2330 Volcanic Glass  
  
Sunny was no stranger to strategic rеtreats. There was no shame in running away with his tail tucked between his legs - when facing an adversary that he could not defeat, that was the best choice.  
And just a few seconds ago, Sunny had been sure that they would not be able to defeat the Ice Hive.   
  
The problem, though, was that there was nowhere for them to retreat. They were trapρed on the volcano, and trying to escape it would provoke the ire of the being that dwelled beneath the clouds… Sunny had considered destroying the chains holding the Ash Castle above the main vent and plummeting into the fiery depths with the Crystal Wasps, but that did not seem like a good idea either.  
  
And then, it hit him.  
[You have slain an adversary.]  
  
'Ah…'  
Sunny suddenly realized that there was a disadvantage to possessing overwhelming strength.  
Being strong tended to make one stupid.  
  
He had grown powerful enough as a Sovereign to develop bad habits… no, truthfully, it might have started to happen all the way back when he was a Saint.  
When Sunny had been weak, he obsessively considered every single possibility to find a way to survive. But after becoming strong, he fell into the habit of relying more on his strength than on his mind, wrecking his enemies like a Supreme sledgehammer. That was why he had been slow to understand how to defeat the Ice Hive.  
  
'I have slain these enemies.'  
Sunny had killed about ten Crystal Wasps, and Slayer had killed a dozen more - first as they flew across the sea of clouds, and then here in the main keep of the Ash Castle.  
  
The Handy Bracelet had announced the kills, even if it couldn't determine the Rank and Class of the slain enemies. It couldn't determine thеm because Sunny's cores were already saturated, and he received no shadow fragments for the kills. However, that did not mean that he received nothing.  
  
The shades of the slain Crystal Wasps would still enter his Soul Sea, even if Sunny had no access to his Soul Sea and was cut off from his Domain. They would…  
He was pretty sure that even Ariel would not have been able to change that.  
  
And why would he?  
'Why would Ariel rob the Ash Tyrant of all power?'  
Sunny and Kai could not summon new Memories, but the Memories they had summoned before entering Ariel's Game were still working as intended. He was pretty sure that if he created new ones, they would be able to use them as well. Apart from that, some facets of their Aspects were suppressed, but their Aspect Abilities still worked just fine.  
  
Sunny could use his Dormant, Awakened, Ascended, and Transcendent Abilities…  
So why wouldn't he be able to use his Supreme Ability?  
His Domain was not gone, after all. It was merely replaced with the Domain of Ash. Wouldn't it be reasonable to assume that his Suρreme Ability was also substituted instead of being entirely blocked?  
What was the point of granting him a Domain if he could not make use of it?  
  
'I see now. This… should work, right?'  
Having thought that, Sunny immediately erased the thought from his mind.  
  
A new thought took its place:  
'I see now. This will definitely work.'  
There was no place for doubt if one wanted to force his will upon the world. And Sunny was going to do just that. Even if he could not enter his Soul Sea and summon the shades he had earned before entering Ariel's Game…  
Who was to say that he could not summon the shades he had earned after entering it?  
Even if someone said it, Sunny was not obliged to believe them.  
  
So, just as the Crystal Wasps surrounded them - some of them rushing across the ash covering the floor of the castle, some moving across its ceiling - Sunny inhaled deeply and turned into a shadow.  
Then, he activated his Supreme Ability, opening a gate between his soul and the world…  
And called upon the shades.  
  
For a moment, nothing happened.  
  
'S - sunny?'  
Kai's voice sounded nervous. Slayer, meanwhile, crouched into a low stance, preparing to take as many Great Beasts as she could with her into the embrace of death.   
  
Then, a gust of cold wind blew across the interior of the Ash Castle, and the ash stirred.  
The ash stirred and rose, forming dark shapes.  
  
Just as the Crystal Wasps rushed to devour Sunny and his companions, Obsidian Wasps - shades formed by ash, their bodies resembling volcanic glass - rose to face them.  
There were twenty of them, so the enemy still outnumbered the defenders of the castle manyfold…   
  
But it did not matter.  
Because with each Great Abomination they killed, a Supreme shade would join the ranks of the defenders.  
  
Assuming his corporeal form once again, Sunny grinned and threw a poignant look at Kai.   
The charming archer seemed to have lost the ability to speak for a second.  
'As I said, don't worry. You sеe, Kai… death always wins.'  
  
Because death was inevitable.  
With that, Sunny tossed his spear into the mass of Crystal Wasps, killing one of them, and rushed forward while manifesting a new weapon out of the shadows.  
  
A violent battle took place in the Ash Castle, making it quake and rattle. A few of the shades were destroyed, and then, a few more. But new ones immediately took their place, lunging at the crystalline insects without fear or doubt. Even if each individual Obsidian Wasp was weaker than their former kin due to not possessing the Will, the Titan who had summoned them did.  
Sunny could also fight much more freely now that he was supported by a small army of shades. As a result, his lethality increased explosively.  
Kai and Slayer did not waste any time, either.  
  
Soon enough, the outcome of the battle hung in precarious balance. The Ice Swarm had been reduced almost by half, and the number of the ash shades swelled. Victory was not decided yet, but Sunny felt that the odds were in their favor.  
  
It was then that a subtle ripple seemed to spread through the world.  
Almost at the same moment, the remaining Crystal Wasps did something peculiar.  
  
They all turned back and rushed away, escaping the Ash Castle.  
Sunny was startled.  
'Are they… fleeing?'  
  
Since when had Nightmare Creatures - mere Beasts, no less - had enough presence of mind to suppress their frenzy and flee from an unfavorable battle?  
Frowning, he followed the Crystal Wasps outside.  
Cresting the edge of the caldera, Sunny witnessed a breathtaking sight.  
The Crystal Wasps were flying back to the distant mountain.  
The sun had risen above the horizon, and the golden light of dawn turned into bright daylight.  
  
And almost as soon as dawn burned itself out…  
The resplendent radiance of the ethereal glass bridges dimmed.  
The gossamer bridges crumbled, turning into plumes of snow, and were dispersed by the wind.  
Before too long, nothing connected the lonesome mountains once again.  
  
The dawn was over, and with it, the enemy move came to an end.