

-||-

Several things happened at once.

First, Izuku felt an uncharacteristic, *icy-cold* bloodlust rise in his Bishop. He chanced a look at her and saw something he had never seen before on Lavinia's face: pure, unadulterated fury. She was not *blinking* as she stared at one of the enemies in particular: an old woman wearing a violet robe and hat not unlike Lavinia's own.

Secondly, Deila's heart sank into her stomach at the sight of the weapon on the man's shoulder. "True Longinus." She hissed, face even paler than usual.

Izuku did not react despite the alarm he felt momentarily. He *did*, however, react to Asia. "That's the Holy Spear..." She said, sounding mesmerized.

Akeno was the closest and she reacted immediately. "Don't look at it." She covered Asia's eyes. "That thing is dangerous to true believers. It's a true holy relic, like the True Cross, Holy Grail, Shroud of Turin, or the Holy Nails. It will rob you of your sanity if you stare at it." Asia trembled in her arms, the spell broken.

Izuku turned back to the man, unamused. Of all the Longinus, Rias had made *sure* he knew about *that* one. Thankfully, Akeno had been on the ball and reacted immediately. "Hmmm, you have us at a disadvantage, stranger." He said, hoping this could be resolved peacefully. He rather doubted it though.

The man chuckled, "Oh, I suppose I do, though most of you are still unknowns. After all, your Peerage retired without doing a thing in that Rating Game of yours, Rias Gremory, even if you yourself are quite famous!" Rias *did* preen slightly at the words, but not much. "I am Cao Cao." Cao Cao introduced himself, "I am descended from the famed Cao Cao of the Three Kingdoms period... more or less."

"CAO CAO!" Kunou yelled from beside Izuku. "I have something to say to you!"

Cao Cao looked amused, "Is that right, Your Highness? Go ahead then. Don't hold back."

Kunou looked taken aback for a moment, before yelling, "Are you the ones who kidnapped my mother?!"

"That's right." Cao Cao nodded agreeably.

And Izuku abruptly decided that he was going to break his nose. He didn't know if this was some sick game of Cao Cao's or if he legitimately was just like that, but this whole 'affably evil' thing the guy had going was pissing him off. "What are you doing with her?" He asked, his tone still even.

The man smiled slightly, “Oh, we just recruited her for a little experiment of ours. Her cooperation is necessary.” Kunou bared her teeth in furious rage, tears licking at her eyes.

“An *experiment*?” Rias’s eyes narrowed, “What are you planning?”

“Nothing you need to worry about quite yet.” Cao Cao waved the question off.

“Then why bother with this?” Izuku asked, waving his hand around, “We thought you were here to kidnap Kunou as well to force Yasaka’s aid, but that doesn’t seem to be your goal.”

“No, we have no interest in the little Kyūbi.” Cao Cao tapped True Longinus on his shoulder a few times. “The time just isn’t ripe for our experiment quite yet. No, no, what brought us here was *you*.” He grinned, “I thought it might be interesting to meet the human who refused to become a Devil yet is strong enough to bring one of their precious Purebloods to his knees with nothing but a scary glare.” He shrugged, “We came to play a little game, you see. A test, you could say, to see whether you are worthy of joining our organization.”

Izuku smirked inwardly at his words. *Refused to become a Devil*, indeed. ‘*Lavinia*.’ He thought at his still frigid Bishop, ‘*Don’t reveal you’ve become a Devil unless you need to.*’ He got a sense of acknowledgement from Lavinia in moments, and barely any time had passed. “Is that so?”

“And what organization is this?” Rias asked sharply, going along with Izuku. “What are your goals?”

Cao Cao’s smile didn’t really meet his eyes, “Why, the Hero Faction, of course.” It was like a violin string inside Izuku’s head snapped. He barely heard what Cao Cao was saying after that. “And our goal is simple: We wish to know the limits of what it means to be human and *break them*.” For the first time, Izuku could read some actual malice in his eyes, “Devils, Dragons, Fallen... all you Supernatural Forces... whenever you go to war, it is humanity that suffers the most.” Despite his passive face, all of them could feel him leering, “You’re monsters, and whenever there are monsters, it’s a Hero that must rise to slay them.”

“Hero?” Izuku took a step forward. “You’ve kidnapped a woman, leaving her child alone and terrified, and you think you’re *Heroes*?” He took another gentle step and a wide crack appeared across the entire length of the bridge.

Some of the people facing them looked alarmed, and the tiniest of the group, a boy who probably wasn’t even in *middle school* yet, took a step back, a bead of sweat dripping down the side of his face.

Cao Cao chuckled, “That’s some aura you’ve got, Midoriya Izuku. I suppose you think otherwise? That’s a shame.” He patted the boy on his shoulder, “I’ll let you handle this, Leonardo.”

Leonardo, who had dark skin, gray hair, and purple eyes, swallowed heavily. An eerie shadow started to spread from beneath his feet. A cold sensation engulfed most of the group. It was like

they could sense that unspeakable horrors were contained within that shadow. The darkness continued to spread out before they started to bubble upwards, revealing arms, legs, heads, and even gaping jaws. Beasts of various sizes and shapes erupted from the darkness, howling their fury.

Deila clicked her teeth, “Annihilation Maker too? Fucking Hell, who are these fuckers? It’s a fucking bargain bin superstore of Longinus Gears. What’s next? Incinerate Anthem?” Lavinia tapped her on the shoulder and pointed at the elderly witch, still not taking her eyes off the woman. “...It was a fucking joke.” She snarled at confirmation of a *fourth* Longinus standing before them.

Cao Cao broke into laughter, “Very good! Yes, our friends here possess Annihilation Maker and Incinerate Anthem. Don’t worry though, that’s the last of our Longinus, and, of course, none of them are as powerful as my True Longinus here.”

“How do they compare to my Boosted Gear?” Aika asked, wariness all over her face.

“Yours is a Mid-Tier.” Rias said, “As I said yesterday, Dimension Lost is on another level compared to yours... as are both True Longinus, the most powerful, and Annihilation Maker.” She clicked her teeth, “At least they don’t also have Zenith Tempest.”

“Oh, wouldn’t that be fun.” Cao Cao sighed, “Unfortunately, Dulio Gesualdo is deep inside the Church. I doubt he’d accept my invitation.” He patted Leonardo’s shoulder again, “Though we won’t need it for you, of course. We might not have as much data as we’d like on your group, but most of you are Devils, and Leonardo here excels in making Anti-Monsters. These guys are all designed specifically to fight Devils.” He smirked and wagged his finger at Izuku, “And of course, since they’re not alive, your little trick shouldn’t work on them. At least if I’ve worked out what it is correctly.”

Izuku tilted his head, “And you think I’ll need it?”

Cao Cao opened his mouth, only to suddenly jerk his spear in front of him as Ace crashed into his guard. Wind blew most of his Hero Faction compatriots back several steps as Ace and True Longinus trembled against one another. For the first time, a vague look of worry crossed Cao Cao’s face. He could see that *every single monster* that Leonardo had created had been diced to bits. “You’re fast.” He pushed Izuku back, watching as he landed a few feet away.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?” The biggest member of the Hero Faction growled as he stepped forward, “You can’t go right for the King, you know?” He clenched his fist in front of him.

Cao Cao laughed off that brief moment of hesitation, “You just want to fight him yourself.” He smirked, “Alright then. Go ahead.”

Izuku turned an unimpressed gaze to the man. He was big, though not as big as Sairaorg. He had shoulder-length silver hair, and like the rest of the Hero Faction, was wearing a gakuran. It must have been their uniform. “The name is Heracles, after my many-great’s grandfather.” Heracles pounded his fist into his chest. “I’m glad I’ll get to test my strength against you.”

Izuku merely stared at him blankly, “I’ll make this simple.” He said, “Return Yasaka, and I might be convinced to leave you with teeth.”

“That’s a whole lot of shit coming from a DEAD MAN!” Heracles roared as a golden-orange aura engulfed him, blowing his hair up like he was going Super Saiyan. He blitzed forward so fast that even Kiba wouldn’t have been able to keep up with him. His fist thundered into Izuku’s face, and a *massive* explosion occurred.

“IZUKU!” Kunou and Ingvild yelled in panic as Izuku flew like a rocket out of the smoke cloud that had been generated. He flew so fast, arms and legs flailing in front of him, that he almost crossed the distance of the entire bridge in a second.

“THERE’S MORE!” Heracles yelled, appearing in a burst of speed behind Izuku and landing a thunderous kick into his spine. Izuku’s body contorted as he flew into the air, the glowing orange man following him. “COME ON YOU FUCKING PANSY, FIGHT BACK!”

“We have to help!” Ingvild raised her hand and began to channel her magic. She wasn’t very experienced, but she *did* have a whole lot of power. She could save Izuku!

Rias held her arm out to stop her. “Let him have his fun.” She said as she watched Heracles beat her lover up and down like the world’s most brutal yoyo, each and every blow exploding like a couple dozen tons of dynamite.

Every time Izuku changed direction from another punch or kick, the man would fly just from the wind pressure of his blows. Like he was kicking off the air so hard it was being compressed into a solid he could jump off. It was absolutely reminiscent of All Might, back in Izuku’s home world.

“Fun?!” Kunou asked incredulously, tears pouring from her eyes. “How is this FUN?!”

“You’ll see, ufufufu.” Akeno patted the little Kyūbi on the head and rubbed between the ears.

“Ano... are you sure we shouldn’t help?” Asia was just *itching* to go heal her big brother.

“PLEASE, HELP HIM!” Kunou pleaded with them, being held back from charging by Koneko.

“This is ridiculous!” Ingvild snarled, a blue aura surrounding her as she started to use her Leviathan bloodline.

Lavinia’s hand shot out, and for the first time in several minutes, took her eyes off her target. “Have faith in him.” She said, firmly gripping Ingvild’s hand.

Ingvild bit her lip and looked into the sky, where Izuku had just taken another brutal hit to the head, a knee specifically.

“THIS IS BORING, MIDORIYA! WEREN’T YOU GOING TO SAVE THE BITCH?! YOU WERE TALKING ALL THAT GOOD SHIT!” Heracles cackled, looking anything but bored, “THIS WILL FINISH IT!” He thundered down, fist cocked back and as telegraphed as he could make it, hoping that Izuku might do *something* of note in this pathetic excuse for a fight. But Izuku didn’t. His eyes were closed. He might have been unconscious. “Tch.” He grunted before unleashing his blow, the massive explosion lighting up the sky.

Izuku fell like a comet, plummeting to the bridge and landing in it with a bang that shook the entire structure. A dust cloud engulfed him as bits of the bridge flew everywhere. Heracles landed in the cloud. “What a fucking waste.” He said as he glared at Izuku, who was laying in the crater, spread-eagled and facing the sky. He spat off to the side and started walking away, looking incredibly irritated. “What a waste of fucking time, Cao Cao. I thought he was supposed to be a challenge?!”

Cao Cao shrugged, “Maybe you would have had more fun with Gremory. At least a dragon of her size should-” He stopped talking as his eyes widened.

Heracles whirled around, and his jaw lowered slightly as he saw Izuku sitting up. He was almost cross-legged as he sat there in his crater, left hand on his neck as he cracked it a few times. “You little bastar-” Heracles started to say as Takeru appeared in Izuku’s right hand.

“**Raimei Hakke!**” Izuku growled, simply appearing behind Heracles. He hadn’t appeared to move. He hadn’t even appeared like he had actually gotten up. One moment he was sitting in a crater, and the next he was three meters behind Heracles. A crackle of black lightning ripped itself through the air off of Heracles’s face and also trailed after Izuku’s kanabo. Blood was absolutely *spurting* from Heracles’s face as he appeared almost like he overbalanced backwards. He crashed with the back of his head into the bridge, shattered it with his noggin, and *bounced* up before falling back down into a fresh crater of his own.

He didn’t move. His teeth did, clattering all around him.

Izuku looked back, “Thanks. You really helped with that crick in my neck.”

Far behind them, Rias had a massive smirk on her face, “Like I said. *Let him have his fun.*”

“Fucking hell.” Deila slowly smirked as she looked to the side and beheld her granddaughter’s beet red face. “I couldn’t even see him move.” She idly noted Kunou’s ears were straight up and she was staring unblinkingly at Izuku, mouth open.

“...One hit?!” The blonde girl with the Hero Faction took a step back, obvious fear on her face.

Izuku looked at them. "I'll say it again." He said dangerously, his eyes glowing emerald, "Return Yasaka, and I might let you *keep your teeth*." Haōshoku surged, sending most of the Hero Faction to their knees in terror.

"Tch. You surpassed my every estimation." Cao Cao said, glaring at Izuku now. His True Longinus wasn't held lazily anymore. His weapon's full holy aura surged, struggling to beat back Izuku's Haōshoku. At least his teammates didn't look like they were going to pee themselves anymore. "Leonardo!" He barked, "Anti-Devil and Anti-Dragon monsters." He pointed his spear at Izuku, "Let's take this elsewhere, shall we?" He extended his spear, which crashed against Izuku's blackened Kanabo to force him back and away. Cao Cao then leapt, landing on the water and walking on it just as Jesus Christ was said to be able to.

With the overwhelming auras slightly further away, the rest of the Hero Faction felt like they could breathe again. The user of Dimension Lost sent his mist out to collect the insensate Heracles. It was a pathetic loss, sure, but if it was against someone *Cao Cao* was having to take seriously, then it was forgivable.

The other silver-haired member of the faction chuckled. "Well, he was certainly impressive." He started to walk forward, "I think I'll go introduce myself. Maybe if her little knight is boring, Gram will taste dragon blood once again."

"As unflappable as ever." The blonde grumbled, "Too bad she doesn't have multiple knights. Maybe I could play with the Rook?"

The elderly woman chuckled, "You'd probably have more fun with Gremory or her Queen. But I better go and face little Lavinia. Why, she might just burst at this rate." She summoned a broomstick and started to fly off to the side, not taking her eyes off the blonde, who quickly followed her on her own broomstick.

They landed off to the side in the forested area, and the elderly woman greeted Lavinia, "*Ice Princess* Lavinia Reni. My, my, it's been some time."

"*Purple Flame* Augusta." Lavinia ground out, "Just what are you up to? Joining a group like this isn't your style."

"Kak kak kak!" Augusta laughed, "Oh, but they just had the most fun ideas! I just couldn't help but participate in their little scheme. I'll take every opportunity I have to advance my craft, after all."

Lavinia scowled, "So not a part of them, but along for the ride. Yeah, that's much more you, Witch of the East." A blue aura started to engulf her as the temperature plummeted. "You're going to give me what I want." Lavinia said, her voice dark.

"This little group of yours has grown strong." As cold as the area around Lavinia was getting, the area around Augusta was getting just as hot. A purple aura was engulfing her as she ignored

Lavinia's words. "And you even have the Sekiryūtei in your little group now. To think that six of the Thirteen would gather in one spot. Perhaps they even attract one another? Interesting. Truly interesting." A towering pillar of purple flame rose behind her.

Ice and snow started to swirl behind Lavinia. "***From eternal sleep, awaken. And thus, the fool will be made to sleep for eternity.***" She chanted as the icy chill congregated. A maelstrom of ice gathered and molded itself into the Princess of ice. Three meters tall or so, it had the form of an inhuman woman made of sharp edges and jagged spikes wearing a dress. Its face was inhuman, six eyes appearing on the left side while a rose grew on the right. Four long, thin, spindly arms with sword-like fingers stood ready to skewer the woman before her.

Augusta let out another chuckle. "This certainly brings back memories. Very well then. Defeat me if you can, little witch. Maybe then I'll let you know about Glenda. ***The anointed one was fastened to the cursed cross. By the high priest of the purple flames, the sacrifice is rebuked.***" She recited what seemed like a curse of her own. The purple flames changed in the same way as the Ice Princess had. A huge crucifix formed for a moment behind her, before being grabbed by an even bigger giant made of flame. Augusta smiled in eagerness, "Your Princess of ice, or my fire giant? Cinders or glaciers? Which will come out on top, I wonder?"

There was a frozen moment between them, before both of the giants moved. Absolute Demise swiped her arm and a gigantic, spiked glacier that would have made Todoroki Shōto jealous appeared, charging at Augusta. The giant of flame took a step forward, putting its master between its legs. It slammed the cross on the ground, and a conflagration met the ice, resulting in a gigantic explosion that rocked the entire false dimension like an earthquake. Behind Lavinia, the entire forest froze, while behind Augusta, it all lit on fire and started to blaze purple.

...

While that had been happening, Leonardo, shaken but recovered and sure of Cao Cao's prowess, had done as commanded, summoning his Anti-Monsters. Seeing as one of his compatriots had a demonic sword known for slaying a dragon, he was able to study it and summon black dragons of his own, each writhing under their own anti-draconic aura. He had tried many other configurations in the past, but ironically, the only beings he had created thus far that could handle Anti-Dragon auras were dragons themselves. Although calling them dragons was a bit much, seeing as they were wingless and could only crawl forward.

The Anti-Devils were also recreated, howling their fury at the group. Deila sighed, "So... who wants who?" Her response was an Anti-Devil opening its maw and shooting a beam of holy light at her face. "Ah, so that's their ability. This is going to be such a drag."

"Are you worried, grandma?" Ingvild asked hesitantly.

"No." Deila deadpanned, "These things are all too ***weak!***" She raised an arm and swiped it. An instant tidal wave formed and smashed into the other end of the bridge. The structure rocked as

the water washed all of the Anti-Devils into the lake. She then clutched her fist, and the water impossibly seemed to *compress*, before relaxing. Instantly, pieces of the crushed monsters started rising from the depths, floating harmlessly.

“Wow!” Ingvild exclaimed. “Do you think I can do that too?”

“You’re a Leviathan, Ingvild.” Rias grinned, “Of course you have that power within you too.”

On the other side, Leonardo clicked his teeth as he summoned more Anti-Devils, this time summoning Anti-Water specialists as well. These looked like armored knights with huge shields.

“Go on, my little flower.” Deila patted her granddaughter on the shoulder. “Show them what a Leviathan can do. Show them your power!”

Ingvild closed her eyes, focusing on her magic the way her grandmother, Rias, Akeno, and Lavinia had shown her over these past weeks (or days, in the latter three cases) and opened her eyes. She raised both hands up, palms up, and a dozen dragons made of water rose from the lakes. Thirty meters long and snarling. They all raced down towards the enemies, who defended themselves. The humans were unharmed, with the Dimension Lost user simply redirecting the dragons away with his Longinus.

The beasts, on the other hand, didn’t have as much luck. The Anti-Water knights proved insufficient for dealing with her dragons. True, they weren’t *hurt* by the water, their shields turning one into rain when it crashed against it, but they weren’t invulnerable. The remaining dragons *bit* them instead, tearing them into the air and crushing them with sheer force.

“Good work!” Rias praised her younger counterpart. She had *immense* power and talent. She just didn’t have *practice*. They’d even had an absolutely hilarious moment before coming to Kyoto when Ingvild had summoned her wings (ALL EIGHT OF THEM) and tail for the first time... and then just plainly asked *how to put them away* with a shy smile on her face.

Ingvild pouted, “But I didn’t get too many of them.”

“Ufufu, but you did something more important.” Akeno replied, “You identified which of them has Dimension Lost.” She pointed at the brown-haired, bespectacled man in the long-haired coat.

“Yes, good job.” Deila smiled, “I think I’ll go say hello.” She said, before teleporting directly in front of the man. He flinched in surprise, before summoning dozens of magical circles around him. Deila matched his energy and summoned dozens of her own. Fire, lightning, water, everything clashed in moments, turning the area into a pockmarked hellscape. “Hoo, you’re quite talented, aren’t you?” She asked the empty air, smirking at the direction he had escaped to. “Are you sure you want to go that far, though?” She asked maliciously, holding onto Leonardo’s head in a light grip.

“Do unhand our little one, will you.” The silver-haired man said as he swiped at her head with a sword. At the same time, the blonde woman swiped for her arm. She would have used Leonardo

as a human shield, but she couldn't do both. She cursed as she was forced to let go and jump away.

"Tch. That's Gram." She said as she watched the scared-looking Leonardo vanish into the purple mist of Dimension Lost. "Wasn't that supposed to be with the Church?"

The man chuckled, "I wonder." He said teasingly. "In any case, I don't suppose you're a swordswoman, are you?"

Deila laughed, "Not even remotely." She shooed him away, "I'll play with the Dimension Lost wielder. You go play with your sharp sticks."

"My thanks." He laughed and ran towards the rest of the group. The blonde yelped as she followed him.

Deila found her target again and attacked from a distance this time, summoning dragons of water like her granddaughter had. The watery serpents met fiery ones as more and more Anti-Monsters kept spawning. Clearly, Leonardo had just been moved to safety.

...

Rias let out a sigh, "Akeno, do me a favor and keep Asia and Kunou safe." She said, before tapping her chin, "Oh, and if you could clear out those dreadful anti-dragons, that would be fantastic." She said as her skin began to ripple and she rose into the air. "**Now, where is that little brat?**" She asked idly as she located Leonardo. Locating him with her enhanced senses (and, if she would admit, fairly obvious general area with more of the Anti-Beasts coming from it), she began to charge up an **Extinguished Star**.

*She fired it, sending the attack howling towards the mountains behind the town on the other side of the bridge. Only, to her shock, the attack was sucked up by Dimension Lost. She howled in fury, agony, and grief as her **own attack** smashed into her, her friends, and her Peerage, annihilating them.*

Rias saw red as her Kenbunshoku warned her of the danger of letting this attack off. These bastards had clearly come prepared for her. Or at least they *thought* they had. Her attack died down, "**So, you want to make me kill my own friends, huh?**" She growled out, before her body started to twirl in the air, coiling and winding up and grinding on itself. Wind started to build up speed around her before she snapped her body like a rubber band. "**Tatsumaki!**" She roared as multiple tornadoes spawned around her, grabbing the Anti-Monsters and even the Anti-Dragons and tossing them into the air. The humans (mostly) had to get low and anchor themselves to the bridge.

"Aren't dragons supposed to be beings of fire?!" The blonde yelled as she stuck a sword into the pavement to anchor herself. Her silver-haired compatriot laughed as he did the same. He had an *eager* gleam in his eyes.

Down below, Akeno realized what must have happened as her expression went ice-cold. “**Die.**” She hissed as a bolt of holy lighting shot up from her hand. “**El Thor.**” An equally golden, *titantic* bolt of lighting smashed down in the area that the monsters were coming from. She had no idea if she had scored a direct hit, but she didn’t think it mattered too much if she had. Her lightning had grown *immensely* powerful, and her attack *shattered* the town it had struck. Earth heaved and roiled under her fury, disintegrating buildings and sending huge chunks of others flying with their foundations and the earth they were built into included.

Whether she got him or not was irrelevant. The monsters stopped charging out of the city at them. “Koneko, Aika, Gasper.” She commanded them forward.

“B-But this is too scary!” Gasper whined.

Aika rolled her eyes, “Come on, Gaspy.” She bit her finger with a sharp fang and shoved the bleeding digit into his mouth. “Isn’t it about time you relax a bit?” Gasper responded by *pulsing* and then turning into a giant horde of bats.

“What was that?!” Asia gasped, looking at the horde.

“Gaspy is a Dhampire.” Koneko said, watching as shadowy hands started rising near the monsters and grappling with them. Some of them tried to fire beams of light at the shadowy hands, only for them to freeze out of nowhere. Forbidden Balor View was hard at work, and completely under Gasper’s control. The hands wrenched their jaws shut and then broke their necks. “How did you know that would happen?” She asked curiously as she turned to Aika, only to deadpan.

Aika was gaping. “Fucking hell, a little bit of blood did all that!? Why doesn’t he do that more often? I never see him drink any!”

“Ufufufu, Gasper hates the taste of blood.” Even *Asia* deadpanned at that. “Also, this *was* an unusual reaction. Perhaps because you’re the Sekiryūtei and dragon blood is tastier?” Akeno finished saying. Her eyes then narrowed, “That’s not Gasper.” She said plainly as shadows surged like water. Spears of shadow started shooting out towards the bats, but it was effortless for the tiny, flying creatures to avoid them.

“Well, they’re having fun, don’t you think?” On the other side, the silver-haired Siegfried commented idly as he held back Kiba’s strongest demonic sword with casual ease. The swordsman had seen the Demonic Blade the man had been carrying and instantly raced over to challenge him. Unfortunately, Kiba’s strongest, of course, had nothing on *his* demonic blades. “A shame it appears I won’t have any of my own. This Demonic Sword of yours is weak compared to my Gram, Knight of Gremory.”

Kiba’s eyes narrowed as he increased his speed even further, summoning blade after blade to fight against the acknowledged strongest Demonic Sword in existence. But Siegfried matched him with the greatest of ease. “I have to say, with how powerful your master and her beau are,

I'm a little disappointed." Siegfried said, ducking under a swipe of a demonic blade, "There's nothing remarkable about you at all." He swung harder, shattering Kiba's blade and forcing him back. He sighed, "You're more Jeanne's speed. I guess I'll deal with Rias Gremory." He said, leaping at the dragon flying above them.

"Get back here!" Kiba yelled, before being knocked back to the ground by said blonde.

"Well, hello there, Knight-chan." She grinned at him, "You're a cutie, aren't you?"

Kiba glared at her, "Do you flirt with every boy you meet holding a sword?"

"Only the cute ones." She winked at him, "And we match so well!" She said, before forming a graveyard of Holy Swords around her, "Right down to our Sacred Gears."

An angry look crossed Kiba's face as he mimicked her, summoning demonic blades around him, "We don't match at all." He growled.

She raised any eyebrow, "Yours might be Demonic and mine Holy, but they're functionally the same." She smirked, "Or is the fact that they're *Holy* blades making you angry? Why is that I wonder?" She charged at him, her Holy Blade meeting a Holy Eraser from Kiba. "Tch, that's kind of cheap, Knight-chan." The two became a whirlwind of flashing blades.

Behind them, Koneko looked over at the remaining three members of the Hero Faction. One of them was conjuring a massive amount of fire above his head and flinging tongues of it at Gasper, looking to burn all of his bats to crisps. "Let's go, Chinporyūtei." And with that, her entire body turned into silver light and vanished.

"Koneko!" Aika almost fell over. "Don't call me that! You'll make Ddraig cry again!" She vanished in a burst of **Soru** after the silver kitten, the echoing sobs of her Boosted Gear making Akeno smirk.

Koneko appeared in front of the man trying to burn Gasper and kicked him in the face. She felt bones break even through her shoes. Blood flew through the air as the man rocketed back like he had been shot out of a cannon. He plowed into a home over a hundred meters away in the blink of an eye and destroyed it, before continuing on, leaving a trail of shattered wood and broken building behind.

"What the?!" A man formed a green bow and pointed it at her.

"So fast!" Another man pointed a blue bow at her.

Both loosed arrows at Koneko, before screaming as the arrows passed *through* her and they hit *each other*. Koneko smirked as she walked over to Blue, remembering that night when she had met her sister for the first time in years.

"That one?" Izuku blinked as she pointed out the fruit she wanted to him. "Why that one? I figured you'd want the Zashu Zashu or maybe the Nikyu Nikyu."

“My biggest problem is speed.” Koneko replied, “And my lack of range. This solves both.”

“That’s... fair enough, though both of those would do that too.” Izuku laughed, “I hate to disappoint you though, but I’ve already given the Pika Pika no Mi to someone.”

“Why would that matter?” Koneko arched an eyebrow at him.

“...I know you’ve read One Piece, Koneko-chan. You came and grabbed a couple volumes off me.” Izuku stared at her dully, “You know the power can only exist in one instance. You can’t eat it if I’ve already given it to someone.”

*“Yeah, you gave it to someone. In **your** world, dumbass.” Koneko smirked a little at him.*

Izuku blinked, opened his mouth, closed it, and then tilted his head. He mumbled, “Would that work?” as he rubbed his chin.

Yes. Yes it would.

She stomped on Blue’s face, knocking him out cold, before grabbing his leg and whipping him head-first at Green, knocking him out too. “Now to deal with these annoying guys.” She vanished again, kicking one of the Anti-Dragons in half.

Aika appeared next to her, before grimacing. “Oh, yuck. This anti-dragon aura feels awful.” She said before transforming into her Buddha form. She grinned when she realized the effect was dimmed. Not extinguished, it was still there, but it was like an annoying headache rather than a migraine. She raised her hand and her chakram began to spin.

“**Boost!**” Ddraig’s voice came from the blades, sounding strange from how fast they were spinning. Energy erupted from the edges, and she threw her hand forward. The ‘Kienzan’ flew forward, smashing into one of the Anti-Dragons with an audible screech. Sparks flew from the creature’s scaly flesh as the Anti-Dragon aura warred with the inherently draconic chakram. “**BOOST!**” A second boost was enough to tip the balance in Aika’s favor, and the screeching now resembled an angle grinder on metal. The monster howled as it was ground through in seconds, landing in two halves before dissipating into the ether.

Aika grunted as she jumped into the air to dodge a volley of Anti-Dragon fire. “Wise guy, huh?” She said before landing and stomping her feet. A massive, ghostly-blue version of her foot landed on top of the dragon, crushing it into the pavement with a screeching exhalation of breath. It struggled to rise to its feet as she raised her leg, higher this time, and then stomped a second time.

The Anti-Dragon *popped* like a blood blister, its essence vanishing like the first one did. She grinned as the Anti-Devils turned their holy lasers on her. Her chakram split apart, the individual petals blocking shot after shot semi-autonomously. “**Boost.**” She said, raising a hand coated in blue fire. She thrust her palm forwards and a wave of flame surged. The Anti-Devils didn’t even

have a chance to roar as they were engulfed and burned to cinders. She grinned, “Time to show off my new trick.” She said eagerly as her Boosted Chakram started to glow. **“Clone!”**

Thirteen versions of Aika now stood on the bridge, and they all congregated on the final Anti-Dragon. Off to the side, Koneko’s eyes widened. Aika, all thirteen of her, grabbed onto the beast with their ghostly appendages and then *ripped it limb from limb*. She then fused back into one and clapped her hands up and down in a ‘job well done’ gesture. “And that’s that.”

“Good job, Chinporyūtei.” Koneko said, smirking as Aika fell over.

“Oh come on!” Aika protested, rubbing her staff lovingly and whispering to Ddraig not to listen to the mean old kitten. The two of them turned their gaze to Rias, who was facing off against Siegfried.

...

“You know, not having as much fun as I thought I would be.” Siegfried grunted as he tried once again to reach Rias’s dragon form, only for her to literally blow him away with a huge exhalation of breath. “Come on, fight me!”

“Ah yes,” Rias deadpanned, which sounded absolutely *hysterical* with her ‘volume to eleven’ dragon voice, **“Why don’t I let you get close with your obviously Anti-Dragon weapons? That sounds like a brilliant idea.”**

“Tch.” Siegfried looked annoyed. “Let’s see how you like it!” He grumbled as he summoned Balmung. A drill-like aura formed around the sword and shot a huge whirlwind at Rias.

“Really?” She raised an eyebrow as the whirlwind crashed into her. **“Thanks for ruffling my hair. Was that supposed to do anything?”** She opened her maw, **“Kaifu!”** She yelled as giant green energy blades erupted from her gullet.

Siegfried’s eyes widened and he summoned his full Sacred Gear, activating his Balance Breaker: Chaos Edge Asura Ravage. Four silver arms grew around his regular ones, and he drew a light sword as well as five demonic blades. His six arms were like a whirlwind as he deflected wind blade after wind blade. Each blade smashed into either the water below or the bridge itself, either throwing up huge geysers of water or carving into the structure deeply.

He didn’t notice Rias’s approaching tail, black not only from color but a weak Busōshoku coating as well, until it smashed him out of the sky. He hit the bridge like a bullet, bouncing off the structure and groaning as he got to his feet.

Jeanne raised an eyebrow at him, “Sure you don’t want the Knight?” She asked blandly. “Honestly, I’m getting a bit bored with him.”

Kiba’s eye twitched, “I’m being underestimated.”

“No, our estimation of you is on par.” Siegfried grunted as he cracked his joints. “After all, you don’t even have a Balance Breaker, do you? Jeanne is going easy on you, and apparently you can’t even tell.” He said bluntly as Jeanne smirked at a suddenly wide-eyed Kiba.

“Unfortunately, there just isn’t anything *remarkable* about a Knight like you.” He said viciously, before his eyes widened in shock.

He blocked a *thunderous* kick from Koneko which had him sliding sideways. One moment the space had been empty, and the next was full of petite feet. “You’re a delightful cunt, aren’t you?” The Nekoshō asked blandly as she lowered her leg.

‘That was unnaturally fast. What was that?’ Siegfried glared at her.

“**Seems your little ‘Hero’ Faction isn’t that great.**” Rias mocked them from above, before her body slammed down and she resumed her human form. Or at least, that was what a delighted Siegfried and wary Jeanne thought she was doing. Instead, she stopped shrinking at about ten meters tall. Her skin was still scaly and teeth still sharp as knives, and her body was bulging with muscle. Red hair contrasted beautifully with her black flesh. She raised a hand and the giant Murakumogiri flashed into it. “**How dare weaklings like you mock my precious Knight?**” No one noticed Kiba bite his lip in frustration.

“What the hell?!” Jeanne exclaimed, looking at the humanoid but clearly draconic monstrosity in front of them.

“Dragons can’t do that!” Siegfried was also confused, “They can become human, sure, but it’s one or another! How in God’s name are you doing that?!”

“**Well, there’s a really nifty explanation for that.**” Rias smiled at them. “**Fuck you, that’s how.**” She vanished, and Jeanne’s eyes widened in terror as Rias appeared above her.

“**BALANCE BREAK!**” She screamed before Rias could make her half the woman she once was. Holy Swords erupted around her before forming into a huge dragon made of holy blades. “**Holy Dragon of Judgement!**”

Rias’s naginata crashed into the holy blade dragon, screeching against steel flesh. A whole wing was cut off, forcing a scared scream from the blonde as the weapon threw bits of asphalt at her, but Rias hissed and leapt back, squeezing her smoking and sizzling hands around the shaft of her Meitō. “**I hate Holy auras.**” She grumbled. Still, at least her draconic hybrid form dulled the reaction a fair bit. Without it, a holy aura that strong would have badly burned her.

“Bad move, focusing on her!” Siegfried yelled as he leapt for her, his six blades ready and waiting to bite into her flesh.

Rias turned her head, “**Extinguished Star.**” She grunted, spitting a huge wave of her Power of Destruction at him.

“Siegfried!” Jeanne yelled from beneath her Holy Sword dragon. The silver-haired man was carried away by the wave, desperately crossing his blades in front of him in an attempt to block. He landed a hundred meters away, badly burned and sizzling.

Jeanne gulped, hoping that her Balance Breaker would be enough here. And then everything stopped when a monstrously powerful holy beam attack shot from the surrounding forests towards the bridge. Rias’s eyes widened as she struggled to keep up with it. Akeno barely managed to join her in creating a series of barrier circles.

But the attack from the strongest Longinus mowed them down like they weren’t even there. And their stomachs fell when they realized its target. “KUNOU!” Rias yelled.

And then Izuku fell out of a portal, Takeru held firmly in his grip. With a howl, he clashed with the attack from True Longinus, digging tracks in the asphalt with his ruined shoes to keep it from reaching Kunou.

“Time to go.” Cao Cao, bruised and with his uniform shredded, landed next to Jeanne. He grabbed the blonde, who only had a moment to shriek in shock, and hauled her over his shoulder before taking off in the other direction.

Finally, the attack dissipated, and Izuku was revealed. His clothes had been torn to bits already and he was covered in light scratches. His eyes were *alight* with fury as he allowed his Haki to vanish. “They’re gone.” He growled as the barrier around the dimension vanished, returning them to the real world. Shrieks rang out as humans around them took in the group and started to scream. Izuku and Rias growled and brought their magical power to bear, “**Ignore what you just saw!**” He said as he replaced his clothes and she went back to her fully human form.

The wave of magic washed over the bridge and the humans’ eyes glazed over and they went about their business. “What happened?” Rias asked as she got closer and gave him and Kunou a relieved hug.

“That-That *bastard*!” Izuku was *seething*. “He attacked Kunou in order to distract me so they could leave.”

Kunou teared up, “But-But my mother!” She looked panicked, “We have no idea where she is or when they’ll attack again!”

“No, we do.” Izuku said bluntly, still angry that they hadn’t been able to stop things here. He picked Kunou up and held her in his arms, trying to relax and comfort the young girl. “Njio Castle tonight. That’s when they plan to do whatever their *experiment* is.” He tried not to growl, “And it’s where your mom is bound to be, Kunou-chan.”

She sniffled, “Thanks goodness.” She buried her face into his neck.

“What I want to know is why that bastard was still acting so confidently. I definitely would have beaten him if the fight had continued.” Izuku said, still frustrated.

“Balance Breaker.” Koneko said bluntly.

Akeno nodded solemnly, “Both that blonde Jeanne and the silver-haired bastard Siegfried had Balance Breakers. If he was acting like he wasn’t frightened even after this, it’s likely he has it too. Maybe they all do.”

“We can ask *them*.” Deila said as she walked up, an aura around her causing the humans to ignore her entirely. She dumped the two bowmen with the different colored bows at their feet.

“Good.” Rias hissed viciously. “Koneko, Gasper, go secure them at the hotel please.” She said, and the two nodded, before Izuku sent them all away via a portal. She pressed her palm to her forehead. “We should head back to the hotel as well. We need to let Serafall-sama know what happened here.”

Izuku nodded and looked around, his brows furrowing. “Where’s Lavinia?” He extended his senses, finding her presence in the woods. “...I better go check on her.” He kissed his girls and handed Kunou over to Rias, “I’ll be back in a bit.” He sent them on their way and then portaled over to where he sensed his Bishop. “Lavinia?” He asked, taking her in.

Her dress had been slightly damaged, and she was missing a sleeve. She didn’t react to him at all. He raised an eyebrow, raising a hand and pulling a boulder from the earth. A quick spell cleaned it, and then he picked her up bridal style. She yelped, her trance broken, and he sat down with her in his lap. “Izuku?”

“Talk to me, love.” Izuku said gently, holding her close. Lavinia chewed on her bottom lip in frustration. “Stop that.” He chided gently, healing her suddenly-bloody lip. He then noticed a thick coat of ice on her right arm and replaced it with air. He growled when he saw the light burn on her flesh, healing it as well. “What happened? I’ve never seen you like that.” He said, turning her to face him with a gentle nudge of his finger.

She let out a sigh, drooping. “Ten years.” She said tonelessly. “I’ve been chasing that woman for ten years. And now, when I have her *right in front of me*, she just... *vanishes*.” She clenched her fists.

“Tell me.” He said gently, not commanding, but asking her to share her pain with him.

She hesitated for a moment, before talking. “I’ve never really shared this with anyone.” She said softly, “Not even Rias.” She looked away, “When I was young, I had no idea what Absolute Demise was. I knew nothing of magic. All I knew was that a scary-looking doll kept following me everywhere.” He hid a grimace. That must have been traumatic. “And of course, no one else could see it. They just thought I was crazy. I *hated* Absolute Demise...” She paused for a moment, “I... lost my parents when I was nine. Just a car accident... but no one was willing to take me in. The rest of my family thought I was just a schizophrenic or... whatever it was that they thought...”

Izuku tightened his grip on her, clenching his jaw. How *dare they*? How could ANYONE look at family and think something like that? Was this what people had to deal with when Quirks started coming out?

“But someone did take me in.” She smiled gently, “Glenda. The Witch of the South. She was... wonderful. So kind. So gentle. So passionate about magic. She saw something in me and accepted me as her student. Taught me everything I know. Taught me to love magic and even accept Absolute Demise, once I learned what the doll really was. I loved her and she loved me. I... I almost felt closer to her than my own mother.”

“She sounds wonderful.” Izuku said gently as she rested her head against his.

“She was.” Lavinia said, her smile turning melancholic. “When I was thirteen, she sent me off to Grauzerberer, hoping I’d get along with the other magicians. It was through them that I met Rias-chan... and you, eventually.” She said, smiling at him.

He smiled back, “And I’m so glad we did, Lavi-chan.”

“Me too.” Her cheeks pinked, and she shook her head, “Glenda and I promised to stay in touch, and for a month or two, we did. That all changed suddenly, when she was attacked by the Witch of the East.” She hissed, “She vanished after Augusta attacked her, and I’ve been chasing after that... that *harridan* ever since.” She told him, clenching her fist again. “I *need* to defeat her.” Lavinia declared, “I need to defeat her so I can learn what she did to Glenda!” She said, her face turning frustrated, “But she’s a very strong witch and her powers naturally oppose mine! And it doesn’t help when we’re face to face for the first time ever and she just *leaves*.”

“You’ll have another chance.” He promised her, “Their little project culminates tonight, and Cao Cao told me where. She’s bound to be there too.” He grabbed her chin, “But Lavi, you need to calm down when facing her. Being angry like that is exactly how you make mistakes you wouldn’t otherwise make. Did you even use your Haki? I know you’ve at least *unlocked* Kenbunshoku and Busōshoku even if you’re not very good with them.”

Lavinia looked at him for a moment, before her cheeks pinked and she looked away, whistling.

He snorted, “See?” He patted her thigh, “It’s okay to be angry, but blind fury doesn’t help anyone.” She pouted at him. “How did the fight go?”

Lavinia grimaced, “I launched my ice, she launched her fire. Not much of value, honestly. I nicked her once; she got a small burn on my arm in return. We cancel each other out too well.”

“You didn’t try anything with runes?” Izuku asked, frowning.

“They’re hard to set up in battle.” She replied, opening her mouth and closing it when he raised an eyebrow.

“You’re a Devil now, love.” He said simply. He pointed a finger towards one of the trees, focusing. A green beam struck the tree and the Norse rune for ‘ice’ wrote itself instantly. The entire tree froze solid, jagged shards pointing in every direction. She stared at it, her eyes noticeably calculating as she reevaluated her own ability. “Furthermore, while you haven’t taken to my lessons in branching out anywhere near as well as Rias or even Akeno, I *know* you have learned **Soru**. Why would you stand there and cast when you could see it wasn’t going to work?”

She bit her lip again. He stood and put her on her feet. Her eyes widened as a new barrier went up, locking them in a private dimension. He didn’t have nearly the skill Kuroka or even Rias had with them, but he could still do it. “Get ready. For the next hour, I’m Augusta.” He said as Pele rose up behind him and the air began to heat up tremendously. “Time to plan out your next fight.”

Lavinia swallowed but her eyes hardened. Absolute Demise rose behind her once more.

-||-

Of all the places to assemble for a debriefing, Izuku hadn’t figured it would be a restaurant owned by Serafall. “There you are!” Said Maō exclaimed cheerfully as she waved him and Lavinia in. “We were waiting!” Indeed, Rias and everyone else had been there for a while now. “The food here is delicious, Izu! Especially the chicken! It’s to die for!”

“Good to hear!” Izuku chortled as he took a seat between her and Kunou, with Lavinia finding a seat next to Ingvild. “I’m starving after all that.” The Maō Leviathan had started ordering like crazy for everyone, and the second he took a bite of the wagyu skirt steak his spirit almost transcended flesh. “Oh, you weren’t kidding!” His eyes sparkled as he took a piece of the chicken this time.

“I know my food!” Serafall said proudly, grinning wide. “Eat up, everyone! Nom!” She took a bite of the wagyu herself, letting out a moan of pleasure that had the more innocent ladies at the table (and Gasper) blush.

Izuku looked down at Kunou, who was fidgeting. “Eat, little one.” He said, patting her head gently. She let out a surprised noise and closed her eyes as he expertly rubbed her head. “I know you’re worried about your mother, but she wouldn’t want you going hungry.” He didn’t notice half the girls at the table giving him hungry looks of their own.

“O-Okay.” She mumbled before picking up her chopsticks. “Mhm!” She let out a surprised moan of her own at the explosion of flavor.

Over an hour passed as they ate and made merry, but once the plates were cleared and their bellies stuffed, Serafall got serious. “So. The attack.” She said simply. “What can you tell me?”

“I can tell you that they’re bastards who will attack anyone and anything to accomplish their awful goals.” Izuku growled out, “Children and noncombatants included.”

Serafall bit back a groan, “Of course. They couldn’t make things easy, could they?”

Lavinia raised her hand, “I’m not certain that they’re working alone.”

Rias’s brows furrowed, “How so?”

“Augusta.” Lavinia responded, “That bi-witch-” She side-eyed Kunou for a moment, “-being there was unusual. It wasn’t her style. When I asked her about it, she said she wasn’t a part of the group but that they had ‘fun ideas.’ So clearly, this group didn’t just come out of thin air.”

“That much is obvious.” Kiba said quietly, “A group holding three of the stronger Longinus and partnered with a fourth doesn’t pop up out of nowhere.”

“But are they the leaders or just a part of a larger group?” Akeno asked softly.

“We don’t have enough info to speculate.” Izuku said firmly. “And even if they have backup, it doesn’t really matter, does it? We’re all we’ve got.”

“He’s right.” Serafall let out a sigh. “All the Devils I can pull are already here. Obviously the Yōkai of Kyoto are helping as well. We’ve already gotten some good data.” She snapped her fingers and a magical hologram of Kyoto appeared before them. “The most crucial of which is this.” The hologram changed to show the energy of Kyoto.

Kunou’s eyes widened, “It’s all weird! The energy surrounding the area shouldn’t look like this!”

“Exactly.” Serafall smiled at the pint-sized Kyūbi. “There are more places here in Kyoto filled with mysterious power than you can count. But now, all of the outflows of energy are concentrating on Nijo Castle. That’s where this Cao Cao claimed their...*experiment*... would be happening, is it not?”

“It is.” Rias said, glaring at the table.

“So we know that they weren’t lying or trying to misdirect us.” Deila said, “The question is, what will we do about it?”

“Can’t we ask Sōna-Kaichō for help?” Akeno asked the table. “They have quite a few members to take the strain off of us.”

“Unfortunately, that’s impossible.” Serafall said dryly, “She’s still undergoing hardcore training to get her control back up to her liking. However did that happen, I wonder?” She eyed Izuku with lidded eyes, her face incredibly deadpan. He looked away and whistled. She snorted, “So, like we’ve already established, what we have is what we’ve got right now. So now is time for us to make our plan.”

“First thing we have to do is send Kunou somewhere safe.” Izuku said in a tone that brooked no arguments.

Kunou apparently did not get that memo. “What?! But I-”

“Kunou.” Izuku used the ‘dad voice’ he had learned with Eri. “None of us will be able to fight our hardest if we’re worrying about one of those evil people trying to use you as a target. They already did it once and managed to escape because of it.” He said gently, “I know you want to be there to save your mom, but right now, the *best* way you can do that is to not be there for us to worry about.”

“B-But where will I go?” Kunou asked, looking up at him with those soulful, teary eyes especially cute children always managed to pull off.

Rias grinned, “I think Millicas could use a playmate, no?”

“Ooh, that’s evil.” Serafall grinned, “I like it.”

“Who is Millicas?” Kunou asked in confusion.

“Her brother’s son.” Akeno smiled primly. Kunou looked at her in confusion. “Were you unaware that Rias’s brother is Maō Lucifer, Kunou-chan?” Kunou’s eyes went wide, and her ears went ramrod.

“No place safer in the underworld.” Deila chuckled, “Especially not with Grayfia Lucifuge there to babysit.”

Still, Kunou looked at Izuku, hesitant. He could see that she needed further reassurance, “As soon as it’s safe for you to come back, I’ll come get you personally, okay?”

“O-Okay.” She still looked morose but quieted once Izuku started petting her again.

“Honestly, as useful as Twilight Healing would be, we should probably move Asia as well.” Lavinia said softly. “She’s not a fighter.”

“I want to help!” Asia protested immediately. “Especially with those Anti-Monsters. Even Rias got hurt fighting them. Big brother!” She looked at Izuku with even more devastating eyes than Kunou somehow.

“Asia.” Izuku smiled at her, “That’s admirable, but the Healer is the *obvious* target for any enemy. They’ll try to put you down and I don’t mean gently.” He looked at her resolute eyes, seeing that he hadn’t dissuaded her.

“...May I have one of your fruits, big brother?” She asked after a few seconds.

“Isn’t it usually the Devil offering the temptation?” Akeno grinned, incredibly amused. Asia blushed profusely.

Off to the side, Deila and Ingvild were looking at the blonde in total confusion.

“Hmm.” Izuku rubbed his chin, “That’s... actually a great idea.” He summoned the book flipped through it. He then used a spell to copy a page and flipped through it again, before copying

another page. "I think either of these would fit you well, Asia-chan." Everyone on that side of the table looked over Asia's shoulder as she read through each of them.

"Uhm... this one." She pointed to the one she liked better. Rias took one look and started to *howl* with laughter. She actually fell over backwards and rolled on her back, cackling in delight.

Izuku grinned, and, showing off how his Quirk had evolved a bit since becoming a Devil, had the fruit simply rise out of the page without touching it. It resembled a pineapple with completely green skin and each 'scale' being a swirl. From the top of it, the leaves resembled blue flames. "Only one bite, little sister. Try not to throw up all that delicious food." He teased her.

"It cannot be that bad, despite the name." Asia said optimistically as she cut a piece of it away. Almost everyone grimaced at how completely unappetizing it looked.

Rias raised a hand and cast the anti-curse on her. "By all means then, give it a nibble." She said eagerly.

"What *are* those?" Ingvild asked before she could.

"A state secret." Serafall said sharply. She grumbled, "I forgot they weren't in the know."

"So did I." Izuku rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly. "They just slot into the group so well." Ingvild blushed at his remark.

Deila's eyes widened, "Wait, is *that* how you acquired your dragon form?" She asked Rias incredulously, "A *fruit*?"

"A *Devil Fruit* to be precise." Rias giggled evilly as Deila nearly slammed a palm into her own face.

"But where are they from?" Ingvild still looked confused.

"Exposition later." Serafall ordered, "She'll have to train with it, and we don't have a lot of time." She smiled kindly at Asia, "Go ahead."

Asia nodded and took a tiny bite. Everyone watched as her face went completely green in a matter of milliseconds and she clapped a hand over her mouth. She fought to swallow and eventually managed to get it down. Her body was *shaking*. "Ano... excuse me." She rushed from the room and immediately crossed herself before beginning a prayer for the poor world that had clearly never been touched by God's Light.

"...Is it really *that* bad?" Serafall asked, looking at the fruit like it was radioactive.

Izuku snapped his fingers and the rest of it burned away in an intense flame. "Let's ask Koneko."

"A steak marinated in sewage would be more appetizing than another nibble on one of them." Koneko looked *haunted*. Kunou cringed at even the *thought*. She had picked up the other page

that Asia hadn't chosen and read through it. If she ate it, she might have been able to stay! But if a Nekoshō was acting like that, maybe discretion was the better part of valor.

"Wow, it's been a *long* time since I've seen a 'Nam flashback that bad." Deila cringed slightly.

"Trust us." Rias said, her tone dead, "We will remember those single bites for the rest of existence." She looked off into space, clearly not there.

"Remind me never to touch one." Deila nodded agreeably. "They can't possibly be worth it." She paused and then looked at Rias. "...Can it?"

"Anyway." Serafall napped her fingers. "Next thing is what we're going to do regarding offense and defense." She said, scowling, "With the way you've described them, I wouldn't put it past them to attack the hotel."

"It's safe to assume Yasaka-sama will be at Nijo Castle." Rias said promptly. "As will Cao Cao. Our strongest members will need to go there."

"We can use Castling." Koneko said promptly. "That way, if they trick us and try to attack the hotel instead, I can switch with Rias-sama."

"And one other. Good work, Koneko." Akeno praised her. The silver cat smiled slightly.

"Where will you be, Serafall?" Deila asked her.

Said Maō sighed, "Not in the main fight, most likely." She grumbled, "I'll be coordinating the Yōkai and our other Devils. Our goal is to trap them here and finish them before they can even think about becoming a bigger problem."

"Is that even possible with Dimension Lost?" Ingvild chimed in, frowning. "Can't they just escape?"

"We've dealt with it before." Serafall grinned toothily at them. "We won't be able to stop them from moving around in the city, but we certainly will be able to keep them from *leaving* Kyoto."

"Can you show me?" Izuku asked immediately, a small smirk rising on his face.

"Oh?" Serafall raised an eyebrow, before grinning. "Sure. We've got a couple hours to kill. It's pretty complicated for a relative newbie though."

"But I have an edge." He said, his grin as toothy as hers.

She nodded, and refocused, snapping her fingers. The hologram changed once more as Asia, still incredibly green, came back in and sat down. "The Hotel squad will be Akeno, Asia, Ingvild, Gasper, Kiba, and Koneko." She declared, with five little holograms with their faces popping up at the hotel. "Aika, Deila, Izuku, Lavinia, and Rias will be on offense as our vanguard." The five of them popped up in front of the hotel before advancing to Nijo Castle.

“My opponent is Augusta.” Lavinia said softly. “I have been chasing her for ten years. Please understand that.”

“Rrrright.” Serafall grimaced lightly. Well, she had arch-nemeses, but really only on her show. Her *actual* nemeses were long dead. She could understand Lavinia’s frustration, if only a little.

“I can use my portals to move them if needed.” Izuku chimed in.

“Right. I forgot how useful those were. It’s like having a Dimension Lost lite.” Serafall snapped her fingers with a smile.

“Oh, I forgot to ask!” Rias looked at her leader, “Did we get anything out of the three we captured?”

Serafall grimaced, “Not a damn thing. We started interrogating them, but the second they shared *anything*, it was like those Sacred Gears of theirs self-destructed.” Eyes went wide at the table, “They were dead before we could do a damn thing.”

Izuku scoffed in disgust, his estimation of this ‘Hero Faction’ somehow starting to dig through bedrock.

-|||-

“Izuku-san.” Izuku had been ready to speak with Lavinia when Rias’s Knight grabbed his attention.

“Hey Yūto.” Izuku smiled at him, though it fell when the Knight did not smile back. “What’s wrong?”

“Can we talk?” The blonde asked, a look of frustration on his face.

Izuku raised an eyebrow, before looking over to his Bishop. She waved him off, telling him without words that their rendezvous could wait. “Where to?”

“The roof, please.” Yūto said, and within a moment, they were up on the roof of the hotel, a portal closing behind them.

“So, what’s this about?” Izuku patted Kiba on the shoulder after a moment of silence.

“I was... completely overwhelmed.” He said, clenching his fists in frustration. “Even with all your help and techniques, even with all the faith Rias-sama has placed in me-”

“I told you before, didn’t I? Many months ago...” Izuku interrupted with a wry smile on his face. “When you run into someone who is just plain better than you at your specialization, you have nothing to fall back on.”

“I *know!*” Kiba said, the frustration building, “But it wasn’t just the fact that Siegfried treated me like a gnat... it was the fact that I couldn’t even beat that Jeanne girl and her hells-damned Holy Blades!” He snapped, “And that was *without* her using her Balance Breaker.”

‘...*That sounded personal.*’ Izuku thought to himself as he eyed the Knight. “Did you know her?”

“What?” Kiba looked confused.

“Jeanne.” Izuku said, “Do you know her?”

“No.” Kiba looked even more confused now, “Why do you ask?”

“Because you sounded especially vehement when you mentioned her Holy Blades.” Izuku deadpanned, his face not changing much at all when Kiba flinched. There was silence for a moment, and Izuku sighed, “I told you, Yūto... I can see your soul.” He said, eyes glowing slightly. “Even more now than when I first arrived. And yours just *recoiled* at those words.” He crossed his arms, “Rias has a pattern with her Peerage, even though it isn’t on purpose. Akeno and her family. Koneko and her sister. Gasper and his vampire clan. And I know something awful happened to you too, but I can’t help you if you don’t let me in.”

“I’m sorry, Izuku-san.” Kiba said, looking away, “But you can’t help me with that.”

“Then what is this conversation for?” Izuku challenged him. “All I see here is you acting like an opponent you had never met in your life insulted your mother. By what everyone else has said, she was actively flirting with you.” He smirked slightly, “Aggravating during a fight, sure, but if anything she was one of the *least* offensive of the group.”

“Because if I can’t beat her, then what hope do I have of-” He cut himself off. His fists clenched again, “What hope do I have of destroying *them?*!”

‘*Now we’re getting somewhere.*’ Izuku thought to himself. “Them?”

And Kiba finally spilled the truth. His real name. The Holy Sword Project. The Genocide Archbishop. And as Kiba spoke, Izuku got more and more horrified. Not only of *what* Kiba and his fellow children had suffered, but that this had been bottled up inside the boy for so long. This was *so damned close* to Eri’s situation that it *hurt*. But unlike Eri, Kiba had been saved by a child. And he had nothing against the love of his life. A girl her age shouldn’t have been responsible for the *mountains* of therapy that Kiba required. That *should* have been handled by her parents, her brother, or even her damned sister-in-law. But it hadn’t, and all the same, she had allowed this to fester inside Kiba like a *tumor*.

And as the blonde finished, Izuku discovered that he *very much wanted to hit something until it broke into dust*. He looked at his friend, “I won’t offer empty platitudes, no matter how much I would mean them.” He said softly, “You went through something no child should ever go through. Something I can’t personally relate to.” He said softly, “But I *can* relate, Yūto. I’ve

shared this story with Akeno and Rias, but I don't know if I ever shared this with you. Do you know about Eri?"

"No." And so Izuku spoke as well, telling him everything about the adopted daughter he had lost in his home dimension. And as he spoke, Kiba's anger cooled. When he finished, he closed his eyes and got ready for the hard part. "I'm not going to tell you to forget about revenge." Izuku snorted, "The Maō know how well *that* will go down." Kiba's dry glare was answer enough. "What I want you to do is to *reframe* it. The Holy Swords, Excalibur or otherwise, are not to blame for your trauma."

"They-" Kiba started immediately, and Izuku raised his hand.

"They." He said firmly, "Are not to blame for your trauma." He said, his tone hard, "They have existed for thousands of years in various forms. They are enchanted hunks of metal. They have no will. They did not *choose* to have you tormented in senseless experiments. And there are entirely too many Holy Blades for you to want to destroy them all. Even the Excaliburs themselves are not to blame. They did not choose you. They did not choose your friends. And destroying them *will not bring your friends back*. It was a group of people who *deserve* eternal damnation and punishment who did those things. If you can't let go of your hate, then focus it on those who deserve it. Valper Galilei is the one who deserves your enmity."

"I..." Kiba clenched his jaw, "I see them, sometimes." He whispered, "In my nightmares. I can't-"

"I'm not asking you to forget them." Izuku said gently, putting a hand on the boy's shoulder. "I want you to think about the fact that *they* helped you escape. *They* managed to stall the guards long enough for you to get out. *They sacrificed themselves* so that at least one of you could *live*. They didn't *ask* you to destroy the Excaliburs as you escaped." Kiba huffed in a sharp breath of air. "And they certainly **didn't ask you to avenge them.**"

Kiba was silent.

Izuku sighed and lifted his hand off the boy's shoulder, "You don't need to come to terms with anything I've said today. I just want you to at least *think* about it." He smiled sardonically, "And we've gotten a bit off the original purpose of this conversation." He crossed his arms again, "You came to me because you felt powerless against those two, and because your essential defeat at Jeanne's hands hit a bit too close to home." Kiba flinched, before nodding. "You pulled me here to ask for a Devil Fruit."

"...Yes."

Izuku pursed his lips and leaned back against the railing, "Normally, I wouldn't be against it. A Devil Fruit is a tool. For you though, it will be a crutch. You got frustrated with Haki. I can see that now. Especially with Rias, Koneko, and the other girls having much more success with it. Kenbunshoku requires a calm mind, and even in One Piece, the most common way to defeat it

was to unbalance the user. With the inner conflict you've been bottling up, I can see why you had so much trouble with it. Busōshoku is also something you'd struggle with, because your fighting style isn't conducive to *learning* it. You've been trying to skip the most basic step this entire time and going straight to level two. Doable," He said with a shrug of his shoulders, "But *much* more difficult. And much more time consuming."

Kiba let out a sigh, his frustration having left him during the conversation. Izuku had never seen Kiba mope before, but this would certainly classify. "And time is something we dearly lack. The fight starts in less than eight hours."

"And if you think you'll have instant mastery over your fruit, let me correct you." Izuku said flatly, "It's less of a concern for Asia since she's not *supposed* to be fighting, only healing and defending, but you will struggle with it for a long time. And that's if it doesn't put you on your ass like it did Rias and Sōna. Unlike Asia, you *are* a Devil."

Kiba silently cursed. He had forgotten about that. "Which neatly eliminates any Zoans. Koneko recovered quickly with a Logia though."

"But she still needed to recover." Izuku replied, before his tone went a bit dry, "Even if at least half of that was from the taste." Kiba let out a snort and a smile, which put one on Izuku's face as well. "So that leaves us to gamble on a Paramecia... if we ignore this being a crutch. Which it is."

Kiba was silent for a few moments. "I *want* to get stronger." He said softly. "Maybe I do have my priorities skewed. Maybe I'll never be able to separate Galilei's actions from the Excaliburs. But right now... I can at least put it to the side. We're all in danger because of them. And I can't be the weak link that lets my family down. I can't be the one that they get past to hurt one of you. I just can't."

Izuku smiled. Well, that was more like it.

-||-

Izuku made his way down from the roof, heading to Lavinia's room. She had something she wanted to talk to him about, though he wasn't sure what. As he did so however, Ingvild's door opened. "Izuku?"

"Ingvild." He smiled at her. "What's up?"

"C-Can you come in for a minute?" She held out her hand.

Surprised, he held out his hand and allowed her to pull him in. "What's the matter? Are you worried about the battle?" He asked immediately once she closed the door. It was the natural thing for his mind to go to, and even more natural for her to be nervous. She had *just* woken up less than a month prior and was already going to be in for the fight of a lifetime.

She nodded hesitantly. “It’s a lot. Especially with me still learning. You are too, but I don’t have your experience.”

“We know.” Izuku said softly. “That’s why we have you here and not at the main battlefield. I wish this wasn’t necessary. That you had more time to acclimate. But unfortunately, the world hasn’t decided to be kind this time.”

She smiled at him. “Yeah.” She said simply. “That’s why I want to join your Peerage.”

His eyes widened, “That’s a big jump to make.” He said, “And not one you should feel forced to make, Ingvild.”

She beamed at him, “It’s exactly because of how... *you*... you are, that I want to be yours.” She said and then blushed profusely as she repeated the sentence back inside her own head. “Auuu, I mean- I wasn’t-” She waved her hands in front of her as Izuku chuckled.

“Oho, that was more forward than I expected from you, Ingvild.” He smiled at her in amusement.

She was still blushing as she clapped her hands to her face and made some more noises. She took a deep breath to calm down, “Just...” She unmuffled herself and worked her hands in front of her. He stopped her from fidgeting by taking her hands and holding them gently. Her blush returned with a vengeance. “I was... already hoping to be close to you. You... you saved me. From something I had gone to sleep truly believing would be my death. I... When grandmama promised to save me, I wanted to believe with all my heart that it would be true. I tried putting a smile on my face for her... But even when I went to sleep, I was still filled with doubt. Fear.”

She smiled at him, “And you changed all of that. Then spending time with you for these past weeks, living with you and Rias and everyone...” Her blush had died down a bit, but returned with a vengeance, “And then watching you with Kunou-chan...” She forced her blush down and gave him a heartfelt smile. “When I woke up, I thought my world had ended. And even then, you helped me through it in a way no one else could have. I... I would be proud... *no*, I would be *happy* to be a part of your family.”

“And we would be happy to have you in our family, Ingvild.” He said with a beaming smile back. He let go of her hands and summoned his Evil Pieces. “Are you ready?”

“Yes!” She said, joy in her voice.

Izuku levitated his other Bishop and held it up to her chest. “Then **Arise**, my Bishop.” Power and pleasure flooded through Ingvild as she accepted his Evil Piece. Her wings all popped out of her back, changing between Devil wings and Fallen Wings a few times before she settled. She let out a happy squeak when she settled and put her wings away again. She threw her arms around him and hugged him for all she was worth.

It had taken far longer than Izuku had expected to find himself in Lavinia's room. But finally, they had found their moment, and Izuku didn't waste it. He picked her up once she let him in, pressing her up against the wall. She let out a surprised squeak before it was muffled by his lips. A moan was also muffled as Izuku ground up against the sexy older girl. He pulled back and began kissing her neck, "I'm getting *really*-" peck, "Annoyed at all these interruptions." He said, squeezing her supple ass. "I had hoped to take you on a proper date already."

"Izukuuu!" She mewled under his assault. She was breathing heavily when he put her down, her face flushed.

He smiled at her, delighting in the effect he had on the beautiful blonde. "So, what did you want to talk about?"

She shook herself and snapped her fingers. He raised an eyebrow as her standard witchy outfit was replaced by an expertly tailored business suit and skirt. "I have a trade offer for you." She said with a serious look on her face, steepling her fingers in the meme-iest pose he could imagine.

"Oh?" He raised an eyebrow again and smiled. "Offer away." She lost the meme look and grinned as she leaned up to whisper in his ear. His eyes bulged as he listened to her before an absolutely *evil* smile rose on his face. "Oh my love, you *absolutely* have a deal." She beamed and kissed him greedily as a portal opened and engulfed them, taking them away from the hotel and to Rias's mountain resort.

-||-

Night had fallen and all the preparations they had been capable of had been finished. Izuku looked down at Kunou, "Are you ready, Kunou-chan?"

"...Are-" She stopped, before looking at him tearfully, "Are you sure I can't come with you? I-I want to save mama!"

"We're sure." Izuku said, kneeling in front of her and rubbing between her fox ears. "And your mama wouldn't want you in danger either, little one." Despite normally loving his ministrations, Kunou's mind wasn't ease. "This is my promise to you. I *will* save your mother. You'll be back with her before you know it."

Her bottom lip quivered, before she flung herself into his arms and hugged him. Everyone around them smiled as he reassured her. "Time to go." He said once they separated and he opened a portal. "Hello, Grayfia-san." He smiled at the maid, "And Millicas-san."

"Midoriya-sama." Grayfia bowed as Millicas waved. "And hello, Kunou-oujou-sama."

"Greetings." The little Kyūbi had wiped her unshed tears and put on her imperious face. "Thank you for being this one's host." She bowed.

“You are very welcome.” Grayfia said, holding out her hand and helping Kunou into the profile.
“And good hunting to you, Rias-sama.”

“Thanks. Keep Kunou entertained, Millicas.” Rias winked at her nephew, who blushed slightly from beside Kunou, “We’ll be done before you know it.”

“Of course.” Grayfia bowed, and then the portal closed.

“We ready?” Rias put her game face on.

“As ready as we can be.” Akeno replied. “Stay safe, Rias-sama.”

“You too.” Rias said to her Queen. “Priority is capture, but elimination is allowed. Stay *safe* beyond all else.” She then turned to Aika, “And I am preemptively granting you permission to promote as you please, my Sekiryūtei.”

“You got it.” Aika said, putting on an eager smile to hide her nervousness.

“Watch each other’s backs.” Izuku said, “This isn’t a phalanx, but the principle applies. No one take risks unless not doing so will get one of you killed. We still have plenty of Kyoto to enjoy and we’re *not* going to be missing anyone.”

“YES!” Everyone shouted in response.

Izuku smiled as he opened a portal, “Let’s go.” He, Rias, Aika, Deila, and Lavinia stepped through.

-|||-

BISHOP GET!

Lots of stuff happened in this one. Hope you liked all the surprises!