1945 Spreading Domains

The nature of war did indeed change after the invading armies of humanity conquered two of the ancient Citadels in Godgrave.

The authority of the King of Swords now stretched from east to west, covering vast areas of the Collarbone Plain and the Breastbone Reach. Anvil had waged a terrifying battle against the inhabitants of the Hollows after arriving at the smoldering ruins of the Citadel, eventually clearing a safe area around the lake.

The lake itself grew shallow and drained in a few days, thought, turning into a nearly impassable marsh.

The Sword Army established a secondary camp above the closest fissure and stationed a formidable garrison to guard the Gateway in the Hollows. From there, they started a tentative exploration of pathways to the remaining two Citadels — once situated far below, in the spine of the dead deity, the other at the very edges of the Sea of Ash, on one of the titanic's skeleton femurs.

Neither were easy to reach, let alone conquer. The path to the Spine Ocean was perilous and hard to navigate, while the dark waters below were home to untold horrors. The femur Citadel in the south was relatively easier to reach, especially considering that the Nameless Temple, the stronghold of the Lord of Shadows, was located on the southernmost point of the Breastbone Reach.

However, the territory of the Cursed Tyrant, Condemnation, lay between the lands conquered by the Sword Army and the Nameless Temple. There were other Cursed Ones dwelling in the Hollows, as well — even the Sovereigns did not dare to provoke those beings lightly.

So, the conquest of the King of Swords was temporarily stalled.

On the other side of Godgrave, the influence of the Song Army was similarly growing.

Seishan and Death Singer had conquered the Citadel in the western part of the Collarbone Plain, finally allowing the Song Domain to descend upon Godgrave... and for the Queen of Worms to appear personally, as well.

The battered soldiers of Song were saved from the depths of despair by the arrival of their Queen. Immediately after appearing, she slew a Great Demon and eradicated the stampede of Nightmare Creatures threatening to swallow the trapped expedition force, rescuing both the exhausted warriors and her two daughters.

And Rain, who had been fighting on the frontline with the Seventh Legion.

The dire pressure on the entire Song Army drastically reduced now that they were supported by Ki Song and her Domain. Their precarious position in the west of the Collarbone Plain had become nearly unassailable, and the territories conquered by them were slowly encroaching on the northern boundary of the Breastbone Reach.

Of course, the Song Army was also aiming for the two remaining Citadels. They had almost no hope of reaching the Citadel in the south before the forces of Valor due to sheer distance, but the one in the spine of the dead deity was still within their reach.

On paper, Song still seemed like the losing side. After all, they only controlled one Citadel in Godgrave, cornered on the western part of the Collarbone Plain.

The Sword Army, meanwhile, controlled three —or two and a half, if one considered the lukewarm loyalty of the Lord of Shadows — its vast sphere of influence dwarfing that of Song and stretching all the way from the eastern edge of the dead deity's collarbone to the southern boundary of the Breastbone Reach.

However, if one looked beyond the mere marking on the map, the strength of the two armies would seem more or less equal.

While the Song Army controlled much less territory, it also possessed many more Saints. More than that, Prince Mordret was still besieging his father's Domain from the south. His seemingly inevitable march north had been halted by the tall walls of Bastion — for now — but no one knew how long Princess Morgan would be able to contain the terrifying power of her traitorous brother.

The outcome of the war was still uncertain, and the future of the world still hung in fragile balance.

Which was good news for Sunny and Nephis, who needed the Sovereigns to weaken each other.

The three leaders of the Sword Army's expedition force had temporarily parted ways.

The Lord of Shadows was dispatched back to the Nameless Temple in order to defend it and prepare raids on the supply lines of the Song Army, just like he had been supposed to do before the fall of the House of Night. Summer Knight was left in charge of the lesser camp of the Sword Army in the Breastbone Reach.

Nephis was eventually sent back to the main camp in order to mobilize the fresh forces there and helm the expansion of the Sword Domain's territory.

It was then that Sunny learned a peculiar fact about the Domains — something that he had not known before.

In his mind, the territory of a Domain had always been strictly dictated by the power of its ruler and the location of loyal Citadels. Sunny had usually imagined the influence of a Sovereign akin to his own shadow sense — as a formless sphere that spread to a certain distance, centered around its source.

Only, in the case of Supreme Domains supported by the Nightmare Spell, their source were the Sovereigns themselves, while each Citadel that belonged to them served as a powerful relay that increased the reach of their authority.

But reality turned out to be more nuanced than that.

Not only did the Citadels channel the power of the Sovereigns, but each of their subjects anchored at those Citadels was a vessel of their Domains, as well. At least that was what Sunny had surmised after observing the movements of both armies.

Perhaps there was a more complicated process involved, but the truth remained the same — the more ground the soldiers gained, burning down the scarlet jungle and establishing fortified strongholds on the surface of the ancient bone, the further the reach of the Domains spread. The increase was minuscule when compared to the benefit of having a Citadel nearby, but still significant.

Now, the previous orders of both Anvil and Ki Song made more sense to Sunny.

Laboriously conquering the territory between the main warcamp and the fissure leading to the Garden Castle had not been simply for the sake of helping the army entrench itself in Godgrave and provide reliable support for the frontline fighters — it was also to help the Sword Domain stretch, uninterrupted, all the way from northeast to center of the Breastbone Reach as soon as the Citadel was conquered.

Now that it did...

Both armies continued to push the scarlet jungle back and claim more and more land.

The Song Domain was spreading south, toward the territory of the Sword Domain. The Sword Domain was spreading north, toward the territory of the Song Domain.

Which meant that the two armies were going to clash soon.

The scarlet infestation would not be their only enemy in Godgrave for much longer.

...There were still a few days left before that happened, though.

And Sunny was determined to use these few days well. In particular, he hoped to thoroughly explore the unexpected benefits he had earned in the battle against Revel, pushing his mastery of weaving to a new level.