2223 Blood and Steel  
  
High above the battlefield, the King of Swords was still being pursued by the river of crimson blood. Surrounded by the storm of swords, he retreated closer and closer to the swirling veil of radiant clouds... as if being driven into a corner.  
  
Far below, the fractured bone plain was swelling with scarlet rot, and the dead Titans were struggling against the chains of sorcery that bound them. The shimmering runes formed by countless flying swords were already vague and distorted, on the verge of crumbling.  
  
Finally, one of the colossal creatures broke free of its ethereal cage and steeped forward, ready to unleash its profane power.  
  
Before it could, however...  
  
Anvil spun in the air and slashed with one of his dreadful swords, causing the world itself to split in half.  
  
The thin line where reality seemed to be cut extended all the way down to the surface of the shattered battlefield, passing across the gargantuan figure of the Titan. A moment later, the world healed itself, and the scar left on its fabric by the King's strike was erased.  
  
The Titan, however, staggered and fell apart, cut cleanly in two.  
  
The severed giant plummeted down. Its mountain-like body was so vast that a dozen seconds passed before its dreadful mass hit the ground — when it did, the entire bone plain shuddered, and the cracks marring its fractured surface grew wider.  
  
By then, Anvil was already landing on the quaking bone. Grasping his two swords and commanding the other five to form a rustling sphere of lethal steel around him once again, he looked at the great waterfall of blood that threatened to drown him... and attacked.  
  
This time, his attacks were eerily different in nature.  
  
They seemed the same, but there was something uncanny about the way his swords moved now, as if he was aiming their dreadful blades at something that mortals could not even perceive, let alone fathom.  
  
The river of blood rippled strangely and reeled back, as if hurt. All around the battlefield, hundreds of dead puppets fell to the ground lifelessly-- there were no wounds on their bodies, and no blood flowing to the surface of the ancient bone. However, despite that, the corpses remained laying on it motionlessly, as if the Queen had no power over them anymore.  
  
Lowering his swords slightly, Anvil stared at the crimson wall of blood towering above him darkly.  
  
A cold voice resounded from beneath the visor of his black helmet:  
  
"Why don't you get serious, now?"  
  
A melodious laughter suddenly surrounded him, carried by the gales of hurricane wind.  
  
"Shall I?"  
  
As the echoes of the Queen's laughter were swallowed by the cacophony of battle, the sea of crimson blood rippled once again and receded a little. Some distance away, the colossal corpse of the slain Titan that towered above the plain like a mountаin stirred suddenly, and then moved.  
  
The flesh of the gargantuan creature began to rot with tremendous speed, soon turning into a flood of viscous crimson liquid. The revolting mass of it flowed forward and rose from the ground, surrounding the sea of blood like a shell.  
  
Then, the process of decomposition was reversed, and it turned solid again. Soon, a terrifying flesh golem rose above the fractured plain, towering above it at hundreds meters in height... the river of blood was now contained within it, flowing through its veins and nurturing it with Supreme power.  
  
Pieces of broken bone extended through the monstrous doll's torn skin, and a vague outline of a human face lay hidden beneath the hideous features of its face.  
  
Anvil let out a low chuckle.  
  
"Ah... how distasteful..."  
  
As torrents of flying swords twisted in the air and plummeted down, aiming to tear the towering flesh golem apart, it lunged forward with speed that no creature of that size was supposed to possess.  
  
Its two gargantuan hands rose, and then fell down like crushing hammers. Anvil's five swords rushed forward to block the harrowing strike, and the moment the fists of the Queen met them...  
  
A flash of light drowned the battlefield for a moment, and an obliterating shockwave spread in all directions, disintegrating thousands of flying swords, turning countless puppets into bloody haze, and causing several enormous pieces of the bone plain to plummet into the depths of the Hollows.  
  
...Observing the cataclysmic collision from the distant surface of the Ivory Island, Sunny shivered.  
  
He did not have to turn away to look at the pitiful state of the two great armies. Nephis was still holding the core of the vast, disorganized mob of human soldiers together, while he was dealing with the worst of the nightmare tide at its edges. The Saints were still fighting, and the Awakened warriors were still enduring, as well...  
  
But the situation was turning grimmer and grimmer with each minute.  
  
He was barely pгeseгving all his incarnations and keeping the truly powerful abominations away from Rain. The amount of essence he received back from slaughtering Nightmare Creatures had fallen behind the amount he was expending some time ago, and Nephis was not doing any better.  
  
His Shadows were receiving one wound after another, too... and if even Fiend was suffering damage, then the Saints of the two Domains would soon be on the verge of death.  
  
In fact, a few of them had already perished.  
  
Beastmaster's thralls were nearly eradicated. The forged Echoes of the Valor elites had all been destroyed. The casualties among the soldiers were mounting, and with every one of them that fell, there was one less warrior to stem the flood of abominations left standing.  
  
Worse still, the jungle was escaping onto the surface of the fractured plain. Before, the humans only had to contend the dreadful predators of the Hollows — but now, the spreading scarlet plague was threatening to swallow them, as well.  
  
The hungry moss, the bloodthirsty grass, the poisonous thorns of slithering vines, the clouds of deadly pollen, the spores that landed on human flesh only to sprout abominable mycelia through it... the soldiers had to suffer all of it and more, all the while being torn apart and devoured by the ghastly Nightmare Creatures.  
  
He had joкed about Beastmaster's missing eye before... but really, Sunny was disturbed by the sight. If even the immensely powerful princess of Song could not protect herself in this inconceivable calamity, then what hopе did the rest of them have?  
  
Sunny's thoughts turned somber.  
  
The plan... the plan was to wait until the Sovereigns had exhausted each other, or, better yet, had brought each other to the brink of death — he and Nephis were only supposed to attack them then.  
  
However, Sunny was not sure that they could wait for much longer, not anymore.  
  
Not only were the great armies in a desperate situation, but Sunny and Nephis were wasting essence — both of them possessed vast reserves of it, but those reserved would only continue to dwindle.  
  
Then, who would be exhausted and on the brink of death by the time they entered the fray?  
  
Looking into the distance with a grim expression, Sunny grimaced.  
  
So, then...  
  
When were they supposed to attack?  
  
Only one person knew the answer.  
  
'I need to find Cassie...'