

The Snake Temple...

Sheng bites his lip in delight as his duty for the morning is once more fulfilled; '~Haaa...~' He sighs in delight as the demi-goddess above him takes her morning offering of his essence through their sexual embrace.

Cobra hisses in reaction to her own high of pleasure from her elevated position atop her slave. After basking in it for a moment she leans down to meet him face-to-face with the kind of slithering, inhuman flexibility that drives her thrall wild. 'Good morning, ssslave!'

That's right! Sheng hadn't realised it but she hadn't even greeted him before pinning him down and having her way with him... Still, *this* is what he *lives for*, his *purpose!* Whatever life he once knew before coming to the snake temple is irrelevant next to his duties as Cobra's slave!

'Good morning, Mistress Cobra! Have I satisfied you?' He asks with a genuine intent to please; he feels her powerful, inhuman body slither and dismount him as she rises up once more. It's easy to lose track of the months here at the temple but nevertheless he knows he'll *never* gets sick of the sight of his Goddess!

She strokes his chest and just gently scratches her nails across his pecs. 'Yesss, your sssubmission is pleasssure enough!' She seems delighted even if she is often impossible to read.

'~UHH!~' Sheng moans in delight, looking down as the enchanted token bound to him seals itself once more. It locks his manhood tight within it so as none can touch him beside the Goddess. 'Thankyou...' He smiles in response and watches the snake goddess display her pleasure at his unquestioning servitude.

'You are mosst welcome, ssslave!' Cobra confidently hisses and slowly slithers back into the darkness never breaking eye-contact, 'Now *shouldn't* you get to work?' He startles up from his relaxed position, this is *no time* to enjoy the afterglow: there's too much to do!

'GAH!' Qiao cries out in pain, doubling over and dropping the huge stone block no man should be able to carry. His own token from the Goddess still provides him the strength to lift it but the pain of pushing himself so far beyond his limits is no longer bearable.

He collapses to a knee and reaches and arm behind himself to rub his awfully aching back, '*Dammit!*' He curses himself and reaches to a pocket where he finds a small pack of vials, smiling to himself 'Thankyou for this gift, Goddess!' He exclaims.

He withdraws two and slides the pack away. Almost flamboyantly he throws his head back and slides the two vials into a gap behind his tight, slick scarf hewn from the magical scales of his owner, Cobra.

It does the rest, the enchanted article of clothing taking the vials into itself and pumping them into his bloodstream through a pair of permanently embedded fangs in his throat.

'Morning, Qiao! Up and at it already?' Qiao feels the power, the pain relief and the drive return to him like a drug high and rises to meet his colleague with a smile,

'You know it, Jun!' He smiles as he rides on the wave of body-altering chemicals coursing through him. 'We're almost done I think, it's all looking

pretty damn good!' He concludes, crossing his arms and glancing at the other man's token: a tight sleeve of that slick green scaly texture that apparently gifts him superhuman accuracy in everything he does.

'Wish I could help you with that...!' The hulking if rather dim man responds and looks over the progress Qiao has made hefting the huge stones into place, 'Mistress *always* knows what's best though, so I'll get back to the fine detail work.'

Qiao nods as Jun goes about his job, just as confident in his purpose as the once studious smaller slave to the snake temple. He often wonders to himself if Cobra picking he and Jun for seemingly opposite jobs to their natural inclinations to toy with them.

He thinks this for a moment but always comes to the same conclusion that ultimately her choices have made him a better man, a better man who would give his *life* for the snake goddess!

'Sso?' Cobra hisses in Lok's ear as she appears from nowhere behind him, making the foreman of her project jump in shock and turn to look with a dutiful bow.

'*Goddess!*' He exclaims passionately towards his sadistic yet often benevolent owner, her slick scaled hand taking his chin and tilting his head back up to look at her.

'How go my renovations?' She asks pointedly, seemingly measuring the fear and paradoxical excitement in the senior builder; he's responsible for replacing the tattered, worn infrastructure of the snake temple and knows the price of failure to meet her expectations!

'All on schedule, Goddess! The pit has been enlarged with final detail work well underway and the new archway is ready for your inspection if it pleases you!' Every word he speaks is passionate yet deep down driven by a fundamental fear of what Cobra will do to him if he fails.

'Excccellent!' a second hand strokes over his head and with a firm grip she parts his jaws; Lok judders in response to the huge, thick tongue she thrusts between his lips and he only convulses more as it writhes down his throat to taste his insides for a few brief seconds. He feels it writhe and explore him before hurriedly exiting with a rather unpleasant sensation.

'I plan to hold a festsstival for my worshippers in the nearby villagesss in two weeks... You *will* ssee to it that the work is completed in time, won't you?' She asks but it isn't a question in the traditional sense, it's a flat-out threat: 'Because I am sso looking forward to the *feassst!*' he'd better complete the work or else he'll be the main course!

Meanwhile; in a deep, dark place in a far-away land...

'You've led me on a merry little dance!' A crooked voice strikes him in the back of the head like the butt of a gun. 'You made promises!' He can't turn to see his captor with his arm tied to hooks on the ceiling, but her voice and footsteps say she's getting closer.

'*Power!* You said...' He wrestles with the ropes tied around his bruised wrists, squirming and mumbling into the foul-tasting gag as the bitter, twisted woman gets so close he can feel her presence. '*Fortune!* You promised...' She continues and he feels her cold hands on his back.

'You *lied!*' She hisses and he screams into his gag; he feels electricity arc through his body like a thousand needles tearing his skin apart. 'You *lied* and *now* you have to *suffer!*' She continues, upping the voltage '*Hmhahahaha!*' She laughs in twisted delight before releasing.

'*Muhu-hu-huuu... MUHHHH!*' He weeps in agony, gasping for air and relief. Nothing happens for a few long, terrifying seconds as the helpless man shivers in his cold, naked state.

'You *can* make all of this go away, little *errand-boy...*' The wicked woman continues with evil in her voice and turns to walk around him. In those few seconds the former messenger for the Zodiac Master considers his life choices and the decisions he made with regret.

Previously he'd been warned that the woman known as Ling Leung could potentially be dangerous but nothing he'd seen in their brief previous encounter had prepared him for the level of barbarity she's *actually* capable of!

He finally gets a look at her as she walks around him, this mysterious woman who has been tracking him for months and cutting a bloody path through everyone he's so much as *talked to!* His eyes open wide in shock, she's changed so much!

'I want to make sure you understand how *generous* I'm being to you since you provided me with the Shadow Dragon powerband...' She insists as her captive takes in everything new about her.

He'd been there when she first put on that dark powerband, he'd watched her take on the dark persona but that woman and this seemed like almost two separate people! Everything about it seems to have evolved in the year since that fateful meeting!

From her skin-tone to the obvious bulk she's put on under the influence of the band and then there's the *glowing...* Her eyes, the tips of her hair, even the veins on what little skin he could see; it's illuminated in an ominous blue hue.

'I could *really* hurt you!' Ling stresses, raising a tensed hand and making the air between her fingers broil with blue energy, 'I could make you *scream* like I did all your friends...' She's smiling as she reminisces, 'I could *do things* to you they don't even have words for... But you can prevent all that by telling me one. little. thing.'

With a fingertip she taps his gag and it turns to cinders scorching his lips as it evaporates. '*AAAH!* Anything! Anything! I'll tell you-' That same fingertip presses against his lip and becomes threateningly hot.

'I *want to know* where the Zodiac Master *went...* so I can find him *myself!*' Her eyes burn with a hungry passion at the thought as she sneers at her captive. '*Tell me* where your boss is so I can skin him alive... and I won't have to do that to *you instead!*'

She's serious, he can tell she's genuinely committed to fulfilling her own selfish agenda at the expense of anyone and everyone in her way; this is the power of the Shadow Dragon powerband and it is terrifying!

'Alright! Alright I'll tell you! But please... Please...' She silences him again.

'Don't whimper, it's *pathetic!* Tell me all and you won't endure this agony any longer!' She grins wickedly, not even caring if he understands that he'll die either way!

'Alright... Yes... I received a-a letter...' He explains slowly and methodically as he winces in pain from the torment she's subjected him to. Ling doesn't care

about how much it hurts, she wants-

'ANSWERS!' She demands and crackles with sweltering energy that causes heat haze around her.

'AAAH! AAAH!' The tortured courier shies away squinting but hurries. 'L-Laos!' He spurts out in genuine fear for his life, 'A snake temple in Laos!' The heat dies down and he relaxes, heaving. 'He-'

'That's quite enough!' Ling grins wickedly and clenches her fingers with an open-palm; the courier watches it crackle with that ferocious blue glow the forms something like a burning blade around her fingertips. 'You've been *very helpful!*'

'NOOOOAAAIEEEYEEAAAARGH!' He screams as Ling thrusts her fully functional energy blade into his gut and forces her power through it.

'~Ahaha~' She laughs in such a way she almost moans in delight as she causes his blood to boil on contact with her weapon, '~hahaha!~' Ling's laughter rises as glowing heat begin spewing from her victim's mouth, his skin turning red and blistering!

'~HAAAAHAHAHA!~' She roars in delight as he bursts into flames in front of her face; he screams no more. 'Yes...!' She forcefully removes her hand and shakes her fingers loose to dismiss the energy weapon, '-very helpful *indeed!*'

One week later, 2 miles from the Snake Temple...

'Looks like they're expecting us, huh?' Sheng asks Jun with clear excitement in his tone, leaning out of the window of their remarkably well maintained Nissan pickup truck.

'Sure looks like it, bro.' The still still knuckleheaded member of Cobra's congregation responds; even he can tell the difference in Sheng since they wound up at the temple following their ill-fated attack.

Slowing the vehicle the oaf wonders why Sheng of all of them is most into serving the Snake-woman, after all he was terrified when they first attacked!

'Hey heeeey!' Sheng loudly greets the villagers gathered out front of their rudimentary shacks; before Jun can even stop the truck the other man has opened the door and leapt out.

Slamming on the brakes before his friend is run over Jun curses under his breath and steadies himself. At least it's a few hours away from manual labour and the constant threat of having the mistress grab him and use him for whatever desire has come over her.

Taking his time to get out of the vehicle Jun thinks to himself that actually that sounds pretty exciting and maybe Sheng's just further along the road to really fulfilling their roles. Outwardly he may be a bit stupid but deep down he's actually a contemplative kinda guy when the opportunity presents itself.

'Jun...' He turns to Lok, concern on the face of the slave group's leader as he approaches. The token he wears – a scale-skin hoodie – sticks out from his kevlar vest and seems almost alive in how it reacts to his darting eyes; Lok has his weapon clutched tightly as if ready for anything.

'Duhhh, what's up?' The larger man asks in confusion, but checks his weapon anyway.

'Saw some tracks veering off into the undergrowth back there, could be trouble!' Lok fixes his comrade a stern expression and waits for him to nod back.

Seemingly oblivious to the disquiet Sheng walks into the single main muddy street of the small village with some of the locals. While he converses loudly and jovially the three who follow are *anything* but calm; rightfully so.

Just as Lok starts to wonder if he was imagining things the roar of engines approaching reaches his ears, 'SHENG!' He shouts and feels immediately thankful that his new "employer" isn't the kind of stuck in the past traditionalist the Zodiac Master was!

He cocks his very modern assault rifle and ducks to the side; he signals the other three who hurry along the sides of the street keeping low as the first of a convoy of black military looking SUVs appears.

By the time the four would-be village protectors in the name of their owner are halfway down the street a further three blacked out vehicles have arrived and disgorged heavily armed men onto the street.

'ALRIGHT BOYS, *LIGHT 'EM UP!*' Someone shouts as Cobra's men approach with astounding speed despite their low profiles. Gunfire rings out followed by screaming and panic; whoever these people are they picked a really bad time to pull this stunt!

Cobra's guys return fire taking a pair at the front down in short order as Jun and Qiao charge in brandishing kitanas to supplement the essentially super-human powers gifted them by Cobra's tokens.

The element of surprise doesn't do the four men much good as the charging melee pair are forced into cover behind their enemies vehicles under hails of fire. 'Shit!' Qiao curses, glancing over towards Sheng as Cobra's favourite unleashes a burst of fire. He looks back and they nod, they need backup!

Qiao squeezes himself down and rolls under the Hum-Vee he happens to have used as cover; he knows he's been spotted but it buys him enough time to retrieve his secret weapon from a pocket in his vest.

The coiled green enchanted thing stirs as he brings it out and a pair of tiny snake eyes lock onto his own 'Mistress! A group of unknowns are attacking the village! We're trying to hold them back, but-'

'I'll deal with thisss!' The tiny snake says out loud though Qiao knows full well it's no mere snake. He nods and lays it on the ground; 'Ssstay here!' The tiny snake demands as gunfire ricochets off the vehicle, Qiao is fine with that... though maybe he won't stay *entirely* underneath a truck.

Sheng recoils back behind a stack of barrels providing surprisingly good cover only to nearly drop his gun as something green and glistening slithers out of his vest pocket.

He watches it slither down him and hears it speak as the serpent slides onto the ground. 'Stay in cover, only *I'm* allowed to hurt my boys!' It says with Cobra's voice and her simple command is followed by that all too familiar mystifying way of hers to wrangle up armies of snakes out of nowhere.

The undergrowth around the tiny village seems to come to life as snakes of every size and shape emerge from every tiny nook and cranny. They gather with frightening speed around the tiny green orchestrator leading to a few short, sprawling seconds of chaos.

The slithering and hissing ends with Sheng looking upon a familiar but not too familiar form: Cobra! The goddess of the snake temple he first knew and feared or at least a very close copy of her who spares him a brief glimpse before slithering into action!

Meanwhile, in some shit-hole village in the jungles of Laos...

'Jay!' A frustrated man cries across a small gap in cover to a mercenary comrade of his, *'Who the hell gave these savages machine guns?!*' He asks expecting an answer from his middle-man superior.

'GAH!' Jay exclaims as mud is thrown up by another strafe of fire from down the street. 'God, I don't know but there's *more of us*, right? So keep shooting!' Brody listens, processes and accepts that as good enough.

He's in the middle of nowhere in some rain-soaked asian country he can't even find on a map getting shot at over some dirt, but there's pay in it so Brody's more than happy to- he freezes.

'S-s-s-s-snake... Snakes! SNAKES!' He cries out and just about drops his gun as out of nowhere seemingly hundreds of slithering reptiles crawl out of the undergrowth and send the aggressors into a panic.

'AAAGH!' Jay shrieks 'AAAH!' Jeremy the posh English dude panicks 'WHAT ZE HELL IZ ZIS?!' that surly French bastard Claude shouts from somewhere nearby. 'I freaking *haate* snakes!' Jay sums it up for everyone, sweeping any and every serpent off him as fast as he can.

The gunfire dies down in favour of shock and shouting but as quickly as the tide of scales arrived it subsides; the remaining panic and elevated heart-rates keep the mercenaries pinned down but Brody pokes his head up out of cover to watch.

'Hey, Jay...' He squints as he watches that local guy he saw with the sword roll out from under a Hum-Vee, a Hum-Vee that seems to be attracting an entire army of the slithering critters. 'The snakes, they're...' He briefly sees another congregation only to be pinned down by a burst of suppressing fire.

'What?!' The boss asks, still trying to gather himself.

'They're gathering! Under the Hum-Vee and-'

'Right here!' Cobra finishes his thought for him having appeared with remarkable speed in the gap and reared up between the pair of them, claws sharpened and fangs flashed.

'*WHAT THE F-?!*' Jay exclaims, jumping up and back as he turns his gun on the slick green snake-woman. He opens fire only to watch her turn to something like liquid and shape-shift to the side, completely avoiding his burst of fire.

Again he tries and fails to hit her as Cobra almost playfully slithers closer, then again and again before she suddenly lunges in and snatches his closest hand on the weapon, tilting it to the sky.

Cobra doesn't pause to acknowledge his confusion and instead squeezes with her powerful hand mashing fingers and carpals into the hard metal framework of the gun. Brody watches in horror as this weird woman squishes his screaming boss' bone structure like clay; he can't help because he's frozen in shock.

Brody falls onto his rear and hears other screams go up; he sees another human snake leap through the air over one of the SUVs and coil up Jeremy; chaos and confusion have befallen what was once a well-planned military operation!

Brody's eyes are front and centre as Jay's gun and what's left of his pulverised hands are separated; his eyes fall on the half-terrifying, half-enchancing

womanly serpent as she shapeshifts once more.

Holding Jay's arms by his sides she spreads her jaws to show her long, sharp fangs then spreads them further... and further! By now Brody is convinced she isn't human as her jaws spread wider than Jay's head; she lunges and just like that his boss' head is inside her rubbery, flexible maw!

'Nonono-' He tries to deny what he's seeing as he crawls backwards away but he has no where to go! He watches as she begins to wholesale pull the other skilled mercenary into her mouth but he can't watch any more, finally managing to stand and break into a run towards the rear-most vehicle.

He hears his comrades screaming, feels blood splatter him time and again as in amongst it all *that hissing* rises up; a hissing he knows he'll hear in his nightmares for the rest of time!

Out of the corner of his eye Brody watches one of these seemingly bullet-proof women squeeze Jeremy until something he *wishes* he hadn't seen bursts out of his facial orifices in noisy, gorey fashion.

'Oh god! Oh god-oh god-oh god!' He cusses over and over only to suddenly find himself shocked into slipping. 'Sso happy to leave your friendsss behind?!' Cobra asks as him from behind as bones... a *full* human skeleton in fact land and shatter in front of him!

In the mud once again Brody rolls to the side and doesn't care to look as he scrambles back to his feet; he can't help but look back as that hissing voice addresses him from behind. 'You brought thiss on yourssselfess!' She insists, slithering after him casually.

An engine roars into life and Brody realises all too late that he won't get there! That insufferable *Claude* has beaten him to it and isn't even going to wait for him before flooring it! He chases but the SUV throws sloppy mud in his face while reversing and forces him to stop and swipe it away coughing.

The screaming continues as Brody turns to see the next nearest truck... it already has a dead body on it and Jay's killer is between him and it! He turns back to Claude backing away with a heavy gulp consigned to the fact he's *probably* going to die now...

Brody doesn't even dare turn back and look at his fate; the last screams of his only other colleague gargle out to nothing and when it's finally only him and them everything changes thanks to an explosion!

A moment of *salvation*, he wonders? He realises a moment later that it's anything but as Claude's escape vehicle detonates with a huge blue plume of ethereal energy that spreads almost living flame across the sodden jungle floor.

Brody slips in the mud distracted by the momentary shock and lands face-down on the sodden ground. He watches the strange blue flames spread across the road and into the undergrowth completely cutting off his escape route.

Somehow it continues to burn like oil perhaps but whatever may be it's stayed Brody's execution for a few moments. 'Shhheng! Get everyone out of here and return to me at the temple!' He hears one of the snakes behind him order, apparently this is something else all together!

Amidst the flames he sees a figure, surely Claude couldn't have survived! It's not Claude, he realises this very quickly as the ominous silhouette swaggers almost arrogantly out of the towering blue inferno. Feminine, powerful and as she gets closer he realises: also glowing!

The nearest settlement to that worm the Zodiac Master's last known location...

Ling gazes across the scene of chaos in front of her with disgust. After all the energy she put into torturing and enslaving the heads of every functional organised crime syndicate in Laos *this* is what became of the assault she demanded!

'Wh-Who are you...?' One of her hired maggots - now laying face-down in the mud - asks as she approaches; she doesn't even deem this failure worthy of a glance never mind a response!

She hates this place with a passion, the humidity and moisture play havoc with her electrical and fire abilities but she comes to the conclusion that a little old-fashioned murder-therapy might help her mood!

'Looks like I've come to the right place, Snake Guardian!' She proudly proclaims and raises her foot to make the next step a stamp... A stamp straight onto the back of the worthless man in the mud as she flexes her power.

'I'm not sure how you've managed to duplicate...' She hears but barely listens to the screams of the man below her as blue electricity crackles through him and the mud all around her. '-but that's an ability I'll gladly take from you when I've beaten your sorry ass down and stolen your Power Band!'

The smell of cooking flesh was one that had grown on Ling the more she'd taken to melting people who failed to live up to her standards; the thing she was standing on smelled *particularly* pleasing as it broiled and stopped shrieking!

The Shadow Dragon gazes across the four snake-women now sizing her up and adopting fighting poses but just sneers, disappointed that they're exactly how she'd imagined and nothing more. In the background she watches as the locals run how they often do in her experience.

'Are you protecting these indigenous *creatures*?! ~Hahaha!~ A bleeding heart...' She ignores them for a moment and snaps her neck to watch a man suddenly run from a building trying to make a break for it; she's not having that!

Her eyes glow for a split-second before she unleashes twin beams of searing blue energy that should incinerate the man in moments yet somehow don't. Ling can't see that until she stops and realises that lo and behold these Nagi *do* have some power!

'Well look at that...' She is almost impressed at the way the nearest one is now stretched like an elastic band to put herself between Ling and her would-be roast. '-you have power but oh how you *waste it* caring for this *inferior* specimens!'

The wearer of the Shadow Dragon Power Band looks back across the three snakes and only takes a split second to realise there should be four; she darts to the side hoping to dodge the one behind her but it doesn't help her evade the flexible shape-shifter. The *clever bitch* used Ling's temporary blindness while using her laser eyes to get on her blind side!

The Shadow Dragon's wrist is snagged in the rope-like tension of Cobra's flexible limb and Ling realises that while not on her level she might actually find a challenge here!

She pulls back and ignites her forearm though it doesn't immediately have the

effect it normally does. A little more power pushed into her ability and the snake-woman is forced to release and assume a defensive pose to her side.

'I see... So you're not as powerless as all that, but I know your weakness!' Looking between two Cobras she spots what seems to be a soldier belonging to her foe. Lesson learned she charges power through her hands rather than her face and launches a powerful stream of energy at the man organising the evacuation.

'*Sheng!*' One of the Cobras exclaims but fails to intercept the beam which lands clean in the centre of his back knocking him to the ground with a cry of agony. Ling takes a moment to grin but her expression fades a moment later as the man rises up; the Cobras all turn towards her slowly and menacingly with fury in their collective eyes.

'Ooooh! Finally got your attention, have I?' Normally four opponents would be child's play to Ling but not so much when fighting another Power band user. As the four spring at her with coiling, mercurial strikes that pack more punch than any opponent she's ever faced Ling quickly realises she may have overlooked her opponent.

She deflects and parries, leaping and backtracking from the assault with something approaching fear creeping into the back of her mind. This only serves to infuriate the Shadow Dragon though and putting a chunk of her energy into it she detonates the air around her in a massive blue fireball.

The smoke clears and she has space, the Cobras seem to have been dazed but largely intact. 'That all you've got?!' She goads and leaps at the nearest one with fury in her eyes.

Electricity crackles across her form as she lays punches into the flexible and durable hide of the snake, too fast to be fully blocked or dodged. The combo sends the first flying through the air and into a wall where she seems to lose her form and break apart into a bundle of snakes that hurriedly retreat back into the undergrowth.

'Ah, so *you* weren't the real one!' Ling laughs at her defeated opponent, maybe this won't be that hard at all! She thinks for a moment to try and spot which one of them is wearing the Power Band but her moment of victory passes as something slick, scaly and green snaps around her neck and pulls her off balance!

Another Cobra is on her back and swiftly beginning to coil her up; that power she felt before is there alright and while not on her own strength level the more this shape-shifting snake cinches her hold in the more pressure she feels being exerted on her joints and weak points!

No time to lose Ling focuses and ejects spears of blue light from her spine; like a perfect defensive measure the energy spears cleanly punch through the alright stretched Cobra and instantly reduce her to the same bundle of snakes as the first one.

'Not number two eith-' She's interrupted by the third leaping on her from the front and flashing her fangs; Ling tries to bring a hand up to unleash a blaze of energy but the last snake grabs her wrist while her clone punctures Ling's throat with her fangs.

'*GURK!*' She gags as she feels the toxins pump into her bloodstream with immediate effect, pain arcing through her body as her throat feels like it's burning. Burning should be something she's comfortable with but this is like

swallowing pins!

With a sense of desperation rising Ling forces her energy into the immobile wrist and fires a blast into the fourth to disband that one; finally freed she grabs the last on by the throat from on top of her and holds her up.

'In that case *you* must be-' The final cobra disbands just like the other three and small squirming snakes slither through her fingers. 'Wha?!' She's now genuinely confused and *more* than a little infuriated!

By the time Ling knows it every last serpent is gone, slithering back out of sight into the undergrowth but the Shadow Dragon has bigger problems as she drops to a knee, her body now screaming in agony from Cobra's venom.

'*Dirty tricks!*' She exclaims, enraged as much by the Snake Guardian's manipulation as by the pain she's causing her. Ling focuses, drawing her inner fire up and pumping energy through her veins to burn up and shred the encroaching poison.

It takes a few seconds and a large investment of energy but with enough attention she finally cleanses her bloodstream and gasps in relief. 'So... *None of you* were the real thing!' She concludes and stands up with a grimace. If tht was all just a trick it cost her far more energy than she'd hope to waste but surely her true opponent wouldn't have managed all that for free!

She watches the last vehicles leave the village and contemplates blowing them up; despite her fury she thinks better of it, she'll save her fury for the true enemy here and if what was said was any indication then those trucks would lead her right to both Cobra *and* the Zodiac Master!

The Snake Temple approach...

The cleanly hacked back tree-line and clearly visible mud road up to the Snake Temple is a far cry from Ling's experience with the other temple she visited. Visited... and relieved its guardian of their Power Band in the most *extreme* way possible!

Over the rise the temple proper comes into view but the firm belief, confidence or perhaps *arrogance* of Ling that this will turn out the same remains firm. She wears a cocky smirk on her face as she revs the Hum-Vee's engine to breaking point with a fervour to get there and *finish this!*

Her eyes are drawn to the right of the gate as she approaches. There the Shadow Dragon spies a desiccated skeleton tangled up in vines and seemingly possessed by a nest of snakes using it as their home.

Ling approves of the symbol, a clear message of what intruders can expect. While she approves of it the thought never crosses her mind that the intruder on display might well be the remains of the man she's spent a whole year searching for.

Screeching to a halt the truck launches a spray of mud onto the otherwise seemingly pristine, perhaps brand new fascia of the temple. Ling cares little as she plans to raze the place once she's done with its occupant anyway!

Ling opens the door and leans out to look through the open gates to the small crowd of refugees staring back; her wicked grin tells of her feeling that it's feeding time for the flames.

Leaping out she finds her short pumps plunge into the mud with a sloppy sensation as it seeps inside her shoes. With little care to maintain her energy for the inevitable fight ahead she pushes her power out through her feet,

crisping the mud to dry clods with the heat.

With each footfall the cracked soil is blasted away from her as Ling meanders up to the temple gate with a swagger like she's already won. 'Well *looky* what we have here...' She chuckles at seeing the angry faces before her.

'You see, little people? Running away didn't do you any good, now *did it?*' She asks loudly, wearing a sadistic grin as she climbs the three steps to the gate.

'This place holds *no power!*' The Shadow Dragon insists, flushing her fists with fire and slamming them into the half-opened wooden doors of the temple.

They explode in a fiery cloud of splinters and cinders to mark Ling's arrival; she counts the heads of all the people she's about to kill as she enters. She's going to do it because she *can* and because she *knows* how it will hurt her true opponent!

'I just finished those, you *bitch!*' a big man clad in a modern combat vest and wearing a single snakeskin sleeve growls, baring his teeth as he steps forwards.

Ling smirks; she's half impressed and half disgusted by this man's foolhardiness. She takes a single step, her aura growing hotter as she prepares to kill but she pauses as she hears a loud, inhuman voice echo from behind the crowd 'Jun... No.'

This "Jun" character sneers but backs up, raising an arm to show Ling deeper into the temple as the small throng parts to show the inner reaches of the temple.

Ling turns her head towards the opening with amusement and thinks to herself as she sees a giant golden snake statue above a wide, ornately decorated pit. 'Y'know what? *Fine...* I'll save you *snacks* for after I've immolated your precious Snake Goddess!'

It's a somewhat strange experience to be not just welcomed in but given some manner of guard of honour; Ling quite likes the ceremony of it though! What she doesn't like but can't bring herself to react to are the confident expressions on the people's faces despite her threats!

Beside the pit stands another soldier wearing the same kevlar vest as Jun and stood, arms crossed confidently in front of him. 'Welcome to the Snake Temple, Shadow Dragon. The Mistress is expecting you.' He confidently states and Ling hates it almost as much as she hates his smug smirk.

'Yeah? Then *maybe* she should come out here before I turn your bones into charcoal!' She sneers and *really* wants to kill the guy, '*Where is she?!*' Ling demands and watches the man half turn and look down into the pit while she approaches.

'Come on then, *Snake!* I've *invaded* your sacred turf, even *killed* your little clones! *Show yourself!*' Ling demands while the crowd backs away against the courtyard's outer walls as if lining up to watch what happens next.

'*Clonesss?*' That voice asks, Ling *almost* unsettled by how different it seems to the voice she heard from the clones earlier and how truly inhuman it is. 'Why I sssupposse onccce they *would have been!*'

'*Wha?!*' Ling stammers as a writhing mass of snakes crawls up out of the pit and swarms around the man to the side. As if it's the most natural thing in the world he just lets himself get swallowed up in the slithering tide and be pulled into the darkness of the pit.

'What... the... *hell?!*' Ling unconsciously takes a step back as the snakes once

more surge upwards like a pillar that shape themselves into a frankly gigantic snake-woman who is *more snake* than woman!

Elevated on a glistening green tail where her legs should be Ling counts not two or four but *six* arms and each of them defined with threateningly sinewy muscle!

Even Cobra's face is inhuman: her nose seems to be all but gone and her ears are elf-like as if her human features are in the process of evolving away while her large green eyes are punctuated by the dark slits of her pupils.

The Shadow Dragon has not allowed herself to feel fear in quite some time and even now she tries to refuse letting it affect her. The sight of the evolved Snake Guardian would terrify any mortal mind though and she's not that far removed.

Cobra towers over Ling and looks down on her in such a way to make the Shadow Dragon feel very inadequate! Ling steps back as the Snake Guardian slithers forwards and her long body rises up onto the ground, her tail just seems to keep going as she sets down.

'What'sss the matter, Shhhadow Dragon?!' Cobra asks, her body undulating down to look her in the eyes as her multiple hands form fists, set down on the ground or flash their claws independently of each other. 'You came here for a reassson, correct?!'

Ling steels herself, '*Ha!* You think your little show *frightens me*, Cobra?' She'd known of the guardian by name before arriving and thought she knew what to expect but this is *anything* but what she prepared for! 'It should be *obvious* what I want!'

'Oh? Did you come here looking to *fight me*, perhapsss? Ssseeking multiple Power Bands are we?' Cobra questions with disregard for Ling's swagger.

'That'll be a bonus once I've killed your *creepy* ass! But *first* I want to know where the Zodiac Master went after he left here!' Ling demands and thrusts a finger towards Cobra. '*Tell me!*' Her fingertip glows as if she's pointing a weapon at the Nagi.

'~SSSHAHAAHAAASSS!~' Cobra hisses even as she laughs in Ling's face, 'You think *I'm* creepy?! And the Zodiac Massster...?' She sniggers even more, but worse still Ling hears laughter behind her 'Oh honey you've *already met him!*'

'Don't talk in riddles, *snake!*' Ling counters, getting more and more infuriated. 'I've been searching for him since he came to this temple, so *where the hell* did he go?!' She sneers, clenching her fists.

'*Where?* Well he left through the front gate...' Cobra toys with her intruder, confidence oozing from the guardian, 'Then he took a *shhharp left* and got... *uncomfortable!*' Cobra chuckles.

Ling processes this as she stares off into space. She runs it through her head and eventually stops dead where her thought takes her, turning back to look Cobra square in the eyes. 'You mean-' Her expression says it all. 'He's... *dead?*'

'He'd better be!' Cobra laughs gently, 'But keeping him there *really does* throw off the symmetry of the gates, don't you think?'

Ling is still processing the unfulfilling climax to her purpose as Cobra backs up and lifts herself above the Shadow Dragon. 'Then again as a *cautionary tale* he doesn't seem to have had the desired effect of keeping intruders like *you* away!'

Ling looks up to the towering "Marilith" - a creature she'd only heard of in legend - and realises the snake-woman is more than ready for a fight! '~Heh...~' Ling laughs '~Heh-heh-heh!~ Then I guess that just leaves the bonus prize: *Your Power Band!*'

Quick as a flash the Shadow Dragon goes from confusion to battle-ready, the pair now squarely in the centre of the courtyard like an arena. 'You ssstill wishhh to fight me? *Fine!* I'll find a ussse for *you* around my temple too!'

The talking is over, not another word is shared before the two clash: jets of flame thrust out of Ling's hands only to strike Cobra's own palms and dissipate.

Ling watches in shock as Cobra's arms seem to ripple and wobble like fluid, ripples that slide down her ophidian body; Ling feels the ground gently shake under her feet and realises Cobra has simply diverted all of the Shadow Dragon's thermal energy into kinetic energy and pushed it into the ground!

She stops, recoiling 'What *trickery?!*' She gathers herself and launches them again, this time accompanied by blasts from her eyes; with limbs to spare though Cobra is *more* than capable of completely nullifying Ling's flame attacks, attacks that would turn *normal people* to ash!

She stops and backs away while circling, realising that Cobra is slowly encroaching and the only thing keeping her back is how she grounds herself to undermine Ling.

'How long can you keep this up, Shhhadow Dragon?' Cobra asks confidently as she deflects rapid-fire blasts with a flurry of limbs that utterly overpower any slight speed advantage Ling might have!

'*Heh*, all day...' She lies '-but I'll *bet* you can't handle *this!*' She changes up her attack and channels electricity through her fingertips; Ling sends searing hot arcs of light towards Cobra only to find herself once more undone!

'Bet you I *can!*' Cobra counters and with a tense of her an arm ejects scales like shrapnel; the countermeasures intercept the charged arcs and deflect them harmlessly away.

Ling staggers back in disbelief and watches that single tensed arm relax and regrow its scales almost instantly, '**GRAAAAGH! SCREW YOU!**' Ling reacts with nothing short of fury at her ranged advantage disappearing. She launches full-bore at Cobra, fists thrown with furious power but measured, honed technique.

Cobra leaps at the opportunity presented by deflecting the initial strikes and snagging Ling's wrists within moments of her opponents arrival, 'No, *no you won't!*'

Before the Shadow Dragon can even fully process what happened Cobra whips her tail around the out-limbed woman and quickly cinches her coils in, squeezing with immediately agonizing power!

'You managed to purge my toysss' venom, but *mine* isss *much deadlier!*' She grabs Ling from every angle to tilt her head back and flashes the huge, dripping fangs behind her assured grin.

'**GAK!**' Ling spits up as she feels Cobra's monstrously powerful jaws slam like a vice made of nails around her throat and feels genuine, irresistible fear overwhelm her!

The hot pain she felt from the lesser poison of Cobra's clones was nothing compared to this, Ling can do nothing but squint and try to scream in reaction!

That's not all she feels though as deep down beneath the crushing coils

something else is beginning to consume her: wet, cold and tight... a *man-eating maw* between Cobra's hips is trying to *swallow her whole!*

'Nuh... **NUH!!!**' She resists the agony pumping through her veins and realises she has to escape this hold in seconds before Cobra kills her! A mix of fear and desperation results in a searing eruption of electricity and fire from every pore of the woman's body, force enough that even Cobra is forced to release her grasp and slither a few yards back.

'**GREEEEYAAAARGH!!!**' Ling shrieks in fury as she pumps fire through her veins and out into the world but Cobra looks almost... *pleased!* 'You *slithering bitch!* I'm going to-' The unexpected happens and it's the worst-case scenario for Ling as through her own doing she learns the importance of home-field advantage!

With startling force a deluge of water enters the arena: sprinklers and jets of mist almost instantly soak Ling's clothes and hair while below her feet waters rise as if flood drains are backing up.

'**What?! NO!**' She tries to ignite fire between her fingertips but even with her power the sparks are drenched almost instantly and worse still her attempt at creating any electricity zaps her too instantly shorting her ability out!

'*Oh yesssss!*' Ling looks into Cobra's eyes and sees her confidence has grown into full-bore delight! 'After *all your talk* of this place holding no power... it'sss you who iss now powerless, Shhadow Dragon!'

'*The hell I am!*' The fool rushes in where angels fear to tread and while Cobra knows she has the absolute advantage she decides to almost toy with her now helpless attacker!

Ling fires punches and kicks with all her might expecting that even without her powers she can overcome any opponent; "it's always worked before so why not now?" she reasons only to find a more than worthy adversary before her!

Despite them being a new addition Cobra uses her additional limbs with a skill and dexterity that should only come from natural aptitude and her sheer animalistic power allows her to both cushion and redirect Ling's strikes with a little shape-shifting shock-absorption.

'Are you quite finishhed?!' Cobra finally ends the fight once she's happy with Ling's realisation of the danger she's willingly stepped into! Two hands grab her wrists, two more grab her ankles and the last pair snag the Shadow Dragon's throat as the huge guardian pins her prey down.

'**Ssstop resssssting me!**' Cobra hisses and presses her thumbs into Ling's throat to make her eyes bulge in terrified shock. An almost reactionary spark of electricity shocks both but Cobra's slick, almost rubbery skin makes her almost completely immune as it dances off her.

'**SSSTOP!**' She demands and slams Ling's head into the hard stone; she finally begins to falter as Cobra picks her up and whips her tail around the increasingly limp intruder. '*Relaxxx...* Your fate iss already deccided!' Cobra almost assures Ling as she lets the woman's arms droop so she can coil her up almost entirely!

Ling's vision is fading as she feels Cobra's claws dig into her throat and something like another poison enter her bloodstream. 'You feel that, don't you? My fangsss can kill, but my clawsss carry a venom that'sss *far more* sssoothing!'

Ling isn't ready to give up yet but she's struggling to even muster the power to fight back the pumping poison that just keeps coming and she's all but spent; the further Cobra's toxin reaches the more Ling feels herself becoming numb: its a paralysing agent!

Ling can still see the slit eyes of her foe squinting into something like delight but in a shock twist the snake goddess lunges in and *kisses her!* Unexpected as it is this and the long, thick tongue she feels suddenly plunged down her throat break the last of the Shadow Dragon's resolve!

With the air already squeezed out of her and now her airway completely plugged the darkness encroaches more and more until the lights completely go out.

She can still hear and the last of her sensations tell of a her sinking into the slick, wet coils of Cobra and deeper, deeper and deeper into a pit of cobras within the Cobra! That cloacal within the guardian's tail welcomes the foe who in her last moment of consciousness senses mortality return as her Power Band slips off her wrist!

One week later, the Snake Temple...

Music, joy and enticing smells fill the air; food, drink and celebration are shared amongst the throng of people from every village for tens of miles around. Within the Snake Temple's courtyard the festival is in full flight.

Fireworks light up the sky as the soft glow of traditional lanterns illuminate the festivities; above and central to the dancing masses their deity made flesh undulates back and forth in a dance no human can perform.

Everyone here adores Cobra, they drink and party in her honour and in honour of her victories! Victories that not only saved their lives but elevated her into the now darker-scaled superior form she has adopted.

Once Ling was defeated Cobra had devoured her Power Band just as readily as she'd absorbed the woman herself; made supplicant to the Snake Band through Cobra's victory she had cleansed its corrupting force and takes its remaining power to enhance her own.

She she stands on her tail above the pit her people worship dancing to the beat of her own peerless power over the spiritual realm, life *truly is* good for the guardian of the Snake Temple!

The fireworks display casting the ophidian goddess in silhouette reaches a crescendo as the music rises to its climax and with one final trill of light and sound the festival proper is brought to a spectacular conclusion.

'~Ssshahahasss!~' Cobra laughs in delight as she slows her undulations and looks out over her cheering, adoring jungle people. 'Wonderful! Sssublime!' She claps all six hands together in delight only to then cast them wide and proclaim '*Thankyou all!*'

Applause rolls around as all eyes turn from food stalls, games and conversations to the elevated dark scaled snake-woman at the heart of the fun. 'What a joy this hasss been...' She begins-

'The ccelebrations will continue...' Cobra announces '-but the time hasss come for the little onesss to leave and only thossse with the desssire and the sstomach to pleassse me intimately to remain!' Murmuring in amongst the crowd.

'I will choosse from you who remain thossse I deem *fit* to be my new

ssservants here at the temple!' She concludes, 'The Festival may be over, but let it ssserve as the beginning of the *Trials of the Sssnake!*' Her announcement shocks many but excites others.

'To that end I have sssomeone to introducce...!' She smiles knowingly, '-both a new sssymbol of my *power* and a warning to thosse who would intrude on the Sssnake Temple or the landsss I protect!'

Beside Cobra a new mass of snakes begin to rise, people clamoring over each other and squinting to see as the smaller figure rises from the pit and forms a figure at the top of the steps leading up to it; gasps and shock as another, smaller and lither feminine figure is formed.

She too wears the visage of the snake, her scales as pitch black as her hair. Her face is familiar to those who she threatened and those who saw her that day but her expression and her mannerisms are all new and telling of what Cobra has accomplished!

'Allow me to introducce the new ssslave to the Sssnake Temple: The former Shadow Dragon, Ling Leung!' She bows humbly to the crowd. 'Shhhe will aid me in... *assesssing...* the candidatesss!' Her expression is telling as she turns to Lok and gives him a nod before compressing her tail down to fold away into the pit.

Ling looks at the faces before her, some concerned and other confused. She wishes them no ill, these are her people now after all... She lives to serve the temple, to protect it and those who serve her mistress. Her smile is warm despite her blood running cold though she knows that warmth will soon come to her by Cobra's will!

In the depths of the Snake Temple...

'I'm really not sssure-' Cobra speaks up over the tail end of the latest wail echoing through the catacombs from one of the numerous underground chambers.

'-what kind of reputation I have throughout the villagesss...!' She continues as she glances to the young woman on her left side filing the razor sharp claws of one hand.

'-but I'm really no sssolely interested in pleasssure and pain!' She concludes as another human male lets rip a cry of one or the other from somewhere in the depths.

'I enjoy my ssservantsss, yesss...!' She lectures as she looks down to another young prospective shrine maiden propping up her tail on her lap polishing the scales meticulously.

'-but I *also* want what iss besst for my people ~ssSSss~' She hisses in delight at the multitude of caresses and services being lovingly performed on her superhuman form by the gathered worshippers.

'Tell me...!' She gently interrupts one young woman from filing another set of talons by taking chin in her slick, powerful hand; she raises the girl's face to look at her. Another shriek echoes through the tunnels 'Doesss *that* sssound like agony or *ecsstassy* to you?'

The pretty young woman is wide-eyed as she looks into Cobra's big, narrow eyes. She is clearly unsure and wonders in silence for a few moments, '*Feel free* to anssswer ass you sssee fit.'

'Uh- uh- he sounds like he uh- maybe *likes it?* Goddess.' The snake guardian's

long forked tongue flicks out and tastes the young thing's face so quickly she barely even registers it.

A moment later Cobra releases her and pulls her other limbs gently away from the other five servile maidens and slithers her tail to the floor; '~hn-ssss~' she rises and stretches every powerful limb with a hissing moan amidst numerous sets of watchful eyes.

'Let'sss go and find out, shhhall we?' She smiles excitedly and slithers from her underground throne towards the opening flanked by her new prospective entourage.

'~HNNNN!~' A young man from the easternmost village in the parish of the Snake tenses up in reaction to another stinging bite to the side of his abdomen.

At this moment in time he's questioning everything about his life as he feels the constant, chaotic slithering of hundreds upon hundreds of scaled entities taking warmth from proximity to his skin.

'Try not to move too much, you'll agitate them...!' Sheng instructs the young, frightened man who turns to the more experienced inhabitant of the Snake Temple with a grimaced smile and nod. 'Good lad!' Sheng gives the other's hand a squeeze in solidarity.

'Here...!' Cobra's voice rises up from the darkness, drawing both men's attention and causing a couple more bites from the nest of snakes into the soft flesh of the prone man. '-we have a little adaptation training.' She concludes as she fully appears followed by the small group of women.

The man laid out recognises a face and offers a brave smile to the shocked young woman; she doesn't know what to make of what she's seeing but feels a firm scaly hand on her shoulder.

'Relaxxx... He won't be harmed, the bitesss he feels may be painful at firssst but they are not dangerousss! They are building hisss immunity with every nibble, marking him and hisss blood as part of the Sssnake Temple!' The young man nods, he wants this.

'Shhheng?' Cobra pries into the progress as she slithers forwards, her most intimate servant rising to his feet to meet her and standing at attention.

'Mistress! He's showing remarkable bravery and commitment, he hasn't once asked for it to stop.' Sheng reports as Cobra's hands reach out and begin fondling her favourite.

'Isss that sssso?' Her powerful, dexterous hands behind undoing the buttons of his pants, unstrapping his combat vest and generally undressing him with startling speed and precision while making it all seem rather methodical and intimate.

'You begged me to sstop on *numerous* occasssionsss!' She reminds him, 'And right now... ass I wishhh to *ussse you* as another form of adaptation training-' With a tug she undresses all of his unfastened clothing at once revealing his almost naked form save for the snakeskin pouch she keeps his manhood in.

'-do you sstill want me to *sstop*?' She makes sure he is acutely aware that he is in full view of her new cohort of shrine maidens, 'I wishhh to *take you* ass my mate!'

Two hands scoop his legs up so she can pin him down beside the bed of snakes, arms pinned above his head as she mounts him. 'Never, Mistress!'

Pausing for a moment with a smile, Cobra elongates her neck with her inhuman shapeshifting ability to move her head behind her back inverted to look at the woman who can otherwise only see her rear.

'Thesse are amongsst the dutiesss expected of my shrine boysss!' She explains as her hips wriggle back and forth like she's burrowing, a moan of delight rising from Sheng's flattened body.

'*Watch...* ass your own dutiesss are to include keeping my boysss *regularly* tested and strained for peak performance!' She turns back to Sheng and hisses in delight as her almost fluid hips slide back and forth to ride on and off her helpless servant.

'Thiss one I consssider *sspecial!*' She stresses as she slams him hard with a powerful flick of her hips '-but that *doesssn't* make him-' again and again with her superhuman strength she smashes him into the hard stone floor '-off limits!'

There is a definite sense of uncertainty amongst some of the women, but Cobra fully expects that; after all not *every* applicant will pass and become a priestess at her temple.

'The sssuccessssful-' She fucks him into a gargling mess and reaches a hand up to his face to push her fingers into his mouth and partially gag him, '-amongsst you will not only have *complete accesss* to every boy *asss* and *when* you desssire it...'

She picks up the pace, her slick ophidian womanhood taking every inch of him for all it's worth; she hisses in delight in amongst her discourse '-you will be *exxxpected* to keep them all *trained* in how to be properly ridden *and* reminded of their position in the eyesss of their goddesss!'

As much as she can sense the discomfort in some she can equally almost taste the excitement in others, this test has *certainly* been informative!

'And here...!' Cobra introduces herself and her party to the next exhibition, the throng of women entering a chamber where multiple of her boys lay almost unconscious across a large, velvet-sheeted love bed.

At the centre the once Shadow Dragon, now Shadow Snake is hard at work humping the next one unconscious. '-we have my cccentral chamber... Here I help myssself to whichever boysss I like throughout the night!' Cobra proclaims, one set of hands firmly planted on her hips.

'Go ahead...!' She half-turns to the half-dozen plus young women behind her, '-take them for a ssspin and let me sssee what you can do! There'sss ssstill *juice* left in them yet!' She smiles as some of the women look to each other while others are more than eager.

One by one she watches her candidates follow her instructions climbing onto the bed towards the already worn-down men. 'Worry not, my sssnakeletsss...!' She hisses in delight.

'-the undergarmentsss I pressented you with will ensssure nothing comesss of it: I asssk not chassstity so I *deliver* contraception by rightsss!' She promises in reference to the almost rubbery smooth enchanted scale-suit underwear they each now understood the purpose of.

Morphable to the whims of the wearer her plan was for her priestesses to over time be bestowed with more and more comprehensive enchanted scale-suits until her most senior truly reflected her vision for a perfect woman!

'Enjoy them, ladies... For the next hour they are all yours! Take your time, *allow* them to shower you with romance... ' She grins in delight. 'This is your chance to revel in your fantasies... *No matter* what they may be!'