2231 First Domino

There was a low groan of breaking bone, and a powerful gust of scorching wind. Somewhere far away, a piece of the battlefield plummeted into the Hollows.

The world quaked.

The King of Swords and the Queen of Worms were still locked in mortal battle, while their armies were still drowning in the flood of the abominable horrors that spilled from the dark depths. The situation was growing more desperate with each minute, and too many human lives were being wasted on the vile altar of war.

The carnage was unimaginable.

Sunny had manifested his sixth avatar, throwing it into the fight as well. Now, his mind was fully split in eight parts, and six of them were actively participating in the mayhem — it was more mental strain that he had ever endured, and while each of the incarnations was like a dark herald of death, reaping a bloody harvest in the sea of abominations, he was slowly unraveling under the pressure.

He had not unraveled yet, though… and he was not going to break any time soon.

Or ever.

'Just die…'

One of his incarnations used a black tachi to behead a frenzied Nightmare Creature, sending its body barreling back into the fissure it had emerged from with a powerful kick. The bleeding corpse got caught in the tangle of scarlet vines, and a moment later, it was torn apart by the sharp thorns and digested by the rising jungle… perhaps to provide nutrients fоr more abominations to be born.

[Sunny…]

Cassie's voice sounded clearer than before, hinting that her powers were slowly returning. Sunny hoped that enough of her Aspect had been released, already — he desperately needed to know what was happening beyond Godgrave, because many things depended on it.

Cassie did not disappoint.

[The loop is broken… Bastion has fallen.]

A vicious grin appeared on his face.

'Good… good…'

Jet, Effie,and Kai were the dagger they had prepared to stab the Sovereigns in the back at the perfect moment — when Anvil and Ki Song were already committed to fighting each other and could not allow themselves to be distracted. They were meant to conquer the Great Citadels.

Bastion, Ravenheart, Night Garden…

The purpose of taking them was twofold. First, it would greatly weaken the Sovereigns and diminish the power of their Domains — something that Sunny and Nephis had to achieve if they were to stand a chance against them.

Secondly, it would put all four Great Citadels, the Ivory Island included, under Neph's control as soon as she attained Supremacy herself. After all, while becoming a Supreme was the ultimate goal, that alone did not guarantee victory. A newly risen Sovereign would still be weak when facing the vast, deeply established Domains of the two Supremes.

Naturally, while conquering the Great Citadels had always been the plan, plans changed. In fact, at the level of machination Sunny and Cassie were perpetrating, there was no such thing as a concrete plan — rather, there were only complicated webs of planned actions and contingencies that were only as effective as they were adaptable.

They had never anticipated the fall of the House of Night and Mordret's invasion of the Sword Domain, for example. Neither could they have anticipated Morgan's ingenious feat of locking herself and her brother in an improvised time loop.

However, the web of their designs had proven adaptable enough to weather these unexpected factors… with some adjustments.

One of these adjustments was the sacrifice of the Cursed Demon whom Nightmare had beеn lulling to sleep for almost a year. Sunny had wanted to use it against the Sovereigns, but because of how insidious and sinister Mordret was, he ultimately placed it in Effie's Black Beast Locket instead.

Not only was it going to ensure that Bastion fell into their hands,it would also temporarily remove the wild card that was the Prince of Nothing from the board and prevent him from playing a meaningful role in the final confrontation against the Sovereigns… most likely.

'Ah. I wish I saw the expression on his face…'

Sunny was smiling, but he felt cold inside.

That was because the fall of Bastion signified something very important.

It was the point of no return.

Now that the time loop was broken, and the Great Citadel was torn from the fabric of the Sword Domain, countless mundane people living there had been rendered defenseless against the tyranny of the Nightmare Spell.

They were not in the throes of the First Nightmare yet — some time was needed for the infection to take hold, after all. Because of the loop created by Morgan, they would have lost the protection of the Sword Domain mere hours ago.

By now, the entire mundane population of the city — people like Beth — would be slowly starting to feel a strange fatigue. Then, they would start feeling sleepy. And they would only be thrown into the Nightmare after succumbing to sleep.

That meant that Sunny and Nephis had some time, still, to defeat the Sovereigns.

More importantly, at least one of them had to attain Supremacy in the process.

Otherwise, even if they somehow emerged victorious from the battle, they would have to pay a terrible price for that triumph.

The death toll would be staggering…

It would be ruinous.

…But the number of Awakened humans would explode exponentially, as well.

That was why Sunny could not help but tremble while he forced a smile onto his face.

'This... this is our will. Who dares...'

And as if to aggravate his horror, Cassie's voice resounded once again in his head:

[...Ravenheart has fallen.]

And, only moments later:

[Night Garden has fallen.]

It was done.

Sunny took a shaky breath, and then sent one of his incarnations through the shadows, emerging from them in the core of the vast sea of desperately fighting humans.It only took him a few moments to reach Nephis.

She was fighting at the head of the drowning army, wreathed in radiant flames and surrounded by ash. With her silver hair, incandescent blade, and white wings, Nephis looked like an annihilating angel... the single gem of the Crown of Down shone with pure light on her forehead, resembling a third eye.

The scorching heat had created an empty space around her, and the soldiers were dozens of meters back, battling the tide of abominations with dark resolve. The surface of the ancient bone was soaked with blood and littered with hideous corpses.

Sunny lingered for a moment, and then said evenly:

"It is done. And we… we can't wait anymore."

Nephis glanced at him silently, then looked in the direction where Anvil and Ki Song were fighting each other.

Neither of the Sovereigns was at thе door's death yet, which was not a part of the plan.

But too many people were dying. And Sunny and Nephis were wasting too much essence.

And plans had to change.

He took a deep breath, then steeled his heart.

"We must attack now."

Here it was. The moment they had been waiting for, hoping for… and dreading… for so long.

Their chance to conquer the world.

Or die trying.

'Finally.'

Nephis remained expressionless for a few moments, white flames dancing in her eyes.

Eventually, she turned away and looked up.

"Then we attack."