

## Multiverse 186

### Chapter 186: "Hyōrinmaru"

"Rumble rumble rumble..."

The sky suddenly seemed to welcome a storm, with layers upon layers of dark clouds drifting in from unknown directions, darkening the sky ominously.

At this moment, the temperature between heaven and earth seemed to drop, letting a chill spread throughout the air.

Kaiser stood beneath the oppressive sky, at the boundary of the Soul Society, gazing half-smilingly at Tōshirō Hitsugaya across from him, while gripping the Zanpakutō that had appeared in his hand from thin air.

That was not the Zanpakutō Kaiser usually wore at his waist, but an entirely new Zanpakutō.

It wasn't as ornate as the Zanpakutō at his waist, nor did it emanate any aura of nobility. It was shaped like a tachi, with a light purple hilt, a cross-shaped guard, and at the back of the hilt a crescent-shaped iron chain gradually extended, swaying in the air filled with frost.

That Zanpakutō was something Tōshirō Hitsugaya knew down to his very bones.

There was no way he wouldn't recognize that Zanpakutō.

Even if he mistook every Zanpakutō in the world, he could never mistake that one.

Because the exact same thing was currently being held in his own hand.

"Hyōrinmaru..."

Tōshirō Hitsugaya couldn't believe his eyes, his face full of shock and disbelief.

"Captain Kaiser, you..."

Tōshirō Hitsugaya stared at Kaiser in astonishment, his expression utterly confused.

Kaiser, however, didn't offer the slightest explanation. He simply met Tōshirō Hitsugaya's shocked gaze and spoke calmly.

"You asked me why I brought you here, right?"

"In fact, what I want to do is very simple—to show you in the most direct way how to properly use Hyōrinmaru."

"Here, even if the Shinigami Research and Development Institute detects the Reiatsu, they won't be able to pinpoint all the details or know what we're doing."

"So we can fight here freely without worrying about being interrupted."

As he spoke, Kaiser slowly raised the blade in his hand.

"Crack crack crack crack..."

Immediately, the ground beneath Kaiser's feet began to freeze.

The ice rapidly spread along the surface, expanding in all directions, freezing everything in its path.

Whether it was rocks or trees, even the moisture in the air was all frozen, turning the entire scene into a world of snow and ice.

"Whoosh—"

A cold snow-laden wind blew in from the sky, causing the already plummeting temperature to fall even further, and letting large snowflakes begin to descend from the dark clouds.

"Watch closely, Hitsugaya."

Kaiser's voice echoed within the snowstorm, entering Tōshirō Hitsugaya's ears.

"This is Hyōrinmaru's true power."

As his words fell, icy mist burst from the tip of Kaiser's raised Zanpakutō.

"Crack crack crack crack—!"

The freezing ground's ice layer thickened at a visibly rapid rate, transforming the earth into an ice field, raising towering ice pillars, forming massive ice rocks, and even causing ice mountains to rise—an overwhelmingly majestic sight.

In that instant, everything standing on the ground was frozen solid, including Tōshirō Hitsugaya.

His feet began freezing at a speed visible to the naked eye, finally shocking Tōshirō Hitsugaya awake.

The terrifying chill invaded his body, causing ice crystals to form on his eyebrows, hair, even his mouth and nose.

Almost instinctively, Tōshirō Hitsugaya realized—if this continued, he would freeze to death.

Yes, freeze to death.

Before he was entirely encased in ice, he would certainly die from the cold.

As the wielder of the strongest Ice/Snow-type Zanpakutō, Tōshirō Hitsugaya had never truly known what cold was. Now, however, he was on the verge of freezing to death—how ironic.

"Bankai!"

Obeying the fear and panic in his heart, Tōshirō Hitsugaya loudly activated his strongest power.

"Daiguren Hyōrinmaru!"

A burst of astonishing Reiatsu erupted along with the chill from his body, shattering all the ice and frost clinging to him.

An ice dragon took shape on Tōshirō Hitsugaya's body, with wings stretching from his back, his sword hand covered by the dragon's mouth, the dragon's tail trailing behind, his legs transformed into icy talons, and above his wings, three twelve-petaled ice flowers appeared.

Relying on the explosive Reiatsu of Bankai, Tōshirō Hitsugaya broke free of the frozen state and soared into the air.

However...

"It's impressive you'd dare fly into the sky even after knowing the Zanpakutō in my hand is Hyōrinmaru."

Kaiser's voice rang out again, making Tōshirō Hitsugaya's eyes contract.

"You should know this best—Hyōrinmaru rules the skies!"

The heavy snow descending from the sky suddenly transformed into a blizzard, sweeping across the heavens and earth with a roar.

"Guaah...!"

Soaring in mid-air, Tōshirō Hitsugaya was instantly caught in the blizzard, as if struck by some invisible shockwave, thrown back violently.

"Crack crack crack crack..."

The sound of bitterly cold condensation echoed again. Tōshirō Hitsugaya, caught in the blizzard, was once again covered in frost.

"How... is this possible?!"

Tōshirō Hitsugaya shouted in disbelief.

"I'm in a Bankai state right now!"

As the wielder of the strongest Ice/Snow-type Zanpakutō, in this Bankai form, he should be the one most immune to ice and snow.

But now, even in Bankai, he was gradually being frozen?

"There's nothing surprising about it, is there?"

Kaiser's voice suddenly came from behind Tōshirō Hitsugaya.

"I told you already—you can't even use Shikai properly, let alone Bankai. You're not unleashing its true power at all."

"In that case, facing a stronger freezing force, even Hyōrinmaru in its Bankai form can't avoid being frozen."

"Not to mention... what I'm using against you right now is also the strongest Ice power in this world."

Hearing this, Tōshirō Hitsugaya's pupils contracted again, instinctively trying to turn around and slash back.

But he was too slow.

"Ice Dragon Swirling Tail."

Before Tōshirō Hitsugaya could react, Kaiser, who had somehow appeared behind him, fiercely swung his Hyōrinmaru and unleashed a wide-ranged slash.

"Boom!"

Instantly, the entire region in the direction of Kaiser's blade was frozen.

In a single strike, ice spread like a dragon's swinging tail, freezing an enormous space—including Tōshirō Hitsugaya—at a terrifying speed.

"Bang!"

A moment later, the frozen zone shattered, and Tōshirō Hitsugaya, his body covered in frost wounds, came flying out, bleeding and panting heavily.

"You should feel lucky—lucky that your Zanpakutō is also Hyōrinmaru."

Kaiser watched as this unfolded, neither stopping him nor taking the opportunity to strike again, simply standing amid the blizzard and speaking with a smile.

"Otherwise, with your strength, there's no way you could've broken free from that Ice Dragon Swirling Tail."

Facing Kaiser's words, Tōshirō Hitsugaya had no way to refute him.

He knew better than anyone how powerful that Ice Dragon Swirling Tail had been, and how high its freezing power was—there was no way he could've broken free from it at his current level.

The only reason he escaped, as Kaiser said, was because his Zanpakutō was also Hyōrinmaru.

Thanks to that, he had high resistance to ice and snow, and his familiarity with Hyōrinmaru allowed him to locate the pressure points most likely to help him break free.

Without that, there was no way he would've escaped the ice.

"...So that Zanpakutō really is Hyōrinmaru? Not some imitation or counterfeit?"

Tōshirō Hitsugaya finally had no choice but to accept the truth.

"Whether it's a fake or not, you should know better than anyone," Kaiser said with a soft laugh. "This power was born from your own soul—how could you not recognize the difference between real and fake?"

"Of course, that's not the point today, so it doesn't matter."

"What matters is—what are your thoughts after seeing my Hyōrinmaru?"

Thoughts?

Was that even a question?

"The difference... is far too great."

Tōshirō Hitsugaya's whole body trembled.

Yes, the difference was simply overwhelming.

Put everything else aside—even in this very moment, he had already activated Bankai, while Kaiser was still only using Shikai. Yet in every aspect, Kaiser's Shikai was overpowering his Bankai—it was utterly unreasonable.

Whether it was Hyōrinmaru's basic ice/snow abilities or its power to control the weather, his Bankai couldn't match the other's Shikai. Nothing could be more absurd.

He wanted to attack, to strike back using ice and snow against Kaiser—but realized that Daiguren Hyōrinmaru's techniques wouldn't even activate.

Why?

It was simple—Hyōrinmaru's abilities rely on freezing the moisture in the air.

Without moisture, Hyōrinmaru's powers are greatly reduced—or even unusable. In severe cases, even Bankai can't be maintained.

That was exactly Tōshirō Hitsugaya's current situation. He could no longer draw moisture from the air to launch attacks. All he could do was barely maintain his Bankai and prevent it from collapsing.

Kaiser's Hyōrinmaru had seized control over all the moisture in the atmosphere—and taken dominion over the sky—leaving Tōshirō Hitsugaya with nothing to use.

As for the sky... he never controlled it to begin with, let alone wrest it from Kaiser.

"Do you know why the difference is so great?"

Kaiser spoke while slowly walking toward Tōshirō Hitsugaya. With each step, an ice flower bloomed beneath his feet, making it seem as if he were walking across floating petals of ice.

"There are two reasons."

"One is that you yourself are still immature, not yet at the level where you can unleash such power."

"The other is that your impatient approach has led to this result."

In Kaiser's eyes, while Tōshirō Hitsugaya was undoubtedly a genius, it was precisely because of his excessive talent that everything in his growth had progressed too fast—so fast that even he couldn't keep up with himself.

Even before becoming a Shinigami, before entering the Shin'ō Academy, when he was just a normal kid in Rukongai, Tōshirō Hitsugaya had already begun to show signs of his uniqueness.

He had been able to see the manifestation of Hyōrinmaru in his dreams even without a Zanpakutō. Hyōrinmaru had even demanded him to call its name before he had a blade. And due to his excessive Reiatsu, which he didn't know how to control, he had nearly frozen his grandmother to death.

It was to avoid harming his grandmother that Tōshirō Hitsugaya, under Rangiku Matsumoto's recommendation, entered the Shin'ō Academy, received an Asauchi, obtained his Zanpakutō, and completed Shikai in no time—graduating in just a year.

Then, he immediately began to train in Bankai, and with his overwhelming talent, successfully reached that final Zanpakutō form.

Everything had progressed far too fast—even before he could adjust.

"Before you even had a Zanpakutō, you could hear its voice and manifest a portion of Hyōrinmaru's power."

"Once you entered the Shin'ō Academy and received an Asauchi, you achieved Shikai and quickly graduated, beginning Bankai training and progressing rapidly."

"But did you think this came without cost?"

"Being able to manifest part of your Zanpakutō's power without a blade made it so you couldn't control your Reiatsu—you nearly killed your family."

"Then once you got your Zanpakutō, you didn't study it thoroughly. You immediately rushed into learning Bankai, and now your control over Bankai is a mess, and you can't even properly use Shikai. How are you supposed to unleash Hyōrinmaru's true power?"

Kaiser lightly waved Hyōrinmaru in his hand, and the clouds above began to churn, intensifying the blizzard.

"Normally, anyone who masters Bankai would already be fully proficient in Shikai. But you're different—you mastered Bankai before even mastering Shikai."

"That's not good. You can't even control the basics—how can you expect to grasp something greater?"

"To put it bluntly, in your current state, you're not even qualified to use Bankai."

As he spoke, Kaiser swung his blade again, turning the moisture in the air into ice and unleashing it within the blizzard.

"Boom!"

With the sound of shattering, Tōshirō Hitsugaya's ice wings, the ice dragon on his arm, the icy claws on his feet, the dragon tail connected to his wings, and the ice flowers above—all shattered.

With the atmosphere's moisture further depleted, Tōshirō Hitsugaya could no longer maintain his Bankai.

"Go back and start over from Shikai, idiot."

That was the last thing Tōshirō Hitsugaya heard.

Then, his consciousness faded.

The silver-haired youth within the blizzard was frozen into an ice sculpture and fell from the sky.

"Was I too harsh?"

Only then did Kaiser slowly sheath his sword, murmuring to himself.

"Hmm... well, he won't die from it—so think of it as leaving him with a lasting impression."

With that, the blizzard dispersed, and the sky began to clear.

But the events of this day would forever remain etched in Tōshirō Hitsugaya's heart.