It wasn’t like she got to wield Lexida every day. She could hear it sing her name in praise for her bravery, though it knew that fighting was the last thing in Selena’s mind. But with Arius in a desperate struggle against the thunder god, she couldn’t just sit back and watch his people die.

“Your highness!” Lucina jumped in, still wearing the brown cloak that covered her body. “You shouldn’t…”

“Lucina,” Selena returned a cold stare. “Get the civilians out of this place. I’ll take on this witch.”

“Are you sure about it?” Will asked.

“Do as I say. I can’t guarantee your safety if you don’t.”

“R-Right away, ma’am,” Lucina tumbled away, beckoning Will and Themis over. “Be careful…”

“That’s real sweet of you,” Ulkina said, idling on her broom. “Putting your life on the line for the sake of others.”

“Are you done talking?” Selena pointed her sword at Ulkina, leveraging the weight forward before bursting into a sprint.

She swung Lexida across, sending a wave of ice only for it to be melted effortlessly under Ulkina’s black magic.

“I like that look of yours,” Ulkina said, spinning her staff wildly, summoning a rain of meteors down on them.

There was no time to think. Selena danced about, evading the individual flaming rocks before thrusting her sword towards the somewhat defenseless opponent. But the smirk on Ulkina’s face appeared to tell her that she was wrong; Ulkina tilted her head to the side, dodging the hit so narrowly that if Selena could alter the course of Lexida, she would have cut the head off.

But Ulkina was faster - she swung her staff across, smashing Selena’s face so hard that it felt like she was rammed over by a hammer. Selena somersaulted back, landing softly on the ground, unable to take her eyes off the drops of blood that found its way down.

“What happened? You used to be so much faster and stronger,” Ulkina said, resting the staff on her shoulder.

“It’s none of your business,” Selena replied, returning to her original stance.

She cursed under her breath. The god’s power was something to reckon with. But she wasn’t about to give up just yet. Selena dashed forward, swinging Lexida only for Ulkina to jump away in full anticipation of the attack. She turned around, unloading a wave of ice, a small part of it sliced her opponent on the side, but the wound was far too shallow to properly incapacitate her.

Ulkina flew high into the air, unleashing another wave of flames that covered practically every possible escape route open. She bit her lip, holding the sword close to her waist as she watched the inferno blazed towards her. She mumbled a spell under her breath, swinging Lexida with renewed strength and vigor, freezing the entire blast when it touched the blade.

“Can’t believe that you fell for it,” Ulkina’s voice trailed behind her.

She turned around, fear finally taking hold of her composure. The mouth of Ulkina’s staff lit as a fiery mix of molten rock materialized on it. Selena turned around, but it was already too late. The fireball burned onto her shoulder, vaporizing the armor and cloth to reveal a grilled part of her skin.

“Is this the finest of you humans?” Ulkina asked, raising her staff at her. The screams of her subconscious rung in her ear, but the burns had practically paralyzed her. She shouldn’t have shoved the help Lucina offered. Now, at the mercy of the enemy, all she could do now was to hope that Lexida would perform a miracle. A deafening clash of metal filled her ears with a ringing silence, the wind above her head moved so quickly that it felt like it was a gust. She looked up, staring at a petite lady wearing a tutu-like skirt.

“Are you alright, your highness? You don’t look so good right now,” the lady said.

“Who are you? That technique… where did you learn that from?”

“Themis. I just mimicked Vanros Klavier’s favorite blocking technique. That’s all, yes?”

“Vanros?”

“Hmph, I’m surprised his name dazes you even in the middle of a battle,” Themis pushed the staff off. “Since you can’t handle this on your own, I’ll help you out.”

“Thanks,” a gentle smile surfaced on her face.

“A two-on-one isn’t a fair battle,” Ulkina commented. “It doesn’t matter. The gods will approve my presence once I clear you two.”

The duo jumped away from the point of contact. Even with the reinforcements, Ulkina remained unfazed by the mere numbers, activating a barrier of fire around her each time they attempted to get close. The chill on her left hand grew stronger by the minute, almost as though Lexida was beckoning her for her attention. But that was about to turn around - Selena swung Lexida with the renewed vigor and strength, clashing against the flaming protection. She mumbled a spell under her breath, freezing the wall that encased the fire witch.

Now frozen solid, her target had no means to defend herself. Selena swung her sword across, unleashing another wave of ice that toppled the top of the crystal tower over. But she took too long. Ulkina melted the remaining ice that encased her body, thrusting her staff right into Selena’s abdomen.

“That didn’t really hurt, goddess,” Ulkina pulled the weapon out, watching Selena collapse without any form of resistance to the ground. She raised the stake on her, its tip gleaming in the sunlight.

“Did you forget about me?” Themis bounced high into the air behind Ulkina, smashing her wand flat on the head. It was so hard that she could have heard bones cracking. Blood trickled down her face as she turned around only to get slapped hard on the cheek with the jewel wand. Themis leveraged her weight forward, pointing the jewel wand as if it was an actual sword. She burst into a sprint, swinging it with so much speed and force that it swept the fire witch away.

“That’ll keep her down for now,” Themis said, stowing her bloody wand away.

“You have my thanks,” Selena said.

“Come on, Klavier’s probably not done yet,” Themis trotted towards the area where agonizing screams and metal clashing with metal were music to their ears. “He’ll probably need your support too.”

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Uda appeared faster than ever, preventing Klavier from breaking away to catch his breath for even just a second. The unrelenting opponent swept any forms of reinforcements away from them, keeping them confined in a space where only the two could stand on. Klavier deflected Uda’s strike, but the strain it left from overexertion brought him to his knees.

“It’s clear that you can’t keep up,” Uda said, sending him flying across the plains with an overpowering attack. “What have you been doing these fifteen years, Vanros Klavier?”

“This used to be so easy,” Klavier mumbled, firing a mini red beam at Uda only for it to be deflected away from him.

“You humans are weak,” Uda smashed him back to earth. “Does age grow on you so fast that you can’t keep up anymore?”

“It’s true that we’re weak,” Klavier broke the fall, wiping the blood that trickled down his forehead. “How is it, then, that a human like me is able to keep standing no matter how much you hit me?”

“You’re trying to win a battle that’s already lost,” Uda said.

“What makes you think I have lost?” Klavier dived below the incoming strike, scooping up Uda by the thighs and lifted him off the ground. With his arm locked in his grasp, he collapsed backwards, smashing him right back down to the ground for a crippling blow to the back. The impact was so great that it left Uda somewhat paralyzed for a good few seconds.

“You’ve got moves for an aged swordsman,” Uda said, blocking Klavier’s attack before Sirkius could stab through his throat. “Why fight when you know the gods are way stronger?”

“Why kill the innocent people when you can try talking to them?” Klavier popped the white sword out of the scabbard in front of Uda’s chin, sending him into the air. “We don’t fight because we like it. We fight to defend ourselves.”

“How noble of you to say that. Fine,” Uda sheathed his lightning sword. “I’ll hear no more from you.”

Uda stood his ground, staring intensely at Klavier as though he was trying to read the next move Klavier was going to make. That stance was familiar - Klavier had seen him used that once in a distant past and he recalled the brutality of that strike that almost left him permanently disabled.

It happened when he was trying to save two kids that appeared like Selena and Lucina nearly fifteen years back. Klavier, along with a group of Summoners were tasked to fight off the gods that were invading Sama kingdom after they received a distress call from them. But their task was simple - assist in the civilian evacuation operation.

It was only in their imagination. The hordes of gods that attacked were so huge that all defenses were breached within the first few hours of the siege, leaving absolutely no time for the innocent people to get away from the conflict. Among those caught in it were the two children; one that had straight long blue hair and the other had fin-like ears popping out of her cotton-candy hair. The girl with the straight hair tripped over her long blue dress and before she had a chance to stand up, a yellow armored god was right before them, his lightning sword raised high in the air. Klavier swooped down from the rooftop, swinging his black sword that pushed the god’s bloodthirsty blade away.

“Hmph, for a human to stop my attack like that,” the lightning god said. “You are no ordinary one.”

“Why are you doing this?” Klavier shifted his stance.

“It’s none of your business,” he burst forward so quickly that the air around him appeared to be cut by it. But Klavier’s reflexes outmatched the charge - he raised his sword in a fraction of a second, stopping the relentless strike from going any further.

“Go,” Klavier said to the kids. “I’ll take care of this.”

“But mister…” the girl with the odd ears said.

“Get out of here now!”

“Where do you think you’re looking at?” the thunder god’s voice bellowed from the heavens. He looked up, staring at a tiny figure in the sky gradually increase in size until he could make out the shape of a human-like body. On his hand was the sword crackling with lightning, pointed straight down at him.

Klavier jumped away before the attack could hit him. But the landing did more than just dig the sword into the ground. It sent shockwaves across the entire land, lighting them up with electricity that ripped through Klavier’s body.

“Damn,” Klavier mumbled, his right hand and leg completely numbed. “What kind of sick attack is that?”

“I told you already,” the god said, sheathing his sword. “It’s none of your business.”

In a fraction of a second, the god was right before him, swinging his sword so fast that Klavier didn’t even have the time to block or dodge the attack. The blade ripped through his body as he was sent into the air, the slash so deep that the blood oozing out of it appeared black for a moment. He touched down on the ground, his hearing muffled, his vision blurred so badly that the abyss wrapped it whole.

But that wasn’t going to happen this time. Klavier sheathed his black sword, entering into the same stance that Uda was in. In a blink of an eye, Uda was right before him, his blade moving at an impossible speed just like the last time he fought him. Klavier pulled his sword out so hard and fast that the draw matched Uda’s, their swords colliding into a clash that shook the air so violently it felt like an earthquake for a moment.

Uda raised his sword high the air, lightning crackling from it as if he was trying to intimidate Klavier. But that block was just a prelude. Klavier took a step back, sheathing his sword once more as he pulled Uda along with him, taking advantage of the aftermath of their high velocity clash. He ripped it out once more, breaking through all the armor that protected Uda’s chest and deep into his flesh as he was sent into the air.

It was like the pressure in the atmosphere turned off. Klavier dug his black sword to the ground as he fell onto his knees. His body was aching, jittery from the immense amount of energy that the technique drained out of him. He struggled back up, regulating his shallow breath as he refocused on the Uda splayed on the ground.

“To think that a human can stop me,” Uda said weakly as he forced himself up but not without a great deal of difficulty. He seized his sword, thrusting his sword towards the now defenseless Klavier when it was pushed off course.

“You used that technique again, didn’t you?” the croissant-haired girl stepped in.

“Michele!”

“Don’t look so surprised. I’ve seen you use that enough times to know how much it strains you.”

“Get out of the way, woman,” Uda slid the blade across the ground, electrocuting those that were near him. But the effect was not as strong as it used to be, though Michele still toppled over, her body twitching uncontrollably.

“Where are you looking?” Klavier asked, holding his sword steady, swinging it so fast that it shredded Uda in different angles.

Klavier fell to his knees again, the weight bearing down his shoulders so immense that it threatened to crush it. But his best wasn’t enough - Uda stood back up in spite of sustaining already grievous wounds, the desire for battle burning endlessly in his eyes.

“I’ll admit that that technique is good. But that’s about all you can do, human,” Uda said, swinging this sword down at Klavier. Instincts seized his body, he raised the blade in a desperate final stand.

“I can’t lose!” Klavier said, bringing himself back to his feet. “Not this time. Not after what you’ve done to the Sama people!”

Uda pressed harder on him, forcing him back to his knees. Lightning surged in Uda’s blade, buzzing deafeningly loud in Klavier’s ears as it inched closer to his face.

“Sing, Lexida,” a soothing voice said as a wave of ice swept Uda away.

“Klavier!” Themis jumped in front of him.

“Why must people keep meddling with my target?” Uda swept off the ice on his shoulders. “Fine, I’ll take all of you on.”

“Your opponent is me,” Klavier picked himself up, but could not stand upright anymore. “Themis, please help Michele. It’ll be over in a flash.”

He sheathed his sword, his hand close to its handle as Uda rushed forward in an inhuman speed. Alas, just as Uda was right before Klavier, he forced the sword out of its scabbard, outpacing his opponent’s swing, his blade digging far deeper into the already battered body as he shot Uda up into air once more. No one, not even a god of his caliber could survive that attack twice, at least in Klavier’s most recent memories of it. But that was all he could do. The strain was so immense that his body practically shut down on him. He collapsed to the ground head first, the cold embrace of the abyss cloaking over him as everything blacked out.