2326 Attack and Defense  
  
Sunny was tossed out of the shadows and rolled across the melting rock, still holding Slayer in his embrace. A moment later, he pushed himself off the ground and carried both of them dozens of meters away, to safety.  
  
Kai wаs in the air, embers burning in his auburn hair. The bronze elements of his ivory armor had turned radiant on the left side, and wisps of smoke were rising from beneath his pauldron.  
  
There was a long scar left on the slope of the volcano. The layer of ash had been burned away, and the rock beneath had turned to lava, flowing down like a red river.  
  
'Hell…'  
  
Sunny came to his senses when Slayer's elbow connected with his ribs, pushing him away. A moment later, she was already drawing her bow without sparing him a look. Kai was doing the same in the air, using only the strength of his core to pull the string.  
  
Far away, the crystalline swarm was speedily devouring the distance between the snowy peak and the volcano. The insect-like abominations had assembled into an odd formation in the sky, their translucent wings almost touching each other.  
  
These wings were like lenses, focusing the light of the rising sun into a beam of pure white destruction. Each individual beast might not have been too dangerous, but when scores of them worked together… The defenders of the Ash Castle could very easily be turned to ash themselves.  
  
Sunny blinked a couple of times, appalled. It seemed like the crystalline nightmare creatures were not as easy as they looked.  
  
'Fifteen moments, perhaps.'  
  
Cursing under his breath, he called out:  
  
'Kai, are you alright?'  
  
The archer responded from above, his voice sober:  
  
'Yes. I am not easily burned.'  
  
It seemed that his words were both an answer and a command - as soon as he finished speaking, the fiery embers shining in his hair were extinguished, and the smoke rising from beneath his armor was blown away by the wind.  
  
Sunny smiled darkly. 'Keep dodging, then!'  
  
Another beam of incinerating light illuminated the slopes of the volcano, but this time, all three of them evaded out of the way in time. None of them were burned… however, Slayer and Kai had to slow down their barrage for a brief moment.  
  
Sunny frowned. 'Are we actually going to die here?'  
  
Even if they had more time, Kai was running out of arrows. Slayer, meanwhile, was recalling hers - but each one took some time to return.  
  
After all, these arrows were not Memories. Unlike Saint, Slayer could not summon and dismiss Memories, so her armaments were merely enchanted in ingenious ways to resemble them. Her bow could turn into a slender chain and wrap itself around her arm like a vambrace, while her quiver was enchanted to summon arrows back through a special spatial storage.  
  
Actually, quite a fascinating piece of sorcery went into marking the arrows and connecting them to the hidden dimensional layer of the quiver, as well as into making sure that they could be summoned back from a distance… But Sunny had no time to admire his own handiwоrk at the moment.  
  
He hesitated for a split second, then glanced into the shadows. What Sunny wanted to do was reach his hand into them and retrieve the corpse of the first Great Beast that Slayer had killed, which was still laying on the slope of the distant mountain. However, as he moved faintly to do just that, he suddenly was overwhelmed by a cold, dreadful sensation. It was as if somеthing vast and frightening was looking back at him from the shadows, warning him to stay back.  
  
'What… is going on?'  
  
Sunny was startled. This was the first time he had felt something like that… the dark expanse of shadow was supposed to be his home, so encountering something far deadlier than him there was an unwelcome novelty.  
  
It almost felt as if a titanic tentacle would rise from the darkness to grasp him if he dared to step foot or even lay a finger on the snowy mountain.  
  
'Are we prohibited from attacking the enemy peak?'  
  
Why would the being hiding beneath the clouds allow their arrows to land, but forbid them from moving across the sea of clouds personally?  
  
Sunny shifted his reasoning, forcing himself to think about what was happening as a game.  
  
The Snow Domain was attacking, so the Ash Domain was defending? That made a peculiar kind of essence.  
  
Shooting at the attackers was considered an act of defense, but moving to the snowy peak seemed to be against the rules.  
  
'What happened to offense being the best defense, though?'  
  
Sunny's gaze turned darker.  
  
While he was considering what to do next, Kai and Slayer had managed to slay a dozen more abominations. The crystalline beasts were quite near by now - enough so that Sunny could actually see shattered crystals and ancient bones resting inside their transparent bellies.  
  
If there was one good piece of news, it was that the insect-like abominations had dove under the clouds of ash by now. The rising sun was obscured by the dark clouds, so there were no devastating beams of focused sunlight blasting the slope of the volcano anymore. Still, time was short.  
  
Sunny inhaled deeply, preparing himself for the battle.  
  
'Hey, Kai! Remember how I said that our castle was absolutely horrible?'  
  
Kai landed on the ground near him, sliding on the ash and nocking another arrow on the string.  
  
'Sure! Why?'  
  
Sunny glanced at the approaching swarm of Great Beasts and smiled.  
  
'I changed my mind! Let's retreat into the castle, right now!'  
  
Kai sent his arrow flying, looked at him briefly, then shot toward the Ash Castle without saying another word. Slayer followed, rushing into the caldera with breathtaking speed.  
  
For a few seconds, Sunny was left alone on the pinnacle of the fuming volcano, looking at the swarm of Snow Beasts chillingly.  
  
'Weaver, you bastard…'  
  
Had Weaver known that someone would come to retrieve a part of their Legacy from Ariel's Game, one day? They had to - otherwise, it wouldn't have been hidden here in the first place.  
  
So why the hell couldn't that damned daemon make retrieving their Legacy a little easier?  
  
Cursing the Demon of Fate, Sunny called upon the shadows. In the next moment, hundreds of long spikes grew from the slope of the volcano, each ending in an awfully sharp tip.  
  
And then, all of them shot into the dark sky, rising to meet the descending swarm like a welcoming salvo.  
  
Using the barrage of shadows as a cover, Sunny retreated toward the Ash Castle.