2160 Past and Future  
  
About a year later, Jest was leaning on the wall of a random building, feeling dizzy from drinking too much. It was hard for an Ascended to get drunk, but he had smuggled a bottle of special brew from the Dream Realm — it wasn't made from mundane stuff, so its effect was correspondingly outstanding.  
  
He had fallen apart, a little, after his older son's death — not too much, but just enough to allow himself a day or two of drowning in self-pity every few months or so.  
  
After all, Jest still had another son to take care of. His wife needed him, as well… and Warden, too, although now that all the enemies of the new world order had been eliminated, there was rarely a need to use his services.  
  
That last fact was slowly changing as of late. Not because new external adversaries were rising, but simply because the new order had become robust enough, and had existed for long enough, that internal threats were.   
  
Now, Warden had to put effort into maintaining if not control, then at least a decisive amount of influence over the unwieldy apparatus of human governance. Jest had to help from time to time — his work these days was usually less bloody, and he served as more of a scarecrow than an executioner.  
  
…Usually.  
  
'Ah, I'm sick of it. When will it end?'  
  
When would he and Warden be able to get some rest? Work, work, work… for two decades, almost, they had done nothing but work tirelessly.  
  
He imagined the two of them retired, sipping wine in some warm garden in Bastion while their grandkids played around, and giggled.  
  
'Bah. With how stiff that guy is, I doubt he'll ever settle down.'  
  
Jest grimaced, then took another sip of the bitter brew.  
  
In front of him, in the distance, the workers were finishing constructing the Awakened Academy. Looking at the mighty wall defending the complex from a distance, Jest smiled darkly.  
  
'Bastards. Took them long enough…'  
  
Many things had changed in the last year. More of the children of the original Awakened had contracted the Nightmare Spell… some survived, some didn't. Of course, countless children had perished to the Spell already, but these ones were different.   
  
Because they were the first infected who had been born after the descent of the Nightmare Spell, and grew up not knowing anything but its dire new world.  
  
The Second Generation.  
  
Looking at the gates of the Academy being hoisted up, Jest suddenly felt like he was back to that day when he returned to the barrack, only to find himself unable to walk through the broken door.  
  
A dark, deep sense of futility overwhelmed him, and he hurried to wash it away with the bitter taste of alcohol.  
  
'That's good. That's better…'  
  
He wasn't watching alone, either. At some point, another figure appeared in the alley, walking past him without even noticing — well, it wasn't surprising. Jest was standing in the shadows, after all, and actively suppressing his presence. That was a habit he had developed after perpetrating numerous assassinations.  
  
It was someone he knew, in fact. Awakened Orum… a nice enough guy. Not too pоwerful and not too ambitious, but solid and reliable. He, too, was a member of the First Generation, and since his Citadel was in the general area of influence exerted by Bastion, the two of them had fought side by side a few times.  
  
Still, Jest would have preferred if no one disturbed his solitude.  
  
When the gates of the Academy were installed in place, he sighed and let out a laugh.  
  
"When the gods close a door, the Nightmare Spell opens a window."  
  
Orum turned his head in surprise, only noticing Jest now. Internally, Jest shook his head.  
  
'Eh, Orum… I really hope we never meet as enеmies. You'd never see me coming.'  
  
They exchanged a few meaningless words, with Jest playing a drunken fool, then continued to watch the construction. Eventually, the conversation turned to the Academy.  
  
Little Anvil… who was not so little anymore… was going to attend it. He had been infected by the Spell just before turning sixteen, and survived the First Nightmare — thank the gods. Madoc was already eighteen, and still not showing any symptoms. In one more year or so, he would be safe.   
  
Immortal Flame's daughter was going to attend, too.  
  
They were the future of humanity now…  
  
Jest hoped desperately that they would be. He would gladly become the ρast, if only they survived.  
  
People were calling these kids Legacies as of late.  
  
It was a bit disgusting, that word, but not as disgusting as parents who had become enamored by the gifts of the Spell and actually hoped for their children would contract it.  
  
Was Orum one of those bastards, by chance?  
  
If he was… Jest thought that he might just kill him right here and now, in this alley. There were no witnesses, and he could handle a mere Awakened in a matter of seconds. Losing one moderately competent would not affect anything major, either.  
  
'Wait… he doesn't even have children, I think? But he's taking care of his niece and nephews…'  
  
After staring at Orum for a bit, Jest smiled coldly.  
  
"Your sister's children are what, around ten? You must be thinking about a lot of things right now, too. Huh, Orum?"  
  
The man nodded.  
  
"Yeah. I am thinking… I really hope that they won't become infected. Of course, I'll need to prepare them well, in case they do."  
  
Just like that, without even knowing it, Orum had saved his life.  
  
Jest grinned.  
  
"...That is why I like you, Orum. Thank the gods you're still normal, at least."  
  
There were sane people left in the world, too.  
  
He took another seep of the bitter brew, which had loosened his tongue. So, Jest went on a little rant.  
  
'Legacies. Ha, what a joke!'  
  
That was not the kind of legacy they had wanted to leave. Their children becoming Awakened was not it!  
  
This… the city around them… that was the real legacy Warden and Jest had spent their lives building. The clean air, the stable supply of electricity, the robust infrastructure. Public trams that arrived on time, warm water in the showers, and enough food to feed everyone — even the surplus population that had to be relocated to the outskirts of the city beyond the barriers.   
  
That was what they had wanted to leave behind for their kids, not the bloody horror of the Nightmare Spell…  
  
No matter the cost.  
  
But what was the point if their children were taken away by the Nightmare Spell, anyway?  
  
There was no point at all...  
  
Jest let out a laugh.  
  
"Orum, my friend, listen to this fool… abandon hope. In this era, the only thing worth believing in is the Nightmare Spell, and the Spell is a cruel bitch. Just… teach your kids well. Teach them really wеll, bastard."   
  
If only Jest had taught his son better... then, maybe...  
  
He finished his liquor and waved a hand.  
  
"See you at the opening ceremony…"  
  
Jest did see Orum at the opening ceremony a few days later, not that he cared too much to talk to the man.  
  
He was more concerned about Anvil, who was supposed to enter the Dream Realm for the first time come winter solstice.  
  
The boy had been acting strangely ever since returning from the First Nightmare…