

Interlude - Battlelines

The warriors assembled around her, but Nayra had eyes only for the enemy in front of her. The sects didn't have any real frontline, there were no rows of soldiers with overlapping shields and spears pointed to welcome the enemy. No, they were spread out, arranged in smaller teams ready to support the strongest of them. That was how the sects fought, they protected, they bought time for those who were stronger than them, allowing them to unleash their power on the enemy. Sometimes, they bought that time even with their lives.

Nayra stood next to Lesamitrius and a group of other Heavenly and Monarch Realm Cultivators of the Sect. Their immortals had their own teams. One of the Cultivators in her team was the messenger, following a path that allowed him to move quickly across the battlefield. Him, Nayra would use when she wanted to give orders. She led from the front, having learned how to read the flow of battle in the Empire's last war.

To her side were other Sect teams, and beyond other families of the sect, Reki Ra Jhan led the closest one, and on the other side, a bit away was her brother Emyris with a squadron of Ornn retainers. That side resembled more what Nayra would consider a real army, though she knew that each had its strengths.

The enemy was speeding up, their charge down a hill in front of her coming closer and closer. Whatever had slowed them down was losing its power. But she took a moment to take everything in. She saw towering generals in the distance, some walking toward them on two legs, others floating above the ground and more heading higher in the sky. To the far right, on a front held by another Sect, a General the size of a small hill lumbered on four feet, each the size of a city tower. She knew the type, the single great eye that stared with black malevolence could fire powerful beams of energy that could devastate entire armies. She hoped

that someone powerful was ready to protect the army from it, otherwise it could do a lot of damage.

Nayra got ready, her armor glistening in the light of the morning, her shield hefted on her left forearm and **Er'ishi Resav** held ready in her spear arm.

"You ready?" She asked her awakened spear.

"Always," Resav answered. The two of them had gotten very close to one another, a true awakened weapon and its wielder, their bond had progressed.

Whatever held the enemy back broke, and a tide rushed forward. A black sea of running monsters of all shapes and sizes. At the front, Nayra saw a tall monster that was familiar to her, a runner, as they called it. It was the size of a wagon, with six legs and a long elongated snout. Black scales glistened as if they were covered in tar, it roared as it ran at her.

The days when Nayra would feel fear when seeing such a sight were long gone. The monsters were still hundreds of meters away from their lines, but Nayra wasn't about to let them get in the first strike. She triggered her perks. The **Lady of Battle** spread out of her, increasing the stats of those around her. She felt others layer their own boosts across her and those around her. Qi flowed through her body, and she activated her **{Mantle of the Rising Mists}**, her stats rose higher.

She pulled her spear hand back, then snapped it forward in a stabbing motion. While doing that she activated **Er'ishi Resav's** ability.

God-killing Spear

In a span of an instant, Resav's length flashed, increasing as it grew faster than an eye could blink. Across the hundreds of meters of distance, her spear stabbed into the head of the charging monster, then through it and the dozen monsters behind it. She pulled her spear back and Resav retracted in an instant. A dozen monster corpses left on the ground to be trampled by others.

As if her strike was an announcement, the Sect army fired. Long range attacks of all kinds filled the air and the distance between the two armies. Behind Nayra, Twilight Melody Sect archers fired arrows that filled the sky, powers were used to multiply them, to increase their size, to just make them stronger or explode on impact. The onslaught hit the first rows of the enemy forces and obliterated them.

It didn't take long for more monsters to arrive and climb over their dead. Then the lumbering giant monsters behind in the backfired their own long range attacks, and the battle began in earnest. As monsters reached their lines, fire engulfed Nayra, she was ready.

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When the first lines hit their forces, Lesamitrius didn't get to do anything. His commander, Sect Leader Nayra Ornn-Dagda sent a blast of orange mist ahead of her, scorching the monsters. The heavenly warriors behind him fired their arrows and killed a few while Nayra finished off the others. But there were more coming, and soon the fight changed. Nayra fought, but she couldn't hold everything, and a monster slipped by her side, then turned to attack her flank. Lesamitrius dashed forward, Qi burning through his body and then slashed with his saber, cutting a limb off a monster that had far too many of them growing from weird places. It didn't roar or whine, it had no mouth. Its body was covered with a dozen eyes that all turned to look at him, its limbs were caricatures of those of other races. Twig thin, ending in hands that had six fingers and long claws at the tips.

It rushed him, and arrows struck it from behind Lesamitrius, his teammates coming to his aid. They didn't stop it though. He ducked, then rolled beneath its attack. It raked the ground as it tried to catch him, and Lesamitrius swiped with his saber cutting off a limb it used as a foot. It stumbled, and Lesamitrius closed the distance, he opened his mouth and

sprayed acid on its center body. Its dry black skin sizzled and it recoiled, Lesamitrius followed. Qi filled his saber, and he dodged its attacks to stab it into its body. He used his **{Green Exuding Deluge}** and sent a blast of it into its body. The Qi ate away at its inside, and soon the monster collapsed in on itself as its insides were destroyed.

He raised his head and saw Nayra kill two more, by stabbing them with her spear, then dash in a blaze of flames at another to bash it into the ground with her shield. A quick moving and small monster jumped at her and her flames expanded, burning it in the air.

Lesamitrius jumped forward, building his technique. He moved behind her, his saber high above his head gathering his Qi. Then, he summoned his **Aspect Manifestation: Acid Orb**. He sent the orb flying forward beyond their lines and then swiped with his saber and sent his **{Green Churning Rain}** technique out. It hit the orb and they amplified each other. Green droplets started spinning out of the orb—the technique that had given the sect its name—it was slow at first, but then it changed, it grew, and the tiny drops of acid Qi started to do damage.

The monsters tried to run away from it, but it was useless. Lesamitrius paused as another team from the Green Rain Sect arrived from behind their lines. They jumped into the rain, their gear and bodies resistant to it, and mopped up the monsters that Lesamitrius had caught before retreating back again. Another sect team unleashed techniques from the sides, taking advantage of the momentary hole in the enemy charge. Flames hit from one side, burning up the monsters, and walls of ice that then shattered and speared more came from the other. Two teams of spear wielders dropped on top of the stunned monsters, the few of the stronger and bigger ones, and immediately stabbed with their spears, each glowing a spectral green that was different than Lesamitrius's acid Qi. The Black Viper Venom Qi ravaged the monsters, and the two teams unleashed dozens of **{Summon Exploding Spectral Vipers}** that flew through the air and exploded against another score of charging monsters, then they retreated with their movement ability, **[Burst Step]**.

Further ahead, Lesamitrius's technique ended, but still left pools of acid Qi on the ground. The monsters charged straight through it, weakening themselves. He didn't jump forward again, instead he watched as the archers and Nayra fought, and waited for any monsters to get by his teams front line.

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Emrys stood behind the row of soldiers, their shields locked into a wall. The monsters slammed into them, hard. But the wall line held, then the soldiers stabbed with their spears using their **[Thrust]** abilities, and the soldiers behind them used their **[Forward Thrust]** to stab their lances in between the shields with precision. He saw their defensive perks activate as they fought to hold their ground. Then, they layered their perks and stabbed forward as one. A wave of force hit the monsters and staggered them back, killing or maiming some.

Emrys raised his staff and the other casters around him did the same. He gave the order, and the line of soldiers in front of him spun their slings then released them, sending fragile containers flying over the front-line. They hit the monsters and shattered, splashing them in liquid. A moment later Emrys gave another order and fired his **[Spray of Flames]**. A third of the casters fired alongside him, flames hit the enemy and ignited the oil. Everything went up in flames as the casters behind the first wall used their **[Power Shield]** variants to protect the soldiers. Then, the second third of the casters cast their abilities, and wind hit the burning monsters, fanning the flames, spreading them back for hundreds of meters over the front.

The first line of soldiers pulled back their shields and stepped back as a new, fresh batch of soldiers replaced them, their cooldowns unused. A new front line was established with a new wall of shields, and as more monsters arrived, one of the powerful ones simply inhaled all the fire that

they had thrown at them. Emrys gave the signal and then stepped forward.

The monster exhaled, spewing all the fire it had consumed in the small and pressurized blast of flames. Emrys raised his staff and focused on his perk. **Steal Fire**, he reached out to it and it became his, then with his **|Of Fire Manipulation and Command|** he expanded the blast, with **Empowered Fire** he made it stronger and then forced it back over the monsters, splashing over them, burning hundreds to cinders in an instant. He saw the monster prepare to inhale the flames again, and nodded at the casters around him.

Two dozen casters fired their abilities and perks and demolished the monster in the distance.

Emrys didn't cheer like the soldiers around him, he saw the more powerful monsters coming in the distance, and behind them, the generals. One was coming straight at them, a type that Emrys recognized. They called them the line killers. The tall General was thin, hunched over and still the size of a building. It walked on two legs and had two limbs that ended in blades. Its head was elongated and narrow, with a single eye that Emrys knew could fire deadly lasers. It was behind a group of larger monsters running on four feet, the breakers as they had called them. Their flat heads pointed down like makeshift shields, protecting them from long range attacks. They were making way for the General, Emrys could tell. They hadn't seen anything yet.