

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

Section 7: More To Say "Oh Crap" About!

Finally, Szayel Aporro thought, that wretched headache is gone!

Watching the Fracciónes, the Octava kept his eye on the one who called himself "Brian". In his own universe he hadn't bothered to learn that one's name. Either that or his process in forcing a quick transformation into dispensible cannon fodder had eliminated his ability to recall his own name.

Szayel did not care. He did note the trust displayed towards him on the simple-minded medic's part. He had protested the shoddy attempt at a memory test, rigged to try and spot hints that all may not be as it seemed with their Master (which he had easily cheated his way through. He knew the symptoms of true amnesia no one better and was adept at faking it).

He was ripe for the using. The pink-haired Espada narrowed his eyes and smiled, trying to make his face as kindly as possible.

"Oh, Brian..." The Arrancar turned, surprised to hear his name, "Could you... do something for me..?"

"Of... course, my Lord." Brian gave the Espada a strange, wild look. Something seemed wrong but... He couldn't put his finger on it.

"I knew you would," The Octava's voice was sweet as honey. He leaned in closer to the medic, breathing the words into his ear, "Listen closely now... I'm not supposed to be telling anyone about this, but... well," He threw a swift glance over the shoulder for good measure, as if afraid of someone overhearing, "So, I can only tell you so much... I need you to find Renji Abarai and Uryu Ishida. You know them, right?"

"Renji and Uryu..?" Brian drew back, blinking in shock, "They're here? I thought they were back in the World of the Living until the—."

"I know, I know. They're here, trust me," Szayel pulled Brian close again, "I need you to find them, and you must bring them to me. Tell them anything to get them to come, but be careful: If you see *me*," Szayel's voice took on an urgent hiss, "if you see me anywhere but right here, it's an imposter. Don't trust him. Don't *talk* to him, don't let him *touch* you, don't tell him *anything*, just get away. If Renji and Uryu are with the fake, then bide your time. Wait until they're alone. Then tell them to come here. Do you understand?"

Brian felt the inexorable strength of the Espada's fingers let go of his collar. He stepped back, dizzy and in mental chaos.

"I... think so, Master," Brian stared at Szayel oddly, "But...Why?"

"I'm sorry, Brian," Szayel smiled ruefully and shook his head, leaning back in the seat, "If I told you... Well, let's just say it's for your own good. Now go!"

Brian turned on his heel, sweat pouring off of him as abundantly as the questions bouncing in his mind. It was such a strange request. And a fake Szayel? Roaming the halls of Las Noches, with no one but himself to deal with it? There were surely some other, stronger Espadas who could be trusted to track down the imposter and destroy it.

But then again, he could never know with the implied secrecy surrounding the issue. Szayel Aporro never kept anything from his Fracciones before this. If it was that important, and lives depended on it, Brian did not doubt that his Octava would lie to them. He certainly wasn't pure, despite his gentle reputation.

Stopping at a crossroads, Brian gazed this way and that, his head weaving in the air as if trying to track down a scent. Closing his eyes, tiny blue lights appeared in his mind's eye. Thousands upon thousands, some close, some farther away. Some were dim and almost indistinguishable from the smoky backdrop; others, like Szayel's just on the other side of the wall, were blindingly bright, obscuring those next to them.

Then he made out two that did not shine with the wavering pale blue that Arrancar's spirits tended to appear as. One, darkened and red, but huge, glowered far away, nearly half a mile across the Palace's grounds. It was next to another bright light of an Arrancar, but neither fully overwhelmed the other. The other non-Arrancar energy was something resembling a silvery opaque sphere, neither giving off light nor sucking it in. This one was, if possible, more dominating than the ominous red one.

Brian knew what he had to do. His Master was depending on him, and him alone.

The hallway echoed with the buzz of Sonído, and he was off.

And Now For Something Completely Different

Uryu was not sure what was worse:

Option one was fighting Szayel Aporro Grantz--the one that was evil, of course.

Option two?

Handling another five minutes of Lumina's constant prattle. She had not ceased chattering at him since they had left the monitoring station in search of Pesche and Dondochakka.

"Yes, yes, so that was time Master Szayel Aporro make super-alcohol by accident," she finished off one of the scandalous tales. Uryu felt a twinge in his neck from looking down at her for too long. He rubbed the poor tortured vertebrae and prayed for the two Great Desert Bros to come into sight soon.

"Umm... Okay then."

"Heeheeheehee!" Lumina put both hands over her mouth to stop the stream of giggles, "You should have seen the Master. He think it normal drug he test. But BAM--super-booze! He get real red in face, stagger around, make fall on Brian and then on Jesse, then say weird thing about him brother, then go asleep for long long time..." She wagged a finger, "He still no remember it happen. He think me dream it, but I talk to Brian. He see it."

"I'm... sure he did." *God, if you're there, please make this little Arrancar stop telling me things I don't need to know? That would be great, God. Or Allah. Or Yahweh. Or Spirit King. Or whatever you like to be called...*

"We come close close, I think," Lumina informed him. The Quincy perked up and peered around at the hallways. It certainly seemed to be in the right area. This was one of the long halls lined with Arrancar's quarters he had seen on the monitors, just yards from where they had first spotted Pesche.

"You're right," He sped up, walking alongside the squat little female instead of just following her. "They should be right up ahead, or at least not too far from he—"

THOOOOOM!

The whole floor seemed to ripple in a shockwave of power. Uryu crouched and managed to stay on his feet, but was too unsteady himself to help Lumina. She rolled like a ball, shrieking, into the nearest wall and crumpled there grumbling.

"Ouchie, ouchie, me knee got bumped..." She crawled to her feet, "Eeee... me not like that big boom."

"Nope," The Quincy's glasses flashed. He summoned his bow, "I don't like it either..."

Ass-Kicking Time

"DAH-dah-dah-dah, dah-dah, dah-dah--can't touch this!"

Iffort, transformed into Del Toro's massive minotaur-esque form, sprawled across the floor, skidding to a halt by the far wall as he dug his fingers into the white stone floors. He staggered upright, cursing the ill fortune he and the other Fracciones had by encountering such a dangerous pair of foes. Pesche Guatiche did a little victory dance, pelvic thrusting impudently in front of his face.

"Oh yeah! Uh-huh! How you like me now, son?!"

"Grrrr...!" Under the bull's skeletal face Iffort snarled and bared his teeth. Despite the aching in his shoulder from an earlier hit, he lunged forward, arms splayed ferociously and horns extending to their longest in the hope of skewering his enemy.

Pesche continued dancing about, yawning as the Sexta Fracción seemed to sail towards him in slow motion. An arm's length away, he darted around, coming up behind Shawlong and two Octava Soldados.

"U-uhh!" Shawlong twitched away, slashing reflexively at the sneaky beetle-masked Arrancar with the blades on the back of his head. Tijereta had never let him down before, yet it was getting increasingly difficult for his bladed claws to even come close to striking the pair of traitors.

"Whoops! You missed again!" Pecshe grinned. He hadn't fought anything much stronger than random aggressive Hollows out in the white desert in a very long time, and though he was rusty this was bringing back a lot of fond memories. "Here, look, this is how you're supposed to do it..."

WHAM!

Shawlong crashed into the opposite wall, narrowly missing D-Roy as he slumped to the ground. The snaggle-toothed Arrancar had released as well, appearing to be some kind of long-bodied creature with a second set of jaws where the centaur-like upper half of the human form ended. Shaking he reached out and felt the tall man's wrist. He was out cold, but still alive.

"Eshéh... Oh, shit...Oh, shit... We're all gonna *dieeee*..." An Octava Fracción, in a release form that looked like some kind of anthropomorphized rabbit, shoved him from behind.

"Oh, stop whining and get in there! You can fight too, can't you?!"

D-Roy swallowed nervously and was about to grit his jagged teeth and charge when Dondochakka crashed down to the floor in front of him, an enormous mace-like weapon slung over his shoulder.

"Someone say 'fight'?"

"Don't stand there gawking, *get him!*" The Octava Fracción leaped, a fist wound up for a

punch. Dondochakka watched him come, his mask somehow contorting to mimic the face underneath--bored out of his mind. When the Fracción got close enough he took the mace off his shoulder and swung out with it like a baseball bat.

CRRK!

Had there been a baseball field around, the poor Soldado would have soared into the stands. But this wasn't a field. It was a relatively narrow hallway, lined with rooms. The clubbing victim burst through one wall, then another, then a third, ending up senseless in an entirely different hallway, an Arrancar-shaped hole tracing his flight path.

Dondochakka guffawed loudly.

"Whoa, it's been a long time since I got ta do *dat!*" He swatted D-Roy away with a backhand, foiling the snaggle-toothed Arrancar's attempt at a courageous attack, "I forgot how fun it was ta bonk a baddie!"

"Heehee! 'Bonk a Baddie'? Is that like 'Whack a Mole'?" Pesche snickered, holding two female Fracciones in a double headlock effortlessly. "We could be rich selling that game!"

"Nah, it's a knock-off. Knock-offs don't make no money," Dondochakka side-stepped Ilfort, who back-peddled desperately but ended up with both his curved horns stuck eight feet in a solid wall anyhow.

"You tell that to Disney, they'd have a good long evil chuckle at that!" Pesche spotted a big bald Fracción trying to come at him from the side and tossed the two women at him, bowling him over as he was forced to catch them instead of attacking.

"Whut is it wid you an' Disney?" Dondochakka aimed a light kick at Ilfort's exposed rear. The Espada's brother yelped and redoubled his efforts to get free of the imprisoning wall. "You got some kinda grudge from when you was livin' or somethin'? That ain't very Arrancar-like, ya know..."

"It's not a grudge from my former life...!" Pesche took up a noble and passionate pose, the cheesiest one he could think of, with his hand on his puffed out chest and everything, "It's the simple fact that Disney Corporation is a low-down, evil, slimy, no-good baby-eating, idea-stealing hovel of filth! That in no way counts as a grudge!"

"What the *hell* are you bastards talking about?!" Ilfort screamed. The wall his horns were impaling began to crack as he heaved upwards, twisting the pointy appendages and smiling fiercely as the stone began to split. It hurt his shoulder again, but now it didn't matter. He wanted to stab him some (perceived) evil. "Damn...idiots...Not even paying attention... to your enemy!"

The wall shattered, sending fragments of silvery-white stone flying everywhere and clattering against the opposite wall.

A ripple formed in the air between the points of his horns, which then evolved into a foreboding crimson glow. A ball of reishi materialized, staining the walls with its red light.

"Eat *cero*, you pieces of sh—"

In a tag-team assault, the "comedy bros" were instantly right in his face, their feet kicking out at exactly the same time, planting themselves in the center of his face. The next millisecond and they were gone, standing clear many meters away as the beginnings of the *cero* literally blew up in Ilfort's face.

The six Octava Fracciones who had yet to be thrashed into unconsciousness stood back, mouths agape. Ilfort, Shawlong, and a number of other much tougher warriors had been felled easily, so what chance did they have? They cowered in half-formed fighting stances, expecting at any moment the pair of disguised Arrancar to turn on them with a vengeance.

And they did turn. But not with vengeance.

"So...You guys steppin' out of da fight?" Dondochakka scratched the back of his head with his mace, "Awww.... Dat was fun. Oh, well."

"Now that the fighting scene's over, on to business!" Pesche sheathed his brightly glowing sword, letting it click coolly (but not seeming to notice that *that sound coming from the front of a man's pants is not exactly epic*). He hadn't actually had to use it, which disappointed him. He wished there was some way to use a blade technique in a cool way that didn't involve disemboweling people. "I thought I saw a sign for a men's room down there before that guy ran up."

"Yeah, I did too," Dondochakka ambled toward the pack of Fracciones, who recoiled in fear. He waded through them as if oblivious to their terror, "Yeah, there it is! Right back there next to dat door!"

"Whoo-hoo!~" Pesche jumped over the crowd easily. The Fracciones winced and covered their eyes, afraid of looking up and seeing what was under there. "Great news! Cuz I dunno about you, but a good fight usually makes me kinda need a break!"

"... You're weird, Pesche," Dondochakka shook his head, trundling alongside the overly excited Pesche, "I don't think no one else's gotta pee every time they fight..."

"Who cares?! I do! So onwards!"

The Fracciones del Octava blinked and looked at each other, each not believing that they were still alive. Gradually it dawned on their fear-numbed brains to try and attend to their badly beaten comrades. One of the girls that had been tossed by Pesche found Ilfort half-buried in a pile of wall gravel, a good ten feet into a space where thick stone fortifications were supposed to be.

"Unnhhh..." He groaned, energy swirling around him as he became too weakened to sustain the Del Toro release. His sword clanged on the ground next to him, still somewhat hot and glowing. He had a brand-new gash on his forehead and a large bruise was forming on the shoulder he had supposed to have been taking it easy with.

"Ow..." He came to, straining to lift his arm from underneath the rubble pinning it. "Damn...damn... Where's sword..?"

"Here," the woman gingerly picked up Del Toro and returned it to its scabbard, "You need some help?"

"Ow... Yes..." The female Fracción began scooping handfuls of stone fragments away from his left arm, until with a grunt Ilfort managed to free it himself. The first thing he did was tenderly paw at the new cut on his face. "Agghhh... What happened..?"

"We...We got our asses handed to us..."

Well, This Is an Awkward Scene

Uryu's and Lumina's eyes widened, but for different reasons. While the Quincy worked at reconciling the fact that he was seeing people that he'd been told had been very much killed in his own reality, Lumina squeaked plaintively and dashed over to the multitude of limp bodies.

"What the hell..?" Uryu followed at a measured pace, looking from side to side at the various Fracciones, who were either knocked out or coming around and licking their wounds. "What happened..?!"

"Whhuuuuuughhh..." D-Roy peeled off the wall he had been thrown against and crawled across the floor, bumping into Uryu's shoe. The Quincy drew his foot back, recognizing the Arrancar but restraining the immediate urge to shoot the hell out of him. *Calm down, Uryu, he thought, He's not the same murderous idiot that tried to kill Chad. He might still be a murderous idiot, but he's not that one.*

"Eeee!" Lumina slapped Shawlong in the face with a limp hand, trying to wake him up but only succeeding in making his head flop over, "Mister Earwig *DEAD!*"

"He's not *dead*..." A voice from a pile of rubble grumbled, sounding remarkably like Szayel Aporro, "None of us are... Those bastards!"

He sat up with an audible crack from his shoulder, wincing. Taking stock of his surroundings, his gaze came to rest on the Quincy and stayed there for several minutes.

"Aren't you Uryu?" He brushed stone dust from his shirt, "How come you're here and not off in Alive Land with the plain vanilla humans?"

"Ummm..." Uryu was not sure he should disclose exactly where he had come from so readily. He wasn't even sure if the Fracción would believe it, or if he would try to attack or detain him out of suspicion afterwards. He decided to leave the part about alternate universes and parallel histories and whatnot out of the conversation, "Szayel Aporro called me. We're having a little...problem."

"You don't say," Ilfort sneered, struggling to stand. The female Fracción tried to stop him with both hands, pushing his painful shoulder so that he abruptly had to sit down again. "Ow, that hurts you know. Why are you abusing me?"

"You really shouldn't stand up so soon after a beating like that," she scolded. Ilfort shrugged (only one shoulder; the other wouldn't cooperate) and brushed her off, standing up with a wobble anyway, "Ilfort!"

"I'll stand up if I want to!" he growled, leaning on the remainder of the wall. His vision was spinning--Uryu looked as if he were slowly sliding to the right, and with every blink the illusion would reset itself. "Ow, damn those two...!"

"Those two?" Uryu's eyes widened, "You mean Pesche and Dondochakka did this to all of you?"

"Ehh...Ehhh..." D-Roy whimpered, his face in the floor, "Th-they jusht *appeared* like magic, then they... they..." He looked up with a look of terror, "They kicked our assesh sho hard... I might never walk again...!"

"Oh, stop being such a baby," Ilfort tossed a chunk of wall weakly at the sniveling Sexta Fracción, "We all lived, didn't we? Somehow..."

"So you didn't... notice anything weird about them, did you?" Uryu posed. He was pretty sure that the pair that had wreaked havoc on this hallway and its defenders had been the good pair from his reality, but it was also pretty clear that the Fracciones were unaware of the fact that Pesche and Dondochakka could be anything other than traitorous enemies. The woman Fracción cocked her head slightly.

"What *isn't* weird about those two fiends?" Uryu found himself resisting the urge to bust out laughing. Something about her calling Pesche and Dondochakka "fiends" with a straight face struck him as intensely funny, "They were wearin' some pretty strange get-ups, though. Hunh, I guess those pillocks thought it would disguise them."

"Well, er," Uryu realized that hiding the fact that more than one universe existed side by side, and that there were ways for inhabitants of either to cross the normal boundaries, wasn't going to work to his advantage at all. "I hate to tell you all this, but... you attacked the wrong guys."

"*What?!*" Ilfort's face twisted with confusion. D-Roy didn't even seem to notice what the Quincy had said; it had flown right over him.

"Look, this is what Szayel Aporro wanted me and Renji here for—" he added swiftly, before they could organize their suspicions, "Something very weird happened and, er, there's two Pesches and two Dondochakkas now. And, well... There's two Uryus, two Renjis, and even two Szayel Aporros..."

Ilfort tried to stand independent of the wall, in his shock forgetting just how unsteady he was. He was forced to flail out both arms for support as he half-fell against a pile of rubble.

"*Scheisse!*" He caught his breathe and gave up on standing while his legs still felt like rubber, "What the *hell?!*" He let himself slide down the side of the pile of stone pieces, staring at Uryu oddly, "He *didn't..!* Don't tell me they're clones. For the love of all things holy, *please* tell me he didn't make a crapload of freaking clones!"

"They're... not clones." Uryu took a step back, glad he was able to say what Ilfort seemed most open to hear. "They're actually, well... Actually, I'm one of the extras."

The Fracciones stared at him. D-Roy seemed to finally catch up to the rest of their understanding of what Ishida was saying.

"*What?!*"

"Well what are they—you—if they're not clones?"

"Erm..." The Quincy didn't like all the eyes on him. He nudged Lumina with the side of his shoe. "Can't you explain it to them? Your boss is the one who has the slightest idea of what's been happening."

"Er..." she stood up a bit straighter, "O...kay. I try." She jumped up on a smaller pile of rubble to gain the crowd's attention, "Hey, lookie, lookie! This Uryu, he from 'nother place, like this place but not. Like 'nother world just like this one, only weird and peoples is different. There Pesche, Dondochakka, Renji, Uryu, Master Szayel Aporro--all got extras come from other place. Was big accident they come here. Goody Master, he thinking now, think of how fix." She paused and caught her breath, not used to speaking in front of this many people before, "We need find all of extras from other place. Mister Pesche and Mister Moai Mask from other place is good, but Master Szayel from other place is real real bad." She shivered, "So we gots find. Find real quick. No fight with Good Pesche and Good Dondo, beat up Bad Master."

Uryu was surprised that he had comprehended the entire speech with no trouble. It seemed to have gotten through to the Fracciones as well. Shawlong groaned and blinked, sitting up. He had awoken near the beginning of Lumina's address.

"This seems like an...interesting predicament..." he said.

"Yeah," Ilfort nodded, "but I think you meant the word 'annoying' there..."

"Hey, where you go?" Lumina spotted Uryu making his way past the destroyed area of the hall, heading into the Mess. The large room had escaped the battle relatively unharmed.

"I need to catch up with those two," he spoke without turning, "They're still very close. Can you feel it?"

Lumina tilted her head like a dog's. Her eyes popped open wide after a moment.

"Oh!" She dashed up level with the Quincy, "I see them now! I think... that way!"

Uryu followed her long finger as it pointed towards the far end of the Mess complex. His eyes stopped on the sign for a men's room.

"Ugh," he disarmed his bow, "Why am I not surprised?"