

Multiverse 228

Chapter 228: “Espada”

"How do you want to die?"

As this sentence was uttered by that arrogant man, a terrifying Reiatsu surged out like a tidal wave, enveloping Kaiser.

It was a chaotic, disorderly, muddled Reiatsu—vastly different from a Shinigami’s.

This was definitely not the Reiatsu of a Shinigami, nor that of an ordinary spirit body. This was Hollow Reiatsu.

Only a Hollow could have such chaotic, impure, and murky Reiatsu—so much so that at the very moment it was felt, one could immediately sense the ominousness and evil within it.

"Arrancar..."

Bathed in that ominous Reiatsu, Kaiser’s expression remained calm, though his eyes flickered slightly.

Arrancar—this was the term used to refer to a special group of Hollows.

When a Hollow, under certain circumstances, obtained the powers of a Shinigami and comprehended Shinigami abilities, the mask that once signified their Hollow nature would break, and they would evolve into a form resembling a Shinigami.

Such Hollows were known as Arrancar—in other words, Hollows that had become Shinigami.

The man before him was one of them—an Arrancar, a Hollow that had obtained Shinigami power and taken on a Shinigami form.

The broken mask on his face and the Hollow hole in his body proved his Hollow identity, while his human male appearance and the Zanpakutō at his waist signified his Shinigami traits.

These were all marks of an Arrancar.

Kaiser then glanced toward the man's lower back and saw the number "6."

So that meant...

"You're the Sexta Espada—ranked sixth among the Arrancar army under Sōsuke Aizen?"

Kaiser's calm words made the man freeze slightly.

"You actually know me? You even know I'm one of the Espada?"

The arrogant man seemed somewhat surprised.

"Of course I know."

Kaiser replied indifferently.

"Sōsuke Aizen, in order to study Hollow power and create Shinigami-like Hollows, ventured into Hueco Mundo long ago and conquered many of its denizens."

"He united a large group of powerful Hollows and used the Hōgyoku to make them undergo the Arrancar transformation, granting them the powers and forms of Shinigami."

"These Hollows, now wielding Shinigami abilities and forms, work under his command, forming what is known as the Arrancar army."

Most Arrancar in that army bore numbers engraved on some part of their bodies.

These numbers typically indicated the order in which they had undergone the transformation.

Only the top ten Arrancar had numbers ranked by combat ability.

In other words, Arrancar with numbers less than "10" were among the ten strongest in the entire army.

These ten were known as the Espada. Their strength was on another level compared to the rest of the Arrancar. They also had authority over all those numbered below them and were followed by Fracción—akin to how Division Captains were ranked in the Gotei 13.

The man before him bore the number "6," proving that he was the Sexta Espada—the sixth strongest member of the Arrancar army.

As for the one fighting Ichigo Kurosaki, the number "10" was engraved on his arm—undoubtedly the Décima Espada.

"So Aizen sent you guys to the World of the Living?"

Kaiser looked at the arrogant man and asked.

"Isn't he worried you'll die here, costing him two fairly decent subordinates?"

At these words, the man's eyes instantly widened, and he released a terrifying killing intent.

"You think you can kill us?" he grinned savagely. "Just you?"

"Just me," Kaiser nodded. "By the way, I haven't introduced myself yet, have I?"

"I'm Kaiser, Captain of Division 3 of the Gotei 13."

"Nice to meet you, Arrancar."

Upon hearing that, the man's grin froze, and his pupils shrank.

"...I see. So you're Kaiser?"

The man's attitude instantly changed dramatically.

If earlier he had looked at Kaiser like he was sizing up a juicy piece of meat or easy prey walking into a trap, now he was looking at him as a legitimate enemy.

"You actually know who I am?"

Kaiser mirrored the man's earlier reaction, feigning surprise.

Except his expression clearly looked intentional—like he was faking it.

This made the man furious, his killing intent spiking once more.

"Of course I know you. After all, Lord Aizen specifically warned us to be cautious of you." The man sized Kaiser up, then scoffed. "Now that I've seen you, you don't seem like much."

"Your Reiatsu is strong, I'll give you that, but compared to that kid down there, you're not much stronger."

"With that level of strength, I don't understand why Lord Aizen was so concerned."

He wasn't trying to act disdainful—he genuinely didn't see Kaiser as a threat.

Compared to the Shinigami stationed earlier in Karakura Town, this Shinigami wearing a white Haori was certainly stronger—his Reiatsu surpassed even many lower-ranked Arrancar. But compared to a true Espada like himself, there was still a wide gap.

The Espada were the strongest Arrancar—even before their transformation, they had already been fearsome Hollows.

Take him, for example—before becoming an Arrancar, he had been among the top Adjuchas-level Menos Grande, second only to the highest-class Vasto Lorde.

Even back then, his power was already on par with Captain-level Shinigami. After becoming an Arrancar and gaining Shinigami powers, he only grew stronger.

To someone like him, ordinary Captain-class Shinigami were nothing. Ichigo Kurosaki, for instance.

The Shinigami in front of him and the brat getting pummeled below had similar Reiatsu—how could they possibly threaten him?

If the Décima Espada could beat someone like that so easily, then for him, the Sexta Espada, taking this one down would be effortless.

What the man didn't know was that Ichigo Kurosaki was currently unstable due to internal issues.

And the Shinigami before him, whose Reiatsu only seemed comparable to Ichigo's, was actually being suppressed by 80%.

"You sure talk big," Kaiser said with a half-smile. "Hard to believe someone who talks that big is only ranked sixth."

"Anyone who didn't know better would think you were number one."

"Wouldn't you agree... Number Six?"

The arrogant man's eye twitched.

"Then let's see if a Number Six like me has the right to talk big!"

The arrogant man pulled his hands from his pockets and spoke.

"Remember my name, Shinigami."

"I am Grimmjow."

"Sexta Espada—Grimmjow Jaegerjaquez."

With that declaration, the man named Grimmjow suddenly vanished.

"Boom!"

With a sound like space being pierced, his figure left behind only a puff of white smoke as he appeared in front of Kaiser in an instant.

"Bang!"

The dull thud of impact followed a second later, with a shockwave bursting through midair.

Grimmjow, who had suddenly appeared in front of Kaiser, launched a lightning-fast strike toward his chest, only for Kaiser to intercept it with a sudden punch—palm and fist collided in a fierce clash.

The two of them were pushed back in the shockwave, gliding smoothly through the air as if walking on solid ground.

"Ha! Not bad!"

Grimmjow grinned in excitement after his attack failed.

"Catching my claws bare-handed—your body's toughness really isn't like that of a Shinigami!"

Hearing this, Kaiser remained unfazed, casting a glance at the hand Grimmjow had just used to strike him.

When their attacks collided, it had felt like slamming into steel rather than flesh. If not for his own tough body, his fist might have split open on the spot.

"That must be the Arrancar's Hierro, huh?"

An Arrancar's outer skin had extremely high hardness, known as Hierro.

Hierro was effectively armor for an Arrancar. Breaking through that layer was difficult—even most Shinigami couldn't do it, even with released Zanpakutō.

"And that movement technique he just used to appear in front of me—that's Sonído, isn't it?"

Sonído—a high-speed movement technique only available to Hollows. It was similar to Shunpo, but fundamentally different in nature.

Shunpo was just high-speed footwork. Sonído, on the other hand, was more akin to spatial movement. In terms of burst speed and movement, it generally outperformed Shunpo and was extremely hard to track.

Typically, only higher-ranked Menos Grande could use Sonído. Some powerful ones still struggled to master it.

But judging from Grimmjow's movements, he used Sonído with ease.

"Boom!"

While Kaiser was thinking this, Grimmjow again vanished as if piercing space, reappearing instantly in front of him.

"This time, taste my blade, Shinigami!"

Grimmjow drew the sword at his waist.

Undoubtedly, it was a Zanpakutō.

Once Hollows gained Shinigami powers, they could seal their strength into cores, forming Zanpakutō and wielding them like Shinigami.

Grimmjow's swordsmanship wasn't exactly refined, but he was strong. When he swung his blade, the air itself was cleaved, currents twisting along the edge and producing a piercing whistle.

"Bakudō #39: Enkōsen."

Kaiser raised his palm and cast Bakudō, forming a spiritual shield in front of him.

"Clang!"

Grimmjow's strike crashed into the round shield, sparks flying wildly from the clash.

"Hadō #33: Sōkatsui."

Kaiser raised his palm again toward Grimmjow, spiritual energy surging.

"Boom!"

A blast of blue fire erupted, shattering the round shield and detonating at point-blank range on Grimmjow, engulfing him entirely.

The temperature in the air spiked like billowing smoke, lingering without dissipating.