Their presence could be felt even though they were nowhere to be found. Everyone was on edge for the incoming attack of the mighty gods except for one person. He appeared the least concerned of the lot, playing various medleys on Duel-GX accompanied with Lilith’s flawless violin skills. It was expected of her anyway since a cyborg would be programmed to be nothing but perfect. Whatever he was doing didn’t backfired though - Arius’s men appeared to be revitalized by the music with so much intensity that they appeared to be rising above the heavy dread.

“Everyone’s fighting a war and there you are fooling away with the piano!” Themis pulled him away by the ear. “Do you not understand the situation?!”

“Of course I do,” Klavier pulled a cheeky smile. “But what good will it be if everyone thinks negatively?”

“Idiot. You’re just going to make them panic when they arrive.”

“So this is what you do when you’re not fighting,” Arius said, now wearing a full set of metal protective gear. “It certainly fits you, Vanros.”

“Please call me by Klavier,” he said.

“You have my thanks. My men weren’t at the best of their game when the gods invaded. But now, they look so much better.”

“Sire, please tell them that they’d better survive if they want to hear more of our music. What they heard is not the best we’ve got,” his words drew glares from his team.

“Very well. We have a deal,” Arius turned around, walking towards the army that gathered outside of the refugee camp.

“Did you really have to say that?” Themis asked. “You know we can’t play music as well as you do.”

“You can always learn,” he replied. “Anyway, you guys already know about the battle plan, right?”

“Um, yeah,” Michele said. “Can we go through it one more time?”

“Alright,” he beckoned the group over and once they gathered, he begun. “We’re up against an enemy that wields lightning. So, make sure you all have some form of lightning nullifier in your possession. However, take note that not all may use lightning, so adjust your battle strategies accordingly.”

“Will, Aem and Amy, you’ll take the defensive posts. Make sure the civilians are evacuated fast enough to keep them away from the crossfire. Themis, your white magic isn’t working at the moment, so you’ll join Will and assist him.”

“Roger!” she grinned from ear to ear at the cost of Aem’s smile.

“Lilith and Duel-GX will support both Michele and I. We will be together with Arius and his men in the frontlines. If you see us struggling, do help out but only if you’ve done what you’re supposed to do. Is there anything else?”

“Um,” Michele said. “I found this thing in Shida’s lab the other day.”

She pulled out a piece of wrapped cloth from her pocket, unfolding it to reveal a broken black blade. He seized it at once, joining it together with the black sword he carried.

“Nice. Sirkius can fight at his full strength now,” he said.

He swung the black sword across just before the loose edge could hit the floor, unleashing a wave of ice that traced the tip of the blade onto the ground, slicing it open with a violent jolt. Klavier lifted the sword up, staring at the now complete weapon, absent of any forms of flaws.

“What the heck did you just do?” Michele asked.

“Reformed Sirkius using the ‘Niflheimr’ technique,” he said, the stunt rousing applause from those that witnessed it.

“What?”

“Ice magic.”

“Is there something you can’t do?”

“I don’t know. Woo-ing you?”

“You’re not hooking me up, idiot,” she punched his forehead, rubbing her knuckles hard enough for him to stagger back.

“I was just kidding, okay? Besides, I wouldn’t want to be unfaithful to my wife back home.”

“Your wife? The heck are you spouting?”

“So not only is he already forty-four,” Themis’s voice traced from the back. “He’s also married. Wow.”

“Themis, don’t tell me this dimwit is older than he looks,” Michele said.

“He is. How else would he get so many battle scars?”

“You saw them too, huh?” her mind flashed the instance where she saw his bare body full of the marks along with the dragon tattoo on the back.

“In any case,” Klavier said. “Time to move out. The enemy will not wait for us. Will, take charge of the evacuation.”

“Got it,” he tapped on Aem’s and Amy’s shoulders before they dashed out of sight. Themis’s face drained of all color.

“Waaah! Wait for me!” Themis trotted behind, running at a speed that made her look like a slowpoke compared to them.

“Proceeding with master’s order,” Lilith said, stowing away her violin in Duel-GX. “Will return when requested.”

She jumped onto Duel-GX’s head, riding it towards another location away from Arius, leaving both Michele and Klavier as the remaining people on the post.

“So, what do we do now?” Michele placed her hands at the back of her head.

“Get ready, of course,” he stashed both the black and white swords at the right of his waist.

“Why bring both when you can only use one?”

“In case I want to capture and torture somebody from the enemy’s side, I’ll use Leorone,” he returned an eerie smile. “But I would normally use Sirkius to get the small fries out of the way.”

Michele didn’t know whether to be scared or to be relieved. Klavier didn’t come off as a cold blood killer, at least from what she saw throughout their journey. With an enemy that strived to erase their existence from Grand Gaia, her fingers tingled with excitement thinking about witnessing the other side of the coin.

“Sire!” one of Arius’s men shouted. “They’re here! The ones who killed our brothers!”

A small army, half the size of Arius’s marched in from beyond the horizon. But the men weren’t the least encouraged by the tiny turnout. In fact, they appeared shaken by their very presence. Even Michele wasn’t spared from the daunting chill. She glanced at Klavier, hoping to look for some support, but he, too, appeared petrified.

“What are we going to do?” Michele asked.

“Don’t falter, men!” Arius shouted, drawing his sword. “We can do this.”

“But sir, what can we possibly do with our current force against the elite enemy?” one of his men asked.

“Actually, it’s okay to be afraid,” Klavier said.

“Are you trying to encourage the enemy to win?” Arius asked.

“No,” a smirk surfaced on Klavier’s face. “What matters is whether you become the master of the fear, or you become the slave. So, which one is it?”

“That’s…” Even that got Arius to think about it. They looked at each other, doubt evident in their faces. Klavier sounded scary talking about deep topics like these, a far cry from his usual cheery self she would see outside of battle.

“We can do this, sir,” one of the men said, his body covered with ice except on the face. “We won’t let it stop us like the last time.”

“Sergio,” Arius said. “You heard him, guys. Let’s show them whose boss!”

“So you’re not as wimpy as you appear to be after all,” Klavier said, holding onto the handle of the black sword. “Well, get into your formations. They’ll be upon us in a matter of seconds.”

On the frontline of the gods army was a god wearing predominantly golden armor that had the consistent designs of a golden dragon in it. A red cape flew behind him as he ran forward, leading the charge with his electric double edged sword fully drawn out. He swung it across, zapping the earth with deadly lightning rattled Arius and his men out of their formation. As if that was not bad enough, the men behind the initiator entered into a series of blade spinning, slicing the unlucky ones into ribbons.

“Fall back! Fall back!” Arius shouted as the soldiers fell faster than they could retaliate.

“Activate plan B,” Klavier said, stabbing his opponent through the neck with the black blade.

“Plan B?” Michele asked.

“Get Arius and his men away from this place,” he said, summoning a small ball of energy that massed up on the hilt. A blueish aura danced over Klavier’s brow, oozing out of the tight ball of energy. It was so powerful that the ground around him shattered into fine dust. She opened her mouth, about to shout the order when Klavier slammed his sword down to the ground, sending pillars of sharp earth from the ground up, breaking the formation that Arius desperately kept in control. Despite the strength of the spell casted, the gods appeared to have anticipated the attack, diving away from the focal area. They swung their swords at Klavier from his blind spot only for a beam of red light to blaze from his side that vaporized those that were within the range.

“Sirkius got mad at me for not reciting the order,” Klavier mumbled, popping the white sword out of its scabbard, smashing the butt of the sword at one of the unwary attackers on the chin that sent him flying.

“What was that?” Arius asked.

“Dragon Fury Style, Churning Earth. Signature magic move of Sirkius.”

“Idiot, you guys still have the time to talk when your lives are on the line,” Michele said, watching a blade come down at her. But her reflex was faster. She blocked it with her axes, head-butting the attacker before thrusting the weapon onto his torso.

“That’s master for you,” an orange-haired man wearing an eyepatch on his right eye said, swinging his multiple swords at a speed beyond comprehension that shredded his opponent. “You’d best mind your own business, pipsqueak.”

“L-Luther?! Since when did you side us?”

“I’m not siding with you, numbskull. I’m only here to have a ride of my life. Now,” Luther flexed his black claws. “You guys seriously better get out of the way. Because this show is only going to get hotter from here.”

Klavier pointed to the back using his thumb. Without a second to lose, Arius got his men to withdraw as the boiling Luther provoked the attention of the remaining gods. Before their adversaries could react, Luther blew himself up, along with the nearby attackers, leaving nothing but black ash in its aftermath.

The blow that Luther did to the enemy turned the tables around. Arius and his men, who were formerly on the defensive, were now pushing the shaken gods’ army back. But it wasn’t like they could be destroyed anytime soon. Their opponents regrouped into a tight cluster, fighting against them with enough endurance to bring it back to a stalemate.

Now was the time to strike. Michele dashed forward, swinging her axes wildly, creating a ring of fire around her allies that endowed their weapons with a flame that didn’t burn their hands. That granted Arius’s men the much needed boost - so not only did they hurt with their chilly strikes, it also burned with her magical fire. Her enhancement seemed to be working - the enemy’s formation was beginning to break apart to the relief of Arius and his men. The end was in sight, they could finally finish this and return home.

But it was only the start of the nightmare. The same god that started the attack thundered down on them, burning even more of Arius’s men to crisp. He swung his sword across, lightning tracing the tip of his blade as it electrocuted those that were near him. Even Michele wasn’t spared from it, the torment of the strike pooled at her side to the point that standing was difficult.

With Arius and what was left of his army at the mercy of the gods’ army’s commander, he pummeled it down once more, no doubt displaying the superiority that he commanded in the final attack. But before it could hit them, a thin line of black intercepted it, the two metals clanging so loud that the sound reverberated across the land.

“Looks like I was on time,” Klavier said, a smile breaking on his face as the victims whimpered away.

“Hmph, to see Lord Dragon in the flesh,” the god said. “You sure are a meddlesome one.”

“Right back at you, Crusher God Uda,” Klavier broke the clash between them.

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The explosions and clangs of metal could be heard even though they were a couple of kilometers away. The thought of people dying in this much dreaded war with the gods sent a chilly sensation down Themis’s spine. However, Will seemed to have things under control, utilizing his no-nonsense flair to influence the reluctant civilians to get away from the fighting.

“Themis,” Will said. “I need your help to take care of the women and the elderly. Aem and Amy are dealing with those at the front of the march. Can you do it?”

“S-Sure,” her stomach churned with a tingling sensation. She could practically hear her own subconscious screaming his name like a fan girl would to a celebrity.

It was like a dream come true. It mattered not the kind of situation they were in. All she cared about was that she finally had some kind of ‘alone’ time with Will. There were a lot of things she wanted to say, yet her voice won’t come out.

Just as she finally opened her mouth to speak, her eyes focused on the tense expression on Will’s face as he directed the less fortunate with a gentle hand. She puffed out her chest, rushing over to his side in hopes to attract his attention.

A red flash zipped past the corners of her eyes. She turned to look at it, staring at a giant fireball that was coming down on them at a speed beyond any defenseless people could run. Without hesitation, she pulled the elder that struggled in his footsteps aside, diving away from the attack just before it could destroy them.

“Go!” Will said, pulling his sword and shield. “Their safety takes priority!”

He swung an uppercut with his sword, sending a wave of light energy ripping across the ground, intercepting another meteor that targeted the area. She could take her time to watch, but the sudden jerking she did to the old man had him grunting.

“It’s a real surprise that someone’s able to deflect my fireballs like that,” a wicked voice rung in their ears.

A woman clad in predominantly red robe with a witch hat designed to look like a dragon’s head descended on them. She stayed afloat with the help of her dragon-design broom, sitting on it like a real stereotypical witch. On her hand was a black metal staff that spewed flames that threatened to go out of control.

“Who are you?” Will asked, dragging his foot forward.

“Will?” Themis asked.

“Go, I’ll handle this.”

It appeared that she had no other choice. The elder she tackled earlier was too injured to recover from the fall properly. She scooped him up, ignoring the increased weight bearing down on her legs as she took flight. The other civilians followed suit, moving as fast as they could when a wall of fire blocked their path.

“You’re not going anywhere,” the red witch said.

Themis bit her lip. If she could use her magic, she would have teleported them out of the place without a hitch. But it won’t work no matter how hard she tried; the power would just fizzle out on her with every attempt made.

“Mommy, I’m scared,” a young boy hid behind his terrified mother, who was also burdened with an infant that refused to stop crying as the heat intensified.

“Ulkina,” Will gritted his teeth. “How could you point your sword at us humans when you are one yourself?”

“Does it matter?” she threw a fireball which was deflected easily with a swing of the shield. “You all will fall eventually. Look at you, holding back just because a few people can’t defend themselves.”

“Hey you!” Themis shouted, putting down the elder slowly as she pulled out her wand. “You want to eat this?”

“Don’t get provoked by the enemy, Themis,” Will said. “Remember our objective.”

“But…”

“I understand your sentiment. But we can’t afford to fight her with so many of them on our backs.”

“So what are we going to do?”

“I’ll hold her back. You’ll need to get them through the firewall while I distract her. Got it?”

She gulped at the notion of getting burned. “Um...if it’s for their safety, I guess I can do it.”

“Go. It won’t take long before she will notice what we’re doing.”

Will broke into a sprint, throwing his shield that spun like a disc towards Ulkina. She raised her black staff, deflecting the attack almost effortlessly.

“You’ve got quite the cheek to fight me with your handicap,” Ulkina said. “Let’s see how you handle this.”

The tip of her staff lighted up, as she pointed it at Themis. Before she could blink her eyes, a pillar of flames blazed towards her, moving so fast that it was impossible to evade it.

“Where is the magic when I need it the most?!” she shouted as she attempted to fan the blaze away from her, ignoring the intense bites it made on her arms.

“Sing, Lexida,” a soothing voice said overhead.

The fire in front of her froze into several icicles joined together. In front of Will was a lady wearing a royal blue dress, modified with a chest plate and groin guard. Clenched on her left hand was a double edged sword with a matching color.

“So you decided to show up, Ice Goddess Selena,” a smirk surfaced on Ulkina’s face. “That’ll make things more convenient for me.”