2386 Rat Race.  
  
When the end camе, it came suddenly.  
  
Slayer was rushing through a gap between two tides of vermin, her sword hissing as it flew at incredible speed, slicing apart individual rats who had managed to jump at her from the writhing mass of their brethren. The path she had cleaved was about to disappear, and there was nowhere for them to retreat to - Kai was late with his next arrow, so no island of safety had been created by a powerful explosion. Slayer was already pouring essence into her sword, preparing to activate its enchantment immediately after using it a split second ago, already - it was wasteful and dangerous, but they were short on choices.  
  
It was then that Sunny felt a condensed and oppressive mass of barely contained power rushing at them from behind at awful speed. Almost at the same time, he sensed a speedy shadow flying across the obsidian bridge… the shadow of an arrow. In the next moment, the arrow flashed above their heads and clashed the mountain close to the peak. There was no fiery explosion, this time…  
  
But what followed next was several magnitudes more violent. The mountain shuddered as an incredible amount of concussive force and sound was released in an instant. A myriad of rats were instantly pulverized by the obliterating shockwave, turning into a crimson haze. More than that, there was no island of safety created on the slope this time - instead, the impregnable stone simply shattered, and myriad tons of it were thrown high into the air. The fountain of shattered stone extended into the sky, expanding as it rose.  
  
Then came the deafening roar of the impact and the powerful tremors that made several sections of the fractured slope collapse.  
  
The damage near the peak was much worse, though. In fact, the entire peak was obliterated, crumbling under its own weight and plummeting down. A gigantic rockfall turned the western face of the mountain into a scene of chaotic devastation, billowing clouds of dust obscuring the view as myriad rats were crushed and buried under the enormous boulders. Then, the debris that had been sent flying into the sky rained down, pulverizing even more.  
  
…That was the result of Kai using the final enchantment of the Supreme bow Sunny had crafted for him - the tried and tested [Death Dealer], modified to incorporate his latest insights into weaving. Kai had to have poured most of his essence into this one shot, sending his most fatal arrow fly. And there was only one reason he would have done that. Sunny wanted to grin.  
  
The destruction of the peak of the mountain, the countless rats destroyed by the initial impact and the rockfall that followed… all of it was merely a side effect. Kai's true target was a single rat - the source of the Rat King. He must have found the invisible string and traced it to the source rat's back.  
  
After that, his task was easy… he had to clash that single moving rat among a million identical vermin, from dozens of kilometers away. What could have been simpler thаn that?  
  
And he did. Sunny was sure of it, because he could already sense the behavior of the swarm changing.  
  
His heart was filled with vicious glee. The first change was somewhat subtle and hard to describe. The rats were not disoriented, and the Will of the swarm did not diminish in its harrowing, oppressive power - but it became wilder and more unbridled, losing all pretenses of guidance. That was because the rat swarm had escaped from under Snow Tyrant's control.  
  
The second change was far more impactful, though. It only took Sunny a moment to realize that there was something lacking. And when he concentrated on that stark absence, he realized that no new rats had appeared to replace the ones killed by the rockfall.  
  
With the death of its progenitor, the swarm ceased its endless growth. The Rat Кing was Rat King no more… now, it was merely a vast horde of starving abominations. And these nightmare creatures were already starting to devour each other. Sunny wasted a heartbeat observing the distressing sight of a myriad of rats lunging at each other to rend each other apart.  
  
Maybe if this was allowed to continue, if all the myriad rats were given a chance to devour each other… then, at the end, a new Rat King would have been born. A single dreadful creature who had feasted on the flesh of its kin, and absorbed the essence of the entire swarm to become the source of a new rat plague.  
  
But Sunny and Slayer were here to prevent that from happening. Well… mostly Slayer.  
  
'Come on! Hurry!' She did not make Sunny ask twice.  
  
Before thе violent tremors shaking the mountain could cease, and long before the dust of the enormous rockfall settled, Slayer had already resumed her barbarous slaughter. She was almost gleeful, eviscerating vast swathes of the frenzied vermin with each graceful swing of her sword.  
  
This time, the gaps cleaved in the swarm by her blade closed much slower. And after a while, they did not close at all. Soon enough, Kai joined them, as well. He arrived in the form of a dragon, blasting the slopes of the mountain with the sonic booms of his haunting songs.  
  
The sun was speedily falling behind the horizon, and the mountain was groaning, barely supporting its own weight - after all, the rats had gnawed on it in their hunger, eating away at its roots. Sunny, Slayer, and Kai were racing against time. There were too countless rats to kill, some of them buried under the stone debris, but still alive. Maybe they would have failed to clean every single one of them up, but luckily, Kai's vision could penetrate the slopes of the mountain, while Sunny's shadow sense could envelop the mountain whole.  
  
In the end, he separated himself from Slayer and poured his essence out, manifesting myriad shadows to finish off the remaining stragglers. And then, just before the sun disappeared beyond the horizon, Sunny finally heard it…  
  
[You have slain an adversary.]  
  
Letting out a long sigh, he sat оn the ground and glanced west. The battle against the Cursed Beast, the Rat King, was over.  
  
They won.