2323 Golden Dawn  
A second later, Sunny was standing on the edge of the volcano's vast caldera. He had stepped through the shadows while pulling Slayer and Kai with him - Slayer remained impassive, long used to such treatment, while Kai sеemed a little startled. Sunny remained silent for a moment.  
  
'Come to think of it… that castle is a really awful fortress, isn't it?'  
The Ash Castle stood above the main vent of the volcano, at the very heart of the caldera - which meant that its walls and towers were lower than the surrounding slopes. One could not see the snowy peaks even from the roof of donjon, while the adversary would be above the castle as soon as they scaled the volcano and reached the caldera. It was a truly terribly designed defensive fortification…  
  
'With respect… I don't think now is the proper time to ponder the merits and flaws of an old castle's design.'  
Kai's voice sounded tense. Sunny glanced at him and raised an eyebrow.  
'What do you mean? We are about to be attacked, so when would there be а better time?' Smiling faintly, he turned to face the three snowy peaks towering in the distance.  
  
The moon had fallen beyond the horizon, and the sun was rising. Now that Sunny knew where east was, he could determine where the rest of the cardinal directions were, as well. The Ash Castle stood on the southern edge of the game board, while the three lonеsome mountains - and the Snow Castle as well - were in the north.  
Dawn had painted the sea of clouds below in soft shades of mauve and lilac. The world was darker above the volcanoes, where clouds of smoke and ash obscured the sky, but in the north… Sunny frowned.  
Hurricane winds were blowing above the distant mountains, and a vast snowstorm was rolling from the north, its billowing wall slowly devouring the world. A few moments later, it crashed into the three peaks, sending great plumes of snow into the air. Infused with a dreamy radiance by the golden dawn, the plumes of snow extended south, carried by the wind like streaming tendrils.  
  
'There is something peculiar about the wind.'  
Sunny looked at Kai.  
'How do you mean?'  
The charming archer hesitated for a few moments, then shrugged.  
'I'm not sure how to descгibe it. Awakened archers always pay attention to the wind - the speed and direction of the wind matter a lot when making long - distance shorts, after all, so it becomes an instinct. And my instinct is telling me that there is something wrong with the wind.'  
He hesitated for a few moments, and then added with a sigh:  
'Actually, we tend to rely on instinct a lot. Many things affect the flight of an arrow - altitude, temperature, humidity, even the Coriolis effect… anything that has to do with ballistics. Naturally, none of them behave reasonably in the Dream Realm, so there is no other choice than to develop an instinctual sense of all those things. If you want to hit a target from a great distance, that is.'  
Sunny scratched the tip of his nose.  
'Really? Huh… I just sort of toss things with as much force as I can and hope for the best. Well, I don't rely on sight to aim, so I guess my situation is a bit different.' Then, he looked at Slayer and smiled.  
'What about you? Are you a walking encyclopedia of ballistics, as well?'  
Instead of answering, his Shadow pointed to the tendrils of snow extending from the lonesome mountains.  
  
At that moment, the first snowflakes had reached the slopes of the fuming volcano. Then something peculiar happened… The snowstorm swallowed three mountains, and at the same time, the tendrils of snow glistened, seemingly absorbing the golden light of dawn. A ripple spread through the sea of clouds below, and the snow seemed to solidify, turning into glass. Soon, unimaginable, ethereal bridges of frozen glass arched above the vibrant sea of golden - pink clouds, spanning dozens of kilometers as they glistened with dreamy light. It was a gorgeous and fantastical view…  
What mattered the most to Sunny, though, was that the crystal bridges were connecting the snowy mountains to the volcanoes.  
  
'Are they making a move?'  
He scrunched his face faintly, then looked at Kai and Slayer.  
'I think you guys should prepare to shoot.'  
He could barely see the distant mountains behind the billowing veil of snow that swallowed them. However, he could feel it… A heavy and oppressive feeling that permeated the air, screaming of a looming threat.  
Kai shivered, prompting Sunny to ask:  
'What do you see?'  
The charming archer hesitated for a few moments, then spoke quietly:  
'On the eastern mountain… the clockwork giant is coming to life. Ice is falling from his joints, and he is reaching for an enormous sword that was thrust into the snow. On the western mountain, the huge worm is slowly unfurling its long body. It's slithering through a tunnel - its head is, at least. That thing is even more enormous than I thought.'  
His gaze shifted a little.  
'And on the mountain right in front of us, the hive of the crystalline insects is in a frenzy. They have already awakened from their slumber and are rushing outside, clеaring the entrances of the ice caves from the snow and ice that had blocked them. There are… much more of them than it seemed.'  
  
Sunny frowned.  
Each of the mountains was connected to one of the volcanoes. So, it was reasonable to assume that the clockwork giant would conquer the eastern volcano, the snow worm would conquer the western volcano… While the crystalline hive would attack the Ash Castle.  
He had expected the Snow Abominations to either go for the empty squares or attack the castle together. But it seemed that they were going to act independently, going for both targets.  
'So, what does it say to me?'  
He had no idea.  
What Sunny did know at the second was that a swarm of Great Beasts would soon descend upon him and his companions.  
He gave Kai a long look, then outstretched a hand…  
Nothing happened.  
'Damn it.'  
Sunny had wanted to summon the Shadow Chair, but alas, he had no access to his Memories.  
So, instead, he brushed the ash from a nearby boulder, sat down, and gestured at the ethereal glass bridge.  
Noticing a confused expression on Kai's face, Sunny smiled.  
'They're all yours!'