1848 Reign Of Steel

Sunny sensed it before he saw it.

An invisible, but undeniable change that spread across the battlefield.

He was not affected himself, but the Fire Keepers certainly were. They did not grow stronger, and their swords did not become sharper…

And yet, suddenly, more Nightmare Creatures were falling to their blades. More blood was flowing to the ground, but less of it belonged to humans.

Observing the inexplicable change through shadow sense, Sunny couldn't help but feel a deep sense of confusion. There was no reason for the sudden shift in the cadence of the battle, but it had shifted, without a doubt.

Lacking any other explanation, he was tempted to think that it was a result of luck.

But there was something deeper than that going on…

He continued the wanton slaughter, defending one side of the Ivory Island.

At the same time, he was standing on the grass of the island, near the Marvelous Mimic, observing the battle idly side by side with Aiko.

It was that incarnation of his that tried to understand what was happening.

Almost an entire minute passed before his eyes suddenly narrowed.

Sunny exhaled slowly.

'I… see.'

The Fire Keepers were not lucky. They had not grown stronger, and their weapons had not become sharper.

It was just that they were fighting better.

Their already impressive coordination had improved, reaching an almost inhuman level of perfection, and their battle sense seemed to have become even keener. It was as if they were possessed by a spirit of war, and had received its blessing.

He had seen something similar once before, albeit in a less pronounced way.

It was during the Battle of the Black Skull. Back then, Morgan had armed her soldiers with enchanted swords forged by her father — wielding those swords, the warriors of Valor showed a strange level of cohesion, making it seem as if her entire army was one vast, lethal being.

Back then, Sunny had guessed that the swords served as conduits for Anvil's authority… as vessels of his will, and therefore, of his Domain.

And now, his Domain had spread to Godgrave.

After all, that was the entire reason why the Ivory Island was so important to Valor's plan of subjugating this cursed land and winning the war. The entire war was, at its heart, a race to conquer local Citadels and allow the Sovereigns to express their power here.

At the end of it all, the Supreme who controlled more Citadels in Godgrave, and could therefore manifest their Domain in a more profound way, would have a great advantage in the battle against the enemy.

The Queen of Worms was still powerless in this dreadful land, since there was nothing to summon her authority here. But Clan Valor had Nephis, and her flying Citadel as well — that was why they had tolerated Sunny's defiant unwillingness to surrender the Nameless Temple to them, and that was why they were already winning.

Because, unlike Ki Song, Anvil could already express his power in Godgrave.

And he was expressing it now. It had already spread in the vast area around the Ivory Island, and rooted itself in the ancient bone, under the cloudy sky, empowering his subjects.

That was why the Fire Keepers were suddenly more effective in the fight against the Nightmare Creatures. And that was why the Sword Army would have far less trouble entering the scarlet jungle — the spot where the Ivory Island landed had been chosen carefully to make sure that the King's authority covered the army's approach.

But that was not all.

Sunny shivered, suddenly overwhelmed by a cold presence.

Turning around, he looked up, at the balcony of the Ivory Tower.

'N—no way…'

There, a tall figure in dark armor stood, a vermilion cloak fluttering in the wind.

A crown made out of dull steel rested on his head.

The King of Swords had arrived to Godgrave.

…Then, the world was consumed by a scarlet storm.

Countless sparks enveloped the Ivory Island and the sky above it, swirling like a hurricane of scarlet light. There were so many of them that it seemed as if the whole world was suddenly desaturated of all colors except for red.

Then, the sparks formed into a sea of rustling swords.

An endless river of them bloated out the sky, moving in strange, hypnotic patterns.

Mesmerized by the sight and drowning in their shadow, Sunny almost forgot about the figure of a man standing on the balcony of the Ivory Tower.

The man did not move, but his cold gaze fell on the horde of Nightmare Creatures below.

In the next moment, the storm cloud of swords exploded with a lethal hail.

Countless swords rained down, making the bone plain shudder.

Down below, Sunny's avatar lowered the black odachi and froze.

It was a terrifying feeling, to see the steel sky fall on him, glistening with countless sharp tips.

However, he did not have to feel fear.

Although it seemed that the rain of swords would obliterate everything on the surface of the ancient bone, none of the falling blades struck him. Instead, they reaped a terrible harvest of lives, piercing every Nightmare Creature in sight.

In just a few moments, the horde of them was eviscerated. Numerous abominations were violently impaled by the flying swords, while those that survived the first onslaught were either bloodied or petrified, slow to escape the inevitable doom.

None of the Fire Keepers had received even a scratch, though, despite the fact that many of them were now surrounded by a forest of swords.

The swords did not stop moving.

More of them rained from above, and those that were impaling the Nightmare Creatures tore free of the bleeding flesh, rising into the air and turning to point at new prey.

Standing in the sea of blood, Sunny turned and looked at the distant balcony.

He should have felt elated because the battle was ostensibly over…

But instead, all he felt was a cold feeling of unease.

Sunny knew that, one day soon, he would be the target of these flying swords.

'What's the matter? It's just a Sovereign.'

For once, the words did not bring with them any levity.

Lowering his gaze, he peered at the horizon.

There, far away…

The first of the vermilion banners appeared in the distance.

The Sword Army had crossed over to the collarbone of the dead deity.