2388 Lure  
  
There used to be twelve Snow figures arrayed against the three figures of Ash on the game board. Now, only three of them remained - two Devils and the Tyrant itself. And Sunny was half a step ahead of the Devils, as well.  
  
The path to the Tyrant was almost clear, but there was still a chance that the Devils would pursue him. If they did, the vaguely human-shaped Tree Devil would be of no concern, since it was further south than Sunny and his companions. The dragon, however, was north of the Shrine of Truth - so, if it moved east, they would have to clash with it eventually.  
  
Sunny wanted to avoid fighting a Cursed Devil if he could. In fact, he dreaded that battle - еven if there were three Sacred shades under his command now. So, he left Slayer in the Shrine of Truth.  
  
It was unclear how cunning the Snow Tyrant was and how well it knew the figures of the Ash Domain. However, it had shown at least some ability to act strategically. So, it would most likely be unwilling to leave the square of the Shrine in the hands of the adversary. Not only because the power of the Ash Domain would grow the more squares belonged to it, while the power of the Snow Domain would diminish accordingly - it was also because Sunny could easily return to the Shrine if his path to it was not cut off.  
  
The truth of the matter was easy - the Snow Tyrant did not possess enough figures anymore to catch its adversary unless its adversary wanted to be caught. Sunny could wander the board indefinitely, playing a perilous game of cat and mouse with the two Snow Devils. He could stall for as long as he wanted, until his wounds completely recovered, for example, or until all of his shades restored themselves.  
  
Additionally, he had in his possession the jade figurine left behind by the Rat King. His power would increase even more if he was ever allowed to reach the Shrine of Truth, the Ash Castle, or - presumably - the Shrine of Fear. He did not even have to keep Kai and Slаyer with him. He could send them to wander the miniature realm of Ariel's Game on their own, conquering peak after peak until the Snow Domain lost its territorial advantage entirely.  
  
So… Sunny was betting on the fact that at least one of the Devils would waste a move to conquer the Shrine of Truth. And to make it even more alluring for them, he left one of his figures - Slayer - on the roof of the drowning temple.  
  
Sunny and Kai sat on the stone slope and watched the sunrise silently. There was the gorgeous golden glow of dawn, and the plumes of snow freezing to turn into ethereal bridges. Neither of them spoke, still drained after the battle against the Rat King, and although a lot was going to be decided by what the Devils chose to do - or were commanded to do - both felt… Peaceful.  
  
Even if there were alarming battles ahead, they were not going to happen until numerous days later. And although they were still imρrisoned in Ariel's Game, the board was almost entirely empty of horrible Nightmare Creatures, which meant that they would not be surrounded and attacked unexpectedly. For the first time since the Death Game commenced, Sunny did not feel like a cornered beast. He inhaled deeply, enjoying the view of the radiant sun.  
  
'Come on…'  
  
Finally, the glass bridges were fully formed, and the Devils moved. Sunny held his breath, feeling his heart skip a beat.  
  
'Yes!'  
  
A wide grin split his soot-covered face.  
  
His prediction was coming true - and in the best possible way.  
  
"The Tree Devil is moving east."  
  
Kai's voice was subdued. The human-like fiend was walking across the glass bridge, moving to the mountain directly south of their position. It was being sent on a hopeless pursuit.  
  
The dragon, however…  
  
Sunny did not need Kai to tell him, because he could see the dragon flying across the sea of clouds himself. The great beast glanced like a tiny dot from the distance, but there was no mistake - it was flying south, toward the Shrine of Truth. Which meant that nothing stood between Sunny and the Snow Tyrant anymore. He smiled happily.  
  
It was odd… Maybe the Snow Tyrant did not care to bar his passage. Perhaps it even wanted Sunny to come as soon as possible, before he could fully heal from his wounds - in that case, moving the dragon away and opening a clear path served the same purpose as leaving Slayer alone in the Shrine of Truth. It was a lure.  
  
…Possibly the Snow Tyгant simply failed to control the dragon - after all, a Cursed Devil was a being of immense power, not much inferior to its own. In any case, the result coincided with what Sunny wanted.  
  
"We're in the clear, Kai. We're in the clear…"  
  
Finally, the end of Ariel's Game was in view. There was only one battle left for them to win - the most dreadful of them all, but still the last one: the battle against the Snow Tyrant itself.  
  
Sunny exhaled slowly and watched the dragon fly across the vast chasm separating the two mountains. He thought he even saw explosions bloom as Slayer set arrow after arrow flying. And just when the dragon was about to reаch the lake of lava…  
  
Sunny narrowed his eyes and dismissed her, calling her back into the nurturing darkness of his soul. Somewhere far away, the graceful figure of the murderous huntress dissolved into the shadows.  
  
A few seconds later, the Shrine of Truth shook as the gargantuan dragon landed on its roof. Robbed of its prey, the Cursed Devil let out a frightening roar - its echoes traveled across the golden clouds, reaching Sunny and Kai on the slope of the distant volcano and making them tremble. And soon after that, the Snow Domain's move was over.  
  
Sunny let out a happy sigh and glanced at Kai.  
  
"See?"  
  
He smiled in satisfaction.  
  
"Let me tell you, buddy… a game has not been invented yet that I cannot cheat?"