2393 Who Puppeteers the Puppeteers  
  
As darkness shrouded the world, Sunny and Kai sought shelter from the eerie gaze of the Puppeteer on the other side of the mountain. Sunny sat in the ash, his six hands dancing in the air as he wove the complicated enchantment of the Evening Star, one of them was giving him trouble, but he worked through the stiffness and the pangs of ρain. His expression was both focused and distant, as if he was in a state of flow, but also rattled to the core.  
  
As the radiant patterns of the sorcerous tapestry took form, he could feel his shades being mended. The Obsidian Wasps were restored first, then the Shadow Wolves and Abundance… the Wolf was going to recover soon, too. Slayer was close to being fully healed as well. The shade of the Rat King, meanwhile, had never been vanquished, so Sunny could summon it at any second as long as he wished to.  
  
'The Puppeteer Moth… really, now?' Sunny was a little shaken.  
  
Locking these feelings in an isolated partition of his mind, he allowed that part of him to take control of his mouth and spoke quietly: "What a splendid coincidence." Meeting an Nightmare Creature that was connected to his First Nightmare here was truly unexpected. Unbelievable, even. What were the chances? It was almost as if someone - a certain nebulous daemon, perhaps - had pulled the strings behind the scenes to make it happen. Not the strands of black silk that the Puppeteer used, though, but an entirely different kind.  
  
The Strings of Fate themselves, maybe. …Who was the real puppeteer here, then?  
  
Suddenly, the giant black moth perching on the peak of a towering mountain did not seem so traumatic anymore. It even seemed a little pitiful. But, naturally, that feeling only lasted for a moment.  
  
Kai, who had been staring at the stars idly, turned to look at Sunny. "But how do you know that horror?" Sunny remained silent for a few seconds, engrossed in weaving, then shrugged. "It was mentioned in the description of a Memory I owned. It was the second Memory I had ever received, actually… and its description was quite memorable. Because of how creepy it was. Who knew I'd meet that creepy Nightmare Creature myself, one day?"  
  
He sighed, then shook his head slowly. "But, actually, it is a good thing. It is a wonderful thing, even."  
  
Sunny glanced at Kai and tried to smile. "Knowledge is the origin of power, after all. Few things are more important than knowing your adversary. I thought we would have to go into battle against the Snow Tyrant blind, but would you look at that? Now, we don't have to. We know quite a lot about it. In fact, we know the things that matter most." He glanced away and contemplated the situation for a while.  
  
Eventually, Sunny said: "The Puppeteers Moth… can also be called Doubt, I guess. That is the essence of its power. It infects the hearts of living beings with doubt and turns them into puppets - in other words, it is an immensely potent manipulator. I hesitate to say that the Puppeteer specializes in mind attacks, because at its level of power, these distinctions are somewhat meaningless… but fundamentally, that is what it does." He took a deep breath, then smiled.  
  
"Which means that we are actually in a highly advantageous position. These types of Nightmare Creatures usually rely heavily on their insidious powers and, most of all, on their thralls - but they themselves are relatively weak and frail when it comes to physical confrontations. And what did we do here in Ariel's Game?" Kai studied him for a few seconds.  
  
"We killed most of this creature's thralls and put ourselves in a position to attack it when it's alone." Sunny nodded. "Indeed. That is what we did. So, in a way, we are incredibly lucky. Of all the Cursed Tyrants in the world, this one might just be the easiest to kill - considering the circumstances, that is. Not that killing it will actually be easy, naturally. A Cursed Tyrant is still a Cursed Tyrant."  
  
He exhaled slowly. "We got rid of most of its thralls and outran those who remain, true. The Puppeteer is huge and monstrous, but it won't be that fearsome in a battle - relatively speaking, I mean. I'd say… between that thing and the Wolf, the Wolf would be more furious." There was a long stretch of silence, and then Sunny added in a concerned tone: "But that does not mean that facing the Puppeteer won't be infinitely more hazardous than facing the Wolf was. That is, naturally, because while we did kill most of its puppets, the real difficulty will be not becoming its puppets ourselves."  
  
Sunny could not help but shiver. "I would imagine… that a Cursed Tyrant can subjugate someone like us in an instant, as long as we give it a chance. It will make us doubt ourselves first, and then, before we know it, there will be invisible strings wrapped around our hearts."  
  
Doubt… that was the weapon the Puppeteer would use against them. Doubt was truly an insidious concept because no human was really immune to it. Even Supremes like Sunny were susceptible to doubt, as for Saints like Kai… Sunny glanced at his friend and shook his head.  
  
"Actually, I am not really worried about you." Kai raised an eyebrow.  
  
"You're not? But… I am quite an insecure person. I doubt myself all the time." Sunny smiled faintly. "That is exactly what makes you dreadful prey for the Puppeteer. You do indeed seem to suffer from self-doubt a lot… and yet, you have never allowed it to control you. On the contrary, you have overcome yourself at every step of the way - it is like you've been training for this exact moment all your life, really."  
  
Kai, despite his lack of confidence, was a faultlessly dependable person. He never failed to rise to the occasion - even if he struggled to get there more than the rest of them did. Sunny sighed and shook his head.  
  
"In truth… I am much more worried about myself."