2359 First Siege  
  
Kai and Slayer had little time to get used to their new power… granted, Slayer had not required time for adjustment at all. She simply took the change that had happened to her because of the boon of ash in stride, as if remembering something she already knew instead of coming to terms with something new.  
Then again, she wasn't very expressive, so it was hard to tell what was on her mind.  
  
'Why am I always surrounded by stoic women?'  
  
Sunny chuckled. Perhaps it was neither good luck nor bad luck, but simply a sign of the times. Considering the world they all lived in and the horrors Awakened faced, it was really not that surprising that there were a lot of strong, silent types walking around.  
'Couldn't be me…'  
  
Kai, meanwhile, had spent the few hours left until sunrise training. He performed a variety of exercises and shot his bow hundreds of times, slowly getting used to his newfound strength. Sunny observed him, feeling like he was watching an intricate masterpiece of a machine tune itself to perfection.  
Then, the sky in the east finally brightened, and as the violent winds howled in the distance, a familiar snowstorm enveloped the world. Plumes of snow stretched toward the fuming volcano like tentacles, ready to turn into glass bridges as soon as the first ray of sunlight spilled over the horizon.  
  
Sunny inhaled deeply.  
"Get ready."  
He felt a bit of trepidation in his heart.  
This time, they were going to be attacked by three figures of the Snow Domain - a Cursed Demon, a Cursed Beast, and a pack of Great Beasts. Therefore, he had to split his forces to face all three threats simultaneously.  
Slayer and a number of Obsidian Wasps would be defending the north slope of the volcano against the Snow Wolves. Kai and the shadow of Abundance would defend the east slope against the Clockwork Giant. Sunny and the rest of his shades… were going to face thе Cursed Demon on the southern side of the mountain.  
  
The odds were not in their favor, but thankfully, they did not have to defeat their fearsome enemies. All Sunny and his companions really had to do was hold the enemy back until the dawn exhausted itself. That said… Sunny had no intention of choosing a passive strategy. Only death was waiting for them that way.  
  
True, they could simply hold the enemy back, but that would simply mean facing the same threat tomorrow. And by tomorrow, their power would be diminished - they would be wounded, lacking essence, with fewer shades to help them in battle. The burden of consecutive battles would only mount after that, and sooner or later, it would crush them.  
So, Sunny had to finish today's battle - and every battle after that - in a way that would leave him more powerful than he had been yesterday. That meant removing at least one Snow figure off the board, or better yet all of them. If he managed that, there would be new shades in his slowly growing army, and new jade figurines for his companions to sacrifice.  
'Let's hope things go according to plan.'  
  
Sunny had an ace hidden up his sleeve, naturally - the grand enchantment he had woven into the mountain. But there were certain conditions that had to be met for his sorcery to work, and both he and his companions would have to work hard in order to make sure that it delivered the desired result.  
Which was complete and utter annihilation, of course.  
"What do you think, guys? Will we convince the Snow Tyrant not to underestimate us too much?"  
He looked at the Obsidian Wasps that surrounded him from both sides. Considering their size, Sunny had to crane his neck a little to look at their expressionless, gemlike eyes.  
Their eyes were huge and compound, so he could see hundreds of his reflections staring bacк at him.  
…It was a good thing that Mordret wasn't around.  
In any case, the Wasps did not respond, making him sigh in disappointment.  
"I mean, who does that bastard take me for? Sending a mere Demon and two Beasts to kill me… how humiliating."  
He forced out an unconvincing smile.  
Of course, Sunny knew that the Snow Tyrant was probably not trying to kill him seriously today. Rather, today's battle was merely meant to wound and exhaust the Ash Tyrant until the true elites of the Snow Domain arrived - the Devils, the Monsters…  
  
The coming days would be quite eventful, to say the least.  
This was one more reason why Sunny had to destroy as many Snow figures as he could this morning. The Shrine of Truth could only be attacked from three directions, but that did not mean that it could only be attacked by three figures. If more of them occupied the surrounding peaks, there could be up to ten horrors attacking the fuming volcano at the same time.  
Actually, it was a bit peculiar that the Snow Tyrant had not employed that strategy already. So peculiar, in fact, that Sunny was starting to suspect that being able to bring several figures to a single square was a unique privilege of the Tyrants. After all, Slayer and Kai had never remained on a mountain without him…  
That was something to consider, at least.  
  
As Sunny did just that, the snow plumes finally solidified into ethereal bridges of glistening glass.  
The golden light of dawn washed over the sea of clouds. It looked just as dreamlike and gorgeous as ever, but Sunny was in no mood to appreciate gorgeousness.  
Instead, he watched chillingly as a vast protuberance seemed to extend from the milky wall of the snowstorm, as if the blizzard itself was crossing the glass bridge.  
That was the Cursed Demon coming to kill him under the cover of swirling snow.  
"Ah, hell…"  
Summoning the helmet of the Jade Mantle, Sunny reached into the shadows and pulled a black odachi from them.  
The Obsidian Wasps seemed to tremble a little, as if shivering in the cold.