

Halloween in the Crossroads

by zacknapattack

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“Come on Mom, let’s go! It’s already dark out, we should go walking around before everyone starts going to sleep!”

“Ok, ok~ I’m coming~”

“Yes, we’re coming. It took a while to get into this thing. Where did you even find this?”

“That’s my little secret~”

Exiting the Fox’s Den were three individuals usually familiar to the regulars of the bar, but in outfits mostly different from their usual attire. Miss X was a simple white dress with large holes for the arms, as well as a blue bow on the front and a blue bandanna in her hair. Saki wore a pair of loose pants, waraji that went up to her knees, and a metal belt around her waist. A large shoulder pauldron was connected to the rest of her outfit with a chain on both sides, and bandages that covered her chest. She wore an eyepatch over her left eye, and carried a large sword easily with one hand.

By comparison, Chifu seemed to barely change in terms of appearance. Instead of a black and gold dress, she wore a mostly white one with black sleeves, and a pair of red tobi pants with a stitched split along the other sides. She had straightened her hair for this outfit to more resemble the character, though still kept the two ear-like strands so people could recognize her.

Miss X led the procession excitedly, with the two older women following after her. It was a tradition of theirs to walk around the Crossroads during Halloween and see how everyone is celebrating the holiday. And with the fighters from the summer's tournament still around, it would certainly prove to be an interesting trip compared to previous years.

The first few houses were the usual business they came to expect from previous years: the people inside in various costumes, loudly greeting the trio and giving them candy. With Miss X, she pretended to reach in and "pull out" a piece of candy (really just her creating a hologram of candy and adding it to her basket), while Saki tried to make sure Chifu didn't take advantage of her position as the goddess of the town to get all of the candy at every house.

As they got to the edge of the Business District, they reached the first of the houses where the fighters were staying. Outside was a statue of a woman in traditional Chinese garb, her arms outstretched and a tag hiding her face. Bits of red skin could be seen underneath, and the long black hair spilled out from underneath the hat on her head as the statue stood upon the porch. A basket of candy hung on the arms, with a sign saying "Take one" taped onto it.

The traveling trio walked up and took the candy, admiring the statue's quality up close. "Wow, they put a lot of effort into making this statue! It looks so life-like!"

"I think that's because it is~" Chifu teased, brushing up next to the "statue." As she did, the face beneath the tag began to flush dark as Piano grew embarrassed at the attention, her tail uncoiling to nervously flick behind her as she got out of her pose, revealing herself to be alive.

Chifu and Miss X gave a round of applause at Piano's reveal, while Saki seemed to nod like she was impressed. "That was a cool trick. Is that why they made you stand outside with the candy?"

"Sort of." Piano admitted in a timid voice, her tag billowing as she talked. She glanced towards the front door. "Halloween is a time to scare people, so having a statue that could leap out towards trick-or-treaters was considered ideal. Though that's not the only reason I was picked to do this..."

"Oh?~" Chifu leaned in, interested. "And why else would they leave a poor girl like you out here all alone on Halloween?~ Did you hope that your true love will finally come find you in costume?~"

Piano flushed again, looking away from them. "N-nothing like that!" she protested quickly, pointing towards an open window. "You can see for yourself over there."

The trio looked intrigued, walking over to the window to look inside. Arranged around a fireplace, several figures sat in various chairs, while one stood in front of the fire gesturing as they seemed to be talking.

The sitting figures proved to be quite the motley crew as they were illuminated by the flickering flames of the fire behind the speaker. At one end sat Piano's brother Forte, dressed in an elegant Victorian-style suit with a puffy white undershirt and black and red motifs, a pair of fake fangs sticking out of his mouth. Next to the vampire was a figure in a blue suit with large blue spikes acting as hair. Gold rings wrapped around his arms that ended in white gloves, tapping his red shoes as Quan sat waiting for something in his Sonic outfit.

Next to him sat Wendy, dressed like an angel with a halo and feathery white wings, her dress decorated with fluffy white cotton on the hems of it. Next to her sat Ronin in a mad scientist outfit, with crazy white hair sticking out everywhere, a disheveled lab coat, and a few beakers of fluids around his seat. To his side sat Jackie, dressed like she was imitating Wendy's usual outfit with a large brimmed black hat, a black dress with a wide skirt and a pink broom propped up behind her.

At the end of the line, slightly away from the others, was Muhamorha wearing a light blue leotard, fishnet stockings, and blue heels, her mushroom hat now appearing to be the bell head of a jellyfish with tentacles descending down from the brim to cover her.

Across from the all, clearly invested in the story she was telling, was Delivery Girl. She was dressed like a US Postman, with bloodstains covering the outfit in various parts and a bloodstained messenger bag slung around her shoulders. She leaned in close at this point, getting to the climax of her story.

"And then, when the post woman went to look for the package, she found that it wasn't where she placed it. With sudden horror, she realized that she had..." There was a dramatic pause, as everyone else leaned in. "...that she had lost the customer's package in the shipping warehouse!"

“Forsooth, what a troubling dilemma.”

“Maybe someone stole it! Mail fraud’s a huge problem!”

“How awful!”

“That’s terrible!”

“Why did she trust the mail to deliver it? Should’ve just given it to them herself.”

“How unfortunate.”

The reactions of the listeners got a huge grin out of Delivery Girl, who looked proud of herself as the trio outside turned back to Piano. Piano looked at them sheepishly.

“I’m not much of a storyteller, so I volunteered to give out candy instead.” she explained, holding the basket. “I’m also making some food to take over to Aude and her little party, but since I’m out here, Wendy and my brother are doing everything I ask them to, so hopefully it turns out ok... But in exchange, they told me to jump out at people, but if I just don’t move when people walk up, nobody knows I’m a person and they don’t give me attention. So it’s not so bad.”

“I see~” Chifu hummed, leaning forward and putting a hand on Piano’s shoulder. The latter shuddered, but didn’t try to throw off the goddess’ hand. “And who’s told stories so far?~”

“Just Muhamora and Jackie. Muha told one about a man that slowly turned into a mushroom for being mean to everyone, and Jackie told one about a cop going into an abandoned business looking for criminals and running into a serial killer. But she seemed to enjoy talking about how the cop died...”

“Sounds like fun~” Chifu glanced back in, seeing everyone laughing as Delivery Girl rubbed the back of her head asking for critiques. “And what about Forte and Quan?~ I know they can tell some really long stories, as excellent as they both are as storytellers~”

“They agreed to go last and second to last, respectively. My brother has promised that he’ll finish by midnight, right when the witching hour begins.”

“Is he planning on summoning actual witches at the end of his story?” Miss X asked, Chifu nodding her head in agreement.

“He hasn’t said he will. But he hasn’t told me he isn’t either.” Piano looked unsure and nervous at the thought.

“Well, I might have to come by again before he finishes and see for myself~ After I get a few drinks in me first, of course~ But we have other houses to visit, so I’ll stop by later~”

“Oh, ok...” Piano gave an awkward wave as the three women began to depart. “Bye, I guess...” As the trio nearly got away, she called out, “And tell Aude I’ll be over in a couple hours to bring the food for the rest of the party tonight!”

As the three women walked away waving to Piano, Miss X looked back towards the house. “Telling scary stories on Halloween night! What a fun time! Maybe once I’ve outgrown going trick-or-treating, I’ll broadcast myself reading scary stories for all of the Crossroads!”

“I think that’s a wonderful idea, my daughter~” Chifu purred, stroking the air near Miss X’s head as a rough approximation of a head pat. “I look forward to hearing it when you’re ready~”

“Thanks Mom!” Miss X cheered, as Saki guided the two along towards the next group of fighters’ house. As they got closer, they could hear the sound of a tv playing, some cheers, and the simmering energy of a fight ready to break out. Saki looked at the other two, but they were too busy discussing their idea to notice the tension in the air around the next house.

Sighing, Saki reached the door first and knocked, stepping back to wait for a response as Chifu and Miss X slowly caught on to the fact they had arrived. There seemed to be a hushed discussion on the other side, which they could only catch brief phrases from.

"I can't, it's too..."

"You'll be fine, just..."

"But they're going to..."

"Just don't worry about it..."

After some back and forth, the door slowly opened up with a creak, as Chifu and Miss X looked on with anticipation. On the other side of the door, Senko greeted them in what looked like a bloody shrine maiden outfit, which luckily covered most of her body as she stood shyly in the doorway. To the side, Michaelis' voice encouraged her as she held out a bowl of candy. "H-h-h-happy Halloween..." Her voice was quiet and timid, barely above a whisper.

"Happy Halloween~" Chifu and Miss X cheered at nearly a hundred times the volume, reaching forward to take their candy. Saki took a second to reach forward and get hers as she began to hear an argument building up from deeper in the house.

As everyone looked towards where it was coming from, two figures began to charge down the hall, making their way towards a cowering Senko. The taller of the two had a large, open green vest with fur around the collar, bandages covering her chest, and green pants along her legs with a red sash at the waist. Her hands had large brown paws and she had a large brown tail attached behind her. The smaller of the two floated at about the other's height, wearing a black and white suit-like outfit with an open back and sleek black pants. Her hair was slicked back into her ponytail, and the "back" that was exposed had a large dragon like motif. The two women were looking at each other angrily, the latter having raised a pair of black sunglasses to glare directly at the former.

As Raku and Inari closed in, Michaelis came out of his hiding spot, looking like a creepy figure with a black cloak over a black leather outfit. He wore large gloves that went up most of his forearms and a black mask with a long beak in the front and round glass lens for eyes, which he had to the

side as he moved towards his sister with raised hands.

“Now now, what did I tell you two about fighting tonight?” He tried to calm them down with his words, reaching out to touch their shoulders, only for both of them to brush him off.

“Yeah, yeah, we heard you earlier.” Inari brushed off Michaelis. “But you heard what that Quan guy said: if you go for a test of courage with someone into the Sacred Forest on Halloween, then you’ll become even closer with them. And I’m going to be the one taking Senko into the forest!”

“Don’t talk to my brother like that!” Raku shouted at Inari, getting in her face. “And I told you that I would be the one to escort Senko through the Sacred Forest! There are ghosts in there, and I wouldn’t think you’d be willing to hurt someone similar to you if it comes to it.”

“Oh, so you think you can just go around hurting ghosts, do you?” Inari snarled back, her hair whipping like flames as Green and Red began to float behind her and her arms glowed a faint blue. “Well, maybe I should show you what a ghost can really do.”

“Yeah, I can if I need to.” Raku shot back, the wind beginning to whip around her as her brother tried to pull her away. Senko was also beginning to look nervously between them, waving her arms and the bowl of candy. “Maybe I’ll start with the one in front of me.”

They then both turned towards Senko, their eyes burning with passion. “So, which one of us are you going to pick?” they both asked in unison, before turning to the other. “Not you, of course!” Their growls of anger rose as they pressed against each other, as everyone else looked on awkwardly.

“I-I-I-I’m not sure...” Senko stuttered, unable to provide them an answer in time as the tension between the two women rose to a higher pitch.

As the two were pressing their foreheads together in anger, sparks flying between them, another figure rounded the corner. She was wearing a black leotard that showed ample cleavage with a

white trim on the sides connecting to translucent sleeves, a pair of purple tights with bat designs, and bat wings coming from her back and hair. Her red hair ran down her back as Vilivian looked to the four at the entryway with an almost bored look, seemingly not bothered by her provocative outfit.

“Aude told me to get you all to shut up for a few minutes.” Vilivian informed them, crossing her arms. “The game’s about to reach the sixth inning and the Ryu Claws are leading the Kame Defenders and she says the seventh inning should be good.”

“Oh?~ Are you guys catching up on some baseball games?~” Chifu asked, leaning forward with some interest. “They’re not as interesting as the Cross Tournaments, but all the different mayors each own a team in each sport here in the Crossroads, so it’s very interesting to see each sponsored team really going at it for the pride of their section of the Crossroads~”

“Aude’s trying to teach me about it.” Vilivian explained. “She thinks I would make a great player, but I don’t see how this sport is useful for combat. I can understand wrestling as a sport to refine physical techniques, but this is just a bunch of males running in a circle after swinging a stick.”

Aude’s voice preceded her appearance. “I told you, just listen to me and you’ll see the appeal of baseball. You and me, we’d make a real superstar team together.” Stepping around the corner, Aude mostly looked the same, wearing her usual outfit. But overtop of it, she wore a regal looking purple cloak with white fur trim, and her crown was looking more ornate than usual. She carried a small scepter in her hand, using it to point at the two arguing.

“And you two, knock it off! It’s hard to hear the tv over you two fighting for the last hour and a half!” The two looked at her, but the fox girl’s glare was enough to at least calm them slightly, as she outangered the both of them combined. “No one cares that you want to go on your little date with Senko so bad! Just shut up so the rest of us can enjoy the game until Piano, Wendy, and Ronin gets here with all the food and we can really live up the rest of the night!”

“Speaking of, she said she should be by in an hour or so with all that food for you guys~” Chifu piped, getting everyone’s attention at this point. “By the way Aude, I noticed that Armel isn’t with you~ What’s with that?~”

“Oh, him?” Aude asked, shifting her weight as she turned to the goddess in disguise and her entourage. “Well, Ad came running by about an hour ago, saying he had something important to talk to him about. He hasn’t been back since. But he’s a grown ghost, so he should be fine, especially on Halloween.”

“Is that so?~ Well then, we’ll have to go over to Teekee’s place and see what’s going on~ Well, enjoy your game everyone, and I might stop by later when Piano gets here to get a taste of all her food~ Ta-ta for now~”

Chifu gave a wave, only to be outdone by Miss X’s as the party inside gave their farewells, most of them having calmed down once Vilivian grabbed a hold of the two troublemakers to drag them back into the other room. The last thing the trio outside saw before the door was Michaelis giving Senko a pat on the shoulder as if to congratulate her for greeting at the door, only for his hand to pull away with bits of frost as Senko’s arms waved in panicked apology.

“That was pretty weird!” Miss X announced, looking back at the house.

“I’ll say~” Chifu chimed in with a delighted giggle. “Although a test of courage sounds a lot of fun~ Maybe I should go back and ask if either of them will take me on one?~ Inari probably wouldn’t so she would get a free shot at Senko if Raku accepts my offer~ I really am a problem solver~”

“Speaking of tests of courage, Vilivian’s outfit seemed rather... interesting.” Saki piped in, seeming to instantly silence Chifu. “I didn’t give it to her, and I doubt anybody in that house did either. You wouldn’t happen to know where she got it, do you Chifu?”

Chifu attempted to whistle, which only served to attract the oni’s attention towards the fox woman more. “Hahaha~ What in the Crossroads could you possibly mean?~ Oh, by the way Miss X, what did you get from Aude’s place?~”

“Well, next up is Teekee’s place.” Saki said a sigh, guiding the other two as they excitedly looked at all the candy they’ve gotten so far. “I get the feeling I know where my nephew went to go ‘trick-or-treating’ tonight...”

They got up to the door and went to open it, when there was a sudden loud shout from the inside from a young, very familiar voice.

“HOOGALABOOSHKA!”

“ARBASHKARDOOLA!”

The women outside stood bewildered at the call and response from the inside as the door began to open. Inside was the large figure of Teekee, wearing a tattered brown vest over a white shirt, with a large screw floating in the orange goo that made up Teekee near his head. He gave the three women a wave, holding out a bowl of candy. “Happy Halloween!”

“Happy... Halloween...” the three said in unison, their focus on the scene behind Teekee.

In the middle of the room, all furniture cleared to the sides, was a large circle drawn on the ground with chalk. On closer inspection, it appeared to be a sumo ring, and where the fighters were to start sat two figures. On one side was Ad, who was currently shirtless, his hands covered with paw-like gloves and wolf ears on his head. The rest of his werewolf costume was flung behind him on the ground as he sat on his knees chanting weird battle cries.

Across from him sat Volley, who was likewise shirtless, his oni warrior costume likewise cast to the side, a tengu mask on the side of his head as he beat his chest in response to Ad’s challenge. This caused the other men around the circle to give a cry of their own.

From left to right, sitting at the edge of the circle, was Armius, Gensai, Taketor, and Rum. The former was wearing wrestling pants, with a large wrestling belt across his stomach as he seemed excited about the coming matches. Gensai was wearing an orange gi, the top wrapped around his waist as he likewise prepared himself for the match. Taketor didn’t seem to be wearing a costume, although the trash can lid nearby likely indicated what he wore to this “Halloween party.” Rum was dressed like a stereotypical Grim Reaper, with a large black cloak with a tattered hood that would serve to obscure his face if he had it up.

With a couple of dull thuds, the chanting died down. Looking to the back of the room, two more figures were in the room. Standing still was Beston, the scarred turtle man wearing a very stereotypical cowboy outfit with a red vest, brown chaps and boots with large spurs on them, with a bandana across his face to conceal his expression. To his left, sat on a throne made of PVC pipes and red fabric scrounged from who knows where, sat Armel in a regal purple cloak with white fur trim, a large ornate crown, and a golden scepter that he had just used to silence the group.

As Armel looked over the boys arrayed before him and gave them an approving nod, Teekee turned from the ceremony back to the girls, who all had various expressions of mixed confusion and amusement. "You're just in time before the matches begin for the Ghost Challenging Challenge."

"Ghost Challenging Challenge?" Miss X asked, looking offended. "Couldn't you guys come up with a better name for it? Something like the Spooktacular Ghost Tournament or something?"

Teekee looked surprised as Chifu giggled behind Miss X. "Ad didn't think of that. He was more excited to get the matches started so the winner could get ready to go out into the Sacred Forest around midnight."

"Oh really?~ And what's supposed to happen then?~" Chifu leaned against the door, taking her piece of candy from the bowl.

"Well, Quan said that the ghosts become more powerful during the witching hour, so Ad wanted to challenge the ghosts." Teekee explained. "But then Quan said that the ghosts will only face the strongest warriors that step out there. So Ad threw all this together to prove who's strong enough to face the ghosts."

“Huh~ That actually makes some sense~” Chifu teased, as Miss X and Saki grabbed theirs. “I wonder if they’ll still be scared of Piano once they’re stronger?~” She then pointed to Armel. “And what about him?~ What’s his job here?~”

Teekee shrugged. “He’s supposed to ensure that the results are official. But he didn’t know anything about sumo, and Gensai is playing too, so Beston is acting as the referee. Whoever wins, the two of them will take the winner to the Sacred Forest and witness a legend be born!... according to Ad. He’s really excited about it. Taleus was too, but Michiko dragged him away for something. He seemed upset about that.”

“As he should be. Contests like this are ways for men to prove themselves to each other.” Saki said, before addressing her nephew. “HEY, VOLLEY!” The boy jumped and looked at his aunt. She slammed her fist into her palm. “IF YOU DON’T WIN, I’M PUTTING YOU THROUGH SOME EXTRA HELL FOR TRAINING! I’M NOT SENDING YOUR MOTHER BACK A WEAKLING!”

Volley shivered in fear, imagining how much harder her training could possibly get from what she was already doing to him. He gave her a salute as he responded in a shrill voice. “Yes Aunt!” There was a sudden intense aura that surrounded him, his eyes glowing with intense focus as the next round of chants began.

“BOOKALADOOGA!”

“FORCADORNA!”

“BOOKA!”

“WHAMM!”

“BOOKA!”

“WHAMM!”

More chest beatings and chantings rose from the boys, as Armel pounded the ground with his scepter to keep the pace. The three girls slowly began to back up as Teekee looked on with a smile on his face. By the time they started heading towards the bridge leading to the Tiger Fields, there

was a loud cheer as the first match started.

“That was pretty weird, not going to lie.” Miss X commented, scratching her face as they walked across the large wooden bridge.

“Boys are going to be boys~” Chifu said with a shrug. “But I wonder what Taleus got called away to?~”

“Well whatever it is, I’m sure it can’t be weirder than that...” Saki said, though she didn’t sound like she believed it.

“YOU DAMN WITCHES! UNHAND ME AT ONCE!”

“It’s weird.”

“Without a doubt~”

“You only invite weirdos to this town...”

“Well, let’s see what my weirdos are up to then~” Chifu giggled, walking towards the sounds of a screaming Contractor. “Hopefully they didn’t break too much~”

As they approached one of the larger, empty fields, they saw a scene of mass destruction. There were weapons strewn across the field, blood spattered on most of them and across the other parts of the field. Flames were just starting to burn out, shadow arrows were beginning to fade, and smoke was beginning to dissipate from several craters scattered across the entire field. And sitting near a pair of weapons was the slightly rotted arm of Valentine.

“Oh my~ I can’t believe we missed such an amazing fight~” Chifu commented, picking up Valentine’s arm and putting it in her basket.

"I know! It would've been so fun to commentate!" Miss X complained, her microphone suddenly in hand as she clutched it tightly in anguish. "Let's go see what the aftermath is!"

She quickly took off to where the shouting Yamarashi was coming from, Chifu and Saki following after. As they found where the commotion was coming from, they saw a small group surrounding a fallen Yamarashi, who thrashed from the ground. Two of the figures were holding down the struggling Contractor, two more putting a large flannel shirt with straw sticking out of the sleeves onto him. There were holes in it for where his weapons would go, and they placed a straw hat on his head as he cursed them in every way he knew how as a fifth person stomped on his face angrily, swearing at him in turn.

One of the figures holding down Yamarashi was his opponent in the tournament, Taleus, who wore an all black outfit, consisting of a black coat, shorts, gloves, boots, and a blindfold that would cover his eyes, but his extra pair allowed him to peek out from around it. The other binder was Viola, who was dressed in a sharp pinstripe suit and suit pants, along with a nice pair of dark shoes and a pair of shades over her face.

The two putting on the outfit were both female themselves. One was Michiko, who like Taleus was also dressed in all black. Her dress had ornate designs over it, a half skirt covering her left leg while her right was exposed. She wore black thigh high boots, and a white sleeve emerged from the feather like opening of the dress, meeting with a pair of black gloves. Like Taleus, she also wore a black blindfold, though she did not have the extra eyes he did. Nevertheless, she had little issues seeing what she was doing as she buttoned up Yamarashi's shirt.

The other proved to be Valentine, though she was dressed more feminine than usual. She wore a light purple dress, with an ornate design similar to what a princess might wear, with matching heels on her feet and a simple silver tiara on her head. One of her arms was missing, making her effort to fit every weapon through their respective holes rather difficult. But she was trying her level best, walking across Yama's back to do her task.

The last figure, cursing out the Contractor on the ground, turned out to be Angelique, who like Viola was dressed much like an Italian mobster. But unlike Viola's, hers was much nicer looking, with a nice white shirt under a pure black suit, with a black bowtie around her neck and a red rose in her breast pocket. She had a pair of white gloves on to cover her metallic arms, and her body was emitting a shadowy aura from having cast a lot of magic in the struggle before.

“So what was the big idea, you washed up, old geezer?” she shouted down at the prone man. “My friend and I are on a walk and you think you can just attack us because you think I’m helping them?”

“Of course!” Yamarashi shot back, not phased by the foot in his face. “All you witches like to work together, so when that brat and undead witch started attacking me, I knew you couldn’t resist the destructive part of your nature and join the attack!”

“Destructive nature? What kind of old-fashioned nonsense are you trying to put on me now?”

“A witch’s instincts to destroy are strong, especially on the Night of Witches! And the more fools they bewitch into celebrating the fool holiday, the stronger it is! Which is why I refuse to allow you to don that bewitched garb upon me! Now unhand me at once!”

“I think you’ll look better as a scarecrow than whatever you’re supposed to be, you big porcupine!” Angelique stepped away, before noticing Chifu and company approach. “Oh great. Just when I thought it wasn’t crowded enough. Now the fox and her buddies have to walk around like they own the place. Oh wait, I guess you do.”

“Oh, don’t make a big deal about that~” Chifu waved away the hostile words directed towards her. “I’m just a friendly girl, same as you~ So, can anybody tell me why we’re bullying the elderly today?~ I’m sure he’d appreciate being able to stand up~”

“Just a minute, Chifu dear~” Michiko purred, putting on the last of the outfit onto Yamarashi. “Aaannnnndddd perfect! I agree, he looks so much nicer as a scarecrow than as that mountain of a man he normally is.”

“Does that mean we can get off of him?” Taleus asked, his eyes blinking one after another as he looked at his supporter. “That the mission is complete?”

“Oh yeah, get off of him.” Michiko said carelessly, waving her hand as the assassin and demon girl both got up. Yamarashi immediately sprung to his feet, flexing his arms and cracking his neck in his new outfit. Then with a yell, the weapons strewn across the battlefield began to shake and rattle. Within a few moments, they all began to hurtle back towards him, lodging themselves in his back as before, with each fitting perfectly into the holes allotted for them in the costume.

He then looked to the sky, a terse scoff coming from him. “And tell your magical golem that it can stop pointing its infernal weapons at me. I can’t believe this brat’s beat me twice now...” Yamarashi looked to Taleus, who didn’t seem to care as everybody looked up.

Above in the sky, flying with his jets, was Pembroke in his ATG as he raised the weapons away from Yamarashi. The mecha was decorated with various hanging fabrics that were tattered near the bottom, giving it an almost ghostly figure from high up. As the mech landed, the cockpit hatch opened, revealing its pilot. He was dressed in a very similar outfit to his usual, but there were more medals on it, and where his heart would be, there was a very realistic looking bloody hole as if his heart had been removed. Fake blood splattered his face, as he gave a wave before addressing Yamarashi. “It’s a machine, not magic. As I said many times while you threw weapon after weapon at it.”

“Because you wouldn’t come down and fight like a man!” Yamarashi shot back, crossing his arms defiantly.

“Why fight on the ground when I can bring all my firepower to bear from the sky. That said, it was hard to avoid hitting the rest of you in the crossfire. Especially you Taleus.” He turned to the blood assassin, who shrugged. “You were always too close to him when I went to fire, it was a miracle that I didn’t hit you.”

“It’s not up to a tool to get out of danger.” Taleus countered. “It’s up to those that use it to make sure it doesn’t get damaged.”

“This again?” Valentine piped in. She shook her head, putting her remaining hand on Taleus’ shoulder. “You’re not just a tool. You’re a person too. You should treat your body better.”

Taleus looked at her, then her missing arm, then at her arm in Chifu's basket. "Right..." He then turned back to Michiko. "So is this a complete mission?"

"I'd like to think so." Michiko responded, looking at a piece of paper. "The mission Quan gave us was to get Yamarashi in a costume before midnight and try to keep it on him for at least ten minutes. So unless the infamous, twice-lost Contractor would like to tussle with us another round, I say we're good."

"Quan told you to do this?" Miss X asked curiously as Valentine and Pembroke cheered, while Viola and Angelique did a more quiet celebration nearby. "And what was the reward supposed to be for it?"

"That's what we'd like to know~" Michiko replied, leaning into Chifu's space. "Quan said you'd give us our reward once we did it. So, what's it going to be?~"

"Huh?~" Chifu seemed confused before regaining her composure. "Oh, right~ Just give me a second~"

Chifu's tails suddenly appeared, covering her body for a few moments as there was a flash of light. When she reappeared, she was in her God Eater persona, though that too was also dressed for Halloween. Her hair was done up in an ornate braid with a flower in her hair, her mismatched eyes framed by bangs as she smiled at the others. Her outfit was now a rather skimpy dress which barely covered most of her body, with black lace and bows to enhance, a white bottom tied behind her underneath her tails, bandages around her left leg and arm, and a pair of black heels.

"Now, dear travelers, shall I grant you all a small boon for your efforts?~" There was a ringing of bells, a smile on her face. "And you too Yamarashi, for putting up with my little game~"

"Alright, I got a small boon to ask for." Angelique spoke up, stepping forward. "How about some peace and quiet, where maniacs won't attack me?"

“Easy enough~” Madame chief tapped her heel and the ringing of bells created a doorway. Angelique and Viola stepped through, disappearing with the doorway.

Yamarashi spoke up next, pulling at his outfit. “You’ve had your amusement, witch. Now leave me be and let me have my peace.”

“Done~” Another door was heralded by the ringing of bells, and the walking mountain vanished as well.

“I just want my arm back on.” Valentine piped up, reaching her still attached hand out to grab her severed one out of Madame Chief’s basket.

“And I’ll take somewhere fun to go for the rest of the night.” Pembroke added, leaning up against his ATX as he spoke.

“Hmmm~ Now that should be easy to solve for the both of you~” Madame Chief giggled, before conjuring another door. “Aude’s throwing a house party tonight, and Piano’s bringing food there~ Michaelis is already there, so between him and Piano, I’m sure someone will fix you up~ And I’m sure it’ll be tons of fun~”

“Thank you.” both said at the same time, walking through the door. As they did, there was a loud shriek, followed by billowing winds and the cocking of a spectral gun as whatever was happening there was disrupted by the arrival of two new guests. Madame Chief snickered as the door closed with another ring, leaving the two assassins with the goddess and her escorts.

Michiko began to walk forward sultry, raising her blindfold to look at Madame Chief directly as she got closer. “So, about my reward~”

Madame Chief looked at her... then walked right past Michiko to Taleus. “I’m sure you want to go back to Ad and the others~ They only just started, so I’m sure you can still join~”

Taleus blinked at Madame Chief, clearly confused, before nodding. With the ringing of bells, another doorway opened up and Taleus stepped through. As he did, there was a loud shout from inside before the door disappeared. "GORSHKANOOGLA!"

"Those boys are so silly~" Madame Chief commented, as Michiko perked up. She then turned to the mech. "So how are we going to get this somewhere safe?~ Think I could fly it to the garage?~"

"I think that would be a bad idea..." Saki said.

"I think that's a great idea!" Miss X cheered.

"What about me?" Michiko complained.

"Oh right, your boon~" Madame Chief said, as if she had forgotten her. "Hmmm, let me think~" Michiko nodded, encouraging her. "How about Saki makes you a special drink tonight?~ I'll be coming by later to drink up~"

"Eh, I suppose that's good enough." Michiko said with a shrug. "I'll be waiting for you, Chifu~"

Madame Chief opened up another portal, and Michiko disappeared with a flirty wave. Once she was gone, she transformed back to her Chifu form and giggled as she looked at the other two. "Tonight has been so amusing~ I'm glad I invited all these people to the Crossroads~ They're lots of fun~"

"They are!" Miss X agreed. "I hope they stick around longer!"

"They've certainly livened the place up a little more than usual." Saki also agreed, resting a fist on her hip.

“Now, let’s put this thing away, then go back to Aude’s for that party~” Chifu said excitedly, climbing up the mech as Miss X did similarly on the other side. Saki sighed, shaking her head as she expected this to turn into a disaster.

As the sounds of jets sounded across the plains, the forest seemed to glow with an ethereal light. The ghosts of the Sacred Forest looked over the town as Halloween continued to be celebrated across the Crossroads, the cheers and celebrations sounding almost like the howls of the dead, intermingled with the chiming of bells.

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