

Ending in the FranXX – Part 2
t. Deltafag



Fig 1 : What the fuck was that ending, Nishigori?

Disclaimer : *As I said in the first disclaimer, this is a bad fanfiction meant to replace the episodes 23 and 24 of Darling in the FranXX. I repeat : Bad. Fanfiction. As such, this is not fucking canon, unless you're the kind of people who prefer badly written greentexts on /a/ to the official ending of the show – who are a staggering part of the /a/ Franxxfags, so it seems. In that case, well, do as you wish, I guess.*

A big part of this has been written during a heavy fever-induced delirium. Just thought you should know. But hey, at least I wrote a script beforehand.

Once again, forgive possible subtle english grammar mistakes plox, I am but a filthy frog legs-eating, wine-chugging, ESL surrender monkey.

– "Darling ! Darling, wake up !"

Hiro painfully opened his eyes, meeting the gaze of Zero Tsu, intensely worried. He was feeling weak, queasy, and groggy, but the presence of his beloved was enough to bring him to smile warmly.

- " Don't worry, Zero Tsu, I'm alright. Sort of." he answered, hugging her. "What happened?"
- "That...*thing* hit us. APUS doesn't seem to move anymore, and you lost consciousness for a bit."

- "That thing? Hringhorni? The spear of life? How the hell did it manage to hurt APUS?" Hiro asked, worried by what his partner was telling him.

"This spear of life is made of the cores of our brethren, the klaxosaurs. That's one of the only weapons that could damage our child, just like you ningens slaughtered our kind with magma weapons."

The princess' voice was calm and composed, but Hiro felt in her a seething fury, a burning hatred for the VIRM fiends who had once more managed to hurt the child of her civilization. At least she still was able to communicate with them.

- " Oh no, Darling, she's still there..." muttered Zero Tsu, pressing herself further against Hiro's body with a wince of pain and panic, clinging to him as he started gently patting her head.

She seemed scared by the ethereal and disturbing presence of the klaxosaur princess – with reason, as their last meeting had seen the pink-haired pistil thrown to the ground from Strelizia's cockpit by the royal creature. Sharing his attention between his stressed dino and the dire situation they were in, Hiro managed to ask :

- "So they want to destroy Star Entity, or control it? Again? They said something about paradise, but I kind of...blacked out."

"Worse. They want to absorb him into their army, all of us with it – "us" including you. They're controlling the cores with their evil powers, I don't know how. And now they once again want to corrupt our child."

- "And send us to paradise, whatever they mean by this." concluded Hiro, before an idea, not an idea, a shard, a spark of something, shone for one second in his mind. "Did we at least destroy everything else?"

"Yes...You're quite efficient for a couple of ningens. Only remains their accursed leader, and the spear of life. Of course, all of it doesn't matter if Star Entity falls into their hands."

Hiro was thinking, and fast. Falling into VIRM's hand wasn't an option : he had already promised to explore the earth with Zero Tsu, and getting into a hivemind "paradise" was in full contradiction with these plans, and as such UTTERLY UNACCEPTABLE.

- "Is...is there a way to, I don't know, scan the spear of life for its weaknesses or something? Such a thing MUST have a weak point!" he said, firmly hugging Zero Tsu.

"You goddamn ningen. In case you haven't noticed, Star Entity is currently disabled by this thing, which is EATING OUR CHILD ALIVE. Even if you had them, what would you do with these informations?"

- "Can you do it or not?" Hiro shouted, his eyes and horns glowing blue as his own way to answer to Hime's anger. He heard her loud telepathic sigh just before she

answered slowly.

"Yes, I can, our child still has a bit of power left. For what purpose do you need them?"

- "Transmit them to the ship. We may be unable to act, but our friends will probably be able to do something about it. A weakness, a switch, anything to disable it. Translate it if you can, make it as clear as possible."

There was a few moments of silence before Hime spoke again, this time with a respect that surprised the now fully saurified stamen.

"Alright, we will do as you wish. I seem to have made the right choice in entrusting the Earth to you two. Now it is time for me to fight off this corruption."

- "Anything we could do to help?" asked shyly Zero Tsu.

"Nothing. These fiends made this weapon to hurt Star Entity and to disable your connection to it, just like they had trapped me inside of it. Their treachery and ruthlessness knows no bounds. Once, young one, your partner helped me and hold them off. Time for me...to repay this debt. You probably have a few hours before all of us get assimilated. Pray for your friends' success, and take solace in each other's presence."

Meanwhile, on the ship, the situation seemed...explosive. Papa's speech, the flight of the Hringhorni, the sudden defeat of APUS, leading to its return to the pure, white, maiden form it had took under the hands of Werner Frank, everything had happened too fast for any of them to handle safely.

- "Okay, so what was that?" squealed Nana, her happy face turning white as the massive shape of APUS was not only unresponsive, but also pierced by the tip of the gigantic Hringhorni.
- "They used the spear like...a spear", remarked the lonely Nine Alpha, all traces of his previous smug smile and extatic devotion gone with the offensive VIRM just had pulled.
- "Alright, Hachi to the squad" said the male caretaker, who seemed as distressed as his colleague. "Come back immediatly."

A few minutes later, everyone was there, and some news just came in, that Hachi was eager to communicate to the team. Good? Bad? Eh, a bit of both.

- "So, here's the situation," he started in front of all of them. "I got a message from Hiro, inside Star Entity. He appears to be alive, for now, and he sent us the informations he got by scanning Hringhorni – including some possible weaknesses. I...cross-checked these with what Hakase had kept about the spear, and there seem to be some recent additions near the cores of the thing, which look nothing like human technology. Hiro's plan would be for you to go and destroy these parts, which could probably stop...whatever's the VIRM plan for Star Entity. Any questions?"
- "Yes, I have a question", said Alpha without even looking at him, "How did you

become an expert on klaxosaur and VIRM tech?" he asked with a suspicious tone, hoping to elicit an emotional reaction.

- "I have been Hakase's right-hand man for a long time, Nine Alpha. Long enough to learn a few tricks. Besides, his notes are very detailed...if a bit hard to follow sometimes." he answered, making no allusions to the multiple references to "Hime" inside said notes.

No other questions were asked, Hachi and Nana exposing their plan – well, Hiro's plans – with a bit more details. The squad was supposed to rush inside, destroy the control checks left in place by VIRM, reconnect the cores, get out and let APUS handle the deactivated spear of life and destroy Papa – assuming it could. If they couldn't destroy him...well at least his army was no more, and the only weapon able to hurt Star Entity would be in their hands, lost forever to their enemies. All he could do would be, maybe, to promise a rematch in millions of years, like his kind had done to the klaxosaurs. Even though, to be fair, the squad wasn't yet at this point in the story. After this briefing, they were going to ride again when they saw Nine Alpha, coming with them to the hangars, as if to ride one of the FranXX.



Fig 2 : Of all sad words of tongue and pen, the saddest are : "What could have been"

- "Huh? What do you think you're doing?" asked Ichigo, curious.
- "All of your plans were nice and all, but I guess you all have forgotten about Papa being here. And while he's not one to take part in this fight...I think...he's not one to stay there while you steal or disable his stuff right in front of him. You need a diversion." explained Alpha, calmly.
- "Looks like you have an idea..." said Miku, still impressed by the good looks and charisma of the former leader of the Nines.
- "Yes, I have. Go around and assault Hringhorni as stealthily as you can. I'm going to talk with him."

A cold, incredulous silence welcomed his proposition. Finally, after a few seconds, Goro started speaking :

- "Alright, I trust you. Go and talk with him, buy us some time, and we'll try to say hidden until we get to the Hringhorni."
- "Thank you, Code 05...Goro." Alpha answered, smiling again.
- "Wait one second? Didn't you destroy your FranXX during the battle? How will you manage to get to him?" asked Zorome, a bit lost.
- "Don't worry," explained Gamma. "We still have my M9. Of course you can take it, Alpha. Try not to damage the paintjob, though."
- "Thank you, Gamma. And good luck, all of you."

Meanwhile, Hiro and Zero Tsu were still together inside Strelizia's cockpit. Not that they could go anywhere else, with the problem of VIRM corruption spreading. Besides, why should they go anywhere? For this time, their fate was beyond any kind of control, out of their hands. But hey, at least, this time they had each other, after all this dreadful time. Separation after separation had taught them to enjoy every second of every minute they could spend together, especially after the last few weeks, where their time together between two painful separations had been about half a minute long in a dream-like trance. But now, they were together, physically and mentally, at long last. As a direct consequence, none of them was able to let the other go.

It was a constant stream of kisses, a flow of whispered "Dahhlin" and "Zero Tsuu", an unending tide of love and affection that was flying uninterrupted from one's soul to the other's. Zero Tsu and her Darling reunited, all was right with the world. After a five minutes-long kiss where both their tongues fought to the bitter end, the adorable pistil put her head against Hiro's chest, quietly listening to his heartbeat.

- "Say, Darling...You told me about how you lost your humanity to save me and become blue...but what about my own skin?"

Hiro laughed gently. Beneath all her layers of smug playfulness, his loved one, deep inside, was still the scared and insecure – but incredibly cute – red gremlin he had met and loved so long ago. And now...well, she was back to red again.

- "Honestly, you're still the most beautiful thing I've ever seen, by a mile. Your hair looks great, your horns are as alluring as ever, and your skin..." he said, giving the nape of her neck a long sensual lick that made her squeal, "...your skin tastes like honey. I love it! I love every part of you!"
- "Silly Darling...but, what about the others? Do you think they will...you know...accept me like this?"
- "Don't worry about this, they won't say a word" he told her, his eyes shining with a single-minded devotion, "I won't let anyone speak ill of you, Zero Tsu, be it about your skin, your horns or whatever else. Besides," Hiro added, "our friends accepted you once. They have no reason to change and reject you just because your skin is now another...*profoundly beautiful* color."



Fig 3 : Code 016 "If you hurt my dinosaur, let your body hit the floor" Hiro

As he said these words, his fingers were gently, lightly stroking her shoulders, her arms, her cheeks...whatever places they could reach in their gentlemanly ministrations.

- "You're a flatterer, Darling."
- "I just say the truth, Zero Tsu, I promise. And about the others...I don't want to marry them, I want to marry *you*. *You* are the most important part of my life, not them."

Zero Tsu was standing there, like in shock. It wasn't the first time : in numerous occasions, her Darling had told her how much he wanted to stay with her forever, how much he loved her. Hell, he had told her so when he first met her, breaking out of her Garden cell, years and years ago. But now...maybe because of the circumstances, because of their position, because of Darling's tone of voice, because of how long she had been trapped in the cold, unforgiving hivemind of Star Entity... she felt his words, she believed his words much more deeply than previously. Fighting back tears of joy, she affected her old playful and aloof persona and asked him :

- "Darling, this is now the third time you tell me you will marry me...how can I be sure you really want to do it?"
- "I...I guess you have to believe me..." teased Hiro, understanding quickly what she was trying to do. "But for starters, let me do it right for once." he continued, before taking a deep breath.
"Zero Tsu, will you awwi...sorry, *marry* me and be my wife?"

Much had been lost in the reign of APE about the true meaning of love and marriage, and even Hiro, one of the most knowledgeable of the surviving parasites on the subject, didn't know much about what it could truly entail, besides being about two people promising to stay together forever. He knew the most important parts : he loved her, he knew she loved him, and now, like this prince in her old picture book, he had "asked for her hand" – though he'd marry the rest too. They could always figure the rest later and talk it out, when they would be back on earth. Having some kind of "symbolic wedding" here in space would be a hilariously bad idea when they could have the real deal back home.

Zero Tsu's answer, however, didn't wait until they came back home. She kissed him with tremendous force, her hot tongue fighting to get inside her Darling's mouth, and succeeding near instantly. Now, her whole being was naught but pure love and burning lust for this man who had given a meaning to her life, had given her his heart and stolen her

own.

She only left his lips alone when Hiro started feeling light-headed due to both pleasure and lack of air, and she looked at him with a surprisingly shy attitude. He knew she was blushing, even if her now crimson skin was hiding pretty well.

- "I guess...that's a yes..." he managed to pant, gasping for air and his horns shining blue.
- "Yes, Darling, I will marry you."

Hiro took a few more moments to catch his breath, before hugging her again, whispering gently into her ear.

- "You know, we may be alone in space, and about to die or assimilated into VIRM if our friends fail their mission, but I don't care. This is probably the happiest day of my life."

His fiancée was lightly sobbing against him, her agreement with the statement carried with each of her heartbeats, and an idea came to him to change the mood and pass a bit of time while the rest of the squad could prove their worth – oh, and save them and the hopes of an entire galaxy. Maybe more.

- "You know what, Zero Tsu? What if we started to discuss the details of the wedding already? You know, the place, the day, the people? We don't seem to be short on time right now..."
- "Hmm. There is so many ways we could do it. But I already know the perfect place, Darling..." she answered, euphoric.
- "I think I do too, Zero Tsu. The big mistletoe tree, near the Garden."

Both of them laughed together, happy once again to be so perfectly in sync about their ideas. This tree, to be honest, had been an important part of their early life, and he had often featured in their dreams and visions – even in the time their memories of each other, and of this previous life, had been wiped out. Under this tree, Hiro had once promised to stay forever with Zero Tsu, who was, at the time, barely human. It was only justice that, after all these years, their wedding took place here.

- "Maybe...maybe Hakase could marry us ! I'm sure he would be happy to do it !" proposed Zero Tsu, overjoyed by the idea. Hiro's wide smile instantly disappeared ; focused on the well-being of his beloved, he had not talked to her about what had happened on Earth during her absence.
- "Zero Tsu...I'm sorry but..."
- "I know, I know, you don't really like him but, despite everything he may have done, he still raised me...and that's thanks to him that we could be reunited after all these years !" she explained, trying to convince her dead-eyed Darling.
- "That's not what I meant, Zero Tsu. I'm sorry but he's...he's dead."



Fig 4 : RIP you SUBARASHII-screaming sinful man. Press F to pay respect.

"So the sinful man is dead and gone. Good, even though he deserved far worse."

- "Shut up, Hime." answered Hiro, while trying to comfort his dear wife-to-be.

Werner Frank, may he rest in peace, had been a complex man. Creator of the FranXX, he had spent most of his life as a klaxosaur-obsessed scientist, finding in the monstrous creatures a most profound beauty. In the first years of Zero Tsu's life at the Garden, he had himself behaved as a monster in the name of science, conducting experiments bordering on torture upon her frail red body to uncover the secrets of her nature. Despite all he had put her through, he had later managed to form a healthier relationship with her, becoming kind of a father figure to her – even though he had been the one wiping their minds after their jailbreak.

And now, Zero Tsu was mourning this man she had thanked and forgiven mere weeks ago, her tears rolling off her cheeks as Hiro, once again, embraced her to give her a bit of comfort. After a few seconds, she tried to smile, talking once more.

- "I'll...I'll be alright, Darling, don't worry. There will be time to mourn him once we get back on Earth. Anyway, about the wedding..."
- "I think we should have a few friends only," said Hiro, eager to change the subject and get her to smile again, "with the squad, Nana and Hachi...maybe the Nines?"
- "Why the hell would you invite the Nines, Darling?" asked Zero Tsu, a barely concealed disgust seeping into her voice.
- "Well, they helped us reaching you. And after all that happened to them...I guess they're on their own path to redemption." explained Hiro, locking eyes with her. "Most of them are dead, anyway."
- "What...they are dead too?" Zero Tsu seemed surprised, a spark of sorrow hidden behind her confusion.
- "Alpha told me Delta and Epsilon were killed by VIRI during the invasion, and Eta,

Theta and Zeta died because of a lack of maintenance. So only Alpha, Gamma and Beta are still alive and kicking today." he said to Zero Tsu.

- "What a shame," the red oni sighed. "Delta and Epsilon were the least annoying ones of the bunch. Miles better than Alpha or Gamma. Meh, at least they will probably die quickly without their 'maintenance'." she added, with hatred in her voice.
- "Well...about that. I gave them my blood, Zero Tsu. They could help me, I had to save them." he explained, giving a quick kiss to her horns. "A bit of blood for their help to save you...fair trade, if you ask me. And who knows? Maybe you will be able to get along, one day."

Zero Tsu didn't answer, squinting suspiciously at her Darling. After a few seconds, however, she nestled back comfortably against Hiro's chest, seeing no reason to fight him on the subject.

- "Now we have the location, and we have our guests." concluded Hiro. "For the date, I propose we do it as soon as we can when everything will be ready."
- "Seems good to me, Darling." she whispered, taking his hand to her lips and kissing it.

Meanwhile, on the ship, Alpha didn't seem to be ready. He was about to confront something he had once regarded as a living god, a divine being whose will he had been enforcing for years with his brethren. It was in the name of Papa he had done everything he had done. Killing klaxosaurs by the score, bringing his vengeance on the bearers of forbidden knowledge...Yes, Zero Tsu's first and foremost clone had accomplished lots of terrible things in the name of this alien thing posing as a benevolent god. He had been his favorite son, his enforcer, his executioner. And when the time had come, he had let him die on Earth, like an abandoned toy. Alpha knew his diversion was essential for the survival of his friends – but he had also proposed this plan to have one last discussion with this inhuman *father*. He had no way to know how this creature would react to his words. And to be honest, he didn't care. Okay, he cared *a bit*. Maybe more. But he wouldn't falter.

He took one deep breath before sending his mind inside his M9, searching for the connection he managed to instinctively establish with this kind of FranXX. There was no real difference between this mech and his own – well, what his own had been. He had once, for a routine inspection, saw the cockpit of Epsilon's M9, and had been amused and intrigued by the few things the duo had installed inside their battle-beast. No pair of pilots in the Nines ever had a deeper connection than these two, and even if they may have been lacking raw talent compared to the likes of him or Beta, their bond's strength had been off the charts, where the triplets were only able to provide a standard connection. And this fact showed on their decoration, including a group picture of the Nines, with Eta, Zeta and Theta, hanging inside the cockpit. A picture that had been taken at the beginning of their service, when they were all young and skillful pilots destined by birth to be Papa's own favorite sons and daughters. Every year afterwards had seen Zero Tsu become more bitter and aloof, and all of her clones become more smug and haughty.



Fig 5 : Best duo amongst the Nines. Bar none.

Alpha, remembering every moment he had spent with these two siblings of him, steeled his resolution as he launched his FranXX towards his former god. How big had he gotten, in this cold void between the stars? His presence was nearly rivaling APUS', his form and power only loosely chained by the laws of the universe. Papa was not a creature of this world, nor a being of flesh and blood. However, such a revelation was not enough to shake Alpha's determination. Coming near the ethereal creature, he let all his bottled bitterness, his contempt, his newfound hatred for his former master combine in one sentence of pure disgust.

– "Tadaima, Papa..." (1)

He felt the gaze of the VIRM emissary upon him, scrutinizing every single one of his moves. He felt a sudden rush of insignificance compared to the white-and-purple entity, but managed to hold his gaze with a look of defiance on his face. His creator was looking at him, and he wasn't afraid to look back. A few seconds later, Papa started talking, his two voices united as one.

"VIRM remembers you, Nine Alpha. Of all our human soldiers, you were the most devoted and one of the most useful. You served VIRM well, but now your usefulness has come to an end."

– "So everything was an act? Your nature, your goals, your words and feelings? Everything was fake?"

"Silly human. You were a tool, nothing more, nothing less. A good one, but ultimately a tool to be discarded. In the long run, neither you nor any other parasite we engineered was more than just a means to an end."

- "Alright...enlighten me, Papa, VIRM or whatever the hell you are. What would have happened, had your plan to get Star Entity succeeded? To me, to the Nines, to mankind and the planet?"

Alpha was nearly crying now. To hell with the mission, to hell with the *Hringhorni*. In this moment, deep inside, he was a just a broken, abandoned child, learning his father never loved him. He was standing on the edge of the abyss, looking at it and waiting for Papa's answer to knock him down the pit.

"You saw what happened to mankind. They were taken away to paradise. About your kind...Star Entity, or our armies, would have given you a quick death once in VIRM's possession. Besides, that happened with some of you, right?"

Over the edge. Alpha could have *maybe* stayed calm and focused had the answer be different. Had this *Papa* said their survival was planned, that Delta and Epsilon being killed had just been an accident due to overzealous VIRM soldiers, that the hive of aliens had a plan for their lives instead of just throwing them away like broken toys, he could have followed the plan of diverting Papa's attention away from the spear of life, which the three mechs had already infiltrated. A tide of acceptance washed over Alpha, letting only cold resolution. He was going to fight here, he was going to die here, and, maybe, in his final moments, he would find the peace and purpose that had been stolen from him. Papa made no movement when Alpha, teary-eyed, activated his M9's magma spear.

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- "Do you think Alpha will make it?" asked Miku as Argentea, Delphinium and the last M9 reached their target, breaking the cold silence that had been their only companion for now a few minutes.
 - "I hope so" answered Goro. "He's been nothing but a nice fellow since we came in here."
 - "Nice to hear you care so much about our brother..." snickered Beta, ready to act.
 - "Don't worry, guys, you're alright too, now !" explained Zorome.

Only a loud sigh answered him as the M9's stamen, one last time, verified the data Hachi had sent them. Beyond this wall of metal, there were entire rooms filled with inhuman technology, buzzing with the weird energy powering the devices of VIRM. These were probably the parts used to enslave and control the cores of the defeated klaxosaurs, like the ones Star Entity had retrieved from the Super-Lehmann after the Gran Crevasse battle. The cores themselves were basically everywhere in the tip of the miles-long spear of life, but they were not the primary target : the leashes and collars VIRM had placed on them were.

- "Ready?" asked Ichigo in a whisper.
- "Ready." answered both the FranXX.

It was time to go and save Hiro. Such was the fate of the squad, it seemed : prepare the field for Hiro and his partner, so they could clear the field in a matter of seconds for a crushing

victory. The two sacrificed pilots were near unstoppable together inside a FranXX, but Fate had the disgusting habit to separate them as often as it could. Now, even together, they needed the squad to remove a thorn from their side. And what a mighty thorn it was... However, the size of the boat didn't matter as much as his resistance to magma weaponry in this case : in mere moments, they were inside the thing, which seemed even bigger on the inside than on the outside. None of the parasites here had extensive knowledge in technology and engineering, but even they knew the esoteric implements around them were much more advanced than what mankind was using under APE's reign. The art of the ethereal aliens had been distilled in this thing, corrupting and defiling what could have been the gigantic weapon of Strelizia APUS. Now, it was time for the squad to right these wrongs, as they went searching for the weak points in the structure.

Argentea, the now-black twin-tailed FranXX of Zorome and Miku, struck first, trying to disable a dozen pulsing purple...VIRM things in one swift movement. Both the parasites inside never had enough patience or foresight to really act beyond the orders and their instincts, and now every fiber of their being was screaming at them to destroy these aberrations. With a surprising resistance, most of the eldritch tech they attacked ended up destroyed after about half a minute of uninterrupted strikes. Had it been a good idea? Maybe. Maybe not. Whatever the answer to this question, a red light started glowing around them. The buzzing was now intermittent and screechy, with an air of urgency to it. Even the purple pipes carrying energy around seemed more agitated, unregulated by the feat of destruction.

- "Whatever you guys did, looks like Hringhorni doesn't like it..." commented gravely Ichigo. "So by all means...continue."
- "Yay!" screamed Zorome, ready to enter the fray to break more stuff.

As he readied his weapon, he alas never saw the purple tentacle of steel and energy that uncoiled, like a venomous snake, to strike Argentea from above. Goro saw it, though, and like he had done so many times during their times as squad brothers, he had to jump on the thing to destroy it before it attacked his friends. Now powered by a deeper connection to Ichigo, he had absolutely no problem in slaying the beast. But, as he landed on the ground, he saw how much more difficult the task at hand promised to be, with hundreds, thousands of these extensions of VIRM's will spawning from the walls and floor.



Fig 6 : These are just turgid pulsing tentacles ready to brainwash you, goddamnit.

- "Argentea, Delphinium, start destroying the controls" shouted Gamma. "We will try to hold them back a bit."

With this ultimate order, his M9 attacked, slaughtering everything on its path as his friends could now try to accomplish their mission without getting stopped and, presumably, assimilated into the hivemind. However, with each head of the hydra cut off by Beta and Gamma's mastery, three or four more seemed to rise up against the threat to Hringhorni. It was a slow and stressful mission, as the awoken will of the alien race seemed to focus its efforts on protecting the controls, diverting lots of power to the innate shields protecting these unearthly pieces of engineering. Sure, the magma spears of the two FranXX could pierce them, and quite easily. But with each part destroyed, the task seemed more and more difficult, and the M9 behind looked more and more desperate in its dangerous mission.

It was over.

Done.

Finished.

For one time in his life, Alpha was truly free. He didn't know if he would survive the next seconds, and he didn't care – no, he secretly hoped that he wouldn't. His god, his *Papa*, had decided to throw him out like used goods, unable to satisfy him anymore? Well, him had decided to throw everything he had at the tyrant, going out with a bang and not a whimper. From the Hell's heart, I stab at thee, and everything.

And now it was gone. His M9, his warrior pride, his squad, his life...every concern of him was gone. In a red mist, he had heard the VIRM harbinger speaking about the gruesome fate of his friends. Of those who died on Earth, and of those who had followed him in space. As below, so above. Both were doomed, anyway.

Half a second ago, he had charged the ethereal monster, hoping...hoping what? To destroy him? Madness. Madness and stupidity. He had seen the truth, all the horrible, ugly truth, in the infinite refractions of this being as he passed through him. Millions of years of strife and deceit had been revealed to him in this fleeting moment. Hundreds of planets and races enslaved. The slow nurture and final reaping of whole civilizations. Had he gazed upon a fragment of his own nightmares, a reflection of his fears, when in the beating heart of VIRM he had seen Delta and Epsilon? When he had witnessed Beta and Gamma, bathed in dim red light, fighting hopelessly against the will of VIRM?

The destroyed remains of his M9, of Gamma's M9, were scattered all around him, floating silently in the void of space. The cockpit had been breached, the limbs teared from the gigantic mech in an orgy of instant violence. Attacking directly the emissary of VIRM was not something mortals were allowed to do.

A last thought went to Hiro and his partner. What could have been, had they survived...So much he could have said, and heard, in hope to stop the pain. No need for remorse, now.

Only oblivion.



*Fig7 : "And when he goes to heaven, to Hakase he will tell :
Another Nine reporting, Sir ; I served my time in hell."*

Alpha was about to die, to lose his life here, in the silent neighbourhood of Mars. Would the void kill him first? Or the cold? Or the lack of air? He closed his eyes, waiting for the end, for his soul to pass on another life – or to return to nothingness.

His last vision was that of a gigantic angel, a beast with dark wings coming to collect him...and carry him wherever his final fate would be decided.

Futoshi wasn't happy. At all. In fact, he was pretty much as far from it as he could, his eyes red and swollen from the pain and sorrow. And he was fully justified : in front of him, in a small hospital bed, the frail and unconscious form of Ikuno was resting for now. She was still alive, but between the exhaustion from the fight and the damages to Chlorophytum, it was nearly a miracle at this point. All he could do, at this point, was wait and see. His old self, in such a situation, would already be bawling his eyes out and munching on half a dozen different loaves of bread, perpetuating once again his dreadful of overeating. But now... now the thought of eating something was enough to make him sweat in desperation, his stomach caught in the iron grasp of his despair. His old self had been a pathetic, overeating mess, too focused on food and Kokoro to progress. As of now, he was barely understanding what he was feeling for his partner. He just knew he had to be there for her. Even if that meant staying all day and night until she came back from the darkness. At the very least, he owed that to his faithful partner.

How frail and brittle could one girl be? In her weakened state, Ikuno seemed even smaller than Ichigo, the designated "little girl" – and leader – of the squad. And yet, at his side, in their FranXX, she had proven time and time again her strength, her courage and her resilience. She had accepted him and fought beside him, and their union inside Chlorophytum had been an angel of death ready to make their enemies suffer annihilation. He had seen figments of her mind in battle, when their connection was pushed to its limits.

Mere moments, ephemeral shots of her soul, in which he had felt her utter loneliness, her inadequacy, and, shining above everything else, her adoration for Ichigo. He didn't know if the squad was aware of the fact, and as her partner he wasn't about to talk about what seemed to be her first and foremost secret. He was pretty sure she had seen things, too. Probably related to Kokoro, or food – but just about everything in the squad knew about that, so... But hey, they both knew the untold agonies of unrequited love, right? With a faint smile, Futoshi took Ikuno's hand into his own, marveling at the size difference between the both of them ; her whole hand could basically fit into his own. He could feel her slow heartbeat on her small wrist, and her cold fingers gradually getting a bit of their heat back inside their newfound shelter.

- "Futoshi...is that you?" he heard her ask softly, as she was waking up from her slumber.
- "Don't worry, Ikuno, I'm right here," he answered, "Do you need something? If I can get you anything, just ask."
- "I'm...fine. Where are the others?"
- "That's a bit long to explain..."

Futoshi took his time to ensure everything was alright for his partner before starting to tell her the truth about their fate. How, during her time out of commission, she had missed APUS waking up and destroying the army of VIRM. How Papa had managed to come back, and with him, the spear of life full of stolen cores. How the squad, following Hiro's last plan, had decided to disable the gigantic weapon and hope to free it from VIRM's clutches. How Goro and Ichigo were both wearing an unusual smile together, and how their FranXX seemed now to be almost as powerful as Strelizia. Hearing these words, the pistil couldn't help but lower her head with a sigh.

- "Of course they found each other, that was bound to happen..."
- "At least Ichigo is not running after Hiro anymore, so that's nice." commented Futoshi, before looking at her and continuing. "Don't worry, Ikuno, the pain will fade after a while. It always does."
- "That's nice of you, but I don't think you understand..."
- "You know, I may be fat, but I'm not *that* dumb, Ikuno." he cut her with a bitter smile. "I know how you feel about that because I went there first! And trust me, the best you could do is find a way to get over it, and be happy for her. If you ever...need someone to talk about it...or to talk about anything in general...I'm here for you, remember."

Ikuno looked at him with a look of curiosity on her face, a little smile creeping back as Futoshi, blushing, started to understand all the possible implications and innuendos of his proposal. As he was about to apologize for the poor choice of words, she hushed him, just smiling back.

- "You're right, Futoshi. We really ought to talk more..."
- "I'm sure we will have lots of time for that once we're back on Earth, I guess," he explained, happy to see her happy. "But for now, I should let you rest. Call me if you need anything."

He was about to leave when he heard her speak, and turned back immediately.

- "Futoshi...thanks for being my partner."
 - "Thanks to you for being mine, Ikuno." he answered, smiling once more.
-

Hiro opened his eyes. How long had he been sleeping here? He remembered their talks about marriage, but...how had he come to fall asleep in such a terrible situation?

Well, terrible was maybe not the most appropriate word. He was alive and kicking with his wife-to-be inside Strelizia, so it was far from being desperate. Zero Tsu herself was peacefully asleep too on top of him. Extending his hand to rouse her from her slumber, he felt the weight of his exhaustion slow him, as if he had been drained of all his energy. As she was waking up, a quick glance around the room showed him the depth of the damages which had been done during his sleep.

Now, a good part of the cockpit was shining with the colors of VIRM, slithering through the walls of steel to infect and corrupt this ultimate core of iron will and pure love. It was slower and more hesitant than the last time the alien race had managed to enact its disgusting schemes on the gigantic FranXX – probably due to the destruction of their previous failsafes and their reliance on external means to succeed on their disgusting mission of assimilation. To say the least, things were not looking good.

- "That doesn't look that good, Zero Tsu."
- "Darling, do you think the others will succeed?" she said, hugging him tighter against her chest.
- "I...don't know, Zero Tsu. They delivered every time we needed to be reunited but this time, maybe the task at hand was too much for them." he answered. "They don't have our strength, or our bond."

That was the pure truth. The squad of the Plantation 13 was composed of dear friends and exceptional beings, but neither of them was even near the level of pure power and skill the two near-klaxosapiens had shown for most of their existence.

"You know what I always say : Ningen were a mistake."

- "Hime, shouldn't you be fighting against VIRM to protect your "child" instead of insulting people?" barked Hiro, his anger giving him a bit more energy.

"Maybe if ningen didn't ally with VIRM for immortality in their paradise, I shouldn't have to protect Star Entity from their invading corruption...besides, neither of you are really ningen, so you don't have to take offence."

- "Well, Hime, some of my best friends are ningen, and they're the ones fighting for our survival now, so be a bit more...gentle."

Even Hiro's anger was fading away quickly. Maybe it wouldn't be such a bad idea to sleep for a while. When he would wake up, everything would be alright. He would still be with his love, the war would be a half-forgotten dream and his suffering would be over. He would sleep forever in paradise and...

- "Darling, stay awake !"
- "Don't worry, Zero Tsu...I will, I will..."

"Fall asleep and you will die, child. Remember what happened when we fought together against them? VIRM is apathy and passivity, they're death hidden under a cozy blanket of paradise and equality."

- "Zero Tsu...in case something happens to us, I want you to know..." he started explaining, trying to resist falling asleep again.
- "Shh, Darling, just stay with me, and everything will be alright. We will make it together, right? Right?" she cut him off, trying to mask her fear with a big smile.
- "You are right, of course. As always."



Fig 8 : I BLESS THE RAINS DOWN IN MISTILTEEEEEEEEEEEIN

After a few seconds, locking eyes with her, he spoke again, in a voice that was barely above a whisper, like to beg her.

- "Don't let me go, Zero Tsu."
- "I won't, Darling, I promise you..." she feverishly said, before starting to take off her pistil suit. "I can't let you go. Never."
- "Zero Tsu, what are you..." he asked as she tried taking off his own stamen suit, finding the hidden seams and separations.

- "I'm keeping you with me." she answered, before stretching out in front of him, in all of her naked glory. "Even if we are to be parted, this time we won't be...just stay with me, right? And let me show you what comes *beyond kissing*..." she answered with a sultry, seductive tone.
 - "You mean there's something beyond asking for your hand in marriage?" he managed to joke, mesmerized by her unveiled beauty, smiling when he heard her clear laughter ringing in the cockpit.
 - "Silly Darling...Let me show you what Hakase's old archives taught me."
 - "I love you, Zero Tsu."
 - "I love you too, Darling."
-

How many of the infernal machines had they destroyed? So much, and yet not enough. Beta and Gamma were still fighting against the many-headed menace of the VIRM assaults, their M9 standing upon a mountain of destroyed parts and bits still moving. Zorome and Miku's Argentea was trying to get the job done, but unlike Delphinium's parasites, mowing the arcane tech left and right, they had no deeper connection to exploit to push their FranXX to their limits.

- "Alright, guys, looks like it's enough, you can retreat." Beta said suddenly, eliciting a grunt of incomprehension from his squadmates.
- "What do you mean, *you can retreat*? You don't come with us?" asked Zorome, unable to understand.
- "Don't worry about us, we will finish the job and hold them off. Now GO!" Gamma screamed, his spear cutting off a tentacle who had wrapped itself around the FranXX' wrist.
- "Alright, but come back alive..." concluded Ichigo before getting out in a flash, quickly followed by Argentea.

Beta cut the comms, before turning to his brother, who had a concerned expression on his face. They shook hands what looked like one last time.

- "How angry and sad do you think they will be once we're done here?"
- "A thousand tears, I'd say. Maybe more. You're sure you want to go down this path?" he asked, his smug smile back.
- "Avenging Epsilon and the girls *and* saving Hiro and Iota *and* getting off this wild ride in a bang? Count me in." answered Gamma.
- "Hey, Gamma, wanna see how many of them we can destroy before activating the self-destruct command?"

Few songs about the old VIRM battles are sung on Earth, for this past now is behind and better left in shadows, and the future needs more peace and tranquility than wars and torments. But the story of the Hringhorni and the two clones that saved it from VIRM is now whispered all across the ruins of the plantations of yore. And when a new arrival try to ask about the ones to whom even Hiro and his wife bow their head, the answer is always the same. They fought alone in Hringhorni. And that answer is enough.

Somewhere on the battlefield, an angel saves an abandoned child.

Somewhere on the battlefield, a new light is brought into this world.

Somewhere on the battlefield, two kids sacrifice their lives for the collective.

Somewhere on the battlefield, a father sees his plans destroyed by the will of man.

It all happened really fast. Well, more than fast, it happened in the very same couple of seconds, when the one being mankind had known as Papa for more than a century was about to declare complete and utter victory upon the world in the name of VIRM. Hringhorni had corrupted the gigantic klaxotitan, and Star Entity would as such join their quest to bring paradise and equality to all beings in this universe, the spear of life in its hand as a gigantic soldier. It was about to happen. It was supposed to happen. VIRM had been bested once by the thing, it wouldn't be bested twice. Such a feat would *not* happen.

And yet, it did happen. In the same moment, something big seemed to be exploding inside Hringhorni, which, for half a second, seemed to come back to its old color scheme, white with gold and red parts – like a weapon fit for Strelizia APUS ; and APUS itself started moving again, a wave of gold covering it. Once again, the familiar face projected itself on APUS' faceplate, displaying a mask of rapture and ecstasy, oblivious to pain, sorrow and misery. In a swift movement, the golden titan ripped the Hringhorni from its side, at long last wielding it like it was supposed to be wielded – like the spear of the old gods, a planet-destroying weapon which seemed to be now made of solid gold. There was no plea for mercy or negotiation from Papa as he stood there silent, watching gigantic wings of golden light sprout from the ultimate, awakened form of the Bird of Paradise.

"You may win for this time, humans, but know that we will be back at the apex of evolu..."

Before he could even finish his sentence, his very form, though body-less, was disappearing from the world in an explosion of white sparks as the spear shattered him, passing right through him and sending him back to the nothingness that was supposed to be his final rest. No longer would his evil infect the world, as Hiro and his wife were now back.

- "You're so good at impaling things, Daaaaarling..." moaned Zero Tsu, moving seductively her red loins upon his own blue dinosize.
- "It's...just teamwork, Zero Tsuuu..." he answered with the same tone, caught in the throes of ecstasy. "Hey...is that Mars over there?"
- "I don't know, Darling... You're all that matters to me right now."
- "Hey, Zero Tsu...look at this !"

As he said those words, Golden APUS bolted to the surface of the red planet, Hringhorni still in its hand. With such a mighty tool, it took Hiro about half a minute to finish its little side-project, which he then took the time to admire and show to his wife the result, spanning

about a thousand miles. Upon the reddish surface of the war-god, a crude but profoundly beautiful heart shape had been drawn by her prince, with a few words of love written inside of it.

*Hiro loves Zero Tsu
You're my wife
I'm your Darling.*

After all, how could such a space story end if not by planetary vandalism?

I mean, fucking Hell, Nishigori, you had a fucking Eureka 7 clone (*slowly dying from lack of maintenance in the last episodes, heh*) with a 50-KM HIGH ROBOT and you don't even end the last episode with Hiro carving his love for his partner over every planet of the solar system. Hope you never find love in your next reincarnation, you nip faggot.



Fig 9 : Darling in the FranXX in a nutshell

EPISODE 24 : HITORI JA NAI

But wait, there's more !

-
-
- "How long has he been unconscious?"
 - "He's in that state since we brought him back. It's been hours now."

Alpha felt something again. Like a pain in his skull, radiating in every direction to make his life a living hell and...wait a second. Life? Living hell? Pain?

He was alive. Moreover, he felt like he could move, had he the courage for it. Would he? Should he? Oh, and to the hells with it.

He tried to open an eye, then the other, before closing them immediately afterwards. The light really was too bright to his liking. Groaning in pain, he decided to nevertheless persist, opening them again to find Nana and Hachi looking at him, her with a big happy smile and him with his usual unemotional face.

- "Welcome back, Nine Alpha !" she exclaimed, happy as can be.
- "You nearly died out there...Attacking him was a pretty stupid idea." commented Hachi. "Eh, at least you won't need your M9 anymore back on Earth."
- "It was...Gamma's. Where is he, anyway? Where are the others?"

A few seconds of silence passed before Nana sat on his hospital bed to tell him the truth.

- "I'm so sorry, Alpha, but..."
- "Both of them?" he cut her off.
- "Yes."
- "...Did they at least manage to succeed?"
- "See for yourself." answered Hachi, showing him, through the nearest window.

Helped by Nana, the former leader of the Nines, now only member of the team, got up and walked to the window, where the red planet could be seen in the distance...and on it...

- "Are you serious..." whispered Alpha, gazing upon Hiro's masterpiece.
- "I guess you will have to ask them once they come back from their little cloud." said Nana. "Do you need something to eat, to drink? Is everything alright?"
- "Just tell me how I got back here."
- "Nana and I saw your little attack on Papa. After your M9 was destroyed, we went there as fast as we could and we managed to get you to safety in a few minutes."
- "How did you two..."
- "Who the hell do you think we are?" snickered Hachi, seething at the elite pilot – his eyes squinted a bit more than usual.
- "Well, until now, the kind of people who lead from the rear and let idiots like me die. Glad we cleared that up...and thank you." he said, his smug smile back.

What else could he do? He was alone, now. He had been the first of the Nines, and now he was the last one of them – well, except Iota...Zero Tsu...but she never had been one to flaunt

her bond to the team. The Alpha, and the Omega. What a cruel twist of fate. Even his own name was a reminder of this destiny. As he was pondering that very fact, something Hiro once said to him came back to his mind.

"Once everything is over, your mother and I will find you a name."

He was almost laughing at this inane suggestion. But the more he tried laughing at it, the more it crept into his mind, bringing to his soul visions of peace and acceptance. He had tried going down this road before, accepting Hiro's blood and all, and he had thrown it all through the window when he had understood he could find no peace as long as Papa was alive. Even the peace of the void had been refused to him.

But now...now that they would be back on Earth, he could start again. Not as a pilot, not as a child soldier. Not as a leader or a hardened klaxosaur-killer. He didn't know what he would do. But hey, at least Hiro would be there, and he trusted the black-haired stamen to be a good leader...a good *Papa*. And, he hoped, someone who would not let him down.

What a stupid hope. But wasn't hope always a bit stupid?

A moment later, back to his bed, he had made his decision.

The travel back to earth was remarkably uneventful. There was no klaxosaur, no VIRM creature, no living being in this return to their home. Hiro and 02 acted as some kind of guardian for the klaxosaur ship in which the rest of the team was coming back – even if, judging by the road it seemed to be taking, the autopilot system were on most of the time. Hiro and his beloved were keeping to themselves, the only communications coming from or going to the golden titan being short and quickly dismissed. Even more than usual, the two inhuman pilots were keeping to themselves, staying within their gigantic FranXX. None of them seemed to ever need to drink or eat now, probably one of the numerous byproducts of piloting APUS. A few days later, the blue planet – well, as blue as it could, knowing the desertification that had been its fate – was once again within their line of sight.

- "Darling, is that the Earth?"
- "Looks like it, Zero Tsu. Now we just have to find Gran Crevasse and..."

"And throw the spear of life inside. Give back our brethren to the Earth, so they could sleep peacefully for the aeons to come. Release them from this war."

Was there happiness and joy in the voice of the klaxosaur princess whispering in their mind, deprived of both for so long? At least, it really looked like it. She had spent millions of years waiting for VIRM to come back, and be able to fend them off, and now her mission was over – moreover, her defeated brethren could join the Earth again and get at long last the rest they deserved.

No man or woman around Gran Crevasse or the Nest this day could remember clearly what happened. Some talk of a second sun shining on this beautiful day, of an explosion of untold power, of a blast of lightning made material hitting the ground at noon. The details are always a bit fuzzy, but there's two facts everyone agrees about : first, after this moment, the plants and seeds started growing again, the withering effects of magma exploitation seeming

countered by their return. The klaxosaur Young King was back, and with him, fertility. The second fact from that day that everyone remembers is how the legendary Strelizia, the most powerful normal-sized FranXX ever created, the mech that singlehandedly won the Gran Crevasse battle months ago, rose from the abyss alone as the ship of the P13 squad was landing on earth.

- "Looks like we have to go, Darling..."
- "Alright, alright, let's go, honey."

Zero Tsu's face was one of puzzlement as her husband-to-be called her so, which quickly became pure happiness as he embraced her again, kissing her cheek and taking her hand before going down with her on the ground. The earth was soft under their boots as they saw, in the distance, all of their friends coming with them. Well, Mitsuru and Kokoro weren't there, but still. Hiro smiled slightly when he saw, a dozen meters away, the concerned looks upon the faces of their friends. Well, the foot-long blue horns upon his head and the red ones adorning his beloved's head could have that effect. Oh, and the skin color changes, too. They stopped about six or five meters away from them, waiting for any of the ningens to make the first step. No word was uttered for a few moments, until, looking bleak and alone, Alpha slowly and awkwardly crossed the gap between them, taking Hiro's extended hand with a wide smile. The ice between the dinosaurs and the ningens had been breached by one that belonged as of now to neither of them, and in a few seconds everyone was talking to everyone about what happened, what they wanted to do, what would happen now. It was during this feverish discussion that a vehicle, piloted by the new Nana that had been assigned to their squad during the invasion, arrived. And inside of it...

- "Mitsuru ! Kokoro !"
- "Hey guys, looks like you found what you were looking for in space. Nice to see you again, Zero Tsu." commented Mitsuru. "Thanks to the new Nana, we took a very important decision together with Kokoro."

Everyone stopped to listen to the young couple, who seemed to have important news to communicate. As they stepped out of the vehicle, they started explaining what they had chosen for the future.

- "Together with Mitsuru, we took the decision to...what's the word, Nana? *Terminate* the pregnancy?"
- "In the old APE manuals, they call it an abortion. We have every necessary equipment for it." ensured the young caretaker.
- "...Okay, what the hell?" asked Miku, shocked by the revelation.
- "Listen to me, all of you. According to what you told us about our past, it seemed Kokoro really wanted to leave something behind, beyond piloting a FranXX, and as her...partner, I likely accepted to help her in this task. But now...now, with the rebuild of this world, there is so much more we can let behind." Mitsuru explained, showing how much him and his...well, wife, they were *technically* married, even if said marriage had been interrupted by the arrival of Papa goons...had thought about it.
- "Neither of us feel ready to raise a child right now, not with the world in this state."

added Kokoro, speaking softly. "But you can be sure, once our civilization is back on its feet and everything is right, we will try again!" she laughed, trying to soften the blow.

Hiro was the first to comment on the weird situation his two friends were in.

- "Well, it takes a lot of maturity to understand you're not ready for such a big thing. I'm happy you guys agreed to this together. That's your life, after all."
- "Thank you, Hiro, that means a lot to me." answered Mitsuru, beaming and overjoyed to hear his old mentor accept his path in life. "Nice horns, by the way."
- "Hiro is right, that's your life. Do as you wish !" shouted Futoshi, adding his voice to that of the horned stamen.

Soon, the discussion turned to Mitsuru and Kokoro's choices and baby discussions, with Hiro, his wife, and Alpha standing on the edge of the group.

- "I should probably make a comment about that choice, but I'm not sure they would listen to my input..." muttered the blonde Nine.

Before he could say another word, he felt Zero Tsu's arms embracing him into a powerful bear hug. It was....probably the first time someone had attempted this on him, and as such he stood there, paralyzed and unable even to think about what was happening.

- "Darling told me how much you helped him save me and the others. Thank you, Alpha. You're a good boy...sometimes."



Fig 10 : "Holy fuck, the dino is loose and she started hugging people"

As soon as he could, Alpha slithered out of her grasp, an air of fake disgust and real embarrassment on his blushing face.

- "Oh, and Darling also told me you'd need a name to fit in now, and I thought about

something which could fit you very well."

She dropped to her knees next to Hiro, motioning both her Darling and her genetic clone to join her here to see what she was drawing. Apparently, she was better with colored pencils than with her finger, but she still was able to draw a big α on the soil. A few seconds later, while Hiro and Alpha were looking confused, she completed the drawing into that of a fish.

- "Fishie ! *Sakana* !"
- "That's...pretty good, Zero Tsu." said Hiro, looking quite impressed. "I'm pretty sure I gave some names less thought out than that when I was at the Garden. Do you like it...*Sakana-kun*?"
- "I...You know what, Hiro? I will give it a try."
- "I'm sure you will, *Sakana*!"

As they followed the others to get back at the Nest, Hiro knew his time here would eventually come to an end. After all, they still had a promise to fulfill about seeing the world outside...and yet, after the time they had passed inside APUS together, he would gladly spend a few days – maybe more. No, definitely more – in a comfy bed with her. The gigantic klaxosaur creation, though able to fulfill their basic vital needs, was not exactly comfortable enough to do...whatever they wanted to do inside of it. Zero Tsu had shown him the door of a world of untold wonders when she had taught him about what came after kissing...and while there was no word strong enough to describe the overwhelming wave of passion, love and lust that had washed over the both of them during these golden times inside APUS, the cockpit of *Strelizia* was nowhere near comfy enough to his liking for these lewd activities. However, knowing how it had been the place where they shared their first kiss, shared their first true love declaration and where he had asked for her hand, it was only justice that they would have their *first time* in here too.

That said, as of now, Hiro just wanted his beloved oni, a shower with his beloved oni, and a few days inside a nice bed with his beloved oni. He missed *Mistilteinn*, and the attic where they had spent so many nights together, drawing and cuddling at the light of a little candle. The Nest, where they had a room, lacked the old familiar feel of their former home.

The place was abuzz with activity, as many of the working parasites had taken to the fields to see what happened with the return of the P13 squad. Many whispers of fear were dancing in the air, as the arrival of two inhuman horn-bearers was not exactly a common sight.

- "What the...Hiro, is that you?"

Hiro instantly turned his head towards the source of the sentence. *That voice...* that voice was the voice of someone who was supposed to be dead. Someone he had seen die. Or did he? Was it possible that she survived this? That voice had been there for him in some moments where he had needed it – to remind him of some truths he had forgotten, or to push him into the right direction.

His shining blue gaze searched in the crowd for a few seconds, before he whispered, having found who he was searching for in the group :

- "Hey, Naomi."

- "Hiro...that's really you !" his former partner screamed, jumping on him and drawing a half-suspicious, half-surprised look from Zero Tsu. "Look at you, seriously...Kokoro told me you had changed, but she didn't tell me about these...horns."
- "Who's that girl, Darling?" asked the red oni, curious.
- "Zero Tsu, here's Naomi. She...was supposed to be my partner before you came along."
- "The girl with the mirror, huh? I'm Zero Tsu, Darling's partner, and his wife-to-be. Now, come, *Daaaarling*, there is much we have to do !"

Hiro was about to protest, maybe wanting to talk a bit more with his old friend, asking her where was her right arm, how did she survive, and everything...but the feeling of his partner nudging him to go and her bright smile were things his will was unable to resist. He followed her eagerly, letting Naomi with even more questions than she already had. Why was Hiro so...blue? Why was he partnered with a notorious – and clearly inhuman – partner-killer? Was he really coming back from space? She sighed and smiled at the other members of the squad, joining them to get answers.

The girl with the mirror? Really?

The next weeks at the Nest were busy and tense, as it became necessary to deal once again with the day-to-day ordinary problems of the rebuild. Thanks to Hakase's database, most of the knowledge of the ancient world was still available, and bringing back both Star Entity and Hringhorni to the earth seemed to have brought back fertility to the planet. The magma-extracting facilities were the first to be shut down and later replaced, as using dead klaxosapiens as a power source seemed kind of ungrateful. Most of the P13 squad were now acting as *de facto* leaders, coordinating the other parasites and taking the important decisions if needed, while Nana and Hachi, along with the others, ensured everything ran smoothly enough. Some started whispering about the stone-faced caretaker and his busty colleague being the true power hidden behind the squad.

To be fair, neither Hiro nor his fiancée cared about it. Both of them were actually too busy planning the wedding – which could have been done a lot more quickly if any discussion of this kind didn't end prematurely in heated blue oni-on-red oni action, culminating of course in bed-breaking, wall-shattering, mind-melding dinomating. However, they managed to get all the little details covered : everyone was of course more than happy to contribute to the wedding in every way they could. Futoshi volunteered to prepare the wedding cake, and Goro, the ever helpful best friend, accepted to marry them. Even Nana and Hachi, though overwhelmed by work, accepted to come for the occasion, taking them into the cargo ship to the Garden where the ceremony needed to take place.

And then...the wedding day had come. Hiro and his wife had accepted to be separated for three days by their friends, as a way to prepare for the occasion. At his side, both Mitsuru and Al...Sakana were there, as were Miku and Kokoro for his wife-to-be. Goro, Futoshi, Ikuno, Zorome and Ichigo each had their duties during this special day, which promised to be one of the happiest of their lives – as this time, the probability to be ambushed by Papa's

troops were next to none. It would take more talent than I have to describe the beauty of Hiro's bride and the joy shining into her eyes, the happiness that overflowed everyone into this day. However, I can tell you this : whatever the conflicts, the pain, the misery that they short lives had already known, everything would have been worth it for this day alone.



Fig 11 : Yeah, he lacks horns and blue skin in this picture, but that's still our DINOBOI, trust me.

Ever faithful to his word, Hiro left his friends with Zero Tsu three days after his wedding. After all, his promise to see the world with her was long overdue, even if they had felt a glimpse of the immensity of the universe during their battles, and carved their names in molten rock on the surface of Mars. He listened with a smile every single one of their promises to always remember him, return or not, and left on the first day of autumn with his wife. Sakana had decided to stay with the humans, not wanting to interfere with their honeymoon – besides, Hiro had already left him enough blood for a lifetime.

After this, the stories about their fate diverge. For some, they never came back to their friends, traveling around the world as two immortal creatures beyond mankind, on the lookout for any threat that would once again endanger the Earth. Some other tell us they met with Alpha a few years later, and settled with him in a repurposed Mistilteinn, where they could take care of their child, a young blue girl with a piercing gaze and a rampant disgust for ningen – or rather, their children, as Zero Tsu is supposed, in this version of the story, to have been a fertile and plentiful mother, bringing many more kids into this world. For some others, at last, they decided to return to their friends, ruling this planet to steer its course towards a prosperous and happy future for anyone.

Which version is true? Which one is not?

Well, beat me if I know. It's supposed to be an open ending, folks :^)

(1) : Nipspeak for "*I'm back*"