2063 Total War

The war raged on, spreading like a cancer in all directions.

The main camp of the Sword Army was becoming more and more desolate. Every day, new troops were leaving it to head west, where they were meant to participate in the inevitable and dreadful siege of the Crossing Strongholds. Some were being sent to garrison the new extermination outposts as the remains of the Breastbone Reach fell to the might of the King of Swords, instead…

However, the city-like camp was not being completely abandoned — a considerable force was being left behind to guard it. After all, it was still the most important logistical hub for the Sword Army, both receiving the supply caravans climbing the left arm of the dead deity and housing the Dream Gate.

Sunny and Nephis spent the last few blissful days together, watching the once-lively avenues of the warcamp grow silent and waiting for the order that would call her back to the frontline. Without having to say anything, they both seemed in a hurry to enjoy each other's company while there still was time…

The future was unclear, and there was nothing like the promise of death to make one's heart beat faster, and make them want to voraciously relish life.

But to their surprise, the inevitable parting never came.

Instead, the King's order was delivered by Saint Tyris personally. He did not simply command Nephis to return — he commanded her to bring the Ivory Island with her, intending to turn it into the cornerstone of the future siege.

So, they released its seven anchors and started the slow journey to the Western Collarbone Plain, at the precipice of which the decisive battles of the war were going to take place.

As they traveled across Godgrave on the flying island, blood was being spilled.

The Sword Army was pursuing the forces of Song across the northern parts of the Breastbone Reach, engaging in frequent skirmishes and battling the spreading scarlet infestation.

Somewhere else,the conquest expeditions were braving the darkest parts of Godgrave.

Far in the south, Mordret and Morgan were still locked in a fratricidal battle for control over Bastion.

Worst of all…

The tacit agreement made by both Domains to keep the war out of the waking world had finally collapsed, and the cradle of humanity became submerged in a wave of terror and violence.

The streets of NQSC — and other human cities in the waking world — had never been peaceful, exactly. People had always lived in the oppressive fear of Nightmare Gates and perished Sleepers going rampant after turning into abominations. These threats had only grown more dire in recent years… and there was the Skinwalker, as well.

But now, the violence was being perpetrated by the forces of humanity itself, not the Nightmare Creatures.

There were explosions thundering in the silence of the night, charred remains of destroyed PTVs burning on the roads, and sporadic firefights happening in broad daylight from time to time. The direct collateral damage was not high, but these bloody confrontations between the two great Domains was negatively affecting every facet of humanity, weakening its ability to defend itself.

The terrible losses suffered by the House of Night alone had dealt enormous damage to the logistical connection between the four Quadrants, resulting in temporary food shortages and countless other complications. Even though the government had absorbed the remaining Nightwalkers into its ranks, the scale of the navigation across the ocean was severely reduced.

And now, more and more problems were creeping up. While the two Domains battled against each other, there were too many crises to solve, and not enough people to solve them. There were not enough soldiers to contain the ever-increasing amount of Nightmare Gates in time, watch over the Aspirants while they challenged the First Nightmare, and keep the order on the streets.

The waking world was slowly, steadily,and inevitably sliding into chaos.

The world seemed to be ending... ending more swiftly than it had been before, at least.

If there was one mercy to the situation, it was that most of the combatants participating in the skirmishes and sabotage in the waking world were mundane agents of the royal clans, not Awakened warriors. Those were mostly needed on the frontline in Godgrave or human settlements in the Dream Realm.

Still, conventional weapons were just as destructive when wielded against mundane people and infrastructure, so the damage wasn't insignificant.

Worse still…

The agents Song were not shy when retaliating against the government forces, seeing them as collaborators of the Sword Domain. Government Saints were defending Bastion, after all… the servants of the Queen did not go out of their way to attack the government soldiers, but did not hesitate to act against those of them who became an obstacle either.

Which, not at all unexpectedly, only pushed the government deeper into the embrace of the Sword Domain. As a result, the forces of Song were being pushed back both in the Dream Realm and in the waking world, losing ground with each day.

The Song compound in NQCS still stood, protecting the approach to the Dream Gate, but there were already many breaches in its scorched walls.

Even the Awakened Academy was not spared, a section of its defensive barrier crumbling for the first time since being built decades earlier.

It was appalling. It was utter madness.

…It was war.

And as if responding to the madness of the human war, the world itself seemed to start coming undone under the pressure.

The already rapid increase in the number of the Nightmare Gates opening across the territories held by humanity had grown even more. A flood of abominations flowed into the waking world, threatening to overwhelm its already strained defenses. More people were succumbing to the Spell,and therefore more Sleepers were losing their lives while challenging its first trial.

The process was gradual, and the situation worsened one small step at a time. People of the modern era were well-accustomed to hardships and calamities, and distracted by the tectonic changes caused by the Great Domain War, as well. So, like a frog being boiled in the slowly heating pan, they were slow to notice that the dire reality surrounding them was dreadful even beyond the terrible norm.

Still, even they were slowly growing aware of how much worse it was than it had ever been… with no indicator that things would eventually grow better, as they had always done before.

In that tense and heavy atmosphere, the war in Godgrave was swiftly approaching its final stage.