

Act II - Ryun

With only a few minutes of experimenting with his new sight, Ryun had decided that he liked it very much. It was a bit hard for him to actually *see*, but his skill made it so that he didn't need to use his eyes. With his new sight he could still see everything around him, shapes, objects, people even. They all just looked like he was looking at them through a filter. He didn't see color in the real world, but he saw Essence, and Qi. He could see everyone's Class pathways and Qi core and conduits, but for some reason he wasn't able to see skills even though his perk said that he should. But he didn't have the time to experiment with that. He had just taken a look at a few guards around the compound and at Ereclaw. The wolf looked different than people, he didn't have a core or a class pathway, instead he had a chaotic jumble of deep red lines and spheres. Probably because his power was different than that of people.

Ryun also learned from Ereclaw that his eyes now looked different, he no longer had a pupil. His eyes now only had the whites surrounding a solid irises, which were now just endless pools of the void, darker than black and completely eerie to look at, as the wolf put it.

After he was done with the preliminary testing of his eyes, he returned to the training hall and prepared for his final advancement. He knew that he was in a way cheating. His class allowed him to harvest a lot of Essence, but even with it, he would've taken a lot longer to fill his core with the right Essence in order to make his cycling better, months at least, maybe much more for the leap from Peak Monarch to Early Heavenly. But they had taken the Essence from the sect, Eerv and Ryun had basically bankrupt it. They had purchased cycled Essence to circumvent Ryun's need for drawing in Shadow Essence, and accumulated an incredible wealth. Or at least it appeared to be so. If the swarm disappeared before it attacked them, the sect would be done. They had taken Essence from the people, sold everything of value, all on a promise of a greater return if they managed to survive the swarm. Without the swarm the sect couldn't recover, the people would be left destitute and would probably need to find another sect to join. It was a risk, one that could pay off for everyone, or destroy their future.

Ryun had seen how much it pained Eerv to follow Ryun's plan, he had built up his sect over many decades. Made it into a machine to fuel his growth for many years to come, he had not meant for it to be something to sacrifice for a relatively small gain. He had planned on using it to reach the Immortal Realm, but the most that they could do with the entire value of his sect was to push Ryun to Early Heavenly properly and use some of what remained to raise a few of the sect's warriors. The higher they went, the more Essence it took to advance.

Ryun sat down in a meditative pose and prepared, he had been trying to decide how he wanted to cycle for his last stage. So far he had been a pretty even split between improving his conduits and his core, but now... His techniques all took a lot of Qi, and he had been in fights where he ran out of Qi by the end. From Tali he knew that the Early Heavenly perk would improve his core. Cultivators called that perk a sea of Qi, an improvement on his core. He would not be able to choose that perk, it was going to be decided based on his Peak Foundation perk, the one that had empowered his core. For him that was **Void Forged Core**. It had increased his Qi density as well as his core capacity, but he felt like he should have a bigger well of Qi.

In the end he decided to cycle in order to improve his core. He started putting in Essence into his core, filling it to the brim, stretching it out. And then, he started cycling, drawing the Essence out into a single Essence Crystal. It took him almost an hour to cycle several times. And then, he pulled out the rest of the Shadow Essence Crystals that they had bought. The store run auction house allowed for items to be transferred through the Framework instantly, so it was incredibly useful. Too bad that it was also filled with so many items that finding what you needed might take you awhile.

Ryun pulled the Essence in, the crystals cracking in his hand. And then he cycled again, creating his own Shadow Essence Crystal, of an even lower value since it could only be cycled by one more person. Finally, he put in more Essence and got ready to trigger the change. He didn't know what to expect, but he was feeling excited.

He looked at his screens and then triggered the advancement. Immediately he felt the change fill his core and then spread through his body. Everything felt as if it was on fire, and his core suddenly winked out, as if it

was a hole in his stomach. For a moment he felt panic, as if he had done something wrong, but then, the burning sensation went away and he saw a notification.

NEW PATH PERK AVAILABLE	
Abyssal Core— Void Well (Path Perk)	Your core is an abyss of the void, your current total core capacity and your current Void space size are increased by 50% of the current total. +10% to wisdom. Your core, an endless abyss. Nothingness and incomprehension rule here.

Ryun looked at the notification and then down at his body, looking at his core. It was definitely larger, but it also suddenly felt as if it wasn't even there, like it was a void. He could still see it, but compared to the churning ocean of Qi that he had in the Monarch Realm, now it was silent and still. The violet accents to the Qi had diminished, but they were still there on the edges of his core, but the center was just a void in space, darker than black.

He tried to use his technique and his Qi obeyed instantly, moving through his channels as **{Null Mantle}** filled him and his stats increased. And he felt his stats increase, he ended the technique immediately. He just wanted to make sure that everything still worked. He glanced at his next notification.

Cultivation Bonus
Gain plus 60% effectiveness to all of your technique effects.

His cultivation bonus had gone up as well, instead of increasing all his techniques and perks by 40% it was now going to increase everything by 60%. He glanced at his windows, bringing up all of his techniques individually to see how they were affected.

Null Mantle	Increase all stats by 80% (50%) of their total while technique is active. You can shift the bonuses from any stat to any other.
Breath of Destruction	Send out a wave of Qi from your mouth, dealing Void energy damage equal to 8x (5x) your wisdom. The wave marks anything that it touches, dealing one quarter of total damage over the next four seconds.
Darkest End	Unleash a sphere of Void energy all around you, the energy deals Void damage equal to 11.2x (7x) your wisdom. Anything marked by the attack takes one quarter of total damage over the next four seconds.

That increased his **{Null Mantle}** bonus from 70% to 80%, but also the damage of his **{Breath of Destruction}** and **{Darkest End}**. He glanced to his second path to see the changes there as well.

Qi Shaping	Create a geometric shape made out of Qi. The construct is fixed in space, and its durability is equal to 4.8x (3x) your wisdom.
Qi Armor	Sheath your body in armor made out of Qi. Durability of effect is equal to 6.4x (4x) your wisdom.
Avatar of the Reaper	Partition your mind and split a minor part of yourself to create a Qi copy of yourself that will have limited initiative and intelligence but will obey the main part's will. It requires 4% (10%) of your total Qi to create, and will be able to use

	<p>your techniques by drawing on your core at the rate of 0.8x(2x) of the techniques costs. The techniques will be only 48%(30%) as effective. The Avatar's durability is equal to 3.2x(2x) your wisdom.</p>
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The durability of his **{Qi Shaping}** and **{Qi Armor}** had gone up. As did everything about his **{Avatar of the Reaper}**. He smiled, he had plans for improving his techniques again, but he needed more time, which was something that he didn't have. Finally, he sighed and glanced at the rest of his screens to see his full gains.

Titles		
First Kill	Kill the first monster in the Framework run world	5000 essence
Adventurer	Hunted more than 100 monsters	+5 to all stats, 5 000 essence
Hero of Promise	Save more than 10 people with a single action	+5 to all stats, 5 000 essence
Transcended	First Cultivator in the World to reach the Foundation Stage	+10% all stats, 100 000 essence
First Body of Iron	First Cultivator in the World to forge their body	+20 endurance, 10 000 essence
Beaten but not Broken	Survive torture for more than thirty days	+10 to all stats, 50 000 essence
First Quickened Mind	First Cultivator in the World to forge their mind	+20 intelligence, 10 000 essence

First Lake of Qi	First Cultivator in the World to forge their Qi	+20 wisdom, 10 000 essence
Cannibal	Kill more than 5000 people of your own race for their essence	+10 to all stats, 50 000 essence
One Against Many	Fight against more than 10 opponents and win	+5 to all stats, 5 000 essence
First Lord	First Cultivator in the World to Reach the Lord Stage	+10% all stats, 100 000 essence
First Qi Manipulator	First Cultivator in the World to gain Qi manipulation	+5 to all stats, 10 000 essence
One Against Horde	Fight against more than 100 opponents and win	+10 to all stats, 10 000 essence
First True Body	First Cultivator in the World to obtain True Body	+5 to all stats, 100 000 essence
Hated Foe	Be hated and hunted by more than half of a world's population	+50 to all stats, 100 000 essence
One Man Army	Fight against more than 1000 opponents and win	+40 to all stats, Indomitable, 500 000 essence
Butcher of Humanity	Kill more than 500 000 people of a race by yourself	+200 to all stats, Reaper's Aura, 5 000 000 essence
True Understanding	6 Evolve a skill to tier 6	+20 to all stats, 20 000 Greater Essence
Limitbreak	Defeat the three Rulers in the Reign of Three Territories	+40 to strength, endurance, vitality

	scenario, while on a lower Realm and lower level.	+5% to all stats, 10,000 Greater Essence
Monarch	Reach Monarch Realm	+10 to all stats, 1,000 Greater Essence
Ruler	Become the sole ruler of a territory.	+5 to all stats, 5000 Greater Essence, Small Mansion (Town Upgrade)
Alchemical Tester	Use more than 10 alchemical concoctions to improve yourself	+2 to intelligence, 500 Greater Essence
Heavenly	Reach Heavenly Realm	+30 to all stats, 50 000 Greater Essence

Perks	
Void Touched Body (Path Perk)	Your body is touched by the void. Damaging effects of the Void have less effect on you. Immobilizing effect are 50% less effective on you, all physical or Qi attacks deal 80% of their total damage to you, +40% to endurance.
Feast (Class Perk)	Killing enemies heals you. Strength of effect depends on vitality stat.
Tinker's Mind (Path Perk)	Your mind is quickened, able to think faster than ordinary humans. Able to alter perception of time for the user. +15% to intelligence. Strength of effect equal to 2x your intelligence.
Vampire (Class Perk)	Killing enemies adds one tenth of their highest stat to your own

	temporarily. Strength of effect depends on level.
Void Forged Core (Path Perk)	Your core is forged by the Essence of the Void. Increased core capacity by 20%, increase Qi density 40%, +20% to wisdom stat, able to create a personal void space inside of your core. Size of void space dependent on wisdom stat.
Regenerator (Class Perk)	Heal rapidly when in combat. Strength of effect depends on vitality stat.
Silent Hunter (Class Perk)	Your movements don't disrupt the air around you, making you nearly silent. Strength of effect depends on dexterity stat.
Qi Controller—Thousand Threads of Destruction (Path Perk)	Your Qi control is nearly perfect, able to finely manipulate your Qi and use up to 3 techniques at the same time. +20% to wisdom. Control depends on wisdom stat. You weave a thousand threads of Qi, each thread filled with power. As you weave, you ensnare all those who would stand in your way.
True Body—Untethered Cloud (Path Perk)	Your body retains all the abilities granted by Untethered. Untethered Cloud is your truest self. Your body is soaked in Void Qi, and you may assume the state of Void Cloud . While active your body becomes a cloud of the Void, giving of the Essence of Void, increasing the effects of your Void Qi based techniques by 20% in your immediate surrounding. While in Void Cloud state, you gain a +80% increased resistance

	to physical attacks but you also gain a -40% to special attacks resistance. While full Void Cloud is active you have none of your physical senses. Running out of Qi while in Void Cloud will result in death. Entering the Void Cloud when your physical body is damaged allows you to regenerate it through expenditure of Qi. You gain +10% to wisdom and +20% to endurance.
Indomitable (Title Perk)	You are immune to all mind altering effects from opponents that are of a lower level or cultivation stage than you.
Reaper's Aura (Title Perk)	You can no longer be scanned by any abilities, technique, or skills from people who are less than twenty levels above you, less than a single stage above you, and whose skill level is less than one tier above your highest. You may manifest the Reaper's Aura filling all within your presence with dread.
Great Hunter (Contract Perk)	Any person whose blood you have drawn is marked by your power. The mark allows you to track them no matter the distance between you.
Shadow's Favorite (Bond Perk)	When standing in shadows your form blends in the surrounding. Strength of effect depends on the depth of the bond with the awakened object and the darkness of shadow.
Void Qi (Aspect Perk)	Your Qi passively enhances your body with the essence of the Void.

	Gain +20% to Strength and Wisdom.
Aspect Manifestation: Void Aura (Path Perk)	Manifest your Qi in the form of an aura around you. Dealing Void damage equal to 0.5x (0.1x) your wisdom per second. Anything marked by the Void Qi takes additional one quarter of total damage dealt over the next four seconds.
Eternal Hunter: Reaper (Unique Perk)	You hold the essence of Twin Aspects of True Death. You are one part of two, and are inescapably linked with your other half. Your mind is linked with that of your other half, allowing you to speak to one another regardless of distance. You may sense your other half regardless of distance. You gain Death Mark : Anything with a soul killed by you has its soul completely destroyed and returned to oblivion. You gain the ability to sense death. You gain the Presence of the Eternal Hunter Aura, when active, nearby enemies suffer -25% to all regenerative effects and -25% to total stats, half of the drained stats are granted to you, the other half to the Scythe.
Rapid Regrowth (Class Perk)	Once per week regrow a lost body part. Speed of regrowth depends on your vitality stat.
Physical Appearance: Refined (Class Perk)	Your body and features are refined. Enhances your current capabilities. +15% to wisdom, +15% to dexterity, +15% to dexterity.

Astral Eyes— Sights Unseen	You have achieved a great power, your eyes reflect your achievement. Their appearance reflects you inner spirit, you are no longer able to see the real world, instead you see a world in between the Ethereal and Real. Allows you to see Class, Cultivation, and Skill, power currents. You gain +10% to vitality, +10% to intelligence, +10% to wisdom. You thrive in the darkness. And now, your blind eyes see what others cannot.
Abyssal Core— Void Well (Path Perk)	Your core is an abyss of the void, your current total core capacity and your current Void space size are increased by 50% of current total. +10% to wisdom. Your core, an endless abyss. Nothingness and incomprehension rule here.

Class	Harbinger (E)
Level	75 (0/330 Greater Essence)
Combat Ability	Bringer of Sorrow
Movement Ability	Inevitable Step
Support Ability	Reave

Cultivation	The Path of the Final End (E)
Stage	Early Heavenly (0/400,000 Greater Essence)
Aspect	Void

Base technique	Null Mantle
Branch technique	Breath of Destruction
Fruit technique	Darkest End

Cultivation	The Path of the Unbreakable Wall (R)
Stage	Mid Lord (0/12,000 Greater Essence)
Aspect	Void
Base technique	Qi Shaping
Branch technique	Qi Armor
Fruit technique	Avatar of the Reaper

Passive Skills	Active Skills
Combat Mastery (10/10) >> Sword Mastery (10/10) >> Sword Art (2/10)	Perfect Cut
Vibration Sense (10/10) >> Enhanced Vibration Sense (10/10) >> Resonance Sense (10/10)	Pounce (9/10)
Enhanced Balance (9/10)	

Strength	822
Dexterity	785
Vitality	1002
Endurance	912
Intelligence	759
Wisdom	1089

He was very much satisfied with his improvement, now he felt like he was ready to meet with the Last Ember Sect.

The meeting took place at the edge of a forest, the border of the Last Ember sect. When Ryun arrived, the meeting place had already been set. A pavilion had been raised, and warriors from both Sects surrounded it. Ryun walked inside with Anrosh and Eerv flanking him and Eerv following a step behind them. The Last Ember Sect Head was already there, sitting in the only chair in the room.

Ryun had been warned about this. By coming first and taking the seat, the Last Ember Sect Head made it clear that he considered himself the superior in this meeting. It was also an insult that a seat wasn't already there and waiting for Ryun. To ask for a chair would mean to lower himself, and if he didn't ask it would mean that he had taken the insult without responding. Too bad for the old Sect Head that Ryun had no idea nor patience to play such games.

Anrosh, Eerv, and Ereclaw took their positions in the semi-circle behind him, while Ryun walked forward to the center. As he walked, he looked at the Sect Head. The man was clearly old, as Ryun's skill and his eyesight told him. He couldn't see the real world, not really, but he still *saw*. People just looked like they were translucent, with their Qi and Class pathways visible inside of them. But he could still see the edge of their body, but they were filtered, almost greyscale.

The Emberhorn, Mar Nu Zar—Sect Head of the Last Ember Sect, the demasi with long horns and a tail curled around his leg, watched without speaking as Ryun came to a stop across from him. Ryun couldn't tell what kind of a look Mar Nu had in his eyes, to him they were only outlines, and his skill couldn't really let him know. But Ryun could see the core of the man, filled with crimson fire that churned constantly as if just waiting to explode. His Class pathways were similar to those that Ryun had seen in Eerv, faint, which probably meant that he wasn't higher level than 60. But Ryun knew

that this man was in the Peak Heavenly Realm, that he had been in that Realm for a long time, stuck without an inspiration to allow him to get into the Immortal Realm. It saddened Ryun, to see someone reach so high and then be denied reaching higher.

According to Eerv, the Emberhorn was dangerous and powerful. That he was not a weak cultivator, and that he had decades to get comfortable with his power and learn how to best utilize it.

Ryun knew that he was too young and inexperienced to deal with this man as an Infinite Realm Sect Head. Nor did he even want to, so his only course of action was to surprise the man enough that he had to deal on Ryun's terms.

So, after a long moment, Ryun dropped down to the ground and crossed his legs. He looked up at the Sect Head and spoke.

“Yo, I’ve heard that your sect is gathering its forces. I am told that the most likely target is my sect. Now, I would really appreciate it if you could convince me that that isn’t true. I would really like not to have to kill you all.”

Ryun could sense the shock of everyone inside the pavilion. His skill told him that both Eerv and Anrosh were staring at his back. He hadn’t told them what he intended to do. He knew that it might not be a good idea to antagonize the potentially more powerful Sect Head, but if he was being honest, he didn’t know how to play any of their games. He needed to shock the man and keep him off balance. A part of that had been both him and Eerv advancing to Heavenly Realm, Eerv had told him that the Emberhorn had a way of sensing power, he would know the moment he saw them. Ryun hoped that seeing two Heavenly Realm Cultivators was enough to keep things civil.

Ryun kept his eyes on the Mar Nu, waiting for a reaction. A then the man burst into laughter, his entire body shaking with it. Ryun could tell that his people were shocked and unsure what to do. He patiently waited for the Sect Head to calm down.

Once the Emberhorn gathered himself, he tilted his head and looked at Ryun.

“I was told that you were a recently raised Monarch,” Mar Nu glanced at the man standing next to him. According Eerv that would be his right hand

and son, Gin Nu Zar. “I see now why Little Viper surrendered to you. And if my eyes aren’t failing, he too has advanced...”

Ryun didn’t answer, he didn’t lie, but not revealing the truth wasn’t the same thing. Once the man mentioned that Eerv was in the Heavenly Realm too, the Last Ember people stiffened.

Mar Nu’s eyes narrowed, and then when Ryun didn’t speak he spoke again. “Why have you asked for this meeting?”

“In part because you’ve been gathering forces, most likely to attack us, and in part because there is category three monster swarm heading toward the Frontier, and if it isn’t stopped it will ravage every sect in its way.”

Whatever Mar Nu expected to be the reason, it was obvious that it was not that. The old cultivator leaned forward in his chair. “Tell me more about this monster swarm.”

Ryun couldn’t actually see the look in the man’s eyes, but from the tone of his voice and what he could see of his expression, he recognized the emotion that the man was displaying—Greed. And that, Ryun could work with.

The meeting continued for hours, and by the time it was done, their two sects had agreed to fight together against the swarm. Ryun had managed to convince the man that it would be better for him to fight in Twilight Melody territory, defending Ven’oran, than to wait until the swarm hit the Last Ember Sect territories. It was simply in their best interests. They would fight together, and split the rewards from the swarm. And the rewards will be more than just materials from the dead monsters, and items that they dropped, the swarm will let them power level people.

Ryun stood on a hill overlooking the moving procession of Last Ember people. Eerv, Anrosh, and Ereclaw stood next to him looking at them with him. His skill, of course, allowed him to monitor them much more closely, as well as *hear* what they were saying.

Eerv was the one to break the silence. “Will they honor their promise?”

Ryun nodded his head. “They aren’t saying anything to make me think that they are planning to let us face the swarm alone. The question is, what are the chances that they aren’t going to try and stab us in the back afterward?”