2313 Pawns of Ash  
One of the questions seemed to have been responded. Kai was a Saint - a Transcendent Beast - so he took the place of one of the Ash Beasts that had remained on the Death Game board. He had also traveled between the volcanoes without being erased from existence by the being below the clouds, which gave Sunny a hint about the rules of this miniature realm.  
  
He would have to think about that in more detail, but for now there was a more pressing question that needed to be responded.  
Kai had been able to see Sunny across the great distance dividing the two volcanoes due to his Awakened Ability, which granted him unparalleled sight. So…  
  
Sunny looked in the direction of the third volcano, wondering who had taken the place of the second Ash Beast.  
'Can you see who is out there?'  
Kai looked in the direction of their volcano and faltered for a moment.  
'That… I think you might want to take a step back.'  
Sunny frowned, then did as he was told.  
  
A moment later…  
A black arrow plummeted from the sky and sunk into the ash, right where he had been standing. Sunny stared at the arrow for a few seconds, then shook his head. He would have been able to dodge it even without Kai's warning… probably.  
  
But definitely not without rolling on the ground gracelessly.  
'That damn murderous lunatic…'  
He inhaled deeply.  
'I guess Slayer is here, too.'  
And it seemed that her eyesight was just as exceptional as Kai's… she lacked the ability to fly, though. So, she had announced her presence in her usual barbaric way.  
  
Sunny pondered the situation. There was a small possibility that the Song sisters were somewhere here, as well, having taken the place of three white figures. However, Sunny rather suspected that they had not been imprisoned by Ariel's game. If so, one question remained. Where had the actual Ash Tyrant and two remaining Ash Beasts gone?  
  
Looking at Kai, he hesitated a little and asked:  
'Hey… do you think that Seishan, Hel, and Revel are fighting three ancient nightmare creatures in the Toy Room right now?'  
Kai seemed startled by the question. He looked at Sunny with wide eyes, then shivered.  
'I… really hope that they are not.'  
Sunny inhaled deeply.  
'Well, don't worry too much. Seishan is quite resourceful, so I am sure she'll manage somehow.'  
  
After all, she had survived on the Forgotten Shore for a decade - longer than anyone else who escaped it. Revel, meanwhile, was one of the deadliest Saints in existence. Not only had she gone against Sunny and lived to tell the tale, but she also conquered the Spine Ocean of Godgrave while annihilating seven Saints of the Sword Army and their entire expedition. And while Death Singer was sort of disarming, she was actually quite alarming as well. Sunny did not forget the first time he saw her, entering the council chamber of the Song Army with the same innocent look, but also with blood dripping from her crimson hands. Plus, they were in the Jade Palace - their former home. Considering how well Revel knew the magnificent palace, they had an overwhelming terrain advantage.  
Noticing that Kai still seemed worried, Sunny patted him on the shoulder.  
'Cassie is keeping an eye on the situation. You know that she always has a contingency.'  
Kai lingered for a few seconds, then nodded slowly.  
  
'Still. Considering how serious the consequences are, I think I have the right to know what the purpose of this entire endeavor is, at least.'  
Sunny studied him with a faint smile.  
'Finally ready to ask questions, huh? Well, fair. I'll tell you.'  
He looked into the distance, where the snowy peaks rose above the sea of clouds.  
But what was he supposed to say?  
Any honest answer he could give would be forgotten.  
Eventually, Sunny said evenly:  
'I guess I am searching for the key to the Nightmare Spell.'  
Kai's eyes widened a little.  
'The key… to the Spell?'  
Sunny nodded.  
  
'It is easy to lose sight of the big picture because of all the immediate problems we are facing. The resettlement of humanity, the looming threat of total annihilation… even the race to Apotheosis. All of it is so great, so overwhelming, so all-consuming. But even while we are dealing with these eschatological issues, we mustn't forget about the ultimate goal.'  
Kai sighed.  
'I am starting to grow tired of sounding like a parrot, but… ultimate goal?'  
Sunny chuckled.  
'Yes, the ultimate goal. Godhood.'  
He turned and looked at Kai without any humor in his lightless eyes.  
'Humanity can only survive if new gods are born from it. Which means that someone has to conquer the Sixth Nightmare - the final Nightmare. Someone has to become Divine. Even Apotheosis is merely a stepping stone on the path to true godhood.'  
Sunny shook his head.  
'But it is not that easy, is it? Now that we are mere men, we can allow ourselves to follow the Path of Ascension blindly. But if we dare become gods, we have to dare look upon the gods as equals… instead of merely being their puppets. We must be willing to not only question the will of the gods, but also to endure the weight of the answers we find.'  
  
Kai frowned, confused by his words.  
'Which gods?'  
Sunny laughed quietly.  
'All of them… but one first and foremost. Weaver, that nebulous knave - the chief puppeteer of this whole affair. Why did Weaver create the Nightmare Spell? How? To what end? All of us are following the road that Weaver built, and at this point, we can't afford to ignore the mystery of why it was built, and what is waiting for us at the road's end.'  
Kai glanced at the distant snowy peaks, lingered for a few seconds, and asked:  
'And the answer to that question… is here? In this odd realm that Ariel created?'  
Sunny sighed.  
'A piece of the answer, at least. That is what I believe.'  
He glanced at Kai and shrugged.  
'I mentioned Weaver's Lineage earlier. That lineage, you see, is a cursed thing that should have never existed in the world. And yet, Weaver scattered it across the tapestry of fate for us to find. That daemon never did anything without a reason, so it is my belief that there is a reason why they unleashed this curse upon the world.'  
  
There seemed to be no reason whatsoever for Weaver to have left behind a cursed Lineage, unless it was for the purpose of destroying the world. There were easier ways to destroy the world for someone like Weaver, though, so Sunny did not believe that Weaver's cursed Lineage existed for that reason.  
  
Flaws were seen as curses, as well… and they were. However, Flaws also pushed those who carried them to grow and improve. In that sense, they were blessings.  
The description of his lost [Fated] Attribute had said that there were those who were blessed, and there were those who were cursed - however, rarely was there someone who was both blessed and cursed.  
But actually, every Awakened was both blessed and cursed, existing in a state of fateful balance.  
Maуbe Weaver's had been forced to maintain the same balance, too. Perhaps the Demon of Fate had wanted to bless the world, but could only do so by leaving a curse behind as well.  
The Nightmare Spell, the forbidden lineage…  
Which one was a curse? Which one was a blessing?  
Possibly Weaver's cursed Lineage was the Spell's Flaw.