

Class

Zach jumped back as Naha stabbed forward with one of her daggers. He blocked her follow up and then kicked in her center mass. She twisted her hips and pushed his kick wide, making him lose his balance. Before he could react she blurred forward, tackling him. He hit the ground hard, and she fell on top of him, restraining his arms with her legs. Her daggers touched his throat and he stilled.

She leaned down, her eyes narrowing, and then spoke. "I win."

Zach smiled. "And so you do."

Naha returned his smile, she was in her Quell body as they had started training with all of them. Each fought slightly differently, and since the two of them often fought together, Zach wanted them to be familiar in all her forms. She leaned back and then started to change, shifting back into Nyathulla.

Zach suppressed the voice deep inside that made him feel guilty. He had made a choice when he accepted Naha, a choice to live by the rules of this world. And the Infinite Realm was brutal, twisted, and unfair. Naha had spent a large portion of her life being driven insane by the imbalance her power caused. And he had vowed to help her, to stand by her and make sure that she managed to find her way back.

He forced himself to look at her, at one of her forms. There was no question in his mind that it was all Naha. He could see it in the way she held herself, in the way that she did everything. Slowly she stood up, and Zach followed.

"You ready?" Naha asked.

Zach didn't need to wonder what she meant by that, he already knew.

"As ready as I can be," Zach answered. "We've had a few training sessions, and I am confident that we can at least function as a team."

The Warden Guild Team had won their first qualifier match. After Zach's victory, Okim stepped into the ring and lost. It hadn't been that surprising really, Okim was the team leader, and his powers leaned more

towards that. Buffs for his allies, and more aoe abilities that hindered the enemy. Thankfully, Okim had left one of their strongest members as last.

Shkok Evasi, the krecean warden, had won his match against the strongest of the opponents' team members. Shkok was a blade master, one that even Zach was impressed by. He didn't know if he could've won against the krecean, at least not in a pure sword fight. His sword technique as well as his powers were impressive. Apparently, the strongest sword masters in the Infinite Realm tended to be krecean. Their two sets of arms giving them a big advantage. Of course other races had their representatives in that fighting school, but Zach had seen just how overwhelming a real krecean sword master could be. With his match won, they move a bit closer to the main tournament. They had one more match in order to qualify for the brackets. There were a lot less people in the team category than there were in the singles.

Zach and Naha had managed to get in to watch one of the singles qualifiers. As a team member, he had access to the Warden slot. The battle hadn't been anything really impressive, which was to be expected. The real fights would take place once the main matches started, once only the best were left. The last week they had spent on patrols or in training. More on patrols really. With the Wardens in charge of most of the security, they were somewhat short on people. And they tended to send most of their people out during the arena events, since that was usually the most dangerous time, when most people think that they can get away with things.

But Zach and Naha had been given a day's rest, since he had a match tomorrow. They had taken advantage to spend some time together.

"You know," Naha started as they settled on the bench that was placed against a wall of the training room. "I was approached by three different parties, asking questions about you."

Zach blinked, then narrowed his eyes. "What did they want?"

"To know more about your build, of course," Naha answered. "I was even offered quite a lot of Essence for that information."

Zach was surprised. "Really?"

“Of course,” Naha met his eyes. “You didn’t show much in your match, but you did intrigue people. The betting places had to adjust their odds for the Warden Team.”

“Because of my match?” Zach asked.

“You are the only one that had been an unknown. They’d made your numbers low, since you are from the Seventh Iteration, assuming that you had been raised to your tier of power and that you were not that adept at using your powers.”

“Huh,” Zach had never really gave it much thought before. But the betting was apparently a very big part of the Tournament. “So, what did you tell them?”

Naha rolled her eyes. “Nothing, of course. They are annoying, but I don’t think that they will have to wait long for their answers.”

“Oh?”

“Your next opponents are strong,” Naha said.

Zach grimaced, she was right. “They are. You think that I will need to reveal more than I want?”

“Yes, I don’t see how your team wins otherwise,” she said. He trusted her opinion a lot more than he those of the Warden Team. Okim and the others didn’t think that their opponents were that difficult to handle. They were set to fight against a team from a small monster hunting guild, Okim and others believed that they had an advantage. Since they were more used to fighting people, Zach had agreed with them. Yet, Naha seemed to have a different idea. Zach could tell that she was holding something back.

“What is it?” He asked.

Naha met his eyes, and then answered. “The team you are going against is strong, the odds are only slightly in your favor. But I’ve asked around about them, there are rumors about them taking on some pretty powerful monsters.”

Zach didn’t answer immediately. “You think that we are going to lose?”

“Your team is good, solid, but they lack the really big finishing attacks. Your opponents are used to fighting monsters and outlasting them. You will need to use as many advantages as you can if you want to win.”

Zach tapped his thigh with his fingers. He didn't want to really show all that he could do, not his Shade Reaver at least. He was aware that he might not have a choice if he wanted to win, only he wasn't sure if he did want to win. He had accepted this because it was good practice, because it could push him further. But he also knew that there was more to the reason as to why he had been chosen. He wasn't stupid, the Warden Commander clearly wanted to see something. He just couldn't imagine what that thing was.

"You should use the Essence you received," Naha said, interrupting him.

Zach raised his eyebrows at that. "You think so?"

"I do," Naha nodded.

"Fighting with less levels will give me better feats and achievements," Zach added, it was the reason why he hadn't done it.

"It will give you a lot less if you lose," Naha added. "Power in the Infinite Realm never comes without a price. There are rewards that you might get if you reach far enough."

Zach nodded, he did know a bit about the rewards. Items, potions, Essence, and a lot of other useful stuff. It wasn't like he didn't see her point, the fact that the Wardens decided to give him Essence to advance meant that they at least want the team to do well. He knew that winning wasn't a priority for them, they just wanted a good showing. The Wardens weren't real competitors, that wasn't their job. They were unlikely to win against people who spent their entire lives preparing just for the tournament.

But, if he advanced, he would get two new perks. That wasn't a small thing.

He looked inside his storage, and then pulled out the box filled with Essence. He looked at it for a moment, then glanced at Naha and sighed.

In the end, Zach followed Naha's advice and leveled all the way to level 359. After he assigned all of his free stats, he turned back to his notifications and started looking at them in order.

Warrior's Stamina	Your stamina regeneration rate is increased by 50%.
Warrior's Vigor	Your health regeneration rate is increased by 50%.
Warrior's Mentality	Your mental stamina regeneration rate is increased by 50%.

Each option was simple, but also very powerful. It was a passive effect, which increased his current rate by the percentage. It wasn't much, but Zach knew that every small thing could matter in battle. He showed his choices to Naha, but he already had an idea of what he wanted to take. He was reliant on his abilities and perks, most of which used his stamina as a resource.

After a short discussion, he picked the stamina option and moved on to the next.

True Link — Through Your Eyes	Allows you to see through the eyes of your linked partner. You will only be granted the eyesight sense when using this perk, and the effect drains up to 5% total stamina per second to maintain depending on distance between you and Nahamassa Plainrunner.
True Link — Our Power	Allows your partner to designate one perk and share it with you. You will be able to use an active perk once per week, or a passive one for half a week. Once the perk is used or a week has passed, a new perk can be designated. Both sides will be able to use the perk independent of one another. Cooldown depends

	on your bond with Nahamassa Plainrunner.
True Link — Restore	Once per month, you may increase your linked partner's health regeneration by 200%.

Zach again showed Naha his choices. This was a second **True Link** perk he had gotten, and the choices were good. They immediately dismissed the first one. It was good, but they didn't really have a need for it, not now anyway. The second was very interesting, and as Naha leveled and gained better and more powerful perks, it would only get stronger. The last one was also good, it gave Naha more survivability, which was never bad. But she already had a regeneration perk, which meant that there was really only one choice.

He picked the perk, and saw that he had one more notification. He blinked, and then pulled it up.

No Immortal Class requirements met. You will be unable to continue leveling until you meet the requirements for at least one Immortal Class. You can attempt to discover the requirements on your own, or undertake a Class Quest from the Dealmaker.

Zach wasn't quite sure what the notification meant, but he saw that his Class seemed locked. He couldn't put any Essence in to reach level 360. He was confused, nothing that he had read in the library told him about this, although few of the guides that he read showed anything after the third evolution. He showed his notification to Naha, hoping that she might know something.

"I've never seen anything like that," she said. "But... I haven't really been looking. I hadn't leveled enough to even get close to an Immortal Class."

Zach grimaced, wondering what he should do. The one thing he knew, was that he needed more information.

Zach found his way to Okim's room, he knocked and then waited. He heard the minotaur grumble as he walked up to open the door. Once he did, he blinked at Zach.

"Warden Zacharia, how can I help you?" Okim asked.

Zach shifted uncomfortably. The minotaur had told him that if Zach ever needed anything he could come to him. But Zach was pretty sure that it was just something that the man had said, not really meant. Anyway, Zach decided that Okim was a good choice for him to try and learn more about his class.

"I was hoping to ask you a few questions, if you have the time?" Zach said.

Okim tilted his head, clearly surprised, but then he nodded his head and stood aside letting Zach enter. He walked into a room that was almost identical to his and Naha's. Okim gestured at the seating area, and they climbed down the few short steps to sit down in the den.

"What can I help you with?" Okim asked.

"Well," Zach started slowly. "I just used the Essence you gave me to level. And I reached level 359. I wanted to ask about this," Zach showed him the notification.

Okim nodded his head. "Ah, you didn't know?"

"No," Zach answered. "There was nothing about this in the Citadel's library."

"Not surprising," Okim said. "It is usually something that is guarded fiercely, and—in the case of us Wardens—usually passed on from mentor to mentee. Once you reached this level, the Citadel would put you in touch with someone who had already gone through this, assuming of course that your class can evolve into theirs. Getting an Immortal Class is not easy."

Zach grimaced, that wouldn't be an option for him. "And if someone didn't have a Class that was that well known?"

"Well, then you are on your own. You need to find a master that can teach you how to accomplish the requirements to evolve your class. This is

why, in most cases, people follow the guides. The well-known Classes, because the evolutions and achievements are known.”

Zach shook his head, that would've been good to know before. But of course, no one ever wrote anything about it down. He still didn't understand the Infinite Realm's obsession with being so obscure and secretive. But then again, perhaps it was just him. He hadn't gone through the usual education system of the Wardens, perhaps this was something that was covered. He sighed, realizing that he probably would've done the same thing even if he knew. “And what about the other option?”

Okim looked at him for a long moment, not saying anything. “Only if you have a death wish.”

Zach raised his eyebrows.

Okim sighed. “There are always fools like you, thinking that they can do it that way. They usually die quickly The Dealmaker doesn't give easy quests. Sure, going that way, you will not need to do the achievement requirement, but trying to figure out what achievements are required or doing random stuff to discover one is far more likely to get you something than trying the Dealmaker's quest.”

“It is that hard?”

“I've heard about a Warden who tried it,” Okim shook his head. “He was tasked with killing a dragon that was five tiers of power above him, alone. He never stood a chance.”

Zach didn't comment, but... that didn't sound as unachievable to him as it obviously did to Okim. But then again, Zach was used to fighting those that were much stronger than him. And he understood that he was a lot different than others.

He thanked Okim for the conversation, and then left, thinking about what he was going to do.

Zach stood with his team in the arena, there was no stage this time. Their battlefield was the entire arena floor. Only, the geomancers had created

an environment. Pillars of stone, hills, small mountains and even caves filled the area. Both teams had their starting positions on different sides of the arena, and both were waiting for the match to begin.

The people in the stands watched through the massive screens that didn't allow the contestants to see anything from the arena side. That way they couldn't get any information about their opponents. One of the arbiters stood next to them, probably in connection with the other one that was with the other team, waiting for both teams to be ready before announcing the start of the match.

His team was all standing still, waiting. All of their preparations already done. Zach grabbed his helmet and adjusted it slightly, more out of impatience than any real need. The rules for this match were different than those from their previous one. They team that eliminated all of their opponents first won, but there were also a few additions to the rules. Every contestant could use up to three healing potions of the same grade, since they were provided by the organizers. It meant that battles could get prolonged. In reality, battles between highly skilled people rarely lasted long, all it took was a moment, a single small mistake, and a master could take advantage.

Most of Zach's fights ended in that manner, it was what the spirits of terra had taught him. Go in for the kill from the start. It was what he planned on doing. The arbiter glanced at Okim and asked if they were ready. Then, after he heard the response, a voice filled the arena.

“Begin!” The voice echoed.

Immediately Zach's team sprung into motion, heading toward the center of the arena. Zach turned to the side and ran in a different direction, creating some distance between himself and them. Following parallel to them. His job was to take advantage of opportunities that the team created and take out as many of the opponents as he could.

Zach kept pace with his team, all his senses looking for any sign of his opponents.