2011 : Transcendent Battlefield

Sunny felt his limbs grow heavy, and his mind grow numb.

Suddenly, he felt worn down and exhausted. Every burden that he carried, enduring the oppressive weight both willingly and silently, was suddenly so much more grievous and tiresome.

This war went on for so long... and even before the war, he had never known a moment of peace. Having grown accustomed to torment and turmoil, Sunny had easily deceived himself into forgetting how dreadful the world truly was. But now, he felt it in his every bone all of a sudden.

At the same time...

A peculiar feeling bloomed in his mind.

A feeling of witnessing something infinitely beautiful, inviting, and wonderful. Something so wondrous, so amazing, and so... precious. It was as if a resplendent light had shone in the broken darkness of his mind, illuminating it gently and bringing tears to his eyes.

Enthralled by the beautiful radiance, Sunny found it hard and devoid of meaning to concentrate on anything, let alone move.

And yet, he did move.

Somewhere far away, Master Sunless was sitting in the darkness, weaving strings of shadow essence with six nimble hands. Looking up from his meditation, he frowned a little... and then drove the long needle through his hand, piercing it without a hint of hesitation.

A wave of sharp pain washed over his consciousness, making the enthralling light waver and dim a little.

Sunny's mental resistance was already strong enough, and the additional push of feeling pain pushed him the rest of the way.

Shaking off the hex, the Lord of Shadows moved, too.

The towering onyx colossus turned his torso. In the next moment, Silent Stalker's arrow tore through the breastplate of his armor, pierced his body, and exploded from his back in a torrent of dissolving shadows.

If he had been a split second late, that arrow would have pierced his very soul instead of simply damaging the Shell.

‘What a nice arrow…’

For a moment, Sunny felt aggrieved at having to live in a world where weapons were always more powerful than armor, and destruction was always easier to perpetrate than building something up.

No, but why was everyone trying to drive an arrow through his heart these days?

Staggering back, Sunny raised his maimed arm to prevent Lonesome Howl from tearing his throat open, activated Shadow Manifestation, and poured a little essence into the Extraordinary Rock, which lay nestled in the neck of the Shadow Colossus.

He barely survived the twin attack of the two winged Saints – which nearly tore off the head of his Shell – and then looked at his enemies silently.

In the next moment…

A low, deafening, chilling laughter resounded from behind the Weaver's Mask.

If Saint Jest had heard it, he would have been proud.

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Somewhere not too far away, Rain dragged Tamar to the where the battered warriors of the Seventh Legion had made a temporary camp the day before. Everywhere she looked, pale-faced warriors were resting on the ground, too rattled and exhausted to move.

The wounded were treated hurriedly in the field hospital, and she noticed Fleur tending to a man who was missing his leg. Ray was nearby, holding the soldier down.

The two of them were thankfully alive.

The battle was not over, but many of the soldiers had chosen to dismiss their armor, finally finding reprieve from the terrible heat. Some were staring down or covering their faces, trying to hide from the constant, harsh radiance of the overcast sky.

Most of them, however, were looking back to where they came, terrified and enthralled by the titanic battle that was taking place behind them.

Rain helped Tamar sit down and turned to look back, as well.

His heart skipped a beat.

Both of them had heard the deafening thunder and felt the ground shaking while retreating. But it was only now that she witnessed the awesome devastation that had been unleashed by the clashing Saints.

It was...

As if the world was ending.

Rain and Tamar watched the calamity silently.

The camp of the Song Army was far enough that they were safe from the terrible shockwaves and destructive powers of the fighting demigods, which also meant that they could not discern much.

Still, she could vaguely see massive, monstrous silhouettes moving in the scorching haze.

There was a swath of the battlefield awash in white radiance. That was where Changing Star was fighting, without a doubt. There was also...

“Look!”

Tamar's voice was hoarse and heavy.

Following her finger, Rain looked to the right and froze.

The young Legacy inhaled sharply.

“That... that is the Lord of Shadows.”

Indeed, it was him... Rain's mischievous older brother.

Only, right now, he did not look anything like his usual self.

Instead, an onyx colossus in fearsome armor towered above the plain, besieged by three bestial figures. His movements seemed deceptively slow from the distance, but it was terrifying to see how easily he shrugged off the attacks of a cohort of Saints, resisting them all with a strange, frightening, and eerie grace.

‘D-damn…’

The fury of that particular fight was harrowing enough to make everyone looking in that direction shiver in fright. A mere Awakened would have been reduced to bloody hazy by simply being in the vicinity of the unholy clash.

This was the power of Saints.

Or... of this particular Saint, at least.

Still. He was already missing a hand, his right arm a mangled mess of darkness. His breastplate was pierced, and the enemies were only growing more vicious as the fight continued.

Rain suddenly felt something that she had never felt before...

She was worried about her teacher.

After lingering for a moment, she asked tentatively:

[Are... are you going to be alright?]

His voice resounded in her mind a few moments later, sounding as aloof and nonchalant as ever despite the dreadful battle in the distance.

[Who, me? Oh... I'm really touched that you worry about me, but don't fret. I'll be fine.]

There was a moment of silence, and then, he added in a more ominous tone:

[You should definitely be worried about the other guys, though…]