

# Pumpkin

Pumpkin is a hybrid life form. A [Nekovalkyrja](#) crossed with a [Mishhuvurthyar](#), she works for a variety of factions such as [Sfrarabla Mishhuvurthyar Xhrafuklurp \(SMX\)](#), [Black Spiral](#), and herself. Pumpkin was first encountered by the crew of the [YSS Sakura](#) and has since become both menace and savior. Her true loyalties are unknown, although she once stated she was a devotee of former Empress Ayame.

Her appearance is that of a Neko with long orange hair and a variety of Mishhu-like tentacles.

Pumpkin's Goals Are:

- Nekovalkyrja supremacy
- Yamataian Democracy

## Important Roleplay Post

Kotori let out a pained croak as she slipped out of her state of semi-consciousness, jerking her legs as her body tested if they were working right. Apparently, someone had recovered her lower torso and reattached it while she had blacked out, allowing her NH-22M body to rebond both parts together.

Skin-vision wasn't quite working right, so the bedraggled neko opened her eyes, out of focus images swirling around before her managed to adjust her hemosynthetic oculars, the chaotic mess of colors sharpening to reveal the slightly blurry face of Hanako.

Hanako had recovered from her burns, and was leaning over Kotori with her arms around her. She pressed her cheek against Kotori's bosom, using the Taii as a teddy bear.

Kotori winced, realizing Hanako was stuck in the same predicament she was. Her eyes wandered a bit around the containment cell both women were trapped in.

It was pretty much a generic Star Army prison cell. There was a small toilet on one side and a bed on the other. They looked to be very solid. Through the transparent door, Kotori could see Pumpkin sitting outside, lazily sipping at a drink from her bridge-style rolling chair. Her legs were a mass of dark red tentacles, long and straight, neatly arranged to look like a skirt. She wore a black [T-Shirt](#) on top.

Kotori closed her eyes with a small sigh, piecing together their probable location and then weakly lifted one hand to stroke Hanako's hair.

"Ha-" she began whispering, but her voice sounded more like a rasp than an actual intelligible syllable. Damn, it sounds like I've been swallowing a couple of Rufus' razorblades. Thinking about Rufus hurt way too much for the young neko to want to dwell on it. She moistened her lips in an effort to regain her composure and again tried to communicate with her cellmate. "Hanako." she reached out telepathically.

Hanako's eyes looked up at Kotori, and widened as she saw Kotori was awake. She smiled thankfully.

Kotori coughed weakly as she tried to clear her throat, but that didn't seem to do the trick. "Are you

unhurt?" she asked the Taisa.

Pumpkin's bright green eyes contrasted against her pale pink skin and fiery orange hair; she was almost neon. Her small pupils in their radiant irises darted from place to place as the hybrid's mind wandered; when Kotori spoke, they focused on her. "Well, well, well," the half-woman, half-Mishhu sneered. "If it isn't Taisa Hanako, Yui's favorite little play toy..." she said, repeating the words she had spoken when she was first encountered on a Mishhuvuthyar ship.

Hanako squeezed Kotori affectionately. "I am fine," she softly replied, afraid to turn around and look at her captor.

Kotori held on Hanako, providing whatever meager comfort she could offer as her eyes spat Pumpkin with a glare. "It seems the roles have been reversed. Now I'm the one that ended cut up in half and you're the one looking at captives from outside a cage." she set her lips in a silent snarl. "Are you really called like a fruit, or do you have a real name to offer me?"

Pumpkin smirked. "As if your name is any better." She took another sip of her drink.

"Fine, have it your way." Kotori replied, still glowering at the other. "I can understand why you would capture Hanako-hime, but I'm not quite as clear on why you didn't kill me. It is not like I'm important."

"Why would I kill you unless I had to?" Pumpkin counter-questioned. "Few things are more terrible taking a life."

"I suppose." the captive neko shot back. "So why did you capture me then? You went pretty much out of your way to do so." she scoffed, her arms tightening protectively around Hanako. "The princess would probably have been much easier to capture once I had set her down in the escape pod. You could have carried her to a shuttle, flown out stealthed on your way back and no one would have been the wiser until you'd be very well gone."

The hybrid simply shrugged. "Perhaps someone will be willing to trade something in return for your release." She paused for a moment, and then added. "Perhaps not... It would be very sad if no one cared."

Kotori's throat erupted in a ragged cough - that seemed to do the trick, her voice had cleared up. "It don't see why they would," she replied hoarsely. "I can't believe we were actually coming to your hideout to try talking to your organisation. So much for good intentions, I guess."

"Oh? We can talk," Pumpkin offered.

Kotori looked over to Hanako. "Well, you we're the one whom said a Mishhuvurthyar-Nekovalkyrja hybrid could have surprising insights to offer. Want to give it a shot?" She whispered gently to the other's ear.

Hanako was quiet for a moment, but then sat up to finally face Pumpkin. "I do not understand you, because I do not know your goals."

Pumpkin smiled. "Why, we're here to ensure Nekovalkyrja remain the dominant species."

"I don't suppose the Ketsurui creating the NH-29s would have been any indication of them already being on it without running amok through the Empire." Kotori scoffed. "Why so keen on the nekos being

dominant anyways? I know I can live with Yamataians, Geshrins and Neplesians just fine.”

“The NH-29 is such a human neko, though... But look how wondrous we've become! Combined with the Mishhuvurthyar, we are very powerful. The Emperor has no ambition these days. Remember our fleets of millions? And now, they're replaced by handfuls, with trillions of our kind essentially tossed in the garbage!”

“And I suppose being slated as combat machines is better? How about the nekos to whom normal Yamataian life would look appealing? After serving for 8 years, shouldn't we deserve to sample that as well? And what about our offsprings?” Kotori shook her head vehemently. “You're considering things like power and strength... but those are really just superficial, especially when the power armors can compensate with that.”

“Look at the big picture. Nekovalkyrja are being dumbed down in favor of human culture, despite us being the majority. Nekovalkyrja lives continue to be thrown away. It is time we stood up and ran our own lives instead of being stuck in the grasp of an Emperor.”

“Tch.” Kotori gritted her teeth, her eyes smoldering in resentment. She had been thinking something very close to what Pumpkin was saying when Yui had talked about the NH-29. “I wish I could disagree, but really can't. Your logic is actually quite impeccable. But even with us nekovalkyrjas being dominant, what would that achieve? The Ketsurui clan already rules over the Empire. That wouldn't really make any big difference. Your opponents aren't armies but the popular opinions of most Yamataian citizens, especially the geshrin ones.”

Hanako tilted her head. “A democracy?”

Pumpkin nodded. “Ayame wanted one...” she pointed out bitterly.

“Ayame was killed.” Kotori declared flatly. “I was assuming it was you people from the moment you started spouting that 'True Nekovalkyrja Empire' bit.”

Pumpkin scowled. “It was probably one of the samurai...what is it with the Sakura getting the absolute worst of them, anyway?”

Hanako looked down. “I wish she was still alive,” she whimpered, her eyes beginning to fill with tears. She'd loved Ayame.

Kotori ignored the verbal barb their jailer sent the way of the Ketsurui Samurai and instead reached out to squeeze Hanako's shoulder in quiet support, before returning her attention to Pumpkin. “That was then and there though,” she told her. “Still, while all those speculations and throwing rhetorics around is interesting, it really doesn't get down to our current situation : you've captured Hanako-hime; Yui's toy, as you so charmingly put it. You're not going to get very far in your fight for Nekovalkyrja independance - or supremacy, call it what you wish - by antagonizing the Mistress of the Star Army. Don't you think you'd be on better footing if you played the good host with Hanako and then tried talking with Yui?”

“Yui is already on our side,” said Pumpkin. “In fact, we have a military might many times greater than that of all the Star Army fleets.”

Kotori reared her head in disbelief and Hanako shook hers in denial. “I do not understand! Yui would not

betray her own Empire..."

"Yui-Taisho was the one whom sent us after you!" Kotori added, thinking back to Rufus' suspicions that Yui knew more than she let on. "What are you getting at?"

"Her Empire is out here among the stars, not sitting on Yamatai with a bunch of aliens," Pumpkin said, setting down her drink.

"You're still not making any sense." Kotori shot back. "And you'd probably not have gloated over Hanako's death if Yui had been on your side in the first place."

"Well, she wasn't at first... it is complicated."

"We seem to have time." Kotori shrugged, subtly inviting Pumpkin to continue.

"I think I've said enough," Pumpkin amended, "considering that I'll probably release you at some point... if you're good."

"And what then? We keep trading blows?" Kotori's shoulders slumped and she shook her head. "it is really ironic in a way. We fight and become more like our enemies, and the same happens to them as well." She hesitated before asking "Were you a mishhuvurthyar or a Nekovalkyrja before getting that body?"

"I have always been a Nekovalkyrja, and still am. Do you know what model of body this is? it is an NH-25."

Kotori slowly blinked her eyes as she took the information in. "And what type were the Mishhuvurthyar?"

"NH-19."

Kotori winced inwardly. She had hoped it wouldn't be a NH type that would look as standard part of the Ningyô Heiki series. It made the past conflicts seem all the more awful.

"...and... I was right, wasn't I? Hoshi no Iori had been the place where the Black Spiral got their non-Ketsurui Fleet Yard manufactured vessels built. The Mishhuvurthyar would have given you access to the buiding docks." She swallowed hard. "What do the Mishhuvurthyar get out of this?"

"They want the same thing we do. A vast, free nation for all Nekovalkyrja," Pumpkin smiled. "The first prototypes were -19 series, designed to mate with the Dark Ones. Their children were the common Mishhuvurthyar you know. They were out of our control for a while..." Pumpkin trailed off.

Hanako rubbed her chin. "Have you now reconciled with the Mishhuvurthyar?" She wondered who the Dark Ones were.

"With some of them. Others have chosen the ways of the Dark Ones."

"You speak of the Dark Ones as if we should know who they are." Kotori noted aloud.

"The Star Army has seen them a few times before... they are vile creatures whose image the Mishhuvurthyar are based on. A huge mass of black and red, angry and cruel, with infectious tentacles

and thoughts..." Pumpkin frowned. "PNUgen steered our neko sisters in the NH-19 project right into their grasp."

"And thus, the Mishhuvuthyar fleets were born," Hanako finished.

Kotori looked at Hanako, feeling a hollow ache in her chest after the conclusion she had drawn. The Mishhuvurthyar fleets... Kotori numbly echoed in her mind. It made sense. It added up to everything they had learned so far. It didn't really explain whom had provided the Mishhuvurthyar with warships to match the Star Army's though.

However, all that predated her. It involved an organization that was one of the building foundations of the Empire. It could pit two vast fleets of warships against each other for something that could be settled through politics... but things had already gone too far and there didn't seem to be anyway of stopping that particular behemoth. There was way too much resentment involved.

Kotori sighed bitterly. It felt like she was one of many pawns in a giant chess game in which she had no control whatsoever.

Pumpkin stood up, supporting herself with smooth, slender legs hidden within her skirt of tentacles. Toying with her now empty glass, she approached the clear doorway, and looked down at Kotori and Hanako. "Now what punishment do you deserve for being Imperialist, human-subservient pawns?" she asked, rubbing her chin in thought.

The expression in Kotori's eyes had been rather bleak, but Pumpkin's words jarred something back into place inside. The reason why she fought. "I was created by the Ketsurui Zaibatsu. I owe the Empire eight years of servitude for being granted life. What you call subservience I call a show of gratitude."

"How can you justify continuing to serve a cause you know is wrong? Deep down you're in denial," Pumpkin said.

"it is not because I'm indebted to the Empire that I don't have a reason of my own to fight. Before I joined the Star Army, I had the unique opportunity to live with a family of four geshrins : husband, wife, son and daughter. They were happy, they were free, they were innocent and they deserve to be kept that way. In the time I lived with them, I think I was happy too, the children pretty much treated me like I was an older sister."

Kotori stood up to look Pumpkin, even though the cell's boundaries still separated them. "I fight for the people like them. I want those children to lead fruitful lives that will beget families of their own. That is what living is. That is how I'd like my life to be later too." her golden eyes narrowed. "I can understand your cause, but I can't condone you wanting to oppress the people like them. You'd be only repeating the same mistakes that's been done with us : racism, I think it is called. I'd like to think that despite what our kind have suffered, we'd have enough sense, enough nobility of spirit, not to repeat the mistakes of our creators."

Pumpkin's response was harsh but true. "You can't make babies."

"No, but I can choose to become a Yamataian later on." Kotori simply replied. "Why should the body I have matter as long as I'm happy?"

"Your personal contentment is not what controls the universe."

"Of course it doesn't. But neither does yours or the millions of Nekovalkyrja whom would feel they have been ill treated. You could just as well have chosen to go far away and build your own lives as you saw fit. After all, if the fleets you have at your disposal are so superior to the Star Army's, why are you even bothering?"

"If you look anywhere but Yamatai in the Empire, all you'll see is poverty. Why should we let that continue?" Pumpkin countered.

Kotori looked at Pumpkin and shook her head. "I don't understand you. One moment you talk about the Empire as if it was an enemy that needed to be defeated for nekos to be free and now you want to save it?"

"We've managed to turn one of the worst genetic experiments in history into a strong chance to save the empire from human oppression and rule by the artificially rich upper class. You should be thankful! Our enemy is not the people, but rather the cruel system that rules over them."

"I recall you calling Princess Hanako and I 'Imperialist, human-subservient pawns'." Kotori shrugged. "I'm not fighting for the Emperor's pretty eyes, I'm fighting to protect the people he rules over. The Star Army happens to be the organisation that is supposed to do that. How can you expect us to know better when you shoot first and talk after?"

"Because you were going to shoot first if we hadn't," accused Pumpkin.

"Of course," Kotori shook her head bitterly. "We can't trust each other enough to talk, so, we resort to killing each other until one side grinds the other to dust. Is that what you mean?" Kotori was practically seething by that point. "The corrupt Yamataian government aside, nekovalkyrjas are still the ones that are going to die for the Empire, one way or another. This isn't fixing anything - it is simply throwing more lives away."

Kotori whirled around, showing her bare back to Pumpkin as she hugged herself; her shoulders stiff as she tried bring her temper back under control. "Well, I hope you'll forgive me if I'm not on my knees thanking you. I'm only two years old after all - I trained to fight to protect the things I cared about and the next thing I know, within one week I'm thrown in the middle of what looks like a Nekovalkyrja civil war. "

Pumpkin's face was grim. "It'll be over soon." With that, she rose into the air, and glided out of the room, leaning sideways as she passed her cup, and snatching it up in one hand as she moved.

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Replacing Pumpkin was a very pale Nekovalkyrja woman with cold, sharp, black eyes, salmon lips, and chocolate hair. She wore a flowing tunic of black silk and velvet, black fur boots, and sheer black tights. There was a slowly bubbling anger in her expressions.

Sensing the other's approach, Kotori gritted her teeth, made an effort to compose herself and turned around to look at the other, her golden eyes evenly meeting the other's. "Nice dress." She said, her eyes having a guarded look.

"You will answer my questions," the neko stated flatly, "or you and Hanako will suffer."

Hanako's eyes shifted and she curled up a little more on the floor.

Kotori made a sigh. Maybe Pumpkin hadn't been so bad after all. "Ask away."

"What is your function on the Sakura?" the Black Spiral neko inquired.

"I'm the ship's commanding officer." Kotori paused. "Or at least I was."

A slot in the wall (presumably, made to serve food) opened and a large, very tough looking red insect of some sort rushed into the room, immediately taking a bite out of Hanako's calf muscle. The girl screamed in pain writhing on the floor, kicking at the bug to try to get it away. Of course, there was nowhere to run to. The interrogator outside knocked on the glass to keep Kotori's attention. "MEGAMI knows when you're lying," she warned.

"I was the executive officer!" Kotori snarled at the other. "Taisa Sydney died in the battle in which your NH-25 captured Hanako and I. Hanako herself might outrank me, but she's an Imperial observer! I'm a Taii : I was the one left in command!"

Hanako cowered from the biting bug in a corner of the cell. It watched her hungrily, waiting for the signal to strike again. "What is the Sakura's destination?" the interrogating neko demanded to know.

"I sent it back in hopefully friendly territory so the crew could get medical attention. It should be pretty far away now." Kotori eyes hardened, "The lives of my crew are more valuable than Hanako's - that's all you get."

More insects crawled into the cell now, and began attacking Hanako. The Taisa kicked at them and tried to knock them away with her hands, but this time there was many more. The girl screamed, as agonizing bites left bloody holes in her flesh. And then the bugs began to burrow into the openings, crawling under Hanako's skin. Poor Hanako couldn't stop squirming, shrieking, and desperately crying for help as they chewed their way around.

Kotori sent a baleful look at the interrogator and leapt into the fray to fend off the insects. She supposed the insects themselves were tough enough to be a threat to a Nekovalkyrja, but she wasn't going to leave Hanako like that without helping.

She risked opening up with a shriek of brute psionics; probably the only attempt the ship's MEGAMI would allow past before the PSC would come online; and then, activating her skin camouflage, she waded in the melee, tearing at the insects on Hanako before interposing herself as an obstacle before she began to counter-attack, crushing and rending with her hands.

More and more of the tough, vicious bugs flooded into the room. "You should have realized by now, that we control PANTHEON already. That just happens to mean no mental backups for the princess here," the interrogator sneered. "I wonder how long it will be until one of them eats her sweet little brain? They're already deep inside her."

Kotori's eyes widened. "Ushobrakflug!" she yelled over the din of the chittering, biting insects. Unknowingly, the interrogator had not only pointed to Kotori the obvious, but had also jarred a memory back to the surface of Kotori's mind. Yui's joined with the PANTHEON, she told me her NH-23 body tapped into that- she cut her realizations short by backhanding one of the insects into the wall. "Get them off

her!”

By now, Hanako's cries and begging had been reduced to drooling and twitching. Her once perfect skin was now full of glistening red sores and moving lumps. A few that had entered elsewhere even crawled out from between her lips. As Kotori finally answered, the bugs began to exit Hanako's mutilated body and neatly gather in a pile in the opposite corner of the room. The interrogator smiled. “Much better.”

Kotori bent down besides Hanako. She had earned her shares of wounds too, but Hanako had obviously taken the brunt of the assault. “Give me a moment to attend her and I'll answer your other questions.”

The NH-22M sank her teeth into the underside of her own forearm - the sound of teeth shearing through her skin much like a knife cutting through wet melon - and then placed the wound over Hanako, coaxing her blood out with the other hand to spill over Hanako's injuries - this time to help nurse the wounded girl back to health.

Hanako coughed more bodily fluids into the red pool of them beneath her, shivering in pain. Thankfully, Kotori's blood and Hanako's own healing systems began to patch the girl up.

“It is the end of your mission, Kotori,” said the pale neko in black. “Soon the Sakura and its crew will be captured...or destroyed. But I'll give you a chance to join us, Kotori, if you're interested...”

Kotori looked over the scarring tissues, her chest heavy with guilt. The interrogator was probably going to play the same game over and over again. Kotori had wanted to keep the Sakura's crew safe... but how many of them would have been willing to lay down their lives just so Hanako wouldn't have had to suffer so?

Pale and feeling a tad light headed, the neko pressed her free hand against the self-bitten forearm to stem the bleeding. She turned a dire glare toward the interrogator. “I trust you'll understand if I don't really feel all that ecstatic about it.” Pale, she stood back up. “Next question?”

“Who else besides those on your ship knows about Black Spiral?”

“It was all kept tightly in leash to prevent any spillovers. The Mishhuvurthyar being created by PNUgen was considered highly inflammatory knowledge. The people concerned would be the squadron of handpicked vessels Yui assigned for the search.” She shrugged helplessly. “Instead of offering an answer I'm not certain of, I'd just recommend getting the details from Yui. She is on your side, right?”

“Did you forget who is asking the questions?” their captor asked. The bugs inched closer, their little chewers moving excitedly.

Kotori growled irritably. “Fine, fine, I'll humor you. It should include the YSS Nozomi, the YSS Azalea and the YSS Oniyuri. There were these two other gunships that tried to capture us that might have had something to do with it too, but one is destroyed and what happened to the other I couldn't really care less.” she thumbed toward the bugs. “As you can see, I have other worries.”

“Was there anyone who Yui briefed that went to some other assignment?”

Kotori looked back to Hanako. “Not that I recall. Taisa Sydney might have had a better idea, but then again, he really seemed kinda stumped about this whole hunt after you people.”



The questions kept on coming. Kotori was asked the number of crew members aboard the Sakura, number of non-neko crew members, the number of power armor available on the Sakura at the time, what the crew morale was, crew specialties, and even personality profiles of each crew member. The pale neko also asked about last known deployment orders for other ships, last known fleet readiness level, and about any known efforts that were being made to repair the PANTHEON.

Kotori begrudgingly replied to the questions as they came, trying to be vague when she thought she could get away with it. Most of the answers she provided came from files and textbooks she had studied at the SARA even before she had been recruited in the Star Army - hardly vital information anyways. After a while, Kotori began nursing the hope that the Black Spiral interrogator would get bored and just move on - she didn't see why the interrogator even bothered with some of the questions : they were obviously things she must have known already. Kotori was getting irritated, tired and very hungry.

"Does the Sakura have any special equipment onboard?" finally asked the neko in black.

"Well, back in the southern nebula the Sakura lost it is NH-28 NIWS unit, so it doesn't have one right now. The ship also made a stop to Scorpio Base in order to get tools that could help us even up the odds with... well, you people."

"Such as?"

"An experimental upgrade of the Mindy armor that was supposed to work well with the new NH-29 SPINE interfaces. There also was a new aether rifle that mounted anti-personnel weaponry and a barrier system I never tried out." Kotori answered, omitting the teleportation system to see if she could get away with it.

The Black Spiral neko's eyes stared into Kotori's, while there was a dead silence.

Kotori glowered at the other. "If Pumpkin reported to you already, why do you keep asking me questions you already know the answers too?! We went to get our gear at Project Inoue - you know damn well what's over there already."

"So you got weapons at the same place?"

Kotori shrugged. "Pretty much."

"Why didn't you mention the teleportation units, then?"

"Because I knew Pumpkin - or whatever you call her - saw me teleport in the bridge. She should have already reported it." the golden eyed neko tilted her head. "She did, right? After spying on the Sakura for a few days - I'm not sure when she managed to get onboard - she ought to have learned a lot of what you already asked me."

"I think you were just trying to be slick. That's bad for you." The pale neko called for Pumpkin, who entered the room a few moments later.

"Yes ma'am?" Pumpkin asked.

The interrogator whispered something into one of Pumpkin's pointy ears.

Kotori, glad for the reprieve, left her captors to confer with each other and went to check on Hanako. At

least there was one good news : Hanako had regained colors and seemed to be well on her way to recovery. She knelt by the unconscious girl, feeling her forehead for a moment and then making a lame attempt to neatly brush the blood matted hair with her soiled fingers

Pumpkin opened the door and immediately stabbed at Kotori's backside with one of her tentacles. A needle-like structure embedded in its end was laced with a strong Nekovalkyrja muscle relaxer and a mild sedative.

"Ahrnk!" Kotori's eyes went wide with shock, but she had prepared a response in her secondary memory for an eventuality where a Mishhuvurthyar would sting her. Much like back in the Sakura's main gun control room, a fist-sized portion of the flesh around the needle spontaneously combusted, sending chunks of skin and a copious amount blood splash over Pumpkin. Fortunately for the hybrid, the reaction had not included turning the blood into a weapon as well. Kotori shrieked in pain - that did more than just hurt a little - and whirled to face Pumpkin in a defensive crouch, standing over Hanako protectively.

"The next time you do that, a blast shutter won't save you!" Kotori snarled, her chest heaving : blood had already streamed down the length of her left leg, taxing the neko's already waning strength. "I'll gladly blow parts of myself apart if it can mean avoiding being even more helpless than I am now!"

Pumpkin frowned and looked back to the interrogator for guidance. The pale neko motioned to Hanako, who was just beginning to wake up on the floor below. Pumpkin nodded and entered the cell. With her hands, Pumpkin firmly pushed the resisting Kotori backward, to keep her away from the Taisa, her skirt-like rows of tentacles grabbing hold of Hanako's limbs and dragging her out of the cell.

The bloodied NH-22M had been cast aside like a doll. Kotori grunted as she struggled to get up, but she slipped in the blood now covering the floor of the cell as Pumpkin slowly backed away and the clear door closed again, sealing Kotori inside where she could only watch Hanako. They strapped her arms and legs to an examination table, and rolled it over near Kotori. A large, pink Mishhuvurthyar glided into the room. The interrogator lifted the tattered, burnt skirt Hanako had on and then looked to Kotori with a smirk as the monster approached.

Kotori stared in awe at the Mishhuvurthyar as it made its entry. she had heard of them, had seen images and holograms of them, it they didn't do the real thing justice. However, she knew enough to have an idea of what they could do next. "Pumpkin! She's Yui's daughter! You can't allow her to be harmed like that!" She pounded her fists at the cell's walls. "All you're showing me is that when you win, we'll simply be trading one kind of dictator for another! Is that the message you want to pass on?!"

Hanako's eyes widened as the giant carapace blocked out the overhead lights above her table. "Please no!" she protested, as the tentacles swarmed around her. Suddenly, one jammed itself into her womanhood, wriggling its way deeply inside. Hanako let out a shriek of surprise and pain, and then went into a ragged moan as her insides were manipulated to accommodate the eggs. Kotori could see the round bulges moving down the tentacle as Hanako squirmed and strained against her restraints. After a minute or two, it was all over and the Mishhuvurthyar exited with a creepy "HU HU HU," chuckle. The Taisa laid there prostrate on the table. Her belly was slightly swollen.

The interrogator laughed at Hanako. "How does it feel to be an expecting mother?"

Hanako looked down at her abdomen, ashamed. "Please...please let us go," she pleaded, her voice hoarse from all the crying and screaming earlier.

Over Hanako's wrenching sobs, Kotori's voice finally echoed from the containment cell. "Pumpkin, is that what the foundation of building your 'True Nekoalkyrja Empire' will be? Is this how noble your cause is?!" Still kneeling in the puddle of blood, Kotori glared accusingly at the Nekoalkyrja-mishhuvurthyar hybrid.

Pumpkin seemed unhappy. "I think we've got all we want out of them," she stated, feeling sorry for the two captives.

The interrogator gave Pumpkin an angry warning look, as if to say, "Getting soft?"

Pumpkin pushed the matter. "Is there anything else to ask?"

"Not for now... I think we'll let them stew for a while."

With a nod, Pumpkin untied Hanako, giving the girl a reassuring squeeze on the hand while the other neko was looking at the outraged Kotori in the cell. Hanako soon rejoined Kotori, taking a seat on the floor as the cell door closed once more. The bugs were all gone by now, back to the slot they'd come from. Soon, the two neko captors outside departed as well, leaving Kotori and Hanako all alone under the watchful eye of the ship.

Hanako slumped over in the corner and began to quietly sob.

Kotori knelt to her side and was about to hug her, to try and make some attempt at comforting the violated girl, but she stopped in the middle. What right do I have to comfort me? This was my fault! Shame, choking and unpleasant, rose in her chest as her mind mercilessly unveiled that Kotori had tried being defiant all along and Hanako had paid for it. Just now, Hanako had effectively taken the bullet that had been meant for her. And the worst part of it was... deep down, Kotori was glad the eggs had been implanted into Hanako instead of her.

Heartsick, the dark-haired Nekoalkyrja finally bent down and, her hands shaking, she hugged Hanako close, resting the frail girl's head in the crook of her shoulder. "Gomenasai." she pleaded in a husky whisper. Kotori too began breaking into sobs. "Gomenasai." and again, "Go-gomenasai, gomenasai, gomena-gomenasai, gomenasai, gomenasai, gomenasai..." she continued, repeating her apologies like a litany as tears spilled from her cheeks.

\* \* \*

Kotori wasn't sure how long she remained in the darkness of the medlab with Hanako, crying. She wasn't sure of when Hanako had finally managed to cry herself to sleep. Kotori was not so fortunate : she kept seeing images of the mishhuvurthyar hovering above Hanako, she kept hearing Hanako's pleas for it to stop, to spare them. She kept remembering their interrogator's glee at Hanako's predicament.

She had never found a cause to hate someone. She had disliked her share of people, she had been angry... but hate was a new emotion. It was stifling and all-pervasive, filling her thoughts legion of inner demons that whispered thoughts of seeking out retribution. If she hadn't been holding Hanako, Kotori would have curled up her hands just from the sheer need to inflict pain back on the ones responsible for their current predicament.

Kotori started as the door to the cell suddenly slid open. Two environmental suits flopped to the floor, a

battered Mindy armor standing just beyond them in the threshold of the cell. "it is time to get out," a familiar voice said. Yuuko removed her helmet for a moment so that Kotori could see her face, but quickly put it back on.

Hanako woke to the noise of the suits hitting the deck. She rubbed her eyes and looked at the power armor, then to the suits, and began slipping into one of them. She checked to make sure Kotori was suiting up, too.

Kotori made to pick up the suit... but the suit would hinder her skin camouflage. She hesitated and looked back at Yuuko.

Yuuko turned around and began to nervously watch the darkened medical bay. "Faster," she urged the two nekos.

"There's no way we can outrun a Sakura-class in just power armors or a shuttle." Kotori whispered with a scowl, having no idea of just how Yuuko was going to manage to get them out of there, light years from any allied forces. "Do you have a plan?"

"Would you rather stay?" Yuuko quipped. She darkly pondered the Sakura's shield systems and weapons pods.

"If that means killing them all, yes." Kotori spitefully answered, perhaps more than a little foolishly. Even if it sounded unreasonable, she couldn't just leave like a coward leaving Hanako's tormentors unpunished. "Can we get to the Mindy bay and use some suits there?" It had worked for Pumpkin before, it could work in their favor as well.

"We could try," Yuuko said, not sounding very confident. Just then, the medical bay lights switched on, along with red flashing ones. An alarm sounded, followed by a cold-sounding MEGAMI announcement. "Intruder Alert...Intruder Alert."

Hanako put on her helmet, looking worried.

Kotori's lips curled up, her eyes shining with wrath. "Yuuko, if you can take out the MEGAMI, it should seriously impair them. I think I could manage from there and cause enough trouble to cover your escape." Kotori told Yuuko and camouflaged, intent on heading out to the Mindy bay... and just as she was headed for the door, the Black Spiral's NIWS stepped through, its twin triple-barreled aether cannons at the ready on each forearm.

Kotori, despite being stealthed, sucked in her breath sharply and backpedaled in surprise. The NIWS had been active and on guard!

Yuuko cursed under her breath. The NIWS unit opened fire, shooting through the wall. Hanako dropped to the floor and curled up as bright white energy passed overhead into Yuuko's torso. Yuuko stumbled and fell back into the wall of the cell. NIWS stopped firing and moved to get a better shot to finish the job. Black Spiral Nekos were now starting to flood the main passageway and entrance area of the medical bay.

Seeing her last chance, Yuuko ignored the pain and darkness that struggled to overcome her, and swept up Hanako into her arms. "Kotori!" she yelled, as her teleportation module began to emit a loud buzz.

Kotori hissed : the NIWS had already leveled one of its cannons at Yuuko's head. Summoning what strength she had left, Kotori made a flying tackle into the NH-28's side, hoping to ruin its next shot and then ~maybe~ run over to Yuuko if there was enough time.

She might as well try wrestling with a starship - the NIWS didn't budge at all and Kotori's tackle was stopped cold. Hanako held herself tightly against Yuuko's bleeding Mindy, watching the NIWS in horror over her shoulder. The android fired, just as Yuuko's Mindy blinked out of existence with a loud PHLUMP noise. The NH-28 immediately redirected its attention to Kotori.

Kotori, suddenly alone, tried eluding the NIWS and camouflaging herself to escape, but the other android deftly caught the fleeing neko by the right arm. Kotori was reeled back toward the android in a whiplash motion and immediately twisted her arm to loosen the hold... but the NIWS' held her fast, its grip uncannily strong. The Black Spiral nekos began to crowd around with submachineguns aimed at her. One of them was her interrogator from earlier. The neko pointed her pistol at Kotori's head. "Checkmate."

Kotori, her arm still trapped in the NIWS' grasp, turned slowly to face the interrogator and the business end of her pistol, her golden eyes smoldering with hate.

Kotori let out a resigned sigh, lifted her chin with whatever shred of dignity she had left and faced death. There was the distinctive discharge of a Nekoalkyrja Service Pistol - a strobbing flash... and then, just a long fall into darkness.

END <sup>1)</sup>

Character Data	
Character Name	Pumpkin
Character Owner	<a href="#">Wes</a>
Character Status	NPC Available for GM or FM use

<sup>1)</sup>

Kotori was shot on stun by Pumpkin and ended up in an escape pod! XD

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