

Prologue

Wagan-ryu dojo. It is a Japanese swordsmanship school located in Los Angeles, California. There are several experienced senior instructors but they have one significant disadvantage. The senior instructors do not speak English very well. The previous headmaster recently retired and his oldest son took over the school.

On this day, at this very moment, three people occupy the dojo. All three are wearing gi and hakama. Two of them are important. One of them is not.

Harry Cheng speaks English as his primary language. He has very basic knowledge of Japanese and Mandarin. He is a junior instructor at the Wagan-ryu dojo who recently passed his instructor licensing exams. In terms of his skills with the sword, Harry is considered among the top three percent of the students who have ever studied at the dojo. Throughout the school's history, there have been tens of thousands of students.

Luken Duren was brought into the Wagan-ryu dojo by Harry. Due to the various challenges concerning the language barrier faced by the school, the dojo was in need of a Japanese language expert. Despite his name being non-Japanese, he quickly impressed the senior instructors and the previous headmaster with his language skills. His skills with the sword are, as he would put it, awful.

Harry is taking some swings with an iai-to. Luken is sitting on a chair and hammering away at a laptop. While Harry tries to improve his skills even further and Luken types like mad on the laptop, the son of the previous headmaster approaches Luken.

Tomoyoshi Washizuka, nicknamed "Tommy" and also "Yoshi", is six feet tall. He also weighs 350 pounds. He resembles a sumo wrestler more than a swordsman.

Tomoyoshi says, "What are you doing?"

Luken replies, "I'm working on the dojo's website. It hasn't been updated in like, 10 years?"

Tomoyoshi says, "Stop working on it."

Luken asks, "Why?"

Tomoyoshi replies, "There's no need for a Japanese language version."

Luken replies, "I was working on the English side."

Tomoyoshi repeats, "Stop working on it."

A bit puzzled, Luken says, "Oh... kay," and starts typing on the laptop again.

With a slightly angry tone, Tomoyoshi says, "Hey, idiot. I said stop working on the web site."

Luken frowns and responds, "I stopped working on the web site and started work on the lesson plans."

Tomoyoshi maintains a slightly angry tone and says, "You will not use dojo time to conduct Japanese language lessons."

While having a slightly confused expression, Luken responds, "But aren't learning the terminology and understanding the senior instructors important?"

Tomoyoshi, still maintaining an angry tone, explains how the senior instructors are old and they will be going into retirement. Going forward, the younger, English-speaking junior instructors will be taking over teaching duties. He doesn't want Luken updating the web site in any capacity. He doesn't want Luken teaching Japanese to the students. Tomoyoshi is attempting a complete overhaul of the school.

Tomoyoshi then says, "You will also not go to that weeb shit convention and perform anything at it."

Many months ago, Luken signed up to have a swordsmanship demonstration at an upcoming local anime convention.

"Your skills are shit! What makes you think you can even put on a demonstration?"

Luken then explains that's why he convinced a few junior and senior instructors to go to the anime convention with him. Luken did so with the idea this will get the dojo some exposure and may attract new prospective students. Tomoyoshi declares doing so is a complete waste of time because he sees anime con weeb as a bunch of weak-willed quitters. Tomoyoshi makes it clear he doesn't want any dojo resources, including the time of the instructors, to be used on a complete waste of time like an anime con. He also doesn't want the school's name to show up in the convention's programming guide.

Tomoyoshi then says, "Don't ask why. Because I said so. Do not make me repeat myself. Do I make myself clear?!?"

Luken stares at the laptop. As he folds the laptop, he looks at Tomoyoshi and says, "Very."

Luken stands up. He looks at Tomoyoshi and says, "Just remember one thing. When you take the next step beyond your Neutron star state, you will only have yourself to blame."

Tomoyoshi is visibly confused. In the blink of an eye, Luken picks up his gym bag and makes his exit from the dojo.

Tomoyoshi looks at Harry and asks, "What the fuck was he talking about?"

Harry responds, "I have no idea either."

Harry exits the dojo to go after Luken. In the parking lot, Luken finishes throwing his gym bag into his car's trunk. Harry catches up to Luken and says, "Look. He was out of line. Let me talk to him and find out what's going on."

Luken responds, "Don't bother. That LDL 300 motherfucker wanted me gone and this was his way of doing it."

Harry, with a confused expression says, "OK, I know this is again one of your references but LDL 300?"

Luken says, "Low Density Lipoprotein. You know. Bad cholesterol."

Harry responds, "LDL 300... That's not even the total."

As though a light bulb just turned on in his head, Harry follows up with, "Oh. You were calling him fat. Now, what was that star thing you mentioned to Yoshi earlier?"

Luken explains to Harry what a Neutron star is in very basic terms. The "step after" for a Neutron star is a black hole.

Harry laughs. He says, "You called him a fatass to his face without him even realizing it."

Harry tries to hold in his laughter and fails.

Luken says, "When you're done laughing, I have a question for you."

Harry catches his breath and says, "OK, what is it?"

Luken replies, "Konishiki can't stop me from going to conventions and putting on a show. What I can't do is to use the school's name. I intend to go no matter what. I'm going to create a new organization name. Are you in, or am I going solo?"

Harry stares at Luken for a few seconds and then responds, "I'm in. Looks like this is my last day at Wagan-ryu as well."

Luken says, "I didn't ask you to quit Wagan-ryu. I asked if you were in on doing a presentation with me under a different name."

Harry says, "Yeah but I'm sick of Yoshi's bullshit. He really let himself go and he can't teach anymore. He just has the junior instructors teach everything now and barks orders. Those are just the tip of the iceberg. The amount of bullshit he dishes out keeps increasing by the week."

Luken unleashes another wise ass comment: "After he swallows something, he doesn't poop out an egg. It stays in his stomach."

That reference, Harry understood.

Luken asks Harry whether he'll open his own school. Harry says he would like to but doesn't want to start a new business while having the cloud of whether to get a divorce hangs over his head. Harry's marriage to his wife has become so toxic, divorce is an option on the table.

Luken says he'll start a new school as a business under his name, and then have Harry as an employee. Teaching martial arts is merely a part-time job, so Harry will be paid as a part-time employee. In this way, Harry's wife won't be able to count the new school as a part of community property. Assuming the divorce happens, Harry can then take an ownership stake in the dojo.

Luken has a name for the new school: Yonebi-ryu. They will attend conventions as, "Yonebi-ryu School of Japanese Swordsmanship."

Luken tells Harry he would like to meet up at least twice a week before the upcoming convention so they can go over the presentation choreography. Due to Luken's lack of skills with handling a sword, he wants to get as much practice in as possible before a presentation. Harry says let's make that happen.

Luken drives off and leaves the Wagan-ryu dojo parking lot for the last time. Before going back to the Wagan-ryu dojo to retrieve his own gym bag, Harry uses his phone to look up a certain name: Konishiki. Harry wondered why Luken referred to Tomoyoshi as "Konishiki". Once he does the search, Harry learns Konishiki is the heaviest sumo wrestler in recorded history. Harry bursts out in laughter at the parking lot.