

ANROSH

A monster leapt up to the wall, its jaws open wide as it dashed forward to bite her head off. Anrosh used **[Deflect]** and the flat of her sword smashed into the monster's jaw from below, closing its maw and turning its head. She stepped to the side as she raised her two handed sword and then brought it down on its neck severing the monster's head. The **{Frost Ward}** on her weapon froze the wound, preventing the usual gore and blood from spilling out.

Without missing a beat, she continued moving with somewhat slow but precise steps over the wall. Her sword hitting monsters that were trying to get over the wall. She was wearing her **Armor of the Leshy King** and had her **{Frozen Armor}** over it. It made her heavy and less maneuverable, but it also provided incredible protection. Monster attacks that caught her unaware or managed to get through her defenses barely even scratched the ice covering her body, let alone reach her armor beneath it.

The battle seemed to have been raging for a while now, and she was surrounded by chaos. Warriors fighting, people screaming, powers flying, blood splattering all over, everything was filling her eyes and ears, making it hard to see what was really happening. Smoke didn't help it either. But at least the Emberhorn and his sect had kept their side of the agreement. She could see their fire powers, killing the monsters beyond the wall by hundreds. Her people were holding off the wall itself, and she was running from one side of the wall to the other, helping where needed.

The original plan had gone out of the window the moment fighting started. She and Eerv were supposed to stay close to each other, but among the fighting she had lost sight of him, and there wasn't much that she could do about that now.

A strange half-bird half-bear monster climbed over the wall a few meters away from her and its beak snapped down and bit the head off of one of Twilight Melody Sect warriors. Anrosh **[Dash]**-ed forward as soon as it appeared, but she wasn't fast enough. The monster turned, intending on killing another warrior. The warriors around it stabbed it with their poison infused spears, but the monster's skin was too tough for them.

Anrosh wasn't going to get there in time, so she extended her hand and moved Qi through her body. A moment later her **{Frozen Shaping}** blasted out of her hand, a ranged technique that she had devised herself. An area the size and shape of a cube surrounding the monster's head was suddenly filled with her **Absolute Cold** Qi. The temperature dropped and froze everything inside, the air and the monster's head. A moment later she was there and her sword came down on the frozen cube, shattering it into a thousand little pieces.

She pulled the corpse and threw it back over the wall, hitting another monster that was trying to climb up. She saw a nimble little monster jump toward her from the ground, and she swung her sword, using **[Crescent]** and cutting it in half.

She looked around, seeing an endless sea of monsters in front of them. Her **{Frozen Armor}** shattered, and she grimaced. Having techniques that she didn't need to actively use was useful, but she had already renewed them a few times. She moved back, letting the other warriors fill her space on the wall and reapplied her **{Frozen Armor}** and then did the same for her **{Frost Ward}** since it too was going to expire soon.

As she used her techniques she took the time to look over at the battlefield. Seeing more and more monsters reaching the top of the wall as the bodies of the dead served as ramps for them to walk over. More and more monsters dropped from the wall and into the city, and she saw Nayra and her warriors hunting them down. She thought for a moment about Kri, her daughter was deeper in the city, closer to the compound halfway up the mountain. A part of her was worried about her, if things continued in this manner her daughter was most certainly going to see combat, but on the other hand she was strong. And only through combat could she grow stronger still. Her advancement wouldn't matter if she didn't use her powers in combat.

She noticed that the Last Ember warriors had faltered in their defense, more and more monsters were coming through. It was understandable, they had to be burning through their Qi, but they should have enough potions to last them a long while. The fire monsters that the Emberhorn used to summon were no longer attacking the monsters, but instead were gathering

in a few locations, turning into bonfires that didn't even impede the monsters way. She saw a larger circle of fire gathering in the distance, a long way from the wall.

Perhaps the Sect Head was preparing for a big attack—she thought as the smaller bonfires burst up and curved through the air, lines of fire that coalesced into a large ball of fire that churned like the sun.

It was becoming brighter and brighter, and she saw even the monsters on the ground shying away from it. It had to be a powerful technique, or a perk power. Anrosh didn't know what it was that alerted her, but the moment she saw the great ball of fire pulse and get ready to explode, she started running.

The ball suddenly compressed, and then a beam of orange fire exploded out of it and instead of hitting the monsters, it smashed straight into the wall. Anrosh jumped just before it hit, but she only barely got out of the way. The wall exploded and the explosion hit her midair, sending her flying through the air. She had to have blackout for a second because she found herself on the ground, in the square behind the wall, amid the rubble and dead warriors. She shook her head and stood, looking around.

She saw the dead Twilight Melody warriors, and a few Last Ember warriors as well. Some were still alive, injured and wailing in pain. Her ears were ringing and she couldn't hear anything. And then, through the hole in the wall, monsters started charging in.

She saw Nayra yelling, ordering warriors to pull back behind the defenses deeper in the city. And then fire hit them, the Last Ember warriors turning on them. Anrosh's vision turned red and she started her **{Glacial Onslaught}** technique, her stats increasing. She triggered one of her **Qi Anchors** and Qi flowed out of her. Her Avatar of Cold manifested next to her, and she charged into the enemy. The closest group of Last Ember warriors was coming down from the wall, attacking the Twilight Melody Sect warriors as they were trying to retreat. The Last Ember members seemed to be trying to get to the tower where the Emberhorn and his strongest had been placed. She didn't let them.

She laid into them, her avatar and she smashed into them with their swords, cleaving them apart and painting the ground in red. They were

ranged specialists, and they had little chance to defend against her. She split the last one in half, from the top of the head to groin, his body peeling away and falling to the ground.

Suddenly the sky was filled with fire, a massive pillar of orange and red flames exploded out of the ground filling the air and reaching the heavens. Anrosh looked at it and knew instantly what it meant. The Emberhorn had attacked Ryun, had used a powerful attack to strike while Ryun was fighting the swarm leader. She felt anger fill her two beating hearts, as well as the fear that he had succeeded.

She looked around at the chaos instead, knowing that she couldn't let what she didn't know for certain to interfere. She saw that most of her warriors had retreated, and others were running from the wall in the distance as they were getting overwhelmed. The monsters were rushing toward her, but Anrosh's eyes locked onto the tower, seeing the Emberhorn and his son, surrounded by their best warriors walking down the stairs from the tower, and their other warriors making a protective circle around them, while others were placing some strange boxes on the ground in a circular pattern.

Anrosh saw a group of Twilight Melody warriors attack them, and she rushed forward to help. She knew that she was no match for the Emberhorn, but anyone could die in fighting like this. Monsters were attacking them from the wall, and others that had entered the city, while her warriors were keeping pressure on the other side.

All she needed was one moment of distraction. She **[Dash]**-ed forward, her avatar following, she cut through the first line of the Last Ember warriors defending the circle her **|Greater Swipe|** cutting four of them down and her avatar stabbing another behind her. She had to give it commands, and so she focused on what she wanted and the avatar ran ahead of her, heading straight for the Emberhorn who had just stepped from the stairs to the ground level and was looking behind at the wall where a group of monsters had leapt toward him. His hand raised and bolts of fire exploded out of his palm, spearing them.

Her avatar reached them, and she saw Emberhorn's son step in to protect his father. She commanded her avatar to use her technique, and a wall of ice formed in front of the son. Anrosh ran past the son and her avatar

and jumped into the air, straight at the Emberhorn. Her sword was raised and she activated her **Qi Anchor**. Her **{Arctic Storm}** came into being around her, swords made out of ice appeared around her and then as her leap neared its end the attack flashed around her. She activated **Figther's Strike**, and a flurry of swords exploded forward as the Emberhorn noticed and turned. She saw a barrier of fire flash into existence and his hands raising. Several of her swords were battered away and some melted, one managed to get through, and it slashed downward, cutting a line on the Emberhorn's hand that frosted over.

She reached him and slashed from above, but the old man was too fast, he turned to fire as her sword passed through and then flashed a few meters away. She turned toward him immediately, seeing him return to his physical state and saw that she had reached him, a wicked line split his face from brow to jaw going over his left eye. He glared at her and she **[Dash]**-ed forward.

Emberhorn raised his hand and a ball of fire appeared in his hand, a moment later a wave of force exploded out of it. It smashed into her, picking her up from the ground and sending her flying backwards. The ball of fire was still in his hand, and she realized that it looked similar to the technique he had used before to take down the wall, only smaller. Her **|Enhanced Danger Sense|** blazed in her head and her eyes widened as she saw the attack execute, a beam of fire blasted forward.

She put her sword in the way, tried to use **[Deflect]** but it was futile. Her sword shattered as if it wasn't even there and the beam punched through her **{Frozen Armor}** and her **Armor of the Leshy King** beneath. She felt the beam pierce through her, obliterating her insides and pain spread through her body. She activated **Fighter's Heart** and the pain disappeared, but she felt the weakness in her body.

Her flight ended as she smashed into a roof of a building and broke through the roof. She thought of her daughter, and wished that she could've spent some more time with her. Then she was falling down and everything went black.

VIPER

Eerv shook his head as the explosion shattered the wall. The concussive force of the explosion sent him flying off the wall and among the monsters, and he got to his feet as quickly as possible. With his **[Burst Step]** he stepped off a monster's head and jumped to the wall, he climbed up and swiped with his spear, killing the Last Ember warriors that were about to incinerate him. It was clear what had happened, the Last Ember sect had betrayed them.

Eerv had never thought that the Emberhorn was stupid, but this was an insane action. He had expected something like that after they defeated the swarm, but now? While they were still fighting the might of the swarm? It was mad. They hadn't dealt with even a third of the swarm, there was no way that the Emberhorn and his warriors could escape now.

Eerv's eyes looked for the traitor, and saw the Emberhorn on the tower assigned to him and his people. The old Sect Head was looking toward the monster swarm, his head tilted to the sky. Before Eerv could see what he was looking at, the Emberhorn gestured with his arms to the sky, and the light of an enormous fire filled the world. Eerv turned around, startled to see a pillar of roaring fire stretching high up into the sky and immediately he knew that Eerv had decided to eliminate a rival.

Eerv's eyes narrowed as he saw the pillar burn out and saw a shape falling from the sky. He didn't know if Ryun had survived that, but if anyone could, then it was going to be him. Eerv turned away, there was nothing that he could do to help Ryun now, not when he was in the middle of the monster swarm.

Instead, Eerv looked toward Ven'oran. His city, his people, his sect. He had surrendered to Ryun because that was the only way that he and the sect could survive. And now... now it was on fire. Monsters were entering and demolishing everything that he had been working for over the long decades he had spent here.

And the Emberhorn was the one who had taken it from him. Eerv had never wanted to fight, all he ever wanted was to advance in peace. But the

world didn't care for that. He saw now that if he wanted to have the peace he desired he would need to fight for it.

He started running across the wall, straight at the Emberhorn. The old Sect Head, the representation of everything that he hated about the sects. The arrogance and posturing, the back-stabs and lack of true honor.

He saw Anrosh on the ground, running at the Emberhorn as well as he was walking down the stairs from the wall. He wanted to shout at her, to tell her to wait because she didn't stand a chance against him. But the battle was too loud around them and he knew that she wouldn't hear. So he watched as her attack came, and saw as she nearly cleaved the Emberhorn's head off. His heart beat faster as he ran, she had done more than he had anticipated, and the Emberhorn had to be tired from the use of so much of his power. But then the Sect Head counterattacked and Eerv saw Anrosh fly across the city, a hole in the center of her chest, and smash through the roof of a building in the distance.

There was little chance that she could survive that, and Eerv locked his eyes on his target, pushing everything else out of his mind. He saw the Emberhorn and his son move toward the center of the circle that was created with small boxes. He recognized them for what they were, a teleportation formation, and he knew how they intended to escape. The formation wouldn't be able to send them far, but it was going to be enough to escape the swarm, especially since it was going to be busy with the city. Eerv infused his spear with **{Greater Venomous Infusion}** a technique that would last for several minutes.

Just before Mar Nu Zar and his son entered the formation, Eerv reached their position. He leapt from the wall with his **[Burst Step]** and landed among a group of Last Ember warriors. His body turned into **Venom Crystal** and two **Venomous Stingers** made out of Qi appeared over his tails. He smashed them through the throats of two of the warriors while he decapitated the other two with his spear.

Mar Nu and his son noticed him and their eyes widened, but Eerv continued. With **Reset** his **[Burst Step]** came off cooldown and he pushed off the ground heading straight for the Emberhorn. Mar Nu's son stepped in front of his father, a plume of fire blossoming from his hands that engulfed

Eerv, but his **Venom Crystal** let him ignore most of the special damage. His Qi cycled and Eerv was filled with his **{Defiant Advance}** technique. His speed soared and he pushed through the fire.

He stepped to the side and out of it, saw the Mar Nu's son's eyes widened, and Eerv's **|Perfect Spear Mastery|** let him turn seamlessly. His spear soared through the air, and before the other Early Heavenly Realm Cultivator could react, Eerv cut his head off.

He heard Mar Nu's roar, but Eerv didn't stop. He surged toward his target and the Emberhorn punched forward with his hand, a wave of heat and force hit him, and stopped his advance. The heat didn't hurt him much, but the force made Eerv stop in his tracks, forcing him to stab his spear into the ground to keep himself from being pushed back.

As soon as the force ran out a beam of fire headed straight for Eerv. **|Spatial Evade|** made Eerv slip away from it, and he jumped forward a new technique building inside his body. He used his **|Transferring Viper's Strike|** with his **{Rapid Attacks}** and his spear strikes hit the old man from five meters away. The Emberhorn turned to fire, but Eerv's first strike pierced the man's shoulder. The Emberhorn came out of his evade, and attacked with bolts of fire.

More of the warriors around them joined in the attack, and Eerv grimaced. He needed to get close, before they overwhelmed him. With his **[Swift Parry]** he cut through several of the fire attacks and then used his **{Defiant Advance}** again. He surged forward and got close to the Emberhorn who was trying to enter the circle. Eerv's stingers lashed out, but the man was suddenly sheeted in fire that pushed his attacks away. His spear came at the Emberhorn, the old man moved his hand to block it, but Ressay moved. The spear bent like a viper and slid around the Emberhorn's guard. Eerv quickly changed his technique and his **{Paralyzing Strike}** hit the Emberhorn's shoulder as the man twisted away.

Eerv saw the Emberhorn's arm drop uselessly to his side and pushed his advantage as bolts of fire were raining down on his crystal body from the sides. He was starting to feel the damage, but he couldn't stop now. The man before him was more than a traitor now, he was everything that he hated, a symbol for everything that Eerv had ever wanted to change. A stand in for

his parents, for his uncle and ever other Sect Head out there. And Eerv was going to kill him for it.

Two warriors got between him and his target and Eerv changed his technique, **{Spectral Viper}** grew out of his spear and lashed out killing one while Eerv stabbed the other. He pushed them away as the Emberhorn was retreating toward the circle.

Eerv wasn't going to get him in time, he could see that. He stopped as the Emberhorn stumbled into the circle. Eerv pulled his spear back and the Emberhorn turned, a ball of fire in the palm of his hand. They both attacked at the same time.

Eerv used his technique, and threw his spear as he wove his Qi around it. A version of his **{Heartstriker}** technique activated and his spear flew toward the Emberhorn's heart. The Emberhorn activated his technique as well and a beam of fire flew at Eerv, it hit his crystal and shattered it, pain unlike anything he had ever felt hit Eerv as the beam pierced his body and his body reverted back to its original state. He saw his spear impale Emberhorn, just above the heart as he sheeted himself in fire that somehow deflected Eerv's technique.

A moment later the boxes flashed and light filled everything. Once it was gone, the Last Ember sect was gone with it. Eerv collapsed to the ground as he summoned back his spear.

"Eerv, this is bad, your soul it—you need to drink a potion, now!" Ressav's voice said in his head, but Eerv had no strength to answer. He tried moving his hands, but he couldn't. The beam had destroyed his chest, burned out his heart. Nothing was pumping blood in his body now, he was losing consciousness.

"Eerv?"

He thought about his son, and wished that he had the chance to tell him how sorry he was. And then everything went black.