2367 Lake of Lava  
  
"Your wounds are quite severe..."  
  
Sunny was sprawled on the floor, his breathing labored. Kai had assumed his human form and was standing above him, a concerned expression on his face - his worry was appreciated, but entirely misplaced, since there was no real need to fret.  
  
The wounds looked worse than they were. Surely, the sight of mangled flesh, with bone visible in the deeper tears, was disconcerting. And his soul was hurt, too. But Sunny was Supreme, after all - a bit of damage like that was not going to kill him. In fact, these wounds were going to heal rapidly.  
  
But not rapidly enough to be healed completely before the next battle, which was unfortunate.  
  
The Obsidian Wasps he had lost would not repair themselves in time, either. The spell he had woven went up in flames with the volcano.  
  
Sunny let out a sigh.  
  
Really, he had suffered quite a loss in this battle.  
  
“Well, I did fight a Cursed Demon, you know."  
  
The battle against the Wolf had been truly frightful. Now that it was behind him, Sunny could truly appreciate the fact that he had somehow managed to last this long against a fallen deity of that Class.  
  
Kai himself was battered and exhausted, but most of all, he seemed bewildered.  
  
"A Cursed Demon, yes. I still can't believe that you killed it so quickly."  
  
Sunny let out a hoarse laugh, then winced and thought better of it.  
  
"Quickly? It might have felt quick to you, but I had been wrestling that fiend for an eternity. It wasn't quick at all, far from it." Time itself had fallen victim to their battle, so measuring how long exactly he had been trading blows with the Wolf was a fool's errand.  
  
Groaning, he turned his head and glanced at the three jade figurines standing on the altar, as if wanting to make sure that the feral fiend was truly dead. Then, Sunny sighed again.  
  
"You've done well yourself, though. How many Saints are there who can boast battling a Cursed Beast?"  
  
Kai smiled.  
  
"Not too many, I hope."  
  
By which he meant that he hoped that as few Saints as possible would find themself in a position to fight a Cursed Nightmare Creature, naturally, not that there would be few who could match his glory.  
  
‘That guy...'  
  
Kai's gaze shifted back to Sunny's bloodied form. Kneeling beside him, the archer spoke firmly:  
  
"Heаl."  
  
And, obeying his command, both Sunny's body and soul started to heal faster. It was not quite as effective as what an actual healer could do, especially not a Transcendеnt one, but still quite miraculous.  
  
Sunny let out a weak laugh.  
  
“Wow. You are a real magician."  
  
Then, he closed his eyes.  
  
"I'll... rest now, if you don't mind. I am a bit spent."  
  
As Kai nodded tiredly, beads of sweat running down his soot - covered face, Sunny released his manifestation and turned around into a shadow. Since his soul was wounded as well, not just his physical form, the pain did not disappear - but at least he did not have to feel the damn heat anymore.  
  
‘Damnation. Why couldn't I have become the Snow Tyrant, instead?"  
  
Enjoying the cool embrace of shadows, Sunny slowly collected his thoughts. The battle might have been over, but that did not mean that the Death Game was. He had to start preparing for the adversary's next move. First things first.  
  
Now that dawn had run its course and the sun was climbing the vast dome of the sky, Sunny allowed his shadow sense to spread across what remained of the volcano.  
  
There wasn't much left, really - just an enormous stone bowl containing a lake of lava, and the Shrine of Truth floating in its middle. Sunny did not try to explore how deep the lake went, since that would mean catching a glimpse of what hid beneath the clouds. For now, it was enough for him to know what the next battlefield he would have to fight on looked like.  
  
He was sufficiently certain that all three of the Snow abominations were dead, but it was a relief to confirm that no trace of them was left.  
  
Sunny remained motionless for a while, coming to terms with the fact that he had, indeed, won.  
  
He had slain the Wolf.  
  
That primordial fiend was the most powerful adversary he had killed to date. The battle against the ancient fallen deity had without a doubt been dreadful and tremendously harrowing, and yet it... it had not been as desperate as Sunny expected it to be.  
  
But that was simply because he was too used to utter desperation. In truth, the battle had ended the way it had because he entered it sufficiently prepared. He had understood the nature of the adversary and devised a strategy according to that knowledge, executing the plan splendidly.  
  
The beast had died in the hunter's trap. And now, nо trace of the beast remained. Sunny groaned.  
  
Actually, he would have preferred it if some trace of his enemies had remained. The wolves seemed more like wraiths than actual beasts, which meant that eating their meat would have probably not been an option anyway, but what troubled him more was that there were no soul shards left in the wake of the three Snow figures, either. They had probably drowned in lava, or possiblу had been outright destroyed with the Nightmare Creatures. Sunny had never witnessed soul shards being destroyed with their hosts before, but then again, he had never witnessed such a battle either.  
  
The cataclysm summoned into existence by his sorcery had unleashed truly profane power, so, there was no point to be surprised.  
  
He still felt despondent at the loss of four Sacred soul shards, though.  
  
‘How regretful.'  
  
Sunny allowed himself to feel disappointed for a while, then pushed his thoughts in a more productive direction.  
  
It was not like he had gained nothing from the battle, after all.  
  
The first benefit was quite obvious - it was that he was still alive. Kai and Slayer were also in one piece, and even the shade of Abundance had not been destroyed completely, meaning that it would be able to participate in the next siege.  
  
The second benefit was the three jade figurines standing on the altar of the Shrine of Truth. They were the very reason Sunny had driven his companions all the way to the Shrine, in the first place - by sacrificing them, they would be able to grow much stronger, and therefore much better suited to face the next battle, and every Death Game battle after that.  
  
And lastly, there was the third benefit as well.  
  
It was what Sunny had learned from his battle against the Wolf.  
  
That one... that one was an unexpected boon, and one he was most curious about.