Aem’s legs could carry him no more. He ran so fast and far that even the position of the sun couldn’t tell him how long he was at it. Alas, after the extreme marathon that threatened to blow his legs up from exhaustion, the familiar olive green canvas top was in sight. Klavier stood at the entrance of the tent, his arms folded as he looked ahead with immense focus. His hand dropped to the white sword stashed on the right of his waist. Aem raised his hands high in the air. Klavier seemed to get the signal; He dropped his stance, approaching him but not without a little caution.

“What happened? You look really pale,” Klavier said.

“It’s Sama kingdom,” he said in between his panting. “The gods’ army got them.”

“What?”

“Sama kingdom’s taken by the gods.”

“What of its people?”

“They’re barely surviving in a refugee camp in the outskirts of its borders. It’s only a matter of time before the gods army will sniff them out and crush them. Klavier,” he seized his collar. “We need to help them.”

“Whoa, there, mister. Calm down,” Klavier pushed his hands off gently. “I understand the desperation coming from the people but we can’t just charge right in without a strategy thought out. Have you contacted their king?”

“Yes. They are expecting us later when the day is at its brightest.”

“So if that’s the case, they will probably agree to help us in return.”

“I don’t know about that. They’re short on supplies themselves.”

“I see.”

“What’s the commotion?” Michele asked.

“Morning, Michele,” Klavier said. “Aem came to tell us that we’re going to help Sama kingdom.”

“Oh look,” she scratched her mane-like hair. “Another idiot is born. Why didn’t you tell us?”

“I’m sorry!” Aem said. “I couldn’t just leave them alone. I know you guys are tired of fighting but…”

“So,” Michele turned to Klavier. “Are we really going to do it?”

“Sure. Are you game?”

“Fine with me,” she stretched, revealing the toned flesh underneath her pajamas for a brief second. “As long as we get to La Veda.”

“Alright, so it’s decided,” Klavier nudged Amy awake.

“What’s up?” she asked.

“We’re going to liberate Sama kingdom, that’s what. So here’s the plan,” Klavier led them to the planning room, disseminating all the information he thought out of the night before.

“Damn, you thought this out well,” Aem said. “But how did you do this knowing you couldn’t read the map properly?”

“I learnt how to under Amy’s guidance,” Klavier looked at him with a deep frown. “Anyway, show time guys. We’ve got a meeting with the king.”

“Um, it’s not the king… we’re talking to the prince.”

“All the better. Then again,” he looked at his tattered white robe. “I can’t present myself like this.”

“Gee, you just have to ask,” Michele said, tossed over a dark blue cloak that fell onto Klavier’s arms.

It appeared like any other plain, long cloak adventurers would use for a long journey. But the clothing was by no means a light one; Klavier had to flex his muscles just to lift it up. He unfolded it, watching it fall all the way down to slightly below knee level.

“Perfect. Thanks,” Klavier wore it over his white robe.

“Take care of it, dimwit,” Michele said. “That’s my father’s cloak.”

“You could have told me sooner…”

“Nah. I know you’re strong enough to carry it around. If I wear it, it’s like carrying a sandbag.”

“That’s an over-exaggeration, isn’t it?”

“Of course.”

\*\*

It was like waiting for a legendary person to walk into their shabby camp. Arius sat by the entrance with the city guards, on a constant look out for the promised men that would liberate their home from their foes. But the wait was agonizingly long. He could feel the gods’ army’s presence coming closer as the days pass.

“Sire, I think we found them,” a guard said.

Arius took the binoculars from the man, zooming in to see Will and Aem walking side by side with a strawberry-blonde haired man, clad in a rich man adventurer’s blue cloak that covered his tattered white robe underneath.

“Is that who I am thinking he is?” Arius asked.

“It has to be, sir,” the guard said.

“Very well. Tell the rest of the soldiers to get into position to welcome our guests.”

“Right away,” he blew the whistle and in a split second, the camp’s people scrambled into their allocated positions.

It was like a titan approaching them - the aura that the unknown man extruded suggested fear in spite of their miniscule army size. But as mighty as they appeared to be, the group were on their knees the moment they were in front of Arius, a feat that took him by storm since most adventurers would not recognize him.

“Pardon us, my lord, for our lack of punctuality,” Aem said. “We come before you with our very best and we promise that we won’t disappoint.”

“At ease,” Arius said.

“Greetings, your majesty,” the man wearing the blue cloak said. “My name is Vanros Klavier, elected leader of this group.”

“I see,” the mentioning of ‘elected leader’ struck him. “I am Arius, third prince of Sama kingdom. I’ve summoned you guys in hopes of getting back our home from the invaders. But as it is, we are very short in manpower and supplies. Come, let’s discuss it in a place away from the civilians.”

Arius led them into the largest tent of the camp. The interior of this makeshift building was by no means similar to the conventional housing the normal citizens were in. There were all sorts of maps with plans scribbled in red ink stuck on the walls, equipment laid on the table in a somewhat disorderly manner. He shoved the irrelevant things aside, worsening the already bad state of messiness of the room.

“It’s been exactly seven days since the fall of Sama kingdom,” Arius started, tracing his finger across a clean map on a massive table where they gathered around. “The enemy was overwhelmingly powerful, destroying eighty percent of our fighting force within the first hour of confrontation.”

“Eighty?” Klavier asked, the shock resonated across the room.

“Yes. These gods were well beyond our capability to subdue, all of which wielded lightning equipment that paralyzed any form of water combat. With our trump card disabled, we could do little to defend our home.”

“What of this camp?” Michele asked.

“One of our scouts received a threat by the same god’s army commander that this place is next. We only have until tomorrow to prepare and if we lose, we can’t guarantee the safety of our people.”

“It is a dire situation alright,” Klavier said. “So what’s the plan?”

“Actually, we don’t really have a plan. We just know that the civilians need to be evacuated but the other empires are not responding to our plea. Also, with the remaining fighting force we’ve got, it’ll be certain defeat. We can rely on the might of Mega and Sergio, but they can only go so far.”

“The admiral of the navy force and a wandering ice knight eh? So, who is the one leading the gods army?”

“Rumors had it saying that his name is Uda.”

“I see. Shall we go through the plans we thought of?” Klavier glanced at Aem, prompting him to pull out a scroll. “We didn’t come here unprepared. You see, we’ve lost enough loved ones to understand your desperate attempts to save your people. These plans are made so we can make your vision a reality.”

Arius unrolled the scroll, revealing different types of response plans to different scenarios. The details put out in the various situations were so comprehensive and precise that it sent chills down his spine. This man could not be as young as his outer appearance suggested.

“What are you?” Arius heard his voice shake, lowering the scroll to see the wicked twist in Klavier’s lips.

“He is otherwise known as ‘The Madman’,” Lucina’s voice rung in their heads. She emerged from the dark corners of the room, clad in a thick, loose brown cloak.

“‘The Madman’?” Arius asked.

“One that trusts his purest instincts,” Lucina said.

“Hey, don’t go bragging my titles without my permission. Anyway,” Klavier focused on Arius again. “Sir, you need not worry about your people. There are far more of us. It’s just that these people prefer not to show their faces until they have to take care of some filthy business. That said, you should advise your men not to get near them because they are prone to indiscriminate killing.”

“Who are these you speak of?”

“They would like to keep their identities a secret.”

“How will we know who not to cross with then?”

“The people you here are the ones your men can interact with safely. Anybody else apart from these guys here will face hell.”

\*\*

Klavier sat alone in the secluded corner of the camp, watching the camp’s activity buzz down to a stop as darkness shrouded the land. He didn’t mean to scare Arius from the meeting earlier, but it was necessary if he were to ensure that his soldiers would survive to see the next day.

He pulled out two circle emblems, one that had the symbol of fire and other a symbol of ethereal swords revolving around the center from his pocket, joining his hands together as he chanted a spell under his breath. As if materializing out of thin air, two people, the first, an orange-haired man wearing a largely black armor stepped out of the magic circle. The second, a woman sporting a genuinely blonde hair with two bull horns pointed to the sky, sticking out just above her temples and a tiny princess-like crown tilted at an angle that rested on her head.

“Another job?” Luther asked, digging his ear along with a loud yawn.

“Looks like it,” Zellha said.

“I believe you heard me talk with Arius earlier this afternoon,” Klavier said.

“Nope, I was sleeping,” Luther said.

“I was bathing,” Zellha winked.

“Never mind,” Klavier summed up the meeting into a one minute speech.

“Uda huh?” Luther scratched his chin. “That guy’s one of the imprisoned gods for doing a grave crime. Well, count me in! I’ll be sure to wreck him with all I’ve got.”

“You’re not going to have all the fun, boy,” Zellha licked her lips. “Because I’ve got a score to settle with him too.”

“In any case, you guys will be compensated appropriately. One word of caution though, do not hurt Arius’s men when you can.”

“Not without some gems,” Zellha said.

“Okay,” Klavier said slowly. “How about two gems if you put in effort to keep Arius’s men away from friendly fire?”

“Seriously?” her eyes sparkled with enthusiasm.

“Yeah.”

“We got a deal,” she shook hands with him, but it was so tight that her claws sunk into his flesh.

“Dude,” Luther pulled her hand out. “You trying to kill master?”

“I trust that you guys know what to do,” Klavier said.

“For more destruction, yes. Come on, Zellha, got to prepare those weapons,” Luther pulled her away, blending into the darkness until he saw them no more.

“So those were the people you were talking about,” a voice said, busting all the alarms in his body. He turned around, staring back at the blue cotton-candy-like hair.

“Oh, it’s you,” Klavier heaved a sigh.

“Why so uptight?” Lucina sat by his side. “Don’t they know about your summoning abilities?”

“No. I’d prefer to keep it that way though. Letting them know that I’m one will definitely change their opinion of me.”

“I see. You haven’t changed much even after fifteen years have passed,” she looked up at the twinkling night sky. “So I assume they think you’re as young as you look?”

“I suppose,” he scratched his head uncomfortably.

“Klavier! I know you’re over there!” Themis’s voice rung from the camp’s direction. “We got some beef… stew,” her jaws hung open as she stared on, fury raging in her eyes. “What are you doing?”

“Having a talk with an old friend,” he replied. “Want to join us?”

“Oh, okay,” Themis looked at Lucina suspiciously. “So what were you guys talking about?”

“About how old he actually is,” Lucina’s response knocked Klavier over.

“No, do not tell her…”

“Tell me what?” Themis tilted her head to the side.

“He is turning forty-four this year,” Lucina said with a smile.

“Heh. So young. Wait. Did you just say forty-four?”

“Yup.”

Themis pulled his cheeks. “He doesn’t look anywhere like that!”

“Get off me!” Klavier said, nudging her off.

“But seriously. How is it that you’re that old and yet look young? Wait. Don’t tell me you’re a vampire…”

“How in the world did you derive to that conclusion?” he heard Lucina burst into laughter behind him.