

The Lore of Shadowcloud

First Struggles (Hatchling Age)

Shadowcloud hatched on the 11th of July, 4984 BC, emerging as a seemingly ordinary shadow dragon. His scales were as black as the void, with only his piercing red eyes breaking the monochrome of his form. His father was a towering black shadow dragon with faintly glowing light blue eyes, while his mother was a silver dragoness with fiery crimson eyes, bringing forth thirteen hatchlings in their clutch.

His clan, a dwindling lineage of shadow dragons, had long struggled on the brink of extinction. War after war against rival clans and other beings had left their numbers dangerously thin. In desperation, the elders and alchemists found a radical solution: strengthening their young by merging them with demonic souls. Demon prisoners captured over countless ages. They hoped this would strengthen each offspring, giving them an unmatched presence. It was a gamble for survival, an attempt to fortify their kind and ensure their legacy.

The process was cruel. Each youngling's soul was tested for resilience to determine if it could endure the presence of a demon. The strongest were chosen first, while the weaker ones were either spared or deemed unfit and left to grow without enhancement. The ritual itself was ancient, complicated, and filled with risk. Some younglings emerged with newfound strength. Others were torn apart from within, their tiny forms collapsing under the strain, their bodies lifeless as the demon inside them broke free once more.

Shadowcloud, still a small and innocent hatchling at the time, was a witness to the torment, forced to watch what would await him in the future. He would never forget the screams, the anguished roars of his kin as their souls shattered, their bodies crumpling into stillness or if they had to go through several dimensions of pain, just to become an enhanced version of themselves.

Transformation (Youngling Age)

By the time Shadowcloud reached the appropriate age, his fate had already been sealed. The ritual was performed on him, and unlike many others, he survived without any immediate complications, though he endured stinging pain for several hours afterward. Yet the success came with a heavy burden: he gained immense power, but felt only guilt,

knowing that so many of his friends had perished in the same process. Despite the darkness looming over his early life, Shadowcloud still experienced moments of a normal dragon's youth. He played, explored, learned to fly, hunt, and navigate the world. His siblings were far more aggressive, with their games often bordering on combat, leaving bruises and scratched scales in their wake. Even though he disliked fighting, he reluctantly participated to avoid being seen as weak or different.

One fateful day, while a group of younglings - Shadowcloud included - ventured near a forbidden well, tragedy struck. The well was unique, leading to an underground reservoir of magical spring water brimming with powerful magic. The alchemists often used the enchanted waters for their rituals and potions, but no youngling dragon was permitted near it without an elder's presence. But curiosity drew them closer, and during the rough play of the wild dragons, Shadowcloud lost his footing and tumbled right into the well. The moment he touched the water, raw magic surged through him, overwhelming every nerve with searing pain. He struggled desperately, trying to scream, but his body went numb as the influx of power took hold. Within mere minutes, his consciousness faded entirely. His siblings looked down into the well, panic setting in as they saw their brother struggling for life. Fearful of punishment, they fled back to the elders, leaving Shadowcloud submerged in the arcane depths for five agonizing hours before a rescue effort finally pulled his lifeless form from the water.

But Shadowcloud did not die. Obviously. The alchemists and healers of their clan - and even other clans - rallied together to help him, especially given that he was the one youngling with the highest chances of success in ensuring their clan's survival. They spared no effort to bring him back. When he awoke after several days of magic-induced coma, he found himself irreversibly changed. His once purely black scales were now ruined by hundreds of strongly glowing violet dots where the magic had penetrated his body and damaged his scales, making him look like a cruel version of a dragonized Dalmatian. He had become something different, something altered by forces beyond his understanding. The alchemists and healers worked for years to refine these changes, moving the unnatural markings into more symmetrical and sensible patterns across his body, along his scale plates, wings, and frills. In time, he came to embrace this new form, despite its unsettling origins.

Yet the transformation went far beyond aesthetics. His growth accelerated unnaturally, and within mere months, his body swelled far larger than his siblings'. His fire, once a simple flame, now blazed in a deep purple, radiating not heat but a paralyzing effect. His soul, already bound to a demon, was fractured by the magic, making the entity inside him more active and powerful than before, instead of fully merging with his soul. And perhaps most distressing of all, he became dependent on a regular influx of energy.

His training mostly focused on harnessing these gifts. He grew stronger, faster, and sharper. He developed the ability to extract and devour souls - a grim necessity given his insatiable need for energy, a skill he inherited from the demon within him. Though proud of the changes he underwent, he was also worried about the safety of his siblings and fellow dragons who did not receive this chance, but not too concerned that his transformations would become a problem for him in the future. The training also covered fighting

techniques, but Shadowcloud never enjoyed useless fights. The elders often whispered that if he continued to learn and improve, he might become an ambassador for their kind rather than just a warrior, never having to participate in senseless battles again. Shadowcloud clung to this hope, working tirelessly to improve himself and reach his goal of a future free from violence. But fate had other plans.

First Battle (Adolescence)

War erupted, forcing Shadowcloud and his fellow students to leave their studies behind and fight for their own and their clans' survival. After everything he had learned, he took the chance to see what he could really do, and he proved himself in battle, surpassing even the highest expectations of his clan. He was more than just a skilled, enhanced warrior. He was bound to become a force of nature, a killing machine, an unstoppable presence on the battlefield. The war was won swiftly, with their abilities turning the tide in ways none had foreseen, giving Shadowcloud a lot more courage about fighting and his powerful abilities.

The Great War (Adulthood)

Centuries passed as Shadowcloud dedicated himself to self-improvement, learning, and practicing. He found someone he loved intimately, spent a lot of time with his family and siblings and enjoyed life with close to no incidents. But soon another war loomed on the horizon.

By this time, Shadowcloud had matured into a towering, fully awakened dragon of immense power, even larger and bulkier than his father. Yet rather than fulfilling his vision of becoming an ambassador for his clan, he was once again forced to join the war. His unimaginable powers were needed to ensure success. Now more confident in himself and his abilities, Shadowcloud led a squad of demonically enhanced dragons, whom he considered friends due to their extensive training together. Their bond strengthened his resolve to win the war. The stakes were higher than ever; failure could mean the annihilation of their clan or even their entire race.

They followed orders without hesitation or questioning, just as they had learned at school and done in the previous war. Carving a path through enemy hordes, slicing bodies with their claws and crushing them violently underpaw, Shadowcloud tore souls from living bodies with ease. Together, their squad left nothing but devastation and death behind. Corpses littered the ground, largely untouched, as there was no need to fight when a mere tug on the soul could end it all.

But something changed as they pushed deeper into the battlefield. Soon, orders came down to eliminate all non-demonic beings in their path. Doubt crept deeply into Shadowcloud's mind, questioning these commands for a long while, but he seemed to be the only one. Not wanting to stand out or appear weak, he fell back into old habits from his childhood when he had forced himself to keep up with the others, afraid of being left behind. Yet, fear of unknown consequences kept them all obedient, and so he pushed aside his unease and fought on, not wanting to be punished.

But the truth behind these commands would soon reveal itself.

They were ordered back to their remaining clan, assuming the war had been won already. A vile plan was unfolding to let them know their true destiny in this war.

Breaking Point

As they returned from the battlefield, yearning to embrace their families once more, a familiar foe awaited them. All non-demonic beings had turned against them, driven by an unyielding desire to see them dead - friends, family, and the rest of their own clan. No one cared about their familial ties anymore. They were now considered demons, enemies to all normal beings. The hatred stemmed from the belief that they had betrayed their kind, siding with dark forces.

This conflict left Shadowcloud questioning everything he thought he knew about himself and his orders. His intuition had always guided him before, but fear and his past had clouded his judgment. One of his childhood fears, of being mocked for his softness or labeled as weak, drove him to continue blindly. Now, he faced the harsh consequences of those choices. He couldn't bear the thought of killing his family, siblings, and loved ones over a misguided war order or a misunderstanding. Despite being demonically enhanced, Shadowcloud remained loyal to their side, no matter what lurked within him. He hadn't realized that the war had shifted to demons against all non-demonic beings, even if he could've known if he hadn't been so blind. Yet, at the same time, he was deeply afraid of the repercussions if he deserted the fight.

He tried to reach out to his former friends and family on the other side, pleading with them that he still loved them and remained loyal despite his demonic enhancement. But their ears were closed to his words, seeing only the vile creature before them. Frozen in place, Shadowcloud watched as the nightmare unfolded around him, realizing this would be his end if he refused to fight. His once-close friends now stood as enemies, while his squadmates prepared to battle through without a second thought. His mind spiraled into chaos, questioning everything he ever did. His childhood, his studies, his actions, his

decision to join the war, and even his ability to fight. He had to resolve the situation! He had to convince them of his innocence or stop his squad from attacking, but every path seemed sheer impossible. Time was running out, and he felt utterly betrayed, overwhelmed by the weight of his thoughts.

Paralyzed by despair with tears running down his scaled cheeks, Shadowcloud collapsed, covering himself with his wings as he shivered. He longed for an end to his suffering, hoping death would come swiftly. Crying on the battlefield, he anticipated being called a coward or traitor, facing a death sentence for disobeying orders. Yet, despite everything, his love for friends, family, and fellow soldiers remained unwavering, even as they stood against him now. For the first time in his life, he found himself unable to make a choice. His squad, loyal to their orders and him, didn't understand what was wrong. As the threat closed in on Shadowcloud, still reeling from his mental breakdown, they acted swiftly, slaughtering through every enemy without hesitation. Their sole goal was to save their downed squad leader from the attacks, driven by sheer loyalty and a desire to avoid the harsh punishments for deserting and disobeying orders. Shadowcloud remained in a trance, detached from the chaos around him. Every sound was drowned out by a high-pitched ringing in his ear canals, his vision shaky, blurry, and dark. His mind and heart were racing as he hid in plain sight, hoping to feel a claw slicing his neck open, leaving him to bleed out unnoticed. He wished for nothing more than to disappear forever.

Descent into Darkness

When the last echoes of battle faded, signaling the threat had been dealt with, Shadowcloud's squad returned to check on him. Their voices and presence slowly penetrated his haze, attempting to calm him. He had no reason not to trust them, unaware of the massacre that surrounded him. Gradually, he calmed enough to emerge from his hiding spot, his mind still clouded with thoughts and fears, his eyes still full of tears. Thinking that his squad had simply fled the battle and taken him with them, the first thing Shadowcloud saw were the blood-smeared bodies of his teammates. All tainted with the blood of friends and relatives.

Shadowcloud gasped in utter disbelief as he began looking around, unable to comprehend the devastation and death that surrounded him. No one from his clan or family remained alive. He was merely surrounded by dozens of shredded corpses with pools of blood everywhere. His heart sank as reality set in, the weight of what had happened crushing him. Tears streamed down his face as he stared at the carnage, unable to move or speak.

Slowly, Shadowcloud forced his trembling body upright and weakly stomped forward, sobbing with each step as he scanned the lifeless forms before him. His heart pounded in his chest, a surge of rage rising within him as he saw the bodies of his siblings, parents, and the one he loved. Flames flickered in his eyes, still smeared with tears, and his

heartbeat thudded louder as rage consumed him. Suddenly, his head turned around, and he began shouting at the other dragons in a much deeper and slightly distorted voice, accusing them of murdering his entire family and friends and taking countless innocent lives. His crimson eyes burned like wildfire as he lashed out at their blind obedience, telling them about their utter stupidity for following orders without questioning them. But they didn't seem to care much. All they wanted was to justify themselves, trying to avoid punishment not just for themselves but for their leader as well. They refused to acknowledge the horrors they had caused. Rage overtook him at their reaction, his eyes burning like a volcano about to erupt, glowing brightly as the demon inside him used the moment to rise and take control of the dark dragon's body.

Shadowcloud completely lost control, consumed by a feral rage. His mind clouded with anger, he began attacking his own team, sending purple, energy-infused flames their way to paralyze and burn them, blindly striking them with his sharp claws with no thought other than to release the storm of fury that had taken over him. Every blow he landed was filled with the weight of his grief and betrayal as if the very force of his rage could erase the pain of what had happened. The dragon he once was - calm and calculated - had disappeared, leaving only a demonic beast driven by the need for vengeance behind in his scaly shell. After two of his comrades fell before him, slaughtered by his own claws and abilities, his senses slowly seemed to come back to him.

As the haze of rage slowly began to lift, the weight of his actions crashed down on Shadowcloud like a tidal wave. His breath was heavy, and his heart still raced, but it was the overwhelming horror of what he had just done that made his instincts scream at him to flee, to escape the consequences of his madness. He realized he had become exactly what he had always feared to become - a mindless beast, a killer without cause. Spreading his wings, Shadowcloud immediately began flying away, consumed by feelings of guilt and shame, knowing he had made things worse. He felt like a cold-blooded murderer, a coward, and a failure. Behind him, the remaining squad tried to catch up to Shadowcloud but soon chose to tend to their wounds and mourn their fallen comrades instead of escalating the conflict further. They knew their dark leader could succumb to another fit of rage, killing them on the spot, and they didn't want to risk it. They had no words for Shadowcloud, only the silent understanding that punishment would hopefully await him soon.

Shadowcloud's wings beat weakly against the air, the weight of his grief and actions dragging him down. Tears flowed uncontrollably as his sobs echoed through the empty, dark skies. Desperate to escape the nightmare that had become his world, he fled, haunted by images of his fallen family, friends, blood on his claws, and dead squad mates. All he wanted was to vanish into nothingness. Eventually, Shadowcloud's strength faded, his wings too tired to carry him any longer. He stumbled upon a cave, its dark mouth yawning before him. The space was barely large enough to fit his giant form, but it was all he could find - fitting, given what he had done. With the little energy left in him, he pushed a massive boulder against the entrance from the inside, sealing himself off from the world outside.

He didn't want to face the consequences, the guilt, or the emptiness any longer. Shadowcloud curled into a ball in the cold darkness, feeling his last energy drain away. His eyes heavy with sorrow and tears, he finally surrendered to the silence. His mind, tortured and exhausted, fell into a deep, dreamless sleep. Lost to the world for days, he hoped and prayed that he would never wake up again.

But death never came.

When Shadowcloud finally awoke, he slowly opened his eyes to find himself no longer in the cave. Instead, he was confined in a cold, dimly lit cell magically chained to the walls with his ankles and neck. Panic gripped his chest as his mind raced, trying to piece together what had happened. But where he was and how he got there remained a mystery. His heart sank as the harsh reality hit: he had been captured, and the price for his desertion and the chaos he had unleashed would be far worse than death.

He was in the Soul Court.

The Soul Court

Soon after being released from his cell, Shadowcloud's paws and maw were again shackled with powerful magic constraints, aiming to stop him from acting up again. As he got dragged into the courtroom, the voices of the judges reached his ears, harsh and condemning. They spoke of his role as a leader, about his demonic merge, his intense training, and his utter success in war, but also of how he had abandoned his team, mercilessly killed his comrades under demonic influence, and left them behind to desert the war. They spoke of the full responsibility he carried for the lives lost and his betrayal in the eyes of the war. It wasn't just his life at stake now - it was his very soul they wanted to annihilate, not just to punish him, but to get rid of the demonic entity. They spoke of the demon's failed attempt to merge with him completely in his younger years, taking advantage of his lowered mental state and causing his outburst of rage. But it was no excuse for what he had done. He growled in disapproval under his constraints, but no one noticed. The fear inside him spiraled out of control as he realized the full extent of his punishment, but he couldn't move much due to his tight constraints. Forced to listen and unable to speak up.

He didn't want to die. Not like this.

Redemption

As he waited for his verdict, a strange figure approached him, its presence both unnerving and intriguing. Cloaked entirely in shadows, its form was difficult to discern, but its voice was clear and deliberate. It spoke of salvation, seemingly knowing everything about him - his abilities, his past, his power, his flaws. The figure offered him a way out of his death sentence in exchange for his service. If he agreed, the sentence of soul annihilation would be lessened. Instead, he would be bound to serve as a soul devourer, tasked with locating and judging stray souls, either guiding them to their rightful resting place or destroying them if they had reached the end of their lifespan. It promised him a purpose, a chance to redeem himself.

Shadowcloud was well aware of the rarity and power of his abilities, and the offer was more than tempting. Considering his life would be spared and he'd be given a purpose, he had no choice but to accept. The Soul Court immediately released him from his restraints, handing him over to the strange figure in the shadows. Reality warped around him as the figure shoved him through a portal, bringing him to a facility carved into the foot of a volcano. This place was designed to train those like him, to teach them their purpose. Here, he would refine his soul-devouring powers and improve other abilities to carry out his new duties.

The Eternal Struggle

After his training in the facility, Shadowcloud would be sent far away from his past life and everything he had known. He was forced to walk a new path, learning a new life as a servant of fate, judging souls and ensuring the balance between life and death was maintained. For hundreds, thousands of years, he carried out his duty, gradually trying to make peace with his past, though the weight of his sins and the memories of what he saw never left him.

There was one lingering truth he could not escape anymore: the demon inside him had never truly merged. It remained awake, feeding off the soul energy he consumed, growing ever hungrier. The more he devoured, the more it stirred, its greed threatening to escalate beyond his control. This forced Shadowcloud to continue his grim work of destiny, not out of duty or will, but out of necessity.

Each soul he devoured, every fragment of life he converted to energy, was not merely to fulfill his role or destiny. It was to feed the demon, to keep it sated, dormant, controlled, and restrained while he continued drawing on its powers. This was a constant struggle. If the demon ever regained control, if it overtook him once more, it wouldn't just be stray souls or Shadowcloud himself that would become evil forces taking over the lands. The world would face something far darker, something far more dangerous - the full force of

the demon's wrath unleashed without restraint, with the dragon's powerful body at its command.

This demon, fueled by rage, drenched in raw energy from the former hatchling's well mishap, could turn Shadowcloud into a devourer of worlds within just a few years. But as long as he remained in control, there was nothing to fear. He had no choice but to continue his grim task, ensuring that the world remained safe from the darkness within him.

A guardian striving to save the world from the dangers within himself.