2112 Rebelious Shadow   
  
Whether the nebulous archer possessed a soul core or not, they were still a shadow. That was how they had been able to survive in the Shadow Realm, and why they were hunting the shadows of living beings for sustenance.  
  
That was also the reason why this cold and ruthless slayer could influence the wild shadows populating the desolate land, so much so that they were even scared to answer Sunny's call.  
  
However…  
  
Since the archer could interfere with Sunny in that way, didn't that mean that Sunny could do the same?  
  
After all, the archer was a shadow.  
  
And Sunny was the Lord of Shadows.  
  
He held dominion over everything that was a shadow, whether they liked it or not. If Sunny so wished, he could control and manipulate shadows, manifest them into tangible forms, or even send them into the Shadow Realm and back.  
  
Granted, his authority was not absolute. Although few shadows had attempted it yet, the vastest and most ancient of them could resist his will and refuse his commands… like the Fragment of the Shadow Realm did, for example.  
  
More importantly, there was one exception to his ability to command the shadows. No matter how weak, Sunny could neither control nor manifest the shadows of living beings — their loyalty was to their masters, and no matter how revered the Lord of Shadows was by them, that reverence did not trump that loyalty.  
  
However…  
  
The mysterious archer was not a shadow cast by a living being. They might have been once, but now, they were cast by nothing and belonged to nothing. They were alone and ownerless, without a master…  
  
It is improper for a shadow, let alone such a murderous one, to walk around without a master.  
  
Not the least of all because an unscrupulous Lord of Shadows might happen to pass by and try to exploit that defect.  
  
So…  
  
While suffering under the chillingly lethal barrage of insidious attacks and at the same time wrestling the cold will of the rebellious shadow,Sunny focused his own will into a sharp blade and added another command to his call.  
  
That one was addressed directly to the damned archer and consisted of only one word:  
  
"Halt."  
  
The archer suddenly shuddered.  
  
And because they shuddered, Sunny easily pushed aside the obsidian knife and plunged the splinter of the ivory fang into the enemy's side.  
  
A moment later, the archer punched him in the face, shattering the damaged visor of the onyx helmet and making Sunny see stars. They struck down with the bone knife, slicing through the splinter of the ancient fang, and disengaged.  
  
A moment later, the archer landed gracefully on the glossy stone a few dozen meters away and pressed one hand against their side, hunching a little.  
  
Sunny was pretty sure that being pierced by a fang of an ancient Soul Serpent was quite harmful, even for a relentless death machine like this damned maniac.  
  
He dismissed his broken helmet and laughed.  
  
"...Two can play this game, you know?"  
  
Before, the archer had interfered with his limbs.  
  
Now, Sunny was interfering with the archer.  
  
Of course, the nebulous slayer did not halt as commanded. However, their movements appeared somewhat constrained, sapped of some speed and power.  
  
Just enough to even the playing field in this battle.  
  
Taking a step forward, Sunny ignited his will and battered the archer with a barrage of irresistible commands.  
  
'Halt!'  
  
'Move!'  
  
'Kneel!'  
  
'Surrender!'  
  
'Beg!'  
  
'...Die!'  
  
But the mysterious shadow did resist them, hunching some more and remaining silent.  
  
Their slender fingers, nevertheless, dug into the wound, grasping the broken splinter of the ivory fang and pulling it free.  
  
A trickle of ghostly smoke flowed out of the wound, mixing with their billowing veil.  
  
'Still ready to fight, then.'  
  
Sunny grinned.  
  
Well, it was only to be expected. He had never expected that his little trick would bring this ruthless slayer to their knees. It was just something to weigh them down and let Sunny himself deliver the fatal blow.  
  
"What are you waiting for? Let's go, little shadow. I'm just getting warmed up."  
  
The archer stared at him for a few moments silently… at least Sunny thought that he was being stared at. He could not see their face, after all.  
  
Then, in an explosion of swift, purposeful motion…  
  
The archer turned around, fluidly grabbed their discarded bow and dashed away, sliding over the edge of the obsidian island a moment later.  
  
Falling into the depths of the shadow of Condemnation.  
  
Sunny froze for a moment.  
  
He blinked.  
  
'Huh?'  
  
Had he actually scared that damned killer so much?  
  
'No, impossible…'  
  
Then…  
  
His eyes widened a little.  
  
Did the bastard decide to go for the kill first, and deal with Sunny later? If so, he had to follow immediately!  
  
Yet…  
  
Somehow, Sunny did not feel like submerging into the nebulous body of the shadow of Condemnation was safe. In fact, everything inside him screamed against it, as if what awaited him inside was a fate far worse than death.  
  
It would be the same for the archer.  
  
Then what was Sunny missing?  
  
Suddenly, a cold chill ran down his spine, and a bad premonition made him shiver.  
  
With no helmet to shield his head, he realized quite quickly what it was that he had missed.  
  
Because his hair was fluttering wildly in the wind.  
  
The wind… the wind had grown much stronger.  
  
'...I'm getting a terrible sense of déjà vu.'  
  
Had he not caught a ride on the shoulder of a giant once, only to be caught in the storm?  
  
No… technically, it was on the neck of a giant.  
  
Turning around, Sunny looked at the horizon.  
  
The breathtaking, radiant maelstrom of the essence tempest was much, much closer than it had been before.  
  
And the wind was only growing stronger.  
  
Suddenly, a tiny spark of silver light shot past Sunny.  
  
And then, another spark shot from his vambrace… this one having nothing to do with essence. It was just a spark produced when something struck the stonelike metal of his armor at great speed.  
  
Something so swift and tiny that he did not even see it,let alone feel the impact.  
  
Sunny stared at his vambrace for a moment, noticing a deep scratch left onit.  
  
'Damn.'  
  
Then, he turned around to run.  
  
But it was already too late.