

Two years ago, Jessa had thought she was hot shit. She was a level eighty [Rogue] who knew all the tricks: detecting and setting traps, moving silently and unseen, and making sudden and unexpected attacks. She had a respectable dexterity of seventy at her level, thanks to some lucky passive skills.

But now, after two years of training with Franky and Sarena, she is a [Shadowblade], a class every bit as good as a [Ninja] or an [Assassin], and incomparably better than her old class. Before, she was a pain in ass, now, she is lethal.

She sets her hand on an elegant, blonde woman's shoulder. The woman starts, squeaks, and quickly turns in surprise.

Jessa places a finger over her lips.

"You're being tailed. Follow me. It's dangerous out here in the open."

"Um..."

Jessa grabs the woman's hand and pulls.

"Follow."

The woman, thankfully, allows herself to be pulled while Sarena takes up the rear. Jessa isn't worried for her companion. The [Cryomancer] has a few passives and automatic skills that will defend her.

"W-where are we going?" the woman asks.

Jessa frowns. She can feel several eyes on them and glimpses two people jumping from roof to roof above them with such precise and fluid movement she may not have spotted them without her high perception and helpful skills.

She clicks her tongue in annoyance. "Away from here. Why are people following you? What kind of [Lady] are you?"

"I'm not sure. I think I asked some questions I shouldn't have, and no, I'm not a [Lady]. I'm a [Archpriestess]."

"An [Archpri- No, nevermind. Whatever. That probably explains why [Assassins] are after you."

"What?" the woman looks up but sees nothing on the roof. If she had been wearing her mask, then the enchantments would have seen through the stealth skills, but her eyesight alone is not enough.

"If-if it's dangerous, you can leave me-"

"Shut up!" Jessa orders. "I'm helping you because it's the right thing to do, so just keep your mouth shut and keep up! We just have to get away from all these people."

The woman stares at Jessa's back in wonder. Someone willing to go out of her way for a random woman, a stranger whom they do not know, is rare. More than that, to put one's self in harm's way for that stranger is downright heroic.

"Jessica."

"Hm?"

"My name is Jessica. Thank you."

Jessa chuckles. "Really? Ha! Jessica, Jessica... My name's Jessa. Oh, and the silent one behind you is Sara. We're div-shit."

Jessa quickly pulls Jessica out of the way as a dagger flies past where she stood merely moments ago. .

"Well, at least they aren't trying to kill you. They aimed for your legs."

The three girls run through side streets, having left behind the bustle of the bazaar.

They exit from a narrow alley and enter into a wide area behind several buildings.

"Shit!" Jessa stops in front of the other two. "It's a trap!"

From the shadows, a dozen garbed men reveal themselves, their weapons already out and ready.

Jessa turns around and abruptly stops before she can try to flee. From the alley the trio came from, a man covered in wires strolls towards them at a slow pace. Behind him, a wall of tangled wires shrouds the light of the avenue. She turns all the way around. Every other exit is covered.

"Fuck," she curses, reaching into one of her many packs and pulling out several of her knives. Sarena does the same, pointing her staff at the wiry man.

"Little flies, buzzing about... Unable to see the web," the man muses. He casually strums his fingers through the air, and thousands of meters of wire twitch and glitter in the light. From the movement, Jessa realizes exactly how badly she fucked up. They are trapped. The exits, buildings, and even the roofs have been sealed off.

She lowers her center of gravity and faces him whom she deems to be the greatest threat. “Who are you? What do you want?” she asks.

The man tilts his head. Jessa has the distinct feeling the man is smiling “I am *The Spider*, and you are interfering with the Assassin’s Guild .”

The man takes another step forward. Jessa rapidly flicks her hands, releasing six daggers with exceptional precision.

The man grabs in the air, light glints off another string. With a slight tug, a wall of wires pulls taut and blocks the blades. He continues walking forward, and the wall falls away. “You are trapped and surrounded. Give up, and you will be granted a swift death.”

The three girls take another look around. More black garbed assassins have appeared while “The Spider” distracted them. Most are [Killers] or [Rogues], but there are three classed [Assassins] in their midst.

“[Grand calling], [Multi Summon],” Jessica raises her hands and calls forth her mana. “[Summon Angel][Blade Archetype].”

Jessica’s golden mana glows in the air above her.

“[Wire Field]:[Summoning Suppression],” Spider exclaims casually.

And just like that, the wires become visible once more as they shimmer with sickly, orange power.

Jessica’s spell fails as her mana is sucked out of her body, far more than the summoning should have needed. She falls to her knees.

“What?” Jessa asks as she looks at the panting [Archpriestess].

Jessica groans, her head aches from the mana drain. She probably would have lost consciousness if she had not canceled the spell.

“Come now, did you actually believe that will work?”

“Jessa.”

“What do you want, Sare?” Jessa asks.

Sarena takes a deep breath. “I’ll stop him. You, I need you to handle everyone else.”

“Oh? Stop me?”

Sarena, a woman with a demeanor as cold as ice, cracks a smile.

“[Spell Recall][Flash Freeze]”

Sarena’s mana flows out of her body in a torrent and into her staff, before exploding outwards and towards The Spider. Frost spreads rapidly across the ground as the spell reaches the [Assassin].

“Shit,” Spider curses and then folds his hand around his chest, “[Wire Cocoon]”

The glowing wires around him quickly converge, wrapping around him and creating a protective egg-shaped barrier.

The spell hits the cocoon and instantly coats it in a rime of frost. The wires, the walls, all is still but the wind.

Sarena falls to her knees, her mana is completely spent. Her mother’s magic is not something she should have used at her current level, the cost is just too high.

“Jessa, handle the rest.”

Jessa, realizing she is still staring at the frozen cocoon, turns. The other black garbed men are just as stunned, and have not moved at all.

“That idiot,” one of the [Assassins] says. He steps forward, unlimbering a spiked warhammer.

“We’ll finish it on our own. Brown, Pink, surround her.”

“Don’t fucking give me orders,” the one called Brown snarls. He draws two cleavers from behind his back. The large, powerful man moves to the right.

“The masters are going to be pissed that Spider is dead,” Pink laments while moving left.

The lower level assassins hang back, covering the avenues of escape. Their first tier classes are no match for the women in a one on one fight.

Jessa, seeing that they are surrounding her, starts to move towards Pink. [Triplicate Dagger], [Dagger Replication]. Jessa’s hands are a blur while she runs. Every dagger she grabs from her person replicates into three, then doubles again as it travels through the air. The [Assassins] dodge with ease, but they are distracted enough for her to reach Pink.

Pink smiles behind his mask. “[Bomb]: [Poison Fog]”

He drops a bomb on the floor which explodes in a green mist.

“[Dagger Vortex]”

Jessa throws a dagger with a spin. The dagger passes through the fog, creating a vortex that quickly clears the air.

“No,” Jessa says, finding Pink missing. The fog had hidden his movement.

With a mental curse at her stupidity, she flicks a dagger directly into the air. Then she looks up and finds Pink in the air. Five explosive bombs already falling on her position.

Her guess was right.

Her dagger passes the bombs which are about to hit her position.

“[Dagger Dash]”

Her skill activates and her body disappears and reappears to where her dagger is.

Pink’s eyes widen as she appears right beside him in the air. She stabs forward. Pink blocks with his arm.

“[Shadow Dash]” he whispers. His body disappears, leaving Jessa in the air.

She turns her head and curses.

“[Dagger Parry]”

Her hand moves, moving barely fast enough to block the cleaver, but not fast enough to redirect it. The force pushes her back enough that she hits a wall hard before falling in freefall.

She spits blood before using the wall as a spring. She jumps off, dodges another cleaver which wedges into the concrete.

“You’re good, young lady, but you should keep better track of your surroundings, [Shatting Swing].”

Jessa looks down, finding the third [Assassin] jumping to meet her with a midswing of his glowing hammer.

“[Barrier]!” is screamed. As the mana is spent, mana whirls over Jessa the moment before the hammer can impact. The barrier shudders and shatters, but the momentum is lost. The hammer hits the ground and Jessa has already dodged out of the way.

She looks towards the caster, finding Jessica breathing hard with an extended hand. She had cast the spell, but with mana she should not have given. Still, Jessa has to admit, she looks to be in better condition than Sarena. Sarena looks barely conscious. She practically used all her mana on the spell.

“Oi, idiots, knock her out,” the [Hammer Assassin] yells while getting ready to attack again.

But, before anyone can move, they hear the sound of ice shattering.

“You bitch!”

All eyes turn as Spider bursts out of his cocoon. His breath is frosty, and some of his wires have broken, but the worst thing the magic has seemed to have done is make him furious.

The [Peerless Wire Assassin] steps out of his cocoon. The wire that makes up it is no longer useful. Regardless, he has plenty more.

“You think you can kill me!?” he roars while spreading his arms to the side. He grabs a wire and pulls it towards him. The wire travels to his arms, pulling from his entire web. It moves across his skin.

“[Coiled Armor].”

The wires shift and twirl, covering him and all his skin with enough protection to make a [Guardian] jealous. His arm then transforms into a short lance of twirling wire that would dismember flesh with ease.

With his skill completely, Spider rushes forward, the ice cracking as he begins to rush. He jumps and extends his arm towards the exhausted [Cryomancer].

“No!” Jessica yells. Lacking mana, she jumps on Sarena to protect the woman.

Ring of [Fuck All Y’All] activated.

Casting [Kinetic Release] on position.

Jessica feels the ring on her finger release a dormant spell. A pulse of power from the ring races through the abandoned lot.. The ground cracks and the wind whistles around her. She watches in amazement as Spider is blown through the wall of a nearby building.. Further away, the effect is less, but everyone else also loses their footing.

Silence reigns. After only for a moment, Spyder emerges from the hole in the building through which he was blasted.

Boot sequence completed...
High-level threat detected.....
Initiating precision artillery strike.....

“You fucking Bitch. Die!”

Target acquired, please stand clear.

He roars and jumps out of the rubble. A red dot appears on his forehead

Gun Widow pauses in the process of making its wager. Its turret swivels till its barrel points south south-east. An ominous purple glow grows at the end of the barrel, then Gun Widow fires a lance of power that punches cleanly through the armory wall, and vanishes out into the night.

Gun Widow swivels its turret back to face the guard and finishes pushing coins into the pot.

The guard, who had been staring at the tank, licks his lips nervously and glances down at his hand. He looks back at Gun Widow.

“I fold,” he says, and carefully lays his cards face down on the table. He then slowly stands up before sprinting to get his superior.

Jessica watches as, almost in slow motion, Spider’s head is vaporized in a beam of violet energy, his hand inches from her face.

She watches in awe as his body collapses like a puppet with its strings cut.

Silence descends once more as the body of what was once a level 211 [Peerless Wire Assassin] leaks blood from the cauterized stump of a neck.

Strike complete. Analyzing...
Multiple mid-level threats detected...
Casting [Call of the Undead Guardian].

The air shimmers in front of Jessica and everyone catches a glimpse of a nightmarish spectre of bone and blade before its [Camouflage] activates.

“Multiple Threats Detected...,” Jessica recognizes Joker’s disembodied voice, **“Commencing Systematic Annihilation.”**

Jessica hunches over Sarena and covers her eyes and ears.

Then, the screaming starts.

Someone outside pounds hard on the carriage door, so hard that [Cleanly King] Tersus frowns at the audacity. Such force could damage the wax coating. Should the coating be damaged, the wood could rot, and then the rot might be inhaled and afflict the occupant with fungal pneumonia.. Even a small smudge might render his entire carriage uninhabitable.

“Enter,” he commands, making sure to use a stern voice so as the culprit knows he has done something wrong.

The doors are opened friskily and his [Tactician Knight] enters the carriage.

Tersus looks down at the man’s feet. He sees they are clean.

Good. It seems punishment will not be severe. If even a speck of dust had entered the carriage, Tersus would have had to take some rather drastic measures.

“My [Kin- Err [Cleanly King], I bring grave news.”

Tersus looks at the man leading his army. He almost made a mistake calling him by his old class. Then again, he cannot blame his [Tactician]. He only got the class upgrade a week ago. It will take time till people remember.

“What news, Ferrante?”

Ferrante bows. “An army half our size has been waiting for us.”

“An army?”

“Yes... monsters of some kind. They number less than half of ours, but he leads them.”

Tersus frowns. His first thought is that Ferrante is lying. But, his [Knights] cannot lie. He has a skill that forces them to tell him the truth.

“Who is ‘he’?” Tersus raises an eyebrow.

“[General] Rathos is leading.”

Tersus leans back into his sofa. He sits, imagining what would happen if he just... stayed in the carriage. If he didn't have to take care of all this military nonsense himself. He sighs.

“Ferrante, get me my horse. Let me take a look at this monster army.”

Several minutes later, Tersus is outside and gazing at, indeed, an army of monsters. Humanoid horses, Lizard people, Giant bipedal bulls...

They are waiting and in formation. They have taken a position with higher ground, no doubt to give range to [Archers].

“What is this?” A man in shiny, spotless armored robes rides up to the [Cleanly King] and asks.

Tersus looks at Odin's [Inquisitor], Joseph. “An army of monsters, led by that [General] you are searching for.”

Joseph gazes at the army. He can't discern the troops' levels due to the distance, but he knows who leads them.

“Retreat. Don't fight Rathos. He is not a [General] you can defeat easily.”

Tersus looks to his [Tactician Knight].

“What do you think?”

“We can win. Our men vastly outnumber them and they wield inferior equipment.” Ferrante points. “They wear monster hides for armor and wield weapons fashioned from bones. Our steel will cut through them easily.”

Joseph frowns. He's read the reports. Rathos has repeatedly defeated armies several times the size of his own. He has powerful skills and can act decisively should the situation require it. It is the reason why he's so desired. [Generals] of his caliber are beyond rare.

“If you plan to fight, then be careful and don't kill him. I need him alive.”

“You will not join?” asks the king.

The [Inquisitor] shakes his head. "I may be strong, but I cannot fight an army. If I am swarmed, I will die. No. For now, I will observe."

Joseph turns and leaves, causing Tersus to frown in confusion. The [Inquisitor] had joined in the war against Gravitus. This is the same. Is it because of Rathos maybe?

Tersus shrugs.

"Ferrante. I will be in my carriage. Call me when this battle is over."

He turns his pure white mare and rides back to his carriage.