2131 Shadow Slayer  
  
Sunny had to get back to the Gate of Shadow to summon himself back into Godgrave. It was going to take him longer to return than it had taken to reach the Serpent Graveyard, though — both because he would not be riding the shoulders of the shadow of Condemnation this time and because he had to circle around the massive essence storm.  
  
There was the last of the Darkness Creatures to worry about, as well. The Wolf was still out there, somewhere… relatively near and drawing nearer, according to Eurys.  
  
But those were minor concerns. The real concern were the harrowing beings that dwelled in the heart of the Shadow Realm, and were apparently coming to consume him.  
  
He could already feel a subtle, terrifying pressure at the outer edges of his shadow sense, dozens of kilometers away. It made him shiver.  
  
That was why there was no time to waste, and why he had resolved the issue of the shadow slayer so hastily. Sunny would have loved to stay and talk to Eurys more, but his instincts were telling him that he had to run.  
  
Or fly… that would be even better.  
  
His original body was severely wounded and weakened, so it could not maintain sufficient speed. So, he intended to construct a powerful Shell around the seventh avatar and carry himself as he fled.  
  
Before that happened, though…  
  
'Argh!'  
  
Sunny staggered and fell to one knee after taking only a few steps.  
  
A piercing pain was ravaging his soul.  
  
'She's... she's not wasting any time, is she?'  
  
Gritting his teeth, he rose from the ground and dove into his Soul Sea.  
  
By now, trained by having to control several avatars at the same time, Sunny could continue moving freely even while a piece of his consciousness entered the lightless expanse of his soul. So, even while he found himself surrounded by the familiar expanse of dark water, his twо bodies continued to flee.  
  
His Soul Sea had changed, somewhat, from the last time he visited it.  
  
The still water was the same, but if the dark ocean felt more deep. There were more shadows surrounding the replica of the Nameless Temple, tens of thousands of them watching it silently…  
  
As if waiting for something.  
  
The main difference, of course, was that there were now seven black suns hanging above the temple instead of six.  
  
The dark sky of his soul… felt complete.  
  
Sunny knew that six Shadows resided in these cores now.  
  
Saint, Serpent, Nightmare, Fiend, Mimic, and the slayer of the Shadow Realm.  
  
As he stared at his Terror Core, another pulse of harrowing pain washed over his conscience, making him groan.  
  
'T—this maniac!'  
  
As Sunny grimaced in pain, he thought he noticed a net of cracks revealing itself on the surface of the black sun.  
  
The still water stirred lightly, and a cold wind blew across its surface, making the branches of the Soul Devourer's shadow sway somewhere in the distance.  
  
The slayer he had invited into his soul seemed to have regained awareness… and was already trying to destroy one of his soul cores from within.  
  
As the seventh incarnation called upon the shadows of the Realm of Death to envelop him and started to build a Shell, Sunny summoned the Slayer to the surface of the still water.  
  
Soon, she appeared in front of him, wreathed momentarily in black flames.  
  
When the flames were extinguished, Sunny could finally see the shadow of one of the Nine clearly.  
  
...She looked much different from how she had been when they fought.  
  
Only now that Sunny saw the Slayer in the darkness of his soul did he realize how tattered and frayed her shadow had been in the Shadow Realm. Now, however, she was restored to immaculate condition. The vague, elusive silhouette was gone, replaced by a figure as solid as he himself was. The billowing mantle of ghostly smoke had dissipated, as well, and nothing obscured her features anymore.  
  
In front of him stood a beautiful woman with a slender and graceful figure, her build radiating a sense of extreme agility and strength. Her poise was unmistakably that of a warrior, and there was a hint of pride in the set of her bare shoulders.  
  
Her luscious ebony hair was gathered into a long braid, and her lean muscles seemed to be sculpted by an obsessed artist… it was just that her lithe body was entirely black, as if cast from ink. In fact, there was not a hint of color that Sunny could see.  
  
Well, it made sense. She was a shadow, after all.  
  
…And a slayer of shadows, as well.  
  
The Slayer was wearing a very light armor that consisted of a pteruges skirt, a chest guard, a single bracer, and greaves that protected her shins — clearly something meant for an archer, not a melee combatant. With how the light ensemble looked on her graceful body, she seemed more like a dancer than a fighter, but Sunny was not deceived.  
  
There were too many holes in his body to make such a mistake.  
  
Her face, meanwhile, was hidden behind a veil — and yet, Sunny could vaguely discern her features. High cheekbones, a sharp nose…  
  
And lifeless blacк eyes that seemed to stare at him with no emotion.  
  
Sunny let out a careful breath.  
  
Summoning a Shadow to appear in front of him in the Soul Sea was not the same as summoning them to the outside world. Here, they usually remained lifeless and passive unless he commanded them to come to their senses, as if in a state of stasis.  
  
So, he could study them and their runes in peace.  
  
'It seems I'm safe for the moment.'  
  
Sunny stared at the Slayer, then shifted his gaze and looked into the shadow that served as her soul.  
  
The rest of his Shadows possessed dark embers instead of Shadow Cores, but this one was unique. After all, she had possessed an actual Soul Core despite being a shadow — so, Sunny did not know what to expect.  
  
What he saw was different from how the Slayer had been before, but also not at all like the rest of his Shadows. Her radiant soul core was gone, but instead of being replaced by a dark ember, it was replaced by a radiant shard instead.  
  
That shard still remained in the same strange state — not quite Transcendent, but also not quite Supreme, as if lacking something.  
  
'How do I learn her runes?'  
  
Sunny was burning with curiosity… and more than a little bit of greed. He was quite excited to possess such a powerful Shadow.  
  
Now that he was banished from the Spell, the most reliable source of information he had access to was Cassie. However, to get her to take a look at the Slayer, he would have to summon the murderous Shadow into the real world.  
  
And she would probably venture to kill him immediately after that.  
  
Thank the gods she was docile and passive here, at least…  
  
Suddenly, Sunny felt a bad premonition.  
  
'Huh?'  
  
And a moment later, the dark eyes of the Slayer, which had been empty and lifeless before, slowly regained their cold sharpness.  
  
Defying all the rules, the Shadow turned her head slightly despite not receiving а command to come to life.  
  
And stared directly at him with murderous coldness.  
  
Sunny gulped.  
  
'Crap…'