

The sounds of fighting filled his ears and set his heart aflame. Even from here Volley could hear the sounds of combat going down within the crossroad's arena. The sounds were distant and brilliant, giving Volley a taste of what was to come.

Volley's face swelled with a boyish toothy grin, sunlight scintillated across his light blue eyes as he cheerily marched through the Phoenix Coastline. Abundant stalls, tricky dealers, fishy folk, and travelers flowed through the streets and passed by as the young oni child took his first real looks at the Crossroads.

Truly, this was a unique place, to bring all these people together in such a way, it was brilliant! This and other similar thoughts roamed Volley's mind as he engorged himself on visual fine colors and curiosities in store around each and every corner.

Billy Brent Braimer, or Long Nose Billy as friends and fellow cross guards called him, had his thumbs firmly tucked under the traps of his uniform and mozied alongside Volley, yammering with him about all the cool things there was to see.

The Phoenix Coastline itself, from Volley's perspective, was a grand gateway to the wonders the Crossroads might hold.

Long Nose Billy waved his hand in front of him, pointing to multiple distant landmarks telling Volley. "Aaand that over there is the Aristocrat District, I actually live there, believe it not, but it is not as fancy as you may think eh, it is just where the Crossguard Lookout's are."

Volley followed Billy's hasty pointing, trying to take it all in as Billy described his surroundings. "So you are part of some sort of group? How many of you are there?"

"Lets just say there are enough of us eh, we protect this place and the interests of the one who runs it all. Glory to Inari! We just really want to help out." Billy explained proudly

"Whoa that's so cool! I could use all the help I can get!" Volley cheered, "Do you guys fight a lot, are you strong!?"

"Oh yea, all us Crossgaurd's are basically officially recognized buttkickers." Billy said with an eager grin, jabbing at the air with multiple clean successive punches.

"Great stuff! Good to know I'm surrounded by strong people, that means there is a lot worth doing here." Volley clapped encouragingly at Billy's form. "I wonder if all the Crossguards are as cool as you Billy, maybe I'll sign up!!"

“Whoa there kid, you just got here.” Billy said, giving Volley a playful jab on the shoulder. “Besides, you are already a challenger in the tournament, I’m sure you will have more than you can handle soon enough.”

Volley blinked, as if he lost focus of why he was here for a moment. Volley let the conversation between him and Billy hang for a moment as they entered a particularly noisy section of the Phoenix Coast, nearly reaching the next stage of their journey across the Crossroads.

“So I can’t help but realize that you seem a little hazy on some details eh. I can tell you have never been here before and potentially never heard of it either. Do not worry, you are not the first nor the last who has found yourself upon the Crossroad’s mysterious shores.” Billy explained, trying to come from a place of helpfulness and security.

“Well, it’s not that.” Volley stretched out his words, thinking about exactly what he wanted to say next. “My aunt Saki lives here, she might be the reason I was invited at all. Aunt Saki is legendary in the eyes of all the people from back home and in my family, so I know a little about the Crossroads. I never looked for Aunt Saki, but I couldn’t let the chance to meet her pass by.”

“Well well, that is quite the story. To think you would be related to Miss Saki, I suppose it is obvious now tho haha. Well Volley, if you would like to see your aunt, then the Fox’s Den is where you need to look. Conveniently enough, it just so happens to be the tallest building in the entirety of the Crossroads.” Billy explained, pointing towards the magnificent structure which stood tall behind the Cross Colosseum.

The duo ascended the stone cut staircases, entering and then crossing the aristocrat district before using a shortcut Billy was well acquainted with to pass quickly into the business district.

As Volley and Billy walked towards the Fox Den, the colosseum loomed even closer. It was a colossal structure to contain the colossal duels going down within. It was quiet now, no sounds of fighting ringing out into the air. Volley looked with wide eyes as they passed by, really absorbing the details of the circular arena and its many grand doorways inviting all within. For the first time Volley felt unsure about where his feet had taken him, this feeling lingered with him as they both walked through the colosseum’s shadow.

“The Cross Colosseum. Terrifying is it not? Like all beautiful things ought to be eh?” Billy said in a lowered voice, leaning closer to Volley to share that opinion with only him.

Volley let those words sink in, they only added to the mysterious energy Volley felt from the structure.

Billy and Volley talked very little until they finally reached the doors of the Fox's Den. A doorway of the highest quality and craftsmanship greeted them. Beyond it a marvelous multi lounged bar awaited. It was filled with people of all shapes and sizes, the air was thick with conversation and banter, hardy laughter, and the occasional surprised shriek was all heard from the rabble. Despite the bar's great size, its clientele were legion and occupied much of the inside of the bar.

"Alright, it is your time now Volley. If you go in there, you will find your aunt. I will go ask some questions and figure out who your opponent is tomorrow morning and return once I find out." Billy said, straightening his back as he addressed Volley, a determined smile upon his face.

Volley looked towards the entryway to the Fox's Den, he gulped back his apprehension and offered Billy a thankful smile. "Couldn't have done it without you Billy, thank you for getting me here. Wish me luck?"

"Ha, I'll save my wishes of fortune for when you step onto the Cross Colosseum eh." Billy Brent Braimer simply stated with no hesitation and without another word the Crossguard walked off, back towards the colosseum they just passed by.

Volley watched Billy walk away for a moment, before returning his gaze to the doorway of the Fox's Den. He took a deep breath and walked inside.

The smell of various sweet, sour, and full bodied drinks seemed to make themselves at home in the airspace within the Fox's Den. Fun of all types was participated in by the various guests, dancing, games of dexterity, music, storytelling, and people celebrating important events such as great achievements and birthdays. As Volley slowly moved across the Fox's Den, towards the crowded bar in the back, he began to realize that this place was more than a bar. This was a meeting place of important and interesting people, travelers, heroes, and vagabonds all drawn here to this nexus of alcohol.

After skirting past a man passed out at his table, the crowd at the bar parted before Volley and there she was.

Saki was an Oni of superior size to Volley. Her muscle mass alone must have outweighed him by two times. Her back was currently to Volley, he could see the gold band that held her imposing hair style together, the bulk of her shoulder muscles flexed with her each and every motion. Her tail shifted side to side, unconsciously moving either on its own or by Saki's own habits. Behind her was a wall filled with bottles, they came in a great assortment of colors and shapes, she was able to reach every shelf, plucking bottles from their places, pouring the contents and then placing them back perfectly in place. These trained motions were extremely natural to her, formed over many years working behind the bar.

Volley was awestruck at the apex oni before him. He took a few timid steps forward, but did not dare touch the bar as he looked wide eyed up to Saki.

Before Volley found the courage to speak, he was spoken too. "Bought time squirt, I was wondering if you'd come running."

Saki's words could have swept Volley off his feet alone, he found himself dumbfounded, unable to react to Saki's words.

"Typical for us Oni's, we run towards things rather easily. Most of the time... willingly." Saki gazed over her shoulder giving Volley a view of her profile. Saki's face was so rigid and strong it could have been carved from timeless red rock. She narrowed her intense eye on Volley, their gazes finally meeting. "The thing that I am wondering is if you came running into something you are not prepared for?"

Volley had been struck by Saki's words up to this point, but the moment Saki asked her question, Volley responded passionately. "No way!" He slapped the bar with both hands to accentuate his point, making a decent noise upon impact.

There was a moment of pause, neither Saki nor Volley moved. Saki's indifferent enigmatic eye held on Volley. Volley in turn gave Saki as brave a look as he could, it was a candle flame to the sheer inferno that was Saki's simple stare.

"Pfft haahaa!" Amazingly, Saki broke first, melting her stern demeanor down into something inviting and pleasant.

Volley let out a breath he had not realized he had been holding, he was relieved as the intensity of the situation lifted off his shoulders.

'Clunk' the sound of a glass cup being solidly placed is heard as Saki presents Volley with some sort of concoction she had been working on seemingly before he made his way up to the bar. "It's been a while, kid. I hope you still like the sweet stuff, booz are off the limits. I don't want to have to wrestle your mother... again."

Volley's face sprouted a smile as he eagerly grabbed the cup before him and downed its contents almost instantly with a few quick chugs. It was delicious, it was a mix of sweet fruit juices with certain zesty sour additions. The smells of berries and apples filled Volley's nose as a more deliciously complicated flavor exploded in his mouth.

"Gah! Wow thanks! I definitely needed that." Volley said, gasping for breath after finishing the whole cup. "What's in it?"

"Lots of things Volley, there are an endless amount of tasty things out there, one just needs the courage to try them all. Welcome to the Fox's Den kid, here's a menu." Saki said, handing Volley a menu she pulled out of her apron.

"Thanks!" Volley said, opening it, quickly skimming over its contents. "Btw it's uh.. It's good to see you! It has been so long, like really long!"

Saki places a hand on her chin, raising an eyebrow in contemplation. "Time works funny here, but I guess you can say that. The Crossroads is a mysterious place, just from walking through a bit of it, I'm sure you've noticed."

"Yes, I have noticed, it's different from anywhere else I have been. But I think that makes it a worthwhile place to visit! Even if I had to join a tournament to get here." Volley explained, climbing onto one of the bar seats, looking up to Saki with big fascinated eyes.

Saki grinned down at Volley, basking a little in the young Oni's excited energy before saying. "We will have to see if you feel that way after tomorrow. First day of the tournament, that is when the real fighting begins."

"I'll get a first hand experience! Either I knock the socks off my opponent or get my socks knocked off! Just like dad would say." Volley placed his elbows against the bar, leaning in to get closer to Saki.

Saki's kind smile grew smaller, but did not disappear. She gave Volley a long look, up and down, doing her best to get a better idea of just who her nephew had become since the last time she saw him. "You always had a spark Volley, tho I gatta warn you kid, we both know you are tough, but you'll need something more than just being tough to make it out there."

Saki pointed a finger towards and beyond the doors. The direction of the Cross Colosseum. "Out there in the colosseum, you will need more and then some. It's gonna be dangerous, are you up for that?"

Volley thought about it for a moment, a confident expression crossed his face and he looked Saki in her large wise eyes. "I said I would do it and there is a great prize. So I don't see why I shouldn't give it a try at least."

Saki lost her smile now, putting on a poker face, pointing towards Volley. "See, that mentality is how trouble starts. I had something to prove so I stepped onto that ring. A fire drives you Volley, the same one that burns in the hearts of every Oni. I am not your mom, I am your aunt, I'll make sure you are safe. I can fix every part of the body with my elixirs and spirits, but I can't fix a broken heart."

The way Saki said this in a stalwart deep tone. It shook Volley, that uncertainty he felt when looking towards the colosseum began to creep back up his spine. He found himself unable to look Saki in the eyes and he pondered her words.

Just then, breaking Volley's train of thought was a voice from behind him.

"Ah, there you are Volley. I see you found who you were looking for eh?"

Billy Brent Braimer squeezed his way through the crowd of drinkers and approached the part of the bar Volley was sitting at, reaching an empty seat next to him. The oni boy looked over and smiled at his new friend as he joined him at the bar.

"Hello Miss Saki, good afternoon." Billy said respectful to Saki.

"Crossguard" Saki said with a nod to Billy, she looked back to Volley. "I'll let you think about what I said, I'm gonna make sure all these hooligans are respecting my bar."

As Saki walked off, Billy leaned an elbow against the bar and looked at Volley, giving the boy a confusing look. "So I found out who you are up against."

"Really? Who?" Volley asked, preparing himself for what Billy had to say.

"She is a red headed woman with emerald eyes eh. Her name is Vilivian. I have not seen her for myself yet, but I imagine we will both get our chances tomorrow." Billy explained, an eager smile on his face. "You still feeling up to the tournament? You can pull out any time if you are not feeling up to it."

Volley didn't give the immediate enthusiastic response he had given Saki prior. After a few moments thinking about it to himself, Volley gave Billy an accepting confident smile "I came all the way to this great place and I was essentially handed a chance to potentially do something great. I feel like it would be silly not to at least give it a try."

Billy nodded in approval to Volley's words. Appreciating the willingness to go forward. "I would like to be there with you as you walk out, if that is okay. I did promise I would wish you luck before you fight, right?"

Volley gave Billy a toothy large grin and nodded enthusiastically. Accepting the long nosed Crossgaurd's invitation.

At that moment Saki walked back up to the both of them. She silently handed Billy a simple glass of water, which he eagerly accepted.

"So I have something for you." Saki stated, presenting a long object wrapped in what looked like an old blanket. "I kept this around for sentimental reasons, but I think you need it now."

Volley's eyes grew to the size of dinner plates, reaching eagerly for the gift Saki presented before him. The moment she let go, Volley could feel the weight of the object, surprising given its size. He unwrapped it, eagerly pulling away the blanket to reveal a weapon.

It was like a baseball bat, made entirely out of iron, with steel studs all along its face. It was old and used, old signs of battle marked its head, its handle was wrapped in an old yet tightly wrapped leather. Volley could barely believe what he had been given, he ran a finger across the steel studs in the weapons face.

"A Kanabo... and it isn't too big either!" Volley said, holding it in his hands properly, wielding it to feel out its weight. This weapon would be difficult for any normal person to use, but for Volley, it was perfect.

"I used that when I was really young, did right by me, hopefully it will do right by you too Volley. You can use it till you don't need it anymore. Then you can give it back." Saki said, holding a certain kindness in her voice, she smiled warmly as Volley admired the weapon.

"Absolutely!" Volley declared, standing atop the chair he was sitting on, both hands on the handle of the Kanabo. "I'll show you aunt Saki that I can be as cool as you! I promise, I'll show you what I can do!"

The Cross Colosseum was bursting at the seams with excited and elated people. It was a circle of cheering loudness as every seat was filled with those who came to watch a fight.

It was a bright sunny day, with only a few lazy clouds drifting in the blue expanse above.

Volley stood next to the tunnel entrance into the colosseum, the noises of the fans echoed in the entry tunnel which opened to the colosseum's center. He poked his head out, gazing at all the fans and people who filled the seats. Until he found the one he was looking for. A strong female oni, still wearing her bartender outfit, sat in a seat close to an exit, she wore a poker face and held her arms crossed patiently waiting for the show to begin. Volley smiled upon finally noticing her, he pulled back into the tunnel giggled to himself from the sheer excitement of it all.

"Ready to go?" The voice of Billy said. Volley looked over and saw the Crossgaurd wearing his own smirk, standing there with his thumbs tucked into the straps on the front of his clothing. "There be monsters out there eh. Ready to face'em?"

"Right now I feel like I was born ready. I've been wondering about this Vilivian red head all night, I wonder how strong she must be to be here!" Volley speculated energetically.

The Crossgaurds enigmatic smile almost seemed to glow in the light of the tunnel "Well Volley, we are all about to get front row seats to see for yourself, you just happen to be in the splash zone."

****BONG!****

Both Volley and Billy looked towards the entry way as the starting gong was struck.

"Well, this is it, now I'll say good luck to you Volley. In this colosseum, you'll always need it." Billy Brent Braimer gave Volley one last thumbs up and a confident tilt of his chin.

Volly chuckled at Billy's gester, before shooting the Crossgaurd his own thumbs up.

****BONG!****

"Yup! That's right! It's that time again folks! Welcome back to another great day for the Crossroads Tournament! My name is Ms. X! Pretty please give me your full attention!"

A roar of cheers swirled through the colosseum like a rogue wave as Ms. X appeared, standing proud, amongst the stands. Mic in hand, a cute bubbling smile upon her face, and a pep in step was what greeted the crowd. Many were obvious fans of Ms. X and seemed fully enthralled as she took the stage.

Ms. X skipped with a jolly jaunt, ending with a well placed swing of her hips before announcing. "Today we have the first round of what will hopefully be an exciting competition this time around! Not like that every competition is always super exciting! Isn't that right~!"

Ms. X held her microphone out to the audience, who answered with a resounding wave of yeses and I love you's.

"Oh yea! That is what I want to hear! Folks, I don't think we should wait another moment to meet today's duelists. So please give them a Crossroads greeting when I call them onto the field! Let us practice that Crossroads GREETING EVERYONE!"

The entire colosseum seemed to vibrate with the sheer force of the cheers and whistles, people stomped their feet and clapped their hands. Ms. X holds a satisfied, almost proud expression as she lets the crowd go wild.

"WOO that's right! Now that's what I like to call good PRACTICE for an actual Crossroads greeting!" Ms. X placed a hand on her hip and winked at the audience as she said that, getting more cheering and some laughs.

"But I think we've waited long enough to meet today's fighters. So, ladies and gentleman, without further adieu." Ms. X said almost cheekily, closing her eyes for a moment as she waited for the moment to build in drama. "From the west tunnel. With hair the color of fire and eyes like emeralds amongst embers. We have a warrior of a timeless nature. People of the Crossroads, please welcome Vilivian of Lilith!"

The very moment Ms. X finishes her introduction, Vilivian of Lilith emerges from the west tunnel.

Her striking emerald eyes seemed to pierce into Volley even from here as Vilivian walked with purpose towards her spot in the colosseum's center. With each graceful advance Vilivian made, her braid gently swayed like a pendulum behind her. In the sunlight, it almost glowed.

The crowd exploded in cries as she walked onto the battlefield, but she didn't seem to pay the screaming onlookers too much mind. She continued until she reached her designated starting spot and only then did she scan the people around her. Her emerald eyes studied those in the audience, noticing details that normal people would never be able to make out. After nearly making a three hundred and sixty degree spin, assessing the people in the stands, she calmly reached behind her and pulled forth a large blade. It was a clean sharp looking sword, masterly crafted for a warrior of unknown purpose.

Vilivian held it into the air, allowing all around her to see it, before sinking the blade into the earth at her feet with a quick decisive action.

Then Vilivian looked towards Ms. X and waiting patiently for what was to happen next.

“Oh yea, what an entrance! Squeee, so cool, I love contestants that can really bring that style! Now for our second contestant! From the east tunnel! A young man who found a passion for the fantastical and amazing! He’s a traveler, someone many people here at the Crossroads and relate too! Welcome to the field, Volley! The Oni!” Ms. X yelled to the crowd, who roared in response.

Volley took to the field, the sun streaking over him as he exited the shadows of the tunnel. He clenched his Kanabo in one hand, but with the other waved towards the crowd. Giving them all a large smile as he jogged onto the field.

Volley did not take too long to get to his spot on the field. Getting into place, he finally looked Vilivian in the eyes. Vilivian looked him up and down, but her expression did not change nor did her posture. The only thing Volley thought he noticed within her green eyes was perhaps a look of distaste.

Volley gave Vilivian a nervous smile, trying not to let his nerves get the better of him in this important moment. “Hi!” Volley said meekly, before offering an awkward hand to shake.

“Hi.” Vilivian said, unmoving from her poster, she eyed Volley’s hand suspiciously for a moment. Before reluctantly taking it and giving Volley’s hand a single shake.

Volley couldn’t control the shiver that ran through his body, he couldn’t place the texture of her hand, how different it was from his rough warm hands.

The moment the two shook hands, the crowd's cheers reached an all time high. The anticipation had finally built to this moment.

Volley released Vilivian’s and stepped back into his place, unsure what to do next. He turned his head to Ms. X who seemed to be getting slightly distracted by fawning fans.

Once Ms. X noticed both Volley and Vilivian had shaken hands and were in position, she brought her microphone up to her mouth again. “Alright! Don’t you just love to see some sportsmanship between fighters! Now then, I believe we can get ready to begin! Remember the rules are simple, fight until one of our fighters gives up or is incapacitated! Good luck to you both!!!”

Ms. X floated a few feet off the ground and held a hand up to the sky. Above her, a massive number three appears in thin air. “Here we go! Three, two...”

The floating numbers counted down in cohesion with Ms. X’s words. Volley looked back to Vilivian, who was now giving him a curious look, but still with that same unlying distaste he couldn’t quite place the origin of.

“...aaaaand ONE!”

BONG!!!!!!

Ms. X’s count ended, the sound of the went off again for a third time. The battle had begun.

If Volley hadn’t been quite literally staring at Vilivian, what happened next may have done him in instantly.

The oni boy felt an instant moment of panic the moment the count ended, because Vilivian was already on him. He did not even blink his eyes, he did not have the time, before Vilivian naturally just flowed into position and took her strike.

There was a great cracking sound as Vilivian’s bare hand connected with Volley’s chest. It sent the boy flying right across the colosseum field, almost back to where he entered from. Instead of being sent careening into the east entryway, Volley slammed into the rock walls of the colosseum with a terrible impact.

The whole audience gasped and quieted by the sudden and violent display. Everyone in the audience strained their necks to try and get a better view.

Volley gasped as a small amount of blood spilled onto his lip. His back was planted into the stone wall behind him, spider-like fractures creeping up in every direction around the impact site. Volley held his Kanabo with both hands, holding it above his chest. A small stream of what looked like smoke seemed to just exude where Volley had just barely blocked Vilivian’s devastating attack.

Volley, wide eyed, looked down at himself and the spot on the Saki’s Kanabo where Vilivian’s strike had impacted. A new battle scar had been added to the weapon. Volley then looked up and towards the center of the colosseum where Vilivian stood, arms crossed, standing where Volley previously stood.

Volley suddenly seemed to realize exactly what just happened and pulled himself from the wall, breaking more of it in order to drop to the ground. He landed on his knee and took a moment to breathe. The wind had been knocked almost completely out of him. What he didn't do, was take his eyes off Vilivian, now knowing that to do so might mean his end.

Then there was silence, neither moved for a moment, they just stared at each other. It was only finally broken when the voice of Ms. X filled the colosseum. "Incredible! If I didn't have my eyes plastered on what just happened I would have for sure missed it! What an incredible first attack from Vilivian! It has sent Volley reeling!"

The crowd began to cheer again, shrieking out and applauding such an incredible attack.

Volley stole a glance at the audience, he felt his heart drop as he realized that Vilivian was already gaining the support of the crowd, cheering and begging her to attack him like that again! He gritted his teeth as he used the Kanabo to push himself to his feet with it.

It was the moment Volley began to push himself to his feet that he felt something, a mistake, he had made a mistake, he felt it but didn't know why. All his senses flared, every warning signal went off in his brain. Something old and primal in his blood was almost trying to tell him something. His eyes enlarged as wide as they would go, staring directly towards Vilivian.

Sure enough, she once again seemed to glide across the battlefield, almost floating towards Volley as she moved at supersonic speeds in his direction. Volley could now see her eyes as she came for him, they were focused and deep. As she blurred forward, her eyes seemed less like human eyes and more like the eyes of an ancient predator.

Volley realized it now, his body was screaming at him in this way because that is exactly what Vilivian was. She was a predator, he stepped into a colosseum and they had set a true lion on him.

Vilivian's charge ended in a high impact precise strike of her fist. It was a strike that could easily bore through solid earth, which it did. Vilivian's strike slammed into the floor of the Cross Colosseum, marking the floor of the battle field with a destructive mark fit for Vilivian's might.

The half matriarchal knew her attack didn't land the moment she didn't feel breaking bones or obliterated flesh. From her perspective, Volley had almost completely

disappeared, which did not suit Vilivian's fancy. She pulled her fist out of the earth and immediately scanned the area all around herself, but her eyes failed to notice Volley before her ears did.

Vilivian could hear the sound of Volley's heart, it was like a drum, beating harder and larger than a humans by the sounds of it. Vilivian whipped her head to the origins of that sound, it was above her.

There rising higher and higher into the air above the colosseum. Reaching ten feet, then reaching fifteen feet, the pushing nearly twenty feet high in the sky as Volley rabidly backflip spun straight into the air. He had tucked his arms, legs, and tail in towards his body to increase his center of gravity as much as possible, allowing him to backflip faster and faster as he reached max height.

For the first time since the battle began, Vilivian seemed genuinely momentarily baffled if not confused by the athletic maneuver Volley utilized to avoid her attack.

The only ones more surprised was Ms. X and the audience.

"Incredible! I've lost count of how many times Volley has spun in the air and he just keeps going. What an incredible way to avoid another crushing blow from Vilivian!" Ms. X shouted into her mic, nearly jumping in place as she witnessed the spectacle before her. The crowd also began to grow in intensity, cheering and screaming in emotional passion as they watched Volley do the impossible.

Volley curved over Livilian, landing closer to the center of the battlefield on his two feet. He hefted his Kanabo up a hand on his waist proudly as he wiped a bit of blood from his lip with the other, giving Livilian a lively grin.

Livilian straightened herself and let her shoulder relax and hang loose. She tilted her head looking upon Volley again with the same long silent stare she had offered him the entire time since he walked onto the field. Volley noticed something different in Livilian's eyes now tho, that look of distaste had been replaced, it was something new, something Volley didn't know if he liked or not.

She seemed intrigued. Perhaps somehow interested now. Then Livilian closed her eyes and she smiled.

"Hark, there are so few that I have seen look at me with eyes like mirrors. So many stupid men fail to see the mountain in between them and their ambitions... few are different... few are like you. Before I even landed my first strike, you saw the incredible incline. I thank you, I suppose, for not making that mistake. It is refreshing." Vilivian

spoke, her words held centuries of weight in them, she believed her word full heartedly and it was obvious to see that her beliefs were reinforced regularly.

“Tho I get no happiness from this fight, I am amused. Volley, I’d ask you to give up, but you would have already.” Vilivian stated simply, “Am I wrong?”

Volley held his lively smile as he listened to Vilivian’s words, as she asked her question, Volley could only shrug and give an almost sheepish expression. “Yea sorry, I won’t be giving up, sorry you aren’t enjoying this? Walking away without fully trying? I feel like I would be disappointing someone.”

“Do not apologize to me, that is most improper indeed” Vilivian said, any warmth from her face fading as she went back to staring only daggers at Volley. “This merely proves my point. I can tell from the sound of your heart how afraid you are, yet you are too foolish to listen to your own blood’s warnings. Perhaps you do not deserve that body you seem so keen on abusing.”

“I don’t know if I deserve my body, but it is my body to abuse as I choose.” Volley said, that lively smile growing somehow more intense. “You also seem really worried for my well being, which I appreciate! Everyone has been so nice to me since I got here. But unfortunately Mis Vilivian, you are also my enemy and my enemy should be wondering why I am unarmed.”

Volley spread his fingers, showing off his empty sweaty palms, his lively grin almost becoming deranged as blood slowly trickled from the side of his mouth.

Vilivian only had a moment to realize the failure in her perception, for her it was a moment of confusion and rapid thinking. All of it quantified in a single shift of the head upwords, towards the sky.

Like a judgement from heaven, Volley’s Kanabo swung around and around in complete beautiful arcing circles, falling down with the full support of gravity behind it. It fell in such a perfect rotating way, that the head of the weapon found purchase square on Vilivian’s forehead.

The impact made a sound like a coconut getting grand slammed by babe ruth straight out of the park. There was a great collective pained “oooooh” as every onlooker collectively rubbed the spot on their heads where Vilivian was clobbered. Ms. X covered her eyes, but her heart pupils to peek out from her fingers, unable to look away.

Even Volley looked pained, his smile fading as Vilivian hit the ground hard, the Kanabo also hit the dirt and was sent skittering away...

A terrible silence washed over the colosseum, a few seconds go by, all eyes plastered on the spot Vilivian lay. The oni child held his breath, the adrenaline caused every silence moment to be followed by a fiery heartbeat that filled his own ears with the sound of thumping. A single bead of sweat rolled down the side of his face, slid off his cheek, and hit the ground.

Instantly, Vilivian was on her feet again. There was barely a transition time of her being on the ground to standing back to her feet. The entire audience gasps at her sudden jolt of movement, but none so spooked as Volley himself who took a few steps back.

The mood had changed now, Volley no longer felt good about this fight, he had felt very clever up until this moment. That all changed upon seeing Vilivian's face.

What he saw caused him to feel a very real fear.

The spot she had been clobbered was black, like a stain across her flesh. It grew, the blackness seemed to spread across her pale skin. Like oil spilling into water, it seemed to merely spread. A few strands of her hair horrifyingly began to fall out, not all her hair, but pieces, a chunk or two, falling down past her face onto the ground. The slow changes seemed to all culminate into one sickening crack of bones that seemed to originate somewhere in Vilivian's spine, her whole body twitched and jerked, as Volley could swear she grew slightly taller.

"I try.." She says, the words escape a quivering jaw, pure anger was palpable in her every word. "I try so hard... so hard not to kill just everyone I meet."

Volley took further steps back, his teeth clenched together as he watched merely the beginnings of this transformation. Any expectation he may have had getting thrown out the window.

"Stupid stupid stupid little oni..." Vilivian's face was contorted into a special type of rage, as if she was about to release years of built up frustration all at once. She began to take steps forward now, her hands reached out towards Volley revealing that her fingers were growing longer and longer right before his eyes. "I tried... I really tried. You stupid stupid little oni. Now look at what is happening, there is no way to stop it either, not until you die or are erased."

clank

Volley's slow steps further and further away from Vilivian came to a stop. His back hitting something hard. He turned his head and looked up at the long curved blade sitting embedded in the ground behind him. The moment he touched it, Vilivian stopped.

Volley turned his eyes back to Vilivian and saw her unmoving now, staring at the sword he had backed into.

“Get away from that, you wouldn’t dare touch it again. That sword is not for you.” She said almost from a distant place. “Step away from it, so I do not get your blood upon it.”

Volley, eyes filled with fear at this monstrous form of Vilivian approaching him, blinked. “T-then stay back! Or...or I’ll lick it!”

Vilivian nearly sputtered at the idea, her face now fell to disbelief. The pain from her wound mixed with her slow transformation causing her to lose herself faster and faster. “You... You would not dare!”

“I would!” Volley growled disobediently, he immediately repositioned himself so that he was facing both the blade and Vilivian.

Vilivian could only look in shocked anger as Volley reached up and placed both hands on the hilt and grossly licked the blade’s surface. He looked Vilivian in the eye with desperate fear with each salive filled lick. As he pulled away there was a single line of saliva running from the blade to Volley’s outstretched tongue.

Vilivian could only stand there and watch this defilement. Finally she took a step forward, to do something, to stop Volley. However, she found that step difficult to make as her body changed further and further. Her own transformation taking hold, Volley stopped and bore witness to this horrific display. Vilivian’s hair was all but gone at this point, her skin had completely shifted black, her feet and hands were extended monstrous renditions of what they were. Soon any and all complicated thought, began to leave Vilivian’s mind.

Seeing this, Volley’s fear transcended itself. He stood there clenching the handle of this sword, his tongue barely in his mouth, as he slowly watched this display. Volley finally fell prey to full panic, he looked all around himself for a way out, for a way to escape. After some panic flailing Volley’s eyes centered on the blade he was holding in his hands.

This sword had gotten him into this problem and it may be the only way to get out of it. Volley could see the fear in his own eyes as he gazed into the shiny metal of the blade. It was an incredible sword and so Volley attempted to pull it out.

He gave a single mighty oni heave, the ground beneath him shifted and cracked, there was almost a groan from the ground. Despite his mighty heave, Volley failed to pull the sword from the ground, he didn’t even make it budge!

Volley fearfully glanced back over to Vilivian, who had now almost grown 3 meters tall. Her face and head had shifted into an elongated calf skull topping the horrible demon body she had had. Any former physical similarities between the horror Volley now saw before him and the woman he had been fighting was gone. All that was there now was a monstrosity that would surely kill and eat him.

Volley turned back to the blade, he once again saw his reflection in the blade. At that moment Volley felt as though he had lost and that it was over for him. That the journey, the adventure had ended, far too early.

He thought of Saki and how he just wanted to meet someone as cool as her. Maybe learn how to be a little cooler himself.

“GRAAAAAA!” Volley released a scream, he bared his nubby oni tusks as he released a primal deep warcry. Volley then pulled harder than he ever pulled before. Fueled by his adrenaline, his hopes, his fears, and his desire to live all came out in an incredible final attempt on the sword. The earth around the sword blade ground, quaked, and cracked more and more as Volley pulled and pulled.

As Volley roared, Saki, who sat in the audience, stood up and began to roar. The sheer energy of the moment reached deep inside Saki almost the same way it did for Volley. The bartender ripped off her sleeves, revealing her bursting muscle underneath as she joined Volley’s warcry.

Demon form Vilivian finished the extremes of her transformation, momentarily existing in the afterglow of the transition, before snapping to attention. Once again she narrowed on Volley and she too released a cry, but hers was not heard in the air, it was heard in everyone’s present minds. She began racing towards Volley, prepared to finally bear down on him and tear him to pieces.

With all three screams filling the background, Volley pulled and finally the sword came free! Like a plant being ripped out of the ground, the sword took a huge chunk of rock with it, making its freedom imperfect but Volley didn’t care.

He screamed, he held the sword up high in both hands and turn to face Vilivia’s monstrous form. She came right for him as she screeched for murder!

“YOU WANT THIS!!!” Volley roared as death approached, “THEN GO GET IT!”

With a single three hundred and sixty degree spin, Volley released the sword. Holding it from its handle, he spun it around like an olympic weight thrower before releasing it.

Releasing the blade into the air, arcing above and over Vilivian. The creature scraped against the ground to stop their charge, looking almost desperately at the blade that kept getting higher and higher, farther and farther. Until it flew above the Cross Colosseum, over the Fox's Den, and into the sky where it twinkled distantly as it was flung somewhere over Mount Mei.

Vilivian, through her head injury and transformation, looks somehow momentarily baffled as the sword disappears into the distance. A baffled moment that ends with Vilivian jumping into the air and landing on the roof of the colosseum. She released another terrifying telekinetic screech that echoed through the minds of those present in the colosseum, before racing off into the distance, after her lost blade.

Volley stood exhausted, eyes wide, heavily breathing, and only now feeling all the aches and pains that littered his body after this exchange. He waited a few moments, just to see if she would come back, but thankful she did not.

Slowly the oni boy looked to the audience and towards Ms. X. All of whom were quiet other than low murmuring and whispers amongst the crowd.

Ms. X waited a moment, as if she too expected Livilia to return. When she did not, Ms. X looked around, cleared her throat, and shouted."ISN'T THAT WHAT YOU ALL CAME HERE TO SEE FOLKS! Another incredible day here in the Cross Colosseum! What an intense exchange! The drama! The fear! Don't you just love it folks!!!"

That is when the crowd went ballistic. All the energy they had soaked up during the battle, all the twists and turns, it was all too much. Volley was struck by a wall of people cheering his name, people were standing and clapping, some cried. It is unlike anything Volley has ever seen.

"I think I speak for everyone in the audience when I say that it is apparent Volley is the victor of this round in the tournament! LET HIM HEAR YOUR SCREAMS!"

Volley could only stand there, baffled, slowly a smile grew upon his face as he slowly calmed down from his intense encounter. He waved to the people, doing his best to thank them. People began to approach him from the stands, walking into the colosseum to join Volley. Billy Brent Braimer was the first at his side, congratulating and patting Volley on the back. Others came up to him, slowly Volley was surrounded.

Before Volley completely turned his attention on the crowd that grew around him. He looked past them all, into the stands.

There he saw Saki standing where he last saw her. A smile on her face as her tattered sleeves hung loosely in the wind.