2383 Lord of Rats  
  
For a moment, Sunny was disoriented.  
  
Slayer's senses were difficult to get used to. Each of her five senses was vastly superior and far sharper than his own - except for his touch, which had been elevated by Bone Weave a long time ago. Fusing with Slayer was like stepping into a world overflowing with an endless complexity of sounds, scents, flavors, and starkly vivid images.  
  
It would have been overwhelming if not for the fact that Sunny had developed a staggering capacity to grasp and absorb new information over the years, as well as while rising in Rank. Still, Slayer possessed more senses than the mundane five, as well - a primitive version of shadow sense, for example, and the remainder that Sunny could not even name.  
  
And there were a myriad of dreadful rats moving simultaneously all around them now. There was the Will of a Cursed Beast bending the world, and the rules of Ariel's Game sapping Slayer of strength. It was enough to send Sunny reeling for a split second.  
  
'So countless,'  
  
Slayer, however, was already moving.  
  
As an avalanche of writing rats descended upon them, she bared her teeth behind her torn veil and dashed forward to meet them. Her black eyes glistened with the cold bloodlust of a merciless predator, and ghostly smoke trailed behind her like a billowing mantle.  
  
At that moment, Sunny felt something strange - something he had never felt before while embracing Slayer as a shadow. The flow of her essence changed, moving awkwardly in a way that was not supposed to be possible… but also purposefully, as if she was remembering something that had been second nature to her once, but then covered by rust as the years passed.  
  
Like she was attempting to channel her radiant soul essence into the sharp blade of her sword - not to satiate its spellweave and activate its enchantments, but simply to saturate the cold steel with it as she would her body.  
  
She failed to achieve whatever it was she was trying to remember, but just barely. So, Slayer activated the enchantment woven into her sword instead.  
  
Sunny had crafted two short swords for his murderous Shadow - one from the metal of the great chains holding up the Chained Isles, one from a splinter of bone from Godgrave. Both were enchanted to be dreadfully sharp and incredibly durable, as well as to return to her hand if she ever lost them. The sheaths of the twin swords were also enchanted, meant to mend the blades in case they were damaged.  
  
There was a difference between the two swords, though. The active enchantment of the one carved from bone coated the blade with an invisible layer of penetrating force, which was meant to allow it to pierce the toughest of armors. The active enchantment of the one forged from metal, on the other hand, was not meant to pierce. It was meant to sever.  
  
The enchantment generated a field of fearsome force and then folded it into a razor-thin plane that extended forward along the path the blade traveled.  
  
Unlike his other Shadows, Slayer could not change her size at will - compared to the huge Nightmare Creatures Sunny routinely faced, she was entirely tiny. So, he had thought of giving her a blade to cut down giants. Its blade was short, but the invisible severing field would be as immense as Slayer could muster.  
  
The enchantment was meant to be used against titanic foes, but it was quite useful against vast swarms of vermin as well.  
  
As the short sword cut the air with a hiss, the fabric of the world seemed severed along its path. Enabled by Slayer's raging, radiant essence, the cut cleaved a hundred-meter gash into the descending mass of rats, obliterating thousands of them. Blood, viscera, and pieces of pulveгized bodies were sent flying high into the air, and a crimson haze suddenly enveloped the slope of the mountain, painting the snow red.  
  
Each of the rats was technically a part of a Cursed being, but there were three rings of ash around Slayer's incomplete core now, fully saturated by Sunny's Supreme will, while Slayer herself was amplified by his dark embrace. So, even while weakened by the Snow Domain, she had no trouble destroying the small creatures.  
  
That was the result of coming to the Shrine of Truth.  
  
There was something wrong… something deeply wrong… happening to the rat swarm, though. Sunny sensed the eerie, unfathomable Will of the Cursed Beast swelling for a moment, and then, he sensed something that sent a chill running down his spine… metaphorically speaking. Sunny did not possess a spine at the moment, and Slayer was not the kind of being to be disturbed by anything.  
  
There were countless rats on the mountain - they had been gnawing on it, slowly eating away at its stone roots, before rushing to devour Slayer. The rats were myriad, and yet, Sunny had still expected to feel their number lessen a little when Slayer destroyed a few thousand. And yet, he felt the opposite. In place of the thousands of slain rats, even more seemed to suddenly appear out of nowhere. The remains of their fallen kin were instantly consumed, and the swarm swelled, increasing in number.  
  
It was then that Sunny intuitively confirmed the essence of his foe.  
  
He had harbored a suspicion even before stepping on the snow-covered slope of the mountain, but now, he was sure of it. And that only made him feel more wary.  
  
'So I was right, after all. Damnation,'  
  
In a sense, the rat swarm - the Rat King - was similar to Abundance. It also pursued endlessness, but while Abundance did so by wielding infinity, the Rat King did so by wielding… propagation.  
  
The concept the Rat King personified was numerousness. Perhaps there had been a single Sacred rat once, a long time ago, but as time went on and it was consumed by Corruption, there were many. And then, there was a myriad.  
  
In short, for every rat Slayer and Sunny destroyed…  
  
Two were going to take its place.  
  
'Ah… that doesn't bode well.'