

Instruction

Kri sat on the ground, her legs crossed, in the middle of the forest outside of Consequence. They were far away so that the chaos of the city and its surroundings was out of her sensory range. Not that nature was less... noisy, it was just different. Easier for her to let seep into the background. She had finally gotten somewhere with her ideal, at least she had a starting point. Which was all that Ryun and Tali had wanted from her it seemed. They had given her permission to advance to Immortal Realm.

It was still unbelievable to her, that she even could advance to Immortal. But Ryun insisted that her **Crucible of the Body** was enough. Yet, here she was, patiently waiting. Neither Ryun nor Tali would stand in her way now, but it was she who was holding off on even her Peak Heavenly advancement. She wanted to learn more about skills, perhaps evolve a few to tier 6 or even more. She wanted to learn more about Aspects and the secrets that she knew her elders had.

She had seen them talking, whispering and pushing forward with their own paths. Even Ryun and Tali were wrapped up deeply in their own training. She turned her attention to her instructor, Zacharia Gardner, Ryun's... friend? Enemy? Ultimately, it didn't matter, he was clearly one of the most powerful people in the world. Kri knew that Ryun and Tali had gotten her the best that they had been able to, in order for her to advance her skills beyond what most would be even capable of.

Her instructor had spent several of their sessions after the first one just talking, explaining all that he knew about skills and how they worked. He covered things that Kri had already known, but also expanded on that knowledge, touched on things that she had no idea about. It had given her ideas about how she could use skills to build the core of who she was as a person. And she was starting to understand what he meant when he spoke of *meaning* and *idea* of one's being.

And she had to admit, her instructor was a lot better at teaching than either Ryun or Tali. Their idea of teaching was to throw her in a hole with a monster, Zacharia actually explained, then asked her questions that led her to the answers.

“I see,” Zacharia said as he paced in front of her. “And that is your choice? Yes?”

Kri dipped her head. She hadn’t said anything to Ryun or Tali yet, but ever since she had learned about *meaning*, she had been trying to figure out what hers should be. She knew that she was very early in her path, she still didn’t have an ideal even, but she from what Zacharia said, that shouldn’t matter. She was supposed to shape her being, the ideal would follow from that.

“It is,” Kri said. She had several examples of different paths before her. Her mother shared her Aspect, but her entire being was shaped around the Sect and family, being Ryun’s right hand. Kri respected and looked up to her mother a lot. It took strength to understand where your place in the world was, and Kri had struggled with that a lot. But she had come to understand that she was being brought up as the heir to their Sect. And if she was honest with herself, she did want it. But she also understood, now at least, that being the heir did not mean doing the things that her mother did, it meant being like Ryun.

Being a bastion of power that kept everyone else beneath her safe just by her presence.

And so, as her instructor had suggested, she had started to shape the idea behind her being. What she had come up with was simple, it was about power. She had even made a decision on what her second Aspect would be, and how she wanted to merge it with her current one. Aspects existed in the world in many different shapes and forms, perhaps in an infinite number, and she had to believe that her own will could influence the way that her two Aspects merged. She didn’t know if what she wanted existed even, but she felt like it was right.

Regardless, she was going to try to achieve it, one way or the other. She had gotten the idea from her named perks, the second one she gained with her Core Forging. **The True Absolute Cold Core—Onset of Winter**, it was her second perk with Winter in it, and one of the main reasons why she was holding off on advancing to Peak Heavenly. She already knew what choice she would be picking, like Ryun she would merge her body perks into something new. What she wanted to do was to ensure that that merger ended up in line with what she wanted the idea behind her power to be. Which revolved around **Winter**. Her **True Body—Untethered Winter** already was in line, but her **Body Enhancement** worried her a bit. She knew that while only two perks will be merged, everything else about her path would be taken into account, her will, her experiences, her titles and feats.

Because of that she wanted to push her skills in a way that would contribute favorably to that merging of perks.

“So,” Zacharia said. “You want to shape your being toward power and the coming of Winter?”

“Yes,” Kri said. “Winter... appeals to me. It is in line with my Aspect, and it is powerful. It changes entire territories with its power.”

She had visited a few territories that had cycles of seasons, as well as those who were always filled with Winter. She had felt at home in such places.

Her instructor nodded. “I’ve already explained how to influence your skill evolution with an Aspect. Your **|Frost Touched Body|** is closely related to **Winter** already, I do not see you having issues with it. Your second idea though... You have two paths before you, either you join your **|Spear Art|** with an active skill to make a set, or you start one from scratch. One will take up one more skill slot, but it might prove useful. A Technique set that was merged from an art is... you lose some of the art’s broadness, but in return you get a narrowed understanding of your art, and more power in a single skill. So, the question you have to answer for

yourself is if you want to have a broad skill with less power, a narrow skill with more power, or to sacrifice a skill slot to have both.”

Kri thought about it a lot, she knew that skills weren't her focus, which meant that she would have a limited number of skills to achieve her goals. Regardless of what she decided on, she needed to infuse her |**Spear Art**| with the Essence of Winter before she advanced her Path.

She had done all the preparations she could, now it was on her to put them into action.

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Watching others evolve their skills was always an honor for Zach. He found those moments filled with awe, and he treated them with reverence. He followed his student across territories until they found the right place for the task before her. He was also very surprised to see and learn how a Cultivator approached evolving skills. Their methods had some merit, as he had learned. It was less about will, and more about finding the right state of mind and an environment suited for their evolution. As well as stacking a deck in some ways.

She had her Sect buy for her Essence Crystals of Winter, and some of the Essences that make it up. She procured the Essence Crystals of Stillness, and of Cold, and then brought them to an alchemist who ground some of them into elixirs, while others she had put in formations to project that Essence.

Now, her little circle was surrounded by those formations, each giving off different Essences, which somehow blended in with the **Aspect of Winter** in the air around them, amplifying its tier and presence. When asked, she had told him that this was something that Ryun and Tali were experimenting with, using aides with their advancements. That it was an idea Ryun got from his smithing of all things, and that she thought that

it might help. Some of the elixirs she drank, others she had poured over herself and her gear.

Zach wasn't sure if it would work, but he didn't see the harm in it. And if it helped her mental state, it would only be an advantage.

Kri stood in her full gear, holding a spear and a shield. They had found a territory where the Winter just arrived. The snow covered everything, and the trees around them were bare.

Winter was more than just cold, it was the slumber of nature, it was the stillness and the quiet in the air. And Zach agreed that this place was perfect for what she intended. She had already evolved her |**Frost Touched Body**| first to |**Winter Touched Body**| and then to the |**Perfect Winter Touched Body**|.

Now, she was attempting to add the Concept of Winter to her |**Spear Art**|. She started slow, going through the motions of the spear movements she was taught. Her will was focused on her skill, Zach could sense it from the distance.

Then, after a while, she slowly started to use her techniques, introducing her Qi into the mix of movements. The Essence around her moved toward her, swirling as she pulled it toward her. He saw her will trying to grasp it while it was coming, and ultimately failing to do anything other than speed up the pulling process. But it did do enough, it made contact between the Essences and her will, which was good.

He watched as she slowly leaned her will on her skill and changed the way she moved. Winter was a concept that Zach wasn't that familiar with, but Ra'vallim was. Zach had given some guidance to Kri, passed on from the old soul. He saw her now putting it into practice.

Winter was an **Aspect** of the coming death, and he saw that reflected in how her style changed. He had offered only a few pointers when they were developing her new art, and he saw the brutality now projected from her spear's strikes. Winter came quickly and it ended life with a cold heart. There was no pause in her movements now, the cold was spreading from

her, with death following. The Essences around her were trembling, reacting to her dance. The formations glowed and the frozen trails of the elixirs she poured over-herself cracked.

He felt her will rising, reaching a crescendo. Until finally she stabbed her spear forward and stopped. A wave of Essence spread around her, now uniform and easily recognizable to Zach. It was the concept of Winter. He felt its arrival and knew that she had succeeded.

She collapsed to her knees, exhausted, and Zach smiled at her success. He saw a bright future in front of her and couldn't wait to see what else she would accomplish.