

Giant Robot

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59

**KIYOSHI KUROSAWA • DEPARTURES • CHOCOLATE
TOKYO! TALES • SICHUAN SWEAT • SEVENTIES SMUT
CUTE BENTO • MAFIA MAN • MASAKATSU SASHIE**



The Tale of Kenji

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Where do you meet a once-prominent drug trafficker and gangster who has a target on his back for being an FBI informant and a *résumé* that includes racketeering, alleged murder, robbery, pornography, and prostitution? In broad daylight at a cafe, of course. Next to us sit a group of cigar-smoking hipsters, and a middle-aged couple. They don't faze the half-Japanese, pitbull-shaped Kenny "Kenji" Gallo, who, right out of high school, worked with big-time Italian mobsters in Los Angeles and New York City. While many of his peers are dead or in prison, he escaped the crime world by wearing a wire. You'd think the MMA fighter in-training would be quiet about his past and stay out of the spotlight, but on the eve of releasing a tell-all book about his life in crime, *Breakshot: A Life in the 21st Century American Mafia* he doesn't hesitate to quickly answer any question posed, lowering his voice only when recalling something illegal from his past whether it's about crime, punishment, or pussy.

GR: What were you like in high school, what were you doing then?

KG: I went to 7th, 8th, and 9th grade at an Army-Navy academy in Carlsbad, CA. There were no girls there. Obviously, it kinda sucked, but maybe it gets you disciplined, gets you away from your parents—you know what I mean? So then I moved to Irvine with my dad, and I went to University High School. You know, Will Ferrell went there, and I was in dance class with him. Tim Commerford, the guy from Rage Against the Machine, was there. Zack de la Rocha was there.

In military school I got straight As because it was disciplined; there were 12 people in the class and it was hard for me. When things are not hard or stimulating, I just get bored. Like I read three books a week. I have really good memory—almost photographic—and I'm really good with numbers. At Uni, there would be like 48 people in the class. I mean come on. I had done all the math, geometry, trig, and everything in Army-Navy academy by 10th grade, and when I got to public school, they put me in consumer math. Honestly, why would I show up? You're gonna teach me fractions? So I would just party, fight, and drink. I took jeet kune do—kind of like the first mixed martial arts.

GR: When did the crazy stuff start?

KG: It was really weird. Some of the guys that I went to military school with came to Uni. I remember the day my friend Frank took me behind the school and he was like,

"Look what I have." He was like, "Cocaine," I'm like, "Aw I don't wanna do that," he's like, "Just try it, a little bit." I didn't smoke pot and didn't even like drinking, but I took it, and boom—it was like an epiphany. But it wasn't like I was addicted. I was thinking, "Man, people will pay whatever for this. This is something that I should get into."

So my dad got me a job at a Japanese restaurant in Orange County, and it was owned by a Mexican guy named Joe Avila. At that time, he was one of the biggest drug traffickers in Orange County. He's dead now; he got killed by the Medellín cartel. He got machine gunned in Newport Beach on the side of the road in his Porsche.

I started working there, became friendly with Joe, and met all the crooks that came in there. I used to go to the liquor store and get cigarettes and booze for everybody, and from there I made connections. You know what I mean? I started making the connections to get coke, and I would get really good stuff at really cheap prices. Then I started selling, and it just got crazy. By the time I graduated high school, I had no interest in doing anything besides being a criminal because I was making a ton of money. I would still go to school, though, and I even went to college afterward. Like I would put a gun, a bulletproof vest, and my books in my backpack; take classes; and go deal. At first, there were no beepers, so I'd carry around dimes and had to wait by pay phones.

Then I started making trips to Hawaii when I could fit them in. I'd smuggle coke and bring back big amounts of money, like 40 or 50 grand at a time. It's not like I wasn't scared; I just had balls. I'd just suck it up, like, "Okay, I gotta do this." I'd carry on a bag with four or five keys in it, and back then they weren't looking for bombs or anything; they just wanted to see if you had a gun. So I'd carry it on a plane, go to Hawaii, and come right back. Maybe I'd eat some Hawaiian food, chill out, and maybe surf a little bit. So then I started meeting more people and making more contacts, and it just got crazy, man. Around then, a lot of people started getting shot, so we started buying guns. On May 7, 1987, my friend Joey got machine gunned to death. I was just out of high school, graduated in 1986. Then I really went crazy.

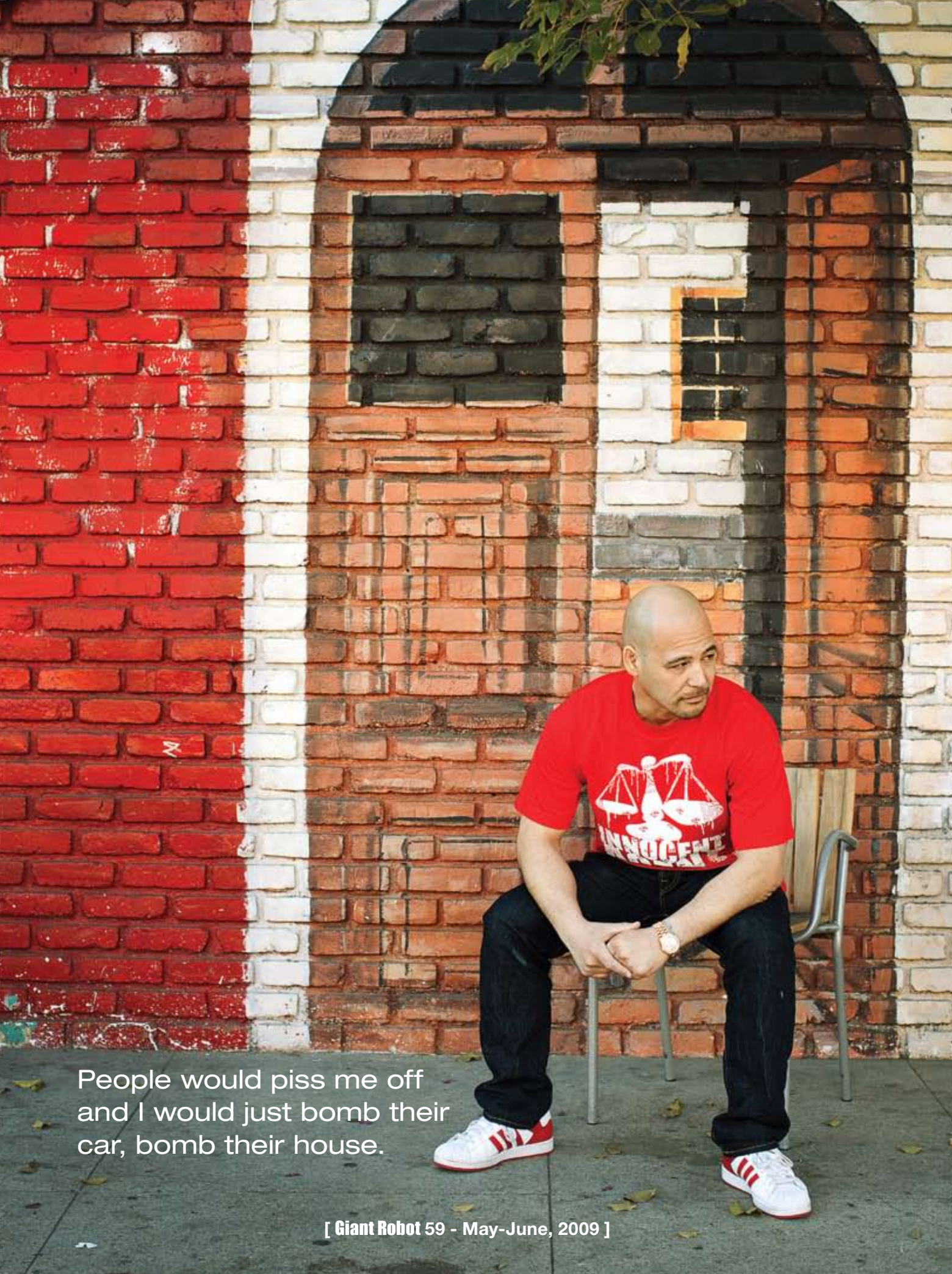
GR: What did you do?

KG: Fucking everything, man. Like people would piss me off and I would just bomb their car, bomb their house. If one of my guys said, "Let's go do a drive-by shooting," we'd do it. I was still kickboxing, and I was taking steroids and whatnot, so I was just a menacing dude. I was just a fucking hoodlum. Then I started to learn about loan-sharking, like how to loan out money, and I started meeting more sophisticated criminals who would school me on what to do.

Around '88, my attorney was like, "Hey, you should get into porn." And it was really weird because we used to work out at a gym. So everyday, I'd be with a couple of my friends—we didn't have jobs—so we'd be working out and tanning, and then there was a guy in there who'd come in all the time. I was like, "Dude, that guy looks like a cop. I think he's watching us." One time, my friend Phil came in, and went, "Oh my God, do you know who that is?" I was like, "Yeah, that's the cop that works out with us," and he went, "No, that's Peter North. He's a porn star!"

GR: I guess he could look like a cop.

KG: Yeah, because he's really clean cut, you know? Like proper. I became interested in him because I already started getting into the business. He wanted to start his own



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company and wanted me to back him, so I was like, "Cool, no problem. How much money can I make?" I put out like 60 thousand dollars and we shot two movies, but those idiots didn't sell 'em. He was like, "Oh, I'm busy. Blah, blah, blah," you know, just making up excuses. So I got some screener copies, started delivering them, and was introduced to more guys, including some mob guys. One criminal can tell another, and I sorta just started backing movies and having people shoot, and, at the same time, I was still dealing and robbing dealers. I did a lot of armed robberies of dealers.

GR: Really?

KG: Yeah, I did armed robberies of dealers, not businesses. Like if someone told me, "Hey, Kenji. Some guy wants to buy three kilos from you," I'd say, "How do you know him? Blah, blah, blah. Cool, tell them to come up with the money." Then he'd give

me the money and I would go, "Dude you're fucked, I just robbed you."

GR: How did you get drugs in such large quantity?

KG: The Colombians and the Mexicans. I got a few of Joe's connections.

GR: The writer Luke Ford said you were like the biggest coke smuggler and gangster in L.A. Is that true?

KG: I wasn't the biggest. I worked with guys that were the biggest. I dealt a lot. I got away with a lot. I also transported it for all these people—for Colombian guys and other people. So that wasn't really mine. I'd move 50 or 100 kilos, but it was someone else's. I'd get paid a transportation fee—a thousand or two per key—and drive from Orange County to San Francisco. They knew that I was smart and I'd obey all the traffic laws. If I got pulled over, I'd be an Asian kid with a back-

pack full of books and nothing was gonna happen. Our crew would buy 10 or 20 kilos at a time, and move 'em quick. I could pretty much sell as much as I got. But at one point, it has nothing to do with the money, because you can't really do anything with it except just piss it away. And I was really young back then, too. I wasn't sophisticated in how to launder it. I learned all that later, but at that point I was just having fun.

GR: So when did you start getting in trouble? When did you get caught?

KG: I got in a fight, someone was choking me through the car window, and one guy jumped in front, so I just floored it. I got arrested for that. I got arrested for storing shit. I was always facing charges, on bail, arrested, or on probation for something. It never ended from when I was 15 all the way until I was 35.

GR: Eventually, you were in a witness protection program?

KG: Yeah. In 2004, I was doing stuff with the Colombo family. The porno girls would come to New York to do prostitution—they'd call it side work—and I'd go with them, get collections, and it was so easy. I met all these wise guys, and they were like, "You gotta move to Brooklyn." I figured I spent all that time in L.A. but I wanted to be in the big leagues. It's like if you're playing in a baseball team, are you gonna spend all your time in Tampa Bay or would you rather go to the New York Yankees?

When I got there, I just happened to get into the right crew. I was in the boss' nephew's crew. This guy Teddy Persico was locked up in prison, got 20 years to life, and wasn't supposed to get out. But then they changed the Rockefeller law and he ended up getting out early. So they came to me and said, "This is the biggest thing you're ever gonna do. You gotta set up a limo ride to pick up Teddy and you gotta get girls for him." So we started looking at the girls, and there weren't any good-looking ones. My roommate in New York was a girl named Dayton Rains. She's a Vivid Girl, and was like, "I'll do it!" Teddy was happy with her, so I had access to him, I'd meet him, and we'd have dinner.

As time went on, I started doing things with his uncle Manny, who was in construction. He was doing all these big projects, skimming, and teaching me all this stuff. He and I got involved with a telecommunications company and things started getting really crazy. He was worried because he was stealing money from the Colombo family, and was scared that I was telling Teddy because I was really close to him. Teddy would ask me, "Hey, am I getting robbed?" It was a really tricky balance to live that whole lifestyle, especially when you're not from Brooklyn and you look different. Obviously, I don't look like any of the guys there.

After that, I was on the streets in New York for maybe another five or six months, and the FBI wanted me to tape Manny and investigate the telecommunications company. So I took a trip up to Toronto and the Colombos started calling me. They wanted to visit me, and I was like, "That's kinda weird." And then an FBI agent called, like an hour after the guy called, and was like, "Has Eddy been calling you?" and I'm like, "Yeah," and he said, "Don't tell him where you are, and don't meet anyone."

And I was like "Whoa." See, I'm always smarter than that. Like Eddy asked me where I was staying. I was staying at the Hyatt, but I said, "Oh, I'm downtown at the Hilton," which was like a mile away. You develop that kind of sense. The FBI just told me to stay still, and a couple days later they said, "I don't think you'll be able to go back to Brooklyn or New York. Just stay put." So I ended up staying up in Toronto for weeks with these strippers and porno stars. It was okay. I was having fun. Then, reality set in like, "Wow, I'll never be able to go back home."

The FBI told me to fly to a different location and that someone would meet me there. So I flew to a different location where some FBI agents met me, and were like, "We're going to get you on another plane here and fly you to another location. And I flew there, and they were like, "Okay, we're gonna debrief you." And they just went over all the stuff—like all my life of crime and hundreds of hours of tapes. They brought me to another house, another location, and another hotel, and they were just like, "We're gonna change your name and we're

GR: But like now that you have a book and do press, isn't the mob going to see you?

KG: They're going to, yeah, but how are they going to find me?

GR: You really have no fear of being found?

KG: I'm very good at covering my tracks. Most people don't even know my real name. Kenji Gallo is not my name. It never was. My nickname is Kenji and everyone called me that, but no one knew my real name. No one knows my Japanese name, you know? They don't know who my parents are or anything because I never brought anyone into anything. I mean, literally, I went through my life like that, without ever telling my last name.

You know, I have all these fake I.D.s, each like four or five different names. I've moved a bunch of times, but basically I've been living in the same places for like half a year. I live in areas where these guys from Brooklyn are gonna stick out. I'm like a normal guy. It's a real small world, and if outsiders came and started asking about me, I would know.

GR: You write that in L.A. there's a whole Mafia network right under our noses. I live near Culver City, and you say that there are Italian dudes running an operation there.

KG: Yeah. They have an Italian restaurant in Culver City, one in Brentwood, and a couple in Beverly Hills that they own or run. I was walking around the Taste of Brentwood, and saw these Italian zips, heroin dudes that I knew, like by a booth. I saw the name of the booth and

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gonna arrest these guys," but they still wanted me to talk to them on the cell phone and record it. The Colombos were trying to get me where they could kill me.

GR: Was going undercover an easy thing to do?

KG: No. I had gotten in trouble. Before I went to New York, I was with the L.A. family in Las Vegas, and there was a big case going on. They had undercovers and everything. You know *Casino*? I was with the crew that killed Herbie Blitzstein, one of the characters in the movie.

GR: Really?

KG: Yeah. He got murdered and they blamed it on the mob guys like my friend Fat Stevie who didn't do it. But they took us all down. They didn't really get me for anything, but I had done an insurance fraud with my ex-wife, who wanted to get rid of her Beemer. The FBI was like, "We're gonna arrest you."

GR: What year was that?

KG: I think '97 or '98? I was done, you know? Done with my life, done with the whole lifestyle. So they called me and said, "Hey, do you want to meet at this Kaplan's Deli in Costa Mesa?" and I went in there, and FBI agents sat me down and were like, "Look, we got you down for this bullshit case, and you're gonna get out in a couple years. It's not a big deal. But eventually, someone's gonna kill you or you're gonna get 100 years." And I was like, "Yeah, whatever." And they were like, "We can offer you a new life. Everything new."

GR: And you actually did that?

KG: Yeah, I did.

GR: For how long?

KG: Forever. My name's changed right now.

just recorded it. They have gambling operations and a couple of them own celebrity-type restaurants. They're here, and I save those little nuggets for when I need something.

GR: What's your take on gangster movies? Are they complete bullshit or are there some with elements of reality?

KG: Well, *Goodfellas* is one of the best books written on the time period, but it's not like that. It's not even close. The best movie, and closest to the way it is today, would be *Donnie Brasco*.

I really wanna come out with a book. I wanna do speeches. And when people ask, I'm gonna tell 'em that it might sound like a lot of fun, but it wasn't. It was a grind, and it was really bad for me. I had a lot of bad times and that life is over. There is no winner. You're never going to win. Jujitsu and the whole martial arts thing saved my life because it gave me something to do.

GR: Did you come out ahead at all?

KG: The way I look at it, I'm a thousand times happier now than I ever was before. I'm at peace and I don't care about the girls or not being able to go to \$1,000 dinners, and I don't need to look like a baller any more. I have my life. I do well. I have really nice cars. I have to admit, to work is harder, but I think it's better. I find more satisfaction in what I do, and the money I make now is like a tenth of what I pulled in. The money I make now is better than 90 percent of the people in this country, but it's nothing compared to what I used to make.

GR: Does it feel better to earn it?

KG: That's what I'm saying, I feel so much better. And like when I get a paycheck, I'm like, "Wow cool," I put it in a bank account, and I don't have to worry about it getting taken, you know what I mean? If I were to have saved every penny, I would have been a multizillionaire by now. Whatever. Easy come, easy go. 🤖