2363 Shattered Rock  
The mountains of Ariel's Game were titanic, towering much higher than any peak on Earth. They were impressively rugged and durable, as well, nearly indestructible - theу had to be, considering that each was meant to become an arena for tremendously powerful beings.  
  
And yet, in everу battle Sunny had fought in this miniature realm, the mountain in question would inevitably be damaged. The two clashes with the Ice Hive and the harrowing battle against Abundance had resulted in dreadful devastation.  
  
But even that level of destruction paled in comparison to what was happening to the Shrine of Truth volcano now that six figures - three figures of Ash and three figures of Snow - had collided on its slopes.  
The unimaginable scale of the unraveling calamity contrasted peculiarly against the dreamlike, glowing gorgeousness of the gilded clouds below. The billowing black veil of ash above was illuminated by the golden glow of the rising sun, as well, contributing to the striking sight.  
  
Between the gorgeous white gold of the clouds and the elegant black gold of the ash, a scene of utter devastation was taking place.  
  
On the southern slope, an immense mass of shattered rock had collapsed into the sea of clouds. The ground was torn by wide fractures, and rivers of lava were flowing down the weathered stone, spilling into the milky veil of swirling mist. The calamity was only just beginning, as well - Sunny and the Wolf had intertwined into an obliterating whirlwind, slowly moving toward the caldera as they left a trail of destruction in their wake.  
  
On the northern slope, the Snow Wolves had reached the end of the glass bridge. This was the natural bottleneck they had to be brave if they wanted to step onto the ash-covered surface of the volcano, so that was where the phalanx of the Obsidian Wasps met them, scurrying forward to keep the enemy away from Slayer.  
The Snow Wolves were quite cunning, though. Instead of colliding with the orderly battle formation of the insect-like shades, they turned into a rushing mass of snow and tried to bypass them - these Great Beasts were intelligent enough to know that the lethal archer hiding behind the Obsidian Wasps was the true threat, and so, they were determined to deal with Slayer first.  
  
Their attempt had been spoiled, though, when the Wasps unfolded their translucent wings. A hurricane wind was raised by the beating of the obsidian wings, pushing the avalanche of snow back and arresting its advance.  
The Snow Wolves had no choice but to assume corporeal forms and descend upon the shades in all their bestial fury. Scarlet eyes glowed viciously as they bit into the glossy obsidian and shattered it with their paws, shattering several Wasps in an instant.  
The Wasps were shades of Supreme Beasts, and there were more of them than there were Snow Wolves… however, shades were inherently weaker than their living counterparts, and these Great Beasts seemed far more powerful than each individual Crystal Wasp had been.  
Still, the clash of so numerous beings of the Supreme and Great Ranks was nothing short of distressing, producing almost as much violent destruction as the battle between Sunny and the Wolf did. The northern slope shook almost as much as the southern one, and sharp pieces of stone flew in every direction like shrapnel.  
  
Fissures and cracks appeared on the surface of the weathered rock, and the mountain seemed to groan. Its titanic edifice shuddered in pain.  
The Obsidian Wasps seemed to disintegrate under the vicious assault of the Snow Wolves, but they fought with the tactical awareness and precision of a well-trained army unit - what they lacked in strength and fеrocity, they made up for with seamless coordination and unity. That was only possible because Sunny commanded them with an intricate level of control, naturally.  
  
One of the shades fell, shattered in the maw of the towering white wolf, but that gave two more just enough time to bite into the wolf's legs with their obsidian mandibles.  
…And that, in turn, gave Slayer just enough time to draw her bow.  
Now that the wolves were not rushing across the bridge but were instead bogged down in the crumbling phalanx of Obsidian Wasps, they were easy targets. A black arrow flashed through the air and sank into the wolf's rabid eye - in the next moment, the entire upper half of the beast exploded into a bloody mess. The Great Beast fell down, its body crumbling into snow and ice.  
  
On the eastern slope, the indomitable Clockwork Giant stepped onto the ash. Its stiff motions were measured and inevitable, and the world itself seemed to be bending around him, as if pushed by the crushing mass of the Cursed Beast's heavy presence.  
The giant glanced up, at the huge body of Abundance that was already descending upоn him like an avalanche of black flesh. His sword rose like the blade of a guillotine and fell down, cleaving through the enormous worm's neck.  
  
Even the great sword's immense length was nоt enough to cut cleanly through it, though. And even though the cut delivered by the Clockwork Giant extended far beyond the brass blade of his sword, leaving a huge scar on the face of the mountain, Abundance refused to be beheaded.  
  
Instead, the giant was buried under the endless flesh of the worm shade. The volcano shook and shook from the cataclysmic impact, a hurricane of ash rising into the air as the weathered rock split and turned to dust.  
  
The surface of the volcano broke, but the indomitable brass giant did not. Instead, it simply carved his way through the flesh of Abundance, emerging on the other side with mechanical, unfeeling malevolence.  
As soon as it did, a sonic wave crashed into him violently, making the ancient metal rattle and pushing the Cursed Beast back.  
High above, a dark dragon was soaring among the ash, its eyes shining with a gorgeous silver light.  
  
Kai was a Saint, and Saints were not supposed to battle Cursed Ones.  
However, he was strengthened by the boon of ash and emboldened by Sunny's own deathly will.  
  
So, today, he could achieve things he would not have been able to achieve otherwise.  
Like, for example…  
Meaningfully affecting a Sacred shade with the mystical power of his voice.  
No sooner than the Clockwork Giant staggered back into the coils of Abundance, an eerily gorgeous voice thundered from above:  
"CRUSH HIM!"  
And suddenly, the giant found it much harder to escape from the endlessness of the black worm than before.  
  
The mountain shuddered, breaking apart, as the Cursed abominations and the Sacred shade clashed on its slope, the breathtaking dragon unleashing the annihilating power of its songs on the shattered slope.  
The sun crawled slowly from behind the horizon.