2331 Last Square  
The sun had risen above the realm of clouds and mountains… above the world of Ariel's Game. The ethereal, glistening bridges turned to snow under its radiance.  
Sunny was standing on the edge of the caldera, his battered armor slowly repairing itself, as he glanced north - there, far away, the surviving Crystal Wasps had landed on the slopes of the snowy peak and disappeared into the myriad entrances to the Ice Hive.  
'The adversary move is over.'  
Taking a deep breath, he glanced west. There, the giant body of the Snow Worm was coiled around the volcano, its pale flesh standing out starkly against the black ash.  
  
Then, he glanced east… somewhere out there, the clockwork giant was standing in the ash, as well.  
The Ash Castle had withstood the siege, but the other two volcanoes were now conquered by the Snow Domain. As Sunny watched, a startling change took place.  
Two pillars of lava shot out of the conquered volcanoes, rapidly solidifying in the cold air. At the same time, the snowstorm veiling the distant mountains moved south, consuming the world. It flowed past the Ash Castle, sparing it the elemental fury, and completely obscured the neighboring volcanoes.  
Just then, Kai landed on the ash beside him.  
'What is going on? Why did they retreat?'  
  
Sunny hesitated for a while, struggling against the powerful winds as he glanced into the swirling mass of snow that swallowed the world, sparing only the billowing clouds of ash above the Ash Castle.  
'They retreated because their time ran out. It seems that Snow figures can only move at dawn.'  
He paused for a moment, then added slоwly:  
'I guess the Ash figures can only move at dusk, then.'  
  
Sunny imagined ash blowing across the sea of crimson clouds, turning into obsidian bridges in the fiery glow of the dying sun. Yes… that would make sense.  
He glanced at Kai.  
'As for what is going on… I think we will see soon. Two more squares were conquered by the Snow Domain.'  
  
Just as he finished speaking, the violent winds suddenly settled down, and the great snowstorm passed. Dark clouds still boiled above the Ash Castle, but the rest of the world was resting under a clear blue sky now.  
The other two volcanoes… had disappeared.  
Or rather, transformed. The deep calderas were buried under solidified lava, turning into sharp peaks. The thick layers of ash had been blown away by the wind. The dark slopes were stripped bare, and then covered in snow.  
Two snowy peaks stood where the fuming volcanoes had been just minutes ago, and the Ash Castle was now completely surrounded by the Snow Domain. It was the last black square left on the board.  
'Well… that sucks.'  
Sunny sighed, then patted Kai on the shoulder.  
'I'm going to be quite busy, but you can rest until evening. We'll do something exciting then.'  
Kai blinked a couple of times.  
'Sure, I'll… wait. What are we going to do in the evening?'  
Sunny simply shrugged.  
'I have no idea, yet. But… it is bound to be exciting! Doesn't it?'  
With that, he turned back and headed back to the Ash Castle.  
  
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Some time later, Sunny was sitting on the floor, feeling a little miserable.  
'These damn daemons.'  
Ariel had done something incredible, hiding forty - nine mountains inside a game board and populating them with powerful abominations. The Demon of Dread was truly great and awful.  
But, that godly bastard…  
Did he not think to provide the poor Nightmare Creatures imprisoned in his game with basic necessities?  
There was no food to be found anywhere, unless Sunny wanted to dine on an infinite amount of worm meat. Much worse, there was no water. The figures of the Snow Domain could at least melt the snow to quench their thirst, but what was he supposed to do? Was he supposed to melt ash? How would that work?  
  
Sunny shook his head dejectedly.  
Of course, he did not really need to eat or drink. As a Supreme demigod, he could simply sustain himself by absorbing essence, and more than that, he was a shadow, not a real human. But not needing food and not wanting to eat were two different matters - otherwise, he would not have been pampering Nephis with delicious meals at every opportunity. There was Kai to consider, as well. As a Saint, he could last quite a while without water, but not to the degree of not needing it at all.  
Perhaps Ariel had not designed this game for humans.  
'One more problem to solve…'  
  
As Sunny was relaxing on the soft ash, there was a lot of activity around him.  
After all, just because he was sitting and doing nothing didn't mean that he was doing nothing. All around him, the shades of the Crystal Wasps were busy at work. There were a couple of dozen of them left intact, while the rest were being rebuilt and repaired within the dark depths of his soul. Some were collecting soul shards of their fallen kin… or perhaps even retrieving them fгom their own corpses… while some were gathering and sorting crystal fragments themselves.  
  
Sunny observed his worker wasps with a curious expression, wondering if they would be able to focus sunlight into destructive beams with their obsidian wings. If they could, then he would be able to melt the snow on the mountains from a distance, then collect the water in some kind of giant reservoir…  
As he considered this matter, Kai descended from above and landed on the ash near him. Glancing at Slayer, who was standing motionlessly behind Sunny, he bowed politely and offered her the short sword she had lent him previously.  
'Thank you, Lady… uh… Lady Slayer.'  
Slayer glanced at him before accepting the sword and sheathing it silently.  
Kai shivered under her gaze, then sat down near Sunny and exhaled slowly.  
Sunny looked at him:  
'How are your wounds?'  
Kai had been caught in that first solar attack, but it was hard to say how bad his burns were underneath the armor.  
The charming archer shook his head with a smile.  
'It's nothing serious. As I mentioned, I am not easily burned.'  
Sunny clicked his tongue.  
'That might be true, but we are stuck here without a healer, and there are numerous battles ahead. Such small wounds will accumulate if we're not careful.'  
His own back was shredded pretty badly. Luckily, he healed at breathtaking speed as a Supreme - this wound would be gone in no more than a day.  
Of course, a new one would very likely take its place.  
Kai hesitated for a few seconds, then said suddenly:  
'We… we really defeated a hundred Great Beasts, didn't we?'  
He shook his head in disbelief.  
Sunny lingered with the answer.  
  
Eventually, he said:  
'I guess we did. That… was a humbling experience, wasn't it?'  
Kai chuckled.  
'Humbling? I wouldn't say that. I think it was more of an unbelievable experience.'  
He glanced at Sunny, swept his hair back, and then said ruefully:  
'I know that I'll regret asking… but that was probably a routine battle for you, wasn't it?'  
Sunny studied Kai for a few seconds, then shook his head with a faint smile.  
'No… actually, that was a novel level of peril even for me.'