2327 Proper Siege  
  
By the time Sunny reached the main keep of the crumbling fortress, Kai and Slayer were already there. The vast interior of the castle was just as they hаd left it - vast, dark, and filled with nothing but smoke and ash.  
  
'What's the plan?'  
  
Kai tried to sound calm, but there was a hint of tension in his voice.  
  
Sunny hesitated for a moment.  
  
'Now… might be a good time to start praying.'  
  
The gods were dead, though, so there was really no point. He flashed the charming archer a grin.  
  
'Hey, don't be too worried! This is not even one of the top ten worst situations I've been in.'  
  
Kair forced out a pale smile.  
  
'O - oh… that's a relief, then. Just out of curiosity, though… what might one of the top ten worst situations you've been in look like?'  
  
Sunny scratched the bаck of his head.  
  
'Well… this one time, I met a particularly loathsome bird. That one was pretty gruesome. Did I mention that I hate birds, by the way?'  
  
Crow Crow would have been quite offended to hear him saying that, but luckily, the peculiar Echo was not here right now.  
  
Sunny turned to the gates of the keep.  
  
'In any way, the plan is simple.'  
  
Answering his call, the shadows surged and rose. A moment later, all three entrances to the hollow interior of the Ash Castle - the gate and the circular openings in its floor and roof - were blocked by impenetrable walls of solidified shadows.  
  
Despite the questionable design of the ancient castle, it still offered a vital advantage to its defenders - there were only so many ways the enemy could get inside. Sunny doubted that the Great Beasts would be able to bring the walls of the keep down, which meant that he could syphon them into a narrow passage or two.  
  
That was not exactly a trump card, but it was definitely better than fighting a hive of flying nightmare creatures in the open.  
  
'My shadows will slow those bees… those ants? They will slow those bugs down, but not stop them. Once the vermin start to break through, I will engage them in melee, while you two will support me from the back. If more than one entrance is breached, we will each concentrate on one.'  
  
Now that all entrances to the keep were barricaded, it was completely dark inside. Luckily, none of the defenders required light to see - Kai due to his Awakened Ability, Sunny and Slayer due to being shadows.  
  
Kai counted the arrows in his quiver and frowned.  
  
'I must say, as far as plans go…'  
  
He did not get to finish, however, because at that moment, something crashed into the roof of the keep.  
  
Then, something scraped against the ancient stone.  
  
And then, more and more scraping sounds surrounded them, echoing in the darkness.  
  
Kai's face paled as he glanced up, his gaze penetrating the walls of the ancient fortress.  
  
Sunny could sense what was happening outside, as well. His expression dimmed.  
  
The muffled impacts and the dreadful scrаping fused into a strange litany, and then, the castle shook again as a deafening thunderclap made him wince.  
  
The crystalline abominations had landed on the walls and the roof of the keep and were now ramming their bodies into the wall of shadows barring its main entrance.  
  
The first crack appeared on the surface of the manifested shadow.  
  
'Hold!'  
  
As Kai commanded the dark barricade to stay intact, the second impact failed to produce a new crack.  
  
The third, however, did not.  
  
Sunny frowned.  
  
'What to do, what to do…'  
  
It used to be that he always lacked the means to deal with the endless tribulations facing him, searching for solutions desperately. Now that Sunny was a Supreme Titan, however, there were almost too many tools at his disposal.  
  
His versatility was nothing short of singular, so it was not so much a question of finding a solution as a question of choosing the best solution out of many that were available to him.  
  
Taking a deep breath, Sunny split his mind into three streams.  
  
'Prepare yourselves.'  
  
One stream focused on repairing the crumbling barricades, as well as manifesting shadows outside the castle - as the Great Beasts attacked it, sharp spikes protruded from its walls, impaling them. Black hands rose from the ash to break their limbs, and heavy chains wrapped themselves around their bodies, pulling them onto the spikes.  
  
Sadly, the Great Beasts were both too powerful and too cunning to be severely harmed by the manifested shadows. A few of them had been killed or wounded in the initial barrage but now, they rapidly wisened up and started dodging the shadows - only to destroy them a moment later.  
  
The crystalline insects were astonishingly nimble, both in the air and on the ground, so they fared well against the shadows. Still, they were forced to concentrate on destroying the barricades, which allowed Sunny to focus his countermeasures only on those spots and thus increase his efficiency.  
  
It was a proper siege… one where the besieging army consisted of enormous glasslike insects, while the defending army consisted of one man controlling the shadows cast by the castle, but a proper one nevertheless.  
  
The second mind stream was reserved for controlling Sunny's own body in the inevitable melee.  
  
While the third…  
  
The third partition of his mind was responsible foг analyzing the situation and looking for the best solution to it. Sunny felt like he was missing something, and this feeling of making a mistake was driving him mad.  
  
'Above.'  
  
A violent impact shook the castle, and the seal of shadows blocking the opening in the roof of the keep suddenly fractured. A crystalline body exploded from the rain of black debris, but before it could lunge at the three defenders, two arrows hit its head - Kai pierced its left eye, while Slayer pierced its right eye.  
  
The body of the enormous crystal insect plummeted down, while another got stuck in the quickly mending barricade - it would have freed itself a second later, but a split second later, a black arrow slid in the crack between its thorax and abdomen, severing the Great Beast in two.  
  
Slayer had killed it, and therefore, the [Handy Bracelеt] spoke into Sunny's ear:  
  
[You have slain an enemy.]  
  
He scowled.  
  
'What am I missing?'  
  
Just then, the largest of the barricades - the one blocking the gate of the keep - was torn open by a wide fracture.  
  
Crystalline bodies filled the breach.  
  
Grasping his odachi, Sunny rushed forward.  
  
'Whatever it is, I hope I'll figure it out soon…'  
  
He dove into the familiar cradle of battle.