

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

Section 11: And NOW the Fighting!

Brian lined up his sights, centering the trajectory of his blow-dart gun on whom he felt was the strongest of the party. The red-haired Soul Reaper continued on regardless, never knowing that the meek servant behind him possessed the power to knock him out cold as easy as sneezing.

The misdirected servant checked his aim one final time and fired a dart laden with mystery tranquilizers right at the back of Renji's neck.

THIKK!

"Ooch!" Pesche slapped at the place where the dart had struck his flagging arm. The limb had, in the strangest and perhaps weirdest timing ever, stuck out right in the path of the dart and took it instead. Before the beetle-masked Arrancar could find the dart with his fumbling grasp Brian hastily willed it to disperse into a silent puff of reishi.

"Whut was dat for?"

"Something stung me, or maybe bit me," Pesche rubbed his armpit and found a mini-drop of blood, "Ow! That had to be some kind of monster mosquito to do that!"

"Shit..." Brian mumbled to himself. Taking Pesche out of the fight was alright, but he would've preferred to secure the Bankai-user. A Bankai meant a Captain-like strength, and Captains were the one major threat to Espadas. Brian wondered if he could get in a second shot before the fast-approaching ward came into view.

"Pesche, pick it up, man!" Dondochakka peered over at his lagging friend, "Why ya movin' so slow all a sudden?"

"I dunno... Feel kinda sleepy..." Pesche wobbled, having difficulty sustaining a proper Sonído.

"Run it off! We're kinda in a hurry here!" Renji's bark temporarily shook Pesche into wakefulness. Both he and Dondochakka sped up, but no one but Brian took note when the loin-clothed Fracción suddenly appeared to faint and drop to the floor.

Brian skidded to a halt in front of the unconscious Arrancar. What to do with him now

that he'd knocked him out, he had no idea. But he had at least took an opponent out of the nasty war about to be waged on his Master.

Then a thought struck him. Could the allies of the false Octava be persuaded into reason somehow by using the comic Arrancar? Perhaps they'd hesitate to attack with Pesche Guatiche's neck between them and Szayel Aporro.

Brian shouldered the limp body, ignoring the urge to roll his eyes when Pesche mumbled something of a naughty nature in his sleep.

FIGHT! FIGHT! FIGHT!

Rebecca was slowly coming around to the fact that Szayel Aporro had never really used his full strength in front of her before. She deflected his latest sword swipe, loathing the playful smirk painted on the evil Espada's face enough that she longed for there to be a way to rip it off. But that was not likely to happen.

Nor was she likely to come within a foot of even hitting him.

She spotted Szayel flitting alongside her too late, and with a snarling grin he planted a knee in her chest. Rebecca crashed to the ground, her zanpakuto skittering across the floor and coming to rest just under an operating table.

"Tch-tch... To think a pathetic little creature like yourself would even think to stand up to me!" Szayel fluffed some hair out of his face and stomped on Rebecca's prone form. "You can't hope to beat me. None of you can. So... I suggest you all shut your ignorant mouths and fall in line..."

Ilfort tried to stand, but Szayel was on him in less than a second, tipping his chair over before he was fully out of it and sending him sprawling. Ilfort sucked in a painful breath at having landed on his bad shoulder.

"You... You go to Hell..!" Ilfort growled. His good arm shifted slightly, hand creeping toward his sword. Szayel did not see—the alternate twin was shielding his movements with his body.

"Ha!" Szayel cackled, lifting his head and preening with a pair of crooked fingers, "The utter incompetence of your thought process never ceases to amaze me...!"

He was cut off, nearly in a literal sense, as Ilfort whipped Del Toro low at the evil one's ankles. Taken by surprise, the Octava only had the chance to lift one foot out of the way before the blade bit him.

"Gyaah!" Szayel fell back, crouching with his hair cascading over his face, hissing as he breathed. The sword had gone in deep—for a Soldado trying to do battle with an Espada—slicing the top part of the Octava's stylish shoes completely off and revealing a moderate gash that seeped a fair quantity of blood. Ilfort was mildly surprised that it wasn't black and putrid, or at least an alien green.

"You..."

Szayel's eye gleamed under the curtain of pale pink, the normal amber taking on an ominous reddish tinge. Ilfort scuttled to his feet, holding the blade out to keep some distance. He backed into a chair and upset it. The medics and injured Soldados took one look at their dangerous enemy and flattened themselves against walls and objects, seeking something that wouldn't get tossed around that easily.

"You..." Szayel repeated, his voice no longer chirpy and slightly fruity, "You... YOU WILL PAY FOR THAT!"

Tziing!

"Ow!" Szayel turned at a sharp new pain, sticking in his back. Looking over his shoulder, his face turned grave as he examined the luminous blue projectile jutting from the meaty part of his back right by his arm.

"Correction," Uryu paused just outside the threshold, another arrow locked and loaded, "You're the one who's going to be paying..."

"Whoa! Dat's an awesome line!" Dondochakka was nearly weeping at the theatrical genius of the threat. Uryu's shoulders slumped as he gave up trying to rein in the Desert Bros. "Ain't dat so cool, Pesche? ...Pesche? ...Pesche!?"

"He was behind me," Renji shook it off, his Shikai eagerly hissing and glowing a faint red, fully prepared to go Bankai any second, "He'll catch up!"

"But I don't see 'im..." Dondo's comically huge fake teeth gnawed briefly on his fingernails as he cast a glance back down the hall they had come from. "Uhh...I don't feel good 'bout dis..."

"He'll catch up," Uryu reassured the big Arrancar, "After all, he's not as incompetent as you two were letting on."

"Hmph!" Szayel faced the three in the doorway, plucking the Quincy's arrow from his

shoulder with three fingers and snapping it. Ilfort could see the thin drip of blood running down the Octava's back from the tiny wound, but despite its lack of severity the sight gave him confidence. "Coming up from behind again, eh, Quincy? You seem to favor that position..."

"I favor any tactic which hurts you," Uryu snapped back. Renji's face turned a shade of pink not unlike that of their enemy's hair as the secret meaning of Szayel's words suddenly dawned on him.

"Hurt? You think *that* hurt me?" The Espada burst into a seizure of maniacal laughs, "That was only a mosquito bite, a mishap with a thumbtack at most! You really are much stupider than I bargained!" His slender hand slid across his torso and took an unorthodox hold of his zanpakuto, "Well, enough of that. You lot were lucky to survive the first take, but you won't make it through take two..."

Slipping the short blade out, the evil Octava pointed it at them. An ominous reddish glow lit up the confined space. The Soldados' and medics' eyes went wide and they all dived for cover, knowing what was about to be unleashed.

Uryu darted backwards and then sidestepped out of the cero's path, but Renji stepped up, grinning. He gave his Shikai a swift flick, and from it burst a jangling collection of bony segments, the space in between glowing with a fiery substance. A monstrous head like that of a serpent's skull burst out of the ruddy light and lunged towards the Soul Reaper's foe, shrieking like wind.

"Heheh... *Hihio* Zabimaru." Renji sounded like he was enjoying himself, snickering like a child who'd just set up the perfect prank.

Szayel Aporro had to force himself to not look panicked. Yes, he knew the strength of the Bankai was not quite up to his own level, but... it was still too close for comfort. And as much as he hated to admit it, he was not in the advantageous position. He sent the cero forwards, hoping it would slow or even dismantle the massive serpentine weapon striking out at him.

THOOOM!

The whole palace seemed to shake, and the red of the cero was cancelled by the fiery energy of Zabimaru. The giant vertebrae fell apart, clinking and scattering onto the floor in a heap. Szayel bared his teeth in a grin of triumph and came at the Lieutenant, convinced he had won.

Uryu decided now would be the time to join in the fun of finally having an even shot at the madman. What looked like one arrow became hundreds as it left the spindly luminous bowstring. Szayel saw the blinding bank of projectiles approaching in his periphery and halted his attack, dropping to the floor and breathing raggedly as the swarm zipped by just inches from grazing him. Uryu leaped directly over the Espada and readied another arrow, this one a highly

lethal Seeleschneider. It buzzed as if it were full of angered hornets as it lit up and was drawn back.

"Sh-scheisse..!" The Octava didn't remember ever having to fight so hard to not get damaged. He was rusty and unused to real combat after a decade or two with his devices to help him out. He was having to dig deep into his memory to recall how to even deal with being directly attacked!

"Dammit. He's a little too slippery still," Uryu tracked the flight of his foe as he once again managed to elude his missile. The Seeleschneider had whipped by inches from spiking the Arrancar's head, burying its own head in shame into the white stone of the floor. The Quincy stooped for less than a second, snatching up the silvery cylinder for reuse, and took aim again, "Are you *done* putting your Bankai back together yet, Renji? I can't keep this up on my own!"

"Just give me two seconds!" Renji focused hard on the femur-like handle of the weapon, and the reddish glow returned. Fire flew out from between the joints of Zabimaru and the massive burning snake came alive again with a grating hiss of hot coals. "Yeah..! That's what I'm talking about!"

Renji's grin would have terrified children.

The red and white alliance continued their assault, driving Szayel further and further down the hallway and farther from the cowering Fracci6nes that had miraculously managed to escape harm. Szayel threw everything he could think of at them: More ceros, balas, slashes when they got close enough, feints, even trying to escape into side-ways. At every turn his attempts to fight back were snubbed--either blocked by the gigantic Bankai or cut off by a flight of painful arrows. Whenever he feinted to the left to avoid Renji's giant bone snake, there was the Quincy ready with a thousand arrows centered on his face. Whenever he ducked out of range of Uryu and tried slinking off down a corridor, there was the head of the grotesque monster, snapping at him and sending jets of whitish-red flame after him like the most pissed-off dragon in existence. He was starting to tire already. He had one last ace up his sleeve, but the issue was using it. If the constant attacks kept up he wouldn't possibly have the time to release it...

Szayel turned a corner and found himself facing an imposing wall. His putrid heart stopped. Turning slowly, he winced as he saw the beastly Bankai turning the corner into the cul-de-sac, fangs bared and wisps of flame licking at its chops. The Quincy darted in over the serpent's head, hovering on a platform of spirit energy and knocking the Seeleschneider to his bowstring.

"Oh... Scheisse..! D-damn..!" Szayel clung to the wall farthest away from his opponents, cowering at the knees, "You... You haven't beaten me! I'm still stronger than both of you! This isn't fair!"

"Yes it *is*, you pretentious ass." Uryu smirked and aimed.

"Heheheh..! This is the first taste of fairness you've probably ever had!" Renji and Zabimaru both seemed to be smiling like sharks.

Dondochakka waddled in, his mace over his back, frowning.

"Bah. I'm not gonna get to have no fun here, ain't I?" He kicked a fragment of ceiling that was somehow on the floor, "Wish Pesche could see this..."

"If anyone touches the Master, then your friend suffers!"

Everyone turned, even Szayel, with a stunned expression on their faces. Brian stood out in the adjoining hall, a barely awake Pesche slumped limply on the floor. The medic's fingers were clenched tight around the two ends of his blow-dart gun zanpakuto, holding it tightly across the second half of the Great Desert Bros's throat. He gave a small squeeze to show he meant business, and Pesche groaned as his air was temporarily cut off.

Szayel was pleasantly surprised. The medic wasn't as pointless as he looked. A viscous grin spread across the evil one's face.

Uryu and Renji stared with mouths agape. The Quincy lowered his bow by a fraction, not wanting to give the hostage-taker the idea that he would shoot now. He was not betting life. Renji's brow knitted and Zabimaru slithered an about face, now glaring down at the tiny traitor with its pupiless stare.

A sound of a single applause made them peer back over their shoulders. Szayel stood up straight, clapping slowly with a smug expression lifting up his face and drooping his eyelids.

"Bravo, Brian..." He twirled his zanpakuto and tasted the razor-sharp tip briefly, "I knew I could count on you..."