That sneaky Shida wasn’t about to get away for getting them into a messy situation. Themis stood before him, folding her arms as she looked at him in the eye. She knew she wasn’t the most intimidating person to deal with a menacing magician like him, but with the other two busy in their own battles, it was up to her to stop him from mobilizing even more fighters to incapacitate them. She fired a pink bolt at him, chipping off a small part of his armor as he swerved to the side in an attempt to evade it.

“Looks like I’ve underestimated this tiny creature alright,” Shida wiped off the burning debris on his shoulder.

“Call me that again and I’ll make sure you’ll never see the sun rise again,” her eyebrows arched to form a “V” shape.

“I love your confidence, you know that?”

Themis focused all her energy onto her wand, unleashing the largest shot that she could conjure at him. It didn’t come with a recoil strong enough to slam her on the nearest wall though. If it was that powerful, Shida probably wouldn’t stand a chance, that was, if he got hit by it. Perhaps now was the time to believe in lady luck…

He raised his staff in full anticipation, intercepting the projectile with little difficulty. It didn’t stop there - he threw the spell right back at her, reinforced with an overwhelming presence of dark power in it. Themis dived away from the evil magic as it crashed right on the hovel behind her, bringing up into flames.

“You were correct to dodge that thing, tiny creature,” Shida said, resting his staff on his shoulder. “Warm up is over. Time to get serious.”

Shida swung his staff across, sending a wave of black fire blazing towards Themis. She jumped away, ignoring the flames that blazed on her shoulder as she tumbled across the floor like a smooth metal ball. Themis bounced to Shida side, wrapping her arms around his waist, pointing her wand at his face.

“See if you can dodge this, old man,” the tip of her jewel wand lit up, blowing up the projectile before she could even think of escaping. She crawled out of the dust cloud, cursing her itchy trigger finger for releasing the shot too early.

“Is that all you can do?” he heard his voice from her back. She turned around, staring at a demon incarnate whose hands became wicked claws similar to Luther’s. Instinct told her to run but with her body a bashed up by her own blast, she couldn’t see herself successfully evading the attack. She took it hard, enduring the five talons that ripped through her back. Blood rushed out of the fresh wounds, staining her dress to create a deep red patch. She should at least try to stop the bleeding since there wouldn’t be much time before the loss became too great for her body to bear.

She pounced onto his head, pulling his hair with all her might before smashing her wand flat on his forehead. The damage ought to keep him down for a while. But no, he stood right back up, denying her the time she needed to heal herself of the grievous injuries.

The environment around Themis with nothing but dark matter. The tips of his lips lifted as he swung his staff down as he shouted the words “Soul Prison”. She wasn’t about to repeat the same mistake. She mumbled a spell under her breath, picturing a location away from the perimeter of Shida’s incoming attack. A small pink magic circle formed around her but before it could be completed, a purplish circle of a different design formed on top of it. It overloaded her spell with foreign magical particles, destabilizing it before it blew up on her.

She fell to her knees, having been drained of all the remaining power left of her. It was of little comfort that she was risking her life for Klavier’s escape, only to be stopped by a mad magician whose magic pool knew no bounds. Her death would probably help him in his survival.

“Bellow, Sirkius!” a familiar voice shouted so loud that it drowned the noise of the impending doom dashing towards her. A flash of red zipped past her, so close that a few strands of her hair fell to the ground, blazing through the air before crashing into Shida’s magic, rendering the preparations behind it useless.

“Oh, if it isn’t Klavier,” Shida said.

“Get away from Themis,” he pointed his broken black sword at him.

“And what? Fight me in that kind of condition?”

“Does it matter? I’ll cut you down no matter how badly injured I am,” he drew out his white sword.

“No,” Themis raised her hand across. “I’ll handle this.”

“But you’re…”

“You’ve done enough brawling for the day. Look at you,” she glanced at the countless cuts on his body. “Giving me more work than I already have.”

“Okay, if you say so,” Klavier sheathed his swords.

“Hey you!” Themis threw a pebble that landed square on Shida’s nose. “Your opponent is me!”

“Some courage you’ve got there, tiny,” he wiped the blood off his crooked nose.

“I told you not to call me tiny, didn't I?” she dashed around him so fast that he didn’t have time to react. “I’ve been watching how Klavier fights for a while already, so I learnt one or two tricks from him,” she raised her wand high in the air, smashing it down onto Shida’s head with all her might. Shida stood his ground but having received a hard hit, he didn’t seem to be able to recover from the impact quickly, allowing Themis to land a chain of bashes to the head until he collapsed.

Shida forced himself up, holding onto her wrist as tightly as he could so that she couldn’t escape. He raised his staff against her, chanting under his breath as a maelstrom of dark magic pooled around the tip. But the casting took too long - Themis grabbed him by the head once more, head-butting him with all her strength. Shida toppled over, clutching onto his forehead before lying down on the ground with his limbs spread wide open.

“Damn! I’m not done yet!” Shida thrust his staff into her abdomen. The sounds around started to muffle to the point that only her heartbeat could be heard. She could have sworn she heard both Michele and Klavier shout her name. But with the world around her starting to spin, she couldn’t be sure if that was the case.

Any normal person would have passed out by now, having endured such attacks. No, she wasn’t about to let it take her away. Klavier and Michele would be goners without her. She mustered all the remaining energy left in her, pulling the staff out of her body for blood to pour out of the hole created in its aftermath.

She swung her wand across, picturing the same way how Klavier would slash across to reach out to his opponent when he attempted to dodge. It landed Shida’s head with so much force that he collapsed once more. This time, mercy was not in her dictionary.

“Never! Ever! Call! Me! Tiny! Again!” she smashed his head continuously, timing her strikes with every word she shouted.

She bashed his head so much that it looked a bit disfigured. But that was a good thing since she could be sure that he would not interrupt her in her healing. She hovered her hand on the stab wound, squeezing out the last bit of energy she had to close it up. But her all wasn’t enough, closing it halfway when the magic failed on her.

“Michele! The medicine!” she heard Klavier’s voice just before the abyss embraced her whole.

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“This is bad,” Klavier said, examining the wounds on Themis’s body. “Michele, use the towel to stem the blood flow on her back. I’ll deal with the one on her front.”

Themis may have survived the battle against Shida, but the chances of survival was slim with the immense amount of blood lost from that duel. She wasn’t one to fight in a battlefield to start with anyway. Yet he couldn’t disapprove the spirit she put in to defeat an enemy that was way out of her league.

There was one thing that he couldn’t shake off. How was it that Themis understood some of his techniques just by watching him? She didn’t execute it as perfectly as she ought to, but it was good enough to give Shida the beating he deserved.

“Hey Klavier, quit spacing out,” Michele’s voice threw him back into reality. “She’s still bleeding, you know.”

“I know,” he spread pressed a little harder on the pressure points near her wound. “I couldn’t help but to think that she somehow managed to imitate some of my techniques, that’s all.”

“It’s easy to copy. It’s just… I don’t know. Maybe it’s a bit difficult to wield?”

“That’s the point. No amateur fighter can handle its pressure without first building the physical resilience.”

“I see you guys are having fun,” a husky voice said. They turned around, looking at an orange-haired man with an eyepatch on his right eye peeking out of the entrance of a violet-colored giant house.

“Y-You!” Michele pointed at him.

“Look little miss. I’ve got a name and that is Luther.”

“What are you doing here?”

“Not here to dance with you, that’s for sure. Anyway, get in already. I still need to hold back the army you know.”

“Thanks, we owe you one,” Klavier and Michele supported Themis up.

“Zellha will hitch you a ride out of this damned place. Till then, take care.”

“What about Will, Aem and Amy?” Klavier asked.

“Them? They’ve already escaped. Meet up with them in the plains after you’re out of this place. Oh,” Luther passed two emblems, one which was purple-black that bore the symbol of a dual scythe and the other silver which had the symbol of a great sword and its hilt decorated with angel’s wings to Klavier. “I think you’ll find this useful.”

“Thanks,” Klavier entered the tank.

“Well, took you long enough,” Zellha greeted him with a toothy smile, sending chills down his spine. “Let’s go.”

They took off, moving so fast that those in their way had no time to run away, getting themselves flattened or launched like a catapult rock aimed at the heavens.

“Michele,” Zellha said. “Man the cannon. We’re blasting a hole on it.”

“Who are you to order me eh?”

“Please listen to her,” Klavier said. “I’ll take care of Themis in the meantime.”

“Fine,” she jumped onto the seat by Zellha’s side, maneuvering the joystick as she aimed at the wall in front of them. “Um, how do I shoot?”

“Pull the trigger.”

“You mean this?” she squeezed the trigger sitting underneath her fingers, unleashing a powerful projectile at the wall that came crumbling down.

“Nice shot. Now make it bigger so we can ram our way through.”

“Never thought we actually have that kind of technology,” Michele commented, firing away all the shots the tank could offer.

Now was the time to use it since Michele wasn’t watching. Klavier mumbled a spell under his breath, swinging his left hand across Themis’s body. Lime green particles filled the air around her, sinking into her skin slowly. The blood that once was running out of the wounds like a fountain started to thicken into a thin clot. He dropped to his knees, overwhelmed by relief that the healing spell worked without any hiccups.

“Oh,” Michele said. “I saw what you did there.”

“Heh?” his cheek muscles twitched.

“Come on, spill the beans already. You’re not an ordinary knight as you claim to be.”

“You sure you want to know the truth?”

“I’m waiting for it.”

“I’m a…” he glanced at Zellha. “A magician. Yeah.”

“That doesn’t sound very convincing.”

“Have you heard of the term ‘magic swordsman’?”

“Not really.”

“I’m one of them. A magic swordsman knows all kinds of magic, including healing. But healing isn’t our forte since the profession is more tuned to combat. I would still rely on medicine for that reason.”

“At least she’s off the danger zone now.”