

Relu and I'ani were swept up by the crowd heading to the stadium, following the flow—the musk of people mixing with the evening sea breeze. And the dozens of foods, charred or steamed wafting through the air. Creating a nauseating concoction of a thousand confusing things.

“Wanna get some food to eat during the fight,” Relu asked

“Sounds good,” I'ani nodded

They pushed against the crowd, choosing the first place that had a semi-decent-looking line. Only a dozen people, one fiery-looking girl in the front catching Relu's eyes. Blond hair and gray eyes, both not native to the peoples of the O'ozhiwu clan. It was a curiosity, but they had different things to think about.

They looked at I'ani, now how should I say this? Is the casual discreet way, prodding at the subject gently till he lets something out the way to go? No, he was always weirdly perspective, he just didn't care to think about anything 'Boring'. (The idiot) No, something more direct would be better.

“So,” They started, “About your siste-”

“No,” He cut them off.

“Come on, I think I deserve more information. Especially on that....,” They looked for the right words, “Hand thing? Since you know, It was manipulating my mind!”

“I've already told you as much as I know.”

“I'm not buying three sentences is as much as you know.”

“It doesn't matter if you buy it or not, it's the truth.”

“....So, about your sister th-”

“Didn't you just ask that?”

“I still want you to tell me more about her.”

“I can't”

“Because you don't want to tell me or because you don't know anymore.”

“I'm under a soul contract not to tell anyone.”

“Soul contracts wouldn't let you tell me this much, they're based on a person's perception.”

“Those are Oaths sometimes Geis's. Contracts are more concrete, but unless the person who drew it up could account for every possibility there's gonna be loopholes. And since,” His speech started to slow down and become more careful and over-enunciated, “I'm not talking about.... Her in relation to.... A an accounted for uh, Perspective, I can reveal more about it than I usually would.”

Relu sighed, “Ok, ok. fine. Just Fine. But can you just.... You know, tell me anything when you can. Ok?”

“Will do.”

They quieted down, then Relu saw two nobles hassling an old lady. Then Relu saw I'ani seeing. He tensed up and Relu put a hand on his shoulder.

Leaning in, to whisper in his ear, “What did I say about fighting.”

He mumbled something then said, “Don't fight unless they attack us first or in our defense.”

“And?”

“I have to hold back so I don't kill them.”

“Now, are they attacking us?”

“No, bu-”

“No buts. We have to set lines.” They sighed exasperatedly. Relu couldn’t believe they had to treat someone they knew was at least a few hundred years old like a child.

“How can we just watch.... Sitting?”

Relu felt a pang in their chest, but they just held onto his shoulder tighter. Unresponsive.

Looking back over Relu saw the black-haired noble splinter the edge of the counter with a pound of his fist. Yell, then raised the other, readying to strike. Then the fiery blond-haired girl at the front of the line charged forward. Punching him right in the liver with weirdly pin-point accuracy.

Crumpling him over like wet paper into the fetal position. But the brown-haired noble girl yelled and punched Blondie in the back of the neck. Sending her to the floor. Face down. Oh.... oh no. That wasn’t good. A hit to the neck like that followed by a face plant. Oh Hells she could be dead.

I’ani ripped away from Relu’s now slack grip. Running towards the poor nobles at blazing speeds. He grabbed the noble’s outstretched fist by the forearm, kicking the back of her knee. Making her fall to her knees, then pushing her to the ground. I’ani pinning her down with his weight.

He put his free hand on her head, a knee onto both shoulders. Then pulled her extended arm up, the bone and joints letting out a deafening snapping crack. The noble letting out a guttural, burbling scream.

She started to struggle, kicking and violently wiggling around like a worm in the mouth of a bird. I’ani let her broken arm go. Getting off her and lifting her head by the hair. Slamming her face into the wood below. Breaking the planks and sending her face through the splintered hole, just feet above the abyssal mouth of the water.

Her brain rattled, going unconscious and limp, I’ani stood up. Brushing away the wood splinters on his clothes, walking over to the blond girl lying down.

“Hey Relu get over here. Need you to heal her.”

“Why can’t you do that.?” Relu said walking towards him anyway

“Can heal myself. Can’t heal others I mean.”

“I think some pill of elixir would heal more than I can,” Relu said crouching down

I’ani winced, “Yeah... kinda ran out of those.”

Relu rolled their eyes, “You can tell me later. So what do I have to fix?”

“Let me check,” He put a hand on her body, a pulse of colorless energy going through the girl’s body, “Nothing serious, a broken nose and a concussion.”

“The neck’s fine?”

“Just a bruise, she fell unconscious because the hit rattled her brain.”

“Ah,” Relu placed their hands on the back of the girl's neck and poured in Endless One mana. A mixture of Cohesion and Life mana tinged with force since it was their innate mana type. Relu could do a scan like I'ani, but they weren't strong enough to properly pierce through any solid object, much less one with massive amounts of innate mana like a human body. So they left it to their companion.

A silver light poured into the girl's neck, coming from Relu's hand. Injecting into the veins and flowing like rivers under the skin. And in just a second Relu was done. They lifted their hand off her neck. Rolling them over so they didn't drown in the blood that poured onto the wood from their nose. Whipping away any on their face with their sleeve.

Looking up Relu saw that they'd attracted a crowd. The only people even daring to get within ten feet of the people who dared attack a noble were the people that were in line with the girl. The black-haired noble started to groan. Trying to stand up by themselves but I'ani gave a swift kick to the face. The three friends stepped back, eyes a little wild.

The tall black-haired androgynous boy spoke first, “Is she going to be ok?”

“Her?” I'ani spoke

The redhead rolled her eyes, “No, the other unconscious girl lying on the ground.”

I'ani looked at the noble lady he'd beaten to a pulp then back at the redhead.

She once again rolled her eyes again, “You know who I mean.”

“I healed her, there's no need to worry,” Relu spoke up

“When will she wake up,” The boy spoke quietly, nearly a whisper.

But I'ani caught it, “Just about now,” and he slapped the blond girl in the face with a cupped palm.

She sputtered awake, sitting up. Relu getting out of the way just in time to not get a concussion themselves.

“Really! I'ani, bedside manners!”

“Sorry, sorry.”

“Huh, wah. What, um... the Depths? Wait, what...” She looked around, eyes widening when she saw the two unconscious nobles, her eyes went wide, but a smirk was at the edge of her lips, “happened?”

“Oh thank the Sky,” the boy said, letting out a breath.

“I thought you were going to die Xukali you sea-rotted idiot,” the redhead said, going in for a hug.

“Ok, ok. But seriously, what in the Blazing Skies happened I'ama?”

“Oh, uh. So that guy over there,” She pointed at I'ani, “Beat those assholes half to death. Then this one,” She pointed at Relu, “Healed you.”

“Oh, thank you, thank you,” She gave an awkward bow to Relu, I'ama letting go of her so she could.

“No worries, but I think it's best if we start running,” They replied

“Why?”

“Are you really asking that after trying to beat up a noble,” The boy said.

“Oh shut up Mei, you should've never learned sarcasm.”

“That wasn’t sarcasm, I’m calling you an idiot.”
Xukali looked at Mei incredulously.

Then Relu saw I’ani look up, ears practically perking up like a dog catching a scent. Relu looked around, focusing their senses. Then they heard it, guards in the crowd yelling about thirty or so feet away. Pushing through the disgruntled people.
Relu and I’ani locked eyes, communicating wordlessly, “Ok people, I think it’s time to get going,” I’ani said.
Relu stood up, preparing to unleash their Spirit Avatar at a moment’s notice.
“The guards?” Mei asked
I’ani nodded.
Xukali stood up with the helping hand of I’ama.

They started walking away, naturally flowing into groups of two. Xukali and Mei. I’ama and the last girl who had black hair that only revealed to be a dark red in glaring light. She was slightly shorter than Mei but still had that baby fat on her face and body, of a child.

She stood stock still, like a deer in light. I’ama had to pull her by the hand to start her walking. But then two guards caught up.
Shouting, “Hey, you...” he started counting under his breath, “You seven stop right there. The group of friends stopped walking, except for I’ama pulling along the last one, saying, “Ma’u we have to run!”
I’ani and Relu pushed the remaining three forward, “Don’t want to get killed now, do we? So just keep on moving, yep, yep, that’s it.” I’ani said.
“We said stop,” The shorter guard said.
“Depths, that’s the captain’s kid,” the other said.
They ran forward, the short one stopping at the black-hair noble boy’s side, the other charging spear raised.
“I’ll stop them, Relu you get those five to safety.”
“Yes sir!” they nodded and turned away, scrambling the group away.

OOO

I’ani stepped to the side of the spear thrust, then it started to swipe to the side. Going for his neck. But he manifested his Spirit Avatar, blocking it. Unintentionally slicing the spear’s shaft in half. The wooden stumps turning into embers.

His Spirit Avatar Kumuheailio’ofuna, meaning ‘The sword that serves one of the righteous flames’ had served him well for millennia at this point. She wasn’t going to fail now, not till his final breath. Even then she’d grown powerful enough to live beyond him and his remnant as her own being.

l'ani focused pure mana into his free hand then struck forward into the solar plexus of the guard. Using the 'Core Breaking Palm' technique. Letting it pulse out as a wave, disrupting the man's half-finished core. It was only half the move, you're supposed to concentrate the mana into a spike with it. Destroying the core completely but he didn't want to kill the man in such a painful way. It would just be cruel.

The guard flew backward, landing on his back next to his companion, his body excreting sludge like black ink.

"Oh... that was unexpected," l'ani had accidentally helped this man surpass a realm. Most likely the core or meridian development of Mist Lord. No other Realm in the early stages would do this.

He had no idea how that happened, but it didn't matter so l'ani just ignored it. Then five more guards appeared, wait no ten. Half in front, Half behind. All of them were still in the crowd on their way to him.

Sneaky little boys weren't they. Facing ten guards without trying to hurt any civilians, now that was a fun challenge. Then the crowd of people and vendors started to filter out from the guard's orders. Leaving behind only two walls of men in plain steel blocking off the exits.

"We have you surrounded," The guard with red accents on his armor said, "You may have hurt my son!"

Oh, he's the little prick's dad they mentioned earlier,

"But we are not afraid to start a fight with an Uncivilized Practitioner!"

They had a weird culture around practitioners not being a part of a sect. Relu said something about trying to centralize power, but he didn't care.

"What is your decision!?"

What could he do to make this more fun, maybe a binding vow? No, those would just make him stronger in a different area.

l'ani snapped his fingers, "Got it!"

"And that is?"

He could make a temporary Geis to seal his abilities till the end of the fight. How about only using pure mana, no icons, only one-twentieth of his mana output, and no.... Spirit Avatar?

Yeah, that felt right. He could feel the seal click into place on his soul. His Spirit Avatar dissolving back into his core.

He looked the captain in the eyes and said, "How about a fight?"

"What?"

l'ani rushed forward, slower than normal since he'd restricted his natural movement mana. But he'd still be faster than every guard here just on body refinement alone. Seriously though how long would it take them to learn proper body refinement techniques? It's been thousands of years for them to do so.

l'ani was right in the captain's face, using the half-finished 'Core Breaking Palm'. He only stumbled back a little bit. He must've had a more stable core, no matter. l'ani developed the same technique in his other palm. Striking upwards onto the man's chin.

Letting the power pierce through into the mental realm since the captain hadn't developed his Mental Gates it was extremely vulnerable. Scrambling his brain for maybe a week or so. One down ten to go, no, the guard that was attending the captain's kid. So one down, nine to go

A spear stabbed in from l'ani's left and right. He ducked down, and grabbed both shafts of the spear. Sending weak pulses of pure mana through them, the guards let go of them from mana shock.

Planted the left one point-first into the ground, kicking off the ground into a spinning kick on the makeshift pole. Kicking the guard squarely on the side of the chin, knocking his brain into sleep.

The force spun him back around, a punch to his crotch incoming. He hollowed his body, spreading his legs. Letting the punch go through them. Then wrapped his legs around the arm. Putting his weight onto the guard. Falling to the ground.

The guard landing chest down, losing his breath. l'ani put his right foot over the man's neck, and left one over his shoulder and arm, tucking it back under his right. Putting him into an arm lock.

Pushing pure mana into his right foot. Releasing Core Breaking into the man's head. Like he did with the Captain

l'ani stood up as quickly as he could, a crossbow bolt grazing the edge of his cheek. Leaving behind a streak of blood dribbling down his cheek. Then l'ani felt another bolt flying towards him through his Aura sense.

He stepped to avoid it, but another guard thrust his spear at him. l'ani fortified the spear in his left hand with mana, using it as a vaulting stick. With the other spear in his right hand, he attacked the guard.

But he sensed another bolt and spear aiming at his back and side respectively. The spear of the guard that attacked him initially swiping towards him. He had to abandon this attack.

l'ani jerked his body to stop the sideways momentum. Pushing out pure mana upwards more in force than technique. Using the recoil to send him onto the floor. Hitting the ground, partially knocking the air out of his chest. Forcing him to take a second to recover.

But the world decided to screw him over so while still laying on the ground the second crossbowman shot him in the chest. Hitting and collapsing a lung. Then the two guardsmen both stabbed him, one in the gut the other in the inner thigh. Pinning him to the ground.

Then another bolt landed in l'ani's chest again, on the same side as the last. Seas and stars how fast can they reload those? They aren't supposed to be that fast yet, at least not here. "We got him pinned, come over here and help us restrain him," the one holding the spear in l'ani's gut said
l'ani looked over and saw all five of the guardsmen on the side holding empty crossbows. Oh, that explains why. l'ani thought that they were two crossbowmen since they only came from one of two angles.

As they walked over, l'ani closed his eyes, taking a gulp of air. Focusing on the points of skin contact with the wood beneath him. Then in a ten-foot circle around him, the wood exploded into splinters. All but two guards near the edge fell into the inky black water beneath.

With a calm mind, l'ani pulled the two spears out of his body. Running the Heart Forge technique using pure mana. But only getting his wounds half healed, using anything besides the intended mana was highly inefficient, especially with pure mana.

l'ani kicked up to the surface, crawling out using the serrated edges of wood as hand holds. Clearing away the bitter salty water from his eyes, spitting any out. With his aura sense, he felt a bolt coming in. Frantically stepping to the side.

A spear came crashing down towards him, running through his chest. Breaking right through his heart.

"I finally got you, you bastard," The man said, spitting venom.
l'ani fell forward onto the spear. Slumping onto the man. l'ani feeling the blood in his convulsing heart spilling out. Whispering the last words he would hear, "I have three hearts, idiot."
And stabbed the guard's neck with the knife l'ani stole from his belt. Piercing through the spine's vertebrae cleanly.

The guard fell backward with a thump. Accompanied by no fanfare. No squirming, no screaming. Just instant loss of control throughout his body.

Leaving l'ani standing with a spear in his chest. The last guard looked younger than the rest. His eyes tinged with fear, but brimming with overwhelming rage. He raised the crossbow in hand to the sights and fired.

l'ani leaned to the left, avoiding the well-placed shot. And walked forward one slow step at a time, pulling the spear out of his chest. Healing the surface wound instantly.

The guard dropped his crossbow and started screaming. Turning away to run, l'ani raised the spear fortifying it, then threw it, the metal of the guard's armor screeching as the tip pierced it and passed onto meat and bone. Killing the guard instantly. Five down, five to go

l'ani turned toward the opening in the wood to the water, a guard crawling out. l'ani kicked him in the face, sending him back in. Then keeping him down by pushing on his head, sending pure mana through his other hand into the water. Selectively pushing away heat mana or anything that wasn't cold or ice.

Then he cracked open one of his external Greater Gates to the spirit realm, letting the physical and spiritual truly connect in a single area in space and time. Mana gushing through it, l'ani encouraging it to become ice or cold. Freezing over the lake water over the opening.

If he wanted to do this he would normally just gather up those types of mana from around him. But the Geis considered that using a mana type other than pure during the fight. So he had to use this roundabout method. Since technically he wasn't using the mana, just doing something to produce it.

l'ani broke his hands away from the ice. Killing the three that he put to sleep in the beginning. Making a speedy retreat, hoping nobody would recognize his face. The only portion of the fight that normal people could see was the last. And he was sure nobody else was watching.

But fate could be a pain in the ass. He knew that more intimately than anybody knew. Dead or living.