1618 Trancendent Battle Art

What was a battle style?

Depending on the practitioner, the answer varied.

At the lowest level, a battle style was nothing more than a comprehensive collection of movements and steps aimed at giving the practitioner sufficient competence to engage in battle. A set of practices meant to encompass all possible combat situations, and arm the warrior with tools to solve them.

There were countless battle styles, some taught to groups of people, others formed from the personal habits and quirks of talented combatants. Some styles emphasized strength and strived to overpower the opponent, some emphasized speed and precision, some emphasized solid defense and waiting for a perfect moment to counterattack.

There were solid battle styles created with deep insight, and poor battle styles that were concocted without a real understanding of the fundamental laws of combat.

But that was only the most shallow layer of a true battle art. A person could practice a battle style without truly understanding its essence, but they would never be able to master it.

At a higher lever, a battle style was not only a set of movements, but also a formative philosophy. It concerned not only the body, but also the mind. A person who truly mastered a style had to possess a certain level of insight into the governing laws of combat. Knowing why each of the elements had been created and what its purpose was, they were not beholden to a predetermined repertoire of actions. Instead, they could freely improvise an actionable response to each situation..

If all movements could be improvised, then what was the difference between the various battle styles? It was their philosophy. The school of thought and the dominant intent, a unifying principle that guided the shape and direction of these improvised moves.

Therefore, even among those practitioners who had mastered both the body and the mind, there were still those who fought with domineering strength, swift precision, patient caution, or any other type of guiding intent.

These were the true masters of combat.

Sunny had become one of them — and one of the absolute best among them — a long time ago.

But now that he was a Saint, a whole new horizon had opened up before him.

Because there was a third layer above the body and the mind, available only to a few chosen existences.

It was soul.

She has changed…

While clashing with Nephis in a ferocious dance of steel, Sunny couldn't help but feel amazed. She had always been a true genius of the sword, and since he knew her better than anyone, he had expected this fight to be a tough one.

After all, just like him, Nephis had four long years to perfect her technique. As the vanguard champion of Valor, she had gone through countless battles. She had also come into her Transcendent power, learning to wield it as naturally as she breathed.

A Saint was a different kind of beast, and the difference between them and their lessers was not only a question of raw power. Sunny had already glimpsed that chasm when he and Nephis fought Dire Fang, but only now that he was a Transcendent himself did he truly understand the reason it existed.

The further a human walked on the Path of Ascension, the more intricate their control of soul essence became. Masters were already very proficient in using it to deliberately and efficiently augment their bodies in combat, but Saints were capable of elevating these rudimentary essence techniques to a completely new level.

Therefore, a comprehensive essence technique was an integral part of a truly transcendent battle art. And since each Transcendent warrior possessed a unique Aspect, each essence technique had to be tailor-made for a single user. The difference that mastering such a technique could make was truly striking, and therefore, that alone made Saints vastly more deadly on the battlefield.

But that was not the end of it.

Since each transcendent battle art was unique and tailored to a single user, there was an additional step to be taken. And that was to seamlessly incorporate each Aspect Ability into the combat technique, making it truly complete.

A transcendent battle art demanded the complete integration of body, mind, and soul into a combat technique.

...Losing his True Name made it much harder for Sunny to advance in mastering Shadow Dance, so he had been concentrating on developing such a personal transcendent battle art for himself in the past four years. He had already formulated its principles, and was now tempering these principles in battles against powerful opponents.

And, in the process of it…

He thought that he might have glimpsed what the next level of mastery was.

Saints did not exist in and of themselves, as sovereign beings. Their souls were vaster than their bodies, coming into contact with the world and the underlying laws governing it. Some parts of the world welcomed them, while others repelled them. That was why Transcendent beings were able to absorb the spirit essence of the world, as long as they were in their element.

For Sunny, that element was shadow. For someone like Saint Tyris, it was the sky, or perhaps storm clouds. For someone like Nephis… he couldn't guess. It might have been light, or flame, or something more esoteric, like inspiring longing in the souls of other beings.

Therefore… he guessed that what came after the body, the mind, and the souls was the world. Incorporating the world itself into one's battle art would probably make it a supreme battle art. That said, Sunny was not sure if it could even be called a battle art, at that point, let alone how to actually achieve something like that.

In any case, he was voraciously curious to witness and experience the battle styles of other Transcendent warriors. To learn from them, and maybe even gain more understanding about the path to supremacy.

Which was why fighting Nephis was a boon to him.

So… he definitely wasn't prolonging their clash simply because he missed her.

Why would he cut this duel short if humanity's premier sword savant was graciously allowing him to steal her achievements?

'I see… I see. No, I don't see…'

Deflecting a barrage of almost instantaneous attacks, and at the same time desperately preventing these attacks from dictating his next moves to avoid the countless traps Nephis constructed for him on the fly, Sunny carefully observed her movements, the flow of her essence, and the form of her shadow.

Pretty soon, he had to admit something to himself...

'What the hell has she been doing for the last four years? It's… damn incomprehensible!'