2357 Second Altar  
Slayer was where he had left her, standing silently in the darkness of the Shrine. Now that the sun had risen, a bit of light was falling into the empty hall of the scorched temple through the opening in its roof and the towering fissure of its gates - still, shadows swallowed most of the hall, so her motionless figure was entirely unnoticeable.  
Naturally, Sunny could see in the dark, so she could not hide from him.  
  
He sighed.  
Slayer was a peculiar Shadow.  
  
She had been a shadow of a mortal woman once. That woman perished, and her shadow traveled to the Shadow Realm like all shadows did… however, once there, she refused to be destroyed like the rest of them and persisted, hunting down the others like her to sustain herself. Whether it was because her sense of self was especially strong or for some other reason, Sunny did not know. In any case, her stubborn refusal to succumb eventually bore fruit. Slayer ceased to be a mere shadow, and was reborn as a Shadow Creature instead.  
The passage of time had erased what little remained of her original self, turning her into the feral, ruthless huntress Sunny met - she did not even remember her own name, by then, let alone her past.  
She was killed once more, and reborn again… this time, as his Shadow.  
So, Slayer was neither human nor a creature, but something in between. She did not possess an Aspect like humans did, but she was also far more intelligent and lethal than a Beast was supposed to be.  
  
Which was to say that she did not possess any special powers. All she had was her skills, her sharp intelligence, her frightening killing intent, and her stubborn will. It was with these tools that she had endured thousands of years of surviving in the Shadow Realm, crafting weapons and arrows from pieces of obsidian, preparing traps for her enemies, and hiding when an essence storm passed nearby.  
Perhaps that had not always been the case, though. She was a peculiar Shadow full of soul essence instead of shadow essence, after all - not quite Transcendent, but not quite Supreme either, perhaps Slayer had indeed wielded some kind of power, or even an Aspect, before her radiant soul deteriorated and lost its initial form.  
Maybe her Aspect could be recovered one day.  
In any case, Sunny was not going to think less of her - or consider her less of a threat - simply because Slayer did not have any special powers. She was incredibly menacing even without them, after all, to which he could personally attest.  
Still, he was very curious to see how the Shrine of Truth would make her stronger.  
  
The same held true for Kai… in fact, Sunny had no idea how the Shrine of Truth was supposed to work. All he knew was what Seishan had told them - that killing an enemy figure on this square was supposed to make the killer more powerful, somehow.  
All of them desperately needed to grow more powerful, so that was really fortunate.  
The fact that the jade figurines could seemingly substitute kills was, as well.  
'I wonder what Ariel's Game will do.'  
Would it grant them a sorcerous boon? Evolve the figure to a higher Class? Bestow magical weapons and equipment upon them?  
Would these boons be permanent, or would they disappear as soon as they left the board?  
He was going to learn soon.  
  
Just as Sunny headed to the center of the Shrine, Kai descended from above, landed near him, and smiled.  
"Sunny… are you done with your sorcery?"  
Sunny nodded and said, his voice both tired and satisfied:  
"Yes. It turned out well, despite the difficulty. Ah, am I not a genius? Who else could have invented something so groundbreaking, huh?"  
He glanced at Kai with a hint of expectation, remained silent for a moment, then added:  
"Groundbreaking. Get it?"  
Kai coughed suddenly.  
"Oh… yes. The volcano has been shaking quite a lot. I was afraid there was going to be an eruption."  
Sunny chuckled.  
"That was just me excavating the mountain. Come, I'll explain what I did in detail a bit later."  
  
As they walked toward the two altars, Slayer following silently from behind, Sunny gave Kai a curious look.  
"You are back from observing the enemy, right? So, who is our guest from the north?"  
Kai frowned a little.  
"Well… it is a Beast. However, it is not a single beast."  
Sunny stopped for a second and blinked a few times.  
"Don't tell me, are there another hundred of them?"  
Kai shook his head lightly.  
"No. There sеems to be around a dozen - a pack. They look like ghostly wolves made of snow."  
Sunny grinned.  
"A pack? Finally, good news!"  
This might have been awful news, actually, but Sunny believed otherwise. He did not think that Cursed Ones were so plentiful as to travel in packs… so, the Snow Wolves had to be Great Beasts. Which meant that he would not have to battle three Cursed Nightmare Creatures at the same time.  
"Great, great… the more, the merrier!"  
Smiling brightly, he approached the two altars and studied them intently.  
  
The one on the right looked almost identical to the altar in the Ash Castle. The one on the left, however, was quite different.  
It might have had some runes and engravings carved into it once, but everything had been smoothed out and erased by the passage of time. Now, the altar was simply covered by soot.  
Sunny could still see the indentation in the center of the altar, though, just the right size for a jade figure to fit.  
He sighed.  
'Here goes my opportunity to learn two tantalizing truths…'  
It was funny, really. He had expected the Shrine of Truth to be a place where one learned truths, but instead, he was going to sacrifice truths in order to gain power.  
"Here, take this."  
He handed one jade figurine to Kai, the other to Slayer.  
  
Kai raised an eyebrow.  
"Me? I thought you would try to strengthen yourself."  
Sunny shook his head dismissively.  
"I am plenty strong already - so, maybe later. The two of you need to become more useful right now, though."  
Taking a step back, he gestured to the altar.  
"Come on. Put the Snow Beast figure on it."  
Kai hesitated a little.  
"So… uh… and what will happen when I do?"  
Sunny grinned.  
"No idea! We'll know soon, won't we?"  
Kai frowned slightly.  
"You're… not letting me go first just to see if something awful happens before trying it yourself, are you?"  
Sunny glanced at him with reproach.  
"Of course not."  
His smile returned.  
"If that was my goal, I would have let Slayer go first!"  
He looked at Slayer, scratched the back of his, and added quietly:  
"This definitely has nothing to do with the fact that, as a Shadow, she would be an unreliable test subject… believe me…"