1772 Deus Ex Machina

Strangely enough, Nephis was enjoying the play.

The leading actress was good at her craft. The role she was portraying was taciturn and stole, but revealed a stalwart determination to resist the tide of Nightmare Creatures at all costs... a true warrior. The Guardian Angel of Antarctica did not display a lot of emotions, which could have made some people consider her a flat character.

But personally, Nephis thought that it was the opposite. The actress managed to show the subtlety of someone who was unaccustomed to expressing her emotions openly, and felt that there was no place for such things on the battlefield. It was really quite commendable, even if the Angel seemed a bit lonesome as a result.

The protagonist was her complete opposite. He was very emotive and did not shy away from voicing his opinions, even if these opinions were usually not something people would want to hear. His dry wit and casual nonchalance were disarming, and his slightly comical persona was strangely endearing. His heart was in the right place, too...

And yet, Nephis found herself unable to fully immerse herself in his character, The actor portraying the Devil was handling the role well, so there was nothing to complain about. It was just that.,,, how could she put it? The man was a bit too.., brawny, She had never really considered the matter, but now, Nephis suddenly realized that rugged men like that did not suit her taste very much.

She was inclined to appreciate men like Master Sunless much better

Feeling the pleasant weight of his head on her shoulder, she smiled subtly in the darkness.

‘How did I end up in this situation?'

The charming enchanter was leaning on her comfortably. Her arm was wrapped around him, as if they were really in that kind of relationship. It was true that there was someone in the theater observing them, but had there really been a need for a display of intimacy?

She had done it mostly on impulse, perhaps because Cassie's unexpected request was still stuck in her mind.

But, well... Nephis didn't mind the result. It felt quite nice.

Enjoying the novel feeling of closeness, she continued to watch the play.

On the stage, the touching love story between the Devil and the Angel had already progressed, and was now nearing a tragic culmination. After being reunited in East Antarctica and confessing their feelings, the heroes faced a deadly crisis.

She tilted her head and accidentally rested her cheek on top of the charming enchanter's head, feeling the silky texture of his raven-black hair. Nephis froze for a moment, perplexed, then made a hard decision... to pretend that she had done it on purpose, and that everything was going according to plan.

Just like that, there was something to distract her from the utterly fictional depiction of the Battle of the Black Skull happening on the stage...

There was no mention of the Great Clans having fought each other, of course. Instead, they were shown as self-sacrificing champions of humanity who had ventured into the wilderness to buy King Anvil and his cohort enough time to conquer the Fourth Nightmare.

The Angel had already revealed herself as a disgraced retainer of Clan Valor, and now, the heroes were trying to stall the tide of dreadful abominations in a desperate last stand.

The play took some liberties with the original film's plot, it seemed, adapting it to the sensibilities of the people living in the Sword Domain.

On the stage, the Angel was supporting the Devil, both of them battered and covered in fake blood.

"Hold on! We must hold on, Captain! The King of Valor will be here soon!"

The square jaw of the protagonist trembled, and he forced out his familiar devilish grin.

"I'm afraid... I'm afraid that I will have to break my promise, angel, I'm sorry, but... really, you have no one to blame but yourself, You... should not have fallen in love with a dishonest man like me.”

Still smiling fearlessly, he pushed the wounded Angel back, into the hands of his soldiers, and commanded them to retreat.

Left alone, the Devil faced the encroaching shadow - created by special effects, it represented the Great abominations that had escaped the Category Four Gates.

A sarcastic scoff escaped from his lips.

"I really thought I'd make it. Well, never mind. This devil's time away from hell is coming to an end... ah, what a sweet dream it has been! Thank you, my love."

Nephis could hear quiet sobs in the audience. She could also feel Master Sunless tremble slightly.

Was he... quite affected by the play? His reactions seemed quite intense from the very start. The charming enchanter was surprisingly emotional...

She wondered idly if he knew the truth about the Battle of the Black Skull. He wasn't there, after all, and most people believed in the false record of what had happened on that day.

The truth was not nearly as romantic.

Knowing what would happen next, Nephis sighed and suddenly wished to fall through the ground.

Was there still a chance to set fire to the theater? That would interrupt the play, for sure...

Master Sunless felt her tension and shifted slightly, looking up.

His terribly handsome face was suddenly way too close.

"What is the matter?"

She tried very hard to hide her embarrassment, looked away, and said in a flat tone:

"It's nothing."

But just then...

The stage was suddenly drowned in bright light, which chased away the encroaching darkness.

A beautiful young woman in white clothes that were a little bit too tight for her generous figure was lowered from above on invisible ropes, somehow maintaining a graceful image despite two heavy wings attached to her back by a hidden harness.

She held a radiant sword in her hand, her face the perfect picture of enlightened valiance.

Nephis sight and covered her face with a palm.

There were a few joyful yelps from the audience.

"It's Lady Changing Star!"

"The King has returned from the Nightmare!"

"Please save him, Lady Nephis! Hurry!"

...Indeed.

The actress being lowered from above was the very same ingénue who played Nephis in the local rendition of that accursed movie... she was portraying Changing Star.

Nephis could feel the enchanter's body trembling once again.

Glancing at him between her fingers, she was startled to see that he was trying to suppress laughter.

Her expression fell a little.

What's so funny?"

Master Sunless looked at her with a smile, his onyx eyes glistening with mirth. Then, he shook his head apologetically.

"No, no... please forgive me, Lady Nephis. It's just a bit of schadenfreude..."

Hearing that, she was suddenly in the mood to do something that she had never done before.

Nephis wanted to pout.

Turning away from him, she remained silent for a few moments, and then said evenly:

"I'm glad my suffering amuses you."

Master Sunless gasped and stared at her with a hint of panic in his gem-like eyes.

Nephis tried to maintain a calm facade, but the corner of her mouth curled upward against her will.

She sighed and closed her eyes.

'Cute!’

On the stage, Changing Star saved the day. The Devil was rescued and reunited with the Angel, who had led the Valor reinforcements to his position. The King of Swords descended to Antarctica, eradicating the Nightmare Creatures and leading the civilians to the Sword Domain

Due to the bravery and selflessness that the Angel had shown during the Southern Campaign, her past misdeed was pardoned by Princess Nephis, and she was reinstated as a Knight of Valor. The Devil was knighted by the radiant princess, as well, and the two of them became trusted champions of the royal family.

It was a happy ending.

The curtain fell, and the lights went on. The actors returned to the stage to bow and were met by a thunderous applause.

Of course, all of them could not help but throw furtive glances at the private box.

Nephis sighed, then stood up with a pleasant smile and clapped a few times.

At the sight of that, the eyes of the actors shined, and the audience exploded with an even more energetic applause.

Master Sunless watched her with an amused smile, then asked quietly:

"I guess you liked the play, Lady Nephis?"

Nephis lingered for a bit.

What was she supposed to say? That the play was alright, but she really enjoyed the experience of him resting his head on her shoulder as she embraced him in the darkness?

She cleared his throat.

"It was a good performance. However... I'm not sure you'll understand, but it is a really uncomfortable thing to see someone playing you on the stage."

Master Sunless stared at her silently for a few moments.

Then, he looked down with an odd expression and said in a neutral tone:

"Yeah... I guess something like that would be hard to understand..."

Nephis smiled faintly.

'At least Cassie had enough presence of mind not to send us to see the Song of Light and Darkness.’

How would her pretend paramour feel watching a play about a fictional relationship between her and another man?

That would have been a disaster!