

## Lo Tek, High Society

In William Gibson's "Johnny Mnemonic," the Killing Floor and the interactions of characters with this environment trivialises the belief in degrees of separation between higher class, highly technological society and the "Lo Tek." The descriptions of the Floor also go further to propose that this Lo Tek outcast group may actually be superior, opposing the idea that future technological advancements will improve society. "The sound [the Killing Floor] made was like a world ending, like the wires that hold heaven snapping and coiling across the sky. He rode with it, for a few heartbeats, and then he moved, judging the movement of the Floor perfectly, like a man stepping from one flat stone to another in an ornamental garden" (Gibson 20).

During the fight between Molly Millions and the yakuza member, the Killing Floor acts to equalise the two separate parties in order to enforce interaction with the elimination of social class disparity. Within the Killing Floor, no matter the background of the individual, everyone is reduced to a form of entertainment. The sound as the Floor initially activates is compared to a "world ending" (20). If we take "world" to mean a societal comprehension of the world, this rings true. The preconceived notion of a strict division between social classes with a lack of understanding between them shatters as the Killing Floor invites Molly and the yakuza to interact. Moreover, though the yakuza member is still a criminal, he is a highly technological man with power and authority, albeit enforced illegally. However, when met with this unfamiliar environment, he is quickly able to "judg[e] the movement of the Floor perfectly" (20). This immediate adaptation to an environment that is central to the Lo Tek lower class presents a seamless blending of these two worlds that questions how different outside society may actually be to the Lo Tek.

Going further, the subversion of a Lo Tek supremacy is implicitly presented by painting the Killing Floor as a parallel to heaven, questioning the true role of it and its residents within this cyberpunk society. As the Killing Floor first activates, the noise is likened to "the wires that hold heaven snapping and coiling across the sky" (20). Associating the Killing Floor, a representative location for the Lo Tek, to heaven forces a consideration of whether the Floor truly deserves the comparison as opposed to the higher class society around them. Allowing the Lo Tek to earn this parallel to heaven challenges the idea that higher technology, and therefore future progression, is always an improvement for society. "Heaven" and "sky" also draw attention to the fact that the Killing Floor is also physically above the city, that the Lo Tek occupy a futuristic idea of a geodesic dome, albeit abandoned in this story, while the higher class resides physically lower. Focusing on this oddity further questions preconceived prejudices about the Lo Tek and, in considering them to be better, asks how depraved humanity could become for a location called the "Killing Floor" endorsing murder as sport to be the best suited as a heaven.

Expanding on that, the interaction the yakuza member has with the Killing Floor reflects the overall societal shift being criticised within this cyberpunk story. As the yakuza member adjusts to the motions of the Floor, his elegance is emphasised, comparing him to "a man stepping from on flat stone to another in an ornamental garden" (20). This, along with the

aforementioned parallels to “heaven,” both apply peaceful imagery to the Killing Floor, associating the violence, and the specific idea of intentional violence as entertainment, to the new peaceful norm, criticising a path to a twisted future that may become reality without conscious efforts to be better. Furthermore, this depicts the yakuza bringing his own perspective and culture, forcibly changing the image of the environment, mirroring the ways in which dystopian horrors can be covered up by mass delusion. The activation of the Killing Floor specifically being the “wires that hold heaven snapping” also implies that the death of heaven has been brought on by the introduction of a high tech outsider into this fight (20). In this way, since the Lo Teks do not seek to hide the intent or their enjoyment of the Killing Floor, the death of “heaven” comes not from depravity, but a refusal to accept its existence.

By painting an image where a lack of technology is the “ideal,” this text challenges the notion that technological progress in the future may be good. This becomes especially relevant when the jump is made from 1981 when this story was written to 2023, when the rise of AI and constant advancement only seems to accelerate every day.

Works Cited

Gibson, William. "Johnny Mnemonic." *Burning Chrome*, Arbor House, 1982, p. 1-23.