

## Prolog

Rin was standing outside a humble farmhouse, deep in the Ethra countryside. It was the middle of the night, the beautiful stars lit the sky. A gentle breeze disturbed some nearby wind chimes, and 10 sentinels surrounded him, all wearing cloaks and blindfolds. It seemed his days of hiding were over.

“Rindalor, stand down.” Major Cassoway said.

Rin held his daggers in clenched fists. “Don't you think I had a reason for doing what I did, Roan?” He said.

“You murdered someone. You vowed to serve the law. This is the consequence.” Roan Cassoway's voice was unrelenting.

“I vowed to serve justice; I vowed to protect the people.” Rin almost yelled. The law would always be imperfect, this is why he would never choose legality over morality.

“Am I really going to have to take you down like a rabid dog, or will you drop your weapons and surrender?” The Major asked.

Rin looked around at the people surrounding him, 5 had swords drawn; 5 had Large energy rifles raised. 10 highly trained individuals, against one man. Rin almost chuckled, the collective really saw him as a threat. “What's the difference, getting killed here, or being executed in the city?” Rin replied. He knew the possible consequences of his actions, and he had accepted them. Rin looked up at the vista of stars above. He hoped against all reason it would not be his last time seeing the night sky.

Roan looked down, shaking their head, “so be it.”

Then Roan opened their mind to him, and their thoughts became clear to Rin.

*“Despite your crimes, it was an honor to serve with you Rin. May the All-Maker have mercy on your soul.”*

An understanding passed between them, then Roan charged toward Rin, and the others followed their lead.

Without thinking, Rin dashed to the right.

The sentinels with rifles fired at him, though not all could get a clean shot without the risk of hitting a companion.

Rin blocked the energy bullets firing at him with his minding. He would need to take down at least some of the gunmen first as blocking their attack was taking too much concentration to properly focus on the other threats.

He saw that a sentinel was on their way to intercept him. Rin leaped in the air, then using his minding, he created a platform of force. Rin jumped up from this platform, soaring over the sentinel currently pursuing him. He landed with a running start. He bolted to the closest Sentinel with a gun as they threw aside their rifle and drew their own sword.

They clashed in a quick flurry of strikes and blocks.

Rin mentally pulled hard on the sole of the sentinel's boot, knocking them off balance. The effort, unfortunately, left him vulnerable to a bullet that broke through his defenses and seared into his right calf.

But his opponent stumbled.

Rin hit the pommel of his dagger on the back of the sentinel's head, and they dropped to the ground. 5 swords left 4 guns.

The sentinel Rin had leaped over was now in range, swinging their sword for his head.

Rin ducked and put the sentinel between him and the sentinels with rifles. The relentless gunfire mercifully slowed. His current opponent was fond of quick, arching swings.

Dodging another swing Rin lunged in close and then quickly touched the sentinel's head with an outstretched hand. With his newfound spare concentration, Rin pulled the sentinel's

mind away from consciousness, while they pulled back. It was like a tug-of-war between the will of the sentinel and Rin's will. Rin quickly won, and they dropped. 4 swords, 4 guns.

Rin couldn't take them all at once. He had to take at least one more sword out of the game.

Rin took hold of one of the sentinel's blades with his minding and firmly threw it far into the distance. Like before with the sentinel he had tripped, it took effort to effect something directly in the will of others.

Two more sentinels came at him, attacking in tandem.

He was just able to dodge and block their attacks. Rin maneuvered himself so that one of the sentinel's next attacks came close to wounding their companion.

They hesitated.

Rin saw the opening and took it. The pommel of his dagger hit the sentinel's temple. They dropped.

2 swords 4 guns. Some of the sentinels with rifles were setting down their weapons, and drawing swords.

Then Rin was facing down Roan Cassoway. He knew their skill. This fight was likely over. He gritted his teeth; he would at least go down swinging.

## Chapter 1: Justice

2 months earlier

Rin woke up early. It gave him about an hour before his job officially started. He donned his uniform which consisted of a simple shirt with off-centered, decorative Pankou knots, and simple pants. Both were made of a fabric that was much stronger than it appeared, similar in strength to kevlar, but with a texture slightly thicker than wool or linen. It wasn't much protection, but it could take a hit or two.

Next were his sturdy boots, then his cloak. The cloak was purely decorative, but it did serve to make the collective distinctive. In the wind, it would billow out behind him dramatically.

Last was his blindfold, it was more meant to symbolize the blindness of justice. However, it did serve to add an air of intimidation and mystery to the sentinels, in addition to showing off the skill required for the job. Many people thought that the blindfolds were simply made of thin fabric that was easy to see through, but that was hardly the case. Rin used an aspect of minding that allowed him to feel his surroundings, it was similar to that feeling that someone was watching you, or feeling an impact split seconds before it hit, but taken to a greater level. Rin could see all around him and could feel what was even behind walls. It was a sphere about 50ft in diameter where he could sense everything. Though his mind could only focus on so much. He could not be aware of everything happening around him. That was one of the other purposes of his implant, it unloaded a bit of the work of keeping track of so much around him. The implant could piggyback off of his minding to make a digital picture of his surroundings.

His sword was the final piece of equipment, it was in its red sheath up against the wall where he left it. He picked it up and drew the blade. Like everything, he wore it was simple, but it was beautiful. The metal had a red tint to it and a mirror shine. It was thin and light and had small runes etched along the double edged blade. They were designed to direct his minding

through the sword to make it insanely sharp. Sharp enough to cut stone and metal. He gave it a couple of test swings, the sword dancing in his hand, then sheathed it and walked out into the cool morning air.

He hadn't made it 10 feet before he got a call through his implant. It was Major Roan.

"Hey, what's up Major?"

"So... I need you to come in for an assignment," they replied.

Spades and aces, it was clear from their tone that he was not going to like this assignment. He mentally prepared himself. "What is it?"

"Well... it's probably going to involve riding for hours in a cargo train... and I need you to come in now. But hey you might get lucky."

"What does getting 'lucky' look like?"

"They might rob the train at the start of the job."

"Train robbery?"

"Yes, anyways you'll be working with Leaf, be here in 20 minutes." They hung up.

Today was going to be a long day, to say the least. His only consolation was working with Captain Leaf. He honestly was quite pleased to work with him, Leaf was simply a reasonable, calm person to work with. In addition, Rin and Leaf's strengths and weaknesses worked very well together, because Leaf was an autonomous AI. When they worked together, they had both technology and minding at their disposal.

The coexistence of AIs and humans had long been a contentious subject. Eventually, the compromise was that humans needed a license to create sophisticated AIs, and if an AI desired citizenship they would have to pass a series of tests. In return, AIs could become full citizens, and fully autonomous. Though autonomous AI citizens were rare, humans outnumbered them about 300 to 1. However, AIs lived much longer lives than humans, so their numbers were always increasing. The way Rin always saw it was that, sure, there were bad AIs but there were also bad people. Rin saw AIs as people who deserve the same freedoms and consequences as

humans. The balancing factor was that just about every major system that both humanity and AIs relied on used both technology and minding. One race did not have complete control over anything.

Generally, Rin enjoyed his interactions with AIs, though some could be somewhat socially awkward and a bit eccentric, as shown by Leaf's choice of name. Rin once asked Leaf why he chose his name, and he simply replied that a falling leaf was the first beautiful thing he saw after getting his citizenship, and his first possession.

Both Rin and Leaf were heavy hitters. Likely they'd be up against another small elite team. The issue was He and Leaf would spend the whole day on a dark boring cargo train. This job would likely go late into the night; no one robbed a supply train in broad daylight. But they would still have to be there just in case. He mentally prepared himself for the day's events and found himself in a grumpy mood over not getting his morning coffee.

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What they had at the outpost was a poor excuse for coffee. It was too watered down. Rin was currently getting ready in the locker room where he was putting on combat armor. It was light and allowed freedom of movement.

He walked out of the locker room and found Leaf. Leaf, unlike many other AIs, put in little effort to appear human. He still had the proportions of a human but had nothing to conceal his metallic composition, and his face was a metallic version of an average person's face.

Most people didn't enjoy working with Leaf for two reasons, most AIs were able to move their faces into expressions that made communication easier, and humans more comfortable with them. Leaf's face had no moving parts, in fact, it was mainly decorative. Leaf had once told Rin that he had considered not even having a static face, but had decided he would at least bother with not unnerving the humans. The fact that most humans weren't used to AIs in the first place was hard enough, but at least having some sort of face made most people at least a bit more comfortable. The other thing that made it hard for most people to work with Leaf was that he was mute, or at least preferred communicating using a chat room, and hadn't bothered adding speakers to his system. Leaf took some getting used to, granted, but honestly, he was a great person to be around.

"Hey, Leaf my guy!" Rin said, giving a classic bro's side huge.

Rin saw that Leaf had already opened a chat room for him. He wrote, "*Hello Rin it's good to see you as well. It is impressive that I have not had to attend your funeral yet, with how much trouble you tend to get into. /j*" with his implant Rin could see the words scrolling past at the edge of his vision.

Rin gave a hearty laugh, "Just promise me you'll outlive me, you got a much longer life ahead than me."

*"No promises, but I'll try. ;)"*

If Rin was remembering correctly Leaf was around 183 years old, the idea of living so long still boggled his mind. "Alright, I suppose we should head over to Roan's office and get this long day started."

Leaf gave a nod and their mission officially began.

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Leaf and Rin were sitting in the caboose of a train transporting Mython, it was a material refined using tech and minding. The substance was incredibly valuable because it was the most efficient known way to store energy, and was fundamental to any electronics. This much of it would be worth a fortune.

The reason they were there is that a member of the collective had gleaned the plan for the robbery from someone's mind. But because of the nature of how the information was procured all the collective could do to prevent the robbery was to offer sentinels to the company to guard the cargo. And the company had of course agreed to the extra free labor. At this point, it was late into the night and Rin was dozing off. Leaf of course didn't need to sleep and figured he could handle lookout.

An irregularity appeared on Leaf's sensors. It seemed to be 5 humans and an AI riding speeders. They were gradually catching up to the train. It was go time. Leaf sent Rin an alert, outlining the enemies they faced and their position relative to the train. Rin awoke with a start.

He groaned "I was just finally falling asleep..."

*"Technically you were supposed to be on alert too."* Leaf replied.

"Hey, us biologicals need our beauty sleep."

*"That sounds like a 'you' problem. Anyways, what's our plan? Our enemy's ETA is about 1 min."*

Rin thought for a moment, they needed to handle this as cleanly as possible, ideally without killing anyone, "we got to end this quick, the longer this fight drags out, the more risk there is."

*"My thoughts exactly. But I think we give them a chance to surrender. The sight of two sentinels might be enough to stop them in their tracks. No pun intended."*

"That more or less voids any element of surprise."

*"We can handle them. :)"*

Rin nodded. Then an energy blade pierced the metal of the train, moving to make a circle. Using his minding Rin could sense that the AI had attached themselves to the back of the train and was cutting through the wall. Rin drew his red-tinted sword and readied himself. Leaf drew his sword as well, though his was different. It was an energy blade similar to the one cutting through the train, but it glowed red instead of the usual white.

The circle was complete, and soon after the metal shot into the train leaving an opening. It seemed at least some of the raiders were psychs, and fairly good ones to have moved something so heavy.

Rin approached the opening. "You have committed attempted theft. Surrender now and none of you will be hurt."

Leaf pointed his sword at the raiders clustered around the opening for emphasis. The raiders wore basic armor and had a cloth covering their faces.

One of the raiders replied, "Nah, I think we'd rather spread your guts on this train and take what we are due."

Some of the other raiders chuckled at this comment.

Rin smiled, it had been a while since he last tested his abilities. This more than anything seemed to unnerve the raiders.

The one who had spoken before finally said, "Alright let's take care of these two first. Vince, you take the human. He shouldn't be too hard. The rest of us will take the metal one."

Vince swung down off from where he was attached to the train and entered, walking toward Rin, the others dismounted their speeders and moved toward Leaf.

Excellent, he did enjoy fighting AIs. After all, his favorite sparring partner was an AI. Immediately, he infused his sword, making it very sharp. However, the aspect of minding that would come most into play in this fight was telekinesis. Now it would be rather convenient if Rin could simply mentally grab his opponent and toss him out of the opening. But it was extremely

hard to affect anything with telekinesis that had a will. And according to the rules of minding, advanced AIs had such a will.

Vince opened his gun ports on his arms and started firing round after round of energy bullets at Rin.

Using his minding, Rin blocked the bullets coming at him causing them to come to a stop and fizzle out, the bullets after all did not have a will. However, something like a sword wielded by someone did, because the sword represented that person's will. This was why in a world with guns, hand-to-hand combat was still as relevant as ever. Though guns had their place, not many people had the skill to block the relentless assault that Vince was presenting.

Realizing his current strategy was not effective, Vince again summoned his energy blade. The blade was attached to the forearm, acting as an extension of his arm. Unlike Leaf, Vince had synthetic skin and very human-like features. Though the energy blade extending from his arm did spoil the illusion.

Then what Rin was waiting for, data from Leaf arrived at his implant. He now knew Vince's weaknesses, what kind of damage would incapacitate him, and what kind of damage would kill him. It seemed Vince had his core in his right thigh. An odd place, but it had the advantage of being unexpected.

Fighting an AI was challenging, you simply couldn't match their reflexes. But they could be predictable and didn't handle the unexpected as well as a human. Instead of dodging the energy blade that was swinging for his torso. Rin made it seem like he was making an attempt to dodge, but instead let the blade cut through his cloak and hit the combat armor on his bicep. This model of armor was specifically designed to stop energy blades. Then he bent his elbow and used his minding to clamp down on the blade with the armor on his forearm. It was his own forearm and so his own will did not interfere when trying to use minding to affect it. Using his sword hand he sliced off the AI's arm just below the elbow. A mess of wires and metal was now

exposed. Excellent, now that the energy blade was out of the equation the fight would be simple.

Vince backed up, surprised at the unexpected attack.

Rin spared some of his attention at Leaf's fight. The five humans had moved in close and were all attacking Leaf with daggers and swords. At first glance, a 5v1 seemed to be in the raiders' favor, but in reality, people unskilled in fighting together tended to get in each other's way more and help less the more people you added. As he was watching, Leaf tripped one of them and stabbed them in the leg. She cried out in pain and collapsed. Good, it seemed Leaf would be able to handle them without trouble. Rin brought his attention back to Vince.

Apparently, the AI had decided this was a losing battle and elected to ditch his companions. Vince was running full speed at the opening in the train car.

Time for Rin's next trick. This one was what he considered his signature move; though many people had implemented it before, they didn't use it to the extent Rin did. At a pouch at his waist, was a bag of marbles, beside many others of its kind. Well, the original design resembled small marbles but he had later changed them to be similar in shape to a torpedo, but he still liked calling them marbles. Runes were etched on the surface, some of them were similar to the runes on his sword, and the others were designed to put more of his will into the marbles, making them easier to manipulate with his minding.

The marbles ripped through the bag and were launched at impressive speeds at the AI. They impacted right as Vince was about to jump through the opening, and dug deep into his metallic body. Rin stopped infusing them with sharpness and pulled back hard on the marbles. In most circumstances, the marbles would have been only slightly easier to effect with his minding than Vince himself, but because they had been etched with runes linking them to Rin's will, they could be manipulated with only about twice as much difficulty as any normal object. As a result, the AI was forcefully pulled back into the train.

"This fight is over for you," Rin said, "surrender now before you get hurt."

Vince looked over at his companions and saw they weren't doing any better than him. So he drew a knife with his remaining hand and charged.

Rin readied himself; all thoughts left, what remained was instinct. This bout would not allow for careful planning.

Vince came at him slashing for the neck, he was fast.

A combination of Rin's implant-enhanced reflexes, and using the marbles embedded in his opponent to slow his attacker down allowed him to dodge without too much difficulty. Then in a burst of minding power Rin locked Vince's right leg in place, and attacked.

The AI realized what he was about to do, but the strength of Rin's mental grip was too much to overcome.

Rin cut cleanly through the leg with his sword, the rest of the body falling limp. The AI most certainly had more tricks up his sleeve, so Rin mentally grabbed the metal flooring around the leg and enclosed it. That would have to do for now.

Once more Rin gave his attention to Leaf's fight. The woman with the wound in her leg seemed to have realized that she could not contribute and had crawled into the corner. Another raider was knocked out on the floor. That left two raiders who seemed to be decent psychs, and the one who appeared to be the leader, and the most dangerous psych of the group. Leaf was handling them just fine, but it would take a bit for the right opportunity to end this. Rin's opening move was to grab a section of the metal around the three raiders' feet and enclose it trying to trap them. He didn't bother hiding his thoughts, he wanted to know which of them could spare the attention and the skill to read his mind.

This turned out to be a mistake. One of the raider's feet was snatched by the metal, which caused him to trip and move unpredictably while Leaf was preoccupied with dodging another series of attacks from the other two raiders. As the dimwit was falling he managed to lop off Leaf's leg with his mind-enhanced sword.

By the All-Maker! It seemed Rin's bad karma had finally caught up with him. He bolted toward his friend. The two remaining raiders did not hesitate at the opportunity. The lesser psych lunged forward and cut through Leaf's other leg. For his trouble, Leaf gave him a stab in the gut, and the raider leader came forward to end the fight while Leaf's mobility was severely hampered.

Fear and anger passed over Rin. Unwanted memories from his past resurfaced. No, he would stop this. Even if he didn't, Leaf always had 5 more tricks up his sleeve. Rin pulled some of the metal flooring and hit the raider leader hard. The raider dodged but was still clipped on the arm. The rest was a complete blur.

Rin came back to his senses with his blade piercing through the raider leader's heart. His glassy eyes were looking into Rin's. He never got his name. Never knew his story. And now he was dead. He couldn't have regrets, Leaf had been in danger. He let the body fall off his sword.

The last raider who had gotten his foot stuck sat there with his hands up, fear in his eyes. Fear for Rin.

Rin wiped the blood off his sword onto his cloak. He took off the ripped and bloody cloak, letting it fall to the ground; it could be replaced. The red tint made it seem like the blood was still there, like the blood of everyone he killed was still there. No, he couldn't go down that mental path. He collected himself. Using his implant Rin signaled that the job was done and he needed medical assistance for 2 people, then looked over at Leaf. Other than having no legs left, he seemed fine.

*"Are you ok Rin?"*

He took a deep breath and replied, "ya, I'm fine. You know how these kinds of situations affect me."

*"It is good they affect you in this way. I have met many humans who killed without remorse, I never liked them."*

Rin gave a small smile. Then raised his voice to address the 3 remaining raiders, "All of you please stay where you are. I will come around and give medical assistance where I can. Other sentinels and medical staff are on their way. I expect no funny business."

Rin grabbed his backpack of supplies that was in the corner and walked over to the man who Leaf had stabbed in the gut. He was pale-faced and barely able to sit up. The raider said in a nervous voice, "Hey, listen man. I- I'm sorry for going after your buddy. I swear I wasn't going to kill him."

"I understand, will you please take off the armor on your torso."

The raider winced at every movement of taking his armor off. Rin got out some scissors, a salve, and bandages, from his bag. He cut away the raider's shirt, and applied the salve; it was a strong antibiotic, sedative, and would help the blood coagulate. He wrapped the bandage tight and tied it off.

"Try not to move as much as you can, you should be fine until backup arrives." Rin gave the raider a smile and said, "You'll have a nasty scar you can tell your drinking buddies about."

The man nodded, still in shock.

Rin walked over to the woman next, He bent down, took off the armor on her leg, and gave her the same treatment as her comrade. As Rin expected the wound was not lethal, it safely avoided the ephemeral artery. Leaf always wounded to incapacitate.

It wasn't long before the train stopped at a station and three more sentinels boarded along with medical professionals. Rin explained the basics of the events that had happened to the sentinels, along with the current state of Vince.

"*Hey Rin, remember your legless friend?*" Leaf wrote. Rin looked over and walked towards him. "*I'm going to need some help getting back to my apartment for repairs....*"

"The other sentinels could take you, if you come with me you'll be riding public transport," Rin said.

"*I know.*"

“In that case, I can take you.” Rin mentally picked up one of the metal flooring panels currently under Leaf. Even without his legs, Leaf was heavy. Rin finally walked out into the cool open air. At this point, they were deep into the Ethra countryside. Being outside of the city was odd, it was just so open. He took a moment to look at the glittering stars above him, the spectacle was one thing the city could never match. Rin sat down at a bench in the station and set Leaf beside him. The next train for the city would be here in about 5 minutes, he would take that time to admire the sky.

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It was late into the night when Rin finally entered his apartment. The first thing he did was take a long hot shower. For Rin, showers always had a way of centering him. He got dressed in his nightwear, then put his bloodied clothes in the wash, the armor he had already returned on the train. Rin lay in bed thinking over the day's events. His response to Leaf when he was in danger wasn't necessarily incorrect, it was the fact that Rin had lost control that bothered him. He found himself in a familiar thought process: what if he had been just a bit stronger? Not for Leaf's sake, but for the sake of the raider. It took strength to show mercy; to spare someone took much more skill than simply ending their life. At that moment Rin didn't have enough skill to show mercy to the raider without risking Leaf's life, and he found himself wishing he had such skill. He wished he had the skill to protect the innocent and spare the guilty. Well, the only thing he could do now was get some sleep.

It wasn't hard to fall asleep that night, Rin was exhausted. The only thing that kept him awake was the memory of that glassy look of the raider, but even that soon left his thoughts, and unconsciousness found him.

## Chapter 1.5: Vengeance

Rin was eating dinner with his parents; his mom, Nyla, had made an amazing roast, and his other mom, Azure, had helped in that she made sure to taste test everything that was made.

“So, Rin,” Nyla said, “tomorrow's your sixteenth birthday. Is there anything you want to do?”

“I think I just want to have some friends over, and a cake, something basic.” He replied.

“Ooo, any cute girls, boys, or people in between?” Azure said teasingly.

“Nah, still have yet to find a crush.” Rin was unbothered by the question, she was always interested in his love life, which had yet to manifest.

Azure seemed content with this answer.

“Oh, that reminds me, I brought home this really cool drawing from art class I wanted to show you guys.” Rin said with some excitement.

“Alright, why don't you go upstairs and get it, I'd love to see it,” Nyla said.

“Ok.” Rin said as he raced through the kitchen and up the stairs into his room. He rummaged through his backpack, it took a bit, but he finally pulled out his latest drawing. It was a pencil drawing of Leaf. Strange, he had never seen this person, but yet he knew his name.

Rin heard yelling from down stairs, and then gunshots. His blood ran cold as ice. He didn't dare cry out. Rin crept down the stairs. When he passed the kitchen he grabbed a knife left over from preparing dinner.

And there were his parents, both dead on the floor. Rin fell into complete shock. No, how could this have happened? His mind could not handle what was going on, so his instincts took over; no thought, only emotion. He turned and saw a man with an energy rifle walking towards

the house's exit. Anger. Red-hot, boiling anger replaced his fear. The man had not yet noticed Rin.

The knife he held shot from his grip, and plunged into the man's back with substantial impact. His corpse fell as lifeless as his moms'. Rin was shocked; it had just happened. He had never really honed his minding. Rin fell to his knees, what had happened, what had he done. Some vengeful part of Rin had thought killing the man would make it all better. That everything would be ok once that man was dead. But now there were three corpses in his home instead of two.

Rin crawled over to where his moms lay. He took one of their limp hands in each of his and let himself cry in anguish.

His thoughts turned to what his parents had always taught him above all else: to always strive to act with morality—to do what was right because it was right. Even though this man had taken what Rin loved most, he couldn't help but feel regret for taking his life. Taking his life unnecessarily. Was this what his moms would have wanted? They had always looked down on vengeance, and Rin had responded with just that, unveiled, anger-filled vengeance. His sobs grew louder at that thought. His actions were understandable, but the actions of that man could have also been understandable. Who's father did he kill? No. He couldn't think like that. The man had gotten what he deserved; he had taken a life so it was only right for his life to be taken. At that thought words from Azure haunted him, "Responding with hate only brings more hate into the world. You have to be the one to break the cycle." He felt like he had not only lost his parents, but lost everything they taught him.

Not long after Rin's tears dried up he heard a voice behind him.

"Hey, buddy. You ok?" It was a woman's voice.

Rin felt a hand on his shoulder. "How in the All-Maker's name could you think I'm ok?" He replied, his voice shaky.

She pulled his shoulder so Rin was facing her. She had a gray blind fold and hood. She removed her face covering, revealing eyes like blue crystals. "Listen, I know it's not ok right now. But later, maybe a lot later, it will be ok. I know it feels like you just lost everything, but you still have their memories, you still have what they taught you. Don't forget them." She looked into his eyes for a long moment. "Now, I'm going to call some back up ok? We'll get this sorted out."

"I'm not going to jail, am I? I- I killed him."

"No. You're not."

"But... I feel like I deserve to."

The sentinel came forward and gave him a hug, "I know."

He cried, soaking the gray cloak.

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Rin awoke in a cold sweat, he was no longer a 16 year old boy. It had just been a dream, but it was also a memory. This dream was always the same, always playing out exactly how it happened. The only thing that changed was who his drawing was of. This time it had been Leaf. He didn't actually remember what the original drawing was. It didn't matter. This dream didn't matter.

Rin took a moment to collect himself. The memories, even after 13 years, seemed so raw. He still wasn't ok; that sentinel had been wrong, because he missed Azure and Nyla so much that it hurt. Would they be proud of where he was, or would they be disappointed that too often he used his talents to kill? It didn't matter, they were gone.

Despite the efforts to push his emotions away, Rin silently cried, mourning his childhood that had been ripped away. And mourning the people who had loved him.