1583 Shadow Avatars

Sunny found himself surrounded by six identical versions of himself, all staring at him with confused expressions. Alabaster skin, raben-black hair, eyes that were like glistening onyx... all of them were clad in full suits of fearsome onyx armor, as well, its design both intricate and impregnable.

He stared at them back.

For a moment, Sunny was scared.

And who could blame him? He had just managed to rid himself of the Sin of Solace, avoided being consumed by the Mad Prince, and survived a meeting with his frightening future self — each a version of him.

But... no.

None of the three was among the six copies that were sitting around him in a semicircle. In fact, the six impostors looked strangely familiar. And not just because they looked exactly like him.

Rather, they were like versions of Sunny that each possessed a distinct personality, which subtly changed how they looked.

One was sullen. Another was joyful. One was deadpan and unsettling, while the one next to him was arrogant and disdainful. The fifth copy seemed mischievous, while the last one looked like a complete lunatic.

They were... his shadows.

Sunny felt like pinching himself.

"Hey, you guys... what, uh... what are you doing?"

Six identical copies of him glanced at each other, then shrugged in unison.

"That's not helping!"

When it became clear that none of them was going to explain himself, Sunny shook his head in bewilderment.

So... this was his Transformation Ability?

'Come to think of it. It makes sense?'

Transformation Abilities were varied. Some were more unique, while most allowed Saints to assume the shape of powerful beasts. Sunny had expected to become a giant beast, as well, but then again... wasn't he already capable of that?

His mastery of Shadow Shell allowed him to assume the form of all manner of creatures, provided he knew how. Serpents, leopards, and winged horrors... as long as Sunny studied someone for a bit, he could grasp the essence of their being through Shadow Dance and recreate it through Shadow Manifestation. Of course, that transformation was purely physical, and did not grant him the mystical powers of the beings whose forms he used. In that regard, Shadow Shell was a lesser version of a true Transformation Ability. But it was still an immensely powerful tool, and much more versatile than almost any such Ability could be.

It was reasonable, then, that his Transformation would have nothing to do with his body.

Instead, it had to do with the invaluable helpers that followed him around.

His shadows.

The new Ability transformed them into perfect copies of Sunny, which was different from simply making them tangible through Shadow Manifestation. If simply made tangible, the shadows were fragile and vulnerable, exposing his soul to lethal damage.

These... shadow avatars, however, were just as strong and durable as Sunny's own body was. That much was already apparent — he could see the proof himself.

That proof was the Marble Mantle... no. It would be the Onyx Mantle now, wouldn't it? Its [Bound] trait was supposed to make it as strong as his soul was. Since Sunny was Transcendent now, the Mantle would have risen to a new Rank, as well.

In any case, the Mantle was a manifestation of the Onyx Shell Attribute. And since each of the shadows was clad in the fearsome armor, they seemed to possess the same Attribute.

Which meat that they possessed the rest of his Attributes, too. [Master of Shadows], [Flame of Divinity], [Onyx Shell]... and the three Weaves: [Blood Weave], [Bone Weave], and [Soul Weave].

[Fated], meanwhile... was up in the air. Sunny was not sure if he even had such an Attribute anymore.

He took a deep breath.

Since the shadow avatars possessed his Attributes, they were just as resilient and durable as him. The Weaves granted them strength and made their bodies exceedingly tenacious, while the Onyx Shell granted them protection against all kinds of attacks, as well as a handful of extremely useful traits.

So, they were just as robust as him.

But were they as powerful? What, exactly, could they do?

Sunny hesitated for a moment, and then decided to find out just that.

He could still perceive the world through the shadows. Now that Sunny composed himself, he could give them a few simple commands to see what they were capable of while manifested through his Transcendent Ability. He concentrated on the gloomy version of himself.

Sunny was about to open his mouth to give the command, but at that moment, something strange happened, making him fall silent.

As he concentrated on the shadow and its perception... it was as though their connection deepened, and changed.

Sunny was still looking at the sullen version of himself, and in turn looking at himself through the eyes of the sullen shadow, but it felt entirely different.

It was as though he was not just perceiving himself from outside his body, but actually... had two bodies.

Startled, Sunny flinched back.

At the same time, his second body flinched back, too, and he felt himself flinching back twice.

He opened his mouth:

"What the hell?!"

"What the hell?!"

His second body cried out, as well, two identical voices breaking the silence of the dusty pocket of space at the same time.

Sunny froze, looking at himself... and at the same time, his other body also froze, looking at himself.

He felt the cracked floor under his hands, and shards of concrete under his other hands.

Sunny raised his left hand and waved at himself, simultaneously raising his other left hand to wave at himself.

'How... weird!'

It was indeed as if there were two of him. He could not only perceive the world through the shadow avatar, but also control it as he would his own body.

As his eyes suddenly glistened with burning intensity, Sunny concentrated.

In the next moment, his own body waved its left hand again, while the shadow avatar waved its right.

'Complete independence...'

Throwing a glance at the other five copies of himself, Sunny gritted his teeth.

Then... each of the seven identical young men trapped in the ruins performed a separate action.

One rose to his feet. Another lowered himself to the floor. One turned his head to the left, while the one next to him turned his head to the right. The fifth closed his eyes, the sixth pressed his hands against his ears.

The last one covered his mouth with a hand.

Seven stunned gasps resounded at the same time, one of them slightly muffled.

The first Sunny — the original Sunny — swayed a little.

Controlling seven bodies at the same time put a lot of pressure on his mind... but it was not nearly as burdensome as almost anyone else would have found it. Sunny was perfectly accustomed to perceiving the world from multiple points of view, after all, so although it took some adjustment to exist in seven places at the same time, he was more than capable of managing it.

It was going to take some time to get used to it... but Sunny had no doubt.

One day, soon, he would be able to wield his six shadow avatars into battle.

Which meant that, instead of becoming a Saint...

Sunny had become seven Saints.