

Brothers In Arms

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Chapter 1

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 you're from around here. We've been having a lot more visitors lately, but I've never seen guys like you. Not even from *Junk City*, and they sure got some oddballs over there."

Oddballs...? Before Nero could open his mouth to answer, feeling slightly insulted,

Dante interfered by leaning against the counter and putting a hand on his shoulder.

"We have some business to take care of and this Tōya told us to meet him there."

A charming smile accompanied this statement, causing Nero to roll his eyes. The old man was getting flirtier every day, and Nero was wondering why. Probably midlife-crisis or something.

"I see. He should be there in a couple minutes, lunch break's about to start."

"Thanks."

Before Dante had the chance to say anything else, Nero grabbed the wrist belonging to the hand on his shoulder and steered the older hunter towards the aforementioned exit.

"Hey, I wasn't done wi-"

"You can hit on girls half your age all you want as long as you're not doing it on the job. Geez, what's wrong with you? You've gotten even worse."

That last part shut the elder's mouth up again pretty quickly. His face then went through some interesting transitions. First, there was insult. The reason for that one was obvious. Next was a slightly amusing mixture of embarrassment and discomfort. Probably because Dante himself was realising what he was doing. And in the end, there was defeat. The half-demon grimaced and dragged one gloved hand through his hair, sighing.

"I know what you mean. I'm not even sure why I'm doing this, I just... Urgh, I don't know."

Nero halted in front of the door that was tagged as the Headstudent's Office, finally letting go of the other's wrist. He shot him a weird look. This was... odd. He calculated his words carefully before responding.

"Look. I don't particularly care whether you're doing that or not, but keep it to yourself while we're on the job. And around people my age, because that's kind of creepy", not particularly fond of the idea of ending whatever this was on this kind of note, he added teasingly: "Makes me scared I'll be your next target."

Successfully distracted, Dante snorted.

"You wish."

Not believing for a second that Dante wasn't purposefully letting himself being sidetracked, Nero obliged and they bickered back and forth for the following minutes. One person that looked like they were working here shot them a very strange look upon passing them, but that didn't matter.

A few more minutes went by until a young, dark-haired man appeared through the door to the corridor they were waiting in. He paused his steps upon noticing them, as did Dante and Nero their words upon realising that must be their client. Nero scrutinised the man standing a few feet away from them. He was of average height and had dark blue-ish, short hair. Bright eyes were hidden behind dark-framed glasses and he was wearing what appeared to be a blue-themed uniform. Both part-devils stood straight and went right into professional mode. It was Dante who spoke up.

"You must be Tōya."

The stranger nodded and gazed at them calculatingly.

"You must be the devil hunters I contacted."

Nero merely nodded, his arms crossed, while Dante saluted.

"At your service."

Tōya nodded and picked up his steps. He went and opened the door to his office, motioning them inside before entering. They followed him and Nero took a look around. The office looked rather simple, there weren't many decorations apart from two picture frames on the desk this Tōya was now sitting down behind. There was, however, an ornate spear attached to the wall. It didn't quite look like its only purpose was to improve the atmosphere. He observed Dante closing the door behind him before taking *Rebellion* off his back, leaning it against the plain, but comfortable looking chair in front of the desk. Plopping down on it, Dante wasted no time addressing their client.

"So, tell us about your demon problem."

Nero opted to lean against the wall next to Dante, guard raised, and crossed his arms in front of his chest. He would leave the talking to Dante. Yes, he had gotten better at keeping his temper at bay, but he was still prone to blowing up on clients he felt were trying to bullshit them. Which was definitely the case this time. They weren't only familiar with magic and had advanced weapon technology, but even melee combat. Why would they need any help?

"Actually, we're not sure they're demons."

Nero's gaze shifted to the young man sitting comfortably behind his desk. His eyes were still calculating, regarding both of the hunters in a cool, distanced manner. In any other situation, both part-devils could appreciate such a thing, but alas, they didn't. Not when it looked like they were being tricked. Nero watched silently as Dante shifted his weight and leant forward, elbow resting heavily on the table, his right hand playing with the straps holding his twin guns. Instead of explaining any further, though, Tōya's eyes stayed fixated on the two of them. A heavy silence pressed down on all three of them and the alarm bells in Nero's mind rang even louder. He shifted, ready to draw any of his weapons instantly if necessary.

To their confusion and disappointment, though, Tōya neither attacked nor made any kind of threatening movement. Quite the opposite, actually- he raised his hands in a peaceful manner and wrung out a wry smile.

"I see. You thought my request wasn't genuine and my words just suggested that to be the case."

Nero growled in the back of his throat. This guy was starting to get on his nerves, for some reason he wasn't even quite sure about. He still kept his mouth shut, though, and stubbornly stared ahead, listening to Dante voicing their both thoughts.

"If you're smart enough to figure that out, why don't you use those brain cells of yours to explain why we'd get that feeling."

Although his voice sounded nonchalant and uncaring, as if they were old mates catching up, it was hard as steel and allowed neither lies nor half-truths. Nero observed them having a short staring-contest, and even if Tōya was the first to speak again, it didn't quite look like a loss.

"I see why you would feel that way. I apologise for that. I realise I should've incorporated more details in my explanation via telephone. Allow me to explain."

Tōya coughed and pushed his glasses back up the bridge of his nose, something which Nero found, for some reason, almost infuriating. He felt like this guy was playing with them, subtly mocking them in their assumed paranoia. Dante gestured for the head student to continue, shooting Nero a look that said *Keep it together*.

"First, I must make it clear that this is the first time creatures like this have appeared around here. As you've probably noticed, this city is actually quite capable of protecting itself. However, we are not familiar with these types of enemies, not at all, and our golems-"

"Golems?"

"The automatised machines you have seen outside- are not made to fight enemies like these. Not even I know how to reprogram them to do so. They've been made to fight other golems and humans, if ordered by the human guards, but these creatures that have troubled us for a while now seemingly count as neither."

To Nero, this sounded like a major load of bull. Grinding his teeth, he kept listening.

"Assuming I bought this story- you openly advertise that this is a university that teaches magic. What keeps you from fighting those creatures with that?"

Dante's inquiry, however, was met with a gaze mostly filled with confusion. Nero could feel his patience running thin.

"Magic? No. We're Enchanters. We manipulate Ether, which is mostly efficient against enemies based on Ether-manipulation as well." Tōya shot Dante a weird look, which

was the first time he didn't look cool and professional. "Magic doesn't exist anymore."

"Are you fucking *kidding* me?"

Before Nero could stop himself, he marched over to the desk and slammed both his hands on the surface, causing the wood to shiver and creak due to the impact. His blood was boiling. This was getting ridiculous, they were both being insulted by how stupid this guy thought them to be. Magic didn't exist anymore? *Bullshit.*

He was already opening his mouth to unleash a rage-fueled snark-feast upon their so-called client when Dante rose from his seat and placed both of his hands on the younger's shoulders. Carefully steering his temperamental friend a few inches away from Tōya, who was silently watching them mostly unrattled, yet surprisingly curious at something, Dante's grey eyes locked onto his own icy blue ones.

"Don't. Let me handle this. I actually think he's saying the truth."

"Are you stupid? This guy-"

"-is genuine. Trust me on this. We don't know anything about this culture, who says magic hasn't died out around here a long time ago? Use your head, Nero. We both know what we felt was different from magic, albeit similar. Calling this Enchanter-business magic was our own assumption- a false one."

Nero merely snorted in mock-understanding. Even if he knew Dante was right in what he said, he still wasn't willing to back down and pretend like everything was making sense because it didn't. But the light eyes drilling into his own were unwavering, and even if Nero fought it a little, he could feel his anger receding again. He whirled around, turning away, and crossed his arms in front of his chest again. He merely shot Dante a look over his shoulder.

"Fine, whatever."

With a final pat on his shoulder, Dante turned back to Tōya, who was fondling some folders on his desk. He still didn't look perturbed. The red-clad hunter shot his client an easy grin.

"Sorry about that, but we've made some experiences in the past. We're not quite popular in certain places, if you get my drift."

The young man merely nodded. His eyes, however, were still carefully regarding Nero's form. His brows were slightly furrowed in contemplation, but after a few seconds, his gaze shifted to the hunter sitting in front of him again.

"I apologise again for not providing enough information to prevent your cautious approach. I assure you, we're not after either of you. We merely need your help to deal with creatures that appear to fall under your expertise we've been struggling with. A few selected students very proficient with Enchantments, including myself, are able to keep them from entering the city, but we can't put an end to this. That's

when I thought of calling for help and your business seemed to be most fitting. My research suggests these creatures are, in fact, of demonic nature, but the few reports I found were old and hence only partly credible." His eyes moved back to Nero, something which Dante noted with a slight hint of both confusion and resurfacing apprehension. Yes, he had told his younger partner to calm down, but that didn't mean he and this Tōya were going to be best buds now. He followed his client's gaze, realising he was focussed on... Nero's right arm. He must've noticed the demonic appendage during his outburst earlier.

He growled on the inside because this definitely wasn't something that could just be waved off- people were scared of this arm, yes, but not interested in it unless they had less than desirable motives. He still didn't believe this job was supposed to be a trap right from the start, but that didn't automatically mean plans couldn't be adjusted. It's happened before. He was glad Nero was more than capable of taking care of himself, but it still left a bitter taste in his mouth and severely pissed him off whenever someone was after the kid. Blame the childhood trauma.

Before Dante could say anything, however, Nero spoke up, his voice sounding strangely strained.

"Dante... my arm's acting up."

Nero slowly turned around, eyes fixated on his tingling *Devil Bringer*. It didn't feel like usual, there was no sign of the normal buzz underneath the scales nor did it glow. Instead, it was like a slight tingle right beneath the thick skin, itching and tickling and causing his fingers to twitch in irritation. He could see Dante rising from his seat and shooting a glare towards their client, who looked both confused as well as uncomfortable. Nero wasn't sure whether the slight hint of worry was his imagination or not, but he was too busy staring at his arm that seemed to heat up now.

Before anyone had the chance to say anything else, though, the door to the office suddenly burst open, wooden door slamming hard into the wall and causing the shelves to shake. Another young man- a student, judging by his red-themed uniform- hastily stumbled into the room, left hand tightly gripping his right wrist.

"Tōya, something's up with my arm! It's all tingly and itchy and feels way too hot-!"

Nero's eyes shot up and he stared at the intruder. His *Devil Bringer* was uncomfortably warm now, and the reason for that had just entered the room. The other young man cut himself off as well upon realising his arm was drawing him to one of the strangers in his best friend's office. For a moment, widened blue eyes met widened green and violet ones. Then, Nero's gaze slowly shifted to the arm the other guy was gripping tightly. Both the glowing lines and the light washing over it in waves were most curious.