2007 : Exchanging Pleasantries

Thirteen... was a lot of Saints to face alone, even for Sunny.

Not that he had ever tried.

He had seen most of them in battle already, as well. Each was a dire adversary…

The obsidian giant with the head of a jackal towered above the blood- soaked battlefield like a malevolent deity. The hill-sized canine with three heads – Saint Ceres – was moving with measured steps, her low growls reverberating across the vast expanse of Godgrave. The alluring woman with a strangely wicked half-smile playing on her lively face was Saint Siord – the beautiful harpy he had seen in the Hollows.

There were others, as well.

But Sunny mostly paid attention to three of them.

Silent Stalker. Lonesome Howl.

..And a mesmerizing enchantress with long hair that fell like an onyx waterfall, fair skin, and tantalizing red lips. She wore a dashing armor of black leather and scarlet silk, which seemed to accentuate her sensual figure and breathtaking beauty effortlessly.

An ugly scar marred the perfection of her enchanting face, running from her forehead to the tip of her chin.

‘...Beastmaster.’

Sunny suddenly felt a headache.

He also felt quite lonely while surrounded by so many enemies.

So... he called a few friends to come keep his company.

As the Saints of Song approached, three figures rose from his three shadows.

Saint stepped onto the battlefield, wielding a round shield and a sword of pure darkness. Her fearsome onyx armor seemed to absorb the light, and two ruby flames were burning behind the visor of her helmet with cold indifference.

Fiend straightened his towering body, sunlight glistening on the countless spikes that littered the polished surface of his steel carapace. His four hands moved, each claw like a razor-sharp sword.

A serpentine shadow coiled on the sun-bleached bone and then rose, turning into a breathtaking woman whose body seemed to be made from inky darkness... Serpent had become a shadow of Solvane, the Priestess of War.

Sunny smiled behind the mask.

‘That's better.’

Finally, the Saints of Song finished their approach.

Beastmaster was standing right in front of Sunny, still remaining a safe distance away – Lonesome Howl was to her left, while Silent Stalker was to her right.

None of them had assumed their Transcendent forms yet, so Sunny could see their expressions quite well.

Lonesome How seemed relaxed and impatient to fight, but there was a hint of sober caution behind her carefree squint.

Silent Stalker was cold and gloomy, looking at him with a dark, impenetrable impression. Her piercing gaze was sharp and heavy.

...Beastmaster, however, appeared to be in a good mood. She looked at Sunny with a beguiling smile and spoke in a calm, husky voice:

“The infamous Lord Shadow... it is a pleasure to finally meet you. I've heard so much about you, after all. I hope that you know who I am?”

Sunny just stared at her silently, his figure radiating a sense of coldness, ruthlessness, and dread.

Eventually, he answered with chilling indifference:

“No idea. Should I?”

Beastmaster's smile seemed to falter for a split second, but then, she let out a melodious laugh.

“Allow me to introduce myself, then. I am Beastmaster, Princess of the Song Domain. I'll be in your care today.”

Sunny tilted his head a little, not saying anything.

After a few moments of silence, Beastmaster nodded gracefully.

“A man of few words... how admirable. In fact, there are several qualities about you that I find worthy of admiration – quite a few, actually. So... I hope you don't mind that I have come to welcome you accompanied by others. Considering your great strength, you wouldn't have wanted Clan Song to humiliate you by only sending one or two Saints here... would you?”

Sunny grimaced behind the mask.

Actually, he would have loved to deal with a couple of Saints and swiftly move on to other parts of the battlefield, picking off the rest of them one by one.

Alas, that was not meant to be.

He lifted his chin a little.

“Indeed. I would have been enraged if your Queen only sent a few of her minions to face me. This, though... this makes me quite content. I only regret that you didn't bring more.”

Bestmaster studied him silently for a few moments.

Then, her tantalizing smile widened a little.

At the same time, he sensed her power assaulting his mind.

It was not a full-out attack... for now. Just a little push to probe his defenses.

Well, could Sunny really blame this poor woman? She was so beautiful, so gentle, so... precious. And yet, her mother had sent her to face the vicious fiend of the Sword Army in a battle.

A lovely flower like Bestmaster had to be treasured, nurtured, and protected - not put in harm's way. Protected by someone strong enough to shield her from the vile greed of this impure, wicked world.

Someone like Sunny.

He frowned, and the shadows across the battlefield stirred in response.

Without moving a muscle, Sunny said coldly:

“...Stop flirting with me, wench. I'm taken.”

If Beastmaster was taken aback, she did not show it. The mirth in her tantalizing eyes did dim a little, however, replaced with a hint of eerie interest.

“I see.”

She sighed, and then moved her shoulders slightly.

“A pity. No one is perfect, I guess…”

Sunny blinked.

No, but why did even her insults have to sound so... exciting?

In the next moment, however, his expression changed.

Because he suddenly had a bad premonition.

And there, behind the thirteen Saints... three more figures emerged, moving forward with dreadful speed.

The Reflections.

All three had assumed the same form... that of a monstrous, towering creature that had a tail like that of an enormous snake, two powerful hands protruding from a human-like torso, and a bestial head with a long and toothy snout brimming with terrifying fangs.

The creatures looked quite familiar...

In fact, Sunny knew their kind quite well.

They were like older and more dreadful, wingless versions of the Chain Worms – who were a tribe of Nightmare Creatures that populated the darkness beneath the Chained Isles.

The Chain Worms bore that name because they fed on the heavenly chains that held the flying islands together... or on any metal, really, as long as they could sink their fangs into it.

‘Now where…’

Before Sunny could finish the thought, one of the Song Saints seemed to unleash their Aspect Ability.

The space around him suddenly shimmered, as if turning into glass.

And when that glass shattered, Sunny and his Shadow were suddenly separated by a great distance.

The Saints of Song were now apart, as well.

The three Chain Worms were surrounding Fiend. Three Saints were surrounding Saint, and three more were surrounding Serpent.

While Sunny himself...

Was facing Beastmaster, Lonesome Howl, Silent Stalker, and four others.

Beastmaster smiled.

“...I bet I can fix you, though. Lord Shadow.”

Sunny snarled.

Taking a step forward, he shaped the shadows into a sword and said in a chilling tone:

“When we are done, who is going to fix you?”