1663 Domain War

Sunny remained silent for a few moments, staring at the map. Then, a hollow chuckle resounded from the depths of his black helmet, sounding a little sinister in the darkness that shrouded the silent hall of the temple.

"Fighting a war in Godgrave... what a brazen act of madness. Ah, but I did not expect anything less from the Great Clans."

The Fire Keepers glanced at each other, sensing a hint of contempt in his cold voice. Eventually, one of them said said stiffly:

"...We are representing one of the Great Clans too, you know. Lord Shadow."

Sunny simply turned his head, staring at him. The Fire Keeper trembled under his gaze, looking away from the impenetrable darkness nestling in the visor of the onyx helmet. It was as if there was no person inside the fearsome black armor at all.

Nephis, however, only seemed curious. She looked at him and asked, her voice even:

"You have a relationship with the Great Clans?"

Well, of course she was curious. Logically speaking, a Saint like Sunny could not have appeared without brushing sides with at least one of the great Legacy clans. It was much more likely that he had served either Valor, Song, or Night directly in the past. He was independent now, and seemed to harbor resentment toward the Great Clans... anyone would be curious to know the reason.

Sunny shrugged.

"A relationship? I guess. Although it might be called a one-sided relationship by some."

He turned his gaze back to the map and made the shadows move. The mountains crumbled, the sea of darkness vanished, and the black skeleton grew larger, reaching the size of an average human. Everything else disappeared, leaving only Godgrave and its vicinity in sight.

"So, how will the war start?"

Nephis remained silent for a moment, then turned to the map, as well.

"Clan Song is already building a road to the Right Hand. They will use it to scale the skeleton and establish a fortress on its right shoulder. Valor is also moving its forces, aiming for the Left Hand. They will be delayed a little by the need to build a bridge."

The left arm of the colossal corpse was broken, a vast distance separating the ulna and radius from the humerus. There was a significant difference in height, as well, so construction of the bridge would take some time.

Nephis continued:

"In the end, though, it doesn't matter. There will be a fortress established on the left shoulder of the giant, and its ribcage will become a warzone, Of course, fighting under the open sky... is dangerous. But the Hollows are not something the soldiers of either of the clans can handle. At least not in the initial stage of the war."

Sunny tilted his head.

"The initial stage?"

She nodded calmly, studying the black skeleton with intense focus.

"Yes. The initial stage will be about slowly conquering territory and positional warfare. Godgrave is a Death Zone, so claiming it won't be easy. But its fall is inevitable, because that is the will of the Sovereigns. The armies will advance, sealing cracks in the bone to cut off the Nightmare Creatures from spawning on the surface."

Nephis paused for moment.

"The army of the Sword Domain will hold an advantage during that stage... firstly, because it has more experience in waging war against the Dream Realm. Secondly, because several Saints who are uniquely suited for the task serve the King. Like Sky Tide..."

Sunny frowned behind the visor of his helmet. Saint Tyris commanded wind and storm clouds... her Aspect would indeed be invaluable in Godgrave, where the veil of clouds stood between all living things and complete annihilation.

That would undoubtedly make her a target.

Already knowing the answer, he nevertheless asked:

"When will the initial stage end?”

Nephis glanced at him somberly:

"Once enough of Godgrave is taken for both armies to locate and conquer a Citadel. The second stage will be about conquering more of them. And the last stage will be about pushing the devastated enemy off the skeleton and claiming it entirely.

Followed by a period of consolidation and an inevitable invasion into the weakened enemy Domain, no doubt.

The Fire Keepers were strangely silent. They seemed to have known that a war was coming... however, perhaps it was their first time hearing someone talk about the inevitable so openly.

Nephis lingered for a moment.

"Do you understand why conquering that first Citadel is so important, Lord Shadow?"

Sunny's mood suddenly plummeted.

"I do."

It was because the moment one of the armies took a Citadel... the Domain of their Sovereign would enter Godgrave, as well. And that would allow that Sovereign to exert their full power in a vast area around the Citadel. Once that happened, the previously unapproachable Hollows would not be that impossible to traverse, and the nature of the war would change,

The more of these strongholds were conquered, the wider the Domains would spread, eventually swallowing all of this region.

Then, it wouldn't be just Awakened, Ascended, and Saints spilling blood on the ancient bones...

Anvil and Ki Song could very well clash directly, splitting the heavens and shattering the earth.

Sunny felt a hint of dread and smiled darkly, excited by that half-forgotten feeling.

Nephis seemed to have noticed that the shadows drowning the great hall moved slightly. She shook her head.

"So, Lord Shadow... you must understand that maintaining the neutrality of your temple will be hard. Possessing a Citadel at the very start of the war is too great of an advantage. No matter what else my elders might desire, they'll be most passionate about this point."

Sunny laughed.

"Oh? No... actually, I think it won't be hard at all."

He tilted his head a little.

"No matter how greedy they are to have my Citadel, they are much more wary of seeing it fall Into the enemy's hands. So, if they don't want to agree to my suggestions... why, I can just go and offer my services to Song. The Queen's daughters might prove to be more accommodating than your elders. Oh, and they are also very easy on the eye..."

One of the Fire Keepers coughed, prompting Sunny to wonder if there was something wrong with his lungs.

Nephis tilted her head and stared at him, most likely considering the blatant threat.

After contemplating for a while, she asked:

"And I'm not?"

Sunny froze.

"What?"

Nephis had a look of contemplation.

"You said that Ki Song's daughters might be more accommodating and are easy on the eye, alluding to the fact that both of these factors are advantages Clan Song has over Valor. But I am also King Anvil's daughter. Meaning... that I'm at a disadvantage, in that regard. Are you hinting that Clan Valor should make more concessions in the negotiations, due to my poor looks?"

Now, Sunny felt that there was something wrong with his lungs. Desperately suppressing a cough, he tried hard to present a cold and aloof front.

'Damnation... is she having one of her moments?! No, she must be teasing me... right?!'

When he spoke, his voice was slightly dull:

"...No. Your beauty is radiant and blinding, Lady Nephis, I wouldn't dare."

She looked at him for a few moments, then smiled:

"Really? It's good, then... oh, but if you prefer, I can ask the elders to send Morgan here, next time…”