2406 Spirit of Doubt  
  
The Puppeteer's wings were mighty, but they were also brittle.  
  
Relatively speaking, naturally. In truth, there was hardly a more indestructible material out there than the wings of a Cursed Tyrant. However, it was being attacked by Kai and Slayer - two Transcendent beings who had received the boon of ash thrice and were strengthened by Sunny's will as a result.  
  
Their ability to wound a fallen deity was the result of six Snow figures being removed from the board, most of them of the Cursed Rank. The deaths of those Cursed nightmare creatures fueled this attack.  
  
Slayer's arrow tore a hole in the Puppeteer's left wing. Riding on the back of a dragon, the graceful Shadow had drawn and aimed her bow deftly - the arrow came from under the dark discus Sunny had thrown, obscured from sight by its spinning mass. The eerie moth had received almost no time to react.  
  
Kai's sonic attack, meanwhile, was less focused. It failed to tear the great black wing, but it did push it aside with great concussive force, making the wing fold.  
  
Suddenly unbalanced, the Puppeteer tilted in the air and lost control of its flight. It plummeted down, straining to regain balance while innumerable strands of silk reached down from the dome of the black cocoon to catch it.  
  
However, the shield the giant moth had skirted slammed into them a moment later, pushing the silk tendrils away.  
  
Sunny lowered his torso, and then launched his towering body up the slope, running to the spot where the Puppeteer would fall.  
  
He was not going to receive another chance to end the distressing battle, most likely, but that was fine.  
  
His stone mind was calm and composed, full of nothing but cold calculation. He could feel the depths of the mountain vibrating under his heavy footsteps, and as it did, his movements accelerated. Great tendrils of black silk rose from the surface of the shattered slope to entangle him, but he cut some with his sword and sidestepped the rest, refusing to allow them to bind him and slow him down.  
  
The Strings of Doubt triеd to catch him in their vile embrace, as well. However, they failed to pierce his skin and fell powerlessly to be crushed under his feet, finding no purchase in his stalwart mind and spirit.  
  
'Doubt.' How could this cowardly, insidious Spirit dare to set its sight on him, a champion of the Underworld? The feeble moth was going to learn the price of its arrogance soon.  
  
In a way, the Stone Saint almost pitied the Puppeteer. Of all the beings in the world, it just had to encounter them three - him and his two companions. Not only had they slaughtered its thralls, but each of them was also singularly resistant to the sinister moth's harrowing powers.  
  
The Stone Saint could not be infected by doubt because he had an indomitable spirit, the Shadow Huntress was immune to its jaws because of her pure soul, while the dragon was simply someone who lived his life with tenacious diligence. Even if the Puppeteer tried to find three enemies it was woefully ill-suited to fight on purpose, it would have struggled to find anyone better matched against it than a Child of Nether and his companions. It was almost as if fate had brought them here.  
  
Or destiny, possibly.  
  
The giant moth managed to right itself seconds before impacting the ground. Its wings unfolded once again, pushing the winds down with their immensity, but it was already too late. The inertia of its fall was too great to stop in time.  
  
It hit the ground hard, its damaged legs buckling. The Puppeteer fell awkwardly on its side, supporting itself with the two unscathed front legs. It raised its head, looking at the approaching Stone Colossus with no emotion apparent in its huge, black eyes.  
  
Did it only seem that way, or was there a hint of fear in them, for a split moment?  
  
The Stone Saint did not know. What he did know, however, was that he was still too far away from the grounded moth.  
  
It could still get away, if it moved immediately.  
  
"Wolf!"  
  
Just then, a bestial shadow lunged at the Puppeteer from behind, awful jaws tearing into its wings.  
  
A haunting song descended upon it from above, pushing it into the ground.  
  
A rapid arrow fell like a comet, blooming into a destructive explosion.  
  
None of these attacks threatened the Puppeteer's life. However, they did hold it in place for a few precious seconds.  
  
And by the time the giant moth recovered. The Stone Saint was already upon it.  
  
His heavy sword rose, ready to fall and sever the detestable Tyrant in two. He glanced at the fallen deity directly in the eye and said with ruthless finality:  
  
"Die."  
  
But just before the sword fell. The Puppeteer's long antennae vibrated peculiarly.  
  
And suddenly, the world was frozen.  
  
The stone colossus and the giant moth stood motionlessly, looking at each other. The strands of black silk remained still as they descended upon them like a black avalanche. The furious Wolf did not move, its fangs tearing into the black wing.  
  
The dark dragon was frozen in the air as it dove to the ground with its wings folded, the small figure of the gorgeous huntress on its back endlessly retrieving an arrow from her quiver. The world was still and silent.  
  
The Stone Saint was still and silent too, unable to move.  
  
And in that silence, a soft voice resounded from all around him, asking a strange question:  
  
"Do you really want to kill me?"  
  
The Stone Saint smiled chillingly behind the visor of his helmet.  
  
"Of course."  
  
There was silence once more. Then, the Puppeteer asked dispassionately:  
  
".Why?"  
  
The Stone Saint frowned.  
  
'What a preposterous question.'  
  
There was a reason, naturally.  
  
There had to have been. But that reason had belonged to someone else. A different being, made from different things. To a shadow that was full of doubt, and hope, and pain.  
  
The Stone Saint could not ever remember that shadow's name. How was he supposed to remember its reasons?  
  
His frown deepened.  
  
"I don't remember."  
  
The giant moth seemed to look at him with pity.  
  
Its soft voice enveloped him like a rustle of fine silk, making the crimson flames burning in his eyes dim a little.  
  
"Are you sure you want to kill me, Child of Nether?"