

## **Big Blast Sonic**

I rested my ear on the metal and listened to the contents inside the passenger wagon, once I confirmed we were on the right place I summoned all of my strength and drove my fist right through it, opening up a path to the inside.

And I made the right call, I lowered my head inside to check what was in, and was immediately greeted by a cute little smile and a wagging tail. "Azreth!" He said standing up on the cage, but quickly tugging the chain. "\*Urh\*." He tried to make it like it was no big deal and continued wagging, and I could feel he was used to such a horrible treatment.

Such a sight immediately made my blood boil, I dove right down, pulling the bars aside and yanking the chain off the ground before breaking the whole thing apart to free his neck. "You alright buddy? Sorry I took so long..."

"I'm fine." Was his immediate response.

That fact he was almost fully naked, shivering, his voice trembling, and with slashes scattered over his body, all told me otherwise. "Dammit..." I growled. "... Now I wish we managed to kill that bitch." I pulled at the cuff in his arms and shattered them apart in sheer anger.

"I-I'm fine." He repeated and smiled. "I'm just glad you guys came for me... I've been worse, don't worry." He shook his head and sighed, patting me in the arm. "I was scared for a moment, she truly was a mean-spirited person, I thought there would be no way out... But now you're here."

I grabbed him beneath the arms and reeled him in for a tight hug, I tried to summon the power to heal but it began to fizzle out immediately... Then I remembered what I just learned.

I let my anger dissipate with a heavy sigh and focused only on helping him, to alleviate the pain he must have been feeling... I let that worry fill my mind, the concern for him, the tenderness I wanted him to feel.

My energy flowed quickly out of me and into him, overgrowing atop his cuts and bruises before dissipating into a stream of blue energy that left behind a sweet flowery scent.

I reeled back and watched his astounded expression. "Azreth... When did you...?"

"I think I just figured it out... Some of it at least." I scratched behind my head. "But we can talk more later, we need to get out of here, Orenji is waiting for us to rescue Hide."

"Oh... I didn't think he would come with you." He tilted his head.

I tilted my head in surprise. "You remember him?"

"Well of course, we were drinking at the bar last night... Did you not remember?" He pondered aloud and quickly went. "Ah... You had too much, didn't you?"

"I suppose at least one of us keeps it level headed last night." I shook my head and sighed, but quickly got back on track. "Climb on my back, I'll take you up."

His fur then ruffled up as he looked down and covered himself. "I-I'm... I'm..."

"C'mon Vernon, now is not the time to be body shy... We gotta go!" I insisted.

"That not it... I still..." He shook his head and reeled back. "My gauntlet! Yes... She took it, it must be around somewhere still."

"You..." I shook my head. "Fine, that is a good enough excuse..." I went up to the door and listened in. "Sounds like the Jiangshi are still there... I don't think Méi being unconscious will stop them." I prepared to pull the lock and went. "C'mon, I'll help ya out... On Three..."

But then he shook his head and stopped me. "I think we might have- IIIHHH!!!" He recoiled in fear as the second furball landed a few inches from him.

"What is taking so long?!" Orenji called out and gazed around, finally fixating his eyes on the almost nude Vernon. "Hajimemashite."

This made the redmane, turn actual red and cower further. "P-P-Please turn around!"

"Vernon! Now is not the time... He saw Grey butt naked a few minutes ago, he doesn't care about your body!" I scolded. "What was the point of bringing you to the sauna?!"

"THAT WAS DIFFERENT!" He growled. "I was ready for it back then, now I'm not!"

But Orenji still respected his wishes, even if he did joke. "I have to say Azreth-kun, I am seeing A LOT MORE of your friends than I anticipated."

"Well at least you're dealing well with it." I shrugged.

But to my surprise, Vernon's reaction was a bit different than expected. "Leave me out of it!" To which both me and Orenji stared rightfully confused at him, slowly his eyes widened. "You two... Don't remember how you...?"

"We what?" I tilted my head. "It's all black in my memory, I don't-" And suddenly I stopped.

"Azreth-kun?" Orenji shook his head and stared at me.

"Nop, nothing... no flashback this time." I shook my head too. "Was hoping I got the hand of that too, but I guess not all can be learned in one day."

"Ahh!! Can you both please take this seriously!" Vernon shouted.

"What? He is already turned... You're the one making it weird buddy!" I crossed my arms and rolled my eyes.

"THERE IS A BOMB ON THE TRAIN DAMMIT!!" Vernon let out and slammed his feet down.

"Nani?!" Orenji turned around in shock.

Which had the expect result, as Vernon collapsed onto the ground and hunched over to hide in shame. "Aaah!!"

"Vernon-kun... What you said is truly serious, we need to get to it." Orenji insisted too.

"FINE, Fine!" He slowly hunched back up and shied away as he explained. "I heard Méi talking about her plan, she had her henchmen set a bomb on the front of the train... It will blow up soon!"

"What?!" I shouted. "You should've started with that!"

"I got sidetracked, ok?! Stop yelling at me!" He grumbled with his fur all ruffled and defensive. "She said it will detonate when it gets to the bridge, that way the train would fall on the water... She wanted us all to fall and die with it."

"Then why did she come up and fight us?" I tilted my head.

"To bide time." Orenji nodded. "Her intent was to stall us up to the last moment, then leave the train."

"Well shit..." I scratched my head. "Then we need to go and stop the bomb, c'mon Vernon... Let's move."

"No!" He insisted. "There are many people here still, I need to get them to safety! It's why I told you to stop..." He then stood up and forced himself not to hide as he explained. "If I get my stuff I can free the people she made hostage and move them as far back as possible, you guys go ahead and try to stop the train before it gets to the bridge!"

"Can't we just uncouple the wagons?" I asked.

Both scolded in unison. "Not without slowing down first." Then stared at each other.

"I see I'm the only uneducated one here..." I shrugged again, but we had to get back on track. "Ok, you sure you can take them all Vernon?"

"Yeah..." He nodded. "Fighting shouldn't be a problem, and If I can get the people to safety before that, I'll try and help you guys out."

"Don't bother." I shook my head and motioned for Orenji to follow. "You try and think of a plan B in case we fail."

He widened his eyes and reeled back in concern. "Azreth... It's going to be a big explosion."

To which I replied. "Don't worry hun... I got this!" And gave him a thumbs up. "Now go show everyone in the train that cute tooshie of yours." I played around and got ready to jump out.

"Wait..." Orenji called out, then stopped next to Vernon, he grabbed something that was tucked away beneath his shawl and handed to Vernon, it looked to be pieces of worn-out paper. "If you place these spell charms in the face of the fallen thralls, their bodies will not reanimate."

Vernon widened his eyes at the paper then counted them. "O-Ok... I'll keep it in mind."

Situation was rather dire now, so in spite of playing around with him, we had to rush.

Me and Orenji went to the front of the train a few wagons away, we reached the coal wagon and before we leapt over, we already saw a familiar face, a pale lion turning around to us and pulling up his gatling once again, already set to fire.

We Jumped down onto the coal and used the wagon to hide from the shots, getting ready for another fight. Our foe did not seem too keen on leaving his spot, so we played our cards... I signaled for Orenji to push while I leapt over to the side.

He jumped up to call attention, and I heard the gun heating up and firing a barrage of bullets point blank. I wasn't about to keep Orenji waiting, the second I managed to get enough movement to reach the engine cart I leapt over with a mighty kick on the side of the lion, I launched the gun off his hands and out the side of the train... Along with one of his arms.

He immediately looked at me and reached forward, he was big enough that his paw could grapple my whole chest, and strong enough to outwrestle me with just one arm, he kept pushing me back trying to shove me outside of the train, and I held on precariously over the edge, using everything I had to keep myself steady... I sure as hell was glad, I was not fighting him alone.

"Heiwana maisō!" Orenji called out, and before I even managed to follow where he was coming from, I watched him lading on the arm of the lion, his blade having finished a perfectly lined cut that severed the undead creatures head from its shoulders, it then erupted in white flame, it's fingers grappled harder for a second then let go of me as the creature got slowly consumed by the flame.

However, something dire awaited for us... The moment he erupted in flames, the air filled with a distinct smell of burning gunpowder. "Get away!" I cried, before grabbing onto the Lion's arm and tossing it over the edge.

The explosion was strong enough to knock me into the wall on the engine room, and Orenji grappled onto the ceiling to support himself, whatever remains of the lion got scattered before they got burned into nothingness.

Though powerful the explosion was brief as the train rushed by and left all that behind us.

I shook my head. "That bitch still kicking even when down on the ground."

"The Táó are indeed very cunning." He nodded along, Orenji leapt down from the ceiling and sheathed his blade before he bowed slightly. "This one I knew, his name was Saburo, Táó enslaved him many decades ago... It is refreshing to finally free his soul." He then turned to me and bowed once again. "I could not have done this without you, thank you Azreth-kun."

"Well we didn't get Táó, so at least this I could help with." I shrugged and turned back around. "Still, we gotta find that damn bomb before we all blow up, so don't thank me just yet."

Orenji nodded. "Hai, there will be time for such demonstrations later."

The engine had little room to move, and there seemed to be nowhere to hide anything... We found the conductors, both knocked out and tossed to the sides, I gave them some relief with my magic, but they didn't look like they would be awake any time soon.

I couldn't see anything that remotely resembled a bomb, so naturally I asked. "Is anything out of place? You're the train expert here, for me this is all levers and gauges."

"No, no..." He shook his head. "... It does not seem to be anywhere on sight."

"You think she hid it with magic or something?" I asked leaning over the sides to check the front of the train... Still nothing.

"Knowing Táo... She probably hid it somewhere nigh on impossible to reach." He tapped on the floor as if looking for something.

"Found it." I hollered out.

"Where?!"

I pulled my head back up from the edge where I had casually stuck it beneath the train once again, and there it was... A fleshy looking creature with sharp bone-like tendrils looking like it was glued to the train's chassi, it stared menacingly at me, but didn't react more than that. "Ugly little bugger down there... You said this was impossibly hard, so I figured that's where she would hide it."

"Hai... I believe I can solve this then." He grabbed onto his sword and pulled it into stance.

I stood up and watched him, knowing fully well what Orenji was capable off, but then something bit me... Well not literally, it was more like a thought, and it bit hard enough to made me go. "NO WAIT!"

Orenji stared in confusion at me, to which I explained immediately. "She knows you..." It was a gut feeling that wouldn't stop. "The lion... He was meant to be the bomb that would set off the little guy below."

He took a moment to grasp what I was saying, but when he understood he raised an eyebrow. "A trap within a trap, seems exactly like her style, she knows my skills are limited to my sword, so it makes sense to punish me for using them."

"Yeah, my gut tells me cutting it is not a good idea." I shook my head and pondered.

"But what are we to do then? The bridge is almost..." He stared outside and the expression he made was easy to understand. "... We have little time."

I laid down on the floor and tried to reach out for it, in spite of the metal moving next to my ears and screeching loudly I pushed through. I reached as far as I could, but then I heard something crack and piece of wood hit me on the side of the face like a bullet. I didn't pierce but it hurt as hell as I pulled up. "DAMMIT!!" I shook my head and rubbed the pain off. "Can't we stop the train?"

"The control levers are destroyed." Orenji added motioning over to a broken-down panel, then down at a larger lever at the bottom that seemed to have been torn from its place. "And the emergency one too."

"Shit!" I let out shaking my head. "If we can't cut it, can't separate the wagons, and we can't stop the train, how do we do this?!"

He shook his head. "I fail to see a way out of this one... But if we do not, the people inside the train will pay the ultimate price." I saw him tightening his fist. "The Táo's are all like this... Such a despicable trap!"

"C'mon we gotta think..." I looked down at the engine and considering our options. "Think... Think... Think!" My head started pounding for a solution and as I squinted every bit of brain juice inside me, something came.

"I got this!!" I cried out and turned back to previous wagon, I placed myself lower on the ground and looked at the wheels. "This might be crazy, but it might work."

"What might?!" Orenji asked.

"I'll make my own brakes!" I focused my mind into that which Vernon taught me, consistency, that exact texture, that exact feeling, every bit of it, how it moved, how it bent, even how it tasted... And then a sudden shift, I focused all the power I had into that move, sinking my vines onto the metal and spreading them everywhere.

The blue vines grew in all directions, I could envision them in my mind covering the metal, then spreading down into the wheels and twisting over it to make it harder to move... And that vision became a feeling, I started to feel as if the vines themselves were part of my body, like I learned from Vernon's influence being part of his.

I felt them spreading, jamming in between every piece of metal and tugging as hard as I could make them. "\*UGGGHHH\* This is... HARD!!!" I kept focusing feeling as if the energy that was flowing was gonna tear me from the inside out. We felt a tug on the train, the whole structure began to slow down and for a moment I thought I did it.

But my power was not enough, the train engine kept going and soon enough I felt the vine's rip and tear as if they were my own arms, and when that happened my focus broke due to the pain, causing the plants to shatter like crystal and the train to start gaining speed again.

"FUUUCK!! \*arf... Arf..\*" I roared out feeling sweat dripping from my body... A good hour-long sparing session with Grey was nothing compared to how much that exhausted me, and I couldn't help but admire Vernon more for how many times he managed to pull off some amazing stunts and still remain standing. "It's no use... I'm not strong enough."

Orenji shook his head. "Then there is only one way." He nodded along, and flexed his wrists "We cannot risk the train getting to the bridge, you move back, go find Vernon... Maybe together you two can keep the people inside safe."

"What?" I turned to him in confusion. "How are you gonna stop this?" I asked... Not realizing immediately what he was suggesting, until it hit me hard and I shouted. "NO WAY!!"

"That thing, the bomb... She created with the intent of countering my abilities." He shook his head and sighed. "But I have one last technique that might work, something I never showed any of the Táo's, If I manage to pull it off... The bomb will not detonate."

"So you're gonna risk your life for it? NO WAY!! That's stupid!" I shook my head. "Maybe if... If I slow it down again, will it work if we separate the wagons?!"

He stopped and pondered. "If it was slow enough, we could prevent the train from derailing... However." He shook his head. "Without the brakes we cannot remove any speed from the train, the wagons would keep up for a long time still, time we do not have."

"DAMN!! SERIOUSLY?!" I shook my head and grit my teeth. "You can't just sacrifice yourself like this!!"

"There is no other way Azreth... You have to understand." He said... But I did not hear his voice, I heard a different kinder voice repeating the same words.

As my mind got focused back on remembering and pushing it's limits... It also brought back a rather painful memory.

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"NO!! You can't do this! Let's get away from here mom!!" I cried, shaking in fear.

She lowered her head to my level. "There is no other way Azreth... You have to understand." She nuzzled me to try and calm me. "He is a dangerous and deranged man, with your father away I am the only one in Az'eira that can stop him... I have to do this son."

"He is trying to kill us mom!" I shook my head with tears in my eyes. "Let's just fly away, if we get off the castle the guards can deal with him until dad gets here!"

She grit her teeth and shook her head once more. "He is too powerful... That sword... With it he will kill them all, all of these poor souls." She sighed and looked outside the window, her eyes filled with sorrow as she tried to explain. "Azreth... Why do you think we exist?"

"What? What does that have to do with it?" I asked in confusion.

"Why do you think we dragons exist?" She lowered her head in thought and the words just gently echoed into my mind. "We are the pillars of this world son, the only ones who can save it, and it keep it alive and well, we are the protectors of all things, small or big."

"We are made strong so that we may protect the weak, it is our duty to fight the battles they cannot, and to give our strength... Our whole selves for it... To make the world a better place." She raised her head quietly, and fixated her gaze on me. "I know this is confusing for you now, you're young, you're scared, it's natural to feel like you don't matter, to feel like nothing you do makes a difference, to run away, and hide from your feelings."

She then lifted up my chin to make me look at her, her eyes filled with a powerful determination I had never seen before. "But it does, we matter, all of us... Dragons, kin, plants, insects, feral... Even monsters." She shook her head. "And that is why I must go... To protect the lives of the people!"

"But mom..." I began to cry even heavier, weighty tears of sorrow.

"Oy chico, don't be so sad..." She shook her head and smiled. "I'm not as strong as your father, but I used to fight alongside him, you know? Mom can take care of herself!"

"You promise? Promise you won't be hurt?!" I asked already shivering.

She cozied up to me and gently edged me aside, I couldn't tell back then, but she was hesitating. "I promise... Now go to the watchtower to south of the city! I'll call when it's safe."

I growled to myself feeling the tears grow and sniffing. "Then I won't go..."

"What! You hav-"

"NO!" I shouted sinking my feet down. "You promised you won't be hurt, so I'll be safe here." I looked up to her. "I'll be right here waiting for you!"

"Mi hijo..." Her eyes filled with tears too, she tried to edge me away, pushing slightly towards the window... But I sat my ass down and stared resolutely at her. "Ay, ay... You are a handful sometimes."

She grumbled and turned her frown away, collecting her strength to feign a smile and say. "Fine... But only if you promise you will stay right here! And don't make a noise! Not a single one!"

"I promise!" I nodded and stood quietly and still.

She walked back to the entrance of our room, pushed the door open, and gave me one last look, smiling confidently. "Don't worry chico... Mama got this!" She said, leaving the room behind and closing it right after her.

The rest of that night was confusing, even the memory I had then began to fade and fail.

I remember I waited, just like she ordered, I waited for what felt like an hour, I kept psyching myself thinking... 'She got this, she is strong.' And moving over the pillows and toys, but I kept feeling a shiver creep up my spine, a doubt, a fear.

It inevitably got the best of me, it inevitably came the moment I opened that door and went outside... I moved through the empty halls, I saw the bodies and blood, feeling nauseated at the sight of death for the very first time.

I pushed through, I had to know... I had to know she was fine... I had to know she kept her promise, I HAD TOO!!

I saw the door half opened, and the loud roar of battle within, the flashes of light and magic getting flung everywhere, I peeked through the opening... I saw the many already dead but I didn't mind that at time, I looked for her.

But then I saw him... Bright red fur that glistened in the moons pale light, his tall and lean features covered in blood splatters and gore, the black colored sword, menacingly glowing with red markings, pulsing and teeming with power, hungry and ravenous for blood.

And finally his eyes met mine, he fixated on me behind the door, the brief second he saw me for a single second, but it was enough to fill my heart with dread... Those bright yellow eyes.

"Another dragon?! That must be...!" He let out pulling his sword aside and leaning down like a predator preparing to pounce.

"AZRETH?!" My mother cried. "NOOO! RUUUN!!!"

"Fla-"

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The memory ended there, like every other time... All I could remember after was a bright light, and powerful ringing in my ears, that memory jolted my brain up, it made me shake and tears began to flow.

Orenji stared at me in awe, not a second had passed this time, but I was in tears. "I... Feel humbled by the fact you would shed tears for me... In spite of what I tried to do."

"No..." I shook my head. "... I won't let you do this!"

"There is no other way-" He tried to insist.

"There is!" I shook my head, my heart feeling warm as the memory, even if sorrowful filled me with that same fire, I now understood what it my mother meant, why she sacrificed herself that day, to stop that mad redmane that invaded the keep. "I'm not about to let you, or anyone, take that fault... I'm a dragon!"

I slammed my chest hard feeling my body burning up as my eyes watered. "We are made strong so that we may protect the weak, we protect the lives of the people around us... It is our job, It is... MY DUTY!!"

Orenji tried to stop me, but I didn't listen. I grabbed onto the top of the engine and leapt up on the ceiling. "I refuse to run away and hide when I haven't given my all! I haven't even tried!!"

"Azreth-kun... I never heard a dragon talk like that." He looked up at me and his eyes widened. "You already tried your magic, it did not work! What do you think you can accomplish still?!" He asked to try and get me to back down.

"Magic?! \*Humpf!\*" I grit my teeth and huffed in excitement. "Magic is just a bonus for me! I'll show you what I can really do... I'll show you what I'm made off!"

I felt my body tighten in anticipation, I was pumped on adrenaline, my mind was focused, my body tensed up and I was ready to rock! "I AM THE STRONGEST DRAGON THIS FUCKING WORLD HAS EVER SEEN!!!"

And then I leapt, using all the strength I had to propel ahead of the train... I turned around immediately as I landed, sunk my hind legs down, and lifted my front ones up to meet my opponent head on.

The impact dragged me back at first, and the whole thing trembled as the metal tried to fight me, I got carried for the first few meters... The engine kept going, the wheels turning and screeching, but as I tightened my muscles and pressed my legs down, I began to feel the force transferring as the engine cart bent under my muscles.

It was an enormous amount of force, so much so that I clenched my teeth down and all of my muscles tightened up to the very maximum. The wooden ties began shattering beneath my hind legs, I hadn't thought that would cause the whole thing to rattle like crazy.

But I stood my ground, pushing back with as much force as I could, for a brief moment a though passed my mind... I wouldn't make it, I would fail again... But as the though came I knew I couldn't listen to it, I knew if I second guessed myself then I would be done for, just like with magic, your mind is the primary tool, and it needs to stay SHARP!

So what did I do to stop it? To drive those thoughts away? I ROARED!  
"RAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHH!!!"

The most surprising bit of all... I felt the wheels slow down, I saw the train rattling, the force still felt the same, but somehow that crazy idea that came over me in the heat of the moment, was working.

Still... "Azreth!!!" Orenji called out from atop the train. "You won't make it! It's too close!"

Given how tense I was, it took a ridiculous amount of force just to turn my head around, but I did it for a second and saw... He was right, the bridge was too close... And in the desperation that came over me I managed to squeeze out enough strength to shout. "CUT THE COUPLER!!"

Orenji looked at me in appalment at what I suggested, but wasted no time, he knew if he didn't it would all be for naught. He leapt back and jumped down drawing his blade and crying out. "Tōboesuru yamakaze!" And with that cry I felt a sudden crack in the pressure.

And it was all I needed, that brief split second of relief was enough for me to pull my body back and drag the entire engine alongside me as I leapt away from the tracks. I felt the enormous weight loom over me, and with all I had I lifted it over, flinging my body back... And the engine along with it.

The moment it passed over my head I let it go, causing the engine to fly a few meters. The engine landed on the ground next to the edge of the cliff where the bridge crossed, before slipping down into the chasm, plummeting down to its end.

And before I even caught my first breath after laying down, we heard the sound of something massive collapsing into a heap of metal... Before a loud. KaAAAAAABOOOMMM!!

"\*Arff... Arff... Aaarff... Arrrrff...\* I'm alive!" I cried out staring blankly at the bright blue sky above. "Orenji?!" I called out... but he was too far, the train had kept on moving and by now the engine-less front, where you could still see the capybara staring back at me, was crossing through the halfway point of the bridge, and probably would still go several meters before it actually stopped.

"Hell... I did all that and ain't no one around to congratulate me... What a waste!" I shook my head, smiling painfully to myself as I felt my body twitching from all the effort.

I then saw a pair of feet pull up to me... Staring down at the hole then back to me. "I will be damned gecko... Zhat was genuinely impressive!"

"Ah c'mon." I rolled my eyes mocked aloud. "Can't you be a bit more in appalled?! I just stopped a fucking train! I deserve gasps and applause!" I said with a smile to hide all of the sores.

Grey stopped, then smiled and shook his head. "Humm... No, zhis is all you get... You did not really stop it in zhe end."

"I TOSSED IT INTO A FUCKING CHASM! That's gotta be worth something!" I protested.

He shrugged and smiled coyly at me. "Shift back down and I will carry you to zhe backseat, we still need to get Vernon out."

"Come on!" I grunted loudly, but he wasn't about to back down. "Fiiiiine." I grunted as I felt that exertion wash over me... On this day, I had succeeded... No matter how you look at it, I had finally done something right.

I just couldn't stop smiling.