2375 Hear no Evil  
  
The abominations of the Snow Domain surrounded the Shrine of Truth in the morning. This time, it was a Cursed Demon and two Cursed Monsters - the force that had been defending the Shrine of Fear at the start of the game.  
  
By then, the lake of lava was already starting to cool. It slowly lost its radiance and dimmed, solidifying into a vast plain of ash-grey rock. However, Sunny knew that the solid nature of this crust was merely an illusion - it was like a thin layer resting atop a scorching abyss of magma, too easily broken by the forces that a battle between deific figures would unleash. Actually, he was considering using the treacherous nature of the thin crust as a strategy. Cursed Nightmare Creatures would not be seriously harmed by something as trifling as taking a plunge into a pool of lava, and they were not going to drown in it, either. However, he could still gain an advantage by pulling them into the depths of the volcano…  
  
Just not too deep, since he was wary of descending lower than the sea of clouds.  
  
Cursed Nightmare Creatures were not as bound by the mundane logic as lesser beings were, but some things were still dictated by their nature. For example, creatures that were meant to walk the earth would grow weaker if forced to fight in the water. Sunny himself, however, did not have that problem - he could change his form freely, and so, any battlefield was his home.  
  
The form of the Onyx Serpent was one he was attuned to the most, as well. Or rather, would it be the Jade Serpent now? In any case, he had battled Daeron the Serpent King while using this Shell, and countless abominations since. So, if he managed to pull the new Snow Demon into the lava…  
  
There, in the depths, he might actually defeat it.  
  
But Sunny did not feel confident.  
  
In fact, he was overcome by a feeling of unease. He felt like a rat that had been pushed into a corner.  
  
The battle against the Wolf had already been dangerous enough. It had been a close call. Now, however…  
  
Sunny's wounds, both physical and unseen, were quite severe. They had healed somewhat, but not enough to allow him to enter the battle at his full strength come tomorrow. So facing a Cursed Demon, even in the depths of the volcano, did not seem like a winning bet.  
  
Far from it.  
  
If Sunny was honest with himself, he had to admit that he would not be of much use as a warrior in the upcoming battle.  
  
Luckily, there was a different strategy he could use… had to use, considering that there were no better options.  
  
Instead of participating in the battle himself, he could turn into a shadow and enhance someone.  
  
Kai аnd Slayer both received two boons of ash. They were already far more powerful than Transcendent beings were supposed to be, and while Sunny could not enhance Kai - his friend was neither part of him nor a subject of his Domain - he could amplify Slayer.  
  
That was not an optimal use of his power, though.  
  
The optimal use of it would be to amplify one of his most powerful shades. The shade of the Wolf, for example.  
  
The shadows dwelling in his soul were not alive and did not possess the sense of self. As a result, they could not really wield the Will, which was of paramount importance in a battle between deities. So even the Sacred shades were not too different from immensely powerful, but ultimately mundane beasts.  
  
That was unless Sunny wrapped himself around them.  
  
If he did, not only would their power be amplified, but he would also be able to substitute their absent Will with his own. That way, a Sacred shade would become much closer to the glory of its former self.  
  
If Sunny enabled the shadow of the Wolf, the two of them together would stand a decently goоd chance of slaying a Cursed Demon.  
  
That was something to consider, at least. That was the best strategy he could come up with in the absence of Sacred soul shards to cast some powerful spell, or any other material and resource to pull off a daring trick.  
  
'It… should be good enough, right?'  
  
If Sunny and the Wolf faced the Cursed Demon… Slayer, Kai, the shadow of Abundance, the pack of Shadow Wolves, and the remaining Obsidian Wasps would have to deal with the two Cursed Monsters.  
  
Could they?  
  
Alternatively, he could take a risk and concentrate all his forces on one of the enemies first, gambling on the chance of slaying it speedily.  
  
There was a lot to consider.  
  
But he could only consider it after learning more about his enemies.  
  
At that moment, Sunny and his companions were standing on the roof of the Shrine of Truth, observing the surrounding peaks tensely. The sun was rising above the miniature realm of Ariel's Game, and the glass bridges were collapsing into plumes of snow.  
  
Sunny sighed and glanced at Kai.  
  
"Are you sure?"  
  
Kai nodded.  
  
"Quite sure, yes. It should be a Demon."  
  
Kai could see further and better than Sunny, but he could not see the souls of living beings like Sunny. That said, Awakened possessed senses beyond that of mundane people, and these senses developed the more experienced they became, and the higher their Rank was. Saints would rarely be mistaken about the Class and Rank of an adversary even without gazing into the adversary's soul.  
  
Sunny remained silent for a few seconds, then asked somberly:  
  
"So what kind of loathsome horror is it?"  
  
Kai raised a hand to shield his eyes from the rays of the rising sun and looked east, at the distant snow-covered peak.  
  
His expression changed subtly.  
  
"I see it. It…"  
  
His voice changed, too.  
  
"…it is looking back."  
  
Then, Kai fell silent, his body trembling faintly.  
  
Sunny frowned.  
  
"What does it look like, though?"  
  
Kai's lips moved as if he was going to say something… before he did, however, Sunny was distracted by a sudden movement.  
  
He glanced to the side in confusion, where Slayer seemed to be unsheathing her swords.  
  
'Odd.'  
  
Kai finally spoke, the words leaving his mouth sounding like a jumbled mess of eerie, alien curses.  
  
Sunny belatedly realized that listening to these words was a dreadful mistake… but by then, they had already crawled into his ears, and slithered their way into his mind.  
  
'Not good.'  
  
Then, everything turned dark.