2164 Nothing to Lose  
  
Cassie froze for a moment, having finally found what she had been looking for.  
  
"The king's Flaw..."  
  
And what a cruel Flaw it was. No wonder he seemed cold as steel...  
  
It was not that Anvil was incapable of feeling emotions — he had simply taught himself not to. Since he was destined to lose anything he treasured, he replaced fondness and affection with indifference, thus saving himself, and those he was close to, from having to suffer the consequences of his Flaw.  
  
His intentions had been good... noble, even, all those years ago.  
  
But in the end, the path he had chosen only ended up turning him into a monster, twisting and destroying everything he touched. Because once he learned to value nothing, the tethers attaching him to his humanity had come undone. And, unmoored, his cold iron heart slowly drifted further and further away from all that was good and human.  
  
Morgan and Mordret were the most obvious victims of Anvil's inhuman detachment. But there were countless other victims, as well...  
  
Every soldier that perished in Godgrave, every civilian sacrificed to the Chain of Nightmares while the Great Clans waged an internal war, and everyone else who had become collateral damage to Anvil's callous pursuit of what he saw as the greater good.  
  
...Broken Sword, the Immortal Flame clan. And Nephis, as well.  
  
The road to hell was paved with good intentions, and in this case, the hell itself had been forged by a single decision made by a determined young man.  
  
It would have been heartbreaking, really, if it wasn't so hideous and appalling.  
  
Just as Cassie thought that, the lumbering figure of Jest suddenly leaned forward, and his lips stretched into a ferocious grin, revealing his monstrous teeth.  
  
But he had not broken free of her gaze... at least not just yet.  
  
Cassie did not have a lot of time left, though. Luckily, she had already gotten what she wanted.  
  
So, Cassie considered ending things there to prevent further danger...  
  
But just then, another constellation of memories attracted her attention.  
  
It was so vivid and vibrant, but at the same time strangely unsettling. Like something that Jest desperately wanted to forget, but was unable to.  
  
Cassie paused, suddenly feeling intrigued. At this point, she had seen most of his formative Memories. The descent of the Nightmare Spell, meeting Warden, the birth of his children, the death of his son, the loss of his wife and his best friend...  
  
What else was there?   
  
His Third Nightmare?  
  
Even knowing better, she still couldn't resist and burned more essence to delve into the vibrant, unsettling memory.  
  
It was strange, but the constellation of vivid memories had nothing to do with how Jest had become a Saint. Instead, it mostly took place in Bastion...  
  
It had happened only a couple years after that fateful conversation in the Great Mirror hall.  
  
Cassie frowned as she rushed through the kaleidoscope of foreign experiences, feeling her hold on Jest's mind become more and more tenuous.  
  
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Just as Anvil had promised, he put an end to the inteгnal struggle in Bastion. Jest would have solved the problem by simply eradicating all the parasites — or at least some of them, to teach the rest a lesson. But the young heir of Valor went about consolidating his power in a less bloody, but arguably more ruthless way.  
  
There were ways to break people without making them bleed, and he did not spare the members of his extended family at all. His coldness and decisiveness even made Jest feel a little chilly.  
  
The boy had grown up and become a man... a frightening man, at that. Perhaps that was the only way that children born in the era of the Nightmare Spell could grow up.  
  
'He is like... a colder, scarier version of Warden.'  
  
Jest was a little concerned, and a little proud.  
  
In the aftermath, the world continued to spin. The race Warden had mentioned went on, and with each month, humanity continued to lose some of the lead it had gained in the past.  
  
Anvil cemented his position in Bastion, but although the power and prestige of Valor still meant a lot, the influence of his family was in decline. It was not easy for a young Awakened to contend against old monsters of the First Generation, especially since many of them were Masters now.  
  
Many had perished the same way Warden had, though, and continued to lose their lives in the desperate pursuit of Transcendence. It was as though the great culling of the days before Immortal Flame conquered the Seed of Nightmare was transpiring once again, erasing more and more familiar faces from existence.  
  
Every time Jest looked, someone else was gone.  
  
In any case, for these reasons — and many others — Anvil was determined to challenge the Second Nightmare as soon as possible.  
  
His preparations were swift, but thorough. He barely slept, spending all his time either training, forging, or studying the secrets of runic sorcery —Broken Sword might have been the deadliest warrior of their cohort, but it was Anvil who was responsible for equipping his companions with the best Memories and gear an Awakened could dream of.  
  
He also frequently visited the forbidden realm hidden in the eerie mirror under Bastion, somehow managing to return alive each time. Every time Anvil returned from these perilous journeys, he would lock himself up in either the library or the forge, sometimes remaining there for weeks.  
  
As time passed, he seemed to acquire a few odd quirks, too. It was not even the measured coldness and nonchalance he always displayed after that bitter conversation with Jest, but other, stranger things...  
  
For example, one day, Anvil ordered to destroy every mirror in Bastion, and punished those who failed to comply with the order severely. He also seemed to have become an obsessive perfectionist, as if harboring a deep hatred of the very concept of Flaws.  
  
But Jest wasn't too concerned. Everyone who was worth anything in this world was a little bit eccentric... he himself was known to have a strange habit or two. Like dressing too dashingly or never holding back his elevated, highly outstanding sense of humor.  
  
As the date when Broken Sword and his cohort were planning to challenge the Second Nightmare approached, Anvil directed his attention to recruiting exceptional talents to join them.  
  
Broken Sword, Smile of Heaven, and Anvil were already three of the most distinguished Awakened of their generation — or maybe even of all time. Not just anyone could stand side by side with them, however, he did manage to find two.  
  
One was that girl from the western reaches of the Dream Realm, Ki Song...  
  
It was also at that time that he brought a kid named Asterion to Bastion.  
  
By then, Jest was well on his way to fifty, and a Master as well.  
  
But still... the moment he saw that teenage boy, he somehow felt a strong and chilling sense of unease.