1679 Beacon of Hope

There were two ways to build a Domain.

One was provided by the Spell, and depended on the Citadels.

By becoming the master of a Citadel, or having a person who had accepted your authority become one, a Supreme could empower and expand their Domain over vast territories. A Citadel was much more than just a stronghold containing a Gateway it was a daunting construct of impossible sorcery that forcefully subjugated the part of the world surrounding it and brought it under the rule of a Supreme.

That was why both the King of Swords and the Queen of Worms, who controlled most of the human territories in the Dream Realm, were so immensely powerful.

The second way was innate to each Transcendent, and unique to their Aspect.

Nephis suspected that most Domains were territorial in nature, which was the reason why the Spell had based its method on territory.

But not all of them were.

Take the King of Swords, for example. He used the path provided by the Citadels to expand his Domain, but that did not mean that he limited himself to it. The true vessels of his authority were not lands, but people - every warrior wielding a sword forged by him was a part of his Domain, and thus empowered it.

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Ki Song collected the dead. There was the mysterious Asterion, as well, who didn't seem to rule any Citadel.

As for Nephis herself, the only way for her to build a Domain was to inspire people, igniting the flames of yearning in their souls. At least that was her belief.

It had taken countless hours of contemplation and meditation for her to learn how to truly sense the underlying source element of her Aspect. She had noticed the subtle shift in her presence first... or maybe that subtle quality had always been there, too weak to be discerned.

The souls of people shone brighter in Neph's presence, their innermost hopes and aspirations igniting with a stronger flame. Her presence was like kindling for their passions, turning desire into yearning.

And if that yearning was inspired directly by her, or even the idea of her, then a subtle connection was established between them and Nephis, making the inspired a part of her source element.

She had not learned to sense these connections swiftly, though. In fact, it had taken a small breakthrough in mastering her Aspect Legacy for Nephis to grasp the deeper meaning of [Longing]

Her Aspect Legacy was a tree of knowledge that bore seven fruits, She had reaped the benefits of one of them and comprehended the Knowledge of Fire in Twilight.

Since then, Nephis had made strides in comprehending a few others.

Facing the First Seeker in Verge, she had advanced considerably toward the Knowledge of Corruption. And in the last four years, she had not only fully mastered the Knowledge of Destruction, but also started on the path of comprehending Knowledge of Passion.

It was that last branch of her Aspect Legacy that had helped her fathom the underlying nature of her Aspect better, as well as what she was concentrating on mastering now.

Nephis had learned how to sense the subtle connections formed between her and those she inspired. She had also earned the ability to vaguely feel the passions and desires of those around her, which were like sparks and flames burning in their souls.

Of course, not everyone was easy to read... the Lord of Shadows, for example, was like a closed book, especially when he wore that mask of his.

In any case, after Nephis had gained that understanding, she found out with a bit of surprise that there were already countless people in the world who were connected to her.

As it turned out, her fame was the reason. From the day she had led the Dreamer Army to siege the Crimson Spire and failed to come back with them, the mighty propaganda machine of the government churned, exaggerating her inconceivable achievements and making her into a tragic hero. A truly brilliant figure - Indomitable Changing Star, the last daughter of the Immortal Flame clan.

They had even built on the legendary fame of her father and grandfather, turning her into a symbol of human valiance and perseverance.

...For as long as Immortal Flame burned, humanity would not be extinguished. These words were spoken often now by the people born into the era of the Nightmare Spell.

There were even movies made about her, horrendous as they were.

Her sensational return as the only Sleeper in history to conquer the Second Nightmare had only deepened the reverence and veneration people felt toward her, followed by her adoption into Valor, which added the Great Clan's storied prestige to her own.

So, by the time Nephis became a Saint, there were already numerous people for whom she was an inspiration.

And after she became a Saint, their numbers only continued to grow. She could feel it clearly... some were inspired to strive for martial strength. Some were inspired to cultivate the nobility of their characters. Some were inspired to live their lives with earnest confidence, and so on.

There were even many people inspired with a straightforward carnal desire because of her looks. It was a bit awkward for her to sense the kind of yearning they had for her when she was out and about, and pretend not to notice.

In any case, the foundation of her future Domain was already vast and potent.

But it wasn't vast enough, and it wasn't potent enough.

And so, in the past four years, Nephis had endeavored tirelessly to make it even more solid.

To touch the souls of even more people. She had learned how to carry herself, how to present a perfect facade to the masses. She poured her intellect into grasping the Knowledge of Passion.

More importantly, she put her sword where her mouth was.

In that sense, the way Clan Valor treated her was ironically of great help. They always sent her to the most deadly battlefields, dispatched her into the epicenters of the most dreadful calamities, as if wishing for her to die. Wherever there was a crisis, Changing Star and her Fire Keepers would arrive, dissipating a flood of Nightmare Creatures with their swords.

Nephis played along with the will of Clan Valor,

using these opportunities to show the world her

incorruptible will and brilliant radiance, which

made her fame even more wide-spread and

exalted, Cassie, meanwhile, worked behind the

scenes to guide the narrative and fan the flames.

Nephis herself, the Ivory Tower, the Chain Breaker, the Fire Keepers - everything was now a recognizable symbol of selflessness, strength, and nobility. They were beacons of hope in a dark and tumultuous world, bringing people solace... and Inspiration.

The number of those touched by her light grew every day, forming countless connections to her soul. Not all of these connections were equal. Some were tentative and feeble, some were radiant and deep. The deepest connections by far were those of the Fire Keepers - her most loyal followers. It was to a degree that she could even reach them with her Aspect Abilities from a distance.

That was one part of what Nephis was doing - the easier part.

The harder part, by far, was coming up with a way to actually turn this spiderweb of connections the nascent form of her future Domain - into an actual one.

Nephis... still had no idea how to take this step. She had spent some time studying the changes that had happened to her Soul Sea after she bound the Ivory Tower and let the Fire Keepers place their anchors there, hoping to find a clue from the mysterious mechanisms of the Nightmare Spell. But that had turned out to be a dead end.

So, for now, Nephis was left with no choice but to search... and wait.

She had hoped that she would find a hint before the war started, but now that both of the Great Clans were on the move, that didn't seem possible anymore.

Which was why it was so important for her to establish a foothold in Godgrave, and ready herself for what was going to happen here.

Anvil and Ki Song had to fall before the war was over.

Because if one of them truly defeated the other, their authority would spread to all of humanity.

...Once that happened, even becoming a Supreme would not be enough to slay them.