Ririko made the first move. With a flick of her wrist, a frigid blizzard engulfed this portion of the city. She came barreling through the storm, and I met her fist straight on. The impact cleared the snow around us for a moment. For not really being a fighter, she sure as hell packed a punch. My arm went numb, and I had to dig my heels into the ground.

"I hope you didn't forget about me!" Anya jumped Ririko from behind, but a trail of ice burst into spikes to block her way. She didn't care, running through it all like a raging bull.

The ice bitch vanished into a mist, and Anya nailed me in the gut instead.

"Anya… What the fuck?" I wheezed on my hands and knees.

"Shit. Ririko was just here a second ago!"

We both looked up to find a massive block of ice falling toward us. Together, fists clenched, we shattered the cube into harmless pieces.

"Kawa! Go after the sultan and bring Loraine back!" I shouted.

The elemental wolf leaped through the blizzard, unaffected by the cold or terrain. Like Ririko, the fur coat thickened with ice and made her seem much larger than she normally was. As she pounced in their direction, the sultan's muscle-bound groupie emerged from the blizzard and wrestled her to the ground.

"It's hopeless," Sultan Yusef's voice echoed. "Your lives, this city… all of it pales in comparison to *her* might! You witnessed first hand at Kazaar, did you not? The demon lord is no ordinary demon. She might as well be a god!"

Just then, roars bellowed across Cynderace. Flying monsters like dragons soared over the city, breathing fire and laying waste to everything their magic touched. One of them headed in the direction of my house.

"Look, Micchi!" Ririko cackled, unreachable from the sky thanks to being able to fly. "We're giving your city a makeover! Ahahaha!"

"Anya, how's that batting arm of yours?" I asked.

"As good as your pitching one," Anya assured me confidently.

I gave her my ice-made bat, she sprinted down the road and got into a batting stance. When was the last time we played like this? Probably been ages.

"What are they doing? Stop them!" Sultan Yusef demanded.

"Whatever it is won't work. I'm way stronger than the both of you combined," Ririko taunted.

"That so? You got some fucking nerve coming into my turf and wrecking shit up, taking my woman, and hurting Kawa. I'm gonna teach you both some manners the only way I know

how." I pitched a curveball of screeching elemental energy at Anya. She swung hard, but it careened right and devastated a swarm of demons while lighting up the night.

Rirko, Sultan Yusef, and his guard's jaws dropped.

"Ahhh, man. That was just a warm-up. Give me straight this time!" Anya yelled.

"As if I'd let you!" Ririko intensified the blizzard in panic and conjured a gigantic spike of ice to throw at me.

I pitched a hard straight this time, and Anya hit the sweet spot on the bat, breaking the sound barrier. The ball shattered Ririko's spell on the way up and zipped past her face only inches away.

"I'm getting the hang of it!" Anya wound up the bat for another hit. "Third time's the charm. One more for a home run, Micchi!"

Ririko threw volley after volley of spells at us, but Kawa broke free from the sultan's bodyguard to intercept them with a fiery breath.

"Good girl, Kawa!" I locked eyes with Anya, and we reached an unspoken understanding the instant I launched the ball. It left my fingertips spinning like crazy.

Anya struck the curveball, causing it to fly in a wide arc right for Ririko. Her eyes snapped open. She raised multiple barriers of ice, but the ball went through all of them.

"It's just a stupid ball! You guys won't hit me for shit!" Ririko cackled as she flew away to dodge it.

"Too bad that ain't any regular old baseball." I smirked.

Using the momentum from Anya's powerball of a hit, I put my all into guiding the ball after Ririko. She flew higher to avoid it. They were like two rockets rising straight into the sky, but I was gaining on her.

"Gotcha." I clenched my fist and exploded the ball. The shockwave that followed blew flying demons out of the air, unsuspecting people off their feet, and tiles from rooftops.

Ririko plummeted in the distance, a smoking mess. Her blizzard dissipated, meaning she was down for the count.

"Good shit, Micchi. Helluva an arm you still got." Anya clasped my hand.

"Your swings need work," I teased.

"Alright, you little brat. You're getting too cocky for your own good. We still need to finish this," she said, turning to Sultan Yusef and his bodyguard just as Kawa was tossed over to us.

The spire bells began to ring, and with each chime, a wave of energy rippled outwards from the city and healed our injuries. Whatever Yui did must have got them working again.

"You can beg and cry, but it ain't saving you from a beating." I glowered.

"If you think you've won, you're sorely mistaken." Sultan Yusef scoffed, but the sweat beading on his face despite the cold atmosphere showed otherwise. "I have with me a man who can move mountains. The Ramaleiks' personal problem-solver. You two might be strong, but he—"

Anya dashed in. She picked the big dark elf up by his pants and arm, then chucked him at my feet. Dazed from the sudden attack, he stared up at me in surprise.

"Ramaleiks, huh?" I stomped on his face hard enough to crater the ground and put him unconscious.

The smug grin disappeared from Sultan Yusef's face, which was now quickly turning pale.

"What's the matter, Sultan?" Anya asked. "Shit your pants so bad you became a lighter shade of elf?"

"This isn't over! I have men all over the city! Enough to hold it hostage!" he cried.

"You heard 'em. That true?" I cast my eyes over to the edge of the street, where Oaks was dragging out a dark elf and beastling in each hand.

"We worked all night, and they didn't know what hit them. The city guards are taking over the rest as we speak, Boss!" Oaks said.

Releasing those good for nothings turned out to be a good idea. I just needed to round them back up later. The tides were turning. Now that the adventurers and city guards regrouped, they were mounting a strong enough offensive to fight back. All that was left—

Sultan Yusef erupted into laughter. Quietly at first, then it turned into a hearty, bellowing guffaw.

"Awfully happy for someone who's about to get his shit kicked back into him. Step away from Loraine and come down here, and I might be nice enough to only beat you half to death." I glared.

"Did you really think we only came here for my niece? No, I'm—"

I climbed onto the wagon and slugged the sultan across the face. He went flying out the back and rolled through the streets. Lying on the floor, bound and gagged, Loraine was still unconscious. At the very least, she didn't look hurt.

Kawa jumped in after me, causing the entire wagon to lurch from her weight. But she nuzzled into Loraine and whimpered.

"Get Loraine to the guild hall, Kawa." I lifted Loraine onto the wolf's back and silently apologized for letting this happen.

As they took off, I hopped down to confront the sultan. Anya was already on top of him with a foot over his chest.

"Before we get started on your beatdown, we've got some questions that need answering. Why the hell did you attack Cynderace for?" I asked.

"Why don't you… take a look at the precious spires." Sultan Yusef smiled.

The instant we looked up, all five spires exploded. Everything came crumbling down. Dust and debris were carried downwind. Screams could be heard from afar. Neither of us could believe it. Cynderace's monumental backdrops were gone, replaced by the night.

Was that the sultan's and Ririko's goal all along?

"No, Yui! I have to go help!" Anya took off running towards the toppled spires.

Not only Yui, but there were a lot more people inside like Kain, Mildred, and Kaoru.

When I lifted Sultan Yusef up to face me, he began to melt and slip from my fingers like goo.

"It is not so hard to outsmart a brute like you who knows only to speak with their fists. I'm sure we shall see each other again. Be seeing you." Sultan Yusef's patronizing grin was the last to melt away. The pool of liquid turned into water and soaked into the dirt.

"Get back here, you fucker!" I punched a hole in the ground where he disappeared into.

The counterattack that Cynderace had put up was now being pushed back by an even larger horde of demons. Mages and flying beastlings battled monsters from above. On the ground, people were being chased into their homes, and adventurers and soldiers alike were having a hard time holding their own.

All over the street, snarling demons were coming out of the woodworks.

"You're all goddamn eyesores, and I'm pissed the fuck off right now." I cracked my knuckles, stopping the demons in their tracks. "I'm gonna show you who the real demon is."