2287 Will to Kill  
  
Slayer was an odd being. She was a Shadow whose dark depths were illuminated by the silver light of pure soul essence. She was not quite Supreme, but also not quite Transcendent - and while she fought under Sunny's dark banner, she was not loyal or devoted to him.  
  
Her prey, the Great Tyrant controlling a vast swath of the detestable swarm, was quite a peculiar creature as well.  
  
In fact, Sunny had been convinced that the black millipedes were no different from a mindless mob at first, ruled by no one and only beholden to their bestial instincts. It was only after suffering several crushing defeats recently that he guessed the existence of a guiding force behind them. Even then, it took him a long time to discover the Tyrants… Which was too long, considering how nearly omniscient he was when his shadow sense reached far and wide.  
  
As it turned out, the Great Tyrants of the Black Millipede tribe were elusive creatures. It was hard to catch a glimpse of their blurry forms, and even harder to ambush them - that was because they, too, existed in a transient ambivalence of being split between two states.  
  
Only, unlike Slayer, who was torn between two Ranks, the Millipede Queens seemed to exist in the fleeting gaps between two seconds. At least that was what Sunny deduced after failing to kill them on several occasions.  
  
These Great Tyrants did not exist in the present, remaining forever hidden a moment in the past and a moment in the future. And since it was impossible to destroy something that did not exist, Sunny had failed to slay them time after time.  
  
It was a strange and paradoxical ability, to say the least. However, it was also the kind of unreasonable power Sunny expected from beings of the Great Rank.  
  
Apart from the defensive camouflage of time, the Millipede Queens were massive, encased in a fearsome carapace of impenetrable chitin, capable of giving birth to an endless flood of lesser abominations, and usually safely hidden inside their fortress - like nests on top of that. There were seven of them, from what Sunny could tell, and today, his goal was to kill at least one.  
  
Facing six destructive swarms was not going to be much easier than facing seven of them, and the orphaned millipedes would most likely be simply absorbed into the armies of the remaining Queens, thus making them stronger. However, it would still be a breaking point in his war against the Black Millipede tribe.  
  
That was because once one of the grotesque Queens joined his Shadow Legion, she would be able to exert control over the thousands of shades of their fallen offspring that were already there. Thus, his own growing swarm of detestable millipedes would become numerous times deadlier in an instant.  
  
So, being thrashed by Slayer and feeding her his blood was a small price to pay.  
  
While one incarnation of Sunny distracted the Devils who guarded the Queens, Slayer had been laying in ambush. It was not an easy feat to conceal herself from the endless tide of Nightmare Creatures, many of whom were immensely powerful and possessed senses that humans had not even heard about, but she managed to remain hidden even under their noses.  
  
Or whatever it was the grotesque millipedes had instead of noses…  
  
In any case, Slayer had risen from the shadows and sent an arrow flying. She had always been a dreadfully powerful being, and now, her power was amplified by Sunny as well. He shared Slayer's senses, feeling the deadly precision of her movements, her calm and merciless determination to kill, the cold lethality of her willpower.  
  
A Great Tyrant was a fearsome existence - just one of them was enough to obliterate an entire continent in the waking world, turning great cities to ruin and consuming hundreds of millions of unfortunate souls in a matter of days, if not hours.  
  
Everything about them was the epitome of tyrannical power and inescapable dread. Their towering bodies could crush mountains, and their impenetrable armor could easily shake off even the most awful of attacks.  
  
And yet, Slayer's arrow easily pierced the Millipede Queen's head, as if not meeting any resistance.  
  
That was because her will was stronger than the Great Tyrant's will. Not only was it stronger, but it was also sharper, shaped into a penetrating blade instead of falling like a hammer.  
  
'Oh… so it can be done like that, as well…'  
  
Even in the middle of the battle, Sunny did not miss the chance to learn a new lesson.  
  
He had completed his Transcendent Battle Art, already. His swordsmanship did not require further breakthroughs - however, a Transcendent Battle Art as a whole could still be elevated to a Supreme Battle Art.  
  
The difference between the two was easy. A Supreme Battle Art contained an entirely new dimension - an unseen and abstract one, but vitally important nevertheless. The dimension of will.  
  
To master it, Sunny had to learn how to infuse his will into his every movement and strike, wielding it with just as much finesse and precision as he could exert when wielding a sword. He had already made the initial breakthrough during his battle against Anvil, learning from the Supreme Battle Art of the King of Swords, and made great strides in mastering his Will in the past year.  
  
But there was still room to improve, and there was no better example than Slayer.  
  
After all, Slayer was an ancient and supremely accomplished killer. She had existed for far longer than Sunny, had hunted far more beings than Sunny, and had honed her Will to a much deadlier blade than Sunny.  
  
Otherwise, she would not have persisted for thousands of years in the Shadow Realm, refusing to succumb to death.  
  
'Curious.'  
  
The arrow had pierced the Millipede Queen's head, but it did not kill the horrible creature. In fact, the damage it dealt was far more modest than Sunny had expected.  
  
He contemplated for a split second.  
  
'Argh, so that is why. I see.'  
  
In a battle of this level of power, the Will was both a weapon and an armor, playing a role that was just as important as the actual items. However, it did not exist in and of itself. The Will needed a medium to be expressed, and that medium, naturally, was the individual to whom the Will belonged.  
  
But things were more complicated than that…  
  
It seemed that the Will had to be expressed directly - the fewer intermediaries there were between the source and the target, and the closer the point of contact was, the more effective the result.  
  
In this case, the source of the Will was Slayer. Sunny was involved, as well - not because he was augmenting her body, but because he had crafted her bow and arrow, imprinting them with his own Will.  
  
However, the sum of their willpowers that should have overwhelmed the Millipede Queen had merely wounded the creature lightly. That was because Slayer had not expressed her Will directly - instead, her Will had been delivered across a great distance by an arrow.  
  
It was as if the force of her Will was dissipated by the distance and the involvement of an intermediary.  
  
In other words, an attack would have carried the most Will if Slayer had struck with her bare hands. Using a sword would have also been quite effective, since she would have held it in her hand, channeling her Will through it.  
  
However, a ranged weapon was an inferior vessel for one's Will. A bow was somewhat better than other weapons in that regard, since it at least had to be drawn by the archer's own hand, using the archer's own strength. A crossbow would have shown a worse result, and a bullet would have contained very little Will - if any at all.  
  
No wonder contemporary weapons lost most of their effectiveness when used against Nightmare Creatures of the Fallen Rank and higher. Even at that level, the Will already played an important role… impersonal attacks could not penetrate the armor of latent Will these beings possessed.  
  
A sword wielded by an Awakened warrior, however, could.  
  
Sunny whistled.  
  
'This is quite curious. Entirely unscientific, naturally.'  
  
There was also an interesting conundrum to be solved about his will as the Lord of Shadows, the manifested shadows, and their capacity to channel his Will.  
  
That was something he would have to ponder later, though…  
  
For now, there was still a wounded Great Tyrant they had to kill.  
  
Even though ranged weapons seemed to be less effective in the battle of truly powerful beings, that did not mean that they were useless. It was just that great skill was required from the one wielding them - skill that Slayer possessed with plenty to spare.  
  
That was why her arrow had pierced the Millipede Queen's head without much trouble. And even though it did not deal too much damage… that was not its purpose, either.  
  
The arrow Slayer had chosen to begin her barrage was a special one, crafted by Sunny while inspired by the [In Case of Emergency] Memory that belonged to Rain - a sash that could fix her position in space, and which was meant to save her life in case the Cloudveil in Godgrave broke without warning.  
  
The arrow's purpose was quite similar - it was to root the adversary in place.  
  
Naturally, the Millipede Queen was far too powerful, and possessed too terrifying of a Will to be slowed down by the enchantment for long. In fact, she broke free of the sorcerous binding a moment later…  
  
But in that short moment, the Great Tyrant was completely exposed, rooted not only in space, but also in time, and therefore robbed of her odd camouflage.  
  
In that short moment, three more arrows slid between the cracks in the Queen's indestructible carapace.  
  
These ones dealt far more damage.  
  
…In fact, the damage they dealt was catastrophic.  
  
The gigantic millipede's neck exploded from the inside, whole chunks of flesh and cracked chitin flying into the air. Rivers of blood plummeted down like crimson waterfalls, and innumerable lesser abominations shuddered, losing cohesion.  
  
The Millipede Queen let out an earth-shattering screech and swayed, expressing its pain and fear. The Great Devils who had moved to deal with Sunny rushed back to answer their matriarch's panicked call…  
  
But it was already toо late.  
  
Because Slayer had already drawn her bow again, and already sent another arrow flying.  
  
The slaying arrow.  
  
A split second later, the Queen's enormous head was severed cleanly from her neck.