

Cage

Nayra watched as the soul she had been escorting stepped into the light that would take it to afterlife. She had managed to reach three souls, just three out of all those who had died during the attack. And of those three she had managed to escort only one. Death was not an easy transition, even with her perks it was hard to convince the souls to come with her. And... the fear effect of the monsters transferred into afterlife, making the souls skittish. And then there were the malevolent spirits that attacked them.

She had lost souls to them before, even with all of her power it wasn't enough to keep them safe every time. She glanced to her screens and found the perk that she had gained. She didn't smile or feel any sense of accomplishment, even though she had earned the perk. The only thing that she felt was anger. Even in death, the souls held to their loyalty to her family. Every perk that she had gained over the last three years had been decided by her family. Every person serving in the Ornn family had agreed to give Nayra a perk in case that it was possible, and each perk had been chosen by her family's tutors.

It went against what the contract should be. The soul was who should make the choice, not someone outside the two of them. But she didn't protest, she knew that it was pointless. She was caged. It might be a nice and comfortable cage, but it was still a cage.

For a moment, she considered—not for the first time—to just leave. Pick a direction and walk through the Ethereal Realm. She knew that there must be other exits. Perhaps she would get lucky enough to find one. But in the end, like always, she pushed that thought away. She needed to survive, she needed to get strong and live.

She grimaced and turned around, walking back through the Ethereal Realm, heading toward the exit.

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Nayra's spear stabbed forward, only to be parried away by her opponent's spear. She dashed forward, swinging with her shield and the blade attached at the bottom of its edge. Her swing met nothing but air as he stepped back. She grimaced and pivoted, swinging Er'ishi Resav in a wide arc. She was angry, as she always was when she fought him. A part of her wanted to activate her skills, her perks and abilities. But she fought with herself, keeping to the rules of combat—no active powers.

Her spear passed near his neck, and she knew that with a mental command Er'ishi could twist and stab into his exposed flesh. But she did no such thing. His spear came down and battered her awakened spear away, then he surged forward and before she could react, he kicked her in the chest. She went flying, then hit the ground hard.

She remained on the ground for a few moments, just breathing deeply and gathering her breath. She was getting better, she knew that. It was why she suffered through this, why she kept her anger under control. She understood what an opportunity it was to spar with someone as skilled at the spear as her brother.

Erik walked over and stood over her, his expression calm with just a hint of a smile. She hated that look, and obviously her expression had to have expressed that because his smile grew.

"Still haven't forgiven me, little sister?" he asked, the same way that he had asked every time he came back. This time he had been away for a few months, fighting on other fronts alongside the wall.

Nayra narrowed her eyes. She had screamed at him when she first woke up, after he took her. She struggled, trying to escape for their entire trip, wanting to go back. She had seen him burn Anrosh and Ereclaw, her warriors. Taking her away against her will, back to the Empire.

He didn't want to hear anything that she said, and even when she finally made him listen, he dismissed it as rantings of a child. She remembered him telling her that the core was about to collapse, that there was nothing that she could do to help them. Telling her that they were needed back home to defend against the same monsters that had attacked the city. It had taken her a while to understand what he was telling her about the domes, the fact that the one that was open was near the Empire.

In time she realized that she wasn't strong enough to escape, and so she accepted her fate. She didn't know if Anrosh had survived, her brother's flames burned the soul, but she didn't know if she was dead either. She only had her hope. As she looked at her brother leaning over her expecting an answer, she remembered his words from before.

“Love little sister? You knew her barely for a year. You have power, potential, you will live forever, in time you will forget and forgive. In time you will look back at this time and see only a child throwing a tantrum. Our family is tasked with greater purpose, to protect all of the Empire against the monsters released from the Dome. And no matter what your ideas about life are Nayra, the way you want to live your life will be put on hold. You owe our family this service, we've been called, and every Ornn will answer. Prove yourself strong, and then you can do whatever you want to do.”

She had hated him more than anything then. And a part of her still did, because she did see a part of his point. She had seen the horde that they were fighting against, she knew that they needed everyone to fight. She had moved on, decided that the Empire was not where she wanted her home to be, but that didn't mean that she wished to see them all dead. She feared for her people on the frontier, she hoped that Anrosh was alright that somehow, she had survived. But when one saw the horde marching against the wall, one realized how small all other conflict was.

In time, she would escape, she would get back to her true home, but for now she could learn and grow strong here.

“No,” she said as she stood up. “No matter your reasons, you attacked and killed my people.”

She saw his expression grimace for just a moment, an instant where she thought that she saw some other emotion in his eyes. But it was gone before she could truly identify it.

“Come, little sister, Vanessa's meeting is starting soon,” he turned around, fully expecting her to follow.

It wasn't like she had much choice. She didn't even need to glance behind her to know that four guards were walking behind her. Not that they mattered all that much when Erik was around or when Daria had her soul

tracking mark placed on her. It wasn't like she could get far even if she did run.

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“The reports from other forts are not encouraging,” Vanessa continued with her presentation. All of the Ornn family members that were currently in the camp were present, which meant just the five of them; Nayra, Reyla, Emrys, Vanessa, and Erik. The rest of the room was occupied by the head of the Ornn family guard, the Commander of the Warbringer Order force that was present in the camp, and one of the army strategists in charge of the Empire's soldiers that fought under the Ornn family.

“We lost another four forts, and an unknown number of the enemy monsters had managed to get over the wall,” Vanessa added. “The rest of the forts are struggling; the enemy seems to have the ability to hit parts of the wall at just the right times. Even last night, they hit us with a relatively low threat attack, but with numbers that just kept coming. Erik was drawn here to help, while the enemy struck somewhere else seemingly knowing that he wouldn't be there to help. It was how they managed to get monsters over the wall and into the North.”

Narya grimaced, a few thousand of the monsters weren't that much of a threat, the issue was that they could and did capture people and turn them into the taken. They had learned that the hard way, when a group of monsters got over the wall and managed to turn six villages before it was discovered. It had gone on for longer... they could've had hundreds of thousands of taken behind the wall, wreaking havoc.

“And... there had been whispers of treason. Some of the Wall Commanders have been acting on faulty orders. Communications had been lost, orders changed just enough that they seem legitimate, yet when looked at with all the other orders... issues start to arise. And we can't find any leads to point us in the direction of the culprit or culprits.”

“Any word from the Orders?” Commander Greenstone asked, his large head turning in Eric's direction.

Her brother met the minotaur's eyes and nodded his head. "I've spoken with Lord Commander of the Order of the Minds, there isn't any sign of mental manipulation, though they've only just started their investigation. Order of the Defenders started on their project, secondary fortifications are being set up in the territories north of here so that we may have places to retreat if we need to. And the Order of the Hunters is still looking for the enemies that managed to get behind our lines," Erik answered.

"This is not sustainable," General Voth said, his cthul tone vibrating strangely in the air. "The Emperor cannot leave Brak'anor or the enemy forces will get through. But without him or our other big hitters... I don't know how we can do anything but lose."

While the enemy made attacks on the entire length of the Wall, there were a few places where the fighting was highest and constant. It was where her mother and father spent most of their time, fighting against the enemy in those key places. They barely had the time to visit, and when they did, they didn't have much time to spend on Nayra.

She had a few conversations with her mother, and those conversations were part of why she wasn't trying harder to leave. She had never expected to have such conversations with her mother, to find... understanding. She didn't punish Eric or anything like that, she did want Narya here, but she was... remorseful, and she had promised Narya that she would eventually be allowed to go back. A part of Narya that had always sought her mother's approval relished that, and she did want to prove herself. Hearing her praise her for making her own path... for picking what she wanted to do. It was everything that she wanted as a child. Now... There were so many things all mixed up. The war on the Settled Territories, the Dome, her family, Anrosh and the Sect. She was being pulled in all directions, and she had barely been able to keep herself sane. Her current goal was simple, she needed power. The strength to be able to do whatever she wanted.

"Barak'anor will not fall," Vanessa said, pulling Narya out of her head.

Barak'anor was the Capital of the Empire, the city that was in the center of their territory and the central hub of the Wall. The wall was highest and most defensible place in the Empire. It made no sense for the monsters to attack it, and yet they had, and it was working in the enemy's favor. Their

constant assault of it had kept their strongest people there, occupied with the defense.

“It won’t matter if everywhere else falls,” Voth said. He was a mid-tiered General in the Empire’s army, and if he was openly criticizing the Emperor and his strategy... It told Narya a lot about the state of things.

“We have a plan,” Erik said. “We just need a bit more time to put it into motion.”

No one said anything after that. A few moments later, Vanessa continued, listing the casualties of the last night’s attack and her recommendations for the future. Narya tuned her out, it wasn’t like any of that impacted her. If there was an attack she was allowed onto the walls, her perks could boost everyone around her making her an invaluable asset. And the more death there was, the stronger she got.

She had gotten a lot of Essence over the years, and she had gotten stronger. Though aside from a few of her skills, there was no real change in her sheets—aside from the perks she gained from the souls she escorted to the afterlife. She had spent the time she had working on herself, learning how to use her build together and how to fight better. She pushed her limits and found just how much she could push her power.

And she had spent her time working on her Cultivation. She had cycled the full six times that she knew she should, and had done what she needed to advance. She changed her techniques, all on her own. Her family had even provided her with a room filled with steam, a close enough Essence type for her to make use of.

She was happy with her progress, knowing that she had been able to achieve something on her own. Yet... she had no one to really share it with.

“Narya,” a voice startled her, and she raised her head realizing that she was alone in the room with Reyla, the meeting already over. “Can we talk, please?”

“I’ve already said that I have nothing to talk with you about,” Narya said slowly. She couldn’t stand being in the same room as her sister. Seeing her... seeing her standing there next to their siblings, as if they were now somehow a true family when they had been strangers in the past. Everything

had changed for Reyla, she had advanced and she had stepped into the place where both of them had dreamed to be one day.

But Narya had that already, she was respected and loved by her sect. She had warriors that served under her, that she taught the spear. And it was her brother that had taken it away from her, the family that Reyla now seemed a part of. Narya knew that it was... unfair perhaps. But she couldn't look at her sister without seeing her family. And despite all that her mother had said, despite the fact that they had treated her fairly and had tried to help her advance, she wasn't fooled. Narya cared about her other family, about the sect that had taken her in and given her a home. And the Ornn family cared only about themselves, and Reyla was a part of that family. Narya couldn't afford to let her guard down around her.

Besides, Narya was still a Sect Leader, and her time among Cultivators had taught her how to keep her pride. Her screens still showed her as the Sect Leader of the Twilight Melody Sect, the sect survived. And she knew Ryun well enough to know that he did not appreciate others taking what was his. Whether Anrosh had survived or not, in time, Ryun would come looking for her, of that she had no doubt.

"Please, sister," Reyla said. "Can't we at least try to fix this thing between us."

Narya opened her mouth to tell her off, and then closed it. "What is it that you want Reyla? For things to go back to the way they were before? With you leading and me following? That will not happen sister. I am the Sect Leader of Twilight Melody Sect, I have people that look up to me and care for me. I will not be left in another's shadow again."

Her sister stepped back, looking uncomfortable. "No, I... I don't want that. I mean... the family only wants what is best for us."

"Family this, and family that," Narya shook her head. "You do not think for yourself Reyla, and I feel sad by that. I've... I experienced true freedom. The freedom to do what I wanted to do, to advance on my own terms. And all that you do is follow someone else's ideas about who you should be. Once, I thought that we would walk together forever, but I see now that our paths couldn't be more different. I want to lead, to fight alongside people that I trust and who trust me. I want to advance for the sake of it, for the rush and

thrill that I get when I realize that I have managed something that is... unique. My sect gave me that, and our family can never match it.”

“You can get that here,” Reyla insisted. “We can talk with mother, she doesn’t agree with how the family had been run in the past. She... she didn’t have the time or the opportunity to change things before the Dome was opened, but...”

Narya shook her head. “I... I’ve talked with mother, and yes... I can see that she wants something different, but it is too late for me and the family. Erik stomped on any chance of that when he attacked my people and burned the woman that I love.”

They stood there for a long moment, just looking at each other. Once, Narya would always feel like she was looking into a mirror when she looked at her sister. And now... she saw a stranger.

A few moments later, Reyla sighed, and turned around leaving her alone in the meeting room. Narya sighed and closed her eyes. She only needed time. Time to grow strong or time enough for Ryun and the sect to find her. Yet... she didn’t try to run for another, third reason. Because she had seen the enemy, and she knew that she could help. Sometimes, there were no good choices.

Name	Nayra Ornn
Race	Human (Infinite Realm)

Titles		
Third Heritage	Was born to the Rankers of the Third Iteration	+5% to all stats, 500 Greater Essence

Great Feat	Kill a tier one monster with at least 10x your total stats without help from someone with Essence before obtaining a Class, Path, or Skill	+Choose a Legendary Class, Path, or Skill. Gain a Unique Perk.
Adventurer	Hunted more than 100 monsters	+5 to all stats, 5000 Essence
Hero of Promise	Save more than 10 people with a single action	+5 to all stats, 5000 Essence
One Against Many	Fight against more than 10 opponents and win	+5 to all stats, 5000 Essence
One Against Horde	Fight against more than 100 opponents and win	+10 to all stats, 10,000 Essence
Class Evolution V	Evolved your class for the fifth time.	+60 to all stats, 20 000 Greater Essence (all evolutions total)
Lord	Achieve Lord Realm	+5 to all stats, 100 Greater Essence
Monster Hunter	Kill 5000 different monster types	+50 to all stats, 50 000 Greater Essence
Soul Guide	Guide more than 10 souls to the afterlife.	+100 to all stats, 500 000 Greater Essence

PERKS	
Twin Link(Unique) (Unique Perk)	Your mind is linked with that of your twin, allowing you to speak to one another regardless of the distance.
Valkyrie's Descent (Class Perk)	Once per combat, jump high into the air and then descend toward targeted area and stab your weapon into the ground, releasing a shockwave around you. Strength of effect depends on strength stat.

Heat Resistance (Class Perk)	Your body is resistant to heat. 20% passive heat resistance, gain additional 1% heat resistance for every fifteen points of endurance. (Currently 34.4%)
Goddess of Speed (Class Perk)	Once per combat, double your dexterity for two strikes.
Body of the Greater Wolf (Path Perk)	Your body utilizes your endurance more efficiently. Your stamina is counted as if your endurance is if it 2.5 of its base. All stamina draining costs are reduced by 2.5. +10% to endurance.
Thousand Cuts (Class Perk)	Every injury you inflict that draws blood heals 20% slower and bleeds for 10% more.
Rapid Recovery (Class Perk)	Once per combat, heal a non-lethal injury. Speed of recovery equals twice your vitality.
Valkyrie's Avatar of Fire (Class Perk)	Once per day transform into an avatar of fire. Doubles your size and doubles your total stats. Every kill you make while in this form, grants you double Essence.
Valkyrie's Swiftmess (Class Perk)	Once per combat double your speed for thirty seconds.
Ferry the Soul (Class Perk)	Create a contract with a recently departed soul, carry it to the Ethereal Realm and provide protection until it reaches the afterlife. Fulfillment of the contract will permanently grant you a boon in the form of one of the Soul's perks. The perk gained depends on the soul, as the soul will lose the perk it offers.
Valkyrie's Shout (Class Perk)	Once per combat release a powerful shout that stuns nearby enemies. The effectiveness of the stun depends on your opponent's resistances.
Valkyrie's Stamina (Class Perk)	Once per day recover your stamina to its full state.
Valkyrie's Might (Class Perk)	Once per combat double your strength for thirty seconds.
Dawnfire Wings (Class Perk)	Wings made out of dawnfire grow out of your back, allowing you flight. The wings last for a maximum of three hours, and will stay on cooldown for the same amount of time that they have been used.
Dawnfire Blink (Class Perk)	Once per combat, teleport to any place in a twenty meter radius around you. Upon arrival at your destination release a blast of Dawnfire that hits everything in a three meter radius.

Valkyrie's Call (Class Perk)	While in the Ethereal Realm, summon any recently departed soul to your location. The soul is not required to answer.
Vaporizing Cuts (Class Perk)	Every attack that draws blood, sends a blast of heat into the wound, vaporizing a tiny portion of your opponent's blood.
Greater Steel Mind (Path Perk)	In combat your mind is additionally focused. Reading your opponent's movements comes easier to you. Mental attacks are 15% less effective against you. Effect depends on your intelligence stat. +10% to intelligence.
Fortified Core (Path Perk)	Your core is fortified. Increased core capacity by 25%, +20% to Qi speed. +10% to wisdom
Scorching Mist (6) Qi (Aspect Perk)	When using techniques, your inner temperature rises increasing your heat resistance by 25%. When Scorching Mist Qi courses through your body your heat based attacks deal 20% more damage. +20% to wisdom and vitality.
Blazing Conduits (Path Perk)	Your Qi conduits are developed for great bursts of Qi, and are able to handle a greater volume of Qi moving through it at the same time. Able to unleash techniques without the need for a breathing form and able to use up to two techniques at the same time. +10% to wisdom.
Quick Steps (Bonus Perk)	You gain 10% bonus speed when in combat.
True Body—Lotus Born Cloud (Path Perk)	Your body has been reforged into your true self, adopting attributes to reflect your path. Your path is that of one untouched by impurity, of pure heart and mind. As such your body is forged in that image. Your cultivation is no longer affected by the impurity of Essence you use, and always grants the most benefit. Your movements induce dreamy forgetfulness in those who gaze upon you. The power of the effect depends on their mind resistances. Physical changes. Your Body retains all the abilities granted by Lotus Born. Lotus Born Cloud is your truest self. Your body is soaked in Scorching Mist Qi, and you may assume the state of Scorching Mist. While active your body becomes a cloud of the Scorching Mist, giving off the Essence of the Scorching Mist, increasing the effects of your Scorching Mist Qi based techniques by 20% in your immediate surroundings. While in Scorching Mist Cloud state, you gain a +80%

	<p>increased resistance to physical attacks, but you also gain a -40% to special attacks resistance. You are immune to mental attack and anyone caught in your Cloud will suffer a moderate mental attack that induces forgetfulness. While full Scorching Mist Cloud is active you have none of your physical senses. Running out of Qi while in Cloud form will result in death. Entering into your Cloud form when surrounded by essences related to mist will allow you to use them to heal yourself. You gain +10% to wisdom and +10% to vitality.</p>
Dawnspirit Cry (Class Perk)	<p>Once per combat release a cry that will increase soul protection of everyone around you by 50% for 15 seconds.</p>
Great Lunge (Class Perk)	<p>Once per combat, lunge forward and reset the cooldown on one of your abilities of choice.</p>
Valkyrie's Mantle (Class Perk)	<p>Passively gain +20% Essence from every kill you make even when Avatar of Fire isn't active. The bonus is added to that of Avatar of Fire when it is activated.</p>
Dawn Stun (Class Perk)	<p>Once per combat, send a blast of dawn flame all around you that will damage and stun anyone caught in it for 1 sec. Time varies depending on targets resiliencies.</p>
Battle Trance (Class Perk)	<p>Once per combat, enter a battle trance for two minutes. You gain increased awareness of the battle around you and +20% to all stats and your cooldowns are reduced by 20%.</p>
Death Sense (Class Perk)	<p>You are able to sense the nearly departed in a radius around you. You may gain insights about the cause of death. Radius depends on wisdom stat.</p>
Death Empowerment (Class Perk)	<p>You gain increased stats depending on the amount of death around you. Gain 1% to all stats per recently deceased body in a radius around you. Radius depends on wisdom stat.</p>
Lady of Battle (Class Perk)	<p>Once per week you can inspire every ally around you, increasing their strength, dexterity, endurance, and vitality by 10% for 1 hour.</p>

Shield Focus (Bonus Perk)	You gain +15% to endurance when holding a shield.
Minor Strength	You gain +5% to strength when in combat.
Minor Endurance	You gain +5% to endurance when in combat.
Grace of the Commander	Once per day you may use Grace of the Commander to bolster morale of everyone around you and increase their stats by 5%.
Greater Endurance	You gain +15% to endurance when in combat.
Greater Defense	You gain +15% to physical resistance when in combat.
Soldier's Gambit	When you are critically injured, gain Gambit, for ten seconds your stats increase by 25%.
Brawler's Strike	Once per combat make a strike dealing damage equal to 2x your strength.
Minor Reflexes	Your reflexes are enhanced by 20% speed of response equal to 1.2x your dexterity.
Riposte	Once per combat, gain the ability to execute a lightning fast attack after being damaged. Speed of returning strike equals double dexterity stat.

Class	Heart of Gunnr (M)
Level	359
Combat Ability	Dawnfire Mirage
Movement Ability	Shimmering Burst
Support Ability	Dawnfire Immolation
Additional Ability	Dawn Dash
Additional Ability	Ethereal Cross
Additional Ability	

EVOLUTION ATTUNEMENT BONUS:	
Shepherd for the Souls	You are able to see souls. All Ethereal based powers are 20% more effective. All special attacks deal 1.5% of total damage dealt as soul damage. Gain +10% to strength and wisdom.
Dawnfire	All fire based powers now create dawnfire, an intense fire that is extremely hard to put out and burns more intensely during the day. All fire based powers are 20% more effective. All special attacks deal 1% of total damage dealt as soul damage. Gain +10% to strength and wisdom.
Dawnspirit	All dawnfire abilities gain 50% more effectiveness in the Ethereal Realm. Your soul regenerates at 200% faster rate. Gain +10% to strength and intelligence.
Gunnr	Your stats are increased by 20% in battle. Any person you consider an ally gains 10% to their stats while fighting with you. Your base ability cooldowns are reduced by 20%. Souls of warriors think of you as kindred. Gain 15% to strength and dexterity.

Cultivation	Path of the Lotus Dance (U)
Stage	Peak Lord
Aspect	Scorching Mist (6)
Base Technique	Mesmerizing Illusion
Branch Technique	Scorching Burst

Fruit Technique	Curtain of Scorching Petals
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Cultivation	Path of the Final End (M)
Stage	Mid Lord
Base Technique	Mantle of the Scorching Mists
Branch Technique	Scorching Burst
Fruit Technique	Arrival of the Scorching End

Passive Skills	Active Skills
Combat Mastery >> Spear and Buckler Mastery >> Enhanced Spear and Buckled Mastery >> Enhanced Spear and Buckler Mastery	Block >> Greater Block >> Shield Wall
Heat Sense >> Greater Heat Sense >> Thermoception >> Enhanced Thermoception	Swipe >> Enhanced Swipe >> Arc Swipe
Pain Tolerance >> Greater Pain Tolerance >> Toughness >> Enhanced Toughness	Throw >> Greater Throw >> Hurl