2352 Shrine of Truth  
  
In the evening, they abandoned the newly formed volcano and moved west. And in the morning, the volcano was no more, conquered by the Clockwork Giant and transformed into a snow - covered mountain.  
  
Sunny quietly mourned the destruction of yet another manor he had built. 'What even is the point? Ah, I already miss my weirdly stiff, but overly soft sofa…'  
  
He did not miss any Memory more than he missed the Shadow Chair.  
  
Now that they had moved one more square west, the Axis Tree finally disappeared from view. That was a relief for Sunny, who did not need to feel the gaze of the Snow Devil anymore… but at the same time, it made him tense, because they had no way of knowing what the Devil was doing now.  
  
That paled in comparison to the fact that they finally saw the Shrine of Truth, though. Well, Kai saw it… possibly Slayer, too. Sunny was simply comforted by the thought that it was there.  
  
He could see eight surrounding peaks from the current square. The Shrine was two moves away, diagonally northwest of their position.  
Diagonally southwest, meanwhile, similarly two moves away from the Shrine…  
  
'Are you certain?'  
Kai nodded grimly.  
'Yes. That should be the Snow Demon.'  
  
Sunny frowned. The Snow Demon seemed to have abandoned the corner of the board, moving one square up. That made little sense, considering that it could have reached the Shrine of Truth already…  
  
Unless the Snow Tyrant wanted to use the Shrine as a lure to trap Sunny and his Ash Beasts, with nowhere to retreat. If that was its plan, then the Snow Demon would politely let them pass instead of intercepting them come morning.  
Sunny sighed.  
'So, what does it look like?'  
Kai hesitated for а while.  
'Well, I'm not sure.'  
Sunny raised an eyebrow.  
'How come? Don't you have the all - seeing eye?'  
Kai smiled faintly.  
'No… I merely have the most - seeing eye.'  
He chuckled quietly and added in a neutral tone:  
'Remember how you mentioned creepy wraiths made of snow?'  
Sunny did vaguely remember suggesting something like that whеn they had first encountered the Snow Devil.  
'Don't tell me.'  
Κai nodded.  
'Indeed. The Snow Demon is a creepy wraith made of snow. There is a blizzard raging on the mountains, and something is hiding in that blizzard. But I'm not sure what it is. Honestly, I only noticed its presence because the currents of snow seem unnatural, as if avoiding something… or someone.'  
  
Sunny sighed. 'My damned tongue. Why couldn't I have suggested pretty wraiths made of snow instead of creepy ones? Or better yet, creepy wraiths made of delicious food. That'd be great, too.'  
Kai scratched his head.  
'Can wraiths be made of food? I thought wraiths were supposed to be intangible.'  
Sunny grimaced.  
'You make a fair point.'  
He lingered for a moment, and then added in a disgruntled tone:  
'Have I ever mentioned that I hate wraiths? I once spent a few thousand years with a wraith stuck in my head. It had its uses, sure, but by the dead gods! Having a head wraith is so obnoxious. I do not recommend.'  
Kai stared at him silently for a while.  
  
Eventually, he asked in an even tone:  
'Who do you hate more, wraiths or birds?'  
Sunny blinked a couple of times.  
'What an interesting question.'  
He contemplated the answer, then shook his head decisively.  
'Birds are still worse. Definitely.'  
  
With that, he wandered off to find a place to rest.  
  
Sunny had been joking, but hunger was letting itself be known. It was merely a psychological dependency, of course, since he could sustain himself on nothing but his essence… Kai was far from being weakened by the lack of food, as well. Saints could go without sustenance for a long while. But everything was relative, of course.  
If it been Effie whom Sunny took with him on this journey, for example, she would have been dead or dying from hunger by now, becаuse of her Flaw. The realization that he could have led one of his friends to their death, and had only been spared that guilt by dumb luck, made Sunny feel… enraged.  
  
He had not felt that powerless in a long, long while. It was not a good feeling at all, but the truth was both obvious and ruthless. No matter how much Sunny had grown, and no matter how well he prepared, he was still nothing in front of beings like the Demon of Dread. The laws of a miniature realm Ariel had created to use as a toy were enough to render all Sunny's power meaningless.  
'I'll throw this damned board into the Sky Below after we get out of here.'  
  
…But of course, he wouldn't. Ariel's Game was too precious.  
Once it was cleared of the frightening abominations left here by Ariel and Weaver, it could be populated by far more manageable monsters. Then, it could be used as a training tool for the Saints who aspired to become Sovereigns, or even for those Supremes who had risen to their Rank only recently.  
After all, while the Ash Domain was a downgrade for Sunny, the experience of ruling it could be precious to someone else.  
He sighed and went about his business.  
  
In the morning, the Snow Demon remained where it was, indicating that Sunny's suspicion was true - the Snow Tyrant was leaving the road to the Shrine of Truth wide open, intending to completely surround them there.  
Sunny did not mind, though. In fact, that was exactly what he wanted to happen, as well.  
  
They traveled one more square west in the evening, reaching the westernmost column of squares. At dawn, the Snow Demon once again remained in place, while the Clockwork Giant once again conquered the volcano they had just left.  
'That makes two.'  
  
Once they reached the Shrine, both the Snow Demon and the Snow Beast would make one move north, surrounding Sunny and his companions from south and east. That would only leave an enemy to close the blockade from the north - and then, the three of them could attack the Shrine together.  
Sunny did not know who the enemy would be, but he was going to find out soon.  
  
Finally, on their sixth sunset in Ariel's Game, they reached the Shrine of Truth.  
  
Stepping on the slope of the lonesome mountain, Sunny knew that this was where the decisive battles of this Death Game were going to be fought.  
He sighed heavily.  
'Game on, I guess.'