1587 Dream Gate

Sunny remained motionless for a few moments, staring at the distant figure wearing a bright vermilion cloak.

The clouds veiling the sky were not clouds, but a myriad of flying swords. The man standing on the ruined wall of the siege capital was not a mere mortal, but a Sovereign.

One of the three Supreme humans in existence...

Anvil of Valor, the King of Swords.

The Sovereign was facing a Great Titan. Sunny recognized that harrowing creature from the Battle of the Black Skull, where it had decimated the armies of both Valor and Song. The Titan was vast and abominable, its power inconceivable...

But the King of Swords was no less terrifying.

He was more like a force of nature than a human being, a walking cataclysm that tolerated no defiance. Where Anvil stood, his will was the law. Wherever his sword pointed was his kingdom.

And within the borders of his kingdom, his authority was absolute.

Whoever dared to disobey would be obliterated by a flood of slaying swords.

Sunny took a stifled breath.

'Crazy... it's crazy.'

That was what Nephis wanted to fight against?

He slowly shook his head and forced himself to look away from the awesome visage of the rain of swords. If each of them was infused with the power of a Supreme being... then Anvil was much more powerful than Sunny had ever imagined.

Considering that he was effortlessly controlling enough swords to cover the entire sky, this whole siege capital could be destroyed by the tyrannical Sovereign in a matter of seconds. There was no one in the waking world strong enough to stop him.

Well... except for the other two. Ki Song and Asterion.

'Are they here, in Antarctica, as well?'

Sunny wondered. The Queen of Worms had to have descended, too. As for the most mysterious of the Sovereigns, who knew? His ways were inscrutable.

Finally, his gaze settled on the titanic Gate.

A Nightmare Gate... no, not quite.

A Dream Gate.

Something clicked in his mind, and Sunny's eyes widened slightly.

'Of course. It makes sense...'

Sunny had been wary of the Sovereigns for many years, but he did not really know a lot about them — and about their power. What did it mean, exactly, to be Supreme? He had learned that the Sovereigns possessed a unique ability to create, rule, and expand their Domains. Even this piece of information was vague and shallow at best.

However, that was not what Sunny was currently thinking about.

Rather, he was thinking about a more subtle characteristic of those carrying the Nightmare Spell.

Awakened traveled to the Dream Realm when they slept. Masters could enter it at will and physically, leaving a tether behind. Saints were like miniature Gateways, able to come and go between the two words as they pleased, and even carry people with them.

What about the Sovereigns, then? How did this facet of their power evolve when they rose to the Supreme Rank?

Wouldn't it be reasonable to assume that theirs would be a continuation of the power that all Saints possessed? That they would not only contain a Gateway within themselves, but would actually be capable of creating a stable external bridge between the two worlds?

The opposite of a Nightmare Gate. Nightmare Gates allowed abominations to leave the Dream Realm and enter the waking world. A Dream Gate, then, would allow living beings to enter the Dream Realm from this side.

'...He is evacuating civilians.'

Indeed, that was what the King of Swords was doing. The Evacuation Army had spent close to a year ferrying refugees over the dreadful expanse of the ocean to other Quadrants. The process was slow — after all, the seafaring alloy behemoths could accommodate only so many people, and it took them more than a month to make a round trip.

Not to mention all the dangers that the naval convoys faced at sea.

The government had evacuated as many refugees as they could, and the operation would have probably ended in a semblance of success... if not for the three Category Four Gates that had opened during the Battle of the Black Skull. With the Great Nightmare Creatures roaming East Antarctica, there was no hope of anyone surviving — the civilian population, the Evacuation Army, the small contingents of Legacy Awakened... all of them were destined to die.

East Antarctica would have ended up the same way the Antarctic Center had, with everyone who was not already evacuated perishing in the flood of abominations.

And so, the two Sovereigns must have descended, holding back the Great horrors and opening a new, much more efficient path to salvation. The Dream Gates.

Perhaps it was because they could not allow their children — Morgan, Seishan, Beastmaster, and Silent Stalker — to die.

Perhaps it was because Mordret had been right, and the Sovereigns could not abandon humanity that easily. The new world they were building in the Dream Realm had to be populated by someone, after all, and hundreds of millions of refugees with nowhere else to go were the perfect fuel for strengthening their domains and nurturing more Awakened.

In any case, here it was.

Antarctica's salvation.

Sunny felt both incredibly relieved and indecribably bitter as he looked at the towering Dream Gate. Relieved because his worst fears had not come true, and his mission... the Evacuation Army's mission... was not doomed to fail. All the sacrifices that he and his soldiers had made were not in vain.

At the same time, he felt incredibly bitter because the unexpected salvation had come from those whom he despised the most — the Great Clans, whose conceited indifference created this terrible situation, in the first place.

If only they had moved sooner... if only they had not wasted so much time secretly fighting each other instead of preventing the Chain of Nightmares from claiming countless lives.

He could already see the mighty propaganda machine spinning its wheels, burying the truth in the clamor of triumphant fanfares. Look at the noble heroes of the Legacy Clans, who had selflessly come to the rescue of the Southern Quadrant in its darkest moment! Just like these faithful guardians of humanity always did.

Come to think of it, the Sovereigns had finally chosen to reveal their existence. That would also be spun into a fitting tale, no doubt. Probably something about the champions of the two great clans rushing to conquer the Fourth Nightmare in order to assist the people of Antarctica. That would also explain why they had been so late to offer genuine support.

They had not been tardy at all, but had instead been risking their lives in a Nightmare.

A dark expression appeared on Sunny's face.

'Ah. I hate it.'

But at the same time, he couldn't hate it. As long as people were saved, did the hypocrisy of the Sovereigns really matter?

Of course, he still had many questions. Would all these refugees be infected by the Nightmare Spell as soon as they entered the Nightmare Spell? What were the limitations that made it difficult for the Sovereigns to enter the waking world, and how had they bypassed these limitations to appear in Antarctica?

How would the world change now that the existence of the Supremes was revealed, and millions of mundane people crossed over to the Dream Realm?

And so on.

Well... he could take his time finding the answers to all these questions.

For now, the situation did not seem critical. With Anvil holding down the fort, the siege capital was not on the verge of being destroyed. Judging by how orderly the soldiers and the civilians were moving, the situation was under control, or at least not critical. Therefore, Sunny's first priority was to find the members of the cohort.

Since he had been sent back to where his tether had been placed in the waking world, the rest of them would be, too. Which meant that Mordret and Jet had been sent to the siege capital controlled by Song, while Effie and Kai had been sent to the Evacuation Army headquarters.

Nephis and Cassie, though, were supposed to be right here. Probably somewhere in the same ruins he had just crawled from.

Taking a deep breath, Sunny looked around, studying the crater.

It was then that he was thrown to the ground, and a massive explosion tore the center of the crater apart.