2203 Final Stage  
  
Sunny was looking ahead from two entirely different perspectives.  
  
He was Master Sunless, standing on the emerald grass of the Ivory Island. He was also the Lord of Shadows, standing on the surface of the ancient bone in the middle of the sprawling mass of the camped army.  
  
The Hollow Mountains — a familiarly chilling sight — were rising like a colossal dark wall in the distance, with white mist shrouding the jagged black peaks. And there, between his somber incarnations and the misty slopes, a titanic skull loomed above the world, looking down at the insignificant struggles of the mortal warriors with an indifferent, eerie grin.  
  
Each of its empty eye sockets was large enough to encompass a vast city, filled with nothing but impenetrable darkness.  
  
Both of Sunny's incarnations shivered.  
  
'It's strange, really.'  
  
Considering the nature of Godgrave, he would have expected the skull to bloom with an ocean of scarlet growth, the abominable jungle spilling from its eyes like tears of blood. But even the jungle seemed wary of the dead god's skull, staying as far away from it as possible.  
  
Considering what horrors dwelled in the ancient jungle, Sunny shuddered to imagine what kind of being could have scared the scarlet infestation away. Even the Sovereigns seemed unwilling to solve that particular mystery, which was why both of them had stayed clear of the skull.  
  
Perhaps he would find out one day, when he was much stronger than even the Supremes... he would have to live through the final battle of the war first, of course.  
  
His gaze drifted down from the dreadful visage of the titanic skull, returning to the ground.  
  
The Song Army encampment was like a black line on the horizon — a considerable distance for mortal men, but barely a stone's throw away for a Transcendent like him. They were close enough for his shadow sense to encompass the enemy camp, at least, if he wanted to attract the Queen's attention.  
  
There was nothing but the abyssal drop behind them, and the Sword Army had already cut off all paths of retreat. Making camp at the edge of the Breastbone Reach, under the watchful gaze of the dead god, was as much of a strategic decision as it was a statement.  
  
Having their backs to the abyss ensured that the Sword Army would not be able to use its numerical superiority to completely encircle the warriors of Song. And at the same time, it conveyed a message — the Queen had no intentions of retreating.  
  
It was victory or death for her, as it was for her men.  
  
The vast stretch of white bone separated the two camps. The armies were preparing for battle, but the usual clamor was subdued. An oppressive quietness enveloped both camps. The wary soldiers were readying themselves in grim silence, their pale faces contrasting sharply against the deep darkness nestling in their eyes.  
  
They had the look of people who had long lost grasp of reason, and were numbly going through the motions simply because stopping meant death.  
  
The promise of one final, decisive battle filled them with dread and a strange kind of excitement in equal measure. Dread because many of them would die... most of them, perhaps. Excitement because the war, which had seemed endless, was finally coming to an end.  
  
That said, Sunny wasn't quite sure about what this final battle was supposed to achieve.  
  
The logic of a mundane war was quite simple — two armies faced each other, and the one that broke first lost. However, this war... the Domain War, Realm War, or simply the Great War, as people tended to call it lately... was different.  
  
Because all the struggles and sacrifices that the soldiers had made were simply a prologue to the true confrontation — to the fight between the two Supremes. They had spent decades quietly preparing to fight each other, developing their forces and moving game pieces into advantageous positions.  
  
Then, their Domains clashed in a bloody struggle to carve as much power as possible and break the tenuous balance between them by subjugating Godgrave.  
  
Anvil had come out victorious from that clash, nearly pushing the forces of Ki Song off the titanic skeleton... but the Queen had ultimately won. She had destroyed the House of Night, usurped its Citadels of the Storm Sea, and set Mordret loose in the Sword Domain, thus diminishing the power of the enemy while greatly increasing her own.  
  
Now, time was on her side. The longer she delayed the final confrontation, the greater the chance that Valor would lose Bastion became. There was Revel and Gilead, too, who were supposed to be approaching the two remaining Citadels in Godgrave — which meant that Anvil would not give her time and attack as soon as possible.  
  
But what would such an attack even achieve?  
  
Slaughtering Awakened soldiers would diminish the power of a Domain somewhat, but not as much as conquering Citadels or slaying Saints would. And neither of the Sovereigns would let their Saints fall without reason.  
  
There were no Citadels on the northern edge of the Breastbone Reach. There was no territory to conquer here, either.  
  
So, as far as Sunny could understand...  
  
The two armies were preparing for battle for no reason whatsoever. If the Sovereigns were sane —and they were, in their own perverse way — they would not send their soldiers to slaughter each other on this pristine white field.  
  
Instead, they would finally step onto the battlefield themselves.  
  
Ki Song had at least some justification to prolong the conflict, but Anvil did not. So even if the Queen tried to force a clash between the armies, he had no reason to allow her to stall.  
  
The soldiers were merely a tool to tie the adversary down — a potential danger that could not be ignored, and would therefore force the enemy's hand. They were merely here to witness one Sovereign fall, while the other ascended to the throne of war.  
  
Sunny took a deep breath.  
  
'That is, if I understand everything.'  
  
But he could very well be missing something.  
  
In any case, the stage was set.  
  
The main characters of the play were about to enter the spotlight.  
  
History was going to decide who was the hero, and who was the villain.  
  
Not that it mattered, in the grand scheme of things.  
  
...He had done everything he could, as well.  
  
Now, it was time to see if his efforts were enough.  
  
There was no day and night in Godgrave, and therefore no dawn.  
  
So, the moment the two armies stirred and started to move was no different from any other.  
  
Master Sunless took a deep breath on the Ivory Island.  
  
Far below, the Lord of Shadows cracked his neck.  
  
'It's really ending.'  
  
Smiling behind the mask, he glanced at the looming skull one last time.  
  
'Watch well, whatever you are. I don't know how this play will end... but it will definitely be enteгtaining.'