



My Driver Can't be this CUTE!

By: LSNB

To Shuichi Shigeno

For my inspiration.

Author's Note: During a Top Gear episode, James May reviewed a Singer Porsche, where he mentioned that it is a love letter to a car. Likewise, as a person obsessed with cars since birth, this is a love letter to all the cars I love.

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Thank you anime for saving my life.

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DEFYING ORDERS

In a service park at the end of a rally race, one that is the final race in a championship. It is a place where people not only celebrate the fruits of the whole year, but also for participants to get some rest to get ready for the next season.

This is no different to the team made up of Nekomi Fujiwara (Driver) and Mason Freudenburger (Co-Driver). They have just barely made it into the podium of this rally race by getting third right at the last stage. As rookies for the support series of WRC2, having additional good results not only gives good experience for both of them, they even might catch the eye of the main teams.

However, given the lack of teams in this day and age they would probably prefer to keep their current more experienced lineup instead of getting new recruits. Usually, they will probably be able to stay with the same team for a second year.

That is... if everything went well... Huge emphasis on the word "if".

Unfortunately there have been some tensions between the pair and the rest of the team. Also given the fact that Nekomi just disobeyed team orders to fully push the power stage instead of slowing down. Causing the lead driver in the same team to lose out in what could be a close championship fight. Makes the rest of the team unwilling to give out an extension contract.

But its not the fact that Nekomi is being a rebellious young boy trying to go things in his own way, if that's the case Mason wouldn't even bother to support his stance. During the season they found moments in the championship that they were being sabotaged. Times where better quality parts were only given to their teammate and extra parts that belonged to them being used to repair the other car. They both suspect that given the fact that Nekomi was from an esports racing sim background. While Mason, who can barely identify between a Toyota and a Nissan, also had never heard the name Skoda (Which is the car they were driving the whole time) until he hopped into this job practically last minute. Lead to the rest of the team's distrust and discrimination on their abilities.

In this relaxed environment, there is a whiff of tension in the air, with Mason standing by himself outside the make-shift team office, with muffled noises coming from both the team principal and Nekomi. In a moment after Nekomi went in, he came out marching with a serious look. In which only Mason can tell, something bad has happened.

"Are we sacked?" Mason asked.

"Pretty much." Nekomi said as he put both his hands on his waist.

Mason let out a long breath as he looked at his shoulder, then proceed to continue eye contact.

"Good riddance!" Mason exclaimed, "I will probably have to beg for a living right now, but at least I can continue to write music. I would much rather live on the street rather than having to deal with these guys."

"Hey disregarding those inbreds back there, you did enjoy this whole rally thing right?" Nekomi then said, "That's why I invited you over after hearing that you were barely scraping by with all those fast-food jobs."

"Yup lots of ideas in my head now." Mason then chuckled, "Getting someone who doesn't know about cars into the racing scene, and somehow getting a trophy."

"Your job is all about timing and tempo, you are a natural!" Nekomi said, "You did a great job today, lets just put this behind us for now and enjoy some champagne we earned."

"Just like what I said back when you were leaving for the UK after all the bullies that you have to deal with." Mason said as he pat Nekomi on the shoulder. "Oh really?" Nekomi replied.

They both held their own champagne bottles to some chairs within the service park, just to try and enjoy their fruits of their unconventional but temporary success, knowing that they would be out of their job the next day. They both have been together practically since they were kids, two social outcasts fighting a war against the world since they even remember, well only one of them really remembers as Nekomi had suffered a mental breakdown during his school days due to all the social pressure and have practically forgot most of his childhood. So far all he remembers is his family, Mason and maybe his motivation to race. All he knows from his school is that it was terrible.

After a couple sips of the victory juice Mason then proceeds to check on Nekomi further, "So any visions so far?" He also knows that after that mental episode, he occasionally have visions about his past, lurking at the back of his brain. Sometimes, they were nightmares about his schooldays, but more often than not... well... this is better to let Nekomi explain.

"Its her again..." Nekomi said as he turned his body around pulling a sketchbook from his backpack. "Its my 'Master' again."

"Oh... of course." Mason sighed, disappointed yet expected.

"She just told me that we would meet again someday. Again of course." Nekomi said.

"Yeah yeah..."

"But I think she said that sometimes the end could be the beginning of something greater." Nekomi said as he turned open his sketchbook.

"Well that's encouraging." Mason then said.

In his sketchbook, in between the horrors that he drew from his nightmares, there is this blue haired girl, repeated in countless pages with different expressions and poses, with text next to the figures of this girl about his visions and dates of is happening.

"I don't know why but I have a feeling that she taught everything, and she might be out of this world or something." Nekomi said as he shook his head. "Like does she even exist? Like why does she keep appearing in my sleep over and over and over and over..."

"and over and over and over..." Mason followed, "Yeah... I get it, as an artist I can confirm we are all fried in the brain in one way or another, and its just that we have our own nice little way of expressing ourselves. Honestly, you're no different, I make music while you make art and well... drive, too bad its getting harder to feed ourselves with just art these days. Heck, same can be said hundreds of years ago, all classical composers died early, and its no mere coincidence."

"That's why I even studied engineering in the first place..." Nekomi said, "Born to draw and drive, forced to dy/dx ."

They both laughed, took a sip and wondering about what is about to come.

But then a old women approached them, and then asked, "Excuse me is this Nekomi and Mason?".

Mason said, "Well of course." Just as Nekomi turned over to the woman, he realised who she was, and yelled, "WAIT ARE YO-"

The old woman immediately covered his hand and put her finger in front of her lips to try and calm him down.

"What the hell is going on?" Mason said, but unbeknownst to them, there is something out there that will turn the car would on its head.

RECRUITMENT

Suddenly, the old woman quickly led Nekomi to a campervan parked on the side of the service park. With Mason being dragged by his curious friend.

"Hey have you ever heard the saying about the cat that you know... also adding the kind of ears on top of your head, this doesn't look good." Mason said as he followed Nekomi reluctantly.

"Do you seriously have no idea who she is?" Nekomi said excitedly.

"Morv please you know I am not into cars that much and honestly she-"

Before Mason can even finished his sentence Nekomi yelled, "ITS MICHELE MOUTON THE QUEEN OF GROUP B."

"Wait who?" Mason confused, causing Nekomi to groan in frustration with him looking at the ceiling and both hands on his face.

The old woman gently laughed, calmed Nekomi down and said, "Now now young boy, I do appreciate your enthusiasm but I think this would be best if I have introduced myself."

"Hi, I am indeed Michele Mouton, nice to meet you two. I was a rally driver back in the 80s and was the first woman to win a rally. I am currently the president for FIA's Women and Motor Sport Commission."

"Well we aren't women and you have well retired from racing, then why are you asking for... you see... two unemployed guys..." Mason then said.

"Come on man you are making us look embarrassing in front of DA GOAT here." Nekomi then said to Mason.

"Let's just say due to unexpected events I got a new job now." Michele said as she turns to her back, grabbing her bag, taking out a light laptop. In said laptop, it started playing a CCTV footage of a car speeding through the city. Both got intrigued while Michele looks at both of their facial expressions, after watching for it for thirty she paused the video asked for comment. "Notice anything?"

"Its an old Ford Escort, produced around the 90s, whale tail, group A homologation. Definitely the RS Cosworth." Nekomi said.

"Well said, but notice anything about the driving and the driver itself?"

"Well its at least better than the average criminal, probably some street racer." Mason then said, "Wait a minute, hold on, can you please enhance?"

She then enlarge the video towards the windows of the car. Both of them looked through the windows just to notice something, or in this case, the lack of. "There is no driver?" Nekomi then said.

"I bet this is either AI video or AI driving the car." Mason then said, "But isn't this car..."

"Too old for computers?" Nekomi then said. "Someone must have developed something for it and it is being used maliciously. And it is good at it too."

She then clicked on the laptop for a while just to reveal a series of cases of driverless cars going amok in different parts of the world.

"These are all videos being circulated around the public. National governments are trying as hard as they do to cover this situation, but only coming back with news of them disappearing or being lost track."

"Then where do we come into the picture?" Mason then said

"Well, what we are thinking is that we need better drivers" Michele then said. "To help catch the baddies obviously."

"But why us?" Nekomi asked, "We suck at this."

"Well racing drivers aren't exactly free are they?" Michele then said, "I've been one, I know. Also, aren't you two got fired and young enough to try something new?"

Nekomi and Mason then stared at each other awkwardly knowing of their situation.

"I could hire something like a touring car driver. However I think most drivers can only go around in circles, except for rally drivers, they are more likely to adapt to any situation they are given. A co-driver does help too. And given the fact that I am the only person in the executive position in the FIA that can drive rally cars, I have become the lead of this operation."

Both Nekomi and Mason nodded as they finally understand what's going on. "Yeah I do remember seeing those on the Internet" Nekomi then said.

"So are you willing to join ou-"

"Deal!" Nekomi said as he cut right in the middle of her speech, "We'll join."

"But you haven't bothered with the details yet!" Mason then said as he try to stop the impulsive Nekomi.

"Hey what choice do we have here, they ain't going to write us a nice cover letter do they?" Nekomi then explained as he stared towards Mason.

CHAPTER 2 – RECRUITMENT

"Oh well fiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiine, but if this gets anything wrong I am moving back with my parents."

THE FOUNDATION

A few days later, Nekomi and Mason are heading to a place at the foot of the Alps in Switzerland, where they agreed to meet the rest of the crew for their first mission.

"Are you sure that's the spot?" Nekomi asked.

"It seems so..." Mason said as he repeatedly looked between his map, the address given and the mysterious door in a hole that is fitted into a mountain.

Still feeling hesitant, Nekomi decided to try knocking on the door followed by Mason pushing the button next to the door.

"This camera and talking thing should do. Hope we did actually get into the right place or this will get extra awkward."

Weirdly, right before they get any response the big door automatically opened right in front of them. Both of them hesitated at first but eventually they slowly entered the door. Soon both of them were met with a garage with all the tools and parts needed to fix any problem. The garage consists of three cars with Nekomi's Skoda Fabia R5 Evo closest to them, with a Citroen C3 R5 and a Ford Fiesta R5 Mk.II further away.

"It seems that we aren't the only ones here" Nekomi noted after seeing the inside of the secret garage.

Right behind the red Citroen with white and grey pattern, there reveals a pair of pink bunny ears peeking at the top of the car. Then a voice appeared.

"Wait did I hear Nekomi and Mason?"

Right after that, a person slowly moves from behind the car to the side to reveal himself. Showing himself, a bunny boy with a peanut butter complexion and an obvious French accent.

"Remember me guys?" he said as he let out both his arms inviting both to this place.

"Sebastien!" Nekomi exclaimed as he reaches out his hand to have a firm handshake and pat each other at the back, with Mason doing the same soon after.

"So where's Pierre?" Mason then asked.

"He's just in the bathroom." Sebastien then said.

Nekomi and Sebastien before in a historic rally back when Nekomi is still a rally racing esports player. He helped him get to know the ways rallying in real life works and try to help him transition from the sim rig to real life. From what Nekomi heard,

Seb met Pierre back when he was lacking a co-driver due to his original one being sick for an national rally championship while Pierre just so happened to have a similar issue but without a driver. By pure accident they both realised that they work better as a team than their original partners hence from then on they decided to team up after the competition. Later when both Nekomi and Seb's carrer progressed, they even get to compete against with other, however despite that they still helped with each other from time to time.

At this point both seemed to be comfortable to reveal their own animal ears with Nekomi having cat ears and Mason having a pair of fox counterpart.

"So where are the other pair?" Nekomi then asked.

"Oh you won't believe who also came." Seb exclaimed as he led both of them into the resting area. There are sofas with a short table for your legs or food, with a fridge right on the wall. Both of them noticed two guys with white hair wearing the same but different coloured clothes, with fox ears on both of their heads.

Slowly they recognised that both of them belonged to the rival's team from Nekomi and Mason's last rally championship.

They are the Fubuki twins, half Japanese and half Finnish. They both come from a pair of racing drivers, one in super GT and one in rallycross. Been racing since they were 5, and had participated in a lot of karting championships. However, during their training the co-driver and younger brother Kimi got injured in the skiing accident, losing his left leg, which made Tommi the only one able to advance his racing career. As Tommi doesn't want to leave his brother out of the picture, he decided to go into his national sport of rallying and made him his co-driver while being the one driving.

After hearing both of them appearing, both of them slowly rotated their heads towards them. Staring at their soul with a neutral face, with Tommi muttered, "Hi."

"Yeah... they don't like to talk that much." Seb then said. As both Nekomi and Mason proceed to look towards Seb in an awkward manner.

Tommi then said, "We know why you two are here, we do feel the same."

"Wait what do you mean by that?" Nekomi then asked.

"I have feeling that I can be faster than my teammate, but due to higher-ups I also have to prioritise my teammate. Seeing you two willing to stand up for yourselves, makes us wanna join in." Tommi then continued.

"So are we cool now?" Nekomi then questioned.

CHAPTER 3 – THE FOUNDATION

Tommi simply nodded his head, reaches out his hand and said, "We work together now."

Nekommi simply smiled and then reached his own hand out to shake his hand.

Michele then suddenly appeared behind everyone without anyone of them noticing and said, "It seems everyone is getting along well." Surprising everyone in the room.

"Don't get too comfortable here, this is all temporary and we got stuff to do." she continued, "We are here because we have traced down a good target nearby, if it works, we will have more funding and maybe a shiny new base. So it is important that you guys nail this one, set a good impression to the world what we can do."

"Woah woah woah this is all a bit sudden." Seb then said, "We know about the sentient cars situation, but what are we going to do?"

Michele then announced, "That's what I am going to tell you now. Get ready, mission briefing in five minutes."

A FAMILIAR FACE

Nekomi stood on the side of his green and white Skoda, clenching his fists, ready for battle. However this time things are very different. He has dealt with many of the "car spirits" before, but this time he felt a sense of unease, a sense that something is different, something is off, or even something bad is about to happen. His body is trying his best to hide his nervousness but as he was known to not hide feelings well, a person who pay even just the slightest attention can easily able to notice it.

In front of him is his rival, a tall women with a long pony tail, wearing a baseball jacket with side striped shorts, all in blue with streaks of golden yellow as lines on her clothes. Her hair piece is a four angled star each side of her bangs, and the seem to glow like one too. The stood at the side of her blue Subaru, radiating with confidence, facing towards the shy Nekomi.

The woman is a mysterious one, rarely appearing in the twisty mountain roads that they currently on. Usually unable to be seen from the public. But whenever she appears, it is a rare sight to behold, she has the ability to manoeuvre the entire touge with great handing, gaining her the nickname the "Mountain Shogun". There is the saying goes that she only duels with people that she seem worthy, so being able to race with her side by side is an honour by itself.

Nekomi being practically an outsider, and the fact that she previously beaten his teammates Sebastien and Kimi a bit earlier, she is confident to beat him as well. She have a feeling that she can beat them all. His pose isn't helping either, with his body wanting to curl into a ball, makes part of the crowd that are hopeful about him winning become doubtful. The woman decide to further intimidate him by leaning forward to Nekomi and pushed her right arm against his green Skoda.

"You scared kid?" She said in a firm voice.

Nekomi turned his head by 45°, with his eyes looking away from the tall woman in front of him. His four yellow head bands, two on each side of his head, given by his 'Master' when he started to learn racing, glowed underneath her shadow.

Knowing that his 'Master' is beside him at all times, he glanced at the woman and nodded his head, and let out a "M-hm".

"I expected more from the so-called 'Tarmac Specialist', you definitely need to work on your 'Track Anxiety'." The woman said as she smirked. "Let me guess, I bet you're looking for someone aren't you."

Nekomi look straight back at the woman shocked. Unable to believe that she guess

what comes to his mind.

The woman chuckled for a second then said, "It seems that my ears are still as good as ever. I have been hearing your friends about your problem while coming here. So tell me, who are you really looking for?"

"Well..." Nekomi said slowly as he looked behind towards his car, "Someone who taught me how to drive I suppose... Someone who inspired me... I always wanted to thank her but I forgot who she is..."

"Hey if she is so important to you, then how come you forgot who she is, isn't she meant to be important to you?" The woman then questioned.

"Well I lost my memory, and I am trying my best to remember really..." Nekomi muttered.

As he spoke his hair bands seem to slightly glow brighter, the woman immediately notices it and glances at the glowing hair bands.

"Oh I see now..." The woman said "Alright you know what, if you manage to beat me, I will help you find the person you are looking for."

Nekomi the swiftly asked, "Uhh... Thank you very much! But... but what if I lose?"

She than said, "I'll guess you have to do whatever I want." As she slowly went to the other side of the car and opened the door. "Chop-chop, the sun is going to rise soon, be prepared alright?"

Nekomi opened his own car's door as well. Right before the woman gets into the car she called at Nekomi, causing him to turn around his body.

She than said, "Hey, one more thing. Be proud of yourself, I know you can do more than you think you can. Darling."

"Darling?" Nekomi thought to himself, "What is she even thinking? She don't know who I am... Right?"

As Nekomi sat down in his car, Lancer came by leaning towards the driver side window, trying to tell some words of encouragement into his ear.

"Alright, throw everything that she said outside your brain, she always try to intimidate her opponents to try to keep them guessing." Lancer said, "She's fast, but as one of the few people that can manage to kick her ass in the past, its totally possible. Just do your thing, it will be all good."

All of a sudden the 'Mountain Shogun' lowers her car window and said, "Hey! Lancer! I haven't seen you in quite some time, wanna spar?"

The crowd start to get intrigued this, Lancer stood facing her. Looked the crowd around her, thought for a while, then said, "You know what? I've been thinking the same."

Now the crowd got excited for an age old rivalry, between a Evo and a STI. Rest of the crew was shocked to hear that happen.

"I know you have been street racing but this is you know... your nemesis." Celica said with a worrying voice

"I know what I am dealing with here, besides I am here just to test my hypothesis." Lancer responded, "Hey nerd! Get as much track data from the three of us."

"Got it!" said Alice.

"Mason! Prepare all communication systems between all of us."

"Alright!" Mason replied.

"Check-check, Nekomi can you hear me?"

"All clear!" Nekomi said.

"Now, Tommi, Seb. Watch and learn."

"Nekomi, I think you're right, I think there is something sus going on around here. I will make sure things are in check, listen to my calls, we gonna do this." Lancer then said as she goes into her Mitsubishi Evo. Nekomi nodded his head in response.

Everyone around the mountain road cheer for this great race, with three cars which include two of the drivers having great 'Street Cred'.

But Nekomi alone in his car, without his trusty co-driver and best friend beside him, isolated against all the noises and fanfare from the outside. Closes his eyes for a moment, catches a deep breath, with his hair bands given from his 'Master' gently glowing in the darkness of the cockpit, giving him a sense of hope.

"Master... I really wish you can help me right now..."

He tries to remember back when he was younger, remembered one time when he was too nervous, a gentle girl, telling him to calm down with her gentle voice, which she said, "Close your eyes, take a deep breath, and everything you worry about will slowly go away."

But then he was awake from a voice from Lancer, it is being communicated through his head piece. "Listen up small guy, we have a serious race going on tonight. Be prepared."

CHAPTER 4 – A FAMILIAR FACE

Nekomi sat back straight, hands on his wheel, with a guy in front of him getting ready to count down, eyes focused on the road. "Ready!" Nekomi said.

"I repeat, don't think too much. The road is all you should care about." Lancer repeated herself, "Is everything OK?"

"All and clear." Alice replied as she looks at her laptop, "Driving data is being recorded."

Then it begins, a person on the side of the road raises a red flare, begins the count-down, "Three, Two, One" he yells. And by the time he drops his hand, all three cars pressed their foot on their pedal and they are all went in a blink of an eye.

Mason stood still alongside where they have all started the mountain race. Then said, "Drive safe out there."

MASTER AND APPRENTICE

The touge race has just begun. And the crowds along the mountain path cheered on the three drivers who are now racing each other. The blue Subaru is currently in front with the red Evo and Green Skoda closely behind. There are tight turns from start to end of the course but none of them has gained a clear advantage so far. The rest of the crew is spread along the entire course watching their every move, communicating with each other while listing signals from Lancer and Nekomi. The other two co-drivers of Kimi and Pierre stood a few corners down the road.

"So far no problems so far. But I am starting to hear them approaching now." Pierre said.

"Alright, currently signals are still strong." Alice replied, "Keep an eye on the blue one by the way, she's our current target."

The voices of engine roaring become closer and closer and three pair of light appear among the trees. There they come, appearing on their sights after a quick left turn, starting to go downhill and all smoothly drifted a right hand turn in front of their eyes. Then the sounds slowly fade away. Witnessing a touge race is like spectating a rally race, one second they are there and the next they are gone. All that celebration is just for one moment of cars going quick in front of your eyes.

"Number 41 is within close range of target." Kimi responded, "Almost within touching distance."

Meanwhile inside the cockpit of Nekomi's car. He finally heard a call-out from Lancer. "In a few turns the road will widen itself, we shall make a quick move then."

"OK." Nekomi swiftly responded.

"But you make the call alright?" Lancer then said.

"Why?" Nekomi then asked.

"Just shut up and do it! Ask later!" Lancer annoying said.

They both turned a couple corners just to wait for the right moment, until there is a wide right turn in front of them. Nekomi goes up the inside of the corner right beside Lancer's red Evo and said, "Me in you out. Now!"

Nekomi and the blue Subaru initiated into a drift parallel to each other, while Lancer gaining grip swiftly goes around the outside corner overtaking both cars.

"Great distraction Nekomi!" Lancer commented.

After Nekomi took the better line, he overtook the blue WRX on the corner exit as well. The crowd cheered. Angelina and Liana just so happen to be right at that wide corner, not only saw everything, but heard the things that went down was amazed by the result.

Angelina then said, "Well, the lack of snow does makes things easier."

Liana then said, "He sure have improved quite a bit since he came to the Alps."

Angelina then replied, "Yeah, no matter what happens next, at least this is going to be a good race."

Both Nekomi and Lancer thought things has went smoothly, but then they witnessed a corner just after a uphill section. Lancer while at front took that sharp turn by surprise, lost balance of her car and slipped. Nekomi is also shocked to see that happen, had to brake early, although Nekomi is able to recover both were overtaken by the 'Mountain Shogun' in her blue Subaru.

Nekomi got a bit frustrated but also a bit helpless.

"My bad, haven't been in those mountains for quite some time, I seemed to show my age there." Lancer explained but Nekomi simply grunts through his earpiece. "You did initiate a good move there, its on you now."

"Everyone makes mistakes, keep our head low, we persevere." Nekomi needing to focus without all the unnessesary noise then said, "Thanks for you help but I think its best to do it all by myself." Then he puts down his head piece to focus on the race.

"I'm going to take this chance to see how they both drive, just wanted to see if my thoughts are right." Lancer thought to herself.

The rest of the crew listening in just heard that they just missed a really great opportunity. However in the sea of data that Alice got earlier, she got some surprising results.

"After compiling sources from street racers, they are currently three seconds ahead of stage record. If this continue... Holy..." Alice reported.

Mason is surprised to hear that and asks further, "Then who held the previous record?"

"Its the 'Mountain Shogun', it seems that even our target is pushing it." Alice continued, "We may be seeing what our target is capable of. This is definitely going to be useful to our current database. It seems that you can do a lot with around 300 horsepower."

All three cars are now in a fast but twisty section, precise controls are required to make those turns. This terrain totally suits Lancer's car with a sophisticated YAW control system but the other two cars seem to be going fine. Right at the end of this fast section there is a slightly sharper turn that could potentially throw some amateurs off.

Both Clara and her cousin Cossie is on a hill overlooking that part of the road. Hearing all the noises blaring beneath them.

"Alright they are all flawless in their turns so far. Just keep moving up and down side to side like a..." Cossie reported to the rest of the team.

Lancer then interrupted her saying then said, "That is what I'll do but for the other two, we'll see."

In front of Lancer, as Nekomi and the blue Subaru going to the final part of this section, barely slowing down at all, and just when the barriers are gone, they both got their right wheels into the grass and dipped below the road for the left turn before the sharp right.

"Watch out!" Clara exclaimed as they both exited the grass, which kicked up the left side of their cars, shifting the balance towards the corner, landing facing the straight. The locals called this the corner jump, word on the street has it that the 'Mountain Shogun' invented this local trick and other street racers have attempted and failed to do so.

An outsider somehow manages to succeed at the first try, makes the crowd go wild, but a hint of suspicion is in the air within the rest of the crew.

"Well that's all I need to know to confirm my hypothesis." Lancer then said to the rest of the team.

"What was that?" Clara explained, "Only the craziest drivers will do such things?"

Mason unable to see the insanity that just happened, scrambled to try to figure out the current situation.

Alice is now even more surprised and said, "Jumping that corner is three tenths of a second faster than my model suggests."

"Wanna try to compare data between number 41 and target please. Just to confirm." Lancer then said.

Alice typed on her laptop, shocked with the results with both hands covering her mouth, exclaimed, "Gott im Himmel!"

Mason immediately rushed to her laptop to figure out what's wrong.

"They both have a match of 90%, with a p-value of 0.01." Alice muttered in shock.

"I knew this since I saw the way he drives." Lancer explained. "This is not just a race to chase one of the most mysterious 'car spirits', nor its about to defeat one of the most legendary street racers out there."

"Wait, wait, wait hold on!" as Clara jumps into the call, "Has the situation changed at all?"

"How did he even do that." Margarita also jumped into the call near the end of the stage with Camilia beside her. "Its almost a perfect match!"

"It is a perfect match Delta." Alice explained, "The null hypothesis is clearly been rejected here."

"He is definitely mimicking her moves to achieve such speeds." Clara then tried to elaborate.

Mason then goes against her and said, "No he is literally driving like usual here. I am the guy sitting next to him, I can tell."

"This can only mean one thing." Lancer then explained.

"This is a race between the master and her best apprentice."

The rest of the team was in shock by what Lancer just said. Then Lancer further states that, "The master hidden in all his dreams, all of his fading memories, is the 'Mountain Shogun' herself."

Lancer then continues, "These kinds of races can get intense, I will keep an eye on him just in case."

The calls went silent, just to process what they have just heard. One thing is for sure, no matter the result, this is going to be legendary.

OUTSHINING THE MASTER

Currently in Nekomi's Skoda, staring at the back of the Subaru of the 'Mountain Shogun'. He always feel like he is getting very close to her but yet he can't find a way to overtake the WRX. In a while he genuinely feel that he is going to lose this one and have starting to space out.

But then a memory suddenly popped into his mind. Back when he was still with his master, sitting side by side on the side of a river bank.

He was looking at the scenery, exhausted. Then he heard a soft voice from his master said to him. "Don't do things because you want to succeed, you will face failure no matter where you go."

"Then if there is no success then what should I do?" Nekomi asked.

"Do things for the process." She then continued, "Do it for the sake of it, for the love of it."

Later she added, "Aiya, you always compare yourself to others, but you're not them. Its not even an equal and fair comparison. Remember this: 'Comparison is the thief of all joy'. All you need to compare is yourself."

Then he felt a hand touching his back, he looked over towards his master. He saw a girl, slightly taller than him, with a blue ponytail, who then gently said to him, "I am going to leave you soon, try to remember this alright? Darling!"

Nekomi then thought to himself, "Is that... Forget it, there is only one way to find out."

He regained his focus, hands tighten on the wheel, getting prepared to slide into one corner at a time. Beacuse this is the way he likes to drive.

Tires screeching from both cars can be heard all across the mountain roads with another car a bit behind both of them. Margarita and Camilia stood in one section of the road where there are five consecutive tight hairpins, one after another.

"So you telling me that cutie got his driving from, out target?" Margarita in the call trying to confirm.

"It seems that it is." Alice answered, "Try to look closely, they are comming right about now."

Then four dots of bright light emerge from the trees, there they come. A Subaru WRX STI cosely followed by a Skoda Fabia Rally2. They are both getitng into the first

tight hairpin. Both tucked at the inner side of the corner, both got wheels deep in the rain gutters. Same strategy, same philosophy, same school of thought. Both trying to use the same way to gain time from one another, eerily in sync.

"They are like two peas in a pod." Camilia thought to herself, "Its like siblings separated at birth."

This continued on for the next corner, and after the other. All five tight hairpins, all using the same method to attack a corner.

"They are now 8.1 seconds ahead of record time." Alice exclaimed, "They might even destory the record by around 10 seconds."

Mason got worried at the speeds that they are acheving in those tight roads, worry things may start to get dangerous.

"This is ridiculus" Mason yelled though the headset.

"I told you things will get tense." Lancer said, "I promise I will keep an eye on both of them."

Near the end of the track there is a wide long left turn, this could be key to whoever that comes first in this race. Tommi and Seb is overlooking this section.

"Who is going to win?" Seb asked, "Wanna bet?"

Tommi remains silent, looked at Seb for a moment and continues to look over the road.

"Hey come on can you at least say something for once." Seb said.

Tommi then put a finger at Seb's mouth then hushed, "Shhh... Listen closely, they are comming."

Both now start to appear in front of their eyes. So close in fact that look like they are going to touch each other. The blue Subaru is holding the inner corner preventing to be overtaken. So Nekomi have to speed around the outside, going side by side into the turn. Then right before they turn, they both braked at the same time, initiated a drift, still somehow manage to stay side by side with one another.

Both Tommi and Seb was amazed by the amount of control both had with their cars. But then the Subaru started to loose grip, swayed to the outside line, which gives way for Nekomi to take the inside like and overtook his supposed master at corner exit.

Tommi and Seb froze from what they have witnessed but after a second of silence, Seb yelled, "Lets go! Nekomi!"

Nekomi pat himself at the chest, for achieving potentially the greatest move of his entire racing career. However right before the last corner which is a 90° turn, his engine decided to fail, bursted into flames, losing control of his car. This led him to crash into the barrier and got into a coma.

Nekomi suddenly being disconnected from the system shocked the rest of the team, some can even able to see the flames emerging, all now in a state of panic.

Luckily Lance manages to follow them just a few seconds before the two, seeing what just happened immediately stopped at the site of the accident.

There she saw the 'Mountain Shogun' herself carrying a little boy on his arms, lifeless but shows signs of breathing, slowly lowering him into the passenger seat of the Subaru.

"Well at least you came." the 'Mountain Shogun' said, "He's a great driver isn't he?"

Lancer nodded her head in response.

"I bet we both know that he doesn't belong to you at this point." the 'Mountain Shogun' continued.

"Can't deny, you raised him well." Lancer responded.

"He's a lovely boy isn't he, didn't grow much since we met." she then said, "At least we got the chance to meet each other and had a fun time, well for the most part."

Lancer simply nodded her head again.

"Tell your new friends that I will take care of this sweet child. We have a lot to talk about." she said as she secured Nekomi with seatbelts and goes back into her blue car.

"Goodbye red head, it was nice to meet you. May we spar again." she said as she close the door.

"Sayonara blue bastard." Lancer responded.

"Just like good old Lancer." she sighed as she closes her window and slowly leaves the scene.

"Well, guess all I can do is to clean up this mess." Lancer told herself as she went back to her car and uses the fire extinguisher that comes with the safety kit to put down the fire from the wrecked Skoda.

The rest of the team finally rushed to the scene, only to find out a burnt car with Lancer standing right beside it.

Mason panicked and yells at Lancer, "Where's Nekomi! Where is he?"

CHAPTER 6 – OUTSHINING THE MASTER

Lancer unfazed and the only person calm with the current situation then said, "He's in good hands right now, I may hate her but I got to admit she is an honest person."

"What you just left cutie into her hands and disappear like that?" Margarita questioned, "How can you just let him go like that."

Lancer replied, "I got my own reasons."

Seb then asked, "Then where is he then? Do you have any idea where she could be heading. She could be heading to Narnia for god knows what!"

"She lives in the mountains, its going to be hard for me to reach her like that. For now, we can do nothing but wait." Lancer further explained. But everyone is still frustrated at Lancer's decision.

But for now, at least one of the largest mysteries in the foundation might have a chance to be solved.

BLUE

His eyes slowly opened up, things were blurry at first but it slowly got clearer in front of him. He looked around his surroundings, looks like he is in a seat of a car of some sort, trapped in a seat belt, too fatigued to even move around his seat. Looking across the black dashboard of the car he is in, he sees a woman with a long blue ponytail with a blue baseball jacket, driving calmly.

Looking closely at her, she has two star shaped hair clips each on her side, and on her outfit, there are lines of yellow decorating her look. After some analysis, it is clearly the 'Mountain Shogun'.

She took a glance towards himself, continued to look at the world, opened her mouth then said, "I'm glad you're awake."

Nekomi remains seated, then softly muttered, "T...Thank You..."

"I was just going to send you to the hospital but for now I think its time to find a nice place to talk, just between the two of us." She then said, "Also, let me remind you. Currently, you owe me three things."

"Well, I think I at least owed you my life there." Nekomi then smiled.

"That's one for starters, but lets hold this conversation until we go somewhere nice."

As the 'Mountain Shogun' slowly goes up the mountain roads, Nekomi regains his strength, started to sit straight and started to stretch himself.

"Be careful, don't do any sudden movements OK? You don't want me to see to lose another one do I?" she then jokingly said.

Then she parked her car on top of a hill, a small parking lot with a viewing point and two vending machines at the side. They both got out of the car, Nekomi then sat on the bench while the woman went to the vending machine for some drinks.

"I am getting coffee, what do you want?" she asked.

"Marble soda will do." Nekomi responded with increased energy.

She then returned, sitting next to Nekomi, with the stars shining above and lines of winding lights criss-cross through the mountain, those are the mountain roads that Japan is famed for, and some of them are parts of the course that they just raced through.

"It was fun isn't it?" the woman then said.

Nekomi simply responded by nodding his head, while making a sound of affirmation.

"You still owe me two things you know." she then said, "One of them you just promised me, that when you lose, you will have to do whatever I want."

Nekomi got a bit embarrassed at that fact, with her continued, "You're going to have to stay with me for a while it seems."

"But..." she then said, "I am impressed with your driving there, so for now, you can ask me any question you want."

Nekomi thought for a while, turned his head towards her then asked, "So why did you slow down for me?"

The woman laughed at his question, "Really? Your first question is to question my performance? You're really funny."

"I'm being serious!" Nekomi tries to explain, "I thought I was going to lose there but you somehow opened a window of opportunity at the last second, isn't that a bit suspicious?"

After laughing her heart out, she then said, "Well I was really having tire problems at the later stages. You genuinely have pace over me. Besides, if not for the mistake from Lancer, you would have ran away. You've gone quick."

Nekomi blushed red looked down on his marble soda with both hands holding it, then said, "Thank you."

"You're nice and shy, but curious at the same time, it makes you cute, just the way I like it." she then complimented.

Nekomi got revealed his cat ears and tail at this moment, the woman chuckled, and continued, "And just the way you used to be."

Nekomi just noticed the way she says things, grew a bit suspicious. Looked at the blue haired woman wondering about the words she said to him.

"Oh yeah the third thing that you owe me." she said, "But by the look of your face, I think you are starting to get the hint by now."

"During the race." Nekomi slowly wondered, "Are you my... Master?"

She then got up then walked in front of Nekomi, reaching both hands towards him, and gently said, "Welcome home darling!"

Nekomi slowly realises that the one standing in front of him was his master, the one that taught her everything, the one shred of memory that kept him going, the one that he is looking for during the whole journey. He slowly got up, eyes getting wet, he blurted out saying, "...Master..."

"Don't call me that, we are close friends after all, just call me Subaru-chan, or..."

Suddenly, like a spark that lights a fire, he remembered all the things in his past, as a lot of nightmares overwhelm his mind, but just as he was about to go insane, he also remembered all the pleasant things done by his Master. At this moment, his mind just stopped, as he felt a sense of comfort that he has been craving for so long. Now as he is in between her arms, he slowly looked up to his Master and said.

"Onee-san?"

"Just the way things are supposed to be." as the 'Mountain Shogun' hugs Nekomi tight in her arms with her best apprentice Nekomi crying profusely on her shoulders.

"Thirdly, you owe me my dear darling." she said.

Its been so many years since Nekomi has cried like that, and it is his first time in his life that the fluids coming out of his eyes are tears of joy. Feelings that have been holding up for years got out like a broken dam, flooding out onto her jacket.

"Just cry on my shoulder all you want, I can tell you have been through a lot Nekomi." she gently whispered while slowly patting his back, "Don't cry! Onee-san is here."

For Nekomi, under the starry sky, above the mountain roads, time has seemingly stopped and rewound back in time to a period where he dearly missed. He holds on her jacket tighter and tighter, unwilling to let go, keeps on murmuring "Onee-san" while surrounded by Subaru-chan.

"Oh dear! You missed me so much. Calm down now, I'll bring you to my place now, alright darling?" She said as she carries Nekomi again towards the passenger seat.

When they both sit down in the car, she poked a finger on Nekomi's cheek. "Boop." She said which causes Nekomi to giggle.

"There, there, lets get you back home." She said as she continues her journey along the mountain roads.

Surely, Nekomi is finally in the right hands right now.

PROJECT No. 4I

"Wait what!" Michelle yelled after hearing the news of what had just happened back on the mountain roads.

"In conclusion, car had experienced terminal damage while driver was gone missing." Alice reported.

"We were catching some big bad blue spirit just to end up with nothing?" Seb then said, "Wait no, not nothing, its negative things! Do you understand how absurd this is?"

"I got nothing to say." Tommi then commented as he lowers his head.

The whole Japanese base of operations has gone crazy, as they have never had a situation where a person has gone missing during a critical operation, let alone concede said person onto enemy territory. At this moment only Lancer seems to have to know half of the whole story, while Mason is trying to wrap his head around the little information provided to all of them. Not only that, what little information found has given more questions than answers.

"Are you sure that's even her?" Mason yelled, "We barely had any information regarding the Subaru and you have the most information about her in the whole room. And yet you still barely know what's going on, do you know what damage you have caused, do you even care about how we feel, how I feel?"

Everyone seems to keep nagging Lancer regarding this critical moment, trying to find out what has led to this moment. Lancer took a deep breath, yelled at everyone. "Shut up!"

The whole room went quiet, then Lancer turned towards Mason and questions him, "Do you remember what he had said about the hair bands he was wearing?"

"F...From his master." Mason answered, frightened by her loud voice earlier.

"Those are not just simple decorative hair bands." Lancer continued, "They are hair bands that were given out by the Mountain Shogun to members of the Comet Squad. I knew there is something up when I saw him for the first time. I saw the way he drives. A retard like him can't possibly get this much driving skill just from playing video games."

"Hey! How dare you call him like that!" Josephine yelled.

"Who cares he's gone!" Lancer continued, "They are a group of highly skilled individuals that either showed great service or great potential under the witness of the Shogun, all handpicked by her one by one. Colin McRae, Richard Burns, Travis Pastrana just to name a few. For the longest time since the inception of your foundation, you guys have

simply been borrowing the powers of a member of the special forces without knowing, and even he doesn't realise that."

The whole room went silent after founding out her thought process in all of this. After a quick pause she then proceed to say, "No matter what, every borrowed thing must be returned to its rightful owner, even Nekomi. I was simply following rules and showing respect, I had to let him go."

"But... what will happen to him?" Margarita asked.

"I think only the two of them knows now." Lancer answered.

Meanwhile is a way less tense atmosphere, in the middle of the mountains. There is the abode of the Mountain Shogun, alone with her apprentice. Celebrating a long awaited reunion. Subie led Nekomi to her living room, both sat on opposite ends of a short table both crossing legs. Nekomi is tired but thankful on what just happened to him and all the things he taught along the way. Subie let out a big yawn and proceeds to sit with him.

"You seriously did save up all those tears for years just to let it all out on my jacket huh? Jeez you really do miss me" Subie said at which Nekomi nods his head with joy.

"Its not your fault I really missed you too." Subie said as she took off her jacket, revealing her now grown up body. She is now and still is taller than Nekomi and he always have to look up just to face her. But it seems that he now noticed something large on his eye level, which makes him blush a bit and pointed his eyes to the ceiling to try to not look at her. However this doesn't mean he has escaped the eye of his master.

"You were looking at my breasts, aren't you?" Subie gently teased and make Nekomi's face turned fully red and he is furiously turning his head left to right.

"Ara-ara! So you did grow up in other ways. But you're still looking, but don't worry I can show you more if you want." Just as Subie said that Nekomi is now covering both his eyes with his tiny hands.

Subie now laughed at Nekomi's reactions and said, "You are still shy as always." She then proceed to calm him down by patting his head, which make Nekomi subconsciously showing her cute cat ears. And now Subie is not only patting his head she is now also rubbing his ears.

"Its alright Neko-kun, I really like you, you know." She whispers as she slowly move her hand across Nekomi's face that led to Subie holding onto Nekomi's cheek. Afterwards, she pulled his little face towards herself, with his whole head totally occupying her view. "Going an entire pilgrimage across the world just to meet the Shogun, do you really miss me that much darling?"

Nekomi's both hands now holding on her arm that is touching his cheek. Leans on her hand a bit, closes his eyes for a moment, then let out a cute little smile.

"You still remember you have lost a bet and have to do what I say right?" Subie gently reminded him, which subsequently made Nekomi release his hands from her elbow.

"Hey wait!" Subie then said as she re-grabbed Nekomi's face. "I haven't told you what I want yet."

She pulled his face closer to her for a second time and whispered, "I want you to stay and be my darling is that alright?"

Nekomi's mind paused for a while, just to ended up being smooched on the lips. Just as he realised what is going on, his eyes went a bit wet and nodded his head, "Onee-san" he gently said.

He then got lifted up, with both his soft thighs being grabbed by both of Subie's arms, pushed against the wall, and she whispered directly to one of his cute neko ears. Saying, "I am going to enjoy this supper very much." followed by a longer kiss. Nekomi wrapped her neck in response.

And when Subie released his lips, Nekomi has experienced love that he wasn't expecting but it made him to simply say one thing, "I wan't more please." In which Nekomi moved his head towards her just for a deeper kiss, and both started to grab each other tighter than before.

"You liked it don't you?" Subie then said, "Its getting late now, let me just get you to bed. Let me prepare some milk, then you go take a bath and go to bed alright?" She then put Nekomi back on his two legs and walked into the kitchen. He was left feeling warm after this whole ordeal, but soon he snapped back his mind knowing that as a driver for the foundation he got a duty to fulfill. He immediately, sit back down on the short table, pulled out the notebook in his inner pocket that was used for pace notes, and his pen on the other pocket. Then quickly finding a blank section and starts to record everything he knows about this familiar spirit.

In the foundation there is a quite interesting naming and numbering convention, driver numbers are skipped for numbering spirit cases, but drivers themselves are allowed to choose a spirit that they like with their own race number. For the longest time, he has been wondering who should that title to be given to, from the past many of them have been considered, from Erika the BMW M3 E30 as being his father's dream car to Margarita the Lancia Delta whose past wounds he helped to heal. And now it seems that his choice was made clear, the one that started it all.

CHAPTER 8 – PROJECT NO. 41

So he writes down on his notebook, title of the case file.

"Project No.41"

SWEET MORNING

The day after the Shogun incident, people in the foundation base has had barely any sleep at all. Mason has been waking up in the middle of his sleep multiple time over the potential loss of his best friend, and yet he wants to know more.

Nekomi has been talking about his once hypothetical master from his past in several occasions, well the word "several" is somewhat of an understatement, its been known and talked about it for so long that, practically speaking everyone has heard of some version of the whole story with varied amounts in detail, and Mason is fully annoyed to see him yap over and over again.

This story has been investigated and thoroughly disproved in several investigations. Even when Alice the nerdy, techy 959 has done a brain scan of Nekomi and done a material analysis on his hair bands has concluded its probably an inner voice of some sort leading him. As for a second opinion, the investigative Mini with her assistant Watson the Metro 6R4 has done several interrogations on Nekomi just for them to think that his master is an alter ego in his mind. If somehow these two experts are not enough, the Lancia family with their underground connections has concluded that no such person exist.

However, with this new information somehow came along, this case has been widely reopened with Lancer's mere intuition, which further proves her experience as a street racer. This news is so unexpected, it has caused everyone with the exception of Lancer or maybe one hopeful side of Mason's brain to have a mental whiplash. Not only people were sad to see a tragedy happen, but feelings of frustration and confusion re-emerge surrounding this case.

Lancer woke up to see a half awake Mason, yawning multiple times. Being one of the newest member of this group, she barely heard about the story in much detail. She got to ask the closest person from Nekomi to ask further details, but right now she needs to make sure he's well awake.

"Morning Four-eyes, you alright?" Lancer asked.

Mason barely awake drank some coffee, slowly looked at her then continued to drink his coffee.

"I thought that we need to talk but right now you definitely need that dose of caffeine." Lancer said.

"Yeah... I figured." Mason murmured, "I got plenty of questions as well."

"You know Nekomi and I know the Shogun. I think we could figure something out if we work together." Lancer then said.

"Yup, I guess this is what we do now, but please be patient, I need my coffee."

Most of the people belong to the foundation is either frustrated or tired from what has happened... Well except for one, the one deep inside the mountains, the one in the abode of the Shogun.

Nekomi opened his eyes, thinking he just had one of the wildest fever dreams he had experienced. He thought to himself, "OK... that was weird. But... this ain't my ceiling, this ain't my blanket, this ain't my bed, this ain't my room. Wait, why I'm stuck. Can't make it! Can't make it! This shit's stuck! Outta my way son! DOOR STUCK! DOOR STUCK!"

"Wait! Calm down Neko just try turning your head around and see what's going on." He then thought to himself, by doing so he saw the blue haired girl from yesterday.

"Oh my god! This is real. Oh my god! I can't wait to prove them all wrong." Just as Nekomi stared at Subie, she slowly opened up her eyes.

"Hmm? Darling? Its still early, can we sleep for a bit longer?" she then whispered with a smile on her face.

Nekomi looked around to realised that she has hugged him so tight that he can barely move at all.

She then whispered, "I felt good last night doesn't it? I did make sure you won't forget about me this time. Want some more?"

Nekomi looked around him, noticing that both of them barely has any clothes on, and his body was filled with kiss marks. Remembering all the event that had led him to this point, made him slowly go ahead for the kiss. Subie then slowly adjusted the position of both of them, with Nekomi's back against the bed, facing his master, and continued to make love. Those years apart, Subie has pent up a lot and Nekomi misses her so much, he just let his master go her way with him and continued in the shower.

After they were done, Subie's lip marks on Nekomi's body had been washed away, but what's left behind are hickeys, nail scratches, bite marks... It has gotten so ridiculous as Nekomi got out of the shower, he turned to his master with a slightly unamused look saying, "Onee-chan, you're such a massive pervert."

"Ara? I may be a pervert but you did eventually ask for more didn't you. Hmm?" Subie gently said as she uses a towel to dry Nekomi's head.

CHAPTER 9 – SWEET MORNING

"You don't have to make my injuries even worse you know." Nekomi replied as he faced forward, but then he slowly looks back at her with a smirk and said, "but... you did made me moan at the top of my lungs so I shall let it slide. Besides, you're still my master after all."

"...and now you understand why this house is deep in the mountains." Subie said as they gently laughed at each other and to get ready for the day.