2319 Educational Trip  
  
Looking at Kai, Sunny felt a profound sense of amusement. However, that amusement came and went swiftly.  
  
Letting out a sigh, he glanced up. The firmament of the miniature realm was obscured by the clouds of ash, but it was clear above the snowy peaks. It seemed like the moon was descending… the night would be over soon, making way for the radiance of the day. Somehow, Sunny felt that this short moment of peace was not going to last much longer thаn the night.  
  
'What will the Snow Tyrant do?'  
  
And what could the Snow Tyrant do?  
  
Actually, Sunny was aware of the subtle strangeness of his situation. He had assumed the place of the Ash Tyrant… who was a figure of vital importance, no doubt, but merely a figure nonetheless.  
  
Sunny was not the player.  
  
His suspicion that there was a distinction between the two was based on a couple of facts. First of all, if the players of Ariel's Game were supposed to act as Tyrants оf their respective Domains… then there would be no Snow Tyrant anywhere in this artificial woгld - after all, the original players of the game were long gone. Secondly, his status as the Ash Tyrant had not granted Sunny any new powers - including the power to control lesser Ash figures. Kai and Slayer were not compelled to obey him because of the nature of the game, they simply listened to him because he was Sunny.  
  
Similarly…  
  
If there was a Snow Tyrant on the opposite end of the board, would they have any cоntrol over the Snow Abominations?  
  
He was not sure. Depending on the answer, though, Sunny was facing two entirely different perils.  
  
If the Snow Tyrant could control the figures freely, then he would be facing a coordinated and lethal force. This game would be a battle of two minds. If not… the Beasts would roam free, and the main obstacle standing in his way would be this artificial realm itself.  
  
'We'll see soon.'  
  
Kai raised an eyebrow.  
  
'What?'  
  
Sunny let out another sigh.  
  
'We'll see what kind of battle this is once the Snow Abominations start to move.'  
  
He glanced at the three snowy peaks.  
  
'If they are mere Beasts, they'll rush to devour us straight away. If they are minions of a Tyrant, though… they'll conquer the other two volcanoes first, to enhance the Snow Domain and weaken the Ash Domain as much as possible before the final siege. Our response will differ drastically depending on what they'll do.'  
  
He created a needle out of shadows and went about finishing a quiver for Kai. Less than a minute later, it was done.  
  
Sunny placed the arrows he had crafted into the quiver and offered it to the charming archer with a smile.  
  
'Here… this will do for now.'  
  
Standing up, Sunny brushed the ash off his clothes and pointed to the pillar of smoke rising into the sky behind them.  
  
'We should probably explore the castle while we can.'  
  
As they descended into the crater, Sunny glanced at Kai, and then asked calmly:  
  
'You have some experience fighting Great Nightmare Crеatures, yes?'  
  
Kai nodded.  
  
'Yes. As a government Saint, during the war in Bastion, and later as the steward of Ravenheart… I've faced a few.'  
  
Sunny smiled darkly.  
  
'How was it?'  
  
Kai's expression grew concerned.  
  
'Like fighting gods.'  
  
He remained silent for a few seconds, then added with a sigh:  
  
'The Great Ones… are stronger and more fearsome than abominations of lesser Ranks, true. But I've long grown used to fighting against enemies who are superior to me in all regards. The problem is that facing them feels different from a normal battle. It is as if the world itself is on their side.'  
  
Sunny nodded.  
  
'The world is indeed on their side - because they force the world to be on their side. What separates those Great and Supreme from those of lesser Ranks is the quality of our will. Our will is tyrannical enough to subjugate the world… to some degree, at least. Well, you must know all that already - after all, both Nephis and I spent quite a lot of time sharing our experience with Cassie, who then compiled a report for those who need to know.'  
  
Kai glanced at Sunny with a distant expression.  
  
'Yes, I know. However, I am sorry to say this, Sunny, but I don't think that anyone else will be able to repeat what you two have done - attaining Supremacy naturally, I mean. That… that is not my self - doubt talking. It's just that you and Nephis often underestimate how exceptional you are. Underestimating it woefully.'  
  
Sunny pursed his lips. Kai, meanwhile, let out a sigh.  
  
'Which means that the rest of us will have to do it the usual way. We will have to challenge the Fourth Nightmare.'  
  
Sunny studied him for a while, then looked away.  
  
'Only four people have ever survived the Fourth Nightmare. You will face Great Nightmare Creatures there, too… so, think of this little excursion of ours as a practice run. I'll handle the Cursed Ones, if we have to face any, but the Great abominations will be on you. I'm sure you'll manage - after all, I…'  
  
Sunny wanted to mention how he had killed a Great Devil as a Sleeper, but held himself back for once. Now was not time for jokes.  
  
'I'll have your back. You have two perfect teachers with you, anyway. I am a Supreme myself, while she…'  
  
He pointed to Slayer.  
  
'She is probably the most prolific killer I have ever met. Not only that, but her main killing tool is a bow, as well. So watch her carefully, and learn from her.'  
  
There was really no better role model for Kai than Slayer. So, Sunny had high hopes for him. Having two exceptional archers assisting him against the Snow Nightmare Creature sounded like a dream, too - he was rarely pampered by having such support.  
  
Kai smiled.  
  
'I will.'  
  
Sunny hesitated for a few seconds, thinking what else to say. It was not a matter of motivating Kai to do his best - he had never lacked motivation. It was more of a matter of showing him a perspective that would make him want to do more than his best. To have the will to succeed no matter what.  
  
This was the only way to survive in the ruthless world of the Nightmare Spell.  
  
Eventually, Sunny asked:  
  
'Your Nightmares. How did you survive them?'  
  
Kai contemplated his question for a while, then answered with a faint smile:  
  
'I survived because of the people who were by my side.'  
  
Sunny nodded.  
  
'Indeed. Because no one survives in the Dream Realm alone.'  
  
He glanced at Kai and added evenly:  
  
'But to those people, you were and will be the person by their side. Their survival will depend on you, just like your survival will depend on theirs.'  
  
Kai's expression changed subtly, and his smile disappeared.  
  
Witnessing that change, Sunny looked away.  
  
'So, how many more people will survive the Fourth Nightmare in the future is up to you. Take responsibility.'  
  
Kai remained silent for a long time, then nodded silently. By then, they had reached the crumbling castle.