

London's skies had been gray the whole week Team Santiago was there, but today especially felt like the clouds were darker and heavier. The air felt oppressive, eyes looking at them from all angles. In the stands, all of the spectators were Nigel Thorne fans, chanting his name and waving their union jacks in support of him. All of the fans for the other racers were crammed into one bleacher at the end. Orien could see a square carved out for the small group of people cheering for him. He stood in his pit garage next to his car while Parker was making changes to set up his car for the London track.

Grant was examining a map of the circuit. It was mostly straights and technical turns around the city, involving the racers to drive by a bunch of landmarks. The pits and starting line was on London Wall, then they'd pass St. Paul's Cathedral, Trafalgar Square, make a round turn in front of Buckingham Palace, Big Ben and the London eye, and after a bunch of streets cross the Tower Bridge. Just another urban circuit. One Nigel most likely knew by heart.

"Any luck?" Orien asked Grant. Grant sighed.

"None. Nigel Thorne has the upper hand in this whole race. It's all asphalt and technical turns, which is his forte. Plus he knows London well."

Parker scratched her head with her wrench. "I might have an idea," Grant and Orien turned to face her. She smiled. "Nigel Thorne is a GT racer. All we have to do is modify Ryan's car to be able to compete with him on his level. It's just going to be Ryan's part to finish the job and to defeat that arrogant prick."

"The only arrogant prick here is you, Santiago." A snobby British voice rang out in the garage. The trio turned around and saw Nigel, clapping slowly. He had his signature cocky grin.

"Nigel, shouldn't you be in your pit right now with your crew?" Orien crossed his arms and glared at the Brit.

“Oh, I don’t need to prepare. I coordinate with my crew the night before every race, so everything is already prepared in the morning. I just use this time to scope out the competition and have a bit of fun.”

“So then, why are you here?” Grant asked, very unwelcoming.

“I came to deliver a message to Orien Santiago: Don’t even bother with this race.”

“Why? Because Ryan can beat you with his eyes closed?” Parker bit back, her hands on her lips. This caused Nigel to laugh.

“You’re funny, little girl. But no, it is I who will beat you with my eyes closed. Don’t think for even a second because you managed to climb from 79th to 10th place that you and I are in the same realm. I’ve won three Grand Prix races so far and this will most assuredly be my fourth. An American street racer doesn’t hold a candle to an undefeated champion.”

“So why come to me about it?” Orien scoffed. “Tetsuko was the one who tied with you in Rio. Why not give her this spiel?”

“She got the message during my press conference. London is my home turf, where I began. I have the overwhelming advantage and support here,” Nigel said before turning around to leave. “If you wish to remain in the Prix, you can settle with being in the 50s. You’ll fail eventually.”

Orien furrowed his brow. “Why are you even in this Prix if you’re one of the best racers of all time?”

Nigel turned his head back. “Isn’t it obvious? I’m here to prove once that I am the best racer in the world. Racing is just a game that’s meant to be won. And I have a perfect record that I do not intend to lose.”

With those words, Nigel waved off the crew as he returned to his own pit. Parker slammed a firm hand on Orien's shoulder.

"Murder his ass." She encouraged, with a deep growl. Orien gave one quick nod before securing his helmet and hopping in his car to get in the starting position. He finally got to start pretty high up on the road due to his success in Rio. It felt nice to finally have a winner position at the starting line. He got a spot next to Jabari's car, who revved his engine at him to greet him. Orien revved back. Tetsuko and Nigel were at the very front before the starting line. Engines revved over each other, roaring in anticipation for the fourth race. The lights turned green, and the racers disappeared in a cloud of smoke which blended in with the London skies.

For the first leg of the first lap, Nigel had an unmatched lead. He kept a comfortable distance in front of many of the other racers. Zooming by St. Paul's Cathedral, he took the lead. Rounding the Somerset House gallery, he took the lead. Even by Trafalgar Square, he still took a wide lead. It took the other racers everything they had to even get close to him. He was practically gliding down the burgundy roads, like he was leading a parade of race cars in some sort of spectacle.

Tetsuko managed to gain on him on the roundabout to Buckingham palace. She saw a visualized map of the race in her head. On Buckingham Palace road, it was a wide turn onto the street leading to Big Ben and the London Eye. If she could drift and get a headstart when the road ended, she could easily overtake the Brit. When she was at least two cars' length behind Nigel, she cut her wheel and her car began to drift. Nigel, who was already turning, saw Tetsuko's hands on the wheel turn.

"Not this time." Nigel cackled to himself. He slammed his foot on the brake, nearly bringing his UK-themed GT to a screeching halt. Tetsuko looked up and saw her car barrelling

towards Nigel's rear. Tetsuko's eyes widened and her heart began to palpitate. If she didn't do anything, she was going to slam right into the back of him and cause an accident. She froze up. An image of a scene popped up in her head. A scene from long ago. A scene she tried to bury years ago. She remembered the acrid smell of smoke, she remembered the flames burning in front of her, the heat that embraced her body at the time. The sounds of metal scattering across the road and the sound of Japanese sirens. Without thinking, Tetsuko hit her brakes and swerved, narrowly avoiding the Brit. Her car hit the guardrail, some sparks flying as her side swiped it. Nigel cackled loudly as he sped off towards the direction of Big Ben.

"That was marvelous!" His pit chief said to him.

"Naturally. She doesn't stand a chance." Nigel sneered as he passed under the towering gaze of Big Ben and the London Eye. Tetsuko sat in her car, trying to quell the trembling arms and heavy breathing. Her suit got uncomfortably warm from the sweat building up in her racing suit. Why now? Why now did she have to remember? Her mind raced faster than the cars, replaying the image over and over again.

"Tetsuko-chan! Tetsuko-chan! Are you okay?" Her pit crew frantically asked her in Japanese.

"Y-Yeah," She croaked, her voice trembling. "I'm fine." A couple of cars zoomed past her before she could muster up the courage to get back on the road. She's come so far since then. She wasn't the same Tetsuko. At least, she would've liked to believe.

Even after she got back on the road, her performance tanked horribly. She was swaying left to right and not going as fast as before, a couple of cars passing her. Orien was weaving his way through the different cars from his tenth place starting position. Around fifth place, he

passed Tetsuko. He saw through her window that something was off. He remembered the near accident Nigel caused.

“Was that his idea of beating Tetsuko’s drift?” Orien complained to Grant.

“Nigel Thorne is a psychological war veteran. From what I’ve observed in past races of his, he likes to get into your mind. I couldn’t find one race he was in where he didn’t pull some sort of trick like that.”

Orien looked over to Tetsuko. He could only see her eyes, but he saw they were staring at the long road of the track, not even looking to the present. She was driving absentmindedly. He wanted to help her, but knowing Tetsuko, she would’ve pushed him away. He decided it would be best to leave her be to sort it out herself. There was only one goal he had to focus on.

Orien, with a newfound passion and fire burning deep within him, drove through the straights of London, passing 4th, 3rd and 2nd place. 1st place was still Nigel Thorne. In his mirrors, he saw a very tense Orien gunning for his car.

“Oh, how cute,” He scoffed. “He thinks he’s just like his daddy.” Right before Orien could pull up to him, Nigel turned in front of Orien and blocked him. Orien tried turning but Nigel blocked him again. He kept a steady speed so Orien couldn’t easily overtake him. This continued for the entire first lap. Orien desperately tried to pass him but Nigel aggressively cornered or blocked his turns. On the second lap, right before crossing the Tower Bridge again, Orien managed to get level with Nigel’s car, going bumper to bumper with him.

“Mate, you’re going to let him squeeze by you like that?” Nigel’s pit chief asked.

“Watch this.” Nigel replied simply as the two entered the bridge. Nigel turned his steering wheel to the right slightly to where his car was edging closer to Orien. Orien kept glancing between his window and the road ahead, noticing the incremental closing of distance. He knew

this was a feint and he shouldn't be intimidated by him. But seeing how close Nigel was getting, he drifted to the edge of the bridge without thinking. Orien's mirror was centimeters away from striking the side of the bridge and turning even a few degrees into the bridge would've sent his car flying right into the River Thames. After Nigel boxed him in, he put his foot on the gas, leaving Orien in a trail of smoke.

"Orien, are you okay? Don't let him get into your head like that!" Grant shouted. Orien gripped the wheel tighter and grit his teeth, turning back onto the main road. Something caught Orien's eye, however. There was a trail of smoke emanating from Nigel's rear tires. The tires looked ratty and fraying. In fact, he noticed thin puffs of smoke ever since he braked in front of Tetsuko.

"Grant, look at his tires." Orien pointed out.

"I don't think he's noticed, either," Grant's voice responded. "You thinking what I'm thinking?"

Orien chose not to pursue Nigel any further, but didn't slow down too much. He and Nigel kept a very level distance between them so Nigel wouldn't feel threatened by Orien. Upon the third lap, Nigel was once again at a decent lead with Orien dragging behind.

"See? They were worrying over nothing. As usual, the best racer is me. The third lap is a formality by this point." He told his pit crew.

"Make us proud, lad."

Orien was about a car's length behind him when the two approached Trafalgar square. It involved a roundabout. Nigel sped up in order to leave the loop quicker. However, as he made his turn, the car skidded to the edge more than he would've liked. The car even slowed down as he slid across the turn. Orien, who was about to make the turn, saw his opportunity.

“Dethrone this prince.” Grant said. Orien could hear the smirk on his face through the communicator. Orien effortlessly drove through the square roundabout, leaving Nigel behind midway through.

“WHAT THE—” He demanded angrily. He forcefully kicked his gas pedal to speed up, his tires squealing in place before his car began to gain traction again. Further back at the London Wall, Tetsuko was still trailing behind at fifth. She was driving at the same lower pace since the first lap. However, she looked up at the jumbotron, seeing Nigel’s tires giving out on him. She saw that he was now crippled in the race. She embraced the steering wheel with both gloved hands. She was able to stomach the scent of fire and the pounding thoughts enough to catch up.

Orien continued to lead, seeing no other car in his way. He lost Nigel during the turn around Buckingham Palace, where he lost momentum because his car skidded again while exiting the turn, killing momentum. Nigel passed the London Eye street, trying to catch up to Orien. But then a certain LMP car came back around, sneaking onto his mirror once more. Tetsuko.

“Her again?” Nigel seethed, looking up and down between the road and his mirror. He looked back to see her getting closer. After everything he’s said about her in the media, in news articles and on the track, he should be better in every way. He was the Prince of British Racing. How was a Japanese woman beating him in his own city? She was getting closer. He had to do something. Nigel attempted one more block. Cutting his wheel, he sped up and tried to cut off Tetsuko. However, Tetsuko swerved in the opposite direction as he turned, finally overtaking him. Nigel saw halfway through Tetsuko’s plan and he tried desperately to gain control back over his vehicle. However, he sped up too much and couldn’t turn away in time, causing his car to

strike the side of the street circuit barrier. Sparks flew and his paint job had clean gray scratched on the door. Tetsuko, through her window, waved bye-bye to him mockingly before taking off, heading for Tower Bridge. Nigel saw three cars looking to gain on him. He tried again to block them, but veered too far off on the other side of the street and scratched the right side of his car this time, leaving thin smoke from his tires. Jabari was the final car passing Nigel in the group of three. Even at his relaxed speed, Jabari managed to overtake Nigel. All Nigel could do was slam his fist angrily on his dashboard, cursing.

Orien swiftly drove through the Tower Bridge, passed the London Tower and returned to the London Wall, passing the finish line. When Orien returned to the pits, Parker and Grant looked at him with huge, excited grins.

“Ryan, look!” Parker shouted, pointing to the giant leaderboard screen. His eyes couldn’t believe the first thing he saw.

1st - Orien Santiago - #31 (USA)

“I... Won...? I actually beat Nigel?” Orien asked excitedly. He looked down at his hands, which were trembling with excitement. The pit erupted into rumbles of cheers, hands being slapped in high fives, the trio hugging each other, chest bumping the Ferreira boys in victorious cries. Orien stopped mid-celebration and looked left and right. “Speaking of Nigel, where is he?” Grant looked over to his personal computer screen before randomly bursting out into laughter. Parker and Orien walked over to the screen. It was written plain as day.

15th - Nigel Thorne - #1 (GBR)

“15TH PLACE?!” Orien screamed with laughter. He didn’t just dethrone the Prince. He practically humiliated him out there. The same man who trashed him and disrespected his father was now dragging his GT car across the road with barely functional tires. The thought alone



made him laugh harder. He even collapsed on the floor, his arms around his gut as he cackled loudly. He didn't care if the media got footage of him losing it. In fact, he would pay money to see them broadcast his reaction.

After all of the cars finished racing, Orien heard a sound emanating from the stands. All of the Nigel fans who were holding Union Jacks and screaming had casted them away, changing Orien's name instead. As he stepped out, he was surrounded by cheers and applause. The same rabid animals who wanted to watch him get embarrassed and humiliated were now celebrating him. It was a very different feeling. He looked around, taking in the sights and sounds. He wondered if this was how Mateo felt after a race back in Puerto Rico. Where everyone would chant his praises. Sing his name. Showering him with love and affection. But this time, Orien didn't fall back on Mateo's legacy. He didn't have to. This was his. No one else's. And he felt amazing.