2368 Wrong Order  
  
Sunny had made the decision to channel the essence of a concept opposite to that of the Wolf in the spur of the moment. However, it had not been a baseless idea.  
  
Rather, he had come up with that countermeasure after coming to understand his enemy deeply. Learning the very essence of his enemies was one of the things he did best, after all, having shadowed countless humans and Nightmare Creatures in his life.  
  
Sunny had learned that skill while mastering the first step of Shadow Dance. In the beginning, it was all about glimpsing the secrets of his adversary's battle style, but just as Shadow Dance had outgrown the confines of merely being a combat technique, its purview had expanded greatly, as well. Sunny had long become capable of sensing the flow of essence through his enemies. But after fighting the Wolf, he realized that he was also capable of sensing the adversary's Will - not just its impact, but also its affinity. Understanding the nature of the Wolf was one part reasonable deduction and one part being able to sense what its ferocious spirit truly was.  
  
'This is...'  
  
It was strange.  
  
Sunny felt that he had stumbled ontо something profound. Channeling the concept of the Hunter had helped him survive the ferocious assault of the Cursed Demon - possibly it was the very reason he had managed to survive until the volcano absorbed enough damage to produce a powerful enough explosion. And he did not delude himself into thinking that just anyone could have been able to accomplish the same.  
  
That last part was especially important. Nephis possessed a singularly powerful Will, but her Will was firm and indomitable. It was like a sword that refused to break and demanded that everything else break under its blade. Her uncompromising spirit strived to be absolute.  
  
Sunny's own will, however, was subtle and insidious. Nephis described it as a weapon that only knew how to kill, and there was certainly truth to her words - but that slaying weapon was flexible and versatile, willing to assume any form it needed to kill the enemy. Just like shadows were inherently formless, and therefore willing to assume any form. That was the reason why Sunny was uniquely positioned to channel any foreign concept, which meant that it was something that only he could do, or at least do so effectively. That ability suited him perfectly.  
  
So perfectly, in fact, that he wondered if he was meant to discover it. Not in the grand way of being fated or influenced into stumbling upon it, though, more so in the way of that ability being the next step on the path he had been walking all along.  
  
Was this the sixth step of Shadow Dance?  
  
'I think it is.'  
  
Sunny felt that it was, and that was why he was so bewildered. After all, he had not mastered the fifth step yet.  
  
'How... novel!'  
  
This was the first time his understanding of Shadow Dance had become greater than his actual mastery of it. Before, he had always stumbled in the darkness, seeking epiphanies and revelations. Usually, the act of fathoming the secret of the next step meant mastering it. But this time, things were different. The fourth step of Shadow Dance allowed him to assume the shapes of his enemies. The fifth step was supposed to allow him to shadow their powers and Attributes, as well, he had even discovered a way to master it by fusing with his Shadows and augmenting those of his Domain - humans and shades both. However, Sunny had never gone through the actual process of doing so.  
  
That was because by the time he learned the secret of the Fifth Step, his fаte had already been lost, and his True Name was gone. Without the True Name to anchor his self, it was too dangerous to delve so deeply into the essence of other beings and assume their form. He could easily lose himself forever, forgetting how to return to his own form in body, mind, and soul.  
  
So, the fifth step of Shadow Dance remained beyond his reach. It had remained unreachable for so long, it seemed, that both Sunny and his enemies had grown in power greatly. And now, hаving failed to master it, Sunny was already discovering the secrets of the step after that.  
  
'So...'  
  
Was what he had done in the battle against the Wolf dangerous?  
  
Sunny felt bitterly reluctant to admit it, but he knew that it was. The absence of a True Name was once again holding him back. Everything had gone smoothly this time, but that was only because the concept Sunny had channeled was not inherently foreign to his own spirit - it was the concept of the Hunter, after all, and Sunny was himself a greatly accomplished hunter. But what if the concept he had to channel was completely alien to him? Would he be able to embody it? Sunny knew that he would, with enough practice. He knew how malleable everything about him was. But would he bе able to return from channeling a concept that was in conflict with his own spirit? Sunny was not sure about that.  
  
What about channeling a hundred concepts, each of them vastly different and in opposition to each other? Well, that sounded like a perfect way to fall into complete lunacy, and Sunny already had precious little sanity left. He was already afraid of losing himself, or at the very least his humanity, to the nature of being Supreme. Or becoming something he despised on the path to Apotheosis.  
  
'This feels awful. Damn!'  
  
Sunny felt like he had found a shiny weapon, only to discover that he was incapable of picking it up. Like he was denied something he was owed. He stayed nestled in the shadows, hidden in the darkness of the Shrine of Truth, unseen and motionless. His wounded soul was once again being ravaged by the scathing feeling of regret.  
  
If only he had chosen differently, if only he had not surrenderеd to his desperate wish, if only he had not betrayed his friends, and still possessed his True Name. But Sunny knew that these thoughts were meaningless. There was no way to turn back time, and even if he could, regret would have been eating him alive all the same, just for a different reason. For a far worse reason.  
  
No matter how much he regretted what he did, it was better than regretting something that he had never dared to do.  
  
Which was not to say, that he could not correct his mistake and be rid of all this regret altogether.  
  
All he had to do was make a choice and get his fate back.  
  
'I've already killed a Cursed Demon, now killing a Cursed Terror did not seem so impossible anymore.'  
  
But Sunny still had doubts.  
  
Sometime later, he emerged from the shadows and rubbed his face, chasing the uninvited thoughts away. He had no time to ponder these difficult matters now, because there were numerous enemies he had to kill.  
'Right. On to the next point of the agenda...'  
His gaze fell on the three jade figurines.