First Match

Anrosh and Ryun walked back into their compound just as the moon turned into the sun. There weren't many people in the courtyard, a few of the workers feeding their mounts, a couple of warriors training. But as they walked in, they were immediately noticed. Anrosh had been leaning on Ryun's hand as they walked, still a bit shaken from all that happened the night before, her body still recovering. Ryun had offered to carry her back, which would've been quicker, but she wanted to walk. She had felt that it would help entice her body to recover faster.

She saw the people in the courtyard look at them, and especially her, as they walked in. It was clear that they were surprised, shocked even. As they passed them, everyone bowed deeply. They weren't bowing to Ryun, he didn't care for such things and most had learned that a quick and respectful half bow was good enough for him. These bows were deep and long, and they were intended for her. They could tell that she had changed, that she had advanced, that she was now in the Immortal Realm.

She didn't quite know what to do, she could hear them whisper behind her as they walked deeper into the courtyard. A commotion at the building in front of them announced the arrival of two people. Lesamitrius walked out first, followed quickly by Nayra.

"There you are," Nayra said quickly as they approached. "We've been worried, you left without telling us where you went, we were going to…" She trailed off as Lesamitrius froze in front of them, then he knelt bowing his head to her.

"Immortal Master," he said softly. "Congratulations on your advancement."

Anrosh grimaced, she didn't know how to handle all this attention. Ryun had tried to teach her a bit about how to keep her Qi under control, but one lesson was never going to do much. "You can stand, Lesamitrius."

The ravzor glanced up, his expression clear and almost looking… proud? She didn't know what to make of it, and she was too tired to try.

Nayra was looking at her with a guarded look on her face. Neither of them said anything, but Anrosh could detect something from her. She got the feeling that she had messed up somehow, only she didn't know how exactly.

"Nayra," Ryun said before anyone could say anything. "Can you escort Anrosh to your room? She needs to rest."

Nayra blinked, then nodded her head and moved to take Anrosh's hand from him. Anrosh let herself be led, as she heard Ryun announce to Lesamitrius that they would be starting a training session immediately.

They left the two of them behind, and walked into the building. It wasn't too large, but it was big enough to house them. Their room was small, large enough only for one bed that could barely fit them both. Nayra led her inside and then pulled the curtain over the entrance since they didn't have doors.

"So," Nayra started as she led Anrosh to the bed and she took a seat. "You are an Immortal now. How?"

"I asked Ryun to raise me," Anrosh said. "I... I was never going to be able to do the things that he, or even you can. And I need to be strong enough to protect the Sect when he isn't present."

Nayra nodded her head, but Anrosh could tell that something was wrong.

"What is it?" Anrosh asked slowly.

"What is it, you ask?" Nayra said, her eyes narrowing. "Well, how about the fact that my girlfriend made a pretty big decision, without even talking with me about it?"

"Oh," Anrosh said, realizing what she had done.

"Oh is right," Nayra stood in front of her, looking down at her with her hands on her hips. "I thought that we were in a better place than this."

"We are," Anrosh said quickly. "It was... it was an impulsive decision. I didn't know I was going to ask him about it when I woke up. It was... the tournament. The fights that we watched, they made me realize that I would never be like them."

"But you couldn't have even just told me what you were planning?" Nayra asked. "Frankly I feel... I don't know, hurt."

"I'm sorry," Anrosh said and reached for her. Nayra let her grab her and pull her close. Anrosh leaned her head on her chest and hugged her close. "I didn't mean to leave you out, it was just... Sometimes I feel inadequate when I'm with you. I can see that you will advance far on your own, and I... I'm well, I'm just me."

Nayra grabbed her head and turned it upward so that she was looking into her eyes. "Inadequate? You?" she looked bewildered. Then she shook her head and chuckled. "Anrosh, you are anything but. You are a great mother, a great leader. You've been keeping the Twilight Melody Sect together for a year, and even more before Ryun left. You are basically his caregiver, he can barely function as it is, without you he would've done something stupid enough to get himself killed long before now."

Anrosh blinked, and then returned her smile. "It wasn't like he doesn't do stupid stuff when I am around."

"Well, at least he knows what he is heading into with you around."

"I'm sorry for not talking with you."

Nayra closed her eyes. "It's fine, we haven't been together for long, we need time to become closer. But, I would appreciate it if in the future we could at least discuss things like this."

"Of course," Anrosh said, and they yawned. Her body was betraying her.

Nayra leaned down and kissed her lips. "Go to sleep," she said after. "We have a big few days coming up."

Anrosh walked next to Ryun as they walked into one of the many small arena buildings raised near the center ring wall. The buildings were large, enough so that they could fit several small stages inside. The building that they entered into had eight stages, four on one side and four on the other. The building was filled with people, contestants and their escorts. Each contestant was allowed four people as their escorts. Ryun brought Anrosh along with Nayra, Lesamitrius, and Riodan, who walked behind them.

Once inside, Anrosh cast her eyes on the competition, seeing a good mix of sect and other types of factions. The administrators were standing near the stages they were assigned at, while the wardens stood nearby keeping an eye on things. This was just one of two dozen buildings, all of which would be conducting the qualifiers for the High Division. Ryun's division's qualifiers were the last on the schedule, and now that the Low and Mid were done, it was their turn. Every contestant would fight a single one on one match in one of the buildings just like this one, and those that get through would fight in the large free for all event for the chance to get into the tournament proper. It wasn't really fair, of course, but nothing about the Infinite Realm was fair.

Everyone in the building was ignoring them, most were focused on their upcoming matches. This was a great opportunity for many of them, some had the resources of their entire faction invested in them just for this moment. Ryun didn't really look around, but then again, he probably didn't need to.

"Which stage were you assigned again?" Anrosh asked.

"Stage four," Ryun answered, then glanced back at Lesamitrius and Riodan. "Go and watch the other matches, take note of any interesting winner."

The ravzors inclined their heads and disappeared into the crowd. They had limited opportunity to gain intel on Ryun's opponents, so they had to take advantage when the opportunity presented itself.

Nayra walked up next to Anrosh, looking straight ahead. "There is your stage," she pointed at a big sign with the number four written on it. They had worked through some of the stuff between them, but there was still a bit of a distance. Anrosh knew that she had messed up, but the only thing she could do now was to do better in the future.

The three of them walked up to the stage, and stopped at a table in front of it where one of the administrators sat. They had been given the time and place when Ryun's match would take place, and she could see matches taking place at every stage.

"Name?" the administrator said as he noticed them.

"Ryun Nacht."

The administrator looked up at Ryun then back down to his papers. "Your match is next up, your opponent is Kelak Strongclaw, First Knight of the Whiteriver Kingdom," the man gestured with his head toward the side where a group of five stood. All wore plate mail armor, painted red with an emblem of a white river passing between two mountains. Two were human, and three drakes, the contestant was obviously the man that stood in the middle, a drake with red scales. The others were checking his armor and whispering softly.

They noticed Ryun and were looking him up and down, but they didn't seem too concerned with him.

"The rules are simple," the administrator said. "You are forbidden from using deadly force, killing will disqualify you, you cannot use anything other than what you have on yourself when you step onto the stage, you will be leaving any spatial storages outside the stage if you have them."

Ryun tilted his head. "If I bring potions on my person I can use them?"

"Yes," the administrator said.

Anrosh glanced back at the knight who was going to be Ryun's opponent and saw that he had a small pouch on his hip, probably where he kept such consumables. He wouldn't be able to have many, and even if he did, there was always the risk of them breaking in battle.

Ryun nodded his head. She knew that he had a perk that gave him a spatial storage, but he probably wasn't going to reveal that.

"Prior to the start of the match, both contestants are allowed to use one non offensive perk, ability, or technique and drink one potion in preparation. The wining conditions are; knocking the opponent out of the ring first, forcing them to lose consciousness, or forcing them to surrender."

Anrosh thought that the rules limited a lot of what a contestant could do, especially in such a small area, the stage was barely thirty five meters long and wide. The potion part was also dubious, some might be able to buy something really powerful and skew the odds in their favor. Ryun nodded again stepped away, walking to the place that the administrator indicated. The stage was occupied by two people fighting. A karura was flying above the stage, while a kreacean shot balls of fire at it. Instead of watching the battle Ryun turned his back to the stage and faced Nayra and Anrosh.

"How many healing potions did we buy again?" Ryun asked.

"A few hundred low grade ones, and two dozen high grade ones," Anrosh answered. A healing potion increased the regeneration rate of the person who consumed it, low grade ones could generally help heal small injuries, help bones heal and so on, but they couldn't heal every wound. Higher grade potions were required for that. Ryun looked thoughtful, and then his form shimmered, his robe came off the equip/unequip function triggered as he sent it to his storage. Anrosh blinked as he was suddenly wearing only his undergarment which left his entire body visible. The cracks in his skin misted faintly and glowed with black and violet light. A moment later he was wearing a different robe, something that he had bought on the auction days ago. It wasn't anything special, just an epic armor that gave him a small boost to wisdom. Ryun didn't rely on items that much, although she knew that he had some. He pulled out two potions from his ring, one filled with blue liquid—meaning that it was probably a Qi regeneration potion, and the other filled with a liquid that was silver—a boosting potion of some kind. He put both potions inside his robe and then he took off one of his rings, his spatial storage and gave it to Anrosh. He still had a few rings on his fingers, a couple epic rings that boosted his stats, and the golden band that was his legendary **Lifedrinker** ring.

"You sure you don't want to take more potions?" Nayra asked.

Ryun tilted his head, his eyes not really focusing on anything. Then he shook his head. "No need."

Anrosh blinked, not really sure if it was just him being sure of himself or arrogance. She glanced at the knight who was talking with his people then back at Ryun. She knew that he didn't have a power that could let him measure his opponents, but she also knew that he was pretty good about telling those kinds of things—she just didn't know how.

"All people here are strong Ryun," Anrosh told him.

"I know," Ryun nodded. "But strength is relative. We shall see."

She sighed, accepting his answer, she trusted him enough. They settled into a silence as the noise of the building roared around them. People fighting and their escorts cheering them on. She didn't know if the match ups were random or if the organizers had a way to sort them, but the matches didn't

seem to last that long. Finally the match at the stage four ended, as the karura was brought down. The warrior hit the ground and was immediately swarmed by healers.

The administrators called and Ryun smiled at them. "Don't worry so much," he said to Anrosh, reading her expression.

"Try to win this, we put a lot of Essence on you," Nayra said. They had placed a substantial bet on him, the odds were average, as they were for all contestants that were an unknown, but they could still win a lot.

Ryun walked up the stairs and stepped onto the stage. His opponent, the red scaled drake raised a bottle and drank a potion, then he put his helmet on and gave Ryun half a bow, but didn't talk. Ryun paused for a moment, and then inclined his head. It was more than he usually gave anyone.

Suddenly a sword appeared in the drake's hands, a large and beautiful two-handed weapon with a broad blade and a golden cross-guard.

"That's an awakened weapon," Nayra whispered.

Anrosh nodded her head. She still couldn't quite understand why Ryun had decided to give her his awakened weapon.

"Because he understands that his strength isn't the sword, and that it will never be," Kagehime said.

Anrosh shook her head, she understood what Kagehime meant, but she didn't know if she would've been able to do the same.

The drake's armor and weapon suddenly flashed with golden light, and the red armor turned golden.

"A boosting power of some kind?" Anrosh asked.

"Probably," Nayra said.

Ryun reached into his robe and pulled out the silver vial, then downed it immediately. She felt a flash of something and realized that he had used a technique, but quickly it disappeared as he brought his Qi under control.

The administrator looked at the two contestants then asked if they were ready. Once they both nodded, he announced the start of the match.

Immediately the drake used a movement ability and shimmered forward.

Before he crossed half the stage a hole of darkness appeared between Ryun and him. If she had seen it for the first time, she would've been somewhat confused. From their side of the stage it looked just like a hole in space, darker than black, but in truth it was a wall made out of Void Qi.

She hadn't known that Ryun could now shape his Qi at a distance, but she wasn't surprised, not when it came to him.

The drake's sword glowed with a brilliant light and he swung it at the wall, shattering it. It was too bad that Ryun had created two more walls behind the first one. The drake didn't strike the wall again, instead he dashed to the side, intending to go around. Ryun started to walk. At exactly the moment the drake came around the third wall, Ryun moved behind it on the other side of it and out of their sight. The drake looked around quickly and saw that Ryun wasn't present, he jumped away from the wall and then swung his sword, sending a crescent of golden light into the wall. The third and the second walls cracked and broke apart under that power. Anrosh leaned forward looking for Ryun, she found him crouching on a cube in the air.

The drake stepped forward immediately, but a step made out of Void Qi grew out of the ground and hit his foot while it was mid-step, making him stumble. While the drake got his footing back, a large wall grew in front of him again obscuring Ryun from his vision, and then more walls filled the stage, making it impossible for anyone to see anything inside.

The drake recovered and then moved around the wall, only to discover that there was another one there, Ryun seemed to have closed himself inside a box. The drake stabbed his sword into the wall and then twisted, cracks of light filled the wall and shattered it. But behind it was another wall.

"What is he doing?" Nayra whispered.

"I have no idea," Anrosh said, just as bewildered as Nayra.

The drake didn't enter the box, instead he jumped back, and took a few moments to just look at it. Then he raised his sword and a ring of light appeared above the box of void and then a pillar of light fell, striking the top of the box and shaking the stage and the building around them. She saw people turn around and look at the display of power in amazement. Even she was startled by it.

The dust settled quickly, showing a cracked stage and no more walls, except for one. Ryun stood in the middle with his hand above his head and a wall growing like a shield out of it.

"He had to have pushed Qi in it to offset the attack," Nayra said. "Kept repairing it as it was destroyed."

Anrosh didn't have the time to respond because the drake attacked immediately. He sent another crescent of light at Ryun and then dashed after it.

Ryun raised tall walls between them as he let the one above his head disintegrate. He jumped and landed on a cube as the light crescent broke through the walls. The drake was strong, if he could destroy those walls so easily, or Ryun wasn't making full power walls.

As the drake rushed through the crumbling walls Ryun jumped forward creating another cube above the drake and then jumping behind him. The drake was again surprised when he didn't find Ryun, and quickly turned around and saw him standing on the other side of the stage.

Anrosh and probably everyone else could tell that the drake was getting frustrated.

"He is toying with him," Nayra said in disbelief.

"Fight me!" The drake yelled suddenly.

Ryun didn't seem to be listening, his eyes stared straight ahead, and while it was hard to tell with his pitch black eyes, to her he did seem as if he wasn't really looking. Then he closed his eyes.

The drake seemed to lose it, he pulled two potions from his pouch and downed them, then his sword sang and two more swords flew out of it then oriented themselves around the drake. A moment later the knight's form burst into golden light and he appeared in front of Ryun. He raised his sword and swung down, all three swords coming down toward Ryun's head.

A horizontal rod of Void Qi grew above his head and blocked all three. The golden knight was glowing so bright that it was hard to look at him, but it wasn't an issue for Ryun. Not only were his eyes closed, his vision would probably not be that impaired by it.

The drake took a step back and then several things happened in quick succession that Anrosh couldn't quite follow. He executed several attacks,

and several small plates made out of Void appeared around Ryun, blocking the many attacks.

Then, she saw things that looked like small black and violet spikes appear around Ryun, a thin thread of Void Qi attached to the plates in front of him. The dozen or so spikes flew at the knight, forcing him to retreat and block. Each swipe of his three swords destroyed a spike, but the drake was still moving back.

Then, as he took another step back, four walls sprang up around him with another up above him, boxing him in.

A second later the knight burst out of the box, blood spilling on the floor as he moved with broken spikes sticking out of his body. Anrosh blinked as she saw the inside of the void box, it was filled with broken spikes that had grew at odd angles from every wall. The knight's light flickered then winked out, and the drake roared.

He raised his sword and it disappeared from his hand. Then it reappeared above Ryun only it was ten times the size it used to be. It blazed with light and stabbed down faster than Anrosh could follow.

 She didn't see how Ryun evaded it, but when the dust settled, he was standing on the other side of the stage with his back turned toward the drake. His opponent noticed him, still bleeding from the holes that Ryun's spikes had punctured through him, but also still standing. He pulled out a healing potion and downed it, the blood stopped gushing, but it still dripped from his armor. The drake put his hand to the side and his sword came back, shrinking in size as it flew through the air.

As he started forward, pillars sprung into existence around him, growing in his direction. He cut them apart as he whirled in a flash of light. Then he blazed forward, activating another movement ability.

Ryun titled his head as walls sprung up between them, slowing the drake down.

Light met the Void and crashed through the walls, the drake found Ryun in the same position with his back turned to him. He raised his sword and light flashed around it, more solid now, increasing the size of the sword. Then he swung down at Ryun.

Ryun didn't bother with a wall, he just sidestepped the attack and walked around the drake, his eyes still closed and his expression that of concentration. The drake burst into speed, but Ryun could *see* every attack coming.

It was… incredible. Anrosh had never seen anything like it. She could feel flashes of Ryun's Qi, moving faster than she ever thought possible. Then, finally Ryun opened his eyes, and she saw him smile as if he had finally realized something.

He blinked several times, and then his eyes landed at the haggard drake who was leaning on his sword, breathing heavily, with blood dripping from his armor.

Ryun tilted his head as if in surprise, and then turned around and started walking back toward the stairs of the stage. He flicked his hand and a pillar the size of a building came into existence near the knight and grew in his direction. There was no way for him to evade as it slammed into him and shoved him out of the ring.

There was silence as Ryun reached the edge of the stage and glanced at the administrator.

The administrator looked at the drake who was being surrounded by healers then back to Ryun.

"Winner, Ryun Nacht, Sect Head of the Twilight Melody Sect."

With a nod Ryun started descending.