

Selia

Selia watched Ryun's match from the main Zenshuen berth, sitting next to her grandfather. She had been surprised, and very impressed when she saw him regenerate crippling wounds in instants. Nothing about his previous matches had suggested that he had that much survivability. She had assumed that he was a short-range control and burst caster. And most of his techniques seemed to be built toward that, but his body was also clearly able to take and regenerate an incredible amount of punishment. He seemed to be like Erdania, only where she had an endurance-based toughness that tried to make her nearly invulnerable, his was based on vitality and insane regeneration.

Selia wished that Erdania had come to watch, she would've found him interesting. Selia grimaced, wondering if perhaps she should've insisted, but Erdania had said that she was only interested in the real matches, which for her were the semi-finals. She knew Erdania and understood that she needed time for herself from time to time. Mental illness didn't really exist in the Infinite Realm, not like how it had in the pre-Framework worlds—as far as Selia understood it. But she knew that as people grew older and got warped by their power, peculiarities emerged. Erdania had many that were visible, ways of dealing with her past. And occasionally she just shut down for a while, lazed about without the will to do anything. It usually came when she had close encounters with death.

She continued to watch the match in silence. She could tell that the match had grabbed her grandfather's attention since he was actually watching instead of talking with the other people sitting around them. Ryun had been hit repeatedly, and always managed to regenerate his wounds. The smaller wounds closed slower than he had regenerated before, but still incredibly fast. And when he got his hand blown off for the second time it regenerated in a different manner than it had before. It meant that he had several ways of healing quickly. That made him a very dangerous opponent, as most regenerators were.

Dealing with people that could take your strongest attack and just regenerate or shrug it off was difficult, especially when they could hit back hard too—and she knew that Ryun could do that.

He continued running toward his opponent, and his armor changed from solid to mist too. He had a lot of ways of mitigating damage or just outright healing it. But his opponent was an incredibly bad match up for him. The sharpshooter was clearly powerful, focused on empowering his shots. People using such devices were not widespread, for a simple reason that their equipment was an added Essence sink. It had to be if one wanted to be able to use those weapons to fight people on the same level as them. Ryun's opponent obviously had weapons made out of the high-grade materials, strong enough that Selia knew that his big shots would threaten even her if they managed to hit. And Ryun seemed to lack a long distance attack that could reach his opponent. Then, as he grew closer, he started pulling out over-sized javelins and throwing it at his opponent, surprising her again as he forced the sharpshooter to evade and give Ryun time when he wasn't being shot at to get closer.

She looked at the scree as Ryun was forced to hide in a canyon to evade more attacks as the sharpshooter's cooldown came back. And then she watched as he got out, summoned a Qi copy of himself and fired a beam technique at his opponent. Everything it touched it deleted from existence, but the sharpshooter had some powerful evading abilities and managed to stay ahead of it.

The two exchanged fire, and then it happened. He used his Ideal, and the sharpshooter's attack stopped in the air and then the bullet fell to the ground. The Ideal would be unmistakable to anyone who had an ideal themselves in the stands. Those who were in the range of his ideal would hear the name of it inside their head, whether they had an ideal or not. But anyone who already had an ideal and was close enough to see would know what he did. It was... a resonance, just a knowing.

She didn't know what it was, or what it did. It clearly stopped his opponent's attack, but that didn't tell her much. She watched as the match drew to a close, the winner already clear in her mind. Only once

his victory had been announced did she realize that she had leaned forward in her seat.

“I see why you have taken interest now,” her grandfather’s voice made her startle, and she leaned back.

“Ah,” she started. The conversation about the elixir that she had given to Ryun had not been easy. But she had managed to convince her grandfather that it was for the best. “Yes, he could become a good ally.”

Her grandfather nodded his head. “We shall see. He used an ideal... he is the fifth so far.”

Selia knew what her grandfather meant. Four people in the top 32 had gained an ideal during their matches. Those that had shown more of their power during the free for all. It was far more than any time before according to her grandfather. The Tournaments usually produced one or two Ideals, three at the most. This Tournament was different. This was the first tournament that was broadcast across the settled territories. Billions of people were watching, it had to have influenced things. The question that Selia and many others had now, was just how powerful these Ideals were. There hadn’t been any time for the people to talk, for an external ideal to be formed by the people. Obviously, many people looked at a person and thought the same thing, which was why the Ideals were formed in the first place. But... just how clear those opinions were was yet to be determined.

She shook her head in response to her grandfather’s statement. “No, he didn’t gain it now,” Selia told him.

Her grandfather turned and glanced at her, raising his eyebrow.

“He had an ideal before this match. I think that he gained it sometime between the qualifiers and now.”

“So not an external one then,” her grandfather said. “That’s a pity, based on what he showed in this match he could’ve gotten something incredible.”

Selia nodded her head in understanding. An external Ideal was not necessarily weaker than an internal one. And based on Ryun’s showing, it would’ve most definitely been something tied to his

regeneration. It could've elevated his already great survivability to unkillable levels.

"We don't know what his Ideal is," Selia said.

Her grandfather shrugged. "His next match is against one of ours, isn't it?"

"Eari, Emar's student, yes," Selia answered.

"Well, that will be interesting at least."

Selia nodded, the matches were random, but... Zenshuen competitors had been placed in brackets that met before the final fight, but chance was chance. The winner of Ryun's next match would face the winner of Reki's next match since he had already won his first one.

Selia had to admit that she had underestimated Ryun greatly, and she wondered just what else he would show them in the future.

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Ryun

Ryun stood in the corner of the large ball room, Anrosh and Lesamitrius at his side. They were in Zenshuen compound, again. The Sect was holding parties after every round, and since he was *sponsored* by them, he was required to attend. Or at least that was what Anrosh and Lesamitrius told him. He would've much rather spent his time cycling, with his new perk every moment not spent cycling seemed like a waste. Still, he couldn't complain. His reward for passing the first round was a lot of potions and elixirs of all kinds. Enough that they were preparing an elixir bath for Ryun which he did look forward to.

Two familiar people approached from the side, and Ryun turned to look at him. Reki had a wide smile on his face.

"That was a great match!" Reki said as he reached Ryun and slapped his shoulder.

"Thank you," Ryun said slowly. The person that stood behind Reki stepped out and looked at Ryun.

Eerv's son was Ryun's next match, and he wondered what the man planned.

"I am looking forward to our match," Eari said at last.

Ryun tilted his head, surprised, he didn't yet have a clear picture of who the man was. Because of Eerv he felt compelled to be at least somewhat courteous. "Likewise."

Reki laughed. "And I get to fight whoever wins! It is going to be great!"

Ryun inclined his head, wondering just how strong Reki was. Ryun had been there for Reki's match, with Anrosh and Lesamitrius telling him how it went. But there was only so much that they could see on the screens. He was a physical damage mid-range fighter, similar to Ryun. His techniques seemed to be capable of firing powerful blasts of kinetic force.

And Ryun had also been there for Eari's matches, what Lesamitrius and Anrosh described to him was enough for him to confirm that he was following the same paths as his father. It made it easier for Ryun, since he already knew what Eerv had been capable of. And Ryun had an idea of how to fight him.

Reki and Eari didn't stay for long, they excused themselves and mingled with others. A few minutes after they left, Selia arrived with a few people shadowing her from among the crowd.

"You came," she said as a way of greeting.

"I was told that it was... important," Ryun said while he met her eyes.

The side of her lip rose in a half-smile and she shook her head. "Trust me, I don't enjoy these gatherings any more than you do. My partner hates them even more than me though." She sighed. "I had hoped to get her to come today, to meet you, but... The two of you have builds with similar goals. You could have a lot to talk about."

Ryun shrugged his shoulders; she had mentioned her partner only in passing. But Ryun had gathered that she was a woman and that the two of them had been together for a long time. It seemed like the

story that Ryun had been told was true, though he had never asked Selia just how true it was.

“I’m sure that there will be opportunities for us to meet in the future,” Ryun said.

Selia nodded, then glanced around the room. A lot of people was pretending not to look at them. Even before Selia had arrived, most had cast glances and whispers in Ryun’s direction.

“You know what they’ve started calling you, right?” She asked finally.

Ryun nodded. His sense had told him exactly what everyone whispered where they thought that he couldn’t hear. He didn’t know how to feel about that, he had seen it happen even on Earth before the Framework. Nicknames or titles been given to people who do something exceptional, or something stupid. As far as nicknames go, it wasn’t the worst though.

“**The Undying Void**, not the worst nickname to be known by,” she said, mirroring his own thoughts.

“It doesn’t matter to me,” Ryun said.

“Oh, trust me, it matters. It is what will shape the perception of others toward you. It is what will guide your enemies when they decide to go against you, and shape how those who want to be your friends approach you.”

Ryun didn’t care much about those things, so he just shrugged.

Selia chuckled at his gesture. “I envy that about you.”

Ryun didn’t have anything to say to that, so he remained silent. They stood there for a while, neither one saying anything. It took Ryun a while to realize that she was using Ryun as a shield of sorts. While she was near him, it would be considered rude for people to approach her. She knew that Ryun didn’t really want anything from her, and that he was comfortable with silence.

It suited him fine, he could play along. He tuned the party out of his mind and turned inward, planning his next match.

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Eari

Eari stood in the arena, his spear ready and his armor shining in the sun. A part of him was nervous, he had seen his opponent's fight and knew that he was difficult to deal with, but he did have a plan. His equipment was geared toward countering his opponent, but he would need to close the distance as quickly as he could and overwhelm him with his aspect. The Void aspect was a hard aspect for his own to overcome, but it was possible if he did things correctly.

The other part of him was actually excited. He was about to fight someone who his father had lost against. He didn't know the details, but not all of the members of his father's sect had remained after his father surrendered. Eari's uncle had found them and offered a lot of Essence for information. Eari knew the rough outline of events that led to his father's surrender, which was what emboldened him. His father had won the first battle against Ryun Nacht, that meant that Eari could too.

If he managed it... it would mean that he was on the right path. He could prove his father wrong, his old way of thinking. Eari focused his mind on the battle, ignoring the voice announcing the match. He knew what they had started to call his opponent. **The Undying Void**, he had to admit that the name fit. Eari saw the arbiter appear next to him and ask if he was ready.

He nodded his head and a few moments later the battle begun.

Eari jumped forward activating the ability of his helmet, suddenly two blue shapes appeared in his vision. One was an arbiter standing on a small hill, and the other was his opponent his shape moving up as he probably used his shaping technique to create steps. Eari couldn't see him, he was behind several stone pillars, but **Life Sight** showed him any life signature even through walls or in this case stone pillars. He started his **{Bolstering Venomous Infusion}** pushing his Qi into his spear and into his legs. His awakened weapon

was a gift that he had received at birth from his grandparents, and it was his greatest possession.

“He isn’t coming for us,” the voice of his awakened weapon, *Grudge*, said in his head.

“No,” Eari agreed as he shifted his direction to follow the life sign.

His strength and dexterity were boosted, and he hurried after him, being careful not to allow a line of sight between them. He always moved so that some hill, mountain, or stone pillar was in between them. The closer he got, the better his chances were.

Then the life sign stopped mid-air, and Eari quickly caught up. He paused behind a boulder as he saw what his opponent was doing.

“Well, that is new,” *Grudge* said.

Eari grimaced as he peeked out and saw his opponent, Ryun Nacht, standing on top what could only be described as a crude fortress/tower made out of black and violet walls. The base was a large box, with a smaller box on top of it. Ryun was standing on it, his black and violet armor covering him in hard Qi plates, and around him were four walls keeping his sides and head covered. The front that faced Eari was open, with only a half wall built, reaching up to his waist. That was not even close to anything that he had done before. Eari quickly focused on the **Ring of Safe Return** on his hand, creating an anchor point behind the boulder.

Eari had only a moment to react as Ryun pointed his hands at him. With a **[Burst Step]** he got out of the way of the beam of void that disintegrated the boulder he had been hiding behind. He triggered his **True Body—Mithridatic Crystal** and ran, just barely staying ahead of the beam. He knew that it was going to catch him, so he realized that he had no choice. He triggered the set bonus of his **Incarnate of Strength Armor Set** and his strength rose by 120%. He jumped up on top of boulder and then used it as a step stone to get even higher in the air. He had wanted to get closer for this, but he didn’t know if he would be able to do it. The closer he was, the less time his opponent had to react.

As the beam moved getting closer to him, Eari quickly moved his Qi and triggered his **{Summon Exploding Vipers}** technique. Six green vipers flew out of his spear and toward Ryun. The man didn't even bother to react to them, but they struck him in his armor exploding with Venom Qi, slathering it over his armor. Their aura hung around Ryun, marking him, and that was enough.

Eari activated **Technique Charge—Overwhelm** and started charging a technique as he landed on a stone pillar just as a beam reached him. His amulet flashed a shield around him, protecting him for a second that it took him to ready another technique and use his **[Burst Step]** again. He launched himself off the pillar as his shield broke and midair activated his **Overwhelm** with his **{Heartseeker}**, it locked onto the Venom Qi hanging onto Ryun's armor and Eari pushed his mind. His **|True Sight|** and **|Enhanced Spatial Awareness|** made it easy for him to orient himself in the air. He pulled his hand and back and then with a **|Perfect Spear Throw|** and **Piercing Star** launched his spear.

Even if his opponent could avoid it, **{Heartseeker}** would follow him. Instead of evading, Ryun shaped several walls in front of himself. They were powerful, but with **Overwhelm** which increased the effect of his technique by three times and **Piercing Star** that increased his strength and his piercing damage by 500% for one attack. His spear punched through all of his walls and then through his armor. Ryun stumbled back as the force of the spear pushed him back.

Eari landed on a stone pillar and pulled out an ordinary spear, then dashed forward through the air with **{Defiant Leap}**. He could feel his **Black Viper Venom Qi** seep into his opponent. Ordinarily it might not have much effect on him, but *Grudge* lowered his opponent's resistances to Venom type Qi and any attack with him ignored 50% of any resistances.

Eari flew through the air, his spear high above his head as he prepared to activate more perks. *Grudge* was still embedded in Ryun's chest seeping Venom Qi into his body, its presence making it hard to heal. The only thing that saved Eari was a moment when Ryun's control

of his Qi slipped for just a moment. Ryun activated his technique and a blast of Qi exploded out of him, shattering his tower and blasting everything around him.

Eari's momentum carried him toward the blast, but he triggered his ring before it could. The only charge on the **Ring of Safe Return** activated and he was teleported back behind the wreck of the boulder where he created the anchor. He glanced up and saw Ryun standing on a step in the air, a big sphere of nothing around him. His tower was gone, and one of the pillars that had been nearby was nowhere to be seen.

Ryun looked straight at him with *Grudge* in his hand. He had baited Eari, had left the spear in his chest on purpose. With a flick of a hand Eari summoned his spear back to his hand.

“How much?” Eari asked.

“Not nearly as much as we hoped. The venom hurt him, paralyzing effects had probably numbed him a bit, but... He has a high Aspect tier, it is combating our Qi,” *Grudge* said.

Before Eari could respond, Ryun pointed his hand at him and fired his beam. Eari used **[Burst Step]** and moved to the side only to find that Ryun had pointed his other hand at him and fired a second beam from it before Eari had even landed. Eari raised his spear and focused his mind. **|Spatial Deflect|** met his beam and the beam bent around Eari. He felt his mind strain under the effort, and as soon as his leg touched the ground, he pushed himself off it with **|Spatial Evade|**.

He escaped behind a stone pillar and got ready for another attack. Ryun had baited him again. His beams were fast, but he couldn't move his limbs as fast as he could when he fired them. So, he had fired one and then aimed with the second before using it.

No new attack came and Eari waited tried to get his bearing and figure out what he wanted to do. He needed to do a lot more damage if he wanted his Venom to take hold. But with how much Ryun could regenerate... He didn't know if he could do it.

Eari activated his **Venomous Stingers**, and they grew on top of his tails and prepared for another offensive when he heard Ryun's voice.

"I fought your father before," he said. "He was better you know. The way he moved was more practiced. I know what he could do, and while you aren't as good, you are more powerful. I'm not letting you get close enough so that you can take advantage of that."

Eari ground his teeth. He had to force himself from not responding. This was not the place, and he would not let his opponent distract him.

He started preparing his technique again, when his **|True Sight|** caught something at the edge of his vision. He spun around as a dozen spikes flew at his head. He switched his technique to **{Army of Spears}** and a dozen spears manifested around him, shattering every spike.

He saw an armored Ryun rushing at him, only his **Life Sight**, still showed him standing in the air. The copy then, only when had he created it? When he distracted him with words? Before, when Eari had been forced to use his ring? Before they even met on the field? It didn't matter, the copy shaped four walls raising them around Eari and he knew enough from Ryun's previous battles to know that he couldn't let it close around him. With his **[Triple Thrust]** and **Overstrike** he broke through the wall then used **[Burst Step]** to get away. A javelin flew at his head, and Eari spun his spear in a **[Swift Parry]** blocking it as two spikes exploded beneath his feet, hitting his midsection and cracking on his crystal body. He felt the impact though and knew that his crystal skin had cracked at impact points even though his armor held. How much power could one person have? It wasn't fair. Eari had trained for his entire life, he was thought by some of the best in the world. He had equipment and resources. And still he couldn't even reach a Ranker who had only been in this world for barely two years.

His eyes saw Ryun throwing another javelin his way, he turned and used **Crescent Wave** sending a crescent toward his opponent breaking the javelin in the process. Then he turned toward the copy

that had its hands pointed in Eari's way clearly intent on using his beam technique.

Eari used **{Defiant Leap}** and activated the shield from his amulet again. The beam hit it and shattered the shield, then it struck Eari. His armor and crystal body survived for long enough that Eari could get close. With an **Overstrike** and **|Transferring Viper's Strike|** Eari broke through the armor and speared the center of the copy. Then he danced around it cut its head off. The copy dissipated into mist but Eari didn't have the time to celebrate. Two javelins flew in his direction, one after the other. He blocked one with **|Spatial Deflect|** but the other hit his shoulder, breaking itself on his armor but still making him stumble back. Eari groaned but pushed forward cycling Qi from his core to heal his body. His crystal body was weaker against physical attacks, and Ryun had decided to stop using special attacks and instead slam javelins at him. Eari dropped his crystal form and ran forward. He sent another **Crescent Wave** at his foe, then used **Greater Reset** to reset his perk cooldown.

He triggered **Overwhelm** while Ryun raised a wall to block the crescent. He prepared his **{Hearseeker}** as there was still enough traces of Venom in Ryun that it could lock-on. Again, he chained his powers. **Overstrike** with **Piercing Star**, into **|Perfect Spear Throw|** and finally **{Heartseeker}**. His awakened spear blazed through the air, sending a sonic boom that shook the air. Ryun created walls to block again, but they didn't even have the time to fully form before Eari's attack smashed through them. It hit Ryun and picked him off his step, carrying him back through the air. Eari ran forward pulling another spare spear from his storage.

Ryun caught himself in the air, his speed slowing unnaturally fast, as if he bled all of the momentum in seconds. With *Grudge* still in his chest he shaped a step beneath himself and stood on air. Eari focused on his bond perk and activated **Malice**.

All of his Qi bleed out of his body, leaving him without breath and nearly stumbling. Up on the step he saw Ryun sway as all of Eari's Qi was transferred to his awakened weapon and directly into his

opponent's body. His armor crumbled around him and Eari saw green lines spreading all over, beneath the skin on his face and down beneath his robes. His eyes looked at Eari in surprise but Eari forced himself to ignore everything. He had no more Qi, and he had to leave *Grudge* in Ryun's chest for its power to continue to reduce his resistances. He clicked his heels together then used **[Burst Step]** to walk on air. His boots ability lasted only seven seconds, but that was enough for him to reach his opponent.

Ryun tilted his head and gave him a sad smile. Eari didn't even have the time to process that before space around him rippled. He hadn't even gotten that close to Ryun, and he didn't see Ryun do anything at all. His right hand was savagely carved to pieces, as if a hundred little cuts had rent his flesh apart. His hand was gone and the rest was just mangled meat, his armor torn to pieces. His left leg was gone, his hip savaged, his chest cut open and green venomous blood seeped from all his wounds, but he didn't understand. Half of his world was gone, and he realized that one of his eyes was gone.

Without one of his boots, he tumbled down through the air and hit the ground hard. He struggled to think, to make sense of what happened. There was no technique activation, no movement from his opponent at all. The dimming vision of his remaining eye he saw Ryun land near him, *Grudge* in his hand. His skin blazed with violet lines that were devouring the green ones, and he was stumbling as he walked forward. Eari forced his body to move, his remaining hand pulling him over the ground. He focused his weakening mind and the trickle of Qi that had regenerated in his core and triggered **{Summon Exploding Vipers}**. One viper manifested and flew at Ryun who shaped a box around it, containing it. He moved his remaining tail and launched a stinger from it that Ryun just slapped away.

"That was well fought," Ryun said, but Eari barely could hear as he felt his body give out. Ryun said something more, but that was lost on Eari as he slipped into unconsciousness.

He opened his eyes a while later, and immediately realized where he was. The healers moving about was a dead giveaway. He closed his eyes and sighed, he had lost.

“We fought well,” Grudge said. “We nearly overwhelmed him with Venom, if he had been just one aspect tier lower...”

Eari didn't say anything, he couldn't. If he was honest he had gotten a lot further in the tournament than he had ever dreamed off. It didn't change the fact that he failed. He could see now why his father had surrendered to that man. There was just something about him, an overwhelming sense of power. **The Undying Void** indeed.

He opened his eyes and realized that he had a notification in the corner of his vision. He pulled it out, and blinked at what he read. He had to do it again because he wasn't sure that he wasn't imagining things. He remembered what his uncle had said, about him making a good showing and being rewarded by it. He smiled and looked at the notification again.

The Unyielding Spear (Unique)	Reach at least a combined power level of nine tiers. And embody an ideal.	+1200 to vitality and endurance, 5% to all stats, Last Spear, 100 000 Greater Essence
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