

Multiverse 196

Chapter 196: Why Exactly?

"Splash, splash..."

Perhaps it was because a large amount of moisture had been evaporated by the earlier Raikōhō, but light rain began to fall over the Fifth Division's quarters, creating the soft sounds of rainfall and droplets hitting the water.

Yet every single Shinigami drenched in that rain felt cold to their core—hands and feet numb, heads blank.

Because before them, lay a corpse whose chest had been pierced by a blade, the entire body soaked in blood.

Wearing black-rimmed glasses and a white haori, the once gentle and kind-hearted Captain of the Fifth Division lay there, devoid of all signs of life.

Sōsuke Aizen—was dead.

This fact was laid bare in the most direct way before all of them.

Even for the Shinigami who had arrived afterward, and the Captains who rushed over upon hearing the news, the sight of the corpse left no room for denial—a respected Captain had died before their eyes.

"Boom!"

A heavy, explosive thud rang out.

It was the sound of a wooden staff slamming heavily onto the ground.

Standing at the front, Genryūsai Shigekuni Yamamoto's entire body radiated scorching Reiatsu. Though no rage was visible on his face, anyone could see that the Captain Commander of the Gotei 13 was now furious.

"This is your way of maintaining order in the Soul Society, Kaiser?!"

Yamamoto's voice thundered like a great bell, the anger within it unmistakable to all.

Unfortunately, Kaiser had already left and could not feel Yamamoto's fury in the slightest.

Those who were initially present had wanted to stop him, but even Sui-Fēng—Captain of the Second Division and Commander of the Onmitsukidō—couldn't keep up with Kaiser's Shunpo. How could ordinary Shinigami possibly stop him from leaving?

Thus, Yamamoto's anger had nowhere to go and simply burst out as overwhelming Reiatsu, making all nearby Shinigami feel as though a mountain was pressing down on them—they could barely breathe.

"Let it go for now, Captain Commander," Shunsui Kyōraku said quietly, head lowered. "If you keep this up, our own Shinigami will collapse first."

"That's right, Sensei," Jūshirō Ukitake added with concern. "A Captain has died—this isn't a small matter. On top of that, the Ryōka are causing a stir. If you don't take command, things may spiral out of control."

At their words, although flames of anger still flickered in Yamamoto's eyes, reason prevailed, and he reined in his Reiatsu, allowing the Shinigami around him to breathe a sigh of relief.

"Where are the others?" Yamamoto asked grimly. "Something this serious has happened, so why haven't they come?"

The news of Aizen's death had already spread. The other Captains should have arrived by now.

But despite the time that had passed, only Shunsui Kyōraku, Jūshirō Ukitake, and Retsu Unohana were present.

Kyōraku and Ukitake stood to Yamamoto's left and right, while Unohana had been silently examining Aizen's corpse since arriving, frowning deeply as though lost in thought. She hadn't said a single word.

As for the rest of the Captains, not a single one had shown up.

"They're probably not at their barracks, so the message didn't reach them right away," Kyōraku explained, as the Captain of the Eighth Division, well-informed on his peers' whereabouts.

"Captain Sui-Fēng of the Second Division is pursuing the Ryoka with the Execution Corps. I heard she's searching for a black cat."

"Captain Kenpachi Zarakī of the Eleventh Division hasn't returned since going out. Probably lost again, as usual, while chasing Ryoka."

"Captain Kurotsuchi of the Twelfth Division is, unusually, not in the Shinigami Research and Development Institute. Apparently, he's searching for any Ryoka who might interest him as experimental subjects."

As for the others, their actions were more ambiguous.

"Captain Kuchiki of the Sixth Division is at the Special Detention Building. No one knows what he's guarding or waiting for."

"Captains Kaname Tōsen of the Ninth Division and Gin Ichimaru of the Tenth are missing. Even their Lieutenants don't know where they are."

"Captain Komamura of the Seventh Division is currently looking for Captain Tōsen..."

In total, seven Captains were still acting on their own, possibly unaware of what had happened.

Only Kyōraku, Ukitake, and Unohana had been in their barracks when the news broke, so they'd learned immediately and rushed over without delay.

Including Yamamoto who arrived first, the absent Kaiser, and the deceased Aizen, the Captains of the Gotei 13 were now scattered and disunited.

Yamamoto's expression grew worse.

At such a crucial time, the Captains were either acting on their own, had met with misfortune, or were outright missing—and some even appeared to have betrayed the Soul Society. The Gotei 13 had become so unstable at this moment that Yamamoto's anger almost reignited.

"Relay the command at once!" Yamamoto issued a cold order. "Any Captain not currently assigned to a mission is to lead their Lieutenant and subordinates in searching for Captain Kaiser. Once his location is discovered, capture him immediately!"

The nearby Shinigami received the order and began moving.

"What about the Ryoka?" Ukitake asked. He wasn't surprised by Yamamoto's decision but still inquired, "What do we do about them?"

"A few Ryoka, no matter how disruptive, can't compare to the death of a Captain!" Yamamoto declared without hesitation. "Our top priority is apprehending Captain Kaiser. Everything else can wait!"

"Kenpachi Zaraki is already after the Ryoka. That alone is sufficient!"

"As for the Special Detention Building, both the Ryoka and Kaiser may head there. Since Captain Kuchiki is already stationed there, let him remain on watch!"

"All other Captains must focus their efforts on capturing Kaiser—no delays permitted!"

This made it clear: Yamamoto was going all-in to capture Kaiser.

Except for Kenpachi Zaraki and Byakuya Kuchiki, all other Captains would be recalled.

The target had slain a fellow Captain and was one of the greatest geniuses in Soul Society history. Though furious, Yamamoto had not lost his reason. He knew that to capture someone like Kaiser, he'd have to commit everything.

So this time, Division 1 would mobilize as well. If Kaiser's whereabouts were discovered, Yamamoto himself would go and take action.

The remaining Captains were allowed to work together to ensure success.

However, just then, Unohana—who had been silently observing Aizen's corpse—spoke up.

"Captain Commander, I will not participate in the search."

Unohana spoke calmly. "I want to examine Captain Aizen's body and see if I can find any clues."

She had a strong feeling that something about Aizen's corpse was amiss, though she couldn't say exactly what.

She wished to take the body back to the Fourth Division for thorough examination and investigation.

"Granted."

Yamamoto assumed she wanted to find out why Kaiser attacked Aizen. After some thought, he approved.

Even without Unohana, the remaining active Captains were enough. If they all mobilized, surely they could take down Kaiser.

Just as Yamamoto was about to leave, Chōjirō Sasakibe appeared.

"Captain Commander Yamamoto." Sasakibe knelt on one knee beside him and reported, "Central 46 has issued a new resolution."

"The order states: due to the current chaos in Seireitei, and to ensure Rukia Kuchiki's execution proceeds without complications, the execution has been moved up."

"The new time is noon, three days from now. The location remains Sōkyoku Hill."

At this news, not only Yamamoto but all the Captains present were stunned.

"They moved the execution up?"

Ukitake was shocked and anxious.

"Why?"

Unohana frowned and muttered.

"Rukia Kuchiki, of all people... why are they in such a rush to kill her?"

Kyōraku's eyes gleamed, his thoughts racing.

Even Yamamoto's gaze grew heavy.

But he voiced no objection.

Central 46's rulings must not be contested—not even by the Captain Commander. This had always been Yamamoto's belief.

Even sensing something was wrong, Yamamoto still intended to uphold this principle, to preserve Soul Society's authority.

"...Relay this order as well."

"Yes."

Sasakibe acknowledged Yamamoto's command, then vanished with Shunpo.

"You all—move out immediately."

Yamamoto left these final words, then departed with the help of his staff.

Unohana also left, taking Aizen's body with her. Only Kyōraku and Ukitake remained behind.

"Are you alright?"

Kyōraku patted Ukitake's shoulder and asked gently.

The two of them were among the first graduates of the Shin'ō Academy, personally taught by Yamamoto himself. They were also the first students to rise to the rank of Captain, and their deep bond was well known.

They had fought alongside each other for over a thousand years. No one knew Ukitake's heart better than Kyōraku.

"...Shunsui," Ukitake said with a pale expression and sorrowful tone. "Why does everyone want Rukia Kuchiki to die?"

He had been thinking of ways to save her, but now with the execution moved up to just three days away, what could he possibly do?

He no longer knew what to do.

"I want to know what really happened too." Kyōraku sighed and said meaningfully, "Maybe only Captain Kaiser knows the truth behind all this."

"Him?" Ukitake blinked in surprise. "He knows the truth?"

"It's just a guess," Kyōraku smiled. "Otherwise, why did he say those things during the Captain's meeting? Why did he kill Captain Aizen in broad daylight?"

"I don't understand what grudge he had with Aizen, or why he killed him. But precisely because I don't understand, I suspect the truth may be far bigger than any of us imagined."

"Or do you really think he's the kind of person who would kill a comrade and challenge the old man in front of everyone without reason?"

Kyōraku's words made Ukitake shake his head thoughtfully.

"Based on Captain Kaiser's usual behavior, this really is unusual."

For decades, Kaiser had never once challenged Yamamoto in a Captain's meeting. He rarely voiced opinions, always indifferent and detached.

With other Captains, he had never openly clashed—though he once fought Kenpachi Zaraki, they had remained neutral ever since. With Byakuya Kuchiki, aside from one fight in the past, they had minimal interaction.

Rumor had it he wasn't especially close to any Captain.

But among those who graduated with him from the Shin'ō Academy, it was said he maintained good relations, even after becoming a Captain. People often saw them training together.

As for Aizen...

Thinking about it, Kaiser had always been somewhat distant toward Aizen.

Why?

Aizen was known for his good personality, easy to get along with, and had shown appreciation for Kaiser even when he was just a student—frequently praising him in public and treating him warmly. Yet Kaiser had always kept his distance—and now he had killed him.

Why?

At that moment, Ukitake knew what he had to do.

"Let's go find him," Ukitake said resolutely. "Let's ask him what he knows."

Kyōraku smiled without responding, simply nodded.

The two stepped into Shunpo and vanished.

Meanwhile, other Captains who received the news also began moving, searching for Kaiser.

This night was destined to be anything but peaceful.