



THE FIRST TESTAMENT

What exactly is heroism? Is it a title bestowed upon individuals by others, or is it a state of being, an inherent force that drives one to act? If heroism is defined by saving others, then what exactly does it mean to save? To rescue someone from despair, to safeguard them from harm—these concepts appear straightforward enough.

But is a hero still a hero if their presence alone ensures that disaster never comes? If no one ever faces suffering because one being is too powerful for it to exist, is that still salvation, or is it merely control?

If power is the means by which one saves, then is power itself a prerequisite for salvation? Or can the powerless save in ways that strength never could? The whisper that breaks a cycle of hatred, the outstretched hand that lifts another from isolation—are these acts lesser than stopping a meteor? If so, then is salvation merely the exercise of dominance over fate?

And if one can save, must they? Does the ability to protect impose the obligation to do so? If salvation is a right, then it implies choice. If it is a duty, then it is a burden. Yet, does anyone ever have the right to determine who is saved and who is not? Or is the very act of deciding a quiet form of tyranny?

Perhaps, in the end, the greatest power is not strength itself, but the wisdom to know when to use it—and when to abstain.

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City A was calm, almost unnaturally so. Skyscrapers stood tall, their glass surfaces reflecting the sunlight without a single crack or scorch mark from a recent battle.

The streets were orderly, the sidewalks clean, and the people moved about with the relaxed air of those who hadn't seen a monster attack in weeks. A quiet city was a safe city, yet something about it felt... off.

It wasn't just City A—every city had been strangely peaceful lately. No monstrous roars in the distance, no evacuations, no craters in the middle of the street. The S-Class heroes, always on edge for the next disaster, found themselves with unexpected free time.

Some used it to train, others to indulge in hobbies, but one hero, a bald hero specifically, had nothing to do.

Saitama strolled down the sidewalk, hands in his pockets, wearing the expression of a man who had just finished the most boring TV show imaginable. His eyes were half-lidded, his posture loose, his very presence blending into the ordinary world around him. A city without threats should have been a good thing. And yet, for a man like Saitama, it only served as another reminder of how empty victory could feel.

His mind drifted to the countless monsters he had defeated, each battle ending in the same effortless way. Was this all there was? As he listened to the distant sounds of busy stores and honking taxis, the normalcy felt almost surreal.

No chaos, no threats—just life moving on without him. His fingers curled into fists, not out of anger, but something harder to define. Restlessness? Emptiness? He didn't know. All he knew was that, once again, there was nothing left to do.

What am I doing wrong? I'm not improving at all. I haven't learned anything new because there's no one that can teach me anything. I've done it. I've maxed out. And now the only thing I can do is wait until I just go of old age or something. Hmm.... Saitama thought.

Saitama stopped mid-step, his thoughts slipping away. He had a feeling—an odd sense that someone familiar was approaching. He couldn't quite explain it, but when he glanced back, he saw King pedaling toward him on his bike.

King looked exhausted, sweat dripping down his face. He wasn't running from danger, but rather from his persistent paparazzi. Of course, Saitama had no idea. He just saw a sweaty guy on a bike and shrugged.

King sighed as he slowed down, steering his bike next to Saitama. There it is again. He's got that gloomy look, King thought. He didn't bother asking about it, though.

Without a word, they started walking together, King pushing his bike along. A few people on the street turned to look at them—some in awe, some in confusion—but neither of them paid any attention. It wasn't anything new, after all.

"What's gotten you so gloomy, Saitama?" King asked

Saitama shrugged and frowned.

"Nothing in particular. Just...thinking I guess. I don't know. I'm really confused." Saitama replied.

King raised his eyebrows and took off his cap.

"Good grief, when are you *not* confused..." King replied.

"*Ha-ha-ha...very funny...*" Saitama replied sarcastically.

As they walked, a ramen stand came into view on their right. King glanced at it first, considering the idea of stopping for a meal. Saitama, however, barely acknowledged it. He wasn't hungry, and the thought of eating there didn't interest him in the slightest. Skipping it was an easy decision.

Still—King decided to ask.

"Got any appetite?" King asked.

Saitama shook his head, and they kept walking in silence. The streets of City A were quiet, the distant hum of traffic filling the gaps in their conversation. Eventually, Saitama glanced at King.

"King, do you think I'm a hero? Like... a true hero?"

King stopped in his tracks, considering the question. He looked at Saitama, his expression thoughtful.

"Saitama... I think, deep down, you already know the answer. You've shown me yourself."

Saitama frowned. I have? I literally can't recall.

"Huh?"

King sighed. He crossed his arms, his voice steady but sincere.

"I won't sugarcoat it for you. You are a hero—whether you believe it or not. You've saved more lives than anyone I know. That alone should be enough. You should be proud of that, Saitama."

Saitama said nothing.

King hesitated, rubbing the back of his neck. "But, uh... when it comes to other things, like, you know... personality and stuff... well, that's another story."

Saitama blinked at him.

"Huh...?"

King coughed awkwardly. "Just take the compliment, man."

Saitama nodded, but something still nagged at him—his motive. What was it, really? Ever since becoming a hero, he had never found a clear purpose. He told himself he fought for fun, for justice, or even just out of habit.

But no matter how hard he tried to believe in any of those reasons, none of them ever felt real. None of them ever truly filled the void inside him.

"I don't know, King. Something just feels... off. It doesn't matter what I've done before, and nothing really feels like it matters now. I'm just gonna head home." Saitama said, his tone flat but carrying a hint of frustration.

King wasn't convinced. He knew Saitama well enough to understand that boredom, not peace, was his real enemy. And if there was one thing guaranteed to snap him out of it, it was competition—especially one he could never win.

"What about another match?" King suggested casually. "You know it's still 120-0, right? We can even pick an easier game if that helps—"

"*ALRIGHT, THAT'S IT. YOU'RE ON!!!*" Saitama shouted.

King smirked. As expected, some things never changed.

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Evening

Saitama and King decided to settle down in one of the rooms at the Hero Association HQ in City A. King had brought his gaming console with him anyway, so it seemed like the perfect opportunity for them to hang out. Well, hang in the sense that King would absolutely destroy Saitama in every match, as usual.

No matter how hard he tried, Saitama just couldn't grasp the mechanics beyond mindlessly mashing the same buttons over and over. He had also changed into a simple t-shirt, shorts, and flip-flops, making himself comfortable for what he thought would be a fun gaming session.

"*THAT'S IT! YOU HAVE NOWHERE ELSE TO GO! HAHA! YOU'RE STUCK! WHAT ARE YOU GONNA DO NOW, HUH? HOW ABOUT MY CONSECUTIVE NORMAL—!*"

Saitama was mid-sentence when King nonchalantly pressed a few buttons, effortlessly reversing the situation. In an instant, Saitama's character was completely overpowered. His brow twitched.

*How? How does that even make sense? I'm watching exactly what he's doing, and I swear I'm doing the same thing...*Saitama thought.

King sighed, still focused on the game.

"C'mon, Saitama. Didn't I already tell you that you need to parry my attacks instead of just blocking them? If you want to gain any real advantage, you have to stop using the same basic moves. All you do is block, attack, block, attack—it's the same thing every time. There are other mechanics in the game, you know." King said.

Saitama frowned, gripping the controller tighter. He still didn't fully understand, but he wasn't about to give up. No—he needed to win at least once.

"Alright...how about this?" Saitama muttered, narrowing his eyes.

Saitama leaned forward, putting his full attention on the screen. As soon as King's character stopped attacking, he struck. His fingers blurred across the controller, mashing the buttons so fast that afterimages formed.

"*HA! TAKE THIS! ALL I NEED TO DO IS—!*"

Before he could finish, King's character effortlessly parried every single one of Saitama's rapid attacks, countering with perfect precision. Within seconds, Saitama's health bar was wiped out.

His eyes widened. His mouth hung slightly open.

For the first time in a long while, he felt something he wasn't used to feeling. Fury. But he couldn't let King see that. No, that would mean King had truly won.

So instead, Saitama leaned back and stared at the controller in his hands.

"Uh... I think I broke your controller." Saitama said flatly.

King, who had paused the game momentarily, turned to look at him. With a tired sigh, he inspected the damage. Sure enough, the controller's buttons were completely wrecked, some of them stuck in place while others had popped out entirely. It was beyond repair.

"You do realize you're buying me a new one, right?" King said, his voice calm but firm.

Saitama bit his fingernail absentmindedly.

"Uh... I'll just have Genos do it. He's got a ton of yen anyway."

King crossed his arms.

"That's not the point, Saitama."

"Sorry about that." Saitama said, standing up as if to escape the conversation.

King only sighed again. He didn't take Saitama's apology seriously—especially since this was the fifth time Saitama had broken one of his controllers.

"Are you headed out?" King asked, keeping his eyes on the screen as he resumed his game.

Saitama slipped on his flip-flops and nodded.

"Yeah. I ran out of manga to read, so I'm gonna get some more. See you when I get back or whatever." His voice was as plain as ever, as if this were just another routine errand.

He opened the door and stepped out, leaving King alone once again. The door clicked shut, and for a few seconds, the room was silent except for the sound of King's game.

King's fingers moved instinctively over the controller, but his mind was elsewhere. *Manga?* he thought.

Now that I think about it... what kind of manga does Saitama even read? King thought.

He had never really asked him before. Saitama never talked about his hobbies much, aside from fighting and occasionally playing games. What kind of stories *did* Saitama read?

Action? Comedy? Maybe something weird like romance? King shook his head. *Nah. That'd be too out of character... right?*

For a brief moment, he considered asking him about it when he got back. But then he just dismissed the thought.

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The bookstore. It was still open, surprisingly, and as Saitama walked up to the front doors of the store, he could even see some adults looking at the *adult* section of the store. Saitama shrugged, opening the front door and stepping inside. He had already read a bunch of comedy manga, and right now, he was feeling like he could use a nice stereotypical fantasy one. Maybe one where the protagonists weren't *too* overpowered.

I usually hate those kinds myself anyway. They remind me too much of myself... Saitama thought. He kept on looking, letting his eyes take him to whatever manga on the shelf piqued his interest. Aisle one, two, three, four...eventually, he stumbled upon the second to last aisle—the one closer to the back of the store. This aisle was also near the *adult* section.

Saitama, looking more particularly bored, decided to reach out and grab one of the random manga he saw. The main thing about this manga that caught his attention was the color theme: black, red, and white. To him, this typically meant the manga would've had something to do with *horror*, which he didn't read that much compared to comedy or fantasy. Either way, he felt the need to try something different.

With the manga book in his hand, he read the title: THE HOLY GHOST.

The Holy Ghost? Dammit...this title doesn't even make any sense...oh...wait...

Saitama turned the manga around and saw a short description on what it was about. Turns out, it mainly had to do with a post apocalyptic world where the rest of humanity were forced to take refuge underground while the monsters above ground thrived.

Compared to what I've dealt with, this almost seems too peaceful. Hmm...sure, why not give it a shot. Maybe Genos might like it too. Oh, and maybe King as well... Saitama thought as he started walking out of the aisle.

While he was walking, the lights in the store began to flicker until they shut off. At the same time, the presence of other people in the store began to fade, and was replaced by another collective presence—a sort of *ominous* presence. Saitama, his mind scrambled a bit, tried to blink, the manga still held tightly in his hand. The store itself was still there, and Saitama was too, but something felt oddly different. The smell of books had been replaced by a smell of rot, decay, and even smoke.

Saitama maneuvered to the front of the store. The air felt like it shifted a bit—it felt denser. Saitama could tell. It was like comparing the air at higher altitudes compared to lower altitudes...the difference was definitely noticeable. There were also cobwebs on every corner of the store. Webs had also occupied the front doors.

What the? Uh...is this some sort of interactive read? But I didn't even open the book...

Saitama sniffed, feeling a bit off. The surrounding mist made it even harder to see. The doors of the store, once automatic, were now closed and stuck together. Vines had grown on them as well.

Still holding the manga, Saitama gently decided to push the front doors of the bookstore, causing it to crack. With just a little more force, Saitama had managed to completely push open the door with great ease. When Saitama had stepped outside, he took a deep breath. It was still misty, which he didn't really expect. It was also snowing...

It's winter already? Ok, I don't know what happened, but I'm pretty sure it was summer when I entered the store...so...uh...

Confused, Saitama turned his attention back to the store and thought of entering again. He went with that thought and entered the store, trying to see if maybe he had gone through a mystical portal or something. Then, it clicked to him: the manga. He opened the book, expecting to see something pop up, but alas, it was nothing. Just blank pages.

Great. I've been tricked somehow.

Saitama stepped outside the store. Ignoring the snow, mist, and overall cold atmosphere, he casually bent his knees, preparing to leap. One, two, three...*Saitama leaped*. He leaped so hard that the force had shaken the entire ground and left a ginormous crack in the pavement, followed by a loud *BANG!* Ascending, Saitama noticed that not only was he in a different place and time, but everything felt old and unnatural. By the time his body had almost reached the clouds, he completely understood that he might've even been on a different planet...or a planet that was vaguely similar to his.

I need to find someone that can help me get back...

Descending, Saitama looked at the front cover of the manga. The title and cover picture were still there—so what was going on? When he finally landed several meters away from his initial leaping point, he could feel that something was approaching. It felt...animalistic. He crossed his arms and waited for whatever was approaching to show itself. Not really caring, he decided to toss the manga away. He had better things to worry about.

Then, from the bushes, a creature appeared—its fangs shown. The creature had the appearance of a rat combined with a wolf, along with more horrific features—like its growl. Saitama wasn't intimidated, but interested. He's never seen an animal like that before...

Or is that thing a monster? Can I even pet it? I remember I failed to pet this one monster when I first came across it...

It wouldn't hurt to try again. Saitama slowly approached the creature. More of its kind were watching in the shadows, but Saitama didn't notice. The creatures continued to surround Saitama, planning to pounce him at the same time.

"Hey, I don't like how you're growling at me like that...stop it..." Saitama said plainly. The creature retaliated. After Saitama took one more step, the creature leaped towards him, its mouth open wide and aiming for his neck. Saitama casually sidestepped it and karate chopped it in the neck with enough force to paralyze it. The creature fell down with a *THUMP*. "I told you to stop..." Saitama said. The creatures that were in hiding all came out simultaneously and attacked Saitama. One after the other, Saitama continued to paralyze them with karate chops. *I'm not their food. They can go eat something else...* More came, and Saitama started realizing that toying with them was pointless. He shrugged and started jogging away—easily outpacing them. Even after Saitama had lost the pack, he continued to jog regardless. He needed to explore some more...

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It was still pretty chilly outside, but that didn't bother Saitama in the slightest. What bothered him was the lack of anything *human* wandering around the streets or woods. The only thing he had seen so far were animals, and if that wasn't bad enough—a lot of animal corpses sprawled around and scattered across the road too.

Am I ever going to find anyone that can tell me what the hell is going on here? Geeze...

Saitama glanced behind, wondering if the pack was still following him. They weren't. Good. Saitama had stopped jogging just a moment ago, so he should be fine walking for now. About fifteen-minutes of walking later, he came across a trestle bridge. According to Saitama's memory, which wasn't all that great anyway, there usually weren't many tracks so close to the woods in City Z anyway. Most of the tracks there were destroyed and not maintained because City Z was practically a dead city. At least, that is what Saitama and Genos had observed.

Saitama sighed and knelt on the tracks, paying attention to how the ice was practically binding some broken pieces together. And just like that, Saitama had lost his train of thought. He was thinking about something *random*, again, and he didn't notice the two men with assault rifles and gas masks sneaking up behind him from underneath the bridge. However, the men had no idea who *Saitama* really was. They had just mistaken him for some crazy, suicidal maniac that they could take advantage of, which meant that they could *rape* him.

The men smirked when they got close enough.

"Turn around, slowly..." One of the men said.

Saitama, not really caring, quickly turned around and saw the two men. He wondered why they were wearing gas masks. Were they a part of the police? But why now? Why did they show up all this time?

"You guys enjoy pointing firearms at people? Uh...who are you and what do you want?"

Saitama asked plainly.

The men looked at each other simultaneously, then, back at Saitama.

"You must have taken a lot of painkillers to be walking around bare, no?" The other guy said, stepping closer to Saitama.

Saitama finally stood.

"How long have you been out here? *You must be lonely.*" The man next to him said.

Saitama felt confused. He could usually pick up on someone's intentions if they gave too much away, but it was hard because these men were wearing gas masks. Saitama then shrugged.

"I guess." Saitama replied.

The man, which had initially stepped closer, holstered his assault rifle.

"I can make you feel much happier if you, well, turn around?" The man said.

Saitama continued to think. Then, he came to what he believed was a reasonable conclusion.

"Ah...I see. Are you guys trying to steal my clothes? But why? You already have comfy stuff on." Saitama replied, crossing his arms.

The man halted, and frowned.

"It's remarkable how well those supplements are working. You're not choking or anything. They say that only demon folk can walk around bare on the surface with no gas mask and warm clothes. It's like you're immune to the radiation...it's an honour for me to get to fuck one of these folks..." The man said, giggling a bit.

Saitama raised his eyebrows. The other man then aimed his assault rifle at Saitama's head.

"Now stand still while I take what's mine!" The man said, charging at Saitama. With a casual flick of Saitama's wrist, he sent the man flying and crashing into a tree causing his gas mask to completely shatter. Saitama frowned. The other man didn't even bother to shoot. He was too shocked.

"I prefer not to be raped. Thank you." Saitama said plainly.

He then slowly turned towards the other man, who was staring at him intensely, but didn't have the willpower to pull the trigger at Saitama.

"Can you stop aiming that thing at me? It's kinda annoying..." Saitama said, clenching his fists.

The man quickly holstered his rifle and bolted in the opposite direction, going to the other side of the bridge and beyond. Ignoring the man that ran away, Saitama walked up to the other man he had swatted. He was slumped against a tree, breathing hard and heavy. The man couldn't say a word, but his bulging eyes said everything. He was in utter terror.

Saitama knelt in front of him.

"Wait...why are you choking? I didn't even hit you that hard...I barely grazed you." Saitama said, still oblivious to the new environment he found himself in. He stared at the man, confused.

"Hey, say something. Anything. I don't just want to watch you die. Oh...you need a gas mask."

"Uh...yea, I don't know where I can get one. The other guy ran off...so..." Saitama said plainly.

The man took three last heavy and slow breaths, before he faded away—his eyes still bulging in terror.

Did he just...die? I didn't mean to kill him. I guess it was the rad-something that did it. Crap. I haven't even spent a day here and I already killed someone. Well, it wasn't my fault. He was trying to steal my clothes. And...oh yeah, and rape me. I can consider him a monster for that, right? Well, if he's a monster, then I guess I shouldn't feel too bad. It wasn't my fault...

Saitama finally stood and maneuvered back onto the main road.

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THE BOOK OF NICODEMUS #1

My name is Nicodemus Hammas, and I'm an offensive soldier that operates across the Yarogorsk metro system. I'm 23.

Right now, I'm stationed at Kropotkinskaya on the Roskovet Line, deep in Yashlika territory. Not exactly a comforting place for someone like me. The Yashlika here aren't shy about their hatred for Punips. It lingers in the air like the damp stench of mold in these tunnels, heavy and inescapable. Even with my rifle slung across my back, my uniform matching theirs, and my service record proving my worth, I still catch the looks. The side glances, the sneers, the

way they tighten their grips on their weapons when I pass by. It's not fear. It's disdain. But I've learned to keep my head down and my mouth shut. As long as I do my job, none of that matters.

We're preparing for a surface run—just another operation. My unit, the 12th Recon, has been gearing up all morning. There's a sense of routine in it, a rhythm I've grown accustomed to: checking filters, securing ammo, making sure the gear won't get us killed the second we step into the open air. The surface is a graveyard, but it's also an unspoken proving ground.

Survive enough runs, and your name starts to mean something.

Just as I finish tightening the straps on my pack, I hear my name.

"Hammas!"

I turn to see a soldier standing near the tunnel entrance, his face unreadable under the dim station lights.

"General Kil wants you in his office. Now."

There's a moment of silence between me and my unit. The guys exchange looks—half-curious, half-worried. No one gets called to see General Kil without a reason. I exhale, nod, and sling my rifle over my shoulder.

"Guess I'll see you all in a bit." I say.

But I have a feeling I won't.

Kil's office is carved into the old station walls, repurposed from what used to be a security checkpoint. The moment I step inside, the air feels heavier. The general is standing behind a rusted metal desk, his uniform pristine despite the filth of the metro. He's an older man, scars marking his cheek and neck, eyes sharp as the knives we carry. He wastes no time with pleasantries.

"Your record is impressive, Hammas. Your combat skills, your ability to think on your feet. That's why I'm offering you a place among the Ghost."

The words hit me harder than a shotgun blast. The Ghost. Elite operatives, the best of the best. They handle the missions no one else can. And my uncle, Adrik, is one of them.

I hesitate. My mind flashes to Kira—my little sister, back in the depths of the metro, probably reading whatever book she's managed to get her hands on. She's eighteen now, but she still feels like the kid I had to protect when everything fell apart. Then there's Aunt Maryina, holding our fractured family together while Uncle Adrik fights in the shadows.

If I join the Ghost, I'll see Adrik again. But it means leaving behind Kira and the little time I have with her.

Kil watches me, patient. He knows the weight of this choice.

"Your skills are wasted in recon. With us, you'll make a real difference." General Kil said.

I clench my fists. I know what Uncle Adrik would say. He'd probably tell me to think it through, to be sure. But I also know what this means. If I refuse, I stay here, a Punip in Yashlika territory, constantly looked down on. If I accept, I become something greater.

I took a breath, then, I said: "I accept."

Kil nods approvingly and picks up his radio: "Colonel Andrey, I've got a new recruit for you."

"Understood. I'll prepare the paperwork." A gruff voice responds.

Kil turns to me.

"You'll be assigned to Andrey's unit. But first, let's get you properly equipped." Kil said.

The armory is tucked away behind reinforced steel doors. Inside, I meet a quartermaster—a grizzled man who barely acknowledges me as he hands over my new gear. A scoped assault rifle, laser attached. Extra magazines. Grenades. Throwing knives. A pistol.

Then comes the real change. A new helmet, marked with the Ghost's emblem—a faded skull painted onto the metal. A jacket to match, sturdy and dark. I run my fingers over the insignia, feeling the weight of what it means.

"You're not recon anymore. Try not to die." Kil commands.

"I'll do my best." I replied, almost stuttering a bit.

When I return to my unit, they're already finishing their final checks for the surface run. Ivan is the first to spot me.

"Nico, what's going on?" Ivan asks.

"I'm leaving. Joining the Ghost." I said, adjusting the strap of my new rifle.

A beat of silence. Then, unexpectedly, Ivan grins.

"Damn. Look at you, moving up to the big leagues! Can't say I'm surprised though." Ivan says, putting his arm over my shoulder.

A few of the others clap me on the back, offering their congratulations. Some are envious, but most are just happy for me. I wasn't expecting that. Maybe, despite everything, I wasn't just another Punip to them. Maybe I was a soldier first.

Before I go, I hug them. They're not family, not like Kira or Aunt Maryina, but they've been the closest thing to brothers I've had down here.

"Just, um, don't get a shot in the balls or whatever." Ivan jokes as I step back.

I chuckle.

"No promises." I replied.

With one last glance at the group I called home, I turn and head toward the exit tunnels. The Ghost awaits me.

THE SECOND TESTAMENT

Once, humanity reigned as the dominant force of Earth. They carved mountains, bent rivers to their will, and built towers that scraped the sky. But their reign was not eternal.

In their arrogance, they poisoned the air, cracked the earth, and unleashed horrors beyond their own understanding.

What was once a world sculpted by their hands became an abyss of their own making. Now, they do not rule. They do not even belong.

The surface no longer bears their name. It belongs to the creatures that rose from the ashes of human folly—beasts with lungs that breathe the new air, skins that do not wither under the unfiltered sun, and instincts that have surpassed the frailties of intellect.

These beings are not burdened by memory or regret. They do not long for a past that no longer matters. They do not cling to the ghosts of what was. They simply are, and in their existence, they are the rightful inheritors of this changed world.

Below, in the tunnels, the last remnants of humankind scurry like vermin, feeding on the scraps of their former empire. They call themselves survivors, but they are little more than echoes—whispers in the dark, speaking of a world that no longer cares for them.

Evolution does not look back. It does not pity those who refuse to change. And so, the earth will wait. The creatures above will thrive. And humanity, stubborn in its resistance, will fade, not with a bang, nor with a cry of defiance, but with a whimper drowned beneath the weight of time.

The world has moved on. The only ones who cannot accept it are the ones who no longer matter. Or so it seems...

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Night, Yarogorsk City

The mission was simple: get to the bunker where Colonel Andrey and the rest of the unit are situated by leaving the metro and traversing through the surface. Easier said than done. Nicodemus had already checked everything before he had started climbing the shaft ladder: his filters, Geiger counter, firearm, supplies. In his opinion, he was more than ready and honored to get to join Colonel Andrey on the surface.

Once Nico had reached the hatch, he put his gas mask on and pushed the hatch open. Right away, he could feel the cold air hit like a hundred needles all over his body. It wasn't that bad though given what he was wearing, but it could've been better. Nonetheless, he was a Ghost now, so he had to learn how to tough it out anyway. This wasn't the metro anymore that was his battlefield—it was the surface.

Nicodemus did a full circle check to see if there were any creatures or anything of the like around. Given his judgment, there was none. He finally pulled himself up and stood on the surface...the snow beneath his feet feeling harder than usual. Damn. Anyone could easily freeze to death out here in a matter of minutes. He closed the hatch and took out his rifle. Slowly, he scanned his surroundings and snuck past a couple of vehicles before he was in the middle of the street. He glanced up and saw a tower. That was East on his map, which meant that the Sibersk River was West. After taking out his map and looking at it again just to be sure, he knew that the bunker had to be Southeast.

Ok, ok. Easy enough. I only have about a mile to cover. Nico thought.

Nico quickly put his map away and moved quickly, but stealthy. He didn't want to attract any unnecessary attention. He passed a couple of more vehicles that were broken down and had bullet holes, as well as frozen corpses sprawled up against them. He took deep and calculated breaths, trying to move quickly while also preserving the time on his filter. Eventually, Nico reached an alley. He continued moving, but halted when he saw a thin wire that was connected to both buildings. A trip wire.

There's been a lot of them around recently...

He quickly pointed his rifle at one of the windows on the higher floors of the apartment complex. For some reason, he thought he had seen something move in there. Maybe his eyes were deceiving him. Turning his attention back to the trip wire, he kneeled, carefully cut the wire so that the IED wouldn't go off, and took the bomb for himself. Then, he continued trudging through the snow. Almost before he had snuck through this alley to continue his journey, he felt the ground shaking.

Fuck. Pestilents, Nico thought, before burying himself deeper in the snow. He was lucky that the snow he was trudging through was at least a few feet tall, or else, he would've probably been spotted.

Nico watched as the *Pestilents*, mutated creatures that looked like a combination of a wolf and a rat, moved in packs to go past the apartment complex buildings. After a minute of waiting, the packs were finally through, and Nico felt like it was safe to continue moving. He pushed himself up, brushed the snow off his attire, and continued to trudge through the snow, making sure to lift his rifle while he did. Once he was finally past the apartment complex buildings, he knew he had already made it a quarter of the way to the bunker. The only thing that could've potentially stopped him at this point was more *Pestilents* and maybe other humans who went about on the surface.

Taking a deep breath, he managed to get to a point where the snow wasn't up to his waist anymore, so he started moving quickly again. Left, right, check. Left, right, check. The same muscle memory motion he had been practicing since forever.

This pace is good. Now all I need to do is...

Nicodemus halted again...hearing sounds coming in front of him. It was kind of hard to pinpoint exactly where it was coming from due to the mist, but he had a pretty good idea. He un-holstered his rifle, checked to make sure the safety wasn't on, and continued moving. Something, a tin can maybe, hit something else metal, which made a loud noise. It came from the left. Nico quickly turned around and aimed his assault rifle in that direction, only to see a man holding an assault rifle with a gas mask.

"The rifle, on the ground, now!" Nico shouted, pointing the rifle at the man's head.

The man froze, shivering a bit. Then, he reluctantly dropped the rifle. Nico smirked.

"Including your pistol..." Nico said.

Nico couldn't see it, but he could imagine the man frowning after he said those words. The man slowly took out his pistol and dropped it. Nico walked up to him and whacked him on the shoulder with his rifle, causing him to stumble forward and land on his knees with both hands on the ground.

"Where are you coming from and headed to? Show me your ID—if you even have one..." Nico said, gripping the rifle tighter. The man coughed a bit before speaking.

"There was this guy that promised me some goods if I met him West from here..." The man started.

Nico kicked away both the man's rifle and pistol, but he didn't take his eyes off the man.

"You alone?" Nico asked.

The man nodded.

"I should put a bullet through your head. You aren't with one of those raiders, are you? You thought we wouldn't catch you guys on the surface because it was 'too dangerous'?" Nico pressed.

The man didn't know what to say, but spoke anyway.

"No—that's not it. I...there was this guy. Y'know. He was just walking around with a T-shirt and shorts and was wearing no gas mask. He was breathing just fine..."

"Hmhhmm...and what does that have to do with you? Roll up your sleeves." Nico commanded.

The man hesitated for a moment, then followed Nico's orders and rolled his sleeves up. Nico immediately noticed the burnt markings on the man's skin and frowned. The man was affiliated with a notorious gang in the metro, that might've even been secretly supported by the Yashlika, that was known for stealing goods from the Punip and transporting them all over the metro.

Nico frowned. There was no way a person like him would've dared to go on the surface alone unless he was a part of a unit or was in some deep shit.

Nicodemus sighed.

"So, what's in the backpack?" Nico asked, still pointing the gun at the man's face. The man stuttered a bit. Before he could answer, Nico heard a loud *BANG* that occurred just down the street—like a vehicle explosion. Strange. Was it a tripwire?

...

Just how many of these things are there? Is there an entire family tree of you in this city?

Saitama thought as he landed on one of the vehicles—easily getting balance. Further in the distance, the *pestilents* were approaching, their hungry gaze never leaving him.

Saitama frowned. There were about eight or nine of these creatures surrounding him, attempting to pounce him at the same time. Guessing their intentions, Saitama casually hopped off the vehicles and watched *pestilents* simultaneously charged at him.

Saitama clenched his fists.

“Consecutive Weak Punches.” Saitama said nonchalantly, his fist moving so fast that it created afterimages. In a blur, the *pestilents* exploded into a bloody painting scattered across the vehicles that were lined up in the street. Saitama sighed and shrugged.

Besides mosquitoes, these things are the most annoying creatures I’ve ever met. Wait, is someone else here with me?

Saitama could feel it: the presence of another human being. He slowly turned around and looked down the street—two people were approaching him: a man with a rifle and the same guy that he had caused to bolt in the opposite direction back at the tracks.

Saitama waits for them to get close, and he completely forgets about the massive amount of blood that’s covering his face and clothes.

“*THAT’S HIM! THE DEMON! SEE! HE’S WEARING NO GAS MASK!*” The scared man said.

Nicodemus frowned and whacked the man in the back of his head with his rifle, causing him to stumble.

“Just shut the fuck up before I blow your brains out.” Nico said.

Saitama picked his nose watching them argue. Nico then turns his attention to Saitama. Just like the scared man, he was a little taken aback that he had actually seen someone walking on the surface with no protection in Yarogorsk City. He’d only heard stories about these things happening, about *Surface Humans*, but never actually believed them.

Nicodemus aimed his rifle at Saitama.

“Who are you, and how are you walking without a gas mask?” Nico asked.

“Sorry if just me existing is enough to frighten you...oh, that’s why, I’m covered in blood.”

Saitama replied, rubbing blood off his face. He continues to speak.

“I’m a hero for f—I mean, a professional hero. Yea, that’s me. Where are we anyway?” Saitama finishes.

“This is Yarogorsk City—the Capital of Yaroslavnia—well, at least it once was the capital, before the Fall. Everyone who inhabits this city knows this, so tell me, *how* are you not wearing a gas mask? What drugs are you taking?” Nico demanded.

Saitama raised his eyebrows.

“Drugs? I don’t do drugs, and I don’t get why you guys need those masks anyway. I’m breathing just fine.”

“Are you an idiot? The radiation levels up here are too high for anyone to last more than a minute without a gas mask, and yet, you seem to be shrugging it off...”

Nicodemus glances at the burning vehicle not too far away, and he also catches a glimpse of the blood smeared across the vehicles too.

“Were you the one who set those traps?” Nico asked, holding his rifle steady.

Saitama scratched his chin.

“There were no traps or anything. A pack of weird creatures came out of nowhere and ganged up on me, so I decided to give them a taste of my fist, and well, *that happened...*”

Saitama replied, looking at the blood.

Nicodemus was shocked.

“*Pestilents?* The “creatures” you were talking about are called *pestilents*. Their kind is feared by many. Alright, you convinced me you aren’t from here pal, but that doesn’t explain how you’re immune to the radiation, which means you’re coming with me until I find the answer.”

Nico said, gripping his rifle tighter.

“Sure....” Saitama replied.

“What’s your name anyway?” Nicodemus asked.

"Oh, it's Saitama, and can you please stop pointing that rifle at me? Like, seriously. What if you accidentally shot my forehead and the bullet bounced off and hit you?" Saitama replied, genuinely serious.

Nico cleared his throat.

Bounce off his head? What is he talking about? Also, what kind of name is Saitama? That's not Yashlika, nor is it Punip. He also doesn't seem to have an accent either, which makes me believe him even more. So maybe the stories of the Surface Humans are true...

Saitama frowned a bit.

"Look, do you have any idea how I'm able to get back to my world, or know anyone that can help me? I walked inside of a bookstore, and when I was ready to leave, I found myself here..."

Saitama tried explaining.

Nicodemus didn't believe a single word Saitama said, but he listened anyway and gave an answer any sane person would give.

"Sorry, but I have no idea what you're talking about." Nicodemus replied.

Saitama exhaled lazily, then strolled up to Nicodemus.

"Ok, then, uh...I'll just follow you for now I think." Saitama said.

Saitama and the scared man began to follow Nicodemus as he trudged through the snow.

The mist was still a bit thick, but with the map, they would arrive at their destination eventually. Saitama was still covered in blood.

"So are you telling me you beat the *pestilents* with their bare fists?" Nicodemus asked, glancing back.

Saitama nodded.

"Basically, yea."

"But that's impossible. Even if you could withstand the radiation up here, those things would've ripped you to shreds."

"Oh...well, I don't know what to tell you."

"Do other *Surface Humans* have superhuman strength?" Nicodemus asked.

Saitama squinted his eyes in confusion.

"*Surface Humans*? Now you lost me." Saitama replied.

Nico frowned, but decided not to push the topic further.

"Never mind. I'm Nico, by the way." Nicodemus

Saitama nodded in response, not really caring and still somewhat bored. The trio continued to move through the snow until they came to a halt. In front of them was a massive barricade of vehicles and buildings that had collapsed. Nico frowned.

Nico knew that there was another route to the bunker he could take, but it involved a shortcut through a metro area he was unfamiliar with, which posed an unnecessary risk. If anything, he would want to find a way over this barricade without taking a detour. But how?

"Are we supposed to keep going?" Saitama asked.

"Yes, but this barricade is trouble, and I don't want to take a detour..."

"Oh, ok. I guess I'll just punch it for you." Saitama replied plainly, moving Nicodemus out of the way. The scared man's eyes were bulging. Nico was breathing heavier.

Punch it? What the hell does that even mean? Nico thought.

Saitama took a casual step forward, raised his right hand, clenched his fists, and punched—his punch causing the snow beneath their feet to go flying in all directions and completely disintegrate the barricade that was in front of them. Nico gasped.

Saitama turned around and looked at Nico and the scared man, acting as if what he had done was completely normal.

"What's with the look?" Saitama asked, his fist steaming.

"*WHAT THE FUCK?! THE HELL?!*" Nico yelled, almost tripping.

"Are you ok?" Saitama asked.

"YOU DESTROYED THE BARRICADE WITH YOUR FIST!"

"Yea, because we needed to. I'm confused. What's the problem?"

While Saitama and Nicodemus were conversing, the scared man used the opportunity to bolt away, finally escaping. Saitama knew he was running away, but didn't really care. That guy was a weirdo anyway...

"Wha-HEY!" Nicodemus said, taking out his rifle and looking for the scared man.

"He's gone." Saitama said.

Nico turned to Saitama.

"What?"

"I said he's gone. He just ran away. So...can we continue our journey? The place we're going has food, right?" Saitama asked.

Nicodemus was still bewildered at what he had just seen. Nonetheless, he had to keep moving. The colonel was waiting for him. And, just on cue, he heard a beep from his transistor radio. He holstered his rifle and took it out.

[RADIO TRANSMISSION]

NICODEMUS: This is Nico. Identify yourself.

COLONEL ANDREY: Colonel Andrey speaking. What's your distance from the bunker?

NICODEMUS: Just a mile out, give or take.

COLONEL ANDREY: Copy that. The team is standing by. Don't keep us waiting—we'll do a final briefing once you're here.

NICODEMUS: Understood. Should be there shortly.

COLONEL ANDREY: Good. Stay sharp.

NICODEMUS: Roger that. Over.

Nicodemus put his transistor radio away and stared at Saitama again, who was just looking up at the sky like a dumbass.

I'm scared, and very confused. Is he a god or something? I've never seen or heard of a creature that strong in my entire life. If I get on his bad side, there's surely nothing I could do to defend myself. I'm not even sure bullets would work on him.

Nicodemus gulped. He took deep breaths, then gathered himself. He needed to stay focused. He was a Ghost for Christ's sake.

"Alright, Saitama, follow me. We got one mile left to go." Nico said calmly.

Saitama stopped looking at the sky and yawned.

"Great. I'm starving, and tired..." Saitama replied.

...

THE BOOK OF NICODEMUS # 2

I don't know what the hell I just witnessed. I don't think I'll ever be able to make sense of it, no matter how hard I try.

Saitama. That's the name he gave me. Doesn't sound Punip, doesn't sound Yashlika. It doesn't sound like any damn thing I've heard before. The way he speaks—no accent, no hesitation, just this weird, casual tone like he's completely detached from reality. And maybe he is. Maybe that's why he isn't dead yet.

I found out that this man—this... thing—tore through a pack of Pestilents with his bare hands. A couple of punches. No scratches, no bruises, no signs that he'd even been in a fight. I've seen soldiers get mauled to death by those creatures, torn apart while screaming for help.

But him? He stood there, covered in blood, like he had just swatted a few flies. I can still see the red dripping down his shirt, his face blank, like he was bored. Like none of it mattered. And then, as if that wasn't enough, he obliterated an entire barricade with a single punch. I swear to God, the impact sent a shockwave through the ground. The snow scattered like a bomb had gone off, and the damn thing just vanished. I can't explain it. I don't want to explain it.

The worst part? He's immune to the radiation. No gas mask. No filters. Just walking around on the surface like it's a summer day in the old world. There's only one thing in the metro's folklore that even remotely resembles what I'm seeing—Surface Humans.

The stories say they were the first to adapt after the Fall. They say their bodies changed, that the radiation made them stronger, faster, something beyond human. But those were just stories. Stories to scare kids or explain away the disappearances of scavengers. But now... now I have one walking right beside me.

I don't know if bullets will work on him. I don't know if explosives will. What if I piss him off? What if he decides I'm in his way? He could rip me apart before I even pull the trigger. I know it. I feel it. I've spent years fighting and surviving. Saitama? It's not just his strength—it's the way he carries himself. Like none of this is real to him. Like nothing can actually touch him. And yet... he's an idiot. At least, that's my only hope. He doesn't seem to understand anything about where he is. If I can keep him thinking I'm the one in control, maybe—just maybe—I can keep him from doing something that gets me killed.

I need to stay calm. Act like I'm not afraid. Like he's just another soldier under my command. I don't know what the hell he is, but for now, I just have to pray he stays on my side.

THE THIRD TESTAMENT

Yarogorsk, once the capital of Yaroslavnia, is now a dead city—at least on the surface. Its buildings stand like broken skeletons, their walls cracked and covered in vines. Rusted cars fill the streets, half-buried in dust, rubble, and snow. Street signs hang from bent poles, their letters too faded to read. The city is covered with a dark gray cloud, indicating a storm is approaching. Among the ruins, the Pestilents rule. These creatures, a mix between rats and wolves, roam in packs. Their bodies are covered in patches of rough fur and swollen, sickly lumps. Their glowing green eyes shine in the dark, and their long, sharp teeth drip with saliva. They are fast, smart, and deadly, hunting together to corner and kill anything that moves. Their numbers keep growing. The worst of them all lives at the heart of Yarogorsk, where the old City Center once stood. Now, a massive hive rises from the wreckage, built from bones and rubble.

Inside waits the Mother Pestilent. She is three times the size of the others, her bloated body constantly birthing new creatures into the tunnels below. Her deep cries shake the ground, calling her spawn to spread even farther. Soon, Yarogorsk won't be enough for them.

...

There was a storm brewing above, to top it all off with the mist and snow that didn't seem to come to an end. Needless to say, the two travelers, Saitama and Nicodemus, were very close to the bunker now.

They had only but to cut through a couple of blocks before they found themselves in an area that used to be a secluded part in Yarogorsk—where a part of the military would make their plans and run their tests. Now, it was just like many other places in Yarogorsk, except for the bunker.

Shit, I can barely see through this gas mask. I have to wipe every ten seconds or so or else I won't be able to see a thing... Nico thought.

Nicodemus halted. He thought about asking Saitama to see if he could spot a bunker up ahead, but he wasn't sure if Saitama even knew what a bunker was. Well, he had nothing to lose anyway.

"Saitama." Nico started.

Saitama stopped and looked at Nico.

"What?" Saitama replied.

"Can you spot anything? Maybe even a bunker up ahead? It might be hard because of the mist, but I'm pretty sure it's there..." Nico said.

Saitama squinted his eyes to look. At first, he couldn't see anything—just snow piled on snow. Then, his vision had managed to adjust a little and he saw a gray bunker with an entrance.

"Uh...yup, I can see it." Saitama replied.

Nico was about to say something, but Saitama had grabbed him by the waist and casually jogged through the snow, arriving at the entrance of the bunker in no time

"AHHHH! WHAT! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!" Nico screamed.

Saitama put Nico down with a flop, and dusted more snow off his shirt and shorts.

"I just decided to carry you the rest of the way, no big deal, right? I mean, I'm kinda hungry...so..." Saitama started.

Nico slowly stood up, dusted the snow off his suit, took out his transistor radio, and contacted Colonel Andrey.

[RADIO TRANSMISSION]

NICODEMUS: Nico. Is this Colonel Andrey?

COLONEL ANDREY: Affirmative. Nico, who is that person covered in blood standing next to you? Right now, your associate has a sniper trained on his forehead from 70 meters out. I suggest you tell me who they are before I order the shot. You can start by telling me how they're not wearing a gas mask and are wearing a T-shirt and some shorts...

NICODEMUS: Colonel, the man standing by me is an anomaly. I stumbled upon him on my way here.

COLONEL ANDREY: He's covered in blood...private...what happened...?

NICODEMUS: Sir...

COLONEL ANDREY: So he's a raider...?

NICODEMUS: Colonel, this might sound crazy, but I'm going to have a hard time explaining it to you.

COLONEL ANDREY: Then you don't need to. Give him the radio. I want to have a word with him.

NICODEMUS: As you wish.

Nicodemus hands the transistor radio to Saitama. Saitama reluctantly takes it, really confused about this whole dispute. He raises his eyebrows as he waits for someone to start talking.

COLONEL ANDREY: Who are you and what station are you from?

SAITAMA: My name is Saitama. I'm from City Z and I'm a professional hero.

Yes, I nailed it. I didn't sound awkward or anything either. Hope he doesn't ask me anything too complicated...

COLONEL ANDREY: City Z? What does the Z stand for?

I jinxed myself...

SAITAMA: It doesn't stand for anything. That's just where I'm from.

COLONEL ANDREY: Ok, that's one strike.

SAITAMA: Huh?

COLONEL ANDREY: You get three strikes, but now you only have two. Once you're out I'll put a bullet in your head.

SAITAMA: Oh, ok.

COLONEL ANDREY: Are you a Yashlika or a Punip?

SAITAMA: Neither.

COLONEL ANDREY: That's two strikes.

SAITAMA: What? How?

COLONEL ANDREY: Because I'm hearing a lot of bullshit, and I don't tolerate bullshit. Why are you accompanying my private?

SAITAMA: Private? Private of what?

COLONEL ANDREY: The man standing next to you.

SAITAMA: Oh...I just tagged along.

COLONEL ANDREY: *Anyone* can tag along, but what they can't do is last long without a gas mask. How are you even breathing?

SAITAMA: I honestly don't know what to tell you, and it's kind of annoying to have to explain myself to everyone. I can breathe just fine, and if you have a problem with that, then I guess we, uh...can't be friends or whatever.

COLONEL ANDREY: Alright, that's three strikes.

Nicodemus quickly grabbed the transistor radio from Saitama.

NICODEMUS: COLONEL! Wait! Please, I'll take full responsibility.

COLONEL ANDREY: So you trust him?

NICODEMUS: So far, yes. If I'm being honest, I don't think conventional firearms can put a scratch on him.

COLONEL ANDREY: And why is that?

NICODEMUS: Well...

COLONEL ANDREY: Let's put your words to the test, private.

Nicodemus heard a loud *POW* coming not too far away. Right after the gunshot, he knew exactly where the sniper was: the watchtower on the left.

I wonder who that is...

"This is a pretty cool bullet." Saitama said, holding the bullet in his hand. Nicodemus turned around and saw that Saitama's forehead was clear without a scratch. No, this was even more shocking than he had thought.

Did he just catch that bullet?

Nico was expecting the colonel to start lashing out in shock, but then he thought better.

The colonel was too hardened to have that reaction towards anything, whether it be supernatural or horrific. He had too many years of experience for that.

Saitama casually tossed the bullet away and stared at the bunker entrance. About five seconds later, the bunker entrance slowly opened and three people in military uniforms came out with assault rifles. One of them was Colonel Andrey, and the other two were Rohan and Tamara.

"More guns? Seriously? You guys got a fetish for them?" Saitama said plainly.

"She shot you...I heard the gunshot, and she *never* misses. *Never*. Are you even human?"

Colonel Andrey asked firmly, gripping his rifle tighter.

Nicodemus stepped back, thinking about his next move. It wasn't until he felt the ground shaking a bit that his heart had skipped a beat: *pestilents*. Due to the recent gunfire, a pack of them was probably on their way at the location of the bunker at this instance.

"Colonel!" Nicodemus warned.

Colonel Andrey took his eyes off Saitama and looked at Nicodemus, who seemed very cautious. Andrey sighed, ordered the two soldiers behind him to fall back, and grabbed Nicodemus, pulling him in the bunker by the collar.

"Wait! Sir, are we leaving him?!" Nicodemus asked as Andrey pressed the button to close the bunker entrance. It was heavily fortified, and no beast could ever dream of getting through—not even the *pestilents*.

"If what you say is true, then we'll leave those beasts to him!" Andrey stated.

Nicodemus struggled to keep himself standing due to how hard the ground was shaking. Even after the bunker entrance had closed, he had imagine that Saitama would turn those *pestilents* into another bloody mess. He wondered what the look on the colonel's face would be once he saw Saitama walk out of that onslaught completely unscathed...

....

Did they really just leave me out here? All I wanted was to get something to eat. I guess they expected me to handle those creatures or whatever you called them... Saitama thought.

Saitama clenched his fist. He didn't even bother to turn around and face the horde of the *pestilents*. While Saitama was lazily daydreaming, the pack pounced on him, but their efforts were to no avail.

Their claws and fangs would shatter on contact with his skin, and their numbers weren't even enough to get him off balance. In short—they were weak. Way too weak that Saitama might as well consider them a negligible part of his presence.

This world is so boring. The weather is boring, the creatures are boring, the people are just plain weird, and I haven't eaten anything for hours...

Saitama frowned. More *pestilents* continued to pile on him from every angle like a never-ending flow of water, but it didn't matter. With one casual gesture, Saitama raised his fist.

"Weak punch." Saitama said.

...

The ground shook to the point of causing cracks on the walls in the bunker, and when another loud *BANG* occurred, those cracks became more evident, spreading around the bunker entrance like wildfire.

Colonel Andrey had stood firm, not taking his eyes off the entrance door. Nicodemus, Rohan, and Tamara did the same, but with more effort.

"The sound you just heard is not what you think." Nico said.

Andrey took a small glance at him.

"A hidden mine, as expected." Andrey said.

"I'm afraid that's not what I'm talking about." Nico replied.

Andrey shifted a bit.

"Then what are you talking about, private...?" Andrey asked.

Gradually, the shaking stopped, and they were able to retain their balance once more.

Andrey stretched his arms. He was getting too old for shit like this, but shit like this was necessary—so he did it anyway.

Nicodemus is a useful and capable soldier, based on his records. His death or leave would be such a waste. I'm confident that the man is competent, so there has to be a truth in what he's saying. He better not be risking my unit's lives.

"I say we should open it up now. The pestilents are dead." Nicodemus said, almost as if it were a matter of fact. Andrey rubbed his temple, having a hard time believing what he was hearing. The other two soldiers were also confused, but then Andrey gave them the signal. He pressed the button to open the entrance, and paid close attention as Rohan and Tamara straightened up—their rifles pointing past the entrance. Once the entrance was fully open, Colonel Andrey got out of cover to get a better look at what had happened outside the bunker. He couldn't believe it.

Saitama was standing still, covered in blood, and unscathed. If there was a trip mine around here, then Saitama would have surely been affected. But he wasn't...

"This is disgusting. You guys got new clothes or something I can wear, right? I mean, I even have some meat stuck on me too. Bleh..." Saitama said nonchalantly.

Colonel Andrey, Rohan, and Tamara held their breath while Nico just stared at Saitama—wondering how he even got to possess such power...

...

It took Saitama about two minutes to put on a new pair of clothes: a shirt that was almost too big for him, and some jeans that had holes and tearings. Yet, Saitama couldn't really complain. Once he had changed, he left the changing room and stepped into the corridor, where Colonel Andrey, Nicodemus, Rohan, and Tamara were waiting for him.

At least it's relatively warm here. Still, they haven't offered me any food yet, and those two weirdos are staring at me like I'm some sort of freak. I might have to rethink who I talk to. They continued down the corridor. On the way down, many images and writings had caught Saitama's attention, but he couldn't really understand most of them—if not any of them. So, he kept his attention forward, only thinking about what they were going to feed him once they settled down.

"And you're telling me that you don't speak *Northern Punipic* or *Yashlikan*, yet, you can understand what I'm saying right now?" Andrey asked.

Saitama didn't know what to say. This was obviously one of the weirdest situations he's been in.

"I guess, yeah."

"I'm speaking *Northern Punipic* right now."

"Oh, ok." Saitama replied.

Tamara and Rohan seem to be taking this pretty easily, Nicodemus thought. It was great that he was finally able to take out his gas mask and *breath* for once.

"Name's Rohan. I'm the Scout/Tracker of this team, and she's Tamara. Welcome to the Ghost." Rohan said, extending his hand. Saitama shook it, and immediately, Rohan tensed up.

Nicodemus noticed it. Andrey noticed it. Even Tamara noticed it. There was something off about that handshake.

"You good?" Saitama asked.

Rohan nodded slowly.

"That's a pretty strong grip there. It felt like...*steel*." Rohan said, pondering on the thought.

"You're a very *peculiar* person, and I truly mean it. How did you survive that? What's your secret? What are you not telling us? Who do you work for?" Colonel Andrey asked.

Saitama shrugged.

"I don't work for anyone. I told you before, I'm a hero." Saitama said plainly.

Colonel Andrey sighed and opened the door in front of them.

"That's the most vague description yet. Tell me, what defines a hero?" Colonel Andrey asked.

"Well—" Saitama started, but couldn't say anything further. He knew that he *was* a hero, because truly, that's what he was, but to define his job?

"Saving people from monsters, I guess." Saitama replied.

Nicodemus walked up to Colonel Andrey.

"Sir, I'm truthfully sorry for tagging him along. As you could see what he was capable of, I didn't want to..."

"No, I understand, private. I understand well. You just keep your head up." Andrey said.

Nicodemus nodded and walked away, headed in the direction of the debriefing room. While Nicodemus was walking to the room, one soldier, going by the name of Diana, had walked out of the room and approached Andrey. Rohan and Tamara left Andrey and Saitama to head for the debriefing room.

"You never told me you were having a Surface Human join the team. Where was his gas mask?"

Diana asked, eyeing Saitama down.

Saitama didn't really care. At this point, he was just a background character in whatever conversation they were having about him. He felt like that most of the time when he was in a group of three or more people...

"Enough of that superstitious nonsense, Diana. You are the best marksmen I have. I've never known you to miss *anything*, not *once*..." Andrey taunted.

Diana kept a neutral facial expression, almost as if she was unfazed by Andrey's disappointment—if one could even call it that.

"I didn't miss." Diana replied, saying it as if it were a true matter of fact. She turned in Saitama's direction, still baffled at the fact that he was able to resist a bullet like that. It was unlike anything she had ever seen.

"We have to do something about that hive soon or they'll eat their way into the metro." Diana said to Saitama.

It took about three seconds for Saitama to actually register what Diana was saying, then another two seconds for him to nod in response.

"Yeah, I definitely understand...yup..." Saitama said plainly.

He indeed did *not* understand.

Diana squinted her eyes for a moment, like she was trying to look into Saitama's soul. It wasn't until Andrey brought something up that she snapped out of it.

"Since you're a 'hero', it wouldn't be out of the question that you'd help us destroy the hive in the City Center, correct?" Andrey asked Saitama.

Saitama yawned.

"I'm kinda confused. You guys forgot that I have no idea what's going on. I even forgot where I am right now. Wait...what was this place again?" Saitama replied.

"A military bunker. You've never seen one before?" Andrey said.

Diana crossed her arms, her expression still neutral.

"Deadpan—a relatable attribute you and I have. How odd. Or, could it merely just be that you're scared of nothing..?" Diana asked.

Saitama was confused. At first, he didn't know who Diana was referring to, then he eventually figured it out. She was referring to his lack of expression.

"The only thing I'm worried about right now is food..." Saitama replied, rubbing his stomach.

Diana brushed her hair and didn't reply.

The door to the debrief room opened, and Fedir, one of the soldiers, stepped out of the room.

"Sir, is that the Anomaly?" Fedir asked.

...

Since taking refuge underground, humanity has fought to survive. But hiding is not enough. The surface is full of dangers—monsters that grow stronger while humans remain trapped below.

To fight back, the metro created two types of military forces: Defense Units, who protect the stations and scavenge for supplies, and Offense Units, who hunt the creatures above before they invade the tunnels.

*Among them, one group stands above the rest: **THE GHOST**. They are the strongest Offense Unit, known for their skill and fearlessness.*

People believe they have almost superhuman abilities—faster reflexes, sharper senses, an awareness of danger beyond normal men. Some think they are gifted, chosen to lead the fight for the surface. Others see them as humanity's last hope.

But no matter what people believe, they are still human (except for the Anomaly—he's another matter). They feel pain. They grow tired. They can die just like anyone else. The difference is that they keep going, even when everything is against them.

They fight so humanity can dream of a future beyond the metro. But the world has changed, and no matter how strong they are, they are still fighting against something much bigger than themselves...

...

THE BOOK OF SAITAMA #1

Anyway, I don't know where I am.

Like, seriously, no idea. One second, I was in a bookstore looking for some manga to read, and the next thing I know, I'm in some frozen wasteland where everything looks like it got punched by a really angry guy and then left to rot for a gazillion years. The buildings are falling apart, there's snow everywhere, and the air smells weird, like old socks and gunpowder. Also, everything is dark and creepy, and I'm pretty sure there are things watching me from the shadows, but they never actually do anything. I guess they're scared? Which, fair.

Oh, and there are monsters. Ugly ones. Some kind of rat-wolf things with glowing eyes and nasty teeth. They all rushed me at once like I was some all-you-can-eat buffet, but they broke their teeth on my skin. That was kinda funny. Then I threw a couple of punches, and they all exploded. Now there's monster blood stuck on my flip-flops, and I can't get it off. That's annoying.

Then there's the people. I met this guy named Nick, I think that's what his name is. He's a soldier or something. Wears a gas mask like he's about to fight a chemical war. He's cool, I

guess. A little nervous. Keeps looking at me like he's trying to figure out if I'm gonna eat him or something. I told him I was just hungry, not that kind of hungry, but I don't think that helped.

Then there's the boss guy. He's, like... super serious. Has that "I've seen some shit" look in his eyes. First thing he did was have a sniper shoot me in the head. Then he started doing this thing where he asks a bunch of questions and gets mad at my answers.

When I failed, he ordered someone to shoot me. I caught the bullet...I think he was about to shoot me again, but Nick told him not to. Anyway, he let me into his bunker *AFTER* I dealt with the monsters for them, so I guess he doesn't totally hate me.

There's also this soldier named Diana, or Dian, I think? I can't remember her name perfectly, either. She was the one who shot me. I guess that's just how people say hello around here. She's weird. She barely reacts to anything. She just stares. I think she's trying to figure me out like Nick was, but I don't even know what to tell her. I don't even understand what's going on, so how am I supposed to explain it?

Then there's Ro-something and something-something. They didn't shoot me (yet), so that's a good start. Ro-something shook my hand and got all tense, like he touched an electric fence. The other something-something hasn't said much, just kinda watches me like she's waiting for me to do something crazy. I don't really feel like doing anything crazy, though. I just want food.

Speaking of food... THEY HAVEN'T FED ME YET.

I helped them out with their stupid monster problem, got blood all over my clothes, and now I'm stuck in some bunker with a bunch of armed weirdos who keep staring at me like I'm an alien, and *STILL*, no one has offered me a single meal. Unbelievable. What kind of military operation is this? If they want to fight monsters, fine, but they should at least have a decent meal plan.

Also, I don't know what language they're speaking, but I can understand it for some reason. They say it's called "Northern P" or something. I don't know. I wasn't even good at languages back home, so why can I understand this? Maybe my brain is just going along with the whole "new world" thing. Not like I have much of a choice.

I've been trying to figure out what's happening, but honestly? I don't care that much. I feel lost, but it's whatever. I'm just kinda... here. It's like when you take the wrong train but you're too lazy to get off, so you just go with it. Ok, sure, I guess I might want to figure out what's going on, but that might cause my brain to shut down from the amount of thinking...

Anyway, apparently there's a giant monster nest somewhere, and they want me to help destroy it. I mean, I could, but do I have to? I just got here. I'd rather get a warm meal first. Maybe take a nap. But no, they're all about duty and responsibility. Blah blah blah.

I miss home, you know. At least back home, I knew where the grocery stores were. Here, all I know is that everything is half-destroyed, people shoot first and ask questions after, and I'm still hungry.

This world sucks.

THE FOURTH TESTAMENT

Fedir bit his nails as he stared at the Anomaly. His mind was spinning with questions that irresistibly wanted answers—answers as to how this bald weirdo, or Anomaly, came to be. But—he pushed them aside. He didn't want to make a fool of himself in front of Colonel Andrey.

Fedir sighed, leaned up, and extended his hand to the baldy.

"Fedir. Medic. What's your name again?" Fedir asked, following the baldy, including Colonel Andrey, and Diana, back inside the debriefing room where everyone else was already situated.

The debriefing room is a plain, windowless space with old maps pinned to the walls, their edges curling up. The air smells like dust and paper, even though the team tries to keep it clean, and the overhead lights sometimes flicker with a low buzz. A long metal table sits in the middle, scratched up from years of use, surrounded by stiff chairs that creak when you sit. There's no fancy screen—just a beat-up radio in the corner and a whiteboard covered in messy marker lines.

"It's Saitama. Uhh...I guess I could call you Fed?" Saitama asked, raising his eyebrows.

Fedir nodded.

"Sure, Fed is fine. Welcome to the team. Here, take a seat."

Fedir said, gesturing toward an empty and rusty chair.

*I don't believe a single shit the colonel said. There's no way a weakling like him could've ever dealt with those Pestilents with his bare fists...I mean—look at him, the guy's a walking joke. He's so casual about everything. I wonder what he's thinking right now...*Fedir thought.

Saitama, thinking about food again, decided to ask Fedir: "Do you have anything I could eat? Haven't had something to munch on in a while..."

Fedir made a quick glance at Colonel Andrey, who nodded in recognition, causing Fedir to leave the debriefing room to get something for Saitama to eat.

Saitama, feeling bored once again, slouched on the chair while Colonel Andrey and Diana finally sat down. Saitama didn't notice it yet, but nearly everyone in the room was staring at

him, trying to figure out what made him tick, like most of them did with new recruits. It wasn't until Fedir re-entered the room that someone, more specifically, Nicodemus, asked Saitama a question.

"Are you...good?" Nicodemus asked, careful of his words. Saitama glanced in Nico's direction, and Nico flinched. He thought he had completely gotten over the shock of what he had seen Saitama do, but that wasn't true. He had just *pushed it* to the side for later because he needed to focus on getting to the military bunker. Now that he was here, all of those feelings of fear and terror started to creep up, making him shudder.

"Oh, uh, yeah, I'm fine." Saitama said, nodding in thanks as he took the food can and plastic spoon from Fedir, who, right after, took a seat next to Diana.

While Colonel Andrey got up to start the debrief, Saitama slowly opened the food can, trying to minimize the sound so he wouldn't draw unnecessary attention to himself. Andrey took a giant wooden ruler and pointed the tip on a red dot which showcased the location of Yarogorsk City Center on a large map of Yarogorsk City. Surrounding the dot were red smudges, which meant high density areas of pestilent packs, and the red lines, which meant trenches that were dug about 10-feet deep in the earth and were created by pestilents.

"Ghost...we have a predicament in our hands. The explosives are set, and our enemies should be going back to sleep when the storm clears, but, given the recent increase in activity, it's highly likely that we won't get most of the pestilents. We need to make sure none of them make it out alive. Any solutions?" Colonel Andrey asked.

No one spoke, and the only sound in the room was Saitama chewing. Then, Diana spoke up.

"Any remaining pestilents I see would be killed in an instant—if I have a decent and secured spot. I'll tally the kill count and report it back here. That's all I have. It's not a solution, but it's a step in progress." Diana said, her chin resting on the palm of her hand.

Colonel Andrey nodded. He couldn't help but feel proud as an uncle in the presence of Diana. How far she had come...

Varushka spoke up: "Looking at the trenches again, I'm sure we can predict and map out where the bulk of the pestilents will flee after the bombing. Then, like Diana said, we could easily finish them off."

"What about the Mother? There's a possibility that she survives the bombing and flees, only to find another place where she can settle down and create a new hive. V's already discussed how she's one of the few mammals with the ability to lay an abundance of eggs. That would make all our efforts go in vain." Adrik said, flipping his pencil.

Georgiy, who was sitting next to him, agreed with his point.

"To your point, considering the scale of the bombing, we risk blocking one of the tunnels in the metro due to collapse. And it's winter. That alone is enough to call off this entire operation." Rohan said.

"We're aware." Colonel Andrey replied. He placed the ruler back down.

"These are all good points, and luckily, we have a backup plan that might mitigate some stress if our efforts fail to bear fruit, right?" Colonel Andrey asked, turning to Saitama.

Everyone simultaneously looked at Saitama, who was still chewing his food. Saitama quickly swallowed and began speaking.

"Oh, yeah, totally. Uh...I guess I could just punch them, right?" Saitama asked, a bit questionable about his own response. Colonel Andrey crossed his arm.

"Theoretically, yes, you could, but are you certain you could replicate what you did outside this bunker entrance to the City Center hive?" Andrey asked. He was now leaning forward, eager to hear Saitama's input.

"I guess, yea."

"There's no 'I guess'. I need you to be sure."

"Yea, I am."

"Repeat it."

"Huh?"

"Say you're confident in your abilities to eradicate the remaining pestilents after the bombing."

"Oh, ok—I'm confident that I'll be able to...oh, yeah, eradicate the remaining pest...I'm sorry, I forgot the name..."

"Pestilents..."

"Ok, I'm confident that I'll be able to destroy the last pestilents after the bombing.." Saitama finished, somewhat slowly. Colonel Andrey, focusing too much on Saitama's eyes, noticed a sudden change in them. It was almost instant, and that was all the colonel needed to know to confirm that Saitama wasn't lying: *he would eradicate ALL the pestilents...*

Diana, fidgeting with her dog tag necklace, sat up a bit. She couldn't stop thinking of the moment where she had Saitama's bald head in her line of vision, and she didn't feel his life force reduce to nothing when she pulled the trigger. She was so used to that—almost feeling a living thing's life force flare out the instant she had pulled the trigger, and because she didn't feel that with Saitama, it made her uncomfortable. But...weirdly curious about his body...

Surface Human...there's no denying it, but there's also no point in reminiscing about it either. He's here, whether it makes sense or not, so why not use him to our advantage, like a puppet on strings?

"How exactly will you deal with the Mother, if the bombing fails to eliminate her?" Varushka asked Saitama, leaning forward.

Saitama took another spoonful of his meal and started talking.

"The same thing with how I would deal with the others, I guess...is she pretty strong or something?" Saitama asked.

Varushka put a finger on her button lip.

"No, but she's very strategic. I doubt you'll be able to waltz right up without her sensing you from afar, unless you plan on going in stealth—instead of all in."

"I think I'll go for all in. Stealth is boring."

"But stealth is efficient."

"Hmmm...I don't know. So far, what's worked for me is barging into anything and just punching."

Varushka's face distorted a bit. She felt as though she were talking to a toddler.

"You might be superhuman, but there has to be limits, yes?"

“Limits? I don’t even know what that word means.” Saitama replied, finally gulping down the last spoonful. He casually got up and placed the empty food can in a black, dirty trash bag near the corner of the room. Colonel Andrey turned his attention to Georgiy as Saitama sat back down. Georgiy seemed to be reminiscing about something, and usually about the absurdity of their operations, and how many times they’ve managed to pull them off. However, based on the way Georgiy was sitting, and how calm his face seemed, Andrey believed he was thinking about something else.

“Y’know, it wouldn’t be far-fetched to say Saitama here could simply deal with the entire thing himself...” Georgiy began, glancing at Saitama.

Everyone in the room gave Georgiy their attention—even Tamara, who hasn’t contributed any input yet.

“Elaborate.” Colonel Andrey commanded.

Georgiy leaned up.

“It would make more sense to have Saitama *actually* waltz up to the pestilent hive and exterminate every single one of them. I wasn’t there when it happened—when you witnessed what Saitama did to the hordes of pestilents outside, but he came out of the battle without any injuries, no?” Georgiy stated.

He was right. No one could see any visible injuries or scratch marks on Saitama’s body. It was almost as if he were invincible. Georgiy put a finger over his lips, staring at Saitama.

“You’re fast, right? Faster than the pestilents?” Georgiy asked Saitama, to which Saitama replied: “Yea, sure.”

“Apparently fast enough to catch a bullet...” Diana said in monotone.

Georgiy then raised his eyebrows and put his arms in the air.

“*SEE? Problem solved. We save resources AND ammunition. How hard was that?*” Georgiy said.

Colonel Andrey nodded. He thought about considering Georgiy’s proposition because the snow would make it hard for the team to traverse to the City Center anyway, even in trucks.

“Not a bad idea—plausible and quick. However, we still need someone to make sure that Saitama here doesn’t forget to exterminate some pestilents...” Andrey stated.

Nearly everyone turned their attention to Diana, who was still fidgeting with her dog tag necklace. Diana leaned forward and folded her hands.

“If I monitor the hive from the high ground, then Saitama and I can communicate via T-radio. Since he’s clueless about the landscape of the city, I’ll be guiding him.” Diana said quickly but efficiently. Saitama raised his hand.

At first, Colonel Andrey didn’t know what to make of Saitama’s actions. He pointed at Saitama and said: “Yes?”

Saitama stood up.

“You guys got anything I could drink?” Saitama asked, yawning.

Georgiy grinned to himself.

“I already got you figured out. You’re too easy.” Georgiy said.

Saitama didn’t know what Georgiy meant, so he scratched his bald head.

“What?”

Georgiy simply shrugged. He didn't feel like he needed to explain himself to Saitama. If he got the joke, good. If he didn't, whatever.

Colonel Andrey took one last glance at the rusty pinned maps, then, back at his team. He thought about how each member had now contributed to the overall success of their operations, and this is what he came up with:

1. Saitama - **The Brawn**
2. Nicodemus (Nico) - **The Tactician**
3. Diana - **Marksman/Sniper**
4. Rohan - **The Scout/Tracker**
5. Adrik - **The Electrician/Computer guy**
6. Tamara - **The Linguistic**
7. Fedir (Fed) - **The Medic/Survivalist**
8. Georgiy - **The Mechanic guy/Engineer/Demolitionist Expert**
9. Varushka (V) - **The Beastmaster**

"Ghost...this concludes the debrief. Regardless of who's the center of the operation, *all* of us have a critical role to play. May that thought guide you well. Now, let us recite our Ghost Creed. As long as there's blood in our veins, we shall not falter." Colonel Andrey said as he maneuvered over to the other side of the room, where the Ghost banner was located. Andrey casually lifted the banner and presented it to the team, signaling them to start reciting the creed. Of course, Saitama wasn't expected to follow them, but he'd do well to listen and learn it.

THE GHOST:

*Amidst the mists and fiercest frosts,
With barest wrists, and stoutest boasts,
He thrusts his fists against the posts,
And still insists he sees the ghosts.
We march through fire, through dust and decay,
Unbroken, unbowed, we carve our way.
Steel in our veins, ice in our breath,
We fear no pain, we laugh at death.
Through endless night, through shattered ground,
We stand as one—no soul backs down.
For duty, for honor, we rise once more,
Stronger than before.*

...

After the debriefing was concluded, Nicodemus found himself in the locker room alone, making sure to claim one of the lockers in his base as his before they left for the metro after the operation.

While he chose a locker, opened it, and checked its interior before deciding that *this* locker was the one for him, he heard the locker room door open. He didn't even have to look in that direction to determine who it was that entered the room: Adrik, or what Nico would call, *Uncle Adrik*.

"Man, just look at you. Way to make a man feel old." Adrik said, leaning against one of the lockers.

Nicodemus closed the locker.

"I wouldn't say 40 is old—more like middle-aged." Nicodemus replied, walking up to Adrik.

"You've thought this through, right? I mean, really, have you? I'm sure Kil gave you all the implications—not that you wouldn't have expected them anyway." Adrik said.

Nicodemus nodded.

"He did, and I'm not going back on my word. I intend to stay in the Ghost and make my skills useful, until, of course, I'm no longer of use..."

Adrik frowned.

"*No longer of use?* What the hell is that supposed to mean?" Adrik asked.

Nicodemus sighed as he rummaged through his backpack again, taking out stuff that he probably wouldn't need during the operation.

"I didn't mean it like that, it's just—I have this feeling that this is really where I belong."

"Got eyes for anyone yet?"

"Unc, seriously? I just joined..."

"Just a question. I mean, there's three of them on the team. Surely, you must've had a thought. Just think about it. There's seven of us and three of them. I bet they're doing the same thing. They're probably looking at us and are like: *'Hot damn, we got a whole buffet of men in here.'*"

"*Says the guy who's married...*" Nicodemus replied, smirking a bit.

Adrik shrugged.

"Hey, I never said I had any eyes for them. I'm just putting more wood in the fire, that's all."

Adrik said.

"There's no fire. There wasn't even a spark to begin with."

Adrik crossed his arms.

No spark, huh? I like that. He's already proving that he can live up to his mother's legacy. I just hope that Kira will somehow be at ease with this decision, or could it be that Nico would eventually inspire Kira to get into this job as well? I don't know how I feel about that. If Nico inspires Kira, then Kira will surely inspire Kurtz. The thought of Kurtz, my son, heading into battle is just unfathomable to me...

"I get that you're trying to 'set me up' with someone, but isn't Diana Yashlika?" Nicodemus asked. As soon as Nico was finished asking, Diana entered the room and went to her locker. She was probably taking her meds. Nico and Adrik played it casual, acting like they were

doing something else before she entered the locker room. Once Diana finished her 'business', she left the room and Adrik and Nico continued their conversation.

"Yea, I wouldn't try to get you with Diana—I'm just messing with you. 'Testing' you, if that's what you want to call it. The three here are way out of your league, to be frank." Adrik said, almost as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

Nicodemus grabbed his backpack and slugged it over his shoulder.

"Figures. I assume you and Tamara are staying here while we carry out the operation?"

Nicodemus asked.

Adrik put a thumbs up, and switched his voice to sound more deep and authoritative:

"Affirmative, private."

Nico almost chuckled. It was nice to have a conversation with Uncle Adrik. Besides him being the authority figure he looked up to, conversing with Uncle Adrik was therapeutic.

Nicodemus made his way to the locker room door. Adrik watched him, his facial expression turning solemn.

"Stay safe out there." Adrik said.

Nico glanced back at Adrik, nodded, and exited the locker room.

...

Diana knocked three times on Colonel Andrey's office door, calculating how long it would take him to get up from his chair, and open the door for her. When the colonel opened the office door, Diana immediately recognized an old letter that the colonel presumably wrote to his lost brother—her other Uncle Tig, and her father's brother too.

"My niece, my gem...are you ready for the operation?" Andrey asked.

"Yes. Just wanted to pick up the T-radios." Diana said plainly.

There was silence—a bit of awkward silence. Diana didn't say anything...just stared at the letter on Andrey's desk. Andrey caught on to where she was looking at and maneuvered towards his desk to put the letter away.

"We all cling to the *ghost* of what was, right?" Andrey asked, but Diana took a step forward.

"You still see him in your sleep, don't you? You've taken therapy, but still...there's been no progression. Schizophrenia mixed with PTSD, perhaps?"

"Diana...you don't have to worry. I know he's gone. I'm not going on a pig chase to look for him. I'm just...relieving some old memories."

"But those old memories are causing you harm."

"I know." Colonel Andrey replied, coughing a bit. Diana put an arm over his shoulder. She was close up to him, almost too close, but in a sentimental way—or at least that it was Andrey had believed.

"You told me that you stopped looking for him, but I saw the map you hid underneath your desk. Why did you feel the need to lie to me? Is it because your condition is worsening? You told me you left it all behind, but here you are, still obsessed. Uncle Tig could've had a similar obsession, and that's what probably caused him to run away..."

"Stating the obvious pisses me off."

“That’s a good thing. I’ll piss you off more if it keeps you alive.” Diana said neutrally. Colonel Andrey sighed. In a way, Diana was right. He needed to let go, but he didn’t really know how to. He grabbed the two T-radios from his desk and handed them over to Diana. He carefully placed the letter back in the pedestal drawer. He took his gas mask, backpack, weapons, and left the office with Diana.

...

THE BOOK OF DIANA #1

My kill log is meticulous. Not just the termination events, but the precise mechanics. The terminal ocular shift, the staccato breaths, the abrupt cessation. Each expiration is a data point, a rhythmic pattern I’m refining. The 'essence' of a subject, that fleeting energy signature, possesses a quantifiable weight. Some dissipate like a wisp of smoke, minimal resistance. Others cling, a sticky residue, reluctant to relinquish their hold. The optimal specimens, the ones truly worthy of archival, leave a distinct aftertaste.

My collection isn’t human. Organic material is too...volatile. The tunnels and surface offer far superior trophies. Specimens with aberrant ocular arrangements, dentition that violates anatomical norms, digits that continue to exhibit motor function post-severance. Each piece is meticulously curated, cataloged, a private museum of termination events. While others record nocturnal hallucinations, I chronicle definitive endings.

It’s not merely about numerical accumulation. It’s about the methodology. A cranial shot offers a clean, efficient erasure. A binary state change. But a visceral penetration, a pulmonary collapse? That’s where the data resides. The subject’s futile struggle, the desperate attempts at self-preservation. Pain is a potent catalyst, a revealer of true biological function. I’ve gleaned more from the dying than the living.

I anticipated a distinct sensation upon his termination. The dissipation of his ‘essence,’ the collapse of his vital systems. A data point. But the expected outcome failed to materialize. He intercepted the projectile.

An impossibility. The lead slug had already exited the barrel, traversed the intervening space. Yet, he captured it, a casual, almost dismissive gesture. I’ve encountered genetic deviations, biological anomalies that defy classification. But this...this is a new vector.

Saitama presents a perplexing enigma. Not his persona, which is devoid of interest, but his biological architecture. He fails to exhibit the expected survival reflexes. No tension. No hypervigilance. No awareness of the omnipresent threat. He traverses the surface, a known termination zone, with the nonchalance of a pedestrian in a controlled environment. A fatal error, theoretically.

His physiology operates on an alternate algorithm. A normal human framework cannot account for his capabilities. And yet, his outward appearance is...standard. No visible mutations, no obvious enhancements. This suggests a manipulated baseline, a subject of controlled experimentation. He remains uncooperative in divulging his origins, but the data speaks for itself. He is an anomaly, and anomalies must be dissected.

I speculate on his internal structure. No scarring, no adaptive tissue layers. He exhibits no reaction to stimuli that would induce significant trauma in a standard human. He appears to lack a pain response.

Given the opportunity, I would perform a thorough vivisection. Not for the purpose of termination, but for the acquisition of knowledge. To understand the mechanisms that allow him to perform such improbable feats. To comprehend his indifference to the inherent fragility of biological systems. It's an inefficient deployment of resources. A specimen of his caliber should be utilized for a purpose, a goal. Instead, he treats his capabilities as a triviality.

As a youth, I studied subjects in their sleep state. The involuntary movements, the rhythmic respiration, the subtle shifts in posture. In those unguarded moments, their true nature was revealed. Their weaknesses, their fears, their underlying programming. This allowed for manipulation, for the precise calibration of their actions.

I suspect such methods would be ineffective on him. There is no discernible pattern, no exploitable weakness. He exists outside the parameters of conventional analysis, a systemic error. I can observe, I can record, but I doubt I will ever fully comprehend his function. This generates a level of...discomfort.

For the present, I will continue to monitor. And should a window of opportunity present itself, should his defenses lapse...I will examine the underlying structure of his being.

THE FIFTH TESTAMENT