

Multiverse 166

Chapter 166: The Captains Assuming Office Together

Time flew like a white steed glimpsed through a crack, passing swiftly in the blink of an eye.

This was especially true in the Soul Society, where souls frequently lived for hundreds or even thousands of years.

A month's time, in the Soul Society, was incredibly short.

But during this period, Kaiser had already attended his graduation ceremony at the Shin'ō Academy and officially graduated.

The day before the Captain inauguration ceremony, Kaiser left the Shin'ō Academy and headed to the Division 1 barracks.

He did not notify anyone, nor did he say farewell to Renji Abarai and the others. He simply walked away alone in silence, barely carrying any belongings. With only his Zanpakutō at his side, he used Shunpo, carried his blade, and departed freely.

By the time he arrived at Division 1's barracks, the Division 1 Lieutenant, Chōjirō Sasakibe, was already waiting and led him inside.

However, this time, instead of being taken to the meeting room where the Captains gathered, Kaiser was led to Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto's personal office.

"Looks like you're ready,"

Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto sat upright before a low wooden table, his ever-present wooden staff resting beside him, and a spread of documents before him, looking like he was attending to official duties.

"More or less."

Kaiser sat in front of Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto—not in a chair, but directly on the tatami mat, and not even in a formal seiza position, but cross-legged, which made Chōjirō Sasakibe frown.

Kaiser pretended not to notice, continuing to sit cross-legged as he pleased.

He couldn't help it. He disliked sitting formally. Even though his physical endurance was not lacking now, sitting seiza for too long still made his legs uncomfortable, so he generally avoided it.

Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto glanced at the seated Kaiser but said nothing, only speaking up.

"Since you're ready, then starting today, you're officially appointed."

"Tomorrow morning, the Captains of each squad will gather for your inauguration ceremony. So for today, you'll stay here."

"Also, there's something else I need to tell you. You won't be the only one appointed during tomorrow's ceremony. Another person will also assume a Captain's position alongside you."

Upon hearing this, Kaiser was slightly stunned.

"Someone else?"

It seemed he had thought of something.

"That's right," Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto nodded. "Captain Kuchiki of Division 6, had long planned to retire. Now that the long-vacant Captain seat of Division 3 is finally to be filled, he took the opportunity to submit his request to step down."

Within the Gotei 13, there was technically no formal resignation system.

Because the Central 46, which governed Seireitei, regarded the Gotei 13 as a noble institution, they did not allow "disqualified members" to exist among the already-qualified ranks.

Though it sounded unreasonable, members of the Gotei 13 were generally not allowed to leave of their own will. Only under unavoidable circumstances would they be granted a temporary leave of absence.

Shinigamis on leave who failed to return after a long time would be directly struck from the records.

As for formal dismissal, that typically applied to Shinigamis deemed ideologically or behaviorally dangerous—akin to expulsion from school. Those declared as having been dismissed would be forcibly confined within the Special Detention Building, effectively imprisoned and monitored.

Therefore, when a member of the Gotei 13 left due to betrayal, death, retirement, expulsion, or promotion, the organization would select a qualified candidate to fill the vacant position.

The current Captain of Division 6 had requested to retire under the "retirement" category.

It was originally planned for a later time, but since the final vacant seat in the Gotei 13 was about to be filled, he decided to step down now and let his successor take over.

"His successor is the 28th head of the Kuchiki Clan, regarded as the most outstanding heir in its history—Byakuya Kuchiki."

Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto delivered the information slowly and deliberately.

"The Kuchiki Clan..."

Kaiser narrowed his eyes slightly.

Everyone knew that nobles existed in Seireitei.

These were families descended from the pioneers with long-standing histories in the Soul Society. Each one could be called a noble house, descended from Shinigamis born with innately powerful Reiryoku.

Among these many noble houses, four were the oldest and most prominent.

These Four Great Noble Clans were interrelated, and generation after generation produced individuals of extraordinary ability and strength.

They received elite education and took up key positions in the Gotei 13 and other organizations. They were tasked with setting an example for the people of the Soul Society.

The Kuchiki Clan was one of the Four Great Noble Clans, and ranked first among them—wielding the greatest authority. Its members were revered even among other noble families, with many servants and immense influence. They served as paragons for all Shinigamis and bore the duty of upholding and enforcing the laws of the Soul Society.

In Division 6, a noble-exclusive squad, the positions of Captain and Lieutenant were usually held by members of the Kuchiki Clan. This squad was essentially their personal domain. At least for the Captain's position, this had always been the case. Occasionally, exceptions occurred for the Lieutenant role.

Currently, the Kuchiki Clan had passed to its 28th generation, and the present head—Byakuya Kuchiki—had surpassed his predecessor's strength in just a few decades. He was considered the most outstanding heir in the history of the Kuchiki Clan.

"Though he's still not quite your equal, Byakuya Kuchiki is especially remarkable even among noble history," said Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto. "From the moment he took over as clan head, the Division 6 Captain position was destined to fall into his hands sooner or later."

The implication was simple: why wait? With the final Captain position in the Gotei 13 being filled, they might as well push this already-decided successor forward too.

"Tomorrow's inauguration ceremony will thus be a joint appointment for Division 3 and Division 6."

Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto lifted his wrinkled eyes and looked toward Kaiser, asking him just in case,

"If you have any questions, now's the time to ask."

Upon hearing this, Kaiser shook his head.

"I don't have any problems," he replied with a smile. "If there is a problem, it's probably the other side who'll have one, right?"

To be inaugurated together with a commoner from the filthiest District 80 of Rukongai, someone from the exalted noble house might not be thrilled.

"Head Kuchiki is a reasonable man. He wouldn't think that a genius who's broken multiple Soul Society records lacks the qualifications to stand beside him."

So said Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto.

"Then that's fine."

Kaiser replied nonchalantly.

"Chōjirō," Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto said, seeing that everything had been settled, "prepare a room for Captain Kaiser."

This time, he didn't even call him "Kaiser" anymore—he called him "Captain Kaiser."

That meant Kaiser's appointment as Captain was now official. There would be no further changes and no surprises.

"Yes."

Chōjirō Sasakibe nodded and bowed toward Kaiser.

"This way, please, Captain Kaiser."

Even this Lieutenant of Division 1 now treated Kaiser with new respect—not as an up-and-coming youngster, but as someone who stood above him.

Once again, Kaiser felt just how rigid the hierarchy of the Soul Society was.

But—

"Not bad at all."

As the beneficiary, Kaiser accepted it with ease.

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The next day, early morning.

When Kaiser awoke and finished preparing himself, his clothing had undergone a major transformation.

The white robes of the Shin'ō Academy student were gone. In their place were a black kimono and a white haori.

"So this is the Shihakushō?"

Kaiser looked down at the kimono beneath the haori and curiously brushed his fingers across it.

To him, it just felt like an ordinary kimono.

In truth, this full-black outfit—with kimono-style top and wide-legged pants on the bottom—was the official work uniform for Shinigamis performing their duties. Its name: Shihakushō.

Compared to ordinary clothes, Kaiser didn't notice any obvious differences.

He only knew that this was a special garment that would restore itself using the wearer's Reiatsu when damaged.

"Pretty comfortable to wear. Doesn't feel restrictive at all."

Kaiser moved around a bit and found that the Shihakushō was surprisingly easy to move in. No wonder so many Shinigamis could wear it while sprinting and leaping around without issue.

As for the white haori worn over the Shihakushō—that was a garment reserved for Captains only.

In the Gotei 13, all Shinigamis wore Shihakushō, but only Captains wore the white haori emblazoned with squad numbers.

Kaiser's haori bore the number "3" on the back, signifying his position as Captain of Division 3.

Additionally, Captain haori came in long sleeves, short sleeves, and even sleeveless varieties. Kenpachi Zarakī's haori even had a jagged hem. Apparently, the style could be personalized.

Kaiser's haori was sleeveless, so the black sleeves of his Shihakushō were fully exposed beneath the white haori—giving him a rather unrestrained appearance.

By the way, Lieutenants, as the second-in-command, did not wear haori. Like ordinary Squad Members, they wore Shihakushō, but they bore a Lieutenant's Badge—usually on the arm.

Chōjirō Sasakibe of Division 1 wore a badge with the squad's number on his arm. Gin Ichimaru also wore one with the Division 5 emblem. It was a symbol of status.

"This will do."

Kaiser hung his Zanpakutō at his waist, concealed it beneath the haori, and that was now his public image.

"It's almost time, Captain Kaiser."

Chōjirō Sasakibe's voice came at just the right moment from outside the door.

"You may proceed to the inauguration site now."

At this, Kaiser turned and walked to the doorway, sliding the door open.

"Let's go, then."

He smiled calmly, not at all looking like someone about to ascend to the peak of the Shinigami world.

Yet from Kaiser's presence, Chōjirō Sasakibe could feel a faint pressure, making his expression turn solemn.

"This Reiatu..."

Only now did Chōjirō Sasakibe understand why the Captain Commander had appointed such a young Academy student to be the Captain of Division 3.

Even though he hadn't witnessed Kaiser slicing an Adjuchas in half, nor seen him defeat Kenpachi Zarakī, just this Reiatu alone—so strong it pressured even him—was proof enough that Kaiser had the qualifications and ability.

"Please."

Chōjirō Sasakibe's tone toward Kaiser grew even more respectful.

Kaiser nodded, then followed him to the inauguration ceremony.

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At that time, some of the Captains had already arrived at the Division 1 barracks, while others were still slowly making their way there.

As one of the main participants, Kaiser was not brought into the meeting room with the other Captains, but to a side room where he would wait for his entrance.

However, when he arrived, he found that someone was already there.

That person was a strikingly handsome young man with long black hair, pale violet eyes, and a stern expression. He wore a noble's signature hairpiece—the Kenseikan—and a scarf called Ginpaku Kazahana no Uzuginu, which only high nobles were permitted to wear. Like Kaiser, he wore a Shihakushō beneath a sleeveless Captain's haori.

He also wore white fingerless gloves, and his Zanpakutō was concealed beneath his haori, just like Kaiser's.

When Kaiser entered the room and saw him, the other man noticed him as well—and turned to look directly at him.

"...Kaiser?"

Perhaps because he was a man of few words, his tone was cold—just as his appearance suggested.

"The one and only."

Kaiser stood in stark contrast to him, his voice filled with a light, teasing tone.

"You must be Captain Byakuya Kuchiki, right?"

Kaiser sized him up and spoke with a smile.

"The one and only," the man replied with the same words, glancing at Kaiser as he added, "I heard you're quite the exceptional genius."

"And I heard Captain Kuchiki is the most outstanding heir in the history of the Kuchiki Clan," Kaiser replied calmly. "The title 'genius' seems to suit you just as well."

"But we are no longer merely 'geniuses in training' in others' eyes. We are about to become Captains," Byakuya Kuchiki said flatly. "I know you defeated the Captain of Division 11 and proved your strength in front of all the Captains."

"Unfortunately, I wasn't present. I didn't get to witness that scene."

"If there's ever a chance, I hope you'll show me your strength as well."

Byakuya Kuchiki said this plainly.

To which Kaiser only smiled and said:

"There will be a chance."