1843 Crash Landing on You

The Crushing descended upon Godgrave, flattening a vast swathe of the vermilion jungle and pressing the Nightmare Creatures into the white surface of the ancient bone. Its reach was a magnitude smaller than it had been in the ruins of the Kingdom of Hope… but its force was just as tyrannical.

The winged abominations that had been rising toward the flying island were either obliterated or thrown to the ground. A deluge of blood rained down, and only the strongest and most resilient of the flying horrors managed to stay in the air. They persisted stubbornly, their eyes full of demented frenzy.

There were terrifying aerial behemoths among them, and nimble creatures that zipped around on swift, translucent wings.

A moment later, the first arrow streaked down, hitting one of the larger abominations in the eye and obliterating half of its hideous head.

Sunny looked at the macabre spectacle, feeling his blood boil with a familiar thrill. He had never thought that he would grow accustomed to the ghastly crucible of battle one day, but here he was, acting as if he was addicted to it. He longed to join the bloodshed, but could not allow himself to. It was the strangest thing.

He could see the Fire Keepers, who were spread out along the edge of the island, drawing their bows. Some of them were better archers than others, but each and every one was proficient enough with bow and arrow to be a lethal presence on the battlefield.

Their Memories were all top-notch, as well — not only because they had gathered a vast arsenal of them during the long years of defending humanity from the horrors of the Nightmare Spell, but also because Sunny had personally tinkered with their equipment in the last month. On top of that, all these Memories were being enhanced by the Crown of Dawn that Nephis wore.

A barrage of enchanted arrows unleashed by seven Ascended cohorts was a dire sight to behold.

The winged Nightmare Creatures that had endured the Crushing were simply erased from existence, chunks of flesh raining on the scarlet jungle below. Only one remained — an enormous beast with wings wide enough to drown the world in their shade. Its frenzied eyes were burning with chilling malice, and its pale brown hide was dotted with dozens of arrows, none of it which managed to pierce it deep enough to deal substantial damage.

The winds groaned as they were torn apart by its mighty wings.

Before the monstrous creature could rise any higher, though, a single fiery arrow streaked down from the top of the Ivory Tower, piercing its head clean through. Wisps of white flame escaped from inside its cracked skull.

The massive abomination lost momentum, rolled in the air, and started to fall down.

The Ivory Island was plummeting from the overcast sky, descending lower and lower. The closer to the ground it got, the more the jungle was affected by the Crushing. Many of the Nightmare Creatures that had been pressed down into the red moss were now flattened into piles of bloody flesh, sharp shards of bone protruding through the broken skin.

Most were powerful enough to survive, though.

Finally, the speed of the flying island's descent started to reduce.

It was still great, nevertheless, almost uncontrollable — as if the people on the island were in a rush to reach the ground.

And they were. Because the sky above them was suffused with blinding glow, and only a thin veil of clouds stood between them and inescapable annihilation.

"Brace!"

When the shout spread among the Fire Keepers, Sunny gracefully lowered himself to one knee and put one hand on the grass. Aiko simply floated into the air, hovering above the ground.

In the next moment, the Ivory Island crashed heavily into the white surface of the ancient bone.

The dead god's collarbone quaked, and a violent shockwave obliterated a vast stretch of the vermilion jungle in the vicinity of the impact zone. The seven chains hanging from the Ivory Island rattled as they struck the ground. The lake resting on its surface rippled, spilling over its shores, and the Chain Breaker swayed on the tall waves.

The Ivory Island came to rest, laying tilted on the white expanse of ancient bone.

The Crushing dissipated.

Down below, countless Nightmare Creatures moved, rising from the ground. Their bloodshot eyes focused on the figures of the Fire Keepers looking at them from above.

The cloud of debris raised into the air by the impact had not settled yet when they started to move, flowing toward the invading island from all sides.

However, the Fire Keepers were moving, too.

The closest to Sunny was Sid, who had been Neph's driver on the day of the assassination attempt. Clad in a light armor and armed with a sword and shield, she stepped up to the edge and looked at the tide of abominations with a grin.

Then, before the sparks of light swirling around her head manifested into a helmet, she raised her sword and kissed the flat of its blade.

"Here we go!"

Letting out a battle cry, she jumped down, the plume of her helmet fluttering in the wind.

All along the edge, those Fire Keepers who were proficient in melee were doing the same. Those who excelled in ranged combat, as well as those who usually played a supportive role, stayed above, continuing to send arrows and sorcerous attacks into the tide of Nightmare Creatures.

Soon, the fastest of the abominations reached the vicinity of the island and clashed with the advancing Fire Keepers. Sharp steel hissed as it cut into flesh.

More blood spilled on the sun-bleached surface of the ancient bone.

Sunny observed the battle with burning eyes. The familiar cacophony assaulted his ears, and he felt his hands itching. Nevertheless, he remained where he was, playing the role of a non-combatant.

Before the Fire Keepers could drown in the tide of Nightmare Creatures, a radiant figure shot from the balcony at the top of the Ivory Tower, falling down like an incandescent meteor.

Nephis landed in the thick of the abominable horde, and in the next moment, a blinding explosion boomed above the bone plain. A wave of incinerating flame spread outward from the point of impact, turning countless Nightmare Creatures to ash.

The Fire Keepers cheered, welcoming their personal deity to the battlefield.

Looking from above, Sunny let out a long sigh.

"Ah, to hell with it…"

Then, he took control of the gloomy and used Shadow Step to send that incarnation of his far away, under the canopy of the scarlet jungle. Assuming a corporeal form there, he manifested the Onyx Mantle and summoned Weaver's Mask.

Then, before any of the rushing Nightmare Creatures could lunge at him, he stepped through the shadows once again, appearing in the midst of the battlefield.

An enormous, towering abomination was right in front of him, rising its terrifying fists to deliver a crushing blow to the ground below.

Reaching into the shadows, Sunny pulled an inky-black odachi out of them, and then lunged forward.

A dark line was suddenly drawn on the massive body of the Nightmare Creature. It froze for a moment, its fists still raised above its head…

And then slowly fell apart, bisected down the middle with a single terrifying slash.

Behind the abomination, a slender young woman with silver hair was revealed, holding a mirror-like sword.

There was an expression of surprise on her beautiful face.

Grinning behind the mask, Sunny gave her a small bow and said, his cold voice hiding a hint of dark glee.

"Welcome to Godgrave, Lady Nephis."

With that, he looked around.

"I hope you don't mind the mess…"