2010 : Heavy Hand of Shadow

All of it took no more than heartbeat.

Sunny knew that Clan Song had a vast arsenal of powerful Memories — some of them even of the Supreme Rank, without a doubt. After all, even if Nephis was right and the Spell created those far more parsimoniously than the Memories of the lower Ranks, Ki Song had been a Sovereign for decades.

Seven of her daughters were also Saints, and he knew from personal experience that at least some of them were more than capable of slaying Great Nightmare Creatures with ease.

So, he had expected something extraordinary to happen when Silent Stalker's arrow and Beastmaster's bone projectile struck Ceres.

However, he was both disappointed and a little relieved to have been mistaken.

Because nothing happened, instead.

His enemies were far too outstanding to wound one of their own so foolishly. Even though there was only a split second to react, both Beastmaster and Silent Stalker managed to dismiss their Memories in time, so all that hit the enormous canine were two swirling streams of radiant sparks.

So, Sunny did not hesitate to continue with the momentum of lifting her up… and slammed Ceres into the ground with all his dreadful might.

The battlefield quaked, and a pitiful whine escaped from all three of her bestial mouths.

At the same time, Lonesome Howl jerked her head sideways, tearing off his right arm with one powerful motion. A river of shadows flowed from the stump, pouring down like a dark waterfall.

'Ah…'

And the obsidian jackal had already recovered by then, bringing his golden polearm down once more.

Only, this time, Sunny had no time to dodge it, and no opportunity to block its descent.

So, he did not.

A moment before the crescent blade cleaved the Shadow Colossus apart… it simply fell apart on its own.

His onyx armor parted, and the inky-black body beneath parted, as well. For a few moments, there was a wide chasm separating the right side of the Shell from its left side.

The polearm plummeted through this chasm, not dealing Sunny any damage.

And the Shadow Shell simply mended itself as soon as the golden blade passed.

By the time it plunged into the crimson haze and crashed into the surface of the ancient bone with a deafening thunderclap, the Shadow Colossus was as good as new.

Well… it was still missing a hand. But otherwise, his body was whole and undamaged.

'...Finally.'

Sunny had always been a bit envious because of failing to learn how to perform this trick. Fiend had used it against him all the way back in Antarctica, after all, but despite having slain him there, Sunny — the vengeful imp's new master — never managed to figure out how to partially turn his body into an incorporeal shadow himself.

Granted, this time, he had not just turned a part of his Shell intangible — he went a step ahead and created a physical breach in it. Otherwise, there would have been little sense in doing it at all.

Sunny possessed plenty of ways to cut intangible enemies, and the Saints of Song would have their own ways, as well.

Regardless…

Now, finally, Sunny could do what he had wanted to do from the very start.

The Jackal had not expected that his weapon would meet no resistance at all, so he had put a lot of force into his strike. As a result, his balance was broken, and he wasted a moment too many trying to regain it.

So, Sunny punched him in the snout with all the might he had.

The force of the impact was so fierce that there was actually a blinding flash. A moment later, the bestial giant toppled and fell in the thunderous boom of a violent thunderclap, causing the entire battlefield to tremble.

A few of his fangs rattled on the ancient bone, each large enough to crush several humans.

Sunny felt amused at the sight of them.

'I wonder if those will remain after he transforms back into a human…'

The first exchange was over, and it was Sunny's resounding win.

His Shell did lose a hand, but that was of no significance. Meanwhile, Ceres was seriously wounded, and the Jackal had received a terrible blow. Silent Stalker and Beastmaster had wasted their first, most important volley — it would take them a while to summon the powerful Memories back, and in a battle of Saints, those precious seconds could very well feel like an eternity.

However, the battle was only getting started.

And by the second exchange, Siord and the Saint of Sorrow would be joining the fray too.

Sunny was already suffering from not having enough hands to contend against all his foes. With two more added enemies into the mix, his numerical disadvantage was going to grow more dire, and would thus bring him closer to being overwhelmed.

'What to do, what to do…'

He considered doing something drastic for a moment.

Sunny had been patiently hiding the fact that he could manifest several bodies all this time, but now, he was considering if it was even worth it to continue the charade. It did seem like a perfect solution to his current predicament , as well as the last straw that could break the camel's back, thus helping him turn the tide of the entire battle.

…Whatever the hell a camel was.

It must have been quite a weird animal, considering that its back could be broken by a straw.

'Probably some invertebrate?'

However, in the end, Sunny kept his shadows wrapped tightly around his body.

Not because he didn't want to reveal his incarnations to the world, but simply because he couldn't.

At the moment, he had not experienced the most dreadful weapon his enemies had in store — Beastmaster's terrifying ability to manipulate one's mind.

The Onyx Mantle granted Sunny a high resistance to mental attacks, but he wasn't confident in resisting the tantalizing Saint with just that, or at least not entirely.

So, he needed the shadows to augment him — and the [Stalwart] trait of the Mantle — for as long as Beastmaster remained a threat.

And speaking of her…

Just as Sunny shifted his weight, preparing to repel another of Lonesome Howl's ferocious attack, he suddenly felt it.

A powerful, insidious, and enthralling power invading his mind.

It felt muted and distant, as if weakened by a stalwart barrier, but still mesmerizing.

His limbs grew heavy all of a sudden.

'...Crap.'

As Sunny staggered, the monstrous wolf lunged at him like a tide of darkness and bestial fury.

At the same time, two swift shadows fell on him from the blinding sky.

And an arrow whistled through the air, aimed precisely at the point where his own shadow was hidden in the depths of the colossal Shell.

'I... really... hate mind attacks the most...'