


# THE UNDERGROUND

YAMAMOTO TAKUJI



# THE UNDERGROUND

A SHORT FANFICTION  
of Panzer Dragoon Saga (1998) on Sega Saturn

YAMAMOTO Takuji



PDP

TOKYO

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I dedicated the story

to Team Andromeda,  
Smile-bit,  
and Yu Godai.

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YAMAMOTO Takuji

# 1

“You alive?” somebody called from above me.

I looked up. Stretched out on the bank were two slender legs wrapped in cloth strips that ended in combat boots. The legs disappeared at the knees into a woolen cloak.

“Yes,” I answered.

“OK. Get up.”

The guy came down the bank and entered the shallows with a splashing sound. Then he reached out with his thin arms to support my upper body. He was surprisingly strong.

Water trickled through my clothes, and I wondered how far I had drifted through the groundwater in the ancient ruin.

“No serious injuries,” he said. “You’re lucky.”

A lantern on the bank illuminated his face, and I could see him staring at me from inside his hood. I’ve since forgotten what color his eyes were, but I remember they sparkled then.

“Can you walk?” he asked.

I just nodded.

His clear, high-pitched voice echoed through the semidarkness. He might have been younger than me because his voice had not yet broken.

We walked in silence, and he let me join him at a camp that had been settled by explorers, Seekers, and others—one that had been abandoned long before. Then he collected scattered solid fuel and quickly lit a fire.

“Do you mind if I take off my clothes to dry them?” I asked.

“No.” He’d already closed his eyes and leaned against the wall. “My body needs to conserve power. If something bad comes here while I sleep, use that.” He pointed to an old gun.

“But I’ve never...”

He didn’t answer.

His cold attitude was comfortable for me. I didn’t have to worry about what to say. Boys are like that. We never worry about having to chat with one another.

I peeled off my soaked shirt, pants, and boots. Then I found a shabby curtain in a box and wrapped myself in it, returning close to the fire.

## 2

There are huge spaces under the capital where we live. It is a cluster of mysterious ruins built long ago during “the ancient age.”

Sensible adults rarely walk into the ruins.

A half century ago, the underground was teeming with monsters—the living weapons created from gene reconstruction. My father said most fools who went into the ruins were eaten by nightmarish creatures.

But the place had already become quiet and calm by the time I first entered. I’d seen no monsters in the tunnels until that day.

I left school early and explored the ruins every week, carrying a lamp, a gas detector, and a multipurpose knife. My father didn’t come home from the academy until late at night, and my nanny was busy with her dating.

I picked up bits of ore and fossils and hid them in drawers, little by little. Some of them remain on my desk even now as my unforgotten souvenirs.

Eventually, I noticed people who were also

exploring alone. We didn't tell one another our names but shared our lunches and water. Some seemed to be Seekers, and others looked like Meccanians or Empire nobles, but none of us cared. That was the way we were. I liked the unspoken rule.

There was an area of safety under the arch of the giant's foot. For me, the tunnels were my refuge. Even though the oppressive Empire thought it had trampled all free will in the continent, the ground beneath the earth gave us the freedom to ignore it.

Looking back, I might have let my guard down because of my false sense of security.

When a shadow of a large creature I'd never seen appeared that day, I accidentally slipped in the channel in surprise.

My new companion and I were walking along the faint luminescent bank, talking to each other. Mainly, I spoke to him. "Maybe it was Seekers' Coolia. Those ancient aggressive creatures must have disappeared from the ruins completely after the Great Fall."

"They were gone?" he replied without looking back at me.

“I think all the monsters died then, and we’re safe now in the ruins, although most adults still fear this place. It’s good for me to explore without weapons. I’ve never shot guns in my life. I appreciate the Great Fall!”

“Good for you,” he said.

He seemed to get a little cranky when I mentioned the Great Fall, but I continued talking. “Please tell me the nearest way to the ground. Where did you come from?”

He didn’t have a large pack of supplies, so I assumed he came from nearby.

“Nonsense.” His lips moved under the hood. “You’ve run away from there, but now you want to return. Why?”

I thought he spoke awkwardly, as if a child were reading from a script in a monotone voice.

The lantern light flared. He raised it forward with his thin hand, which was covered in a tight-fitting black leather glove.

“Well, fine,” he said. “Follow me.”

I had no other choice but to comply. My compass was beyond the water channel.

“The deepest route leads to the exit.”

### 3

We kept on walking into the depths of the labyrinth. My companion gave me salty hard biscuits and jerky. A group of other explorers had given them to him, he said. He ate no food and didn't take off his hood or boots in front of me.

“I'm fine,” he just said when I asked.

The next night, we slept in a strange room by the tunnel. While he was asleep, I saw glimmering luminescence on the ground, blinking around him as if attracted to him.

As the tunnels became deeper and more intricate, my companion's words became more enigmatic.

“I'm collecting parts,” he said when I asked why he had walked into the ruins.

“What are the parts for?”

“To become another.”

“Why do you need to become another?” I said.

“I can’t meet him with how I currently look.”

“Who is ‘him’?” I asked, but my companion didn’t answer me. He was staring at his own hands while holding the gun.

Instead of asking again, I glanced at the side of his face. He was pretty, with fine features. Maybe my nanny would be pleased with him.

“Because I did some very terrible things to him,” he explained.

We went even deeper the next few days, and the tunnel was becoming more expansive. The atmosphere’s temperature had been growing warmer, like a gigantic dragon’s internal organs. Even with my optimism, I was getting scared. Where were we going?

I had only a few biscuits left. “It’s my last meal, isn’t it?” I asked him jokingly as I nibbled on the last bit.

“Maybe, yes. Humans will die without water and food. So many people starved and died after the Great Fall.” His words lacked empathy.

I stared at his fair-skinned face. His eyes always looked like gleaming jewels, but I hadn’t seen

any emotions appear in them.

“The ruins here barely survived after the event so that the capital citizens could be supplied with clean water and energy. However, some rural regions could not...”

I remembered a classmate from a remote town. He looked thin and small for his age, writing a play script about “the tragedy of the Great Fall.” I thought it was a tearjerker drama with too many typos, not cultured writing.

My classmates and I laughed at his work, and it was full of my red pencil lines after I proofread it. I had said, “You wouldn’t know, but the Great Fall played a crucial role in human development.”

“Exactly. It was good for you.”

## 4

My companion didn’t laugh at me. Then he said, “We caused the Great Fall.”

His comment was too abrupt and did not have

enough explanation for me to read between the lines.

“You... did?”

He was talking to himself, not to me.

“He said he would return for me, but I knew he never...”

“Who was he? Was he your father, or your friend?”

“He never forgives me.”

I realized that one reasonable explanation was that the boy in front of me was crazy. He had been walking toward the abyss to kill himself.

The silence continued.

*I'll return for you soon. Wait here for a minute...*

I remembered my mother's words. She had told me she would be back for me, too. So, I waited, but she never came.

Then I asked, “Is he still alive?”

A tiny light of emotion appeared in his eyes.  
“I'm sure.”

I had to find my way to the ground, so I asked him again. “Why don't you just go and apologize?”

I loved the calm of the underground, but I preferred life to death. I had to turn his attention to the outside world.

“You should apologize to him before you change yourself into anyone else,” I told him.

When he heard my words, he got upset. His voice was fragile as he said, almost in a whisper, “Suppose your mother comes back...”

I stopped breathing.

“What if she apologized? Could you forgive her?” he asked.

My body felt heavy like a stone.

“Why do you know about my mother?” I said.

“I’m sorry...”

He said the knowledge was coming to him naturally because we were so close to the “Node.”

“I’m sorry, but I didn’t mean to hurt you,” he said remorsefully. He whispered words like that again and again, but I almost didn’t hear them.

I stood up. “OK. I’ll be out in a minute. Nature calls.”

“Take the lantern and come back here

immediately,” he said to my back in his usual monotone voice. “Something dangerous is approaching, so we should leave here as soon as you return. Be careful and quiet.”

## 5

I ran back the way we had come.

Had I ever told him about my mother? No, I hadn't. I had to escape from him as soon as I could. What a creepy experience. Where had he come from? I felt like I was in the real underworld.

I returned to an underground lake that we had passed the day before. The water was still clear and calm. A smooth white rock stood in the middle of the lake, looking like a beautiful little island.

I heard echoes, maybe from a distant thump of an explosion. A small-scale rockfall might have occurred away from here. After a few minutes, the sounds stopped, and the silence came back.

I went down to the shore and drank my fill of

water, and then I couldn't move. How many minutes had I been running?

After the lantern turned off, I took a little break there, wondering where I should go on my way home. I had to find another explorer besides him to help me survive.

For a while, I watched as rippling waves came up to the water's surface.

Suddenly, blinding light beams penetrated the surface, and several dark figures emerged from the water. The lights illuminated my body, and I covered my face with my arms.

"I found you!" somebody shouted, and I was quickly knocked down by a punch.

"No, we're wrong," another voice said. "Where is she?"

"She?"

A second punch hit me. Three armed men in dark diving suits were standing around me.

"Who are you, boy?"

Immediately, I could tell they were looking for somebody else, not me. Their words had a strong

regional accent. Meccanians?

“I... I’ve lost my way...” I decided not to say anything about the strange boy I had met.

“Did you reach such a deep area by yourself?”

“Please, lead me out of this place. I have lots of sketches and maps of the ruins in my room. I’ll give them to you if you—”

One of them laughed at me. “Poor Imperial boy,” a younger voice said—the one trampling my back.

The older one standing by my head scoffed and said, “We need no amateur tour guides.”

With my head still on the ground, I glanced at the third man, who was crouching and pulling on a rope by the water. A flashlight shined in my face once more.

“I’m asking you again, have you seen anyone else near here?” one demanded.

“No, never. I’ve just strayed—”

“Unfortunately, you won’t be making it back to your room. You’ve seen our faces.”

The older man started to walk around, and then picked up the dropped lantern. “Oh, this was not made in the Empire. Who gave it to you?”

“OK, OK,” said the younger one, who seemed pleased to hear it.

“Where is she? I want to try my new knife—”

“Nooooo!”

## 6

A scream and a loud splash came from somewhere, but not from me.

I couldn't make a sound because I was frozen with fear. The sound had come from the man closest to the water. He was being dragged into the lake by a long leg covered with a fluorescent-white shell.

The younger man looked back and shouted. His cut upper body dropped to the ground. Several gunshots cracked through the air, a bright-red ray flashed, and I smelled something burning.

This was my first time seeing ancient bioweapons.

I rolled onto my back slowly and stared.

What I had thought was a white rock in the

middle of the lake was instead a winged fish floating to the surface of the water. Myriad gleaming eyes looked at me. Moving legs were sticking out of its mouth, and one whipped up to hit me...

“Stop it!”

Light came on suddenly in the cave, illuminating everything.

“Don’t kill him. He will not hurt your family,” said the familiar voice.

The legs stopped whipping. The fish seemed to hesitate.

“Please, Guardian.”

My companion—she—stood in front of the lake. Why had I thought she was a “he”?

She’d taken her hood off. Her long black hair was tied back in a bow like a tentacle. She extended her slender arms toward the fish. They were covered in a tight black knit with luminescent lines. I couldn’t imagine what materials were woven into it.

“I ask you again,” she said.

The fish closed its mouth and blinked a few times. The wall of caves behind her blinked, too.

After a moment, the fish's eyes stopped blinking, and they all looked at her calmly.

"I appreciated your lenience," she told it.

The ancient creature dived into the water with a loud splash and disappeared.

Then, the luminescence in the cave dimmed.

Her arms fell, and she dropped to her knees.

## 7

I took a flashlight from one of the dead men and ran to her.

Giving her my shoulder, I attempted to help her stand up. Although she seemed slender, her body weight was heavier than I thought it would be.

"Are you OK?" I asked.

"No, I'm not. I exhausted most of my energy in the negotiation."

She was unable to stand up. I felt embarrassed that I was grabbing her dainty wrist.

"You talked with the ancient creature..."

“Now it’s a protector of its kin rather than a guardian serving the will of the ancient. It accepts the responsibility with its own free will.”

Free will? Did the beast have that?

Instead, I asked, “Why were the Meccanians seeking you?”

“That’s their business. I don’t know why,” she replied, her voice weak and her speech slow. “The guardian told me that the men blasted its grandchildren’s playing channel.”

She didn’t seem too interested in the men.

“I asked it to allow you to be in its domain in exchange for my new errand,” she continued. “Now you are its guest. You can find the way by the luminescence. That’s the reciprocal gift.”

Then she looked at me with half-closed eyes, which looked like sharp-edged sickles. My heart started to beat faster because she was so close to my face.

“Take me to the Node,” she said.

I couldn’t reply at first. “What’s the Node?” I finally asked.

“After we destroyed the centralized system,

some Nodes survived,” she whispered with an air of nonchalance. “They’re distributed all over the world and interact with one other. Every memory and thought in the vicinity stream into them...”

In retrospect, I realize that she told a stranger about the secret of the world. But I didn’t know what she meant at that time.

“It’s not so far. Take me over there. I need to recharge.” Then, at an unexpected moment, she smiled at me. “You can do it.”

Suddenly, all her weight leaned on my shoulder.

“I will shut down my consciousness to preserve my memory,” she said.

Shortly afterward, she became faint, as if she were dead.

## 8

I wanted to ask her many questions. *Why did you save me? Why did you smile at me?*

But she never responded.

After letting her lie down, I looked at the roof over the underground lake. The luminescence looked like a galaxy, more beautiful than anything I had ever seen. In our capital, the nighttime illumination and the smog cover the starlight every night.

Then I pulled up the rope to get the supplies belonging to the men. A sleek wooden case appeared from the water, and I hauled it ashore. It was waterproof and had space for one person inside if the contents were emptied.

As expected, I found some rations. There were also other resources: rope, fuel, backpacks, a body bag, powder and bullets, a syringe filled with unknown solution, and backup batteries for the lights.

I picked up the knife from the dead youth, unwrapped a dried meat pie using the blade, and ate lunch beside my companion. I'm still afraid to speak poorly of the Empire, but even average Meccanian food is better than ours. That's inconsistent with their unadvanced industrialization.

I then dragged and gathered the dead bodies in one place on the lakeside as a warning for new explorers.

If their peers came here, they would find them.

*Everyone had a family. We just survived.*

Those were the words my grandfather once told me. He was a disabled war veteran. He was always sitting by the fireplace, reading a book. The pages would be open on his left thigh. The rest of the leg below the knee was gone.

Some days, a friend of his visited to reminiscence with him. The old man was blind. He said to us proudly, “I killed hundreds of Meccanians in those days.”

After the man left, Grandfather sighed and hugged me tightly.

The knife that almost cut me has saved my life from many pinches since then. It’s still in a locked drawer of my desk. Fortunately, it hasn’t killed any human beings yet.

I wore the belt holding the knife and the light, carried the backpack with the rations and a water bottle in front of me, and lifted her onto my back. Then I began to walk.

## 9

It was easy to trace the way with the lantern. Even when I saw a huge floating beast, I didn't feel fear.

I walked toward our destination with other biological creatures, which had white-and-black shells. Many beasts passed by us that needed to feed on the energy like my companion did. They showed no interest in us, and they were so quiet.

I was a guest, a small visitor to their ecosystem.

When I gave up on carrying her weight because the way was too long for humans, I boldly attempted to hitch a ride on a slow-moving beast with a flat back. Some small creatures were already on top of it before we jumped on.

While I ate greasy Coolia meat from the supplies, one of the small half-human-sized creatures approached us. I showed the remaining fat to it, and it glanced at the meat. However, it didn't take the fat from me, as if it were a boy refusing to take candy from a stranger.

I looked over the ancient creature's back at

wonders no human being had ever seen. The roof of the tunnels loomed high overhead, and creatures with transparent wings flew above me.

Big, medium, and small ones were all destined for the same Node. I saw the creatures that were returning, maybe after they had charged their energy. They were tranquil but talked to one another in ways humans couldn't sense.

“K...ey gaa...”

I felt someone call my name in a squeaky voice when I hopped down to the ground with my companion on my back again. She had read my memory, so perhaps the creatures around me could pick up information from my brain waves or what was near the Node. But I couldn't feel any thoughts from them, which was disappointing.

We stood in line as if we were model students in the front of the dining hall at noon. It was a funny sight!

Nobody cut in line or preyed on me, even when I was taking a nap.

Finally, our turn came.

Before us was what looked like a creek to human eyes. The water's surface filled with glaring light. Everyone soaked in the stream, like ancient ghosts purifying themselves in the river of the underworld.

I took off my boots, put my backpack down on the riverside, and lifted her. Spectators gathered around us, blinking temporally.

“...zzel,” a creature with five black talons groaned.

As I look back on this now, I realize it was probably telling me her name.

I laid her on the bottom of the shallow creek. The water shrouded her, reflecting lights onto her. Her body began to move slightly as if she was in a dream. My sleeping beauty hadn't been dead.

I was very satisfied, but I also felt extreme fatigue. My strength had melted away.

Maybe I fainted. The last thing I heard was the splash of my body sinking into the shallows.

## 10

Though I could not open my eyes, I felt my companion stand up and stare down at me.

“...”

She called my name. Yes, she knew it.

“Do you remember when you read my memory about my mother?” I asked.

“Yes, I do.” She crouched down. Her slender fingers touched my cheek.

“I won’t forgive her, but I miss her.”

I thought I could not be back in my old bedroom. I would die in this underworld river.

“Really?” she said.

“Yes, I want to see her again.”

“Again...”

“So, you should go to your true destination and meet him again.”

*Again? Yes, once again. I want to find you if you become anyone else.*

“Meet him and apologize. OK?” I told her.

“...”

Maybe she called my name once more, but I can't remember what happened next.

According to my nanny, I was sleeping in our backyard.

I was barefoot and had the empty backpack. The knife was on my waist.

Many years later, I learned my companion's identity at the Imperial academy.

I heard it was a drone, an ancient interface with a humanlike appearance.

That individual had been faulty and malfunctioning. The former emperor had sacrificed his life to destroy the drone and “the tower” to save his subject.

Drones have no gender. They have no soul. They never smile.

But I know...

No matter how old I get, in the dream, I'm a boy in the underground.

She sits on the shining shore, legs crossed as

she smiles at me. I see my girl there at last. I've wanted to see her again for a long time.

I call her name. "Azal."

She is staring at me, too—curiously, with her big, sparkling eyes.

If she is a girl, that would be nice. I want her to be one because I'm a man. Who would blame me? It's my dream.

I want her to call my name again.

And smile.

The end

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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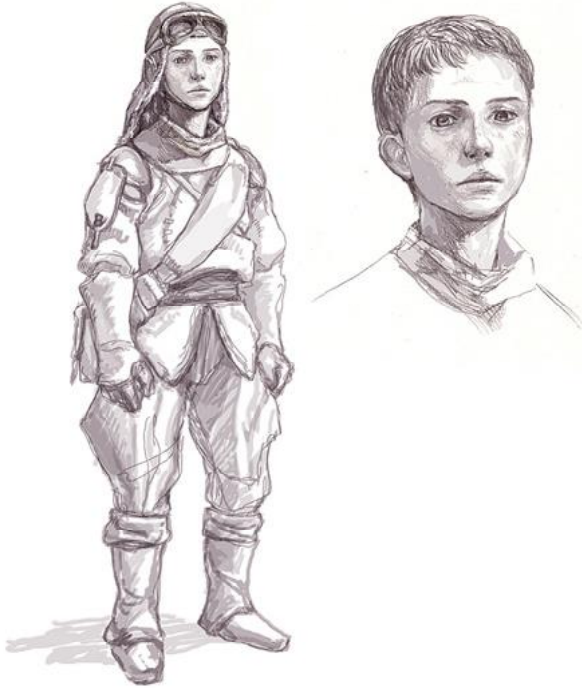
At last, I say thanks to a great fan-made website Panzer Dragoon Legacy (<https://www.panzerdragonlegacy.com/>). Many years ago, I decided to learn English to chat with many PD fans worldwide on this site.

Thank you for reading this ebook.

To receive further info from YAMAMOTO Takuji, visit me online at <https://pdp.xrea.jp/>

# THE GALLERY

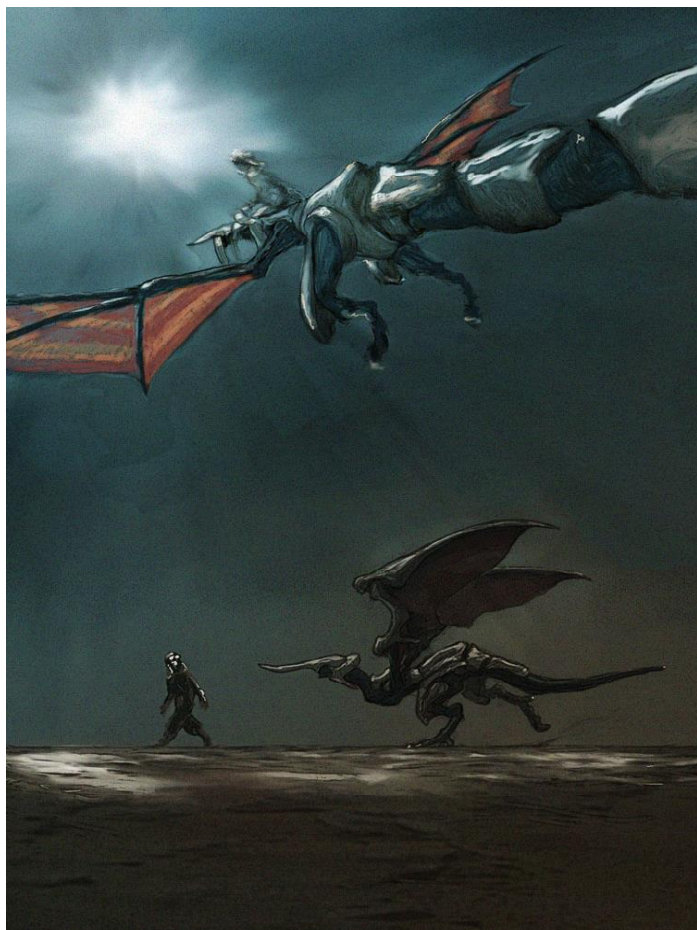
Artworks for my old fanfiction novel "Panzer Dragoon Pseudo" in 2007 illustrated by Metal fly



Geno, an early image of the protagonist



"The White Fish"



"The Rider"



"The Dragon Tamer"



Celad (The grandson of Paet in the fanfiction)



A sketch of Orta's adopted child, Albo



Sketches of Geno's dragon

