

[Adam C. POV.]

"Judge all things in this universe, Zanryuzuki," I said, unleashing my Shikai. Immediately after, I felt a surge of energy as my weapon glowed with spiritual power, transforming into its Shikai state.

Cromwell's lips curled up into a cruel half-smile as he lifted his blade at me, and the metal began to shimmer, expanding in size before breaking into several pieces. "It's been a while since I've used this." At this, Cromwell brought his arm back, and glowing pieces of metal raced toward him. The shards formed around the blade, making it look almost whole, though there were still gaps between the pieces.

"Are you done?" I asked.

Smiling, Cromwell lunged forward, his broken Claymore cutting through the air like a whip, extending his range by several meters. The impact of his initial attack was cataclysmic, pushing me back as our swords met,

unleashing a wave of power that pulsed outwards from the point of impact.

Then, before I could react, the pieces of his shattered claymore flew at me in a dance, each fragment weaving independently from one another, but somehow still in sync.

Kicking the ground back, I jumped out of the way, aiming my right hand at him. "Hado #31. Shakkaho."

A burst of red flames shot out from my hand, hurtling towards Cromwell, consuming everything on its path. He smirked and held up his left hand, the pieces of his Claymore reforming into a shield that blocked the attack with ease.

"You're gonna have to do better than that," Cromwell taunted.

Blurring out of sight with a single step, I dropped my body low, letting the momentum of my movement carry me forward, as I aimed at his legs with my blade.

Reacting in time, Cromwell twisted his body, dodging my attack with ease. He then spun around, his Claymore now in its whole form, and brought it down towards my head.

I raised my sword up to meet his blow, blocking the attack. Before unleashing a flurry of quick slashes at him.

Cromwell countered each of my moves, his blade moving and breaking apart with a speed and precision that was almost inhuman. "My turn."

Wasting no time, Cromwell pressed forward, the pieces of his Claymore dancing through the air in an erratic ballet of death, where one bad step could mean my end.

Yet, despite the increasing difficulty of the fight, I met each strike, each attempt with fluid grace, my blade cutting precise arcs as I parried and dodged.

Alas, despite this, a stray blow from Cromwell's fierce onslaught eventually grazed my shoulder, leaving a trail of crimson, one that served as a reminder of my counterpart's unpredictable lethality.

Paying my new wound no attention, I retaliated in kind, leaving a shallow cut across his face, one that dripped into his blindfold. However, instead of pain, it seemed like the sight of his blood ignited a maelstrom of excitement within Cromwell, his face breaking into a wild grin.

"Not bad," A malicious grin spread across Cromwell's face as he ripped off his blindfold, the tautness in his voice betraying his obvious thirst for destruction. "Let's see what you can do."

I knew it was only a matter of time before he removed that. Good, it means the real fight it's about to fully begin.

"That's my line," I replied, getting into position.

Cromwell bared his teeth in delight and lunged towards me, his broken Claymore whistling through the air as he went in for the kill.

I met his advance in kind, letting myself enjoy the moment of this fight.

And just like that. The desert was once again engulfed in a maelstrom of dust and steel, as our swords clashed in an ever-increasing tempo. The clatter of metal against metal echoed through the air, piercing the darkness with each spark that lit up the desert sand like flashes of lightning.

[Erza Scarlet. POV.]

As I stood at the edge of the cliff, overlooking the capital of Edolas, my mission was clear, however, despite this clarity, my mind couldn't help but wander to Adam.

The wind whipped at my hair, reminding me of the countless battles he had fought. Each time, despite all odds he had emerged victorious, showing that his strength and determination were unparalleled.

But this time he wasn't at his best, this time, he felt vulnerable, and the uncertainty of this gnawed at my resolve more than I wanted to admit.

Despite this, all I could do was trust his own resolve, and strength, when I could not.

He had never failed me before, and there was no reason to believe he would start now. Still, the possibility of something happening to him, and the doubt this brought clawed at my heart like a rusty knife.

"Focus on your part, he's going to be fine," I muttered to myself, as if the words could dispel the unease in my chest. "Adam's the strongest person I know, he's my teacher, my friend, my... he always emerges triumphant."

I hated this.

I wasn't one to be uncertain.

I wasn't one to have doubts.

But no matter what I said, or tried, a tiny voice inside me questioned my every thought, whether his strength would be enough this time. My fingers clenched into fists, nails digging into my palms, as I struggled to banish those treacherous doubts that threatened to consume me.

It seemed I couldn't bear the thought of losing him.

"Then I won't!" I declared. For even if he were to die, I wouldn't let him, and while this might not make any sense for anyone, it didn't matter.

Fairy Tail has never made any sense, and we weren't about to start now!

[Adam C. POV.]

Seconds turned into minutes, and before I knew it, our duel had dragged on into the night, moving across the desert in a seemingly never ending clash. By this time, we both bore the clear signs of our duel.

Our bodies, glistening with exertion, moved with diminishing speed, the drawn-out clash draining our strength. But as my movements grew heavier, I noticed a sluggishness creeping into Cromwell's strikes, the once unpredictable warrior now seemingly entering within the realm of predictability.

"Kinetic charge: Explosion!" Cromwell growled in a burst of renewed energy, as he swept his Claymore in a wide arc, releasing a massive explosion.

Taken back by this new power of his, I barely managed to bring up my sword, bending space around me, the ensuing explosion jarring my entire body, as the force of his attack propelled me back.

Seizing this chance, he pressed on, unleashing a relentless assault of strikes my way.

However, within the onslaught of strikes, I found my moment. As Cromwell lunged, with a grace that belied the exhaustion gripping my body, I sidestepped out of his path. My blade slicing through the air in an arc, its sharp edge aiming to cleave through him.

Slashing his chest, I moved to strike again seeing this wound hadn't been as lethal as I would've wanted, however, this time, Cromwell was ready, and his blade intercepted mine in a shower of sparks.

Our blades met in a deadlock, as our eyes locked in mutual acknowledgement. We were both enjoying this, a fight where we could give our all.

And while the truth of the matter was that this wasn't my all, seeing that most of my power was within the Lacrima that had been meant to seal me, I still felt alive!

"Not bad, but not enough," I grinned, pushing against him, shattering our impasse. Then, as Cromwell reeled backward ever so slightly at the sudden break, I seized the opening given to me. Wasting no time, my blade moved, flashing like a comet streaking through the night, its path aimed to end this duel.

And it did.

Cutting him once again across the chest in a wide arc, this time, deep enough to ensure the result I had been looking for.

Taking a shaky step back, Cromwell raised a weary arm, his battle-worn face splitting into a pleased grin, as his body buckled under the weight of his wounds, his Claymore slipping from his grasp as his knees hit the sand beneath him with a loud thud.

"That was a good fight," Cromwell said, his voice strained but content. "I couldn't have asked for a better opponent. Me."

I snorted at the joke. "Likewise."

"Don't be condescending, it doesn't suit us," Cromwell chuckled weakly, his eyes closing as he let out a long-tired

sigh. "I had fought enough battles to know when someone isn't at their best, you weren't even close to your peak. But it doesn't matter, I had fun..."

I smiled, my own body dropping to the ground face first.
"Well, I guess it's time for a nap."

If I had learned something today, it was that sometimes being weak was a lot of fun. Who would've thought?