

Epilogue: Those Who Face the Earth

“- April 1, 9 ANB .-“

Credit to the Ame border guards, they kicked things up the chain really fast once they realized I really was who I claimed I was. I didn't even have to wait an hour before a certain self-proclaimed God of Rain was descending down from the sky.

Since I still had a few moments before he was low enough to imperiously talk down to me without having to yell, I of course flew up to meet him. Which led to me looking slightly down at the orange-haired corpse puppet because I was one of the tallest men on Earth. “Hello, kinsman, I'm glad to finally meet you,” I briefly glanced past him precisely in the direction where I could feel his true body waiting with Konan standing guard. “Even if not strictly in person.”

The Deva Path stared at me for a lot longer than I thought Nagato would. “I wondered when you would come to treat with me.”

“I've not come to treat *with* you, I've come to heal the mess that Danzo, the other Hanzo, and Madara's eyes made of your body.”

“Excuse me?”

I stuck my hands in my pockets, which coincidentally made my white coat flutter magnificently in the convenient gust of wind. “I do have some opportunities to discuss, but there's no point before I've given proof of reliability, right?”

“Do not play games with me,” Pain demanded. “What did you mean by Madara's eyes?”

“The Uchiha Madara you know wasn't really Madara, he was Uchiha Obito, the Fourth Hokage's student. He's dead now. The real Madara did survive long enough to press him into his service, though, and those eyes you have are his. They were implanted in you because your Uzumaki Yang bloodline trait gave you the greatest chance of awakening the ability to bring people back from the dead.”

“... Rinne Tensei,” Pain understood immediately. “I was meant to resurrect that man.”

“Obviously, that’s not going to work anymore since I destroyed the King of Hell.” The real Nagato’s chakra thrashed violently for a moment, over yonder. “It was the last and worst vestige of the Shinju that the demon Kaguya and her siblings planted on this world in order to devour us all. The other realms were harmed and perverted even more than this one. I will not apologise.”

“For one facing a god, you are incredibly brazen.” Pain tried to punctuate that claim with a sudden press of gravity. It only made my coat flutter, instead of forcing me back to the ground. “But I suppose you have more cause than most for your lack of fear.”

Yeah, that kind of nonsense didn’t work on me anymore. “I have a question I’d like to ask, and it’s not intended as an insult.”

“Speak.”

“Did you ever try to resurrect Yahiko?”

Pain was silent for quite a bit longer than a moment this time. He stared at me through Yahiko’s necrotized eyes. “Yes.”

“I thought so. Do I have your permission to heal your real body?”

“So certain are you, that you can achieve this miracle without even a cursory examination?”

“Yes.”

Pain delayed in answering for long enough that I could have guessed he was discussing the issue with Konan in the background.

“I will agree on one condition,” Pain finally said.

“That being?” I asked even though I’d watched the entire talk between them just now as if I was right there.

“You must reach Amegakure before me.”

“What does that have to do with my credentials as a healer?”

“It does not,” Pain admitted. “However, it has everything to do with your credentials for everything else I wish to verify.”

“No, you’ve already decided to let me help, you’re just playing mind games because you’re annoyed at me ruining your ambitions of world policing, and to see how much I personally care about this even after all that. And you.”

Pain didn’t gape at my audacity, but I was sure it was all down to the degree of emotional separation from remotely puppeting a corpse.

Some clarification remained though. “Does this mean I have permission to enter your country?”

“... You do.”

“Great, let’s go down and tell the good border guards so they don’t signal a country-wide alert or anything.” I didn’t wait for him to agree and flew down. I wasn’t sure he’d actually go along with it, what with the optics of God coming down to earth to treat with mortals, but he did.

“I’m holding a clan gathering next spring,” I told Pain as I was signing my visitor’s visa in front of the gobsmacked border nin. “Talking, barbecue, kids playing in the sun, all that good stuff.”

Pain’s blink lasted longer than the others because he needed to take a moment over in his hollow tree. “Why are you telling me this?”

“Because, little cousin, you’re invited. Obviously.” I slipped the pass into my coat pocket, not caring that our audience was staring at both of us, stunned. “Unless you decide to commit genocide or try to hold the world hostage for some impossible ideal of peace, or something silly like that. On that note, I have to invite Roushi too, so I’ll stop by his place first.” I smirked. “See you in Amegakure.”

Teleporting to Roushi’s hermitage was the matter of half a moment, I’d long since looked ahead to see where I could come out of my dimensional slide. “Kinsman!”

Roushi fell off his meditation post right on his head. “Sonnuva bitch!”

“You’re doing well! I’m glad.”

“Ack,” the middle-aged man rubbed at his head as he glared at me. “What the fuck? Where did you come from? Who the hell are you?”

Not the most serene sort of ascetic monk then. “Hattori Hanzo, Head of the Clan.”

Roushi's impending diatribe died in his throat. The entire world knew who I was these days, it was kind of annoying.

Oh well. "Anyway, as I just told your head of state, I'll be holding a clan gathering in about a year." I transmuted a fancy invitation out of the air and dropped it in his hands as he climbed to his feet. I then gave his hand a firm handshake, during which I initiated ninshu with the beast sealed in him. *Son Goku, I'm almost done with the solution for you and your siblings, wait just a little bit longer.* "It was nice meeting you. Oh, and since I'm here." I used some of what Minato had taught me via ninshu in the past few months to make a modification to his seal.

Roushi staggered away from me with a curse, trying and failing to initiate tailed beast mode. Not because he couldn't, it was very easy now, but Son Goku was too emotional to cooperate. Unless I was mistaken, the Four-Tailed Gant Ape was gearing up to give Roushi a major tongue-lashing. Which he could still prevent from occurring, I wasn't going around spreading Gaara-type trauma. But if he wanted the chakra, he'd have to convince the beast from now on.

"I'll be going now, your fearless leader has decided that a race somehow matters to my reliability as a healer for some reason. I hope you can attend."

The next moment, I was in the sky above Amegakure.

Since Pain wasn't currently here, because he'd taken all his paths with him to the border in case he had to fight little old me – I'd known where they were all along – it wasn't raining. It wouldn't be a problem even if it were, I'd be able to redirect the droplets so he didn't detect me through them, even incidentally by moving the air around them, but it seemed there was no need.

I very openly descended from the air down to the city, and upon showing my visitor's pass to the very spooked shinobi who surrounded me, I asked to be given the scenic route around town.

The fact they complied told me I either had reputation here so fearsome that it rivalled Pain's literally godlike one – unlikely – or there was some standing policy about how to deal with me if I did show up out of the blue one day. The latter I confirmed by means of Trito invisibly eavesdropping or overlapping the paperwork of the security stations we passed by on the walk.

Soon, Pain caught up with us and dismissed the ninja to lead me into his palace of copper and iron.

“I attempted what you asked many a time,” Pain told me, and I knew he was talking about the corpse he was speaking through this very moment. “It did not work, even with the Naraka path. There was nothing to revive.”

“That’s because Yahiko’s not in Hell.” I ignored the way Nagato’s chakra coiled with tension. “Or most other places. He’s in Heaven, despite that the chakra system abuses the Yin so much during life that most ninja can’t even remain themselves after death. Most of you lot break down until there’s barely enough to reincarnate as an animal. In that regard, Yahiko was lucky to die so young.”

To my surprise, Pain didn’t say anything to that, though I could feel his real body in turmoil some distance away, deeper in this strange palace that gave the impression it was constructed more than half out of pipes. The Deva Path walked ahead of me, so I couldn’t see his face, but we were headed in that direction.

“Before you ask, yes, I talked to Yahiko while I was up there.” I could feel the question just barely withheld. “Quite understandably, no one wants to come down from Heaven. But he’s willing to make an exception at least a few hours, for you and Konan. Since you have his body so well preserved, I can use the sympathetic principle to find him and let him use it for a while. You can decide what to do from there as a group.”

“Heaven.” Contrary to most things I’d expected, Nagato’s chuckle actually came through even this dead puppet. “Of course. Where else could he be? Of course the King of Hell could not return him, Yahiko never passed through his mouth at all, did he?”

We were both silent up until the Deva path opened the door to Nagato’s inner sanctum, which was more of a sick room than a parlor. Konan was camouflaged in my supposed blind spot, so I gave her a nod in passing on the way in.

“Is Yahiko also Uzumaki?” was the first thing the real Nagato asked me upon finally being in the same room. “I read your book on genealogies.”

“Let me see.” I took one of the corpse’s hairs and rubbed it between my fingertips while I analysed the DNA. “No, he’s part of the clan they experimented on and accidentally turned into pseudo-sages that either turn to stone or go berserk after turning into misshapen monsters. I’ve fixed their

problems too, though Yahiko never had anything to worry about. He wasn't part of the experiments per se, he was son to a couple in the control group."

Nagato was silent for a while. "Even our clan stopped at nothing in pursuit of power, did they?"

I scoffed. "Don't be ridiculous. They stopped at plenty, it's not like they kidnapped people to play god with. It was a retainer clan, and the Uzumaki did not renege on their side of the deal. They promised independence, land, and startup money, and they gave all of it. Nobody expected the monster transformations, and why should they? It was just the Shinju ruining everything for everyone again. The rest of the blame falls with the other nations for massacring Hidden Whirlpool before they could come up with a treatment. Fortunately, that's no longer a problem either."

"You make many grand claims," Nagato remarked. "Can you prove them?"

"Do I have permission to heal you?"

Nagato looked at me, then past me to Konan who was still poised to strike me down, even though we all knew she'd fail. Whatever passed between them, though, was good. He looked back at me and shrugged as if to indicate the contraption he was trapped in. "If you need me to lie down, we will have to relocate."

"No, this is fine. Wood Release: Artificial Womb Technique."

In the end, Konan still thought I was attacking and tried to smother me under twenty layers of crepe paper.

It didn't work, but it was still kind of funny.

“-. Konoha, same time... .-“

"This is not funny."

"It is not meant to be."

The longer I lived, the more I understood why roosters started every day screaming. "Sarutobi," the me over in Konoha told the sprightly little man who was now the third most powerful man

alive. And forty years younger. “My hiring poster was for the position of secretary, not spy. I already have Shisui for that.”

“Oy!” The bodyguard in question complained from where he was substituting for the post I was *supposed* to be interviewing for. “I *can* hold loyalties that are higher than the one to Konoha you know.”

“So can I,” the Third Hokage told me.

“Coming from one of only two people in the world who might credibly try to subdue or kill me, that’s not very convincing.” They couldn’t, I was growing and training my powers more and more every day, and I was in three places at once now, not just two.

But it was the principle of the thing.

“Is it so impossible to believe?” The former hokage asked with a humble tilt of his head. “After all that has happened, is it so impossible that I would want to put Konoha behind me?”

“You can do that just fine without becoming my problem,” I said flatly. “Go retire to the country or something, don’t pretend to need anyone else for that.”

“I only have this new lease on life because of you,” Sarutobi replied, which was true. “Should I not be allowed to spend it in payment for that miracle?”

“And I should *also* want that, because...?”

“I am a master calligrapher, know several types of shorthand, am fluent in the dialects of all the notable nations as well as sign language, and I consider paperwork a way to meditate stress away, which will enable me to work even the longest and toughest hours without issue. Furthermore, my combat ability has only grown since your healing, and I am willing to dedicate all of it to the defence and preservation of any goals you set. Indeed, I do not believe there are worthier ones anywhere on Earth now.”

Flattery was the bane of all organised resistance, I swear.

“I also have abundant connections all over the world, both coercive and diplomatic, more so than even Minato himself. Conversely, I am much more respected than feared, which will only serve to open more doors for you. If you accept my application, I will leverage all these things to your

greatest benefit within whatever parameters you set. In fact, though it may harm my case here, I will place all my contact at your disposal in any event.”

Annoyingly, this was by far the best pitch I’d heard these entire two months while I was looking for a personal assistant. In two different countries.

“I also possess the Shadow Clone technique,” Hiruzen reminded me. “With the mental acuity and massive chakra capacity I now have thanks to you, I can easily use about a dozen of them constantly. You are unlikely to find another applicant capable of the same.”

“If it was just clones, I could do that myself.”

To his even more annoying credit, Hiruzen only nodded respectfully instead of asking me why I was looking for an assistant at all, if I could do that. Which would’ve been fair, but only for an underling already in my service for long enough that both of us were willing to let it slide.

Coming from the former absolute ruler of the place I’d lived all my life in, it would’ve set a much different tone. “Hiruzen, let me be very clear about this – I chafed enough under your rule when I was a normal man. If you’re only here to try and put new strings on me, you can fuck right off.”

“I am not.” Hiruzen folded his hands over one another in his lap. “Is it truly so impossible to fathom? That I’m here in good faith?”

“Yes.”

“I see it is not easy to convince you. What will it take, then? Give me any test. I will pass it and thenceforth loyally serve as your kashin.”

Apparently, my terms and conditions of employment were so much better than the hellscape of the wage slave workplace I was actively avoiding, that people here couldn't fathom I was looking for anything less than life-long, sworn-in-blood retainers.

“Kashin,” I tasted the word. That went far beyond what the job demanded. “Are you sure you want to overcommit this much?”

“Is it overcommitting? Or is it the minimum you will accept from the likes of me?”

“Shinobi with their first loyalty to the Village and Hokage, you mean? And the Daimyo too.” I rested my cheek on my fist. “It’s true. I do not recognize any authority above my own anymore. Knowing that, can you truly serve me and me alone, Hiruzen Sarutobi?”

I held the eyes of the former Hokage, daring him to make an issue of what my words implied about the little Uchiha putting double duty over there.

“... Yes,” Hiruzen finally said, and I knew it was the truth. “I can.”

I... still didn’t believe him.

“Hanzo... No.” Hiruzen abruptly straightened where he knelt, then bowed his head like... a real and genuine inferior. “Most Honorable Lord. Every time in the past, this unworthy one never stopped subjecting you to unseemly mind games and power plays. Always I abused my advantage against you, even as I failed to do the same with those I truly should have. You suffered at my hands, and much more at the hands of those empowered by my indulgence. But when the tables were reversed you granted me mercy, and salvation from weakness, agony and madness. I know I do not deserve to impose on you after all this. I am a poor excuse of a man. But here I am nonetheless. Please, allow me to repay you for all that you have done.”

Don’t weep for the stupid, you’ll be crying all day.

No, that was too unkind.

And...

As someone claiming before all the high and mighty that I planned to completely defang the Cycle of Hatred, it would be hypocritical if I couldn’t grant this little forgiveness.

“The Forbidden Scroll.”

“Pardon?”

“The Forbidden Scroll of Sealing. The most confidential Hokage records. The Root records. Your own clan’s most sensitive secrets too, while we’re at it, and of course your personal ones. Make it a handwritten confession. The arms and armors of all the past hokages too, why not. Bring them to me. Without anyone knowing. Even Minato.” I smiled grimly as I stood up. “I probably still won’t believe you, but I’ll be out of arguments at that point. You have until tomorrow at noon.”

I wish I could say it was an impossible task, but today was also the day when Minato and Naruto were scheduled to finally get those seals taken out. This way they, at least, they won't be around to make Hiruzen's trial impossible. No way was he slipping such ridiculous theft past Minato, even *with* the Tree of Life on his side. Curse my soft heart!

Hopefully I was right that he wouldn't go that far, especially to give me every possible leverage over his own clan and himself. Then I could put this weird episode in my life behind me.

I should've just hired Kaiza, I thought mournfully as I teleported to the Hokage tower. *But he persuaded me my business would take off even faster if he remained an independent contractor.*

Which it had. He'd been right. With him getting the population on my side, and Gato fed to the sharks before he could cause any real trouble, Wave Country was going to be my very own neutral economic superpower in no time. Almost every other household there had their own gun already, and Tazuna was even plotting my first train rail.

There was the issue of reincarnation as well. Many of the Uzumaki had reincarnated in Wave and other places along the coasts, according to the people in Heaven who'd been there for some of them. It would help a lot if the country liked me, should I ever go about collecting those people in the future. If only so I could restore one of the more respected figures to pass leadership to, and finally stop feeling like a walking line theft.

It still rankled not to have such competent help all to myself though. Worse, because I'd chosen the noble approach instead of just taking over the country and getting them to love me afterwards – which I easily could have – I now had to give Hiruzen an equally fair shake just to stay consistent.

And here I thought the worst was already behind me, after I had blindsided the Fire Daimyo with my independent powerbase in a different country as a *fait accompli*.

This can't be what people mean about having all your dreams come true, surely?

“-. A few hours later... .-“

Nagato was healed, Nagato was emotional, Konan was twice as emotional, and the one to blame for all that was Yahiko who was now properly undead. Also, he'd needed all of ten minutes to persuade the other two to follow me to Hell.

"What is this place?" Konan asked when we had passed through my portal, the first words she'd ever spoken to me. "Is this truly Naraka?"

"It was a barren place made of many block-like posts with seemingly bottomless pits between them, like basalt pillars but square." I waved at the vibrant blue and red vegetation all around us, massive megaf flora growing fast enough to see with the naked eye. All of it shone and glittered with its own light. I pointed beyond it then. "See over there? It was all like that before. I'm livening the place up a bit."

"And then some," Yahiko was looking all over the place. "It's nothing like I imagined, even with your descriptions. Why do they glow? Just for light?"

"Energy bleed-off." I plucked one of the leaves of the palette-swapped ash-tree lookalike. It turned to actual ash once broken from the stem. "There's no natural light here, so I had to come up with other ways to generate energy. These are basically a self-replicating invasive species whose only purpose is to make fertile soil out of all this stone and the like. Don't let the huge size above ground fool you, the roots go way deeper. Still, it takes a lot of – let's call it transmutation. It's very energy-intensive as you might imagine. Neither the power generation nor the transmutation is 100% efficient, as indeed nothing is. Light was the safest way to cast the extra off, alongside heat."

Heat was especially good because Hell was damn cold. It wasn't just photosynthesis that needed sunlight.

"How energy intensive?" Nagato asked intently, because he'd never stopped looking for ways to gauge the level of danger I posed.

"Atomic."

Yes.

I had, indeed, made nuclear trees.

“That is not a term I’ve heard before,” Nagato admitted. “One of the many things you haven’t published?”

“And probably won’t,” Yahiko wryly answered in my place. “For a long time.”

Not as long as any of them think.

“Why go through all this trouble?” Konan wondered. “If this place is for the damned...” She stopped and looked between Nagato and me. Her next words were a soft murmur, and she couldn’t look Nagato in the eye. “Though I suppose mercy for the damned is not such a bad thing.”

“Because now that the Shinju’s gone, the damned and their cast-offs won’t be devoured by that wretched tree anymore, which means that sooner or later this place will be populated by demons. Best to pretty this place up a bit before then, and make it capable of sustaining its denizens, very important. We wouldn’t want whatever hordes collect here to invade the living world like a ravenous plague of locusts in a few thousand years, or something silly like that.”

“You...” Nagato was... lost for words?

Why?

“What my friend *means* to not let you in on,” Yahiko said blithely. “Is that he didn’t realize your schemes are so much beyond his own in scope, and the fact your vision extends thousands of years into the future is every bit as godly as he tried to paint himself.”

“Oh, I see. Well, there’s the rub.” I looked at Nagato. “Are you willing to accept that peers exist?”

To my lack of surprise, I didn’t get an immediate answer, and Konan looked at me like I’d just kicked her cat.

“You speak of peers,” Nagato finally spoke up, pinning me with his Rinnegan and all the force of will and chakra of him in the prime of his health. “But what about superiors?”

“There’ll definitely be many of those soon enough.” I deliberately misinterpreted the question.. “The solution to maximising world peace and stability isn’t a monopoly on violence, it’s empowering as many people as possible to do sufficient violence on their own behalf. Decentralization of force, self-sufficiency, the right and ability to kill thieves and brigands without needing to pay ninja to do it for you. Still, giving every peasant power like mine all at once would

be foolhardy, so I'm going to start with the monasteries. I'll earn their trust by letting them see into the afterlife, give them all the proof they'll ever need to know they're right about most things. After that--

"That was not what I asked and you know it."

With a roll of the eyes, I manifested the Rinne-Sharingan in both of mine and glared right into his.

He blinked first.

I shook my head and walked ahead of the three of them. Dominance displays, ugh. I didn't question their usefulness, exactly, but I *did* mind when the other party understood only the least impressive things I could pull out.

"Don't mind him, Hanzo-san, this is amazing!" To my continued lack of surprise, the only undead in the group proved the most amiable. And in possession of all the common sense the Akatsuki had between all three of them. Or however many they were right now. Leaving the other two to walk behind us, Yahiko sidled up to me again. "How did you do it?"

Trying to butter me up, was he?

But Yahiko came by it honestly, so why not? "That's the beauty of DNA," I waved grandly at my slice of hell. "It's nature's own data storage system. Cheap, very compact, can even do parallel computing, and it's just about the most resilient organic substance known to nature. If you dropped dead right now and left your skeleton here for the next hundred thousand years, people would still be able to read your DNA, given the tools. And of course, we can't forget its storage capacity, a single gram can store a zettabyte! That's a billion terabytes, where a single terabyte is a thousand billion times the capacity you need to encode one letter. For comparison, a human brain can range from ten terabytes to ten petabytes. Well, if you don't count holonomic wave-forms and quantum tubule storage."

And I'd already lost my audience again. It was almost enough to make me wish Tsunade was here. She not only understood this stuff, she'd gone and outright figured out DNA mapping while I was still in a coma. Finally.

Oh well.

“I did some adjustments though,” I admitted. “By going from binary to hexadecimal, I was able to synthesize a new DNA base. This further increased the amount of information stored in each individual cell of these things. When the roots loosen and fertilise the ground enough, a final generation of flora will be emerge whose only purpose will be to produce seeds for every plant I could get a sample of, and a bunch more than I could come up with. By then I should have lakes and rivers up and running, if not a sea or three. It might take a few decades, but it’ll be fun to watch the ecosystem settle.”

“Just so long as you don’t make Hell better than the other five realms,” Yahiko mused. “That would be unfortunate for the rest of us.”

“Us who?”

The Bridge-to-Peace-In-Denial nodded brightly. “I’m sure I can convince Nagato to offer equivalent payment if you bring me properly back to life. Say the Two-Tailed girl?”

The ‘God’ just kept walking behind us as if he wasn’t being usurped right before his own eyes.

Good, that was the only reason I was doing this. “My only hangup is that I don’t want to go around ripping people out of Heaven against their will,” nor was it as easy as I made it sound, if they were unwilling. “If you want to come back, I’m willing to do it just because of the influence you’ll be on certain people with god complexes.”

“You may be willing to do it without price paid, but I’m not.”

Behind us, Nagato shook his head and smiled wryly. For all the offense he may or may not take at my bluntness, he seemed practically incapable of holding anything against Yahiko at all.

“You should get a free shot at Roushi too, I think. He should know what his options are,” Yahiko added. “Yugito Nii and him for Nagato and Me. Not quite a fair trade, but at least its two for two that way.”

Two for four, more like. Unless he’d already intuited some of what I was planning on the bijuu front. Maybe someone up in Heaven had tattled on me?

Kenzo, Yui, was that you two?

I felt embarrassment and more embarrassment come from the other side.

We'll talk about this later.

Fortunately or unfortunately, we finally arrived at our destination soon after. Or, rather, within sight of it.

Minato. And Naruto. Waiting for me to arrive so they could finally do their thing in front of our oh so important audience. The me from Konoha was with them, since I was the only one who could travel between realms even now. Still, I teleported that me away the moment I saw me, because I had other pans on the fire too.

“You asked about superiors, Nagato,” I said, signalling at the distant two to go ahead. “So let *me* ask: what about yours?”

Right before our eyes, Namikaze Minato and Naruto bumped fists and undid both their seals at once.

Since my return, Minato and I had experimented much with ninshu. Specifically, we used ninshu to let him speedrun centuries of fuuinjutsu research by making full use of my brainpower. As a side benefit, I got to learn all of it too. I didn't have Minato's talent or passion for the art, but thanks to perfect memory I could more than get by. My participation wasn't necessary for this, though.

The many additions and modifications that Minato had added to both their seals coursed over their skins, up their arms all the way to their fists, where they joined together into a conduit. A conduit that linked both seal dimensions together. And the inside of that sub-dimensional space with the one outside.

Like twin eruptions of molten glass, the two halves of the Nine-tailed Demon Fox burst out of the man and his son. Like spiralling shimmering rivers, they came together like the tajitu in the air above them. From there, it took no time at all for Kurama to take shape, full and whole.

I watched the tailed beast as he breathed the first breath of his new life. I was ready to jump in if he decided to attack while they were weak.

He didn't.

Instead, Kurama looked down at them, then over at me, before turning away and leaving.

Damn. I was hoping to negotiate pseudo-summoning seals so those two still got to call on the chakra, at least. Guess I'll leave that for later.

I left a wooden clone with the Akatsuki trio and teleported to where Minato and Naruto were going through rather nasty weakness and pain throes. Artificial womb technique times two, infuse bodies with newborn anami souls, heal, remove chakra systems, create Trees of Life, implant, check results, fix redundancies, effect final refinements, change Naruto's cell souls to Hashirama structures because no way was I giving him ultimate power before he was eighteen and married, and we're done.

Even handling both of them at once, they weren't anywhere near the trouble that Hiruzen gave me.

While I gave the father and the son another few minutes in the trees, I returned to the trio and stopped before the orange-haired undead corpse that was the sanest man in hell.

Other than me of course. "Nagato and you for those two, right? I accept your offer. Also, while the human realm has the better atmosphere, there's a certain thematic pathos to going to and back from Hell as your own self. So." Trito flowed out of me and around me, rising and weaving into the Thousand-Armed Enlightened Buddha Statue of the Spirit Sage. "Would you like to do it here or out there?"

"Huh," Yahiko huffed, nonplussed. "Before I answer I have one question."

"What?"

"Is there anything that can kill you now?"

"A simp at sufficient velocity." Enough momentum could destroy anything. Well, except maybe an object in a completely locked energy state, but that was my business. "An uneducated swine at sufficient velocity too, but he'll never be good enough."

Yahiko covered his mouth to muffle his snickering. "I don't know what else I expected."

"In the interest of not violating every last principle of informed consent, I only healed Nagato but I'm going to do more with you. Rinnegan or not, I trust your judgment more than his, so you'll have live with being the strongest in your trio from now on. If any of you have a problem with that, now is the time to say it."

I waited.

No one spoke.

Thumbing my cufflink, I unsealed the biomass I would need for the upcoming procedure. Both the chunk of super frog meat, and the other thing.

“... Hanzo-san, is that a live cow?”

“No, it’s a freshly euthanised one.”

“... *Why?*”

“The gut flora mostly. Transmutation is good practice, but not when it’s a matter of life and death.”

“You just had to make it all weird, didn’t you? Whatever, let’s do it. Right here, right now. I’ve been waiting to hug these two knuckleheads for way too long.”

“-. One day later... -“

Back in Konoha, it was now two years since Sarutobi Hiruzen had first revealed himself to be a pathological busybody, and my vengeance had since manifested as dreams where he featured as my browbeaten, woebegone secretary.

Now, all those dreams were about to come true.

Joy.

I sighed. “Your first job is to take all this stuff back.”

Hiruzen sagged where he stood at attention. In gratitude and relief and complete vindication. He never thought I’d actually go through this stuff either, or at least he’d fervently hoped...

But he’d still done it. And would be have followed through on his oath even if I had.

He collected the items, all of them were the originals too, and left to return them.

He left his own signed confessions behind though. It was a sizable roll of scrolls.

I didn't touch them.

When he came back, he gave them a complicated look, but still didn't take them back.

I sighed, picked up the roll and sealed it in my left cufflink with the rest of the sentimental clutter.

After that, for a while I just sat behind my desk and stared at the man, wondering what to do with him.

...

Well, he asked for it.

“Your second job is to be the one and only one to reintroduce Tsunade to Dan and Nawaki, and Minato and Naruto to Kushina. They're in the basement.”

“Excuse me?”

“Unfortunately, all the Uchiha have already reincarnated. Here's the paper with our headquarters' address, meet me there when you're done.”

“Masanari, wait – Hanzo, HANZO!”

“-. A few moments later... -“

After a long flight up and away, Yemo had finally made it to the moon. Which meant I was finally able to teleport over too. I could've done it without help, or at the very least without anyone having to make the physical journey. It would've taken some mental and spiritual gymnastics to match astronomical calculations with dimensional sliding, but I could've done it. Still, he'd volunteered.

Now that I was here, I could've done and said many things, from pithy quotes of a different Earth's moon landing, to jokes at my dragon's expense for getting distracted playing hoops and loops in the void for days.

I did none of that, because of what I felt under the surface. Or, rather, what I didn't.

A relative while of magical earth displacement later, I stood before the Gedo Mazo and completely failed to stop myself from laughing like mad.

There were no people!

I'd drilled all the way to the Moon's centre and I hadn't found it hollow at all. The Last...

It was not canon! It was not fucking canon!

How wonderful!

Overflowing with happiness and relief, and a glee like I'd never felt at any time in *either* life, I burned the last remains of Kaguya to ash, and disrupted the atomic bonds of what was left until only helium and hydrogen atoms were left. I made sure to scatter those out in the emptiness of space as well, as far away as I could teleport them.

Then I changed the others me's down on Earth into actual clones for the next while, and let myself completely loose for the first time since returning from death.

Trito spread out of me, further and further as my chakra poured out of me, then further still as I extended new growth from the Tree of Life, until my awareness overlapped the inner core of the Moon in all directions for a hundred kilometres.

Then I transmuted the whole thing into the moonbase I'd spent far, far too long pretending was just a mental exercise ever since the notion of a hollow moon became an actual plausibility.

I could've kept track of the time it took, but I didn't.

When I was finished, I sat down in my all-new throne with a satisfied sigh. It was the first time since I came back that I felt tired.

Phew.

I looked around at the expansive hall I was in, and through the walls outside at the biome that I'd brought into being. Solid construction, architecture in line with all the best principles of sacred geometry, verdant vegetation everywhere I looked, left, right, up, down, even the rivers flowed without a problem both above and below. I'll go over the gravity arrays more thoroughly later, but for now it seemed everything was to specifications. Even the fake sun at the centre emitted all the right light wavelengths and frequencies.

I retuned my attention to my new throne room. There was a spirit in front of me. My first ever petitioner.

I looked down at him sternly. “Make it good.”

“Papa,” the ghost of my dead son sniffed soulfully, clung tightly to my sleeve. “I wanna live!”

“You don’t say,” I said sceptically. “Whatever happened to ‘no one wants to come back from heaven’?”

“Dad,” Kenzo said seriously. “You have a *moonbase*.”

“Fair enough.” Transmute new body, install Tree of Life, bind spirit, infuse body with Hashirama cells and we’re done. “There you go.”

“Thanks, Dad, you’re the best! I’ll just – hey wait, no! What about the little plasma thingies?”

“Not until you’re older.”

“Awww...”

Yeah, no. Forget Naruto, no way was I giving *any* children ultimate power before they were at least sixteen, especially without any health condition to speak of. Even the ones I’d adopted down on the planet didn’t get to keep the Anami spirits for long, I’d long since changed what I gave them to Hashirama-type structures too.

“But Daaad-”

“None of that now,” my wife’s ghost scolded him from the throne next to mine. “Since when did I have such an ungrateful son?”

“Sorry mom.”

“How about you, dear wife?” I reached out to twine my fingers with hers. They were intangible, but not to me. “Do you want to pick up where we left off?”

“Of course, husband. After all, it’s not coming *down* from Heaven anymore, is it?”

“Not like there’s anyone making up rules.”

Apparently, I am the greatest dad and husband ever.

*“Well keep me out of it!” My daughter Yui sniffed imperiously from the other side. “I’m going to stay and rule right where I am. You know, like a **real** goddess.”*

“Alright honey,” I said sadly. “Stay and rule your very own Neverland. I hope you can at least visit from time to time.”

*“Naturally you will – wait, what do you mean? Why do **I** have to visit?”*

“Because we won’t,” I said flatly. “Obviously. We have too much to live for now. I understand if you don’t feel the same way-”

“Hey wait, no! We can talk about this.”

Kids weren’t *all* the same, but they were close.

I let my daughter talk herself in circles while I stared out through the moon’s many layers, and then further down at the blue planet. Reaching out through the many dimensions, I reconnected with the others parts of myself far down below, where I was being accosted by friends, enemies, clients, employees, nobles, peasants, and a score of children with a loudmouth on top who was blubbering in his mother’s bosom almost as much as he was trailing snot over my suit.

I brought my wife’s all-new hand to my lips so I could hide my smirk as I absentmindedly resurrected my fake-sullen daughter.

Compromise is for scrubs.