2353 Sacred Battlefield  
The square of the Shrine was not different from the rest of them. It had been a snow - covered mountain before, but now that the Ash Domain swallowed it, the peak of the mountain shattered, and rivers of lava flowed down its slopes, melting away the snow and ice. Soon enough, it was covered in ash.  
  
Sunny and his companions slowly ascended the slope of the newly born volcano, not in a hurry to reach the caldera. There was some time to spare, after all, since their enemies would need at least two moves to launch an attack.  
  
'It's interesting.' Sunny glanced at the pillar of smoke rising into the sky. He was reminded of his First Nightmare - the Namеless Temple had also been located atop a snowy peak, after all. But now, the peak of the mountain had exploded and crumbled, replaced by the crater of a fuming volcano. This meant that the Shrine of Truth could not have been located there.  
  
'Was it hidden in a cave?' He could ask Kai, but really, Sunny was not that curious. Kai, meanwhile, seemed a little troubled.  
  
'This time, there will be three Snow figures launching an attack at the same time, won't there?' Sunny shrugged. 'Most likely.'  
  
The charming archer exhaled slowly. 'The two we killed were already terrible enough. Are you sure we will be able to handle three at the same time?'  
  
Sunny hesitated for a little while. 'Well, we also have the Obsidian Hive and the shadow of Abundance with us now. And we don't need to kill all three - we just need to hold out until the sun rises. If we fortify this place well, it should be doable.' His expression darkened a little. 'The real problem is that we will have to repel them the day after that, and the day after that, and the day after that… as countless times as it takes until one side is entirely obliterated.' He smiled faintly. 'But that was the very reason we decided to come here, wasn't it? To grow stronger every time a Snow figure is sacrificed to the Shrine of Truth.'  
  
In fact, Sunny hoped that he would be able to make use of the Shrine even before the first siege. He carried two jade figurines, after all… the idea of wasting two truths pained him, but if the figures could be sacrificed to strengthen him and his allies, he was willing to part with them. Kai chuckled. 'You are still full of confidence, I see. Aren't you even a little bit afraid?'  
  
Sunny shook his head. 'Why would I be? These things stopped scaring me a long, long time ago. It's like I've exhausted all the fear allotted to me at birth… ah, but I am not completely fearless. Do you know what really frightens me?'  
  
Kai raised an eyebrow. 'What?'  
  
Sunny took a deep breath and shivered. 'Watching Nephis pour honey on the pancakes I made. Now that's… that's frightening.'  
  
Kai blinked a couple of times. 'What's wrong with honey?'  
  
Sunny gave him an indignant glare. 'Everything! The better question would be what's right with honey… who in their right mind would taint innocent pancakes with something so vile?'  
  
The charming archer just stared at him silently for a while, then took a shaky breath. 'And you're being sincere, too. But if you fear honey so much, why not tell Nephis to stop using it?'  
  
Sunny coughed and glanced away. 'Well… why would I? If she likes honey, I am willing to fill the entire Ivory Tower with honey. If that is not enough, I'll replace the water in the lake with honey, too.'  
  
Kai laughed. 'Aren't you sweet? Just like…' Sunny gave him a dark look. 'I suggest you stop there, pal. If you know what's good for you.' Kai only laughed louder.  
  
Eventually, they crested the edge of the caldera and began the descent. Soon enough, they reached the main vent of the volcano and the pillar of smoke rising from it.  
  
The Shrine of Truth rested on a platform suspended above the abyssal chasm on soot - covered chains. Unlike the Ash Castle, though, there was no fortress on the platform. Instead, there was a charred temple built from large blocks of stone, its edifice turned black by ash and smoke. Tall pillars, a broad frieze, a triangular pediment decorated by weathered reliefs… The Shrine of Truth looked vaguely familiar, like a shabby cousin of the Nameless Temple. The two were not exactly the same, but definitely resembled each other, as if built in the same style.  
  
Sunny stared at the chаrred temple for a few seconds. 'Curious.'  
  
He knew that the Nameless Temple was truly ancient. Since it had been originally dedicated to all seven gods of the pantheon, it must have been built at the very dawn of existence - after the Void was sealed, but before the seventh god was forgotten, his very memory forbidden. The daemons had been born roughly at the same time, so this kind of temple must have just become ingrained in Ariel's mind in the days of his youth. So, when he needed to create a rough model of a temple, he could have simply defaulted to this style without thinking too much.  
  
Sunny tilted his head. Was it right to think about daemons in such easy terms? To imagine them so human?  
  
Daemons had been born Sacred, having been torn from the soul of a god. So, they could not have been too human… That said, they had been young once, too. They had experienced passions and sorrows, too. They had walked the Path of Ascension and elevated themselves to the Divine Rank.  
  
So, who was to say that they had shared no similarity to mortal men like Sunny and Kai? Shaking his head, he turned to Slayer аnd grinned. 'Should I toss you over the chasm again?'  
  
She gave him a cold, sinister look… then took a graceful step toward Kai, stopping near him silentlу. Sunny opened his eyes wide. 'Ah! The bitter pain of betrayal…'