

Evolving Skills

“You should’ve called for me, or anyone from my family,” Nayra said.

They were sitting in a meeting room, returned from their trip just that morning. Ryun and Tali sat on one side of the table, with Nayra and Anrosh on the other, Lesamitrius was standing near the door behind them.

“It wouldn’t have changed anything,” Ryun told her.

“Of course it would’ve,” Nayra insisted. “We have history, we could’ve—”

“—No,” Ryun interrupted with a shake of his head. “That history would not have changed anything. Perhaps I would’ve listened to your advice, but in the end, I would not have acted any differently. They attacked what was mine, and for that they were going to die no matter what. Even if I had called for you or your mother, it would’ve still been my decision in the end. I am the Sect Head of Twilight Melody, it is my responsibility.”

Nayra looked at Ryun for a long moment, not answering. Ryun had never hidden who he was, she had to know the truth of his words. Finally she nodded, acquiescing. Ryun could understand why she thought that he should’ve called her family, Tali had suggested it too. His reasons were as he told her, it wouldn’t have changed anything. They were guilty, he had heard enough. The only reason he gave them so much time was because Zach asked it of him. He wouldn’t have done it otherwise. Perhaps, he had ended up being less... thorough in his actions because of him as well.

“Send word to your mother,” Ryun spoke. “She should send someone to take control of their territories and people soon.”

“You want us to take them in?” Nayra asked.

“You said that there was history,” Ryun tilted his head.

She opened her mouth, and then just shook her head. “Of course.”

“How is the construction going?” Ryun asked, changing the topic.

Anrosh cleared her throat. “It is going well; we are on schedule. The arrays we purchased from the **Speaker’s Hall**, arrived yesterday and are being placed in the walls now. Formations have been laid down beneath the major streets, and anti-pest formations are being placed in the ground on the outer ring.”

Ryun nodded, it was going to take a while, but they were building up Consequence to be as defensible and as livable as possible, while also accounting for future growth. They were building the city to be a world hub. A desirable place for people to visit, and try and live in. A place of importance.

Even Ryun has come to understand the value of such things. Protecting what was his could be achieved in many ways. And he had decided to build up other kinds of power aside from personal. Or rather, he had put people in place to do that for him.

“Good,” Ryun said. “Let me know if there are any issues that I can help with.”

Based on the look that Anrosh gave him at those words, he knew that he was unlikely to be called if there were any issues. She... didn’t think that his brand of resolving issues was suited for all situations. Ryun didn’t hold that against her, in fact he agreed. That only meant that when she did call for him it was needed even in her eyes.

The rest of the meeting was led by Anrosh, discussing on how to expand the sect and swallow a few more territories that Ryun had just left leaderless. By the time the meeting came to an end, Ryun was ready to go back to training.

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“All skills hold a piece of an Aspect,” Zach said as he paced around the clearing. Tali and Ryun sat in front of him, listening. “A **|Strike|** is inherently a physical thing, it creates and transfers **Kinetic Force** Essence. It doesn’t need to have the name of the Essence within it to be colored by it.”

“And **|Kinetic Strike|**? What about that?” Tali asked.

Of course, both had known this already, but Zach’s knowledge was... deeper in some ways, more attuned to the ways that the skills interact with different Aspects, while Tali and Ryun were more focused on the Cultivator way. Internalization and improvement of self through Essence and Qi.

“It is my belief that names are... important, that the way things are called gives them power, gives... *meaning*,” Zach said. “A **|Kinetic Strike|** is more strongly attuned to the Aspect of that Essence.”

“You think that it is better to have a skill with an Aspect in the name?” Tali asked.

“I don’t think that better is the right word. It depends on what you want and need. What I would suggest is a... theme. There are threads spread out in every corner of the Framework, ready for us to reach for them. A Path, a Class, A Skill, an Ideal, Aspects and Essences. All of them are tools given to us to build ourselves up. But it all has to have a purpose, beyond just gaining power, doesn’t it?”

“Power is reason enough for most people,” Ryun commented.

Zach shook his head. “I am not talking about people; I am talking about...” He waved his hand at the sky, at everything around them. “Those who are behind the curtain. The reality is shaped by conscious hands, by a will, we are not given tools just to gain power, though I will admit that gaining power is a big part of it, but there is so much more to all of this.”

Ryun glanced at Tali, then back at Zach. “Like your titles,” Ryun said. “Being a Sage, crafting a Way of Aspect.”

Zach nodded. “Aspects are so strange,” he put his hand to the side and a sword appeared in his hand. It had a hollow in the center of the blade, near the handle, where a soft blue light pulsed. Ryun could tell that the Essence there was that of a Soul. “There are countless Aspects in this world, some are what I have come to think of as building blocks. Aspects like Time, like Space, Light, and Gravity. And there are those that are combinations of different Aspects, others that are concepts that don’t really have a physical form but do have an impact. Lately, I’ve been thinking a lot on what such a Way of an Aspect would be like. I know what it meant for Time. I took the loose laws and ideas of Time, and I gave them form and direction. I forged a Way that was singular in its purpose. But what would the Way mean for the Aspect of the Blade? It is the element of Metal, it is the concept of Sharpness, of Conflict perhaps, of War? Of Blood? I don’t know, the Blade is not my focus. But, if someone made a Way of the Blade, how would that impact the other Aspects that were part of that idea? Would it impact them at all?”

Ryun was listening closely, interested in his views of the Aspects. “Do you think that these Ways were one of the reasons behind the nature of the Infinite Realm?” Tali asked.

Zach blinked, as if he had been startled from his thoughts. Then, he turned to look at her. “Definitely,” Zach answered. “I was the first to create a Way, the Dao, it seems obvious to me that this was the end goal of all three focuses. Though, I suspect that there is something more beyond it.”

Ryun tilted his head. “More?”

“I don’t know,” Zach sighed. “There is a clear progression in the way that we interact with Aspects. We have the Aspect Mastery titles, which we gain once we’ve mastered the use of an Aspect and aligned ourselves with its most whole form, the tier nine Essence. And then we have the ones focused on understanding. I believe that Mastery and

Understanding are not the same thing. One can have Mastery without understanding,” he hefted his sword. “Take this for example. I could have Mastery of the Blade Aspect, but it doesn’t mean that I understand all of it. I might not know how to make such a weapon and forge several Aspects together in order to make the Aspect of the Blade, but that will not lower my ability to use it. Just like me not knowing the exact inner workings of my body wouldn’t lower my ability to use it. Understanding is something different, I have achieved the Glimpse of an Aspect, just like your Kri has the Glimpse of Absolute Cold. I’ve pushed that a step further, to gain the Grasp of Mind as well. I know that Sage is a progression of that, though I am unsure if it is the next step or if there are more in between. The Sage of Time was me skipping steps, it was a unique event that I don’t think I will repeat again. What I am pretty confident in, is that being a Sage is required to make a Way of Aspect.”

Ryun nodded, that did make sense to him. “So, about skills,” Ryun said, turning the conversation back to the topic. “You believe that we should evolve them in a way to complement our Aspects.”

Zach shook his head. “Not Aspects, but as I said before... an idea, a build, or maybe... Perhaps it would be easier for me to explain by using myself as an example,” Zach paused. “My goal, the idea behind my being, is to understand Aspects. Therefore, I seek to learn more than one Aspect. I understand Time, I shaped it. I want to do that for other Aspects too. To share that knowledge. So perhaps Knowledge is my ultimate Aspect, if it even is an Aspect...” He narrowed his eyes. “Perhaps I could make it an Aspect,” he said, almost to himself. “A concept with...” He shook his head. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to trail off.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Tali said. “I think that I understand. The idea behind your build, your self, your being and power. Something that encompassed everything you are, past, present, and future. Something that is built from all your focuses, your ideal, your Aspects. An idea... a purpose, or... a *meaning*.”

Zach tilted his head at that. “*Meaning* of a person, yes, that does sound better.”

Ryun tried to think about it. His Ideal made him the **Witness of the Journey’s End**, he had the Aspect of Oblivion, his Paths were those of the **Final End** and the **Unbreakable Wall**. There was a theme there, an idea, a *meaning*, as they had said. His skills were a bit... scattered. Could he bring them together somehow? In a way that could solidify everything about him, put in the missing pieces.

Perhaps, but it would take some thinking about.

He focused back on Zach and Tali as they talked, theorizing, but in the back of his mind he was already thinking of ways to evolve his skills in the right direction.