



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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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 a person with an attention to detail can notice it.

In front of him is his rival, a tall woman 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 they seem to glow like one too. She 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. Whenever she appears, she has the ability to manoeuvre the entire touge with great handling, 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.

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. "Let me guess, I bet you're looking for someone."

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 comming 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 wante 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 glaces at the glowing hair bands.

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

Nekomi the swiftly asked, "But what if I lose?"

She than said, "I'll guess you have to do whatever I want." As the 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 engouragement 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 I – A FAMILIAR FACE

Nekomi sat back stright, 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.

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!" 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 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 scources from street racers, they are currently three seconds ahead of stage record. If this continue... Oh my!" 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 slow 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.

"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 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 mimicing 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 bewteen 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 ledgendary.

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!"

CHAPTER 3 – OUTSHINING THE MASTER

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 3 – 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."

"I think it is best to leave him under her care, but rest assured, at least he's got a pleasant surprise." Lancer replied, "We may hate each other but we have rules to follow, he is her apprentice after all. I just confirmed that fact."

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. But for now, we can do nothing but wait. At the same time, after being apart for many years and how important she is to Nekomi, I believe they do need some alone time." Lancer further explained. Although everyone is still frustrated at Lancer's decision but at the same time some do see where she is coming from.

But for now, at least one of the largest mysteries has been solved, they just need to wait for Nekomi's impromptu undercover mission.

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..."

"Onee-chan!" Nekomi said as he rushed between her arms.

"Just the way things are supposed to be." as the 'Mountain Shogun' hugs Nekomi tight in her arms with her best apprentice Nekomi started to cry 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, you did well Nekomi." she gently whispered while slowly patting his back.

For Nekomi, under the starry sky, above the mountain roads, time has seemingly stopped and rewinded 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 in the right hands right now.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT No. 4I