

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

Section 9: Something Happens In This One!

The Fracciones thought nothing of Szayel Aporro Grantz's quick recovery from the headache and odd behavior of earlier, so it was not much of a shock to them to find him poking around once the pains receded.

A servant trundled into the ward, laden with various charts and a box containing some small samples. He stopped in his tracks and watched unobserved as the pink-haired man fiddled with an information databank. He didn't look like he quite knew what he was doing, or at least didn't know where he was supposed to be searching. His manipulating the machine was actually quite skillful regardless of how clueless about what it contained he seemed.

"Nothing's in here, nothing!" he snarled, punching away at keys faster, "None of my data, none of it's here. None of my subroutines. Nothing shows my combat reishi containment system... Nothing!"

The Fracción jumped a bit as the Octava smashed his fist down upon a desk close by the monitor he was hunched over. The desk split in twain, clattering to the floor. The servant shuddered; he knew the man was capable of much more power than that. And an Espada in a bad mood is an Espada likely to break things or injure people nearby by accident.

Still, this was the famously kindly Octava, known for disliking fighting and having more of an interest in science and especially medicine. Surely he wouldn't take it out on a subordinate? The servant thought not. He approached tentatively, setting the materials down on a different desk.

"My Lord? Is there something I can help you with?"

Szayel turned around swiftly, pausing just before his talon-like fingers closed around the freaked servant's throat.

Then, casting his eye upward, he thought better of the senseless murder. The fool hadn't seen anything to rouse suspicion anyway, and no doubt the idiot couldn't understand "combat reishi containment" anyway. Playing out his "nice" role, he let out a soft chuckle and released the shivering subordinate.

"Oh, I'm sorry," he stood up straight again from his aggressive crouch, "I wasn't

expecting you to be there. Sorry about that."

"N..no harm done, Master..!" the servant-class Fracción felt his neck. Well, it could've been worse. With how strong Most Espadas were he could have had a nice big Szayel's-hand-shaped bruise to decorate it for a few months or so. Or a crushed windpipe...

"Now, what was it you wanted..?" Szayel kept his tone absent-minded.

"Er, I was just asking if you wanted any help with anything." He shuffled in place. "Like, er... Say... That databank, maybe? I don't mean any offence, but when I walked in it seemed like you couldn't find what you needed..."

Szayel's eyes hardened. Perhaps he wasn't an idiot, only a little stupid. Well, it wasn't too big a threat. Even the non-blithering ones paled in comparison to his own superior intellect. Still, nothing he could have seen would have pointed to anything indicating he was not as they knew him...

"Ah," he turned away, looking at the screen still displaying a garbled schematic chart to avoid the Fracción seeing his glare, "Yes. That might be helpful... I seem to have difficulty remembering where I left a few of my defensive measure programs in the files..."

"Well, sir... That's not my specialty," He picked his way around Szayel's side so that he was level with the Espada by the screen, "But with your memory gone funny and all, I'll give it a try."

"Wonderful," the Octava hid his curling lip, wishing he could have said it more sarcastically. The Fracción did not catch the subtle distaste and began pecking at the controls.

"Well, I dunno what to tell you..." he began to sweat slightly, "But everything appears to be in here."

"And... How do you know that..?" Szayel was beginning to grow impatient. The cheek of this basic servile creature, implying it knew better than him!

"Well, you see here, sir, is the last date anyone accessed this system," The evil Octava's eye followed where the Fracción's stubby, sausage-shaped finger was pointing, "And it says only eight hours ago you yourself was looking at something in there. If it'd been messed with there would be some indication down here in the logs of an unauthorized entry..."

Szayel felt like growling aloud. The impossible seemed to have happened. He'd been outwitted by a lowly gopher of a Fracción! How did he not see the date entry at the bottom? His computers had always had something to that effect, including the recording of attempted hackings. Inwardly fuming, he twisted his face into a smile and tried not to look like he was baring his teeth.

"Hmm. Well, that's odd." He turned on his heel. "I must have this databank confused with a different one. So easy to do with a short-circuiting brain, you know..."

"Oh, yes, sir." Bewildered, the Fracción reserved the urge to ask where the Octava was going.

"And it's dreadfully hot in here. I think I'll go and take some air..."

"Sure, my Lord..."

Stupid little filthy, no-necked, monkey-faced... The Espada's thoughts beyond this point would have exploded the brains of at least three conservative clergy members. Or decent human beings. In this measure there was no difference.

And Now For Something Completely the Same

"And so... In this reality, Aizen was an Arrancar who took over the Soul Society, and not a Soul Reaper who took over Hueco Mundo..?"

"Pretty much." Szayel smiled. Pesche scratched his head.

"And so... Does that mean everyone here that was evil in the place we're from is good here and vice-versa?"

"I... don't quite know. That certainly seems to be the case for at least a few individuals."

"G-guh!" Pesche suddenly stood straighter, his eyes wide, "Is... Nelliel evil here..?"

"Well, this reality's versions of you two are despicable, and they follow her lead..." The Octava cast his gaze upward and shrugged. Pesche and Dondochakka looked at each other.

"Just don't try an' imagine it, Pesche," Dondochakka quivered, "A thought like dat might blow up our brains..."

Following Brian, who was himself not entirely sure where he should lead them, the newly formed band of unlikely Octava-hunters were being brought up to speed to the mechanics and common knowledge of the world they were currently stuck in.

The news was a bit baffling, but a bit easier to accept since, oh, I dunno, *they were in a freaking alternate universe already so why the hey not?*

"Hmm..." Uryu hummed, "So, wait, wait--If it's the Soul Society being controlled by Aizen here, then how come you and this world's Renji have met...And haven't tried to kill each other?"

"An excellent point!" Szayel wagged a finger, "I did say they were taken over. No doubt not every Soul Reaper is jumping for joy about that, so to speak. You could probably say the same thing about the Arrancar from your world."

"Yeah, Uryu!" Pesche scowled at the Quincy, hands on his hips.

Ignoring the banter, Brian had thought of an idea. It was quite risky, but worth it to stop the false Master that was allying himself with the wicked Fracciones of Nelliel and leading the allies of the Arrancar astray.

"Just down here, sir, it won't take long," Brian tried to make his tone apologetic as he beckoned his Master down a set of stairs. Szayel Aporro gave the band a short wave and followed his servant.

"Wait here, I'll be back in a short while," he smirked, "All in a day's work, you know." With that he and Brian disappeared down the staircase. The echoes of his voice, still flamboyantly chatting with his Fracción, could be heard for quite a while.

"What?!" Renji twitched, "He just expects us to sit here and wait?!" He slouched against the wall, "It's been two freakin' hours. I want to do something already!"

"Ummm... Not so loud, Renji..." Uryu was referring to the three or four curious Fracciones passing by, staring at the four of them because of the shouting.

"And I can't even--" Renji made a frustrated motion with his hand, to which Dondochakka slowly backed away from.

"Enhh... Let's... Let's just wait an' stuff. He said he wouldn't take long, ya know..."

"Grr..."

And Now For Something Horror Movie Characters Can't Seem To Ever Accomplish

Szayel didn't look it, but he was paying rapt attention to Brian as the servant led him down the staircase. He was behaving a bit weird. For one, that look of abject terror on his face

when they nearly collided outside the door... Odd. Then there was this "problem" he was taking him to rectify. There wasn't much down this corridor; it was a dead-end with only a few storage rooms and small vaults. Szayel could imagine that there could be something wrong with the vaults... but it wasn't very likely. These weren't vaults where valuables were kept, things to be absolutely kept out of the grubby mitts of the enemy... Odd that anything would be missing or damaged down here.

Odd...

"Brian, my friend, how have you been lately?" Szayel's tone was sweet and coddling, "I haven't had the chance to talk to you all that much lately, what with the wartime preparations... Are you well?"

"Er, I'm fine, sir." Brian muttered. He wasn't liking the turn this conversation was taking one bit. "I had a cold last week, but I'm fine now..."

"Hmm, you seem a bit feverish now," the Espada said, eying the beaded sweat running down the back of his subordinate's neck, "Are you sure you're not coming down with something? Here, I can check if you'd like..."

Brian saw the Octava's hand slipping discreetly towards him and flinched away, laughing nervously. True, he'd already crossed the line by disobeying his Master's orders not to speak to the fake, but he damn sure wasn't going to let it touch him. He feared that the "false" Octava had discovered his plan already. He had to have the same superb intelligence as the true one.

"Ah, no, it's fine, sir." He bluffed. "I-I can just check on it later, Master. There's still the trouble back here to be dealt with..."

"Ah, yes. Of course," Szayel's mind raced, then registered a solution. Quicker than Brian could object and as casual as if this were any regular day, the Espada gave his Fracción a friendly tap on the shoulder. He observed the twitch like a horse's flanks bothered by a fly affect Brian once again. Odd... "Well, let's not dwell on that then! Lead on, my faithful servant."

The two reached the vaults. One was sealed shut, the other, larger and stronger, one, was slightly ajar. Brian motioned towards the larger one and took a step towards it himself.

"It was, er, like that when I found it, sir," he invented, "Well, I already took a look inside, and, eh... Well, take a look for yourself."

Szayel stepped a bit closer to the vault, but stayed himself at the door.

"It's a bit dark in there to see properly..." he murmured, glancing back at Brian, who was standing just a foot or so behind his Master so as not to look suspicious. "Is there a light anywhere nearby?"

"Here's one," Brian eagerly passed a common small contrivance, a lantern-like affair powered by some long-lasting Kido spell, "I warn you, Lord, when you look you're not going to like what you see..."

"I'll take that to heart then," Szayel steeled himself and leaned a bit closer inside. He was, at first, mildly surprised to see nothing but the usual excess of experimental equipment and slightly outdated machines, but the shock faded faster than an ice cube melts in Hell.

Judging his moment precisely, Brian put all his strength into one mighty push, just strong enough to bump Szayel Aporro Grantz past the threshold of the vault door. Leaping back and slamming the hefty portal, Brian could barely hear the enraged roar of the now-trapped Espada for the blood pounding in his ears. He ratcheted the combination shut as quick as lightning, aided by adrenaline and fear that the Octava might still have enough initiative to fight the door open again before it locked.

The heavy clicked sealed away Brian's worries!