2310 Fear the Truth  
  
'I'm going crazy.'  
  
How had he not sensed a thing?  
  
Sunny had sharp senses, and they had only grown sharper after he attained Supremacy. All Awakened could feel certain things - presence, power, the subtle flow of soul essence... Corruption. And the stronger they grew, the more sensitive they became to the hidden side of the world.  
  
Especially so when it came to beings who were twisted by the corrupting influence of the Void. Just like nightmare creatures could sense the scent of human souls, Awakened responded to the presence of their sworn enemies - Nightmare Creatures.  
  
And yet, Sunny had felt nothing until he gazed into the depths of the gorgeous jade board.  
  
Inside the Death Game...  
  
Was a sea of Corruption so vast and dark that it made his blood run cold.  
  
It was contained flawlessly, with not even a drop of it seeping out, but he could see the bottomless well of appalling darkness moving subtly. Surging, straining... waiting.  
  
He had never witnessed anything that malignant and pestilent before - not even when gazing at the corrupted deity, Cursed Tyrant Condemnation.  
  
'How the hell...'  
  
How had he not felt it?  
  
Sunny should have become covered in cold sweat as sоon as he entered the Toy Room.  
  
'That damned daemon!'  
  
What the hell had Ariel been thinking, leaving something like that lying around?  
  
"Everyone, get away from that thing."  
  
The rest did not know it yet, but they were standing near a bomb. A frightening, inexplicable bomb full of Corruptiоn.  
  
No, come to think of it, Death Singer had reacted to the jade board peculiarly. Seishan had covered her nose, as well, as if overwhelmed by the stench of blood. Sunny had noted their reactions, but having sensed no immediate threat, chose to question them later.  
  
At the moment, he was closest to the jade board. Kai was directly behind him, while Slayer was on the other side of the game table. The Song sisters were closer to the door.  
  
Hearing the tension in his voice, they backed away slowly.  
  
Sunny took a careful step back, as well.  
  
When he did, though, he noticed something...  
  
There were four runes carved into the jade board, one on each side.  
  
'Snow. Ash.'  
  
His eyes narrowed.  
  
'Fear...'  
  
He did not see the fourth rune from where stood, but could sense its form in the shadow cast by the jade board.  
  
'...Truth?'  
  
And just as Sunny read the fourth rune...  
  
The world suddenly shifted, dissolving into darkness.  
  
"Dam..."  
  
"...ation!"  
  
Sunny fell, his knees sinking into the soft ash. A cold wind suddenly blew across his face, making him squint.  
  
The first thing he felt was that he was not in the small underground chamber anymore, surrounded from all sides by white jade. Instead, he was in a vast open space... standing on his knees under a boundless sky.  
  
'What the?'  
  
Sunny jumped to his feet and reached into the shadows, manifesting a black odachi from them. The Jade Mantle revealed itself, covering his body like a black carapace. His shadow sense shot outward, searching for any sign of immediate danger.  
  
However, nothing around him was moving. The world was still, with only the wind blowing across the desolate expanse.  
  
It was only then that Sunny finally saw where he was. His hand trembled.  
  
'What the hell?'  
  
Stunned, he lingered for a moment, and then lowered his sword.  
  
The Jade Palace... had disappeared.  
  
Sunny was somewhere else entirely.  
  
He was standing in the crater of a restless volcano. Behind him, a billowing pillar of smoke was rising into the dark sky, with moonlight spilling through the rifts in the clouds of ash. Black flakes were falling down like snow, covering the ground in a soft carpet.  
  
Sunny could not see it, but he could feel an enormous form hidden in the pillar of smoke. It was an ancient, crumbling fortress, its tall walls half-buried in the ash.  
  
As his shadow sense encompassed the world, he felt the rugged form of stone slopes that fell at a steep angle, surrounding him from all sides. There was nothing else there, at least nothing he could find at a quick glance.  
  
Sunny hesitated for a moment.  
  
"...Am I on the other side of the bridge?"  
  
He seemed to be standing in the crater of a towering volcano. The reasonable assumption would be that he somehow returned to where he and Kai had passed days before, but...  
  
Where was the city? Where was the bridge? Where was the Jade Palace?  
  
His shadow sense did not find any structures on the ashen slopes. More than that, the form of the volcano felt unfamiliar.  
  
"Have I been teleported to somewhere else in the mountain range, then?"  
  
Sunny scowled.  
  
What about Kai, Slayer, and the Song sisters?  
  
What was going on?  
  
An ominous suspicion rose in his mind, but he ignored it for the moment.  
  
The Jade Palace might have disappeared, but his shadow sense was still being somewhat suppressed. Its range was severely limited. Sunny could only feel the top of the volcano, but not its roots or other mountains that must have surrounded it.  
  
That was... troubling.  
  
The first thing he needed tо do was figure out where he was.  
  
[Cassie?]  
  
There was no response.  
  
Turning into a shadow, Sunny glided across the ash and soon crested the edge of the crater, thus reaching the highest point of the fuming volcano. He assumed his human form once again and glanced around, his expression turning somber.  
  
The landscape in front of him... was odd, to say the least.  
  
The volcano he found himself on was not a part of a mountain range. Instead, it stood apart from everything, towering above a sea of misty clouds. The sky above was obscured by ash, rare rays of moonlight illuminating the stark world...  
  
There were other lonesome peaks rising from the clouds in the distance, situated in a peculiarly symmetrical grid.  
  
There was another volcano to his right, and one more to his left.  
  
In front of them, far beyond the veil of ash, three snowy peaks were bathed in moonlight. There might have been more lonely mountains further still, but Sunny could not see them.  
  
Behind him, the entirety of the world was vast and empty, with only the sea of clouds swirling far below.  
  
Sunny cursed quietly.  
  
...Then, he cursed loudly.  
  
'Three black volcanoes surrounded by pristine white peaks...'  
  
"Goddammit!"  
  
Sunny gritted his teeth.  
  
'I knew something like this would happen!'  
  
He was fairly certain that he had been sucked into the Death Game.'