

[Adam C. POV.]

Blood still warm on my blade, I stand over the lifeless form of Zero, the man who had at one point, haunted my days, casting his shadow into the world.

His once imposing figure was now nothing more than a crumpled heap, cut in half.

I had finally done it.

I had finally killed him.

His breaths had finally ceased, and the twisted smirk that had adorned his face for as long as I've known him was now frozen in a perpetual mask of shock.

The final blow had ended his life; had been swift, just as I had imagined a thousand times in my dreams.

For years, the burden of his existence had weighed heavy on my shoulders, on my mind.

But as I stand here, staring at his lifeless form, at my handywork, my blade dripping with his blood, I felt... nothing.

There was no triumphant roar in my chest, no relief washing over me like the crashing waves of the sea. There was only a hollow space where I expected... something else.

"I imagined this moment a thousand times," I said aloud, my voice strangely calm, and devoid of any emotion. "But I never imagined that I would feel nothing."

What did I expect to feel?

Anger? I had been angry for years. Enraged at his very existence. And yet... I feel nothing.

Relief? Surely, I would feel relieved to be finally free of his shadow. But there is no relief either.

I felt like I should be happy. After all, I had taken his life. But even that emotion eluded me.

As I stood there, contemplating my lack of emotions, I became aware of multiple presences behind me.

"I hope you don't think you've won," A familiar voice declared with a perverse glee.

It can't be.

I turned around to see the man I had killed, clad leathery garb, his long hair pulled back in a ponytail. He stood in a predatory crouch, his face twisted into a grimace.

Zero.

But, how?

I had killed him.

Had I killed a fake?

No, that wasn't the case. I knew without a doubt my blade had cut the real deal, so... what in hell was happening.

"Surprised?" Zero sneered, standing tall as he looked down on me. His eyes, once lifeless, now glowed with a malicious glee.

But there was something different. An unnatural aura around him, a shimmering haze that was barely visible. It was unsettling.

"You're dead." I managed to get the words out, still processing the scene in front of me.

"I am, and at the same time, I'm not," Zero agreed, his smirk widening, "Did you really think it would be that easy?"

His laughter filled the air, the echo bouncing off the surrounding trees. I tightened my grip on my blade, my eyes never leaving his figure.

"How?" I asked, glaring at him as my rage resurfaced once more.

He shrugged, an eerie grace in his movements, "Magic. Science. The line between them is thin. You maggots are so sure of your own mortality, always so shocked when it's proven otherwise."

His words hung heavy in the air. This was something I had not anticipated. But then again, Zero was always one for theatrics.

"Doesn't matter." I finally found my voice, stern, unwavering. "I'll kill you as many times as it takes."

Zero laughed, a humorless sound that did nothing to ease the tension. "You've got spirit, I'll give you that, my little slave. However."

Suddenly, as if the shadows of the forest themselves were giving birth to more horrors, more figures stepped out of the shadows into the light.

All of them, the same person. Zero, clad in the same leathery garb, with the same malicious smirks on their faces. Each one felt exactly like the next, like the Zero I knew.

Their power.

Their appearance.

Everything was the same.

"Meet my army, the true power behind Oracion Seis!" The first Zero spoke with a flourish, "A legion of one, a legion born for greatness!"

I clenched my teeth.

The army of duplicates sneered at me, their chilling laughter blending into a horrifying symphony.

I could feel at least a hundred of them, all around me, surrounding me from every angle.

I chuckled darkly.

It infuriated me he was still alive, but in the end, it didn't change a thing. One, or a million, it didn't change a damn fucking thing, after all, it doesn't matter the number of flies that try to crash into the sun, they will all get burned.

"So, what you're saying is, that I have to kill you a few hundred times to get the job done?" I said, staring at them as

a dark smile spread across my face. "Well, I'll be damned, my birthday came early this year."

"As cocky as always," Zero scoffed, grinning at me. "But I'll admit, I enjoy your bravado. Makes this game of us all the more entertaining."

At his words, the army of clones spread out in a semicircle, each maintaining a sneering grin. Caging me inside as I stood in the center.

Then, without any warning, they attacked. Using their Darkness magic to unleash a barrage of beams in my direction.

Calmly, I swung my blade, putting enough power in my swing to shatter their combined attack before blurring out of sight, striking a few of them down, cutting their heads off.

I chuckled, realizing what Zero had done as the bodies I had cut down, turned into dust, leaving only a string of white hair behind.

Dolls.

I was fighting hundreds of dolls, all as powerful as the real deal. All created in his image.

I had killed the real one.

And this was his last resort to torment me, an army of one.

I felt the laughter bursting from within me, and I couldn't contain it. As my chuckles echoed through the forest, the clones paused, their confusion written on their faces as they stared at me.

"He really thought he could kill me alone?" I chuckled, taking a moment to recover my breath. "He could've had a chance to survive if he had used all of you, but I guess defeat wasn't a possibility in his mind, was it?"

"Going insane so soon?" Zero, or at least one of them, chuckled with twisted glee. "Or are you too stupid to comprehend? I'm not dead, I am beyond such bindings!"

I shook with laughter, head thrown back, and mouth open wide. "Oh, but you are. None of you have a soul, he did, as surprising as that is."

Before any of them could reply, I moved forward, cutting through several lines of clones, dismembering each and every single one of them with a single strike in an effortless manner.

"Do your best, little dolls," I taunted, cracking my neck to the side. "I'll enjoy killing you all, it will be... therapeutic."

[Gildarts Clive. POV.]

Somewhere deep in the forest, I sensed the unnerving surge of dark magic, a prickling sensation like an icy hand brushing against the back of my head.

"Adam," I muttered, my eyes narrowing in concern. The presences seemed to be converging all around him, surrounding him.

A part of me wanted to rush to my son's aid. But at the same time, I knew how strong he was, he was a Clive after all, so I trusted him, trusted his strength, his resolve.

He was no longer the little boy who used to hide behind his emotions, behind his hate. He was a man. A powerful mage in his own right.

Besides, I had my own problems to handle, like Nirvana and Jellal.

"Gildarts Clive," Jellal's voice echoed in my ears. "We finally met."

"It seems you want a generational beatdown," I replied, cracking a grin. "First my son, now me, who's next? My daughter?"

Jellal's cold, piercing eyes bore into me. There was a sinister air about him, an aura that screamed, I need therapy!

"Take a picture, it'll last longer," I said, letting out a yawn.

"You don't seem to understand, Gildarts," Jellal sneered. "Your brute mind might not comprehend the situation but allow me to help you. This isn't a simple contest of strength. I can't lose, I am a harbinger of a new era."

Harbinger of a new era?

Fuck, kids nowadays sure are depressing as fuck.

"Well said, Jellal," A new voice spoke up from behind Jellal, a voice I didn't recognize at first, but as the person in question came into view, I instantly recognized him.

Zero.

The man that had tortured my boy.

Or a clone of him at the very least.

"Are you ready to witness the beginning of a new era?" Zero asked, as more figures stepped out of the shadows into the light.

More clones.

More Zeros.

I chuckled.

"It seems your imminent demise has made you lose your mind," Jellal said, scowling.

"Oh, no, it's not that, I'm sorry, it's just... I'm very glad this happened," I replied, as my power broke free, bending the earth around me under an unfathomable amount of magical pressure. "It means I get to kill the man who tormented my boy, well, the copies of the bastard. But beggars can't be choosers, am I right?"

I'll admit.

I am about to enjoy this shit more than I should.

"Bring it on!" I roared, challenging the army of fakes, and Jellal to do their worst before I crushed them down!