

## Paranormal Investigations Task Force

“I don’t wanna be in here!!” screamed Arisa. She pounded on the bathroom door, whilst three girls were chuckling on the other side.

“Come on, stop being such a baby!” said the orange-haired girl, Satsuki.

“It’s not even real, just say it!” said the yellow-haired girl, Misa.

“You wanted so, so much to join our club and now you’re flaking out?! Sorry, but we don’t allow crybabies into the film club.” said the cat-eared girl, Chiyoko.

“Guys, we shouldn’t be messing with this stuff! What if it’s real?!” said Arisa.

“Well then, we’ll be the talk of the campus! So do it!” said Chiyoko.

“We’re not letting you out until you do it!” said Satsuki.

“Yeah! Do it, do it!” said Misa.

Arisa knew better than to perform the Mirror Mirror ritual. Her parents had always told her not to mess with the spirit world. That included stepping on people’s graves, destroying home altars, and provoking spirits. The Mirror, Mirror ritual was most certainly breaking the last rule. With no way out, Arisa tried to devise a plan in order to procrastinate on the subject and try to trick her friends into letting her out.

“Guys, I don’t even know how to do the Mirror Mirror ritual!” said Arisa.

“Pfft, Bullshit. We saw how you perked up when we mentioned it,” said Satsuki.

“N-No I didn’t.”

“Yes, you did! I saw you! Plus, your family has always believed in that paranormal bullshit, so we know you know how to do this!”

Arisa came from a line of paranormal believers starting with her great-great-grandmother and continuing to her from her mother.

“That’s not what the means! All I know is that it summons Lady Kotera and she kills you!” said Arisa.

“Well then, allow me to elaborate on what to do. Oh.. and FYI, you’re still not letting out of the bathroom until you do it,” said Chiyoko.

And with Arisa’s procrastination plan failing, Chiyoko began to summarize the story.

“The Mirror Mirror ritual is supposed to summon the ghost of Lady Kotera, who according to legend was married to a samurai named Iida. One day, Iida returned from battle with a magic mirror that would enhance a woman’s beauty. All Kotera had to do was say “Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the prettiest of them all?”. The mirror would reply “You are” and suddenly Kotera would become the most beautiful woman in the land. Her new beauty would allow Kotera to get anything she wanted: more food, more gifts, and more money—”

“And then she decided to have sex with a farmer!!” interrupted Satsuki.

“Girl! What the hell? I was trying to be scary and then you just come in and screw it up!!”

“Come on Chiyoko, that was getting so fucking boring! I had to spice it up a bit!”

“Sigh... Anyway as I was saying...” continued Chiyoko “ Anything she wanted, she got with just her looks. Over time, Kotera turned into a spoiled woman who would use her beauty to entice men to sleep with her in exchange for money. This went on for a while, until one night when Iida went out to run some errands. Earlier, Kotera had hidden a farmer in the closet of Iida’s room so that when he was gone... and as Satsuki said... both Kotera and the farmer could have sex. However, as the two were “in flagrante”, Iida returned to the house as he realized he had forgotten something. When Iida returned to his room and found Kotera and the farmer together in his bed, his body filled with rage. Iida then drew his katana, slew the farmer, and slashed Kotera across the forehead as punishment for cheating on him. Kotera instantly ran to the room where the magic mirror was being held and when she got inside, she barricaded the room door. Within a few seconds, Iida arrived and started ramming the door. She arrived at the mirror, her face blood-soaked from the gash on her head, reciting the words: “Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the prettiest of them all?”. Nothing happened. Again she said,” Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the prettiest of them all?”. Nothing happened again. Kotera said one last time in a screaming voice “Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the prettiest of them all?!!!”. The mirror replied “You.... are not!” and shattered into pieces. In anger and pain, Kotera let out a blood-curdling scream. Soon, Iida was able to bash down the door and, still filled with rage, he cut down Kotera where she stood....”

“Yep,” said Satsuki “and legend has it that if you light 3 candles at a mirror at night and say the words “Mirror, Mirror on the wall, who is the prettiest of them all?” thrice, then Lady Kotera will appear behind you, covering in blood. If she thinks you look prettier than her, she will attack you and give you a deep gash on your forehead, similar to the one she received for cheating on Iida. Did you get all that down Arisa? ... Arisa? ... ARISA!!”

Arisa didn't have time to answer because she was quaking in her shoes. *This* was what Arisa was afraid of. *This* was why she didn't want to do this. Even though she had tried to dispel the story in her mind, the slim chance of it being real derailed the entire process. Arisa was so close to just ramming the door repeatedly and then sprinting out of the house.

But Chiyoko, Satsuki, and Misa wouldn't let her be a film club member (or even let her out of the bathroom) unless she performed the Mirror Mirror ritual. The three girls had also already placed three candles in the bathroom, meaning they had actually planned this whole scheme out beforehand. All Arisa had to do was light them.

Arisa begrudgingly took out the lighter that she had in her pocket and lit all the candles, one by one. She then looked up at the mirror, and took a deep breath, mentally preparing herself for what she was about to do.

"Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the prettiest of them all?" said Arisa.

She then heard the whispering and giggling outside of the three girls.

"Dude, she's actually doing it! Keep going, Arisa! You have to say it three times, remember?!" said Satsuki.

"You'll be fine, Arisa. It's just a dumb urban legend," said Chiyoko.

"M-Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the prettiest of them all?" said Arisa. By now, she felt as if her heart was in her throat. She nervously began to bite her nails and stroke her brunette hair as she mustered up the courage to say the phrase one last time.

"Come on Arisa, you gotta scream it this time!" said Satsuki.

“Yeah, scream it, scream it!” chanted Misa.

Arisa slowly balled up her fists, both in anger and fear. She knew that what she was doing went against everything her parents had warned her about. She knew that this was a bad idea. But she desperately wanted to join the film club or any club for that matter. Arisa had been an outcast for much of her life due to her “superstitious” parents. In a world where few people believe in the supernatural, she felt, at that moment, unlucky to be born with parents who were believers. Though she loved her parents and believed in the supernatural herself, she wanted to break free and join the normal people. She wanted to fit in. She wanted friends. At this point, she wanted all this more than life itself.

Shoving her fear into a mental jar, and her fists violently shaking, Arisa yelled at the top of her lungs:

“MIRROR MIRROR ON THE WALL, HOW IS THE PRETTIEST OF THIS ALL?!!!”

There was silence. An eerie silence. A silence so palpable, you can cut it with a knife.

“There ya go, Arisa!” yelled Satsuki.

“See, you had nothing to worry about Arisa,” said Chiyoko.

Arisa was not listening to the girls. Her eyes were open wide, her head was twitching, and her entire body was shaking with complete fear.

There was another figure in the room facing opposite Arisa. A woman in a kimono with a large, bleeding gash cut across her forehead. Her eyes were blacker than charcoal, and her head

was twisted unnaturally to the side. The woman then turned her head 360 degrees around to look at Arisa. Then she let out a blood-curdling scream.

“Arisa? You ok in there?” said Satsuki.

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Yoshi sat at his desk, eating his boxed lunch, and listening to a podcast with his headphones. He was so swamped with school and homework that day that he hadn't eaten anything, not even breakfast. It was one of those days where everything was due all at once, and every break between classes was spent working on one assignment or another. At least at work, Yoshi could take a breather since all he was supposed to do was file reports. Not only that, but the office was quiet tonight as almost everyone else was off patrolling the streets of the Imperial City or completing a mission.

“You're eating your lunch, now? At 6:00 PM?” said a female voice.

Yoshi lowered his headphones to see Rin, his best friend, and superior squadmate.

“Yes, Rin. I am eating lunch now. In case you didn't remember, I was up to my ears in homework. On top of the fact that I have 4 classes today!” said Yoshi.

“Still, it shouldn't get to the point where you don't eat. You need to take better care of yourself!” said Rin.

“I know, I know... it's just... it's just that my work-school-personal life is crazy right now. I have like a thousand things I am thinking about right now...”

“Well, maybe you should take your mind off of it. Possibly, by ... oh, I don’t know... coming over to my dorm and playing the new StrikeZone 3 game!”

“Wait, you have that?! I thought it wouldn't come out for another two mon-”

Both Yoshi and Rin’s conversation was interrupted by the ear-piercing blaring of the alarm. That could only mean one thing: a paranormal rupture, or a violent ghost sighting, has occurred somewhere in the city. While the alarm is blaring, the voice of the Battalion Commander comes over the intercom.

“Attention! Private Takayama Yoshi and Company Commander Kamisato Rin! A Paranormal Rupture has been reported at 1337 Kawaguchi Drive. I need both of you to investigate, immediately! Battalion Commander Hanekawa, over and out!”.

As soon as the alarm stops, Rin and Yoshi look at each other and nod in acknowledgment. Rin wrote down the address given to them by the Battalion Commander and both Rin and Yoshi sprinted out of the office and into the locker room. There they quickly dressed into their uniforms and grabbed their designated weapons (Rin, her sword, and Yoshi, his rifle). Yoshi was an Arquebusier, which in the Paranormal Investigations Task Force meant that he was best at killing entities with firearms such as pistols, rifles, machine guns, and explosive launchers. Yoshi’s rifle (specifically an L1A1 rifle) was specifically blessed to do damage to entities. However, for a powerful entity, it would take a lot more than a few bullets to kill them. Rin, meanwhile, was a Bushi, which meant that she was good at using melee weapons such as swords, kunai, spears, and axes. She had specifically chosen to use a katana that was enchanted in order to kill entities.

Now that Yoshi and Rin were equipped, they both rushed outside to a squad car. After buckling up, Rin input the address into the car's GPS while Yoshi turned on the car, flipped on the car's siren, and put the pedal to the metal.

"Let's do this!" said Yoshi.

Rin gave a slight nod of acknowledgment and the pair drove out into the city.

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By the time Yoshi and Rin arrived at the house, there was already a host of police officers and SSAT men armed with rifles and submachine guns outside, illuminated by the red and blue flashing lights of police cars parked around them. As Yoshi and Rin got out of the car and approached the house, a police officer approached them.

"Excuse me, sir and madam, where are you two going?" said the officer.

"Oh, we need to get inside the house to do our work," said Rin.

"Sorry Ma'am, but you're not allowed inside. Only uniformed police officers, SSAT, and inspectors are allowed inside. So get outta here!" said the officer.

"But sir, we gotta get in, it's important!" said Yoshi.

"Yeah well, you're still not allowed in. So beat it, ya scabs!" said the officer.

"Look, sir, it's very important that we get in. If we don't, very bad things will happen!" said Rin.



“Ok, then tell me. What could be so important that you would need to head into an active crime scene to go do it? In fact, how do I know that you two are not involved in what’s happened here? You better give me a good reason and you better do it NOW! ” said the officer.

“Well, for starters, we’re from a “governmental” organization,” said Yoshi.

“Oh *really*? Which one?!” said the officer.

“PITF, sir,” said Rin.

“What the hell kind of name is that? Some kind of homeowner’s association? Look, I already have to deal with homeowners associations enough already. I don’t need anymore ok?” said the officer.

“No. It’s the PITF. Paranormal Investigations Task Force. Didn’t the police higher-ups tell you who we were during your orientation?” said Rin.

The officer pointed her finger at Rin to say something, but then he stopped. He looked down for a moment as if to think about something. Then his eyes grew wide. At that moment, both Yoshi and Rin simultaneously knew that he figured it out. The officer then looked back up and them, eyes filled with bewilderment and awe.

“Seriously?! Ya guys... are a thing?! Like an actual organization?!” said the officer.

“Yep! I know it’s weird seeing us for the first time, but we do in fact exist,” said Yoshi

“Holy shit! I thought that the PIFT was just a gag that the force made up!” said the officer.

“Oh we are indeed real,” said Rin “And what is also real is the thing we need to deal with inside that house.”

“Oh shit... You guys better go on ahead then.... Oh, wait! I have to ask this! Is the government telling us officers to keep quiet about ya guys? I mean, shouldn't the public know about what's going on?” questioned the officer.

This question took Yoshi aback a little. It would make sense that the public should be informed about this. They are the ones who suffer the most from paranormal ruptures. Plus, this could mean there would be more people enlisting in the PITF. At that moment, Yoshi couldn't see any reason not to tell the public about what they did.

“It's to prevent fear,” said Rin. “The public's or any human's natural first reaction to a reality-shattering revelation would be fear. The entities we fight and kill feed on fear. The more fear there is, the more powerful the entities become, and the more PITF soldiers and civilians die from powerful ruptures. Not an ideal situation I know, but it's better than the alternative.”

“Shoot, I see... Well, I won't keep ya. Go and do what ya need to do.” said the officer.

“Thank you, sir,” said Rin as signaled for Yoshi to follow her to the house.

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As Yoshi and Rin got closer to the house, Yoshi smelt something weird. There was a metallic smell emanating from the house.

“Hey Rin, what's that smell?” asked Yoshi.

Rin turned to Yoshi with a concerned look on her face.

“Blood...” said Rin.

Yoshi's eyes grew wider as Rin said this. He then let out a sigh and mumbled a curse word under his breath. If the scent was this strong, it meant that at least a couple of people inside the house were dead, and Yoshi grimaced at the fact of seeing a bloodied dead body. He had taken cases with dead bodies before, but those bodies were usually strangled or had their necks broken as that was usually the most common way a paranormal entity would kill these days.

As Yoshi and Rin entered the house, they could already see a big trail of blood. Upon closer inspection, it looked as if the body was dragged across the floor. Yoshi felt his stomach churning at the sight of it. He then felt a hand gently touch him on the shoulder. It startled him a bit, and he quickly turned his head, only to see Rin looking at him with a determined look on her face.

“Hey, keep your head together. I need to check that hallway down there. I’ll check over this way.” said Rin.

“Ok.... Ok, I will,” said Yoshi. As Rin unsheathed the sword and walked down the opposite corridor, Yoshi equipped his rifle and moved down his designated corridor. He tried to move quietly, but the creaky floorboards and dead silence of the house were betraying him with his footsteps echoing through the corridor. That’s when Yoshi noticed something, a sliver of blood coming from a closet door.

*Oh, shoot... There’s a dead body in there isn’t it?*

Slowly, Yoshi walked up to the closet door where the blood was seeping out from. He gripped his rifle hard with his right hand, gulped, and swung the door open with his left hand. Even though he knew there was a dead body inside, it still didn't prepare him for what he saw.

There was a girl with orange hair, slumped over among a pile of brooms, with her forehead cut open, and a waterfall of blood already pouring out from the wound. Yoshi's stomach churned and his face cringed in disgust at the gory sight. He used the radio on his uniform to contact Rin:

"Rin... I found a body here..." said Yoshi.

"And?" said Rin.

"It's a girl, late teens... and there's a big gash on her forehead..."

"That's just like the body I've got over here."

"Shoot! There's another one?"

"Yes. She's late teens, has cat ears, and also has a gash on her forehead."

"Ok, what kind of entity are we dealing with here?"

"Possibly an Onryō..."

An Onryō, or vengeful spirit, was a paranormal entity that was capable of causing harm to the living, which included injuring or killing people and in some rare cases, could cause natural disasters. With a reputation like that, everyone in the Paranormal Investigations Task Force knew to keep their guards up when dealing with them.

“Fuck me... Ok, how should we approach this...” said Yoshi.

“Keep searching. If we see anything or anyone, contact via the radio,” said Rin.

“Got it...Ok....”

Yoshi’s heart skipped a beat as he said this. He had only heard of Onryōs from first-hand accounts from other Task Force soldiers. Onryōs were fast, agile, and very ferocious and Yoshi had never been up against one of them.

“Rin...” said Yoshi over the radio.

“Yes?” said Rin.

“I...I don’t know if I can do this...”

“What are you talking about? We have faced entities before.”

“Yeah, well, those were just regular ghosts and demons. They weren’t near an Onryō’s power. Plus, I was usually with you defeating them.”

“Well, the only advice I can give you is, just don’t die.”

“That doesn’t fucking help me!”

“Well look, I’m going to investigate this room. So do not radio me unless it’s important. I cannot hold your hand on every mission we go on. You need to fight for yourself otherwise you won’t be useful to anyone.”

“But Rin!”

“Over and out!”

And with that, Yoshi was all by himself, in a haunted house, with a potentially terrifying Onryō on the prowl.

As Yoshi moved further into the corridor, he came into the living room where the lights were off. There was a kitchen to the right side of the room and large windows all around the back and left side walls showing off the city and its bright, multi-colored lights in the background. Yoshi slowly moved into the living room, (after turning his rifle’s flashlight on), and that’s when he noticed something out of the corner of his eye. There was an ajar door in the living room that slowly moved. At first, Yoshi thought (more like convinced himself) that his eyes were playing tricks on him, so he continued to investigate the rest of the living room. That was until he heard the sound of a small item being dropped. When Yoshi turned his head around to see where the sound came from, it was in the direction of the door.

“Ok fine, I’ll check it out!”

Yoshi slowly inched his way up to the door, right pointer finger gently stroking the trigger of his gun, ready to fire. Yoshi thought to himself that there was only one thing that could move a door like that: an entity. He tried to calm himself down and say that the entity was just a regular ghost or demon, but then the scene of the bloodied girl in the broom closet flashed in his mind and instantly squashed his confidence.

“It’s definitely an Onryō that’s doing this...” Yoshi thought.

Still, by curiosity or perseverance, Yoshi continued to inch towards the door.

Yoshi took a deep breath, grabbed the doorknob, and flung it open. Instantly, he heard two girlish screams, which caused him to girlishly scream as he shined his rifle flashlight into the room. Yoshi's screams dissipated when he saw two girls, one with blonde hair and one with brunette hair inside the closet, huddling together in fear. After staring at Yoshi's silhouette for a few seconds, the girl's fearful expressions started to calm down a bit.

"Who are you?!" exclaimed the brunette-haired girl.

"P...Private Takayama Yoshi of Paranormal Investigations Task Force, i...identify yourselves!" said Yoshi.

"I...I'm Yatagami Arisa, and..she..she's Akagawa Misa.." said Arisa in a shaky voice.

"Is she gone?!" said Misa.

"Who?!" said Yoshi.

"Lady Kotera, she attacked us, and now she wants to kill us," said Arisa.

"Lady Kotera?!" said Yoshi in a shocked voice.

"Yoooooooooooo!!!"

The guttural scream sent a shockwave of fear up Yoshi's spine. He instantly turned around to see a woman in a kimono with black eyes, a blood-covered face, and a huge gash on her forehead.

“THEY ARE TOO PRETTY!! THEY MUST DIE LIKE THE OTHER TWO!!!” screamed Lady Kotera. She ran towards Yoshi whilst screaming gutturally. Yoshi managed to fend her off by wounding her with a few rifle shots and hitting her with its buttstock.

“Get back inside and stay there!” Yoshi ordered the girls.

“Ok!!” Arisa and Misa said as they closed the door.

Yoshi felt screwed. For the first time, he was facing an Onryō, an entity that had more power than a regular ghost or demon.

HAHAHAHAHAHAHA! WHAT'S WRONG LITTLE BOY? TOO SCARED TO MOVE? JUST GIVE UP AND ILL PUT YOU AND TWO BITCHES OUT OF THEIR MISERY.

Yoshi was then overcome with a feeling of despair and hopelessness. Morbid thoughts began to course through his brain veins. Thoughts of wanting to just shoot himself and die, thoughts of wanting Lady Kotera to plunge her claws into his chest, thoughts of his life being one of patheticness and failure, and thoughts of how he could never be reliable without someone else helping. Yoshi began to feel his will to live being sucked out by Lady Kotera like a slushie. Yoshi thought to himself: “Crap, she’s sucking out my life force...Is this how I’m going to die? By having this Onryō sucking my life force out of me? And drown in just a big, black sea of despair? Is this it?”

That’s when it happened. Though the thought in his mind was small and came from seemingly out of nowhere, its effects were profound:



*Come on Yoshi! Don't let this Onryō suck the life out of you. You need to stand up for yourself. You can do this!! I know you can! Remember, this is what God had planned for you to do!!*

That's when Yoshi felt a surge of energy. Energy that consisted of anger at Lady Kotera for having such a 'colorful personality', determination to be better and stand on his own two feet, and reassurance that he has the power to defeat.

This surge also made Yoshi then take a deep breath, and remember his training in dealing with high-level entities. Then he raised his rifle and fired a shot in Lady Kotera's direction, piercing the entity in the stomach area.

AAAAAARRRRRRRGGGGGGHHHHH!!!!!! YOU SON OF A BITCH!!!

As Lady Kotera jumped away, Yoshi noticed someone out of the corner of his eye. It was Rin, hiding in a hall. Yoshi mouthed for Rin to help him. However, Rin just shook her head and mouthed back: "Your turn...". Yoshi instantly knew what she meant: His turn to bring down a powerful entity.

Yoshi kept his eyes on Lady Kotera as she jumped around the room looking from an angle to attack. It was a good thing that Yoshi shot Lady Kotera when he did because since she was wounded, Lady Kotera could not disappear as other entities would. Still, Lady Kotera decided to attack from the right side. Yoshi was able to see her long claws reflecting the moonlight from outside as she moved. She darted to a table to Yoshi's side and lunged from the table at him to try and catch him off-ground.

But Yoshi was quick on his feet and shot three bursts of rounds into Lady Kotera, who retreated behind a couch. This entire time, Yoshi stood with his back to the door for safety. That's why he was able to track her easily. If he was in the middle of the room, Yoshi would have had a much harder time. Lady Kotera began to grow angry. She appeared from behind the couch and hatefully stared at Yoshi.

YOU BASTARD!!! JUST LIVE ME THE FUCK ALONE!!! THOSE GIRLS NEED TO DIE!! YOU NEED TO DIE!!! EVERYONE NEEDS TO DIE!!! MY BEAUTY WAS TAKEN AWAY FROM ME AND I CAN'T HAVE IT... NOOOOO OOOOOONEEEEE CAAAAAAANNN!!!

"Shut up!" said Yoshi as he shot two more rounds at Lady Kotera. She leaped behind an island in the kitchen.

"Your time of killing people is over Lady Kotera! Just accept your fate and prepare to be vanquished!" said Yoshi.

NEVEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEER!!!

Yoshi decided now was a good time to quickly reload his gun, but right as he was switching out his magazines, Lady Kotera decided to lung at him for one final time. This time she bounced to the ceiling and from there she lunged down at Yoshi. At that very moment, it looked like Yoshi was going to die. It looked like Yoshi was going to be slashed into a bloody mess. Just then, a straight flash of blue light zipped in front of Lady Kotera with a long SHING of a sword. Lady Kotera's body separated into two parts and dropped to the floor in front of

Yoshi with a thud. Lady Kotera let out one last dying breath before her body slowly broke into pieces and disappeared.

Yoshi stood in place. Shocked.

“Huh, so you were just going to stand there while she was going to make shish kabob out of you?”

Yoshi looked to his side to see Rin with her glowing blue Katana unsheathed.

“No! I was just reloading... Nevermind... I thought you said that you weren’t going to help me back there?” said Yoshi.

“Well, what kind of squadmate would I be if I let you die?” said Rin.

“I had everything under control!”

“Right... Anyway, good job at finally standing up for yourself. When I write my report on this mission, I will be sure to include your bravery in it. I’m proud of you.”

Slowly but surely, a smile and a blush crept across Yoshi’s face.

“Thanks....Rin...” said Yoshi. “So, is she dead?”

“Yep, Lady Kotera is finally defeated,” said Rin.

“Thank God..” said Yoshi, breathing a sigh of relief. “Girls, it’s safe to come out”.

Yoshi stepped away from the door as it slowly opened, and Arisa and Misa slowly crept out.

“Is she gone?” asked Arisa.

“Yes, Lady Kotera has been vanquished. You’re safe now,” said Rin as she turned around.

“What about Satsuki and Chiyoko?! Are they ok?!” exclaimed Misa.

Instantly Yoshi and Rin looked at each other with saddened faces. Misa seemed to notice and instantly knew what had happened. Upon which, she fell to the floor, sobbing.

Rin picked Misa up and began to walk her to the front of the house where the police were waiting.

“Hey...” said Arisa.

“Yes?” said Yoshi.

“Does your organization deal with things like this all the time?”

“To put it mildly, yes.”

“Well then, can I join?”

To be continued....