1683 Dark Deity

A Cursed Tyrant...

Nephis felt an unfamiliar emotion that she couldn't quite describe. Awe, perhaps? Or maybe hatred.

The pure flames of her soul roared, surging restlessly in the presence of the harrowing adversary.

Cursed Nightmare Creatures were... the epitome of terror. Each of them was equal to what a Sacred being would have been - not that there were any of those around. Nevertheless, Sacred beings held a special meaning for humanity.

That was because of what the steps of the Path of Ascension meant, at least as far as humans theorized.

If the Path of Ascension was the road to divinity, then each step brought those treading it closer to godhood. Transcendence was the step of breaking away from the limits of the mundane. Supremacy was the act of asserting one's power over the world, thus establishing the foundation of their future apotheosis.

But it was the next step, which no Awakened of their world had taken before, that signified truly attaining the qualities of the divine. A Sacred being was already a deity, albeit a lesser one.

The same could be said about a Cursed being. The Cursed Tyrant, Condemnation, could very well be called a deity, A profane deity of abyssal Corruption.

And so, in a sense...

Today was the first time Nephis would face a god In battle.

But not the last.

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Time seemed to slow down as Condemnation rose from beneath the ruins. The gargantuan shape of the ancient fiend was still hidden behind the layers of collapsing soil and crumbling buildings, but it was already like a towering mountain. The quaking earth, the scale of it all... seemed more like a natural process than the movements of a living being.

Or rather, unnatural.

Witnessing the sleeping giant wake from its slumber, Nephis could finally guess how this ancient city had been destroyed, and why it had fallen despite the dire might of its defenders. The warriors that wielded the dreadful power of the sorcerous exosuits and the sublime diamond weapons, the asuras... had perished when the Cursed Tyrant descended upon their city like a cataclysm.

Even their impossible strength had not been enough to save this land, which was now a forgotten ruin. One of many similar ruins swallowed by the jungle.

Such was the caliber of enemies the civilization of Godgrave had faced before extinction.

It certainly made one wonder...

If the same fate awalted the civilization of the waking world - the last human civilization.

America had already been lost to the advent of a Category Five Gate, Antarctica to the Chain of Nightmares. Humans were migrating to the Dream Realm now... but what would happen if a Cursed Tyrant was attracted by the smell of human souls and attacked Bastion? Or Ravenheart?

How long would the Great Clans last if the true horrors of the Dream Realm abandoned the Death Zones to roam its vast expanse freely?

Safety... was an illusion.

The waking world was dying, but the Dream Realm was a death trap as well. Of that, Nephis was certain.

Which was why the Sovereigns had to be eliminated.

Not because they had killed her father. Not because they had sent assassins after her and turned her childhood into a cruel nightmare. Not because they had brought the Immortal Flame clan to ruin... although Nephis would lie if she said that none of that mattered.

It was not even because of the countless lives lost because of their schemes in Antarctica.

The reason... was that the Sovereigns were not up to the task. They were incompetent, strangling humanity's power in pursuit of misguided reasons. Ki Song, Anvil, Asterion - none of the three was wise enough, determined enough. And desperate enough.

Their achievements were great, and they might have thought that their cynical tyranny was for the greater good. But they were not someone who could defeat the Nightmare Spell.

That said, to have a chance to defeat them and bring about change...

Nephis had to survive the meeting with this Corrupted Tyrant first.

She gritted her teeth.

‘There is no escape...'

A Cursed Tyrant was like a deity, and a deity could exert great power upon the world. The ruins of this ancient city were Condemnation's territory, and so, its will here was like a law here.

If it didn't want to let the two Saints leave, they wouldn't be able to leave. Nephis and the Lord of Shadows had already witnessed how space itself was preventing them from escaping into the jungle.

What other option was there?

If they couldn't escape, they had to fight. But defeating a Corrupted Tyrant in battle was not something either of them was capable of... even surviving a single attack by the profane being was questionable,

The gap was too great.

Nephis glanced at the Lord of Shadows and asked, her clear voice resounding in the roar of the quaking earth:

"That spatial Ability of yours... can you escape?"

He shook his head.

"Not this time."

'Not this time...'

It sounded as if this was not his first time encountering a Cursed Nightmare Creature.

Just what kind of life had he led?

Nephis took a deep breath.

...Or rather, he mimicked the familiar motions of taking a deep breath. The radiant spirit did not have lungs, after all, and neither needed nor was capable of breathing. It was simply a vessel containing a vast ocean of flame.

She had been prepared to unleash her full Transformation if things went south. However...

the current situation was way worse than even her worst prediction. Even if she did allow the spirit form to dissolve, releasing the ocean of flame contained within its brilliant figure, she wouldn't be able to contend against the Cursed Tyrant.

'No other choice, then.’

Well... it couldn't be helped. She had managed to come closer than usual to fully saturating her soul cores this time around, already,

The important part was to make the sacrifice count.

Watching a vague figure reveal itself from beneath the mountain of flowing soil, Nephis glanced at the approaching asuras and said evenly:

"Hold back these creatures, then. I'll... create an opportunity for the two of us to escape."

Surrounded by radiant light, Nephis concentrated for a moment...

And reached into her incandescent soul.