

Crack, Science, Weird-Ass Events, and an Alternate Reality!

Section 4: Of Goobers and Psychos!

There was a whinging squeak coming from the wheel of a supply cart being pushed along by a whistling servant-class Fracción. The Arrancar was not atypical, but wasn't lacking in deformities either, being slightly pot-bellied beyond the ordinary range with long arms and slightly sharper teeth than was normal in a plain vanilla human. He apparently didn't have a very good attention span either because he neglected to notice the two unconscious men sprawled in the path of his cart—until he bumped right into them.

"Enh?" The servant Fracción leaned out and around his wheeled contraption to see what was obstructing it.

What he saw was the prow of his little vehicle rammed against the upturned rump of a very big, very odd-looking Arrancar. The Fracción stepped up warily, scrutinizing the garb of the knocked-out person.

Is he wearing a clown suit? And is that another guy sticking out from under him?

"Er... hey, buddy, wake up, y' hear?" the servant said as he prodded the big one's mostly masked face with his foot. Immediately he could tell the mask was false, and was slightly unnerved by the tribal style of it, "C'mon, man. Y' can't lay in the street all day. You even s'pposed to be in th' Octava's Palace?"

Pesche, who was the second Arrancar crushed under his companion, came awake in style. Loudly crowing in anguish, he scrabbled at the white floors with all four limbs.

"Guuuaaargh! My baaaaack!"

The servant drew back and, shortly after noting what his discovery's mask looked like, began to bead sweat in torrents.

"Aagh! Dondo, you're heavy! Get...Off...Me!" Pesche wailed, straining as he tried to wriggle out from under his companion. Then he noticed the Fracción, who was pointing a shaky finger at his forehead, "Eh? Aren't you going to help? A fellow Arrancar-type guy, you know?!"

"Y-y-y-you're... P-Pesche Guatiche!" the Arrancar squeaked. Pesche blinked, not sure whether to be bemused or flattered that the inconspicuous servant knew his name.

"Why...Why yes I am!" he beamed, his silly grin of pride invisible under the false mask's pincers. The loincloth-clad comedian failed to register the deepening look of horror on his discoverer's face.

"Whhuuurgh!" Dondochakka groaned weirdly as he too regained consciousness, "Whoa, my whole front hurts, man! Whut happened?"

"B-B-B-B-Bilsten?!? D-D-D-D-Dondo..!!" The poor servile Fracción stammered, obviously terrified out of his wits but somehow not being noticed by the duo, "D-D-Dondochakka Bilsten..!!"

"Eh?" the large Arrancar sat upright, inadvertently freeing his companion. As Pesche dragged himself upright with a wheeze of relief, Dondochakka continued with a grin, "Yeah, dat's me! Dondo and Pesche—Nel Tu's comedy bros!"

"Gack...Yeah!" Pesche added weakly.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAIIIIIEEE!"

The servant Fracción tore off down the hall at full speed as if Satan himself and a brigade of flaming pitchfork-toting demons were after him. The supply cart sat abandoned. The dynamic duo were left speechless and nursing aching body parts as the echoes of the bloodcurdling scream died away.

"Uhhh... Whut was dat guy's problem, eh?" the large Arrancar scratched the back of his gigantic head, "Did he gotta go t' d' bathroom or somethin'?"

"Why would he be screaming if he had to go to the bathroom?!" Pesche reasoned out loud, still irritated from being squashed under his seven-hundred-plus pound pal, "We're still in Szayel Aporro's place, man! That guy us clearly going to go tell 'im where we are! We must be vigilant!" The loinclothed Arrancar leaped up, trying to strike a gallant pose but failing as he half-tripped on the wheel of the abandoned cart, "Ow, oh, ow! Ouch, my foot, ooh!"

"I dunno," Dondo muttered, shrugging, "Meebe he just hadta go real bad. He didn't look like one o' the mad doctor's mutant freaks." Dismissively the big Arrancar stood and began ambling off towards where the panicked Fracción had fled, "You're just bein' paranoid, brudda."

"I am not paranoid!" Pesche protested, ashamedly hiding that he had been attempting to loot the cart, "I-I'm being vigilant! And where do you think you're going?!"

"Ummm..." he paused, "I guess da bathroom or wherever that guy's goin'. Mebbe there's a way outta this crazyfest dat way. Ooh, mebbe we'll find Renji an' dat glasses guy you were wid that way."

"Wha..? Why would they be down there? And why didn't you say you were going to look

for 'em?"Pesche fumed dramatically, "I would've been with you in an instant!"

"Whoa, Pesche, take it easy," Dondochakka gave his comrade a strange look from under the tiny eyeholes of his false mask, "And why else would they be down where da bathrooms is? They gotta do it too."

"That's your logic?! Hmm, you're right though," Pesche followed his enormous friend down the long hallway studded with doors, "Damn, they must have colons of steel. We've been in Las Noches for at least three hours."

"You... can't go three hours widdout goin' numba two?"

"Gaah, no! I meant bladders of steel, geez!"

Wakened by the desert brothers' loud chatter, another servant-class Fracción cracked his door and peeked out into the hallway at their receding forms.

"Okie-dokie. But you betta go see a doctor or somethin' anyway about dat..."

"Oh, shut your giant face! We need to concentrate on finding Uryu and Renji...! ...And a bathroom."

"Aw, man, me too. You gotta keep up wid me, Pesche."

"Ugh...I am! Let me know if you see a john... Or a potted plant."

"Wha...! Aw, dat's naaaasty, man! Don't wizz in somebody's plant! Dat's disgusting!"

"Would ya rather I went on the floor? C'mon, I'm desperate here!"

Pulling a wry face, the Fracción decided the two weren't his problem and retreated back into the sidechamber, closing the door with a click.

Somewhere Else In The Palace of the Octava!

"My Lord," came a voice through the fog of unconsciousness, "Lord Szayel Aporro..? Are you... alright sir..?"

Gradually it dawned on the mad Espada that someone was shaking him on the shoulders. Also, he had a terrible headache.

"Augh!" Szayel grunted, his eyes opening into foul-tempered slits. Next he addressed his most pressing problem—he whipped out a deceptively weak-looking arm and thrust the concerned Fracción away. "Ugh! Get off me, you... Unh! Damn headache..."

Rubbing tenderly at throbbing temples, his baleful eyes cast about. He knew he was in Las Noches still, and it seemed to be still within the confines of his palace, but where he could not tell. He didn't recognize anything right away, but the passageways and their layout seemed familiar.

"Sir?!" the Fracción squeaked slightly in alarm, looking at his Master as if he were a frightening stranger (which was not far off), "My Lord, how come you are lying unconscious in the street? Did something happen? Are you wounded?"

Szayel Aporro peered over at the gray-green garbed medic Fracción as if he'd just noticed he existed.

Who is this buffoon? He thought. He looked remarkably similar to one of his Fracciones del Octava, but he was not a giant, nor was he mostly unable to speak from mind-destroying drugs. And his eyes were normal--with white sclera and visible pupils and everything so like a natural Arrancar. Something not seeming off was starting to seem off to the mad scientist.

"And...who are you?" he began haughtily, drawing himself up as he stood shakily. He quickly looked over himself. Good, his outfit had not suffered any excessive wrinkling from his time crumpled on the ground and was undamaged.

"Sweet Jesus," the medic muttered, horror-stricken. He believed his Espada was suffering memory loss, though the sudden personality change was disconcerting as well, "I'm Brian, of course. You don't remember me, Lord?"

Realizing through his self-glorifying delusions that he was in strange new territory, the Octava decided to play it safe for now. He adopted a look of puzzled innocence that could have earned him a Grammy were he one of the Living.

"...Brian..?" he ran a hand through his hair as if thinking hard and being pained by the process, "I don't believe so... Oh, my head hurts! Why does..?" The devious Arrancar feigned an unsteady wobble, which he reluctantly allowed the Fracción to support him through, "Ah, I'm not sure what happened. And I'm not sure where I am..."

"Shall I escort you to the nearest medical ward, sir?" Brian the medic Fracción offered. Holding back a disgusted sneer at the thought of touching another, and therefore inferior, life form Szayel leaned on him heavily and let the oblivious subordinate lead him down the hallway.

The journey to the medical ward was a short one. Still pretending to be dazed and confused, Szayel Aporro encountered near to a dozen more uncharacteristically uncorrupted Octava Fracciones. Also not realizing that all was not as it appeared with their Master, they showered worries on him and bombarded him with inquiries. The Espada kept up a baffled blank look but was really absorbing all he could get from the content of their questions.

"My Lord! Are you alright?!"

"Did something explode in the lab again, sir?!"

"Oh, my goodness! Are you hurt, my Lord?!"

"Can Lord Grantz hear me, Brian? Like, did the explosion mess up his hearing again? Er, I assumed something blew up, sorry..."

"Oh, no—did something happen at the lab, my Lord?!"

"My Lord, you look strange! Did a bad guy ambush you?!"

"Is Szayel Aporro okay? ...And why is he wearing a cape?"

"M-Master! Did something blow up on you again?!"

Aside from their unaltered states of well-being and their genuine concern for his, all seemed about the same. Well, that and the questioning of his impeccable taste. The mad scientist fondled the edge of the flowing garment possessively as the unassuming Brian helped him into a comfortable chair.

Immediately, Fracciones of all three classes huddled around him, almost overwhelming Brian, who fought to keep them back. He was still uncertain about the imposter's mood swings.

"Will you all just... shut up already?" Szayel grumbled at the clamoring throng, finding it suddenly hard to keep up the appearance of the other Szayel Aporro (of which he was currently unaware), "I need something for headaches... That's all." A female medic approached, some of the desired medicine in hand, and began to hand to him, but made the mistake of lightly placing her other hand on his knee, "And don't touch me! I don't want to be touched by... Ugh... Never mind."

As soon as the pills were out of her hand the medic scurried back out of his reach in alarmed silence. Brian kept a suspicious eye on the evil Octava while the rest of the crowd held a short huddle on the other side of the ward.

"Brian, how'd you find him?"

"Er...by looking. He wasn't very far from here—next to the botanical and fungal gardens..."

"No! I meant in what state did you find him. Was he already acting weird?"

"Y...Yeah," Brian glanced over his shoulder again. They seemed to not be audible to the irritable Szayel, who was... rearranging his hair some more. "He shoved me as soon as he came to. Lord Szayel Aporro never did that before to any of us as far as I know."

"And he never complains when girls touch him..." the female medic growled. Several of her cohorts gave her weird looks.

"True," the first speaker relinquished, "Didn't you say he sounded amnesiac at first, Brian?"

"He didn't recognize me," Brian whispered gloomily, "And I'm not sure if it was true or not, but he claimed to not know where he was or what happened to him that knocked him out."

"His headache seems suspicious," a second woman chimed in, "D'you think he's faking it?"

"Nah, it's real. He took the meds."

"Brain damage, then?" another male one suggested anxiously, "It can do strange things to someone when the brain shorts out. Even personality changes..."

"Should we've given 'im that medicine if he's had that happen?"

"That's skull fractures you have to worry about. Duh."

"Err, oh, right."

Again Brian took a secretive look on their sociopathic charge. Szayel Aporro had his head down and was rubbing his forehead as one would expect a headache sufferer to do.

"If he's really got memory loss we should quiz him," the initial speaker proposed, taking a glance himself, "I'm still not sure that's what's up..."

"What else could it be?!" Brian exclaimed, looking stunned, "He's just hurting from the headache and can't remember things yet. Leave him alone."

"We can't 'leave him alone'! It would be a disgrace for an Espada's Fracción to ignore him when he could be in distress." The medic shot his complacent companion down quickly, "Remember, I outrank you. And I've decided we test him. Anyone who objects can just go find the Soldado Fracciones and inform them. Oh, and someone try and find the twin brother too."

As the medics whispered and murmured, deciding in hushed tones the material they would grill their false Master with, Szayel continued with his ruse.

Though the throbbing in his head was real, the illusion that he was paying the huddle no mind was just that. He almost couldn't restrain the smirk creeping across his face at the thought of his brilliant self, once again outwitting every clueless obstacle of a person he encountered. Now the pain in his head and neck was receding.

Returning to a calm and calculating mindset, Szayel waited and listened, ready to deceive

and cheat his way to victory as usual.