GENESIS

J.M. COLEMAN   L.L. WIRTZ

GENESIS

To the women in our lives,
Those who made it this far,
And those who didn't.
May your love shine through us,
Ad aeternum.

N
W — E
S

Train Tracks

Receiving

Metalworks

Maintenance

Reactor

Shipping

The Garden

Living Quarters

Bathhouse

Pod Rails

THE SPIRE

Castrum

Academy

Greater Library

Hospital

Lesser Library

MARKET DISTRICT

Shops

Murimoto's Ramen Shop
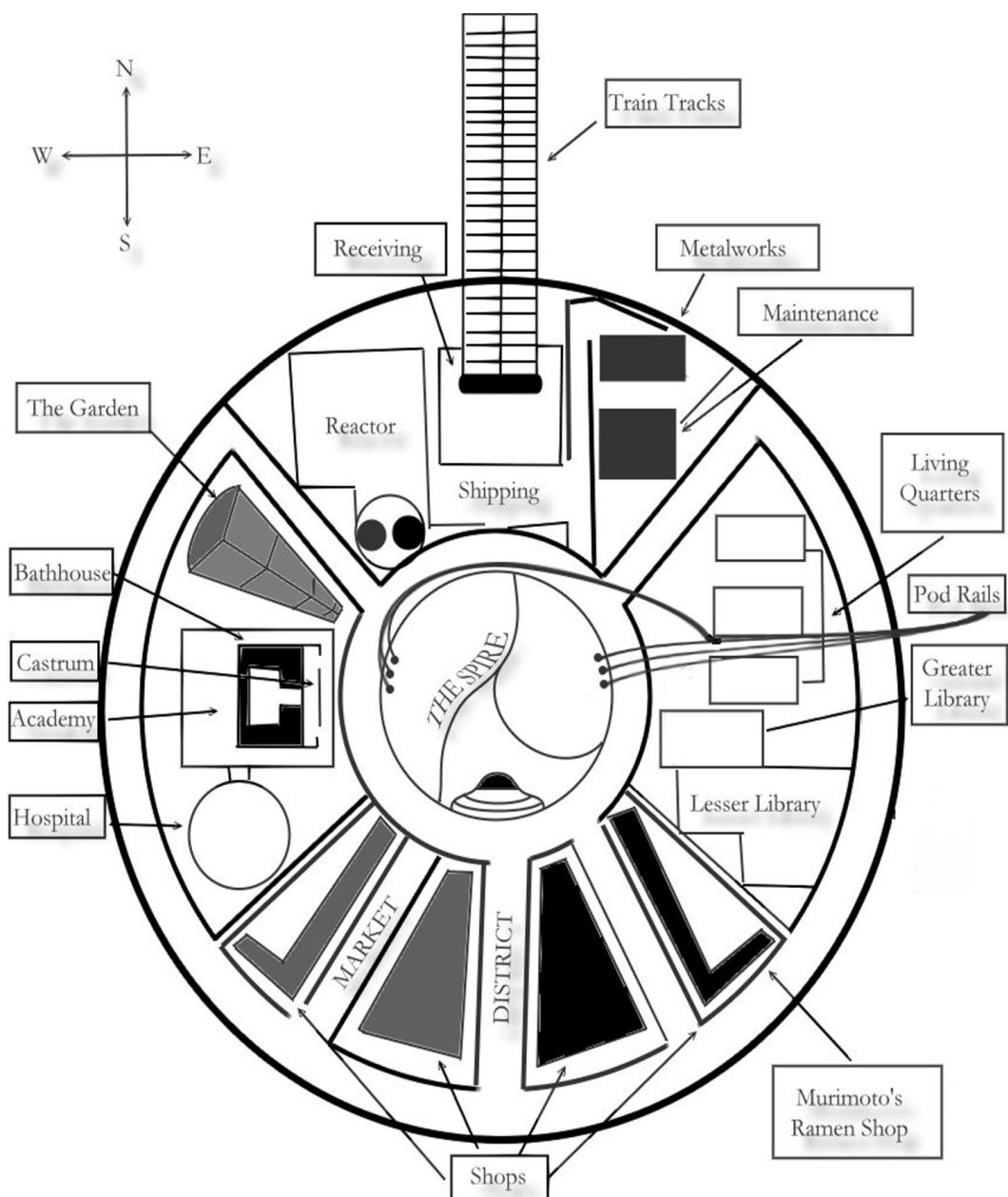
SICARII HEADQUARTERS

CHARACTER INDEX

The Sicarii

<u>The High Council</u>

Alef (1)

Bet (2)

Gimel (3)

Dalet (4)

He (5)

Vav (6)

<u>The Twelve Squads:</u>

Seraph Squad:

Seraphiel - Leader

Helel ben Sahar - second in command

Metatron

Michael

Jehoel

Squad Three:

Gilroy - Leader

? - Ranger

? - Warden

? - Alchemist

? - Wraith

Squad Four:

Kai - Leader

Tara - Ranger, second in command

Marlowe - Warden

Amina - Alchemist

Piers - Wraith

Squad Nine:

The Black Death Mahta - Leader

Joseph - Warden, second in command

? - Wraith

? - Alchemist

? – Ranger

Non-Squad Sicarii Members

Alphonse - archaeologist, best friend of Kai

Sohei Murimoto - previous Squad leader, owner of Sohei's Ramen Shop

Haley - librarian assistant in the Greater Library

Sofia - bodyguard of the High Council

Verena - secretary of the High Council

Summer - watcher of the Spire's plaza

Dr. Henry Mun - forensic pathologist

Dr. Áñez - medical doctor at the hospital in HQ

Unaffiliated Characters

Black Star - freelance assassin, son of Alexander Stromberg

Maria (White Star) - inventor, mechanic, daughter of Alexander Stromberg and sister of Black Star

Alexander Stromberg - environmental scientist, bioengineer, astrophysicist, inventor, father of Maria and Black Star

Sylvia Stromberg (Silver Star) - retired assassin, mother of Maria and Black Star

Red Star - maternal grandfather of Black Star

Cornelius - purveyor of freelance assassin contracts, financial advisor

Sandy Shores - Italian mobster

Konstantin and Sergei - Russian mobsters

Vadim - Pakhan of the Bratva operating in the New States

Lilian Marshall - ex-soldier and CIA operative

Adrian Blom - head of the Swedish Security Service

The Phantom - ?

Ahmed and Adelina - father-daughter duo who run the Hashround Haberdashery

Abe Davidson - skilled thief

Elaine - ex-Engineer, inventor

Table of Contents

GENESIS

The Lightning Arc
Book One

J. M. Coleman

L. L. Wirtz

ONE

KAI

On an insignificant rooftop in an insignificant city a steel door burst open from a forceful kick. A middle-aged suited man fell backwards out of the doorway and scurried hurriedly away from the shrouded figure following him.

"What do you want!?" he shouted, unheard by the rest of the world. "I'll give you anything! Money, drugs, women, just please don't kill me!" In the darkness red stared back at him. In that horrifying collusion of parallel and perpendicular lines the man saw only one thing: oblivion.

"Adrian O'Connor," the figure stated, his voice as terrifying as his mask. "On the order of the High Council of the Sicarii you have been sentenced to death."

"No!" the man shouted into the void. "You can't do this!" He moved quickly, but not quick enough to dodge the sword that plunged into his heart, severing his aortic valves and rupturing all four chambers in the process. The man's head fell and the rain began to pour. The blood dripping from the assassin's blade mixed with the water, creating an ocean of diluted ichor between himself and the rooftop. He flicked the blade outwards, spattering the rooftop door with blood like a painter with a canvas. His longsword shone in the darkness, reflecting the lights of The City all around him while revealing the Greek word "θρυμματίζω" (Shatter) engraved on the blade.

"Contract complete," he sheathed his sword and the interior of his mask lit up a brighter crimson than before.

"Voice recognition confirmed," it stated in a cool feminine voice. "Target eliminated. Funds added in the amount of one-hundred thousand USD."

The young man reached around to the back of his neck and pressed a circular, red-ringed button which triggered a collapse, or rather a dissolution, of his helmet into the space in which the button existed. He looked up towards the night sky. As the rain penetrated the troposphere and fell towards the earth he felt for once, in his entire life, a kind of peace as the water droplets struck his face lightly. The helicopters flying above him broke his peace with their obnoxious rotors that tore through the air like vultures through flesh, and because of this he put his head down, reconstructed his helmet, and began walking forward. Walking towards the ledge, the short, messy-haired killer kept his sights on the helicopters as they headed towards a building on the west side of The City. He jumped across the gap in front of him to another roof and followed them. The boot-like footwear built into his suit pounded ferociously against the wet concrete as he moved more quickly westward.

"Transmission incoming, Kai," his mask stated abruptly.

"Who is it, Eris?" Kai asked.

"It's the High Council."

The High Council? Kai thought. *I highly doubt this is a coincidence.* Kai's thoughts flickered with the endless possibilities of the events that were about to unfold, but no training, no understanding or calculations of percentages and probabilities could make him understand this. "Put them through," he stated.

"Identify," a younger woman commanded.

"Kai. A-Rank Knight-Hybrid. Leader of Squad Four. Assassin under the order of the High Council of the Sicarii." This statement was like clockwork to him. It was stitched into the very fabric of his existence, just like everyone else at the Academy. Name. Rank. Class. Affiliations. Any differentiation ended in death.

"Kai," the young woman said calmly. "Something has happened." She was upset, afraid, and Kai picked up on her emotion immediately.

"What's going on, V?" Kai asked, still sprinting across the rooftops, trailing behind the helicopters. At this height falling meant instant death, but Kai wouldn't fall, he couldn't fall, because the rooftops were his home, as they had been nearly his whole life. So, when he was up there, above the busy streets, above the disgusting swine that were ignorant of their own world, he was okay.

"Kai... it's Alphonse..." His heart stopped. His head fell and he stopped moving, teetering on the edge of a roof hundreds of feet in the air. Any thoughts lingering in his mind fled as pictures and memories of Al began flooding back through him. "He's gone rogue."

A pulse shot through Kai's body. He instantly felt sick, and vomit began forming in his gut. Sadness, despair, and frustration overwhelmed his body and poured out of him like an overfilled jug.

"You'll need the rest of your squad for this one," the young woman said. "He's on the roof of the Empyrion Building. You know what must be done, Kai, and the High Council trusts you'll do it. Transmission over, Eris." The woman's voice cut out and Kai stepped away from the edge and fell to his knees, pressing the button on the back of his neck to collapse his helmet. He began vomiting bile as the shock of his orders overwhelmed him and he hadn't eaten in over two days. *Not Al.* He thought. *Anyone, but Al.* The hard rain beat on his back and head soaking his short, dark, messy hair. He stood up, his throat burning, and wiped his mouth. He looked back up at the same night sky. *Ah, fuck,* he thought. He pushed his hair back with his hand and pressed the same button on the back of his neck, bringing his mask back. The interior of it began glowing a deep crimson yet again.

"Eris?" Kai asked.

"Yes, Kai?" Eris responded.

"Connect me to the rest of Squad Four immediately."

"Right away," Eris confirmed.

"Marlowe," Kai said shakingly.

"Yes."

"Amina."

"What's up?"

"Tara."

"Alive and well."

"Piers."

"Kai! What's up buddy! How are y-"

"Track my position and move on me," Kai ordered, cutting off Piers. "We have a mission from the High Council directly."

"Copy that," Tara responded.

"Affirmative," Marlowe stated roughly.

"On my way!" Amina said excitedly.

"I'm closing in on you now," Piers informed.

Piers arrived first, a fourteen-year-old cloaked boy with shaggy blonde hair and a knack for hacking off limbs with his scythe. "What's up dude!?" Piers exclaimed.

"Now's not the time, Piers," Kai responded.

"My bad, my bad. What happened?"

"We'll go over the mission when everyone arrives." Kai's harshness bothered Piers and his happy demeanor quickly turned sullen as he matched Kai's speed, which was easy enough for him since he was a Wraith. Marlowe was the next to arrive, his thunderous stomp shaking the rooftop below Kai and Piers. Marlowe was a massive, male Pacific Islander with the muscles of a bodybuilder and long locks of curly hair encompassing his head. He was large, but he was fast, unexpectedly fast, which made him even more terrifying as a Warden.

As Marlowe fell into formation Tara joined the fray, her dark brown cloak flapping in the wind and rain. Tara was mild-mannered, strong, and rarely spoke. She was a Ranger, and if she wasn't with the squad she was in the forest hunting with her half-wolf Hastur. Tara's golden hair was braided down to the middle of her back where she tied it off with a piece of string. She was a true warrior and the second in command of Kai's squad. Amina showed up last, a petite girl, eighteen years of age with blueish hair and pale skin.

"Yo!" Amina yelled. "Sorry I'm late!"

"We still have some ways to go," Kai said. "Don't worry." Amina was an Alchemist who wore leather vestments over the standard, black Sicarii suit with vials of poisons and potions in the holsters built into her waist and chest, and two hardened steel daggers strapped to her thighs. She was the medic of the squad, and every squad needed one, but she was much more than that. Amina was deadly with a blade and even deadlier with the toxins she carried around.

"Who's the target?" Tara asked.

"Alphonse has gone rogue," Kai replied. Piers' heartbeat began to race and his face became red. "Damn it..." he whispered under his breath.

"Target location?" Tara responded.

"The Empyrion Building on the west side of downtown," Kai replied. The Empyrion Building was a prominent science and research facility on the west side of The City. Genetic testing and pharmaceutical research were two of the many complex ideas studied by the Empyrion scientists within its glass walls. From the sky, the Empyrion Building looked like an eye, and was referred to as such by most citizens.

"Distance? Amina asked.

Tara pulled out a rectangular piece of metal that fit neatly in her palm and pressed a button on the lower half of it. The metal split horizontally and the two pieces moved away from each other. A thin, reinforced, glass screen began forming in between the two metal pieces until they were six inches apart, where the pieces stopped moving and the screen lit up. In her hands, Tara held the newest line of mobile devices by Trytek, the largest and most powerful producer of all things technologically advanced from artificial reality to military-grade weaponry.

"3.7 kilometers," Tara stated. "At our current speed, ETA is approximately eight minutes and twelve seconds."

"Let's step it up," Marlowe insisted. The five continued flitting across the rooftops, their thoughts on the massive building in the distance, except for Kai and Piers - their thoughts were elsewhere. Alphonse was their friend, Kai's brother, and had been since the very beginning, since their rescue, through the Academy, and up until now. *What happened, Al? Why you?* Kai thought. *Where is all of this coming from?* Alphonse was always a good kid, always bright, always willing to learn. He wasn't the strongest, or the fastest, but he could outsmart just about anyone and he was a hell of a good strategist. If Kai was five steps ahead of his opponents at all times, Al was twenty. He didn't need strength or speed when he could read the minds of his enemies and force their hand.

"We're 1.6 kilometers out," Tara stated. "We should be seeing the perimeter soon."

An explosion on the roof of the Empyrion Building caught their attention and they stopped running. Smoke began billowing into the crisp night air.

"What the hell was that?" Marlowe exclaimed.

Al..., Kai thought. "Split up," he ordered. "Marlowe and Amina, move towards the north side of the building. Get to the roof by whatever means necessary. And Amina," Kai said while unbuckling his sheath, "take my blade. I won't be able to carry it where I'm going."

"You can count on us!" Amina said excitedly while taking Shatter. Marlowe and Amina dashed off quickly onto another building and disappeared in the lights of The City.

"Piers, I need you to create a distraction. Move into the building from the upper floors and do whatever you can to keep the police and their SWAT units away from the roof." Piers nodded his head and moved towards the south side of the building to breach from higher up.

After Piers was out of sight, Kai stared at Tara. Tara was shockingly beautiful by society's standards, but such things mattered not to him. Kai was a soldier, not a lover. An assassin, not a significant other. To Kai, beauty was fleeting and love even more so. The only thing true and honest in the world was Death. Because Death always came for everyone.

"I'll enter through the front door." Kai stated.

"How are you going to do that?" Tara chuckled.

"It's hard to see who's under those black uniforms of Kevlar and cloth, don't you think?" Tara smiled and nodded her head in agreement. "You know what to do,

Tara," Kai said, pointing behind him in the direction of a cluster of buildings. "On it," Tara responded, catching a glimpse of the three snipers on the rooftops of businesses at the north, south, and west perimeter of their target location.

Kai smiled a half, crooked smile, hiding this time behind an internal mask. "Thanks Tara. Let's go." Tara smiled back, ignorant of Kai's façade. She moved across the rooftops towards her first target as Kai hopped down the fire escape towards the dank city streets. A few hundred feet in front of him was a roadblock and a cluster of law enforcement vehicles, their red and blue lights illuminating the buildings surrounding them. He moved closer towards the roadblock and saw three SWAT officers directing the westward traffic on a detour that went north around the police line. Kai moved deep into an alleyway close to the walking, talking, traffic lights. A man clad in Hyper Kevlar and a standard issued SWAT uniform began walking towards the alleyway. Kai made noise to attract him further.

As the soldier moved deeper into the swaying darkness, Kai flanked him and locked his arms around the man's neck to restrict his airflow, causing him to lose consciousness within seconds. Immediately, Kai threw on the SWAT uniform over his own suit and pressed the button on his helmet, collapsing it down to just the piece that surrounded his jaw, and placed the balaclava over his own head. Kai put the SWAT helmet on and hid the body and walked out of the alley assault rifle in hand. Across his upper back scrolled the words *SWAT* and *POLICE* in a holographic display of authority.

"Hey! You! What the hell are you doing?" a bald black man with a large mustache and a police jacket yelled in Kai's direction. Kai glanced towards him. "Yeah you! What are you doing? Stop staring at me and get the hell in there!" the man continued to shout. Kai began jogging towards the rest of the SWAT team that was entering through the front doors of the Empyrion Building. He caught up to them and took up a tactical position in the rear.

"Alright men, here's the plan," a man towards the front said, who was obviously the captain of the squad. It was strange to Kai, taking orders from a squad leader after being one himself for over a year. "We're going to move into this building, clear the floors of any late-night employees, which we hopefully won't find, and take out any tangos along the way. Understood?"

"Yes sir!" the SWAT team exclaimed.

"Let's move out then."

The team of well-trained military police moved into the building swiftly, cautiously, and perceptively, and their captain followed them from behind. Their boots made almost no noise against the white, marble floor, and the light coming from the flashlights mounted on the barrels of their assault rifles bounced off the floors and walls, penetrating every crevice of the darkened building. They moved carefully, methodically, like a hivemind, up the stairs to their left and onto the second floor overlooking the lobby. Most of the research labs were underground, so the second floor and above were entirely offices and conference rooms.

As they cleared the second floor they pushed up to the third, unaware of Kai's ferocious presence lurking next to them. Above them came noises drowned out by the hundreds of feet of glass and steel between them and the origin. They stopped at

the sign of their commander, Kai included, and listened. A bang. No, multiple. *Gunfire,* Kai thought. The SWAT team moved faster now, closer to the noise, and their leader followed behind Kai. The more floors they moved through, the staler and colder the air got, as if death had infested each and every corner of the building. Fear and doubt began creeping into the minds of the men and women in front of Kai and he could sense it - slight jerks in their movements, hesitations when rounding corners, changes in breathing - they were weak.

As they moved, Kai kept most of his focus on the shadow lurking near them. It crept silently, unheard by the men and women in ballistic vests and armor as well trained as they may be. Kai smirked. *Piers.* Piers placed himself down the hall and around the corner from the SWAT team so that they would see him when they moved up further. The frontrunner rounded first and saw him immediately.

"FREEZE!" she exclaimed. Piers rounded the next corner and the company chased after him. Kai slipped away as their focus stayed on Piers and moved quickly towards the emergency stairs to head towards the roof. He shed the uniform he was wearing and sprinted upwards towards the origin of the gunfire he had heard previously, boots slamming on the concrete steps below him. A glass exit sign protruding from the ceiling lit up the top of the stairs in a brilliant red blaze. He reconstructed his helmet from its resting place and memories of the Academy and Alphonse flooded Kai's mind; his darkness overwhelmed him constantly, but during the Academy Al was always there for him. Their friendship didn't stay as strong once they found their true place within the Sicarii, but Al was still his friend, his brother, and Kai doubted whether or not he could cut down the pale-haired boy that smiled at him so long ago. Fear began overwhelming him and his helmet became a coffin for his mind. His sight began darkening and his body began aching. He heard not the footsteps coming up behind him. A hand fell lightly on his shoulder.

"Kai?" a young woman's voice broke through the silence softly. Kai's hand moved to the knife at his hip and in one swift motion it shifted from its resting place to the throat of a fearful Amina. Her teal hair flew back, and Marlowe stood shocked behind her. "Hey..." Amina's voice trailed off. Kai came out of his trance and replaced the knife at his hip.

"Sorry," Kai said monotonously.

Amina handed Kai his longsword and he buckled the scabbard across his hip. "Are you okay?" Amina asked concerned, quiet, hoping for a glimpse at his true self.

"I'm fine," he responded as he slid his sword out, inspected it, and slid it back in its casing. "The probability of being seen must be minimalized." Amina accepted that her probing got her nowhere and backed off. Kai made eye contact with her, locking her focus on him. "Do you have anything, Amina?"

"Um," Amina fumbled a bit, looking in her satchel. "Yeah, I have a few smoke bombs."

"Good," Kai responded. "Marlowe, I need you to secure the rooftop perimeter. Any witnesses must be killed. Understood?"

"Understood," Marlowe replied.

"Eris, connect me to Piers." Amina realized months ago that Kai tended to speak to Eris kinder than he did his squad mates, and it bothered her greatly. It wasn't due

to Eris's obedience, unbeknownst to Amina, because that's not so much what Kai cared about. Rather, it seemed, it was Eris's possible disobedience that drew Kai to her and her always assisting him, even though she wasn't human.

"Right away, Kai," Eris responded.

"Yo," Piers opened.

"Piers, what's your status?" Kai asked.

"Keeping our friends busy and far away from you," he chuckled.

"Good," Kai responded. "Only kill if absolutely necessary. We need to be in and out as quickly and quietly as possible," Kai said kindly.

"No problem, buddy," Piers ended.

"Tara?" Kai asked over the intercom.

"In position Kai. All scouts have been eliminated. I have a clear line of sight on the entirety of the rooftop."

"Excellent," Kai said pleased. "Amina will be laying down heavy smoke so switch to virtual imaging."

"On it." Tara replied.

"Are you ready Amina?" Kai asked.

"Ready."

"Marlowe?"

"Ready."

"Moving in," Kai stated. "Let's get this over with."

Kai kicked in the rooftop door and Amina threw out three metal orbs that rolled speedily outward. The bright lights from the helicopters beat down heavily, so Kai and Squad Four hid in the dark until the smoke would be thick enough to hide them instead. Amina's orbs split up and rolled to different parts of the roof, the first in line to the farthest point, the second to the middle, and the last fifteen feet in front of the doorway, where they stopped and exploded into a thick cloud that, unseen to the eye, had electric currents flowing through it that wouldn't damage organic life, but interfered with electrical systems like the helicopter's infrared and night vision cameras. However, Tara's virtual imaging went past the electrical smoke because it didn't try to see through it, but rather used satellite imaging and artificial reality software to reimagine the area in view. Eris had said during previous missions that the currents in the smoke 'tingled' a bit as she moved through them, but they never harmed her in any significant way.

Kai, Amina, and Marlowe pushed in through the smoke and moved carefully across the rooftop. Marlowe stayed near the stairs and Amina followed behind Kai further into the smoky void. In the distance, Kai caught the glimpse of a silhouette of a person and as he and Amina moved further in to investigate they watched the same silhouette slide a blade out of the chest of another.

"Wait here, Amina," Kai stated.

"But Kai…" Amina responded quietly. Kai glanced at her seriously.

"I said stay here. That's an order."

Amina backed off and Kai moved in towards the silhouette. As he walked further his boots began sticking to the rooftop and when he looked below him he saw dark red looking right back up. He moved further into the lake of blood and

began seeing mutilated bodies around him: arms hacked off, entrails falling out of carcasses, legs hanging on by arteries alone. The scene was grim, even to Kai, and as he moved closer to the silhouette he could hear the chilling sound of metal sliding in and out of blood-soaked flesh.

"Al...?" Kai's voice trailed off and the silhouette straightened and turned towards him. Kai moved closer and could make out the ridges of the clothing hanging off the shadow in front of him.

"Al... is that you?" Alphonse's pale hair broke through the smokescreen and confirmed the fears that Kai held deep inside of him. Surrounding Alphonse were piles of bodies, torn to shreds by the dull, jagged katana he held in his hand. Kai collapsed his helmet to see Al with his own eyes. "W-what have you done?" Kai stuttered.

Alphonse stepped closer to Kai, his face breaking through the mist, piercing Kai's soul with bloodshot eyes and veiny cheeks and brow. Darkness and death invaded Kai's mind as he stared into the eyes of his lost brother and remnants of their life in the Academy came to the forefront. Kai dropped his hand from his hilt and reached out to touch Alphonse's face.

"You know nothing, Kai," Al's voice broke through the silence and cut through the smoke like his blade cut through all those soldiers. Kai retracted his hand and stepped back slightly. Al followed Kai's step with one of his own, maintaining the distance. "Everything you think you know is a lie. Everything you've been told is a lie. Your very existence as you see it is a façade!" Alphonse was screaming now, the veins in his face pulsing with each beat of his heart. "Everything is a lie! You're a lie! Reality is a lie! LIE! LIE! LIE!"

Kai moved in towards Al to calm him down, but Al lifted his beaten sword in front of him. "Stay away from me!" Alphonse screamed. You're not my brother! You're not my friend! You're nothing! You don't even know what you are! You murdered dozens of people for what!? The Sicarii!? On orders!? Alphonse continued screaming at Kai, his eyes getting more bloodshot with each word.

"Al!" Kai shouted back. "You've lost your mind! What happened to you? Why did you do this? These people had families, wives, husbands, and children! They were innocent and you slaughtered them like sheep!"

"And you'll be next," Al responded hatefully, madly, viciously. Kai's face fell and he pressed the button on the back of his neck, encompassing his tear-stained face with his helmet once again.

"So be it," Kai stated sullenly. His brother was lost and his heart was broken.

Alphonse slung his jagged blade at Kai's face faster than he ever could've before. Kai dodged under and struck Al in the jaw with his fist, sending him backwards a few steps and disorienting him long enough for Kai to draw his own blade. The tip of Kai's blade met with Al's chest in a quick slash straight from the scabbard, lightly scratching his skin. Al pushed forwards, slinging his blade wildly in every direction. Kai's eyes followed it with ease and he blocked left, right, down, and up, parrying Alphonse's jagged sword with his upward strike. Kai spun and aimed the edge of his reinforced steel longsword at his brother's waist. Al caught the blade with his gloved hand and wind whipped around them from the speed at which they were moving.

Changing his grip, Kai pulled his blade upwards, forcing Al to let go, and cut straight through his shoulder, taking his right arm off in one move.

Al began screaming as blood gushed from his wound. He dropped his blade and struggled violently to stop the bleeding with his left hand. Tears streamed down Kai's face under his mask, his very existence breaking in half. "I'm so sorry Al..." Kai whispered. "Sleep now." Kai brought his blade downwards and to the right, cutting cleanly through Alphonse's neck. His lifeless body collapsed to the ground and his severed head rolled off to the right. Kai fell to his knees and dropped his blade. His left hand moved frantically to find the button at his neck, and when he did find it he let out a heart-wrenching scream that silenced everything else in existence. The world ceased to rotate, the cars ceased to move on the streets, and the rooftop he was falling apart on top of ceased to exist. He was floating in darkness, just him and Al, and the pain he experienced in that moment was worse than any pain he had felt before. He began sobbing uncontrollably and he put his head in his hands in an effort to contain his sorrow.

"Kai! Kai!" a woman's voice screamed behind him frantically. Invisible hands grabbed him under his arms and lifted him to his feet. They put his left arm over their invisible shoulders and began walking him away.

"Grab Shatter off the ground and pack up the evidence," the woman's voice shouted. "Tara, Piers, get over here now!" Piers' exhausted voice broke through the darkness.

"I'm here, I'm here." Piers began bagging up Alphonse's remains as quickly as possible.

"I'll meet you back at HQ," Tara said through every member's earpiece. "Just go. Get him out of here now."

"Amina..." Kai said faintly, his eyes absent.

"I'm here Kai, I'm right here. Everything's going to be okay," Amina reassured.

I need transport!" she continued to yell over the intercom. The police helicopter circling the rooftop landed and a member of the Sicarii wearing a police uniform stepped out.

"Get in, now!" he yelled over the rotors while keeping his head down.

"We have to hurry!" Amina shouted. "The smoke will be clearing any second!"

Amina put Kai in the helicopter and got in along with him. Piers hopped in next, followed by Marlowe and Alphonse's bagged body and weapon and anything else that would've pointed to them being there. The helicopter lifted off the ground and began flying off, blowing the rest of the smoke over the edges of the rooftop. Amina rested Kai's head on her chest and wrapped her arm around him. He looked out the window at the Empyrion building as the SWAT team that was chasing Piers burst through the rooftop door. Kai closed his eyes and saw only Alphonse smiling at him, just like he did all those years ago. A tear strolled softly down Kai's face and onto Amina as he finally lost consciousness, ending the worst night of his life.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

J. M. Coleman is the co-author of the dark sci-fi thriller series "The Lightning Arc". He is an author, teacher, and scholar, holding two bachelor's degrees in Theology and Secondary Education and one master's degree in Theological Education. He generally writes science fiction, horror, and/or fantasy, and spends his free time writing fiction and non-fiction, reading, and playing the few games he has time for.

L.L. Wirtz is co-author of The Lightning Arc. He has always had a passion for writing ever since he was kid making comics, a passion that has continued into adulthood and now takes the form of writing novels and poetry. His unique writing style is hard to replicate, and his creativity can be hard to match. When he doesn't have a pen in his hand it is often replaced with a frisbee or poi balls. He loves nature and pushing his body to the limit. When he is not exhausting himself outside during the spring and summer, you can find him inside playing a video game or watching his favorite anime. If he is not doing that he is juggling his friendships and meeting new people, constantly expanding his social life by creating new bonds - all in enough time to squeeze in an afternoon cat nap.