

Act II - Zach

Zach ran through the corridors, prison cells on either side of him. The howling was getting fainter behind him. The spirits had to have reached the yeti's hole and found it empty. He didn't know what their response was going to be, but he didn't want to be anywhere close to them when they decided what to do.

He rounded the corners, choosing directions at random. He found stairs leading up, and he took them. He had no idea where he was or where he was going. This place was a labyrinth, but he didn't need to find the end. He only had to survive until his perk came off cooldown, and he could get back to the real world. He would be in the same place, this entire tower seemed to be anchored fairly well to the real world so he would not appear in the Infinite Realm on the other side of the world, as could happen. Instead, he would still be inside the tower. And since he was fairly sure that it was empty on that side, he would have the time to find his way back to the top and then out.

Finally, he felt himself tire, he had shut off his **Phantom Avatar** since it had been draining him too much, but his **Last Heir of Terra** was still active. It was only because of the spirits of the old masters inside his head that he reacted fast enough.

On instinct pushed by the voices inside his head, he jerked back. A clawed hand smashed into the wall as the spirit, the same warden as the one he had fought before attacked. Zach had little time to react, but he had to fight. His **Ethereal Sword** appeared in his hand, a copy of Mistral. He blocked an attack that sent him flying back and hitting the wall hard. The warden was there in an instant its four clawed hands attacking. Zach activated **Phantom Avatar** again and activated **Old Heritage**. The attacks came-in lightning fast, and Zach blocked with this sword, one claw managed to nick his shoulder, carving through his armor.

Zach twisted and activated **Riposte** immediately. As his sword curved through the air, he triggered the **Dazzling Strike**. The spirit blocked and the perk blinded it. It lashed out widely, but Zach used his **|Spatial Evade|** to get away. He looked into his storage and pulled out his second spirit bomb.

He threw it on the warden spirit and it sizzled, making its entire body vibrate. He realized that the noise seemed to be coming out from that vibration, that it spoke that way instead of using a mouth.

Zach pulled his sword back, his **|Vulnerability Sense|** and his **|Perfect Tempest Dance|** guiding his attack. He stabbed forward, activating his **Double Ethereal Strike** and his **Consequence**. All of the kinetic energy stored in his sword from him blocking the spirit unleashed itself into his strike. He felt the sword pierce through its body and stab deep into its head. A moment later the Ethereal version of the attack followed.

It stabbed into its head and it exploded into pieces. The spirit fell to the ground and Zach leaned on the wall, breathing hard. He looked around, but saw no more spirits, nor did hear any nearby. It didn't look like most of them were in this part of the prison. Or perhaps they had been recalled up to the top once Gemheart and his people broke inside, he didn't know.

He only knew that he had to move. He noticed a doorway in between two cells, he walked over and saw it leading to a room that led to three more rooms beyond it. He grimaced, not knowing what purpose they had or if it was safe. But he needed time to look his notifications over, time to formulate a plan. He glanced at the dead spirit and then crouched, picking up the three meter tall spirit and placing it on his back. He walked into the room, then picked the last room beyond it.

It was a small room, with something that looked like a pedestal in the middle and markings all over the wall. He dropped the spirit, seeing that the wound he had inflicted was slowly peeling back, as if the spirit's body was dissolving, but at a snail's pace.

He put it behind the pedestal, then sat down behind it as well. He took a deep breath, then drank one of the three healing potions that he had left and healed his wound. He looked at his hand. With his skill he could see in the dark, but he didn't see a whole lot of color. He knew that it was a pale green color now. His hand felt normal to him, the same as it always had. It wasn't heavier, although when he touched it with the fingers of his other hand it did feel firmer and harder.

He experimented with moving it, but he had already used it without thinking about it. He didn't think that there were going to be any issues there at least.

He dropped his hand and then he turned to his notifications and looked them over.

Warning! Awakened item bond broken! Wind's Favorite perk removed!

Incompatible presence detected — Soul Weapon integration initiated. Integrating... Error... incompatible... outside interference detected, rewritten, adjusting... Compensating... Soul Weapon — Shade Reaver integrated. Unique Perk gained: — Shade Reaver

He did lose the **Wind's Favorite**, and there was no sign of Mistral. Their bond was broken, and whatever his hand was now, it was not Mistral. It felt like it was alive, but not... not how Mistral had been. It was just a primal presence inside his head.

He looked at his perks, and saw his new perk.

Shade Reaver (Unique Perk)	You have gained the Shade Reaver , a soul weapon. It grows stronger with you and allows you to take power from the shades and spirits you kill. Your soul weapon can have at most nine forms, each with its own unique power. Forms are made from the most dominant
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	<p>aspect of the shades or spirits you take it from. The stronger the target the stronger the power and form.</p> <p>You can use Source Drain to drain the power from shades and spirits. Doing so on living spirits and shades will grant you 10% of all the Essence they had ever used in life for advancement and in the case of spirits 10% of the Essence that comprises the spirit's power.</p>
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He didn't quite understand what all that meant, but he noticed something else. He had a new window, just below his perks.

Shade Reaver	
Lesser Wind Aspect	Wind blade form. Attacking with this form sends gusts of wind in the direction of attack. Allows you to control wind freely around you while the form is active.

Seeing the name of the first slot made him feel angry, his mistake had cost the awakened weapons its existence. He was certain that the Runelord had destroyed what Mistral used to be completely. This new window had eight more slots free for a total of nine. Zach focused his mind on his hand and he felt it respond. With only a few attempts, he managed to manifest his weapon.

His hand lit up with runes that glowed faintly in a shade of green the same one that his hand was supposed to be now. Then, Zach felt the wind move up his arm until a blade made out of the same pale green energy extended out of his hand. It was straight edged and looked like a constant spiraling of wind blades around an energy blade.

He turned to the body of the spirit and pushed the wind blade closer. The moment the tip drew near the body dozens of tiny cuts appeared all over the surface of the spirit's body. Zach drew the blade back and looked at it.

He focused on the wind around him. He felt a lot closer to it now, the sensation was similar to **Wind's Favorite**, only stronger. He moved the wind, and it obeyed.

He closed his eyes, glad that at least some part of Mistral had survived whatever it was that the yeti had done. He dismissed the blade and then read through his perk again and something occurred to him. The perk said that he could drain living shades and spirits, and that made him think that perhaps he could drain the dead ones too.

He reached for the dead spirit with his new hand and placed it over it. It was a **Lower Prison Warden Spirit**, but it hadn't really had any obvious Aspect-like powers. Zach wondered what was going to happen. He focused on the hand, and then activated the perk. Immediately he felt the presence inside it rear up and reach out. And then he felt himself pulling something out of the body.

A mass of energy flowed into his arm, and in a few seconds was gone. A new notification popped up in the corner of his vision and he pulled it up.

Shade Reaver—New Aspect available	
Lesser Darkness Aspect	Dark blade form. Attacking with this form sends blasts of darkness in the direction of attack. Allows you to pull darkness around you while the form is active.

One of his slots was filled by the new Aspect. Zach focused on his hand and runes flashed over it, the color changing to being completely dark, so much so that it was eating whatever light was available. He moved his hand and the only reason he could tell that it was there was because he could see an area that was darker than everything else. The blade was the same, just a straight blade that ate everything around it.

He stabbed it in the spirit's body, and it passed through the skin, but didn't seem to be doing anything else. *Probably because the spirit had that Aspect too.* It would probably not be effective against the warden spirits of this type, but perhaps it would let him move through the prison without being noticed. He focused on its other power and felt something come over him. He looked down and saw that the entire area around him was dark, all light was being absorbed. It wasn't quite stealth, it would probably stand out anywhere where there was light. But most of the prison was in the dark. It would be useful.

He dismissed the blade and then looked through his storage rings, seeing what exactly was missing. All of the weapons that he had kept in his storage were gone, almost all of his healing potions and boosting potions as well. He didn't have much else of worth, since he was selling everything, but his **Ring of Quickening** and **Ring of Deepscan** were gone as well. From Kishua's storage almost everything that he had was gone, his legendary weapons, his extra armor, rings and amulets, as well as all of his Essence Crystals. The only thing left were a few potions, one soul restoration one and four spirit bombs.

Zach wondered if the yeti left them on purpose or if he just discarded them since he didn't need them. It didn't matter, not really. He looked at how much Essence he had. He had gained a lot, both from the shade that he killed and the two legendary spirits. The two legendary spirits had given him 50,000 Greater Essence each, more than anything he had gained before from a single monster. They were powerful, and he probably wouldn't have been able to harm them without the spirit bombs.

From the shade he gained around 100,000 GE. If his math was correct, with the reward from his new title, he should have just about enough Essence to get to level 220. That was two new perks.

He put his Essence into his Class and started to level. Once he hit 195 he looked at the choices for his new perk.

Spirit Prison	Once per combat cast a prison intent on capturing and holding a spirit. The duration of the
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	prison depends on the target's power and your intelligence stat.
Phantom Mantle	Passively gain 20% reduction to physical and special damage while in the Ethereal Realm even when the Phantom Avatar isn't active. The bonus is added to that of the Phantom Avatar when it is activated in the Ethereal Realm.
Shade Prison	Once per combat cast a prison intent on capturing and holding a shade. The duration of the prison depends on the target's power and your intelligence stat.

The two prison perks were powerful, and they might help with him being able to **Source Drain** a still living shade or spirit, but it would not help him survive here if he was ambushed by more than one spirit. And the Phantom Mantle was amazing, a passive effect at that. One that only worked in the Ethereal Realm true, but he was stuck in the Ethereal Realm for the moment. He picked the mantle and continued leveling until he reached 210 and his next perk.

Resistant Soul	Reduces any Ethereal damage you receive by 25% and increases your soul's natural regeneration by 25%.
Enduring Soul	Any damage you suffer deals damage to your soul. But any damage to your soul is reduced by 80% of its total.
Reflective Soul	Each time your soul takes damage it sends out a blast of Ethereal energy that deals half of the damage you suffered to

	anyone in a two meter radius around you.
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Zach grimaced at his choices. Each was incredible in its own way, but he already saw the issues with two of the choices. **Enduring Soul** might be incredible, it would let him take only 20% of any damage done to his soul. But it made it so any type of damage also damaged his soul. A mundane cut would deal the same damage as an Ethereal one. And it didn't help him much now, when he was in the Ethereal and with little resources. He could reduce the damage he was getting, but if it accumulated... And he had to think of the future. Perhaps if he had built up his Class differently, he might've considered it but not now.

Reflective Soul was the same, it was powerful, but he would much rather not rely on having to be hit in order to deal damage. And it didn't discriminate between ally or foe, it would deal damage to anyone around him. And he most often fought with Naha nearby.

That left the last choice, **Resistant Soul**. It wasn't as impressive as the others, but it was a solid bonus. A 25% reduction and an increased regeneration of his soul. That was what could save his life in the next couple of weeks. It wasn't really any choice at all in the end.

He picked **Resistant Soul** and then leveled up until level 221 before he ran out of Essence. He had been tempted to save some, he could buy a lot of stuff with that much, but if he ever managed to get out of here he was owed the reward from the High Ranker. Better that he used everything, he would need it in order to survive.

He glanced at his stats at the end and saw big changed.

Strength	864
Dexterity	769
Vitality	242
Endurance	242
Intelligence	724
Wisdom	820

He had improved a lot, the title helped one of his perks that relied on his wisdom, making his **Ethereal Sword** stronger. He took a deep breath and checked his equipment again, making sure that his armor was in good shape.

He debated just staying hidden here until his cooldown was back, but he didn't know if the spirits had a set patrol schedule. For all he knew the one that he killed would be missed eventually, and someone might come here to check on it.

He needed to keep moving, and on the other hand, this was a good opportunity for growth. He had to be smart and patient. Stay moving and see if he stumbled on situations where he could get some Essence. He glanced down at his hand, still looking like the last form he had used—completely dark. If he could find some of the weaker shades... Or perhaps a spirit that he could try to kill while it was still alive, he wanted to see what the difference was.

Zach tightened his fingers into a fist and then stood up. In his left hand, he summoned his **Ethereal Sword** in the shape of a short sword, not quite a dagger but close enough. His right he focused and changed the form to the **Wind Aspect**. The blade grew and the wind picked up around it, the sensation of knowing the wind returned. His hand was free, only shrouded in glowing energy, and he could move it around while the blade stayed straight as if it was attached to his forearm.

He took a deep breath and walked out of the room and into the hallway where the cells were.

He had two weeks, and he planned on making the most of them.