

# LIGHTNING THE ARGENT

— English Translation Rough Draft —

FEBRUARY 1, 2024 DRAFT

This is a rough draft of the English translation of *Lightning The Argent* by Kaihou Norimitsu. There will be some random jagged edges of the translation process laying around. Parts of this *will* change in the “final” version once it’s done and posted online.

You can send me translation or edit suggestions if you want but I’m a lazy, stubborn, goat and probably won’t listen.

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Thanks for reading! I appreciate all the support.

— Sol Radguy



Patch Notes —

2024-01-01

- First draft! Posted on Lightning The Argent's 23rd birthday.

2024-02-01

- Added additional thanks to Credits, added a Proofreader too.
- Added a warning about not bookmarking this document directly from the Neocities host, since the file will get deleted and replaced with each update to this draft (meaning the bookmarked page will get destroyed).
- Added some clarification to the bounty hunter book thingy to make the buildup and reveal at the end of c1p2 better. Thanks for the feedback!

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[01 COVER]  
[02 RAVEN, JACK-O', THAT MAN, I-NO]  
[03 SOL IN FIRE]  
[04 SOL & KY FIGHTING CATHEDRAL]  
[05 CREEPY CHILD BIRTHDAY PARTY]<sup>1</sup>

# GUILTY GEAR X

Lightning The Argent

Kaihou Norimitsu

Famitsu Bunko eBook Edition

—

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Rubber Duck / Shottie, Raven, Sydney, the Library of Illyria server, those that have offered constructive feedback, and to everyone that's listened to me complain.

If you enjoy this book please consider supporting it by purchasing a copy on the publisher's site:

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1. Image placeholders. These have text on them that I need to translate eventually. Images will be added when the final draft is done because the files are huge and stupid to work around.

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[SRG: I'll translate these last two chapter titles once I get to them later. Context could affect my word choice.]

AFTERWARD

PROFILE

— NOTE —

This story contains excessive descriptions of gore, blood, and violence, and may be unsuitable for some readers.

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# — CHAPTER ONE —

Generals & Beasts

- 1 -

London, October 26, 2180 C.E.

— LALALA —

A song of joy, without any hint of embarrassment.

It was, metaphorically, the courtship call of a little bird that was welcoming its first spring.

It was the cheerful dance of a fawn, bouncing around in the sun's abundant rays.

It was such a song.

A song older than words, celebrating light and life.

A voice that sang its love to all things in the world.

It was the kind of voice that warmed the hearts of those who had ears to hear it, and made them feel at peace with themselves.

It was filled with the joy of someone who had lived in the depths of darkness and now, for the first time, knew light.

The owner of the voice did not know that from which it came.

That voice reached the darkness beneath the earth where it could not be heard.

The man who heard the song of joy cast down his eyes with sorrow. His face looked both old and alarmingly young.

“Justice... Are my design plans still in place?” The man mumbled with disgust as three shadows surrounded him.

To one of the shadows, the man called out, “Raven. Will you secure and erase the... sample?”

In the darkness, the shadowy figure gave a short nod, then disappeared.

“Ten billion lives have been lost, yet you still seek power...”

Creatures that kill their own people, tear up mountains, scour the earth, pollute the

oceans, and corrupt the winds. An organism that has an uncontrollable urge to destroy, and whose only desire to live is to destroy itself and the ecosystem that surrounds it.

Hence, humanity was said to have deviated from nature. But mankind knew. Even the best trained goat was capable of turning a verdant island into a wasteland with its gluttony, starving all the beasts on it, including itself. Humanity may have deviated from nature, but the instincts of nature are not so noble to begin with. So perhaps even the tyranny of man is the natural order of things when viewed from a different perspective.

Somewhere in the universe, there may be a place for sinful mankind. The man thought of the ten billion people who died at his hands and what that meant.

The next person to hear the singing voice was the "Beast." The Beast was sleeping. It was born only to fight and to kill in perpetuity, to do as it was commanded, until the moment its life ended. Now, when all of its capabilities were forcibly sealed off by command, it was asleep. Even its heart had stopped beating.

The Beast did not dream. All that goes through its mind is periodic body maintenance and reexamination of past battles. Even now, the Beast repeatedly re-simulates battles it once experienced, analyzing them from every angle. The Beast was created to kill. It has no extra functions.

The Beast in the simulation had just arrived in a city called London. Massive skyscrapers turned to sand before the might of the five-headed monster's roar. Seven swords at the ends of seven limbs slaughtered every warrior who approached. No arrow or spear could pierce its hide. Few could even come close to it. The primary enemy to the humans in the battle were a small parasites that nestled within the flesh of the Beast, and could turn both warriors and children who had failed to escape into gory chunks of meat.

In a single day and night, London was reduced to ruins. But then, the enemy was joined by a warrior.

Under his command, the exhausted troops that were on the verge of collapse quickly regained control and gathered in a deliberate formation. They exerted all their strength and raised a magic forcefield to strengthen the man.

Lightning, fire, wind, water, and all other forces saturated the atmosphere. The gray-haired man stood alone in front of the Beast as a terrifying wave of heat surged across the earth.

The weapon in the man's hand was unknown to the Beast. The single-edged blade on the end of a thin hilt was as long as an adult's body and resembled a giant meat cleaver rather than a weapon. It was a weapon with a terrifying weight that dealt a brutal death

from slashing steel on high. It was a weapon that was the embodiment of a coup de grâce. The Beast did not move.

In its place, the monstrous parasites formed a row in front of the man. Each was larger than an ox; some had arcs of lightning sparking from their horns, while others blew toxic fumes from their noses. Not one of them yet held the honor of bathing in the spilled blood of a warrior. Dozens of them leapt at the man at once.

The man swung his huge weapon with one right hand, and the atmosphere cracked open from the rush of air filling the vacuum in its wake. The monsters were cut in half or burst apart without even being touched. The man rapidly closed the gap between them. But the Beast's reflexes far exceeded that of humans. Seven bladed limbs struck the man from seven blind spots without the slightest delay. The man dodged four of them with a twist of his steps and kicked off the ground into the air before the remaining three touched him.

Stars of magic plasma flying through the air acted as catapults for the man. He channeled a propelling forcefield of "ki" energy<sup>2</sup>, and each time he stepped between the stars, it launched him forward in an arc.

The man rose several meters<sup>3</sup> above the heads of the Beast in a rapid, twisting spiral. The trajectory, however, was anticipated by the Beast. The moment the man reached the pinnacle of his flight, the Beast twisted its entire body. Its bladed arms, given a new opportunity, coiled like a snake and struck at the man again from the front and back. At the same time, five mouths released five roars.

However, a wave of sonic energy rushed at the man faster than sound. He caught it with only his left hand then, with an exhalation, he released explosive ki from that hand and repelled the shockwave. In time with the explosive crash of energy, the man turned and slammed his blade into the Beast's head, its sword-like limbs scattered behind him.

With a thunderous roar, one of the Beast's ten eyes was crushed, and blood poured out of it.

The man's subordinates cheered after witnessing such a successful first blow. But the Beast and the man knew that the battle had only just begun....

After three days and three nights, the man took three of the beast's heads and four of its bladed limbs, depriving it of its freedom of movement. But even so, the Beast did not die. The Beast's life force was overwhelming, and the man had other battlegrounds awaiting him. As a result, the Beast was sealed away.

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2. 気

3. JP: 数十メートル. Tweaked slightly because "several tens of meters" flows weird.



Thirteen wedges were sewn through the magical channels<sup>4</sup> of the beast's body, and weights were placed on two of its heads. A Sentinel was also placed nearby in case of emergency. An area of the city was permanently sealed off, but this was not wholly necessary. The surrounding buildings were destroyed without mercy, and a toxic miasma spewed forth from deep cracks in the earth. Even in places that could barely be called "safe," the boiling earth had formed solid ripples of waves that made it difficult to traverse.

...And, with that, the Beast's simulation returned to the beginning. After thousands and thousands of repetitions, the memory had lost its focus, and even the Beast could no longer tell which parts were original and which were the results of simulation calculations. Perhaps the Beast was only dreaming after all. A dream of a successful battle filled with agonizing screams and rivers of blood.

All scars heal with time. And so can humanity adapt to any environment necessity dictates. Little by little, people cautiously returned to that hellish city. As 60 years came and went, a settlement had been established in the blockaded area not marked on any map...

— LALALA —

The dream was interrupted for the first time in a long time. Capable of melting even the most frozen of hearts, the song was received by the Beast apathetically. The Beast had not been given a heart. But still the voice reached the Beast's closed information processing system and alerted it. The Beast slowly stirred and the earth shook slightly beneath it. Though there were no further commands, and its body did not regain its freedom. After a few moments, the Beast returned to its dream.

With the Beast, the Sentinel also awoke. Sensing signs of change in vital operations of the Hydra-type bio-weapon, the Sentinel immediately reactivated all of its own functions. The pulse of awakening observed by the Sentinel for a moment, however, quickly faded away.

As the Sentinel was preparing to return to its dormant mode after forwarding the alert to headquarters, another pulse caught its attention. It was faint and from another section of the city. The Sentinel quickly produced an "Insect." This Insect functioned as scouting eyes for the Sentinel. It sent the Insect out into the field on a gust of wind.

Rain poured down in the Insect's vision. This area was in an old technological zone; the

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4. 経絡(けいらく) meridian (e.g. in acupuncture) channel; one of the lines connecting vital points in the body. - via jpdb.io.

rain could not be blown by the wind towards the sea or allowed to runoff into a reservoir and instead fell directly on top of the city. The downpour roared deafeningly as it splashed on the cobblestones, bringing a milky mist that drowned the entire city. Even the night watchmen and robbers didn't bother walking out into the rain, which would beat them down and freeze them to the core.

The Insect was chasing a shadowy figure that dared venture out in the splashing rain. He was a young man. According to the Sentinel's analysis, he was between 24 and 26 years old. The soaking wet clothes clinging to the man's body made sloshing sounds as he moved. He was wearing a white shirt and jeans, but his face was hidden from the Insect.

He screamed as he ran. Raindrops stung his wide-open eyes, and blinded him. It poured into his open mouth and choked up his throat. Still the man kept running, screaming and gurgling.

The man's feet caught in wet moss on the cobblestone pavement and he tumbled hard onto ground. The air in his lungs was forced out, and he lay motionless for a moment, breathing heavily. A pool of blood formed around him, which the rain washed away.

The man slowly pulled himself up and looked back fearfully. Sprawled on the ground, holding his cheek. Fresh blood trickled from between his pressed fingers. His vision widened. There were numerous small holes in his face. It was as if a thousand fishhooks had been poked through the flesh of his cheek and gouged back out. Again, another scream echoed through the alley. The man's movements became weaker and weaker, until only his limbs were left twitching feebly. The Insect's audio data processing began, and the noise of the downpour was identified and filtered out. All that remained was the sound of the man's weak breathing. The sound of blood dripping onto the cobblestones... and one more.

— LALALA —

Unbeknownst to the Sentinel, a small choir sang a little song of joy in the distance. With each chorus, the man's flesh was pinched, gouged, and devoured. Already his neck turned red, and white bones were exposed. Even when the man stopped moving, the singing continued. At that moment, a presence suddenly entered the detection range of the Insect.

"This is Raven. Moving to retrieve the target."

The Sentinel's attention shifted from the corpse to this other man. In the next moment, the system of information that flowed in from the Insect returned a multitude of inconsistent errors. In short, the man who had just appeared could not have been there. Not even a trace of him appeared in the video or audio recording logs. Either he had

somehow fooled all of the Insect's sensors, or he had appeared there faster than the sensors—which were capable of processing 600 frames per second—could detect.

Even in that moment, the man still did not technically exist. There was a reaction in the visible light range, but no reaction in the infrared or ultraviolet wavelengths. The man also did not produce any sound, and the ultrasonic waves emitted by the Insect were absorbed in all bands. In other words, as far as the Sentinel was concerned, the man was a human-shaped void... an impossible apparition.

After a millisecond of hesitation, the Sentinel resumed its analysis, which was limited to the visible light spectrum. The man who had addressed himself to nothingness as "Raven" was clad in a black body suit, with thin spines protruding out of it in various parts. His hands, fingers, and face, which were exposed through the suit, were wrinkle-free but dried up like an old man's with several needles also piercing through them.

Among the spines was a particularly thick one that stabbed through his forehead like a horn, and protruded out through the back of his head. His left eye was tightly closed, and the pupil of his right eye—wide open—shone with a silver sheen. Curiously, not a single drop of rain fell around him, and his long, thin, white hair flowed gently. A puddle of water retreated noisily from where the man had turned his feet.

Raven slowly crouched down and inspected the bloody man. A black sludge-like substance lay around the man's neck, whining and eating his flesh. When Raven swiped his hand at it, the sludge spat out green fluid and stopped moving. He stuck his hand into the sludge and leisurely lifted it.

Up close, it looked like a tangled ball of string. Countless black tentacles were intertwined, repeatedly splitting and reabsorbing back into each other. At the tip of each tentacle was a round mouth with a ring of sharp fangs. Raven nodded as he put it into a bottle he had taken out of his pocket.

Suddenly, Raven turned his head and stared straight at the Insect. Then he turned his wrist as if he was preparing to throw something. The image signal blurred and cut out.

The Sentinel, now confronted with an unprecedented situation, slowly began to explore its memory field.

In a dark room, countless lights flickered. The lights were powered by electricity—a rarity nowadays. In the center of the room was a large table with a monitor above it. Two bright dots appeared on the map above the monitor: a large red dot and a smaller white one.

"Two echoes of 'Amoretto' have been identified. One is the 'Hydra' and the other is a resonance group. We have confirmed feedback from all three."

“What’s the Hydra’s response time?”

“About one millisecond. It’s asleep, but it seems its dormancy has lessened, hasn’t it?”

“Even so, the resonance was successful...”

The light from the monitor shone down on the face of a man at the table. He had a large aquiline nose and a pointed mustache. But above all, his small, cruel eyes gave a brutal impression. If one had to venture a guess, it could be said that he had the face of a hyena, not of a tiger or a lion. His arms were crossed and a smile spread across his face as he stared at the screen.

“How many resonant groups do we need to reach critical wakefulness?”

“We still need to adjust the synchronization, but... roughly 500 units.”

The hyena stood up and smiled broadly, as if he had just found a fresh carcass.

“All right, gentlemen, let’s make a toast. It took us twenty years to get here, but it was well worth it. This weekend we’re going to change the world.”

Applause echoed throughout the small room.

- 2 -

Blue, yellow, red, green, and purple.

Five colors of light flowed around the small room. The appearance of the room itself was simple, and the soft light—the only light—that filtered through the luminous stained glass windows made it clear that it was part of a church.

Bathed in the multicolored light, documents were lightly turned by long, delicate, fingers. At the end of these fingers was an arm clad in white ceremonial dress, which in turn led to a smooth curve over bare shoulder and neck.

The figure's smooth skin and slender body were like a perfectly balanced sculpture held to a most elegant degree. If one were to guess an occupation based on appearance alone then, yes... perhaps a dancer would be most fitting. The handsome face and radiant blond hair above the shoulders were also appropriate for a dancer, but there was a slight cloud of gloom darkening the face's expression.

The sorrow of nobility, like that in a painting. But the eyes betray all.

They were the eyes of a murderer.

With his eyes calmly surveying the battlefield, the man abandoned the completely hopeless in order to save those who still had a chance at survival. From his beautiful throat came not a song, but an order for his men to die.

Nearly all the men under his command accepted their fates willingly. He himself was always at the forefront of the battlefield, stepping through rivers of blood and mountains of corpses. The treasured sword in his hand, Thunderseal, not only led an army of a thousand men, but also cut down ten thousand enemies. Despite this, he was still a murderer, and he never forgot that.

His name was Ky Kiske. Since childhood, he had been a prodigious swordsman, and during the Great War—the Crusades—he led the Sacred Order of Holy Knights, which was said to be the last hope for mankind. After the end of the war, he demonstrated his command ability and intelligence beyond combat, moving on to serve as a public safety officer in the International Police Force.

With a glance, he assessed the details contained in documents sent from all over the world and devised effective strategies for them. Although the battlefield had changed, his job itself had not changed much. Instead of commanding troops with a weapon, he now urged his men to die with a single signature.

Suddenly, his finger stopped at a point on the page.

Ky's elegant eyebrows knit together as he frowned in silent contemplation for a moment. Then he stood up and went to the sink in the corner of the room. With a practiced hand, he boiled water and added the black tea leaves. Immediately, the dark leaves unfurled and began to dance within the hot water. While the pot steamed, he warmed additional teacups with the leftover hot water.

Ky poured the golden-colored tea, and just as the two teacups were full, the ebony door to the room slid open, and a black-clad steward appeared with a tea tray, as if he had been waiting.

"Thank you for your assistance, Mr. Kiske."

He was about 50 or 60 years old, but his back was straight and the wrinkles on his face and greying hair were the only signs of aging. From the way he looked at Ky, one could tell that he had an extraordinary amount of respect for him, who was about the same age as his own son.

Placing a tea biscuit from the tray next to his teacup, Ky picked up his documents and said, "I apologize for keeping you up late. While you're here, I was wondering if you could help me gather reports concerning London from the past 10 years?"

The steward nodded his head.

"Of course. I'll bring them to you shortly. Is there something amiss?"

Like Ky, Bernard was also a former member of the Sacred Order of Holy Knights, and during his time in active service, he distinguished himself as a staff officer. Now, he served as Ky's personal steward and analyst to help unravel the severity of international criminal organizations based on intelligence reports from multiple countries. Every day, Bernard combed through the mountain of documents sent from all over the world to the former headquarters of the Holy Knights in Paris, then summarized the vital information from the useless. Having known Ky since the days of the Great War, he knew exactly when and how much detailed information Ky would need.

It was unusual, then, that he had no idea what the specifics of Ky's request truly was for. Bernard tried hard to remember, but was sure that nothing more than the usual reports from London had come in. The amount of crime had not changed, and there was no indication that other organizations had moved into the area.

Sensing Bernard's confusion, Ky set down the teacup he was about to sip from and began to explain.

"Ah, it's just... I have a hunch. Hopefully it won't come true."

Ky showed him the paper he had separated from the others.

“This newspaper, here...”

Bernard closely examined the article.

The front-page headline of the London Alternative, which Ky presented, read, “Even The Company President Is Revived<sup>5</sup>?! Rejuvenating Miracle Cure Discovered.” It was a crude tabloid of about 10 pages in total. Next to the sensationalist headline was an image of a man in a black tailcoat holding up a small bottle. He was a gaunt man in his fifties or sixties, with sunken eyes and a long nose reminiscent of a hyena. The caption beneath him read, “Company president Sebass is committed to Vitae.”

Bernard nodded. The announcement of “Vitae” was being talked about all over the world, even outside of third-rate newspapers. Few people believed the hype about its promise to be the cure-all for a varieties of disorders, illnesses, and injuries, but there was certainly a lot of attention being paid to it.

After skimming through the entire article to be sure, Bernard concluded that the Vitae was only mentioned in passing with the rest of the article elaborating on a bunch of nonsense about President Sebass drinking Vitae, and whether or not he had three mistresses at once.

“The ‘Blackard Company’..? Needless to say, the rapid development of this company is quite extraordinary. They’re being investigated now, but it’s possible they may be in possession of illegal Black Tech.”

“No, that’s not quite it.”

Ky pointed to a small column on the side of the article. It read, in the style typical of obvious page-filler, “A Blood-Curdling Night Of Terror—The Wailing Spirit Of A Demonic Woman!”

Bernard raised an eyebrow as he continued reading.

The most eye-catching feature of the article was a picture of a woman with her breasts fully exposed. Beside her, a muscular monster drawn in a different, cruder, style. An anonymous letter had been received by the company, and it contained a horrifying story.

One cold evening, a man was on his way home from work when he was invited by a woman he met by chance to hook up with her at her house. After a very drawn out and detailed description

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5. 昇天

of how much he *enjoyed* himself, he woke up to find that the woman was no longer beside him. However, a strange singing voice could be heard coming from the next room.

So, the man peered into the room and there he saw... the woman in the form of a monster singing a song. The man didn't remember how he escaped, but he ran away to a human settlement where he asked about the woman and—

“—they told him that there had never been a street with that house on it. How nostalgic. A classic ghost story told even in the Holy Order.”

“It's a nice drawing, don't you think?”

At this, Bernard stared at the illustration. The woman had golden-brown skin and small eyes, and seemed to be of East Asian descent<sup>6</sup>. The overall cohesiveness of the illustration, with its risqué composition, certainly wasn't bad.

"Agreed. Though, I like just a little more around the waist..."

“That's not where this is going, I'm on duty,” Ky cut in, coldly.

“Ah, I misspoke.”

Bernard's eyes narrowed as he studied the drawing of the monster.

“I see now. It's without a doubt a terrifically well-drawn Gear,” he said, his gaze rising to meet Ky's.

For many people, “Gear” was synonymous with “demon.” To Ky, Bernard, and others who had spent their lives fighting Gears on the front lines, they were more cunning than the devil, more ruthless than death, and more blasphemous than the concept of sin itself.

The origin of Gears dated back more than 100 years.

In the year 2010, mankind solved the energy crisis. The system of supernatural control methods that brought about the unlimited source of energy was aptly called “magic<sup>7</sup>.” With it, conventional scientific and technological systems that had been polluting the environment were promptly banished and destroyed.

The energy crisis was solved, but the environmental one was not. Since the Earth could not

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6. 小麦色の肌と細い目は、東方系のようだ

7. 魔法



support an unlimited population, someone had to make a sacrifice, and that someone was always someone other than that proposed the issue. The major powers began to engage in skirmishes among the Third World countries. From there the expected quandaries arose, and the conflict intensified. In this conflict, the most “humane” weapon that emerged were Gears.

“Gear” is a general term for preexisting organisms that have been mutated by the administration of Gear cells. Theoretically, it’s possible to create Gears from any living organism, and since the form of the mutation can differ significantly, there are numerous variations.

They are invincible soldiers who need no supplies and follow orders with absolute obedience. Combined with their superior mobility, Gears are capable of subduing the enemy with a minimum amount of casualties.

Then God brought the hammer down on this sinful program.

Justice... A single Gear, bearing the name of righteousness, went beyond the intentions of its creator and led all Gears in an uprising against mankind. The Gears' rebellion, which started with the annihilation of the Japanese archipelago, swept over the globe, and an all-out war between Gears and humanity waged for a hundred excruciating years. The Sacred Order of Holy Knights, the most elite group of humans, stood in opposition to these rebels. A group of extraordinary individuals capable of single-handedly slaughtering Gears that could normally withstand the might of an army of 10,000.

The battle ended with the destruction of Justice and the resulting deactivation of all Gears.

Ironically, the Gear rebellion did indeed solve the human population problem. In addition, during the century of war, the destructive technological civilization that was the legacy of the old, previous, generation was largely destroyed. Moreover, science as a body of knowledge was all but abandoned.

There may well be little difference between God and Satan. In fact, although it’s never said publicly, some people are said to believe that the rebellion of the Gears was punishment for humanity’s dependence on profane science and technology and the destruction of nature.

However, Ky and Bernard, who had witnessed the damage caused by Gears and believed in the mercy of God, could not bring themselves to believe this.

Swollen muscles, four limbs and horns, the silhouette of its body. What lay before Bernard was indeed evil incarnate. It was a poor drawing, but there was no mistaking the medium-sized Gear.

“But... I don’t think it’s anything to be concerned about,” said Bernard. “It’s quite natural to use Gears as the monster in a work of art.”

Ky nodded.

“Yeah, I think so too. The only thing that bothers me is that the British haven’t had much contact with Gears since the early days of the Crusades. That aside, it’s a very accurate drawing.”

“It’s said that in those early stages of the war, Mr. Undersn sealed away a Hydra-type Gear. Even though it lost three of its heads and four limbs, it still did not die.”

With that, Bernard offered a quiet prayer. Only a year ago had Kliff, who had led the Holy Order for nearly half of the century-long war, passed away. Even after handing over the leader position, he continued to fight on the front lines until he was 70 years old, as if he was a superhuman. Both Bernard and Ky had been saved many times by Kliff’s stubborn, yet caring, nature.

Ky, too, looked up and blessed himself with the sign of the cross.

“Of course, it was only a year ago when the last of the Gears had been cleaned up. It’s not surprising that a civilian would illustrate one but, as I said... It’s just a hunch. I think my anxiety is getting the better of me on this.”

Despite his words, he was sincere.

“I understand. Preparations will be made immediately.”

Ky’s hunches were seldom wrong. Bernard began to consider which agent from among his subordinates would be right for the job.

“I would be very grateful if you would do so. Though, I will have to dispatch them—“

*DIIIIING-DOOOONG.*

A heavy bell rang out, interrupting Ky’s words. The sound of it was so familiar to Bernard and Ky that even now, five years after the war, it still stirred hatred and rage within them.

Many times had they been torn from their sleep by the sound, and forced to lead their men to their deaths in battle. Once a week did Bernard still hear the bell in his dreams, jolting him awake in the middle of the night.

It was the warning alarm for the arrival of a Gear.

Immediately they ran out of the room. Their feet stomped against the marble floor as they leapt over a railing and down into the main hall of the church. The bells continued to ring out with a deafening roar.

[ILLUSTRATION: KY JUMPING OVER RAILING TOWARDS GLOBE HERE]

Ky raised his right hand and the unpleasant sound subsided.

“Which way is it?” Bernard asked, out of breath after catching up with Ky.

Directly below the large bell was a huge globe, larger than even a person. The normally motionless globe now emitted strange noises. Three copper rings surrounding the outside of the globe rotated in a complicated orbit.

“North latitude 51 degrees, 32 minutes. West longitude 0 degrees, 35 minutes. The scale is... Megadeath-class.”

Ky’s voice was steady as he read. The rough definition of the Megadeath-class was its ability to destroy a city of one million in one hour. This was the definition immediately after the start of the Crusades. There were hardly any cities with a population of one million left on Earth anymore.

Bernard quickly replied, “Alright, let’s issue an evacuation order immediately. I’ll send out an urgent call to all former group members.”

“No, that’s no longer necessary. The reaction’s disappeared.” Ky said, composed.

Bernard stared at the globe intently. The bells did not sound, and the giant copper rings showed no sign of resuming their orbits. Two minutes passed, then three, while they watched. After a full five minutes had passed, Ky broke the silence.

“It seems that nothing more is going to happen. But, more importantly...”

“Hm?”

“The tea has gone cold,” Ky said, a little forlornly.

“Please, allow me to pour you a cup sometime,” Bernard smiled kindly and laughed.

Back in Ky’s workroom again, a pot of boiling water was poured into a warmed teapot. Then, tea the golden color of honey was poured into a similarly warmed teacup. Ky inhaled the refreshing and comforting aroma until it filled his chest.

“That’s a wonderful tea.”

“Thank you kindly, sir. Now then, what was the issue with that alarm bell earlier?”

“The sensor was old, so it could potentially have been a malfunction,” Ky said in a deliberate tone.

“Have you been betting on it malfunctioning for a while now?”

Bernard’s eyes flashed mischievously. Ky laughed in response.

“A deal for you, then,” said Bernard, “I’ll bet that it was a malfunction. If my bet loses, I get a nice bottle of cognac.”

“I’ll take it. If your bet is correct and it was a malfunction, you’ll owe me a cup of the second best black tea there is.” Ky laughed like a child.

“It was 51 degrees north latitude and 0 degrees west longitude. That area is located in the suburbs of London, near the Blackard Corporation district.”

“Yes, I know.” Bernard was unfazed.

“There’s a Megadeth-class Hydra Gear there, the one sir Kliff sealed up.”

“That is correct.”

“Knowing all this, you still want to bet on it being a malfunction?”

“Yes. I don’t take bets I can’t afford to lose. First off, if it really is a malfunction, I’ll have swindled a bottle of cognac from you, so it wouldn’t have all been for naught. And if it really was the London Megadeath waking up, well...”

He cut short and looked at Ky.

“There’s a good chance the bet will never get a resolution.”

Ky shook his head in minor disappointment.

“You’re truly no match for me. I’m in charge of this case but... I’ll go investigate this myself.”

Bernard nodded, and set his teacup down as well.

“When it comes to a Megadeath-class foe, there’s no one better suited. However, let’s keep this matter a secret for the time being. It’s fortunate that we seem to have been the only ones who heard the alarm.”

Since the death of the command unit, Justice, all Gears on the planet have been in a vegetative state. Except one, to Ky's knowledge. Most of the Gears had been disposed of, but the International Police Force learned that several nations were secretly recovering the dormant bodies of Gears and had plans to reuse them as weapons.

If it turned out that it was possible to reactivate a Gear that had been deactivated, it was guaranteed that it would eventually be re-purposed to some nefarious end.

"Well, that's our plan then. Can you arrange a cover for the case?" Bernard said, then he produced a letter from a document case.

"I was going to give it to you later, but you have been personally invited to a charity party hosted by the Blackard Corporation. Would you like to attend?"

"In truth, I'd rather decline. But the timing of this works quite well in our favor, don't you think?"

"Then I will make arrangements for the airship. Good night, sir. And don't stay up too late."

Bernard bowed and took his leave.

Ky forced a laugh, then retrieved another document from under his desk.

Stamped across the first page were the letters "FYEO"<sup>8</sup> in a bold font. The department-restricted article inside contained only the latest information on wanted bounties around the country and nothing else. The main layout for an article appearing on page one of the newspaper was laid out like this:

In the first half of the document were portraits of wanted bounties, the nature of their crimes, their abilities, and the reward for their capture. Skipping them all, Ky turned to the back of the page.

- International Most Wanted: No. EI3645 / 21801016 / Decapitated / Stray Sheep
- Domestic Most Wanted: No. US211 / 21801031 / Annihilated / Günther...

The list contained bounties caught that month, as well as when the bounty hunters—listed at the end—caught them, and when the reward was redeemed. It was a government publication and lacked elegance in its presentation. If it was a monthly report for the general public, it would likely read, in a large typeface, "The 10,000 Prisoners' Gang **Destroyed!** Peace returns to the Swiss night!" and so on.

The goal of most bounty hunters is to obtain a stable job or position. Even if they remain bounty hunters until the bitter end, they have little to lose by keeping their names on the market. For that

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8. "For Your Eyes Only"

reason, the names of those who have captured large bounties are prominently displayed.

If someone wants a job in killing that cannot be publicized without using names, then they become an assassin. Bounty hunters don't care about such frivolous details.

Ky turned to the next page.

- International Most Wanted: No. AF1278 / Decapitated / Nameless
- Dangerous Organization Assignment: No. EI332 / Annihilated / Nameless...

Occasionally, a case is purposely left without an attributed bounty hunter name. When a hunter captures an especially fiendish killer, or destroys a vast crime syndicate, not a single name is given.

Magazines reporting on these hunters will often have headlines like, "An unknown and solitary hunter appears. Follow their footsteps into the extreme cold of Siberia!" or "Exclusive interview with Mr. Nameless in this issue. The first public look at his mysterious life!" and other articles to get the blood of daydreaming readers pumping.

Any bounty hunter with even a small amount of experience would not go deep into such rumors or gossip. Most of the unnamed reports were the result of backroom deals between police forces and criminal organizations. Criminals who want to get rid of their relatives and the police, who want to improve their records, sometimes team up. The codeword for this is "Nameless." What these are, then, are not legendary bounty hunters but dirty tightrope walkers treading the fine line between corruption and service.

As part of the police force, Ky knew all about it. And more. As he checked each of the "Nameless" entries, he eventually found the one he was looking for.

- UN Special Designation Unit: No. UN12 / 21801002 / Total Annihilation / Nameless (Individual)

The special annotation of only a single additional word had a terrifying significance.

Of course, Ky understood it entirely. There was at least one solitary hunter, as described in the magazine articles, that was real. The only reason this hunter did not identify himself was because his prey would scatter. Lost in a sea of thought, Ky murmured to himself.

"Sol... What are you doing now..."

- 3 -

Cheerful singing. The sound of drinks raised in toast echoing here and there. Hairy men. Red-hot bonfires lit up the men cavorting in the forest square. Drunken men laid scattered across the ground.

There, then, laid a still twitching torso... with lengthy intestines pulled apart. The body's severed ginger-haired head laid beside it, eyes filled with resentment staring at the stony ground. The entire area was filled with the stench of blood and raw meat. With a thud, another head—blonde<sup>9</sup>—fell, and crude laughter erupted.

Blood spurted from the headless torso with force. The body, hanging from a tree, still convulsed violently, and the branches to which its arms were tied twitched from the force of it. A blindfolded man with a machete swung his sword again. This time, the right leg flew off in a mighty arc.

Many other slabs of flesh hung from the branches. Some were bound to the tree by only their arms, while others were tied by arms and more. Old hands, young hands, large hands, small hands; a broad collection of arms decorated the branches, making it look like a butcher's storefront.

"Ham Maker<sup>10</sup>." That was their name.

No country had the resources necessary to supply a system of defense across the vast Russian continent's sparse frontiers. The military might of the settlements scattered across it like stepping stones was limited, and Siberia was said to be a field for harvesting to the bandits that roamed it.

And the bandits' harvest grounds were in turn the hunting grounds of bounty hunters.

Without warning, the bonfire built in the middle of the clearing erupted into a infernal pillar of fire with a deafening explosion. The soaring flames descended, enclosing it all within a wall of flames. Immediately, the men took up their weapons.

"A damn mage! They're just trying to scare us."

"Hey! Don't fall for this distraction, it's a trick!"

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9. Most of this scene does not have clearly marked genders for the bodies, which made some descriptors/pronouns hard to work with in English.

10. 燻製作り. Furigana:

ハムメーカー

At that moment, a humanoid flame stepped out of the wall of fire. The deep darkness of the night and the red flames gave way to the shape of a jacket. His bristling brown hair still seemed to harbor smoldering embers. A molten-gold crown of steel <sup>11</sup>wrapped around his forehead, and in his hand he held a sword with the linear form characteristic of the last generation of science; Black Tech.

The burning man, taking in the scene of the bandits' barbaric revelry, scowled and spit in disgust.

"...Where's the general?" The man's deep voice echoed through the area, overpowering the crackling of roaring flames.

"What're you gonna do about it if we don't tell ya?" One of the bandits shouted while knocking an arrow in his bow. The man did not answer.

"Wait!"

Just as the tension was nearing a breaking point, a man appeared, pushing through the crowd. He was a short, seedy, little man, wearing a white apron and thick glasses. His apron was smeared with blood, and in his gory hands he held a large butcher knife.

"Are you, perhaps, another over-confident thug wanting to join my crew? We have enough members for now. Hang him," He commanded in a gruff voice, and bandits began to close in. The man on fire took a wanted poster from his pocket and looked it over.

"Jeremiah Antonio. There's no mistaking it."

"Are you seriously a bounty hunter? If so, you're outta your mind..."

The burning man nonchalantly approached Antonio. It was only after his blade had severed the thick-lensed glasses in half that the bandits standing around thought to try to stop him.

Antonio's head flew into the air and his lifeless torso went up in flames. The head tumbled across the ground, and the man kicked it up into his hands.

"A little burnt, but good enough for verification. Now, the rest of you..." The man said to himself, and threw a sombre glance at the crowd before him. "...Are as good as charcoal."

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11. They used 鉢金 to describe his limiter headband instead of 鉢巻 like they usually do. It's not a typo, as far as I can tell, but it does make it a little harder to get into English. I had to get creative in some areas.



Immediately, bows, javelins, and even knives flew from all directions, but with a single swing of his sword, they were all repelled and burnt to a crisp.

One of them tried to escape after witnessing this feat, but ran into the wall of fire and was engulfed in a pillar of flames. He danced around before falling to the ground and crumbling apart into ashes. Seeing this, the rest of the bandits took up arms again. With wild shouts, the men attacked.

The man with the fire didn't seem to be very agile, but he still managed to casually avoid the bandits' attempts to cut him down, even though they were just as willing to engage in friendly fire as they were with him. Every time the man swung his sword, a new human torch was formed.

— LALA-LA-LA-LA- I found it, I found it! —

Then, the man on fire fell to his knees, clutching his temples. A rapturous song pierced the man's brain and gouged deep into his very soul. His body was flooded with a strange power and, at the same time, his headband came off with a snap. The men around him hesitated for a moment, and their hesitation proved fatal.

A moment later, a small explosion emanated outward from the man's core, blasting several people away. The man slowly stood up.

**“URAAAAAAAAAAAAAGGGGGH!!”**

The bandits backed away at the roar of the outsider.

As soon as they saw the man raise his head, one by one they dropped their weapons and backed away from him. Those who were still standing ran as fast as they could, and those who could not walk crawled and threw themselves into the surrounding wall of fire, their faces contorted with fear at every turn. They were so full of fear were they that none of them could even scream.

After the last bandit disappeared, the man slowly stood up<sup>12</sup>. Then, with careful movements, he picked up the red, curved, metal headband, and the aggressive energy that had been emanating from his entire body gradually shook and eventually retracted back into his body. With one, two, snaps, he reattached the piece of metal to his forehead and sighed deeply.

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12. He stands up twice in the original text. Maybe an error on the author's/editor's part? I try to keep my translations faithful to the source text, but if it makes the scene confusing... Future edit may happen here. Need to think on it.

“...Who the hell are *you*?”

The man said this to himself as he looked away towards far-off London.

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