

The Meaning

Ryun dashed to the side, just fast enough to avoid the attack from the golem. Its fist smashed into the ground, cracking the stone. He was surrounded by six Hearthstone golems, each more powerful than usual. The war effort against the Taken had not gone by without gain. One of their spoils was an item, a so-called **Dungeon Tuner**, when used on the doors of a respawning dungeon it could increase the tier of the monsters inside from one to nine tiers. They were making a lot of Essence through it, both in material and in run selling. Ryun rarely used it himself, even on the strongest setting the dungeon wasn't that much of a threat to him.

But today wasn't about being challenged, not in that way at least. His eyes saw Essence, he saw the Hearthstone Essence mingled with Stone and a dozen other things inside of the golem. With his **|Perfect Target Mark: My Eyes, Mark Essence|** he tried to mark only the Essence of Hearthstone, and then he focused on his sense, trying to narrow it down to the exact Essence that he was targeting, sensing it and nothing else.

One of the greatest weaknesses of his **|Perfect Resonance Sense: My Sphere, Total Clarity|** was that the more Essence *noise* there was, the less he could actually sense. The resonance got entangled, it turned into just an indistinguishable mass inside of his head. He had decided that trying to merge the two would eliminate that weakness.

He had evolved his **|Target Mark|** in a way that would utilize the advantage of his eyes a bit more. It seemed logical, and he hoped would prove to be the right decision.

He evaded the golems as they attacked, just looking at them and trying to get a feel for the Essence that his eyes were marking. Then, he felt his

skill grab hold of it and he closed his eyes, now focusing on both skills without any other interference. His will leaned on the two skills, trying to bring them closer together as he shaped a pillar of his being inside his mind.

What Zach had spoken about made sense to Ryun. *The meaning* of a person's life was important, how could it not be? It seemed so obvious now, after all that he knew about Essence. They were Essence, it followed that it applied to them too. But, the path to creating a true shape, a true meaning for himself, was not so easy. There were many different things that made him, him. The desire to see the end of all things, to witness stories, was just one part of that. There was a part of him that was a piece of the world, that interacted with those stories, not just as an observer. There was the part of him that cared about his word, and the one that wanted to see those who oppose him fail.

Then, there was the piece of him that was the Aspect of True Death—The Wolf of the End. It was a big piece of him, perhaps the most important one. He remembered the dreams, the memories of the Reaper. After Selia became his second half, there were more of them. He remembered the dream of the one who was there before the Reaper and the Scythe. He remembered stepping out of the confines of reality to where its creators dwelled. That being was tasked with administering the True Death, the final end. What happened to the souls of those who died in that manner he didn't know. Perhaps the memory was there, buried somewhere deep. But he had changed the Aspect, it was not what it once was. Ryun killed based on his own code, not some grand rule of the reality.

There were other parts of him that mattered. Selia and Erdania, for example, he loved them. Though he had come to understand that love for him was different than others. Still, it was no less important to him. He had chosen the two of them to be his partners in life, and he didn't regret that choice. They were different than him, and that was important, they filled in things that Ryun lacked.

Anrosh and Kri, the Sect, they were important too.

But if he had to say what the *meaning* of his life was, well, it would be something... harder to put into words. If Zach's was *Accumulation and Dissemination of Knowledge*, Ryun felt like his would be... *Watching for Worth*. Listening to stories, watching the world and the struggle of others, enduring so that he could do it until the end. He had no issues interfering, no issues with helping, but first, you had to show him something that was worthy of it. A drive, a talent, or... anything that would spark his interest really.

So perhaps, his full meaning could be something like: **The Witness of Journey's End**—the part of him that witnessed the stories of others; the Paths of the **Final End** and the **Unbreakable Wall**—the part of him that survived unbroken, until the end; **Aspect of Oblivion**—the part of him that endured, the Aspect that persisted, that had always existed and always will; **The Wolf of the End**—the part of him that had once been the Aspect of True Death, now the one that passed judgment on his own conscience.

What he needed was an idea, a *meaning*, that could encompass all of that. Something like *Enduring in Pursuit of Worth*. He didn't know what to call it yet, but he didn't need the name to start building it. Skills, it seemed to him were made for this. He had always felt a bit unsure as to what they were supposed to be there for. Class and Cultivation were clearly ways of choosing a life's goal. Skills were too varied, except that they allowed you to lock in pieces of yourself in them.

The pillars inside of his being upon which all else was built. And he could do that now without knowing the end goal. He could put in a strong foundation that could hold any kind of an idea and *meaning*. It could be a habit, a personality trait, or something more abstract. He had already locked in his vow to never break his word, and his unwillingness to allow anyone to stand in his way. Not the perfect pillars, but he couldn't have

known what they meant back then, still, not the worst ones either. For his newest perfect skill he had used a broader piece of himself, his love for Cultivation. It seemed safe enough.

Now he focused and formed a new pillar inside of his mind, placing it next to the three others, in this one he put his will to endure, to remain until the end of all. He felt the golems around him, felt the Hearthstone Essence only. His skills working in tandem painted an image inside of his mind of golems, showing him only the targeted Essence and nothing else. They approached him in the darkness, and he moved, avoiding their attacks as he struggled to push the two skills together.

He felt his will making the skills vibrate in his mind's eye. The effort made him pause, his concentration on the skills and not the golems. They still came, and he knew that they would hit him. If he moved, he would lose the grasp on the skills, if he stayed still he would lose once they hit him. He remained still, focusing fully on the skills.

Just as the golem had been about to hit him, a shape moved from behind, silent and sharp claws cut through the golems dropping the pieces on the ground. Ryun tuned it out and reinforced his will, the skills merged, evolving into a new skill.

He sagged, feeling his will slip away from the effort. With a mental command, he pulled up his notifications and looked at his new skill perk.

Marked Target	Your Of Targeted Resonance Sense allows you to mark anything, as long as it is inside of your sensory range, you
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	always know where it is. Can only have one article marked.
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He opened his eyes and felt his new sense spreading from him. It was still the same, but as he focused on something with his eyes, he felt it intensify on that particular Essence. It would take some getting used to, but it should prove valuable.

“Congratulations.”

Ryun raised his eyes at the speaker, then nodded in gratitude. “It was harder than I thought it would be,” Ryun commented.

Ereclaw grunted, but didn’t say anything more. He didn’t have the same problems.

“And your *meaning*?” Ereclaw asked. “Any progress there?”

Ryun grimaced. “Some,” he answered. “It is hard to find something that is broad enough, though I think that I am on the right path.”

Ereclaw inclined his head, then knelt and started collecting the **Hearthstone** from the golems. They couldn’t afford to waste it, Anrosh would kill them, they had already taken two time slots for their experimenting.

“It is easier for me, I believe,” Ereclaw added. “I am the Emissary of Twilight, he who ushers in the transition between states. Part of you is in me, where you are the end, I am that which precedes it. Besides, the stronger you get, the stronger I am. It isn’t the same.”

“If only it could be so easy for me,” Ryun shook his head.

“Perhaps my teacher could help,” Ereclaw glanced at him.

Ryun grimaced. He knew about the dragon in the Ethereal, he had told him. And while he struggled to grasp some of what Ereclaw had witnessed, he was interested in meeting the being. But there was still a big issue. “The Ethereal is still wreaking havoc on my senses,” Ryun said. It was one big weakness that he had. Sure, he could stay for a short while, but the Ethereal had the awful tendency to move and change often. As soon as it started changing, his sense went haywire, ranging from mild inconvenience to outright debilitating. He hoped that his new skill would let him control it better.

“The offer stands,” Ereclaw told him.

Ryun just nodded. “We should finish the run quickly,” he said, excited to get out and pick up a new skill. He finally had empty slots.