2245 Counsel of Despair  
The cursed sword fell down, its inescapable blade shining in the blinding light. Sunny was kneeling in front of Anvil, looking up — his black mask was baring its fangs in a fearsome snarl, but beneath it, he was pale and terrified.  
In his eyes, the thin edge of Anvil's sword seemed as vast as the sky, obscuring the whole woгld. He was gruesomely wounded and weak, his hands trembling, fear consuming his dazed mind.  
He could not move, he could not breathe.  
There was no escape.  
…There was no point in trying to escape, anyway.  
He was defeated, and so, all he could dо was surrender. He wanted to surrender.  
'Ah…'  
Had he not struggled enough? Every step he had taken was an arduous struggle. Every battle he had won was a torturous trial. He was tired, terrified, and in pain — just like he had always been.  
It had all been so hard, so painful. So lonesome. He was erased from the world and forgotten by everyone...  
He was lost.  
There was no salvation from Anvil's blade, but the blade itself offered salvation. A sad and somber kind of salvation, but salvation nonetheless — an end to all his pain and all his fear... as well as everything else.  
Sunny had no hope left.  
'Let's… let's give up, Sunny.'  
He looked at the falling sword meekly, ready to accept his end.  
And then, he raised his hand and caught the cursed blade, stopping a short distance away from his neck.  
Sunny's hand trembled. The sword trembled as well, and as Anvil pushed it down, the steel blade easily cut the onyx gauntlet, mangling the flesh beneath and becoming smeared in blood. The sharp tip drew closer to Sunny's throat, but it still failed to pierce it… for now.  
The two of them wrestled for control of the sword. Anvil was pushing it forward with his physical might and Aspect powers, while Sunny fought to hold it in place with all his strength, desperation, and sheer unwillingness to give up.  
Giving up…  
Sounded wonderful.  
But there was one problem — if he gave up,he would not be able to kill Anvil.  
And that was not something Sunny was willing to compromise on.  
The cursed sword traveled a bit more, and a bit more of its length became painted by Sunny's blood. It was mere centimeters away from his throat now.  
'Not good…'  
Pale as a ghost, Sunny gritted his teeth behind Weaver's Mask and looked at Anvil with murderous darkness burning in his eyes.  
He had not saved himself from death, really — he had merely postponed it, and not by long at that. He was managing to hold the cursed sword back for now, but Anvil would overpower him soon. The smallest of actions would break his concentration and allow the sword to plunge into his neck, as well.  
So… what was Sunny supposed to do?  
'Think, think…'  
He could sense Anvil's shadow. He could feel Anvil's tyrannical will giving shape to his killing intent and empowering the fatal inevitability of his sword.  
Summoning death upon Sunny.  
The will, the sword — what came first? What was the true weapon? No… was there even a distinction between the two? Or were they inseparable?  
Were they one and the same?  
As Sunny drowned in powerlessness and pain, as he was being consumed by a singular and overwhelming desire… a hint of a vague understanding suddenly dawned upon him.  
His eyes narrowed slowly.  
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Far away, Nephis was hopelessly outmatched in the battle against the colossal vessel of the Queen. The titanic creature was too vast to be hurt by her flames — the burns they left on its flesh were too small to deal any lasting damage, and the cuts were too shallow to do any real harm. Even these shallow cuts healed in mere moments, leaving no trace behind.  
At the same time, she was deeply infected by the Queen's power. Nephis could heal herself, while Ki Song could aggravate any wound — their powers had been locked in a stalemate before, but by now, Nephis was too outmatched, too grievously injured,  
and so her soul continued to rot and crumble a little faster than it was being cleansed and repaired.  
Her suffering was unbearable…  
And her defeat was inevitable.  
Deep in her heart, Nephis knew that she could not survive. It was impossible.  
She was thinking of assuming her full Transcendent form, but there was no point. Even if Nephis unleashed herself, she would not be able to harm the colossal vessel terribly enough to destroy it… and it was dangerous for her, as well.  
There was a reason why Nephis only ever used her partial Transformation, and it was that she was afraid of losing herself forever in the furious flames of her true form… of never being able to become human again.  
She would have still done it, of course, if she saw that there was a chance. If that could have helped her survive.  
'Ah!'  
The colossal creature moved irrationally fast for its prodigious size. There was both something regаl and something bestial about her ferocious onslaught — the Queen's titanic hand reached toward Nephis, creating a hurricane with the pressure of its passing. Nephis evaded the immense talons, this time, but she could not avoid them forever.  
Sooner or later, she would be caught, crushed, and extinguished.  
There was nowhere for her escape. All she could do was fall.  
'No.'  
No… she refused.  
Her soul continued to crumble and mend itself, continued to rot and be cleansed by the searing flames. Nephis wanted to scream, but she had no voice. Her vision was turning blurry.  
Far away, the Lord of Shadows was pierced by Anvil's sword and fell to his knees. The King raised his cursed blade, ready to strike down.  
'No!'  
The great armies were drowning in the flood of abominations. Her soldiers were dying, the flames of their brittle hopes disappearing in the sea of encroaching darkness. They longed to survive, but were met with the cold embrace of death instead.  
'No…'  
Overcome by pain, Nephis felt ready to succumb to despair.  
  
It was then that her radiant gaze turned to the dark sky.  
She hesitated for a moment, and then her figure blazed with blinding radiance.  
Abandoning her futile attempts to wound the Queen, Nephis flew up.  
Up and up… up past the towering figure of the Queen's vessel, into the darkness of the rustling swords.  
And beyond it.  
Rising high above the battlefield, Nephis left the veil of shadows and escaped into the brilliant light of the cruel sky. The eternal veil of radiant clouds was just above her…  
Spreading her wings, Nephis continued to rise.  
The clоuds welcomed her like a lost daughter.