

Multiverse 198

Chapter 198: Add a Little Fuel to Your Fire

"_____"

Under the suffocatingly heavy atmosphere, the orange-haired Shinigami's grip on his Zanpakutō tightened more and more, sweat streamed down his face in increasing amounts, to the point that his breathing had become labored.

He was a Shinigami halfway through the path—only after Rukia Kuchiki granted him spiritual power did he awaken his latent talent and began walking an extraordinary path.

Although he possessed powerful spiritual power from the beginning and had remarkable strength as soon as he became a Shinigami, as someone who came into it halfway and not through official channels, his understanding of Shinigami was actually very limited—one could even say minimal.

To someone like him, everything Yoruichi-san was saying was hard to comprehend. He didn't even fully understand what kind of genius or prodigy the other party was.

But at the very least, the disparity in strength—he could feel that clearly.

He also knew that within the Gotei 13, the strongest Shinigami were the Captains of each Division. The one who had come to the World of the Living and taken Rukia away—Byakuya Kuchiki—was one of them.

In his understanding, Byakuya Kuchiki was indeed the strongest person he had encountered so far.

He couldn't even take a single blow from that man and had been defeated instantly.

And the person in front of him had already had the power to defeat a Captain decades ago, and now was being described by Yoruichi-san as the worst possible opponent they could encounter—which meant he was even stronger than Byakuya Kuchiki!

At his current level, there was simply no way he could defeat this person!

"Huff... huff..."

Unknowingly, the orange-haired Shinigami's breathing changed from quickened to heavy.

Even though the opponent hadn't released his own Reiatsu, he already felt like he was being crushed by it, which greatly shocked him.

Kaiser acted as if he hadn't noticed any of this. After glancing at the black cat, he looked at the orange-haired Shinigami with great interest.

"So, you're the human who became a Shinigami after receiving spiritual power from Rukia?" Kaiser asked with a half-smile. "I remember your name is...?"

Hearing that, the orange-haired Shinigami took a deep breath and forced himself to calm down.

"Kurosaki Ichigo."

He stated his name firmly.

"I am Kurosaki Ichigo. I'm here to rescue Rukia."

That's right—he was here to save Rukia.

Rukia was being sentenced to death because she had granted him spiritual power and committed a serious offense.

If he fell here, wouldn't that mean he wouldn't be able to save Rukia?

Then Rukia would die because of him!

That... must not happen!

Thinking this, Kurosaki Ichigo's gaze became much more determined. His Reiatsu surged unconsciously and suddenly became much stronger.

"Huh?"

The black cat, who was thinking of ways to flee, noticed the change in Kurosaki Ichigo's Reiatsu and was startled.

"Oh?" Kaiser raised his brow and said, "As expected of this world's protagonist. You exploded with potential under pressure and got stronger just like that?"

If Kurosaki Ichigo's Reiatsu had been around the level of a third or fourth seat earlier, then now it had reached roughly the Lieutenant level.

To grow stronger just like that—this was even more ridiculous than the original protagonists Kaiser had encountered in the other two worlds.

Though it was only natural—compared to those two, Kurosaki Ichigo was a far more special existence.

He wasn't like Ayato Amagiri, who had been sealed by others, nor like Issei Hyoudou, whose body housed a powerful Sacred Gear—yet he had elements of both.

His bloodline was extraordinary by nature, and within his body resided multiple sources of power—he was far from an ordinary human.

The spiritual power granted to him by Rukia Kuchiki was merely a trigger—a catalyst to awaken his own strength and potential.

Once that trigger appeared, Kurosaki Ichigo had constantly remained in a state of explosive growth—each battle turned his potential into strength, each hardship transformed pressure into motivation, making him constantly grow stronger without pause.

In the future, five individuals in Soul Society would be designated as Special War Powers, each possessing some unknown and terrifying factor.

Among them, Kenpachi Zaraki was listed due to "unknown combat capability," Sōsuke Aizen for "unknown Reiatsu."

Kurosaki Ichigo would also become one of the five Special War Powers, listed for his "unknown potential ability."

In terms of potential and uniqueness, Kurosaki Ichigo was undoubtedly the most exceptional existence in this fantasy world—almost unmatched.

In the original story, this substitute Shinigami, just to save Rukia Kuchiki, experienced numerous deadly battles in Soul Society and, in only about ten days, grew from having only third or fourth seat power to reaching Captain-level strength.

That absurd growth speed was merely the tip of the iceberg of his potential.

In the future, he would grow even faster, even more outrageously—shocking countless people.

Unfortunately...

"At your current level, you're still far too weak. There's no way you can save Rukia."

Kaiser smiled at Kurosaki Ichigo and said,

"Such a rare opportunity—allow me to add a little fuel to your fire."

With that, Kaiser slowly stretched out one hand toward Kurosaki Ichigo.

At that moment, there were about ten meters between them.

His movement was slow, making Kurosaki Ichigo highly alert.

But in Kurosaki Ichigo's eyes, the distance between them was still far, and the hand movement was so slow—even if the opponent tried something, he'd have plenty of time to react.

However, just as he was thinking that, the black cat's panicked shout entered his ears.

"Idiot! Get some distance now!"

The moment the words fell, before Kurosaki Ichigo could react, he felt darkness before his eyes.

His vision was blocked by a hand.

"Pa!"

Ichigo's face was suddenly gripped by the hand that had appeared before him, caught tightly in its iron-like five fingers.

"Boom!"

Kaiser, now somehow standing directly in front of Kurosaki Ichigo, grabbed his face, leapt forward, and with a burst of force at his feet, shot into the sky like a rocket and carried him away.

".....?!"

Kurosaki Ichigo only felt himself being hurled through the air. The rushing wind howled past his ears, powerful gusts surged behind him, like a rollercoaster ride—he couldn't resist at all as he was dragged away from the area.

"Boom!"

Moments later, Kaiser, now high in the sky, threw Kurosaki Ichigo to the ground like a fastball, making him crash down like a meteor. With a howling blast of wind and a blurred silhouette, he smashed into the ground, carving out a crater.

"Cough...!"

A mouthful of blood spurted from Kurosaki Ichigo's mouth, his eyes bulged, and his body was wracked with pain.

Kaiser remained suspended in the sky, walking in the air as if on solid ground.

Under his feet, Reishi in the atmosphere condensed, allowing him to hover and move in the air.

Shinigami, Hollows, and other extraordinary beings could all condense Reishi underfoot to move through the air—this was a basic ability.

It wasn't flight, but rather the formation of invisible footholds—allowing them to walk as though standing in midair.

So, at this moment, Kaiser truly was walking on air—not floating as in flight.

"Come. I'll give you a chance to attack."

Kaiser looked down at Kurosaki Ichigo and said, "Hurry up, or the Shinigami in the area will be arriving soon."

"You bastard..." Kurosaki Ichigo struggled to rise from the crater, propped up by his Zanpakutō, glaring at Kaiser in the sky, his anger unconcealed.

He could clearly see that the other party wasn't taking him seriously as an opponent—he was just toying with him.

"Don't look down on me!"

Kurosaki Ichigo's Reiatsu surged, breaking through once more—he became even stronger than before.

"Haaaaaaaahhhhhh...!"

Holding his massive and exaggerated Zanpakutō, Kurosaki Ichigo charged into the sky, swinging the blade down toward Kaiser's head.

"Clang!"

Faced with the oversized blade, Kaiser simply flicked his hand and deflected it, sending out a spray of sparks.

"What?!"

Kurosaki Ichigo's eyes widened.

"He blocked Zangetsu with his hand...?!"

Zangetsu was the name of Kurosaki Ichigo's Zanpakutō.

That exaggerated blade shape wasn't its Asauchi form—it was already released, his Shikai form.

Though Kurosaki Ichigo had only been a Shinigami for a very short time—far too short to have achieved Shikai by normal standards—he was inherently special, and after training in the World of the Living to save Rukia, he achieved Shikai with the help of a certain individual.

Since then, his Zanpakutō had always remained in its released form—it was one of the rarest "always-released" types in Soul Society, needing no incantation or name call to release.

And now, this always-released Zanpakutō was deflected barehanded by Kaiser—how could Kurosaki Ichigo not be shocked?

"Don't be surprised. This is entirely normal."

Kaiser's voice entered his ears at just the right time.

"Reiatsu is the density of a spiritual body. Its strength directly determines the strength of that body. It affects the power, duration, number of uses, and consumption of combat techniques—and everything else."

"If one's Reiatsu is strong enough, then attacks from those with weaker Reiatsu may not even affect their body. Even a Zanpakutō can fail to cut."

"In other words, the gap in Reiatsu between us is too great—you simply can't hurt me."

"That's why I could deflect your Zangetsu with my hand."

Kaiser pointed his finger at Kurosaki Ichigo—the same hand that had deflected Zangetsu. Sparks of lightning danced at his fingertip.

"And my attack, on the other hand, can easily inflict severe damage on your spiritual body. That's what happens when the gap in Reiatsu is this large."

With that, Kaiser began reciting an incantation.

"Hadō #4: Byakurai."

The lightning at his fingertip exploded, shooting forth like a beam of light.

"Splurt!"

Kurosaki Ichigo couldn't react in time—his shoulder was pierced by the incoming bolt.

"Gah...!"

He groaned in pain.

Kaiser reached out again, grabbing his face as before—and flung him toward the ground.

"Boom!"

The air roared, an explosion rang out, and Kurosaki Ichigo once again crashed into the ground like a cannonball, sending up a plume of dust.

"Shun!"

Kaiser used Shunpo to appear in the crater and pulled Kurosaki Ichigo out from under the rubble.

"This isn't your full strength."

Ignoring Kurosaki Ichigo's battered state and pained expression, Kaiser spoke coldly.

"You can become stronger—much stronger than this."

"Lieutenant level?"

"In the Gotei 13, that's considered strong, yes. But if you want to save Rukia Kuchiki, that level isn't even close to enough."

Kaiser let go, allowing Kurosaki Ichigo to drop to the ground.

"Boom!"

In the next moment, Kaiser suddenly spun and kicked, sending Kurosaki Ichigo flying.

He tumbled along the ground, rolling and bouncing for nearly a hundred meters before crashing into a wall, smashing it to pieces.

The wall collapsed, a cascade of rubble burying his body completely, rendering him invisible.

Kurosaki Ichigo's Reiatsu rapidly dropped—growing very faint.

Kaiser took a step forward, just about to use Shunpo to pursue—but suddenly sensed a Reiatsu rising from weak to strong.

It wasn't Kurosaki Ichigo's—but the other strange Reiatsu he had sensed earlier.

That Reiatsu was no longer hiding. As if released, it burst forth and instantly reached Captain level!

"Shun!"

The owner of the Reiatsu appeared before Kaiser, bringing with them a wave of pressure and power.

"...That's enough, kid."

With an aged and icy voice, the black cat glared fiercely at Kaiser.

"Can't hold it in anymore?"

Feeling that overwhelming Reiatsu, Kaiser wasn't surprised. Instead, he smiled as if he had been waiting for this.

"It's about time you returned to your original form, don't you think?"

Hearing Kaiser's soft chuckle and words, the black cat narrowed its eyes.

"Looks like... you know who I am."

The black cat spoke in a low voice.

"And you know who I am too, don't you?" Kaiser said calmly. "I thought the famed 'Flash Goddess' had been away from Soul Society for over a hundred years and shouldn't be so well-informed anymore."

"But the moment you saw me, you could recite my achievements in detail—clearly you've been keeping tabs on Soul Society all along."

Kaiser looked at the black cat, smiling faintly.

"So how should I address you?"

"Head of the Shihōin Clan?"

"Or... Captain Yoruichi Shihōin?"

As those words fell, the black cat fell into an indescribable silence.

Moments later, its Reiatsu suddenly surged, its whole body radiating dazzling light.

Within the light, the black cat's body transformed rapidly—gradually taking on a human form...