“Well, what are you waiting for, boy? Hurry up and get back to your leader,” Michele said.

“Actually,” Klavier folded his arms. “I’ve been tasked by my leader to be your bodyguard.”

“Huh?!” her eyebrows twitched. “Well, whatever. It wouldn’t hurt to have one more person to protect me. Good. Then let’s get to the ballroom and hear those old men talk politics. Man, I hate those stuff, seriously…” she trailed off into a soft mumble.

Michele entered through a door. Klavier followed suit, entering into massive room that was the length of three hovels. The ceiling was just as mammoth, spanning several metres into the air with a circular platform housing several candles at once that lit the place. In it were a great number of people dressed in tuxedo suits and elegant dresses. The buffet table sat on the far left, hogged by a small group of well-fed people drinking red wine.

“Your face tells me that it’s your first time here,” Michele commented.

“It is, milady.”

“You’ll wanna stay close if you’re not to get lost.”

“It feels off without the music,” he walked over to the empty stage like he was attracted to it. “Maybe I’ll fill it in to avoid boring the crowd.”

“It’s not necessary, kid. These people know how to entertain themselves with a lot of things - music, drama, theatre, war, you name them. But none of those interest me a single bit.”

“I see,” he heaved a sigh.

Nobility was not something people could earn by mere hard work. Envy riled up in him as he watched them enjoy an abundant amount of food amidst their banter though the atmosphere was all but calm peaceful. With the recent happenings in Shida’s lab, the empire was on the hunt for the destroyer’s head. He shrugged the thought aside, following Michele like a shadow as she engaged the men with a pleasant smile.

“Hey, can you hear me?” a familiar voice rang in his head.

Klavier blinked his eyes twice.

“Hello! I’m talking to you dammit!” the same voice said. “It’s Themis! I’m talking to you right in your head. It’s a technique called telepathy.”

“Er,” he looked around, trying to look for her physical body in the crowd. “Where are you?”

Michele shot a glare at him.

“I’m still at the infirmary. Will just woke up and is now taken care by Aem,” Themis said.

“Aem?”

“Some long haired pretty boy. Anyway, do you feel something?”

“I feel lost, that’s for sure.”

“Ha. Ha. Very funny. Jokes aside, there’s a powerful presence inbound at your location. It’s something like Zellha’s, but stronger. Warn the guards about this. I think this guy’s really strong and will be coming in big.”

“They can’t handle them, is that what you’re saying?”

“No. Best be prepared for anything.”

“Got it,” he shifted his attention to Michele. “Milady, there’s a message from Themis.”

“Go on.”

He described Themis’s explanation from the first word to the last, watching her expression turned sour as he went on.

“...I see. It sounds like a god is coming to invade soon. They’ve done it before, but why now of all times?”

“Did someone call me?” a sinister-sounding man asked from behind.

They turned around, glaring back at an orange-haired man wearing a predominantly black armor. Traces of beige fur peeked out of his pauldrons and along the lines of his cloak. Unlike Zellha, he did not have any trace of blackness in his sclera even though he emitted an unearthly aura that threatened to smother those near him. The small talk stopped as time virtually froze. Everyone had their eyes on the uninvited guest as he flexed his abyss-black claws.

“Go on. Don’t mind me,” he said, conjuring a flaming sword with the swing of his hand. “I’m just carrying out my orders.”

There was no time to think. Klavier seized Michele, diving to the back of the piano when the mysterious man unleashed a powerful explosion that burnt practically everything to black dust. Despite its destruction, Klavier and Michele remained relatively untouched from the attack but the kind of power shown suggested that their opponent was either a god-like creature or a god himself. Either way, he wasn’t about to allow a god to rampage and massacre everybody just because he was following instructions.

“Milady,” Klavier stood up. “I’ll handle this. Please stay here until it’s safe.”

“Are you mad, kid? That guy could take on an army by himself!”

“I have my tricks,” he returned a smile. “Besides, it’s my duty to protect as many people as I can from danger.”

Klavier stood up, his hand gripping onto the white sword’s handle as he approached his new target. He moved from one pillar to the next, keeping his footsteps as light as possible so as not to attract his attention. Klavier pulled the white sword out of its scabbard. His heart pounded, watching his opponent walk about carefreely in the destruction. All he needed was just one attack.

But the carefully planned assassination had already failed the moment Amy charged towards him. She raised her halberd, summoning the power of the thunder gods which ripped through the blade as she swung the heavy hit. He raised his free hand, stopping the crushing attack without any trace of struggle in it. He smirked at the shock that surfaced on Amy’s face.

“Is that all?” he taunted, slashing down her shoulder for blood to spill all over the place.

Amy fell to the floor face first, blood gushing out of the deep wound like a burst water tank. He spat on where she laid, lifting his sword high in the air as if he was performing a public execution in front of the terrified people. Not on Klavier’s watch. He burst into a sprint, deflecting the slash off its course.

“Who are you?” the man’s eyes narrowed.

“None of your business,” Klavier thrusted his blade forward aimed at his torso. “Luther.”

Klavier dashed towards Luther at a speed unlike a human’s. His strikes were deadly and precise as he savagely reduced Luther’s armor into loosely connected chunks of scrap metal. The deafening clangs of their blades was like music to his ears. Klavier and Luther, locked in a heavenly dance of swordfighting.

Yet the control that he was familiar with waned on him. Pain ripped across his chest but it didn’t come from Luther’s sword. The world around Klavier sunk - his body was yet to fully recover from Ryuuga’s deadly attack. Luther would have noticed the drastic drop in his performance by now.

The pitiless assault on Luther seemed to have lost its slightest momentum, resulting in him being able to bring back the fight into another stalemate. Luther swung his right arm out authoritatively, blazing through the loosening defence of Klavier. As if he wasn’t unfortunate enough, Klavier was also surrounded by countless blades. A dark, bitter feeling filled his heart - not because of the exceedingly dire situation he had found himself in, but because he had somehow seen Luther pull off those actions before. A voice whispered in his head, “Inferno Sin.”

With an authoritative swing of his hands, Luther focused all that he had into those swords. They simultaneously converged onto the ground where Klavier stood helpless, ripping him apart as they zipped to and fro. He fell to his knees, practically incapacitated from the merciless strikes that shredded his body.

“I’ll admit that you’re good,” Luther said, sending a crippling kick on Klavier’s abdomen that sent him flying.

Klavier hit the ground hard, the impact of his fall was enough to destroy the water fountain behind him. He cursed his own inability to sustain the power, ignoring the intense gravity trying to keep him down as he pulled himself up.

No sooner than a few seconds after he regained his composure did Luther resume his relentless strikes. He came down on Klavier so quickly that the air around him appeared to give way. Klavier lifted his sword up in a fraction of a second, just in time to parry the incoming deathblow. Klavier forced his blade upwards, breaking free from the stalemate between his opposition’s equally stubborn sword.

Klavier pointed at Luther, amassing a massive red ball of energy on the tip of his finger. But Luther was faster - he grabbed Klavier by the head, unloading power reserves stored in him that sent Klavier flying across the streets.

“You’re an interesting boy,” Luther said, kicking him on the stomach that forced him to lie on his back. “You do know who you’re up against, no?”

“Shut your trap,” Klavier rose to his feet once more but that was about everything he could do. One more hit like that and he would get knocked out cold.

“I admire your courage, but that’ll be all that you’ve got,” Luther burst into a sprint, moving so fast that he appeared to be teleporting towards Klavier when a man clad in a thick purple-black cloak and a wicked magician hat stood in his way.

“Woah, there,” he stopped Luther in his tracks with an open palm towards him. “I think we have a big misunderstanding, amigo.”

“Eric? What are you doing here?” Klavier asked.

“To play my music, of course.”

“Get out of my way!” Luther swung his fist across his face but it stopped an inch before it can actually hit.

“No can do, amigo,” the man in purple-black cloak raised his magician hat to reveal his violet irises.

“You, what the hell did you do to me?” Luther was frozen on his position, unable to break free from what appeared to be an invisible bind created by the magician.

“I was just playing my guitar, that’s all,” he strummed it. “So, shall we enjoy the performance?”

“Give me back my damn shoes, you jerk!” Michele shouted as she rode on her axes towards Luther at a speed faster than a human sprint. She unleashed a flurry of slashes down his back in a fit of fiery fury, each hit causing a small explosion after another. Luther staggered from the attack, blood oozing out of the fresh wounds dealt by her deadly strikes.

Luther forced his arms out as though he broke free from the invisible binds made by Eric. The confidence on both Eric’s and Michele’s eyes faded as they forced themselves into a more defensive stance. Luther swung his hand across, throwing forth set of metal chains that found its way to both of their legs. He tugged them towards him, licking his lips as Eric and Michele flew forward. He slashed down Eric’s shoulder and stabbed Michele on the stomach with his claw.

“So much for group effort,” Luther licked the blood off his claw. “Now’s your turn.”

Klavier raised his sword as Luther burst forward at a phenomenal speed. But instead of going straight towards the frontal defence Klavier set up, Luther took a step to the side, striking Klavier by the side with a lunge.

“Hmph. You guys made me put in so much effort,” Luther said. “Now, time to burn this city.”

“Not until you’re done with us,” a familiar voice said. Klavier forced himself to look up to see Themis face off with the divine being along with both Will and a giant sword wielding man.

“More pests to deal with,” Luther dug his ear. “Fine. Bring it on.”

“Themis, get Klavier back into battle,” Will said. “Aem and myself will hold him while you’re at it.”

“Don’t die on me now, Will,” Themis teleported to Klavier’s side, casting a spell on Klavier that numbed the pain for a moment.

“I should have known,” Klavier mumbled.

“Shut up already. Let Will and Aem take care of this.”

A bitter feeling pooled in his heart. Even as Will and Aem tagged in and out, Luther’s peerless swordsmanship allowed him to overwhelm both of them. Will’s helmet broke as Luther slashed across his face, sending Will down to the ground with a crash. Aem, distracted by Will’s downfall, fought hard against the increasing odds stacked against him as Luther pressured him to the breaking point. But he could only go so far - the slowness of his swing gave Luther plenty of opportunity time to outflank him before he finally fell.

“Hmph,” Luther swung his sword across, cleaning it off the blood after he slayed both Will and Aem. “I guess it’s game over, little girl.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” Themis held her staff so tight that Klavier could see it shake.

*Get up!* he screamed to his paralyzed body. He wasn’t about to lose everything he had against a god. He could picture himself already on his knees in front of Sirkius, begging for his strength. Sirkius simply stood there, his face hidden under a hood that made it impossible to tell whether he was about to give in to his request. Time was not on his side. Themis was already engaged into a heated battle with Luther, holding her ground somehow with whatever magic she knew.

“What’s wrong, girl?” Luther taunted, locking his sword against her staff. “Am I too fast for you to handle?”

“Don’t take me too lightly, alright?” she broke the deadlock, blasting him with a beam of white light that launched him off. “Do it, Klavier!”

Klavier stood up once more, shaking off the pain that seared all over his body. He grabbed Luther by the head, smashing him down to the ground as he allowed the rage within fuel his final burst.

“Hah, you’re not going to hurt me without using a god’s power,” Luther said.

“Thanks for reminding me,” he took aim at Luther’s forehead, a massive red ball of energy materialized on the tip of his finger. Fear flashed in Luther’s eyes as Klavier pummeled his sword down, sending a shockwave that blew everything in its path. As the dust settled to its rightful place, the reason that kept him standing finally crumbled on him as he collapsed.

"Waaaah!" Themis's voice banged in his eardrums as she lifted him off the ground by pulling his collar. "Klavier! What the hell did you just do?!"

"Take down the enemy, what else?" a slight smile dashed on his face.

"I don't like that smile of yours. Whatever. Let's go get everyone patched up," she supported him by the shoulder, dragging their way out of the charred land. Soldiers flocked into the area, securing the perimeter, helping all the injured civilians that were caught in their crossfire.

"Say," Themis said. "How could you survive such a blast?"

“I casted a protective spell around myself before I used that final attack.”

“Heh, that’s real clever of you. Wait. You know magic?”

“A little.”

“I hope you don’t abuse such power. Your life isn’t worth such destruction anyway.”

"Of course I won't. If I do, I can count on you to remind me."

"W-What? Well, okay."