1515 Formless Shadow

High in the sky above Twilight, Sunny was being mauled by the Dread Lord. The monstrous butterfly shell he had hastily created was battered and torn, bleeding shadows into the air. The shadows dissipated into the beautiful radiance of dawn, disappearing.

He had spent months on Aletheia's Island, fighting against and being killed by all kinds of harrowing creatures. Of course, he had learned a lot about his killers during that time. The Hollow Butterfly was harder to fathom because it lacked a soul, though, and so its shell was rough and unstable.

Sunny did not care. All he cared about was hurting the hateful dragon.

His wings had long been broken, failing to regrow, so he clutched onto the body of the Dread Lord with his six sharp legs. His giant eyes were faceted, consisting of thousands of smaller ones, and so, thousands of harrowing dragons reflected in their dark surface, filling him with boundless rage.

His long beak had just pierced the Dread Lord's flesh in the spot where a few scales had cracked, mangling it.

'Ah...'

Sunny felt murderous joy.

Bleeding and hurt by that last attack, the dragon spread its wings. His maw opened, and another melodious call escaped from it, battering the monstrous butterfly like a devastating ram. Reeling from the shockwave of the following sonic boom, Sunny felt his shell falling apart and growled, mending it.

The Dread Lord was a step ahead, though. Before the damaged butterfly coalesced back into a stable form, he tore two of its legs with his fangs, then broke another with his terrifying claws.

Sunny felt his grip on the odious dragon loosen.

'No... no! Come back here, you hideous worm!'

Blinded by pain and driven mad by the scent of blood, he laughed.

The massive body of the tenebrous butterfly rippled and then flowed, changing shape. Long tentacles shot from its carapace, wrapping themselves around the Dread Lord's wings and pressing them into his body. Soon, a revolting octopus-like abomination was clinging to him, tearing at his scales with a sharp beak.

Sunny had no wings anymore, and the dragon could not move his. They plummeted from the sky... slower than they were supposed to, considering that Kai — and, by extension, the Dread Lord — could fly even without wings. But still fast enough.

The moment the two of them hit the ground, shattering a dozen buildings and sending cracks running through the carapace of the inconceivable carcass Twilight stood upon, Sunny was thrown off the body of the dreadful dragon.

He rolled away, his shell already shifting. By the time the Dread Lord rose, a giant leopard of decaying flesh was already lunging at him, aiming to bite into his throat.

Their frenzied battle continued.

When they fought on the ground, Sunny assumed the form of a land predator. When the Dread Lord tried to rise into the sky, he assumed the form of a flying monstrosity. When the dragon threw him underwater, he turned into the onyx serpent, relentlessly attacking his loathsome enemy in the murky depths.

He was crazed and relentless, but his enemy was both powerful and vicious. Even robbed of his most insidious weapon, the Dread Lord was still a harrowing foe. His mighty body, his sinister mind, and his profane voice were all fearsome, capable of visiting unimaginable devastation upon the world.

Sunny was suffering much more than the odious dragon, his shadow incarnation receiving more and more soul damage despite being hidden inside an armored shell. But the dragon was hurting, as well. Although the wounds littering his body were not deep, they were numerous, seeping with silver blood.

And that... was all Sunny wished for.

'Bleed for me, worm...'

There was an annoying fly trying to intervene in their battle, hovering around them and sending one arrow after another at the Dread Lord. That fly wanted to steal his vengeance from him, and so, Sunny swiped at it with his claws, sending the pest plummeting down. It soon returned, though, drowning him in rage.

'Just wait a little... I'll kill you too...'

Everyone... he was going to kill everyone!

But the dragon would be first.

Even if Sunny had to rip his own soul apart to murder the loathsome worm, he would see him dead.

'Die! Die! Die!'

Even with nearly endless reserves of essence and the boundless fury of the [King's Resentment] fueling him, Sunny was struggling to deal severe damage to the Dread Lord. He vaguely remembered that there was someone else he had to kill... a vile amalgamation of countless beings hiding in the reflections... but he couldn't even slay this winged fiend!

Indignant, Sunny broke through the barrier of corpses floating in the water and slithered onto one of the carcasses. Before he could even change his shape, the harrowing dragon bit into his shell, tearing it, and dragged him into the sky. Four sets of terrifying claws slashed at him, shattering the onyx plates of the shell and maiming his serpentine body.

A hateful voice boomed in his head, making him dizzy:

[YOU HAVE RETURNED TO THE SOURCE. I SEE. SHE IS BACK TOO, THEN...]

Ripping into the crumbling shell with his maw, the Dread Lord laughed.

Laughed at him.

Sunny roared in fury.

[SHALL WE KILL HER AGAIN? YES... I'LL DEVOUR HER SLOWLY. RIGHT AFTER I'M DONE WITH YOU.]

Nephis. He was talking about Nephis.

Deep in the crumbling embrace of his shell, Sunny went absolutely mad.

Forgetting everything else except for his rage, he allowed the shell of the onyx serpent to dissolve into a torrent of shadows, and escaped their embrace.

Landing on the shoulder of the harrowing dragon in his fragile human form, Sunny grasped the hilt of the Sin of Solace and plunged it between the impregnable scales.

...Or at least, he tried to.

As if sensing the cursed blade, the Dread Lord finally showed a reaction. The massive body of the dragon recoiled, sending Sunny flying.

He fell through the air with terrible speed, plummeting down, down... there were no shadows for him to safely land into.

Before Sunny was splattered against the cold stones, someone caught him, slowing his fall. The two of them hit a stone wall and shattered it, rolling into the courtyard below.

Sunny landed on something soft and bounced away.

"Argh..."

Leaning on the Sin of Solace, he rose and looked around with bloodshot eyes. The weathered corpses... the battlements... he knew this place.

He was back in the floating fortress where Mordret had welcomed them to Twilight.

'So... the worm is afraid of my sword.'

A twisted grin appeared on his lips, and Sunny finally noticed another figure struggling to stand up from the cold stones near him. It was that annoying fly...

Killing it would only take a split second.

Before he could do it, though, a massive shadow covered him. Then, the battered dragon landed on the wall of the fortress, crushing the battlements with his claws. With silver blood streaming down his midnight scales, the Dread Lord gazed down at him, starlight burning in his malevolent eyes.

His gaze shifted slightly, crushing down on the annoying fly like an invisible force.

[YOU...]