2076 : Fragments of War (13)

Just as Seishan had predicted, the second assault on the Greater Crossing Stronghold only happened after the Ivory Island arrived on the battlefield.

It was a sight both daunting and awesome. The flying island moved slowly across the chasm, effortlessly enduring a barrage of destructive attacks. A billowing cloud of smoke obscured it for a few moments like a fluttering mantle, but then, the graceful silhouette of the Ivory Tower revealed itself from the smoke once again.

Pristine and unblemished.

At the same moment, the elites of the Sword Army stationed on the island unleashed their own arrows, raining death and destruction down upon the defenders of the fortress.

The island moved slowly across the chasm, high in the sky, suppressing the Song soldiers. Using the opportunity, three sets of powerful cables were shot across the darkness, embedding themselves into the ancient bone on the other side.

Thousands of soldiers rushed forward, in a hurry to build up the bridges. Enormous shields were carried in front of them, protecting the engineers from the onslaught of ranged attacks. Slowly but surely, the three bridges started to take shape.

Soon, the defenders of the Greater Crossing had to fight on four fronts. Both the left and the right wing of the impregnable fortress, as well as its main keep, were being assaulted by the soldiers of the Sword Domain, while the Ivory Island loomed above.

This time, the most seasoned veterans of the Sword Army, including the Knights of Valor, were leading the assault.

As the Ivory Island neared the middle of the dark chasm, threatening to break through the defenses of Song, a vast swarm of appalling Nightmare Creatures rose from behind the fortress, aiming to deliver a subjugation force and conquer the flying Citadel — in response, Knights mounted on winged Echoes rushed to intercept them.

The thralls of Beastmaster clashed in the air with the warriors riding the Echoes, and a fierce battle unfolded above the terrible bloodshed happening below.

All hell broke loose, threatening to pass into the annals of history as one of the most dire and perilous battles of the dark era of the Nightmare Spell.

…Far away, in the west, things weren't going much better at the Lesser Crossing.

The First Rib, while still vast and humbling in scale, had a much narrower point of connection to the breastbone of the titanic skeleton. Therefore, the stronghold there was smaller, and the soldiers guarding it were fewer in number. Nevertheless, the bloodshed there was just as terrible.

There was no flying island there to lead the assault, so the soldiers of the Sword Army could only rely on the engineered bridges. No one was suppressing the defenders of the stronghold by raining death upon them from the sky, either, so the casualties of the attacking side were much more severe.

Sunny observed the battle with a grim expression, feeling a suffocating fury rattle his mind at the sight of so many people dying senselessly. But there was nothing he could do to stop the shameful atrocity happening right in front of his eyes… no, that was not true.

There was plenty Sunny could do.

He could manifest a bridge of shadows wide enough to carry thousands of additional soldiers across. He could send his Shadows to break the walls of the fortress. He could command the army to retreat and refuse to accept the orders of the King.

But then what?

Using his powers would give the Saints of Song to unleash their, in turn. Sure, Sunny could probably give them all a good fight… but how many soldiers would become collateral damage in the clash of Transcendent powerhouses?

Rebelling against the King of Swords prematurely, meanwhile, would just cost Sunny his life and make deposing the Sovereigns that much harder, if not entirely impossible.

So, all he could do was grind his teeth, bide his time, and endure the poisonous feeling of anger.

'How much longer?'

He knew that the King of Swords was observing the Lesser Crossing closely. Cassie was not the only one, by far, providing him with information. Therefore, Sunny could not end the battle until it truly looked like the forces of the Sword Domain had no chance of winning.

And the soldiers… as dispirited and disillusioned as they were, the soldiers still fought valiantly. They strived to achieve victory with all their hearts, not the least of all because victory seemed like the only salvation to them.

'Damnation.'

Hiding his face behind Weaver's Mask, Sunny observed the battle silently.

Eventually, the bloodshed had become too dreadful, and the momentum of the assault broke.

He had his excuse.

"Reatret!"

Somewhere far away, the assault on the Greater Stronghold was ending in a deadly stalemate, as well. The gates of the fortress had withstood the blows of a specially enchanted siege ram, and neither of the three attacking forces managed to create a stable bridgehead on the battlements.

The Ivory Island was forced to retreat, as well, swarmed by the thralls of Beastmaster and under threat of being taken by the warriors of Song.

It was another defeat.

'Damn it, damn it, damn it!'

Full of resentment, Sunny looked away from the gruesome scene of the battle and walked off.

Soon enough, the battle was over, and he hid himself in his tent.

He knew that Anvil would not be satisfied with just two failed assaults… especially because the second had been much more deadly for the Song Army then the first.

There would be a third assault, and the fourth, and the fifth…

Until one of the sides broke.

…It was when Sunny was going over the battle in his mind and coming up with ideas on how to minimize the casualties next time that someone approached his tent.

There was a polite knock, and a man wearing a vermilion cloak of the royal clan entered it slowly.

Sunny stared at him coldly from behind his mask.

"What?"

The man bowed, and the spoke in a reverent tone:

"Lord Shadow, sir. The King has sent you a special order…":