1990. Iron Maiden

Morgan knew how devious and monstrous her brother was.

In Antarctica, he had been weaker than her. He had been slower than her. Even his technique, while stellar, had been inferior to hers.

He had not commanded an army or possessed a force of powerful Echoes, either.

And yet, he had turned her nearly assured victory into a defeat.

Even if it had seemed like the forces of Valor would have prevailed before the descent of the Nightmare Gates, in the end, Morgan herself would not have lived long enough to see their triumph — she would have been dead, slain by that fiend.

So, she knew how fearsome her brother was.

However...

She also noticed how he had changed after coming to the shores of the Sword Domain.

Even his mask of pleasant friendliness was gone, replaced by the inhuman emptiness that Mordret had usually kept hidden in the past.

He must have dreamed of his revenge for a long, long time... for many long years, locked in a dark room in the Night Temple, waiting and dreaming of visiting death and ruin upon those who had locked him there. His family.

So, now that his goal was at hand, the Prince of Nothing had lost some of his flawlessly maintained composure.

He was being impatient.

And since he was also monstrously strong, Morgan knew how to use his impatience and turn it into arrogance.

From that first battle at Rivergate, she had been carefully hiding her true strength.

She had not revealed it even when her life was in danger... and when the lives of her Saints were in danger, either.

That was because even while unleashing his thirst for vengeance, her brother was still supremely cautious.

So, Morgan had to wait.

She had waited for many long weeks, methodically reinforcing the notion of her lacking strength in his mind.

Mordret was a monster, but there were still remnant pieces of humanity left in the depths of his abominable soul.

He already despised Valor, and therefore felt contempt for his younger sister. Deep down, he wanted to prove that he was better than her. Stronger than her. Smarter than her... that his father had chosen wrong when casting him aside, and choosing to elevate Morgan instead.

It was for that reason, and because of having already defeated her once, that Mordret had to be prone to underestimating Morgan. He already wanted to believe that she was below him in all regards, after all — so, showing him weakness over and over again was bound to reinforce that subconscious bias.

However, Morgan was not weak.

She was just waiting.

And now, finally, the day she had been waiting for was here.

...Granted, the situation was still terrible. She had hoped to decimate Mordret's forces in one fell swoop, but he had proven to be too monstrously, unreasonably powerful.

It tasted bitter to admit... that he was indeed much stronger than her.

As a result, Morgan could only hope to level the playing field and assure that the siege would last for a while longer with her carefully prepared trap.

But there was no escaping it. Her Saints were already battered and worn out, losing more of their strength with each day. If she continued to stall for time, it would be her forces that suffered fatal losses, not his.

'...A pity.’

Morgan deflected a glancing blow of the enemy's sword, somehow managed to push another aside with the pommel of her own, and then gasped when the towering reptile's trident brushed against her side.

Her armor caved a little, and she was thrown back, slamming into the parapet of the battlements. A net of fractures spread through the ancient stone, and a rain of debris fell down... she groaned and straightened slowly, tasting blood on her tongue.

Feeling beaten and tired, Morgan glanced east, caught a glimpse of Athena, and felt new strength flood her veins.

Her cracked helmet collapsed into a rain of sparks.

Sensing cool air on her heated face, Morgan smiled crookedly, looked past the hideous head of the humanlike reptile — one of the strongest vessels in Mordret's possession after Typhaon and Knossos — and pierced her brother with a dark gaze.

The fiend was still refusing to join the fray...

Or rather, refusing to risk his original body. In truth, each of these vessels was him, and he was already engaged in the battle.

Why was he so cautious? She had hoped to destroy that original body today…

But the gargantuan crocodile would have to do.

"Hey, brother..."

Standing some distance away, Mordret looked at her without any particular emotion.

His lips twisted into a false smile.

"Are you ready to surrender, sister? Or, wait. Are you going to run away again? Go and ask our father for help, per chance? I'm sure he can spare a few Echoes..."

Morgan let out a hollow laugh and watched as the giant reptile raised its trident to deliver another blow. The other two Transcendent vessels had not been idle while Mordret was talking either, having already flanked her.

She lingered for a moment, and grinned.

"...Why are you calling him our father, anyway? You bastard."

Mordret's expression finally changed, bringing her great satisfaction.

In the next moment, Morgan's smile disappeared, replaced with a cold and ruthless expression.

And her body turned to liquid steel.

The torrent of it swallowed the black armor and rushed forward like a flood. In the past, Morgan had only used this Transcendent Ability to change parts of her body into blades or grow in size, becoming a steel giant of about ten meters in height. A few times, she had even mimicked the forms of other creatures... but that was not all she could do.

She had held back the true extent of her power until now.

Becoming a sword?

Who wanted that…

A sword could cut flesh, and in the right hand, it could even cut souls.

But it could not cut the world.

It could not wield itself, and force its own will upon existence.

Morgan was going to do exactly that.

A torrent of liquid metal rushed forward, expanding in size until it was like a river. It instantly swallowed the two Transcendent vessels that had been rushing to attack her from the sides, slicing their bodies apart and extinguishing the false sparks of life that burned in their dead chests.

Then, it dove off the wall and wrapped itself around the colossal reptile like a snake made of mercury.

The humanoid crocodile was truly gargantuan, standing as tall as the fortress wall. But finally unleashed, Morgan was able to envelop it almost entirely.

And there was no escape from her iron embrace... she had absorbed quite a lot of mystical steel in the past four years, after all. The swords her father had forged, as well as the shards of the destroyed Sentinel Swords, had reinforced her Transcendent form especially well.

Trapped, the enormous reptile staggered back.

But it was too late.

Because the river of liquid metal that Morgan had become retained the curse of her Flaw. Amplified by her Aspect Power, her flowing shape was cutting into the flesh of the powerful vessel, slicing it apart, and letting torrents of blood flow down onto the rubble.

It was too slow, though.

The shell of liquid metal swirling around the body of the taken Saint rippled, and countless long, appallingly sharp spikes shot from its inner surface into his flesh, riddling it with holes and destroying his every organ.

Just like that, three Transcendent vessels of the Prince of Nothing were destroyed.

Even knowing that his retaliation would follow a few moments later, Morgan couldn't help but laugh.

Of course, she only laughed inside her mind, since her current form had no mouth and no lungs to produce sound.

‘Three down...'

Would that be a big enough gesture to invite Mordret into her soul?

If yes... one of them was going to die in the next few minutes.

Or both of them.

If not, the siege of Bastion would continue on for a long time — the loss of these vessels would slow Mordret's momentum, after all.

Two of the three possible outcomes ended in her victory.

Those... weren't bad odds...

East of the crumbling fortress, a beautiful steel colossus was battling a hideous monster in the shallow water.

West of it, a graceful dragon was fighting a titanic horror of the depths fiercely, his haunting songs traveling across the surging lake.

Inside the fortress, the ancient walls were collapsing, and a man with mirror-like eyes was looking curiously at as a river of living metal was slowly painted red.

The shattered moon shone coldly in the broken sky.