

**BLIZZARD**  
ENTERTAINMENT

**OVERWATCH**  
X  
**YOASOBI**

# THE FALL OF A SPARROW



A SHORT STORY BY E. C. MYERS

STORY

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# OVERWATCH

## THE STORY SO FAR

*For several centuries, the Shimada ninja clan controlled and protected a small region of Japan encompassing Hanamura, Kanezaka, and Hanaoka. While the Shimada were criminals, they shielded local residents from the full wrath of the rival Hashimoto gang, who ruled through violence and trafficked in more unsavory businesses. But when the leader of the Shimada clan, Sojiro, was assassinated, the clan was thrown into disarray. Sojiro's eldest son, Hanzo, soon inherited his father's seat, but in Hanzo, the clan elders saw an easy path to attaining their own selfish goals. The elders pushed Hanzo aside and used the clan's resources to conduct increasingly risky dealings—blackmail, assassinations, power grabs—that ultimately captured the attention of Overwatch, an international peacekeeping organization.*

*As pressure mounted, the Shimada clan elders directed Hanzo to straighten out his wayward younger brother, Genji. Genji and Hanzo's confrontation escalated, and in a ninja duel, Hanzo nearly killed his younger brother. Unbeknownst to Hanzo, however, Genji was rescued by Overwatch, who rebuilt his body and later recruited Genji to help dismantle his father's criminal empire. When Genji*

*returned to Hanamura with Overwatch to deliver the Shimada clan its final blow, Hanzo was long gone. After their ill-fated duel, Hanzo had entered a self-imposed exile, ashamed and horrified by what he did to his brother.*

*In the absence of the Shimada, the Hashimoto gang claimed their territory for themselves. The Hashimoto elders took the Shimada bladesmith, Toshiro Yamagami, into their custody, ordering him to craft for them the powerful anima avatar weapons he'd once forged for Sojiro Shimada and his sons. They then ordered Asa Yamagami, the Shimada blademaster and wife of Toshiro, to keep the citizenry in line, or they would employ harsher tactics to quash the spirit of the people. But Toshiro and Asa had a daughter: Kiriko. Kiriko had grown up in Shimada Castle, had even been close to Genji and Hanzo. As she grew, she began fomenting a rebellion, the Yōkai, which found ways to resist the Hashimoto.*

*More than a decade later, Genji visited Hanzo to tell him he had in fact survived their duel. This revelation forced Hanzo to reckon with his past and the role he wanted to play in the future of their world. Hanzo returned to Tokyo and, after a chance run-in with Kiriko, decided to stay and help his people rebuild from the Null Sector invasion and take back their city from the greedy reach of the Hashimoto. Genji returned to Overwatch, rejoining the international peacekeeping organization. But a new threat looms on the horizon: Vendetta, and the resurgence of Talon. With the Hashimoto stronger than ever, Genji journeys to Tokyo to scout the threat they pose and determine if the Hashimoto may have pledged their allegiance to Talon.*

## THE FALL OF A SPARROW

*People are the heart of a place, Genji's father had once told him. Any fool can pay a lackey to work for him, fight for him. But if you earn the complete devotion of the people, they will do everything you ask of them to save their home.*

If the empty streets of Shibuya were any indication, Tokyo was already lost.

Japan's capital city was usually bustling and bright, even at this time of night, but Harajuku appeared dark and desolate. Tokyo had been slowly rebuilding from Null Sector attacks months ago, and Genji wondered whether it would ever recover under the sway of the Hashimoto. The gang had taken advantage of the chaos to seize control over entire prefectures, whose citizens now lived in fear.

Genji had dispatched himself to Tokyo—against Overwatch's orders—after seeing the reports firsthand of Yakuza brandishing weapons that looked like his own. Weapons that could have only been forged by Toshiro Yamagami, the Shimada bladesmith. Genji knew Null Sector had devastated the city, but with Toshiro-san's weapons, the Hashimoto could bring any recovery effort to its knees. And still the question remained: Was Talon bolstering the gang, or were the Hashimoto succeeding all on their own?

Genji pondered the question, poised on the edge of a low roof, scanning the shadowed street below for gang activity. The Hashimoto didn't seem to be doing much at the moment. Maybe if he could find their stronghold . . .

*There! Finally.* Half a dozen Hashimoto wearing dark suits, hanging out on a corner. Their oni masks shone dully in the light of guttering streetlamps, still-glowing neon signs, and holographic billboards.

They seemed to be waiting for someone. Or perhaps for further orders.

Genji watched for a while, his fingers twitching with impatience. *Perhaps they need motivation to leave*, he reasoned. If he let one of them escape, he could follow them to their base.

Tensed on the ledge of the building, his servos whirred almost imperceptibly where his limbs had been reconstructed and augmented by technology. He stepped forward and dropped to the street. As he fell, he pinpointed the positions of the six Hashimoto goons, plotting the most efficient order and methods of dispatching them.

He landed silently in a crouch behind them, undetected until the one in a black mask happened to turn and spot him.

The man startled. "Watch out!" he cried, fumbling his gun out of its holster.

Genji burst forward, shuriken between each finger.

Along with the masked figure, the shuriken took out the streetlights, plunging them into relative darkness. The other Hashimoto got off a couple of wide shots, which Genji easily avoided. The night echoed with the pings and blasts of ricocheting bullets. Heavy feet pounded against pavement as two men in red oni masks converged on him.

By the time they reached his position, guns blazing, he had somersaulted over their heads and seemingly vanished.

"This guy for real?" one of them muttered.

"Where'd he go?"

Above them, clinging one-handed to a stone facade, Genji flicked his free hand and the air whistled as two shuriken found their targets. *Thunk. Thunk.*

Genji landed next to the slumped bodies and faced a silver-masked woman, who fired at him. He easily deflected her shots with his short sword and advanced. Two more assailants rushed Genji, one with a bronze mask, one in white, swinging their rifles like clubs.

Sidestepping the shots, Genji slashed the weapons neatly in half and jump-kicked the bronze-masked man. Then he bounced off, spinning away with his blade out in a lethal corkscrew. The two crumpled to the pavement, leaving only the woman standing.

Genji considered what message to give her, planning to follow her back to the Hashimoto elders.

*Zzzzzt!*

An energy blast came from above like a lightning bolt. Genji deflected the attack, and it struck the woman instead. She collapsed backward and lay still. Wisps of smoke rose from her scorched clothes.

*What? Who?*

Genji traced the source of the attack to a new foe: a hulking figure glared down at him from behind an elaborate gold oni mask. Further distinguishing himself from the standard gang members, he wore a long leather coat over his suit and brandished a katana rather than a rifle.

*I have been looking for you,* Genji thought. The way this guy was dressed, he either was in charge here, or he thought he was.

Sojourn hadn't wanted Genji to come here, let alone engage enemy combatants. But since the Hashimoto lieutenant had now challenged him directly, Genji would bring back more than intel. A Hashimoto lieutenant would be a valuable prize for both Overwatch and the local authorities.

In the space of that short reflection, the Hashimoto lieutenant unleashed a volley of energy beams from his katana. Genji dodged as the powerful blasts cratered the pavement around him.

The enemy's blade crackled erratically with energy similar to that generated by his own Ryu-ichimonji—a blade honed and augmented by Toshiro Yamagami.

*So . . . it is true,* he thought.

Genji had lost track of the man since the fall of the Shimada clan, but if the Hashimoto now had him and his technology, that could explain how they'd so swiftly seized Tokyo. Toshiro's blades were powerful, requiring specialized training to wield. Judging by the unstable sparking and buzzing of the lieutenant's weapon, it seemed he hadn't fully mastered it.

Dust and small chunks of cement pattered against Genji's armor. He ducked and

rolled, coming up on his feet and whipping shuriken toward the lieutenant. But the attacker was gone as swiftly as he had appeared.

*You won't get away that easily.* Genji silently scaled a nearby building, mantling onto an old-style gabled roof. He scanned the horizon for movement—and nearly missed the flutter of the leader's coat as he dropped to a lower ledge in the distance.

Genji raced after him along the rooftops, careful to keep an eye on the fleeing man below while not losing his footing. Rather than a grid, Harajuku was defined by irregularity. It was practically a maze, with angled streets between buildings, an untold number of narrow alleys branching off the main roads, and numerous dead ends.

Genji had spent his early years seeking escape from these labyrinthine streets—from the weight of his father's expectations, the unspeakable things his family did to make money, the gaping hole his mother made when she left them. Genji had eventually flown the cage his family had built him, and yet here he was, mired in the same ugly business.

Tokyo may not have changed much since the days of his youth, but Genji had.

He continued to track his quarry: gaining on him, evading crackling blasts of energy when he got too close, losing sight of the lieutenant only to pick up his trail again. It was a game of cat and mouse.

Until the lieutenant scored a lucky shot—not at Genji but at the roof he was leaping onto. The corner of the building crumbled and slid away beneath his feet, sending him tumbling several stories down to the sidewalk.

Genji's armor absorbed the hard fall, but he still felt the impact in his bones.

He gritted his teeth against the painful jolt and climbed to his feet. He had survived much worse than this, mostly intact. He looked around and swiftly spotted the lieutenant looming in the darkened doorway of a dilapidated building. Genji started toward him, and the leader slipped inside.

A broken neon sign winked off and on above the entrance, and Genji smiled to himself. The man had finally made a mistake.

*Now you are in my territory.*

Genji hurried into the abandoned arcade. He'd passed many hours here while his father did business in the city. He couldn't tell if the place had fallen on hard

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times recently or if it had shut down long ago, but he recalled the layout and could use it to his advantage.

Genji crept through the darkness, moving slowly and silently among game cabinets in various stages of disrepair. He kept low, listening close for any noise or sign of movement.

Suddenly, a flash of light—screens began lighting up all around.

“The storm’s coming!”

“Fight!”

“Ready? Three, two, one, go!”

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Genji’s fingers danced across the buttons of the arcade machine, inputting a series of commands to his small, pixelated avatar on the bright screen: Heavy Punch, Heavy Punch, Light Punch, Light Punch, Light Kick, Heavy Kick. His main in *Fighters of the Storm*, Stone, was at half health, while his opponent, Thrall, was hanging on to a sliver. It was the final round, and if Genji could pull this off, he would claim the high score.

A large shadow fell across the screen. Genji dared not turn to look, and he didn’t have to: only one person eclipsed light in just that way.

*Game over*, he thought.

Hanzo’s arrival and what it portended was only a slight distraction, but that was all it took for Genji’s focus to break, for Thrall to finish Stone.

CONTINUE? the screen flashed over Stone’s bruised and bloodied face, along with the quote, A WHOLE LOT OF BAD LUCK, BUT WE’LL FIGURE IT OUT.

“Lose anything?” Hanzo asked.

“Yes. But I almost beat my high score.” Genji typed in his initials on the screen, adding it to the long column of his achievements.

“I was referring to this.” Hanzo placed something on top of the arcade cabinet. A little girl giggled and kicked her sneakers against the side of the machine.

*Kiriko!* Genji was so absorbed by the game, he’d completely forgotten about his sensei’s daughter. She often tagged along on his trips to Kanazaka, though he was the first to admit he wasn’t an ideal babysitter.

“Hi, Genji!” she chirped.

“I found her outside,” Hanzo growled. “*Alone.*”

Genji sighed. “I told her to stick close—”

“No. This is not her fault,” Hanzo cut in.

Kiriko’s cheerful expression wavered.

Genji turned at last to face his brother. Hanzo was already acting like one of the stern elders of their family’s ninja clan. That had to be why he’d grown that silly goatee.

Genji was not in such a hurry to grow up, no matter how much people told him to. “What’s the big deal? She’s fine. Right, Kiriko?” Genji winked at her.

“*This* time. Perhaps because I was here.” Hanzo tossed up his hands in frustration.

“Aw, no one would mess with the pocket ninja.” Genji watched Kiriko’s face. Her eyes were downcast, hands squeezing her knees, ankles crossed.

Hanzo pounded his fist against the arcade machine. “This is serious! If you insist on letting her tag along on these childish excursions, remember that you are *responsible* for her. Do you know what Sensei would do to us if Kiriko was kidnapped or hurt or . . . ?”

Genji had begun to think Hanzo actually *cared* about the girl, but he should have known: Hanzo was only ever concerned about getting into trouble. How it would hurt his reputation and standing with the elders. How it would reflect on Father.

Kiriko started bawling.

“See?” Hanzo gestured to Kiriko as if her outburst proved his point.

Genji took Kiriko down into his arms. He held her close and whispered so only she could hear: “He’s right. I’m sorry.”

“Please . . . don’t . . . fight.” She gasped the words between sobs and sniffles.

“Don’t worry. We’re just having a disagreement. It’s what brothers do.”

Genji was somewhat surprised she was so upset. She had seen them bicker before, and he’d meant it when he said she was tough. Usually, this kind of thing didn’t get to her.

“How did you find us, anyway?” he asked Hanzo.

His brother glanced back at the bar. The proprietor looked away when Genji glared at him. Everyone in Kanazaka served at the pleasure of the Shimadas. Some were truly loyal to them. Genji couldn’t decide which was worse.

Genji was a Shimada too, of course, but he didn’t like intimidating and coercing people into doing what he wanted. Hanzo was especially skilled at that sort of thing. “The clan elders have eyes everywhere,” Hanzo reminded him, more gently. “Speaking of which, the reason I came here: Father has called an emergency clan meeting. It would not look good if you missed another one.”

“It wouldn’t look good for me or for *you*?”

“It would not look good,” Hanzo repeated.

“Father doesn’t expect me to be there,” Genji said.

“Because all of his expectations are placed on *me*,” Hanzo said.

Genji crossed his arms. “Maybe you need to loosen up a little.”

Hanzo’s eyes flashed.

Genji settled Kiriko on his shoulders. “I will come to the meeting, dear brother.”

“Finally—”

“If you can beat me in a match.” Genji stepped back and swept a hand toward the *Fighters of the Storm* cabinet.

Hanzo grumbled, but he took up position at the player two controls, his hands awkwardly resting on the joystick and buttons. Genji started up a new match. He selected Stone again, the closest the game had to a ninja character. He was not surprised to see Hanzo select the hulking Garrosh Hellscream.

Genji looked over to his brother, only to see a faint smirk tugging at the corner of his mouth.

“Only in a video game do you have a chance of beating me.”

Genji, Hanzo, and Kiriko were late getting back to Shimada Castle that night, where they found every light within blazing. Genji's skin crawled at the sound of his father shouting. Though he was too far away to make out the words, the anger behind them was clear.

Hanzo cursed under his breath and ran ahead. Genji hastened after him. The sleeping Kiriko woke in his arms, her whole body tense.

"What's wrong?" she asked in a groggy voice.

"Kiriko!" Asa Yamagami called out, and Kiriko relaxed. Genji lowered her to the ground and followed as she ran to her mother. Asa, sensei to the Shimada boys, had stopped Hanzo on the path to the castle.

"Where have you been?" Asa asked Kiriko, taking her hand.

"*Hanzo! Genji!*" Their father's voice was clearer now.

Hanzo shifted uneasily.

Asa cast a worried glance toward him and Genji. "Don't make it any worse," she said. Then she ushered Kiriko away, toward the dojo.

The brothers found Sojiro in his office, pacing back and forth like a caged animal. He froze when Hanzo and Genji appeared, relief washing over his face. But his expression quickly hardened.

Genji steeled himself for more shouting. Instead, his father's voice was hushed, rage trembling just beneath his words.

"The clan leaders wondered why they were called for a meeting that my own sons could not be bothered to attend. I looked like a fool. *Again.*" He rubbed his brow with one hand.

"I am sorry, Father," Hanzo said.

Genji held his tongue. He couldn't add anything to these proceedings that would help their situation. A good ninja knew when and how to become invisible.

"*Get your house in order,*" Sojiro went on. "They suggested that one who cannot control his family, who lacks the loyalty and respect of his own children, cannot demand the same from his subjects. He looks weak to his enemies, and weaker still to the clan he leads."

Hanzo continued staring down at the tatami mat beneath his feet, not yet daring to look up.

Genji didn't show him the same deference from the sidelines.

Sojiro leaned heavily against his antique wooden desk. “When you weren’t there, I feared the worst. I couldn’t know . . .”

He trailed off, looking back at a difficult time they all remembered. He had never been able to live down their mother, Rumiko, leaving them years ago. Her calming presence and cool judgment had tempered their father’s anger, his fear. She was beloved by the people, a soft heart that inspired loyalty and trust in all who knew her. Their father needed control of the people to keep power over the clan elders—a set of rich, self-interested fools who would sooner strip the clan for parts than raise the wealth and status of the whole. In navigating the insult of her departure, Sojiro had come down harder on the boys. A show of strength.

*Show* was the right word for it. Calculated, performative gestures designed to keep the clan under his thumb and his sons under a watchful eye.

It was a lesson Hanzo had learned well. He was obsessed with being the perfect son and heir, leaning into his act as a tough guy. Hanzo was so worried about appearances, he kept trying to hold Genji to his own inflated standards.

Genji’s brother and father thought he was weak and undisciplined for continuing to live exactly as he was, for not changing to better serve the clan. But Genji considered himself weak because he lacked the bravery to do as their mother had done, to leave this all behind.

“This is your fault,” Sojiro said.

It took Genji a moment to realize his father was moving toward him.

“I am *always* protecting you—sparing you from the hard choices I must make, that your brother will someday make!” His father’s face was splotched red. “You endanger us all by shirking your duties to this clan, *Sparrow!*”

Genji braced for a blow, but Hanzo eased himself between his brother and father.

“If anyone is to blame, it is I, Father,” Hanzo said. He lowered his head. “I began some new training exercises, and I required a sparring partner. It took us far from the castle. We were so engaged, we lost track of the time. We will do better. I promise it will not happen again.” Hanzo glanced at Genji. “Ever.”

Genji was so astonished he could only dip his head, cowed into silence.

“We will make the clan proud,” Hanzo said.

Sojiro drew himself up, but he didn’t seem to be looking at them; his eyes

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were focused on something far away. He stepped back and stumbled. Hanzo rushed forward to steady him. Sojiro shoved him away.

“You, I expected better of.” He spat the words and then turned his back, dismissing them from his presence.

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The next morning, Genji rose at dawn with one thought on his mind: He needed to be somewhere else. *Anywhere* else. He sneaked out of the castle, wondering if this was the day he would never return. If his family had pushed him far enough.

He heard activity inside the dojo as he passed. He went to the shoji door and listened through its thin paper. Hanzo was training inside as always, or at least he was *hitting* things. *Did he even sleep last night?* Genji contemplated who Hanzo was channeling his anger at as he practiced on the training dummy. Was it one of their enemies? Or his father?

Or Genji?

He placed a hand on the door, considering entering to tell Hanzo to take a break. But he knew that doing so would only result in Genji being conscripted into an early-morning training session, or another argument—a fight he did not want right now. He’d had his fill yesterday.

He dropped his hand and stepped back. The dojo was quiet again for a moment, but as he walked away, he heard training resume, perhaps slightly more emphatically than before.

With no clear destination in mind, Genji found himself on the path to Kanazaka as usual. Breakfast at the cat café was just what he needed, and maybe he’d run into some friends.

Genji paused, realizing he was being followed.

The footsteps trailing him were soft, suggesting the person was small or light, and out of sync with his own steps. Either they were completely inexperienced at this, or they weren't even trying.

Genji turned to see Kiriko. She kept walking toward him, eyes on his, arms straight at her sides. She really was a ninja; even at her young age, no one noticed her unless she wanted them to. She seemed troubled.

"Hey," Genji said. "Want to come to Kanezaka with me?"

She shook her head. "No. And you can't go either."

"Huh?" He crouched down and opened his arms, beckoning her closer. "What's up, pocket ninja?"

"If you go to the arcade again, you'll get in trouble."

Genji sniffed. "It's *my* trouble to get into."

She stamped her foot. "No! When he's mad at you, he's mad at everyone!"

Genji rocked back onto his heels. She may as well have slapped him. She looked like she might want to. And maybe he had it coming. What was it Hanzo was always saying? *You only ever think about yourself.*

Genji resisted the responsibility Hanzo kept trying to hold him to because he didn't want it. Since he couldn't meet the expectations of his brother and father, maybe they should tune *their* expectations of *him*. He never asked to be a scion of Sojiro Shimada, didn't want to think about the things his father did to make their money or keep their position, and he certainly had no interest in one day doing those things himself. He just wanted to be free of it all. His father called him Sparrow, but a sparrow could fly away without a thought. If Genji ever left . . .

He sighed. "You cried yesterday when Hanzo and I bickered, and now you don't want me to go back to the arcade? No one will even know I'm gone, Kiriko. And if someone finds out, I'll handle it. Unless . . . something else is going on?"

Kiriko looked uncertain. Then she screwed up her eyes, took in a deep breath, and a stream of words rushed out: "Whathappenedtoyourmom?"

Genji blinked rapidly. Kiriko had never known Rumiko Shimada, but she had heard stories about her from time to time. Not from him or Hanzo, and certainly not from Sojiro. But Genji's mother had been the heart of the family and Kanezaka; people still remembered her, spoke kindly of her.

“Well, she left . . . a long time ago,” he said.

“Why?”

“I suppose she felt like she had to.”

Genji remembered feeling angry and confused, lost without her, but unlike Sojiro, he had moved past that and understood she must have had a good reason to leave. Genji often thought about looking for her one day, fantasized about her finding *him*, once he was no longer under his father’s control. But most of the time, he just hoped she was happier wherever she’d gone. Looking back, he remembered how unhappy she had been, when she didn’t think anyone noticed.

“Families are stronger together,” Kiriko said emphatically.

Genji smiled, wishing his family had stayed as close as Kiriko’s—Asa and Toshiro Yamagami and Kiriko’s grandmother, Mrs. Kamori, who ran the local shrine. They were steadfast, loyal, caring. Everything Genji’s own family had once been, before these years of distance and hurt had wedged them apart.

“That depends on the family,” he said. “Listen, even if I leave one day, I’ll find my way back to you. Home isn’t just a *place*, it’s the *people* you care about.” He held out a hand to her. “Why don’t we return to them?”

Kiriko rubbed her eyes and then took his hand.

With that behind them, she chattered excitedly all the way back to Shimada Castle, about *what* Genji had no idea, because he was lost in his own thoughts. He mulled over her words and what they revealed about himself—until he realized they’d walked right into a trap.

A legion of ninjas now surrounded them.

Genji drew his wakizashi and gestured for Kiriko to stay close to him. He was impressed that she didn’t seem frightened at all, her eyes focused on him. He circled her protectively, taking in the eight black-garbed warriors. Were they part of a rival clan? The Hashimoto mostly stuck to Tokyo; surely they wouldn’t venture this far. Then were they assassins, enemies of his father, sent to end the Shimada line? How had they infiltrated the compound without anyone sounding an alarm?

When the circle opened to let a woman in a white keikogi and black hakama through the ninjas’ ranks, he understood: these were Shimada clan ninjas.

“Is this some attempt at a coup, Sensei?” he asked.

Asa laughed. A moment later, Hanzo entered the circle and crossed his arms, his jaw set.

Genji tilted his head toward Kiriko. "You set me up!"

"I was following orders!" she squeaked.

"What is this?" he asked Asa and his brother.

"You haven't been coming to training, so we are bringing the training to you," his sensei said. "It was not my idea, but it is a good one."

She nodded to Hanzo, and he approached Genji, eyeing his drawn sword warily.

"You should have joined me in the dojo," Hanzo murmured.

"Your idea?" Genji asked.

"Father's decree."

"Of course it is."

Asa clapped her hands. "You can only beat these overwhelming odds by working together, using the lessons I have taught you. Try to stay on your feet, but failing that . . . at least try to stay conscious." She looked at her daughter. "Kiriko."

"Aw!" Kiriko wailed. "I wanna play too!"

"When you're older," Asa said.

Genji sheathed his sword. "Take care of this for me."

Kiriko grinned and held her arms out. He placed the weapon across them, then watched her totter off, murmuring, "I am the sword in the shadows."

Asa ushered her daughter away and then stepped back herself. She bowed to her students and raised an arm, slashing her hand down vertically. "Begin."

The ninjas attacked.

Genji was out of practice, unprepared for so many opponents at once. He was used to sparring with one or two ninjas, or facing off against Hanzo himself.

For his part, Hanzo was not much better prepared. He handled his own assailants well enough, at first. He dodged and kicked and punched as ninjas came at him, accustomed to training on his own.

They seldom ever fought *together*. Their cadence was off, and more than once they accidentally turned on each other before realizing their mistake. It was a new and humbling experience.

"There's no way we can win," Genji said. A blow glanced off the side of his head, and stars exploded behind his eyes. He kicked out, missed.

“That does not mean we should give up.” Hanzo grunted and ducked a roundhouse kick, then swept his opponent’s other leg, sending him tumbling to the ground. Genji rushed to his aid but was met by a kick to the stomach, which sent him tumbling into Hanzo.

“I never suggested that,” Genji said. “I’m still here.”

Realization dawned on Hanzo’s face, and a moment later a foot smashed into it. He bellowed, rising and heaving his brother off him, toward the impertinent ninja. Genji shouted as he crashed into the enemy. Genji lay there, stunned, as the ninjas piled onto him, pressing the air out of his chest.

Hanzo tried to pull them off his brother, but that left him vulnerable. While Hanzo was turned away from the remaining ninjas, one of them leapt, landing on his back. Then another, holding on to his broad shoulders. Another hung off one of his arms. One by one, they glommed on to him, immobilizing him and slowly bringing him to his knees.

Genji struggled to breathe until he heard Asa clap, and the ninjas seemingly vanished into thin air. He wheezed and searched for Hanzo. His brother seemed more annoyed than injured, and he wouldn’t look at Genji or Asa. Knowing him, he was beating himself up for losing to his own subjects in such spectacular fashion. Word of this would get back to the elders.

“Even a loss can lead to victory,” Asa said. “However, the sons of the dragon rise”—she shook her head in disappointment—“or *fall* together. It is not enough for only *one* of you to come to training. Your teamwork needs much improvement. I will see you at the dojo tomorrow at dawn. *Both of you.*”

Genji slumped his shoulders and nodded. He couldn’t afford to skip training anymore.

At least, not often.

He rubbed his sore arm, wishing the lesson hadn’t been so rough, though. “Why is Sensei always so hard on us?”

Hanzo glared at him. “Because you are too soft to be a Shimada.”

Genji sighed. He thought they’d had a moment in the fight, but it seemed they were still going to do this.

“So. You have considered leaving,” Hanzo said tentatively.

Genji pulled himself up and dusted his jacket. “You and Father want me to be something I’m not. Maybe it would be better for everyone if I go.”

There was a pain in Hanzo's eyes, pain that Genji didn't think possible. His brother had grown so strong and steely, like their father, but Genji could see he'd made Hanzo bleed.

"You run away all the time. And whenever you aren't there, I take the brunt of Father's anger. Do you think I want to be responsible for you? I come after you because I couldn't bear—" He stopped himself. He inhaled slowly and continued in a hoarse rasp: "Hard lessons are easier to take with you beside me."

He sighed heavily and walked away. Genji watched as his brother disappeared from view.

He'd never considered that Hanzo felt the weight of his duty as much as Genji did, maybe even disliked it as much as Genji. That he was protecting Genji every time he failed to meet their father's expectations. *Families are stronger together*, Kiriko had said. And from this new vantage, Genji could see the bitter truth: since their mother left, Hanzo had been doing his best to hold what was left of their family together.

Genji should have been sharing this burden . . . or at least told his brother he wasn't alone in carrying it.

Brush rustled nearby, and Genji looked up, thinking his brother had returned.

But there was nothing except his sword, nestled in the high grass.

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That evening, Genji headed to Hanzo's room, hoping his brother had cooled off enough to hear an apology. It looked like Kiriko had the same idea. She was waiting outside Hanzo's door already, putting down a plate piled high with mochi. She smiled when she saw Genji, but as soon as he reached the door, she knocked and dashed away.

"Wait!" he called after her, but she ignored him and continued around a corner at the end of the hall.

Genji froze, caught by surprise and indecision. Suddenly uneasy about this conversation, his first impulse was to run like she did. Maybe Hanzo wasn't even—

The door slid open, and Hanzo looked out at him. "Genji," he said gruffly.

"Um." Genji crouched and retrieved the plate of treats, holding it out to his brother.

***“WHENEVER YOU AREN’T THERE, I TAKE THE BRUNT OF FATHER’S ANGER. DO YOU THINK I WANT TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOU? I COME AFTER YOU BECAUSE I COULDN’T BEAR—” HE STOPPED HIMSELF. HE INHALED SLOWLY AND CONTINUED IN A HOARSE RASP: “HARD LESSONS ARE EASIER TO TAKE WITH YOU BESIDE ME.”***

Hanzo took it awkwardly. “What’s this?”

“I came to apologize, but this gift is from a pocket ninja . . . who also wants us to make peace,” Genji said.

Kiriko edged back into view, wringing her hands. “Please don’t fight anymore,” she cried. Then she sucked in some snot and frowned sternly, a chilling reflection of Asa’s signature glower. “Don’t *leave*, Genji.”

Genji sighed, the full weight of the preceding days coming to bear. His brother glared at him, no doubt queuing up a lecture.

“Don’t worry. I’m not going anywhere.” Genji beckoned her over and gave her a hug. “Sometimes people say things they don’t mean. Things that they regret.”

Hanzo shifted his stance.

Genji soldiered on. “Brother, I promise to try harder, but it has to be in my own way. I can’t be anything other than who I am or pretend that what Father wants is what I want. But I will help ease your burden and keep our family together.”

Hanzo was silent for a long time, looking down at the plate of mochi. Finally, he said, “You know, this really is too much for one person to eat. But with three of us . . . I’m sure we can do the job.”

He opened the door wider, inviting Genji and Kiriko in.

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In retrospect, this had obviously been an ambush. That was the problem: things always seemed clearer when you were looking back.

The music and bleeps of the arcade machines lighting up around him nearly disguised the crackle of energy as the Hashimoto lieutenant materialized before

him. The flickering glow of screens reflected from oni masks, gun barrels, and blades—more Hashimoto goons looming in the shadows between the arcade cabinets.

Genji slowly turned. He was surrounded. But before he could heft his sword, he heard a *twang*, and an arrow sprouted suddenly from the lieutenant’s shoulder, the feathers at the end of the shaft still quivering.

The man plucked out the arrow and was still staring at it when a volley of dozens of arrows hit him all at once and sent him flying into the shadows. Genji didn’t have to look to know who it was, but he did anyway.

Hanzo loomed over him. He slung his bow behind him and then extended an open hand to Genji.

Genji hesitated. Whenever the two of them reunited, they always ended up fighting, trading blows and words that cut more deeply than blades. Genji’s body had healed from their previous encounters, but some scars would never go away.

And yet they kept finding each other. As the distance between them had grown, their fates remained intertwined, like the characters from their father’s stories.

In this moment, Hanzo appeared different from the tortured, lost man he’d been. For the first time as far back as Genji could remember, his older brother looked at peace.

“What are you doing here?” Genji asked Hanzo.

“Saving you, apparently,” Hanzo said gruffly.

Genji felt a twinge in his chest as he took Hanzo’s hand,.

“The last time we met, you asked me to pick a side,” Hanzo said.

“Brother . . . I have always been on your side.” Genji pulled him into an embrace, and to his surprise, his brother held him tightly.

*He really has changed,* Genji thought.

Hanzo finally let him go. “And you’re welcome,” he said.

*Some things always stay the same.*

Genji nodded. “I’m glad you’re here, but it’s still two against too many.”

“Not quite,” came a familiar voice behind him. Not many people could sneak up on him like that, but he knew one who could.

Genji spun to face a young woman with a red kitsune mask holding Ryu-ichimonji.

“Welcome home, Genji.” Kiriko grinned as she handed him his sword. “Took you long enough.”

Genji stood, stunned for a moment—he hadn't seen her in years. She was no longer a child, but the mischief hadn't left her eyes. She reached for an ofuda and pinned it to his chest. He felt a warmth flow through him, the pain from his wounds fading.

He looked up at the two of them, reunited after so much time had passed. He didn't know what he would feel in this moment, but now that it was here, there was a lightness in Genji's heart. A hope even as the odds surmounted against them.

The Hashimoto pressed in on the trio, guns raised. Only now they were joined by reinforcements: soldiers in gray tactical armor.

Talon.

There was the answer Genji had been seeking. He only hoped he would be able to confirm Talon's involvement to Overwatch. All they needed to do was make it out of here alive.

Bullets whizzed past them. "This is a bit much, even for Talon. Any ideas?" Genji asked, deflecting gunfire with his blade.

"Try to stay on your feet," Kiriko said. Her kunai flashed as she leapt into the fray. She moved so quickly and silently in the darkness, Genji could only track her by the cries of her victims and thuds as they hit the ground.

Genji and Hanzo pressed their backs to each other. They attacked, defended, turned in perfect synchrony, just as they had trained—Genji taking out anyone who got close enough to attack with blades, Hanzo's steady stream of arrows keeping the back line at bay.

Sweat dripped into Genji's eyes and he breathed heavily as they fought to hold their ground, but the waves of enemies kept coming. Genji's arms grew heavy, and arrows flew from Hanzo's Storm Bow with less frequency.

Finally, there was a lull in the action, as the wounded Hashimoto and Talon operatives limped and dragged themselves into the shadows at the edges of the arcade.

Kiriko reappeared at Genji's side—but the fact that he heard her approach was a sign that she, too, was reaching her limits. She lifted her mask and wiped her brow.

"We won't last much longer, pinned down like this," Hanzo said, adjusting his bow. Genji noted his quiver was almost out of arrows, most of them lodged into the escaping Hashimoto.

Kiriko twirled a kunai in one hand. "We need to clear an exit."

“I will distract them, get you an opening,” Genji said. “But I came here scouting for Overwatch. I must infiltrate the Hashimoto stronghold to gather more information about their capabilities.”

“Trust me, you do not want to do that,” Hanzo said. “At least, not without backup. They have a hit out for the Shimada who remain.”

“And it looks like they’re not the only ones,” Kiriko said.

All around them, the arcade flashed with crackling blue energy. A fresh wave of Talon troopers stepped forward, backed by more Hashimoto, brandishing Yamagami steel.

“Looks like the Hashimoto have been keeping my father busy,” Kiriko said in a small voice.

Hanzo nodded. “Where are they getting all these fighters, these resources?”

“They are working with Talon,” Genji said. “Or *for* Talon. I’m still trying to figure that out.”

The Hashimoto lieutenant strode to the fore of the small army, limping slightly.

“He is still walking. You’re losing your touch, Brother,” Genji said.

Hanzo grunted and grimly nocked one of his last arrows.

The enemy commander drew his own weapon and gestured for his forces to advance. Slowly they pressed in on the trio, surrounding them.

Genji regarded Kiriko and Hanzo silently, considering the bonds that had brought them back to one another. When he had needed them most. But he had a job to do in Tokyo, and they could help.

“I have to find out who is behind all this,” Genji whispered. “You must leave me.”

“No!” Kiriko said instantly. “We just found each other again. We’re stronger together.”

“I know we are, but you can help me more on the outside. Take this.” Genji snuck a small comms device into Kiriko’s hand. “It will connect you to Overwatch. I’ll need an extraction, and they can track my location to the Hashimoto base. They may need backup.”

“We have a team in Kanezaka,” Hanzo said. “We’ll come back for you.”

Genji placed a hand on Hanzo’s shoulder. “I’m counting on it.”

Hanzo clapped a hand over Genji’s briefly and then gestured to Kiriko that they should go.

She scowled. "I still don't like this."

"Even a loss can lead to victory," Genji whispered.

"We aren't playing a game," she said.

"See you later, pocket ninja." Genji turned from her and faced the Hashimoto lieutenant.

The man continued to march forward, backed by his soldiers.

Genji drew his sword and charged into the fray. Instantly, the room exploded into gunfire and crackling energy. He raced around faster than the enemy could keep up, hacking and slashing at their weapons and working his way toward the Hashimoto lieutenant.

In the distance, he heard arrows whistling through the air and clanging metal. Then he was engaged in swordplay with the lieutenant.

He put up a good fight, good enough for a distraction. The forces seemed content to watch him and their leader locked in deadly combat. He blinked stinging sweat from his eyes and risked a quick look back. Kiriko and his brother were safe, slipping away unnoticed.

Trembling, overcome with fatigue, Genji weakly blocked the lieutenant's blade and could not recover. He stumbled and fell to his knees, planting his sword in the floor and holding on with both hands in an attempt to remain upright. He gasped for air, his mask suddenly too close.

Hands grabbed him roughly and held him fast. They took his sword and bound his wrists behind him.

Darkness fell over his eyes.

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It might have been days or only hours later that Genji was unceremoniously awakened and dragged out of a small, stale cell. Still blindfolded, he was shoved down a long hallway and into a bright room. In the light, he could make out only vague shapes directly before him. The lieutenant who'd brought him here had bent his knee before a shadowy figure behind a desk, and Genji was forced to kneel beside him.

"What is this supposed to be?" The figure spoke in a disdainful tone. There was a mechanical, robotic tinge to her voice.

*“EVEN A LOSS CAN LEAD TO VICTORY,” GENJI WHISPERED.  
“WE AREN’T PLAYING A GAME,” SHE SAID.  
“SEE YOU LATER, POCKET NINJA.”*

“A Shimada, judging by his sword and fighting style,” the lieutenant said.

Metal thunked onto the desk.

“Really?” the elder said, leaning forward. “You have my interest.”

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

E. C. MYERS is a *New York Times* bestselling author. He won the Andre Norton Nebula Award for his first novel, *Fair Coin*, and is the author of the SOS thriller series, four *RWBY* young adult books, and interactive novels in the *Five Nights at Freddy's* franchise. His recent publications include *Gamers: Attempting Connection*, *Little Nightmares: The Lonely Ones*, and *Kaiju Gaga* (Choose Your Own Adventure Jr.).