

The Crack of the Other Side

13: Whupass Overload

D-Roy's newly enlarged body jumped at a deep crash and rumble from behind him. Turning, he saw nothing but the slightly red-tinted back of his bandage blindfold but he sensed much more. The presence of the Soul Reaper called Masaru had doubled, while that of Shawlong was now frighteningly small, flickering like a candle close to the ground. Lifting the edge of one side of the bloodied cloth, he was even more stunned that he could not see Shawlong where his senses told him he should be standing.

Instead, he saw a pile of shattered masonry and rocks. D-Roy shivered. There was no question why the Primos was there: To save the skin on their asses and bring their prank back in line. But this... This was not supposed to happen.

"H-Holy crap..!"

Suddenly the blue light of Ayako behind him brightened, snapping him out of his state of horror. The massive worm-like tail he'd grown upon becoming Planaria whipped up, coiling back upon itself and wrapping about the blade, hilt and the hand holding the sword of the fifth seat. Ayako growled and struggled, having no luck against the vise-like constriction of the Arrancar's tail.

"Gotcha!" D-Roy slithered back around to face his trapped enemy, a snarl now growing on him. Swinging the tail skywards, D-Roy spun and slung Ayako bodily towards the ground.

The fifth seat's eyes expanded to superhuman size as the ground rushed towards her. Mere feet from being crunched, her free hand took a tight hold of what little of Mukudori's handle stuck out from the Arrancar's coils.

"Ggg..!" The Soldado was forced to release the Soul Reaper's blade from his grasp as a searing heat flooded through it, singeing the plated segments on his tail even through his improved hierro. Ayako thudded to the ground on her shoulder, gasping and struggling to her feet. The landing wasn't soft, but it was definitely an improvement from being splattered onto concrete at Sonído speed...

"Hnnh! Hah, you're a bit tougher," the Soul Reaper said as she fought her way upright again. She clutched her shoulder for a moment, but quickly let it go to better hold out her weapon. "But you still can't see me. And now you're a bigger target."

"Yowch..." D-Roy attempted to quench the burning on his tail's armored skin against a relatively cool fragment of brick wall. Snapping his head upright, he was momentarily "blinded"

by Ayako's intense spiritual pressure right in front of him, flooding out his Pesquisa. Bringing up both arms in an X-shape in front of her slashing sword, he marveled at how much more sensitive his spiritual senses seemed now that he was fighting at full power.

I should do this more often..! He grinned upwards, towards where he was fairly sure Ayako's face was. She was straining against the Arrancar's new strength, beginning to be pushed back by both of D-Roy's arms.

"Keshehsheh!" The psuedo-planarian centaur leaned down and sidled the blade from his wrist to his hand, grabbing it and freeing his other arm. A wild swipe with his fingers spread like claws forced Ayako onto her back. Growling, she let go of Mukidori, "Wh-what the hey..?!"

For a moment, the Arrancar was off-balance. Ayako took full advantage of this. She rolled with her hair flowing around her like seaweed, ending up inches from the hammer-head that had replaced D-Roy's waist and legs.

"Hado Eleven, Tsuzuri Raiden!" she cried out hastily. Underneath the blindfold the small Arrancar's eyes bulged wide. Mostly because of Ayako's foot--planted squarely between the "eyes" of the second head.

As soon as the electricity was finished arcing through his body and flashing between his arms, D-Roy dropped the sword. Ayako lunged for it, just barely missing being caught under him as he fell over doubled up on his second head.

"G...Ghhh... Aughhh... Why right in the... Owwww..." D-Roy whimpered. Unbunching like his vertebrae were rusty, he eventually returned to a half-upright position. Ayako was already up, albeit dust-covered from her time on the ground. She fluffed her bangs out of her face, picking free a piece of dried tar that had somewhat survived being cero-ed earlier and snorted.

"Thought it be fitting for a perv like you!" She held her sword back in fighting stance, ready to go once more whether D-Roy was done clutching his waist area or not.

"Perv?!?" D-Roy's voice became less lisp and more bestial snarl, "Who's th' perv?! Your power worksh by exploiting your prettiness!"

"Oh, so you actually got that?"

"Duh!" D-Roy's long tail whipped a trash can bitterly aside. The spines lining his armor-plated flanks began to rattle, "Of course I got it! Shawlong friggin' told me..! Well, Shorta..."

Ayako zipped forward, taking advantage of the distraction. However, D-Roy's senses were growing ever sharper in the absence of his sight. The Soul Reaper barely dropped to the ground before the destructive cone of his cero obliterated the row of telephone lines behind where she'd stood. Panting and reining in her luxurious locks, she was shocked to hear the

grating rumble of more stones and concrete being blasted right behind her. D-Roy had missed to start with—but he hadn't stopped shooting.

“Oh, no, I ain't lettin' you eshcape *again..!*” Planaria flew to the ground mere meters from where the Fifth Seat was stumbling to get away, the cero's red light searing everything in D-Roy's path along the way.

Ayako choked on sulphurous tar smoke as the attack began to melt the alley she sprinted on. Her blood was boiling—there was bound to be chunks of the sticky crap in her hair.

The rubble muffled most of the sounds from above where Shawlong was buried, but the grinding of road from D-Roy's distant ceros reached him and woke him to his odd predicament. Pinned under several tons of shifting blocks of concrete, the Primos realized with a grunt that he was still clutching onto the hilt of Tijereta with one hand. The strain of the great weight on him was survivable, but uncomfortable, and laying his palm flat on the sword's handle he immediately went to work correcting that.

FWOOM!

Masaru had almost taken the first step to turning about. Right before his foot settled fully on the ground the whole landscape lurched, a great slab of the smashed and battered roadway tilting up and cracking in half.

The Soul Reaper darted to a rooftop, turning to see the combined heap of asphalt, earth and underground pipe flipping over and shattering into millions of particles where he had once stood. The rubble pile where he'd flung his opponent was completely obliterated, and in its place stood a changed Shawlong.

The Third Seat would have chuckled at the irony—easy to kill an insect, was it? Not this one—but understandably the angry aura emanating from the Arrancar stopped him short. Shawlong's face was now even more obscured, the mask fragment like the beaver of a knight's helm straying down past his chin and coming to a point. Other things had also appeared, or grown; A segmented tail tipped with strongly curved earwig's cerci now arched from the back of his head, and his elongate arms were now tipped with lethal-looking blades, like claws almost. His eyes narrowed as he inspected the new elements, scrutinizing the edges of his razor-tipped fingers as if making sure all had released as planned.

Masaru grunted and whipped around to block the strike. Shawlong was behind him, the claws of one hand grating against the contraption of a Shikai. The speed was easily doubled,

perhaps tripled.

The strength too. This was painfully clear as Shawlong brought his other arm into play. He slashed at the luminous ropes tying the Shikai's blades to the handle in Masaru's hands, and though it didn't sever them as the Primos had hoped the sudden jerk on the Soul Reaper's arms yanked him forward and into range of his swipes.

Masaru's eyes widened in terror as he found himself less than an arm's length from Shawlong's own eyes. He wasn't afraid, but caught halfway between smug smile and accusing glare.

WHAP!

Masaru composed himself just in time to bring two coils of his Shikai's glowing rope between him and the thrusting claws. The Arrancar blinked, then darted away, leaving Masaru's own four-square blades rushing towards him. Reining in a curse, Masaru relaxed his hold on the katana handle controlling the weapon; the blades relaxed as well, allowing the Soul Reaper to safely pass through the gap that opened.

"Impressive!" he snorted, not sounding impressed in the least, "Your speed is almost up to par with that of a Bankai user, and your strength is quite a bit more than most of our Lieutenants..."

Shawlong came to rest on the top of a radio transmitter, his claws held to the side but tensed and ready. His tail and his eyes narrowed.

"Is it typical of Soul Reapers to keep your enemies up to date with all your capabilities..?"

"No. But there's nothing keeping me from lying to you about how strong you are." Masaru grinned, lashing out with the controlling handle like a whip. Right away he knew he had given the Arrancar too much warning; Shawlong was gone from the radio transmitter and in the air mere meters away in a blink. As Shawlong reached out with one set of sword-like claws he sensed something was wrong—the Third Seat had slipped a hand swiftly to the other side of the katana handle and made a whipping motion in his direction.

Lights exploded in his vision from the strike to the back of his head. His wits were still with him as the blade began digging at his armor and he whipped his tail around to knock it off course. The rest of the ring he almost forgot—peering down he was forced to lurch back into the defensive. The ring of blades clanged together less than a second later, sparking against each other with a sound like growling malice itself.

Shawlong growled under his breath at the smug look crossing his foe's face. A numb trickle of blood leaked from the gouge of his head; nothing serious. But it could have been, were

he just a bit slower.

He breathed deeply, studying Masaru's arm beginning to twitch—the beginnings of an assault. Anger would be fatal here. The shinigami's blades and his claws were equally sharp, equally swift. It would take patience and confidence—but too much of either would also be lethal.

The ring of blades shot apart, swirling out in a net-like trap before homing in on his form. The curved cerci of his tail twitched. *Now*, while the weapon was away from its master. *Now!*

Nakim lamented that his release's abilities were such a power drain. As he shrunk back into a manageable form and stepped down on the still-standing portion of the theater's roof a sharp burst of spiritual pressure caught his attention.

Edorad and Atsushi's battle raged overtop of the near-ghost town. A series of concrete crashes sounded and plumes of the powdered stuff flew upwards as the two jockeyed for the best position—neither letting up nor backing down now. This Soul Reaper's powers of physical combat had been amplified, making him as capable as Edorad of churning the sidewalks and tarmac to rubble with his fists.

The large Arrancar contemplated helping, but with a grunt of displeasure he knew he would only get in the way. His musclebound friend wasn't as skilled a "team fighter" as he was solo; he was focused and not in danger just yet. The pressures of his other cohorts' fights got to him too, reminding him that there was no easy choice of who to step in for.

The best he could hope for was to recoup his strengths from his wasted Resurreccion release... and step in only to keep any other Soul Reapers from deciding to pull a tag-team themselves.

Out of curiosity (perhaps morbid curiosity), Nakim instead peeked through the hole in the roof. What *had* become of the targets of their ill-fated pranking? His gaze darted around to the scattered camera equipment on the remains of the top floor apartment, but no signs of the *Demon Journey* crew, scattered or not.

A muffled shriek answered his questions and turned his head to the unoccupied roads behind the theater:

“WAAAAAAAAGH! NIIIIIIICK!”

The fat man tried hard not to giggle at the sight. He failed. Who wouldn't fail at this?

“WHAT THE HELL?!! HEEELP! AAAAAARON! NIIIIIIICK!”

The muscular and formerly-cocky member of the crew had quite a pair of lungs on him. And, since one of the rank-and-file shinigami had him slung across their shoulder and was flitting through the air towards a spot on the far outskirts of the town, he made good use of them with his howls of confusion and terror.

“SOMETHING’S GOT MEEEEEE!” A short way away, two more Soul Reapers had grabbed up Nick and Aaron. Unconscious, they made the shinigami’s rescue efforts much easier than their flailing friend. The one carting Nick rolled his eyes. ***“GET OFF ME YOU DEMON! BY THE POWER OF, OF, AAAAAAH, JESUUUUUUUUUS!”***

“Don’t you have some way of *shutting that fool up?*” A wary glance was snuck Nakim’s way, “He’s drawing all the attention over here...”

“Somehow, I *doubt* his idiocy is drawing anything but *annoyance*,” Zak’s reluctant savior was seething, edges of his eye twitching, ears more than likely ringing. Nakim chuckled again.

The three figures and their live cargo faded into distant specks. The squealing kept up, loud enough to hear even from the edges of the desert. The Arrancar shook his head—at the very least the grunts were occupied and the more serious form of collateral damage was well out of the way.

The more amusing question remained: Would this air as-is, or would creative editing damp out the high-pitched screams?