

4.5 - IGNITION

Enmity fueled Shimon. Irritation ignited Sennin.

The steeled superstructures began shaking from sheer pressure, the battlefield now at a 90 degree angle from the ground. Open field, yet close quarters. As soon as the 28-year old's shout died away, his sight locked with Shimon's and the quiet struggle began. Shinbone against shinbone, forearm against forearm. Both combatants sparked forward, only to clash in mid-air. From then on, a rumble ensued. Constant battering, edging the opponent out by the amount of impacts landed. Sennin prominently defended his body with his arms, while Shimon sent flurries of strikes with his own. Every now and then, the adult himself would open up to land a hit, which the adolescent would successfully, if sparsely, block. More rarely, Sennin would perform his earlier hand gesture and, in a white flash, appear right around the marine-haired boy. From there, he'd deliver a divekick; sometimes a full spin of his leg. This was harder to block. Still, Shimon profited from his ignited spirit, his senses at their very peak. Sennin couldn't help but notice how remarkably tough the boy was. Adrenaline was in the air. Blood would be next. Zeke witnessed it all.

"Your technique is surely impressive," Sennin randomly recalled his superior tell him, "but only in theory. You require actual polish from time to time - scratch that, you need regular training if you want to take some sort of pride in it."

Alberc ended his sentence, but the message still hung.

"Isn't it even the least bit disheartening to have so much wasted potential on your hands?" he added, looking almost pained.

He was right. Absolutely on point, the stagnant adult admitted in his heart. And it rung true even now. Sennin felt disheartened with each day he spent at the collective hellhole called the Sentinels. Carrying out missions and favors that were far below his spectrum, like a mail boy. He felt that he was destined for greater things, but the constant letdowns he experienced challenged his desire to even pursue these grand goals.

It had been three years since he had been promoted. He hoped that it wouldn't take much longer until he reached the next rank, finally ridding himself of the financial stress looming over him and his relatives. Three years later, he was still the mail boy. It was difficult to point the blame to a single individual.

'But maybe now, if I keep the upper hand...'

Sennin's dreams were sealed when his leg was stopped. After five different tries, Shimon first dodged Sennin's vanishing strike. After eight different tries, he fully caught one.

"Oh, okay. I think get it now," he spoke with remarkable calmness; Sennin's right leg firmly grasped in mid-air. The adult tried to escape, but found that he couldn't. In the same breath, the boy spun him like a whirlwind, only to release him into the window-riddled concrete below. Sennin broke through the wall with ease, crashing against the staircase hallway beneath.

"It's really simple, actually! Whenever I just *feint* a move, you never hit me! Hahaha!" Shimon laughed.

The adult's combed black hair broke into a mess when he found himself across the beige stairs. Pieces of rock and glass speckled his arms, as he diminished the crash with them as best as he could.

'The kid is figuring me out...'

And then, there was a certain moment that Sennin made a decision. A hard one.

'... there's no other way anymore.'

And right when he decided, he vanished again. But in spite of what the marine-haired defender expected next, he didn't appear beside him. In fact, he couldn't sense the attacker at all anymore. Perplexed, Shimon tapped over to the office's broken staircase, only to find it void of a body.

"Hey, Shimon," a clear, yet distant voice rung out; far from the vertical plane they fought on.

'—No.'

It took no second for the boy to realize what was happening.

"I changed my mind. We can talk."

—

As Shimon sprung across the skyscraper's wall, carrying all speed he could summon, he looked right into what he dreaded to see. At the origin of their brawl - the middle of a secluded alleyway - a red-freckled Sennin stood, his hand placed firmly around Zeke's head. The 14-year old was in a state of motionlessness, his life on the whim of the pressure applied by five fingers.

"I really don't wanna hurt him, kid. Just come—"

No chance. The moment that this gross scene branded itself onto his eyes, Shimon ran berserk. Before his opponent could even elaborate on his blackmail, a wide shockwave crashed open chunks of glass and wall alike. Stronger than he thought was possible, Shimon's legs launched him off the skyscraper, aiming straight toward the malicious adult.

In this moment, acceptance or refusal was irrelevant. Life or death was the same to Shimon. All that mattered was saving Zeke. Not the response that Sennin had anticipated.

'Shit. Shit. What do I do now.'

In the few moments that remained before the deathly determined 17-year old would carve his head in, Sennin had to face yet another decision. A sort of amendment to his previous one.

'Crush the small one? No. No, no, I can't do that.'

Time flowed onward. Sennin stood indecisively.

'Let go and defend? Is there even enough time left? Use Hideaway again? Can my eye handle another teleportation yet?'

Each moment he spent thinking was a little less time to act.

'—But it's the only thing I can think o—'

There was even less time than he guessed. "Push!" it reverberated through the alleyway. Instead of a direct attack, Shimon pulled his arm back mid-air to release the full brunt of a pulse onto his enemy.

In especially critical situations, the Human body tends to experience a surge of energy. Senses heighten to a laser-focused trance, force extends past the point of self-preservation. And in this moment, Shimon Astrai was veiled in pure, desperate power. All in the name of his brother's life.

With precision and strength that even he was unaware of, the pulse shot forward in what could have only been described as an air bullet. When it impacted with Sennin's chest, the adult felt something crack - then, he flew off. Zeke's head slipped out of his palm like butter, just as the boy had instinctively planned.

But this wasn't the end of his punishment. A disgusting action like this had to be met with appropriate measures. Thus, as Sennin flipped through the air with the speed of a diving eagle, Shimon didn't cease his pursuit.

'—Hideaway!'

In a last-ditch effort, Sennin appeared above the marine-haired punisher with another flash, carrying all momentum in his leg. And yet, fueled by the all-consuming fear of losing his brother, Shimon's intuition made him react faster. Faster than his opponent. Instantaneous was the keyword.

Before Sennin could even hope to extend his leg, Shimon's fist struck his jawline like a train crashing into a dead end. All while both were still soaring through the alleyway. Once more, the adult sailed through the air. This time however, he could neither strategize nor think in the first place. He was out cold.

The boy himself slowed down the other side of the alleyway, skittering to a halt with his father's boots, the soles losing a lot of rubber. Even he had to process what just happened.

'That was me...?' he questioned his body. *'Good thing... good thing it hit as perfectly as it did...'*

He thanked his innate ability and took an intensive breath, the kind reserved to end an intense situation. A single misstep could've cost him Zeke's life. The thought of that made Shimon feel sick again. Now a couple ten meters away from his vacant brother, he decided to rush him out of the danger zone.

This was when his adrenaline spike receded.

"—Argh!"

For quite some time, Shimon neglected his wounds. And they were aplenty. When they fought on the skyscraper wall, Sennin caused more than simple bruises. While the adult suffered from external bleeding, most of Shimon's damage lingered within his body. Physical trauma and cracked bones riddled his frame.

He couldn't take another step. Not for now.

—

The light of the moon's scythe laughed down the desolate alleyway.

Both battlers wore down. Their bodies resembled sturdy trees, chopped down enough to fall with the next swing of the axe.

Shimon could neither pursue Sennin, nor could he rush his brother out of the situation. He remained still, focused to repress his intense pain. In turn, the soaring adult did his utmost to grasp onto reality, but the world kept swinging left and right. And for a couple of seconds, he felt an overwhelming sense of tranquility, as if he was gliding away with the wind. This remained until he hit the ground, fifty meters from his opponent in the same alleyway. Another hard blow to his back that could have easily killed any ordinary Human.

Then, for the first time since their struggle commenced, nothing happened. Eight seconds passed, in which the gentle winds of Cherize graced all three parties with its calming presence. It served to endow the dying embers of battle with life. And steadily, the embers ignited to a small flame once more. Shimon started feeling his limbs again, slowly raising from his crouch. Sennin awoke from his painful slumber, drenched in a small pool of red liquid; undoubtedly his own. Zeke was completely lost on what to do.

"Zeke..."

As the marine-haired boy started reclaiming control over his body, he tried to call out to his brother as best as he could. The ordinary child needed to get out immediately, but his damaged throat failed him.

"Leav—"

Then, suffocation.

Something covered Shimon's face and threw him off-balance, landing him on the cement floor once more. His eyes stared right into Sennin's, whose face dripped blood onto Shimon's cloak at an alarming rate. He held the marine-haired boy's head with his hand, but had no power left to crush him. That wasn't his plan either way.

"H-hey... Shimon," he muttered, "you've caused... quite some shit..."

Sennin chuckled a little as he looked into the 17-year old's terrified eyes. A deeply unsettling laugh.

"Super... uncooperative. Total brat... Your invitation's—"

He repulsed a chunk of blood from his throat, landing on the concrete.

"... been revoked."

Shimon found himself unable to force the enemy's arm off him. His strength failed him. In a way, he was glad that it did so now and not earlier.

"Hey, hey! *Pssshhht...*" hushed Sennin.

"... relax! You really... you really did a number on me. So! We're going..."

An uncomfortably tranquil exhale.

"... on a final trip."

'Trip?'

Shimon's eyes shot up in horror. He ravaged his brain, trying to comprehend what his enemy meant by this.

'He can teleport... Does he mean—'

"See ya," was the last thing Sennin spoke.

'I'm incredibly sorry, little man,' was the last thing Sennin thought.

A flash later, both combatants found themselves thirty kilometers above the city.