1853 The King’s Speech

When the king entered, everyone in the chamber straightened… everyone except for Sunny, naturally, who was the only person sitting comfortably on a wooden chair. Anvil spared him a short glance — which was heavy enough to make Sunny pale behind the mask — and took his seat calmly.

Once the King of Swords was seated, the rest of the Saints took their places behind the round table. Because of its peculiar shape, everyone here seemed to be an equal… however, that equality was merely an illusion. Anvil did not do anything, and yet his suffocating superiority was painfully apparent.

Consequently, those who sat closest to him were above the rest. Morgan sat to his right, while Nephis sat to his left. As for Sunny himself, he was almost on the other side of the table.

At the same time, he was standing near the wall with the rest of the Fire Keepers. The Masters and a few Awakened who had been invited to participate in the war council did not get a spot behind the table.

There were a few moments of silence before Anvil's deep, strangely enthralling voice resonated in the stone chamber. He spoke evenly and plainly, in a strangely calm tone — as if what he was talking about was a mundane matter, not a war that would shape the future of humanity… or maybe even destroy it.

"Welcome, warriors of the Sword Domain. We have carved out a piece of this cursed land and established a fortress atop the ancient bones of a dead deity. Our blades are sharp, and our will is triumphant… for now. The forces of Song have had a hard time achieving what we had achieved with relative ease, but there is no wisdom in belittling their valor. Those who underestimate the enemy are destined to fall. The cost of arrogance is death."

He gazed at them coldly and continued in an indifferent tone:

"There is no one in the world who knows Ki Song, the Queen of Worms, better than I do. So, I tell you this: there is no end to the insidious schemes woven by that woman. You should prepare yourself to taste bitterness as her machinations unfold. However, I also promise you this — at the end of it all, we will taste the sweetness of victory."

Hearing those words, Sunny couldn't help but sigh.

At that moment, he suddenly realized how tragic this war must have seemed to the rest of humanity — for reasons entirely different from the ones he himself had considered before.

Anvil said that there was no one in the world who knew Ki Song better than him, and it was most likely true. Sunny was used to thinking about these two as nebulous and sinister figures — as tyrants of immense power who secretly controlled the fate of humanity. The Sovereigns.

But they had been mere mortals before attaining Supremacy — Awakened warriors no different from him. More than that, they had been members of the same cohort.

So, this was a bitter war between two people who had once braved the horrors of the Nightmare Spell together, and fought side by side in the depths of hell. It was no different from Sunny raising an army against Cassie, to kill her and take her kingdom for himself.

'It's actually… quite sad.'

These people had been the hope of humanity once. Now… the Smile of Heaven was gone. Broken Sword was dead, as well. Asterion was who knew where, and the last two were determined to destroy each other.

It made Sunny wonder what would happen to his own cohort in the future.

He could not know the future, of course… but he did know that, at the very least, they would never end up as the Sovereigns. Not the least of all because the Sovereigns were there, in front of them, as a cautionary tale — without their appalling example, Sunny and his companions might very well have unknowingly ended up becoming them.

He inhaled deeply and briefly glanced at Nephis.

The King of Swords, meanwhile, continued:

"Now that we have established a foothold in Godgrave, we must persist into its depths. The next stage of our campaign will be both perilous and vital. Fortunately… I am here. I am with you, so who can be against you?"

Those were big words, but he was also someone who could speak them without sounding boastful.

After that, Anvil succinctly explained the goals looming over the Sword Army. Sunny ignored the flowery words and listened only to the underlying message that the Sovereign of Valor wanted to relay.

Fundamentally, the Domain War was a clash between the King of Swords and the Queen of Worms. It would reach its culmination when the two of them faced each other in battle, and end when one of them killed the other.

The key to gaining a decisive advantage in that final confrontation were the Citadels scattered across Godgrave. Possessing more of them would allow one of the Sovereigns to manifest their Domain more thoroughly, and make that Domain stronger.

Therefore, the two great armies were merely tools for taking control of the Citadels.

Valor was already ahead of Song in that regard, and there seemed to be nothing that could prevent them from widening the gap. With their Sovereign present in Godgrave, the task of subjugating lost Citadels would become much easier.

Which was not to say that it would be easy.

Although the King of Swords could already manifest his Domain here, his power was still contained in the immediate area around the Ivory Island. That allowed the camp of his army an incredible degree of protection against external threats, and made the task of venturing into the subterranean jungle less daunting. But the warriors of Valor still had to brave their incinerating expanse of the surface and the dark depths of the Hollows to uncover and conquer the overgrown Citadels.

As for where those Citadels were located…

At some point, Anvil paused for a few moments and shifted his gaze to the masked figure sitting on the other side of the round table.

His voice was calm when he said:

"Regarding this matter, I will ask the person who knows most about Godgrave to give us an explanation. Saint Shadow… if you will."

Sunny lingered for a bit, then sighed and leaned forward a little.

"Sure. Let's see… for a godforsaken hell unfit to be inhabited by humans, Godgrave has a surprising number of Citadels…"