

To those that Strive for Blood

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Start

“It was my turn to help Senko today, so what were you doing there?”

“What are you talking about? It was definitely my turn! You’re just trying to hog her for yourself!”

As was seeming usual in this brief moment of time that all of the disparate finalists of the Cross Tournament were gathered together in the same instance of the Crossroads, Raku and Inari were fighting over who would help the injured Senko in the Fox’s Den. The ghost girl was floating up to eye level of Raku with a glare in her expression, her hair blazing behind her. Raku’s hair was billowing in the gusts of wind of her own creation, her own fierce glare meeting the half ghost’s.

Nearby, Piano, Vilivian, and Aude were all sitting nearby, watching the argument with varying levels of concern or boredom. Piano looked the most concerned, trying to find a way to stop the argument but lacking the social skills to do so, while Vilivian only watched on with some interest to see if a fight would break out. Aude was looking bored for now, leaning on her bat as she watched the two as if expecting trouble.

“Oh, you make such a big deal about trying to uphold your responsibility to help those in need, but you’re just using it as an excuse to get closer to Senko!” Inari spat, her arms glowing blue as she crossed them.

“That’s rich, coming from you!” Raku shot back. “You let her join your gang so you would have an excuse to be around her all the time. ‘A boss looks after their underlings,’ bah! We all know you’re lying through your teeth!”

“You’re going to talk about me like that?” Inari flared with anger. “Oh, we’re going to have some problems if you keep this up!”

“Keep this up?” Raku almost laughed, her hand moving towards her spear. “There’s not much left for us to go! Which is why we’re going to end this now!”

“Just what I was hoping to hear!” Inari held her hand out, where Red swiftly landed and shifted into his sword form for her. “Let’s settle this once and for all!”

“W-w-wait a minute!” Piano cried out, moving forward with a wave of her arms as she sought to calm the two warrior women. “There’s no need for fighting, is there? Can’t this be resolved another way?”

“I think now is the perfect time.”

Most people jumped as Taleus revealed himself, with Piano and Vilivian being the exceptions as they sensed his ki and blood respectively when he approached. Even still, his sudden appearance didn’t bode well for Piano’s chances at peace.

“The perfect time for what?” Piano asked, somewhat concerned.

“The time to see which of us is the strongest.” He said simply, like it was the easiest thing in the world. “We’re the six strongest fighters for this cycle of tournaments, right?. So I want to see if I can take you all down, so why not do it all at once?”

“I’m not sure that’s a good idea...” Piano began, but she was soon overpowered by the others.

“Well, that sure sounds fun.” Aude chimed in, rolling her shoulder and giving her bat a few practice swings. “It sure beats sitting here listening to the lovebirds argue for days on end! It might make for a good show!”

“If you’re tired of listening to us, you should’ve just gone somewhere else!” Inari shot back, running her fingers down her blade. “But I suppose if we’re going to settle the score all at once, then I’m game!”

“Yeah, it’s probably best to just get this out of the way now.” Raku spun her spear off her back and into her hand, wind gathering at her feet.

“Uh...” Piano looked around desperately, looking for signs of friendliness, but saw steel in the eyes of the others. “Vilivian! Maybe you can convince th-”

The sound of a sword slamming into earth as Vilivian slammed her sword into the ground. “Let’s see if you all are worthy of your place here today.”

“You guys...” Piano whined, seeming upset. “I don’t think we should-”

Her eyes widened as she was the first to notice Taleus bit his wrist and drew a scythe of blood from the wounds. Quickly kicking off her heels, she sent the two purple darts flying towards him as he charged towards Vilivian, who seemed ready to face him. He blocked the two with a quick swing, before barely raising the shaft of the crimson weapon in time to block the kick aimed at his chest. With a concussive force, the young assassin was flung away as the red skinned martial artist charged after him with another swing of her legs towards his head.

Inari watched the two take off to one end of the field, cracking her neck. “For someone who didn’t want to fight, she’s got some moves. Now, to settle...”

She turned to where Raku was, only to see she wasn’t there anymore. She only had a second to look up and dodge back before the swiftly descending form of Raku pierced the earth where she

floated, cracks forming in the ground and a blast of wind creating a shockwave around the impact point. Raku flashed blue eyes to meet green as she pried her weapon out and spun it to ready it before thrusting towards the half-ghost.

A vs V

Aude and Vilivian watched the other four pair off, before looking at each other. Aude tapped her bat on the dirt, before pointing it at her current opponent. "Well, it looks like the game's started without us. But I'm used to being the fourth batter! Let me show you what I've got!"

Vilivian just got into a combat stance, nodding. Aude gave a wink as a golden orb began to form in the air. "And next up, we've got a golden homerun fitting of our one true superstar!" Aude narrated, lifting her leg as she was winding up for her swing. Vilivian made no effort to move out of the way, before Aude swung her bat with all her might, sending the golden ball rocketing towards her chosen opponent. Vilivian planted her feet, before swinging her fist to match the ball, shattering it with devastating ferocity, before charging to meet her chosen opponent as the initial pairs were established.

Vilivian's fists rained down towards Aude, who barely dodged out of the way as each blow shattered the ground where she had been standing before. One blow, though, Vilivian let her fist embed into the ground instead, using it as a leveraging point to kick towards the baseball star. The fox girl barely raised her weapon to block, getting sent hurtling through the air even after she lessened the impact.

But with a smile on her face, she pointed down towards Vilivian. A shadow appeared over the Matriarch, who looked up at the large golden sphere descending down towards her. Golden Star! She made a short noise before disappearing underneath the attack. But after a moment, the sphere likewise shattered, showing a mostly unhurt Vilivian underneath.

"Geez, you really are a monster!" Aude commented, though she was grinning as she shook her arms to regain the feeling in them. "But that just means I don't have to hold back!"

She got into a ready stance, before charging forward with surprising speed. Vilivian raised her arm, her lips already moving. "Ward!"

A blue barrier appeared, blocking the swing. Aude just gave Vilivian a grin, taking another couple swings at the barrier. Vilivian held onto the flow of magic going into the barrier, keeping it calm under the assault and waiting for an opening. But to her shock, Aude's own magic started working between swings, coating the wooden weapon with a golden sheath around it. Winding up for a big impact, Aude slammed one more time into the barrier, shattering the blue wall and sending Vilivian stumbling back.

The golden sheen was gone from the bat, but that didn't stop another swing from Aude, which hit the Matriarch in the chest with a grunt of pain as she was sent flying back, only for another blow to strike her back as the fox girl quickly outran her. It wasn't for a couple more blows before Vilivian finally blocked a strike properly, a fist hurtling towards her opponent to seek vengeance.

R vs I

Across the way, an aerial battle had begun between Inari and Raku. The dragon of wind was soaring through the sky with ease, dodging the green arrows that the half-ghost kept launching towards her. But the barrage of projectiles meant that Raku had a hard time approaching without risk of getting hit. She needed to close the distance.

Suddenly, Inari seemed to draw her bow back even further, lining up a shot carefully for the Fyujinn woman. Seeing an opening, Raku rushed forward, trying to close the gap as quickly as possible while the chance was there. Inari fired the arrow, Raku's confidence not shaking. All she had to do was dodge this arrow and Inari was hers.

But even as she smoothly dived beneath it, Inari's smirk told Raku that she had made a mistake. Burst Shot! The green projectile exploded into a dozen different darts that shot in all different directions right above Raku. She had no chance to dodge as three arrows hit her back, sending her plummeting back down to the earth.

"Not done yet!" Inari called out, aiming her bow down. Scatter Shot! A rain of green arrows chased down after Raku, causing a plume of smoke to rise from the ground due to the number of impacts. She then had Green revert to rest, gathering energy in her arms as a blue, iron-like coating covered her arms. Brawler Style: Falling Star!

Like a blue meteor falling to earth, Inari slammed into the ground with destructive force, creating a crater from the immense impact and sending the cloud of dust away with the shockwave. But to her surprise, there was no Raku underneath her fist, unconscious.

She looked up, just in time to see the tip of a spear hurtling towards her face. She raised her arms, the iron coverings protecting her as she was sent back. As she lowered her guard to see what was happening, Raku had already spun the spear around and slammed the haft of the weapon into the side of Inari's head. Sent reeling back, she had barely enough time to recover as Raku leaped into the air, leaping back as the earth was once more split by Raku's descent.

Another leap in the air from Raku sent Inari sliding back as jump-stab after jump-stab rained down from above. Inari quickly got used to the pace and leaped a little further back, planting her feet in the ground as she took a fighting stance. As Raku reached the apex of her jump, Inari shut her eyes. She listened for the sound of Raku rushing down to try and impale her. Waiting... waiting... waiting... waiting...

Brawler Style: Cyclone Strike! With a spinning motion, Inari slammed the back of her fist into the tip of Raku's spear, sending it careening to the side and knocking its wielder off balance. Using the momentum, Inari leaped up. Shaolin Style: Whirling Descent! Her fist slammed into Raku's stomach, sending her hurtling back.

But something caught the edge of her foot. Inari looked down in time to see the extended portion of Raku's spear hooked to her leg before she was dragged along Raku's flight. Being ground into the earth, she watched as the wind gathered around Raku to right her flight before the spear was sent in a wide circle to further slam the half-ghost into the earth. She was then flung quite a distance away, landing with a hard impact before rising with an uppercut to match the dashing thrust Raku chased her with, the two locking in place as they growled at each other.

P vs T

Piano, meanwhile, was having a rather troubling time against her first opponent. Taleus was clearly an agile opponent, and while his fighting style was obviously crude and mostly self-taught, she could see that each strike was aimed towards one of her vitals. Even one strike could prove to be fatal to her if she let him get her.

She barely had to glance over her shoulder to see the wicked blade of his scythe come descending down towards her neck, forcing her to lean back to dodge it. She went into a full back handspring, her foot curling around the haft of the weapon. With a quick pull, she disarmed the Perpetual of his weapon, his six eyes widening with some confusion.

But his state didn't last long as he quickly pulled the weapon down with the force of his control over his own blood, forcing Piano to do a narrow dodge as the weapon plunged straight down into the earth where she just was. As she got back onto her feet, she quickly charged him before he could reach the scythe, slamming a fist into his chest to force him back.

As he stumbled back from the first blow, she quickly followed it up with another punch, then another in a combination to keep him away from his current weapon and take his focus away from controlling his blood. He seemed to have enough hand-to-hand experience to be able to block the first couple of punches. He quickly went to pull his scythe back towards himself, trying to impale her in the back in the process. But just as it was about to hit her, she suddenly crouched down low, kicking his legs out from under him. She then leaped into the air and kicked again, sending him crashing to the ground with a painful gasp.

But with his mouth wide open, he raised an arm up and bit down on his wrist once more, creating three more daggers of blood to float above him. Piano leaped back, before the three weapons were sent hurtling her way. Drawing a matching number of throwing knives herself, she flung two steel and one of her blood forged knives to cancel out his attack. While the two steel simply matched their blood counterparts, the blood forged blade made impact with the crimson dagger and sent it away. But instead of breaking apart as the taint of her blood made it unable to connect to Taleus like she expected, the weapon merely spun away for a bit before control was regained upon it.

Figuring there must be something special about his blood, Piano quickly drew more throwing knives in preparation for another assault, not caring for the composition of the blades as she flung them to meet the hurtling daggers once more. Once again, Taleus' three were sent away, but the assassin's charge was halted by a hidden fourth throwing knife heading for his chest. He parried the blade away with his scythe, only to feel a fist impact his stomach as Piano closed the gap between them, not wanting to keep the fight at a range. She lifted a leg in anticipation to ax kick him, only to feel a sharp pain on her supporting leg's thigh as one of the crimson daggers sliced through it, ink-like blood pouring from the wound and sending her off balance.

With a twirl of the weapon around his body, Taleus slammed it into Piano's side, sending her rolling onto the dirt as he chased after her with his weapon raised. She pushed off the ground and kept rolling, getting out of range of the first swing as he continued to give chase. Piano pushed off the ground, leaping high in the air over Taleus, who grabbed hold of his scythe and swung high, managing another glancing blow with the blade on her side.

But prepared for the attack this time, a spray of her corrupting blood rained down on Taleus, causing him to howl in pain as he backed away from her, his skin burning from the corrupting force coating his arms. She landed on the ground behind him, before delivering a spinning back kick to his spine, causing his weapon to go flying from his grip once more as he rolled onto the ground with pain.

Just as she got close enough to try and finish him off with a punch to the throat, however, he kicked out with a leg, the blow light enough for her to toughen her muscles to avoid feeling but slowing her attack as all four of his weapons came for her back. She barely leaped into the air above to avoid that attack, but soon noticed something out of the corner of her eye as the feeling of someone's ki came hurtling towards her.

Like an orange and white projectile, Aude had been flung away by her opponent Vilivian, who stood with a couple bruises showing from her skirmish with the baseball star. As Piano registered what was going on, she twisted her body in the air and caught Aude with her arms, using the latter's upward momentum from being thrown to send the two high in the air. Wrapping her arms around Aude, Piano angled the baseball star's head towards the ground as they hurtled towards the earth in a dangerous suplex, trying to incapacitate the fox girl in this blow so she could focus on the others.

With a heavy impact and the rising of dust, the two women hit the ground, though Piano quickly leaped out unharmed from the maneuver. She looked at the impact point, waiting for the confirmation that Aude was down for the count.

But her hopes were quickly dashed as the dust settled and Aude began pulling herself up, a gold wedge sticking out of the ground where she landed as it had broken open the earth and cushioned her landing. "You almost got me with that one! I'll be sure to pay you back for that!" Aude promised, rolling her shoulders as she stood up.

Taleus, meanwhile, was recovered from the blood shower he just got and turned to look for Piano, only to see Vilivian not too far away. Holding out his hand, his scythe landed back in it and he charged for the red head... only to feel an impact on his side as Inari crashed into him and the pair were sent flying a distance away. Both pushed off of each other and landed a distance apart from one another, getting into combat stances as they glared at each other. Then, with a quick movement, Taleus rushed Inari, who met his scythe with a blue fist and a shout of anger.

Vilivian simply stood tall despite her short stature, looking at the two new pairs before turning to Raku who walked towards her. Raku looked at the silver blade still embedded into the ground, only to receive a shake of the head from Vilivian. Nodding, Raku got into a combat stance, before rushing forward with a thrust that was parried aside by Vilivian's hand and met with a punch that Raku barely juke out of the way as she got some distance once more.

T vs I

The clash of iron fist and steel-like blood rang across the battlefield as Inari and Taleus exchanged blows with one another, neither one gaining ground. While Inari certainly had the power and slight speed advantage, Taleus' nimble movements and spinning fighting style always ensured the blade of his scythe was in her threat range every time she tried to close in. It was any wonder that Piano was able to even stay this close without iron fists, much less land a blow.

Deciding fighting from a distance might be best, Inari began to back off, only for Taleus to close any gap she made with his aggressive pursuit. Inari couldn't create any distance to form Red or Green into weapons, her entire focus on making sure she wasn't sliced in two by the manic assassin. His crazed smile almost scared Inari, as she slammed her fist into the ground to create a shockwave to force him back a little and give herself some room from him.

Before he could land and rush towards her, she managed to send away the remnants of Blue and call Red to her hand. The katana quickly took form in her hand, which soon had to meet the deadly scythe of Taleus, now able to hold him to some distance with the longer range of the sword.

With a bit of room to breathe now, Inari could finally press the attack, swinging her sword to try and nick the blood-wielder. But the assassin proved to be rather nimble, dodging her swings and sending the curved blade of his weapon careening towards her with reckless speed. Even with Red in hand, approaching the whirlwind of crimson that was Taleus was still proving to be difficult, as the cut across her arm now proved.

But then she saw an opening as he recovered from a leaping whirlwind slash, his landing off by her pushing him off of her. She quickly rushed forward, finally forcing him to lift his scythe to try and block her direct slash. With a smile, she caused the blade to be incorporeal, phasing through the bloody weapon before rematerializing to slash across the feminine man's chest.

His six eyes widened with surprise at the pain he felt as the blade he thought he blocked got a good chunk of his chest. But as he watched his blood spill, he looked back up at Inari with a crazed smile once more on his face. He tossed the scythe in his hand at her like a reaping buzzsaw. Inari ducked under the scythe and met the rushing assassin with a piercing thrust.

Taleus ducked to the side, gathering the blood from his chest wound into another scythe, the opening near the end of the blade catching the point of her blade and twisting so that it was caught. Spinning around, Inari was now once more being flung around by the end of a polearm, slamming into the ground a number of times before Taleus leaped high in the air and made a spinning slam, smashing Inari between the earth and the flat of the scythe with a crushing impact.

Inari gave a cry of pain as pressure continued to be applied to her chest as she struggled to get out. As she pushed at the scythe with both hands, Taleus held out one of his hands to call back the thrown scythe. But as he raised the retrieved weapon down to finish off the yurei, he tilted his head. Where did her sword go?

Blade Garden!

He leapt backwards in that moment as several sword blades sprouted from the ground in an attempt to impale him. He scrambled around as more blades chased after him, forcing him to finally retreat as Inari regained her footing. Then, as he backflipped away from another pair of rising blades, he suddenly felt a presence behind him. He quickly whirled a scythe to cover his back as a slash from Inari sent him away, his weapon going another direction as now the ghost girl was pressing the attack.

A vs P

Across the perforated battlefield, Piano was ducking underneath the bat of Aude, the golden fox swinging her weapon of choice was a delighted laugh. While Piano was always good at being quick on her feet, Aude was always just behind her with her bat swinging, making it difficult to get into a proper stance to fight back. Piano could toughen her muscles and skin with ki to block the swings to fight back, but Aude's strength meant that it would quickly wear down Piano's stamina and quickly bring her down.

As Piano got an inch of distance after dodging a swing and moving away, she was finally able to plant her foot and kick backwards, catching Aude by surprise in the gut as she gave a gasp of pain. As Aude was pushed back by the force, Piano immediately drew three throwing knives, flinging them to further establish her own pace in the fight.

Aude planted her own feet and gave a mighty swing with her bat, deflecting the two blood-forged knives and shattering the steel one with ease. But she then found the red-skinned martial artists in her face, a fist slamming into her chest. This was soon followed up by another punch, before ducking into an uppercut to send the fox girl flying. Aude landed on her feet, swinging her bat wildly at the charging Piano, who leaned back to barely avoid the bat before her next barrage of blows.

But she only realized her mistake at the last moment, as a metallic thud as the gold extension Aude put on her weapon made impact with the side of Piano's head. Her golden eye went wide as she was sent reeling back, barely stumbling into a roll to dodge the golden projectiles sent her way by a now cocky Aude.

Getting to her feet, Piano flung another set of throwing knives Aude's way, only for the fox girl to knock them down with her own projectiles that easily batted the slim blades to the side, forcing Piano to dodge again. The sound of sliding feet made Piano jerk her head over, just in time to roll under the mighty swing of Aude before she was hit in the head again. Aude's tail swished to the side, getting in Piano's face and making her splutter with fur in her mouth, only to take another blow of gold to the stomach for her troubles.

Doubling over, Piano knew she was getting pushed onto her back foot. The golden magic Aude used more than made up for the difference in martial skills between them along with the range of the bat versus Piano's fists. And while Piano couldn't just develop a talent for magic right then, she could at least beat out the range problem.

As Aude rushed forward again, Piano moved to meet her, surprising the superstar. The bat came hurtling towards Piano, only for the red girl to raise the sheath of her sword, halting it with the sound of wood smacking wood. Putting her whole body weight to stopping the blow, Piano then grabbed the handle of the sword. As Aude cursed and tried to back up, it proved to be too late as the sound of steel unsheathing rang out and a devastating cut to the baseball player's shoulder stained her white shirt red.

The rush of burning pain Aude felt as the corrupting influence of Piano's blood burned her shoulder like a dose of acid directly in the wound. But the fox girl grit her teeth and focused her gold along her bat to meet Piano's blade, crimson and gold clashing with a loud clang. The moment their weapons separated, the black corruption began to spread along the gold, forcing Aude to fling it at Piano as a makeshift projectile, the Devil Blood diving out of the way as she sheathed her blade and taking up an iaijutsu stance.

Creating three balls of gold, Aude sent them hurtling towards Piano with a swing and a confident smirk, only for the shy girl to dash forward, slashing all three in half and sending the six halves harmlessly to either side of her. Now in Aude's face, she thrust the sheath forward to slam into the baseball star's stomach, before giving her a backflip kick to knock her to the ground.

Aude landed on her back, then quickly raised her bat to stop the axe kick Piano tried to finish her off with, holding back the leg with all her strength. Just as Piano was flipping around her sword to stab down towards Aude, a golden pillar suddenly slammed into the standing woman's stomach and sent her flying. Golden Splendor!

Aude gave a whooping cheer as Piano hit the ground a bit away, before gathering gold around her bat to fortify it against Piano's blade. She spun the heavily weighted tool a couple of times as she waited for the martial artist to regain her feet.

"Well I'm glad you can keep up!" Aude taunted. "Let's see if you can keep up the pace before the show's over!" She and Piano both launched towards each other, Aude swinging her bat as Piano got close, forcing the taller girl to duck low and swing towards the shorter girl's legs. Aude leaped over it and swung down as she leaped over, making Piano lay all the way on the ground and letting the baseball player get her footing first to continue the assault.

Piano's blade met the golden bat with a quick parry, followed by an exchange of blows. The magic being used on the bat ensured the corruption couldn't spread to the rest of the weapon, preserving its quality as the two met blow for blow. Piano's skill with her sword and varying techniques were being matched by the enhanced power of the bat, making it hard for either to truly gain ground. A few times, Aude seemed to be setting up for a big swing, but Piano would approach at a tricky angle and a new style of fighting and that would force Aude back to reconsider.

But always for only a few moments, then she pressed the attack again. Piano was slowly backing away as she defended herself, finding it hard to land a proper blow on the fox girl due to the weight, speed, and range of the weapon keeping her back.

T vs I vs A vs P

But then Piano's senses noticed another ki approaching her from behind. Her back bumping against his, she didn't need to look over her shoulder to know that Taleus was now right behind her. She did have to glance back to see that his ghostly opponent was quickly closing in with blade in hand, matching the pace of the golden superstar approaching Piano's front.

A violet eye met three crimson ones, before both spun around clockwise, with Piano's sword meeting Inari's Red and Taleus' scythe attempting to take a chunk of fox with its swing. While the fox girl dodged the swing, she had to back up again as Taleus tried to bite a chunk out of her with his rows of teeth to prevent retaliation. Inari held back Piano's blade, but Red suddenly began to complain about the weapon, the corrupting influence of her blade making the sword spirit nervous.

With a force of strength, Inari shoved Piano back, the martial artist hitting Taleus' back again to stop his swing as Aude planted her feet. In a fluid motion, Piano rolled along the assassin's back and jumped up as he ducked low, both on either side of the monstrous swing of Aude as Inari closed in. Piano's foot slammed into the back of Aude's head, as Taleus' foot lifted up to vault the superstar by the stomach and send her tumbling into Inari. As the male began to stand though, the red skinned warrior's foot slammed him into the trio, knocking them into a pile on the ground together.

Piano sheathed her blade, rushing forward for an iaijutsu slash, only for Taleus to be kicked forward by both Aude and Inari. Piano released her blade, grabbing the flying man and slamming him to the ground. He couldn't slash her at this range, so he tried to trip her with the haft of the weapon, but she backed away quickly and forced him to block another kick from her. Inari managed to shove Aude off, attempting to slash her with Red, phasing through the upraised bat to cut the fox girl's side.

Aude swung in retaliation, sending Inari back with a dodge. She used her momentum to wind up a downward swing and slam down, shattering the earth with the blow and blasting the ghost girl with debris and even sending the flashy martial artist scrambling for cover. Taleus was lucky and had the debris fly overhead, seeing Inari land nearby. Lunging forward, he managed to get a slash on her back as she cried out in pain.

Piano quickly dashed forward and kicked at Taleus, only to be blocked by him and have to push off before Aude slammed into her with the bat. Inari looked back at the three of them with anger in her eyes, her hair blazing behind her, winding her sword back in a battle stance. Five Meter Slash: Buried Godslayer! A wide red slash filled the area, slicing through the earth with ease. Piano and Taleus were able to dodge, but Aude tried to raise her bat to block. This didn't prove effective, as the golden sheath her weapon was in was ripped in two and a large cut now appeared on her other shoulder and side.

Inari reeled back her arm to do the Ten Meter Slash version, only to have her blade caught by Piano's before a blow from the red skinned woman's fist knocked her to the ground. Before Piano could follow up though, her path was blocked from having to keep Taleus' scythe from slicing her in

two. As she kept him at bay, Aude managed to get behind her and whack her across the back with the wooden bat.

If Piano's ki senses hadn't warned her in time to toughen her back muscles, she likely would have a shattered spine. As it was, her mouth opened into a silent scream as Taleus whirled her high in the air. As he spun his scythe around to slash at her again, he was interrupted as Aude and Inari both rushed him. He gave a look to both, before sending his crimson daggers from earlier to fend off Inari as he then did a full body spin to match Aude's powerful swing, knocking both back a couple of steps.

As both women recovered to attack again, he managed to call the second scythe to his hand, spinning both with his muscles and blood control, before becoming a whirlwind of crimson blades as he engaged both in combat. Even working together, neither Aude or Inari could find an opening, any apparent ones that opened up would quickly have a deadly strike swinging down to force them back before they were instantly cut down.

But Aude was merely keeping his and Inari's attention on him. After a few attempted exchanges of blows, she quickly leaped to the side. Before the other two could understand why she did that, they both felt sharp pain as throwing knives peppered their sides. A moment later, a golden baseball slammed into Taleus from the other side, Aude taking advantage of the opening Piano's long-range assault gave her.

Pulling out a knife with an angry huff, Inari began to rush Piano. Aude quickly followed, though whether she was going after the ghost or devil girl was hard to tell. Taleus quickly rolled onto his feet as well, his crazed smile unwavering as he charged to the trio of women with his scythes in hand.

R vs V

Across the way, a blue barrier was erected just as a spear tip slammed into the space it appeared, a shockwave of force and wind radiating out as Vilivian's magic blocked Raku's dragoon dive. Raku tried to pull back immediately after the impact, which came just in time as Vilivian quickly dropped the barrier and attempted to grab the dragon's leg and slam her into the ground.

Taking to the air again, Raku took advantage of her aerial abilities to weave above Vilivian and prepare her next attack. If she pushed her abilities to the max, she should be able to dive down faster than the barrier could come up and get a good hit on Vilivian.

Soaring even higher in the air, Raku spun her spear above her head, gathering the winds around her form in preparation to dive. Below, Vilivian simply began to regather her magic to counter the coming attack once more, with the intention of getting her hands on Raku this time.

With a burst of speed that sent a shockwave at her descent, Raku hurtled down to run Vilivian through. The Matriarch's eyes went wide as she tried to leap back, her warding spell not being quick enough to avoid damage here. Her left shoulder was slashed before she could get out of the way, her form getting blasted back as the destructive force of the dive radiated outwards in response to Raku meteorizing into the ground.

Violet leaked from the redhead as Raku spun her spear around again, before thrusting forward nearly as quickly. Vilivian managed to pull aside this time, throwing a punch that was pushed to the side by Raku's tail. The spear swung sideways to throw Vilivian to the side, but a hand on the shaft of the spear stopped that full force. Raku gathered wind in her lungs and launched a blast of air to push Vilivian away and make her lose her grip before she could take advantage of it before taking off into the air once more.

Her last dive worked, and Vilivian didn't seem to have a response, so she saw no reason to repeat it. This time should finish her for sure. As she gathered the wind energy, Vilivian below came up with a different strategy to deal with this dive.

Just as Raku began to dive, Vilivian held her hand out... towards the ground. "Sink." With the incantation complete, the ground turned to a semi-liquid as Raku realized too late the danger. As Vilivian backed away from the attack, Raku plunged halfway into the earth, the normally towering woman now only half the height of even the shorter Vilivian.

As Raku used her control of the wind to pull herself up, Vilivian stepped forward and delivered a devastating haymaker directly to Raku's face. The young dragon was sent hurtling across the sinkhole, slamming into a tree and breaking in half from the impact. As she tried to recover all the air knocked out of her lungs, Vilivian had crossed the distance and slammed her fist into Raku's stomach, causing her to gasp in horrid pain as stars filled her eyes.

As Vilivian reared her fist back to finish off Raku, she noticed the dragon woman gathering wind near her hand and back. Feeling a sinking feeling in her gut, she instead leapt backwards. "Ward!"

The blue barrier appeared at the perfect moment. Just as the wall erected itself between the two, Raku launched herself forward, swinging her arm as she reached the wall as a blade of wind emanated from her fingers. The blue barrier was sliced in two, the force of the blow whipping both women's hair back as Raku growled at Vilivian in anger as she adjusted the naginata in her hand.

With a quick motion with her hand, she slashed the naginata towards Vilivian, who dodged back easily. But the point of the weapon stopped right where Vilivian was moving and with her other hand, Raku slammed the naginata forward in a rough thrust to catch the dodging demon off-guard.

But the Matriarch simply fell backwards, landing on her back as the metal tip sailed above her prone form. But Raku leaped up quickly and moved to slam the spear down on the lowered woman, forcing Vilivian to desperately roll away as the spear smacked the ground with a metallic thud and gouged the earth slightly from the weight of the blow.

Twisting the blade, Raku then began to turn, digging through dirt and rock as she chased Vilivian with the blade as she rolled away. Vilivian quickly gathered more magic, conjuring another barrier to stop the blade inches from her face. But she barely had time to breathe in relief as the tip moved to be completely vertical as she sensed Raku's blood moving above her.

Before she could look up, there was a rush of wind and two boots slammed into her chest, the earth cracking beneath Vilivian as Raku put all of her weight into her feet to crush Vilivian beneath her. And while the demon was certainly in pain, the dragon was clearly still underestimating her as the redhead's hands gripped the brunette's ankles. Pushing up with surprising force, Vilivian lifted up the dragon woman and slammed her back down to the earth, leaving cracks with the blow before spinning around and sending Raku flying.

As Raku reverted to being on her feet as she continued to slide, she suddenly felt a body pressed to her back as Aude gave an "Eep!" at being slammed into by the tall dragon woman. The two slid a distance, before Aude was able to spin her bat around and slam Raku away from her. Aude gathered gold into a ball, before slamming it towards Raku, who sliced in half using gathered wind

from her naginata. The two then rushed each other, weapons clashing as they closed in on each other's face.

Taleus looked confused, having just been clashing with Aude. He then grinned and turned around to go after the other two girls. Piano turned to face him, blade at the ready as he rushed forward. But his progress was halted as the ground beneath his feet exploded, forcing him back as Vilivian charged towards him fists swinging. The assassin was forced to block and dodge, starting to get pushed back.

I vs P

As Piano tried to figure out what to do next, she suddenly felt an iron fist drive into her back and slam her into the ground as she gave a silent gasp of pain, her sword getting flung away as she lost her grip on it. Given Inari's unique status in life, her ki was harder for Piano to sense, which the half-ghost took advantage of for the surprise strike as the ground cracked under the impact of the blow. It was only by reflex did Piano's muscles toughened to the point of not being crushed into defeat. She was only just able to kick away Inari to allow herself to get back up, but being unarmed as the half-ghost charged forward was not ideal, but she'd have to manage.

Piano ducked and dived under all the iron-hard punches from Inari, her reflexes sharper now that she was looking at the ghost girl. But every time she tried to slyly maneuver towards her dropped sword, Inari began to swing widely and force Piano far back, the Devil Blood biting her lip as she tried to figure out how to counter Inari.

Her fighting style was really refined, honed from years of fighting both living and dead, and her experience meant that there were few holes for Piano to exploit. And the iron-like coverings over her hands added a large amount of power and durability that meant that armlocks and joint control was impossible, and blocking simply wasn't an option. Most of the fighting styles Piano knew for fighting people were practically useless against someone like Inari.

But maybe one of her monster fighting ones might prove useful...

Getting into a fighting stance, Piano waited for Inari to approach. Brawler Style: Blue Cannon! The blue fists soon came hurtling towards her as expected... only to be repelled to the side by a forceful blow from Piano. But that barely threw off Inari, another blow twisting around to try and recover. But another flowing strike sent the blow aside, spinning Inari around even more.

Rushing Waters style was a technique Piano learned by "stealing" the talents of a monk from a mountain infested with monsters. It was an adaptation of the Flowing Waters martial arts style, with an emphasis on powerful blows to deflect even the mightiest of creatures' claws to the side.

It also possessed counter-attacks to take advantage of those openings, but Piano was too afraid of critically hurting Inari to do that. She attempted to switch into Flowing Waters style instead for the counterattacks, but Inari recovered too quickly for the switch to work and Piano kept getting forced back until she could switch back to Rushing Waters.

This gap proved to be a problem, as Inari managed to get another blow onto Piano's shoulder, sending the Devil Blood spinning away for a moment. But as that distance was created, Piano finally had an opportunity to draw her throwing knives. As Inari approached, Piano flung about four towards the ghost girl, who blocked it by raising her hardened fists over her vitals and sending the projectiles off to the side.

"Did you really think I'd fall for something like that?" Inari asked, her fist now hurtling down towards Piano's face... only to see a blade still in her hand and now resting on her arm. With a quick, shallow cut, a burst of black blood came shooting out of the wound towards Inari.

Her first instinct was to raise her arms to block again, but with what Red had said about the blood-forged sword from earlier, she didn't know if the remnants of Blue would survive contact with the corrupting force. So instead she turned her back to take the liquid, a scream of pain as she felt the ichor begin to eat away at all it touched. It certainly didn't help when a spinning back kick then sent her flying away from the martial artist.

With Inari distracted by pain, Piano was finally able to run over and retrieve her sword, allowing her the distance advantage once more and the ability to handle the iron-like strikes of Inari. But as Piano turned to face her opponent, the amount of green she saw made her heart sink.

Bow now drawn back and an arrow pointed towards Piano, Inari let her first attack fly as Piano quickly attempted to parry it with her newly recovered sword. The arrow was surprisingly heavy, it taking quite a bit of force to repel even one directly. And just as she did so, another projectile was flying towards her. Piano put all her might into repelling that one, and the one after it, trying to slowly approach as she deflected arrows with each step forward.

Inari eventually drew an arrow back, aiming upwards this time as Piano's eyes went wide. Arrow Rain! The arrow went into the air, before a verdant rain began to descend down towards the red skinned girl, the sound of blade clashing with arrows echoing as she began to desperately swing to repel arrow after arrow, but being overwhelmed by the current speed as she disappeared in a cloud of green.

Inari looked confident that this fight was over as the dust was beginning to settle from her attack, but had an arrow nocked and aimed towards where Piano should be, waiting to be sure. As the dust slowly cleared from sight, she sure enough saw Piano still standing. Her left arm and right shoulder had an arrow in them, black blood flowing freely as she gave a couple of heavy breaths, her skin darkened from the increased blood flow she had to give herself to get the strength and speed to survive the attack.

With another deep breath to return her breathing to normal, she rushed forward with the last bit of increased speed before her blood flow returned to normal to avoid straining her muscles. Inari's arrow went flying over her shoulder as she swung towards the ghost girl, who had to unfortunately block with Green as she cursed, before switching him to gun form and taking aim as their fight raged once more.

A vs R

“Hold still!” Raku yelled out, swinging her naginata at air as Aude managed to slip away yet again. The pair had been fighting for some time, but neither could get a hit, as they were both fairly quick and kept dashing out of range. Aude was also attempting to create projectiles to fire to make up the range issue, but Raku’s naginata quickly closed in thanks to her speed, forcing the fox girl to use her base running skills to make her getaway.

But just as Aude got enough distance and could create her first golden orb, she looked over just in time to see Raku’s mouth open wide, wind gathering in the space. With a slight tilt of her head, she sent a blast of wind flying towards the golden batter, who dodged out of the way as her golden baseball was torn apart in the blast. As Aude got back to her feet, she looked at the missing chunk of earth with a look of surprise, before quickly rolling out of the way as she heard another blast heading her way.

Raku continued to gather and fire balls of wind towards Aude, pockmarking the earth with holes with each blast as she did so. It was quickly becoming difficult for the baseball star to run far, constantly having to avoid falling into holes while she dodged. The fox girl began gritting her teeth, before spinning around to face the dragon girl.

“Fine! Tired of me running! I’m right here!” She got into a batting stance, another golden sphere materializing as Raku gathered wind once more. As the blast of wind was about to be fired, Aude swung her bat forward, slamming the wood into gold and sending it hurtling like a golden rocket. At the same time, the blast of air was launched at frightening speeds. Both projectiles looked as if they were going to collide, before passing by each other harmlessly.

Aude barely raised her bat in time, getting blasted back as she slammed into the ground a few times in pain. But Raku got the worse end of the exchange, the golden orb slamming into her mouth and nose, sending her head reeling back as she felt her nose break from the impact as she stumbled back several steps from the force of it.. Red blood began to flow freely as she slowly stumbled back into a fighting pose, just as Aude leaped up onto her feet with a grin.

“Well I can see you’re all fired up! Let’s see how you do in this next inning!”

Before Raku could reply back, Aude quickly closed the distance, finally getting a swing in with her bat. Raku blocked with the haft of her spear, spinning it around to slash with the blade. But the fox girl was nimble this close, dodging out of the way and clipping Raku’s hip with the wooden club in

her hand. Raku grit her teeth, hitting Aude with the blunt end of her spear to back her up, before stabbing forward.

Aude blocked and backed up, a wide grin on her face as the two began to exchange blows, parrying the other's weapon each time. Unlike with Piano, Aude was not nearly on par strength-wise with her opponent. Raku was a dragon, even if her shy demeanor at times obscured that fact. The power she threw around was not something to underestimate. Aude had to put her full weight into every deflection to avoid being overpowered, while Raku looked like she was swinging her naginata around like it was an overly-sized chopstick.

But since Raku's blade wasn't cursed like Piano's was, it meant she didn't need to use her magic to block the corrupting force. Which meant she could spend it on something more valuable. While Aude was slowly being pushed back, suffering light cuts on her arms and side while she focused her energy elsewhere. Raku herself was gathering wind around her blade, pushing the baseball star back even further with each blow as she seemed pleased with herself.

Only to immediately regret everything as she felt a pillar of gold slam into her back. Golden Splendor! As Raku came rocketing forward, Aude set up her swing, before slamming Raku quite the distance with impressive force, making the dragon girl skip twice on the earth before recovering. Both women glared at each other over the newly created distance as the golden pillar began to fade away.

"Huh. You're not bad."

"I'm surprised you could keep up."

"Well, I was just getting started!" Aude promised, an even larger sphere prepared as she slammed her bat into it as Raku thrust forward to close the distance once more, both women giving a cry as the air between them exploded with the force of their attacks.

V vs T

Taleus made a noise of shock as he was slammed into the ground, lifted up by the very weapon he was holding and brought down to earth with a pained grunt. Vilivian was unlike the other five in

terms of strength, confidence, and experience. Every opening he thought she had, she closed in a second with punishing results. Any place her physical defenses couldn't cover, her magical ones were manifested to cover. And every attack of hers had a follow-up as devastating as the initial blow.

It was so exhilarating facing her.

"What a horrid face you bear at me, Male." Vilivian commented, before gathering flames in her hand. "Burn."

Taleus' eyes all went wide and he rolled out of the way, before he became a blackened crisp like the dirt he was on had turned into a circle of scorched ash. With a raise of the red head's arm, the fire trailing the arc as Taleus rolled to safety, all thoughts of attack far from his mind as he was solely focused on survival.

But as she was reaching towards some nearby rocks to prepare to send his way, he finally gathered his wits to fight back. As the stone projectiles came hurtling his way, Taleus almost gave an excited laugh as he charged forward. He barely moved to dodge as he made a straight line for her, scythe drawn back in preparation to swing.

She couldn't gather her magic to block it, so she'd have to use her arms to deflect it. She moved to hit the haft to keep his blade from reaching her as she thought she was successful as his swing was stopped.

But then he rushed forward, the center of his scythe morphing into sickles that he managed to slash her torso. Violet came rushing out to meet him, as she gave a look of surprise. But her shock quickly passed, a fist slamming into his chest to drive him back. He barely slowed down his assault, swinging his sickles to draw more blood from her.

Vilivian was surprised that this male could push her back like this. The Blackblood would've been expected. The Dragon girl too. Even the Fox Girl and the Ghost girl could prove troubling to her. But this male shouldn't have given her any trouble at all. His magic was too rudimentary, his fighting style flawed. He wasn't anywhere near as strong as her in any measurable way.

And yet she was being forced back, taking step after step backwards. She wasn't going to lose to a male like this. "Ward!"

The blue barrier sprung to life to block his attack. If she only had a second or two to recover, she could begin her counterattack and put him in his place. But as the first sickle made impact, he released it and let it fly as he reached for the ground. To Vilivian's horror, she saw a black stain on the ground, the soil being eaten through by the corrupting blood of Piano. 'He can't...'

Vilivian watched as Taleus turned Piano's blood into a dagger, which he then thrust upwards against the barrier between them with a roar. As the blade struck true, the black blood quickly spread itself across all of the ward as it was fully under his control, weakening the guard quickly as his sickle returned to his hand as he struck again.

The blue wall shattered from the force, the sickle digging into her side once more. As violet blood flowed from a new wound, she grabbed his collar, lifting him up with inhuman strength. Before he could fully recover from the shock of her ignoring her wounds, she delivered a devastating uppercut, his teeth nearly breaking from the force of them slamming against each other as he was launched in the air.

As he twisted in the air a few times, he reached his hands out to summon up his blood weapons, twisting them together back into blood scythe form as he righted himself to look down at her. She looked up at him, steadying herself into a fighting stance as she watched him spiral in the air down towards her, the sharp blade of the scythe heading for her shoulder.

V vs T vs R vs A

But before they could clash once more, a blast of air slammed into her spine, the blindsided Matriarch rolling forward as Taleus' scythe embedded itself into the dirt. As the assassin looked up at where the attack that drove away his prey came from, he saw Raku and Aude fighting not too far off, both exchanging blows as Aude backed up towards him.

Tugging the blade from the ground, he gripped the weapon with both hands as he came charging silently towards Aude's exposed back like a grim reaper. Raku's eyes widened as she saw the crimson assassin draw near, swinging her naginata in a wide arc as she channeled the wind

through it. With a large gust of air, Aude was sent flying high above Taleus as he covered his face from the force of the wind.

He then only barely had time to raise his weapon as a thrust came hurtling towards him, the large spear sending him back as he recovered in two leaping steps. He then swung his scythe to his left, catching Aude's bat before she could make contact. As Raku rushed forward to pierce him, she suddenly was diverted to the side as Vilivian pulled the weapon towards her and slammed her fist into the dragon's belly.

Raku grit her teeth as she was knocked back, firing a blast of wind towards Vilivian as she raised a hand to put up another wall of magic to protect herself. But the sudden arrival of Aude behind her made the Matriarch spin around and catch the bat, holding it in place as the dragon stabbed towards the barrier behind her. Each blow from the blue scaled woman was beginning to create cracks in the magic, but Aude's assault meant Vilivian was trapped.

But with a quick swipe of his scythe, Taleus managed to clip Raku's shoulder, forcing her away as she swung her spear to bat him away as he grinned towards her. With one threat occupied, Vilivian let the magic fade as she picked up Aude with both hands, the fox girl kicking and complaining as her bat bounced almost uselessly off the demon's skin. With a quick throw, the orange blur slammed into Raku once more, knocking both to the ground in a heap as Taleus gave a wicked grin at the situation.

Swinging his scythe wildly as he ran towards the two prone women, he saw green and blue go wide as his crimson eyes narrowed in anticipation of the kill. But a voice behind him put that thought to an end.

"Shatter." The ground below the trio began to break apart and fling in all directions as Vilivian's magic shattered the earth. Aude managed to put a golden shield beneath her, protecting her and Raku by accident, while Taleus was flung back by the full force and knocked to the ground.

Vilivian loomed over him at that moment, fist raised to pulverize his skull and put an end to him, only to see a flash of gold as Aude hit one golden ball her way. Vilivian knocked it to the side with a backhand, only to have to catch the scythe that almost pierced her side. She looked up to find that Raku was high in the air, naginata pointed down towards her chest as she began to descend.

Taleus felt a foot on the back of his head, shoving his face down towards the earth as Aude jumped off of it. Her one foot kicked out, knocking Vilivian's head to the side as the golden star swung a homerun swing right towards Raku's chest, knocking her off course as she slammed into the ground with a huge plume of dirt as she cratered the ground.

Raku shook her head, clearing the daze from Aude's blow as she blew away the dust around her. Her spear then quickly shot up to catch Taleus' scythe before it sliced her in two, using some wind to add enough force to push him back. Aude leaped over his back again, swinging her bat to strike at the opening Raku left, only to be punched with a running blow by Vilivian. The red head spun around and kicked towards Raku, who blocked with her own leg as the two fought with some martial arts.

Taleus leaped forward once more to slash at Vilivian's back, only to be repelled when Raku delivered a punch to the red head's face before leaping off her shoulder to kick Taleus in the chest with both feet. But the assassin managed to latch his scythe between the blades of her naginata, swinging himself around before turning his scythe into a pair of bloody sickles once more. With a spinning slash, he managed another glancing blow onto Raku's side.

With a swing of her naginata in a wide arc, she caught him with the haft of her spear in retaliation as she swung him in a circle. A golden pillar suddenly rose up in the middle of the arc, causing Raku to slam the assassin against the resplendent wall with a pained gasp. The metal behind him cracked from the force, Aude sweating nearby from having used so much of her soul energy on creating as much gold as she has so far. The crimson assassin looked up from the spear pinning him down and saw the Matriarch rushing towards him with her fist drawn back.

Thinking quickly, he swung himself around the spear so her fist slammed into the gold behind him, breaking it apart and sending shards of gold showering into Aude as she tried to cover herself. With no more resistance, Raku's swing continued, now catching Taleus' neck as she sent him flying towards Aude. She couldn't swing at him with her bat, so she awkwardly caught him and flung him to the ground. As she raised her bat to attack, he swung his sickles, forcing her to dodge as they fought once more.

Raku went to recover from her swing, only to find Vilivian holding onto it. With a pull of monstrous strength, Raku was flung from her feet towards the demon, but with the spreading of her wings she was able to take flight before Vilivian could follow up properly.

Glancing up at Raku high above, Vilivian shook her head, deciding better than to use up her strength trying to shoot down the dragon. Turning to the weaker prey still on the ground, Vilivian gathered strength in her fist and rushed forward to slam Aude's spine with a shattering blow.

Only for a green arrow to come sailing from across the battlefield and nearly impale her. It was only with good awareness and remarkable reflexes that Vilivian avoided the arrow as she looked in the direction it came from.

The Blackblood had just dodged the arrow, flinging a knife back in response at the Ghost as the two exchanged long range attacks. Deciding to strike at the Blackblood while she wasn't paying attention, running forward to strike at her exposed back. But Piano easily sensed the approach, backflipping over the Matriarch and kicking her towards Inari.

The ghost girl fired an arrow to try and capitalize on the moment, but the arrow itself was batted away by a backhanded strike from Vilivian, who's emerald eyes met the bright green ones of Inari as she took a combat stance once more. Seeing that arrows wouldn't be as effective, Inari decided to change tact.

Arquebus Form. The green bow quickly morphed into an old-styled rifle as Green sensed Inari's needs, the ghost girl holding the weapon with one hand as she took aim at her new opponent. Vilivian seemed rather confused at the device, unsure of what to make of it as the two continued their standoff mere yards apart.

P vs R

Piano glanced around at the battlefield now that her opponent was distracted by a new one. She noted the pair she just walked away from, before looking over at how the golden star was handling herself. She was currently keeping Taleus at bay, his sickles hooked around her bat as she shoved him back with all her might. Piano wanted to jump in to help, but she figured either one might take advantage of her helping one to take her down. So she decided calming down Raku might be the best bet.

She tried to find Raku, but she didn't sense Raku's ki on the ground. Her mismatched eyes going wide, Piano jerked her head up just in time to see Raku plunge down towards her spear first, forcing Piano to back handspring away as the earth shattered under the dragons might as Raku came to face the Devil Blood.

Piano's blade was held in a rather defensive posture, square in front of her as she faced Raku. Raku recognized the style, having been trained in a similar style in the past. It was a sword style meant for fighting spears and other long weapons, to try and counter the range difference between the two weapons.

Grinning as memories of that training returned to her, Raku gathered more wind along her Windbreaker Naginata, before sending a swirling gust towards Piano to knock her off her feet. But Piano's movements were surprisingly quick even despite her injuries, maneuvering around the wide attack with ease and closing the distance. The dragon warrior feinted a stab, trying to bait Piano into a block she knew she could counter.

But the talent thief easily recognized the trick, throwing a pair of throwing knives instead as she stepped into Raku's reach. Forced to repel them with her spear, the blue-scaled fighter couldn't put her weapon between the pair of them as Piano closed in, her crimson blade swinging in deadly arcs towards her. It was only using all of the martial arts training her grandfather instilled in her could she dodge Piano's swings, though she was caught off guard as a kick knocked her to the ground.

Gathering wind at the tip of her blade, Raku swung out before Piano drew close enough to strike, forcing the Devil Blood to block. The wind repelled the actual blade, ensuring no corruption touched her naginata. She had seen enough of what that black blood and the weapons forged with it could do to know not to let an ounce of it touch her or her weapons.

Kicking Piano in the stomach, she forced the young martial artist away as she spread her wings to alight back onto her feet. With both back in fighting position and igniting their fighting spirits once more, the two began exchanging blows.

Neither could gain any substantial advantages over the other. For Piano, the difficulties came from the long reach of Raku's spear, and the wind magic that augmented all of her abilities and attacks, driving her back slowly but surely. The draconic strength of the tall woman also meant that Piano couldn't just meet her blows exactly, deflecting each blow slightly instead.

For Raku, Piano's sword was the most troublesome part. It was basically a one hit for massive damage, so she couldn't take a single hit. And her martial arts was constantly shifting and changing, switching between Iaijutsu to two handed styles to using her sword and sheath as separate weapons with a level of fluidity that was impossible to keep up with. She needed an almost perfect fight, and Piano wasn't giving it up easily.

Even going into the sky was risky, as blood forged throwing knives were immediately thrown to force her back down to the ground. But Raku was slowly gathering wind in her mouth, so slow that even Piano's keen senses didn't notice. Then with a sudden shout, she blasted the thin girl back, sending her flying halfway across the battlefield as Raku took flight as well. By the time Piano hit the ground, Raku dove down with her spear and managed to pierce into Piano's side.

But as Piano gave a scream of pain, Raku gave her own as Piano's blade had likewise pierced her side. What's more, Piano's wound gave a spray of black blood up towards Raku's arms, beginning to corrupt them painfully as she pulled back. The blue dragon began to breathe heavily, her pupils dilating as her fangs began to grow.

I vs V

The sound of an explosion kicked off their fight, Vilivian's shoulder exploding in violet as the green bullet hit her faster than she had expected. The Matriarch reached a hand up, feeling the wound with a look of surprise. "Weapons sure have changed greatly." the red head commented lightly, before rushing forward.

Inari gave a grunt, firing another shot. But this time, Vilivian was wary of the attack and was able to sidestep the projectile with ease. Inari floated back as she created a few more green guns as the barrage continued. Arquebus Form: Line Formation Mass Shot! All of the weapons fired at once,

creating a wall of bullets that not even Vilivian could dodge.

Not that she needed to. "Ward!" A blue barrier once more shielded Vilivian, the bullets bouncing off as each line of ghostly green gun floated up to be replaced with another to fire an additional volley. While her headlong rush had been slowed, Vilivian was still approaching Inari with purposeful steps as the distance between them shrank. The ghost girl gave a noise of annoyance as she continued her assault, but her opponent's magic was proving too powerful to that approach.

Instead, she raised one line of guns towards the air, firing a volley on high. Curving Shot! The bullets quickly curved in the air, heading towards Vilivian's back as the next line of arquebuses fired directly at Vilivian.

But with a swing of her arm, the blue shield deflected the direct bullets with ease, before swinging it around to block the ones coming from behind her. As Inari's eyes went wide, the redhead launched herself forward, her fist slamming into Inari's stomach with great force.

Inari's eyes went wide, spittle flying from her mouth as she was sent hurtling into the ground, a trough being dug from her body dragging along the ground. Green reverted to his spiritual form as he floated over the prone Inari with concern.

"Don't worry Green, I'm not down yet." she assured him, beginning to float up. "Get some rest buddy. Red and I have got this."

She reached out, Red shifting into sword form as Inari got into a fighting stance. She glared over at Vilivian, who cracked her neck in anticipation. "I'm glad you haven't gone down so quickly. I've never fought one like you, and I'd like to see how far we can go."

Vilivian stomped a foot down, cracking the ground around her as she prepared herself. Then, with a burst of speed, she crossed the distance between them with her fists raised. The first swing of Red was quickly ducked under by Vilivian, a counterattack quickly shooting back towards the ghost girl. More prepared, Inari dodged, the two now beginning a furious exchange of blows as the two barely dodged or deflected the powerful blows of the other.

While Inari could phase her weapon through Vilivian's limbs to strike her directly, doing so would mean that Vilivian's powerful punches would turn her insides into soup with too many direct punches to the torso. But if she could just find an opening...

But Vilivian was slowly figuring out Inari's fighting style, each punch getting closer and closer to hitting Inari overwhelmingly. The next opening would have to be the one. The moment Vilivian pulled back her fists, Inari drew her blade back for her next attack. Blade Dance: Three Steps!

Red almost seemed to grow in the ghost's hand, as she gave a wide swipe. Villivan dodged under the swing, only to have to nearly dive to the side from the vertical slice that nearly bisected her. But the third blow was incoming and she could no longer dodge, so she was forced to erect a barrier to stop it. But the blade easily passed through magic and flesh alike, striking true to her core as more violet spilled forth from her sliced belly as she barely avoided being disemboweled by leaning back slightly.

Vilivian looked down at her new wounds with surprise, before a look of confidence took over. Her shoulders rolled slightly as her mass began to shift slowly...

T vs A

Aude and Taleus had their respective weapons locked together, bat and scythe pushing against each other as both fighters grinned wickedly in each other's faces with excitement at the battle. They both pushed off each other simultaneously, each spinning with their weapon ready as they delivered a devastating swinging blow towards the other.

The two attacks collided, sending both fighters skidding back as the force of the meeting blows pushed against one another, the two fighters now a bit of distance between them. Taleus bit his wrist, conjuring another weapon from his blood as Aude began to form another ball of gold.

"Too slow!" Aude called out, slamming her bat for a home run hit, sending it cascading towards Taleus. He sent his blood weapon forward, but the weapon was easily hit aside by the splendorous baseball. He couldn't raise his scythe in time to block the orb as it slammed into his shoulder, sending him sprawling to the ground.

He attempted to roll onto his feet, but Aude was already on top of him as she swung her back, knocking him around some more. Every time he tried to stand up, she knocked him down again, each blow sending him reeling with pain as she laughed at his plight.

But her overconfidence got the best of her, as she didn't notice his scythe's position the latest time she moved in to strike. With a sweeping blow, Aude's leg was caught by Taleus' scythe and now she was the one on the ground as Taleus raised his weapon with six gleaming evil eyes. With the swing of the reaper, he attempted to lop off her head, but she managed to keep her bat between the blade and her slender neck. The blow was still enough to send her flying, blood oozing as her cheek was slashed with a glancing cut.

"Not bad!" Aude wiped the blood from her cheek, glancing at him as he was getting ready to charge. "But you gotta do more than that to keep up with this!"

With a shout, Taleus was suddenly knocked off balance by a short pillar of gold rising up under one of his feet. She charged forward to take advantage of the opening, only to have to stop short as the reaping red blade swung where she was about to be. He quickly spun around, another follow-up attack driving her back as he used his longer reach to try and cleave her in two. But with the enhanced strength Armel had tried to give her, she was able to keep the assassin from striking a vital point so easily.

But his near lifetime of experience and training towards being an assassin was proving to make things difficult for her. Even when compared to the other five, his blade seemed especially deadly. It could be that the others weren't as interested in killing her as Taleus was, even despite the time the six had spent together before their final rounds. But like him, she wasn't one to let sentimentality get the better of her.

Creating a wedge of gold to shield her, she rushed forward to meet him. He went to swing his scythe at her, but she thrust the wedge forward right where the haft of the weapon was. With only a little bit of force, the weapon was rent in two by her own magic, sending him stumbling back.

She discarded the wedge to grab both hands onto the bat, only to see that Taleus had hardly slowed down. Two sickles were now in his hands, and she could barely dodge out of the way before

one of them grabbed onto her bat and pulled her to the ground. As he raised the other one to impale her, she coiled herself up in a ball and kicked up, knocking him away with a pair of cleats to the jaw.

As she was back on her feet and about to strike back, a pair of roars suddenly pulled the two fighter's attention to the other fights.

To one side, Piano had been slammed into a tree by the Windcutter Naginata, her hands trying to push it off her as Raku almost loomed above her. Her scales had grown to coat her arms with blue armor and black claws. Her face was now accented with blue scales, her eyes more draconic with black sclera as she shattered the tree the Devil Blood was on with the martial artist's own body.

The spear was flung towards the lithe girl, who barely rolled out of the way as she tried to recover from the force as quickly as possible. With her claws outstretched, Raku chased after Piano, each swing of her arms leaving gouges in the trees Piano ducked behind that began to bleed sap from how deeply they were struck. The red skinned woman could not even begin to imagine matching the half-dragon form of Raku blow for blow, as she would be easily overpowered by the skilled and powerful warrior.

On the other side, Vilivian's monstrous transformation continued, as her clothes were torn asunder by the growing mass of gray skin and sinewy muscles that overtook the Matriarch's body. Her skull became prominent and cow-like as a beak grew where her mouth once was. Razor sharp claws and a segmented, bony tail ending in a piercing arrow-point began to emerge from the demon as she assumed her full and most dangerously demonic form.

YOUR FATE HAS BEEN SEALED! The echoing mental voice of Vilivian flooded Inari's mind, making her grasp her head for a moment. This almost proved to be a mistake, as at that moment the foot long claws of the Matriarch nearly took her head clean off. It was only by ducking out of the way just in time did she avoid a terrible fate, but was soon forced back as she blocked the tail that stabbed forward to pierce her in that moment.

Aude and Taleus looked at each other, seeing the potential for a spotlight fight and the desire to slay a powerful opponent respectively in the other. Nodding once, they both took off in separate directions, with Aude heading over to assist Piano against Raku, and Taleus running off to take down Vilivian with or without the aid of Inari.

V vs I and T

Inari was already getting pushed back by the transformed Vilivian, her longer reach and more aggressive demeanor pressing down upon her as an overwhelming force beyond what her human form had managed so far. Red was starting to get worn down from all the fighting too, and likely only had a few more attacks in him before he needed a break. And Green was nearly shot as well, leaving her with only the remnants of Blue. This was not looking good.

But just as Inari was pushed back once more and a three-clawed foot was about to slam her into the ground, a mass of hair and blood suddenly shot in as Vilivian turned to face Taleus, who swung his sickles towards the Matriarch with a savage glee. One sickle merely scraped off the tough hide of her exterior without leaving so much as a scratch, much to his disappointment.

The other somehow entered the beak-like maw that was her mouth, the vampiric woman biting down with enough force that he had to pull his fingers back to avoid losing any. With a sickening slurping sound, the sickle slowly got absorbed into the sunken pit of Vilivian's hollowed stomach with a dark chuckle resounding in their minds.

YOUR BLOOD MAKES FOR AN EXCELLENT FEAST. The wounds that they had managed to tag her with in her human form quickly healed under the influence of the consumed blood, making her look perfectly healthy once more as she loomed over the pair. PERHAPS I SHOULD INDULGE IN SECONDS?

"Sure! Next time I'll shove it straight down your throat for you so you don't have to even suck it down!" Taleus taunted back, drawing blood from one of his many wounds to create an even more wicked looking scythe that he held with both hands.

THEN LET US SEE IF YOU CAN LIVE UP TO YOUR BOASTS, MALE. The Matriarch leaned forward, getting ready to pounce as her tail curled above her head.

“Could you try not pissing off the large demon we’re currently fighting?” Inari asked exasperatedly, throwing her hands in the air.

But even that momentary outburst of anger proved to be too big of an opening, as Vilivian lunged forward, her tail striking down towards the ghost girl. But Taleus was just as eager to attack, his scythe swinging up to hit the joints between her segments. The blade struck bone, deflecting away the sharp appendage before it could rupture the belly of the floating girl, who looked slightly relieved at avoiding certain death.

The red blade in her hand angled towards the once damaged shoulder of the behemoth before her, hoping the flesh would still be weakened at having just been healed. But her thrust proved fruitless, as the thick hide still proved sturdy even at apparent weak points. Inari gave a grunt of annoyance, then dodged back before a set of razor claws tore her into quarters as she readied herself once more.

The two smaller warriors then had to work together to deflect the onslaught of claws that rained down on them, each one having to pull all of their might to deflect one attack, leaving them exposed to the other if their partner didn’t take care of it. It was already proving tough, and Vilivian hadn’t used magic yet in this form. If she didn’t do something, Inari knew they would be crushed beneath this imposing threat with ease.

Floating back as far as she could, she held her blade with one hand and rested it against the palm of the other, closing her eyes as she did so. Vilivian could instantly tell that this was going to be a bigger attack and went to go after her, but a crimson blade on her neck managed to drag her back a step, her back arching back as Taleus pulled with all his might.

“You’re not going anywhere!” His confidence was soon sundered, however, as the tail pierced through his side. As he fell to the ground, apparently defeated, Vilivian focused her attention back on Inari only to find...

Godslaying Strike: Twofold! With a quick spin around, Inari’s blade lashed out at a much further range than usual as it impacted the Matriarch just as she began her charge. With twice the force

she was dealing out before, Inari was easily able to slice open the seemingly impenetrable hide of Vilivian.

A violet wound seared across Vilivian's chest, a mental howl of anger erupting from her as Red vanished from Inari's grasp. As the blue on the latter's arms began to glow as she channeled her brawling capabilities, the former focused on a spell to get even. SHATTER.

The ground beneath Inari cracked and shattered, sending shards of pointed rock up at Inari. She covered her face and chest with iron like arms, keeping them safe as her legs and torso were torn from the flying projectiles. As Inari's green eyes peaked between glowing blue arms, Vilivian charged with a furious swipe aimed to overpower the weaker fighter once again.

But her blood senses suddenly went into overdrive, as she sensed Taleus' blood swarming around her. Several blood weapons circled around her, obscuring her senses to find where their source was running around.

A slash to her back told her behind and she swung, only to feel nothing but air as a stronger slash impacted her shoulder, drawing a bit of violet as the blood scythe dug into flesh. She lunged for him again, but another weapon deflected her attack and drew her attention as she was assaulted by a barrage of attacks from every direction.

The assassin was proving himself well even as blood poured from various open wounds, which only served to add more weapons to his arsenal. Even against an opponent whose physiology he has never encountered before, he was already picking at weak spots, aiming for the joints and other softer bits of what made up her otherwise sturdy form.

ENOUGH! The shout echoed in their minds, before her claws began to lash out in all directions. Each of the blood weapons formed were knocked aside in the flurry of attacks in all directions she delivered. Even her tail was swinging around, the bludgeoning appendage knocking aside sickles with ease and even managed to clip Taleus, sending him sprawling as blood slowly from his head as he tried to recover.

Just as she freed herself from the temporary torment of Taleus' assault, she suddenly sensed Inari right next to her. Taking advantage of the opening the flurry attack caused afterwards, Inari was able to get within Vilivian's immense reach.

“Gotcha. Brawler Style: Cerulean Comet!” With a blue trail denoting the power of her incoming strikes, Inari began a combo on Vilivian’s chest, each one creating reverberations throughout the entirety of the Matriarch’s body as she was pushed back with every successive blow. She couldn’t even raise her arms to counterattack, and her tail was unable to close in as she would get knocked back before she could even think of stabbing it into the ghost girl.

Instead, she found herself coughing up violet blood through her beak as her insides were being pummeled under the withering assault of Inari. Never had an opponent pushed her back this far like this, without a silver weapon. Even as she was being damaged, she could help but feel her excitement rising at the thought of such a worthy opponent.

There was a sudden gap in Inari’s rush, as her injuries from earlier began to act up, making her grit her teeth as she slowed for just a moment. But that was just enough time for Vilivian to rush forward, shoulder checking the ghost with her massive frame and knocking the floating woman to the ground.

YOU DID WELL. BUT IT’S OVER NOW. She raised her claw high, preparing to strike down and finish off this opponent before moving on to the next one.

Only for Taleus’ scythe to catch her neck once more, twisting his body to slam her to the ground as the blade bit into the hardened flesh to leave a purple line. Spinning the weapon around, he tried to impale her, but the tail lashing out forced him back, as all three fighters got into fighting poses equally distanced apart, clear excitement in all of their expressions.

R vs A and P

Raku’s claws slashed across Piano’s back, ripping up her coat as she barely dodged out of the way of the crushing blow. While Piano was a skilled fighter, Raku’s own martial arts had been honed to near perfection. While the attacks Raku were making would normally be rather light in her normal form, when enhanced in this half-dragon state, each one could shatter rocks.

As such, Piano had to avoid every attack, for even toughening her muscles wouldn't protect her from those blows. And the dragon girl had managed to tear away Piano's sword from her grip right as she transformed, meaning Piano just had her fists and throwing knives to use.

Getting some distance, the red skinned girl drew three knives, tossing them from a blindspot of Raku's to try and catch her off guard. But with the wind that was whirling around the blue scaled warrior, such a light attack was easily knocked to the side without her having to even act. As such, she was able to rush forward, nearly crushing Piano's chest with an open palm strike as the girl barely deflected it to the side.

Piano tried to fight back against Raku's assault, but quickly became overwhelmed as more and more stikes came hammering in, each deflection leaving bruise on the deflecting limb of the Devil Blood as the dragon's claws proved stronger than Inari's fists had been as Piano felt her limbs going numb trying to protect herself. If this kept up, she knew she'd be easily defeated. If only she had her sword...

In that moment, an orange and white blur suddenly rushed towards the pair, a wooden bat swinging out towards Raku. She easily caught the bat, as Aude stood there grinning at her new opponent as she struggled for a moment. But feeling that she would be easily overpowered if this kept up, she swung out with her other hand, forcing Raku to leap back as Piano's sword nearly clipped her.

Dual-wielding both bat and sword, Aude rushed forward once more to take on Raku, who was now on her backfoot at the double weapon assault from the golden superstar. Each blow with the bat backed quite a punch, while the corrupting influence of Piano's blade made each scratch with it especially dangerous. Combine that with Aude's incredible speed and complete lack of fear as she grinned through her assault, even a powered-up Raku had to be careful.

The pair of fighters wove between the trees they were fighting in, Raku using her wind to float backwards as Aude was an orange blur following after her with wide swings. But eventually the half-dragon had an idea to gain distance, slashing a few tree trunks with her razor sharp claws. With the weakened state of the trees from the deep gouges, the trees began to fall over, forcing Aude to dodge out of the way in order to avoid being crushed.

Just as she was getting up, the fox girl felt a foot slam her up onto her feet. She looked over just in time for Raku's open palm to slam into the bridge of her nose, sending her flying away with a pained gasp. The superstar recovered quickly back onto her feet, but Raku's speed meant that the fox was now on the defensive as sharp claws rained down in heavy blows.

"Well, you certainly know how to put on a show." Aude complimented, wiping blood from her nose as she kept deadly blows from landing on her. "But luckily for me, my partner knows a thing or two about showing off herself."

Raku looked confused for a moment, before her eyes went wide and she spun around, blocking with two scaled arms as a blade slammed into her. Getting knocked away, it took a moment to get her bearings to see what happened.

Piano had now rearmed herself, but not with her blade. Instead, she was now wielding the Windcutter Naginata that Raku had tossed aside, the lithe girl spinning the weapon in her arms as she prepared to face Raku once more.

Raku gave a snarl before rushing forward, where she was met by her two opponents. Piano used the long reach of the spear to strike from a distance, while Aude pressed in close to try and keep Raku's claws busy so the martial artist behind her could land a few blows. Between the flurry of limbs that was Aude and the whirling dancing assault of Piano, even the half-dragon was struggling to keep the two at bay from the surprising coordination between the two.

When Aude started striking low, Piano's attacks would go high, forcing Raku to duck and weave to avoid damage. And when Piano suddenly switched to sweeping low and Aude spun into the air to become a whirling top of deadly armaments, Raku was forced to get knocked away by the latter to avoid the former cutting open her legs. Either way, Raku was slowly accumulating cuts and bruises from the two, all while knowing both girls were holding back some of their strength to try and recover from the earlier fights. If Piano put some ki into pumping herself up or Aude started using magic, she would be taken down in no time.

Breathing in deeply, the half-dragon fired a powerful blast at her own spear, knocking Piano off balance for a moment. Taking advantage of the moment, Raku's wings began to flap hard, creating a whirlwind around Aude that began to spin her around. As she began to protest the attack, she was suddenly flung back, landing on top of Piano in a heap as the latter's sword went skittering off into the woods once more.

As the two girls tried to get up once more, Raku quickly picked them up by their heads and slammed them into each other powerfully, sending both of her opponent's heads ringing as they stumbled away from each other. She then slammed her palm into both of their chests, driving them further apart as she regained control of the situation.

Chasing after Piano to get her spear back, Raku was forced back as the point of the spear came lashing out at her. Having toughened her muscles at the last moment to let her recover, Piano began to push herself harder than before. Her skin began to darkened as she started increasing the blood flow to dope herself up, allowing her to match her opponent in speed and power to an extent.

With another whirling assault of the naginata, Piano pressed the attack more aggressively than she had before as black blood began to spurt from her wounds from the increased flow to shorten the time she had to fight. Raku kept up her own aggression, knowing she could win out in a battle of attrition as claws met blade over and over. Piano kept switching between several Eastern styled fighting styles, which Raku easily recognized and countered each time with a large grin, before sweeping her tail around to slam into the girl.

As Piano was pushed back, she adjusted the grip on the spear and tossed it towards the half-dragon with all her might. Raising both hands, Raku had to use all of her strength to keep her own spear from impaling her as she slid back. When she eventually came to a stop, she tossed the spear aside to find her opponent again, only for Aude to come swinging in.

Raku's fist knocked Aude aside, only to feel something brush her tail and feel a small fist rest near her side. She glanced over to see that Piano had gotten into an intense looking stance as she took a deep breath. Then with a violent push forward, the martial artist delivered a devastating one-inch punch into Raku, knocking all the air from her lungs and sending her flying.

Not giving the dragon any time to recover, Piano ran forward and grabbed her fallen sword, swinging with all of her skill and strength at the half-dragon. But Raku was still undaunted even after all this, her pride as a dragon allowing her to match and slowly overpower even a doped up Piano's attacks. The latter slowly had to wind herself down, already feeling the strain on her body as she waited desperately for the ki behind her to change in the way she needed it to.

As Raku grinned and twisted aside Piano's corrupting blade to give herself an opening, she lifted a claw in order to rend the Devil Blood's side open. Only for a golden shimmer to catch her eyes as she looked up just in time to see a gold coated bat hurtling towards her.

Solar Homerun!

End

Raku was slammed back into the open by the powerful blow of Aude, scales flying off as she landed back onto the field with her two opponents chasing her.

Across the way, Vilivian finally managed to shove away her two opponents a distance away as she took deep breaths, trying to recover from the endless assault of the two.

With the six now gathered together, they all began to assess each other, seeing the weaknesses in the faces of all the others and gathering the last bits of their own strength in order to finish this fight once and for all.

Raku began to grow even more scales, starting to grow in size as she started to shift. Taleus' blood began to coalesce into large tendrils of crimson, each one tipped with horrid mouths made for devouring human flesh. Inari's face began to darken as blue hands began to appear behind her ready to rip and tear. Aude's golden magic began to gather further into her bat, growing it larger and more powerful. Piano's blood got pumping once more, ready to dope herself up to finish off the others quickly. And Vilivian began gathering pink energy in her mouth to eradicate everyone in one fell swoop.

But then a dark shadow came careening down from above, drawing all of their eyes upwards as they stopped their preparations. Seeing the red skin of Saki, they only had a second to marvel at the strangeness before her fist made contact with the ground with a powerful smash.

The earth shattered upon impact, six different segments breaking themselves off from each other under each fighter's feet. With another push, Saki pushed the segments like a see-saw, sending all six fighters into the air to slam into each other above her head. Before any of them could comprehend what happened, she gave a rising uppercut, punching all six with more strength than any had experienced before, sending them all spiraling away with eyes rolled in the back of their heads. By the time they all landed and the dust cleared, all six were clearly knocked out as they returned back to their normal forms once more.

"There, that takes care of that." Saki grunted, wiping off her hands. "Can't have them wasting all of their best attacks on some side fight that doesn't mean anything."

Miss X and Chifu strode out from the nearby woods, the latter carrying a blanket that she draped over the now nude Vilivian to cover her form for now. Miss X looked around at the destruction, her heart eyes nearly shooting out of her head like a cartoon character.

"I'll say! Look at all the fun they had! Think how much all of my favorite kittens would've loved to see a brawl like this! Maybe we should host a more official one with all of these guys! And we can set them up with a cool arena and a crazy objective to achieve! Ooh, and we can bring the other fighters in as well for some variety as well!"

"Now doesn't that just sound entertaining~" Chifu commented, as Saki began picking up each fighter one after another. "I might set up a game or two for them to play~ But we don't want to step on Echo and Mimic's own little game?~ But they're still setting things up, so I suppose they can't complain yet~"

Chifu gave an amused chuckle as she shifted into her God Eater persona, as all of the fighters were finally collected. With the ringing of bells, a pair of doors opened in front of her, leading back to the Crossroads so the fighters could recover in their beds.

"As long as they entertain me, maybe I'll reward all of my dear little travelers~"

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