

*comment Devon Connell 2015
*comment Samurai of Hyuga
*comment Chapter 11

*line_break
Chapter 11: Tetsuzan Bridge
*line_break
鉄山橋
*line_break

[i]■■ Outside Jijinto ■■[/i]

“Fuwaa...the shrine’s on the left. Yeh can’t miss it.”

A guardsman greeted a traveler with a yawn, still weary from the start of the morning shift. It’s his ordinary line, though this stranger was anything but. This was the second time in as many days that a katana entered Jijinto at the hip of someone who didn’t look like a samurai. The idea of having two foreign ronin about in his city wasn’t appealing, though it wasn’t his problem either.

*if (attractedTo = "female")

He couldn’t help but stare for as long as he dared—this ronin was a woman, and a wild one at that. Her slim body was well-defined: not an ounce of fat was to be had on those abs or that waistline. Aside from regular hakama pants, she wore a black haori jacket—but more importantly, nothing underneath. A wrapping of cloth was all she used to keep the above particulars in order.

*goto c11_1

*elseif (attractedTo = "male")

He ended up staring at him over longer than he’d like to admit—this ronin was a man, and a wild one at that. In a word, his slim body was well-defined: not an ounce of fat was to be had on those abs or that waistline. Aside from regular hakama pants, he wore a black haori jacket—though nothing underneath. The man wasn’t particularly large, but his firm, muscular stature made him seem that way.

*goto c11_1

*label c11_1

His glance rose back up—and in fear—met with eyes that were an inhuman shade of yellow. Beneath that mess of frayed brown hair, the fierce $\{womanman\}$ smiled. $\{shehe\}$ spoke like a $\{womanman\}$ enraptured in an ecstatic lust.

“ $\{name\}$ - $\{MC_kunchan\}$...it’s been so long!”

[i]■■■■[/i]

*page_break

I barreled my way through one marketplace after another. Most shops were already open at this early hour, and customers started leaking in. Best to get the shopping done before the afternoon heat sets in, I guess. But the crowd didn't do me many favors as I tried to track down Hatch.

The idiot knew these streets better than any of us did. That paired with his enthusiasm to save Momoko-chan meant the three of us were left in his dust. $\{Masami\}$'s short legs weren't meant for speed, and the large bag $\{shehe\}$ insisted on carrying wasn't helping matters either.

"Hey kid, why'd you bring along the knapsack? Don't tell me you're planning to get some reading done throughout all this." I paused the quick pace I had set to give my employer a chance to catch $\{herhis\}$ breath. $\{shehe\}$ then used that breath to insult me.

"Baka—" $\{inhale\}$ "—my talismans I've crafted are—" $\{inhale\}$ "—in there. Do you even know where we're going?" $\{Masami\}$'s obi heaved up and down at every breath. At least $\{herhis\}$ crimson kimono was as pretty as ever. I was impressed $\{shehe\}$ could even run in such a long robe.

I was reminded that I was supposed to protect $\{herhim\}$, not run $\{herhim\}$ ragged. We needed to get to Tetsuzan Bridge. With the sun to my left, I had to figure out which direction to go.

*if (impulsive <= 50)

[i]<Calculated>[/i]

*line_break

The sun was still rising, in this morning hour.

*goto c11_1x

*else

*goto c11_1x

*label c11_1x

*choice

#up

*goto c11_NOT_CORRECT

#down

*goto c11_NOT_CORRECT

#left

*set attunementBase +1

*set attunementMax +1

*temp attunementTemp2 ((attunementBase/attunementMax)*100)

*set attunement round(attunementTemp2)

```
*check_achievements
*if not(choice_achieved_landof)
  *achieve landof
  *goto c11Achieve1
*else
  *goto c11Achieve1
*label c11Achieve1
[i]<Attunement has increased.>[/i]
*line_break
```

“The East Ward is to the left, where the sun rises. That aside, you can tell we’re getting into the nicer neighborhoods now.” My remark caused $\{Masami\}$ to glance away in a pout. It’s what $\{shehe\}$ does whenever I prove that I’m not quite as stupid as $\{shehe\}$ thinks I am. Just because you can’t read doesn’t mean you can’t navigate.

$\{Toshie\}$ agreed with me. “Well observed, $\{name\}$ -san.” The $\{kunoichishinobi\}$ then started looking around, as if we had an invisible stalker. “I ask that both of you remain vigilant. It’s difficult to explain but...a dangerous spirit is approaching. Or perhaps, we are approaching it.”

$\{herhis\}$ words caused me to raise an eyebrow. My psyche was already stressed enough as it was—I might as well have dug Momoko’s grave myself last night. She needed a friend, or something, and I just offered her guilt.

Guilt enough to...we had to hurry. I picked up the pace.

```
*goto c11DirectionChoice
#right
*goto c11_NOT_CORRECT
*label c11_NOT_CORRECT
*set attunementMax +1
*temp attunementTemp2 ((attunementBase/attunementMax)*100)
*set attunement round(attunementTemp2)
“O-of course I know where we’re going...let’s see...” I felt a sensation of dread dart down my spine. Every street was packed and twisted in similar ways; the carts and houses lined up just so. Lines of people curled in and out, in a chaotic sort of order. I’m not a fan of Jijinto, and that’s never been more apparent to me than now.
```

$\{Masami\}$ prepared to unleash a further complaint, but $\{Toshie\}$ intervened. “If I may, $\{name\}$ -san. The East Ward ought to be towards where the sun rises. Therefore, Tetsuzan Bridge ought to be to our left.”

I nodded and sighed a breath of relief. Good to know the Kondo had $\{herhis\}$ wits about $\{herhim\}$. The sun rises in the East, after all. I wasn’t going to say it was an excuse but—I was stressed out enough as it was. My mind kept going back towards last night, where Momoko needed a friend and I only gave her guilt.

Guilt enough to...we had to hurry. I picked up the pace.

*goto c11DirectionChoice

*label c11DirectionChoice

The bridge came into view ahead, and with it, Momoko and Hatch. With the sun bleeding the sky orange up above, the two made for quite the scene.

*page_break

“Don’t you dare take another step! Do you hear me?” The man shouted into the gust of air that separated him and Momoko. The woman stood upon the edge of arching bridge, and swayed dangerously over the side. The bridge itself was painted a bright red, beautiful in the shade of the rising sun.

[i]And blood wouldn’t stain[/i], I idly thought.

“Hachirobei-san...please go. I don’t want you to see this.” I strained to hear the doctor’s voice from this distance. My eyes were drawn to her long hair, which flew about in the wind. Why of all days did the breeze have to pick up now?

“My name’s Hatch, alright? And $\{name\}$ and I didn’t just save you yesterday so you could—could toss your life away like this!” The streetfighter took a step forward, but even as tall as he was he’d need to close more distance than that.

*if (MC_poisoned = "true")

At least he was able to get her talking. “ $\{name\}$ -san nearly died because of me! I’ve only been a source of pain to others. So keep your distance, Hatch. I’m about to put an end to this pain, for once and for all!”

*goto c11_2

*elseif (MC_poisoned = "false")

At least he was able to get her talking. “You nearly died because of me! I’ve only been a source of pain to others. So keep your distance, Hatch. I’m about to put an end to this pain, for once and for all!”

*goto c11_2

*label c11_2

Her cry carried out with the wind; it felt as if she was right beside me. I almost jump when my sleeve is tugged.

The kid. “Cease your voyeurism this instant! I command you to go over there and perform some sort of...of...heroism to save Momoko-san!” $\{Masami\}$ brushed apart $\{herhis\}$ bangs as one of $\{herhis\}$ nervous ticks. $\{shehe\}$ did it several times more while waiting for my response.

*choice

#“I want to, but...this is something Hatch has to do himself.”

*gosub attunementTestChivalrous

“I want to, but...this is something Hatch has to do himself.”

*if (gender = "male")

Whether it was a man’s sense of pride or a samurai’s code of honor, I couldn’t tell. Well, it probably wasn’t bushidō. But even still I knew that deep down, Hatch had to be the one to bring her off that edge. The clumsy, good-natured thug...he should save the day, not I.

*goto c11_3

*elseif (gender = "female")

Whether it was a man’s sense of pride or a samurai’s code of honor, I couldn’t tell. Hell, I was neither. But even still I knew that deep down, Hatch had to be the one to bring her off that edge. The clumsy, good-natured thug...he should save the day, not I.

*goto c11_3

*label c11_3

I’d stick to what I was good at—killing—and let others handle the nicer bits. At least that was my intention, until $\{Masami\}$ smacked a paper charm onto my forehead. $\{shehe\}$ then reminded me that $\{shehe\}$ is, in fact, a shugenja.

“Baka! Since when did you become an idealist?” The kid squinted $\{herhis\}$ eyes, looking around but being unable to meet my gaze. “Excellent. That talisman has rendered you invisible to the naked eye. Now go over there and make sure Momoko-san doesn’t fall!”

*goto c11MyResponseChoice

#“Of course. I’ll swoop in and save the day.”

*gosub attunementTestCharming

“Of course. I’ll swoop in and save the day.”

I was being sarcastic of course. If the kid wanted heroics, then $\{shehe\}$ better be on the lookout for a new bodyguard. $\{shehe\}$ ’s been around me long enough to know that I’m not the type who goes riding in on a white horse. Rescuing beautiful maidens from themselves was never part of the job description.

I would just let Hatch do the honors on this one. At least that was my intention, until $\{Masami\}$ smacked a paper charm onto my forehead. $\{shehe\}$ then reminded me that $\{shehe\}$ is, in fact, a shugenja.

“Baka! Now’s not the time to be cynical!” The kid squinted $\{herhis\}$ eyes, looking around but being unable to meet my gaze. “Excellent. That talisman has rendered you invisible to the naked eye. Now go over there and make sure Momoko-san doesn’t fall!”

*goto c11MyResponseChoice

#“What’s voyeurism mean?”

*gosub attunementTestPerverted
“What’s voyeurism mean?”

When speaking, `{Masami}` almost always opts for the most complicated words available. Usually I could figure out what they meant given the context. But this one had me stumped, and I just couldn’t let it go. I had expected `{herhim}` to grow frustrated with me, but instead `{shehe}` started blushing a deep shade of red.

“T-that is...irrelevant!” `{shehe}` tossed down `{herhis}` knapsack and plucked a paper charm out. Before I was able to react, `{shehe}` jumped up and smacked it onto my forehead. I was a bit angry over getting slapped in the face, but I was more curious over how `{shehe}` got these things to stick.

`{shehe}` then reminded me that `{shehe}` is, in fact, a shugenja. “Excellent.” The kid squinted `{herhis}` eyes, looking around but being unable to meet my gaze. “That talisman has rendered you invisible to the naked eye. Now go over there and make sure Momoko-san doesn’t fall!”

*goto c11MyResponseChoice
*label c11MyResponseChoice

I was invisible?! Who knew that shugenja were even capable of such a feat? I couldn’t help but think back to my years as an assassin, and how convenient this spell would have been. How many life-endangering battles could I have evaded?

But when I inspected my hands, I could still see them perfectly. “I can still see myself?”

`{Masami}` nodded in a frustrated fashion. `{shehe}` replied but wasn’t facing me directly. “O-of course [i]you[/i] can! I haven’t the time to explain its intricacies—the effect only lasts for a few minutes! Now go over there at once!”

I had a newfound respect for the powers which `{Masami}` wielded. It was no wonder that shugenja were so closely looked after and guarded. Imagining such power in the wrong hands was not a pleasant thought to be had. Speaking of unpleasant thoughts, I had to get to Momoko fast.

*page_break

I was close enough to see the doctor’s tears shine in the morning light. Her voice was strained and her breathing staggered, the pitch heavier than ever before. There was an edge to her words that caught me off-guard. Was this really the Momoko-chan who cried in my lap last night?

“You’re so very stupid, aren’t you? I’m making opium for Shiroyama! No one forced me too—I did it because I wanted to!” Her voice crackles, and the tears ceased. Speaking of poisons, her

words were laced with it. “I was tired of making spare change cleaning bed sheets for old men, tired of wasting my talents as a professional physician! I trained my whole life under my mentor, the renowned Matsuyo Fujii...but when he passed I—I became just a piece of eye candy!”

I gulped and was glad that for once I couldn’t be seen. I felt sorry for Hatch, who had already lost the Momoko-chan he thought he knew.

I couldn’t even imagine what was running through his head right now.

```
*if (told_hatch_about_opium = "true")
```

```
  *if (MC_poisoned = "true")
```

```
    “Stupid...huh.” The streetfighter took a look at his bandaged hand, which shook but not intentionally so. He whispered something that might have been a prayer, but I couldn’t be sure what. “Looks like I owe ${MC_himher} an apology then. I don’t really know what being a ‘professional physician’ means, but I [i]do[/i] know what it feels like to lose someone you looked up to.”
```

```
    *goto c11_4
```

```
  *elseif (MC_poisoned = "false")
```

```
    “Stupid...huh.” The streetfighter took a look at his bandaged hand, which shook but not intentionally so. There was a discolored bulge beneath the cloth wraps, where the poisoned dart had struck. Even squeezing it into a fist had to be unimaginably painful.
```

```
    He whispered something that might have been a prayer, but I couldn’t be sure what. “Looks like I owe ${MC_himher} an apology then. I don’t really know what being a ‘professional physician’ means, but I [i]do[/i] know how it feels to lose someone you looked up to.”
```

```
    *goto c11_4
```

```
  *label c11_4
```

Hatch’s hand stopped shaking. He looked back over towards Momoko, and took another step forward. “Now I might just be an unemployed idiot, but I’m doing right by me. Right by Tan-kun. Don’t you think so, \${name}?” He turned towards me and stared me in the eyes. His brow rose up in confusion.

```
  “What...what’s with the piece of paper on your head?”
```

```
  *goto c11_5
```

```
*elseif (told_hatch_about_opium = "false")
```

```
  “You, you made this poisonous, addictive drug and brought it here—and for what?! Did you want fame? Ryō? Respect?” Hatch spat on the ground and rose his fist, which shook though not intentionally so. “Now I’m just an unemployed idiot who doesn’t know much, but I [i]do[/i] know that doctors are supposed to fix people up. Make them feel better. Not...not get them hooked on narcotics!”
```

I stepped forward on instinct, just so I could be in range to tackle Hatch if his emotions got the better of him. I could see his frustration, and I couldn’t let him do I thought he might. Just a

gentle push would be all it took to get revenge for Tanjiro.

After I took my step, Hatch turned towards me and stared me in the eyes. His brow rose up in confusion. “\${name}, what’s with the piece of paper on your head? This is serious! This bitch she...she killed him! Tan-kun is dead...he’s dead...he’s...”

```
*goto c11_5
*label c11_5
```

...

```
*line_break
```

...

```
*if (impulsive >= 50)
```

```
[i]<Impulsive>[/i]
```

```
*line_break
```

\${Masami}! I tore off the useless piece of paper that the shugenja had tricked me with. This was all just a ploy to get me to come over here! Kuso! \${shehe} got me good.

```
*goto c11_6
```

```
*else
```

```
[i]<Calculated>[/i]
```

```
*line_break
```

\${Masami}. I had been completely fooled. I detached the useless piece of paper that the shugenja had tricked me with. This was all just a ploy to get me to come over here.

Kuso...\${shehe} got me good.

```
*goto c11_6
```

```
*label c11_6
```

I cleared my throat and mind of the incident. I’d have to figure out to a way to pay back the kid for this, but not now. Did I approach Momoko, or did I try talking her off the ledge?

```
*comment hatch_rescue_points = (MC_poisoned = true) + (told_hatch_about_opium = "true")
```

```
*comment mc_rescue_points = (MC_poisoned = false) + (told_hatch_about_opium = "false")
```

```
*temp hatch_rescue_points 0
```

```
*temp mc_rescue_points 0
```

```
*if (MC_poisoned = "true")
```

```
*set hatch_rescue_points +1
```

```
*goto c11_7
```

```
*elseif (MC_poisoned = "false")
```

```
*set mc_rescue_points +1
```

```
*goto c11_7
```

```
*label c11_7
```

```
*if (told_hatch_about_opium = "true")
```

```
*set hatch_rescue_points +1
```

```
*goto c11_8
```

```
*elseif (told_hatch_about_opium = "false")
  *set mc_rescue_points +1
  *goto c11_8
*label c11_8
```

```
*choice
#[Approach]
  *set mc_rescue_points +1
  *goto c11APPROACH
#[Talk]
  *goto c11TALK_HER_DOWN
*label c11APPROACH
```

```
*if (MC_poisoned = "true")
  I closed a bit of distance before the beautiful doctor could react. "S-stay back! I mean it,
  ${name}-san! I can't live with myself any longer! When I was by your bedside, I realized that.
  For you, a guiltless samurai to nearly die because of me...I can't stand to bring any more pain
  onto others. And I won't!"
```

```
  *goto c11_9
*elseif (MC_poisoned = "false")
```

```
  I closed a bit of distance before the beautiful doctor could react. "S-stay back! I mean it,
  ${name}-san! I can't live with myself any longer! When I was by Hatch's bedside, I realized
  that. I only bring pain onto others, and I won't stand for it any longer! I won't!"
```

```
  *goto c11_9
*label c11_9
```

One more step and I should be in range of grabbing her. Though if she was serious about taking a dive down the shallow end, I'd be too late. There was Hatch's position as well to consider.

```
*if (brutal >= 50)
  [i]<Brutal>[/i]
  *line_break
```

```
  I knew the opaque eyes of a killer, and of someone ready to be killed. This young woman had
  neither.
```

```
  *goto c11_10
*else
  *goto c11_10
*label c11_10
```

```
*choice
#[Approach]
  I was about to take another step when a gust of wind picked up behind me. The back of my
  heels lifted up from its force, but more importantly—Momoko!
  *goto c11YOU_OR_HATCH_RESCUE
```

#[Talk her down]
*goto c11TALK_HER_DOWN

*label c11TALK_HER_DOWN
*set hatch_rescue_points +1

*if (charming >= 50)
[i]<Charming>[/i]
*line_break

“Beautiful, intelligent, and motivated? And you’re telling me you want to become a splatter of red paint down there? You’ve got to be kidding. I’ve met crippled, balding bastards out there who fought with everything they had just to live another day. To eat another bowl of udon noodles.”

*goto c11_11

*else
[i]<Stoic>[/i]
*line_break

“My pardon if I can’t sympathize. You’re beautiful, intelligent, and far more motivated than most folks I’ve come across. And yet you still insist on throwing your life away? I’ve met bastards out there, disfigured and half-witted, who fought with everything they had just to live another day. To eat another bowl of udon noodles.”

*goto c11_11

*label c11_11

I shook my head in disgust. Disgust at myself, mostly. I had held back a minor detail; the one those bastards were fighting was me. Coinless, starving goons who picked a fight with the wrong \${MC_guygirl}. They had long-since forgone the need for noodles.

My words gave Momoko something to think about, but she remained unsteadily on the edge.

“But what can I do, \${name}? I can’t bring back those I’ve killed, those who fell victim to the poison my own hands created! And there’s no way out, don’t you see? Shiroyama will use me or kill me! The only control I have in my life is...is to end it!”

*choice
#[Approach]

I was about to take another step when a gust of wind picked up behind me. The back of my heels lifted up from its force, but more importantly—Momoko!

*goto c11YOU_OR_HATCH_RESCUE

#[Talk her down]

“You have more control than you realize! But you’ll never find out if—”

A gust of wind picked up behind me, lifting my heels from its force. But more importantly—Momoko!

```
*goto c11YOU_OR_HATCH_RESCUE
*label c11YOU_OR_HATCH_RESCUE
```

I only had a split second to choose. If Hatch and I collided in our mad dash to get to Momoko, we may turn this into a group-suicide by mistake. Who was closer to the edge? Who could reach her first?

```
*choice
```

```
#Me.
```

```
*if (mc_rescue_points >= hatch_rescue_points)
  *set mc_grabbed_momoko "true"
  *set mc_condition "good"
  *set attunementBase +1
  *set attunementMax +1
  *temp attunementTemp2 ((attunementBase/attunementMax)*100)
  *set attunement round(attunementTemp2)
  [i]<Attunement has increased.>[/i]
  *line_break
  *if (MC_poisoned = "false")
```

First and foremost, the streetfighter was still recovering from that nasty bit of tiger snake venom from yesterday. Even if he did get there in time, gripping a falling woman would take all his strength and then some. Too much risk.

```
  *goto c11_12
  *elseif (MC_poisoned = "true")
    *goto c11_12
  *label c11_12
```

```
  *if (told_hatch_about_opium = "false")
```

Mentally I wasn't sure where Hatch was. I didn't really know what it felt like to mourn someone close to you, but Tan-kun's death had hit him hard. And Momoko was an easy outlet for blame, and not wrongfully so.

```
  *goto c11_13
  *elseif (told_hatch_about_opium = "true")
    *goto c11_13
  *label c11_13
```

With well-trained speed and masterful legwork, I shifted into something of a blur. The wind was at my back, and sailed me to the side where a flailing kimono and its wearer started to fall. I thought about grabbing her by her robes, but as loose they were, I opted to grab her by the waist instead.

```
  *if (brutal >= 50)
    [i]<Brutal>[/i]
    *line_break
```

I tossed her up and over with the adrenaline that surged throughout my shoulders. She hit the bridge hard, but not nearly as hard as if she had dropped to the rocks below. I was breathing heavier than I expected to. The hairs on my neck stood up, and I realized:

```
*goto c11_14
*else
[i]<Finesse>[/i]
*line_break
```

I pulled her close, close enough to smell the scent in her hair. Then I quickly twisted and tossed her back on to the bridge. It wasn't the most dramatic method, perhaps, but she was safe. I could hear my heart beating as if trying to break out of my chest. The hairs on my neck stood up, and I realized:

```
*goto c11_14
*label c11_14
```

Saving lives is much scarier than taking them.

```
*goto c11AFTER_RESCUE
*else
*set attunementMax +1
*temp attunementTemp2 ((attunementBase/attunementMax)*100)
*set attunement round(attunementTemp2)
*if (MC_poisoned = "true")
*set mc_grabbed_momoko "true"
*set mc_condition "shoulder"
```

I was confident in my agility when the situation mattered. But I realized something as soon as I grabbed her—the pain in my shoulder bore into me like heated iron. That's right...just last night I was on my death futon because of my run-in with some tiger snake venom. My shoulder was still sensitive to the touch, so grabbing a falling woman might not be doctor recommended.

Though this doctor didn't have much of a choice. I clenched my teeth together and brought her up and over, using the last of my strength to toss her back onto the bridge. I could hear my heart beating as if trying to break out of my chest. The hairs on my neck stood up as well, and it wasn't from the pain. I realized:

```
Saving lives is much scarier than taking them.
*goto c11AFTER_RESCUE
*elseif (MC_poisoned = "false")
*set mc_grabbed_momoko "false"
*set mc_condition "knees"
```

I was confident in my agility when the situation mattered. The problem was, so was Hatch. He had longer legs, and was faster off the mark than I anticipated. To prevent us from toppling over, I had to stop my sandals mid-dash. My feet crumpled beneath me and my knees turned into a pair of painful breaks that skidded across the wooden bridge.

The pain was immense, but my mind blocked it out for now. Now all I could see was Hatch

grabbing hold of Momoko, and bringing her safely over the railing. Thank the spirits. I could hear my heart beating as if trying to break out of my chest. The hairs on my neck stood up as well, and it wasn't from the pain. I realized:

```
    Saving lives is much scarier than taking them.  
    *goto c11AFTER_RESCUE  
    *goto c11AFTER_RESCUE  
#Hatch.  
*set mc_grabbed_momoko "false"  
*if (hatch_rescue_points >= mc_rescue_points)  
    *set mc_condition "good"  
    *set attunementBase +1  
    *set attunementMax +1  
    *temp attunementTemp2 ((attunementBase/attunementMax)*100)  
    *set attunement round(attunementTemp2)  
    [i]<Attunement has increased.>[/i]  
    *if (MC_poisoned = "true")
```

First and foremost, I was still recovering from that nasty bit of tiger snake venom from yesterday. My shoulder was still sensitive to the touch, so grabbing a falling woman was not something I was entirely confident in. Too much risk.

```
    *goto c11_15  
    *elseif (MC_poisoned = "false")  
    *goto c11_15  
*label c11_15
```

```
*if (told_hatch_about_opium = "true")
```

Mentally I think—or at least, I hoped—Hatch had found it in him to forgive Momoko. It didn't hurt that she was easy on the eyes, of course, but the streetfighter held to a strong moral code. It wasn't exactly bushidō, but it was enough to guilt him into being a virtuous person all the same. And that's all those creeds ask for anyway.

```
    *goto c11_16  
    *elseif (told_hatch_about_opium = "false")  
    *goto c11_16  
*label c11_16
```

So I did the most difficult thing I could do: nothing. I stood there and hoped that Hatch was as capable as he so often boasted. Thank the spirits he proved himself right this time.

“G—gotcha!” He heaved Momoko from underneath her arms and pulled her over the bridge's railing. Hatch overestimated her weight and it turned into more of a toss, but she hit the bridge far softer than if she had dropped to the rocks below. I was breathing heavier than I expected to. The hairs on my neck stood up, and I realized:

```
    Saving lives is much scarier than taking them.
```

```
*goto c11AFTER_RESCUE
*else
*if (MC_poisoned = "false")
*set mc_grabbed_momoko "true"
*set mc_condition "shins"
*set attunementMax +1
*temp attunementTemp2 ((attunementBase/attunementMax)*100)
*set attunement round(attunementTemp2)
```

I had decided to let Hatch take care of this one, but he was slow off the mark. Far slower than he was back during our fight with the yakuza. If I had to guess, he was still a bit groggy from the drugs the good doctor had given him last night. Kuso, I had to run and quick!

“Hu—yuh! Chikushō...” I cursed out in pain. Not because of Momoko’s weight—which my arms felt the full force of—but because of my shins that bent against the wooden rails in a very unpleasant way. It hurt like hell, but it was the only thing stopping me from falling over along with her.

Hatch helped me pull her up and over, back to safety. I sat down in exhaustion, my legs burning. I could hear my heart beating as if trying to break out of my chest. The hairs on my neck stood up as well, and it wasn’t from the pain. I realized:

Saving lives is much scarier than taking them.

```
*goto c11AFTER_RESCUE
*elseif (MC_poisoned = "true")
*set mc_grabbed_momoko "false"
*set mc_condition "good"
*set attunementMax +1
*temp attunementTemp2 ((attunementBase/attunementMax)*100)
*set attunement round(attunementTemp2)
```

I knew I could’ve made it there half a second before Hatch, but the result would have been the same. Thank the spirits. He caught her from underneath her arms and heaved her over, not a moment too soon. He overestimated her weight and it turned into more of a toss, but she hit the bridge far softer than if she had dropped to the rocks below.

My newly acquired pride as a bodyguard took a hit, but that was far from important right now. I was breathing heavier than I expected to. The hairs on my neck stood up, and I realized:

Saving lives is much scarier than taking them.

```
*goto c11AFTER_RESCUE
*label c11AFTER_RESCUE
```

```
*page_break
```

```
*if ((mc_grabbed_momoko = "true") and (mc_condition = "good"))
```

```

*check_achievements
*if not(choice_achieved_savingher)
    *achieve savingher
    *goto c11Achieve2
*else
    *goto c11Achieve2
*elseif ((mc_grabbed_momoko = "false") and (hatch_rescue_points >= mc_rescue_points))
    *check_achievements
    *if not(choice_achieved_betterthis)
        *achieve betterthis
        *goto c11Achieve2
    *else
        *goto c11Achieve2
*else
    *goto c11Achieve2
*label c11Achieve2

```

“Momoko-sannnnnnnnnnn!” The cavalry arrived late and in the form of a kid and a Kondo. The former of which embraced the doctor heartily. You could almost confuse the two for siblings, with their pale skin and matching long black hair. `{Masami}` was in an emotional state, and was tearing up even more than the near-suicide victim.

I let out a sigh of relief—that’s one crisis averted. `{Toshie}` lent me a hand and helped me to my feet.

```

*if (mc_condition = "good")

```

My right wrist started aching, even amid all the other aches and pains my body ought to be feeling. I was otherwise in good condition, physically anyway. I’d have to be if I was going to attempt what I was about to.

```

    *goto c11_17

```

```

*elseif (mc_condition = "shoulder")

```

My right wrist started aching, even amid all the other aches and pains my body ought to be feeling. The only worry I had was my shoulder, which—on top of eating a poisoned dart—just got stretched in a very undesirable way. But I could fight through the pain. I’d have to, if I was going to attempt what I was about to.

```

    *goto c11_17

```

```

*elseif (mc_condition = "knees")

```

My right wrist started aching, even amid all the other aches and pains my body ought to be feeling. Like my knees, which were sure to be growing scabs right about now. But I could fight through the pain. I’d have to, if I was going to attempt what I was about to.

```

    *goto c11_17

```

```

*elseif (mc_condition = "shins")

```

My right wrist started aching, even amid all the other aches and pains my body ought to be feeling. Like my shins, which were sure to be growing bruises right about now. But I could fight

through the pain. I'd have to, if I was going to attempt what I was about to.

```
*goto c11_17
```

```
*label c11_17
```

```
*if (mc_grabbed_momoko = "true")
```

When $\{Masami\}$ finally relented on $\{herhis\}$ affectionate grasp over Momoko, the doctor gave me the deepest of bows. " $\{name\}$ -san...I don't know how I can repay you. I don't know what value my life even holds, not anymore. Shiroyama will—"

"Look at me." I couldn't stand when people spoke to me without looking, even if they were kowtowing at my feet. Even if they were kissing my sandal straps. It didn't feel right. "You and I are more alike than you know. Working for yakuza, trying to build some respect when all along—you can't even respect yourself."

```
*if (drifter <= 50)
```

```
[i]<Protective>[/i]
```

```
*line_break
```

```
*if (MC_poisoned = "true")
```

[i]You can't even love yourself,[/i] I wanted to add. "I'm a bodyguard now. I use my katana to protect others, as a penance for all those I've killed. As a doctor, your path ahead is obvious—I'm still alive because of you. Your hands hold a far greater power than mine."

```
*goto c11_18
```

```
*elseif (MC_poisoned = "false")
```

[i]You can't even love yourself,[/i] I wanted to add. "I'm a bodyguard now. I use my katana to protect others, as a penance for all those I've killed. As a doctor, your path ahead is obvious—Hatch is still alive because of you. Your hands hold a far greater power than mine."

```
*goto c11_18
```

```
*goto c11_18
```

```
*else
```

```
[i]<Drifter>[/i]
```

```
*line_break
```

[i]You can't even love yourself,[/i] I wanted to add. "When a samurai no longer has a master, $\{MC_heshe\}$ becomes a ronin. $\{MC_heshe\}$ only has $\{MC_hisher\}$ own conscience to guide $\{MC_himher\}$. You find your own code to follow, the one that helps you sleep at night, and you walk your own path."

```
*goto c11_18
```

```
*label c11_18
```

Momoko nodded, and I don't think my little speech went to waste. I'm not exactly good at conveying my own experiences. Like the experiences that haunted me in the waking hours of the morning, causing fatigue from yet another sleepless night.

There was no need to disrupt this heartwarming moment. For people like Momoko and myself—who held ties to the underworld—there was no easy way to pry yourself free. If she

was truly going to lead a better life, she'd need her freedom paid for her.

*goto c11_19

*elseif (mc_grabbed_momoko = "false")

When `{Masami}` finally relented on `{herhis}` affectionate grasp over Momoko, the doctor turned and bowed towards Hatch. "Hachirobei-san, I said such horrible words towards you. I am deeply sorry for your loss...and I take full blame for all the suffering I have brought into Jijinto."

The streetfighter looked away, his mouth fumbling for the right words. "Tan-kun never held grudges. No matter how much I owed him. He was that kinda guy, so...just don't make that stuff again, alright?"

Momoko bowed even deeper, thanking Hatch from the bottom of her heart. It'd take a noble spirit to forgive her after all she's done.

My thoughts drifted to the danger ahead, but there was no need to disrupt this heartwarming moment. For people like Momoko and myself—who held ties to the underworld—there was no easy way to pry yourself free. If she was truly going to lead a better life, she'd need her freedom paid for her.

*goto c11_19

*label c11_19

And I bartered in blood.

*page_break

The details about Shiroyama came gushing out of Momoko in a torrent that I could barely stay afloat on. But the more she spoke, the more this fetid stream brought back memories. Memories of a disgusting affair between a yakuza boss, his ambitious wife, and my katana.

"I was monitored constantly, and so I never knew more than they allowed. Their leader is a woman revered as 'The Charmer', though her charm is certainly not in her appearance. Her presence alone inspires dread, and her gaze...mesmerizes you. When rumors of widespread addiction to my..." Momoko trailed off into silence; her eyes shifted away from Hatch and opted to face the floor instead.

"When I heard the rumors, I confronted her. I'm not even sure what she said to me, but she swayed me back into making more. I was fully convinced I was doing the right thing. Those eyes—I swear, those eyes—rattle inside your brain, and bring out the worst in you. They numb any ideas of conscience, and let your greed take control. I was at the forefront of discovering cheap and easy-to-produce opium, and I—I didn't even bother to think about the consequences!"

The doctor's knees buckled and tears started flowing once again. Her information gave me a lot

to think about. Too much. That [i]Charmer[/i] was not only the foulest woman in Jijinto, she was a former employer of mine. I'm the one who killed her husband, and helped her take complete control over what was then called the Yamagata-gumi.

While the name 'Shiroyama' didn't flow off the tongue as easily, the new head had done a considerable job expanding the group's influence in the city. I had a feeling it was due in no small part to Momoko's contributions. I looked down at her sulking figure.

*choice

#"On your feet, Momoko-chan. Looks like we've got our work cut out for us."

*set comforted_momoko "false"

*gosub attunementTestCharming

"On your feet, Momoko-chan. Looks like we've got our work cut out for us."

The burdens she felt deep inside her heart were not ones I could carry for her. I knew this from a life full of bad decisions; an existence haunted by what I've done. If she couldn't stand now, she never would.

But she stood and nodded, and sniffed away her tears. "You're right, \${name}-san. This bridge, my attempt to—it was all just an easy escape. If I'm truly going to help undo the harm I've brought into Jijinto, then Shiroyama needs to die."

*goto c11ComfortMomokoChoice

#"There's no time to waste on regret. We need to act while we have the element of surprise."

*set comforted_momoko "false"

*gosub attunementTestStoic

"There's no time to waste on regret. We need to act while we have the element of surprise."

Momoko was back on her feet and sniffing away tears. "You're right \${name}-san, there's no time. This bridge, my attempt to—it was just an easy escape. If I'm truly going to help undo the harm I've brought into Jijinto, then Shiroyama needs to die."

*goto c11ComfortMomokoChoice

#"You're not alone anymore. Give your new friends some more credit than that."

*set comforted_momoko "true"

*gosub attunementTestStoic

"You're not alone anymore. Give your new friends some more credit than that."

I had grown strangely accustomed to that word as of late. [i]Friends[/i]. Just a year ago I'd scoff at the very idea. To have affection towards someone that wasn't lust, to care for another besides yourself—just what was happening to me? If \${Junko} was here, I know what \${shehe}'d say. I was getting soft.

Momoko rose with a smile, and sniffed away her tears. "\${name}-san...I don't deserve you, any of you, as friends. But there is no one else who would have gotten me off that ledge. Arigatou gozaimasu. I realize now that my attempt was just an easy escape from what has to

be done. If I'm truly going to help undo the harm I've brought into Jijinto, then Shiroyama needs to die."

```
*goto c11ComfortMomokoChoice
```

```
#"Despair isn't a good look for you. Why don't you let your mismatched group of friends help you out?"
```

```
*set comforted_momoko "true"
```

```
*gosub attunementTestCharming
```

```
"Despair isn't a good look for you. Why don't you let your mismatched group of friends help you out?"
```

While I spoke with my usual confidence, a particular word came out from my mouth that I wasn't expecting to hear. [i]Friends[/i]. A year ago I'd scoff at the very idea. The closest thing to affection I've ever had was misplaced lust, and the only person I've truly cared about was yours truly. So when did that change? Or had it changed?

But my feelings aside, Momoko was back on her feet and sporting an embarrassed smile. "I agree, despair doesn't suit me well at all. But $\{name\}$ -san..." Her cheeks lost her blemish, as her expression grew serious.

"...I don't deserve you, any of you, as friends. But there is no one else who would have gotten me off that ledge. Arigatou gozaimasu. I realize now that my attempt was just an easy escape from what has to be done. If I'm truly going to help undo the harm I've brought into Jijinto, then Shiroyama needs to die."

```
*goto c11ComfortMomokoChoice
```

```
*label c11ComfortMomokoChoice
```

A voice that had remained silent throughout all of this replied. "The gaze you spoke of," $\{Toshie\}$ remarked, "and the greed it instilled within you. I am not saying you are free of blame, Momoko-san, but it's possible that this Charmer is the embodiment of the snake spirit we seek. Her death may bring us one step closer to fulfilling our mission."

The $\{kunoichishinobi\}$ had a point. If that was the case, then we'd be killing—

"Sounds like we'd be killing two birds with one stone then!" Hatch interjected, vocalizing my thoughts. "Just tell me where to toss the rock, $\{name\}$. We'll free Momoko-chan from those yakuza and...er, actually I've been meaning to ask. Why are you guys hunting for a spirit anyway?"

I glanced over towards $\{Toshie\}$, who was already shaking $\{herhis\}$ head sideways. In contrast, $\{Masami\}$ was bouncing $\{herhis\}$ head up and down quite vigorously. It looked like I had to choose, and it looked like someone was going to be upset with me either way.

Story of my life.

*choice

#“It’s a long story. I’ll tell you about it later, after we’ve wiped Shiroyama from the streets.”

*set told_them_mission "false"

“It’s a long story. I’ll tell you about it later, after we’ve wiped Shiroyama from the streets.”

I didn’t want the Emperor’s visions clouding Hatch and Momoko’s heads right now. They’d probably think I was crazy anyway—most Hyugans only paid the spirits lip service. Donating to the temple once a month was about the limit of their involvement to the spiritual realm.

And aside from that trippy dream I had earlier, my connection was even weaker than that. But I wasn’t chosen because of my piety. I was chosen because of what I carried at my hip, and what I could do with it.

I was expecting Hatch to raise an objection, but he merely shrugged. “Works for me!”

*goto c11TellThemMissionChoice

#“It’s...Imperial business. The Emperor himself has tasked us with hunting evil spirits.”

*set told_them_mission "true"

“It’s...Imperial business. The Emperor himself has tasked us with hunting evil spirits.”

One way or another, Hatch and Momoko were putting their lives at stake. They deserved to know the reason why, even if they wouldn’t believe it. My words earned me a pair of confused looks and I didn’t blame them. Spirits were something most Hyugans only paid lip service to. Well, lip service and monthly temple donations anyway.

And aside from that trippy dream I had earlier, my connection with the spiritual realm was even weaker than that. But I wasn’t chosen because of my piety. I was chosen because of what I carried at my hip, and what I could do with it.

*if (MC_poisoned = "true")

Hatch gave it some serious thought before smacking his fist into his open palm. “Ah, I see now! Was wondering why a samurai like you didn’t wear armor or act all noble-like. You’re undercover—almost had me fooled, \${name}!”

I smiled and let the silence answer for me. I decided to let the big guy come to his own conclusions.

*goto c11TellThemMissionChoice

*elseif (MC_poisoned = "false")

Hatch gave it some serious thought before smacking his fist into his open palm. That had to be painful, considering the dart wound. “Ah, I see now! Was wondering why a samurai like you didn’t wear armor or act all noble-like. You’re undercover—almost had me fooled, \${name}!”

I smiled and let the silence answer for me. I decided to let the big guy come to his own conclusions.

*goto c11TellThemMissionChoice

*label c11TellThemMissionChoice

When Momoko started giving directions to Shiroyama's mansion, a picture of the estate came back to me. It was close by, with golden-colored walls and white thatched roofs. It was a giant building several lengths high, shadowing the nearby residences.

It was about as extravagant as you could get, even when compared with the samurai estates in Yamato. While the Shinto religion stressed simplicity and modesty in all things, the yakuza held no such ideals.

I knew how to get there, and I knew what had to be done. But the problem was...

"Can't wait to teach those punks a lesson, Ken Raijingu-Ryū style! Hyah!" While Hatch was competent against opponents made out of air, our enemies would prove far more tangible. He was in way over his head. My attention drifted over towards *Toshie* and *Masami*.

*if (drifter <= 50)

[i]<Protective>[/i]

*line_break

A ninja who couldn't fight, and a shugenja who was still just a child. No. I wasn't going let their faces haunt me at night. If they walked in there—against a gang of hardened criminals—they weren't going to be walking back out. It was a den of death for people like them. This was something I had to do myself.

*goto c11_20

*else

[i]<Drifter>[/i]

*line_break

A ninja who couldn't fight, and a shugenja who was still just a child. No way. If I didn't die trying to keep them safe, I'd be haunted with their faces for the rest of my life. If they walked in there—against a gang of hardened criminals—they wouldn't be walking back out. Good and decent folk had no business in a den of death like that. This was something I had to do myself.

*goto c11_20

*label c11_20

*if (charming >= 50)

[i]<Charming>[/i]

*line_break

I knew what the plan was. "Listen up, gang. Taking on Jijinto's largest criminal syndicate isn't something we can do by ourselves. We'll need reinforcements. I'll bring Momoko-chan in as if I'm collecting her bounty."

The doctor's eyes widened in surprise, but she nodded sternly. Good. "Meanwhile, you three are going to bring in the sohei and the city guard. Alright?"

*goto c11_21

*else

[i]<Stoic>[/i]

*line_break

I knew what the plan was. “Listen, everyone. Don’t fool yourselves into thinking that we can take on Jijinto’s largest criminal syndicate by ourselves. We’ll need reinforcements. I’ll take Momoko-san in as if I’m collecting her bounty.”

The doctor’s eyes widened in surprise, but she nodded sternly. Good. “Meanwhile, you three are going to bring in the sohei and the city guard. Understand?”

*goto c11_21

*label c11_21

Unfortunately my strategy didn’t go over as well as I hoped. The kid was the first to raise objection.

“It’s unacceptable! You intend to put all the risk on yourself—that is, Momoko-san is in too much danger! Yes, too much peril!” *{Masami}* stumbled around an argument against me. It’s true that the alluring doctor was going to be in harm’s way. But I couldn’t think of a better way to get into a fortified yakuza stronghold.

*choice

#“I’ll be able to protect her while we’re in there. Don’t worry so much.”

*gosub attunementTestProtective

“I’ll be able to protect her while we’re in there. Don’t worry so much.”

The kid still didn’t know the truth about Momoko. *{shehe}* didn’t know what the doctor was making for them; *{shehe}* didn’t know about the addictive painkiller that did more than just kill pain. *{Masami}* was better off that way. But as far as the poisonmaker goes, her value to the yakuza would be a greater shield than I could ever hope to be.

And besides, I just needed her to get me within striking distance of that Charmer.

*goto c11HarmsWayChoice

#“I’m not about to let her die after all the trouble I’ve gone through to keep her alive.”

*gosub attunementTestDrifter

“I’m not about to let her die after all the trouble I’ve gone through to keep her alive.”

*if (MC_poisoned = "true")

Seriously though, this woman has been more prone to death than a salmon at a sushi parlor. Jumping in front of poisoned darts, yanking suicide victims off ledges—I don’t even know who I am anymore. The *{name}* I’ve known for so many years wouldn’t risk *{MC_hisher}* neck for anyone but *{MC_himher}*self, especially not twice in as many days!

*goto c11_22

*elseif (MC_poisoned = "false")

Seriously though, this woman has been more prone to death than a salmon at a sushi

parlor. Jumping in front of poisoned darts, yanking suicide victims off ledges—Hatch and I have had our hands full keeping her among the living. It felt so out of character for me, to risk my neck for somebody else. Especially when I wasn't getting paid to.

*goto c11_22

*label c11_22

Momoko's value to the yakuza would be a greater shield than I could ever be. All I needed of the poisonmaker was to get me within striking distance of the Charmer.

*goto c11HarmsWayChoice

*label c11HarmsWayChoice

I received a grunt of displeasure from Hatch. One I saw coming. "I agree with the young `{ladymaster}`. We can't bring her back to those bastards, `{name}`! Who knows what they'll do to her, after running away?" He worked himself into a temper, one I wasn't sure how to diffuse.

Luckily Momoko did. She interlocked her hands with Hatch's, and looked up to him with those doe-like eyes. The streetfighter never stood a chance.

"Hatch-san, I swear I will never make that horrific drug again. Please allow me to do my part. I want to put an end to this evil, once and for all!" I could see the tall man visibly crumple at each of those heart-felt words. I could see the tension between their eyes, and how her long, batting eyelashes could captivate any man.

She may not need as much protection as I thought.

*page_break

Before we were about to begin, the young shugenja managed to get a word in with me alone. We had time—Hatch was busy being lovestruck and `{Toshie}` was in a spiritual trance. I had delivered my plan flawlessly, but I had also underestimated how insightful `{Masami}` could be.

*if (MC_poisoned = "false")

Though when I expected a yell, I got a whimper instead. "`{name}`, I know you're trying to keep me away from harm. And I know...I said those horrible words to you earlier, back at the dojo. But please, let me help you!" The kid's eyes grew watery. "We're a team, remember?!"

*goto c11_23

*elseif (MC_poisoned = "true")

I expected a pout, and I got one. "`{name}`! Your scheme makes my presence irrelevant! You'd have me beseeching sohei when I should be supporting you with my magic!" The kid bursted into a bout of coughs as a result of `{herhis}` temper. "We're a team, remember?!"

*goto c11_23

*label c11_23

I shook my head and ignored `{herhis}` emotional outburst. I couldn't allow myself to be

persuaded, to expose `{Masami}` to danger—true danger. I didn't want `{herhim}` to see the side of me I had tried so desperately to hold back.

“Don't tell me you're underestimating me, kid. We didn't make it through crazed Yamato patrols and burning shrines on luck alone. I'll be okay.”

`{Masami}` Hashimoto. To think that a `{girlboy}` from one of the wealthiest families in Hyuga was worried over a coinless ronin like me. `{shehe}` was blessed with spiritual magic, while I was cursed with something unspeakable. `{shehe}` had a future, and I—well, I would make sure `{shehe}` lived long enough to see it.

`{herhis}` sniffles brought me back to attention. “Hmph. Such arrogance shall be your downfall. Oh,” `{shehe}` closed `{herhis}` eyes and smiled meekly. “I owe you an apology for the matter of er...deceit in regards to that invisibility spell, earlier.”

I had tried my best to forget about that embarrassing ordeal. I must have looked like a complete idiot, and I had fallen for `{Masami}`'s trick completely. I didn't think the kid was crafty enough to lie, but `{shehe}` proved me wrong.

*choice

#“And I apologize for being such a lousy bodyguard.”

*gosub attunementTestCalculated

“And I apologize for being such a lousy bodyguard.”

The kid was many things, but safe wasn't one of them. Keeping `{herhim}` close during our stay in Yamato only turned `{herhim}` into a target for the city watch. I couldn't afford to let yakuza know of `{herhim}` too. Opium was valuable, but so was a `{sorceresssorcerer}`.

The further away `{Masami}` was from me, the better. `{herhis}` cheeks puffed out as if ready for an argument, but that would have to wait for another day.

*goto c11ProvedMeWrongChoice

#“Just don't think I'll fall for the same trick twice!”

*gosub attunementTestImpulsive

“Just don't think I'll fall for the same trick twice!”

I deserved embarrassment and more for relying on shugenja tricks. Still, it was a relief to know that `{Masami}` could think on `{herhis}` feet like that. If there was ever a time I wasn't around to protect `{herhim}`, `{shehe}`'d need tricks like that to get by. A quick mind was more useful than a quick draw.

“Nyeh.” The kid stuck out `{herhis}` tongue at me after I painted `{herhim}` out to be a mature young `{womanman}`. Great.

*goto c11ProvedMeWrongChoice

*label c11ProvedMeWrongChoice

The dark-skinned ninja interrupted our conversation. “Pardon me, Hashimoto-san, but I believe Momoko-san wishes to speak with you about your cough before she leaves.”

#{Toshie} gave a warm smile that #{Masami} just couldn’t refuse. The kid gave me one last look before heading over to the doctor. And the #{kunoichishinobi} had me to #{herhim}self, just as #{shehe} intended.

“#{name}-san. The reinforcements...are just a ploy to keep us out of harm’s way, aren’t they?” I deflected #{herhis} piercing gaze, but we both knew what was going on. “A Kondo, a street thug and a child will not sway others to our cause. Do you intend to take on Shiroyama by yourself?”

I let #{herhis} words fly out with the morning breeze. I gave a curt nod, with the ache in my wrist growing intensely.

*if (MC_poisoned = "true")

#{herhis} eyes focused on the hilt of my katana. That’s right...#{shehe} knew who my weapon belonged to, knew whose name was etched into the blade. That demon of a samurai, the last of the free swordsmen. And of course, my sensei.

#{Toshie}’s voice wavered out of fear. “I—I will not ask about how you achieved mastery over that style. But I do know that if you give into it, you’ll...you’ll...” #{herhis} pupils dilated. “You will destroy Hyuga, not save it! Did Satsuma-kun truly dream of this?”

*goto c11_24

*elseif (MC_poisoned = "false")

#{herhis} eyes focused on the hilt of my katana. #{shehe} didn’t know who it belonged to, whose name was etched into the blade. #{shehe} didn’t know that the last of the free swordsmen was not only a demon, but my sensei.

Which was why #{Toshie} doubted my skill. “#{name}-san, you are no doubt a master with the katana. But an entire clan of yakuza...that’s too much, even for The Sword Who Cuts the Heavens. You are not yet ready for—”

I unsheathed my weapon and revealed the name etched on it. Sooner or later, the #{kunoichishinobi} would’ve figured it out. #{Toshie} was too curious not to. I didn’t care what #{shehe} knew, just...

“Don’t tell the kid.”

#{herhis} pupils dilated from sheer fear upon recognizing the name. I carried the devil of a samurai’s blade at my hip. That could only mean one thing. “Y—you’ll, you’ll destroy Hyuga, not save it! Did Satsuma-kun truly dream of this?”

*goto c11_24

*label c11_24

!{herhis} outburst attracted the attention of the others, but I waved them away.

*choice

#“Step aside. I’m about to show you why you can’t dress up a demon as a hero.”

*gosub attunementTestBrutal

“Step aside. I’m about to show you why you can’t dress up a demon as a hero.”

Heroes are bound by codes of honor, loyalty and duty. Of conscience. The Emperor wanted a warrior without those limitations. A ronin of unparalleled skill: a swordsman who had done the unspeakable to obtain the ultimate style of manslaying. And those orphans back in Genfu, and their faces that haunted my sleepless nights, were the reminder of the price that was paid.

The price of the [i]Hell’s Release[/i] style, the Jigoku Ittō-ryū.

*goto c11WavedThemAwayChoice

#“Don’t be so dramatic, \${Toshie}. His Imperial Majesty knew exactly what he wanted.”

*gosub attunementTestFinesse

“Don’t be so dramatic, \${Toshie}. His Imperial Majesty knew exactly what he wanted.”

The Emperor didn’t want a samurai, bound by codes of honor and loyalty. He didn’t want a warrior whose conscience got in the way of what needed to be done. No, he sent me on this spirit-slaying adventure because of what I could do. What a ronin of unparalleled skill was capable of, one who had done the unspeakable to obtain the ultimate style of manslaying.

And those orphans back in Genfu, and their faces that haunted my sleepless nights, were the reminder of the price that was paid.

The price of the [i]Hell’s Release[/i] style, the Jigoku Ittō-ryū.

*goto c11WavedThemAwayChoice

*label c11WavedThemAwayChoice

*finish Next Chapter

*label attunementTestImpulsive

*if (impulsive >= 50)

*set attunementBase +1

*set attunementMax +1

*temp attunementTemp ((attunementBase/attunementMax)*100)

*set attunement round(attunementTemp)

[i]<Attunement has increased.>[/i]

*line_break

*return

*else

```
*set attunementMax +1
*temp attunementTemp ((attunementBase/attunementMax)*100)
*set attunement round(attunementTemp)
*return
*label attunementTestCalculated
*if (impulsive <= 50)
  *set attunementBase +1
  *set attunementMax +1
  *temp attunementTemp ((attunementBase/attunementMax)*100)
  *set attunement round(attunementTemp)
  [i]<Attunement has increased.>[/i]
  *line_break
  *return
*else
  *set attunementMax +1
  *temp attunementTemp ((attunementBase/attunementMax)*100)
  *set attunement round(attunementTemp)
  *return
*label attunementTestPerverted
*if (perverted >= 50)
  *set attunementBase +1
  *set attunementMax +1
  *temp attunementTemp ((attunementBase/attunementMax)*100)
  *set attunement round(attunementTemp)
  [i]<Attunement has increased.>[/i]
  *line_break
  *return
*else
  *set attunementMax +1
  *temp attunementTemp ((attunementBase/attunementMax)*100)
  *set attunement round(attunementTemp)
  *return
*label attunementTestChivalrous
*if (perverted <= 50)
  *set attunementBase +1
  *set attunementMax +1
  *temp attunementTemp ((attunementBase/attunementMax)*100)
  *set attunement round(attunementTemp)
  [i]<Attunement has increased.>[/i]
  *line_break
  *return
*else
  *set attunementMax +1
  *temp attunementTemp ((attunementBase/attunementMax)*100)
```

```
*set attunement round(attunementTemp)
*return
*label attunementTestCharming
*if (charming >= 50)
  *set attunementBase +1
  *set attunementMax +1
  *temp attunementTemp ((attunementBase/attunementMax)*100)
  *set attunement round(attunementTemp)
  [i]<Attunement has increased.>[/i]
  *line_break
  *return
*else
  *set attunementMax +1
  *temp attunementTemp ((attunementBase/attunementMax)*100)
  *set attunement round(attunementTemp)
  *return
*label attunementTestStoic
*if (charming <= 50)
  *set attunementBase +1
  *set attunementMax +1
  *temp attunementTemp ((attunementBase/attunementMax)*100)
  *set attunement round(attunementTemp)
  [i]<Attunement has increased.>[/i]
  *line_break
  *return
*else
  *set attunementMax +1
  *temp attunementTemp ((attunementBase/attunementMax)*100)
  *set attunement round(attunementTemp)
  *return
*label attunementTestDrifter
*if (drifter >= 50)
  *set attunementBase +1
  *set attunementMax +1
  *temp attunementTemp ((attunementBase/attunementMax)*100)
  *set attunement round(attunementTemp)
  [i]<Attunement has increased.>[/i]
  *line_break
  *return
*else
  *set attunementMax +1
  *temp attunementTemp ((attunementBase/attunementMax)*100)
  *set attunement round(attunementTemp)
  *return
```

```

*label attunementTestProtective
*if (drifter <= 50)
  *set attunementBase +1
  *set attunementMax +1
  *temp attunementTemp ((attunementBase/attunementMax)*100)
  *set attunement round(attunementTemp)
  [i]<Attunement has increased.>[/i]
  *line_break
  *return
*else
  *set attunementMax +1
  *temp attunementTemp ((attunementBase/attunementMax)*100)
  *set attunement round(attunementTemp)
  *return
*label attunementTestBrutal
*if (brutal >= 50)
  *set attunementBase +1
  *set attunementMax +1
  *temp attunementTemp ((attunementBase/attunementMax)*100)
  *set attunement round(attunementTemp)
  [i]<Attunement has increased.>[/i]
  *line_break
  *return
*else
  *set attunementMax +1
  *temp attunementTemp ((attunementBase/attunementMax)*100)
  *set attunement round(attunementTemp)
  *return
*label attunementTestFinesse
*if (brutal <= 50)
  *set attunementBase +1
  *set attunementMax +1
  *temp attunementTemp ((attunementBase/attunementMax)*100)
  *set attunement round(attunementTemp)
  [i]<Attunement has increased.>[/i]
  *line_break
  *return
*else
  *set attunementMax +1
  *temp attunementTemp ((attunementBase/attunementMax)*100)
  *set attunement round(attunementTemp)
  *return

*comment Impulsive vs Calculated

```

*comment Perverted vs Chivalrous

*comment Charming vs Stoic

*comment Drifter vs Protective

*comment Brutal vs Finesse