

Fury of the Son

The sun had shone down on the mountain that held their secret base. Kael stood on top of a cliff, his eyes closed and deep in meditation. It had been three years since the night when they had opened the Dome and unleashed its forces on the core. Things hadn't gone exactly the way he had expected them to. The portal was closed, and while the monsters weren't defeated, they were almost forgotten.

But there was a silver lining, the core had turned on itself. The loss of many of the leaders had cause unrest, and wars had broken out. It wasn't exactly what he had wanted, but the effect was similar. People were thrown into situations where they were forced to fight, to grow. Many were dying every moment, but those that survived would flourish. He wanted to change things, to give everyone true freedom. The Framework bound them, it made them follow paths that pushed them to be... less than they could.

He had no way of changing that. The Framework was beyond his reach, for now. But it was now the time to encourage freedom. He and his people were hunted, yes, but few really had the resources to even attempt to catch them. Not when they were so preoccupied with their petty greed. It was... sad. He had painted himself a villain, and they still couldn't unite, not even to punish him. It was why they weren't worthy of leadership. He had done hunting of his own, finding and killing those who oppressed others. It was... almost easy with all the wars happening all around. His people could move freely.

Most of them were in one of their safe strongholds, preparing for the next mission. Kael along with Maya and Tellisa was the only ones who had stayed back. He knew that it was a risk, staying in one place for too long.

This mountain was supposed to be their meeting spot. Hidden, in between several territories of little importance. Most of his people that had been on missions had checked in, aside from one. Fethum was days overdue, and Kaeliss was getting... impatient. He feared that something had happened to him. Everyone in the Unchained knew that death was a real possibility, that they might be called on to give their lives for the cause.

Kaeliss thought of them all as brothers and sisters. He wept for every death that came to those that followed him, but he knew that he couldn't stop. He owed it to everyone else who was exploited by those who held more power. Who were lied to by them and told that they could never reach far.

He knew how damaging it could be to grow up being told that you will never hold power. That you will never make anything out of your life. People followed rules made by leaders who did not deserve to lead. In a world where everyone could become strong, having leaders in the first place was... idiotic. They had an infinite world, room for everyone, and yet they allowed others to hen them in. To put them behind fences that didn't even exist.

Sometimes he wondered if perhaps he should just pick a direction and leave. Take his people and make something new for them. But always he remembered walking through the great cities in the core. Seeing... resignation on the faces of the people walking around the streets. Trying to convince themselves that their lives were happy and meaningful.

He shook his head and stood up, stretching his hands over his head and spreading his wings. His body had felt... different, ever since he reached the Evolved Realm. It was... an adjustment, he had to admit. He felt like every part of his body had improved significantly compared to what it used to be. It was... as if he was, for the first time ever, truly one with his aspect. Tranquility filled him, calmed him and his mind. It was... incredible.

Footsteps announced a visitor running toward him, and Kael turned just as Maya ran up.

"Kael! Quick," she yelled from across the plateau.

Kael tilted his head and yelled back. "What is it?"

"It's Fethum, he is back," Maya said.

By her expression he knew that something was wrong. He spread his wings and flew across, he passed her and went down the pass between two jagged cliffs, falling toward the lower plateau on the other side of the mountain. It didn't take him long to reach his destination.

He found Tellisa kneeling on the ground and holding a bloody and twisted shape. She poured a potion down the figure's throat, but it didn't seem to do anything.

Kael landed and knelt next to them. It took him a moment to recognize Fethum. The cthull was covered in wounds, melted flesh and burns covered all of him. His clothes had fused with his skin in places, and the rest was just a twisted red mess. His right hand was gone, only a charred bone peaked out of twisted meat. His face tendrils were all burnt off, and half of his face was unrecognizable.

“Fethum,” Kael started. “What happened?”

“—ry—” Fethum tried to speak, to say something, but it came out only as a garbled mess.

Kael leaned down, putting his ear near Fethum’s face.

“Sorry, I’m so sorry,” Fethum rasped.

“You have nothing to be sorry about, my friend,” Kael said, pained at seeing him so injured.

“He made me,” Fethum whispered again. “Sorry, sorry.”

Fethum repeated over and over, and Kael froze. He sensed a presence and turned around, his eyes looking up at the sky.

Up above them a figure floated in the sky with the sun behind his back.

“I found you, at long last,” Heor Darkhoof, the Beloved of the Sun said as he raised his hand.

Kael turned around and grabbed Tellisa and injured Fethum. His wings beat against the air pushing them away as he used **|Greater Soaring|** and flew away. The sound cut off for a moment, and then the world turned into bright light and a noise of a thousand burning fires.

Wind billowed from behind them, smashing into Kael and sending him tumbling to the ground. He rolled, trying to keep his people safe but he lost his grip on them. Kael recovered quickly as Tellisa used one of her techniques and twisting wooden roots reached out of the ground to cushion their fall.

He turned around and saw that the entire plateau where they used to be was gone. Only molten hole remained. Maya came down the mountain in a torrent of wind and Kael yelled out.

“Take Fethum and run!”

“Kael—”

“Now, you can’t help against him,” Kael sad and then flew up in the air.

Heor Darkhoof, the son of the Leader of the Adventurers Guild, the former leader, and one of the most powerful adventurers in the world. He was dangerous beyond compare, and Kael didn't know that much about him. Only one thing was known about his power. And that was that it grew stronger during the day, and that he used power of light and sun. No one had gotten out alive from an encounter with him with more than that.

Kael didn't like fighting opponents that he knew nothing about, but he had no choice now.

Heor was still above him, his back to the sun, making it hard to see him clearly. His golden hair was waving in the wind, and his hands held loosely by his side.

"I'm surprised that you aren't running away, little rat," Heor sneered at him. "But I am thankful for it. Murderer, I've been dreaming about this for so long. Today is your last day, make peace with your life, weep and despair for the choice you have made. For they have all led you here to this moment."

Kael took advantage of his enemy's monologuing to prepare his techniques. He prepared his **{Waking Dream}** and then as Heor finished speaking he let the technique go.

Tranquility Qi flowed out of him, tendrils of it stabbing into Heor's mind, intent on creating an illusion of Kael attacking. As the first tendrils stabbed into his mind, creating a state of dreamlike visions. Heor would see himself being attacked, and Kael waited for when Heor moved. Then, his hand moved to block an attack that wasn't there, and Kael got close, he raised his claws and swiped at Heor. His attack was blocked, Heor's eyes were still clouded over, yet somehow, he had been able to see the attack coming. Kael attacked while he prepared another technique. Heor couldn't block properly, and Kael managed to score several gashes on his opponent's flesh. Then, Kael unleashed the second technique he had been preparing, **{Dream of Tomorrow}**. The tendrils grew in size and power, stabbing into his opponent's mind and then—he heard a chuckle. Heor's eyes focused on him, all haze in them clearing, then his wounds sizzled and closed up.

"I am disappointed. Your power over the mind is formidable, but... unrefined. You rely on your aspect more than mastery of your techniques. And the **Sun Burns All Illusions.**"

Kael saw his Tranquility tendrils evaporate out of Heor's head and burn away from Heor's body. He moved away immediately, getting more distance between them. He knew that he couldn't let him take the initiative. Despite knowing that, he was too slow.

Heor raised his hand and a beam of yellow light hit Kael in the shoulder as he twisted himself to evade. He moved Qi through his body, activating his **{Tranquil Fury}**, increasing his stats. More beams of light came at him, and Kael flew, evading close to the mountain's side. The beams scorched and melted the rock of the mountain, and Kael could already feel the heat of it. He beat his wing and used **|Perfect Spatial Evade: As Whisper, In the Wind|** to move away from the mountain. His **|Threat Assessment|** was telling him just how great of a threat his opponent was, but there was nothing that he could do. One couldn't escape him, not during the day.

Kael turned sharply, and with **|Greater Soaring|** sped toward his opponent. With **[Wraith Lash]** he reached out, snaring at Heor's soul. The spectral web in his hand fell on Heor, passed through him and caught on his soul. As he tried to pull, he felt his hand burn as the web ignited, his soul screaming in protest. Kael recoiled for just a moment from the unexpected pain, and then Heor flashed to light and was then in front of him.

His hands were glowing with light that was too bright for Kael to look at, and Heor struck out. With **|Of Wrathful Claws and Tranquil Body|** coupled with his **{Tranquil Fury}** and even with his **Insight** telling him where his opponent was going to strike, he was just barely fast enough to react. He blocked the first two strikes, then next six he barely deflected, each strike hitting him hard enough that it singed his scales and burned his feathers. Then, Heor was through Kael's defense, and punches rained down on his body. He unleashed his **Tranquility Aura**, but immediately he could feel that Heor's power was burning the Tranquility Qi the moment it reached his mind.

The only reason he wasn't beaten to a pulp was his **Calm Form**, which made each of Heor's strikes power perfectly distribute across his body, and his Ataraxia body, which let him mitigate the physical portion of the damage. Too bad for him that Heor's glowing fists still did a lot of damage. He could

lessen the damage, but soon enough he started to feel the pain spreading over his entire body.

He focused his mind, moved his Qi and prepared a technique. **{Ferocious Blow}** filled him, and his power soared. In one moment he was able to overwhelm his opponents strength and focus his mind on **|Perfect Greater Blow: My Fist, Weight of A Mountain|**. He slammed his fist on Heor's chest. The air cracked; the power of his strike exploded forward. Heor was thrown back, flying through the air as shockwaves rocked everything. Ripples of wind and space distorted everything, but then Kael saw his opponent.

He realized that it wasn't nearly enough. His opponent stopped in the air, and his eyes met Kael's, glaring with pure yellow light.

In those eyes, Kael saw his death. A moment later he activated his **Evolved Form—Dracogriff**. His wings grew, his body shifted as a plume of feathers surrounded his ankles, wrists, and neck. His scales got tougher and larger, covering the majority of his body and he grew. A second set of wings sprung out of his back and his snout narrowed down into a beak. His robe changed with him, His stats increased, and he used **Wind Step** to come out above his opponent. Tranquility fell from his body, calming everything in his surroundings. Even the air itself stilled, all things came under the effect of his Tranquility.

The light in Heor's eyes dimmed and his lids half-closed. Kael beat his wings and swooped down, opening his beak wide for a killing blow.

Just as he reached his opponent, Heor's eyes cleared and then...

/Oath of the Sun God: Churning Nova/

Kael barely managed to turn in time, he escaped the initial blast with **|Perfect Spatial Evade: As Whisper, In the Wind|**. Heat scorched his back, his scales melting by the first wave. The feathers on the rest of his body ignited and burned up. The pain would be crippling, but with his Unyielding he managed to fly. His wings beat and he glanced back. He saw his opponent; a blazing being made out of yellow fire that consumed everything. The liquid

in his eyes evaporated and he went blind in an instant. He turned and focused on getting away.

A thunderous sound of blowing fire and straining space filled the air. And then Heor was next to him. The heat itself nearly killed him, his scales cracked from the heat and then started to melt. The shape next to him raised a hand and fire consumed him.

Kael's body burned, liquefying at an incredible rate.

—Reject—

Kael's body healed, and the fire around him vanished, but only fire that was the result of his opponent's body's effects, not Heor's body itself. He still burned like the sun.

"Pathetic," the being that shone like the sun said. "Die."

Heor reached for him with his hand and Kael used his fruit technique.

{Release All Restraints}

His stats exploded, his body swelled. His tendons strained, his muscles tensed, his mind quickened. In an instant he turned and hit with his tail, using **|Perfect Greater Blow: My Fist, Weight of A Mountain|** his opponent was blown back even as his tail melted from the strike. A moment later Kael speed away. Flying as fast as he possibly could while his technique filled him with a calm and allowed him to act far beyond his usual capabilities.

In seconds he had crossed the mountain range, air parting in front of him as if he was cutting it with a knife. Then, words blossomed inside of his mind.

—Sun Fall—

Then everything turned white.

Kael stumbled, grabbing hold of a nearby rock to steady himself. His body was destroyed. One of his arms was nearly all gone. He had spent all of his items, everything and that he had, that he had kept and planned on using for greater things. In the end, he had spent his people's wealth just on trying to save his life. He shook his head, wishing that there was another way.

He was at the bottom of a ravine, a small river flowing next to him. He hoped that he had gotten far enough away from his opponent. Heor shouldn't be able to follow him, Kael had used unique items that were worth a fortune each in order to lose the Beloved of the Sun.

He had been very careful in his actions. He had never attacked anyone who he didn't think that he could beat. But there was a reason why he had never gone after Heor or his father. High Rankers powers varied widely, some were only perceived to be powerful, while others were far more powerful than their ranks indicated. But what Heor had done... He had to have been hiding his full strength from everyone. Kael hadn't heard a whisper of what he had seen and experienced.

He was grateful for this, for the lesson. He lacked power if he was going to achieve what he wanted. And now he knew that he had to advance faster than he had ever planned to. And he knew exactly where he could find power that would make him capable of achieving everything that he wanted.

Now, he had a reason to risk it.