2015 : Heir of Death

As the battle continued, Sunny felt the pressure mounting.

His towering Shell moved like a hurricane, endlessly besieged by the seven Saints. Lonesome Howl, Saint Ceres, and the Jackal led the harrowing onslaught, never faltering or slowing down. The beautiful harpy, Siord, and the Saint of Sorrow alternated between circling above him and diving down to deliver devastating blows.

Their presence was especially oppressive, because it added an entire new plane to the battle. Even when the winged Saints were not plummeting from the blinding radiance of the sky to attack Sunny, the mere fact that they were somewhere above stifled his movements.

There were Silent Stalker and Beastmaster, as well.

The former was a deadly threat due to how relentless and penetrating her arrows were. She was eerily accurate and elusive, too, never allowing him to get close.

The latter was the source of great hardship. Not only was she controlling countless Nightmare Creatures to tip the balance of the Transcendent battle in favor of the Song Domain, but she was also subjecting Sunny to two different types of mental manipulation at the same time. There was her sling and its explosive shots to deal with, as well.

Sunny's power was slowly dwindling.

He could not allow himself to use the Shadow Lantern – not even because he was wary of the deadly arrows flying out of its stone gate, but because he was wary of the mysterious archer escaping the Shadow Realm.

Who knew what that creature was, and what havoc it would cause once unleashed upon humanity? Skinwalker was already bad enough, and Sunny did not wish to be responsible for letting another ancient fiend loose in human settlements.

Without the Shadow Lantern, though, his source element was feeble and scarce in this radiant land. He had already used most of the shadows around him to construct the Shadow Shell. Now, with every blow it received, the Shell was consuming itself to repair the damage.

It wasn't going to last much longer... unless he managed to diminish the number of his enemies soon.

But Sunny was still hesitating, unsure if he was willing to kill Saints.

In the end, however... the choice was made for him.

It was shortly after he leaped over the three-headed canine and crouched, using her massive body as a shield against Silent Stalker's arrows.

His tail shot back, piercing her thigh, two of his hands swatted the harpy and the gargoyle away, while a third picked up the corpse of a lumbering Nightmare Creature – one of Bestmaster's thralls who had been slain in the battle between the great armies – and tossed it forward like a cannonball.

The corpse exploded into a geyser of crimson liquid as it hit the Jackal a split second later, cracking a few of his ribs and sending the obsidian giant reeling.

The plan was to follow the toss with another leap, fall upon the staggered Saint, and maim him before Lonesome Howl could slam into Sunny from the side to aid her comrade.

However, just before that...

Sunny sensed a trickle of power flow into his soul.

‘A... shadow fragment?’

He froze for a split second, knowing what it meant.

Sunny could put himself in mortal danger in order to attempt to preserve the lives of his enemies... but he couldn't, in good conscience, force his Shadows to do the same.

Somewhere out there, either Saint or Serpent had killed one of their opponents.

Which meant that he already failed.

Transcendent blood had already spilled by his hand, making him not only complicit, but also a hypocrite.

He had managed to keep his hands clean of human blood in this war for too long, already.

Others lacked this privilege, so why would he be any different?

...Sunny only halted for a fraction of a moment, but that moment of hesitation cost him dearly.

He wasn't fast enough to avoid Lonesome Howl, who landed on his back and tore into his shoulder.

And because of being burdened by her immense weight, he wasn't fast enough to dodge Silent Stalker's arrow, either – she had already lept to circumvent Ceres, letting go of the string midair.

The arrow slid into a breach in the Onyx Mantle, pierced his Shell, and sliced his own shadow deep within it.

As his soul was being cut, a familiar, terrible agony blinded Sunny.

Lonesome Howl tore into his shoulder with ferocious power, then jerked her head violently, ripping his entire arm off.

‘Ah…’

It was ironic, really.

Sunny had been mentally chastising Rain for hesitating to kill the enemy just a short while ago. And yet, here he was, suffering for doing the same…

The Jackal had already recovered, lunging forward to bring his golden blade down. That polearm of his was a Transcendent Memory of the Seventh Tier... and Aspect Legacy, perhaps. Having already been cut by it a few times, Sunny knew how terrible and inescapable its power was.

But those had only been shallow wounds.

A full-power strike could very well be fatal, even for someone like him.

Time seemed to slow down.

And as it did, the turmoil in Sunny's mind was alleviated.

He was suddenly very calm…

And full of cold, indifferent resolve.

Sunny was crouching on the ground, with Lonesome Howl standing on his back. She had just torn off his upper arm, having used all her strength to do so... therefore, she was still being pulled away from him by inertia.

Her balance wasn't steady.

Sunny went with the momentum and rolled sideways, throwing the monstrous she-wolf down and crushing her with his tremendous weight. The crescent blade whistled past and hit the surface of the ancient bone with a thunderous boom and a powerful shockwave.

Rolling over Lonesome Howl, Sunny was on his fours a moment later. Without wasting even a second, he launched himself into the air, flying at the towering Jackal with tremendous speed.

The obsidian Saint was still leaning forward, grasping the shaft of his golden polearm with both hands. His side was open and defenseless.

Ceres was already lunging into an attack, and two winged Saints were diving down to deliver devastating blows.

Beastmaster sent a swarm of illusions to slow him down.

But Sunny simply ignored them.

The Jackal belatedly shifted his gaze from where Sunny was a moment ago to where Sunny was now. He let go of his polearm with one hand, moving it down to protect his side.

So...

Sunny used one of his three remaining hands to push himself off the ground, and went for the enemy's throat instead.

His onyx claws slashed across it like four enormous blades, leaving thin cuts behind.

A moment later, four tremendous torrents of blood exploded out of the cuts, falling down like a crimson tide.

The towering obsidian jackal staggered, then swayed...

And toppled silently to the ground, making it quake with the heavy impact of his fall.

His throat had been cut, and his spine had been severed.

He was dead.