2123 Courting Death  
  
One of the Nine…  
  
Sunny considered these words for a few moments, a deep frown twisting his bruised face. The seventh incarnation just raised an eyebrow, maintaining a nonchalant attitude.  
  
He had encountered traces left behind by the mysterious Nine a few times throughout the years. However, he knew neither who the members of this nebulous group were nor what their purpose was. All he knew was that they seemed to have left deep scars on the history of the Dream Realm.  
  
Auro of the Nine, the adversary of his First Nightmare.  
  
Eurys of the Nine, the guide who had led Nephis to her Second Nightmare.  
  
And Alethea of the Nine, the First Seeker… the source of the Defilement whose destruction had ended their Third.  
  
And now, here was the fourth.  
  
…A shadow of the fourth, at least.  
  
Sunny stared at the dazed archer, then turned to study the white skull intently before speaking.  
  
"And who, exactly, are the Nine?"  
  
A few particles of light escaped from the empty eye sockets of the skull before it answered in a neutral tone:  
  
"It seems you do not know me, after all."  
  
Sunny smiled darkly.  
  
"I know that you are avoiding the answer, though."  
  
Eurys sighed.  
  
"If our tale has been forgotten, then let it remain so. It's not something to be proud of, anyway... and all of us are dead now, hopefully."  
  
He seemed reluctant to share.  
  
Sunny considered his next words for a few moments. He wanted to know the secrets of the Nine desperately, but at the same time, he was wary of the motionless skeleton.  
  
It would probably be best not to irritate the strange being, especially in his current state…  
  
At least not yet.  
  
Sunny finally spoke:  
  
"You don't seem that dead, though. And yet here you are... how did you end up in the Shadow Realm? You're not a shadow."  
  
Nephis had left Eurys in the Underworld, so what was the talkative skeleton doing here?  
  
The battered skeleton laughed.  
  
"How did I end up here, indeed? Simple, really… I walked here."  
  
Sunny continued to stare at the white skull, not amused.  
  
Eurys sighed.   
  
"What? I really did. It was hard to reach the Shadow Realm before, but now that it has no master and all the realms seem to have been fused together, it's easier to travel from one to another. The Realm of Death always shared a connection to the Underworld, which served as the boundary between the lands of the living and the lands of the dead. Now, it simply lies beneath it. If you jump into the Abyss, you'll end up falling into the Shadow Realm… that was what I did."  
  
Sunny's eyes narrowed slightly, and he couldn't help but look up.  
  
Slowly, it dawned on him that the starless black sky above him was not a sky at all. In fact… he was deep underground. Deeper even than the Underworld, which lay beneath the Hollow Mountains.  
  
However, the Shadow Realm was vast. So, it seemed that there was an entire subterranean world beneath the known surface of the Dream Realm, stretching all the way from the Forgotten Shore to… who knew where. He would only find out if he crossed the entirety of the Realm of Death and found a way to the surface on the other side, if it even existed.  
  
Did other entrances to the Shadow Realm exist?  
  
He was suddenly fascinated by the question.  
  
If they did…  
  
Then maybe one was hidden in the caverns under the Forgotten Shore, where the dark sea had once sought shelter from the ruthless sun. Another could be hidden in the empty abyss below the Chained Isles…   
  
This matter was not exactly important, but as an explorer, Sunny could not help but be enchanted by the mystery.  
  
The presence of the Creatures of Darkness could be explained by proximity to the Underworld, as well. It was very curious.  
  
However, he had more pressing issues to address. For example, the motives of the mysterious skeleton.  
  
Glancing at the expressionless skull, Sunny frowned.  
  
"Why would you come here, though? The Shadow Realm is not exactly a hospitable place. In fact, its promise is one of death and annihilation."  
  
Eurys of the Nine chuckled.  
  
"What an apt description! But that is exactly why I wanted to come here. You seem to have been blessed by Shadow God, boy… but I, on the contrary, was cursed by him. Me, Azarax, Kanakht, and a few others — my, oh my! What a bunch of pitiful wretches we are. We were banished from death, and so, we are unable to die."  
  
He remained silent for a few moments, and then added:  
  
"Shadow God is gone, though. So I've made the journey myself and came to the Realm of Death to be annihilated. Ah… but it's taking a while. So tedious."  
  
Just as he said that, another mote of light drifted into the air from within the white bones, proving that the Shadow Realm was, indeed, slowly destroying even the… whatever it was that Eurys was.   
  
Sunny remained silent for a while, shocked. The shadow of the archer struggled weakly below him, but he paid it no attention.   
  
'What the hell?'  
  
Cursed by Shadow God? Unable to die?   
  
What kind of curse was that?! Why did Sunny get haunted by a loathsome apparition when he was cursed, but Eurys got to be immortal instead?  
  
Where was justice in that?!  
  
He let out a resentful sigh.   
  
'It seems that this guy was not lying when he said that he had angered the gods…'  
  
What was it that Nephis had said? That Eurys claimed to have slit a god's throat?  
  
Did gods even have throats?  
  
<sida note from Soda: read the chaps in advance on telegram (stop reading on your websites guys): @shadow\_slave\_fastes>  
  
Sunny hesitated for a while, then asked somberly:  
  
"You said that if I kill this shadow, it would enter my Soul Sea, just like it had entered the Shadow Realm. So, then… is Shadow Realm what remains of Shadow God's Soul Sea?"  
  
The skull stared at him incredulously.  
  
"Huh."  
  
Eurys paused for a moment, and then said in an amicable tone:  
  
"Gods are not like us people, boy. They don't really have bodies, souls, and Soul Seas… it's all the same. So no, we are not inside the Soul Sea of Shadow God."  
  
The white skull chuckled.  
  
"Instead, we are simply inside Shadow God. Shadow Realm is his corpse."