

Bleach: Legend of the Five Heroes

Vol 1

Ichigo was just a normal young man, a bit of an otaku, and despite some knowledge in martial arts, he wasn't a master or anything. On a trip to the book store, he finds a book called Legend of the Five Heroes, upon reaching the chapter of the Shield Hero strange magic pulls him into a brand new world.

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Chapter 1 The Heroes Summoned

Ichigo Kurosaki was a fine young man at 18, he grew up taking some martial arts when he was young, he kept himself fit and toned when he got older but he wasn't a master. He moved out on his own when he attended school, he learned to cook for himself while juggling a job. All in all, it was a good life, if he had any complaint it lacked excitement. He was a big fan of fantasy anime and manga and liked to dream about worlds more fantastical of his own.

In his off time, he liked to visit the book store and see if there were any new fantasy books. After reaching for a book off a high shelf, a bunch of books fell and hit Ichigo on the head. He rubbed the sore spot as he collected the books, pausing only upon finding a book he's never seen before. "Legend of the Five Heroes?" he opened the book and began to skim through it. "Legend foretells of five brave souls summoned from another world to take up the holy weapons to battle against the evil waves." Ichigo smiled at the thought.

There were illustrations he could see various creatures, both good, and those from the mysterious waves of disaster. There was an image of a woman in the book, but Ichigo got a bad feeling about her, thinking she kinda looked like a villain.

“Let's see, the Spear Hero, the Sword Hero, the Bow Hero, the Axe Hero, and the Shield Hero...ehh?” while the other heroes had several pages of info about them, the Shield Hero's pages were blank.

Suddenly the pages started to glow and turn on their own, in a flash Ichigo's world vanished and he was suddenly somewhere else. The walls were stone, with carvings of weapons and heroes, on the ground, there was a symbol something like a cross but with five points.

“Wonderful the five heroes have been summoned!” they were greeted by men in robes. Ichigo looked at them, then to his comrades who had been summoned with him. Each of them had random weapons. Ichigo's own weapon was strapped to his arm.

“Ehh?” Ichigo gasped. 'A shield?' he tried to remove it but it would not come off. The others talked amongst themselves, saying that this place was different from where they were and how it reminded some of a video game.

“Oh, great heroes please save our world!” The robed men bowed. “Praise be the heroes!”

Ichigo looked to the others, the Bow Hero was the only one really up for it fresh out of the gate. Some had quite the air of arrogance to them, the Spear Hero quickly demanding

compensation for calling them to this world. “Oh yes, follow us to the King, he will fill you in.”

“Very good,” the spear hero runs his fingers through his hair, giving it a hair flip. “Lead the way.”

Ichigo looked at his comrades. The Spear Hero had medium length black hair with white streaks, and a strand hanging down in his face, reaching down to his mouth. He had lavender eyes, a thin face with pronounced cheekbones. He was tall and lanky, wearing an expensive looking uniform.

The Sword Hero wore glasses, and he was average height and had a slender build, he had straight, chin-length black hair that framed his face, he had blue eyes, and he was wearing a fancy uniform.

The Axe Hero also had dark hair, it was short with pointed bangs, and he had pale blue eyes. He had a scar over the left side of his mouth. He was a bit more toned than the others, and he was dressed more like a punk, wearing black fingerless gloves.

The Bow Hero had green eyes and red hair, and his hair was kept in a long mohawk. He had two piercings in his upper left ear and one in his lower right. He had some chains on him, and some black armbands around his biceps. This guy had the most muscle than the rest of them, and he was the only one of them wearing boots.

They were brought before the King. “Welcome heroes, I am Yhwach the King of Karakura,” the King greets. “You have been summoned here, to help protect our world from the Waves of Calamity. Should you save this glorious country you will be duly compensated in turn, aside from that I have funds prepared for you, so I ask that you work to your fullest.” The King explains. “Please tell us your names,” he says gesturing towards his court.

It was the Spear Hero who stepped up first. “My name is Askin Nakk Le Vaar, I am your Spear Hero!” he says proudly, earning some cheers from the King's court. He was 21, and a university student.

“Uryu Ishida,” the sword hero started. “I am your Sword Hero!” he says adjusting his glasses, smiling as he receives cheers. He was 18, and a high school student.

“Your Axe Hero is I, Cang Du!” the male steps forward raising his axe, to cheers from the court. He basked in the praise and cheers. He was 19, and he wasn't in school.

“My name is Bazz-B, I am your Bow Hero.” Again he was met with cheers from the court. He was 20 and he was a university student.

Just as Ichigo was about to introduce himself, the King interrupts. “Excellent, now then...”

“Hey wait, your majesty!” Ichigo raises his shield bearing arm. “What about me?”

“Ah, yes, the shield hero, introduce yourself.”

“I'm Ichigo Kurosaki, your Shield Hero.” He does get some cheers but the King cuts them short. Ichigo felt something was off but there were pressing matters. There were things to discuss, the heroes would have to take a party out to train before the waves came. Powerful monsters would appear from a dimensional crack, and their knights and adventurers were not strong enough to beat them on their own, so the Heroes were summoned, in hopes of stopping more death and destruction.

Ichigo was a bit excited, this world seemed amazing, and he'd like to protect it. With a Tip, the heroes discovered their Icon, it opened a game-like menu that showed their stats, they were all currently level 1, so they would need to prepare before the upcoming wave. They couldn't do it together as the Holy Weapons were said to not be able to grow properly in a party together. Along with arranging party members for the heroes, they would also give them funds and rewards for each Wave bested, on top of the rewards they'd gain from hunting monsters.

Ichigo had to admit this was really exciting. A room was prepared for the heroes and they gathered together and had a chance to talk. “This is crazy.” Cang Du says.

“But kind of exciting right, I've always dreamed of being in a fantasy world,” Ichigo says.

“This world seems a lot like a game I played.” Uryu points out, he wasn't a big gamer, but his main out for stress relief was a VR Game he played known as Dungeon Masters.

“You mean Emerald Online!” Cang Du points out, saying it was more similar like a video game on his phone.

“Please, it's more like Quest Run,” Askin says, saying it was like an MMO he played.

“Seems more like my Holy Warrior disc game,” Bazz-B says. The four look to Ichigo who chuckles.

“I'm not really a gamer, but I did find a book about this world in Urahara's Book Shop!” This was weird, none of them heard of each other's games or locations. They began asking each other questions, only to get different answers. It seemed they came from the same place, just different worlds as people, places and things were vastly different from each other.

They each had some knowledge in their weapons, as by happenstance they used said weapons in each of their games.

All except Ichigo since he wasn't a gamer. “Its weird, the Shield Hero's story wasn't written in the book.”

“You know why that is right?” Askin brings up, giving a look to the others. He puts his long arm around Ichigo. “That's because the Shield Hero is trash!”

“What?!” Ichigo gasped looking to the others.

Uryu adjusts his glasses. “Not to say he's trash, but no one likes using him since he has no offensive skills.”

“He's boring to use.” Cang Du says.

“Guys come on, the Shield Hero is the Tank, he's fine if he levels up enough.” Bazz-B puts his hand on Ichigo's shoulder and gives him a thumbs up. “Hang in there, and don't give up and you'll be fine.”

The next day the heroes line up, and the adventurers got to choose who they would follow. Ichigo was nervous but excited, there was a lot of different adventurers here, he wondered who would join him, he didn't care just that he got along. “Begin!” the King shouts and the adventurers move forward.

Ichigo closed his eyes until the footsteps stopped. When they opened he looked and saw he had no one behind him. Askin had a team of women, Uryu had the most mid to long range adventurers of the group, Cang Du had a group of the most

powerful looking adventurers, and Bazz-B had the most balanced of the group.

The orangette found this a tad unfair since being the Shield Hero, he didn't have a way to fight monsters on his own. Even with his martial arts knowledge, he didn't think that would help him with some of the creatures and monsters he had seen in the book.

While some of the heroes agreed that it was a bit unfair, Uryu saying he didn't need help and those that would slow him down could leave. Askin laughs making a joke saying he's too popular with the ladies to give them up. Cang Du remained silent and stoic. Bazz-B stated that forcing the shift would only make things more toxic.

“I see,” they look to the King. “It seems word has spread that the Shield Hero knows very little about this world, his lack of battle experience seems to have turned off potential party members.”

“But I do...” Ichigo growls in frustration.

“Will no one join the Shield Hero?”

A hand is raised. “I'll join the Shield Hero!” Ichigo turned to see a girl with long black hair.

“Are you sure Bambietta?”

“Yes,” she smiles at him. “I look forward to working with you, Hero-sama!”

To be continued... Lies and Betrayal

Chapter 2 Lies and Betrayal

Because Ichigo had the least party members, he was given an increased monthly reward from the Kingdom's treasury. Each Hero getting 600 pieces of silver, while Ichigo got 800.

“Grow strong Heroes and protect us from the waves!” the king says and everyone gives a salute and promises to.

The parties leave. “Take good care of her Ichigo!” Askin says as he leaves with his party of women.

“Do try to level up quickly,” Uryu says as he leaves with his party.

“Don't get killed out there.” Cang Du says leaving with his band of adventurers.

Bazz-B gives him a fist bump before leaving. “Become a fine tank dude,” he says before leaving with his party.

“Shall we go?” Bambietta asked, giving him a smile. Ichigo nods, she takes his hand and leads him into town. Something Ichigo was noticing was the various creatures that occupied the town along with the humans. Bambietta explained they were demi-humans.

'Hmm, wait a minute, how come all the adventurers assembled were just human, are there no demi-human adventurers?' he thinks.

“Shield Hero-sama,” Bambietta pulled him from his thoughts. “Shall we buy some equipment before we go hunting?”

“Sounds good, where should we go?”

“I know a good place, follow me!” she says and scampers forward, Ichigo following behind her. She brought him to a weapons shop called Benihime's. The owner was a tall blonde man, wearing a green and white hat, a green kimono and clog like sandals.

“Welcome, I'm Kisuke Urahara.” he greets. “What can I do for you?”

“We are looking for some gear,” Bambietta says.

“Hmm, do I know you miss?” Kisuke eyes her, Bambietta chuckles and hides behind Ichigo pushing him forward.

“I'm nothing special, I've just heard you were a skilled craftsman, and willing to make a deal. The perfect start for a new hero!” she says.

“Ohh, you are one of the legendary five?” Kisuke brightened up focusing on Ichigo. The boy blushed and chuckled.

“Yeah, I'm Ichigo Kurosaki the shield hero.” he showed Kisuke the shield on his arm.

“Ahh so you are the Tank, well I'm happy to help, look around and see what you like.” he went to prepare some blades for Ichigo to try. Ichigo was so excited, he couldn't wait to try a weapon out and start leveling up.

Urahara brought out a selection of decent swords for beginning, from iron to steel to the magic core. Ichigo stepped up to try one, but as soon as he touched it, sparks flew, and not the good kind. Ichigo yelped as if he was shocked and dropped the blade. “What the heck?” he tried the steel blade and the same thing happened when he tried to hold it sparks erupted creating a powerful jolt forcing it out of his hand. He tried the magic core sword and the same result, it dropping and hitting the ground.

“I've never seen this before,” Kisuke says.

Ichigo's Icon pops up alerting him to the issue, he was in violation of his equipment. He was not allowed to wield any other weapons besides his shield. “Fascinating,” Kisuke came around and brought out monacle looking device. He used his appraisal skill but only learned so much. “It appears to be a normal small shield, but there is something I can't identify. So this is one of the holy weapons, I can feel a strange power from it.”

“Really?” Ichigo stares at his shield, thinking maybe he didn't draw the short straw after all.

“Why don't we try some armor instead,” Bambietta suggests. She picks out some chain mail, and Ichigo tries it on. “How much?”

“Well normally it would cost 300 silver, but for one of the legendary heroes, I can give a discount,” Urahara says as Ichigo strips out of his other world clothes and puts on some new clothing and the chain mail.

“What about resale?” she asked.

“Oh, just 100 Silver.”

Ichigo comes out of the dressing room. “Why did you want to know that?”

“Obviously, once you level up you'll need better armor, you aren't gonna hang onto your old armor,” she says.

“Oh, good point, thanks I'm new to all this.” he chuckles and rubs the back of his head.

“No worries Shield Hero-sama, let's go hunt!” they pay for the armor and head out into the field. The first enemies they encounter were Orange Balloons, bouncy and bitey monsters that can zip around.

They spotted Uryu who was taking out the Orange Balloons easily with his sword. “You can do it, give it a try Shield Hero-sama!”

Ichigo steps out and the orange balloons spot him, they fly at him and Ichigo tries to punch one it lands but it quickly bounces and back, and three jumps on him biting him. “Hey it doesn't hurt!” he looks at his shield and sees the energy coming from it. 'So my shield is protecting me from their attacks, alright then!' Ichigo calmed himself and did some fighting routines, building up his strength he began to use his martial arts knowledge to try and fight the balloons.

He wasn't able to do a lot of damage, but he was able to take out quite a few with a bit more ease. His experience increased and he actually made it to Level 2. When balloon monsters exploded they left behind their bits, which Bambietta said he could sell for more money. Another feature was he could feed it to his shield.

His shield powered up slightly and he unlocked Orange Shield. Ichigo activated it, and the shield changed to a brilliant shade of orange, the core remains the same. 'This is so cool, so I can feed monsters to my shield and make it stronger.'

“So this is the power of the sacred weapons, interesting.” She says. She draws her sword. “My turn!” she winks at him before going to town. With her sword, she was able to kill the balloons much more easily than Ichigo.

They fed half of the drops to Ichigo's shield and brought the rest of them back to town to sell. Bambietta took them to a shop that takes monster materials, and they got some more money, a bronze per piece. After collecting their haul, they returned to Benihime's.

Bambietta began looking for armor even getting herself a better sword, one with a magical core. She got some pretty fancy armor and an expensive sword. “Bambietta isn't this a bit much?” it would eat up most of their funds for the month.

“Of course not, the stronger my gear, the stronger I am, and the further we can go and the more rewards we will get.” She hugged his arm, pressing her breasts against him. “Trust me, Hero-sama.”

Ichigo blushed and agreed. Urahara gave him a discount, which left them with 200 silvers. For their rooms and food, that brought them down to 150. “This is so good, I thought the food at the palace was amazing.”

Bambietta chuckled. “Thank you for the wonderful gear Hero-sama, I think we can even venture to a dungeon.”

“A dungeon?”

“Yes, you can fight all kinds of monsters there, and there is a chance of finding treasures.”

“That's awesome!” Ichigo was pumped, he couldn't wait until tomorrow. This world was like a dream come true, he may not have been a gamer, but he was having fun.

Bambietta chuckles. “We should celebrate, let's have a drink together.” She had bought them wine but Ichigo hadn't touched it.

“Oh uh, no thanks, I don't drink.”

“Come now, I don't want to drink alone.” she downed her glass. “Won't you please drink with me?” she clinked her glass with his. He was getting a bit uncomfortable it seemed like she was flirting with him.

“I'm sorry Bambietta, but I really don't drink. I'm gonna turn in.” he gets up from the table.

“You really don't know anything,” Ichigo turned to look at her. She looked to the bar and he followed her gaze. “In this country, it's considered an insult for a man to turn down a drink from a lady.”

Ichigo gave a bow and apologized. “I'm not much of a drinker, but let's work hard together to prepare for the waves!” she gives him a smile and he heads upstairs. He runs into Bazz-B's team. “Where's Bazz-B?”

“Bazz-B-sama told us we could retire, he figured he'd find stronger monsters at night and said he was doing something called night fishing?”

“He's tough.” Ichigo was impressed.

“We intend to check on him in shifts, good night.” they pass him going to a room.

“I should ask Bambietta about the night thing, we might gain more experience facing monsters at night,” he says and turns in. No point bothering her now, he was exhausted and figured she was too. He removed his chain mail and washed his clothes and hung them up to dry. The inn they were staying at offered some rest clothes, so he put them on. “Today was crazy, but so fun, with Bambietta's help I think I can get stronger.”

Out of habit, Ichigo pulled an old tourist trick and hid some money on his person, slipping some coins into his shield. He sighed happily and laid back in his bed. “A whole new word huh?” he smiled.

He overheard two people talking next door. “Askin and Cang Du are staying here too? Guess its to be expected.” he turned over and went to sleep.

-x-

Morning came...

Ichigo yawned, stretching and waking up his muscles. He looked over to see where his chain mail was placed only to find it missing. “Gone?” he went over to the desk and found his bag of silver coins was also gone. “Gone!” Even the clothes he got in town were gone. “Gone, gone, gone!”

He ran out of the room, unaware of the knights arriving outside. “Bambietta! Wake up, we've been robbed.” he banged on her door. “Bambietta!” he called.

Knights arrived, surrounding him on both sides. “You are the knights from the castle, you have to help me, I've been robbed!”

“Shield Hero Ichigo Kurosaki, please come with us.” they brought him to the castle, and he was taken before the king. Uryu, Askin, and Cang Du were there and so was Bambietta.

“Bambietta!” Ichigo exclaims, happy to see she was okay. The girl yelped and hid behind Askin. “Bambietta?” he turned to the king. “Your majesty, I don't know why I'm here, but this morning I was robbed and if we hurry we can catch the one who...”

“Silence!” the king shouted. He sighed and rubbed his temples. “Bambietta, I apologize but could you please recount your testimony once more.”

The girl sniffled. “Yes, last night after dinner, I received a knock to my door, when I opened it the Shield Hero barged into my room drunk.” Ichigo stared at her in shock.

'What is she saying? I did no such thing.'

“The night is still young, he said. Then he began tearing off my clothes and he pushed me down onto the bed. I managed to get away and went to Askin-sama!” She had gone to his room naked and told him the same thing.

“That's a lie, I did no such thing!” Ichigo shouted.

“I can't believe you would lie, you disappoint me!” Askin says. Pointing his spear at him. “If not for Bambietta-chan I would have gone to kill you right then!”

“I didn't do it!” he looked to Cang Du and Uryu. “You guys have to, believe me, I would never do something like that even if...” In truth, while Ichigo wasn't very good around forward and aggressive women he actually didn't like girls, but before he could say that.

“Enough!” Yhawch shouted. “To think the Shield Hero would be such scum, to break one of the greatest sins in the country.”

“Sin?”

“It is a sin for a man to force himself on a woman, the punishment is death!” he says.

'What is all this, I didn't do anything?' the palace guards kept him in place, pointing spears at him. "If you are gonna accuse me of this, I demand proof!"

"Here it is," a knight stepped forward. "After searching the Shield Hero's Room we found this in his bed." he held up a perfectly intact piece of sexy underwear.

"Ah!" Bambietta cried and clung to Askin.

"You scum!" he hissed.

Ichigo froze. "This is a setup, that wasn't in my room." he looked at Askin and gasped. "You, you are the thief." Askin was wearing his chain mail.

"Are you talking about this? This was a gift from Bambietta-chan!" he says proudly.

"And it looks so good on you Askin-sama!" she hugs him. He pulls away from her to face Ichigo, and he's joined by Cang Du.

"To think scum like you would be summoned to be a hero." Cang Du says. Uryu remained silent, and simply adjusted his glasses.

"I say we execute him now, serves the bastard right!" Askin says.

Ichigo was trembling, he didn't like this, he didn't understand this. 'Bambietta why are you saying these things tell them the

truth.' he looked to her and his eyes widened. Bambietta's face twisted into a fierce smirk, she stuck her tongue out at him and pulled down her eyelid.

All the pieces fell into place. He should have realized the moment she spoke Askin's name. 'She never once called me by name, she was setting me up from the start.' She had him buy her armor and weapon, she stole his money and armor and gave it to Askin. All the smiles and pretty words, it was all lies.

“You betrayed me!” Ichigo shouted. His shield pulsing with his rage.

“So the scum when backed into a corner chooses to lash out instead of admitting his guilt.” the king sighs. “We never should have summoned the Shield Hero.” the court began to whisper about him, and how he was unnecessary they only needed the other four after all.

Ichigo grit his teeth. What was the big deal, so what if he was the Shield, he was forced to come here, and he was happy to help? “You don't want me fine,” he snaps. “Then send me back to my world!”

“Running away, what a coward.” Cang Du says.

“Good, get lost, who wants to work alongside a rapist?” Askin says.

“Shut up!” the knights tried to hold him down, but it didn't work, the shield pulses and forced them off him and he stood up. “Just send me back, you can summon a new Shield Hero, or not I don't care.”

“We can't send you back, and we can't summon a new hero either, the only way new heroes can be summoned is if the previous heroes die.” This shocked the other heroes as well.

“That means we still have to work with this guy?” Askin asks, and Ichigo glares at him making the male flinch.

“So what are you gonna do, lock me up till the next waves come?” Ichigo asked.

“As much as I'd like to, legend says we need all five heroes to stop the waves. Know this, word of what you've done has spread don't expect to have a moment's piece from this day forward.”

“Whatever, I don't plan on working with you fools. I'll stop the waves my own way!” it hurt, that no one believed him, he felt hurt and betrayed, sure they didn't know each other but still to have them turn their backs on him. As he went over what Bambietta said he was able to poke several holes in her story, but even if he brought it up no one would believe him. He saw such hate and disgust in their eyes, Bambietta had no remorse for what she did, he could see it in her eyes. He

shuddered to think what would have happened to him if he had actually drunk with her.

He was about to leave feeling the money he hid in his shield shift. “Here this is what you wanted right?” he threw the money at their feet. Askin tried to grab him, but Ichigo slapped his hand away. “Don't touch me!”

In an instant, Ichigo had lost his money, his honor, and the trust he once had. As he walked through the village, and people were pulling away from him in disgust, possibly fear. People were whispering about him, and he hated it, he just grits his teeth and kept walking. 'This sucks!'

“Ichigo!” Urahara found him and hauled him down an ally. “I heard what you did to that girl, get ready I'm gonna have to punch you.”

“You too,” Kisuke got a good look into Ichigo's eyes.

“Ichigo...” he released him.

“Not gonna hit me now.”

“No, I changed my mind.” Kisuke Urahara had a good eye for weapons and people. As he looked into Ichigo's eyes he saw a whole lot of hurt and pain, he could see Ichigo wasn't that type of guy. “Here, you can't go running around in the inn pajamas.” he gave Ichigo a new outfit, a button up shirt, and some sturdy pants, and a green cloak.

“How much?”

“Nothing it's free.”

“How much!” Ichigo snapped.

“Normally five coppers.”

“Consider it a loan, I have hunting to do.” he walks off.

“Ichigo... don't die out there.”

-X-

Ichigo fought all day and night, even with his martial arts he was having trouble just fighting balloons. He was exhausted, he spent all day fighting balloons. 'This isn't gonna work.' he barely made it to level 3.

His stomach growled. “Damn it!” he noticed the balloons rolled over to him. Ichigo got an idea.

He returned to the town and went to the monster material shop. Someone before him got a copper piece for each orange balloon piece. When Ichigo stepped up the shop keeper flinched at the sight of his shield. “How much for all this?” he put down a large pile of orange balloon pieces.

“Oh my, this is quite a lot, I see 30 pieces here, I'll give you one copper piece for the lot,” he says with a smirk.

“Excuse me, you gave the other man a copper piece per drop.” Ichigo narrowed his eyes.

“Well I decide the price, after all, its the same for any business.” he gives Ichigo a shrug while having a malicious smile.

“Is that so, then how about these?” Ichigo raised his green cloak, to reveal he had orange balloons biting into him.

“Eh?” Ichigo grabbed him and held him in a headlock, the orange balloons attacked him, biting him all over. Ichigo was protected by his shield the shop keeper wasn't so lucky.

“I'm not trying to rip you off, I'm just asking for a fair price, understand?”

“Y-yes!” Ichigo released him.

“I am a businessman, as much as I may want to refuse, the goods and money are without sin.” he pays Ichigo properly.

“Be sure to let the other vendors know, if they try to cheat me they will get covered in bites.”

“Don't worry I plan to!” the shop keeper says.

As Ichigo walked through the town he spotted some herbs in a shop window. He looked down at his money and frowned. Urahara was moving some merchandise from the back and he found on the counter 5 copper pieces. “Ichigo...”

-X-

Ichigo went out to fight monsters again, only to have as much luck as he's had so far beating them. He did, however, find

wild herbs, ones he spotted in the shop. He collected an herb and fed it to his shield.

Leaf Shield Unlocked!

He changed his shield, and it did look like a leaf. He picked another herb and watched in surprise as his Leaf Shield's ability allowed him to increase the quality of the herbs. He did so doing some herb picking and brought the high-quality plants to sell. He fetched a good price for those.

As he left the shop to go find a place to sleep, he was stopped by Bazz-B. "Ichigo...we need to talk."

To be continued...Trust and Contracts

Chap 3 Trust and Contracts

Ichigo had a feeling he knew what Bazz-B wanted to talk about, and he wasn't interested. "I'm busy," he tried to walk past him but Bazz-B caught him and held him firmly.

"Make time," he says sternly.

Ichigo sighed. 'Might as well get this over with.' he went with Bazz-B. "What do you want to talk about?"

"You know, these rumors that are going around, are they true?" he asked.

"Would you believe me if I told you I didn't do it?" he gave Bazz-B a stern look.

"Honestly, I don't know, I don't know you," Ichigo balled his hand into a fist. "But I also don't know Bambietta either. So I wanted to get all the facts before I make a judgment."

"Well you'd be the first," Ichigo sounded so hurt. "Not even the other heroes believed me." he didn't trust him. 'He was probably put up to this by the others to get me to confess, well fuck them.'

"Ichigo, I'm not your enemy. If you didn't do this, let me help you."

“Whatever, do what you want.” he tried to walk off.

“Ichigo!” he grabs Ichigo by the shoulder only to have his hand slapped away.

“Don't touch me!” Bazz-B could see the hurt in his eyes.

“Ichigo, let me ask you just on thing.”

“What?”

“I've had this feeling for awhile, do you like guys?” Ichigo blushed.

“So what if I do, are you gonna make fun of me, or insult me?” he snapped.

“No, this...” he pulled Ichigo close and captured his lips. Ichigo's eyes widened for a moment, he felt his heart start to pound, and he got pulled into the moment. Ichigo kissed Bazz-B back and began to dominate the kiss, the Mohawk male moaned into the kiss. The kiss broke apart for air, both males were hard from such an intense kiss. “Wow!”

Ichigo blinked and quickly pushed Bazz-B away. “Don't do that.”

“I'm sorry, I don't think a lot of things through, I go with my gut a lot.”

“Just stay away from me! I don't need your pity!” he snaps.

“Ichigo, I'm gonna find out the truth. So please don't cut yourself off, I did in my world. I ran away from people who wanted to help me, so let me help you.”

Ichigo didn't say anything and walked away. Bazz-B hit himself. “Idiot!” he scolded himself. He had a past of his own, he saw himself fall into some bad places, he had lost things to. 'Ichigo don't give up, I don't think you are the kind of guy who would do that, now I just need to find proof.'

-X-

Ichigo couldn't shake the blush on his cheeks. 'Why did he do that?' he touched his lips. 'He was a good kisser to.' images of Bambietta, Askin, and Cang Du crossed his mind ruining his high and he shook his head. 'Get a clue Ichigo, you are on your own. You can't trust anyone.'

His stomach growled. “Better get some food.” He went to the tavern to get a meal. 'Since then I haven't been able to taste anything.' he tried some food and it tasted like nothing, not bland, not salty, not anything. While he was there three men approached him.

“Hey there Shield Hero, you looking for a party.” Ichigo spared them a glance.

“We can help you out.” one of the other men said.

“If you are serious, you'll be paid on how you work. If you do nothing you get nothing, I get 40% of all treasure and drops we get.”

“What?!” the third man gasped.

“Then you get everything, how do we know you'll pay us?”

“If you work you get paid, I'll deal out the funds based on how much you contribute. If you don't I'll take the excess.”
the three men look at each other.

“Sure, sure, let's go hunt.” Ichigo stands up, and they follow him out.

“Lets hit up the equipment shop.”

“We need some new gear.”

Ichigo was getting Bambietta flashbacks. “Buy your own gear, I have no obligation to do so.”

“Enough, just hand over your money.”

“As if we'd wanna work with someone like you.”

'Liars, traitors, all of them!' Ichigo sighed. “Really, you should have just done this from the start.” he reached into his cloak.

“Well, aren't you accommodating.” instead of giving them money however he gave them a taste of his orange balloons. The monsters chomping on the creeps, scaring them off and

they bounced off and rolled back and jumped back onto Ichigo.

'This is pointless, I can't fight on my own, even with martial arts, it takes too long to beat these low-level monsters, it takes too long to gain experience to level up. If I can't level up, I can't fight stronger monsters, and I can't gain more experience. What a vicious cycle.' he was barely at level 4 now, at this rate by the time the waves come he'll be killed. He'd gotten a look at Bazz-B's level he was in the low 30's.

“My my my,” Ichigo whipped around ready to throw one of his balloons. “No need to be so defensive my friend, I come with an offer.” There was a very odd man, he had white skin and weird hair and he was dressed oddly even for this world.

“An offer?” Ichigo didn't drop his guard. “You are just in time to make one, seriously you can't trust anyone these days.” Mayuri chuckled.

“You need party members yes? Well, I have what you need.”

“You do huh?” Ichigo dropped his guard. The man gave a huge, almost scary grin.

“Oh yes, word travels fast, the Shield Hero who travels with just monsters at his size. I find that fascinating, so I sought you out, and I'm glad I did, my eyes do not deceive me!” he grins. “I'm sure you will be a wonderful customer. Follow

me!” he leads Ichigo to a secluded location, down a back alley.

“Why would you want to help me, I'm the Shield Hero you know?”

“Shield, spear, axe, hero, villain, makes no difference to me it's my job to get people what they need.” Ichigo's eyes widen as he enters the man's shop. There were cages all over, with demi-humans of all kinds inside them.

“What is all this?”

“Forgive my late introduction, my name is Mayuri and I'm a slave trader. This is my slave shop!” Ichigo looked around.

“Why would I want a slave? I'm out of here.” he turned to leave.

“Wait, wait, wait, you need party members right, well slaves come with a special seal that makes it impossible for them to lie or betray you.” Ichigo stopped in his tracks and Mayuri smiled. “A slave must obey an order given by their master or the mark punishes them, so betrayal is impossible.”

“And this is legal?”

“Ohh yes, the kingdom approves, most slaves are used for labor but some are quite fierce and would make an excellent party member for you.”

“Alright, let me see what you got.”

“Wonderful, I knew you would like to browse my wares.”
Ichigo did feel bad, but he needed to survive, he couldn't survive all alone. He needed this, needed someone he could trust and would act as his sword.

He pulled off a sheet to reveal a mostly beast lion woman.

“This is my strongest slave currently.”

“How much?” He could see his stats, 75 several times more than his own. He also noticed she was female.

“Fifteen gold pieces.” Ichigo raised a brow at him.

“You know I don't have that much, but you showed me your most expensive slave anyway.”

“Of course, I'm giving you an eye for quality. I hope to be doing a lot of business with you in the future,” he says. “What type would you prefer?”

“I see,” he looks around. “A male would be preferred. Something cheap that isn't broken.”

“I was sure you'd like a female, with that rumor...” Ichigo banged his hand against a cage, many of the demi-humans grew quiet sensing his rage.

“I didn't do it!” he snapped.

“I see, you don't seem the type, I just want my clients to be happy,” he leads him around. “The males are this way.”

Ichigo hears some coughing and is drawn to one of the cages. Inside he sees a young red-haired boy, he looks skinny, and he had red fur on his wrists and ankles, and he had a long monkey tail also red. "Raise your head." the boy does and Ichigo looks him in the eye. "What's your name?"

The boy flinched and backed away from him. "You do have a name right?"

"Re...Renji...Renji Abarai." he says. He says before coughing.

"Forgive him, he probably won't be very useful, he's sickly and his former master loved his torture. He might not last much longer."

"He's fine, I'll take him." He could see something in Renji's eyes. The contract had to be made, Ichigo cut his finger and added his blood to some magic ink.

"Let's begin," Mayuri dips a brush into the ink and goes to Renji, placing manipulating the mark on his chest. Renji cried out in pain as the mark took hold of him.

"Oi!"

"The pain is only temporary, its a taste of what to expect should they betray their master," he explains. "The slave crest on his chest makes it so he can never defy you."

His Icon activated revealing that he had formed a contract with Renji, and he got to see Renji's stats. "Party member settings?"

"Now this boy is all yours."

"Thirty silvers right?" Mayuri nods.

Through all his foraging and hunting he had managed to get 50 silvers. He pays for Renji, giving Mayuri an extra silver for commission. "A pleasure doing business with you."

-X-

Ichigo brought Renji to Benihime's. "Ah Ichigo welcome back..." he was shocked to see the boy with him.

"If you have any clothes on clearance that will fit him show me those, and he needs a weapon." Kisuke sighs, and picks out something simple since he's a beginner gets him a small knife.

Renji is given a bath and fresh clothes. He wears a black shirt and some brown shorts, and his knife was attached to a holster belt. "Take out your knife, Renji." he lifts his cloak and reveals an orange balloon. "Try to kill this thing."

"A monster!" Renji falls back on his butt.

"Kill it! This is an order."

"No...I'm scared...I..." his slave crest reacts and shocks Renji.

“It will only bring you pain, do it.” Renji takes his blade and charges. The attack was too weak and he couldn't pop the balloon. “Too weak, try again!”

“Yah!” Renji charges and this time pops the balloon. To Ichigo's shock, they both gained experience.

“I got experience too?”

“When you made the contract, you set him up as comrade didn't you?” Urahara explains. “Didn't you do that with the other woman?”

Ichigo growled. 'That woman, she truly never intended to be my comrade. She used me to the bitter end.' Urahara could see the rage building inside Ichigo. “Renji, listen to me, you are going to be my sword, you will kill monsters for me!” Renji was a little freaked. “In return, I'll protect you.”

“Eh?”

“Come on, let's go hunting.”

“Y-Yes, coming!” Renji followed after him.

“What a mess,” Urahara says. 'Ichigo do not let the cruelty this world has shown you corrupt you, I saw it in your eyes you are still a good man, don't lose sight of yourself.'

Ichigo only had three silvers left. As they walked through the town, Ichigo noticed how other people were treating demi-humans.

Renji's stomach growled. "Are you hungry?" he shook his head, only to have his stomach growl again. He blushed. "Let's go you can't go hunting on an empty stomach." They found a place but Renji was worried about a sign that says they don't serve demi-humans. He hesitated but went inside anyway.

When they entered Renji noticed took one look at his new master and began to whisper things. "Can I order?"

"Huh? I-I guess..." it was clear he didn't want to, but he heard the rumors about those that try to cheat or deny him business. Renji saw another kid eating a rather delicious looking lunch.

"I'll have the cheapest meal you have," Ichigo noticed where Renji was looking. "And he'll have whatever that kid is having." the man nods and Ichigo gives him the money for the food.

"Why?" Renji speaks up.

"Did you want something else?" He shakes his head no.

"Why are you getting it for me?"

"Because it looked like you wanted it."

The food arrived and Renji's eyes sparkled, his tail wagging happily. He takes the fork out of the kid's meal and starts to dig in, eating so fast he nearly chokes. "Slow down, is it that

good?” he gives him a drink and Renji washes his food down and nods.

Ichigo tries to eat, but he still couldn't taste anything.

-X-

Ichigo's shields currently were the Orange Shield, which he personally liked so he set it to default mode. The Yellow Shield, and the Leaf Shield. He gained small stat boosts for each shield which stacked. Upon becoming level 4 the Leaf Shield also gave him a boost to his Foraging Skill, allowing him to get stronger quality drops.

He had Renji fight monsters, while he acted as bait, letting the creatures attack him and while he held them off Renji went for the kill. Once he reached Level 3 they ventured further, finding stronger balloons. They came across three different mushroom-like monsters, Ichigo blocked them with his shield allowing Renji to cut them down.

From their drops, Ichigo got small Red Shield, Mush Shield, Green Mush Shield, and Blue Mush Shield. He gained a Plant Identification 1, Apprentice's Compounding, and Simple Compounding Recipes 1.

Continuing their adventuring, Ichigo stopping to collect herbs here and there until they come across a river. “I'll catch us some fish, save us some money.” After catching his first one he gets the idea to feed the fish to his shield. It worked and

Ichigo unlocked the Fish Shield; getting Angling Techniques + 1.

This allowed him to catch more fish, and he built a fire to cook them. His Icon gave him helpful hints on how his new skills and techniques worked. Renji eats some of the cooked fish as Ichigo worked on mixing some herbs. He was able to make some medicine, after a few failed attempts. Once he made the first, he fed it to his shield.

Petit Medicine Shield unlocked, Petit Poison Shield Unlocked. The medicine shield boosted the effectiveness of his medicine. He worked on making medicine again.

Renji had made it to Level 3 and Ichigo was level 5.

“Master?” Ichigo looked to Renji. “Who are you?”

“A hero. The shield one,” he says

“You mean one of the Legendary Five?!” Ichigo nods.

Renji couldn't believe it, his parents told him stories of the Shield Hero. How long ago the Shield Hero was always kind to the demi-humans and protected them. Renji wanted to meet the shield hero one day. “If you are a good boy, maybe one day you will meet him.” All the kids in his village looked up to the shield hero, one of his childhood friends saying she would marry the hero one day.

“Please, tell me your name!” Renji says.

“Ichigo Kurosaki.”

“Number One Protector!” Renji smiles, but it's cut short as his stamina dropped allowing his illness to grip him. He fell into a coughing fit, feeling his temperature spike.

Ichigo gives him some medicine. “Drink this, it's a bit bitter but all good medicine is, so my dad says.” Renji takes it and drinks it.

“B-bitter!” he swallows it down, and the medicine did help.

“Get some sleep, I'm gonna keep working.” Renji obeys and lays down.

His rest wasn't peaceful as bad memories haunted the red head. During the last wave monsters attacked their village, Renji's parents ran with him as they were hunted by a three-headed dog monster. His father was already injured, they tried to evacuate with other families but got scattered.

“We are sorry, you have to survive!” his mother tells him.

“Renji, please forgive our selfishness, but we want you to live.” They were cornered at a cliff overlooking a river. The three-headed dog monster approaching them. “I'm sorry!” he pushes Renji off the cliff into the river just as the monster descends killing them both in an instant. That was the last image he saw before he fell into the river.

“No!” Renji shot up in bed. “Dad! Mom!” he cried reaching out to phantoms. “Help...no...help us...”

“Renji!” Ichigo rushes over to him. The boy was clearly half asleep, the nightmare shaking him. “It's okay,” he pulls Renji to him, and the boy clings to him crying. “Don't cry, it's all right.” he pets him, running his fingers through his hair.

He holds Renji and lets him cry. Whispering that it was okay and that he was safe. The boy eventually fell back asleep his tail wrapped around Ichigo.

To be continued...Fear and Friends

Chapter 4 Fear and Friends

Bazz-B was not happy, he asked around and no one from the night in question was talking. “Please sir, I don't want any trouble.”

“Then tell me, what you saw that night.”

“I...I can't...” he looked terrified.

“Tch,” Bazz-B grabbed some gold from his bag. “I understand you don't want to talk to me, but you must keep some kind of record of how much you sell.” He handed the man five gold pieces. “Let me see those records and no one will ever know.”

The man agreed. Bazz-B checked the records and saw only 2 drinks were ordered for the Shield Hero's table. 'This isn't enough, some people can take two drinks as if it were nothing, and others can get drunk on just one drink. It's also odd no one is talking, everyone assumes Ichigo is guilty, so why hide anything? Unless there is something to hide?'

He wanted to talk to the other heroes but they were often busy hunting. By chance, he ran into Uryu. “Uryu, a moment.”

“Where is your party?” the glasses boy asked.

“I told them I had business in town and to keep training on their own until I return.” he gave Uryu a strong look. “I need to ask you about Ichigo.”

“The Shield Hero, what about him?” he looked away.

“Do you believe that he assaulted Bambietta?” Uryu was shocked at the question.

“Well...” he began. “I'll admit there was something odd about Bambietta's story.”

“Tell me,” Bazz-B says.

“She claimed he tore off her clothes, and when Ichigo demanded proof her underwear was found in his room, but the underwear was perfectly intact, not a rip, tear anything, it was too perfect like it was never worn, to begin with.”

“You think it was planted to frame him?”

“I'm not sure, it was certainly odd, why would they frame a legendary hero?”

“I'm not sure, but things aren't adding up.” he crossed his arms.

“I feel bad, perhaps it was mob mentality perhaps I was simply a coward, but I couldn't speak up before. With no proof, I kept my mouth shut.” Uryu frowned. “I didn't have many friends in my world, I kept to myself and didn't get involved.”

“It's hard to break certain habits, but its never too late to do the right thing.” Uryu nods.

“Bazz-B, if Ichigo was truly framed, there might be something going on we are not aware of. You should be careful.” Bazz-B gives him a thumbs up and walks off. It had been bothering him too, from the time they arrived, to meeting the king, to the rumors being spread, it seemed the Shield Hero was looked down upon, but why?

-X-

Ichigo brought the medicine and herbs he made to a shop.

“You made this hero-san?” the shop keeper was shocked.

“This is some high-quality medicine. Is this really your first time making it?”

“Yes, it is, old man, what's more, profitable selling medicine or herbs?”

“Hmm, well since the waves lots of monsters are about, so medicine is in high demand.”

“Good to know,” he looked around and saw instruments that were used for making medicine. 'Well gotta spend money to make money.' he thinks. “Do you have any old equipment you'd be willing to part with, I'll buy it from you.”

The shopkeeper agreed and gave Ichigo some old tools. Renji was outside, watching some kids play with a ball. “Renji, let's

get going.” he came out and saw Renji staring at the other kids. “Do you want a ball?”

“No, not at all,” he says, but his tail wagged giving him away. 'He really wants one huh?' he finds the seller and gets one for him. “Here, you can play with it after we do our work.”

“Thank you master!” he blushes.

They went to an inn to stay the night, only for the owner/manager to flinch when he sees Ichigo. “Welcome how can I help...uh, the Shield Hero...”

“I'd like to rent a room,” Ichigo says. “My companion might scream at night, though.” The manager flinched in disgust, Ichigo could guess what he was thinking. He flashed some fresh balloons that were biting on him. “You will give us a room.”

“R-Right away sir!” he runs off to prepare the room. Ichigo sighed.

'I need to find a way to survive until the next wave of catastrophe hits.' Renji and Ichigo spent quite a few days together, the red-head got to see the town, Ichigo gave him food whenever he asked for it, let him rest when he needed it, and even stopped working when Renji wanted to show him a trick he learned with his ball. Ichigo gave Renji a hair cut and even bought him a hair tie to hold his hair back.

Renji saw how hard his master worked, even after they hunted, Ichigo would work on making medicine, and sorting materials for them to sell. He understood money was tight, so he was doing his best not to be a burden, but even when he made mistakes his master didn't treat him cruelly. He even had an accident in his bed, but instead of yelling or striking him Ichigo gave him a pat on the head.

They were getting stronger bit by bit, so Ichigo wanted them to venture further into the forest. It was then they were attacked by a rabbit monster, it lunged and went right at Renji. "Watch out!" Ichigo blocked the attack, he took the bite. "Now, Renji stab it!"

"I can't..." he backed away.

"What's wrong, hurry up!" Ichigo says.

"If I stab it, it'll bleed." Renji backed up more. "I'm scared of blood!" his slave mark reacted, shocking Renji for his refusal.

"Listen, if you can't fight, then I won't be able to look after you anymore." Renji gasped. "A Wave that threatens the world's existence is coming soon. I have to get as strong as I can before it does." he kept a firm grip on the rabbit monster.

"Defense is all I'm good for, so I need someone to fight for me. If you can't do that...I'll find someone else."

"You are going to fight the Catastrophe?" Renji asked.

“That is my job,” The rabbit was still biting at Ichigo, but the hero kept a firm grip on the monster not letting it escape.

Renji grabbed his sword, and the seal ceased. Ichigo got ready holding the monster in place for Renji to stab it. Blood gushed, covering the two. “Master...I'll fight for you.” he panted. “So please don't throw me away.”

“All right.” he pats Renji's head. “Good job.” Ichigo had to face this reality it wasn't a game. One mistake and they'd both end up dead.

-X-

Since they had leveled up some, Ichigo decided to get them some new equipment. Renji needed a stronger weapon, so they went to Urahara. Kisuke was the only one willing to give them a discount and information. Renji's weapon was upgraded to a short sword. “Is there any villages nearby we can reach with our current gear?”

“Ah looking to make some extra money?”

“Right, the shops around here are...you know...”

“Giving you a hard time, stay strong kid. I believe the Village of Lute will be your best bet.” he gave Ichigo a map and after getting some supplies the two were off.

They killed more rabbit monsters along the way. “Master, is there something special I can call you?”

“Call me whatever you want,” he says and they carry on their journey. They reach The Village of Lute in good time.

Ichigo found a buyer for the furs they gained. “These are some nice furs, I'll give you some silver for each.”

“Thank you, tell me, do you know anywhere someone can make a large amount of money quickly?” he asked.

“Hmm, that would be the coal mines, you can mine special ores in there, but I warn you since the waves started its become a den of monsters.” the shopkeep sighed. “I have no idea what our “heroes” are doing?”

Ichigo agreed to mine for them and was given a pickaxe to use and some rope. Ichigo had the bright idea to feed the rope to his shield and unlocked the Rope Shield. It wasn't very fancy but it allowed him to conjure rope from it and use it freely, it also came with a new skill. 'Air Strike Shield?' he tested it out summoning a green energy shield in the air.

“Master?” Renji peeked into the cabin holding a pickaxe of his own.

“It's nothing, let's go.” They ventured into the cave and it wasn't long before they were attacked by giant spiders.

“Renji!”

“Right!” the boy used his new short sword and cut down the creepy bugs. He fed them to his shield and unlocked another

new shield Silk Spinner Shield. Armor Stat Boost + 1, Silk Weaving Level 1, Steel Thread Skill. 'A capture skill? Still nothing offensive, but I can use this shield to make silk and sell it.' The shield had a spider design in a diamond pattern. According to his Icon, the shield could only make so much silk a day and would need to recharge.

“Renji, the villagers claimed this place is a den of monsters, I don't want us to get surrounded if things go south, we run.” Renji nodded.

They found a good spot to mine, and Ichigo got to work. Renji helped a little bit but he could only get small pieces out. Ichigo was going for the larger ore clusters. “This should fetch us a pretty penny.”

“Huh?” Renji noticed some strange footprints in the cave.

“Renji?” the boy fell back, backing away in terror. A growl was heard, and Ichigo turned to see a two-headed dog monster coming from a cave tunnel. Renji was shaking with fear, eyes widening as common sense gave in to terror. His mind flashed back to the time when his village was attacked and his parents were killed.

“No!” Renji screamed.

The two-headed dog attacked. Ichigo grabbed Renji and jumped from a cliff, falling deeper into the cave. Thankfully

there was a large lake to break their fall. Ichigo used his Rope Shield, to lasso a rock and pull them out of the water. “Renji, are you okay?”

“Dog monster...killed all the villagers, even Dad and Mom...” he began to tear up.

“During the first wave?” Renji nodded. 'No wonder he has nightmares, and cries at night.' The dog monster wasn't done with them and tracked their scent to their location. “Is that the same dog that killed your parents?”

“No, that one had three heads.”

“Listen Renji, take that thing out right here and now.” He could see its level, it was stronger than them, but they had to do this. “If you fight and we get stronger, we can fend off the waves of catastrophe and prevent that tragedy from reoccurring.”

The beast got closer and closer. “There isn't a way to bring your parents back to life, but we can prevent other kids from going through what you did.” The beast charged an Ichigo met it, blocking one head with his shield, but the second head bit down, tearing into Ichigo's shoulder.

Renji's eyes widened as Ichigo's blood was spilled. “Now, Renji!”

“No...” the beast tore into Ichigo causing more blood to spill.

“If I die, so will you!”

“Please no!” Renji begged.

“Then hurry up and kill it!” Ichigo didn't want to do this but decided to try and give Renji a push. “That's an order!”

Renji's slave mark reacted shocking the boy, but the memories were making it too hard to move. Ichigo could see the tears in the boy's eyes.

“Renji, forget it.” the slave mark stopped its punishment. “If you can't fight then get out of here.”

“But what about you?”

“I'll buy you time to escape,” he says. “Now go!”

“What?” Renji gasped. “That'd be just like then...” his parents had died protecting him, he didn't want that to happen.

“Just go!” Ichigo hisses as the creature tears into him some more.

“Master!”

“Ahhh!” Ichigo cries out in pain.

'No not again, not master.' he remembered all the good times they had together. The meals they shared, the battles they fought. 'Don't go!' he saw his parents fade away, then Ichigo. His grip on his sword tightened. 'Don't leave me!'

The fear broke and Renji's eyes narrowed. "Don't die!" he charged at the beast and stabbed it in the head, forcing him to release Ichigo. The beast whipped its head back and sent Renji flying, but he didn't drop his sword.

Says something for a creature of level 15 it doesn't die so easily. It charged at Renji. "Air Strike Shield!" Ichigo used his skill and blocked the beast's attack. "Now Renji!"

"Raahhh!" he stabbed the beast right in the chest, piercing its heart in the process. Renji fell back panting, his heart was pounding so fast.

"You did it, Renji." He gave the boy a smile.

"Ichigo-sama!" he ran over to him and hugged him.

"Ouch, even with the shield's power that wound still hurts." Renji cried into his chest.

"Don't ever die! Please don't leave me alone! Ichigo-sama!"

'He chose my name,' he pets Renji's head. "You attack, and I defend. That way, neither of us will die."

"Right!" Renji continued to hug Ichigo nuzzling into him.

"We'll leave once I feed that monster to my shield."

"Okay, Ichigo-sama," he says and holds him. He let Renji hold him, rubbing his back, he had done really well.

Everything made sense now, he just hoped they both could get stronger.

Ichigo's mind began to wonder. He thought about the state they were in if too many monsters or more powerful monsters attacked them in a group they'd be overwhelmed quickly.

'We've been lucky so far. Maybe its time to get another party member.' Once Renji was satisfied with cuddle time, Ichigo fed the monster to his shield unlocking the Two Headed Dog Shield, it had a pretty useful counter attack so that would be useful.

Ichigo had to use some medicine to recover, and after selling the ore they headed back to the city. "Ichigo-sama where are we going?"

"To the Slave Shop to talk to Mayuri." Renji grabbed him.

"You aren't gonna sell me are you?" the boy got teary eyed.

"No Renji I'm not gonna sell you, you've gotten very brave and very strong, but I think you could use a friend and we could use another party member." he pets his head.

"A friend? But I have Ichigo-sama!" he says and glomped onto him. Renji had friends before in the village but he had no idea where anyone was or if they were even still alive. So he tried not to think about it. "If you aren't getting rid of me or replacing me, I'll follow whatever decision you make Ichigo-sama!"

Mayuri hadn't changed much since last they met. "Welcome, I see you and Renji have gotten stronger, was I right, or was I right!"

"You were right, I was hoping to buy another, someone more ready for battle." Mayuri's grin made Renji nervous.

"I knew you'd be an excellent customer, follow me." he led them to the male side again, where some rattling could be heard. "This one has been quite the troublemaker, he's been returned 6 times already."

Inside the cage was a young boy with wild blue hair, kitty ears, black claws, and a long blue kitty tail. He was wearing a loincloth and a collar. "I'm no one's house pet damn it, I'm a warrior!" he growled and thrashed.

"Feisty isn't he? His name is Grimmjow, I'm afraid if he's returned again he'll have to be put down." Mayuri says. "He's becoming bad for business."

Ichigo approached and Grimmjow glared at him. 'Another fool wants to buy me, I'll show him.' Ichigo reached out to him and Grimmjow bit his hand.

"Ichigo-sama!" Renji was about to rush forward but Ichigo raised his free hand to stop him. Grimmjow was strong, but he was only level 3, his bite caused him no pain. Ichigo got a good look in his eyes.

'He's a fighter.'

Grimmjow didn't understand how his bite did no damage.

'This guy isn't that strong how is he...' he stopped when he looked and saw the shield on Ichigo's arm. "You are...the Shield Hero?" he couldn't believe it. The legendary hero who protected and cared for demi-humans was here right in front of him.

He gulped and surprising both Mayuri and Renji he licked Ichigo hand where he bit him as an apology. Ichigo smiled and pressed forward, bringing his hand to one of Grimmjow's fluffy ears. "Ah!" the bluenette blushed as Ichigo began to rub it.

"Grimmjow, would you fight for me?" the bluenette gasped and leaned into his touch. He couldn't believe this, it was his dream to fight for the Shield Hero of legend.

"You'll let me fight?"

"Yes, you can kill as many monsters as you are able, I would like you to help me prepare for the upcoming Wave." He rubbed and scratched Grimmjow's ear eliciting a purr, his tail thrashing happily behind him.

"I...I'll do it..." Ichigo released him and turned to Mayuri.

“I'll take him.” Mayuri let Ichigo bring the demi-human out of his cage Grimmjow nuzzling against the orangette. “Ichigo-sama has a nice scent,” he says purring.

“Why are you smelling him?” Renji pouts feeling oddly jealous.

The bluenette grins. “I thought he'd smell like berries, but he smells even better.” Getting one last whiff before Ichigo set him down. Grimmjow received Ichigo's seal, and he was added to his party.

“Grimmjow this is Renji, I trust you two will get along, we need to work together from now on.”

“Okay,” the two say in unison. Ichigo pays 50 silver for Grimmjow making sure to give Mayuri his commission. From there it was to Benihime's for armor and gear.

“So you got another one?” Urahara raised a brow.

“Renji needs a friend, and I need all the help I can get.” Even Kisuke had to admit the kid had a point. From the look of Grimmjow, the boy was a fighter, he'd never make it as some rich ass hole's pet or some jerks labor horse.

“I don't want armor, I can fight like this.”

“You can't fight half naked.” Grimmjow didn't want to wear clothes, but they compromised and Grimmjow skipped the shoes. He got pants similar to Renji's but a more v cut shirt.

Kisuke got Grimmjow a dagger similar to what he gave Renji when he was first starting out. They had a meal together, and if possible Grimmjow had worse table manners than Renji.

They went out to hunt and Grimmjow was a natural, if not a bit wild. He would sometimes throw his weapon at a monster killing it, then use his claws to rip apart the other nearby monsters. Renji and Grimmjow would often compete on who could kill as many monsters as they could. Since Grimmjow was new, they stayed in the lower level areas so Ichigo could see his stuff.

Much to Ichigo's surprise not only was Grimmjow a natural but he leveled up quickly. "How'd he get so strong already?"

Grimmjow grinned. "I'm a pantereian, we are a proud warrior race, not only are we natural born fighters, but we have a natural ability to level up faster than other demi-humans."

"That's not fair!" Renji growled.

"Better try harder then." Grimmjow shrugged and brought his haul of drops over to Ichigo to be praised. Renji did take his advice, getting his old dagger and using his tail to hold it. He worked and strengthened his tail so he could hold two weapons at once it made his fighting far more effective. Their levels soon passed Ichigo's but demi-humans did level up faster than humans so it made sense, but Ichigo's levels continued to rise.

When Ichigo worked on making medicine, silk, and other things to sell, Renji and Grimmjow would play together. The bluenette thought it was silly at first but actually enjoyed it. “You know I didn't play much even before the waves came, I learned the legend of the five heroes and one day I swore to myself I would train and get stronger so I could be a party member of the Shield Hero.”

“It's not so strange, there were many kids in my village that wanted to marry the Shield Hero when they grew up,” he says and the two blush.

Grimmjow and Renji came from different demi-human villages. During the first wave, there were tons of monsters going wild across the land, the kingdom didn't care about demi-human villages so a lot of them were wiped out.

Grimmjow had no idea if anyone from his village was still alive. His mother died of illness, and his dad died fighting during the Wave. “Don't worry, Ichigo-sama is working hard to make sure what happened doesn't happen again.”

“He defends, we attack!” Grimmjow says with a grin. The two did bond, but that didn't stop their rivalry any. Even with a second mouth to feed, Ichigo was doing alright money-wise, it seems more drops could be found if you had more party members. Plus with more members, they were able to tackle larger swarms of monsters more easily. Ichigo was getting

good at quickly changing his shields to optimize their abilities. Using Steel Thread he was able to immobilize flying opponents allowing for Renji and Grimmjow to take them down.

It wasn't all easy, Grimmjow was fast and strong but could be reckless, needing Ichigo's support to shield him from attacks, and even with Renji's new moves, faster creatures proved a problem but with Ichigo's help they took down.

To be continued Chapter 5 The Wave

Chapter 5 The Wave

Renji's Pov

Dear Mom and Dad in heaven, I am doing well, still miss you terribly, but I understand why you did what you did. You wanted me to survive, and I have. Things were rough at first and there were times I didn't think I was gonna make it, but guess what I was saved by the Shield Hero. I didn't know who he was at first, but he was truly kind to me. He treated my wounds and sickness, gets me food whenever I want, and has taken very good care of me, even when I make mistakes or mess up. There are times when I still get nightmares, but Ichigo lets me sleep in his bed and it helps a lot. He's helped me to become strong, and he wants to crush the Waves so other kids don't have to experience what I did.

Ichigo-sama works very hard, I want to help him and be his sword. He cares a lot about me, even getting me a friend to help hunt. Grimmjow is from another village, he's tough and tends to hog Ichigo-sama's attention, but I'm not jealous. He cares for both of us! I wish I knew more about him, he seems angry at times, like something is haunting him. Even when he cooks us yummy food he doesn't seem to enjoy it, eating not

the cooking. He's really something great, I want to be by his side until the end.

If I had one complaint about Ichigo-sama it's that...

Grimmjow's Pov

Dear Mama and Pops in heaven, I miss you both, but I hope you two have reunited together and are proud of me. Things were a bit tough at first, but I never gave in. You won't believe this, but I actually met the Shield Hero of legend. He's actually nicer than I expected. Even though our first meeting was odd, he let me join his group. I think I impressed him with my strength.

He had another boy in his care, a demi-human like me, Renji. He's okay I guess, we are friends/rivals. He was so mad that I leveled up quickly it was funny. He didn't give up either he got pretty creative, and learning how to fight as good as me, something I noticed as he's leveling up he's getting these weird tattoos on his body, they just show up. We play, train, and eat together. Ichigo-sama's cooking is amazing! I like it better when we camp outside. When we go to the city I hear people whispering about Ichigo, it sounds like they are saying bad things about him. I don't like it. It can't be true, Ichigo isn't that kind of person, how do they think they know about him more than us. He's hardworking and dependable, even

when I go too far, he still protects me. I want to stay by his side forever.

If I had one complaint about Ichigo-sama it's that...

End Pov

“He still treats us like kids!” the two shared the same complaint.

-x-

Ichigo had made it to level 15, and he's unlocked quite a few shields. Through their hunting, he gained the Egg Shield, which boosted his Culinary skill by 1. Sky Egg Shield, which unlocked Beginner Cooking Recipes. He wasn't eating much so he fed some of his food to his shield, unlocking Calorie Shield, Energy Shield, an Energetic Shield. This gave him a stamina boost, a stamina consumption decrease, and an SP Boost. He needed SP to use his more advanced skills, and the stamina boost and consumption decrease helped him a lot allowing him to work more even when Grimmjow and Renji turned in.

They got enough Pill Rabbits to unlock Rabbit Leather Shield, that gave him an agility boost. They were able to hunt Pikyu Pikyu which were bird-like monsters, it unlocked the Pikyu Pikyu Shield, which gave Ichigo Beginner's Rank's Weapon Repair Techniques 1. He gained the Butterfly Shield from hunting Butterfly monsters, they proved tricky for Renji

and Grimmjow as it spread paralysis spores. After absorbing a few he gained Paralysis Resistance (Small).

He started feeding random things to his shield to get an effect. Like wood, rocks, even some old pipe he found laying around. It unlocked Wood, Rock, and Pipe Shield Respectfully. The wood shield gave him Lumbering Techniques, the Rock Shield gave him a small decent boost in his defense, the Pipe Shield gave him a new skill, Shield Prison!

Ichigo fed a broken mining pickaxe to his shield and unlocked the Pickaxe Shield, not very clever names but the skills were a benefit, as it boosted his Mining Skill, and lowered the stamina it took while mining. He was also given an old whetstone by Urahara, which he fed to his shield unlocking the Sharpening Shield. It gave him Mineral Identification +1 and gave him a side skill of Automatic Sharpening. Using this skill he was able to mostly repair and keep Renji's and Grimmjow's weapons sharp since it took time they often retreated to balloon areas where the enemies could be taken down much easier.

The last shield he acquired recently was the Light Metal Shield, it had a Defense +1 boost but its unique effect was Magical Defense Enhancement. He had gained quite a few shields, it was almost hard to keep track of them all,

thankfully most of them didn't have unique effects which could only be used in that shield form, the other boosts were stackable.

-X-

Even with his increased defenses, Ichigo had to be careful as they learned when a porcupine-like monster rushed them and attacked Ichigo. The creature had powerful quills that pierced Ichigo's defenses and dashed off.

Grimmjow and Renji gave chase, Grimmjow's sword was being sharpened, so he was having trouble fighting it with just his claws. "See if you weren't so reckless you'd have your sword." Renji teased.

"Shut it, don't let it get away!" Grimmjow hissed as the two chased after it. It was very fast, zipping and darting, circling around for Ichigo.

"Ichigo-sama!" they shout.

"Shield Prison!" Ichigo cast, catching the beast in a ball of metal and chains. "Now, Renji!"

"On it!" The prison opened up allowing Renji to stab the creature, and killing it with one blow. "Got it!" Renji says happily, holding up his kill to Ichigo and Grimmjow.

"Don't get cocky if I hadn't chipped my sword, I'd have killed it way faster than you." Ichigo stared at them. They were both

level 18, but the weird thing was, they weren't kids anymore, not that Ichigo could see it.

Renji was as tall as Ichigo now, he had broad shoulders, fine pecs, and rock hard abs, his arms and legs were toned and even his tail had grown longer. His body was inked with rather sexy tattoos to show his strength. He continued to wear similar clothing to his old ones just upgraded for his size.

Grimmjow was just a little taller than Ichigo, he had his hair cut short, that made him look rather sexy, he was chiseled and toned. Grimmjow wore a vest, to show off his pecs, abs and blue treasure trail, he wore loose pants and still wouldn't wear shoes.

“You guys still bickering like children,” he sighs, he comes over and pats them both on the head. “You both did great, let's get moving.”

“We aren't kids Ichigo-sama!” they tell him.

“Right, right,” he says. The two share a look, Ichigo still treated them like children even though physically because of their level increase they weren't anymore. Demi-humans would age naturally if they stayed at level one, but upon leveling up they grow up. Not only had they evolved but their feelings had evolved to. They wanted Ichigo to look at them as men, not children.

He bought them kids meals still, and when men and women flirted with the two Ichigo didn't get jealous or mad, he looked confused. It was another strange thing about Ichigo they hoped to figure out.

Ichigo may not have known when the wave was coming but felt it would be soon, at their current level he was worried. He was hoping with some new gear they'd be able to make it through.

-x-

They went to Benihime's, and Kisuke greeted them. “Ah Ichigo-kun, Renji-chan Grimmjow-chan, boy have you two grown into dashing lads.” Kisuke complimented. “Its been so long since I've seen you guys.”

“A lot has happened, an innkeeper taught us table manners,” Renji says.

“Only did it to eat properly as Ichigo-sama does.” Grimmjow huffed. They had gotten stares when he ate like a beast. He didn't care, and neither did Ichigo, but he didn't want others looking down on Ichigo because of him.

“You both have grown so much, I'm impressed. Nothing like the pipsqueaks you used to be.” Renji pouted, and Grimmjow glared at Kisuke.

“You think so?” Ichigo looked at them not seeing any change. Kisuke gave a concerned look at Ichigo. Ichigo didn't or couldn't see the change, Renji and Grimmjow had grown into fine young men, it was no wonder they were popular with many of the food vendors.

“Ichigo, don't you know what demi-humans are like?” he asked.

“Kisuke-san!” Renji interrupted. “Forget about that, we are here to buy armor for Ichigo-sama!” Grimmjow nods.

“Armor for me? What for, we need to upgrade your weapons and equipment.”

“Ichigo-sama, while we appreciate the thought you need to think about yourself.”

“Did you forget you just got hurt in the plains, you need proper armor,” Grimmjow adds.

“If you aren't careful, you might end up dead!” Renji says seriously. He upgrades to two magic core iron swords, and a magic core dagger. As Renji leveled up he gained the Basic Sword Skill, Dual Blade Sword Skill, and thanks to training his tail he gained the unique skill Tri-Blade Technique. His tail was strong enough to swing a sword, but the weight of three blades was a bit much so he kept it to holding a dagger.

Grimmjow got an iron sword since it was more sturdy than his old one. “Kisuke-san can you give us a discount.”

“Sure, sure, anything for my favorite customers.”

“How about this Ichigo-sama?” Ichigo turned to see Grimmjow holding up some chain mail, and his anger flared. “I think you'd look good in this.”

“Absolutely not! I'm not wearing THAT fucking thing!” Ichigo snapped making Grimmjow flinch. It was rare to see Ichigo snap, his eyes burning with rage. He looked into Grimmjow's eyes and saw shock and concern, and he quickly calmed down. “I'm sorry Grimmjow...I'll get something else, anything else,” he says, looking down ashamed. Grimmjow looked to Kisuke, who gave him a pat on the shoulder. He seemed to know something, even whispering, “I figured as much,” under his breath.

He looked to Renji who shared the same look of confusion. “Um, how about something custom made?”

“Sure, if you got some spare materials, I'd be happy to.” Ichigo handed over some Pikyū feathers, and some furs and pelts. “Excellent I can make you some fine armor.” Ichigo pays for the new equipment, with the discount and all of his farming and grinding he was able to stay under budget.

“I hope it will be ready before the waves come,” Ichigo says.

“Didn't you know, you can check it at the church,” Kisuke says.

“What?” Kisuke shows them the way, the church holds the Dragon Hourglass. In the town, the knights were on the move, so the wave had to be soon. Ichigo didn't know how soon. They went and got some food planning to return for the new armor.

“Kisuke is a good man, don't you think?”

“Hmm,” he looked down feeling this unshakeable feeling of distrust. “He wants our business I suppose.”

“I think he likes taking care of you, even if he's a bit weird,” Grimmjow says. They go to their frequent spot and Ichigo buys them both kid's meals, much to the embarrassment of the two demi-humans.

“Ichigo-sama, we aren't kids anymore, we can eat the same meal as you.”

“You don't want it? You don't have to force yourself to act like an adult,” he says and tries his food, once again he couldn't taste anything. They ate their kid's meals as it was rather tasty even if a bit embarrassing.

They returned to Benihime's, and Kisuke had the armor finished in no time. Ichigo went to the changing room, and Renji and Grimmjow were torn on peeking. Kisuke put a stop

to it quickly enough. “I know its tempting but Ichigo-kun needs your trust more than anything.”

“Right,” they say.

“Give him time, you'll see,” he says.

Ichigo stepped out in his Barbarian Armor. Renji's eyes sparkled. “You look so cool, Ichigo-sama!”

“You look like a real hero!” Grimmjow says giving him a thumbs up.

“Thanks, Kisuke, for making this for me. I owe you a lot, I'll be sure to pay you back when this is all over.”

“Ichigo, I don't help you out because of the money, though you are my favorite customer. I help you because I know a good man when I see one.” he gives him a fist bump to his armor. Ichigo felt an honest smile break the scowl on his face.

“Thank you,” he says.

“Good luck out there.” Kisuke waves them off.

-X-

At the church, there were women wearing strange charms around their necks. It looks like all the hero weapons in one place, except one. Ichigo was focused on something else, the huge golden hourglass in the center of the room. “This...this is the Dragon Hourglass?” His shield reacted to it, a beam of light connecting them and his Icon opened up.

20:04

“Less than 24 hours!” Ichigo gasped. 'Are we gonna be okay?' he was more worried about Renji and Grimmjow.

“Well if it isn't the Shield Hero!” Ichigo tensed and grimaced. 'I know that voice.' he turned and sure enough, there was Askin, with Bambietta, and a few other girls.

“Come on, are you still fighting with such flimsy equipment?” he asked, approaching them.

“Are they friends of yours?” Renji asked while Grimmjow narrowed his eyes. Ichigo was clearly upset.

“Who are they, Ichigo-sama?” Grimmjow asked. Ichigo grits his teeth and walked forward. Choosing to ignore Askin he walked by him.

“Oi, Askin-sama is talking to you!” Bambietta says, just seeing her made Ichigo relive it all, it made his blood boil. She tried to approach Ichigo and Renji and Grimmjow got in the way.

“Pardon us, but it seems we are leaving,” they say.

“This is the Criminal Shield Hero's party?”

“Are they adventurers?” Bambietta looks and partially sees Grimmjow's tattoo, but gets distracted.

Cang Du and Uryu were also there. He didn't see Bazz-B.

“Where's Bazz-B?” he asked them. Cang Du just huffed not answering him.

Uryu adjusts his glasses. “He came earlier, he has the count down, he has quite a few stamina boost skills, and he makes good use of them. He plans to grind until 8 hours before the Wave.”

“Ah,” Ichigo says. 'He probably has forgotten all about helping me anyway.'

“Hello,” Askin approaches Renji. “I'm Askin Nakk Le Vaar, the Spear Hero.”

'Does this guy flirt with anything with a pulse?' Ichigo thinks. 'He has a whole party of girls and he flirts with a kid?!'

“You're a hero?” Renji raises a brow at him.

“So cute,” Askin takes hold of Renji's hands. “Please join my party, beauty such as yours surpasses all. Come save the world with me!”

“Oi, back off.” Grimmjow hisses.

“My aren't you a feisty kitten, no worries you can join my party too. It's hard to be so popular.” Grimmjow flexes his claws ready to stab this guy.

Bambietta steps forward. “Askin-sama, why are you complimenting filthy demi-humans?”

Renji butts in. “I'm afraid not, we are with Ichigo-sama!”

“Ichigo?” Askin gasped. “That's not a good idea! If you're with a guy like him, you'll be in danger!”

Ichigo snaps and gets in his face, glaring at the spear hero.

“Something wrong? I'm only speaking the truth.”

“We are leaving, Renji, Grimmjow!” he turns to leave and the two are quick to follow.

“Surely you've heard the rumors about him, too,” Askin says and Ichigo stops for a moment. Grimmjow could see his body tense up with frustration.

“See you at the wave,” Uryu says when they pass him.

“Don't hold us back.” Cang Du says.

“Do come to the wave, while your busy protecting yourself, you can watch as a real hero handles things,” he says with a smirk. 'How'd he get two hotties like that on his party, no matter they'll leave him soon enough?'

-X-

Ichigo left town finding some balloons. “Ichigo-sama why did we come out here?” the balloons charged and Grimmjow and Renji were ready to attack.

“Stay back both of you!” his scowl was back, his eyes burning with anger. “I just really need to punch the fuck out of something right now!” Ichigo fought the balloons cursing with each popped balloon.

“I feel him, I wanted to rip that guy's throat out.”

“Grimmjow you can't, he's one of the five heroes.”

“He's an ass, talking that way to us, saying shit about Ichigo-sama. I don't like him.”

“I wonder what happened between Ichigo-sama and those people.” he tried to ask but Ichigo wouldn't answer.

'They won't believe me, they are only with me because they are my slaves, if they weren't they'd abandon me, betray me, I hate this!' he finished popping the balloons. Ichigo was quiet the rest of the night, even when they returned to town and got an inn, he worked on making medicine's in silence. Renji tried to speak to him, but Grimmjow just shook his head at him.

“Ichigo-sama we are turning in,” he tells him.

“Good, get some rest, the Wave is coming in the morning.” Ichigo was in a foul mood, his thoughts getting twisted up. Even as the morning came and Renji and Grimmjow pledged their loyalty to him, he wasn't hearing it, a part of him refusing to believe it.

“We are your blades, we will cut down your enemies, and will follow you wherever you go!”

“Good luck with that,” Ichigo says. In the last ticking minutes, adventurers and knights were making preparations.

“Ichigo!” Bazz-B came running over to him.

“Bazz-B what are you doing here, where is your party?”

“Don't worry, we'll all warp once the wave starts.” Ichigo had no idea what he was talking about. “Listen after the wave we have to talk, I don't have all the evidence yet, but something is very wrong with Bambietta's words against you. So no matter what, don't die okay?”

“I wasn't planning on dying, this might seem like a game, but once you die its over,” he says.

Bazz-B steals a kiss, making Ichigo, Renji, and Grimmjow blush. “A kiss for luck.” he winks at him and the clock hits 0.

-x-

The Dragon Hourglass glows and in an instant, the heroes and their parties were warped to where the Wave was gonna hit.

“How did we?” he looked and saw that Lute Village was nearby.

“Ichigo-sama!” Renji gasped. Ichigo turned and saw the sky rip apart, pouring out waves of wild colors, swirling out and blocking out the natural sky.

The others were summoned to and they raced towards the crack where the boss would be. “This is bad,” they could see monsters coming from the miasma. “Did Lute Village evacuate? Where are the knights?” Ichigo saw the others race

towards one direction. “Wait, you guys, there's a village nearby we need to help it.”

They were too far away to hear. Someone sent up a flare for the knights to find them. “This isn't good, the village is closer to the rift than we are,” Grimmjow says.

“Damn it, what are they thinking.” his hand balled into fists.

“What do we do Ichigo-sama?”

“I can't fight, I can only protect, the options are clear. Let's go!” he turns and runs towards the village. “To Lute Village!”

“Yes!” the two race after him.

-X-

In Lute things were bad, zombies and dimensional wasps were swarming the area. The villagers were using farm tools and whatever they had on them, but it was no match for the zombies' weapons and armor.

“Ahhh, help me!” the zombie cut through the man's pitchfork and was readying another strike.

“Air Strike Shield!” the glowing shield appeared in front of the man blocking the zombie's attack. “Renji!” The red-head swooped in and cut the zombie down.

“Thank you!” the man says.

“Renji, help with the evacuation. Grimmjow, focus on taking down the wasps and healing the wounded.”

“What about you?” Renji asked.

“I'm gonna be bait,” he says with a smirk.

“That's crazy, I'll stay and fight,” Grimmjow says.

“No, I can't win on my own, so I need you two, to carry out this task and get back to me as soon as possible understand?”

“Yes, Ichigo-sama!” they two rush off. Ichigo transferred all their supply of potions to Grimmjow and Renji and prayed it would be enough.

Ichigo used Shield Prison to protect a mother and daughter from some dimensional hornets. Grimmjow cut them down with his claws. “When the spell dissipates run in the opposite direction of the rift,” Ichigo shouts.

“Its a hero, the shield hero has come to save us.”

Renji was leading the evacuation, cutting down monsters that got in their way. He used some of his healing potions to help those injured from the zombie attacks.

The Hornets were a real problem attacking in large swarms. Grimmjow was tearing through them as fast as he could, only for more to pop up. “You think you can beat me huh? I'm a pantereian Raaawrrr!” he spins like a buzzsaw and tears through a massive swarm. He stopped only to treat others,

Ichigo had made healing potions and antidotes, and a couple that was a bit of both. Grimmjow had seconds to act, he treated the wounded as best he could. Some of the swarms had gotten people so fast that they couldn't be helped. "You lot can't die, run the Shield Hero is here for you!" Grimmjow shouts.

After treating those he could, he directed them to Renji who continued to get everyone out. "This way, hurry!"

-X-

Ichigo tried to fight a zombie but as he suspected it was not possible. As he fought one off a huge beast came after him, swinging at him with an axe. Ichigo dodged and the zombie he was fighting got crushed instead.

'This one is a bit slow but powerful.' He slipped past the big bruiser and ran about. "Listen, everyone, I'll keep them distracted, move to the evacuation site." His plan was working, the zombies and Dimensional hornets were going after him.

Those that weren't Ichigo used Air Strike Shield to block their attacks. He saved a merchant who was about to be zombie chow. "Run quickly." His interference earned the attention of the monsters.

The giant hornets swooped at him, trying to pierce him with their massive stingers. Ichigo dove under some burning wood,

and broke a piece off to make a torch. “Come on, I'm right here, come and get me!”

His distraction was making it easier for Grimmjow and Renji to do their part. He looked around, there was so much destruction even from just a few minutes. He used the torch to fend off the Hornets not that it damaged them. 'I'm risking my life to protect total strangers, I'm a fool. Would you be proud of me?' he thinks thinking of his family.

Things weren't looking good, Ichigo was getting surrounded. “There's way too many of them, how can I minimize the damage to the village?” he spots a large wooden tower.

He used the Air Strike Shield to jump over zombies. Some men were still cornered by zombies. “Stay away!”

“Damn it stay away from us!” they were backed into a corner. The tower had a bell and Ichigo began to ring it.

The noise turned the zombie's attention and they left the people alone and began to swarm the wooden tower. “This is bad, it's not showing any signs of slowing down. What are those guys doing?”

He lured a massive horde into the town square. He doused the zombies and the tower in oil and dropped the torch. It burned consuming several dozen zombies and scaring off the Hornets. Using the rope shield he jumped, and landed kinda rough but made it out of the fire.

To Ichigo's shock, some of the more able-bodied men returned and formed ranks to try and help him. “You can help, try to pin them down till the evacuation is complete, from there you have to go, to protect your families and friends understand?” the men nod.

“I've had enough of these damn bugs!” He activated his Silk Spinner Shield. “Steel Thread!” he fired webbing and began to bind the bugs, they fell to the ground unable to move and ended up getting trampled by the villagers and zombies.

They were doing their best, but it seemed the big one brought friends, or the wave was getting worse. These massive heavily armored zombies were even cutting their own down trying to get to the villagers. “Run!” Ichigo shouts. “This one is too much for you.”

“But...” the men were hesitant.

“Think of your families!” his own flashed before his mind as he blocked the massive zombie's strike. “Don't die here for no reason!”

They pulled back, carrying the wounded and Ichigo soon became surrounded by two of the bruisers. 'This is bad?!' Renji and Grimmjow charged in. “Ichigo-sama!”

Renji cut off one's head, and Grimmjow busted out his sword to do the same. During this fight, their levels had increased.

Ichigo was now at 19, and Renji and Grimmjow were at 22 and 23.

“Amazing!”

“We cleared the path for you, hurry and evacuate,” Renji says.

“We got things here, the monsters will focus on us, get going,” Grimmjow added.

“Alright, please be safe.” the men retreated, heading to the evacuation site, far from the rift.

“This seems like bad odds, are you sure you don't wanna run?” Ichigo asked.

“Not without you,” Renji says.

“We fight together, let's kill them all!” Grimmjow says. They had evacuated everyone they could, now it was time to fight.

"Heroes don't run so they say, let's do this!" Ichigo readied his shield.

Even though they were surrounded they weren't gonna give up. Before they could fight though...

Flames were shot into the sky converging on one point.

“What is that?”

“Renji, Grimmjow, come here!” Ichigo shouted. The two obeyed, he pulled them close and wrapped them in his cloak.

He raised the Light Metal Shield up and created a small barrier around them.

Good timing too as the ball in the sky became a rain of flames pelting the ground and consuming everything in the area. Many monsters were killed, but thanks to Ichigo's shield they were safe. So many homes were destroyed he was glad they were able to evacuate everyone they could in time.

“Hahaha, we burned them all to death at once.” knights marched forward. “The Shield Hero? You're quite tough.”

“Tch, they didn't care that we were here?” the look on Renji's face shifted in an instant, he looked as furious as Grimmjow. The red-head left Ichigo's embrace and charged at the head knight, only to get blocked by a younger knight.

“Did you know Ichigo-sama was here?” he growled. “Answer me, depending on your answer I will have your head.”

The younger knight told the others to draw their swords. “Are you with the Shield Hero?”

“I am one of Ichigo-sama's blades. None may disrespect him in my presence.”

“All we knew were the monsters were gathered here in one place, we didn't know why, but it was an opportunity to blast them all at once.” The older knight says. “And besides, he

came out of it just fine, so what's the problem?" Grimmjow escaped Ichigo's hold.

"How dare you!?" Grimmjow roared, he readied his own blade.

"Grimmjow stop, Renji enough!" Ichigo shouts.

"You think you can point your blades at royal knights? You filthy demi-humans."

"What kind of knight neglects the people they are sworn to defend?" Renji snaps back.

"Drop it!" Ichigo says. "It's not over yet."

A new wave of zombies had come and they were a mix of the armored and the big bruisers. "If you morons want to act like that, I can just sit back and watch as you lot become monster feed. That doesn't sound too bad!"

"D-don't falter, stay in formation." just two attacks from the bruisers caused the formation to break. The old knight was about to be killed when Ichigo stepped in.

"Want to die an honorable death in battle?" he asked while blocking the strike. "Renji, Grimmjow," the two charge, Renji cutting down the first massive zombie, Grimmjow cutting down the second that was going after the younger knight.

"We'll buy you time, use it to get back information."

The trio moved in perfect sync, it almost looked like a dance instead of a battle. Grimmjow had strong jumping power so with a quick Air Strike Shield, Grimmjow was able to jump from that and slaughter the Hornets, and when he came down crush some zombies before jumping back to Ichigo. “This is getting fun!” Ichigo blocked projectiles, it seems some zombies were using bows and arrows. Renji moved with Ichigo cutting through the zombies as they made way.

A young knight was in awe of their impressive skills and cooperation. “Leave this to the Shield Hero, we are going to where the other four heroes are!” the older knight says.

The knight that had blocked Renji's attack earlier, didn't budge, he watched these three fight so hard for this village. “Men, we are gonna help the Shield Hero, Phoenix Formation!”

“Byakuya, what are you doing?” The young knight removed his helmet to reveal long dark hair.

“My job!” he rallied some of the knights, and they began using the phoenix formation and pushed the monsters back. The older knight left with a few others.

-X-

“Tsunami Slash!” Uryu slashed at the boss monster, using water to extend his blade farther.

“Crimson Arrows!” Bazz-B fired a barrage of flaming arrows that pelted the boss monster.

“Tornado Slicer!” Cang Du spun his axe, building up wind and launching it at the boss.

“I'll finish it off, Lightning Spear!” Askin charged dealing the killing blow.

With the boss dead, the crack closed up, and the remaining monsters were picked off by the party members in that area.

“That was easy, I bet the next boss will be even easier!” Askin says.

“If we keep leveling up between waves it'll be easy as pie.” Cang Du says.

“Where's Ichigo?” Bazz-B asked.

“Huh, that's right I haven't seen Ichigo anywhere.” he jokingly looks around for him.

“It only makes sense that he isn't here,” Bambietta says. “He'd just be in everyone's way.” Bazz-B narrows his eyes at her.

“You're right!” Askin laughs.

“Well done heroes!” the knights say upon arrival.

“So you finally came a bit late don't you think?” Cang Du points out.

“Don't say that the king has prepared a banquet for you, to celebrate your victory. Plus the rewards for defeating the wave as promised.”

“Right let's go,” Askin says, and the groups head off, following the knights back to the castle, all except for Bazz-B, who heard from his Scout that a village was nearby and that Ichigo and his party was there.

“There was a village nearby and you didn't tell me?”

“I'm sorry sir, I was focused on the rift.” Bazz-B sighed.

“If I had known there was a village nearby I would have helped.” he punched his palm in frustration.

-X-

The Miasma dissipated from the sky, and Renji and Grimmjow finished off the few straggling monsters that were left behind.

The village was a mess, the people returned and began treating the wounded and caring for the dead. Tears were shed, and the lost lives mourned. Ichigo looked to Byakuya, among all the chaos the two said nothing. He simply walked off with his fellow knights.

“Ichigo-sama,” Renji and Grimmjow approached him. “We finished off all the monsters.”

“And we gave out medicine, so the wounded should be okay.”

“Good job...” Ichigo says.

“Did...did we win?” Renji asked. That was hard to say, it didn't feel like a victory.

“Shield Hero-sama!” The leader of the village approached them. “We couldn't have made it without you.” he bows to Ichigo.

“Thank your lucky stars, not me.”

“No, your presence is what helped us survive.”

“We'll never forget what you've done for us.” Ichigo turned his back as they all gave a bow to him before leaving. Renji and Grimmjow saw families that survived together, some that were chipped but still standing.

“They looked truly grateful,” Renji says and Ichigo remained quiet. “We prevented some kids from going through what I did, right?”

“Yeah,” Ichigo finally speaks.

“Their village is trashed but so long as they are alive they can rebuild,” Grimmjow says.

“We killed lots of monsters.”

“We fought as hard as we could.”

“You did great.” he pets them both on the head. Renji cries, and Grimmjow sniffled but chose to hug Ichigo and nuzzle

his neck instead. Renji joined him and the trio embraced. It wasn't perfect but they did their best.

-X-

The Dragon Hourglass completes its cycle, turning over and as the sands spill from the top, the countdown to the next wave has already begun.

To be continued...Chapter 6 Duel! The Slave Crests Are Removed?!

While the other heroes celebrate their victory Ichigo is focused more on learning about the waves. They leveled up some more from battle, and some of the monster parts were fed to his shield. Things go from quiet to a storm as Askin challenges Ichigo to free Renji and Grimmjow from his hold. Ichigo of course refuses but the King forces his hand, trying to take them away by force. Ichigo agrees, but will hate consume him and turn him into the villain they see him as or can Renji and Grimmjow save their master from...himself!

Ichigo's shields

Orange Shield: +2 Defense

Yellow Shield: +2 Defense

Red Shield: +4 Defense

Leaf Shield: Collection Skill + 1

Mush Shield: Plant Identification 1

Fish Shield: Angling Skill + 1

Green Mush Shield: Apprentice's Compounding

Blue Mush Shield: Simple Compounding Recipes

Petit Medicine Shield: Raises Medicine's Effects

Petit Poison Shield: Poison Resistance (Small)

Rope Shield: Can turn to rope to be used. Air Strike Shield Skill

Silk Spinner Shield: Armor Stat Boost +1. Silk Weaving Skill + 1, Steel Thread Skill.

Two-Headed Black Dog Shield: Alert Shield Skill, Dog Bite Skill

Wood Shield: Lumbering Techniques 1

Rock Shield: Defense + 3

Pipe Shield: Shield Prison Skill

Pickaxe Shield: Mining Skill +1

Egg Shield: Culinary Boost

Flying Egg Shield: Beginner Cooking Recipes

Calorie Shield: stamina boost

Energy Shield: SP boost (small)

Energetic Shield: Stamina consumption decrease

Rabbit Leather Shield: Agility Boost +1

Pikyu Pikyu Shield: Beginner's Rank's Weapon Repair Techniques 1

Butterfly Shield: Paralysis Resistance (Small)

Light Metal Shield: Defense + 1 Magical Enchantment Defense

Dimensional Locust Shield: defense boost of 6. Dimensional Bee Shield: agility boost + 6.

Bee Needle Shield: attack boost + 1, skills; Shield of Needles and Bee's Poison (Paralysis)

Beast Needle Shield: ATK + 2

Dimensional Corpse Eater Demon Shield: Decay Resistance Small