

Chapter 26: Fallout's a bitch. Not a sexy one either. Rebound's a hit or miss though.

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Kzzt.

“-view with the Maou Falbium tonight to discuss the recent revelations about the thought dead Sekiryuutei and the controversies-”

Ksst.

“Rumored that Heaven is under a state of lockdown to calm down the protests regarding what the long presumed dead Sekiryuutei revealed just three days ago. No direct word from any of the Seraphs has been made as of yet while extensive effort to verify the existence of the twelve newborn-”

Kzzt.

“Riots in the streets in multiple high populated Fallen territories are still going strong as the populace demands answers from their leadership regarding the formerly presumed dead Sekiryuutei's statements regarding the delayed potential breakthroughs to address Infanti Ame Damne Hypo Peccatum Syndrome, which is the leading cause for their high infant mortality ra-”

Kzzt.

“The dragons have been unusually silent ever since the Sekiryuutei's reappearance three days ago, leading to suspicion that they had been aware of his condition if not whereabouts ever since his rampage over five years ago. No word yet has been received from any major party from Tiamat or her delegation-”

Kzzt.

“We now resume our review of the Sekiryuutei's attack on the Bael territory five years ago. What we know. What is currently veiled by the Grigori's information inhibiting magic, and what we can speculate. Mr. Mabel, we were going on about the dragons before.”

“Of course. As we were talking about before, there are countless reports of elevated aggression levels of the Dragons not just after the rampage, but during it as well. What

few documents and pictures we can recover clearly show that the Sekiryuutei was not the only dragon that actively set the Bael territory ablaze, rather it appeared as though he was accompanied by an entire army of them during the event. However even to this day we have yet to identify a single one, and the remaining resources and connections still available with the known tribes and conclaves of the world have all unanimously stated that neither they nor their own associates participated in the-

Kzzt.

“In spite of ramping pressure, we have still yet to receive word or explanation from the Bael household for the rumors regarding the Sekiryuutei spreading like wildfire around the-

Kzzt.

“Tyler’s underworld famous discount adult sex shop! Buy three vibrators and get your fourth-

Kzzt.

“I AM ZIIIIIIIM!! BOW BEFORE ME YOU PITIFUL FILTHY UNCLEAN EARTH MONKEYS!!!”

Kzzt.

“-Alima are working our hardest to get to the bottom of these ludicrous rumors regarding our leader and its founding. Rest assured, the people will know the truth from us, and those responsible for disrupting the lives and the faith of our supporters will be brought to face the consequences of their act-

Kzzt.

“-Ridiculous. Anyone that has witnessed the recordings of the incident firsthand can tell that the Sekiryuutei is as unhinged as ever. Five years has done nothing to clear that mad fool’s derangement, and he clearly lives in a reality completely separate from our own.”

“That is one popular opinion. But that begs the question then as to why the leaders of the three main factions seem to be on his side despite being candid with what they are willing to tell us? Or that the Bael family have yet to make any official statements? Could the rumors of the gag order the Sekiryuutei alluded to have any substance?”

“Of course not. It’s tripe, much like virtually everything else that came out of that fool’s mouth. Really, how can anyone believe that an immature child like that be capable of bachelor’s degree at all? Much less a PHD before he was a teenager? Don’t be ridiculous. No, it’s more likely that there was some sort of agreement made with-

Kzzt.

“-still not seen or heard from the heiress and president of the Ig Alima organization Carnelian Bael, after the surprising events three days ago at what was supposed to be the party where the youngest generations of Gremory and Phoenix were to officially declare their union-”

Kzzt.

“Access to Japan from the underworld is still heavily restricted by all factions and affiliates in reaction to the revelation to the Sekiryuutei’s survival and residence in the country. No word yet has been received as to his exact whereabouts, activity, or intentions as of yet, however this crew will do its best to keep its audience-”

Kzzt.

“It’s impressive in a way. The fact that you were quite literally in the middle of this mess, and yet next to nobody is paying you any mind.”

Rias glared at Akeno standing dutifully behind her while they sat in the lounge of the notably large upscale apartment they had been staying in, unofficially contained, ever since she had left the disaster of a party. Enough rooms, services, and accommodations to house a family of twenty comfortably if so desired, and the Crimson Ruin Princess never felt more confined.

None of her peerage was allowed to return to Kuoh, or contact with the outside world. Much less Issei for that matter.

Speaking of her peerage, they hadn’t taken it too kindly when they had found out that she had managed to piece together that Issei was the Sekiryuutei and didn’t tell them. They understood why she didn’t, but the revelation was still a sore spot for them. Between that and Issei’s reveal itself, the bulk of her pieces weren’t particularly eager to talk to her in earnest at the moment unless it was about new developments.

Not that there was much of that either.

Speculation, conspiracies, and anger was all over the news. All the main factions were in crisis mode trying to regain order, to the point that Rias doubted that the Maou, much less her brother would be able to find time to contact her about her situation, much less allow her to go back to Kuoh.

... To Issei.

“You know that in a way, it would have been better if they did.” Her king just as evenly replied.

“If someone did falter in their responsibilities again, there would be no doubt that Kuoh would be set ablaze already.” Akeno shrugged as though it was someone else’s problem. There was no question that Issei had been barely hanging onto his sanity when he had left, and it would be a long time before he would manage to regain enough self control to deal with another potential disaster.

“The way things are, I don’t know if we’d be among the first or last to know if that happened.” Slouching in seat and leaning back, she looked up at the ceiling.

She hated this. She hated being powerless. She hated being shunted to the side “for her own good”. It was part of the reason why she went to Kuoh. To get away from it all...

Or at least, that's what she thought at the time.

Thinking back on it all, when she had been looking at places to take up with Sona, and Sirzechs had brought up the seemingly quiet town in Japan, she had thought nothing of it at first. She had been looking for territory in Japan to begin with due to being a Japanophile, but something about Kuoh in particular just... spoke out to her. Lured her there in particular...

Just like...

Kzzt.

Akeno changed the channel on the television, this time to an interview with Azazel.

The leader of the Fallen Angels clearly had been run ragged with work from all the interviews and keeping his people in line.

What really stood out though was the dark shiner of a black eye he was sporting in front of the world.

“Lord Azazel! What is the story with your injury!? Did you get into a fight?! Was it the Sekiryuutei that did it?!” One interviewer shouted.

The Lord Governor laughed as though he was telling an embarrassing secret. “It can’t be called much of a fight. Let’s just say that there’s more than the Sekiryuutei to look out for if you try to get close. And they aren’t too fond of what’s happened recently either.”

“Asami-san?” Akeno asked a rhetorical question.

“Asami.” Rias nodded confidently. “I would not be surprised if Issei was the one that taught her how to throw a punch. I can’t tell what’s more surprising though. That Azazel hasn’t healed it up yet, or that she actually hit him hard enough to leave that much

damage. Even if he wasn't reinforcing himself, he's still a Twelve Winged Fallen. His body should be tough enough to take the hit from a human without a scratch."

"I suppose we'll just chalk it up to another mystery to blame on Issei then." Akeno sighed before flinching at the glare Rias gave her, "Ara, perhaps not the best choice of words given the circumstances."

"Perhaps not." Rias agreed before closing her eyes. "... Be honest Akeno, what do you make of all of this personally?"

"Hmmm. I do feel some sympathy for Issei. It would be a lie to say otherwise, but his efforts to put everyone at arm's length at the very least weren't ineffective. Outside of you and Gasper, he hasn't gotten terribly close to anyone in particular."

"Akeno." Rias sighed, not fooled by the non-answer she had been given.

The perpetually smiling Queen gave a lackadaisical sigh and looked at her King. "I do not have much more of an answer than that Rias. I mean it. His efforts to distance himself did yield results. Especially in my case. You know how cautious he is with me for whatever reason he has. Even if his training was beneficial, and my understanding of him is better than most, my input isn't ideal on the matter."

"And here I thought that you may have reasoned as to why he reacts the way he does to you after finding out who he was." Rias shook her head in disappointment. There was clearly something going on between Akeno and Issei in their past that neither knew about. Akeno wouldn't keep showing up in the peculiar corner of his subconscious if it wasn't the case. He wasn't this wary or react this way around Raynare, Azazel, or other Fallen from what she could tell. Only Akeno. "But that still doesn't answer my question."

"What would you have me say? He's like a cross between Gasper and Kiba when you first found them, violently unwilling to reach out to anyone, and terrified of what they could do to everyone if they lost control. Only unlike them, he's not a part of the peerage." Akeno shrugged helplessly. "I can't deny that he's impressive. If even half of what he claims is somehow true, then I would even hazard to say that all the efforts that the leaders of the Factions have put into him are actually warranted. If I am to feel anything about all of this, I am disappointed and enraged at your brother and the other Maou for putting you and Sona-sama in the positions you are in without even telling you."

Rias looked at her Queen almost disappointed in the answer before sighing in defeat. Akeno was right. From an outside perspective, Issei had done a wonderful job of keeping everyone away whenever possible. Whether out of fear or to minimize the potential fallout spreading to others was anyone's guess. If Akeno was a bit more curious as to why Issei reacted the way he did about her, maybe there would be something more

between them, but as it stood, he had been successful keeping her away. Kiba was of the same mind most likely.

Gaspar and Koneko on the other hand...

Knock knock.

Her musings were interrupted as someone announced their arrival at the main entrance of the apartment, which was rare as the premises was under high guard and nobody came in unless it was to deliver food or a request that one of the occupants had made to the guards.

"Please pardon me."

Rias turned around to see Grayfia entering the room, bowing politely as she did so in apologies for potentially interrupting something.

"Grayfia. I'm surprised. With how chaotic everything has been as of late, I half expected you, or anyone for that matter, to not visit for a week at least." Rias greeted her sister in law with a half cooled tone.

"Lord Sirzechs and the other Maou have been working without rest to address the discontent among our kind. Fortunately, he has managed to work himself some minor time off with your niece and nephew today, allowing me to visit and update you on the situation at hand."

"You sound as though I am actually relevant for anything right now. Wasn't that supposed to be part of your plan?" The Crimson Ruin Princess scoffed. She knew she was being petty, but she wasn't particularly in the mood to pretend that all was right with the world either.

"It was, however the fallout has proven to be far greater than anticipated. The revelation of Issei's survival alone would have caused major disruptions regardless, but..." Grayfia trailed off for a moment before getting back on topic. "Your brother has decided that it would be best if you did not return to Kuoh for the foreseeable future."

"He WHAT?!" Rias didn't even try to hide her displeasure as she shot up to her feet in pure rage and indignation. It was abrupt enough that Koneko, Gaspar and Kiba all ran out of their personal rooms seconds later to see what had pissed off their king so badly.

"What's going on?" Gaspar asked from the stairs.

"Something happened." Koneko frowned, appearing next to him.

“...” Kiba didn’t say anything as he somehow appeared in the living room without anyone noticing, his eyes darting between Grayfia and Rias.

The most powerful Queen in the world did not react to the outburst, or their appearance. She had expected as much to happen to the news.

“Kuoh, and Japan for that matter, is under a great deal of scrutiny, not only from the three Factions, but other international parties as well. The reveal of the Sekiryuutei’s survival has caught more interests and ears than what most know. Enough so that entrusting his security to young Devils like yourselves, as talented as you are, is not only a haphazard gesture at best, but one that will send the wrong messages to the world at large.”

“And you think isolating him further will make things better?!” Rias balked at what she was hearing. “You saw what he’s like now! He’s unstable, traumatized, and terrified of people on a good day! If what... *SHE* said is right, by the time he recovers and calms down, if ever on his own, he’ll already be dead!”

She didn’t want to acknowledge the idea that Issei was actually dying, but too many pieces of his history and behavior fit into place when it was taken into consideration. The fact that Issei more or less brushed over the fact when it was brought up might as well have been a confirmation to anyone that knew him well.

“And the alternative?” Grayfia calmly countered, “Nobody can risk him having another outburst. Whether out of the destruction he’d cause, or due to the risk of him burning up the remains of his life force.”

She turned to the television where Azazel was still on the screen sporting his black eye.

“Allow me to clarify the situation to some extent. The Sekiryuutei’s sanity is hanging on by a thread as of now. He does not engage in conversation, nor attempt to interact with anybody, and has withdrawn himself to his room, rebuffing anyone that even attempts to enter or communicate him viciously at a base. This includes those that still remain in his home, including Asami-san. He has for all intents and purposes regressed into the state he had been in shortly after his initial outburst in the Bael territory. Seeing as his initial interactions with you and your associates was the Maou’s idea alongside Azazel and Michael, Asami-san has taken what has transpired as a severe breach of trust and is unlikely to give any of us the benefit of the doubt. As you have seen.”

“... Did she know? About Issei’s father?”

“... You will have to discuss that topic with her. Azazel was her primary contact over the past few years.” Grayfia replied diplomatically.

Meaning yes, she did know.

No wonder Issei had shut her out too.

“And Jasmine?” Rias pressed. “She’s supposed to be Issei’s biggest crutch to sanity. Where is she during all this madness?”

Grayfia frowned slightly. “You are very fortunate this facility is secure. Jasmine Redsmith is more valuable to the three factions than you assume... but to answer your question, she has other obligations that you are unaware of. Obligations that has tied her down immensely due to this turn of events, lest the situation at hand devolve even further than you could possibly realize. If she could make some time to console Issei without severe ramifications, she would without question. But she is unfortunately unable to for the foreseeable future. As is the White Dragon Emperor, although from what I have been informed that may change soon.”

“So you mean to tell me that my brother’s brilliant plan is to simply wait and see what happens while treating Issei like he’s essentially Chernobyl?”

“I see that you have adapted some of his vernacular habits.” The maid almost sounded amused, “But no. There are some other sources and assets that are making preparations to Kuoh as we speak that are more suited to handle Issei should his mental state deteriorate any further-”

“What about trying to help him get better?!” Rias snapped, cutting Grayfia off.

If she expected her loss of temper to get a reaction out of Grayfia, she would be disappointed. “What would you have us do then in this situation, Rias? Given the circumstances, who is available that he can remotely trust right now that isn’t already at his home? What little good will the three factions had managed to recover has been reduced to ash. He will interpret any attempt to reach out to him as nothing more than another vain effort to satisfy our desires at the cost of what little integrity and stability he has left, true or not.”

“And you think leaving him alone is any better? You should know him better than we do! You know how often he withdraws and beats himself up whenever he thinks nobody is looking! It’s astounding that he managed to muster up enough self control to come outside the first time!”

Rias couldn’t help but be dumbfounded by the logic she was hearing. Leaving trauma victims alone to their thoughts for extended periods of time was one of the worst things you could do. Much less when they’re having a severe relapse.

It was so unbearably frustrating. People meaning well, but acting in one way or another out of fear or priorities or politics or...

Oh.

“Ha. Haha. I get it now.” Rias couldn’t help but laugh mockingly. At herself, Grayfia, and the irony in general. “I finally get it. I complained about the same exact thing when trying to deal with Riser, but couldn’t recognize the same thing when it was right in front of my face the entire time.”

“Rias?” Grayfia wasn’t the only one confused at her confession if the other teen’s expressions were any indication.

“Issei’s right. We’re all... fucking idiots. Blind, selfish idiots that wouldn’t be able to see the obvious even if it smacked us all across the face. It’s no wonder he can’t take anyone seriously.” Rias continued to laugh in a self-deprecating way at the crude admission with language that normally would never escape her lips, before donning a serious expression. “This is ridiculous.”

Grayfia frowned as Rias marched past her as if she didn’t matter. “Where are you going?”

“To Kuoh. Obviously.”

“Ara?”

“Huh?”

“Wait what?”

“I find that hard to believe.” Grayfia took the announcement better than the peerage. “You are still under house arrest. The security personnel here is not simply for show. Even if your Peerage attempted to leave, you would not be able to force your way out, regardless of how well you performed against Riser. And that does not take into account the security around Japan and Kuoh right now. Your attempt would be a futile one.”

Rias didn’t seem to take the news well and glared at the maid. “I’m *going* to Kuoh, Grayfia. One way or another. Now either you can help me, or you can explain to my brother this afternoon why my name and face will be across the news for breaking whatever laws he has in place after putting so much effort to ensure that everyone forgot I existed.”

The most powerful Queen frowned at the empty ultimatum. They both knew that had she so desired, Grayfia could down Rias’ entire peerage in an instant before they could manage to step out of the room, much less the building.

“... Hah. If you are so adamant about making matters more difficult than they already are for everyone, then the best I supposed I can do is mitigate the damage.”

Everyone gave the maid a double take. They had all been expecting a fight or some discourse to break out any second, but for Grayfia to simply give up was unprecedented.

“... You were planning on letting me go from the start,” Rias frowned, annoyed.

“I have no idea why you came to such a ridiculous conclusion. Your argument simply convinced me to take the least disastrous option.” Grayfia’s diplomatic response didn’t convince anyone. “That said, if you are adamant about risking your life to try and engage Issei, I at the very least should chaperone you on your trip and inform you of several factors that have transpired as of late, and a few other key details that you may find informative.”

“Such as?”

The Maid’s expression was completely impassive. “While it hasn’t been announced yet, your cousin Sairaorg Bael, along with his brother and mother, have been missing since the night of the party. All three of them have not been seen by the public, nobility, or unconventional resources for three days.”

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One day earlier.

“Everyone please calm dow- yes just sign this form-no there’s another section for your biological sex. YES for the tenth time you have to put that shit down for health, magic ritual, barrier, and legal reasons. We’re a terrorist group, not a public company that pisses itself the second we see a crowd of angry social science college students that still live off their parent’s money. We care about getting shit done without things exploding unexpectedly, and any idiot that’s taken a beginner’s class in magic rituals knows that biological sex is in fact a factor when pulling off the complicated shit. HR doesn’t give two fucks about you or your feelings unless you can fight on even ground with an Ultimate class or you have damn good connections willing to bend over to make you shut up. You lie, your plastic daddy issue ass is out- I SAID NO FIGHTING! VALI!!”

BOOM!!

“THAT IS YOUR LAST WARNING!! NEXT DUMBASS THAT TRIES TO CUT IN LINE OR BE CUTE WILL BLEED THEIR BRAINS FROM EVERY HOLE IN THEIR SKULL!! I DON’T GIVE A FUCK IF YOU’RE WINGED, HUMAN, OR SOME RETARDED TENTACLE MONSTER THAT HAS NO SKULL!! I’LL FIGURE OUT A WAY TO DO IT REGARDLESS!! GOT IT?!”

It was absolute madness in the main entry hall for the Khaos Brigade as Jasmine tried to lead the efforts of the sudden wave of new recruits trying to join their merry terrorist group.

Humans. Devils Fallen. Even the occasional Angel and non biblical based entity dotted the main entrance and out into the caves that connected to it, all pissed and fed up with the current system that had apparently failed them for the last time.

“And here I thought that the three factions couldn’t get along.” Vali laughed bitterly as he flew over the crowd and landed next to his elder sister figure as she frantically sorted out as much paperwork as possible while simultaneously inputting more data on a computer to one side and printing out more documents on the other, “Seriously though, how the hell did all these idiots find us? I thought this place was supposed to be concealed. It feels more like an open secret that nobody bothered with until now.”

“Questions for later. Help me out manage this disaster. You figure out a way to use that Sacred Gear of yours to make this manageable yet?”

“Do I look like Issei? He’s the game breaking workaholic, not me.” The White Dragon Emperor scoffed while refilling the printer with paper, “Why don’t you use yours to calm these idiots down?”

“It’s because they’re idiots.” She replied rhetorically, “Even if I do pull it off, there are so many here that they’ll just find an excuse to work themselves up again. I can only strongly affect Dragons psychologically. To everyone else it’s just a mild suggestion. Not that I wouldn’t mind just blowing up all their heads and be done with it all at this point...”

“Easy Jas. You’re supposed to be the calm one. Not me.”

“I AM CALM!”

It wasn’t as if the Khaos Brigade was lacking in members or resources to begin with. Many of their more notable members were part of Devil Aristocracy with cash to spare...

The problem was that the cheap and lazy fucks all kept their finances and personnel to their personal groups in the Brigade.

Meaning that Jasmine, and the handful of individuals in the Brigade that didn’t have their heads up their asses... or were simply just spies for said private groups, were the only ones able to handle the deluge of new “applicants”.

Lazy shits just wanted her to deal with the initial paperwork and save them the trouble of doing it themselves so they could waste time conjuring up their “brilliant plans” that either never worked or were never implemented to begin with, because “reasons”.

It didn’t help that most of these newcomers were young, stupid, weak, or a combination of the three. In other words pure cannon fodder.

She had expected it to happen when she had been warned that Issei had decided to go and bail out the Gremory Heiress from marrying the fried traitor, but it didn't stop her from cursing the situation all the same.

Then again, with the idiot leaders of the other divisions of the Khaos Brigade away, she was in a prime position to, oh say, make note of anyone that may or may not be a problem for other particular groups to be aware of. Or maybe snag a few of them for her own elite group...

“Hey Jas. Long time no see. Is that opening you told me about still there or is this a bad time?”

Pushing himself through the crowd, Sairaorg Bael with his understandably concerned mother and little brother came into view, all flanked by his eight peerage members.

Speak of the literal Devil. With reinforcements no less.

“Sairaorg Bael you beautiful meathead.” Jasmine almost cried at the familiar face, “You're late. Join the other meathead to smack the lesser meatheads around.”

“Sup meathead.” Vali smirked, an eager aura to fight slowly escaping him.

“Been better.” Sairaorg's smile widened hungrily.

WHAP!

POW!

“Not here!” Jasmine wasted no time chucking a coffee mug and stapler at their heads before turning to Sairagor's brother and mother. “Madragan. Misla. I know you two are confused, but can you please help me out with the paperwork here? I need all the hands I can get moving this crap in bulk.”

“I... sure?” The young boy laughed nervously. He clearly wasn't used to such a crowded and unruly environment.

“I'll do my best. Although I feel I'll fare better with the less crass people here...” Misla looked at the vicinity with some worry, her face somewhat pale.

Jasmine frowned. “Misla, when was the last time you took your medication? Was that prick husband of yours “accidentally” misplacing it again?”

The woman shook her head in denial. Even though Issei and Jasmine had all but perfected the cure for sleeping disease, there were occasional long lasting aftereffects that lasted long after it was cured that needed to be constantly addressed. “N-no. I still have enough for another couple of weeks. It's just been... stressful lately. Even before learning

cunt Carnelian happened! Just like there conveniently USED to be a whole bunch of developments for new baby Devils, Fallen, and Angels in the works before she showed up! He ALSO happens to be one of the Sekiryuutei's few friends that he doesn't want to burn to a crisp! And now he IS helping me deal with you lot! So unless you are interested in being one of the first chucklefucks thrown against a Maou once things get started, I suggest you treat any questions about him like you would Carnelian Bael, and beat them until they are quiet! Am I understood?!"

The room was dangerously quiet.

"Good! Now! If you came in a group, line up on my left on the side of the hallway! Stags on my right! Groups will each send ONE representative to the desk here to collect entry forms and contracts for the rest of you! If you have any questions, you will line up and ask us politely what it is! If you decide to still be a pain in our asses, the White Dragon Emperor here will personally shrink what you call your balls, tits, limbs, and or heart into oblivion before we use your corpse to feed some of the demon beasts we have on the farm as chum! Are we clear?!"

"... You have a farm?"

"Vali?"

BOOM!

The impressive part was that even though the idiot in question had been blown up, nobody else in the crowded room was hurt.

And yes. They did have a farm. It was where everyone kept their familiars.

"ARE! WE! CLEAR?!"

She didn't get so much a verbal response as everyone started running towards either side of the room.

"Good."

"I have a question." A large Fallen arrogantly walked forward, nodding towards Vali and Sairaorg, "You said these two know the Crimson Dragon Emperor. The White Dragon Emperor and a Bael of all things. Even if the first of the lot is as insane as they say, claiming he's friendly with these two is a stretch if you spend more than a second to actually think about it."

Vali scoffed and shrugged helplessly. "When you put it like that, you do make a point for anyone that's never met the porn addict before."

Sairaorg chuckled and nodded in agreement. “It does sound like a bit of a stretch in hindsight, doesn’t it? From their perspective, we should all be at each other’s throats the second we make eye contact.”

“Ugh. That idiot wouldn’t even bother. He’d just walk away and ignore us, and kick our asses again and then do something humiliating to us as blackmail us to stop if we got in his way.” Vali rolled his eyes.

“He’d do that to me if I got in his way. For you he’d do that out of habit. And then ship you off to some random harem enclave in the middle of nowhere dressed in something ridiculous. Again.” Sairaorg smirked.

“I’m sorry. The last time I checked, your record against him was a fat zero just like mine.” The silver haired teen turned to his elder with an irritated grin on his face.

“Funny. I could have sworn that was also your record against me.” The runaway noble likewise turned to meet his opponent.

“A lot can change in five years, meathead.”

“Really. I haven’t seen any proof yet.”

Two titanic beasts were slowly fading into view. The overwhelming Golden Demonic Lion and the unfathomable Ivory Demonic Dragon. Apex Predators. Apex Monsters. The very air and world around them shifted and bowed to their-

CRACK! WHAM!

“What did I just tell you two?! Fight or hate fuck or whatever after you help me out! Am I clear?!”

Unlike the rest of the people in the vicinity, Jasmine seemed to be absolutely unaffected by their display of Presence, nor did she care that the floor around the two young men had been stressed to the point of faltering into spiderweb cracks that stretched almost the entirety of the hallway. Instead, the young woman had somehow, completely unaffected by their near rampage and intimidating silhouettes, walked in between them and decked them both in the faces without any hesitation.

“Ngh. Yeah sis. Whatever you say.” Vali sarcastically muttered while rubbing his cheek.

“You’ve gotten stronger Jas. I actually felt that.” Sairaorg laughed in good fun as though he didn’t just get cheap shotted, physically copying Vali even if the hit didn’t leave a mark on him in the end.

And if that wasn’t enough...

“Is there a problem, Jasmine?”

It was a soft and seemingly innocent enough voice of a young girl. The kind that seemed mundane enough, had it not effortlessly carried through the room with an undercurrent of power that sent chills down everyone’s spines.

This time, Jasmine did twitch, as did everyone else, as they all turned back to see Ophis standing just behind her desk with a curious look on her face.

This time, everyone did shut up.

Regaining composure, the human sighed and held her head. “No. No, it’s nothing Ophis. We just got more recruits than expected. Sairaorg just arrived as well. He and Vali were just being idiots like young boys are. You know what they’re like.”

The Ouroboros Dragon blinked innocently enough before slowly turning to the two culprits, who had enough dignity to look ashamed at what they did.

“Ah. Sairaorg. It has been some time, young Leader of the Demon Pride.”

“Lady Ophis.” Sairaorg bowed politely. “I apologize for causing a commotion.”

“You just encountered Vali after a long time. I would be surprised if the two of you managed to resist the lure of your natures.”

“She’s saying the two of you are meatheads.” Jasmine translated bluntly before turning back to the suddenly very quiet crowd, “Is there anyone else that wants to question our current setup?”

The hallway was filled with a mix of awkward silence, some shaking heads, and a few grumbles made under breath.

“Good.” The woman sighed, turning back to Ophis and mouthing a “Thank you” to her before moving to get some papers to hand out...

“Oi! The hell are you doing?!”

Only for a new commotion to start up as some young Devil woman staggered to the front desk, ignoring those around her that were angry for her cutting.

Jasmine frowned. It was clear this newcomer was unwell, but that still didn’t excuse the behavior. The sign up was for a terrorist group, not some hospital...

The girl looked up, the whites of her teared eyes were notably green, and her complexion wasn’t much better.

“Help. Please.”

“... Shit.”

o. o. o.

Irchirou calmly walked through the hallways of the eerily quiet Bael Mansion. His hair slick back. His clothes pressed. His shoes clicking off of the marble floor and echoing in the well adorned hallway.

It was such a lavish sight that to the common eyes, nobody would have assumed that the two of them were under house arrest.

The former human stopped near the end of the wing in front of a set of doors that were guarded by two impassive and very powerful looking Devils standing guard.

“I believe I am expected.”

His words were even and to the point.

“Purpose of visitation,” The guard on the left demanded.

“I am to update my king on the latest events outside and reported impacts from the Ig Alima organization.” He took out his documents in a magically sealed folder. “All of which has been inspected and passed scrutiny by the Maou sanctioned security outside as dictated by the courts when receiving any outside parcels.”

The guard on the right took the documentation and inspected the magic for tampering while the left stepped forward. “Hold out your arms.”

The entire inspection of the pawn took well over ten minutes to complete as he was combed for any hidden spells, devices, artifacts, or anything else that may be deemed suspicious by the security.

Personally, it still beat going through American airport security if he had been asked.

“You have one hour to conduct your business. Be warned, the room is monitored for magic. Any violation or funny business will result in consequences.”

“Understood.” The Pawn walked past the two men without a second look and into the room behind them.

Carnelian was there, lying on a bed in a medical robe that did nothing to hide the fact that her upper body was wrapped in bandages and her right arm was missing.

Accompanying her were several standard medical machines to monitor her health, a couple of tables, some with stacks of documents and random paperwork on them, another with a half eaten lunch, and a flat screen television on one wall.

She smiled at him as though he was a breath of fresh air as he closed the door behind him and enabled the privacy spells that ensured that at least their conversation was kept between them.

“Did you get it?”

“I’m fine. Thank you for asking.” The King sarcastically replied, far more childish and immature of a display than what she had shown at the engagement party.

Ichirou frowned and took a step forward to her. “Did. You. Get. It?”

The albino sighed and shrugged, only to flinch as the movement caused her pain that the drugs couldn’t suppress. “And people think that Issei’s temper is something that belonged to only him. Yes, mostly.”

“*Mostly?*” Even the deaf could hear the near volcanic rage in the man’s tone.

“Yes. Mostly.” Carnelian repeated herself without shame or fear. “I was in the middle of a crowd and Issei’s guard was constantly up. Even if I wanted to, I couldn’t take it back in a single instant. Truthfully, I have to thank you for even getting as much as I did. The distraction you and Issei made afterwards gave me quite the opening. Pity Sirzechs had to interrupt me just as I was cleaning up.”

With a casual wave of her remaining hand, an elaborate mask with wings materialized. An ivory piece of immaculate detail that looked more at home in a theater than anywhere.

Though the most peculiar bit of its design, other than a most of its upper right head missing, was its absolutely elated and overjoyed smile combined with its twisted, hungry, and almost vicious looking eyes.

A product of her Sacred Gear: the Harlequin Congress.

“Hehehe. Oh hi Ichirou! It’s been a while! Wow! You look angry! Why? You saw Issei recently, didn’t you? Or maybe it was because-”

Ichirou looked like he was about to destroy the abomination speaking in an immature, almost psychotic imitation of Carnelian’s voice before she made it vanish.

“Haaah. If it makes you feel any better, that one hasn’t shut up since I took it back, and the medication does nothing to make the headache go down.” Carnelian gave him an

apologetic and pained smile as she readjusted her glasses. “I have to put in quite the effort to sequester it away for any peace of mind.”

“It doesn’t.”

“I figured as much.”

“You’re certain you can’t kill the damn thing?”

“You know it doesn’t work like that. They’re reflections that can pretend to be the real thing to the point of tricking the world. And me for that matter. At worst you’ll just make me more insufferable for a while. It’ll just come back eventually. You should know this seeing how often you handle the others.”

The best she could do was compartmentalize and sequester them away temporarily.

Or maybe put it in someone else...

No. This one was too unstable. Especially after being away for so long.

It took the man a few seconds to calm down from hearing the answer he already knew, “Unfortunately. I’m surprised you haven’t asked me to take over yet. Like you said, you’re foolish enough to let me of all people handle the others.”

“You wouldn’t have the time or freedom to do so even if I asked. They won’t let anyone use magic in here other than the doctors. You’d be removed the moment you would start the procedure.” Carnelian looked a bit dejected while admitting as much before noticing the paperwork in her pawn’s hands. “I see you have the latest reports. How bad is it?”

Ichirou pretended to ignore the fact that his King looked absolutely gleeful when asking the question. Like a child about to open a ton of presents at once.

She must have been loosening the restraint on her other “masks” ever since she had been locked in here.

Or maybe it was because she had finally seen his son after so long.

Not that he could blame her. As much as he despised the woman, he did share some opinions and trains of thought with her. “In a word, chaos.”

He took out the documents he took with him. “There are angry crowds in front of virtually every Ig Alima facility and major Bael family sponsored enterprises protesting the family name, demanding explanations, cures, restitutions, pretty much everything on and under the planet, as the angry crowds of the desperate tend to do. The Maou are busy putting out fires, figuratively and literally across the underworld. Azazel is not much

better. Heaven is under lockdown. Ironically, the Dragons are the only major related party that is keeping calm and quiet for the time being.”

“And the Khaos Brigade?”

“Swamped with newcomers dissatisfied with the status quo.” He looked up at her knowingly. “Along with a large number of women suffering peculiar symptoms turning their eyes and skin green, along with erratic emotions and fluctuating demonic energies. They all seem to have been prior clients of Ig Alima that no longer have trust in our services. Funny how so many of them managed to hear some rumor about a terrorist group potentially having the means to treat their conditions.”

“Fufufu. It sounds like Jasmine will be quite busy keeping an eye on the Ouroboros and her new clientele for quite a while.” Meaning she’d be kept away from Issei for even longer than most would have anticipated.

Ichirou clearly didn’t share her amused feelings on the matter.

“The Church is starting to act suspiciously. With Heaven under lockdown and not replying to their inquiries, several sections of their faith are branching off with their own beliefs. Some are calling for war. Others are questioning why there is an issue birthing new Angels in the first place.”

“Oh no. The worst thing for any religion is taking place. Their people are asking questions. How dreadful. Fufu.”

“Japan is under a magical lockdown as well, but it is a difficult situation. The native Yokai are not taking the interference of western powers very well, as are the local clans, so the efficacy of keeping foreign powers out is spotty at best. Kuoh, of course, being a major exception.”

“There’s bound to be more than a disaster or two take place before things have a hope of calming down.” Carnelian inspected her nails idly, her previous fit of giggles completely gone as her temperament swapped almost instantly again.

“Other major powers and factions are asking questions as well, but for the moment are mostly keeping their distance and watching with curiosity. The Egyptian Gods are a notable exception, though that has more to do with Riser Phoenix than the Sekiryuutei.”

“Understandable. Oh, that said, how is Riser doing?”

“Unknown. He’s under as much security as you after Yuri’s attempt to get to him during the party. It’s suspected he’s still unconscious though. Yuri’s being kept in a separate facility being interrogated.”

The only reason why he was able to move with any form of freedom was because she had imposed that he act as her primary liaison and contact in situations just like this, even above her father and ancestor in most cases that didn't directly have to do with Bael family.

... Well, that and because he was weak as sin as a Pawn piece and nobody expected him to be able to accomplish much even if he wanted to.

“Ahhh. Riser. I really do regret playing you like that again. But sacrifices had to be made, and what better sacrifice than one that can literally revive itself? I'm sorry. I'll try to make it up to you somehow. Really.”

Nobody would have believed or accepted such a half hearted apology. Especially when the guilty party was smiling like a shameless child.

“As for your father...”

Instantly Carnelian's good mood was killed mercilessly.

“As expected, he has been perpetually trying to stomp out rumors of what has happened, decrying any “slander” of the Bael name, and threatening roughly three times as many mid and lower class borne organizations than normal.”

“Meaning that dear Lord Zecrom is too busy putting out the real fires himself to babysit my dear sperm donor.” There was an ocean of disdain and sarcasm in the woman's statement. “I'm almost surprised they haven't come to see me just yet to discuss “the truth”.”

“Your father has tried, however he did not go through the proper procedures, and you are currently under the supervision of the Maou.” Ichirou stated the obvious, though there was a hint of satisfaction in his voice.

“How much of a fool did he make himself. No. Please tell me you have a recording of it. I need something other than drugs to put myself to sleep with for once.”

“I will see what I can do for my next visit.”

“Meaning you already have a copy and you're holding out at my expense. What an astounding pawn I have.” The woman laughed bitterly and shook her head in mock despair.

“As for Lord Zekrom, he has been keeping his moves and thoughts to himself. As expected.”

“Hmmpf. That ancient monster always prefers the wait and see approach. But he can’t stick to this for long, or else risk someone else taking advantage of the first move. Or letting my idiot father screw things up before anyone else.”

“And if the fool does achieve just that?”

This time the white haired woman smiled maliciously. “Well then, we’ll just have to take a page from Issei’s book and fight with the blatant truth for once. Won’t we?”

For once, Ichirou could get behind the woman’s plans whole heartedly. It would be a nice change of pace for once.

o. o. o.

Grayfia had not been exaggerating when she had said that Japan and Kuoh had been under lockdown.

Rias and her peerage had to go through no less than five different security checkpoints with the maid as their escort before they could make it to the city limits. Angel, Fallen, Devil, human, and Yokai forces grilled them all with intense scrutiny, often needing permission and clearances from their higher ups before they could resume their journey back to the place that the peerage had called home for years now.

Not a single one of them missed the displeased and distrustful looks they got from the guards as they passed.

It took nearly two whole days to make a trip that usually only lasted a couple of hours to get to the city limits. And even then they had to follow a regulated path to get to the Hyoudou household.

This time it wasn’t just the building itself that had high levels of security magic around it, but the entire street for an entire block.

It was... uncomfortably quiet.

Every step they took closer to the house they had visited dozens of times already felt like they were walking towards a cataclysmic domain where a true monster resided.

A monster they all had a hand in hurting, intentionally or not.

Even Kiba and Akeno, both usually unflappable in their appearance and demeanor, couldn’t help but naturally break out in a cold sweat as their instincts told them that they should not be here.

Before any of the teens had prepared themselves, or were aware of how close they really were, Grayfia approached the door and politely knocked.

Almost a full minute passed before the door opened to reveal a slightly disheveled and stressed looking Raynare on the other side cautiously. She took one look at the Strongest Queen, and Rias' group, and sighed in frustration.

“It’s the maid and the ginger posse. You want me to kick them out Asami? Or do you want to deck them too?”

“... I’ll see them. One moment.” Came the far too calm reply from inside the house.

The teens had the decency to look slightly nervous while Raynare allowed herself to be a bit smug.

“Welcome to the club of colossal fuckups, brats. It’s not as exclusive as you think. Isn’t that right, maid? By the way, nice job with the alcohol. The dumbass must have been left you with one hell of a tab.”

Grayfia didn’t grant Raynare the dignity of a response, which was telling in its own way.

“Raynare. That’s enough.” With a firm tone, Asami walked into view and took control of the doorway, looking at the powerful Devil dead in the eyes. “... I thought I made myself blatantly clear the last time you tried to excuse your incompetence.”

“You made your impression on Lord Azazel quite clear for the world to see.” Grayfia bowed in deference to the angry mother. “I am not here on behalf of the Maou, the Fallen, or Heaven. This effort was by personal request.”

“DOES THAT FUCKING MATTER?!” Asami bellowed in pure rage, causing several of the devils to jump in surprise. “MY SON HAD JUST STARTED TO FINALLY SHOW SIGNS OF RECOVERING! OF BEING THE PERSON HE USED TO BE! OF SHOWING SOME SEMBLANCE OF LIFE!! OF SHOWING SOME HOPE THAT HE MIGHT BE CAPABLE OF ENJOYING LIFE!! YOUR INCOMPETENCE HAS STRIPPED ALL OF THAT AWAY FROM HIM!! AGAIN!! AND THIS TIME I DON’T THINK HE’LL COME BACK!!”

Rias’ peerage looked at one another warily. They had all been aware that Issei had been “getting better” by those that knew him before, but they had never personally witnessed what him being “worse” actually meant.

The ground began to tremble. A monster sensed something disturbing its territory.

In response to the woman’s rage, and the rousing monster deeper within the property, Grayfia didn’t bow.

She didn’t nod her head.

Instead, the Strongest Queen got on her knees in full view of everyone, and pressed her head to the ground.

It was an expression of absolute humility that no one, no noble now or during the war, had ever witnessed from the powerhouse of a woman.

“Asami, you have every right to be enraged with us. We failed you and your son when you needed us the most. We failed in all the ways that mattered and more. After your son helped me with my daughter. After he went out of his way to aid so many across all races, only expecting kindness and acceptance in exchange, but receiving fool’s gold in its place at best. The cruel treatment he has received by the world and those close to him. The broken contracts and promises. He deserves none of it. It is a sin that all rights should be condemned by Gods and Devils alike unanimously. Your rage. His distrust. They are both fully deserved and warranted, if not exponentially compounded.”

The enraged mother was not satisfied. “Then why are you here?”

Grayfia did not lift her head from the ground. “Because Lady Rias had no knowledge or part in devising this travesty. And she desires to apologize nonetheless. Regardless of what council she has received. And... because we hold hope that at least her connection to your son has not also been rendered asunder. For his sake, if nothing else.”

For a moment it looked like Asami was going to explode again and even possibly attack the Devil several thousand times more powerful than herself, but held herself in at the last moment. “I don’t see what difference your sister in law will make. Little Asia has been trying to get to Issei since he returned, but he’s shut even her out. And now even she’s holed up in her room depressed.”

“I still want to try.” Rias spoke up for the first time since the door opened. “I... I figured out what Issei was a while ago. He knew, but we trusted each other to not talk about it. I never asked questions and he... at the very least appreciated it. After everything he’s done for me, even if he won’t admit it, I don’t want to simply leave him alone like this. I owe him at least that much, and my pride won’t let me leave things as they are when I feel I can at least make an attempt.”

Asami didn’t seem moved by the speech in the slightest, but didn’t immediately rebuff the girl either.

Instead she looked up at her peerage. “And what of the rest of you? Are you all simply here to follow your master like lemmings?”

The teens flinched at the cold accusation. More so because, at least for half of them, Kiba and Akeno, it was more or less true.

“Let them in, Asami. Nya.” A new unexpected voice purred from further inside, just before Kuroka appeared into view. “At the worst, Issei will just kick them out with a few burns. Nyathing I can’t fix.”

“Stray Devil Kuroka.” Akeno blinked in surprise. “I thought someone of your reputation would have vanished after what happened.”

“Nyahaha. Are you kidding?” The criminal giggled knowingly before donning a sultry and confident smirk.. “Who would be foolish to attack this house, let alone Kuoh right nyow to get little old me? As far as I’m concerned, there’s no place more secure for me than here.”

Well, when she put it like that...

“Nee-san,” Koneko muttered with a curious mix of frustration, anger, and confusion with the faintest dash of hope.

“I thought you were part of Issei’s original group. I was told you even helped him get out of his despair the last time. Why can’t you do it again?” Rias asked skeptically, causing the elder nekomata to flinch and look away sheepishly.

“Ah. About that. The thing is most of us knyew about... certain unspoken people, for a while and didn’t tell him to prevent him from reacting like this until he could recover more. And as you can see, it backfired on us spectacularly. He doesn’t want to see anyone. I doubt even Jyasmine would be able to get in without some serious effort on her part the way he is.”

The fact that Kuroka was actively admitting that even Jasmine would have trouble with Issei right now was not easily overlooked.

“Are you sure about this?” Kiba looked at Rias skeptically. “I know you’re fond of taking risks, but this is too extreme. Even taking the disaster with Riser into account.”

“I’m sure.” To her credit, Rias did appear to be confident in at least her desire to attempt to reach Issei again. “I owe him too much to simply ignore him now.”

“Even if we tried to do just that before this shitshow.” Koneko grumbled under her breath.

“Nyahahahaha. Yes, that more or less sums up what it’s like to be with Issei in general.” Kuroka laughed knowingly.

Asami, inversely, was not amused by the turn of events. “... Fine. However only Gremory will try to reach him. The rest of you will stay on the ground floor and wait.”

“Um. Can I see Asia?” Gasper tentatively lifted his hand up nervously. “I want to see if she’s okay and if I can talk to her.”

The mother huffed in frustration and turned back into the house. “Fine. If nothing else you can at least help her.”

On a first impression, it sounded like she had completely written her son off as a lost cause, but in reality it was clearly the opposite. She had absolutely no faith in the visiting Devils to have any positive impact on Issei in the slightest.

Looking at one another with concern and some trepidation, the young peerage momentarily waited to see if Asami would say anything else, only to get a damning silence in return.

“Well? Hurry up already.” Raynare rolled her eyes and motioned for the group to come in. “The sooner you lot see how badly you fucked up, the sooner you can leave.”

Taking the accusation personally, Rias stepped forward...

This was a private (defiled) home.

And shivered.

It had always been slightly awkward entering and leaving the house before, but the sensation was outright oppressive and haunting now.

No wonder nearly everyone in the building was high strung and irritated in one way or another.

“Go on.” Raynare nudged up the stairs, almost as if urging the girl to her execution. “You know there’s only one place the perv will be.”

“You don’t need to tell me. Or were you offering to be my escort?” Rias almost snapped back irritably before heading up.

She didn’t notice her Peerage and Grayfia following her close behind, more focused on the growing pressure and genuine rise in temperature as she closed in on her target.

Stopping in front of the door, Rias hesitated, as though she was about to enter the gates of hell itself.

The irony was not lost on her.

“Issei? Are you there?” The redhead asked softly, reaching for the doorknob and slowly turning it...

“DON’T!!” Grayfia, Asami, Kuroka, and even Raynare all shouted at once as the door opened...

A crimson and ebony inferno. A private domain. Sacrosanct. Secure. Violated. Trespassed. Refute. Deny. Burn BURN BURN!!!

Rias yelped in horror and surprise and slammed the door shut just before what felt like a literal flood of fire poured from the doorway and immolated her.

“O-oh dear. That was, overwhelmingly unexpected.” Akeno faltered, unable to move from her place.

“What on Earth was THAT?!” Kiba for once lost his normally cool and collected composure.

“THAT, as you put it, is apparently what *usually* happens when someone barges in the jackass’ room or house without permission. Especially when he’s in a mood.” Raynare grunted as she let go of Rias from the tangled mess on the floor and picked herself up. “From what I’ve been told, the last idiot, barring Jasmine, that tried to barge in unannounced was covered in burns and barely survived long enough to make it to the hospital.”

“Nyahaha. It really was a close call for Vali. That boy’s head’s as thick as Issei’s sometimes. Good thing we had that emergency first aid magic circle available back then.” Kuroka laughed almost nervously.

“Remind me how those two consider one another friends again?” Koneko deadpanned to her sister.

“They’re idiots.”

“Right.”

“Have you finally realized what you are doing yet?” Asami stood up and gave the Devil an annoyed glance. “Because I will not help you a second time.”

“Rias. I have aided you to this point, but onwards I will be of little assistance. Please, think carefully before you make a decision.” Grayfia added her own two cents on the matter.

“President.”

“Rias.”

“Rias-sama.”

All around her, Rias saw the looks of concern and worry that her friends and peerage members all gave her. They were worried for her. They weren't completely convinced she could do anything about the person on the other side of the door, even if they had gone all this way to provide her support in the first place.

It was annoying.

It was frustration.

It was... exhausting. Completely, emotionally, and physically exhausting in a way she didn't even realize existed until now.

She turned back to the door.

"Issei?" She knocked lightly on the door. "Issei? It's me, Rias. Can I come in? Please?"

Exhausting in a way that she just didn't care anymore.

"I'm tired."

Only a handful of the people there noticed the aura behind the door flicker ever so slightly at the admittance from the girl.

"The underworld's a mess. Brother's trying to hide me to the point that I don't exist. Kuoh's a disaster. I'm only being told half truths and partial stories at best despite being in the middle of the utter joke of a disaster that just happened. And I... I just want to sleep."

The upstairs hallway was quiet as they listened to the girl talk, no one daring to interrupt whatever it was she was trying to do.

"Somewhere that nonsense can't reach me even if they tried. Somewhere quiet where everyone can just go away. And right now, the only place I can think of where those idiots won't be able to reach me, or anyone for that matter, is with you. I won't talk to you or do anything stupid. Can I just, sleep with you tonight? Please?"

The entire building was absolutely motionless, as if the world itself was contemplating her words and determining if it was truth, or even worth processing.

... Click.

Slowly, very slowly, the bedroom door opened just enough to be noticed.

Nobody celebrated. Or even said a word for that matter. Most were surprised that Rias' words had even reached the lone occupant in the first place.

Rias' heart pounded heavily as she slowly slipped into the room and closed it behind her, taking care not to open the door too much and risk wasting what little good will she had managed to earn in the first place.

Despite the absurd realistic pyrotechnics earlier, the room was distinctively not on fire. Warmer than normal, but not on fire. The gravure model posters, paperwork, computers, sex toys, books, and equipment were all in their previous locations...

And Issei was sitting on his couch, hunched over a desk watching another porn video with headphones on and writing on some paperwork that she couldn't read properly from this angle.

He didn't greet her. He didn't wave to her. He didn't make any gesture that he had noticed her entrance.

Rounding the couch, she noticed a small blanket and pillow on the half with more room.

She also noted that his eyes were impossibly bloodshot, sunken, and dilated, focusing all his might on the work in front of him, with headphones on that cut off all sound from the outside world.

His face was gaunt and his skin was a bit pasty. It was blatantly clear he had barely eaten if at all for the past few days, and the fact did not seem to bother him at all.

No. He didn't want to talk. Talking never did him any good. From his perspective, all he ever got were excuses and false promises. If she talked now, she'd just be another example to that long list.

Rias took off her clothes neatly and placed them by the bottom of the couch and took up the blanket, and crawled onto the furniture. Issei was well aware her family were nudists and her own sleeping habits, so this shouldn't have surprised him at all even if he was acting normally.

Instead of the pillow though, she wrapped her arms around his waist and rested her head on his lap.

At the very least, he was still warm.

"Thank you. Goodnight."

Issei didn't reply or respond. If anything he acted as if she didn't exist at all.

o. o. o.

Rias opened her eyes to find herself at the entrance to a massive cave.

She couldn't make much progress inside however. The bulk of its caverns were either on fire or collapsed.

o. o. o.