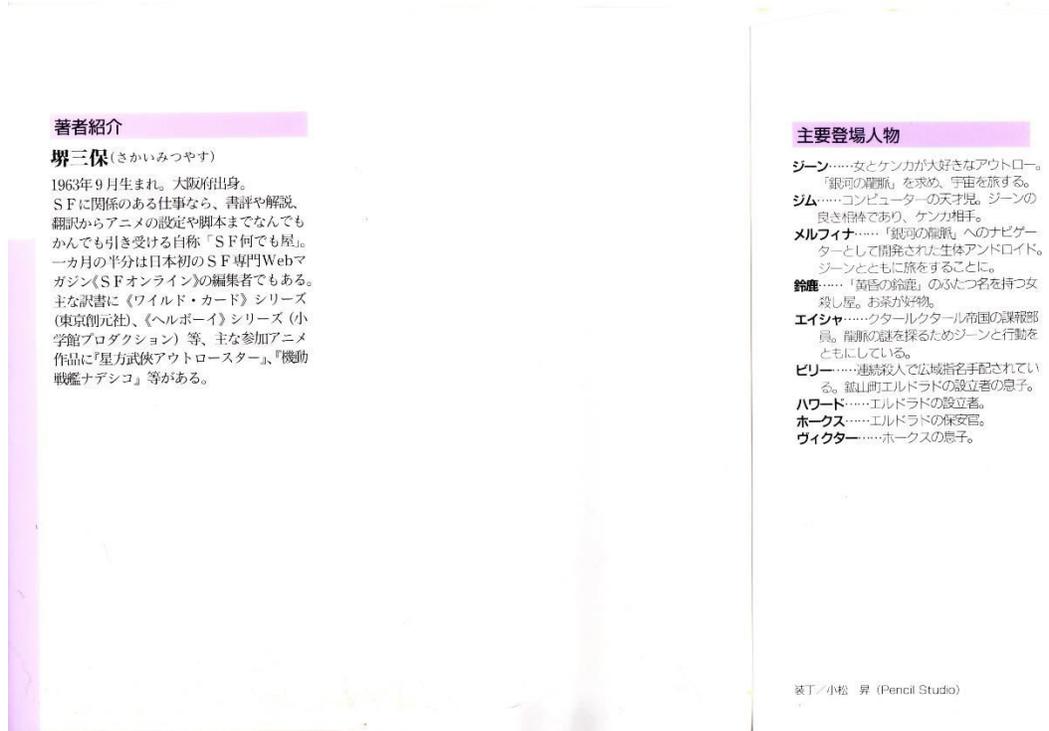


El Dorado Covered with Clouds

Zemekis' note: The first few pages of the book are an "About the Author/About the Characters" section, followed by a brief gallery that acts as a sort of preview of things to come. The story proper kicks off for on page 6 of this document. Without further ado, ENJOY!



About the Author (paragraph on the left)

Mitsuyasu Sakai

Born September 9th, 1963 and hails from Osaka. A Sci-Fi Jack of all trades who takes on any job related to Sci-fi, be it book reviews, commentary, translation, or anime stories and scripts. He was also a writer for Japan's first SF Web Magazine SF online for half a month. His major translated titles include the series Wild Card and Hellboy while his main anime series are Outlaw Star and Martian Successor Nadesico.

Dramatis Personae (paragraph on the right)

Gene - An outlaw that loves women and fighting. He explores space looking for the Galactic Leyline

Jim - A computer prodigy. He's both Gene's best friend and who he gets into fights with the most.

Melfina - A bio-android designed to be a navigator to the Galactic Leyline.

Suzuka - A hitwoman who also goes by the name Twilight Suzuka. Likes tea.

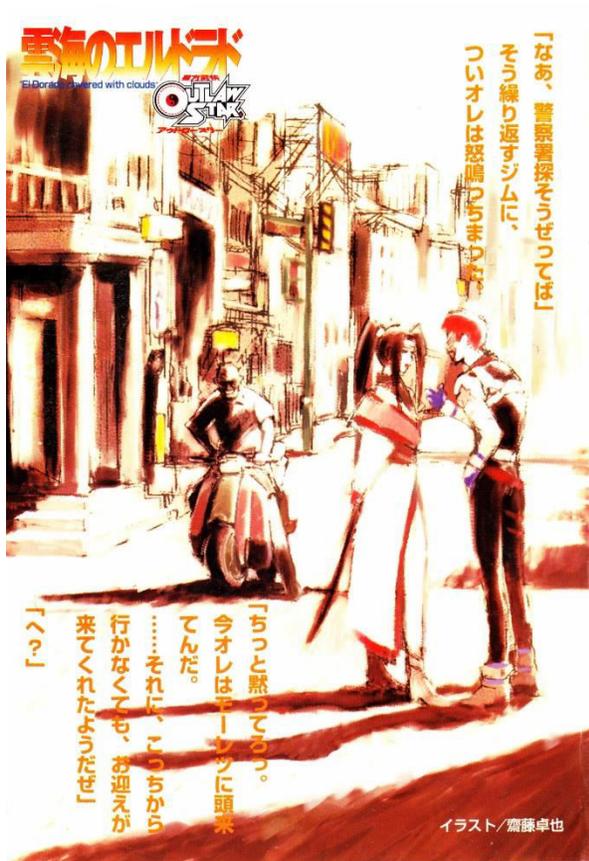
Aisha - A reconnaissance officer for the Ctarl Ctarl Empire. She travels with Gene to uncover the mysteries of the Galactic Leyline.

Billy - A serial killer wanted far and wide. Son of the founder of the mining town El Dorado

Howard - The founder of El Dorado

Hawkes - Sheriff of El Dorado

Victor - Hawkes' son.



(left picture) Jim turned and said “Hey why don’t we try to find a police station?”

Gene: “Could you be quiet for a sec? I’m so pissed off right now. ‘Sides, looks we won’t have to make the trip ourselves. We’ve got company.”

Jim/Suzuka: “Huh?”

(right picture) “This is the tenth one, Aisha.” Melina said, eyes open wide as she approached to add yet another pancake to Aisha’s plate. At that moment, the town’s speaker system suddenly crackled back to life.



振りかえるまでもない。
愛用の木刀をひさげ、「黄昏の鈴鹿」が
やってきたのだ。
ただし、たぶんいつもと違ってタンクトップに
ミニスカ姿だが。

There's no need to do a double take.

Twilight Suzuka has arrived with her beloved wooden sword in hand. She appears to be sporting a tank top and mini skirt ensemble, however. A bit different from her usual trappings.

El Dorado Covered with Clouds

Character Profile (filename IMG0007)



Gene Starwind

A twenty-year-old who loved fighting and women. He ran a repair shop on Sentinel III with his friend Jim. His side-job as a bodyguard allows him to make use of his spectacular gunplay skills. At Hilda's behest he moved his base of operations to space to facilitate his search for the Leyline.

Jim Hawking

The son of a legendary hacker genius, Jim is a computer whiz-kid as well as a proficient mechanic. He's quite precocious, possibly owing to his upbringing in the slums. He and Gene are great friends and love to pick fights with one another.



Melfina

A bionic android developed to link with the Outlaw Star and show the way to the Galactic Leyline. She joins Gene on his quest to find the Leyline so that she may understand who or what she truly is.

Aisha ClanClan

An intelligence agent from the Ctarl Ctarl Empire. She travels with Gene to uncover the mysteries of the Leyline. Her regenerative ability makes her invulnerable and she can also transform into a fierce beast. She behaves recklessly and is quite the scatterbrain.

Suzuka

A hit-woman who enjoys giving each of her swordplay techniques peculiar names. Steadfast in the path she chooses, she takes things in stride, but proves to be a dependable ally when things get down to the wire. She acts as the big-sister type and seems to greatly appreciate the finer points of drinking tea.

Part 1 - The Golden City at Twilight

I guess I've always been the type of kid prone to getting in trouble since I was born. That feeling really kicked me in the balls when, not one foot into this dive bar, I'm staring down the barrel of a ray gun. But this was only a fart in the wind compared to the type of shit that was about to hit the fan. This tiny, dingy, mostly empty bar fit right in with this boring, dying mining town. My reason for coming here? Well, this here's kind of a haven for degenerates to run away to after they've had their fill of killing across star systems like Heifong. And, well, I entered this shitty bar 'cause I thought a bar'd be the perfect place to get some info on a block-head, piece-of-shit murderer. Degenerates... and blockhead, piece-of-shit murderers... Get it? Well, the one pointing the gun at me is pretty-boy Billy McLaughlin.

(next image)

He's not as tall as me, but he's still pretty tall and lanky with short and even blonde hair. He's got delicate features, but his well-structured face makes him your typical silver screen pretty-boy. Must get all sorts of panties thrown at him by shallow broads. If he wasn't wearing such clashing clothing and waving his gun around in a dive bar, that is... Although I guess I should count my lucky stars I was able to find my bounty so fast.

"Whoa-hoa there! Talk about a warm welcome. Guess strangers ain't welcome in bars around here, eh?" I chided as I put my open palms in the air with a shrug so I wouldn't provoke him.

"You better shut your mouth or the only thing that's gonna be warm here are the holes in your head. Like this fucker," Billy barked.

Getting a closer look at him, his face was flushed, and he had a white-knuckle grip on his hand gun. The barrel was shaking with his nervousness. With the barrel of a gun practically up my nose, I hadn't noticed that at Billy's feet there was a guy facedown on the floor with scorch marks on his back. No holster on the back or the waist. His hands up in the air.

Christ...

Billy's the same age as me and word on the street is that he's killed dozens of people. To top it all off he seems to be a hothead with a short fuse.

(next image)

"You shot this guy, I take it?"

"Do you see anybody else around here who looks like they could've, wise guy?"

I looked around the bar. There were ten others, excluding us. Half of the patrons had guns holstered around their waists, but they were all seated with their heads facing down, trying to ignore us. The bartender was nowhere to be found, either making his escape out the back or hiding under the bar.

"Yeah, doesn't look like there's any other asshole like you here who'd shoot an unarmed guy in the back."

"Looks like you REALLY wanna die today, motherfucker."

A vein popped out on Billy's head. Guess he didn't like my joke too much. Wish he'd pop a gasket right here and do my job for me, honestly.

“Why’d you kill ‘im?”

“He was preaching about how he ‘couldn’t have a young man like me drinking alcohol.’ When he’s been downing some cheap sludge for the better half of the afternoon in this waste of space. Get the fuck outta here.”

I’ve had enough of this asshole.

I flipped back the hem of my coat and gave Billy a good look at my armpit holster and the gun handle sticking out of it.

“You gonna talk that way to an armed man, eh?”

“Tsk”

Billy made a sucking sound through his teeth as he realized he was being too full of himself.

“My sight’s been fixed on your head, you know. There’s nothing you can do no matter how quick on the draw you are.”

“That so, eh?”

I pulled my gun out with my left hand and aimed it at his face. Billy, his attention on my hand now, stood there with his mouth agape, surprised at how fast a gun was shoved in his face. Normally, if you’re right-handed you keep your holster on the left side armpit and pull it out with your right hand, but you’d have to cross your right hand over to the other side of your body which leaves you open. It’s slower than pulling the gun from your right-side hip or back. I did that little trick to lessen my draw time as much as I could and get my gun out as quick as possible. I’m not right-handed so I won’t be able to shoot that accurately, but at this range it’s not gonna matter.

“How you fancy that?”

His face turned white as the blood drained from his dumb mug.

“Y-y-you wanna d-die that badly... d-do ya?”

His stupid voice was shaking.

“From the looks of it, seems like you do too. If you so much as move a muscle, I won’t hesitate to blow your brains out... the ball’s in your court, buddy.”

He was frozen. The only thing moving was his right hand, shaking as it held the gun. And you’re tellin’ me *this* guy’s killed dozens of people?

“I think you’re takin’ it a little too far, bro.”

I heard a voice come from behind Billy, near the bar’s exit. It was my buddy Jim’s voice. I had told him to block the back exit. Guess he sensed something was up and came inside.

Jim Hawking. 11 years old. Still a little ankle-biter but he's got a good eye and comes through in a pinch. I've never told him that 'cause his head'd swell three sizes.

"You move a muscle and we'll tear ya a new one, Billy." Jim said as he approached us. His freckled face and short hair made his age easy to guess. The girls love to baby him. He activates their maternal instincts. People like to look down on 'im just 'cause he's a kid, but he's a bitchin' engineer when it comes to messing with mechanical hardware and software.

He was holding this stupid huge needle shotgun that was too big for his body. It had a range of less than ten meters, but it fired thousands of small needles that'd make mincemeat of anything with just one shot. A scary toy when you consider how bad Jim's aim is.

From where Jim was standing he wouldn't have had to worry about lining up a shot. That said, I was nearly pissin' myself because at this rate I'd be caught in the line of fire too.

"Wh-wh-wh-who the fuck are you guys?!" Billy exclaimed at the top of his lungs.

"We're outlaws, just like you. Although, I guess we're bounty hunters for today."

"Could we get you to drop your gun and put your hands behind you back, Billy? I'd like to resolve this like gentlemen...unlike Gene..."

Jim used his left hand to pull out some handcuffs from his back pocket and showed them to Billy as he clanked them around.

"Grr..."

As soon as Billy looked at Jim and grit his teeth, I took a step forward and hit Billy right under the nose with the grip of my gun, feeling some of his front teeth break. As he leaned forward from the shock, I gave him a right hook on the chin. A shockwave traveled from his jaw to the rest of head and shook his brain. He stumbled, then collapsed in my direction.

"Well, that was pretty easy," I thought as I picked up his unconscious body.

"Gene! There's something coming from above!" Melfina's voice rang out just as a huge mass of iron burst through the ceiling.



“Jim, shield!”

I shoved Billy away and crouched down with my hands over my head, deploying a light shield from my gloves.

That was too close.

A hail of photon bullets from some high-speed long-range pulse lasers rained down on us, accompanied by their unique, high-pitched firing sound.

The thing that came from the ceiling started to clean house. It shot at everyone and everything. The people cowering in the corners of the room got laser beam baptisms. I could hear them scream as they fell to the ground with a thud.

I could see a figure in the dust through the blue hue of my light shield. A round face, shiny black body, and thick appendages. On its back was a short-range gravity cycling flight unit.

Of course.

3 meters short at best. The new Triforce combat droid. The droid shot wildly with the pulse laser gun mounted in its right arm while it picked up Billy's body with the other.

"Bro, the shield's not gonna hold," Jim cried, his voice cutting through the sounds of the lasers.

"The ceiling! Shoot the ceiling!"

I pointed my gun toward the ceiling and shot like a madman. After staggering for a second, Jim lined up his shot to where I was shooting and fired his needle shotgun. The hole the droid made in the ceiling when it crashed into the bar had weakened the what remained of the room's ceiling supports. Unable to take much more, the ceiling started to moan and groan.

"Jim, the window!"

Jim nodded at me and we burst through the transparent resin of the window, landing outside.

"Gene, Jim, are you guys okay?" Melfina asked as she ran to us. I'd told her to keep watch outside.

At first glance she was a babe with cool, black hair to die for. Actually, though, she was a super-bionic android that was the key to a mysterious motherlode known as the Galactic Leyline. In any case, she looked about as human as can be. Technology couldn't have advanced far enough to build an android like this yet, which shrouds her origins in mystery. If you were to ask Jim, he'd probably say that her most redeeming quality is that she's the voice of reason for all of us.

"Yeah, yeah we're good. The wanted poster didn't say anything about Santa's little helper here..." Jim said as he stood up and dusted off his clothes.

"Yeah they prolly thought that no one'd go after Billy if they mentioned it. I'm sure that half of the people that Billy killed were actually this thing's doing," I complained as I sat on the ground.

Looking at the collapsed bar, I was at a loss as to how I was gonna pull Billy out of the wreckage. He'd been wanted dead or alive anyway, so if I couldn't at least get the body out from the rubble I could kiss my reward goodbye.

"Gaah..."

I sighed as I gazed at the remains of the bar. A huge shadow stood up out of the wreckage, shaking the ground and flinging pieces of the collapsed ceiling every which way. It was the droid of the hour. Despite being pretty busted up it seemed to be working just fine and was still holding Billy to its left side.

"No... way..." Jim was at a loss for words.

"That's a new model for ya, I guess." I said as I stood slowly.

I kept my eyes fixed on the droid. It returned the favor by fixing its head monitors on me, aware of my presence as well.

“Bro, it’s lookin’ at us... What do we do!?” “... What... should we do?” Jim and Melfina asked me anxiously.

Psh... That’s what I wanted to know. We had our feet planted smack dab in the middle of the main road. As you’d expect of a ghost town in the middle of nowhere, the street was huge. There wasn’t a soul on the road either, not to mention any cars.

Well, I guess if there *were* any pedestrians they were probably long gone and had hidden somewhere by now, what with all this commotion going on at the bar.

No cover... No place to run... And my shield was spent from the photon bullet storm earlier...

Shit... What a goddamn bitch of a situation.

“Oh? Hello, Suzuka-san!” Melfina said in a cheery voice.

I don’t think it’s normal for a person to be so polite to a friend just passing by while we’re in the middle of a do-or-die situation like this. And why’s Suzuka here, anyway?

Suzuka entered my field of vision while I was still fixed on the droid in front of me. She walked briskly toward it, her long waterfall of raven-black hair tied back in a ponytail. Suzuka was gorgeous. She wore a layered Oriental kimono style dress (a little different from a real kimono but I couldn’t tell you the details of why) that draped enticingly over her long, slender, curvy body.

Closing the gap in an instant, Suzuka sliced the droid’s right arm off with her wooden sword so fast that you couldn’t catch it with your eyes. It was either some Oriental sorcery or some hidden Tao ability (but if you asked her she’d prolly say it was ‘the fruits of her training’ or something like that). She can cut through anything with that wooden sword. Suzuka’s assassination skills would make anyone quake in their boots.

“Something the matter? Run out of tricks, have we?” Shizuka said smiling, as she raised her sword to the droid.

The droid’s right arm panel opened and out came 10 coaxially mounted rocket pods. Suzuka calmly responded by jabbing her sword into the top of the robot’s head, tearing it in half. The move is called “Karatake-wari” or some such, if I remember correctly.

The two halves of the droid, cut open like a fish fillet, fell to either side. Billy, who was still being held on the flank of the robot, fell to the ground. He let out a soft groan as the side of the robot fell on top of him.

“Such an opponent will not even serve to rust my blade,” Suzuka mocked.

I don’t think wooden blades can rust, but whatever.

“Wow, Suzuka-san... That was super cool.” Melfina said with childlike wonder.

Does she not understand that Suzuka’s about to steal our mark from right under our noses?

Suzuka made her way toward Billy, who was still reeling in pain and hadn't fully regained consciousness, as she spoke:

"Billy, you're under arrest. You're wanted dead or alive for 300,000 Wong."

"Oh, hello everyone." she turned and flashed us an artificial smile.

Just my fuckin' luck.

El Dorado...

That was the name of the ghost town that our search for Billy had brought us to. Despite being considered a 'town' it was only a small speck of a cave, dug out of a lump of rock only a few kilometers in radius. What sets this particular lump of rock apart from the numerous asteroid cities near the enormous gas giant Aurum IV is that it floats *within* Aurum IV's thick atmospheric layer.