1739 Assassination

The PTV exploded.

No, really... Sunny was stunned.

‘Who tries to assassinate a Saint with explosives?"

Were these people mentally challenged?

The notion was so silly that, for a moment, his mind refused to register it.

Everything had happened too fast for the government soldiers to react. The vehicle dissolved into a blinding flash, and a furious onslaught of flame was unleashed upon the world.

A devastating shockwave also rolled out, spreading like an invisible ripple of crushing force.

...But, of course, the Saints were faster.

Kai was too far away to do anything, but Sunny, Morgan, and Nephis were not.

Granted, there was not a lot that they could do in such a short amount of time.

Nephis seemed to have controlled the flames to flow around Sid, her driver. The Fire Keeper was spared from being burned, but received the full brunt of the shockwave, staggering back as her dirty-blonde hair fluttered in the wind. Of course, as a Master, she would not be hurt badly, but a pained grimace still appeared on her face.

Morgan, meanwhile, raised one leather-clad hand... and cut the explosion apart.

Sunny was pretty sure that he was not seeing things. As her hand slashed forward, both the flame and the shockwave parted in front of her, as if cut by an unseen blade. The explosion rolled past the Princess of War, leaving her entirely unscathed. Not a single blemish appeared on her stylish black suit.

As for Sunny himself...

He didn't do anything. That short moment was enough for him to determine that the explosion was utterly mundane, so there was no need to act. Sunny simply allowed the flame to swallow him, and for the shockwave to batter him.

A second later, his onyx figure was revealed from the expanding fire, standing exactly where he had stood before. He didn't even flinch under the assault of the violent forces.

But behind him, many of the government soldiers were thrown against the hulls of the armored vehicles, the vehicles themselves swaying heavily or even overturning. Screams and stunned yells filled the air.

There were many wounded. Luckily, the PTV had stood apart from the military vehicles, so no one seemed to have died.

But still.

The explosion seemed to have hurt everyone except for the person it was supposed to, presumably, kill.

Before the shockwave even had time to dissipate, Morgan, Nephis, and Sunny looked at each other, all sharing the same thought.

'It's a diversion.'

The explosion was simply meant to distract them when the actual attack arrived.

But what...

Suddenly feeling a sense of urgency, Sunny sent his shadow sense outward, spreading it across a vast area. There were countless shadows on the crowded streets of NQSC, so his mind was almost overloaded by the density of information flowing into it. Luckily, he had long learned how to filter out the useless noise, concentrating solely on potential threats.

There did not seem to be anything dangerous close to them... but it took some time for his senses to stretch to their absolute limit.

"There!"

Sunny had sensed a swift shadow barreling towards them, but there was already no time to react,

Before any of them could move, a strange arrow that had only become visible a split second before hitting its target revealed itself in the air, piercing through the cloud of flame caused by the explosion.

It was enormous in size, almost two meters long, and resembled a projectile fit for a slege engine much more than it did an arrow meant to be shot from a bow. If not for the fletching on the back side of the shaft, Sunny would have mistaken it for a heavy javelin.

The great arrow struck Nephis in the chest, throwing her back like a rag doll. She flew backward and crashed into a military vehicle, deforming the alloy armor plates before falling to her knees.

Sunny was already moving.

He knew, of course, that something like that would not kill Changing Star of the Immortal Flame clan to be honest, he wasn't even entirely sure what it would take to kill her, given her divine ability to heal herself - but his heart still skipped a beat, knowing that she was hurt.

That arrow... what kind of arrow was it? What was its Rank and Class? What enchantments did it possess? Did it carry a deadly venom? Did the arrowhead explode into numerous jagged shards after piercing the victim's flesh?

However, in the next moment, Sunny's eyes glistened under the expressionless mask.

That was because the broken pieces of the arrow dissipated into a whirlwind of sparks. Nephis, meanwhile...

Her waistcoat was torn, and so was the white blouse beneath it. What he saw in the tear was not her alabaster skin, however, but the metal rings of a chainmail shirt - bent, but unbroken.

"That Memory!"

He recognized it from their time in the Tomb of Ariel.

Still kneeling on the ground, Nephis suddenly leaned her head to the side, and the second arrow flew past it. It pierced the heavy military vehicle, dragging it away with the force of the impact, and exploded from the other side in a rain of alloy debris.

'Who the hell is shooting these giant arrows?’

The third arrow was cut apart by Morgan, who severed it with her bare hand.

However, now that Sunny's shadow sense had extended further, he could feel it.

A dozen swift shadows were falling upon them like meteors, each moving with dreadful speed.

Two were aimed at him, and two more at Morgan. One was heading toward Sid, but the rest were all aimed at Neph's heart.

It didn't make sense, really, Considering the distance from which the mysterious archer had shot them, most of the arrows must have been in the air long before the first arrow hit, and very likely before the PTV had exploded. So, the sniper must have accounted for everything - how the three Saints would react to the explosion, where Nephis would be thrown back, how Sunny would move...

What kind of skill was that? Was the mysterious archer a prophet? Or did the arrows possess a mind of their own, altering their paths to pursue their prey?

Sunny had to deal with the strange arrows before there would be a chance to find the answer.

‘There's not enough time!’

He raised a hand and simply caught one of the great arrows from the air, sliding back a few steps before its momentum dissipated.

Sunny had already started to manifest countless shadows when a haunting song suddenly resounded above the silent park, drowning out all other sounds.

Sound was invisible, and yet he sensed the song move past him like a ghostly river. In the next moment, the great arrows seemed to have hit a wall in the air, splintering and scattering in different directions.

Looking back, Sunny saw Kai closing his mouth as he rushed toward the burning remains of the PTV.

‘...Good job, buddy!'

Sunny's shadow sense had already reached the limits of his perception, encompassing a vast part of NOSC.

However, no matter how much he searched, he could not sense the mysterious archer, That meant one of two things.

Either the sniper had the ability to avoid his detection... or the arrows had been shot from beyond the range of forty plus kilometers.

Sunny felt a hint of chill, wondering who would have been able to shoot enchanted arrows from such a distance, and with such precision.

A Master? Possibly, with the right Aspect... but quite unlikely.

A Saint?

An Echo of a high Rank?

Catching Kai's glance, he gestured in the direction from which the arrows had come. A split second later, his friend... former friend... shot into the air, flying toward the possible location of the attacker.

But, somehow, Sunny doubted that the sniper would be caught. They must have escaped immediately after sending the arrows loose, and would be long gone by now.

Looking back, he studied the scene of devastation.

Broken vehicles, pieces of burning debris, dozens of wounded soldiers groaning on the ground.

Nephis was slowly rising to her feet, white flames dancing in her eyes. Morgan lowered her hand, a deep scowl replacing her usually composed expression.

Sid had just landed on her back, rolled over her shoulder, and jumped to her feet, hissing in pain.

The whole attack had only lasted a few seconds.

But the impact it had left... was bound to have long-lasting consequences in the days to come.

And maybe even beyond that, far in the future.