1513 Furious Shadow

Sunny had transformed himself in the image of the Serpent King. However, he was not as powerful as Daeron. His onyx body was giant, compared to a human, but it was still much smaller than the Azure Serpent had been.

Much more importantly than that, it did not possess the power of a Great Beast. Sunny was merely an Ascended, after all, and even though the shadows he had used to form the onyx serpent were more powerful and ancient than him, the essence that had manifested them was that of a Master.

Six shadows were augmenting his shell, this time, but Nephis was not here to grant him the blessing of her flame... and although the Dread Lord was weaker than the Azure Serpent had been, the dragon was also not littered with gruesome wounds and nearing death.

None of it mattered to Sunny, though.

Consumed by frenzy, all he knew was the mad desire to rip his enemy apart.

'Kill you... I'll kill you...'

His fangs pressed down on the impregnable dragon scales, leaving deep grooves on their dark surface. His mighty body coiled tight around the Dread Lord, restraining and crushing him.

'I'll kill you no matter what!'

However, the harrowing dragon was full of ire and murderous will, as well. Even though his most dreadful power — the tyrannical authority of his voice — had proved to be futile when used against Sunny, he still had plenty of means to destroy the insolent slave.

A furious roar shook the dim throne room.

And, at the same time, an insidious whisper resounded in Sunny's clouded mind:

[ALL THAT EFFORT TO ESCAPE... AND YET HERE YOU ARE...]

Sunny vaguely realized that the Dread Lord was confusing him with the Mad Prince and doubled his effort to tear open the vile worm's throat. At that moment, however, his enemy finally moved.

Its tail whipped across the great hall once again, crushing countless Soul Stealer vessels. At the same time, he strained his wings against the coils of Sunny's giant armored body, causing cracks to appear on the surface of the Mantle.

Much worse than that, the Dread Lord lowered his head and bit into Sunny's own neck. His porcelain fangs pierced the onyx armor plates and sank into the shadows, tearing them apart.

It did not matter, though.

Hidden deep within the onyx serpent, Sunny let out a mad laugh. More shadows flowed from the open gate of the Shadow Lantern, mending the wounds delivered to his shell by the odious dragon.

He had plenty more hidden away, and his essence was nearly limitless here in Twilight. If the Dread Lord wished to win, he had his work cut out for him.

'I'll bleed you dry, one drop at a time...'

Finally, one of his fangs slid between two scales and cut into the tough hide beneath. Tasting blood... or maybe simply imagining tasting it with a tongue made of shadows... Sunny let out a triumphant growl.

Continuing to maul the shell's neck, the Dread Lord threw his massive body down. Tangled together, the dragon and the serpent rolled across the ruined floor of the throne room, making the whole palace shudder. The marble tiles were pulverized into dust, and countless hollow vessels were turned into puddles of shattered bones and blood.

'...Is Kai alive?'

The thought flashed in Sunny's mind and disappeared. He did not care... he did not even really remember who Kai was. All he could feel was bloodlust and rage.

Crushed under the weight of the Dread Lord, his serpentine body was coming undone. His neck was shredded, and his head was moments away from becoming separated from his body. Even though he was mending the damage, the hateful dragon was tearing through the shadows faster than Sunny could manifest them.

But...

But he tasted the dragon's blood.

Sunny was full of dark glee.

His coils moved, a ridge of spikes growing from his spine. His body was like a circular saw now, sending clouds of sparks flying from the points where it ground against the Dread Lord's scales. More blood flowed, falling to the shattered floor like drops of silver flame.

Flame...

Letting go of Sunny's neck, the dragon pierced him with a loathsome gaze and opened his maw.

Hidden within the serpentine shell, Sunny gritted his teeth.

But what came out of the Dread Lord's maw was not a torrent of flame... instead, it was an eerie, melodious, otherworldly sound. It almost sounded like a song.

...And, enveloped by that harrowing song, the giant body of the onyx serpent shattered. Terrible cracks appeared on its surface, the shadows melting into a tenebrous haze.

A deafening sonic boom sent a hurricane of stone dust into the air, and Sunny was thrown away, his shell torn asunder. Freed from the crushing embrace of his coils, the Dread Lord rose, his eyes burning with demented hatred. His gaze landed on the torn remains of the onyx serpent, searching for the human body hidden within.

As he was looking, though, a radiant arrow hit the side of his head. A fiery explosion bloomed, pushing the dragon's head aside.

Hovering near the cracked dome of the palace, Kai gritted his teeth and drew the string of his bow again.

The Dread Lord opened his maw, wanting to give the archer another command...

But at that moment, Kai screamed:

"Shut your mouth, you traitor!"

And, although the authority of his voice was not nearly powerful enough to restrain the Defiled Saint, the Dread Lord's jaws did freeze for a moment.

That moment was all Sunny needed.

The two parts of his severed body slithered across the shattered floor like snakes and connected, almost instantly growing back together. His ravaged head rose, baring its fangs, and sank them into one of the harrowing dragon's wings.

There, the scales were much thinner, and easier to pierce.

More Soul Stealer vessels were already pouring into the throne room. These were not as weak as the previous ones — very few of them died from the fall, which meant that there were much more Awakened and Ascended among them.

Kai let another arrow loose.

The Dread Lord looked around in fury and let out an infuriated growl.

Then, his wings moved, raising a hurricane.

The bastard... was trying to fly away.

Or so Sunny thought.

Unwilling to let the enemy go, he tried to hold on to the dragon's wing, but it was of no use. He was thrown aside, crashing heavily on the ground. The walls of the throne room were falling now, unable to withstand the battle of two giant beasts.

Soon, the whole palace was going to collapse.

Surrounded by hurricane winds and dust, the Dread Lord was rising into the air. He was already reaching the broken dome, ready to break through it and cause the entire thing to crumble.

Sunny looked up in fury.

'No, no, no! You won't escape!'

Coiling his massive body like a spring, he sent it flying into the air. His leap produced a shockwave that shattered the walls of the throne room and made the palace quake.

His head collided with the Dread Lord, sending the dragon crashing through the remains of the dome. But then, gravity pulled him down.

Sunny howled in fury.

And, responding to his wrath...

His tenebrous body flowed and shifted, changing form. Giant wings sprouted from his back and struck against the air, sending him flying up. Wreathed in darkness, a grotesque figure pursued the harrowing dragon into the sky.

A moment later, the six chitinous legs of a giant, monstrous butterfly made of shadows struck the Dread Lord's scales.