1981. Disillusionment

There was no way to defend Bastion from the Prince of Nothing — not the city on the shores of the Mirror Lake, certainly, and most likely not even the castle itself. As a strategist, Morgan was quite adept at evaluating both the strength of the enemy and that of her own — therefore, she knew that her side was lacking. Achieving victory did not seem like a realistic outcome.

It was very likely that she had not been sent here to achieve victory, to begin with. Buying her father enough time to defeat Ki Song seemed far more likely of a purpose.

So, Morgan had done two things after returning to Bastion from Rivergate.

First, she had claimed the Citadel for herself to gain control over it.

Second, she went to a vast underground chamber hidden deep below the castle, in the heart of a stone maze very few people knew existed, and even fewer still were allowed to enter.

There, a great mirror stood, towering above the floor at dozens of meters in height.

Its frame was composed of two immense stone pillars, and it was covered entirely by black cloth, reflecting nothing.

Morgan hesitated for a few moments, then took a deep breath and pulled the cloth down.

It flowed to the floor like a black waterfall, revealing the dark edifice of the ancient mirror.

The vast underground chamber was drowning in darkness, so one would have expected to see nothing reflecting in the great mirror. However, instead, pale moonlight poured out of it, illuminating Morgan's pale face.

Inside the mirror, a devastated version of Bastion seemed to be drifting in the beautiful night sky. Countless stars shone on the surface of the still water, made pale and bleak by the radiant shards of the broken moon. Dreadful beings hid in the cold lake, and there was no city on the distant shore. Instead, an ancient forest stood where the city should have been, teeming with harrowing beasts.

That was the true face of Bastion.

And, unlike the illusory one humans of the waking world had inhabited, it was a place that Morgan could defend.

So, taking another breath, she closed her eyes, concentrated on her connection to the Great Citadel...

And made reality and illusion switch places.

Soon, a sunlit city that sprawled on the shore of a beautiful lake was reflecting in the dark mirror, instead, seen from the walls of an immense and magnificent castle. She sighed, gritted her teeth tightly, and used her authority over the Citadel to break free of the illusion.

A moment later, Morgan disappeared from the underground chamber and found herself standing in a ruined hall with a tall dais and crumbled dome. There was no sunlight here, but the eerie scene was bathed in moonlight.

The world was in the embrace of a foreboding night.

The castle was a ruin, and the still lake was surrounded by a pristine wild forest.

This was what lay in the heart of the Sword Domain now. The Bastion that people knew was safely hidden in the dark mirror, and the true face of this land was revealed to the Dream Realm once more.

The citizens of Bastion were safe... but the same could not be said about the rest of the Sword Domain. The human cities depended on each other, after all, and they especially depended on the capital - the place where the Dream Gate had stood before being summoned to Godgrave instead.

There were merchant caravans, exploration parties, patrolling warriors, and the like traveling to or from Bastion. Now, they had nowhere to go or return to. Worse than that, there was now a dire and perilous region of untamed wilderness in the heart of the Sword Domain, one far more dangerous than any of the surrounding lands.

The closest human Citadel to Bastion, Rivergate, had already fallen - but the rest of them would have to mobilize all their forces to avoid disaster.

Luckily, there was Nightingale.

Morgan had sent word to the people who ruled the Citadels in the absence of the Transcendent champions in advance, and she had also sent Saint Kai to scour the surrounding land and warn the travelers of danger. With his ability to fly, inhuman sight, and stunning speed, most tragedies could be avoided... hopefully.

Of course, she had no doubt that her dear brother would anticipate that decision and set up an ambush for the charming Saint. But Nightingale was quite a fearsome being... Morgan had faith that he would complete his mission alive, especially after being warned about the danger.

But even if there was no way to warn the rest of the Sword Domain about unleashing true Bastion from the mirror, it still had to be done.

Morgan had several reasons to summon it back to reality.

First and foremost, of course, was protecting the populous city... or rather, preventing her brother from using it as a hostage. Now that the city was replaced by the dark expanse of an abominable forest, Morgan could concentrate on defending only the ruined castle and use the lake to her advantage.

Naturally, it would have been much better if Mordret had not taken the entire House of Night as his vessels, in that regard. But there were creatures in that lake that would give even Transcendent Nightwalkers pause, not to mention that Morgan had Naeve, Aether, and Bloodwave by her side.

Both of them had come prepared for the battle for the Mirror Lake.

The second advantage was the forest itself, which was no less dreadful than the depths of the lake. Her brother would have to launch his siege from there, suffering the full brunt of the fury of the powerful Nightmare Creatures inhabiting the nebulous dark expanse.

Sadly, that was actually a sword that cut both ways.

On one hand, Mordret would have to protect himself and his vessels from those abominations without rest, which would slowly drain his power.

On the other hand, the forest would also present him a nearly inexhaustible supply of bodies to take, and the same Nightmare Creatures could become the cannon fodder he sent to ground the strength of the defenders of the castle down.

A lot of blood was going to spill... which Morgan welcomed.

The more chaos there was, the more opportunities to exploit it she would find.

The final advantage...

Introduced the most chaos, by far.

It was also the most vital, and the most dangerous of the three.

Both to Mordret and to herself.

That advantage...

Were the Others.