

**NINJA
SLAYER**
NEO-SAITAMA
IN FLAMES

BORN in Red Black

ボーン・イン・レッド・ブラック



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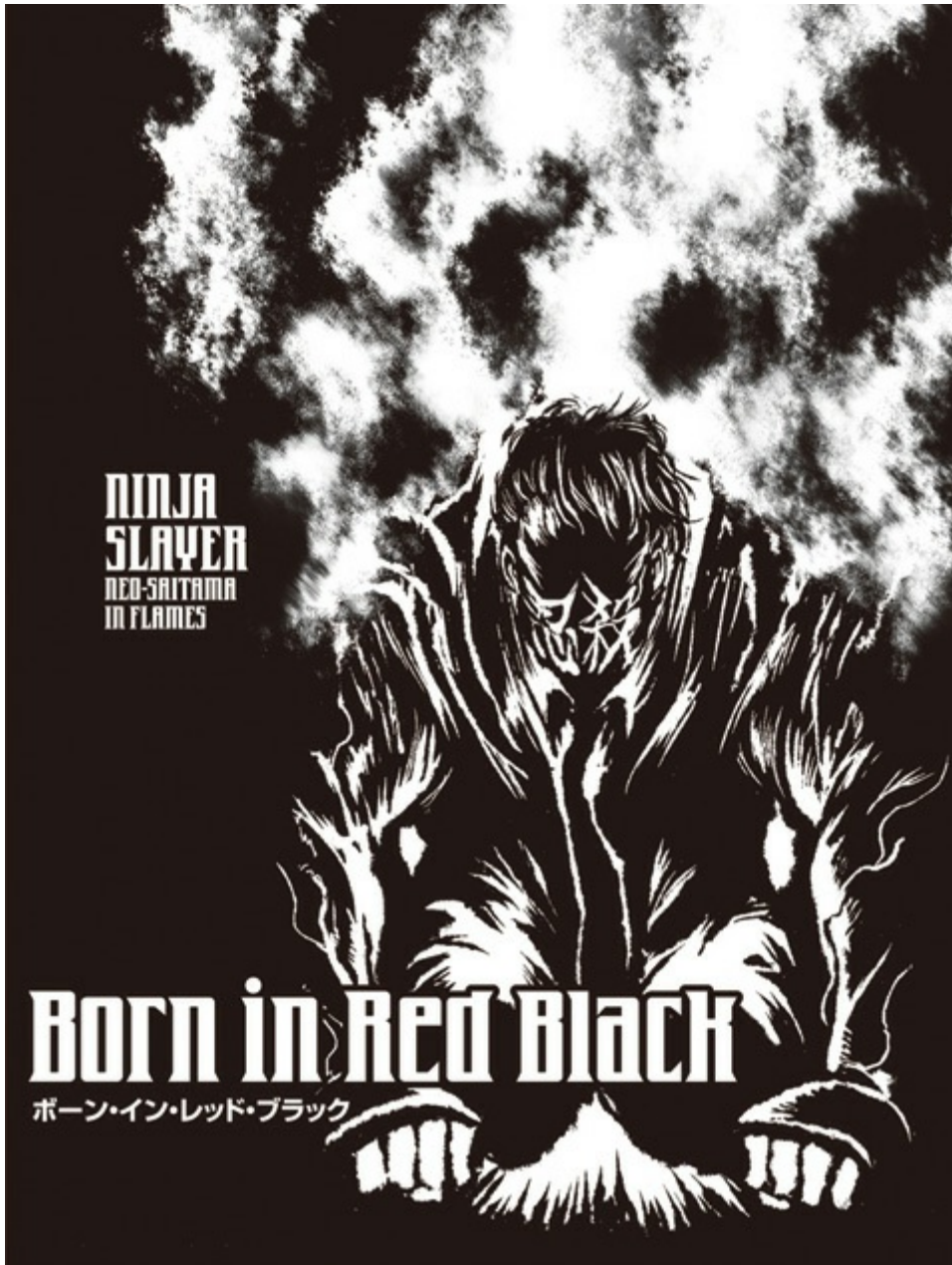
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Chapter 01

NINJA SLAYER



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Chapter 01

Like greedy departed spirits criss-crossing the stratosphere, heavy metal acid rain clouds blew quickly and heavily over the skies of Marunouchi in Neo-Saitama as the wind roared in the sincerest form that something bad, really bad was about to happen.

The Marunouchi Sugoitakai building. This skyscraper towered over the city like a tombstone. Several hours had passed since the explosion on the upper floors. Black smoke billowing from the destroyed floors formed a cryptic cloud partially shrouding the top of the building.

All the same, the area around the cluster of tall buildings feigned indifference as the many colored, mundane neon lights lit up the scene. Even at a time like this, billboards right next door to the dead building that displayed slogans of desire --「スゴイ」“Sugoi!”「ワンコ玉」“Wan-ko Dama”「ヤッテミル」“Yattemiru?”「精力大発揮」“Seiryoku Daihakki” -- continued to blink to lure clients without resting.

The fire department nor the riot police had yet to learn why they'd been rushed to the scene. Holding-up in their herd of vehicles on nearby streets, they await orders but do not know when or if they'll ever come. Why were they mobilized and then been put on this absurd standby alert?

Anyone who truly wanted to know the answer to that would surely cut his own life short. Anyone who wanted to know the existence of the underworld authority that controlled and mobilized the bureaucracy from behind closed doors that is.

“Target located!”

What echoed from the building floor filled with dust and rubble was the high-pitched shrill of Offender, a Soukai Syndicate ninja agent. Wearing a monkey-like facial armor metal mask and clothed in an ocher costume, the small statured ninja crotched down and hoisted the man who was lying face-down on the ground by his hair.

While his clothing was stained red with blood, oxygen was still pumping in his

lungs.

“Hey, wake up. You’re the last, you know.”

Offender whose cruel pupils shined like a crazed hyena pressed the knife against the man’s cheek. “Wake up.”

The man moaned and opened his eyes.

“Welcome to hell.” Offender chuckled. “I’m going to skin you now. You got it?”

Namusan...Buddha! What did he say? Skin his face?

But the man’s consciousness was murky. With no intention of resisting, he screamed in fear. Not recovering to his senses might have instead been a boon from Buddha’s tender mercy as the blinding reality was all too cruel.

“What are you doing?” A scolding voice rang out from behind them.

While gripping the man’s head of hair, Offender tilted his cranium and turned to the source of the voice.

There stood a man with his arms folded wearing a cylinder shaped full-faced ninja helmet. He was dressed in ninja garb as well. In a word, a new ninja had joined the party.

Offender squinted with discontent.

“I told you to get busy and do it.” The cylindrical helmeted ninja blurted. “I want to see him suffer fast! Now, hurry up and skin him!”

Offender laughed. “Have a little more dignity, Scatter-san. He’s the last, isn’t he?”

“Yes, the final one.” The green UNIX lights notched in Scatter’s cylindrical helmet pulsed.

“According to my life-force reading, he is. Well, not including us.” The ninja called Scatter muttered and surveyed the area again.

Several hours earlier, like an artist’s rendition of Buddhist Hell, the still untouched upper floors of the Marunouchi Sugoitakibiru raged with flames and explosions.

The ninja duo sported a common emblem: two intersecting katana and the letters ki-ri-su-te or omission in Japanese. The motto meant but one thing: their sworn allegiance to the Soukai Syndicate, the underworld organization exploiting their host bodies by controlling the reincarnated ninja souls that dwelled inside

and ruling the economic and political worlds of Neo-Saitama with an iron fist.

“With so few survivors like this, my frustration pools.” The blood stained cloth hanging from Offender’s belt hook fluttered.

Namu-Amida-Butsu...Oh my Buddha! What fluttered in the breeze was the skinned face of a half-alive victim!

“I thought we’d bag much more! This corpse is meaningless.”

“Darkninja-san killed them all since the feud,” said Scatter. Offender snorted. “He sadly lacks any sense of style.”

This time, what they had been assigned was a clean up detail. They themselves had not participated in the ninja turf war a few hours ago. They merely entered the scene after everything was said and done, after all the citizens who witnessed the battle that might leak information had been killed that is.

...To conceal evidence.

The media would surely have a field day reporting the tragic-disaster-strikes-town news. The film-at-11 would show some employee from the building management company sepukuing himself. And that would be the still-born end of it.

Some crackpot story about a ninja turf war would never see the light of day. The Soukaiya would continue to rule with concealment, silence and oppression.

“So look man.” Offender tugged the man’s hair and waved the knife. “So why can’t I enjoy myself and take my time killing this one?” He pressed the knife against the man’s cheek. Offender blurted out a laugh. “You, my friend, are on the brink of life and death. Now, scream! Fight back!”

The man muttered. “Kill.” Offender stopped moving his hand. “Huh?” The man muttered again. “Shall perish.”

“You don’t mind being killed? Your honesty is taking all the fun out of it. Beg for your life!”

“Shall perish.” The man’s eyes recover focus and gaze up at Offender. The man repeated. “Shall perish.”

“Huh?”

Finally, able to complete a full sentence, the man muttered again. “Ninja...shall perish!”

“Aaaargh!?” Offender screamed in agony and bewilderment. The man reached out his hand and grabbed his face without warning. Offender squirmed and could not escape!

Making a groaning sound, Offender’s mask started to morph. What vile like power had hold of him?

“Yeeart!”

The man threw Offender’s face to the floor and stood up!

“Offender-san! What’s wrong?” Scatter shouted.

The man strikes a daunting pose. And at his feet, Offender was face-down on the floor. The unexpected, not-in-a-million-years attack happened in the blink of an eye.

His facial surface was dug into the floor and cracked wide open like a spider’s nest.

The man whipped his head around and eyeballed Scatter. His line of sight pierces Scatter; murderous intent and hate blaze in his pupils.

“Ninja...shall persish.”

Scatter scooted back. The man drew closer, one step and then another step. Regardless of being a ninja himself, he was alarmed by the nerve of this injured civilian. So alarmed that he was having trouble thinking straight. Kill ninja? Did he actually saying kill ninja? Ninja are...I am...going to be killed?

Yeeart! The man jumped!

Scatter quickly tried to protect himself. He was too late!

The man had already bridge their gap to a distance of one inch.

Yeeart! The man’s right fist smashed into Scatter’s stomach!

R-R-RETCH! Scatter vomited inside his ninja helmet. The rancid upchuck flowed out his helmet!

“Yeeart!” The man drove his left fist into Scatter’s ninja helmet!

“Aaaargh!”

“Yeeart!” The man drove his right fist into Scatter’s ninja helmet!

“Aaaargh!”

While twitching, Scatter moved a few paces back. His helmet was already mangled like crushed scrap metal. The UNIX circuits inside the helmet flashed and sparks flew.

“Oooff! How could this happen? But I’m a ninja. I’m a ninja!”

“Ninja! Shall Perish!” The man flared out both his hands like cracking a whip. Blood dripped from the tip of his arm and then dribbled along his palm. What pray tell was this supernatural phenomenon! The hemoglobin catalyzed with the dust particles in the air and then rematerialized as two suriken in no time flat.

“Yeeart!” The two simultaneously discharged suriken pierced Scatter’s mangled ninja helmet and the insides exploded like a watermelon.

“Aaaargh!”

Scatter staggered. This time, instead of vomit, a bucket load of blood overflowed from his ninja helmet. The UNIX system hummed and sparks flew even more.

“Oo...oooff!?” Scatter’s body swelled up as he collapsed face up on the floor. Then, he scattered everywhither till kingdom come.

“Sayonara!”

The man let out a deep sigh and turned around. He then spied Offender. Offender tore off his face from the floor and stood upright. Their lines of sight met.

“You...what are you?” Taking a step back, Offender wielded daggers in both hands. “What! I haven’t heard word one from the bosses above.”

The blood stains on the man’s garb gradually expanded bit-by-bit. Then blood gushed from his eyes like tears running down his face. While the hemorrhaging was tremendous, the man remained completely calm. Finally, as if by its own volition, the red blood colored clothing distorted, ripped and began morphing into a costume...a ninja costume!

Offender gazed out into space as if he’d been lobotomized. The bloody filaments of fabric crept up along the man’s neck and wove themselves into a hooded ninja cloak covering the man’s head. The blood continued to gush and flow even more finally producing a long cloth like a scarf.

The man took a step forward. Dripping blood shrouded the bottom half of his

face. In one breath, the blood formed a menpo ninja mask. Embossed in a fear-instilling-font on the outside of the mask were two Japanese characters: nin (covert) and satsu (slayer).

“Domo.” The man bowed to Offender. “I’m Ninja Slayer.”

Offender was confused. Who was this guy? What had just occurred? Was this guy really called Ninja Slayer? Was he going to be killed?

Shivering in his boots he returned the exchange of courtesies. “D-domo. Pleased to make your acquaintance, Ninja Slayer-san. I’m Offender.” For Ninja Slayer who came for battle, this exchange was a most inviolable and sacred act. And so it is written in the Record of Ancient Matters. If greeted, one must return the greeting. It’s simply proper ninja etiquette.

“You bastard, who do you think you’re talking to?” Offender crossed the daggers in his hands in a menacing manner. “What are you doing to go now?” “Kill you.” The ninja dressed in dark red replied.

“Why?” Offender screamed. But his question was mere nonsense. Moments earlier, he was the one who unreasonably threatened to kill Ninja Slayer by skinning his face. Ninja Slayer took another step forward then responded. “Because you...are a ninja.”

“Stop it!” Offender screamed in terror while thrusting forward. Aiming to stab with both his daggers, Offender let out a ninja scream, “Yeeart!” “Yeeart!” Ninja Slayer landed two quick chops at the base of both of Offender’s arms.

“Aaaargh!” Blood spurted from Offender’s shoulders as he collapsed to the ground. With no power to grip his daggers, they fell to the ground with a plink-plank-plunk. Ninja Slayer stood with his hands horizontally in chop mode. “Prepare to recite your haiku death poem, Offender-san.”

Overwhelmed by fear and despair, Offender was unable to recite his death haiku right away. He simply quivered. “No. I don’t want to die. This is a mistake.” “Yeeart!” “Aaaargh!” Blows of repeated finishing chops severed Offender’s head. Finally,

his head went flying end over end into the air and screamed.

“Sayonara!”

His headless body scattered everywhither till kingdom come.

For a few seconds, as if stranded deep in thought, Ninja Slayer stood there. A breeze of smelly soot blew through the floor; the long scarf around his neck fluttered in the wind.

Then, he took off running.

To Be Continued