2219 Shattered Earth, Breaking Sky  
  
Hell had descended upon Godgrave.  
  
A storm of rustling swords blotted out the sky, unleashing a devastating rain of slaying steel upon the sea of living corpses that flooded the blood-soaked reaches of the shattered bone plain. Grotesque figures of towering Titans were straining to break the chains of sorcery that bound them, the ground quaked like a wounded beast convulsing in the throes of death, and a violent litany of deafening noises seemed to shake the very foundation of the world.  
  
Two demigods continued their mortal battle high above the fractured battlefield, observed in silence by the distant, evil omen of the dead god’s skull.  
  
Far below, on the broken ground, a scarlet flood was flowing from the black cracks like bloody foam. The ancient jungle was rising from the dim twilight of the Hollows, starved for light and warmth — with it, countless harrowing abominations crawled to the surface, driven into a dreadful frenzy by the fury of the great battle and the tantalizing scent of human souls.  
  
Even Sunny, who had seen a hell or two throughout his life, felt somewhat shaken by the scope and scale of the disastrous calamity, as well as by its astonishing nature...  
  
He could not even imagine what the ordinary soldiers felt.  
  
The two human armies were on the verge of being consumed by the dreadful tide of Nightmare Creatures.  
  
However, the veterans of the Great War were a tough tribe — they had not lost their minds to fear, even in the middle of а seemingly aρocalyptic disaster.  
  
The Saints had regained their composure first, moving to intercept the most dangerous of the emerging abominations while barking orders at the paralyzed Masters. The Masters followed the orders — mechanically at first, as if simply out of habit, then with a growing sense of purposeful determination. They rallied the Awakened soldiers and joined them in defending against the chilling flood of Nightmare Creatures.  
  
Despite that...  
  
The death toll was heavy in those first few moments. Then, as the two armies rose to face the liberated jungle, it lessened somewhat — but it was still of no use.  
  
Sunny, whose incarnations allowed him a perfect view of what was happening on both sides of the battlefield, could see it clearly. One incarnation was among the soldiers of the Sword Army, one was among the soldiers of Song, and one was watching it all from a great height.  
  
There were too many cracks, and the Nightmare Creatures crawling out of them were too powerful. These weren’t the surface dwellers whom the soldiers of the two great armies had faced before, during the conquest of the Collarbone Plain, the Breastbone Reach, and the ribs of the dead god — and who had already been nearly too dreadful for Awakened to fight.  
  
Instead, they were the ancient horrors of the Hollows, the great and dreadful predators who had spent countless years hunting others of their ghastly kind in the eternal twilight of the scarlet jungle. Many of them were of the Great Rank, and therefore almost entirely impervious to the attacks of the Awakened soldiers. Only the Saints could face them... but there were not enough Saints аround.  
  
Even worse, neither of the two armies had managed to maintain their formation. The cracks had appeared too suddenly, and they cut the battle lines, breaking them. Instead of presenting a united front against the tide of powerful abominations, the soldiers were now fighting desperately in whatever formations they could assemble, surrounded from all sides by the flood of monsters.  
  
The situation seemed bleak. Despite the daunting scale of the battle and the immensity of the two great armies, the struggling clusters of human soldiers were like islands doomed to drown in the rising sea of scarlet darkness. They were resisting for now, but the writing was on the wall.  
  
If nothing changed, both armies would be consumed, disappearing without a trace.  
  
The Song Army was faring a little better, at least — its position was closer to the edge of the dead god’s breastbone, so there were very few Nightmare Creatures attacking the soldiers of Song from the rear. Seishan had realized that fact, it seemed, and was now struggling to get her army to retreat further north.  
  
The Sword Army, however, was in dire straits.  
  
Sunny had summoned Saint and Fiend, sending them to help the soldiers. After hesitating for a few moments, he manifested two more avatars of himself, so that three incarnations of the Lord of Shadows could enter battle. All of them descended upon the Nightmare Creatures, holding the scarlet tide back.  
  
He had to be wary of wasting essence before confronting Sovereigns, but with Serpent in his hands and countless abominations around, replenishing it by killing them would not be a problem.  
  
Sunny and his Shadows were like heralds of death, each a devastating presence on the battlefield — but even his presence was woefully insufficient to break the tide. It was like a drop on the ocean, at least for as long as he was still holding back.  
  
Some distance away, Nephis was like a beacon of hope in the sea of hungry darkness. The core of the Sword Army rallied around her, the soldiers being healed by her flames while her sword reaped the lives of the most powerful Nightmare Creatures.  
  
However, she was in the same situation as Sunny.  
  
One of his shadows was still hiding in her own.  
  
Using the moment, he spoke to her and relayed the information shared by Cassie as quickly as he could. Then, Sunny fell silent for a moment, waiting foг her to finish off a hideous abomination that resembled a rotten, walking tree with a trunk littered by countless jagged maws... or perhaps a dead beast whose body had become the host of a tree-like parasite.  
  
The white flames engulfed the ghastly creature, turning the scarlet leaves to ash, and the incandescent sword — the Kinslayer — cut the trunk in half.  
  
There were already two equally horrid Nightmare Creatures rushing at Nephis through the flames a moment later.  
  
He spoke:  
  
“We won’t last long here.”  
  
She looked around the battlefield, then nodded briefly.  
  
“...We must advance.”  
  
Sunny lingered for a moment, then chuckled darkly.  
  
“Advance? Advance where?!”  
  
Nephis lunged at the two abominations, brandishing her Supreme sword.  
  
“Across the battlefield, toward the edge of the plain. To reach the Song Army, or at least get on solid bone!”  
  
He regarded the carnage of the calamitous battlefield from the edge of the Ivory Island, remained silent for a moment, and took a deep breath.  
  
“That is... a crazy idea!”  
  
Sunny rose from Neph’s shadow, manifesting one more avatar.  
  
Crushing the second abomination’s skull with a monstrous blow of his armored fist, he glanced at Nephis and grinned beneath the visor of his onyx helmet.  
  
“It might just work!”