The shrine maiden was anything but weak. She cut down numerous monsters that lurked in the corners, protecting them from ambushes that even Klavier did not anticipate. She only had one issue: her fighting techniques were appeared to be self-taught, leaving a lot of loopholes that could potentially be exploited by observant opponents. Klavier was pretty sure that she knew that problem herself, practicing diligently day in day out as her maiden friends claimed.

The group entered into the shrine, bowing to the shrine guardian statue that sat at the altar, its eyes looking straight at them. Amul sat down on the clean timber floor, ordering Klavier to show his blue robe for examination. He laid it out, every part of its fabric revealed before the maiden.

Fear was written all over Amul’s face the moment she touched the robe. The energy was so strong that it ignited a flame on where her hand was, burning it until only black ashes were left.

“This can’t be good news,” Klavier concluded. “So, what was that about?”

“The gods are attacking,” Amul said, unable to hide the grim frown on her face. “They come in numbers far beyond the capability of La Veda’s defence can cope.”

“I see,” Klavier said. “We’ve got to warn them first in that case.”

“We’ve got to hurry then,” Will said. “Amul, I would like to request that you evacuate your people. We won’t know when they will attack.”

“Very well,” she replied.

\*\*

Klavier found himself staring at the ceiling. He tossed and turned on his wooden bed, but it done no good in making him fall asleep. The grim message of the invasion really got to his nerves. The humans did nothing to deserve such a punishment and yet they would dare to slay their own creation? It was anything but forgivable.

He needed answers. The gods couldn’t have decided to kill the humans overnight. It must have been plotted over a long period of time, probably way before he came into existence. He got up from the bed, his eyes set upon the black sword that leaned against the wall. It was as though it was beckoning him over, shining luminously in the moonlight. Just as he was about to reach for it, a green orb of light hovered in between them, morphing itself into what appeared like a young girl wearing a predominantly lime green dress. There was a pink-purple ribbon attached on her back which kept the clothing together. On her head was a golden yellow tiara, blending with her wavy, dirty blonde hair color well enough to be hardly noticeable.

The curious one hugged his sword and attempted to sneak out of the room only to be stopped by Klavier’s watchful eyes.

“Okay,” he said slowly. “What in the world are you doing with my sword?”

“Uh oh,” she mumbled. “Luna-!”

Like he would allow her to call for reinforcements. Klavier covered her mouth tight with his hand, forcing her arm to the back with the other. She let out a muffled shriek as he increased the pressure on her arm, eventually making her let go of the weapon.

“Shut up if you don’t want to die,” Klavier said. Even if he said that, he couldn’t shake off the feeling that he was messing with the wrong person.

“Let her go,” a firm voice came from behind. There was something sharp poking his back, probably a lance for that matter. He turned around, looking back at another lady, probably in her twenties. Her hair was long, silky black that stretched all the way to the back. She wore a bare neck one-piece dress that was primarily purple and black mixed together. A long, purplish lance was pointed at him, the tip so close that he could feel the sting of its poke.

“What if I don’t?” Klavier asked.

“I’ll slice off those hands of yours,” the gothic lady shifted her stance, ready for an all-out attack.

Klavier hooked onto the black sword with his leg, kicking it up high enough for him to grab onto it. He pulled the sword from the scabbard, blocking his opponent’s strike just before it could cut off his right hand. The hostage by his side screamed at the top of her lungs, muffled by the tight grip of his hand over her mouth.

“You didn’t consider your options carefully now, did you?” Klavier said. “I would have used this young lad beside me as my shield if I couldn’t block it on time.”

“Let her go,” she gritted her teeth.

“I will if you will cooperate with me. So,” he lowered his sword. “Who are you and what do you want with my weapon?”

“I’m Lunaris, one of the twelve Guardians,” she replied, maintaining her stance. “The one you’re holding onto is Luly. The gods call the spirit of Sirkius, saying that they need him at once.”

“You could have just told me that,” he pushed Luly back to her partner. “I’ll have to go wherever Sirkius is needed. He doesn’t work without his master as far as this is concerned.”

“Really?” Luly snatched his weapon.

He raised his eyebrows, watching the kid examine the material she just seized with awe worn all over her face. That moment of victory for her soon turned in a rather agonizing one. The tip of the sword started to lower gradually even as she strained herself to keep it up. Yet it was futile – the weapon came crashing on the floor, trapping Luly’s hand along with it.

“Sirkius is the kind that will go haywire if he is held by someone he doesn’t recognize,” he picked up the sword, sheathing it. “So, I presume I’ve already proven my point.”

“Very well,” Lunaris sighed. “Let’s go.”

She raised her hand, mumbling a spell under her breath. She ran the tip of her finger across the wall, creating a line on it. Light peeked out of the line. Lunaris sunk her hands into the line, pulling it apart to reveal a starry-night-like environment. Not a single human work and familiar earth ground could be found in there. Klavier took a step back, unable to shake off the doubt that started to dominate his mind. But before he could truly back out on it, something hard hit him from his bottom, launching him right into the portal.

“Seriously Luly,” he heard Lunaris’s voice. “You could just push him in.”

“But kicking people’s butt is fun!”

“No it’s not,” Klavier mumbled to himself, not minding the endless descent that had already stopped his heart for a split second. After what felt like a second, he landed onto a cold, black ground but not an ounce of pain was felt from the crash. He rose to his feet, his eyes making out a barely lit environment, fireflies being the only source of light in the area. The moving yellow bulbs of light eventually met with what appeared like a forest and in front of them was a piano that was well-worn with age.

“Before we can proceed,” Lunaris said, closing the portal behind them. “We need to summon Sirkius out of that sword. I believe you have the know-how to do that.”

“Yeah, show us your skills,” Luly said.

“Luly, can you not interrupt me when I’m speaking?”

“Sorry.”

“I see what you mean,” he picked up a ragged music score titled ‘Autumn Leaves’.

“Come on, play it! I heard its Sirkius’s favourite song!,” Luly said.

“It is. But he won’t be happy to hear that he is needed.”

“We’ll take care of that once he comes out,” Lunaris said. “Just get him out of his cage.”

“You’d better not regret this,” Klavier said as he begun at a soft, relatively fast pace. The moment he begun a moment of pause, other instrumental sounds not coming from his piano accompanied the music. But there wasn’t really a moment for him to think about the sudden increase of support to the otherwise bland song. It wasn’t a slow, soft ride throughout – he picked up the pace and volume, entering into a devilishly quick tempo that got Luly’s jaws hanging.

As the song entered into its final moments, the sword on his waist rose into the air, glowing in a dark purple light that threatened to drown the fireflies. The power grew so much that flares of it whipped across the ground, creating visible, deep scars that struck everywhere but Klavier.

The evil aura emitted from the weapon slowly died down, leaving nothing more than the destruction the summoning did. In front of the piano was a black hooded figure, carrying exactly the same sword as Klavier’s. Klavier couldn’t see the eyes beneath the hood, but he was very sure that Sirkius was really irritated.

“How nice of you to disturb my long nap, master,” the black hooded man said.

“That is Sirkius?” Lunaris asked.

“Not handsome at all,” Luly commented.

“Err, greetings sir Sirkius,” Lunaris said. “I’m Lunaris, one of the twelve Guardians and we’re requesting for your help.”

“Brush off, scrub. I wasn’t talking to you.”

“Wh-Why, you could just tell me off nicely.”

“Little girl,” his focus shifted to her. “Do you know what happens when someone summons me?”

“What?”

“There’s no need to tell you that,” he pulled the black sword hidden under his robes, raising it high into the air. Klavier stepped in between them, ripping the white sword out of its scabbard to block the strike when a wave of dark energy penetrated his feeble defence, blasting them both across the area.

“Is this the power you’ve been wielding the whole time, Klavier?” Lunaris asked, brushing off the burnt armor piece on her forearm.

“I don’t usually use the full power, but I’ve encountered his strength enough times to know the kind of adversity he is as an enemy,” he replied. “So, stay out of it. I’ll convince him to help us.”

“If you want my strength, then show me that you have what it takes to control this power of mine, master,” Sirkius said, pointing his sword at him.

“You haven’t changed a single bit even after fifteen years, Sirkius. Your master has grown old and feeble, but I’ll show you again if it pleases you,” Klavier replied.

The moment Klavier got into his combat-ready position, Sirkius was already right before him. Sirkius raised his sword into the air, ready to smash it down with all his might when Klavier took a step to the side, smacking him on the side with the scabbard.

“You’re still too soft even after all these years, master,” Sirkius commented, slashing all around him that caught Klavier off-guard. Blood spewed out from the shallow wound on his chest, the blade tearing a substantial part of his clothing.

But it was too early to submit. Klavier stepped aside, swinging his sword with all his might only for it to be blocked effortlessly by the hooded figure. He broke the clash, unleashing a flurry of slashes in an attempt to subdue Sirkius. Even his best wasn’t enough – Sirkius evaded each and every one of the attacks, countering with a devastating cut to the back once Klavier ran out of steam.

“This is what happens when you summon me,” Sirkius wiped the blood off the black sword. “I tolerate none less than perfection in the control of the sword.”

“You talk quite a bit, you know that?” Klavier asked, slashing across his opponent’s side before he could react. This time, it was deep enough to reveal a depression in his flesh. Sirkius jammed his teeth together as though he was suppressing the urge to scream.

“That small thing won’t stop me,” Sirkius said, bursting towards Klavier. But the speed was drastically slowed down, giving him enough time to evade the incoming attack with tiny step to the side before entering into a massively fast sword dance.

Klavier broke the clashes between them, sheathing his sword. Sirkius smirked at that sight, mimicking Klavier’s stance. The moment they got into position, it was like time stood still as they waited out for the moment.

“B~oring!” Luly said loudly but even that did not distract Klavier from his target. At that moment, both Klavier and Sirkius pressed their right foot forward, rocketing their way to each other. Both of them swung their swords at a speed that it was practically impossible to see the angle of the swing. But all that could be seen was that Klavier was rooted on the ground at his final pose after executing the technique, his opponent sent high into the air before crashing down without any form of cushioning

“What? It’s over already?” Luly asked.

“Shut your trap, Luly. It’s not like it’s so easy to use that technique,” Klavier said.

“Dammit,” Sirkius said, curling into a ball. “It still stings even after all these years.”

“Right back at you, hothead. Come on, we need your help and we’ve done what was needed.”

“I will,” Sirkius rose back up. “My sword is yours to command.”

“Very well. Lunaris, we’ve got his cooperation.”

“Are you sure he will?” she raised an eyebrow, inspecting him closely.

“You have my word for it. But,” he moved so close that Lunaris could see what was beneath the hood. “I can and will turn against you if I suspect something is off.”

“Let’s go already. Time’s a wasting,” Klavier said.

“Take this, master,” Sirkius said, summoning a small, white orb of energy in front of both Lunaris and Klavier. The moment they touched it, a wave of refreshing energy swept through them, stopping the bleeding and regenerating the flesh that was destroyed in the fight earlier.

“You’re a strange weapon soul, you know that,” Luly said. “First, you beat the crap out of your master and my friend, and now you just healed them.”

“Do you have a problem with that, kid?” Sirkius asked.

“No,” she squeaked.

“Good.”

“Now that we have his help, we now need to make Klavier masquerade as a Guardian of the gods,” Lunaris said. “They’ll be able to tell immediately if one is a Guardian to start, but I believe you can deceive them easily with your power.”

“I see where this is going,” Sirkius said. “Basically, you want master to be around just in case something screws up.”

“Yeah. How did you know that?”

“I’m called a god for a reason.”

“Okay,” she said slowly. “So you know the grand plan already before I said it.”

“Correct. I will go along with your plan. It’s not the best, but it’ll do for now.”

“So what’s all this about?” Klavier asked.

“We’ll get straight to the point,” Lunaris said. “The gods are suspecting Sodis, the leader of the Guardians of treason. We need to bring counter evidence if we’re going to avoid him from being executed.”

“I see. I guess we’ll find out more information as we go along.”