

Fire on the Wall

The attack came in the afternoon, as the sun slowly dimmed, preparing to be turned into the moon. Wave after wave of four-legged creatures throwing themselves at the wall. Nayra stood on top of a wall tower, watching over everything. These types of monsters were the most numerous of the enemy's forces. From the distance they appeared like all black wolves, or perhaps big cats. They were neither, though they had features of both. They were as fast and as strong as a monster somewhere around tier 6 of power. Though such measures were never absolute. They didn't have any real special powers, aside from the fact that their entire bodies seemed to be made out of some kind of ichor which regenerated extremely quickly. If they don't die from a wound, it wouldn't matter in a few seconds. Stabbing the head, cutting it off, or just burning them was the surest way of securing a kill, since they were vulnerable to fire. Other than that, they were smart, coordinated, and usually attacked in packs.

Nayra had read the reports, her imprisonment didn't mean that she was kept in the dark—at least not about their enemy. The monsters were smarter when they fought alongside a general, which didn't happen often. Still, the most dangerous part about all of the Dome monsters was that they could capture souls. That meant that there was no chance of an afterlife, no chance at new life through immortality. It made even the strongest hesitate.

The enemy was terrifying, a force that had to be stopped at all costs. So far, it was not looking good. The Empire couldn't hold this enemy back. Nayra didn't know what the Emperor planned to do, but so far she hadn't seen anything even resembling a plan to win, only defense. True, she wasn't as caught up with that side of the war effort, so perhaps she just didn't know about any plans.

She turned her attention back to the fight, the soldiers on the walls were fighting together, using their powers in a synchronized display, rotating and firing at the enemy. The monsters that managed

to crawl up the Wall or jump to its edge were met with melee focused soldiers that fought as one. One soldier would raise a shield and block, another would attack with their weapon—in this case a spear, as it was one of the most versatile weapons in the world. There was a reason why many used a spear, and it was not just the ease of using it.

They seemed able to hold the Wall, so far at least. Nayra glanced at an are of the Wall where golden fire would flash every once in a while. Reyla stood among the soldiers, but she didn't engage fully. They had precious few people able to deal a lot of damage in a short time, Reyla and Emrys were two of them.

Nayra's part in this battle, at least right now, was to be a glorified statue. She watched the battle from atop the tower, her attunement—Gunnr—boosting the stats of all of her allies by 10%. When she had been brought to her family, her former instructors had gone over all of her perks, testing them fully. Her Gunnr attunement was even more powerful that she had assumed. Its range was the entire battle it seemed. At least the part of the Wall defended by her family. She knew that the range changed based on the size of the battle, so she was certain that it worked only on those that she considered her allies. The rest of the Wall was defended by other houses, and while she had complicated feelings toward her family, they were still just that—her family. She considered them allies, at least enough for her attunement to work.

No matter how much she resented being kept under lock and key, her family had given her a lot. When they learned what her Class name was, they scoured all the records they had, looking for any clues about it. There were no records of anyone having a similar Class, they didn't even know what Gunnr meant. Nayra hadn't either, the only thing she knew was the text that accompanied her Class. But in their search, they had found something. An obscure reference in a text that was older than the Empire, a written story put down on the page by a Ranker from Earth long ago.

There they learned that Gunnr was in fact a name of a Valkyrie. A Valkyrie that rode out and chose the slain and decided battles. They

didn't know if Gunnr was a real person, if Valkyrie's were even real. Much of the knowledge of the old worlds was lost or distorted over the centuries. So, they probably will never know the truth.

Nayra had always felt that her Class fit her. It was... everything that she had wanted it to be. When she had joined the Twilight Melody Sect, she had this need to fit in. To be of use. Her build, what her family had wanted to turn her into was someone who fought for herself. Who didn't need anyone else to survive, who could be a beacon of golden fire to inspire others through actions, not really through perks.

It was not who Nayra wanted to be, not after the monster swarm. Not after she watched warriors around her die without her being able to save them. She had dreams about that day, about the days after when she ran alone, before Ryun found her. Every time, the dream turned to nightmare as she failed to save people again and again.

Every choice she had made since was in the service of one goal. To help the people she considered her allies, her family. Those who had accepted her and wanted nothing out of her but what she wanted for herself. Ryun and the others in the sect placed no expectations on her, she didn't need to live out to her family name—they didn't know anything about House Ornn. She didn't have her sister there, excelling ahead of her, making her feel small. There were only her own desires.

Every perk choice she has made since then, she made in order to be of use, to help those around her. She pushed her Class in the direction that allowed her to help them both in life and in death. That need, that desire, is what had rewarded her with her Gunnr Class. A Class that allowed her to help her allies in battle and shelter them in death. It was a perfect Class for what she wanted. And just knowing the story behind it, knowing that it was named after someone from the old world, it meant something. She didn't know exactly what, but there were Classes like that, Classes that had names based on people from the old worlds and their legends.

The Soul of Gunnr Class embodied who Nayra was. Someone who wanted to be of use to others, who didn't want to fall short. And now she was that, she helped in battle and she helped the fallen in

death. That was one of the reasons why she hadn't truly tried to escape. Despite the rules that her family enforced, she was still helping souls to pass through the Ethereal Realm on their way to the afterlife.

The battle on the Wall intensified, more waves coming at the wall with greater intensity. She saw soldiers dying and activated her **Dawnspirit Cry**, bolstering their souls protections. Her perk wouldn't save all of them, but if it allowed even one of them to avoid having their souls devoured, it was worth it. She also activated **Lady of Battle**, increasing their stats further. Her boosts were small, but everything mattered in battles like these.

And then things changed. An army came at the Wall, an army that differed from the monsters that had been attacking so far. They came in a tight formation, wearing armor and weapons. Immediately Nayra recognized the races among them, all the races that were part of the Empire. The taken charged without any battle roars or chants, they hurried in silence, only the sound of their feet hitting the ground announcing their passage.

The battle changed immediately; the charging army came in ranks. The front held shields in front of them, blocking the attacks coming from the wall, and the ranks behind them opened fire with their own long-range powers. The taken were the worst enemies to fight, they looked as they did before they were somehow changed, only with black lines covering their bodies. They knew all that they knew before, they fought the same, they held the same power. But they were now the enemy. No family, no brother or sister, mother or father, wife or husband, could get through to them.

Nayra knew that many had fallen to their own loved ones in the beginning, before they even knew what was happening. This enemy was cruel, and unrelenting. Nayra saw a flash of gold, and then a pillar of fire came down, hitting the front line of the taken. Reyla's attack broke their line, disrupted their charge, but it didn't matter. The taken regrouped and continued their charge.

Glowing shields covered them from the heavy fire coming in from the wall, the army was burning through their powers just to reach it.

Nayra knew that the taken still lived under the same rules they had before, their powers had the same limitations. And they seemed eager to reach the wall, their target the section that had already been breached. The geomancers had filled the hole with stone and earth, extended the wall on the front and created new battlements. Arrays had been brought and installed, but in the end, that part of the wall was still the weakest link.

Nayra saw her brother Emyrs raise his staff and created a comet made out of fire above his head. With a flick of his staff he sent it tumbling down toward the taken. A bright light rose from the army to meet his attack, and the two collided in the air above them. The blast sent a shockwave that staggered everyone, and Nayra looked for the source of the light. She found a single taken, keeping to the middle of the formation. He was a tall krecean, his chitin covered in black lines just like the rest of the enemies. His eyes blazed with light, and Nayra could tell that he was strong. There was just something about him that reminded her of other powerful people she had encountered in her life. There was no point trying to scry or read his screens, none of the taken could be read that way, the power that took over them gave them some protections.

The army started climbing the dead monsters from the previous waves. The fliers attempted to swoop on the wall from above, but the defenders switched the focus of their fire to them, taking them down. Then, as the rest of the army reached the Wall, jumping and climbing, Reyla activated the defense arrays.

A blast of force exploded out of the Wall and sent them and the corpses of monsters flying back. It didn't hold them for long, they tried again, and again, and the array grew weaker and weaker with every attack. It was not one of the layered arrays placed into the rest of the Wall, it was just a stopgap, it was clear that it would not last for much longer.

Some of the taken managed to get up on the wall, and the battle erupted. Nayra took a step forward, but then stopped herself. There was a reason why she was separated, her way of fighting was hard to

deal with in such small area like the top of the Wall. She could injure her allies, because they didn't know what she could do, and they were not ready to fight alongside a Cultivator. The wars that the Empire fought were very different than the way the sects fought. The Empire's soldiers fought side by side, shoulder to shoulder. They supported one another. Nayra's style and build didn't match that.

Reyla followed the family build, and she served as an irregular, someone who could fight side by side, but also strike on her own. Emrys fought from range, supporting everyone. Nayra's Cultivation was just too strong and had too big of a range for her to be able to fight side by side with others. So, she watched as the battle on the wall intensified. She could help, she had powers that could be of use, but their plan for the defense was for her to interfere only if necessary.

Nayra saw Reyla and Emrys fighting, killing the taken. It made her sad, those people had once fought side by side with them, but had fallen to the enemy. Unlucky enough that they survived the battle only to be captured, then twisted into whatever it was that they were now. She knew that the Empire had tried to help them, to save them, that they still had some of the taken imprisoned. Nothing that they had done had managed to make any difference. The taken served the Dome Leader, Hastur. There was nothing else that mattered to them.

Then, a bright beam of light hit the wall, and Nayra saw soldiers flying back. She recognized the kracean taken from before. He had somehow turned himself into the beam of light to reach the top of the Wall. He attacked everyone nearby, his four fists glowing with light. She saw people being thrown back, their armor breaking. Then, fire surrounded him as Emrys attacked and Reyla arrived with golden fiery wings on her back. The kracean walked out of the fire, his body surrounded with plates made out of light, and then engaged Reyla.

Nayra watched her sister fighting, her spear flashing and her body on fire. The kracean was stronger. She saw Reyla being pushed back, despite Emrys attacking from the side. The kracean pointed one hand at her brother and a blast of light hit Emrys, sending him flying from the wall.

Nayra moved, her form shrouded in fire as she activated her avatar perk and wings of fire manifesting on her back. She flew from the tower, over the Wall and then used **Valkyrie's Descent**. She landed on top of the krecean, forcing him to flash to light and evade as her spear stabbed into the ground, cracking the stone and sending a rolling wave of it all around her.

She glanced at Reyla and saw her ready her spear. Nayra moved Qi through her body activating **{Mantle of Rising Mists}**, then she rose to her feet. Both of them moved at the same time, fighting in the same way that they had since childhood, as if no time had passed. Reyla attacked high with her spear shrouded in fire, and Nayra attacked low, her shield near her body and ready to cover her sister if the taken attacked.

The krecean didn't have a weapon or armor, relying instead only on his power. As Reyla's spear went for the taken's head, he raised one of his arms and blocked. Nayra's spear went low, and was intercepted with another hand. The other two punched forward in their directions, and Nayra raised her shield. The impact sent her two steps back, and she saw that Reyla had evaded and attacked again, her spear flashing with fire and moving in an arc forcing the taken to move a step back, then she let go of the spear with one hand and pointed the palm in the direction of the taken. A wave of golden fire left her hand. The taken flashed to light as the fire consumed everything. Nayra didn't see if she managed to hit him, but as soon as the attack ended, she saw that the ground and part of the battlements had melted. The stone red and flowing.

She glanced around, looking with her eyes and senses. She found the taken quickly, saw that one of his hands was gone, completely burned away and the wound cauterized. He had evaded, but not quickly enough to remain unscathed. He glared at the two of them, his beady eyes going from one of them to the other then back.

A moment later he moved. Reyla beat her wings and moved out of the way as he flashed next to her and attacked. A flurry of hits rained on Reyla, getting through her block as she tried to protect herself. She

went flying, tumbling over the wall. Nayra was already on top of the taken. Her avatar form erupted in even greater and more intense fire as she activated her **[Dawnfire Immolation]**.

The heat made the kracean wince, but he blocked every one of her attacks, even when she chained several perks together to get more speed and strength. He was just faster than she was. So she changed pace. She got close and activated her aura. The air dimmed and turned into faint scorching mist. The kracean tried to move out of its range, but Nayra followed, attacking all the way. The dead on the field were empowering her, making her faster and stronger, but it wasn't enough. She continued attacking and activating all of her boosting perks in order to be able to keep up.

She could see a glimmer of the taken's movements with her **Battle Knowledge** perk, but it didn't change things as the taken was just too fast for her. Still, she was doing damage, the heat was cooking the kracean in his chitin, albeit slowly. She switched her technique to **{Curtain of Mist Petals}**. As the kracean turned to light and flashed away she followed him with her eyes and heat sense, then activated her **Dawnfire Blink**. She appeared next to him and unleashed a **Dawn Stun** near point blank. The wave of fire washed over the taken and stunned him. Just long enough for Nayra to attack again, with a roar and released her technique.

Her petals flew next to her spear as she stabbed the taken that tried to evade, moving far enough that she would miss. Er'ishi Resav twisted in her hand as she activated his ability, and he bent hitting the taken's shoulder and running him through. The petals followed as the kracean tried to rip himself free of her spear, and just as he was about to get away Reyla arrived. Her spear flashed with golden light that pierced the taken's other side, then her spear punched through his body from the back.

Impaled on both of their spears, the kracean couldn't evade her petals. The scorching mist petals hit him in the chest and exploded, taking chunks of his body away with them. Then Reyla pulled her spear back and swung again, decapitating him.

For a moment everything was still, despite the battle taking place all around them. Nayra met her sister's eyes and smiled, some of the old feelings coming back to the surface. There was a time when she couldn't imagine standing side by side anyone else.

She opened her mouth to speak, when everything shook. She turned immediately and saw the source. A tall monster, a General, walking toward the Wall, and them.