

Brothers In Arms

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Chapter 1 Alt. Version

When Nero stepped out of the car, his surroundings did not provide the picture he had anticipated. He looked around, slightly awed at the advanced looking technology and modern buildings. And were those robots at the pizza stand...?

Dante let out a low whistle. Seemed like he was a bit surprised as well. But well, neither of them had ever heard of this place called *Yokohama City* in the middle of nowhere before, especially since it wasn't in Japan as the name suggested. That seemed to be a regional thing, though, considering they had passed signposts pointing towards places called *Kyoto City* and even *London City* on their way here. The people living here didn't seem very creative, at least when it came to naming their towns. These robot-machines, however, proved their technical capabilities. *And their firepower*, Nero added mentally, warily eyeing a robot with a gun as thick as his body stomping past.

"Done staring, kid? I know this looks impressive, but we're here for a job. Although I guess these things make one wonder why they'd need any outside help at all. I doubt most demons could withstand being shot in the face by one of these."

Nero shot his partner a look but complied and grabbed his *Red Queen* off the beaten and dirty car's backseat, strapping it to his back. He slammed the door shut, shooting the vehicle a look when it shivered from the impact. He just hoped it would live long enough to get them back home, too.

"Let's go look for our client. What was his name again?"

Joining Dante in his stride towards the city, Nero fished a small piece of paper out of the pockets of his coat. Straightening it, he read the scraggly words written out loud.

"*Tōya, Headstudent's office at the Yokohama City University.*"

Stuffing the crinkled note away again, Nero took another look around. They were approaching what looked like the town centre bustling with activity. It looked like some sort of festival was approaching. There were already a couple food and gaming stands praising their services to pedestrians. A big tent to his left was still unfinished, though, and there were a lot of unoccupied spaces that looked like there were even more booths planned.

The citizens looked rather normal, enjoying life just chatting away. Completely contrasting the urgent call they had received at the *Devil May Cry* two days ago, claiming something that could only be a demon was wreaking havoc near the town, something they supposedly couldn't deal with themselves. A statement that now started to raise suspicion within Nero- how could they *not* be able to handle a demon when they had such weaponry at their disposal? Unless it was a really big one, one of the Lords of Hell, but these needed to be summoned manually, they couldn't just poke their heads through any random rift they might stumble across, like lesser devils could. Something was off.

"Hey, Dante...", Nero muttered while shuffling a bit closer to his companion. The elder looked completely at ease, but the young demon hunter knew better than to disregard his relative's guarded gaze.

"I know. Something's fishy about this", Dante agreed in a low voice. That didn't stop him from winking at a young woman wearing a yellow uniform, though. Nero snorted and rolled his eyes. Dante was such a huge flirt.

"The same procedure as every time, then?"

His only answer was a nod and a grin, which Nero amusedly returned. This wouldn't be the first time someone tried to trick them in order to catch them off guard. Especially since he'd joined Dante in the *Devil May Cry* over two years ago had the demons become even more determined and radical in their quest to eradicate the last drops of Sparda's blood. But so far, the two of them had proven to be quite the team. Even Dante, in a rare display of sentimental mush, had admitted fighting demons and doing his job hadn't been that easy and felt that safe in a long time. Words that had made Nero's chest swell with pride and turned his insides into warm, fluttery goo (which he'd deny with his dying breath). All he had said and shown were a cocky grin, a thumb's up and a careful, yet no less genuine "Likewise." But he figured that was enough.

Nero was ripped from his musings when another low whistle, accompanied by an appreciative noise, was heard from his right. He looked up to check which arse Dante was ogling now, when-

"Wow."

- he saw the huge, elaborate building a couple yards away, a large sign saying *Yokohama City University for Enchanters*.

They both paused their steps to take in the very impressive sight in front of them. The building was gigantic, sporting multiple high tower-esqe structures that looked brand new. The façades were still shiny, void of even the slightest speck of dirt. The cleaning staff was either overly motivated or this had something to do with this Enchanter-business advertised on the big sign. Nero wasn't entirely sure what that actually was, but he figured it had something to do with magic.

Patting himself mentally on the shoulder for his razor-sharp deduction skills, he

discreetly elbowed Dante in the side to get the other's attention. Icy blue eyes focussed on him. Within less than a second, he knew the older hunter had had the same thoughts plus another one. They both nodded.

"Why would they need our help..."

"... if they have a whole university teaching magic?"

Their initial suspicions reaffirmed, the two part-devils raised their guard before entering the university grounds. The moment they crossed the threshold, both felt a slight tingle washing over their bodies. Slightly alarmed, they passed an eerily empty entrance hall bigger than their entire *home* before stepping through another door and finding themselves underneath the open sky again. A few paths were leading in a circle around and to the tower in the middle as well as other buildings. A multitude of flowers were planted between the paths, giving the grounds a comfortable atmosphere. This sure was different from the universities back home, which prevailed with concrete-induced cleanness and their impersonal air, screaming *Your child isn't here to have fun, it's here to become a useful member of society!* into any visitor's face. Almost as nice as a flower garden and open air surrounding what appeared to be the cafeteria.

While Dante crouched down to inspect the greenery a little closer, Nero took a few steps towards the tower in the centre. There were tables and chairs not only on the outside but on the inside, too, as well as a young woman behind the counter rummaging through a fridge of some sort. He shot a look back to his older relative who was approaching him.

"These flowers and their beds are new. Can't be older than a couple months. Now, that could be nothing, but I feel like this barrier we passed earlier is more than just a greeting. These flowers are supposed to be here all year around."

Nero was about to ask how he'd figured that out just by looking at a couple pretty petals, but he stopped himself before he could and decided to take another look at them. There were a bunch of different flowers planted with some grass in between. He could see freesias and amaryllis as well as cornflowers, and were those waterlily dahlias over there? He wasn't quite familiar enough with the other greens to name them, but he was pretty sure the few he did know weren't supposed to be in full bloom at the same time. So yeah, here was definitely some magic going on.

So Nero gave his partner merely a nod, which was returned with a small, yet appreciative grin. The wheels in his head turned for another second to make sense of the confusion Dante's reaction had caused. When the answer hit him, he felt awkwardly proud of himself yet also a tiny bit annoyed because of that. He reminded himself of a dog. But putting that aside, Nero really was glad that he was finally able to let some of the customs the order had ingrained in his head go. Instead of ignoring everything irrelevant to the objective and therefore not being able to see the bigger picture as a subordinate, he was beginning to figure things out for himself naturally again. Something Dante had been encouraging him to do from the very beginning-probably also because he had no desire to point everything out all the time, which

Nero himself didn't appreciate all that much, either. But still, this process was not one to progress too quickly, and the memory of that left a bitter taste in his mouth. His first solo job after arriving at the *Devil May Cry* being the biggest offender.

"What's wrong?"

Nero forced himself back into the present upon hearing his relative's voice. Just now realising his face must've mirrored his unpleasant thoughts, he quickly shook all memories of this particular case off.

"Nothing, just remembered something. Anyways, how about we ask this girl behind the counter where we can find this Tōya dude?"

Even though he could almost feel the look Dante was shooting him, Nero decided to be stubborn and ignored the inquiring gaze sprinkled with doubt and a tiny note of worry. These were his own demons (pun not intended) and none of Dante's responsibility, just as some things weighing down on the older hunter weren't meant to be carried by Nero's shoulders, not even partly.

After a few seconds of intense silence, Dante finally inclined, tilting his head just the tiniest bit, and agreed.

"Sounds like a plan."

And with that, the two part-devils headed towards the glass entrance to the cafeteria. Upon stepping inside, they were greeted with warm air heavy with the scents of prepared lunch boxes for the students. Nero sniffed. Were there burgers and pizza on the menu...?

"Man, I'm starting to wish I went to school in this place... The school I went to only offered the regular stuff. You know, the disgusting kind."

"I didn't even know you actually went to school...", Nero mumbled in absent response while walking towards the nearest counter in the centre of the circular room. The service girl was now focussed on cleaning some cutlery but looked up with a beautifully fake smile upon hearing him coming closer. The professionalism was soon replaced by confusion, though. One might wonder why.

"Hey. We're looking for a guy named Tōya, or rather his office. Can you give us a pointer or two?"

Her smile returned and she nodded before pointing towards the western exit of the yard.

"Just go through there, it's the second door on the left. Mind if I ask what you want from him? You don't look like locals. Or, well, we've had some interesting folks popping in from time to time, ever since relations between the cities improved, but you guys look even fancier than those weirdoes from *Junk City*."

Not even bothering to grace that statement with a reply, Nero merely snorted and

turned away when Dante took up the torch.

"Yep, we're from a place far *far* away. But as much as I'd love to stay and chat- I'm sure you have *most interesting* things to offer- we have some business to attend to. How about-"

"- you'll excuse us now since we have to get going. Bye."

Deciding he'd let that foolery gone on for long enough, Nero interrupted Dante's attempts at flirting his way into a different kind of serving. Grabbing the older hunter's elbow, he dragged him outside in the direction of the building the girl had pointed at. Ignoring her waving after them, the young part-devil let out another snort that was only partly exasperated and mostly amused. He realised that his older relative did this most of the time not only because he tried (and failed at) being a ladies' man, but to make people stop questioning them. Nero had been told more than once that he could do that just as nicely, but he rather left that to someone with no repercussions of leaving broken hearts behind- or at least that's what the red-clad hunter liked to pretend happened.

Dante detached himself from the younger's grip, no hard feelings evident in his face or any of his other gestures, and they merrily made their way over to the automated glass door leading to, according to the shiny plaque screwed onto the wall next to it, the administrative offices. After entering, they found themselves in a clean, white hall with more fancy looking doors left and right. Going directly to the one that should lead the two part-demons to their client and finding confirmation in the form of another glass plaque sporting the words *Headstudent's Office*, they stopped in front of it before Dante raised his fist and proceeded to give it two firm knocks. Mere seconds later, a voice could be heard from within.

"You can enter."

Doing just that, Dante and Nero soon found themselves within a moderately spacious office room. Two large windows offered view on the flowery scenery outside.

"Can I help you?"

They turned to the source of the very same voice that had called them in and found themselves looking at a young man in his, presumably, mid-twenties. Sharp, bright blue eyes behind thin-framed glasses were studying the two of them. His short, dark blue hair was complimenting his blue school uniform, oddly enough. Nero wasn't quite sure why, but the guy had something of a strange air around him, something that caused his insides to tingle in the weirdest ways.

Dante, as usual, cut straight to the point.

"You're Tōya?"

The young man inclined his head, his gaze suddenly a lot sharper and attentive than before.

"That I am. You must be from the *Devil May Cry*, then." It wasn't a question.

Deciding to leave the talking to his older partner, Nero turned around to take in some more of his imminent surroundings, even if he kept listening with one ear.

"I'm Dante and that's my partner, Nero. So, tell us about your demon problem."

Arms crossed in front of his chest, his eyes lingered a moment on the ornate spear leaning against the wall next to a file cabinet. His eyes flickered over to their client, measuring briefly what the man was capable of.

"Can I get you something to drink first?"

"Nah, we're good. So, demons?"

This Tōya seemed perfectly calm- calculating, even. He looked right back at Dante, not showing the slightest hint of fear or even unease at being alone in a room with two very dangerous individuals that were also *very* armed. Nero would be lying if he said that was a first, but it was certainly uncommon. Most people were either losing their shit because of their demon problem or because of them- or both. But not this guy.

"Very well. First, let me clarify that we're not even sure if these creatures are considered demons. They appeared near the city a few weeks ago and have been there ever since."

"Then why call *us*? I usually wouldn't complain about the drive, but two days for a *maybe* sound kind of harsh, don't you think? "

Nero still hadn't turned around and was instead studying the expensive and antique looking chessboard including ornate crystal pieces sitting on a shelf next to the window. This client of theirs couldn't be more of a stereotype if he tried. Well, except for the greatly cared for but obviously often used spear attached to the wall.

"While we're not entirely certain, I have reason to believe these creatures do, in fact, fall under your expertise. I have looked through all the history records I could find and if I recall correctly, there was mention of beings of similar nature dating about thirteen hundred years back. These records also show that all known means of fighting them have been lost to us shortly after, so-

"*Bullshit.*"

Despite his one-worded outburst, Nero still stared intently at the spear hanging on the wall opposite the desk. While it was faint, it caused the same tingle on his insides as the man himself did, and now he had finally put the pieces together of where that tingle came from. Leftover traces of executed magic, albeit faint, and if these people here attended a freaking *university for magic* next to handling real close combat weapons while *also* having some pretty darn heavy armoury running around town- yeah, no. The people here were perfectly capable of protecting themselves.

"You actually believe we're gonna buy this?"

Not bothering to explain himself any further, the young part-devil merely turned around and stared hard at their client. And Tōya stared right back, but his gaze wasn't filled with anger or the like, but rather with a faint hint of surprise peeking through the metaphorical gears grinding in his head. Well. That was a reaction Nero hadn't quite anticipated. But Dante picked up right where he had left, elaborating on their doubts in a much calmer fashion- the look he shot to Nero, however, was one of acknowledgement.

"You know, there are plenty bastards out there who'd just *love* to have a piece of us. Literally. And I have to admit, your story sounds rather fishy. So why don't you explain to us what's really going on?"

Tōya stayed silent for a moment, staring the both of them up and down. Noticing the older male's gaze lingered just a tad too long on the scales on his right arm that weren't entirely hidden, Nero turned around again with a low growl in the back of his throat. After a few more seconds, their client apparently arrived at a conclusion and made an 'ah' sound.

"I think I understand. The two of you are being hunted for being not entirely... *human*, so to speak, and you believe this is some kind of elaborate trap to acquire some sort of power or might the two of you possess. Am I correct?"

"Got it in one. Now, give me one reason why I shouldn't be getting you in one."

Dante's voice may have sounded pleasant enough, but Nero could feel the cold and slightly dangerous aura he emitted. He could practically see the older's hand at the ready to get their client a little more acquainted with *Rebellion* and, just to be sure, he put a hand on the hilt of his *Blue Rose* as well. Instead of mad cackling or demons bursting through the walls, however, they were met with an awkward laugh and raised hands.

"I assure you, I have no plans of the like you seem to think of. I apologise if my call and behaviour made it look that way, but there's no need for this. Neither I nor anyone else is after you."

Nero's eyebrows shot up and he was pretty sure Dante's did, too. Their client actually sounded pretty sincere.

"Would you please explain what gave you the impression this was a ruse? I'm afraid I have to admit I'm not quite sure as to what would make you think so. Otherwise, I would have explained more properly from the beginning to prevent a scene such as this from playing out."

Knowing Dante could be bothered to do just that, Nero occupied himself by skimming over the titles of a variety of books neatly stacked on a large shelf. The tingle in his arm was getting stronger, although it was still faint. And was he imagining things or was it heating up, too? But for what reason?

"Fine, I'll give you the benefit of the doubt for now. First, while demons aren't exactly the hit in high society, most people at least know about them. Otherwise, I wouldn't have a job. Especially in big cities like this since they're drawn to large masses of humans. Second, you guys here don't only know magic, you actually teach it like other universities teach law or medicine. I've also seen you and plenty of other people proficient with hand-to-hand combat. And last, those guys with the big guns out there. I don't know what they are, but judging by their firepower, you guys *really* shouldn't be afraid of a bunch of ickle demons."

There was silence for a moment and Nero could only guess as to its reason. The strange reaction in his arm was getting too strong to wave off or even ignore, and he clenched his right fist tightly. The tingling had gotten too intense for his liking. He threw an irritated look at the offending appendage and realised with a lot of confusion and a small bit of panic that it was starting to glow. He barely heard their client speaking up again, puzzlement colouring his own voice as well.

"It's true that we learn and teach Enchantments at this university, but that's only a small fraction of what real magic can do. That has been lost to us over a millennium ago."

"What?"

Nero didn't even hear what else was being said. His gaze was locked on his *Devil Bringer* and the blue glow it was emitting in waves similar to a heartbeat. Despite himself, Nero felt a small surge of fear rising in his stomach- *this was not normal*. Gripping his scaled wrist with his human hand tightly, he could even feel the heat it was giving off and it was bordering on uncomfortable. Still staring intently at his weirdly acting limb, he raised his voice, too preoccupied with what was happening to even care about the slight hint of panic in his tone.

"Dante, something's wrong with my arm."

Obviously not needing to specify which arm exactly he was talking about, his older relative reacted in an instant. Less than a second later, their client was all but forgotten and Dante stood right next to Nero, hand on his shoulder and unusually serious eyes locked on the phenomenon.

"Anything else?"

"It feels really hot and itchy- I have no fucking clue why, it's never acted like this-"

In the very same moment Dante opened his mouth to retort, the door to the office suddenly burst open, wood slamming hard enough into the wall to leave a crack in the concrete. Three pairs of eyes whipped to the source of the disruption, their client even rising from his seat in shock, surprise and even worry.

Another young man had entered the office. Another student, judging the- for whatever reason red- uniform he was wearing. He seemed to be around Tōya's age

and was obviously familiar with their client, but that wasn't what caught everyone's attention. Neither was it his silver hair or the mismatched eyes. It was the arm he was gripping tightly, his right one. Golden lines were visible on the skin, and the pulsating light they were emitting washed over it in waves.

His arm feeling like it was reaching its peak of unusual sensations and reactions, Nero couldn't help but freeze up. Mismatched eyes found his own and icy blue locked with green and purple.