1991: Hideous Face of War

An enormous Echo stood upon the desolate white plain, shining blindingly as its steel carapace reflected the radiance of the overcast sky. It was powerful enough to flatten fortresses and durable enough to endure Transcendent blows, towering above the sun-bleached bone like a steel behemoth.

The gargantuan beast had four mighty legs, a broad back, and a flat head that rested on a long neck. However, it had not been created by the Nightmare Spell in the image of a fearsome abomination… instead, it had been forged by the King of Swords once — perhaps to serve an important

purpose, perhaps simply out of boredom.

Unless one wanted to bully the weak, the giant Echo was suited well for battle. It was not swift enough to be of use in a serious battle, and while its carapace was durable, it was not nearly resilient enough to survive the many dreadful perils of the Dream Realm. At best, it could serve as a massive siege tower.

At present, however, it served as a mobile redoubt for the command staff of the Sword Army… not because of its power or impregnable carapace, but simply because its height offered the King of Swords and his retinue a convenient vantage point to observe the battlefields.

The Echo's long tail rested on the ground, serving as a bridge that one could use to reach the flat expanse of the creature's back — there were even guardrails installed on both sides of the ascending path to prevent people from falling down.

On the back of the steel beast, the field headquarters of the Sword Army stood, composed of colorful tents and canvas pavilions… most of them black or vermilion, of course. This was where the King and his close aides resided when the army was on the march, and where the generals gathered to hold council.

This arrangement was not at all as impressive as the Valor Keep in the main camp of the Sword Army, of course, but still far more comfortable and convenient than one would expect in the middle of an active war.

Finally, there was another steep path leading from the back of the enormous Echo and up its long neck. A circular viewing platform was located on the other end of the path, resting atop the head of the steel behemoth. The posts of the decorative guardrail were fashioned to look like a crown,

and the white plain of sun-bleached bone could be seen far below in stunning view.

That was where Sunny had found himself on a hot summer day, hiding his grim expression behind Weaver's Mask as he observed the calamitous battlefield.

Well… every day in Godgrave was cruelly hot and sweltering, so this one was no different from all the rest.

He sighed.

'Why is it that every war I participate in happens to take place in an area with extreme weather conditions?'

First the dreadful cold of Antarctica, now the suffocating heat of Godgrave…

It was truly unfortunate.

'The next war I join better happen somewhere with a nice climate.'

The rest of the people gathered on the platform did not seem to share his sentiment. All of them were clad in heavy armor — except for Nephis, who had stuck with her decision to forego it entirely and was wearing simple white garments.

There were no dark corners on the head of the enormous Echo for Sunny to hide in, so he simply found a relatively desolate spot and stood there alone, leaning on the railing with crossed arms. Added to his fearsome mask and cold attitude, this pose dissuaded others from approaching him, which suited Sunny fine.

Most people crowded around the King, anyway.

Anvil was standing at the foremost point of the viewing platform, observing the battle with a somber expression. His vermilion cloak was moving slightly in the wind, and his iron crown seemed especially heavy today. Sunny could not tell what the Sovereign of the Sword Domain was thinking about, and couldn't even guess what he felt.

No one was speaking at the moment, absorbed by the dreadful view of two great armies clashing on the plain below.

It was truly an awesome scene.

There were hundreds of thousands Awakened warriors participating in the battle, as well as thousands of Masters. There were countless Echoes, as well…

There was also a vast horde of horrid Nightmare Creatures subjugated by Beastmaster, and the eerie legion of the dead risen by the Queen of Worms.

The battlefront stretched from east to west for no less than a dozen kilometers, and terrible forces ravaged the crumbling lines of desperately struggling soldiers. Countless Aspects were being unleashed, and countless Memories were consuming oceans of essence to release a myriad of

enchantments. The bone plain was quaking, and the fabric of reality seemed to grow brittle and thin.

The bone plain was drinking blood greedily, and too many lives were being lost each minute.

…It was appalling.

Here on the head of the gargantuan steel beast, it was almost peaceful. The deafening roar of the battle was like a distant murmur of the tide, and none of the devastating forces unleashed on the battlefield reached the viewing platform.

And yet, the people gathered here were not at all at peace.

If there was one thing lacking on the battlefield… it was the Saints. Neither of the two armies had sent their Transcendent champions into battle, so all they could do was watch from a distance and gnash their teeth.

Sunny had imagined the war as many things, but he had never imagined that it would be so… boring.

At the start of it all, he had been worried about having to slay countless humans with his own two hands.

But in truth, Sunny had barely had an opportunity to spill blood after his first few attacks on the supply caravans of the Song Army.

All the killing and all the dying was being done by ordinary soldiers like Rain, and they were the ones paying the hideous price of war.

It was a shameful truth.