

Ataru Chapter II: Journey of a Lifetime

Last Goodbyes



[Play “The Heat of New Suns” by Melodysheep on Youtube](#)

Early in the morning, the family gathers to bid farewell to Ataru. There’s still a sense of surprise lingering amongst the family members at Ataru's decision. I guess they thought he wouldn't be brave enough to actually go. After all, no one of his family members has ever traveled that far before. They are both envious and awestruck.



Ataru's wearing a bright smile on his face. It's the first time in a long time he has been that excited about something. Obviously, his life has been pretty much the same for the past few years. Or perhaps, the sunshine and warm weather are making him feel extra optimistic and energetic today? Even so, he hasn't felt this powerful or enthusiastic in a long time. To him, all things about this morning seem to indicate that he's meant to be going on this journey, and from now on his life will be nothing but joy and amazement (according to his naive mind, at least. Oh, just how easily our brains can deceive us).

Regardless.

The grandfather speaks his last words of wisdom to Ataru.

"Never lose sight of it and remember, don't tell anyone," he warns Ataru one last time. The family is well aware of the possibility that someone could kill Ataru if they found out he owned the Wheel of Fortune.

"Yes, understood." Ataru confirms.

The grandfather also hands Ataru a map of the journey, which they both throughout planned out, so that Ataru's travels would go as smoothly and safely as possible.

"And if anyone asks where you're headed, always tell them that you are going to visit your grandparents who always live in the next place you're currently headed," the grandfather says, "or make up any other good lie according to the situation."

"Yes," Ataru confirms once again.

"I'm sure you'll like it there, but if you don't you can always come back" says the grandmother, secretly hoping for Ataru to come back one day.

"I don't think I'm coming back but thanks!" Ataru laughs. Although he loves his family very much, he really doesn't want to return to his old lifestyle.

Now it's his brother's turn to bid farewell. He gives Ataru a big and tight hug.

"Send us a letter as soon as you get there so we know you're not dead," Ichigo speaks jokingly.

"I will," Ataru laughs.

"And painting, send some painting," the brother adds with a hopeful smile. After all, he's the first and biggest fan of Ataru's artworks.

At last Ataru turns to his dad whose hands are crossed. His dad's face is expressionless as usual, which leaves Ataru wondering if he even gives a damn. Nevertheless, his dad hands Ataru some extra money.

"Keep your money in multiple places in case of robbery. That way it won't be stolen with one go." he gives Ataru one last lecture.

"Yes, I will," Ataru smiles awkwardly, but thankfully. His dad does care after all, doesn't he?

"Time to go," says the coachman, who's been waiting on Ataru patiently.

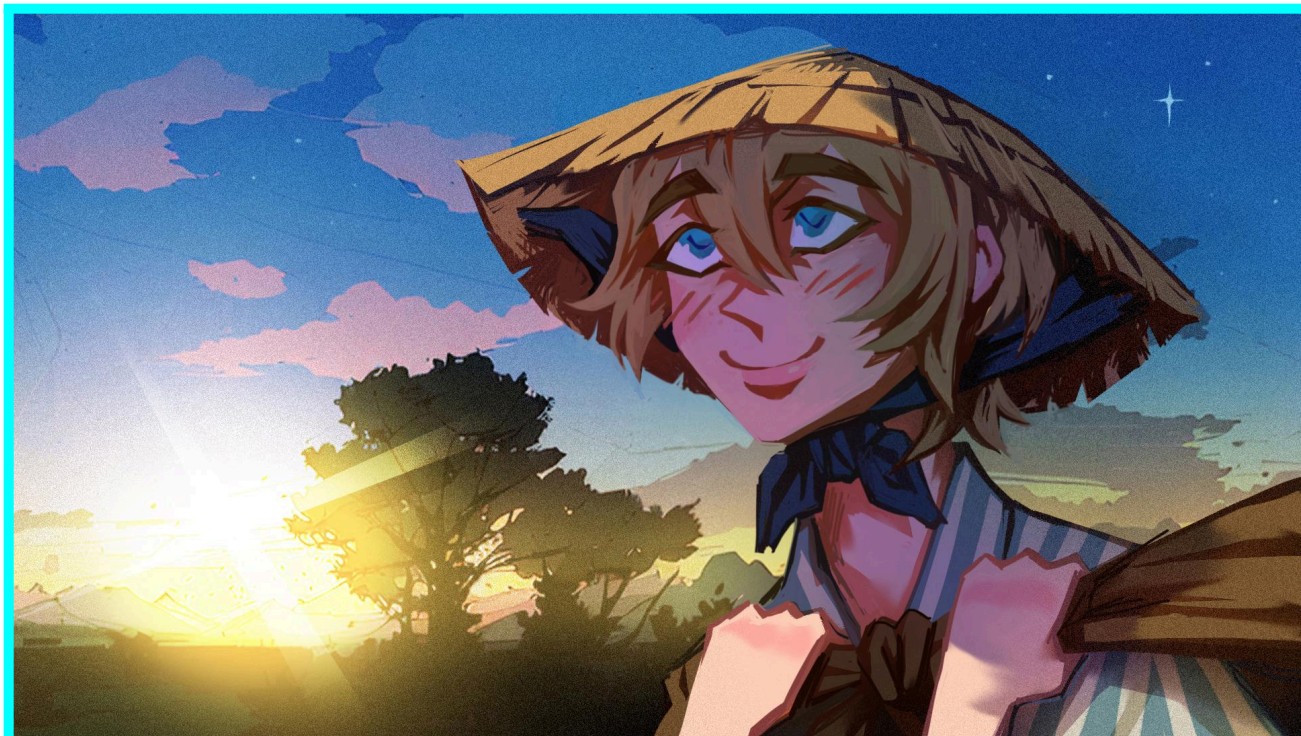
As Ataru settles into his seat, he waves to his family one last time.



“Finally,” he thinks to himself, continuing to smile brightly. “Finally I am leaving this place. It’s been way too long.”

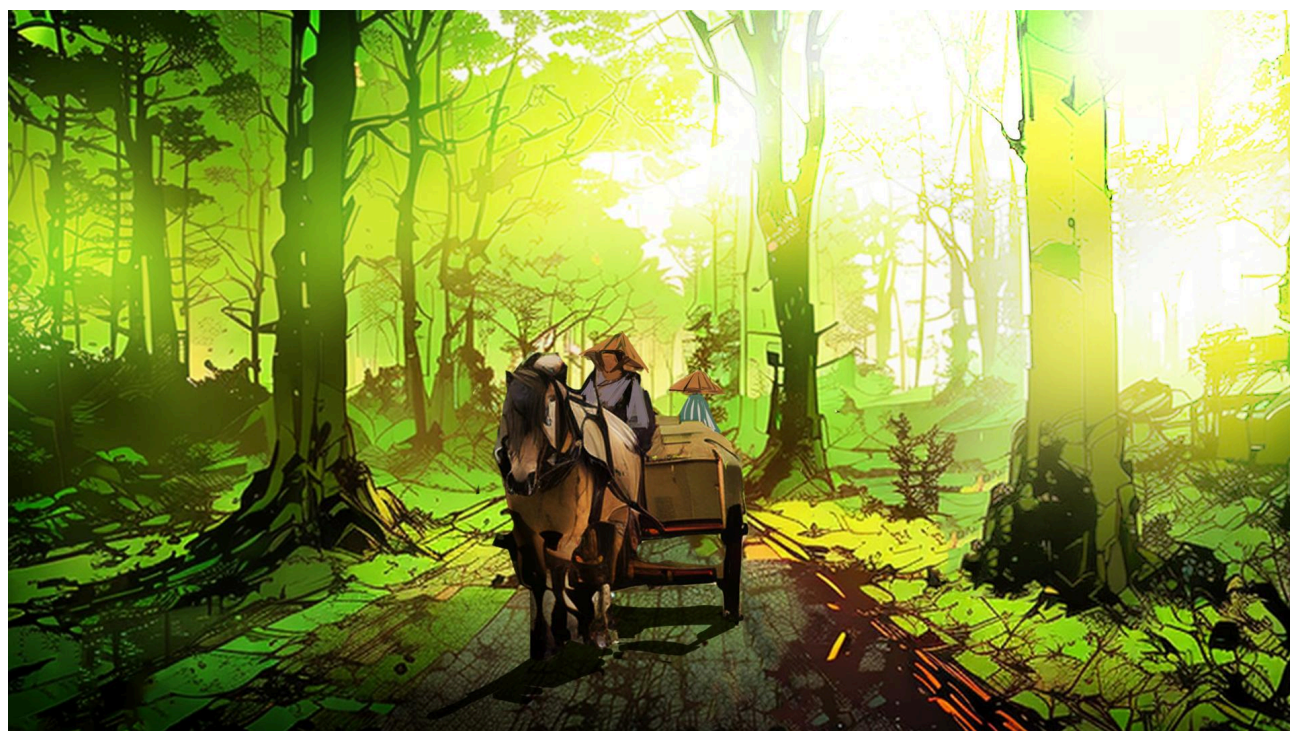
As of today, he is no longer connected to his past. No longer bound to his small circle of family and friends. And no longer a member of his miserable hometown.

He feels reborn as he begins a new chapter in his life.



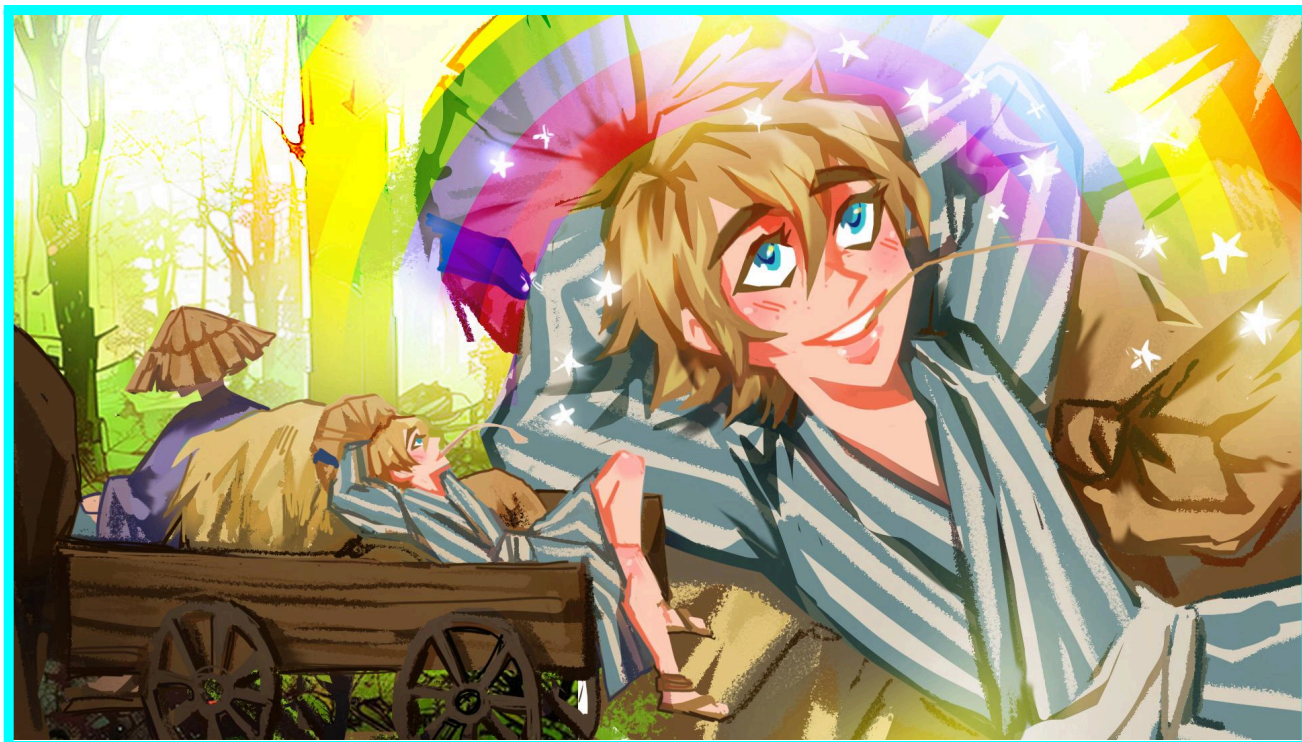
[Play “Running Away from Home” by Smash Into Pieces on Youtube](#)

The Road



On his way to his first destination, The Blooming City of Sakura, Ataru passes the time by daydreaming of his new life in The Promised Land: How amazing the view from his window is going to be, who his friendly neighbors are, and all the gorgeous kimonos and delicious foods he will finally be able to afford.

He's been waiting for this kind of life way too long, but the journey has just begun and it's gonna take him several weeks to get there.

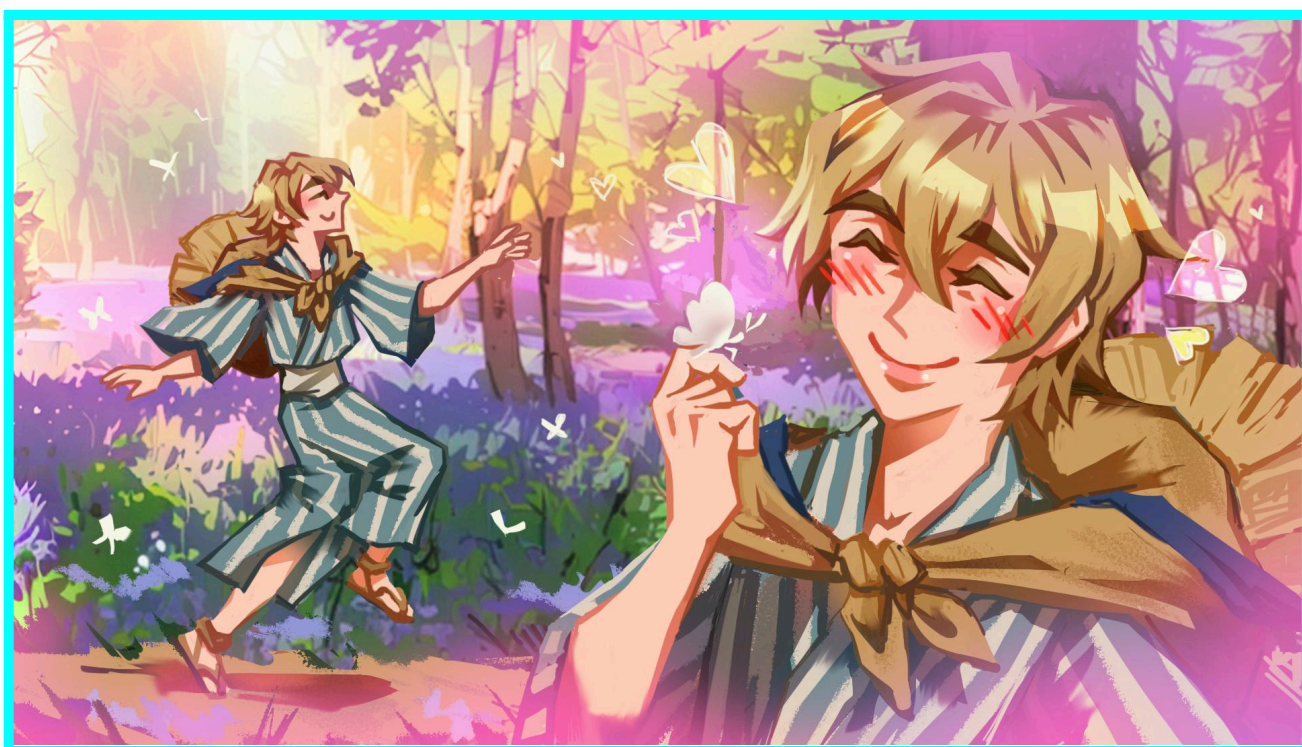


[Play “Dreamer” by Brave the Royals on Youtube](#)

Unfortunately, once halfway through the forest, the carriage breaks down. And since the couchman doesn't have the necessary tools to repair the carriage, he is obligated to return Ataru most of the travel money.

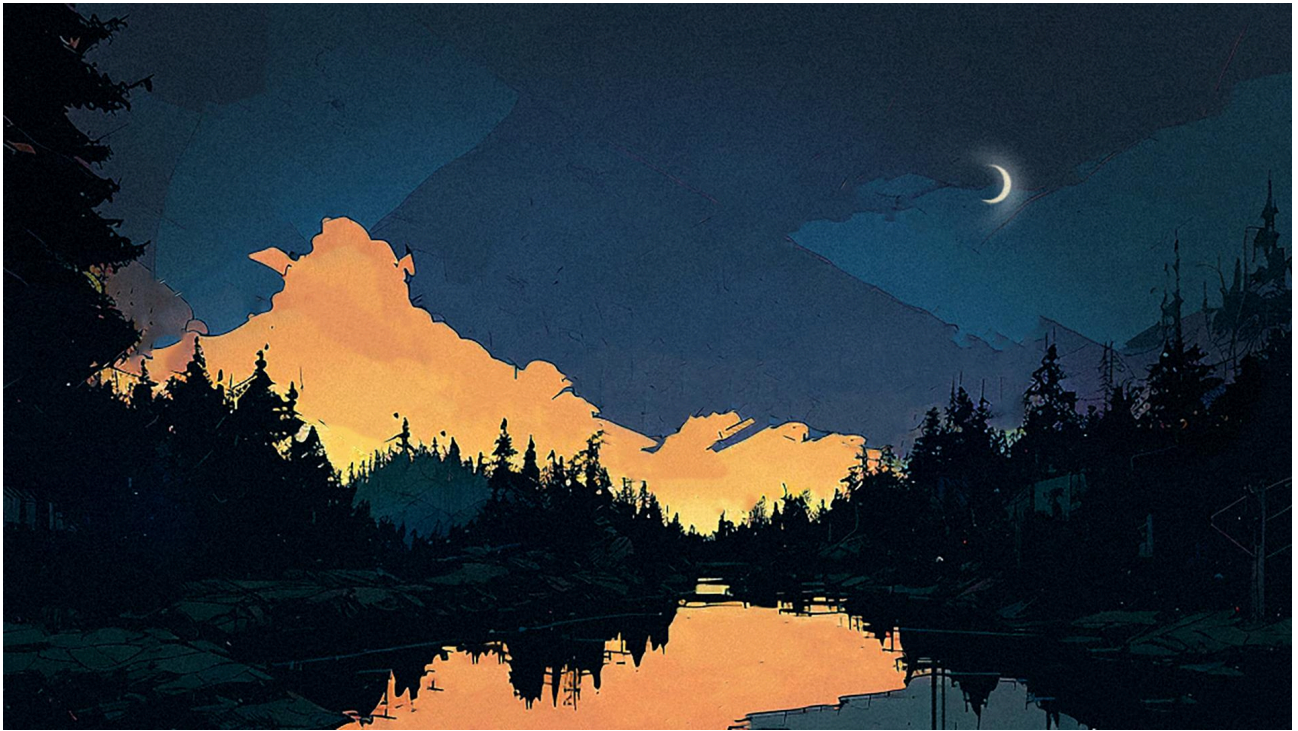
The couchman encourages Ataru to walk the rest of the way to Sakura city, as it should only take him 4 hours. Ataru's clearly not very happy about it, since walking 4 hours is a long time. But eventually he agrees to it, as the road is pretty straightforward and overall safe.

“It's a workout!” Ataru adopts a different perspective. So he picks up his backpack and ventures on by foot with great enthusiasm.

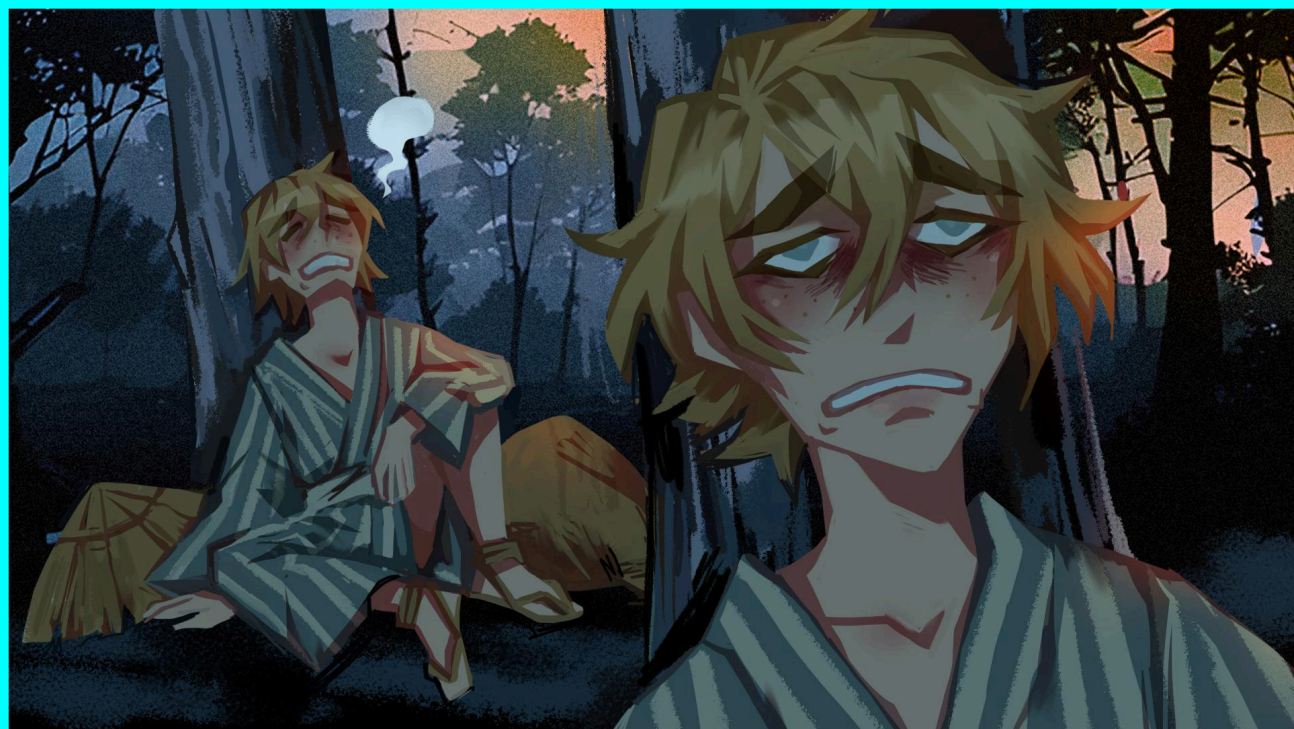


[Play “Edge of A Dream” by Stellar Revival on Youtube](#)

“The Journey of a Thousand Miles Begins With One Step” - Lao Tzu



Obviously it takes Ataru much longer than 4 hours to get out of the forest since he hasn't really walked that much before, and needs to take multiple breaks in between. It sure would be so much easier if he owned a horse, now wouldn't it? Sadly he's just way too poor to own one. But maybe he could buy one once in The Promised Land? Afterall, Ataru has loved horses since childhood.



[Play “What If I Fall” by Archetypes Collide on Youtube](#)

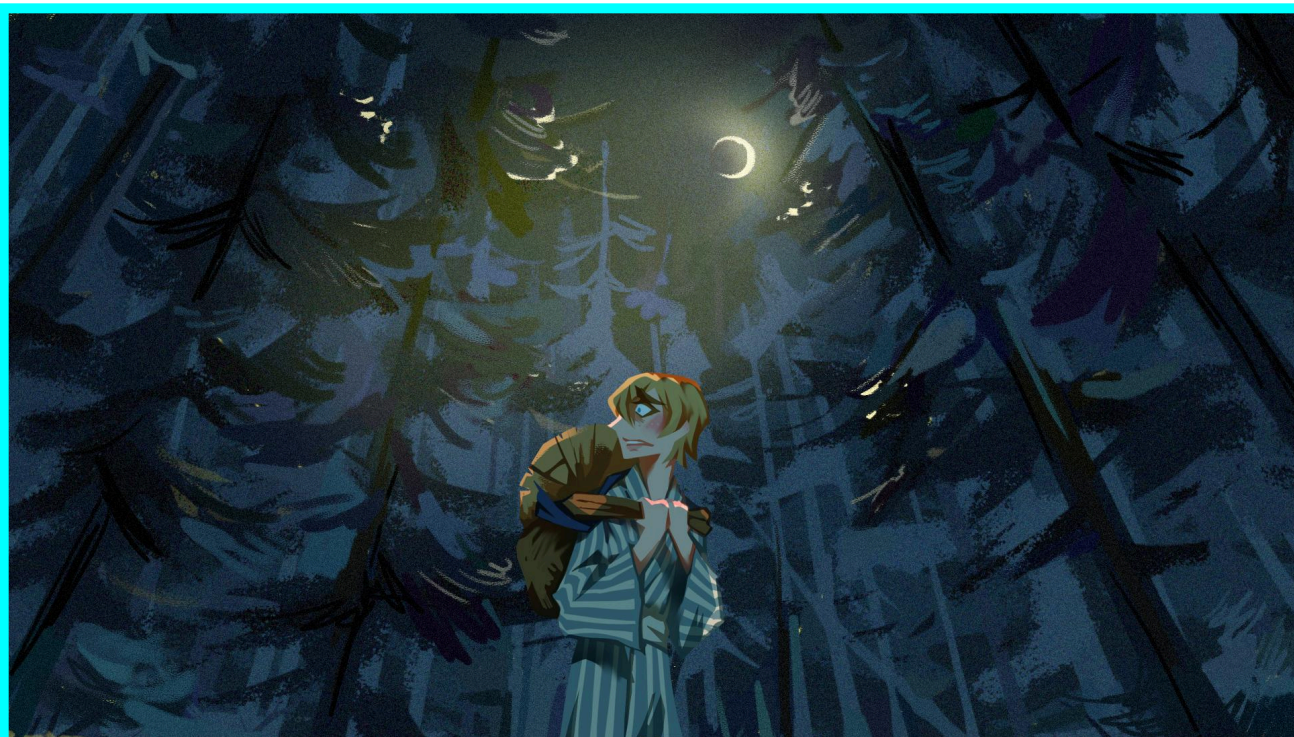
Ataru takes another break, resting his weary back against a tree, his eyes glued to the road ahead that appears insurmountable.

“I can’t do this anymore, let’s just stay here and die.” his pessimistic mind suddenly takes over. “Maybe it’s not going to be that cold and I could just camp here, outside.” he wonders.

Ataru takes his bag and reaches for the painting of The Promised Land. He took it with him because he liked it, but now it looks like he needs it for extra motivation. Once again he finds himself staring at the place where he could be, and the life he could have.

Soon the subtle cold starts slowly creeping in Ataru’s bones, which remind him that he can’t stay here for long. So he puts the painting back into his bag and forces himself to get back up – to continue moving despite his legs hurting like hell, and his soul feeling like giving up. “One step at a time,” he tries comforting himself.

As night falls over the forest, his surroundings begin to feel especially threatening. It’s impossible for him not to feel tired, scared, restless and anxious. How could he possibly have forgotten to pack a lantern? Well, he didn’t exactly plan on traveling at night either. It dawns on him how unprepared he actually is, and he feels kind of stupid. What else did he forget? In any case, at least there’s still the moon to guide him.



[Play “*Learning to Survive*” by We Came as Romans on Youtube](#)

Although Ataru was smart enough to pack a lot of food, he didn’t consider packing extra water (afterall he didn't plan on walking long distances). As a result, he runs out of water, which soon leads to thirst. He knows to keep a look out for a narrow river with clean drinking water, which will also indicate to him that he’s soon out of the forest.

Thankfully, a little while later, he hears the sound of flowing water, so he starts heading towards it with more confidence and pace. Once at the river side, he mindlessly grabs his water flask from his bag and without noticing, drops his Wheel of Fortune on the ground, which quietly rolls under a bush.

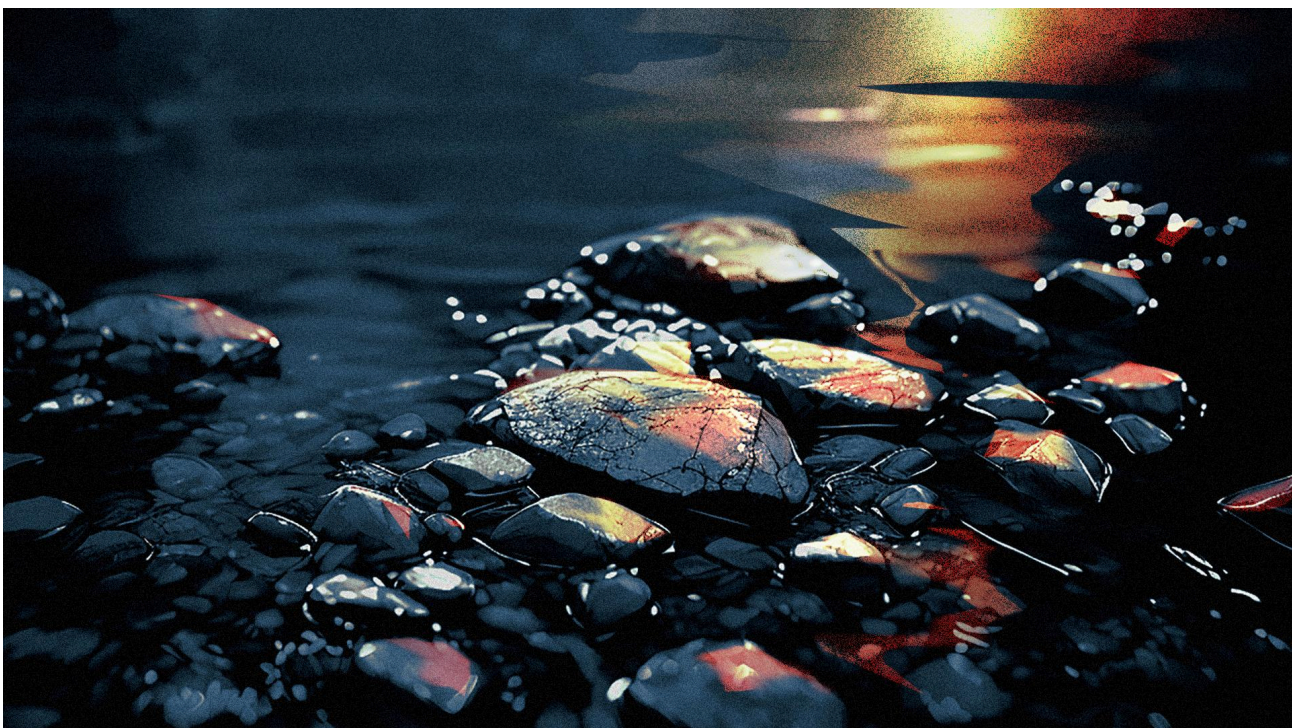
Ataru rapidly fills up his water flask and drinks. Now there's at least one less problem to worry about.

Unexpectedly, he hears the sound of multiple men approaching. Without hesitation Ataru grabs his bag and quietly hurries into some bushes to hide.

He peeks out to see three suspicious men arriving at the same river spot, filling up their water holders.

Ataru quietly decides to wait til they leave before making a move on, since he wouldn't want them to know he’s there.

Shushh, Make No Sound



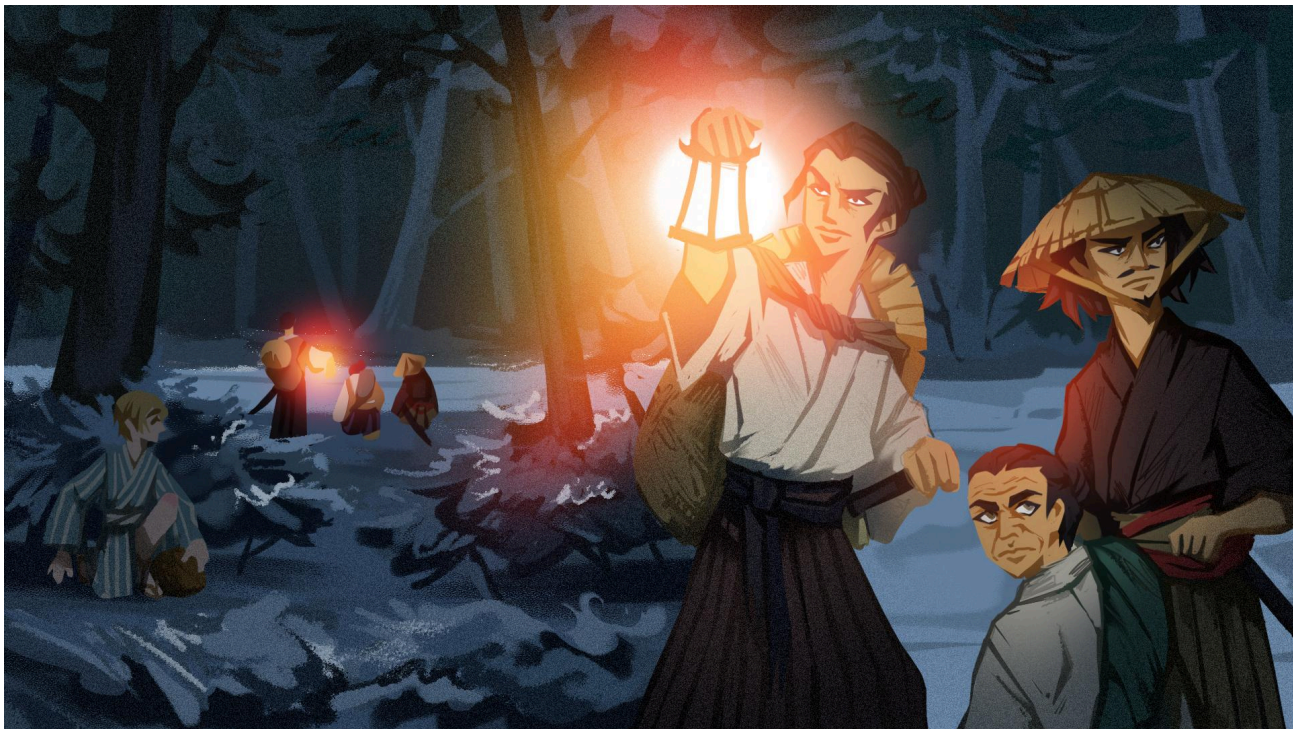
While the three men carelessly chat away and enjoy their time, Ataru is starting to get cold and impatient.

“How much longer till they pack up and finally leave?” he wonders.

Since the men are speaking quite loudly, Ataru eventually decides to sneak away.

(Yes, I know you know what's about to happen next – sneaking away unnoticeably doesn't quite work out, since Ataru happens to step on some annoying little branches).

As the branches break, they make a very clear and loud sound. Ataru quickly stops in his tracks and hides. He listens closely to the reaction of the three men.



“Did you hear that?” asks one man.

“Obviously,” answers another.

Pause.

“You scared?” asks one mockingly.

“Ah, shut up.” answers another.

Pause.

“Must have been an animal, let's keep moving.” says the last man.

Longer pause.

Eventually Ataru hears the men walking back to the road and moving forward. Once enough time has passed, Ataru stands up. Unfortunately, Ataru almost gets a heart attack, as he discovers that one man is still standing by the river side – patiently waiting for Ataru to reveal himself.

(What Ataru didn't see was how the three men were using a secret sign language to inform each other that one of them should stay back. Hide and wait for a little while, to see if someone was actually hiding. They were quite smart to do so. Professional thieves afterall.)

Immediately the man notices Ataru and starts sprinting towards him. Ataru is quick on his feet to make an escape, but as his legs are long worn out, he loses his pace pretty quickly, and so the chaser catches up to him and gets a strong hold of Ataru.

The captor whistles in a specific way, which signals for the other two team members to come back.

“Take his bag,” commands the captor, who still holds onto the struggling Ataru, who's clearly got no chance of fighting his way out of the thieves' grip, but at least he's trying.

The second man takes the bag from Ataru and starts going through his stuff.

“Please don't.” Ataru is begging for them to stop. “I'll show you where the money is, but please don't take my stuff!” Ataru tries bargaining, in hopes they won't find the Wheel of Fortune.

The men simply ignore Ataru, and keep searching through all of his belongings.



“What's he got?” one asks.

“Food, some decent clothes, lots of maps, and a painting,” he pulls out the scroll of The Promised Land.

“Oooh! The Promised Land – this will sell for a good price.” says one, surprised about the lucky find.

“Little boy, are you headed towards The Promised Land?” asks one curiously and mockingly.

“I doubt so, just look at him,” answers another.

“Check his clothes for money,” commands the capturer.

As they start searching Ataru's body for his hidden pockets, they easily find what they were looking for: his money.

“Not too bad,” says one as he counts Ataru's money, “now let's leave.”

They push Ataru to the ground and leave him with nothing.

“Be glad we didn't beat you, worse kill you,” they threatened lastly.

While the three successful thieves continue their journey, Ataru is left on his knees, slowly breaking down into tears.



[Play “Misery” by Feed the Addiction on Youtube](#)

All Hope is Not Lost

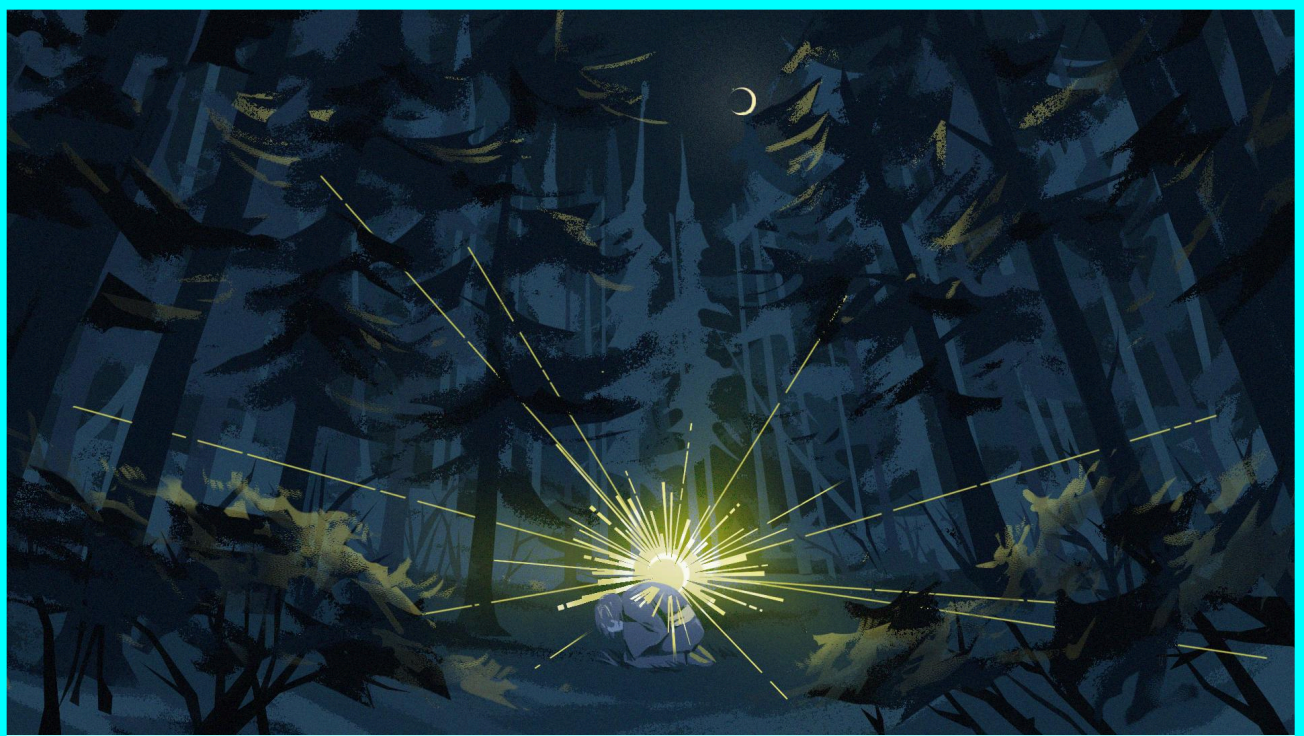
Once the thieves have finally gone, Ataru has a mental breakdown. He has failed. And the worst part of it all is that it happened so early in the journey and by his own recklessness. Ataru feels like a complete letdown, loser and a big disgrace to his family (although he has always kind of felt that way due to being an artist, which makes him naturally different from everyone else).



[Play “Don’t Wake Me Up” by dEMOTIONAL on Youtube](#)

He lingers in self pity and cries uncontrollably for quite some time. Probably longer than he should. Well, he’s a little crybaby. Once there’s no more tears to cry, he still continues crouching on the ground in his misery. Hopeless and glueless. Quietly cursing his bad luck, shitty life and wishing the worst of death upon those three men.

Eventually the Spirit gets tired of the misery show and finally decides to show up.



[Play “Is There Anybody Out There” by Jay Russell on Youtube](#)

As it lays down on Ataru's back to comfort him, he suddenly feels like it isn't the end of the world yet. He also finds himself gathering the strength to finally face the situation and move on. (Ataru

also comes to wonder how the thieves didn't find his Wheel of Fortune when checking over his bag. Was it even there?)

Just in case, Ataru decides to go check his surroundings. He stands up weakly, legs still shaking from the stress, as he goes to inspect the riverside. Unexpectedly, he notices a shimmer below a bush and luckily finds his Wheel of Fortune laying down on the ground. He realizes he must have dropped it when he was reaching for his water flask. Thank god!

Ataru puts the medallion close to his heart and is ever so thankful. All hope is not lost. Yet.



[Play “Rise Up” by Smash Into Pieces on Youtube](#)

Despite the good fortune of not having the Wheel of Fortune stolen, he's now facing a new dilemma.

Firstly, he can't return back home since it's just too far off. Secondly, he also can't stay in the scary and cold forest. Thirdly, even if he gathers all his strength and makes it to the Sakura city, he now doesn't have any money to rest somewhere.

As there's clearly no alternative, Ataru has to continue walking towards his next destination, The Blooming City of Sakura, in hopes he will find at least some place to stay overnight that won't charge him money.

Ataru gathers his newly found strength and starts walking on. Thankfully, he should only have to endure a half of an hour more of this gruesome and exhausting walk.

A Helpful Hand

This time Ataru continues walking through the forest as quietly as possible, while listening carefully to every sound around him.

Eventually he hears something far behind him. He turns to see a small warm light slowly moving towards him. Fearing more thieves, Ataru hides quickly.

Soon Ataru's ears begin to pick up the sound of a horse with a carriage, and once it's close enough, he identifies an old farmer carrying various vegetables on it.

The carriage seems to be moving towards the same direction Ataru's headed. In a flash, Ataru realizes if the man's kind enough, he might be able to get a free ride to Sakura city, or even better – get a free place to sleep for the night. That sounds just too good to be true! Perhaps an angel sent his way?



Once the garriage is close enough, Ataru emerges from the bush, greatly scaring the old man. “I’ve nothing to give you!” shouts the farmer, clearly thinking Ataru’s a thief. “All I’ve got are half rotten vegetables and a sick horse.”

However, upon closer inspection, the old man soon realizes Ataru’s just a boy. This calms the old man down, but he remains suspicious.

“Kid, what are you doing here this late? Sneaking out, homeless?” he asks.

“I was traveling to Sakura, but our carriage broke down so I had to continue by foot. And then I got robbed by three thieves in the forest,” Ataru speaks honestly. “Are you headed towards Sakura as well? I really need to find a place to stay overnight but I have no money, the thieves took everything.” Ataru begs, “Just one night, please. Tomorrow I will walk back home to Ordinary town.”

Upon listening to Ataru's story, the old man feels some sympathy. And though his mind still warns him that Ataru might be a fraud, he decides to listen to his heart. So he answers:

“I could give you a ride to Sakura since I am going that way anyway, but I can’t offer you a place to stay the night, you can rest in the carriage instead. But tell me, what’s a poor boy from Ordinary town going to Sakura city anyway?”

Oh no, Ataru has to rely on the lie his grandfather suggested to him:

“I was planning to go visit my grandparents who live in the Warrior town,” he says.

“That’s far away and without money, I doubt you will be able to reach there by foot. But alright, hop on. I will give you a lift to Sakura and give you some money so you can stay at an inn,” the old farmer says as he makes room for Ataru to join him in his old carriage. He also hands Ataru a blanket so that he can rest until they arrive.



The Journey Continues



[Play "Rise Up \(Instrumental\)" by Smash Into Pieces on Youtube](#)



Through the dark but short summer night, they finally arrive on the outskirts of The Blooming City of Sakura. Having not slept much, Ataru feels miserable, cold and hungry.

Eventually they arrive and Ataru gets off.

"I can't begin to thank you enough," Ataru bows, feeling blessed.

"Do you know why I gave you a ride?" the old man asks. "I saw a piece of myself in you back when I was struggling and no one came to help. The world is cruel, but don't let them change you into one of them. I know you have a good heart, I can tell."

Ataru is left speechless.

The old farmer reaches into his carriage to gather some better looking vegetables which he hands over to Ataru so he wouldn't starve. He also gives Ataru some money, so he could stay and rest somewhere before walking back home.

"Make sure to hide it well. Inside those city walls expect to be lied to, tricked and looked down upon. Don't trust anyone, they're all out for themselves," he warns Ataru.

Ataru takes mental notes, "Thanks, I will keep that in mind."

"Rest well and good luck on your way back," says the old man at last and leaves.

The Blooming City of Sakura



Ataru enters the city through the front gate, whose oversized and grand structure leaves Ataru baffled.



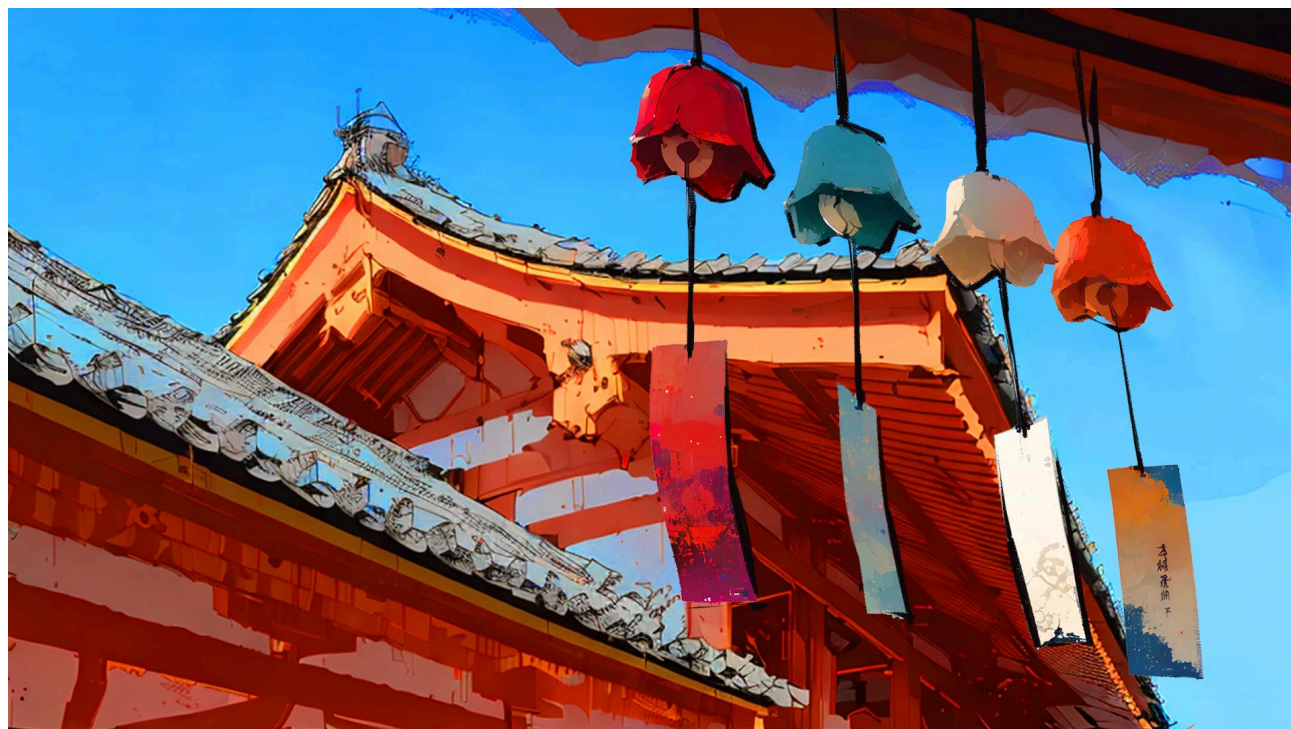
[Play “Mean” by Taylor Swift on Youtube](#)

He continues walking though the main road which is already pretty crowded, even though it's early morning – guess shop owners, restaurants and inns are making their final preparations for any wealthy guests to arrive turning the upcoming day.



Ataru's eyes keep racing from one street side to the other, as there's so much to see and take in: stunning high buildings, crimson red temples decorated with golden statues, neat storefronts selling all kinds of gorgeous things or delicious foods, and wealthy citizens wearing fancy garments with beautiful patterns.

While Ataru has seen drawings and read stories about such big cities, he has never seen them in person, until now that is. Sakura leaves Ataru stunned to say the least. He could even imagine himself living here, though it's a bit too crowded for his liking. One thing for sure – Ataru's hometown Ordinary is nothing compared to Sakura.







Ataru's Dream Kimono

As Ataru walks by a lot of beautiful geishas, he finds himself unable to take his gaze away from them. He knows that what they are wearing is pretty uncomfortable and impractical, but he still can't help but to want to look just like them. To wear an exclusive kimono, have beautiful long hair tied up and decorated by flower ornaments, his cheeks covered with pinkish blush and lips soaked in passionate red.



Does Ataru want to be a girl? Well not specifically. He just likes how the geisha look like and how skilled they are in different arts, dance and music. Ataru just wants to feel gorgeous and talented, so he could get attention from both men and women.

Eventually Ataru happens to pass by a luxurious kimono store, which has many breathtaking outfits on display. Ataru's eyes are glued on a specific reddish-pink kimono garnished with different flower patterns. He's never been a big fan of pink, nore a fan of such an overly feminine thing, but now he is! Because this dress is something else. It's the definition of perfection!



[Play “I’m Not Gay” by J Pee on Youtube](#)

Thus Ataru instantly falls in love with the design. It’s his new dream kimono! He imagines wearing it on the streets and getting a lot of positive attention and jealous looks.



[Play “Sexy Naughty Bitchy Me” by Tata Young on Youtube](#)

He even fantasizes how desperate rich men are chasing after him, showering him with all sorts of expensive gifts just to get his attention and a spot next to his futon.



*Play **"BIG, WANNA BE"** by The Used on Youtube*

But then again, he also imagines himself being a gorgeous stay at home parent, taking care of the house and being faithful to his husband.



So which kind of life does Ataru want? The mistress or housewife? Does he even know? Well I hope he makes up his mind soon.

One thing's for sure, Ataru desperately wants this kimono. Unfortunately Ataru's fantasy is gone in a wim after looking at the price tag.

"What the hell?" Ataru gets mad and starts cursing for being that poor.

He could never afford such a kimono. Or could he if he would work really hard in The Promised Land? But would it be worth it? There's just a lot more useful things he could buy for the same amount of money. For instance he could buy hundreds of cheaper kimonos with it. But he really doesn't want the cheap ones, he wants this one, the expensive one – so for once in his life he could feel beautiful.

Nevertheless Ataru leaves the store disappointed and furious. He continues walking through the busy main street, but this time he keeps his eyes on the ground, so he wouldn't be tempted by anything else.

Soon enough Ataru's dirty and battered appearance catches way too many disapproving looks from the local people. As Ataru feels overwhelmingly judged and embarrassed, he decides to leave the main road.

"It's way too expensive anyway. It's better to go find a more affordable place to stay and rest." he thinks.



Other Side of Wealth



Now Ataru makes his way through the poorer region of the city. Even though moments ago he graced wealth and fame, suddenly it pains him greatly seeing such harsh living conditions compared to the main street.

The streets are filthy and everything looks more disorganized and chaotic. People are looking kind of worn out, sick and tired.



But to Ataru's surprise, he also notices more laughter and openness, as people here are more than happy to socialize and help each other out (even if it's just for the sake to bargain themselves a good deal).



[Play “Oh My God” by Sixx A.M. on Youtube](#)

Hopeless

Eventually Ataru's legs give in, so he finds himself a quiet spot to rest, far away from the crowded market.

“I could waste the money (which the old man gave me) to rest in an inn,” he thinks to himself, contemplating his next move, “Or I could use it to travel to the Warrior town. But how would I proceed from there?”

“Either way I am pretty f***ed. Without money I just won't make it far. I have to go back home and start all over.” Ataru finally admits his defeat, even though he really doesn't want to go back home and start saving up for a new trip. He'd rather go by foot to the Promised Land and sleep under the bushes. That's how desperately he doesn't want to return back home.



[Play “Anymore” by Lø Spirit on Youtube](#)

“Looks like someone's in a rut,” a voice speaks up.

“Eh?” Ataru stutters for a moment, he really wasn't expecting anyone to approach him.

He turns to see an even poorer looking girl pointing a finger at him. Ataru feels a sense of disgust but he doesn't let it show, after all he's looking like a bag of s*** as well.



Ataru decides to talk to the girl besides her appearance:

“I need to get to the Warrior town. Is there any way to get a free ride?” he asks – seems like Ataru has decided to hitchhike his way into The Promised Land.

“Information isn't for free, give me something in return I will tell you how to get to the Warrior town.” the girl demands.

“I don't have anything,” Ataru refuses.

“Well too bad,” the girl talks ironically. “I guess you'll have to go by foot. But ohhhh nooooo, you would get taken hostage by the enemy troops.”

“What do you mean?” Ataru is intrigued.

“Haven't you heard the latest news? There have been multiple incidents of the enemy troops blocking and attacking caravans on the road to the Warrior town. So you can't use the main road, you'll have to go around.”

“Around how?” asks Ataru, completely relying on the little girl's information.

“I told you, information isn't for free,” the girl repeats herself.

Ataru thinks for a moment, “How do I know I can trust you?”

“You can't,” she admits.

Ataru sighs – you really can't trust anyone, now do you?

“So if I give you something in return, you'll tell me how to get a free ride to the Warrior town?” Ataru asks again.

“Yes, I'll tell you how to get safe and sound to the Warrior town,” the girl confirms.

Ataru takes out some of the money the old man gave him and shows it to the girl.

“Will this do?” Ataru asks.

“Haha,” the girl laughs, “I knew you had something. I aint no fool!”

“So how do I get to the Warrior town?” Ataru's getting impatient.

“The shortest way to get there is through the Forest of the Beasts,” the girl starts laughing as she's clearly amused by the thought of it (by the thought of anyone who enters the forest being killed).

“Continue,” Ataru's clearly getting annoyed, “How about without getting killed by the wolves?”

The girl calms down and continues with a more serious tone: “You're lucky, the samurai will be heading that way as well, trying to catch some of those monsters with some traps they bilt.

You could hire a samurai to protect you and get you through the forest. I know a guy called Scar, reddish armor, a big scar on his face. He's known to take side gigs and I am sure he'll take yours too.”

Ataru facepalms from hopelessness, “How could I ever possibly afford to hire a samurai?”

“Just lie that you are a very rich traveler who dresses up poorly to keep a low profile. Tell him that you have unimaginable stacks of gold waiting at home!” her voice is getting dramatic as she imagines it playing out in her head, “A secret fortune passed down by previous generations! Which the samurai will only receive once they bring you to the Warrior town, safely and unharmed!”

“So how about it? Great idea right?” she asks, clearly proud of her plan.

“Fortune passed town by generations?” Ataru thinks to himself loudly, suddenly he remembers the Wheel of Fortune being for two people.

“Which I might just actually possess!” he declares as he stands all fired up.

“Yes, excellent! Very good acting! You almost fooled me!” the girl almost believed that Ataru might actually possess anything worthwhile.

Ataru stops, “So how can I hire the Scar guy?”

The girl stretches out her hand, waiting for her payment.

“Oh right,” Ataru hands her the money.

Ataru clearly got more information for his money’s worth, but that’s only if their master plan is really going to work out.

“Let’s go, they’re soon here!” she says at last.

Arrival of The Warriors

Ataru and the poor girl make their way back to the wealthier side of town, where both the poor and rich have already started to gather to greet the arriving samurai, their heroes and protectors.

“By the way, what’s your name?” Ataru asks.

“Chikao,” she says “And you?”

“Ataru—”

Suddenly, the streets become particularly noisy as people start to shout and cheer.

“Step aside! Make way for the samurai!” a man shouts.

After a brief moment, the streets get taken over by several dozen armed warriors on their horses – with their war flags fluttering proudly in the wind.



Ataru steps aside like anyone else. Lucky for him, he even gets a close up chance to glimpse up to one of the samurai in the front – the one who wears a blue cape.

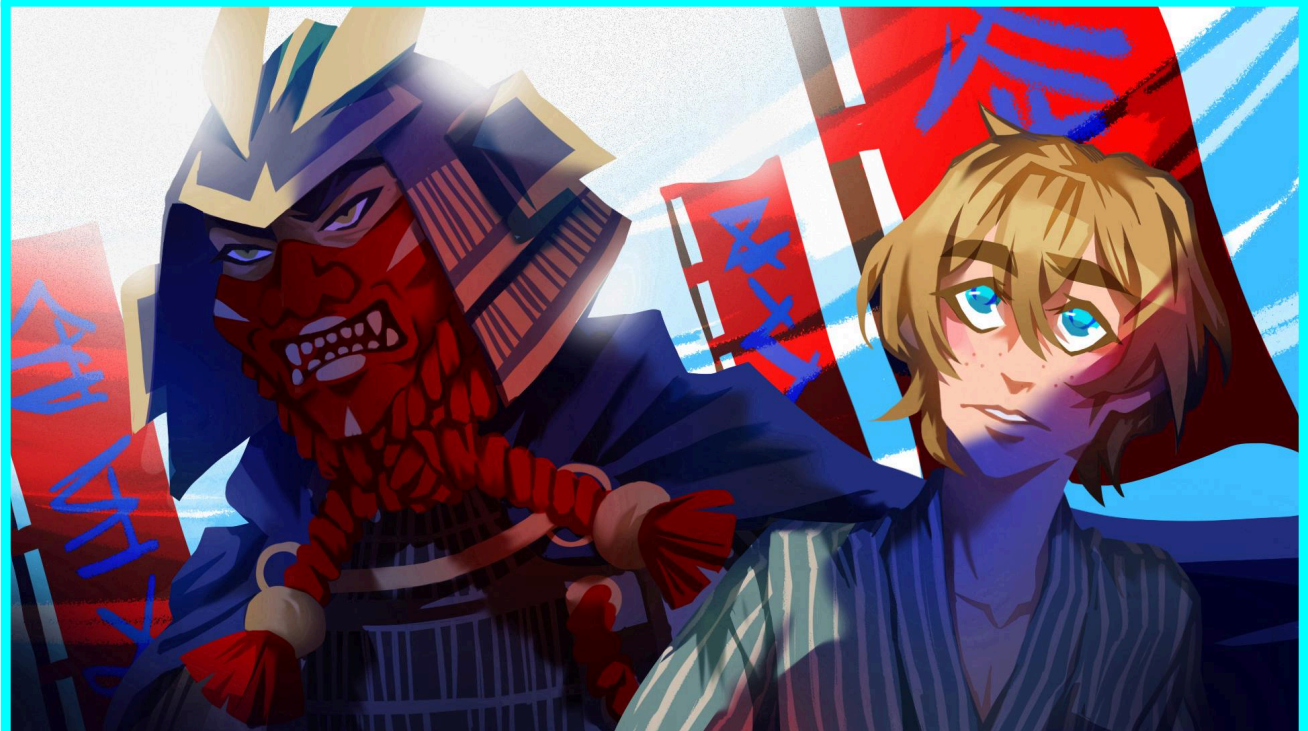


[Play “Wanderer” by Broken Minds & D-Frek on Youtube](#)

“He must be the commander of the clan, or someone else important.” Ataru wonders as he stares at the mighty samurai.

The blue caped samurai doesn’t seem to care about the attention he gets from the fans. He doesn’t even take a moment to check on whoevers watching him from the crowd. Of course why should he, he’s got bigger concerns than that. However, the rest of the samurai do seem to enjoy the attention. And who wouldn’t want a piece of such fame?!

However, Ataru is not yet aware of how this same attention can turn a samurai into an egocentric and proud person.



[Play “All Eyes on You” by Smash Into Pieces on Youtube](#)