**Prologue: Not So Normal Classmates**

**56 – Hunters**

Hunters. People who know of the supernatural, the other hidden secrets of the world, and fight to protect the world as we know it. Most people live in a society where these things only exist in fiction. Unaware of the groups that run in the shadows that protect their normal, peaceful lives.

The Konjou Clan is a hunter group that exists in the shadows of the world and affiliates itself with its mysteries. They fight demons, spirits, and anything else supernatural that threatens the lives of humans and this world. Sneakily in the shadows, they work and use hidden abilities that no normal human knows of.

They shroud themselves with their techniques so that no one discovers their existence. They work with similar groups, not only inside Japan but all around the world. And the hunters of the Konjou clan are dispatched to deal with the problems caused by anything other-worldly or supernatural.

Earlier this morning, there were massive amounts of reports of missing people from all around town. The hunters of the Konjou clan gathered to deal with the problem immediately. And after collecting intel and tracing mana tracks, they arrived at a certain abandoned building inside a mysterious place called the Spirit Realm. And there...

"What are you guys doing here!?"

"We could say the same to you! And what's with those outfits!?"

Yamamoto Sora and Saito Touma appeared in front of Senkyo's group. Sora was wearing black clothing and a cloak with blue lines that spread all over his clothes. While Touma was wearing the same black clothing with blue lines, instead of a cloak, he wore a long black coat.

Sora and Senkyo shouted in surprise at their unexpected encounter. They met their normal, everyday classmates in a world where no such normality existed. Both parties were shocked to see each other. They tried to get answers from the other, and in no time, things became messy and the room was in chaos, mostly because of Itsuki.

After the situation calmed down, both parties decided that Senkyo's group explain themselves first. Senkyo briefly explained what happened, only including the major parts. Of course, this did not include Senkyo's fight with Itsuki because it was irrelevant as well as specifics on how he defeated Fulgur because Senkyo himself did not know what happened. But Senkyo still managed to explain that they took down The Lightning Leader, Fulgur.

After hearing Senkyo's explanation both Sora and even the cold, expressionless, Touma had their eyes open in surprise. Sora was the first to speak out.

"Wait, wait, wait! Did I hear you right!? You said you defeated *The*Lightning Leader of END!?"

"Well... I don't really remember how, but I think so... We defeated him, right guys?"

Senkyo looked over to Itsuki and Yuu for confirmation.

"The Lightning Leader was defeated, but we didn't do anything Yukou-senpai. I know you don't remember, but you defeated him by yourself."

"Wh-what!? By myself!? That's impossible right, Watanabe-san?"

"Shut up and accept it. Shorty is right. You did it by yourself. But don't ask me what happened. I don’t have a clue what did."

"S-Seriously!?"

Senkyo took a step back as both his companions agreed that he defeated Fulgur by himself. He immediately turned to Ryosei about it, but only to get the same response.

Ryosei was conscious the whole time Senkyo's body was possessed by the Divine Soul of Spirits. He saw the power that defeated The Lightning Leader like it was child's play. He had already crafted his own theories as to what happened but he didn't bother explaining now. He thought it would be best if a discussion about that was done later.

Having no one to explain what happened to him, Senkyo was only thrown into confusion. How did he, Yukou Senkyo, defeat Fulgur without any help from Ryosei? Although it didn’t make sense to him, it was what Senkyo was aiming for, to begin with: the mysterious power that Fulgur branded on him.

*"\*Fine, it’s probably best if I don’t know.\*"*

Seeing as he was getting nowhere by troubling himself with it, he tried to put that subject aside and hoped that Ryosei or someone would later explain the events of his fight with Fulgur. Meanwhile, Sora and Touma were having a private discussion of their own. They whispered to each other trying to not let their conversation leak out to the other party.

"Do you think he's telling the truth, Touma-kun?"

"I don't know. He could be a hunter of a different group and came all the way here to spread false rumors about himself."

"He came all the way to a different group's area just to spread false rumors of defeating a leader? Even if he is the strongest hunter in their group, wouldn't that be too far of a stretch for anyone to actually believe that?"

"Then, let's take him to Freda-sama."

"Ah, good idea! With Freda-sama we'll be able to tell if he's lying or not."

"Hey, you two over there, what are you talking about? Where are you planning on taking Yukou-senpai?"

Yuu stepped up angrily. Sora and Touma observed her with caution. They were whispering enough that Senkyo and Itsuki couldn't hear them, but she heard them as if they were talking normally.

"A-Ahaha... It's nothing I swear!"

"I heard you, 'Let's take him to Freda-sama,' 'With Freda-sama we'll be able to tell if he's lying or not.' You don't believe senpai so you'll take him to some sketchy person? Stop troubling him! He's worked himself out too much already, he doesn't need anyone forcing him to go anywhere!"

Sora and Touma didn’t expect them to be heard. They were sure that they whispered low enough that no one would've heard their mumbling unless they there right behind them, but she heard the whole conversation from that distance. Now, they even doubted themselves if they really did lower their voice.

Senkyo walked up to Yuu and placed his hand on her shoulder. He caught her attention and looked at him.

"It's fine, Hisho-chan. I may not look like it but I can still go through a few more crazy rides."

"But..."

**57 – One’s Worth**

Senkyo tried to reassure Yuu, but it didn't look like she took it too well. Yuu was still doubtful that involving themselves any further with Sora and Touma was a good idea. Senkyo went through a lot, and she had a front-seat view of seeing how hard he worked. She was worried about how much he was pushing himself.

Senkyo noticed. He noticed how she wasn't thinking about herself and thinking about him instead. Sora and Touma were talking about taking him somewhere unknown and possibly dangerous. Yuu got mad at them because of that. Senkyo was happy that she was worried for his sake. He appreciated what she was doing and was thankful. So instead of reassuring her, he decided to tell the truth.

"Well... honestly, everything kind of hurts. I don't think I can even last another fight. Even going home and sleeping for a whole day sounds like a good idea. But... if they know something about END or its leaders, it might be worth checking them out. Plus, it's highly likely that they are a part of the Konjou Clan."

"Senpai, you need to rest! If you want to check them out then at least go when you're all rested up!"

Senkyo and Yuu argued for a bit longer but none of them were backing off. Sora, Touma, and Itsuki were just watching awkwardly as they argued. But everything came to a close when Ryosei finally stepped in and suggested that they ask more about who they were before coming to a decision on whether they would leave or not.

It was the most obvious thing to do, but Senkyo and Yuu were too stressed to think how they normally would. Having calmed down, they asked about who Sora and Touma were but at some point, it seemed like they wanted to win the argument more than actually gathering information.

Sora revealed that they were hunters of the Konjou Clan, just as Senkyo thought. Because of the mountain of reports of missing people and students, they were sent with a team to deal with the problem immediately.

When they arrived at the abandoned building, they searched and found a whole pit of people trapped inside purple slime. The rest of their team rescued the victims and sent them to their clan's hospital where the victims will be checked and cleansed for any sort of curse, illness, lingering effects, and anything else. In short, they'll be healed and will return to normal.

Sora and Touma went to explore further in the building because of the lack of enemies in the whole building. It didn't make sense that there were captured humans but with no signs of the abductors. He heard from Senkyo that the leader was defeated and his subordinates could have simply fled, but he was still skeptical of that, not to mention that a thorough inspection should be done on whether or not the enemies fled. Before Sora could continue explaining, Itsuki grabbed both of Sora's shoulders and took all his attention.

"WHERE IS MY LITTLE SISTER!?"

"U-Uhm..."

Sora was startled by Itsuki's sudden appearance. He couldn't answer Itsuki's question immediately because of it.

"DON'T KEEP ME WAITING! I KNOW I SAW MY LITTLE SISTER THERE! WHERE IS SHE!?"

Itsuki began shaking Sora for answers. The whole reason Itsuki even got mixed into this situation was that he was looking for his little sister, Ichika.

"O-Oh yeah! Yeah, I saw your little sister. She should be—"

As Sora was about to tell Itsuki more about where his sister was, Itsuki grabbed Sora and carried him over his shoulder, and ran out of the hallway.

"POINT ME TO WHERE SHE IS!!"

"W-Wait, Watanabe-kun! Stop! Let me goooo!!!"

Sora's scream could be heard getting farther and farther from the room they were in.

"W-Wait, Watanabe-san, we weren't finished talking!"

Senkyo sighed as his companion carried away Sora and ended their talk. Only Senkyo, Yuu, and Touma were left in the room.

"Well... they don't seem to be bad guys."

*"\*Did Yamamoto-san tell any lies, Ryosei?\*"*

*"\*No, he was telling the truth. We should go with them. We’ll be safe.\*"*

Senkyo consulted Ryosei and they were both in agreement on what to do. Seeing that they were actually a part of the Konjou Clan, then it didn't have many dangers at all.

"Well then, I guess we're going, Hisho-cha—"

When Senkyo faced Yuu, she was pouting.

"W-Wait, Hisho-chan, come on, you don't need to be mad about it! I'll be able to take care of myself somehow!"

"That's not it!"

Yuu shouted.

"It's just that... I feel... kind of useless now. Back in the Spirit Realm, it felt like you were the only one doing all the work. I'm supposed to be able to fight, I was supposed to handle half of our enemies, but every time we fought, you and Konjou-san were the ones who were doing all the work. At first, I took it for granted, but when you were fighting Fulgur... I realized how useless I was. I didn't want that... I didn't want to be useless. I just wanted to help you, even just by a little bit... to make up for not being strong enough."

Senkyo didn't know this was in her mind. Her expression was pained. It must've been gnawing at her since the battle with Fulgur. Senkyo knew Yuu was worried about him, he planned on thanking her later, but he didn't know it was weighing on her this much.

Senkyo wasn't going to let her worry over this any longer. He stood in front of Yuu and called her, catching her attention.

"You aren't useless, Hisho-chan!"

Senkyo shouted.

"Eh...?"

"You're not useless! You had my back since the first battle, didn't you? You always had my back when we fought! You covered my blind spots while protecting Watanabe-san. You used your sharp senses to warn us of danger. You even created many chances for me to easily cut down enemies. I wouldn't have even been able to move the way I did if it weren't for you. Because the only reason I was able to fight like that was because I knew you had my back. If you weren't there, there's no way I could've protected Watanabe-san and defeated all the enemies at the same time. You weren't useless one bit! You were essential! We needed you! If anything, *I*was the one that was useless. I wasn't even the one fighting, Ryosei was. So stop beating yourself up about it. But if you still insist on doing so, I'll show you how useful you are... Wait, that came out wrong. I mean how beneficial you were. Wait, that's not quite right either... Ah! You were indispensable! Absolutely necessary! You're a vital part of the group! I'll show you... how amazing you really are!"

Yuu stared at Senkyo, completely stunned. She thought she was just a bother to him. That she was dead weight relying on him but she never thought that Senkyo looked at her that way. That he thought she was amazing. Senkyo praised her like she was the one taking on all the work. To Yuu, she didn't even do much, but to Senkyo, he noticed stuff that even Yuu herself never even noticed. To Yuu, this was the first time she's ever been praised like this.

*"\*I'm... not useless? Senkyo-senpai, you...\*"*

Recalling what Senkyo said, Yuu was incredibly embarrassed. She wasn't used to praising, and Senkyo just praised her like it was the end of the world. Yuu covered her face with both her hands trying to hide her embarrassment. If Senkyo saw her face now, it would've been bright red.

"Sh-shut up, Senpai! D-Don't just say these things casually, idiot!"

"W-Wait, Hisho-chan! Did I say something wrong! Hisho-chaaaan!!"

Yuu ran out of the room. She quickly retreated to hide her embarrassment.

**Chapter 1: The Hidden Village**

**58 – Back to Earth**

"We’re here."

Sora raised his hand and stopped everyone on their trek. Right now, Senkyo, Yuu, Itsuki, Sora, and Touma were within the thick greenery of the mountains. Their surroundings were filled with trees as far as the eye could see.

Earlier, when Senkyo and Yuu got left the abandoned building, they were met by a large group of people in black cloaks and coats surrounding Itsuki and Sora while Touma leisurely stood around. The other people in black were the other hunters of the party the Konjou Clan sent.

Itsuki came bursting out of the building while carrying Sora like luggage. The other hunters immediately pulled out their weapons thinking that it was an enemy attack. Sora tried to explain the situation to them as quickly as he could before something bad happened. Fortunately, the other hunters understood and put down their weapons.

After having settled things down, Itsuki looked around and couldn't see Ichika anywhere. When Sora asked the person who was in charge of taking care of the victims, they said that they were already sent to their facilities to get checked and treated if anything was wrong with them. Frustrated at having missed her sister by a few minutes, Itsuki took it out on Sora and shook him furiously until Sora couldn't even stand anymore.

Coincidentally, Touma and Sora found Senkyo, Yuu, and Itsuki's belongings. Before their party entered the spirit realm, they found three handbags lying around the front gate and a shinai bag in the area, but in a completely different world, the Spirit Realm. Naturally, Sora thought that Senkyo and the others were victims of the serial kidnappings, but to his surprise, they were actually the ones who eliminated the threat. Sora brought them with him so he could return them on Monday but now that the owners are right in front of him, he returned them.

The rest of the hunters left while Sora and Touma accompanied Senkyo and the others to the clan's settlement. Senkyo, Yuu, and Itsuki followed Sora and Touma through the Spirit Realm. While they were walking, they noticed movement in the corner of their eyes every so often. Senkyo asked Sora what those were and they said those were the spirits that lived in the realm. Most of them don't show themselves around humans, they just watch them from afar.

Seeing as a member of the Konjou Clan knew about this world, it was certain that there have been many changes in the past seven years. Namely, how the clan operated. When Ryosei was alive, he didn’t know anything about the Spirit Realm. They only took care of threats that appeared on Earth. These other-worldly activities didn’t exist.

Their group continued walking and climbed the nearby mountain that was about 20 minutes away from the edge of town. There were no roads or paths leading to where they were currently standing. The last sight of anything man-made was when they separated from the mountain path at the bottom of the mountain. If it weren't for the fact that everything was illuminated by the glowing crystals of the Spirit Realm, it would be pitch black.

"Okay, we return to the real world here."

“Whoa… is this another Spirit Realm thing…?”

Sora stopped the party in front of a gigantic white wall glowing clearly as if it were solidified light. Itsuki was the first to question Sora about this unusual sight. The others stared at him, supporting Itsuki’s query with their curious gazes. A troubled look was plastered on Sora’s face as to how he would go about answering his question without them being too dissatisfied.

“W-Well, we can’t really disclose that information to the public, but you can think of it as a lock of sorts. We can only enter through Earth if we want to proceed.”

Itsuki was clearly dissatisfied with his answer, but he opted to keep that to himself so they could proceed.

Sora breathed a sigh of relief as no unnecessary delays and furious shaking took place. He crouched and began to trace a circle on the ground. Taking a closer look, Sora's finger wasn't touching the ground at all, it was hovering over it. His finger moved through the air leaving nothing behind that could be considered a mark.

Sora stood back up, ending his tracing. Seconds later, the ground where he traced began to glow white and blue and it revealed a patch of green grass covered in the dark shade of the night. Touma didn't waste any time and stood on it. A horizontal streak of light stretched out below, swallowing Touma whole and disappearing when the light subdued.

"That guy... always in a hurry. Come on, just stand on the grass and I’ll take care of sending you through."

Sora gestured for them to go. Itsuki followed, then Yuu, then Senkyo. After regaining their vision, Senkyo saw in front of him a dark forest with tall trees and thick bushes. Touma and Itsuki stood close by while Yuu was providing their light source with the fireball floating above her hands.

“Step out of that thing.”

“R-Right.”

Touma ordered Senkyo to step out of the circle he came from. Unlike earlier, the circle was showing a patch of crystal-like grass. It appears the circle shows the ground of the other world at that exact location. Not long after, Sora appeared from a horizontal streak of light that came down towards the circle and disappeared immediately after his arrival, leaving no trace of the strange crystal-like grass.

"Hey! What happened to the lights?"

Itsuki voiced his thoughts when his environment suddenly changed. The only source of light was Touma and Yuu’s fireball

"The Spirit Realm is always illuminated with shining particles and terrain, after all. This is only what everything looks like without those lights. In other words, we’re back on Earth."

Sora provided an explanation for the sudden darkness. They spent so long in the Spirit Realm that it already became nighttime on Earth. None of them had anything they could use to track time with, not to mention barely any chances to since they were mostly in combat.

"U-Um... What was that magic circle earlier? I've never seen anything like it."

Yuu asked Sora about the magic circle that transported them back to the real world. Yuu is from another world where magic is the norm. If she was surprised by a magic circle, then it must be something she never knew existed in her world or something that originated in this world.

Sora gave Yuu a smirk and said "No~ way."

Yuu looked a bit disappointed, leaving her curiosity unsated. On the other hand, even though Senkyo and Ryosei didn’t know what it was at first, simply observing Sora gave them the answer.

He used the skill that every member of the Konjou Clan needed to learn before becoming an official hunter, Espy. The ability to be able to detect spirit power. Some evil spirits have the ability to hide from the naked eye. Hunters used espy to detect their spirit power.

This was a similar case. When Sora traced a circle on the ground, blue particles dropped from his finger and created the circle. People without espy couldn’t see the particles, making it simple magic for Yuu and Itsuki. Ryosei could more or less guess how he activated the transportation since he also used spirit power in the past.

"Enough chit-chat and let's get on with it already. The three of you, hold on to Sora."

Yuu and Itsuki stared quizzically at Touma. They didn’t understand why that was necessary.

"Hold on to him? Why do I need to do that?"

Itsuki asked. Touma didn't answer back, so Sora did instead.

"It's something we can't talk about since you guys are outsiders, but none of you can enter the town without holding on to either me or Touma-kun."

Saying that only made the two more curious, but they understood that they won't get anything by pestering them any further. Itsuki also wanted to see his sister as fast as he could so he didn't say anything to prolong their stop.

"Okay then, if you three understand I'll be going ahead."

Touma walked ahead and disappeared into the darkness of the forest. Senkyo and the others watched as the darkness subtly swallowed Touma. It looked so natural that normal people like Itsuki wouldn't question it, but Senkyo and Yuu sensed something unnatural about it. They put it aside and held onto Sora. Senkyo and Itsuki held on to Sora's shoulders, while Yuu held on to his cloak.

"Hold on tight and don't let go, okay?"

**59 – Konjou Clan**

Senkyo and the others nodded and Sora walked forward. Suddenly, a fog began surrounding them. All but Sora and Senkyo were surprised at its sudden appearance. The further they walked, the thicker the fog got, and eventually, they couldn't see anything in front of them. Their whole vision was covered by fog.

They slightly tightened their grip on Sora because they knew if they let go, they'd end up getting lost. After a few more seconds of walking through the thick fog, the fog slowly subsided and eventually disappeared and in front of them, appeared a traditional-style Japanese town.

The streets were paved in stone brick and illuminated by the warm light of lanterns. Houses and various shops are scattered throughout the street, all of which are in a traditional style. Not only that, most of the people were in traditional clothing but there were also some in normal, modern clothes.

"Whoa... I've never seen a traditional Japanese town before!"

"I've seen some in anime but this is my first time seeing one in person."

"Who cares about that? Where's my sister?"

Yuu and Senkyo admired the town but Itsuki was solely focused on his sister and didn't care about anything else. Seeing Itsuki worry, Sora tried to reassure him.

"Don't worry, Watanabe-kun, your sister is in safe hands. You'll see her later."

"I better, or else you're in for some trouble!"

Sora scratched his head with a troubled face. For some reason, trying to help put him in danger. Their group continued to walk with Sora in the lead. They were headed for the town's hospital especially made to cure curses, illnesses, and anything else otherworldly or supernatural. But they can also treat normal wounds or injuries like other hospitals. After walking through the streets, they finally made it to their destination. When they saw what it looked like, they were somewhat disappointed.

"This isn't traditional."

"Not at all."

"Nowhere near it."

All three visitors arrived at similar conclusions. It was a modern hospital that you would normally see in the world. They were so disappointed that even Itsuki had to say something about it.

"Do you guys even know what a traditional-style hospital looks like!?"

Sora immediately retorted.

"I think we're even more disappointed because we don't know what it looks like."

Yuu and Itsuki silently nodded in agreement with Senkyo.

"I guess you have a point. Wait, that's not why we're here!"

The four of them entered the hospital and were greeted by the receptionist's desk. Sora walked over to it while Senkyo, Yuu, and Itsuki took their time to observe their surroundings. The inside looked like a normal hospital. Senkyo and the others expected something to be a bit different. It was a hospital of an organization with ties to the unknown. It was a hospital that existed in a part of the world where magic, demons, other worlds, ghosts, and other bizarre things were commonplace, only to end up like any other hospital in the world.

"Isn't what you expected? Sadly, I can't tell you how awesome this place is but this should blow your mind. Come on, follow me!"

Sora took them in front of the receptionist's desk. On closer inspection, there was a circle with some sort of pattern carved into the ground they were standing on.

"Is this... a magic circle?"

It was something Senkyo was familiar with because of Ryosei's memories. Upon entering the hospital, the floor looked flat and smooth, nothing looked odd or out of place. That was only until they entered the circle that managed to escape their vision earlier. Sora grinned when he heard Senkyo's surprised voice and said to the receptionist

"To Watanabe Ichika's room, please!"

The receptionist nodded. She placed her right hand on a crystal ball beside her and chanted something so fast that not even Yuu understood what she said. Not a second later, the floor began to light up in blue light and swallowed their group whole.

After a few seconds after the light faded, in front of Senkyo wasn't the receptionist's desk anymore, it was a door that had a number on the side and a name under it. It said: 403, Watanabe Ichika.

"We're here!"

Sora shouted. Itsuki seemed unfazed. After all that happened to him, suddenly getting teleported somewhere wasn’t enough to amuse him. However, Senkyo and Yuu were having a small bit of trouble processing. They looked around them and saw that they weren't in the lobby anymore. They were in a corridor with a window behind them with a good view of the town they were in earlier. Out of the three of them, Senkyo was the first to break out of their surprise.

"Teleportation magic..."

"Correct! You get 100 points!"

Sora said excitedly like a game show host.

"But how!? Never mind the mana cost, how were you able to cast it so quickly!?"

"Ha-ha! That's the difference between us and other groups! It's top secret so I won't tell! Hahaha!"

Sora acted like a kid who was bragging to his friends about what he had. Senkyo and Ryosei couldn’t even imagine what events happened that lead the Konjou Clan to advance so quickly.

In Ryosei's memories, magic in general was something only he could use. Kuro Yaiba is a spectral that contains mana that the user could consume to use magic. Teleportation magic was a spell that used up moderate to enormous amounts of mana depending on the distance. On top of that, it is a mid to high-tier spell that consists of three verses that may need to be repeated depending on the distance. Although the distance was short, there was still no explanation for why it was cast so fast. The receptionist didn't even seem like she chanted at all since the teleport was done in one second.

Yuu was just as amazed as Senkyo was for the same reason. She had sparkles in her eyes and was bombarding Sora with questions, while Sora looked full of himself and kept bragging but at the same time not letting any information leak.

"Enough of that! Ichika... is behind this door, right?"

"Yep, don't worry our doctors here are top-notch."

Itsuki shouted and interrupted their awe. Senkyo was forced to put his questions aside for now. Sora reassured Itsuki. Before coming here, Itsuki always rushed to the next place where he thought his sister was. But now that he was actually there, seeing her in the ball of slime must've made him hesitate. Something was weighing on his mind.

*\*If anything happened to her, I would be there to protect her. If something was troubling her, I would be there to listen. And if she needed help, I would be there for her. That's what I promised myself that day. I lived up to that promise time and time again... but this time... I failed. And all I did was hold back the people who actually did everything... I was powerless. I was... useless… I’m afraid of the expression she’ll have once I enter this room but worrying about that won’t do me any good. I’ll just have to face her and look her directly in the eye. My resolve… can never be broken.\**

Itsuki took a deep breath and opened the door. And beyond it... Ichika was quietly sleeping on a medical bed.

"Ichika!"

Itsuki ran over to her side to check for anything wrong. There were no cuts, bruises, or anything at all. She looked completely fine but he wasn't satisfied with that.

"Nothing's wrong with her, right!?"

Sora picked up a piece of paper on the table and read it.

"It says she's fine. She only had energy deprivation but she'll be fine after she wakes up."

"Can I take your word for it?"

"Yeah, like I said our doctors here are top-notch."

Itsuki let out a sigh of relief

"Then that's fine... Thanks for saving Ichika for me. Seriously, thanks."

"I didn't do anything. If you want to thank someone, thank the doctors and the ones who brought her here."

"Then, can you tell them thanks for me?"

"Sure thing."

Senkyo, Yuu, and Sora looked happy for Itsuki. They stood silently by the side and watched Itsuki take his time by his sister's side. Looking incredibly thankful for his sister's safety. After a while, Itsuki decided to stay with Ichika. As Senkyo, Yuu, and Sora were exiting the hospital, they found Touma who told them to follow him.

**60 – Clan Chief**

After walking deeper into town, they entered a huge cave going into the mountain. The cave had lanterns to light up the path. It was a straight line forward with no twists or turns and beyond it was an incredibly wide-open area.

In front of them, was a bridge that prevented you from falling into the strange but beautiful lake at the bottom. The water shined like a beautiful clear crystal. It illuminated the whole area that would've been pitch black without it. Its serene sight served as the area's light and beauty.

Over at the other side of the bridge, was an island that sat in the middle of the beautiful lake. And on the island, was a huge Japanese castle. It brimmed with strength and at the same time, looked mystifying. It was a castle that was located in a cave inside a mountain where its waters give out their own light.

Senkyo and Yuu were dumbfounded as they admired the scene that they could only see in the movies in front of their own two eyes. They couldn't say a word. They were completely and utterly stunned. Senkyo already saw this in Ryosei’s memories, but actually seeing it in person was a completely different feeling.

They continued to follow Touma. While walking over the bridge, they felt oddly relaxed as they looked over at the serene water. It was like the water was affecting them to be that way. The castle grounds were incredibly wide. There were other buildings that likely served their own purpose and on the other open areas groups of people were training with hand-to-hand combat, weapons, and magic.

Inside the castle, everything was mostly made out of wood, including the floor. Lanterns were hanging from the ceiling and on the walls. It had beautiful decorations like paintings and statues. You could see a huge staircase in the middle of the room that lead to the other floors. Senkyo and Yuu followed behind Sora and Touma. It seemed like Sora already knew where they were going. After climbing up a few flights of stairs, they stopped in front of a sliding door with a sign beside it saying "Clan Chief's Office"

*"\*The clan chief!? What would they want from us!?\*"*

Senkyo immediately got stiff. He could only wonder what someone so high in status would want from them, who just arrived. In reality, he knew the reason as apparently, he made the great feat of defeating a leader, but he couldn’t help but be surprised to keep his composure. Touma then spoke loud enough for anyone inside to hear.

"Excuse me, Yukou Senkyo and his companion has arrived!"

From inside the room, a deep voice responded

"Come in."

Touma, then slowly opened the door for them, and inside was a young man that looked like he was in his twenties. He sat behind a desk table with his arms folded. He had short black hair, wore traditional clothing, and emitted an aura of respect.

"Wait, you're—"

Senkyo recognized who the man was but he cut himself off before he could finish.

"Oh, do you know who I am, young man?"

"Ah, n-no, I mistook you for someone else, sorry."

"Is that so?"

Senkyo, Yuu, Sora, and Touma entered the room and stood in front of the man. He began introducing himself.

"Nice to meet you, I am the current chief of the Konjou Clan, Konjou Yousuke."

Yuu noticed that he was related to the spirit living inside Senkyo, Konjou Ryosei but she didn't mention it and stayed silent.

"I'm Yukou Senkyo, 2nd-year high school student of Honshou Academy. It's a pleasure to meet you."

"And I'm Hisho Yuu, 1st-year high school student of Honshou Academy. It's a pleasure to meet you too."

Yousuke observed Senkyo and Yuu, but noticed something off and brought it up with Touma.

"Touma-kun, you said in your report that there were three of them, right? Where is the other one?"

"Yes, the other person, Watanabe Itsuki, is currently in our local hospital watching his little sister, who was a victim of the earlier incident. Yamamoto-san thought it would be wise to leave him with his sister. Do you want us to retrieve him?"

"No, that would be fine. As long as he stays inside the town, you can bring him here anytime we need him. For now, I'm more interested in you, Yukou Senkyo-kun. Your companions claimed that you defeated one of the leaders of the infamous group, END. Is that true?"

"To be truly honest, I don't know. It is true that we fought a leader of END, but I don't have any memory of defeating him."

"No memory of defeating someone? Are you affected by some kind of magic?"

"I don't think so. The last thing I remember was passing out after getting attacked. The next thing I know, the enemy was gone and my companions said that I defeated him."

Yousuke went silent. He was staring into Senkyo's eyes trying to figure out whether what he said was a lie or not. He carefully analyzed every word Senkyo said while staring at his very soul and then...

"Unfortunately for me, I don't have the same special abilities like some people. Your story is too hard to swallow, but at the same time, in a world where the line of impossibility cannot be determined, I can't afford to let ridiculous stories like this pass if it involves information about this world's greatest enemy."

Yousuke stood up from his chair and exited the room.

"I'll take up Touma-kun's suggestion. All of you, come with me."

**61 – Freda**

Senkyo, Yuu, Touma, and Sora followed Yousuke to another room. The room they entered had a curtain covering the end of the room and they could see a silhouette of a woman behind it. The room seemed to serve as some kind of audience room.

"Oh? Clan chief, what brings you to my quarters today?"

"Freda-sama, I would like to test these kids' honesty."

Yousuke said as he showed Senkyo and Yuu. Senkyo thought to himself why the clan chief used the "sama" honorific when he is supposed to be the highest in status but he kept his thoughts to himself.

"Very well, you may ask them your questions."

Yousuke faced Senkyo

"Yukou-kun, did you defeat a leader of END?"

"I don't know. I don't remember doing it."

Yousuke faced the woman's silhouette.

"Truth."

"Did you get hit by any kind of magic before losing conscious?"

"I was being hit by lightning. It was too much for me to bare and lost consciousness. "

"Truth."

Yousuke asked two questions to test his honesty earlier. So far, it didn't seem like Senkyo was the type to lie. Yousuke cleared his throat and prepared to ask the real question.

"...Then, Yukou Senkyo-kun, did you really fight a leader of END?"

"Yes, I did."

"Truth."

The whole room went silent. Sora, Touma, and even Yousuke wore surprised faces. Yousuke then prepared to ask his next question, but instead of Senkyo, he faced Yuu.

"Hisho-kun, is it true that Yukou-kun defeated a leader of the group END?"

"Yes, he did."

Yousuke awaited Freda's response, but it looks like something was stopping her from doing so.

"Freda-sama?"

Yousuke called out to Freda. Soon after, in a low, somewhat shaken voice.

"...Truth. The girl... is saying the truth."

"I see…"

"Impossible!"

"Whoa!"

Yousuke managed to maintain his composure. However, Touma and Sora were completely baffled. The farfetched story they heard earlier was real. A single person took down an enemy beyond the Konjou Clan's comprehension.

"If that's real, then how!?"

It was so unbelievable that even the normally composed Touma shot a question towards Yuu.

"I can’t tell you."

"Why is that!?"

"....."

Yuu stayed silent. She didn't want to reveal any more information about Senkyo. Touma didn't like that and was about to walk over to her until Yousuke stopped him.

"Calm down Touma-kun, I understand how you feel but you need to get a grip."

"...! Y-Yes sir."

Touma was forced to back down but ground his teeth in frustration. For some reason, Touma was being unusually aggressive. He usually didn't say much but it seems like he was more emotionally sensitive.

"Yukou-kun, I have one last question for you... are you a part of any group or have connections with any organizations?"

"No, I don't"

"...Truth."

"Very well, we'll end it there. Since it's getting really late, how about you two stay here for the night? I'll prepare rooms for you two to stay in."

"Really? Then I'll take you up on that offer. Is it okay with you, Hisho-chan?"

"Yes, I'm fine with it."

"Then, I'll have them prepared in a few minutes, Sora-kun, take them to the lobby and wait for their rooms to be prepared."

"Okay!"

With that, Sora did what he was tasked and Yousuke returned to his office.

"Yukou Senkyo... how interesting. Ever since END and its leaders appeared, no one has been able to defeat any of them. And now I hear that not only that was one was defeated and was done by a single boy…"

Yousuke said to himself as he looked out the room's windows. The door opened behind him, and the person who opened that door was Touma.

"Excuse me sir, but shouldn't we be asking more about the leaders of END and how to defeat them? Why did you let them go like that!?"

Touma sounded impatient. Normally he was silent and didn't talk much, but something about this subject is causing him to lose his composure.

"As I said before, Touma-kun, be patient. We don't know much about these two, other than they going to the same school as you and that they were involved in the defeat of a leader of END. We must be quick but careful. We don't want to lose our one and only lead in freeing this world from END's clutches, for all we know, a single mistake might cost us this lead. We have to gain their trust while confirming they won't be a possible threat themselves. Do you understand what I'm saying, Touma-kun?"

Yousuke was a cautious man. He wanted the information as much as anyone else did, but he didn't want to be reckless in doing so. The last thing he wanted was a fight with someone who defeated a leader of END single-handedly. They didn't know the power that Senkyo possessed and that made him much more dangerous. Touma realized this and hurriedly apologize.

"Y-Yes sir, I apologize. It was wrong for me to question your actions without thinking."

Touma stepped back and hung his head while trying to calm himself down. Yousuke sighed at the sight of Touma agonizing about this.

"Well, no one can blame you after what you've been through. Don't worry, we'll get the information we need. For now, standby for further orders."

"Yes, sir."

Touma left the room, leaving Yousuke alone once again. Yousuke walked back to his desk, filling the silent room with the sound of his footsteps. He turned his eyes to the picture frame displayed on his desk.

"...You should've been the one to take over this role you know? Then again, even if you were still here, you probably would've shoved it to me anyway, wouldn't you, Ryosei?"

The picture frame showed what looked like a younger version of Yousuke and the Delinquent Prodigy, Konjou Ryosei.

**62 – Ties with the Konjou Clan**

Meanwhile, in another room inside the castle, Senkyo flopped on a king-sized bed while wearing a yukata. He was in the room Yousuke provided them with.

The room had a flat-screen TV, a king-sized bed, and a beautiful outdoor view. It had wooden flooring covered with clean tatami mats. And the closet contained futon beds that could be laid down on the floor because of the room's huge space. It seemed like they had the option of sleeping on the bed or on the floor depending on the people's preference.

The reason why Senkyo was in a yukata was that he just finished taking a bath in the castle's indoor hot springs. A hot and relaxing bath after a long day of the battle took the strain off Senkyo's muscles. It was so relaxing that Senkyo fell asleep inside the hot spring and Ryosei had to take over his body to get him out.

"Thanks for saving me back there, I would've been a goner."

*"\*There are limits to how much you can relax inside a bath! Be careful next time!\*"*

"Sure, got it. But I got to say, this place has everything. I never expected there to be a hot spring in here. The electricity too. We're inside a mountain and we still have electricity. Now it feels like I'm in a hot spring hotel or something."

*"\*Well, aside from those two, a lot has changed.\*"*

"Yeah, we share memories but I was still surprised about everything. If I had to count how many times you shouted out of surprise earlier, it probably would've been on the three digits."

*"\*Now you're just exaggerating! But still... this was a big surprise. Now I don't even know my own hometown anymore. It's only been seven years and I don't recognize half of the town. Our technology skyrocketed, our buildings upgraded, You-chan became the clan chief, and that Freda person is new.\*"*

"Oh yeah, your cousin called this Freda person with a 'sama' honorific, didn't he?"

*"\*Yes, there aren't any positions higher than clan chief, I don't think he has to call anyone by that. This Freda person is probably the one we want to know about the most. They even seem to be able to tell when someone's lying or not.\*"*

"So, she's similar to you?"

*"\*Maybe, but we can’t be too sure. I got this ability naturally, but there’s possible that there’s some kind of magic out there to tell.\*"*

"In the end, we don’t know anything, huh? This person really is mysterious. What do we do now?"

Ryosei went deep into thought about their situation. After a few seconds, he came to the conclusion that their next move will be...

*"\*We have to make ties and train with the Konjou Clan!\*"*

"Can't you just show yourself to them? If Freda's powers are real, when you introduce yourself to them in my body she'll end up with 'truth' wouldn't she?"

*"\*No, I don't think it'll be that easy.\*"*

Senkyo was confused as to why Ryosei said that. As Senkyo said, proving Ryosei's existence can be as easy as that if Freda's powers are real. Seeing as Yousuke came to Freda for this sort of thing as if it were natural, and the fact that Freda, who had never seen Senkyo, knew they were saying the truth, there's a high chance that her powers are real.

"Why is that?"

*"\*The clan's rules and my image. If we prove to them that I exist in your body, that might just make things worse. Our enemies are too strong. If we don't get stronger as fast as we can, we might not be able to survive the next time we come across a leader. Being trained by the Konjou Clan is a good shortcut for this, but would The Elders really let a friend of someone who disgraced the clan train under them?\*"*

"Oh, I see your point..."

The Elders, a group of the clan's retired hunters that have been of great service to the clan and achieved outstanding feats in their time. Their position is second to the clan chief and helps him govern the clan by maintaining order, managing attacks, and many more. They, individually, are of lower status than the clan chief, but through voting, they can either force the chief to a decision or completely overthrow them.

In the clan's history, The Elders and the people have overthrown corrupt chiefs and have either exiled or executed them depending on the weight of their crimes, but even that was a rare occurrence. The members of The Elders are people who have gained the clan's trust and are selected by receiving the title from the clan chief.

The problem Senkyo and Ryosei were facing here is that before Ryosei's death, The Elders already had a bad impression of him. They say that Ryosei was completely useless and a disgrace to the clan. They didn't quite like Ryosei's transformation from the clan's prodigy to a shut-in otaku. Ryosei even heard from one of his friends in the clan that the elders decided that he was forbidden to return to the clan until he realized the error of his ways, but at the time Ryosei couldn't have cared less.

Both Ryosei and Senkyo realized that they were in a tight spot. There was a good chance that everything Ryosei-related like anime, manga, and games was banned in the clan. When the elders discover that Senkyo is related to Ryosei, it was more than likely that the clan wouldn't reach out a single hand to him.

Unfortunately, hiding Senkyo's connection with Ryosei is going to be a hard task. After all, Senkyo now wields Kuro Yaiba, the legendary katana that the clan once was in possession of. He got off lucky in their meeting with Touma and Sora. Seeing as none of them recognized the katana Senkyo held, they must not know of it or at the very least what it looked like but it wouldn't go so smoothly when other older clan members see it.

Senkyo and Ryosei were stuck in a tight pinch. They need the Konjou Clan's help to train Senkyo, but the Konjou Clan won't help him if they discovered Kuro Yaiba or Ryosei. One mistake and it will be all over, Senkyo had to convince the Konjou Clan to let him train with them while hiding Ryosei and Kuro Yaiba.

"AHH!! This is frustrating!"

*"\*We have no choice. If we get caught, that'll be the end of your quick power-up training and that might spell our deaths.\*"*

"I know, but still!"

*"\*Stop complaining. Save that energy for tomorrow. You're going to have a long day ahead of you.\*"*

"\**Sigh\*...*Fine, got it."

Later that night, Senkyo fell asleep immediately the moment he shut his eyes. He was just that tired from a whole day of battle and putting his body over its limits.

**63 – Envisaged**

*\*Master...\**

A voice echoed through Senkyo's mind. A small voice that sounded like it could be dragged away by the wind was accompanied by the sound of cat bells. But it didn't come anywhere outside, the source of the voice was in his mind.

*\*Over here... Master...\**

Senkyo opened his eyes and found himself inside a cave lit by blue light running through the walls like cracks. But that was weird, the last time Senkyo remembered was falling asleep on a luxurious bed but right now, he was nowhere near that bed.

"Ryosei? Are you there?"

"….."

There was no response. Ryosei usually responded to Senkyo immediately. He didn't need anything like sleeping. As long as he was inside Senkyo, he was like an ongoing phone call. Eliminating other possibilities, Senkyo narrowed things down, and what most likely happened was...

"I think... I got 'envisaged.'"

Being "envisaged" was what Senkyo decided to call this phenomenon. It is the ability to separate from the body and enter one’s own mind. It is something Ryosei uses to call Senkyo into his dreams, or something Senkyo himself initiates and enters his own head. When Ryosei and Senkyo switch controls, the other is sent here as “standby mode.”

However, no one was there. Senkyo was called, but he didn’t initiate it, and it didn’t seem like Ryosei called for him either. Senkyo didn’t recognize this cave. It was in neither of their memories. The surroundings of this place can only be influenced by memories. Piecing his clues together, he could only come up with one possible outcome.

“Someone else is inside me. I have to be careful. I don't know what will happen if I die here. I have to assume the worst just to be safe."

Senkyo warily walked deeper into the cave of blue light. He didn't know what called him here, but he couldn't just stand around. After a bit of walking, he reached a fork. He couldn't see the end of either path and was unsure of which path to take.

"Huh?"

Senkyo heard the sound of cat bells jingling coming from the left path. It was the same jingling he heard when the voice called out to him. He took the left path and followed the jingling sound. He encountered many other forks but continued to follow the sound of the bells. As the sounds became louder, Senkyo began to hear water flowing. It was like the sound of a waterfall.

Senkyo finally exited the labyrinth-like cave and saw a huge lake that reflected the two moons in the night sky. There were trees, grass, and other different types of greenery around the area, some he could recognize and some that he couldn't. There was a cliff on one side of the lake where there was water falling from its peak and on the walls.

The lake where all the water fell glowed in a blue light similar to the light in the cave Senkyo was in. Thinking about it, even more, Senkyo realized that this lake and the water of the lake surrounding the Konjou Clan's castle were the same. They glowed the same light and had the same beauty, the confusing part was... why? Why were these waters similar?

Senkyo wondered about it, but the jingling bells caught his attention. Senkyo looked over in the direction of the sound and saw a white cat sitting on top of a rock in the lake. The cat noticed Senkyo and made a massive leap toward him.

"Master!"

"Wha!?"

Senkyo was pushed down to the ground by the cat. He felt something wrap around him and weigh down his chest. He opened his eyes to see what it was and saw two white pointy things right in front of his face. On closer inspection, they looked like white cat ears. All of the sudden, the ears twitched and Senkyo got back up in surprise.

"Nya!?"

In front of Senkyo, was a girl sitting on the ground on both her legs. She had skin as white as snow, blue eyes similar to the lake's beautiful glow, and white long hair with the most noticeable trait, white cat ears and tail. She was what Senkyo knew as, a catgirl. She wore white knee-high socks, brown shorts, a white robe with a hood with cat ear pockets, and a red choker with a cat bell attached to it.

*\*Wh-what's happening here? Why is there a catgirl in front of me? Wait, is she just a catgirl because she's in my dream? Is she an assassin trying to get comfortable with me because she knows I always wanted to see a catgirl? If that's so then I should be careful. But wait, there's a catgirl in front of me! A CATGIRL! I might not get another chance to see this when I wake up. I should take my time to take in this sight! Wait, if I do that I might get killed if she really is an assassin! But this is a once-in-a-lifetime chance! AAAAH, WHAT SHOULD I DO!?\**

Senkyo was at a complete loss for what to do. He's been thinking so hard that he didn't even notice that he's been staring at a catgirl for almost a minute now. If the catgirl really was an assassin Senkyo would've probably died already but he didn't realize that.

For some reason, despite being incredibly smart, Senkyo can be easily distracted. He was ready to defend himself at any moment when he walked through the caves. But for some reason, when he saw the catgirl, he let his guard down, is it because she was a catgirl... or maybe something else?

The catgirl stood up and walked up to Senkyo. He backed up a bit but not enough to keep their distance, deep inside Senkyo wanted a closer look at the catgirl. Suddenly, the catgirl extended her arms toward Senkyo.

*\*Ah... So this is the end. I'm sorry Ryosei. I let my guard down. Who knew I would die for the thing I wanted to see the most? In the end, catgirls are just too damn cute that they make you unable to move the first time you see them. Truly the best assassins! But I won't end this without a fight! If I'm going to die to a catgirl, I might as well find out how fluffy their ears are!\**

Senkyo made a break for the catgirl's ears and pet the white fluffs like his life depended on it. It was incredibly soft and had a soothing sensation. It felt like Senkyo's hands were going to sink into her soft silky hair. *"\*It feels like heaven...!\*"* was Senkyo's evaluation. He kept petting and petting until he realized he was still alive.

*\*Eh...? Wait... she didn't kill me? But then what is she...\**

Senkyo looked down at the catgirl and saw her rubbing her head against Senkyo's chest and hugging him tightly.

"I missed you, Master! You're finally back after a long time!"

"EEEHHHHH!!?"

Senkyo was completely confused and couldn't understand what was happening. After a few minutes of collecting his thoughts and some more head pats, Senkyo finally got his cool together and was face to face with the catgirl.

"Shiro is Shiro! Your familiar!"

**64 – Shiro**

"My familiar...?"

"That's correct! You summoned Shiro through a spell you cast."

"What spell...?"

Senkyo went through his memories of when he tried to cast anything. He recalled back when he was being fried from Fulgur’s attacks, Senkyo chanted what seemed to be a summoning spell*, \*SUMMON FAMILIAR: ... SHIRO!!\**

"The time Fulgur was about to kill me!? But I didn't even have Kuro Yaiba or any other spectral on me. How would I be able to summon anything without mana!?"

“Well, that’s because you have mana, of course! It was released the moment you took off the seal!”

“Wh-What? Me? Have mana? I’m just a…”

Senkyo trailed off as he was reminded of the title the lightning leader gave him: an anomaly. He could never forget. He put his life on the line and bet on that title to be able to save his friends and himself. If his burnt, half-dead body returned to normal when he regained consciousness, then there was no way magic wasn’t involved. If it was true that Senkyo was the one who defeated Fulgur alone, then there was no doubt about it, this girl was telling the truth.

“If you’re saying I have mana, then why didn’t I have it before? Who are you? Why did I only gain mana when I summoned you?”

"Hmm... Shiro thinks it would be best to explain things from the beginning. Master, this isn't the first time we met."

"What?"

Shiro began to tell Senkyo her story. It all started way back in time. Shiro lived in Zerid and she a race that they called Nemi. Nemi are peaceful beastmen that commonly live near lakes. They have ears and tails that of a cat with fast speed and sharp senses. They build their village around a lake because of how they live. They survive by drinking the energy and nutrients only Nemi find in natural liquid, but of all the natural liquids, water is the best for them.

But in their world, Nemi have another name, Miracle Beasts. That is because of the natural ability of Nemi: to be able to create a special type of water, Mythical Water. Because of the natural magical barrier that Nemi always emit, every time their barrier makes contact with a water source like a lake, little by little, the water transforms. The water emits a glowing light the same as their barrier and completely transforms it into the liquid they call Mythical Water. Because of its unbelievable power, most regarded it as a myth.

Because of this, Nemi procure their water through simple tools or mechanisms and makes repositories of water for easier access. Doing so reduced the chances of any attacks their village might take. They reduced the chances, but they couldn't eliminate them.

When Shiro was still a kid, she lived a peaceful and happy life in the village of Nils with her parents. But one day, a corrupt noble wasn't satisfied with only hearing stories of the Mythical Water. So he sent out numerous scouting parties and sent them out to search the land. When settlements were found, an invading party was sent out and plundered every Nemian village they found and captured the Nemi, just to have his own personal supply of the Mythical Water.

One of those villages was the village of Nils. In the middle of the invasion, Shiro's father fended off the invaders to buy time for Shiro's mother to hide Shiro. She was hidden under the floorboards and was told by her mother to stay there and not come out. Her mother went back for her husband and left Shiro hidden, but unfortunately, neither of them came back.

A day after the invasion, Shiro came out of hiding and went out to check the village, but all she could see were burnt-down buildings and destroyed houses, she didn't see anyone else, she was the only one who escaped.

Weeks passed and Shiro was about to break. She couldn't survive on her own. The lake the village used to use was contaminated with poison the invaders brought with them. It seemed that they didn't want anyone else getting the mythic water. They went so far as to poison an entire lake that wasn't even turned into mythic water just because Nemi used it.

Shiro had no other way to drink water aside from collecting rainwater. Shiro tried to search for other water sources but failed and only got herself hurt. She had no way to defend herself and her only shelter was the half-destroyed house she used to live in. Nights were cold and sleeping was a pain. She had limited water and sometimes had bad luck where it didn't even rain for three days straight.

Her body was about to give out on her. Her supply of water was scarce. She had numerous wounds and bruises from trying to hunt for other water sources. She was a complete mess. But one day, she met Yukou Yuuto, Senkyo's father.

Yuuto was traveling and found the former village of Nils. He was tired and took a break in a half-destroyed house that at least had its roof somewhat intact. There he noticed something under the floorboards. He heard footsteps and saw movement from below. He looked under and made eye contact with something but what was under there quickly ran away deeper into the floorboards.

Yuuto wondered what it was and thought about checking it out, but before he did, he realized that he might just scare what was under there even more. So he decided to leave.

After a few minutes, after determining the strange man was gone, Shiro went back out of hiding. Upon her exit, she saw a strange half-opened container with two sticks on top and it was letting out steam with a strange aroma. It had text on it that Shiro could not understand, it had the text RAMEN on it and beside it was a bottle of water. Out of thirst, Shiro didn't even check to see if it was poisoned or not, she drank the bottle immediately. Later, Shiro completely opened the strange container but she didn't do anything else with it and left it.

In the following days, the man kept coming back to the same house and always left a water bottle with some different kind of food with it, but only the water bottle was ever touched. Days went by with the same routine and Shiro became a bit healthier, but a bottle of water a day wasn't nearly enough to put her back to full strength, finally gathering enough courage, she decided to approach the strange man leaving her food and water.

Yuuto's curiosity and caring personality made him leave food for the thing he saw under the floorboards. He wasn't sure if it was an animal or a person, but whatever they were kept drinking the bottle he always left but not the food. Yuuto found it a bit strange but kept changing the food until he found one that his little friend would eat.

One day, as he was having his lunch, a part of the wall of the house slowly opened and saw blue eyes and white ears pop out. Slowly, the creature from under the floorboards he wanted to meet came out of hiding and showed itself in front of him but he was surprised to see a little girl with white ears and a tail show up instead.

But what popped out of his mind first was not that she was a Nemi, it was that she was a catgirl. The catgirl cautiously approached him moving out of the shadows and into the light but stopped midway. Yuuto sensed her hesitation and he held out a water bottle to her. Then, the catgirl meekly reached out to grab the bottle, once she did, she immediately took a step back but instead of going back into hiding, she sat over at the other side of the room, opposite to Yuuto.

At first, Yuuto was incredibly surprised but smiled as Shiro showed that small gesture of trust. As days went on, Shiro and Yuuto became closer and closer, and eventually, Shiro was able to talk to Yuuto and even act how she normally did.

Yuuto took care of her and Shiro became healthy again. Yuuto even gave Shiro sleeping bags and magical heaters. Shiro became really attached to Yuuto and she would always await his return every day.

But the day came when Yuuto said that he had to go back home and might not be able to come back. At first, Shiro broke into tears and clung to Yuuto as tight as she could and she kept saying "No, don't go please...!" That was until Yuuto asked her, "Then, do you want to come with me?" Shiro transformed from incredibly sad to beaming with happiness and hugged Yuuto even tighter.

When Yuuto returned home with Shiro, there, she met the person she came to call her big brother, Yukou Senkyo. They were about the same age. Shiro was a bit shy at first but Senkyo always played with her and they got along.

Yuuto even ordered a custom-made hoodie with cat ear pockets from a friend to give to Shiro to wear in public. They spent their days together playing and doing many other things. Senkyo always acted like the big brother and took care of Shiro and protected her. Their days were spent like that until...

**65 – Little Sister**

"....."

Shiro suddenly stopped. Senkyo was listening as she told him about his "past" that he didn't know about.

"Then, what happened?"

Senkyo urged her to continue. Curious about why he never knew of this. In an apologetic voice, Shiro said to Senkyo...

"Your memories were sealed by Yuuto-san and he made Shiro its guardian."

"What!? But why!?"

Senkyo was surprised, even though he expected this. He still remembered the time he was getting fried by Fulgur. A memory of his father played in his mind and carved a spell into his brain. His father said that he wanted Senkyo to live a normal life. It didn't seem like he was lying, but why did he wait for that specific time to seal away Senkyo's memories? He even brought Shiro into his life. If they got along so well, why did Yuuto think that "living a normal life" is what Senkyo wanted? Something felt off. That was probably why Senkyo felt the need to ask Shiro.

"Shiro is afraid she cannot answer that. But please know that Yuuto-san did this for your sake, so... Please don't get mad at him!"

Shiro was asking Senkyo to not hate his father. She must've really liked his father the way he did, but from the start, Senkyo had no intention of putting it against his father.

"Don't worry, I wasn't planning on getting mad at that old man for this."

"Shiro is sorry... Shiro promised Yuuto-san... that Shiro won't release all of your memories until the time came. But Yuuto-san let Shiro release your memories of her when we meet again, so if you want to... would you like to remember Shiro again?"

As Shiro said that, Senkyo felt like she was pleading for him to say yes. Having someone close to you completely forget you must've been really hard on her. From her stories alone, she felt like she really appreciated everything Yuuto and Senkyo did for her. As time passed, their bonds grew to the point where they treated each other like an actual family. It felt to Senkyo that from the bottom of her heart, she was saying "Please, remember me!"

With no hesitation at all, Senkyo said "yes" to her. Shiro looked incredibly happy. Her face was beaming and she was jumping around celebrating. Senkyo was happy seeing her happy. He didn't have any logical explanation for it, but it felt like he was connected with her.

"Then without further ado!"

Shiro grabbed Senkyo's face and touched their foreheads. A bright white light shined at the connection and Senkyo felt a flood of memories and emotions coming back to him. A little bit after, the white light dissipated and Shiro let go of Senkyo. But after that Senkyo stayed still so Shiro called his name out but then, Senkyo suddenly hugged Shiro.

"...Shiro! It really is you!"

"Nya!? M-Master... don't surprise Shiro like that!"

Senkyo tilted his head in confusion when he heard Shiro call him "Master."

"Wait a second, Shiro, why are you calling me 'Master' all of the sudden?"

"Oh... that's because of the familiar pact."

"Familiar pact? What's that?"

"Sorry, Shiro forgot to explain that part. To stay with you longer and be the one protecting you instead, Yuuto-san suggested that Shiro became your familiar."

A familiar, a living creature that entered a 'Familiar Pact' with someone else. A Familiar Pact was a kind of ritual where one person will sacrifice their freedom to the other person in exchange for gaining power.

The familiar will become half-spirit and live inside the one they made a pact with. They will be forced to call the other party "Master" and they will not be able to disobey them. But if the familiar is summoned, as long as they are not told by orders, familiars can do whatever they please.

"Wait, my dad told you to become my familiar? Why!?"

Senkyo wasn't so happy. To him, Senkyo took away Shiro's freedom and trapped her inside him for years. The worst part was that he didn't even know about it but seeing this reaction was something Shiro already expected.

"You never change do you, Master. Don't worry Shiro wanted this. Shiro wanted to repay both you and Yuuto-san for being so kind to me. So she decided to be the one to protect you the next time you needed it and it looks like it already paid off!"

"Huh? W-Wait, were you the one who put that shield around me that time with Fulgur!?"

"Ehehehe... Yes, it was!"

The ripples of blue light that healed and surrounded to protect Senkyo that time against Fulgur. It was done by none other than Shiro herself.

"Y-You didn't hurt yourself anywhere because of that, did you? You're fine, right?"

In the end, Senkyo was still a worrywart.

"Yes, Shiro is fine! You worry too much, Master."

"W-Well, I'd feel bad if you got hurt because of me so..."

Senkyo looked away slightly and avoided Shiro's eyes. Seeing that made Shiro really happy and showed a bright smile.

"Well, thank you for worrying about Shiro, Master!"

That bright smile Shiro showed made Senkyo a little bit nervous. He didn't notice before, but Shiro is cute.

"I-It's nothing! Another thing, stop calling me 'Master' I'm not used to it, I'd rather you call me like how you usually did."

"Well then, you have to order me to do that~."

"Fine... Shiro, I order you to act like how you normally do and not let your freedom be restricted by dumb orders or magic, decide everything with your own will, you got that!?"

"...! Yes, Onii-chan!"

**Chapter 2: Nighttime Trouble**

**66 – Cat Girl**

*“\*—nkyo... Senkyo... Senkyo!\*”*

In the middle of Senkyo's sleep, another voice called out to him, but this time it was the voice of his spirit friend, Ryosei.

*\*This again...? What is it now? I just want to sleep!\**

Senkyo shouted internally. He stayed up late, had his reunion with Shiro, and now Ryosei was calling out to him. It was like the world didn't want him to take any breaks.

Senkyo slowly opened his eyes feeling sluggish. His vision was blurry from waking up. He was feeling the want to close his eyes again and bury himself in the pillows.

*\*Ah... so he's trying to wake me up?\**

At first, Senkyo thought he was being envisaged again, but it was actually Ryosei trying to wake him up. Realizing Ryosei's internal shouting was actually a wake-up call, Senkyo tried to get up. However, something kept his left arm from moving, so he ended up rolling to the left instead. As Senkyo rolled to the side, something blocked his way. He caught a sweet scent that was oddly nostalgic, but he ignored it. He was still half asleep and his eyes were closed as he moved around. Clearly, Senkyo still wanted to sleep, but he still tried his hardest to wake up.

Senkyo tried to identify the obstacle that was immobilizing his left arm and blocking the way, so he used his right hand to feel out what it was instead of opening his eyes. He felt something soft and fluffy, so he determined it was a pillow.

*\*Oh, it was just a pillow...? When did these things get so heavy?\**

Senkyo brushed the obstacle's surface with his hand, it felt incredibly soft, it was like his hand was going to sink in its fluffiness.

*\*Maybe I'll sleep for five more minutes...\**

As Senkyo thought that, he wrapped his arm around the "pillow" and hugged it tightly.

"Nya~!"

*\*...Nya?\**

A cute squeal came out as he hugged the "pillow." Last time Senkyo checked, pillows don't let out cute high-pitched squeals when you hug them. He decided to slowly open his eyes to see what it was. And after his vision cleared up, Senkyo saw white hair and cat ears in his arms. At that moment, Senkyo was completely stunned.

The girl in Senkyo's arms was the catgirl he just reunited with, Shiro. Her scent, her smooth body, and the white fluffy cat ears gave it away. It was then that he realized the smooth sensation he was feeling was not from a pillow, but from a girl's bare skin. Senkyo hugged Shiro tightly without knowing, and because of that, his lips were touching her forehead, his nose was taking in her hair's fragrance, and his body directly touching her body with his leg slightly in between hers.

"WH-WH-WH-WH-WH-WH-WH-WH-WHAAAAT!!?!??"

Shiro was using his arm as a pillow. Senkyo panicked and tried to get out. He successfully slipped his left arm from her head but he ended up falling off the bed. He got up only to see Shiro's fully naked body. A sleepy expression floated on her face as she rubbed her eye and greeted Senkyo, making for an alluring sight.

"Nya... Onii-chan... good morning..."

"A-Ahh... wha...?"

Senkyo was at a loss for words. His mouth was left wide open. He tried to say something but the words got stuck in his throat. He didn't avert his eyes; they were completely glued to the eye candy in front of him. Whether it was because he wanted to imprint the image before him deep inside his brain, or maybe because his brain wasn't functional enough to make him realize he should avert his eyes, either way, he didn't move them. That was until a loud voice echoed in Senkyo's mind.

*"\*Senkyo!!\*"*

"WAH!?"

Ryosei finally caught Senkyo's attention. Senkyo jumped in surprise and looked around the room for the source of the voice but soon realized it was Ryosei.

*"\*W-What?\*"*

*"\*It's about time you noticed me! What the hell is going on!? Who's this catgirl and where did she come from!?\*"*

*"\*I-I didn't know she could do this! Wait... you don't know who she is?\*"*

*"\*What? Of course not, this is the first time I've seen her!\*"*

*"....."*

Senkyo was surprised to hear that Ryosei didn't know about Shiro. From the very beginning, when Ryosei got sucked into Senkyo's body, they shared all their emotions and memories. But when Shiro released parts of Senkyo's memories, Ryosei didn't even have a clue about it.

He discovered another thing about their unusual situation. Senkyo thought that he'd have to look more into this and get all the details. The more they knew about their situation, the better.

He would think about it, but right now was not the time. Senkyo was still in the middle of a bizarre situation. He calmed down enough to be able to diffuse the whole thing. He could explain everything to Ryosei later, but first, he had to sort out Shiro.

Luckily for him, no one else was in the room or so Senkyo thought... until he looked over to the door where he saw Yuu staring at him like human trash. The scene presented to her was: Senkyo alone with a naked catgirl on a pretty messy bed. It was bound to cause misunderstandings. Yuu glared at him with disgusted eyes.

The menacing aura Yuu was emitting was enough to make the whole room tremble. Senkyo felt a chill run down his spine and broke out in a cold sweat. At that moment, Senkyo knew he was done for.

"Ah..."

"Yukou-senpai... WHAT. ARE. YOU. DOING!?"

"W-W-W-WAIT I CAN EXPLAIN!"

"I DON'T NEED YOUR CRAPPY EXCUSES!!"

"GAAAAA!!!"

Senkyo tried to explain himself but it was a futile attempt. Later that day, the room's cleaners would have to deal with burn marks on walls and replace burnt furniture.

**67 – New Memories**

After changing back to his normal clothes and treating his burn marks, the bandaged Senkyo went to Yuu's room where they gathered to talk about Shiro and what they were going to do next. The people in the room were Senkyo, Yuu, Shiro, and Itsuki, who was called by Senkyo via smartphone. Apparently, Sora had the numbers of all of their classmates so Senkyo asked him for Itsuki's number.

"So, do you mind introducing her to us, Yukou-senpai?"

Yuu's sharp glare at Senkyo was a sign that she was still angry at him. Senkyo could only smile ruefully as one more misunderstanding would render him into ashes.

"Y-Yeah... this girl here is Shiro. She is a Nemi, one of the races from Zerid. Due to circumstances, my dad brought her to this world when I was a kid. The three of us lived together ever since."

"That's right! Shiro and Onii-chan have an unbreakable bond!"

"Wait a second, if this is true, then why are you only telling us now? And wouldn't that mean that you were only pretending to not know of Zerid?"

Yuu raised a very sound argument. The first time they met, Senkyo acted like a total outsider, like he didn't know anything. That was because he wasn't acting. Senkyo's memories were sealed and he didn't even know anything about it. Ryosei not knowing about it at first was proof of that.

When Senkyo woke up, Ryosei didn't even know Shiro. It was only after Senkyo explained to him who she was that he came to understand. In the middle of explaining who Shiro was, Ryosei slowly began to receive the same memories that Senkyo recently acquired.

After wracking his brain, Senkyo theorized that he "refreshed" the copy of his memories inside Ryosei. Senkyo and Ryosei couldn’t read what the other was currently thinking. By explaining to Ryosei his newly acquired memories, it was like talking to an old friend about your past experiences and remembering these things that would've otherwise been forgotten.

"Well, I know this is going to sound farfetched, but bear with me. My memories of that… were sealed."

"What!?"

Yuu and Itsuki shouted in surprise. "My memories were sealed," they probably never expected to hear that seriously in a conversation before. Itsuki has already been through a lot with them and experienced a fantasy firsthand, so he knew better than to take that as a joke.

After their initial shock, they quickly regained their composure and urged Senkyo to continue. Senkyo told them all about what happened in his dream and everything he understood from it. In short, Senkyo's father sealed parts of his memories and entrusted them to Shiro, who was like a little sister that Senkyo recently remembered through releasing parts of his sealed memories.

They discovered more mysteries about Senkyo but with no answers. They asked Shiro about Senkyo, but as expected, she refused to say anything. But she did reassure them about one thing, Senkyo's personality was never changed. He was the same as he was before, only with a part of his memories gone.

"Gaah! This is so annoying! You, Furball, just tell us about his memories or I'll beat it out of you!"

*\*Hiss!\**

Itsuki threatened Shiro, and she responded by hiding behind Senkyo and hissing at her aggressor. The new information they received made both Itsuki and Yuu a bit frustrated, seeing as no answers were given in turn. Yuu wasn't as blunt as Itsuki, it was clear by the look on her face that she was bothered by it. She entered deep thought without even noticing.

"\**Yukou-senpai... someone with the ability to house multiple souls in his body. His father sealed his memories for an unknown reason, had connections to Zerid in the past, and most importantly, has a divine soul that he can hide itself and has its own will...* *The more I know about Yukou-senpai, the more mysterious he gets, to the point where he, himself, doesn't even know everything about him. Hmm... this is very strange. Yukou-senpai has a divine soul. It's not unheard of for something that has no mana to have a divine soul. But to use the powers of a divine soul, they need to have a supply of mana. A spectral would be fine, but Yukou-senpai wasn't holding a spectral that time... but, that could only mean...\**"

"—sho-chan... Hisho-chan?"

"Uwa!?"

Yuu fell over her seat when she was snapped out of her trance, only to see the person she was thinking about waving his hand in front of her.

"Whoa! Hisho-chan are you okay? Sorry, did I get too close?"

"N-No, I'm fine! Hahaha... It's nothing to be sorry about. Wait, what are you doing Yukou-senpai? Why did you suddenly appear in front of me like that?"

"Appear in front of you? I was calling out for you a long time ago. You weren't responding so I came to get your attention..."

"O-Oh... Is that so...? Then, sorry for ignoring you, I spaced out for a moment there. A-Anyway, what were you asking?"

"We were asking what you were going to do from here on. We already asked Watanabe-san and he said he's going to stay and train with the Konjou clan as well."

"O-Oh..."

Yuu has been lost in thought for so long that she hadn't even noticed that they already changed topics. They asked what she was going to do. Luckily, Yuu already knew the answer to that.

"If you don't mind, I think I'll stay with everyone. We've been through a lot, we're basically a team now, right?"

"Yeah, no one seems to mind, it's great that you'll still stick around. But, didn't you say before that you had someone you have to find?"

"About that... I think that if I stay with you, then I'll eventually find who I'm looking for."

“I-Is that so?”

*“\*Yukou-senpai, I'll find out whether or not you are the one I'm looking for and the mysteries surrounding you along with it!\*”*

*“\*This is a bit of a weird situation…\*”*

The hunter and the hunted are in the same group. It was only recently that Senkyo discovered that he had mana running in his veins. It was more than likely that he was the one Yuu was looking for. But Senkyo didn’t know why Yuu was looking for him, so he kept it a secret. To Yuu, Senkyo is a human with no mana since the first time she checked him she confirmed it. But now that his mana was released, the only way to keep his relationship with Yuu as it is, he has to keep her from ever checking his mana.

**68 – Training Grounds**

Soon after their meeting concluded, it was decided that Senkyo and Itsuki would ask the clan chief, Yousuke, to let them train with them while Yuu would watch over Kuro Yaiba to make sure it isn't discovered.

They all had breakfast and headed straight to the clan chief's office to ask Yousuke for permission to train with them. To their surprise, Yousuke agreed immediately and had Touma and Sora accompany them with their training.

Senkyo and Itsuki followed behind Sora and Touma as they walked into the forest towards their training grounds where their mentor and other students were waiting for them. Senkyo walked nervously as he thought about training with other people who would be levels ahead of him. Actual fighters who've been training since they were children. Meanwhile, he was just a high school otaku who did running to school to not be late as his only exercise. And to add to the pressure, Yousuke sent them to train with the current most powerful hunter of the Konjou Clan.

*"\*Ahh... The most powerful of the Konjou Clan, he said! Why did he send us to train with someone like him!? I'm not even as powerful as he thinks I am!\*"*

*"\*This is good! What's faster progress than training with the strongest? If we're lucky, he'll whip you up to shape in no time!\*"*

*"\*I don't think you get it, Ryosei. They might be the strongest, but what if they're one of those brutal trainers who would suplex you if you made a single mistake!?\*"*

*"\*Senkyo... you've been watching too many anime. This is a group of hunters, not wrestlers\*"*

*"\*Don't worry Onii-chan! Shiro will be here for you~!\*"*

Shiro encouraged Senkyo, and it felt somewhat reassuring. Now that Shiro is summoned, she will be living inside Senkyo in her spirit mode. It was a familiar's skill to always be with their masters. Basically, she had the same ability as Ryosei, excluding the ability to take over his body.

*"\*They'll be strict but they wouldn't seriously injure anyone. You'll be fine as long as you don't do anything stupid.\*"*

*"\*~~~! I hope that's the case...\*"*

"We're here."

Sora notified Senkyo and Itsuki. They reached an opening in the forest where there stood lines of people in various attire. In front of all of them was the mentor that was assigned to the group, Konjou Clan's strongest hunter, Yamazaki Dai.

He had short black hair and eyes. He held a wooden sword in front of him as he stood. At first sight, Senkyo could tell that he was incredibly powerful. He had a well-built body with a few small scars on his arms. Dai spotted Sora and the others and called them out.

"Ah, you're here! Alright, listen everyone, these people are going to be joining us temporarily. Most of you might recognize these two..."

Dai pointed at Sora and Touma.

"The person with the brown hair and short ponytail is Yamamoto Sora, and the person with the white hair and sharp eyes that looks like he'll bite at any second is Saito Touma."

The well-ordered crowd talked amongst themselves. It seems like those two were well-known.

"You mean those are *the* Yamamoto Sora and Saito Touma!?"

"The Konjou Clan's Yin and Yang...?"

"This is the first time I've seen them in person..."

The crowd's murmuring seemed to annoy Touma but brushed it away with a click in his tongue. Senkyo and Itsuki followed behind Sora. After Sora and Touma's introduction, everyone's attention was directed to Senkyo and Itsuki.

"These two are guests of the Konjou Clan. The clan chief assigned them here because they are apparently the ones who defeated one of the leaders of END. The one—"

"WHAT!?"

"Impossible! A leader was actually defeated!?"

“No way, that has to be a joke!”

"Who are these people!?"

The once-murmuring crowd became rowdy and started getting out of control. It was a huge shock for them. No one had ever defeated a single leader in history. Being the first one to defeat one was obviously a huge deal. So much that the well-disciplined crowd began to riot but...

"..."

"!!"

It suddenly became quiet. It was like the noisy gossiping never even happened. Everyone stopped talking and lined up properly again, just like how Senkyo first saw them. The odd part was that it only took a sharp glare from Dai to quiet them down. He didn't raise his voice or make any gestures to indicate an order. In the first place, most of the hunters were distracted and didn't even have Dai in their vision.

"W-Wow..."

Senkyo knew what Dai did, but he was amazed nonetheless. Almost like a programmed system, the other hunters responded the moment Dai glared. It was a basic skill that hunters learn at a young age, called "Connect."

A skill that connects people's thoughts. It uses a person's spirit power to connect with other people. This has been their method of communication before mana and spectrals were even discovered.

It was an easy and convenient means of communication without hindering movement or requiring speaking. It only uses spirit power when you send your thoughts, and it only costs a small amount so you didn't have to worry much about overusing spirit power. And once you got used to it, sending your thoughts to multiple people will be like breathing air.

"Surprised?"

"Y-Yeah, it was amazing how fast everyone responded to you."

"Of course, discipline is a must. The battlefield does not show mercy to those who overstep their bounds."

"Is that so..."

"Well, how about you two? The clan chief didn't inform me with much, would you mind introducing yourselves?"

"O-Oh yeah, I am Yukou Senkyo. A high school student of Honshou Academy from class 2-B... I-I hope I can learn a lot from this."

"I'm Watanabe Itsuki. I'm from the same class as him. Just don't get in my way."

"....."

The hunters wore puzzled expressions in response to Senkyo and Itsuki's introduction. After all, it was natural to assume that they'd be in another hunter group that fights in the shadows if they were able to defeat a leader, but that wasn't the case.

Senkyo and Itsuki introduced themselves as high schoolers. That lead the hunters to doubt the information they were given, but since they trust the clan, they assumed that Senkyo and Itsuki simply didn't want to reveal who they truly were.

**69 – Clan Classes**

After their introduction, they turned to Dai for what to do next. But Dai was staring at them carefully as if examining them. After arranging his thoughts, Dai turned back to the crowd and gave them instructions.

"Hmm... Okay, since I'll be focusing my attention on our new companions, you're all going to self-train. You can train with someone in the same class if you want. If anything happens or if you want a duel, just call for me. Am I clear?"

"Understood!"

Classes. These are the fighting styles that hunters use. A hunter’s class determines their position and role in a battle. Seeing as the past seven years had massive changes, Senkyo asked Dai about the current classes.

Enchanters. Hunters that fight mainly by using talismans, enchanting their weapons or items with spirit power, and supporting other hunters. They are adaptive depending on their opponent or the situation. Enchanters only use normal weapons, and not spectrals, because the mana from a spectral affects the amount or spirit power a person can use.

If someone holds a spectral, the spirit power they can use will be reduced to only enough to enchant one item an hour or a trip to and back from the Spirit Realm. This is in effect for about 12 hours from the last time one held a spectral.

Fighters. Hunters that fight by using spectrals. Unlike enchanters, they use spectrals to fight their enemies. By using the mana within their spectrals, they can use defensive or offensive magic depending on the situation.

They learn new skills by asking someone who knows a different skill to teach them, or experimenting with magic and creating their own skill. But fighters have to be careful with the amount of mana they use. If they accidentally lose track of their spectral's mana and suddenly run out in the middle of battle, it could mean death. The only way to replenish mana is to transfer it into the spectral.

To avoid such a situation, people created Magic Arts. Compared to shaping fire into a blade or a shield, covering an already-made blade and shield with fire is incredibly simple that doesn't use up much mana at all and doesn't require a chant.

Magic arts were made to preserve mana by using the simplest of magics. They use something as simple as covering their weapon with magic and using their creativity to use that simple magic to something comparable to powerful magic that requires more mana and a chant.

Brutes. Hunters who use their spirit power to use skills and enhance their bodies. Brutes are generally resolute people. With their purpose in their mind, they draw power from their soul and shape it. Unlike the other classes, this is the most dangerous class. If you aren't careful, you might overuse your spirit power and destroy your soul in the process. But on the other hand, you can be the toughest piece on the field and can lead everyone to victory.

And lastly, Casters. These are hunters that specialize in casting spells from afar and defeating their enemies with magic. But casters don't use spectrals, they use staffs. Unlike spectrals, staffs have a large mana supply and can replenish mana on their own. Depending on the user and the staff, mana can replenish at an incredibly fast rate. Having a large supply of mana and being self-replenishing allows casters to use high-tier magic that fighters are unable to use due to the lack of mana.

But casters have a special condition. A hunter cannot be a caster unless they have an affinity for mana and they've taken a "Bond Ritual." The one who created class, and the same person that conducts the bond rituals, is Freda. Hunters that have a special affinity to mana can become casters if they take a bond ritual.

A Bond Ritual is a ritual where Freda makes a bond with the caster and the staff. Making this bond is the same as making the staff's mana supply the caster's own. Meaning that the caster themselves will have their own mana pool and be able to regenerate it. Once bonded with a staff, you cannot change the staff unless you take another Bond Ritual with another staff. Freda is the only person who can carry out these rituals.

Moreover, since the hunter is directly connected to mana, the effect that prevents the use of both mana and spirit power is permanent. Therefore, casters are permanently limited to a trip and back from the Spirit Realm an hour. Within that hour, casters cannot use spirit power.

Compared to seven years ago, two classes have been added and one was removed. In the past, the only classes were Enchanters, Brutes, and Purifiers. Purifiers were like priests that exorcise evil spirits with their spirit power. But now, it seems like purifiers were no longer needed and introduced Fighters and Casters to the Konjou Clan.

*"\*Hearing this just makes me want to know who this Freda person is. All I know is that she appeared at some point in the seven years I was dead.\*"*

*"\*I'm a bit interested in that too. If we're lucky, maybe the clan chief will let us meet her.\*"*

*"\*You'll have to gain You-chan's trust if you want to do that.\*"*

*"\*I know, I just haven't figured out a way to go about gaining his trust.\*"*

*"\*Well, do your best. Oh look, Dai is calling you over.\*"*

Senkyo was busy discussing their newfound information with Ryosei. After Dai's explanation, he left to tend to his other students before he focused on them, leaving Senkyo thinking about Freda and her involvement in the past seven years.

Senkyo approached Dai who was waving to call him over. Itsuki was already there. Senkyo was the only one they were waiting for. The other hunters have already dispersed and gone about their self-training.

"Took you long enough. Could you stop daydreaming and move so we can get this over with?"

"Sorry, my bad."

"Alright, how about we start with testing your stamina..."

And so, Senkyo and Itsuki's training began. The first test was to maneuver through the forest and get down and back up the mountain. They made it so that Senkyo and Itsuki could temporarily cross the mysterious barrier around the Konjou Clan after giving them a sample of their blood. Senkyo, Itsuki, Sora, and Touma all raced to the bottom while dodging the obstacles in the way.

Sora and Touma were used to this, but since they were ordered to look after both of them, they did the test with them. They reached the bottom without a hitch and waited for Senkyo and Itsuki. Itsuki dodged trees and jumped over logs and small streams. Although he had a few trips and stops here and there, he made it to the bottom of the mountain. Immediately after getting down the mountain, Itsuki turned and sprinted back up the mountain.

"Hmm... He has lots of room to grow doesn't he, Touma-kun?"

"So far, he hasn't stopped to take a rest. At the very least, he has the strength and tenacity to endure this. But this isn't enough to defeat a leader."

"Don't be mean! This is his first time doing it, and even you had to take stops every now and again! ...Although, aside from that, I agree that this is nowhere near enough power to defeat a leader."

*"\*Well, they did say that Yukou-kun was the one that defeated a leader single-handedly... But he's not here. He must've already reached the bottom on a different side of the mountain, I guess we should follow Watanabe-kun\*—*Come on, Touma-kun, let's go!”

"I don't need you to tell me."

Right as Sora was about to go. A distant voice reached his ears.

"...?"

"Hey, Touma-kun, did you hear something just now?"

"I don't know what you're talking about just hurry up and go."

*"\*Hm... Maybe I was just imagining things...\*"*

Sora and Touma followed Itsuki as he went back up the mountain. Itsuki almost never stopped running. He would shout every time he was slowing down and it somehow always got him a bit further without resting. The whole way back up, they never saw Senkyo.

"Oh? You're back already? I have to say for the first run you did great. Normally people would've taken another thirty minutes or so."

"Heh... heh... hehh... O-Of course... haah... I'm... hah... incredibly... s-strong... hah... you know...? Hahh..."

From how Itsuki talked, anyone could tell he was beat. He was trying to catch air as he talked just to brag. But from the looks of it, Itsuki was barely able to take on the difficulty he put himself through. While Itsuki tried to walk off his exhaustion, Sora noticed that Senkyo wasn't there yet.

*"\*Huh? This is weird... Did he get lost or something?\*"*

"Yamazaki-sensei, I'm going to look for Yukou-kun, is that fine?"

"Yeah. It would be a problem if he got lost and didn't get back."

Sora jumped on the nearest tree and then to the next. He went to look for Senkyo, who might've gotten lost somewhere. As Sora's search got closer to the bottom of the mountain, he spotted a few broken shrubs that lead to a slope. When Sora looked over to investigate, he saw Senkyo lying face down on the ground with cuts, and bruises, covered with dirt and leaves.

"Yukou-kun!?"

**70 – Taste of Training**

Let's turn back time to the start of the test...

*"\*Okay! Since my stamina and speed went up because of Ryosei breaking my body's limits every time, I should be able to do this now!\*"*

*"\*Well... I don't know about that one...\*"*

*"\*Eh?\*"*

*"\*I think it's better if you didn't know.\*"*

Confused at what Ryosei said, Senkyo didn't notice they already started. Running to catch up with them, Senkyo began to sprint. He dodged the trees, jumped over obstacles, and ran down the mountain. It was almost as if his muscles already adapted to this. Senkyo was about a few hundred meters away from Itsuki when Ryosei suddenly called Senkyo out.

*"\*Senkyo... Sorry, but I can't hold on any longer...\*"*

*"\*H-Huh!? What do you mean by that!? What's happening!?\*"*

Ryosei’s voice sounded a bit strained. It made Senkyo worry about what he just said to him. The worse part was that it didn't sound like he was joking.

*"\*I promise I'll explain later...! I'm about to let go, Shiro, are you ready...?\*"*

*"\*This better be for the best, or else, Shiro will get you for this!\*"*

*"\*Wh-What!? Shiro, too!? Seriously, what's gonna happen!?\*"*

No one answered Senkyo. Senkyo slowed down and began walking to try and prepare for what was going to happen next. Senkyo tried to prepare for anything. Since no one was telling him what was happening, it probably wasn't a big deal but it worried him nonetheless.

*"\*Okay... 3... 2... 1... DO IT!\*"*

Right after Ryosei signaled Shiro, Senkyo felt a sudden pain run through his whole body. In his legs, in his arms, in his shoulders, in his stomach, everything hurt.

"G-GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHH!!!!"

Senkyo let out an ear-piercing scream that echoed through the mountain. Senkyo began to stumble and writhe on the ground. Losing control over his body, he rolled into some shrubs, down a slope, and stopped at the bottom, where he would soon be discovered by Sora sometime later.

*"\*Nature's Time!\*"*

All Senkyo could hear was Shiro shouting and casting a spell, making Senkyo feel just that bit better. That was the last thing Senkyo could hear before slowly passing out on the ground and later getting found by Sora. It wasn't until night came that Senkyo regained consciousness.

**............**

"Mm... Hm... Haa—AAWW!!"

Pain was the first one to greet Senkyo from his sleep. He could still feel his body aching, but not as bad as it was earlier. He was rudely disturbed by his yawn when he tried to move his arms around. Every part of his body had a lingering feeling of pain. He knew if he moved, it would only hurt.

The pain Senkyo felt didn't actually hurt that much. He could even walk around and flail his arms a bit. It was just that he didn't expect to feel pain the moment he woke up. Senkyo toughed out the pain and sat up straight.

When he looked around, Senkyo noticed he was in the room he slept in the other night. But, the more he thought about it, he realized that couldn't be the case. Because earlier this morning, his room was destroyed by Yuu's fireballs.

"Well, this is a large castle. This is probably a different room that looks exactly like the room I last slept in last night."

*"\*Oh? You're awake. Good to see you can move around.\*"*

Ryosei noticed Senkyo was awake and called out to him. Senkyo wanted answers to what happened. He was kept in the dark by Ryosei and Shiro, saying that there was no time to explain. Since everything turned out how it did, naturally, Senkyo wanted answers.

"What happened back there? Was it some kind of magic someone put on me or something?"

*"\*No, it was inevitably going to happen.\*"*

"What do you mean by that?"

*"\*You see, if you remember that time we fought a whole horde of lesser demons, while we were fighting, your body's muscles were getting damaged from all the fighting.\*"*

"What!? Damaged!? What does that mean!?"

*"\*Wait, calm down! Let me finish.\*"*

Senkyo stayed quiet and waited in suspense for what Ryosei was going to say next.

*"\*Right now, your muscles are regenerating.\*"*

"What...?"

*"\*When your muscles get damaged, your body repairs that damage and makes your muscles bigger and stronger than they were before, right? Think about it like that.\*"*

*"*I-I think I heard that before, but are you sure I didn't take any serious damage?"

*"\*Oh, you did.\*"*

"What!? Then—!"

*"\*But that was*before *Shiro saved you, you see...\*"*

Ryosei explained to Senkyo everything that lead to what happened earlier. When they were fighting the horde of lesser demons, Senkyo's muscles were getting too damaged to the point where it was going to be a serious injury.

Right before Ryosei gave Senkyo's body back to him, he used his spirit power to temporarily replace the damaged parts of Senkyo's muscles. Ryosei's spirit power acted as Senkyo's muscles, and it was like his muscles were never damaged at all.

It was part of the spirit power's restoration power. From that point onwards, Ryosei continuously used his spirit power to prevent Senkyo's muscles to be any more damaged than they already were. But unfortunately, during the time they fought Fulgur, Ryosei let go of his focus and Senkyo's muscles were seriously damaged to the point where it would take months or maybe years to naturally heal.

But when Senkyo suddenly got covered in blue light, his muscles were slowly getting repaired. Shiro cast various spells to save Senkyo at that time. One of those spells is one called "Nature's Time." A spell that accelerates the natural restoration of something, depending on the amount of mana expended. It healed Senkyo's bruises, wounds, and muscles. That spell helped Senkyo avoid getting serious damage.

The rest other spells were Nemian Grace, Barrier Transfer, and Unwavering Resolve. Nemian Grace is a spell that imitates part of what Mythical Water does and cures all disabilities. Barrier Transfer transfers and temporarily increase the natural magic barrier Nemi have to the target. And finally, Unwavering Resolve, a spell that uses mana to be cast, but uses resolve as its power. It channels the caster's resolve and shapes it by reinforcing the target's defensive power and tenacity. By casting all these spells, Shiro managed to save Senkyo.

After the whole ordeal, Senkyo's muscles were back in a state where they could naturally heal. But because they were still in the Spirit Realm, Ryosei replaced Senkyo's muscles again. Then, after encountering the Konjou Clan and accepting their offer to sleep, Ryosei didn't want to stop using his spirit power since it would only disturb Senkyo's sleep, so Ryosei left it on until this morning today. In the middle of the race, Ryosei was planning on releasing his replacements and letting Senkyo's muscles naturally heal, but not after Shiro intervened.

*"\*What are you doing to Onii-chan!?\*"*

Shiro noticed the fake muscles acting as replacements and confronted Ryosei. At first, Shiro was ready to attack Ryosei and kick him out of Senkyo's body. Luckily, Ryosei managed to get Shiro to listen to his explanation and convinced her to help him, although she sounded reluctant.

As Ryosei let go of the replacement muscles, Senkyo suddenly felt intense pain. Shiro cast the same magic she cast previously, Nature's Time, that accelerates the natural restoration of something, in this case, it was Senkyo's muscles.

*"\*Right now, Onii-chan will still be in pain, but since Shiro used 'Nature's Time,' Onii-chan's muscles should be fully healed after a good night's sleep.\*"*

Nature's Time took longer this time because Shiro used a lower amount of mana compared to the last time. Seeing the number of spells she used, it was obvious that her mana pool would be running low, for now, this was the best Shiro could do.

"...Is that so...? Thanks, Shiro."

*"\*Anything for Onii-chan!\*"*

“Thanks, but… Ryosei… Why didn’t you just tell me to stop before you did that!?”

*“\*Wait, calm down. For the record, I did consider it. But in the end, someone else would have to pick you up and bring you back to the clan, with that in mind, I thought having someone see you knocked out due to an actual accident would be much better than someone seeing you knocked out out of nowhere. I thought that would sell the ‘this guy must be really tired’ image rather than ‘a mysterious force just took this guy down’ image. It’s better this way so that no one thinks of questioning us too much about it later.\*”*

“I-I guess I can see where you’re coming from. Making it look like I was just tired from the start prevents too much questioning… but still… but still! That isn’t the point I thought I was gonna die there!”

*“\*I’m sure someone who survived being fired to a crisp by a sea of lightning can handle a bit of a tumble down a hill.\*”*

“You’re heartless!”

*"\*Well, you have to get used to this, because your body will be feeling like this for a while.\*"*

"Wait... what do you mean by that?"

Senkyo was caught off guard by what Ryosei said.

*"\*Even if your muscles rebuild tomorrow, that won't be enough. So, we'll be training and pushing your body to the limit again!\*"*

"So... you're telling me, I'll have to live with my body aching like this?"

*"\*It'll get easier as time passes, don't worry!\*"*

Ryosei said enthusiastically, but Senkyo stuttered for a bit.

"So... every day... like this...?"

*"\*Yeah!\*"*

"....."

"Why meeee!?"

With that, marked the beginning of Senkyo's days of training.

**71 – His Haunt**

"Alright, getting to the toilet shouldn't be that much of a problem... Wait, where's the toilet on this floor again?"

*"\*It's right beside the stairs at the end of the corridor.\*"*

"Thanks."

Waking from his sleep, Senkyo felt the need to relieve himself so he slowly walked to the toilet. Although his muscles hurt, it wasn’t enough to immobilize him. He made it to the toilet and successfully finished his business. Senkyo was about to head back to his room, but little did he know that getting back to his room was going to have to wait.

*"\*...! Senkyo... do you hear that!?\*"*

"Huh? No, what is it?"

*"\*My ears cannot be mistaken... this is the opening theme song for Magical Girl Kawaii-chan!!\*"*

"Just so we're clear it's *my* ears—Wh-Whoa!?"

"Come on, Senkyo, we need to get to the source of the sound right away!"

*"\*H-Hey! That's no reason to hijack my body!\*"*

"Don't sweat the small stuff!"

*"\*Be careful! My muscles aren't even healed yet!\*"*

Ryosei took off to the sound of the opening song he seems to love so much. He climbed up the flights of stairs going two floors up.

*"\*You heard it two floors above us!? You don't even have your own body!\*"*

*"\*Tsk tsk tsk... It's precisely because I don't have a body that I can find the things etched into my soul easily.\*"*

*"\*What does that even mean!?\*"*

Ryosei quietly approached the room where he could hear his beloved anime.

*"\*I can't be mistaken, this is it! Behind this door, Magical Girl Kawaii-chan!\*"*

Ryosei opened the door and immediately went inside.

"Kawaii-chaaaann!!!"

"!?"

As Ryosei opened the door, a hurried shuffling was heard coming from inside the room. After carefully examining the room, there was a girl in pajamas frozen in place right in front of them. It looked like she was hurriedly heading to the open window.

"Wait... Kaede!?"

"Wh-Who..."

Ryosei recognized the girl in front of him. Her name was Konjou Kaede, Konjou Yousuke's little sister. She had black hair with braided twin tails decorated by a cherry blossom hair pin. She wore a pair of glasses that shielded her black-colored eyes. She was staring at Ryosei with a surprised face. It was almost like her face was saying *"\*Who is this person!?\*"*

"U-Umm... who might you be...?"

"Ah...!"

That's when Ryosei remembered that he was using Senkyo's body. To Kaede, a random stranger just busted inside the room and called her out like they were close friends. *"\*This is bad!\*"* is what Ryosei thought.

"O-Oh yeah...umm... I-I am Yukou Senkyo, n-nice to meet you. I'm staying in the castle until tomorrow. I hope you don't mind my stay."

"I-I see... I hope you don't mind me asking but, what are you doing here?"

"Ah! I-I was just passing by and I heard the opening theme song to an anime I liked and I couldn't help but check..."

Kaede looked over to the television, the only thing around that was showing anime. Even though it was obvious, she still wanted to confirm, so she asked Ryosei.

"You like Magical Girl Kawaii-chan?"

"Yeah, pretty much."

"Then... could you tell me, what's so good about the show!?"

"Whoa!?"

From being cautious and keeping her distance, to up close and personal. Kaede dropped all defenses and went for the offensive the moment she heard Ryosei's answer. Ryosei was perplexed by Kaede's sudden change and took a few steps back.

"Wh-What's so good about the show? Shouldn't you know that, I mean, you're watching it aren't you?"

"...Then let me change the question... is this show worth dying for?"

"D-Dying for… huh."

"...A-Ah. No, n-never mind, it's nothing."

Kaede backed out of asking "Senkyo," but that was only natural. Ryosei knew Kaede would never confide to anyone she didn't trust with her problems, much less a stranger. However, immediately after hearing her question, Ryosei knew what Kaede meant behind it. It was about him.

When he was still alive, around the time when he got into anime, every time he talked to Kaede, Yousuke, or anyone else for that matter, he would always bring up his newfound hobby. Ryosei was so happy when he talked about it, that it probably made his close friends think *"\*Maybe this is for the best.\*"*

After giving the television one last look, he shifted his eyes to Kaede along with his objective. Ryosei wanted to help Kaede with whatever was troubling her. Although he already had an idea, he also wanted to know more about what happened because of him. Normally, she would never tell a stranger about her personal matters, but if he used her weakness against her, the results could be different. So he decided to use her weakness—her inability to keep her composure when flustered. Ryosei slowly approached Kaede, but Kaede stepped back, even more cautious than she was before.

*"\*Tsk... at this rate, she'll get away. This is going to hurt a bit but it'll be worth it... hopefully.\*"*

Suddenly, Ryosei used Flash Strike, but instead of striking, he slammed the wall behind Kaede with a resounding BANG and pinned Kaede against the wall. It hurt as Ryosei did it but he toughed it out.

"Wha-What!?—\**A Flash Strike!?\*"*

Pinned against the wall and only a few inches away from each other, Ryosei began to break her defenses. Although it looked like Kaede was about to push him away, he said something that caught her attention.

"...You know, if it brings you bad memories, you don't have to force yourself to like it just because someone else did."

“……D-Did you know Ryosei-nii-chan?”

“We happened to meet at a convention.”

“I-Is that so… Then why did you bother saying that to me? Do you really believe that thinking about Ryosei-nii-chan brings me bad memories?”

“Oh? I never said that, though?”

“………”

Kaede kept silent. Ryosei decided to push even further.

“Are you telling me that it won’t bother you if we talk about him?”

“H-Huh? Of course not… not at all.”

“Then, what happened here when he died.”

“You don’t need to know that, do you? You’re an outsider, so why should I tell you?”

“……”

Ryosei was getting a bit irritated. It was true that Kaede wouldn’t leak information about the clan to an outsider, but he wanted answers. He wanted to know the damage he did.

“Is that so? Then if I told you he’s still alive, what would you do?”

“W-What? Why are you saying that?”

Kaede’s voice was getting louder. Ryosei could tell he hit a nerve, but he didn’t stop.

“I’m saying that if he was still alive, then he wouldn’t want you to burden yourself with him!. I mean, it’s obvious you’re bothered. He went ahead and died by himself. Why should you even care about someone who abandoned you—”

*\*SLAP!!\**

Kaede’s hand went across Ryosei’s face and a resounding slap echoed throughout the room.

"Don’t talk about Ryosei-nii-chan like that! H-He died because of me! Because I didn't do anything! I decided to let him stay like that! If only I had convinced him to come back... If I had convinced him, then he wouldn't have died! He could've still been alive and doing what he liked!”

“W-What..?”

Ryosei was dumbfounded. He wasn’t expecting that response. She says that she was responsible. He couldn’t think of a more stupid thing to say. *“\*Why are you saying that? What the hell did I even do to make you feel that way?\*”* Ryosei thought.

Kaede's emotions began to get out of control. She began shouting her heart out, leaving her feelings out in plain view. Tears began appearing in the corner of her eyes as she let every single thought she kept to herself out for everyone to see.

"I can't forgive myself. I could've saved him, but I turned a blind eye.”

*“\*What…\*”*

“I... didn't care enough for him!”

*“\*…nonsense…\*”*

“If I did, then maybe I could've stood my ground and gotten him out of his shell.”

*“\*…are you…\*”*

“That's why I will never forgive myself!”

*“\*…talking about!?\*”*

“For not caring!”

*“\*Stop it.\*”*

“For not acting!”

*“\*Stop it!\*”*

“And for letting him die—”

“STOP IT!”

**72 – Past Mistakes**

Ryosei shouted, silencing Kaede.

“What are you saying? What do you mean it’s your fault!? First of all, you did everything for him already. You kept him company the day his parents died, didn't you!? You supported his decisions! Despite being against the elders, despite being against the whole clan, you still sided with him, didn't you!? When you saw him smiling and laughing again, it must've been a relief, right? After seeing him in such a sad state for so long, you must've been really happy! Because you could see his smiling face, his energetic, normal self! Every step of the way, not just when his parents died! Ever since you were little, ever since you first met, you've always been there for him. At every point of his life, down to the very end, every time he needed someone, you've been by his side, you were there for him, all of you were! You all cared for him and did everything you could to let him live a happy life! Don't take it out on yourself! If Ryosei knew you were suffering and beating yourself up because of this, he would be devastated! To see someone he cared about beat themselves up because of him... it's the worst...

“H-Huh? Wha… Why do you even know all of this!? Why are you speaking like Ryosei-nii-chan!? Just exactly who do you think you are!?”

“Me…? Then… Then why don’t you find out for yourself? You can do that can’t you?”

“F-Fine!”

Kaede reached her hand out to Ryosei’s forehead. Kaede’s special skill, the skill used on innocent victims from the supernatural to send them back to their normal lives. Hypnotic Suggestion. It allows her to prompt a suggestion to a target and persuades them to choose it. Normally used to make others forget about their memories of the supernatural. But of course, to choose the specific memories, the ability allows her to read a target’s memories. Which is why…

“…!? H-Huh? Impossible… How!? If that happened, then…!”

She saw it. Senkyo and Ryosei’s memories. Senkyo’s encounter with Ryosei, their battles, and how they ended up here. There was no doubt. The person who wielded Kuro Yaiba, the person who wiped out the enemies with swift skill, and the person who was controlling the body right in front of her, was his cousin, Konjou Ryosei.

“I bet you’re complaining about why I didn’t come to you earlier, huh? Do you really think that I would have the audacity to come here without a plan? Not after what happened last time—Whoa!?”

A powerful force pushed Ryosei to the ground. Kaede tackled him, and since his body was already weak, Ryosei fell without resist. She was bumping her forehead on Ryosei’s chest, all the while murmuring “idiot” over and over again. He could see the tears pouring down her eyes. He felt the strength behind that tackle and the grip of her arms around his waist. Ryosei returned the gesture and wrapped his hands around her and gently brushed her hair, reassuring her his warmth was real.

“I’m sorry. For leaving you alone, and causing you to feel that way.”

“That’s not what I want to hear from you. I already know that. If my trust in you wasn’t enough, your memories were solid proof that you’re sorry.”

“Then… I’m sorry for shouting at you and opening your wounds earlier.”

“Wrong. If I was still mad about that, then I wouldn’t be hugging you right now.”

“I give up. What is it?”

“Couldn’t you have thought about it more?”

“If I did then we’ll be here all night.”

“Fine… I’ll give you a hint. What do you say when you return home?”

Kaede wiped her tears on Ryosei’s clothes and stared at him straight in the eye, awaiting his words. Realizing what she wanted, Ryosei gave her a bright smile.

“I’m home, Kaede. I promise I won’t repeat my mistakes, so will you welcome me back?”

“Sure! Welcome back, Ryosei-nii-chan!”

After that, Ryosei and Kaede spent their time talking to each other. The whole time, Kaede seemed to be clingier than before, but Ryosei let that pass After some time, they heard footsteps and voices coming from the corridor.

"H-Hello? Is anybody in there?"

Suddenly, Kaede quickly turned off the lights and the television. She was so fast and swift; she knew where to go and what to do like she's already done this a million times.

"Come on! We got to get out of here! Follow me!"

Kaede took Ryosei's hand and headed for the open window.

"Whoa, whoa, what are you doing!?"

"Just trust me!"

"W-Wait—AAAHH!!"

The door opened and two people inspected the room. They saw a dark, and empty room. The television was off, the lights were off, and the windows were closed shut.

"I-I swear I heard a scream come from this room! You heard that too, didn't you!?"

"I-Impossible...! Are the rumors of a ghost living in this room actually true!?"

"Sh-Shut up! There's no way ghosts can be real!"

“What do you mean!? We literally know a world filled with ghosts!”

"Well, I'm not going to stay in this room any longer!"

"H-Hey! Wait for me!"

The two people left the room and quickly walked away as fast as they could. Just outside the room above that room, Kaede and Ryosei could be seen entering the window.

"T-To think we were going to escape through the window and climb upstairs through the roof... What the hell have you gotten yourself into when I was gone?"

"It's only natural, anime is forbidden in the clan after all. You were the cause of that you know? The elders were really mad at you."

"I figured as much. But this is 'natural,' huh? Wait... why were you watching anime in the first place? Didn't you hate it?"

"Well, at first I did. I actually started watching anime just to insult it, but as time went by, I actually enjoyed it... I-I know what you're going to say, and don't bother! I know it's pathetic that I enjoyed something I tried to hate! I was disappointed at the start too, you know!"

"I never said anything! But I think it's good that you didn't keep pretending not to like it. It's like that thing you know, accepting yourself kind of thing."

“I just imitated what you did, excluding the stupid stuff like leaving us of course.”

"I’m sorry, okay!"

“Hahaha, I was just teasing you!”

Her expression was genuine happiness. Ryosei was happy to be able to see this face again. Kaede turned around and headed for the coffee table in the room. It had a tea set placed on top of it, and she poured the tea into a cup and handed it over to Ryosei.

"Here, some tea. It's still hot so be careful."

"Thank you."

Ryosei took a sip of the tea, and for the first time, took a good look at his surroundings. The room was unlike most of the other rooms. Instead of the standard room for guests, this room looked a bit more personalized. It had a bed, a desk with a pc and a bunch of paper and pens, a coffee table, a bookshelf with various titled books, and many other various things.

"You have an organized room, but didn't you like it cutesier?"

“Leave it alone! It looks more mature!”

“‘Mature,’ huh? You know some adults have cutesier rooms than this, right?”

“Eh? Seriously?”

“Yeah.”

Kaede seemed to try and hide her embarrassment but her bright red cheeks were a dead give-away.

“A-Anyway, it’s getting a bit late now. Shouldn’t you go back to sleep?”

“Hmm, I guess you’re right. Well, it's been fun. Thanks for the tea, Kaede."

"Yeah, see you later."

“Oh yeah, don’t go telling anyone about me okay? Not even to You-chan.”

“Of course. You were talking about it earlier this morning, right?”

“…Just how much of our memories did you check?”

“Pretty much everything. We can talk about anything you want to know some other time, okay?”

“That’ll be great. Thanks. Goodnight, Kaede.”

“Goodnight, Ryosei-nii-chan.”

Ryosei closed the door behind him as he left. The sound of his footsteps got farther and farther until it was nowhere to be heard. Kaede stood in place, not moving an inch from where she saw Ryosei off.

“Goodnight, and welcome back.”

**Chapter 3: Senkyo's Class**

**73 – Return Home**

"Y-Yukou-senpai!? What are you doing here!?"

Yuu shouted in surprise when she saw Senkyo in front of her doorstep. It was still a bit early in the morning so Yuu was still in her yukata. She must have just woken up. Her yukata was a bit loose and Senkyo could see a bit more of her shoulder's skin. He went slightly red and pointed it out to her.

"E-Enough joking around! You should be resting!"

"Don't worry. Look, I'm as good as new!"

Senkyo stretched his body around to prove to Yuu that he was actually in good shape. Usually, she would have a hard time believing that. But the events that took place yesterday enabled her to guess what had happened to Senkyo.

**…………**

"All of his muscles are damaged, but from the looks of it, he'll be fine in a few days."

A man in a white coat was inspecting Senkyo's unconscious body. They were inside the room where Senkyo would wake up later that night. Sora brought Senkyo to the castle and called in a doctor to treat him. After thoroughly checking, all the doctor could find was normal muscle damage from training. But Yuu didn't quite understand that.

"Wh-What!? Didn't you say his muscles are damaged!? Shouldn't we do something about that!?"

"Calm down, miss. This is only normal muscle damage someone would get from training. It's nothing to be worried about."

"B-But he was just running earlier, wasn't he? Why is his whole body damaged in such a short time?"

"Although I did find that strange, I couldn't find any trace of a curse or some kind of magic that could do this. But I did find traces of mana, likely to have come from healing magic."

"I-Is that so... sorry for getting worked up."

"Don't worry, Hisho-kun, Yukou-kun will be all fine, don't worry."

Yuu silently nodded her head in response to Yousuke’s attempt to reassure her.

"Well then, I'm afraid I have some business to attend to. If Yukou-kun wakes up, tell him that Sora-kun and the others are continuing Watanabe-kun's evaluation. He can take his evaluation when he feels better."

“Yes, sir.”

The doctor and Yousuke left the room. Yuu sat down on the chair beside Senkyo's bed. She was worried about him, but what the doctor said earlier caught her attention as well.

"Traces of mana... He’s not wrong. I noticed it when I first saw him."

Yuu stared at Senkyo with a mix of worry and curiosity. Although her worry was genuine, at that moment, she couldn't help but think of trying to uncover some of Senkyo's mysteries. She thought of sucking a little bit of Senkyo's blood again, just to make sure he really had no mana.

"G-Gulp..."

Yuu's face slowly came closer to Senkyo's neck. She was entirely focused on it. She thought about what the doctor said, "I did find traces of mana, likely to have come from a healing magic." For the whole day, she guarded Kuro Yaiba. Senkyo couldn't have used it to use healing magic. Unless... he didn't need it.

"\**If Yukou-senpai does have mana... then that means bringing him Zerid. B-But that's...\*"*

Yuu stopped just before she was about to bite Senkyo. Her mouth was open, fangs showing, ready to pierce Senkyo's skin, but she stopped in place just before she did. For a few seconds, she stood still, and she backed out.

"Hahaha... There's no way, right? Why would Yukou-senpai suddenly have mana? The last time I checked, he didn't have any. How would that even change? It must've been Shiro-san. Nemi are known to specialize in healing magic."

She backed off and sat back in her seat. She laughed awkwardly as she tried to shake away her suspicion.

"I-I need to go now! Excuse me!"

Yuu ran out of the door in a hurry, leaving Senkyo alone in the room.

**…………**

"You know, you shouldn't hurt yourself just because Shiro-san can heal you back up."

"Wh-Wha!? How did you know?"

"Oh? That was just a guess."

"R-Really? Then—"

Senkyo felt the dark aura coming out of Yuu. She was staring daggers at him. He reflexively backed off in fear.

"So just because you have a healer, you think getting hurt is fine now? I see, it's not like we were really worried about you or anything."

"Ah! W-Wait, Hisho-chan, there's a misunderstanding here! I didn't actually intentionally hurt myself! I was just surprised about knowing Shiro healed me back up, I swear! S-So—"

*\*Snap!\**

Yuu snapped her fingers and a ball of fire appeared above her hand. Senkyo's face paled.

"If getting hurt is alright, then you wouldn't mind having a few burns on you, would you!?"

"WAIT, WAIT, WAIT!! AAAAHHHHH!!! I'M SORRY! I'M SORRYYYY!!!"

**............**

Later that day, Senkyo, Yuu, Itsuki, Sora, and Touma were all gathered in the Clan Chief's Office where they stood before Yousuke. Senkyo's group had their belongings with them and were ready to leave. They were called into the office by Yousuke to get some final words out before they left.

"First of all, as a token of our gratitude, we would like to reward you three for defeating a leader of END. Here, take these charms with you. It's a charm of protection. Of course, this isn't like any charm. This one can be used in battle and protect you with a barrier. It activates by itself but it can only be up for a limited amount of time. When the barrier disappears, just keep it with you to recharge. It can only be used once every 10 minutes. Most of our hunters have one. It has saved many lives from dangerous situations."

Yousuke presented three white charms to the group. He stood up to give all three of them the items. The trio examined the charms and kept them in their pockets. Yousuke sat back down on his chair and directed his gaze to Itsuki.

"Watanabe-kun, I heard from Dai that you did an amazing job on yesterday's evaluation. I believe you got a brute class, right? It's impressive to get evaluated for a brute. That means there's something you're fighting for."

"Stop with the flattery. It doesn't work on me."

Itsuki said it like he meant it. Even though he was being complemented, he brushed it aside and didn't care at all. Yousuke smiled understandingly and proceeded with his final words.

"After this, you'll be going back to the peaceful world most people live in, away from the shadows. I do hope you already knew this, but you have to keep this place a secret—this hidden world a secret. No matter how much time you spend in that world, it will never be the same now that you’ve affiliated yourselves with this world."

His tone emphasized this was the most important part he wanted to say. His eyes stared at all three of them back with nerve-wracking glares. The three of them tensed up a bit, but they were expecting this. After all, how can they let three outsiders, who potentially never knew of this world until now, roam free with the knowledge they just gained. Senkyo stepped up and spoke for the three of them.

"Of course. Before we even came here, we knew we had to keep this a secret. We do not and will never plan on revealing a secret that would destroy the world's current peace. Although these are only words with no concrete way of reassuring you: we will not reveal this to anyone and we will keep it a secret."

Senkyo didn't stutter. He stared Yousuke back as he said his whole speech. Yousuke responded in satisfaction.

"That's good. Although I will have Sora and Touma keep an eye on you four, including your sister, Watanabe-kun. She did leave this place thinking it was some kind of secret resort in the mountains. Usually, we would hand over patients to public hospitals we're connected with, but we made an exception for your request. So just to be sure, we'll keep an eye on her. That much would be fine, wouldn't it?"

"Tsk... For now, as long as you don't peek into her private life or go anywhere near her that'd be fine. But if any of you freaks do anything to her, you'll have me to answer for it!"

Itsuki didn't seem to like the idea but agreed to it anyway.

"That's fine, I assure you your little sister's safety. I'm sure we'll meet again. Take care on your way home. Sora-kun and Touma-kun will escort you down the mountain. If you ever do plan on coming back, just get in touch with those two."

"Got it, thank you for everything."

With that Senkyo, Yuu, and Itsuki left the clan's settlement. After a long walk, they finally reached the town where they parted ways with Sora and Touma.

"Well, my home is this way. See you at school Yukou-senpai, Watanabe-senpai."

"Yeah, see you tomorrow."

"Heh. Don't get lost now."

Itsuki whispered but Yuu turned his head back and glared at him. Her vampire senses helped her hear it. He stepped back in surprise since he didn't expect her to hear that. As Yuu went off the distance Senkyo was left with Itsuki.

"Well, my route is this way. So, see you at school, Watanabe-san."

"Not so fast, Shittaku. I'll be coming with you, 'cause this is also my route."

"E-Eh...?"

Senkyo's route only led to the neighborhood. If they have the same route, that would mean that they live in the same neighborhood. He was a bit shocked to hear that since he's never seen Itsuki anywhere before. But then, he realized that he didn't even go outside enough to get a chance for that to happen.

"Come with me for a bit. We have something to talk about."

"Huh?"

**74 – Itsuki’s Request**

Itsuki brought Senkyo to a wide-open lot. It had pipes of concrete and planks of wood laying around the area, but other than those, it was completely empty. Itsuki stopped in the middle of the lot and turned around to face Senkyo.

It didn't seem like he brought him here to play around. Itsuki looked serious, though a bit menacing, it wasn't like his usual "I'll beat the crap out of you" face.

"'Who are you right now? Yukou or Konjou?'"

"…!"

"I don’t get it much, but Lightning Boy said something like that, right? That there’s another spirit inside you."

Itsuki referred to Senkyo's conversation with Fulgur.

"Hey, Shittaku, just what the hell are you? I didn’t know what the hell happened at that place, but I know that wasn’t anything a human can do."

Senkyo stayed silent for a moment. He didn't know exactly how to respond to that question. He must have been talking about what Senkyo did after he passed out from Fulgur’s attacks. He thought about what to answer, or if he should even answer that question honestly.

"I'm not gonna let you go unless you answer me. So hurry up or we'll be here all day."

Itsuki didn't do his usual threats, but he pressured Senkyo nonetheless. It's become quite apparent to Senkyo that Itsuki changed how he usually treated him. Instead of threatening to beat him up and shouting in front of his face, Itsuki kept his distance and pressured him out of it.

Senkyo snapped out of his surprise. Thinking about it, he didn't need to answer him. He could just bolt out of the place and leave Itsuki behind. He had no reason to tell him the truth. He had nothing to gain from it. But even so, he decided to tell the truth.

"You see..."

Senkyo told Itsuki about Ryosei and how he could control his body to fight in his place. He told everything about Kuro Yaiba and its relation with Ryosei and the Konjou Clan, the reason why he wanted to train with the Konjou Clan, and the dangers they would inevitably encounter in the future.

If Itsuki leaked this information to the Konjou Clan, the worst-case scenario was that no one would believe Senkyo, refuse to train him, and would take Kuro Yaiba, leaving Senkyo with nothing but his head to defend himself. Senkyo and Ryosei didn't want that to happen. But Senkyo took this chance, hoping that this would be beneficial to them in some way. He decided to trust Itsuki.

"..."

Senkyo finished explaining everything to him. He waited in silence as Itsuki processed everything Senkyo said. Unlike the last time, Senkyo explained something to him, Itsuki took this seriously. Itsuki slowly opened his eyes and made contact with Senkyo's.

"I get it. Don't worry, I'm not that much of a bastard to screw you over. In fact… I can use you."

"Use me?"

Senkyo's face softened when he heard that Itsuki didn’t plan on telling anyone, but it suddenly changed to confusion when he heard the last part.

"Shittaku, I want you to do something for me. You said this ghost friend of yours was a powerful big shot, right? The one who cut all those demons in half. I want him to make me even more powerful. And in exchange, I'll help you with smashing those demons into pieces. How does that sound? I'm sure you're listening inside there, aren't ya ghostie!"

"Two days in from finding out about the supernatural and you’re already making deals with them…. You really are reckless and bold aren’t you, Itsuki-san? Isn't this interesting."

“Huh? What did you just say?”

“Oh come on. You could at least realize that the one you’re making a deal with is talking.”

Ryosei took over Senkyo's body, but it didn’t seem to hit Itsuki that they changed.

“What the hell… That’s creepy. You don’t change voices or anything.”

“Of course not. I can control Senkyo’s body but I can’t change his vocal cords.”

"I couldn’t care less. So, what do you say?"

"Before anything else progresses, I want to know why you want power. If your answer pleases me then I'll accept, and if you lie to me you can forget about getting my help."

No lie could ever get past Ryosei. His all-seeing eyes pressured Itsuki and made him tense up a bit. A bead of sweat dripped down Itsuki's face. But despite all this, he didn’t hesitate.

"I want to repay someone. That's all."

Itsuki's answer was vague. He didn't specify who he was repaying or how he was going to repay them. He could be doing something that might become trouble for Senkyo and Ryosei in the future, or maybe that was his way of saying that he wanted to beat someone up. But none of those thoughts crossed Ryosei's mind. That was because he already knew who it was for. She was the only person that Itsuki went so far as to go to another world. His own sister.

"Fine, I'll teach you. I warn you; it isn't going to be easy. But I'm sure you already knew that."

"Thanks."

Itsuki bowed his head slightly. He retracted back all the while keeping his serious face. Ryosei slightly grinned as he finally figured out what kind of person Watanabe Itsuki really is.

"Just to clarify, I said I'd teach you, but I didn't say when."

"What? Then when are you going to!?"

"Calm down, I'll teach you eventually. But first, you have to actually know the basics of the brute class. Maybe after a few weeks of training from Dai, you'll be ready to take on my teachings. You can't refuse this since you're the one who asked, either get trained by Dai and then by me or I won't teach you at all."

"Tch, Fine! All I have to do is spend a week or two training with that loud mouth, right? That'll be nothin’! I'll make you regret not teaching me earlier!"

With that, Itsuki officially became a part of Senkyo's group.

**75 – Hectic Week’s Reflection**

After that, Itsuki and Senkyo went their separate ways and returned home. Senkyo immediately headed to his room and flopped on his bed followed by a long groan.

"Ughhhh... What a week... So far, the most hectic week in my life and it's just going to get even worse from here on, huh?"

*"\*You say that like you don't want to, but you still end up doing it in the end.\*"*

"Stop reading my emotions, why don't you?"

Senkyo sat back up and looked around his room. It was filled with manga, light novels, video games, had a TV to watch anime, and a PC for various uses. His room became the embodiment of his hobbies. Although he lived alone and was a full-blown otaku, his room was still quite tidy.

"I probably won't be able to watch as much anime or juggle my hobbies anymore, huh?"

Now that Senkyo's decided to train and get stronger, there would be little to no time left for his precious hobbies.

*"\*Do you regret it?\*"*

"No, it's fine. Strangely… strangely enough, I feel like I wasn’t as attached to my hobbies as I thought.”

*“\*What’s that supposed to mean?\*”*

“Dunno. But I think I’ll be able to move on from this lifestyle easier than I thought.”

*“\*That certainly is strange. No human can simply change a lifestyle they’ve been living for years overnight, but that’s exactly what you’re doing. Your emotions say so.\*”*

“I guess you can say I’m an anomaly, huh?”

*“\*I see Fulgur’s words stuck with you.\*”*

“I mean, he claimed I wasn’t even human. How can I just forget that?”

*“\*So you say but it doesn’t seem to be bothering you as much.\*”*

“I guess not. Though I do wish I could still continue things like I used to, fighting demons and monsters from another world sounds cool, right?"

*"\*Did you really have to say it like that? If I didn't know how you think, I would've thought you were doing this for fun.\*"*

"I didn't think I would have to say my intentions out loud to someone who's literally inside me and can read my emotions and scan my memories."

*"\*Touché.\*"*

This whole week, Senkyo encountered and passed many hurdles. He met a spirit that made his body it's new home, fought werewolves and monsters, met a vampire from another world, got dragged into another world, almost died, defeated someone who was supposed to be a big deal, discovered a hidden world behind the shadows of society, and finally ended the week in his home. If someone heard this, they'd think they were making a terrible summary of a light novel.

Even with all of these happening, Senkyo still decided to continue walking on this path and risk his life. Of course, he didn't decide to do this without a goal in mind. After all that has happened, Senkyo realized one thing, he didn't know who he really was.

Sealed memories and his father who sealed them. Senkyo wanted to know all about them. What actually happened in the past, what his father is keeping from him, and the things he could do that no one else could. The shroud of mystery that surrounds him and his father, he wanted to know what was behind it. That is why Senkyo decided to stay on this path.

From the middle of his spacing out, Senkyo got knocked down to the bed as a white-haired cat girl appeared out of nowhere and tackled him into a hug.

“Whoa!? Shiro, where did you come from!?”

“What do you mean, Onii-chan? Shiro is always with you remember? You are Shiro’s master, and Shiro is your familiar! But at the same time, you are Shiro’s big brother, and Shiro is your sister! Isn’t that great!”

“U-Uhh… If you say it like that some people might take it in a weird way… Well, I guess no one’s here.”

“You’re tired aren’t you, Onii-chan? We can sleep together if you want to, just like in the past!”

“S-Sleep together… I don’t think that’s such a good idea.”

“Oh come on, O~ni~chaaaan~!!”

Shiro tightened her hug around Senkyo’s chest.

“Whoa, wha!? Shiro!? Stop! That’s a bit too strong!”

“Ehehee… It’s been so long since the last time we were like this!”

“…Yeah, I guess it is.”

Senkyo tried to resist Shiro, but he couldn’t make himself forcibly pry her off him. Not after knowing that she waited so long just to protect him. In the end, Senkyo gave in to Shiro and spoiled her.

**76 – Brute’s Beginning**

*\*Ding ding ding ding~\**

The afternoon chime rang which signaled the end of classes and the start of Senkyo and Itsuki's training. Senkyo entrusted Kuro Yaiba to Yuu again because it was dangerous to bring it along with them, and it was risky when left alone in the house in case of an enemy attack like that time a werewolf suddenly barged through their door.

Thankfully, no one in the Konjou Clan would suspect her strangely for holding it as they introduced Yuu to them as a fighter class that prefers to use magic that came from a different organization that had now cut ties with them. Although they still suspected her as a spy, it was much better compared to introducing her with no origins.

Earlier that morning, Senkyo talked to Sora about going back to the Konjou clan to train with Dai. Sora smirked and handed him two pendants with the Konjou clan's symbol on them.

"This is something that'll help you get through the barrier and use our teleport points. We finally got an okay from both the clan chief and the village elders to let you use the teleportation network so you don't have to spend hours climbing the mountain."

"I see, thanks."

"Hehe, good luck man, now even the village elders have their eyes on you."

"A-Ahahaha..."

Senkyo could only awkwardly laugh as he attracted yet more unwanted attention.

"Oh yeah, since you'll be using our network now, you can go to a few places..."

Sora told Senkyo the locations of some of their teleportation points. Apparently, teleportation points are scattered everywhere in town. They made these points to travel faster and to be able to quickly respond to any attacks.

One of those teleportation points was inside a family restaurant called "Joe n' Nathan's," the family restaurant Senkyo and Itsuki were currently in. Naturally, if a hidden organization wants to keep itself hidden, it'd cover and disguise everything that would lead to them. In this situation, a family restaurant was a cover. But despite being just a cover-up, business sure was bustling

"Hey, this is the place, right?"

"I think so. Yamamoto-san told me to just show this pendant to the staff and they'll know."

Everything looked so natural that even Senkyo began to doubt what he heard from Sora. While standing there and second-guessing himself, a waitress came to serve them.

"Welcome to Joe n’ Nathan’s! A table for two?"

"Ah! N-No, we're—"

"Someone told us to show you this. Now what?"

Itsuki pushed Senkyo aside and showed off the pendant to the waitress. Itsuki didn't have the time to deal with Senkyo's indecisiveness and took it to himself to take care of the situation. The waitress leaned in to examine the pendant more carefully. When she was satisfied, she straightened back up.

"This way, please."

Senkyo and Itsuki followed the waitress to the back, entered the staff room, and reached another door that had a "Do not enter" sign on it. The waitress placed her hand on the doorknob followed by a glowing light coming from her hand.

The waitress opened the door and gestured for them to come in. The inside was a small empty room with nothing but a carpet covering the floor.

"Stand on the carpet, please"

They did as they were told and stood on the carpet. The waitress didn't enter the room with them, instead, she bowed and closed the door.

"Eh?"

A second later, the carpet began glowing and illuminated every corner of the room with blue light. Their vision began to clear up and saw themselves in an unfamiliar room with a huge magic circle below them.

Looking around, the room was almost empty. It was an incredibly spacious room with tall pillars to support the ceiling. From the looks of it, this room was made just to have this magic circle below them. The circle was about as wide as half a standard track-and-field field.

"You're here!"

Senkyo and Itsuki heard a familiar voice and looked over to see Dai waving while walking toward them.

"Glad to see both of you are in good shape... you are right? Last time Yukou-kun suddenly collapsed so now I'm not too confident with judging from perspective."

Dai jokingly brought up what happened last time. Senkyo cringed as he thought about how that would've looked from Dai's perspective. He was supposedly the one who took out one of END's leaders and got done in by a run down the mountain.

"Sorry about that, my muscles suddenly gave up on me for some reason. But don't worry, today I won't be going down like last time!"

*"\*All my muscles are fully healed this time so I’ll be fine.\*"*

"Good to hear. Watanabe-kun, how about we take a quick one-on-one to refresh your memory?"

"Don't underestimate me or I'll crush you to bits."

"Sure, I'll be careful. Yukou-kun, you observe our match and take what you can get from it."

"Okay."

In the middle of an open field, Itsuki and Dai faced each other. Itsuki had his bare hands for weapons but Dai had a wooden sword. Dai is a fighter class and his main weapon is a sword. It may look like Itsuki had a disadvantage but his only real disadvantage was that he was a beginner.

Brutes are trained to take heavy hits, the one who takes most of the damage in battle. They have high resistance, regeneration, and overall, very tenacious. If this were a battle between people of equal experience, Dai might be the one at a disadvantage.

"Alright, are you ready, Watanabe-kun?"

"Shut up and let's go!"

"Begin!"

Itsuki was the first to move. He ran towards Dai who stood still with his sword in front of him, at the ready. Suddenly, in a blink of an eye, Itsuki disappeared.

"What!?"

Senkyo was caught off guard when Itsuki appeared behind Dai. It was the move Senkyo was most familiar with, the Flash Strike. Itsuki trained for a single day and he was already capable of a flash strike. Senkyo learned it in the middle of a battle, but that was because of Ryosei’s memories. A flash strike requires the caster to send a burst of spirit power to their legs and a basic protective coating on their body to protect them from the wind pressure. Which meant that Itsuki was already capable of basic spirit power control.

"I got you!"

*\*Bam!\**

"Not quite."

Itsuki planted his foot on the ground and hurled his fist at Dai's back. But instead of his back, Itsuki hit his sword. Itsuki who flashed behind Dai's back to punch him at his blind spot got blocked and was now facing Dai, staring right into his eyes.

"Tch!"

Itsuki retracted his arm and created some distance between them.

"A surprise attack like that won't work when your opponent expects you to do it, Watanabe-kun."

"It was a lucky swing, loud mouth!"

Itsuki charged in again, but he didn't use Flash Strike, or maybe he didn't have the time to. Dai, who was a distance away from Itsuki, suddenly appeared in front of him.

"What!?"

*\*Bang!\**

A small explosion appeared between Itsuki and Dai. Itsuki got knocked back but he didn't get any wounds or injuries from it. On the other hand, Dai was standing just fine from where the explosion happened.

"You should be more careful! This is what happens if you use your abilities haphazardly."

*"\*That was one of the brute class's abilities, 'Burst.' An offensive ability that ignites concentrated energy with your spirit power, causing an explosion. In this case, Itsuki was preparing to use burst the moment Dai tried to block his next attack. But he wasn't ready for Dai to suddenly flash at him. He panicked, used Burst when he didn't have proper footing, and got blown away.\*"*

*"\*Wow... I wonder if Yamazaki-sensei did that on purpose.\*"*

Itsuki got back on his feet, clearly frustrated.

"Damn it!"

"Don't let your guard down now. The battle isn't over yet."

Dai flashed at Itsuki and struck him from the back. But before the sword could reach him, it was stopped inches away from Itsuki's body.

"Who said I was!?"

Itsuki tried to grab Dai but he jumped away before he could.

"Don't get cocky just because you have a barrier. If I wanted to, I could've destroyed that flimsy barrier and you would've lost then and there."

Itsuki's annoyance was written all over his face. The fact that he couldn't do anything against Dai was frustrating. Even though he knew Dai was the Konjou clan's best, he still aimed to defeat him.

"I'll get a hit off you if it's the last thing I'll do!"

"Then I'll be waiting. That day won't be today though."

"Wha!?"

Dai disappeared from Itsuki's vision. At that moment, he knew he was in trouble. Itsuki immediately tried to turn around but was met by the sound of shattering glass that was his barrier and a painful wooden sword to the stomach.

"G-Gaah...!"

Itsuki was knocked to the ground writhing in pain with his hand on his stomach trying to somehow lessen the pain by covering it. He rolled around in frustration from his defeat.

"D-Damn it!"

"Good to know you still remember what you learned last time. But that's just a tiny part of everything, you still have a lot to learn. Don't be cocky and keep training. Come find me when you're ready to continue your training."

**77 – Strength and Weakness**

Dai left Itsuki on the ground and went to Senkyo.

"U-Um... Was that really necessary? Wasn't that a bit too much?"

From Senkyo's perspective, Dai just completely crushed Itsuki, a beginner, and didn't bother to help him at all right after. He used an underhanded tactic like using Itsuki's power against him. He didn't show much mercy to a beginner. Senkyo was getting a bit nervous after he saw all that.

"Oh. Don't worry, my way of training you will be different. You see, what Watanabe-kun needs to learn is to not underestimate an enemy. It will be good if he learns how to judge and act based on the difference between his and other people's power. If he stops underestimating people, then he'll avoid reckless decisions like opening himself to his enemy or charging straight in. Just because his class is someone that takes damage doesn't mean that he should. That's all I wanted to teach him."

Dai opted to fix the most troublesome problem first before anything else. He knew Itsuki was a bit too overconfident and took care of it before it became a problem. From the looks of it, Dai noticed these problems from the first day they met.

Today, Dai suggested having a battle before anything else to keep Itsuki's confidence from turning to recklessness. On the first day they trained, Itsuki already learned most of the basics. It was amazing for a completely normal person to learn that much in such a short amount of time.

But, after gaining more power, so did Itsuki's ego. If he kept gaining power, without showing him his limits, he might have gone into battle without ever getting a chance to get out of one.

"Don't worry. He isn't the kind of person that will hold a grudge. He'll turn this frustration into fuel to get him working even harder. He'll aim for the day he finally beats me, and I'll just watch over his genuine bright smile that shows all his effort was worth it. Something like that."

"..."

Senkyo was too surprised to speak. Dai said that with genuine hope. It was a bit odd to Senkyo that he hoped for something like that from Itsuki when it was only his second day training him. That line was a bit cheesy but that made Senkyo lighten up a bit around him.

"A-Ahaha... That was a bit weird, wasn't it? Well, let's ignore that. Let's begin your evaluation first."

"Alright!"

"Ah, on second thought, I need to see if you're fit for the evaluation first."

"O-Ouch... You really like to rub salt in the wound don't you, Yamazaki-sensei?"

Senkyo enthusiastically responded but was shot down by Dai's second comment.

"Hahaha! Sorry about that."

And so, Senkyo began his training. Itsuki came back right after they left him and joined in. Dai trained both Senkyo and Itsuki at the same time without losing focus despite having completely different training methods.

The afternoon passed and it was already nighttime. It was about half past eight and Senkyo and Itsuki just finished their training. Senkyo and Itsuki were both completely worn out, barely catching their breaths. Dai who worked them out to the bone nodded satisfyingly.

"Hah... r-ruthless..."

"...I-Is that all you got?"

"Good work. That'll be it for today."

Senkyo fell to his knees so he could finally relax his body. Dai who wasn't quite finished grabbed Senkyo's attention.

"Yukou-kun, about your evaluation, right now, you aren't fit to be in the fighter class."

"O-Oh..."

Just before Senkyo began his evaluation, Dai asked him what class he was aiming for. Senkyo answered without hesitation: the fighter class. Since Ryosei was also in a fighter class, he wanted to get in the same class so that his body could be trained like Ryosei's which will allow him to use more of his power.

"Isn't there a way to get in right now? Nothing at all?"

"No, excluding the caster class, the evaluation tests are made so that only the ones who can take the class pass. Your evaluation on the fighter class was a fail. Your current stamina won't be able to catch up with the fighter class's training."

"Ah, If that's the case—"

Senkyo cut himself off, to be more specific, Ryosei took control of his body and stopped Senkyo from saying any more.

"I-In that case, is there any class I'm suited for?"

"There is. It's the enchanter class."

"Then I suppose I'll begin my training in the enchanter class tomorrow. I'll be in your care."

"Sure, it's nice to have you."

"HEY! Stop talking and let's go already!"

Itsuki shouted in the distance while he was walking back toward the castle. Dai and Senkyo followed suit. Senkyo and Itsuki were served dinner and offered to take a quick dip in the hot spring. Although they both took the dinner, they declined the hot spring. Itsuki wanted to go back home saying it was late, and Senkyo declined for the same reason.

The two went back to the Teleportation Tower, the building that they were teleported to earlier that afternoon. It was the teleportation network's hub where hunters come and go from and to battles. They were teleported to the closest point to their homes which was the same point they teleported from, at Joe n’ Nathan’s. Senkyo parted ways with Itsuki shortly after they were teleported. On his way home, Senkyo finally brought up Ryosei's sudden body jacking earlier.

"Ryosei, about earlier, why did you stop me from getting in the fighter class. Surely if I say something like 'I have an item passed down to me that lets me restore my stamina' wouldn't sound too farfetched considering everything else."

*"\*You don't get it. That's exactly why I stopped you.\*"*

Senkyo pondered what Ryosei meant by what he said. If everybody knew he had some kind of item that restores stamina, it would be extremely useful in battle. So Senkyo's conclusion was that someone would want to target him, aiming for an item that doesn't even exist and only leading to Senkyo getting into more trouble.

"Is that it?"

*"\*Well, that's also a possibility, but that wasn't my reason.\*"*

Puzzled, Senkyo asked Ryosei what his true motive was.

"Then, what is it?"

*"\*Senkyo, right now, what is our greatest weakness?\*"*

"Our weakness? You mean my body?"

*"\*No, it's me.\*"*

"You? Why? You're the one who does the fighting! I only strategize in my head. You're the one who's using his skills to defeat the enemies. If anything, I should be our greatest weakness because I can't do anything else to help with the fighting."

Ryosei stayed silent. It seemed like Ryosei wanted Senkyo to figure this out himself. Senkyo didn't expect Ryosei to say that. He thought, their greatest power was their greatest weakness. But how could that be? In every single battle, Ryosei fought in Senkyo's place. Every. Single. Time.

"Ah...!"

*"\*Now do you understand?\*"*

"Yeah... I get it."

Senkyo figured it out. What makes Senkyo and Ryosei strong is Ryosei. But if the enemies find a way to take Ryosei out of the equation, then all there'll be left is Senkyo, who has barely any experience in fighting. Senkyo will be a sitting duck ready to be ravaged by predators.

What Ryosei wanted was for Senkyo to be able to fight for himself, in the case that Ryosei was taken out of the picture. At the very least, Senkyo will find a way to get away from the enemies until Ryosei can fight again.

Ryosei stopped Senkyo from entering the fighter class, a class he was deemed unfit for, and got him to enter a different one, a class that Senkyo can take by himself. If Senkyo can find his skill in the enchanter class, then it would be all the much better for them. That way, even without Ryosei, Senkyo will have a fighting chance, and their skill set could even broaden depending on what Senkyo learns.

"I see… You’re right. That would be great. I got too absorbed in trying to get a fighter class that I didn’t consider that."

“As long as you understand. Do your best on training.”

“Of course, I will.”

**78 – Guard Duty**

Senkyo reached his house and opened the door. As he comes in, he couldn't help but catch the smell of curry coming from the kitchen. Senkyo lived alone so there shouldn't be anyone around, but Senkyo also doubted a burglar would be making curry in the middle of their robbery. Senkyo cautiously approached the entrance to the kitchen when someone intercepted them.

"Yukou-senpai! You're finally back!"

"What!? Hisho-chan!? W-Why are you here?"

It was Senkyo's underclassman and vampire friend, Yuu. She was still wearing her school uniform and she was wearing an apron over it. She greeted Senkyo with a bright welcoming smile that a wife would usually show their husband who just got back tired from work.

"Well, when you had me take care of Kuro Yaiba, I forgot to ask how I was supposed to give it back to you. Without Kuro Yaiba you wouldn't have anything to defend yourself. Since I didn't know what to do, I decided to stop by and wait for you. I hope you don't mind but I cooked us dinner while I was waiting."

"O-Oh, I don't mind at all, in fact, I'm glad you did, but how did you get inside? I'm pretty sure I locked the doors..."

"W-Well..."

Yuu turned a bit red when Senkyo asked about how she got in.

"You leave the window to your room unlocked... So, I... kinda flew over there."

"Oh yeah, you are a vampire after all. Even when we first met you were… Ah..."

Senkyo imagined as she explained, but he remembered that her clothes don't get transformed when Yuu turns into a vampire. That could only mean that she came into his room naked and had to grab her clothes outside.

"I-I’m sorry. It must've been hard."

"Don't remind me!!"

After facing Yuu's thousand small punches in an attempt to hide her embarrassment, Senkyo ate dinner again. Although he wasn't too hungry, he couldn't bring himself to tell her that he already had dinner. Yuu worked hard for it after all. He didn't want the food to be wasted or ruin her mood by telling her he already had dinner. After a second serving of dinner, Senkyo washed the dishes and saw Yuu off.

"Well, I see you at school, Yukou-senpai."

"Ah, wait! I'm going to be training every day. It would be troublesome for you if you had to do this all day. So how about you keep it for now and I'll just message you when I need it?"

"You mean we exchange emails?"

"Yeah."

"But what if you really need it? If you encounter an enemy, you would have to get a chance to call me and then wait for me to get there! Isn’t this a bad idea?"

Senkyo didn't have any other means of defense besides Kuro Yaiba. Yuu was worried that it'll be too late before Yuu could even get to Senkyo.

"I'll think of something."

"That's not reassuring at all!"

"It's better this way. I can't have my eye on Kuro Yaiba when we're training, and leaving it alone at home is a bit risky too!"

"What do you mean!? Is this a baby!? Aren't you just being paranoid, Yukou-senpai?"

"No, I'm just taking the risks into account!"

"The risk of you getting targeted is higher than this sword getting stolen!"

"Urk..."

Senkyo couldn't talk back to that because it made sense. Their enemies might not even know about Kuro Yaiba. If they find out that Senkyo was the one who defeated Fulgur, they'd go for him, not the blade.

"See, you know I'm right, but why do you still want to go without it!?"

"W-Well I don't have much of a choice! If I brought it to the Konjou clan, Kuro Yaiba will get found out. If I leave it alone at home, I'd be running the risk of Kuro Yaiba getting stolen."

Yuu's eye twitched. She was getting irritated at how stubborn Senkyo was about leaving himself vulnerable. Then, Yuu pouted and looked away from Senkyo.

"Hmph! For someone who thinks of every possibility, you sure don't like taking the best option."

"W-What!? C-Come on, I said that in the heat of the moment! Another thing, if I thought of every possibility every single time something happens my brain will explode! At least credit me when I actually do it!"

"You still don't get it, do you?"

“Get what?”

“Hmph!”

“…”

Senkyo saw Yuu's eyes peeking while she was looking away, eyes still as annoyed as ever. He couldn't take any more of her cryptic word and broke.

"No, I don't! So please just tell me!"

Yuu kept looking away. It looked like she was having trouble getting out what she had to say. But after a deep breath and using the heat of the moment to push her words, she finally got it out.

"From now on, I'll be on Yukou-senpai guard duty! I'll follow you around anywhere you go outside of school and make sure you get home safely! And you don't have a say in the matter!"

"W-What!? Isn’t that a bit unreasonable?"

“What’s unreasonable here is you leaving yourself defenseless!”

Yuu grabbed Senkyo’s collar and brought his face down to the same level as her face. She came closer to Senkyo and whispered in his ear.

“If you still refuse, then I’ll suck your blood out. I may be your underclassman, but I’m still a vampire after all. *Foo!*”

“Wh-Wha…”

Yuu playfully blew into Senkyo’s ear and as a result, he forcibly jerked out of Yuu’s grip and lightly rubbed his ear with a slightly red face. His reaction seemed to entertain Yuu and she let out a cute giggle.

“Well, Senpai? Do you still want to resist or do you like the thought of your underclassman biting into your neck?”

“S-Stop saying nonsense! Fine! I give up, okay! Have it your way!”

“Hehehe. then that settles it. Now, give me your email.”

“Here.”

Senkyo handed over his phone to Yuu. When Yuu finished putting in their contacts, she handed the phone back.

“Now I can call you if you try to leave me behind.”

“I didn’t even think of doing that! At least give me a bit of trust!”

“Hehe, I know. I was just kidding.”

“This girl…”

“Well then, Senpai. See you at school tomorrow. Goodnight!”

“Goodnight.”

Yuu gave Senkyo a smile before taking her leave. Senkyo was a bit taken aback by how aggressive she was being and stood shaken as he watched Yuu leave his vision. And so, Yuu's plan, Yukou-senpai Guard Duty was initiated.

**Chapter 4: The Dual User**

**79 – A New Lifestyle**

It was Friday morning. The sun shined its comfortable morning rays over the groups of students that walked their way to school. The birds chirped, and the cozy wind blew. It was the perfect weather to start a morning. The sun wasn't too hot, and it wasn't too cold. If anyone stared their day with weather like this they'd be compelled to stop and take in the rare perfect weather.

However, there would always be people that wouldn't notice such nice weather. Those would be the people who were too preoccupied with their problems and such. One of those people was Yukou Senkyo. He walked sluggishly and looked extremely worn out. The cause of this was a combination of both the previous four days of gruesome training from Konjou Clan's most powerful, Dai Yamazaki, and the previous three days of rumors going around about him.

Let's do a bit of catching up. Earlier this Monday, Senkyo went to school with the rumors of him doing immoral things to Ichika still flying around. He entered the classroom with the same disgusted eyes staring him down like filth, the same as last week's but...

"Ah, look, it's that perverted otaku!"

"Eww... get him away from me! Hahaha—"

*\*Slam!\**

As Senkyo was getting the same verbal abuse from last week, a loud slam came from the back of the class, catching everyone's attention. Everyone immediately looked over and saw Itsuki with his fist slammed on his desk.

"Agh! It's so damn noisy in here! Could you shut the fuck up, eh!?"

Itsuki glared at the girls who were attacking Senkyo with eyes that could kill. The girls immediately exited the class and ran away in fear. All the other students were silenced by what just happened but Itsuki wasn't satisfied with that.

"Does anyone else wanna make some noise? I'll welcome it with a fist to your face!"

Itsuki glared at the other students that had their eyes on Senkyo. After getting the message that their life was in danger, everyone looked away and pretended like they were minding their own business. Seeing there were no other competitors, Itsuki took a quick glance at Senkyo.

"\**Don't misunderstand, this is only because Ichika forced me to!\**" is what his annoyed look seemed to say. Senkyo responded with a smile and a quick bow as thanks. After that, no one else messed with Senkyo. But that didn't stop them from making other rumors about how Itsuki had a complete switch in attitude towards Senkyo.

Senkyo was finally free from annoying rumors that dirtied his name. And now with protection from the most feared person in school, no one dares to cross him. But in turn, another rumor about him and Itsuki popped up. Since it didn't bother him like the previous rumor did, Senkyo didn't care. He would return to the usual school days where Kinro was normally the only one who would talk with him. Although it sounds bad, it was better than getting picked on.

That was until the next day came.

"U-Um... is Yukou-senpai here?"

There was a familiar voice coming from the classroom's entrance. It was the voice of the person who declared she'd be on Yukou-senpai Guard Duty yesterday night. Senkyo turned to see a girl in a blue jacket that was acting a bit more docile than he usually saw her. When they made eye contact, she signaled Senkyo to come over.

"What is it, Hisho-chan?"

"What do you mean, 'What is it?' I'm waiting for you! I'll be guarding you so you don't kill yourself with your reckless decisions!"

Yuu was talking in a whispering voice and seemed a bit uneasy. The usual Yuu would just shout at him and recite a hundred reasons why she was doing this, but that wasn't the case.

"Hey, Hisho-chan, could it be that you're actually a shy type?"

"This only hit you now?"

"I mean you don't actually act any bit shy around me."

"It's too late to be shy to the person who already saw me naked...! Nnn~~ What are you making me say!?"

"Ah..."

*"\*Nobody heard that, right? No, there's no way. No. Definitely not. Absolutely. No way. Although the last part was a bit louder than her voice earlier there's no way that's enough to be heard, right? Humans don't have enhanced vampire hearing so I should be fine! Yeah, I'm fine, I'm fine, I'm...\*"*

Right as Senkyo heard what Yuu said, he questioned himself, praying, praying, and praying that Yuu's voice was unheard. But when he slowly looked over behind him, the other students that were nearby looked at Senkyo with shocked faces.

Senkyo and Yuu didn't go to any place private. They were talking in the middle of the hallway, right in front of their classroom. He didn't expect this talk to go in that direction so moving to someplace private didn't cross his mind.

How wrong he was. The students' minds who heard Yuu's last line sent their imaginations into overdrive. When they noticed Senkyo was looking at them, they turned in the other direction and quickly walked away.

"N-No... I'm done for!"

"Eh!? Y-Yukou-senpai? What's wrong? What happened? Hello?"

Senkyo was brought down to his knees, despair in his voice. From what it sounded, Yuu didn't catch on to what happened. Senkyo thought Yuu would eventually catch the approaching rumors, but for now, it was best that she didn't know.

From that day forward, Yuu always comes and waits for Senkyo to leave the classroom and follows him around everywhere he went. That only fanned the flames of the rumors but since Itsuki was always with them the rumors didn't go too wild.

Senkyo, Yuu, and Itsuki always leave school together and head to the usual teleportation point at Joe n' Nathan's. Yuu would watch over Kuro Yaiba as she watched Senkyo and Itsuki train. They always had dinner at the Konjou castle and would be teleported to the closest point to their homes, and since Yuu lived in the town, they said their goodbyes before they get teleported. This was the daily routine these three followed every day.

Going back to the present, it was Friday morning and Senkyo was tired from training. His body was still adjusting to his everyday training. Senkyo's muscles ached, but not too bad that Senkyo couldn't move. Ryosei assured Senkyo that when he got used to this his aching muscles will go away. On his way to school, his best friend, Honjou Kinro, came from behind him and greeted him with a good morning and a pat on the shoulder.

"Good morning!"

*\*Pat!\**

"Ouch!"

Kinro didn't expect to hurt Senkyo. From what he knew, he didn't pat hard enough that it would hurt. But seeing he was wrong, he backed off and quickly apologized.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to hit you so hard."

"No, it's fine. My muscles were just aching from some exercise, that's all."

"Exercise!? You!?"

Kinro's surprise was justified. The only exercise Kinro saw Senkyo do was running to not be late for school. But if a pat on the shoulder hurt, then that meant he was doing more than just normal running.

"What's gotten into you, Senkyo? Are you sick? Is it a fever?"

"Get off my back! Isn’t that a bit rude? I'm actually training here!"

"Wow... I never thought I'd see the day."

"Neither did I."

They were having their normal everyday exchange. But there was something different about how Kinro was acting. This kind of interaction was no different from all the others, but it was like Kinro wanted to say something to Senkyo. Sure enough, he was right on the mark.

"Hey, Senkyo, is everything really okay?"

"What makes you say that?"

"Well, for starters, you nod off in class more often. I can tell you've been more tired recently. You don't go straight home anymore. And whenever we talk you rarely bring up anime or anything anymore. You know, if you need help, I'm here. You don't have to carry everything yourself."

Kinro didn't bring it up before, but he was watching. He noticed Senkyo's change in character. The subtle nodding off to the obvious not talking much about anime anymore. From Kinro's perspective, Senkyo stopped doing what he loved the most in exchange for something that only made him all beat up.

Although Kinro didn't want to assume what Senkyo was doing was bad for him, he also couldn't help but be worried. He talked to Senkyo with the intent to stretch out a helping hand to him. Despite not knowing his troubles, he still wanted to help.

"Don't worry, Kinro. I'm doing this because I want to. Though it was a bit hard to drop my usual routine, I didn't give up on anime. If I did, now that would be worrying. I just don't have that much time for it right now."

"Is that so? I don't really have much of a choice but to take your word for it, do I? Well, just so you know, if you do need help, you can count on me."

"When the time comes, I won't hesitate."

Senkyo gave Kinro a reassuring smile. He was glad that Kinro was genuinely worried for him. He could remember the not-so-distant past. The day that he met Kinro.

*\*He really is a charming idiot.\**

**80 – Lunchbreak with Kaede**

The sound of a can dropping from a vending machine reverberated through Senkyo's ears. It was currently lunch time and he was grabbing some refreshments to wash down the food he ate with Kinro. There was still a bit of time before he had to return to class, so he decided to stay and hang around outside for a bit before going back.

Senkyo turned to the left of him and saw a familiar face sitting on a bench under the shade of a tree while eating lunch. It was Kaede. But it took Senkyo a second to realize that because she looked slightly different from the last time he saw her. Right now, she wasn't wearing any glasses and her hair which used to be tied into twin tails went straight down her back. But the same cherry blossom hair pin never left its spot.

*"\*I didn't know she went to this school.\*"*

*"\*Well, knowing how overprotective Kou-chan can be, he probably got her in here with someone to look after her. I doubt Kaede knows about it though.\*"*

*"\*It must be hard, huh?\*"*

Senkyo walked over to Kaede, who didn’t seem to notice him coming. It looks like she was enjoying her lunch just a bit too much. She was stuffing her mouth with rice and chicken so fast that some bits of rice got stuck to her face.

"There's rice stuck on your face."

Without looking up at Senkyo, Kaede searched her cheek with her hand and picked up two rice grains that escaped her rice-devouring mouth and put them back in. She looked over to see the owner of the voice who ratted out the rice grains and saw it was Senkyo.

“Nice to see you, Kaede-san.”

"Yukou-san!? What are you doing here?"

"I'm a student here, that's why."

Kaede looked like she just remembered something important.

"O-Oh yeah... You're Yamamoto-san and Saito-san's classmate. It slipped my mind."

"Ouch. Does that mean I'm not worth remembering?"

"N-No! That's not what I meant!"

Kaede started to become a bit flustered. Senkyo was used to joking around but Kaede didn't seem to catch on.

"Haha, I'm joking."

"O-Oh..."

"Do you mind if I sit here?"

"No, not at all."

Senkyo sat beside Kaede, opened his drink, and took a sip. Kaede calmed herself down and struck up a conversation after finishing the last bits of her lunch.

“Actually, I haven’t properly introduced myself to you, Yukou-san. I am Konjou Kaede, a 1st year student at Honshou Academy. As well as Konjou Ryosei’s cousin and The Konjou Clan Chief’s sister. Nice to finally meet you.”

“Then, I’m Yukou Senkyo, 2nd year student of Honshou Academy and Ryosei’s partner. Nice to meet you too.”

The last time and the first time Senkyo and Kaede met, Ryosei was the one who was controlling his body. They didn’t properly introduce themselves as themselves.

"How has your training been going? I heard good things from Yamazaki-san."

"Well, I haven't broken down just yet so that's a good sign. Yamazaki-sensei just finished teaching me all the basics in yesterday's training. Man, the enchanter class is so hard. Yamazaki-sensei doesn't even tell me if I did well learning something or not. I'm afraid my learning ability is lower than average."

"Yeah, Yamazaki-san likes to do that. He does that to not affect someone's learning ability. Apparently, he does that to some people that he thinks perform better under those kinds of thoughts."

"Seriously? Personally, I'd rather not have those thoughts."

"He knows what he's doing. I'm sure this is for the best."

"Hopefully."

Senkyo scratched his head as he thought back to the past few days when Dai pummeled everything into Senkyo's head. He felt like sharing his experiences with someone to let out some steam, thankfully someone was right beside him to listen.

"After my evaluation, he had me master making a vessel. Everybody else made it look like it was so easy but it took me about 30 seconds to make one. I had to spend one and a half days trying to improve it. Well, now I can make one in five seconds so I guess that was good progress."

"Eh?"

Kaede let out a surprised voice as she heard that. Senkyo turned to Kaede whose face was in disbelief.

"What's wrong?"

"You reduced your enchanting time that much in one and a half days?"

"Y-Yeah, what about it?"

"That's way too fast! It took me almost a week to finish an enchant in 10 seconds, and my first enchant took 23 seconds! No matter how you look at it, that's way too fast!"

"I-Is that so? Well, I also do some practice and experiments at home. Maybe that had something to do with it?"

Kaede shook her head furiously denying his reasoning. With no idea what else to say, he stayed quiet until she spoke again. Then, Kaede realized something.

"Wait... If that is so, then that means you also finished learning the basics in another one and a half days. Am I correct?"

Senkyo silently nodded, confirming Kaede's deduction. She massaged her temple because of the sudden headache she got from hearing his insanely fast learning. Unable to comprehend how exactly he did all of that in such a short amount of time, Kaede decided that later she would confirm what she just heard with Dai in the small chance that Senkyo was for some reason lying.

Noticing her silence and for some reason exhausted look, Senkyo wanted to continue the conversation so he added the last thing he got from Dai's training.

"Oh, and Yamazaki-sensei told me to start bringing weapons with me."

"You have some on you!?"

"Of course not! I declined the moment he suggested it."

Senkyo's class didn't require the hunter to have a weapon they were specialized in like in the fighter class, but that was because enchanters usually have more than one weapon on them. They would enchant their weapon however they wanted and most of the time they wouldn't be able to retrieve it. Dai wanted Senkyo to get used to that but he didn't take much thought about the places he would be bringing the weapons to if he did that.

"Honestly, I think Yamazaki-sensei forgot that I'll only be training temporarily. I'm not actually going to join the clan."

"Why not? I think you'd do great!"

*\*Seriously. I've never met anyone who learns that fast. Especially in an enchanter class.\**

Kaede thought to herself.

"How can you say that? You haven't even seen me fight by myself."

"You did when you fought Watanabe-senpai, didn’t you? You learned the flash strike in the middle of battle!"

Kaede read Senkyo’s memories, so she knows about everything prior to their first encounter.

“That was because of Ryosei. I just used his memories on how to use it is all.”

"We'll see how things go. But I don't think you should put yourself down like that."

"That wasn't really my intention though. Besides, I'm fine with just being allies with the clan. If I join then I wouldn't be able to go wherever I want to."

"Why is that?"

"There's something I'm... we're searching for."

The chime signaling the end of lunch rang in the distance. Senkyo stood up and threw his can into the trash bin beside him.

"Well, it was fun talking. I'll see you next time."

“Mhm, say goodbye to Ryosei-nii-chan for me.”

“Don’t worry about that. He can hear you too—Well, it’s just as Senkyo said. See you later, Kaede.”

Ryosei took over Senkyo’s body and said his farewells to Kaede

“Yep, see you later.”

**81 – After School Detour**

Afternoon classes were over. Yuu waited for Senkyo in front of the classroom like usual. He went up to Yuu along with probing stares coming from inside the classroom. He learned to just ignore them. As long as they don't cause trouble for him or anyone else, he couldn't care much about them.

"Hey, let's go."

Senkyo didn't notice, but the one they were waiting for, Itsuki, already got out of the classroom and was waiting for Senkyo to move. But unlike the past days, Senkyo had another plan in mind. He just wanted to inform Itsuki and Yuu before he went anywhere.

"Actually, I have to stop by somewhere first so you guys can go ahead without me."

"What do you mean, Yukou-senpai? Did you forget why I'm even here? You aren't going anywhere without me."

Yuu was on Yukou-senpai Guard Duty after all. She wasn't going to leave Senkyo by himself. The past three days of dedication to her word were proof of that.

"You sounded like an overprotective mother."

"No, more like a possessive girlfriend."

"Wha!?"

"~~!"

This is how this trio interacted. Senkyo and Yuu were mostly the ones who talk while Itsuki joins in only to make fun of them. But Itsuki didn’t have any malice in his words. And Senkyo found that somewhat comforting, except for this time.

"N-No I'm not! It's Yukou-senpai's fault for not looking after himself!"

"Wait, Hisho-chan, don't—"

"Did you hear that!?"

"She said she wasn't looking after himself!"

"You mean he gets spoiled by a cute girl every day!?"

Senkyo's peanut gallery hasn't taken its eyes off Senkyo. They've been eavesdropping the whole time without any care about personal business. After Yuu's last line, the crowd went wild and fanned the flames of their uneventful lives so they took pleasure in fantasizing and making false stories about others who do. At that moment, Senkyo knew he had to get out before anything gets any worse. Senkyo took Yuu's hand and ran for it.

"Wha? S-Senpai!?"

Senkyo may have prevented things from getting worse, but the rumors were already going out of control. It was a lost cause.

After Senkyo got far away from the classroom, he was brought down to his knees once again, this time, he already accepted the fact that he was never going to take down those rumors.

"Seriously, what's gotten into you Yukou-senpai?"

"Nothing. It's better you don't know. Anyway, let's go before something else happens..."

With that, Senkyo and Yuu headed to their destination.

Senkyo's destination was none other than the place where people's deepest thoughts and fantasies manifest and are shared with the whole world. The place where Senkyo and other people spend their time scouring for treasure, some buried in the sands of unpopularity, and some placed on the pedestal of fame… the bookstore.

"U-Um... Senpai, is this what we came here for?"

"Of course! Although I barely have any time for my hobbies, doesn't mean I gave up on them."

What Senkyo held in his hand was the latest volume of "My Battle Against Demons and the Supernatural." The series Senkyo began to take a liking due to the similarities between his and the story protagonist's situations.

"You should read it too! The protagonist, Seig, a master spear fighter, gets into an accident with a demon that appeared out of nowhere. After getting severely wounded, Seig managed to fend off the demon, but he got thrown into a rift that appeared out of nowhere by another demon. When he woke up, he was in another world with only himself to rely on. Now, he has to survive the unknown world and find a way back home. Don't you think that's cool!"

Senkyo went on about the novel. He got too passionate and lost himself in his words. It took an awkward look from Yuu and the stares of a few nearby customers to get him back to his senses.

"W-Whoa, Senpai calm down. We're in public remember?"

"O-Oh, sorry about that."

Realizing he was being loud, Senkyo quickly apologized and hung his head in embarrassment.

"Don't worry Senpai, at worst they'll only remember your voice."

"That doesn't help...!"

Senkyo retorted in a whispering voice to avoid bothering anyone. He let out all the troubles piling inside him with a deep sigh and brushed them off with a "Whatever..." Senkyo took the book he came for and was about to head to the counter when an idea came to mind.

"Oh yeah, now that we're here, why don't you get a book as well?"

"Me?"

“Of course. You said you like manga didn’t you?”

“You remembered that?”

“Yep.”

The day Senkyo encountered Yuu in his house, they passed time by playing games and manga. That day, Yuu talked about how she heard about manga but never actually read one. She lives on her own so she had to prioritize herself first. But when Yuu finally secured a stable source of income, she spent hours looking at all the manga, troubled about which one she should buy as her first one.

She thought, "This is the first manga I'm going to buy; I better make it count!" But that only lead her to be hesitant and indecisive about what she was going to buy. Unable to make a decision, she gave up, and in the end, bought nothing.

Senkyo thought it was a weird thing to be worried about but since Yuu is from another world, he didn't know how they thought there and their social norms, so he kept that thought to himself. After all, he didn't want another cultural miscommunication like the first time Yuu said she was going to suck Senkyo's blood.

Of course, Senkyo was kind enough to let her read the manga that he had stored on the bookshelves. Yuu's face, when she was reading, was pure bliss. She flipped through the pages with sparkling eyes and emotion as she got into the story of what she was reading. This is why Senkyo decided it would be the perfect chance.

Senkyo walked over to another shelf and picked up a manga with the title "The Lazy Vampire's Messy Life" and handed it to Yuu.

"Here, it's a good manga to start off with. Plus, you're also a vampire so maybe you'll like it."

"O-Oh..."

Senkyo was thrown off because instead of the sparkling eyes he was expecting, Yuu looked disappointed. Confused about her uncharacteristic reaction, and worried that he may have said something wrong again, Senkyo continued with caution and a bit of hesitance.

"U-Um... Did I say something weird?"

Realizing that she made Senkyo feel at fault for her sudden gloom, Yuu flailed her arms around and kept repeating "Wait, wait, wait!" in an attempt to tell Senkyo that it was all a misunderstanding.

"Y-You see, I'm actually very happy that you picked out a series for me, but I didn't bring enough money with me so I won't be able to buy it today..."

"...Oh? That's it?"

Senkyo sighed in relief that he didn't do anything wrong this time around. On the other hand, this time, Yuu was thrown off because of Senkyo's casual "That's it?" statement. As far as Yuu knows, she had no means to buy manga.

"What do you mean?"

"You see, I was actually planning on buying this for you."

"....."

"......."

"EEEEH!?"

"Whoa!? D-Don't shout all of a sudden!"

After a long silent gap, Yuu finally processed what Senkyo said at the pace of an old computer. But when she eventually arranged her thoughts, she couldn't believe what she heard and spontaneously shouted. Of course, without question, that got the attention of a lot more people this time around, but neither Yuu nor Senkyo seemed to notice that fact.

"N-No, wait, why would you do that? Are you trying to get me in debt to you!?"

"Where did that come from!? I just wanted to give you a gift, that's all!"

"W-What for!? I don't remember doing anything that deserves receiving a gift."

"It's a gift! If I think you deserve one, then it's my decision to give you one."

"That doesn't make sense!!"

"It makes perfect sense!!"

Senkyo and Yuu began to fight for something extremely trivial as a gift. They shouted their hearts out. Flustered and red in the face because of this sudden treatment, Yuu tried to deny Senkyo's gift. This was the first time anyone's ever given her a gift. And this "gift" is something she wasn't all too familiar with.

In her world, the act of giving things to others existed, but it didn't have the concept of a gift. When Yuu researched this world's traditions, she came upon the concept of gifting—To give someone without the expectation of anything in return, which can also be a sign of affection. In other words, Senkyo was showing affection toward Yuu. Which is why she was incredibly flustered.

Immersed in their little quarrel, they neglected to notice the stares of everyone in the store was on them. And that there was an employee beside them trying to get their attention. But when they finally did, they were frozen in place because of two main reasons. One is that they caused a lot of commotion and bothered everyone around them, and two is the fact that they knew what was going to happen next.

**82 – Kaede’s Hobby**

"Hah..."

"Hah..."

Both Senkyo and Yuu let out a deep sigh in hopes that the wind will take away the humiliation they just put themselves through. Right now, Senkyo and Yuu were just outside the bookstore they were just in. They were kicked out because of all the ruckus they made inside the store, which was to be expected.

"...I wonder if I can still show my face around that store."

"I-I'm sorry, Senpai. It's because I made a huge fuss about it..."

"No, don't be. It'll only make me feel worse if you start apologizing to me now, so how about we just put this aside."

"...Okay."

As Senkyo and Yuu were about to walk away from the bookstore and try to forget about the mortifying events that just occurred, Senkyo spotted a familiar girl wearing sunglasses and a mask.

*"\*That's... Kaede, isn't it? What is she doing all the way out here?\*"*

Kaede was still in her school uniform and she has, yet again, changed her look. Or more specifically, just simply wore shades and a mask. As Kaede was walking closer, she noticed Senkyo and looked straight into his eyes. She immediately backed up and tried to get away but he wasn't about to let that happen.

"Wait right there."

"Y-Yes?"

Senkyo, but more accurately, Ryosei went up to her and stopped her from getting away. Ryosei suddenly took control of Senkyo's body again and stopped Kaede. It seems like he wanted to know what she was doing all the way over here when the nearest teleportation point was in the way she came from.

"Wh-Who might you be?"

Even when caught she still tried to play it off. However, this time, Ryosei wasn't going to hold back on her and pulled an ace off his sleeve.

"If you don't tell me why you're here, I'll tell Kou-chan that you used to wet the blankets but I took care of them before anyone else noticed."

"Wha—What!?"

Ryosei showed Kaede a playful face but kept the seriousness in his voice.

"I'll do it, I swear."

"~~~!! FINE, FINE! JUST STOP TALKING, YOU PERVERT!!"

By blackmailing the poor Kaede, she reluctantly followed Ryosei and Yuu to a nearby park to talk. Having done his purpose, Ryosei gave the controls to Senkyo's body back to him.

With her "disguise" taken off, Kaede sat on the nearest bench they could find with Yuu and Senkyo standing in front of her. Although Senkyo wasn't up for prying into Kaede's business, Ryosei wanted to know about it. A memory crossed Senkyo’s mind as he thought that. It was when Ryosei said that Yousuke, Kaede's brother, was overprotective.

*"\*I don't think you're much different.\*"*

*"\*Huh?\*"*

*"\*No, it's nothing.\*"*

Keeping his thoughts to himself, Senkyo turned his eyes to Kaede. But somehow, he couldn't help but feel like he was forgetting something. That something was reminded to him when Yuu whispered in his ears.

"Um... Yukou-senpai, who is this...?"

"Oh yeah! Sorry, I forgot."

Senkyo lead the introductions himself and served as the medium to introduce a friend to another friend. He started off with Kaede's introduction and faced Yuu as he pointed toward Kaede.

"This person here is Ryosei’s cousin and Yousuke-san’s little sister, Konjou Kaede. She's a 1st year in our school."

Just as Senkyo was about to introduce Yuu to Kaede, he felt a tug on his shirt. It was Yuu. She was signaling him to come closer.

“Senpai, is it really okay to talk about Ryosei-san around her?”

She whispered into Senkyo’s ear, not letting her words leak over to Kaede.

“Don’t worry, she already knows about him.”

“What!?”

“We can trust her, I promise. Get along with her okay?”

“If you say so…”

After reassuring Yuu’s doubts, Senkyo faced Kaede and proceeded with Yuu’s introduction by placing his hand on her head.

"And Kaede-chan, this here is Hisho Yuu, also a 1st year in our school and one of my companions."

"Hey! Who told you to touch my head?"

Yuu buzzed off Senkyo's hand.

"I couldn't outstretch my arm so I thought this would be fine."

"And what made you think that?"

"Various reasons. Anyway, Ryosei was wondering why you are here, Kaede-chan."

Senkyo dropped the subject and immediately began the next topic to seek refuge from Yuu's questioning. Thankfully, Yuu decided to let Senkyo off with only a bit of pouting.

“Is this what all of this was about?”

“Pretty much.”

Kaede asked in a bitter tone and breathed a long sigh after confirming her suspicions. She was clearly annoyed. It was understandable. After all, she was blackmailed by Ryosei and dragged over here out of her will. She muttered under her breath “I guess you and nii-chan are still the same after all this time…” before answering his question.

"I was going to buy a new volume for a manga series that I follow."

"Oh? I didn't think you'd be into that."

"Am I not allowed to?"

"Ah, no that’s not what I meant. It's just surprising that's all. Well? Are you satisfied with that, Ryosei?"

Senkyo called out to Ryosei looking to end this uncalled detainment as soon as possible.

“For now, it’s fine. But why did you even bother wearing that weird disguise?”

“Well, if it weren’t for a certain *someone*, maybe I wouldn’t need to buy and read manga in secret.”

Kaede’s intense look at Ryosei was implying that he was the cause of it. And Ryosei couldn’t deny it.

“…Y-Yeah, that might be on me. Fine, sorry about that.”

“About what exactly?”

“About stopping you earlier…… and possibly a small amount of blackmailing.”

“Ryosei-nii-chan.”

“…Sorry for blackmailing.”

“Good.”

It was supposed to be Ryosei that was scolding Kaede, but for some reason, it became the other way around. Yuu was utterly speechless. Even she didn’t understand what just happened for everything to turn as it did. Senkyo, who was looking over Kaede and Ryosei’s exchange from inside his body was somewhat expecting this to happen. That was because of the numerous times Kaede turned the tables on Ryosei in the past. He saw these exchanges in Ryosei’s memories, but nevertheless, he still couldn’t help but be in awe. As tough as Ryosei is, Kaede was one of the few people he had trouble dealing with.

Seeing that he was mercilessly silenced by Kaede, Senkyo took back control of his body and tried to lighten up the mood.

"You really are something, Kaede-san."

“Oh, hello Yukou-san. Sorry if Ryosei-nii-chan was bothering you with his overprotectiveness. It can be very annoying; I know it personally.”

“You must have it hard. W-Well, enough of that, what manga are you reading?”

"Oh, I’m glad you asked. It's called 'The Lazy Vampire's Messy Life.' I started reading it a few days ago and I liked it very much."

"Oh, really? Perfect timing! Sorry to bother you, but could you buy another copy of that? Oh, and the 7th volume of 'My Battle Against Demons and the Supernatural.'"

"Eh? What for?"

"Yukou-senpai! You're still on about that!?"

"Of course, I am. I decided it earlier so I'm going to see it through!"

"...?"

**83 – Charming Idiot**

Kaede, who was not informed of what happened in the bookstore, couldn't follow the flow of the conversation. But that didn't matter, because she was going to know one way or another. She needs context from Senkyo before she does what she was asked to either way. And when Senkyo told her their situation...

"So... you're telling me you were kicked out because of your small lovers' quarrel...? Pfft...! Hahaha! That’s hilarious, hahaha!!"

Kaede laughed her heart out as she heard the ridiculous things that happened in her absence. On the other hand, Senkyo slightly regretted his decision to tell her about it, and Yuu just silently hung her head down in embarrassment.

"A-Anyway, you'll do it, right?"

"Pfft... O-Of course, anything to lighten the weight off your shoulders... I'll be going now."

Kaede left Senkyo and Yuu behind while still lightly giggling as she walked away.

"Why do I feel like I want to give her a smack."

Clearly tired from all that's happened, Senkyo sat down on the bench and Yuu followed. Now that they were alone, with no one else in sight, Senkyo saw this as a perfect time to ask Yuu why she keeps refusing his gift.

"Hisho-chan, why don't you just accept it? You deserve something for everything you've done. I told you before that you're a vital part of this group, and that if needed, I'll show you how amazing you really are."

"Yukou-senpai..."

Yuu thought back to the time when they were about to leave the abandoned building. Senkyo made a whole dramatic scene where he relieved Yuu of her agonizing. Then, after changing his perspective slightly, he took a shot in the dark and gave another possible cause.

"...Or maybe you just don't like the gift."

"N-No! You're wrong!"

Yuu immediately denied it when she heard that. She didn't want Senkyo to misunderstand any more than he already has. So she decided to just come out with it.

"It's just... I lived in this world for 3 years now. I had to learn this world's language and how it worked. Thankfully, with the help of someone I met, I managed to learn its language in a short amount of time. But then I realized that learning that wasn’t going to be enough. So I asked for their help again, and I managed to get into Honshou Academy. I thought I was prepared to interact with other people but… I was just too different. Everyone was in their own groups and when I talked to some of them, they just seemed so aggressive, and in the end, we didn't understand each other and I stayed alone."

Senkyo listened to Yuu's story carefully. Every one of her words served as fragments that recreated her story in Senkyo's head. The image of her being alone kept popping up in his head and finally understood how Yuu felt.

"Um... well... what I'm trying to say is..."

Yuu is from another world and came here, to a world that she knew nothing about. She had to survive in this unknown world where everyone but herself was an enemy. She struggled alone as much as she could until she finally found someone else she could rely on. But who knew the true struggle she’s been through? Definitely not Senkyo. As far as he knew, she did everything she could, but he could never truly understand.

Alone in this world, without anyone to rely on, she became used to the feeling of being alone and doing everything herself. Since she didn't know anyone and didn't interact with that many people. Loneliness was a part of her everyday life. In some ways, just like Senkyo, and in most ways not.

"Hisho-chan, since you told me your story, I'll let you listen to mine."

"Huh?"

"There was once a boy whose father died from getting trapped in a burning building. He was devastated and decided to take it out on society and turned to his hobbies to console him. He decided to be alone and lived his life alone. To him, his hobbies were all that mattered and everyone else was nothing."

Although Yuu and Senkyo were both once loners, Senkyo knew they were different but similar at the same time. Senkyo, who chose to be alone after his father died, put his hobbies first and came to be a loner. And Yuu who sought interaction but was rejected by her peers because she was different.

One that cares nothing about the people around him and saw the world and other people as nothing but background characters. Senkyo was happy and enjoyed his hobbies, but that never shook off the feeling of loneliness and the worthlessness he saw in himself.

"But, in his middle school life, a charming idiot thought it was a great idea to befriend that one loner in the corner of the class. His attitude irritated the hell out of that boy and wondered what stupid worthless things he wanted from him. But apparently, he just wanted to be friends since they had the same hobbies. It sounded like the stupidest thing to that boy's ears. He chased that charming idiot away, but he just kept coming back the next day. Eventually, the boy got tired of chasing him away and ignored him instead. The idiot talked and talked with only grunts as his replies. But one day, when the idiot said something that opposed the boy's opinion about a light novel, he responded sharply and defended it. Little did that boy know, that he was going to have a hard time ignoring him from there on out."

Yuu listened to Senkyo as he told him about his past. But she had doubts as to whether that really was actually Senkyo's past. After all, how could someone that sounds so anti-social and hard to approach become the Senkyo today?

"...How did that boy change?"

"He didn't change. He returned back to his past self."

"Huh?"

"You see, that boy was never a true loner. He was only running away from everything. He just couldn't let go of the past and dragged his original personality down with him. If he really wanted to be alone, he wouldn't have been that easy to budge. That charming idiot helped him let go of the past and turned him back to what he once was."

Senkyo was like that from the beginning and only with the help of Kinro did he change back to his actual self. Hearing that, Yuu thought to herself, "Yukou-senpai really is lucky to have had Honjou-senpai with him." She thought back as to why everything ended up like this. But she had no clue why it did.

"Why did you tell me this, Yukou-senpai?"

Senkyo silently got up from the bench and faced Yuu who was looking up at him from the bench. A sudden gust of wind brushed Senkyo's hair, setting his clothes aflutter. Yuu was blinded by the bright light that was Senkyo's smile. He reached out his hand to Yuu like a saint offering his help. In a cheerful and reassuring tone, Senkyo said the following:

"Hisho-chan, I'll be that charming idiot for you."

"Eh?"

Yuu became incredibly perplexed. Her face was at a total loss as to what was unfolding in front of her very eyes.

"You won't be alone anymore. We're friends, and I'll always be here when you need me. Apparently, a true friend is a working cure for being a fake loner. How about it? Do you want this otaku to be your charming idiot? Then maybe, you’ll be able to act like your true self, the person you were before coming to this world."

With a long pause, Yuu took a big gulp and flushed down her worries. She took a deep breath and looked straight into Senkyo's glistening eyes. The imaginary heat around the area made Yuu's face completely red. She gathered the courage to raise her voice and let out an answer.

"I—"

*\*Wshhh...!\**

"What!?"

"This is...!"

Before Yuu could answer, she was cut off by the sudden change in their surroundings. The temperature became cold and the calm and peaceful day became a menacing night. Particles floated everywhere and the birds that flew around the park disappeared. It was the place they'd been seeing quite a bit the last week. Where werewolves, demons, and otherworldly creatures tend to show themselves. The Spirit Realm.

"Why are we in the spirit realm!?"

"No, this is more likely to be a spirit zone. No other spirits are around. Yukou-senpai, we have to check on Kaede-san if she's alright."

"Yeah, let's go."

Being forced to hold off on the earlier talk, Senkyo and Yuu quickly headed to the bookstore where Kaede went to.

**84 – Hollow Knight**

Turning back the time a few minutes earlier, where the sky still shined the calm afternoon sun with people going around doing their own business. A certain high school student was eying a certain bookstore. He set his back against the building from across the bookstore as he kept his eyes on the entrance, waiting for someone to come out.

"I didn't expect Yukou-kun to be here. What's more, he knows Kaede-san. That was surprising."

The owner of the voice was none other than Yamamoto Sora. He wore a jacket over his uniform, covering it completely from other people’s view. There was only one reason he was there stalking the bookstore. It was because he was tasked by Yousuke to guard his little sister, Kaede, in the shadows.

He did this task every day and he hadn't been found out to this day. This started at the beginning of the school year when Kaede first entered high school. This was due to the overprotectiveness of the clan chief. Sora had to do this without slack. At first, this was supposed to be Sora and Touma's task but at some point, Sora suggested that he do this by himself and had Touma switch with him only when he had something else to do.

He was used to this kind of routine and didn't mind the trouble the work brought. The only thing he had problems with was the guilty feeling he got from stalking and learning more about someone's personal life without their knowing.

What's worse, Kaede was a friend of Sora. If she found out that he was stalking her everywhere around town, that friendship could very well take a huge hit. That was why he took extra care not to get found out.

"I swear, you're too careless. If I weren't the one doing this job, you'd be in a lot of trouble."

He said that as if the person he was talking to was right in front of him. He was referring to Kaede going in and out of the bookstore to purchase manga. Such items were forbidden in the Konjou Clan, but he made an exception for her friend and kept it secret. He wore a troubled face as he said that, but there weren't any negative feelings from his acting.

*\*Wshhh...!\**

"What!?"

Suddenly, without warning, the sound of engines running and footsteps tapping the concrete disappeared, along with everyone around him. The sky became covered with a veil of night and floating particles appeared out of nowhere.

Sora took off his jacket and switched it with a black cloak he grabbed from inside his bag. Along with the cloak, he took out a belt loaded with six kunai and a strange circular compartment attached to its back. Equipping the two items, Sora left his bag and hurriedly entered the bookstore where Kaede was.

"Kaede-san!! Are you alright!?"

"Y-Yamamoto-san...!?"

A scream that was undoubtedly Kaede's came from deeper inside the store. Since Sora couldn't see her, she must've been covered by the tall bookshelves that spread around the store.

"I'm coming! Give me a sign where you are!"

Sora jumped on top of one of the bookshelves and began hopping off one onto another. Alternating from left and right, he scanned the isles in search of Kaede. With eyes and ears on full alert, he heard a low muffled voice and metal clanging from just below the bookshelf in front of him. Sora had a bad feeling about it and stopped jumping on that bookshelf.

Just as he stopped to check his surroundings, a giant piece of metal swung right in front of Sora's face, barely missing him. With danger senses screaming at him at full force, he instinctively jumped over to the bookshelf to his left and looked over to see what that piece of metal was.

Sora's eyes widened as he saw a giant metallic armor set with fiery grey flame leaking through the gaps of the armor. It had Kaede trapped inside its metallic arms. Kaede flailed and struggled but to no avail. The dark ominous light coming from the eye holes of the armor gazed at Sora as it stood up from its crouching position.

"Kaede-san!"

"Mff...Mfff...!!"

Sora made some distance between him and the giant armor, hurriedly thinking of a way to save Kaede from the moving armor. The set of armor slowly stood up. As it was doing so, Sora noticed that it was too tall for the store's height, but instead of bumping its head on the ceiling, its head went straight through the ceiling, destroying it as it stood.

The armor picked up the broad sword lying on the ground with its open hand and held it in a swinging position. Sensing the incoming danger, Sora dived off the bookshelf, and not a second later, a huge broadsword sliced through where he once was cutting through several bookshelves and even the ceiling.

The armor slowly turned its head to Sora and went after him with a broadsword getting ready for another swing. Knowing he was the current target of the sinister set of armor, he went for the exit and lead it outside to a more open field. Although a tighter space was best suited for Sora, the armor’s movements were not restricted by the building, and instead, every time it moved became trouble for him since he would have to watch out for the falling debris.

By both jumping and crouching, Sora dodged the giant swings coming from behind him as he ran. The ceiling and the bookshelves that were obstructing both the giant armor and the sword's swings didn't even do anything to slow it down. Sora was in a panic as some of the swings were just a hair away from slicing him. Finally, after what seemed like forever, Sora busted out of the store and so did the set of armor.

*\*CRASHH!!\**

"What is that!?"

"Yukou-senpai, look!"

Yuu pointed to the armor's arm which held Kaede captive.

"Kaede-chan!?"

Senkyo and Yuu just arrived to find Sora and the giant armor busting through the bookstore, destroying the front entrance. Soon after, the bookstore collapsed, debris reaching all the way to the middle of the road.

"YUKOU-KUN! GET OUT OF HERE! IT'S TOO DANGEROUS!"

In a panicked voice, Sora warned Senkyo the moment he saw him. Whatever that giant armor was, Ryosei didn't know anything about it, but at the very least, he knew it was dangerous enough to break Sora's usual playfulness.

The giant armor was in full view and Senkyo got a good look at it. It was huge in size and over twice his height. Its armor plating had sharp tips ranging from fingers to shoulder plating. Its helmet had horns extending out of it and the eyeholes were filled with two menacing grey flames. Dark flame seeped through the spaces in the armor. Anyone that sees this would freeze in fear.

The armor turned its head to Senkyo who Sora called out to. When it saw him, it gave up on Sora and faced Senkyo. It pointed its sword at Senkyo with a slow and ominous voice that sounded like it came from the deepest part of hell came from the giant armor.

"You... are you the one who ended Lord Fulgur?"

Senkyo took a big gulp. Slightly intimidated by the enemy in front of him.

"W-What if I am?"

"Then... you shall pay the price. Death. A direct order from his greatness."

**85 – Ryosei’s Play**

"Hisho-chan, take these and get back. Leave Kuro Yaiba to me."

Yuu took Senkyo's bag and handed him Kuro Yaiba. She headed to Sora to get an explanation for how this happened.

"Yamamoto-senpai, what happened over here?"

"There's no time for that! You have to get Yukou-kun out of there! You can't take that thing on! It's too powerful!"

Sora shouted his warnings. It seems like Sora already knew what the enemy was.

"Why? What is that thing?"

"That thing is a revenant! They are evil spirits that END turned into servants. They fed those spirits negative energy making them incredibly powerful. They trained them into their personal slaves taking every order given to them. There are many types of revenants, and this one is a Hollowed Knight. The only way anyone can defeat a revenant is if they slice through their core. I've seen Yukou-kun train. He's only a beginner. There's no way he can defeat that thing!"

"Hm... Is that so?"

Yuu said nonchalantly, completely devoid of worry. Hearing that, Sora got slightly irritated and raised his voice.

"Didn't you understand what I just said!?"

"I did. It's just that if it's Yukou-senpai, I can trust his word. He won't go down easily. Don’t you remember? He defeated the lightning leader of END."

“I remember that, but after seeing his training, I’m starting to doubt it.”

"Just look and see."

Senkyo switched with Ryosei and took out Kuro Yaiba as they got into stance. The hollowed knight readied its sword and rushed them. Ryosei didn't move and held his stance. He didn't panic and analyzed the situation. Kaede was trapped in its left arm and it held the broadsword with its right hand. Ryosei's target was clear to him.

The sound of metal clanging reverberated as the possessed armor took step after step and kept getting closer to him. Ryosei refused to move and let the possessed armor get close to him until it got to the point where he was in range of the possessed armor's sword.

"So... you have accepted your fate."

"GET OUT OF THERE!!" Sora screamed.

With a large horizontal swing, the possessed armor sliced through Ryosei... or so it thought. The two halves of Senkyo's body that were supposed to be in front of it weren't there. Then, the sound of metal dropping on the ground rang in everyone's ears.

At a closer look, Ryosei was to the right of the possessed armor, and he sliced its left arm off the hollowed knight's main body. Kaede who was held captive in its left arm was set free and Ryosei quickly grabbed her and brought her to safety.

"What!?"

"..."

Sora who thought Senkyo's death was certain was proven wrong when Ryosei suddenly appeared beside him with Kaede safely in his arms. The possessed armor remained silent as it processed what just happened.

"Are you alright, Kaede-chan?"

"Huh? Oh! Y-Yeah, I'm alright. Thank you, Ryo—Yukou-san."

Kaede was also baffled by what happened. One second, she was trapped by a frightening body of armor, and the next she was in the safety of Ryosei's arms. Everything happened so fast that she didn't even notice she was saved.

At that moment, Ryosei waited until the possessed armor's sword was in the middle of being swung and took that window to Flash Strike just below its arm and positioned himself to the right of the hollowed knight where its left arm was wide open due to the motion of its swing. Its right arm was fully extended while the base of its left arm was completely open from behind. Ryosei took that chance and sliced its arm off to save Kaede.

The hollowed knight's cut-off parts slowly retracted themselves back into the armor. Ryosei who knew things were just about to get started put Kaede down and faced the hollowed knight.

"You... are strong."

"No, you simply underestimated me. With positioning as sloppy as that, anyone could tell you were going for a full power swing. Maybe you should go back to your owners and tell them to train you better?"

Ryosei gave the hollowed knight no room to breathe. He used Flash Strike as his opening attack on it. The hollowed knight was incredibly slow that it couldn't hit Ryosei who was running around it and slicing it up. Its swings kept hitting nothing but air.

*\*Strike! Strike! Strike!\**

Ryosei's strikes began to weaken the armor. Some cuts even managed to pierce right through the armor, causing more grey flames to leak out of it. It was a one-sided battle. The possessed armor was no match for Ryosei who was landing hit after hit without any sort of consequence.

*"\*Let's finish this!\*"*

Ryosei created distance between them to prepare for his final strike. Kuro Yaiba emitted a white light as he went into stance. Confirming his target, Ryosei dashed at the speed of light as a trail of white was left behind from his Flash Strike.

The hollowed knight that didn't manage to keep track of Ryosei had its back turned and completely open to Ryosei. It didn't make any effort to move but instead muttered something under its breath.

"Hate... Hate. Hate. Hate! Hate!!"

The grey flames leaking out of its armor began flickering uncontrollably and the dark aura around it became even darker. Ryosei swung Kuro Yaiba and was about to deliver the finishing blow when—

"I HATE THIS WORLD!!"

*\*BAMM!!\**

The possessed armor's voice suddenly changed. Instead of a slow empty voice,it sounded like a man's voice. It sounded like they'd gone mad and put all their hatred in one loud shout.

Its berserk shout echoed through the whole space and the dark aura around the possessed armor blew up, covering the battlefield. The contrasting streak of white light pierced through the sphere of dark energy.

With the two contrasting lights dissipating, everyone witnessing the battle before them watched in suspense, hoping to see "Senkyo" come out victorious. Their vision cleared, and everyone could clearly see that Kuro Yaiba had pierced right through the possessed armor's chest.

"...No way. What was that...?"

"Y-Yukou-san..."

Sora and Kaede uttered in disbelief. This was the first time they'd ever seen "Senkyo" fight. Although Kaede was Ryosei’s cousin, she never had the chance to actually see him fight except for the memories he collected from Senkyo. But of course, seeing the real thing in person was completely different. Even though they confirmed that Senkyo defeated a leader of END, when Sora saw how Senkyo was in training he began to think otherwise. But seeing as Senkyo was possessing this much power, another question popped up in Sora’s mind: Why is he even training in the first place.

However, Yuu wasn't cheering like how she usually would. She scrutinized the battlefield and noticed something Sora and Kaede did not.

"Wait, it's not over! Look, Yukou-senpai's blade!"

Sora and Kaede examined the place Yuu pointed out.

"That's...!"

"Ah!?"

At a closer look, Ryosei's blade cut through what seemed like layers of tentacles. Multiple dark tentacle-shaped things were severed and lay on the ground. The inside which was supposed to be the revenant's core was no longer translucent but was filled with a solid color of black.

The tentacles that appeared out of nowhere stopped Ryosei's final blow. With an annoyed look, Ryosei clicked his tongue. The tentacles that were still intact wrapped around Ryosei's blade and threw it away. Ryosei didn't let go of Kuro Yaiba and landed gracefully as he was thrown away.

"What just happened?"

**86 – Hollow Army**

Ryosei threw a question to everyone. Sora who was right behind him answered Ryosei's question.

"The revenant manifested itself. By using negative energy as spirit essence, it became strong enough to be able to create a physical form. It must've used the frustration it was getting and amplified the hatred it already had. Now that it has a physical form it'll be even harder to defeat it."

"I see..."

The appearance of the possessed armor before them changed. The flames that leaked from its body turned into a tentacle-like lifeform that wiggled around in the air, and the flame that was supposed to be its core became a solid color, making it hard to tell where its core really is. The possessed armor directed its gaze to the one who forced it to enter this form. It then spoke in a human's voice, filled with pure hatred as it cried out.

"YOU... YOU!! HOW DARE YOU! YOU, LIKE THE OTHER ACCURSED HUMANS IN THIS DAMNED WORLD, WILL FACE THE WRATH OF *END*!! WITH THE HELP OF HIS GREATNESS, WE WILL SHOW THE WORLD HOW FOOLISH THEY ARE! AND OUR FIRST STEP TOWARD THAT GOAL, IS ELIMINATING YOU!"

It raised its sword to the sky.

"MY SUBORDINATES! SHOW THEM THE FRIGHTENING POWER OF END!"

All of a sudden, their surroundings were covered with spine-chilling smoke. Multiple clangs of metal could be heard coming from within the smoke. Ryosei and the others regrouped and awaited what was to come.

From the smoke, came a giant metallic set of armor with grey flames coming out from the gaps of its armor. Then came another, and another, and another, and just kept going. An army of hollowed knights appeared from within the smoke and surrounded Ryosei's group. They were dead center of an army of hollowed knights with numbers going up to at least a hundred.

"This doesn't look good..."

"Yamamoto-san, what else do I have to know about these things?"

"Other than what you already know, attacks with a blessing enchantment or light magic are most effective against them."

"Can you take them on?"

"Don't underestimate me. I can take on ghosts in metal shells! Ah, I don't know about that one though. If your attack didn't cut it down, I'm not too sure about mine."

Sora pointed at the manifested revenant standing across the sea of flaming sets of armor.

"Don't worry, I'll take it on. The only reason it didn't get cut down in the first place was because of its tentacles. Since they aren't regenerating, its lifeline is gone. I only need to get close enough to defeat it."

"Then, I'll leave it to you."

Ryosei turned his head to Kaede, worried about her safety. Seeing as they were surrounded from all angles, an enemy could get under their nose and attack Kaede. Noticing this, Yuu reassured Ryosei.

"Don't worry, I'll protect Kaede-san."

"Sorry for the trouble."

Ryosei readied his sword with his pathing getting planned out in his head. Sora took out six kunai from his belt with three of them in each hand with his arms crossed. Yuu stretched out her arms, aiming where a throng of the hollowed knights were grouped up.

"KILL THEM ALL!!!"

The beastly roar the manifested revenant made signaled the start of the battle. Their metallic footsteps rumbled the ground. The army of hollowed knights charged at them with broadswords ready to slice them in half.

Ryosei was first to act as he dashed in between the enemy's frontline and confused the enemy by running around and slicing their ranks with a white-glowing blade, one covered in light magic. Like a mouse in the middle of a crowd of people, Ryosei weaved through everything, dodging the huge blades that would spell his death and returning the favor with a bright shining blade through their chest.

While Ryosei was confusing the enemies, Sora didn't fall short. He threw all his kunai at the sea of enemies, hitting absolutely nothing. The hollowed knights in front of him raised their blades without a worry in the world seeing as their enemy was completely unarmed. But instead of panicking or cowering in fear, Sora gave them a big smirk.

The sound of metal piercing metal could be heard from behind the possessed armor, but before the enemy could recognize what the sound was, their cores were drilled into and their spirits perished.

Sora took out his hands and caught all six of the kunai he threw away as if the kunai came directly to his hands. As hollowed knight’s spirit perished, the armor in front of Sora that served only as a shell came falling down to the ground, revealing to Sora the cluster of armor on the ground with their chest plates having a clean hole in the middle.

Sora had the power to take on the hollowed knight back inside the bookstore. The only problem was the fact that it had Kaede as a hostage. Even if Sora aimed for its back and stopped his kunai right before it pierced its front plating, the hollowed knight could have used her as a shield or tried to kill her as it died. Sora didn’t want to take those chances. But now without a hostage, Sora could use his weapons as much as he liked.

"Easy."

Sora quickly celebrated his victory and moved on to the next group of enemies. Yuu who was watching what happened was struck by surprise.

"Wow... That was amazing."

"That's Yamamoto-san's original technique, Complete Spirit Power Flow."

"What's that?"

"It's a technique he made himself. It allows him to make his spirit power flow through anything he is in contact with and anything that is in contact with that extends the connection. If you look closely, the kunai Yamamoto-san is using are connected with a strong and thin string. He can transfer his spirit power through the string and can make his kunai go anywhere he wants and do whatever he wants."

"Wow... that really is amazing. From here, it looks like the kunai are missiles flying through the air."

While the two girls were in the middle of admiring Sora's technique, a hollowed knight managed to sneak behind them. With its sword overhead, the hollowed knight was winding up to slash Yuu.

"Hisho-san, look out!"

Kaede notices the sneaky hollowed knight and warned Yuu about it. But it seems like that wasn't needed as Yuu pointed a ball of light in the palm of her hand and at the possessed armor's core without even looking at it.

"Heaven's Pierce."

After Yuu uttered those words, a ray of light extended from the ball in her palm and pierced straight through the hollowed knight before her. Yuu angled her hand to the left and the ray of light pierced through more hollowed knight before the spell was done.

When Yuu finally decided to stop observing Sora and she was met with piles of armor cut cleanly in half with the next wave of possessed armor a few feet away from her had a bit of a burn on their armor. Yuu's vampire senses picked up on the enemies before they reached them and was able to ready a spell.

Kaede who was left nonplussed, stared at Yuu internally praising her magical power and the fact that she did that with such precision despite not even looking.

"I see you don't fall behind, Hisho-san."

"Thanks."

With a quick response, Yuu focused on the army before them and pierced the rest of the waves of possessed armor that came.

**87 – Manifested Revenant**

*\*Slash! Slaaash!!\**

Ryosei picked off another two hollowed knights as he ran through the middle of the army. Numerous blades hit the ground behind him as a result of the slow suits of armor trying to hit his nimble body.

*"\*You know, this wouldn't have happened if you just finished off the first possessed armor in the first place.\*"*

*"\*I'm sorry, okay? I just wanted to test how powerful the thing really was. It's a necessary process. Now, the next time I face the same enemy, I'll have better knowledge about it.\*"*

*"\*Read the clan records instead!\*"*

*"\*Experiencing it firsthand is better!\*"*

Senkyo and Ryosei had an internal argument as they weaved through the dangerous situation like it was a walk in the park. Earlier, the reason why Ryosei didn't finish off the first possessed armor was because he wanted to test the armor's limits. He got his wish, but in exchange, they had to fight a whole army of possessed armor. As Senkyo was finishing up lecturing Ryosei, their main target came into view.

"Time to finish up what I started."

From the cluster of possessed armor, Ryosei dashed out and set his eyes on the manifested revenant. The revenant used its tentacles to intercept Ryosei, but they were simply dodged and jumped over.

"Let's cut off all its tentacles just to be safe."

*\*Slash! Slash! Slash! Slash! Strike!\**

"YOU BASTARD!!"

Ryosei cut off the four remaining tentacles that came after him and disarmed it of its sword. Now, his target had nothing else up its sleeve. Completely defenseless, the manifested revenant came after Ryosei with its fists.

"How pathetic. I'll be sure to end your suffering."

"RAAAAGHH!!!"

With its final battle cry, the manifested revenant launched its fists at Ryosei. Its efforts went for naught as Ryosei nimbly dodged the two fists. With its back completely open to Ryosei, he was about to release the last strike when a huge sword came hurling down at him.

Ryosei backpedaled, dodging the guillotine swing that was coming after his head. Resuming movement, he kept running around and saw that the revenant's reinforcements had arrived. Multiple hollowed knights surrounded the revenant protecting it from Ryosei.

"I wonder if you're all defending it because of companionship or just because you can't defy its orders. But unfortunately, your life extension ends here."

Ryosei gave distance between himself and the group of possessed armor. He gathered power to his legs and held Kuro Yaiba pointing behind him. The suits of possessed armor that weren't protecting the revenant approached behind Ryosei. But before the swarm of possessed armor could reach Ryosei, lightning coursed through Kuro Yaiba's blade and the spark at its tip signaled the battle's final move.

*“\*Magic arts: Crackling Thunder\*”*

*\*BAAANGGGG!!!\**

A huge burst of lightning came from behind Ryosei propelling him toward and above the revenant. The suits of possessed armor that were coming from behind him were charred with the spirits possessing them incinerated from the world.

"Kya!!"

"Whoa!"

"Is that...?"

Kaede covered her ears in fear but Sora and Yuu turned to the huge burst of lightning that came from the distance. The explosion was so incredibly loud and powerful that even the clutter of possessed armor were distracted by it. Everyone's attention was directed at the boy who was in midair directly on top of the manifested revenant.

"May you find happiness in the afterlife."

"CURSE YOUUU!!!!"

Ryosei raised his blade overhead with a spark of lightning coming out behind it and slashed down as his target was within reach.

*“\*Magic arts: Heaven’s Blade\*”*

*\*BAAANGGGG!!!\**

With another resounding burst of lightning, Senkyo crushed the cluster of armor along with the ground supporting them. With a huge shock wave, everyone's vision was temporarily blinded as dust clouds reaching all the way to where they stood were assaulting their eyes. The huge explosion of lightning subsided and the dust lifted up, enabling everyone to lay their eyes on the aftermath of Ryosei's attack.

Sora, Yuu, and Kaede ran over to where they saw "Senkyo" deliver the last strike and saw a huge crater with "Senkyo" standing over pieces of charred and crushed armor. He ended his display with a satisfying click as he sheathed Kuro Yaiba back in its scabbard.

"I-Incredible..."

"Wh-Whoa..."

Kaede and Sora stared blankly at Ryosei with their nonplussed faces. They had a bit of trouble processing the sight before them, but Yuu was used to seeing this and congratulated Ryosei.

"You did great *Yukou-senpai*!"

With a slight emphasis on Senkyo's name, Ryosei took it as thanks directed to both him and Senkyo and responded accordingly.

"Thanks."

The attack that Ryosei did was a magic art. He used Kuro Yaiba as the guide for the lightning to coat. He released a burst of mana to propel himself toward the revenant and proceeded to guide the lighting with a focused strike on the revenant’s core.

Ryosei walked out of the crater that his last strike created with a tired look on his face. Although he wasn't catching his breath, that was only because Senkyo kept restoring Ryosei's stamina with his own spirit power. When Ryosei and Yuu got out of the crater, their faces weren't ones with relief but ones with unease.

"U-Um... I don't like the looks of this."

"Same here..."

Sora and Kaede snapped out of their trances and turned to where Ryosei was looking at. They were met with the rest of the hollowed knights, but they weren't doing anything. They were standing still like statues with their swords dropped on the ground.

"This is bad! They're losing their morale. If they gain too much negative energy, they'll turn out like the first one we fought! We have to stop them somehow!"

Sora exclaimed in a panic.

"Damn it! There aren't many left but there is still too much for us to handle in a short amount of time."

"We have to weaken them or finish them all in one go. If we don't, defeating their comrades will only accelerate their manifestation."

They were in a tough spot. They had to defeat every enemy in one go or they'll have to face more of those manifested revenants. But this time, they'll have full power, unlike the first manifested revenant, Ryosei couldn't damage them the moment they manifest.

"What...? I see... that might work!"

**88 – Dual User**

Sora and Kaede looked over to "Senkyo" with confused looks. To them, "Senkyo" suddenly began talking to himself, but in reality, Ryosei was listening to Senkyo in his mind.

"Um... Yukou-kun?"

"Yukou-san?"

"I have a plan!"

With an enthusiastic tone, Ryosei handed the controls to Senkyo and turned to everyone.

"Hisho-chan, do you still have my bag?"

"Oh, it's right here."

"Thanks."

Senkyo took his bag from Yuu, went through it, and took out a few items: a pen, and a bunch of paper. Everyone looked at Senkyo questionably as no one had a clue what he was doing.

Senkyo laid down the pieces of paper, one in the middle and surrounded it with more paper. He grabbed his pen and started scribbling on the paper he laid down. Not long after Senkyo began scribbling, Sora caught on to Senkyo's plan.

"Wait, is that... a Field Circle!?"

"I think that's what it's called, so yeah!"

"But a Field Circle requires spirit power! And you definitely used a spectral back then! You can't use both! When you use a spectral, the mana affects the amount of spirit power you can use. At most, you can enchant a single item or transfer between the Spirit Realm and back! Everyone knows that!"

"Don't worry and trust me on this one!"

Completely ignoring Sora's words, Senkyo continued scribbling until he drew the circle. It had a half-moon arc and a diamond in the center—the symbol for spirit, and inside its diamond were two interlacing circles—the symbols for connection, which made it look like a Venn Diagram. The outer edge of the spirit symbol was then connected to many other circles on the outer papers with a single line connecting the outer circles to the center. Senkyo placed his palm on top of the middle circle, and soon after, the circle he drew glowed white.

"What!?"

Sora was baffled as his knowledge betrayed him. What he thought was impossible was being done right in front of his eyes. A Field Circle is a technique that requires a moderate amount of spirit power, meaning someone who just used a spectral cannot cast it, but it was being cast by a spectral user right in front of his eyes.

Sora was struck with an incredible headache because he was having a lot of trouble comprehending what and who Senkyo really is, but right now, he knew what he had to do first. With a resounding sigh, Sora gave in to Senkyo and took half of the outer papers, and headed away from them. Getting the message, Senkyo turned to Yuu to help him out.

"Hisho-chan, I need you to take these papers and surround all the possessed armor inside a huge circle with these. It doesn't in what order you place these, you just have to make a circle. Yamamoto-san is already making the other half, you just need to complete it. Can you do that?"

Senkyo handed to Yuu the rest of the outer papers.

"Roger!"

Yuu took off and cast Enhanced Speed to help her go faster. Sora and Yuu placed the papers one by one running around all the possessed armor that were in the middle of manifesting. With haste, Sora and Yuu placed all the papers. Sora shouted as loud as he could at Senkyo to inform him that the circle was done.

"YUKOU-KUN! DO IT NOW!!"

"Alright!"

Senkyo placed his palm on the middle circle again and transferred his spirit power. Soon after, white outlines glowed from the ground, creating a magic circle. The glow from the ground made it look like a holy power was being given to everyone.

Senkyo, Sora, Yuu, and Kaede felt nothing different. But the same could not be said for all the hollowed knights. They began shaking and agonizing as the holy light touched them. It was like their spirits were being cleansed of all evil. That was because a Field Circle is a technique that constantly casts an enhancement the caster chooses. The caster can choose which are affected by the circle and those that are not.

In this situation, Senkyo cast a blessing enhancement on the circle and its power is cleansing all the possessed armor, slowly until their spirits will be cleansed and peacefully pass on.

All the possessed armor were screaming in agony, refusing to get blessed by the circle, but all of them, in the end, passed on. Seeing as there were no more enemies standing, Senkyo took his hand off the circle and sighed in relief and he sat on the ground.

"It's finally done..."

Sora and Yuu walked over to Senkyo. Sora was the first to speak in a completely awed tone.

"Yukou-kun... just who are you?"

"Me?"

Senkyo pointed to himself quizzically and Sora responded with a nod.

"I'm just an otaku who's looking for something."

Sora didn’t know how to return Senkyo's response. Instead of answering Sora's question as he hoped, Senkyo gave a completely useless answer instead and glossed over it. Kaede who witnessed everything from the sidelines came up to Senkyo and took his hand.

"That was amazing, *Yukou-san*! You should really join the Konjou clan, you're incredibly powerful!"

"What? Ah... N-No thanks, we talked about this at lunch, didn't we?"

"Hm… I guess we did. Well? Have you changed your mind?"

“Like hell I would!”

As Senkyo was busy dealing with Kaede, he failed to notice Yuu behind Kaede who looked a bit annoyed.

"Yukou-senpai... are you already planning on leaving me!?"

"Wha...!? No! Wait, Hisho-chan, calm down!"

"How can I calm down if you're going away!?"

"This is a misunderstanding! I'm not going anywhere!"

"Really?"

"Of course. Kaede-chan was just joking around."

Just as Senkyo was calming Yuu down, Kaede decided to stir everything up by bringing a bit of mischief.

“Yeah, obviously. Did you really think I was going to take Yukou-san from you, Hisho-san? Now that I think about it, you two are really close, huh? Are you two lovers?”

“Wha—!?”

“L-Love—!?”

Senkyo and Yuu had a hard time speaking their minds after Kaede’s statement. After barely collecting themselves, the two tried to deny Kaede’s accusations while she just enjoyed the two’s flustered reactions.c

This farce continued for a bit longer. Sora couldn't take whatever was happening with them anymore and took off to find the spirit lantern that was causing the spirit zone. When they got back to the real world, it was already turning night.

Since Senkyo wouldn't have enough time to practice when he reaches the Konjou clan, he and Yuu decided to head home for the day and rest. Moreover, Senkyo managed to give Yuu his gift. With a quick blush, Yuu took the gift and took off in a hurried manner.

**Chapter 5: The True Wielder**

**89 – Weekend Training**

"Agh... Why do we have to do this? I'll be worn out before we even reach the foot of the mountain!"

*"\*What's a little test? I'm sure you can make it somehow.\*"*

"Are you crazy? Somehow is an understatement! It would be a miracle if I pull this off! Just listen to yourself. You're telling me to jog from the neighborhood all the way through town and up a mountain, just what makes you think I'll actually survive this!?"

Saturday. The day when students are finally given time off school and are able to spend their time however they want. This would be the perfect time to spend time with friends or family, or maybe just lay around taking your mind off the stressful school days. Every person has their own way of spending their free time.

In this case, Senkyo was spending his Saturday training at the Konjou clan again. However, instead of going to the Konjou clan like how they usually would through teleportation points, Ryosei had the bright idea to wake Senkyo up early and make him jog all the way over there.

After being forced into his tracksuit and out of the house, Senkyo had no choice but to comply with Ryosei's demands and began jogging. In his grey tracksuit, Senkyo began the jog that would lead to his legs falling off. He did not only have to jog across town but up a mountain while avoiding its obstacles.

"I'm gonna die..."

Senkyo muttered seemingly with no life inside him. He thought back to what led him to this situation but was then reminded that the reason he was going to jog himself to death was because he didn't want to die from all the otherworldly creatures that came after him. The irony of the situation hit Senkyo like a huge wrecking ball to the stomach. Seeing as both options lead to death, Senkyo resigned to Ryosei and jogged.

Yesterday, Senkyo's encounter with the army of hollowed knights caused him to reveal Ryosei's power to Sora. Senkyo and Ryosei feared that everyone in the Konjou clan already knew about how powerful "Senkyo" is.

From their perspective, Senkyo was someone who was thought to have defeated a leader of END. Although it seemed like they trusted Freda's word, doubts about him clearly sprouted from people around him, seeing as he was someone that couldn't even run down a mountain without getting knocked out.

The only reason Dai was training Senkyo from the very beginning was that Senkyo asked him to. Senkyo wasn't cut out to be in the fighter class, so he turned to the enchanter class where it was discovered that he was quite a fast learner, but nothing more than that. If Dai discovered Senkyo's feat that day, Senkyo wasn't too sure if Dai would continue training him without giving him a proper reason.

As Senkyo was heading home yesterday, his mind was filled with these worries. But just before he got home, Sora intercepted him. He came to talk about his power. As expected, it was about Senkyo’s reasons for training with the clan. Of course, he didn’t disclose any information to him. After telling Sora to be quiet about his power, he was unexpectedly compliant and backed off.

"HAHH...! Nouhh...! Aih... caunt... any... moreee...!"

*\*Thud!\**

*"\*Ha-ha! See! I knew you could do it!\*"*

A thud on the ground resounded through the forest as Senkyo fell to the ground right on the Konjou town's outskirts. That thud marked the end of his death jog. After about three excruciating hours, he finally made it.

However, it was decided that they would begin training at 8:30am. Senkyo left the house at 6am, so after about three hours it would be 9am. Senkyo did the math in his head, albeit slowly because of the jog, and it finally came to him that he was late.

Even though he knew he was late, Senkyo couldn't even manage to walk, so he laid there while panting trying to catch his breath like a person who almost drowned. At the moment, he couldn't care less about being late.

Senkyo heard what Ryosei said earlier, but couldn't even muster the power to retort against Ryosei in his mind. That was just how tired he was, exhausted was an understatement. For a few minutes, Senkyo didn't move and focused on getting stable breathing again.

"Uuu... I guess I have to get up at some point..."

Albeit reluctant to leave the grass he was laying on, Senkyo lazily got back up and faced in front of him where there was nothing but trees in sight. He reached to his chest where he took out a pendant with the Konjou clan's symbol on it. He continued to head forward where he was greeted by an immense fog. However, Senkyo continued to walk forward like the fog was non-existent. Not worried about tumbling or hitting an obstacle, he trenched into the fog until it slowly cleared up and revealed a path leading to a traditional Japanese-style town.

"I... I did it... I actually did it!"

After seeing his goal in front of him, Senkyo broke out in a fit of happiness. The joy of overcoming all the pain he went through and reaching his goal filled his mind. Senkyo jumped around while laughing like an idiot. Needless to say, people directed weird stares at him. In the middle of his fit, he remembered the whole reason why he went there in the first place.

"Ah! Oh no, I'm late! I got to hurry!"

Cutting his celebration short, Senkyo ran through town toward their usual training grounds. Unfortunately, Senkyo's legs still couldn't take it and slowed him down into a slow brisk walk. As he was passing by the residents of the town, a voice called out to him. Senkyo turned to the owner of the voice and his eyes were met with someone unexpected.

**90 – Traces of Exile**

In front of him came an old man with long grey hair and beard. He looked like he was still in good shape despite his old age, he didn't need any support and walked with a straight back. He stood tall in front of Senkyo like he was cornering his prey. Senkyo instinctively took a step back as he got closer.

"Pardon, but are you perhaps Yukou Senkyo-dono?"

"Y-Yes I am."

There was a bit of nervousness in Senkyo's voice. That was because, although the old man in front of him didn't know Senkyo, he knew exactly who the old man was. He was Sakurai Kosuke, a former brute class hunter, and a current Elder of the Konjou clan. Going back through Ryosei's memories, Kosuke was one of the people who strongly agreed with exiling him. Although Ryosei knew he was doing everything with the clan in mind, he still couldn't forget the times when he aggressively went after him in meetings.

Seeing how aggressive this old man could be, Senkyo put his guard up. With nervousness in his voice, Senkyo began to talk with Kosuke.

“I am Sakurai Kosuke, and Elder of this town. Seeing as you have been the talk of the town recently, I am glad to have finally met you.”

“A-Ah, it’s nice to meet you too.”

Kosuke stayed silent as he scrutinized Senkyo.

"I see... For what the rumors say, you seem quite dull."

"W-Well, I only started training recently. So, I..."

"Then are you implying that you managed to defeat a fearsome leader of END with no training whatsoever?"

"Ah, That's..."

Senkyo trailed off, unsure of how to answer that question. He thought of pretending of having experience in battle and that he uses a different style in battle, but when it came to it, he had nothing to show. If Senkyo was asked to prove that he would only be put in an even tougher spot.

"Yes. But I don't actually know how I defeated Fulgur."

"You do not know? That is very strange."

"Yes, it really is."

As Senkyo averted his eyes to the side, certain that Kosuke wouldn't easily take an explanation like that. On the contrary, Kosuke did not pry Senkyo any further.

"Although I do not believe that you have defeated a leader, I do believe that you encountered him and the fact that he has been defeated."

"Huh?"

Seeing Senkyo's bluntly surprised face, Kosuke explained the reasoning behind his conclusion.

"In the past, when I was still in action, I encountered the very same leader."

Kosuke’s words caught Senkyo's attention.

"But, 'encountered' may not be the correct term. Watched... might be more appropriate. An incredibly powerful foe with unimaginable strength. In that battle, I managed to mark him. Ever since, I always sensed his overflowing spirit power. But just last week, that power was snuffed out, and up to this day, it never came back. Just like that day…"

Kosuke's words trail away as he said his last line. Like reminiscing a distant past, he looked up to the sky melancholically. Setting his attention back to Senkyo, he extended his hand to him. He was signaling Senkyo to grab his hand for a handshake. He slowly grabbed his hand.

"...!"

Kosuke's eyes suddenly widened in surprise. Senkyo looked around him and there was nothing that stuck out that could be the cause for his reaction. After a few seconds, Senkyo, still as puzzled as he was from the start, gingerly called out to him.

"U-Umm... c-can I let go now...?"

Like a video resuming its play, Kosuke let go of Senkyo's hand and retracted his arm. He cleared his voice, seemingly in an alarmed manner. He then stared Senkyo straight in the eyes and asked him a question. Strangely to Senkyo, something about his expression was off.

"Have you perhaps taken an evaluation test to know which class you would fit in?"

"Yes, I did. I got in the enchanter class."

As Kosuke's face suddenly showed a slight shock as he heard that. His voice faintly began to lose its composure.

"The enchanter class... you say? Why did you not take the brute class?"

"Yamazaki-sensei said that the enchanter class was the only one I was capable of getting into."

"Wh-What..."

Senkyo watched Kosuke place his hand on his chin. Something was troubling him, that much was clear. He called out to him again, but this one didn't seem to register in Kosuke's head. After standing around waiting for him to respond, he said his farewell.

"Yukou Senkyo-dono, I'll be remembering you. For now, there is somewhere I need to be. Until the next time we meet."

Kosuke then left Senkyo alone and went his own way. Senkyo's stare followed his back as he went. The conversation took a direction where Senkyo didn't even know what was happening. As his puzzled look followed his back, he remembered that he was late for training,

"Ah, now I've done it...!"

Senkyo began running to the training grounds, worried about the faces he'll be met with once he arrives almost an hour late. Senkyo was in too much of a hurry to notice, but his legs finally began listening to him again, enabling his ability to run.

"Sorry, I'm late!"

Senkyo announced himself as he approached Dai and Yuu who were watching the other hunters practicing their techniques. There were groups that were in pairs practicing techniques that required more than one person, and there were groups that were by themselves as they enhanced their own skill. From the looks of it, Dai already guided his students on what they should do.

"Oh, you're finally here, what took you so long?"

"Yukou-senpai, you can't start slacking off just because it's the weekend. Have some more discipline."

Yuu greeted Senkyo with an immediate lecture. Though it was natural seeing as Senkyo was an hour late, Senkyo couldn't help but feel his pride take a bit of damage since his underclassman was the first to scold him about this.

"Sorry! I actually woke up early so I decided to jog all the way here. It took me longer than I thought, my bad."

"Really now?"

Dai pressed Senkyo looking to see if he was telling the truth. He looked at Senkyo with a straight face. Even though Dai was nice, he was still a teacher at the end of the day, so it was only natural that he wouldn't let Senkyo off easy. With a bit of nervousness in Senkyo's voice, he answered Dai.

"Y-Yes, I'm sorry, it won't happen again."

Senkyo was expecting some kind of punishment for being late. But instead, he got a long sigh coming from Dai.

"It was my bad on my part too. You didn't have any way to contact me. Connect can only work at a certain distance and you didn't have my cellphone number. It doesn't feel right to punish a student for wanting to grow... So I'll look over this time, but make sure it doesn't happen again, okay?"

"Y-Yes!"

Senkyo was a bit perplexed. Everything that Dai said was correct but he was still expecting some kind of punishment, even if just a little.

"If you understand then let's pick up where we left off last time. I'll give you my contact later, so focus on training for now."

"Roger!"

Putting those thoughts aside, Senkyo headed to a nearby tree and put his hand on it. Dai followed suit and their training began.

Yuu, who was holding the shinai bag that Senkyo handed over to her, watched over Senkyo as he trained. She thought back to the time before they entered the spirit zone and fought the army of hollowed knights.

"'I'll be that charming idiot for you'...huh?"

A slight red blush floated on her face as she recited his words. The fact that she didn't understand what Senkyo was thinking irked her and began tightening her hold on the shinai bag.

"Nnn~!! I can't tell if you're doing it on purpose or not...! For better or for worse, you really are way too nice. Really... unlike me..."

Yuu cast her gaze down to the ground. Something was bothering her, but she kept it to herself and decided to not voice it. Then, from behind her, she heard a familiar voice.

**91 – Spark of Chaos**

"Yamazaki-san sure is soft, huh?"

Yuu turned around to face the owner of the voice.

"Yamamoto-senpai?"

"Hi, you're Hisho-chan, right?"

Yuu responded with a silent nod. Sora then stood beside her and watched over Senkyo who was training diligently with Dai, seemingly observing his every movement.

"You know, I haven't known Yukou-kun for that long. We were classmates last school year but he mostly didn't talk to anyone but Honjou-kun."

Yuu was confused as to why Sora suddenly started talking about this, but she decided to let Sora speak and listen.

"I've always wondered, how can he have such average grades even though he almost never takes any notes in class? How could he bare Watanabe-kun's continuous bullying before? It was nothing but pure curiosity, nothing else. But then yesterday, when I finally saw how Yukou-kun fought, you would think at least one of my questions would be answered. But on the contrary, only more questions came to my head. How is he so powerful? How can he cast a lot of spirit power despite using a spectral? Things like that. I haven't the slightest clue who that person is. Now, I want to know what makes that person so interesting. But before anything else, I want to be sure of one thing... is he or will he be an enemy of humanity?"

"No, he isn't. Yukou-senpai is without a doubt very mysterious. But is not an enemy of this world, that I am sure of."

Yuu answered Sora in a serious tone. Her voice didn't falter as she said that. However, even if it didn't sound like she was lying, Sora couldn't just simply take her word for it. Sora isn't careless, he wanted more concrete proof that they could be trusted.

"Unfortunately, words won't be enough to convince me."

"Then why bring this up to me in the first place?"

"Why indeed... Maybe I just wanted to see your reaction, maybe I wanted to inform you that I don't trust you, or maybe something else entirely."

Sora walked away from Yuu, ending their conversation there. As if remembering something he forgot, Sora faced Yuu to ask one last question.

"By the way... what's with that sword? At first, it would seem like you just don't want it to get stolen, but from where stand, it looks to me that you're hiding the sword."

"….."

Yuu didn't respond.

"Well, it wasn't like I was expecting you to answer in the first place."

Sora turned his back to Yuu and disappeared into the forest. For the rest of the day, Yuu became wary of Sora.

In the space where noise is forbidden and silence is law, the residents of the Konjou clan ranging from normal people to hunters immerse themselves in the books that were displayed on the thousands of shelves in the building. The Great Library.

In the Konjou clan, everything that was ever recorded was always stored at the library. They didn't keep anything hidden from their fellow clan members and displayed the information publicly. If there was anything that anyone wanted to keep something secret, they wouldn't write it on paper, but instead remember it in their heads.

Sora entered the Konjou clan's library where vast amounts of books from normal textbooks to books with techniques you could learn were located. This included a book that Sora came here for, a book regarding the clan's history.

"I'd like to find the books about the clan's history."

"Understood. Please wait a moment."

Sora requested the librarian in front of him. The librarian searched the requested books on the computer in front of her. Soon enough, she got the location and directed Sora to it.

"The books about the clan's history are over there at the very last aisle."

"Thank you."

Sora walked over to where the librarian pointed him. Sora traced his fingers on the books reading the titles of the books out loud as his finger pointed at one. After a bit of searching, Sora found the one he was looking for.

"There it is! History of the Konjou Clan."

Instead of a book, Sora took out a brown file from the bookshelf and took it to the nearest seat. Sora opened the file and searched its contents. From afar, a person who Sora was childhood friends with spotted him searching through a file.

*\*Sora? What's he doing here? That guy hates reading.\**

Touma silently thought in his head. He was currently reading a book while sitting across the room where he could spot Sora.

"Let's see, let's see... swords, swords, swords... Ah, there it is!"

Sora flipped to a page that had a photo of Kuro Yaiba with its description on the bottom. Sora brought the book closer to his face and scrutinized the image of the sword on the book. After being satisfied, he brought the book back down to the table and muttered to himself.

"This is definitely it! The sword Yukou-kun used! *\*I remembered Dai telling me a story. A legend who dropped from grace. A swordsman that cut his enemies down at the speed of light. He wielded a jet-black blade with a steak of red that was said to be the mark of death. An everlasting spectral with a limitless mana pool, unique from the other spectrals. I didn’t notice it before. I almost forgot that story. But yesterday… Senkyo reminded me of that story. His lightning-fast movements made it look like he was teleporting to the naked eye. A black blade with a red steak that cut down those hollowed knights like butter.\**"

Sora finished playing his memories in his mind and read through Kuro Yaiba’s description.

"Kuro Yaiba. The Konjou Clan's legendary blade. It was kept hidden under the castle where newborns were brought to test whether or not the blade would choose them. In the year 20XX, the blade had finally chosen its master and dropped in front of a newborn. Its wielder was Konjou Ryosei, an outstanding prodigy that mastered the clan's techniques faster than anyone else and even made techniques not only within his class but to all the other classes in his time..."

Sora continued reading the blade's history and its wielder. At a certain point, Sora yelled out in shock, catching everyone's attention. After apologizing, Sora finished up his research and put the file back where he got it. Satisfied with his findings, Sora left the library.

After confirming that Sora left the library, Touma came out of hiding and went to where Sora put back the file. He took the same file out of the bookshelf and searched its contents.

“Huh, really now?”

Touma’s eyes glowed purple as he finished reading through the file.

**92 – Lunchtime Daydream**

It was lunchtime. Dai dismissed the hunters to eat lunch and scheduled them to return an hour later. Senkyo and Itsuki were offered lunch at the castle again. Itsuki accepted and headed to the castle, but Senkyo and Yuu had other plans.

Yesterday, Yuu asked Senkyo if he wanted her to make lunch for him. Needless to say, Senkyo accepted her offer.

Under the shade of the trees, accompanied by the calming sound of the stream going down the mountain and the refreshing breeze of the wind. Senkyo and Yuu sat on the grass with their lunches in their hands.

"Mm~ Hisho-chan, your cooking really is delicious!"

Senkyo's delighted voice cut off the calming sound of nature as he complimented Yuu's cooking. His face reflected his joy as he happily ate his food. But he couldn't properly distinguish whether he was happy because the food was delicious or because a girl made it for him, since he was so happy, he concluded it was both.

"Haha... Save the flattery, it won't work on me."

"So you're still bad at taking compliments?"

"Grk..."

Yuu let out a surprised voice, letting Senkyo know that he hit a bullseye. Then resulting in her scowling at Senkyo.

"Could you please not read my mind."

"Sorry, it was just so obvious I had to."

"And stop teasing me while you're at it!"

Senkyo and Yuu enjoyed the calming atmosphere around them as they chat and ate their food. Senkyo couldn't even believe this was real. Just a few weeks ago, the only person that'd eat lunch with him was Kinro. The thought of having lunch with a girl, let alone having them make a handmade lunch for him, never crossed his mind. But now here he is, eating lunch alone together with his cute underclassman.

*"\*Eating handmade lunch together with a girl... It sounds so surreal but it's actually happening!\*"*

Senkyo thought to himself as he quietly took another bite from his lunch. His gaze wandered to Yuu who was also eating her lunch.

"\**Heh, without a doubt her cooking is delicious, but there's only one problem... She's 3D! In this situation, it's textbook for the girl to feed the protagonist a bite or two as she says 'Say ahh,' all the while looking cute and opening her mouth. Unfortunately, the reality is cruel...\*"*

Another weird thought just crossed Senkyo's head. Although he didn't voice it, if someone heard that, they'd probably look at him with a disgusted face saying something like "Uwa... she already made you lunch and you're still thinking of weird things like that? You're the worst!" Senkyo didn't like the fact that he could easily imagine someone saying something like that as it only served to make him feel bad.

Senkyo heaved a short sigh as he tried to push away the thoughts. However, while Senkyo was daydreaming, Yuu called out to him in a weird voice, grabbing Senkyo's attention.

"Yu~kou~sen~pai~!"

"Mm? What is it, Hisho-chan?"

Yuu picked up the food from her own bento with her chopsticks and held it out to Senkyo's mouth. She opened her mouth and said the following, "Yukou-senpai~! Say aaah..."

"Eh... Eh? EHHHH!!?"

Senkyo, who was completely and utterly shocked, shouted as loud as he could and immediately began to panic.

"Wait!? Wha? How? Why? H-Hisho-chan, w-what are you doing?"

"Can't you tell? I'm feeding you!"

"N-N-N-NO! I—WHAT'S GOTTEN INTO YOU ALL OF THE SUDDEN!?"

*"\*Wh-Wh-What the hell!? Did I accidentally say my thoughts out loud or something!? I was only joking!\*"*

With a mischievous smile, Yuu's face came closing into Senkyo's face. He reflexively backed up, but his whole body was unable to move from the shock which resulted in only his head moving back. Yuu went past Senkyo's head placing her mouth right beside Senkyo's ear, and whispering seductively into his ear,

"That's because... I love you, Yukou-senpai~"

"Wha... WHAA—"

"—AAATTT!!"

"Kya!?"

Senkyo let out the loudest howl he could possibly voice. Suddenly, he jerked off of the ground, getting up in a sitting position as he continued to howl. Noticing that his view changed, Senkyo looked around. He was only seeing a stream of water in front of him and the rest of nature beyond it. Now even more confused, Senkyo heard Yuu's voice coming from behind him.

"Jeez, senpai. What are you suddenly shouting for? Did you have a bad dream or something?"

"Eh?"

*"\*A bad... dream?\*"*

Senkyo quizzically turned his head around to face Yuu, confusion written all over his face. She heaved an exasperated sigh as she explained to him what happened.

"Yukou-senpai, you fell asleep while laying down on the grass. I don't know what dream you had but it's time to wake up."

"……"

Senkyo went into thinking, trying to recover the memories that matched Yuu's statement. After a few seconds of exercising his brain, Senkyo let out a quick "Ah..." as he finally remembered everything that happened.

Right after Senkyo finished lunch, he rolled around on the ground and laid on the grass while looking blankly at the blue sky. After a while, the refreshing breeze of the wind and the comforting grass got the better of him and fell asleep.

"Then... That means it was all a dream?"

Yuu quietly nodded, affirming Senkyo's conclusion.

"Hah... hahah... To think it was all just a dream..."

Senkyo played the image in his mind of Yuu confessing to Senkyo. It was an incredibly aggressive approach, unlike the usual Yuu, who would be too shy to pull off something like that.

"I should've known..."

With disbelief mixed into his voice, Senkyo heaved another big sigh, one mixed with disappointment, a lot of it. Taking all the strength away from his body, Senkyo closed his eyes and limply fell down from his sitting position and onto the ground, or so he thought.

"Ah, wait, senpai...!"

Instead of hitting the grass like he initially expected, Senkyo's head hit something soft instead. Curious about what the soft unknown object his head laid on was, he opened his eyes and was puzzled when he saw Yuu's blushing face staring at him from directly above him.

"Hm? Hisho...chan?"

Yuu stayed silent while suddenly averting her eyes in a different direction. Senkyo just woke up and regained his memories before he fell asleep. In those memories, he was certain that he fell asleep on the grass, but how does that explain the sight he was seeing right in front of him?

After having Senkyo's brain finally wake up from sleep, he finally realized his situation. When Senkyo jerked off the ground, neither he nor Yuu moved from their spot. If Senkyo simply lied back down then that would mean that Senkyo's head was placed there the entire time. And judging from Senkyo's perspective where he could see the underside of Yuu's chest, it could only mean one thing...

"A... lap pillow?"

Yes. A lap pillow. Senkyo could feel the sensation of Yuu's thighs wrapping around the back of his head. The view that Senkyo currently had was nothing short of exquisite. The body heat from Yuu that Senkyo was feeling only served to make his flushed face even hotter. Senkyo thought to take his head off immediately, but his young adolescent mind refused to listen and wanted to savor the sensation for even longer.

"Umm... H-Hisho-chan, why am I..."

"Er, umm... I..."

Feeling just as embarrassed as Senkyo was, Yuu kept stumbling on her words. After regaining some composure, Yuu was finally able to speak part of her mind, at least enough to explain the situation.

"This is... I read somewhere that you would get sick if you lay on the ground for too long... That wouldn't be good, so I thought of doing this 'lap pillow' thing I also read somewhere. Should I not have...?"

Yuu was misunderstanding one thing, that laying on a cold surface only increased the chances of getting a cold. Moreover, what she said only applied to cold surfaces like a tiled floor or hard cement. She didn't know that warm surfaces like the grass that bathed in the sun's light at some point in the day didn't quite count.

Although, she thought of what was best for Senkyo, making him incredibly happy. Spoiling the mood now by saying that she misunderstood had a bad ring in Senkyo's ears. So instead, he gave Yuu a bright smile, reached his arm out, and pet her head, along with saying the words...

"Thank you. I really appreciate it."

Yuu returned Senkyo's gesture with her own. She gave Senkyo a bright smile and looked at him with comforting eyes accompanied by a cute little giggle. Although the gesture seemed the same, to Senkyo, it was like the first time he saw the cherry blossoms in full bloom. Senkyo could feel his heart bursting out of his chest. He was afraid that his heartbeats were so loud that Yuu might hear them. Allured, he unconsciously leaked his thoughts into a low mumble.

"Cute..."

"Hm?"

Just before Yuu could process what Senkyo just said, a voice coming from above them caught their attention as Yuu and Senkyo were called out.

"I see, so you two really are a couple."

From atop the tree, Sora dropped down in front of Senkyo and Yuu. With his sudden appearance, Senkyo immediately got up in a panic.

**93 – Sora’s Suspicion**

"We-We're not a couple!"

"Really? Then what was that just now?"

"Th-That was..."

Senkyo couldn't think of a response and looked over to Yuu for help but unfortunately, she was burying herself in her jacket out of embarrassment. Seeing as Senkyo was unable to think of a response back, Sora set aside his teasing and went straight to the point.

"Well, I don't really care about that. What I do care about... is that."

Sora pointed to the shinai bag that was on the ground beside Yuu. Sensing the topic turned serious, Yuu peeked out of her jacket and held on to the shinai bag after pushing it behind her, hiding it from Sora's sight. Senkyo had a hunch about what Sora meant, but instead, he feigned ignorance as if he didn't get what Sora questioned him about it.

"What do you mean, Yamamoto-san...?"

"I think you know what I mean. If you didn't, you wouldn't be making an effort in hiding the Konjou clan's legendary sword from them, would you?"

Unfortunately, there was no bluffing himself out of there. Sora hit all the right spots, making it impossible to get out of. There was no point in dragging it out. Senkyo's only choice was to confront Sora.

"How did you know?"

"I did a bit of studying. Konjou Ryosei, the son of the former clan chief and the wielder of the legendary sword, Kuro Yaiba, died seven years ago in a car accident. He didn't have Kuro Yaiba on him, so the whole clan searched high and low to retrieve the sword but to no avail. To this day, the legendary blade was never found. Its scabbard had a red rose pattern with the blade had a strike of red down its blade, much like yours... or should I say it is the clan’s blade?"

Sora glared at Senkyo menacingly, an expression he never saw Sora make. Sensing the danger coming from Sora, Senkyo went on full alert. Planning ahead, Senkyo observed Sora's person, from what he could see, Sora was wearing the kunai belt he fought with the other day but he wasn't wearing his usual battle cloak. Other than the kunai belt, there was nothing else on him. However, Senkyo was still wary of hidden weapons within his clothes.

"So? What are you going to do?"

"I'm a reasonable guy, Yukou-kun. If you explain to me how and why you have Kuro Yaiba, I might think twice about cutting you down right now."

After hearing that, Senkyo knew Sora was after answers. He wasn't sure, but he theorized that Sora didn't tell everyone about this because he wanted to catch Senkyo in this particular situation. He gave Senkyo a chance to avoid more trouble if he just told the truth.

Although Sora can get the whole clan to keep quiet until Senkyo was deep within the clan's territory, he wouldn't be able to make every person hide the change in their attitude. At the very least, if he told anyone it would be only a handful amount of people that can keep their mouths shut. Seeing as Sora came here alone, he must've given this information to someone.

Senkyo and Ryosei's plan was to get stronger first. After that, then they would think about telling the truth to the Konjou clan, but that plan was completely derailed. Now that their secret had been revealed, Senkyo had to gain the Konjou clan's trust.

"Alright, I'll tell you..."

Time passed by, and it was already time to resume training with Dai, but even so, Senkyo continued to explain everything to Sora. He told Sora everything that happened thus far, about Ryosei, how they met, what Yuu really was, their time in the Spirit Realm—everything.

"Hmm..."

Sora was sitting down in front of Senkyo and Yuu, Senkyo just finished explaining their situation to Sora. Yuu held on to the shinai bag while Senkyo explained everything. With a puzzled face, Sora was trying to process everything that he just heard from Senkyo.

"So... you're telling me, the soul of Konjou Ryosei is living inside your body, and let you retrieve the blade from where it was hidden. After that, you met Hisho-chan, a vampire, after having an encounter with a werewolf, and now, she's following you around as your girlfriend?"

"That's about it... wait, I didn't say anything about that last part."

Sora scratched his head, troubled by the amount of information Senkyo just dumped on him in one go. He knew he was the one who asked for an explanation but to think there was this much stuff that Senkyo wanted to say. Sora told Senkyo a summary of what he understood and added a bit of his personal opinion there, looking for confirmation if he understood correctly.

"Nnn~~... Yeah, it won't do."

"What?"

Senkyo was surprised to hear that. A lot of things ran through Senkyo's mind like: did I not explain it properly? What won't do? Is there something else he wanted?

"No, no, you see, from the beginning, I wasn't really the best at listening. I'm more like someone who learns from doing it instead of reading kind of guy. I want you to show me concrete proof that everything you said was true. How about showing Konjou Ryosei? Surely if something as impossible as another soul inhabiting your body, you should be able to make something happen that can prove that.

“……”

Senkyo could only think of one possible way to be able to show Ryosei to him. After confirming that Ryosei could do it, Senkyo faced Sora.

“Alright, don’t move.”

“What!?”

All of the sudden, a small ball of flame appeared from Senkyo’s chest and flew through the air at speeds so fast that Sora didn’t even have the time to react. The ball of flame was absorbed in Sora’s head, and as a result of his panic, he fell backward onto his bottom. Not too long after, he fell asleep and got knocked out on the ground.

“Yukou-senpai!? What happened!?”

“I just sent Ryosei to invade his mind. Right now, he got forcefully envisaged by him. His conscious should be in the dream world with him.”

“Is that so…? Did you have to be so aggressive with him?”

“Well, as sorry as I am, there was no other choice. If Sora thought Ryosei’s spirit form was some sort of attack, there was no way he would let it touch him.”

“That makes sense. How long do we have to wait?”

“Not too long. As soon as Ryosei is finished, he should wake him up.”

**94 – The Words He Lives By**

*“\*Can you hear me?\*”*

“Who’s there?! Where am I?!”

Sora was in the middle of an open field. Green grass stretched out to the horizon and trees at the far distance. A voice he didn’t recognize echoed throughout the field. Sora was in his fighting stance, ready to attack with his kunai in hand.

*“\*You wanted proof I was really Konjou Ryosei, right? What else do you think I’m here for?\*”*

“Then show yourself!”

“I’m right here.”

Sora heard the voice coming from directly behind him. He threw all his kunai as he turned around to the source of the voice. He saw a humanoid figure and aimed all of his kunai at it.

*\*Snap!\**

But before the kunai could even reach the figure, the strings attached to them were severed.

“What!?”

“I’m trying to introduce myself. There is no need for weapons.”

Ryosei began to appear from thin air right in front of Sora. He looked at the figure he aimed at earlier and saw that it was slowly disappearing. It was an illusion set up beforehand. The sword that the real Ryosei in front of him was holding slowly disappeared as well. It was his way of showing he wasn’t here to fight.

“I’m Konjou Ryosei. Former… no, one of the wielders of Kuro Yaiba. And you are?”

“…Yamamoto Sora, a hunter of the enchanter class. It’s true that you look exactly like Konjou Ryosei, but how do I know that you’re not just disguising as him?”

“You’re a bit hard to please, I see. But that doesn’t matter. If you allow me, I can easily prove myself to you.”

“Then how would you do that?”

“By showing you a part of my memories. You just have to hold still without doing anything. If you can handle that, you will get the proof you’re looking for.”

“What? Do you think I’ll let my guard down?”

“That’s your decision. But I’m warning you, your body isn’t like Senkyo’s. If I don’t get out of here within a day, your soul will be destroyed.”

“You’re holding me hostage!? Why the hell would a legend of the Konjou clan do something so traitorous!? You’re planning on killing another hunter!”

“What? I never said anything about killing you. Before your time limit ends, I’ll just get out of your body. The problem lies with you. If you don’t trust me now, then can you really trust my word that I would leave your body by its time limit? Can you really afford to take such a chance?”

“Wh-What the… What’s with these underhanded tactics!? I heard you fell from grace and were exiled from the clan, but I never heard something like this!”

“Then let this be a lesson. On the battlefield, justice doesn’t always prevail. And in your life as a hunter of the Konjou clan, your goal isn’t to win battles with equality, it’s ‘to save as many lives as you can along with your own. As long as you live, you will save. And as long as you’re alive, you will continue to use your power to protect.’ Those are the words I followed as a hunter. Although it sounds hypocritical of me, would you not say you follow these words as well?”

“……”

Sora was left speechless, deciding what his next move was. He continued to stare at Ryosei looking for a hint to make the right move.

“…Fine. Do as you wish.”

Sora stood still as Ryosei approached him. Just as his head was about to make contact with Sora’s forehead, Ryosei muttered “There really isn’t any need for that kunai you’re hiding.”

Before Sora could draw the kunai from behind him, Ryosei made contact with Sora’s forehead and passed on some of his memories. Sora stood still as fragments of Ryosei’s mind were forcefully ingrained into him. Memories of his time as a hunter, the day of his death, his time as a bodyless spirit, his encounter with Senkyo, and his battles on the first time he entered the Spirit Realm. Parts of those events were shown to Sora.

“Well? Are you satisfied now?”

“…Alright. I believe you.”

“Perfect. See you in the real world.”

“Wait! What the hell is with that!? The new words you live by! What do you mean by ‘Repay debts, extinguish regrets, and protect everything at the cost of my life!?’”

His past motto and the current one were completely different. In the past, he talked about living as the best choice to be able to save lives, but his current one talked about risking his own life to achieve his goals.

“Oops, maybe I shared too much. Don’t bother trying to find out.”

“Wait!!”

Everything was covered in a blinding light. Sora’s head became fuzzy and tried to open his eyes. But in front of him, was no longer the open field, it was Senkyo and Yuu.

“Oh, you’re awake.”

“H-Huh? What happened?”

Sora slowly got up to a sitting position.

“I made Ryosei invade your mind. Sorry about that. But you believe us now, right?”

“Y-Yeah, but wait, Ryosei-san—”

Before Sora could continue his sentence, Senkyo cut him off and silenced him.

“I know. But that isn’t your business nor is it mine. Leave it for now, okay?”

Senkyo was talking like he saw everything that happened in his mind. But he could make a good guess on how that happened. If Ryosei could share his memories with him, then he would be able to do the same with Senkyo. Following Senkyo’s words, he stopped pursuing the subject.

“Fine.”

“Thanks.”

After determining that Senkyo wasn’t a threat, Sora swore to keep it a secret that he possessed the Kuro Yaiba. Now that Sora was satisfied, the three headed back to the training grounds where Dai would be waiting to train Senkyo. However, before they could leave the forest, someone clad in a black coat appeared in front of them. The first one to recognize that person was Sora.

"Is that... Touma-kun? Hey, Touma-kun!"

**95 – Rampage**

Sora called out to his childhood friend, but he didn't respond. Touma began to approach them. However, something about Touma didn't seem right. Sensing a bit of unease, Senkyo took the shinai bag from Yuu and put his guard up.

Looking at Touma closely, he was wearing the black coat that Senkyo first saw him wear when they encountered them in the Spirit Realm. Moreover, Touma had his katana mounted on his waist. In other words, he was in his battle gear.

"T-Touma-kun?"

"How disappointing, Sora."

"Eh?"

Sora was struck by surprise after hearing Touma's sudden remark.

"You really are too soft. You know that bastard stole the Konjou clan's legendary sword! Why are you walking leisurely beside them!? Why aren't you taking it back!?"

"Touma-kun, calm down!"

"Shut up! Are you going to lie to me, just like they did!? I knew it, I shouldn't have made friends with anyone at all! Every single one of you is just a backstabbing liar!"

Touma shouted in anger. He sounded furious, his voice dripping with rage. Touma wouldn't listen to anything that Sora said. Touma drew his katana. He dashed passed Sora, heading directly to Senkyo.

Senkyo, who was prepared for a sudden fight, switched with Ryosei and quickly drew Kuro Yaiba and tried to block Touma. But the sound of blades clashing never reached Ryosei's ears. Just before their swords made contact, Touma's image split into two, one going to his left side and one going to his right side.

"What!?"

To both of Ryosei's sides, Touma appeared with his sword ready to strike. Ryosei was about to dodge but he wasn't going to make it. Just as the blades were about to reach Ryosei, they were stopped in midair.

Touma passed Ryosei, finishing his strike, with a face puzzled at what blocked his blades. He clicked his tongue and took a stance in front of Ryosei. Little did Touma know that the reason for his strike being blocked was because of Shiro, who cast a barrier around Ryosei before he got hit.

"Yukou-senpai, are you alright!?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. I was just a bit distracted. Saito-san—\**No use, huh?\*"*

Ryosei and Yuu stood off against Touma. With a proper face-off, Ryosei took stance while Yuu took position behind him, readying her attacks. Just as Ryosei was about to try and negotiate with Touma, he dashed towards them.

Ryosei intercepted Touma, dashing towards him and clashing blades. Staring each other down, he could see Touma's bloodlust eyes, staring at him with unusual anger.

Neither Senkyo nor Ryosei knew why Touma was so worked up. They would understand if he wanted to take them down because of fear of being an enemy, but that didn't seem to be the reason behind his actions.

Not a second longer, Ryosei jumped to the sky, leaving Touma on the ground. Touma immediately understood why Ryosei jumped when he saw a barrage of fireballs coming at him.

Touma slashed and dodged the incoming fireballs. When the coast was clear, Touma's focus was directed to Yuu, who was providing support from the rear.

Touma tried to change targets but was unable to when Ryosei appeared from his side. Touma went for a diagonal slash. But that was a fatal mistake. He didn't expect Ryosei to be so fast. He miscalculated the distance and gave Ryosei a huge opening.

Before Touma could even strike, Ryosei dashed below him and weaved his fist in between Touma's raised arms, and punched his chin, making him drop his sword and knocking him back, onto the ground.

Ryosei made the illusion that he was holding an exposed blade, but in reality, he was holding the sword while it was in its sheath. Ryosei went for a bare-handed attack and disabled Touma. That was Ryosei's aim in the first place. Killing Touma never crossed his mind.

Ryosei approached Touma incapacitated on the ground. He drew Kuro Yaiba and pointed it at Touma's neck, signaling the end of the battle.

"Why are you doing this? If you would just listen to Yamamoto-san, you would understand that I'm not a threat to the clan!"

Ryosei shouted at Touma. He was recovering from Ryosei's last blow and made contact with his eyes.

"Why... you say...? A threat to the clan, you say...? Heheheheh... Hahahaha!"

Touma began to laugh maniacally while placing his open hand to his face.

"Just so you know, I couldn't care less about the clan! I'm doing this to get stronger! Think about it! If I get the legendary sword, I'll get stronger! After all, all people do is betray others! In this evil and twisted world, the only way to survive in this world is by yourself! And I'll prove that I don't need anyone else right here!"

"Yukou-kun, watch out!"

Sora noticed that Touma was opening the gaps in his fingers, slowly revealing his right eye. Seeing that, Sora throws out a warning to Ryosei, but it was too late.

The gap in Touma's hand revealed not his eye, but a glowing white light. Realizing what it was, Ryosei hurriedly dodged but caused him to lose balance and ended up falling to the ground instead, releasing Touma from his sword. And then, a white ray of light came out from Touma's right eye, grazing Ryosei's shoulder as he dodged.

Having released from his lock, Touma picked up the sword that he dropped and went to attack Ryosei.

"I'll be taking your sword!!"

With Ryosei's sword misplaced from the fall, he was wide open, and couldn't block this strike. As Touma's blade was reaching Ryosei, another blade intercepted Touma.

"What!?"

Touma scanned Ryosei, but he could clearly see that his blade was still on the ground. He investigated the source of the new blade and saw Dai standing beside him.

"What are you doing, Touma-kun?"

"Tch...!"

Touma clicked his tongue and backed up. He was good with the sword but he wasn't better than Dai, he was aware of this fact and decided to retreat.

"'I couldn't care less about the clan, I'm doing this to get stronger,' is what you said, right? Those are some conceited words you said back there. If the other clan members knew of this, you would definitely be punished."

Touma began to panic. Dai heard everything he said from the start. That meant that he knew that Touma had no plans to return Kuro Yaiba back to the clan. Dai was one of the most respected people in the clan, no one would believe Touma if he tried to lie out of it. He was backed up to a corner, after a quick glance at Sora, who was looking at him worriedly, Touma ran into the forest, away from everyone else.

Dai stood still and didn't pursue Touma. Instead, he looked over to Ryosei who was holding the Konjou clan's long-lost legendary sword in his hand.

"Kuro Yaiba, huh? I haven't seen that blade in ages."

After examining Kuro Yaiba, Dai turned his gaze to Ryosei and pointed his sword at Ryosei's neck.

"I'll either have to cut your throat or you'll hand over that sword and come with me. Which one will it be?"

With a reluctant sigh, Ryosei sheathed Kuro Yaiba and handed it over to Dai.

"Good. I didn't want to have to kill one of my students. But... you have a lot of explaining to do."

Dai took out a cloth with ripples flowing through its surface and wrapped it around Ryosei's wrists. Strangely, the cloth seemed to be hard to take off, enough that handcuffs would be ashamed.

"Wait! Let go of Yukou-senpai!"

Yuu pushed away Dai and defended Ryosei. Noticing the unusual strength from her push, Dai couldn't help but comment about it.

"Oh? You might not look like it but you're powerful."

"It's okay, Hisho-chan. We'll be fine, trust me."

"But...!"

Ryosei gave Yuu a reassuring look to calm her down. Although a bit reluctantly, Yuu stepped away from Dai, instead she stayed by Ryosei's side. Seeing as there were no more obstacles, Dai escorted Ryosei to the castle.

Having not moved in place, Sora was still staring into the forest where Touma left them. His face was filled with worry for his friend that ran away. Dai called out to Sora.

"Hey, Sora-kun! You're also coming with us, you know!"

"Ah, sorry, I'm coming!"

**96 – Trial**

All of them were escorted to the castle. After a few hours of waiting in a cell, Senkyo, Yuu, and Sora were brought into a huge room with desks connected into a huge circle. The two were brought to the center of the interconnected desks like some kind of hearing.

The desks were all filled with aged men, also known as the Elders, and on the desk in front of them, was Konjou Yousuke, who had Kuro Yaiba placed in front of him. Dai Yamazaki sat to the left of Yousuke, while Konjou Kaede, who looked worried about the situation, sat to the right side of her brother.

Yousuke was the first to speak.

"I'm sure word was already spread, but to those who do not know, the boy before us, Yukou Senkyo, has been found in possession of the Konjou clan's legendary sword, Kuro Yaiba."

Everyone around the table had serious looks, but the moment Yousuke mentioned Kuro Yaiba most of the elders were in shock. None of them spoke to interrupt the clan chief and held their tongues.

"Furthermore, he claims that he possesses the soul of the former holder of the Kuro Yaiba, Konjou Ryosei, living inside his body. I could not take this any other way but a great insolence to the dead."

Seemingly holding back his anger, Yousuke continued to speak.

"Yukou Senkyo, explain yourself right this moment!"

Yousuke was a patient man. But it looks like hearing Ryosei get disgraced was what set him off. Everyone's gaze was directed to Senkyo. After an audible gulp, Senkyo steeled himself and began speaking.

"I am not lying. Everything you have mentioned is the truth. The reason why I—"

*\*Bang!\**

A loud noise caught everyone's attention. As they turned to see what the cause of it was and saw Yousuke who dropped his fist on the table.

"WHY DO YOU PERSIST WITH THIS FARCE!? DO YOU HONESTLY BELIEVE THAT ANYONE WOULD ACCEPT THIS STORY OF YOURS!?"

Yousuke let all his anger out. His words echoed loud and clear in everyone's ears. His voice filled with anger with a hint of sadness. Kaede, who was sitting beside him, shouted to oppose Yousuke.

"Clan chief! I can vouch for him! Yukou-san is not lying about anything!"

"Kaede... what?"

Yousuke calmed down slightly after hearing Kaede’s words.

“I read Yukou-san’s memories and everything that he said was the truth. About Ryosei-nii-chan, and the fact that he lives in his body.”

Everyone couldn’t believe what they were hearing. The soul of the former wielder of the Kuro Yaiba was in their presence and was living inside another person.

"I-I would like to vouch for Yukou-kun as well. Just earlier, I met the real Konjou Ryosei when he invaded my mind."

“Invaded? What do you mean by that?”

A person from the elders sought an explanation for Sora’s statement.

“When I discovered about the Kuro Yaiba, I threatened Yukou-kun to explain himself by using his secret as a bargaining chip.”

“On your own actions!? Why did you not report this to your superiors?”

“Sir! I reported my findings to Yamazaki Dai-sensei, but I declined Yamazaki-sensei’s order to report it any further due to Yukou-kun being an unknown threat at the time. I determined it was the best course of action to be taken care of as soon as possible. I apologize for neglecting to follow proper procedures! I am prepared to take the consequences of my actions!”

The elders along with Yousuke and Kaede turned to Dai and he nodded in response, confirming Sora’s claim. Just as Yousuke was about to speak, the door to the room slammed open. As it did, revealed Itsuki who was trying to be held back by two guards.

"What the fuck is going on in here!?"

"Watanabe-san!?"

"Watanabe-kun!?"

"Watanabe-senpai!?"

Itsuki stomped furiously into the room. The two guards that were trying to hold him back only served to slow him down, but not enough to completely stop him. Senkyo, Sora, and Yuu let out surprised voices as they stared dumbfoundedly at his dramatic courtroom break-in.

"Oi! Over there, you bastard! What do you mean you're locking that Shittaku up!? He said the truth, didn't he!? What the hell is there to talk about in here!?"

While still trying to be held back by two guards, and their attempt being embarrassingly useless, Itsuki shouted at Yousuke. Everyone including Yousuke was perplexed by the sudden commotion. After a bit of mental processing, Yousuke signaled the two guards to step back and gave permission to let Itsuki in.

"Watanabe-kun, you said that Yukou-kun told the truth, am I right? Then that means that you saw something that proves him to have Konjou Ryosei's soul inside his body, or are you simply claiming that without any proof whatsoever?"

"Of course, I've seen it! He suddenly changed personalities in front of me! Do you really think this guy is capable of doing something like that!?"

Even though Itsuki was defending Senkyo, Senkyo felt a bit attacked when Itsuki basically said that he wasn't capable of tricking him.

"Oh? Is that so? But even if we assume that he really has Konjou Ryosei's soul inside him, that isn't the only thing keeping him in here, you know?"

"I know, I heard it too. It's that this shorty is a vampire, isn't it?"

Another commotion came from the people sitting at the desks around them. A vampire—a race from Zerid that very rarely appears on Earth. Even in the Konjou clan's history, there have only been about 3 to 5 vampires that appeared in their areas.

Yuu shrunk back behind Senkyo, trying to hide from the furious stares of the Elders. Senkyo placed his arm around Yuu, giving her the comfort of his protection.

"Yeah, I had to beat up a few people before getting all the information, but I got it. And all I have to say to that is... what the fuck is wrong about that!?"

Everyone's attention turned to Itsuki.

"She's just a girl, isn't she? Are you old bastards telling me that you'll kill her just because she's a vampire? Isn't that just racism!? Have any of you even tried talking to the vampires you met? I bet not."

"Watanabe-senpai..."

Yuu peeked out of her hiding for a bit. She gave Itsuki a surprised look and so did Senkyo. They never told Itsuki anything about Yuu being a vampire. At first, they'd thought Itsuki would be too conflicted so they tried to hide that from him, but clearly, that wasn't the case.

"Are you an idiot? If you tried to talk to a vampire, you would get your blood sucked in an instant!"

A person from the Elders cried out.

"It's because of that thinking that they attack in the first place! How about I take a fist to your face and try to knock some sense into you!"

"Why you...!"

"QUIET! ALL OF YOU!"

**97 – Judgement**

Just before everything got any more out of control, Yousuke slammed his fist into the desk. Now that he had everyone’s attention, he proceeded to speak.

“Of the Konjou clan, two people are vouching for Konjou Ryosei’s existence within Yukou Senkyo. If these statements are true, then you would have a way to prove his existence to us. If you fail to do so, then all that side with Yukou Senkyo will receive punishment. No exceptions will be accepted.”

Yousuke faced Kaede as he announced his last line. He was warning her that if she continued down this path and failed, then she would also be punished. However, Kaede did not falter.

Senkyo had to prove Ryosei’s existence but it wasn’t possible to prove him the same way he proved him to Kaede and Sora. He had to give proof of Ryosei to a whole audience at the same time. Fortunately, Senkyo and Ryosei already thought about what to do beforehand. Before they even made contact with the Konjou clan, they thought about this exact moment. It was an inevitable event for him since he required the Konjou clan’s power.

“Alright. Then I’ll leave this to Ryosei.”

Senkyo switched with Ryosei.

"Yo, You-chan. Long time no see. Too bad our first reunion was in this place, huh?"

Ryosei addressed Yousuke in a casual manner like he always did. But he was unimpressed. Yousuke kept quiet without a reaction waiting for that concrete evidence that proved Ryosei’s existence. Such greetings weren’t enough. That was to be expected.

Proceeding further, a plain cloth dropped from Ryosei's back. It was the same cloth that Dai used to constrict him earlier. But this time, the ripples on its surface were nowhere to be seen.

"He disenchanted it!?"

Dai voiced out in a surprised tone. That was because disenchanting was a technique that removes all or specific enchantments on a vessel. It was a mid-level skill that required precision. Disenchanting wasn't as easy as enchanting, depending on the complexity of the enchantment it could either be as easy as untying a shoelace or as hard as trying to untie the Gordian Knot.

Ignoring Dai, Ryosei directed his hand towards Kuro Yaiba. The desk in front of Yousuke began to shake. He turned in front of him and saw the red design on Kuro Yaiba began to glow. Looking at it carefully, Kuro Yaiba was the one making the desk shake. And not a second later, Kuro Yaiba quickly flew through the air and landed directly in Ryosei's hand.

"Then... that means..."

"Yeah... Kuro Yaiba recognizes him as its wielder."

"……"

Everyone in the room was silenced. Everybody in the room knew exactly what that meant.

"Let me reintroduce myself I am Konjou Ryosei. Nice to see you again!"

Everybody was in the middle of processing what was happening in front of them. If they recognize that the boy in front of them was in fact Konjou Ryosei, then they would also be forced to accept that more than one soul was somehow able to be housed in a single body. Before anyone could even finish processing, Yousuke raised his voice.

"Wait! I will recognize that you are chosen by Kuro Yaiba, but there is one more thing that I want to see..."

"Clan chief! Don't you think that's enough? Kuro Yaiba itself recognizes him as its wielder! The only person ever recognized by it was Ryosei-nii-chan!"

Kaede interrupted Yousuke, giving him a share of her thoughts. Yousuke looked understandingly at Kaede.

"I understand what you mean. But I am the clan chief of the Konjou clan. I must take wise action in every decision, especially something major like this one. The fact that the blade, Kuro Yaiba recognizes Yukou Senkyo as its wielder is unmistakable. However, we do not even know whether the blade can choose another wielder or not after the former wielder’s death. As the Konjou clan’s current chief, as well as Konjou Ryosei’s close cousin, I will test you one last time."

Yousuke made a sound argument, but he also revealed that even the Konjou clan didn’t know the true capabilities of the Kuro Yaiba. He determined that it was currently impossible to confirm Ryosei’s existence through Kuro Yaiba’s functions, so he decided to take matters into his own hands.

"You, who claim to be my cousin, Konjou Ryosei, will participate in the upcoming 'Hunter Battle Royale' and take the winning spot. But with an extra hurdle. You and your team will be the main targets of all the other teams. If you fail to do so, I will not recognize you as Konjou Ryosei and punish you for claiming so."

Everyone from the Konjou clan turned in shock. It was something that was never done in the Konjou clan’s history before. Ryosei knew exactly what it meant and understood the difficulty, but he didn’t flinch.

"Is that alright? You know, this body is still Senkyo's. It still can't handle most of my techniques. A test to see my fighting style is useless."

Ryosei said so in a nonchalant tone. He wasn't worried one bit.

"That is fine. After all, this isn't a test of skill, this will be a test of Konjou Ryosei. Surely, if you are truly him, you know what that means, right?"

"You got it!"

Soon after that, the hearing was dismissed with Senkyo and his companions tasked to take on the Hunter Battle Royale.

**Chapter 6: Days of Preparation**

**98 – Hunter Battle Royale**

*\*Ding, dong!\**

"Oh, you're early, Watanabe-san. That's a bit surprising, come in."

Senkyo responded to the doorbell's ring and opened the front door. The person who notified him of their arrival was Itsuki. He had his hands in the front pockets of the orange jacket that he wore yesterday. Itsuki entered the house and was directed by Senkyo to head to the living room as he closed the door behind him. Upon entering the room, Itsuki found Yuu sitting on the sofa with a leisurely expression.

"Ah, you're finally here, Watanabe-senpai."

"Yeah, Ichika wouldn't get off my back so I came early. But..."

Itsuki sat on the seat opposite to Yuu and scrutinized her before continuing what he was about to say.

"Never mind me. If I'm early, then what time did you get here? It's still an hour before we were supposed to meet y’know? Do you live here or somethin’? You don't look nervous at all."

"W-Well, this isn't the first time I came here and Yukou-senpai didn’t mind so I thought I'd come in early."

"That so...?"

Senkyo entered the living room and offered Itsuki some tea but he quickly denied it. He wanted to get straight to the point.

"Never mind that. More importantly, where is that ghost friend of yours?"

"Yeah, he's coming—always impatient, aren't you, Itsuki-san."

Senkyo switched with Ryosei immediately. To everyone else around them, it just looked like he continued talking after a short pause. But it was actually what separated Senkyo and Ryosei from speaking. If it weren’t for how they talk and call other people, no one would be able to tell if it was Senkyo or Ryosei actually speaking.

"No one asked for your opinion."

"Guess so. Well, now that everyone's here, let's begin the meeting. I'd like to explain what the Hunter Battle Royale is..."

The Hunter Battle Royale. It is an annual tradition that the Konjou Clan holds to test their hunters' skills and teamwork. Teams are spread around the mountain and fight each other until only one team remains standing. A team can consist of two to five hunters—a standard party. The last team standingwins.

Participants are given battle gear and spirit weapons as their equipment for the event. Spirit weapons are special weapons crafted by the clan’s blacksmiths. They do not come in contact with physical objects like bodies or swords, but instead, they hit intangible objects like the soul. Hunters can apply the same effect to their weapons by using their spirit power which allows them to fight evil spirits.

The Konjou Clan uses spirit weapons in these kinds of events to avoid injury or accidents. Although one might think that, instead of a physical injury, they'll take some kind of injury to their spirit. But those worries were unfound, as the spirit weapons they provide can only knock someone out at full power. Even if someone were to hack and slash someone a million times with those weapons, they would only end up knocked out and would wake up in a few moments. Once a participant is knocked out, they are eliminated from the battle.

With the arrival of Fighters and Casters, classes that use mana instead of spirit power, special battle gear was given to participants. The battle gear protects the wearer from mana-infused attacks. Battle gear used in the battle royale is much flimsier than official battle gear. Once a participant’s battle gear is destroyed, they are eliminated from the battle.

Aside from surrendering, those two are the only ways to eliminate participants. Judges prepared for the event to watch for any violations. The moment a person violates the rules, they are taken away and disqualified.

A person is chosen as a leader of a party. That person serves as the main hub for the whole team’s communication line. The connect skill is what allows mental communication by connecting one person to another. To relieve strain on inexperienced hunters, party members only connect themselves to the party leader. Every party member can communicate with each other as long as they are connected to the party leader. Of course, it creates more strain on the party leader. When the person everyone is connected to is knocked out or loses focus, the connection line is severed.

There are experienced parties that can connect themselves to each and every member. It creates the same amount of strain on each member, but it allows them to maintain the communication line even if the leader is incapacitated. However, in the battle royale, every party is forced to only connect to the leader. This balances the competition by allowing a way for a party to become disorganized. If a leader is incapacitated, the members are not allowed to reconstruct their communication line.

In this particular battle royale, Yousuke said that Senkyo and the others will be the main targets of every party member. Whichever party eliminates Senkyo and the others first, they will win. If multiple parties contribute to Senkyo’s defeat, they are sent to fight each other in one last death match. Parties have the option of attacking other parties besides Senkyo’s but they do will not win unless they defeat or contributes to Senkyo’s demise.

"So it’s safe to say that everyone will be after us... then Yukou-senpai is going to be the leader, right?"

Yuu seemed to care more about who was going to be the leader than the horde of hunters going after them. But before he could respond, Itsuki cut him off.

"Of course not! I'll be the leader! I'm way stronger than Shittaku."

Yuu's eyebrow twitched a bit, showing the irritation she felt when Itsuki said that about Senkyo. Soon after, a fight began.

"How can you be so arrogant! Yukou-senpai is much smarter and stronger than you think! Actually, you saw how Yukou-senpai fought in the abandoned building, right? How can you say that when you saw him yourself?"

"Shut up, Shorty! That was probably his ghost friend controlling his body. What? Can you tell the difference between the two?"

"Th-There was a difference... you know, when Yukou-senpai..."

As Yuu and Itsuki continued arguing, Senkyo talked with Ryosei.

*"\*Ah... they're at it again. Aren't you going to stop them?\*"*

*"\*Maybe a bit longer. It doesn't seem like they're really fighting anyway.\*"*

*"\*Stop acting cool. You noticed it too, didn't you?\*"*

*"\*How could I not? I can see what you see. Although I can't hear what you're thinking right now, I can still figure this one out myself. Not to mention that I can read your emotions. Hisho-chan and Itsuki-san are finally opening themselves to each other. It looks like your job as a medium isn't going to be needed anymore.\*"*

*"\*Who would've thought things would turn out like this? The person who used to be my bully turned out to be a pretty nice guy with a superiority and sister complex, and the first-ever underclassman I ever talked to is actually a vampire from another world. What's more, is that they've become our teammates who'll fight by our side.\*"*

*"\*You did this, you know? You made a choice that brought this unlikely band of people together.\*"*

*"\*Don't be silly. I'm no protagonist. There's no way my single choice would make this much of a change. I don't control people's lives; they have their own. The reason things ended up like this is because of everyone's choices; not a single person's.\*"*

*"\*It really is like you to say that...\*"*

Ryosei put an end to their conversation along with Yuu and Itsuki’s arguing.

"Alright, alright, it's time to stop. We don't have any more time to waste. Come on, follow me."

"Hm? Where to?"

Yuu questioned Ryosei, speaking for both herself and Itsuki. Ryosei quickly turned around to answer Yuu.

"To a secret base."

**99 – Fragments of Home**

Yuu and Itsuki followed Ryosei, who was taking them to his "secret base." After hearing the word, Itsuki was already trying to guess it, an abandoned building, an abandoned train, an abandoned ship, and even guessed the sewers. Ryosei and Yuu were a bit puzzled about Itsuki's love for abandoned stuff but before long, they decided to ignore him.

Ryosei lead them through town and through a familiar route that they took to get to the Konjou clan. Itsuki, who noticed the familiarity, raised his voice.

"Hey, isn't this the path to the Konjou clan? You remember we aren't allowed there, right?"

Yesterday, it was decided that Senkyo and his whole party are not allowed to enter the Konjou clan until the day of the event. They were told that the Konjou clan wouldn't help Senkyo in training anymore. So right now, they were all on their own. Thankfully, Ryosei already had a backup plan.

"I know that."

"Then why are we here?"

"Just follow me."

"Grr..."

Ryosei refused to explain to Itsuki, which got him a bit annoyed. After reaching the foot of the mountain, instead of their usual route, they immediately went off-road. The three of them weaved through trees and shrubs, taking a route that would be confusing and hard to remember. After reaching a certain point, Ryosei stopped.

"We're here."

Yuu and Ryosei looked around, but there was nothing in sight but trees. Although Itsuki looked a bit confused, Yuu remembered a recent memory that was similar to the situation at hand.

"Could it be that it's hidden by fog again?"

"Correct. There's a strong illusion barrier in front of us. This one is actually stronger than the Konjou clan's barrier."

"It's stronger? Is there something more important through here?"

"...Well, to us, it was."

"...?"

Ryosei walked in front of Yuu and Itsuki and told them to hold onto him. They did as they were told, placed both of their hands on either of Ryosei's shoulders, and walked forward. A thick fog suddenly appeared. A strange feeling welled up inside Yuu and Itsuki to let go and turn around. It was like a sweet voice was urging them to leave the whole mountain entirely.

Ryosei stepped back and supported both Yuu and Itsuki with his arms and forced them to walk forward. After a while, the fog slowly cleared up. Yuu and Itsuki felt a bit drained. They weren't physically tired, but it took a lot of their mental fortitude to get through the fog.

"Th-That didn't feel anything like last time..."

"What the hell...? Are you tryin' to kill us?"

Yuu and Itsuki voiced their thoughts as they tried to catch their breath. It seems like it really did a number on them.

"Far from my intention. I told you, didn't I? This barrier is stronger than the Konjou Clan's."

"No doubt..."

Yuu turned her focus from Ryosei to the space behind him. There, she saw a smashed-up house that looked like it could come crashing down at any moment. It was the same house Senkyo first entered to retrieve Kuro Yaiba. That time in the forest, Ryosei took control of Senkyo's body and came here.

"Whoa, I was right! It's an abandoned house!"

Itsuki shouted in excitement. Ryosei walked in front of Yuu and Itsuki. As if introducing a tourist site, Ryosei raised his arms and presented them to the house.

"Welcome, to my house... or at least what's left of it, hahaha..."

Ryosei laughed awkwardly and scratched the back of his head. He walked towards it while signaling Yuu and Itsuki to follow him. He walked up to the front door and pried the door open.

"Whoa, it's harder to open than last time."

"Um... Ryosei-san, are we really going in there? It seems very unstable."

"Yeah, I don't want to get buried in wood."

Yuu and Itsuki were doubtful about entering. It was only reasonable that they did. The house didn't look like it would last another day. Fortunately, Ryosei reassured them.

"Don't worry, we aren't going inside. I was just testing its condition from last time."

"Last time? You've been here with Yukou-senpai before?"

"Yeah, when I came to get Kuro Yaiba. It's been stored here the whole time so no one else could find it. After all, the barrier around this space was created by my mother, Konjou Reiko, also known as, God's Enchantress."

"God's Enwhatsit? What's that?"

Answering Itsuki's question, Ryosei explained.

"My mother, The God's Enchantress, is the one who created the Konjou clan's illusion barrier. She was a prodigy of enchanting. She could make incredibly complex and intricate enchantments that baffled the whole clan. At first, we hid in the mountains without the illusion barrier. But when my mom saw that as a problem, she holed up in her research room for almost a month and created the barrier. She was an incredibly talented hunter and a loving mother..."

For a few seconds, Yuu and Itsuki remained silent as Ryosei reminisced about the past. Ryosei explained how after planning this out with her husband, Reiko created an illusion barrier much more powerful than the original one that surrounded the clan. The barrier was so potent that even an experienced hunter wouldn’t even notice. No one but Ryosei and his parents knew about this place.

They used it as a kind of home away from home. Here, they trained and spent time with each other as a family, out of reach from the responsibilities of the clan. Ryosei valued this place deeply. Putting his feelings aside, he explained the reason why he brought them there.

**100 – Gruesome Week**

"In here, all five of us will train for the upcoming event."

"Five? There's only three of us here."

Itsuki says so as he counts everyone present. But, he neglected to count the ones that weren't in a physical form.

"Have you already forgotten that Ryosei-san and Shiro-san live inside of Yukou-senpai, Watanabe-senpai?

"...Oh yeah, now that you mention it, I forgot that was a thing. Well, it's their fault for being ghosts."

"Shiro isn't a ghost!"

A voice coming from Senkyo's body reached everyone's ears. Senkyo’s voice doesn’t change despite who was in control of the body. But this one was completely different. That was because it wasn't Senkyo's, it was his familiar, Shiro.

A bright light came out of Senkyo's chest and formed the shape of a girl with cat ears and a tail in front of everyone. The light slowly dissipated and revealed Shiro. She was in the outfit she usually wore, a white robe with cat ear pockets, brown shorts, knee-high socks, and a choker. She wore a pouting face as she stared at Itsuki.

"Shiro isn't a ghost, she's a familiar. So stop calling her that!"

"Whoa, what!?"

Itsuki took a step back when he saw Shiro's sudden appearance. Yuu, however, didn't seem fazed. In fact, Yuu stared at Shiro with a bit of an intrigued look. Yuu took a step closer to Shiro and scrutinized her.

"Wow... this is the first time I've actually seen a familiar manifest from their owner, what's more, is that she can manifest by herself, why is that? I heard that familiars can only be summoned if they're told by their masters but she just came out of her own."

"Fufufu! amazing, isn't it? This is because of Onii-chan's order!"

"Yukou-senpai's order...?"

Wondering just what kind of order that was, Yuu stared at Senkyo with a querying look. Senkyo, who didn't see a reason to hide the fact, told her what it was. Ryosei switched with Senkyo to answer her properly.

"It was when we first met in my dream. Shiro kept calling me 'Master,' and I became a bit uncomfortable, so I told her to have her own free will and not be restricted by the pact or any kind of magic."

"Whoa... I never knew you could order your familiar like that."

"Yeah, well, because of that, the moment I got back home from the first time we returned from the Konjou clan, she suddenly showed up and jumped me. It happens a few times too but I don't really mind, so I guess it's fine."

"I see..."

Yuu gazed at Shiro with even more curiosity than before. Meanwhile, on Shiro's side, although she boasted about Senkyo earlier, she slowly became a bit uncomfortable and slowly backed up. Getting the conversation back on track, Ryosei took back control and got everyone's attention.

"Okay, back to what we were talking about. The five of us are going to train here for the Hunter Battle Royale. Although, each of us have our own power, but as a team... no, I take it back. Even as a team, we don't have enough knowledge and skill to confidently fend everyone off."

Ryosei began to point out everyone's strengths and weaknesses. He pointed at each person as he called out their name.

"Hisho-chan, although you're powerful with magic, have you ever thought about close combat?"

"No... that didn't really cross my mind. I tried melee combat before, but I can't say I'm good at it."

"Itsuki-san, you've been doing well on Dai's training, but as of right now, you're still a beginner. You still lack experience."

"You don't have to tell me."

"Shiro, you're a great healer and supported us the whole time, not to be mean or anything, but that's as far as you can do. In terms of combat, you're useless."

"Nnn~ Shiro knows that, but she doesn't like it when you say that in Onii-chan's body..."

"And as for me and Senkyo, we lack coordination. We will probably be able to use both Senkyo's enchanter abilities and my fighter abilities at the same time, but we are nowhere near used to that. In fact, we haven't even tried it."

"Don't you think you're forgetting something?"

Shiro peered questionably at Ryosei as she asked that.

"Hm? What do you mean?"

"Figures you don't remember. That time when that grumpy guy with the sword shot a light beam at you. You didn't have to dodge that, you know? Shiro could have just protected you with a barrier."

Ryosei searched his recent memories, looking for someone with the definition of a "grumpy guy with a sword," and came out with Touma. That time, Ryosei dodged his light beam in a panic, causing him to give Touma a huge opening.

"Oh... I see."

When Ryosei thought about it carefully, Shiro's barrier managed to fend off even Fulgur, The Lightning Leader's attacks. Compared to that, the light beam would've been absolutely nothing.

"That's my bad. Then, coordination training between the three of us would also be needed."

"You bet! Onii-chan and Shiro will always be together—U-Uwaah!!"

As Shiro was puffing her chest out with confidence, she was pushed away to the side by Itsuki.

"W-What was that for, you brute!?"

"Shut up, Furball."

"Why you..."

Itsuki ignored Shiro's menacing gaze and faced Ryosei.

"Well, how do you plan on training us and filling up these gaps?"

"Senkyo will be the one explaining to you that."

Ryosei gave the control back to Senkyo. Although it looked like nothing changed for everyone else.

"Is everybody listening?"

Senkyo surveyed the three people in front of him and received silent nods from everyone, affirming their correspondence.

“The objective given to is the test of Konjou Ryosei, which means—to surpass expectations. And to do that, I need all of you to do the same. Here's my plan. First, Yuu will..."

After a lengthy talking, Senkyo gave everyone their training plan. Since they only had a week to use, they had to fit as much practice as possible in that one week. After that meeting, began the gruesome week of training that Senkyo and the others had to face.

For the first three days, each day they invested their time in training individuals. On times when someone had nothing they could do to help train another person, they would train on their own, or have someone else that was available to help them.

For that Sunday, it was settled that they would train Yuu and Shiro for their melee combat. Ryosei, Senkyo, and Itsuki taught them all about the basics of what they knew. Itsuki taught them about hand-to-hand combat, while Ryosei taught them how to fight with weapons, specifically a sword. Surprisingly, Itsuki had a history with karate which made it a valuable lesson for both girls and even for Senkyo who was watching from the side.

This was done all the while training Itsuki's combat skills. Ryosei trained Itsuki’s combat skills in times when Yuu and Shiro fought one-on-one. Meanwhile, Senkyo and Ryosei would try and practice switching and reacting to each other’s actions.

On the next day, they focused to train Itsuki. Ryosei had tested Itsuki's limits from the other day and decided on how to teach him the secret art that he never wrote in text when he was alive.

Ryosei only shared this technique with one other person, but they swore that they would never teach their technique to anyone unless they had his permission. So they had no problems having someone else use it on the day of the battle.

While that was happening, Yuu and Shiro taught each other and shared each other's knowledge about magic and how they used it. Yuu taught Shiro about how and when to cast combat magic and how to fight with it. On the other hand, Shiro taught Yuu about how to create stronger, wider, barriers and healing as well as other support magic. This included the distance at which the barrier could be cast.

On the day after that, it was Senkyo and Ryosei's time to train. They tested just how fast they could react the moment they switched with the other. They aimed to better their coordination and unlock amazing combos.

They later had Shiro train with them and try to see to what extent they could combine all their skills. While that was happening, Yuu was helping Itsuki out on the missions Ryosei sent him out to do.

And finally, the last four days would be used to train how they fight together as a team and their strategy on how to win the Hunter Battle Royale. One of the practices they did was allowing everyone to suddenly attack anyone in the team and enter battle.

Breaks and being in public were an exception, but other than that, any time of the day someone was allowed to sneak attack someone else.

On one of the times, Itsuki would suddenly use his secret arts and attack Senkyo. This would enhance their combat instincts and others' presence. They would make themselves used to sneak attacks, helping them reduce the chances that they would get snuck on themselves on the day of the battle. Senkyo particularly struggled with this one since Itsuki would always have his eye on him. And worse yet, Ryosei wasn’t willing to help him, so he received more than just a few beatdowns.

After having various experiences and situations handed to them, they finally reached the fourth day of their training week. Wednesday. Senkyo, Ryosei, Shiro, Yuu, and Itsuki finally finished yesterday's individual training. During the school days, there was training they could do while in class, so they used that to their advantage. And after class, they headed straight for Ryosei's hidden house on the mountain.

Unlike when they trained in the Konjou clan, they didn't have any teleportation points set up, so they had to walk every day there. Fortunately, Ryosei's home wasn't too high up the mountain, and took them only sometime over 30 minutes to get from school to Ryosei's house.

**101 – In-Class Training**

And now, the rise of a new day finally came. The end of their three-day individual/pairs training, and the start of their team training. Senkyo was heading out of his house with the usual shinai bag on his shoulder. As he was walking, he saw Kinro walking ahead of him, on his way to school. To pay him back for what he usually does, Senkyo snuck behind Kinro's back and gave him a light tap.

"Yo! Good morning."

"Whoa!? O-Oh, Senkyo, good morning. You surprised me there..."

Kinro didn't know, but Senkyo was over 20 meters away from him. To get to him, Senkyo went to a run, but he didn't make the slightest sound. Like a predator hunting down its prey, or an assassin committing their deed, Senkyo tapped Kinro's back with no trace of his presence, making it all the more surprising.

In the small cervices of free time the five of them had, Ryosei was able to give them some extracurricular activities and taught them a simple trick to move fast but silently. They had a hard time at first, but it was obvious they trained in their free time. Because yesterday, everyone was able to use that skill properly.

Silent Blows. It uses a small amount of spirit power to create a sound barrier around a point of contact. It traps the sound inside the barrier, preventing it from reaching anyone’s ears.

"That's payback for last time."

"Is that so? Then I'll pay you back tenfold next time."

"We'll see if you can try."

Kinro gave Senkyo a rueful smile. He thought about how he was about to get a heart attack from that. Senkyo and Kinro headed to school together, having their usual exchange and catching up with each other.

The two of them reached the classroom and put down their bags. Senkyo looked beside him over to Yukai, who he greeted when he first arrived. Over the past few days, up until today, Senkyo noticed that she was a bit troubled. It was written all over her face but Senkyo never brought it up. She kept her head down on the desk and kept moving around restlessly.

Yukai looked over to Senkyo and immediately averted her eyes. Seeing as he most likely had something to do with her current behavior, Senkyo prompted to talk to Yukai.

"Um, Yutei-san? Is there something you want to talk about? You've been acting weird these past few days."

"Wh-What do you mean? I don't have anything to talk about..."

Yukai said so all the while having the back of her head turned to Senkyo.

*"\*I definitely did something...\*"*

*"\*Way to go, Shittaku.\*"*

Senkyo looked over to Itsuki who was staring at him from his seat. His mouth didn't open and he didn't speak, but Senkyo heard his voice loud and clear.

Even after how many times Senkyo pestered Yukai about what was wrong with her, she refused to answer. Resigned to the fact, Senkyo stepped back and left her alone. But not without saying a few parting words.

"If you want to talk about it, just call me. I'll listen to what you have to say."

As Senkyo backed up, without him seeing, Yukai took a sneaky glance at Senkyo. After that, nothing else happened and the teacher entered the classroom and began class.

"Okay, as you can see here. You can apply the formula and finally..."

In the middle of class, Senkyo was listening to the lesson the teacher was teaching. He had a notebook in front of him, but he showed no signs of writing on it. Just as he was immersing himself in the teacher's lesson, he heard Itsuki's voice come out of nowhere.

*"\*Hey, Shittaku! What the hell is this guy saying?\*"*

*"\*He's teaching the lesson, what about it?\*"*

*"\*That's not what I meant! Answer me seriously before I come over there and beat you into a pulp!\*"*

*"\*I got it, I got it. Just stop shouting in my mind.\*"*

This mysterious exchange inside Senkyo's head was a part of their training. Right now, Senkyo and Itsuki were communicating through the Connect skill. To have better communication in battle, they began using the Connect skill since the start of the week. They used it for trivial and mostly useless things, but the fact that they kept using it and were getting accustomed to it was great. Even though right now, Senkyo was being threatened through mind-talk, he still considered this to be progress.

As Senkyo finished explaining the lesson to Itsuki though Connect, another person joined the line. Yuu, who wasn't even present in the room, was able to Connect and talk with Senkyo, despite being one floor below them.

*"\*U-Um... Sorry to bother you, Yukou-senpai, but what does...\*"*

At first, Yuu and Shiro had trouble using Connect since they had mana inside them. Although their spirit power wasn't non-existent, they had a hard time drawing it out. But eventually, both of them learned how to use it. Senkyo and Itsuki were connected to everyone else in the party to get used to Connect but Yuu and Shiro were only connected to Senkyo since they had very low spirit power.

One question came after another, and Senkyo answered all of them, free of annoyance. In fact, it seemed that he was enjoying it a bit. Just as the three were talking through Connect, the teacher called Senkyo out to answer the question he just asked.

*"\*Ah... Heh, now you've done it.\*"*

Itsuki said so in the despair that surrounded the situation. Senkyo was in the middle of explaining lessons to both Itsuki and Yuu, he was the only one talking while the other two were only listening. Unfortunately, even Itsuki, who was just listening, didn't even hear the question asked. Compare to Senkyo, who was explaining everything, there was no way he would be able to answer.

However, contradictory to that, Senkyo stood up calmly and answered the question. It was then followed by a "correct" from the teacher and allowed him to sit back down. Itsuki, who watched the whole thing happen, was in shock. He was convinced that Senkyo wouldn't have heard that.

Although it wasn't his intention to sabotage Senkyo, Itsuki was surprised by the attentiveness Senkyo had. After a few seconds, Itsuki's name was called out by the teacher. But, unlike Senkyo, he didn't have the same inhuman communication skills Senkyo possessed. Luckily for Itsuki, there was a certain person who could communicate with him through his mind and was an incredibly good listener.

*"\*The question was...\*"*

Senkyo retold the question to Itsuki and saved his ass.

*\*I swear, that Shittaku sure is weird.\**

Itsuki didn't send that message through Connect but was in his own thoughts. His thoughts contained no negative meaning, instead, it was something more along the lines of amazement.

After school, different from all the other days so far, Senkyo, Yuu, and Itsuki didn't go straight to Ryosei's house. Instead, all three of them were inside an empty classroom. Senkyo and Itsuki were sitting in their usual seats, while Yuu was behind the teacher's desk in front of the classroom.

"Uhm, Yukou-senpai, are you sure no one is going to come in here? It's still pretty early out, and some students might come back."

"Don't worry, Hisho-chan. Ryosei put up a spirit barrier that repels everyone we don’t want to come here. We’ll be fine."

Senkyo said that so confidently that Yuu got the impression that he knew what he was doing. Although she felt nothing was different, She didn't know much about spirit power to even be able to tell.

"Okay, Shiro-chan, come out."

"Here!"

Yuu called out to Shiro, and she responded with a bright light coming out of Senkyo's chest and manifested right beside Yuu.

"Hm... 'Shiro-chan,' huh? It looks like you two got close."

Senkyo said so in response to hearing how Yuu familiarly addressed Shiro.

"Yeah, Yuu-chan and Shiro got along perfectly!"

"W-Well, things happened and..."

Yuu averted her eyes as Shiro addressed her. Her face was tinged with the slight color of red and she began to fidget slightly. It looks like Yuu wasn't used to being addressed in such a familiar way. But despite that, she didn't look like she hated it. Having that extra topic pass, Yuu regained her composure and began the lesson.

"Now, let's begin the magic lesson!"

Right now, Yuu and Shiro were explaining the basic knowledge about magic to Senkyo and Itsuki. Today was the day that they would finally broaden their knowledge of magic. To have a good idea of what their teammates and enemies could bring out, Senkyo and Itsuki needed to learn, at the very least the basics of magic.

Although Ryosei was a fighter class when he was alive, no one was there to properly teach magic. He only survived by using abilities his grandfather taught him and creating his own techniques with them. But if they finally get a good look at it, they might be able to become even stronger.

Yuu may have explained to Senkyo magic briefly in the past, but this time they were going in depth. Senkyo, Ryosei, and Itsuki listened carefully to what the two girls in front of them were saying.

**102 – Magic Lesson**

Magic doesn't just happen. By using the mana stored in your body or in a spectral, you are actually releasing it to the space near you. The range someone can cast mana to is dependent on the caster’s skill. Some can have short ranges while some have long. By having mana around you, it creates the phenomenon called Element Ingression. It is what allows the person who released the mana to be able to use the power of the 11 elements. In addition, the caster of the magic cannot be hurt by the magic created from their own mana.

Magic and elements are two different things. The elements are the base of all magic. They are not magic itself, but magic cannot be made without the elements. Magic is a phenomenon derived from the element ingression. There are many types of magic, some of them are fire magic, wind magic, and teleportation magic.

There are 11 basic elements of magic. All these elements branch out and create more magic. The basic elements that magic comes from are fire, water, nature, earth, lightning, freeze, light, dark, blood, control, and null.

Magic enables the ability to control, create, and shape elements or, in other words, absolute control over the element. By using mana, you will receive temporary control over the chosen element/s. Proportional to the amount of mana you use, you will receive access to any of the 11 elements.

The fire element. It is the one that controls fire and hot temperatures. It is mostly an offensive element, but can still be used for other subjects outside of offensive combat.

The water element. It is the one that controls water and its properties. It has the unique ability to change the type of water. For example, one can use the water element to turn freshwater into seawater, or vice versa.

The nature element. It is the one that controls the plants and the wind. It can be used to better crops or enhance the movement speed. However, it is rumored that, in the past, the nature element had the power to control more than just plants and wind.

The earth element. It is the one that controls the solid surface of the earth like rocks and dirt. With a higher skill, the earth element can not only lift the earth from the ground but it can also be used to appraise unknown ores and other secret arts hidden within its magic.

The lightning element. It is the one that controls lightning and its origin. Unlike how lightning usually occurs, this element allows you to create lighting in the palm of your hand. But in a deeper sense, the user is allowed to tamper with what causes lightning to occur.

The freeze element. It is the one that controls freezing temperatures, ice, and snow. This magic allows the user to create snow and ice. Additionally, they can set the temperature in a certain area down.

The light element. It is the one that controls holy blessings, sight, and light waves. It can make dangerous lasers but also serve as a blessing from god. It can also be used as simple illumination, like a ball of light that follows you around as well as deceit by manipulating the light others see.

The dark element. It is the one that controls the shadows, dark powers, and emptiness. This magic can erase existences and control natural forces. Usually used for nullifying light illusions or controlling gravity. It has various applications that are similar to the light element but can differ greatly depending on the situation.

The blood element. Unlike all the other elements, this element is an exclusive power. It means, that only a specific group of people can use this element, namely, vampires.

This is because the element not only uses mana but blood along with it. The amount of blood it uses is beyond what a normal being can handle, which is why, vampires, the beings that have a huge amount of blood in their bodies compared to other beings, are the only ones that can use it. Of course, anyone else is free to try but if they don't have enough blood, it could cost them their life.

This element allows control over the user's own blood. It does not create blood but utilizes the user’s own blood instead. Vampires can summon their blood from their bodies and shape it in any way they want.

The control element. It is the one that controls one's health. This element can cast curses, poison, and many more kinds of afflictions, but it can also cure, heal, give boosts, and many more affects that can positively affect one's health.

And finally, the last element, the null element. It is magic that can be modified by other elements. A few examples are barriers and teleportation magic. They don't have a specific element, but magic like barriers can be mixed with other elements to enhance protection against certain elements, but can also reduce protection against other elements. An example of that is a fire barrier which increases protection against the nature element but is vulnerable to water and earth elements.

Spells are what shape the mana into magic. They are separated into two phases: the chant phase and the cast phase. The chant phase is the part where the caster uses words from a chant to arrange the mana in a way that releases the desired elements. While the cast phase is the part at the end of a chant. It mentions the magic spell's name and makes mana undergo element ingression, creating magic. Only when these two phases are successfully executed, a magic spell is cast, albeit with a few exceptions.

Magic spells are categorized into three groups based on the amount of mana needed and how hard they are to cast.

The first category is called the low-tier spells. Spells that can be cast without the chant phase and are usually easily overpowered. Although they are low-tier, it does not mean they are useless. A simple fireball spell is still capable of burning someone alive.

The next category is called the mid-tier spells. Most of these spells require a chant. These spells are what people tend to use in battle because of the reasonable mana cost and powerful outputs.

The last category is called the high-tier spells. Some of these spells not only require a chant, but are also required to be cast multiple times, changing positions, and other tedious requirements. These spells are mostly used as a to assault from afar or as a last resort, as some of these spells can drain someone's entire mana pool.

With that, ended Yuu and Shiro's lesson about magic. Almost two hours had passed since the start of their lesson. Just before she left it there, Yuu asked her students for any clarifications that were needed.

"That would be all. Are there any questions?"

Yuu presents the question to Senkyo and Itsuki. Senkyo raised his voice.

"Does magic get canceled when it comes in contact with someone else's magic?"

"Magic could be canceled, but that depends on which one has more mana in it. Generally, when magic collides, the one with more mana wins. If they have even power, then the magic would just clash and disappear. Some exceptions happen when the magic with lower mana has the elemental advantage. For example, if fire was put against water, even if it has slightly more mana than the other, the water would win out in the end."

"I see, thanks."

"Then, if that's all..."

That was the only question that was brought up for the entire lesson. Although Senkyo understood, he had his doubts about Itsuki as his face was twisted with a plethora of emotions. He thought about talking to him about it later. As Senkyo and Itsuki got up and were about to leave, they heard a bump on the door, and a high-pitched "Ouch!" come with it.

"Who's there!?"

Itsuki shouted to the person on the other side of the door. Senkyo hurried to the door and opened it, but there was no one there. Senkyo searched the hallway and saw nothing but emptiness.

“U-Uhmm… Yukou-senpai?”

Yuu called Senkyo from behind him. He slowly turned his head behind him and showed his grim face. Yuu, who looked like she just saw a ghost, knew exactly what was on Senkyo's mind.

*"\*R-Ryosei!? N-No one should’ve been able to enter, right!?\*"*

*“\*W-Wha… Huh? Ah, it must be someone from the Konjou clan. Maybe Sora! The barrier can repel normal people but people like hunters can break in.\*”*

Ryosei was speechless. For a second, he couldn’t believe what just happened. But he quickly regained his composure after thinking of a reasonable explanation.

"R-Ryosei says that it was probably Sora. They can get through be barrier by destroying it."

"Is that so…? Then there shouldn’t be anything to worry about, right? We didn’t talk about strategy or anything."

“Yeah, you’re right. We should go now. We still have things to do.”

“Okay.”

Senkyo and the others continued to Ryosei's house and proceeded with training. They were alert and constantly checking their surroundings but they didn’t find anyone.

**103 – Aging Curse**

On Friday, when Senkyo and the others were about to head to their usual training spot, they were intercepted by Sora.

"Hey, Yukou-kun, could we talk? Ah, it's fine if you two want to listen as well. This won't take long."

An unexpected occurrence. The last time Senkyo had a talk with Sora was at the Konjou clan, the day when they found out about Kuro Yaiba. When Senkyo was in class, Sora purposely avoided him, but now he suddenly decided to talk. It was only natural that Senkyo, along with Yuu and Itsuki were surprised.

After securing a quiet place to talk, Senkyo, Yuu, and Itsuki listened to what Sora wanted to say.

"Actually, what I wanted to talk about was Touma-kun,"

Senkyo recalled as the last time he saw Touma was the time he tried to kill him. They weren't pleasant memories, but he remembers them nonetheless.

"Yeah, he went on a bit of a rampage. What was that about?"

"There's a reason why he acted like that. You see..."

Sora told them about his past with Touma. They were childhood friends that lived just next to each other's homes. Unlike how Touma was now, he was a cheerful and energetic kid, always having fun with Sora. They played together, fooling around, and went to the same school.

Because of their closeness, both their parents were contaminated by their friendship. One day, when both of their families were having a party together, a rampaging demon burst through their front door and sent everyone into a panic.

Later on, a group of hunters finally came by and killed the demon. Unfortunately, both Sora and Touma's parents met a gruesome fate. When the hunters were about to take their leave, two kids came running down the stairs and saw what had happened to their parents.

The hunters, who couldn't just abandon the kids, took them to the Konjou clan. After a few years, Sora had put the past behind him and moved on. Touma, however, still harbored a few feelings about it.

"His parents were always quick to make promises to him. Things like what they would buy for him, where they would travel, and how they would spend their time in the future. But at the time of the party, I promised him that I’d always be his ally and stayed with him when we heard the commotion happen downstairs. After we found out that our parents died, he knew that none of those promises would ever come true. I kept my promise until just recently, but when he found me siding with you the other day, it must’ve come through to him as a betrayal. Although that usually wouldn’t be enough to rattle a normal person, Touma-kun is emotionally unstable… severely.”

"Was he always like that or was it just a sort of trauma?"

Sora responded in return by shaking his head from side to side.

"No, that was just the seed that caused him to become like that. After we became official hunters, on a certain mission we were teamed up with another person, his name was Higuchi Daiki."

**............**

"Higuchi-san, are you alright!?"

"Y-Yeah, just a slight wound."

Touma worriedly assisted Daiki. Sora, who was covering the wound on his left shoulder, sighed in relief as he saw that his two team members were okay.

All three of them were inside the Spirit Realm. They were in their black combat gear, wounded, but still breathing. There were no other enemies around them, as Touma defeated the last one.

"D-Damn, I've never fought a Dehin like that before. That guy was strong."

"Yeah, even his minions were freaky."

"Yeah... incredibly."

Daiki voiced his complaints as Touma helped him up off the ground. Using the force Higuchi was assisted with as he stood, a sharp object pierced through Touma's stomach.

"...Huh?"

Touma looked below him where he saw Daiki's hand had turned into a purple spike and was going through his stomach.

"Touma-kun!?"

Sora screamed and hurriedly ran towards them.

"HIGUCHI-KUN!? WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING!?"

"Ha? Stay out of this."

Daiki raised his arm and a wave of sound pushed Sora away, smashing him into the wall behind him. Daiki brought his focus back to Touma.

"Wh-Why... are you doing this?"

"HAHAHA!! Why? Why wouldn't I? That Dehin promised me paradise at their castle! Why would I want to stick in this shitty world if there's a better one right through a portal?"

"Y-You... bastard!"

"Shut up. I would kill you right now, but that Dehin was really interested in you for some stupid reason. If I do this, I'll get my pass to paradise. No hard feelings, okay? HAHAHA!!"

Daiki placed his free hand which was glowing purple on Touma's face. Veins of black coursed through Daiki's hand, and onto Touma's face. The dark veins spread. A scream of pain and agony came out of Touma's mouth. The veins accumulated around Touma's right eye until it became completely black. Then...

"AAAHHHHHHH!!!!"

Touma's right eye exploded, blood running down Daiki's hand. All the while, Daiki looked like he was enjoying everything. The tips of his lips almost reached the edge of his ears as he laughed maniacally.

"What did they call you two? 'The Yin and Yang of the Konjou clan?' HAHAHA! Let's see how tenacious the Yin actually is, shall we?"

"G-GAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!"

**104 – Sora’s Request**

"When I regained my consciousness, it was already too late. Higuchi had left and Touma-kun was severely injured..."

Sora clenched his fists, holding back the emotions he felt when he recalled the memory.

"After that, the Konjou clan's doctors were able to save him somehow. It was a one-time operation that could never be done again. They replaced Touma-kun's right eye with a spectral that could be used as a means of vision. But there was one thing that the doctors couldn't cure, the curse that Higuchi put Touma-kun in."

"A curse?"

Ryosei had no memory of what the being he called a Dehin. Which meant that it only showed up within the past seven years.

"Yeah, a Dehin is one of the beings from Zerid. They are mind-controlling demons that can turn you into his minion or put a curse on you. Since that day, Touma-kun completely changed. That curse... it fed the hatred in Touma-kun's heart and soon enough, turned Touma-kun into what you saw last week. The most frustrating part was… I couldn’t do anything to help him! It was only a matter of time until the curse completely consumed him… I tried to act how I usually did around him saying it would be what he wanted, but in reality, it was just my pathetic attempt to run away from the truth!"

The three of them, who were listening to Sora's story, all showed unpleasant looks. Even though he knew it was a useless question, Senkyo asked anyway.

"Even after all this time they still haven’t found a cure?"

Sora shook his head from side to side.

"No, unfortunately, we don't know that much about magic. Our researchers have yet to find one."

“I see…”

Senkyo went silent. After a deep breath, Sora raised his voice.

“T-That’s why… Yukou-kun, I have a request!”

After saying all that, Sora took his leave but made a request to Senkyo just before he left. The day continued, and the three of them went off to do their training. When night came, and everyone went back to their houses, Senkyo was laying on the bed and thinking about what Sora said that afternoon.

"*'\*If you can do anything about it… Please save Touma-kun!\*'* huh? Geez, you really care about him, don't you?"

Senkyo pondered in his room in silence. He closed his eyes, trying to get a clear image of what he should do. It wasn't his business to butt in, but at the same time, he felt like leaving them like that was a bad idea.

The only reason Sora asked for Senkyo’s help was most likely because of the impossible feats he’s achieved. He was hoping that the person who took down a Leader alone, and the person who was able to revive a legend by housing two souls in his body would be able to perform another miracle to save his friend. All of a sudden, a voice came from Senkyo's head. It was Shiro.

*"\*Um, Onii-chan, are you still thinking about what that ponytail boy said?\*"*

"Yeah, something like that."

*"\*If you want to, Shiro knows of a way to cure a Dehin's curse.\*"*

Senkyo jumped out of his bed in surprise at what Shiro said.

"Really!?"

*"\*Yeah! If it's helpful to Onii-chan, Shiro will tell you!\*"*

**…………**

Deep within the forest of the mountain, unbeknown to the people of the Konjou clan, a lone boy walked through the forest under the heavy rain of the night. He didn't take cover or showed any signs of doing so. Cold and alone, he walked aimlessly.

*\*Why... Why. Why. Why. Why. Why!! Everyone is a traitor... No one can be trusted. No one! No one! No one! No one!!\**

The boy fell to his knees and clenched his head with both of his hands. He was shaking. It may have been because of the rain that he was mercilessly bombarded with, or perhaps something else.

Drops of water dripped from the tip of his white hair. His eyes were devoid of life. His mouth was twisted, showing the suffering he was currently in. He was lost, in every sense of the word. He knew not what to do and what he should do. In the middle of his internal suffering, an ominous voice echoed in his mind.

*"\*Do you want to take revenge?\*"*

*"\*Revenge...? On who?\*"*

*"\*Revenge on all of the people that betrayed you, and the people who caused them to betray you. Take revenge for all the suffering they made you go through!\*"*

*"\*That's... but, I am too weak. There's no way...\*"*

*"\*Do not fret, little one. I will share with you my power, and you shalt take your revenge! Channel your anger, your fear, your hatred, your jealousy, your everything! My power will let it take shape! Now, channel it, manifest it!\*"*

*"\*My... hatred... yes, my hatred!\*"*

The boy's body began to emit a purple aura. It got thicker and thicker, his body, shaking even more so than before. He screamed through the empty forest, letting out all his negative emotions.

All of the sudden, the purple aura surrounding him burst. The raindrops that bombarded him, disappeared before they could make contact. The area around the boy became a safe haven from the raindrops' volley.

The boy slowly stood up. But now, he was different. Black veins covered his body, but it was much worse around his right eye. His body was no longer shaking, but instead, it seethed with hatred.

The boy approached a nearby tree. He took out his arm and swung it right through the tree. With a loud crash as the tree fell down, revealed that the boy's arm was no longer an arm, and was now a purple axe.

"Power... Revenge... Power…! Revenge…!! I WILL TAKE MY REVENGE ON THIS PITIFUL WORLD!!!"

A small purple light illuminated the dark forest, but unlike light in the dark, an even darker force lay within. He became unable to properly express his words. The ominous dark clouds that covered the sky and the rain that became even more powerful than before brewed a bad omen for the upcoming days.

**Chapter 7: The Hunter Battle Royale**

**105 – Day of the Battle Royale**

Sunday. The day of the Hunter Battle Royale. The weather was clear, and the sun shined upon everyone. The Konjou clan's town square was filled to the brim with spectators. They were gathering around the stage with a tall tower in the middle that had four huge screens attached to it. Some watched from far away even as far as their houses. They cheered, showing their anticipation for the upcoming event.

A man in a hunter's combat suit with a mask came up to the stage and took the mic. It was the announcer and commentator of the event. He riled up the crowd even more before he began his speech.

"People of the Konjou clan, are you ready to witness exciting and thrilling battles?"

"Yeah!!"

"Do you want to see the clan's hunters show their skill on the fiery battlefield!?"

"Yeah!!"

"Then look no further, for the 47th annual Hunter Battle Royale is going to be even more amazing than all the others! For in this battle royale, one of the participating teams has been said to have defeated a leader of our lifetime enemy, the infamous, EEEEEEEEEND!"

"Wh-What!?"

"What did he say...?"

"Someone defeated a leader!?"

From deafening cheers to puzzled stares, everyone in the crowd was in disbelief at what the announcer had said. The crowd began to gossip amongst themselves trying to make of the situation. But before they could even process anything, the announcer topped it off with another unbelievable statement.

"Not only that, this team's leader has not only one person inside him but two! It has been said that the soul of the Konjou Clan's Delinquent Prodigy, Konjou Ryosei, lives inside the leader's body! Because if that, this battle will only end once they fall!"

"Seriously...?"

"Now that's just absurd!"

"How are we supposed to believe that!?"

Just before the crowd was about to be thrown into chaos, the announcer skillfully takes their attention and controlled the situation. The announcer took the mic closer to his mouth and shouted at it as loud as he could.

"THAT'S RIGHT!! Even I don't know if I should believe this! That's why, how about we decide that for ourselves! Don't be fooled, they may look like a team of three, but including the Delinquent Prodigy, they are actually a team of five! Try and see through their secrets as they fight in battle, I present to you, the unfathomable team, Team Senkyo!!"

All four screens showed Senkyo, Yuu, and Itsuki, standing by and waiting for the start of the event. The crowd's gossip became louder and louder, everyone, scrutinizing the three people that were shown on the screen.

“Is everyone ready?”

Senkyo asked as he looked over at Yuu and Itsuki.

“Yep!”

“Ready to beat their asses!”

Yuu and Itsuki responded enthusiastically to Senkyo.

“You all know the plan, right? Everyone just follow the plan and we can win this. Tell me if anything goes wrong through Connect. We all trained for this so just show them what we can do! Good luck.”

A loud gong resounded over the distance. It was the signal that the battle has begun.

Inside the mountain, the place where instead of the sun, the crystal waters illuminated the area, the judges of the event sat inside the room where Senkyo had his hearing. There were five screens presented in front of them, but instead of being around a tower, all of them were attached to a wall, four of them forming a bigger square, and one screen separate from the others.

One of the screens in the group of four showed the same screens that were being broadcasted at the town square. It was a live feed, but oddly enough, it was a glass pane with no electrical connections to it. The same applied to the screens at the town square.

"It looks like everything is going as expected. Sorry for having you do this every year, Kaede."

"Don't worry about it, Nii—Clan chief. I'm used to it already."

“There shouldn’t be a problem calling me like you usually do with the people here.”

“Thanks, Nii-chan…”

In the middle of the room, Kaede was standing on top of a glowing magic circle. Her hands were clasped together and her eyes closed shut. There were a few particles that were constantly floating from the circle. She stayed like that, unmoving.

There were five judges for the event, but only four people were present in the room, Kaede included. The first judge, Konjou Yousuke, the clan chief, was looking a bit perturbed as he gazed at his sister in the middle of the room.

"You don't have to worry, Clan chief, your sister is more capable than you think."

The second judge, Yamazaki Dai, reassured Yousuke of his simple plight. Then, the lone screen separate from the others turned on and showed a figure of a woman sitting in front of them. The room was a bit dark, making it hard to make out her face.

"Oh, Freda-sama, you're finally here."

"Yes, I'm sorry I can't make it there. There were a few things I had to take care of over here."

"It's completely fine, Freda-sama. We all know how hard your work is."

"Thank you for understanding."

The third judge, Freda, a mysterious woman that appeared in the clan within the past seven years that Ryosei was gone. After Yousuke had his exchange with her, the door flew open, and came in a young woman hurling toward Yousuke. Part of her hair was braided into a crown and the tail of that crown fluttered in the wind as she presented herself before everyone. She had long dark purple hair and matching eyes. She looked a bit peeved as she scowled at him.

"If you’re joking with me, I hope you know that I'll beat you into a pulp. Clan chief or not..."

"Calm down, Yoshiko. I know you well enough to know that you'll actually do that. Besides, I wouldn't joke about this even if it cost my life."

The young woman who just barged in and threatened the clan chief was the fourth judge, Shimizu Yoshiko. In the past, she was one of Konjou Reiko's apprentices and Konjou Ryosei's childhood friend. She acted like a big sister to him and cared just as much about him and his parents as an actual family.

"Fair enough... Then, where is he?"

Yousuke pointed at one particular person that was being shown on one of the screens that were attached to the wall behind her. There, showed the same live feed that was being broadcasted at the town square, the feed that showed Senkyo's team.

"It's that boy right there."

"That's... Ryosei?"

"No, that boy's name is Yukou Senkyo. To be specific, Ryosei is only inside his body, but he isn't the body's owner."

"That's basically the same thing! I hate it when you overcomplicate things!"

"Is it not because of your negligence that you cannot understand it properly, Shimizu-dono? Seriously, in the position that you are in, you still have the audacity to show up late."

"A-Ahaha... hello to you too, Sakurai-ojii-san. As sharp-tongued and merciless as usual, I see."

The fifth judge, and the person who rebuked Yoshiko, Sakurai Kosuke. He was also the one who Senkyo encountered on the streets last week. He sat behind the desk with his arms crossed, staring at her with a sharp gaze. Yoshiko slowly slid away and sat beside Yousuke.

"I told you this would happen."

"What can I do? I overslept!"

Having everything that happened passed, the judges turned their focus to the screens before them. The four grouped screens constantly changed views, showing different sides of the battlefield and the fights that were going on within it. While the separate screen was constantly showing Freda's screen.

"Hm?"

The event had already started. A few minutes in, Kosuke let out a questioning tone as he noticed something that happened in one feed just before it got changed to another.

"Kaede-dono, could you please change the feed on the upper right back to the last one?"

"Yes, please wait a moment."

Kaede responded while still having her eyes closed. Not a second later, the upper right screen changed back to the previous feed. And there, all of them saw the absurd situation that was happening in that certain area.

**106 – Strategy for Victory**

"Wh-What's this?"

"Is he... alone?"

"No doubt about it. On top of that, he's being chased by so many people!"

Respectively, Yousuke, Yoshiko, and Freda raised their voice in response to what they were seeing. The screen showed Senkyo jumping from tree to tree by himself in the mountain as he was being chased down by other hunters.

"There's more! It looks each member of their team is all alone!"

With that, two more of the screens changed and showed Yuu and Itsuki in the same situation as Senkyo. They were all being chased down and hunted like prey.

"Utter foolishness. Just what do they think they are doing?"

Kosuke said so in an angered manner, along with a tinge of disappointment. Kosuke let out a small sigh and brought his eyes down to the ground.

*\*I suppose people's hopes easily do get crushed..\*.*

Kosuke thought internally. The judges disappointedly dismissed Team Senkyo's live feed and moved on to the other feeds. After another few minutes, Kaede called out to everyone.

"Everyone, look at this!"

Three of the screens suddenly changed feeds and showed Team Senkyo, but this time...

"This many should be enough. Ryosei, Shiro, are you two ready?"

*"\*Of course.\*"*

*"\*As always!\*"*

"Then let's go!"

Senkyo went into a far dash and hid behind a tree, avoiding the vision of the people chasing him. But having known their current location, the hunters launched ranged attacks on the tree. Before the magic could make any contact. Two Senkyos came out of the tree, one ran to the left and one to the right. The casters launched low-tier spells to hit one of the Senkyos, but both of them dodged the magic and proceeded to run.

"One of them is just an illusion! We split up and chase both of them. To the group who's chasing a clone, it won't last if it gets too far away from its caster. Just join us later and intercept his path."

Despite being in different teams, the other hunters complied and split up, of course, after getting approval from the leader of their team. Having their pursuer's numbers cut in half, and assuring that he was far away enough from the other group of hunters, the Senkyo who went to the left began to make his move.

Senkyo turned around and faced the groups of people that were chasing him. It was obvious from their numbers that there was more than just one team. But that works just fine for the Senkyo Team.

Senkyo drew the handle of the katana attached to his waist. It was a spirit weapon instead of Kuro Yaiba. At first, it looked like it was only the handle and the hilt, and no blade could be seen. But as Senkyo continued to draw the handle, a flame appeared at the base of the hilt and quickly shaped a sword. In mid-air, Senkyo turned around and swung his sword at the hunters chasing him.

"Sheath my blade with the wind. Your power is the face of elegance. Flow as I show you the path, the line to a dashing ending. Konjou Style, Gale Fan!"

A razor-sharp gust of wind traced Senkyo's sword and expanded in a fan shape. The hunters chasing him all got out of the way, resulting in Senkyo's Gale Fan hitting nothing. Since it was a spirit weapon that cannot come in contact with physical objects, neither the leaves nor the trees were cut down.

"Man, everyone's reaction time is fast."

*"\*They were trained for this.\*"*

Senkyo landed on the ground, stopping the chase there. Enemy hunters came from all directions and had Senkyo cornered. Some were seen standing from afar and some were ready to close in on him at any time. As their front liners came in to attack...

"Your turn!—Magic Arts: Whirlwind Burst!"

Senkyo quickly switched with Ryosei. Wind exploded from Ryosei as he used flash strike, knocking everyone near him back. Before they even hit the ground, a powerful updraft sent them all flying up the sky. After being treated as ragdolls for the second, Ryosei went from person to person, slashing, eliminating, and even knocking some of them out.

Everyone around Ryosei was dumbfounded that he pulled a high-precision skill off. That was because Whirlwind Burst’s area of effect worked incredibly close to the caster. Had Ryosei not timed it right, he would've missed everyone and left himself open or he would've gotten slashed before he could do anything.

"Casters, open fire!"

An enemy leader shouted his order. All the other teams followed suit after they got the same directives from their own team leaders. Most of the hunters perched on the trees while some stayed on the ground. The casters began chanting, and by the looks of it, they were all casting mid-tier spells. All the non-caster class hunters were on guard protecting their casters until they finished their casting.

Ryosei stood in the middle of all of them, and there were no more than just a few more seconds before everyone finishes their spells. With this in mind, Ryosei began to chant.

Various magical spells were thrown toward Ryosei, who was standing still and chanting. Fire, water, wind, lighting, and many other magics were approaching Ryosei at high speed. But just before they made contact...

"Link one to the other and bind me in your connection. Heed my every call, even if it means bending time and space itself. Terminate the impasse of space. Teleport!"

*\*BOOM!!\**

**107 – Extermination**

The hunters watched the magics explode and shroud the area with a cloud of dust. They watched in suspense as the cloud of dust began to disappear. And when it all cleared up...

"Gone..."

A single hunter spoke up as Ryosei's figure was nowhere to be seen. Suddenly, they heard a scream come from behind them. The hunters that heard the scream looked over to see a caster of their team go down.

"He's here!"

Ryosei jumped off branch after branch assassinating every enemy caster. While in mid-air, two hunters wielding a sword and a spear intercepted him while another threw kunai at him. The swordsman jumped to intercept him while the spearman stayed on the branch and waited for him to reach his attack range.

*“\*Magic Arts: Swallow Strike!\*”*

Ryosei brought up his sword overhead and stuck it downwards toward the swordsman all the while dodging the kunai coming at him. The swordsman noticed his intention and stepped on empty air to dodge sideways. He tried to hit Ryosei as he fell but he was too fast. Ryosei missed the swordsman but not a second later he also stepped on empty air and launched himself at the spearman above him at lightning-fast speeds. The spearman couldn’t react in time and was knocked out as Ryosei’s sword mercilessly passed through his chest.

As the spearman was getting knocked out, the person who threw the kunai threw more at Ryosei and charged at him with a short sword. Ryosei who just finished slashing the spearman sensed the kunai as well as the swordsman coming from behind him.

Ryosei didn’t move from his position and the hunters were already milliseconds away from making contact with Ryosei. But before they even hit him, a spirit blade came from below the swordsman and sliced through his chest. Before the kunai hunter even realized what happened, Ryosei was about to eliminate him with a spirit blade from above. The Ryosei who was standing in front of him stayed motionless, making his mistake clear to him. It was an illusion. Ryosei set up an illusion of himself and turned invisible before moving to strike the swordsman. They were completely fooled.

“GUAAH—!!”

But even after eliminating a whole party, the battle wasn’t over. The other teams have already set themselves up to attack Ryosei. A firing squad of four archers was positioned four trees behind him. Their arrows were enhanced by some kind of magic. Then, a brute class hunter landed on the branch Ryosei was on while three other swordsmen were approaching from each direction. The brute charged at Ryosei and delivered a punch going straight to his chest. Ryosei jumped over his arm and tried to slash through his head but was blocked by a barrier.

The brute immediately retracted his arm while his other was launched to punch Ryosei. The three swordsmen arrived one coming from below Ryosei and two coming from above on both his sides. In addition, four magic arrows were coming straight for him.

*“\*Magic arts: Crackling Thunder\*”*

Ryosei pointed his sword opposite from the swordsman behind his left side which was conveniently pointing at the brute’s head. He charged his sword with lighting and launched himself backward with a huge burst just like what he did when he fought the hollowed knights. The brute was hit by the burst of lightning but he did not get knocked back. He stubbornly stood his ground and ducked out of it as he was being hit in exchange for his barrier.

At that moment, the arrows missed Ryosei and he was now right beside one of the swordsmen and used wind magic to stop himself from getting launched any further back and took a slash at the swordsman beside him. The swordsman successfully made an air foothold with magic and tried to dodge out of range but he was hit by the tip of Ryosei’s blade and electrocuted, stunning him for a brief moment as he tried to take on the pain. Ryosei didn’t let this moment pass and slashed him.

The brute jumped at him and created air footholds to try and punch Ryosei. He did the same and dodged his punches and kicks. Ryosei charged his sword with lightning and prepared to slash at the brute. He noticed this and used flash strike to dodge backward, but as he regained vision, Ryosei was still right in front of him. Like he didn’t move at all.

“What!?”

*“\*Flash Strike: Thunderclap!\*”*

Ryosei predicted the brute’s movements and used flash strike at the very same time the brute did. He continued his strike and slashed through the brute’s chest making him fall out of the sky. A second after he defeated the brute, Ryosei removed his own footholds and fell to the ground.

His actions allowed him to avoid the four magical arrows coming from behind him. Ryosei didn’t even turn around but he knew there were arrows behind him nonetheless. With arrows dodged, now two swordsmen below him were his next obstacle. They both jumped towards Ryosei to prevent him from escaping with footholds. One of them covered their blade with fire while the other covered their blade with lightning. They swung at him but were interrupted when a shout came from the distance.

“THAT’S AN ILLUSION! WE NEED ASSISTANCE! HE’S COMING AFTER US!”

The two swordsmen saw the one who shouted was one of the archers in the distance. They didn’t hesitate and left the falling Ryosei alone and used footholds to quickly come to the archer’s aid. The Ryosei they left simply fell and stood still like a statue and it disappeared as it hit the ground.

Earlier as the four arrows were about to hit Ryosei, he quickly made an illusion of himself and created a foothold to the side which he used to launch himself toward the archers. The archers took notice of this when one of them cast magic that revealed the invisible. She was seeing through a small glass-like pane that was floating right in front of her eyes. A dark silhouette of Ryosei fell downwards while a pure white silhouette of Ryosei could be seen running straight at them.

“Everyone, Defensive Formation 7!”

The archers responded to the order accordingly. Three archers prepared their bows and shot arrows in unison. The three arrows hit the ground in front of Ryosei and created a wall of fire. Ryosei stopped in time before hitting it and ran around the wall. Right as he peeked through the wall, he saw three more arrows heading straight at him. He wasted no time and used flash strike to get past the magic arrows before getting trapped on the other side.

While the three were intercepting Ryosei with fire walls, one of them took out an arrow and stabbed the tree branch they were on right after chanting a spell. The four archers were affected by magic which made the firing rate of the three shooting archers even faster. She then cast a barrier around them just before joining the three archers in shooting.

Ryosei kept running at them and dodging their walls of fire. The two swordsmen were just a short distance behind him. One of the archers noticed that he seemed to be running at the base of the tree.

*\*Is he planning on running up the trunk of the tree and using it as a shield? Or maybe he’s planning on cutting the tree down…. No, that wouldn’t be possible. Spirit weapons faze through physical objects. It’s a different story if we enhanced the tree’s durability like how we always do. The blade will cut through it since it’ll be considered someone else’s spirit power. But no one does that in a hunter battle royale, it's common sense!\**

Ryosei kept using flash strike to dodge the walls. The two swordsmen were falling behind since they weren’t used to using flash strike so many times.

*“\*This is my chance!\*”*

“Sheath my blade with the wind. Your power is the face of elegance. Flow as I show you the path, the line to a dashing ending. Konjou Style, Gale Fan!”

Ryosei ran as he chanted. Right as he was about to cast it, the stopped to take a firm footing on the ground and slashed his sword toward the line of archers. The archers changed their target from Ryosei to the gale of wind coming straight at them. Volley after volley, they hit Ryosei’s attack, but it didn’t show any signs of stopping.

“What the hell is happening!? Why aren’t our attacks doing anything to it!?”

“Impossible! It has so much magical power that our attacks combined can’t cancel it!”

“At the very least, the barrier should protect us!”

The archers hoped that the barrier surrounding them would be enough to protect them from Ryosei’s attack. But alas, their hope was in vain as the sound of shattered glass reached their ears. Their armor along with the barrier shattered from the force of the attack.

Seconds earlier, Ryosei cast Gale Fan and immediately turned around to face his next enemies. His attack hadn’t even reached the archers yet, but he trusted in his own power that his attack would break through and eliminate his targets.

Without a second waste, Ryosei surprised his two pursuers by turning around and immediately using flash strike. He cut down the swordsman to his left and quickly pivoted on his foot to cut down the second swordsman to the right.

Ryosei finally found a chance to catch his breath and scan his surroundings. He eliminated a lot of hunters but there were still a few more remaining.

*“\*Can you still keep up?\*”*

Senkyo threw Ryosei a question as he was catching his breath.

*“\*That was nothing. I just needed a little breather. Thanks to you training your body I can fight decently now.\*”*

*“\*Good to know. Oh, two enemies behind you! A swordsman and a spearman!\*”*

*“\*No worries, I got enough rest. Good to know you have my back.\*”*

Ryoseicontinued to engage team after team. He handled the fighting while Senkyo notified him of new enemies and covered his blind spots. One of the main reasons he could fight with this much awareness was because of Senkyo.

**108 – Scorchless Conflagration**

Meanwhile, on another side of the mountain, Yuu was running through the forest and jumping over obstacles. She was also being chased by a large group of hunters.

Right now, she was wearing the caster's battle gear. But unlike the usual caster battle gear which consisted of a black robe with long and baggy sleeves and some form of black hat, all consisting of the same blue lines that covered the gear, she was wearing a robe with cut-down sleeves and replaced them with long sleeve gloves and changed the witch hat for a beret. Incidentally, all brutes, including Itsuki, wear a black Gi.

"Senpai said that I need to cull them at least once... This many should be enough. Hm... Still, this ring and bracelet sure are strange… with these, I can use fire magic without having to worry about setting the whole mountain on fire, but I don't think I should use too much this early, so maybe I'll pass."

Before the event started, Yuu was given a ring and a bracelet as her spirit weapons. She may have her own mana pool, but they didn't want to risk any injuries.

"I better make use of everything around here."

Yuu began chanting.

"O Nature, bless me with your power, empower your children. Aid me in my plight and suppress my enemies. Overgrowth!"

"Be on your guard! The vampire is chanting a spell!"

As the hunter said that, a yelp was heard from behind them. They looked over to check and saw their teammate was suspended in the air with a vine wrapped around his left leg. Followed by even more vines chaining him up, his libs were all wrapped, and even his body.

The hunter screamed in a panic, "H-HEELL—"

The hunter's cry for help was cut short after another vine wrapped around his mouth.

Everyone readied their weapons and became wary of the trees. When vines came hurling in, the hunters would cut them down before they reached them, but unfortunately for them, there were too many.

"What!?"

A vine wrapped around a hunter's foot and saw that it did not come from a tree, but from a bush. He was then suspended in midair as the vine raised him up in the air. Before long, almost everyone was trapped in vines.

"My body is a mantle of obsidian. A core as fiery as the blistering sun. Empower me and smear my body with your flaming magma. Konjou Style, Volcanic Skin!"

The hunters that acted fast enough as well as the hunters that could still speak while suppressed cast Volcanic Skin. Their bodies were protected with a veil as hot as a fiery inferno. Nothing changed about their appearance but every time the vines made contact with them; it was burnt to a crisp preventing them to suppress them. But before all of them could escape, Yuu out-chanted them and took out most of the suppressed hunters.

“O Nature, Amass your power at my word. Create my weapons and impale my adversaries. Needle Storm!”

The air around Yuu began to compress into long, sharp spikes and launched at the hunters. The hunters were pierced through the chest and destroyed their armor in the process. Air continued to compress around Yuu and so did the volley of spikes. Most of the suppressed hunters as well as those unfortunate enough to not react in time were eliminated.

"Huh?"

A volley of arrows came from the backline. Yuu dodged by swiftly rolling to the side and disappearing into the bushes. She continued running without anyone’s vision of her. However, with her enhanced hearing, she barely heard someone chanting.

"Conjoin my arrows, pierce my enemies. Show them the fearsome storm that you can bring. Konjou Style, Arrow Squall!"

She chanted a quick spell and fired another volley. As she fired a single arrow, numerous arrow-shaped green lights appeared and positioned themselves parallel to the arrow loaded in her bow. She fired the volley blindly into the general direction Yuu disappeared into.

Yuu heard the sound of the arrows flying at her. She used her hearing to avoid the arrows without needing to look behind her.

“Hmm… That’s going to be a problem. I better take care of the backline before continuing. I wanted to save this just in case but it can’t be helped.”

Yuu turned back around to where she lost her pursuers but remained hidden from their sight. She began to set up a trap for her pursuers. She stopped right in front of a bush and set up her plan from there.

“O Light, I am as I desire to be. Standing tall and still, created through falsehoods. Call upon the fire and embed within the power of the blazing sun, follow my word. Ephemeral Clone!”

A copy of Yuu appeared behind her. It stood still and imitated Yuu’s position right before it was summoned. She was in the motion of standing up. It stood still and didn’t move even as Yuu walked around.

Normally, creating a still clone of yourself was a low-tier spell that only required the cast. It was usually executed in a very low voice to avoid having others hear the cast, but Yuu needed to chant for this clone.

That was because she applied an additional property to her clone. As long as it was within 10 seconds of summoning if she desires it, Yuu’s clone will explode and burn everything close to it. It was a mid-tier version of Ephemeral Clone. It lasted longer and could follow an order.

She knew the enemy was using magic to detect illusion since she barely saw the person who shot at her just before she fled. They could indeed detect illusion magic, but that only worked if they were not obstructed by something. She placed her illusion right in front of a huge bush to prevent it from being detected.

"O Wind, coat my legs, aid my every step. Bless me with your flight that will create my path. Enhanced Speed!"

Yuu prepared herself and cast enhanced speed. She stayed quiet and listened for the footsteps of the hunters. When she determined they were on the other side of the wall of leaves, she chanted in a quiet mumble.

“O Fire, break free from your cage, exhibit your power. Scorch my path and bring upon a conflagration. Eruption.”

Yuu punched the ground and was followed by two lines on either side appearing and extending in front of her. The ground exploded and created a thick wall of fire in between the lines. She then ran straight into the flame.

A small bit earlier, the group of hunters tried to find Yuu. They were already back in formation with their vanguard consisting of fighters and enchanters leading the search and their rear guard which consisted of casters and fighters armed with bows lined up in a straight line.

A fighter at the front lines led the search with a glass-like pane in front of his eye. It was light magic that saw through illusions. It was used to detect traps or any sneak attacks. Perhaps because he was too wary of what appeared in his illusion detector or maybe because he wasn’t taking a good look at where he was standing, but the last thing he heard was someone shouting “Look out, below us!” before being engulfed in a fiery flame.

From an outside perspective, two lines on the ground appeared coming from the bushes. Someone shouted a warning because of it, but the ground inside it began to crack and spewed out a huge wall of fire, destroying the frontlines. The backline reacted to it in time and no one got hurt.

Enchanters on the frontlines threw their kunai toward the source of the magic while fast-reacting fighters used flash strike to get past through the bush and pushed toward the attacker. They expected someone to be behind the bush. There was. But through their illusion detectors, they saw a dark silhouette of a girl. It was an illusion.

Not a second later, an explosion could be heard coming from their rear. Their backline was engulfed in fire. But before they could even return to assist, the illusion exploded and burned most of the hunters caught in it while it knocked back the others farther away.

Yuu had used the wall of fire to hide herself and reach the backlines. Since magic created from the caster’s mana cannot hurt them, she was able to run through the flames without getting hurt.

Although she couldn’t see, she used her senses to navigate through the flame, dodging obstacles and hunters that were too shocked to walk outside the flames. She chanted quietly as she ran through.

“O Fire, let my hands guide you. Recreate an image of a burning hell, beginning with this small flare…”

When she finally heard arrows being loaded and spells being chanted right beside her, she extended both her arms directly at either side and cast her spell.

“…Paired Hellfire!”

She continued running forward to maximize the enemies she hit by spreading her fire. Scorching flames came from within the already-standing wall of fire and took out lines of hunters. Yuu emerged from the flames and saw the result of her actions. She created hell on earth. Those she eliminated walked out of her fire furiously dripping sweat and shaking. They didn’t get hurt because Yuu used spirit weapons, only their armor was completely burnt. But nonetheless, they were engulfed in flames without even being prepared for it.

“Oops… Maybe I went a little too far? Well, at least I didn’t need to use hand-to-hand combat. Better play it safe than sorry. I don’t want to ruin Senpai’s plan.”

Yuu scratched her cheek awkwardly. Seconds later, a voice shouted in the distance and caught her attention.

"The vampire is over there! Ready your weapons!"

"Ah, reinforcements are here. I should stop here. I already dealt with most of them. I need to follow Senpai's plan."

With that in mind, Yuu quickly took her leave and ran away from the next wave of hunters chasing her, being wary of intercepting groups in front of her.

**109 – Beast’s Tenacity**

Over on Itsuki's side, he was already engaging with the hunters. He got tired of running away and challenged everyone chasing him. He was surrounded by hunters, in the trees, and on land. Ranged hunters shot their projectiles at him while the melee hunters kept him from escaping the area. It was a good plan but...

"Aight, time to use the thing!"

Itsuki briefly remembers what Ryosei said to him during their training.

*"\*Listen, I only taught one other person about this, so you don't have to worry about enemies with the same skillset. Because of that, take them by surprise. No one will expect your skillset. Hold onto this until the very last second, and then...\*"*

"I'LL MAKE THEM MY PREY!!"

The casters finished their chant and launched various magic spells onto Itsuki. Just before they hit him, Itsuki quickly made various strange hand gestures. And finally, every single spell hit him.

“Bond Manifest: Turtle!”

*\*BOOM!!\**

"Okay, we got him!"

"So much for the team that defeated a leader, am I right?"

The hunters cheered for their victory just a bit too early. From within the cloud of smoke, a thunderous roar as fearsome as a lion reverberated in everyone's ears. Everyone's joyous cheers were cut short and turned into silence as they waited in suspense for what could've made such a roar.

Stunned and unmoving, they watch the smoke. Suddenly, Itsuki came bolting out of the cloud of smoke and charging at the first person he saw. The hunters were expecting his spirit armor to be destroyed, but he didn't look the least bit damaged from the attacks. With that many spells, one would expect him to be very damaged at the least, but that wasn't the case. In fact, Itsuki was more fired up than before.

“Bond Manifest: Elephant!”

After performing hand gestures, Itsuki charged even faster at the closest person to him. That person was also a brute and took his stance. However, he became more and more confused as time passed, seeing as Itsuki wasn't taking any stance whatsoever. He simply continued to charge at him head first.

When Itsuki got close enough, the brute aimed to punch Itsuki's head. But completely contradictory to his expectations, Itsuki didn't slow down one bit and continued charging.

"What!?"

The brute's arm got pushed back and ultimately getting smashed into the tree behind him. Itsuki headbutt the brute so hard that the tree behind him fell backward. After confirming he was knocked out, Itsuki faced the other hunters with another fearsome yell. A moment's hesitation reached the hunters, but quickly recomposed themselves and prepared their attacks.

The casters began to chant their spells while the rest attacked Itsuki. He charged at the next person; this time it was a fighter armed with a sword. He charged the same as he did last time, but unlike last time, when he got close, the hunter disappeared.

Itsuki's target disappeared into thin air. It was illusion magic. Thanks to the lesson he learned from Yuu and Shiro, he didn't panic. He knew his enemy was only invisible, but not intangible. Itsuki crouched down, ready to pounce.

“Bond Manifest: Snake!”

Itsuki performed more hand gestures, closed his eyes, and made use of his senses. His vision turned infrared, allowing him to see the hunter who was about to swing down on Itsuki's chest. But before that could happen, he jumped toward the hunter and wrapped around him. He constricted an invisible figure, like a snake who trapped his prey. Before long, the hunter who went invisible dropped to the ground unconscious.

His next opponent was a group of three, two swordsmen and a brute. He made the same hand gestures and shouted.

“Bond Manifest: Gorilla!”

Before charging in, Itsuki pounded the ground with both of his hands and actually managed to leave a mark. He charged again. The brute confronted Itsuki while the two swordsmen waited behind him.

Itsuki opened up with a punch, which was then blocked by the brute. Having Itsuki's arm temporarily disabled, the other two swordsmen sent piercing attacks in Itsuki's way.

"LIKE HELL I'LL LET THAT HAPPEN!!"

Itsuki grabbed the brute's arm with his available hand and flailed him toward the two swordsmen behind him. One of the swordsmen got knocked to the side and hit the tree, while the other was crushed by the brute's body.

"COME AT ME!!"

Itsuki roared. Seeing what happened to the others who tried to fight Itsuki in hand-to-hand combat, the other hunters learned their lesson and kept a safe distance away. Now, without having to worry about hitting their allies, the ranged hunters, who had their bows and spells ready opened fire.

“Bond Manifest: Turtle!”

Itsuki shouted after he performed the same gestures. Unfortunately for the hunters, he walked away slowly with no signs of his armor getting destroyed or signs of getting knocked out. He managed to take every single attack by raising his arms up in a cross and creating a green barrier around him that looked similar to a turtle's shell.

Seeing as none of their attacks affected him, a seed of fear began to sprout within the hunters. No one approached him or began to cast any spells. They were at a loss for what to do.

"GET THE FUCK DOWN!! BOND MANIFEST: GORILLA!"

Since no one came for him, Itsuki went to the nearest tree where hunters were perched and punched right through it after performing his usual gestures.

Screams came out of the mouths of the hunters on the tree top. He repeatedly punched through the tree until it couldn't support itself and fell down. The hunters were at the point where they couldn't even think straight and let their instincts take over. Proof of that was when they didn't bother to jump to the closest tree but instead braced themselves for the fall. Hunters laid on the ground, unconscious from the fall.

The hunters coordinated one massive attack while Itsuki was distracted. Three brutes rushed at him, two spearmen and two swordsmen followed behind them, while three casters chanted spells from afar.

Itsuki didn’t hesitate and charged at one of the brutes. Since they knew that Itsuki wouldn’t stop for nothing, the brutes charged at him as well. It was a fight to see who was strongest. Three brutes or Itsuki.

One of the brutes decided that it wasn’t a good idea, used flash strike, and tried to punch Itsuki’s side, but when he did, there was no one there. That was because Itsuki happened to use flash strike at the same time.

He then appeared above the brute in front of him. He was upside down with his arms extended to each side of the brute. He used the power he got from flash strike to grab him and lifted him up the brute off the ground as he spun around the air. When he was right side up, he smashed the brute he had in his hands into the ground where a spearman and a swordsman were.

The two hunters underneath the brute were completely knocked out. But since the brute Itsuki used as a weapon was still conscious, he made sure to finish the job by punching him in his temple and knocking him out.

While Itsuki was standing still, the three casters made their move. Two chains of lightning and a snowball were launched at him. The lightning shocked him for a second but he bared it and tried performing his usual gestures and mumbled something.

“Bond… Manifest…”

But when the snowball hit him, he slowed down considerably until he froze.

The spearman beside him didn’t waste a second and shoved the spear through his chest, but it was stopped by Itsuki’s barrier. While trying to pierce through it, he examined Itsuki. Looking at him closely, he saw that his hands were positioned in a particular way. It was the last gesture he always made before shouting “bond manifest” followed by some kind of animal.

*“\*Wait, now that I think about it… wasn’t that Yosuke-ojii-san’s technique!?\*”*

After the spearman’s sudden realization, Itsuki broke the ice and grabbed the nearest person which just happened to be the spearman.

“BEAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAR!!!!!!”

“What the!?”

Itsuki took a tight hold of his head and searched the trees. After seeing one of the casters, he threw the spearman at him, but not before confiscating his spear. Itsuki aimed the spear at the spearman’s chest and threw it at him. The spearman hit the caster and the spear that Itsuki threw pierced them both, eliminating them from the battle.

After Itsuki threw the spear, he heard footsteps coming from behind and beside him. Without hesitation, he turned around and readied a punch. The swordsman was already about to hit him, but his blade was blocked by the Itsuki’s barrier.

He managed to crack his barrier but was delivered a powerful punch to the temple, knocking him out. Itsuki’s troubles didn’t stop. He received the same punch when he wasn’t looking. It was from the earlier brute.

He grabbed Itsuki’s head and struck it with his knee followed by a powerful blow to the solar plexus, knocking him back. The sound of glass shattering reached everyone’s ears as Itsuki’s natural barrier was broken. Having raised everyone’s morale, the other hunters stepped up to take on Itsuki.

*\*What… That sound… was my barrier? No… no, no ,no, no!! Impossible! I’m going to lose… This can’t be happening. Where!? Where did I go wrong!?\**

Itsuki’s mind was a mess. He was on the brink of defeat. He tried to think of what he did wrong, but couldn’t find it. Just as he was about to hit the tree behind him, voices echoed in his head.

*“\*This is Ryosei, dealt with everyone on my side. Setting up the final stage.\*”*

*“\*This is Yuu, I culled my pursuers and bringing the rest. Should I head there now?\*”*

*“\*No, not yet. Hold off for thirty more minutes.\*”*

*“\*Got it!\*”*

*“\*Itsuki-san, any problems on your end?\*”*

**110 – Unrelenting Berserker**

It was Ryosei and Yuu communicating through connect. They were updating their status to everyone. That was when Itsuki remembered something Ryosei told him while they were training in the past week.

*\*Hey, Itsuki-san. I know why you chose to become a hunter. It’s to become strong enough to protect your sister, isn’t it? I don’t know why you’re going this far for her, but there’s nothing wrong with that. You are a brute. You’re most powerful when you have a straight head and true to your goal. Use that drive to power yourself through. For now, stop thinking about useless things like mistakes and remember your training. Let your instincts run wild. I know you can overcome this challenge.\**

*\*That cocky ghost… I’ll never hear the last of it if I fail now!\**

Itsuki responded to Ryosei before anything else.

*“\*I HEAR YOU! THIRTY MINUTES IS NOTHING!\*”*

Just as Itsuki was about to hit the tree behind him, he pointed his arms behind him and bent his legs like he was lunging. Suddenly, explosions erupted at the end of all his limbs and stopped himself. He landed on his feet and performed his gestures.

“BOND MANIFEST: MONKEY!!!”

He shouted his heart out as he used flash strike to return in front of the brute that knocked him back and threw a punch to his temple. The brute anticipated that and blocked it with his arm. Itsuki threw his next punch and exchanged blows with the brute.

Punches and kicks, blocks and barriers. Itsuki began to penetrate the brute’s defenses but was blocked by the barrier. Meanwhile, all the brute’s attacks were getting blocked one after another.

*“\*What!? Why is he faster than before!?\*”*

The other hunters prepared their attacks and were about to take Itsuki down from behind. Finally, after a long series of attacks, Itsuki broke the brute’s barrier. But in exchange, the brute finally got a hit off Itsuki. He didn’t have a barrier; it was only his bare skin. However, contradicting his expectations, Itsuki stood his ground. The brute saw his eyes and the burning passion. It was the last thing he saw before getting knocked out by a punch in the temple.

“COME AT MEEE!!!”

With the brute’s fall, the other hunters’ weapons finally made contact with Itsuki… or so they thought. Their weapons were stopped just before they hit Itsuki’s skin. It was a barrier. Itsuki was able to regenerate it. The barrier was hit with spells and weapons, so much so that black smoke clouded the area. But for some reason, his barrier stayed strong.

Itsuki gripped the head of the brute he took down, just before he fell, and used him to knock back the hunters behind him. They all reacted in time and jumped away. But Itsuki didn’t stop his swing and aimed it at the casters on the trees.

He closed the gap to his closest enemy with flash strike and punched his solar plexus. The other hunters engaged. Swordsmen, spearmen, and ranged hunters. The swordsmen coordinated an attack and used flash strike to slice through Itsuki’s barrier by hitting him from three sides, creating a triangle. Meanwhile, the spearmen tried to stab him from a distance.

But Itsuki didn’t let that happen. His barrier withstood the swordsmen’s triangle strike. He elbowed the person to his left, knocking him out. Then, used that left hand to grip the person to his right by spinning to his left using the momentum of his last attack. Meanwhile, using his right hand to punch the person in front of him, knocking him back, and making him land unconscious on the ground. Then, grabbing the neck of the first person he knocked out.

He lifted the two like ragdolls and used them as shields to protect him from the spears coming from both sides. The spearmen hesitated but Itsuki pushed them forward and ended up skewered by their own allies’ spears.

Itsuki didn’t let this chance go by and knocked out the two spearmen close to him. Magic launched at him but he dodged them all. He locked his eyes on the first caster he saw and rushed at him.

He was intercepted by a brute so he changed priorities. Itsuki engaged with an uppercut. The brute blocked it with his hand and launched his free fist at him. However, Itsuki forcefully broke his fist free and rotated his arm to block the attack. Meanwhile, he took another step forward and used his free fist to punch the brute on the solar plexus. The brute was baffled when he heard glass shatter and shards of his barrier dissipating. With his defenses broken, Itsuki used his elbow that was pointing at the brute’s neck from blocking the attack earlier and struck it. He followed it up with another punch to the solar plexus and one to the temple.

Itsuki heard footsteps approaching from behind him. With no time to waste, he grabbed the knocked-out brute and used flash strike to backflip. Just as Itsuki thought, right below him was a big group of hunters, and now he was going to destroy all of them with a huge crash.

The hunters who had no clue where Itsuki disappeared to was suddenly demolished by an attack from above. Those unfortunate enough to be in the middle of the impact were crushed and knocked out, while those close lost their balance and fell. Itsuki got back up and made swift work with the downed opponents and knocked them out by throwing them at the casters that were about to launch their spell.

Most of the casters hesitated and were knocked out by their allies’ bodies while some were forced to launch their spells at their own allies to save themselves. Itsuki leaped at the first caster he saw and grabbed him. He was inevitably thrown at another caster and knocked them off the tree. The casters were miraculously conscious but were finished off by a powerful stomp to the chest from Itsuki.

The rest of the fighters and brutes charged at Itsuki, eager to finish him off. He waited for them to come and took the defensive. A swordsman was first to reach him with flash strike. He swung his sword but was denied when Itsuki used Burst to create a small explosion before the blade made contact. With the swordsman’s footing destroyed, he finished him off with a powerful punch.

He did the same to the following hunters. With incredible agility, he countered attack after attack and knocked them out when they were open. When the brutes arrived, he took the initiative and used flash strike to power his punch and attacked the brute.

To the brute’s surprise, even though he expected his attack and had his arms up to defend himself, Itsuki’s punch destroyed his barrier in an instant, making him completely open, and was finished off by his next punch.

Itsuki went on an unstoppable rampage. He denied every attack with blocks, bursts, and even parries, followed by a devastating strike from fists, kicks, elbows, and even headbutts, taking every enemy out on one strike.

After defeating all the fighters and brutes, Itsuki looked around to find survivors. After scanning the whole area, he found three casters in the distance. He slowly approached them. The casters seemed to be utterly shaken since they were stuttering and messed up their chant every time they tried it. One of the casters finally chanted correctly and launched a lightning strike. It was blocked by Itsuki’s barrier. One of the casters tried to back up but tripped on a rock. The next attack was from a different caster who launched a snowball at him. The same one that froze Itsuki earlier. But now, it was ineffective to Itsuki’s barrier.

Itsuki was closing in and the two standing casters tried to run for it but were stopped by a flash strike from Itsuki and grabbed both of their necks and threw them to the caster that was already on the ground. He crouched right in front of the three and glared at them with a terrifying face.

“Oi, oi, oi, where do you think you three are going?”

“W-W-We surren—”

One of the casters tried to surrender but was denied when Itsuki forcefully shut him up with his hand.

“LISTEN TO WHAT I HAVE TO SAY, WILL YA!?”

The three frighted casters did as Itsuki said.

“You can surrender once you inform your friends that I’m here, aight? If you do that, I’ll promise you that I won’t go after you goons when this battle ends, got that?!”

The three casters nodded furiously in agreement with Itsuki’s threat. He let the three casters leave and flee for help. With that taken care of, he walked up to one of the fallen branches he destroyed by throwing humans like ragdolls and sat to catch his breath.

*“\*It’s me. I might have done too much to the enemy. How much time do we have left?\*”*

*“\*There are still 15 more minutes before completion. Is it a huge problem on your side, Itsuki-san?\*”*

*“\*No, not really.\*”*

*“\*Okay then, I’ll inform you when we’re ready to go.\*”*

Itsuki finished his update to Ryosei and breathed out a huge sigh as he stared at the sky.

“Looks like there really is no coming back from this path. Ugh… that was hard.”

**111 – Team Senkyo’s Performance**

Over at the castle, the judges just finished witnessing the chaos Senkyo Team dealt. Their faces were the very definition of dumbfounded.

"Wh-What the hell was that...?"

"Ryosei was to be expected, but even his other teammates..."

"They went on a massacre... the remaining participants are down to 44% and it's only been an hour in. This is the fastest a Hunter Battle Royale has ever gone..."

Yoshiko, Yousuke, and Dai expressed their bewilderment. Each individual member overcame the odds and fought against—wiped out a huge number of hunters all by themselves using their own unique way of fighting.

Everyone was baffled by their performance. Over at the side, Kosuke voiced out his thoughts, getting the rest of the judges' attention.

"That boy... the one with the barbaric fighting style. He used Transcendence. A technique that requires you to make a bond with an animal and be able to use their power."

"Isn't that your fighting style, Kosuke-san? How does that boy know about it? Did you teach him?"

Dai curiously questioned Kosuke. Everyone else didn't seem to know anything about what Dai said. They turned their attention to him, intently listening for his response.

"No, I taught him nothing. In the first place, I did not create that fighting style."

"Then, who did?"

With a bit of hesitation, Kosuke told them the truth.

"It was that brat who created it. Konjou Ryosei."

"What!?"

Everyone yelled in surprise.

"It is true. That boy created that skill when he was 11. He came up to me and told me he would teach me a fighting style as a birthday present. Hahaha... amusing, isn't it? To think a child would teach a veteran hunter and actually make use of it. That brat really had it in him... Hm? What is it?"

Kosuke looked to his around and saw the four judges staring at him with shocked faces.

"Oh, sorry. It's just that I've never seen you laugh before, Sakurai-ojii-san."

"I agree with Yoshiko, in the time I've known you, you've always had a face of steel."

Yoshiko and Yousuke inputted their thoughts.

"Then, it is also a bit shocking to me that you had no reaction to me being taught by a child."

"Well, I've seen him do shocking things way back then, so I kind of got used to them."

Yousuke said so as he remembered his past with Ryosei. After realizing what Kosuke entailed, Dai voiced it out.

"Are you saying that the real Ryosei-san really is inside Yukou-kun?"

"Yes, after all, no one but him and I know about how this technique is done."

"I see..."

Having Dai's thoughts heard, Yoshiko was the next one to speak.

"Wait, a bond? That means getting up close and personal, right? Then doesn't that mean that boy got up close to all those animals he mentioned? How..."

Yoshiko gazed questionably at Kosuke. In response, he closed his eyes and shook his head from side to side, signaling that he has no idea on how Itsuki got those bonds. On the other hand, Kaede spoke up and added her piece.

"U-Um... I did hear in the news that there has been a burglar breaking in and out of zoos at night... could it be that...?"

Silently, everyone nodded in agreement to the connection between the two. Although Kaede couldn't see, she thought the same and figured that silence meant they agreed.

"Still, splitting up and eliminating as many people as possible, is that their strategy? It seems to be working now, but do they really have enough resources to keep fighting like this?”

Yoshiko pointed out the flaw in their strategy. However, Dai would say differently.

"No. I think that this is only a part of their strategy."

"What do you mean, Dai?"

Yousuke asked.

"No one would figure this out without this knowledge, but Yukou-kun and Ryosei-san can use both spirit power and mana without a problem."

"Seriously!?"

Yoshiko voiced out in shock. She wasn't the only one, although they didn't yell out, every other person in the room, except for Freda and Yousuke, was in shock.

"Yes. Remember, when I trained Yukou-kun, he had an incredibly fast learning pace and could cast techniques that required a lot of spirit power with ease. And the other day, Sora-kun reported to me that Senkyo was actually the one who defeated most of the enemies when they encountered the revenants last week. And he did that by using a field circle right after using a spectral."

"I received the same report from Sora-kun. He told me that Yukou-kun was a dual user."

"A-A dual user!? You mean the one from that children’s story? How is that possible!?"

Yoshiko yelled out.

"I do not know, but the fact that he can use high amounts of spirit power and mana at the same time is real."

The room fell silent. Everyone knew how absurd that sounded, but Dai and Yousuke would have no reason to lie. Everyone was forced to believe so. Having that fact settled in, Kosuke spoke up.

"Yamazaki-dono, I have heard that that boy failed every class but the enchanter class. But last week, I used Intimidate to test his mettle, but found myself the one intimidated instead."

"I-Impossible! If he topped even your spirit power, then that would mean that he was able to hide at least 97% of his spirit power from the evaluation test!"

"That much!? That's ridiculous..." Yoshiko added.

"I suppose we will have a mountain of questions to ask Yukou-kun about..."

After Dai said that, Yoshiko put him back on track to where he left off earlier.

"Then, Dai, about the Senkyo Team's plan..."

"Oh, yes. It would be easier to show you... Kaede-san, could you please show on the screen all the members of Team Senkyo."

"Right away."

Three screens changed and showed Senkyo, Yuu, and Itsuki being chased by hunters. Having done so, Dai asked a strange request.

"Then, Kaede-san, could you please find another Yukou Senkyo on the battlefield, different from the one on the screen."

From Dai's request, the other judges figured out what Dai meant.

"I see! At the start of the match, that Yukou Senkyo split off into two!"

Yoshiko reminded them of Senkyo's past actions.

"That's right, and in the register, including Ryosei, there were still five members that were registered. The person that magically showed up before the Chief and me when we were confirming the members, was Team Senkyo's fifth member, Shiro."

**112 – Spider’s Web**

"Nya!? Nya!? Nya!? Nya!? Nyaa!!! How many spells are you planning on throwing at Shiro!?"

Shiro, disguised as Senkyo, evaded spell after spell as she was running away from the hunters in her pursuit. At this point, the hunters were convinced that they were running after the real Senkyo.

"Captain, should we really keep chasing this guy? The other half of our group hasn’t come back yet. Should we not be worried this is a trap?"

"You don't get it, do you? If we take out the so-called 'Konjou Ryosei' and the person who defeated a leader, we'll prove that we're powerful enough to take on a leader ourselves and send us to the frontlines!"

"But captain—"

"Just shut up and follow my orders! We'll take the glory and leave that bastard in the dust!"

The male hunter stepped down and kept quiet. Although he had his doubts, he still decided to follow orders. They continued chasing Shiro, who they mistook for Senkyo.

*"\*Everyone, are you there? It's ready. Move on to phase two of our plan.\*"*

"It's Onii-chan!"

Senkyo's voice echoed in Shiro's head. From his wording, it was safe to say that the message was meant for everybody in Team Senkyo. Shiro gave a cheerful response, along with the response of Yuu and Itsuki.

*"\*Got it, Onii-chan!\*"*

*"\*Roger!\*."*

*"\*‘Bout time!\*"*

"Yes! Shiro can finally see Onii-chan again—waah!!”

“Huh!?”

The hunter who cast the fireball that was making a beeline directly toward Shiro was in shock when he saw his fireball disintegrate before it made contact with Shiro. In a slight panic, Shiro turned back and saw that all of her pursuers were still after her.

“Whew, good, they’re all still after Shiro. It doesn’t look like they figured it out yet. Shiro has to hurry up before that happens again.”

Shiro changed course and headed for the location of phase two.

"...So, does that mean that this Shiro is actually a cover-up?"

Yoshiko asked, continuing the conversation from before. Dai answered in response to the question.

"That's right. By having Shiro disguise herself with illusion magic, her pursuers will think she is the real Senkyo because of how long they've been chasing her. While she's doing that, Senkyo and Ryosei, who completely annihilated all of their pursuers, will prepare the second part of their plan."

"And, that is...?"

Yoshiko questioned.

"We’ll just have to see for ourselves."

"Look over there! It's the rest of Team Senkyo!"

A hunter shouted as they saw Yuu and Itsuki heading their way with pursuers of their own. The leader of the group, voiced his orders.

"So this was their plan... They wanted us to fight each other and slip away in the chaos. These dirty bastards... Don't let them get away! Keep chasing that bastard until we have him dead!"

"Alright!"

The hunters responded to the captain's orders. They set their sights on Senkyo, who was actually Shiro, and began to pick up the pace. A certain male hunter, however, had doubts of his own. It was the same hunter that offered to stop chasing Shiro.

*"\*This is strange... There’s a huge opening where that guy is going. But if their plan really was to escape in the commotion, wouldn't it be better to meet up in a place where the trees are thick? But if that isn't their plan then what...?\*"*

The hunter remembered the time when he separated from their original hunter group. Their deal was to come back when they confirm that they were chasing the wrong one, but they never came back. There would've been enough time for them to backtrack their group, so why did they not come back?

*\*Don't be fooled, they may look like a team of three, but including the Delinquent Prodigy, they are actually a team of five!\**

The hunter remembered the announcer's words, just before all communications to the clan were closed off and the event had started.

*"\*A team of... five!?\*"*

He carefully counted everyone present. Senkyo, Ryosei, Yuu, Itsuki... but he failed to account for one more person.

*"\*C-Could it be!?\*"*

Shiro, Yuu, and Itsuki came out of the forest and onto the middle of an open field where there was a single rock standing in the middle of it. Their pursuers came flooding in. They weren't fast enough to properly count them all, but at least fifty hunters were coming in from all directions.

"GET THEM ALL—"

"EVERYONE GET OFF THE GROUND!!"

The male hunter cut his leader off before he could finish speaking, overwriting his order. The hunter stayed perched on the tree that stood at the edge of the forest. The leader and most of the hunters failed to heed his warning and jumped into the glade. Not a second later...

"What is this!?"

The area of ground that covered not only the whole glade but reached all the way into the forest became covered in black outlines that shaped a magic circle. The hunters that touched the circle became unable to move their bodies. Their bodies refused to listen to their orders, but all of them were perfectly conscious.

The hunters struggled and struggled but to no avail. Some hunters managed to avoid the trap, but their numbers were so scarce that they could be counted with both hands.

In the middle of the glade, where a rock once stood, appeared Senkyo who had his hand placed on a piece of paper. Now that there was no rock to be seen, it was obvious that he was concealing himself as a rock with illusion magic.

The ranged hunters that were on the tree tops fired their projectiles at Senkyo, but another Senkyo stepped up in front of Senkyo and created a barrier to protect him. Slowly, the Senkyo who put up the barrier began to reveal her true form, and there appeared Shiro's catgirl figure.

"It worked Onii-chan!"

"Yeah, good work. Thanks for hanging in there. I'll make it up for you with whatever you want."

"Ehehehe~... Well, if you insist..."

A small drop of saliva slipped out of Shiro's mouth as she imagined the various things that she could do with the power she obtained.

**113 – Approaching Storm**

"We'll take care of this."

"Leave it to us, Yukou-senpai!"

Itsuki and Yuu, who were still moving despite being on top of the field circle approached the closest person to each of them. Itsuki pulled up his fist while Yuu summoned a fireball to her palm. The petrified hunters could only watch as their death comes closer and closer to them as Itsuki and Yuu eliminated the hunters in their path.

Not long after, all the hunters that got stuck in Senkyo's fly trap were eliminated. Yuu took care of the surviving hunters who tried to run away, while some of them surrendered themselves, saving the experience of getting knocked out.

Over at the Konjou town, everyone was silent as they watched the screen where they saw almost every single hunter get eliminated with no way to fight back. The announcer was first to break the silence.

"I-It's a massacre!! Team Senkyo lead everyone into their fly trap and took them out one by one! Team Senkyo's earlier performance, where they overcame the odds and took out groups of hunters all by themselves, followed by a merciless tactic to draw every single hunter in and almost end the whole event right there and then in under an hour and a half!! Such an amazing performance! With frightening wits and strength, they received the title of almost every record in the whole Konjou clan! Now, do you think they are worthy of all the feats they have been given up to this point?"

With the announcer's question, every citizen cheered in approval. The whole town rumbled as it was showered in thunderous cheers. It was a sign of the town approving of every jaw-dropping claim that Senkyo and the others had said.

"H-He really is capable of using both spirit power and mana..."

Inside the castle, where the event's judges were located, Yoshiko said so in a meek voice. She has been astonished too many times to have enough power to shout out in surprise. As if the energy was sapped out of her, she rested on the desk as her mind malfunctioned from everything that happened.

"Amazing. To think Yukou-kun thought of such a plan..."

"It was devious but ingenious. He used every member’s strengths and built up a plan around them. His tactics in battle are magnificent."

"So it's not only Ryosei-san but all these other people are strong too... Just what happened that got him into this, I wonder..."

Dai, Kosuke, and Yousuke said their piece about what they thought. But there was one person who hadn't spoken much in the entire time they were watching.

"Freda-sama? Is something the matter?"

Yousuke asked.

"The real challenge is about to show itself."

"Hm?"

One of the screens changed feeds, and everyone immediately realized what Freda meant. Their faces suddenly became serious as they watched him approach the battlefield.

Back where Senkyo and the others stood, Senkyo disabled the field circle after having taken care of everything. He approached a certain hunter, who decided to surrender after witnessing everything that happened.

"Yo, nice fight out there."

It was the hunter who yelled out the warning to everyone else before the trap was activated and managed to save a few hunters. He looked a bit crestfallen as Senkyo said that.

"Well, you say that but I hadn't done anything but chase around a dummy. Not only that, we all got caught in your petrify trap."

"What do you mean? You figured out our plan, didn't you?"

"Not quite, I was a bit off. I thought the fifth member set up the trap. But to think the fifth member was a dummy and the other one was someone who could use both spirit power and mana... Did I stop listening at lessons at some point or something?"

"Sorry, I'm just an anomaly."

"Huh? What's that?"

"Nothing important. Now, you should get away from here as far as possible."

*“\*Did you notice it too, Senkyo?\*”*

*“\*Yep. That frightening dark aura… It has to be him.\*”*

Senkyo turned his back and went to his teammates.

"W-Wait! What do you mean by that?"

The hunter called for Senkyo, but he didn't turn around. Ignoring the hunter's call, Senkyo reached Yuu and Itsuki.

"Are you sure you'll be alright, Yukou-senpai? I can still stay if you want."

"Yeah, I can show off my secret art again!"

Senkyo shook his head in denial.

"Sorry, but let us three take care of this one. Besides, I need someone to take these unconscious people away from the area. If they get caught in, it might be trouble for me."

"I see..."

Yuu said so disappointedly.

"Tsk. Fine, but I'll have a fight with your ghost friend once you're done! I need to show him how weak he is compared to me now."

"Yeah, sure. We'll come back."

Itsuki turned his back and carried the closest unconscious person on his shoulder and took off to get another. Meanwhile, Yuu was still standing in front of Senkyo. Taking notice of her internal plight, Senkyo said some words of reassurance.

"Hey, I told you before. I'm not going anywhere. We'll come back as soon as we're done, I promise."

"F-Fine. Have it your way."

**114 – Senkyo and Touma**

Yuu took off and left Senkyo alone. After a few seconds, a dark aura coming from the trees was slowly coming closer and closer to where Senkyo stood. From within the forest, came Touma. He was still wearing the same battle gear from last week's incident. His clothes were all torn up and worn down. Mud and scratches covered his clothes. His body was covered in black veins and both of his arms were covered with a tinge of purple.

"Wow... He's in worse shape than I thought."

Senkyo placed his spirit weapon back in the sheath attached to his waist. In exchange, he reached out to the back of his cloak and pulled out a wooden sword, and held it with his dominant right hand. On his left, he took out two kunai from within his cloak and prepared for battle.

Unlike all the other times, it wasn't Ryosei who was readying himself for battle, but Senkyo. This was the first time that he was actually fighting with his own body. Being completely aware of that fact, Senkyo did his best to keep his cool, because the only sure way he wasn't getting out of this one alive, is if he chickens out and half-ass everything.

Touma began to growl like a wild animal as he glared at Senkyo with killing intent. Senkyo took a deep breath to calm his nerves. Awaiting Touma's move, he stood still with his guard up.

Finally, Touma charged in head first with his arms placed to his sides like he was about to tackle Senkyo. As he got closer, both his arms turned into purple blades. Senkyo, on the other hand, was enchanting his weapons. His wooden sword rippled in blue light as did the kunai he hid beneath his cloak. With another deep breath to cool his nerves, Senkyo charged to intercept Touma.

"YOU... REVENGE...! YOU… DIIIE..!!"

Touma leaped toward Senkyo with his arm blades forming an X. Just before Touma made contact, Senkyo disappeared in thin air. Touma slashed his blades and ended his strike with his arm blades pointed downwards. He turned his head from left then right, searching for Senkyo's body.

"RAAAA!!"

Touma felt both of his arm blades fall from their place and dropped to the ground. Senkyo was behind him with his wooden sword covered in some kind of purple liquid. The pain ran through Touma's body, but instead of dropping to the ground in pain, he turned around to face Senkyo and charged him.

Purple slime oozed from the part where Touma's arms were cut off and began to form new blades, but before they finished forming, Senkyo threw two kunai into his regenerating arms. They glowed with similar symbols of spirit: a half-moon arc with a diamond in the center. Inside the arc, just above the tip of the diamond was intersected by the symbol of domination: two parallel lines with the upper line stretching twice as long as the lower line, similar to the upside-down of the Japanese kanji for two. And finally, in the center of the diamond was the symbol of interaction: two parallel lines stretching out to opposite sides with one perpendicular line connecting them, which could be compared to a line drawing of a lightning bolt or a deformed version of the Japanese katakana for “sa.”

Senkyo made some distance and took out more kunai from his cloak. When Touma's arms fully submerged the kunai, his arms exploded and severed his newly regenerated arms. Touma screamed in pain but still charged at Senkyo.

*"\*H-How many times am I supposed to do this again, Shiro?\*"*

*"\*Only until his magic barrier subdues, then Onii-chan can finally cure him.\*"*

*"\*Haah...\*"*

Senkyo heaved a deep sigh as he recalled the instructions Shiro gave to him the other night. It was a tedious process but Senkyo had to do it. He recalled his conversation with Shiro.

*"\*A Dehin's curse can be cured by high-tier control magic in our world. But it requires a part of the Dehin’s body that cursed him. Since it’s impossible for us to obtain that, Onii-chan will have to do it manually.\*"*

*"\*Manually? How do I do that?\*"*

*"\*First, we have to tire him out. The curse is powerful enough that its excess power turns into a barrier that protects anything from curing it. So, drain that excess power out. Onii-chan has to cut off the infected parts as much as possible. But don't cut off his head, or he will die for real."*

Senkyo let Touma charge in and entered melee combat. Senkyo used his wooden sword to block the first arm blade while he used his kunai to block the second. With Senkyo's arms all taken, Touma lifted up his foot and kicked Senkyo in the stomach.

Senkyo held onto both his weapons as he was sent hurling backward. Touma immediately followed up and transformed his arms into huge hammers. As he was charging at Senkyo, he jumped up in the air in an attempt to crush him.

Senkyo rolled to the side as fast as he could and got back up. While at his previous location, Touma crushed the ground with his twin hammers and even made a small cloud of dust.

Senkyo placed a kunai on the ground, then ran to a different location and placed another kunai on the ground. He repeatedly did so while dodging Touma's bone-crushing attacks. After having done his work, Senkyo finally faced Touma with his wooden sword in hand.

Touma went for another crushing attack and leaped at Senkyo. He swiftly tumbled to the side where he wasn't going to be affected by the attack.

*\*CRUSH!!\**

"DAMN... YOU... FIGHT... FIGHT!!"

Touma growled monstrously, clearly annoyed by Senkyo's lack of will to fight.

"I'd rather set my advantages first before fighting."

Before Touma could lift his hammer arms from the ground, he felt a sharp pain accompanied by purple liquid gushing out of his arms. With his cries of pain, he got back up and charged at Senkyo.

With Touma's arms yet to regenerate, Senkyo intercepted Touma's charge. Touma raised his regenerating arms and reached out to Senkyo. Purple slime climbed from his arms' base and began to form a long spike as it regenerated.

Touma's aim was to spike Senkyo the moment his arms regenerated. But despite having a spike extending toward Senkyo's face and his stomach, he didn't dodge and proceeded with his attack.

That was because he wasn't going to let that happen. Just before the spikes could fully form, something shot through Touma's arms, dismembering his arms once again. The fast-moving objects that cut Touma's arms twice were the kunai that Senkyo placed around the battlefield. They glowed with the symbol of direction: an equilateral triangle, and inside it, the symbol of spirit.

Senkyo strategically placed the kunai. Unlike Sora's Complete Spirit Power Flow, Senkyo can't control the kunai however he wants. However, he can enchant a kunai to launch in a certain direction beforehand. Senkyo placed numerous kunai on the ground and enchanted them to launch at a straight line angling slightly upward on his word. He lured Touma to the middle of the battlefield where the kunai were all pointing.

Senkyo, who didn't have anything in his way, struck Touma's stomach with the blade of his wooden sword, but oddly enough, it didn't cut through unlike when he cut Touma's arms.

That was because Senkyo disenchanted his wooden sword to avoid cutting Touma down. However, even if Senkyo's sword didn't cut through, Touma still felt the strike and threw up purple liquid.

**115 – Helplessness**

Touma dropped to the ground with his dismembered arms trying to cover up his stomach. Touma was pretty beaten up. Senkyo cut off his arms numerous times already. Touma writhed in pain, but he was nowhere close to kicking the bucket.

"REVENGE...! I... KILL... YOU...! I...! I...! RAAAAGGGHHHHH!!!!!"

Four tentacles came out of Touma's back, sending Touma into even more suffering than before. Each tentacle wrapped each one of his limbs. His arms and legs were completely covered in purple tentacles. Senkyo backed up, knowing it was dangerous to stand too close to Touma.

*"\*Onii-chan, his barrier is gone now!\*"*

"Yeah, but this is going to be troubling. Ryosei, are you ready?"

*"\*Of course.\*"*

Shiro’s final instruction flashed through his head.

*\*Onii-chan has to cut down that guy's weak points. If all the points where the curse rooted itself in him are cut, then the curse will lose its control over him, weakening the curse. At that point, we only have to cast a normal purification spell and he will be cured!\**

Imagining what they would have to do if things got out of hand, Ryosei said to Senkyo.

*"\*This is the first time we'll be doing this in battle, isn't it?\*"*

"Yeah, let's wipe this curse out and go home!"

Senkyo dropped the remaining kunai in his cloak. He switched positions and held the wooden sword in his left hand while he took out the spirit blade and held it with his right hand.

Touma let out another monstrous roar and charged at Senkyo. In a blink of an eye, he reached Senkyo. Touma raised his left arm and launched it at Senkyo. However, in that short period where Touma dashed, at the same time, Senkyo switched with Ryosei.

Ryosei dodged Touma's arm with the slightest of movements, as simple as moving his shoulder away. Using that momentum, Ryosei swung his spirit blade upwards, severing Touma's arm from his body once again. He brought down the spirit sword from the sky and slashed through his head, but it wasn’t sliced off. The slash only resulted in popping Touma’s right eye.

With the spirit sword, Ryosei’s first slash cut through Touma's arm. His neck was in the path of its slash but it didn’t sever it. That was because spirit weapons can only come in contact with spiritual objects like the soul, which included curses. The swords can only temporarily subdue living spirits, but it works just fine on curses.

Since Touma's whole arm was taken over by the curse, it was severed. His neck wasn’t severed which meant that there was still a chance to save him. On Ryosei’s second strike, he didn’t cut through his head, but his right eye popped, indicating that the curse had taken over it.

In a panic, Touma backpedaled, making distance between himself and Ryosei. After a few seconds, Touma's right arm refused to regenerate its purple slime, the same went for his eye. Touma roared in frustration and stared Ryosei down with a bloodshot eye.

"Hey, are you sure this is fine? Even if we cure him, he won't be able to regenerate his arms and eye, won't he?"

Ryosei asked.

*"\*Unfortunately, that is the cost of curing a Dehin's curse this late on.\*"*

*"\*Damn...\*"*

*"\*Sorry. Shiro can't be of any more help, Onii-chan.\*"*

*"\*No, it's not your fault.\*"*

Ryosei has already cut two of the four weak points. Its original weak points were its left arm, right arm, right eye, and heart. Since the spirit weapon only knocks out a living soul, it will only remove the curse. Ryosei already cut off Touma's right arm and right eye. Only two more left before they can fully cure Touma. Determined to release Touma from his suffering as fast as possible, Ryosei dashed toward Touma.

Ryosei was about to cut down Touma's left arm, but a tentacle from behind Touma came and intercepted him. By using both the wooden and the spirit sword, Ryosei blocked and slashed the tentacles that went his way.

Touma didn’t even have the power to control himself. He was just a beast on a rampage. He wasn’t even a challenge to Ryosei and Senkyo to the point where they didn’t even need to use the kunai Senkyo prepared around the battlefield or the plan they had in case the situation went awry. While the battle was occurring, Senkyo thought to himself.

*\*I wonder why... even if we are doing this for Saito-san's sake, it feels like I'm taking everything from him at the same time. If Saito-san gets cured, he'll end up disabled with no arms and one eye... Even if the Konjou clan can make another eye for him, that won't change the fact that Saito-san won't have any arms. In the first place, Yamamoto-san mentioned that it was a one-time operation that couldn’t be done again. Although I don’t know the details, if such a limit was on a spectral-prosthetic eye, then arms are most likely out of the question.\**

Pondering and pondering, even as the chaos outside went on, Senkyo kept thinking about the inevitable outcome of this battle.

*\*Even if it weren’t a spectral, no one can just make artificial arms with a snap of a finger. Saito-san is a swordsman who relies highly on his arms if he loses those, even if he wasn't a swordsman, his life would be ruined. Is it really still saving... if it would only bring him more grief...?\**

Ryosei successfully severed Touma's left arm. Now, only the tentacles stand in Ryosei's way. It was an easy run from there on out. Ryosei only had to get a clear stab through the heart.

When one of the tentacles hurled at Ryosei, he cut it down without difficulty. As it backed off, Ryosei noticed that it stopped regenerating. Touma's back wasn't a weak spot, and he used the wooden sword to cut that tentacle, not the spirit blade. That could've only meant that the curse was losing its power. Seeing an easier solution, he went to cut off all the tentacles.

On the other side of the mountain, in the middle of the Konjou clan's town, the people cheered for Senkyo and Ryosei's victory. However, the announcer looked up to the screens, not with excitement, thrill, or suspense, but with sadness.

He took off the mask concealing his face to get a better look at the screen, and there, revealed Sora. Sadness and frustration floated around him.

"...Damn it! Touma-kun, I'm sorry... I couldn’t do a single thing...!"

Earlier, Senkyo told Sora about his plans to relieve Touma of his curse. He told him everything, how he was going to do it, what was going to happen, and the result. Sora was fully aware of what was to become of Touma after the curse was cured.

In frustration with his inability to help his childhood friend, Sora berated himself. He agreed to Senkyo's plan. In response, he wanted to do everything he can to help Senkyo. That was why he became the event's announcer, to help Senkyo be accepted by the rest of the Konjou clan.

But the fact that he was there, in a safe location without any danger while his classmate he barely even knew took care of his personal problems for him. Having awareness of this, ate Sora from the inside.

With the last tentacle cut, Ryosei walked up to Touma and pointed the spirit blade at his chest, ready to pierce his heart. Hesitation wrapped Ryosei's arms, preventing him from pushing through. Having these imaginary shackles chaining him, he shouted as loud as he could, summoning the courage to break the chains and end Touma's misery, but before he could make contact...

"WAIIITT!!!"

**116 – What It Means to Save**

Senkyo suddenly took over his body and threw the spirit blade to the ground. Touma was completely defenseless. The tentacles that wrapped around his limbs and came out of his back were all gone. In this defenseless form, Senkyo took Touma at the collar and raised him up from the ground.

Senkyo opened his mouth, wanting to say something to Touma, but he swallowed those words down his throat. He was unsure of what to say. Senkyo knew, that saying anything to Touma at this point was already too late.

Simply saying words won't do anything. He won't hear them, it won't change the outcome, and it definitely won't magically cure Touma and give him back his arms without reason. Words are indeed powerful, but they certainly aren't powerful enough to help Senkyo’s plight.

Troubled about what exactly Senkyo wanted to do, he kept standing there with Touma raised from the ground. Everyone who was watching Senkyo stayed in silence, from the townsfolk to the judges. Finally, Senkyo opened his mouth.

"Y... You might be fine with this... You'll get cured and thank everyone for saving you... You'll tell me that it's not my fault that you ended up disabled... But I'm not fine with that at all! It's not that I don't want to take responsibility, but how can anyone be satisfied with this at all? I came here to save you! If curing you means that you'll still be in pain in the long run, then did I really do what I said I would do? WHAT EXACTLY DO I HAVE TO DO!? WHAT DO I NEED TO DO TO SAVE YOU!?"

Senkyo shouted at Touma, who was still out of control and trying to escape. Touma looked pathetic, completely beaten up and out of control. Senkyo cursed at the fact that curing him and making him live like that was his only option.

With his right arm still suspending Touma in midair, Senkyo reluctantly picked up the spirit weapon by his feet. Be pointed it at Touma's heart, but nothing further than that. Senkyo couldn't move his shaking hand.

*"\*…Damn it! Damn it! Damn it!!\*"*

Senkyo dropped the spirit weapon. As he did...

"Good grief, you're as idealistic as your father."

No one else but Senkyo was in the vicinity. The one who spoke was none other than Senkyo, but at the same time, somebody completely different from him. It was the same person who took over Senkyo's body to defeat Fulgur, The Divine Soul of Spirits.

He threw Touma into the air. In the middle of his ascent, Touma froze, suspended in midair without anything supporting him.

After scratching the back of his head, he held out his right hand to Touma. A light-grey light revealed the crest that suddenly appeared on the back of Senkyo's right hand. His cold eyes stared down Touma's pathetic figure.

"Come to me, power sealed by the heavens itself. At this moment, I am God. Heed my bidding and shape my desires, power that exceeds the 12 elements. Shape the very soul in front of me as I desire. Soul Synthesis."

Touma's chest, where his heart was located, began to glow in a light-grey light. A magic circle appeared on the ground below Touma and blasted him with a light-grey light that reached the skies. Soon after, the light came back down and emitted a deafening yet bearable blast.

From the mysterious light appeared Touma, who was completely uninjured. No wounds, cuts, scratches, or severed arms. Touma was completely back to normal now. His arms are attached to his body and the color of his body was as normal as could be.

"Hey, boy."

He called out to someone, but no one else was around. His voice was too low to be able to be heard by anyone else if someone were there, so naturally, he was referring to Ryosei.

*"\*Are you talking to me...?\*"*

"Of course, I am. Now, once this guy wakes up, tell him this..."

With no one else around to hear it, the divine soul told Ryosei to relay a certain message.

*"\*What!? You're not joking?\*"*

"Who could come up with such an elaborate joke like that?"

*"\*Well...\*"*

It wasn't that Ryosei didn't believe what he said, it was just that it was so unbelievable that he was shocked it was real.

"Anyways, I'll be going now—"

*"\*Wait!\*"*

"Huh?"

Ryosei stopped the divine soul before it completely disappeared again.

*"\*Why do you keep helping us? And why do you hide yourself from Senkyo?\*"*

"Hmm... Then let's put it like this. Why do you eat? Why do you sleep? And why did you hesitate to stab his heart?"

The divine soul turned the question back on Ryosei. He picked up on what the divine soul meant, and that was "I'm a divine *soul.*If you couldn't tell, I have my own way of thinking and doing things."

Silenced by the soul, Ryosei stepped down. But just as he thought the conversation was over, the divine soul raised his voice.

"Well, as for your second question, don't tell Master that I exist. I knock him out every time I come out to not have him discover me. The last thing I want is for him to be dependent on my power. Master has potential. I don't think I have to specify what I mean, right?"

He meant that if Senkyo discovered he had such power; he would ruin his own growth by becoming dependent on him. He is not ready to receive his power. But seeing as he can openly interact with Senkyo, and the fact that he used his power on Touma, that could only mean one thing...

*"\*Then... does this mean that Senkyo was already recognized before?\*"*

The divine soul didn't respond. He returned to Senkyo's body and hid himself. Proof of that was crest behind Senkyo's right hand was gone. When Senkyo regained consciousness, he was absolutely confused as to how Touma was back to normal.

Ryosei pondered about his talk with the divine soul. The odd part was that his conversation with the divine soul and his memory of the Soul’s battle with Fulgur were never shared with Senkyo. He could only imagine that it was the soul's doing.

Normally, Ryosei and Senkyo shared every memory, so far, the only exception was if their memories are sealed. But now, that included the Divine Soul’s tampering. Ryosei put those complicated thoughts at the back of his head, but he couldn't help that they kept popping up every now and again.

**Epilogue: A Knock on the Rift**

**117 – A Knock on the Rift**

It was Monday. A week had passed since the day that the Hunter Battle Royale was held. In the end, Touma was sent to maximum-level detainment in the dungeons where he also received medication since he had yet to wake up.

Senkyo’s team won the battle royale and was accepted as official members of the Konjou Clan. But to be more accurate, they became the allies of the Konjou Clan. Since Senkyo did not want to be bound by the clan's rules, he wanted to be allies instead of members. Furthermore, Senkyo was recognized as another wielder of Kuro Yaiba. The clan elders were skeptical about the wielder of the clan’s legendary blade not being a member of their clan but somehow Yousuke was able to convince them.

After that, Senkyo asked to be trained by someone in the clan to become even stronger. As per Senkyo's request, he was assigned a personal mentor. He was assigned to someone else besides Dai, so Senkyo was, yet again, nervous about meeting his new mentor. He did not know if they would be someone he could deal with or not. But to be stronger, Senkyo accepted.

After school, Senkyo was called in by the clan. However, he was not called in by Yousuke or any of the elders. He was called in, by the mysterious woman, Freda.

"U-Umm, it's Yukou Senkyo. Excuse me, I'm coming in!"

Senkyo announced himself as he opened the door to Freda's quarters. He was told by Yousuke to head straight over there and that he was free to let himself in.

Senkyo entered the room with caution. Similar to last time, the room was empty, and only consisted of the curtain that hid the other side of the room.

"Freda-sama? Hello? Is anyone here?"

Senkyo called out to the other side of the curtain. Thankfully, it looks like his calls were heard as the sound of hurried footsteps became louder and louder followed by a distant voice saying "I'll be right there!"

He waited, and finally, a silhouette of a woman appeared through the curtains. The curtains began retracting upwards, revealing to Senkyo the other side of the room. But betraying his expectations, there was nothing but emptiness on the other side as well.

When the curtain was fully opened, Freda came out of the corner and showed herself to Senkyo. His jaw dropped at her unexpected appearance.

She had white porcelain skin. Her golden curly hair went down her back and her front. Eyes as green as emerald reflected the light of the room. She wore a green dress with touches of white, and chest assets that were on the bigger side. From what Senkyo could tell, she was about the same height as him and she had a young beautiful face. But the most eye-catching of her whole appearance was her pointy ears. Senkyo only knew one race with the same characteristics as those...

"An elf!?"

"Yes, I'm Freda, and I am an elf from Zerid. Nice to meet you, Yukou Senkyo-san and Konjou Ryosei-san!"

Senkyo thought Freda was most likely a level-headed and serious person. But from her cheery introduction and gestures, he now knew that he was completely and utterly wrong. To add to that, Freda immediately approached Senkyo and took his hand.

"It really is you! Nnn~~ Amazing!"

Her emerald eyes sparkled as she scrutinized Senkyo. He reflexively took a few steps back, but that proved to be useless as she closed the distance in a quick second.

"U-Umm... So, you're an elf? That was surprising..."

"Aw, that isn't that important. Right now, what's important is you! Here, come with me!"

Freda took Senkyo's hand and dragged him through the other side of the room.

**............**

Over at a distant land, one so distant from Earth that it was separated as a different world. In the world they call Zerid, at a particular ominous castle where the clouds were as dark as the aura around it, and lands as barren as the most lifeless of lands.

A certain man sat on top of a throne. Three people kneeled before that man. However, these three people were far from being considered "people." For these three people, who were covered with different kinds of armor, were skeletons.

From left to right, the first skeleton wore a huge set of full-body armor. It was as huge as a bus. Its skull bathed in a red flame, lighting up the area around it. If it weren't for the fact that it wasn't wearing its helmet, there was no way to tell what was actually inside that glowing red helmet.

The second skeleton was a bit smaller than the first one. Instead of full-body armor, it wore a coat that covered its body that was bathed in a blue flame.

The third skeleton wasn't much different from the second one's height. However, it had scars ingrained in its skull. It wore a light set of armor, but that didn't hide the black flame that bathed its body. The man on the throne raised his voice.

"The infamous 'Brothers in Death.' I heard great things about you three. You said you can hunt anyone and anything, am I right?"

The third skeleton responded to the man.

"That is correct, my lord. We have yet to fail a single hunt. Anyone and anything can be hunted. Nothing is safe when they enter our sights."

"Great... But this job won’t be a hunt. It’s a package retrieval."

"Could you explain in detail, my lord?"

"Here."

With a snap of a finger, a flame appeared before each skeleton, like a burning paper played in reverse, two pieces of paper appeared in front of each skeleton.

"Those two are your packages. They’ll be quite the handful. They even successfully took out one of my precious leaders. Quite the feat, isn't it?’

“Th-They defeated a leader!? I-Is this really a job we can take on, my lord? With all due respect, but not even we would have the power to go against a leader, much less someone who defeated one!”

“Oh? Are you going back on your word?”

The man shot the skeleton with a blood-curdling glare. The skeletons stiffened in fear. The one that was negotiating with the man tried his best to de-escalate the situation. At this moment, their lives were on the line.

“N-No! Of course not, my lord. It was a lapse of judgment. If my lord asked for us, I’m sure you knew we could accomplish the mission. I would like to receive the details of the mission!”

“Good.”

The man’s face lightened and the skeletons sighed in relief. He continued to relay his orders.

“They both live on Earth. The female is a vampire that goes by the name Hisho Yuu. And the other is a high-school boy called Yukou Senkyo. I want these two packages delivered to me alive. If you can't get them alive, then find a way. I trust this retrieval won't be a problem for you all, will it?"

"There would be no such problem, my lord. Rest assured; we will have these two before your greatness in no time."

"I'll hold you up to that..."

With a frightening laugh, the skeletons stared at the papers in front of them. Like some sort of practice, they pierced the two pieces of paper from the back with a blade. One would be able to see that the blade pierced right through the images of Senkyo and Yuu.

Just outside that room, someone overheard the conversation. They hurriedly left and kept walking through the huge corridor like they hadn't stopped to eavesdrop.

"Hm... So the rumors of that lighting kid dying were true. Heheheh, even though that kid was weaker than me, if someone defeated him, then that means they are sure to be able to entertain me. Hahahaha!"

He was the very definition of a demon. He had long horns on his head and his large body looked like it was nothing but muscle. A huge sword was attached to his back, one with cracks and red veins. His demonic eyes glowed red in the darkness as he thought of the havoc he'd reek. His ominous deep voice echoed through the corridor as his large figure glowed red within the darkness.