2309 Death Game  
  
Sunny looked at the jade board for a few seconds, then turned to Kai.  
  
"Chess? Have you gone blind all of a sudden? This looks nothing like chess."  
  
Indeed. Sunny did not know too much about chess, but Teacher Julius had taught him how to play during his days as a guest lecturer at the Academy. A chessboard was supposed to have eight rows of squares, not seven. More importantly, white and black squares were supposed to be placed in a grid pattern - the jade board in front of him, however, was almost entirely white.  
  
Not to mention that the grotesque figures were nothing like the ones he was familiar with. There were no pawns, knights, bishops, or rooks - instead, there were only a variety of grotesque creatures.  
Kai chuckled.  
  
"I meant to say that it looks like a game similar to chess."  
Sunny frowned.  
It looked more like a war map to him. But why would a war map be in a toy room?  
  
"He's right!"  
Death Singer entered the chamber next and looked at the jade board with a fascinated expression. Then, she stopped moving entirely.  
Her pupils widened, making her glistening eyes look even larger.  
Sunny waved a hand in front of her face.  
"Hello? What exactly do you mean?"  
  
The petite woman turned her head and slowly focused on him, then threw a furtive glance at the board and forced out a smile.  
"Oh... it's the Death of a Tyrant, also known as Death Game. It is a game similar to chess that was popular in various regions of the Dream Realm once, a long time ago. Some even say that it was invented by Shadow God himself!"  
  
Sunny raised an eyebrow, then turned to the jade board as Seishan and Revel came in.  
  
"Really?"  
Death Singer nodded energetically.  
"Really, really! Seishan, tell him!"  
  
Seishan covered her nose with a hand, as if overwhelmed by a powerful scent. Her eyes grew oddly unfocused for a few seconds, but then she regained her composure and spoke in a calm tone:  
  
"It does seem that way. Death Game is similar to chess, but instead of sixteen figures, each player controls fourteen - seven Beasts, two Monsters, two Demons, two Devils, and a Tyrant. Just like in chess, each figure moves according to a specific pattern, but the rules are a bit more complicated. That is because when you play the Death of a Tyrant, your Domain plays an important role too."  
  
She pointed to the board, where three black squares were surrounded by a sea of white ones.  
"That is because the color of a square affects the battles between figures. Black figures have an аdvantage while battling on black squares, while white figures have an advantage while battling on white squares - unless they are surrounded mostly by squares of the opposite color. You can also conquer squares to make them a part of your Domain. So, positioning and movement carry greater strategic meaning."  
  
Seishan shrugged.  
"Well, there are other differences as well. For example, in some versions of Death Game, there are squares with special properties, like the Castle or the Shrine. The former never changes color, while the latter can give a blessing in return for a sacrifice - if two figures battle on a Shrine square, the one that is killed is considered the sacrifice, while the one that remains receives the blessing."  
  
Sunny blinked a couple of times.  
"Interesting. How do you know all this?"  
  
Seishan chuckled.  
"How do you not know? It's a popular game among Legacy children. We used to play it as well when we were young. Our mother taught us."  
Sunny stared at her with an unreadable expression. Then, he shrugged.  
"That's because I'm not a Legacy, I guess."  
  
She seemed surprised. Actually, Kai seemed startled, too.  
"You're not?"  
  
Sunny scoffed.  
"Why, did you all imagine that I was a bastard child of a powerful clan, or had been raised by some sinister shadow faction? Sorry to disappoint you, but no... I am a completely self-made man."  
  
He contemplated for a few seconds, then added:  
  
"Actually, I take it back. No one in this world is really self-made, and I too have received plenty of help from generous people along the way."  
  
With that, Sunny focused on the jade board.  
Most of the squares were white, and there were far more white figures left standing. The black side only had three figures left - one of them was wearing a crown, and was obviously the Tyrant, while the other two seemed to be mere Beasts.  
He tilted his head a little.  
"Seems like someone did not finish a game."  
  
The black side was at a fatal disadvantage, but the Tyrant was still standing, which meant that there was still a possibility of clawing one's way to victory.  
Naturally, it was more or less a hopeless situation.  
He studied the intricately carved figures for a few seconds, then shivered, suddenly oveгcome by an ominous sense of dread.  
  
The jade board... gave him the same feeling as the eerie dollhouse. Perhaps it had been created by Ariel, as well.  
  
Sunny remained silent for a while, then asked:  
  
"Who do you think the players were?"  
Nobody responded.  
But he could imagine the Demon of Dread and the Jade Queen sitting on the cushions, moving the figures across the jade board and waging a mock war against each other.  
Had the Jade Queen played white? Or had she played black?  
...In the end, it did not matter. What mattered was the fact that his blood stirred when he looked at the jade board. Which meant that the key to recovering the fourth piece of Weaver's lineage was somehow connected to this Death Game.  
  
Sunny took a step forward and looked at the jade figures. Eventually, his gaze stopped on the tallest of the white figures... the White Tyrant.  
  
'It's not the board itself. It's this one figure, in particular.'  
  
His senses told him that whatever he was looking for was somehow contained in that small jade statuette.  
  
'I wonder if I can find traces of divinity here.'  
  
Sunny needed to understand if the jade board was enchanted, as well.  
So, he shifted his gaze and peered into its depths.  
And when he did...  
  
The shadows populating the small chamber suddenly surged, reeling back from the game table. Sunny himself paled, his eyes widening.  
His hand moved faintly, as if grasping for a Memory weapon.  
The remainder noticed the change in his posture. Revel was the first one to frown.  
  
"What's wrong?"  
  
Sunny remained motionless, looking at the jade board with a somber expression.  
Then, he said evenly:  
  
"Everyone, get away from that thing..."