**More things in heaven and earth**

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Additional Tags: Alternate Universe - Fantasy, Magic, Witch Kyouko, Kyouko is marginally terrifying, Protective Siblings, Unconventional Uses for Dying Will Flames, Flames plus magic equals chaos, Sun flame Kyouko, Ghosts, Sort of temporary character death, ghost Hibari, Tsuna is disturbingly perceptive, Cursed swords, Muramasa swords, Werewolf Gokudera, Wolf Instincts, combined with magic mafia flame instincts, non-human behaviours, Discrimination, Mad Scientists, Mad Science, Spark Shouichi, Spark Spanner, Killer Robots, death rays, Time Travel, For Science!, Pagan Gods, Half God Lambo, Dragons, Dragon I-Pin, Alien Fuuta, Gods have bizarre ageing requirements, God-Blooded, Kitsune, Curses, Kitsune Haru, arcobaleno curse, blue/orange morality, cultural dissonance, Human Experimentation, Body Horror, Non-Consensual Body Modification, Sanity is relative, The universe is vast cold and indifferent, Cyborgs, Steampunk, Crane wife Nana, Fairy Tale Elements, BAMF Sawada Nana, Perceptive Nana, Iemitsu is smarter than he pretends to be, Reborn is a troll, A deeply sadistic troll, His students are pawns in his plans to torment the mafia, Witch Bianchi, Family Issues, Possibly onesided Bianchi/Reborn, Humans Are Terrifying, especially Varia humans, Kelpies, Sea Monsters, Man eating horses, Implied Cannibalism, Dino can be terrifying when he wants to be, which is all Reborn's fault, Family History, Cavallone Prima was a terrifying woman, Incubus Shamal, Ten Years Later Arc (Reborn), Damage to the fabric of reality, BAMF Kyouko, bamf Haru, Undermining the enemy for fun and profit, Fae Byakuran, Mare rings are bad for peoples mental health, Seer Yuni, Prophecy, Species Dysphoria, Grief/Mourning, space travel, Angst, Fae & Fairies, Djinni & Genies, Djinn Basil, Cursed Iemitsu, Eldritch Horrors, Implied/Referenced Rape/Non-con, Human Sacrifice, of a sort, Omens & Portents.
More things in heaven and earth

by Dissenter

Summary

Tsuna is not quite human, neither are his guardians. Magic and flames can have some odd interactions.

Notes

When Kyoko was five she built herself a brother out of earth and blood. He was the first thing she ever created. He wasn't the last.
Sasagawa Kyouko was a desperately lonely little girl. Her parents were distant, not cruel, just… absent, and their house felt so very empty when they were gone. The years before she was old enough to start school were defined by disinterested nannies, and solitary games, and the nights she stayed up afraid of the dark wishing there was someone to chase away the monsters under the bed.

And that might have been the end of it. There was nothing special about the story, nothing hundreds of other lonely little girls had not had to endure and learn to cope with. It might have been the end of it, but Kyouko was not like other little girls.

Sasagawa Kyouko was a witch, just as her mother was. She had power born into her, for making, for creating, and a child’s will to change the world to her own desires. She was a lonely little girl and when she was five years old she built herself a brother out of earth and blood, and brought him to life with sheer force of will. He was the first thing she ever made. He wasn’t the last.

She learned how from one of her mother’s books, only half understood but fully believed in, and as everyone knows magic is about belief more than anything else. If she had understood a little better, she might well have failed, because while the book held instructions for simple makings, the making of a human was a magic far beyond that, one that masters had baulked at. But she was a child, and children lack an adult’s concept of limits. The most important thing in making is knowing what you want, she’d guessed at what she could and forced the rest through with yellow fire and determination, and she’d wanted a brother more than anything in the world. So she made one for herself, and was confused when her parents were so shocked.

She used earth to make his shape, and blood to bind him together. Her blood, because brothers and sisters share blood, that much she knew. It hurt a bit, when she cut herself with the kitchen knife, but it worked. The crude earth sculpture of a vaguely human shape changed, became a person, a boy a little older than her, strong, and loud, and kind, her Oniisan.

…

When her parents came home and found out what she’d done they were… surprised to say the least. At first they thought Ryouhei was just a simple construct, a doll given movement and the semblance of life, that would return to its natural state within a few days. Common enough in children, although impressive for one as young as Kyouko. But as days and weeks went by, with no sign of him vanishing it became increasingly obvious he was a true making. A child with a mind and a soul as much as any that were naturally born, Kyouko was five years old, and she had created a life.

In the end her father had finessed the paperwork, and her mother had hexed the minds of the public officials, and as far as the world was concerned Sasagawa Kyoko had always had a big brother. Kyouko was pleased. He was everything she’d ever wanted.

He was loud because to five year old Kyouko, little boys had been a loud sort of creature, he was a fighter, because Kyouko had wanted someone to protect her from the monsters under the bed, he loved Kyouko more than anything in the world, because he was born out of her need to be the most important thing to somebody. Ryouhei was a masterpiece, a mishmash of a little girl’s dream of what a big brother would be like that was given life and left to grow up, and somewhere along the line became his own person. A little odd, but certainly not outside the realms of human possibility. The
only outward sign of his unusual creation was the fact that he lacked a belly button, he had been created not born the lingering trace of connection to a mother simply wasn’t there. He didn’t mind much, it was easy enough to hide and it was good to have a reminder of just how amazing his extreme little sister was.

…

Sometimes Kyouko wondered if she’d made him too well. She wouldn’t change a thing of course. But still, seeing him bloodied and half dead from fighting, knowing he was made for it and begging him to stop anyway, she wondered if she’d made him too well. Because she begged him to stop and he refused, had said no to her even though it broke him inside to make her cry that way. She’d made him a person and that meant he made his own choices, and Kyouko had to live with him coming home bruised and battered from those choices. She wondered, but she didn’t regret, not ever. He was her Oniisan and she would never want her Oniisan to be any less than he was. If he couldn’t make his own choices it wouldn’t be real.

He hated to see her cry so he joined the boxing club as a compromise, it was better than the street fights at least, and so Kyouko dried her tears and cheered him on, and appreciated the honest joy he took in his sport. She should have known it was too good to last, he was made to protect, to kill monsters, but Kyouko wasn’t five any more and the monsters under the bed were long gone. It was almost inevitable that he got tangled up in Tsuna’s twisted web of flames, and magic, and danger. He needed to fight and protect, and Tsuna had the kind of enemies that demanded that fighting strength. Part of her had been angry, had felt like Tsuna was stealing her big brother, that he had no right, that Ryouhei was made for her and he had no right to take him away. But that wasn’t fair and she knew it. Ryouhei’s heart was big enough for all of them, and Tsuna needed him in a way that she didn’t anymore. That was why she’d offered to share him in the first place. Tsuna was sweet, and kind, and vulnerable, he deserved to have someone look after him the way Ryouhei had looked after her.

Chapter End Notes

Basically Kyoko used magic to create a brother, and then used sun flame activation to bring him to life. Not that she knows that's what she did. She just believed it would work, so it did.

Think about it for a while. That is a terrifying power for a five year old to have. And she only gets better at it as she gets older.
Chapter Summary

Hibari Kyouya is dead and buried, and Kusakabe Tetsuya is the only one who knows.

Chapter Notes

In which death is not nearly enough to stop Hibari, but it takes Tsuna to save Kyouya.

Sometimes Tetsuya wondered, why it was that no-one but him noticed just how long Hibari Kyouya had been running Nami middle’s disciplinary committee. He was Hibari senpai to even the oldest students, by this point he was pretty sure that none of the current students could remember a time before Hibari, and yet still no-one wondered. Maybe it was natural, some kind of perception warping effect that prevented people from thinking too hard about Hibari, about where he came from, how he did what he did, how long he’d been doing it.

Sometimes he wondered why he was exempt from that effect, but then, maybe he knew the answer to that too. Maybe it was a part of what he owed, after all he’d been there that day under the sakura trees, he remembered the blood, the still body, he remembered why.

Hibari Kyouya was fifteen years old, he would always be fifteen years old, the dead don’t change and age the way the living do. They just become more set, more themselves, more a force of nature and less a human being as time passes, and God knew Hibari had barely been human when he was alive.

No that wasn’t fair or true. Kyouya had been human, under the tough shell and impossible strength of will. Tetsuya remembered even if no-one else did. He’d been human enough to die anyway, no matter what he or anyone else had believed.

It had been Tetsuya’s fault. Not all of it of course, he hadn’t been the one that beat a fifteen year old to death under the cherry trees out behind the middle school. But enough of it. If it hadn’t been for him it wouldn’t have happened, and that made it his responsibility. He’d been a reckless teenager, had gotten in over his head, angered the wrong people and Kyouya paid the price. The details blurred a little in his memory, it had been years and the human mind wasn’t made to process the way time warped around ghosts. He didn’t remember the details of how they’d all ended up there, but he remembered the men had been there for him, had meant to kill him, and Hibari had intervened, just as he always did for “causing a disturbance on school grounds”. He remembered thinking he was saved, that Hibari would fix everything. He had watched the fight, too battered to move, with absolute faith that Hibari would win. And he had fought like a demon, a whirl of black coat and shining metal and danger, but in the end he was one fifteen year old boy, with tonfas and they were five grown men with knives and chains, and a gun. In the end Kyouya had gone down, blood soaking into the earth by the treeroots, and he’d been so very still, so much smaller than he’d been in life.
Tetsuya remembered… mostly shock actually. More than grief or horror or guilt, there had been pure shock and disbelief at the still form on the ground, at the idea that Hibari Kyouya was dead. Even then, when he’d been human, when he’d been alive, he was a force of nature, and Tetsuya couldn’t believe that anyone was strong enough to kill him. But terrifying and invincible as Hibari had seemed to the fourteen year old Tetsuya, to the adults he faced he was just a fifteen year old boy, not immortal, not omnipotent, just another child in their way.

But then maybe the children had the right of it after all. After all, in the end nothing so mundane as death had been able to stop him. His body had been cold and still under the sakura trees but his spirit had returned with such force of will that no-one had even noticed he was dead. Most ghosts were transparent, or at least fuzzy around the edges, most ghosts struggled to touch things, while Kyouya was crystal clear even at high noon, and fought as though tangibility wasn’t even something he had to think about. That spoke of a force of will beyond most people’s comprehension, the kind of determination that moved mountains, and warped reality, and stared down death with the certainty that it would not hold him. The children had been right in the end, Hibari had been unstoppable, even by death.

His body had been still and cold, and his killers had been laughing, had been about to move in to finish off Tetsuya when everything went cold, and a human shape outlined in purple flame had appeared above the body. Hibari Kyouya had avenged his own death, his killers too shocked to even try to fight back, not that it would’ve done them any good. There isn’t much that can hurt a ghost after all, aside from the memory of their own death.

Tetsuya had been the one to bury him, to dispose of the killer’s bodies, to hide the evidence that Hibari Kyouya was a dead man. He wasn’t sure why Kyouya had asked him to, just that he would have followed any order Kyouya gave, would have done just about anything for him. Keeping Kyouya’s death a secret was orders, making himself Kyouya’s anchor, that was his own choice. He owed Hibari Kyouya a debt that could never be repaid, and Tetsuya knew enough about the nature of spirits to know how their humanity faded over time if there was no-one to act as a living anchor, to remind them of what life felt like, how they wore themselves down to their core principles and lost all the petty unimportant details that added up to make someone a person. Kyouya had died saving his life, Tetsuya could not abandon him to that fate.

So Tetsuya became Kyouya’s anchor, and Hibari had gone back to school, and somehow no-one had noticed anything wrong with either of them. They were still terrified of Hibari, and wary of him, and no-one commented on anything aside from the fact that Kusakabe Tetsuya had taken to following Hibari around and acting as his assistant. They hadn’t noticed Hibari had stopped eating, that Tetsuya now wore three layers of clothing even in high summer, that both of them seemed to have stopped aging. Hibari was still a vicious enforcer of order, and Tetsuya was still a vaguely irrelevant delinquent, and no-one saw any deeper than that. Maybe they didn’t want to.

Still, it wasn’t the same. Maybe Tetsuya was the only one who noticed, but while Hibari senpai demon of Namimori was mostly unchanged, Kyouya, the fifteen year old boy who’d loved small animals and been kind underneath it all had been fading year by year. If Tetsuya hadn’t made himself Kyouya’s anchor he was pretty sure that nothing would remain of Kyouya’s humanity. It cost him, that kind of thing always costs. The price paid in the ache deep in his soul where something important was missing, in the way that some days he just couldn’t get warm, in the grief as friends and family and time passed him by, not frozen the way Hibari was, but it had been nearly seven years since that day, and still Tetsuya was only fifteen. It cost him and every day Tetsuya was faced with the bitter knowledge that it wasn’t enough. That Hibari became less of a person and more of a force of nature with each passing year and all he could do was slow the process. These days Hibari was more likely than not to put rule breakers in the hospital and Tetsuya was just waiting for the day when he finally killed someone for petty rulebreaking.
Sawada Tsunayoshi had done what Tetsuya alone had been unable to do. Somehow he had seen and understood what so few others had. Somehow he’d reached out to parts of Kyouya that Tetsuya had thought he’d buried under the sakura trees along with his own childhood. He’d reached out and made a connection, with kindness, and understanding, and a strength of will that Tetsuya had only ever seen in Kyouya. Because of Tsuna, Kyouya had started to care about people again, rather than just rules, for Tsuna he’d left the school grounds he’d haunted since his death to do what needed to be done, thanks to Tsuna, Tetsuya could see the boy Kyouya again under the surface shell of the inhuman entity that was Hibari. There was something special about Sawada Tsunayoshi, strength of will and an instinctive understanding that sent shivers down Tetsuya’s spine. He hadn’t twitched the first time he’d seen a bullet pass right through Kyouya without leaving a mark and a part of Tetsuya wondered how long Tsuna had known Kyouya was dead. (Years later he’d asked and Tsuna had just smiled softly and said he’d always known.)

Chapter End Notes

So in this story the weakness to sakura is because it reminds him of his death, which is a weakness for all ghosts. There are other weaknesses, but they are usually very elaborate and involved.
Those who live by the sword

Chapter Summary

Shigure Kintoki is a Muramasa blade.

Chapter Notes

The family sword is a cursed blade. It fits far too well in Takeshi’s hand.

Takeshi had always known the sword would change him. His father had made that very clear, had told him that if he chose to follow the way of the sword then the family blade would become his responsibility, and from that point on death would walk beside him. Yamamoto Tsuyoshi had told his son, with utter seriousness in his eyes, not to take up the sword unless he had something he was willing to kill for. For once Takeshi hadn’t laughed it off.

That was half the reason he’d thrown himself into baseball. Into an innocent, harmless sport, free of the impossible weight of duty that waited for him behind the doors of the family dojo. He’d ignored that part of his blood that longed for edged steel and the clarity of dancing with death. He’d smiled and laughed and refused to think about it, and it worked… for a while. He was good at baseball, it made him popular, well liked and busy, and the focus of competition was almost enough to satisfy him.

Over time though, it stopped working, stopped being enough. He’d laughed and smiled, and won the games but every day he’d felt more hollow inside, more alone. He was popular, but his classmates didn’t like him, they liked baseball star Yamamoto, if they’d known what Takeshi dreamed at night they would have run screaming.

And then he’d broken his arm and it was like a slap in the face from the baseball gods. Like a punishment, for pretending to be something he wasn’t, for pretending to follow them even when his dreams rang with the clash of steel on steel. It was a thought the universe itself was trying to corner him into accepting the duty he’d been hiding from ever since his father told him the true nature of the family sword.

In retrospect trying to kill himself might have been a slight overreaction, but at the time all he could think of was the walls of fate closing in, and the blood he wasn’t ready to spill. He’d just wanted out, away from this world where the things normal teenagers wanted weren’t enough, and he craved things no decent person should, he wanted away from the friends who didn’t really know him, and wouldn’t have been his friends if they did. He’d wanted free of the sword on the wall of his family dojo, old, and cruel, and hungry, he’d wanted away from the truth. That he wanted the sword even when he didn’t want to, wanted it like water, and air, and purpose.

He’d been drowning in his own desperation, when Sawada Tsunayoshi reached out his hand. He had honestly been ready to jump, just to avoid having to face his own truth, but Tsuna had looked at him with orange fire flickering behind his eyes, and the kind of understanding and acceptance that
he’d never expected to find in this life. It had felt like Tsuna was looking right through to his soul, and Takeshi had known with the swordsman’s instinct he’d liked to pretend he didn’t have, that Tsuna knew exactly what he was, and he didn’t care. In that moment he knew, he would follow Sawada Tsunayoshi anywhere, that he had found something he was willing to kill for.

So when the Varia arrived, when it became clear he was going to have to honour that resolve, to fight and kill for Sawada Tsunayoshi, he hadn’t hesitated. He’d gone to his father, eyes serious and voice steady, and he’d asked to learn the sword.

He’d expected it to be hard, learning to kill, learning to bear the dark hungers of a cursed blade. He hadn’t expected it to feel so right. Shigure Kintoki fit into his hand like it was meant to be there and he felt whole in a way that he hadn’t in years, as he ran through the forms that would turn it from an innocuous looking shinai into a weapon of death. It sent a slight chill down his spine knowing that he felt more himself in that moment with predatory steel in his hand than he had in his life. He’d remembered to slice his thumb open on the blade before he sheathed it, and he’d known in that moment as the blade flickered back into it’s deceptively innocent resting form, that the sword was his now.

…

It had taken far too long for Squalo to realize. He should have known the minute the brat drew the sword, he should have seen it from the way he took care to cut into the back of his own hand before the fight even began. Squalo was a swordsman he knew the stories, he knew that was what you did to keep control of a cursed blade. It shouldn’t have taken him half a fight to realize just what he was facing. His only defence was the sheer improbability of it, the brat was meant to be a civilian where the hell did he get hold of a fucking Muramasa sword. And how the hell could he seem so lighthearted wielding it. The dissonance was distracting to say the least and the brat was quick to take advantage. Kid had talent, he’d give him that, although how much was his own instincts, and how much the sword’s hunger whispering in his ear, Squalo didn’t care to guess. There was a reason he avoided the damn things. When the kid brought his sword down for the final blow Squalo had honestly expected to die feeding the sword’s hunger. The kid turning the blade had just been another layer in the utter surrealism of that whole fight. The kid carried a Muramasa blade, and he’d held back from the kill, had just laughed and said their fight had given the sword enough blood for now. It was fucking unnatural.

…

Takeshi was reasonably sure that Tsuna knew exactly what Shigure Kintoki was, there wasn’t much Tsuna didn’t know really. He knew what the sword was, and he knew what Takeshi was, and still he didn’t flinch when Takeshi’s eyes when hard and cold with a blade in hand, still he didn’t hesitate to call him family. For the first time in his life Takeshi felt like he truly belonged. For the first time there were people who knew him, who knew what he was capable and didn’t care, were impressed if anything. There was Gokudera Hayato who could smell the blood on the blade, and feel the killing intent, and just bared his teeth in something that was half challenge, half poorly disguised comradeship. There was Sasagawa Ryouhei who craved the fight in a way that Takeshi had only ever seen in himself, and wasn’t ashamed to admit it. There was Hibari Senpai who Takeshi was pretty sure he’d heard holding a conversation with his sword, and had disappeared with a neutral nod of acknowledgement when he caught Takeshi listening in. And always, always there was Tsuna, who saw right to the heart of things and never flinched at the truth, even when he flinched at just about everything else. The sword had changed Takeshi, to the point where sometimes he didn’t know whether the killer instinct was his own or the blade’s. But when Tsuna looked at him with eyes that knew too much, and a will that could move mountains, he knew that no matter what the sword did, it would never have half the hold over him Tsuna did.
Muramasa blades were swords made by a particular swordsmithe, named Muramasa. They were very good swords with a very bad rep. There was a general belief that they were cursed, that they drove their wielders mad, that they refused to be sheathed without spilling blood, that they forced their wielders to kill others or themselves. So yeah evil magic sword, passed down through the family.

I'm going with the sword has a limited sort of consciousness, which influences it's wielder over time.
Tooth and claw

Chapter Summary

When Gokudera was eight, living on the streets alone, he was bitten by a werewolf. It quite possibly saved his life.

Chapter Notes

You know a character's backstory is bad when turning them into a werewolf actually improves it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hayato was eight years old and utterly alone when he was bitten. It probably saved his life. It was a brutal bloody business but if it hadn’t happened then he most likely would have died on those streets. Hunger, or violence, or the cold of winter would have been the end of an eight year old human child, he’d known it even then. But a wolf, a wolf even half grown as he was, could survive things a human couldn’t, could eat rats and pigeons raw, could raid dustbins with no ill effects, could go days without eating at all. A wolf had thick warm fur, to shield it against the cold, had teeth and strength to fight off attackers. By winter’s end Hayato had got used to spending more time in wolf form than human.

It had happened seven months after he’d run from the poison gold cage he’d been raised in. Seven months since he’d run from the lies, and the manipulations, and the constant feeling of being simultaneously surrounded and alone, of being caged.

He had been seven months sleeping with one eye open, eating whatever came to hand, he could feel the cold starting to bite at his bones at night, and he’d known the winter might just kill him, but he couldn’t go back. His family wouldn’t have turned him away, if only to save face, but the very thought made him feel sick to the stomach. The streets are not kind to starving children but the mafia was no better, and the idea of being at the mercy of the same people who’d killed his mother, left him feeling cold and panicky for hours after. He thought about having to smile, and apologise and play their games, of dressing to their standards, and watching his words, of gritting his teeth and swallowing Bianchi’s cookies when he was told, of trying to bend to them, knowing exactly what they were capable of, what they had done, what they could do, and he knew, it was more than he could bear.

He had no gift for deceit, and far too little self restraint. He could have gone home, for the sake of warmth, and shelter, and three meals a day, and sooner or later he would have slipped up. He would failed to hold his temper, or his tongue, or his mask, and he would have died just as surely as his mother had when she became inconvenient. He would prefer to die like a dog on the streets then cage himself in with them again.

And then he was bitten, a starving young human became a starving young werewolf, and the whole game changed. There was an adjustment period of course. The first change was bad, the first change
is always bad. The confusion and disorientation, the new instincts he hadn’t known how to process, the predator’s reaction to hunger that the human had gotten used to ignoring. He wasn’t sure what he’d eaten that night, and honestly he didn’t really want to know. What he did know was that he woke up the night after the full moon with bloody fur stuck between his teeth, and he felt full for the first time in months. He should have felt sick at the taste in his mouth, but all he could register was the absence of the awful gnawing hunger that had become so familiar he barely noticed its presence until it was finally gone. He should have been angry at whichever wolf had lost control of their instincts and stolen his humanity, but all he could summon up the energy to feel was a kind of distant gratitude. Humanity was overrated anyway.

There was a blur he found, between human and wolf. He was never entirely human even when he wore his original skin, his senses too sharp, his instincts too strong, but his wolf skin was no less ambiguous. No wolf could plan, and reason, and strategise the way he did. No-one seeing the sharp intelligence in his eyes could ever mistake him for an ordinary animal. It wasn’t like that for all ‘wolves. The few born ‘wolves who would speak to him said it was to do with acceptance and self denial. That those who spent too much time in either form lost balance, went utterly rabid in one form while seeming completely normal in the other. Probably what happened to the one who’d bitten him. It certainly put a new perspective on the way most people bitten just locked themselves up for the full moon and tried to ignore their “condition” otherwise.

The born wolves were different. Not biologically, but culturally. They were the ones who taught him to maintain the blur. They might not have liked him, but he was technically a cub and entitled to some basic instruction. Besides none of them wanted a rabid stray hanging around their territory, that was just basic self preservation. Born ‘wolves viewed themselves as an entirely separate species to humans, spent most of their time in the woods getting back to their hunter gatherer roots, in order to “harmonise both sides of their nature” or some such bullshit.

None of the packs would take him in of course, the ones that didn’t have strict rules against accepting bitten ‘wolves had stricter ones about killing humans, and Hayato was already a murderer twice over by the time he was bitten. The explosives Shamal had taught him were dangerous and a small child alone on the streets can have a lot of reason to need to be dangerous. The ones that might have made allowances for age and circumstance were wary of his mafia connections, unwilling to bring such influences near their own cubs, and he tried not to hold it against them.

It wasn’t so bad being a lone wolf anyway. He was still only half grown by ‘wolf standards so they were tolerant when he strayed into their territory in search of food. They’d chase him off of course but they would generally just give him advice, and lessons in how to behave while they did it. He’d seen what they did to loners who were old enough and experienced enough to know better, he knew he was getting off easy. It wasn’t so bad. It wasn’t… Except it was. Neither wolves nor humans were meant to be alone, and the isolation gnawed at his soul.

It was the isolation that drove him back to the mafia in the end. They didn’t really want him either, but sometimes they needed him, needed his skills, and that was better than nothing. It didn’t really help that he refused to hide what he was. Prejudice was alive and well in organised crime. And in the rest of the world to be honest. Werewolves had a pretty bad rep. But he refused to cripple himself to avoid offending their delicate sensibilities. His wolf skin had saved his life far too many times for him to be willing to try and suppress it, even if trying didn’t risk sending him rabid, and the enhanced senses had let him pick up on more than one planned ambush or double cross before it became an issue. On second thoughts maybe that was the real reason most mafia men hated skinchangers.

They didn’t like him, wouldn’t invite him into their families, but they would grit their teeth and work with them, and Hayato could make that enough. He told himself it was enough often enough that he’d almost managed to make himself believe it. Then an arcobaleno had called him and thrown his
carefully constructed equilibrium into chaos. He was being offered a place in a family, somewhere to belong, pack, and he wanted so badly it terrified him.

Maybe that was why he was so angry when he first met Tsuna. Reborn knew what he was, everyone knew, Hayato refused to believe Reborn was uninformed. And knowing what he was Reborn must have known that he couldn’t follow someone so weak. Hayato was as much wolf as human and wolves do not follow alphas that are weaker than them. By the looks of things this Sawada Tsunayoshi was weaker than just about everyone. It was beyond cruel, to be offered a place, a pack, and be unable to take it because the leader was too weak for him to follow.

His anger blinded him a little, made him underestimate Tsuna, made him miss the signs that he really should have picked up on. But then Tsuna surprised him, he defeated him, and then saved his life in the same breath, and when Hayato had gone limp and shown his belly in response Tsuna had known exactly what to do. The calm that settled over Hayato when Tsuna ran his hand over his stomach in acceptance cleared his head and allowed him to finally register the ozoneandfeathers scent that marked Tsuna as distant kin. A skinchanger of a different sort.

He regretted asking what it felt like to fly when Tsuna flinched at the question. He was pretty sure that if he’d pushed Tsuna would have answered, but seeing the pain in his leader’s eyes he chose to back down instead. If Tsuna wanted to talk about it he would, Hayato would not pressure him.

Tsuna was his pack leader his sky, his friend, he never wanted to make Tsuna hurt like that.

There was definitely something about Tsuna though, beyond just an ordinary skinchanger. If Hayato had needed more evidence he needed only to look at how the mystical swirled around him. There was something magical about every one of the guardians, about nearly all of those Tsuna considered family, and the way he was able to connect to each and every one of them, from the vicious ghost Hibari, and the idiot Yamamoto with the sword that reeked of old blood, to the sweet and terrifying creator witch Kyouko, and her devoted older brother/creation, was proof that Tsuna was truly something special.

Chapter End Notes

In case it doesn't come up. Bianchi is actually a witch like Kyouko, but since she's a storm not a sun, it results in her cooking being toxic rather than her creations coming to life. Also the fairly toxic atmosphere growing up had a subliminal effect, because young magic users tend to be a bit suggestible.

Next chapter we take a slight detour to check in on Shouichi.
Shouichi and Spanner are mad scientists. The world trembles.

I'll be deeply disappointed in anyone who didn't see this coming. Ideas shamelessly stolen from Girl Genius.

In hindsight the death ray really shouldn’t have been their first clue, but then again, Shouichi’s family always did have an absolute gift for ignoring things they didn’t want to deal with. So while little Shou-chan had been busy building robot spiders in his bedroom and drawing up early blueprints for his secret underground base, they’d just cooed at how clever he was and gone on with their lives like nothing was wrong.

In the end it had taken an incident letter from his school to get their attention. Apparently some of the other kids had been picking on him, and he’d responded by barricading himself into the science lab, for three hours. The unsettling harmonics of his laughter alone would have been warning enough, even if he hadn’t emerged with an honest to god death ray. Shouichi remembered the resulting chaos being… unsettlingly satisfying on a deep and instinctive level. He’d still been in the madness place at that point, and the sight of his classmates and teachers alike channeling their inner cowering townspeople, had made him laugh and laugh, with the gleam of insanity shining in his eyes.

That had been an awkward parent teacher conference. He wasn’t in trouble exactly. He’d been provoked, he wasn’t in full control of his actions, technically it was just an unfortunate incident. But… well the school just wasn’t set up to deal with a baby Spark. It wasn’t that he’d done anything wrong, the headteacher had been quick to reassure them, not on purpose anyway. But maybe he’d benefit from an educational establishment that was better able to handle his… special requirements.

The upshot of it all was that he’d been withdrawn from school. He would have cared more, but the courses he took online had been more interesting anyway. And best of all it meant that he didn’t have to deal with those FOOLS, who didn’t understand the importance of SCIENCE, they DARED QUESTION his GENIUS. Instead he got left in peace to spend his days in the pursuit of SCIENCE. Selling some of his earlier work meant he even had the money for his own lab equipment. Life was good.

It got better after he’d gone to that robotics competition. Robots weren’t really his thing, but they were still interesting, and it had seemed like an interesting event to enter. He’d been right. That was where he’d met Spanner. Spanner liked robots. He liked science in general but robots were his favourites. It had started with Spanner admiring Shouichi’s robot, and ended with them holed up in Shouichi’s hotel room with a pile of repurposed machinery and a robot that shot laser beams. Shouichi was good with lasers.
Shouichi had never had a friend before, let alone a friend that understood. He’d seen the uncanny shine take hold in Spanner’s eyes as he’d done something unholy with wires and power cells, he’d felt himself follow as their joint project started to take shape. Thoughts darting and flying with a kind of clarity that no-one around him had ever been able to match, but Spanner could, and the ideas flew between them in half formed sentences and scribbled diagrams. It was morning by the time the two of them emerged from the madness place. Their creation was a work of art, that was probably illegal in at least seventeen different countries. It had ended up destroying most of the floor of the hotel they were on before the combined efforts of the other contestant’s robots had brought it back under control. It was ok though, it was a robotics competition, one of the more traditional Spark gathering places, the organisers had expected there to be some sort of incident, and had insured accordingly.

At least they hadn’t unleashed it on unsuspecting citizens. That could have been embarrassing. Going full on madboy and trying to terrorise your school at age five was excusable, going full on madboy and trying to conquer a city at age thirteen was a problem. It indicated a worrying lack of control, the sort of lack of control that got you landed on government watchlists as a possible danger to human civilisation. No self respecting Spark wanted to end up on those watchlists, if only because it would make any future world domination plots that much harder to pull off.

But they hadn’t, so it was all fine, and now Shouichi had a real life friend. Of course they’d had to go back home to different countries when the competition ended, but they’d stayed in contact. A competent lab partner was someone it was worth keeping in touch with. Spanner had promised to move to Japan as soon as he was old enough, so that they could build killer robots together. Shouichi had his whole future planned out, and it was glorious and full of SCIENCE.

And then Sawada Tsunayoshi and his merry band of freaks happened and chaos ensued. There were some days that Shouichi really resented that, right up until the crisis of the week provided inspiration for more scientific advancements than he could ever have come up with on his own. As irritating and, traumatic, and disruptive to his research as the thing with Byakuran had been, it had expanded his mind in directions he had never considered before, time travel, dimension travel, magic, the possibilities were limitless.

Admittedly most of Tsuna’s friends were utterly terrifying, but then, if they weren’t terrifying they wouldn’t be nearly so interesting. Spanner agreed. Cowering citizens were amusing, but ultimately nothing special, they’d existed for thousands of years and would no doubt continue to exist for thousands more with very little variation on the base form, there was nothing new to be learned there. Tsuna’s friends were more likely to be the ones causing others to cower, and Shouichi, and Spanner both found themselves utterly fascinated. Magic and flames, and futuristic technology, and the absolutely unpredictable ways they interacted, their fellow scientist Verde had clearly spent a lifetime studying it all and had barely scratched the surface.

Sometimes Shouichi resented the way Tsuna had disrupted his plans, but then he remembered just how much more interesting the new plans were and he found himself laughing in a way that made random passers by flinch and back away. He’d follow Tsuna to hell and back for the kind of research opportunities he had offered.

Chapter End Notes

I've just got this image of little five year old Shouichi seeming sweet and helpless and innocent, until he walls himself up in the science lab and all people can hear is chilling laughter and unsettling electric whirring sounds, and then he emerges with a death ray
and everyone has an Oh Shit moment, and there is much screaming, and wailing, and chaos.
Lambo is only half human, and he is very, very sick of being a five year old.

In which a minor local weather God has a fling with a Bovino woman, and the Bovino family gets stuck with a very annoying semi-permanent five year old Lambo. Absolutely no-one is happy about this.

Lambo was so very tired of being a child. If he’d been entirely human he would have been an adult grown by the time he’d met Tsuna. But he wasn’t, he was only half, and the human half was all too weak in him for years alone to age him.

It wasn’t like being an arcobaleno either, for all he felt a certain kinship with them, frozen in time as they were. They were adults in heart and mind, no matter what had been done to their bodies. He was a child in truth not an adult trapped in a child’s form, he had a child’s heart, and thoughts, and reckless innocence, and so he had to be treated like a child, even if he was older than any other child he’d ever met. Even if he felt like he ought to be older.

Gods don’t age like humans do, was the problem, and Lambo had enough God in him to age like they did. He was God enough not to age like a human, and human enough to feel like he should be ageing, for it to feel wrong to spend decades without growing, or changing. Half and half, caught between, too human for his father’s kin, not human enough for his mother’s. It wasn’t that any of them were cruel, he was just... a lot to handle. They tried their best of course but there is only so much patience any human family could have with an eternal five year old. A five year old they remembered playing with when they themselves were toddlers, a five year old now playing with their own young children, that might well play with their grandchildren if nothing was done. They didn’t know what to do with him. It was a problem they weren’t equipped to deal with.

Honestly it wasn’t just the ageing. Lambo was barely human, and had needs that he was too young to explain and his mother’s family were too human to really understand. He was a Halfgod, and he needed worship, offerings, respect, belief. It was a need wired into his very nature, and while his mother’s family knew that intellectually, they struggled to fight back the instinctive knee jerk response that categorised his constant attention seeking as the actions of a spoilt or clingy child. They meant well, and tried their best, but the situation became more and more uncomfortable with each passing year.

The ageing was the hardest thing to deal with though. It wasn’t that it was slow, slowed ageing would have taken some adjustment, but over time people would have adapted. No the problem was more complicated than that. Where humans age in a steady linear progression, year by year, the ageing of Gods is a complex interaction of power and potential. Lambo knew, from what his mother
had told him of his father, that a God’s age was proportionate to how powerful they were, to how much of their potential power they could access.

He was strong for a Halfgod, was the thing, for all that his divine father had been nothing particularly special. Just a minor local weather God associated with lightning, and fire. It was the combination of the green fire his human mother used, the divine magic that sustained his father, and the fact that his God side was so very dominant in him. No-one really knew what made some Halfgods lean more divine and others more human, it was just one of those things. For better or worse, Lambo leaned divine enough that for all the training his mother’s family gave him, he hadn’t been able to age past five. everyone was pretty sure that was evidence his adult form must have truly impressive levels of power.

Which only made things more infuriating to be honest. Lambo was a Halfgod, with a God’s craving for admiration, and respect, and attention, which were difficult to get as a bratty five year old. Knowing that at his full strength he could be a true force to be reckoned with, that he had the kind of power that could make people whisper his name in awe, only made it more frustrating, being so limited. His human family had spent years trying to bring out his full strength, with training, and technology, and everything else they could think of, and nothing had worked. He was trapped, plateaued as a child too young for anyone to take seriously, and too wild not to cause havoc, and the thought of him being stuck that way forever sent shivers down the spines of both him and his family.

In the end that had been the reasoning behind sending him to Japan. If years of gentle training hadn’t helped him grow up, maybe brutal experience, and real danger would. Some people needed that edge to access their full potential. Life or death, do or die growth, the kind of urgency he’d never been faced with, safe with his mother’s family. He’d hoped to find a challenge, a way to grow stronger. In the end he’d found so much more.

He’d found Ipín, who was a quarter dragon, and more like him than anyone else he’d ever met. Dragons aged with wisdom rather than power, but the upshot of it was that she was as stuck as he was at an age too young for their human years. He’d found Fuuta, who said he was from another planet, and felt like it, the electricity in him feeling just slightly the wrong frequency for earth, and didn’t see anything odd about the way Lambo and Ipín aged. He’d found Nana, who’d loved them and cared for them and told them to call her Mama, and was about as human as his father or Ipín’s grandmother. It had felt so good not to be alone amongst humans who didn’t understand.

And he’d found Tsuna-nii, who felt like the freedom of flight, and the shelter of heaven, and knew what Lambo needed just by looking at him. Who gave him offerings of sweets when he demanded them, and paid attention when he craved someone to acknowledge his power and advancement. Tsuna-nii who’d made Lambo his guardian and given him the ring that let him age a whole year in minutes, that Lambo felt drawn to in ways he couldn’t fully understand, and Lambo couldn’t for the life of him figure out whether it was his mother’s green fire, or his father’s divine magic that bound them together. He honestly wasn’t sure he cared.

Chapter End Notes

Desperate times, desperate measures. The Bovino family have seen the future and it is small, loud and wearing cow print. they really don't want to have to spend the rest of eternity trying to supervise the same, overpowered, hyperactive five year old. So they sent him to Japan, in the vague hope that real life experience might help the ageing process, or failing that making him the vongola's problem. Either way the plan works.
Fox cunning

Chapter Summary

When Haru was older than most humans ever get to be, she decided to try being one for a while. Kitsune are after all such curious creatures.

Chapter Notes

Possibly slightly ooc. Haru is surprisingly hard to write

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Call her Haru. It’s not her real name. But then she’s a trickster by nature and she knows that that a name is not unlike a lie, it is as true as you can make it. Her real name doesn’t translate all that well anyway. Haru is the name she uses, the name people call her by, so really it’s as much hers as any other. She wondered if a human would feel guilty about the deception. Maybe they would. Humans felt guilty about a lot of things. She wasn’t entirely sure why. It didn’t matter though really, after all, she was only pretending.

She was pretending really well though, she’d even been attending school. She hadn’t even used any of her fox magic in the last few years. She’d been learning to make disguises the human way, and while part of her resented the effort it took, another part adored the challenge. Besides the irony appealed to her. She could look however she wished with a thought, who would ever suspect one like her to be hiding behind a crude human creation.

If someone had asked her why she’d decided to live like a human for a while she wouldn’t have been able to give one simple explanation. There were lots of reasons, curiosity, boredom, wanting to see if she could, simple glee at the thought of tricking so many people, so completely. Honestly none of the reasons mattered. She was kitsune, steeped in chaos from tails to whiskers, she didn’t need a reason beyond casual impulse. Her kind were the sort to ask why not rather than why.

Having said that her patience with the project had been wearing thin, by the time she met Tsuna. Humans were fascinating creatures, but she’d missed her tails, her fire, the freedom to run through the woods under moonlight. She had been planning to abandon her human shape. But then she’d seen something so fascinating she couldn’t just walk away, not without getting a closer look.

It was a cub, yet not a cub. Small and cute like a cub, but adult in power, and experience, and sheer lethality, with a sadistic sense of humour that should have belonged to one of her own kin. And that was just the surface, underneath, she could feel human life force drawn from its own form, teased out in threads and spun into a patch to cover a hold in the fabric of reality. It was an abomination. Haru was mesmerised, the perfect absurdity of it, the contrast of innocence, and blood, and horror, it was so pretty.

Admittedly stalking the killer baby probably hadn’t been her best decision, but kitsune are curious by nature, and he was the most interesting thing she’d seen in years. She’d just gotten a little… carried away, there was a reason her mother used to call her Burnt-whiskers-in-the-fire. She’d lived many
lifetimes of men, but she was still young for her kind, she was allowed to be a little reckless. She
been surprised when the adorable little abomination led her to Tsuna. There was something about
Tsuna, she wasn’t sure if she wanted to cuddle him or fight him, all she knew was that she couldn’t
walk away, there was something that just drew her in. In the end she just couldn’t resist playing with
him a little, he squeaked so adorably when she threatened him. Besides, she wanted to know what
the sweet little gunman was doing hanging around some random kid, what did that kind of power
want with someone so human, was it the same thing that made her want to be close to the boy or was
it something else entirely.

Then Tsuna pulled her out of the river, and she’d realised he wasn’t human after all. Or not entirely.
He was part human, but up close she could smell him, and she knew he was distant kin. Everyone
knows magic breeds true. She could smell feathers, and magic, and the open sky, and she’d almost
yipped in excitement. Anyone with an aura that hypnotising would be a magnet for chaos. Just
staying near him promised such wonderful entertainment.

And with Tsuna came a whole tribe of fascinating individuals. There was Gokudera-kun, who she
knew for a cousin the first time she saw him, there was Yamamoto-kun who flipped back and forth
between predator and clown in a way that would put most kitsune to shame. There were the adorable
little halfbreed cubs, God and Dragon, and something from a whole other world. And there was
Kyouko-chan, who was her first real human friend. She’d had acquaintances, and victims, and people
she used for cover, but she’d never met a human who saw her clear enough to be her friend.

Kyouko had seen right through her on the first meeting, and smiled at what she saw. She’d seen
chaos, and curiousity, and an utterly inhuman morality, and she’d smiled. It had given Haru an
unfamiliar warm feeling in her chest to see it. Sometimes she wondered if she’d been human too
long. But then if she hadn’t then she would have missed out on all this excitement. She would have
missed out on meeting Kyouko, and her life would have been far less interesting for it. Kyouko
made things, creatures, people. She made the world what she wanted it to be in ways that most
humans couldn’t even imagine. It was terrifying, and exhilarating.

They’d bonded over cake, and conspiracy, and the fundamental adorability of Tsuna-kun. It had only
taken a minute for them to recognise each other’s nature, it had taken an hour to solidify them as
partners in crime, by the end of the day the world trembled.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah this Haru finds reborn cute for reasons that would give most humans screaming
horrors.
The abyss gazes back

Chapter Summary

In which Mukuro has seen things no human was meant to see, Chrome has lost the illusions that shield most people from the truth of reality, and both of them are as much machine as human.

Chapter Notes

They're both vaguely steampunk cyborgs. They have also spent too long staring into the abyss. It's a good thing mist users are a bit mad to begin with.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He died.
He drifted, through the space between the stars. He saw the cold, infinite, unfeeling, shape of the universe. He existed between hearbeats, suspended in a place where time had no meaning, and he felt absolutely nothing.

…
He woke up screaming.

Men in white labcoats wrote notes on clipboards, and pretended not to hear.

One of his eyes was missing.

…
He died again.

He felt the movement of the world, the flow of particles too small for the human mind to comprehend. He was everywhere and nowhere, and nothing could bind him down.

…
He woke up.

He returned to his cage of flesh and bone to find more changes had been made. Skin on his arms and legs peeled back to expose muscles replaced with wire and bones wrapped around with brass. There were IV bags full of strange coloured liquids feeding into his blood. He was strapped down too tight to struggle.

…
He died, and woke up, and died again
He saw the truth in all things, and it was cold and pitiless, and utterly without purpose.

....

He woke, and died and woke.

He woke with metal under his skin, and vines under his fingernails, and something alive crawling through his veins. There were organs in jars in the room. Most of them weren’t his. It was the first time he’d thought about the fact that he wasn’t alone in hell.

...

He died.

He gazed into the abyss that contained everything and nothing, and took what he needed. He stole power from hell, and hell indulged him. He meant nothing, so his theft meant nothing. The abyss watched him go with detached amusement.

...

He woke up laughing. Mad, chilling, gleeful laughter. The laughter of those that know sanity is nothing but a convenient illusion, and reality is something that can be negotiated.

He named himself then, for the knowledge he’d taken from death itself, for the power he’d taken from the abyss. Rokudo Mukuro. He barely noticed the inhuman eye that had flickered into existence in his empty eyesocket, half drunk on the knowledge that his tormentors had miscalculated.

He laughed with bared teeth, as he broke through his restraints, he laughed as he painted the walls with the blood of men in white coats, he laughed as they screamed, for the mercy they’d never given him. He used the power they’d given him, the knowledge he’d stolen from the void, the force of will he’d summoned from hate, and rage, and the knowledge that he wasn’t their only victim, to wreak a bloody vengeance.

Ken and Chikusa had taken one look at what he’d done and sworn to follow him for ever, for doing what they had not had the strength to do. He allowed it. They weren’t quite like him, but they were close enough, as close as anyone could get. Having them follow at his heels helped him feel less alone in the vast emptiness of the universe, helped keep the screaming at the back of his head at bay.

...

Nagi was like him. More so even than Ken and Chikusa, because for all they had shared his tormentors they had not seen what he had. They believed the world was cruel, he had learned it was indifferent, had seen the sheer incomprehensible emptiness of that indifference. It was that cold truth that he shared with Nagi, who was dying alone in a hospital bed, and knew bone deep that no-one cared.

Nagi hadn’t died, but she was close enough and clear-sighted enough to see what Mukuro had already seen. The world, stripped of all illusions. There was something comforting in the knowledge that someone else knew what he did.

She understood, but she was dying, so he went to her. Such clear vision should not be allowed to fade so easily into the night. He used the knowledge of what was done to him, to Ken, to Chikusa, to dozens more that did not survive, he took that knowledge paid for in blood and used it to save her.

...
There was ticking in her chest where her heartbeat used to be, the bubbling of arcane liquids, and the whirring of gears, where human organs used to be. She was nearly as much metal as flesh now, and she’d be lying if she said that had no part in the name she chose for herself. Chrome, a reminder of what she’d been saved from, and what it had cost her. Shiny insides of brass and steel all powered and held together by indigo fire, and belief. Belief was important, was capable of warping the world if you had the force of will.

Mukuro sama had told her that reality is what you make of it, and she had known bone deep that it was true. She’d known it from the edges of the truth she had grasped at when she’d known she was dying and it didn’t matter, that nothing mattered, that she could disappear and fade out of existence and it still wouldn’t matter. The realisation had lent her a clarity that hadn’t dissipated even after Mukuro sama came and saved her, and so when he’d told her the secrets he’d stolen from the void, part of her knew he was right.

…

Mukuro sama had done more than save her life. He had seen what she had seen, had seen even more of the darkness than she had. He knew what she meant when she tried to explain, and he never tried to shield her from the truth of the world. For that alone she owed him more than words could say.

She thought that maybe she owed Sawada Tsunayoshi even more than that. His presence kept the howling of the void at bay, his words helped her to start believing in the illusions most people lived by again, love, and friendship, and hope. And most important of all, he forced Mukuro sama to start looking at the stars again, not just the space in between, made him see the meaning as well as the emptiness. She knew it hurt Mukuro sama, but it was a good hurt, like stretching a scar, and she knew with the clarity she’d won from despair that Sawada Tsunayoshi would drag Mukuro back to the world kicking and screaming, and never ask a thing in return. For that alone she would name him friend, and commander, and sky, all the things that Mukuro would never say out loud, she would say it for both of them. She knew Tsuna would understand.

Chapter End Notes

Honestly it’s kind of hard to twist the backstory for these two any further. I mean the canon versions of them have mad science experimentation, resurrection, and organs made of imagination. It pretty much fit into this universe already. So I just dialled it up a bit, and added some body horror, and existential despair, for flavour.
Chapter Summary

Nana is a crane wife. Tsuna is too much his mother's son.

Chapter Notes

In which Nana's priorities are not the same as a human mother's priorities. But that doesn't mean they're wrong.

Sometimes, watching Tsuna made Nana want to cry. He was too much her son in all the ways that mattered most. She watched as he stumbled, as he struggled, dragged down by gravity that should never have had such a hold on him. She'd seen the way he looked at the sky, her Tsuna, the way he moved wrong for an earthbound creature, the clumsiness that would have been grace, should have been grace, had he only had the wings his soul cried out for. She could see his potential in his clear-sightedness, his kindness, in the way he saw right to the heart of things and in doing so drove away the darkness. But he was born to a human skin and a human fate, with none of the long years or good fortune that should have been his.

And she couldn’t help him. If he had been a girl she could have given him her own skin, when she recovered it. Would have done, even though it would have meant grounding herself forever, but he was a boy and her skin would never fit him, and he had none of his own to wear. There were no wings for him, her little crippled hatchling that would never fledge, and one day he would find the skin that his father had hidden from her and she would fly away and leave him forever, and there was nothing she could do, because that was how the story always ended. Iemitsu had known it from the day he’d first bound her to the earth that she loved her son, and she loved her husband, but she loved the sky more, and when she had the chance to return to it he would lose her forever. It broke her heart to know that Tsuna had inherited her longing for the wind, and yet would never be able to fly.

There were days she bitterly regretted the day she had been careless enough to let Iemitsu steal her skin from the riverbank. If he hadn’t, then she would still fly free with her brothers and sisters, she would have children with wings of their own, that could ride the winds with her, she would live in the moment, and the pattern of the next breeze, and never have known how heavy life could be. She would never have had to watch her child cry for the sky that should have been his birthright. She would not have lived near twenty years missing the air under her wings and the world stretched out below her. But then if Iemitsu hadn’t hidden her wings, she would never have married him, never have had Tsuna, and for all the grief she feels at her son’s struggles, she would never wish him unborn, for all that Iemitsu’s love has cost her, she does not regret taking him as her mate.

She loved Iemitsu with all the fierce devotion of her kind, for his strength, and his cunning, for the unwavering love he held for her. She stayed in his home and waited for him because he stole her skin, and that is the way of things, but she danced for him on his return because she chose him, and
cranes do not choose their mates lightly. Few humans in these times would have been wise enough to know what they saw when they came upon her and her sisters bathing in the river, fewer still would have had the daring to steal one of their skins, or the devotion to stay faithful over so many miles and years apart. Sometimes she wondered if he didn’t share some of the blood of her kind, he was often gone, for long spaces of time and yet for all that she never sensed another woman on him, for all the weaknesses of humanity. He had secrets of course, but then so did she. Life was full of secrets, that was where the magic lived. He could keep his secrets if he wished, she knew everything that mattered.

Tsu-kun was so much her child in so many ways that sometimes she forgot, that he was Iemitsu’s too. There was a power in him that was not of her blood, and she hadn’t understood until Iemitsu’s secrets came crashing into their lives just what that meant.

It was at Iemitsu’s word that the cursed man came to teach her son. Reborn he said his name was, and though he appeared no more than a chick newly hatched, the magic on him was dark and old, and she knew he was more than he appeared. The curse bearer wasn’t the kind of influence she would normally have allowed near any hatchling of hers, but Iemitsu was more perceptive and more cunning than he liked to appear, so she held her judgement. She played at human for a man cursed and found it amusing how little he knew about the world beyond the ordinary, despite the dark power that clung to him.

He brought with him chaos and death of course. Anyone bearing that kind of darkness cannot help but taint the world around them. She didn’t hold it against him. Tsuna was happier since he’d come. Had started to make friends, and feel comfortable in the human skin that was the only one he’d ever wear. For that Nana could forgive much.

For the day that Tsuna had come home with orange fire dancing behind his eyes and freedom in his step and told her, “Kaa-san I flew”, for that she could forgive almost anything. Her son flew with hands and gloves and orange flame rather than wings and feathers and wind, but he flew, and for the first time in his life he looked right in his skin, and as far as Nana was concerned that was good enough. The mafia might be bloody, and brutal, and dangerous, but they’d given her Tsu-kun wings.

A human mother might have been angry at the danger that Reborn brought to her nest. But she was not human, mother birds protect their chicks, but in the end when it is time for a chick to fledge, it is up to them to fly or fall. It was not in her nature to hold Tsuna back from the ledge. She worried of course, but he was a fledgling now, and had to be trusted to make his own mistakes. She doubted he’d make many, he was her son in most of the ways that mattered, he could see right to the heart and truth of things, and weave peace out of the bloodied strands of chaos that swirled around and through the flock he was building. He had the strength, and the wisdom to choose well.

Chapter End Notes

A crane wife is basically a Japanese variant on the animal wife story that usually involves things like selkies and swan maidens. In Japanese mythology cranes symbolise peace, immortality, good luck, and fidelity. They are also considered a very spiritual animal, which i’m translating into a strong magic affinity/perceptiveness about mystical forces.
Stirring up trouble

Chapter Summary

Reborn arrives in Namimori and finds a wonderful opportunity to fuck with people.

Chapter Notes

Reborn knows more than enough about power to know that Tsuna is far from human.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Reborn was surprised when he first met Sawada Tsunayoshi. It wasn’t that the information he’d been given was wrong, the boy was just as clumsy and scatter-brained as the reports had indicated. The information wasn’t wrong, just... incomplete. There was a power in that house, in the boy and in his mother that had nothing to do with flames, and Reborn found himself fascinated.

Reborn had lived decades with the weight of the world hanging around his neck, twisting his body and feeding off his soul. He knew power, and he knew that not all of Tsuna’s power was human. He smiled softly as he considered his plans. This, was an interesting development. It had... possibilities.

He could have just ignored it of course, Tsuna was subtle enough, he could have played it straight as a purely human mob boss, with human guardians. That would have been the safe option, would certainly have been the one that would have made Nono and Iemitsu, and the mafia as a whole happy. It would have been the easier option, but it would have been such a wasted opportunity. To see what a generation of Vongola unbound by human limits could become, what the interplay of flames, and magic, humanity, and inhumanity could achieve. Maybe it would even be unpredictable enough to break his curse. Reborn just couldn’t resist. He wanted to see just how much upheaval Sawada Tsunayoshi could bring to the mafia world if he combined his mystical heritage with his human mafia inheritance.

...

That was at least half of the reason he called in Bianchi’s little brother. The other half being a combination of the fact that it would make Bianchi happy, and that the boy was a talented storm being wasted because there were far too many people in the mafia that clung to inefficient prejudices. Reborn never could abide waste.

It was a bit of a gamble calling him in so early. Tsuna had potential, but potential alone couldn’t win fights. If he couldn’t force the smoking bomb to submit then this whole situation could go sky high. But Reborn had never been one to shy away from risk, and Tsuna would need a guardian that could navigate the mafia, just to stand a chance of living up to his potential.

It had paid off. Admittedly it had taken a dying will bullet and it probably wouldn’t have worked nearly so well if Gokudera hadn’t truly wanted Tsuna to defeat him, but the strength to defeat him, the will, that was all Tsuna’s. Reborn loved being proved right.
He’d watched as the storm had rolled over onto his back and bared his throat, and been surprised at how Tsuna had run his hand over Gokudera’s exposed stomach, without a trace of discomfort. That wasn’t something most people, even ones with magical ties, would have known to do, there were even fewer that would have done it so casually. It was a disconcerting gesture for anyone raised human, and it was yet more evidence that Sawada Nana was nothing of the sort.

He brought back Tsuna, battered and bruised from training, he fired guns in Tsuna’s room, he dragged unbalanced and dangerous looking strangers through the house at random intervals, and Nana just smiled and asked if he wanted more coffee. Reborn wasn’t entirely sure how that woman ever managed to pass, because even if he hadn’t been able to feel the power that clung to her, he would never have believed she was human. He wasn’t sure what exactly she was, but human wasn’t it.

The day Tsuna had first managed to use the gloves to fly, flames rippling up his arms from his hands in a too bright mimicry of feathers that transformed his arms into wings, Reborn had started to see the shape of it. The pure open joy when he landed and said “I have wings”, with wonder and gratitude, as though he’d been given a miracle he’d long since given up hope of, the grace Tsuna had in the air when the ground was so much his enemy, the way Nana had smiled and given Reborn extra servings of dinner when Tsuna came home and told her he flew. Nana was a bird not a woman, and Tsuna was his mother’s son. The sky was his birthright from both sides.

He wondered where Iemitsu was keeping Nana’s skin.

…

Honestly, Reborn had barely needed to lift a finger to get Tsuna his full set of guardians. He’d called in Gokudera, and he’d dropped a hint to the Bovino that had landed Tsuna a Halfgod as his lightning, but the rest of them practically gathered themselves. Like fate, or destiny, or nature taking its course. Reborn hadn’t needed to seek any of them out, Tsuna’s own nature had called them out and bound them to him. Maybe the old superstition was true, that Skies called out to elements that could match their power in all things not just flame.

Tsuna’s guardians certainly matched him, they were no more human than he was, and most of them were far less subtle about it than he managed. The young swordsman with the Muramasa blade, and the magically constructed sun that was made to fight and protect. The absolutely lethal ghost cloud, and the paired mists as much machine as human. The whole tenth generation of Vongola filled with inhuman monsters, and nightmares. Reborn suspected that the older mafia generations would have a collective aneurysm when they worked it out, there was a deeply satisfying irony in the whole situation. They’d refused Xanxus, in favour of the innocent civilian because they thought Xanxus was too much of a monster, and now they ended up with the real thing, he couldn’t wait to see the looks on their faces. He had a camera prepared for just that occasion. Really they should have known better, no student trained by him would ever fail to wreak havoc with their sensibilities. He made sure of it. It was one of his main sources of entertainment since the curse took sex off the table. If he had to suffer, so did everybody else.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah Reborn takes out his issues on the world at large by using his students to fuck with
them. You don't want to know what he managed with Dino. He sees that Tsuna isn't human and instantly sees an opportunity to fuck with the mafia on an unprecedented scale. (Cause the mafia is kinda prejudiced about people who aren't entirely human.)
That which conquers all

Chapter Summary

Magic and family and love are never quite what you would hope for. Bianchi knows that all too well.

Chapter Notes

Bianchi is a witch, and an assassin, and a lover, and an older sister, and a teenage girl. All of these things matter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Magic, and family, and love. Three things that Bianchi knew were all too much alike. They were never quite what she wanted them to be and yet she still couldn’t let go of them.

Every little girl dreams of magic, of power, of being special. Sometimes, if they are very unlucky, they get exactly what they dreamed of. She’d been so proud when she baked those cookies for her brother, to help him get through his performance. It was what good sisters did, they looked after their younger siblings, and made them cakes, and supported their activities. She’d wanted so badly to be a good sister. But Bianchi had a gift for destruction, for killing magic, and everything she cooked was touched with death.

It had taken too long for her to realise what she was doing, far too long, with her mother smiling, and her father saying he was proud of her, and she should bake for her brother more often. In the end it had been Shamal who’d told her the truth, and for that alone, no matter what other reasons she might have to dislike him, she cannot hate him. Not when she’d spent nearly a year and a half innocently poisoning her little brother, and Shamal was the only one with the decency to stop her, demon though he was.

By that point though it was too late. Hayato could no longer even bear to look at her. They had become ghosts to each other in the vast expanses of the family home, as Hayato avoided her, and she let him, because she had no idea how to fix what was wrong between them. Six months later he was gone, and there was nothing Bianchi could do. It hurt, deep in her chest, a feeling somewhere between grief and guilt. She had magic, was special in a way that other little girls dreamed of, and it was like ashes in her hands. She was twelve years old and she just wanted her brother back.

Her mother had said once that she let her heart rule her too much, that it would probably be the death of her in the end. Had said she should lock it away in an iron chest and hide the key, and grow as hard and cold as winter for fear that wolves would gobble it up. She’d wondered at the time if that was what her mother had done to herself to be so calm when Hayato was missing. He was seven years old, and he’d run away and her mother just sat there drinking tea and dispensing trite pieces of advice. Bianchi wanted no part of that coldness. Maybe her heart would be the death of her in the end, but she would not be her mother, as safe and as cruel and as hollow as an empty stone tower.

Maybe it was because she was a Storm that Bianchi understood what her mother didn’t. That
everything dies in the end, that eventually it all comes to dust. She knew that life was lived in the
dance of the wind, the hurricane, the hailstorm, the blizzard, and without her heart she would
have no way to navigate it. A fire burned in her soul, kept her warm, and strong, and brave, and it
demanded that she care. She tried to explain once, with a child’s stumbling clarity, but her mother
hadn’t understood. There was no fire banked in the hearth of her mother’s soul. Sometimes in more
vicious moments Bianchi wondered if it was locked away in an iron chest with her heart and
kindness.

So Bianchi had cared, and felt, and cried for her lost brother while her mother sipped tea, and
betrayed no feeling at all. She was twelve years old, her brother was gone, and her mother didn’t
care. She hadn’t known family could be so easily shattered. As easily as a little girl’s dreams of
magic.

…

The magic wasn’t what she’d wanted, but she hung on to it like grim death anyway. It was
something that was hers, not tied up with family, or duty, or things that she owed to her parents. The
magic was something they owed her for, they’d used it, used her against her brother. She would not
allow them to do so again. So she took her magic, and her heart, and herself, and weaponised them
all. She reforged herself into the Poison Scorpion, and when she left her parent’s home it was in
broad daylight with harsh words spoken, not the dark of midnight and secrecy that had hidden her
brother’s escape.

She’d taken her magic and owned it, and at fifteen years old she’d walked out into the world to
become a professional killer. Working as a freelance hitman had been difficult, and dangerous, and
unstable. It was shocking how much easier it was to breathe, out on her own. Away from her family
she could rage, and attack, and move where her heart demanded, and she never had to lie about what
she was feeling. The storm in her soul raged free, and it felt right in a way that home never had.

Her brother was a Storm too, wild, and stubborn, and destructive. Was it any wonder he’d run, she’d
seen how the walls of the castle closed in on him, how he’d grown from a sweet and inquisitive
toddler into an angry child that resembled nothing so much as a fox caught in a snare, willing to
gnaw its own paw off to escape.

She hoped he was well, wherever he was.

…

She always was ruled by her heart. It was hardly surprising that she fell in love. His name was
Romeo, and he was cool and collected, and handsome. The stuff sixteen year old girl’s dreams are
made of. It had been a whirlwind romance, had felt a great deal like being lifted off the ground by a
tornado in fact, and she could admit the thrill of it might have overridden her common sense for a
while.

She came crashing back to earth when she caught him in bed with another woman. It wasn’t even
the cheating that had made her so angry, although she wasn’t pleased about it, it was the sheer
pettiness of it, that he could break her trust, and their love for something so pathetically ordinary. He
had taken a love for the ages, something out of a fairytale or Greek tragedy and he’d turned it into a
soap opera, into a high school movie, and that she could not forgive.

She’d made a half-hearted attempt to kill him, and then buried herself in her work. That was the point
that her reputation really started to pick up, she’d become a name in the world of blood and shadows.
Someone to fear, someone to respect, not a child who could be tricked into poisoning her brother, or
a teenager whose boyfriend cheated on her. She was the Poison Scorpion, a skilled hitwoman, and
that was how she met Reborn.

It hadn’t been love at first sight, not like with Romeo. For one thing he looked like a child, and for all that she knew, intellectually, what an arcobaleno was, she didn’t respond to him the way she would to an adult. It had started with work. It had started as a simple collaboration, as mutual respect, and professional courtesy. They worked well together, and one job had become two had become many, until they could almost call each other friends. He wasn’t a child, he didn’t think or act like one, and as time went on she found herself forgetting that he looked like one, found herself being surprised when civilians asked if he was her son. It was strange, having an older friend who everyone else couldn’t help but think of as younger.

It was while she was working with Reborn that she first heard her brother’s name spoken again. It had been four years, and she hadn’t even known if he was alive. It had eased a tension in her chest she hadn’t known she was carrying. He wasn’t dead, she still had a brother. Anything else was just details. He was working as a hitman, according to rumour, explosives expert, and she did have vague memories of Shamal teaching him how to use dynamite. Smoking bomb Hayato they called him when they were being polite. When they weren’t being polite they had other words for him. He was a werewolf now, and the mafia could be cruel to those who were other than human. She thought about tracking him down, trying to reconnect, maybe they could do jobs together. But then she remembered those last months together in the house, with Hayato unable to even look at her, she thought about what she’d done to him, what their family had done to him, and what he’d done to escape. She had no right to push him. If he wanted to find her he would, she would let it be his decision. He’d earned the right to make his own choices.

She’d told Reborn. She’d needed to tell someone, and she had few enough friends to talk to, fewer still who would understand her choice. Reborn just listened though, listened and nodded, and respected her decision. No-one had ever really done that for her before. She’d found herself looking forward to the jobs they did together, she’d found herself appreciating his sadistic sense of humour, and his sense of theatre. She found herself happy in his presence in a way that it had taken her more time than it should have to recognise as love. She still wasn’t attracted to him physically, but that seemed to matter less and less as time passed. How could anything as mundane and physical as sex compare to the sheer perfection of their connection.

Love was like magic and family though. It was never quite what she wanted it to be. Reborn was cursed, she knew it, he knew it, everyone knew it. When she looked out the corner of her eye she could sometimes see the black cords that twisted his form and siphoned off his flames to feed a hole in the world. He was cursed and warped by magic that was so far beyond her it was almost funny, and it was going to kill him. There would be no happily ever after for them.

Still there was time, years yet. Years to work side by side and talk, and spend time together. It would be enough, she would make it enough. She would make the most of every moment.

…

She had been so angry when Reborn’s students kept stealing precious time from them. Dino wasn’t so bad, at least he lived in Italy, it wasn’t hard to drop in and visit. Tsunayoshi though. He’d stolen Reborn halfway across the world, and all she could think was no not now we have so little time left can’t you see what you’re doing to us. In hindsight trying to kill him might have been a bit of an overreaction. But in that moment it had seemed appropriate, and Bianchi was after all a Storm, impulsive by nature.

She hadn’t expected Nana. Tsuna’s mother, and not in the least bit human. She’d known what Bianchi had tried to do, and instead of trying to kill her back, she’d invited Bianchi in for tea, and
listened to her reasons. She’d been sympathetic, had understood how important love was in a way that no-one else she’d spoken to could. Just talking to her had helped soothe the ragged edges of Bianchi’s heart, and when Nana had offered her the spare room so that she could be close to her mate, Bianchi had almost broken down in tears.

When she saw Hayato again, for the first time in nearly seven years, she was painfully glad she hadn’t killed Tsuna. She hardly recognised her little brother, grown tall and fierce and predatory, and inhuman, but happy in a way she hadn’t seen him since he was three years old. She watched the way Tsuna didn’t hesitate to rub behind his ears or stroke his belly when he needed it, she watched the way he snapped and snarled playfully with the young Rain, she watched the way he tussled with little Lambo who was more than tough enough to deal with a ‘wolf’s strength, and she knew her brother had found a place to belong. Maybe she could too. Magic, and family, and love, the tenth generation of Vongola was short on none of those things. Maybe this time it would be everything she hoped for.

Chapter End Notes

I actually meant to do the Varia this chapter, but Bianchi wanted her story told so here you are. She’s a witch, but because she has storm flames she destroys things (see poison cooking), rather than bringing them to life like Kyoko does as a sun. And yeah she doesn't like her parents much after what they made her do to Hayato, which if you think about it was pretty fucked up. Making one of your kids poison the other one is not good parenting.
Man's inhumanity to man

Chapter Summary

Xanxus and the Varia are completely human. This only makes them more terrifying.

Chapter Notes

In which Xanxus meets the tenth generation and laughs himself almost to tears over the irony.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

People said things about the Varia. About their strength, and bloodlust, and power. People said that the Varia weren’t human, couldn’t be human. People said the Varia were monsters.

There was a lot of speculation. Some said they were demons summoned up straight from hell to serve the Vongola, that Xanxus was the halfbreed child the ninth had sired on a demon princess, and that the rest of the Varia was his honour guard. Others that they were every one of them a werewolf, and that new members had to accept a bite to become truly Varia quality.

Some said it was nothing so simple or coherent. That they were every one of them a different sort of monster, and the only thing keeping them from tearing each other’s throats out was the sheer force of Xanxus’s will. That they could be anything from a vampire to a frost giant and you’d never know which until it was too late.

The Varia were silent on the subject, not that many people were brave enough to ask. Dino Cavallone had asked Squalo once, more to try and provoke a reaction than in any real expectation of an answer, but Squalo had just grinned viciously and said nothing. No answers were forthcoming so the rumours just flew thicker and more farfetched as time went by.

Xanxus found it funny. That was why he’d ordered his men to neither confirm nor deny anything. The truth was that every one of his guardians was human right down to the bone, and there was a dark humour in the way that the rest of the mafia refused to believe that. No-one believed they could be operating solely on human power, that blood and bone the only difference between them and the ordinary people, was skill, and strength, and will. That Belphegor’s broken glass madness was something that might lurk in any mind, that there was nothing alien about Lussuria’s desires and Levi’s brutal ruthlessness. That Squalo really was that good a swordsman, that devoted to blood, and that Mammon was as bound to the mundane as any mist user ever was. That Xanxus’s wrath was entirely human in its depth, and breadth, and all-consuming power. They didn’t want to believe that. They didn’t want to believe that humans could be more terrifying than any magic, or monster.

It wasn’t as if Xanxus had set out for all his guardians to be human either. He’d sought out the strongest, and most deadly, and he’d found them, human every one. He thought maybe it was because humans had to fight to be dangerous. A dangerous monster knows it is dangerous, has always known, and is secure in that knowledge. A dangerous human always has something to prove.
People talked about the Varia, feared them and called them monsters. That was half the reason the ninth had passed Xanxus over, had chosen an innocent civilian child instead. Xanxus had laughed and laughed when he realised what the tenth generation were.

Not that he’d figured it out immediately. He’d assumed based on the reports he’d been given that they’d be dealing with weak human civilian trash. He’d felt a niggling sense that something was off the moment he entered Namimori, but it wasn’t until the Sun battle that he started to see the shape of it.

Because nothing human could have taken a blow from Lussuria like that. The trash should have had broken bones, damaged insides. Should have been coughing up blood on the floor, not getting back up stronger, hitting harder. It was unnatural, and Xanxus might have shaken it off if it wasn’t for the lightning battle that followed.

The lightning guardian had been a child, hadn’t looked more than five years old, and Xanxus had been able to see how insulted Levi had been right up until the brat had summoned down the power of a thunderstorm and with a scream of rage, aged ten years in a moment with the electricity running through his body. Not an ordinary child at all. A Godchild, with all the power and capriciousness that implied. What was Sawada Tsuanyoshi to be able to bind such a creature.

The storm guardian was at least a known quantity, but he was no more human than his fellows. The whole mafia was aware that Smoking Bomb Hayato was a werewolf, and that made three out of six guardians not human, brought it from a vague suspicion to a pattern. The whole mafia knew Gokudera was a werewolf, but Xanxus had never truly appreciated the power that implied until he saw the boy fight Bel on equal terms. Until he saw Gokudera’s outline flicker and collapse in on itself in mid leap, shifting from one form to another without breaking stride, now wolf snapping and snarling and faster than any human could be, now human, lighting dynamite and laying traps. Bel had lost that fight and they all knew it, regardless of who was left holding the rings.

By that point the cloud guardian had also made himself known, and Xanxus was too observant to miss the fact that he didn’t cast a shadow, that his coat didn’t move in the breeze. Four not human and Xanxus wasn’t prepared to bet on a break in the pattern. He was right. More or less. The Rain trash was human as far as it went, but Xanxus had spent enough of his life with Squalo to know a Muramasa sword when he saw one. A swordsman’s legend, half dream half nightmare. Swords that could not be sheathed until they’d tasted blood. The sword brat wielded it as though it was nothing, and maybe to him it was. Cursed weapons like that got into the bloodline, and Xanxus would bet a great deal that he’d inherited that sword, had grown up with it whispering in his soul. Brat could probably barely tell the difference between his own bloodlust and that of his blade.

By the time the sky battle came around Xanxus no longer had any expectation of Sawada Tsuanyoshi being human, and he took a visceral satisfaction from the irony, that the ninth had chosen Tsuna because the Varia were too much like monsters, only to end up with real monsters as his tenth generation. Xanxus refused to believe Reborn hadn’t arranged things that way on purpose. Fucker had a sadistic sense of humour at the best of times and a bad habit of using his students to cause trouble, Dino was enough proof of that. Xanxus grinned at the thought of the ninth’s expression when he figured it out, made it almost worth throwing the fight, just to see.

Not that Xanxus’s pride would allow him to actually throw the fight, but the thought was tempting. Still he’d fought all out. The Brat was fast he’d give him that. For someone who couldn’t have learned to fly more than a week or so ago he was good. Better than Xanxus tell the truth, Xanxus wasn’t a bad flyer, but the Brat flew like he was made for it, with wings of fire spreading up his arms from the gloves that were a clear shout out to Primo. Whatever the Brat was, it was something that was meant to fly.
Xanxus had won in the end of course. He was older and more experienced and more dangerous, and he had everything to prove. The ring rejected him, but he’d made his point, and the Brat was skilled and wise, enough to learn from it. Human didn’t mean weak, and if he and his guardians wanted to survive they couldn’t afford to be complacent about their power. He hoped the Brat lived up to his promise, he’d seen more in a few moments of fighting than most people ever had, he’d seen right to the core of Xanxus’s rage and accepted, had failed to judge in a way that was utterly inhuman, and was maybe just what the Vongola needed.

Chapter End Notes

In case anyone's wondering, the cloud battle involved Hibari showing up, the machine guns letting rip, going straight through him, and hitting the mosca. He didn't even get an opportunity to attack it. He was very very irritated about that. The cervello weren't as observant as the varia and didn't figure out Hibari was a ghost before setting up the arena. The mist battle went pretty much as canon. Lambo won the lightning battle on account of his God powers getting temporarily supercharged by Levi's lightning attack. It wears off after a few hours. He is not happy to return to childhood.
Gokudera could have won the storm battle but it would have meant biting Bel, and Belphegor the rabid werewolf is just not something he wants to be responsible for unleashing on the world.
Although he would never admit it, Xanxus actually quite likes Tsuna, because Tsuna doesn't quite have human morals, and therefore is not particularly judgemental about Xanxus (This version of Xanxus is very tired of people moralising at him).
The hunger of the sea

Chapter Summary

Dino takes after his distant ancestor far more than anyone but Reborn is comfortable with.

Chapter Notes

Dino and Tsuna have more than just a little bit of common ground

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Dino Cavallone was born on the sea. When his father heard the news he’d turned completely white. The sea always calls her children home, even so many generations down the line. He had been too careless, the baby had come early, and for the first time in over two hundred years a child of Cavallone blood had been born over the water. God help them all, he knew the stories. He named his son to remind himself, to warn the world, and prayed the warning would be unnecessary.

…

It was… honestly it was a relief when Dino turned out to be a sweet natured, clumsy child. It might not be ideal for a mafia boss to be, but better that than a monster. He grew up, and as the years went by his father relaxed a little. Maybe the blood had thinned enough not to be a risk, maybe they had just got lucky, but to all appearances Dino was human.

Maybe that was why he allowed things to get as bad as they did. Because he’d seen Dino’s weaknesses and been so relieved that he hadn’t tried all that hard to correct them. He’d let too much slide, and too late he’d realised that his health was failing and his only heir was a teenager with no apparent ability to do… anything really, least of all running a mafia family.

Everyone knew they were in trouble, but it was Romario that had suggested drastic measures. He had seen the future and it was blonde, clumsy, and terminally underconfident. Dino was a sweet boy and he was going to get them all killed. Something had to be done. The boss had agreed, calls had been made, and a week later Reborn had arrived. Dino might not thank anyone involved for this, but desperate times called for desperate measures.

…

For as long as he could remember, Dino had heard the ocean whispering in his ear, felt the salt in his veins stir at the things it told him. He knew what it meant, he might be clumsy but he wasn’t an idiot. He knew how his father looked at him when he thought he couldn’t see, how he relaxed when Dino proved yet again that he was useless but well meaning. He stumbled over his own feet and his father might take that as evidence of humanity but Dino knew better, humans didn’t get confused over whether they had two legs or four, didn’t find themselves surprised to find toes instead of hooves. His father should have known better, probably a part of him did, he’d named Dino truly after all and names mattered. Dino, Deinos, the terrible, one of the mares of Diomedes that fed on human flesh.
He might have buried that knowledge under layers of wishful thinking but he knew.

He knew the stories after all, the reason why Cavallone children were never born over the water, why they were kept well away from the ocean until they were old enough that their blood wouldn’t be wakened by its call.

…

The first Don of the Cavallone had been a woman. A girl really, for she had been young when it all began. Young enough not to be wed when she met a strange man with seaweed in his hair down by the seashore, and back then people married young. He had called to her with a power she did not understand, and he had been beautiful, and she had wanted in ways that she had only just started to realise were possible. He had been beautiful, and wild, and had she been a shade less wise she might have gone to him then. But she was a Sky, and blood of the Vongola, and she knew, with that uncanny knowing of her family, that he was dangerous, that he would kill her if he could, so she did not set one foot on the seashore. Had she been a shade less strong she might have run then and not looked back, but she was a Sky, and blood of the Vongola, and he was wild and strong and unlike anyone she had ever met, and she had never been one to run from something she wanted. She did not take one step back towards home.

Instead she called to him. Called with a power he did not understand, with all the power of her Sky flames, and declared herself his equal. And he had frozen, for though he had lured and drowned a hundred and a hundred beautiful young women, he had never felt anything like that before. And had he been a shade less curious he might have run then and disappeared back into the ocean, because the unfamiliar is always dangerous. But he was young by the ways of his kind and he was still more curiosity than caution, so he stayed on the seashore, facing the human girl that dared to challenge one of the mad white horses of the sea.

There they stood, eye to eye, power to power, will to will, and what they said to each other is not recorded, but talk they did until the sun sank below the horizon and the tide fell to its lowest ebb. There they made love on the sands by a fire made of driftwood in the liminal point between land and sea, the fire of life and the chill waters of death. She walked away from that place as the sun rose with a new life in her belly and her death at her back, he swam away from that place as the sun rose with a promise in his heart and a new life at his back.

She had returned home, carrying the bastard child of a monster, which went down about as well as could be expected, but she was a Sky and a Vongola, and she had faced down that monster alone and come away with more than one life. It would take more than her family’s anger to make her falter. In the end she had founded her own family, allied with the Vongola because she still loved her kin, but not answerable to them. She was no longer answerable to anyone, save for the one who would kill her.

The child she had born was far from human, but he wasn’t quite of his father’s kin either. He was human enough to live as one, more or less, mafia dons were expected to be a little bloodthirsty anyway, and if her son was rumoured to eat his enemies on occasion, and have an unfortunate propensity for water torture, well a vicious reputation hadn’t done Vongola Secundo any harm. She could see herself in his determination, in his will to protect those he called his own, and she was proud of every deadly inch of him. And when her son was grown and his own child half grown, she went back to that sea shore to fulfil a promise and meet her death. Her bones were found washed up on the shore a week later.

And so since the beginning the Cavallone had carried the blood of the deadly horses of the sea, weaker with each passing generation, but always present, always waiting to be awoken by the
Dino knew exactly what he was. Maybe that was why he hesitated to take the reins of the family, why he played up his uselessness, why he let his father see his failings as a result of human weakness not a mismatch between human body and life, and a monsters instincts and desires.

And really he should have known better. He criticised his father’s naivety but he was just as guilty. He was the heir to his family like it or not, competent or not, and as comforting as his father might find his incompetence it was an indulgence the family could not afford. So they’d called in Reborn. The most disturbing thing was that deep down, part of him was grateful.

Reborn had smelled like salt, like seawater and sweat and blood, and it made the part of him that was human feel sick and frightened even as it made the other part of him feel hungry. He had beaten Dino into competency, had forced his two halves to accept each other, at least when the herd needed his protection, and he’d seen right through Dino to what he was. Had seen what he was and hadn’t judged except to see where it might be useful, and under his guidance, Dino had started to accept himself. The first time Reborn had fed him raw meat had fed a hunger he hadn’t even realized he was carrying. The taste of blood and warm flesh sliding down his throat, had felt right in ways that he couldn’t describe, and he was sure it had shown on his face, but Reborn hadn’t even flinched. Had just commented that it could be a useful intimidation tactic in some situations. He hadn’t realised how much his father’s denial had hurt until he was faced with Reborn’s non-judgemental honesty. There had been no kindness in Reborn’s teaching but then, the inhuman part of Dino didn’t respect kindness any more than his distant ancestor on the seashore had, the mad white horses belong to the sea and the sea respects only strength. Reborn had given him something much more important than kindness, and for that Dino was more than happy to fuck with the mafia for him, to veer wildly between human and monster, between clumsiness and strength, to eat raw meat in front of his enemies and fumble with cutlery in front of friends, to smile innocently at both, and offer swimming lessons to those who angered him. It was actually oddly satisfying, maybe Reborn had rubbed off on him.

The day he met Tsuna it was like looking in a mirror. Even his clumsiness was familiar, the clumsiness of a person whose instincts were screaming they had limbs that humans just didn’t have. He looked in Tsuna’s eyes and saw the same conflict between human and non-human that he saw in a mirror, and the same blending. The blurring at the edges where it was impossible to be sure which instincts were human and which were not, the twisting confusion where one set of instincts screamed one thing while the other demanded another. And also the rare pools of tranquillity where the instincts managed to complement each other, to weave together to make something stronger, and better than either would be alone.

They weren’t exactly the same of course, Tsuna’s other half was a bird of peace and loyalty, rather than a manifestation of the capricious hunger of the sea. But still they were alike, in the way some human responses just passed them by, in the way the past seemed to matter so much less than the present or the future, in the wanting things that they could never have, and no sane human would want.

A part of Dino was pretty sure Tsuna understood his other half better than Dino himself did, after all he’d been raised by his mother who was definitely not human, while Dino’s inhuman ancestor had been so long ago no-one now living could remember the name he’d given. But still there were things Tsuna needed to learn from him. Nana wasn’t human at all, and Iemitsu had been far away, there was notone to explain the human side, and in any case neither of them really understood the conflict that came from being neither one thing nor the other. Little Lambo might but he was younger still than Tsuna, at least as Halfgods aged, he needed teaching as much as Tsuna did. It was an older brother Tsuna needed to explain such things and Dino was happy to be that older brother.
There isn't one specific creature Dino's ancestor is based on. Rather it's a sort of mishmash of various horse based sea monsters notably including Kelpies and the each-uisge. There is also a connection drawn with the mares of Diomedes, who were fed on human flesh and thus wild and uncontrollable. The implication here is that in this universe all these stories are based on one real type of creature which acts as a manifestation of the hunger of the sea, and can appear as a horse, or a human, or as a breaking wave, and are generally known of as the mad white horses. When they are in horse or human forms you can tell them by the seaweed in their hair or by any confusion between human and horse forms. And yes they eat people. No Dino doesn't eat people but he does eat raw meat. As for Dino’s ancestor Cavallone Secundo, well no-one knows for sure, but enemy families still scare their kids with stories of him.
Shamal is an incubus

In which what Shamal wants, and what he needs, are sometimes very difficult to separate

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shamal walked in women’s dreams, and their desire gave him power that could warp the world. There was of course a cost. There was always a cost. He fed off their life force, devoured it, and no woman could withstand that for long. He could spend one night, maybe two, but nothing more. Nothing that lasted. Not if he wanted his lover to live.

Sometimes he didn’t. He was after all a hitman, and it was one of the more pleasurable ways to kill a female target. But even then two weeks was about the limit, and if too many of his targets died with no obvious cause after he slept with them, then people would start to get suspicious. He had no desire to out himself, it would be much harder to get what he needed if people knew what he was. People were funny about that, never mind that one or two nights caused no lasting damage and were pleasurable on a level that no human lover could match. He blamed the Catholic Church. For a bunch of murderous criminals the mafia had odd hang ups about religion.

Not that he didn’t love the freewheeling bachelor lifestyle. There were so many beautiful women in the world, and it was a privilege to spend the night with them. It was just... there had been women he’d have liked to know better. Women he’d respected, and been interested by in ways that one night could never really satisfy. His kind were not by nature monogamous, but he had sometimes thought he might like something deeper than a simple night’s feeding. Something personal. But there was no use wondering. He was what he was, an incubus, a demon of desire, a predator, and it was nothing he couldn’t live with.

There was a power in sex, in desire, and he fed off it, needed it. He’d tried going without once, when he was younger, mostly just to see if he could. It nearly killed him, stole half the breath from his lungs and wasted him away to skin and bones in his own hotel room. If Reborn hadn’t found him, hadn’t guessed rightly about what was wrong and called a prostitute, he would have died there alone. He owed Reborn for that, for saving his life, and keeping his secret, and not judging him for what he was. Likely he’d owe him for ever. Shamal was surprisingly ok with that. It was a less transient human connection than his endless stream of casual lovers, and it eased a loneliness he’d never allowed himself to admit to feeling.

So many beautiful women, and he’d adored them all, but over time their names and faces had started to blur together, and in the end it was the people he’d never slept with, the ones he never would sleep with that mattered most. Reborn, Hayato, Bianchi, Tsunayoshi, maybe a half dozen others, people
that meant more than pleasure and survival to him.

It cost him though. There was a good reason he only treated women and for them he broke that rule over and over. It hurt, even touching men hurt, let alone siphoning off the stolen energy he lived off in order to heal them. He had tried taking power from a man once. Youthful experimentation. He should have trusted his instincts because the night had ended with him coughing up blood as his soul violently rejected their life force. With women there was little cost to healing, the energy he used on them being replaced by the energy he stole from them almost immediately, with women the healing felt good. Whereas men took and took, and left him pale and shaking, because he couldn’t take any power back from them and it felt wrong right to the core of the soul many people said he didn’t have. But when Reborn made demands on what he owed, when Tsuna begged him to help, when Hayato looked at him desperate but still unwilling to ask, when Bianchi tried to bargain for the sake of those she loved, he couldn’t refuse. It was worth the pain.

For the life of him he couldn’t figure out how they’d come to matter so much to him though. Reborn he owed, owed more than he could ever repay, but debts don’t equal friendship, and somehow Reborn had become the closest thing to a friend a demon like Shamal was capable of having. Bianchi and Hayato made even less sense. Hayato had been a small angry scrap of humanity when they first met and to this day Shamal wasn’t sure why he’d indulged him, beyond the fact that his persistence was kind of cute. Bianchi for her part had been busy obliviously poisoning her brother, and if Shamal had been the one to tell her what her mother and father and family as a whole had been unwilling to point out, it wasn’t because he felt any particular attachment to Hayato, or sympathy for her. Having a poison witch running around unaware of what she could do was just begging for the kind of accident Shamal did not want to get caught up in. It wasn’t that he was bothered by the cruelty of her parents deceiving her into poisoning the brother she obviously loved. He was a demon, things like that didn’t bother him. Not in the slightest.

But years later seeing the siblings again had given him a feeling that he couldn’t quite name. Somewhere between relief and pride and happiness. They were both hardened killers and unrepentant criminals, Bianchi was in love with a man more than twenty years her senior that looked like a small child, and Hayato was now about as human as Shamal himself. But he was proud of them. They’d both found something worth living for, they’d broken away from their family, and carved out a place in the world and they were happy. He cared about them, his student and his student’s sister. He cared and somehow he felt responsible for them, and it was at least partly for their sake that he cared so much for Tsuna.

Partly but not entirely. He found that for him Tsuna inspired a strange combination of pity and respect. Pity because in so many ways the boy was hopeless, because there were so many human experiences he was missing out on, because he had Reborn the sadist as a teacher. Respect because he kept fighting anyway, because he looked at the twisted menagerie of monsters he’d taken as guardians and friends and saw people, believed in it enough to make it true. For those reasons, Shamal couldn’t pretend he didn’t care, about Tsuna, about Hayato and Bianchi and Reborn. Not when Tsuna looked at him, and knew he was a demon but saw him as a person anyway.

Chapter End Notes

Note Shamal isn't all that old for a demon. He's actually a little younger than Reborn. He didn't have anyone to teach him this stuff so he's had to figure most of it out the hard way.
Tsuna never wanted to be buried in the ground. Waking up in his own coffin was not the future he'd hoped for.
that resembled nothing so much as Reborn, and the other arcobaleno he’d met. Not quite the same, but close enough to have the same origins. She was almost an arcobaleno and she was sick. Whatever was wrong with the world, it was eating away at her life force like acid, and Tsuna couldn’t help but wonder, if it did that to someone who was almost an arcobaleno, what would it do to the real thing? What would it do to Reborn?

And then there were the weapons she fought with. Box weapons, a combination, of magic, and flames, and technology that were truly breath-taking in their power. They were well named. A box was after all a thing of infinite potential, it could contain anything, all the sins of the world… and perhaps hope, fragile feathered thing that it was. A future that held weapons like that was no easy place to live.

…

Older Takeshi had been at once no different to their own Takeshi, and almost completely unrecognisable. His bloodlust was right there underneath his skin, and yet the blade he used was ordinary steel, there was no sign of the Muramasa blade that was his birthright and his burden. It was a strange thing to see. Tsuna wasn’t sure his Takeshi had been more than six paces from it since he’d first chosen to take it up. He wondered what it meant that older Takeshi chose not to carry it.

The secret base he’d led them all to, had at least held some answers. Reborn was there and a cold fear that had been wrapping itself around his insides slowly uncoiled, before tightening again when he realised that the Reborn of this time, future Reborn, was dead. He supposed that at least answered his question about what the warping of the world would do to a full arcobaleno. He might have been happier not knowing. Truthfully he might have been happier not knowing a lot of the answers he’d received since arriving in the future. But ignorance would have solved nothing. He needed to know, he might not have wanted to know, but he needed to know, and he needed to find a way to live with it. Hayato helped. Having someone there that was just as lost as he was, and yet still had utter faith that he would make everything ok, he hadn’t known how comforting he would find it. That unshakable blend of wolf pack instincts and human guardian devotion, that left Hayato incapable of doubting him, even when Tsuna couldn’t escape his own doubts, it reminded him that he was flock leader, that he had to keep his eyes on the horizon even when his wings burned with exhaustion and his heartbeat rattled with fear, because those that followed in his slipstream needed him to.

The base at least was cool. Giannini wasn’t a weak Spark as it turned out, just a bit of a late bloomer, and the base was a true work of mad genius. Just as well because the giant robots were a clear indication that the enemy had Sparks of their own, and technology was hard to fight with pure magic. As for the box weapons, well as far as Tsuna could work out they must have been designed by a Spark with magical abilities, which was a chill inducing concept all on its own, even without introducing the flame component. All things considered the box weapons were a terrifying idea, brilliantly executed. A fairly large part of him, the same part that had wanted to grow up to be a giant robot, wanted one badly. It was frightening, the fact that the box weapons, with all their possibilities and potential were far from the most worrying thing he had to deal with.

His family members kept on arriving from the past, Takeshi, Kyouko, little Lambo and Ipin, Chrome. He was simultaneously terrified for them, and relieved to have them with him, because their adult versions were almost strangers that he didn’t understand and couldn’t predict, but these versions of them he knew right to the core. He knew what they could do, what he could ask of them, what they needed from him. Their presence steadied him. The human part of him felt horribly guilty at that fact. They’d been brought to the future, into danger for his sake, and while the bird part of him was just glad to have his flock where he could see them, where they could mob the enemy together, the human part knew they could die there, and it would be his fault.
He had never been ruled by his human instincts though, and so he held his silence and restricted his expressions of concern to preening all of them when they got back to the base. Running his fingers through their hair, making sure they were all alive and safe. They all had enough of their own inhuman quirks not to judge.

Chapter End Notes

So Lambo does have the ten year bazooka in this fic (mostly because I couldn't think of a good way to do the tyl arc otherwise). Basically his family loaded him up with all the weaponry they could think of to try and help him grow older, the bazooka came with the rest of it. But he never used it because ten years isn't much for a godchild, and so while they all know how it works, this is the first time they've actually used it. The death of the arcobaleno and the damage to the Tri-ni-sette has a mystical effect that Tsuna can feel because of his magical affinity. Honestly anyone with a trace of magic would know something was wrong, but Tsuna has an especially clear sense of it. And yes the little kid in Tsuna secretly thinks the box weapons, and secret underground base, and giant robots are really really cool.
Pandora's Box

Chapter Summary

Kyouko and Haru know that the best attacks are the ones the enemy never sees coming.

Chapter Notes

In which Kyouko and Haru take a little trip outside the base, and set their plans in motion.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The first thing Kyouko made in the future was for Haru. A cloak of misdirection and deception so that Haru could walk through the shadows of this new world and uncover its secrets. She wove it from her own hair, and Haru’s fur, and spider silk, and as she made it she whispered, protection, and allegiance, and conspiracy, and all the things that she and Haru shared. She spun friendship into every line, every thread, because that was one of the oldest powers there was, and Haru would need every bit of help she could get against the tainted aura that pervaded the outside world. She stitched runes of power, and intent, and used the patterns they formed, of belief, and long use, and tradition to channel the sun bright willpower she burned into it when she was done.

Haru had smiled her wide mischievous fox smile when Kyouko had given it to her. Had taken it and whispered and giggled with her as they planned their attack on the enemy, and that was why secretly, Haru was always Kyouko’s favourite. She more than anyone understood the satisfaction in coming at an enemy sideways, in ways that they didn’t expect, that left them helpless, and reeling, and utterly humiliated. The appeal of the indirect attack. Of getting away clean and laughing at the enemy’s misfortune over cake and chocolate.

The first trick that Haru played in the future was for Kyouko’s sake. Well it was to everyone’s benefit of course, and Haru did get a fair bit of personal satisfaction out of it, but it was still mostly for Kyouko, for the bloody, vicious, mischief in her eyes when she’d given Haru a cloak of shadows to hide her in, and a smile, and a suggestion.

“Ne Haru-chan. Wouldn’t it be fun to undermine Millefiore a bit before we actually get to the fight? I mean, they’ve been undermining us with the giant robots, and the patrols, and the non-trinisette radiation. It’s really only fair if we even the score a bit.” Haru wouldn’t have been able to call herself a fox if she’d refused.

They’d split up after leaving the base. Kyouko to play distraction and see if she could retrieve any supplies from her house, Haru to wreak subtle havoc amongst the foot soldiers of Millefiore. It had worked like a charm. Haru shedding the human disguise that she had worn for fourteen years, and with it all the rules and limitations that humans lived by. She was foxfire, and deception, and chaos, she was the trickster of a thousand folktales from all the four corners of the world, and she wreaked petty devastating havoc amongst the lower ranks of the Millefiore.

She didn’t go after the upper ranks, not directly. Their enemy was not weak and neither Haru nor
Kyouko was fool enough to rush into a confrontation their side wasn’t prepared for. The upper ranks were strong enough to be unpredictable in the way those with power often are, but the lower ranks, they were vulnerable in the same way as all large organisations are, hobbled by procedure and their own lack of authority, and resentful with it. It didn’t take much to throw them into disarray. A few small illusions on seemingly insignificant requisition forms, a couple of amusing herbs added to the incoming food supplies, a haze of poor judgement cast over the workers responsible for maintaining the enemy base’s plumbing, all to sow discontent, and provide a distraction. And all the while, here and there, men who seemed like unimportant paperpushers found themselves becoming less than discreet in the presence of a beautiful woman, who was gone in the morning like a wonderful dream.

Haru hadn’t had so much fun in years.

Kyouko’s trip had been a success too, although it hadn’t quite gone to plan. She hadn’t been able to get to her old house unobserved, not with enemy patrols on every street, but Hana had been able to provide her with the materials she needed. Evidently her future self still had the good sense to rely on Hana when she was in trouble, because she had a bag of emergency supplies stashed at her apartment, and a list of emergency numbers written into Hana’s diary. Hana of course had taken the situation with her usual exasperated levelheadedness, always older than her years. Truesight did that to a person, allowed them to see too much too young, and denied them the peace that ignorance could grant. Hana always saw the truth of things, and yet even knowing the trouble on Kyouko’s heels, she still stood by her.

It had been a comfort Kyouko hadn’t known she needed. That even with everything else that was wrong in this twisted, rotten future, Hana was still and always would be her friend. She left behind a bracelet when she returned to the base, a simple thing of braided thread, but imbued with as much power for protection as Kyouko could muster. She would not have Hana suffer for her friendship.

…

There had been trouble when they returned to the base. Tsuna had been worried, and Reborn had been angry, and pretty much everyone thought they’d been irresponsible. Haru had been slightly insulted that they thought she’d get caught. She was a fox, she knew how to sneak.

They’d calmed down a little when Haru explained exactly what she’d been doing. For some reason they found it reassuring that she’d had a plan and a purpose in going out there. As if she couldn’t have been just as effective if she had been operating on a casual whim. Kitsune did their best work when improvising. They’d been glad of the information she’d returned with at least. And she was pretty sure half of them were trying not to snigger when she told them what she’d done to the enemy minions.

They’d been more than just glad when Kyouko told them what she’d gone out for. Kyouko had an idea, and she’d needed materials they didn’t have in the base to test it out. All their anger at her recklessness had vanished in favour of excitement and disbelief, when she told them what she thought she might be able to do.

She’d left Haru in charge of the cooking that evening. She’d grabbed her bag, and her brother’s box and locked herself in the lab with Giannini. They’d worked through the night and into the next morning, only periodically emerging to restock on coffee and chocolate. When the others listened at the door they could hear a truly chilling harmony of a spark’s mad laughter, and a witch’s cackling as they worked.

Both she and Giannini were exhausted by the end, but when they emerged, half manic, and gleeful, with a nondescript looking box, no-one could say it wasn’t worth it. The box itself was nothing special, but it was proof of concept. Magic, and science, and flames woven together into a weapon
like no other, and they’d managed to work out how to do it. They could make their own boxes.

Even Reborn was impressed.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah Kyouko can make boxes now. Or to be more accurate, Kyouko and Giannini working together can create boxes now. Because you need that combination of science and magic. The box they made is a sun box because they used Kyouko's flames to pattern it. To make others they'll be dragging everyone else in one at a time to use as guinea pigs.

And yes Haru did exactly what you think she did to Millefiore's Japan operation.
Chapter Summary

Byakuran is mad and fae and powerful in the ways of magic. This makes him hard for Shouichi to predict. But Shouichi is mad, and human, and powerful in the ways of science, it makes it nearly as hard for Byakuran to predict him.

Chapter Notes

In which Byakuran is more fae than human. This is not a problem until the Cervello give him the Mare ring and upset the delicate balance of his mental stability. Shouichi really hates the Cervello.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Shouichi had always known Byakuran was mad. He of all people would know, given that he was pretty mad in his own right. It had taken a while for him to realise Byakuran was Fae though. At least half maybe more, and he’d definitely spent time in the summer country. It had taken him nearly a year to be sure although he’d suspected for months before that.

If he hadn’t met Tsuna and his guardians he might have missed it. He was a scientist, and if Tsuna hadn’t triggered his interest in the ways science and magic might blend he would likely not have known enough to recognise his friend’s nature. And Byakuran had been his friend then, whatever else might have followed, back then he was still Shouichi’s friend.

It was the little things that clued him in. For one thing Byakuran had never outright lied to him, twisted words, and truths, and meanings until it was as close as made no difference, but never an actual lie. For another thing there was no iron in his home, he avoided it, subtly but unmistakeably. Mostly though it was just the way he was, the slightly cruel sense of humour, the way he loved hierarchy at the same time as he embraced chaos, the oddly old fashioned cadence of some of his more formal speech that was a clear sign of fae court manners.

He wasn’t pure fae though. Not when Shouichi could feel the Sky flames that rested just under his skin, and coiled through Shouichi’s own Sun flames like vines. Flames were a human power, Tsuna had made that very clear. To wield them he must have been at least part human, even if it didn’t generally show. Not that Shouichi cared much, Byakuran was human enough to be his Sky, and if that turned out to be barely human at all, well that just made him more interesting, more right. He would never have been satisfied with anyone ordinary that was for sure.

Byakuran was anything but ordinary. He was as mad as Shouichi was and twice as unpredictable. His fae heritage gave him a perspective on the world that was skewed about thirty five degrees off normal, and the kind of unbalanced curiosity that he’d only ever found in his fellow sparks. And he was brilliant, inhumanly so. Brilliant enough to keep up with Shouichi’s spark fuelled inspiration, but with a magical slant that both challenged and complemented Shouichi’s more scientific thought process. He’d been amazing. And then he’d been given the Mare rings, unlimited power and more
knowledge than any creature bound to four dimensions could ever hope to handle, and everything went to hell.

Shouichi hated the Cervello more than anything.

Byakuran had always been mad, and mostly inhuman, but there was mad and then there was this. The Mare ring had changed him, warped him. Shouichi had seen it happen, had seen his friend, his Sky, move from playful capriciousness to the kind of desperate hungry brokenness that could burn the world to ashes. More than that Shouichi had seen the future, the world his friend would create, and it was a line he couldn’t cross. Shouichi was a scientist, he knew that sometimes contaminated samples had to be discarded, no matter how much of yourself you’d put into them. He’d called Tsuna and agreed to help him kill Byakuran.

Possibly the worst thing was that despite everything he was still Shouichi’s Sky. Byakuran’s vines were still woven through Shouichi’s soul, and if they’d grown tight enough to strangle, and sharp with thorns over the years they were no less powerful for that. He was Shouichi’s Sky and Shouichi would kill him, and break his own heart doing it.

Byakuran was no fool. Wherever Shouichi went the Cervello went with him, pink haired shadows he was never free of. Byakuran had said he was assigning them as his assistants but they all knew they were really there to watch him. Shouichi tried to act like it didn’t bother him, he knew he was fooling no-one. He hated them, he knew it, they knew it, Byakuran knew it, he suspected that was half the reason he’d given them that assignment, purely for the pleasure of watching Shouichi squirm. He hated them, they had ruined his Sky, and broken the world in doing so, and they never showed their faces. He wanted them dead. Shouichi distracted himself by fantasising about using them as test subjects for whatever experiment he was running, they just stood there radiating smugness, knowing that he couldn’t touch them.

They were always watching so he swallowed his hate and did his work, and allowed Byakuran to toy with him like a cat with a mouse, it got to the point where it was a relief when he went so deep into the madness place that he couldn’t even remember what he built. At least then he was beyond anyone’s control his own included. Besides, he knew it unsettled the Cervello when he went there. They hid it well but they’d been his shadows for years and watching went two ways, he could probably read them better than anyone else alive, and he knew that they were afraid of his spark. He found that grimly satisfying. Not nearly as satisfying as when he finally got to shoot the bitches with a freeze ray though. That had been a good day, he’d finally got out, and even better he’d got to take Spanner with him, he had missed his lab partner. Away from the Millefiore base he’d finally, almost been able to breathe again.

Then he found out about the real six funeral wreaths and the thorned vines that Byakuran wrapped around his soul twisted and tore at him. He was worried of course, this was nothing any of them had planned for, and if he knew Byakuran (and he did, oh kami he did), then those people would be beyond lethal, he was frustrated at the collapse of their plans, but underneath all that, underneath all the things he should be feeling he felt betrayed. It was stupid, it wasn’t as though he had any right to Byakuran’s loyalty or trust, not when he’d spent years plotting to kill him. But still Byakuran was his Sky, Byakuran’s flames were briars woven into his, tight enough to strangle, and yet he’d still given the ring to someone else, to a stranger, a monster, and a part of Shouichi felt so betrayed at that. Even after everything Shouichi would never have considered calling anyone else his Sky, that Byakuran would call someone else his Sun was simultaneously painful and terrifying, because how broken must his Sky be that he would try and deny his own guardian bonds.

It hurt having Byakuran’s brilliance turned against him, if Byakuran had been any less lost to reason, he suspected that Shouichi’s betrayal might have hurt him just as much. But it didn’t touch him, lost
in the grandiosity of his own plans. He didn’t care anymore, even though Shouichi still did. That was his advantage in the end. Both of them were brilliant, but they thought in different enough ways that they never were quite able to predict each other, not with thought alone. But Shouichi still cared, was still able to admit that he cared, that gave him an edge, an emotional connection that Byakuran had lost. That was how Shouichi managed to kill him in the end. Tsuna might have struck the blow, but Shouichi made it happen, with all the mad genius he was born to, and all his soul deep connection to his Sky. He felt it when his Sky died, the warm orange flames that had twined so closely around his soul for such a long time, withered and dissolved in an instant. It left him feeling so very cold inside. He was beyond reason by human or fae standards by the end, it was almost a mercy when Tsuna killed him. And yet still it broke Shouichi’s heart. He hoped the reset would allow him to forget.

Chapter End Notes

There will be more on Byakuran and his many many issues later, but basically he was mad to start with, but he was pretty functionally insane. Then he got the Mare rings which really probably aren’t good for anyone's sanity and that led to full on supervillain syndrome. Shouichi is very very upset about that, he liked Byakuran. Byakuran was his friend, and scientifically interesting, and a good lab partner for trying to combine science and magic. Anyway Byakuran is at least half fae and he spent some of his childhood around their courts, but his memory on the subject is a bit patchy due to his head having been tampered with at the time.
Die by the sword

Chapter Summary

Takeshi makes a different choice to his older self, Reborn approves.

Chapter Notes

Takeshi doesn’t know why his older self stepped away from his sword, but he will not make the same mistake. Shigure Kintoki is angry at years of abandonment.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Shigure Kintoki was angry with him, or rather with the older him. Takeshi could feel its rage singing in his blood. He didn’t know, couldn’t imagine, why his older self had stepped away from his blade, but at some point during the ten years that lie between them he had done so. No that was a lie, he forced himself to admit, he knew exactly why.

He wonders how his own Shigure Kintoki, ten years newer and yet for all that the same sword, was reacting to his absence. There was little to be done about it but still Takeshi worried, just as he worried about what his father thought of his son vanishing. This version, the older bloodier, abandoned version of the sword he was sworn to bear, was harder to wield. It doubted him, it knew he had not forsworn it yet, knew he had no intentions of doing so, but his older self had done so and so the blade was not easy with him.

It was easy to think of this future as being a different world, his older self a different person. Everything was so different, so wrong, even his sword felt different, angry with him in a way that his own was not. It would be so easy to pretend. But that would be a lie, and not the kind that was harmless but amusing in the way calling the Mafia a game was. That would be a lie in the way that stepping away from Shigure Kintoki would be, it would be a lie like pretending he didn’t dream of blood, like acting as though all that mattered to him was baseball. He’d told those kind of lies to himself once. They’d almost killed him.

No the future was not separate, it was the result of all the choices they and others had made. Their future selves were still themselves, were a glimpse and perhaps a warning of what they could be. The man who had set aside the family sword in favour of lesser blades had been himself, or at least could be himself. The versions of themselves that had let Tsuna die were a shadow of what could be. He could see his own shame over that knowledge reflected in Gokudera’s eyes.

Still because the future was not separate, that must mean it could be changed. He didn’t have to repeat his own mistakes. When Shigure Kintoki called for him with whispers of blood and dreams of death he did not try to fight it. He went to the cupboard where his older self had hidden the sword and reached for it like a feral dog, like a poisonous snake, cautiously and with respect, but without hesitation, without fear. Fear was a weakness that dangerous animals and demon blades both could sense and he couldn’t afford it.

He took his blade and himself down to the training room at midnight and surrendered himself to the
truths he’d been running from since the first time he’d dreamed of killing. He was the blood rain, the
killer, the edge of the blade. He danced through his katas with predatory focus and felt Shigure
Kintoki purr at the way he let it weave itself into his soul. He finished with a flick of the blade, and
his own blood dripping over its mirror bright surface. He licked it clean before it retreated back into
its harmless wooden camouflage, and it felt good, smoothly metallic on his tongue. He turned to the
doorway where Reborn had been watching him, he wasn’t sure for how long and he smiled openly,
blood still on his teeth.

“So what did you think?” Reborn had given him an inscrutable look.

“I’m thinking that you know exactly why your older self laid down that blade.” Takeshi laughed
softly and rubbed at the back of his neck.

“Aa maybe I do at that. I’ve been trying to pretend that I don’t get it, but I suppose in the end I can
see how it might have happened. This sword, it’s not an easy thing to carry, and it’s all tied up with
blood. I guess I must’ve seen that if I carried this sword into the kind of trouble Tsuna was leading us
towards I would never be able to lay it down again. So I locked it away and used ordinary blades for
the work that needed doing. At least that’s what I think must’ve happened. I was trying to keep from
being a monster.”

“That’s still true though isn’t it? The trouble headed this way is still the same. Are you sure you don’t
want to step away. There’s plenty of other swords in this base you could use, ones that would leave
you human, that wouldn’t demand blood.” Reborn’s face was impossible to read, Takeshi didn’t
even try.

“My older self clung too hard to his humanity.” Takeshi said, dead serious in the way he so rarely
was. “He clung to his humanity and he hid from what he was, and he was a failure. Tsuna died and
he couldn’t stop it, couldn’t even avenge him, if that’s what humanity is then I will walk with eyes
wide open into the darkness. I chose Tsuna the day I first picked up a blade, I knew what it would
cost, it will take everything of me. This is the truth I have run from, I will live and kill by the blade
and one day I will die by it. There is no more time for lying to myself. I’m just as much of a monster
as the rest of them. Shigure Kintoki is my sword, I will not lay it down again.” Takeshi was almost
certain that he saw respect in Reborn’s eyes at his words.

He wasn’t surprised when Reborn offered to train him. He suspected Reborn felt a certain kinship
with him, both of them were after all human, save for the twisting of dark magic that their respective
burdens effected upon them. The sun pacifier in the end wasn’t so unlike Shigure Kintoki, a duty,
and a curse, and a source of power all at once, although he had chosen to accept his burden where
Reborn never had. They were both bound, and cursed, and doomed to die in violence and that made
them kin. When it came down to it Reborn told him about his curse, not because of his success in
training, but because he understood in ways none of the others ever could, except perhaps Kusakabe,
and Kusakabe’s loyalties were always and would always be to Hibari first and foremost. Even
arcobaleno needed people to understand sometimes, especially when they knew they were the last of
their kind still living, when they knew the coming fight would most likely kill them too. Reborn was
cursed, and deadly and far, far older than he looked, but in the end he was still human, still thought
like a human, and humans don’t like to be alone. Takeshi could understand that.

He understood so he didn’t try to break Reborn’s illusions. It cost him nothing to let Reborn think
they were alike. It wasn’t even truly a lie, they were in many ways alike. But Takeshi had chosen to
take up the sword, had let it weave itself into his soul until he could no longer tell whether it was the
sword’s bloodlust or his own that drove them, while Reborn fought and twisted and struggled against
his own burden every moment of every day, even after years with it chained around his neck. It was
a small difference, but no less important for it. He didn’t think bringing it up would help though, so
he held his smile, and his silence, and let Reborn and Shigure Kintoki together teach him how to kill, and how to die.

Chapter End Notes

This is this universe's equivalent of Takeshi's decision to devote himself entirely to the sword while they were in the future. Basically he's stopped fighting his sword's urges. Reborn gets on quite well with Takeshi, they have a lot in common, and Takeshi is perceptive enough not to rub Reborn's nose in the things they don't have in common.
The cruel hand of fate

Chapter Summary

Yuni is a seer like her mother before her. When the future is as bleak as it is, it's more a curse than a gift.

Chapter Notes

The first thing Yuni ever told Gamma was that he would fail her. He chooses to follow anyway.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“The Lady of Summer is dead.” said the blank faced little girl that had somehow replaced his boss. “The shadows have devoured her, just as they devoured the Autumn before her. Only Spring remains, young and alone against the abyss.” She turned fathomless eyes upon him and he shivered with the weight of truth he felt there.

“You cannot save her, Knight of Summer.” She’d said and he’d been angry at her, so very angry. Angry because she wasn’t Aria, because Aria was dead, because she was Aria’s daughter, of course she was Aria’s daughter and he hadn’t known. He’d been angry because he’d stood at her mother’s right hand more than long enough to know the sound of prophecy when he heard it, and this little girl had just predicted his failure. He’d stormed out then, away from the little girl with the too old eyes, and the room and the job and the cursed pacifier, that should have been her mother’s but were hers now. He should have known that prophecy wasn’t about Aria.

Aria had known she was dying of course. The women of their family always did know too much. A legacy of unnatural blood Aria had once said, which made less sense than it should’ve. On one level, yeah, the gift of prophecy was obviously a result of some kind of magical or inhuman heritage, but on the other hand Aria had said unnatural, and she’d never been prone to hate speech. She’d known she was dying and so she’d made sure there was a valid replacement available. He felt stupid. Of course there was a daughter, a continuation of an unbroken line of generations upon generations of seeresses ensured by duty. He wondered exactly how young she’d been when she did it, who the father might have been. Yuni could have been his, maybe, but he thought she was a little too old for that. Not that it really mattered. Among the Giglio Nero it was always the mother that mattered.

He’d come back as the sun set. Where else after all would he go? The Giglio Nero was still his family even with the beating heart of it ripped out and replaced by a strange cold child who wouldn’t weep for her mother. He’d come back and challenged his new boss, tried to crack the cold façade she’d been hiding behind. He hadn’t expected to succeed. The weight of prophecy had faded from her eyes and she looked like the child she was when he asked why she didn’t weep, a child in a role she was too young for, trying to fill her mother’s shoes. There was none of the ageless weight of a seers voice when she told him she was trying to honour her mother’s memory by hiding her own grief.
That was when he knelt for her. The others, the rest of the family, they’d knelt for the seeress, for the boss, cold, and powerful, and ageless, but Gamma had first and always knelt for a child trying to do a woman’s job, for the impossible bravery in her eyes as she’d faced the future she knew was coming.

You cannot save her. The words haunted his dreams, as he desperately tried to hold their family together, with a boss that was far too young, and allies they couldn’t quite trust, and the Gesso family bleeding them dry at every turn. Knight of Summer, she’d called him and he’d known she was talking about him because the name twisted in his chest like red hot wire. A knight that had already failed once, and would fail again, would always fail. He was a Giglio Nero man, always and forever, he knew better than anyone that there was no way to fight prophecy. He was no mist to find the loopholes in fate itself, or sky to force his way through despite it, or cloud to ignore it as if the very idea of destiny applying was absurd. He was lightning, and all he could do, all he could ever do was put himself between those he loved and danger, and bleed for them.

You cannot save her. And it was true of course it was true. Genkishi had come home bleeding, and she’d slipped seamlessly into a seer’s trance, eyes fixed on something no-one else could see, voice warped by ageless knowledge.

“And so the Sky falls, and everything comes to dust. The Lady of Spring is stolen by the Lord of Madness, and the world eats itself. The Summer Knight lays down his sword, and the Blade in the Shadows forsakes his oath. None may follow on the paths she must tread.” Yuni had always been so much clearer than Aria, less of the ambiguity that marked most prophecy. Gamma honestly didn’t know if it was because Yuni was stronger, or just that the future was more brutally clear, more inevitable these days. Sometimes Gamma wished for the bliss of ignorance.

He watched his boss, Aria’s daughter, Yuni, walk into the enemy’s hands of her own free will. He should have known. He could stand between her and her enemies, fight for her, bleed for her, die for her, but he couldn’t save her from herself. She came back with a cold blankness behind the eyes, a trance deeper than any he’d seen her in and he knew she’d gone where none of them could follow, lost in the way that only seers could be, but free because of it. After that it was long years of waiting.

It wasn’t until the very end that he met Sawada Tsunayoshi. He met his guardians first. The teenage rain with a killer’s eyes and blood on his blade. The storm that had looked human right up until the edges of his shape realigned themselves into something that definitely wasn’t, shifted as naturally as breathing. He’d known the Decimo’s Storm was a werewolf, but knowing and understanding were two different things.

The Sun was by comparison easy to face. Even if he was older, more experienced, more dangerous in nearly all ways that could be measured. Even if by all rights he should have been the one to fear, in the end it was the storm, reckless, and wild, and terribly, terribly young that managed to match him, to defeat him, leave him burned and bloodied on the floor. The younger ones, the ones taken from the past, they had a strength their older counterparts lacked, that anyone who’d lived through the last ten years lacked. They remembered who they were. Hadn’t spent years losing, learning to make compromises, and calculate odds, and respect their own limits. There was a raw power in the sheer force of will that they could bring to a fight, unburdened by concerns about what was possible, or practical, or socially acceptable.

Yuni had returned. And for a brief moment he had hoped. Had hoped that maybe even if he couldn’t save her, Sawada Tsunayoshi with his uncanny power and child’s force of will, could. If he’d dared look into Yuni’s eyes at that moment, then he would have seen the truth.
You cannot save her. The first prophecy she had ever told him, and it was only at the very end that he truly understood. He couldn’t save her. No-one could. But he could do something more important than saving her.

He could make sure she wasn’t alone.

It was the only time he ever managed to surprise her.

Chapter End Notes

I’m not sure how happy I am with this. Basically Yuni and all her female ancestors were seers, who use a variety of techniques from trances to specially designed drugs, to see the future. Their gift has two layers, they see multiple futures, which can be manipulated, but when they speak prophecies they are inevitable, although usually open to interpretation. Seeing is semi voluntary, prophecies are involuntary. The way their gift manifests has its roots in factors which will come up later.
Hard lessons

Chapter Summary

Shishou told Ipin what he was, what it meant a long time ago, he knew better than to hide knowledge from a dragon. He knew she would tell no-one, dragons know how to hoard secrets when they must.

Chapter Notes

Ipin doesn’t take Shishou’s death very well.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shishou was dead. Ipin knew with the dragon knowing, as deep as the fire that ran through her soul. Shishou was dead and it was a heavy piece of knowledge to bear.

“You can’t learn everything from books Ipin,” Shishou had said. “You can’t learn everything by being told. There’s things that can only truly be known by being lived.”

Now her eyes burned with tears, and her heart burned with the fire of grief, and she knew what loss felt like. The human part of her wished she could unknow it even as the dragon part of her curled tightly, possessively, around the bitter truth of it, Shishou’s last lesson to her, and no dragon would ever let go of knowledge, no matter how much it hurt.

There was no time for tears though. No time, with the world unravelling around them. Shishou was gone, all the arcobaleno were, save for Reborn, and strong as he was he couldn’t hold the world together alone. The world was breaking. She knew she wasn’t the only one who could feel it, Tsuna was on edge, he knew, and so did most of his guardians, although she suspected Tsuna felt it most keenly. He was after all, far too perceptive. Kyoko and Haru felt it too, and Kusakabe and Bianchi, all of them more than magic enough to sense the wrongness in the world. Giannini scientist to the core felt nothing, and for Fuuta, the world always felt a little wrong, so it was impossible to say if he was able to tell the difference. Reborn of course felt it most keenly of all, bearing the weight of the world almost enough to strangle him. Not that he’d let it show of course. In some ways he was very like Shishou.

It had been a general announcement when, they’d told her about Shishou. No time to be careful, to be private, not with so many dead, and so much to do. They’d said a lot of names, enemies, strangers, friends, she was far from the only one left grieving by the litany. The young swordsman had looked almost as lost as she felt, but there was no time for weeping, not even for her and Lambo. There was no more time to be children, and even if their bodies would not co-operate they had to own every one of their years.

Shishou’s blood and everything learned from it granted her two years’ growth, even as Lambo managed to earn his own two years working out how to call green fire to the ring he carried. It wasn’t even nearly enough, she could see her concern echoed in Lambo’s eyes. He knew as well as she did, it was taking them too long to grow up. He wouldn’t show his doubts of course, it wasn’t in
his nature, a Godchild always had to be larger than life, but she knew, they were too much alike for him to hide from her.

It was hard being in abeyance, a child, but one far older than any child had a right to be. It was hard, not having the size and strength and wisdom to help those she loved. Shishou had always told her not to worry about it, even as years and decades passed. That it was ok to grow up at her own pace, that she could trust those she loved to look after themselves. But Shishou had died, and she supposed that was another thing that she had learned from losing him, that sometimes he could be wrong.

She’d never felt right in her own skin, too small, too soft, with no wings, or claws, or fangs to protect her. That at least she shared with more than Lambo. Shishou was the first who’d understood it, his own shape twisted and warped down into an unnatural mockery of childhood his life force siphoned off to feed the unnatural hungry emptiness that emanated from the thing around his neck. Shishou was the first but more followed, Shishou’s comrades, warped just as he was, Lambo human enough to feel time passing, not human enough to show it, Mukuro and Chrome, broken and remade into shiny brass dolls of themselves, Tsuna, who like her should have had wings. She still wasn’t right, not even close, but she wasn’t alone, it helped, having so many people who understood.

But Shishou had been first, and Shishou was dead, and her skin felt ten times too small to hold everything she was feeling. She took Lambo down to the training rooms and fought with him until he gained nearly an inch of height, when he got bored and ran she chased him, down all the lost and secret passages of the base, into labs and libraries, and storerooms, listening in as the older ones talked until she had gained an inch to match Lambo. She pretended it helped.

When Tsuna and the others took the fight to the enemy she and Lambo were left behind. Just as she’d known they would be. Too young always too young, and she could not grow up fast enough to keep from being left behind, to keep her loved ones from dying. But her skin was ten times too small, and the fire in her soul felt like it would burn her to ashes from the inside out, and she refused to stay back. They’d been left behind but they were needed anyway. So she and her wild brave friend Lambo, and bold brass clockwork Chrome, and the angry shadow Hibari with his half shattered anchor Kusakabe, all of them went to help.

She killed a man on the way in, and pretended not to notice that the ground seemed just a little further away than it had before she cracked his head against the wall, pretended not to notice the fine dusting of scales around the wrists and elbows and ankles that she could now call up. She knew how it felt now, to kill someone, and it was a knowledge almost as heavy as Shishou’s death, but there was no time to process it, with the world falling apart around their ears. She knew now how killing felt, how guilt and satisfaction could war with each other in a person’s heart, and she wondered why the most important truths were so heavy to carry.

Chapter End Notes

In this verse Dragon aging is a bit like God aging, except instead of power, it is knowledge and experience that age them. Losing someone she loves is a fairly major experience for Ipin and she ages two years accordingly.

Ipin is only about a quarter Dragon, but the draconic traits show pretty strongly in her. Once she gains enough age and experience she will be able to shapeshift a bit into a dragonish form (probably not full transformation though), hence the scales.
It has been a long, long time since Fuuta has been home, Tsuna nii helped him build a new one in this harsh and chaotic world.

Sometimes the only way home is to build a new one.

If you were to light a torch on Fuuta’s homeworld, it would take more than two thousand years for him to see it from where he is standing now. Two thousand years by earth counting, that’s more than twenty human lifetimes, and Fuuta’s people are not so different from humans in terms of lifespan at least. More than enough time for civilisations to rise and fall.

Light travels faster than anything else in the universe.

…

Space and time are not so separate. Travel fast enough and time starts to slow. It took Fuuta lifetimes to reach earth, it took moments. It took thousands of years for him to lose everything, he blinked and it was gone. Even if he were able to fix the ship, to return to the world he came from, the world he would return to would not be home. Worlds change. Time does that, and it has been a very long time.

He is older than any of his people have ever been, he is a child not yet grown. He was not supposed to be alone here. He was sent with what humans would have called his mother and he supposed the concept was close enough to be a fair translation. He was sent with a whole shipfull of others, adults, children. A one way exploration trip to see what the universe held they had known and accepted that going in, but they weren’t supposed to be alone. That wasn’t the plan.

Best laid plans, the humans would say. There was a flaw in the ship’s environmental controls, three of them survived, got to the escape pod and made it to Earth. He was the only one left. Surya the ship’s navigator had died when they opened the airlock, massive allergic reaction, they hadn’t had the equipment to check the air, they hadn’t had the equipment to protect her even if they had. That left Fuuta and Ansel, alone on a world they didn’t understand. Ansel had been older but not by much, Fuuta hadn’t really liked him. It didn’t seem to matter in the face of the awful aloneness they were faced with.

They could pass for local, for human, at least as long as they avoided hospitals. Convergent evolution, there were really only so many ways for living things to respond to similar living conditions. He’d tried to explain it to Tsuna once, the universe was like one of those shaped ice trays, you could pour water into it, or you could pour orange juice into it, and it would still come out roughly the same shape. Tsuna had been confused, but then, Tsuna wasn’t human either, as far as he
was concerned a thing was only ever itself. Tsuna had known he was not of earth the first time they’d met. But most humans hadn’t seen it, and two more runaway kids living on the streets had drawn little attention.

The ship helped. Now just another star in the sky of earth, shiny dead metal in a high irregular orbit, but its scanning capabilities, its telepathic link to their minds, that remained intact, gave them languages, and culture, and rankings to help guide them through this new and alien world. It wasn’t enough for Ansel, hadn’t saved him from dying in a fight over half a loaf of bread, because knowledge could only take you so far when you were without resources and support. And then Fuuta was truly alone.

Ansel’s death had been what drove Fuuta to seek protection. He had been in this awful, unfamiliar world long enough to know that his knowledge was valuable, and so he made it known that he could accurately rank anything. It hadn’t taken long for someone to pick him up, and to this day he was still convinced it was the right decision. He hadn’t been happy with them, but he’d survived, and sometimes that was all you could do.

Years of being traded, and sold, and stolen, years of being a valuable commodity, and it wasn’t enough. Survival wasn’t enough. They weren’t cruel, not to a resource as valuable as him, but they were not kind, and he knew all too well what kind of men he served. He was so tired of keepers that looked right through him and didn’t see a person, tired of not being allowed outside, not being able to stare into the night sky and dream of a home long lost. Years of living on a world that he was never truly a part of. It kept him alive but it wasn’t enough, he barely felt real, a shadow of a lost home cast over a place where he had no power to act.

He knew them better than they knew themselves, but they underestimated him. They looked at him and saw a child, fragile and helpless, at their mercy, but he knew them better than they knew themselves and there was power in that kind of knowledge. He was a child, but he was clever, and he had all the knowledge he needed to break free. He was done being a shadow. He was cut off from his own world forever, but this world, this strange, uncomfortable, alien world whose fate he now shared, was right outside the bars on the windows.

... He’d known he would have one chance, so he prepared carefully. He ranked the best ways out, the best routes away, the weaknesses of his jailors. He ranked where to run to and how to get there, and who in this cruel alien world might protect him and not use him. And he found Sawada Tsunayoshi, staked everything on what he knew of Tsuna’s character, and the world changed.

Ten years later and still a thousand lifetimes away from the world he was born to, but he was home. Tsuna had made it home, had given him home and family and love, had known him for what he was the moment they first met and yet had never looked at him and seen anything but a person.

Tsuna had shown him the beauty and power of the world he now lived him, had introduced him to others who were in their own ways as out of place and alone as he was. He learned to love the burning orange blaze of Earth’s sunsets, so reminiscent of the fire in Tsuna-nii’s heart. He started to see this harsh alien world as more than just a place to stand in the empty vastness of space.

Ten years later and Fuuta would fight and die for Tsuna, and the world that he had never expected to become his home. Earth might not be his homeworld, but after so many years, more years in the end than he had lived on the planet he was born to, he could feel that it was breaking. He had managed to find enough resonance with the world around him to sense it crumbling, and this world was the only home he had left, Tsuna and the others were the only family he had left. He was a part of this world now, for better or worse, and he would not let it die quietly. He burned out the last of his connection
to the ship, his ranking star, finding every weakness and opportunity Byakuran left open. Sacrificed his last connection to the past for the chance at a future.

Chapter End Notes

The ranking star is Fuuta's psychic spaceship, their connection has been fading over the years, he burned out the last of it to help Tsuna. The ship originally had a full exploration crew, meant to make contact with alien races and explore strange new worlds. They had an ansible to send their findings back to the homeworld, and enough fuel to travel a lot further than they did. But there was an accident and in the end Fuuta, who was there as the child of one of the crew, was the only one that survived. His understanding of the ship and tech is correspondingly limited.
Chapter Summary

Mukuro is playing a dangerous game with a dangerous madman. It's a good thing he's also a dangerous madman.

Chapter Notes

Byakuran, like Mukuro, has seen too much. Mukuro has nothing but contempt for him. He let it break him after all.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Byakuran had smelled the lies on him when he’d infiltrated. Fae were infuriating that way. But if he had the fae’s ability to know lies from truth he also had all their arrogance and love of convoluted schemes, and so he’d let Mukuro spy anyway. No doubt he thought Mukuro didn’t know he knew. Mukuro wanted to laugh, Byakuran might be Fae but Mukuro was a mis he breathed deception. It was a brilliant convoluted dance, the things Byakuran let him learn, the things Byakuran didn’t know he’d learned, the things both true and false that he’d allowed Byakuran to find out about him and his plans.

Dancing with Byakuran had felt like being back on that edge between life and death, where everything was held in potential. He hated it, no he loved it, no… he didn’t know how he felt expect that there was power and possibility and an intensity that nothing else could match wound up in every word, every gesture, every thought. Mukuro thought he understood now, how people could feel so drawn to the fae’s inhuman, predatory beauty. It wasn’t shallow, it wasn’t shallow at all, it was about the way they thinned the barrier between life and death, reality and illusion, until it was almost impossible to tell the different.

He had danced that dance as only a Mist could, with knowledge of truth and iron hard belief in illusions, with deception, and truth that masqueraded as deception, but he hadn’t seen Byakuran’s trump card coming. He should have seen it. It was right there in his eyes, in his words, in the shape of his madness. He saw too much, too much for anyone to bear. Mukuro knew Byakuran’s eyes, he saw them whenever he dared look in a mirror. Power that came from knowledge, insanity that came from exactly the same source. That ring had broken a man who must have already been barely holding the fine line between fae and human, and now he was almost impossible to stop. Whoever gave him that power should have been shot.

With everything out in the open he had looked into Byakuran’s eyes and seen kin. They had both seen more than any mortal should. Had seen the shape of the universe and understood their own irrelevance. What they saw was not the same, Byakuran had seen the infinity of possibilities rather than the void of death, but the implications, the meaning of what they had seen was all too much alike. It was more than enough to make them family.

Of course Mukuro had murdered his family like the mad dogs they were, so he wasn’t sure if his
kinship with Byakuran had all that much relevance to his plans going forwards. Staring into the abyss had taught him many things, sentiment was not one of them. Given his own way he’d happily walk around with Byakuran’s head on a spike, considering what the mad bastard had done, considering what he planned to do.

Mukuro would freely admit he wasn’t exactly the picture of mental stability, but there was mad and then there was mad. Byakuran was a mad dog, had stared into the abyss and instead of accepting his own insignificance had decided to tear reality apart rebelling against it, had decided to make himself God because he had seen his place in the universe and he couldn’t bear it. Maybe it was because he was fae, they always did have to be at the centre of everything. Or maybe it was because he was a Sky, made for power and authority. It was perhaps significant that he and Chrome, the only others he knew of that had seen so clearly were Mists. There was a difference in mindset there, Mists had to layer their knowledge of the truth, to see and acknowledge the human skin without ever forgetting the metal underneath, while Skies, they had to believe in their own myth, that the world was theirs to reshape to their liking. They couldn’t afford to learn they didn’t matter.

It could be his fae side, or his flames, or just his own weakness, either way Mukuro had nothing but contempt for him. Mukuro had stared into the abyss and it had only made him stronger, he had faced the sheer indifference of the universe and his response was to steal its power and use it’s truth and do what he wished regardless (he ignored the screaminghorror at the back of his mind, he wouldn’t listen to it, he couldn’t). Byakuran had let it break him, was a mad dog that had to be put down. Byakuran had said that if the universe didn’t care about him then he would make it care and damn the consequences. Mukuro despised him for it. (If there was a part of him that screamed at the back of his mind “he killed Tsuna, he killed Tsuna, he’ll die for that”, well that was between him and his other-self Chrome, and she would hold her silence.)

He had smiled when Byakuran grabbed him, and remembered too late that Mukuro was as much metal as meat, that there was cold iron under his skin and in his bones, and that even when using a medium, things like that mattered. Byakuran had grabbed him and burned, and Mukuro had laughed as he screamed. Of course then Mukuro had tried to flee and it was Byakuran’s turn to smile as Mukuro was forcibly reminded that Byakuran was human as well as Fae, human and a Sky, and perfectly willing to build traps made of science and flame as well as magic.

If Chrome hadn’t been half of himself he might never have broken free. The cage was made to hold a person entire, and Byakuran hadn’t understood quite understood how much they were tied up in each other. Still it had cost him, more than he could afford to pay, and he prayed Chrome had the strength to keep her own heart ticking while he tried to piece himself back together, soul as much a patchwork as his body. He regretted nothing though, because Tsuna was back ten years younger, and impossible to predict, and the secrets he’d stolen from the enemy before the game ended might just be the tool he needed to put this mad dog in the ground where he belonged.

Chapter End Notes

Mukuro's spying on Byakuran goes pretty much as it does in canon, but with more double, and triple bluffing, and an even messier ending. They try very hard to kill each other, but Mukuro is able to use his connection to Chrome to escape and drag himself back to his own body, where he has to piece himself back together.
Scientific advancement

Chapter Summary

Spanner is a lot more terrifying than his co-workers give him credit for.

Chapter Notes

In which Spanner decides he wants a new job.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sometimes, Spanner suspected his so called comrades didn’t take him seriously. It was very strange. They persisted in thinking of him as nonthreatening, a harmless techie. Spanner was a Spark, it was like people had forgotten what that meant. He was on six separate government watchlists, he had a higher indirect kill count than pretty much any of his co-workers, he’d been ten the first time he’d built a doomsday device. He’d never been harmless in his life.

Honestly the history spoke for itself. Sparks had been the terror of innocent nations since before the industrial revolution. They were the kind of people that could create an army of homicidal cyborg ducks with teeth, and be disappointed when they only killed most of the local wildlife. They were the kind of people who, if you pissed them off, wouldn’t just kill you, they’d make sure you didn’t stay dead, and that you spent the rest of your long and painful unlife, cleaning up after their messier experiments.

Not that Spanner would do any of that, he really did prefer engineering to biotech, but that didn’t mean he couldn’t create an army of tiny self-replicating robots that could eat people alive. He’d been seven the first time he’d levelled a city block. Ok, so he wasn’t much of a head on fighter, the point was he really didn’t need to be. Given five minutes and a random assortment of parts and he could have a nifty little murder device ready to activate at the touch of a button, with enough chilling laughter to make an army of townspeople run for the hills.

It was amusing enough when they dismissed him, it was utterly hilarious when they did the same to Shouichi. Not to his face of course, he was after all, Byakuran’s favourite subordinate, but Spanner had heard them whispering. They thought Shouichi was weak. It was all he could do to keep from laughing, and laughing, in the way that triggered the cowering villager instinct that most people didn’t know they had.

Spanner wasn’t exactly a weak Spark himself. He knew full well how dangerous he could be if he put his mind to it, dangerous enough to topple governments and level cities, dangerous enough to make an arcobaleno think twice, back when there were still arcobaleno. Spanner was strong, but Shouichi was something else entirely. Shouichi was terrifying. Shouichi was quite possibly the most powerful Spark in the world, and yet his subordinates whispered that he didn’t deserve his rank, that he’d got his position because he was friends with the boss along with other less savoury accusations. Spanner wondered how long it would be before they got their rude awakening. He wouldn’t personally use them as experimental materials, he preferred robots to biotech, Shouichi on the other
hand had a much broader range of interests.

He did miss working with Shouichi. It was nice to have a lab partner to bounce ideas off of, to push your designs further than you ever thought they could go. It was good to have someone to say, why stop there? Or if we did this, what would happen. It was fun, staying up all night with a lab, and a friend, and enough weapons grade nuclear material to flatten a small town. He missed that. But Shouichi had drifted away from him since he’d started working more closely with Byakuran, he’d been busy with admin, and magitech projects, and other things that Spanner had little interest in, and so with one thing and another it had been years since they’d done a joint project. Spanner was smart enough to suspect he was being shielded a little from their crazy boss. Shouichi was after all Byakuran’s sun, a blind man could see it, and so anyone in Shouichi’s orbit was likely to end up in Byakuran’s before too long. Spanner had no particular ambition to end up the boss’s lightning, not if Shouichi, who knew the man better than anyone, thought it was a bad idea. So he took the hint and kept his distance, and grew ever more bored with his work and his colleagues.

Honestly he really wasn’t sure he liked their boss much. On the one hand he provided excellent laboratory equipment and a more or less unlimited budget. On the other well… he was a bit cuckoo, and that was coming from a bona fide mad scientist. There was an edge to Byakuran’s madness that Spanner didn’t quite like. Besides, he made Shouichi unhappy, and Spanner liked Shoichi.

No, for more than one reason, Spanner really wasn’t entirely happy with his current employment. Shouichi was in it up to his neck of course, being the boss’s sun had that effect even if the boss didn’t properly acknowledge it. Spanner though, there were advantages to being underestimated. It meant that no-one was watching him too closely. So when the opportunity arose, well, then he would be in an excellent position to grab it.

…

The Vongola decimo falling into his hands had been like a gift from the heavens. A fascinating, scientifically unique gift, that could fly and shoot fire from his hands. It was everything Spanner wanted in a robot, wrapped up in a biological package. It wasn’t that he didn’t love his moscas, because he did, but well they had been getting a little repetitive. Spanner was a Spark and the prospect of something completely new to work on was intoxicating.

So instead of finishing him off like he was told to, he took him back to his lab for study, and fed him tea. Honestly if Shouichi hadn’t wanted him to do it he shouldn’t have shown Spanner such an exciting test subject. The decision to defect really hadn’t been as hard as it should have been. The labs were nice, but according to the Vongola Spark Giannini the Vongola ones were just as good, and he really had been getting bored working for the Millefiore. Shouichi would understand. The Vongola decimo was just too interesting to turn down.

Of course he’d designed the contact lenses on the assumption that the decimo was human. It turned out he wasn’t, that his eyes were a good deal sharper than a human’s and correspondingly more sensitive. Still he’d managed to work the kinks out, and in the end they’d worked a treat. He was quite pleased with them, and judging by the way he invited Spanner into his family, Tsuna thought so too.

Spanner was even more pleased with his decision, when it turned out that Shouichi had been working for the Vongola all along. This meant they could work together again. The world would tremble. They would build death rays, and robots, and all kinds of other exciting things. Giannini had even implied that they had the knowledge and equipment to build their own boxes, which was something even Shouichi hadn’t been able to figure out. The possibilities were endless, just as soon as they managed to off their old boss that was.
Next chapter we move into the arcobaleno trials. Which I will probably just skim briefly.
Cold steel

Chapter Summary

Bonus chapter, the fight between Takeshi and Genkishi goes a little differently, with a cursed sword in the mix.

Chapter Notes

Takeshi knows how to listen to his sword.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Genkishi was clever, clever and skilled. He was a good swordsman and a better illusionist and had Takeshi been playing by the rules, had he been fighting alone, he would most likely have died at his hand. That was most likely how he’d beaten Squalo, because Squalo for all his bloodlust was an honourable swordsman. The kind that shied away from Muramasa blades. But playing by the rules belonged to the parts of himself Takeshi had laid aside, along with baseball and mercy, when he picked up the sword his older self had put down. Takeshi had picked up the sword that was his birthright and his duty and from that moment he had never fought alone, the soul of the sword always with him, in every movement, every strike.

“This is what it means to bear a Muramasa blade.” Takeshi had told his opponent with an easy predator’s smile. “It means the sword is never just in your hand. It’s in your head, and your heart and your soul. And your head and heart and soul are in the blade, never entirely separate. I would have felt it if Shigure Kintoki had cracked.”

“A Muramasa blade.” Something between shock and fear and desire ran through Genkishi’s eyes. “Vongola Rain doesn’t carry a Muramasa blade. I would have known about that.” He probably would have, assassins could be terrible gossips, and Muramasa swords were always a subject of gossip.

“Ha ha, well. It’s a heavy thing to carry you know. I guess my older self decided it was too heavy.” He laughed before he let his eyes go hard and sharp with conviction, “I won’t repeat his mistakes.”

Then he moved and Genkishi found himself on the back foot, overwhelmed by an enemy that moved so much faster than him, or… no he was moving slower, fucking rain flames. He tried to conjure up an illusion to give himself some breathing space, but found that his opponent no longer seemed to register them. It’s in your head, the boy had said, and shit that meant he was letting the sword guide him. He couldn’t cast illusions on cold steel, not with Lord Byakuran’s power holding his body together.

Takeshi drew blood and felt it run down the blade of the sword like a lover’s caress. He let his flames bleed into the sword and watched the way the movement of red over silver slowed to a crawl. He looked at his opponent and was unsurprised to see that he was afraid. Mists almost always were, they drew strength from it the same way Rains drew strength from certainty, and Storms drew from anger. After all mist was all about deception and deception was born in fear.
He was surprised at the ring Genkishi pulled out, it was a twisted ugly thing, and it made something in Shigure Kintoki sing in recognition, in kinship, the same way it sang for the arcobaleno. The ring was cursed then. Takeshi gave Genkishi a smile with far too many teeth when he slipped it on.

"You don’t have the strength to wield that ring." Takeshi shared his observation. Genkishi didn’t take it well, half transformed, and deeply unstable.

"I have the strength. Lord Byakuran commands it and I refuse to fail him. I will not break my oath to him, even if it costs me my soul." He snarled, with the light of fanaticism burning in his eyes. A memory flashed through his mind as his body twisted. A girl, no more than a child with the weight of ages and certainty in her voice. *The blade in the shadows will keep no oath he makes.* No. He would defy that witch child’s prophecy. He didn’t serve her any longer, he didn’t believe in the inevitability of fate. Lord Byakuran would remake fate to his own will. Genkishi believed that.

"Well if you say so." The brat’s dubious tone was infuriating. He would kill him, and bring his bloodied sword to Lord Byakuran as a gift. He struck wildly, all inhuman fury.

Wearing the ring Genkishi sacrificed all his cunning and subtlety and skill, for raw power. Takeshi thought it was a bad trade, really. Genkishi was clever and skilled, and that was what made him dangerous, what made him a challenge. The ring turned him into a rabid wild animal, and he thought that made him strong. But it was a false gain. Humans were more dangerous than animals, the most dangerous thing in the world when they wanted to be. The Varia was proof enough of that, utterly lethal, and human to a man. Genkishi had sacrificed everything in one poor decision. Takeshi almost felt sorry for him, he wondered what it was about Byakuran that could inspire such loyalty though. The man had clearly known what the Ring would do to him and had no hesitation about using it anyway. It must’ve been fairly impressive. Not that it mattered much. Not with Tsuna waiting for him.

Takeshi smiled and readied his blade and did not falter as he cut Genkishi down. Genkishi was a fool. He knew cursed weapons had power, and forgot that they always, always, had a price. He had forgotten that, and his weapon had stolen his mind, left him easy prey. Takeshi was wiser, he had not forgotten, he knew the price had to be paid in blood the moment he drew his blade. The sword was coated red with it.

Chapter End Notes

So Byakuran saved Genkishi using fae magic, which means he can't cast illusions over the semi-sentient piece of steel the way he could its owner. Takeshi lets Shigure Kintoki tell him how to move when he figures out the illusions are in play.

Genkishi’s fanaticism about Byakuran is at least in part because he’s very susceptible to fae glamour, especially since Byakuran used fae power to heal him.
The weight of the world

Chapter Summary

Lal Mirch is not an arcobaleno, but she is possibly the only other person in the world who truly knows what it means to be one. That's why she is the observer for the trials.

Chapter Notes

Lal observes the tenth gen undergo the arcobaleno trials.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The weight of the world is an impossibly heavy burden for a human being to bear. Lal Mirch knew that better than almost anyone, after all, for an infinitesimal fraction of a second, that weight had been hers to carry.

An infinitesimal fraction of a second, more than enough time to twist and warp her form in ways the human body was never meant to warp. It had hurt, she remembered, it had hurt more than anything she had felt before or since. There are only six others living in the world who know that pain. They do not speak of it. After all the pain was in the end the least of it.

There was an unspoken agreement amongst the arcobaleno, that they didn’t talk about what their curse had done to them. Lal was never truly one of them, it wasn’t her place to challenge that agreement. That weight she had carried for a mere fraction of a second, they had borne in silence year after year, decade after decade, and she had no right to question how they chose to live with it.

There was an unspoken agreement, they didn’t talk about what was done to them, and they did their level best to avoid each other. It was too much of a reminder, looking into the eyes of someone bearing that same terrible weight. The arcobaleno trials were an unwelcome suspension of that rule, the one time they would put aside their misery and face the twisted mirror they saw in each other.

She missed being a rain, the core of tranquillity that had been available to her even when everything else was going wrong. A space to breathe, and calm, and make a decision. But her flames had been twisted by the curse gone wrong, mist and cloud were her power now, an awkward mismatch with the shape of her soul and she could not find her centre. It left her angrier, and less balanced, in ways that hadn’t affected the real arcobaleno. Still she would rather face that mismatch of self and power that scraped her heart raw and bloody, than bear the weight that she knew the others carried. She knew exactly what it was they faced.

Lal wasn’t truly one of them, but she wasn’t truly separate either. That was why they made her the observer. That was her place after all, always on the edge, not quite a part of proceedings, but still inextricably connected. She knew the weight they carried in a way that no-one else who was not one of them could ever truly comprehend. Who else could fairly bear witness on their behalf?

…
There was an unspoken agreement to avoid each other, and it was one that Lal had always been thankful for. Seeing Colonello again was like a blow to the chest. His simple honest smile only made things worse. There was nothing simple about her feelings for him.

There was love there, she’d had more than enough time for introspection over the years, and she’d be a fool not to recognise that much. There had been love there long before they’d even heard the word arcobaleno. It had been a gentle teasing love, the kind that rises out of friendship, and camaraderie, and just enough antagonism to spark attraction. An ordinary enough sort of love, the kind of love she could understand. She didn’t know what that love might have grown into had the world been different, kinder, but the curse warped that love, the same way it warped her flames, changing the form and nature of it into something utterly unfamiliar to her. The teasing of a small, good, ordinary love, suddenly shifted to the sacrifice of high tragedy, to pain, and grief, and so much guilt. To the sure knowledge, that in the end he’d been stronger than her when it truly mattered, that he’d been better than her right down to the bone. That he’d been better than her and because of her he’d sacrificed everything, and he didn’t regret a thing.

She suspected he would never understand how much that hurt her. He was too straightforward for that kind of overthinking. In his mind there had never been any question about the right course of action, he couldn’t imagine a universe where he could have done any differently. It was infuriating. She hated him, she couldn’t stand him, she couldn’t bear to look at him, it hurt so much to look at him and know what she’d done to him.

She could just tell it was going to be a bad week.

…

The trials were a shambles. The result of seven very different human beings with very different ideas about the way the world should work, trying to test a group of people who didn’t quite think like human beings. It was actually slightly disturbing to watch. Not their actions exactly, there was nothing technically wrong with their actions, but their body language. Like they had to think about what they ought to be doing all the time, like they were just performing humanity. The little inhuman behavioural tics, that wormed their way right into a persons subconscious and sent chills down their spine. Gokudera nibbling at the corner of Tsuna’s jaw with teeth too sharp to be human, Yamamoto licking a bleeding wound, and then the blade of his sword, and smiling like a predator, Hibari standing dead still, without his coat ever moving in the breeze, Sasagawa sleeping with his eyes open. And Tsuna himself, with eyes that saw far too much, who moved like the ground was his enemy, who in some ways moved a little like someone she had trained, impossible though that might be.

If she had been someone else, someone who hadn’t felt the weight of the world around her neck for a single infinite moment, who hadn’t felt her soul twist and tear when it was snatched away from her, she might have found Tsuna and his guardians unsettling. But she had seen too much and felt too much, and knew things no human should ever know. Tsuna and his guardians were just kids, rookies. Human or not, rookies were nothing she didn’t know how to deal with. There were far worse things in the world.

They had disappeared again with the trials passed, and the seals gained. She wished them luck. They were god kids under it all, not that she would ever tell them that. They disappeared off the face of the planet, and if Lal had suspicions drawn from a sensitivity to the fabric of the world that no-one else in the world shared. Well she knew enough to keep it to herself.

Lal sometimes suspected she knew things the true arcobaleno didn’t. The curse wasn’t meant to be interrupted halfway, according to all the records they’d been able to find her situation was
unprecedented. The curse wrapped the others neatly, within parameters that had been set ahead of
time, a thing entire. She on the other hand was a ragged half made thing, burnt to the soul, the scar
on her face just the physical manifestation of a wound that was still bleeding, still oozing, and
festerling. Every time she used her flames, her twisted unfamiliar flames the wound reopened, and her
life force bled out, chaotic and uncontrolled, a sharp contrast to the true arcobaleno’s carefully
controlled drain, the diffuse mass of bled off flames outlining things that she was never meant to see.
It was a mess, and because of that fact she could see details that had been so carefully concealed
from the others. She thought about telling them sometimes, what she saw. But she didn’t think it
would help. There were some things they were better off not knowing.

Chapter End Notes

The arcobaleno trials arc was originally going to be from Lambo’s pov, but I just
couldn’t make it work. Then I realised Lal hadn’t had a chapter, so I decided to do it
from her perspective.
Up the airy mountain

Chapter Summary

The fae are like humans, in much the same way as sharks are like dolphins. They look roughly the same shape until you get close enough to see the teeth. And when you cut them open, their insides are nothing alike.

Chapter Notes

Byakuran walks a tightrope between human and fae, until the Cervello give him the mare ring and set the rope on fire.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Byakuran remembered three things about his mother. She was beautiful, she was human, and she was very, very afraid.

The first five years of Byakuran’s life were ruled by that fear. He remembered salt on the threshold of the house, hawthorn on the mantle, cold iron in every room, enough to make his stomach twist in ways he didn’t understand. He remembered lessons, rules, never tell your true name to anyone, never make a promise to a stranger, and more important than anything, if you should see something that no-one else can see, don’t ever let anyone know.

He could no longer remember her name, or her face, or the sound of her voice, but he remembered her fear, the fear of an animal that knows it is hunted. Since then he’d become a connoisseur of fear in all its myriad flavours, from the nervousness of prey when there was no predator in sight, to the bleak horror of a caged prisoner who knows mercy is an alien concept to their captor. He knew fear from every side imaginable, from the times he’d played prey in the hunts of the gentry, to the times he’d sat on the summer queen’s knee as she stroked his hair and watched a man being skinned alive for betraying her. From the times he’d fallen prey to a trick that might just kill him, to the times he’d caught another in his own traps and held their life in his hands. Fear was anything but a stranger to him, but still his mother’s fear stuck in his mind.

She’d had her reasons to be afraid though, and he wouldn’t say they weren’t good ones. She had taken a lord of summer to her bed, and borne his half-blood child. The fae were endlessly curious, and casually cruel, and having their attention was no safe thing. Byakuran had attracted their attention simply by being what he was, caught between neither one thing nor the other, and the courts did so love to steal children.

His mother had known that, and she had feared it. Feared it enough that Byakuran could taste its sickening weight on the air. It had almost come as a relief when his mother’s fears had finally come to pass. He’d been five years old when they’d taken him. Time had got very subjective after that.

The life of a human in a fae court was strange. Hard to describe in terms that could encompass the sheer alienness of the experience. It could be described as an odd combination of pet, and slave, and sideshow attraction. It wasn’t an incorrect description, but it called up misleading associations with
human trafficking, which was like being fae stolen only in the same way that a dolphin resembled a shark. There was a superficial resemblance in the form, but the nature was utterly different.

A human that enslaved other humans, was after all ultimately still a human, thought in human ways. The fae were not even the slightest bit human. They looked human, right up until you were close enough to see the teeth, but they didn’t think like humans. He supposed maybe pet was the closest concept to describe it, especially for the children they took. One creature keeping another creature of a different species as captive for its own amusement.

The thing that very few people understood when he tried to tell them was that it was neither better, nor worse than life in the human world. It was just terribly, overwhelmingly, surreally, different. Many of the things the fae did would be the worst kind of depravity coming from a human, but likewise many of the things humans did without thinking would be beyond unforgivable to the fae. It had been a difficult adjustment to make, five years old and new stolen. The games of the fair folk are complicated and lethal, it only ever takes one wrong step to leave you choking to death on flower petals. But Byakuran was fae as well as human and there was a part of him that understood without words, a part of him that wanted. It was dangerous, but it was a game he could play, a game that part of him couldn’t help wanting to play.

Time was so very subjective in the summer country. He had no idea how long he lived that way, memories of that time existing in flashes rather than any kind of cohesive framework. Living, and sleeping, and aging according to the whims of the gentry, in a land where it was always summer, where night and day shifted randomly, one, then the other, then somehow both simultaneously in a bizarre stomach twisting patchwork that could not, should not exist. It could have been a month or an eternity and either way would have changed nothing.

He left, was banished from, escaped the summer country when someone grew careless and allowed him to age too far. With the pretty child replaced by a gangly teenager the Lady had grown bored with him soon enough, and he was released back into the human world. In some ways that had been a harder adjustment than being taken to faerie had been. Five year olds were after all, more adaptable than teenagers, and the human world was so large and overwhelmingly complex.

He could fake his identity, and papers, and money, with the glamour he’d learned from his father’s kin, but he couldn’t fake the thousand little social rules he’d never had a chance to learn, he couldn’t fake the innocence that most humans seemed to maintain, not when all his experience and instincts screamed at him that innocence was a weakness, was such a pretty target, was meant for prey.

But he’d learned. He’d had to, if the courts had taught him one thing it was that failing to follow the rules, especially the invisible, unspoken ones, had heavy consequences. He’d learned to fit in, and even better he’d learned to play the games. He’d signed up to university to learn about science, to learn the fascinating human power, a birthright from his mother’s kin that was utterly beyond fae understanding.

He discovered three things at university. Or at least three things that mattered. The first and best thing he found was Shouichi, a human utterly unlike any he’d ever met, as curious and unlimited by morality as his fae kin, but with a scientific instinct that was entirely human. He was brilliant, and powerful, his madness both like and unlike Byakuran’s own, a fractured diamond that he wanted to gaze into forever, examine every glittering facet of it. He wanted to keep his Shou chan close and wrap him in flowered vines and never ever let him leave.

The second thing he found was the mafia, and the flame power they hid. Byakuran was instantly fascinated. It was like a human version of fae court politics, right down to the formal manners and the bloody conclusions. Life and death and deception, and a twisted sort of honour, all played out under
the noses of the ordinary population. It was like coming home. The mafia led him to the power he’d inherited from his human side. Sky flames, the power to rule and bring together, fire in his soul to make the world dance. He loved it. Unlocking his Sky flames reacted oddly with his fae blood as well, giving him visions of the might have been, and that was no small power. Seers of any sort were valuable, had he shown any sign of it before returning to the human world the courts would never have allowed him to leave. The thought of pulling the wool over the eyes of his fae kin was hilarious, especially considering what they might do if they found out.

The first two things were fine things to have discovered, the third thing though, that was the poison gift. In rare moments of clarity he could admit that. The third thing was a ring all twisted up with the soul of the world, that amplified his seers gift beyond imagining, and twisted his madness into a sickness that could break the world. Two women with no eyes behind the masks they wore had given it to him, and in doing so had shattered the careful balance of his mind. He saw too much, too much to bear, too much to comprehend, and with it there were a million million versions of himself whispering in his mind at every moment. In his madness he shattered the beautiful deadly complexity of mafia politics, turned the dance into open warfare and lost track of everything he’d wanted from it. In his madness he crossed a line even his brilliant, amoral Shou chan couldn’t follow him past, and so he lost him too. The third gift turned the others to ash, and wasn’t that always the way of it in the stories. It was almost a mercy when Sawada Tsunayoshi, no more human than he was, his own light reflection, put him out of his misery.

Chapter End Notes

Byakuran carries a lot of traits both fae and human, he can tell lies and break promises in ways that the fae can’t, but iron burns him in ways it doesn’t burn humans. His thinking is an odd mishmash of both, especially since he was raised partly in the human world and partly in the summer country.

I feel like I should clarify, the fae didn’t take him because his father wanted him, his father couldn’t care less and may or may not have figured out they’re related. They took him because he was part fae and therefore unusual and interesting, they take a lot of kids that they think are interesting. If Nana hadn’t been there to keep an eye out they might have even gone after Tsuna. But because of Byakuran’s fae heritage he adapted a lot better than most stolen kids.
Love and loss

Chapter Summary

Bianchi has been watching the world die for too long

Chapter Notes

The kids are enough to give Bianchi hope

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There is an old poem. A poem that has always been truer than it should be, but lately had been so true no-one could bear to say it out loud. No-one but Bianchi with the storm in her heart and a soul bound to destruction. For her it had become so true she could not help but say it, no matter how much it made people flinch. The hollowed men and the stuffed men, and the one line everybody remembers even if they don’t know where it came from. “This is the way the world ends. Not with a bang but a whimper.”

Bianchi watched the world die by bloody bitter inches, watched almost everything she held dear follow, with Reborn dead, and Shamal dead, and Tsuna dead, and Hayato walking around pretending to be alive so well that some people even fell for it, right until they looked into his eyes. And the very worst thing was that death of the man Bianchi loved, was almost enough to break her, and it didn’t matter because the really important thing about Reborn dying was that the curse he bore was weakened by his death.

“As the hollow men” the poem said, and it wasn’t just the last line that rang too true. Reborn didn’t matter because of his vicious sense of humour, or his brilliance, or his strength. He mattered because of that hateful sickening thing around his neck, everything he was reduced down to the one thing he’d hated most. Important not because he was Reborn, or the World’s greatest hitman, or the tutor of the Vongola and Cavallone tenths, but because he was an arcobaleno. The one title he’d never wanted, was in the end the only one that mattered, and Bianchi hated it.

This is the way the world ends. It ends with one madman, with six deaths, with a ring that tells too many secrets. This is the way the world ends, it ends with a slow twisting feeling of wrongness, with friends and allies hunted down in the night, with a grief that never quite has time to fade before another loss hits. This is the way the world ends, with a war fought in secret, with the slow unravelling of the curse that held the world together, with a thousand petty betrayals, and too many graves. Not with a bang but a whimper, and the ordinary people wouldn’t notice until it was far too late, while anyone with a trace of magic could feel the slow decay.

She felt the world die slowly, so slowly it was almost possible to ignore, so slowly that before she knew what was happening the touch of corruption had become as familiar as her own breath. It was
interesting seeing the reactions of the children, dragged out of the healthy world they’d been living in and suddenly faced with a world rotting away while it still lived. Despite herself she found herself impressed by their resilience. Or maybe it was just that they didn’t understand what they felt fully. She knew they felt it, it was in their eyes and their voices and the way they moved, but there was feeling and there was understanding, the kind of understanding that only came from watching the slow creep of everything becoming wrong.

Still they were brave, with all the reckless courage of youth, and ignorance, and potential. Kyouko had impressed her. Her older self never had managed to figure out the boxes, but the child worked it out in one night of determined effort and refusal to give in. And it wasn’t that her older self hadn’t tried, Bianchi had nothing but respect for adult Kyouko and she knew her fellow witch had been trying. It was just, something had been lost over the course of ten years, a kind of certainty, a breadth of imagination, that had been worn down by ten years of watching the world die. She and Bianchi had seen the same things, in much the same ways, their power too much akin not to, and they were both so tired. Ten years earlier Kyouko, young Kyouko, Kyouko undefeated, did what no-one with that poem echoing in their soul could.

Sometimes she felt as though she should resent Kyouko, after all Kyouko could create while all Bianchi could do was destroy. She didn’t though, at its core Kyouko’s power was no less lethal, no less cruel than her own. The power after all was the same, it was only the expression that was different. Destruction and creation were in the end twins, one without the other was a crippled broken thing. Kyouko was her sister in power, and she liked her a lot more than she should.

She also liked what Kyouko had done to the Vongola boxes, what Bianchi had helped her do, because sometimes to create you had to destroy first, and that was Bianchi’s gift not Kyouko’s. The originals had clearly been designed by some idiot who thought the tenth generation were some kind of reflection of the first. Bianchi could have told them, if they were a reflection it was a warped fairground mirror sort of reflection. The first generation were human, and fought like humans, the tenth generation were not, and there was no time for any of them to adjust their fighting styles to match. Far better to adjust the boxes instead, and so that was what they’d done, the two witches, and the three scientists, in between their own training and a thousand and one other projects that might just give them the edge they needed.

And it was hard work but for the first time in years Bianchi could feel something other than numb despair at the world’s slow passing. The kids’ optimism and conviction was contagious, and it gave Bianchi a strength to fight, that she’d thought was long worn away. She’d been so very tired, but then she’d seen Hayato frantically scribbling ideas his older self would never have dared to think, she’d seen young Yamamoto practicing with the sword his older self had laid down, she’d seen Tsuna wrapped in the feathered shape of his own box weapon and radiating a kind of conviction his older self had long since lost in year of compromise. She’d stayed up all night with a Kyouko who’d done the impossible and had no intention of stopping there, she had watched as all of them broke through their own limits like they didn’t even know they were there and she felt the fire in her own soul flare in response. Maybe it would work, and maybe it wouldn’t but either way it would end with a bang not a whimper, she was a storm, the soul of destruction, and this was not the way the world would end.

Chapter End Notes

I'm really not that happy with this chapter. It's not nearly as good as Bianchi's first chapter, but I needed to get past it to move into the vongola first gen arc.
Chapter Summary

What they are doing will have consequences. Dino knows that even if the children don't. But Dino also knows that any consequences are better than failing, so he keeps quiet about what he knows.

Chapter Notes

The new boxes are powerful enough to be dangerous in more ways than one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The sea always claims its own. That’s a truth repeated in whispers all through Dino’s childhood. The sea always claims its own and so Dino wasn’t sure quite how to feel about his box weapon after Kyouko and Bianchi had finished with it. Blood for blood, blood for power, blood for a future. They were playing with power that demanded a high price, and he was old and experienced enough to be cautious of it, even as he knew there was no more time for caution.

It fit so much better was the thing. The horse hadn’t been a bad fit, for his fighting style or his instincts, but this was better, it was him. It was better and it was stronger, and that made it necessary. But it was also a mark of the sea’s claim on him, an acceptance of that claim. He was a Cavallone, he would be a fool not to be wary of that, the sea always demands it’s dues.

They’d modified all the boxes of course, not just his. He wondered if the others found their new forms as unsettlingly right as he did. Now his boxes held a whip made of seawater and a white horse with too many teeth and a predator’s eyes. A weapon that took the form of his own distant kin, and he knew there was power in that resonance. It made him feel… hungry. It made him feel more himself than he’d ever dared to be before. He had long since accepted what he was, learned to appreciate the benefits and live with the weaknesses, Reborn had made sure of that. He did not fear being who and what he was. But this new power, it was the sort of strength, the sort of connection that drew attention, and the sea always claims its own. He could feel the predator in his soul gaining power every time he opened his box, felt his hold on humanity weaken, but he couldn’t afford to stop.

The change for him was less drastic than Tsuna’s weapon though. He knew that box had originally contained a lion and a cloak, which fit the image of Vongola, but didn’t quite fit Tsuna, would not have sparked with Tsuna’s nature and amplified everything lethal about it. Kyouko changed that, by the time she was finished the box held a Firebird that could wrap Tsuna in its own form and give him the feather skin he should have been born for. It fit better than his own skin ever had. Dino had seen him training with it, had seen his little brother enfolded in glowing bright feathers, with glowing eyes and a promise of peace or disaster in his aura. It was in its own way, even more terrifying than the implications of Dino’s own box weapon.

Because Dino knew his folklore. All the Cavallone did. There was too much magic in their blood to
He wondered what that meant for the Vongola who had tried to trap Tsuna as surely as Byakuran had, because there was as much bird in Tsuna as human, and Dino knew all too well how weak the hold of human morals could be when their instincts were screaming something different.

Dino knew what all those of them that were still adults knew, and didn’t speak of. He had watched the world dying slowly, had seen the deaths it had taken to set that in motion, and he knew the pattern of the old stories. There would be a price to pay in blood to put things back to rights. “Blood to break and blood to bend, blood to make and blood to mend.” Aria of the Giglio Nero had told him that a long time ago, and everyone knew the stories about the Giglio Nero Donnas. It hadn’t been quite a prophecy, but it had been a true thing, a thing she knew he needed to be told, he’d been a boy then but he hadn’t forgotten. He’d found many meanings for it over the years, but he suspected that this one might be the most important.

Dino was adult enough to understand sacrifice, even if he was human enough to grieve for it. He didn’t know who would pay the price, although he had suspicions, but one way or another it would have to be paid. It probably wouldn’t be him, his life did not carry enough weight to tip the balance of the world. If the ocean came to claim him when all this was done, it would be a small addition to the blood price he could taste on the air.

He wouldn’t tell the children though, if they didn’t know then there was no need for them to carry that weight. They had already set the world on those small shoulders, as adults, he and the others could at least shield them from that truth.

Or try to. Sometimes he wondered. Those kids, Tsuna especially, but the others as well, sometimes they were too perceptive for their own good, saw too clearly to sleep easy. He and Bianchi, and the other adults might hide their fears, refuse to speak of what they knew victory might cost, but he didn’t know how successful they had been. The kids were too perceptive, it showed in their daring, in the lines they dared cross in their desperate scrabble for any advantage. It showed in the way Takeshi bound himself to the sword his older self had refused to use, in the ever more lethal modifications Kyouko made to their weapons, in Hayato and Ryouhei’s obsessive focus, and Chrome’s silences, and the look in Tsuna’s eyes when he talked about what was to come. Dino wondered how much they might have guessed, how much they might know in the depths of their hearts, how much of it they allowed themselves to know.

Still he would say nothing. He belonged to the ocean, now more than ever and the ocean kept its secrets well. They might guess but they wouldn’t hear it from him. That much at least he could give them, even as he let them bear the responsibility for righting the sins and failures of the future.
So yeah, Kyouko took Tsuna's bird nature, and his human flame powers and used them to draw a magical correspondence with Firebirds (see Russian mythology), and then worked that into his box. It's still a cloak, sort of, but it's a cloak in the sense of being the bird skin Tsuna is missing. (She can't completely change the functions of the boxes, there has to be a correspondence.)
And yeah, Dino finds Kyouko fairly terrifying right now.
Dino's box is now a predatory sea monster in horse like form rather than an actual horse. This is useful because the mystical correspondence boosts his power a lot, but also really dangerous because it increases the chances the sea will want him back at some point.
(but when faced with the apocalypse that seems like a risk worth taking)
Next chapter has the first gen meet the tenth gen arc. They have less in common than they think they will with their descendants.
Lost in translation

Chapter Summary

People see the first generation in the tenth generation, Hayato doesn't see it. But then he doesn't rely on his eyes,

Chapter Notes

The first generation are too human to understand how their successors think. Hayato is concerned.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first generation weren’t really ghosts, not the way Hibari was, a soul bound to the earth by willpower, and force of personality. They were memories, an impression of mind and soul, and they were human memories. The first generation was human to the core, and they didn’t understand what it meant, that the tenth generation was not.

Their understanding was more limited than any of them could afford.

Hayato had known that, from the moment the shade of G stood in front of him and demanded to see his resolve. G didn’t understand, he didn’t understand and he needed to. They all needed to, because they were looking for human conviction and Hayato wasn’t human, Tsuna wasn’t human, the closest any of them came to being human was Yamamoto, who’d been feeding his soul piece by piece to a demon sword. They didn’t understand and Hayato was worried, right down to his predatory pack animal soul. There would be trouble before this was over, and his pack was in danger.

…

Under any other circumstances the look in the first Rain guardian’s eyes would have been funny, a fine tuned combination, of shock, horror, fear, and revulsion. The kind of expression that appealed to the predator in Hayato, made him grin wide and fierce with too many teeth in a way that mirrored Yamamoto.

The man had brought it upon himself. He’d encouraged Yamamoto to draw his blade, he had to have known what he was asking, surely. Yamamoto might look like an innocent idiot, but any swordsman should know those blades were not to be drawn lightly. Except clearly he hadn’t known what he was asking, hadn’t seen Shigure Kintoki for what it was. He had gone through the whole fight without realising what he was facing. It was in its own way impressive, that he was a gifted enough swordsman that Yamamoto hadn’t been able to cut him and yet he didn’t know a Muramasa blade when he faced one.

He’d beaten Yamamoto and declared that he’d failed, and then he’d seen Yamamoto blood his blade so that he could sheathe it, and he’d gone dead white. In any other situation it would have been hilarious. As it was it was troubling, these people, these humans that had been set to judge them didn’t understand the first thing about them.
A part of Hayato was increasingly convinced they were trying to see themselves in him and his comrades. His father had done that sometimes, back when he’d been human, and trapped. Sometimes he’d looked at him and Bianchi and tried to see himself, other times he’d tried to see their respective mothers. It never did end the way he wanted it to, that’s not how hereditary works, not how people work, and that was when Hayato had still been the same species. The first generation of Vongola were trying to see themselves in their successors and Hayato had no words for how badly that could end.

The physical resemblance didn’t help. It was actually more than a little uncanny. It was like looking in a mirror, seeing the face of the first Storm guardian, and the resemblance with the others was equally evident. It added to the illusion that they were alike, and he remembered all too well how dangerously easy it was for humans to judge by looks, after all, their other senses were so weak. They were designed to trust their eyes first, and so the difference that lay under the surface, clearly evident in scent, and mystical aura, and the pattern of their heartbeats, was all too easy for them to miss.

He watched with ever more concern as Lampo dismissed Lambo as a child and missed the ease and entitlement with which he called down the wrath of the heavens, the hints of a God’s rage that Tsuna had only just managed to soothe away. He watched halfway between angry and worried as Ugetsu criticised Takeshi for the bloodlust that went hand in hand with the blade he was bound to, the bloodlust that the idiot did an impressive job of controlling considering. They were too human to understand.

He considered asking Yamamoto to play human for his second test, just to get what they needed, but that wouldn’t have been fair. It wouldn’t have been fair and it wouldn’t have helped the situation. The first generation needed to understand because while Yamamoto might be able to play human Tsuna and Hibari certainly couldn’t. Hayato wasn’t even too confident of his own prospects on that front, it had been a very long time since he was human, and he never was much of a liar. In the end Yamamoto had got through with a speech. Hayato hadn’t been paying too much attention, something about duty, and control, and burdens to bear. Either way it had worked, had got him through the test, even as it had left Ugetsu visibly shaken.

…

And then it was Hayato’s turn, and he was the boss’s right hand, the leader of the guardians. He was second in command, so he had to do what was necessary to protect the others. It was his responsibility to make the first generation understand what they were dealing with, in a way they couldn’t ignore, before they came up against Hibari’s sense of purpose, or Mukuro’s horrifying breadth of perspective, or Tsuna’s morality, that looked human right up until it really really wasn’t. He had to cut through their assumptions before their assumptions caused everything to fall apart.

So he didn’t bother with words when he confronted G. Words were a human tool and G needed to understand that Hayato wasn’t human. He played up the wolf in him, the part of him that loved the taste of blood and cared for nothing but his pack. He snarled, and snapped and then he flickered into the wolf shape that was as familiar and natural to him as his human form. Tsuna had gone to him then, had stood beside him with arms spread like a bird flaring its wings to intimidate a predator and eyes burning sky orange. No words had been needed.

It wasn’t until G had looked suitably uncomfortable that Hayato had shifted back into human skin, taking care to smile a wide wolf’s grin as he did so, and for a moment he’d thought it worked. But then he saw G pull himself together, and dismiss what he’d seen as adolescent posturing. He’d sighed a little when G tried to continue with his argument that Hayato should leave for Tsuna’s sake. He interrupted as G was outlining his failures as a right hand. If a demonstration didn’t get through to
him maybe he should try just saying it.

“Listen, G-san. I’m not human.” G looked like he wanted to say something but Hayato didn’t give him the chance, he was a Storm, he was Tsuna’s storm, so he pushed the attack. “I’m not human and I don’t think like a human, and if you carry on trying to treat me like I am we’re never going to come to enough of an understanding for you to pass fair judgement over me.”

G at least looked like he was listening, so Hayato continued more gently, “And if you can’t come to a fair judgement on me then you will never be able to make sense of Hibari, or Sasagawa. They aren’t human either. In fact none of us are human. We are the nightmares of humanity, the monsters under the bed and we do not always think like you.”

G was silent for a moment then. Held Hayato’s gaze as if searching for something. Then he nodded.

“I can tell you’ve been very deliberately obvious about what you are, in order to make sure we’re prepared to deal with your fellow guardians. As right hand it is your duty to see the problems the rest of the family will face and take action to deal with them. You pass.”

Hayato restrained the urge to curse as G disappeared. He still didn’t get it, Hayato knew that as surely as he knew the taste of blood, the scent of gunpowder, the touch of his Sky’s flames. Or he did get some of it, but not enough, not even close. G was maybe too clever, he’d seen through to what Hayato was doing and allowed it to distract him from why Hayato was doing it. He thought he understood and missed the point entirely. Hayato had passed his trial, but it felt like failure, when he knew he still hadn’t managed to get through to them. He’d told them, and they still didn’t get it. But then, maybe he shouldn’t have been surprised. Explanations had never been his strong point, he never did have the gift for making people understand.

Chapter End Notes

So that’s Hayato’s pov on the first gen arc. Next chapter we see the same arc from the first gen’s perspective.
Cast a long shadow

Chapter Summary

Giotto's descendant's are nothing like he'd expected. He isn't sure how to deal with that.

Chapter Notes

Giotto's pov on the last chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sometimes Giotto wondered if inscribing a copy of their souls onto the Vongola rings had been the right decision. He had spent nine lifetimes watching his legacy descend into a nightmare of blood and darkness, nine lifetimes waiting for someone to restore the organisation he had built. Maybe that was why he’d been so determined to see himself in his successor.

The faces were the same, that was the trouble. Like looking in a mirror, and it was so so easy to see themselves in these young and reckless descendants of theirs. The faces were the same but the eyes were different. They all pretended not to see it, didn’t want to see it, but it was there.

Asari had come to him after the rain trial, shaken and thoughtful. He hadn’t spoken his concerns directly, that wasn’t in his nature, instead he’d come at it sideways, a reminder of the truth that so many chose to forget, that Rain and Mist were kin, water droplets in the air that could obscure the vision and chill the bones. Asari had come to him and told him a story. About when he was still a boy, before the Vongola, and flames, and Giotto, back when he’d still been learning the sword. He told him that his teacher had warned him, that sometimes you’d meet a man, or what you thought was a man, and if you watched them carefully you’d come to realise, realise that they weren’t a man at all. “Pay attention” his Shishou had said, “If you don’t watch carefully, you’ll end up having to fight them, because sooner or later you’ll cross a line you don’t know is there.” Giotto had kept quiet, it didn’t pay to interrupt Asari when he was being serious.

“Today”, Asari said quietly, “I didn’t pay attention.” And then he left Giotto alone to think over the implications of what had been said.

…

When Asari was serious, Giotto listened, so he paid attention during the lightning trial. Lampo didn’t, but then, Lampo preferred not to worry about things until they were too big a problem to ignore, it was one way of coping with being the lightning guardian. After all being the one to draw attacks meant you could either live constantly on edge, or learn to roll with the punches. It made Giotto glad he was Sky, he couldn’t imagine not trying to see the big picture.

Giotto paid attention, and saw how Tsuna and his other guardians subtly danced attention on the little Lightning Lambo, plied him with more sweets than could be healthy for any small child and made no attempt to remove the lethal weapons that no child should be carrying. He would have called it indulgence, but his intuition nagged at him, told him there was more to it than that. And then he saw
how the child grew and aged in seconds as the lightning ran through him, he saw the way the child screamed in rage and called down the power of the heavens. A lightning bolt out of blue skies, and there was a power crackling in the air that made something in Giotto want to kneel and offer worship. Giotto had never been a superstitious man, but there was something more than simply human about the tenth generation Lightning. He didn’t know how to feel about that.

... 

He was still thinking about it when his right hand began the Storm trial. It was painfully obvious that he hadn’t fooled Tsuna at all, but G was a Storm to the core and he would see his attack through to the end. Honestly Giotto wasn’t sure anything could have fooled Tsunayoshi for long, that boy saw far too clearly, more clearly than Giotto himself ever had, and it wasn’t just hyper intuition. He had played along though, Giotto wasn’t sure if he had guessed it was part of the trial, or if he was just curious to see what happened.

Then Gokudera had shown up and his body language was off in ways Giotto didn’t know how to describe. He stood like a predator, and snarled like an animal, and between one heartbeat and the next the human shape that had stood by Tsunayoshi’s side was replaced with a large grey wolf. The same person just a different shape Giotto’s intuition screamed, and he’d heard stories but they were no preparation for meeting a skinchanger face to face. He glanced over at Tsuna himself, and mentally corrected himself, two skinchangers, because there was nothing human about Tsuna’s stance, or expression.

Gokudera recovered his human form with a wolfish grin, all teeth and dark humour. G had recovered admirably, it would take more than turning into a wolf to shake the first Vongola Storm, and Giotto couldn’t shake the spark of pride in his Storm’s composure.

Then there was an argument. Or maybe there were two separate arguments going on at the same time, because both of them kept missing the mark. G more so than Hayato, for all the years of experience that he had over him, and that in itself was concerning. But it seemed like neither of them was taking the other’s words in the way they were meant. “I’m not human” Gokudera snarled, and Giotto thought about Asari’s story of men who weren’t men at all, he thought about a child who raged like nothing human, he thought about his descendent, Tsunayoshi, watching the fight unfold with head tilted in curiosity. It was important he knew it was, and yet he couldn’t get away from the image of Gokudera as a smaller, silver haired version of G, the image of Tsuna as a more innocent version of himself, and he knew G like the back of his hand, knew that he was thinking the exact same thing as he passed the younger Storm. The younger Storm who looked more worried than triumphant as Giotto followed G, back to their meeting place.

Giotto was a memory of a person, trapped inside a ring for four hundred years, and his living self had no experience to tell him how to handle this situation. He didn’t know what to do, he was starting to wonder if he ever had, and he wondered if maybe it might have been better to leave the future to the care of his descendents. He was an imprint of a memory, less than a ghost, a shadow of a person, and he was starting to wonder if he was ever fit to pass judgement on the living.

Chapter End Notes

Next we get Ryouhei’s view on the first gen trials, mostly because he hasn’t had a chapter of his own yet. After that we get Daemon’s pov, and then we’re back to the tyl arc.
To be clear back in Giotto's time the mafia was quite new and supernatural creatures were no more common within it than they were in the world at large. Over time, thanks to the mafia's bloody nature, and the fact that power calls to power and dying will flames are powerful, various inhuman creatures got drawn in to the point where pretty much everyone in the mafia knows someone who isn't all human. The civilian world has a vague awareness of it all, but it's not something they ever expect to actually run into. And they wouldn't necessarily know how to spot the signs. So not only are they human, they are humans who had very little if any contact with the supernatural while they were alive, not including flames and associated stuff.
First and foremost, at the heart of everything he was, Ryouhei was an older brother. It was his reason for being, the core of his existence, the reason Kyouko made him.

Humans, Ryouhei had found, tended to make things far more complicated than they needed to. Humans weren’t alone in that tendency of course, the fae for example made an absolute art out of overcomplication, but still there was a special kind of absurdity in the way humans managed it. Fae made things complicated to mess with other people, which was nasty but practical, Ryouhei could respect that even if he extremely didn’t like it. When humans made things complicated they even managed to get themselves tangled up about things. That couldn’t be healthy.

Death made very little difference to that tendency, if the way the first generation managed to mess up with Hibari was any indication. Ryouhei had always rather liked Hibari. Hibari was straightforward, as long as you knew his rules he was actually pretty easy to deal with. And yet somehow, the first generation Cloud guardian had managed to mess up with him so badly that he was refusing to even participate in his test. It was actually extremely impressive.

The trouble, Ryouhei suspected, was that they were expecting a degree of flexibility that Hibari no longer possessed. Ghosts didn’t really change the way people did, even Ryouhei was more flexible than Hibari was. It must be very frustrating for Kyouya. Because he was Tsuna’s cloud, and he did care, and he didn’t want the world to end because he failed the test, but at the same time he couldn’t be anything other than what he was. He was Namimori’s ghost, he was bound so tightly to the order and wellbeing of Namimori that even death couldn’t stop him, and he acted always and only of his own will.

In any case the first generation had messed up and the rest of them were left scrambling trying to fix the damage, trying to beg, or manipulate, or force Hibari to listen to them. Ryouhei knew it was too late for that. He and Hibari were very alike in some ways, once they’d made a decision it was all but impossible to sway them. The only way to get Hibari to do what was needed was to appeal to Kyouya, to the long dead boy that was at the core of Hibari’s resolve, and that, in the end that was Ryouhei’s job, because whatever else he might be he was a Sun, and Suns activate. If anyone could re-energise the sparks of Kyouya that Tsuna had started to coax out of Hibari over the months they’d been bonded, it was him.

The Cloud notchild had turned out to be more clever than any of them had given him credit for. He knew his own kind well enough to give Hibari the excuse Kyouya needed. Ryouhei’s pushing had brought Kyouya close enough to the surface and somehow it all worked out, they even got through
Ryouhei’s own trial at the same time. It all worked out for the best, but it had been a bad mistake and Ryouhei started to see some of the reasons Gokudera had been so worried. Because he and Hibari were extreme in a way that humans just weren’t, they didn’t bend, they didn’t adjust their world views, and it was pure luck that they’d only tripped Hibari’s limits, because Ryouhei was built of earth and blood and willpower and he was under no illusions that his response would have been any better.

Still Ryouhei was a straightforward person. They’d got through alright, there was no sense in worrying about it after it was done, so they might as well move forward. And they did, straight into more extreme danger but that was fine, there was always more danger, Ryouhei was made to deal with danger. There was a sense of absolute rightness that Ryouhei felt when he was fighting to protect that he just didn’t feel at any other time. That was half of why he’d chosen to follow Tsuna, because he’d known as soon as he saw him that he would need that protection in ways that Kyouko generally didn’t.

Daemon Spade wasn’t quite like the other first generation guardians. The others were just shadows, memories, Daemon had a certain solidity to him that they all lacked. He put Ryouhei in mind of Hibari more than a little, a ghost rather than an echo. He had his own sense of purpose to him, rather than the others who seemed to exist mainly to test other people’s sense of purpose.

Still for a ghost he was remarkably human in his understanding or lack of it, maybe because he was an echo in the ring as well as being a ghost in his own right, or maybe he just hadn’t met many other supernatural beings. He kept expecting Ryouhei to react like a human. Ryouhei had never been human.

Ryouhei was made of earth and blood and purpose and his true name was not Ryouhei at all. The name he had awoken to, the one that ruled him, and defined him, was the one that Kyouko had called him into existence by. Oniisan, it was name, and purpose, and identity all wrapped up together. Whatever else he might be, might have become over time, first and foremost he was Older Brother. Daemon told him to abandon Lambo as though that weren’t a violation of the primary purpose he had been built for, as though he was capable of breaking that purpose. He was an older brother, and Lambo was a little sibling to all of them. He would protect Lambo, and rescue Kyouko, and keep all of those he loved safe, because that was what he was made for.

He also rather suspected Daemon Spade might have made the mistake of underestimating Lambo. Lambo was in many ways more a force of nature than a child. His suspicions were confirmed when the illusion wavered at the power Lambo brought to bear in a fit of panicked anger.

Actually he rather suspected Daemon Spade might have underestimated all of them. Tsuna included because while they fought he kept on comparing him to Primo. If Tsuna had been as human as Primo Ryouhei would never have invited him to call him Oniisan, would never have given him that power over him. Tsuna had accepted his offer with full understanding of what it meant, he didn’t think Giotto would have.

Then Mukuro appeared in that extremely disturbing way that he did, and laughed at Daemon, before pacing over to whisper in his ear, it took a while. Ryouhei really didn’t want to know what had been said, but whatever it was sent the ghost pale. It was a little odd, not the fear, that was a perfectly normal reaction to Mukuro, but underneath the fear Spade looked almost… impressed. Certainly he’d given his approval quickly enough after that.

They’d all watched on as Primo manifested himself to give Tsuna his blessing. More uncomfortable than seemed natural for someone who was a mere imprint of a memory. It seemed the Vongola hyperintuition was making it hard for him to ignore the truth. He might have thought himself up in
knots, but faced repeatedly with the evidence of what his descendent was, the truth must have been starting to bleed through. Ryouhei felt a little bad, but with his approval, however reluctant, they had what they needed to return to the future, and for Ryouhei guilt was only ever a transient emotion. His younger siblings had what they needed, and that was enough to satisfy him, the emotional dilemmas of their long dead ancestors were not his problem.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter is Daemon's pov, we get to find out exactly what Mukuro said to him, among other things.
Ghosts of the past

Chapter Summary

Daemon is in over his head

Chapter Notes

Daemon’s pov, on the tenth generation among other things.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Being a ghost was like walking around with your skin off, everything stripped raw, every nerve exposed. It was humanity reduced to its core motivations, and it was so very intense.

Intense but not human, not really. A ghost was the will and purpose of a human being, a will and purpose strong enough to cling to the world even when the body was long since returned to the earth. But human beings were more than just their will and purpose, more than the things that drove them, they were complicated and there were so many things that got lost in the transition. Small things, human things, that were stripped away and forgotten when death came to dance. Favourite foods, a fear of spiders, the memory of a night spent getting drunk in the bar with Giotto until G and Asari had to come and drag them out.

Ghosts were less complicated than humans, and with that simplicity came clarity. Ghosts didn’t feel doubts, it wasn’t in their nature. Ghosts were people who had been so sure of themselves in life that their surety had lingered even after their deaths. Ghosts didn’t doubt.

But then, Daemon wasn’t just a ghost was he?

It was Giotto’s fault, of course it was Giotto’s fault. Everything that ever happened, good or bad, was sooner or later, Giotto’s fault. The Sky of Skies, events centred around him, shifted around him, there was a harsh inevitability to it. Daemon hated him for it, almost as much as a deep buried part of him loved him for it.

Because of Giotto. Giotto and the thrice cursed rings of the trinisette, the memory of Daemon the human was imprinted on the Vongola mist ring for all time. It wasn’t just him of course. Giotto and the others had been recorded too, shadows of the people they once were. Shadows of the dead but not the same way ghost were, not the same at all.

If Daemon were inclined to explain it, he would say it was the difference between an extract from someone’s daily diary, and the message they scrawled in blood on the floor of their own murder scene. And he really was in a unique position to explain the differences. But who would he explain to? The only people who would ask and he would care to answer were long dead and dust, Giotto didn’t count, he was as dead as everyone else Daemon had ever known, no matter how intrusive his memory might be, and besides, Giotto never was one to ask. He would listen, and intuit, and he would make his own decisions regardless, and nothing anyone had ever said had been able to sway him from his path. Daemon owed him no explanations, and would give him none.
Daemon wasn’t a proper shade either. The others had let themselves fade and die. Had accepted defeat and left their work undone, and so the memory impression in the rings, and the dry bones in their graves were all that remained of them. Daemon though, he’d been so angry, so determined, so devoted, he had not gone quietly into the night, could not. Not while the Vongola’s future, everything they’d worked for and tried to build, was so fragile.

And so his ghost had lingered while the others had passed on, and he was both ghost and shade at the same time. Both greater and lesser than the sum of his parts. Four centuries later and he still hadn’t decided whether or not to hate Giotto for that.

Ghosts don’t feel doubt and shades lack the power to act, but Daemon was both and neither, and faced with what he’d seen too late about the tenth generation, for the first time in four centuries he didn’t know what to do. If he were a true ghost he wouldn’t have doubted, if he were a simple shade he could have done nothing about it and so it wouldn’t have mattered. His dual nature meant that what he did or didn’t do, the choices he made, held the world on a knife edge, and he wasn’t sure if he hated Giotto for leaving him with this awful responsibility, or if he was glad of the power to change what needed to be changed.

It had taken longer than it should have, longer than any of them could afford to see what the tenth generation was, and there was a gap between seeing and understanding that Daemon wasn’t sure he could bridge. He’d never known much about magic. He understood ghosts, at least in part he was one, and familiarity bred comprehension, but as for the rest of it. Well he’d miscalculated, and a lack of understanding was at the root of that miscalculation.

He’d told the young Sun to abandon the little Lightning, and the boy had reacted as though he’d asked him to breathe underwater, not refusal, but utter incapability, and there was nothing human about the determination in his eyes as he fought. Just as there was nothing human about the wave of indistinct lightning shaded power that radiated out from the younger child, almost enough by itself to shatter his illusion.

He’d told the young Rain to give in to his bloodlust, only to be told that no-one who wielded Shigure Kintoki could afford that loss of control. “If you’re not careful.” The boy had said smiling, “The sword will end up wielding you, and swords generally lack the imagination to be really good fighters.” He’d smiled with too many teeth, and a practical tone of voice that was utterly alien to the human Daemon Spade had been, and all too compelling for the monster he’d become.

He’d looked at Sawada Tsunayoshi and seen his own long dead Sky, too naïve, too young, too weak to protect the family, he’d made the same mistake as Giotto and his loyal puppies, and that stung more than a little. But Tsuna was nowhere near as human as Giotto had been and he didn’t understand mercy. When his other mist showed up, he didn’t try to rein him in.

The girl mist was a clockwork child, barely enough human in her for him to control, machines did not answer to his power, and so his hold was fingernails on glass fragile. He hadn’t been able to hold it long, couldn’t have held it at all if she wasn’t used to sharing her form. And so when her counterpart appeared, her twin in looks and flames, and the mechanical ticking of his organs, it was in the exact space where she’d stood, trading places as naturally as lighting her own flames.

The girl traded for a boy with infinity in his eyes and darkness in his voice. A boy no more than fifteen who’d stepped up to him smooth and casual to whisper in his ear, things that Daemon with his four hundred years had never known or wished to know. He told him things, that were too awful, carried too much weight, to be anything but true.

“The universe is vast cold and indifferent.” Mukuro had said, and coming from anyone else it would have been trite but the bleak despair disguised as humour in his tone, made something inside
Daemon’s shadowy form twist in horror. “I have seen the truth” He continued without pause, without mercy. “You little insects who call yourselves people, human, ghost, demon, monster, you scrabble for petty advantage, cling like rats to the things you care for, people, things, ideas. You think any of that matters.” He laughed then, too quiet for anyone but Daemon to hear. It was chilling. “I have seen the truth. I have seen our place in the universe, I have seen the full weight of our tiny little blip of existence, love, hate, fear, greed, and it means nothing. You mean nothing, I mean nothing, the Vongola means nothing, the world means nothing.”

There were mist flames running through his voice, underpinning his words, conveying all the certainty and understanding that mere words could never encapsulate. Ironic, using the flames of deception to tell truths too terrible to explain by voice alone. It had been a long time since someone had been able to make Daemon Spade uncomfortable, to make him afraid, longer still since anyone had done so with words. Despite himself Daemon was impressed, and in the end that was all it took for the mist guardian to pass the test.

He still didn’t know what to do, he had all the power to act and none of the dead certainty to use it, and a treacherous part of him missed Giotto violently. The real Giotto, that is, not the shadow of a memory that wouldn’t leave him alone. He hated, resented, needed, missed, his Sky, who had always known what to do even when he was wrong. Maybe that was why he’d failed to snap at his Sky’s shadow after the living were gone, when he’d appeared at Daemon’s side looking more lost than Daemon had ever seen him. Giotto had looked like he wanted to say something, so Daemon had put his finger over his Sky’s lips. “Don’t.” He said softly, “Don’t speak. If you speak we’ll end up fighting and I’m too tired to fight today.” Giotto had nodded, and they’d sat together in silence as the sun rose. It was a comfort of sorts.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah Daemon has issues. Especially regarding Giotto. The fact that he's a weird combination of a memory imprint like the rest of the first gen, and a ghost like Hibari, doesn't help. It's not an even mix, he's mostly a ghost, but the memory imprint means that parts of him are more human than ghosts are meant to be and the dissonance is messing with his head.

Next chapter we go back to the future, the whole tyl arc should be wound up in a couple more chapters, four at most, and then I will need to do research on the arcs that happen after the anime finished because I haven't actually read the manga. And wow I really wasn't expecting this fic to end up so long, it's now officially the longest thing i've ever posted and it's still not finished. I think wolf and cub might end up longer though.
Ways to tell the truth

Chapter Summary

Yuni knows too much to sleep easy, more than anyone ever should.

Chapter Notes

The Cervello are more than they seem. Yuni realised that far too late.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Child of the war” her grandmother had called her. Not that they ever had a chance to meet, but if there was one thing the women of her family did well it was keeping records. How else to keep the tangled web of the future straight, and her grandmother’s journals named her “Child of the war”, just as they named her mother “Blood tithe”. Grandmother Luce had a tendency to be cruel in her namings. Oh they were true, the names of prophecy were always true, but there were many ways to say a truth and Luce’s prophecies had always been brutal in word and phrasing. Maybe that was why she’d chosen to lie to the arcobaleno, because the truth as she understood it had always been too cruel to bear, and lies were the only comfort she knew how to offer. Yuni didn’t know, they’d never met, her Grandmother had faded away long before she was born and she’d never had a chance to ask. She didn’t know if she would have asked if she did.

Child of the war, but which war? Grandmother Luce never said, maybe didn’t know, it was always hard to say how much a particular seer understood of what they saw. Was it the war between the Millefiore and the Vongola, a war fought at least in part over her, for the power she bore. Or perhaps, the war between herself and Byakuran, mad bearer of the Mare ring, fought in the reaches of her own mind for control of her own soul. Was it the war between the arcobaleno and the one who cursed them, or everyone against the curse itself. Maybe it was all of those wars, and a thousand other small battles that shifted and swirled around her as she tried to live, even knowing she was doomed to die. And wasn’t that the most fundamental war of all, the one between life and death, between fate and hope. The war that her Grandmother had chosen to lose, that her mother had chosen to ignore as much as anyone could, the war that Yuni refused to fall to because she wanted to live.

It was a true naming, but not a kind one. She much preferred her mother’s name for her. “Little Rainbow”, it could of course be taken literally, the next Sky arcobaleno, a child born to that duty. But there were other meanings for Rainbow, a messenger, a message, a promise of never again. It gave her hope, that maybe, just maybe she might be the last Sky arcobaleno, whatever that ending might mean. Her mother’s namings were often like that, at once very literal and deeply metaphorical. She called Gamma “Mortal Soldier”, and that was true and simple on the surface, and just as true when you remembered, that in the old stories, it was often only the human devotion of the mortal hero that could tie the demon princess or the fairy lady to the world.

Of course as the Millefiore rose and the arcobaleno fell one by one she had to wonder if she would be the last because Byakuran’s madness would break the world. It was the kind of madness that
could, she could see it in his eyes and the thorny twists of his flames, and the way he hunted her down the shadowed paths of her own mind. He held her family and all that she loved as hostage to her obedience, and of all of them so few understood what she was doing. It broke her heart to see the confusion and betrayal in their eyes. It hurt more to see the despair in her Summer Knight’s eyes, Gamma, who had been her mother’s and now was hers, Gamma, who she had once told, with all the weight of prophecy, that he couldn’t save her.

Byakuran held her heart with her family, and her body with his flames, but her mind and will were her own and they would never bend to him. He tried of course, chasing through her mind again and again with his flames, and his cunning, and all the subtle magics his fae heritage granted him. But she was arcobaleno, the Rainbow, there and then gone, down the shadowed pathways of her own mind, and mad and brilliant though he was he would not catch her. After all she was mad enough herself to be hard to predict.

Who could be sane, knowing the things she knew.

…

She knew why Byakuran was mad. She knew, far too late to change anything. He had been unstable to begin with of course, half bloods often were, if there was enough of a mismatch between conflicting instincts. But it was the Mare ring that drove him over the edge into true insanity, and she knew what manner of creature had given the ring to him. God forgive her but she knew all too well.

Mare. Most people assumed that meant ocean, and it did, but words have more than one meaning and in some languages, Mare meant nightmare, meant a creature that would ride your dreams and drive you insane, and leave you broken when it was done. Byakuran really should have known that. Court raised as he was. But then the fae always were too curious for their own good, a warning was as good as a challenge for their kind, so maybe he knew and had taken it anyway. Someone else had known that, had known the nature of Byakuran, and the nature of the ring, and what the consequences of his bearing the ring would be. Someone had wanted the world broken.

The ring had sent him mad and now he would break the world and she wanted to scream and curse at the unbroken line of her female ancestors for not seeing it sooner. For spending so much time seeing, that they didn’t notice what was right in front of their eyes. Someone had given him that ring, knowing what it did, and she knew it was not by chance. Four hundred years and no-one had thought to ask, who were the Cervello, and what did they want.

Her family of all people, should have known better, should have noticed. There were no eyes behind the Cervello’s masks.

…

She liked her mother’s name for her best but it wasn’t what she called herself. With the weight of prophecy upon her she called herself “Lady of Spring”, and she chose to see it as hopeful. Spring usually meant hope. She chose to see it as hopeful and knew she was lying to herself, but sometimes lies were the only comfort there was.

Standing at Byakuran’s side she was struck by how true her naming was, true and cruel, in a different way to her Grandmother’s naming. After all Persephone had been Lady of Spring, before she was stolen away to the underworld, and now Yuni herself had been dragged into the dark by a King of shadows. But Yuni had no mother to save her from her prison, life wasn’t fair and her mother was dead, and the burden of what to do next was on her shoulders.

That didn’t mean she couldn’t help though.
Sawada Tsunayoshi, the boy her dreams named “Firebird”, and until she met him she hadn’t thought the name could be so literal. But she could see the shadow of feathers on his spirit, haloed by the sheer brightness of his flames, and so she went to him, distant kin threatened by a predator, and let his instincts take over. She went to him and remembered that a Firebird was good luck, and hoped that maybe, just maybe, that would be enough. She knew what she had to do, and it would be so easy to fail.

Little Rainbow, the last Rainbow, and she thought she might break under the knowledge of what must be done. If she succeeded, if they won, then time would reset. None of this nightmare would have happened. It would be worth it, she knew duty and her life was a fair price for the world. But still, she was afraid. She was fourteen years old and she didn’t want to die.

She didn’t want to die. She could see Tsuna fighting desperately to give her the time she needed, even as doing so broke his own heart, could see Byakuran fighting equally desperately to stop her, and she knew what was at stake. Had seen this moment in dreams and waking trance and she knew what would happen next. But she was fourteen years old and so very afraid.

Then Gamma, her brave Summer Knight did something she had not seen, had not expected. He stepped through the barrier, and held her close, and wrapped his flames into hers so tightly they were impossible to separate. So tightly that his bled away even as hers did. He couldn’t save her, they had both always known that, but still he did what Lightnings did, and put himself between her and death, so that she would not have to die alone.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry, it's been a while I know. Yuni is actually surprisingly hard to write. There will be I think, two more chapters in the tyl arc, one from Kikyo's pov, and one from either Hayato or Chrome's pov. After that i'll have to put this on hold while I find out what exactly happened after the anime finished. I have a rough idea, but fic demands detail. And yes the Cervello are deeply sinister and definitely "up to something". Honestly they're like that in canon anyway, i'm surprised how few people decided to take that and run with it.
The ties that bind

Chapter Summary

Kikyo is Wildfae to Byakuran's Court Fae, but he had sworn allegiance and the fae cannot break their promises.

Chapter Notes

A quick look at Byakuran's guardians and what binds them.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Easy to draw in, but hard to hold. As fickle as the wind and just as impossible to pin down. That was what the lords and ladies of the courts said of his kind and they weren’t entirely wrong. The low fae gave their obedience as was most expedient in the moment, and would turn at a moment if they needed to, they had to. They had not the power of the Court Fae, and the Court fae did not tolerate rebellion. So the low fae learned to kneel, and defer, and stay beneath the notice of the highborn.

But obedience is not loyalty. That was a truth the low fae knew, the truth that made the low fae the wildfae, the true fae, truest to the chaotic nature that is at the core of all their kind. It was a truth the high fae had forgotten, and when the balance of power shifted, when the day shifted to night, the winter to summer, the wildfae would kneel to whoever served their interests best, because the low fae first and foremost were true to themselves. It took something more personal than power to take and hold their loyalty, and Kikyo was wildfae down to his core.

They were drawn to power, of course. All fae were, like moths to a flame, like elements to a Sky, and for all that set them apart from the lords and ladies they were fae. They attended the court revels and involved themselves in court games, and followed one or another of the knights and ladies, as their whims dictated. But it took more than a show, more than simple power to claim their loyalty. After all, the common fae knew what the highborn had forgotten, that the balance of power shifted with the turning of the seasons, and only a fool failed to hedge their bets.

Maybe that was why he was a Cloud. Clouds were supposedly rare amongst humans, but if any of his kin had flames of their own, he’d lay odds on them being Cloud. They were too bound to their own paths, their own natures to be anything else. But they didn’t have flames. That was just him. A grandmother’s, grandmother’s indiscretion lost to time and the wild fae’s disinterest in record keeping. Purple fire born from soul, and intent, and human will to live, that told him a truth that he had never expected to find. He was wildfae down to his core, except for that trace of human he hadn’t even known he carried until Byakuran had burst into his life in a whirlwind of orange fire and possibility.

…

He had met Byakuran first by the river below the old dancing stones, at a place where line between the worlds wore thin. Byakuran had stood on the human side of the shore where Kikyo could see him, and waited for his own curiosity to entice him across. It wasn’t until much later that Kikyo
realised just what kind of a risk Byakuran had taken, coming so close to home. That he had come anyway, in search of his Cloud, of Kikyo, even before Kikyo had known his own nature.

He had met Byakuran by that riverbank, perfect summer court manners, and a taste of humanity and sidhe mixed together into something all its own, and he hadn’t hesitated to follow. His power alone would have been enough to intrigue Kikyo, waves of it rolling off him in a blaze of orange human willfire, and silk smooth fae glamour, taken together it was enough raw power to match some of the strongest of the courts knights. But there was more than power to Byakuran, there was a broken glass brilliance there that Kikyo couldn’t help but be fascinated by.

So he had followed half in curiosity, half in excitement, and there had been battles, and parties, and every move and countermove was so beautifully unexpected. Then one day they fought side by side against enemies wise enough to carry iron and Byakuran had saved his life. A life saved is a life owed, a debt, a bond, and the flames he hadn’t known he carried had answered that debt. The loyalty of the wildfae is a hard thing to win, but as is true of all fae, once fealty is sworn, once that oath is given, it will hold forever. No matter what depths of hell it might lead to.

He doesn’t regret it exactly. He acted true to his own nature, always, and none of the decisions he had made on the road to this place had been things he could have changed and remained himself. And it had been brilliant, mad and decadent and beautiful in the sheer havoc they had wreaked. But still and still, sometimes he wishes things could have been otherwise.

The brilliant mad lord of fae and humanity that Kikyo had sworn himself to was going to destroy the world. The world or himself, or possibly both at once, and Kikyo would help him. The oath was given, the bond was forged, and he would follow his liege lord into hell if he had to.

He knew the others felt the same. All but the Sun. The real one, with the soul of iron, and machinery, and a madness that would have suited a fae. Maybe it was the iron in Irie Shouichi’s soul that allowed him to draw a line like that, and break his own heart in defiance of his Sky, or maybe it was his nature as a Sun, bound to life in a way that the rest of them weren’t. Kikyo respected Irie Shouichi, who had the strength to be what his Sky needed, not what he demanded. He would still kill him if he could. Kikyo had chosen his side long ago.

Kikyo had never understood why Byakuran had tried to deny his metal souled Sun, in favour of the empty dead thing he called his sun guardian. Kikyo could only assume it was a twisted attempt to mirror the Vongola, their Sun was a construct too after all. But Kikyo had met Sasagawa Ryouhei, he was created from a wish for older brother, a wish that implied a person in his own right. Daisy was born of a wish for a tool, and so that was all he could be. Kikyo had an affinity for nature, and the flow of life, Daisy made his skin crawl. Irie Shouichi’s flames had burned like cold iron, but he had felt right in a way that Daisy never would. He disliked Daisy.

The other three though, he did like. Ghost didn’t count, wasn’t really even a person. More like a bolt of lightning on a chain, dangerous, difficult to control, and as likely to shock his master as his enemies. But the other three, they belonged, in that way that he and Irie Shouichi did, and they were, each in their own way interesting.

Bluebell was maybe his favourite. Distant kin in a way. Her mother had been an Undine, and Undine were close kin to flower fae. He had seen Bluebell’s watermark, the sign that marked her as a child of the waters, she had gills at her throat, and fused bones in her legs, and until Byakuran had found her and asked her to follow, she had been seen as weak and damaged. Byakuran was court raised, he knew better. Those marks were a sign of power not weakness, and he’d known from both his own power and Kikyo’s that fae power mixed with flames was a lethal combination. Kikyo knew he had no need to doubt her loyalty, not when it came from the same roots of fae fealty as his own.
The other two, Zakuro and Torikabuto, bore more watching. Zakurp because underneath it all he was human and if Shouichi had shown them anything it was that humans were capable of changing their allegiance. Not that Kikyo doubted him, there was a certain fire of fanaticism in Zakuro’s eyes that Kikyo felt he could count on. The fire of a true believer. Zakuro had spent a lifetime believing in nothing, hunting down the most deadly supernatural beings, just to see if he could, carried a hundred amulets, and charms, and salves made from their dead corpses, had anointed himself in salamander blood to leave himself fireproof, and had eaten unicorns heart to render himself immune to poison. And then he had met Byakuran, human, and fae, and force of nature, and he had found something beyond himself to believe in. He would not, Kikyo believed be easily shaken. Humans could be rather stubborn when they had a cause.

Torikabuto needed watching for a rather different reason. He needed watching because if demons weren’t watched they found loopholes, and if they found loopholes they used them. Torikabuto was as demon as Kikyo was fae, that is, almost entirely, save for the flames that bound him to Byakuran. It made him predictable, as his kind often were, but that very predictability was enough to warn Kikyo to be wary. After all the most predictable thing demons did, was turn on their masters. Despite that though he rather liked Torikabuto. The creature had a sense of humour to rival some of his own kin. He was one of the few people Kikyo had met in the human world that had laughed about that story of the human boy they made to eat hot ashes thinking they were cakes. As long as he was watched, he was a good ally to have.

He liked the others, and he liked the world, and he adored his Sky, and he was going to lose them all. A part of him hoped Sawada Tsunayoshi succeeded in killing his Sky, because deep down part of him knew. Byakuran needed someone to stop him.

Chapter End Notes

So to recap, Kikyo is nearly entirely fae, but not such powerful fae as Byakuran. He's basically just human enough to have flames. Bluebell is the child of an Undine, a type of female water spirit known to take human lovers. Their children always bear some physical sign of their mother's heritage. Torikabuto is a demon bound to a wooden mask. Again with just enough of a trace of human blood to manifest flames. Zakuryu is basically human, but with lots of upgrades from years as a sort of supernatural big game hunter. There's only one chapter left of the tyl. I'm pretty sure it's going to be from Chrome's pov. I've made an executive decision to skip the Shimon arc, because there's too many new characters I can't get an accurate feel for, and honestly it doesn't seem worth it. I have an excuse for Daemon to hold off on that whole mess (he is kind of intrigued, kind of intimidated by this version of Tsuna and co), and i'm going to use it. I have big plans for the arcobaleno curse, Kawahira, the Vindice, and the Cervello, and I want to go straight into that.
A heavy price to pay

Chapter Summary

If there's one thing Skull knows it's that there's always a price, and it's always more than he's willing to pay but he pays it anyway, because no-one ever offers him a choice.

Chapter Notes

Skull never asked for any of this, but he keeps going because he knows how stories and curses work, and he knows that as long as he doesn't let it break him, there is still a chance.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He hadn't asked for this. He didn't want it. But then that never had mattered, had it. He hadn't asked to be the strongest Cloud in the world, hadn't asked to be ripped from his civilian life and everything he'd loved and dragged all unwilling into a life of crime. He hadn't asked to be cursed with the weight of the world hanging around his neck, his body twisted and warped so that he could bear it. He hadn't asked for any of that and yet it had happened anyway, why should this be any different.

He didn't want this though. He didn't want to remember how the world had died, how he had died, how a little girl had sacrificed herself to drag him kicking and screaming back to life. But no-one had asked him, no-one ever did, and so all in a moment he was sent to his knees with the weight of all the memories of a future that never was.

The worst thing was, he understood. Why it had been done, why the future arcobaleno had collectively decided it was necessary to send back those memories. That was always the worst thing, because he always understood far too well why people did such terrible things, the terrible choices they were faced with, even if he always did seem to end up the victim of those choices.

He alone of the arcobaleno didn't blame Luce for the curse he bore. What she did to him was unforgivable, but what else could she have done, it had to be someone, seven lives or the world, and Skull couldn't blame her for choosing the world. Especially when she'd paid the highest price of all. Because there's a price there's always a price and it's always more than you're willing to pay. But you pay it anyway, because you don't have a choice. Because if you're resorting to curse magic it means that all your choices are used up, and all that's left is what needs to be done. He knew that too well to take it personally.

The others he thought, had taken it personally. They were used to being special, used to being targeted because of things they'd done, or been, or said, and it made it almost a reflex to take things personally. He knew better. It never was personal with him, he didn't matter enough for it to be personal, so he was left with nothing but the truth, the cold empty knowledge that he was just collateral damage, caught up in the vast and unfeeling gears of the world and broken. It was never about him.

Just like the memories hadn't been about him. They'd been about the fate of the world and the
Vongola decimo, and making sure the people that mattered, had the knowledge they needed to keep history from repeating itself. He’d just got carried along with them, collateral damage again, and again he couldn’t blame them for it. God knew he didn’t want that future to come to pass.

But he was angry, he was always angry. Because he’d lost everything, and suffered more than any human being should have to bear, and no-one cared. No-one had any reason to. And there was no-one to blame but people long dead who made mistakes long since forgotten, and nothing to hate except the world itself for being so broken as to demand these things of him, and that just made him more angry. An anger he couldn’t shake or appease because it lacked direction, lacked a target to burn itself out on.

Was it any wonder he was passive aggressive. He was a Cloud, and if the only way he could rebel against the chains that bound him was to make a mockery of everything an arcobaleno stood for, to seem weak, and incompetent, and ridiculous, well so be it. They could force him away from his civilian life, from his shows, and his bike, and the crowds he’d so loved, they could warp his body, and bleed his soul dry, and drag him kicking and screaming into a world he’d wanted no part of, but they couldn’t force him to be good at it.

The weight of the world around his neck, and he wasn’t even sure how human he still was. Could anyone who held the world together by the sheer force of their will truly be considered human. Or maybe he was thinking about it the wrong way, maybe only a human could do it. A human to drag Tam Lin down from his horse and hold him tight until dawn, a human to cut through the rosebushes to where the princess sleeps, a human to stand firm against all that the world could bring to bear. Even if it hurt, even if it seemed impossible.

It wasn’t fair, but Skull remembered nights by the fire with his grandmother, back when he’d truly been a child, and he knew how stories worked. It was never fair, and that never mattered. All that ever mattered was how you got up and kept going. And if there was one thing Skull could do it was to get up and keep going. That was, he supposed, the nature of Clouds. Hibari, the current Vongola Cloud hadn’t even let death stop him from getting back up again.

So he’d got back up after his flames had dragged him into the mafia, and he’d got back up after the arcobaleno curse, and he’d got back up after Luce, his Sky, his betrayer, his friend had died, and he would get back up after receiving memories he’d never wanted from a future he prayed he’d never see. It wouldn’t be the worst thing he’d ever had to get back up after.

He’d keep getting back up because he knew how stories worked, in a way that the others, with their mafia roots might not. Mafia families didn’t tell the same stories as civilian families. He knew that curses could be broken, as long as you kept getting back up again, as long as you didn’t give in. No matter how much bigger, how much more overwhelmingly powerful your opposition was. Mafia families were too used to being the ones holding power to tell those stories.

Skull knew how the old stories, about curses, and monsters, and powers beyond human understanding worked. Something was coming, he could feel it in the sickening weight around his neck, and his half raw half numbed sense of the world around him. In the way the world warped around the inhuman nature of the latest generation of Vongola. Something was coming and every story he’d ever heard at his grandmother’s knee told him it would mean either the breaking of the curse or its ultimate completion. He would be ready.
Sorry it's been a while. I had to stop for research, and to work out where this fic is going exactly. I'm going straight into the arcobaleno curse arc from here. Next chapter will be either Iemitsu or Kawahira.

So all the arcobaleno are full human, except for what the curse does to them. The kind of fairytales that Skull grew up with, are actually more applicable to the arcobaleno situation than the stories mafia parents tell their kids would be. Mafia stories are actually kind of short on ordinary people overcoming an overwhelming and inhuman power by being ordinary, and not giving up. But when faced with something like the arcobaleno curse that is exactly the sort of story you need to fall back on.

Fun fact, this chapter was originally going to be Reborn's pov, but I couldn't get it to work, so I rewrote it from Skull's pov. I think it works quite well.
Born in fire

Chapter Summary

Basil spent an age sealed in a box of iron and silver, before Iemitsu found and freed him. He refuses to compromise his principles for this new world.

Chapter Notes

Basil would follow his master into hell. He might just follow his master's son even further than that.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It had been an age and more than an age trapped in a box of iron and silver, lost in the ever shifting sands. The world had turned itself upside down and inside out over that time, and when he finally found himself free, he barely had the presence of mind to hold a form, to address his rescuer, the man he now owed.

The man called himself Sawada Iemitsu, and he didn’t seem to understand what he had gained in opening that box. What it meant, for a child of fire to owe him that kind of debt. It had been more than an age, and this man came from a land oceans away from his people’s home territories. It made sense that he wouldn’t know.

But just because his rescuer didn’t know, didn’t change the fact that the debt must be paid. Besides, after so long sealed away, he had nowhere else to go. His clan was long since scattered to the winds, and he had always been a follower not a leader. He could do worse than swear himself to this man’s service.

To his credit Sawada hadn’t flinched when he went to his knees in full formal submission. He had spent the last age sealed, not unaware, he knew that few of the children of earth and water still remembered the old forms. Sawada seemed to at least recognise the general intent, the significance of the moment, and that… was interesting. Something to ask about when things were more settled.

“Thou hast freed me from my imprisonment, therefore I owe thee a great debt.” He used the formal words, Sawada might not know the proper forms but that was no reason not to follow them. “I would swear myself to thy service in gratitude. My power at thy command, my advice at thy call, my loyalty to thy will. Name me according to thy desire, and I shall be thy faithful subject, from this day until the day of thy death.”

Sawada considered for a moment, clearly wary of what he was getting himself into. Wise, the children of earth and water had to step carefully when dealing with the other powers of the world. But the possibilities were obviously too tempting to turn away. That was good, if Sawada Iemitsu had done him the insult of refusing his service he might well have been tempted to kill him, and that would be a poor repayment indeed for the debt he owed the man.

“Basil.” His new master decided, and the newly named Basil bowed his head and kissed the ring that
was offered. It was good to have somewhere to belong.

He hadn’t initially realised it was more than just relief at not being alone. Not until the blue flames that were proof of his great grandmother’s human blood, a power he’d always dismissed in favour of the djinn magic that was his own birthright as a child of fire, rose up in response and sang in resonance with his new lord’s soul.

...

The reasoning behind his naming became clear when he met some of his Lord’s other subjects, every one of them named for herbs and spices. Basil found he rather liked it. It encouraged cohesiveness within the clan. He wasn’t sure he approved of how the curse struck woman, Lal Mirch refused to conform to the pattern.

But then maybe that was in itself a pattern. His master himself didn’t follow that rule either. Maybe those who were cursed weren’t meant to match the others, for fear the curse might bleed over from them to the others.

Not that Lord Iemitsu was obvious about the curse he bore. But Basil had seen such things before. Outcast curses, wanderer curses, meant to keep their victim from finding home, or solace, or a lawful lace in the world. Basil could see the delicate black scriptwork of it hanging in the air around his Lord, far beyond Basil’s own ability to undo, although nowhere near as heavy as the one that scarred Lal Mirch. He wondered just who his Lord had angered enough that they would lay their deathcurse on him.

...

The adjustment was not entirely smooth. Basil may not have been unaware of the world during the long years of imprisonment, but there was a difference between watching a change and living it. His manners were antiquated, his ideas about loyalty and service belonged to a different, harsher age, and his master’s other subjects kept on advising him to bring himself up to date, to stop calling Sawada “master”, to learn to speak less formally.

He knew better than to follow their advice of course. To do so would be to indicate that he considered them wiser and more capable, to accept a position subordinate to them, and he would not. He had sworn himself to Sawada Iemitsu, as sword, and advisor, and loyal servant, not to them, never to them. He was a child of fire, a djinni, ancient, and powerful, he would not renounce his position in his Lord’s shadow at their request.

But his refusal to obey them left him in the position of having to emphasise his archaic manners, and attitudes. Left him to show them by brutal example just how far the years had eroded their sense of right conduct. It was rather more blunt than he would have preferred to be, given the chance he would have chosen a more subtle way to try and nudge them back towards right conduct. Still, they had decided to make an issue of it, and he had to rise to the challenge. His pride would allow no less, and pride was important.

...

His Lord was more understanding than his subjects. Or no, understanding wasn’t the right word. Iemitsu didn’t understand him, but he accepted him anyway. Accepted that he wasn’t human, and was born in a bygone age, and didn’t think quite the same way as the humans that surrounded him. It was actually almost spooky just how little any of it bothered his Lord, how he could just take it all in stride.
Meeting Sawada Nana, and their son Tsuna explained *so much*. Of course his Lord knew how to deal with inhuman behaviour patterns. His *wife* wasn’t human, he must have adjusted a long time ago.

And as for Tsuna sama, well, before he met him Basil had doubted whether he’d be willing to continue to serve Iemitsu’s family after he died no matter how much Iemitsu wished it. Now, well Basil had no doubts at all. He would serve Tsuna sama as loyally as he ever served his father.

The memories of a future that never was, only reinforced that certainty.

Chapter End Notes

Yep so Basil is a djinni. Mostly. There's some human ancestry to give him flame access. I knew I wanted to include djinn in this story, but I didn't think of making Basil one, until I started wondering if there could be a good reason for Basil's archaic speech, and the whole calling Iemitsu master thing.
It also explains why he looks like Iemitsu. Djinn are shapeshifters, and his bond with Iemitsu's flames makes a human shape that bears some resemblance to him easier to hold for long periods of time.

Sorry. I know I promised Iemitsu or Kawahira, but Basil just wouldn't leave me alone, and he does provide a good opening into Iemitsu's story. I'll almost definately be doing Iemitsu's chapter next.
Torn out roots

Chapter Summary

Iemitsu isn’t sure what’s worse, the things he and Lal have in common, or the things that are utterly opposite.

Chapter Notes

Iemitsu is cursed. Sky witches can cripple a person’s ability to form human connections.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was something all but impossible to describe to anyone who didn’t know. What it meant to be cursed, the way it set him out of sync with the right workings of the world, that turned him half against reality, and alone amongst people who didn’t couldn’t understand. There were reasons why Lal Mirch was his, why they fit. They had too much in common. And part of them couldn’t help but hate that, because the things they had in common were all the things they hated most about themselves, all the things they couldn’t escape or forget or ignore.

But in some ways they were very different too. In some ways they were entirely opposite. Lal always described her curse as the weight of the world around her neck, weighing her down enough to break her, binding her with chains she couldn’t break. He couldn’t imagine being so bound. Not when it took everything he had to stay grounded, when every step might be the one where he lost his footing and slipped the bonds of the world entirely.

She’d cut the ties that bind, unanchored him from the world, from family, and community, and society. That was what a Sky witch could do, driven by grief, and rage, and desperation. It was a terrible thing for a human being to face. Not belonging, cast out, alone. Humans weren’t made to be alone. Ever since, he’d had to fight for every bond, every connection, and he’d never been able to find a lawful place in the world.

But the mafia were not lawful, they by definition lived outside and on the edges of society, and the CEDF were outsiders even to the mafia. It was a loophole, just enough of one to keep Iemitsu from drifting entirely, and he would owe Timoteo forever for thinking of it.

The woman had anchored the curse with her death, with everything she was and ever would be, with all the power of a Sky and a witch, and a mother. It wasn’t something easily or lightly broken. Not on the same level as Lal’s curse of course, that curse was ancient and inhuman in its scope, but in its own way just as impossible to break. He’d tried, when it was first set, he’d wandered the world looking for a way, before he’d found that the price was more than he was willing to pay. Balance in all things, death to make, death to break, magic had its own rules.

But rules had loopholes, and Timoteo had helped him see that curses were no different. Human’s were good at loopholes. He might not be able to break the curse, but he could try and work around it, to live his life in spite of it.
It was hard though, harder than he ever could have imagined as a careless arrogant seventeen year old who killed the wrong man in a bar fight. He’d been puffed up on the pride of his newly activated Sky flames and his connections to the Vongola, and things had got out of hand, and before he knew it his opponent was dead on the floor.

It had been so quick, too easy, to do something that couldn’t be taken back, and so quickly after that the man’s mother had taught a careless teenager a hard lesson about consequences. He never could quite belong, and it was so hard to form true connections with people. It left his guardian bonds a twisted shadow of what they should have been, his Sky’s harmony ravaged by the discordant influence of the curse, and where most Skies his age would already have a full set, he didn’t even have half.

Lal was his though, and their connection might be a twisted bitter thing but it was true. There was understanding in it, and solidarity, the camaraderie of those who would always be outsiders even amongst other outsiders. Even amongst the mafia, Iemitsu was on the edge the periphery, and even amongst the arcobaleno Lal didn’t quite belong. How could they not be drawn to each other, bound by all the things they didn’t have, and couldn’t have. It wasn’t a happy connection, but it was strong, sometimes, in the early days, it had been the only thing keeping his feet on the ground, and, though she didn’t say it, he knew that sometimes he was the only thing keeping her from crumpling under the weight of the world.

Things were easier after he found Basil in the sands, after he’d opened a sealed bottle and a child of fire and air had sworn himself to him, blade and honour. An oath and an attitude for a bygone age, as out of place in his own way as Iemitsu and Lal. And yet not, because Basil had never been anything other than sure in who and what he was. He had seen Iemitsu’s strength, and been grateful for his unsealing him, and he’d sworn himself to him in an archaic ritual Iemitsu had barely recognised.

It had been a shock when they bonded, Rain to Sky, Basil because he clearly hadn’t known he had enough human blood to manifest that power, Iemitsu because the curse made it so hard for him to bond at all. But maybe Basil’s nature helped with that, air and fire were unanchored in ways earth and water were not, and maybe that was enough of a correspondence to circumvent the conditions of his curse. Or maybe it was just that Basil wasn’t very human in his thinking or in his abilities. Some people might have been bothered by that, but Iemitsu had spent enough of his life as an outsider to overlook other’s differences, and Basil was a steady constant loyalty wound into his Sky. It was simple and uncomplicated and clean, and that stabilised him in ways even Lal’s bitter kinship hadn’t been able to.

It had been a long time though. A long time before he’d had anyone else to call his own, a long time between that desperate early connection to Lal, and the later steadier one to Basil, and the isolation had eaten away at his soul, and left him half desperate for any kind of connection to remind him he was still a part of the world.

Maybe that was what had fuelled that mad impulse that drove him to steal Nana’s skin. He’d seen her, bathing in the river with her sisters, neat piles of feathered skins on the bank, just like the old stories, and she’d been so very beautiful, and he’d been so very lonely. And she was otherworldly, her eyes so utterly inhuman he couldn’t look away, and a part of him had known instinctively that his curse couldn’t touch her or his feelings for her, because that curse was meant for humans and human love, and she was not.

And so he’d taken her skin, and taken her home, and made her his wife, like the crane wife in the stories, and of all the stupid impulsive decisions he’d ever made, that was the one he never regretted. Because she was beautiful, and patient, and strong in ways he never would be, and she might not have been human but she loved him, with all the enduring faithfulness of her kind, and that was an
anchor to the world, a reason to keep fighting that he hadn’t known to wish for.

Other people thought their relationship was odd, spending so much time apart, keeping so many secrets from each other, but it worked for them. It worked with Nana’s instincts, and Iemitsu’s curse bound inability to settle, and the demands of Iemitsu’s work and Nana’s nesting instincts. It worked, and then they had a son, and Iemitsu was torn between wonder and panic at this gift he’d never expected to have. His son Tsuna, with human fire in his soul, and bird freedom in his heart, a better man than he would ever be. He might not have been the most present father, but he was proud, of this son he couldn’t understand, or teach, or guide, who was first and always true to his own nature.

Chapter End Notes

The curse Iemitsu is under is sort of derived from the mark of Cain. In that he's effectively mystically outcast from human society. Although without the protection clause.
He’s able to have a place in the CEDF because A. the mafia is peripheral to normal society, and B. the CEDF is peripheral to the mafia itself. Loopholes are king in fairytales.
Skies’ power is tied up with human social bonding the way Suns are tied up with creation, and Storms with destruction, so a Sky witch with a grudge can do serious damage to a person's ability to form human connections. Iemitsu is only in as good a state as he is, because he is a Sky himself, which helps mitigate the effects a bit.
The Sky that cursed him did it because he killed her son. He did it in a barfight, and it was more or less unintentional, but that doesn't matter to a grieving mother.
See no evil

Chapter Summary

Hana sees more than she should and can affect less than she'd like.

Chapter Notes

In which Hana has the Sight, and has seen more than enough to leave her worn and cynical.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

See, the thing was, Hana saw altogether far too much. People thought of the Sight, and imagined dreamy, gentle, souls, concerned with inner peace, and spirituality. Hana knew better, she had the sight, and all it had done for her was to make her bitter and cynical. She saw the world as it truly was, all illusions, and masks stripped away, and in her experience, what lay under those illusions and masks was rarely pleasant. Anyone who believed in the comforting bosoms of Mother Nature, in Hana’s opinion, hadn’t watched nearly enough Attenborough.

If someone had asked Hana to describe what it was like, having the Sight, if she had felt at all inclined to answer them, she would have said it was like waking up every day two drinks short of sober, with the insulating haze that most people took for granted missing. It was the harsh unforgiving light of day, and abandoned bones in the wilderness, and the hungry, unfathomable darkness of the abyss. Humans weren’t meant to see so clearly, and she’d be lying is she said she didn’t resent the fact that she had to.

She shouldn’t see what she saw, wasn’t made for it, no human was. But should meant very little in the face of what was, and Hana saw too clearly not to know that. It wasn’t like there was any way to get rid of the Sight if you had it after all, and there was no point crying over things that couldn’t be fixed. Some things just had to be lived with.

Well no, that wasn’t quite true. The fae had a fairly effective method for dealing with the problem. That was to blind any human they caught with the sight. For obvious reasons Hana wasn’t too keen on that solution. So she learned to live with her talent, and all it entailed.

And it wasn’t all bad. It was at the least, an early warning of threats that an ordinary girl might not have seen until it was far too late. She could see when a spirit had laid a trap for the unwary, when the innocent seeming child asking for help finding his mother was nothing of the sort. She might be bitter and cynical, but better that than innocent and dead.

And seeing more than she should had brought her to Kyouko, and that was worth a lot of things she’d have rather never seen. She’d noticed when little Kyouko in her nursery class, suddenly had a big brother who hadn’t existed before, who burned with the same bright sunlight that Kyouko did. Hana had noticed and no-one else did, as though he’d always been there, little Hana had been very curious about that. Somehow, over the course of weeks of semi stalking, and suspicion, that Hana had allowed herself to indulge in, Kyouko had become her best friend, someone who, didn’t quite
understand, but at least understood what it was that she didn’t understand.

Kyouko was a witch after all, and she saw more than normal human beings did too. Not as much as Hana, no-one saw as much as Hana, but she knew that there was more to the world than the surface that was all the everyday monkeys allowed themselves to believe existed. She was a bit more upbeat about it than Hana, after all, she had her own power. Kyouko was one of those small children that believed absolutely that if they just wished hard enough the world would be how they wanted it to be, and horror of horrors, she wasn’t actually wrong, as the existence of Ryouhei proved. A part of Hana really wanted to hate Kyouko for that.

She didn’t of course. Kyouko was a very difficult person to hate, especially when she wanted someone to like her. Besides, it was just so good to have someone who she didn’t have to lie t, to pretend with. She didn’t really talk about what she saw, but Kyouko knew she saw it and that was comforting in a way that was very hard to define.

It was a comfort, and on days when the weight of the truth Hana saw was almost too much to bear, Kyouko was always there, bright sunlight, and optimism to balance out the horror, the sickening rot of the cancer that was killing the old lady down the street whose name Hana didn’t know or care to know, the twisted warped broken wings of Sawada Tsunayoshi, a cripple when he should be able to fly, the deep soul sucking awfulness of the baby who wasn’t that had started following Sawada around, the wrongness of the thing around his neck that most definitely wasn’t a pacifier.

Hana saw far too much, but that thing that wasn’t a pacifier but tried very hard to look like one, that was in the running for one of the worst things she’d seen. She didn’t want Kyouko near it, hell she didn’t even want Sawada near it and she’d never really gotten along with Sawada. She even worried for Hibari, and the thought of anything that could be a threat to that vengeful ghost was pretty terrifying in itself.

But what Hana wanted didn’t matter, never mattered, she saw too much and controlled too little, and the arcobaleno was there to stay. Rainbow, such an innocuous name for such a terrible thing. Or maybe not so innocuous. Rainbows after all were bound to the flood, to disaster that tore apart the world. Certainly there was nothing innocuous about that curse and its bearers, despite their outward appearences, anymore than there was anything innocuous about the polite shopkeeper that called himself Kawahira. Hana refused to come within a hundred meters of his shop, she doubted it would make any difference whatsoever if he struck out against her, but she still didn’t want to get too close. She could see what lay under the seeming of human skin. The claws, the tentacles, the thousand thousand eyes, the angles that couldn’t quite be described in three dimensions, the very worst part, the human body, twisted, and warped and writhing at the core of what he was. Kyouko was human with just a little extra, Sawada was the result of a human loving a crane woman, Ryouhei was life breathed into dead earth, all the others the not quite right ones that had shown up to follow in Sawada’s wake, they were different, sometimes horrifying, but they still belonged, to this world, to this reality. She didn’t know what unholy union had created Kawahira but whatever he was he both belonged and didn’t belong, simultaneously, he couldn’t, shouldn’t exist, and just looking at him made Hana feel tired and sick.

She feared him, wanted him nowhere near her, her town, nowhere near anyone she loved. But she was only a human who saw more than she should, and she knew better than to make an issue of it. Sighted humans who drew too much attention tended to get their eyes put out, and just because she didn’t always like what she saw didn’t mean she wanted to be blinded. After all, even if she couldn’t see them, she’d still know the nightmares were there. All closing her eyes would do was give them a chance to catch her unawares.
So yeah Hana is basically standard model human, except that she sees the world exactly as it really is. She is pretty much knurd most of the time, and she has a clearer image of what everyone is than just about anyone else. However, given that Sighted humans who admit what they can see tend to be blinded by supernatural creatures not happy about being watched. So from an early age Hana has been taught not to draw attention to her Sight.

And finally Kawahira makes his first appearance, through someone who can see what he really is. More on him later.
In blood and bone

Chapter Summary

Sometimes it's hard for Luce to know which heritage cuts deepest, the human, or the inhuman.

Chapter Notes

Luce is being eaten alive by human guilt and inhuman knowledge. In some ways dying of the curse is a relief.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

There were some days she felt so much larger than her own body could contain. Not because of the curse, although that was its own kind of wrongness, its own kind of suffocating trap, but because there was something in her that was so much more than mortal skin could hold. More and less all at once, and there were hollow hungry places inside her that she dared not look too closely at. Uncle Kawahira said it was because the old blood was strong in her. He would know, she supposed. After all, how much stronger did it run in his veins, ancient and inhuman as he was.

The old blood was strong in her, and it showed in a thousand tiny ways, in the parts of her that were neither cruel nor kind, just… other, just at odds with everything right and natural in the world. But still it didn’t make her any less human when it counted, when it could cut her deepest. Humanity was insidious like that, it truly didn’t take more than a trace for it to affect someone. Look at Uncle Kawahira, less human than not, but still he cared for the world, still humanity in all its desperate, determination, dug its claws in deep and would not let him go.

And Luce was not Kawahira, she was far more human than not, even with the old blood so strong in her. She loved, and regretted, and was torn apart by her guilt just as any human would be, faced with the choices she’d made. Sometimes she really wished she wasn’t.

“For each man kills the thing he loves.” In the end Wilde said it best. Luce might be a prophet, but she was no poet, and so she was left to turn to other people’s words to express the awful truth that had haunted her since she was old enough to understand the things she saw. She would kill the thing she loved, everything she loved. She had seen it, she knew it would be so.

And she knew it would be kinder to use a knife, but she smiled, and lied, and used a kiss instead because she lacked the courage to fight the chains of duty that would kill her, and her kin, and her guardians. She had known, she had always known, that she would bow her head, and play her role, and keep the world alive at the cost of everything she loved. That she would smile and lie, and lead them to their doom, and they either wouldn’t understand, or would understand far too well. It was impossible to say which was worse, with so many flavours of guilt to choose from.

There was the sharp bite of Reborn’s anger and bitterness at yet another person he wished he’d never been fool enough to trust, the special flavour of guilt knowing what a rare gift that trust had been, and how much deeper it would cut him because of it. There was the sting of Fon’s disappointment,
that she hadn’t been what he thought she was, the knowledge that he’d believed in her and she’d used that faith against him. There was the awful sickening shame of Viper and Verde’s confusion, they of all of the arcobaleno were ill equipped to cope, scientist and information dealer, they both lived and died by knowing, by understanding, by being able to see things coming. She had caught them off guard and they would not forgive her for it, any more than they would forgive themselves.

And yet for all that maybe it was Skull’s understanding that cut deepest. Of all of them, he knew far too well that life was never fair, especially not to him. He was a civilian, not mafia, a different way of seeing the world and so when he asked, her, when she told him why, he had just looked at her with a terrible kind of understanding. He’d never expected anything better, from her, from the mafia, from the world. She’d told him, she’d told him what she hadn’t even bothered trying to explain to the others, seven lives or the world and he understood why she had made the choice she had. He was angry, bone deep, soul deep, angry, but not with her, never with her even with all her lies, and betrayals. He didn’t have it in him to blame someone just as caught up in the curse’s tangles as he was. It only made her hate herself more.

But she supposed that was the humanity in him, blazing bright and strong, a strength to rival any magic. Clear and steady in a way that she couldn’t be. Luce was human too, but there was still that thread of other in her, the root of their sight, of their magic. That nightmare part of her that wasn’t human, and didn’t belong to this world, and was ancient, and incomprehensible, and inimical of everything she held dear. The blood her line shared with Kawahira, from when a mortal woman bore children to an unspeakable horror. A horror that saved the world, just like the arcobaleno curse itself really, magic always did tend towards symmetry.

There were two children, so family legend said, twins. A girl who was mostly human, and a boy, who was mostly not. And the girl grew up and grew old, and had children, and those children had children, and so on and so forth right down to Luce herself, all of them just a little off, with a sense of the whatwillbe that was born of the space between stars. And the boy, Kawahira, grew up, but did not grow old, not as humans understand it, and he came to understand how the world was fraying at the edges, being picked apart by his father’s kin, by the horrors that dwelt in the howling void. They called to him, to open the gate to let them in, but he was human enough to care, human enough to fear, human enough to choose the world over his blood. He fought them, fought their call, worked against their movements in the world and tried to find a way to hold the world together, to prevent the slow unravelling of everything that was.

He succeeded. The price was sickeningly high, but for what it was worth he succeeded. Seven lives for the world, and many humans would have agreed that was a fair price. Not a good one, not one easy to live with, but worth it all the same, and in a way fitting. Seven of the best, drained of everything they were, or would be, sacrifices to hold the world together. Necessary evils, some would say, and who was Luce to argue, when she, of all this generation’s arcobaleno, had made her choice freely, and in full knowledge of the consequences.

A necessary sacrifice, broken, and bled dry, and scraped raw against the holes in the world, human will and life force spun out to weave reality back together. And the Sky was the lynchpin of it all, had to be, the only thing that could hold together the sheer force of will the other arcobaleno represented, the only thing that could bring them into armony, with each other, with the world. Was it any wonder the Sky arcobaleno didn’t last a third of the time the others did, with all the threads of the curse wrapped around her soul and pulling her in every direction?

Kawahira’s curse worked. It did what it was designed to do, it held the world together, and his sister’s descendants would pay the price. He regretted that she thought. Maybe. As much as he could regret anything. He was human enough that he felt something for family. He regretted it but he didn’t hesitate to ask it of her, knowing that she would not refuse. And she couldn’t hold it against him, not
when she was guilty of far worse. When she had led her own to their doom all unknowing, when she had condemned her own daughter and granddaughter to the same undoing as herself. At least her many times great uncle had asked. She had lied instead, cruel mercy that it was. She had kept the truth from them until the moment it was impossible to hide any longer, and that more than anything was the human in her coming out. After all the old ones were not given to cruelty any more than they were to kindness, they didn’t understand the concept. Mercy and cruelty both, they always were human things.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah so many many generations ago there was some kind of unspeakably awful ritual that resulted in a poor unfortunate woman bearing the children of an eldritch horror from between the stars. The girl was mostly human and her descendants became the Giglio Nero donnas, the boy was mostly not, and he became Kawahira. Both sides of the family are human enough to want to protect the world, and that is what the arcobaleno curse is for.
Cold Mistress Reason

Chapter Summary

Humanity will always betray you. Verde knows this, that's why he clings so hard to cold hard reason. With that, he wonders why Kawahira clings so tightly to his traces of humanity.

Chapter Notes

Verde is a problem solver at heart, and when it comes down to it, the arcobaleno curse is really just one big problem.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It’s a commonly held misconception, that there are things man was not meant to know. A belief repeated so often it became a truism, something that everyone believed without even questioning. Verde refused to subscribe to such foolishness. After all what greater purpose was there to human existence, than the pursuit of knowledge in all its forms, and if that was so, then surely man was meant to know everything.

On that fated day, when the man in the iron mask had proved himself to be so much more and less than human, Verde had stared into the abyss. He had stared long and hard, refusing to so much as blink, even as his body twisted and warped in unnatural ways and the weight of the world settled around his neck. He’d seen the rip in the fabric of reality, he’d seen what was on the other side, he’d seen what his soul was being spun out to stitch together. The others, they had all turned away, looked away, had caught no more than a flash of the impossible emptiness of it, and even that flash wore heavily upon them. It wasn’t something an ordinary human could look at and remain sane.

But Verde had never been ordinary, and no Spark could ever really be described as sane, and so in that abyss, that unthinkable emptiness he had seen not horror, but endless possibilities.

He had also seen what he suspected the others had not, the immense inhumanity of the Iron masked man’s true form, the incomprehensible vastness forcibly crushed down into three dimensions. He knew that the man in the Iron mask was no man at all, but a Thing beyond any human understanding. They were less than insects to this creature, just tools to accomplish his tasks. Verde understood that mindset well enough. Often the seething mass of humanity were nothing more than insects, and he was so much more, saw more, understood things that their puny little minds couldn’t begin to comprehend. He didn’t much like being on the other side of it.

And yet there was a part of the creature that was human, Verde had seen that too. If he were only the Thing, only the monster, he wouldn’t have gone to so much trouble to hold the world together, wouldn’t have bothered deceiving them in the first place. He’d have torn through the world like paper and everyone would be dead and worse than dead, existence itself unravelled to its constituent parts.

Besides. He’d heard Luce call him Uncle, when they thought no-one was listening, and Luce was
human enough as such things went. It only stood to reason there was some humanity in him.

Verde understood that too, although sometimes he wished he didn’t. Spark or not he was human too, subject to all the unpleasantness of human feelings. Sometimes he let them get the better of him, before being forcibly reminded that such petty feelings as attachment or betrayal were a distraction from the work, from the things that really mattered. He’d allowed himself to care, about Luce, about the others, and look how it had turned out, the disruption to his work was immeasurable, with the weight of the world dragging at his neck and feeding on the flames in his soul an agonising distraction and the his unfortunately shrunken form an inconvenience he could well do without. He’d have been better off if he’d never cared at all.

It made him wonder why the creature that cursed them clung so tightly to his tiny traces of humanity when Verde himself would sometimes give anything to excise them from his soul.

Still he was what he was, fighting it would be futile, a waste of energy and therefore illogical, and Verde clung to logic with the sure knowledge that it was the only thing that could be relied on in this world. He was a Spark so he made knowledge and progress his business, he was human, so if he sometimes allowed sentimentality to sway him when his former comrades were concerned well, he had factored that into his calculations.

He was an arcobaleno so of course, he had put a certain amount of research time into figuring out how to break the curse. All of them had, in one way or another, but he wasn’t just being arrogant when he said he’d got the closest. He’d figured out exactly how long they had, which was more than any of the others had managed. He’d also worked out that if the curse was going to be broken it would have to be done at the changeover, at the moment the cycle weakened.

He’d told the others of course. He wasn’t a fool, and he was enough a scientist to know when his work could benefit from a fresh perspective. Surprisingly enough it was Skull that had been most helpful, a stark reminder that the stuntman was considerably smarter than he was willing to admit to. He’d agreed with Verde about the timing, pointed out the magical laws that backed up Verde’s scientific conclusion, the pattern of it, the need for circularity, “as it begins so does it end”. It was a useful confirmation, Verde had dabbled in magical studies, but they weren’t his main field of interest and no research that he could think of ever suffered from a second opinion. Skull had also posited that they might need some kind of magical expert to work in tandem with his scientific solution if they wanted to succeed in breaking or twisting the curse. Loathe as he was to admit it, Verde suspected he might be right. There was too much of the unnatural in this for it to be solved by science alone no matter how brilliant Verde was.

True academic expertise in magic was not exactly common though. They needed someone with a breadth and depth of knowledge that was rare in a discipline that was dominated by those who operated on instinct and folk wisdom. They needed someone with power, and the experience that only comes with age, and most importantly they needed someone who understood how things worked rather than just how to do things. They needed a wizard, and wizards had a habit of being hard to find.

Finding people was not Verde’s specialty. Still Verde was a genius, so he knew well enough when to bring in an expert. How convenient it was that he knew a number of people with relevant skillsets who had just as much of an interest in solving this problem as he did. Just the right skillset and far too much time on their hands if Reborn’s recent hobby of torturing mafia heirs in the name of education was anything to go by. So Verde settled down to work out the scientific side of the issue, and set the other arcobaleno on the wizard problem. After all, they might as well make themselves useful, and tracking people down and getting what they wanted out of them by any means necessary was what they were good at.
They had growled a bit when he made the calls. Sulky at the idea of him ordering them around, but none of them were quite pigheaded enough to refuse when they wanted the curse broken so badly. Not quite. Although Verde did have a feeling Reborn wished he didn’t need him quite so much, and would be taking his revenge as soon as the situation changed. Verde made a mental note to be on the lookout for murderous hitmen after the curse was broken. It wouldn’t do to be forced to put his emergency reanimation plans into practice, that would be a terribly inconvenient disruption to his ongoing research projects.

Chapter End Notes

Verde is a Spark, and staring into the abyss has not done his state of mind any favours. Not has being betrayed by Luce. But he's practically minded, so he has a tendency to lull people into a false sense of security with logic until they forget that the crazy's there. He has some ideas about dealing with the curse, but he needs a wizard to help him work out the details and put it into practice.
The cost of living

Chapter Summary

In which Kawahira has both too much and too little humanity, and the world is a fragile thing.

Chapter Notes

Here’s Kawahira, he's only mostly an eldritch abomination.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Life. It always came down to life in the end. The humans sometimes deluded themselves, convinced themselves it was about power, or love, or wealth. But the being that called itself Kawahira saw so much more clearly than they ever could, the kind of clarity that would drive a mere human to madness, and he knew that without life, none of it meant a thing.

He, not it, although calling him it might be truer. Sepira was she, so Kawahira was he. It was a choice, he chose to be a he, to be a person, his mother’s son, his sister’s brother, not an it, not his father’s plague upon the world. Gender, and pronouns, and kinship, little pieces of humanity that made all the difference, and he clung to them.

His father’s kin were ever present after all, awful and alien and achingly familiar. Always watching, always waiting, always looking for a way in. Vast, and endlessly malicious not alive enough to rage, but real enough to hate everything that did live, himself included. They whispered to him sometimes, asked him to open the door for them, to let them spill into the world his mother had birthed him into. He could do it, that power was in his blood, and bone, and twisted soul, it would be so very easy to do it, as simple as a thought, as a twist of intent. Holding the door shut, that was the hard thing. That carried a cost.

There was too little and too much human in him, the opposite of Sepira’s problem really, she’d been too much and too little inhuman. It wasn’t quite grief that he felt when he remembered his fierce ruthless twin, he wasn’t human enough to feel that, just as he hadn’t been human enough to age and die the way she had. It wasn’t quite grief, but it was the closest he’d ever come, was capable of coming. He might not be human enough to grieve, but he was human enough to miss her, and it almost almost hurt when he thought about her.

In many ways she’d been the stronger of the two of them. For all his unearthly, incomprehensible power, she’d been rooted in a way that he’d never been able to manage. She belonged to the world, for all their father’s inhumanity, and that in the end was the difference between them. She was their mother’s daughter, and he was always their father’s son.

She was stronger, and in many ways wiser, even though she saw less clearly than he did. She used to tell him there were more truths to be found in the way a lie was told, than in the clearest, coldest certainties. Maybe she could have found a better way to hold the gate shut, to hold the world together. But it had been lifetimes since she breathed her last, and her bones had no answers for him,
so he did what needed to be done, and wondered what it would be like to feel the full heartbreak of the choices he made.

Lifetime after lifetime, of souls unspooled and unravelled, and used to stitch together the ever widening tears in the sky, in the world. It wasn’t a good solution, but it was what he could do, magic always carried a cost, and for magic like his, it was always someone else who paid. Countless ages of unwilling sacrifices, and he owed them things he couldn’t pay. He owed them grief, and guilt, and tears of remorse, and he wasn’t human enough for any of those things. That was half the reason Bermuda, eldest and dearest, would never forgive him.

But he was human enough to care, he was human enough to value what humanity he had, he was human enough that he would set everything he was, everything he could be, against the howling emptiness between worlds that he was born from.

Bermuda said once that he didn’t understand the value of life, and of all the bitter charges the Vindice’s leader had laid at his door over the years, it was the only one that Kawahira could honestly call untrue. The trace of human in him was unequal to many things, but he did know what it was to live, to cling to life like it was the only thing in the world that mattered, because, in the end it was. He valued life more than Bermuda could ever know, because in the end it all came down to life, all its wonders, and horrors, and impossible unpredictability.

Too much and too little human in his soul and it was hard being caught between, hard, and lonely. His father’s people and his mother’s people shared very little, but both sides understood loneliness, and that was an understanding he had inherited in its fullest measure. He was lonely, and had been since his sister died, but still, he wasn’t ready to let go. Life had been his mother’s gift to him when his father could only offer existence. He lived, but he stood right at the edge of the abyss of unlife, and so he knew, in ways that no human could see, just what value life held.

So, maybe Bermuda did understand after all. Life was what had been taken from him, and all those like him. If any human could understand just how important life was it would be them. There was something darkly amusing about that thought, that the only people who might truly be able to understand him were those who hated him entirely, and had every right to do so, because he knew the value of what he’d stolen from them, and he’d done it anyway.

His father’s kin also knew the value of life. They knew the value of what they didn’t have, could never have and they hated, as deep, and as cold as the void itself. They were always waiting, always watching, with the endless patience of those who do not truly live, and sometimes Kawahira’s dark works were the only thing holding them at bay.

They knew it too, those nameless, lifeless, horrors, they knew that the trinisette and the arcobaleno curse were what held the line against them. They didn’t know how it worked, exactly, but they knew the purpose it held, and they’d sent their agents to work against it. Interfered with the inheritance of the Vongola rings for generation upon generation, as the bloodline weakened, whispered in the mad corridors of the Mare Sky’s mind whispered until he burned the world trying to bring together the pieces that would shatter reality once and for all.

He should have seen it, should have stopped it, but there was too much and too little human in him. Too little for him to age and die with his sister, but too much for true immortality. He was old, countless ages old, and his strength was not what it once was, when he’d first forged that dark and dreadful piece of magic that was all that held the world together.

Luckily, he’d designed the pieces to defend themselves, one way or another. The Vongola rings governed time, and that was enough to grant their bearers a chance to set things right. Just a chance, but that was all that was needed. His father’s kin might have patience on their side, but the living had
a resolve that was beyond the comprehension of creatures that simply existed. The will to survive could turn the smallest chance into victory, and inhuman as they were, Tsunayoshi’s family had that in no small measure.

It all came down to life, and the will to survive, and every generation, Kawahira couldn’t help but wonder if this time the will of one of his victims would prove strong enough to find another way. If he’d been any more human than he was, he might have hoped for it. But he wasn’t, so he painted a smile that meant nothing onto the glamour that he wore, and prepared for another set of arcobaleno trials.

Chapter End Notes

This was actually really hard to write. Not quite a horror from outside reality is a hard perspective to get right. I hope it works.
So yeah, now we're getting into the arcobaleno curse arc. Hoping to tie this story up in the next few chapters, which is good because I have way too many WIPs.
Subtle and quick to anger

Chapter Summary

Fon might be human but dragons named him the wind and names mean more than most people know.

Chapter Notes

In which Verde sends Fon on a mission, and even wizards can’t hide from the wind itself.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They called Fon human, as though it made him weak, made him biddable. But those who knew would only say that humanity just meant everything to prove, and Fon had proved his will as strong as any in the world. The dragons had named him Fon and names, especially names given by dragons were powerful things. Fon was the wind, was the Storm, was destruction itself. He blew where he wished and no man could hold him if he didn’t choose to let them.

No man but one, but then, the man in the iron mask wasn’t truly a man was he, human limits didn’t really apply. Fon’s soul raged at the creature that had dared to cage the wind and the sun and the lightning and the rain, that had brought low the clouds and imprisoned the mists and drained the life from the sky itself. He raged, but the man who wasn’t a man who had dared to bind him, well his power went beyond the world and his curse was woven through it, and so, try as he might he couldn’t break free.

But whatever power a monster in human skin might have to chain the elements themselves, there was certainly no human that could command him to hunt for them. Verde had no right to make demands of him.

His very soul raged at the thought. But in many ways both obvious and not, Verde was the smartest of them. A glass bright, glass brittle, glass sharp brilliance that Fon would be a fool to disregard, and Fon was no fool. He had studied with dragons, he knew all too well the value of knowledge.

Verde was the cleverest of all of them and it was a truth unspoken that while every one of them had fought to break their curse with all the fevered desperation the strongest wills in the world could muster it was Verde who had come closest, who understood best the forces at work. So when Verde said that time was running out, that time was running out and that if they wanted him to save them all they’d have to run some errands for him, well the wind could blow in favour of human endeavour as easily as it could blow against. It wasn’t such a great imposition, for Verde to send him to retrieve someone.

A wizard the Spark wanted, and a wizard he would get, if that was what it took to shatter their chains and free them all. Because of all of them, Verde was the one who might just succeed in that work, and Fon wanted freedom.
Wizards weren’t easy to find though. Secretive, and powerful, and dangerously clever, and there were so few of them to begin with. Turning over rocks and blowing through concealing forests at random would serve no purpose save to alert them of his coming.

But the wind could be subtle, could be patient, when it needed to, the dragons had taught him that, and Fon suspected that subtlety was in fact what was needed here. Everyone knew wizards were hard to find, for anyone who went looking for wizards, because wizards liked their privacy and had all the means necessary to secure it.

But there was another truth that Fon knew, one that wasn’t exactly a secret and yet surprisingly few people realised. Wizards were powerful, and secretive, but at their core they were also academics, and academics needed to show their work. Come at it sideways, find the work find the wizard, and no wizard could ever bring themselves to hide their work, no completely. Fon let a smile borrowed directly from his dragon blooded apprentice inch its way across his face. Reborn would be so pissed when he figured out how Fon had managed to succeed before him.

He was pretty sure the Vongola rings were wizard work at least in part, at least in terms of repair work, and truthfully it was a better place to start than any other he could think of. After all, the Vongola rings, or at least the stoned embedded in them, were near kin to the arcobaleno pacifiers. A wizard that had worked with one stood a better chance than most of knowing something useful about the other.

So the wind blew west to Italy, and whispered through the ranks of the Vongola. Viper was only too happy to facilitate his search when he told them why he was looking, and so, not a week after Verde had first set him his seemingly impossible task, Fon stood at the edge of a small and isolated Vongola owned estate, and waited for the inhabitant to notice him.

“What do you want?” The voice seemed to come out of nowhere, old and bitter. “And don’t try to deny it, you people always want something.”

“My colleague sent me. He wants to discuss some theoretical points with you.” Fon kept his voice light and pleasant, not a hint of the desperation, and despair, and wild anger that swirled under the surface. Slowly slowly catch a monkey.

“Go away. I’m busy. And I’m not fool enough to think it’s just theory any colleague of yours will be after. I know what you are, and I’m not about to set myself against the one who laid that curse. I like being alive.” The back and forth was tedious, but Fon had studied with dragons, he knew how to be patient when it mattered. He also knew his target’s weakness.

“Not even to see if it can be done?” He asked, eyes wide in exaggerated surprise. No doubt Talbot knew he was playing him, but that didn’t make him any less likely to break. After all, a known weakness was still a weakness.

Sure enough there was a long pause, and Fon sat himself down with a back against a tree while he waited. Half an hour, an hour, and then, out of the trees, a blindfolded figure appeared.

“Damn you.” He said. “If it can be done I’ll be the one to do it.” Fon smiled a dragon smile and offered his arm for support.
Not too sure about this chapter, but I decided it was worth pushing through and trying to finish this story. I may come back to it at some point.
Happy new year everyone. Have some dark presentiments of apocalyptic doom to start things off.

Talbot is enough of a wizard to know they're all in big trouble. Talbot got called in by Fon to help Verde break the arcobaleno curse. It was only after that happened that Talbot bothered to look into the portents, and promptly started to panic. When a thousands of years old wizard is panicking, sensible people look for a bomb shelter.

“You do know this is black magic.” Talbot pointed out, but didn’t pause as he sketched out the runes. After all, this was hardly the darkest working he could claim to have performed, and desperation was a cruel mistress.

“Superstitious rot.” Was the only answer Verde gave, as he linked up the generators and started to type in numbers, but Talbot could feel the edge of unspoken fear in the man’s voice. Verde might be a man of science, but he’d looked into the void with his own two eyes, he knew what was waiting there, what powers were involved in this working.

“Ah yes. I’d forgotten hard scientists didn’t believe in right and wrong.” Not that Talbot’s sense of morality was anything to write home about, but there was something irritating about how Verde didn’t even notice the alignments of the forces he called on. Besides, the sharp comments grounded them both. A little fear was useful, made you willing to do what needed to be done, too much, well, that left a man unable to do anything at all.

“Don’t be absurd.” Verde snapped. “Of course we believe in right and wrong. There’s right answers, and there’s wrong answers, that’s the whole basis of the scientific method. We just don’t make the mistake of assuming right and wrong have anything to do with good and evil.” It was in its way, a startlingly honest philosophy, but then, Verde might be a madman, but he wasn’t especially dishonest by nature. If it didn’t disregard almost three centuries of Talbot’s research into magic alignments and their effects on spell casting he might even had admired it. As it was it was… irritating.

Bickering aside though, Verde was fascinating to work with. A true genius, but with such a radically different way of understanding the world that he and Talbot agreed upon almost nothing. Talbot hadn’t felt so challenged in centuries. And it was making him better, making them both better because what they were making. Well, maybe Talbot could have made something similar on his own, given time, he was after all, the best at what he did. But it would have been an imperfect, flawed, shadow of the work they were doing now, and he suspected, that over time, any solution he’d come up with on his own would have cracked and weakened under the pressure of the horrors
it was made to keep at bay.

Anything either of them alone might have built to do this work would have had weaknesses, flaws that could be exploited, and the stars were telling Talbot they couldn’t afford that, not now. The world couldn’t afford it. Something was coming, and the power of the arcobaleno curse to hold the world together had been weakening generation by generation. Something was coming and eccentric though he might be Talbot was still sane enough to be afraid.

He should have seen it sooner. Should have looked up from his books and watched the skies more closely, after all, there were few things in this world that didn’t fall under the influence of the sky. But time passed so quickly when there was so much of it to spend, a decade here, a century there, and he hadn’t been paying attention, until the arcobaleno Fon had dragged him out of his tower, and brought him to his colleague to build impossible things. Then he’d looked, just for reference before the work started in earnest. He’d looked casually, and what he’d seen had turned the blood in his veins to ice.

He’d told the young Vongola decimo, for reasons he couldn’t quite pin down except that he didn’t know who else to tell, and that the young Vongola had the kind of eyes that urged a man to confide in him. He’d told Sawada Tsunayoshi what was coming, and he hadn’t been surprised.

The young Vongola heir was nothing like he’d expected.

Not human. That was the main surprise. Half at most. His mother certainly wasn’t human, and Talbot had always harboured suspicions about Iemitsu. Not human, and so maybe it wasn’t surprising that he already knew what was coming. He had the eyes of one who saw more than most people could.

Nine generations of the family, nine generations bearing the Vongola rings and until now they had been so painfully human. It was only right really. The Trinisette was made to feed off humans, human will and human power. Talbot had been given more opportunities than most to study the Vongola rings, and even, on occasion, the Arcobaleno pacifiers, and all his studies suggested they were specifically designed to be borne by humans. In all his long years, he had never known any part of the Trinisette to be entrusted to those who were not.

And now that had changed. Because young Sawada Tsunayoshi was not human. His guardians weren’t either, and the implications of that were fascinating. Fascinating and terrifying. Now not one of the Vongola tenth generation could be called entirely human, and the Mare rings too, had settled oh so quietly on people who were more than a little other, and now he and Verde were trying to transform the power of the arcobaleno pacifiers entirely. It was as though the trinisette was reacting to the same nightmare he’d seen in the stars, as though it knew human strength alone could no longer be enough and was desperately drawing in any hint of extra power it could find.

Talbot didn’t like to attribute that much agency to those items, but the fact was things that old, and that powerful often had an… awareness of their own, as young Takeshi could probably attest. He didn’t like to think it, he knew how dangerously alien such consciousness’s could be, but he’d be a fool not to consider the possibility. And wizards didn’t live to his age by being fools.

If the Trinisette items were stirring, well, all to the better if they finished their work soon, because every sign Talbot could see was telling him they might just need it.

Chapter End Notes
Coming up on the end game, maybe four or five chapters to go. There will be eldritch horrors, dark magic, darker science, and chaos, not necessarily in that order.
Yet each man does not die

Chapter Summary

Bermuda is a nightmare held together by spite and revenge. But sometimes, hate and bitterness are the easy part.

Chapter Notes

Bermuda and his undead minions are on the move.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Bermuda was a thing made of shattered humanity and spite, barely more human than his enemy. He knew this about himself. He had lived more lifetimes than any human should, and spite walked in his shadow every step of the way. There is always a cost to that kind of thing.

It was a spite born of old betrayal, old grief old anger. It was the kind of hate, of rage, that could destroy empires, bring whole worlds to dust, and it had long since become a part of him. It was there in the burning, freezing pain that ran through muscle and bone day and night as he kept moving, kept breathing, kept living by sheer force of will, when all natural laws said he should be dead. It was there in the dreams of blood, and vengeance that haunted his every waking thought and devoured his dreams when he allowed himself to sleep. It was there in the taste of ashes that had clung to the back of his mouth since the day he was betrayed.

It was the kind of hate that only ever comes from love.

His enemy was moving again. The arcobaleno trials had been called, and Bermuda knew what the current arcobaleno did not, that no-one gets out alive. Magic has its price, magic to hold the world together the highest price of all and his enemy had already determined who paid it. His enemy was moving, and this time Bermuda would too.

They said hate could be something like madness, if it was carried for long enough, held close enough. If it was allowed to become everything. It had that much in common with love. It was true, after all if he were sane rather than mad with hate, he wouldn’t be trying to break the curse. Sane people don’t try to end the world. The thing that Kawahira did, had done to him, it held the world together, Bermuda knew that. He even had a fair idea of how it worked, he’d lived long enough to have picked up a reasonable grounding in magical theory along the way. He knew exactly why Kawahira had done it, couldn’t, himself see a better solution, and he knew what the consequences of breaking the curse would be.

But hate had long since become everything to him, and as long as Kawahira hurt for it, bled for it, he no longer cared about consequences. Not even if those consequences were the end of everything.

Bermuda understood the cost of the curse in a way that perhaps no one else did, understood just how high the price truly was. Had seen generation on generation of arcobaleno ground up and torn apart body and soul, the pieces of them spun out into a million threads to stitch the world together. Old,
young, kind, cruel, wise, foolish, the curse didn’t care, the only thing they had in common was their strength. Some had been brave, when it came to it, some had even sacrificed themselves willingly with a courage even the inhuman Kawahira had been able to respect. Others had been afraid, rightly terrified, had needed to be chained and forced and dragged to their fate by main force. Some had fought back bright and fierce, some had accepted their fate with a dignified stoicism. Most though had been like Bermuda himself, deceived, and betrayed, and unsuspecting of their fate until it was already upon them, never given a choice of yes or no, never given a chance to fight or run. There was one thing though that all of them, every single one, had in common, they had all been strong in their own way, the kind of people that could have changed the world had things been different. Irina who’d been wild, and brilliant ahead of her time and so very heartbreakingly young, who’d tried to run and found that there was nowhere to run to. Arthur who’d been solid as a rock, and driven by the kind of conviction that changed the shape of the world, who’d fought back until Kawahira had told him exactly what his refusal might cost, who’d sacrificed himself willingly in the end for the sake of all that lived. Jaeger who’d been fierce, and brave, and bitter enough after being deceived to his doom to become Vindice and join Bermuda on his quest for vengeance.

The world was poorer for their loss, and the sheer bloody waste of it was enough to make the rage in Bermuda’s soul burn. He’d been a Storm once, and for all that bright passion had turned to cold bitterness, he still knew how to Rage. He would break the curse, whatever the consequences might be. After all, if the life of the world was bought at such a price, was it really worth saving.

It had been countless lifetimes of hating in the dark, gathering his strength, gathering his forces, making his plans, and now, now he was ready to move.

Now he would have to move, because time had run out, one way or another it was time for things to change. Everywhere, the signs were clear to see that things were coming to a head, all the players in this centuries old drama finding themselves inexorably drawn together. Talbot the wizard, the only man ever to reforge a piece of the trinisette, was in Namimori. Kawahira too, for all he hid himself well, and the Cervello, whose true masters even Bermuda had been unable to determine. All the most powerful flames in the world were converging on one small Japanese town, even before the trials were announced, and Bermuda had lived long enough to recognise fate at work when he saw it. He had spent lifetimes watching the patterns of the universe, learning the narrative paths magic followed and he knew, that for better or worse, this was the place and time things would be resolved.

It was time, and for the first time since the curse had failed to kill him all the way, since he’d survived for a given value of survival, Bermuda would come face to face with Kawahira. Would stand face to face with the architect of his ruin and call him to account. Soon, so very soon, Bermuda would stand face to face with the man who’d destroyed him, the man who’d betrayed him, the man who wasn’t really a man at all, for all he tried to pretend, the man who he hated more than human breath could contain.

But if he was to confront Kawahira he’d have to confront himself first, confront the truth, and the truth was that wasn’t all that Kawahira was, and it never had been. After all for betrayal to have any meaning, there has to be trust first.

Kawahira was his enemy, the man who’d betrayed him and destroyed him and cost him everything, but he was also the man he’d trusted, the man he’d believed in, the man who’d always tried so very hard to be human. Before the hate and betrayal there had been a man who Bermuda had considered a friend and comrade, who he’d shared everything with and thought himself the richer for it.

It was easy to name Kawahira his enemy, hate was after all most of what held him together, that part was easy, but it was only half the truth. Easy to name him the monster he was, far harder to say the other half, that Kawahira was also the man he once loved.
So yeah, apparently I now ship Bermuda and Kawahira, I was not expecting this chapter to go that way, but now that I think about it, it makes a certain amount of sense. You don't work up that level of personal vendetta for someone who means nothing to you after all.
Incidentally, Bermuda is now somewhere between a ghost and an actual person, running mainly on sheer force of will fuelled by spite (i.e. flames of night).

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