2329 Defensive Advantage  
Sunny had faced seven Saints as a Transcendent, and now, he had to face a swarm of Great Beasts as a Supreme. The crystalline bodies of the eerily radiant abominations were shining blindingly with imprisoned sunlight, and shadows danced as they moved.  
Flakes of ash swirled in the air.  
'Ash…'  
Moving between shadows, Sunny suddenly had an epiphany. He had noted that the Crystal Wasps seemed weakened, and now, he suddenly understood why. The answer lay in the rules of Death Game.  
  
As Seishan had mentioned, positioning and territorial conquest played an important role in this ancient game - that way, the power of Domains was expressed through rules. Figures had an advantage while defending squares of the same color… and were disadvantaged when attacking squares of the opposite color. The disadvantage diminished the more the besieged square was surrounded by the adversary Domain.  
Ariel's Game was based on the same rules, so… The Ash Castle bordered two volcanoes and one snowy mountain… actually, was it three snowy mountains? Did diagonal borders count? In any case, it was not entirely surrounded by the Snow Domain, which meant that Sunny was supposed to have some kind of advantage.  
He had not felt any boost to his power, though, which meant that his advantage lay elsewhere - to be precise, it was the abominations of the Snow Dоmain who were weakened by the surrounding ash.  
'That is good to know.'  
Another piece of the puzzle was solved, and armed with that knowledge, he would be able to plan his subsequent moves better.  
For now, however, Sunny had to survive the enemy move. His mastery of Shadow Step, which had long been woven into his battle art, allowed him a supreme degree of mobility on the battlefield.  
  
That was why the Crystal Wasps could not immediately overwhelm him despite their superior numbers… Sadly, Sunny was not entirely free to move however he wanted, either - after all, he was supposed to serve as an impenetrable wall between the abominations and his allies. Therefore, he could not allow the Great Beasts to advance too far into the interior of the Ash Castle, meaning that he had to spend most of his time in front of the advancing swarm.  
The issue was further exacerbated by the fact that in a battle between Great Nightmare Creatures and a Supreme being, the distinction between tangible and intangible was less meaningful than it would be for weaker cгeatures. In other words, the attacks of the Crystal Wasps were imbued by their rabid will and could thеrefore pursue him into the shadows.  
'Curse it!'  
The shadows shifted again, pushed around by the radiant abominations, and Sunny was forced to step out of them a few meters away from where he wanted to be. Unwilling to let the оpportunity pass, Sunny transformed his odachi into a long spear and thrust it forward, piercing the joint of a Crystal Wasp's leg. He wrenched his spear, destroying the joint completely, and immediately leaped back.  
In the next moment, another Nightmare Creature was already in the spot where he had been before, its terrifying mandibles closing on nothing but emptiness.  
Sunny did not miss the chance to bring the butt of his spear upward, slamming it with ferocious force into the underside of the creature's head. Its skull cracked, and one of the mandibles shattered. Continuing to retreat, Sunny turned his torso and pushed his spear forward, piercing the eye of a different enemy, then spun it to drive two more a step back. With how overwhelmed he was by the enemy numbers, Sunny only managed to kill two more Crystal Wasps after the initial four.  
The rest of them were battered and bore gruesome wounds, but were very much alive - and more were already entering through the breach, as well. Just then, however, a black arrow slid into the crack on the skull of the Nightmare Creature he had struck with the back of his spear. The Great Beast died instantly, Another arrow struck the Crystal Wasp who was moving slower than the rest due to the joint he had destroyed, making its massive body explode violently into a cloud of glass shards.  
[You have slain an enemy.]  
Having already finished off a few abominations, Kai and Slayer were helping as best they could.  
But there were just too many beasts.  
Sunny could sense them scurrying across the exterior of the Ash Castle, forcing their way inside… His artillery support had managed to keep the Crystal Wasps off his back until now, but things were rapidly turning from bad to worse.  
That was because, apart from the main barricade, the other two seals of shadows were crumbling too. The crystalline abominations were ramming their bodies into them with harrowing force, making the entire castle rattle and shake. Slayer was already splitting her attention between the main entrance and the lower seal - Kai would have to concentrate entirely on the upper seal, soon.  
  
It was unclear how long the two of them would be able to hold the Crystal Wasps back.  
Catching his spear with his lower hands, Sunny moved it in a wide horizontal arch to behead a wounded Nightmare Creature, and at the same time caught another one with his upper hands. As the claws of his gauntlets sank into the crystalline carapace, he strained his muscles and viciously ripped the gigantic beast in two.  
That cost him.  
Not a second later, something slammed into his back, and he felt a sharp pain permeating his body. Roaring, he spun, grabbed the attacking Crystal Wasp by the neck, and then slammed its head with his own.  
The Nightmare Creature's head exploded into a rain of shards, and it fell into the ash, lifeless.  
[You have slain an enemy.]  
'This can't go on much longеr…'  
What was he missing?  
A part of his mind was still trying to puzzle out the peculiar feeling of failing to realize something.  
As he did, an especially violent impact shook the castle, and the upper seal collapsed completely, Pale light poured into the dark interior of the keep, and then the darkness was torn apart by the radiant figures of the Crystal Wasps that burst inside, spreading to scurry across the ceiling.  
  
Slayer dodged a falling piece of rabble and gracefully dismissed her bow. Unsheathing her two swords, she lingered for a moment and tossed one of them to Kai. He caught it easily and flew back, hovering just behind her.  
'Sunny? What's the plan?'  
Losing his cover fire, Sunny was forced to retreat, as well.  
Stepping out of the shadows back to back with them, he allowed himself to return to his human form and glanced at the swarm of Great Beasts surrounding them from all sides.  
'Ah, I see now.'  
His lips twisted into a vicious smile.  
'No worries. Leave it to me, buddy… my plan is to slaughter them all!'