2200 Army of the Dead  
  
As the war dragged on, a great number of people had been killed in the fierce clashes between the two invading armies — and perhaps an even greater number of Nightmare Creatures had perished to human blades. Many, if not most of them, became puppets of the Queen of Worms.  
  
The Sword Army had destroyed countless pilgrims, and yet, their number only continued to grow. That was why time was an ally of the Song Domain — the longer the war continued, the more advantage it gained.  
  
That advantage had already played a large role in the siege of the Greater Crossing Stronghold. Pilgrims made for convenient meat shields for the defenders of the fortress, sacrificing their bodies to lessen the losses suffered by the Song Army, while at the same time increasing the losses suffered by the forces of the Sword Domain.  
  
And yet, the pilgrims had never been a decisive factor in the battles between the two human armies.  
  
...Today, that could very well change.  
  
Ki Song had amassed a secret army of the dead at the bottom of the abyssal chasm, and now, that army crawled from the darkness. A tide of ashen corpses poured from the depths, climbing the puppeteered corpses of the monstrous worms like siege towers.  
  
Sunny gritted his teeth as the wind carried the shouts of the officers to his ears from the ground. They were desperately trying to assemble the army into a solid battle formation in time, but it was hopeless.  
  
The avalanche of the ashen dead had caught them by surprise.  
  
Before the disorganized soldiers could form into a proper line, the dead tide was upon them. Ashen corpses tore into the vulnerable mass of humans like hungry wolves, ripping into their armor and their flesh with bare hands — as well as with fangs, claws, and mandibles, since there were plenty of dead Nightmare Creatures among them.  
  
This time, there was something different about the pilgrims. It seemed... it seemed that the Queen was not holding herself back аnymore.  
  
Before, her puppets were a little sluggish and somewhat easy to deal with. But now, they moved with great precision and skill, no less deadly than seasoned Awakened warriors were... no, in fact, it was as if each of them possessed skill and combat awareness that were far greater than those of ordinary soldiers.  
  
With his shadow sense, which spread far and wide to encompass the entire field, Sunny could feel the full extent of their chilling lethality. Their skill was so eerily deadly and profound, in fact, that he was struggling to understand its essence... as if each and every one of the countless pilgrims was a superior fighter than him, or his equal at least.  
  
The thought made Sunny shiver.  
  
'Is she controlling each of them... all of them... by hand now?'  
  
If Ki Song was capable of personally controlling all of her countless puppets at the same time, then her power was even greater than they had feared.  
  
The pilgrims moved with cold and ruthless determination. The Awakened soldiers stood no chance against these dead, unfeeling killing machines... or they would not have, if not for the very nature of the Queen's puppets. Pilgrims had no souls, and therefore lacked the ability to possess and summon Memories — so, they fought unarmed.  
  
More than that, many of the bodies that had fallen into the chasm were severely damaged, which limited their strength and mobility. They seemed to be able to mend themselves, to a degree, but Ki Song was either unwilling or unable to truly restore these broken bodies to a better state.  
  
Human blood flowed upon the white surface of the ancient bone.  
  
Sunny felt sick to his stomach.  
  
Not only because people were dying far below, but also because he was the reason they were dying.  
  
After all, if it wasn't for him, Nephis, and Cassie, this battle would not have happened.  
  
The Song soldiers at the Lesser Crossing Stronghold would have been dying under the swords of Anvil's warriors in a day or two, instead.  
  
The sum of deaths might not have changed as a result of Cassie's actions — and his silent support of her — but nevertheless, he felt like a traitor.  
  
No, he was a traitor. To the people who were dying because of his betrayal far below, he was.  
  
That was a burden Sunny would have to carry, and its weight, while not great, was still unpleasant.  
  
The tide of the dead bit into the side of the unprepared army, causing heavy casualties. Worse still, those of the soldiers who perished rose from the ground a few moments later, empty-eyed, joining the ranks of the rampaging corpses.  
  
For a minute or two, it seemed as if the initial shock of the pilgrim attack would snowball into a one-sided massacre — one that would only grow into a harrowing disaster before too long.  
  
But the soldiers of the Sword Army were not weaklings, either.  
  
As the initial shock receded, the soldiers dug down and met the Queen's puppets blow for blow. Overcoming their horror, they greeted their teeth and stood their ground. The officers organized their warriors into unit-scale formations, bringing order to the senseless slaughter. The units moved to support each other and merge into a proper battle line.  
  
The battle line could have still collapsed... but at that moment, the Saints entered the battlefield, pushing the tide of pilgrims back.  
  
Nephis was there, as well, her flames spreading far and wide to wash away the wounds of the soldiers and save those who would have joined the army of the dead otherwise.  
  
The Queen took the dead, making them rise from the ground with empty eyes... Changing Star, however, healed the living, helping them rise to their feet with their own strength.  
  
The Chain Breaker reached the battlefield, and the Fire Keepers jumped down from its deck, joining the fight.  
  
It seemed as if the Sword Army would be able to repel the unexpected attack, after all...  
  
But, of course, that was merely an illusion.  
  
Because the pilgrims were not the tip of the spear. They were a distraction.  
  
Their purpose was to buy enough time for the real peril to arrive...