

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

Section 10: An Epic Battle Too?! Que Suerte!

Ilfort struggled down the hallway, aided by Shawlong and D-Roy. They had his arms slung over their shoulders in an awkward, lopsided arrangement, as the Espada's brother still wasn't walking steadily on his own. The blow to the head from the double kick was suspected as the culprit.

"Ouch, D-Roy, that was my foot before you stomped all over it!"

"Shorry, I can't walk shtraight with your freakin' arm on me like thish. You're shquishin' me here!"

"Oof," Shawlong was forced to hunch painfully once again as D-Roy pulled away from Ilfort. "You know, every time you do that my spine shortens. If you do it again, so help me God I will—"

"Will you idiots shut the Hell up?" It was the female Fracción del Octava, leading them along and practically baby-sitting the visiting Sexta Soldados. "We're a few hundred meters from the ward and you can't shut up for two minutes so you can get there? Every stupid word that comes flying outta your mouths is a waste of time. You can either cooperate, or fall down on the ground and just be hurt."

The trio shut up. The woman smirked and led on.

"That's better!" she giggled, "Maybe you boys deserve a piece of candy for behaving so well!"

"Lady, we are not children," Ilfort ground his teeth as D-Roy once again staggered and irritated his wounded shoulder, "I'm thirty years old, dammit! And that's if you don't count the Hollow time or the alive time!"

"One; I don't care how old you are," she rounded on them, holding a finger up in the face of the twin, "Two; it's how old you act, not how many years you've been around. And three; I have a *name*, you know. And it's Rebecca. Not too hard to remember, yes? So *remember it*."

She turned and strode off again, a swing in her step. D-Roy whistled.

"Ehsheshe...She's pretty hot..."

"D-Roy..!"

"What? She ish!" D-Roy bared his jaggedy fangs in a cheeky grin at the blond man, "Jusht admit it, you think sho too.."

"Of *course* I do..!" Ilfort lowered his voice and took a sneaky glance to see if Rebecca was still in hearing range, "But I don't just go around blurting it out left and right! It's called 'restraint', you little shit. Ever heard of it?"

"Aw, shut your fashe..."

"You shut yours!"

"I wash gonna before you yelled at me!"

"Then just shut it and stop talking!"

"Why don't you shut it and shtop talking?!"

"The next idiot male to talk gets *A BOOT TO THE TESTICLES!*" Rebecca had had enough.

The boys shut up.

"That's better," she smirked, pushing open the door to the ward. As she looked in, she noted nothing amiss; there were medics and a few servants acting as aides milling about, going about their regular duties. The female Fracción shoved the door open wide and admitted herself.

Two medics looked up from their tasks over by a fume hood. As the trio of literally sore losers stumbled in they hurried over with alarm on their faces.

"Oh, Rebecca! And the Master's brother and his friends! What's happened?"

"We had the misfortune of engaging Pesche Guatiche and Dondochakka Bilstin, that's what happened." She huffed, pawing a bruise on her elbow, "Mister Grantz here got a very big kick in the face, and Mister Qufang has suffered a very powerful knock-out slap. I'd get to that first."

D-Roy tried to protest Rebecca's wish to have him treated last, but it came out as a few strangled squeaky noises and some clumsily mouthed words. One of the medics took the dizzy Ilfort off Shawlong's hands and had him sit in a comfy chair off to the side. The other found a seat for Shawlong soon after. A third who had been listening kept her snickers to a minimum and went to D-Roy's side, having to push him rather firmly to get him to move along to a seat of his own.

"Now, before you guys freak out and stuff I gotta tell you something," Rebecca

announced, earning the attention of each of the some dozen Fracciones in the room, "There's some weird crap going on. Those two, Lord Szayel's nimrod brother, and some Soldados including myself fought Pesche and Dondochakka, sure. But we found out that due to this weird crap that's going on there's basically 'good guy' versions of them running around. We ended up attacking the 'good guy' versions..."

She paused, a tic crossing her face in impatience as a low murmur spread throughout the medic audience.

"Yes, thank you," she sneered at one very short medic Fracción who had spoken last, his voice awkward and obvious. He lowered his head until her eyes were no longer on him. "And while I'm at, I'd better tell you that there's also a—"

She froze and her words trailed off, her eyes on the small door leading off into a room of databanks.

There stood Szayel Aporro Grantz, Octava Espada. Standing in the ward with an ambiguous smirk on his face, even though she knew her Master to be elsewhere with the party of displaced heroes.

"Well," the Espada's smirk slowly turned into more of a devious smile, "Whatever is the trouble?"

"Him..!" Rebecca became speechless, numb from the realization that what stood before her was not really her Master. Ilfort's brow furrowed and he gripped the armrests of his chair tightly.

"It's the other one!" the Octava's brother howled out a warning, "The one that came from the other universe!"

"Very well done, my imbecile brother," Szayel was in front of Ilfort before the Sexta Soldado could blink, "I must say, if my real brother had had this little glimpse of sense maybe I wouldn't have taken him as a specimen..."

Ilfort shivered. Fighting his twin when in perfect health was a losing battle to begin with, even with the Octava actively trying not to break him in half. What chance did he have with this sinister version, and wounded on top of that?

"Th-th-the bad guy one?!" D-Roy squeaked. The Octava grinned and his eyes flicked sideways to glance at the scrawny little Soldado.

"Ahaha, really. 'The bad guy one'. How very droll, you puny maggot." D-Roy cowered as Szayel turned his attention wholly on him, the effeminate and thin frame somehow becoming towering and intimidating, "Hmm, just as I suspected. A copy of the world I knew. A few things switched around, of course, but really quite the same at heart." The evil one whipped around,

catching one of the female medics who had just caught on to the Espada's true nature and was trying to slip out while his back was turned.

He snagged her by the back of the shirt with two crooked fingers, slamming her down roughly onto the floor.

"I wasn't done, you whore," he gave a large, humongously inappropriate smile, baring all his gleaming white teeth, "Now stay there until I'm finished, there's a good girl. Right, where was I?"

He thrust his face back close to Ilfort's so close the blond twin could smell Szayel's disturbingly cloying breath.

"Ha, whatever differences there are, they don't amount to a drop in an ocean to me. Look at you, for instance. You seem even more watered-down and pathetic than I remember you! And still only marginally worth keeping alive..."

"You... *bastard..!*" Ilfort overcame his shock and emanated death at his "brother" with his eyes.

"Incorrect use of the word," Szayel straightened up, sniffing as if offended by his genetic copy's very normal breath so close to his face. "Not that it surprises me. Now hold still. Do try not to make this too hard on me; I only just got over a nasty headache..."

The Soldados braced themselves for a fight they could not win. Rebecca stepped up, barring Szayel's way to the three wounded warriors. She drew out her zanpakuto from the sheath at her hip, which took the form of a highly curved long knife.

"A headache'll be the least of your problems when I'm done with you," she smirked, "Scum! You're not fit to lick my Master's boots clean. If you're gonna fight, then do it. I'll be happy to take you with me to Hell..!"

When In Doubt, Cut To Goobers

"Grr..."

"Eheh... That's a scary face, Renji..."

The Soul Reaper looked at Pesche as if he were stupid.

"Yes, it is a scary face!" He growled and slumped against the wall, "It's supposed to be a scary face! I'm pissed as Hell here!"

"Just be patient," Uryu crossed his arms. "He's coming; he said it'd only be a moment."

"It's been at least ten moments! Where the Hell is he?" Renji was tempted to take a look down there himself, and might have in a few seconds had Brian not poked his head around the corner, red in the face and puffing from his race up the stairs.

"Sorry, sirs..." He panted, "It...It's going to take longer than expected..."

"Fuck!"

"Renji," the Quincy shook his head, "We don't need to hear that kind of language. Just say 'damn' like the rest of us."

"I got tired of 'damn'!"

"Eheh... Er, anyways," Brian stalled and stuttered, rubbing the back of his neck to free it of nervous sweat and hoping it action looked natural, "Lord Szayel Aporro told me to take you on ahead, and he'd catch up with us once he's fixed the, ah, problem..."

Brian was troubled by how easy that last lie had been. But perhaps it was worth it to obey his Master's orders and make sure the false Espada (or whatever he was supposed to be, clone, doppelganger, etc.) was safely secured somewhere.

Before he could ponder the morality of his actions any further, a wave of energy whooshed by them, emanating from the western side of the Palace of the Octava.

I was just over there..! Brian thought, *Wait, that's...*

"It's Szayel Aporro's reiatsu!" Uryu straightened in less than a second and had his spirit bow ready. Renji said nothing, and had his Shikai bristling in his hands a millisecond later.

"Who's he fighting?!"

"I can't tell at this distance--his aura's overpowering any others close to him."

Brian was almost left behind as they sped in the direction of the aura. Pesche leveled alongside Uryu, gasping heavily as if he were struggling to keep up.

"Umm... Why are you doing that?" The Quincy gave him a weird look.

"Because—ack, hurk!—oof—ugh—It's funnier this way..!"

"Well, knock it off. It's not funny anymore, just very dumb." Pesche dropped the matter. Dondochakka sighed as Pesche fell back a bit to join him.

"Sad, ain't it? They learn we ain't weak or nuttin', an' they still ignore us..."

"Have faith, my lumpy friend!" Pesche puffed out his chest, "We still have time to prove our worth! Onwards! To the epic battle scene, where we shall be cool for once!"

"Shut up and run!" Renji glared back at them, tired of the heroically loud shouts in his ear, "We're kinda dealing with a serious fight here! So stop being so damn annoying!"

"... Okay..."

"Thank you!" The Quincy and Soul Reaper turned back. Pesche fell even further behind.

Brian found he could keep up with them, but only just barely. They were headed straight back toward the ward where Szayel Aporro waited. It was almost perfect, he didn't even have to do anything to convince them and they were headed right for him.

But the trouble lay in their attitudes! It seemed to have been ingrained in them that the Octava in the ward was some kind of imposter, and the one he'd trapped in the vault was the one they should follow. But Brian trusted his Master.

And like any good Fracción, they put a great deal of thought into not getting their Espadas into dangerous situations. And now what amounted to an angry mob of four very strong fighters was rushing headlong towards a conflict with the Octava.

Szayel was an Espada, yes, but he was not among the strongest of them. Aside from *maybe* Aaroniero, the Novena, he was physically the weakest.

And even Espada-level strength and reiatsu was not all that mattered in a fight. The odds were somewhat lop-sided as they were. Brian knew he had to even them.

He reached into his shirt and rummaged carefully as he could while in Sonído. His hand connected with a very unusual object to be found tucked into a man's shirt.

A zanpakuto. But more specifically, one that took the form of a small blow-dart gun.

The Fight's In the Next One, Isn't It? Dammit!

It was thoroughly dark for a moment. The echoes of the Octava's enraged bellows died away until the only sound he heard was his own breathing. Groping in the dark, his hand encountered the Kido lantern where it had fallen. It was the work of a second to turn it on.

"Well, that was rather sucky, now wasn't it?" He spoke to himself. His eyes wandered to the massive door sealing him into the black, echoing place, "Could be worse, though."

Setting the lantern down on a large busted apparatus near the vault door, the Espada dipped a finger into one of his sleeves, under the wrist. He drew out a tiny device, almost small enough to fit on the end of a pinky finger with no risk of falling off. A press of a button and the object emitted a tiny blue light.

Szayel closed his eyes and let his strange invention do its thing. Immediately he was aware of where his servant Brian was headed.

"Ahh... Got you," his grin would have made passing birds stop flying, "Hunhh... I've had enough of this sitting around for now...Now, to business!"

Brian, whatever strange things and misled ideas were going through his mind, had underestimated the power that Espadas (even weak ones) were capable of. It was no small feat to break out of such a strong container, but then again Espadas were not known for their inability to do amazing things.

"Right..." Szayel muttered to himself as he went into an aggressive crouching stance by the door, "Lift with the legs, not with the back. One...Two..."

SKKKKKRRRRREEEKK!

He dug his fingers into the bottom of the door's seal as if they were talons, partially piercing the metal it was constructed of. Then, with one violent wrench, he tore the freaking door in half.

"Ooh, ow, jammed a finger..!" Szayel dropped the mangled remains of the door with a hefty clang, sucking on the mildly discomfited digit out of reflex. He looked up and his eyes hardened, his head twitching about as if trying to hear something.

"Hmm." It was bad news. With the help of his device he was now tracking Brian, but he could also sense that the interdimensional travelers were on the move. And they were moving in the same direction as Brian. And all towards the place where his wicked alternate version was obviously preparing to unleash a private Hell on some unfortunates.

Szayel sighed and hastened to catch up to them.

Damn all this fighting, his inner dialogue continued with itself, Every time I try to do some serious research or experimentation—bam, fight. And who's always got to break it up? Me,

of course, who else? The one Espada who values their body parts highly? Sure, send him in to possibly get them chopped off! Makes perfect sense!

Still...

Outwardly he gave a short chuckle.

I look damn good when I'm kicking some ass...