1721 Footsteps of History

Effie rose to her full height, towering a hundred meters above the desert. She was like a colossus cast of lustrous steel, the gorgeous lines of her athletic body shining under the blinding sun... a beautiful war deity rising to face the tide of monstrous abominations.

The white fabric of the Starlight Shard rippled in the wind.

Expanding the two Memories to fit her giant size cost a significant amount of essence, but it was worth it. Sadly, the same could not be said about the rest of her arsenal - not that there were a lot of Memories in her possession that could accommodate her Transformation. Even those that could were too weak to justify the expenditure.

Especially because Effie had other ways to spend her essence.

As soon as her Transformation was complete, she activated her Ascended Ability. Instantly, every soldier at the bottom of the dry riverbed - those that could see her, at least - felt their hearts beating faster. Their spirit and body were reinvigorated, while their strength, speed, agility, endurance, and resilience were greatly enhanced.

But that was the good thing about Effie's Transformation... it was hard not to notice a hundred-meter-tall colossus, especially one as striking as her, Her Ascended and Transcendent Abilities synergized beautifully to make sure that anyone on the battlefield could see her at any moment, even in the midst of a furious melee.

As long as she was on the front line.

The loud, reverberating roar rose from the riverbed as thousands of soldiers, both mundane and Awakened, chanted in exhilaration:

"Raised by Wolves!"

"Saint Athena!"

"War Beast is here!"

Their impassioned voices were full of resolve and grim determination.

And as they looked at her, Effie felt hher essence being slowly replenished.

‘Well, at least someone is in a good mood.’

Looking past the exultant soldiers, she gazed at the burning city. From her current height, Effie could see the eerie fissures of the Nightmare Gates surrounding it like seven ghastly siege towers. One of them was especially tall, reaching even higher into the sky than she did.

There were several gargantuan figures moving in the sea of Nightmare Creatures. The Great Devil was not the only calamity unleashed by the seven Gates there were other Gate Guardians, as well.

Two of them was even Titans.

'A Great Devil, a Corrupted Tyrant, two Fallen Titan, and a swarm of Terrors…’

One way or another, today's battle was going to end up in the history books. It was not quite the Chain of Nightmares, but definitely the worst crisis the waking world had faced since the Southern Campaign - by far.

What would the history books tell?

That on that day, the forces of humanity triumphed vallantly over a dreadful enemy?

Or...

That on that day, humanity mourned the loss of many of its most brilliant warriors?

Even now, on the precipice of the battle, Effie could not tell.

‘...To hell with that'

She grinned and kneeled, then placed the back of her hand on the ground, the open palm facing the sky.

Who cares about history? This battle might seem dreadful, but it was destined to become an insignificant speck in the tapestry of horrors that awaited humanity in the coming decades. In the near future, there would be a hundred, a thousand battles much more terrible than this.

By the end of it all, there might be no one left to read history books, let alone write them.

Such exciting times! She was definitely not going to miss them.

[Cassie.., are you watching?]

There was a moment of silence, and then a response came, as calm and relaxed as ever:

[Tam.]

Effie smiled.

[... Watch well.]

It was Cassie's job, after all, to witness and remember everything.

Down below, on the ground, the tiny ant that was Jet soared into the air and landed gracefully on her palm. Effie rose to her feet, gazed ahead, and took the first step forward.

The ground quaked under her titanic footsteps.

She leaned forward and pushed off, breaking into a sprint. The sight of the beautiful steel colossus running was both magnificent and terrifying, the sheer scale of it all escaping imagination.

Awash in the echoing war chant of the advancing army, Effie leaped over the vast battle formation the marching mundane soldiers, the wings of lumbering MWPs, the heavily armored tanks, the Awakened phalanx - and crossed the dry riverbed in no more than a dozen great strides, making the world quake.

Then, she was among the Nightmare Creatures. Standing on her palm like a beautiful toy soldier, Jet shouted:

"Don't slow down! Proceed to the designated drop point!”

Effle answered with a seoff.

"When have I ever slowed down?"

Her volce was like the thunderous song of a divine war horn.

And that was with her keeping it down. Jet was tough enough to withstand the full volume of Effie's voice, but if a mundane human happened to be too close, they would easily be crippled or outright die under its pressure. So, she had developed a habit of staying silent or speaking softly when assuming the godlike form of the militant giantess.

A moment later, her foot descended on a swarm of Nightmare Creatures, ruthlessly crushing dozens of them in one fell swoop. Some had survived, and were already trying to crawl up her shins, their fangs and claws scraping fruitlessly against the polished steel.

Her armor was a Supreme Memory of the First Tier, though, so none of their attempts amounted to anything. Even if the armor was breached, Effie had her Awakened Ability to fall back on. As great as her offensive might was, her defenses were even more astonishing... in fact, Effie was often tempted to say that she was practically Indestructible.

Of course, she never did. Saying something like that was just inviting trouble.

There were all kinds of Nightmare Creatures out there, Many of them had means of bypassing physical defense, or could deal entirely different types of damage. The moment a powerful Awakened became arrogant was usually the moment they died.

The Spell whispered into her ear:

[You have slain...]

[You have slain...]

[You have slain...]

Ignoring the sonorous choir of its voice, Effie leaned forward a little and delivered a powerful kick, pulverizing an especially large abomination.

The creature must have been at least a dozen meters tall, and would have looked like a towering behemoth to the advancing soldiers. But to her, it was no bigger than a large rat. Its body disintegrated into a disgusting torrent of bloody liquid, and before that liquid splattered across a vast stretch of the riverbed's slope, Effie was already past the foremost wave of the Nightmare Creatures.

Nothing but devastation was left in her wake.

[You have slain a Corrupted Monster, Maw of Kanakht].

A moment later, she reached the city barrier.

It was quite inferior to the great walls surrounding NQSC, Not all human cities were siege capitals, after all the true siege capitals had been constructed and received that title during the Dark Times, and there were just a few of them left standing in the world.

Of course, all human cities had been turned into highly advanced strongholds after the descent of the Spell, both to keep the Nightmare Creatures out and to make them habitable in the aftermath of the previous era. Still, the scale of their defenses varled.

The ruined city in front of Effie had quite a robust wall once upon time, but now it lay in ruins. The streets were obscured by smoke, and countless abominations were rampaging under its suffocating shroud.

From this close, she could hear a terrible cacophony of crumbling buildings, bestial roars, sporadic gunfire...

And human screams.

There were indeed survivors there, below her. Which was why she had to be careful.

"To your left!"

Jet's shout was very timely.

Turning her head, Effie saw a wide highway piercing into the heart of the city. There was a fortified railway in its middle, with a mess of overturned train cars laying on the tracks. The highway itself was crowded by military vehicles... all empty and painted red by blood.

This was where the city garrison forces had tried, and falled, to stop the tide of abominations after the walls fell.

What was important to Effie, though, was that she would be able to use the highway to reach the heart of the city without trampling countless civilians to death and toppling damaged buildings.

Paving a bloody path through the horde of abominations, she stomped her way to the highway. Countless abominations perished under her footsteps. Those that were more powerful were crushed to death in her grasp, torn apart, or splattered across the concrete.

Their assault was like a dark tide. Some were large enough to pose a threat to even someone as giant as her... but Effie did not only have size on her side. She also had her skill, intellect, and battle experience.

The combination was truly devastating, and none of these meddling creatures could withstand her might.

It would have been even more devastating if she had a proper spear and shield to wield, but alas, she did not. So, Effie fought with her bare hands- or rather, with her entire body except for one hand, which was being used to carry Jet - in accordance with the ancient hand-to-hand combat techniques hammered into her bones by the War Maidens of the Chalice Temple,

There were swarms of flying abominations, as well. When those descended upon her, even Jet received an opportunity to bloody her blade.

Reaching the highway, Effie advanced swiftly toward the heart of the city. As she ran, shattering the road and flattening overturned train cars and abandoned military vehicles with each step, she kept her eyes on the true threats.

To her left, on the edges of the city, the colossal shape of the Fallen Titan was toppling residential towers and feeding on the crushed corpses of countless humans.

To her right, the massive figure of the Corrupted Titan was consuming the remains of the government compound.

Another Titan was nearby, having already breached the ceiling of a deep underground shelter.

And finally, far ahead, on the opposite side of the city, past the shattered barrier...

A vague silhouette of the Great Devil was towering above the local outskirts, moving slowly in the eerie silence.

There were two more Gate Guardians spread throughout the ruins, as well, both already gazing at her and narrowing the distance.

And a sea of Nightmare Creatures following them.

'Everyone wants in on the party...'

Finally, she reached the drop point.

Effie sent a shockwave spreading from the spot where the edge of her foot had dug into the ground to stall her momentum, and came to an abrupt halt.

In the next moment, her voice shook the sky with a thunderous, defiant call:

"Wolf Army! Charge!”