

The feeling of weight disappeared the moment Isyrion was loaded in.

For a moment, he was met with silence in the dark space. Then the world came to bloom - a grey, square, mechanical arena with floors etched with glowing lines. There were no walls, only the edges and ends of the platform. The sky took a muted blue, while aurorae streaked the digital horizon.

This realm was neither world, nor dream, but a space created for one thing: combat.

Isyrion rolled his shoulders and flexed his fingers, letting out a slow breath. This was different from fighting Heartless or others out in the field.

*"Initializing combat simulation."*

A computer voice rang out from above. Omega's warning that things were about to start.

Directly across from Isyrion, cubes of white and columns of binary trickled down like rain as data assembled. The limbs formed first, followed by the bodies, until a dozen pale silhouettes emerged from the gathered data.

Soldiers, Shadows, and Neoshadows. The creatures were spread out, their beady yellow eyes locked on their target. A dozen against one.

Isyrion, however, remained still. With a flash of light, his Keyblade materialized in his hand. He lowered to a measured stance, his eyes sweeping from one foe to the next, measuring the distance between them and him.

A Neoshadow's claw scraped against the metal surface. A Soldier leaned forward, rattling its helmet. A Shadow hopped twice impatiently.

The silence of the arena stretched for one final breath.

*"Begin."*

The arena erupted with motion. A Neoshadow charged head first, its claw carving through the air as it sprang toward him.

Isyrion didn't retreat. The moment it committed to its momentum, his Keyblade glided upward with a single stroke. Steel met with shadow before the creature could finish its swing, and the Neoshadow dissolved in a puff of smoke.

His attention wasn't on it for long. Two Soldiers closed in. One came high, a fist aimed for the wielder's head.

The other pounced low, sliding across the floor in an attempt to sweep the blonde's legs.

Just as he expected.

Isyrion shifted back a single step, just outside of the first punch, then sprang as the second Heartless darted beneath him, the duo crashing with a thud. As Isyrion descended, he drove his Keyblade downward, striking the floor beneath them, the blade tearing through both Heartless before they could separate.

A Shadow burst upward from the floor and swung both its claws, driving Isyrion backwards defensively. Another emerged by his left. A third by his right. And one behind him. Surrounding.

No escaping from the ground, he noted. The pack of Heartless leapt, claws cutting through the air.

Isyrion lifted one foot into the empty air and launched upward. His Keyblade spun with a trail of light, rotating thrice. The Shadows surrounding him were caught in this vortex before tearing apart into wisps of shadow.

He noticed the pack had grown thin as he made his descent - three Neoshadows and two Soldiers. It was time to wrap things up.

He landed in motion. One sweeping slash carried him through the first Neoshadow, the momentum flowing seamlessly into a reverse slash that cleaved through a Soldier before it could react.

The remaining Neoshadows and Soldier, behind their brethren, darted instinctively. The two Neoshadows raised their claws and prepared to skewer the swordsman, while the Soldier wound up his fist.

There.

He planted one foot, twisting into a rising spin. An arc of light ripped through his Keyblade, carving through the air before crushing the three Heartless, light engulfing them in a brilliant flash.

Isyrion exhaled softly as the smoke cleared.

*"Combat simulation complete."* Omega's voice rang out. *"What would you like to do next?"*

*"... Run it again."* Isyrion requested. *"Increase the difficulty."*

Silence lingered in the air for a moment, broken by the whirring of a machine.

*“Affirmative. Raising difficulty level from Standard to Extreme.”* Omega answered.

Directly across from Isyrion, strings of binary and cubes of white once again trickled down. Yet instead of a light rain, it crashed into form like a thunderstorm, as more Heartless took form.

The first simulation had been a dozen. This time, Isyrion stopped counting. He took a breath and assumed his stance once more.

*“Begin.”*