1997. Human Cost

The pilgrims were consumed by the tidal wave of steel warriors, only managing to fell the vanguard of unfeeling Echoes. There were more of them on other parts of the battlefield, but here at the epicenter of the calamitous clash between the two great armies, the Knights of Valor were too shrewd and callous to allow the dead to rise en masse.

The indomitable formation of the Sword Army elites surged forward like an iron wave, crashing into the Seventh Legion and shattering its offensive line. However, not long after, the momentum of the Valor forces stalled.

And then, it was exhausted entirely, leaving them in a deadly mire. Their enemy was not to not be trifled with, either — the seven Royal Legions consisted of the best warriors of the Song Domain, and among them, the Seventh Legion was the fiercest.

It only lost to the First Legion, perhaps, which had vanished into the darkness of the Spine Ocean and was not present on the battlefield today.

After suffering the initial blow, the broken formation of the Song warriors did not buckle, and the warriors themselves did not lose themselves to fear. They were not routed — instead, they descended upon the Knights of Valor and their auxiliary forces like a deadly swarm, burning with wicked resolve and primal fury.

These men and women were neither enthralled by the promise of glory nor intoxicated by the raucous hymns of war. However, they weren't willing to taste the bitterness of defeat, either.

...A wide swath of the hellish battlefield turned into an even harsher hell, with thousands of powerful Awakened and hundreds of fearsome Masters clashing in a deadly melee.

The cacophony of deafening thunderclaps, the litany of human screams, and the violent tremors of the bloodied ground fused into a nightmarish choir of destruction, as if the world itself was in the throes of death — or rebirth, maybe. Perhaps it was the dead deity of Godgrave that was being reborn, its ancient bones soaked by human blood.

In any case, the warriors of both the Sword Army and the Song Army seemed to have forgotten themselves, consumed by the dire and macabre necessity of battle. Their previous doubts were washed away by the shock and awe of the harrowing battlefield, and their minds were hollowed by the dreadful, demented noises of the disastrous havoc.

The world had gone insane.

Rain was so afraid that she did not even feel fear anymore. It was as if that part of her that had been responsible for knowing fear overheated and went up in flames, leaving only cold ashes in its wake. Now, all she felt was fury and resentment.

She did not even know what she was furious about, and whom she resented.

In the absence of an answer, Rain could only focus her reeling mind on the enemy in front of her.

Tamar was the first to clash with the warriors of the Sword Army, vaulting over their loose battle line with the help of her Aspect Ability and using the second floating step to abruptly arrest her momentum, twist on one leg, and lunge herself at their backs.

As soon as her foot touched the ground, her brutish zweihander flashed in a wicked horizontal arc, breaking someone's armor and throwing them aside.

She was putting herself in terrible danger, of course, all alone behind the enemy line…

But a moment later, her soldiers collided with the front of the enemy formation.

Attacked from both sides, the Feather Knights momentarily fumbled.

That was all the opportunity Rain and her comrades needed, tearing into them with urgent determination.

Steel rang against steel, and tasted human flesh, as well.

Blood spilled on the pristine white surface of the ancient bone.

Rain raised her tachi and forced her hands to stop trembling.

Somewhere not too far away…

The elites of Clan Valor were struggling to hold against the vicious attack of the Song warriors. Acting with astonishing precision and stalwart poise, they maintained their formation and refused to give ground, which was already drenched in blood.

The enemy would not allow them to retreat, anyway... and there, behind them, the dead were already stirring, ready to rise.

If they were to be saved, they had to carve a bloody path to salvation with their own hands.

And so, they held fast…

However, a few moments later, a swift figure in crimson garments flashed between the soldiers of Song and crashed into the formation of the ironclad knights. It was a beautiful woman who wore no armor, her ebony hair fluttering behind her in the wind.

Her skin was pale like snow, and her eyes were just as cold.

Her scarlet lips were pressed tightly against each other.

She was one of the Blood Sisters who followed Princess Seishan... A Master of the Song Domain.

Wielding a sharp dagger with a wavy blade, she collided with the warriors of the Sword Army and pushed them back. Her thin hand moved with inhuman speed, slicing up the throat of one soldier, blinding another, piercing a third one's chest.

The knights staggered back in a haze of blood, opening a breach in their formation.

The Blood Sister dashed forward, ready to widen the gap...

Only for her kris to be stopped by a sword's blade.

Sid, one of the Fire Keepers who had been sent into battle with the Knights of Valor, pushed the enemy Master back and looked at her with a scowl.

Her dirty-blonde hair was wet with sweat, and her shield Memory was gone, destroyed by a ferocious Echo... which was a real shame, considering that it had been wonderfully modified by the charming guest of their island not too long ago.

As the breach in the formation widened and the soldiers of the two armies descended into a frenzied melee, she sighed and spoke with a hint of regret:

"Elly."

Her voice was somber.

"...You should have stayed away from this war, stupid girl."

The Blood Sister - the former Handmaiden - forced out a defiant smile.

"It's good to see you again, Sid."

With that, she raised her beautiful dagger and prepared to attack.

A moment later, the two former members of the Dreamer Army clashed under the merciless grey sky, aiming to end each other's lives.