2286 Bountiful Harvest  
  
As Nightmare leaped across the tangled surface of the charred deadfall and landed on the fallen trunk of an enormous tree, easily hundreds of meters across, champions of the Shadow Legion surged forward.  
  
The rushing millipedes cowered as the aura of dread surrounding the black steed washed over them like a cold wave. A split second later, Saint's dark blade fell, slicing the chitin like paper.  
  
Not far behind her, something massive moved. The ground shaking as it did - as if a dark hill was moving across the fallen trees.  
  
Then, the towering figure opened its four arms wide and let out a low, alarming roar that reverberated across the battlefield like the voice of an erupting volcano. Infernal flames ignited in the depths of the steel giant's maw, and his eyes blazed with fire.  
  
…Fiend had hit a growth spurt in the wake of the war in Godgrave.  
  
The tiny imp used to be no taller than Sunny's knee, but now, he towered above the battlefield at more than forty meters in height, his powerful body encased in an impenetrable steel carapace and littered with innumerable sharp spikes - like a hellish colossus cast from many great swords.  
  
As the red flames burning within him flared to life, Fiend lowered his torso and lunged forward, crushing the millipedes under his feet and slicing them apart with his enormous, dreadfully sharp claws.  
  
A moment later, King Daeron entered the fray, wearing a regal suit of armor forged of shadows and wielding a heavy mace.  
  
Wind Flower, twin shadows of Solvane, and the seven Saints of Song were not far behind him - some as humans wielding sharp weapons, some having assumed their Transcendent forms. The latter, too, were wearing armor forged to fit their bestial forms by Anvil's shadow. So were the shades of the Great Nightmare Creatures Sunny had slain in Godgrave.  
  
The old predators of the detestable jungle had always been powerful and deadly, but now that their terrifying bodies were protected by armor forgеd of shadows, their claws and fangs turned to even deadlier weapons, they were both more resilient and far more annihilating.  
  
Every other elite of the Shadow Legion rushed forward, as well - the Defiled Seeker of Truth, Goliath, Remnant of the Jade Queen, the Asuras of Condemnation… And following them, a sea of Corrupted shades tore into the tide of hideous millipedes too.  
  
A scene of alarming violence took place under the watchful gaze of Sunny's incarnations.  
  
Myriad millipedes were being destroyed - only to join the ranks of the Shadow Legion seconds later. His shades fell, as well, disappearing from under the ashen sky in indifferent silence.  
  
'Do уou think we will win today?'  
  
Sunny looked at himself and answered his own question with a shrug.  
  
',It's indecisive.'  
  
Then, he glanced at the battlefield and smiled chillingly.  
  
'Today's harvest will be just fine, though.'  
  
He laughed at himself, shaking his head in amusement.  
  
'Look at you, talking like the Grim Reaper.'  
  
The Shadow Legion stood its ground against the overwhelming flood of loathsome black millipedes. Despite the fact that the adversary vastly outnumbered them, Sunny's shades were ruthless and fearless. His champions - Saint, Fiend, and the remainder - were especially destructive, leaving a trail of severed and crushed bodies in their wake.  
  
Still, it wasn't quite enough. Soon enough, his forces would be exhausted, most of them sent back to his Soul Sea, and Sunny would have to retreat once again.  
  
Not yet, though. The ground trembled.  
  
His armored incarnation sighed.  
  
'I told you. They are getting smarter. It used to be that they simply attacked us like a mindless mob, but their strategies are growing more and more nuanced.'  
  
Just then, another flood of millipedes suddenly crawled from under the deadfall behind the Shadow Legion, encircling it. A moment later, his shades were attacked from the rear, numerous of them crumbling and dissolving into streams of darkness.  
  
The millipedes had already shown signs of intelligent behavior once the Demons and Devils of their profane tгibe began participating in the battles. Now that the Tyrants were involved, their tactics had become even more complex.  
  
For example, they used the nature of the tangled terrain of the Burned Forest masterfully, moving unseen in the depths of the charred deadfall to stage destructive ambushes and appear unexpectedly behind the adversary.  
  
The armored incarnation chuckled.  
  
'Isn't it time for you to act?'  
  
Sunny smiled.  
  
'Indeed…'  
  
Taking a step forward, he lept off the edge of the towering trunk and plummeted down, toward the distant ground. A river of darkness escaped from the Shadow Lantern, surrounding his body.  
  
By the time Sunny landed, he was enveloped in the Shadow Shell of the dark colossus, at least a hundred meters high… Finally, he was just as tall as Effie's Transcendent form.  
  
Reaching into the shadows to manifest a alarming odachi, Sunny summoned the Jade Mantle to coveг his titanic body and lunged at the enormous centipede that threatened to swallow a dozen of his shadows in one bite.  
  
His appearance on the battlefield caused a stir, forcing several of the Great Devils leading the millipede tribe to rush in his direction.  
  
…Left alone on the charred trunk, Sunny inhaled deeply.  
  
He was far more powerful than any of his champions, naturally. However, unlike the shades, if his incarnation was destroyed, it would be gone forever - so, he had to be cautious about entering a battle as disadvantaged and doomed as this one.  
  
Especially since he was using himself as bait.  
  
As dozens of millipedes climbed up the legs of the shadow colossus, seeking the cracks in his armor to crawl insidе and sink their mandibles into the Shell, Sunny slowly exhaled.  
  
'I already gave you my blood. So, if you will…'  
  
A moment later, he stepped into the shadows, appeared hundreds of meters away, and wrapped himself around Slayer's lithe body.  
  
'Go and hunt.'  
  
The murderous Shadow moved. By now, she was armed with a sinister bow that Sunny had personally crafted for her, carried a quiver of eerie arrows, and had two frightening short swords sheathed at her waist.  
  
Rising from the shadows of the Burned Forest, Slayer moved like a ghost and drew the string of her bow in one smooth, elegant motion.  
  
A moment later, a sharp arrow pierced the head of one of the Great Tyrants leading the swarm of hideous millipedes, causing thousands of them to shudder and lose cohesion.