryun focused mostly on Qi replenishment and regeneration potions and two healing ones. He had to empty show his ring to the organizers so that they approved of the contents. He wasn't allowed to bring anything other than what was allowed. He had a replacement robe as well, but that was about it. The rules allowed for a replacement set of armor, as well as 10 replacement melee weapons, or in the case of throwing weapons or ammunition a number decided by the arbiters based on the type. They had allowed Ryun 25 of his javelins, with how many opponents would take the field that was a low number.

Still, he was as ready as he could be.

"It's time," Ryun said.

Anrosh nodded, and then pulled him in close in an embrace. "Good luck."

His only response was a small smile, and then he walked into the gathering hall.

Anrosh made her way up through the tunnels, and out to the stands. A few minutes later she reached their plot. Everyone was there already, waiting. Nayra stood with Ereclaw sitting with her sister, while Lesamitrius and Riodan sat with one seat empty in between them. Four of their warriors behind them, near the edge of the plot as well, eager to see the match. It was early morning, and the stands were full. The amount of people that had watched the prior matches was nothing compared to this. Every plot was

filled, flags flying, and people waiting. The noise was deafening, an entire city filled the massive arena.

The arena itself was changed completely. Instead of the flat ground, it was now filled with rocks sprouting out of the ground, small hills and even a lake. The geomancers had taken the last few days to prepare the arena, and it seemed that a mixed terrain had been chosen.

She made her way to Nayra and sat down next to her, then put her hand on her thigh.

“How is he?” Nayra asked.

“As he always is,” Anrosh sighed. She didn’t detect any nervousness from him, any fear. She didn’t know how he did that, but she had learned to accept it.

They had spent the days before the match talking about whether they should accept the Zenshuen sponsorship, and they still hadn’t made a decision. Ryun had decided that he would make a decision after this match, as if his qualifying wasn’t even a question. They could’ve gained a lot by accepting the sponsorship before, better gear at least. But Ryun was Ryun, and one could have a better chance of touching the sun than to know what is happening inside his head.

An amplified voice cut through the noise of the arena, and the glass windows blazed to life. A green scaled drake stood on top of a tall rock that jutted out of the ground. Zenker Broketail, one of the most powerful people in the Infinite Realm. She blinked as she saw him appear, usually he wore nothing but a simple pair of pants, but this time he was completely different. He wore armor that looked like it was made out of red crystals, rough and uneven, as if it was sheared into shape. It made him look wider than he was, with long spikes jutting out of his shoulder to the side. The chest piece bulged forward and ended up in a triangle shaped edge in the middle of his chest. In between the crystal, it had orange looking plates that probably allowed movement. His hands were covered in gauntlets that ended with large and wicked claws, the same for his feet.

**“Welcome, to the Free for All match of the High Division,”** his voice thundered across the arena. **“Today you will see something special, people who dared to push and advance to great heights.”**

**Those who would one day become High Rankers, the rulers of this world.”**

Anrosh couldn't help but shiver as she heard that. She had always known that people in the High Division often became people that the entire world knew about. The winners of the High Division without fail became High Rankers. Most of those that ended up in the top five did as well.

The drake's armor flowed over his head, creating a helmet, and then he finished his speech.

**“A battle for fame, for power, for ideals. Watch, learn, enjoy, see what the Infinite Realm requires of us all.”**

With that, the entire arena flashed with bright white lights as the contestants were teleported in. A moment after the light winked out, the battle began.

## **Ryun**

The light that surrounded him didn't bother him at all, but he had sensed the other contestants around him grimace or close their eyes. To him, the light was just essence, and that was so fine it was almost see-through. He had no issue seeing the other Essence, it was not dense enough for that. It was what gave him an advantage.

He had arrived in at the bottom of what looked like a small canyon, stone stretching all around him. He hadn't been teleported alone. Around him four others teleported in at the same time. He didn't have the time to waste, and he had to test some things. Ryun cycled his Qi through his body, using his **{Empowering Null Mantle}** to boost only his legs and arms, pushing all his bonuses into strength and dexterity. Two out of the four around him wore heavy armor, he went for them first. He pulled out a sword out of his storage, he used **|Pouncing Rush|** to close the distance quickly

and with his **|Sword Art|** and **|Greater Aim|** he swung for the tiny opening in the armor.

The four were all distracted by the light, the first one didn't even see Ryun before it was too late. As soon as his attack got near the opening in the armor Ryun pushed all his will into his **|Perfect Cut: My Foes, Torn Asunder|**. His sword burst forward, tearing through the gap in the armor and the metal around it cutting into the person's neck and the surrounding flesh. It was as if several cuts came at him at the same time. The other fighter did notice the attack and managed to react, but just not fast enough. Instead of cutting the man's head off, Ryun split his neck open, cutting through more than half of it along with the spine. His armor parted but stopped most of the other cuts, still his chest and helmet sprouted gashes. The man tumbled to the ground as his legs pushed him away from Ryun, but he was done. His mind would survive for a bit longer, but unless he had a power that could help him recover from that wound he would die, regardless he was done for now, and Ryun turned toward the three remaining fighters.

Lesamitrius had done a lot of reconnaissance for him, and he had passed on the knowledge about the most powerful people, those who were the favorites to pass this round. He had also told him that many of the factions had managed to get several of their people through to this round, but that some had plans to focus on getting one through. It meant that some people would meet up and move as squads, protecting the person that they intended to pass into the next round. Keeping them from getting tiered, as well as allowing them to hide their power. Of course, everyone was teleported into the arena at random, so they would need to survive and meet up. Ryun was at a disadvantage there, he was alone, and he needed to survive until only thirty two out of thousands of competitors were left. They would fight until all others were eliminated. From what Lesamitrius had told him they could be fighting for days.

The other three of his foes recovered and saw that one was already down. Immediately they moved. One turned into a bolt of lightning and blasted upward, escaping, the other two stepped back getting some distance as their bodies flashed. He could see numerous perks being activated by both of them, and he raised a wall in front of himself, hiding his body from view.

The two started fighting and he watched them with his **|Perfect Resonance Sense: My Sphere, Total Clarity|** skill. He needed to pace himself, so he was content to let the other two fight. He dropped his mantle technique and turned. As the ground shook from their attacks he approached the fighter on the ground, he saw that his neck was surprisingly trying to stitch itself back together. He cut down with his sword through neck again. He felt the sudden flow of power as his **Vampire** and **Feast** perks activated. That had been one thing that he had wanted to check, it seemed that it did work.

As soon as the he separated the head from body light flashed and the body was gone. He saw the moment the token decided the person was dead, and teleported them out. The person would be teleported to the healers, and Ryun wondered if they would be able to save him. Reattaching the head and bringing a person back to life after such a short time didn't seem like a big task. People on Earth could resuscitate and save certain people after death without any power, he couldn't imagine what kind of powers people here had. Regardless, what happened to the fighter told him what he should expect to happen to him in case he lost. His token was tucked into his robe, tightly secured against his skin. He turned his head toward his wall, seeing the battle taking place beyond it. One of the fighters, the second armored one had cut off the hand of the other, who was now trying to escape while being pursued. Ryun debated going after them, but he decided against it. He needed to conserve his power.

His sense painted a picture of a hundred battles all around him. The ground shook and the air was filled with thunder. Ryun looked around, for a moment debating just staying down here and hiding out for a while, but quickly he decided against it. This was not a good place for him to exert his power, he needed open space and much more room. He started walking, going after the two fighters, his sense had never lost them. He could *see* a great part of the arena with it, although not all with total clarity, the closer something was to him, the clearer it was.

As he walked he detected the end of the fight ahead of him, the armored fighter, surprisingly lost. The now one-handed fighter had to have detected Ryun somehow, because he immediately hid behind a rock, waiting

obviously in an ambush. The man drank a potion and his limb regrew, it seemed that he had brought a very powerful potion for it to act that fast. His foe was a Classer, without weapons and dressed in light garments. Ryun had sensed his fight so he knew what the Classer could do.

As he approached, he pulled his mantle around him and pushed everything into wisdom. Then he wove his Qi through the ground, sending threads of the Void behind the rock where the man was hiding. The moment Ryun got near enough the man decided to attack, but Ryun had already been prepared. Spikes stabbed from three different spots and pierced the Classer, one got him through the leg another through the stomach, and the last pierced through the bottom part of his head and punched through his head and brain. A moment later the man flashed and was out.

Only a few minutes had passed and he had already eliminated two fighters, too bad that there were thousands more left just in his range. He monitored his surrounding and slowly walked, avoiding the battles and any people heading his way. Staying out of the battles at the start seemed the best way to preserve his power and also gather information.

As he walked he observed what kind of powers his competitors had, looking for weaknesses and things that he could exploit. His sense meant that nothing could get close without him knowing, so he relaxed as he monitored the situation.

For a moment he paused, his mind going blank as if his sense skill had just disappeared. The moment he realized something was wrong, he acted pulling on his **Mind Shield** skill he shrouded his mind. It was what saved him.

As his sense came back to him he *sensed* a blade coming straight for his head. Time slowed as his **Tinkers Mind** activated and he moved his Qi. His mantle shrouded him immediately, half of his bonus in his strength and the other in endurance. As he moved the blade cut through his shoulder instead of his head. Then the wound sizzled and widened but it didn't pain him or hinder him much, his **Unyielding** perk meant that he could function despite the state his body was in.

He twisted summoning a blade in his hand and swiped where his opponent was. His sword met a short blade and the other fighter twisted

through the air, visible to his eyes as only a faint outline that quickly disappeared from his sight just as he slipped from his sense.

Ryun grimaced, it seemed that there were some powers that his skill couldn't pierce. The fighter had a stealth build, obviously. But he had appeared to his sense the moment he started to attack. This meant that he would have some warning. The other interesting thing was that he couldn't even see him with his eyes. That meant that he wasn't moving through the real or the astral realms. It was annoying, but Ryun needed to deal with him quickly, he couldn't afford to spend much time and his power on this fight.

His mind was still operating at an accelerated speed, so he quickly shaped his Qi and raised a box of Void Qi around himself, buying a bit of time. He couldn't see the fighter or sense him, which meant that he would have only a short window to act. He grimaced but decided that he needed to do something. The wound on his shoulder had stopped hurting, blood spilling from it was turning into void mist. With his **Unyielding** it wasn't even a nuisance, but he still pulled some of his bonus to vitality, making his **Regenerator** more effective. He pulled the Qi from his core and formed his armor in its crystalized form, in his hands he pulled out two swords from his storage and then lowered his walls.

He stood still, monitoring everything with his skill and listening for any other sign of his opponent. There was nothing that he could sense or hear, he kept his **Mind Shield** on, something that the fighter had done had momentarily made his mind go blank, a mental attack of some kind.

Then the attack came. Faster than before, two blades smashed into Ryun's back, cracking through his armor to pierce his back. As soon as he felt the pain he pulsed his Qi through his armor and spikes exploded backward through the man. Except that he seemed to have gone insubstantial, the blades stopped pushing through his armor and the fighter was gone again.

Ryun grimaced, the wounds weren't deep, but he was at a disadvantage it seemed.

He wondered what he should do, and then realized that he had little choice. He knew that the fights were being shown to the audience through the great screens, which was why he wanted to keep as much of his power a secret as possible. People would be watching in order to sell the information,

but he also knew that it wasn't like they could show every battle, it wasn't likely that they were focusing on him right now. Not when there were probably a hundred more interesting fights around him.

Ryun dismissed his spikes and then reformed his armor, a moment later he switched the bonuses to his intelligence and then blasted his surrounding with **[Bringer of Sorrow]** and **Reaper's Aura**. A sound reached his ears, and his skill picked up a slight disturbance to his left. Immediately Ryun moved, with his **[Inevitable Step]** he reached the space as his mantle switched all his bonuses to strength and dexterity. He swung his swords with **|Perfect Cut: My Foes, Torn Asunder|**.

He bisected the entire area with cuts that rent the space apart. The fighter was good, faster than him, even the large area of attack wasn't enough to completely catch him off guard. But a tiny amount of blood splattered against the floor—and that was enough.

The moment he spilled his blood, the **Great Hunter** activated, immediately telling him his foe's location. The fighter was behind him, and then he surged forward, quickly approaching at Ryun's back.

Ryun moved all of his bonus to his wisdom, and sent threads all around his back. The moment the fighter approached and became solid, four walls snapped around him—spikes punching inside. He called that particular application of his technique the *death coffin*. It seemed fitting. He turned, his swords raised and then dismissed his coffin, although he already knew what happened. The bisected body of his foe dropped to the ground and then flashed with light, teleporting away.

Ryun grimaced, he had spent more Qi on that than he had wanted, and he was forced to use both his armor and his mental attacks. Hopefully none of the fighters nearby had anything like Ryun's sense, and hadn't been able to see or sense what he had done.

He decided to keep his armor around himself and started walking, monitoring the situation once again.