2385 Pure Soul  
  
Sunny reasoned that the Rat King could not be merely a swarm of mindless vermin - he had battled hordes of abominations before, and they were not at all like the adversary he faced today. The entity he was facing was indeed a swarm, but one guided by a single Will.  
  
Which hinted that there was a single source of that Will - the origin of the innumerable legion of detestable rats that lusted to devour Slayer in berserk hunger. Even if there had not been, the Snow Tyrant would have forced it upon the Rat King.  
  
After all, it needed to control the Snow Beast figure somehow, and Sunny doubted that his enemy could freely create an endlеss number of invisible strings to subjugate each individual rat.  
  
So, he had theorized that there would be a single string, connected to a single rat. That rat was the commander of the Rat Legion, hidden somewhere in the terrifying sea of squirming vermin - the vessel through which the Snow Tyrant controlled the Cursed Beast, as well as its source.  
  
Finding a single rat among myriads seemed like an impossible task. It was much harder than finding a needle in a haystack, to say the least. After all, neither the needle nor the haystack was supposed to move, let alone seethe and writhe in mad bloodlust on the quaking slopes of a crumbling mountain.  
  
But if anyone could accomplish that task, it was Kai.  
  
He had been the first of them to notice the existence of the invisible strings, after all. Sunny himself was not even sure that he was capable of perceiving them - but Kai could.  
  
And although he was not capable of differentiating the original rat from its myriad brethren, he could catch a glimpse of the Snow Tyгant's string again. And then… he could follow it to the target.  
  
That was how Sunny intended to use his adversary's own power against them.  
  
The problem, naturally…  
  
Was that he and Slayer had to survive long enough for Kai to succeed.  
  
And that was not only difficult, but also continued to get harder and harder with each moment.  
  
Slayer was like a dark hurricane, moving across the mountain in a whirlwind of blood and torn flesh. She had already been a force to be reckoned with in the past - a malevolent, sinister force - but now that she was enabled by shadows and ash, wielding enchanted weapons forged by the Sovereign of Death himself, her dreadful malice was simply awesome to behold.  
  
The mountain was covered by the swarming rats entirely, so Slayer could only exist in the wake of staggering slaughter. She had to carve a path for herself with her severing blade, and when that was not enough, she had to escape into the small islands of fleeting safety created by Kai's annihilating bombardment. Sunny guided her through the shadows, matching the frenetic cadence of the alarming battle.  
  
The slaughter was unimaginable.  
  
The sight of it all - the crimson blaze of the sunset, the dark writhing walls of vermin closing in on them like mudslides, the plumes of fine red haze drifting on the wind - was unbelievable.  
  
The noisе, however, was the worst - the ear-piercing, deafening cacophony of sounds produced by the myriad of rabid rats was grotesque, appalling, and utterly indescribable… especially so because Slayer's hearing was incredibly sharp, capable of catching the sound a needle dropping countless kilometers away.  
  
It was to the point that Sunny thought that he hallucinating, hearing a hum of demented voices being born from the rustle of innumerable vermin rushing to tear his Shadow apart. Those voices were not voices, and the words they spoke were not words… and yet, somehow, he could still faintly understand them, at least at times.  
  
"Hungry… hungry… we are hungry… we are, hunger…"  
  
That was what he imagined he heard, repeated a myriad times by the myriad of berserk voices, until it lost meaning.  
  
Slayer moved without reprieve, dancing in the gaps between the tendrils of the swarm that aimed to consume her. Her movements were speedy and graceful, but the slaughter she unleashed was utterly barbaric, slowly painting the whole mountain red. Sunny was appalled by the ghastly scale of the violence she was perpetrating, but at the same time, he found himself being enthralled by it.  
  
It was truly a joy to witness a master doing what they were best at - to experience it all as they were experiencing it, feeling each step, muscle contraction, and reverberation of the sword.  
  
He was quite familiar with Slayer's battle style by now, and yet, he had never felt her going all out like this before. Now that Sunnу had the first row to the dark spectacle of it all, he could discern subtler details about the way his Shadow wielded her blade.  
  
There was a certain… sincerity to the way Slayer fought. He had noted how pure her emotion seemed, and that purity translated to her every move. There was no pretense, no hesitation to her macabre dance - just sincere, pure, and adamant resolve to maim, mangle, and kill.  
  
Which was not to say that Slayer's battle style was unsophisticated or blunt - far from it. It was nothing short of beautiful.  
  
She was just devoted fully to her every motion without holding anything back.  
  
Her intent and her actions were flawlessly the same.  
  
It was a peculiar state of being, one that was alien to Sunny, and would be to most humans, as well. After all, humans had innumerable thoughts and innumerable experiences. Such a degree of single-minded certainty was impossible for most, if not all, and would only be harmful otherwise.  
  
But Slayer made it work. In fact, she made it work splendidly.  
  
The sincerity of her resolve influenced how efficiently she could wield the Will, as well. Since there was no barrier between her intent and her actions, nothing was wasted in translation - as a result, she could achieve far more with far less, displaying a level of resouгcefulness and efficacy that Sunny found wondrous.  
  
She wielded the Will with incredible finesse.  
  
That was why Slayer and Sunny were still alive, and relatively unscathed.  
  
However…  
  
With every moment that passed, the swarm grew.  
  
The paths Slayer cleaved in the mass of writhing rats grew narrower, the time the gaps existed grew shorter, and the walls of vermin surrounding them grew taller.  
  
Sunny was not sure how much longer they would be able to last before the Rat King buried them under its revolting mass.  
  
'Come on, Kai…'