

## Survival and Decisions

The wall was on fire.

Twisted forms of burnt or still burning monsters filled the ground in below the walls, on them, and behind them. The wall had been breached, a General monster had crashed through it, creating an opening for the horde. It was moving back just outside of the Wall, letting other smaller monsters pass through. It looked as if it was... retreating, limping, injured. Generals had been rarely seen and Reyla wondered why this one was here. Recognizing them was easy, their eyes looked more... intelligent, and they were all unique, no other monster resembled them. Their power varied greatly depending on what their purpose was. Some had powerful mental attacks, others were massive—towering above everything, and some were small, the size of ordinary people. This one was taller than the Wall, big and slow, but it had cracked and then destroyed the array improved Wall in only a few attacks. It didn't seem that much more powerful than other some of the other big monsters that had attacked the wall. And it had taken one of the house Ornn strongest soldiers in the attack, the commander of their forces at this fort. It had paid a price for that though, despite being tough. It hadn't been enough, though, the Wall's defenders hadn't managed to take it down before it attacked the Wall. But... they hadn't expected it to be able to get through in the first place, none of the other monsters or even Generals had managed to do the same. Which meant that this General probably had some special power that allowed it to do that.

Reyla suspected that this entire thing was a test. They had seen new types of monsters appearing, even new types of Generals. From her mother, Reyla had heard that some in the command suspected that the enemy could breed different types of monsters. She didn't know if that included the Generals, but they seemed to be able to replace their losses quickly. So, this General could just be one that had never shown itself before.

She saw its shape getting smaller and smaller behind the Wall as it retreated, and she cursed to herself. On one side, she knew that they probably would've been screwed if it attacked, and on the other... if they could've taken it down... She had seen one of the Generals die before to her brother.

Reyla stood next to her brother, Emrys, outside of the fort on the Wall, with a thousand soldiers at her side and back, holding back the tide. There were no High Rankers present, her brother Erik was responsible for a big swath of the wall in the area and another fort had been pushed hard, forcing him to go to their aid. Her mother and father Olem were helping other parts of the Wall too. Everyone was tired, Reyla herself had barely had the time to rest in between the fights. The wall was constantly under siege in the last month, the enemy was throwing more and more forces at them.

She glanced behind her, where a team of geomancers was waiting for a chance to close the hole in the wall, but they couldn't risk them with the monsters coming through. The only way was for them to clear them first. There was confusion in the ranks. The highest ranked officer had died on the Wall fighting the General, leaving them without orders. Most looked at Reyla and Emrys, not because they were the most powerful but because they were Orns. The soldiers around them were their family's personal guard, and this part of the wall was their responsibility. Her other siblings that could fight were all spread over their part of the Wall, their family didn't let others do what they were responsible for, not alone.

A wave of monsters reached them and Reyla released her **Dawnfire Raging Strike** and her brother raised his staff. A wave of golden fire exploded forward from her spear and bolts of fires hit the monsters. The first ranks of the monsters were staggered, some burned to death. Moments after their attacks, the rest of the formation around her fired, those that had ranged powers at least. Fire, ice, blasts of colorful Essence, everything was thrown at the monsters in front of them.

The monsters were dying, but it didn't matter. There was always another behind them to take the place of the fallen. The ground was filled with the dead soldiers and monsters, forcing the horde to climb over them to reach them.

They kept firing, but the monsters didn't stop. Soon, the horde smashed into their line and Reyla stepped forward. Her great spear moving in an arc as she used **|Perfect Flaming Crescent|** to kill two of the monsters. Emrys stood behind her, casting cones of fire around her while she kept him safe. She danced among the monsters, her body shrouded in golden fire as she activated **Fire of Dawn**, and then **[Dawnfire Immolation]** increasing its damage by 100%. The monsters around her shied away from the fire that surrounded her, just approaching her harmed them. She used her **[Dawnfire Mirage]**, and sent a copy of herself forward that consumed a monster, turning it into ash.

She dashed to the side and rolled under the attack of another monster that tried to decapitate her, she raised her spear mid roll and cut along its side, opening a wound that oozed black. She got to her feet as the monster jumped at her with its claws coming down quickly and used **Goddess of Speed**, her dexterity increased and she stabbed twice in quick succession in between the monster's attacks, once in the torso and once in the head.

The four-legged monster fell to the ground, dead. She glanced around, seeing people fighting all around her. Her brother stood a bit behind her, sending fire at the monsters with his staff. A small circle of fire surrounded him and kept him safe from most monsters.

The majority of the horde were four-legged monsters the size of big wolves, with elongated jaws and black ooze like substance covering their entire bodies, and their insides too. They weren't particularly strong, but there was a lot of them. And in order to kill them one needed to do a lot of damage. The only reason she was able to dispatch them quickly was because they were vulnerable to fire.

Two smaller monsters jumped at her, nearly taking her off-guard. She swiped with her spear, smashing one of them off-course. They were

barely the size of her arm, but had wickedly long and sharp, which she felt as one of the monsters grabbed hold of her shoulder and sunk a claw into the side of her neck through the gap in her armor. The monster died a moment after it attacked her, the fire around Reyla immolating it. She grabbed hold of it and pulled the corpse away, throwing it to the side as she immediately activated **Rapid Recovery**. The wound in her neck, just over her collar bone sealed slowly, but the pain persisted.

She grimaced as she moved, avoiding more attacks. All around her, soldiers were dying, their bodies falling to the ground and then monsters reached up into the air above, ripping their souls apart. She could see them, faintly, her **Shepherd for the Souls** attunement allowed her to. It was almost as she saw them through the edge of her vision, just barely perceivable. But they were there. She used [**Dawn Rush**] to reach one of the monsters that had attacked a soul, and she stabbed her spear through its head. Then, she activated **Soul Sanctuary**. A zone of light appeared on the ground around her, calming the soul and healing it. Other souls caught in her perk. She couldn't do much more to help them, but she could at least provide something.

She couldn't even tell for how long they had been fighting, but the monsters were everywhere, and so many of the dead soldiers were dead.

A big six-legged monster jumped through her zone and swiped at her. Reyla raised her spear and blocked, catching its top pair of limbs on it, but the monster's second pair lashed out at her unprotected stomach. She felt the powerful strike against her armor, heard the grinding of claws against metal and the sizzling noise of the monster's flesh being burnt away even as it tried to puncture through. She groaned and activated [**Inner Strength**] ignoring the pain, then she pushed the monster back a step. She raised her head to the sky and activated **Beacon of Dawn**. The light of dawn came down from the sky and she sighed as her attunements activated. Her stats increased and her fire became stronger. She threw the monster off and then

stabbed with her spear, killing it. She danced to the side as she saw her brother raised his staff and throw a rolling wave of fire over the ground. It caught a dozen monsters and Reyla moved back next to him.

Emrys was throwing waves upon waves of fire at the monsters, keeping them at bay.

A loud screech pierced her ears and the secondary component of the attack hit her mind. She recognized the mental attack and raised her eyes, immediately finding the screecher monster. It stood among the other monsters, protected. The soldiers around her weren't brought down by the attack, but it slowed them down, more of them dying as they were momentarily stunned. Her **|Mind Sphere|** protected her, and she hefted her spear, then through effort of will hurled it with **|Flaming Spear Throw|**. A lance of fire crossed the distance, through the other monsters to hit the screecher. It punched through its chest, the golden fire spreading over all of its body.

Reyla pulled out another spear out of her storage and got ready. They were still holding the line, but more and more monsters were coming in. She saw fighting on the part of the Wall that was still whole, monsters running into the darkness, going around them. The fort behind the wall was lit up, powers flashing everywhere as they fought the monsters from the other side.

They lacked people that could deal enough damage in a large enough area, quickly enough, to clear the opening and allow the geomancers to get close enough to fill the Wall. Powerful people were needed, now more than ever, and with each one of them that they lost, they were weakened. Their enemy was draining them dry. Reyla glanced to the side, to where the fort stood. She should've sent word, but everything happened too fast. The fort commander had probably sent a call for aid, but... that didn't mean that aid would be coming anytime soon. Their teleporters were hard to use, the enemy had done something that interfered with them, and there was no guarantee that there would be anyone free to come and help them.

Then, before she could go any further down that line of thought, a glowing star fell from the sky near the Wall, on the inside, right in the

center of the monsters. Reyla turned her eyes forward and saw a tall woman made out of fire with wings on her back, holding a fire shield and spear.

She recognized the woman immediately as her sister. Reyla didn't know if Nayra's guards had let her go, or if she herself had escaped and came, but a part of her was furious. Their orders were to not let her fight unless it was safe, on the other she was fearful of seeing her sister surrounded by monsters.

**“Nayra! Get back before you are overwhelmed. What are you doing?”** She sent through their bond, hoping that her sister was willing to listen. She was surrounded by monsters, there was no one around her to support her.

**“What I'm doing?”** Nayra sent back to her, her tone almost dismissive. **“What you can't.”**

Before Reyla could ask what she meant, several things happened. She noticed, at the edge of her perception, something surging toward Nayra. It took Reyla a moment to recognize the feeling and see what was happening. Something was flowing out of all the dead on the battlefield around Nayra and filling into her. It was Nayra's **Death Empowerment** perk, it increased her stats for every dead body around her. And there were hundreds, if not thousands of the dead. Then Reyla felt more.

**Lady of Battle, Dawnspirit Cry.** Those were her two active perks that boosted those around her, but Reyla could feel more—Nayra's attunement increased Reyla's stats too.

Then, Nayra raised her spear and slammed it against the ground. A wave of golden fire exploded around her, stunning the monsters. She dashed forward, leaving a trail of fire in her way. Reyla and Emrys pushed forward, killing the monsters in front of them faster. The soldiers around them followed suit.

But while they fought, Reyla couldn't keep her eyes off of her sister in the distance. A blaze of fire ignited around Nayra's already

burning form and she swiped her spear, leaving a white line in an arc where the tip of it passed, killing three monsters. Mist rose from her fiery form in the shape of bright red and orange petals, then as the monsters tried to jump her, a blast of mist exploded around her, scorching every monster around her. Reyla saw them twisting in agony on the ground as their ichor-like bodies were melted from the heat.

A big monster, almost twice the size of Nayra's avatar form attacked her. Its dozens of tentacles lashed out at her, but she just pointed her spear and the petals orbiting her surged forward. Each hitting one tentacle and detonating, blowing the tentacles off. She raised her shield hand, and a blast of orange mist surged forward in a cone, enveloping the rest of the monster.

Then, Nayra exploded. Or at least that was what it felt like. A massive sphere of orange tinted mist exploded out of her, enveloping the monsters around her so fast that Reyla couldn't even see what happened to them. The mist stretched far, dozens of meters in all directions. And then it moved.

Reyla watched her sister unleash destruction on the monsters. As the mist moved, melted bodies of monsters were left behind. She saw a few escaping out of the mist, hacking and stumbling in agony as their bodies melted around them. It was an image out of horror stories.

Reyla snapped out of it and pushed forward, Emrys and the rest of the survivors following behind them. She had seen her sister fighting before, but... it was never like this. They kept her surrounded by guards, protectors. They let her be on the wall when they thought that there wasn't much danger. And... Reyla had only seen her use her Cultivation like this when she was demonstrating what she could do. She realized now why that was, Nayra couldn't use these attacks when surrounded by others on the Wall.

Her family wanted Nayra to survive, to live and take as many perks as she could. Her choice of Class had allowed her to do that, and the family was nothing if not practical. In a decade, or half a century, Nayra could be incredibly powerful with the right perks at her command.

Now, Reyla saw her just... fighting. Unleashed. The way she plowed through the monsters, it was familiar to her. She had seen that before. It was how Ryun Nacht had fought. She knew that Nayra had taken his main path as her secondary.

The mist reached the wall, and closed the gap, burning all the monsters that tried to enter. Reyla and the rest cut through the monsters left behind. Emrys sending orders for the geomancers to come in behind them and get closer.

Then the mist started moving away, dissipating. A thick cloud remained, then moved back. Slowly it reformed into a naked Nayra, one wisp of it carried something that Nayra grabbed out of the air as her hand formed, then put it on her finger. She equipped her gear straight from the storage, and pulled her weapons out. Then she jumped back. The opening in the wall was cleared, and Emrys instructed the geomancers to close it. The earth shook and stone rolled as they filled the hole in the Wall, Reyla led the half of the soldiers up on the Wall to clear it of monsters that had climbed on top, while the other half hunted those that were still behind it. Many of the monsters had probably run away behind their lines to wait and strike at the people they were protecting, which meant that they would need to send out hunting parties after them.

But for now, they had other concerns.

Reyla and Nayra stood on top of the Wall after it was cleared of monsters, just looking at one another. No one said anything, but it became apparent, in this moment, just how much the two of them had changed. Nayra was... she didn't follow the guidance of their family, of their teachers and instructors, of their parents. She had a Class but also a Path.

Reyla saw a group of people running down the wall in the distance, and recognized them as the guards assigned to Nayra. Immediately she saw their state.

"What did you do to them?" Reyla asked, nodding her head in their direction.



Nayra glanced at them, then shrugged. “They refused to let me go.”

She didn’t say anything else. So far, Reyla had believed that the guards were able to hold her, they should be able to. They were all strong, but... it seemed like none of them really knew Nayra that well.

“Thank you Nayra,” Reyla said.

Her sister glanced in her direction, then nodded.

“This enemy is terrible, no matter what I think or want, that much is true.”

Reyla didn’t respond, there wasn’t much that she could say anyway.

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Reyla sat inside one of the training rooms inside the fort. It was a small fort, so the training room was much the same. Only her brother Emrys was present. They had finally been able to get through the interference and get in in touch with their mother through a Far-link Orb, and the news that they got were not good.

“We are on our own?” Reyla asked once more.

Emrys looked down and waved a hand in defeat.

She shook her head. “We can’t hold the Wall, not when it is weakened. We barely survived last night,” Reyla said. They were lucky that the monsters didn’t attack again. She doubted that they could’ve fought them off a second time.

“Mother said that other parts of the Wall had been attacked at the same time. Not all of them had fared as well as we have. She said that she has faith that we can handle ourselves,” Emrys said. “She said that she was proud that we’d... proven worthy of the family name.”

Reyla grimaced. The two of them were in charge of their forces in all but name. And according to Emrys they were to remain in charge. She was proud that her mother had confidence in them, but she didn’t know if she really understood what they were facing. Or... things were

so bad everywhere else that they had nothing and no one to send to them. She didn't know which option was worse.

"Emrys," Reyla started. "We can't do what she wants us to do."

"I don't think that we have a choice, Reyla. The Wall is crumbling everywhere. You've seen how tired Erik was the last time he arrived? Everyone else is probably spread just as thin."

Reyla closed her eyes. She knew, she had seen it over the years of this war. The monsters didn't overwhelm them, they slowly ground them to dust. The monster horde and their Generals were unstoppable force that kept coming no matter what they did. They couldn't win, but Reyla couldn't stop. Her family was tasked with protecting this part of the Wall, and she couldn't fail in her duty.

But... they lacked power.

Reyla raised her head and looked at her brother. "We should level up."

Emrys looked at her without answering. They both understood why they hadn't done that so far. Their parents and their instructors had worked hard to guide them. To allow them to gain powerful powers as they leveled up. What they were doing was attempting to make them gain better perks sooner than they would've been able to get them on their own. Perks and powers that their parents had gotten a lot later in life. For the most part, they had succeeded. It was all in preparation for their Immortal Classes. They wanted them to get a Class of better quality than what their parents had gotten. And they had succeeded.

Reyla had two choices for her Immortal Class. One tied to fighting a war against the Dome monsters for three years, and the other... It was a good Class, but it was an unknown. That wasn't a bad thing, it was something that her family was actually looking for. Her early powers and Classes were closely tied to what the idea behind her mother's build was. That meant that she was unlikely to get something that put her too far away from that build path. But... she was instructed to wait for more choices, she knew the requirements for her mother's Immortal Class, though she hadn't fulfilled them yet. And she was worried that she never would.

She met her brother's eyes. "I know," she answered his unspoken question. There was a reason why they hadn't been on the Wall. They weren't placed in direct danger often, not when there weren't others who could command or aid them. Now though, their mother wanted them to defend this part of the Wall. They would be in much greater danger.

"I don't disagree, but," Emrys started. "Everyone will be furious with us."

"We have good choices," Reyla told him.

"We have one choice, each," Emrys added.

Reyla grimaced. "We have two."

Emrys tilted his head and narrowed his eyes. "Specialization in opponents is a quick and sudden death."

Reyla sighed as she recognized the quote. It was something that Erik liked to say about Classes that specialized in types of opponents. Both of them had a Dome related Class, which would increase all the damage they deal to the Dome monsters, make them stronger against them and give them more Essence as a reward when fighting them. But... Erik's words were true. They would be strong against the Dome monsters, and could die to anything else. Erik had given them examples even, of people who were very powerful, but died because they encountered something that they didn't expect or couldn't effectively fight.

Their family focused on fire, but it also built warriors that could fight against any opponent.

"You are right," Reyla told her brother. "One choice, then, still better than death."

With immortality at least they might be able to survive for longer.

Emrys sighed and then took a seat on the bench next to her. "I guess that if we are in charge, there is no one around to tell us not to do it."

Reyla chuckled and shook her head, then met her brother's eyes. "Ready?"

He nodded his head, and then turned away, his eyes looking at something in front of him.

Reyla did the same and brought up her level up screen. She had two Classes available, the **Dome Huntress of Dawnflames** a mythic rarity Class—the same as her current Class. None of its bonuses regarded anything other than making her stronger against Dome monsters. The second choice was a relic Class, a Valkyrie Class, same type of class as her mother’s if perhaps not the exact same.

<p><b>Dawn Phoenix-feathered Valkyrie</b></p>	<p><i>Of dawn and fiery rebirth. You stand in life to safeguard death.</i></p> <p>The <b>Dawn Phoenix-feathered Valkyrie</b> is a warrior focusing on the use of dawnfire to improve oneself and survive, while also safeguarding and nurturing souls in life and giving them protection in death. A <b>Dawn Phoenix-feathered Valkyrie</b> excels at fire-based combat and soul protection. A Valkyrie can cross over from one realm to the other, though <b>Dawn Phoenix-feathered Valkyrie</b> focuses</p>	<p><b>Dawnmarked:</b> All fire-based power are 20% more effective. Once per day, for every hour of dawn you gain an instance of Dawnmark which passively increases all your abilities damage by 10%, you can spend one or all Dawnmarks that you have to increase your next power's effectiveness by 20% per mark. Marks disappear after the sun turns into the moon. Gain +20% to strength and vitality</p> <p><b>!Gain one of the following:</b></p> <p><b>-Dawn Protection</b> support ability: Increases all resistances to yourself and those around you during the dawn.</p>
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	<p>on the living souls more than the dead.</p>	<p><b>-Dawn Call</b> offensive ability: Summon the bright light of dawn to burn and blind your foes.</p> <p><b>-Might and Fitness:</b> Gain plus 20% to base strength and vitality.</p>
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Reyla made her choice, there wasn't much else that she could do. It went against everything that she had been taught, but... She remembered her sister, killing monsters, holding such great power. And all of it she had gained by following her own path. Reyla understood what her family wanted, why they insisted on what they did. They wanted them to be the best, or at least the best versions of themselves that they could be. But real life was not that, the Dome monsters had taught Reyla that. She didn't have the luxury to follow her instructors and what they wanted now. None of them were near to ask for advice, even they were needed elsewhere.

She wasn't going to take any of the abilities, her mother's advice was to wait for her last three evolutions in order to get the strongest ones. And Reyla did agree with that.

The situation was dire, and she had made a call.

She leveled and then glanced at the choice for her first perk, her immortality.

<p>Valkyrie's Rebirth in Dawnfire</p>	<p>You are tied to the dawn. Upon death, your body will collapse into ash. If you are under the light of dawn, the ash will catch fire and you will be reborn from the</p>
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	<p>ashes. If you die at a time other than the dawn, the ash will remain inert unless there is enough fire-related Essence around it. If there is enough of it, the fire will be consumed and you reborn. If the ashes are not exposed to enough fire Essence or Dawnlight within 7 days, your soul will move on to the Ethereal Realm. As a Valkyrie you will retain all of your powers after death, but will be unable to gain regular entrance back to the Real Realm.</p>
<p>Valkyrie of the Dead</p>	<p>You are tied to death and souls, you no longer age. Upon death, your soul will reach the Ethereal Realm and your body will be recreated there with all of its power. You will not be able to enter the Real Realm regularly, only when there is a recently departed soul. You will be able to escort souls to the Afterlife and enter and leave it as you please, but you will never return fully to the Real Realm. If your soul is sufficiently damaged you will be pulled into the Afterlife to recover.</p>
<p>Flaming Birth</p>	<p>You are tied to fire, you no longer age. Once you die,</p>

	<p>your soul will be transported to the closest fire related plane where you will be transformed into a fireformed spirit. Some of your powers will change and you will retain all of your memories. As a spirit, you will be tied to the domain of fire, and will be very hard to kill as long as your fire domain remains.</p>
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Reyla looked at her choices, discarding the last one immediately. She didn't want to become a spirit. She really wished that her instructors were here, or at least her mother or older siblings. Someone who could give her advice. She had to make a choice between two types of immortality, similar, but very different also. One of them would allow her to be reborn in the Real Realm, while the other allowed her to enter and leave the Afterlife. She knew that some Valkyries had that ability, whether as part of their Immortality or a power that they had gained sometime in life. There was a reason why there weren't many more visible Valkyries in the world outside of her mother. Most were in the Ethereal or the Afterlife. Helping souls or doing whatever it was that people did in the Afterlife. It was still a mystery, the Valkyries that could return didn't speak about what was there, so no one knew. Her mother couldn't do that, her Valkyrie Class was more focused on the living souls.

In the end, she wanted to remain in this realm, and she needed to follow in the same path as her mother. She picked the first perk and then sighed in relief.

She had done it now, there was no coming back. She glanced at Emrys and saw that he looked like he too was finished.

"How do you feel?" Emrys asked.

“Not that much different, if I’m being honest,” Reyla answered.

“And now what?”

“Now,” Reyla stood up. “We go and talk with Nayra.”

Emrys tilted his head, but Reyla was already moving. If she was being honest, she was surprised that her sister hadn’t already advanced to her Immortal Class. She knew that she had the same one as Reyla did, the Dome one at least. And she suspected that she had more. Their mother had... firmly asked Nayra not to do anything until their instructors could research her choices. Nayra had taken her Class in a different direction than what they had intended, one that wasn’t that well known.

Now, Reyla knew that the only way for the three of them to survive was if they had as much power as they could get, and if they fought together. Reyla needed to level more, she had the Essence, but she needed something else first. She had let her sister sulk in a room alone for long enough.