1681 Battle Partners

In the form of the radiant spirit, Nephis was much more powerful than her human incarnation. Her speed and might increased vastly, and her fire powers grew much more potent... especially when the beautiful vessel of light was augmented seven times over by her Aspect.

Not only that, but mundane attacks could not hurt her at all - most weapons would simply turn to ash before reaching her, and those that did break through the immolating heat would find no flesh to harm behind it.

Only fire.

So, what hurt her the most was her Flaw, the [Pristine Soul]... and in that form, the danger it posed was much more dire than the suffering she experienced when using her lesser Abilities. The incandescent white void of her soul was so pure and searing that it threatened to consume her, burning away her very self. Perhaps forever.

At least that was what Nephis feared. She rarely used the power of her Aspect in combat, relying on nothing but her martial prowess if there was a choice, and she used her Transformation Ability even less frequently.

Of course, she was not invulnerable even in that brilliant form. There were many beings and weapons there that could harm this fiery vessel of hers, but the damage they dealt would be instantly healed at the cost of her essence. The form of the spirit of light was a manifestation of her Incandescent soul, and so, one would have to extinguish her soul completely to destroy it.

Which was not Impossible, especially when facing enemies of higher Ranks.

The ancient stone wraiths she was fighting were among such enemies.

[You have slain a Great Beast, Asura of Condemnation.]

[Your soul shines brighter].

[You have slain a Great Beast, Asura of Condemnation.]

[Your soul shines brighter.]

[You have slain a Great Beast...]

Nephis managed to bring down three of the seven Nightmare Creatures in quick succession, but after that, the situation worsened. The abominable golems witnessed her power and grasped it, their movements changing as a result.

They were of the Great Rank, after all. For creatures like these, the distinction between flesh and flame was of no importance. The strange diamond weapons they wielded carried their killing will, and before that will, all would be annihilated. The laws of the world themselves bent to accommodate it.

If she was struck by one of the asuras... her soul would not collapse from a single blow, but the damage would be considerable. Even for a Great Beast, destroying a Transcendent Titan would not be easy - but there were a lot of these creatures here, so she had to be careful.

Nephis gave up on offense and evaded the thunderous attacks of the menacing golems, biding her time until the Lord of Shadows returned

She had not waited for long.

On the seventh second after his departure, the shadow demon shot out of the darkness on the border of the burning clearing, his great odachi plummeting onto one of the asuras a split second later, like the edge of nightfall.

Now, there were two of them facing four Great Beasts.

Nephis and the Lord of Shadows glanced at each other briefly, her radiant, graceful silhouette contrasted starkly against his towering, tenebrous figure.

Then, they exploded with motion.

'I wonder...'

Nephis was concerned for a split second. Her partial transformation was less destructive than the full one, but it still generated terrible heat. The stone armor of the ancient golems withstood it easily, but what about the Lord of Shadows? Very few people were strong enough to fight side by side with her when she went all out.

However, she didn't have to worry.

The onyx carapace of the shadow demon glistened darkly, reflecting the furious white radiance of her flame, but held. That fearsome armor, it seemed... was of a better quality than her own, or at least possessed a very high resistance to elemental attacks.

In any case, he did not seem to have any trouble plunging into the middle of the burning clearing, seemingly unperturbed by the blinding light, scorching heat, and lack of oxygen.

His movements were just as swift, ferocious, and sharp as they had been before.

‘That's a relief, then.'

Her spirits were uplifted.

Nephis and the Lord of Shadows clashed with the four asuras, the surrounding jungle swiftly turning into a wasteland of splinters and ash.

The black sword she had wielded had been long obliterated by flames, so Nephis used her stunning speed and agility to fight the abominations with bare hands. She was swift and much smaller than the towering golems, her technique fluid and flawless. The diamond weapons flashed past, never managing to touch her radiant vessel...

However, Nephis herself wasn't able to attack as brazenly as before, either. Using her sublime grasp of the essence of combat, she delivered a constant stream of shallow attacks to her enemies. The stone armor on their wrists, ankles, and joints was gradually melting, slowing the abominations down.

The Lord of Shadows, meanwhile, was a much easier target. Not only was his dark body broad and towering, but he was also slower than her, his terrifying odachi demanding a lot more space to be wielded effectively.

And yet, somehow... none of the attacks of the asuras managed to land on his onyx armor.

His technique was just as sublime as hers, but it was also... strange. Sometimes, his movements did not seem too swift - compared to her, at least - but at other times, it was as if he was so fast as to leave afterimages behind him.

No, not even that... it was as if the Lord of Shadows was sometimes in two places at the same time.

It took Nephis a few moments to understand what was happening.

‘Transcendent battle art...'

His spatial movement Ability was intricately woven into his battle style. The Lord of Shadows masterfully used short-distance teleportation to maneuver around the battlefield, blinking from place to place with such speed that it seemed as if he was in several places simultaneously.

The graceful movements of his sword flowed uninterrupted between the jumps, so a slash that started in one spot could land dozens of meters away. An enemy attack could be blocked despite him being nowhere near its path. In a sense, the whole battlefield was within the reach of his serpentine odachi.

There was also another detail...

'He's jumping between shadows.’

After noticing that detail, Nephis also realized with a bit of surprise that the Lord of Shadows was anticipating and making use of her own movements.

Currently, she was the brightest source of light on the battlefield, so the direction of the shadows cast by the massive bodies of the asuras was dictated by her position.

The Lord of Shadows was paying attention to her movements to anticipate the movement of the shadows, and was therefore able to escape the danger freely, unfailingly appearing behind the abominations to deliver a terrible strike and dissolve into the darkness before they could retaliate.

It was... an utterly beautiful display of flawless technique, firm intent, and devious ingenuity.

‘...Diabolical’.

Nephis was... impressed.

Dodging the crushing blow of a diamond staff, she floated into the air to avoid being thrown off balance by the quaking earth, and shot forward. Her incandescent palm touched the elbow of the ancient golem, and its elbow joint finally cracked, falling apart in a rain of molten stone.

Now that the enemy was unable to wield the heavy staff effectively, she had a window of opportunity. Landing lightly on the burning ground, Nephis spun and delivered a devastating roundhouse kick to the towering abomination. Her long, slender leg connected to its abdomen, and the asura was thrown back, its entire torso exploding and catching fire.

By the time the burning golem fell to the ground, it was already dead.

...But just as it died, more asuras appeared from the depths of the ruin, lunging at Nephis and her battle partner with silent malice.