Remnants of Causality

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Remnants of Causality

by Johnnieboy11

Summary

The destruction of the Superordinate and the First Hive marked the beginning of Humanity's counterattack, all thanks to the sacrifices of a group of heroes whose names may never be known. With that victory, though bitter, came Shirogane Takeru's chance to return home. It seemed, however, that Fate still had one last mission for him and his friends.

Chapter 1: Prologue:Landfall

Unknown Location, 2002

An uneasy shift in reality felt like a thousand years passed in a half-second. His vision blurred as the image of his teacher, guide and probably closest ally in this world *and* that of what he could only call his adoptive little sister began to distort and vanish. A white void flared in front of him as he wore a soft smile on his face.

He had finished it. His mission here, to defeat the BETA, the Beings of ExtraTerrestrial origin which are Adversary to the Human Race, an amalgamation of malformed alien monstrosities that shared little but their desire to kill mankind, had technically been a resounding success. With the destruction of the Superordinate, the command presence of the BETA on Earth, and all the intel they'd received from 'talking' to it…

Sure, humanity still had a great big war ahead of them, but without the Kashgar Hive? They would have an easier fight on their hands. At least, that's what he hoped. That the sacrifices he and all of his friends had made wouldn't be squandered. Not anymore. Not by anyone. He trusted Professor Kouzuki and Yashiro to help usher in this victory, though.

… The weight and skintight feel of a familiar suit, however, awoke the young man from his little moment of reflection. He gasped for air, staggering as he felt the familiar controls wrapped around his hands. The whirr of machines filled his ears, alongside the chirps of the central computer system of a familiar, *powerful* warmachine.

When his dark-brown eyes shot wide open, he felt his breath hitch in his throat. The Heads-Up Display that was being projected right into his eyes glowed a dull cyan. A radar system pinged calmly on the top left of his vision, while the ammo count for his Type-87 Assault Cannon, a mix of a 36mm autocannon and a 120mm standard cannon with a magazine poking out of the top for the second, displayed on the bottom right.

"No," He whispered, staring at the various data packs, at the weapons in his machine's hands, at the height he was at. He mumbled, "No…!" before examining the rest of his loadout. His Blades and knives, his supplemental armor shield, his jump packs and the unit's colors. He was *back in his Shiranui*! "NO! GOD *FUCKING DAMMIT!*" He screamed out, slamming his fists into the consoles.

"IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE ***OVER***!" He cried out, staring at the machines and feeling the machine shift with him. He looked at himself, at his Fortified Suit, the very item keeping him connected to his Tactical Surface Fighter, then moved his hand toward the emergency release before pausing. He grit his teeth, clenching his fist and mumbling, "God *dammit*, Sensei, what the fuck is this…!? I thought I was done!? Isn't this the reason Sumika died…?" before he choked up.

… Memories of all of his friends' faces flashed in front of his eyes. Sergeant Jinguuji… Marimo. Class Rep and Ayamine. Mikoto, Tama, *Meiya*… ***Sumika***. Their deaths, their

sacrifices so that humanity might win in the face of the BETA. The destruction of the Superordinate wouldn't have been possible without them…

Perhaps the world did decide he wasn't done. They still had a hell of a fight to deal with the BETA ahead of them. Perhaps Sumika had heard him and decided to let him be there for the others before he could go home. To help Yashiro and Prof Kouzuki. After everything they'd sacrificed for humanity, it'd be the least he could do.

He breathed in, stilling his thundering heart, then clenched and unclenched his teeth, his fists and muscles, then he opened his eyes, looking around at the diagnostics for his Shiranui. Everything was in the green, armor included. His suit was showing his vital signs as slightly erratic, but good. He checked his data, activated his com beacon and called out, "This is Storm Vanguard One, transmitting in the blind to any allied Element in this AO. Do you copy?"

He listened. Static played through the speakers as he shifted the weight of his TSF around. He went through a quick checklist to ensure it was operating at capacity, including slight thrust adjustment tests and weapons cycling. He thumbed the com again and called out, "Repeat, Storm Vanguard One to A-01, Yokohama or any other allied unit in the AO. I don't care if you're Japanese, American or goddamned Soviet, does anyone copy?"

Yet again, static replied. He sighed, flicked his microphone off, then started looking around through the use of the Shiranui's optical sensors. He mumbled to himself, "Take in your surroundings, Takeru. Remember your training," as he saw the vast peaks of distant mountains ahead. He stood barely above the canopy of a forest of bright emerald-green trees and grass.

He crouched the mech down slightly to hide it behind the forest, then saw several heat sigs on his display. He selected the cameras and zoomed in on them, only to pause, eyes widening as he saw a herd of *deer* moving about, prancing deep within the forest itself. He furrowed his brows, then smiled, mumbling, "Did I land in the US or something? Or am I actually home?" before laughing, "Man, never thought I'd see the day I'd be excited for *deer*…"

The young man then remembered to make a check. He looked over the equipment he had in his cockpit, which included a bullpup carbine and his service pistol, both of which were safely stowed away and both of which were loaded. His medical kit was also full, as well as several packs of survival meals.

"Fuel check… Full, damn," He mumbled, "And ammo, too. I got dropped in ready for War…" before he stood up his mech and started scanning his surroundings. He picked a cardinal direction and started moving out, feet thundering as he whispered, "Not gonna expend jump pack fuel yet. Unless BETA start crawling through the green here, I'm safe enough to hoof it."

He continued moving, the weighty mech's feet shaking the trees, causing birds to fly away. He had his weapon up, the Heads-Up Display system tracking its orientation through the crosshair. He scanned his surroundings with every step, checking the motion sensors and thermal cameras of the Shiranui every few seconds to make sure he wasn't wading into the start of a BETA Hive.

Before long, he marched out into a clearing of some kind where ruins were. In the far back of the large clearing, there were the remains of some kind of circular temple, the black stone it was made of having golden symbols carved deep into each stone. He approached them, noticing a half-dozen pedestals that were empty.

He mumbled, "Huh… Weird."

Approaching the temple, he saw the dust falling off the rocks thanks to the footfalls of his machine. He stopped in front of, panning the optical sensors across the place. Mumbling to himself, "Okay, maybe I'm in Peru or Mexico…" before pausing as his system began blaring with alarms. He gasped, the familiar whine of a slow alarm began to echo across his entire cockpit, his heart stopping for a second as *memories flooded back.*

He swiveled about, aiming his cannon as **CODE 991** blared across his HUD, lifting his cannon and preparing. His heart started firing off like an assault rifle all over again. Ahead of him, a cloud of dust about the height of the Shiranui appeared, tearing through the forest. He grit his teeth and mumbled, "Yeah, I guessed I'm not done with you fuckers! COME ON!"

… But what came out of the woodwork was not the deformed frames of the alien monsters that they'd been in a constant War with. No flesh, nor hide or armor he recognized, nor the bulky plates of sickly-green bone or the multi-eyed, mouthless heads of their largest monsters. What stood before him defied all logic.

Black ichor monstrosities stood before him, a swarming, swirling mass of creatures that looked like the renditions of how a madman saw animals. They were deformed in their own way, ranging from two-legged lizard-like monsters with clacking jaws, to lanky, wolf-like creatures sitting on short hind legs and with elongated arms. Some looked like a mix of wild bears and porcupines, while others still resembled boars. Above, massive wings flapped, revealing a trio of overgrown ravens with quills sharpened to the micron.

"... What the fuck…?" He mumbled, stunned.

The swirling mass moved, revealing the largest creature of the lot:An uparmored Scorpion of some kind, its plate like that of its strangely unrelated siblings. Bone armor that glowed with red symbols across its body. Its multitude of eyes locked onto the Shiranui as the monsters spread out, preparing to approach Takeru. He mumbled, "Not BETA… What the hell are you guys?" as he shut off the CODE 991 alarm. His sensors showed little in the way of heat signatures, but energy emissions were off the charts.

The giant Scorpion, whatever it was, took the first steps forward, its glowing orange stinger cocking back. For a moment, Takeru recalled the Fort-class BETA's ability to launch out its stinger. His mind immediately shifted into combat mode as the Monster blitzed forward first, followed by the herd behind it in a stampede that kicked up another dust cloud.

He grit his teeth and slammed the throttle forward *hard*, thumbing the jump pack's ignition immediately. He felt himself slightly pressed into his seat as the sudden G-Force exertion was countered and saw the sky approaching, alongside the three alien birds. One flapped its wings forth *hard* and glistening quills began to zip past the Shiranui's armored frame.

Below, the Scorpion sent its stinger up at him. He dodged deftly, turning his cannon toward it and opening fire. 36mm rounds rippled out of the barrel of the weapon, bursting into the ground around and in the much smaller, human-sized alien monstrosities. He saw several disappear, turning into black mist, while others lost limbs, stumbled and fell before slowly starting to dissipate.

He landed on the other side of the Scorpion and switched to the 120mm. Just as he fired a shell, though, one of the enemy's quills struck his left shoulder, throwing his aim off. The round ripped through the ground ahead, tearing out a chunk of the herd of alien monsters. He stumbled forward, giving a quick glance over to the Suit's systems. No damage to the arm, joint or anything.

The quill had broken off the plate. He grinned, turned toward the birds and switched to his 36 again, jumping up and away from the clamoring smaller creatures. He grumbled, "Don't wanna find out if you bastards can tear out armor like Tank-classes," before locking onto the middle bird of the trio and squeezing off a burst.

He saw its frame explode as three rounds made contact, black ichor flowing into the sky as it fell, split in half to the ground. He used his right thruster to quickly adjust his aim and fired at the left one as it tried to dodge. He clipped its wing, causing it to lose altitude, but it returned the answer in kind with its remaining sibling as a volley of quills flew out from their frames. One quill struck near his cockpit and left a dent, but shattered just like the previous, while another hit the leg and narrowly deflected off the joint.

He landed feet-first into a smattering of the taller, lanky wolf-looking creatures, crushing several underfoot and ripping one's arm off. Said one clambered onto the mech, digging its claws into the exposed joints to try and clamber up to the cockpit. Takeru shifted his supplemental armor and used the arm to grab it and throw it into the ground with a thundering *crash*.

He stepped back, using his mobility to cut down more of the chaff with the 36mm while trying to locate the Scorpion, the apparent leader of the formation. He shifted his aim up again, stopping for a second to fire another round at the bird. He watched the shot pierce its breast, ichor exploding out from its back as it slumped and fell to the ground.

Its sister whined, but finally succumbed when he jumped to close the distance and stomped its head in, shattering the bone plate. The Scorpion, meanwhile, swiveled about on its feet, visibly charging the Shiranui which was backing off. He started emptying the remaining 36mm rounds in his magazine into its frame, rounds ripping off chunks and chunks of its forward armor plate. It lifted its claws to deflect the attacks as it drew close, then it *stabbed* with the stinger.

The tip struck the left side of the mech, melting a fleck of the armor off with whatever acid or heat energy it emanated. It was close enough, though. Takeru switched to the 120 again, using his supplemental armor as a battering ram to move its arms aside. He slammed it again and again as he called out, "Come on, you fucker! *BUDGE*!"

He slammed the cannon's barrel into the first opening he saw, then *shot*. The 120mm round ripped through the already-damaged plate armor right between its multiple eyes and tore out

through the *other side*, destroying it and taking several more of the herd with it. It split in two from the front down to the tail, its stinger falling off to the side… And Takeru just realized he'd hit the rear wall of the temple.

"... Oops…" He mumbled, then switched out his cannon for the blade. He deflected several smaller aliens using his shield, swiping the sword low to kill several more, then he crouched as the gun was reloaded and drew it off his back, using the 36mm cannon to tear through the remaining herd participants.

He paused, however, when the mech picked up *four* Human lifesigns on his immediate left. He turned his head and spotted them:Four strange blurs moving through the monsters, cutting them down while fighting off the larger ones. He blinked, then said, "Okay, so these things can actually be fought on foot. Good to know," as he turned to engage the remnants of the herd on the other side.

The Herd thinned, the last of their scattered formations being torn apart by the four colored blurs of motion. Takeru reloaded his Autocannon in the meanwhile, settling down from the combat high while staring ahead. He whispered to himself, "So, not the BETA, but they're close enough the Warnings gave me a 991… Great."

He looked down at the four and paused. Four teenage girls, one with hair that went from black to red at the tips and silver eyes, clad in an attire that matched the hair plus a cape, a white-haired, princessly-looking gal with blue eyes and a scar that really didn't detract from her beauty, an aloof-looking black-haired girl with a bow on her head and two weirdly Japanese-looking blades *and* a blonde with a grin on her face and *two GAUNTLETS THAT LOOKED LIKE SHOTGUNS*.

He blinked, stunned, while watching the little red-and-black one bouncing giddily on her feet. He also just noticed she had a *Scythe* that also looked like it contained a high-caliber firearm in hand. She was smiling like a kid in a candy store, while the white-haired one looked slightly concerned, hand resting on the hilt of her own weapon.

He turned to face them fully in his Shiranui, then pondered popping open the cockpit. They weren't using TSFs to fight whatever the hell those monsters were, but they fought'em off with melee weapons. He furrowed his brows, then shifted the right main arm of his TSF, waving hello slowly. The princess took a step back, surprised, while the other three looked on, with only little red riding-reaper down below looking *particularly* excited.

The blonde put her hands together in front of her mouth, opened them, then yelled out, "HEY! We didn't know Atlas was testing new tech over here!"

English. They were speaking English clear as day. He hummed, switched on his own translator, then replied, "I'm friendly!"

"Yeah, we figured when we found ya killing Grimm by the bushel, dude!" The Blondie shot back, smiling. She put her hands on her hips, then looked at the tense white-haired Princess, gesturing at him and seeing, "There. Can you relax now, Ice Queen? Whatever kinda tech Atlas decided to drop in here, whoever's drivin' it is friendly."

"It isn't Atlesian Technology, Yang," Weiss replied with half a mouth.

"Sure," She chuckled, then turned back to the TSF and waved, "Hey, man, can you come down here!? Feels a little weird, yelling at a building-sized mech!"

Takeru looked them over, watching all of them stow their weapons away, with blondie's shotgun gauntlets shifting into bracelets on the go. The more he saw of these four and this world, the more confusing it got… He sighed, flicked on his translator again and replied with, "I'll be down in a second," before switching the TSF to auto-pilot and guard mode, just in case.

Weiss put her hands on her hips, then looked at Ruby and asked quietly, "Would you calm down?"

"*HOW CAN I!? LOOK AT HOW COOL IT IS!*" Ruby replied, thrusting her arms forward and opening her hands at the massive mech with the letters 'UN' on its shoulder. They all paused as they heard the mechanical whirr of the cockpit doors opening, then looked up, gasping as they saw the young man in his strange bodysuit standing there.

The Machine shifted its hand toward its chest, open palm up, then slowly let down its pilot onto the ground. He jumped off, dusting off his gear and rubbing the back of his neck. Weiss whispered, "Okay, now I'm *certain* this is not Atlas technology. We don't have our pilots wear suits like…" and she gestured, "*That*…"

Yang's grin grew as she chuckled, "Man. That thing doesn't leave much to the imagination, eh?"

Blake chuckled, blushing a little, "Definitely not…"

He walked up to them, flipping on his suit's translator with a thought, then said, "Hey… Sorry for the scare and… Apologies ahead of time if this looks weird. I don't speak English, but my suit comes with a universal translator," before he looked them over. Yeah, the attire and equipment was certainly weird.

"... English?" Yang asked, "Y… Y'mean Basic, right?"

"Basic?" He raised a brow, crossing his arms. They also noticed he was armed. He had a rifle on his back and a pistol in a thigh holster that didn't match the suit. He lowered his arms, looking slightly confused while the four girls also processed this little discussion. The Blonde nodded, to which Takeru said, "Right…"

"... Anyways! Hi! We're team RWBY!" Ruby peppily added, approaching him, "I'm Ruby! Team Lead! The girl with the grumpy face and penchant for rapiers is Weiss!" and Weiss gave a small glare to Ruby, as if to accentuate the point. The red gal chuckled awkwardly, then continued, "Next up is Blake, my sis's combat partner…" and Blake gave a wave, "And my sis herself, Yang! Our CQC expert."

"Y'want someone knocked out, send me in, coach," Yang let out a boyish laugh, then asked, "What's your name there, bud?"

"... Takeru. Shirogane Takeru," He replied, "Second Lieutenant with the UN Armed Forces."

"Huh," Weiss began, "We never heard of your military."

He blinked, eyes widening slightly, "That's… Kind of impossible. It is the largest multinational contingent force fighting the BETA, bar maybe the US Military," as he looked around. Yet more confused looks. He whispered, "... What the hell is going on here, man? First, new ugly monsters, now this…?"

Ruby started, "Hey. We were sent here to get you to come with us… Takeru, right?" and she raised a brow. The small, innocent girl gave him a momentary flashback to Tama. She continued, "I can see a lotta confusion's going on here and… Trust me, cool mech aside, I'm also kinda confused, but we can probably help ya understand… Provided you don't mind it."

"... I mean, I don't? I'd like to get some answers as to how I wound up in the middle of an archaeological dig site *filled to the brim with zombie animals*," He replied calmly, "... And why nobody knows what language they're speaking *and* who the UN and US are…" then he blinked and realized, "*And* I might need a spot to wait for rescue…"

"Alright!" Ruby beamed, "C'mon! We'll get you a ride outta here. Before more Grimm show up."

"I'm gonna hazard a guess that's what those malformed things we fought together are and put a pin in it for later," He murmured, then jabbed a thumb back and said, "I can probably follow you girls in my Shiranui. Who sent you to retrieve me, anyway? Like… I'm gonna hazard a guess we're close enough to somewhere inhabited that I caused a ruckus?"

"Could say that," Yang shrugged, "The forest's kind of a training ground. Got cameras all over the place as far as we know."

"Huh," He said, then noticed one of said Cameras in a nearby tree, camouflaged. The only giveaway was the slight glint of the lens whenever even a speck of the sun's light struck it. He whispered, "Training ground. I guess that's how you four learned how to fight these 'Grimm' things," before resting a hand on his hip.

"Yep!" Ruby chuckled, "It was also where our initiation into Beacon took place," and she saw that same confusion from their side appear on his face. "Y'know, you say you wanna know how *we* don't know stuff that's apparently basic to you, but how d'ya not know what Beacon is, considering you're *really close to it?"*

He raised a finger to reply, frowned and lowered his hand before sighing, "Should we get going?"

"Sure!"

… It really didn't take long for Takeru to see what these girls were riding out of here in. The Bullhead was a fat dropship with thin wings and VTOL capabilities. Seemingly used more for cargo transport and short-distance personnel transfer than any actual proper applications, it

floated nicely beside him as he flew NOE with his Shiranui. He didn't know if these Grimm things had any equivalent to the Laser-classes of the BETA, but he wasn't gonna risk it.

On board the Bullhead itself, the girls continued to watch the Mech as it flew. Weiss said, "Most impressive. His kingdom and this 'UN' must be quite advanced…"

"We not gonna talk about his name?" Yang asked, leaning forward, "Sounds close to a Mistrali one, but… Not quite there."

Weiss agreed quietly, adding, "The fact he also requires a translator to speak to us… Where have he and his people been hiding for this long that Basic has faded out of use and been replaced?" before humming and saying, "We should ask the Sergeant about this. The Headmaster hired her for her apparent 'special skills'..."

"Sounds good to me," Blake replied, then looked at Ruby and smiled, "You really wanna ask him about the Mech, right?"

"Yeah!" Ruby giggled, "*It's so freaking **COOL!***"

"... Can you keep it to yourself until *after* we let Headmaster Ozpin debrief him?" Weiss inquired, slightly exasperated. Much to everyone's surprise, though, that exasperation seemed to have a hint of fondness behind it. After her and professor Port's discussion, Weiss truly seemed to have at least 'melted' a bit when it came to her teammates.

Ruby chuckled, "Yeah, yeah, I know…" then she looked out and beamed. She waved at Takeru and yelled out, "HEEEEY! WE'RE ABOUT TO REACH BEACON!"

Takeru craned his head and, in turn, his TSF's head toward her, then looked right ahead and his eyes shot wide open. *That was a massive university campus up ahead.* Rows of Dormitory buildings lay in neat alignment off to the side, mixing in with the many buildings of the place ranging from what he assumed to be mess halls and libraries to various classroom buildings, gyms and so on. In the middle of it all, rising tall and befitting the name of the place, a clocktower with an emerald glow stood above all else, a watchful eye.

In the distance, an even wider sprawling megalopolis spread as far as the eye can see…

… Well, this was gonna be interesting, he thought to himself.

The two craft landed at the nearest landing pad, with the TSF touching down on its feet and kicking up a small wave of dust with its maneuvering jets. It settled into place with Takeru stowing the supplemental armor shield and his autocannon away before crouching with the mech. He opened the main hatch, feeling the breeze on his face.

He descended from the mech and *immediately* caught sight of the fact there were multiple hundreds of Students who'd just seen him land. Awkwardly staring as the rest of team RWBY approached, he raised a hand, made a V-sign and said "I come in peace…?" before realizing just how stupid that must've sounded. He let out a deep sigh, lowered his hands, then watched team RWBY(apparently the gang's name here) show him to follow.

They marched toward the Tower, with him stating, "... Lemme guess, the headmaster of your school's up th-... Wait a minute, *what the hell kind of school is this place*?"

"... A Huntsman training academy?" Ruby smiled, "Y'know. To help us learn how to fight those monsters you just met out there. The Grimm. We're Huntresses in Training."

"... Oh…" He let out. That made sense… To a certain degree… "Wait, so your Headmaster's training a personal army?"

"No. He's training us to fight Grimm. Basically, we're fighting the big bads of the world here," Yang replied, crossing her arms as they walked up to the elevator, "Gist of it is, we're dealing with hordes of evil monsters tryin' to kill humanity and our Faunus pals, so we gotta be able to fight'em. That's what we're all here for."

Takeru nodded. Noble goal. Also… 'Faunus'?

The elevator reached the top of the tower as fast as it had departed the ground floor, opening the twin doors to reveal a surprisingly ornate place. A library lay on the left in a separate room, just beside the gears that turned to keep the massive clock ticking. Below, through a thick glass floor, more gears spun slowly, ticking away the minutes. And finally, nearby the window/main face of the clock, a gentlemanly-looking man with greying hair, a green suit and scarf and really tiny sunglasses sat.

"Miss Rose, Miss Schnee, Miss Belladonna and Miss Xiao-Long. Just in time," He smiled, "Are you the pilot of that machine, then?" and he eyed Takeru. Takeru nodded in turn, to which the Headmaster told him, "Welcome to Beacon, then. I am Headmaster Ozpin… Please, have a seat. We have a *lot* to talk about."

Chapter 2: Beacon

Takeru immediately felt a little off about the good Headmaster. He had that *stare*. The one someone who'd lived too long in a world that doesn't like letting people live had. He knew it a little too well. He was doing a much better job concealing it, though. Probably a fellow Veteran, then, though one with an obviously much longer history behind him.

He shifted uncomfortably in his seat, locking eyes with the Headmaster as the girls continued chatting behind him. They'd lowered the volume, but Takeru could still hear Ruby freaking out about the Shiranui's existence. He listened for a bit, but heard nothing that interesting coming from any of them. Simple gossip and what felt like the usual 'girl talk'... With weapons involved, thanks to miss Rose.

"You seem to be in thought. I hope you don't mind me interjecting, mister…?" The Headmaster spoke, raising a brow as Takeru snapped out of his momentary state of observation.

He blinked, then replied, "Shirogane… Shirogane Takeru. Second Lieutenant…" with as much calm as he could muster. "Sorry about that. A lot of stuff going on in my mind right now, Headmaster…" as he scratched his cheek. This was getting slightly awkward. He looked back at the four young women and immediately saw them *stop* talking. They all turned and waved, Ruby with a little awkwardness.

He smiled, then shook his head and turned back toward Ozpin. The Headmaster then said to him, "That's completely understandable, mister Shirogane," with an understanding tone, like a grandfather or father addressing his child. He continued, "Do you know where you are? Besides the obvious name-drop of 'Beacon' that I'm sure miss Rose and her team mentioned."

"... Not really, no," He answered, then mumbled, "It almost looks like Europe," to himself, "But that's kind of impossible. That continent's long gone," and noticed Ozpin's brow raised slightly. He continued, "No, I don't know where I am. I'd like to, though," as he leaned back in his seat. He felt the Fortified Suit shift slightly, too.

The Headmaster hummed, then replied, "You are currently in Beacon Academy, a Huntsman Academy in the Kingdom of Vale, one of the Four Great Kingdoms. Each has an Academy that trains the next generations of warriors fighting the Grimm, the monstrous creatures I'm sure you've encountered in your machine before team RWBY's arrival."

"... So you're an academy that trains kids how to fight," Takeru spoke with a lower tone, then mumbled to himself, "Why the hell does that feel familiar…?" and adjusted his suit's gauntlets. Drawing parallels between Beacon and Yokohama was not smart. One was a school, the other was… *Well, technically also a school, but a military base above all else.*

"I suppose it would fit with how you became the pilot of the machine outside," The man spoke, then gestured to the Shiranui on the landing pad, visible from here.

Takeru nodded, then said, "Yeah… Being taught how to fight was a major part of becoming a Surface Pilot," as he stared at Oz, "... You said Kingdoms. Like. Four of'em. What continent are we on, then if not Europe?"

"The Continent of Sanus…" Ozpin replied, narrowing his eyes, "... What planet do you think you are on, mister Shirogane?"

"... Earth…?" The young man replied awkwardly. He saw the concern grow on the Headmaster's face, then inquired, "Not Earth then? How…?" and *he paused*. He wasn't on Earth anymore. He wasn't *home* proper. Which honestly should've been a given considering the ancient structures looking nothing like anything he'd seen in history books *and* the fact there weren't BETA, but GRIMM. ANIMAL DEMONS.

Ozpin narrowed his eyes while the girls behind him let out various, but commensurate sounds of surprise upon learning the young man was *basically* an Alien. Which felt like a very common trope for this place for some reason or another. The Headmaster then said to the boy, "You're not on Earth, young man… You're on the planet of Remnant."

"... What…?" He blinked, staring at the man. He asked, "... Remnant? For real?"

"Yes," Ozpin chuckled, "I'm afraid so," as he tapped a strange digital pad on his glass desk. A holographic display appeared, showing the planet and its destroyed moon, including the continents themselves *with* the emblems of each Kingdom in their specific locations. Ozpin continued, "You are currently in Vale, as I mentioned."

"... So I'm on another planet where humanity is under attack by Demons and they teach teenagers, both male and female, to fight," The young man spoke, looking at the planet's hologram spin around its axis. The broken moon was probably the most interesting part of this strange little Isekai situation. He scratched his chin, visibly processing this stream of new info while Ozpin nodded.

"Very much so, yes," The man replied, then asked, "What about your world, then, Second Lieutenant? That Earth also hires young men like you for their military must mean something has gone wrong there, too," while Takeru thought of how to best explain the situation. He looked back at the girls, finding all four of them being surprisingly quiet. As if they were listening in, too.

He sighed and said, "Well… That's gonna be a long story. Thankfully, I have some visual data in my suit to help show you I'm not crazy," before checking the neck brace of the suit for a connection point or something. When he found what he was looking for, he slotted it into a connection port and activated the suit, starting with, "... To start with. Earth…"

The display of Remnant was changed out for the display of Earth, its moon still entirely whole. It… Looked oddly similar, but this wasn't the time for Takeru to wonder about this stuff. He heard the girls gasp, smiled, then continued, "To put it simply, we originally didn't have any major threats keeping us pinned. We were kind of in a Cold War with each-other."

Several parts of the wider continents were immediately divided by borders, with him saying, "And obviously, we had a lot more than a few countries… Several of them have no kings, but

instead are lead by democratically elected leaders," and that highlighted several European countries, his homeland of Japan(though they still had an Emperor, technically), followed by, "And some were lead by forever-leaders and dictators," and that highlighted the Chinese, the Soviet Union and a few dozen others, "... To put it simply, the world *was* in a Cold War. *Was.*… Then our own problems arrived."

A fisheye-like lens view showed a planet of sand and desert with jagged rocks jutting out from the ground. The data was in Basic, or English as Takeru had called it. Multiple images of the place scrolled, before finally settling on one image of a silhouetted, odd-looking rock formation. No, Ozpin immediately thought, *not* a rock formation. *A creature*.

"Photographs from the Viking-1 probe on Mars. A United States vessel exploring the fourth planet from our sun sent these images back moments before they lost contact with it. It was our first contact with the BETA, or Beings of Extra-Terrestrial Origin which are Adversary to the human race," The young man explained warily, "That was almost fifty years ago… More recent wars include the Lunar War in the '60s, when the BETA attacked our Moon Colony," as more footage played along, including the cratered surface of the moon and the troops that were fighting there.

"... Then the invasion of Earth, with the Original Hive's landing at Kashgar," Takeru sighed deeply, then said, "I'd get into a lot more detail, but I'm giving you guys the basics right now, so you get where I'm from and what I had to deal with… To continue, the Kashgar Hive kicked the asses of the Chinese and later the Soviets, who tried to solve the issue on their own. Melted both their nations from the inside out, made dozens more hives… They committed basically mass genocide in the decades they've pushed out toward us."

Footage showing combat against the Alien creatures continued to play, ranging from the early TSFs and infantry units engaging. The alien creatures were *sickening*, looking like amalgamations of various caricatures of human and animal species. It was a beautiful representation of how a nightmare would look if made manifest, including how they fought:Close quarters, bloody and brutal.

Yang had covered Ruby's eyes, but kept staring, while Takeru continued, "And like I said, we've been fighting these things for decades… When I arrived, my home country of Japan had been invaded by the damn things years prior and was 'saved' by the US Military in a sense. To understand, the US and Japan were 'allies', or more akin puppetmaster and puppet to some degree, even if the Empire retained all of our old traditions."

"I see…" Ozpin spoke, looking almost… Horrified? Takeru couldn't quite read the old man's facial expressions, but he could tell the man wasn't exactly too joyous about what he was seeing. Ozpin, however, gestured for the young man to continue. Morbid curiosity was probably part of it. Like watching a trainwreck.

The young man continued, "Thankfully, we got by. Then, I dropped into the picture, metaphorically speaking. I joined the UN Yokohama Base in Japan, trained with my friends, passed all trainings and exams and…" at first, both the girls and Ozpin saw him frown while his mind remembered the multiple operations they undertook. The 12/5 Incident, Operation 21st, Operation Ouka… All of them. Then, he smiled a smile that didn't reach his ears as footage of all Operations played, "... We got a couple of major victories against the BETA,

with Operation Cherry Blossom winning Humanity at least a few more years after we destroyed the Kashgar Hive… I wouldn't say we won the war, but maybe…"

"What happened to your friends?" Ruby asked, though the way she said it told him she knew.

Takeru replied, "... We all gave our lives for the cause, to put it simply," then he mumbled, "Including poor Sumika… I hope she's okay wherever she is," before he disconnected the wire. He looked around, then shrugged and told them, "That's War. You girls are probably gonna face similar issues if the Grimm are anything like the BETA."

"... Yeah…" Yang mumbled, rubbing her shoulder, "We know."

"... Then I have a lot of respect for all four of you for signing on at your age, honestly," Takeru chuckled warmly, "A year or two ago you wouldn't have caught me dead in the military," then he turned to Ozpin, asking him, "Is there anything more you want to know, Headmaster? My TSF's specifications are top secret, before you start."

Ozpin raised a hand, then said, "That will be all for now, mister Shirogane… At least when it comes to questions about your background," and watched the boy raise a brow. He smiled and offered, "While I'm certain you'd like to return home to celebrate the beginning of your war's end, I'm afraid we don't know any way to do that… So, you may need a place to rest, recuperate and resupply."

Takeur narrowed his eyes, "... And you're about to give me an offer to stay at your school… Probably become a student so I have a cover story *while* you start thinking about how to explain," and he jabbed a thumb toward the Shiranui, "*That*…" before crossing his arms. When Ozpin's smile grew slightly, the young man mumbled to himself, "*This feels hella Cliche, dude.*.." before sighing. The four girls behind him seemed excited by the prospect.

He sighed *deeply*, then smiled and said, "Hey. I'll take a warm bed and a place to rest… And I don't have much choice since I don't know your world," before looking back at the girls. He told them, "The Headmaster and you should probably keep this stuff secret, though. This whole thing's gonna either sound incredibly insane to everyone else, *ooor* it might get me targeted by the other Kingdoms. I'm not in the mood to deal with that right now."

"Our lips are sealed," Ruby assured him, smiling.

Beacon Dorms, later that day…

After signing a contract admitting him to Beacon, Takeru had gone downstairs in order to *make sure nobody damaged his Shiranui* and to retrieve supplies from it. He'd gotten his pistol, the survival kit and various other important items from within before letting it be taken to… Surprisingly enough, an underground Hangar that Beacon had in its vicinity.

Why? He didn't know. At this point, he wasn't sure if he could question even these weird encounters anymore. From the first time he dropped into the world that was under siege by the BETA to being revived apparently countless times across countless attempts as Causality

Conductor and to *Sumika* being the 00 Unit of *all* people in his life, he'd learned to just take things as they came and plan accordingly.

At least the Shiranui would be out of sight while Takeru got his full bearings. He entered his new Dormitory, using his Scroll, what was basically a highly-advanced holographic cell phone, to open the door, then tossed his new uniform onto one of the beds in the room. These places were usually set up to house four students in a Team after initiation, like team RWBY.

He sighed, setting the rest of his stuff down onto the left-most bunk bed, then walked to the bathroom. He washed his face, looking at himself in the mirror, still clad in his Fortified Suit and wondering just what the hell had gone wrong to land him in this place. They were supposed to have won, right? The Superordinate was dead thanks to their sacrifices, the entire BETA command structure at least slowed or completely decimated… *And Sumika was gone, meaning he was no longer Causality Conductor…*

He wiped his face with a towel, feeling slightly more refreshed than he'd felt when he first entered this place. He looked at the room itself, a somewhat barren place where his only personal effects were his bag, gun and maybe the new Beacon uniform he'd just received. He checked the schedule for classes on his Scroll and saw a free period, what with Lunch being nearly here.

He started undoing the locks on the various pieces of the suit, taking it one item at a time and setting them aside in the dresser, donned the Student uniform and mumbled to himself, "Lightweight and actually comfortable. Reminds me a little of our ol' Hakuryou uniforms…" as he stretched his arms, shrugged his shoulders and moved his legs. He added, "And a lotta storage space… Good."

He hummed, looking at his service pistol. He picked it up, making sure it was on safe, then pulled the magazine out and racked the slide twice. He then slid the mag back in and put the gun into the end table beside his bed, sliding the drawer closed. He figured he might as well have some sorta self-defense means. He also picked up the bullpup rifle which he'd also retrieved, did the same motions with it(removing the mag, checking the chamber, et-cetera), before hiding it in the dresser, next to his Fortified Suit. He also removed the translator from the suit and set it up in his new uniform.

Everything else, he dispersed into the room, bathroom and the attached small kitchenette area, MREs included. His medical pack was now resting within reach inside another nearby drawer. He sighed deeply, stretched and yawned, then mumbled, "Gotta buy a toothbrush, toothpaste, a couple new towels… Jeez, man. Wonder how 'Vale' feels about Part-Time jobs…"

… He sighed, shaking his head and saying, "I'm on an alien planet filled with humans fighting demons… I guess Causality doesn't want me outta the game yet," as he patted down the creases of his uniform. He tugged on his collar, straightening it out while looking in the mirror, then he smiled, "... Buuut I'm back at school, so… Baby steps to going home, right?"

He whispered, "If only you guys showed up, too, though," as he gingerly pulled out a photo from his pack, depicting him and the gang. He paused, however, when he realized the picture

was from Hakuryou. It was a Class Photo of them all. Him, Sumika, Meiya, Mikoto, Chizuru, Ayamine and Miki. They were all happy, obviously, with him and Sumika butting heads.

He set the photograph back into his pack and decided not to delve too much into *why* he had it with him. A chill shot up his spine as he heard a knock on the door, his hand immediately going toward the end table to grab his pistol. He shook his head, then mumbled, "... Civvie life, Takeru. Civvie life for now…" before yelling, "Yeah!?"

"Hey, Takeru!" Ruby's voice called out from behind the door, sounding jovial, "Lunch is up and then we got some classes! Ya wanna tag along with us for this one!?"

"... Sure!" He replied. Ah, childhood joy and whimsy. How he missed having at least a little bit of that. He walked to the door and propped it open, immediately watching Ruby nearly tumble over as she prepared to knock again. He caught her by the arm and lifted her to her feet, then said, "Jeez, Ruby. Watch yourself."

"Sorry," She replied with a smile, "Just figured we're basically the welcoming committee to Beacon *and* to the whole of Remnant for ya! So we gotta be punctual!"

"Indeed," Weiss replied, looking the young man over. She asked, "I thought your suit had the translator within it. I suppose it is portable?" before watching the young man reveal the device by turning. She shrugged and said, "Good… At least we get to keep talking… I must say, it's a sort of honor to know we're your first contact with alien life. And you, ours."

"And it's slightly *scary* since," Blake started, "You know, one would expect to see things like the BETA in space, bar their genocidal tendencies. To see human or humanoid aliens is…" then winced. She smiled, though, then added, "Still… It's pretty amazing that *you're* that foreign to our world, alien language needing a translator included…"

"Yeah," Takeru chuckled, "I guess it is. Though like I said, let's keep that on the down-low. Don't wanna get people staring at me funny…" *because I had enough of that in previous runs at life*, he thought to himself. The fact everyone was also speaking English here was a Godsend. He wasn't sure how he'd do with *any alien-ish language*.

Yang cleared her throat as, taking Takeru out of his momentary pause, then gestured with her right hand thumb down the hallway, "Soooo… Lunch? We're gonna have to get to classes."

"Right, right," Takeru nodded, "Lead the way."

The now-five person group walked down surprisingly beautifully-decorated hallways of the Dorm, took a trip down with the Elevator and out into the courtyard. They passed into the main court area, a roundabout made of pavement. Multiple benches spaced evenly apart surrounded a massive statue depicting a Huntress and Huntsman wearing hoods and carrying old, medieval-style weapons and standing over several Grimm.

A neat little memorial to the people who started the profession.

Takeru noticed Ruby looking at him with a broad smile. He asked, "I'm guessing you've been holding back from asking me about the Shiranui, eh?" to which the girl rapidly nodded. A kid

in a candy store. Well, if 'candy' meant heavy weapons of mass destruction. Amused, he began explaining, "We call mechs like the Shiranui Tactical Surface Fighters, or TSFs. We're also called Surface Pilots because of that. They're incredibly agile and mobile and you can arm'em to really do anything."

"Even fight people, if the footage from the December 5 Incident was anything to go by," Weiss mumbled as she looked around, "Where is it?"

"It's hidden now. Tucked safely away," Takeru grinned, "Don't want some rowdy kid stealing it and taking it for a joyride… Even though it'd sorta be suicide without Piloting Data and a Fortified Suit," then he shrugged. As they entered the main mess hall, a cathedral-sized place that felt more like a hangar with arched windows. The place could feed hundreds, or maybe *thousands* of students.

And it was already feeding plenty of them. A lot of the seats were already occupied, with Takeru thinking to himself, *Just like in the barracks mess*, before a soft scent reached his nose. He froze as his eyes widened and he locked onto the buffet. He saw *all of it*. ***Fresh, warm food that looked like home.***

"Holy shit…" He whispered. Before any of the girls could say anything, he dashed toward the buffet, grabbing the first tray he could find to fill it up. He started dashing across the line with a beaming smile and said, "It's as if God answered my prayers, man…! Pizza? Hotdogs?! *SUSHI*!? AND IT'S ALL REAL?! HELL YEAH!"

Team RWBY watched the man carrying the 'good, real' food over, a full plate of the stuff, before sitting down. Yang laughed and asked, "Jeez, man, you'd think you haven't eaten anything but slop for the last year," only to pause as she saw him looking up at her. After a second to process it, she realized and said, "Right… Military. Sorry, dude."

He gave a thumbs up and continued eating, while Weiss commented, "Team JNPR seems to be absent."

"Jaune's nursing a cold and the other three stayed behind to help him," Blake said as she sat down with her own tray of food, which was much more sensibly filled with normal food. She looked at the young man before them and said, "They're friends of ours who're also your neighbors… Make sure you wear some sort of earmuffs when sleeping. I don't wanna know what Ren and Nora are doing that's so loud."

Yang snorted, while Weiss rolled her eyes. The white-haired girl continued, "Do you think the Teachers will be okay with a new arrival?" as she looked at Ruby, who was downing several cookies. Weiss narrowed her eyes, staring at her team lead with a hint of disappointment. Ruby raised her hands defensively and spoke with her mouth full.

Blake snorted, then said, "Ruby, swallow your food."

As asked, little miss Rose swallowed the food, then answered quickly, "I think they're gonna be alright with it. I mean, they accepted new staff here, too, right? We wouldn't have new teachers if they weren't really cool, y'know?"

"Fair enough," Weiss sighed, pinching the bow of her nose. She looked at Takeru and said, "The new staff also has a rank, 'Sergeant'," which caused the man to pause and look at her. She was about to speak again, only to pause, mouth open. She whispered to herself, "Oh, Ye, Makers Above, please *no*," while staring past Takeru.

He raised a brow, swallowed his food, then asked, "What?" before a looming shadow appeared over him. He closed his eyes, going into a deadpan, then sighed *deeply*, before looking back and up. A burly-looking man with ginger-esque hair and deep blue eyes stared down at Takeru, a grin on his face. He said, "Well, well, well. Whadda we have here? This the new kid?"

"Cardin," Yang glared at the young man, "You really wanna do this?"

"Oh, yeah. It's just a standard Beacon greeting, though, Goldilocks. Don't worry," The man replied, still wearing that shit-eating grin. Takeru's shoulders slumped, not out of fear, but due to the realization of a simple truth:School life meant bullies were a thing again. And God dammit, he really wasn't looking forward to dealing with *that* again.

"So, buddy," The 'Bully', Cardin, spoke with feigned warmth as he set a hand on the young man's shoulder, "I figured you oughta know there's a small issue… You gotta pay a little fee to eat and I don't feel like you have," to which the young veteran simply went deadpan again, staring right at 'Cardin' like he was an idiot. Which he was.

Now, how to make it a teaching moment, Takeru thought.

Chapter 3: The Sergeant

The Courtyard of Beacon was awash with activity as the various students gossiped and talked about the mundaneities of teenage life. Some were eating homemade lunches in the courtyards and parks of Beacon during this free period, which gave ample opportunity for the Headmaster and one of his favored Employees to walk around and ensure all was going well.

And all was going well. For the most part, anyway. Save for Ozpin having to talk Glynda down from her somewhat-justified anger. "... And to think you could not be bothered to wake me up so I could see who this new young man you brought in is… I hope you allowing strays to stay here isn't going to become a habit, Headmaster."

"You seemed to enjoy me hiring the Sergeant," Ozpin replied confidently, his observation obviously having hit home.

She sighed and answered, "I will admit having her help for survival and CQC training has been a boon, however letting other people in randomly without consulting the rest of your staff should be reprimanded. The young man you added in will have to catch up to two months' curriculum while he doesn't have a Team…"

"I fully trust our students to welcome mister Shirogane with open arms and provide to him the materials he needs to catch up," The Headmaster replied coolly. He looked at the worried woman and said, "Let's also keep the Second Lieutenant's arrival secret from the Sergeant for the time being and vice-versa… Provide both of them a happy surprise."

Glynda looked upon her employer once more with a hint of concern, but the man seemed as calm and collected as ever. With a heavy sigh, she asked him, "Do you really enjoy keeping people in the dark so much, Ozpin?"

The Headmaster chuckled proudly, then replied, "It's only for their own good. If they know each-other, familiar faces are always going to be a welcome surprise."

"Or a nightmare, depending on their previous relationship," The Assistant Headmaster shot back, scratching her chin. She looked at her Scroll Tablet when it pinged, then let out a hum of surprise. When Ozpin was set to ask her what had happened, she told him, "Professor Peach confirms she's begun the examination of the Machine he came here with."

"We should let the Sergeant know about it after their meeting. She might be able to give us more insight into its capabilities," The Headmaster spoke, then took a sip from the mug of hot cocoa he'd brought on their walk. His cane hung off his belt, the primary support, that black hardened tube, having been retracted into the hilt.

Glynda hummed, then asked, "How do you think he will react to seeing her *if* they are from the same general area, or even the same unit?"

The Headmaster shrugged, answering with, "Like you said yourself, miss Goodwitch. It entirely depends on their previous interactions in that life. I'd like to think, however, that they

will be happy. Considering mister Shirogane seems like a friendly young man, bar his inability to speak Basic requiring him to use a translator."

"... I just remembered that team RWBY knows he is for all intents and purposes an alien," Glynda added in a murmur. Ozpin smiled, while the woman continued, "I hope they know not to speak to the others about this, though they are likely going to tell team JNPR about it…"

"I believe they promised they'd keep it secret," Ozpin said to try and appease his fellow professor. Truth be told, there was no real harm to anyone, not even Takeru and the four young members of team RWBY if they brought up the fact that the Lieutenant was an alien by and large, save maybe some people considering the group of five crazy without clear proof;like the Lieutenant's recordings.

"You know how teenagers are," The woman replied with a heavy sigh. "They would like to get clout with their peers, especially in this place. While the Lieutenant likely won't blab about it to just anyone, miss Rose is a hyperactive young lady who would *like* to be liked by her peers. Should we trust the rest of her team to keep her in check?"

"Yes," He answered immediately, trying to avoid further scolding. Glynda let out a deep sigh of annoyance, taking off her glasses and rubbing off her eyes. He then told her, "Look, miss Goodwitch, regardless of the situation, I was not going to let a potential boon to our weapons and defenses, much more a young veteran leave for the wilds. I'm certain he won't cause any major problems."

"I hope you're right, but I have a bad feeling," She replied as they made it to the front of the School's cafeteria. Only a second later, did that bad feeling come true in the form of one of their students flying out *through* the main door, screaming bloody murder. He skidded across the floor the moment he landed and his Aura flared.

Glynda stared at Cardin Winchester struggling to stand up, fear in his eyes as he looked at the person that threw him out. Glynda also looked at the man who threw him out and saw Takeru, dusting his palms off with a scratch on his cheek. The young man started, "... How's that for a 'fee', dumbaaaaaa-" only to pause, stretching out the word when he saw Ozpin and Glynda.

The Headmaster looked at him with concern, while Glynda stared at the young man like she wanted to rip him in half. However, that wasn't anything compared to how she was glaring at the good Headmaster:Namely, ice cold daggers sharp enough to pierce the armor of a Tactical Surface Attacker. Behind Taker, in the meanwhile, team RWBY and a few of the other kids around them cheered.

"... Hi…?" Takeru greeted Prof Goodwitch awkwardly. She craned her head toward him, ice cold glare causing him to stagger slightly, almost in the same way Sergeant Jinguuji's used to…

… Having been brought and sat down in Ozpin's office due to his quote-unquote 'inappropriate behavior' at lunch, Takeru had now missed said lunch. He was thankful he got a couple of bites of the stuff in, *because it tasted like the food from home*, but fact of the matter was, he might have to rely on nibbling on MRE crackers before the next period.

Professor Glynda Goodwitch, the school's foremost combat teacher, seemed upset, surprisingly enough, but not only at him. Ozpin was receiving the brunt of the woman's complaints regarding safety, the school equivalent of OPSEC and, in her own words, "... He may not be suited to be amongst the general student populace, considering what you've told me! No offense to be taken, Lieutenant, but you *throwing* a young man through the doors of our cafeteria-"

"He's a bully who apparently has it out for new kids, including one of the JNPR ones. I was just making sure he understood who he was messing with," The young man tried to defend himself, his voice flat. Seeing that was the *wrong* answer as miss Goodwitch's metaphorical daggers turned toward him, the young man raised his hands and said, "Look, I don't really like bullies. We had some even in the military. Elitists, pricks who think they're above everyone else because they're either stronger or higher on the totem pole… While I couldn't do much to the latter, I figured I can ease at least my life with the former *here*, considering we're all nearly the same age."

"That is not excuse to-" Glynda wanted to yell at him, but he cut her off.

"With all due respect, ma'am, it is. Bullies don't get the message unless you say it on their terms. I couldn't just run to one of you guys and have people think I'm some dumbass tattle-tale who can't defend himself. It wouldn't have stopped any bullying, but emboldened Winchester and his goon squad to further press on it," He said with as calm a voice as one such as himself could muster, "I understand your authority on the matter, too. You're teachers, the people meant to keep the peace and make sure we learn how to fight and survive out there."

He then leaned back into the seat and sighed as he saw the woman's expression ever-so-slightly soften, before continuing, "... I don't wanna step on anyone's toes, but schools leave bullies be all too often. The military does, too, if they're the higher-ups of the people getting harassed, though at least there the UCMJ and stuff like that apply so you could technically report'em… You know."

The Professor thought for a moment, lowering her arms by her side as her memories of her time at school came back. She let out a heavy sigh, then her voice lowered to match Takeru's calm. She said to him, "... You still threw a young man out through a door. And without Aura to boot. You'll be the talk of the entire school."

"So much for keeping a low profile," He joked, wearing a smile that didn't reach his ears. He put a hand on his small wound, then sighed, feeling the sting. He asked, "Aura, huh? I don't think I got a brief on everything yet."

"In the simplest terms," Ozpin began, "Aura is a protective field made from a person's soul. It can be activated and controlled, with some of the best Huntsmen and Huntresses being able to project it over any weapon they wield, or use it as a weapon in and of itself. It also comes with the bonus benefit of what you would probably call a 'Super Power'. A Semblance."

"... Huh?!" Takeru blanked.

Glynda nodded, "Indeed. Miss Schnee, as an example, from team RWBY. She bears a hereditary semblance known as Glyphs. Her entire family line supposedly has it, allowing her to summon various highly-capable 'spells' of a sort that also match the Dust she has in her weapon's revolving drum at the moment."

"Dust," Ozpin started, noticing the boy's confusion, "Is a sort of catch-all term for a series of very powerful crystalline ores we can find below Remnant's surface, with the main four being based on four elements. Water, fire, wind and lightning. Combining them in varied compositions leads to the other types, such as Hardlight, Gravity-"

"Wait, GRAVITY?" He balked, "As in-"

"A Dust Type that can both apply and *reverse* gravitational pull depending on the type of current *or* Aura that flows through it," Ozpin nodded, "You will get more information on this in your last class of the day, however, Lieutenant," and he looked at Glynda. She nodded, then tapped a few buttons on her Scroll Tablet and the young man's own Scroll pinged.

He pulled it out of his uniform pocket and extended it, looking at the notification. The words **WRITTEN WARNING** flashed across the screen, garnering a short, slow blink out of the young man. He looked at miss Goodwitch, who said, "Consider your case closed for the time being, Lieutenant Shirogane… And please, try to stay out of further trouble."

He smiled, "I'll do my best."

"Doubtless that Cardin likely won't let that humiliation go, however," She grumbled, then said to him, "Request for one of your classmates to awaken your Aura before your next class. It might prove very useful… And if you wish to further embarrass mister Winchester, whose father *is* on the Vale Council, by the way, do it in classes."

The smile immediately shifted into a grin, "So you're okay with me beating the tar out of him then?"

"I said no such thing," Glynda denied, but batted a confirmatory eyelash at the young man. She then said, "Now, go. Get to the next class before you get a tardiness warning, too… And possibly some issues with your next teacher. She is *strict*," before a small smirk formed on her face. "Dismissed, Lieutenant."

He stood up and saluted, then walked out. He visibly cringed, however, when he realized the salute was a bit off, before the door of the elevator closed behind him. Glynda sighed and told Ozpin, "I hope things go well."

"They will," Ozpin said self-assuredly, giving his aide a pat on the shoulder.

Later on…

Takeru had managed to speedily head to his dorm and nab the cracker pack from one of his MREs, alongside a bottle of fresh water from a vending machine. He reached Beacon's main classroom building and was strolling down the Hallway toward his classroom when he

caught sight of team RWBY already standing by the door. They were engaged in a conversation where Yang was showing off something with what seemed to be her characteristic smile. Other students had also gathered, five minutes before class started.

Yang had stopped mid-talk when she noticed Takeru approaching, then her grin widened as she greeted him with a wave. Awkwardly, the young man waved back as he walked to join them. She said, "There's the guy of the hour. Not even two or three hours into Beacon classes and you already got yourself into trouble! Gotta be a record."

"What can I say?" Takeru chuckled, then joked, "I am a trailblazer."

"A man flying a super-mech and defeating bullies before they get to him," Weiss snorted, "And escaping with only a simple Warning? Color me impressed, Lieutenant."

"I think I got through to them somehow," He answered, then shrugged. He then looked at the title of the class and mumbled, "Combat and Survival Training…? Huh, sounds familiar," as his thoughts wandered back to the CCSE and how that had gone for him and his teammates. A metaphorical Death March.

He wondered how Beacon handled this stuff, turning to the girls and asking, "How is the teacher for this one?"

"Sarge is a hardass," Yang chuckled, "In the best sense of the word. Sure, she presses us to be tough as can be, but she can be a bit *harsh*," as she stretched slightly, her uniform stretching over her muscles. She looked at him and saw a hint of recognition in his eyes, then smirked and asked, "Sounding familiar?"

"Oh, yeah," He nodded, "Must be a common trait for Sergeants honestly," before the bell rang. He said, "In we go…" before he propped the door open. Slowly, the students walked inside the room, a large amphitheater with a central desk sitting on a raised platform right in front of what looked like a mix of holographic board and a basic chalkboard.

Ruby said, "Don't worry! Teach is awesome! She's pretty cool, too… C'mon and sit with us! We have a couple free chairs beside us," and gestured to their row. He shrugged and joined them, sitting off to the left side of the middle row while the team sat side-by-side, combat partner by combat partner, AKA in the following order:Ruby, Weiss, Blake and Yang. The blonde gal was sitting next to him, with a smirk on her face.

"Hey, how'd you wind up fighting the BETA, by the way?" The girl asked while the last students walked to their seats and sat down. Takeru also noticed Cardin and the others of team Cardinal sitting in the uppermost area, with Cardin seemingly nursing the jaw he nearly broke with a pack of ice. The two men caught a glimpse of each-other and Cardin looked away.

He hummed, then looked at Yang and said, "... I dropped by a UN Base and joined in. Simple as, considering the shit the BETA were doing to my homeland and to the Earth overall," which got a few looks of surprise from the girls. He continued, "Do you need a bigger reason beside saving humanity and all that?"

"... I guess not," Weiss replied with half a mouth, "When monsters are overrunning your home, your only choice should be fighting."

"Yeah, because fleeing only delays the inevitable," He added, tapping a finger against the desk and looking around at the other students. Most were just talking, same as this little group. When he turned to look upon his benchmates, he saw them staring at him like he'd just said something concerning. He shrugged, "You know… That's what I think, anyway."

"Honestly, I agree," Ruby answered, "Running's no answer."

"You're a lot more grown up than most people, Ruby," Takeru replied with a smile. The girl laughed, a small red tint on her cheeks, and rubbed the back of her neck. She gave a thumbs up, while Weiss rolled her eyes and shook her head. Beside her, Blake was busy reading 'something'. He peeked past Yang, narrowing his eyes when he saw that what was behind the leather-made cover that looked like a standard school book was one of those weird newfangled YA/girl novels.

He frowned when he read a line, shook his head and said, "Blake…" which caused the cat to yelp, closing the book immediately. He told her, "C'mon, girl. Do it on your own time, not during class-" before pausing just as the door facing the group propped open. He whispered, "That must be Teach. Wonder how she's-" and he *visibly froze*.

Team RWBY looked at him, then at the woman approaching the desk. Shoulder-length, wavy, bright brown hair and eyes, a beautiful face that felt more fit for modelling than teaching, a yellow ribbed turtleneck sweater and skirt, leggings and high heels. She also had a jacket in her left hand and a mug of coffee in her right. The Jacket dark-greys and blacks with blue strips and a strange globe on the puffy shoulder.

She set it onto the chair and said, "Good morning, Students!"

"Good morning, Ma'am!" The entire class called out, chairs scraping as they stood up.

She smirked, "Louder! You're supposed to be humanity's defenders! Lemme hear your voices!"

"GOOD MORNING, MA'AM!" They cried out, all save for Takeru, who was still sitting, staring in pure shock at that which stood before them.

With an approving nod, she set her mug of coffee down and said to them, "I have to work with all of you on that after today's class… Sit your asses down!" while she prepared her Scroll tablet. She opened it, looking around the room from the uppermost rows down, speaking, "Anyways! I hear we have a new student coming in! Let's see…" then her eyes darted back down to her Scroll.

The name flashed on screen first. She started reading aloud, "Takeru! Shiroga… *Ne*…" and visibly froze, her voice lowering to a whisper, eyes shooting wide open. She frowned, then looked up and yelled in a tone that made several of the kids twitch, "Shirogane! SOUND OFF!" sounding more military than before.

"HERE!" The young man replied loudly, standing up, back ramrod straight. For a moment, the girls and the Teacher saw his face scrunch up, but he quickly put that stone mask back on. The woman looked him up and down, the young man clad in his Beacon uniform. She pursed her lips, the frown slowly shifting into a look of… Pity? Concern? The girls couldn't discern it.

"Think they know each-other?" Yang whispered to the others. All three seemed to nod, though Ruby looked excited.

"Well, well," The woman began, a small smile forming on her face. She read through Takeru's file as the man started to sweat, then said, "Getting a warning on your *first day of classes* is a record at Beacon, Shirogane! Care to explain yourself, or should I just read the report poor Professor Goodwitch had to write!?"

"... I-" Takeru started, looking a bit worried.

She shook her head, smile growing wider, then said, "Sit down. Class is starting," before she looked at the others and said, "As for everyone else, I can see team JNPR isn't here, meaning mister Arc finally took my advice and decided to stay at home and nurse his cold with his friends. Team RWBY," and she saw them perk up, turning toward her. She ordered, "I expect you girls to help our new student catch up with the curriculum so far. *Am I clear*?"

"Yes, ma'am!" All four of them replied, Blake looking particularly fearful. They all looked at poor Takeru as the young man seemed to be going through a *string* of emotions before settling on what looked to be joy, going by the smile. The Sergeant gave a nod of approval, then showed them to sit down. Takeru had already found another group of young women to help him.

Heh. Typical, the Sergeant thought. She turned and said, "Alright, let's begin with today's class! Maintenance! All of you Hunters have different weapons that need different means of maintenance, so the good lord knows you should keep an ample supply of Spare Parts! And yes, mister Winchester," and she turned toward the man with the hurt jaw, then grinned, "That also means your explosive Mace."

"Yes, ma'am," He replied awkwardly, before cocking his jaw and wincing.

She snorted and added, "And try not to heckle soldiers next time, son…" before she thumbed her tablet and activated a few images. While the rest of the class laughed, the Sergeant said, "Oh, laugh it up, kids! We've got more to talk about in this class, not just Winchester's desire to compensate!" and that further bolstered the laughter. "Alright, enough. Focus," She then ordered, voice flat as she put up the presentation on the holo-screen.

Almost an hour later, the woman was still speaking, saying, "... And as such, your weapon is always going to be an extension of who you are, regardless of if you bought it at a store, inherited it or made it yourself," and she eyed Ruby. Deactivating the holo-emitter, the woman turned toward them, tablet in hand, before stating, "I'd have had you kids running laps, but seeing the presence of our new comrade in arms here, I figured I might as well let you go today. *Just this once.*"

The kids cheered, while Takeru looked at the woman. She looked right back at him and said, "Except you, Shirogane. On me. We've gotta talk," which got several gasps and 'ooos' and 'aaahs' from the class, as if they weren't expecting the young man to be an immediate target. Yang joked about something, but Takeru didn't hear. He stood up, while the Sergeant ordered, "Alright, go! Before I change my mind about those laps!"

The class immediately filed out leaving young Takeru alone in the room with the Sergeant. She walked over to him slowly, moving her hands behind her back. *She looked exactly like back at home. That same silly, loud outfit, but the hardened eyes and facial expression of the Sergeant still stood first in front of him.*

The two stared at each-other, with the Sergeant very obviously sizing him up, before her eyes settled back onto his. And she smiled, "... Hello, Shirogane-san…"

"M-ma'am-" He was about to salute, voice cracking, but she showed him to stop.

"No… I'm not Sergeant Jinguuji right now, Takeru… Just Marimo, your teacher," She said softly, then walked up to him, putting a hand on her shoulder, "... How'd it go after I went out?" only to see the young man bow his head. She frowned and asked, "... Did you-" while her mind thought of the *worst*, that humanity had lost, that Japan was gone.

Takeru looked up with his own smile, though she could see his eyes clouding. He spoke with a low voice, "We took out the Kashgar Hive… We did it. Operation Cherry Blossom was a success, but God, the people we *lost*, both then and during the defense of Yokohama," while Marimo visibly blanked. She smiled brightly, while he asked, "... Marimo-chan…?"

"Don't push your luck," She joked, then sighed deeply and smiled, "... But yes… I think I'm just like you in a way. A mix of memories."

"... So you remember-" Takeru blinked.

"A few things… Walk with me to my office. We've got some catching up to do," The Teacher said, then picked up her jacket. She watched Takeru for a second, seeing the young man stare at her in confusion, then said, "Would you rather I make it an order even though I'm a Sergeant, Lieutenant Shirogane?"

He sighed, then nodded and followed her inside. This was gonna be interesting…

Chapter 4: Honor Part 1

Sergeant Jinguuji's office

The Sergeant's… Marimo-chan's office was the same as it had been at home. Somewhat of a mess, though an organized one. Her military and teacher personalities seemed to have melded together, kind of like how Takeru's multitude of personalities and previous loops had merged together to form the man he was today. Shirogane was sitting in front of her desk, where stacks of paper both finished and in waiting. A radio in the background played the familiar tunes of Kino, a Soviet and Post-Soviet Rock band.

The Sergeant approached her desk with two cups of warm coffee. She handed one to Shriogane, then sat down in front of him, with the backdrop of a large arched window letting the warm light of a twilight sun peer through. She said, "So… I'm guessing you have as many questions as I do in regards to *why* we're here."

"That'd be an understatement," Takeru replied, looking at the steaming cup in his hands, watching the warmth wafting up toward his face as his reflection darkened. He blinked when he heard a refrigerator door pop open, then looked up and saw Marimo offering him milk and some non-sugar sweeteners. He asked, "... You looking after your health and stopping sugars, ma'am?"

She chuckled, then said, "Just take them. My Teacher self couldn't stand my coffee this black, which is at odds with my current preferences," as she set them down in front of him, "And I'm not sure how much you used to drink before anyway."

"Maybe a cup every day," He answered, then set the warm porcelain mug down on the desk and started pouring and mixing his own. While he was doing that, he looked into his old Teacher's/DI's eyes and asked, "So… Any idea how we wound up in this mess? Bar the obvious with… Well, Sumika, believe it or not."

"Sumika?" The woman raised a brow, "What does our darling little troublemaker have to do with this?"

"... The Sumika from during the BETA Invasion became Unit-00," Takeru admitted with a hint of bitterness in his voice, "... They recovered her brain from the Yokohama Hive after Operation LUCIFER," then he paused as he saw the woman's eyes widen in shock. She set the mug down and leaned forward…

"You can't be serious. *Sumika*… Kagami Sumika. She was Unit 00? The one from the BETAverse, if we want to use that term, captured by the BETA and turned into one of those brain pod things…" She whispered, then covered her mouth and asked, "And what about you? The… The you from our war, I mean, from the Japanese Empire?"

"Died protecting her when Yokohama first fell to the BETA," he answered, then visibly shivered as he felt that *familiar pain surge through his arms and legs, then his body,* "... The

BETA tore me apart in front of her… Poor girl was traumatized by that alone. Much more by what they did to her *after the fact.*…" and he growled.

"... Takeru…" Her expression softened once again. Her words became whispered, "I'm *so sorry.*…"

"You've got nothing to apologize for, Sarge…" He answered flatly, leaning back into his seat and sipping his coffee without even tasting it. The slight bitterness hidden behind the artificial sweeteners and milk brought him back to reality. He continued, "The BETA did it. It wasn't your fault or mine that I woke up in place of a dead man…"

"Still, that must've been…" The woman began, then clenched her teeth, "*Why the hell didn't Yuuko say anything.*…?"

"OPSEC," He answered, "I think. I mean, you also didn't even know me or Sumika since you were never our teacher in any of the Timelines involving the BETA. At most, you had passing knowledge of me after every loop because Kouzuki-sensei decided it was really need-to-know. And even if you did know, like I said…"

"I didn't even know either of you, or the rest of 207B before they all became my trainees," Marimo completed, then breathed a heavy sigh, shifting uncomfortably in her seat, "... I always had a hunch of some kind, though. Like… You were supposed to be familiar to me. Maybe it was this whole Causality issue Yuuko kept talking about."

Takeru shrugged, "It's possible. I mean, weirder things have happened thanks to it."

"Don't I know it," She mumbled, then sighed and said, "Again, Takeru, I'm… So sorry. That must've been awful to you. Every loop and every failure. And even the successful one… What exactly happened during the Kashgar raid? And what did they even call the Operation?" then took a sip of her own black coffee.

He smiled, "Operation *Cherry Blossom*. A clever little play," as he adjusted his position to be more comfortable, "As for what happened? The mass assault of all Frontline Hives as a distraction for our infiltration mission. It was both successful and terrifyingly costly, but I and the rest of the Valkyries made it inside with the XG-70d Susanoo IV."

"They got that big hunk of alien crap flying," The woman smiled, "I missed a lot."

He nodded, then sighed, "The infiltration went well… Mostly. Until we got to the Doors to the central reactor area of the Hive. Then, shit started going wrong. The door was moving too slow to open, swarms of BETA were advancing on us, the Susanoo was nearly out of defensive turret ammo and the others stayed behind…"

Marimo could already tell where this was going. Like the heroes of old Greek Epics, 207A and 207B had gone down swinging. She saw it in his eyes. Then, she listened to him explain the Causality Conductor issues and Yuuko's involvement with Alternative-IV's actions. She *almost* became uncomfortable at the idea that good old Kouzuki Yuuko-sensei was this much of a crazy woman, but regardless of that…

They talked a bit about the Operations before Ouka, namely the battle on Sadogashima and the Defense of Yokohama where so many others lost their lives, the first Susanoo being detonated by Isumi–which damn near seemed to get Marimo to tears, though the woman hid it well–and everything else the poor woman had missed after getting her *head* chomped off by a Soldier-class.

She looked the young man she had trained and taught over, then breathed a deep, *deep* sigh, mumbling, "I'm sorry I died in front of you, Takeru. And I'm even more sorry you went through so much just because you wanted to fix both worlds you've been to. I can't call either ours alone, because we've been to both. And are part of both."

"I know," He answered, "And I don't blame you, Marimo-sensei… It's… I guess Yuuko-sensei really had a weird way of going about things," then he looked at her with an awkward smile, "But hey, it helped light a fire under our asses. And you did really well in training all of us. Doesn't matter if it was Captain Isumi and the other Valkyries or us in 207B."

Marimo smiled a smile that didn't reach her ears, then replied, "You and 207B got so goddamn lucky I'd mellowed out by the time you came to me. The things I put poor Michiru and her team through *and everything else that happened during the CCSE*… I still feel like a genuine *cunt* because of it…" and then she let out a chuckle.

Takeru smiled, "Hey, you made the captain and the others tough as god-damn nails. They helped ease us rookies into our actual duties!"

"You're too kind…" The woman replied, then checked her Scroll and said, "I think I kept you long enough. You've got Dust Applications as your final class for today, then I expect you to go to team RWBY and ask them to help with the curriculum…" before she locked eyes with the Lieutenant and asked, "You got me, Lieutenant?"

His smile grew a bit, though it, too, didn't reach his ears. He snapped a salute and said, "Loud and clear, Sergeant Jinguuji, ma'am."

She saluted back and said, "Atta, boy. Go. I think you're gonna like the Dust Class. Professor Peach is very hands-on with its application," before she stood up and prepared her materials for her own next class. The young man followed suit, with the woman turning toward him just before he walked out the door and telling him, "If you ever need someone to talk to, Takeru, my door's gonna be open to you. And to anyone else who might drop by…"

She saw the confusion on his face, smiled and said, "Shirogane, I thought your deductive reasoning was better than that. One of us dropping in would've been a weird coincidence. A *second* coming in with his TSF and equipment is no longer that, but the beginning of a Pattern. Be ready for anything, would you? When we're gonna have to sally out to rescue more of our comrades from the Grimm, they'll all need your head in the game."

He nodded, "Yes, ma'am," though he wasn't sure he believed they'd have that kind of luck. The woman dismissed him with a wave, then breathed a deep sigh as soon as he left the office, closing the door behind him. She could see the Survivor's Guilt, that glint, that specific question in his face. She could see it because she'd been asking herself the same thing since Korea. *Why were any of them still alive?*

Takeru breathed a sigh as he stepped out into the empty amphitheater-style classroom. He turned toward the chalkboard, lifted up his Scroll and took a picture of the material with the HD camera of the phone-computer combo before switching from that to the Beacon Map application. He checked where his next course would be, then sighed and walked out through the door.

"Hey, Takeru!" He heard a voice call out, nearly jumping out of his skin, then craned his head to the right. Yang was standing there with the rest of the team, grinning as she asked, "Did Sarge Jinguuji grill ya all that hard about Cardin, man? Jeez, you'd think she didn't know we had other classes… Don't worry, though, we still got five minutes."

He answered, "Nah, we just talked…"

"It seems like you two know each-other," Weiss commented, arms crossed. He nodded, to which the Heiress smugly said, "I guess I can say 'I told you so' to Yang. How, though?" while the blonde started to grumble, much to the amusement of Ruby and Blake. The group began their march toward their next class, with Takeru looking at them as they stared, waiting for answers.

He replied, "... We're from the same time and place to put it simply. She was my Drill Sergeant and my Teacher. Seeing her here again was…" and then actually smiled properly, "It's nice to have someone like her back… Especially as a teacher. And the hell of it is, I think she'll do well in training you girls how to properly fight those Grimm things…" and looked at them.

"Aw," Ruby smiled, "Sweet."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence, T-Man," Yang chuckled as they strode forth through a set of doors, arriving at their next classroom. Their classmates were waiting for Professor Peach to arrive there, with the blonde immediately warning him, "Be ready. Prof Peach is an entirely different beast to our good Sergeant."

"She can't be that bad, right?" He asked as they entered the classroom, watching the four girls wince. Great. They sat together again, with the young man saying, "This reminds me, I should probably ask you all for the notes for this semester. Y'know, to actually be caught up with my studies and stuff and *not* look like a complete idiot."

"I will provide. Worry not," Weiss answered, then said, "Oh, there's Prof Peach…"

Like a whirlwind, a woman with orangeish-blond hair, tan skin and a very fancy and oddly-styled labcoat with multiple patches emerged from her office. With a beaming smile and a ton of lab equipment on hand, she greeted the group with exacerbated cheerfulness. "Welcome to the last class for the day, my darling students! I heard we have a new face among us from Sergeant Jinguuji! Stand up, mister Takeru!"

… Shirogane sighed. Was this gonna become the norm?

About a week later…

Takeru stirred in his sleep. Memories he had hoped would be buried deep in his subconscious mind resurfaced like knives, stabbing into his mind. The final battle at the Original Hive replayed now in his mind. His comrades fighting rearguard action, protecting him, Sumika and Kasumi on their way in. All of them winking off his HUD one by one, falling like flies. Their voices, urging him to press on into the maw of the beast.

Then, the darkness that followed, the blue-hued glow of the Hive's Reactor still flashing in his mind. The rise of the Superordinate from its frame, that ugly multi-eyed BETA bastard who commanded the forces on Earth. The talk they had, the near-continuous attempts on his and his friends' lives… Then Meiya.

Oh, God… Meiya…

"Takeru!" He could hear her strained voice begging, "Please… Don't let the deaths of our friends be for naught…!"

"I can't do it, dammit! Do you hear me!? I CAN'T! I CAN"T LOSE SOMEONE ELSE!"

"PLEASE!" She begged, "Please… Let me at least die by the hand of the man I loved!"

MEIYA!

The Gunfire. Takeru jumped awake when he was squeezing the trigger. His eyes welled with tears that dripped down onto his blanket. He whined, rubbing his eyes and whispering, "God… *Meiya…*" as he shook his head. He took a deep, shaky breath, feeling his body weakened from the ordeal, then nearly jolted in fear as his alarm blared.

He hit the snooze button, then stood up, rushing to the bathroom and turning on his faucet before splashing cold water onto his face, trying to stifle the last few tears before he would don his Beacon Uniform. He sniffled, wiping his face. He leaned against the sink, letting that nervousness wash away as the few tears that he'd barely managed to clean turned into full-on sobbing.

He let himself cry for four minutes against the sink, feeling his knees shaking as his mind flashed with the images of all of his fallen friends again before settling on both poor Meiya and *poor Sumika.* He shivered with each sob, coughing from time to time. Then, he took three deep, *deep* breaths, tightened his grip on the edges of the sink and turned the water back on, washing his face of the salt and snot.

A few minutes later, he was in uniform, his scroll in his pocket and gun hidden in his pants. He heard a knock on the door as he was buckling his belt, steeled his voice, then called out, "Be right there!" as he made sure he had fully cleaned his face. He walked over to the door and propped it open, only to see Yang standing there with a smirk.

"Yo, T-man…" She started, but her voice faded out as she frowned. "You good?"

"Yeah," He answered, arranging the collar of his jacket. He asked, "Why-?' then paused as he realized. Damn, right, his eyes were probably still bloodshot from the crying. He answered, "Oh, right… I just had a bit of a rough sleep tonight. Nothing to worry about," to which the

blonde squinted her lilac eyes at him suspiciously, before letting him off with a sigh, smile and a pat on the shoulder.

She tilted her head left and said, "Alright, mister Insomniac. C'mon, we'll be late for Sarge's class," as she turned toward the rest of her team. She mumbled, "Last time we missed classes, we had to do a hundred push-ups and I *don't* wanna repeat what happened after," as she walked. The man chuckled, then adjusted his tie.

"Yeah, that sounds like Sergeant Jinguuji Marimo, alright," He told her amusedly, "Worked me and my friends half-to-death for mistakes, too."

"Hehe," Yang chuckled.

When they reached the R, W and B of team RWBY, Takeru greeted them with a wave and said, "Before anyone asks," while pointing at his eyes, "I had a bad night's sleep. Can happen to anyone at any time…" and didn't hear anything else from the girls. As they strolled down the halls and took the elevator down to the ground floor, Takeru's mind wandered.

He'd slept relatively okay for most of the god-damned week. So, *why* exactly was he dreaming of Meiya's death? He had managed to suppress most of those memories pretty well *without* descending into anything like Alcoholism or drugs, just focused breathing and maybe a bit of that old Post-Hypnotic suggestion stuff.

Heh. He still remembered captain Isumi mentioning that had all been bull just before she died. That she gave him a Placebo as a means of driving home the fact *he was by no means a coward.* That she knew very well he was a courageous young man that could fight. She and everyone else had made him the man he was today.

To cry for them was normal. To stain their memory by wanting to die again was an insult to their sacrifice.

He smiled a little, then looked at Ruby, noticing she was staring at his pants. He blinked, face flushed, then asked, "Ruby, where the hell are ya staring?" Which caused Little Red Riding-Reaper to jump out of her skin and yelp. Yang started laughing. Blake was hiding her smirk behind her book. And Weiss was pinching her brow, looking annoyed.

"SORRY, SORRY! I SAW YOU'RE CONCEALED CARRYING," She raised her hands defensively.

He blanked, then looked down and said, "It's *that* freaking visible!?"

"HAHAHAHA!" Yang's outburst stopped the team in her tracks. She hunched over, grabbing her belly as she laughed aloud. She barely managed to utter out, "*PHRASING*, DUDE!" between each hiccuping laugh. "HOLY CRAP! ESPECIALLY IN THE *MIDDLE* OF A CONVO LIKE THIS!" She finished, which made him crack a smile, too.

Ruby, ever the innocent girl, replied with, "I dunno what the heck Yang's talking about. What kinda gun is it?"

He chuckled, then lifted his shirt and pulled the Minabea P9 out. He examined the weapon to make sure the safety was on, pulled out the magazine and racked the slide to make sure he hadn't loaded a round. Then, he handed it to the Ruby and said, "It's a Minabea P9. Standard issue sidearm of the Imperial Japanese Mainland Defense Forces."

"Woah," She let out, taking the pistol. She racked the slide back again, letting it slam forward, then looked the gun over with a beaming smile. "It's so cool! And it's a bit front-heavy, too. Recoil must be nice considering it fires a nine-mil round and the balance would *probably* be better with it loaded, but it's cool!" and she examined the markings on the side of the gun. She squinted and said, "Uh… Can't read these."

He snorted, "It's just the serial number, factory markings and acceptance stamps from the IJMSDF, Rubes. Nothing important written on the side except the caliber."

She giggled again, then gripped it by the barrel and gave it back to Takeru. He took it, slid the magazine back in and put it back in its holster, shifting it slightly to the side so the uniform jacket would cover it. Then, he looked back at Yang as she finally began to settle down. Weiss commented, "Gods, the blonde's immature."

"I know how to have fun, Ice Queen," Yang jabbed back with a smirk. Weiss pouted, while the blonde stuck her tongue out at her.

Blake chuckled and shook her head, then looked at Takeru and said, "How are you doing? Getting used to the mess that is Beacon and being friends with us?" as she lowered her book. Honestly, if Takeru spent any amount of time thinking about it, the girls were easy to get along with. Ruby was a gun nut, but she was friendly, Weiss had an icy exterior, but seemed quite warm and friendly to anyone she deemed was worth it, Blake was aloof at times, but he could connect to her love of fantasy books–despite some of the weird recommendations she gave him–and Yang? Yang felt like Sumika if they'd never met… Bar the obvious extra strength.

He joked back, "It's a steep learning curve, I'll admit," which made the catty girl smile a bit more brightly. Yang threw an arm over the man's shoulder and gave him a pat, laughing again. The five continued down the beaten path toward Beacon's main classroom area, passing through the Campus which was yet again alive with the din of students and teachers.

They came upon team JNPR in the waiting area outside of the classroom, with Takeru raising a hand and greeting, "Jaune, Nora, Pyr, Ren. Glad to see you guys again," then looking at Jaune and asking, "How's the Cold?"

Jaune sniffed, then wiped his nose with a red handkerchief with *weirdly specific embroidered bronze and gold patterns*, then said with a stuffy nose, "It's gotten manageable thanks to Pyrrha. And Nora's pancakes actually helped a bit, too, heh," before gesturing at Ren and saying, "But I think Ren's caught it now."

"I will be fine," Ren replied, then put his hands together and bowed, greeting, "Good to see you again, Shirogane."

"Likewise, Ren, but we literally just saw each-other yesterday," He replied with a smile. He looked at Pyrrha and asked emphatically, "I hope the request wasn't too weird, by the way."

"Not at all," Pyrrha smiled, "Chicken soup *does* seem surprisingly good for colds, heh," though she was rubbing her shoulder. While Jaune was a bit klutzy, kind of like Mikoto, Pyrrha was closer to Meiya in personality:A sheltered type. Though that would be unfair to Pyr, as she had encountered people beforehand. As for Ren? Well, he was the calm one of the group to offset Nora's own bombastic, seemingly Thor-From-Comic-Books-inspired personality.

He was about to reply to that when he felt a hand land on his shoulder. Swiveling about, he saw Marimo standing in front of them, with all the kids looking stunned that she managed to sneak up on him. She said, "Sorry, girls," before turning and saying, "Kids, small announcement! We're cancelling today's class and we'll catch up on what we're teaching today the next time! Move your asses back to your dorms! Shirogane, you're with me."

Though there were cheers around, the urgency with which the woman had grabbed Takeru worried him. They walked away from the group before he asked, "What's going on?" as he felt worry bubble up in his heart. The woman pulled out her tablet as they walked and showed to him footage from the farthest perimeter of the Emerald Forest, right near the mountains.

He went bug-eyed as he watched… Like blurs, a pair of purple-colored Tactical Surface Fighters with red accents dashed across the battlefield. Their blades flashed, cutting swathes through a swarming Division-strength herd of Grimm both small and large. The largest of the creatures looked almost like mutated Elephants and bears mixed with Porcupines.

"... T-Those are…" He stumbled over his words, heart starting to race as he saw the pair of Mechanoids dance with their blades, almost as if they were in a competition of who could slay more Grimm.

"*Takemikazuchis.*.." The woman answered flatly, "Bearing the colors of the Shogunate… I asked Ozpin to cancel classes today and will be acting as your Mission Control for this. Your Shiranui's ready for deployment… *Go get them home, Shirogane*!" before she gave him a slap on the back and pushed him forward.

Purple Takemikazuchis…

Before he could even process it, Takeru was running in a full sprint toward his room. In about five minutes, he'd donned his full Fortified Suit and dashed toward the indicated area where his Shiranui had been taken. He descended a set of stairwells down to the underground section of Beacon and flicked his com system on, calling out, "This is STORM VANGUARD ONE to Command Post, I'm in," as he jumped into his Shiranui. *Meiya…? No way… No way, right?*

"STORM VANGUARD ONE, roger. You've got the Green Light. I'm feeding you the exact Coordinates now… Get the Shogun and her escorting comrade home," Marimo replied, her face flashing onto the Heads-Up Display of the Shiranui. Takeru quickly went through the pre-launch procedures, engaging the engines and detaching from the makeshift Gantry in the

massive underground area which was seemingly used to store Airships. He turned the mech, stomping his way forward, then powered his Thrust System to maximum.

"I will… STORM VANGUARD ONE, *away*!" He barked, then slammed the throttle of the bird to full. The TSF lurched forward, before bending its knees and its back and pushing out under the full might of its propulsion. Takeru banked left as he approached the tunnel exit, then turned toward the target area. He grit his teeth, then said, "Your Highness, Koubuin Yuuhi, wait. *And if you have Meiya with you.*…" and shook his head, clearing the thoughts of that final confrontation and letting out a *mighty* roar as the flew out at NOE-level.

He'd get her back…!

Chapter 5: Honor Part 2

… Emerald Forest, 2002

"This is Koubuin Yuuhi, Shogun of the Empire of Japan, transmitting in the blind to any allied nations forces in the area! We are currently under attack by an unknown strain of BETA, requesting assistance!" That message continued to repeat over and over in his cockpit as his hands gripped the controls of his Shiranui like a vice. The thrusters on the old Mech burned *hard* so he could make it to them.

The Herd of Grimm attacking them kept growing in size for some Godforsaken reason. There must've been thousands of contacts from all across the Emerald Forest. He could see the little fuckers moving about down below, like a swarm of ants charging a piece of food. *They wouldn't take either Yuuhi or her escort out.*

Deep down… *Deep* down, Takeru hoped that it wasn't Meiya in that second Type-00R. *He couldn't face her right now*. Not after failing to notice so much during their time together. Not that he regretted his choices when it came to Sumika, obviously, but that he'd been so blind to *all of them* and *Meiya, most of all.* He'd trusted the girl with a lot. And failed her many times…

No, no time to think about it. He checked if he was finally in range. His own transmitter had been damaged slightly or something, because the transmission range was much smaller than the receiver range. His HUD displayed the circle around his Shiranui. He saw it was in range and he was pretty sure his IFF was now on their HUDs. Regardless…

"... Your Highness, this is STORM VANGUARD ONE, Unit A01, coming up from your six o'clock! Check your fire!" The man spoke. He could see the combat halt for a half-second in the distance, the muffled roar of autocannons and the slashes of swords stopping. He grit his teeth and said, "Hold on! I'm almost there, ETA twenty seconds!"

"... T-Takeru…?" He heard an ever-familiar voice whisper back. His eyes widened as the DataLink struggled to form a coherent image. Damned lack of satellites…

"On my way! Just hold on!" The man replied with a light crack in his voice, then pulled up. Normally, it was suicidal to pull up in the middle of a warzone with a herd of enemies due to Laser-Classes, but the Grimm seemed to lack that kind of capability at the moment. Meaning, he could strike the Grimm Birds, the Nevermores, hammering the pair with quills.

The first one appeared on his HUD, target locked. He raised his twin Autocannons, then barked, "HOW'S THIS FOR SIZE?!" before squeezing the twin triggers. The bursts rippled through the air and the first bird was caught completely by surprise. Its right wing exploded at what would've been its shoulder joint, while its chest burst wide from the APHE rounds.

The second tried to turn and attack him, apparently using its wings as swords. He spoke, "Oh, the fuck you don't…!" and dodged deftly by pushing max thrust on his right thruster. He

tracked the bird and fired another short burst from his right-hand cannon, ripping it in half before he spun, making the engines face forward and hitting his airbrakes.

He landed between the two Type-00R Takemikazuchis and saw various smaller fodder Grimm were already torn to pieces by their blades and dissipating into shadow dust. He spoke, "Sorry for the delay, Your Highnesses. It's been a day…" as he checked his ammo count. "What's your propellant and ammo status? Any damage?"

"We're both green on ammunition and supplies, but I've suffered slight damage to my right thruster unit," Yuuhi replied warmly over the comlink, then said, *"... It's a pleasure to see you again, Shirogane-kun."*

"Pleasure's all mine," He replied with an awkward smile as he saw Yuuhi's communication window appear on his HUD, off to the side of the altimeter. She looked so *odd* in a Fortified Suit, but he had to expect it. The Shogun was the head of military affairs for the Empire among other things, so of course she would've been trained in operating one of the finest war machines the IJMDF and Royal Guard had on hand. He asked, "Is it only you two? No Captain Tsukuyomi or her Three?"

"For the moment," Yuuhi answered, *"We couldn't track any other friendly contracts and our DataLink has failed to connect to the SAT Networks. We're all on local systems."*

"Yeah… Long story, we're not on Earth anymore," He replied awkwardly, then watched the larger of the Grimm horde appear:Giant, elephant-like monstrosities escorted by those Scorpions he'd seen beforehand, the Death Stalkers. He heard both girls gasp, then said, "Look, no time to think about that now! We got a *LOT* of incoming! I saw them on my way here…" as he saw the *blob* of red on his Radar, surrounding their own little clear spot. He mumbled, "What did you two even do to piss this many off?"

"We would tell you if we knew, Takeru…" The woman in the other Type-00R replied softly, a hint of sadness in her voice. Takeru's heart skipped a beat.

He replied, "... Yeah… I know," before stowing his guns and switching to his blade, "... We'll have to do this the old fashioned way. They're too close already."

"We will let our blades speak for us as we have so far, then," The Shogun answered, her voice firm. Her counterpart in the other Mech answered affirmatively, steadying her blade with some flourish. Storm Vanguard One smiled and nodded, before deactivating visual com to clear up the clutter on his HUD.

The three began their engagement the moment the first large-form Grimm stepped into the line. Takeru's swing decapitated one of the larger elephant-like creatures, then bisected a Death Stalker. Their sibling creatures did not take too kindly to that, charging forth. The leading Death Stalker, a monster much larger than the others at about the size of a FORT-Class, met Takeru headfirst.

The young man swung his blade against its thick bone plate, but only saw it chipping through. He swore under his breath as the chittering, chitinous monster thrust its own massive poison stinger toward him, forcing him to dodge as it struck the ground. He knocked down

several trees with his move and burned a hole in the grass, but ignored it, powering up his thrusters and saying, "Jesus *Christ*, that's a big one!"

"I didn't take you for a Christian man, Shirogane-kun," Yuuhi found the time to joke at such an important moment.

"Oh, ha ha!" He replied with a mild hint of sarcasm, then yelped and said, "OH SHIT-" as the creature swung its tail around to try and swat him out of the air. He dodged, feeling the G-Force slam him into his seat slightly. He had removed the limiters and safeties of his Shiranui in order to be able to move the same as he always had. And the Takemikazuchis weren't doing much worse.

He saw the escort Takemikazuchi dive low, sliding across the ground and swinging her own blades like a blender. A very, *very swan-like* blender, obviously. She was cutting limbs and dealing with smaller forms of Grimm like the Beowolves in long, broad and graceful swings. What she couldn't kill with her blade, she let the wash of her jet engines burn away. Her strikes also split Trees in half. *He damn well knew that fighting style.*

And Yuuhi was no slacker either. The Shogun moved with all the poise and strength of her Station, her blade striking true each time she swung it, bisecting Grimm creatures as she dodged the Quills of the monsters above. She spun about, drawing the autocannon off her back and firing *two, read that, TWO ROUNDS*. Each punched clean through the head of a Nevermore, taking the crows' head off with a thunderous roar.

She then turned, aiming her cannon beneath her arm. The 120mm top barrel roared next and a High-Explosive round slammed into the elephant-like Goliath. The shrapnel spray and shockwave wiped out dozens of smaller creatures that were all cluttered around *or* riding on its back, all the while the Shogun continued to pass through the enemy like a hot knife through butter.

The young man had to keep up somehow. He ducked beneath another swing of the giant Deathstalker's tail, landing on top of it and driving his blade *deep* into a chink in its segmented armor, before powering the TSF's hydraulics to the maximum to pry the monster's armored frame open. He saw the bone plate start to peel as the monster screamed in what he could *only* assume was a mockery of the human sensation of pain.

He pried off the plate and drove the blade deep into the black flesh, causing it to stagger. Its claws nearly caught him, however. He had to move away, dodge the swinging pincers as they tried to clip his wings. He swung high again, deflecting the Tail that was aimed for his head, then drew his guns again as he flew up and away.

The 120mm cannons repeatedly thundered, AP-HE rounds chunking through the upper plate, turning more and more of it to metaphorical dust. He redirected his aim at the smaller strains seemingly trying to protect it and switched to his 36mm autoguns. The HE blasts rippled like an earthquake across the ground, tearing through more and more of the herds while the Shiranui banked and shifted its weight, using its propulsion unit to the maximum.

He remembered that the stinger area was a relative weak-point. The rear of the tail was armed with segmented, articulated plating, though. He could try and snipe the tail or slice it off,

drive it into the top of its skull. Felt a bit cliche for a finisher, but he'd gotten through the upper plate, so… Why not. He said, "Stand clear of the big guy! I'm gonna try something!"

He powered his boosters, flying as high as possible while he tracked his intended target with the cannons. He still had enough ammo in his 120 to make the shot, so he aimed, aligned the barrels via sensors, then squeezed. The first shot went sadly wide, impacting the ground and tearing a tree out with its roots. He scoffed, aimed again, then fired. The second shot hit closer, having nailed the tail and chipped through its armor plate.

He grit his teeth, then mumbled, "Nearly got you…!" as he used his mobility again to dodge more quills flying his way. He heard the rip of twin autocannons firing from below and turned his head, watching Yuuhi play the part of the Anti-Air. She'd cleared a decent chunk of land around her–and deforested a lot more of it–giving her ample room to provide anti-air duties.

The other Takemikazuchi continued to fight through the onslaught, though, larger and larger swathes of land being cleared while Takeru was taking his aim, waiting for the proper opportunity to turn the Grimm down below into a dead bug walking through its own weapon. Then, he saw it, an opening as the creature's tail recoiled back, aiming to strike the Shogun's mech.

He slammed the trigger and the 120mm APFSDS round shot out like an arrow. The dart of depleted uranium zipped through the air at supersonic speeds and struck the very *joint* linking the stinger to the tail. The alien sinew ripped and tore and the monster screamed in pain, bucking back. Takeru saw his opportunity to finish it off then and there.

He roared a battle cry as he went on full thrust toward it, stowing his weapons. As he made contact with the stringer, he used the Shiranui's enhanced artificial musculature to tear it out, watching black ichor spew out from the tail as he dived down with it. A moment later, he slammed it *clean through the top of the monster's body, into the exposed spot he'd managed to create.*

Then, he jumped away and drew his guns again, joining the Takemikazuchis down low as the creature hissed, bucked and *collapsed*. Like dust in the wind, it dissolved and began to disappear. The rest of the Herd seemed to thin out, slowly but steadily disappearing back into the forest. Takeru touched down, watching the creatures slowly dissipate.

He breathed a deep sigh, finally able to relax as the adrenaline started to wear off. He checked his TSF for damage and found only very slight dents and dings through the basic diagnostics, though he was sure he'd taken a quill to one of his own engines when he wasn't looking. He looked around at the other two, their Takemikazuchis glistening in the sunlight, bar the scratches and dents from the damage they, too, had sustained.

He smiled, then said, "I'm coming out. Area should be safe now…" as he hit the button to open the control block's doors and extended the hand, switching it to automatic as the main door opened, letting in the beautiful sunlight of the day. Jumping onto the hand in his full Suit felt so, *so* familiar, especially when dealing with people. He radioed, "HQ, this is STORM VANGUARD ONE. Friendlies are now secure."

"Roger that… We'll have berths ready for when you choose to return," Marimo replied with a smile.

He smiled, then watched the other two pop open their hatches. To his right, he immediately saw Yuuhi standing atop the hand of her mech, a smile on her face and her arms crossed. He could also swear he saw something *faintly* moving behind her, but he wasn't sure what it was. He quickly saluted the woman, who replied in kind, then raised a hand to show him to calm down.

Then, the other Takemikazuchi opened. If Takeru's heart was still beating, he could no longer feel it. The air around him suddenly felt like it was pressing down on his shoulders and his suit felt *tighter* than it should have for a form-fitting piece of equipment. Standing on the hand of her machine, too, *Mitsurugi Meiya, heiress to the Mitsurugi Zaibatsu and his OTHER childhood friend*, stood, staring at him with eyes as wide as his.

As the three hands lowered in unison and the TSFs crouched to let them down, the three stepped off the metallic palms of their machines onto the dirt. Meiya smiled, a sad, weird smile that reached her eyes, but looked off, almost depressed. She rubbed her hands together and spoke, "... Takeru… I'm so happy to see you."

"Hey, Meiya…" He answered softly, rubbing the back of his neck.

"Before we start with the sappy items on the list… Shirogane-kun? Have you noticed anything different about us?" Yuuhi interrupted, causing the man to look at her. His heart hadn't gone silent. He just noticed now that it was firing off like an assault cannon. The woman grinned smugly, swaying her hips a little…

… What the fuck-

"... M-Ma'am, is that a-" Takeru stuttered, pointing at the woman.

"Tail?" The woman replied, then turned to where she was showing her rear area. *Indeed*, a tail poked out from the suit. A strange, canine tail with a bit of purplish-blue fur that matched her hair in color. It was wagging. She smiled and said, "We woke up with these traits while we were figuring out where we were."

"*'WE'*," He repeated, then looked at Meiya. On top of her head, just behind the hair vents, a pair of wolf-like ears twitched slightly as the girl blushed. The ears drooped slightly while Takeru stared at her with a mix of pure disbelief and… Some part of happiness? In his expression. She blinked, face flushed red as the ears twitched again.

Then, she said to him, "T-Takeru… Please, stop staring. I'm embarrassed enough as it is…" her voice lower in volume, but slightly higher in pitch. He was actively trying to process what he was seeing, enough so that his mind seemed to forget about everything tied to his own grief for at least this very moment. She whispered, "It's annoying. I cannot even fit my helmet on anymore…!"

Yuuhi added, "And now that that is out of the way… We should go home."

"R-Right," Takeru snapped out of his fugue, then said, "Board your Takemikazuchis and follow me. I got us a home base on this planet ahead of time," before mounting back up into his Shiranui. The other two followed, quickly boarding their Type-00Rs and reactivating their engines. The three TSFs let their Thrusters roar to full power before they took off, flying NOE above the Emerald Forest, just close enough for their mechs' metallic toes to skim the treetops.

As they approached the southern edges of the forest, both young women could finally see it:Beacon. Their safety net. The tower in the center glowed, promptly revealing itself as the place's namesake as the trio flew. Both of the girls followed Takeru down toward the front cliff area of the school, turning towards a tunnel. The Shiranui shifted its thrusters forward and deployed its airbrake, landing softly atop the concrete.

The berths that waited for them looked almost exactly the same as those used in military bases back home. The three machines walked their way toward them, where technicians and staff waited to look over the machines and check for damage. They settled into place and the main gantries folded in around them, hugging the machines and providing the Pilots a way off.

Takeru dismounted first, leaving the machine to cool as it shut off. Beside him, he saw both Her Highness and Meiya. They both looked at him, smiling, though Meiya still held onto that sad-looking face. They descended from the gantries and marched over to the elevator, which they quickly took to the top floor.

None of them spoke as the lift rode up to Headmaster Ozpin's office, though it was clear to Yuuhi that Takeru and Meiya wished to speak. To delve into that which they'd faced when they attacked Kashgar and the events that occurred there between them and their friends. She could probably never understand it herself, but she knew her sister cared deeply for the young man. And to his credit, Shirogane-kun seemed to care for Meiya, too. In his own way. At least if she remembered all of *her* sides of the loops correctly.

… He finally broke the ice, asking, "Are you okay, Meiya?"

"I am…" She answered, rubbing her shoulder, "I suppose I *am* still reeling from awakening here. With *ALL* of my memories…" and she smiled awkwardly, face flushing again. Takeru blanked, remembering a *few of the Loops involving them*. She told him, however, "... I am sort of… Shocked and saddened that our duty is not yet done?"

"Could be what dragged the Grimm in," Takeru explained, then saw the confusion on both women's faces and explained, "They're attracted to negative emotions. Waking up here caused a lot of issues for me, too. And I dragged a smaller herd in. You two combined must've… Well, seemed like an open buffet to that massive force."

"That would… Explain a few things," Yuuhi admitted, "A terrifying foe, these Grimm."

"No match for the BETA, I'll tell you what," He answered in a murmur. The elevator chimed to their arrival and the three walked off of it, to the sight of Marimo in her uniform and Headmaster Ozpin talking. Marimo turned, then smiled brightly at the sight of Meiya… And damn near did a double-take when she saw Yuuhi. She saluted.

Yuuhi saluted back, then said, "Please, Sergeant Jinguuji. Relax. There is no need to salute me…"

"S-Sorry, ma'am," She blinked, then looked at Meiya and nearly doubled-over. She'd spotted the Faunus traits the moment they walked in and looked at Takeru for confirmation. He nodded awkwardly, arms crossed. Marimo said to Ozpin, "Sorry about that, Headmaster. I was just surprised… Second Lieutenant Mitsurugi and Her Highness, Shogun Koubuin did not have faunus traits before coming here."

Ozpin smiled, "I understand, Sergeant. Ladies, if you and mister Shirogane would take a seat, please," and he gestured to the chairs.

Yuuhi hummed, then looked at the two and said, "... I apologize, but I am afraid Meiya may not be able to attend this discussion. If she will allow me, I will speak for her," before her gaze shifted to Meiya. The young woman blinked, then her eyes widened as she looked at her twin. Yuuhi smiled and said, "You and Shirogane-kun have a lot to talk about… I can speak for both of us, sister."

She wanted to protest, to say that it was fine, it could wait, but… She sighed, shoulders sagging. Her eyes locked onto Marimo next, though. Then, she said, "I suppose so… However, please give me a few seconds…" as she walked forward, voice cracking. Sergeant Jinguuji stared on in slight surprise at Meiya, who stepped up to her and saluted. Marimo replied in kind, her smile returning, then gasped as *Meiya* of all people gave her a hug.

She let out a deep, but happy sigh and hugged the girl back, giving her a pat on the head. She told her, "It's good to see you, too, Mitsurugi-san… Now, go. Her Highness is right, you and Takeru have a *lot* to talk about," and that gave the girl the all clear to break off the hug. She nodded, still smiling, then walked back to Takeru.

He turned his head and gestured to the elevator. Yet again, the descent to the ground floor was quiet, as was the walk back to ward the Dormitories which Takeru was pretty sure Ozpin was going to send both Yuuhi and Meiya to. The two entered, then entered his room, which now had two new beds placed inside.

Meiya whispered, "I suppose the Headmaster prepared for our arrival," though her voice cracked. She turned toward Takeru, who was seemingly trying to say something to her. She, too, wanted to say something. About their original timeline, their homes, their lives, about the Alternatives and the BETA, her sacrifice, what she'd said. She wanted to make excuses, but just like Takeru, her words seemed to stick to her throat.

She felt extremely guilty, both for not being able to hold onto her own thoughts AND because she'd left him alone…

Takeru, though. The young man was staring at one of his greatest failures. Sure, he and Meiya were very good friends, or at least he hoped she still thought of him as a friend despite him choosing Sumika very clearly in the final loop. He wanted to apologize for not being able to save her, but his usual self seemed to be winning out.

Tears welled in his eyes as he stared at the girl. He couldn't utter a single word to beg for forgiveness, instead standing there like a lost dog, staring at her like she'd just come to punish his mistakes instead of what she was really here for. She blinked, trying to wipe away her own tears… And, then, without hesitation, she marched up to Takeru and did as she did to Marimo. She hugged him.

A moment later, all those bottled up emotions that Takeru had been holding onto for the entire day, trying not to let them spill out, *rolled out like a wave.* He broke down in her arms, as did she in his. Meiya, however, was unsurprisingly more dignified than Takeru. He moved quickly to wipe the snot that was threatening to stain Meiya's suit, then whispered, "I'm so sorry…" through barely-choked-out sobs.

"It's okay," She whispered back, then swallowed and smiled, *"We're okay. We made it."*

"Y-Yeah…" He replied, "We did…" as he started shivering.

"... Where's Kagami-san-... Sumika?" She asked. The young man bowed his head, continuing to cry in her arms, to which she whispered, "... I'm so, *so sorry,* Takeru… Look at the bright side. She might yet make it here, just like I and Yuuhi did," as she patted his head. She wiped her own tears from her face, *"Maybe everyone will…"*

"S-So… Sorry… I… I didn't notice, I didn't know, I…" Takeru continued through the tears.

She answered, "Takeru… It's okay," then sighed and said, "I know… *But it's all in the past now,*" before the two of them moved back. They wiped their own tears away, with the girl adding, "And we're alive again. We've done our part in every known loop or universe… And you and Sumika did it, after all. The enemy is gone… Maybe this is our way to peace…"

"Maybe," He replied, then breathed a shaky sigh and put on a smile, finally, "... You've got no idea how happy I am to see you, Meiya. Especially after… *Everything,*" and he shrugged his shoulders, "And I'm even happier to see Marimo-chan was right," which immediately got Meiya giggling. He said, "Hey, she's cool with me calling her that here! At least from time to time and *definitely not in her class.*"

"She's back to teaching?" The girl asked, her wolf ears twitching joyfully. She was glad to see Takeru finally smiling. She'd been worried she did something to upset him in truth, what with that confession *right* as she was set to perish at his hands. Shirogane then gave a happy nod, to which the girl chuckled and said, "Oh, I pity the students at this Academy, then."

"... It's good to see you two in such high spirits," Yuuhi spoke from the door. The pair immediately froze, then turned toward her. She smiled and said, "Before either of you inquire, I have been standing here since your little comfort session began… I'm glad you got through your issues, but I suppose we should say we will be sharing a room from now on, Shirogane-kun. *Hope you don't mind*~! Co-ed rooms are very normal here, after all." and she smirked.

… Takeru blinked and looked at a suddenly-fearful Meiya whose face had turned *BRIGHT* Red.

Oh, shit.

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