1852 Champions of Valor

Sunny, as the Lord of Shadows, reached the council chamber before his original body did.

The room was not quite as impressive as the hall where the King of Swords had gathered all the Saints before the war, but it was also quite spacious. The walls were built from grey stone and adorned with vermilion tapestries, and there was a round table in the middle of the chamber, with forty-two chairs positioned around it. An elaborate enchanted chandelier shone with cold glow above.

There were already plenty of people gathered inside, and all of them turned to look when Sunny walked in. The Lord of Shadows was still a mystery to most of them, and although the rumors of his fearsome power had already spread far and wide, few knew what to make of him.

Mostly, they treated him with a mix of respect and wariness.

He graced them with an indifferent gaze, then walked to the table. No one had taken their seat yet, since the king was not present. Ignoring the unspoken convention, Sunny chose a random chair and sat down.

'...Pathetic.'

His Shadow Chair was superior to this pitiful thing in all regards.

Hidden behind the mask, he secretly studied the people who had been summoned to attend the war council.

There were many Masters and a few Awakened here, but they were mostly meant to observe the discussion and provide insight if any of the true decision-makers had a question having to do with their expertise. The people of real importance were the Saints, and they were the ones Sunny was curious about.

Most of them hailed from the vassal clans, while some were retained by Valor. Several were members of the royal clan's branch families, as well, albeit not many.

The Sword Army possessed slightly more than forty Transcendent warriors. It was less than the Song Domain had, but the Saints of Valor were forged from tougher steel… or at least that was what the public believed. They had more renown, a longer history, and had accomplished more incredible feats.

However, Sunny was doubtful that they were truly superior to the Transcendent warriors of the Song Army. After all, some of the strongest Saint he knew of were those few people had ever heard about or cared to pay attention to. So, he had a feeling that the champions of the Queen of Worms would give their enemies a nasty shock when the two armies finally clashed in battle.

Which was not to say that the people gathered in the chamber weren't outstanding in every regard. A Saint was a Saint, after all… even now that Transcendents were somewhat divided into tiers, everyone understood that those tiers only differentiated between various levels of absolute excellence.

He saw a few familiar faces, of course.

There was Morgan, the Princess of War. The sharpest sword of her father's kingdom. The enchanting beauty was clad in black armor, leaning on a wall as she studied the room with a hint of amusement in her vivid vermilion eyes.

There was Nephis, Changing Star of the Immortal Flame clan. Even among these legendary figures, she was treated with a hint of veneration — both because of her family and because of her own accomplishments. Sunny knew how tyrannical her power was better than anyone.

Looking at the two princesses, Sunny had a sudden thought. He found it ironic there were seven Saints among the girls Ki Song had adopted, while Anvil only had two Transcendent children… and out of those two, one was now fighting on the side of the enemy, while his place was taken by the daughter of a man the Sovereigns had most likely killed.

'That's one messed-up family tree.'

He continued to study the gathered Saints.

There was Cassie, the blind seer. People paid attention to her because of her startling beauty and quiet demeanor, but few understood how dangerous she was. Most knew her as a competent advisor of the royal clan, while some treated her with subtle reverence that was often afforded to oracles. But since she was not too accomplished as a warrior, no one held her in truly high regard.

Then, there was Sunny himself — the Lord of Shadows. People seemed to have various opinions about him, but everyone agreed that he was an extremely formidable combatant. Still, there was a certain feeling of distance between him and the rest of the gathered Saints, as if they were not entirely ready to put their trust in a stranger.

That was because his position was somewhat unique — unlike the rest of them, he had not sworn loyalty to the King of Swords, and was therefore more of a mercenary than a true comrade.

Some distance away, Sunny noticed Saint Tyris. He saw her recently, so he was not too surprised by the fact that she had not changed at all in the last four years. Sky Tide had always had a stern, but strong presence — now, however, everyone seemed to treat her with an extra bit of respect. After all, she was one of the most important strategic assets in this war.

Strangely enough, the man standing next to her had not changed that much, either. He was tall and rugged, with broad shoulders and an easy bearing. His hair and beard were the color of straw, while his eyes were piercingly blue. There was a blue scarf wrapped carelessly around his neck… Roan of White Feather had grown even more handsome after becoming a Saint.

Together, they made for a beautiful pair.

Awakened Telle was standing behind her parents. Sunny was pleased to see the [Belated Apology] on Roan's right forearm — it seemed that her father really liked her gift.

'I'm glad.'

On the opposite side of the chamber, a gallant man in lustrous armor was waiting calmly for the meeting to start. He was Sir Gilead, the Summer Knight — a man whose loyalty and noble character were a legend in and of themselves. He was known for his straightforward nature, embodying qualities such as honor, valiance, and devotion.

Although… after spending some time with the man in the Nightmare Desert, Sunny suspected that there was more to Sir Gilead than blind loyalty. In any case, Summer Knight was one of the strongest and most renowned Transcendent warriors of the old generation. He was, more or less, the personification of what people thought a Saint should be.

Having someone like that fighting by one's side was quite reassuring in a dire war.

These were all the gathered Transcendents Sunny knew personally.

However, there were a few more that he instantly recognized from hearing about them here and there.

There was a dashing man wearing a beautifully decorated suit of golden armor with floral motifs in the accents. He was Saint Rivalen of Aegis Rose, also known as Shield Wall — a distinguished knight known for his gallant demeanor and stalwart character.

There was also an elegant older gentleman leaning on a black cane. He was Jest of the Dagonet clan — a former member of the cohort led by the founder of Clan Valor and one of the most experienced Awakened of the Sword Army. Among other things, Saint Jest was known for his peculiar True Name… Not So Funny Anymore.

Sunny really didn't know what to make of that fact, however, he was quite curious about the older Saint. They shared the bitter fate of having an extremely weird name, after all.

There were a few others, as well…

However, before Sunny could properly study them, the King of Swords arrived.

The war council was about to begin.