1406 Undying

...Sunny waited for a moment, then slowly straightened and looked around. The Chain Breaker was laying on white sand, tilted awkwardly.

'Damnation!'

His trembling fist collided with the railing and splintered the enchanted wood. He didn't feel the pain.

'Curse it! Curse it all!'

"Sunny? Are you alright?"

Sunny lingered for a moment, took a labored breath, then looked himself over and slowly turned to Nephis.

His voice sounded hoarse:

"...Yes. It seems that I am."

In the end... he still lost to Undying Slaughter.

The odds seemed to be in his favor. He successfully avoided having his shadows destroyed, summoned Saint and Fiend, and managed to wrestle the initiative from the ghostly claws of the mist wraith.

However, the battle did not go how he had hoped it would. It ended in disaster, just like the previous time.

Sunny had been almost certain that Saint would be immune to Undying Slaughter's soul attacks. And it turned out to be true... somewhat. It seemed that she could withstand much more damage than the rest of them, but even then, the ghostly blade was just as lethal to the taciturn knight as it was to Sunny and Fiend.

The reason, as he belatedly realized, was the unique nature of Jet's Aspect. Her attacks bypassed physical defenses and struck the soul... and yet, they were not true soul attacks. Instead, they were physical attacks that inexplicably dealt damage to the soul.

How was one supposed to defend against that?

The mightier one's soul was, the more it took to destroy it. Other than enduring the damage or avoiding being hit entirely, there was no other way... at least none that he knew of.

Sadly, it was easier said than done. Saint's sword and the Cruel Sight were capable of blocking the ghostly blade of Undying Slaughter, but actually withstanding her dreadful assault was almost impossible. The mist wraith was astonishingly swift, devastatingly strong, and insidiously cunning on top of that.

She was a truly abominable creature... and an inexplicable one, too. Sunny had just enough time to catch a glimpse of what hid in the darkness of her defiled soul, and what he saw left him reeling.

Undying Slaughter could be called a Corrupted Beast, since there was only one node of vile darkness infesting her soul. But that node... was truly colossal in size, dwarfing any other corruption core he had even seen before. So, her actual power could very well be equal to a Terror or a Titan.

Still... faced with Saint's resilient soul and two weapons that could both block and damage intangible beings, Undying Slaughter was at least forced to change tactics. After clashing with them a few times, the mist wraith silently discarded her ghostly form, turning back into a corporeal creature.

If Sunny had ever had any doubt that the Six Plagues were the future version of the members of the cohort, they were instantly dispelled at that moment. Undying Slaughter looked more like a revenant, both dreadful and dreadfully beautiful, than a human being... but there was no way he could fail to recognize those icy blue eyes, that chilling presence, and the ruthless way in which she fought.

She was truly Soul Reaper Jet... or rather, had been once.

Undying Slaughter might have been Jet once, but there was nothing human left in her merciless, mad eyes anymore.

Once she assumed a corporeal form, Sunny was thrown into despair.

His plan to stall the abomination while Fiend retreated with the real Jet was shattered almost instantly. Undying Slaughter read his intentions like an open book, and not only made following the plan impossible, but also cruelly turned it against Sunny.

The initiative he had so arduously won was immediately lost when the revenant aimed all her attacks at Jet instead of him, Saint, or Fiend. Forced to protect the gravely wounded companion, they had no choice but to follow her cadence and fall under her control.

It was a simple, but viciously effective strategy.

Considering how skilled, explosively fast, and terrifyingly strong Undying Slaughter was, the rest of the battle did not take long.

...Fiend's carapace of black silver, which Sunny considered nearly indestructible, was eventually pierced and violently split open, the infernal flames spilling out of horrid wounds like blood. The ravenous ogre collapsed with a frightened, confused howl and grew still.

Saint's stone armor was shattered, her limbs were broken. Ruby dust flowed like a river, and although the taciturn knight tried to stand her ground, the ghostly blade eventually found its way into the narrow crack of her visor. The crimson glow of her ruby eyes was extinguished, and Saint crumbled to the ground, lifeless.

The Spell announced her death mournfully.

Sunny thought that he would be next... but Undying Slaughter was not that kind.

She made him watch Jet die before delivering the fatal blow.

Back on the deck of the Chain Breaker, he closed his eyes.

'How... how can anyone fight that thing?'

"I'm fine. I can still put up a fight."

Sunny flinched and looked up.

Nephis must have mistaken the reason for his grim expression and repeated her usual words... it was just a coincidence.

Suddenly, he felt a strange sense of incongruity. Mere seconds ago, Sunny had been fighting for his life, watching his Shadows die in fear and sorrow. He had watched Jet die, as well.

He had even died himself... again.

And yet, Nephis and Cassie were behaving as if nothing had happened.

Well... it had not, for them.

Sunny understood that, but he still couldn't help but feel ashamed, angry, and resentful.

He lingered for a few moments, and then forced out a smile.

"...Yeah. I can still put up a fight, too."

He smiled widened slightly, growing both darker and more sincere.

It was true.

Sunny might have lost to Undying Slaughter again, but he acquired something extremely valuable from that loss.

Looking around, he took in the sight of the swirling mist, white sand, and the black cliffs.

'So I'm back again...'

What he received was truly precious.

It was the knowledge that his strange return to the past was not a one-time thing.

Which meant that he was not done fighting.