2172 Descent  
  
Jest blinked.  
  
The voice was cold and indifferent... as it was supposed to be. But after spending some time in the company of the warm and friendly anomaly, it sounded a bit jarring.  
  
And strangely comforting.  
  
He hesitated.  
  
"C—congratulations on conquering the Nightmare, Ascended Anvil!"  
  
Anvil nodded matter-of-factly, then looked around and pursed his lips, as if evaluating the cost of repairs needed to restore the sleeping chamber. A moment later, he looked into the distance — most likely reading the Spell's runes.  
  
Then, he turned back to Jest.  
  
"Thank you. But what are you doing here?"  
  
Jest felt his mouth suddenly turning dry.  
  
"Well... about that. Actually, we have been dealing with a bit of a situation here."  
  
Anvil frowned slightly.  
  
"What kind of situation?"  
  
Jest coughed.  
  
"That, uh... nothing too serious?"  
  
He thought for a moment, and then said:  
  
"It's just that while you were gone, we've replaced you with a doppelganger. He's nicer and easier to get along with. Your wife is with him right now!"  
  
Anvil stared at him for a moment, then rolled his eyes.  
  
"Is this really a good time for your jokes, Uncle Jest?"  
  
Jest remained silent for a moment, then sighed.  
  
"Boy... I wish it was a joke. But there really is a copy of you, who just popped up in Bastion one day without any warning. I don't know how to explain it, but he is being held here, just a few floors below, at the moment."  
  
Anvil looked at him silently.  
  
Then, his expression slowly changed.  
  
Jest had not expected him to laugh at his awkward joke — gods knew the boy was just like his father, having no sense of humor whatsoever — but what he really did not expect was to see fear bloom on Anvil's face.  
  
Terror, even.  
  
It was so strange that Jest was stunned.  
  
He did not think that he had ever seen Anvil show fear, not even as a child. And especially not after encasing his heart in the cold armor of indifference.  
  
While Jest was paralyzed by shock, the young man asked in a hoarse voice, his usual nonchalance completely gone:  
  
"A copy... of me... appeared in Bastion?"  
  
Jest nodded.  
  
"Yes. He was found in the throne room. Uh... stark naked and in a strange mental state..."  
  
Anvil's took a step back.  
  
"H—how... how long ago? Has anyone seen it... has anyone talkеd to it? How many people? Who?"  
  
Jest lingered for a moment, the old sense of alarm slowly turning into panic in his heart.  
  
'Did I... did I make a mistake?'  
  
He forced himself to answer:  
  
"Abоut... two weeks ago? A couple of Squires and a few Knights. It was mostly me and Madoc watching over him. Oh, and Gwyn, obviously."  
  
Anvil's eyes suddenly widened.  
  
"Gwyn!"  
  
Before Jest could say anything else, the chamber suddenly came undone.  
  
That was the only way he could describe it — the floor opened like a flower, the thick plates of reinforced alloy tearing with a deafening screech. Shards of concrete and sparks from torn cables flew to all sides, and at the same time, the blinking lights were extinguished completely.  
  
Anvil jumped into the churning pit of torn metal without wasting a single moment. No, he did not jump — rather, he flew, accelerating his movements by pushing the steel plates of his armor.  
  
'Since when can he...'  
  
The whole compound shook as a cacophony of noise rolled across the underground tunnels.  
  
'D—damn!'  
  
Jest came to his senses and dove into the pit to follow Anvil.  
  
Even though he had only wasted a single moment, he was already far behind.  
  
The floor of the sleeping chamber had been utterly destroyed, as if it had been made of paper. The room below it was in ruins, too, entire meters of reinforced alloy pierced and bent out of the way in a split second. The same for the floor below that.  
  
It was as if a cataclysmic disaster had transpired in the depths of the Valor compound.  
  
Jest fell for a couple of seconds before finally landing on something that was intact. He was now on the level where the anomaly was being kept, and immediately rushed toward the living quarters.  
  
He saw the obliterated door and the Knights who were picking themselves off the floor with dazed expressions. Just before he could cross the threshold, though, a powerful shockwave rolled from inside, throwing him back.  
  
Jest flew through the air and collided with a wall, leaving a deep dent in it. A mundane human would have been turned into bloody goo by the force of the impact... as a Master, he was somewhat unscathed.  
  
But it hurt like hell.  
  
The Knights were alive, but unconscious.  
  
Ignoring the pain, Jest picked himself up and lunged back toward the containment cell.  
  
The compound quaked once more, and there was another shockwave. But this time, he was prepared for it — lowering his torso and turning it slightly, Jest cut the shockwave with his shoulder and finally entered the devastated living quarters.  
  
It was too dark to see, since all the lights had been destroyed, and the only source of illumination was one of Gwyn's Memory lanterns.  
  
Taking a step forward, Jest fell.  
  
'Argh, damn it, why does he have to keep destroying the floor?!'  
  
The entire set of rooms assigned to be the anomaly's living quarters were gone. The few floors below were completely wrecked, as well. Judging by the magnitude of destruction... the thing he had brought to Anvil's home was chillingly powerful.  
  
After bouncing off a few jagged pieces of torn alloy, Jest hit the ground. This time, it was not the metal floor... instead, it was cold, wet soil. They were on the lowest level of the compound now, its outer walls seemingly obliterated.  
  
Rolling, Jest jump to his feet and stood up.  
  
There was a scene of devastation around him, with plates of bent alloy and unrecognizable debris piling in the darkness. Some of it was on fire, filling the remains of the lowest floor with dim light.  
  
Just when he regained his bearing and looked around, searching for Anvil...  
  
He heard a strange sound.  
  
It should have been drowned out by the noise, but somehow, Jest heard it clearly.  
  
A melodious, bright ringing of breaking glass.  
  
It was only then that the sense of unease that had been tormenting him for the past two weeks finally disappeared, and he involuntarily let out a relieved sigh.