1992: Mass Destruction

There was a good reason for that, of course.

And shameful and ugly reason, but a good one nevertheless.

Soon after the second stage of the war started, the forces of both Domains had ventured to gain control over vast territories of Godgrave. The Sword Army had held a great advantage in that regard, already holding East Collarbone Plain and a large portion of the Breastbone Reach at the time, while the Song Army had been locked on West Collarbone Plain.

There were expeditions launched to conquer the two remaining Citadels in Godgrave. Revel was leading an expedition into the darkness of the Spine Ocean, and a Saint from the branch family of Valor was leading a competing one to make sure that the Lightslayer died there.

At the same time, Sir Gilead ventured south with a small force of elite warriors to claim the Citadel on the femur of the dead deity — considering that Nameless Temple stood between them and the Song Army, his expedition was unopposed. The Queen of Worms had seemingly decided to choose her battles and gave up on the south completely.

A lot of time had passed since the three conquest parties departed, but neither of the Citadels was conquered yet… which was quite important.

That was because the conquest of the last two Citadels would become the final tally of the authority that the two Domains possessed in Godgrave. And once their authority had no more room to grow, there would be nothing left to hold the Sovereigns back.

And so, the King of Swords and the Queen of Worms would finally enter the battlefield in person… to face each other, and see which one of them would inherit the throne of War's Divine Realm.

Which one of them would kill the other and get the other's crown.

…That did not mean that there was nothing for the two great armies to do while the conquest parties braved the dreadful depths of Godgrave to claim the Citadels, though. In fact, the ordinary soldiers had to play the most important role in this Realm War.

The authority of a Domain did not only depend on Citadels, after all — as Sunny had found out. There were other factors involved, like the strength and spirit of those people who belonged to the Domain… and its territory.

The latter was especially important, because while the two Domains were roughly equal in terms of population, there was vast unconquered territory in Godgrave. The side that managed to claim more of it could very well swing the final balance of power in its favor.

So… the two great armies had begun the conquest.

The initial process of claiming territory for a Domain was rather simple — Sunny had helped the Sword Army do just that while marching to the Vanishing Lake.

The forces of humanity had to push the scarlet jungle back, burn it, slaughter the Nightmare Creatures who populated it — the original masters of this cursed land — and build fortresses around the fissures in the ancient bone, thus preventing the abominable infestation from extending its tendrils from the Hollows again.

However, what followed next was more complicated, and far more vile.

Because after the forces of humanity wrestled control over the lands of Godgrave from the grasp of Corruption, humans could still fight for that control among themselves.

And that was what had been happening during the second stage of the war.

Both armies continued to claim more territory by banishing the scarlet jungle into the Hollows wherever possible, but they also clashed with each other, fighting for the already conquered land. The extermination outposts had become the currency that both Domains lusted for, and so, humans were now spilling human blood in Godgrave.

The Song Army had eventually made its way to the Breastbone Reach by staging a two-pronged offensive from the Collarbone Plain and the Western First Rib. The battlefront had become twisted and complicated, with some fortresses changing hands several times a week.

…And all of that was being done by the Awakened soldiers and Ascended officers.

The most powerful champions of both great armies, the Saints, mostly remained on the sidelines.

That was because Saints were too powerful, and too rare. Losing even one was a great loss for the Domains, especially if the fallen Saint controlled a Citadel — since there was usually no one left to replace them as its ruler.

Besides that, a single Transcendent could annihilate an uncountable number of soldiers. If they were unleashed on the battlefield, the casualties among the Awakened warriors would be too monstrous.

…Which would never stop either of the armies from using their Saints as weapons of mass destruction, of course. In fact, they would gladly do just that — the more enemy combatants perished, the better.

However, they were deterred from doing so… by the enemy Saints.

The Transcendent champions of the Song Army guarded the Transcendent champions of the Sword Army watchfully, and vice versa.

None of them was allowed to enter the fray unless an enemy Saint launched an attack on the ordinary soldiers, so everyone remained passive, doing nothing.

Valiant Saints led their warriors to battle, only to stand back and watch as the soldiers fought the enemy alone — all the while the enemy Saints stood on the other side of the battlefield, doing the same.

Of course, there were exceptions to the rule, especially because the Song Army possessed much more Transcendent champions, and the Song Army had been having a hard time keeping them in check. At the same time, though, the Sword Army possessed Changing Star and the Lord of Shadows, who could not be stopped by just one or two Saints. These exceptions were rare.

So, the weak fought and died while the powerful stood back and watched.

It was a disgraceful affair...

While not at all different from how it was in most other wars, perhaps.

It was also quite strange at times.

At one point, for example, the Saints of Song had decided to stage a clandestine attack in the portion of the Breastbone Reach that Sunny had been assigned to watch over. He had to Shadow Step into the middle of the battlefield, summon the Shadow Chair, and sit down… then watch Silent Stalker and a few other Transcendents shift awkwardly from one foot to another and grind their teeth, unwilling to provoke him and unable to do anything.

Sunny had remained sitting until the battle ended, never moving a muscle.

He had a feeling that things could change today, though.

Because although there had been countless minor battles and skirmishes in the war already, today's battle was different.

It was the first full-scale clash between the two great armies, with most of their soldiers present on the battlefield and participating in the bloodshed.

The scale of it was both terrible and daunting... there had never been a greater battle in the history of humankind, after all.

Sunny was watching the greatest crime in history be committed right in front of his eyes.

...Well, maybe not. Humans of the waking world, the children of War, had committed plenty of atrocities during the Dark Times, after all, and plenty more before that.

Nothing had really changed since then, except that human soldiers wielded far greater powers now.

In the indescribable chaos of their cataclysmic confrontation, anything could happen.

He doubted that Saints would be forced to remain idle until the bitter end.