2168 Sense of Alarm  
  
A bit later, Jest finished the call and put his communicator down, then stared at the wall with a dazed expression.  
  
Wake of Ruin was not mistaken. Very few people knew which Seed of Nightmare Broken Sword and his cohort had challenged, not to mention which Gate was connected to it — this was the kind of information Legacy Clans usually kept to themselves.  
  
But Wake of Ruin was one of the pillars of the government, so he knew. That was why he had been secretly monitoring Gate C2-167, knowing that any change in its condition — or lack thereof, after a certain time — would have an effect on the entire world, one way or another.  
  
Because of who had challenged that Nightmare.  
  
So, he would have known if the Gate suddenly closed. Jest was not satisfied with just that, though, so he forced the man to check right there and then — Wake of Ruin could gain access to the telemetry of the Obel Scale faster than he could, so it only took ten minutes.  
  
There was no doubt. The Gate was still open.  
  
Which meant...  
  
Jest had no idea what that meant. It did not make any sense.  
  
Had the Nightmare not been conquered? Had its Seed not been destroyed despite the Nightmare being conquered? Was Anvil's strange state somehow connected to that anomaly?  
  
How was Anvil back?  
  
Jest raised a hand and rubbed his temple.  
  
"What the hell is happening?"  
  
He hesitated for a while, then dialed another number.  
  
He had to be discreet about the questions he asked and the people he talked to, so it took some time, but eventually, it became clear that neither the Immortal Flame clan nor the Song clan were showing any unusual movements.  
  
Which meant that nothing had happened to Broken Sword, Smile of Heaven, or Ki Song. They had neither awoken nor perished.  
  
Short of contacting Immortal Flame himself, Jest was not going to get a more concrete confirmation.  
  
Which... he could do, theoretically.  
  
However, there was an easier way to gain clarity. Frowning, Jest left the underground portion of the Dagonet estate and proceeded to the garage. Soon, he was driving a luxurious PTV across the streets of NQSC, struggling to keep himself from speeding recklessly.  
  
The subtle sense of unease he had been feeling in Bastion had grown stronger, turning into alarm.  
  
'What is going on?'  
  
What was it?  
  
He should have been celebrating and drinking expensive wine now that Anvil had returned unscathed, but instead, he was feeling like something teгrible happened.  
  
Was happening.  
  
Like he had made a mistake.  
  
It seemed like the world itself was against him. His communicator made a grаting sound as Jest was driving, announcing that a Nightmare Gate would soon open nearby. As a result, the streets ahead turned impassable due to the evacuation procedures. Government vehicles blocked the roads, and he had to take a long detour to arrive at his destination.  
  
Which was Clan Valor's compound.  
  
Jest used to live relatively close to their headquarters in NQSC, but after losing his son, his family moved away. So, it had taken him quite some time to reach the heart of the city. By the time his PTV stopped in front of the heavily defended gates, it was already early morning.  
  
Gaining entry inside the compound, however, was relatively quick. Soon, he was already walking to the main building.  
  
"Master Jest! You are visiting us at a peculiar time. May I be of assistance?"  
  
He stared at the butler, Sebastian — one of Warden's original followers, just like Jest himself was. He, too, had been left behind when Warden challenged the Third Nightmare.  
  
It was fortunate to meet him instead of a member of the extended Valor family. Jest trusted the guy much more than he did those people.  
  
His suspicions were already confirmed by how nonchalant the butler looked, and how peaceful the compound seemed.  
  
But he still needed to check.  
  
Jest leaned forward a little.  
  
"Sebastian... take me to see the young lord."  
  
The butler studied him silently.  
  
Awakened were exceedingly vulnerable while they slept, so the sleeping pods of Legacies were guarded with extreme caution. Jest was one of the most loyal subjects of Valor... but he was also a notorious killer.  
  
If he chose to betray the family of his late friend and benefactor, giving him access to Anvil's sleeping pod would be a fatal mistake.  
  
Nevertheless, the butler nodded eventually.  
  
"Follow me."  
  
The two of them proceed past several security checks, descending deep underground. The vault of Clan Dagonet was quite formidable, but it could not even compare to the security measures of the Valor compound. Jest doubted that even a Titan could break through these defensеs easily.  
  
Then again, the hungry forest that had been besieging Bastion for two and a half decades could even destroy the ancient Citadel if not for the efforts of its defenders. So, a real Titan would probably crack this shell of enchanted alloy in a matter of days, if not hours.  
  
Eventually, they reached the most heavily defended floor. Here, the sleeping pods of the direct descendants of the Valor clan — Anvil and Madoc — were located.  
  
Even their wives slept on a different floor when visiting the Dream Realm.  
  
However, at the moment, there was a third occupant here. The kid, Asterion, was taking up one of the rooms.  
  
The butler entered several security codes to proceed into the depths of the fortified level. They also had to stay in place while undergoing several scans, both mundane and magical.  
  
In the end, however, Jest finally found himself in front of a heavy steel door.  
  
It opened slowly, and he walked inside.  
  
There, an iron sarcophagus stood on a low platform, shimmering in the darkness. It was Anvil's sleeping pod — one he had entered before setting out to conquer the Nightmare.  
  
Jest felt his heart beating rapidly as he approached the sarcophagus and looked through the narrow window on its lid.  
  
Then, he took a shaky breath.  
  
The sleeping pod... was not empty.  
  
Anvil was laying inside, slеeping peacefully. He was right there.  
  
Jest staggered back, deeply stunned.  
  
'What... what the...'  
  
Everything, including his own two eyes, was pointing to the fact that Broken Sword's cohort was still in the depths of the Nightmare.  
  
Аnvil was still in the Nightmare, as well.  
  
And if he was there...  
  
Then who the hell was currently in Bastion?  
  
Jest suddenly felt cold sweat rolling down his back.  
  
Who was in Bastion...  
  
Or what was?