2016 : Fallen Saints

As the enormous body of the obsidian giant toppled to the ground, Sunny was already moving away to avoid the retaliation by the remaining six Saints.

Still dazed by the agony of receiving a soul wound, he ground his teeth and whispered something to himself quietly.

Just a few words...

‘You have slain a Transcendent Beast’

His shadow grew stronger.

...The words tasted bitter.

Almost at the same time, there was another trickle of subtle power entering his soul.

Saint and Serpent had claimed one more life.

And just like that, in less than a minute, three human Saints had lost their lives.

‘Damn it!’

The fury of the Saints of Song descended upon him like a hurricane. Another arrow found its way into his Shell, shattering its internal structure. A slingshot hit him like a cannonball, exploding with a devastating roar and mangling his entire left side.

Still missing an entire arm and reeling from the pain of his soul being cut, Sunny stumbled.

He righted himself before the giant wolf and the three-headed hound tore into him with their fangs, though. Moving with uncanny foresight, he dodged their feral, but chillingly precise attacks and dashed back.

His mangled side healed. A new arm emerged from the depths of his towering onyx body...

Only that body was not that towering anymore. In fact, it was barely half as tall as it had been once. Which made aiming for his real incarnation much easier.

But that was fine.

Because for once, time was on Sunny's side – he just had to survive long enough to rip the benefits.

The Saints of Song did not know it... most likely... but he was a Transcendent Terror. Which meant that his reserves of essence were six times deeper than those of his enemies.

Of course, his Aspect was also much more potent – so, usually, Sunny drained his essence at a speed that would make most Saints feel appalled, therefore suffering from having to ration it just as much as everyone else, if not more.

However, not in this battle. With his ability to use Shadow Step stifled by the shattering of space, and his ability to use Shadow Manifestation limited by the lacking number of shadows present on the battlefield, Sunny was not burning through nearly as much essence as he usually did. He only had to maintain and move the Shadow Shell.

But his enemies were in a different situation... especially those who had assumed their Transcendent forms.

So, even though Sunny's Shell was slowly shrinking, their reserves of essence were also diminishing.

Soon, they would have to release their Transformations and return to being human – but he would still be flush with essence at that time, thus gaining a great advantage.

Sunny just had to endure the battle until then.

Doing so while facing six enemies instead of seven was not easy, but it was at least doable.

It would be much better if there were only five, though...

Sunny quickly evaluated the battlefield.

Which one was he going to take out next?

But it was not really up to him. It was up to his enemies.

The first Saint that made a mistake that their allies failed to cover for would be Sunny's next victim.

The battle continued... it was supposed to slow down now that all of them were suffering from wounds and fatigue, having expended oceans of essence, but instead, it only grew more fierce.

Sunny had abandoned all reservations, while the Saints of Song were set aflame by the death of their comrade.

They were skilled, they were valiant, and they were fierce.

And yet, the six of them were still unable to bring the single enemy down...

Because their enemy was the Lord of Shadows.

The barrage of attacks continued, and Sunny continued to dodge, deflect, and block them. Now that his Shell was smaller and carried less mass, it was becoming more difficult for him to withstand the dire power of Lonesome Howl and the primal ferocity of Saint Ceres.

At the same time, he was harder to pin down or target with ranged attacks... most importantly, though, there was one less enemy for him to contend against.

The Jackal had been the most massive of the seven Saints, and had wielded a long polearm to boot. His absence on the battlefield was a real boon, making it much easier for Sunny to move.

...Of course, the body of the slain Saint was already rising from the ground, turning its hollow eyes in Sunny's direction. But both his gigantic form and his crescent blade were gone... now, he was merely a Transcendent puppet of the Raven Queen.

Powerful, but not nearly as dangerous as the man himself had been.

Sunny destroyed the puppet easily, letting it drown in the storm of devastation summoned by the clash of Saints.

And just after that, his patience paid off. He received an opportunity to take out another enemy.

However, this one was an enemy Sunny felt most reluctant to kill.

The Saint of Sorrow…

The stone gargoyle had misjudged his increased speed, missing the attack by a few meters. In and of itself, it was not that lethal of a mistake... however, both Lonesome Howl and Ceres were recovering their balance after performing devastating lunges, while Silent Stalker and Beastmaster were moving to get a better shot at the lightning-fast onyx demon.

Even Siord, the gargoyle's partner, was a step behind and too far to do anything instantly.

Which gave Sunny a perfect opportunity to catch the Saint of Sorrow in his fist... he had four of those, after all.

And once the gargoyle was caught, his stone body could be destroyed in a hundred different ways.

But the Saint of Sorrow... was Tamar's father.

Could Sunny really kill the father of his sister's closest friend?

He had already decided to be merciless, after all...

However, he also spent quite some time with Rain's cohort... he had even saved their lives after the winter solstice. These kids weren't strangers to him, either – not by a long shot. He was quite fond of them.

And although Sunny did not really know the Saint of Sorrow, the man enjoyed some of that fondness simply for having raised Tamar into who she was – an upright, loyal, and frustratingly serious young woman who had once jumped into a dark abyss to save the life of a simple porter.

Most importantly of all, hurting Tamar would hurt Rain.

And that weighed on Sunny heavier than the need to preserve the lives of the Saints for the benefit of humanity.

He allowed himself a split second of hesitation…

And then, he lashed out with one of his hands.

Instead of catching the gargoyle in an iron grip, he batted him down.

The blow itself was terrible enough for a net of cracks to appear on the stone body of the Saint of Sorrow, shattering his wings. And a moment later, the gargoyle crashed into the ancient bone with terrible force, causing a small shockwave to roll outward from the point of impact.

The enemy would not be rising from the ground any time soon... but although his wounds were severe, he would live.

Sunny did not spare the Saint of Sorrow out of pure sentiment, though.

Definitely not.

He just didn't want to bother destroying the tough stone body of the gargoyle completely, and by sparing the enemy Saint, he would not have to deal with another puppet of the Queen of Worms a few seconds later.

In any case, it was done.

Now, only five enemies remained.

And Sunny already knew which one he would target next.

He turned slightly and let out a growl…

By then, his gaze had already locked on the bewitching figure of Beastmaster.