2260 Peace  
Neither the Sword Domain nor the Song Domain had won the war.  
Instead, both of them ceased to exist. Sunny and Nephis had won the war instead.  
Changing Star was destined to become the new Sovereign of humanity…  
However, the Lord of Shadows could not stand by her side.  
Because he was the fateless heir of Weaver, the Demon of Fate.  
Simply disappearing into obscurity was not going to work, either. Anvil and Ki Song were able to hide their existence because they had become Supreme in the darkness of the Underworld, unwitnessed by anyone… Sunny, however, attained Supremacy in the most flamboyant fashion.  
He became Supreme in front of hundreds of thousands of Awakened warriors, summoning a legion of shadows to save them from the flood abominations and slaying the King of Swords in full view of everyone who had the ability to see.  
So, there was only one solution…  
The Lord of Shadows had to die.  
And he could not simply die, either, since that could potentially turn him into a revered martyr.  
He had to waste all the goodwill he had earned first.  
Far away, the soldiers grew tense as they looked at the legion of silent shadows that now faced them, ready to attack.  
Some gazed into the distance, as well, where the Lord of Shadows was pointing his dark sword at Changing Star.  
Their eyes were wide with shock, and their faces were pale.  
But the soft radiance still illuminated their souls and their bodies, so they were not afraid. Many gritted their teeth, grasping the hilts of the weapons tighter.  
Sunny stared at Nephis from below Weaver's Mask and sneered.  
"Changing Star, Changing Star… you are surprisingly naive for someone so exceptionally strong. But then again, you are so righteous and benevolent… disgusting, really. Did you really think that I would share the throne of humanity with someone — anyone — when I can sit on it alone?"  
He took a step forward.  
"Anvil and Ki Song had the right idea, you know. There can only be one person wearing the crown.They had the right idea, but what could I do? I wanted to be that person. I could not kill them both myself, though, so I needed to use someone gullible as a distraction."  
Sunny chuckled.  
"So I used you. And now… I have no use for you anymore."  
Nephis pursed her lips, looking at him calmly.  
A few seconds later, she asked:  
"So it… it was all a lie?"  
Sunny laughed.  
"Of course! Did you think I enjoyed being treated as your toy? Did you think I wanted to spend time in your company? Ah, I hated every minute of it. Seducing you was surprisingly easy, but enduring the burden of your naive infatuation was an unpleasant chore."  
She tilted her head, then sighed and raised the Blessing.  
"I… see. So it was like that, then. I… understand. No, maybe I don't. But you are right. I should not have trusted you."  
Her eyes shone with blinding radiance, and she said in an even tone:  
"I think I will feel hurt by your betrayal… later. Maybe I will even be hurt by having killed you. So, I should hurry up and kill you soon."  
Sunny smiled bitterly behind Weaver's Mask.  
The two of them looked at each other, the air practically crackling with tension at the point where their gazes met.  
For a few moments, the entire world seemed to stand still, and the pressure continued to build until it became crushing.  
The shadows stirred, growing deeper and deeper. The blade of the Blessing shone with radiant light, chasing the shadows away and illuminating the two Supremes as they prepared for battle.  
Then, in the blink of an eye, both Sunny and Nephis lunged forward.  
There was a flash of light, and a thunderous thunderclap…  
And when the light dimmed, the soldiers saw the Lord of Shadows kneeling on the ground, Changing Star's blade buried in his chest.  
Sunny groaned, struggling to grasp its blade.  
Looking down at him, Nephis spoke solemnly:  
"Three Supreme warriors of humanity died today. Ah, what a waste…"  
A heavy sigh escaped from her lips.  
And at the same time,Cassie's voice resounded in Sunny's head:  
[Nephis says not to be so dramatic. You're not really hurt!]  
Sunny shuddered, still pretending to be in pain.  
The Blessing was indeed buried in his chest… but the area around the supposed wound had turned into an intangible shadow just before it hit, so he was not wounded. It was still a bit painful, but since Nephis had not put any killing intent into her strike, his soul was mostly intact.  
[Well, tеll her to act her part better. Wait, no… actually, never mind. Tell her she did well!]  
Nephis was not known for her acting skills. She was doing her best.  
For a few moments back there, Sunny had wanted to reenact their vicious battle in the Crimson Spire. He had imagined losing the fight, then hearing Nephis ask why he allowed her to win in a trembling voice.  
But then he realized that there was no need to deceive her into making it seem like she killed him.  
He could just ask.  
So, he had told what needed to happen to Cassie, who relayed it to Nephis.  
And as a result, the Lord of Shadows was dying now.  
[She says that you owe us a good explanation later.]  
Sunny forced out a smile.  
[I'll… try.]  
Would he even be able to explain? Probably yes, with some trouble.  
'She trusts me enough to go along without asking why... why is this so sweet?'  
With that, Sunny pretended to convulse…  
And then dissolved into shadows.  
At the same moment, his dark legion disappeared, as well, returning into his soul.  
Nephis was left standing alone, like a sole island of light in the ocean of darkness.  
Victorious.  
The long war... was over.  
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Some days later, a towering Dream Gate opened in the clear sky above Bastion, and the stunning silhouette of the Ivory Island slowly emerged from it, drifting among the clouds to hover high above the great castle.  
Millions of people had gathered on the streets of the city to watch the triumphant return of Changing Star, the last daughter of the Immortal Flame clan…  
The new ruler of humanity.  
High above them,Nephis was looking down at the familiar sight of the sprawling city that had grown on the shores of Mirror Lake. Then, with a sigh, she turned away and left the balcony.  
Descending the stairs, she walked through the corridors of the Ivory Tower and entered a spacious room.  
There, a stunning woman sat in a wheelchair, positioned in front of the window. Her face was emotionless, and her gaze was strangely hollow… as if she was not there at all.  
Placing a vase with fresh flowers on the table near the bed, Nephis walked over to the window, leaned against the windowsill, and looked at the woman quietly.  
She did not speak for a while, then sighed.  
"Hi, mom. I am sorry if you are uncomfortable… it's just that it's difficult for me to come to NQSC, these days. And I don't know how much longer it will be safe for you to remain there. So… I asked Cassie to bring you here."  
Nephis lingered for a few moments.  
"I am Supreme now. And I avenged dad. His killers are in the grave… well, two of them are, at least."  
A shadow suddenly ran across her face.  
"Oh. Right. You wouldn't know… for you, they would have been your friends, still. In that case, I am sorry. Your friends have passed away."  
Then, she smiled awkwardly.  
"By the way — I guess I have a boyfriend now. He is very handsome. I'm sure you would have liked him… oh, but things are a bit complicated between us at the moment. Things are complicated in general."  
With a sigh, she looked in the window and said wistfully:  
"Our world is being consumed by the Dream Realm. There's so much to be done before it is swallowed entirely… I am terribly busy, and he is too."  
She looked at the woman and smiled.  
"We need to become gods, after all."  
With that, Nephis inhaled deeply and headed for the door.  
She did not know how much time they had left, but it was probably not as much as they hoped.  
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Somewhere far away, a desolate land lay under a starless sky, shrouded in eternal darkness.There was a colossal crater at the heart of that land, and on its edge, a dark city stood, empty and forlorn.  
Nothing moved in that city…  
Until, suddenly, a magnificent black temple appeared there, as if it had stood in the darkness all along.  
Soon enough, two figures emerged from the temple.  
One of them was a young man with pale skin, wearing a simple black tunic.  
The other was a petite woman who floated a few centimeters above the ground, with a grim expression on her face.  
Looking around, Aiko shook her head in disbelief.  
"Gods. I really never thought I'd ever return to this hellhole. Hey, boss, do we really need to be here?"  
Sunny looked at her and shrugged.  
"There's almost no Nightmare Creatures here anymore. It's one of the safest places in the Dream Realm, really… plus, can't you see in the darkness? What are you so angry about?"  
Aiko stared at him with indignation.  
"What am I angry about? My job! I'm jobless again! All the effort I spent on building the Brilliant Emporium brand, and my boss just had to go and become the most villainous scum of humanity! And then die. Couldn't you at least have the decency to stay dead after dying, huh, boss?!"  
Sunny coughed.  
"Decency? What is that?"  
Then, he patted the petite girl on the shoulder.  
"Don't be sad though, Aiko. Do you think that war profiteering is all that? Let me tell you…"  
He gestured to the dark, desolate streets.  
"Colonialism! That's where the real money is at. And Forgotten Shore is a prime colony location."  
Sunny smiled.  
"So… what do you say? Shall we build a city here?"  
A peaceful city away from all the strife.  
It would stay peaceful for a bit, at least...  
  
[End of volume nine: Throne of War].