2328 Crown of Horns  
  
Sunny rushed forward as the first of the crystalline insects burst through the breach. These great glasslike horrors glanced like grotesque bees, but also somewhat like dreadful ants… considering their warlike behavior, however, he decided to call them the Crystal Wasps.  
  
The Crystal Wasps were Great Beasts, while he was a Supreme Titan. By all means, he was supposed to be much more powerful as far as pure physical prowess went… but it was not that easy. After all, his was a human body, while their physique was anything but.  
  
Both a mouse and an elephant were beasts, but were they equal in strength? No. Similarly, humans were often physically inferior to Nightmare Creatures, even if their Rank was the same.  
  
Sunny was still a Titan, though, so even his modest human body was stronger, faster, and more resilient than each of the grotesque abominations. And, naturally, nothing really prevented him from assuming a different form.  
  
As Sunny dashed forward, his body turned into a surging wave of unfathomable darkness and then solidified into the fearsome form of a four-armed fiend. This time, he wasn't creating a Shell from the surrounding shadows - instead, he simply turned himself into a Shadowspawn. After all, Sunny was himself a shadow now. His human appearance was merely a form he assumed, so if he was familiar with a different one well enough, he could just as easily become something else.  
  
His Shadowspawn form glanced pretty much exactly as the Devil he had been in the Second Nightmare - towering at three meters in height, encased in the fearsome black carapace of the Jade Mantle, and with four hands ready to tear and rend the flesh of his enemies. If there was one difference, though, it was that seven horns were crowning his head now instead of four. Suddenly, the Crystal Wasps did not dwarf him anymore. Neither were they as threatening anymore…  
  
But they were still Great Beasts. Even if Sunny was stronger than them, he was still vulnerable to their malice. And… there were a lot of them, numerous more than he would have chosen to face, if there was a choice.  
  
No being of the Great Rank could be taken lightly. He poured more shadows into his odachi, increasing its length to nearly three meters. Almost at the same time, the Crystal Wasps ignited with blinding radiance, chasing the darkness away - as if sunlight had been stored in their glasslike bodies. A wave of scorching heat washed over him, making him frown.  
  
'Curious…' That ability of theirs… was that how they built their hives? By melting tunnels in the ice? There was no time to ponder.  
  
The first of the abominations was already upon Sunny - or rather, he was upon it. Slicing off its crystalline leg, which was poised to pierce his chest, Sunny rammed the creature with his shoulder and at the same time grabbed its frightening, razor-sharp mandibles with two of his four hands, pushing its head to the side and preventing it from biting a huge chunk of his flesh off. A split second later, he spun his odachi and slashed downward. The nimble Nightmare Creature easily dodged his strike even while reeling from being slammed into…  
  
However, it still convulsed and toppled, its lifeless body suddenly growing brittle and shattering into many shards with a melodious ringing. That was because Sunny had never aimed for the Crystal Wasp, to begin with - instead, his black odachi had severed its shadow from its glasslike body, thus destroying its soul. It wasn't easy to destroy the soul of a Great Beast in one strike, even when striking its shadow. However, Sunny's killing intent was especially deadly, because his will to kill was especially firm - the touch of his black blade carried uncompromising lethality, as if imbued with an echo of death itself.  
  
The Crystal Wasp died instantly, unable to offer much resistance. That said… Sunny had not expected its body to crumble into innumerable shards. He had been planning to toss the corpse of the Great Beast at the other abominations rushing at him, thus slowing them down.  
  
Instead, anotheг insect-like Abomination was already lunging at him through the cloud of falling shards, a split second away from biting into his neck. Sunny reeled back to block the glass mandibles with his odachi, holding the hilt with two hands and bracing the flat of its blade with two more. The impact was tyrannical enough to push him back, but instead of falling and being buried under the mass of the Nightmare Creature, Sunny collapsed into the shadows and shot out of them behind the adversary almost at the same moment, his odachi falling down to split the adversary in two.  
  
[You have slain an adversary.]  
  
Spinning to face the next Crystal Wasp, Sunny saw that the barricade of shadows he was fervently repairing was continuing to crumble, and that four more abominations had made their way inside the keep in the time it took him to kill two.  
  
Nevertheless, he was surprised by something.  
  
'Huh?' Why were the Crystal Wasps… weaker than he had expected?  
  
They still possessed the dire power one would expect from Great Beasts, but it was significantly lower than it was supposed to be… than it had been, back when they were escaping the Ice Hive on the slopes of the snowy mountain.  
  
Two abominations lunged at him at great speed, their radiant bodies creating a dizzying movement of light and shadows. The ash covering the floor rose like a whirlwind in the wake of their violent passage. 'The ash…' Sunny moved, raising his odachi to impale one of the abominations and at the same time catching the second one in the air.  
  
This time, he did what Nephis had advised him to do, wrapping his will around his entire self instead of focusing primarily on his weapon. It was easy to feel the difference - despite being outnumbered, Sunny did not feel like the world was fighting against him just as hard. The willpower of the Ice Hive was pressuring him like a crushing wave, but strangely enough, Sunny was like a fish, cutting through it almost with ease.  
  
He slammed one of the Crystal Wasps into the floor, causing the entire Ash Castle to tremble and for a web of cracks to appear on its transparent carapace.  
  
The second Abomination was impaled on his great odachi, but that did not seem to slow it down much - its scythe-like legs scraped against the surface of the Jade Mantle, and the creature pushed itself lower across the length of the black sword, aiming to shred Sunny to pieces. The weight of its body was immense enough to make him stagger.  
  
His armored foot descended upon the Crystal Wasp on the floor, shаttering its already cracked head, and at the same time, his tail wrapped itself around the second Nightmare Creature's thin neck.  
  
[You have slain an adversary.]  
  
Falling on all fours - on all six, to be precise - Sunny used his tail to send the Great Beast flying back. As if shot from a sling, the Nightmare Creature flew through the air and crashed into its advancing kin.  
  
'That's four.'  
  
In the time it took Sunny to kill four Crystal Wasps…  
  
Eight more had breached the barricade. The wall of shadows was collapsing faster than he could repair it, and the breach was growing wider with each second.  
  
Sunny glanced at the mass of crystalline abominations somberly.  
  
'Damnation.'