2220 Infernal Trailblazer  
  
Sunny smiled... but his smile was quite forced. He could not bring himself to feel the desperate kind of glee that often overwhelmed him when in situations that seemed too bleak to cope with.  
  
Luckily, his face was hidden behind the visor of the Mantle’s helmet, so Nephis did not see his hesitation. To her, the Lord of Shadows looked as he always did — cold, confident, and full of aloof arrogance.  
  
It was such a misplaced impulse, to look good in front of her even in the middle of a literal hell descending, and yet Sunny could not help but want to.  
  
Reaching into the shadows, he pulled a black spear out of them, and then looked back to Nephis.  
  
“I’ll carve the path for the army to follow.”  
  
As the words left his mouth, the shadows stirred...  
  
Then, a dreadful figure rose from them, making the soldiers shudder and flinch away.  
  
The vast shadow took the form of a tenebrous steed with wolf-like fangs and two sharp horns, its eyes burning with terrifying crimson flames. The stallion seemed to be wreathed in a ghostly, indistinct haze of moving shadows, as if surrounded by a swarm of living nightmares, his sable coat seemingly absorbing light.  
  
Just looking at the towering destrier filled the hearts of the soldiers with a cold feeling of dread... which was quite a feat, really, considering how terrified they had been already.  
  
The soldiers flinched away, but Sunny took a step toward the nightmarish steed instead. Patting him on the powerful side, he said:  
  
“Hey there, buddy. I really missed having you around.”  
  
Nightmare turned the chilling gaze of his crimson eye toward Sunny, lingered for a few moments, then snorted quietly.  
  
Sunny smiled.  
  
“Hey, I’ve been working hard too, you know!”  
  
With that, he jumped into the saddle, lowered his spear a little, and looked at Nephis from above.  
  
“...You’d better follow soon.”  
  
She nodded, already giving orders to the nearby officers.  
  
Nightmare rushed forward.  
  
The dreadful dark destrier moved with the speed of lightning, his adamantine hooves striking sparks from the ancient bone. He rushed through the ranks of the soldiers like a wave of darkness, then soared high into the air, breaching hundreds of meters in a single leap.  
  
A few moments later, the tenebrous steed landed nimbly outside the crumbling formation, in the middle of the mass of abominations. Bones broke beneath his hooves, and flesh was torn by his steel fangs.  
  
Splatters of blood flew in all directions, and Nightmare Creatures, who were not supposed to know fear, suddenly cowered in terror.  
  
No matter how dreadful and deadly the black stallion was, however, his rider was like the devil himself. His fearsome onyx armor glistened dimly, and the plume of his helmet fluttered in the wind — his dark spear moved with terrible speed, piercing bodies and severing limbs. Mangled corpses fell to the ground.  
  
For a brief moment, it seemed as if the destrier and his rider would be swallowed by the tide of abominations, but instead, the tide of abominations was broken by their furious assault. The shadows stirred around them, widening the gap, and the Lord of Shadows rode forth, leaving a trail of death and devastation in his wake.  
  
Behind him, the Sword Army slowly started to advance.  
  
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“This is... useless...”  
  
Rain staggered back, pulled by Fleur. A moment later, a hideous claw tore at the ground where she had been standing a moment ago, leaving deep grooves in the bone that had sеemed indestructible before.  
  
The titanic skeleton had been a symbol of mystical fear for the soldiers of the Song Army, and although few truly believed that it had belonged to an actual god once, many came to regard it with the same reverence. However, today, Godgrave had proven to be far more fragile than they believed it to be.  
  
The entire bone plain had been fractured by the King and the Queen, and now, Nightmare Creatures powerful enough to leave marks on its surface were besieging the Song Army.  
  
Needless to say, Awakened soldiers were like ants in front of these harrowing abominations.  
  
They had always been weaker than the native inhabitants of Godgrave, and so, the Song Army developed various ways of dealing with stronger opponents. Rain’s own arsenal was largely aimed at debilitating the enemy through various means... and yet, today, her arrows were proving to be completely inefficient.  
  
“What a blessing.”  
  
She did not even have to worry about her Flaw, because there was no chance in hell that she would be able to kill anything.  
  
Even though Rain did not want to admit it, she felt despair settle in her heart.  
  
“Rain! S—snap out of it!”  
  
Fleur pulled her back, and Tamar advanced, desperately trying to slow down the attacking horror. Her zweihander plummeted down, striking the abomination... and bouncing off uselessly. The Legacy girl staggered from the recoil of the powerful blow, and Rain’s eyes widened when dreadful claws shot toward her body.  
  
A split second later, one of the Blood Sisters landed on the Nightmare Creature’s back, piercing its neck with a wavy dagger. Something flashed, and Tamar was tossed back — there was a deep gash on her side, but she was alive.  
  
All around them, the Song Army was slowly buckling under the tide of monsters. The Nightmare Creatures were already impossible to overcome, but there was also the scarlet infestation itself they had to contend against. A mass of vines, moss, and grass spilled from the deep cracks in the ancient bone, crawling across its surface like a plague.  
  
The jungle brought all kinds of deadly perils with it.  
  
“Damn... damn it...”  
  
Rain had no name for the emotion she felt, but could sense something boiling deep within her soul regardless.  
  
Just then, Ray appeared out of nowhere, grabbed Tamar, and helped her stand up. The four of them did not even receive a momentary respite before another abomination lunged at them, its maw opening wide enough to swallow the entire cohort whole.  
  
This time, there was no escape.  
  
Before they were consumed, however...  
  
Rain’s shadows suddenly moved and rose from the ground. A dark blade flashed in the air, and the lunging monstrosity was cleanly cut in half.  
  
She let out a relieved sigh. Sunny was here...  
  
“Wait.”  
  
Did he just openly climb out of her shadow?  
  
Rain... did not know whether to be glad or horrified.  
  
Obviously, she was happy that he was with her. But if her brother had decided to reveal himself... then the situation was truly desperate.  
  
He was also wearing а fearsome onyx armor and a closed helmet, emanating a cold and unfamiliar presence.  
  
Turning his head slightly, her brother — the Lord of Shadows — brushed across the members of her cohort with an indifferent gaze. His cold voice seemed devoid of all emotions:  
  
“Huh... you three again. Haven’t we met before?”  
  
Tamar, Ray, and Fleur stared at him in stunned silence for a moment.  
  
They would have stared more if not for the fact that the first row of the Seventh Legion was on the verge of collapsing under the onslaught of Nightmare Creatures.  
  
Then, however, something strange happened.  
  
The pressure on the fighters seemed to lessen slightly, and a new abomination emerged from the mass of monsters — this one even more dreadful than the rest.  
  
It was a rider on a terrifying black steed, both of them drenched in blood and surrounded by a veil of moving shadows.  
  
And behind them...  
  
Rain’s eyes widened.  
  
“I’m seeing things, right?”  
  
Was she mistaken, or were there vermillion banners moving behind the wall of Nightmare Creatures?  
  
Surely, she was mistaken...