2389 Final March  
  
Sunny and Kai slept like dead men in the warm cradle of ash. This time, there was no manor of shadows to shelter them - Sunny was too hurt and exhausted to raise one, and did not feel the need to do it either.  
  
They woke up from the sounds of the dragon roaring at the setting sun. The volcano Sunny had destroyed was now a mountain once again… granted, the mountain seemed crooked and low, not at all as tall and magnificent as the snowy peaks that surrounded it.  
  
He was faintly glad to have left a scar on the realm of Ariel's Game.  
  
The Shrine of Truth was now encased in ice and hidden in the depths of the mountain. The dragon rested on the peak, baring its fangs at the falling sun, as if warning it not to come closer. The sun, naturally, paid it no heed.  
  
Sunny studied the distant peak for a while, then looked at Kai and asked in a tone of contemplation: "Do you think all dragons come from Sun God?"  
  
Sevirax, the Ivory Dragon, was a descendant of Sun God. Granted, he was merely a Saint who could transform into one… or rather, had been. Still, all creatures except humans had either been made by the gods or were sired by those creations.  
  
'Except for the Nothing Creatures, I guess. And the The remainder. And the Darkness Creatures. Also the Stone Saints. Who else? Nephilim, as well. Actually, I take it back… not all creatures were created by the gods.'  
  
But most of them had been.  
  
So, who had created the dragons?  
  
Kai hesitated for a while, then shrugged. "I am not sure. Perhaps all white dragons do?"  
  
Sunny yawned, then гose to his feet and studied his unresponsive right hand for a few seconds. Then, he glanced west. "Chances are we won't have to fight this particular white dragon. Are you disappointed?"  
  
Kai raised an eyebrow. "Huh? Why would I be disappointed?"  
  
Sunny chuckled. "Well, don't you want to add a third dragon to your collection?"  
  
Kai studied him with a sour expression, then shook his head lightly. "I am not greedy. You are welcome to take this one, if you want."  
  
Sunny grinned. "Thank you kindly! I'd rather not."  
  
He was indeed a little envious of Kai the Dragonslayer because of his glorious track record. How was it fair that Kai went around slaying dragons, while Sunny was stuck with rats, worms, and the like?  
  
That hint of envy was far too slight to survive the sight of a Cursed Devil, though. So, Sunny had no desire to battle this particular dragon.  
  
He sighed. "Let's go. We'll be leaving this place soon."  
  
At this point, Sunny had a choice to make. He could reach the Snow Tyrant in five moves at the earliest - coincidentally, that was also how long his shades would take to repair themselves. Slayer was most likely going to heal from her wounds in that time, as well.  
  
Sunny did not see a lot of sense in delaying the final battle, so he was leaning toward taking the shortest path. There were three routes that would take him to the Snow Castle in five moves… and he did not have to take just one.  
  
He could just as easily travel west to the Axis Tree, and then turn north. Kai, meanwhile, could travel north to the edge of the board, then turn west. That way, they would reach the Snow Castle at the same time - with the added bonus of possibly bringing four volcanoes into the Ash Domain. That was an alluring prospect…  
  
But it was also too risky.  
  
After all, Sunny was only assuming that the Snow Tyrant remained in the Snow Castle. If it had left the heart of the Snow Domain, though… Then sending Kai out alone could mean sending him to die.  
  
They could only see the neighboring mountains, after all. If the Snow Tyrant was waiting in ambush one peak over, or just happened to be in the way by chance, then there would be no chance for Kai to escape… not as long as one of the Devils chose to pursue him instead of Sunny, at least.  
  
So, Sunny had to swallow his regret and abandon the plan of potentially expanding the territory of the Ash Domain. The two of them were going to stay together until the very end… for better or for worse.  
  
"Ah. Am I not the best friend in the world?"  
  
Hearing that sudden proclamation, Kai gave him a sidelong glance, but wisely chose to remain silent.  
  
'I knew he would agree!'  
  
Sunny was delighted.  
  
They left the volcano at dusk and moved west, coming in sight of the Axis Tree once again. The mountain where they had killed Abundance was now to their right… to their left was the unexplored half of the game board that belonged to the Snow Tyrant.  
  
In the morning, the Tree Devil and the Cursed Dragon both moved east in pursuit. Watching the mountain where the Rat King had died become covered by snow, Sunny could not help but feel uneasy.  
  
He found it hard to believe that Kai would not end up fighting the Cursed Dragon, somehow. But then, he had to remind himself of one easy fact.  
  
…Not everyone was Fated.  
  
In fact, very few beings were, and Kai was not one of them. He could end up facing the Cursed Dragon by some improbable twist of fate, or not. Actually, Sunny himself was not Fated anymore either, so the odds were in their favor.  
  
The only probable future in which they would be forced to fight the dragon… was if they failed to κill the Snow Tyrant and had to retreat. Then, the Tyrant and its two Devils would descend upon them together, and they would die.  
  
'There is no way back, only forward. Failure means death. The enemy is overwhelmingly powerful, and mistakes are not allowed… ah, how nostalgic!'  
  
Sunny smiled faintly, knowing that he was staring death in the face.  
  
That felt like home. After all, he was the Sovereign of Death.  
  
The next evening, as the falling sun set the sea of clouds ablaze, Kai and Sunny crossed the obsidian bridge and set foot on the titanic branch of the Axis Tree. They had reached the very heart of Ariel's Game.'