1968 Council of Shadows

Somewhere far away, a titanic humerus bone hung far above the desolate ashen wasteland like a floating mountain chain. It was the right arm of the dead deity that connected Godgrave to the distant Moonriver Plain, as well as to the road leading to Ravenheart.

Not long ago, it had been covered by the scarlet jungle. Now, however, the jungle was gone — the vermilion forest had been obliterated by the soldiers, and the white slope shone blindingly under the radiant, overcast sky.

Then, there was movement.

A small bird suddenly fell clumsily from that sky, colliding with the bone surface at full speed, head-first. The black crow bounced off the ground, rolled a couple of times, then jumped to its feet and shook its tiny head dazedly.

Then, it remained motionless for a while before suddenly bursting into a tide of shadows.

Those shadows surged and formed into the menacing figure of the Lord of Shadows.

Sunny stared at the horizon with an absent expression.

He was supposed to be preparing an ambush for the supply convoy of the Song Army right about now.

But... how the hell... was he supposed to...

He was already lucky to have fallen on the arm of the dead deity instead of plummeting straight into the Sea of Ash. That would have been... would have been...

What was he thinking about?

Why was he even thinking about anything, to begin with?!

Shaking his head decidedly, Sunny fell backward and crumbled into four bewildered shadows. He had released control of his incarnation, entirely unwilling to split his attention between several bodies... right now.

The shadows looked at each other in confusion.

Nobody was controlling them at the moment, so it was unclear what they were supposed to do.

A few seconds later...

The naughty shadow suddenly threw its arms into the air and performed a triumphant pirouette. Then, it threw a smug, satisfied look at its companions.

The haughty shadow would have usually given its sibling a contemptuous stare, but this time, it charitably held itself back. In fact, it raised his chin even higher than usual, emanating a very subtle feeling of contentment and pride.

As if saying:

"Finally. Everything is as it should be."

Haughty was such an august shadow, after all. It could reluctantly approve of being with a literal princess — their master had done something worthy... for once...

Even the crazy shadow seemed happy. Or... at least excited. It was usually hard to tell what the lunatic felt, but today, it seemed to be in a good mood.

Too good of a mood, maybe.

Only the creepy shadow remained his usual self. No, not quite... he looked very puzzled by the whole situation. And a little bored.

His emotionless stare seemed to convey a silent question:

"I don't really know what is happening, but weren't we supposed to start killing soon? Hello? Can we concentrate on the important stuff? Hello?!"

Why wasn't anyone listening?

The other three shadows ignored him.

Creepy scratched the back of his head.

Well. It wasn't all bad. At least he was learning new things... about human anatomy.

In fact.

It was quite fascinating.

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Eventually — quite some time later — the haughty shadow coalesced into the fearsome Lord of Shadows once more.

Only... he wasn't so fearsome anymore.

It was hard to maintain one's ferocity while happily humming a tune.

Sunny only realized that he was humming a few minutes later, though, and forced himself to stop.

However, he neglected to erase the stupid smile from his face. His face was hidden behind Weaver's Mask, anyway, so no one would know.

The other three shadows were giving him strange looks.

Well, the gazes of the creepy shadow and the crazy shadow were strange.

The naughty guy... was quite obvious and expressive.

Sunny grinned.

"Shut up."

He failed to make his voice sound stern, though.

'What does he even know...'

Looking around, Sunny tried to concentrate and glanced warily at the sky. Then, he turned into a shadow and glided swiftly across the surface of the white bone.

He was already running late to his rendezvous...

Some time later, he reached the road built on the dead god's arm by the soldiers of the Song Army. It was hardly a proper road, really — not even a Sovereign could have built something substantial on the nearly indestructible surface of the ancient bone. Instead, logs scavenged from the annihilated jungle were placed on the ground, held in place by tar.

The supply caravans used this road to pull heavy carts up the slope, eventually reaching the crossing to the Collarbone Plain. Now that Ki Song had descended upon Godgrave in person, the Song Army possessed a Dream Gate of their own, so their supply situation was not as bad as it had been before.

But there were limits to what a Dream Gate could achieve. First of all, only cargo from the waking world could be carried through it, most of which was mundane. Secondly, the supply infrastructure in the waking world was a glaring vulnerability —after the fall of the House of Night, no one believed that the war would stay contained in the Dream Realm anymore.

The flow of supplies from the other side could be cut off at any moment, so both armies were working hard to maintain a logistical connection to their Domains.

Sunny's job was to disrupt that connection by harassing the Song Army from the rear.

He had briefly considered destroying the crossing itself, but decided against it in the end. The crossing was too close to the main camp of the enemy, and to their sole Citadel in Godgrave, as well. The risk of running into someone truly powerful — perhaps even the Queen herself — was too great.

So, he had chosen to start with a single caravan.

Those caravans weren't easy targets, either. The supplies were guarded by both Awakened troops and Ascended officers. From time to time, there would even be a Saint mixed between the soldiers — Clan Song had plenty of those to spare, after all.

Worse still, the carts were being pulled by Beastmaster's thralls, and there were dead pilgrims escorting them.

The Queen had her eyes on the caravans, so Sunny had to be swift about his attack.

He had already lost the chance to be swift due to... unforeseen circumstances...

It was worth it, though, of course — without a shadow of a doubt.

Sunny couldn't stop smiling.

'Focus! There is no time to waste.'

He could already see the head of the caravan in the distance...

But, sadly, he really could not focus at all.