2377 Oblivious Victors  
  
Two days had passed, and it was night again. Which meant that the three figures of the Snow Domain had besieged the Shrine of Truth… and failed.  
  
Someone had stopped them. But who?  
  
Sunny studied his own pathetic state, then glanced at Slayer. Finally, he glanced at Kai.  
  
A few seconds later, he muttered a stifled curse. His thoughts were in disarray.  
  
"What… the hell?"  
  
He had been saying that a lot after entering Ariel's Game. So, he had to be careful not to say it again… unless he wanted to get stuck with another catchphrase. And he had plenty of those already.  
  
In any case, it seemed like Sunny and Kai had fallen victim to some kind of mind attack while observing the Snow Demon, and then… and then.  
  
Something happened, but the Snow Demon failed to conquer the Shrine and kill them.  
  
From what Sunny had seen so far, that something seemed to have been Slayer. That did not make much sense, considering that Slayer was not nearly powerful enough to defeat a Cursed Demon, let alone one accompanied by two Cursed Monsters. And yet, the evidence was hard to deny.  
  
The evidence being that they were still alive. Sunny sighed deeply.  
  
Slayer was not going to talk, so he had no choice but to try to deduce what had happened slowly. But first…  
  
'I should probably take Kai off that wall.'  
  
His friend did not look very comfortable, pinned to a pillar by arrows and gagged. Granted, Slayer must have gagged him for a reason…  
  
',I'll take it slow.'  
  
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Some time later, Sunny and Kai climbed out of the tilting Shrine and observed the scene of utter devastation outside. Both looked rattled and confused, not to mention battered, and seeing the lake of lava did not make them feel any better. Slayer had stayed inside, seemingly too tired and wounded to move.  
  
"What the…"  
  
Sunny stopped himself from finishing the sentence, raised his hands, and rubbed his face ferociously.  
  
One of his hands was made of flesh, sinew, and bone. The other was entirely black, manifested from shadows.  
  
The platform on which the Shrine of Truth stood had split in two. One half of it was entirely gone, the other was partially submerged in lava - the ancient temple itself was tilted on the side, half-drowned in the lake.  
  
The layer of cooled lava that had formed a crust atop the lake was almost entirely gone, shattered and swallowed by the scorching crucible. Still, some of it remained… hideous silhouettes formed from volcanic rock protruded from the luminous depths, reaching toward the sky with eerily shaped fingers. They glanced like unfinished creations of a mad sculptor, and simply looking at them made Sunny's skin crawl.  
  
It was as if a swarm of indescribable… beings… had tried to form themselves from fiery lava, but were frozen solid midway, failing to take form. Now, only their empty husks remained, soulless and twisted in agony, like a legion of sinful souls who had failed to escape hell. Or perhaps someone had just wanted to create a garden of creepy statues. Either version could be true.  
  
Kai opened his mouth and whispered: "What the hell?"  
  
Sunny glanced at him with gratitude. ",My thoughts exactly."  
  
His friend was in rough form, but far better off than Sunny and Slayer. Apart from the wounds causеd by the arrows, he was relatively unscathed - and those weren't a threat to a Transcendent being.  
  
He had no memory of what had happened in the past two days, either. The last thing he remembered was catching a glimpse of the Snow Demon… and yet, he did not remember what the creature looked like, or what it was.  
  
Sunny felt deeply… unnerved. He would have been frightened, really, if not for the fact that they had found three jade figurines laying in the ash near the altar, just a few meters away from the lava.  
  
The Snow Demon… whatever that thing had been… was dead. The Monsters were dead, too.  
  
Sunny, Kai, and Slayer wеre alive. Somehow.  
  
That should have been good news, but Sunny only felt more disturbed, not knowing how their enemies had died. Humans feared the unknown the most, after all.  
  
He looked down with a grimace. "Well, let us see what we do know."  
  
Even if his memory of the past two days was gone, he could deduce some things from the clues left behind by the missing time.  
  
As the two of them flew to the edges of the volcano, the night sky rippling with shimmering starlight above them, Sunny went over all these clues.  
  
First of all, Sunny and Kai were missing their memories. They had been affected by some kind of mental attack, while Slayer had seemingly resisted it - or had been incapable of being targeted by that attack, to begin with, due to her inherent difference from them.  
  
It was easy to deduce that Sunny and Kai had not remained passive and motionless while under foreign influence, too. In fact, they seemed to have involved themselves in all kinds of activity - their wounds were solid proof of that.  
  
Additionally, their behavior in the past two days had to have been different from what they would usually do. In other words, they had not been acting as themselves - otherwise, Slayer would have no reason to debilitate them with arrows or gag Kai.  
  
Sunny could not be sure, but after studying Kai's wounds - as well as his own - he suspected that the two of them had not only fought Slayer, but also other powerful beings… as well as each other.  
  
That was quite a disturbing theory, and although Sunny could not thoroughly prove it, he could not confidently refute it either.  
  
'This is the worst.'  
  
If they had indeed suffered a mental attack, this would be the worst crisis of that nature he had encountered in a long while, maybe even ever. After all, he had retained at least some senses even at LO49 or on the Ashen Barrow… but now, he could not even remember what he had done.  
  
That should not have been possible. His mental resistances were extremely formidable, and even if his other incarnations were not here, he still possessed the Will of a Supreme Titan. No mental attack should have been able to enthrall him so thoroughly.  
  
It was the fact that something that should have been impossible had happened that was driving Sunny mad. Just what kind of creature had that Cursed Demon been?  
  
The worst part of all…  
  
Was knowing that now with the creature gone, there was a high possibility that Sunny would never find out.  
  
It could all remain a mystery, forever. Looking around, he wondered if that was a mercy, instead.