# The Cycle of Rebirth: An Exhaustive Strategic Analysis of the Nephthys Archetype

## Introduction: The Undying Phoenix of the Modern Era

The legend of Nephthys in the Yu-Gi-Oh! Trading Card Game began with a single, iconic monster: Sacred Phoenix of Nephthys. Released in the 2005 set *Flaming Eternity*, this fiery avian became a cornerstone of classic competitive formats like Goat Format.1 Its revolutionary effect—reviving itself from the Graveyard during the Standby Phase after being destroyed by a card effect and subsequently destroying all Spell and Trap cards on the field—turned the opponent's most common forms of removal into a liability.3 This simple yet powerful loop made it a resilient and formidable threat that defined an era of dueling.1

In 2018, with the release of the *Hidden Summoners* booster set, this solitary legend was reborn as a full-fledged archetype.5 The modern Nephthys archetype expands upon the original's theme of resurrection, creating an intricate Ritual and Link-based strategy centered on a core mechanic: a continuous cycle of self-destruction to generate card advantage and field presence.6 However, this modern incarnation carries a fundamental design flaw that has defined its competitive journey. Many of the archetype's most crucial effects are delayed, triggering not immediately upon destruction, but "during your next Standby Phase".4 In the high-velocity environment of modern Yu-Gi-Oh!, this inherent slowness presents a significant handicap, often giving the opponent an entire turn to counter a strategy before its value can be realized. This has led to the archetype being seen as a disappointment by some, a powerful concept held back by its own mechanics.8

The evolution of Nephthys from a standalone control monster to a complex, engine-based combo deck mirrors the broader design trajectory of the game itself. The original Phoenix was a self-sufficient threat that thrived by punishing the prevalent, destruction-based interaction of its time. The new archetype is a web of interconnected cards, where no single piece is a threat on its own, but together they form a fragile yet potentially powerful engine. This analysis will dissect this modern archetype, exploring its internal synergies, core combo lines, and its necessary reliance on external engines to overcome its inherent limitations and achieve its full, fiery potential.

## Section 1: The Coven of Nephthys - Main Deck Effect Monsters

The foundation of the Nephthys strategy is a core of Level 2 WIND Spellcaster monsters. These are not attackers, but enablers that activate the deck's destruction-based engine and facilitate its Ritual and Link Summoning plays.

### The Primary Starter: Disciple of Nephthys

Disciple of Nephthys is the most critical consistency tool and combo starter in the Main Deck. Its first effect allows the player to destroy one card in their hand to add any "Nephthys" monster from the Deck to their hand.4 This transforms any card into the exact piece needed to begin or extend a play, most often searching for the key Ritual Monster, Devotee of Nephthys. Its second effect, which triggers during the next Standby Phase after it is destroyed by a card effect, allows the player to add one "Nephthys" Spell or Trap from the Deck to hand.3 This floating effect provides resource recursion and is a primary target for the Special Summon effect of Devotee.11

### The Extenders: Defender of Nephthys and Matriarch of Nephthys

Defender of Nephthys and Matriarch of Nephthys serve to extend combos by placing additional monsters on the field, which are then used as materials for Link Summons. Defender destroys a card in hand to Special Summon a Level 4 or lower "Nephthys" monster from the hand.3 Matriarch has a similar effect but Special Summons its target from the Graveyard instead.4 Matriarch is generally considered the superior of the two, as the Graveyard is a more accessible resource pool in the middle of a combo. Both monsters also possess floating effects that trigger in the Standby Phase after their destruction: Defender destroys a "Nephthys" monster in the Deck, a niche but useful way to trigger other Graveyard effects, while Matriarch revives itself from the Graveyard.4

### The Recovery Tool: Chronicler of Nephthys

Chronicler of Nephthys is the archetype's primary tool for the long game. Its on-field effect allows it to destroy a card in hand to add any "Nephthys" card from the Graveyard back to the hand. Its floating effect mirrors this, also recovering a "Nephthys" card from the Graveyard during the next Standby Phase.4 Chronicler is essential for recycling key resources, such as the Ritual Spell Rebirth of Nephthys, enabling the deck to loop its plays over multiple turns.

### The Legacy Tool: Hand of Nephthys

Hand of Nephthys is a direct callback to the original strategy, allowing the player to Tribute itself and another monster to Special Summon Sacred Phoenix of Nephthys from the hand or Deck.4 While this was the primary way to summon the boss monster in its heyday 1, it is now largely obsolete in modern builds, which have pivoted entirely to the more versatile and powerful Ritual strategy.

The operation of these Main Deck monsters hinges on a principle that can be described as an illusion of card neutrality. At first glance, their effects appear to be a simple one-for-one trade: destroy one card in hand to gain one card on the field or in hand. However, the true advantage is generated by carefully selecting *what* is destroyed. The "cost" of these effects is designed to be turned into a "benefit." A novice player might use Disciple of Nephthys by destroying a generic Spell card, resulting in a net loss of one card from the hand for a search. An experienced player, however, will destroy another Nephthys monster, such as a second Disciple or a Matriarch. This action initiates a cascade of value; the destroyed monster will trigger its own effect during the next Standby Phase, replacing itself and turning the initial cost into a net neutral or even a positive gain in card advantage over the full turn cycle.10 This demonstrates that the deck's resource management is not about immediate advantage, but about investing cards for future returns.

## Section 2: The Sacred Rites - Ritual Monsters and Support Spells/Traps

The modern Nephthys strategy is built around its Ritual Monsters. These cards are not just powerful bosses; they are the central gears of the deck's combo engine, enabling its most explosive plays and facilitating its primary goal of Link Summoning.

### The Ritual Spell: Rebirth of Nephthys

Rebirth of Nephthys is the sole, indispensable Ritual Spell for the archetype. It can be used to Ritual Summon any "Nephthys" Ritual Monster. Its most important feature is a secondary effect: if Devotee of Nephthys or Cerulean Sacred Phoenix of Nephthys is tributed for the Ritual Summon, the player can destroy one card on the field.4 This destruction is not merely a form of removal; it is a versatile combo tool. It can be used to disrupt the opponent's board or, more strategically, to destroy one of your own Nephthys cards like Disciple of Nephthys or the Continuous Trap Awakening of Nephthys to trigger their effects immediately.

### The Primary Combo Ritual: Devotee of Nephthys

This Level 2 Ritual Monster is arguably the single most important combo piece in the entire archetype. When Devotee of Nephthys is Ritual Summoned, it Special Summons any "Nephthys" monster from the Deck. This effect instantly turns a single Ritual Summon into two monsters on the field, which is the precise number needed to summon the key Link Monster, Nephthys, the Sacred Preserver. Devotee is destroyed during the End Phase, but this is a feature, not a drawback, as it sets up its second effect: it can revive itself from the Graveyard by destroying a "Nephthys" card in the hand.4

### The Secondary Combo Ritual: Conductor of Nephthys

Also a Level 2 Ritual, Conductor of Nephthys is the primary enabler for summoning the archetype's Link-3 boss monster. When Ritual Summoned, it Special Summons another "Nephthys" Ritual Monster from the hand or Deck, treating it as a Ritual Summon.3 This effect puts two Ritual Monsters on the field at once, setting up the conditions for Nephthys, the Sacred Flame. Furthermore, when Conductor is Tributed or destroyed by a Nephthys card effect, it triggers a powerful delayed effect: during the next Standby Phase, it destroys up to three "Nephthys" cards (except Rituals), one each from the hand, Deck, and field, setting up a massive cascade of value.4

### The Boss Monster: Cerulean Sacred Phoenix of Nephthys

The Level 8 Cerulean Sacred Phoenix of Nephthys is the archetype's main offensive powerhouse and board-breaker. It has a Quick Effect to destroy "Nephthys" cards in the hand or on the field to destroy an equal number of monsters the opponent controls. Echoing its original counterpart, it also revives itself from the Graveyard during the next Standby Phase after being destroyed.4 This makes it a persistent and recurring source of monster removal.

### The Support Cards: Last Hope of Nephthys & Awakening of Nephthys

The archetype's dedicated Spell and Trap support cards are Last Hope of Nephthys and Awakening of Nephthys. Last Hope is a Normal Spell that targets and destroys one Nephthys card you control and one card your opponent controls. Awakening is a Continuous Trap that provides a minor 300 ATK boost and, when destroyed by a card effect, Special Summons any "Nephthys" monster from the hand, Deck, or Graveyard.4 Unfortunately, both are generally considered too slow for competitive play. Last Hope's status as a Normal Spell prevents it from being used as interaction on the opponent's turn, a critical flaw, while Awakening is a slow trap that requires another card to trigger its powerful floating effect.10

A key aspect of this archetype's design is that its Ritual Monsters function more as "conduits" than as traditional boss monsters. Their primary role upon being summoned is not to remain on the field as threats, but to be immediately converted into other resources—specifically, materials for a Link Summon. A traditional Ritual Monster is summoned to leverage its powerful on-field presence. In contrast, Devotee of Nephthys is summoned, uses its effect to bring out Disciple, and both are then immediately used to Link Summon Nephthys, the Sacred Preserver.11 The Ritual Summon is not the end of the combo; it is a crucial intermediate step. This subverts the typical role of Ritual Monsters, positioning the archetype as a Link-climbing strategy that uses Ritual Summoning as its primary method of generating materials.

## Section 3: Ascending to the Perch - The Nephthys Extra Deck

The Main Deck's intricate engine of destruction and Ritual Summoning is designed to build towards two powerful archetypal Link Monsters. These monsters represent the ultimate goal of the deck's primary combos.

### The Lychpin: Nephthys, the Sacred Preserver (Link-2)

Requiring two "Nephthys" monsters as material, Nephthys, the Sacred Preserver is the absolute heart of the modern strategy, described by some players as one of the best archetypal Link monsters ever designed.14 When it is Link Summoned, its controller can activate one of two powerful effects. The first, and most commonly used, allows the player to add one Level 8 Winged Beast monster from their Deck to their hand, and then they can also add one Ritual Spell from their Graveyard to their hand. This single effect searches for a boss monster like Cerulean Sacred Phoenix and recycles the key Rebirth of Nephthys, generating immense card advantage and setting up the next turn's plays. Its second effect allows it to destroy a "Nephthys" monster it points to in order to Special Summon a different "Nephthys" monster from the Graveyard, providing a way to trigger destruction effects on demand.4

### The Ultimate Boss: Nephthys, the Sacred Flame (Link-3)

Nephthys, the Sacred Flame is the archetype's intended ultimate boss monster. It requires two or more monsters, including at least one Ritual Monster, for its Link Summon. It gains increasingly powerful protection effects based on the number of Ritual Monsters used as material:

* **1+ Ritual Monster:** Cannot be destroyed by battle.
* **2+ Ritual Monsters:** Cannot be destroyed by card effects and gains 1200 ATK.
* **3 Ritual Monsters:** Cannot be targeted by card effects and gains another 1200 ATK, reaching a formidable 4800 ATK.4

When summoned with three Ritual materials, it becomes a nearly invincible "towers" monster. However, the immense resource investment required to achieve this makes it a risky proposition. Such a powerful monster is highly vulnerable to non-targeting, non-destruction removal, such as being tributed by a Kaiju monster, making it a potential "kaiju bait" that is often not worth the cost.14

The design of these two Link Monsters reveals a fundamental tension within the archetype's strategy. Nephthys, the Sacred Preserver synergizes perfectly with the efficient, low-cost engine of Level 2 Spellcasters and Rituals. The most common combo involves using a single Ritual Summon to field two monsters, which are then used to summon the Link-2 Preserver. This is a resource-light play that generates significant advantage. In contrast, summoning Nephthys, the Sacred Flame with its full suite of protections requires three Ritual Monsters on the field simultaneously, a feat demanding multiple, resource-intensive Ritual Summons. The deck's consistency tools are geared towards the former play, not the latter. This creates a strategic dichotomy: Sacred Preserver is the practical, consistent boss that makes the deck function, while Sacred Flame is the aspirational, "win-more" boss that represents a high-risk, all-in gamble.

## Section 4: Mapping the Flow of Power - Search and Summon Chains

To effectively pilot the Nephthys archetype, a player must understand the intricate network of interactions that allows them to search, summon, and recover resources. The following table provides a quick-reference guide to these internal pathways, visualizing how each card contributes to the deck's overall engine. This map is designed to be easily adaptable for visual aids, clarifying the flow of combos.

| **Card Name** | **Searches/Adds from Deck** | **Recovers/Adds from GY** | **Special Summons from Hand** | **Special Summons from Deck** | **Special Summons from GY** | **Triggers Destruction in...** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Disciple of Nephthys** | Any "Nephthys" monster (on-field effect); Any "Nephthys" S/T (floating effect) |  |  |  |  | Hand |
| **Defender of Nephthys** |  |  | Level 4 or lower "Nephthys" |  |  | Hand, Deck (floating) |
| **Matriarch of Nephthys** |  |  |  |  | Level 4 or lower "Nephthys"; Itself (floating) | Hand |
| **Chronicler of Nephthys** |  | Any "Nephthys" card (on-field & floating) |  |  |  | Hand |
| **Devotee of Nephthys** |  |  |  | Any "Nephthys" monster | Itself | Hand (for its own revival) |
| **Conductor of Nephthys** |  |  |  | "Nephthys" Ritual Monster |  | Hand, Deck, Field (floating) |
| **Nephthys, the Sacred Preserver** | Level 8 Winged Beast | Ritual Spell |  |  | "Nephthys" monster | Field (monster it points to) |
| **Awakening of Nephthys** |  |  |  | Any "Nephthys" monster (floating) |  |  |

## Section 5: Executing the Strategy - Core Combo Lines and Endboards

With an understanding of the individual card roles, it is possible to construct the core combo sequences that define the Nephthys strategy. These lines demonstrate how the deck converts initial resources into a board presence and sets up for future turns.

### 5.1 The Foundational Combo (2-Card Starter)

This is the deck's bread-and-butter opening play, demonstrating the core engine's ability to generate advantage from a simple two-card hand.

* **Required Cards:** Rebirth of Nephthys + Devotee of Nephthys
* **Steps:**
  1. Activate Rebirth of Nephthys, tributing Devotee of Nephthys from the hand.
  2. Ritual Summon a second copy of Devotee of Nephthys from the Deck.
  3. The on-summon effect of Devotee triggers, allowing you to Special Summon Disciple of Nephthys from the Deck.11
  4. Activate the effect of Disciple of Nephthys, destroying a disposable card in your hand to add Matriarch of Nephthys from your Deck to your hand.
  5. Link Summon Nephthys, the Sacred Preserver using the Devotee and Disciple on your field as materials.
  6. The effect of Nephthys, the Sacred Preserver activates upon being Link Summoned. Choose the first effect to add Cerulean Sacred Phoenix of Nephthys from your Deck to your hand, and then add Rebirth of Nephthys from your Graveyard back to your hand.
* **Endboard:** This sequence concludes with Nephthys, the Sacred Preserver on the field, Cerulean Sacred Phoenix of Nephthys and Rebirth of Nephthys in hand, and both Devotee and Disciple in the Graveyard. While this board lacks immediate disruption like monster negates, it has generated significant card advantage, established a key Link monster, and prepared the Graveyard with resources for follow-up plays on subsequent turns.

### 5.2 Advanced Play Extension

Building upon the foundational combo, having an additional Nephthys monster in hand to use as destruction fodder allows for more extensive Link climbing.

* **Steps (Continuing from Foundational Combo):**
  1. After adding Matriarch to hand, Normal Summon it.
  2. Activate Matriarch's effect, destroying another Nephthys monster in hand to Special Summon Disciple of Nephthys from the Graveyard.
  3. You now have Sacred Preserver, Matriarch, and Disciple on the field. These three monsters can be used to Link Summon powerful generic monsters like I:P Masquerena (to enable disruption on the opponent's turn) followed by Knightmare Unicorn or Accesscode Talker on the following turn.16

### 5.3 The Path to an Unbreakable Sacred Flame

This sequence is more resource-intensive and represents the deck's high-risk, high-reward ceiling, aiming to summon the Link-3 boss with its maximum protection.

* **Required Cards:** Access to Conductor of Nephthys and at least two other Ritual Monsters in hand or Graveyard.
* **Steps:**
  1. Begin by Ritual Summoning Conductor of Nephthys.
  2. Conductor's effect triggers, Special Summoning a second Ritual Monster, such as Devotee of Nephthys, from the Deck.
  3. Activate the Graveyard effect of a third Ritual Monster (e.g., another Devotee), destroying a card in hand to Special Summon itself.
  4. With three Ritual Monsters now on the field, Link Summon Nephthys, the Sacred Flame using all three as material.
* **Endboard:** A 4800 ATK Nephthys, the Sacred Flame that cannot be destroyed by battle or card effects and cannot be targeted by card effects, presenting a formidable obstacle for many strategies to overcome.

## Section 6: Forging Alliances - Hybrid Strategies and External Engines

The pure Nephthys strategy, while synergistic, is often too slow and fragile for the modern competitive landscape.9 Its true power is unlocked when its unique destruction-based engine is combined with other archetypes that can either compensate for its weaknesses or further exploit its strengths.

### 6.1 The Fire King Alliance

The synergy between Nephthys and Fire Kings is one of the most natural and thematic pairings. Both archetypes thrive on having their monsters destroyed by card effects.14 The Nephthys Level 2 Spellcasters provide a consistent, in-engine way to destroy Fire King monsters like Fire King High Avatar Kirin or Sacred Fire King Garunix in the hand, triggering their powerful effects without relying on the opponent or specific Field Spells.18 The original Sacred Phoenix of Nephthys and Fire King High Avatar Garunix can create a devastating loop, where both monsters recursively revive themselves and wipe the entire field of monsters or spells and traps each turn.20

### 6.2 The Impcantation Engine

For any Ritual-focused deck, the Impcantation engine offers unparalleled consistency. Monsters like Impcantation Candoll and Impcantation Talismandra can search for both Ritual Monsters and Ritual Spells at no cost, solving the Nephthys deck's inherent need to open with specific combo pieces.11 However, this consistency comes at a steep price: the Impcantation monsters lock their controller out of the Extra Deck for the turn.11 This completely disables the Link-climbing aspect of the Nephthys strategy, forcing the deck to rely solely on the on-field power of its Ritual monsters, which is often insufficient against established boards.

### 6.3 The Spright Connection

A more modern and highly competitive variant involves pairing Nephthys with the Spright engine.22 The synergy stems from a simple but powerful fact: all the core Nephthys Main Deck monsters and their primary Ritual enablers (Devotee and Conductor) are Level 2 monsters. This makes them perfect targets for the Spright engine's effects. Gigantic Spright can Special Summon a Nephthys monster directly from the Deck to start combos, while Spright Elf can revive one from the Graveyard for combo extension or disruption.23 The Spright engine provides the speed, consistency, and interaction that the pure Nephthys build desperately lacks, making it the most viable path for competitive play.

### 6.4 Essential Generic Support

Beyond full engines, certain generic cards are staples for optimizing the Nephthys strategy.

* **Pre-Preparation of Rites:** Because Rebirth of Nephthys specifically lists both Cerulean Sacred Phoenix of Nephthys and Devotee of Nephthys in its text, Pre-Preparation of Rites can search both the Ritual Spell and one of those key monsters simultaneously. This makes it a one-card combo starter that generates immediate card advantage.24
* **Diviner of the Herald:** This Level 2 Fairy is another powerful one-card starter. When Normal Summoned, it can send Herald of the Arc Light from the Extra Deck to the Graveyard. Arc Light's effect then triggers, searching for any Ritual Monster or Ritual Spell from the Deck. This provides another consistent way to access the core Nephthys combo pieces.17

The choice of which engine to pair with Nephthys is not merely a deck-building preference but a direct response to the state of the game's metagame. In a slower, more attrition-based format, the Fire King variant's powerful grind game and recursive board wipes would excel. In a faster, combo-oriented environment, the Spright variant is the only one that provides the necessary speed and disruption to keep pace. The Nephthys archetype, therefore, is best viewed as a flexible "chassis" that can be outfitted with different "engines" depending on the competitive challenges it is expected to face.

## Conclusion: The Phoenix's Final Verdict

The Nephthys archetype possesses a unique and compelling strategic identity, built upon an intricate cycle of destruction and rebirth. Its internal synergies are well-designed, allowing for a recursive and resource-intensive grind game that can out-value opponents over time. The core loop of destroying its own cards to generate advantage is a powerful concept that rewards skillful play and careful resource management.

However, the archetype is fundamentally held back by its core design. The reliance on effects that trigger during the "next Standby Phase" is a critical weakness in a game where the outcome of a duel is often decided in a single turn. This delay renders the pure version of the deck too slow and non-interactive to be effective in a competitive environment.8 It cedes too much initiative to the opponent, allowing them a full turn to dismantle a board or establish an unbreakable field before the Nephthys player can capitalize on their setup.

Ultimately, the Nephthys archetype is best understood not as a standalone strategy, but as a synergistic engine waiting to be combined with a more powerful framework. Its true potential is only unlocked when paired with archetypes that can either compensate for its slowness or further abuse its unique destruction mechanics. For players aiming for competitive success, the Spright variant is the most logical choice, as it provides the speed and interaction necessary to compete in the modern game. For those seeking a more thematic and casually powerful experience, the Fire King hybrid offers a satisfying and explosive playstyle. The phoenix may be eternal, but in the fast-paced world of modern Yu-Gi-Oh!, it cannot afford to wait for the dawn of the next turn to rise from its own ashes.

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