

Інформація

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Chapter no.73

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Yuki Haku vs. Tsuchi Kin vs. Kinuta Dosu

Haku stood at the center of the arena facing her two opponents. She cursed her bad luck at being the one selected to have the three-way match. What made it worse was that both of her opponents were from the same team and would use every advantage they had to take her out. This meant teamwork, they obviously knew each other's strengths and weaknesses and would cover them flawlessly.

This would be a problem for almost anyone, anyone but Haku. The reaven-haired girl was strong, maybe even the strongest genin in Kiri. She wouldn't have much of a problem dealing with the two Oto-nin before her, but that didn't mean that she would underestimate them.

Haku was a beautiful fifteen year old girl with long black hair, pale skin, and large brown eyes. Her frame was quite slender and she was fairly short for her age. Haku also had a fairly developed C-cup bust. She wore the standard Kirigakure pinstriped outfit which stopped just below her knees. Over that she wore a green haori with white trimmings and a brown sash around her waist. It was the outfit that she usually wore when performing her duties as a Kunoichi.

Haku carefully eyed her two opponents. It seemed that the one with bandages covering his face was the offensive type and the girl was a genjutsu type. Haku would need to be prepared for all areas of shinobi

arts in this match.

The proctor stepped forward and looked at each of the genin in the arena, "Are all combatants ready for battle?" He received nods from the lone shinobi and two kunoichi. "Then you may begin!" The proctor jumped back to avoid getting in the way of those who would be fighting. Haku quickly Shunshined away after Dosu had begun to charge her. She had seen what he had done to that Kabuto boy before the first stage of the chunin exams started. If she had to guess, she'd say it was a sound based ninjutsu that damaged the inner ear and would affect her motor skills and physical abilities. She would need to keep a distance from him and rely on Ninjutsu and Bukijutsu.

She glanced at the girl behind Dosu and saw that she had pulled out senbon with bells attached to it.

'Bells? Those aren't normal for a person using senbon...She's either going to use the Shadow Senbon, which is unlikely, or she's planning a sound based genjutsu. Judging from the name of her village and the skills of the rest of her team...it's most likely the latter.'

Haku pulled out a few of her own senbon needles and threw them, aiming for Kin's vital spots. The Oto kunoichi saw the Kiri-nin's senbon flying at her and was forced to block with her own, causing the bells to ring on her senbon.

'Two bells? There's my answer...those are for a sound based genjutsu.'

Haku thought, confirming her theory.

Haku noticed all of the surrounding water from the Suiton jutsus that the Hokage's daughters had used in the previous matches. These were the perfect conditions for her. She noticed That Dosu had begun to charge her once again, she wouldn't deal with him yet. She would first need to take out the girl as it was obvious that she was the weaker of the two.

Haku moved at speeds far above the level of a genin to move around Dosu and rush at Kin. In the blink of an eye she had crossed halfway around the stadium and appeared behind Kin. The Oto kunoichi quickly turned around after she had sensed her enemy and brought up her senbon with the attempt to stab Haku. The Kiri kunoichi however, had drawn her own senbon and blocked the strike.

The Hyoton used slowly began making one handed seals, surprising everyone in the audience, "Sensatsu Suisho (Thousand Flying Water Needles of Death)." One thousand senbon made of water rose and formed from the surrounding water and completely surrounded the two kunoichi. A second after they were formed, they began to speed toward Haku and Kin from all directions, leaving no means of escape.

Haku quickly Shunshined out of the way of the water senbon while Kin could only stand there as her life flashed before her eyes. Haku looked back at the kunoichi she was fighting only a moment ago to see a corpse filled with hundreds of water senbon protruding from her dead body, blood flowing out all across the floor.

Many of the remaining genin on the observation platform above them gasped in horror as they saw the Oto kunoichi had been pierced by hundreds of senbons made of water and her blood fly everywhere in a shower of crimson. Very few of them had seen death before, let alone kill someone with their own hands. And yet, this girl only a few years older than them had done so without even showing a hint of remorse on her face.

"KIN!" She heard the other Oto-nin scream in horror as he saw the lifeless body of his teammate fall to the ground. Otokakure may not have preached about friendship and comrades, but their team had been together since they became genin. Zaku had already been crippled for life

and now his other teammate was killed by the girl in front of him.

"Is this the first time you've lost someone precious to you? It's only when you're protecting someone precious to you that you become truly strong...You could not protect her...You are not strong...You are weak."

Haku told Dosu emotionlessly, a hint of pity in her eyes. She may pity him, but she will not give him mercy.

"AARRGGHH!" At these words Dosu charged Haku in a blind rage, intent on ripping her limb from limb.

Haku did not respond visibly, she merely looked down and noticed that the blood from the girl she killed had mixed in with the water which spread it across the battlefield even further and produced more of it.

Using her body as a medium, she slowly started to freeze the water around her and even extended the range to freeze even the arena floor.

She made a few hand seals and crouched down on one knee to place her middle and index finger onto the ice now covering the ground. "Hyoro no Jutsu (Ice Prison Jutsu)." Medium sized pillars of ice rose from all of the previous water sources and even spanned across the arena floor, erupting from every part of the ground as they continued to rise until they reached Dosu. The Oto-nin had a look of shock on his face before a pillar rose from the ground underneath him, freezing him in the process.

Haku looked up at her handiwork and locked her eyes onto Dosu's trapped form. She reached her hand out in front of her body in a manner not unlike Gaara's and squeezed her hand. "Hyoton: Ice Funeral." The ice surrounding Dosu became highly pressurized and crushed him, liquifying his entire body within a single moment causing blood to erupt from that particular ice pillar like a fountain.

At this sight most of the genin watching the match from above lost their

lunches, even some of the Jonin looked a bit green. Gaara and Naruto were the only two to smile a bit at the sight.

After recovering from seeing a genin kill someone so efficiently, Genma stepped forward. "Winner by death, Yuki Haku!"

Haku walked back up towards her team as if nothing had happened. As soon as she was back on the platform on the other side of the room, all of the Konoha genin began whispering amongst themselves. They were probably as terrified of her as they were Gaara, maybe even more because she didn't seem insane and was in perfect control of her actions.

Naruto did not care for what the other genin thought of her actions.

Naruto would have done the exact same thing had he not been matched up against a Konoha genin.

What Naruto was staring at was the now frozen wasteland that was the arena. It was beautiful, perhaps only second to the landscape that he had created in the forest. Exactly half of the arena was covered in a thick sheet of ice but was completely smooth and and untouched, while the other side was littered with fairly large pillars of ice. It reminded Naruto of what was once Yuki no Kuni.

Naruto inhaled the crisp, cold air that the arena had altered and smiled as he remembered the last time he felt this sensation. It brought a nostalgic feeling to his mind as he remembered the events revolving around Koyuki and Yuki no Kuni. He would always remember his very first mission outside of the village walls and the downward spiral of events that occurred not too long after it began.

Naruto was forced back into reality as he heard the proctor's voice. "Will Hyuga Neji and Portgas D. Naruto make your way down to the arena for the final match!"

Chapter no.74

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Hyuga Neji vs. Portgas D. Naruto

Naruto had planned to let any Konoha-nin that he fought live as it would only cause more trouble for him if he were to kill someone from his own village, but he was seriously reconsidering his plan and thinking of just incinerating the Hyuga in front of him. The boy would not stop preaching about fate and the match hadn't even begun yet.

"I shall give you this chance to surrender Portgas, fate has already decreed me the victor."

"I think I'll take my chances. I didn't wait all this time just to give up."

Naruto was getting tired of the boy's speeches.

"Very well, do not blame me should your fate meet its end."

Neji was done talking, he wanted to get this fight over with. There was no way the genin in front of him stood a chance, he was the Hokage's disowned son after all. Forced out of the family for being too weak. Their family situations weren't too different from each other, but he was too blinded by his hatred of the main house of the Hyuga to see that.

Neji took his usual Juken stance and activated his byakugan while Naruto took the stance of his Interceptor Fist. However he didn't end there. For the first time in over three years he opened his right eye in front of his classmates revealing not an empty eye socket like they all thought it was, but a crimson three-tomoed sharingan.

Observation Platform

Almost everyone in the audience gasped at the sight of one of the most revered kekkei genkai in Konoha.

There was one thought going through everyone's minds, 'The

sharingan...but how does he have it?'

Ino and Sakura had both made it back to their teams and were greeted with the sight before them. Sakura had already known about Naruto's eye from when she had seen him in the Hokage's office several months ago, but Ino on the other hand was shocked beyond belief. She was pretty good friends with Satsuki, well they were on good terms, and the female Uchiha had never told her about this.

"Asuma-sensei? How does Naruto have the sharingan? He isn't an Uchiha is he?" Ino asked.

Most of the Konoha genin were now paying close attention to Asuma's response, as they were just as confused as Ino was. The academy didn't go into depth about kekkei genkai or how they were obtained, only that certain shinobi possessed them.

Asuma sighed as he saw all of the genin's eyes on him, waiting for an answer. "Kekkei Genkai come from genes that are passed down through certain clans. Konoha has two dojutsu kekkei genkai, the sharingan and the byakugan. There are many other kekkei genkais but these two are two of the most prominent. Usually they are only passed down through reproduction, however in the case of dojutsu they can be implanted into another individual. This is the case with Kakashi's sharingan and most likely the case with Naruto. As you know Naruto lost his eye several years ago and it was removed, so it's likely that he had it transplanted not too long after that accident. For anyone else they'd have to have their eye ripped out to have one transplanted."

Asuma noticed Natsuki look down and tears build up from her eyes at the mention of his accident, but he would push it to the side for now. He looked to see the faces of the genin as they turned their heads back toward the arena, telling him that they understood.

Arena Floor

Neji's eyes widened in shock for a moment before returning to normal. It did not matter whether Portgas had a dojutsu or not. Fate had already decided that he would win.

"Begin!" The proctor announced.

Neji didn't need to hear twice as he rushed at Naruto. Naruto quickly coated his arms with Busoshoku Haki so that Neji wouldn't be able to close the tenketsu in them. Naruto had already seen Hinata's Juken, but he could tell that Neji had surpassed her by leaps and bounds, there was no comparison. He would have to keep his guard up if he wanted to even they playing field with Taijutsu.

Neji laced his hands with chakra in order to initiate his Juken. He sent a palm strike toward Naruto's chest, but the ravenette blocked by pushing his arm away. This didn't stop Neji as he continued his fast paced palm strikes with Naruto either avoiding it altogether or blocking. Neji couldn't understand what the boy had done to his arms, they were pitch black and the byakugan couldn't see through it. Neji sent a finger strike toward his chest intent on hitting a vital organ. Naruto, seeing this, ducked below the strike and swept Neji's legs out from under him. He wasn't going to break apart without a finishing blow, so he sent a vertical chop straight into Neji's gut forcing him to the ground.

Naruto jumped back a few yards to gain some distance. The Hyuga was quite good and proving to be a match for him in pure Taijutsu alone.

Their specialized Taijutsu allowed them to strike directly at the chakra networks, even blocking with your arms would render some of the pathways there blocked. However, his Busoshoku Haki was similar to very powerful armor that would prevent any of the strikes from reaching his chakra network.

Neji immediately got off the ground and charged at Naruto once more. He brought his leg out to sweep Naruto's feet out from under him, but the sharingan user jumped into the air avoiding the kick. Neji wasn't done yet as he used his momentum to spin and kicked out with his other leg, aiming for Naruto's chest. Naruto raised an eyebrow at this, the Juken usually only used a person's hands specifically the palms and the fingers. He caught the kick with his hand, but was sent back a dozen feet. He wasn't expecting so much force behind it.

Naruto was done playing around, the time for defense was over. He switched his stance into one that could better utilize his Haki. This Taijutsu style revolve around ferocious strikes using palm strikes and kicks.

It was Naruto this time who charged Neji. The scarred boy was moving at speeds that no genin could usually keep up with, but somehow Neji had avoided a hard palm strike to the sternum. However, Naruto spun in mid-air and delivered a talon-like kick to Neji's left arm sending him flying into one of the ice pillars.

Naruto stayed behind a bit as the impact produced a cloud of mist that slightly obscured his vision, though he could sense where the Hyuga was with his Kenbunshoku Haki. He could see Neji kneeling on the ground planning his next move. A moment later he dodged a barrage of shuriken with only the slightest movements, not even bothering to move from where he was standing.

Neji soon flew out of the mist with his arm drawn back. "Hakke Kusho (Eight Trigrams Vacuum Palm)!" Neji thrust his arm forward releasing a high speed palm thrust forming a vacuum shell was sent towards Naruto. With his sharingan he could easily predict the path of the strike and maneuvered around it. After avoiding the strike, Naruto quickly jumped

behind the ice pillar to his left to figure out what the Hyuga prodigy was planning. A moment later Neji landed in the middle of the ice covered arena and stood completely still.

Naruto seeing as he wasn't going to get any of his answers this way rushed at Neji once more.

"You are within my field of divination." Neji stated as he took an odd Juken stance.

Naruto was only a few feet away when Neji moved in a maneuver that even the Sharingan had trouble tracking, once he found Neji again it was too late. "Hakke Rokujuyon Sho (Eight Trigrams Sixty-Four Palms)!"

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With those words he began to relentlessly attack Naruto with a secret technique of the Hyuga clan.

"Two Palms!"

"Four Palms!"

"Eight Palms!"

"Sixteen Palms!"

"Thirty-Two Palms!"

"Sixty-Four Palms!"

Neji had succeeded in closing sixty-four of the chakra points all over Naruto's body. This would render him completely handicapped for the rest of the match, with the inability to mold chakra and hampering his movements. However after the final strike was delivered 'Naruto' burst into a flock of crows, surprising everyone in the room, even the Hokage. That particular technique was only known to one person in the world.

The real Naruto stepped out from behind the ice pillar that he had first hid behind and stood there taking in what Neji's technique had done.

"Karasu Bunshin (Crow Clone), it's an incredibly useful technique.

Completely unlike other types of bunshin, even the Kage Bunshin. That was an impressive technique, one that should only be known to a single child of the main house, after seeing it once I won't be caught up in it again."

Naruto walked forward a few feet until he was in front of the ice pillar. "I must thank that girl Haku for the change of scenery. Now I don't have to go through the trouble of doing it myself." Naruto formed a few hand seals, "Hyoton: Haryu Moko (Tearing Dragon Fierce Tiger)."

Every shinobi's eyes in the room went wide once more as they heard his words, even his own team, but especially Haku who was speechless at the moment.

The entire ice pillar behind Naruto turned into a giant tiger that rushed through the sky and towards Neji with such ferocity that it may have killed him if the jutsu hit. The mere creation of the massive beast caused the temperature in the room to drop several degrees. Haku could only continue to stare wide-eyed as even she didn't have any Hyoton jutsu within her arsenal on that massive of a scale.

Neji silently cursed as he continued to dodge the large tiger that continued to chase after him. It was the predator and he was the prey. No matter how many times he dodged it, it wouldn't let up. In fact every time he avoided the creature it only became faster. The young Hyuga only had one jutsu that would be able to defend against the predator's onslaught, he had been hoping to save it for the finals but it was the only thing that would save him right now.

He stopped running and slowly began to spin until he picked speed,

"Hakkesho Kaiten (Eight Trigrams Palm Rotation)!" Chakra expelled from every tenketsu of his body as he spun, creating an impenetrable blue sphere. The ice tiger crashed into the sphere and slowly began to shatter until it was completely destroyed.

Neji stopped his jutsu a moment later, panting from how much chakra he had used. He would need to perfect the Kaiten later on so that he didn't have to waste so much of his chakra on it. Neji looked up and saw that he was on the complete other side of the room from where he was when he began dodging that ice tiger.

He knew just how close he had come to defeat in that moment he stared at the tiger's gaping jaws about to devour him whole. He would need to end the match soon, he didn't have much chakra left. Enough left to use the Hakkesho Kaiten once more, but that was it. Should he have to resort to that, then he was done, defeated.

"You did well to defend against such an attack Neji, you truly are a genius of the Hyuga clan." Neji's eyes jerked up at the sudden voice and locked onto the form of Naruto across the arena. "But will you be able to avoid the next one?"

Neji's eyes widened as Naruto began going through hand seals, he got up and quickly charged Naruto in an attempt to finish him off before he completed the next jutsu. However, he was too late as Naruto landed on his seal and thrust his arm out forming a black ether-like dragon from the ice and snow behind him that flew into the air at high-speed. It's glowing red eyes locked onto Neji and went in for the kill. "Hyoton: Kokuryu Bofusetsu (Ice Release: Black Dragon Blizzard)!"

Neji knew he had to use the Hakkesho Kaiten once more in order to even survive the massive dragon. He began to spin at a rapid speed, exerting all of his chakra into this last jutsu. Even that was not enough as the

black ether-like dragon hit the Kaiten, but did not dissipate. Instead it picked Neji's technique up while he was still spinning and launched him into the air, impacting the ceiling as the dragon continued to rush him. Neji had long since stopped the Kaiten and could only feel his body screaming in pain as the dragon continued to pin him to the ceiling as the ice dissipated against it from the force of the impact. The last thing he remembered was the freezing feeling of the ice against his body before he was pulled into the darkness.

The dragon vanished from existence as soon as Naruto felt that Neji had lost consciousness. The Hyuga that was pinned to the ceiling slowly began his free fall back down to earth before Naruto Shunshined into the air and caught him, the natural heat of his body immediately causing Neji's body to recover from hypothermia. He landed on the ground once more and waited for the medical teams to come and take his opponent away.

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Naruto looked up and saw that everyone in the room had a gobsmacked expression on their face, including the Hokage. He could see Natsuki, Narumi, and Satsuki all staring at him in pure awe and admiration. They were soon brought back to reality as they heard the proctor clear his throat.

"Winner by knock out, Portgas D. Naruto! With the final match over this marks the end of the preliminary rounds. All of those who have one their matches, please make your way down to the arena to decide the matches for the final rounds!"

As Genma made his announcement to the chunin hopefuls, they slowly began to make their way down the stairs until they were standing beside Naruto in a single line.

Minato and Anko had made their way down to the arena floor as well.

The Yondaime Hokage stepped forward to start his speech to congratulate everyone, "Congratulations to all of you for winning your matches and making it to the third and final stage of the exam. I am proud of all of the Konoha genin that have made it thus far and I'm sure the Kage of your respective villages feel the same way." Minato let a moment of silence pass before he continued.

"However, the final stage of the chunin exams will not be happening now. Many important people such as the Kage of your villages, Daimyos, and many potential clients will be attending the final tournament.

Therefore you have exactly one month to prepare for your matches. Time will allow you to study your opponent's abilities in order to form a strategy to deal with them and it will also give you a chance to improve your own skills." Minato said.

"For now we will decide what the match-ups will be for the tournament.

Please take a piece of paper from the box that Anko-san is currently holding. These pieces of paper will determine who you will fight in the first round, so I hope you are all confident in your good luck."

One by one each of the genin walked up to the box and pulled out a small piece of paper with a number on it. They presented their numbers to Ibiki and were drawn onto the tournament grid where their number was.

Match 1: Uzumaki-Namikaze Natsuki vs. Sabaku no Temari

Match 2: Uchiha Satsuki vs. Uzumaki-Namikaze Narumi

Match 3:Portgas D. Naruto vs. Uzumaki-Namikaze Nawaki

Match 4: Inuzuka Hana vs. Chojuro

Match 5: Suigetsu vs. Sabaku no Gaara

Match 6: Yuki Haku vs. Winner of Match 5

Naruto was grinning like a madman at the idea of Nawaki, the brat just annoyed him to no end and this would be a perfect opportunity to show his true strength.

"Are there any questions dealing with the rules of the final tournament?"

Minato asked after everyone had seen who they would be fighting.

Shikamaru raised his hand, "Will there only be one person who becomes chunin since this is a tournament?"

"No, there are several different judges for the tournament, Kage included, if someone is determined to have the skill and mindset of a chunin then they will be promoted. However, fighting more matches in the tournament will give you more opportunities to show the judges that you are fit to be a chunin. There is also a chance that none of you will be promoted to chunin, but from what I have seen that scenario is highly unlikely. Are there any more questions?"

None of the genin before him raised their hands or looked uneasy.

"Very well then you are all dismissed. Oh Naruto! Please meet me at the Hokage Tower as soon as you have spoken with your teammates." Naruto had expected this after showing a bit of what he could do in his match, so he didn't voice his opinion.

Slowly all of the genin left the tower until only Team 11 and Team 7 remained. Obito turned to speak to his team, they needed to deal with the time they had during the period before the third exam. "All of you think about what you plan to do with your thirty day time period overnight okay. Meet me at the usual training ground tomorrow morning at 9:00 AM." He said as he disappeared from sight a moment after seeing

them all nod their heads.

Naruto thought a bit about what he needed to work on before making the journey to the Hokage Tower, he would take the long way around so he could prepare himself for his eventual meeting with the Hokage, and most likely the rest of his family.

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What are secrets really? Are they pieces of information that are not meant to be known by others? Or are they just things that you'd like to keep to yourself and only the people that you truly trust? Everybody had a secret or two.

Secrets were the basis of the shinobi world. Every country kept secrets from each other in order to benefit their own interest, whether it was to keep their hidden village's strength at the top of the elemental nations or to hide their own underground dealings. The world was a dark place. A rotting wasteland where the sun would never shine, at least it would be until someone decided to set the world aflame.

Naruto had many secrets, such as the fact that he knew the truth about the Uchiha massacre or that the Kyuubi was really still being controlled by Uchiha Madara on the night of his birth. Secrets were meant to stay in the dark because should they come to light, the consequences would be greater than any kind of benefit.

If either of these two secrets were to get out, the fallout would be disastrous. If anyone were to find out about the Uchiha massacre then the people of Konoha would lose faith in their village and their Hokage. They would see him as a tyrant who ordered the execution of an entire clan just because they no longer believed in the village's 'will of fire' and were going to speak out against it. Those Uchiha children who were spared would seek revenge for their losses, or betray the village altogether.

The second secret was just as dangerous, if not worse. If what Shisui had said the night of the massacre was true, then the Kyuubi was most likely still under the effects Madara's Kotoamatsukami. Naruto would need to deal with that the first chance he had, only a the same jutsu would be able to remove the effects. Should the people of the village find out that the Kyuubi was under the effects of a sharingan that night, then the Uchiha would be ostracized even more. Some may even call for the complete extermination of the clan because they feared that what happened all those years ago would happen again.

Naruto had no idea that the Kotoamatsukami was so powerful. Should the village find out that he possessed the very same jutsu that cost Konoha all of those lives sixteen years ago, then he would most certainly have to take counter measures to prevent his family from being knew that it was the strongest genjutsu of the mangekyo sharingan, but to be able to control the most powerful of the Bijuu for over half a century with it was an amazing feat. Naruto had yet to reach that level of mastery with the sharingan. He was capable of activating Shisui's mangekyo, but when he did he still felt like there was a higher level to reach. It felt as if there were a power just within his grasp, but he had to take one final leap to reach it. Were his eyes telling him that he was capable of awakening the rinnegan? He would continue that thought later.

People also might interpret that Natsuki and Nawaki are also under Madara's control because they hold the Bijuu within them. Then they would be treated like that of real jinchuriki instead of heroes who saved the village. That brings up another theory that Naruto had. Yin and Yang were never supposed to be separated, it was the law of nature. The only reason that Naruto was able to completely split apart his chakra with his perfect chakra control was because he still contained the other half

within his body. The Yin half of the Kyuubi was sealed inside Natsuki and the Yang half was sealed within Nawaki. That being said they would naturally be drawn back to each other, the pull of the forces would be so powerful that they would even break the seal holding them in the process.

Naruto theorized that if one half of the Kyuubi was broken from Madara's control then it would instantly draw the other half back to it and merge back into the complete form of the Bijuu. The extraction wouldn't kill the Uzumaki-Namikaze that possessed the half that was still under the Kotoamatsukami because of their Uzumaki genes. The Uzumaki always had incredibly strong life forces, which is why Kushina was able to survive having the Kyuubi escape from her. Though it would be an incredibly painful and exhausting process. If Naruto could help it he would break the Yin half from Madara's control because it would be easier to because it represented the Kyuubi's spirit half, as it was made of Yin chakra.

It would probably be best to deal with this either after the chunin exams, or during the invasion that would occur during the finals where Gaara would transform into his full Bijuu state. Naruto couldn't wait to deal with Shukaku, he had spent far too long in isolation and it had made him even more bloodthirsty and insane. Naruto would have to remind him of what he was like when he was just born. He would remind him of what fear was.

But that would have to wait for another time, as Naruto was currently sitting in front of Namikaze Minato the Yondaime Hokage. He was obviously interested in uncovering all of Naruto's secrets. Though they weren't the only ones in the Hokage's office. Uzumaki-Namikaze Kushina stood behind her husband, staring forlornly at Naruto, while Narumi and

Natsuki both sat to the side of the office on the couch. Both of the genin had no idea why they were there, but there Kaa-san had requested that they be there. Nawaki wasn't there as he had been moved to the hospital for the night to recover from the injuries he received during his match. Even Jiraiya was in the room sitting on the windowsill, Naruto had not even glanced at the man since he arrived.

Naruto had not seen Jiraiya in years, nor did he want to. Naruto could only describe the Toad Sage with one word, pathetic. He was strong, that much Naruto was certain of, but it was his beliefs that made his entire existence a joke in Naruto's eyes. He lived his entire life based on a prophecy that the toads gave him decades ago. They told him that he was meant to create peace by finding the child of prophecy. The sharingan user never understood what made the toads so special that they could hand out prophecies like they were pieces of candy.

It was one of these prophecies that drove the Uzumaki-Namikaze family apart even further. Several years ago after he had awoken from his coma, Naruto had thought that he would give his family a chance after seeing how his family life couldn't even compare to how bad Aces was. After all, Naruto's parents didn't actually try to kill him. However, it was not meant to be as they had began to focus even more on his siblings' training after Jiraiya had given yet another prophecy to Minato about the child of prophecy and how they will either bring forward peace or lead the world to ruin. That had been the final chance he gave his former family.

Chapter no.77

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The room was silent, eerily so. It was obvious that the only ones in the

room who knew what was going on were Minato and Jiraiya. Naruto stared on impassively at the blonde Hokage, who matched his gaze. Naruto had partially figured out why he was here. Minato wanted answers about the Hyoton, but what confused him was Jiraiya's presence. He had sensed the man watching from the shadow at the preliminary matches, but he had assumed that Jiraiya would go off for some 'research' at the hot springs. Jiraiya was the world's largest pervert and that disgusted Naruto, he had even caught the man sneaking glances at Kushina's figure every so often.

The only reason why Jiraiya would be here is if they wanted to speak about something more than just his abilities. He had no doubt that they would once again try to bring him back into their family, but he would have none of that and they were probably starting to catch onto that idea by now. No, there had to be more going on here than he realized.

"Congratulations on winning your preliminary match Naruto." Minato had thought for a long time about how to start off the conversation with his wayward son. If he had outright demanded answers from Naruto then things would quickly turn out like they usually did with him. He wanted Naruto to be able to open up to them and maybe they could fix their estranged relationship from there. "To be able to overwhelm the prodigy of the Hyuga clan so easily is quite an accomplishment, he was the rookie of the year for the previous graduating class at the academy you know."

"Thank you Hokage-sama." Naruto replied blandly. He had to restrain himself from rolling his eyes, it was quite obvious as what Minato was trying to accomplish. "But if that was all that this was about, may I ask why I was the only one who was requested to be here? There were many other genin who had won their matches, surely you would give them the same treatment."

Minato sighed in exasperation. His son had never been interested in exchanging pleasantries, Naruto always saw right through all of his attempts to get closer to him.

"There are questions that need to be answered. Your abilities specifically have come into question and we require answers to them."

Naruto raised an eyebrow at Minato's tone of voice. This obviously wasn't just Minato's curiosity that brought him there, this was an interrogation.

"Why do you have the Hyoton bloodline? It isn't like some of the other elemental bloodlines that have sprouted up in several different nations.

The Hyoton is exclusive to Kirigakure and the Yuki clan...You already have a sharingan, Have you been experimenting on the rest of your body too? If you have you're no better than Orochimaru!" Jiraiya stated coldly, his voice rising in anger at the end.

Naruto's gaze pierced through Jiraiya's very being. He knew the man was a fool, but he certainly didn't expect the sage to jump to such a wild conclusion. It was obvious that he had already decided that was what Naruto had done, his hatred for Orochimaru had blinded him to what was around him. He was no better than that Anko woman who was screaming for the Hokage to cancel the exams because she had fought her former sensei in the forest.

"To come up with such foolish assumptions...are you sure you're a sannin?"

I had no idea that a shinobi of your stature had the thinking capacity of an academy student." As Naruto spoke, Jiraiya could be seen losing his composure as he got up from his seat on the windowsill to force some answers from Naruto. He was forcefully restrained by Kushina's Kongo Fusa (Adamantine Sealing Chains) so that Naruto could finish speaking.

"To answer your little interrogation...I do not have the Hyoton."

This earned raised eyebrows from everyone in the room.

"What do you mean? We clearly saw you use it during your match."

Minato asked, very confused as to what Naruto was trying to imply.

Naruto sighed. 'These two have been shinobi for decades and they still can't figure anything out for themselves? This is the leader of the village and Konoha's strongest shinobi?'

"What I mean is what I said. I cannot use the Hyoton...Think about the condition of the arena when my match was held...it was covered in ice. What I used was pure ice manipulation, using the pre-existing techniques to form Hyoton techniques." Naruto stated. He was getting annoyed with what he had already guesses would be a long night ahead of him.

Minato sighed in relief after learning that his son hadn't been using his body for experiments like his sensei's old teammate. Now that he thought about it, why did Jiraiya immediately think that he was the second coming of Orochimaru?

Jiraiya narrowed his eyes once again. It seemed that he wasn't satisfied with Naruto's answer.

"How would you even gain access to such powerful techniques. The only ones who uses those kind of jutsu are the shinobi from Haru no Kuni and no Konoha shinobi has set foot there in over a decade. The last one was Kakashi when he rescued their princess when her uncle and shinobi there staged a coup."

Naruto scoffed. This man was supposed to be Konoha's spymaster and yet he couldn't even piece together such simple information. "Your information is outdated Jiraiya...either that or your memory is failing you. I don't blame you if it is the latter, it comes with advanced age after all..." Kushina had to strengthen the hold of her chakra chains as Jiraiya tried to break free and jump at her son.

"I was sent to Haru no Kuni by Hokage-sama over a month ago. It was

our first C-rank mission but it went south pretty fast. To keep the story short, we found out that we were escorting Kazahana Koyuki, the rightful heir to the throne of Haru no Kuni. I wound up killing the former Daimyo and those shinobi who were key in staging the coup, freeing the country from their grasp. Because of that Koyuki was made the new Daimyo and I was given access to the shinobi library in Yukigakure for saving their country, along with the Hyoton jutsu I copied with my sharingan."

Everyone's eyes widened after hearing that little piece of information, after all the report Naruto's team had given the Hokage wasn't the whole truth. Only Naruto knew the full extent of what really happened.

Natsuki and Narumi were shocked to hear that their Nii-san had killed someone. They knew that shinobi had to do things like that, but the concept was still just so foreign to them. They had only done simple delivery and escort missions, minus their mission to Nami no Kuni. But they were completely outclassed on that mission so Kakashi and Kushina had done all of the work. They had never even come close to taking a life, and yet their Nii-san had said that he killed several people without even a hint of remorse present his face. Could they really call themselves kunoichi just yet?

Chapter no.78

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Kushina looked a bit downcast after she had heard some of the story. She wasn't even there to comfort her own son after his first kill. To all shinobi and kunoichi, the first kill is always the hardest. It's the first step into what the shinobi world is truly like, and to hear that he had already done so broke her heart a little more. She really wanted her baby back, he was

so loud and energetic when he was just a few years old. He used to be just like her. Now she can't even recognize him, both personality and appearance wise.

Minato had gotten the answers he wanted and decided to move onto his issues with what was going on in the final stage of the chunin exams in a month.

"Naruto...the final stages of the chunin exams are only a month away have you considered what you are going to do about training yet?"

Naruto was taken by surprised at this question. He hadn't thought they would talk about his training schedule. He figured that one of them wanted to help with his training in order to worm their way back into his heart. He had already thought about what he still needed training in, not that he would tell any of them that.

"Why does that concern you Hokage-sama? If you are concerned about my performance then I can assure you that you won't be disappointed."

"That isn't really what I was getting at..." Minato sighed. "I am going to be training Nawaki this month. Though all four of you have made it to the final exams, he asked me to train him the day before the first exam if he should make it to the final stage...Naruto...I can assure you that Nawaki will be at least chunin level by the end of this month, and without ice in the arena I don't know how long you'll be able to last against him."

Naruto had to stifle a laugh at how Minato had no idea of what he was truly capable of. He didn't voice his opinion on the matter and kept his neutral gaze on the man as he continued to speak.

"All of you will be representing the village in this tournament and I need you to show our strength to the world...that's why I've asked Jiraiya-sensei to train you over the next month. Narumi and Natsuki will be receiving training from both Kushina-chan and Kakashi. I don't want you

to be left behind. I'm sure Obito will be busy with training Satsuki for the exams because of her sharingan and I don't want you to get your hopes up that you will be receiving the usual amount of attention that you require.

'Really? He wants me to train with Jiraiya? The same Jiraiya who tried to attack me a few moments ago and who accused me of being no different than Orochimaru?...Who the hell is he kidding...I'd sooner accept training from Ebisu than him.' Naruto could not believe that Minato had tried to set him up for training with the pervert who was obviously enjoying being wrapped up in Kushina's chains.

"No thank you Hokage-sama." Naruto replied in a bland tone.

This statement had everyone in the room gaping like a fish out of water. Minato, Kushina, and Jiraiya had expected him to accept the training instantly. Narumi and Natsuki had no idea what their parents were planning, but as soon as they heard he was going to be trained by a sannin they were going to ask to join the training so that they could spend more time with him.

Natsuki really wanted to be near him whenever she could, she had even considered stalking him a few times when she had seen him on the street but that idea was quickly shot down. She really wanted to be near her 'Onii-sama' as she called him in her head, she just wanted to please him however she could. She wanted to be his and his alone. She wanted to train side by side with him and spar with him, but then she remembered what had happened the last time they did. She may never get over the fact that she put him into a coma.

Narumi needed help with summoning toads. She had already been able to summon low level ones like Gamakichi, but they hadn't truly trained in it or any of the other toad arts. Though that was only an excuse, she

secretly wanted to be with her Nii-san too. Every time she saw him she was reminded of how bratty and stuck up she was in her younger years and she hated that. She felt hot every time she looked at his finely sculpted body and as if she needed a cold shower every time he looked her in the eyes. She didn't understand why it was her own brother that made her feel this way.

Minato looked at Naruto incredulously, "B-But why? Jiraiya-sensei is one of the sannin, arguably one of the strongest shinobi in the village...Anyone would jump at the chance to train under him and yet you turn the offer down!"

Naruto did not react to the outburst of the village leader, "I am not just anyone Hokage-sama. It would be detrimental to have someone who has no idea what my fighting style is or what level I am at train me, especially someone who clearly does not want to. He would obviously force me to learn his jutsu and how he fights...as I shinobi I am already set in my own way of fighting and therefore it would only take that much longer for me to break away from my old style, not that I'd want to...I refuse the training."

Some of those in the room calmed down after understanding his situation, but Jiraiya had clearly taken it as a personal insult. "What is that supposed to mean? Are you trying to say that your fighting style is superior to mine?! I am a shinobi who is feared all throughout the elemental nations and yet you, some snot-nosed genin thinks he's better than me!..Why don't we settle this right now? A spar at one of the training grounds right now! If you can last two minutes against me then I won't bother training you!"

Many of those were surprised at Jiraiya's declaration, especially with how much convincing it took Minato to get him to agree. Naruto's expression

had still not deterred from his apathetic gaze.

"I wouldn't want you to break a hip old man, you're still useful to this village after all...though you really should start thinking about retirement."

"You ungrateful little shit! Free me from these chains and I'll show you just how old I really am!" Jiraiya had gotten tired of Naruto's teasing of his age.

"I have no plans in participating in your little competition either. I'm a busy person, did you really expect me to spend one more moment with you than I really had to?...I've got nothing to prove to you Jiraiya, nor do I care about your opinion of me." Naruto turned back towards Minato. "If that will be all Hokage-sama then I will take my leave. I have not been home in over five days after all." With those words said he began to walk out the door.

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Minato raised his hand to stop his son from leaving, if he did he would most likely not see his son until the day of the tournament. "Naruto wait!...There is one more thing."

Naruto turned back around to face the Hokage. From the look on Minato's face, he knew he would not like what the man was about to say.

It seemed that this conversation would need to draw on a bit longer.

Minato sighed, knowing his son wouldn't want to hear what he was about to say. "I want you to retake to Uzumaki-Namikaze clan name...Konoha needs to show its strength during these exams and the village's strength is intertwined with the strength of their Kage...this includes their families."

The room noticeably dropped several degrees after Minato spoke those words. Words that everyone in the room knew he would not listen to. Even Jiraiya knew there was a reason why he changed his surname, though he would never understand it.

In that moment Naruto remembered all of the pain that his family had caused him over the years. Those words that he recalled Ace once saying were right, people never forget.

"I refuse...and I am not part of your family anymore Hokage-sama...perhaps I never was."

The words of the lone ravenette in the room broke the hearts of the females in the room, they wanted him back the most.

"This isn't a request! I am ordering you as your Hokage, not your father! You will take back the Uzumaki-Namikaze name and you will come back home so your mother and sisters can be happy again! Do you understand me!" Minato yelled as he stood up and slammed his fists against the desk. Naruto's glare hardened, even going so far as to open his right eye and activating his sharingan from its neutral state.

"No I will not." Naruto stated sternly, earning a glare from Minato. "You may be able to give me orders when dealing with shinobi affairs, but this is a clan matter. You cannot force me into a clan that I am not a part of...also I may not have taken the name because I am partial to my current one, but I am under the protection of the Uchiha clan."

This statement caught the attention of those in the room. They had known he lived at the Uchiha compound with Satsuki, but they didn't think that Mikoto would go so far as to put him under the clan's protection.

Naruto continued, "You may be the Hokage but we both know that you don't have the authority to interfere in clan matters." With those words

said, Naruto began to walk towards the door once more.

Minato looked down at his desk in defeat, tears welling up in his eyes, never before had any of those in the room seen the hero of Konoha look so weak and fragile. "...Will you at least tell me what the name 'Portgas' means to you?"

Naruto stopped mid-step. Those words brought back all of the memories behind the name.

Ace was never given the attention that his brother's were because of their use of chakra. Kaguya hadn't always tried to kill her sons, only after she began to perceive them as a threat and power corrupted her mind did she turn to that solution. His situation wasn't too different from Naruto's, he was cast aside for his brother's who had inherited all of their mother's chakra related abilities. Their father had died when they were still young, but he was the only one of his parents who could say that he loved Ace.

After Whitebeard's death, Ace moved away from home and lived in isolation. Away from his mother, away from the Otsutsuki, and away from his brothers. Ace didn't hate Hagoromo or Hamura, no he loved them like any brother would. But their mother had prohibited him from interacting with them. She feared that they would lead the world into war once more. As a goddess, she could not let that happen.

Chakra was not a power that humans were meant to wield, she never wanted Ace to get involved with chakra because of what may happen should his brothers grow too strong for her to control. She was secretly spending this time trying to figure out how to retrieve her chakra from her sons, but to no avail. She feared what the future would hold if more humans became able to use chakra. The world would be locked into a fate of constant war once more.

Ace didn't know any of this however. He didn't need her, he didn't need

anyone. Or at least that was what he had thought for a time. That was what he thought until Otsutsuki Ace met a woman named Portgas D. Rouge. It was a chance encounter, Ace had thought nothing of the woman until she started visiting him everyday. She had seen the sadness and loneliness within him and decided that she would give him the happiness that he had never had.

Rouge had given everything that Ace had never received from Kaguya, maternal love, understanding, affection, and so much more. She gave him a place that he could truly call home. However, it was not meant to last. Kaguya had finally realized that Hagoromo and Hamura were threats to her reign of tyranny and had decided to take back the chakra that was rightfully hers. She needed to find Ace too. She had loved him more than anything and only focused on Hagoromo and Hamura to make sure they didn't try to overthrow her because of their abilities with chakra. Ace was the only one she truly loved and she would bring him back to her at all costs.

However, she had found out that another woman had been taking care of Ace and had become something of a mother figure to Ace. Her Ace! She would not let some other woman try to steal her place as her child's mother. She was a god and he belonged to her and her alone.

The events from there onward were what would mark the turning point of Kaguya's rule. When Kaguya found Rouge she killed her in a rage of jealousy for daring to steal the one son that she still loved, however it was this action that made her lose Ace indefinitely. The murder of his mother and the death of Sabo not long after were the main reasons why Ace turned on Kaguya and decided to seek out the chakra fruits. He had decided to give up the Otsutsuki surname and change it to Portgas to honor the woman who was a mother to him when his own blood was not.

Naruto couldn't help but see the parallels between Ace and himself, Rouge and Mikoto. It was as if history was repeating itself. He would not let it come around full circle though, he wouldn't let anyone ever lay a hand on Mikoto. Even if he had to burn down the entire world to do so, he would keep her safe.

"The name Portgas represents what a real family should be like...Hokage-sama, Kushina-sama, you may say that you want me back now, but where were you when I really needed you?...When I had nothing but hatred and loneliness consuming me?...Now you expect me to just accept you back into my life because you're sorry?...Do not fool yourselves, you mean as much to me as the civilians on the street...You two are nothing more than my sperm donor and incubator." With those final words said Naruto left the room, leaving behind those whose hopes he clearly just shattered.

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Minato wasn't doing anything to hold the tears back anymore, as they fell from his eyes and soaked the paperwork below. Kushina had released her chains and was now sobbing into her hands on her knees, her legs had given out just as Naruto said his parting words. He had made it perfectly clear that he didn't see them as parents, nor would he ever.

Natsuki was hugging her knees as she cried into them. Naruto had only reminded her just how far away he was from the rest of them. If he didn't even see their mother and father as parents, the what exactly was she to him? Narumi was stronger than this, she knew it. She was able to hold back her emotions, but on the inside she was a wreck. She would never

be forgiven.

Jiraiya could only look at the family with pity in his eyes. He could not see why they were so obsessed with making Naruto part of their family again. It was obvious to him that particular ship sailed a long time ago. It would be a long night for the Uzumaki-Namikaze family.

Uchiha Household

Naruto had just walked through the Uchiha compound and had been congratulated by all of the Uchiha children who now lived there.

Apparently the announcements for the chunin exam tournament had already been relayed to the village. He must have been at the Hokage Tower longer than he thought.

All of the Uchiha now lived at the compound. Just after the massacre, they were placed in the orphanage for a small amount of time because Mikoto was deemed mentally unfit to take care of them, the only reason she was able to stay with Satsuki was because Naruto was there too and she was old enough to take care of herself. However, Mikoto recovered fairly fast thanks to Naruto's constant comfort and had gotten all of the children out of the orphanage. They were still fairly young, but Mikoto had taught them how to take care of themselves and they were given apartments in the district to live in. No matter how great of a mother Mikoto was, she couldn't take care of so many children at once.

Naruto was standing in the doorway to the living room, staring on with a look of amusement on his face. Following his line of sight, Satsuki and Haku could be seen talking quite animatedly about what had gone on during the preliminary matches.

"-I loved when you used your Hyoton to turn that shinobi from Oto into liquid! It was so beautiful!...I wish I could do things like that." Satsuki ended with a cute pout on her face.

Haku sweatdropped at the girl's actions. This was strange right? "U-Um people are usually terrified of me after I do something like that...you're a strange one aren't you Satsuki-san?"

Satsuki shrugged, "Eh I have to deal with seeing people have their flesh melted off their bones on a daily basis, something like what you did seems pretty tame to me."

A shiver ran down Haku's spine, which was odd since she was a Hyoton user. Her body was always naturally cold, in fact she couldn't remember the last time she felt any kind of warmth.

"You're team worries me Satsuki-san."

"What! I love my team there the best! We've all been friends forever!"

Satsuki whined childishly.

"Ah that's why I came here actually. I wanted to speak to Portgas-san, but it seems he's not here at the moment...I could always come back at another time if it is inconvenient for you or your mother." Haku offered politely.

Naruto had expected the girl to come by at some point. From what he knew Hyoton was quite rare, even in the Yuki clan. Very few of them awakened it but they all excelled in the use of Suiton and Futon, the two base components of Hyoton. That being said, seeing someone who used such powerful ice techniques in Konoha of all places must have interested the girl greatly.

Naruto was more willing to answer her as opposed to the Hokage and his family. She had reason to be curious while they only demanded answers about his abilities. He was still a bit irritated about everything that had gone down since the preliminaries ended. The elder ravenette decided it was time to make his presence known.

"Oh? You were looking for little old me Haku-chan?" Naruto teased from

his spot in the doorway.

The sudden voice cause both female genin in the room to jerk their heads toward the door. Satsuki's smile grew a little wider at the sight of her Nii-san and rushed over to engulf him in a hug, she had wanted to go out and celebrate their victories after the second stage ended but that opportunity was taken away from her by the Hokage. She would make sure to ask him about that later.

The reaction that Naruto found amusing was Haku's. The girl's face turned beet red when she caught sight of him. Many people called him shameless and improper for walking around half-naked all of the time, but he did enjoy when girls had reactions like this. She seemed so cute and innocent blushing up a storm and trying to look away, nobody would even suspect that she killed two people only a few hours ago.

"I didn't expect you to come and see me so soon." Naruto told her, after which he turned to Satsuki. "Satsuki, why don't you go to the kitchen and help Mikoto-chan with dinner. I'm sure Haku wants to have a private discussion."

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The female Uchiha nodded and headed towards the kitchen to help her Kaa-chan. Something had seemed different about her lately, her mother had seemed much happier. Happier than she had ever seen the woman before. She even started training again, it still amazed her how strong her Kaa-chan was after all this time. Still...something was going on and she would figure it out. Satsuki already knew that the woman had feelings for her Nii-san and honestly she was a bit jealous of how beautiful her

mother was. She wouldn't let her get too far ahead.

"Okay were all alone Haku...I have an idea of why you came here, but why don't you tell me anyway." Naruto asked as he sat down across from the pale-skinned beauty on the couch.

Haku looked a bit nervous as she began to speak, "U-Um I watched you preliminary match and...I was wondering if you were a Yuki just like me? They are the only ones I know of that possess the Hyoton bloodline."

Naruto chuckled a little to himself causing Haku to gaze at him curiously.

"Sorry about that. I had just finished having the same conversation with the Hokage. Now I don't want this conversation to drag on as long as that one did, so I'll get straight to the point. Have you ever heard of Yukigakure?"

"Hm...I've heard that was a village in what used to be Yuki no Kuni, but it still hasn't been renamed after all of the snow was melted. I don't know much about them other than that." Haku stated.

Naruto nodded, getting the answer he expected. "That's understandable, they are a minor village who haven't been on the radar much over the years. They are well known for ice manipulation jutsu, and that is exactly what I did. I learned quite a bit from the time I spent there over the course of a mission."

Haku was visibly downcast at his answer. She had really hoped that he was a Yuki. The clan was slowly starting to die out, as of now there were only a little over twenty members left. Still...he used such powerful Hyoton jutsu, stronger than most of the ones that she knew. Maybe he could give her some help? She still had trouble fully controlling her bloodline, that's why she usually ended up killing her opponents and why her body was always at such a cold temperature.

However right now she didn't feel cold. In fact, she could feel quite a lot

of heat emanating from the man in front her. It was strange, she found the warmth comforting and inviting it was as if she was drawn to him. What could possibly be happening to her?

"Um would you mind helping me out with training this month Portgas-san? I still don't have much control over it...that's why my body is always so cold...but for some reason...right now I even feel warm." Haku said, as much to herself as she did to Naruto.

Naruto concentrated and could feel the cold temperatures that were spread throughout her body. He would have to fix that. Naruto got up from his seat on the couch and walked over until he was standing in front of Haku, earning a curious look from her. Soon enough, that look of confusion morphed into one of shock as he cupped her cheek and steam was produced from his mere touch.

"Naruto, just call me Naruto."

She couldn't believe what she was feeling. Warmth, true warmth. Not just less cold, but she could actually feel heat. Haku felt as if she were in heaven right now, she melted into his touch and nuzzled even closer into his arm. She never wanted to leave his side. "Naruto-sama..." Haku whispered softly as she began to wonder if this was only a dream.

Naruto smiled at the girl's actions. He could easily tell that she longed for the one thing that she could never have, warmth. For normal people such feelings couldn't be understood, it was a good thing that Naruto wasn't normal in any sense of the word. She longed for the heat just as Naruto longed for the cold. The fire and ice melding with each other produced a plethora of steam that filled the room in a manner of seconds.

Naruto thought about Haku's request. He had no reason not to help her, and with the newly formed alliance between Konoha and Kiri it would eventually benefit them in the end. Especially with the invasion that

Suna and Oto were planning...but he just didn't have the time.

"I'm sorry Haku...but I have my own training to do over the month..."

This earned a disappointed whimper from the girl in his arms. "Though I can at least give you the information I have on Hyoton and perhaps some of the techniques I've learned...A better understanding of Hyoton should help you with controlling your ice better, which would help you in regaining control of your body."

Haku looked up and smiled softly at the older teen holding her in his arms. She had never felt so complete before in all her life.

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Later That Night

Naruto was idly stroking Mikoto's hair as she laid on his chest. He had always had a fascination with her long, silky, obsidian hair and had taken a liking to playing with it whenever he could.

Naruto was exhausted, it had been a long day. He had to sit through hours of watching boring fights during the preliminaries of the chunin exams then deal with the stress that the interrogation from the Hokage and his family gave him. He also had to have his talk with Haku, but he actually enjoyed her company.

Naruto had just wanted to go to bed after this excruciatingly long day, but apparently Mikoto had missed him. A lot. And he would never pass up the opportunity to pleasure the woman he loved. After putting up the silencing seal they had gone at it for hours. Though this wasn't just pleasing for her, nothing could pleasure him the way Mikoto's body did. Nothing felt as perfect as she did wrapped around him. He loved her.

As Mikoto purred from Naruto's petting, his thoughts drifted to what Obito had said to the team earlier in the day. There was not much that Obito would be able to help him improve on during the time that they had, so he would skip out on the training he was offering.

Naruto then remembered what Minato had said during their little talk. Natsuki and Narumi would be trained by Kushina and Kakashi, and Nawaki would be trained by Minato. Now that Naruto thought about it, Jiraiya would now probably train the boy when Minato had to attend to his Hokage duties. Whether he wanted to admit it or not, the Uzumaki-Namikaze siblings would definitely be stepping up their game in the next thirty days. Naruto would need to do the same.

Though he wanted to spend each and every waking moment with Mikoto during his time off, he knew that she wouldn't want him to neglect his training just for her. He had much to prepare for, the chunin exams, the Suna/Oto invasion, freeing the Kyuubi from Madara's control, and he couldn't let anyone else know about these things or else they would become suspicious about how he obtained such information.

There was also that feeling in his eye that he had been curious about.

When Naruto activated the mangekyo it was as if the eye was pleading, no begging him to go further. To pass the limits he currently had and to gain what only the Otsutsuki had before him. The only problem was Naruto didn't know how to surpass those limits. That was a problem for another time however, for now he would train in the arts of the phoenix. His summons had wanted him to train in there jutsu for a long time now, but Naruto just couldn't afford an extended trip away from Konoha at the time. Now would be the perfect opportunity.

He would certainly have a nice surprise for all those who would be watching the chunin exams.

"Ne Mikoto-chan?"

"Hm? What is it Naruto-kun? I don't think I can go another round just yet, you were quite...thorough during the last one. I need a little more time to recover." Mikoto teased.

This earned a snicker from Naruto, "No, not that. I'll probably be gone for the rest of the month for training."

Mikoto looked up at him with a sad smile on her face. They hadn't been able to spend much time together recently, Naruto had been occupied with the chunin exams and missions. Now he had to leave for training then he would have to participate in the tournament.

"My summons have been wanting me to come to their realm for a while now, to train in their secret arts. Now is the first real opportunity I have to do this." Naruto noticed the sad look on his lover's face and went to comfort her. "Don't worry Mikoto-chan. After the chunin exam tournament, I'll be all yours."

Mikoto's smile turned into a mischievous one as she sat up and straddled Naruto. "Well then we'll just have to make the most of tonight now won't we?"

She leaned down and slammed her lips onto Naruto's. Oh yes, this would be a very long night and most likely morning ahead of Naruto.

Training Ground 11 - 9:00 AM

Naruto, Satsuki, and Hana all sat leaning against a tree at training ground 11. They began to wonder why they still bothered showing up at the time their sensei specified when he was always late.

Naruto was dead tired. Even with his incredible stamina that came from being an Uzumaki he couldn't help but be exhausted after what Mikoto had put him through last night. They had only finished their fun a few hours ago when they felt Satsuki starting to wake up. Mikoto was both

easy and hard to please. She loved his very touch, but once he started she wouldn't ever let him stop. Not to mention how...experimental she was. If Naruto had been a pervert like so many men in Konoha are, then he would've gotten a nosebleed just by recalling the memories.

Naruto was using the time he knew his sensei would give them to catch up on his missed sleep. Naruto previously had a habit of falling asleep everywhere he went, especially during his time at the academy. Some had called it narcolepsy, but it only ever happened when he was very bored. Some people had even thought he was a Nara at one point. He'd broken that habit during the three years of training that he had done on his own in the cave, but that didn't mean he didn't ever get tired.

It seemed luck wasn't on Naruto's side this morning as Obito arrived only five minutes late.

'Really? This is the one time that he shows up close to the appointed time...whatever, I'll just get my rest at Mt. Silver.'

Obito looked down at his genin team with pride shining in his eyes. His team had been the only one from Konoha to have all of its members reach the final stage. He knew that it was too soon for the rookie teams to enter the exams, especially with how they had been training them.

Kushina and Kurenai both mothered their genin, so they weren't pushed passed their limits. Kakashi and Asuma were both too lazy to get any real training done. He could only snicker as he remembered the horrified faces of them when they saw how ruthless his team was.

The only members of the rookie 13 who made it to the finals were his team and the Hokage's children. Hell, not even a single member of Gai's team had made it passed the preliminaries. Naruto had even completely outclassed the Hyuga prodigy on his team. Even though they passed, the Hokage's children barely won their matches. Nawaki and Narumi both

struggled against their opponents and came out with a win at the last second. Natsuki was slightly better, but the Hyuga heiress did prove to be a challenge for her. In any case they would still need more training to come out on top.

"Okay my cute little genin!" This earned a groan from the three other occupants of the training ground. "First I would like to congratulate all of you for making it to the final stage of the chunin exams on your first time. I didn't even make it this far until a year after I became a genin. And I'm glad you showed your former classmates how hard you've been training because it's obvious they have not."

Obito paused for a minute to let everything sink in before he continued speaking. "Next is where it gets a little complicated. Because of my duties as the liaison between Konoha and Kiri, I have been tasked with taking care of the Mizukage and his bodyguards when they arrive here in the village. I'm also required to be one of Minato-sensei's bodyguards during the final exams. Because of that I must be present for debriefings and preparations."

Obito sighed as he continued, "Due to everything that's going on, I will only have time to train one of you...the other two of you are welcome to come to me for advise but I won't have the time to give you any hands on training...I told you yesterday to consdider what you needed to improve in and what you wanted to learn. So what have you decided? Who will be the one to receive training from me?"

The three genin looked at each other for a moment before Naruto decided to break the silence. He knew that he did not need any help from there sensei while Satsuki and Hana would surely benefit from it.

"I have already made arrangements to be summoned to Mt. Silver and be trained in the secret arts of my summons. Sorry sensei but I won't be in

need of any help with the time that we have."

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Naruto received a nod of understanding from Obito before Hana spoke up.

"Actually sensei...my Kaa-san has already agreed to help me train for the finals. She wasn't very happy about the condition that I put Kiba and Akamaru in, but she understand that I did it to put him in his place. The clan only needs strong alpha males, and it became obvious that Kiba was not. I'll be training in my clan techniques and hopefully gaining better control of my elemental affinity."

Obito had thought this might happen. The Inuzuka clan needed someone strong to lead their pack, and with Kiba being defeated by his sister wouldn't bode well for his standing in the clan.

Satsuki was the last one to voice her plans, "Actually I could use help with my training sensei. I still need to fully mature my sharingan and I still need to master my main elemental affinity. Neither my Kaa-chan or Naruto-nii can help me with my Raiton affinity because they don't use it..."

Well at least one of his students still needed his help. Obito was glad that he had Kakashi help develop his lightning nature and teach him some of his personal techniques. It had certainly come in handy with all of the Suiton users there were in Mizu no Kuni and now he would be able to pass his knowledge down to his student.

"Well then, I will be training Satsuki until the finals. Do you have any issues with that Naruto, Hana?" Obito asked, not wanting to make it seem

like he was playing favorites like how many other of the jonin-sensei usually did. He didn't want either of his other students to feel as if he was being unfair or neglectful.

Both of the said genin shook their heads. They had clearly stated that they would be preoccupied with their own training to receive any from him. Satsuki was the one who he could really train to her full potential. She was a sharingan user, possessed a small Katon nature and a high Raiton nature. He was the only one who could help her as she was right now. They both knew that.

Though Obito was curious as to what kind of training Naruto would receive from the phoenix. From what he had seen they were incredibly powerful. The elder Uchiha had witnessed Jiraiya's toad techniques and collaboration jutsu many times. If Naruto were to learn phoenix related techniques, he could become something to be feared.

Obito smiled at the two of them before grabbing onto Satsuki's shoulder. "We'll be off then. I'll see the two of you at the finals. I look forward to seeing just how much you improve." Not a moment later the two Uchiha were sucked into a vortex, leaving Hana and Naruto alone at the training ground.

The two genin turned towards each other as the wind began to pick up. They had been friends forever, before Naruto had even met Satsuki and Mikoto. Which is what made this a bit harder for the two of them. Hana couldn't find the words she wanted to say, so Naruto took the lead.

"The two of us have been friends for a long time haven't we Hana?"

Hana smiled at how sincere and sad he sounded. "Over seven years now...I can still remember the first day we met...you were my first real friend Naruto."

"And you were mine Hana...should the two of us both win our first

matches...then we'll end up fighting each other..." Naruto looked away, his long hair swaying in the wind.

"Yeah...I know..." Hana really didn't want to fight her best friend, but she wouldn't back out of this.

Naruto looked at her with a smirk on his face, "Should it come to that, I want you to go all out. No holding back...I intend to grow even stronger during this time period we have with training...I suggest you do the same. I want you to give me the fight I've always wanted. Show me how much you'll improve until then."

A second later, Naruto was covered in a shroud of blue and orange flames and was gone once the flames had dispersed, signaling he had been reversed summoned to his summoning realm.

"I'll give you just that Naruto...I'll show you just how far I've come since we met." Hana spoke to herself as the wind carried her voice away.

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Mt. Silver

Naruto gazed across the vast landscape that was set ablaze by the holy flames of the phoenix. He was once again, at the peak of the tallest mountain within the phoenix clan's territory. They had the most land out of all the summoning clans by far because of their strength and their reign as the longest summons in existence. This was mainly because of their inability to become extinct. Once they died they would simply rise from their ashes as they were reborn once again.

He had only been here a handful of times before, but it was impossible to forget. Naruto continued up towards where the den of the clan leader

was as the flames made way for him, recognizing him as their master. He nodded his head to some of the smaller phoenixes and newly reborn ones. Such things were beautiful to him. Here there was no life and death, there was no pain and misery. Here everyone lived their lives to the fullest and then repeated the process. Naruto would agree that these were the perfect summons for him.

As Naruto walked up the peak a majority of the volcanoes erupted simultaneously, causing avalanches of molten lava and clouds of superheated ash to come rushing down the mountain. Naruto was not fazed. Such thing was a common occurrence here and neither of these things could harm Naruto anyways, he was fire itself.

He simply channeled chakra to his feet and walked on the oceans of molten lava as if they were water. To outsiders this sight of burning earth, tsunamis of lava, and raining of ash would strike fear into their hearts and crush all of their hopes and dreams as they journeyed through the apocalyptic scene, but Naruto actually enjoyed the scenery. To him it were as if he were walking on a sandy beach and watching the sunset. Naruto stopped as he reached the main room within the den and stood before the towering phoenix who was seated on his throne. The mighty phoenix had been waiting for his summoners arrival. This was the first time that they had ever had a summoner, this would also be the last as it was unlikely for any other human to be able to set foot on their sacred land. As this would be the only time they would have a summoner, they wanted to pass down their arts to him to carry on their pride and help him master his own as well.

The phoenix before Naruto was now in his true form. Dranzer's feathers were midnight black with hints of red outlining them, the gold armor coating his wings, chest, and head was now much thinner. His white

mane flowed down to his mid-back and his eyes were much fiercer than before. The leader of the phoenix clan gave off a feeling of pure power and authority. The phoenix preferred to keep his feathers red when in the presence of the rest of the clan, as to not expose them to his overwhelming aura, but he knew his summoner could withstand his presence.

"You wished for my presence here Dranzer?" Naruto asked. Normally the king of the phoenix would have made a point for someone to show respect in front of him, but he knew his summoner's tendencies all too well. The boy did not show respect for anyone, he refused to use titles when he did not have to and would not bow to anybody. It was rare to find a being with as strong of a will as his.

"It is about time you've returned Naruto. I had wanted to start your training in our secret arts over a month ago." The ruler of phoenixes stated. Naruto had kept him waiting for quite a while as the boy was kept quite busy with his shinobi duties. Dranzer wasn't known to be the most patient or understanding of their species.

"I apologize Dranzer, but as of now I will have an entire month to begin my training before I must return to my village." Naruto was ready to begin, he had not wanted to wait this long either but outside circumstances had forced him to do such. He needed to get stronger that much was obvious. While he was strong for a genin, or even a chunin, there were still people much stronger than him. He had no illusions that he would still be defeated by the likes of Orochimaru, Jiraiya, Minato, and others like them.

He was not yet at Ace's level and knew that he would not be for a long time. It was hard to train his flames, even with the cave he had underneath the Naka Shrine. Many of the techniques he wanted to

perfect were far too destructive and would attract unwanted attention.

Here he could train to his heart's content without having anybody ask too many questions.

"Good, there is much that I have to teach you before I die and am reborn.

When such a time comes Marco will take my place as the clan head." This did not surprise Naruto. Marco was his familiar and knew just how strong the blue phoenix was. He was only second to Dranzer and had still not even come close to reaching his full potential yet.

"However there is still some time before such a thing happens, but it would be best to dive headfirst into your training." The old phoenix spoke.

The phoenix clan had many different techniques as there were many different types of phoenix, they had existed for thousands of years and gone through many adaptations to the world. In fact, what many people know as dragons are really phoenixes that have gone through evolution so that they may protect the heavens above the skies and to guard the moon and what it holds at its core. "We shall start with your senjutsu training, you have yet to master it even after years of training in the art. This may be because you need an atmosphere that is rich in nature chakra to fully be able to surpass your limits in the art. You have an advantage in that you don't need to remain completely motionless because you can passively absorb nature chakra, as you are made of one of the components that forms nature. This is what we will start off our training in."

Naruto nodded. He knew that with how intense Dranzer's training methods were, he would not be getting much rest over the month. Would he end up regretting his decision to come here? Too late for such thoughts now, he would need absolute focus if he wanted to pass the strength of all those in the tournament and all those outside as well. He

would not let anyone suppress the flames that were his will. The will of fire shall rise from the ashes once more.

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Chunin Exam Arena - One Month Later

Konoha had been bristling with business over the past month. Many people from outside of Konoha had come from outside the village walls to watch the chunin exam tournament. Business was booming because of the influx of visitors, more visitors meant more profit which would benefit the village in the end. The chunin exams were always a main attraction and would bring not only visitors, but more clients as well. The stadium was packed full of people. There were almost no seats available and it was filled to the brim with shinobi and civilians alike. Many of which were running about trying to make their last minute bets, hoping to win some extra cash based on who they thought was sure to win it all. Many of the civilians had placed their bets on the Hokage's children, knowing that their Hokage wouldn't let them participate without training them to the full extent of his ability.

The streets had been bustling with activity hours ago, but now they were quiet as a mouse. Many of the shops had even closed early so they could watch the tournament as well. Everyone and anyone was now in the stadium waiting for the exams to start.

Many of the most prominent people in Hi no Kuni were at the event.

Even VIPs who were from other countries had travelled all this way to attend. Konoha was one of the strongest of the great nations alongside Kumo and Iwa.

If someone were to look at the Kage Box then they would see several prominent figures of the shinobi world. The first one that would be noticed was the Yondaime Hokage, Namikaze Minato who was wearing the traditional Hokage robes that had been passed down since the reign of the Shodaime Hokage. To his left was a much shorter man that had the appearance of a child. This was the Yondaime Mizukage, Yagura, who wore a mesh shirt with a green scarf wrapped around his neck. He also had on a green sash around his waist and adorned the Mizukage's traditional hat. To Minato's right was the Yondaime Kazekage, Rasa. He too adorned his traditional Kage robes.

Behind the three Kage were several notable figures. To those from Konoha, they would easily be able to recognize Jiraiya of the sannin and Uchiha Obito. Next to them were a beautiful redhead, Terumi Mei, and a man with an eyepatch covering his right eye, Ao. The Suna bodyguards wore large cloaks so they were unrecognizable.

It was rare to see more than two Kages to come to an event like this, as many of the leaders of the great nations did not get along with one another.

All of the chunin hopefuls stood in the middle of the coliseum floor where the entire stadium could see them. They were the main reason for all of the commotion that had been happening the past few weeks.

Everyone had come to see the prowess of the new generation. Most of those in the audience had come to see the Hokage's three children or one of the few remaining Uchiha in particular. Most people had bet on one of them. Whatever the case, they were all there to represent their village and show off its strength.

They had trained to their limits and beyond over the past month. Each and every one of them could say that they had greatly improved

themselves in preparation for these matches. All of them stood before Genma just as he was about to announce the rules and start the first match. However, most of the genin representing Konoha were focused on one person, Portgas D. Naruto.

Naruto stood in the middle of the line that the genin were made to stand in. He maintained his usual impassive expression while his hands remained in his pockets as he waited for Genma to start the proceedings. Naruto had changed greatly over the past month. One change that had surprised everyone who was familiar with him was that he actually decided to wear clothes. He hadn't worn a shirt in months!

Naruto's appearance had changed a great deal. He now wore a short-sleeved gray trench-coat that reaches just below his knees with the Uchiha clan crest on the back. Underneath is a skin-tight, black, form-fitting shirt. He has also opted to wear pants instead of his usual shorts. His pants are black in color and reach down to his black combat boots, as opposed to normal shinobi pants which only reach down to the calves. His hitai-ate can still be seen being used as a belt buckle. A black chokuto can be seen strapped to his back, however only the handle is visible because he has chosen to wear it under his trench-coat. The majority of his right arm is wrapped up in bandages and black gloves are worn on each of his hands. He's opted to not wear his usual orange cowboy hat, revealing his new short hairstyle that is somewhat reminiscent of Obito's. Naruto was done hiding behind someone else's appearance. This was who he was. During his time training and all of the meditation needed to become one with nature, Naruto had realized that he had been emulating Ace. Though their beliefs were similar, they were not the same person. Due to the time spent living Ace's life their personalities and identities had merged in Naruto's mind and it became hard to distinguish who he

really was, that was the one thing that was holding him back. After realizing this, he spent countless hours separating the two personalities and he finally succeeded. This was who Naruto truly was.

Large blushes could be seen on the faces of the Kunoichi on the arena floor, even Hana and Temari. For some reason now that he was fully clothed, there was a feel of mystery and charm to him. Something that woman seemed to be drawn to.

It was now that Genma decided to make his announcements. Seals had been previously placed all over the stadium floor and walls so that the audience could hear everything that was said by the proctor and the contestants competing.

"Welcome to the chunin exam finals! My name is Shiranui Genma and I will be the proctor for these exams."

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"Welcome to the chunin exam finals! My name is Shiranui Genma and I will be the proctor for these exams."

He said as much to the genin as to the audience. "Every genin here today had worked hard to get to this point of their careers and have already made their respective villages proud by doing so...However you are here today to show the strength of your village and which of you has what it takes to become chunin!" The crowd cheered as they knew the matches would be starting any moment now. "So without further ado we will now begin the matches for the tournament!"

Uzumaki-Namikaze Natsuki vs. Sabaku no Temari

Genma walked over to where the proctor judged the match from and

looked at the lineup. "The first match will be Uzumaki-Namikaze Natsuki versus Sabaku no Temari! Will those two please make their way to the center of the arena. All other contestants, please make your way up to the contestant's booth to observe the match." All of the other genin walked towards the stairs up to their booth, leaving only Natsuki and Temari behind.

Temari's appearance had not changed much over the month, she still wore her usual battle dress that was made for purposes such as this. Natsuki however changed into a more revealing attire, which many of the men in Konoha were pleased to see. She wore a small black tank top that ended just above her stomach, underneath was a short-sleeved mesh shirt. She had on a short blue skirt, black shinobi sandals, and knee-length tights. She wore her beautiful scarlet hair down as usual and her katana was positioned at her waist.

Genma looked between the two kunoichi before speaking, "The same rules apply here that were applied during the preliminary rounds. I trust you remember them?" He received nods from both girls. "First match of the chunin exam finals, Uzumaki-Namikaze Natsuki vs. Sabaku no Temari. Begin!" He yelled as he swung his hand down from above his head to signal the start of the match.

Natsuki immediately reached down to her waist and unsheathed her katana. She locked eyes with the Suna-nin who had unstrapped her fan from her back and they charged at each other. Normally one wouldn't use a war fan in combat against a sword, but it seemed as if Temari had no other choice. The girls traded slash after slash in an attempt to gain the edge in this fight. Natsuki brought out her katana into a stab, but it was easily blocked by Temari. The Suna kunoichi then brought her fan back, intent on slamming it into Natsuki's side, but the girl managed to bring

her sword up in time to lessen the blow.

Natsuki was sent flying across the field until she flipped in mid-air and drove her feet into the ground, slowing her down until she stopped completely. She looked up and saw that Temari had already opened her fan until all three stars were showing. She silently cursed to herself. She had been trying to stop Temari from creating any distance between them so she couldn't use her Futon jutsu, but it seemed as if she was too late.

"Kamaitachi no Jutsu (Wind Scythe Jutsu)!" With a single swing of her fan, Temari created a giant air current which collided with one another resulting in a large vacuum pocket. Natsuki knew that if she was hit by this jutsu she would be assaulted by countless wind blades and the tide of the battle would turn in her favor. She would not let that happen. She wouldn't be beaten so easily.

Natsuki quickly sheathed her sword and weaved a few hand seals and began molding chakra in her lungs. "Katon: Gokakyu no Jutsu (Fire Release: Great Fireball Jutsu)!" Natsuki expelled a single stream of fire from her mouth that took the form of a fairly large orb and soon engulfed the oncoming Futon Jutsu. The wind only served to accelerate the flames as they became hotter and moved at faster speeds toward Temari.

The blonde kunoichi cursed as she channeled chakra to her feet and jumped far to her right as the flames shot right passed her. She looked over to her opponent and saw her panting fairly hard.

Natsuki had found out that she had three elemental affinities, Futon, Raiton, and Suiton. She had gotten her Suiton affinity from her mother and her Raiton and Futon affinities from her father. She didn't have a Katon affinity but Kakashi had taught her some Katon jutsu anyways because she was up against a Futon user in her first match. Because she didn't have an affinity for it, Katon jutsus took much more chakra than

any of her other elements.

Temari couldn't waste too much chakra right now, so she would have to resort to other methods. She pulled out three kunai with exploding tags attached from her weapons pouch and through them at the still form of Natsuki. Natsuki was forced to dodge the kunai as they impacted the ground, but she hadn't noticed the exploding tags attached and was blown away a good distance by the explosion.

She slowly got up, slightly ragged from the impact of the blast, and quickly unsheathed her sword to block the shuriken that were coming at her. Natsuki quickly rushed at Temari once more. Temari was quickly on the defense because she didn't want to waste too much chakra here in a fight such as this one. Natsuki was wildly slashing at Temari, not giving her a chance to break free from the clash or gain any distance between them. Finally Natsuki managed to get inside her guard and slashed her across the stomach. It was a shallow slash, but she still managed to draw first blood.

Natsuki jumped back and went through a few more hand seals. "Suiton: Teppodama (Water Release: Gunshot)!" She sent three large, condensed balls of water towards Temari, who easily dodged. The fast moving projectiles continued and impacted the ground next to her, leaving only small cracks.

Natsuki was about to fire more of the same jutsu at her, but Temari quickly raised her arm. "Proctor, I forfeit. It's obvious my Futon jutsu won't do me any good here and I don't have many other techniques besides that." Genma quickly nodded his head, accepting the answer and stepped forward.

"Winner by forfeit, Uzumaki-Namikaze Natsuki!"

The crowd erupted in a roar as they continued to cheer on one of the

favorites of the tournament. Temari turned around and walked up the stairs towards the contestant's booth, leaving a confused Natsuki behind. She had thought the fight would have kept on going, Temari obviously had plenty of chakra left and didn't even look tired in the slightest. She stared on for a few moments before making her way up to the booth as well.

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Kage Booth

"That fight was a bit disappointing don't you think?" Yagura asked the other Kage. "Both of them were daughters of Kage and yet neither of them showed qualities befitting of a chunin."

"Ah yes that's true. My daughter is more specialized in Futon, but it appears as if she needs more training to combat her weaknesses." Rasa stated, but he was commending Temari inwardly for not wasting too much chakra on a match that would not have mattered either way. All that mattered was the invasion that would start during Gaara's match at the end of the tournament.

Minato frowned, he thought he had taught his children better than to fight straight on from the very start and to judge your opponents first, but he was still glad that she had won. She would have time to prove that she is chunin material later on in the finals. "I'm sure Natsuki will show more of her potential in the oncoming matches."

"Oh one of the remaining Uchiha and your other daughter are fighting next Hokage-dono. I'm looking forward to this matchup very much. It should prove to be quite interesting." Rasa stated.

Minato hoped that Narumi would be okay. Natsuki had proved to be quite

ruthless in the preliminary rounds and hoped that she would not permanently cripple Narumi if she had the chance. No, he knew that wouldn't happen. Narumi had been personally trained by him, Kushina, Kakashi, Jiraiya, and Tsunade in the past. There was no way that she could lose.

Combatant Booth

Naruto was standing on one end of the booth with Satsuki and Hana by his sides. Narumi was only standing a few feet away because she wanted to be near her Nii-san and she also wanted to hear what he had to say.

"That match was a bit dull...I honestly expected much more from both of them." Naruto said, he was obviously expecting a more exciting match.

"Don't worry Nii-san! I won't disappoint you. I'll show you just how much I learned during my training with Obito-sensei!" Satsuki said as she heard the proctor call for her and Narumi to come down to the arena.

A moment later the female Uchiha and the Hokage's daughter both left the booth, with Narumi giving one last glance at Naruto before she followed Satsuki down the stairs.

Hana had been curious about something for a while. "Ne Naruto? When did you learn Kenjutsu? I thought you said that you weren't a usual user of Bukijutsu?"

Naruto nodded, he expected her or Satsuki would ask. He had learned Kenjutsu extensively under Shisui's training, but wanted to focus more on other aspects of his shinobi training. Then after he adopted part of Ace's personality, he chose not to focus on weapons at all. Ace had never used weapons and didn't have much of a like for them. Those opinions transferred on to Naruto and he eventually dropped his Kenjutsu training. This past month of training he had picked up the art once again after remembering how useful it was.

"I guess you could say I'm an old hand at it. I haven't picked up a sword in years, but I've gotten back into my training over the past month."

Naruto said as he rubbed the back of his head sheepishly. Hana noticed this and found it odd. Naruto was always serious and would only act sincerely to Mikoto or Satsuki, but she hadn't seen him like this in years. It was...strange.

Uchiha Satsuki vs. Uzumaki-Namikaze Narumi

The second match of Uchiha Satsuki and Uzumaki-Namikaze Narumi will now begin!" He yelled before heShunshinedout of the way.

Satsuki quickly activated her sharingan as Narumi took the Uzumaki Taijutsu stance and charged at her. Satsuki would not be drawn into her pace of the battle. She quickly sweep kicked Narumi and followed up with a kick to her side, effectively sending her a dozen feet away.

Satsuki made a quickShunshinand reappeared next to one of the trees on the edge of the arena. She needed to plan out her moves carefully. This exam wasn't just about overpowering your opponent, you needed to show strategy and be able to think on your feet. That's why Nii-san said he was disappointed with the last fight, all they did was rush at each other and throw their jutsus around carelessly.

Narumi got up a moment later and looked around the battlefield, unable to find her opponent. She wanted to fight this girl for a long time, she had stolen her place as Naruto-kun's imouto. In all honesty she was jealous of the place that Satsuki held in Naruto's heart. But now she finally gets the chance to fight her and she runs away.

She calmed herself down and tried to focus onto Satsuki's chakra signature. She had to spread out her senses quite a bit in order to find her, but she finally managed to do it.

Narumi quicklyShunshinedacross the battlefield, and reappeared only a

dozen feet away from her. Narumi quickly pulled out two handfuls of shuriken and launched them toward the girl. The shuriken pierced Satsuki but she was soon covered in a cloud of smoke, signaling to Narumi that she managed to use the Kawarimi. However, Narumi noticed too late that she had used a log covered in exploding tags for her escape. There was a loud explosion, and Narumi could be seen flying through the air as she was launched back into the middle of the battlefield. The blond was covered in scrapes and bruises, but was otherwise fine. She slowly began to get up, but immediately pulled out two kunai from her holster as shuriken began raining down on her from above.

"Shuriken Kage Bunshin no Jutsu (Shuriken Shadow Clone Jutsu)!" Satsuki yelled as the fifty shuriken turned into a hundred. She had stored a large amount of shuriken in a preprepared scroll, as this was one of her favorite jutsus. It worked especially well when the target managed to fall into a trap.

Narumi quickly realized that she wouldn't be able to block them all with just kunai. She was only able to use one jutsu without forming hand seals and she was thanking all her training right now for it being this jutsu. "Futon: Daitoppa (Wind Release: Great Breakthrough)!" Narumi exhaled a large amount of wind from her lungs and sent all of the shuriken flying the other direction and into a wall.

She wouldn't give Satsuki another chance to prepare any more traps. She rushed the girl and engaged her in a bout of Taijutsu. Narumi sent a kick towards Satsuki's side, which was easily blocked by bringing her arm out. The female Uchiha responded by grabbing onto the leg and sweeping her other one out from under her, causing her to fall. Satsuki sent a fist toward her face as she hit the ground, but Narumi quickly rolled out of the way.

The Uzumaki-Namikaze sent her own kick towards Satsuki's legs, causing said girl's knees to buckle. As she lost her balance, Narumi quickly sprung herself up and slammed her fist into Satsuki's gut. However, the girl held strong and retaliated with a palm thrust into her chest. The blonde wasn't as experienced in Taijutsu as Satsuki was and was forced back as she spit up some saliva.

Narumi knew she couldn't keep up with her foe in Taijutsu alone. She needed an advantage. The Hokage's daughter formed a few familiar hand seals and began molding her chakra, "Suiton: Mizuame Nabara (Water Release: Starch Syrup Capturing Field)!" She released a sticky liquid from her mouth that was meant to cover Satsuki's mobility. The liquid slowly began to cover most of the area they were fighting on and was about to ensnare Satsuki.

Unfortunately for the girl, Satsuki was an Uchiha and once they see something, they never forget it. Satsuki had used this same jutsu against Hinata in the preliminary rounds.

"Sorry Narumi-san, but I've already seen this jutsu before, it won't work."

Satsuki said confidently as she jumped up as the liquid flowed beneath her. She concentrated chakra to her feet and stood on top of the sticky liquid as if it were merely water.

She then crouched down and channeled chakra into the seals on her arm sleeves, summoning several shuriken. She threw them at Narumi but the girl was easily able to dodge them.

"It seems your aim has gotten worse since you last tried that." Narumi commented confidently.

However, Satsuki only smirked as she pulled on some wire that was nearly invisible and the shuriken came back around and tied the wire tightly around Narumi, completely immobilizing her. The blonde gasped

as she felt herself unable to move.

"Katon: Bakufu Ranbu (Fire Release: Blast Wave Wild Dance)." Satsuki expelled a continuous stream of intense flames which began to spiral outwards, creating a massive fire vortex. The flames were guided by the wire and moved to consume Narumi and turn her into nothing but a pile of ash.

Narumi cursed as she felt the heat of the flames, before an idea popped into her head for her way of escape. She concentrated wind chakra around her body and formed various small wind blades which cut through the wire holding her. She jumped to her left to narrowly escape the torrent of flames that passed by.

Narumi wanted to impress her Nii-san, but this girl was far better than she had anticipated. What he said a month ago had really hurt her. He had essentially cut all ties with their family by claiming that he would never see Minato and Kushina as parents. Where did that leave her? Would she be left alone too? She didn't want to be abandoned by him the same way that he was by their parents. But such things were out of her control as they barely had any contact as it was.

Satsuki couldn't let this drag on any longer, she needed to save her chakra for the next round. She needed to finish this now. Narumi slowly got back up to her feet as the stream of fire had ended. She looked up to find Satsuki but she had lost her once again. Suddenly she felt another presence right below her and looked down to see Satsuki with her left leg extended. Narumi felt an excruciating pain in her jaw as Satsuki kicked her up into the air.

The ravenette didn't stop there as she quickly spun behind Narumi to initiate the next step of her favored Taijutsu technique. Satsuki spun around Narumi and slammed the back of her forearm into her chest

sending her downwards. Satsuki slammed her forearm into the girl once more, increasing the speed at which they descended.

"Come back here! I'm not done yet! Shishi Rendan (Lion's Barrage)!"

Satsuki flipped in mid-air and dropped an axe-kick into the girl's gut just before they made contact with the ground, causing Narumi to cough up a large amount of blood before succumbing to unconsciousness. Satsuki was sent sliding away from the momentum of her rendition of the Omote Renge (Front Lotus). She looked back and saw that the ground had cracked where Narumi had landed.

Satsuki sighed and slowly got up. She didn't want to use that move, especially on a comrade, but it used almost no chakra and excess use was something she couldn't afford at the moment.

She also didn't like the fact that Narumi continuously tried to worm her way back into her Nii-san's life, even after everything that they had done to him. Her and Natsuki's continued attempts were starting to annoy her, so she didn't feel too bad about using the Shishi Rendan (Lion's Barrage) on her. After all her Nii-san was hers and hers alone. Well she would probably have to share with Kaa-chan, but she would just have to deal with that.

"Winner by knock out, Uchiha Satsuki!" Genma announced after checking on Narumi.

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The crowd was speechless for a moment at what they just saw, before erupting into cheers once more. It was a great match in their opinion and would like to see both of the girls promoted to chunin. Many of them

were cheering because they had bet on the heiress of the Uchiha clan, while others were in tears as they had thought that the Hokage's daughter would win for sure.

Satsuki headed back up the stairs after seeing Narumi being taken away by a gurney by the medical squad who was on standby for those who were injured in combat.

Kage Box

"That was quite an impressive match for two genin." Rasa commented. "I believe that the Uchiha girl already has what it takes to be a chunin. She proved to be able to think with a clear head and not let her opponent control the pace of the battle from the start."

Minao nodded, "I agree she is quite skilled and those traps that she set up at the start of the match were a good plan on such short notice. She easily held the pace of the match from the very beginning. But what about Narumi?" Minato wanted his daughter to be promoted to chunin, but she was always brash and reckless just like her mother. She charged into the match without a plan and showed very little strategy.

"While she did prove to be skilled and was able to utilize two different chakra natures, there was little forethought to her actions and when she got tired of how the match was playing out she recklessly charged at her opponent to try to take control by force. I don't think that she's ready quite yet." Yagura gave the Hokage his opinion on the matter.

"I also agree. You really need to teach your daughters some discipline Hokage-dono, they both seem quite stubborn and headstrong." Rasa commented.

Minato could only sigh, "It's a trait that they got from their mother, there's little I can do to break something like that...no matter how much I want to."

Stands

In one section of the stands sat Mikoto, Kushina, Kakashi, Gai, Kurenai, Asuma, and a majority of the genin from the rookie 13 and Gai's team.

Even Lee was there. During the thirty day break between the preliminaries and now, Tsunade had operated on his injuries and the surgery had turned out successful. Many were worried that he would never be a shinobi again, but he was good as new and even screaming about the flames of youth as they spoke.

Mikoto was cheering like wild as she watched Satsuki win her match. She was a mother, what was she supposed to do. Kushina had done the same thing when Natsuki had won, so why couldn't she now. She also wanted to rub it in Kushina's face a little. That her daughter had won while Narumi had lost. One of the very children that Naruto was thrown aside for, some good all that extra training did them.

Kushina gave her a glare before turning her eyes back to the arena. She was disappointed that her Narumi-chan had lost in the first round, especially with all of the training they had done over the past few weeks. At least Natsuki had made it to the next round.

"I'm surprised that you aren't upset that Satsuki copied your student's technique Gai. You looked quite angry when Nawaki did the same thing in the preliminaries." Kakashi stated as he didn't even take his eyes off of his little orange book.

"Well unlike your thief of a student, Obito had asked me for permission to train Satsuki-san in the Goken style. Such things as stealing techniques are most unyouthful." Gai responded.

Kushina gave Gai a glare for calling her son a thief, but she couldn't argue with him there. Nawaki had blatantly stole a technique that someone had worked hard to master and then wrote it off as his own. She

should have taught him better than that.

Many were surprised that Satsuki had one. She was one of the top kunoichi who had graduated the academy this year and many of her classmates idolized her, for both her skills and her beauty, but she was completely defeated by Satsuki.

She had shown to be able to use two elements, but she had yet to learn how to use them effectively and when to use them. Her Taijutsu was only average and she was beaten before she could use the Kyuubi's chakra. Most of the Jonin in the stands didn't see anything very impressive from Narumi, it was obvious to many that she needed more training or that their senseis teaching wasn't very effective.

"Oh look! Naruto-kun's up next! I've been waiting forever to see him fight!" Mikoto squealed like a school girl.

Kushina raised an eyebrow at her friend's actions as did many of the others who knew her.

"You seem awfully excited to see Naruto-kun, Mikoto-chan...why is that"

Mikoto then noticed that she spoke out loud, ah it didn't really matter did it? "What exactly are you trying to imply Kushina-chan?"

"What exactly is your involvement with my son?" Kushina asked, getting more irritated by the second.

Mikoto thought about telling her for a minute, but she would prefer Naruto to do that. Plus it would be quite funny to see him not care at all when Kushina overreacted and tried to tell him that it was wrong.

"I just want to see him compete is all." Mikoto said in an overly innocent voice. "He does live with me after all, and we are quite close."

Kushina eyed her suspiciously before accepting the answer and turning her head back towards the arena.

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Portgas D. Naruto vs. Uzumaki-Namikaze Nawaki

Naruto stood in the center of the arena as he listened to the roars of the crowd. He would give them a show that they would remember for the rest of their lives, one way or another. Naruto was done hiding. Naruto was tired of hiding how strong he really was, tired of keeping all of these secrets, Naruto was just tired of it all. Today would be the very day that the will of fire rises once again.

Naruto impassively eyed his opponent who was standing across from him. Nawaki hadn't changed much since the ravenette had last seen him. Nawaki was now wearing an orange and black jumpsuit as opposed to his usual orange and blue ones. Naruto didn't understand the family's fascination with orange. Yes, Naruto had previously worn an orange hat and belt, but he didn't stand out like sitting duck in the color nor did he completely cover himself in it. Nawaki also wore what looked like a mesh shirt underneath and blue shinobi sandals. Over his jumpsuit he wore a haori similar to Minato's, however Nawaki's version was red with black flames licking the bottom edges and had the Uzumaki crest on the back.. What really caught Naruto's attention though was the cylindrical hilt of a sword on Nawaki's waist.'It seems as if Minato has given him the Raijin no Ken to wield...oh well, it's only a minor hinderance...Though this does give me some useful information. One must have a natural Raiton affinity to use that sword to its fullest potential.'Naruto thought after seeing the blade.

Nawaki looked confident to say the least. He had no doubt that he would win this match easily. He had spent the entire month training with his

father and the toad sage Jiraiya. Tsunade had also given him Senju Tobirama's notes on how to wield the Raijin no Ken and how to utilize it to its full capabilities, unlike what Rokusho Ao was able to do with the blade when they fought him. It would definitely give him the edge.

"You might as well give up now." Nawaki said to Naruto as Genma began to walk over to them. "You won't be able to use your Hyoton that Tou-san told me about here. Take a look around...there's no ice. You stand no chance against me, just save yourself the embarrassment and forfeit."

Naruto sighed at his opponent's speech. Nawaki had always been too arrogant for his own good. Before the chunin exams started, the only jutsu he knew were the Kage Bunshin, the basic academy jutsus, and a single Doton jutsu. He usually just drew on the Kyuubis chakra and tried to overwhelm his opponents with brute force. The only reason he was even able to draw upon the demonic chakra was because the Bijuu was still hypnotized and wouldn't resist. That wouldn't be a problem for too much longer though.

"I'm not planning to quit so easily after coming so far...and if I remember correctly...you were the one who was sent to the hospital after their preliminary match, not me." Naruto was tired of dealing with the boy's attitude, seriously one would think that he was a Hyuga.

Nawaki gritted his teeth at the memory, "Tch! Fine by me, but I won't give you any mercy from here on out...remember that I gave you a chance when I'm ripping you apart piece by piece."

Genma saw that the two genin in front of him had finished their conversation and decided to start the match, it was obvious to him that the genin wanted to begin so that they could rip each other limb from limb. Genma sighed, this match was sure to get messy and at least one of them would come out of it bloody and broken.

Genma raised his arm up above his head and began to speak, "Let the third match, Portgas D. Naruto vs. Uzumaki-Namikaze Nawaki, begin!" He yelled as he brought his arm down to signal the start right before he shined away.

Nawaki didn't need to be told twice. He quickly formed his hands into a cross-shaped hand seal, "Kage Bunshin no Jutsu (Shadow Clone Jutsu)!" Fifteen perfect copies of himself popped into existence and began their charge at Naruto.

Naruto wasn't fazed in the slightest at the amount of Kage Bunshin that were coming at him. He had expected a maneuver like this, this very jutsu was widely known to be Nawaki's favorite and most used. Naruto had never been one to shy away from a fight, even if he was outnumbered. He got into his usual Interceptor Fist stance and prepared to counter.

Naruto easily sidestepped a kunai strike and dispatched the clone with a quick elbow strike. He ducked as two more clones came to stab him, but ended up striking each other instead, causing them to dispel. The Sharingan user quickly jumped over two more oncoming clones, and forced them to dispel with a powerful kick to the head. The clones began to surround him after he disposed of three more with a few well placed kicks and palm strikes.

Naruto saw this as the perfect opportunity to rid himself of this distraction. He jumped into the air and began to spin, pulling out several shuriken and launching them at the remaining clones. It was a technique that he had seen Itachi practicing when they were younger, though he was using kunai and throwing them at targets.

Naruto now stood in the center of the empty battlefield. All of the Kage Bunshin had been successfully dispelled, however, Nawaki was nowhere

in sight. Normally this would be a cause for concern, as the next attack could come from anywhere, but Naruto knew exactly where Nawaki was. The ravenette had been using Kenbunshoku Haki the entire time and knew what Nawaki's plan was from the very start.

'Doton: Dochū Eigyo no Jutsu (Earth Release: Underground Projection Fish Jutsu).' Nawaki thought to himself. He had been moving underground silently, planning to catch Naruto off guard with a sneak attack. He would have his clones keep Naruto busy while he crept up beneath him, preparing for a devastating right hook to below Naruto's chin.

However, Naruto would not let him enact his master plan. He had already sensed that Nawaki was a few feet below the ground and still about ten feet away from him, so he thought this was a perfect opportunity to test out one of his newly developed techniques.

Naruto crouched down so that he was sitting back on his calves and only the balls of his feet were on the ground. He raised both of his arms up into the air and bent them as if he was going to throw a punch. His current actions confused many of the onlookers in the audience, including all of the jonin-senseis, genin, and even his team. Unbeknownst to them, their confusion would be turned into utter shock in only a moment.

Naruto coated both of his arms in Busōshoku Haki and slammed his clenched fists into the ground. The impact of his fists caused large cracks to appear all across the ground within a twenty five yard radius of him. Naruto began channeling his Haki into the ground, causing waves of a clear blue energy to be emitted from them. 'Ryūsoken: Ryu no Ibuki (Dragon Claw Fists: Dragon's Breath)!' The waves of Haki became incredibly intense until the ground started to break even more. With one

final push, all of the ground in the twenty five yard radius shattered and was thrown into the air into a large twister of Haki.

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Nawaki was thrown into the air and sucked into the twister of Haki and debris when Naruto completes his technique. The shock on his face was evident, as his eyes were literally popping out of his head and his jaw was on the ground. With a final push, Nawaki and all of the debris were sent flying in all different directions across the arena.

Nawaki slowly recovered and his eyes bulged once again when he saw what had happened to the arena. Naruto was standing on a lone pillar of earth, with all of the ground surrounding him completely destroyed. The massive crater was right in the middle of the arena floor and would greatly hinder whoever would be participating in the following matches if it was not fixed. However, the arena was rather large so they still had plenty of room to continue the match. Nawaki was not injured to badly, there were cuts and bruises all over his body but other than that he was fine. Though his clothing was covered in dirt and debris from the destructive attack.

Naruto finally stood up from his crouch and surveyed what his technique had done. 'Not bad...it could use a little fine tuning and I could probably make the radius larger, but it's a start.' The technique he had used was meant to destroy the surroundings and alter the terrain they were fighting on. He smiled, knowing that he had effectively countered whatever Nawaki had been planning.

He chuckled as he didn't hear a single sound from the crowd, they were

shocked into absolute silence. It was a sign that his power had surpassed their expectation. There would be much more to come. Naruto leaped into the air from his spot on the earth pillar and landed just outside of his technique's blast radius.

Nawaki was broken out of his shock when he felt Naruto's presence get much closer. He looked up and saw that he was now standing just outside of the crater. 'That jutsu may have been impressive...but this match is far from over. Fate has already decided that I will be the victor!'

"That was quite impressive for the family dropout...but here is where the real battle starts!" Nawaki yelled before reaching into his weapons pouch and grabbing two handfuls of shuriken. He launched the shuriken in Naruto's direction with rather poor aim, but it wouldn't matter because of what he had planned. "Shuriken Kage Bunshin no Jutsu (Shuriken Shadow Clone Jutsu)" Four shuriken turned into thirty as they sped towards Naruto.

Strangely enough, Naruto didn't move a muscle or even move to defend himself. He could hear the screams of the other genin in the stands for him to get out of the way and saw that the proctor was about to leap into action. Naruto only smirked, which was clue enough for everyone not to concern themselves with him. He turned his body to fire and allowed the shuriken to pass right through him, surprising everyone in the arena.

Nawaki's smirk dropped as he saw that his shuriken had no effect on his opponent. "What was that! What the hell are you!" Nawaki demanded as he got up from his knees.

"I am that which will burn down this very world...now if I've satisfied your curiosity...why don't you dance for me?" Naruto asked as he formed his index and middle fingers on both hands into the shape of guns. "Higan (Fire Gun)!" He turned his fingertips into flames and began to shoot

bullets made of fire at Nawaki's feet.

Nawaki was forced to jump back and run from the bullets as they continued to impact the ground, wherever he stood. He sprinted to his right to try to get some distance between him and his brother, but it was to no avail as the bullets continued to chase after him. Finally he decided that he had enough of running.

"Doton: Renga no Jutsu (Earth Release: Earth Style Barrier)!" Nawaki turned around and placed his hands on the ground after forming a few hand seals. A large wall of earth erupted from the ground in front of him, blocking the fire bullets from reaching him. This was the most basic Doton technique that even those without a primary Doton affinity could perform easily, but it was quite effective in blocking weaker attacks. It also helped that it used very little chakra.

Nawaki had greatly trained his Doton affinity during the last month, his Doton and Raiton affinities were his strongest. He had found out that he had affinities for four of the five basic elements. The only one he didn't have an affinity for was Katon. One month wasn't enough time to learn to use all of them properly, so he had decided to focus on his strongest ones first.

He needed to think of a plan. Nawaki knew that this low-level barrier wouldn't hold against any of Naruto's stronger attacks if he had any. If he couldn't block Naruto's attacks fully, then he would trap Naruto himself. The orange-clad genin rushed out from behind his barrier and saw that Naruto had slowly begun to walk towards him. This was perfect. He moved his hands into the rat hand seal and channeled his chakra into the earth.

"Doton: Ganban Kyū (Earth Release: Bedrock Coffin)." Multiple sections of rock erupted all around Naruto and moved to completely surround him,

creating a large, thick earth dome. Two larger sections of earth formed with the intent to crush the ravenette, but Nawaki shouldn't have underestimated his brother.

"Enkai (Flame Commandment)." Nawaki heard from inside of the earth dome. "Hibashira (Fire Pillar)!" A large crimson-orange column of fire erupted from the earth dome, completely destroying Nawaki's jutsu. Nawaki couldn't help but stare in awe and jealousy at the flames before him. They were magnificent and beautiful beyond belief. He was sure that he would never see another sight quite like this one. The flames danced into the sky as if they would never die out, illuminating the coliseum even further. The audience too stared as the flames burned. Normal Katon jutsu looked nothing like this, they could even feel the heat the flames gave off from all the way up in the stands.

The earth beneath Naruto began to melt into magma from the intense heat it was experiencing. The molten earth slowly began to spread as the flames continued to erupt into the sky.

The flames soon dissipated and Naruto walked out of the center of them, completely unharmed. There were sections of his body that were on fire, but he didn't seem bothered by them in the least. In fact, it seemed as if he welcomed the flames to his body. All of the flames that were left behind from the previous attack converged onto his form as he began to glow yellow and merged with them.

"Do you still think you have a chance at victory Nawaki?... Give up now and I will save you the embarrassment of being burned alive in front of all these people." Naruto stated, giving Nawaki the same choice that he was given before the match started.

Chapter no.91

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Nawaki scoffed, "Ha! You think some pitiful embers will scare me away? I will be the one walking away the winner!" Nawaki declared. He began channeling large amounts of the Kyuubi's chakra around his body. The charka became visible within moments and took the form of a fox with two tails surrounding him. This was as far as Nawaki could go with the Kyuubi's chakra, the two-tailed chakra cloak was one of his last resorts but it also greatly increased the strength of his attacks.

Nawaki charged Naruto at speeds which he had never had before. Naruto once again coated his arms with Busoshoku Haki and prepared for the fierce attacks that he knew would come. He had not forgotten the last time he had faced someone using the Kyuubi's chakra cloak, he still had the scars to prove it. He would not hold back anymore. Nawaki needed to be dealt with, Naruto could sense that he was just on the brink of losing control. With that in mind, he took the stance of the Ryusoken and steeled himself.

Nawaki wildly swung his clawed hands down in an attempt to tear Naruto in half. Naruto blocked the strike by merely bringing on of his Haki coated arms above his head. Naruto used this opening to deliver a swift kick to Nawaki's side, sending him skidding a few feet to the left. Nawaki charged again and unleashed a barrage of strikes with his claws, however Naruto closed his eyes and easily evaded every single one. He sidestepped Nawaki and pushed his outstretched arm away as he delivered a crushing palm strike to the Kyubified boy's shoulder, shattering the bone.

Nawaki let out an inhuman roar as he clutched his shoulder in pain.

Naruto could see the third tail about to sprout out, but it was retracted

immediately as Nawaki regained control of himself. He sent a kick towards Naruto's head, but said boy immediately ducked and sent Nawaki into the air as he retaliated with a kick of his own.

Nawaki flipped in mid-air and skidded to a stop, using his feet as brakes. He was panting quite hard and the Kyuubi chakra was rapidly healing the bone that was shattered in their earlier confrontation. The boy growled lowly as he knew he was being beaten.

Suddenly Naruto disappeared and reappeared directly behind Nawaki crouching on the ground. Nawaki looked behind him to counter, but he already knew it was too late as he heard the name of the jutsu.

"Konohagakure Hiden Taijutsu Ogi, Obito's Teachings: Sennen Goroshi (Hidden Leaf Village Secret Finger Jutsu, Obito's Teachings: One Thousand Years of Death)!" Naruto coated his fingers with Haki and formed them into the tiger seal and thrust the hand seal into Nawaki's ass, propelling him high into the air with chakra. Nawaki's pained screams could be heard for miles as he flew through the air and landed in one of the trees.

Many in the stands either sweatdropped or blushed at hearing the name of the technique and seeing what it really did.

Obito tried to hide within the cloak he was wearing as he felt the eyes of all those in the Kage box turn to him. He had used the jutsu on Naruto once during training and he guessed the genin had managed to copy it. What a huge mistake.

Nawaki had enough. That was the most embarrassing thing that has ever happened to him. Kakashi-sensei had used that very same technique on him during their genin survival test and now Naruto used it here, in front of all these people! He would finish his estranged brother right here once and for all!

Nawaki slowly went through the hand seals and wiped the blood from his mouth with his thumb. "Kuchiyose no Jutsu (Summoning Jutsu)!" Nawaki slammed his hand down on the ground and put a large amount of chakra into the jutsu.

A giant puff of smoke erupted from where Nawaki was standing, and soon covered a majority of the arena. The smoke soon dispersed and revealed a large, rust-colored toad with a pipe sticking out of its mouth and a tanto on his hip.

"Hm? Why have you summoned me here you Gaki?" The booming voice of Gamabunta could be heard asking to Nawaki who was on its head.

"Boss, I told you I was in the chunin exam finals and might need you help!" Nawaki yelled down at the giant toad.

"And just why should I help you?"

"Come on boss!" Nawaki whined. "You're supposed to help your underlings aren't you?"

Naruto could only sweatdrop at the interaction between summoner and the one who was summoned. Was this supposed to be some kind of joke or comedy routine to throw him off guard? Him and his summons acted nowhere like that. It just proves that the toads were a pretentious and foolish species if they wouldn't even help those who they let sign their contract.

"Very well...I suppose that I will help you this once." Gamabunta stated, after which he looked at Naruto. "We'll start off with the usual combination then."

Gamabunta released a large jet of oil from his mouth, with the stream heading towards Naruto, after which Nawaki threw several kunai with explosive tags into it causing the jutsu to ignite. "Katon Gamayu Endan (Fire Release: Toad Oil Flame Bullet)!" They yelled simultaneously as the

giant flamethrower charged at Naruto with great speeds. It had far greater power and magnitude than Nawaki could ever hope to use with his non-existent Katon affinity. Nawaki smiled, wanting Naruto to be burned alive with the same jutsus that he was so fond of.

Naruto didn't even move a muscle or bat an eyelid. Nawaki was foolish to try and finish him off with his own jutsu. The flamethrower crashed into Naruto and the ground, igniting everything in its path and scorching whatever it came into contact with.

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Gasps of horror could be heard all over the stadium, especially from the combatant booth and where all of the people who knew Naruto were sitting. They couldn't believe that Nawaki would go as far as to kill Naruto for the sake of winning.

Natsuki, Narumi, and Kushina were all in tears as they saw the flames swallow Naruto, nobody could survive that. He was gone, now and forever. They would never have their chance for forgiveness. They could never even begin to imagine what they would do without Naruto driving them forward. It was all that Narumi and Natsuki lived for, to be loved and acknowledged by him. To have a life with him, and now he was gone.

"Haha! You thought you would be burning me alive! How does it feel to be incinerated by your own jutsus?" Nawaki laughed at the large sea of flames beneath him and the toad he was standing on.

"Your flames are pathetic. You dare to call this a Katon jutsu?" A voice could be heard from the arena floor, catching everyone off guard. Natsuki

and Narumi looked up with hope shining in their eyes as they recognized who it was. The flames were drawn to the center of the arena and were sucked into what looked like a vortex. When the flames finally converged, they revealed a glowing yellow Naruto who was still absorbing the last of the flames.

"WHA-WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU!" Nawaki yelled as he fell back onto his butt on top of Gamabunta's head. "You should be dead! Any normal person would have died!"

Naruto ignored his question and decided to continue his monologue. "Let me show you what real flames are...let us all burn together." Naruto bent down and crossed his arms over each other, summoning a sea of spiraling flames centered on his location. "Dai Enkai (Great Flame

Commandment)!" The flames surrounding him suddenly started amassing at the palm of Naruto's right hand as he held it above his head. The large amount of flames manifested to reveal a large mass of yellow energy surrounded by flames, resembling the sun. "Entei (Flame Emperor)!"

The technique was easily as large as Gamabunta, if not bigger. "Let's see which is stronger. The water or the sun." Naruto hurled the giant mass of energy forward with the intent to obliterate his opponents. Nawaki's eyes widened as he saw the fireball become bigger and bigger after it impacted them with the strength of a meteor. It consumed them instantly and continued to disintegrate the large wall behind them, completely destroying it before the technique dispersed.

What it revealed was that Gamabunta was forced to dispel after shielding Nawaki for as long as he could. Nawaki was laying in the pile of rubble, unconscious and covered in burns, especially the left side of his face.

That may never be repaired no matter what operations were performed.

The wall behind them was obliterated and now there was nothing to even

suggest that there had been a wall there in the first place, revealing a beautiful view of the village in its place. It was a good thing that nobody was up there and it was in the opposite direction of the audience.

Genma quickly called the medics over to Nawaki's location before walking to the center of the arena. "Winner by knock out, Portgas D. Naruto!"

Naruto was met with silence as he began to walk off the field. However, the audience soon erupted into cheers after recovering from the titanic battle that they had just witnessed.

An assistant in the tournament came running up to Genma and whispered something in his ear before running back to the sidelines. Genma coughed once to clear his throat and gain the attention of the audience. "Excuse me everyone! There will be a one hour intermission so that we may repair the arena, combatants please use this time to recover from your previous matches or to prepare for your upcoming matches"

With those words said he walked off the field to begin coordinating the repairs for the arena floor, but more importantly the arena wall. If a stray jutsu were to make it through there, then the village itself would be damaged. He would need to gather Doton users to begin the reparations.

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Combatant Booth

Naruto was once again met by silence as he ascended into the waiting booth. He did not care if they feared or admired him now, there was just no point in dealing with it. Now that Nawaki was out of the way, it would be far easier to release the Kyuubi sealed within Natsuki from

Madara's control. However, Naruto was broken from his thoughts as he felt something glomp onto him.

He looked down and found Satsuki tightly hugging him around his stomach.

"I knew you could do it Nii-san! You had me so worried when you were hit by that Katon jutsu! Never do that again understand!" She looked up at him with a demanding look on her face. She could be quite scary and controlling at times.

"Hai Hai. Understood ma'am." Naruto said sarcastically as he saluted the smaller girl in front of him, this earned him a smack to the back of the head from said girl. She then pulled him in closer and snuggled her face into his chest. Girls confused him, they could go from demanding devils to devoted little sisters within the span of a moment.

Hana watched the interaction between siblings with a smile on her face.

"You're odd sibling act aside, that was quite impressive Naruto. I had no idea you could do things like that. You've been keeping secrets from us."

Hana said teasingly as she shook her head. Satsuki too, brought herself out from his chest to give him another glare before nuzzling back in.

Naruto smirked at his other teammate as he rubbed Satsuki's head affectionately, messing it up. She giggled at her Nii-san's actions before releasing him. "We've all gotta have an ace up our sleeve don't we."

Naruto stated rhetorically to the brunette before taking a look around the booth.

He saw that most of the genin he didn't know as well had left, either to make some last minute preparations, use the restroom, get something to eat, Naruto didn't really care enough to bother with all the possibilities.

He did see that Haku was staring at Satsuki rather jealously when she was snuggling into his chest, but he would wonder about that another

time.

Narumi had come back to the booth sometime during his fight, she was wrapped up in quite a few bandages which indicated that she wasn't as a hundred percent just yet. She and Natsuki both had teary eyes and puffy cheeks, it was obvious that they had been crying. They probably thought that he died when he was hit by that collaboration jutsu from Nawaki and Gamabunta.

He knew that they cared for him deeply, but Naruto didn't care too much. It was nice to know that they cared about him to such an extent, but he couldn't trust them. He didn't blame them for abandoning him as much as he did his parents, but that didn't mean that they would become siblings again or turn into the best of friends. They were also Minato's children which meant they were taught to believe in his ideals of peace, love, and loyalty. Naruto couldn't trust anyone who would willingly live and die just because the village ordered them to. This village and its beliefs were corrupt and he knew it.

Naruto looked up at the Kage booth and saw Minato looking right at him. He returned the glare with just as much intensity. It was clear to Naruto that there would be many questions later on from the Yondaime, but hopefully the invasion would take his mind off things. Oh yes, Naruto's plans would start during the invasion.

Kage Booth

"I didn't realize you had genin on such a level Hokage-dono." Yagura stated, still surprised. "In fact, many jonin aren't able to perform techniques of that magnitude."

"Neither did I." Minato looked back to Obito, who merely shrugged his shoulders. Obito had never seen Naruto use that technique before. Had he been holding back all this time? If he had used it during training then

at least half of the forest would have been obliterated. Just what did he do this past month to reach such a level?

Yagura looked over at the Hokage and voiced his curiosity, "His ability with Katon reminds me much of the Hozuki clan's abilities with Suiton.

Tell me, do you know if he is related in some way to the Hozuki?"

Minato shook his head, "No, Naruto is my first born son." This statement surprised the other two Kage as well as their bodyguards. They were not aware that the Hokage had another son. Minato sighed, seeing their confusion, "He may have died his hair and deny us as his parents, but he is Kushina's and my son."

"From the intensity of the match and what was said by them, it is clear that you have quite a bit of family issues to work out. Perhaps as many as my own." Rasa commented with a sad chuckle.

"Hm...whatever the case, he is definitely chunin material strength wise. He was also able to keep calm throughout the entire match, even when his own brother was trying to kill him. Not to mention he was in control of the match the whole time, even after Nawaki went into his two-tailed state. He has my vote for chunin."

"I agree, in fact I'm surprised he hasn't made chunin already with how old he appears to be. Why would you keep someone so skilled a secret from the rest of the world Hokage-dono?" Rasa asked.

Minato sighed. This was the first time seeing what his son could really do. Just how could he do everything that he did? Obito didn't appear to know how he did that last technique, did he have another sensei before Obito?

Minato's eyes immediately widened when he remembered the prophecy that Jiraiya told him a few years back.

"A child born from great power but with memories of old shall pave the

way toward a new era of peace. Whether they walk the path of light or is forced into the darkness shall determine what the future will hold. Their predecessor has already burned the path for them, but it shall be their will of fire that determines whether they will walk it or forge their own." Minato whispered. His voice was only audible enough for him and Jiraiya, who was right behind him to hear.

The toad sage's eyes widened when he heard Minato's words and he too remembered the exact words of the prophecy. He silently cursed himself as Naruto had made it perfectly clear that he was the most likely to be the child of prophecy now. He had really screwed up, especially with how he had acted a month ago. He would need to fix things with Naruto as soon as possible. The boy was the one who was supposed to bring peace to the world after all. He would need help to do that.

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Stands

The genin from the rookie 13 and Team Gai, who had not made it to the finals looked like fish out of water as they continued to stare at the scene that had just unfolded in front of them. The jonin weren't any better. The only one who appeared normal was Mikoto, well as normal as she could get.

"Mmm...Naruto-kun's so strong!" She moaned dreamily, she had never even imagined that Naruto would be able to do things like this at such an early age.

The rest of the shinobi ignored her fantasies as one thought ran through all of their minds,'Was that real? Did all of that just really happen?'Those

thoughts were understandable. What Naruto just did was like something out of the Princess Gale movies.

Kushina and Kakashi were the first to recover as they quickly shined away from the stands, most likely to see what kind of condition their student was in. Kakashi was worried about Nawaki, the boy was his sensei's and Kushina's son so he was like Kakashi's little brother. Kushina had mixed feelings about what had happened. She was overjoyed that Naruto was safe and unharmed, she thought that he had been killed when that combination Katon jutsu hit. She had thought that she lost the son that she had never had.

But now she was extremely worried because of Nawaki's condition. She had managed to catch a glimpse of his motionless body in the rubble and what she saw struck her hard. Nawaki was covered in burns, especially the left side of his face. It looked as if the wounds had already been cauterized too, that meant not even medical ninjutsu would be able to heal him fully. His body was in a position that humans should not have been able to bend at and he was soaked with blood. She hoped that Tsunade would be able to heal him.

Those who remained in the stands were left to slowly recover as their brains began to process what they had just seen.

"Asuma-sensei...just what was that?" Ino managed to force out of her throat.

Asuma wished he could answer his genin, he really did. But he was just as dumbfounded as Ino was at the moment. "I can't quite say for sure...I've never seen a Katon jutsu quite like that before...but it seems as if Naruto is immune to fire...and has a unique affinity for that area of nature manipulation..."

Sakura was confused, "Asuma-sensei? I've never heard of nature

manipulation before. What is it exactly?"

Most of the genin and jonin of the rookie 13 were still gobsmacked at the match they had just witnessed, but they still had enough common sense to stare at her with their flattest expressions. Even if very few of them knew how to use elemental jutsu, they had at least heard about it or witnessed it from their senseis.

It was Kurenai who answered her this time, "Sakura...every member of your genin team uses nature manipulation and you still don't know what it is?" She received a shake of the head from the pink-haired genin.

Kurenai sighed, what have her senseis really taught her? "Nature manipulation is the ability to mold and define one's chakra into a specific element. There are five main elements, fire, wind, lightning, earth, and water. Every person has at least one innate element, this is called an elemental affinity." Kurenai explained.

'Though elemental training is usually reserved for when shinobi become chunin or jonin! Just what has Obito been teaching his genin?' Kurenai thought to herself. She had always taken it easy on her genin, some would even say that she mothered them. Perhaps why they had not grown much since they left the academy. Maybe that's why they aren't participating in this tournament. Was she wrong with how to train her team?

"Oh that's why Natsuki, Narumi, and Nawaki can use those elemental jutsu. I thought that was something that had to do with the clan that they came from." Sakura said as if she finally realized something.

The rest of the rookie 13 thought it best not to make any comments or questions to avoid a lecture from their sensei, though they couldn't help but wonder how Naruto had gotten so skilled in fire manipulation. He never showed that kind of skill in the academy, but he had just easily

defeated their rookie of the year. None of them could match up to the Uzumaki-Namikaze siblings, and yet two members of Team 11 had just trounced them.

Inuzuka Hana vs. Chojuro of Kiri

The hour was up in the blink of an eye. Those who had yet to compete had been busy making their last minute preparations and coming up with an assortment of strategies. Hana had been sitting on the floor of the combatant's booth for the better part of the last forty minutes thinking of all possible moves that could be made and all of their possible outcomes. She was fighting one of the newly selected Seven Swordsmen of Kiri. Him being chosen to take up that title would mean that he is incredibly skilled in Kenjutsu, despite how young he is. Everyone of those swords has a special ability, the one that he possessed was able to form his chakra into the shape of any kind of weapon. This would be a close battle.

'What am I thinking? I told Naruto that I'd give him the fight that he'd always been looking forward to between us, and he'll hold me to that. There's no way I'm losing yet, not after I've come this far!' Hana thought to herself, determination burning in her eyes.

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"Will Inuzuka Hana and Chojuro of Kiri please make your way down to the arena floor!" Genma yelled from the middle of the repaired battlefield.

Hana looked over to her teammates and saw Naruto give a slight nod and a smile to her. Satsuki was a bit more animate as usual and was cheering for her loudly. Hana wasn't really paying attention to her female

teammate's words because she was so wrapped up in her own thoughts.

She began to walk and before she even realized it, she was standing in the middle of the arena with her opponent right across from her.

'This is it. This is what I've been preparing all this time for. Let's see if all of my training was worth it!' She got into a stance with the three Haimaru brothers by her side as Chojuro withdrew Hiramekarei from its place on his back.

"Are both combatants ready?" Genma asked the two genin to which he received nods from both of them. "Then the fourth match, Inuzuka Hana vs. Chojuro of Kiri, may now begin!"

Hana immediately jumped back and formed a single hand seal, her ninken also began channeling chakra. "Jujin Bunshin (Man Beast Clone)!" The three wolf-sized ninken disappeared in a puff of smoke and were replaced with identical copies of Hana, albeit much more feral.

Hana's eyes became more fierce and her finger nails elongated into claws as well.

Chojuro was a shy boy and not a very confident one at that, so seeing four vicious looking girls wasn't exactly inviting for him. He knew that this would be a tough match, so he would not hold back. Chojuro released a burst of chakra to unravel the bandages wrapped around his sword. What they revealed was an oddly shaped dual-handle sword with a wide, flat blade. The sword looked somewhat reminiscent of a flounder fish in shape.

Chojuro knew that he was the weakest among the seven swordsmen. He had aspired to be a member of the seven swordsmen every since he was a child. He had managed to finally become one shortly after becoming a genin and his countless hours of training himself in Kenjutsu. This was only supported by the fact that he had managed to master Hiramekarei at

such a young age.

However, Hiramekarei was a very chakra intensive sword and required chakra to constantly be stored and channeled into the blade for its ability to activate. He was still a genin, so his chakra reserves weren't large enough to wield Hiramekarei for extended periods of time. He couldn't let this battle draw out if he wanted to make it to the next round.

Hana leaped off of the ground with her ninken and began to spin their bodies into one of the Inuzuka clan's favored jutsus. "Gatsūga (Man-Beast Ultimate Taijutsu: Fang Over Fang)!" They began to spin at ferocious speeds and began to deliver countless beast-like attacks to Chojuro. Much to Hana's dismay however, the glasses-wearing boy managed to block every strike with his sword and divert them in a different direction. This wasn't what she had planned at all.

She needed to switch her tactics. She remembered that the boy probably remembered this jutsu from when Kiba had used it during the preliminary rounds. She wanted to save the majority of what she learned for the next match, but she would need to step up the intensity a bit to deal with her current opponent.

Hana was pushed back when she made contact with Chojuro's sword and they became locked in a duel of dominance. Hana's Gatsūga was losing power because she had lost her momentum once Chojuro managed to stop her. She was at a large disadvantage at the moment.

Chojuro released his chakra from Hiramekarei and transformed it into a giant hammer. As soon as he did, he gained the upper hand in their stalemate and sent Hana flying across the battlefield. This victory was short lived however, as he had to acrobatically dodge the large oncoming drills that were the ninken.

Hana slowly stood up from her spot on the ground as she watched her

ninken put Chojuro on the defensive. She saw what that sword could do and would need to be careful around it.'So that sword has the ability to shape his chakra into weapons...that's going to be a problem...though it doesn't seem like he'll be able to use that technique too many times, I sensed him pour a lot of chakra into that last attack...'

Hana was busy coming up with alternative strategies while Chojuro continued to fend off the ninken. He may not have been using chakra at the moment, but they were damn hard to get rid of. He knew he was getting tired from dodging their barrage of attacks, if this kept going he wouldn't even have enough strength to wield Hiramakarei properly anymore.

Chojuro began to focus even more chakra into the blade before he had gathered the required amount. As the three drill-like attacks came at him once more, he shaped Hiramakarei into a massive longsword and simultaneously slashed all three ninken across the chest as he spun around to create the torque needed to finish them all off at once.

He sighed as he finally had some breathing room for the first time since the match began. Unfortunately for him, he forgot about Hana and let his guard down. It was only when his vision became clouded with the smoke from several smoke bombs did he realize his mistake.

Once again he channeled chakra into Hiramakarei, this time to create a giant fan similar to Temari's. He knew that this would be the last time that he would be able to create such a large weapon out of chakra, but he wasn't left with a choice at the moment. He waved the fan forwards, creating a large gust of wind which blew all of the smoke in front of him away. What it revealed was Hana only inches away from his chest with a kunai.

With incredible reflexes, Chojuro swung his sword as fast as he could and slammed it into Hana's side before she could pierce him with the kunai.

He sighed once more as he made it in time, but his eyes widened when he saw her disappear in a puff of smoke as if she was never there in the first place. The real Hana erupted out of the smoke behind him with a Chakura no Mesu (Chakra Scalpel) active on each hand. The swordsman screamed in pain as he felt her cut the muscle tissue in his arms and legs, rendering him immobile.

Chojuro collapsed onto the ground as he no longer had his muscles fully connected to stand. Hana walked up to the Kiri-nin's downed form and placed a kunai to his neck. "Forfeit." She told him, not really giving him a choice in the matter.

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"I forfeit." Chojuuro said, a bit disappointed with how the match turned out. He had severely underestimated the girl standing over him.

Hana withdrew the kunai from his neck as the medical crews rushed over to retrieve her opponent and her ninken. She didn't have the necessary skills to heal them with medical jutsu just yet. She followed the medics to the medical bay just as Genma stepped into the center of the arena to make the official announcement.

"Winner, Inuzuka Hana!" He stopped speaking for a moment as the crowd cheered for the girl. She would have a tough time fighting in her next match if her ninken weren't recovered by then. "Now will Hozuki Suigetsu and Sabaku no Gaara please make your way down to the arena for the final match of the first round!"

Hozuki Suigetsu vs. Sabaku no Gaara

Both combatants stood across from each other in the center of the arena.

This would most certainly be an interesting match. Gaara usually resorted to just crushing people with his sand, but those sort of tactics wouldn't work on this opponent. Suigetsu usually relied on Kenjutsu and his logia abilities but Gaara had made it painfully obvious that the only way to bypass his perfect defense was with superior speed, which Suigetsu did not have. This would most likely end up being a long match. "The fifth and final match of the first round, Hozuki Suigetsu vs. Sabaku no Gaara, may now begin" Genma announced before jumping back a safe distance. He had seen what these two were capable of in the preliminaries and he did not want to get caught up in it.

Suigetsu jumped back as a wave of sand erupted from the gourd on Gaara's back and rushed towards the Hozuki. Suigetsu unsheathed the large sword from his back and took a Kenjutsu stance. Suigetsu's blade was an enormous broadsword, it was approximately six feet in length and one foot wide with a single edge. It was similar in height and width to Zabuzza's sword. This particular blade was not one of Kiri's legendary one's, but Suigetsu hoped to become one of the seven swordsmen eventually.

"Stop running away! Mother wants your blood!" Gaara screamed maniacally. "I will satisfy mother's thirst."

Gaara sent wave after wave of sand trying to catch Suigetsu in its grip, but Suigetsu proved to be too quick for him to catch with the amount of sand that he was using. Realizing this, Gaara drew upon more sand from his gourd and even crushed the earth around him, turning it into sand. Suigetsu cursed to himself as he saw the amount of sand that Gaara was gathering, he was obviously planning something big. Seeing that he needed to move quickly, Suigetsu brought up his index finger and thumb in a gun-like fashion. Through the hydrification technique, he

compressed a drop of water in his index finger."Mizudeppō no Jutsu (Water Gun Jutsu)!"Suigetsu fired the drop of water with tremendous force, comparable to that of a real gunshot.

Gaara gathered a large amount of sand and formed it into a thick half-dome to shield himself from the water bullet. However, he didn't expect the jutsu to have so much force behind it as he felt the drop of water almost pierce through his sand shell completely.

Suigetsu saw the effect that his jutsu had and continued to fire more water bullets. He re-sheathed his sword and brought up his other hand to do the same."Mizudeppō: Nichō (Water Gun: Two Guns)!"Suigetsu continued to fire water bullets at Gaara's sand shell, as the latter was forced to continue rebuilding it.

Gaara knew that his opponent could go on doing this forever, seeing as he was made of water, so he decided to take the offensive. Using the large body of earth and sand under him, Gaara rose himself into the air by erecting a pillar of sand, thus moving himself out of the line of fire as the sand dome was finally pierced.

Suigetsu stopped firing his water bullets after seeing Gaara rise into the air and out of his line of sight. He prepared himself for Gaara's next move.

Gaara released his sand pillar after Suigetsu stopped his jutsu and dropped back down to the ground along with his sand."Sabaku Taisō (Sand Waterfall Imperial Funeral)."Gaara sent a large tsunami of sand that spanned the width of the arena towards Suigetsu and buried him in the sheer amount of it. He then slammed both of his hands down onto the large amounts of sand that he had created, creating a powerful shockwave that compressed the sand and completely crushed anyone buried in it.

Genma was about to call the match due to death, but then he heard the

bubbling of water.

A small section of the sand became wet and slowly turned into mud.

Suigetsu managed to work his way back to the surface in his liquified state, looking quite exhausted. Gaara was getting ready to send another wave of sand at the white-haired boy, but Suigetsu spoke up. "Proctor I forfeit, I'm out of water after liquifying just now and I can't use any of my other techniques without consuming any water."

Genma nodded his head and decided to call the match, "Winner by forfeit, Sabaku no Gaara!" Genma announced to the audience. "This marks the end of the first round of the finals! There will be a half an hour intermission before we move onto the second round! For those who will be fighting, please use this time to recover from your previous matches, study your opponents fighting style, or prepare for your next match in general."

With those words said, Genma walked off the battlefield along with Suigetsu and Gaara.

Naruto looked over to see Natsuki and Satsuki glaring at each other heatedly, then his thoughts drifted to Hana and wondered if her ninken would recover in time, finally he looked over to Haku who was currently meditating in preparation for her first match, since she had a bye this round. One thing was for sure, these matches were going to get a whole lot more interesting.

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Sarutobi Hiruzen once said, "To those who possess the Will of Fire, everyone is family. The desire to protect one's family builds thicker and

stronger bonds between each and everyone in the village. If the Will of Fire is embraced by everyone, the village will be alright no matter what happens." Today was a day where this family would shed each other's blood. Where they would face each other in combat where one of them may perish by the other's hand.

Satsuki stood across from Natsuki in the middle of the battlefield. She had been waited for this particular matchup for a long time now. To Satsuki, Natsuki had always been too obsessed with her brother for her liking. To Satsuki, this was a girl who abandoned her Nii-san and threw him away like he was nothing more than trash.

Satsuki could honestly say that she hated the girl in front of her. Before Naruto had met the Uchiha family, he was broken. His heart had been shattered repeatedly by those who dared call themselves his family, and they had spent years piecing it back together. The one question he always buried deep within his heart was if it was good that he was born. He was incapable of love for a long time, the kind of neglect and pain that he went through wasn't able to be healed overnight.

It had taken years but he was finally able to see Satsuki as a little sister and Mikoto as a mother, perhaps something even more. Satsuki had always been suspicious of her mother, she knew that after everything that they've gone through together it was only natural for Mikoto to develop feelings for her Nii-san. Though she tried to deny it, she knew that her Nii-san felt the same way about Mikoto too.

She just hoped that he could see her the same way too. She didn't care if she had to share him with her mother, but she just wanted to be with him. For him to make her his. She loved him more than anyone would ever know.

Ever since she was a little girl and helped to rebuild Naruto's heart from

the ground up, she had loved Naruto. She began to fall in love with him after seeing how tainted his mind and heart were, but yet how they were also so pure. He didn't try to hide behind his false sense of ideals or beliefs, he looked at the world for what it truly was and had no illusions about how ugly it was. Yet he kept on walking down his own path for the sake of her and Mikoto alone.

He was there for when nobody else was and helped her pick up the pieces when everything went to hell. Satsuki was a lot smarter than she let on, and he knew this. From an early age she had seen how corrupt this village was, but how they hid behind the excuse that everything was for the good of the village. She knew the truth of what had happened three years ago.

She had noticed how everyone had been acting, she had noticed that all of the adults would all disappear for periods of time, she had noticed how Shisui-nii and Itachi-nii were acting. While it took her a while to figure out after the massacre, she finally realized that everything had been planned. That the Hokage forced Itachi to kill the clan.

Now Satsuki didn't hate Itachi for doing this, nor did she hate the Hokage for ordering it. It should be expected as he would do anything for the sake of the village. It was only after she realized everything, did it make sense why Naruto had turned out so broken.

A person who would willingly put the sake of the village above the sake of its people can never be a real father. And Kushina had bought into the village's ideals at a young age and would never even think of straying from them, she was too far gone. On the surface they were a perfect family, but underneath all of the false pretenses, they were no better than Danzo training his mindless drones.

Naruto was the only one who could see through her. He could tell that

Satsuki knew of some of the village's darker secrets, she was the daughter of a clan head after all, it should be expected. However, he never mentioned it, and she was thankful for that. She saw that he was in even more pain than she was. It had been his own father who cost him the life of the first person to ever treat him like family, the man he saw as a brother, and the clan of his new family.

He had chosen their little family over the prestigious honor of being the son of the Yondaime Hokage and the head of the Uzumaki clan. He had left them behind and he would never look back.

Ever since then they had only grown closer to each other. To some level she knew that she loved him as much as he did Mikoto, but he would never show it unless she did first. He had always seen her as something of a higher being, something fragile, something untouchable. She was the one who healed his broken heart, the one who made him whole again. He would always think to protect her innocence, for the sake of never corrupting her.

She never understood why he saw her as such. He was the one who was her angel. He was her savior from a clan who would never seek anything besides power. The Uchiha respected strength above all else, they couldn't care less about family. Naruto was her escape from that, he and Mikoto were the only ones who would always love her unconditionally.

That is why Satsuki couldn't hold in her rage whenever the Hokage's family would try to bring him back to them. She knew it was foolish, he would never leave them, but she was still scared that she would lose him.

That was her one fear, to lose her Nii-san the same way she lost everything else in her life. She would die before she let that happen.

That is why she would rip the girl in front of her limb from limb.

Chapter no.98

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Satsuki knew that Natsuki was in love with her Nii-san. She had been trying to take him back for years now, every possible chance that she had she would try to get closer to him. She tried to force him back to the very people who broke him. She had abandoned him when Naruto needed someone most, and now that he had been fixed she wanted to be a part of his life!

This was something that Satsuki could not stand. Naruto was an angel that had descended from the heavens into her life and now these hypocrites were trying to take him away from her! He was her Nii-san! No, he was more than that, he was her Onii-sama.

Satsuki would prove here and now the difference between them. The Will of Fire and the good of the village be damned! This is where the leaves on the great tree of Konoha, the flames of the Will of Fire, a member of the family that is Konoha, will fall.

Uzumaki-Namikaze Natsuki vs. Uchiha Satsuki

Genma could feel the raw amount of killing intent that the two kunoichi before him were emanating, it was impressive for two newly made genin. Most chunin wouldn't be able to withstand this much pure pressure and bloodlust. There was obviously some bad blood between these two and it was sure to get ugly. He wanted to get the hell out of there as fast as he could to avoid any of their rage. Dealing with women when they were angry was never a good thing.

"Are both combatants ready?" Neither of them even acknowledged that he had said something, opting to try pierce each other and finish the match with their glare alone. Genma sighed and took their silence as a

yes, "Then let the first match of the second round, Uzumaki-Namikaze Natsuki vs. Uchiha Satsuki, begin!"

Satsuki immediately activated her sharingan and drew two kunai from the holster on her leg at the same time that Natsuki unsheathed her katana. The two glared at each other for a moment before charging at each other with the intent to cut the other to pieces.

Natsuki had always been jealous of Satsuki. She was always around her Nii-san and stole her place as Naruto's sister. Natsuki loved Naruto with all her heart, but it was their past that made it so hard for her to move forward. Because of that, she could only watch on as Naruto replaced her with Satsuki.

Natsuki had wanted to bring her Nii-san back into their family even before their days at the academy. When they had started training early on, she had always hoped that her parents would let Naruto join them. And finally they did, but that was the first and last time that that would ever happen. That was the day that scarred her for life.

She had almost lost her Nii-san that day. She was the one who almost killed him and she hated herself for that. This all happened because she lost control of herself and let the Kyuubi run free. That single day was the worst of her life.

She spent the next months beside her Nii-san's hospital bed as he lay there in his comatose state. She visited him everyday and would cry herself to sleep every night, she still did sometimes. Finally he woke up and things improved with their family life for a short time, but then everything went to hell as soon as it began to get better.

For some reason he began to distance himself even more from their family to the point where he moved out. Nothing was ever the same after that and she still didn't know why. It killed her that she didn't know why

she wasn't his sister anymore or why he doesn't consider their parents as his anymore. It felt as though she had lost him forever.

He was just within her reach, but yet she still couldn't grab onto him. She hated this feeling. She loved him more than anything in the world and she had to watch on as another girl stole her spot. She hated this girl, more than anyone would ever know and she would finish everything right now. She would show her Nii-san that she had changed and that she was worth his love. She needed him.

Natsuki swung her sword down, but it was easily blocked by Satsuki's kunai. She brought her sword back up and slashed at the girl's side, but it was parried by another kunai. Natsuki was getting frustrated that none of her attacks were getting through, so she began to pick up the pace. She would not be out done by this girl.

Natsuki switched from slashes into a fast barrage of stabs. Satsuki was forced to dodge and divert the strikes with her kunai, there was no time get out of range of the swords-woman. The redhead was unrelenting in her strikes, it was clear that she wouldn't stop until she had run the female Uchiha through with her blade.

Satsuki finally had enough. If this kept on going then she was sure to slip up eventually. She looked Natsuki directly in the eyes and activated her jutsu. "Sharingan: Genjutsu."

Natsuki was instantly paralyzed and couldn't move even a single finger as she held her sword above her head, in an attempt to bisect Satsuki.

Satsuki used this chance to spin around and deliver a powerful kick to Natsuki's chest, sending her flying back but also breaking her out of the genjutsu.

Satsuki reached into her weapons pouch and pulled out two handfuls of shuriken, which she threw at Natsuki. The redhead managed to flip in

mid-air and drive her feet into the ground to slow her momentum. She didn't have time to dodge the shuriken, so she was forced to block them with her sword.

Chapter no.99

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Natsuki didn't have a particular kenjutsu style that she focused in, neither the Uzumaki nor Namikaze clans were renowned users in kenjutsu. In fact Kushina was the only shinobi in generations of the Uzumaki clan to be known for using a sword. She hadn't gotten around to teaching Natsuki much about kenjutsu just yet, so the girl mainly relied on her quick reflexes and the sword's ability to cut.

Natsuki knew that if she kept using kenjutsu then she would quickly be overwhelmed. She mainly used her sword to complement her taijutsu style, but after Satsuki had put so much distance between them her sword would be nothing more than a hindrance.

The redhead quickly sheathed her sword and prepared herself. It seemed that she would have to mainly rely on ninjutsu and taijutsu. With her large reserves from being a jinchuriki it was better this way anyway.

Satsuki formed a few hand seals before she began molding chakra in her lungs. "Katon: Hōsenka no Jutsu (Fire Release: Phoenix Sage Fire)!"

Satsuki released a volley of small fireballs from her mouth and sent them towards Natsuki. These fireballs were controlled by one's chakra, so avoiding them is extremely difficult.

Natsuki cursed as she saw the jutsu, these fireballs would be hard to dodge. She would need to counter them instead.

"Suiton: Suijinheki (Water Release: Water Wall)." Natsuki released a large

stream of water from her mouth that rose up into a large wave to protect her from the oncoming attack.

When the wall of water dispersed, Satsuki was nowhere to be found.

Natsuki looked in front, left, right, and behind her, but she was nowhere to be found. Natsuki immediately jumped back, thinking that she would be coming from below, the same strategy that Kakashi-sensei used in their survival exam. However, she was wrong.

As soon as the girl jumped back, she was met with an axe-kick from above, courtesy of Satsuki. The redhead was sent face first into the ground creating a rather large impact. Spiderweb cracks appeared from the where she landed outwards, signaling just how hard she had been hit.

What Satsuki did wasn't so different from her last step of the Shishi Rendan (Lion's Barrage).

The female Uchiha recoiled from how hard hitting Satsuki and crashing into the ground right after was. She panted on her knees several yards away from Natsuki's prone body, exhausted. She wouldn't be able to go on much longer, her earlier match and this match wore her out quite a bit.

Her head jerked back in shock as she watched Natsuki slowly get up the ground. That last attack should have at least broken some bones or given her a concussion. A moment later her eyes widened in realization.

'Oh yeah...she's an Uzumaki. They're supposed to have incredible regenerative powers...I'll need to finish her off with one last jutsu.'

Satsuki channeled chakra to her feet and jumped back a dozen yards to gain the distance she needed. She watched on Natsuki got up with a look of pure rage on her face and made a Kage Bunshin, a moment later a spiraling blue sphere of chakra manifested itself in the palm of her hand.

'Just perfect...the Rasengan...this might complicate things.' Satsuki

thought to herself.

Satsuki went through a few hand seals before a large amount of Raiton chakra was concentrated in her hand. The sound of birds chirping could be heard all over the stadium from the execution of Hatake Kakashi's original technique.

Natsuki and Satsuki both rushed at each other with their most powerful jutsus active. Just as they were within striking distance of each other, they thrust their respective hands out so that their jutsus met in the middle.

"Rasengan/Chidori!" The collision of these two A-ranked jutsus created a large explosion emanating from their hands and sent them both flying backwards. A huge plume of dirt and dust covered the battlefield from their collision.

Genma walked into the center of the arena once more as he waited for the dust to clear so that he could call the match. It was obvious that one of those girls wouldn't be getting up from their last confrontation.

A few moments later, the wind picked up and blew the cloud of smoke away, revealing the unconscious forms of the two kunoichi. Both of them were covered in scrapes, bruised, and burns, but other than that they were completely fine. Genma breathed a sigh of relief as he had seen what both of those jutsus could do at full power.

"Both combatants are unable to continue, therefore this match is declared a draw and neither of them will continue on to the next round." Genma announced to the crowd. He gave a nod to the medical team to bring those two to the medical bay to heal their wounds and wait for them to come out of unconsciousness.

He received both boos and cheers from the crowd as they had witnessed a good match, but also wanted to see someone move on to the next

round. Well, this did make it easier for the tournament setup as they wouldn't need to have any semifinal rounds and could go straight onto the finals.

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In the audience, both Kushina's and Mikoto's eyes widened at the sight of their children being carried out off of the battle field after the explosion that occurred after the clash of their A-rank assassination jutsus.

Kushina had just gotten back from checking on Nawaki and the news was not good. He was terribly burned after being consumed by Naruto's massive Katon jutsu. The medics had done everything that they could and he was stable now, but the entire left side of his body was burned beyond the point of healing. From his neck down, the left side of his body would be completely covered in scar tissue. The good news was that only his eye and part of his head was burned on his face. He was still unconscious, but he should wake up in a day or so.

She wanted to watch Natsuki's match to take her mind off of things, but as soon as she does, she had to watch as a Rasengan and a Chidori collided. She hoped that Natsuki wouldn't be permanently damaged the same way that Nawaki had.

Mikoto was watching on in horror at the prospect of losing her last child.

She had already lost her clan because of the village and her son was forced to become a nuke-nin, she couldn't take losing one of the last remaining family members that she had left.

Both women looked at each other and nodded before Shunshining to the

medical bay to see if their children were alright.

Kakashi's lone eye was also widened in shock.

He had taught Obito how to use the Chidori many years ago, but he had never expected his best friend to teach it to his student. Now that he thought about it, Obito probably knew that the Hokage's children would know the Rasengan and taught her the jutsu as a counter for it. Though he was impressed that the girl had learned it in such a short amount of time, it took him months to create that jutsu.

It was much better than his decision to teach the Chidori to Nawaki. As much as he loved his sensei and Kushina-sama, the boy was clearly unstable. He also had a massive superiority and inferiority complex to finish up the perfect little package. Kakashi was silently happy that Nawaki had faced Naruto in the first round and lost. Had he fought a different opponent, he would have most likely gotten a chance to use the Chidori and possibly killed one of his fellow Konoha genin.

Something would have to be done about the boy if when he woke up. Things will definitely go south after he sees what kind of condition his body is in. Not to mention how inferior and weak he will feel towards Naruto. Kakashi could only sigh as he knew that things were going to go very bad, very soon.

Portgas D. Naruto vs. Inuzuka Hana

Naruto stood across from Hana, as Genma stepped forward from the proctor's area towards the center of the arena. Naruto carefully analyzed his teammate as he thought of a strategy of how to deal with her.

Most of his plans were out of the option as they were prepared for dealing with multiple opponents at once. The three Haimaru brothers had not recovered in time for the match. They were healed from the slash wounds they received and were stitched back up, but they would need to

rest for the rest of the day so they were taken back to the Inuzuka compound.

Naruto eyed Hana critically. He wasn't foolish enough to think that she was completely helpless without her ninken the same way that most Inuzuka were. On the contrary, Naruto had been friends with Hana for over seven years, he knew exactly how skilled Hana was. She was just as dangerous without her ninken as she was with them. Obito had made sure that she was prepared for combat if she was separated from them or they were rendered useless on a mission.

That part of their training Hana did alone with their sensei, so Naruto didn't know exactly what she would have in store for him. She was a skilled medic and could use her Chakra no Mesu (Chakra Scalpels) with incredible skill and precision, but she knew that wouldn't be enough to even stall him. Whatever she had, this was sure to be exciting.

"Why don't we put on a show worth watching?" Naruto asked as he was getting excited for what Hana was planning.

"I couldn't agree more. Don't think that you'll have an easy win just because I don't have my ninken with me. I promised to give you an exciting match and I'll do just that." Hana declared with a small smirk.

Naruto smirked as well, "I wouldn't dream of it."

Genma saw that the two before him were ready to start their match and made the announcement.

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"The second match of the second round, Portgas D. Naruto vs. Inuzuka Hana, may now begin!" Genma yelled before jumping out of the way.

As soon as he heard that, Natsu jumped back and drew the chokuto from his back. He didn't really want to use his usual Katon jutsu against her, they were far too deadly. But he had learned much over the last month that he would be able to use here.

Across from him Hana drew four kunai with exploding tags attached and threw them in her teammate's direction. Naruto saw what she was doing and he wouldn't have any of it. She wanted to use the smoke caused from the explosion as a cover to move around freely.

Naruto rose his sword and charged it with blue colored flames. He swung down and in the blink of an eye, all of the kunai had been bisected, exploding tag and all. With no seal to cause the explosion, the kunai turned into nothing more than duds.

Hana silently cursed to herself before throwing a smoke bomb on the ground, causing the entire area around her to be filled with a purple smoke. This was her backup plan, to have to resort to it at the very start of the match didn't spell good news to her.

Naruto looked on at the large cloud of smoke, wondering what she could possibly be planning. When the smoke cleared, Hana was nowhere in sight. Naruto quickly activated his Kenbunshoku Haki and smiled to himself.

'I see...you have a Doton affinity Hana. You saw what I did to the last Doton user I fought so what will you do differently?'

Quite a ways underneath the arena floor, Hana had dug several different tunnels that spanned the length of the entire battlefield. It had taken a bit of time, but all of her preparations were complete.

Hana made a hand seal and produced six Doton Kage Bunshins (Earth Release Shadow Clones) which gave her a nod and proceeded to run into different directions in the different tunnels. The best part about these

clones were that they weren't as chakra taxing as the standard Kage Bunshins (Shadow Clones) and since it's made out of mud, they can continue to reform itself back into its original shape. It can also be used as a powerful restraint once it's reverted back into mud.

Most members of the Inuzuka clan had Doton affinities, so they had plenty of jutsu for her to learn in the clan library. Though rarely any of them use it. They prefer to perform the usual clan techniques alongside of their ninken because of their usual reckless and brash nature. Hana couldn't help but think that her clan was full of idiots sometimes. They had a library full of offensive and supplementary jutsu that nearly all Inuzuka could learn, yet they chose not to.

Naruto patiently waited for Hana to make her move, unlike what he did with Nawaki. He quickly moved to the right as a Tsūga (Passing Fang) erupted from right underneath him. Then he jumped backwards to avoid the same thing from happening again.

Soon he was avoiding attacks all over the battlefield as drill-like attacks would erupt from the ground and then return back underneath it from a tunnel that another one produced. He had to admit, Hana was quite clever and this little maneuver would no doubt get her promoted to chunin.

These fights didn't really matter after all. What the judges were looking for was if you had the strength of a chunin, if you could come up with a strategy on the spot, if you had the thinking capacity of a chunin, and if you knew your limits. The tournament was just for show and to show the rest of the nations how strong your genin were.

Naruto slashed the drill that came up right next to him across the chest, but as soon as he did, it turned to mud and tried to restrain his movement. He wouldn't let any of that happen. He covered his sword and

his body in an aura of blue fire and flared it outwards, destroying what was left of the Doton Kage Bunshin (Earth Release Shadow Clone).

'So all of these are Doton Kage Bunshin huh? I thought it was odd that there were so many of them when Hana didn't have her ninken and there was no way that she would be able to produce this many normal Kage Bunshin if she weren't a jinchuriki...I know just how to stop her in her tracks.'

Naruto dodged one more of her clone's Tsūga (Passing Fang) before he spun his sword around in his hand and stabbed it into the ground. He began channeling his blue flames into the sword and ground until large bursts of them erupted from all the tunnels that Hana had created. All of the extra clones had been crushed by the impact of the fire, but the real Hana flew out of one of the tunnels like it was a geyser and she had been riding the flames.

The blue flames that he had been using were similar to Marco's. These flames weren't meant to incinerate their target, no, they weren't even hot. They were meant for impact strength and destruction. They were also meant for regeneration if used on yourself. It was because of this that they were perfect for using against his teammate.

He looked over to where Hana had landed, she had seen better days. She was probably still injured from her earlier match and may even be running low on chakra. This match had been going on for almost thirty minutes and she had been constantly making new clones and using the Tsūga (Passing Fang) herself.

Though he hadn't been disappointed with the fight thus far. She had made him work, harder than he had in most of his matches since he became a genin in fact. With Nawaki, Naruto didn't really need to use all those powerful techniques to beat him, but he wanted to put the brat in

his place. Oh yes, Hana had given him quite a good fight, and it wasn't over just yet.

Hana got up wearily, she wasn't done yet. She was low on chakra and her body was aching all over, but she still had some fight left in her. She wouldn't be able to last much longer.

Chapter no.102

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With that in mind Hana brought her hands into a tiger hand seal. "Doton: Doryū Taiga (Eath Release: Earth Flow River)." Hana turned a large area of the ground in front of her to mud in preparation or her next technique. She then made two hand seals before landing on the final one. "Doton: Doryūdan (Earth Release: Earth Dragon Bullet)!" The mud before her shaped into a dragon-like head that was merged with the ground. It opened its mouth and launched a large volley of cannonball-shaped bullets of mud towards Naruto. The volley covered a large and wide area, so it would be next to impossible for him to dodge.

Naruto smirked slightly at his teammate. She had really improved over this past month. Before she would have only used her clan techniques alongside her ninken and some medical ninjutsu. Without her ninken she was pretty handicapped, she knew some taijutsu and some basic ninjutsu, but that wouldn't help her much on a real mission.

That was why he was so impressed. She had covered so many of her previous weaknesses and even adapted a whole new fighting style to complement her elemental affinity. However, it wasn't enough to beat him. He hadn't been fooling around either, he would show her the fruits of his training.

Naruto held his sword with his right hand and brought it across his body preparing for a slash.

'The hardest part about learning the ancient arts of the phoenix was all of that damned meditation...however, I did gain something out of it...the three components to make these techniques work, the mind, the body, and the soul. Each one of these must be in perfect harmony with each other. It was a damned pain learning these techniques, but it was worth it.'

Naruto ignited his blade with the blue flames he had grown so fond of.

"Sanjuroku Pound Ho (Phoenix of the 36 Earthly Desires)!" Naruto swung his sword horizontally and released a large crescent wave of flames that sliced right through the bullets and the dragon that were in front of him.

It didn't stop there as it impacted her and consumed her, sending her into the wall across the arena along with it until the technique ceased.

Once again, the wall that had just been repaired was heavily damaged, but Naruto made sure to hold back this time as to not destroy it completely, or wound Hana too seriously.

He looked over to see her unconscious form lying against the wall as the medical team was rushing over to carry her off to the medical bay. At least she was in better shape than he left Nawaki in, hopefully she wouldn't be too upset later.

"Winner of the second match of the second round, Portgas D. Naruto!" He heard the proctor yell. After the announcement Naruto slowly walked up to the combatant booth to get a bit of rest. He was getting a bit tired too from all this fighting.

"Will Sabaku no Gaara and Yuki Haku please make your way down to the arena for the final match of round two!" The proctor yelled.

Sabaku no Gaara vs. Yuki Haku

Both of the genin stood face to face in the middle of the arena.

Haku was tired of waiting. She didn't have to fight in the first round, so she was fresh and ready to fight. This didn't mean that she would recklessly charge into battle though.

Her opponent was far too dangerous to charge in head first without a plan. His skill in manipulating sand was like nothing she had ever seen before. And if his last fight was any indication, he had much more up his sleeve.

She couldn't risk been trapped in that sand, if she was, the same thing would happen to her that happened to that Rock Lee and what almost happened to Suigetsu. If he hadn't had the ability to liquify then he would be as good as dead right now. She would need to play thins carefully.

Genma stepped forward to address the two shinobi before him.

"Are both combatants ready?" He received a nod from both of them, signaling for him to start the match. "Then let the third and final match of round three, Sabaku no Gaara vs. Yuki Haku begin!" He yelled before jumping out of the area. He knew what these two were capable of and he did not want to get caught up in it.

As soon as the match started, Haku had to jump out of the was as a wave of sand was launched at her. It seemed that her opponent wouldn't let up as she had to continue this action several times before she was finally out of range of his sand. Or at least the amount of sand that he currently had. She couldn't let him prepare the absurd amounts of sand that he had in his match against Suigetsu. If she did, the match would be his. There was no she would be able to avoid the tsunami of sand that he would throw at her and she wouldn't be able to survive it like Suigetsu did. As bad of an idea it was, she needed to get in close to prevent him from doing that.

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Haku rushed at Gaara with high speeds just as the sand returned to him.

She had to maneuver to the right to avoid being smothered with the sand, but she was close enough to do what she needed.

Haku made a singular hand seal and suddenly, the entire arena was filled with cold air. "Makyō Hyōshō (Demonic Mirroring Ice Crystals)." From the moisture in the air, a dome of twenty-one floating mirrors of ice surrounded Gaara, trapping him completely.

Haku stepped forward and merged with one of the mirrors at ground level and as soon as she did, every single mirror reflected nothing but an image of Haku, impossible to tell which one was real and which was a reflection. This was her ultimate technique. Once inside the mirrors, it is possible for her to move at exceedingly high speeds between the mirrors which can easily overwhelm any opponent. Without the use of a dojutsu, it is impossible to track her. Should she create clones to enter the mirrors as well, it would be all over for her enemy.

Gaara didn't even look fazed as he stared on at the twenty-one reflections of Haku. He either had a way out of the ice dome or he didn't know that there was no escape from her clutches. He began preparing his escape by turning the earth below him into a large amount of sand. By using the Sabaku Taisō (Sand Waterfall Imperial Funeral) he would certainly be able to overwhelm the jutsu before him and kill the kunoichi.

However, Haku saw what his plan was from the very start and had already thought of a way to counter it.

"Ice Age!" A tendril of ice stretched from her reflection on each of the mirrors until it made contact with the ground. First the ground

surrounding Gaara began to freeze until a thick sheet of ice covered the entire length of the arena floor.

"Did you really think that I'd let you create more sand?" Haku's voice spoke from one of the ice mirrors/ "How foolish. Without your sand you can't do anything."

"No! I won't let you erase my existence! I will be the one to prove their existence!" Gaara screamed maniacally.

It was obvious that the boy was mentally unstable, but Haku paid it no mind as she had met her fair share of insane shinobi back in Kiri. She pulled out a handful of senbon and emerged from the mirror, throwing them in the process and piercing Gaara's shoulder and leg before she merged into another ice mirror.

She had seen that the sand surrounding the boy acted like as shield on instinct alone, he had no control over it. However, that shield of sand could be bypassed with pure speed alone. That much was made obvious during the preliminary rounds. To have such a glaring weakness made obvious to you and not even bother training to fix it was proof as to just how much the boy relied in his natural ability alone. Haku would not lose to someone like him.

"Blood! It's my blood!" Gaara screamed in horror as he pulled out the senbon that had pierced through his sand armor.

Haku was about to launch another barrage of senbon at the boy, but he quickly surrounded himself with a thick dome of sand. Haku could hear some kind of weird chanting coming from the inside of the dome.

It was obvious that he wasn't coming out of that dome anytime soon, so Haku decided to take measures into her own hands. "Ice Ball." The cold air around the dome began to solidify and take form. Not a moment later, a large, thick sphere of ice surrounded the dome of sand, freezing it solid.

This was only a preparation for her next jutsu as she reached out her hand and squeezed it shut. "Hyoton: Ice Funeral." She had used this technique against that Oto-nin in the preliminary rounds and the result was made obvious. The surrounding ice became highly pressurized and was meant to crush him. It was actually not so different from a technique that Gaara used.

However, just as the ice was about to crush the sand dome and him inside of it, a monster-like arm with what looked like veins all throughout it erupted from the ice prison and shattered several of the mirrors. A moment later, the rest of the ice dome shattered and what looked like a human-sized tanuki made of sand emerged from it.

He swiped his arm several times and destroyed what was left of the ice mirrors easily. Haku had managed to escape before suffering any damage, but when the mist cleared, she along with the rest of the audience saw that Gaara was in his partially transformed state.

Before anyone knew what was going on, a large plume of purple smoke erupted from the Kage box, causing everyone to turn in that direction and see a large purple barrier being erected with all of the Kage being trapped inside.

The stadium erupted in panic, but of all those in the audience, Naruto only smiled. It seemed as if the invasion was starting off a bit earlier than expected. Now was the time to put his plan into action.

Chapter no.104

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As Naruto stared on at the enemy before him, he felt nothing but pity for him. This was a result of how far the hidden villages had fallen, a

weapon that the village had made, a sign of how corrupted these villages were with power, an example of what this world truly was. The boy before Naruto wasn't even a boy anymore, he wasn't even human anymore. Perhaps he never was to begin with.

The Yondaime Kazekage had done this to his own son. Of course, Konoha was no different. They preach about peace and family, yet the Yondaime Hokage turns three of his own children into jinchurikis, shinobi who are no more than living weapons. Even a weapon can malfunction and this was the result.

Naruto stood on a large tree branch with Natsuki at his side. She was delighted that her Nii-san had brought her along to keep Gaara from destroying the village, but she couldn't help but feel pity for the but who was so similar to her, and yet so different.

Gaara was going past his initial jinchuriki state. The sand had continued to surround his body until he looked like a full version of a mini Shukaku. He was halfway between total insanity and his normal mental state.

"Come! Prove my existence! I will crush the both of you! I am one with mother now, mother is now one with me! Together we shall bury you together!" Gaara screamed maniacally.

This had all started during Gaara's match with Haku. As soon as he started his initial jinchuriki transformation, Temari and Kankuro had jumped down to the stands and led Gaara into the forest, so that he could transform without any disruptions. That hadn't worked out as planned. Temari and Kankuro were both bleeding and unconscious on the forest floor, Gaara had lashed out against them when he had sensed presences following them and wanted to fight. This was the result of them trying to stand against him.

Haku was locked in a fierce duel with Baki back in the chunin exam arena, so she was unable to pursue her former opponent. Naruto had taken this opportunity to grab Natsuki, much to her surprise and pleasure, and follow Gaara into the forest. This was the perfect opportunity to deal with another issue altogether as well.

As soon as he defeated Gaara, he would release the Kyuubi from the Kotoamatsukami and have a nice chat with him. Of course he wouldn't tell Natsuki about his plans at all, there was no telling how she would react, knowing that the Kyuubi sealed inside of her was an actual living being and not just a mass of chakra like she had always been told.

Then the Yang half of the Kyuubi would immediately respond to the Yin half being freed and break free from its seal to reunite with itself inside of Natsuki. It would be forcible ripped out of Nawaki, but it was a price that Naruto was willing to pay. He had no doubts that Nawaki would survive, he was an Uzumaki after all, but he would be extremely weakened and put in a near death state. Similar to how Kushina was after she had given birth and the Kyuubi escaped from her last night. If she could survive that, then Nawaki would be mostly fine after this.

All of the Kages and their bodyguards were locked in an all out battle blocked by a large purple barrier on the roof of the Kage box and who knows what was going on in there.

The Yondime Kazekage and Orochimaru would probably be in there fighting the Hokage and the Mizukage, but there had to be more going on in there than that. The Kazekage may have been a fool, but he would know that he wouldn't stand a chance against two kages and their bodyguards, even with Orochimaru by his side.

The Yodaime Kazekage was currently the weakest among the five kages. The Sandaime Tsuchikade had his Jinton, the Yondaime Raikage was a

master of nintaijutsu and was the second fastest man alive, only second to the Hokage, The Yondaime Mizukage had full control of his bijuu and was a master of Suiton, and the Yondaime Hokage had the Hiraishin, one of the most feared jutsus in the world. The Kazekage was able to use the gold dust, but there was no way that would make a difference in that fight. He must have something up his sleeve if he is confident enough to betray Konoha and make an enemy of Kiri.

Though, Naruto didn't have time to pursue those suspicions right now as it looked like Gaara was getting impatient.

Naruto quickly discarded his trench coat, it had been torn up pretty good from his earlier fights and would no doubt only get in the way here. He now only wore his skin tight black shirt on his upper body and the bandages covering his right arm and hand were now fully revealed.

Dealing with Gaara and Shukaku would take a bit of time.

Naruto and Natsuki jumped in different directions to avoid a large claw swipe that Gaara sent at them, splitting the tree branch in half.

Natsuki looked a bit tired, but other than that she was fine. She had been given a soldier pill and had rested a bit before coming back up to the combatants booth to watch Haku's fight, only shortly after that did everything go straight to hell.

Naruto was perfectly fine, because of his relation to the chakra fruits and the Shinju tree, his chakra replenished at incredibly fast rates. All of the chakra that had been used in his earlier fights with Nawaki and Hana had been restored ages ago. He was ready to fight, he looked at Natsuki and noted to himself that he would be doing most of it. She was clearly still exhausted. Hopefully she wouldn't get in the way too much.

Naruto took the five exploding kunai he had in his weapon pouch and threw them at Gaara, imbedding them into the thick layer of sand

covering his body. Only a moment later did the explosion echo throughout the forest and take the tree branch down with it. Naruto looked down to see that Gaara was already getting up off the ground and the sand surrounding his body was already reforming. It would take a lot to get through that sand armor...or perhaps burning him and turning it to glass would be easier.

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"Natsuki! How much chakra do you have left?" Naruto yelled to the redhead that was kneeling on another tree branch several yards away.

Natsuki's attention suddenly drifted to the person she wanted to acknowledge her more than anything. Did he still care about her?

"I have about half of my regular reserves!...I could probably tap into some of the Kyuubi's chakra if needed, but even so I won't last too long in a prolonged fight."

Naruto expected this. Even as a jinchuriki, the girl didn't have the same chakra reserves or chakra regeneration that he did. That didn't mean she couldn't be of use here, he had already come up with a plan to restrain the insane jinchuriki below.

"Natsuki, look into my eyes!" Naruto commanded and the girl did just that.

'Sharingan: Genjutsu.' In a split second Naruto implanted all of the specifics of his plan into Natsuki's head so that she could play her own part. Naruto was a master of the sharingan. He couldn't pull forth things like the Susanoo, Ameterasu, or Tsukuyomi, but his sharingan was the strongest to exist since Madara Uchiha's. He could do things like casting

powerful genjutsu or transferring the memories of a plan that they were about to execute with ease.

Just as Gaara was about to charge up a tree to reach his opponents' level, golden chakra chains erupted from the tree trunk all around his, successfully binding him to the tree and limiting his mobility. Not a moment later did four of Naruto's Kage Bunshins (Shadow Clones) drop down from the treetops above and cling onto Gaara's immobile form for dear life. 'Bunshin Daibakuha (Great Clone Explosion!'

Each of the four clones detonated into a large explosion, destroying the majority of Gaara's sand armor.

This was the moment of truth, to see if their plan would end this...or if it would lead to something far worse.

Naruto placed his palms forward as they glowed green. "Hotarubi (Firefly Lights)." Small green balls of light floated down from his position in the treetops to Gaara's level, filling up the entire clearing. "Hidaruma (Fiery Doll)." Within the span of a single second, all of those lights converged onto Gaara's form and exploded on impact creating a large fire around the tree. This time it didn't just hit sand armor, but Gaara's actual body. Loud cries of agony could be heard for a few moments before they subsided. Naruto hoped that was the end of that, but his Kunbunshoku Haki didn't lie. He swiftly grabbed Natsuki with one arm before jumping across the clearing into another tree. It was perfect timing too, because just as they did, a massive arm of sand shot up into the air with the intent to crush them.

Naruto looked back at the position that they were in moments ago and saw that Gaara was quickly turning the surrounding earth into sand and converging it onto his form. In mere seconds, Naruto was looking up at the actual bijuu-sized Shukaku.

"Tanuki Neiri no Jutsu (Feigning Sleep Jutsu)!"

'Oh now that doesn't sound good.' Naruto thought to himself as he watched Gaara collapse from where he was merged with Shukaku's forehead and an immense surge of chakra flooded the area.

"I'm back baby!" A booming voice yelled maniacally.

"Well this looks bad...It seems that Gaara has released the full power of the Shukaku." Naruto told Natsuki as he set her down.

"Shukaku?" Natsuki asked with a tilt of her head. "What is a Shukaku?" Naruto could only sigh at how foolish and uninformed the shinobi and kunoichi of today were. Did everyone think that the Bijuu were just masses of chakra without minds of their own? How naïve. And what is worse is that even kages think this way.

"It doesn't matter at the moment, I'll tell you about it later. No doubt you'll have a lot of questions." Naruto spoke with absolute seriousness in his voice. "For now you need to get out of the area, you'll only get in the way if you remain here."

Natsuki appeared to want to fight his orders.

"What! You can't take a Bijuu on by yourself! I can summon Gamabunta to fight him on even ground!"

Naruto looked at Natsuki with the flattest expression he had. "Natsuki, I completely roasted Gamabunta earlier...do you really think he's in any shape to fight right now? Not to mention he probably wouldn't even want to help me."

"But still..."

It appeared that she wasn't going to relent any time soon.

Naruto sighed, knowing that there was really only one way to get her out of here. He opened his right eye once again. "Sharingan: Genjutsu." With just a split second of eye contact, Natsuki felt drowsy and slowly drifted

into unconsciousness. With that taken care of, Naruto went through a few hand seals and bit his thumb, drawing blood, and slammed his hand down of the tree branch.

There was a poof of smoke and a medium sized phoenix appeared.

"What can I do for you boss?" The newly summoned phoenix asked.

"I need you to take Natsuki" He pointed to the now unconscious girl, "And take her high into the sky above here. I can't have her interfering or at risk of getting hurt during the battle that is to come. Bring her down after Shukaku is dealt with." Naruto ordered.

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The phoenix gave his summoner a no and picked the girl up with a large claw and took of into the sky.

All of that occurred within a plan of a minute, now that he was free of distraction, Naruto would be able to deal with Shukaku without having to worry about anything getting in the way.

He jumper even higher into the treetops, until he was at the very top with all the other trees below him. Naruto now stood face to face with Shukaku, with the giant tanuki eying him with his insane eyes. It was clear that years of confinement had driven him to the point of insanity, it certainly didn't help that he had always been the most bloodthirsty of the Bijuu.

"So you've finally come Portgas." The maniacal voice of Shukaku commented. "Let us see if you are as strong as the last one!"

Naruto was forced to jump into the air as a large tsunami of sand was released from Shukaku's body, trying to swallow him whole and crush

him with the weight. He would need to either remain in the air or turn all of the sand into glass for this fight. Shukaku easily dwarfed all of the trees so taking cover or using them as a platform wasn't an option. This wouldn't be as easy as he thought.

As he flipped through the air, Naruto released a stream of fire from his feet to propel him in mid-air. This was one of the only ways that he could remain air-born, but it took up a lot of chakra. He would need to find a better solution. One should never have to fight a Bijuu, it was just plain unreasonable.

While in mid-air, Naruto began to knead chakra in his lungs. "Katon: Gōka Messhitsu (Fire Release: Great Fire Destruction)!" Naruto expelled a massive stream of intense flames that set the entire area below ablaze. The sand quickly began to crystalize and turn into glass, making certain that Shukaku wouldn't be able to swallow him from underneath using the sand. The terrain below could only be described as a veritable sea of flames.

Naruto immediately ceased propelling himself in mid-air, via the jets of flames from his feet, and landed amongst the flames. The flames melting the glass even further began to converge onto his form, restoring the chakra that he had just spent. That was one of the biggest perks of being a logia type, all of the flames that he created or any flames in general, could be instinctually absorbed to restore his chakra in battle.

"It seems you do possess HIS abilities. However, you are still a far cry from his level!" Shukaku screeched as he prepared for another attack.

"Of course. I'm nowhere near Ace's level...but I'm strong enough to deal with you Shukaku." Naruto retorted as he braced himself for what was to come. Shukaku's jutsu covered far too large of an area for Naruto to avoid by any normal methods, he would only be able to counter it then

make his counterattack.

Shukaku's main element was wind, this meant that Naruto would have the advantage. Though, it didn't guarantee his victory outright. Shukaku would most likely be preparing for a barrage of Fūton jutsu.

"Fūton: Renkūdan (Wind Release: Drilling Air Bullets)!" Shukaku took a deep breath, and then pounded his stomach to apply external pressure, power which was used to shoot a highly compressed ball of air, moving at high speeds, towards Naruto.

Naruto quickly brought his arms out to his side, where they became coated in blue-orange flames and took the shape of wings. He crouched down and jumped into the air while using his wings to fly. "Shinsoku (Extremespeed)." Using one of the phoenix's most favored techniques, Naruto quickly blurred out of existence, moving through the air at speeds not even the Sharingan could track.

He reappeared behind Shukaku not a moment later. The jutsu was far faster than the Shunshin (Body Flicker) and was perhaps able to match the Raiton no Yoroi (Lightning Release Armor) and Hiraishin if he went all out. Though, he could only activate it when using his phoenix wings at the moment.

Shukaku was still confused as to where he disappeared to, so Naruto took this as the perfect opportunity to strike. Naruto reared his fist back and then threw it forward. "Hiken (Fire Fist)!" Naruto turned his fist into flames and launched it forward in the shape of a large column of flames shaped like a fist at Shukaku. The flames were so intense that the surrounding glass began to crack and shatter from the sheer power behind them. The column of flames impacted Shukaku, causing him to shriek in agony as the majority of his back became crystalized.

As the flames subsided, Shukaku immediately turned around and fired

several more shots of his previous Fūton jutsu in quick succession. Naruto was forced to turn his arms into wings again and quickly make his escape to the sky.

He made it just in time too, because when he turned around, he saw that those compressed bullets of air shattered and blew away the sea of glass and a descent portion of the forest along with it. He couldn't afford to be hit by one of those, he couldn't turn intangible because Shukaku's Fūton jutsu would blow him far away and give the freed Bijuu a chance to destroy the village.

Naruto looked around at the surrounding area and noticed the destruction all around him. Not just the part of the forest that Shukaku had just destroyed, but where his attacks had burned down the forest as well. If this continued to go on this entire section of the forest was as good as gone, they wouldn't even be able to call it a hidden village anymore because it would be right in the open...he would have to finish this up quickly.

Naruto quickly turned his wings back into his normal arms and softly landed on the ground. This was going to be risky and quite destructive. He had immersed himself greatly in the arts of senjutsu every since he arrived at Mt. Silver thirty days ago. However, he still had yet to master it and he wouldn't anytime soon. Mastering senjutsu took months, perhaps even years to learn. It was asking too much for him to do that within the span of a month. That isn't to say that he didn't have any success with it at all.

Every summoning clan has their own brand of senjutsu. The toads use their toad oil as a main base of their senjutsu, the snake contract has its summoners become part snake and gain some of their qualities to help master senjutsu, and so on. The phoenix inherited their flames from

Portgas D. Ace, the progenitor of flames and fire-based chakra. Because of this, Naruto's natural nature energy from his flame body was naturally aligned with the phoenix clan's senjutsu. He would definitely have to go back for more training after this was all over.

Naruto crouched down on the ground so that one knee was on the ground and his other foot was in front of him. He coated his right hand with flames far more intense than the ones he had been using in this fight and slammed it down on the ground.

"Senpō: Ennetsu Jigoku (Sage Art: Flames of Hell)!"

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The earth slowly began to rumble before seven immense pillars of searing hot flames erupted from the ground below and encircled Shukaku while continuing to burn into the sky. The intent of this technique is to trap the opponent in the caged inferno and incinerate them until not even ashes remain. If Naruto had mastery of this technique then it would be capable of destroying something much larger like one of the five great hidden villages. The burning pillars slowly began to move in closer to Shukaku as the heat was slowly turning him into a giant glass statue, there was no way of escape, in a matter of moments the fire pillars consumed him and began to converge into one massive pillar before incinerating anything within and around it before releasing its final burst of flames into the air before dispersing.

Naruto was left on the ground, panting heavily from the use of that last technique. He may have had incredibly powerful chakra, and a lot of it, but he couldn't use so many powerful jutsu in quick succession without

wearing himself out yet. Shukaku had only been the Ichibi, the weakest of the Bijū, and yet he had been pushed so far. It left a bad taste in his mouth.

Because of all the heat in the atmosphere above, thunder clouds began to gather and let down a heavy rain. Now was a time when Naruto still wished he had his hat. He looked over to where Gaara was moments ago and cringed at the sight. There was nothing but charred earth for miles, not even the ashes of Shukaku or Gaara remained. Temari and Kankuro had also been incinerated by that last jutsu, their unconscious bodies had still been within what was the forest and Naruto felt all their 'voices' vanish with the use of his Kenbunshoku Haki.

He would no doubt be getting a scolding from Obito for incinerating the entire forest in this section outside the village. At least Konoha still had one Mokuton user in its walls, had it not this would be very bad.

Now all he had left to do was release the Kyuubi from its genjutsu. He whistled for his summon to bring Natsuki back down. Not a second later was the medium sized bird with an unconscious Natsuki floating right above him. It dropped Natsuki from its talons, who Naruto caught in his arms. Naruto gave his summon a nod before it dispelled in a burst of smoke.

Naruto looked down at the redhead in his arms. How was she still unconscious after everything that had just gone on? Yes, he did place her under a genjutsu, but seriously, he had just turned this forest into hell on earth for a few minutes and here she was sleeping peacefully. He didn't know whether to be impressed or disappointed in the girl.

He laid her down on the ground below and forcefully opened one of her eyes with his index finger and thumb. Naruto activated his mangekyo sharingan, the normal three-tomoe design morphing into a four-point

shuriken design, and cast a genjutsu on her so that he could enter her mind.

Within Natsuki's Mindscape

Naruto was instantly transferred to a sewer-like plane and was forced to wade through the ankle-deep water submerged the ground. The mind scape itself was like a maze, there were so many turns and dead ends that the only way Naruto was finding his way was because of his Kenbunshoku Haki.

He was following the presence of two beings. One was Natsuki, in a state of unconsciousness even in her own mind scape, and the other was the Kyuubi, who Naruto could even sense from here was in a trance.

Normally when a jinchuriki was rendered unconscious, they were immediately transferred into their mind scape and forced into contact with the Bijuu, however, it seemed that Natsuki was forced into a state of unconsciousness so it seemed as if she was only rendered unconscious the first time in the real world. For Madara to have set up such an intricate design within the Kotoamatsukami was an astounding feat that Naruto had yet to reach.

Naruto finally entered the large dungeon with a cage as tall as the room was. Natsuki was half submerged with the ankle-deep water and the eternal-mangekyo sharingan pattern of Uchiha Madara replaced her usual violet eyes, a sign that she became trapped within the same genjutsu as the Kyuubi when she came here. The Kyuubi itself was laying down inside of the cage eying Naruto, the very same pattern replacing what should be slitted, crimson eyes. The trance was apparent, the Bijuu's eyes were opened, but the beast was not in control. It was likely that the Kyuubi was only woken from its slumber once outside of the jinchuriki-s seal.

How far the mightiest of the Bijuu had fallen.

Naruto still had his mangekyo sharingan active and whispered the name of the most powerful genjutsu in existence, the very same genjutsu that these two were under.

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"Kotoamatsukami." Naruto spoke after looking the Kyuubi directly in the eyes.

Immediately the sharingan design within the Kyuubi's eyes shattered and was immediately released from Madara's control. He immediately let out a large growl and began to thrash around the cage.

"Who are you ningen?! Where is that detestable ningen, Madara!?" The booming voice of the Kyuubi roared.

After such a loud commotion, Natsuki began to stir as well.

"Nii-san! What are you doing here? What am I doing here? Where are we Nii-san?!" Natsuki cried, obviously freaked out and confused right now.

"Ah! It's the Kyuubi Nii-san get away from the cage! Why is it here?! I thought it was sealed inside of me!"

Naruto decided to focus his attention solely on the Kyuubi. Natsuki was too frantic and confused at the moment to understand anything he would say, in fact it would create more questions than answers. Most of her questions would be answered with his talk with the Kyuubi anyway.

"Kurama" Naruto spoke, earning a surprised look from the Kyuubi, now named Kurama. "You have been under the control of Uchiha Madara for well over a century. Sixteen years ago you broke out of your former container and resealed into this girl here" Naruto pointed towards

Natsuki. "and her twin brother...right now you are incomplete, only your Yin half has been broken out of the genjutsu." He spoke calmly, wanting Kurama to understand how much the situation had changed since he was placed under Madara's control.

"Who are you ningen, and why do you know so much? Not even I was aware that I was under that detestable man's control." Kurama asked. The boy before him was no older than sixteen, there was no way that he could have possibly known what happened during the age of Uchiha Madara.

"Ah yes, I haven't properly introduced myself have I?" Naruto asked while giving a small, polite bow to Kurama. "My name is Portgas D. Naruto."

Kurama's eyes widened at the boy's statement. Portgas D. Ace was the twin brother of the Rikudo Senin, the man who created the Bijuu. Portgas D. Ace was the man primarily responsible for the defeat of Ōtsutsuki Kaguya and the Juubi, a man of such power that he could destroy the entire earth if he wished. Was this boy really related to this man.

"You may be thinking of the man who held the surname that I currently do...I must admit that I am not related to him by blood...but I have inherited his will and his abilities." To demonstrate, Naruto lit his entire body ablaze before limiting the flames to only cover half of his face and his hands.

'That fire...it isn't at the same intensity as Ace-sama's was, but that is no doubt the same ability of the chakra fruit...the only way for him to find it would be to be the reincarnation of the one who possessed the fruit before him...Old man Hagoromo was right about life and death after all...not to mention he looks a lot like Ace-sama with those freckles and that tattoo.'

"Very well, I believe you Naruto. You already know that my name is

Kurama...Who is that ningen over there?" He asked while nodding his head over to Natsuki.

Natsuki was speechless after seeing and hearing what was going on. The Kyuubi was right in front of her, this had never happened before, why was it happening now? The Kyuubi was under the control of Uchiha Madara this entire time? Why was her Nii-san talking with the Kyuubi like it was an old friend? What were they talking about? Just what was going on?

"She appears to be a bit overwhelmed right now. This is Uzumaki-Namikaze Natsuki, you were sealed within her mother after Mito had gotten too old and was ready to die...she is also my biological sister...just go through her memories and you'll find all the information you'll need...She had always been told by her parents that you were evil and that the Bijuu were just large masses of chakra, so she may not understand how to interact with you right now."

"Nii-san...just what is going on right now?...Why are you talking to that thing like it's alive? Kaa-san and Tou-san always told me that they were just manifestations of evil chakra from the negative emotions of humans...so why are you talking to it?" Natsuki questioned, clearly frightened of the being behind those bars.

Naruto could only sigh, he didn't know where those misconceptions came from, but for the Hokage to believe in that bullshit too was pretty much expected from Naruto by now. He did not have high expectations from the man. Naruto looked Natsuki in the eyes with his sharingan and transferred all of the information that was relevant about the Bijuu at the moment to Natsuki.

Needless to say, she was overwhelmed by the amount of information she now had on all of the Bijuu. She was shocked, shameful, disappointed,

embarrassed, and horrified all at the same time. Everybody had been wrong about all the information they had about the Bijuu for all these years. She was disappointed in her own parents for believing such nonsense and in herself for listening to them. And now she just told the most powerful of the Bijuu that he didn't have emotions of feelings like every other living being. And now she had to face the consequences. Natsuki shut her mouth and tried to process all of the information she just received.

"Will you be calling your other half here now?" Naruto asked, curious as to when all this was going to take place.

"I can sense myself. The moment I was released from that man's control, the seal of my other half should have been weakening. It should be here any minute now...you should never split the halves of yin and yang, it goes against the very principles of nature itself."

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Arena Infirmiry

The infirmiry in the colosseum within Konoha was currently being protected by Konoha-nin from the invading Suna and Oto shinobi, as there were still many genin and medics within its walls who were either providing care or receiving it.

One of these people was Uzumaki-Namikaze Nawaki. He was dealt a humiliating defeat by his own blood-related brother and was currently unconscious. It was easily to tell that his body had been terribly scarred from his match earlier that day. His left eye was almost completely burned shut and there were burns surrounding it that wrapped around to

the side of his head. From his shoulder down, the entire left side of his body was covered in third degree burns.

The medics had done all they could, but they weren't miracle workers. Those burns were too severe to ever heal completely. Honestly, the only reason that he wasn't in a coma right now or brain dead was because of the Uzumaki blood that flowed through his veins. They were renowned throughout the elemental nations for their incredible regenerative abilities and their life-force.

Suddenly, the seal on his stomach began to glow crimson. The next moment, the boy was screaming in agony while a malefic red chakra in the shape of a fox began to break out of the seal. The chakra occupied the entire room, but it didn't burn or even touch anybody like it should have. No, it faded through them as if they were not even there, and it appeared to be looking around for something. It finally locked onto a direction and pulled the rest of its body out of Nawaki and vanished through the wall.

All of this happened while Nawaki was unconscious, but it was so painful that he shrieked and reacted as if he were awake the entire time. The seal on his stomach was no longer black like it was written in ink, but it was steaming and the mark of the seal had been burned into his body, never to disappear again. His chakra reserves and regeneration abilities also took a massive drop, the machine that he was hooked up to began to beep erratically.

The medical-nin who had just witnessed the scene unfold before them were terrified, but they rushed to his side nonetheless when it was clear his heartbeat was rising above its normal rate. They would do everything they could to save the life of their Hokage's son.

Whatever the case may be, Uzumaki-Namikaze Nawaki was no longer the

Jinchuriki for the Kyuubi no Kitsune.

Within Natsuki's Mindscape

"Ah, here it is now." Kurama commented as a large crimson fox made of malefic chakra, the same size as Kurama, entered into Natsuki's mindscape.

The fox reached out towards the cage and Kurama did the same. The two equal sized foxes merged as the one made of chakra wrapped itself around Kurama's entire arm and body before covering it completely and being absorbed.

A rush of power was released from within the cage as the mightiest of the Bijuu was now complete again.

This amount of power was incredible, it easily dwarfed all of the power that Shukaku had been utilizing earlier. Natsuki was forced on her hands and knees from the pressure it alone, and had Naruto been a lesser man, he would have as well. This is what the most powerful of the Bijuu was capable of? Kurama may have been the most powerful of them, but he was still only one ninth of the actual Juubi. Had Ace, Hagoromo, and Hamura really fought against a being of such immense power?

It was clear to Naruto needed far more training. Especially if someone were to enact the Eye of the Moon Plan that was inscribed into the tablet in the Naka Shrine. Naruto knew that what was inscribed on the tablet wasn't what the Infinite Tsukuyomi really was, so someone must have engraved that there to try to manipulate the Uchiha. The tablet stated that the Infinite Tsukuyomi was a plan that created an eternity of blissful dreams for all those in the world, but in reality it was a plan to revive Ōtsutsuki Kaguya and retrieve all of the chakra that originated from Kaguya and return it to her.

This meant that someone was trying to revive Kaguya. Whether they

were being manipulated into believing that they were creating a world of eternal peace or they were doing this with that as their intent, someone, somewhere was trying to revive her. If they succeeded it could spell the end of the world as they knew it.

There was nobody in the world that could match the strength of those who fought and sealed her the first time. Even if every shinobi in the Elemental Nations combined their strength, it would be almost impossible to match theirs.

Naruto would need to be prepared for when that day comes, freeing the Kyuubi from Madara's control was only the first step. If these people were serious about their plans, then they would need each of the Bijuu to complete it, or at least their chakra. For Natsuki to stand a fighting chance against them, then she would need the full power of the Kyuubi. They would also most likely need a wielder of a rinnegan. There hasn't been a wielder of that dōjutsu since Hagoromo. Wait, Jiraiya once had a student during the Second Great Shinobi War in Ame that possessed a pair of those eyes, but he was supposed to be dead. Or was he?

Naruto was getting a headache thinking about all of this. They were in the middle of an invasion right now, he would think about everything later.

"That is all I came here to do. Our village is currently at war with enemy shinobi, so we'll be needing to get back..." Naruto spoke as he grabbed onto Natsuki's shoulder. "Until next time Kurama." With those final words said, Naruto and Natsuki exited the mindscape.

Chapter no.110

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Formerly Konoha Forest

Naruto and Natsuki were brought out of the latter's mindscape and were now standing in the charred remains of what was formerly a section of Konoha's surrounding forests. Over an hour had passed within the mindscape, and yet only a few minutes had passed in the real world. That was the beauty of genjutsu and the workings of the mind. What felt like hours in an illusion would really only have lasted a second in the real world.

Natsuki was on the ground, still overwhelmed with everything that had happened. It was to be expected, she had been misinformed about what had been sealed inside of her for her entire life and now that she learned the truth, she was more confused than she had ever been in her life. She had always just believed that having a Bijuu sealed inside you just meant that you were entitled to more chakra, but after coming face to face with the actual being and hearing it speak with your brother made you question everything you knew about the world.

Naruto saw the girl's dilemma and decided that he should do something about it, seeing as how what just occurred was his fault.

"Try not to think about it too much at the moment Natsuki..." Naruto said, gaining the girl's attention. "We've got bigger things to worry about like this invasion. You'll have plenty of time to think things over later."

Naruto advised the girl as he began to walk back towards the village before he suddenly stopped.

"Oh, and do not inform anybody about what just happened...well I suppose you can tell Narumi since it involves her too, but no one else. This includes Minato, Kushina, Jiraiya, Kakashi, and whoever else you would consider telling. They will only become weary of Kurama and try to tell you that it is evil and that it's trying to take control of you. They

will also try tampering with the seal, something that will do more harm than goo as you've already noticed." Natsuki noticeably cringed. Her having both halves of Kurama meant that it had been ripped out of her other brother. If the chakra hadn't have been separated into yin and yang that wouldn't have happened.

"If I do find out that you have told them...then consider our relationship over, done, non-existent. I am able to tolerate you right now, but should you betray my trust then I will treat you the same as I do Minato and Kushina." Naruto told the girl.

Natsuki flinched once again at the tone of his voice, proving that he was absolutely serious. She saw how much Naruto disliked their parents and she would hate herself forever if she was the one who forced him to treat her like that. She wouldn't throw away any chance she had of having any kind of relationship with her elder brother.

Natsuki knew that he was also right about her parents, godfather, and sensei. They would no doubt try to convince her to never make contact with Kurama again and to stop using its chakra completely, and if the conversation that Naruto and Kurama had was any indication, she would need it very soon. They would also try to mess with her seal, and there was no way she was letting them come close to her seal with the fine mess they had already made with it.

She would keep this to herself, and Narumi once she knew Naruto's conditions as well.

Natsuki quickly brought herself out of her thoughts and quickly followed her Nii-san back to the village to help fight off the invasion.

Kage Battle Royale

As soon as Gaara transformed into his initial jinchuriki state during his match with Haku, a large burst of smoke erupted out of the Kages'

viewing box. Rasa, the Yondaime Kazekage, had immediately fled to the roof with the Mizukage and the Hokage not far behind. His goal had been to lure them up to the roof while Orochimaru's henchmen kept his fellow Kage's bodyguards occupied.

He stopped moving once he reached the rust-colored, tiled roof of the building. Not a second later did Yagura and Minato make their presence known.

"Kazekage-dono, what is the meaning of all this?!" Minato demanded just before the Suna bodyguards who had been training them split into four people who each positioned themselves at a corner of the large rooftop before erecting a large, purple barrier, surrounding the entire area of the roof. What was most notable about those four was that they were dressed in the usual attire for Oto-nins.

In truth, Minato was well aware of what was going on. Jiraiya had informed him about Orochimaru's presence in the chunin exams and the subsequent Suna/Oto invasion that would follow. He didn't make a move beforehand because he didn't have any evidence to support his claim besides Jiraiya's words, but they had been preparing for this for well over a month now.

Minato had not confronted the Kazekage about his accusations either because he had honestly believed that the man was being manipulated by Orochimaru, or that Orochimaru would be impersonating him during the finals. The man had a disturbing ability to copy the faces of others and make organic masks out of them. However, before him was the real Kazekage, so all his theories had all been thrown out the window.

The only response the Homage received was Rasa biting his thumb in order to draw blood and slamming his hand onto the tiles below. There was a poof of smoke, but what stepped out of it was what made both of

the men cringe. In all his pale-skinned, snake-like, glory stood one of the three sannin, Orochimaru.

"Ah, Minato-kun. How good it is to see you once again." Orochimaru commented as he let his tongue hang out of his mouth and lick his lower lip. He couldn't wait to kill the Yondaime Hokage, Minato was the man who stole the position of Hokage from him. Him! One of the sannin, while Minato had just been a snot-nosed brat who had only just become a jonin.

"Orochimaru..." Minato growled as he tried to turn the man in front of him to ashes with his gaze alone. Had he been an Uchiha, that may have been possible, but for now he would have to settle with merely glaring menacingly at his sensei's former teammate.

"I'm sure you are well aware by now as to what the meaning of all this is." Rasa declared as he stepped forward to stand by Orochimaru's side.

"We will be destroying Konoha today!...I wish it hadn't had to come to this, but Sunagakure is in a state of near bankruptcy because our Daimyo has been sending all of the mission requests that should rightfully be going to Suna to Konoha...this is the only option to our financial crisis."

This earned widened eyes from the two kage before him.

"You're doing all of this for the sake of financial profit! Have you not learned what war does to the villages after the last war?!" Yagura asked incredulously to the Kazekage. Seriously, he was acting as foolish as the Tsuchikage usually was.

To go to war for the sake of earning more missions from your country was preposterous. Suna was likely to lose more than it would gain from this invasion, even if Otogakure had allied themselves with them. Konoha was still suffering from how many shinobi had been killed in the Kyuubi attack sixteen years ago, but the village still had far more shinobi than

Suna did. Suna had not yet recovered from the amount of shinobi they lost during the Third Great Shinobi War, not to mention the fact that they were the smallest of the five great villages and therefore didn't have as high of a population.

Orochimaru looked amused at the young kage's comment. "We live in a world that thrives in war and hatred Yagura-kun. As one of the five kages you should know such a simple reality of this world."

Minato closed his eyes in frustration, there was no way around this. The entire village was in a state of crisis right now. Giant snake summons looked to be destroying sections of the forest and the village, every shinobi was fighting to defend their home right now, his family was in danger, Jiraiya and Obito should be finished taking care of the Oto-nin that had swarmed them and should be heading off to take care of the situation throughout the rest of the village right about now, Minato didn't have the luxury of standing here chatting.

"It seems that there is no avoiding conflict here." Minato stated as he pulled several of his marked kunai from his weapons pouch.

"How observant Minato-kun...but I hope you don't think you'll be having an easy time." Orochimaru commented as he went through numerous hand seals before slamming his palm onto the ground.

"Kuchiyose: Edo Tensei (Summoning: Impure World Reincarnation)!"

Chapter no.111

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From the ground below, three wooden coffins rose from the ground. One had the kanji for 'one' on the lid while the other two both had the kanji for 'two'. Minato and Yagura both raised an eyebrow at these coffins.

They had clearly heard Orochimaru claim that this was a summoning jutsu, summoning techniques were usually used to summon animals and the like, but this was something that neither of the Kage were expecting. Minato's eyes suddenly widened as he remembered a jutsu that the Nidaime Hokage, Senju Tobirama, had created that was closely guarded in the forbidden scroll in the Kage Tower.

The Edo Tensei (Impure World Reincarnation), a kinjutsu where, using a living person as a vessel, a deceased person's soul can be called back to the world of the living and bound to it. The vessel then takes on the form that soul had in life, thereby reincarnating them to do the summoner's bidding.

"Don't tell me that you've mastered even that jutsu, Orochimaru..."

Minato pleaded more than asked, all he received was a wide grin in return, confirming his fears.

All three of the coffins slowly opened, and their lids fell to the ground. The three individuals who had been revived slowly emerged and made their way onto the roof.

Minato and Yagura were both speechless at the sight before them.

"I knew that it would need to come to this, so I made a few preparations in advance. Sadly, these were the only three that I could get my hands on with the amount of time I had." Orochimaru could hardly contain his laughter as he burned the horror-stricken faces of the Hokage and Mizukage into his memory.

There on the roof in between the two opposing sides, stood the Shodaime Hokage, Senju Hashirama, the Nidaime Hokage, Senju Tobirama, and the Nidaime Mizukage, Hōzuki Gengetsu.

This was more than Minato and Yagura had signed on for.

Orochimaru stepped up behind the three Kages and placed a kunai

attached with a seal at the end, to bind their personalities and retain control over them, into the back of their heads.

As soon as the tags were bound to their souls, the three reanimated Kage took off running in the direction where the current Kage were.

Orochimaru and Rasa stayed behind and would wait for their chance to step in once Minato and Yagura were weakened. They were two of the strongest Kage of this generation and wouldn't be taken out easily.

Though with three of the strongest Kage of all time as their opponents, not even they will last long.

These reanimated Kage were not at full strength, if they had been they would have been near impossible to control with this imperfect version of the Edo Tensei, but nevertheless they should be able to easily able to overwhelm those two.

Minato and Yagura were standing only a few feet apart, so the three former Kages separated and charged them from all angles. Senju Hashirama was continuing with the frontal assault, while Senju Tobirama was running along the highest point of the roof on their right, with Hōzuki Gengetsu flanking them on the left.

It appeared that divide and conquer would be their only option of getting out of this alive.

Taijutsu wasn't a viable option as all of the shinobi on the roof were Kage level in taijutsu, therefore trying to match their opponents in taijutsu while being outnumbered would be certain death. They would only use it when there was no other choice or when it was in conjunction with another technique. They would need to keep their distance and rely on ninjutsu and genjutsu. Though they needed to conserve enough to deal with Orochimaru and the Kazekage afterwards.

The current Hokage and Mizukage were in a tough spot with not a lot of

options at their disposal.

Minato quickly reached for his hip and drew a sealing scroll from his weapons pouch. He swiftly unraveled it and pushed chakra into it, causing three-pronged kunai to erupt from it and rain down all across the rooftop.

The three Kage who had been continuing their charge were forced to veer off course and take precautionary measures to save themselves the trouble of having to regenerate. This bought Minato and Yagura some time to take the offensive.

They looked each other in the eyes before nodding and vanishing out of sight. Minato reappeared to the middle of the battlefield directly in between the Senju brothers, they would be his opponents. Yagura reappeared on the left side of the roof, cutting off Hōzuki Gengetsu, it only made sense that one of his predecessors would be his opponent.

"Hahahaha! This will prove to be excellent entertainment! Let the games begin!" As Orochimaru began laughing maniacally the three Kage charged their targets with only one purpose in mind...to kill them.

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Yagura vs. Hōzuki Gengetsu

Yagura eyed his opponent's moves very carefully. Hōzuki Gengetsu was undoubtedly one of the strongest shinobi that Kirigakure had ever produced, if not the strongest, Yagura would not take this man lightly.

Yagura pulled up the sleeve on his right arm and channeled chakra into the seal that was on his wrist, summoning his favored weapon, a large, hook-ended staff with a green flower on the end.

Gengetsu recovered from the hail of kunai and charged at Yagura once more.

Yagura knew that he wouldn't last long in a taijutsu confrontation, due to his rather child-like body and shorter limbs, but he would be able to make up for it with his use of bujutsu. Originally, he had believed that a close quarters match wouldn't be a good option, but that was before they had split up to take on their opponents. Right now he only had to deal with the Kage in front of him.

Hōzuki Gengetsu was a specialist in the field of genjutsu. This gave Yagura the advantage because he was a perfect jinchūriki and therefore was almost immune to genjutsu.

Yagura brought his staff forward to block the oncoming kick from Gengetsu. He then shifted his weapon to to the left to cut off a punch from the right side. Isobu, from inside Yagura, immediately flared its chakra to dispel the genjutsu that had been discretely placed on its host.

Gengetsu charged at Yagura once more, forcing him on the defensive.

The former Mizukage brought a kick towards Yagura's head, using his momentum to put more force behind it. Yagura ducked under it, but was caught off guard with a second kick that sent him back a dozen yards.

Gengetsu jumped back from the smaller Kage and placed his palm on the tiled roof below them. There was a large burst of smoke before a giant clam appeared on the rooftop with Gengetsu standing on top of it.

It seemed that those who had been revived with this particular jutsu retained all of the abilities they had in life, even summoning contracts.

The giant clam slowly opened its shell and began exuding a thick mist that quickly covered the battlefield.

Yagura was no stranger to fighting in the mist and the silent killing technique, he was from Kirigakure after all, but he was still rather young

for a Kage and his predecessor no doubt had more experience than him, even if the man wasn't in control of his own actions right now his body and mind still retained the memories of when he was alive.

Yagura closed his eyes and focused on his surroundings. Every movement of the air, every small sound, all of the scents in the atmosphere, Yagura focused on all of these, as well as focusing on his own chakra network.

Hōzuki Gengetsu's giant clan summon was famous for being used in conjunction with his Yin-release genjutsu, even as a perfect jinchuriki and Isobu helping him from the inside he would need to keep a careful eye on his own chakra system to be sure he wasn't under a genjutsu.

That wasn't the only thing he was keeping an eye on though. Gengetsu was a dangerous man and was incredibly skilled in the art of silent killing. The man was a sensor, so he was in complete control in the situation. In fact, he was probably already waiting until he let his guard down or was preparing his assault. Neither option were good for Yagura. Sensing a surge in chakra, Yagura immediately jumped to the right of his current location, and it was just in time too. The current Mizukage looked back to where he was a minute ago and saw a large number of bubbles impacting the ground with enough strength to turn the tiles into rubble.

Now Yagura was quite familiar with the history and clans of Kiri, so he knew exactly what Gengetsu had just done. The former Mizukage had used the Suika no Jutsu (Hydrification Technique) to produce bubbles from his body, those bubbles then floated upwards into the air and rained down on the roof at high speeds, intent on breaking a few of his bones.

That was a rather clever strategy, using the Mizu Fūsen no Jutsu (Water Balloon Jutsu) as the finisher to gain an edge in the battle.

He was lucky to have reacted as soon as he did, had he been unprepared

for that jutsu then he would have been in a world of trouble. Though, he wasn't out of the woods just yet.

Yagura forcibly dispelled another genjutsu that was cast upon him through the mist, this was becoming quite an annoyance, he didn't have the luxury to keep worrying about whether or not he was under a genjutsu. He needed to get rid of that giant clam and quick. Though, that was easier said than done as once the mist was produced from it, the clam was camouflaged within an illusion, while it produced dozens of copies of itself. And those copies littered the battlefield, he had already managed to dispel quite a few of them, but he needed to find the real one.

The only way to disperse the mist and these illusions was to find the clam's real body and force it back to its summoning realm.

It seemed that he would need to step up his game a bit.

Yagura got down on all fours as a dark red, nearly black, layer of chakra enveloped his body, turning his eyes pure white and making him appear as a miniature version of the Sanbi. Behind him, two tails could be seen swaying in the air.

This was the Yagura's version two jinchūriki state. This was the highest he could go without transforming into the full Sanbi. If he were to do that then the entire roof would be destroyed. Yagura was the only person to be able to claim to be a perfect jinchūriki besides Killer B from Kumogakure. He had first mastered Isobu's power at a very young age, so he actually trumps him in that regard. Even a former Kage will have dealing trouble with a perfect jinchūriki.

Yagura slammed both his claws into the ground, sending a shockwave across the battlefield, and shattering a majority of the roof in the process, successfully dispersing the mist and thus revealing what was hidden

within it.

Over twenty giant clams littered the battlefield with Gengetsu nowhere in sight. Yagura let loose a massive pulse of chakra, disrupting the chakra and illusions in the surrounding area. All of the imaged of the clam slowly dissipated into nothing but air, while the real clam came into existence about twenty yards away from Yagura.

This was the best chance he was going to get to turn the tide in his favor. Yagura began gathering positive black chakra and negative white chakra at an 8:2 ratio into a small purple sphere. Keeping its spherical form instead of compressing it, Yagura fired the ultimate technique of the Bijū at the giant clam, so he would be able to find Gengetsu's real body.

"Bijūdama (Tailed Beast Ball)!"

The medium sized purple flew through the air at high speeds, intent on eradicating the clam summons. This version of the Bijūdama was far weaker than when a Bijū would perform it, or when it is compressed and swallowed to form a beam from a jinchūriki, but this jutsu was only meant to rid the battlefield of the clam, nothing more.

Gengetsu's personal summons opened its mouth to catch the purple sphere and trapped it within its mouth to stop the jutsu from harming its summoner. A moment later, the Bijūdama exploded within the confines of the clam's mouth, forcibly causing it to dispel in a burst of smoke.

There was no time for Yagura to celebrate as from the smoke, emerged a chibi-like clone of Gengetsu, however its skin was a pale white and was much larger than Gengetsu himself. Gengetsu was standing a good distance away from the clone, as the use of it leaves him in a severely weakened and vulnerable state.

Yagura silently cursed to himself at the appearance of this particular clone. This was a jutsu that Hōzuki Gengetsu was renowned for, and it

was his personal favorite, the Jōki Bōi (Steaming Danger Tyranny).

This was quite the predicament indeed. Even while Yagura was in his version two jinchūriki state, he would have trouble keeping up with its speed and strength. The only good thing about its appearance is that it left the Nidame Mizukage wide open for attack once it was dealt with or when he got an opportunity to strike, whichever came first.

A large axe-shaped blade forged from water formed from the clone's right forearm before he rushed at Yagura with incredible speeds.

Yagura, still in his version two cloak, swung his staff to counter the blade of the water and oil clone before him. However, that didn't stop Gengetsu's creation as it continued to strike out towards Yagura at high speeds. They were locked in that pace for several minutes as Yagura was forced to remain on the defensive.

He leaped back to gain some distance between them and to bring the speed of the battle to his pace.

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Suiton: Daikaisuidan (Water Release: Great Water Mass Bullets)!" Yagura took a deep breath and condensed large masses of water in his mouth before firing three large water projectiles at the Jōki Bōi.

Gengetsu's clone was far too fast for the water projectiles to his, as it swiftly flew through the air to avoid them and charged at Yagura once more. Yagura's jutsu impacted the roof and created small shockwaves that only accelerated the clone's speed further.

As the clone flew through the air, it slowly started to expand and increase exponentially in size.

Yagura's pupil-less eyes widened as he knew what the increase in size meant.

The clone was made up from the oil and water in Gengetsu's body. The water in the clone is surrounded by a thin layer of oil, and do to this structure, the clone's temperature can be easily altered from cold to hot and vice-versa. When it exerts itself, the outer layer of oil heats up and evaporates the water within it. As the internal pressure builds, the clone expands until it violently explodes and water vapor is released. The vapor then cools down and rises and as a result, turns into hail that cools the clone, causing it to shrink again and repeat the never ending process.

It only takes chakra to create the clone, not sustain it, as the rest of the process is carried out by the laws of nature and science. Even if it didn't, as a reanimation Gengetsu had an unlimited supply of chakra.

Yagura began kneading suiton chakra within his lungs, knowing that he had to do something to slow the clone down before it exploded.

"Suiton: Suijinheki (Water Release: Water Formation Wall)!" Yagura released a large torrent of water from his mouth that rose into a large wall as it intercepted the large clone. It slowly became powerful enough to stop the clone in its tracks and push it back towards the direction it came from a bit.

Though it seemed as if it was too late as the clone's expression changed to a large smirk before it exploded violently in a burst of water vapor.

Yagura was sent back across the roof by the incredibly powerful shockwave and searing hot water vapor produced. He landed just near the farthest edge of the roof, sections of his version two cloak ripped from his body, his clothes tattered, and parts of his body scalded from the heat of the blast. Nevertheless, he slowly managed to stand back up as he stared at the clone who had already returned to its normal size and

cooled down.

The Nidaime Mizukage truly was a force to be reckoned with, and to think this wasn't even the man's full power. He was truly fearsome and worthy of the title of Mizukage.

Yagura eyed the water covering the battlefield from his earlier defensive countermeasure, and slowly but surely a plan began to form in his mind. There was no guarantee that it would work, in fact it may be detrimental to him with the cost of chakra and add more fuel to the fire, but he managed to pull it off then he would have a chance to seal Gengetsu while he was still in his weakened state.

Yagura made a single Mizu Bunshin (Water Clone) from the water below him, before they charged off in different directions. Yagura's clone was heading for Gengetsu's clone, while Yagura himself was going for Gengetsu.

The Mizu Bunshin didn't have to go very far to enact the first part of the plan, as this entire section of the rooftop was covered in a thick layer of water, with Gengetsu's clone standing right in the middle of it all.

'Yagura' stuck out his palm before the water began rising and flowing, before it became a large, dense, inescapable sphere of water.

"Suirō no Jutsu (Water Prison Jutsu)."

Yagura's clone may only have had ten percent of Yagura's original strength, but the Kage was a master of the water element and could control it with his will alone, even going so far as to use some of the most powerful suiton jutsu ever created without even forming a hand seal.

This was due to Isobu, who was sealed inside of him and whose own element was water, and because of his own tremendous skill.

For the Jōki Bōi (Steaming Danger Tyranny), who needed to be able to expand to explode, the dense and heavy water of the prison would be the

perfect countermeasure for stopping it in its tracks.

The only problem was that 'Yagura' needed to continuously hold and keep the prison active. Once it ran out of chakra, the jutsu would dispel and Gengetsu's signature clone would be free to do what it pleases. This only meant that the real Yagura would have to finish his part as soon as possible.

The real Yagura was currently rushing at Gengetsu at high speeds, whilst avoiding continuous barrages of Gengetsu's Mizudeppō: Nichō (Water Gun: Two Guns). That isn't to say that Yagura was unscathed from the near constant bullets of water that were traveling at him with tremendous speed and force. No, he had received his fair share of gunshot wounds, but that was nothing that Isobu wouldn't be able to heal, albeit slowly, but he would still be able to heal it nonetheless.

Yagura had long since given up any form of defense. He needed to finish him off quickly before his special clone could get involved one more, and judging from the amount of struggle the clone was putting up in trying to break free inside of the water prison, it wouldn't last much longer as it was taking even more chakra for his clone to hold it. He needed to seal Gengetsu at this very moment.

Yagura really only knew one fūinjutsu technique and it was the one that Obito had taught him while he was the liaison between Kiri and Konoha. It had been taught to him by Minato, who had it taught to him by Jiraiya of the sannin. It was a short-ranged type though, and that is why he had given up all concentration on defense in order to get in close to his target.

Yagura brought his right hand to his side as each of his fingertips were ignited with purple flames. Within each one of those flames, an element was inscribed. Not the elements for each of the chakra natures but the

kanji for metal, wood, water, fire, and earth. Yagura never really understood what the purpose of these kanji were, so he figured they were merely symbolic and had no real purpose.

Yagura had finally reached within striking distance of Gengetsu. He reared his palm back and slammed it into the former Mizukage's abdomen, but not before the man managed to fire off two more of his Mizudeppōs at point black range into Yagura's chest. A large splatter of blood erupted from his back and chest just as the seal began forming on Gengetsu's abdomen.

"Gogyō Fūin (Five Element Seal)!"

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The seal placed on Gengetsu cut off the chakra that was causing the reanimation to remain active and binding his soul to the body. A white light emerged from the host's body and the spirit of Gengetsu could be seen floating up towards the sky. The man smiled at Yagura and gave him a nod as to thank him for freeing him from the material world before ascending back to the afterlife.

Yagura grunted as he was now feeling all the pain that had been inflicted to him throughout the battle.

He muscled through it as he began his journey to the center of the rooftop to face his final opponents.

Senju Hashirama vs. Namikaze Minato vs. Senju Tobirama

Namikaze Minato had seen better days.

Currently he was on one knee and panting heavily as he eyed the two Kage before him. His clothes were torn in several different areas, he was

bruised, beaten, and soaked in his own blood from the wounds that had been inflicted upon him.

At the same time that Yagura was facing off against Gengetsu, Minato was face to face with two of the founding figures of Konohagakure.

He really got the short end of the stick this time, as he was facing off against Senju Hashirama and Senju Tobirama, two of the strongest shinobi in the long history of the Elemental Nations.

Why did they agree to each take on the reanimated Kage from their respective villages again?

Oh yes, it was because they would know their opponents strengths and weaknesses the best and know the secrets and mechanics behind their strongest jutsus and fighting styles. There were only a few problems with that. The Shodaime and Nidaime Hokages were what the definition of shinobi should be, they covered all of their weaknesses and had no openings. The only people who had been able to push them to their absolute limits lived during the era of warring states and founded the shinobi world.

It didn't help that he knew the workings of some of their jutsu, it only made it clear as to how dire of a situation he was in right now. The only advantage he had at the moment was that his marked kunai were spread out all over the rooftop so he could make a quick escape and catch them off-guard.

The Hiraishin had already saved his life countless times during this exchange.

The costs for him would be tremendous if the fight dragged on, he needed to seal them the first chance he got. It also worked in his favor that the Edo Tensei's biggest weakness was fūinjutsu, an art that he specialized in.

That had been the theory at least.

Their strength was truly overwhelming, especially when working together. They were no doubt the strongest Kage in the history of the Elemental Nations. Minato himself had been feared by all who had the unfortunate fate to be his enemy, even the other Kages would be hard pressed and would ultimately lose against him. Yet, he had been on the defensive since this fight started and things didn't look to be turning in his favor anytime soon.

Minato slowly brought himself up to both feet as he wiped the blood from the corner of his mouth with his thumb. It seemed that he would need to be prepared as his predecessors were about to begin their onslaught once more.

"Suiton: Suishōha (Water Release: Water Colliding Wave)!" Water molecules were swiftly gathered from the surrounding air by Tobirama and turned into a large spiraling vortex of water. It then exploded from the top and crashed down towards Minato in the form of a wave.

Minato silently cursed to himself and teleported to a marked kunai directly behind Hashirama. As soon as he arrived, he sent a slash towards Hashirama's head with a kunai that he held in a reverse grip. The slash was blocked with a simple raise of the arm by the Shodaime Hokage, who countered with an elbow to the blonde's ribs. Minato grunted in pain, but took this opportunity to send a reverse kick to Hashirama's side as he simultaneously tagged the man with a Hiraishin marker. This time the kick made contact and sent Hashirama several yards away, but before Minato could celebrate he was kicked in the stomach with a strong front kick from Tobirama and sent crashing into an earth wall that had previously been erected.

Minato quickly pulled himself out of the crater he made in the earth wall

and fell to the water that had been covering the ground from Tobirama's earlier suiton jutsu.

He saw that the former Hokages hadn't moved from their earlier positions, so he took this as a chance to take the offensive.

"Katon: Karyū Endan (Fire Release: Dragon Flame Bombs)!"

The current Hokage went through several hand seals before spewing out a large stream of fire after which he began to knead the chakra into genuine-looking dragon that divided and launched to the left side, the right side, and a frontal assault in all three directions at once. He increased the output even further, making the dragon larger and turning the stream of flames whitish in color and much hotter.

Minato was no specialist in nature transformation, in fact he rarely used any elemental ninjutsu, but that did not mean he neglected his research into the arts. He was the Hokage and was the strongest shinobi in the village, he would protect it against any foreign threat, even if it meant having to reduce his predecessors into nothing more than a pile of ash. This jutsu was personally taught to him by Sarutobi Hiruzen, the Sandaime Hokage, and it was his most powerful offensive elemental ninjutsu.

As the searing hot flames raced towards the Shodaime and Nidame Hokages and began to consume them, Tobirama once again gathered the moisture in the air, even with such hot flames burning around him, and prepared a powerful suiton jutsu.

"Suito: Suijinheki (Water Release: Water Formation Wall)!" Tobirama spewed a large torrent of water from his mouth and combined them with the moisture that he had pulled from the air to make the jutsu at least three-times as powerful as the one that Yagura had used during his confrontation with Gengetsu. The water took the form of a large wall that

circled both him and Hashirama, effectively protecting them from the flames.

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Minato's katon jutsu finally died down and he was immensely disappointed with the result.

Hashirama and Tobirama were completely unharmed and the water was slowly starting to dissipate around them, seeing as they no longer needed the protection.

It appeared that a master of suiton jutsu would be able to easily counter the flames of someone who was not well versed in elemental ninjutsu. It appeared as if Minato would need to stick to his specialties here if he wanted to survive.

"Having the two of them as opponents is difficult as expected." Minato commented to himself more than anything.

Minato was panting heavily, trying to keep up with two Kage at once was taking quite a toll on him. It seemed as if nothing he did was having any effect on them. Was this the difference between the current generation and the previous one? How could there be such a large difference in strength and skill?

Minato was brought back to reality as large tree roots began emerging from the rooftop and growing at a rapid pace. He looked up and saw that Hashirama had his hands in a single hand seal and was kneading large amounts of chakra into a life source for the trees to grow.

"Mokuton Hijutsu: Jukai Kōtan (Wood Release Secret Technique: Deep Forest Emergence)!"

The trees began to emerge everywhere from the ground below and even through the earth wall behind Minato. Within the span of a single second, an incredibly dense forest sprouted up from beneath the tiles of the rooftop and was trying to pierce Minato with roots, branches, leaves, and tree trunks, as he was forced to continuously teleport away using the Hiraishin to escape the immensely powerful jutsu.

Just as the trees stopped growing, he landed on the top of the earthen wall, which now had large trees growing all throughout it and that had pierced through it. The blonde Hokage hadn't managed to dodge every one of those trees as he now grasped at several new stab wounds that were engraved into his abdomen.

He took a moment to catch his breath and closed his eyes to wipe the blood covering his forehead and flowing over his eyes. That turned out to be a costly mistake as Tobirama used his Suiton: Suidanha (Water Release: Water Severing Wave) to release a highly pressurized stream of water that flew through the air and severed Minato's left arm from his body completely, and sliced clean through the rest of the earth wall causing it to crumble completely.

"AAARRRGGGHHHH!" Minato screamed in utter agony as he gripped where his left arm used to be, not even a stump remained. However, he had no time to dwell on it as he was forced to jump from the wall he was on to the highest pieces of falling debris to prevent himself from being crushed completely by the large chunks of earth. After what seemed like an eternity, he finally landed on the water as the debris settled beneath the water's surface.

His breathing had become ragged and his vision was becoming blurry from the amount of blood that he had lost from all the injuries he sustained. He needed to end this now, he was already in a state that he

may not even be able to fight evenly with Rasa, let alone Orochimaru.

These were the price that he knew he would have to pay if this fight dragged on. If he couldn't finish this in the next few minutes, then he was as good as dead, and maybe Konoha was too.

Hashirama began his charged while Tobirama stayed behind to cover him. Minato saw this and figured it was the best chance he would receive, given his current condition. As Hashirama glided across the water's surface, Minato threw several of his three-pronged kunai at the man, which were promptly deflected using only his bare hands.

That was only a distraction though. While Hashirama was focused on defending himself from the kunai, Minato teleported right above Hashirama via the Hiraishin seal that he had placed on the man during their taijutsu bout. Using his almost instantaneous reflexes, Minato flipped in mid-air and brought his hand onto Hashirama's back and placed a Keiyaku Fūin (Contract Seal) to cut the connection between him and Orochimaru.

A Keiyaku Fūin (Contract Seal) removes any direct control that a summoner has on a summoned creature or being. Though it does remove Orochimaru's control from Hashirama, it did not place the former Hokage under Minato's control. Most of Minato's fūinjutsu require direct contact with the target, that is why he had been trying to get in close the entire time.

His original plan had been to remove the control tags that Orochimaru had been using to control them, but they were far too skilled for him to carry out his plan. Whenever he got in close, he was thrown across the rooftop not a moment later. That is when his plan drifted to sealing them immediately.

He had merely gotten lucky that he had managed to place a Hiraishin

seal on Hashirama's body, had he not then things would not have been quite as easy. This was a blessing that he needed, now he would be able to focus solely on one opponent.

A white light began to cover Hashirama's body and his spirit began to ascend back into the heavens. The debris that had been covering the body that he had been bound to fell to the ground as it revealed a body of a nameless Otogakure shinobi.

"May your soul forever rest in peace Shodaime-sama." Minato commented as the soul of one of Konoha's founders was released from this horrid jutsu

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However, it wasn't time for a celebration just yet. He still had the Nidaime Hokage to deal with, and it would be much more difficult since he hadn't been able to place a seal on the man's body.

"Suiton: Suiryūdan no Jutsu (Water Release: Water Dragon Missile)!"

Minato's attention was brought back to his current situation as he was forced to teleport away from the massive water dragon that consumed what was left of the earth wall and devastated the forest that Hashirama had created.

The fact that these reanimations had an unlimited amount of chakra was a real pain. And it didn't help that the entire area was covered in water, he was practically as Tobirama's mercy right now. Had the Nidaime Hokage been alive and in control of his own thoughts and strategy then Minato surely would have been dead right now.

Minato quickly teleported to an area that had no water near it, as to

eliminate his opponents advantage. However as soon as he did, Tobirama appeared right before him and slashed him across the chest with a kunai. Minato recoiled in pain and jumped to another one of his kunai only a dozen feet away. He had forgotten that Tobirama was the creator of the Hiraishin no Jutsu and was able to link himself to another users markings. Truly impressive.

Tobirama wasn't done yet. The Edo Tensei had originally been designed for the purpose of taking down your targets along with yourself, maximizing the use of suicide techniques. Therefore he had developed a fighting style personally designed for those who had been reincarnated.

"Gojō Kibaku Fuda (Mutually Multiplying Explosive Tags)!"

Using his immortal body as a medium, Tobirama created several large special explosive tags, with each bearing five seals on them. He threw these explosive tags into the air as they began to surround both him and Minato, the tags then summoned even more explosive tags as they went off and repeated the process continuously, creating a near infinite number of explosions.

Minato had managed to flash away at the last moment before the explosive tags went off to an area that was out of range of the explosion, just barely though. He eyed the section of the rooftop where the jutsu had gone off and when the smoke cleared, he saw that Tobirama was on the ground and still regenerating from the suicide technique he had just used.

He took this chance and teleported to one of the few kunai that were still intact throughout the area and blurred out of sight once more as he raced towards the downed form of the Nidame Hokage. Each of the five fingers on Minato's remaining hand ignited with a bright purple flame with a different kanji on each of the fingertips. He reappeared right above the

immobile silver-haired man and slammed his fingers into the man's abdomen.

"Gogyō Fūin (Five Elements Seal)!"

A seal became engraved into Tobirama's abdomen as the connection that bound his soul to the host's had been cut. The same white light that had surrounded Hashirama's body surrounded his and his actual soul began its ascent into the sky, leaving behind the fallen debris that had been covering the body of a nameless Otogakure shinobi that hosted his soul.

"Rest in peace, Nidaime-sama."

It seemed that his duty was done here, now it was time for him to deal with Orochimaru and the Kazekage.

Center of the Rooftop

"Well, you two look like you've seen better days." Orochimaru commented, amused at the state of the two Kage in front of him. "Such a pitiful state for two of the strongest shinobi in the world to be in."

Orochimaru and Rasa stood face to face with Yagura and Minato after they had finished their subsequent battles. What he said wasn't too far from the truth as both the Hokage and the Mizukage were heavily injured. In fact, they were so injured and exhausted that one could probably push them over with a single finger.

However, they still stood tall and did not take a single step back from their enemies, truly befitting of their titles of Kage.

"Especially you Hokage. you were suspected to be the strongest of us five kages, yet here you are barely alive right now and missing an arm." Rasa added in. "Though I must commend you for being able to take on the Shodaime and Nidaime Hokages at the same time, it speaks volumes of your abilities though with only one arm now much of that strength is gone."

Yagura and Minato barely had the strength to speak at the moment, so they remained quiet, trying to conserve as much of their energy as possible for another Kage level battle.

"Though it seems as our plans to take you down when you were weakest were for naught as it appears that we have company." Orochimaru commented as he eyed the swirling vortex in the air to their right.

A moment later three people materialized from the vortex and stepped forward to intervene in the upcoming battle. There stood Uchiha Obito, Jiraiya of the sannin, and Uzumaki-Namikaze Kushina. Three S-Ranked shinobi who would throw quite a wrench in the plans that had been in the making for months now.

All three of them were frozen in shock one they arrived at the state that Minato and Yagura were in, Minato more so though.

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"Minato! Oh Kami what happened to you!?" Kushina screamed as she saw that Minato was now missing an arm and was covered from head to toe in blood.

Jiraiya and Obito were worried as well, but they did not outwardly show it as they were staring down Orochimaru and Rasa. How could they not be worried? Minato was Jiraiya's student, he practically raised the boy since he was a genin. If anything, he was just as worried as the man's wife. Obito was Minato's student. Obito had never really fit in amongst the Uchiha clan, so Minato was the closest thing he had to family. Even if he had grown up a lot since he became a genin and the events during the Third Great Shinobi War, he still saw the man as family even when Obito

had lost faith in everything else.

However, right now they needed to worry about Orochimaru and the Yondaime Kazekage. It was obvious that Suna had turned against Konoha due to the invasion that they had just cleaned up. Not to mention the fact that they saw Rasa leading the Hokage and Mizukage up on the roof as Orochimaru's henchmen stalled them.

"Orochimaru..." Jiraiya seethed as he glared at his wayward teammate.

"Ah, Jiraiya. How good to see you again. If only Tsunade were here then we could have a team reunion." Orochimaru commented offhandedly, but inside he was cursing his luck for how things were turning out.

All three of the shinobi that had just bypassed the barrier that his subordinates were holding up were Kage level. It would be too risky to continue with this plan any longer. They would need to retreat for now.

"It's over. Your little invasion has been silenced and most of your shinobi killed. The rest are being rounded up as we speak. The Ichibi along with the Suna jinchūriki looks to have been killed by Naruto. Your plans have failed Orochimaru." Obito stated as he reactivated his mangekyō sharingan.

Rasa's expression turned into one of utter shock. "He killed Gaara!? That's impossible, I've been trying to get rid of Gaara for years but he's far too strong to kill by ordinary means! There's no way some genin could be a match for him!"

"Ah Naruto-kun was it? The boy with fire? He must also have been the one to kill my favorite subordinate Kabuto...I'll make sure to pay him back someday." Orochimaru stated darkly.

"Kabuto? That boy was a Konoha shinobi! Are you telling me that he's been a spy for you all along?" Jiraiya yelled at his former teammate. Was that how Orochimaru had been getting all his information.

"You're quite right Jiraiya, but I assume that he died in the forest of death during the second stage of the chunin exams. Who else do you think could have caused such a tremendous fire within the forest besides Naruto-kun?"

Jiraiya froze after hearing that last statement. Was it really Naruto who had burned down the forest? What had happened there was quite a popular topic amongst the shinobi and even the ANBU of the village. Over a quarter of the forest was burned down and there were now several rivers of molten lava flowing through it. He remembered that Anko had been quite pissed at whoever had the nerve to do this to her playground.

He shivered upon remembering how angry she was. Women and anger should never mix, it is a deadly combination.

'A child born from great power but with memories of old shall pave the way toward a new era of peace. Whether they walk the path of light or is forced into the darkness shall determine what the future will hold. Their predecessor has already burned the path for them, but it shall be their will of fire that determines whether they will walk it or forge their own.'

The words from the prophecy the toad elder spoke of rang through his mind once more.

"We're falling back Rasa, the tide of this battle has turned against us and I have no more reanimations to even the playing field." Orochimaru spoke to the Kazekage, who eagerly agreed with him.

Orochimaru signaled to the sound four to drop the barrier and begin their retreat as they slowly began walking away.

"Do you really think that we'll just let you leave here after all the damage you've done!?" Kushina yelled while supporting her husband with her arms.

Rasa turned around to see Jiraiya charging at them. The Kazekage summoned a small tornado of wind and gold dust in the palm of his hand before throwing it at his target.

"Sables (Sandstorm)!"

The tornado of sand grew massively in size and was sent on a rampage around the rooftop, picking up water as it raged. All the shinobi on the rooftop stuck to the ground below using chakra, while they were forced to cover their eyes to prevent any of the stray gold dust from impairing their vision.

When the sandstorm finally died down, Orochimaru and Rasa were gone, not a trace of where they went left behind. All of the surviving Oto and Suna shinobi had also mysteriously disappeared from within the walls of Konoha.

All that remained was the destruction and death that they had caused.

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The strong feed upon the weak, it's such an obligingly simple rule.

Sunagakure had been weak and had used the opportunity of the chunin exams to take their place amongst the strong. In a world built upon violence, bloodshed, and war, the only option you have is to be strong.

Only the victors are allowed to live...this world is merciless like that.

However, they chose to betray the wrong village.

The Suna/Oto invasion, that would later become known as the Konoha Crush, had failed miserably. Over three-quarters of the invading Suna and Oto forces had been decimated over the course of battle. Most notable of these deaths were Sabaku no Gaara, Sabaku no Temari, and

Sabaku no Kankuro. The loss of Suna's jinchūriki was an important achievement due to the fact that jinchūriki were known to be the strongest weapons for each of the villages.

That isn't to say that Konohagakure had escaped the conflict without any casualties. Kiri only had a handful of its shinobi within Konoha's walls and none of them had been fatally wounded. Konoha faced many casualties, nearly half of their forces had been lost during the invasion. However most of those who had lost their lives in the line of duty would have their names engraved on the memorial stone and were mentioned during the mass funeral that was held, nothing more, nothing less.

This was the truth behind the Will of Fire. Shinobi whom had lived and died for their village would only be remembered by the people closest to them and by the name that was engraved into the memorial stone. Is that how their loyalty was rewarded? Wives, husbands, lovers, children, and families were left with holes in their hearts, because the duty to protect one's village was more important than their family. Was it really worth it?

It had been a week since the invasion and the fallout was worse than expected.

Much of the village had been destroyed by Orochimaru's snake summons before Jiraiya and Obito had gotten a chance to stop them. The Northern walls of Konoha had collapsed and that section of the village had been host for where those monstrous snakes ran rampant through.

The entire village had been the battleground for guerrilla warfare and large scale shinobi battles. The area that had suffered the most damage was near the chunin exam arena where the fighting had first broke out. Numerous people had met their ends at this once bustling stadium, shinobi and civilian alike. All in all, the village looked like a war-zone.

At least, that was what the scene had looked like a week ago.

Currently, the village was being rebuilt by all its occupants. Both shinobi and civilian pitched in to help speed up the rebuilding. The northern sector of the village had been personally rebuilt by Yamato, a shinobi whom was capable of weilding the Shodaime Hokage's Mokuton. Those shinobi whom excelled in doton were doing their part to repair the walls that protected Konoha and to smooth out the land where the earth had been scarred from the numerous battles that had taken place.

While there had been utter chaos the first few days after the invasion, things looked like they would be returning to normal quicker than expected.

Currently in the Hokage's office, Naruto was standing alongside Satsuki, Hana, and Haku. Natsuki and Narumi were in the room as well, but they were sitting on the couch rather than standing alongside the other genin. It was clear to all the other genin in the room as to what that meant.

Sitting behind his desk was Namikaze Minato, the Yondaime Hokage...well at least for now. He had made a full recovery since his near death like state a week ago, minus the missing left arm. He was staring at Naruto with a bit of pride, but mostly suspicion. Naruto sighed inwardly, it seemed that the man hadn't forgotten about his recently revealed abilities, even after he had just returned from death's door.

Obito and Kakashi were also in the room, standing behind their former sensei. Obito was present because it were his genin that were requested to come to the Hokage Tower, along with him. Kakashi was here for some reason that was unknown to him, though that didn't stop him from reading his Icha Icha Paradise novel and giggling perversely ever few minutes.

Kushina was sitting on the couch alongside her daughters with a worried

look on her face, though she also looked up to glance at her wayward son every once in a while. She was probably worried about Nawaki.

Ah Nawaki, he had been an interesting topic as of late. He was still cooped up in the hospital, though he was out of critical condition, he still needed to recover. Minato and Kushina had turned white as a ghost and nearly had a heart attack when they found out that the Kyuubi had ripped itself out of Nawaki's seal and merged with Natsuki. His current condition also wasn't a very appealing sight, though they couldn't feel pity for him since he brought it upon himself.

Kushina, Natsuki, and Narumi had all seen the real side of him just a few days ago.

They had realized just how messed up their family was when he started trying to order them to release him so that he could kill Naruto for what he did to him. His inferiority and superiority complexes finally made themselves fully known as he continued to make threats he couldn't back up due to him losing most of his power due to the Kyuubi ripping himself from his body. Nawaki had about the same level chakra reserves as an ordinary genin now. Though, that didn't stop him from trying to attack his family when they refused to comply with his demands. He was currently strapped to his bed, like a prisoner, to prevent anymore violent outbreaks.

It was made clear that he wasn't mentally stable at the moment. Or perhaps he had always thought like this and the recent events only pushed him to his breaking point.

It was only then did Kushina truly realize how terrible of a parent she was. She had no idea that her son acted this way nor did she know where she went wrong. Kushina had been left a hollow shell of herself these past few days as she went through every memory she had with her

children to figure out where everything went to hell. She didn't find an answer...perhaps she was never doing things right to begin with.

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Jiraiya was sitting at his usual spot on the windowsill as he glanced at all of the occupants in the room, a neutral expression on his face. He was worried, very worried in fact, about the prophecy and how things would turn out if the child of prophecy really was Naruto. He would fix everything as soon as he possibly could, the entire world was at stake, he had no time to waste.

Tsunade stood beside Jiraiya, she really had no idea why she were even here. People were still wounded from their involvement in fighting off the invasion, they needed to be at the hospital. Sure there were plenty of capable medical-nins there, but Tsunade was the best in the village, perhaps even in all the Elemental Nations. Currently, Shizune was running things at the hospital, so her mind was a little more relaxed knowing it was in capable hands.

Standing beside the Hokage's desk was the Yondaime Mizukage, Yagura. His wounds had healed quite quickly due to the fact he was a jinchūriki, so he was out of the hospital only a day or two after the invasion. He was looking at Haku with a proud smile on his face.

Off to the side stood Momochi Zabuza, Hōzuki Suigetsu, and Chōjuro. They were here due to the fact that they were members of Haku's team and were here to support her.

In total, there were sixteen occupants within the confines of this small room, not counting the ANBU in hiding of course. This made it quite

crowded and a bit uncomfortable for the four genin standing in the middle of it all.

They had a pretty good idea of why they were here, but nothing was certain just yet.

Minato looked at the four genin before him with an appraising eye. They had all done excellent during both the preliminaries, the finals, and the invasion. It was rare to find such talented and well-balanced shinobi at such a young age. Naruto, Hana, and Satsuki had only been genin for a few months and yet they were already at this level, it was truly impressive. Most genin had to take the exam two or three times before being promoted, while others received field promotions after taking these exams several times.

"First of all I would like to personally congratulate the four of you for your performance throughout the chūnin exams and for your efforts during the invasion. You have greatly benefitted Konoha during its time of need and for that, I offer my utmost gratitude." Minato spoke with a smile on his face. "I will let Mizukage-dono start off this ceremony since there is only one Kiri shinobi who is being considered for promotion, then I will speak to each of you individually, the genin who are both being considered for promotion and those who are not."

It had been a week since the chūnin exam finals, and although they were interrupted before the final round, the judges and the Kage had seen more than enough of the matches to determine whether or not the genin participating were worthy of the title of chūnin.

It seemed that only the genin who had been decided were ready for a promotion, along with the rest of their team, were summoned to the Hokage's office.

The Yondaime Mizukage stepped forward until he was in front of the

genin from Kirigakure.

"I'd like each of the three of you to know that I am proud of you and that you showed strength and skill befitting of shinobi and kunoichi from Kirigakure. However, I'm afraid only one of you has shown the necessary qualities of a chūnin."

Yagura move to the side in front of Chōjuro to address the boy's performance. The goal of this was to address the strengths and weaknesses of only the genin that were being promoted, but doing so for all of the shinobi would benefit them in the end.

"Chōjuro, while you did show considerable skill in wielding Hiramekarei, your speed and reaction time began to slow down halfway through the match, giving your opponent several openings that they exploited, due to how much chakra Hiramekarei consumed. You must increase your reserves considerably if you wish to wield it correctly. You were also quickly overwhelmed and let your opponent control the pace of the match. If you continue to progress at the rate you are growing, I have no doubt that you will become chūnin during these exams next time."

Chōjuro's eyes widened at the Mizukage's words, and he nodded vigorously at the praise towards the end. For a boy with low self-esteem, encouragement would do the boy well rather than pointing out all of his faults. With those words said, Yagura moved over in front of Suigetsu.

"Suigetsu, while you did show great skill in your clan's nature transformation, you showed relatively little strategy and were quickly overwhelmed by your opponent. Had you not been hydrated at the time, you wouldn't have been able to liquify to survive the Suna jinchūriki's sand jutsu. You will need more training and experience before you are ready to become a chūnin.

Suigetsu nodded and stepped back as Yagura made his way to the middle

of the room and stood in front of the only Kiri kunoichi in the room.

"Haku, you showed exceptional skill with your kekkei genkai, far more than you had when you left Kiri and far more than any Yuki has had in generations. You were able to quickly overwhelm even a jinchūriki, an impressive feat in its own right. I see no reason not to promote you."

Yagura said with a smile, while handing a chūnin flak jacket that had been on the Hokage's desk to the girl. This earned a charming smile from the newly named chūnin as she put on the flak jacket.

Yagura, having finished his involvement with the advancement of the genin, stepped back behind the Hokage's desk.

This time, it was Minato to step forward. His signature haori a bit uneven due to the absence of a left arm, but otherwise looked as strong and imposing as ever. He glanced at the three Konoha genin that were standing in the middle of the room before his eyes traveled to his daughters who were sitting on the couch.

"I had originally only planned to address the three members of Team 11, but Mizukage-dono made an excellent point. It would benefit all the genin here to understand their strengths and weaknesses and why they were or were not promoted this time around." Minato spoke as he paced around just in front of his desk. "Natsuki, Narumi! Stand up, you are present at an official ceremony and will treat it as such."

The two girls quickly jumped to their feet, a bit surprised at the tone that their father had used. Though they chalked it up to still being concerned that his two sons and their brothers had just tried to kill each other the past week as well as him having to deal with the stress of the invasion and almost dying.

"I shall start with the two of you since you were judged to not be ready for the responsibilities of a chūnin." Minato announced as he stepped a

few feet in front of his two daughters.

The two sisters squirmed uncomfortably under their father's gaze. They had known that they wouldn't receive a promotion with their performance, but to hear it from their own father still hurt.

"Narumi, while you did show skill with two different forms of nature transformation, which is quite impressive for a genin, you showed a lack of forethought in your moves along with little to no strategy." The girl nodded her head solemnly as Minato continued to speak. "You charged into battle recklessly, and because of that you fell into several of your opponents traps one after another. Continue to work hard to improve and add some strategy to your fighting style, and I have no doubt you'll earn a promotion."

"Natsuki, while you also showed proficiency with two different forms of nature transformation, as well as improving your kenjutsu leaps and bounds, you rushed into both of your matches without showing the higher-level thinking and strategy necessary for a chūnin. Had you put more thought into how to deal with the opponent you were facing and adjusting your fighting style accordingly, you may have ended up defeating Temari in the first round and possibly winning your second match. You have shown massive amounts of improvement since you became a genin, but you still have much more room to improve. You will not be promoted just yet." Natsuki only nodded and took a step back beside her sister.

Minato swiftly turned around on his heel and made his way to the center of the room to address the remaining three Konoha genin. His frown was immediately replaced with a small smile upon remembering each of their performances.

While he was glad that three of his genin showed so much promise, the

same could not be said for the rest of their graduating class. Minato was rather disappointed that so few of this year's graduating class made it pass the second round of the exams. Most of them were clan heirs and heiresses, which only made their performance that much more sad. Their jōnin-senseis had either been slacking off or babying them, either way something needed to be done about it or they wouldn't last much longer in the shinobi world.

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"Satsuki, you showed great forethought in your battles and covered all three main areas of shinobi arts, ninjutsu, taijutsu, and genjutsu. You made sure to control the pace of the battle through the use of traps and evasion tactics. As well as showing great skill with two forms of nature transformation. These qualities are certainly befitting of a chūnin, congratulations." Satsuki had suppress the urge to cheer in victory as she took the flak jacket and merely gave a charming smile.

"Hana, while the Inuzuka clan's fighting style is more reckless than most, you did not fall prey to those tendencies and showed great strategy with the use of smoke bombs and tunneling underground to make your clan's signature jutsus more effective. I was also pleasantly surprised by your use of medical ninjutsu as an offensive technique, it takes a great level of skill and control to be able to pull off such a feat. Congratulations on your promotion." Hana quickly took the flak jacket from Minato and threw it on, earning giggles from her teammates. She had always wondered what she would look like in one of these, not too bad if she did say so.

Hana stepped back so that she was now alongside Satsuki, leaving Naruto and Minato alone in the center of the room.

Minato looked at his wayward son with pride in his eyes...but he was also very suspicious of him. No mere genin fresh out of the academy should have been capable of what he had. That was something that he would find out later after this ceremony.

"Naruto, at the beginning of this tournament, most people didn't expect much from you. As the tournament rolled around, you were seemingly overlooked for the aces of the respective villages. Now, the title of winner of the tournament is shared by you and Haku-san, since you were the only two left along with the now deceased Suna jinchūriki when the invasion started. You showed strength that far surpassed the level of chūnin, and are capable at wielding such a powerful S-Rank jutsu. I have never seen someone wield Katon ninjutsu quite like you did during your first match and am very interested to hear how you are capable of such a technique. You easily controlled the pace of both your matches and never let your opponent take advantage of any opportunities they had. Not to mention the your efforts during the invasion. Congratulations on your promotion."

Naruto took the flak jacket from Minato's hand and immediately put it on to cover his skin-tight, short-sleeved shirt. He quickly turned around and gave his two female teammates a large smile, for him anyway, which they quickly returned. The three of them had been looking forward to being chūnin for a long time, even more so than genin. Chūnin is the rank where they finally stopped being treated like children and were able to make their own decisions about their careers and their lives. It was quite a milestone for the three of them.

For the three members of Team 11, this was only the beginning of the

path that lied before them.

"Congratulations to all those who passed the chūnin exams this time around, and for those who didn't, better luck next time. These particular exams were a bit more exciting than what usually occurs during this bi-annual event, but they were successful nonetheless. We are proud of all of you and hope that you continue to serve your respective villages until the day you die. Once again, congratulations."

Those final words from Minato marked the end of the promotion ceremony.

It wouldn't do well to have a Kage absent from their home village for too long, the only reason that Yagura was still in Konoha was to fully recover from his injuries and for the traditional promotion ceremony. Now that those two things were finished, there was no reason for any of the Kiri shinobi to remain here any longer.

With that in mind, Yagura stepped forward. "Zabuza, Suigetsu, Chōjuro, Haku. Now that our business in Konoha is finished we must be heading back to Kirigakure as soon as possible. It would not bode well for us to be away for the village too much longer. Please return to the hotel immediately and gather your things. We will begin our journey back to Mizu in one hour."

All four of the Kiri-nins gave a nod and a short bow to the Mizukage before leaving. Her two teammates and sensei immediately headed out the door, but Haku stopped to give a quick wave and a charming smile to Naruto, who responded with a similar gesture.

Team 11 and Haku had become quite close over the past week, but Naruto and Haku especially. They had found some kind of mutual understanding due to their various predicaments and ended up spending a lot of the week together. Of course that could be attributed to most of

their teammates being restricted to the hospital for the majority of the past week.

In the short time that they had spent together, Naruto could honestly say that she had become one of his closest friends. Some would say it was a sad fact, but Naruto preferred it this way, he could really only say that he had a handful of friends. Obito was his sensei, so Naruto didn't really count him. Mikoto was his lover, so even though they had been friends and family for years, she had some special circumstances. Really, Naruto could only say that Hana and Satsuki were his friends.

Actually, they considered themselves to be more like friends than family. The three of them had known each other since even before they started the academy and could always be found together. When people share a bond that strong, the only thing that they can really be described as is family.

So, it was nice to be able to talk with someone like Haku. While she didn't share the same history with him that Satsuki and Hana did, he felt like he could really trust her. Not to mention that she was quite a lot of fun to be around once you tear down that respectful ice princess exterior. Fun, he could honestly say that he had fun.

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Recently, Naruto had realized that he had been taking everything far too seriously. It was either secrets this or invasion that, it was nice just to be able to sit back and relax with someone. In reality, he was still only a sixteen year-old teenager, and these were the kinds of things that teenagers were supposed to do, shinobi or not.

Much to the shock of his teammates and joy of his sisters, Naruto had been smiling a lot more...it was odd. Even while being in the same room as almost every person who had wronged him in his life, he couldn't force himself to feel angry or have the same hatred and that he once did. By no means did he feel like running up to Minato and Kushina and giving them a bear hug, but he felt more at ease. This feeling was nice.

With Konoha's alliance with Kiri, he was sure that he would be seeing her a lot more often now.

Seeing as how Konoha's alliance with Suna was effectively ended with their invasion, the village would need ties to another one of the great shinobi villages to ensure that none of the other villages took the opportunity to launch a second invasion in their time of weakness. This is precisely why Obito had spent several years in Kiri working as a liaison.

The alliance with Suna had been shaky at best for a long time now, so their invasion shouldn't have been too much of a surprise, that was why Minato had worked out the details with Yagura through Obito, who had spent several years in foreign territory to prove Konoha's sincerity.

For them to position their strongest shinobi in foreign territory on the premise of a treaty and alliance was a sign of the village's good faith. This was because he was constantly surrounded by foreign shinobi who would be willing to end his life at any moment. No sane village leader would sacrifice their strongest asset if their intentions were built upon lies.

"Thank you for your hospitality, Hokage-dono. Our stay was most interesting to stay the least. Should Konoha ever need such help again, do not hesitate to contact Kirigakure, may this alliance prosper." After those final words had been said, Yagura followed his fellow Kiri-nin out the door to prepare for their departure.

Minato signaled for an ANBU to escort the Mizukage and his shinobi back

to their hotel to make sure that no harm befell on them during their commute. Now would be the perfect opportunity for enemies to strike, since the village was vulnerable and their forces spread thin and concentrated on the work effort to rebuild the village.

"Now with that taken care of, Satsuki, Hana, you are excused for the rest of the day. Make sure to see Obito tomorrow at your usual training ground so that he can brief you as to what your duties as a chūnin entails. Though, Naruto I would like you to remain behind for a few minutes. There are some things that we need to discuss." Minato said with a smile on his face as he took his seat once more.

Satsuki and Hana gave a worried glance to Naruto, but he merely smiled back at them and nodded.

Naruto's new attitude really confused them sometimes. He usually hated having these talks with his parents, but this time he seemed to not care that they were basically going to tie him down to a chair and interrogate him.

But if he was fine with it then so be it.

It was still fairly early in the day, only an hour or two left until lunchtime. They had previously agreed to celebrate whatever outcome the promotional ceremony held at the Akimichi's barbecue restaurant and they really had nothing else to do until then.

Though, the fact that Naruto would be questioned about his abilities really didn't surprise either of them. This occurrence had already happened on more than one occasion before. Hana and Satsuki understood that they wanted to know more about their son or brother, but this wasn't really the way to go about it.

The both let out simultaneous sighs. Whatever, he would be the one dealing with it, not them.

"Well...we'll be waiting for you at the barbecue restaurant when your done here Naruto-nii." Satsuki spoke as she waved goodbye to her brother figure while heading towards the door.

"Don't keep us waiting too long, you're paying you know." Hana teased as she added a wink to stress her point.

"Yeah, yeah. I'll catch up with you two in a bit. Don't start without me!" Naruto called out just as the two newly-made chunin left the room.

Jiraiya slowly got up from his seat on the windowsill, before he walked over to the door, making sure to close and lock it so that nobody would interrupt their conversation.

Seemingly ignoring all every set of eyes that was on him, Naruto walked towards the Hokage's desk and took a seat in one of the chairs right in front of it. The sooner he got all this over with, the better. He had no plans of wasting time with people who didn't like secrets being kept from them, when they knew every one of the darkest secrets of Konoha's history.

Minato whom was staring at the boy with the most suspicion, other than Jiraiya, was the first to break the silence that was slowly filling every corner of the room. "I trust you know why I asked you to stay Naruto." Minato asked with the utmost seriousness.

"Yeah, yeah. Every time I show off the slightest amount of skill, I'm the subject of tis kind of treatment. This really isn't all that surprising anymore." Was Naruto's sarcastic remark which was completely out of place of the serious atmosphere in the room.

Blocking off any form of retreat, Jiraiya was standing in front of the door,was eyeing the boy sternly. He would need to play this carefully if Naruto really was the one that the prophecy spoke of. They already didn't have the best relationship, so he couldn't take his usual approach here, he

would need to let Minato lay all the groundwork before he stepped in.

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There were only a few in the room who knew why this was exactly going on. Those few were Minato, Jiraiya, Kushina, Kakashi, and Obito.

Though, it should be noted that Obito looked like he really didn't want to be here at the moment.

While Obito was quite enthusiastic that all three of his genin were promoted, he didn't see why his sensei had to take this kind of approach when dealing with Naruto. It was clear that it was not working. Not to mention the fact that the eldest male Uchiha didn't give a damn about any of Jiraiya's prophecies.

He just couldn't understand why Jiraiya and the Uzumaki-Namikaze family put so much faith in these kinds of things.

The previous prophecy that the toads told Jiraiya was that Minato would be the one to bring peace to the Elemental Nations and cure the shinobi world of war and hatred...It was easy to tell how that exactly worked out, seeing as Minato had not made a single step forward in creating world peace and the fact that the village that he led suffered an invasion.

Obito had believed in Jiraiya's words and the prophecies of toads for a time when he was still a genin. But after experiencing the horrors of war first hand, he realized that such beliefs were foolish dreams and nothing more than that.

Prophecies were just that, prophecies. Some superstition passed down by some senile old toad. Why in Kami's name would anybody take something like that seriously. Yet here were some of the most prominent

shinobi in Konoha along with three of the Hokage's children, sitting here about to waste a fair amount of time trying to force a boy, who clearly didn't care about such things either, to live his life accordingly to some words spoken by a glorified frog with one foot already in the grave.

The one-eyed man sighed as Minato began to speak once more.

"Naruto, this is serious, treat it as such." Those were nothing short of orders from the Hokage. "I remember having to have this same conversation with you just after the preliminary rounds of the chunin exams, just over a month ago. You've been keeping secrets for far too long Naruto. Secrets are what get people killed in this world. While your recent performance in the chunin exams was remarkable, it has brought your abilities into question. These questions need to be answered, it is of the utmost importance."

Naruto could only stare on incredulously at the man sitting behind the desk. Was he really giving him a lecture about secrets? Was this some kind of joke?

"My secrets huh?...I'm sure you have secrets as well don't you Hokage-sama. But why is it that my secrets are always the ones brought into question and not yours?" Naruto proposed to the Hokage.

"You are not here for a philosophical debate, Naruto, you will answer my questions whether you like it or not. The world could very well be at stake here!" Minato seemed to be losing his patience as his voice started to rise at the end.

Naruto was completely lost now. Had the man gone insane from the loss of his arm? "...What does me having some skill in Katon jutsu have to do with the world?"

Minato noticed his slip up and sighed as he calmed himself down and retook his seat. This was a matter that he didn't want to discuss with him

until he knew for sure that it was talking about Naruto, but it seems as if he didn't have a choice at the moment. He had told all of his children besides Naruto on their birthday just after they started the academy, but nothing had come of it so far. He supposed telling Naruto about it might actually make him realize just how important of a role he'll possibly play in bringing peace to the world.

"Several years ago, the toads came to Jiraiya with a prophecy, after which, he relayed it to me. What the prophecy said was, 'A child born from great power but with memories of old shall pave the way toward a new era of peace. Whether they walk the path of light or is forced into the darkness shall determine what the future will hold. Their predecessor has already burned the path for them, but it shall be their will of fire that determines whether they will walk it or forge their own.' We had originally believed that it was speaking of Natsuki, Narumi, or Nawaki. But due to the events that have occurred recently, we now believe that the prophecy spoke of you." Minato relayed to Naruto with absolute seriousness.

Peace had always been something that Minato dreamed of. He had been born during the era of the Second Great Shinobi War and had experienced more than he would ever wish his students to see. Sadly that wish never came true as they were sent off to war when they were deemed ready. Cruel reality showed its ugly head, as it was his genin team that was ripped apart during the Third Great Shinobi War. One of his student was killed, another went missing for years, and the last was the one who had killed the first. War knew no bounds. War had no rules. War was the result of the evil and hatred of man.

He would do whatever it took to bring peace to this world. And by anything...he meant anything.

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After hearing the prophecy Minato was speaking of, Naruto could only roll his eyes. This was what they were getting so worked up about? This was the very same prophecy that Naruto had overheard Minato telling the rest of the Uzumaki-Namikaze siblings just after stating the academy...on the day of the Uchiha Massacre. That memory still brought a pain to his chest.

Naruto, too had noticed that the prophecy sounded like he could be their so called 'child of prophecy', but he immediately discarded the idea. He was not going to become some kind of toad fanboy like Jiraya and Minato just because a half-dead toad had a vision. To believe in such things were utterly foolish. He had seen just how prominent those toads were when he roasting Gamabunta over an open fire during his match against Nawaki in the chunin exams.

"...And why exactly should I care about this prophecy...from what I saw during the chunin exams, those toads really aren't anything special..."

There were a few groans from the as some of the occupants in the room knew just how proud Jiraiya was of his toad summons. He would no doubt turn this into some kind of argument, not that it wasn't one already.

"What do you mean they're nothing special?! Don't get arrogant just because you got a lucky shot in during the chunin exams! The toads are the most battle oriented summons there are and could crush anyone in the blink of an eye! Nawaki just hadn't properly trained in how to fully utilize them when they're summoned, don't think you're some hot-shot

just cause you beat a mere genin who had signed the contract." True to everyone's beliefs, Jiraiya lost his cool when it came to his summons. Didn't they have some kind of plan or purpose for dealing with Naruto at the moment?

Naruto really didn't care to argue with Jiraiya. When it came to an argument with the man, there was just no winning. Not because he was always right, on the contrary most of the time he always fought losing arguments, but he made them so preposterous and silly that it was just embarrassing to be part of one of them.

"If that was all...can I leave now? My team is waiting for me." It seemed that this was going nowhere fast and he really didn't want to waste anymore time than he absolutely had to.

Naruto's voice brought most of the room's attention off of the still upset Jiraiya, and back onto him.

"We are far from done here, Naruto. We need to discuss what will be done about you and the prophecy." Minato stated firmly, giving Jiraiya a sharp look that seemed to scream 'calm down, we have more important things to deal with.'

As if on command, Jiraiya walked over to the desk and unstrapped the large scroll on his back, placing it on the table. Naruto stared on uninterested as the toad summoning scroll was unravelled before him, the names of Jiraiya, Namikaze Minato, Uzumaki-Namikaze Nawaki, Uzumaki-Namikaze Natsuki, and Uzumaki-Namikaze Narumi could be seen written vertically in large kanji using their own blood, naturally there was also a handprint soaked in blood below each signature.

"Seeing as how it is possible that you are the one that the prophecy spoke of, it would be beneficial for you to sign the toad summoning contract. This way you can speak to the toads personally and have them test you to

see if you truly are the child of prophecy. Naturally, they will also help you on your quest towards the goal of peace." It seemed that to the Hokage, Naruto's opinion on the topic didn't matter as Minato had already decided that Naruto would be signing the contract.

It also seemed as if Minato and Jiraiya hadn't gotten what Naruto was trying to convey earlier.

Even so, if he had wanted to do so, signing the toad contract would be impossible. He already held the contract with the phoenixes, which was most likely the one of the strongest summoning contracts if not the strongest. Signing two contracts may have been accepted with the toads and the slugs, but the phoenixes were highly territorial. Especially when it came to summoning clans that were weaker than themselves, Naruto's recent match in the chunin exams only proved how inferior the toads were to the phoenixes.

At his current level, Naruto wouldn't even be able of fighting on par with Dranzer for even a minute. Not to mention the fact that a majority of the summoning clans considered the toad contract rather pretentious, the phoenix included. It seemed the fact that the eldest of the toads seemed to hand out prophecies like they were candy on halloween didn't sit well with the other summoning clans.

Some of these summoning contracts had originated from the time of the Rikudō Sennin or his sons. Therefore prophecies were something sacred to them as there were only a few that had been passed down throughout the generations. So when some self-entitled, senile old toad seems to make them up from thin air, they were bound to get a little upset with the entire clan.

It seemed that Minato and Jiraiya were ignorant to the validity of the prophecies from the toads. After all, they were still clinging onto the one

that they believed said that Minato would undoubtedly one day bring peace to the Elemental Nations. This time the prophecy they received wasn't even specific in the least. The few key phrases that Naruto could actually relate to were: will of fire, memories of old, predecessor, burned the path.

Another thing that Naruto found peculiar was that while it did say that the child of prophecy would bring about a new era of peace, nothing was said about what would happen if they chose another path. There was just too many angles to cover and it was too broad to narrow it down any further. Such was the nature of most prophecies.

The only viable conclusion Naruto could come up with to what Minato was saying, was that he was supposed to be this child of prophecy, Ace was the one who had already burned the path towards peace, and this uncertain future probably is related to the Moon's Eye Plan and the revival of Ōtsutsuki Kaguya.

There were only a few problems with that theory. For starters, Ace never truly believed in peace. Hagoromo was the only child of Ōtsutsuki Kaguya who aimed to rebuild this world into a place where war and hatred were nonexistent. Ace had always lived his life how he wanted to. His goals and dreams weren't as noble as his brothers', in reality his ambitions were rather selfish. But that was how people should live their lives, it was their life to live however they pleased, so why should a person live their life for another person? Or a cause that they knew was fruitless?

Due to that, it was highly unlikely that Ace was this 'predecessor' that the prophecy spoke of. Either that, or the toads were completely wrong of their history. Whatever the case may be, Naruto didn't care to find out.

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Naruto stared at the contract spread out on the table blankly. He had been in a good mood earlier because Satsuki, Hana, Haku, and him had spent the entire morning together, but right now he was beginning to lose his patience.

"...No." That single word was Naruto's reply after staying silent for a few moments.

There were a few grans from a few people in the room, namely Obito, Tsunade, and Natsuki. This was just another version of the conversation that Minato and Naruto always had. Minato offering things like training, jutsu, and summoning contracts, while Naruto continually refused because they were trying to force him into a life he didn't want to live.

"I see this is just one of you're usual attempts to force Naruto back into your lives, so I'm leaving. I have patients to attend to." Was Tsunade's irritated statement before she gave Naruto a pitying glance, though the reason for it was unknown to him, and Shunshined out of the room, presumably back to the hospital. There really was no reason for her to be here. Minato had selfishly summoned her here in hopes that she would help to persuade his son, forcing her away from tending to the wounded at the hospital.

A few people in the room gave the spot where she was previously standing a glance before turning their heads back to the scene that was unfolding before them.

Minato and Jiraiya had not even noticed that Tsunade had left, as they were staring on in shock at Naruto's blatant refusal to sign Konoha's most renowned summoning contract. They had thought he would be ecstatic at

the prospect of signing the same contract that some of the most prominent shinobi in Konoha held. It would be foolish to deny something that could increase your strength and skill tenfold, just because you weren't the biggest fans of some of the other holders.

"...What do you mean 'no'?" Minato asked panicked, he had not fully recovered yet from Naruto's sudden rejection.

"Do you know how many people would sign this contract in a heartbeat if given the chance. It's easily one of the most powerful summoning contracts in the world, it's likely you'll never come across one as strong as this in your lifetime ever again! If you don't take this opportunity now, then you'll end up regretting it the rest of your life!" Of course it was Jiraiya who ran to the aid of his summoning contract and defended it relentlessly.

Naruto sighed inwardly. This conversation would clearly be continuing in a repetitious cycle, so it would be best to break out of it as soon as humanly possible. Perhaps even faster.

"I believe I said it quite clearly...you want me to sign this contract to further your dreams of peace...that's quite selfish in my opinion. The both of you are trying to force your own ideals and ambitions upon me because you can't do it yourself." Naruto rolled the summoning contract back up and threw it towards the offended Jiraiya.

"Wait that's not true at all! You-" Jiraiya was cut off as Naruto brought his hand up to signal him to stop talking.

"Jiraiya...I believe you always said that 'someday the the day would come when people could truly understand one another', yet you've done nothing to further you dreams of peace, besides handing out prophecies and pushing the duty off onto other people." Naruto then turned to Minato, he wasn't finished yet, not by a long-shot. "You're no better

Minato. You easily accept this man's beliefs, so easily that your dream now is to find peace. Yet, you have done to turn that dream into a reality. You've been the Hokage for over sixteen years now and yet, you have not made a single step towards bringing about peace."

The room was silent for a moment as they took in Naruto's words. Oddly enough, none of them could recall either of these men actually doing anything about their dreams besides push them onto other people or preach their ideals to the younger generations. Even Kushina's eyes widened when she realized this.

"Naruto, you have to understand-"

This time it was Minato who was cut off as he was trying to explain to his wayward son how difficult it was to bring this world together.

"I don't need to hear any excuses, if fact there are none to use." Naruto said as he sat back in the chair and crossed his arms over his chest.

"Things have only gotten worse since you had taken over as Hokage, the recent invasion is proof of that...actually, now that we're on that subject, I'm actually rather disappointed that you are talking about peace only a week after our village was invaded."

Minato and Jiraiya both flinched at the tone of his voice. Was it a mistake to tell him about the prophecy so soon after the invasion?

"I will tell you this here and now...Do not try to force your beliefs of peace on me. I've already seen just how far you will go to keep the peace within Konoha. World peace...that kind of belief is a little too naïve for someone like me. Find someone else to push this onto." With those final words said, Naruto got out of his chair and walked out of the room, leaving behind a room of stunned shinobi.

Minato's, Jiraiya's, and Obito's eyes widened at the indirect reference to the Uchiha Massacre, as that could be the only thing he was referring to

when he mentioned keeping the peace within Konoha's walls.

As an eerie silence filled every corner of the Hokage's Office, Minato stood completely still. After a minute of silence, when he looked around the room, he realized that everyone was either purposefully looking away from him while whistling or had their faces planted in their hands. A despondent, sheepish expression made its way onto his face as he rubbed the back of his head. "Um...Did I mess up again or something...?"

Much to the surprise of everyone in the room, it was Obito who finally answered after a moment of silence. "...I wouldn't go as far as to say that...You're completely justified in what you believe, Sensei, but you haven't considered how other people feel about your ideals or beliefs...You automatically assumed that he would jump aboard and you'd have the perfect family once again."

Minato's features turned hostile as a low growl leaked out of his throat. Obito may have been his student, but what right did he have to tell him how he should handle his own child? "Well what should I have done...!? You heard what the prophecy said! The path that he takes will determine the future of the entire world! You want me to-"

Before Minato could continue his rant any further, Obito held his hands up in the same fashion that Naruto had used to cut off the man earlier. "Naruto...is a special case. You can't deal with him the same way you do normal people, I've learned that first hand since I became his sensei...He doesn't believe in living his life for some greater cause...World peace, something like that doesn't matter to him. No matter how selfish it may seem to you, he lives his life the way that he wants and for the people he cares about. You can't decide what someone else should do with their life...One day your going to have to allow him to make his own decisions..."

With those final words said, Obito warped out of the room, leaving the people behind with much to think about.

Though, those words were mainly to Minato and Kushina as it was clear they would not stop pestering him anytime soon. Jiraiya didn't seem fazed in the least by Obito's proclamation. Though he did seem a little hurt from Naruto's words about how he had been living his life up until now, but that didn't last for too long. In his mind, what he had been doing was right, he wasn't meant to bring peace, but he would make sure to find the one who was.

Chapter no.125

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The population of the room had decreased dramatically since thirty minutes the Kiri-nin, Team 11, Tsunade, and Obito having already made their exit, the only ones who remained were Jiraiya, Minato, Kakashi, Kushina, Narumi, and Natsuki. It was not uncommon for these particular people to be in the same room together.

"Well, why don't we give Naruto a little time to think about what we said here...Perhaps he just needs a little time and space to think about everything he just learned. He's probably just a bit overwhelmed after learning how important his role in the world really is." Jiraiya spoke to no one in particular as he strapped the large summoning scroll to his lower back once again.

'Are you really that dense?' were the simultaneous thoughts of Natsuki, Narumi, and Kushina. They seemed to be the only ones in the office to still have their head on straight. Kakashi probably hadn't even been listening to the entire conversation as his nose was still buried in his

smut, giggling perversely every few minutes.

Minato seemed to be brought out of his daze as a lightbulb suddenly went off above his head. "Oh, that's right Jiraiya, now that you're free, could you take a look at Natsuki's seal? She won't let me or Kushina look at it for some unknown reason."

Due to Naruto's request in what formerly was the forest just outside of Konoha, Natsuki had not told Minato nor Kushina about what had occurred a week ago, nor would she even let them near her seal.

If any of them were to find any discrepancies in the seal formula on her stomach, they would surely tighten up her seal, which would successfully cut off her connection with Kurama, or the Kyuubi as they would call him. While he may have been very uncooperative ever since he found out about how much she had been abusing his chakra, she wouldn't allow him to be locked up anymore. Kurama seemed to know something behind her Nii-san's surname, she wanted to find out more about why that was, so she would have to work to gain his trust. Cutting the connection and forcing him back into the cage would be going against that.

Not to mention now that she knew that the Bijū were living beings instead of giant masses of chakra who merely caused destruction, Natsuki hated the fact that they were forcibly imprisoned to create jinchūriki for each of the villages. Kurama was merely the victim of an unfortunate fate, he never meant to attack Konoha on the day of their birth, he was being controlled by a dead man for over a century. Perhaps the other Bijū had suffered a similar fate.

Though Naruto did say that she could relay what happened to Narumi, due to the fact that she was just as involved as they were, but she just didn't know when she would get the opportunity to do so without their parents overhearing. Nor did she know if her sister would keep the

information from their parents. She remembered just what would happen if they were to find out. She really didn't want her brother to see her as an enemy, perhaps that would be enough to make Narumi understand how serious this was as well.

"Nope! He's not coming near my seal either!" Natsuki exclaimed as she crossed her forearms into a 'X' shape and held them out just in front of her chest.

Narumi raised an eyebrow at her twin sister's attitude. She noticed that she had refused to let anyone near her seal a few times this week already.

Normally they just complied when their parents or Jiraiya wanted to inspect if the seal was still holding properly. Perhaps it had to do with what had happened with Nawaki's seal. Whatever it was, she would make sure to ask her sister at a later time, but for now she would remain quiet.

"Natsuki, I don't understand why you're acting like this. You've never had a problem before when we wanted to study the seal." Minato said, quite confused at his daughter's actions. They really needed to get a look at her seal to make sure that it was still holding properly, they couldn't let whatever had happened to Nawaki happen to her as well. Now that he thought about it, the exact cause of why and how the Kyuubi's chakra had broken through his seal were still a mystery.

"That was before everything that happened with Nawaki's seal! You think I'm gonna let any of you near my seal after the fine mess you've caused!?"

Natsuki yelled back at Minato. She needed to play the part of the scared little girl for now...though a lot of what she was saying was actually true.

Now a majority of the room was confused. What did they have to do with what happened to Nawaki? None of them had tampered with the seal or even looked at it since after the second stage of the chūnin exams.

Perhaps Orochimaru did something to the seal as well when their team

encountered him in the forest of death.

"What are you talking about Natsuki-chan? None of us did anything to alter the seal, so there's no way that any of us could have been responsible for what happened to Nawaki." Kushina tried to calm her daughter down, but it seemed to have the opposite effect as she was now even more worked up than before.

"You mean the three of you really have no idea why the Kyuubi was able to escape Nawaki's seal?" Natsuki asked them rhetorically. She almost called the Kyuubi, Kurama right in front of them. If she had done so, there would be far more explaining to do than why he was able to escape from the seal he was confined to.

She received three nods of the head in the negative, while Narumi and Kakashi now only stared on curiously.

"Sandaime-sama may have been the one who sealed the Kyuubi inside of us, but he did so according to the seal formulas that you had prepared in advance and already placed on the three of us, so he can't be blamed for the current situation." Natsuki felt as if she was lecturing children with how clueless her parents and Jiraiya looked at the moment. "What do you think happens when you separate yin and yang, oh great fūinjutsu masters?"

The eyes of the three fūinjutsu experts in the room widened to epic proportions. How could they not have realized such a basic principle for so long?

"I see you finally understand what happened to Nawaki's and my seal. Yin and yang are not meant to be separated, they need to be together to keep the balance. It's the most basic principle of this world, not limited to only fūinjutsu. When the two are separated for long enough, they will eventually try to find their way back to each other. It just so happened

that they found their home inside of me."

Needless to say that everyone still present in the room was stunned into silence, though the three men in the room had to suppress a shiver from running down their spine at the appearance of the famous Uzumaki temper.

Having said everything that she wanted to, Natsuki breathed a sigh of relief and hopped off the couch to walk out the door. Narumi followed not long after her sister, not wanting to be left in the room when her parents were going to be in that kind of state.

Minato and Kushina had fallen to their knees and were now holding onto each other tightly while sobbing hysterically. They had ruined not just Naruto's life during his childhood, but also Nawaki's and possibly Natsuki's due to their lack of foresight. Why hadn't they thought of the consequences of separating the two halves of the Kyuubi, it was one of the basic principles of fūinjutsu, which they claimed to be masters at.

How could they have screwed up so badly?

With how their children had turned out and all the mistakes they had made, were they even meant to be parents?

Akatsuki Hideout - Unknown Location

A large amount of spectral figures, numbering into the double digits, flickered to life around a large, round table, centered in the middle of an underground cavern. It could not be determined where exactly they were, though if one looked around, they would see a large, demonic entity with a decayed appearance and a number of spike-like protrusions on its back. This was the Demonic Statue of the Outer Path, an entity only capable of being summoned by one possessing the Rinnegan. The statue was the only thing in the cavern besides the table and chairs.

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Had anyone else been in the cavern, they would have been trembling at the mere presence of these shinobis' astral projections. Any shinobi worth their hitai-ate would recognize almost every single one of the figures in the room, as they were some of the most dangerous criminals and nuke-nin in all of the Elemental Nations.

The first, and the obvious leader of this organization was known only as Pein. Pein was a slim man of average height that looked to be in his mid-twenties to early thirties with medium length spiky orange hair. He bore six piercings, a metal bar through each ear, three studs through each side of his upper nose, and one spiked stud on each end of the bottom lip. Most notable about his appearance was the pair of Rinnegan eyes. As per the attire of the organization, he wore a high-collared black cloak with red clouds on it. It seemed that he was a nuke-nin from Amegakure due to the Ame hitai-ate around his forehead with a vertical slash mark running through it.

Although her hitai-ate could not be seen, Konan was also a kunoichi who was formerly a part of Amegakure. Konan was a relatively tall woman with short, straight blue hair, amber-colored eyes with lavender eyeshadow and a labret piercing. A large, light blue paper flower could be seen in her hair, which had been made using her affinity for origami-based ninjutsu. She wore the usual Akatsuki cloak, though instead of the usual shinobi sandals and white leg warmers, she wore a pair of blue pants that also functioned as her shoes, with white high heels, inverting the organization's standard color scheme.

The next 'person' was rather odd looking. Zetsu appeared to have two

venus flytrap-like extensions that emerged from their sides, enveloping their head and upper body as a shell, which they were able to open and close at will. Half of Zetsu's body was white and possessed humanoid features, this was known as White Zetsu. The other half of their body was completely black and possessed no qualities whatsoever, other than a round, yellow eye, he could be described only as a shadow. This was known as Black Zetsu. They were part of the same being, yet had two completely different personalities. It is unknown whether Zetsu had previous affiliations with any of the hidden villages, but he was classified as an S-Rank criminal nonetheless.

The next shinobi was easily discernible as his Sharingan eyes were blazing. Uchiha Itachi had not changed much since his time in Konoha, in fact it looked as if he hadn't aged a single day. As stated before, his eyes adorned a three-tomoed Sharingan design, under which were long, pronounced tear-troughs. His jet-black hair was tied into a low ponytail and his face was framed with centre-parted bangs that extended to his chin. On his forehead was his Konoha hitai-ate with a long, vertical slash mark running through it, symbolizing that he had broken his ties with the village.

Deidara was one of the newer members of the Akatsuki, with only Hidan having been recruited after him. Deidara had slanted blue eyes and very long blonde hair which he wore drawn into a ponytail with the rest hanging down freely. His most distinctive feature were the mouths in each of the palms of his hands which were used for kneading chakra into his explosive clay and molding it into various shapes and creatures.

Kakazu was a tan-skinned and tall man, easily standing amongst the tallest members of the Akatsuki. Noticeably, despite his advanced age, he still appears as a a man well within his prime, retaining a very muscular

build. He wore a white hood and a black mask, with his eyes being the only visible part of his face. Underneath the usual cloak, his entire body was covered with various stitches and predominantly appeared to be sewn together, this was a result of the Jiongu kinjutsu that he stole from Takigakure just before he defected from the village years if not decades ago.

Sasori was an infamous nuke-nin from Sunagakure, however his appearance was unknown to everyone, even most of the Akatsuki members. Currently, he was hiding within his favorite human puppet, Hiruko. Within the puppet's confines, Sasori didn't look a day older since he defected from Suna. This was primarily because he had turned his entire body into a living puppet, with the only human part of him left being his heart.

Hidan has medium-length silver hair that was slicked back and distinctive purple eyes. He wore his Akatsuki cloak open with no shirt, only pants under it, thus revealing his slashed Yugakure hitai-ate around his neck and an amulet representing the religion of the Jashinist cult. On his back was a triple-bladed scythe which was his primary weapon and used in conjunction with a majority of his specialized jutsu.

The next shinobi was Hiruko, not to be confused with the shinobi who now functions as Sasori's human puppet. Hiruko has long white hair that was hidden within his cloak and a pair of pale red eyes. Despite once being close friends with the Sannin and being the same age as them, Hiruko has a much more youthful appearance due to the heavy modifications that he had made on himself. Most of his body was covered in bandages, including his mouth and arms, revealing only the upper half of his face and hair. His body is covered in stitches and scars, much like Kakazu, due to assimilating the bodies of other shinobi with his own.

Hiruko is a nuke-nin from Konoha, who was forced to flee during the Third Shinobi World War after his research and findings were discovered by the Sandaime Hokage and the Sannin were sent to assassinate him.

Uzumaki Menma, the only other surviving member of the ill-fated Uzumaki clan, and the presumably deceased twin brother of Uzumaki-Namikaze Kushina. His red hair, the trademark sign of the Uzumaki clan, was worn in a longer, shaggier-looking style, not too different from the Yondaime Hokage. He was a very tall man, with a muscular build. Most notable about his appearance was that he has a large X-shaped scar centered on the left side of his forehead that stretches over both his eyes, with only the whites of his eyes showing. He is presumed to be blind. He has white bandages wrapped around each of his forearms, with handguards on both hands. In his hand was a shikomizue, that doubles as a cane when not in battle due to his blindness. This is presumably one of his clan's famed fūinjutsu swords.

Unlike most of the other Akatsuki members who wore a cloak, Sir Crocodile donned a black shirt, a green scarf, dark gray slacks, and a black overcoat with a fur trim and red clouds on it. Crocodile is a tall man with a wide chest, broad shoulders, muscular arms and legs, and a thick neck. His pale skin and nape-length, black hair, which is neatly kept slicked back, make people question if he is really a nuke-nin from Sunagakure, although after hearing his reputation, those doubts were subsided. Most notable about his appearance was the long stitched scar above his nose that stretches vertically across his face, as well as a missing left hand that has been replaced by a large hook made of a tough gold alloy. In his mouth was the usual cigar.

Similarly to Sir Crocodile, Enel did not wear the usual Akatsuki garb.

Enel is a tall, muscular man who has white-blond hair that was covered

by a simple white bandana. His nose had many lines running horizontally across it, along with strange, long earlobes that stretch all the way to his chest. He also has four large tomoe drums attached to his back via a large metal ring. He wore loose black pants with red clouds running across them, around his waist is a blue, flowing sash, holding up a light blue veil. He seemed to have an affinity for gold as he wore gold bracelets on both his arms and his legs and the gold staff in his right hand. Around his neck was a Kumogakure hitai-ate with a vertical slash mark running through it.

Dracule Mihawk is a lean man with black hair, a short beard, mustache and sideburns that point upwards. His eyes were a strange yellow color with a ring circling around the pupil, resembling a hawk's eyes. His attire consists of a wide-brimmed black hat decorated with a large plume, and a long, open black coat with no undershirt, and with red cloud designs. Around his neck was a crucifix pendant concealing a small dagger. He wears white pants held up by a decorated belt and tucked inside overly large boots in comparison to his leg size. On his back was the famed sword Yoru. To this day, Mihawk hold the title of the world's strongest swordsman. He has no prior affiliations with any of the villages, as he is a wandering swordsman.

Gekkō Moria is an abnormally large person with distinct devil-like features. Standing at 22'7" in height, Moria is the tallest amongst the Akatsuki members. It was impossible for one of the usual Akatsuki cloaks to fit his body size and shape, so he wore a fur-laced black cape with a red cloud design. It is unknown whether or not Moria has any connections to the hidden villages, although due to his size if he was formerly, he would be hard to miss. Though if he was formerly a shinobi of one of the villages, he was most likely banished due to how immoral

his abilities were.

Bartholomew Kuma is an enormous man, standing at a height of 22'6", he is easily the tallest member of the Akatsuki if Moria was excluded. His overall appearance resembles that of a bear, though there are a few key differences. His jacket was a jet-black color and covered in the trademark Akatsuki clouds. On his hands were a pair of gloves that covered the paw pads on his hands, and thus preventing him from accidentally activating the kinjutsu that he possesses. Kuma is a former shinobi from Iwagakure who became known throughout the world for fighting on par with the Sandaime Tsuchikage for four days and three nights before he defeated the Kage due to his old age during his defection. He was one of the key players in the Akatsuki's plans due to his abilities.

The only other female amongst the Akatsuki members was Boa Hancock. Hancock is considered by many to be the most beautiful woman in the world. She is a very tall, slender woman in her mid-twenties with long, silky black hair that reached down past her waist with locks of hair that frame her face down to her chin, large breasts, a high forehead, dark blue eyes that have long, voluminous lashes, and a narrow waist. She wore a black, tight, form-fitting dress embroidered with the Akatsuki's usual red clouds. The dress itself was a Chinese-style design with slits on the sides to reveal her legs, it exposed a fair amount of cleavage and rose up into a high collar. She usually chose a rather revealing attire as to increase the effects of her Mero Mero kinjutsu. This particular kinjutsu was developed by the Kuja tribe before they were eradicated during the Third Shinobi World War, to which she is that sole survivor.

The final Akatsuki member was the only medical-nin in the world who could put Senju Tsunade to shame, Trafalgar D. Water Law. Law is a slim young man in his mid-twenties of a relatively tall height. His gray eyes

were covered by faint shadows from his trademark white, northern-style fur hat, which also obscured his spiky black hair, save for his sideburns and small black goatee. He adorned the usual Akatsuki cloak, and held a large nodachi with his right hand, resting it on his shoulder, thus revealing the tattoos on his hands and arms. Law holds a deep hatred for the great shinobi nations, as he is the sole survivor of the tragedy of Flevance also known as the 'White City', a nation that discovered how to make firearms and powerful weapons using the amber lead that was mined there. However, the amber lead caused poisoning and eventually everyone in the nation was diagnosed with the disease. Fearing both the potential of their weapons and that the deadly disease was contagious, Iwa, Kumo, Ame and Suna formed a temporary alliance to eradicate every single person living there. This resulted in the death of his parents and his younger sister. This information is also what lead him to be recruited by the Akatsuki several years ago.

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"Zetsu, what news do you have on the jinchūriki that participated in the chūnin exams?" Pein ordered more than asked the plant-like being. The current level of strength would be essential knowledge for the group as it would benefit them in capturing all of the jinchūriki.

"Ah yes, the jinchūrikis within Konoha during that time put on quite a show. There have also been some very interesting developments regarding the Kyūubi jinchūrikis." White Zetsu was the one who answered in his usual playful tone. Him and his black counterpart had watched the entire chūnin exam finals, hidden from view of everyone,

Kages included. Black Zetsu had been seething in anger and rage ever since he saw the only non-jinchūriki child of the Hokage compete. It wasn't like him to be angry, he was usually serious, critical, and even harsh to everyone, but he had never been angry before.

"What kind of developments exactly?" The figurehead leader of the Akatsuki asked once more. He was getting irritated that things weren't going according to plan, they had enough strength and numbers to start hunting the jinchūriki as of now, of course the Bijū had to be captured and sealed in order from least amount of tails to the greatest so that the Gedō Mazō could slowly adjust to its power returning.

If they were to seal a Bijū with a larger amount of tail before the ones with a lower amount were sealed, the sealing process would take much longer and be much harder on the physical body and the chakra of those sealing it because the statue would have too much power already. That was the reason that they would be going in order of the number of tails.

"As we expected, the Sanbi jinchūriki, Yagura, has perfect control of the Bijū sealed within him and is incredibly strong. He will be quite difficult to subdue and capture, but that wasn't very surprising. What was interesting is that there are no longer three Kyuubi jinchūrikis, only two. The Kyuubi's chakra inside of the Yondaime Hokage's second son ripped itself out of the boy and fused with the other half of itself inside of his daughter, leaving the boy without a trace of its chakra. This means that the Kyuubi is whole once again and is sure to be far stronger than we had anticipated." White Zetsu informed the group excitedly, there was a reason that he was occasionally referred to as 'chatterbox'.

There was a collective silence among the group of S-Rank shinobi as it was unheard of for a Bijū to actually forcibly remove itself from its host. There have been cases where a third party has somehow gained control

of the beast and ripped it out of the seal holding it, but never before has it done so on its own. For those who were hunting the Bijū this was a very interesting development.

At least to some it was.

"You call that an important development? All that means is that we have one less jinchūriki to capture." Menma's dislike for Kushina and anyone related to her began to show as he voiced his opinion.

"No, that was just the tip of the iceberg. What really matters is what happened during the Suna/Oto invasion of Konoha." This statement caught the attention of most of the other shinobi in the room. It had been a week since the invasion occurred, but Konoha was keeping the betrayal of Suna quiet for now until they rebuilt their village and bolstered their strength. Seeing the questioning looks he was receiving, White Zetsu chose to elaborate, "Yes, the Yondaime Kazekage chose to side with Orochimaru and Otogakure and they invaded Konoha with their combined forces during the final stage of the chūnin exams. Though they were forced to retreat and lost nearly three-fourths of their forces in the process. What matters to us though is that Portgas D. Naruto, the eldest son of the Yondaime Hokage, managed to kill the Suna jinchūriki during the midst of the invasion." Zetsu spoke, earning a surprised look from Law. He was the only one among them to possess the initial 'D'. As to what that initial meant, only the few of them knew the vague details concerning that name, but the one thing that was certain, no matter how confusing it was, was that the Clan of D were the natural enemies of God. A thick silence filled the cavern once more as everyone processed White Zetsu's words.

The death of the Ichibi would be a major setback in their plans as it was the first Bijū that they needed to seal. This meant that they would have

to wait until the Ichibi was reformed somewhere, or that they would need to start hunting the other Bijū first and seal the Ichibi last. They would most likely be doing the former since it should only take a few years at most for it to reform.

"...That is quite troublesome indeed...With the death of the Ichibi jinchūriki, our plans will have to be pushed back. The last time a jinchūriki was killed, it took the Bijū three years to reform, I assume it will take the same length this time..." Pein announced to the rest of the organization with an irritated look on his face.

"And what exactly are we supposed to do until that time comes? Surely the jinchūriki will have grown in strength by then, especially the younger ones." Crocodile questioned as he blew out a puff of smoke from his cigar.

"We need to know how strong each of the jinchūriki currently are so that we are adequately prepared. We had already prepared to do this anyway, so that plan hasn't changed. Each of the teams is to report back here when they are done, and be sure not to kill any of the jinchūriki, we can't afford to have the plan delayed further than it already has...The rest of you are on standby for now. Continue to gather funds and strength for the duration of our operation."

Most of the members of the room gave a simultaneous response of "Hai, Leader-sama!", while the more silent and reserved characters merely nodded their head.

Seeing that everyone understood the current plan of action, Pein continued, "Good, do all of you understand your current objectives?" His question was more rhetorical than anything and not exactly meant to be answered, but strangely, someone spoke up.

"...Actually Leader-sama, I'd like to be the one to test the Kyuubi

jinchūriki this time around." The deep voice of Black Zetsu spoke up.

Though his voice was far darker and filled with much more rage than usual. He suppressed it quite well, but every shinobi in the room was S-Ranked, in other words the highest ranking in the Elemental Nations, nothing got by them.

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Pein raised an eyebrow at Black Zetsu's request. It was unlike him to object to something that he said, the being was extremely loyal to whomever he served. "Why is that Zetsu? Itachi and Hiruko are the ones who are currently assigned to the Kyuubi jinchūriki, why should they not be the ones to test its strength? This would probably be the most important task since the Kyuubi is the strongest of the Bijū and we need to see the jinchūriki's capabilities after having the Kyuubi whole once again."

Itachi's and Hiruko's projections turned towards Zetsu and Pein, their attention had been successfully caught at the mention of their target. It was unusual for Zetsu to request such a front-line mission, he usually operated as a spy and gathered information on the jinchūriki, this was how the Akatsuki had gotten the locations of where each Bijū resided. He must have had some ulterior motive behind his actions. Though, neither of them seemed fazed or spoke out against the fact that someone was trying to steal their target and mission.

"Itachi and Hiruko are both infamous nuke-nin formerly of Konoha, they're bound to attract far more attention than the mission would allow. And with shinobi such as Namikaze Minato, Uzumaki-Namikaze Kushina,

Jiraiya, Uchiha Obito, and shinobi on par with them currently residing within Konoha, the chance of capture is far greater than we would prefer...Someone like me on the other hand would be able to easily escape if I were to find myself driven into a corner...and I have some personal business with someone close to the jinchūriki. It would be beneficial to our plans if he is dealt with sooner rather than later." Zetsu reasoned with Pein.

White Zetsu had a confused look on his face, he hadn't known that they had anything to settle with any of the Konoha shinobi. In fact, the last Konoha shinobi that they had dealt with, other than the ones in the Akatsuki, was Obito when Madara was trying to manipulate him into creating the Akatsuki and become the leader behind the scenes.

Pein was silent for a moment as he thought about Zetsu's words. Konoha did indeed have the highest number of S-Rank shinobi residing in it, though Jiraiya was frequently outside the village walls, Obito and Kushina were usually on missions, Tsunade had her hands full as a medical-nin at the village hospital, and Minato was now crippled. It was certainly more of a risk than he was willing to take, sending two of his shinobi within those walls. Then again, Zetsu was extremely trustworthy, having never failing a mission and being one of the Akatsuki's very first members. Perhaps he did have a point.

"Itachi, Hiruko. What do you think of Zetsu's request?" Pein turned to the team that assigned to capturing the Kyuubi jinchūriki.

"Let him have the mission if he's so insistent on it. It will give me more time to track down the shinobi who I plan to fuse with." Hiruko possessed a kinjutsu known as Chimerawhich allowed him to absorb the bodies of at most four people, gaining their Kekkei Genkai and attributes they possessed when alive. Currently, he had already absorbed three people

and he had already found the fourth, but he had yet to put his plan into action.

"It does not matter to me." Itachi responded in his usual calm, stoic voice. However, inwardly he was quite worried. It was Itachi's duty to protect Konoha as much as he could from inside the Akatsuki and relay that information back to Jiraiya or the Hokage, if he wasn't the one responsible for capturing the Kyuubi then far more casualties were likely to occur. The Akatsuki was far more dangerous than they had believed it to be. Originally Jiraiya and the Yondaime Hokage had believed there to only be nine members, but now their numbers had grown to almost twenty. If Zetsu was going to get involved the death of Konoha-nin was unavoidable, but Itachi couldn't voice his disapproval and needed to maintain his cover.

"Very well then, you may be the one to approach the Kyuubi jinchūriki...However, you are one of the Akatsuki members who frequently works on their own. You will need a partner for this." Zetsu may not have been a usual front-line fighter for the Akatsuki, but he was still one of the strongest among them. Even so, the mission would have a higher chance of success if he brought a partner along with him. That is why it was encouraged for Akatsuki members to work in pairs, though a handful of them still preferred to work solo.

"...Enel..." Zetsu's deep voice rang out, gaining the attention of said man.

"You'll be coming with me."

"God does not take orders, God is the one who gives them." Enel's spoke out arrogantly, soon after though, he began to scratch his chin and a thoughtful look made its way onto his face. "...Though I will be joining you anyway. It has been far too long since I've had any fun. Perhaps the Kyuubi jinchūriki will provide me with some entertainment."

An irritated expression made its way onto Pein's normally stoic face. He was the only God here. Enel may have been strong and been granted with divine power, but he was no God. Only the bearer of the Rinnegan had the right to call themselves as such, as they were the ones who were freely able to bend the boundaries of life and death.

"Then, if you all know your current assignments, you're dismissed."

The other sixteen members uttered a "Hai Leader-sama" in unison before flickering out of existence, until only Pein's figure spectral figure was left alone in the room.

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A sound of footsteps approaching is what caught his attention, as the real leader of the Akatsuki was about to make his appearance known.

Out from the shadows stepped an unusually tall man, standing at a height of 10', blonde-haired, very lean and muscular man with tan skin in his late thirties. Draped over his shoulders was a hot pink feather coat, his pants were black and designed with the usual Akatsuki red clouds, strangely, he wore a pair of dress shoes instead of shinobi sandals, under his coat was a plain white open shirt that revealed his chest and abs, on his face were a pair of curved, thin white sunglasses with red lenses.

From the slashed Suna hitai-ate functioning as his belt buckle, it was easy to mark him as a nuke-nin from Sunagakure. This was Donquixote Doflamingo.

"Zetsu seemed quite adamant about handling the Kyuubi jinchūriki himself don't you think? Though whoever he wants to deal with personally must've really pissed him off." Doflamingo spoke, making his

presence in the room fully known.

However, Pein didn't seem fazed in the least by the man's sudden appearance, which meant that he knew that the man was here all along and was already accustomed to dealing with him.

"He will complete his mission just as all the members will." Pein spoke with the utmost seriousness.

However, Doflamingo never lost the maniacal grin that seemed to always be present on his face. "You're far too serious all of the time Nagato, loosening up every now and then will do you some good. If you're this wrapped up in the plans of the organization, the plan is bound to end in failure. Take a step back from our goals and just enjoy what's around you for the moment!" Doflamingo declared as he spread his arms out wide and took a dramatic pose.

"That is for me to decided." The man's attitude didn't seem to affect the figurehead leader for the Akatsuki one bit.

Taking on a more serious expression Doflamingo looked down at Pein's spectral figure, "Don't take these next three years too lightly though.

Once the jinchūriki are aware of our presence, they will no doubt increase their strength dramatically...Though such a thing wouldn't be too difficult to deal with, most jinchūriki rely on brute force alone and once they lose control of themselves, that's all they're able to utilize."

"We will have to wait until the other members report back with their assessments and we will prepare accordingly. After which we will just have to wait until the Ichibi reforms. Then our plan will be set in motion."

With those final word said, Pein's figure flickered out of existence, leaving Doflamingo alone in the cavern.

Akimichi Barbecue Restaurant - Konoha

After leaving the Hokage's Office, Naruto had been slowly making his way towards the restaurant where they had planned to meet up today after the ceremony.

Naruto still found it hard to believe that after everything that has happened between them, that Minato had tried to force him to play a part in his prophecy. That was the reason that he was slowly walking to his destination instead of just Shunshining there, he needed some time to cool off before meeting up with his teammates. Although he had rather good control over his emotions for someone his age, what just happened had gotten him pretty worked up.

Though he was pleasantly surprised that Natsuki hadn't told their parents about what had happened with Kurama. If she had, it would have been the first thing that he was accused of rather than about his abilities or their prophecy.

He was also surprised that neither of his sisters nor his mother tried to push him to sign the toad contract that their family was so fond of. It appeared that the three of them had finally gotten the message that he would never be a part of their family again, so they were taking a backseat for now and just letting things play out. Though he could see it in their eyes that they really wanted to celebrate his celebration to chūnin with him.

He had to admit that knowing that he would no longer be bombarded from all sides with pleas for him to come back to their family and live in their estate with them took a lot of weight off of his shoulders. He wasn't really a cold person by nature and he disliked having to brush them aside every time they tried to cling to him, but far too much had happened at this point for anything else to be a viable option.

He shook his head to bring him back to reality as he walked into the

barbecue restaurant that he had become so familiar with. Their team often celebrated the complete of a successful mission here or came here for special occasions such as today. The comparison could be made that barbecue was to them what ramen was to Team 7. They had actually run into Team 10 here on more than a few occasions as it was Chōji's family that owned the restaurant.

"Naruto-nii!"

Naruto looked up to see Satsuki waving excitedly at him from their usual booth in the corner.

"Yo." Naruto gave a small wave to them as he made his way to the booth and took a seat on the side that Satsuki was on, with Hana sitting directly across from him.

Just as he arrived, the waiter came over. It appeared he had kept them waiting for quite a while, seeing as how it was already lunchtime. It'd be best to order their food now. Having been here so many times after becoming genin, they didn't even have to look at the menu to decide what they wanted. The three chūnin placed their usual order and a little extra for the celebration.

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It had been over an hour since he had parted with them in the Hokage's Office. What had happened there took far longer than he anticipated, but true to their word, Satsuki and Hana had been patiently waiting for them. They might've been too excited to eat at the time though, but now that the idea of them being chūnin had settled into their minds, their hunger was beginning to take over as he could hear their stomachs growling.

"How was your talk with Hokage-sama?" Hana quickly asked, trying to get the attention off of her's and Satsuki's grumbling stomachs.

Satsuki quickly scarfed down a few pieces of bread that had been given to the table to satisfy her stomach for now, though her face was red from embarrassment from having Naruto hear such an unladylike noise coming from her. But after hearing Hana voice her curiosity, she shifted her attention towards Naruto.

"Nothing different from usual, though because of my abilities he believes that I'm some kind of child of prophecy that Jiraiya told him about before any of us entered the academy...You two are lucky that you don't have to deal with these kind of things." Naruto spoke as he put his elbow on the table and leaned his cheek onto the palm of his hand.

"Hm, what'd they want exactly?" Satsuki asked curiously. Though she was a bit upset that every time her Naruto-nii did something in front of the Hokage, something like this had to happen.

"...First they tried interrogating me about how I can do what I can, then after giving that up they tried to force me to sign their toad contract and push me towards creating world peace...I walked out of the room after refusing and some arguing..." Naruto sighed as he explained the summarized what had happened to the girls.

The two females at the table nodded in understanding.

"Though, it is quite rare to find a shinobi with a summoning contract.

Less than one percent of the shinobi within the Elemental Nations are holders of summoning contracts. Konoha is actually hold the most of the known ones with the toad and slug contracts being the most prominent...I wish I had one...Oh yeah, Naruto-nii, how'd you come across yours?"

Satsuki asked with stars in her eyes. The girl had always been interested in summoning contracts seeing Itachi's and Shisui's crows when she was

younger.

Naruto lifted his head off of his hand and looked at his 'little sister' sitting next to him. He chuckled lightly after seeing the stars shining in her eyes.

She was so adorable when she was like this, like a child in a toy store.

"There are only a few ways to get your hands on a summoning contract.

The first is a third party or outside factor. This means that it is either given to you by someone else or you find the actual contract by chance.

Pretty much any outside factor can be thrown into this category. The second way is to encounter the actual animal belonging to the contract by chance where they can let you sign their contract if they so choose.

That one is pretty self-explanatory. The third one is how I came into possession of my contract, though I wouldn't advise you to do so. By performing the hand seals for the summoning jutsu when not in possession of a contract, you can reverse summon yourself to the summoning realm you are naturally aligned with. Though, being naturally aligned with one is rare and very few people in the world will be able to do this successfully. Had I not been immune to flames, I would have been burned to death upon being summoned to Mt. Silver."

Naruto noticed the downcast expression that had made its way onto Satsuki's face, forcing his older brother instincts to kick in.

"Though if you're still interested in getting one for yourself, when I was still training under Shisui, he told me that he found his crow summoning contract in the depths of the Uchiha clan library. Maybe if you looked there as well you'd be able to find one for yourself." These words earned a wide smile and a hopeful look from Satsuki.

Naruto moved his hand just above her head. Satsuki looked up into his eyes after after feeling the gentle pat on her head and the wonderful feeling of her silky, black hair being stroked.

The atmosphere around the table had gotten sickly sweet as the two chūnin looked into each others eyes with love and adoration. Naruto gently stroking Satsuki's hair and Satsuki leaning into his touch with a look of absolute delight on her face only served to heighten those feelings.

Fortunately or unfortunately, it was difficult to tell in this case, a voice spoke up from the other side of the table, effectively dispelling the romantic atmosphere that surrounded the table.

"Um...you two, people are starting to stare..." Hana awkwardly commented with a sweatdrop. Normally one would have been a bit embarrassed after seeing such a sweet scene, but these kind of things happened more than one would think.

Naruto and Satsuki had been so wrapped up with each other that they had forgotten that Hana was at the table with them. Naruto looked around the room and true to her words, there were quite a few people who had turned their attention to the table, though they hadn't really done anything to garnish the attention of so many people. It was probably because of their recent performance in the chūnin exams that they had drawn this much attention. Though Neither of them seemed fazed in the least, in fact Satsuki even subtly flashed Hana a victory sign and gave her a wink.

Their attention was brought off the current situation and back to their stomachs as their waiter brought the many dishes of food onto the table, along with a large bottle of sake. Among the dishes they ordered were a large platter of assorted meats that they would cook themselves with the grill on the table, a platter of rice balls, a large platter of fried rice, fried tofu, deep fried beans tossed with garlic, and several orders of gyoza.

This may seem like a lot of food, even for people like Chōji, but every

single time they came here, not a single piece of food was left. Unlike kunoichi like Sakura and Ino, Satsuki and Hana understood the importance of nutrition and a balanced diet, so neither of them had even thought about dieting. Though most of the food was usually eaten by Naruto. His appetite knew no bounds.

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Naruto threw the pieces of meat on the grill to start their cooking, after which he took the three sake cups and filled them up with sake. After filling up the three cups with the clear liquid, he placed a cup in front of sake in front of Satsuki and one in front of Hana.

"Sake?" Hana asked with a tilt of her head. Sure they were considered adults once becoming genin, even more so now that they were chūnin, but she had never drank any of the stuff before.

"When you exchange sake cups, you become family...as well as to celebrate our promotion." Naruto said as he lifted his sake cup in front of him.

"Family? Really?!" Hana asked as she stared down at her own cup. They had always considered themselves to be family, but there was never anything to secure that bond. Perhaps this was it.

"We're chūnin now, that means our paths will take us our own way...we may not even be on the same team together for much longer...but our bonds will keep us together as family! No matter where we are or what we do, our bond will never be broken!" Both Hana and Satsuki found themselves surprised at how passionate his words were. They each picked up their own sake cup and brought them towards the middle of the table,

creating a ringing sound as the cups resounded off of each other.

"Starting with this, from this day onwards, we're officially family!"

As Naruto said those words, each of them downed their cup of sake in one gulp. The two younger girls choked on the burning sensation running down their throat, but swallowed it nonetheless. Naruto couldn't help but chuckle at the reactions of his newly named sisters before pouring them another cup.

"Don't worry, after a few cups, you get used to it. Now let's eat before the meat burns and the food gets cold!" Naruto said as he took the meat off the grill and began distributing it amongst the three of them.

Soon enough the group of three were digging into their food like their was no tomorrow. This wasn't as uncommon as one may believe, every time they came to the Akimichi's Barbecue restaurant, a quick lunch turned into an enormous feast. Hana and Satsuki were eating in the most unladylike manner humanly possible and Naruto had almost choked on his food three times already because he was shoveling it down so fast, but none of them cared about quirks like that. Today may be the last day that they will ever be together as a team and they we're going to make the most of it.

Halfway through there meal, the three of them began to slow their pace down. This is the point where they usually began to take their time and simply savor their food. This was also the time for conversation now that their unruly hunger had begun to express its satisfaction.

"So what are the two of you going to do now that we're chūnin?" Satsuki asked as she wiped her mouth with a napkin.

This caught the attention of the other two at the table who paused while still chewing their food to think about her question. Hana quickly swallowed her remaining food before turning towards her new sister.

"Well, you've known what I've always wanted to do. During genin introductions I think I told the both of you and Obito-sensei that I wanted to become a veterinarian. Now that I'm a chunin, I'm able to apply for medical ninjutsu training at the hospital, that way I'll be able to work on animals as well as people. The only medical ninjutsu I currently know was taught to me by my Kaa-san, but she doesn't know much more than I do now. After I start at the hospital, I'd eventually want to become one of the veterinarians for the animal hospital in the Inuzuka compound." Hana had a smile on her face the entire time at the prospect of being able to achieve her dream so early on in her shinobi career.

"I guess I'd serve as a team leader for now." Naruto spoke as he threw another dumpling into his mouth. He had absolutely no table manners whatsoever. "Because we lost so many shinobi during the invasion, I have no doubt they'll be sending us out on missions as soon as possible. We may even be in charge of shinobi that were in our graduating class, seeing as how we outrank them now."

"Why's that? If we just lost so much of our forces, wouldn't it be best to concentrate the shinobi that we do have left on protecting the village?" Hana asked curiously. She didn't exactly know if she had what it took to lead a team. Naruto was a natural leader, when Obito wasn't around on missions or was occupied with a more important matter, Naruto was the designated stand-in leader, which he always excelled at. And Satsuki never had any doubts about herself or her decisions. They were completely different from herself.

Naruto shook his head in response, "We can't do that...If we were to start turning down missions, it'd be like telling the other nations that our village is getting weak. Kumo and Iwa would no doubt take that opportunity to attack because of their dislike for the village and the

Hokage. That's why even the academy has been temporarily closed and the chunin instructors have been sent on field missions once more...I may not like it, but that's just how it is."

The two girls had a thoughtful look on their face as if wondering that kind of missions they'd possibly be assigned to lead. They were probably worried about how well they'd do or if it'd be successful. Nobody wants to fail the first mission that they were assigned to lead. Naruto didn't have those concerns however. He's been assigned to lead sub-missions by Obito many times during the course of their time as a team, and while he thought he wasn't cut out for it at first, Naruto had grown accustomed to taking charge in most situations. Though, he could understand if his two teammates didn't feel the same way.

"Hmm...I see...that sucks for whoever gets stuck leading a team..." Satsuki spoke lazily, still partially in thought, as she bit down on another piece of the fried tofu.

Naruto gave the girl a deadpan look as she continued to chew, "Hey, I'm talking about you too, you know...most of the jonin of the village will be sent off on higher ranking missions, because those are more prominent, that leaves us to lead their genin teams for the time being. Obito-sensei will probably be forced to take on more S-Rank missions as well."

"Hm...tomorrow is bound to be a pain." The girl moaned in defeat.

"Why don't we finish up our food and get out of here. We've still got a whole day before all of that begins, why not make the most of it?" Naruto spoke as he started back up on his food once more.

The other girls smiled at his words and followed suit. They still had an entire day before they had to worry about leading missions and the like, so why worry about it now when there's nothing they could do about it?

They would make sure to take him up on his offer, those sweet smiles turned mischievous and wicked, he was the one paying for everything today after all.

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Uchiha Household - Night

After several hours of being dragged around the entirety of Konoha's shopping district and being brought along on the most grueling shopping spree that may have ever taken place within the walls of Konohagakure, an exhausted, beaten, and half-dead Naruto, laid sprawled out on the living room couch next to Mikoto as Satsuki was using the hallway as a runway for the fashion show that was currently taking place. He now understood why Shikamaru always referred to women as 'troublesome'. It would take over an entire months pay to replace all the money he had spent during the girls' 'celebration'.

If he never saw another pair of shoes again, it would be too soon.

Naruto looked up to see Satsuki spinning around in one of her new outfits as Mikoto squealed in delight at how cute her daughter looked. Mikoto had a much more girly side to her than he had ever imagined.

"That looks absolutely adorable of you Satsuki-chan." Mikoto praised cheerfully, but with a weak tone that only Naruto was able to notice. It made him worry.

He had noticed over the last few months that Mikoto's body was slowly weakening. It was slow-going, but the rate at which her body was weakening had picked up substantially over the course of the past few weeks. She was forcibly suppressing the symptoms, but it was still

noticeable for those who had a background in medicine or that had special eyes.

Naruto belonged to both of those categories. While he was younger and still training under Shisui, the elder teen had always referred to them as 'the eyes of the hawk' not to mention the Sharingan that was now implanted into his right eye socket. Then there was the fact that he trained under Tsunade for around a year while he was still in the academy. That was mainly to achieve perfect control over his chakra so that he was able to access Haki, but he learned quite a lot about medicine and medical ninjutsu during his time with her.

Still, the weakening of Mikoto's body was alarming. Ever since he had known the woman, she had never been sick a day in her life and now this happens? It has been especially bad over the last week, where she had secretly been making visits to the hospital when she hadn't been injured in the least during the invasion. This meant that she knew that her body was quickly deteriorating, so why was she acting so carefree and cheerful?

If her disease was this serious and hasn't been healed yet, then it means that not even Tsunade was able to cure her. Konoha had the best hospital within all the Elemental Nations, they had seen and cured every injury and sickness known to man. Did this mean that her condition was something that they had never seen before, or was it simply incurable?

Has she been torturing herself for them all this time?

She smiled whenever he smiled.

She laughed whenever he laughed.

She cried whenever he cried.

She shared his pain, whether it was physical, mental, or emotional.

She had always been there for him, but what if she were to no longer be

there. No, he couldn't think like that.

She had even trained together with him whenever she could. She tortured herself, with her weak little body, just to spend whatever time she had left with him and Satsuki. She did this to herself just for them... Naruto knew he didn't deserve someone as wonderful and selfless as her. And it seemed that the God watching over this plane agreed with him. Perhaps this is what they meant when they said that the Clan of D. was the natural enemy of God...a cursed clan where everyone close to their heart was ripped away from them...a clan where happiness was still a mystery.

Truly a clan with a cursed fate.

Mikoto seemed to notice that Naruto was staring at her suspiciously, so she offered him a weak smile in return.

Satsuki had just left the room to change into another one of the new dresses that she had bought today, leaving Naruto and Mikoto in the living room alone together.

"You've bought Satsuki-chan an adorable new wardrobe, Naru-kun. She seemed happy to finally be able spend the entire day with you with how hectic everything has been." It was true, as the chūnin exams started over a month ago, then they had the entire month to train, then the finals and the invasion. There wasn't much time to spend with their little family.

Though she may have been just trying to get him to join the conversation instead of how he was eyeing her body. It wasn't one of love or lust, but one of deep concern and worry, perhaps even a bit of fear. If she had left him to his thoughts, things would have taken a path that she would prefer to have left unexplored.

"Yeah, her and Hana went on a rampage in the shopping district. Not a single clothing or shoe store was left untouched." Naruto smiled right

back at her, but his mind was still on the condition of her body. If he had a Byakugan he wouldn't have to be guessing at what kind of state her internal and cellular condition was in...Perhaps he could ask Hinata for a favor later. A shiver went down his spine as he thought about the pale-eyed girl who he had caught staring at him with her Byakugan active more than a handful of times. She was definitely out of the question.

"Those two may not be like the rest of the kunoichi who are fresh out of the academy that focus on dieting and clinging onto their crush's arm, but they love shopping just the same." Mikoto sighed as she remembered the times she had taken her daughter out shopping when she was younger. Ever since she was a child, she had rather expensive tastes...Mikoto started to feel a little bad for Naruto. Though, her love for high-end civilian and clothes didn't translate over to her shinobi-wear. When on missions or during training, she usually dressed like a tomboy or wore rather tight and revealing clothing. The girl just couldn't stick to one style.

"...Mikoto-chan...are you having problems with your health...?" Mikoto noticeably froze at that question. Naruto had always been too observant for his own good. It seemed that he always found out about every secret she was trying to keep hidden, first it was the Uchiha Massacre and now it was her body's condition.

She could easily lie to him right now to advert this topic altogether, he wouldn't believe her and would be able to see through any lie she spat out, but he would play along and understand that she wanted to deal with this on her own...but there was no dealing with this. She could lie to Satsuki because she would undoubtedly be crushed by the truth, but she couldn't lie to Naruto. For some reason the thought of hiding something this important from him made her feel more sick than her actual sickness

did...but that didn't mean she had to tell him the whole truth.

"You were always too smart for your own good, Naru-kun...This isn't like the last time I tried to keep something from you though...This time, there's no simple solution, no easy way to make everything go back to how it's always been...So just this once, could you leave everything up to me?"

Mikoto looked over her shoulder and gave him a small smile, it was a smile that he had only seen a few times before in his life, and it was never worn by her. The first time was the day before the Uchiha Massacre when Itachi had given him one final genjutsu lesson. The second was when Shisui refused to be taken to the hospital on the cliff that night, just before his death. It was a smile that Naruto despised with all his being.

It was the smile of already accepting the inevitable.

Naruto wouldn't let her leave him the same way Shisui and Itachi had.

"What exactly is going on Mi-!" Naruto stopped mid-sentence when he saw the pleading look in her eyes. It was a look that he had never seen before, the tears threatening to spill from the corners of her eyes only added to the pleading feel that it expressed. He sighed as he made a decision that went against his better judgement. Actually that was an understatement, every fiber of his being was telling him not to say what he was about to, "...Just this once...but don't do anything stupid, okay?"

She didn't have a chance to respond, as Satsuki came running down the hall in the most beautiful white sundress that complemented her pale skin and dark hair perfectly. It seemed that the fashion show would be continuing after that brief intermission.

Naruto sent one last worried glance over to Mikoto, who was now staring at this new outfit with stars in her eyes. It appeared that she was no

longer concerned with their previous agreement and was going on as if nothing had happened. Women were so damned troublesome.

Though seeing Mikoto act in her usual manner did raise his spirits a bit and lift the weight that had been placed upon his shoulders by his previous worries.

As if nothing out of the ordinary had happened that day, the evening deepened into the night as usual for this little family.

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Death.

Death is indiscriminate.

It is the one and only truth of this world.

Good or bad, young or old, it doesn't matter. Death is unrelenting and equal to all.

That is why it is so terrifying.

However, there once was a clan that defied all those beliefs, essentially declaring war on the heavens.

A clan that seemed to be able to withstand incredible punishment to their body, mind, and very soul in battle or otherwise, known only to surrender to death when they knew there truly is no way of avoiding it.

Some even looked forward to it, rushing towards their demise.

Not because they had given up on their time in this plane, but to find out if they were really alive in the first place.

Any normal person would have been afraid of their death, but the members of this clan were often seen laughing or smiling greatly when they were about to die, as if they seemed to accept their death when they

cannot escape it and display no apparent fear towards the unknown.

Death was merely a sign that they had lost their battle against the heavens.

This was what led the Clan of D. to become known as the cursed clan.

From the time of their birth, they were the natural enemy of God and would continue to rebel against the borders of life and death for as long as they lived. As punishment for their actions and the actions of the previous D's, those that were closest to them slowly died one by one.

A cursed clan with a cursed fate.

The world was merciless like that.

It seemed that the current D's are still being punished for the crimes of their ancestors, the unfortunate history of Trafalgar D. Water Law and Portgas D. Ace is proof of that.

Though, it seemed as if the war that has gone on since the beginning of time was finally drawing to an end as there were only two final descendants of the Clan of D left.

Every D is related to one another, if not by blood then at least by their fates. As of now, it was more common than not for it to be the latter as all the families that pass down the initial "D" have died out.

Even if the bloodline of D has been extinguished, their flame has yet to disappear from this world...And in that way, even from far away and long ago, their will has been continually passed down time and time again.

And one day...Perhaps today or even hundreds of years into the future, all of it will be engraved into the history of this world.

Someday someone will appear, carrying all those centuries of history on his back, and challenge this entire world to a fight. Whatever the outcome of that fight, it will lead either the rise, or the fall of D...Their final stand. It will be the product of thousands of millennia in the

making.

Whatever the case, once D leaves their mark on this world once again, it will never be the same.

Not so different from a month ago, Konoha was bustling with activity.

Every single person, whether it was man, woman, child, shinobi, or civilian, wore a broad smile on their face. Just for today, the workers had taken a break from the final stages of rebuilding the village and were enjoying the festivities like everyone else. It wouldn't be an understatement to say that not a single person currently within Konoha's walls were in the streets or shops enjoying the mood that seemed to have swept over the village.

All previous problems had been forgotten, and everyone had chosen to be happy. A drastic change from feeling of the village this past week and a half. There was no festival being held, no special ceremony, no important event. The reason for the shift in mood was that earlier this morning, a new Hokage had been named.

The villagers weren't celebrating because they disliked Minato or they wanted him out of office, but because they were celebrating all the years that he had led the village in prosperity and the reign of a new Hokage who would hopefully do the same for years to come.

Uchiha Obito was certainly a shinobi worthy of following in Namikaze Minato's footsteps.

Obito was well-known throughout the village even though he had been absent from it over the past few years due to his duties as the liaison with Kiri. His reputation spread far and wide, being known as untouchable due to his signature fighting style. He was currently hailed as the strongest S-Rank shinobi within Konoha, as Jiraiya and Tsunade were getting old and Minato was now crippled due to the loss of his arm. He

was an excellent choice for the position.

He and Kakashi had been the only real candidates for the Hokage position and with how lazy and perverted Kakashi was, Obito was the only option that both the Hokage, the advisors, and the council would accept.

With the disbandment of his team due to each of their promotions to chūnin and the village's time of crisis, it was decided that Obito should take the position as soon as possible. Normally the ceremony would have waited until the village was rebuilt and until all of the shinobi in the field were back within the village's walls, but time was of the essence. Minato had lost one of his arms during the invasion and was currently unable to perform any jutsu besides his two signature ones and perhaps his fūinjutsu, therefore his strength had dropped dramatically. If Kumo of Iwa caught wind of his condition, they might have chosen it as their best chance to exact revenge for his actions during the Third Shinobi World War. If Konoha wanted to maintain its image of strength, a new, younger Hokage needed to be chosen as soon as possible.

Obito was currently sitting in behind his desk in the Hokage's Office. No matter how many times he had previously been in this particular room, it still felt strange to actually be sitting behind the desk and giving orders. Sure he had always dreamed of being Hokage when he was younger, but his illusions of what that the Hokage did were shattered when Rin died and because of what he had learned during the void period when he went missing.

That did not mean that he would reject the position though. If Kakashi were to be chosen, then far more injustices may be committed, such as how it was decided for the Uchiha to be dealt with years prior. Kakashi may have been his best friend, but the man believed in their sensei's

naïve ideals far too much. Peace, teamwork, having to endure all the suffering and pain that the world throws your way for the good of the village. Obito couldn't let this village be led along by lies and and foolish ideals any longer.

There were so many things that he could change now that he was in the position to. First off would be teaching the children about the realities of the shinobi world and how much they are risking by taking this path in the academy. Straightening out the fangirls would also be at the top of his list. While he personally didn't have a fangirl assigned to him on Team 11, which he was thankful for, he had seen many of them over the years and was classmates with quite a few of them. Every single one of them was dead now. After seeing Ino's and Sakura's performance and attitude during the preliminary stages of the chūnin exams, the sad truth of their existence was once again brought to the front of his mind. Then, though Danzo had disappeared years ago, Koharu and Homura were still causing problems in every one of the council meetings, yet Minato had done nothing about them. It seemed that it was about time for their retirement. The civilian council was also vastly unnecessary as most of the concerns in the village revolved around shinobi.

Ultimately, he would like to remove Konoha's evil ideology to make personal sacrifice 'for the village'. It was those very ideals had torn apart countless families and led thousands of shinobi to their untimely demise. It had also cost them phenomenal shinobi such as Uchiha Itachi and Uchiha Shisui. Obito wanted nothing more than to reveal the truth about the Uchiha Massacre to the public and bring all of the shadows into the light, but doing so would compromise Itachi's position within the Akatsuki and that information could save the lives of countless shinobi across the Elemental Nations. That was one thing that must be left in the

dark.

Though, those ideas would have to wait as he was currently assigning an important mission to the shinobi present in the room. The traffic flow of missions was continuous and slightly overwhelming at the moment.

Every able-bodied shinobi were being sent on field missions in order to maintain the balance of power within the Elemental Nations. The recent performance of the Konoha shinobi in the chūnin exams had only increased the amount of missions that were being requested of the village. Normally, this would be good. The village was benefitting greatly economically because of the excess missions being assigned, but at the moment they had less than their usual forces to take on these missions. Almost half of their forces had been killed during the invasion well over a week ago, and many other shinobi were still in the hospital suffering from serious injuries or recovering.

At the moment, almost every Konoha jonin and chūnin were out performing missions in the field. That was the concern for the current situation. In his hands, Obito held a report he received from a team of his shinobi that had been sent back via messenger bird before they were killed. And the message that the report contained was more than troubling. That was why he summoned the best shinobi he currently had at his disposal to the office.

In front of him stood Portgas D. Naruto, Uchiha Satsuki, Uzumaki-Namikaze Natsuki, and Uzumaki-Namikaze Narumi.

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As this mission was of high priority, two chūnin as well as two genin

would be given this task. However, there was still one member of the team who had yet to arrive yet. No matter how many times he tried to refuse her, the woman adamantly requested to be assigned to a team with two of the shinobi in the room. He ultimately relented after hearing the circumstances surrounding her situation, but he still felt that it was a bad idea.

All three of the kunoichi were dressed exactly how they were for the chunin exams. Though Naturo's attire seemed to be changing constantly as he once again donned a different outfit. Most shinobi chose to stick to a certain style and possessed multiple sets of the exact same wardrobe since they would become accustomed to the limits of that particular style of clothing. Naruto was dressed with his chūnin flak jacket worn open over his upper body with a three quarters sleeved mesh shirt underneath it. His lower body was equipped with his usual black pants and steel-toed combat boots, strapped to his back was his chokuto with his right arm was wrapped in white bandages from fingertips to mid-bicep.

"You called for us, Sensei?" Naruto asked as Obito rolled up the scroll he held in his hands. The four of them had only just entered the room a few moments ago. He and Satsuki had met up with Natsuki and Narumi in the lobby on their way to their summons. It seemed as though the four of them would be working together on this mission.

Naruto didn't really have a problem with that. If Minato was still in charge, the man would have made a big deal about them becoming a family again or using this as an excuse for the three of them to get closer to each other. Naruto found that he would have a lot less dealings of that kind of nature now that Obito had been appointed Hokage, it would surely save him a lot of time and trouble. Though Kushina would still be an annoyance, but she wasn't here at the moment.

"Yes I have a mission for the four of you." Obito told the shinobi in front of him before throwing the scroll at Naruto, which he effortlessly caught.

"It is a A-Ranked mission that needs to be dealt with immediately.

Though seeing as how it may require more manpower than we currently have, one other person has volunteered for this temporary squad."

Before Naruto could ask his sensei what he meant or even open the mission scroll, the doors to the office opened up and walked in a woman that two of the shinobi in the room were well acquainted with. Tied around her forehead was a Konoha hitai-ate, which was partially hidden by her long, silky black hair. Her pale skin and dark eyes made for the perfect combination with the usual jonin uniform, at which Natsuki and Narumi were staring in awe. She was yet another woman who was many times more beautiful than them. However, on her jonin flak jacket was the emblem of the Uchiha clan, signifying that this had to be their clan head.

Both Naruto's and Natsuki's eyes widened at the sight of Uchiha Mikoto decked out in all her shinobi wear. It was a look that they had never seen on her before, it was common knowledge to the two of them that Mikoto hadn't been on a mission since before she was pregnant with Itachi. After Itachi was born, she became the housewife and mother that she was today, if she hadn't then nobody would have raised the children since their father had obviously never been interested in the task. Though her strength hadn't diminished much over the years and she had been training so that she could protect her children if the time ever came for it, the two chūnin couldn't believe that she had been the one to ask for this mission.

"Mi-Mikoto-chan!/?Ka-Kaa-chan!/?" Were the simultaneous outbursts of Naruto and Natsuki as Mikoto nonchalantly walked into the room,

closing the doors behind her.

"Hello everyone, sorry I'm a bit late, but I only received the summons just now." Mikoto gave a small wave to the occupants of the room as she spoke in a sweet tone.

Naruto knew that she shouldn't have even been considering returning to shinobi duty, even if the village was in a state of emergency, with the condition that her body was in. He opened his mouth to voice his disapproval, but before he could utter a single word, the promise he made to her last night resounded throughout his head.

'What exactly is going on Mi-!' Naruto stopped mid-sentence when he saw the pleading look in her eyes. It was a look that he had never seen before, the tears threatening to spill from the corners of her eyes only added to the pleading feel that it expressed. He sighed as he made a decision that went against his better judgement. Actually that was an understatement, every fiber of his being was telling him not to say what he was about to, "...Just this once...but don't do anything stupid, okay?' Naruto closed his eyes and sighed deeply.

'You were always too smart for your own good, Naru-kun...This isn't like the last time I tried to keep something from you though...This time, there's no simple solution, no easy way to make everything go back to how it's always been...So just this once, could you leave everything up to me?'

If this was her decision, her way of dealing with things, then he wouldn't say a single word against it...Could this be considered as doing something stupid?...No, this wasn't anything of the sort...She wasn't walking towards her death, she was going to find out if she was really alive. Naruto gave a proud, yet sad, smile to the woman. She deserved the title of 'D' more than he did.

It's official, he had lost his mind. Strangely enough, he felt more proud than sad at the ominous feeling that she may very well be unknowingly replicating the actions of the descendants of that cursed clan...Then again, all D's were a little crazy to begin with.

"Do not worry Mikoto-sama, everyone else only arrived moments ago as well. Now please stand in line as I debrief you on the mission you are being assigned." Even as Hokage, Obito still kept his lighthearted approach most of the time. He had seen many of the horrors of this world and wished he hadn't know some of the things he did, but that didn't mean he had to be dark and serious all of the time. He acted the part when it was required of him, or the situation demanded it.

"Oohh look at you Obito-kun, acting all professional and dutiful. I remember when you had just joined the academy and already had dreams of becoming Hokage." Mikoto cooed as she held her hands to her cheeks.

A pronounced tick mark throbbed on Obito's forehead as he shut his eyes in frustration. "Mikoto-sama...We have no time to relive the past as this mission is of the essence...and it's Hokage-sama now."

"Hai, Hai, Hokage-sama!" Mikoto gave the Hokage a mock salute, causing him to sigh wearily. It was his first day on the job and already it was taking its toll on him. Seriously, how did the previous Hokage hold this position for so long when it was such a pain. Now that he thought about it, why would any sane person ever dream of becoming Hokage. It was far more trouble than it was worth.

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During their interaction, Naruto took the time to unravel the scroll that was in his hands. Naruto's eyes widened drastically as he burned every word of the mission parameters into his mind with his mismatched eyes. Were a team of two newly promoted chūnin, two genin, and a jounin that had been inactive for over two decades, really being assigned such a high profile mission?

Obito, after seeing Naruto's reaction to the mission, decided that playtime was over and it was about time to get down to business. "I see you've already taken a look at the mission assignment, Naruto, and the situation is just as dire as it sounds. We've recently discovered one of Orochimaru's hidden bases near the border between Hi no Kuni and Oto no Kuni. You are being tasked with investigating this particular base."

Obito waited until Naruto finished reading through the scroll, after which he rolled it back up and gave the new Hokage a nod to signify that he understood the mission parameters. Though, this debriefing was to inform every member of the team of the mission overview. The scroll that Naruto had just placed into his flak jacket pocket contained the more detailed version of the mission, including locations and the report that the previous team were able to send back before they were presumably killed.

"We have gotten disturbance reports from a small town just north of this hideout, called Banaro Town. Large amounts of Suna-nin and Oto-nin had been seen near that area over the past month. This is presumably where all of the shinobi of the invading forces had been taking refuge before making their journey to Konoha. This is most likely also how they were able to bypass the guards on the border without raising suspicion. If this base isn't dealt with, then Otokage shinobi will be able to come and go from Hi no Kuni whenever they please. I don't think I need to inform you

of how dangerous that is. Not to mention that they may have left behind sensitive information in that base, as was the case with Orochimaru's other abandoned hideouts." Obito clasped his hands together while resting his elbows on the desk and leaning his chin against his hands. "There is likely to only be more than a handful of shinobi remaining in that base. Their primary duty is probably to maintain it and conduct experiments for Orochimaru. It's likely that they caught the chūnin who had come across this base accidentally by surprise, so you shouldn't have too much difficulty dealing with whoever is still there. Your mission is to eliminate those remaining shinobi, recover any documents or information that you may find, and completely destroy the entire base of operations along with any evidence left behind." Obito spoke to the shinobi in front of him with the utmost seriousness. "I'd also like you to investigate Banaro Town, in case there are any foreign shinobi that have taken refuge in the town after the invasion of Konoha."

Naruto had been thinking deeply about the parameters of this mission. There were too many unknowns or additional factors for a group shinobi of their ranking and circumstances. Normally chūnin were only assigned C-Rank or B-Rank missions, with the occasional A-Rank if they were accompanied by a jounin.

"Wouldn't a mission as vital as this one usually be given to a team of jounin? And given that two of the shinobi here have already been marked by Orochimaru, is it really alright to send this team?" As Naruto said those words, Natsuki and Narumi subconsciously brought their hand to the cursed seal on their necks.

Naruto was indeed correct, Obito really didn't want to send a team to their deaths, especially his own genin team, but this was the best he had at the moment. Most of the usual jounin and jounin-senseis were

currently out on other A-Rank missions and in some cases, S-Rank missions. This included Kakashi, Kushina, Asuma, Kurenai, Jiraiya and even Minato had taken on a few missions. He may have lost an arm, but that didn't mean that he would quietly sit on the sidelines while everyone else did their part. The other genin of the rookie 13 along with Gai's team were also out on missions. Hana had even been temporarily put in charge of Team 8 because that was the team her brother was on. And with his parents still unsure of how to deal with him, Nawaki was still locked up in the psychiatric ward of the hospital. Therefore, the remnants of Team 7 had been temporarily combined with the newly promoted chūnin of Team 11. This only proved how the village was incredibly short-staffed at the moment.

"Normally, this would be a mission that a team of jounin would handle, but this is the best I can do at the moment. You are currently the most capable shinobi I have at my disposal and with this being a time sensitive mission, I wouldn't be able to recall any of the village's jounin in time...You're the only ones capable of such a mission at the moment."

Obito spoke sadly, this mission may be a bit much for a group of genin, chūnin, and a single jounin, but he was confident in their abilities and had no doubt that they would pull through in the end.

Truly anything they found that was related to Orochimaru was bound to be troublesome. However, any information at all about him was absolutely crucial, especially regarding the current questions surrounding him. Questions like 'Why had he marked three of the Uzumaki-Namikaze siblings?', 'How did he plan to get a hold of them now that he was no longer in Hi no Kuni?', 'Why had his face been able to peel off during his confrontation in the forest of death with the Hokage's children and with Anko?' and 'Had he been able to successfully create the immortality jutsu

he had been so obsessed with?' As of now there were far more questions than they had answers to, and every single one of them caused great concern.

"Naruto, you're lead on this mission." Obito said after a moment of silence, earning the surprise of several people in the room. They had expected Mikoto to be in charge seeing as she was the only jounin among them. "Normally the highest ranking or most experienced shinobi would be in charge, but seeing as Mikoto-sama hasn't been on active duty in quite some time, that leaves you, Naruto. You've led more than your share of missions under my charge these past few months. You're a natural born leader and I have faith you'll pull this off."

This earned a nod of the head from the only male in the room other than the Hokage.

Naruto then turned to the side to face the rest of his current team. "Do whatever you need to in order to prepare for this mission. Make sure to pack enough for a few days as it will take some time to get to our location, complete our mission, and return back to the village. Report to the main gates in one hour, and do not be late. We leave as soon as everyone has arrived."

Naruto received four nods of the head and a 'Hai!' before they Shunshined out of the room in order to prepare for their current mission. Naruto however stayed behind in hopes of obtaining some additional information about the current situation.

Naruto turned back to Obito with a troubled look on his face, something the man noticed. "Natsuki, Narumi...Have they even made their first kill yet?" Naruto asked seriously. If they hadn't this mission wasn't exactly suited for them and Naruto wasn't exactly looking forward to the prospect of having to deal with them after they did so. He hadn't had one

of those mental breakdowns after he made his first kill, but Satsuki and Hana had been a bit more sensitive to it. If Natsuki and Narumi froze up during the mission the price would be heavy.

Obito rested his head in his hand once again and was massaging his temples, trying to get rid of the headache that Kakashi and Kushina had left him with. "No...Kushina and Kakashi refused to take them on any sort of elimination mission or any mission where they may have had to take a life, even in self-defense. They've really only done a handful of C-Rank delivery and escort missions, aside from the one to Nami where they recovered the Raijin no Ken...I suppose Kushina was trying to mother them and have them retain their innocence for as long as possible...I really have no idea what Kakashi was thinking though, he should have known better, especially with what happened to our own genin team."

Now it was Naruto's turn rub his face in frustration. This was the worst case scenario for the current situation. He may have been better with fresh genin than ones who had been pampered. They've probably already adapted to the notion that they would never have to take a life or even have their own lives in danger on a mission. What could Kushina have possibly been thinking as a sensei!? Minato and Kakashi as well.

"What do you recommend I do prepare them for this mission. If they act purely on instinct when we get in there, they could wind up getting us all killed." Naruto asked with absolute seriousness.

"I don't really think they should be too hard to deal with. They are Minato-sensei's children and whether they want to believe it or not, they probably already have an inkling as to what the shinobi world can be like once they step away from how much their parents have been sheltering them...The journey to the the border should take quite some time, on the way their stop for the night and have a heart to heart talk

with the two of them as to what they're getting themselves into. Whether you like it or not, if it's coming from you they should be able to come to terms with it a lot easier." Obito spoke, remembering just how Minato had them prepare for their first kills. The man may have had an overly optimistic outlook on life and peace, but knew just how cruel the world could be, especially during war.

Naruto gave the man a small nod of the head, relaying that he understood what he had to do, before walking over to the window and looking out at the bustling streets of the village.

"Is there something else?" Obito asked as he glanced over at the boy.

"...This mission has something to do with those cursed seals doesn't it?"

Naruto asked. For an outsider this question may have seemed like it came out of the blue, but the sigh that Obito let out confirmed that the boy's assumptions were indeed correct.

The mission that Obito had sent that group of chūnin on was to investigate the appearance of strange humanoid creatures with monster-like appearances. Obito had originally thought that the townspeople of Banaro Town were either mistaken of what the creatures really were or were under the influence of a powerful genjutsu, so he had only sent a team of four chūnin to investigate. Only after he received the report they managed to send back before their mysterious disappearance and presumable death did all the pieces begin to fit into place.

"...Have you ever heard of the clan of monsters...?" Obito asked rhetorically. Philosophical or round-about conversations were not uncommon between these two. The nature of their relationship was not so different from the one that Sarutobi Asuma had with Nara Shikamaru, though instead of playing shōgi they merely had intelligent conversation over drinks or while seeking advice.

"...No, I'm aware of most of the clans within the Elemental Nations, but I've never heard of a clan by that title..." Naruto replied as he took a seat on the window sill, now facing his sensei.

"I wouldn't expect you to...They were a clan that was known throughout the world for their madness and how bloodthirsty they were. They came to light during the Second and Third Shinobi World Wars, but their existence disappeared as soon as it became known. After each of the wars, they suddenly disappeared, never to be heard from again...They were made for war, nothing more, and it appeared that they were well aware of that fact...The actual name of the clan is unknown, but they earned the title of the clan of monsters due to the physical alterations that their bodies can undergo. Their change in appearance is due to their innate ability to unconsciously absorb natural energy from their surroundings, however, the adverse effects of this energy and so much power flowing constantly throughout their bodies results in sudden and uncontrollable surges of madness, causing them to sporadically go berserk...We believe this clan is where Orochimaru derived his cursed seals from..." Obito lectured Naruto as the boy engraved each and every word into his mind.

'Senjutsu is one of my only glaring weaknesses...just great...' Were Naruto's thoughts as he heard about this particular clan's abilities.

"When activated, the cursed seal releases Orochimaru's own senjutsu chakra into the user's body, granting enhancements comparable to those of Sage Mode. The seal eats away at the user's own chakra to sustain its activated state, with possibly fatal consequences. As long as the user has sufficient chakra to sustain the state, he or she would then obtain additional chakra to perform skills they would have otherwise been incapable of due to exhaustion. However, this additional chakra is

separate and distinct from the user's own chakra, altering their chakra signature. Prolonged usage of the cursed seal can corrode both the body and mind of the user due to Orochimaru's chakra being present, making them more susceptible to his influence." Obito continued his lecture, as this knowledge may be beneficial to the mission that the team is currently undertaking.

"Though, not all individuals are compatible with these cursed seals, with incompatibility resulting in death. Orochimaru has averaged a ten percent success rate when applying these seals based on his first experiment with ten test subjects, out of which Mitarashi Anko was the sole survivor. Even if the individual survives the initial application, their body will not easily be able to control the seal's power, resulting in intense pain. When the user is unable to control or otherwise suppress their cursed seal, it can forcibly activate and begin draining their chakra whenever they attempt to manipulate it. Eventually, the power of the cursed seal can synchronize with the user's regular body through extended use, exponentially enhancing the abilities of their normal state."

"...You seem to be quite knowledgeable about those seals, sensei." Naruto really didn't know what to say from all that information. He had no idea those cursed seals were so complex and serious.

Though, he could now understand why he didn't say all of this with the rest of the team in the room. Natsuki and Narumi would no doubt panic if they found out they were hosts for a portion of Orochimaru's soul.

"Minato, Kushina, Jiraiya, and I have studied the cursed seal that was placed on Anko extensively, and more recently, the ones that were placed on Natsuki, Narumi, and Nawaki...We know the mechanics and innermost workings of the seal, but just can't find a way to remove them...If the clan of monsters is present at Orochimaru's hideout near

Banaro Town, then there should be extensive research related to the cursed seals there as well...If you can get a hold of that research, then we may be able to find a way to remove Orochimaru's influence, as well as find a way to trace them back to his location." Obito leaned back in his chair, thinking of how much of a headache Orochimaru was causing all of them. The Sandaime should have killed the man all those years ago, but instead he let Orochimaru escape because he couldn't bring himself to kill his own student.

"...How many of these clan members do you expect there to be...?" Naruto asked, going through scenarios in his head where every person on his team came back alive. If these shinobi were as dangerous as Obito made them out to be, then this could turn out to be quite a setback.

Obito sighed once more, it was hard to decipher whether this was good news or bad news, but it couldn't hurt to tell the boy. "Banaro town is only ten miles south of the border that divides Oto no Kuni, Yu no Kuni, and Hi no Kuni, though it is closer to the Oto border...There have been sightings numbering well over a dozen of their distinctive appearances." This elicited a groan from Naruto. "However, the clan of monsters appeared to be moving towards the border of Yu no Kuni and are presumed to be out of our territory as of now...but from the report that I already handed you, there is still at least one of these clansmen within Orochimaru's hideout."

Well, one was better than a dozen, but it begs the question, why did he remain behind when his clansmen have already moved on? This mission was getting more complicated by the minute.

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"Are you requesting that you bring one of these clansmen back?" Naruto asked with a raised eyebrow.

"...No, they're well-known for being mentally unstable, so bringing one of them to Konoha would be more detrimental rather than beneficial...Your mission remains the same, eliminate any of the remaining shinobi, recover any of the research you may find, completely destroy the entire base of operations as well as any evidence left behind, and investigate the town. However, if you run into one of these clansmen bring back a DNA sample once he is eliminated...And by eliminated, I mean eliminated. I want no survivors left behind." Obito spoke seriously, earning a nod from his former student.

Getting the information that he needed, Naruto quickly Shunshined out of the room to prepare for his long journey to the border.

Uchiha Household

Naruto immediately reappeared within his room of the main Uchiha household. Even after all these years, he still used the Shunshin that Shisui had taught him. His former sensei had perfected the jutsu beyond shinobi comprehension, as of now, Minato was the only one in the village who was able to boast that they were faster. No swirl of leaves, no poof of smoke, no bursting into a flock of crows, just simply appearing out of thin air.

His sudden appearance in the room earned an 'eep' from the woman who was sitting on the bed, and causing her to drop the tanto that she was running her fingers over.

"Taichou! Don't scare me like that!" Mikoto whined cutely, re-sheathing her tanto into the scabbard strapped to the small of her back.

Normally one would question why there was a person in their room when

said person should be preparing for a mission, but due to her playful personality Naruto simply dismissed her presence and moved to gather his necessary equipment.

"Shouldn't you be getting ready for our mission Mikoto-chan?" Naruto asked as he moved towards the dresser that held all his shinobi equipment.

While shuriken and kunai were common tool for a shinobi to carry, Naruto mainly used his sword for melee combat. It would be too much trouble to carry around excess weaponry when he knew that he wouldn't be using it very much, so the dresser only contained a few sets of kunai and shuriken each. He grabbed one of the pre-prepared sealing scrolls that had already been stocked with shuriken and kunai, placing it in the weapons pouch on the back of his right hip.

"I've already finished!" Mikoto exclaimed as she excitedly patted the scroll pockets on her flak jacket. She had most likely sealed several sets of clothes and any other necessary items into sealing scrolls for convenience so that she wouldn't have to carry around a large pack.

Many newly graduated genin usually carried around backpacks on missions due to their inexperience, whereas chūnin-ranked shinobi and above resorted to sealing scrolls as they were more effective.

This had not been the case for Naruto though, as he had made sure not to neglect his training in the art of fūinjutsu while he was still training on his own in the cave before he had graduated from the academy. Then later on, Obito had taught him more in depth about sealing and how useful it really was. Konoha had four fūinjutsu masters, Minato, Kushina, Jiraiya, and Obito. Though it was unknown how exactly Obito was so adept in the art, he seemed to have picked up knowledge of it during the period of his life when he went missing during the Third Shinobi World

War that even surpassed Kushina's knowledge, a woman who had grown up in Uzushio.

"...I remember everything that was said last night, but I can't just leave it alone...Why'd you request to be put on this team?" Naruto didn't turn around the entire time as he placed several blank sealing scrolls into an extra pouch which he attached to the back of his left hip, so he couldn't have seen the content look that graced Mikoto's face.

Though he may have not turned around because he didn't want to see that very look.

"Hm, it's important to spend what time you have with your family whenever you can...not to mention that before the invasion, things had been pretty boring around here. I mean, now that the other Uchiha children are living within the compound again, I go and check up on each of them and help them out when I can, but other than that there isn't much to do when you and Satsuki-chan are gone...I supposed that I wanted a little more excitement while I was still able to, you know?"

Mikoto gave Naruto a charming smile as he turned around.

Not just what she said, but the phrases she used were a little strange and out of character from her usual manner of speech. To most it would have sounded like she was talking about getting older and the previous generation taking their places in the world, but there was something deeper behind those words that was hard to grasp.

Naruto shook his head, dismissing the idea for now, as he grabbed another pre-prepared scroll, this one containing explosive notes, and secured it within one of the chest pockets on his flak jacket. If they were to completely destroy an entire laboratory, they would need the firepower to do so. Naruto could easily do so with his own abilities, but something like this was far more conventional and would draw less

attention from anyone else in the area, they couldn't be warning any shinobi taking refuge in the town that they were there. Within the scroll were forty explosive notes, that much explosive power could easily get the job done.

"Well, I'm all set we better get going before we're late...talking with Obito-sensei took more time than I had anticipated." Naruto offered his hand to Mikoto, who was still sitting on the edge of the bed, which she happily accepted.

She had only been expecting to be helped up, but instead was pulled into a passionate kiss as they stood there in the middle of the room. It took a moment for her to react, but she leaned into the kiss with just as much passion. She moved to deepen the kiss, but it seemed that fate was playing with them once again as they were cut short by a knocking on the door.

"Naruto-nii, Kaa-chan! We should probably get going soon to meet up with Natsuki-san and Narumi-san!" Were the Satsuki's shouts from behind the door. It appeared that she was ready to leave as well and had only been waiting on the two of them. "I'll be waiting out front, so hurry up and finish whatever it is you're doing in there!"

It would be rather awkward if she found out that her mother had just been locking lips with her brother figure, but lucky for them, she had most likely assumed that Naruto would be wondering why Mikoto was suddenly taking missions again, just like she had. Whatever the case, she was right. If they had gotten caught up in the moment like usual, then they would have undoubtedly missed the one hour deadline that Naruto had set.

"We'll be right out Satsuki!"

After giving a small peck on the lips to Mikoto, Naruto grabbed her hand

and led her out the door to meet up with Satsuki. He somehow had the feeling this would be a long mission.

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Konoha Main Gates

After trekking through the streets of the Uchiha compound where they greeted the younger Uchiha children who were playing in the otherwise empty streets, Naruto, Mikoto, and Satsuki finally arrived at the village's main gates, where Natsuki and Narumi were patiently waiting for them.

Natsuki had moved her sword from her back to her hip, in place of the sword was a medium sized backpack, which could also be found on Narumi's back. It appeared that neither of their parents had taught them even the basics of sealing, which was odd considering they were fūinjutsu masters. They probably didn't want their children to be capable of messing with the seal that kept Kurama at bay.

Now that Naruto thought about it, most of the other rookie thirteen were rather uninformed about the shinobi world, such as how they should prepare for missions. Though the academy certainly didn't help with that aspect. To them, being a shinobi was nothing more than a game or a competition. Kiba, Ino, and Sakura were the ones who fit this description the most accurately. This kind of mission would be sure to introduce Natsuki and Narumi to the harsh reality of the world.

"Oi! You're finally here! Hurry up, let's get going!" Narumi yelled excitedly from her spot next to the check-in for anyone leaving or entering the village. Completely opposite of her sister's exuberant reaction, Natsuki merely smiled and waved at the rest of the team.

A moment later, all of the members of the team were standing face to face with each other. Naruto figured he would have to relay the information he received from Obito sooner or later, but now wasn't the best time. It would be better to inform them of the complications of the mission once they were closer to their destination.

"Sorry, I had some additional details regarding the mission to go over with Obito-sensei. Did the two of you have to wait long?" Naruto asked as he opened up one of the pockets on his flak jacket and pulled the mission scroll out.

"No, we just arrived, it took longer than we expected to get ready. We used up most of our supply of kunai and shuriken during the chūnin exams and the invasion, so we had to pick some up on our way home."

Narumi spoke sheepishly as she rubbed the back of her head. She was a bit embarrassed that she hadn't been prepared earlier when they had first been called in to take a mission. She should have restocked on weapons earlier in the week, especially when she knew that she would eventually be assigned more missions because of the excess mission flow.

"Where is all your equipment?" Natsuki asked curiously after eyeing the three members of the team who had just arrived.

Satsuki reached into her weapons pouch and pulled out a single sealing scroll, holding it up for the two Uzumaki-Namikaze children to see. "We sealed all of our equipment away. Didn't your senseis or parents teach you anything about fūinjutsu?" She received a shake of the head in the negative from both girls before she continued talking. "I'm no expert in it, but basic fūinjutsu was one of the first things that Obito-sensei taught us after becoming a genin team. Most shinobi of the village use sealing scrolls when going on missions instead of carrying around larger packs." The two girls' eyes widened when they found out that their senseis and

parents had skipped such an important part of their shinobi training.

Sure, they were still genin and still on a genin team together, but if sealing was as important as it sounded then why hadn't they been taught it right after they became a team or even while they were still in the academy?

Now that they thought about it, both their mother and father were fūinjutsu masters, two of the only in the village, so why had they never spoken of teaching them in that area before. They had been offered training in ninjutsu, genjutsu, taijutsu, and even bukiyutsu, but never fūinjutsu. Why was that?

Only one thought came to mind.

'...The seal...!' Were the simultaneous thoughts of the only blonde and redhead in the group.

Naruto saw that their eyes had widened with realization, so he chose this time to interject so they wouldn't make a big deal of it later. "I see you've finally realized...They didn't teach you about the art they specialize in because they didn't want to give you the opportunity to alter the formula of the seal that holds the Kyuubi back. Whether that was the right or wrong decision, that's up to your own interpretation."

Leaving behind the two, now silent, girls, Naruto handed the mission scroll to Izumo and Kotetsu, who were once again on gate guard duty, that seemed to be their preferred position within the village. They quickly wrote down the names of those leaving in their log and stamped the end of the mission assignment next to the Hokage's stamp and signature. After which, Izumo handed the scroll back to Naruto.

With that part of the formal procedure completed, everything was set for them to begin their mission.

Placing the mission scroll back into his flak jacket pocket, Naruto stepped

back to face his team. "We're set, is everybody ready?"

He received a simultaneous response of "Hai, Taichou!" from the four females who he would be working with over the course of the next few days.

"The journey to the border between Hi no Kuni and Oto no Kuni should take just under two days. We'll stop later tonight once night falls, then travel the rest of the way all day tomorrow. I still need to brief you on all the details of this mission before we arrive in Banaro Town, so I'll do so tonight." Naruto spoke as the team payed close attention to his words.

After hearing that there were even more details for the current missions, most of the lower ranked kunoichi were confused. Usually it was their sensei who would deal with the finer details of the mission and they would merely follow along and listen to their sensei's orders, not that they knew that. They were mostly familiar with C-Ranked missions such as escort or delivery missions, those types of missions didn't exactly have too many discrete orders other than the main objective, however, most of the higher ranked missions did.

This was the first A-Ranked mission that Naruto and Satsuki had done since their time in Yuki no Kuni. For Natsuki and Narumi, they had never been on a mission that was ranked higher than B before. The B-Ranked mission was the one where they came across Rokusho Aoi and retrieved the Raijin no Ken, where the two of them nearly died, along with Nawaki. That was still a terrible memory for the two of them.

"We should get going now." Naruto spoke before walking out the gates and jumping into the tree-line, cutting off most of the kunoichi from their thoughts.

They quickly rushed after him, not wanting to get left behind.

Had they paid more attention to their surroundings, such as the shadows

cast by the large walls surrounding the village that had been rebuilt, they may have been able to see the distinct pair of golden-yellow eyes, belonging to a plant-like apparition, before it sunk back into the ground.

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Forest Within Hi no Kuni - Approximately Halfway Between Konoha and the Border

The entire forest was silent except for the crackling of burning wood and the occasional rustling of a small animal moving through the vast amounts of vegetation surrounding the area. The brilliant orange glow of the small fire partially illuminated the campsite and revealed five familiar faces, with each sitting on a vertical log, not too different from the logs that genin would be tied to during their survival exams.

The moon was full tonight and was shining down on them peacefully. It was strange, Naruto had always felt incredibly powerful during the night of a full moon. Perhaps it was because of the Ōtsutsuki chakra lying dormant within him, though seeing as how Kaguya acted as the core for them moon, it shouldn't feel like he was being protected by its very existence.

Even though the full moon illuminated the night, it had been decided that they should stop for the night. Natsuki and Narumi seemed like they wouldn't be able to go for much longer anyways. Their low endurance and lack of proficiency with how shinobi usually travelled only further proved that their senseis and the previous Hokage had been pampering them far too much. Even so, the group had covered more ground than had been anticipated, which meant that they wouldn't have to travel for

as long tomorrow and could start their mission late-afternoon at the latest.

Usually shinobi wouldn't risk having a fire where enemy shinobi could easily track their location, but Naruto was a sensor-type shinobi and combined with his Kenbunshoku Haki, it was nearly impossible to sneak up on him. Seeing how tonight was incredible cold, with the other shinobi on his team shivering and looking like they were freezing, it wouldn't hurt to have a fire this once. If he sensed anything other than an animal, he would extinguish it at once.

Naruto had been gazing longingly at the moon. He didn't know why, but it just felt like something was calling out to him from there...it was an odd sensation. Though he would need to save such thoughts for another time. After giving the moon one last whimsical glance, Naruto turned his attention back towards the four kunoichi sitting before him on the other side of the fire.

Their attention had been captivated by the roaring fire, but that was to be expected with how cold it was for them. It was an oddity for Hi no Kuni to experience such severe cold at this time of year, or really any time of year. He watched as their breath was able to materialize as they breathed in and out with their hands open and facing towards the fire.

"Now that we have some time to rest, why don't we go over the mission and its details?" Naruto asked rhetorically, successfully gaining their undivided attention.

"Didn't we go over those in the Hokage's office?" Narumi asked, honestly confused as to what more they could discuss in regards to their current assignment.

To them, they had been given simple orders. Eliminate the threat the shinobi posed, recover any documentation that may be there, destroy

Orochimaru's hideout, and investigate the town for any foreign shinobi that may be residing there. It was fairly straightforward if one thought about it.

"Do you really believe that would be the only information he would give us for an A-Ranked mission? Those were orders, nothing more." Naruto responded as he faced the blonde-haired girl.

Mikoto and Satsuki remained silent and were waiting for Naruto to relay to them information that would be crucial to the completion of the mission, but it appeared that the Uzumaki-Namikaze siblings were more talkative and impatient. Two qualities that were not the best fit for a shinobi, which was strange considering that they were both daughters of the Yondaime Hokage.

"The mission objectives we usually receive are pretty simple and straightforward. Wouldn't this mission be the same?" This time it was Natsuki who spoke up. Naruto had to resist the urge to roll his eyes at such a simplistic outlook on missions.

"...I don't exactly know what Kakashi-san and Kushina-sama have been doing as your senseis, but they obviously have not taught you the importance of information in our line of duty. Knowing the correct information could mean the difference between life and death, though when dealing with cases involving Orochimaru, you should always assume that he's one step ahead of you." Was Naruto's somewhat harsh reply to the girls. He didn't want to come off as arrogant or anything like that, but these two girls were starting to get on his nerves. He saw that Narumi was about to speak up once more, but he rose his hand to cut her off. "...Please remain silent and listen to the information that I have before speaking up again."

Naruto gave the two children of the former Hokage a glare that silenced

them. He waited a moment to ensure that no other outbursts would follow before continuing what he had intended to say.

"...While all our previous objectives remain and are just as important, the main purpose of our assignment is to recover any information that we can find about Orochimaru's cursed seals..." Naruto closed his eyes as he remembered his conversation earlier that day with Obito, though he would make sure to omit the portion where part of Orochimaru's soul is housed within those marked with the cursed seal. "This hideout that we are tasked with investigating and destroying...holds the origins of the cursed seal."

Naruto opened his eyes to see the reactions of the shinobi before him. They were as expected, eyes widened to epic proportions, jaws on the ground, and utterly speechless. The origins of Orochimaru's infamous cursed seals had always been shrouded in mystery, but everyone in the village knew that once you were marked by the Sannin, you were as good as his.

"The seal originated from a clan who possessed the innate ability to passively absorb natural energy from their surroundings. However, this constant surge of power within their bodies can be linked to their insanity and causes them to go berserk constantly." Naruto explained the short version of what they needed to hear for this mission, once again leaving out the part that they were known as the clan of monsters. The two girls would begin to constantly doubt themselves and question their humanity if they knew that fact. "The reason why Konoha shinobi were even in the area of our destination was because their had been sightings of strange humanoid figures wandering throughout the forests. The cursed seal has a second stage where the user can take on a strange appearance that greatly increases their power by giving them access to

Orochimaru's senjutsu chakra and ultimately his influence."

"These clansmen are also able to take on that form, albeit naturally, so it is far more powerful...Every single one of Orochimaru's higher-ranked subordinates is marked with one of these seals, giving them access to an almost unlimited source of power. When it their second stage, their power can be compared to that of a jinchūriki. However, this increase in power comes at a cost. Every time the seal is released, it corrodes the mind and body of the user, making them far more susceptible to his influence and ultimately turning them into his mindless puppets...There have been dozens of these clansmen to have been reported in the area, but they have been presumed to have left the country and are now residing in Yu no Kuni. Though the report that was sent back stated that there is still one of them who remained at the laboratory...If we can obtain the research on these cursed seals as well as obtain a DNA sample from its original source, we may be able to remove these cursed seals entirely as well as track the chakra they produce back to Orochimaru's location."

Naruto remained silent for a moment to let everyone come to terms with what he just said. It should be noted that Natsuki and Narumi were now clutching their necks and trembling slightly. They were most likely worried that they would eventually be consumed by the cursed seal just like Naruto had said. He would leave the questions and answers until after he finished everything he needed to say.

"...That's not all..." Naruto spoke up once again, bringing his team's attention back to him. "From what Konoha has found from Orochimaru's previous hideouts, they operate as laboratories for human experiments, prisons for human test subjects, research facilities, and so on. There are likely to be prisoners being held captive their as well as people actually

being experimented on. From the information we know, there are at least a handful of shinobi still in the hideout, but prisoners and such could number far more and they are likely to be enemies as well, considering their minds and bodies are likely to have been corroded even more so than those who had overused the cursed seal."

"In reality we have so much information on Orochimaru, yet none at all. We can't be sure which is accurate for this base and which is merely assumptions...What I'm trying to say is that we're essentially going in blind." Naruto wrapped up his long winded briefing with far more of a headache than he started with. He hadn't realized just how much of a disadvantage they were at until now.

He had edited major aspects of the cursed seal and its inner-workings, mainly because they weren't essential at the moment and would have caused Narumi and Natsuki to only worry about it further. Though, he hadn't considered what would happen if either of them were to get near the source of their cursed seal. It could immediately force them into their stage two transformation or possibly resonate with them, causing large-scale corrosion of their minds, inducing them into a berserk state just as the clan of monsters was prone to.

He would need to keep them as far away from the source as possible.

Then there was Mikoto and Satsuki. Satsuki was no doubt skilled, but she was still only at chūnin level and Mikoto was currently a question mark.

She was a jounin-level shinobi, but with the condition of her body he was unsure of her limits. That ruled them out as well.

Naruto sighed to himself. It seemed that he would need to be the one to retrieve the DNA sample.

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"Though the situation inside the hideout is relatively unknown, our mission remains the same. Eliminate every shinobi we come across, recover any and all of the research we may find, retrieve the DNA sample, completely destroy the base of operations as well as any evidence left behind, and investigate the town after the base is taken care of."

Naruto relayed the direct orders that had been given to him earlier that day. He suddenly stopped and gave Natsuki and Narumi a serious look.

"...And by eliminate, that means no survivors left behind. Do you understand?"

Naruto saw that Satsuki and Mikoto gave him a quick nod in response, but continued to glance at the two other kunoichi to see if they had come to terms with what they had to do...He didn't like what he found. He found himself frowning because the two of them looked absolutely appalled by what they had just been told.

"I-I thought we were only supposed to eliminate the threat they posed, not kill them in cold blood!" Narumi yelled, breaking the silence that had filled the forest. Had there been any enemy shinobi in the area, they would have surely been drawn in by that outburst.

"I agree with Narumi! They can't be exterminated just because someone has a problem with them...I-I can't do this! How would we be able to call ourselves shinobi of Konoha when this mission goes against everything that Konoha stands for?!" Natsuki argued. She didn't scream it like her sister did, but her argument wasn't lacking in passion.

Naruto could only sigh at the childish beliefs they were clinging to. If they weren't ready to take a life, then they shouldn't have become shinobi at all. Although being Minato and Kushina's children, they probably

glamorized the occupation for them and promised them that being a shinobi was about protecting their village and their precious people, nothing more. What a fine mess they had left him with.

Naruto shifted his line of vision from the two Uzumaki-Namikaze children to Mikoto and Satsuki. He merely nodded his, signaling that the briefing was done and that it would be best for him to deal with this alone.

Mikoto, seeing Naruto's gesture, chose to take the initiative. "Come on Satsuki-chan, why don't we get get some rest? Tomorrow will be a long day and we'll need to be at our full strength." Mikoto spoke as she faced her daughter and got up off her log.

She didn't receive a verbal response, only a nod from Satsuki, after which they walked into one of the two tents that had been prepared to get some rest for the night. They had already assumed that Natsuki and Narumi would have a problem with this aspect of the mission, so their sudden outbursts were not so surprising. They would leave Naruto to take care of the girls.

Once the two female Uchiha had left the clearing, Naruto reopened his eyes and faced the two remaining kunoichi with a look of absolute seriousness.

"...I can understand how you feel, actually it is expected for genin only three months out of the academy to hold these kinds of beliefs...That aside, do not, I repeat, do not use Konoha as an example of harmony, righteousness, and peace...You really think that Konoha has done no wrong...? How naïve and utterly foolish. Shinobi from Konoha don't have the right to talk about morality after all the pain and hatred they've inflicted upon the world...Not just other villages, but its own inhabitants as well...If you can't understand my words, then it only means that you

haven't seen the true face of Konoha." Naruto wasn't going to sit there and listen to nonsense all night, especially from two children who didn't know the first thing about the reality of the world they live in, nor have ever experienced true pain.

The harshness of Naruto's words made the two kunoichi falter a little, mostly because they didn't know what he was referring to...and that was what scared them. However, they still believed that they were in the right when it came to this mission.

"T-Tou-san would never allow missions like this to take place...He may not be the Hokage anymore, but he still holds the same power and influence that he did while he was in office!" Narumi continued to argue. Though it seemed that her sister wasn't as passionate as she had been before. Natsuki seemed to be in deep thought and even more withdrawn now. Perhaps she was able to comprehend the kind of things that her sister was too stubborn to realize.

"Minato is considered to be a butcher and a monster by Kumo and Iwa, you think he got that reputation by merely defeating his enemies?" Naruto asked rhetorically. He really wasn't good at these kind of things, so it was best to be straightforward. "These missions are nothing new, they've been going on since the birth of the shinobi system and even far before it. Your father assigned countless missions just like this one, and ones even more inhumane than this. Your mother and him probably went on countless ones such as this when they were younger...I'll be honest with you, as shinobi, you've been sheltered and pampered because you were the children of the Hokage and because your own mother was your sensei...On my first real mission outside of the village walls, I had no other choice than to kill dozens of shinobi from Yukigakure that were working for a corrupt Daimyo and I've had to take even more lives

after...This is the case with most shinobi, but Kushina has been mothering you and most likely forcing Kakashi-san to do the same because she doesn't want her 'babies' to lose their innocence or something of that nature."

Naruto took a breath to bring himself out of his rant. If he wanted to get it through their thick skulls he would need to remain calm and rational. If they were as naïve as most of the others in their graduating class, appealing to their belief that they should only take another person's life if their comrades were in danger should do the trick.

"Look...I don't care if you hate the idea of killing or hate me for making you follow through with this mission, but if you refuse to eliminate the shinobi you come across tomorrow it will cost the two of you your lives as well as the lives of your teammates...And I will not stand for you putting my teammates, the people I care about, in harm's way for your own selfish reasons...These people we're going to be dealing with, they aren't like the shinobi you've come across on your escort missions. They will be ruthless, inhumane, cruel, and use every advantage that you give them. Things won't be finished after you simply defeat them, they will get back up and come after you, perhaps even taking themselves along if it means killing you in the process. If you have even the slightest bit of hesitation, you're as good as dead."

The two girls didn't even try to argue what he was saying now, it was the truth and they knew it. Perhaps they had known this all along and had try to fool themselves into believing in their own fantasies. Or perhaps it was the academy teachers and their parents who led them to this line of thinking. Either way, they couldn't run from reality any longer. This was the life they had chosen.

After a long silence, one of them finally spoke up.

"...U-Um, Nii-san? What's it like...you know...taking a life?" Natsuki was obviously still uncomfortable with the idea of ending another human's life, but she had finally started to settle down and come to terms with what they had to do.

Naruto was a bit unsure of how to answer, his case wasn't exactly normal, but he supposed the two of them needed to hear his experience to be able to relate to how close all shinobi are to death. "...My first kill, I didn't really react the way any normal person would after ending a life. I didn't have time to feel remorse because we still had a mission to finish and if I had lost my composure at that moment, then the country may still be under the rule of a corrupt tyrant...Even after though, I never felt any remorse...Many would describe me as bloodthirsty or a monster, but I think my mindset regarding human life is really screwed up because of the circumstances of my childhood...I never really wanted anyone to know this but I suppose it may help you understand my way of thinking...Because I never really had parents who were there for me or even showed that they cared for me, I had always felt unwanted and worthless...It made me question if my existence mattered at all in the first place or if anyone was happy that I was born...I think it's because of those beliefs that I grew up with that I can't see the worth of a human life...My experience only illustrates that every person sees the world in a different light...Don't assume that every person will have the same views of the world that you do. Personal beliefs and ideals are derived from our past experiences, if you don't share those experiences, then your interpretation of reality may be different than another's."

The expressions on the Uzumaki-Namikaze girls' faces grew pained after hearing what exactly shaped his views on the world. Though in this case, hearing the experience of their brother did help them understand that

even if they didn't want to take another life, they had chosen this duty by becoming shinobi. They had always assumed that the person killing was the bad guy, that the one holding the bloody kunai was a monster and that the one dead on the ground was the victim, hearing that everything wasn't as black and white as they were led to believe really struck them deeply.

There was one simultaneous thought running through their heads as they thought about their brother's experience, 'Even if everyone calls you a monster, even if you hate yourself, I'll always be by your side.'

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Naruto seeing the pained yet determined looks on their faces told him that he should wrap things up before this turned into one big confession.

They also needed time to think on things as a person didn't come to terms with having to kill over the course of a few minutes.

"Why don't the two of you head off to bed? It'd be best for you to think on everything that was said here. I'll be taking watch, so don't wait up for me."

The two girls normally would have argued to remain with him for the night, but with everything that they had just learned it would be best to do as he said just this once. They stood up from their seat on the logs and walked towards the direction of their tent, leaving Naruto alone under the moonlight.

He may have just cursed himself with telling them as to why he viewed human lives as insignificant, but if the outcome was them getting out alive after all of this, then he would let it slide just this once.

Seeing as how there was no one left in the clearing besides him, he snapped his fingers, resulting in the crackling fire to be extinguished. He slowly stood up and leaped onto one of the tree branches overlooking their campsite.

There was a reason that he offered to take watch for the entire night, Mikoto and Satsuki knew this reason, on nights where he was in the unrestricted presence of the moon, whether it was full or not, he was incapable of feeling tired nor could he sit still for long periods of time. He came incredibly restless and his primal instincts were brought to their fullest, making it impossible for him to enjoy these peaceful nights like normal humans were.

He shook his head from these thoughts and merely closed his eyes as he bathed in the moon's illumination. He had yet to understand all the mysteries surrounding the Ōtsutsuki and the moon, perhaps he never would...

Near the Border of Hi no Kuni and Oto no Kuni - Orochimaru's Hideout
True to their plans, the group of two genins, two chūnins, and a single jōnin had made it to the border in the early afternoon and were currently preparing to commence their mission. Mikoto, Satsuki, Narumi, and Natsuki stood side by side at the foot of a large rock formation in the middle of a dense forest as they looked down at Naruto who was on one knee, using his sensor abilities to gather any information he could about what was currently happening within the hideout.

There was a general feeling of uneasiness circulating throughout the group, but they had only assumed they were nervous at how little information they had on the current conditions of their mission. They may very well be walking into a trap or whoever was inside was waiting for them to come since they had already encountered a team of Konoha

shinobi earlier in the week.

Mikoto and Satsuki both had their Sharingan active as they were simultaneously watching for any movement in their surroundings with their peripheral vision. If this really was an ambush then there may as well be shinobi who would aim to silence them before they could even catch a glimpse of the experiments that were occurring within the laboratories. Though, since they hadn't been attacked yet, it could be assumed that their presence had still gone unnoticed.

Through the combined usage of his sensor abilities as well as his Kenbunshoku Haki, Naruto was exploring every hallway, room, prison cell, laboratory, library, and research room within the underground confines of the base. The place was like a maze. He was forced to burn every human experiment, every dead and tortured body, every mindless monster into his mind for the sake of the mission, there were too many things which he wished he could erase from his mind just from one glimpse over the hideout. True to their earlier worries, this hideout turned out to be connected somewhere north of the border which explained how so many Oto-nin were able to bypass the border patrol stationed by Konoha during the time of the Chūnin Exams. This would take a bit longer than expected.

The good news was that there were almost the correct number of presences expected, just over a dozen researchers and shinobi, which were accompanied by only a few dozen or so prisoners, but judging from their chakra levels, they wouldn't be any real threat. And there was the clansmen from the clan of monsters. Naruto had severely underestimated just how powerful he would be. The amount of pure natural energy flowing throughout the man was enormous and the man was easily as insane as he was made out to be. Dealing with him would be a handful.

Using his strategic mind, Naruto had already divided the hideout, more like compound, into four floors and four sections. On the first floor below were nothing more than hallways and rooms, this was the first section. On the second floor below were the library and the research facilities, this was the second section. On the third floor below were the prison cells and the laboratories, this was the third section. The entire fourth floor below them was where the large tunnel connected Hi no Kuni to an unknown location within Oto no Kuni. Each of these sections were at least a quarter of the size of Konoha. They would need a lot more firepower than anticipated to level the entire compound.

It was getting late in the day, so most of the experimentation was finished and the prisoners sent back to their cells. This was good news for them as this meant that most of the researchers were in the research facilities compiling their data or in their rooms after retiring for the day. Most of the shinobi and researchers within the facilities were either on the first or second floors, with only the prisoners to deal with down below.

They would need to split up into three teams to achieve the most successful outcome.

Naruto quickly finished up his analysis of the compound and stood up, opening up his eyes in the process, his three-tomoed Sharingan blazing. This action caught the attention of those of his team, as their attention was now focused solely on him.

Naruto's Sharingan spun idly as he looked each member of his team in the eyes, implanting the images that he had just seen into their minds. It took a certain degree of mastery over the Sharingan to be able to do something as delicate as transferring memories, proving that Naruto had finally been able to master his implanted eye.

Each of the females recoiled from shock at the memories they had just received. Orochimaru truly was a despicable being for allowing such inhumane experiments to be conducted. Nevertheless, now that they knew the layout of the compound, their job became much easier.

Naruto's pair of mismatched eyes caught the gaze of Mikoto. While she had tried to hide it, he saw just how hard she had to work to keep up with them on the way here. Was her body really in such bad condition? But even though he was worried for her, he needed all the manpower he could get at the moment.

"Mikoto, you and Satsuki will be taking the second section. Do it quickly and quietly, after you've eliminated everyone on that floor, seal all of the research and information you can find into sealing scrolls." Naruto spoke to his lover as he tossed her one of his empty sealing scrolls that he had brought along specifically for this purpose.

Naruto then turned to the two Uzumaki-Namikaze females, who were trying their best to keep a neutral expression. Though their real feelings were given away by the slight trembling of their legs and their hands clenching into fists. They were obviously still a bit nervous about what they had to do, but they were even more disturbed by the images that had been implanted into their mind. Perhaps seeing how cruel and inhumane these people were would make it easier for the girls to kill them.

"Natsuki, Narumi...You will be handling the section right below us, the first section...Do not leave anyone alive, that is the mission that was assigned to us...Can I trust you two with this?" He had purposefully assigned them the area with the least amount of people occupying it.

While there were quite a few individuals in their separate room, most of the researchers and shinobi were in the research facilities going over the

data that they had gathered today.

Hearing their brother ask them so sincerely and depending on them so much, the two Uzumaki-Namikaze siblings quickly shook off any doubts that they held and nodded their heads vigorously.

"I will handle the third section which contains the prison cells and laboratories. The source of where the cursed seal originated is there as well, I will deal with him, so if you hear any commotion do not panic."

Naruto spoke calmly. With his assignment, all of the main sections had been taken care of and that only left the tunnel. "I will deal with the tunnel as well. With a little effort I can melt the surrounding walls and have it collapse in on itself, which will also ignite the explosives in the process."

Naruto reached into the pouch on the back of his left hip and pulled out the semi-large scroll that was pre-prepared with explosive notes. He unraveled it and unsealed five smaller sized scrolls that contained a set amount of explosive notes. He threw each member of his team one of the scrolls while placing the fifth scroll back into his pouch. After which, he ignited the scroll that contained the smaller scrolls until not even ashes remained. No sense keeping a scroll that would have only taken up more space and served no real purpose. He had a feeling that he would need every advantage he could get today.

Each of the scrolls contained fifty explosive notes. That would be more than enough to level the first three levels completely, however, the final floor was so large it would take a bit more than he currently had. He would need to deal with that personally.

"After you've eliminated all of your targets and gathered all of the research material, place explosive notes all over each of your sections. I will do the same. They are all set to go off automatically when mine do,

so make sure to return in no longer than thirty minutes." Naruto turned around to face the entrance at the bottom of the rock formation as a breeze blew through his short black hair. "When you've completed your separate assignments, meet back here...Now move out!"

With those final orders given, Naruto disappeared in Shisui's signature Shunshin, fading completely out of sight, leaving no trace of either his presence or his destination. He only made his exit this way because his destination was on the lower-most floors and him running through the halls of the compound would draw more attention than he would have liked.

The rest of the team stood their silently for a moment before Mikoto grabbed Satsuki's shoulder and they disappeared in their own Leaf Shunshin, leaving behind Natsuki and Narumi. Though the girls quickly took their leave on foot, seeing as how their assignment was only on the first floor.

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First Level Below

Within the narrow hallways with man-made stone walls, floors, and ceilings that were dimly lit by candles on the walls, giving it an atmosphere that seemed as though it was from a horror movie, Natsuki and Narumi were silently through the halls towards the section of the compound that contained the personal rooms for the shinobi and scientists.

After traveling down the long spiral staircase, making sure to spread out there senses to avoid any person they may come across to keep their

presence hidden, the two kunoichi were now racing down the empty halls towards their destination. They had yet to come across a single living being as of yet, even the main hall was completely empty.

Though, this is what they had been expecting. From the memories that had been implanted into them by Naruto, they were aware that most of the researchers were on the second level in the research facilities and most of the shinobi who were tasked with protecting this base, had retired to their rooms for the afternoon as all scheduled experiments for the day had finished.

The hall with the personal chambers for those who were stationed here were located just further down this straight hall, after which they had to take several turns. This place truly was a maze. The design was most likely for the purpose of confusing any intruders who entered the base, as were the dimly lit hallways and countless storage rooms they had passed. As the two girls reached the end of the straightaway, they quickly made a left turn down a much shorter hallway and then a right.

While Natsuki and Narumi were utterly inexperienced when it came to search and destroy missions, they were shinobi, who specialized in a fighting style that was meant to kill. They had been lucky to have made it this far without doing so yet, or perhaps unlucky as such a high-ranking mission had been assigned as their first one. And while they had massive reserves due to them being jinchūriki, Natsuki even more so now that Kurama was whole once again, they had been taught how to successfully suppress their chakra signature.

This type of suppression was unique to them since they had abysmal chakra control, this was done by completely cutting off the access to their chakra for a few minutes. This made them impossible to sense, except for sensor-type shinobi. However, this particular method also made them

unable to access their chakra for the time they were using it and even several minutes after they ended the suppression, as they had to let the chakra flow back into their chakra network.

They really preferred not to mention this, but they had to learn this method in order to capture Tora the cat. It seemed the cat was able to sense chakra levels at the lowest level after running from shinobi for decades, and because their chakra reserves were so massive, she was able to make her escape before the girls were even able to get within striking distance of it. They had failed the Capture Tora the Cat Mission over a dozen times. It was an embarrassment on their shinobi records that led them to become obsessed with capturing that damned cat for a short period of their lives.

After five minutes of continuous running and making all those turns, they finally arrived at the long hallway that contained the personal quarters.

This particular hall was different from the others. The hallway was much taller than the others, so much so that there was a complete upper deck where a second row of doors leading into rooms were. Off to the side was a staircase that led up to this upper deck. Instead of being dimly lit by candles as all the other halls had been thus far, this area was well-lit by lanterns, with a single lantern hanging from the wall between each of the doors. In total, there were thirty different rooms, fifteen on the bottom row and another fifteen on the second deck. Though not all of them would be occupied at the moment, or even if every researcher and shinobi were in their rooms. The design of the hall and the rooms were not so different from the ANBU Headquarters that they had the privilege of exploring when they were children.

Seeing as how they had finally reached their destination, Narumi and Natsuki looked at each other and nodded. They each formed a half ram

seal and discretely re-introduced their chakra back into their chakra network, successfully releasing their chakra suppression technique.

It had only been about ten minutes since they had departed from their team's meeting point, so there shouldn't be any additional people that had returned to their quarters. But to be thorough, they would cover those rooms after they had completed their primary objective.

Natsuki shakily reached down to her waist and unsheathed the pure white blade from its scabbard. As much as she disliked it, she would need to bathe the blade, white as snow, in the crimson blood of man.

She looked over to Narumi, who had pulled a kunai from her holster, and gave an affirming nod. "I'll take top, you take bottom."

Unable to respond verbally due to her heart being stuck in her throat from the unparalleled uneasiness and adrenaline, Narumi merely nodded in response before the two sisters separated to fulfill their promise to their brother. They would never take a life solely for the sake of their village, but they would as to not disappoint the person who had put his faith in them.

These stone walls would be painted crimson within a matter of minutes.

Second Level Below

Within a small, dark corridor leading up towards the research facilities, a small gust of wind coupled with the swirling of leaves was created in the middle of the hall, with the mother and daughter pair of Mikoto and Satsuki emerging from it only a moment later.

Satsuki stumbled a bit before leaning up against the wall and glaring at her mother for using such a violent and uncontrolled Shunshin. Mikoto rubbed the back of her head sheepishly in response to her daughter's reaction. The Shunshin was one of the easiest jutsus to preform next to the academy three if one had the required amounts of chakra control.

Though Satsuki was unaware of her mother's weakening body as well as loss of chakra control, as she was a bit more dense than her surrogate brother.

After recovering her sense of balance Satsuki remembered their mission and silently looked around the corner of the corridor into what she presumed to be the main research facility. From what Naruto had shown her there were approximately six people on this floor with low chakra levels, signifying that they were mere researchers and scientists instead of actual shinobi.

In reality, the two of them probably didn't have to be sneaking around like spies and could simply deal with them head on, but it would benefit them if the researchers only realized their presence after their lives had already been ended.

All six of the researchers should be in the facility compiling their data, with the library left completely empty. There were fourteen presences, besides the prisoners and their primary target, altogether. Six of them were on the second level and had been assigned to the two of them and the other eight were on the first level in the personal chambers and had been assigned to Natsuki and Narumi.

Naruto had been intending for the Uzumaki-Namikaze siblings to take this floor because it would be in an open area and would have less of an assassination feel to it, not to mention that there were less targets to eliminate, but due to their inexperience in this field as well as their recklessness, he couldn't guarantee the safety of the research if they were assigned this level. That was the determining factor in deciding which team was assigned which section.

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The research facility was easily as high as the Hokage Monument, easily noticeable by its high ceiling. This must have been the largest level due to the research and non-human experiments that were constantly conducted, day in and day out. What really drew Satsuki's attention were the large machines and pipes that were built on the far side of the room, taking up most of the area, and being overshadowed by the balcony and the railing. Then there were the researchers, each going over their respective data on what looked like large screens connected to machines with pictures, numbers, statistics, and charts on them.

This was strange. Satsuki only knew the basics of machinery and technology because they were used in hospitals for medical conditions that could not be healed by medical ninjutsu alone. They were used to keep the patients alive, read their vital signs, and help them breath, because a nurse or doctor couldn't watch over them twenty-four hours a day. Hana was quite fanatical about their usage and development, that was the only reason Satsuki was so well-informed about their purposes. Though she had never seen machines as large as these and they looked to be for a purpose other than medical purposes, evidence of this was that there were no medical patients in the facility. And just what were those machines that the researchers were typing into? Her scouting brought more questions than answers.

Satsuki quickly burned these images into her mind with her Sharingan before moving back into the corridor where Mikoto still was. It looked as though the people stationed here were researching more than the normal person could comprehend. If that was the case, then they couldn't just blow up all this important research and documents. These machines were

likely to be the only of their kind, so she and Mikoto should at least try to recover any and all information, not just regarding the cursed seals, that they could in the short period of time that they had.

"What'd you find?" Mikoto asked her daughter who was now fully back in the narrow corridor.

Satsuki's only response was to look at her Mother's Sharingan with her own, replicating the actions of Naruto, albeit at a much slower rate. After all the memories had been transferred, Mikoto could only stare at her daughter with an incredulous expression marring her face. In all her years as a kunoichi, she had never seen machinery such as this before.

Satsuki nodded vigorously after seeing her mother's expression. It seemed that the young girl had been enthralled by the devices that the researchers were working on, as her Sharingan had been replaced with stars in her eyes. She seemed to be voicing the words 'I want!' over and over again silently to Mikoto. She was acting like a child in a toy store, something not so out of character for her.

Mikoto also had a mischievous look in her eyes as she gave a small smile and a nod to Satsuki. She lifted up three of her fingers on her left hand, using them to slowly count down for her and Satsuki. Satsuki drew a single kunai from the holster on her thigh...three fingers...Mikoto unsheathed her tanto from the scabbard strapped to the small of her lower back...two fingers...The two female Uchiha looked each other in the eyes and nodded...one finger...They set aside and nervousness that they may have had in order to finish the job swiftly and silently...Mikoto put her final finger down just as the two of them disappeared from view in their own respective Leaf Shunshins.

Mikoto reappeared right behind the researcher on the furthest right-side of the room, as he was sitting at a screen behind his fellow

researchers on that side. She charged her chakra-conductive tanto with fire chakra as she covered his mouth, pulled his head back, and decapitated him as he finally realized what was going on and began to struggle.

The kill was delivered silently, so not one of the others in the room bothered to turn around and see what was going on. The blade of the tanto cauterized the wound as it delivered the only strike, therefore, not a single drop of blood stained the research documents on the desk.

She quickly jumped over the normal-sized desk and drove her blade into the head of the female researcher who had been steadily typing into her keyboard. The blade erupted out of her forehead, drawing only the smallest amounts of blood, as she displayed an utterly shocked expression on her face. She hadn't even realized she had been killed, so her brain was still recording the final moments of her life.

Since the desk the woman had been working at was facing a diagonal direction, Mikoto didn't even have to avoid the desk as she extended the fire chakra surrounding her blade until it grew to the size of a regular sword. The slight crackling sound caught the attention of the male researcher, who had been inputting some statistics into the screen in front of him, causing him to begin the motion to turn around. However, he was stopped dead in his tracks, literally, as Mikoto rose the ethereal sword above her head and swung down with a single, decisive strike, bifurcating the man in the process.

He had yet to process what had happened to him as he still displayed a neutral expression on his face before his body slid unevenly before falling to the ground in two separate directions and erupting in a fountain of blood. Though it should be noted that the blood splattered all over his chair, Mikoto, and the floor, while not a single spec landed on his

research documents.

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With those three successfully eliminated, all that was left was to wait for Satsuki to finish her side and start sealing away any and all research documents they could find, as well as any of the portable machinery. At the same time that Mikoto had arrived at her location, Satsuki reappeared just behind her own targets, however, they were on the complete opposite side of the room from Mikoto and the other three researchers.

Since her targets were clearly not experienced shinobi and were likely to only have the barest amount of combat and shinobi training, they were unable to sense the chakra buildup from her Shunshin, allowing her to easily sneak up on them.

True to her assassination mission, Satsuki covered the mouth of the female researcher that she had ambushed, preventing the woman from screaming, and plunged the kunai in her hand into the side of the woman's head, silencing her permanently. After a moment or so, Satsuki pulled the kunai out of the woman's skull and swung it to the side to rid the weapon of the excess blood that stained the blade.

Satsuki was by no means emotionless, a professional assassin, nor did she enjoy these search and destroy missions, but the first kill really was the hardest and everything after that was somewhat gray. She was aware that she had ended a fair number of lives in her career as a kunoichi, but they no longer affected her like they once did. Natsuki and Narumi would understand soon as well that taking a life was not as monstrous and

inhumane as they believed it to be.

Quickly maneuvering around the large and cluttered desk, while on the run, she pulled back her next target's head by his long hair and deeply slit his throat from ear to ear, causing him to gag and sputtered as the blood flowed down his neck and onto his lab-coat, causing him to slump over.

The final researcher hear his co-workers strange sounds and turned around to tell the man to quiet down and let him work in peace, however, he recoiled in shock at what he found. Just as he was about to let out a scream in horror, he found that he couldn't even utter a single sound. He clawed at his throat with his fingernails as he became unable to breathe, but it was to no avail. The shinobi wire wrapped around his throat was far too tight to ever be able to pry off with his level of physical strength.

Satsuki who was standing in front of his desk, but now behind him, about a dozen feet away, tightened the wire that she held in each of her hands and spread her arms outwards, causing the wire around the man's neck to forcefully tighten inwardly as it began to draw blood. As she continued to slowly tighten the wire, the wire around the man's neck became tighter and tighter until it ultimately decapitated him with one final pull. His head lifelessly fell to the ground as his body slumped over in its chair. With her targets having been eliminated, that marked one part of her mission as completed. Now all she had to do was collect all of the data, research, and documents from this room and the library, then plant the explosive notes. That and she wanted to take home some of those cool portable machines that the researchers were using, or at least bring back the schematics and data on them and what they did.

Naruto had given them only a single storage scroll, but his were different

than standard ones. The seal formula he used to create it was of his own design and was able to hold far more mass than scrolls that could be purchased in stores. Shop owners bought storage scrolls with inferior sealing arrays in order to force shinobi to buy enough to tore away all their necessary equipment. It may have been unethical, but it was business. Though, if you only bought blank scrolls and wrote your own sealing formulas on them, they were far more reliable.

His scroll coupled with the empty storage scrolls that her and her mother brought along would be more than enough to seal away all of the research held within the research facility and the library.

As time was short, Satsuki rid herself of the now bloody shinobi wire and raced across the large room towards her mother. It would be best to work together for the most efficiency.

Third Level Below

The third level below the surface could only be described as hell on earth. The entire prison sector was being consumed by flames as a lone figure serenely walked through the hall amidst all of the screams of agony and the ensuing chaos.

Crimson flames spread from the artificially created stone floors to the ceiling above, leaving not an inch within the prison sector untouched.

The bars of the prison cells that sealed of a person's chakra had already melted along with much of the walls, floor, and partially the ceiling. The earth above slowly dripped down to the ground below as it began to liquify. All of the prisoners besides Naruto's primary target had already been melted into nothing more than puddles of blood and innards. This method had been the quickest way of dealing with all unnecessary prisoners who were in his way.

Within Naruto's field of vision was the most secure cell at the end of the

prison block. It looked more like a vault in which Kages would store village funds or the most dangerous jutsu and secrets than anything. This only spoke as to how monstrous and uncontrollable the person inside of it was.

There was quite a distance between the first two levels and the last two levels, as it took quite a bit of chakra to Shunshin from the surface to his current location. It was roughly five miles below the surface. Orochimaru probably designed this hideout with the fact that there was a town close by in mind, therefore those on the surface would be unable to hear the screams of the prisoners being experimented on, whether willingly or unwillingly. He also would want his researchers to be as far away as those mindless creatures at all times, other than when they were conducting human experiments. From what Naruto had already witnessed from the appearance of those behind the bars, the experiments conducted daily must have been horrendous and far beyond inhumane. He may have just been doing them a favor by ending their lives when he did.

Naruto didn't extinguish his flames like he usually did after finishing the job, instead he let them burn and eat away at any and all surfaces within the large hall since he would need to destroy this place anyway and it didn't take any extra chakra of natural energy to keep the flames burning.

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Naruto finally made it to the most secure prison cell, and his destination. The thick steel door didn't have chakra sealing bars like the other cells did, in fact it was impossible to fully seal off a person's body from natural

energy alone since it was such an unknown and mysterious energy. The closest thing Orochimaru had ever come to developing something of that nature were his cursed seals that temporarily restricted movements, making any chakra or natural energy useless. The door had no access to the outside world, or at least no way to see out of the cell, with a single handle, and four separate locks, after which it was chained off in a X-like fashion.

'...Someone really didn't want this guy to ever see the light of day again.' Naruto thought as he looked at what he assumed to be overkill on the security of his prison cell. This guy had stayed behind in this hideout willingly, and yet they locked him up as if he was a threat to the people around him...Or perhaps he really was that insane.

Naruto stood there silently as he heard a voice talking to itself behind the door.

"Kill...Kill...A man...The Next one I kill will be a man after all...No a woman...If the next one who comes through that door is a woman, I'll kill her...No, a man would put up more of a fight...Alright! It's decided. If the next one who comes through that door is a man, I'll kill him." A deep voice whispered obsessively to itself.

Hearing that whispering satisfied most of Naruto's curiosity. The obviously male voice was heavily laced with insanity and bloodlust. Whatever came out after he opened this door would be a real pain in the ass to deal with. Just once he would like to not be paired up against the insane and creepy ones ones. First it was Doto, then Kabuto, then Nawaki, followed by Gaara, and now this guy.

He really did have the worst luck.

Seeing as how he didn't have the necessary keys in his possession, Naruto placed his right hand on the door and produced an excess amount of heat

from the palm of his hand, melting the thick steel in a single moment.

The steel liquified and flowed down to the floor just as quick, only leaving a few strands behind, and revealing Naruto's face to whoever resided within the confines of the cell.

"Jackpot! I'll kill you!" The voice roared as soon as he caught a glimpse of Naruto's appearance.

Before Naruto could even adjust his eyes to the darkness of the prison cell, he was forced to cross his arms in front of his body to lessen the impact of the monstrous fist that was heading straight towards him.

There was no time to avoid the strike, nor was there any time to coat his arms with Haki, it was all up to physical strength and durability at the moment.

Naruto felt the bones in his forearms scream in agony as a cracking-like feeling erupted throughout the entirety of both his arms before being launched into the wall directly behind him, creating a small crater with many spiderweb cracks now marring its complexion.

'...Just what the hell was that...?' Naruto questioned himself rhetorically as he pulled himself out of the wall and felt his blue flame's regenerative properties repairing the extensive damage done to his arms by a single strike.

What he saw emerge from the room was a tall, muscular young man with spiky orange hair and red-orange eyes, or what normally would have been a pair. His left eye was currently a vibrant yellow color with a black sclera and the entire left side of his body was a pale gray color while his left arm took on the form of an enlarged fist with various spikes jutting out from all sides and moving upwards towards his bicep. Unsurprisingly, his eyes had a crazed and murderous look within them.

'...And this must be the what the second stage of the cursed seal looks

like...Or rather, for him, his natural transformation.'

Naruto spit out a bit of blood after turning his head to the side. Against a user of natural energy like the people from this clan of monsters, his intangibility would easily be negated by their every strike. Naruto had greatly underestimated the pure physical strength of his opponent once again, add to that the fact that he is at a disadvantage because he couldn't use any of his larger and more powerful techniques due to their position in the confined hallway, it was clear things weren't looking up for Naruto.

Then there was the fact that he still had to search the laboratory and bring back a DNA sample of this man. That meant Naruto couldn't just destroy this entire floor, he was already walking a fine line as it was with the flames he had already produced. His options really were quite limited at the moment.

While he had not neglected his taijutsu training completely, he would be the first to admit that not fighting a foe who could actually touch him for such a long time caused him to slack off on the intensity of his physical training more recently. He now questioned how he could possibly come to such a conclusion.

"And who might you be?" Naruto asked as the marks on the man's body spread even further across his body until it was covering him completely.

"It doesn't matter, because you're gonna die right here!" Jūgo yelled maniacally, not that Naruto was aware of what his real name was.

Naruto jumped into the air and used Jūgo's shoulder as a stepping stone before jumping even higher in the air to the side of the man while he coated his arms with Busoshoku Haki, as Jūgo sent a punch towards the wall he had been previously standing in front of, shattering it completely and causing some debris from the ceiling to collapse.

Naruto was forced to land while dodging the falling debris as Jūgo didn't seem to care in the slightest about the danger he had just put them in and raced after Naruto once more. He outstretched his left arm to his side and forced a large axe blade to form on the side of his forearm by utilizing the unique abilities that his passive natural energy granted him.

Naruto drew his chokuto from his back and coated it with Haki as well.

Any normal weapon would have broken from the natural energy surrounding that axe, but Haki should even the odds in a straight duel.

Naruto's blade met Jūgo's in the middle and caused shockwaves to ripple throughout the room and shatter some of the smaller pieces of rubble that were now scattered across the floor. Naruto was the first to pull back, causing Jūgo to recoil in the process, as he switched his sword into a reverse-grip and swiped the blade across the orange-haired man's abdomen. However Jūgo had managed to lean back in time so that only a shallow slash wound made its way onto his stomach, but the sight of his own blood made him even more excited as he hadn't found anyone who was capable of wounding him since Kimimaro.

In response to the flesh wound he received, Jūgo brought his fist down hard, on Naruto's head slamming him into the ground before the raven-haired teen had a chance to react. While the wound had only been a flesh wound for Jūgo, he only thought that way because of the regenerative properties that his body granted him. In reality, the slash that he was just dealt was only an inch or two away from severing his spinal chord and rendering him incapable of movement. It would only be natural for Naruto to expect the match to be over after his opponent had received a fatal wound such as that, however, Jūgo was able to regenerate within the span of a single moment.

The ground split into spiderweb-like cracks as the full force of Naruto's

body combined with the extra push from Jūgo impacted the ground.

Naruto clenched his teeth to prevent himself from coughing up too much blood, but a small amount still made its way onto the ground as it spilled out of back of his mouth.

'...Damn...this guy outclasses me physically in every possible way...I won't be able to stay conscious if I take to many more hits like that one.'

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Naruto was only flat on the ground for the same amount of time it took Jūgo to regenerate from his last wound. As Jūgo was laughing maniacally, thinking that he had already won, Naruto pushed himself up off the ground and delivered a Haki enhanced uppercut to the man's chin, sending him high into the air and back a dozen or so yards.

This had been the most amount of hits that Naruto had taken in years and the lack of regular pain was starting to catch up with him. He shakily stood back onto his own two feet as he stared into the eerie yellow eyes of Jūgo, whom was already back on his feet, looking as bloodthirsty as ever, even after taking such a heavy blow.

The two rushed at each other again, Jūgo intent on slaughtering the man before him. He fought more like a wild beast than a shinobi, though it was working for him magnificently with his pure strength making up for his lack of elegance. Naruto sent a slash towards the man's chest, but it was effortlessly blocked by the axe-blade that was now his arm. As Naruto was now stopped in his tracks at the moment, Jūgo transformed his other arm into a piston-like shape to increase the force of his fist and slammed it into Naruto's gut, forcing him to cough up a mouthful of

saliva before being flung into another wall.

After regaining the feeling of his body, coupled with the incredible feeling of pain coursing through it, Naruto pulled himself out of the wall and stared distastefully at the man who had not yet moved from his previous position. He was really getting tired of being thrown around like a rag-doll. This was the first time that he had been so outmatched physically and he could honestly say he hated it. Was this how every other opponent facing himself felt before?

Jūgo's body started to transform once again, as many jet-like appendages formed on his exposed back and began expelling large amounts of chakra from them. Jūgo immediately blurred out of sight using the incredible speed boost that those boosters gave him.

In such a confined space with his opponent moving as fast as he was, Naruto was barely able to track him with the Sharingan, and even then he could only react fast enough to bring his sword up to block the axe-blade that was being aimed straight for his head. However, the speed Jūgo was moving at was the decisive factor as it cut right through Naruto's blade, but was offset just enough to miss its target altogether. However, as soon as Jūgo was forced off-balance by missing his target, he disappeared from sight once more. A strike came from behind Naruto, but he swiftly sidestepped it, though he didn't have the chance to counter strike as his opponent was gone once again. The raven-haired chūnin ducked a swing of the axe-blade once more, but this time he managed to grab Jūgo and kick him upwards with a kick. Though once in mid-air he disappeared from sight once more before appearing across the hall from Naruto only a short distance away.

He was panting heavily as he retracted the boosters into his back and stopped the chakra flow to them altogether. It seemed that form took

quite a toll on him, so much so that prolonged use of it was out of the question. It normally would have been so fast that any opponent would have been finished with a single strike, this would have been the case with Naruto as well, had he not been using his Kenbunshoku Haki.

"You're different from the others I've fought! But I'll kill you all the same!" Jūgo yelled as his arm changed from the axe-blade he'd been so fond of up until now into something that may very well be more powerful. This time, large jet boosters, similar to the ones that had been on his back until just a minute ago, grew from the length of his forearm to his shoulder facing backwards. They were most likely used to make any punch that he threw dwarf Tsunade's super strength by a wide margin.

"Kassokuken: Ichishiki (Piston Fist: Style One)!" Jūgo roared as chakra was propelled out of the large boosters on his arm, sending him forward at incredible speeds with his right arm outstretched to deliver the finishing blow.

At the moment, Naruto didn't really have a lot of options on how to deal with the maniacal monster being propelled right at him. At least, that was before his right leg accidentally kicked his broken sword that he had dropped earlier.

"What the hell." Naruto shrugged, seeing as he may as well attempt the idea that came to mind. He stomped on the blade of the broken chokuto, causing it to flip into the air until Naruto swiped his right hand in its direction and gripped it tightly. He flared the chakra from the tenketsu points in his right forearm, forcing the bandages wrapping around them to loosen and fall to the floor, revealing a large seal in the shape of a pitch-black Chinese dragon, with its head on Naruto's hand and the rest of its body wrapping continuously around his arm until it reached his

bicep.

"I hate to use this technique, I find it devoid of any style or elegance, but it seems that you prefer our little meeting to end messily whether I use it or not." Naruto said as he took an offensive stance with his left shoulder facing forward as Jūgo was finally within striking distance of him.

Just as an extra boost of chakra propelled Jūgo's fist forward even faster, Naruto's channeled the power granted to him by the seal with his own, coating his sword with malefic green and black flames, increasing the cutting power of his sword exponentially as these particular flames were as hot as the surface of the sun. With a swift movement, Naruto sliced vertically through Jūgo's arm before sending another slash, bifurcating him horizontally, after which he blurred out of sight, appearing behind Jūgo.

"Kokuryū Zan no Tachi (Darkness Dragon's Remnant Longsword)!" As Naruto spoke the name of the technique, Jūgo's still-standing body split into over a dozen different pieces, illustrating just how fast the technique truly was. Because of how powerful those flames were, the dismembered pieces of the man's body were instantaneously ignited with the malicious green and black flames, as they threatened to disintegrate the remains. Naruto quickly extinguished the flames that covered the body as well as the flames that were coating his sword.

He had nowhere near mastery over these particular flames, in reality, he was only able to control and withstand these without getting burned because they were a combination of the darkness flame and his own. For him to obtain full mastery over the darkness flame, he would need to fully consume it, something that may very well kill him in the process.

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After Naruto had verified that the remains were still workable, he glanced at what was left of his blade and sighed. While the blade had been previously rendered unusable, it was now almost completely melted within the palm of his hand. He turned the palm of his downwards and kept his hand open so that what remained of his blade was discarded onto the ground. He would need to get his hand on a sword that was able to withstand the heat of his techniques. He was actually surprised that it lasted as long as it did by just being in the general vicinity of his flames. He also unstrapped the scabbard that was resting on his back and discarded it as well. No sense in keeping something that would only slow him down.

Naruto quickly let the phoenix flames within his body heal him to the best of their ability, so that all of his bones were regenerated and he was able to move properly again. Whoever it was that he was fighting packed a punch, it felt like the entire Hokage Monument had been dropped onto his back.

The raven-haired boy, who was now partially covered by blue flames as they were doing their job, walked over to the dismembered remains of Jūgo and pulled out one of his empty storage scrolls. He bent down on one knee as he picked up each piece of the man, one by one, and sealed them within the scroll, and successfully completing a portion of his assignment.

While the fight seemed to go on for hours, it had only been a few minutes due to how fast-paced and intense it was. There was still plenty of time before the explosive notes were set to go off automatically, that was why they had set the time constraint before entering the hideout. With those

thoughts in mind, Naruto limped towards the section of this level that contained the laboratory while his flames continued to regenerate him, albeit at a much slower rate.

Even with his body broken, he still had a mission to complete.

Fourth Level Below

After searching the entirety of the laboratory on the level above and recovering many documents pertaining to the cursed seals and setting the explosive tags all over its vicinity, Naruto had finally made it down to the fourth and final level of the compound.

Level wasn't exactly an appropriate word to describe it, as the entire floor only had the large staircase leading up to their level and a large, dark tunnel that was lit only by lanterns as it went on for miles, perhaps even further than that.

The tunnel was easily a quarter of the size of all of Konoha and was surely capable of holding all of Orogakure's invading forces. This area was definitely how so many Oto-nin got past the border and where they planned the final stages of the invasion during the one month reprieve between the preliminary exams and the final exams that was given to prepare for the chūnin exams.

Naruto spread out his senses using his sensing abilities and Kenbunshoku Haki to find the status of his teammates before he decided on how to deal with his current situation. He smiled when he found that all of the explosive notes had already been planted with Narumi and Natsuki already back at the designated meeting place and Mikoto and Satsuki making their way up the final flight of stairs at the moment.

Seeing that almost all of his team was out of the hideout, Naruto made a cross-shaped hand seal and created ten Kage Bunshin (Shadow Clones), after which he threw the scroll with his leftover explosive notes to one of

them, after which, they took off running into the darkness of the tunnel.

Since he had the scroll in his possession when he created the clones, they also had a copy of the scroll and would be able to plant those explosive tags as well to cover the distance of the tunnel. Since he had melted over half of the third floor, he only needed to use half of the explosive tags there coupled with the fact that when they went off it would collapse inwardly from the explosions above and below it. This gave him a surplus of explosives to use down here.

Though those tags would be planted further down the hall by his clones. Jinchūriki were the optimal users of the Kage Bunshin no Jutsu (Shadow Clone Jutsu) because of their vast chakra reserves, but almost every shinobi in Konoha who was jounin level knew the technique and were capable of making at least ten to fifteen clones. Couple his large chakra reserves with the fact that he was an Uzumaki and he could easily use this technique better than anyone, minus jinchūriki.

Naruto's scroll had contained approximately twenty-five explosive tags, which he had given to one of the clones he had produced. Due to them being exact copies of Naruto, each of them also possessed a scroll that contained twenty-five explosive tags. This added up to two hundred seventy-five explosive tags, such a large amount of explosives were enough to destroy a majority of Konoha. It should be more than enough to cause this tunnel to collapse.

Though since he couldn't tell exactly how long the tunnel reached since his Haki didn't have that kind of range yet, he had assigned the clones to take care of the middle and far end of the tunnel and leave him to deal with this section.

Seeing as how his clones were finally out of range from his senses, he closed his eyes and began expelling large amounts of heat energy from

his body. No flames were given off because he didn't want to risk any of the explosive tags in the vicinity going off prematurely, so he merely increased the temperature of the flames that made up his body, giving off heat ranging far above what any normal human could withstand.

Nothing happened for a few moments as the heat continued to be emitted, but then the bonds that held the walls, ceiling, and ground in place began to weaken and slowly but surely melt off into a magma-like substance or make the surrounding surfaces especially malleable. This went on for a few minutes at such a rate that the walls would have collapsed if they were even touched with the slightest amount of force. That should be more than enough to ensure that the passageway was rendered unusable in the future.

Leaving everything else up to his Kage Bunshins, Naruto faded out of sight, signifying that he had disappeared in his favored Shunshin.

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Surface

Naruto reappeared at the surface in a matter of seconds, surprising two of the kunoichi who were waiting their patiently.

Naruto looked at Satsuki and Mikoto and noticed that they had excited smiles on their face, suggesting that they had found something quite interesting within the reasearch facilities or library. He hadn't expected them to be affected by the elimination mission because it was something that they had done countless times before, in Mikoto's case, and at least a few times before for Satsuki. He would make sure to inquire later as to what they were so ecstatic to have in their possession.

Naruto then shifted his gaze towards the blonde and redhead of the group and smiled softly at what he found.

Narumi looked like she was bathed in remorse and trying to figure out whether they were in the right or the wrong with what they did, but other wise she had come out unscathed. He wouldn't say anything at the moment and let her adopt her own views on the kind of mission they had just done. It was best to let her come to her own conclusion rather than force her into his own line of thinking and reasoning, as any other team leader would have done.

Natsuki, on the other hand, was calmly cleaning off the blood that stained her snow-white blade with a cloth that she kept in her weapons pouch. She didn't seem to be too bothered or even shaken up by the fact that she had just taken several lives. Naruto studied her for a few moments before shrugging his shoulders. Sometimes the first kill put everything in perspective for a person. Or perhaps cleaning her sword was just a way to calm her nerves as she thought everything over. Either way, the two girls were in far better mental condition than he had been anticipating. He was glad that the two of them made it out of there alive. Having them not sobbing over the lives they had taken and forcing him to comfort them was definitely a preferred outcome.

The sound of Naruto's footsteps approaching earned the attention of the Uzumaki-Namikaze siblings, whose faces contorted in shock and horror as they saw the condition that their brother was in.

True enough, Naruto's figure was drenched in blood, however, most of it had been Jūgo's. That didn't take away from the bruising and gashes that marred his frame from their encounter though. As soon as his broken and shattered bones had been repaired, Naruto had cut off his use of the phoenix flames, seeing as how his use of them was limited as of now.

"Nii-san...! Wha-What happen-!" Natsuki started to panic as she saw all the blood, but was cut off as Naruto raised his hand up with a tired expression on his face.

"I don't want to talk about it...I finished my part, that's all that matters."

Naruto was a bit disappointed in himself that his current condition had been the result of only taking a few heavy punches. While that man had been incredible strong and natural energy was one of Naruto's few weaknesses, the course of that battle still left a bad taste in his mouth. In the shinobi world, whoever is the one left standing is the victor, no matter the means, but Naruto didn't feel the same way. He could never claim that the outcome of that match had been his victory.

From the tone of his voice and how he avoided the question, it was clear that it was something that he preferred to have left alone. The four kunoichi understood that as they had all done things that they had wished they didn't have to on this particular mission.

"...Why don't we finish up our business here and then move on to the town then?" Mikoto suggested, honestly tired of being in the same vicinity as Orochimaru's compound. She couldn't seem to get the images that Naruto had implanted into her as well as a lot of what she found in the reports she came across out of her head.

Naruto nodded at the suggestion and went through a dozen or so hand seals which erected a large, light blue colored silencing barrier to limit the exposure of the explosion to the outside world. The hideout was located far enough away from the town that it was possible for it to go unnoticed, but he erected the silencing barrier just to be cautious.

"I want the four of you to head into the forest and get away from here, I don't know how large the blast radius will be or even if it will have any result on the surface." Naruto spoke to the kunoichi.

That clearly was not accepted by a few of them. While Stasuki and Mikoto didn't know the full extent of his abilities or even how he was capable of doing such, they knew he wouldn't die from a simple explosion such as this. Natsuki and Narumi were more weary of the situation.

"B-But what about you?!" Narumi had gotten over her previous feelings of remorse to address such a crazy plan.

"I need to stay behind to start the chain reaction of the explosive tags as well as detonate my clones." Naruto spoke calmly, not at all worried that his life was in danger. Even if it was, an explosion couldn't be able to physical harm him like Jūgo had. "I can assure you, I'm in no danger here."

"B-But" Natsuki tried to interject, but was cut off when she felt Mikoto's hand on her shoulder.

"Naru-kun will be fine, he's the mission leader and we still have a mission to complete. He can't just go get himself killed leaving us with all the work, can he?" Mikoto asked jokingly. Seeing Natsuki's expression relax, Mikoto started pulling her away while Satsuki did the same with Narumi.

"Now let's follow his orders and put out faith in him."

The two hesitant girls nodded as the Uchiha females Shunshined them out of the area, leaving Naruto behind to finish the destruction of the base.

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"Those two always were a pain in the ass..." Naruto mumbled to himself as he spread out his senses and felt that his clones had finished their job

and were now back within range of him at the beginning of the tunnel.

Forming a half-ram seal, Naruto simultaneously detonated his clones along with the explosive tags, triggering a chain reaction as every explosive tag in the compound and the tunnel went off. Within the span of a second, explosions were going off one after another all throughout the tunnel and the hideout as each explosion caused a section of it to collapse and bring more weight down upon the section below it until the actual earth shattered beneath the surface and the tunnel caved in.

Naruto could feel the earth shifting and shaking below his feet as the ground began to create large fissures from the large-scale shifting occurring beneath it. It became hard to keep his balance as the shaking was equivalent to that of a magnitude six earthquake, but Naruto needed to keep the barrier up to keep the full effects of the explosion contained within it.

After several minutes of withstanding the force that the explosions brought upon the very earth itself, the shaking began to die down as the fissure finally stopped spreading and breaking apart the earth and the final explosives went off.

Naruto looked around and noticed that he was standing on the only earthen pillar in the area as his chakra had preserved it, with all the rest of the ground having been shattered and collapsed from having no more support from the structures below. It could easily be described as a giant crater that ascended into darkness or a bottomless pit.

As he surveyed the destruction their mission had caused, Naruto released his control on the barrier, forcing it to subside. Seeing as how the entire radius around the hideout had been destroyed, including the rock formation that contained the entrance, Naruto Shunshined to where the land began once again before looking back once more and blurring out of

sight to reconvene with the rest of his team.

What remained of the once favored hideout of Orochimaru was nothing, it was as if its entire existence had been erased from the face of the earth.

On top of a large cliff, Naruto and his team stood side by side as they gazed upon the small, quiet Banaro Town. The town itself looked to have an old Wild West theme to it, at least the team had assumed so from the movies they had seen during their youth due to the fact that they were based off of merely fantasy. The town was surrounded by vast forests and huge rocks that faced upwards in different directions, known as Banana Rock according to the map that Naruto had picked up at a previous town. The team were situated on the highest of these rocks.

It had been about thirty minutes since they had detonated the exploding tags at Orochimaru's hideout, and thanks to the barrier Naruto had put up, it looks like nobody was aware of what had happened. This was to be expected since the barrier not only prevented sound from traveling, but it also limited any of the vibrations from within the earth to reach outside of it.

This time lapse had given the shinobi of the team time for their chakra to regenerate, as well as recover from any wounds or mental stress they had accumulated through the course of the mission.

From the chakra levels Naruto was able to sense, most of the villagers within the town were civilians. However, there were a few signatures that could borderline on shinobi levels. This meant that either they really were shinobi and were suppressing their chakra, they had shinobi training but had no affiliations with any of the villages, they were nuke-nin, or they were retired shinobi. They were too high up from the town for Naruto to be able to accurately sense them with his Haki, so they were going to have to do this the old-fashioned way.

But before that...

"I think it would be best if we gathered all of the storage scrolls and sent them back to Konoha in case something goes wrong with this part of the mission...I can't help but feel that something going to happen soon, though that may just be my imagination." Naruto spoke as he walked away from the edge of the cliff, towards the middle and knelt down on one knee where he began removing the numerous storage scrolls from weapons pouch and his flak jacket pockets.

The other members slowly followed him and replicated his actions. They didn't know exactly why, but there was an odd sense of foreboding in the pit of their stomachs, that was the only reason they didn't dismiss Naruto's words as merely paranoia. Though that still begged the question of how they would get the scrolls back to the village.

After everyone had emptied their pockets, ten storage scrolls lay in the middle of the circle that the shinobi had created. Narumi and Natsuki were unfamiliar with the workings of storage scrolls and they had not been given an information retrieval mission, so they hadn't contributed any of the scrolls. Mikoto had filled up four entire storage scrolls, Satsuki had contributed five, and Naruto had only recovered enough information to only need one and then there was the scroll that contained Jūgo's dismembered remains.

"Um, Nii-san? How are we going to transport the scrolls back to the village? Is part of the team returning to the village early?" Natsuki asked with a tilt of the head. She had been silent ever since they left the hideout as everything that she had done in the hideout finally settled into her mind. Though, she wasn't really hit with deep feelings of remorse or guilt like her sister had been, what she felt...was nothing. It was something of an out of body experience, she knew she had killed those

men, but yet, it felt like she hadn't at the same time...it was odd.

She didn't receive a verbal response, Naruto merely stepped back a few meters and bit his thumb to draw a bit of blood, after which he placed his hand on the surface of the rock. He had mastered the summoning technique to such a degree during the reprieve between the second and third stages of the chūnin exams that he no longer required hand seals to summon any of his phoenixes.

There was a large burst of smoke, signifying the use of the summoning technique from the actions that Naruto had previously performed. Once the smoke cleared, the eyes of all four kunoichi widened, even Satsuki's and Mikoto's who knew what kind of contract Naruto held. Standing, or rather levitating, in front of Naruto was a bird-like dragon. It possessed an aerodynamic body, with the lower half of its body colored blue with jet-plane wings and fin-like feet and white and blue arms that looked like they could be tucked into its body, on its chest was a red triangular mark. The upper half of its body was white and it had triangular ears and a blue face with a white pentagon in the middle.

An outsider would find it strange for a dragon-like creature to be a part of the phoenix contract, but the dragons were the descendants of the phoenix, so it makes sense if one knew the relationship between the two species. It is rumored that the dragon contract is the most powerful of the summoning clans, but that is only rumor, there is no such contract. That is because the dragons lie in the depths of Mt. Silver or roam the atmosphere where no other creature would be able to survive. Just as the dragons have descended from the phoenixes, their abilities have also evolved and spread out so that their abilities do not lie solely with fire. From the looks of this particular one, it appeared to be specialized in speed, perhaps being able to fly so fast that it could be described more

accurately as teleportation.

"Sorry for calling you out so suddenly Latios." Naruto apologized merely out of courtesy. Latios was one of the phoenixes that he had taken a liking to him during that month he had spent on Mt. Silver. He may have been a dragon, but Latios was still considered to be a phoenix because he was their descendant.

There was another interesting fact about Latios. He couldn't speak the way most of the other of his kind could, though it wasn't due to a lack of intelligence, actually he was one of the smartest of his kind. He possessed incredible telepathic abilities and communicated with others that way.

'It's okay Naruto, I told you that you may summon me whenever my presence is required. How may I be of service?' As Latios spoke telepathically to Naruto, its eyes turned a shade of light blue to signal the use of its telepathy. To outsiders it would seem that the interactions between the two were no different from any other animal, with the dragon giving off a small roar that sounded more like a sonar than anything. But it was obvious to the four still-gobsmacked kunoichi that these two understood each other very well.

"I need you to transport these documents back to Konoha as quickly as possible. They're incredibly important and we still have a mission to complete. I'd normally just wait until we could bring them back ourselves, but I can't help but feel that something is going to go very wrong very soon." Naruto spoke as he unsealed a messenger bag, from the scroll that held his personal effects, and placed the scrolls containing the information they had retrieved into it.

'Very well, it shall be done. Once I reach your village, I will take my human form and deliver them to your sensei.' Latios dipped his head down so that Naruto could strap the messenger bag around the dragon's

neck. After which Latios raised his head back up and placed his arm around the bag, securing it so that it would not fall off when he reached top speed.

"Sorry for all the trouble." Naruto apologized once more. He didn't like treating some of the most majestic creatures in the world like they were merely a delivery service to be used at his convenience.

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After giving one final nod of understanding to his summoner, Latios disappeared faster than the blink of an eye, leaving a silent sonic boom in its wake. After the dust cleared from the small explosion, Naruto turned back around, only to be greeted with the frozen, wide-eyed expressions of the four kunoichi.

"...W-What-?" Narumi tried to muster her voice, but was cut off by Naruto.

"We don't have time for questions, we still have a mission to complete."

Naruto spoke, not really wanting to talk about his summons right now.

It's not that he was still trying to keep his abilities a secret, but a sonic boom just went off from Latios's departure. It was likely that nobody else hear it because of how quiet it was or heard it because of how tall the rock formation they were on was, but they should still disperse as soon as possible so that nobody would be able to sense their presence if they got close enough.

Naruto walked back to the edge of the cliff to assess just how they would divide up the town. They couldn't just scout it out in a large group such as the one they were currently in, their large chakra signatures would

alert any shinobi in the area of their presence, especially with two jinchūriki on the team. They would need to divide and conquer just like they had with Orochimaru's hideout.

Even if he was the only sensor-type shinobi amongst them, the kunoichi should at least be able to sense chakra signatures and the presence of other shinobi, even Natsuki and Narumi who had abysmal chakra control and sensing capabilities.

The population of the town was not too large, so locating and investigating their targets shouldn't be too difficult. The town had a population no greater than a few thousand people, most of which were farmers who worked in the fields on the outskirts of town. That meant it would be quite easy to spot someone who wasn't from Hi no Kuni since they would obviously be out of place.

"We'll split up into the same teams that we had when we hit the hideout."

Naruto didn't even turn his attention away from the townspeople that meandered through the streets of the town, mainly in the square and the shopping district, but he knew that the rest of his team had their eyes on him and were vividly listening to his words. "Natsuki and Narumi, you'll take the eastern side of the town. Mikoto-chan, Satsuki, you'll take the western side. Since I'm the only sensor here, I'll take the southern side where the town square, shopping district, and most of the residents are."

He received an affirmative nod from each of the kunoichi after they had received their assignments. Though a few of them furrowed their eyebrows after they had realized that one of the sections was missing.

"What about the northern section?" Natsuki asked with a confused expression making its way onto her face.

Unknown to the kunoichi, but not to Naruto, the northern section was mostly for agricultural usage and where a majority of the farms laid. The

only structures in those areas were farmhouses, stables, and silos used for holding grain. There were at most a handful of people in the area at the time. If there were any Suna or Oto shinobi remaining in the area, they would try to blend in, in a much more populated area. If they were to take refuge in the northern sector, they would stick out like a sore thumb.

"The northern sector is used for agricultural usage, any foreign shinobi would stand out far too much there. They would take refuge in the more populated areas of the town if they wanted to blend into their surroundings. That leaves the three other sectors which have far more people traveling through them constantly." Naruto informed the group as he finally turned around to face them.

He received a nod in understanding from the girl who had voiced her confusion, after which, something caught his eye.

The Konoha hitai-ate...

That simple piece of metal strapped on in various different places amongst their group would undoubtedly alert the townspeople to their presence, especially since it was so far away from any of the shinobi villages. While the swords strapped to Natsuki's waist, as well as the additional shinobi equipment they carried would also be a give away, they would draw far less attention as opposed to the hitai-ates and the flak jackets that he and Mikoto wore.

"...But before we split up, I've just realized we stand out far too much as it is...These people will be weary of our presence knowing that we're Konoha shinobi, which in turn will make it much harder to keep a low profile." Naruto lectured as he unclipped his hitai-ate that was acting as his belt buckle and took off his chūnin flak jacket, leaving his upper body only in his mesh shirt. "It'll work best for us if no one even realizes were

here, but some attention can't be avoided. Our exposure will be limited without us wearing our hitai-ates or our flak jackets."

After hearing Naruto's reasoning, Mikoto and Satsuki began taking off said items and storing them in their personal sealing scroll that held their personal affects, easily understanding the that for a pseudo-undercover mission any clothing that gave away their origin would be out of the question. Actually, villagers way out in the middle on nowhere wouldn't easily recognize clan emblems, but none of the kunoichi here were wearing anything of the sorts anyways.

"Aren't shinobi always supposed to wear their hitai-ates while on missions to represent their village?" Narumi asked incredulously, a bit reluctant to remove her hitai-ate after all the stories her parents used to tell her about bringing honor to their village and how a mark to the hitai-ate was a shinobi's greatest shame, that was why nuke-nins drew a slash mark through their former village's symbol.

Though recently she had started to doubt a lot of what her parents had been telling her, especially through the course of this mission.

The first was when she realized why her parents hadn't even mentioned their favorite form of shinobi art in front of her and her siblings, much less taught them the basics of fūinjutsu. The second was when their current mission had been explained to them in detail in the forest on the first night after they had left Konoha. Her parents had always told her bedtime stories about how shinobi protected their village from all the evils of the world and strove to protect the people precious to them...were all those stories just lies to get them interested in being shinobi? The third was when she found out really how much her parents' neglect of Naruto affected his mental state, she couldn't imagine what it was like to live everyday of her life questioning whether or not if her

being born was a good thing. Of course it was, and she was told that everyday!...Though she had never thought people could possibly think that their very existence was a sin. The fourth and final straw was when she had taken her first life in that underground hideout. She may never be the same again after that experience, whether that was a good or bad thing, she had yet to determine.

Yes, Narumi had undoubtedly lost a lot of faith on everything she had been told by her parents up to this point. Natsuki most likely had the very same thoughts running through her head. She couldn't help but wonder why her parents had been keeping so much from her for so long and if there was more that they were hiding.

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"In this case, it would only hinder us completing our mission. Wouldn't that be a worse case for representing our village rather than not wearing a piece of metal strapped to some cloth?" Naruto asked rhetorically and he pulled the storage scroll out of his chest pocket and sealed away his flak jacket and his hitai-ate.

Narumi nodded in understanding and began to untie the Konoha hitai-ate that was around her forehead, albeit a bit reluctantly. Natsuki, who had been listening to the interaction between her older brother and her sister, smiled at Narumi's compliance. Normally, Narumi would have stood her ground and continued to argue, but it seemed that the recent events had caused her to doubt her parents' teachings...Natsuki felt the very same way.

Seeing that the entire team was now free of anything linking them back

to Konoha, Naruto felt that he should continue with his orders. "Now this part of the operation should take quite a bit of time. You are to locate any and all chakra signatures and determine whether or not they are foreign shinobi. If you determine they are, in fact, enemy shinobi trespassing in Hi no Kuni, you are to deal with them just as before...Do not eliminate them in the middle of the street or open area, rather, tail them until they are in a secluded area then finish them off and hide the body. Understood?"

Naruto received affirmative responses from the four women now standing before him.

"This isn't a time sensitive mission as it was before, meaning there is no need to rush or blow your cover." Naruto spoke, giving his final words of advice to his team. "You'll be investigating these people and, if you deem them a threat, are to tail them where you'll eliminate them. This process will be slow and will require the utmost patience. Regardless of whether or not you've investigated all your targets or not, meet back at this location in exactly four hours to check in and report your progress. You know your assignments, move out."

Not a moment later were there four gusts of wind and swirls of leaves where the four kunoichi had previously been, signifying the simultaneous usage of the Leaf Shunshin to reach the outskirts of their designated sector in order to inconspicuously enter the town.

Naruto gave one last glance to the town before fading out of sight in his own Shunshin.

Southern Sector - Shopping District

Naruto could be found walking down the length of one of the streets within the southern sector of the shopping district. For a town with such a small populace, it was far larger than he had anticipated from merely

studying it from so high up on one of the Banana Rocks. Though this may only have accounted for his sector, as it was the main attraction of the town and where the townspeople spent their day when they found the time.

It had been close to two hours since he had parted ways with the rest of his team, and he had already encountered all of his predetermined targets as of now. He had located at least a dozen chakra signatures when he had been scouting the town for his team, six of them were located in the southern sector, three in the eastern, and three in the western.

Naruto had set the four hour time restriction because he knew it would take the other two teams longer to do their parts. He had only had such an easy job with this because of his sensor-like abilities and his Kenbunshoku Haki, though for some reason his Haki wasn't able to reach a certain area, or perhaps it was being cancelled out. That couldn't be right because no one else should be capable of using Haki due to it being such an ancient art. Naruto chose to push it to the side for now and merely chalked it up to him having not mastered his Haki yet.

Those six he had been tasked with investigating turned out to be quite a disappointment, or perhaps this was the better outcome, it really depended on how one looked at it. His first target was an old man at about ninety years of age with dementia. He couldn't even continue living day to day life like he once had, let alone continue with shinobi duties. The second target had been a muscular man in his late forties who was clearly used to working in the fields. Chakra is a life energy that all living beings now possess, therefore, those who are accustomed to strenuous physical labor will have higher chakra levels than ordinary civilians, even if they haven't unlocked their chakra yet. The third was merely a child, not even seven years of age yet, who had been abandoned

as a child and left at the orphanage just after he was born. He had lived there ever since. The fourth was in a similar condition to his first target, only instead of dementia she was in her final stages of cancer. The elderly woman would likely be dead by the end of the month. The fifth target was a pregnant woman who was in her final stages of pregnancy, there was no possible way that she had participated in the invasion of Konoha while in that kind of condition. The sixth and final target was a teenager, about the same age as Naruto, who seemed to be nothing more than a common street thug. It appeared that even small town such as this one were not immune to crime.

It turned out that not one of his targets had been any shinobi from the remnants of the Suna/Oto army. That cemented the reasoning that investigating the town was purely a precautionary measure.

Currently, Naruto was simply walking the length of his sector to kill time and to finalize that there were no foreign shinobi in the town. Though, he couldn't help but feel that he was overlooking something crucial. Perhaps it was connected to his imperfection with Haki when he came closer towards a certain area of the town...

Or perhaps it had to do with the feeling what someone was constantly watching him as soon as he stepped foot in town...

Not those odd looks he was getting from the female population from only having a mesh shirt, that was almost see-through, covering his upper body nor was it from the townspeople or the targets he had been tracking. He didn't know why but he felt an ominous feeling in the pit of his stomach once again.

He shook his head breaking him away from such thoughts. He couldn't afford to have his mind clouded at the moment.

Perhaps the rest of his misfit team would be able to find what he

couldn't. He would just have to put his faith in them for now.

As he brought himself out of his inner thoughts and looked up at his surroundings, he noticed that he had travelled from the outskirts of the southern sector all the way to the middle where the Town Square was located. What was strange though, was that compared to the bustling streets he had been traveling earlier, there was not a single soul in sight. What was even stranger is that Naruto could hear the crackling of lightning around him when there was not a single cloud in the sky for miles, it wasn't the sound of that lightning chakra that shinobi use, but natural lightning itself.

As soon as Naruto realized that the cause of the noise was that the electrical sound waves that transversed the air around him had been turned into actual electricity, it was too late as the explosion of a thunderclap resounded around him as well as through the rest of the town.

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Eastern Sector - Minutes Earlier

Natsuki and Narumi shared a simultaneous groan as they could finally slow down their pace now that they no longer had to locate and tail their targets. This kind of work had been much more difficult than they had expected, though that may have been the result of their personalities and favored fighting style.

As far as their personalities went, they were quite different people, with Natsuki being almost a carbon copy of their mother and Narumi being somewhat of a tomboy and only putting up with the dresses and feminine

clothing that her mother picked out for her for the time being.

However, they did share the same base traits, with both being boisterous and exuberant individuals, being very picky eaters as seen by their steady diet of ramen, and their love for pranks. They also had a similar verbal tick, just like their mother, but unlike her, through years of training and discipline, they had managed to suppress it for the most part. Now it only made itself known when they were very excited or feeling incredibly strong emotions, positive ones in particular. Their fighting style also turned out to be similar since they were trained by the same people, though they preferred to rush into battle as opposed to thinking of the situation beforehand, one of their many faults.

Due to these traits, they had accumulated a completely incompatible relationship with intelligence work and tracking missions. The levels patience and stealth required for these types of missions was far too much for either of them to handle, they had nearly blown their cover and given away their presence to their targets over a handful of times in just over two hours because of their incompetence in this particular field.

While they were not a good match for this kind of work, they had managed to fulfill their part of the mission. All three of their targets had been duds. Their first target was a teenage girl who looked to be a severe drug addict. There was no humanly way possible that she was in any kind of condition for shinobi work, much less participate in a full scale invasion of one of the five great hidden villages. Though to make sure they did tail her for some time in order to come to their conclusion. The second target was farmworker who was on his day off, it seemed he was the one who owned the farm in the furthestmost section of the northern sector who provided the entire town with their supply of crops and grains, judging by the conversations he had and people who he had

interacted with throughout the day. Their third and final target was an elderly man who was restricted to a wheelchair and whose sight was rapidly deteriorating, judging from what they had overheard his nurse say.

In other words, the town looked as though it hadn't had a shinobi presence here in months, if not years. Though that wouldn't be very surprising since the town was pretty out of the way from any of the other towns.

They still had two hours to observe their surroundings before they needed to meet back up with the rest of the team, so they were wandering aimlessly through the now-empty streets in the direction of the northern sector because that area of the eastern side was the only place that they hadn't checked out yet. Though, now they could pose as regular girls walking down the street instead of having to stick to the shadows or blend into the crowds that had previously flooded the narrow streets.

"Narumi, Are you okay? You've seemed kind of out of it for a while now..." Natsuki asked her twin sister worriedly. Though she had an idea of why she had been estranged and silent for the most part.

"..." Once again the blonde-haired girl refused to respond. She had only spoken when it was in regards to the mission, no more, no less.

Natsuki sighed, knowing how thick-headed and stubborn her own sister was. It would be much harder than this to get through to her.

"You're thinking about what happened back at the hideout aren't you..."

"..." Natsuki was met with a long silence once more, causing her to let out another sigh. Just as it seemed that this conversation would die out, Narumi finally found her voice. "How do you do it...? How can you be so...so normal right now...?"

Natsuki stopped walking and looked over at her sister who was clearly disturbed by what she had done. "You feel remorse for killing those shinobi back at the hideout..." Natsuki's response was a statement, not a question.

"I-I know I'm a shinobi...and I know I shouldn't feel like this...it's just, I can't help it! Then I look over at you and everyone else on the team...and it seems like taking another person's life doesn't even affect all of you at all!" Narumi was trying hard to hold back her tears. She knew what she was getting into today and she knew the reasons for why she needed to do it, but every time she closed her eyes, even if it was only to blink, she saw all the faces of the people she had just killed.

"..." Natsuki was silent for a moment, not exactly sure what to say to bring comfort to her distraught sister. "I'll be honest with you and tell you straight out that it doesn't...It's kinda hard to explain, ya know...On one hand I was there, I know that I killed those people and shed all that blood...but on the other hand, it feels like it wasn't me who killed them...or like I know I did it but I haven't been able to process it yet..."

"I-I see..."

"Though the only thing that has been running through my mind recently is the story Nii-san told us about his experience yesterday...I guess I feel that I just don't have the right to feel guilty or remorseful for what I've done, knowing his experience had to have been at least a hundred times worse...He never had anyone to comfort him all his life, never to show them that they cared, no matter how much we try to deny it...but when we get back to the village Tou-san, Kaa-chan, Tsunade-obaa, Ero-sennin, Kakashi-sensei, all of them there beside us..to comfort us...Knowing that I wasn't there to help Nii-san makes me feel that I don't have the right to feel bad for myself..." Natsuki honestly answered Narumi's unasked

question. After hearing her brother's story yesterday, she couldn't help but beat herself up for having such selfish thoughts when he had to go through all of this so early on and on his own at that.

Narumi's eyes widened as she heard her sister's reasoning. She knew that her sister was attached to their older brother, perhaps more so than a sibling should ever be, so at the beginning of her explanation, the blonde simply disregarded it as her willing to do anything for him. But now that Narumi fully understood what her sister was trying to say, she couldn't help but feel a pang of regret in her chest...Not because she was thinking about her recent kills again, but because she hadn't realized how selfish she was being. If what she had been feeling up until now was enough to drive her over the edge, then just how much pain had her brother gone through? How was a person able to deal with all of that mental trauma on their own?

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There was a long silence as Narumi went through all of these thoughts in her head, long enough for several minutes to pass and for them to reach the northern-most section of the eastern sector. Natsuki was looking over at her sister worriedly, wondering what kind of resolution her twin would come to.

A small smile graced Narumi's face as she looked over to the redhead.

"Thanks Natsuki, I-I think I understand things a little better now...I-I'm also sorry for saying accusing you of not feeling the same way as I did after all this time...I didn't even consider your feelings or what anyone else was going through..."

"No need to apologize." Natsuki replied as she shook her head side to side. "You were completely justified in what you thought...Just don't assume that every person will have the same views of the world that you do. Personal beliefs and ideals are derived from our past experiences, if you don't share those experiences, then your interpretation of reality may be different than another's...Even though you and I have pretty similar experiences, doesn't mean we'll always have the same opinions or react the same to everything...We're two different people after all, even if we are twins!"

"We're you quoting Nii-san just now?" Narumi was slightly amused, a compete one-eighty as to how she had been feeling just minutes before.

"He does have a way with words, don't you think?"

"Hm, he always does know just what to say at the exact right time."

Narumi responded, though when she looked over, she noticed that her sister was already in one of her fantasies with a bit of drool coming out of the corner of her mouth. A shiver went down Narumi's spine, she didn't even want to know what her twin was imagining. On the topic of family, something did come to mind though. "Hey, Natsuki...?"

"Hm, what is it?" Said girl responded as she turned around once more.

"What do you think Tou-san and Kaa-chan would've said if I'd had this conversation with them instead of you?" Narumi asked, wanting to know if her sister had been having the same doubts as she had been having.

Natsuki paused for a minute to think about that before coming up with her answer. "They probably would have said something along the lines of 'Some people are just better at covering up their feelings than others. In fact you should feel guilt and remorse every time you take another's life, it's what makes us human...If you don't even feel a little remorse for killing someone...then you're not even human at all.'...Something similar

to that."

"..." Narumi stared silently at her sister for a moment, studying her reaction.

Seeing the look that Narumi was giving her, Natsuki waved her arms in front of her defensively. "Don't get me wrong, I love Tou-san and Kaa-chan, but lately I've just been seeing everything a bit clearer and...I guess I'm just having trouble believing everything that we've been taught up till now, haven't you been feeling the same way?"

Natsuki had been thinking about thinking about the time she had learned the truth about Kurama during the invasion and the numerous times that they had conversed afterwards, and while he hadn't been very forthcoming with telling her everything she wanted to know, she had learned more about the history of this world from him than from her own parents.

"...Yeah...That's why I asked..." Narumi responded dejectedly.

Natsuki looked over at her sister with a wide-eyed expression. Out of the two of them Narumi was far more stubborn and thick-headed and loyal to a fault. That was why she hadn't told her about the meeting with Kurama yet and why the chakra had been ripped out of Nawaki. Now that Narumi openly admitted that she didn't have the blind faith in their parents like she previously had, it might be easier to tell her the truth about Kurama and the Bijū.

Though that talk would have to wait for another time.

"I love them...but I can't help but feel that they're...I don't know, subconsciously trying to use us to further their own goals...I don't mean to make them sound evil or manipulative or anything, but think about it. Pushing us to become shinobi since we could speak, telling us bedtime stories about how shinobi were heroes and fought selflessly for their

village, pushing us towards the dream of becoming Hokage, that stupid prophecy, making us Ero-sennin's apprentices...I just can't help but feel like they were setting all this up so that we would fulfill their dreams of finding peace because they couldn't...I guess I can kind of understand why they want to find such a thing now, but..." Natsuki trailed off at the end, trying to find the exact words she wanted.

"But...?" Narumi asked, trying to push her to spit out the rest of what she wanted to say.

Narumi had an idea of what her sister wanted to say, these were some of the very things that Naruto spoke of with their father and Jiraiya just after the chūnin promotional ceremony. She hadn't really paid much attention to what he had said then until now.

"...It's noble and all, trying to find world peace...but... the world will always be at war, there will always be some kind of conflict...it's just human nature, ya know. That doesn't mean it's right, but to find peace you'd have to completely redefine the human nature of every single person in the world...and even then there will be people who will stand against what you're trying to do and lead some kind of rebellion, leading to yet another war...I guess what I'm trying to say is that conflict is inevitable and that won't be changing anytime soon...Just look at the recent invasion. We had been in a peace time before they decided to invade to show their power and secure a location at the top as one of the strongest villages...If people are so willing to risk the lives of others just for superficial reasons like power political standing, do you really see peace in this world coming anytime soon?"

Before Narumi even had a chance to respond, a large crash of thunder resounded through the town followed by a flash of lightning, causing the two of them to jump at the loud outburst and turn towards the direction

it came from.

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The two of them looked up into the sky, expecting thunderclouds to have gathered while they had been immersed in their conversation. However, there was not a single cloud in sight, so it just wasn't possible for there to be thunder, let alone lightning.

At least, not naturally. That could only mean...

"That sound came from the southern sector!" Narumi spoke, now on guard for anything that came their way.

"That's Nii-san's sector! Let's go!" Natsuki responded, earning a nod from her sister.

After they had come to an agreement, the two Uzumaki-Namikaze sisters bolted towards the direction the thunderclap came from. They would have normally just Shunshined there, but they were in the northern-most section of the eastern sector which meant it was too far of a distance to do so and repeated use of that particular jutsu would be too chakra intensive. And judging from the amount of chakra that was being emitted from the southern sector, they would need every last drop.

{Western Sector - Minutes Earlier}

Completely opposite of Natsuki and Narumi, Satsuki and Mikoto were actually quite adept in this field of work. As of now, they were currently exploring the further outskirts of the western sector.

They had determined within the first hour that not one of their targets had been foreign shinobi, it seemed Obito had just been paranoid after all, therefore they had decided to scout and explore the entirety of their

sector since they had never seen a town of such a design, aside from the movies.

They had been casually walking through the mostly vacant streets of Banaro Town for the last hour and had finally made it to its border. It had been just over two hours since they had separated from the rest of the team and they still had two hours to kill before they were required to be back at the meeting place.

The two female Uchiha briefly pondered as to why Naruto had given such a long timeframe for the mission before realizing that it was most likely because Natsuki and Narumi were utterly inexperienced in this sort of task and may need a lot more time than would be expected to recover the necessary information.

Though even then four hours was a bit much, even for those inexperienced in the area of information gathering a task this simple should take no more than two hours. Perhaps the extra time was meant to deal with any unforeseen circumstances. Though they had to admit that their job would have been a lot more time consuming if they had actually found any foreign shinobi that needed to be dealt with.

Their targets had been quite easy to mark since their sector was comparable to that of a ghost town, with only having passed a few dozen other people aside from their targets. Out of the three sectors that had been assigned, the two of them had received the most unpopulated.

Naruto tasked himself with the largest sector and the one with them most targets since his sensor capabilities would make the job much quicker where it would have taken the rest of the team the entire four hours to investigate the targets due to the sheer number of people within the southern sector. Though the reason as to why Natsuki and Narumi received the second most populated area was still a mystery.

On second thought, they probably were assigned that sector because it was the perfect balance between the southern and western sectors. They would no doubt fumble a bit with their task, so if they were in a vastly unpopulated area tailing their targets, they would end up standing out quite a bit. If they were in an area where the population was too high, then they would have a much harder time even finding their targets, much less validating them.

Naruto really had thought of everything.

Though, not everyone seemed to realize how much planning he had gone through for such a mission...

"How'd we get stuck with investigating the ghost sector anyways?"

Satsuki complained as she interlocked her fingers behind her head. "I'm bored! We finished scouting out the area over an hour ago, we've just been wandering around since then! Why couldn't we have gotten one of the more interesting areas?"

Mikoto sighed exasperatedly at her daughter's antics. The younger Uchiha had been complaining for the better part of the last hour, though Mikoto had been tuning her out and simply letting her rant, but now it seemed like a good chance to intervene. Satsuki had never been the patient type, so walking around and doing nothing didn't fit her usual style.

Sticking to the shadows, tailing targets, the typical nature of these missions she was quite skilled at, but aimlessly walking through the empty streets of an unfamiliar town didn't exactly pique her interest.

"Because Naruto-kun was doing his duty as a team leader." Mikoto answered Satsuki, causing the younger female to look towards her mother with a confused expression. "We were selected for this area because he knew we would be able to stay inconspicuous even though

the low population of this area would cause more attention to befall any outsiders. He got the most populated area because his sensor abilities would make it easier to find his targets and track them. Narumi and Natsuki are unfamiliar with this kind of work, so they would need a perfect mix of the two in order to come out successful."

Satsuki took in all of her mother's words before huffing in annoyance. It seemed she didn't like the fact that she overlooked such an obvious answer.

Though that was just a front, as internally she was thinking over all of her surrogate brother's actions and decisions since they left the village. Every single action as a team leader was flawless, as if he was born to lead and take command of those willing and unwilling to follow him. It only cemented the feeling that she wasn't cut out for a position of leadership as she would have never thought of some of the plans or decisions that he had made.

"Are you starting to understand the reasoning behind his actions?" Mikoto asked in a tone that suggested she was scolding a child.

"I guess, but it still irritates me that those two always get special treatment."

It was true, the Uzumaki-Namikaze princesses did get special treatment from the entire village, but Satsuki was referring to their mission records and incompetence at almost everything they had been assigned through the course of this mission. Back before the chūnin exams, they had always been assigned easy escort and delivery missions where they really didn't have to do anything resembling shinobi work in the slightest. It was as if they were too precious and pure to get their hands dirty, as deemed by their senseis and the Yondaime Hokage. Meanwhile, Team 11 had been basically forced to pick up all the slack that the Hokage's

children left because their team had the best mission record. To her, Team 7 was nothing more than a group of spoiled children.

Though she knew that Naruto wasn't showing them special treatment because of who they were. It was the exact opposite really. She had seen the look of annoyance that made its way onto his face whenever he was forced to make decisions regarding the mission. It was because of how pampered and inexperienced the two girls were that he had to make sure they got assignments where it was hardest to screw up.

"You know that's not how it is right now." Mikoto sighed, trying to come up with an explanation for the two Uzumaki-Namikaze girls. Now that she thought about it, their parents and those close to them did spoil them far too much. "...er...um, sure they're given preferential treatment by their parents and people like Kakashi, Jiraiya, and Tsunade, but that isn't by Natsuki and Narumi's choice. They were born into their family just how you were born into the Uchiha clan...While you may not be their biggest fans now, you're all still young and have plenty of room to grow and mature. I'm sure that one the three of you mature and get past your differences, you could turn out to be great friends. So don't be too hard on them."

Mikoto knew that besides Naruto and Hana, Satsuki didn't have very many friends. While the bond between the three of them was stronger than even family, that didn't mean she should limit herself to having only two friends. Mikoto understood that her daughter really couldn't stand a majority of her graduating class for various reasons such as them being annoying girly fangirls, cocky, annoying, arrogant, silent, lazy, and so on, so in reality Natsuki and Narumi were the only other girls that Satsuki could possibly form a friendship with.

Mikoto's only real friend that was still alive was Kushina. But she had

begun to distance herself from the redhead ever since she found out about how Kushina had treated Naruto when he was a child. In fact, the first time they had talked in ears was at the chūnin exams and that was only since Kushina had decided to sit next to her and reminisce about the old days when they were on the same team and taking part in those exams. When most of your other friends fall in combat or for whatever other reason, it can certainly become lonely. Mikoto didn't want her daughter to feel the same way that she had over the past few years. "I don't ever see the three of us being friends, but I guess you're-

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Satsuki was cut off by large crash of lightning and the roar of thunder, causing the two female Uchiha to jump at the sudden noise. With weapons immediately drawn, Mikoto and Satsuki frantically turned towards the direction where the outburst originated from.

"What the hell was that!" Satsuki all but screamed, completely at a loss of what such a noise could have been when there was not a single storm cloud in sight.

"I don't know but it came from the southern area." Mikoto responded, her body and hearing recovering from the shock that the sudden, incredibly loud echo sent into her system. "Quick, let's go. I know Naruto-kun's strong, but I think he'll need all the help he can get if whatever that jutsu was, was anything to go by."

Without another word spoken, the two ravenettes quickly took off in the direction of the thunderclap. Neither of them could exactly pinpoint exactly where in the southern sector the explosion came from, but they

assumed that there would be many more to follow which would help them immensely. Though that line of thinking was a bit disconcerting considering that Naruto would be the target of such explosions. They just hoped they'd make it in time.

{Southern Sector}

Naruto clutched his bleeding left ear as he knelt down on one knee atop of a wooden rooftop that overlooked the street. He had managed to jump out of the way of that burst of lightning, but the shock and sound waves that followed through him across the air onto the rooftop he was currently occupying and ruptured one of his eardrums.

'...Just what...was that?' Naruto thought to himself in between his fits of panting as he stood back up, despite his loss of balance from hearing loss. He hadn't suffered much damage, but such a thing happening so suddenly took a lot out of the young man.

Even with his left ear successfully deafened alongside the ringing in his right ear and coupled with his now blurry vision, he was able to notice the large hotel, that he had passed by earlier, being flung at him from above.

Pushing any thoughts of what was currently happening to the side for the moment, he was forced to take action.

With a simple wave of his outstretched arm, Naruto activated his Enkai (Flame Commandment), amassing a large amount of crimson-orange flames around his body. The move itself wasn't meant to deal with the falling building, in fact it wasn't even an offensive technique, however it was a prerequisite for what was to come.

In the epicenter of the spiraling flames, Naruto, activating Hibashira (Fire Pillar), crouched down until his hands were touching the wooden surface below him, causing the flames to rise and rotate around him more

fiercely, after which Naruto shot the collected flames straight upwards, piercing straight through the hotel causing the remnants to scatter in all different directions, as the sky was alit the color of his flames for a few moments.

As the flames dispersed, Naruto's vision began to come into focus once more. Though he was thankful for his sight back and that the ringing in his ears had subsided, even with those ailments he had saw how bright his flames were as they lit up the sky and how loud the destruction of the hotel had been, not to mention how loud the previous thunderclap had been.

That begged the question, why had none of the townspeople come out of their shops or homes to see what was going on in the streets?

'What the hell is going on in this town?'

However, before Naruto could mull over the possibilities, two powerful presences in the immediate area demanded his attention.

"So you managed to survive that huh?" An, obviously male, lazy voice asked rhetorically as him and a shadow-like being emerged from one of the alleyways and casually walked into the middle of the street. "I must commend you on your efforts, even though they'll prove futile in the near future."

Naruto's head instantly whipped towards the direction of the voice as he hadn't been able to sense their presences until this very moment. They must have been the ones who had been countering his Haki since he had stepped foot in the town.

Something told him not to take them lightly.

"Who are you?" Naruto asked with narrowed eyes as he sized up the two new arrivals.

Naruto's eyes were immediately drawn to the slashed hitai-ate that was

worn around the taller one's neck, signifying that he was a nuke-nin from Kumogakure. After that, he took in their physical appearances, neither of which could be classified as normal.

However, his eyes narrowed even further when he focused on the second person, who looked like a humanoid black mass with no visible hair or orifices and two yellow eyes that lacked sclerae or pupils. It felt like he knew this being from somewhere in his past, but he just couldn't place his finger on it.

Actually, he could feel familiar presences within both of them but he was at a complete loss as to what that could possibly mean.

"I'm surprised that you aren't aware of what organization we belong to, seeing as how your sisters are our targets this time. We know for a fact that Konoha is already aware of our existence due to Jiraiya's intelligence network." The shirtless man spoke with an air of arrogance to him. "We are known as the Akatsuki, not that it matters since you'll be dead in a matter of minutes."

Naruto froze after absorbing the man's words. If they were after his sisters then the Bijuū were most likely their organizations goal, either that or for the fact that they were practically royalty as far as Konoha was concerned. But if that were the case then he and Nawaki would also be their targets. The fact that they only mentioned Natsuki and Narumi cemented the former. But how could they possibly know that Nawaki was no longer a jinchūriki? That development only happened during the invasion, there was no possible way that information could have spread that fast, and even if it could there was no one around to do so. This meant that at least one of them had to have been there during the invasion.

An entire organization devoted to the capture of the Bijuū did not spell

good news. It was then that another thought came to mind. If they were after the jinchūriki for their respective Bijū then why were they here in front of him? They already proved to be skillful enough to avoid detection from even a skilled sensor, so they should have easily been able to capture Natsuki and Narumi without making their presence known. Why risk unnecessary people knowing of their goals? Even if they planned to kill any witnesses, they could have killed the rest of his team already, yet he could still sense their presences.

'Just what is their goal in revealing themselves so openly?'

"You're after the Bijū." It was not a question, but a statement, though Naruto did not voice any of his other previous trains of thought. He was well aware that the rest of his team had heard the explosion and were now rushing towards his general vicinity, but they were still ways off and probably wouldn't arrive for quite some time. Though Naruto was aware that these two shinobi were at too high of a level for him to take on alone, any of his other team members would only serve to get in the way and would most likely be killed in the process. Maybe Mikoto would be able to bail him out, but with her weakened body he couldn't be sure of anything at the moment.

This meant he had to take them both on by himself now if he wanted his team to have any chance at survival. It was quite the predicament, a losing battle no matter which angle he looked at it from.

"Looks like we have a winner." Enel congratulated sarcastically. "Though for the time being, our purpose is only to test how strong they currently are for when we initiate our actual plans. Things wouldn't work out very well if tried to capture them now, it'd actually be more trouble than it's worth at the moment."

"Enel, shut up." Naruto's attention was brought from the Kumo nuke-nin

and onto the shadow-like being as he spoke, who was staring at him with unrelenting hatred while subconsciously releasing massive waves of killing intent. "He's mine, just stay out of the way and deal with the rest of his team when they arrive."

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"Tch, from their chakra levels I can already tell they won't even be able to put up a decent fight. Why can't I play around with him a little Zetsu?"

Naruto's eyes widened to epic proportions as he heard what the man, Enel if he remembered correctly, called the pure black being. Zetsu was the manifestation of Ōtsutsuki Kaguya's will that she created just before she was fully sealed. As for why he was created in the first place, Naruto hadn't had the slightest idea.

All that he knew was that Ace had spent countless years tracking him and chasing him down until his prime past him and he became unsure if he would be able to deal with opponents of such a high caliber as he once had. That was why he originally decided to reincarnate the fruit and set up so many fail-safes.

Though, Ace had never actually fought Zetsu head-on, the being had always managed to escape at the first chance he found. From what Naruto was aware, Zetsu wasn't a front-line fighter and would have easily

been killed all those centuries ago, but he couldn't be sure if that still held true after so many centuries had passed.

'To think that I would have run into him so soon...Wait! This Akatsuki is going after Jinchūriki for their Bijū, and he was created by Kaguya, who was the progenitor of all chakra, so he's well aware of what collecting all nine of them could do once extracted...' Naruto's eyes widened in realization after piecing everything together. 'He's trying to revive the Juubi and later resurrect Kaguya!'

Naruto braced himself as best he could and focused his presence purely on Zetsu as Enel moved off to the side and the being of black mass slowly began to walk forward into the middle of the street. He couldn't worry about how the rest of his team were doing at the moment or even how far out they were from here, Naruto knew that things were going downhill fast judging from the malicious smirk that made its way onto Zetsu's face.

"I'll enjoy eradicating your existence from the face of this world...You were always her favorite, she had always tried so hard to make things right, even going so far as to create the Mugen Tsukuyomi for the purpose of creating a world where you and her could exist together alone, in harmony." It wasn't difficult to realize the feelings of utter loathing that laced each and every one of Zetsu's words. "She couldn't see it, but I can. Your existence would only bring more pain and suffering to her, I will not let her suffer anymore. Then it will be just me and her together. Only then will I be worthy of Okaa-sama's love."

Naruto didn't fully understand what Zetsu was rambling about, but he managed to comprehend that it was related to Kaguya and that Zetsu had more of an interest in killing him than going after the jinchūriki here in town like a member of this Akatsuki should have. The fact that his

partner was completely dismissive that they weren't going after jinchūriki was also a cause for concern.

He needed to make the first move.

"Hiken (Fire Fist)!" Rearing his fist back while turning it into fire, Naruto launched a column of flames forward with power and size that would be able to pierce through a majority of the buildings in the southern sector that would be taken down along with Zetsu. The lone Konoha-nin put as much power into it as he could without destabilizing his favored technique - calling it a jutsu just didn't feel right - with the intent to vaporize Zetsu with this first move, he couldn't risk giving the being a chance to counterstrike.

However, that plan was never meant to come true as with a single motion of his hand, Zetsu created an equally large vortex of black mist that seemingly absorbed Naruto's prior attack, leaving the ravenette stunned for a moment as he ceased his futile attempt on Zetsu's life.

Seeing the boy's confused expression, Zetsu thought to rub salt in the wounds. "This ability has chosen me! With it, I have become the strongest of this generation and so many before! Even among the Logias it's unique!...Your body is fire right? I am...Darkness!"

With those words said, Zetsu produced a spiraling vortex of darkness from his back that rose into the air causing the brightness of the cloudless day to dim with its presence.

"Darkness...?" Naruto questioned, not having ever recalled a chakra fruit of that nature. There should only be five fruits which represent the five natural elements, those being fire, water, earth, lightning, and wind.

Though the darkness being emanated from the 'person' before him was undoubtedly a chakra fruit ability, easily noticeable by any wielder of a chakra fruit.

"That's right, you can't touch me." The arrogance in Zetsu's voice was not a small amount in any sense of the word, but with the amount of power he was releasing, he had the right to be. "Out of all the chakra fruits grown by the Shinju tree, the one with this power is known as the most evil of them all...It cannot be found the same as all the other fruits, I was born with this power when Okaa-sama created me while she was still merged with the Shinju. She knew all the Shinju's secrets and gave me the greatest of them all!"

Naruto had not known any of this. His knowledge of the history of Kaguya and the Shinju tree was limited to what Ace knew, meaning that since Ace was unaware that such a fruit existed and that Zetsu had possession of it, Naruto could not have possibly known such a fact. He was traveling in uncharted territory at the moment, the influence of darkness could possibly be limitless.

"Why don't I give you a little demonstration, killing you won't be entertaining unless you struggle." Zetsu spoke as the darkness emanating from his body increased tenfold, blocking off most of the light given off by the sun and leaving most of the area as if it were night. "Don't worry, I'm not going after you...yet. Just stand there and take a good look at the town."

"Black Hole!" Channeling all the darkness that he had released into the atmosphere already back towards his body, Zetsu thrust his palm towards the ground and spread his darkness across it, mimicking the motion of waves of water crashing onto that shore. The Darkness quickly began to flow and spread across the earthen ground as if it had a mind of its own until it covered the entire area of the southern sector.

With one final push, the ground began to shake with a similar intensity of an earthquake as the pull of darkness became more intense, swallowing

up everything in its path. Buildings, houses, trees, monuments, everything was swallowed up by the darkness and crushed by its influence until it simply ceased to exist as it re-converged with Zetsu and the technique subsided.

The only remaining structure in what remained of the southern sector was the small shop that Naruto was perched atop of.

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Naruto finally realized the utter hopelessness of the situation as he was forced to watch an entire section of a town be crushed by the influence of darkness until it simply ceased to exist. Naruto had no illusions that this 'man' could have easily done the same for the entire town if he had wished so, and had only not done so since that was only a demonstration of his power...

The differences in their power were just far too vast.

"Darkness is Gravity! The power to pull in anything...and spare not even a single ray of light...Darkness is a void that devours and crushes everything." Zetsu voiced regaining his previous composure as the darkness returned to him until it only coated his hands. "Now why don't I show you what became of it?!"

"Liberation!" Releasing the spiraling mass of darkness from his back once again, Zetsu expelled all the remains of what his darkness had swallowed up all at once. Shattered pieces of wood, crushed portions of buildings, flattened houses and so much more was expelled all at once until the wreckage created a large ring around them that stretched on for miles, leaving only a clearing in the middle of all of it where the three of them

stood.

'...This looks like a pretty troublesome ability so far...I don't know where the townspeople were, but if they were in those buildings, they're probably dead at this point...Though something else has bothering me so far...I've never heard of this darkness fruit, but he claims it's a logia-type just as the others are...If so, then why did he need to absorb my Hiken instead of letting it pass through him...?' Were Naruto's thoughts as he stared down at his enemy from the single building still standing in the area.

Coating his fingers with fire, Naruto put his index fingers together in a cross shape, emanating a cross-shaped ray of light which locked onto his target. Traveling across that lone ray of light, Naruto launched a large column of cross-shaped fire at incredible speeds towards Zetsu only moments after he had finished releasing what remained of the southern sector.

"Jūjika (Cross-Fire)!"

Unknowingly proving Naruto's prior theory correct, Zetsu conjured a barrier of the black mist to absorb the powerful attack rather than avoiding it like any logia should have been capable of. As the Akatsuki member dispersed the darkness after completely nullifying his smirk turned into a frown when he saw the analyzing look that the boy was giving him.

"I see you've already noticed one of the glaring weaknesses of my chakra fruit...Naturally the greatest of all powers would have a drawback or two." Zetsu commented emotionlessly, shifting his piercing gaze from the boy to the building he was still standing on. He had left that lone structure standing in the area simply to demonstrate to that insect the power that he held, but now it seemed as if it would get in the way of the

slaughter that was to come.

Raising up just one of his arms, Zetsu targeted the building and all the area surrounding it, singling out just the gravity aspect of his abilities instead of a combination of the two as he usually did. With a single flick of his wrist, the gravity surrounding the entire area of the lone structure increased until it became unbearable for the building to remain standing, let alone a person.

In less than a span of a second, the entire building gave into the incredible increase of pressure, cracking and collapsing until it was a mere pile of shattered wood just like the rest of the surrounding area. The damage did not just stop at the building though, the ground surrounding was forced to crack and cave in, making it impossible for anyone in the targeted area to remain standing.

Expectedly, Naruto was forced down onto the remains of the structure he was previously perched on as he was held there by the immense force of gravity. He had realized just how powerful gravity could really be when Zetsu had destroyed part of the town, but seeing and being subjected to it was a completely different experience.

Naruto felt like an insect facing off against a dragon...he had never truly felt fear in his life before, was this what it felt like? If he wasn't currently being crushed by at least a hundred times the normal gravity, he was sure he would be trembling at the moment. Though he could still feel the cold sweat that had broken out on his face. Had he not been made of fire, he would surely been dead by now as the shattered pieces of wood had pierced his body when the building had collapsed. Even fire had been subjected to gravity.

Nothing could escape gravity's influence.

Summoning every bit of strength he had within his grasp, Naruto

struggled against the omnipresent force that was rendering judgement upon him and forced to one knee. Gritting his teeth as hard as he could while clenching his hands with enough strength to draw blood, with one final push Naruto managed to force himself back on his own two feet. Despite gravity trying to force him back on his knees, Naruto took a single step forward. And then another. He just kept repeating the impossible process of walking under such intense pressure. He put everything he had into the simple movements of walking until he managed to step off the remnants of the collapsed structure and onto the broken ground before him.

Portgas D. Naruto would not kneel for anyone.

Seeing as how Naruto wouldn't be forced to his knees anymore, the gravity suddenly returned to normal, causing Naruto to stumble forward at how light he felt before catching himself. He looked up from the ground that had occupied his vision for the last few minutes and caught Zetsu's smirk. That had only been another demonstration of his power, Naruto realized.

"I already told you...Darkness drags in everything. Shuriken, kunai, swords, fire, and even lightning...I can't dodge attacks like the rest of you do, I can't turn into my own element. Actually, my body absorbs much more pain because of the Yami Yami no Mi...But with this much power at my disposal, I think those drawbacks are only minor annoyances at this point." Once again the black mist began to radiate from Zetsu's back and shoulders, though this time it wasn't in the form of the vortex that was used to release whatever it absorbed.

Zetsu continued to speak, "But in exchange for those risks there's one more thing I'm capable of absorbing. Kurouzu (Black Vortex)!" Extending one arm forwards, the black mist surrounding Zetsu's hand began to

move in a spiral-like fashion. "The gravity of darkness can accurately absorb the entity of chakra fruit users."

Naruto stood there for a moment with a questioning look on his face since nothing was happening as of yet, but as soon as he began to wonder if the technique was a dud, an immense pull of gravity pulled him forward until he was in Zetsu's grasp a second later. One moment he was standing over thirty yards away and the next Zetsu was manhandling him.

Naruto's eyes widened as he felt Zetsu's hand gripping his shoulder with strength not reflected by his physique. He had expected his enemy to be aware of Haki and have a high level of mastery over it, but he had never expected his intangibility to fully be cancelled out...This was not the work of any kind of Haki.

"How does it feel...? Have you figured it out yet?" Zetsu mocked as he eyed the boy that was now within his grasp.

"No way...!"

Just as Naruto realized what was going on, Zetsu reared his free arm back and brought his fist right into the disoriented Naruto's gut with strength that made Jūgo's feel like a love tap. The force behind the punch forced Naruto to cough up a bit of blood before he was flung across the clearing into one of the boundaries of the battlefield that was a home that had been ripped in half earlier.

After feeling untouchable for so long, Naruto cursed his unfortunate luck for coming across two people who could actually harm him in the same day. His body screaming for mercy, Naruto pushed himself out of the crater on the side of the house the impact had created, forcing his body to slide down the wall until he reached the ground with his back still leaning up against the structure.

Naruto took his index and middle fingers and wiped away some of the blood that was leaking from the corners of his mouth, almost unbelieving that this could possibly be happening even though he had gotten beat fairly well only a few hours ago. But this guy...he was on an entire different level.

"You understood the moment I grabbed you. The other thing my darkness can absorb is...the chakra fruit powers! In other words, by being touched, those with abilities of the chakra fruits are unable to use their ability for that time!...Though it works best on chakra fruit users and those with a certain intangibility, my powers can nullify the chakra of any being as long as I'm touching them!" As Zetsu boasted about his strength, Naruto slowly made his way back on his feet.

"So it's fine as long as I don't get caught." Naruto spoke quietly, more to himself than Zetsu, with several different scenarios already running through his mind.

However, Zetsu seemed to hear his whisper, "I've already proved to you that you can never escape from the influence of darkness, yet you still have hope...? I'll make sure to correct that."

"Looks like I don't have much of a way out of this." Naruto clutched ripped what was left of his torn mesh shirt off his body and clutched his bleeding shoulder. He would need his phoenix flames as much as he could later, so he couldn't be wasting them on the few wounds and fractured bones he had at the moment, instead they were focused on the shattered and snapped bones within his body.

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If his assessments were correct, he only had enough of Marco's chakra left to fully restore his body once more after wasting so much of it during the Konoha invasion and his prior battle with Jūgo.

Those flames were the result of Marco implanting his phoenix chakra into Naruto's body, it wasn't natural to him, therefore the chakra wouldn't regenerate within his body. The only way to regain those flames was to make a trip to the realm of the phoenix's and implant more of their chakra within him...He really wished that he hadn't used so much of them in his earlier fight...Then again, if he hadn't that punch probably would have shattered most of the bones in his chest...Naruto wasn't exactly in the greatest position at the moment. However this went, it was certain to be an uphill battle.

"Kurouzu (Black Vortex)!" Once again, Zetsu extended his left arm forward with the spiraling darkness surrounding it, causing Naruto to be pulled forward from the affects of gravity.

"Shit! Not again!" Naruto was caught off guard the first time that Zetsu used this technique since he had no idea what it would actually do, however this time he had time to analyze his current situation due to having experienced this before. The pull of gravity was too strong for him to try to escape it, even a Shunshin or Shinsoku (Extremespeed) would be useless to escape from its pull.

That didn't mean he was completely out of options, however...

"Shinka: Shiranui (Sacred flame: Unknown Fire)!" Igniting his hands with large bursts of crimson-orange flames while in midair, Naruto hurled long lances made of fire forward, both piercing Zetsu's chest while simultaneously burning his insides, forcing him cringe before letting out a large roar in pain.

However Naruto didn't get off easy either as Zetsu swung his right arm

down into Naruto's neck, forcing him to grit his teeth while a large amount of blood was still coughed out and causing his eyes to roll into the back of his head. That wasn't the end either as when the lances piercing Zetsu's chest ignited with even hotter flames that began to spread and eat away at his innards, he flung Naruto across the clearing once again and into the foot of another building.

When the dust cloud cleared from where Naruto had landed, he was clutching his neck in pain after getting back onto his feet once more.

'Damn, he almost broke my neck...Quite a troublesome ability he has. I can't afford to let him do that again, I'll need to keep my distance.' As Naruto was getting a bearing of the situation after regaining his senses, Zetsu was screaming in pain as he grabbed onto the flaming lances and absorbed them from his chest with his darkness. Though, it couldn't be seen and it was unknown whether he had internal organs or not, the fact that those lances had such an effect did not change.

It meant that even though he is the manifestation of Kaguya's will he could still be killed, albeit it will much more difficult than a normal human...

Naruto staggered forward, his eyes never leaving Zetsu as he clutched his shoulder as it continued to bleed heavily. He was pretty sure it was broken at this point, or at best fractured...A physical fight would be beyond his ability at this point, even if he had never planned to do so in the first place...Still, he could not afford to let it hamper him...

"Enjōmō (Flaming Net)!" Waving his arms out towards his sides, Naruto erected a large wall of flames that circled the entire clearing and reached high into the sky bathing the battlefield a shade of crimson-orange, heating up the atmosphere dramatically and preventing anyone from entering or leaving other than himself...Though Zetsu could probably

absorb it with his darkness if given enough time, but running away wasn't what he was planning here...Actually most of his plans had gone to shit after finding out about Zetsu's abilities to nullify chakra, so he was pretty much thinking on the fly as on now. He really didn't have much of a choice.

Standing several miles away from the clearing atop of some of the wreckage, Enel whistled in appreciation as he looked upon the wall of flames that rose high into the sky. The kid was putting up a much better fight than he had expected. Hell, the boy was even pushing Zetsu back a little.

"Not bad kid, not bad at all..." Enel smirked as he wished he could get a little action in but for now he was tasked with taking care of any unwanted attention...along with observing the jinchūriki of course.

Though he really didn't care much for that, they would no doubt be a let down. Very few could stand up to the power of lightning...these jinchūriki would not fit into that category. They were still aways out anyway, but the sounds of fighting would be sure to make them pick up the pace...Maybe then he would be able to test out the little fire brat for himself.

"Though, Zetsu's nowhere near done with you yet...With how adamant he was about coming here, you won't be leaving this graveyard unless it's as a mutilated corpse hanging over his shoulder..."

Back in the clearing, Naruto had jumped up onto the wreckage, which was now burning from the intense heat that the atmosphere become acclimated to, as Zetsu had recovered from the pain of having two lances shoved through his chest and had filled the holes with extra black matter from his body. While physically fine, his cloak had become singed and covered in soot from the presence of the the flaming walls.

"What was the point of all this? You've seen how easily I was able to absorb part of this town, what makes you think these little fireworks will be any different?" Zetsu questioned critically, he was quite annoyed that the brat had actually managed to injure him.

Not bothering with a response, Naruto simply waved his hands causing the net of flames to rush towards Zetsu at once, resulting in a massive fire storm centered at the middle of the clearing. As the inferno raged, Naruto did not let up one bit and continued to fuel the flames with an even greater intensity, knowing full well that even something that could kill any other human may not be enough.

Naruto kept the massive firestorm going on with everything he had for well over a minute until he was forced onto his knees, panting from exhaustion. However, even with him no longer fueling the fire the flames still raged.

"Is this the extent of your power...? How disappointing..."

Naruto's head jerked back to the clearing with so much torque that it was surprising he didn't snap his own neck when he heard the voice that he had come to recognize so well. He didn't even have time to react when several chains conjured from darkness erupted from the ground under him and pierced him through his legs, chest, and abdomen, forcing no small amount of blood to spill from his mouth before the chains dispersed into black mist.

Suddenly, a large burst of wind erupted in every direction with the inside of the inferno acting as the epicenter. The ferocious winds traveling well over several hundred miles per hour tore up the ground, sent the wreckage of the town flying in every direction, and completely snuffed out the flames that had been roaring in the clearing. Naruto was thrown well into the wreckage, unable to move from the pressure the winds put

on him being crushed by winds moving as fast as an actual tornado
perhaps even faster was even worse than being crushed by gravity
earlier, as soon as the winds picked up, luckily they soon stopped after
the flames died out instead of forming into a tornado.

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