

Chapter 1: The Siege

After the fall of the fortress at Nakatome to the allied forces, Kato's father, Lord Eivel, mobilized his army in Kaga. Shinobi in the region quickly notified the emperor of this. Within weeks, the coastline from Kaga to Dewa had been lost, and the mountain passes in Shinano were no longer under imperial control. Eivel's army was poised to strike at the last coherent fighting force left in the Kwanto...

- [Agador]: [Peering over the castle walls at the bastion in Mutsu] I can't see a thing in this fog...
- [Kong]: Maybe they won't attack at all... this castle is very well defended.
- [Agador]: But I hear their army outnumbers ours by almost 20 to 1.
- [Miso]: A target rich environment for you arquebusiers.
- [Agador]: They would be fools to rush up along the beach, the Portuguese warships will annihilate them with their canons...
- [Kong]: I wonder how Jotito is doing out there... haven't heard a word from his patrol unit for days now...
General Mako, who is in charge of the defenses, walks on to the rampart.
- [Mako]: Good news, Agador. The Portuguese rescued Jotito and his patrol up the coast. They were being chased by some of Eivel's men.
- [Kong]: Whew!
- [Mako]: And they have given us some good intelligence on the makeup of the enemy army. It seems most of them are fanatical Ikko-Ikkei warrior monks...
- [Agador]: ... from Kaga.
- [Kong]: Kaga!
- [Miso]: Wait until Lord Oda hears that. They have been a thorn in his side for years.
- [Agador]: Why would the monks join such a vicious regime as Eivel's?
- [Mako]: I don't know. But, we will not be able to hold this bastion if they breach the walls. We only have a handful of spearmen ready to take them on... everybody else we have are Ashigaru and you Arquebusiers.
- [Agador]: What about the Portuguese?
- [Mako]: That brings me to the next issue...
- [Kong]: What issue?
- [Mako]: I got new orders from the emperor himself. You are to go to his citadel at Edo immediately.
- [Agador]: Just me?
- [Mako]: You, Kong and Miso. The Portuguese will escort you to Kawachi on one of their warships. From their, it's just a few days march to the citadel.
- [Kong]: What about this fortress? You need every man you can get...?
- [Mako]: Jotito will be put in charge of the Arquebusiers in your absence. Just then, a barrage of arrows descends on the ramparts on the northern wall. The sounds of confused men yelling reverberate throughout the castle.
- [Agador]: What the heck is going on?!?
- [Mako]: They are attacking from the North!

[Kong]: We must not abandon this post, they may attack from the East as well...

[Agador]: There seems to be more going on over there than just archer fire...

[Kong]: Look! It looks like there are some men cutting up the arquebusiers on the northern ramparts! How did they scale those walls without us knowing?!?

[Agador]: Those are not warrior monks...

[Mako]: Ninja!

[Kong]: [Trembles] Shit!

[Miso]: [Draws sword] Oh... I'm gonna have me some fun... I'm gonna have me some fun today...! [Runs towards the melee on the northern rampart]

[Mako]: This is getting out of control! Ninjas too? When you reach the Emperor, you MUST inform him we need reinforcements!

[Agador]: [Loading arquebus] We must repel this attack at once!

[Mako]: No! You must get on that Portuguese warship NOW.

[Kong]: What about Miso? We must go get him first... his presence was requested as well...

[Mako]: GAH! Alright! Go get him. Just don't get yourselves killed or it will be my head!

Miso jumps into the melee and starts clashing swords with the ninjas. The terrified arquebusiers, who by now had lost about 75 men to the ninjas fled, leaving Miso alone to fend off the horde of 20 ninjas all by himself. But the narrow rampart enabled Miso to hold off the attackers without allowing them to flank him or get behind him. His masterful skills with the sword proved superior to those of the enemy ninjas as he began to drop them. First a few, then some more. By the time Agador, Kong and some other arquebusiers arrived on the scene, Miso had already killed half the ninjas. The arquebusiers opened fire on the surviving ninjas. After a single volley, the 5 remaining ninjas decided to flee and retreated into the tower they had emerged from. Minutes later, they were seen running into the fog. Several ropes were seen dangling from one of the windows from the tower.

[Miso]: Thanks.

[Agador]: Looks as if you single-handedly stopped that attack.

[Mako]: Damn! How many more ninjas do they have, I wonder?

[Agador]: Your sentinels must be more vigilant... I'm sure this fog played a part in their stealthy approach...

[Kong]: Look! Who is opening the gates?!?

[Mako]: Oh no!

[Agador]: [Yells at the top of his voice] All arquebusiers take aim at the gates!

[Mako]: What are you doing?

[Agador]: I bet there are ninjas opening those gates, and that this attack here was merely a feint. If those gates open, you better be ready for a sea of sohei...

[Kong]: If Fatsumo were here, he'd 'see' a sea of love...

[Agador]: Only if the monks smelled of lavender...

The arquebusiers on the ramparts aim towards the gates, which moments later are flung open. Just as Agador had suspected, a surge of warrior monks burst into the courtyard.

[Agador]: FIRE!
The arquebusiers unleash a lethal volley from all the ramparts. Many monks fall under the lead hail. But before they can release a second volley, the monks are engaging the spearmen of the garrison. The valiant yari samurai are no match for the fanatical monks, who cut them down with ease.

[Agador]: RELOAD FASTER!
As the arquebusiers take aim for their next volley, the monks retreat back out the gate from which they entered, preempting the second volley. The courtyard is littered with the mutilated bodies of the yari samurai contingent, of which only a handful survived.

[Miso]: Look! The gate is on fire!
[Mako]: Shit! Shit! Shit!
[Kong]: What now?
[Agador]: We MUST put that fire out!
[Mako]: Shit! Shit! Shit!
[Miso]: [With swords still drawn, races down to the courtyard] Quick! Get buckets and load them with water from the well! Move it! Move it!
A human chain of Ashigaru soon puts out the fire at the gates.

[Mako]: Shit! Shit! Shit!
[Agador]: We must repair the gate...
[Mako]: What is the point? Most of our spearmen are dead. All we have are Ashigaru left... and some arquebusiers. But we lost many of those on that ninja feint and the walls...
[Agador]: Its not so bad... we repealed their attack.
[Mako]: But they destroyed the gate! They have shown they can break in here at any time they chose...
[Agador]: Look on the bright side...
[Mako]: Bright side...?
[Agador]: You get to face your enemy in battle and die with honor!
[Mako]: When you teppo say it that way you make it sound so silly...
[Kong]: The emperor has faith in you. Why else would he place the man who is set to wed his daughter here to defend his domain?
[Mako]: I need some sake.
[Miso]: I wish Mimi were here...
[Mako]: You 3... you must depart at once!
[Kong]: Well... the emperor did ask for us...
[Agador]: Don't worry, Jotito will keep the arquebusiers sharp...
[Miso]: Give our regards to Jotito for us, eh?
Agador, Kong and Miso gather their gear and board the Portuguese warship anchored in the harbor overlooked by the allied bastion.

[Agador]: I wonder what the emperor wants with us...?
[Miso]: Don't know, but I don't like that we are leaving the defenders behind like this... Their situation seems dire at best...
[Kong]: The Portuguese will help them out if trouble arises...
[Miso]: Like they helped during that attack?
The Portuguese warship departs, leaving the besieged bastion in Mutsu behind. The 3 men gaze at the castle, with smoke still rising from the smoldering gates into the sky, and watch it sink beneath the horizon as they head toward the distant province of

Kawachi in Central Japan...

Chapter 2: Audience with the Emperor

Agador, Kong and Miso are lead into the Great Hall at the Emperor's palace. After their arrival is announced, they are brought to the Emperor's presence.

[Emperor]: Welcome to Edo.

Agador, Kong and Miso bow before the Emperor.

[Emperor]: I have a delicate mission for you. First, however... some formalities.

[Agador]: [Looks at Kong, confused, and shrugs]

[Emperor]: Agador... you have done the Empire a great service. Your heroic deeds brought about a decisive victory at Nakatome. And in your completing your mission from Buddha, you have also become the foremost expert on the headless horseman in the Imperial Army.

[Agador]: You are too kind...

[Emperor]: I hereby award you the title... of sei-taisho. Stand and be recognized!

[Agador]: [Stands and receives his new rank ribbons from the Emperor] Oh!

[Emperor]: You are the first non-samurai to be awarded this rank.

[Kong]: Holy cow! Agador! You're a general!

[Miso]: Whoa!

[Emperor]: [Strolls to window and gazes out] Your men are awaiting you at the port in Kawachi.

[Agador]: My men? You mean... I get an army of my own?

[Emperor]: Yes... you will soon take command of an Imperial Army.

[Agador]: Ah so!

[Emperor]: You will board a small flotilla of ships anchored in Kawachi that will carry you and your army to the mainland. There, I have arranged for you to meet some local guides, which will take you to the remote Buddhist monastery of Manchu Kwo... somewhere on the eastern rims of the Gobi.

[Agador]: I am to invade the mainland? Surely the Great Khan would decorate his palisades with my head should I attempt such a feat...!

[Miso]: I'd say...

[Emperor]: You will not land your army. They will await your return. They will escort you back to Japan.

[Agador]: So... why am I going to this forsaken place?

[Emperor]: At this monastery lives a special monk. He has trained his whole life with but one objective in mind: to face the horseman. You will go to Manchu Kwo and escort this monk to Japan. Once he arrives, we will hunt down the horseman and have this monk destroy him.

[Kong]: What if the monk is killed... by the Mongols, Lord Eivel... or the horseman himself?

[Emperor]: Then Buddha save us all. This monk is the first, last and only line of defense that can protect the world from total annihilation.

[Miso]: And if the monk doesn't want to travel here?

[Emperor]: He will. This is the sole purpose of his life work. If he resists, you must remind him of his duties and his oath.

[Kong]: How will we recognize our contacts on the mainland?

[Emperor]: I presume you know Fatsumo... he will be waiting for you with your guides.

[Agador]: Fatsumo! I wonder what happened to him since we split up after Nakatome...!

[Emperor]: You must leave at once. Time is of the essence.

[Agador]: One question... what units are in my army?

[Emperor]: I have assigned you the 2 finest Arquebusier units in the Corps. And, for support, I have added 2 fierce Yari Samurai units, 1 No Dachi unit and 40 Yari Cavalry.

[Miso]: Alright!

[Agador]: Wow! 340 men!

[Emperor]: You also have 10 bodyguards. You should only disembark with your bodyguards. Remember: the rest of your army must remain aboard the ships or the Khan might take it the wrong way...

[Agador]: Hopefully he won't take the mere presence of our ships the wrong way...

[Emperor]: The ships will not wait in port, but along the coastal waters... somewhere isolated. Don't just sail into a harbor... you're likely to start a war that way!

[Agador]: Got it!

[Kong]: Say... shouldn't we be trying to take out Lord Eivel before dealing with the horseman?

[Agador]: The horseman is more important than a mere mortal lord. If he finds his head, it will be the end of us all.

[Emperor]: That's right. We will certainly try to defeat Lord Eivel. For now, just concentrate on the mission at hand. When you arrive, we will initiate the next phase of the operation against the horseman. Buddha willing, Lord Eivel will be defeated by then...

[Miso]: Doesn't look likely. Lord Eivel has been storming through territory at a furious pace... Say, why don't you send some ninjas to assassinate Lord Eivel? That would solve that problem...?

[Emperor]: We shall defeat him. My objective is not to kill him. Mercy will bring the empire back together.

[Agador]: No offence... but that could be construed as a sign of weakness. Perhaps this is why Lord Shimazu is the only Daimyo to not join your coalition against Lord Eivel?

[Miso]: And I bet he is amassing his forces and laughing at you and Oda... bidding his time to invade Honshu and sweep over it once you and Eivel batter each other to a pulp...

[Emperor]: Well... Lord Oda is making preparations to abandon his citadel at Owari. His forces are decimated and the remains of his army will be joining mine here at Edo.

[Agador]: Damn! That means that castle we just left in Mutsu is the only stronghold we have left east of Owari?!?

[Emperor]: Well... Hojo has some forces holed up in some citadels in Musashi... but they are too terrified to venture outside their walls. Can't blame them. Their patrols are discovered beheaded or there is an enemy army camped nearby that dwarfs theirs...

[Kong]: Beheaded...?

[Emperor]: Their heads are never found... just the bodies...

[Miso]: [Rubs his neck] Ouch. What a way to go...

[Emperor]: There are some troubling parallels between Eivel's advances and reported sightings of the horseman. It seems Eivel moves in right

behind the horseman... almost as if they are working in tandem...
[Agador]: ... or Lord Eivel is trying to capture him...
[Miso]: Hey, let him! That fixes one of our problems!
[Kong]: Eivel's head in a basket!
[Agador]: Remember what the monk in Nagashima said... he shrinks the heads and adds them to his necklace...
[Miso]: Ouch. Even worse.
[Emperor]: I would rest just fine at night if the horseman decorated his necklace with Eivel's head...
[Miso]: And the Ikko-Ikkei...
[Emperor]: Those reports truly disturbed me...
[Agador]: About the monks fighting with Lord Eivel?
[Emperor]: Yes.
[Kong]: Why?
[Emperor]: Reports from all over the kwanto suggest that even Lord Eivel's Ashigaru corps are every bit as fierce and fanatical as the Ikko-Ikkei...
[Agador]: No way.
[Miso]: NO WAY! A peasant outclassing a samurai? NEVER!
[Emperor]: Those are the reports. The body counts do not lie. 3 days ago, Oda sent 2000 men – No Dachis and heavy cavalry supported by Arquebusiers – against 700 of Eivel's Ashigaru... which had NO backup, I might add. Oda figured he would get a token win against this raiding party. He was wrong...
[Miso]: No way! Can't be! 700 grubby peasants beating 2000 samurai? Can't be!
[Emperor]: Well... Oda lost the battle. 1500 of his men died.
[Agador]: Ouch.
[Emperor]: Only 56 enemy Ashigaru were killed in the melee.
[Agador]: I don't understand...
[Miso]: Neither do I...
[Emperor]: I have consulted all my taishos... all my Buddhist consultants... only one explanation surfaces to explain this...
[Kong]: They are possessed?
[Agador]: [Nudges Kong] You crazy, Kong!
[Emperor]: It seems Lord Eivel might... just might... be a High Priest of the Sword of Buddha sect...
[Miso]: You have got to be kidding...
[Agador]: What?!? Buddhism is pacifist in nature! It seeks to end suffering... The whole sword thing makes no sense!
[Kong]: Hey... I remember hearing about this when I studied Japanese history at the Corps! Was this sect exterminated a thousand years ago?
[Emperor]: Yes. That is right Kong. This sect has been extinct for a thousand years. Or so we thought...
[Agador]: What is this sect... Sword of Buddha...?
[Emperor]: It is a virulent strain of Buddhism... founded by a bloodthirsty lunatic who claimed to be the son of Buddha himself. The basic tenet is that the only means to reach Nirvana is by cleaning the Earth from the non-believers. The High Priest is hailed as the representative of Buddha on earth... anointed in Heaven by Buddha himself.
[Miso]: Madness! This is madness!

- [Emperor]: Furthermore, they believe that dying in battle trying to clean the world of infidels is the fastest way to Nirvana. In fact, they even added some earthly pleasures to the whole thing to make it more appealing to the ignorant masses.
- [Miso]: Geez! Now the peasants are ferocious and the samurai are running like whipped dogs...! What next?
- [Emperor]: Not true. Samurai that become believers will be just a fanatical as the peasants or the monks. Their motivation is the death of anyone that does not share their beliefs... that the word of the High Priest is the word of Buddha.
- [Agador]: And Lord Eivel's word certainly is a call for dominion over all Japan...
- [Emperor]: If this is true... and Lord Eivel is in fact a High Priest of this sect... and he has managed to infiltrate the Ikko-Ikkei with these beliefs, then we are surely facing an army of fanatics. Even the peasantry is driven by the beliefs to excel in the battlefield. This explains the phenomena in all the battlefield reports.
- [Kong]: And on top of that we have a headless horseman running around chopping people's heads off...
- [Emperor]: Truly... you must depart now. The captain of the ships will brief you on the landing zones when you return.
- [Agador]: Of course. We shall be on our way.
- [Emperor]: May Buddha's compassion go with you.
Agador, Kong and Miso bow to the Emperor and depart the Great Hall. They are lead to the gates, where they are introduced to Agador's new bodyguards. From there the men take the road south to Kawachi and leave the Imperial citadel at Edo behind.
- [Agador]: Well... I hope this monk is worth this much effort...
- [Miso]: Piece of cake. We just go in... get the guy... come back. In and out.
- [Kong]: GAH! Mongols! I hate Mongols. I hear they smell funny. I hope we won't have to meet any...
- [Agador]: Now, now... when in Mongolia... do as the Mongols...
- [Miso]: Tell that to the Chinese...
- [Kong]: I wonder if this monk is Mongol...?
- [Agador]: I don't know. Not that it really matters. We just have to get his smelly arse over to Edo... whether he is a Mongol or not...
The following day, the men reach the port in Kawachi and board the ships waiting for them there. The ships raise their anchors and head out to sea... heading west towards the vast Mongol Empire...
- [Miso]: [Clutching his sword] The only good Mongol is a dead Mongol. And my sword and I shall be ready for them...

Chapter 3: The Sands of Manchu Kwo

Several days later, the Japanese flotilla pulls up close to the shore somewhere in northern Korea at an isolated stretch along the coastline. Agador, Kong, Miso and the bodyguard contingent board small boats and row to shore.

[Agador]: We have landed.
 [Miso]: Korea. One day, these lands will be ruled from Edo..
 [Kong]: I feel naked here... pity the army won't be traveling with us..
 [Agador]: We must hurry and get out of here before dark.
 [Miso]: Not to mention find Fatsumo..
 [Kong]: Gah! We are in a strange land looking for a blind man!
 [Agador]: Could be worse..
 [Kong]: Yeah, he could be deaf and mute too..
 [Miso]: Glorious will be the day I take a Mongol head..
 [Kong]: [Glares at Miso] You'd think you would turn into the headless horseman should you die..
 [Miso]: [Laughs] You're just scared. Its natural for non-samurai. *The men hide the boats and head inland. Several hours later, they arrive at the rendezvous city. Thirsty, the men decide to stop by a local sake parlor for a drink...*
 [Agador]: Ah! I could use some nice warm sake right about now..
 [Kong]: This land is so... so... harsh..
 [Miso]: When the Chinese were in charge, I bet the lands were much nicer... too many grazing grounds for horses..
 [Waitress]: [Approaches table] Oh! So many men! I can serve you long time..
 [Miso]: What can I get for 2 koku?
 [Waitress]: Any ting you want.
 [Miso]: [Raises an eyebrow] Anything?
 [Waitress]: Any ting.
 [Miso]: You guys stay here... I'm going..
 [Agador]: Just keep the dragon in its cage... I know Mimi is not here, but control yourself. We are here to have some sake and move on..
 [Waitress]: You want sake?
 [Agador]: Yes please.
The waitress drops to her knees and starts to crawl under the table.
 [Agador]: Ahem! The drink..
 [Waitress]: Ah so! The drink! Of course!
The men sip sake for an hour after the waitress brings them a pitcher. Then, from out of the blue...
 [Fatsumo]: I smell sake!
 [Kong]: Look! Its Fatsumo!
 [Miso]: YO! FATSUMO! OVER HERE!
Fatsumo's companions lead Fatsumo to where the men are enjoying their sake. Fatsumo joins the drinking and they reminisce about the old times.
 [Fatsumo]: Well... we have a long journey ahead. We should get started..
 [Agador]: Agreed. We brought some extra horses so we can travel a little faster.

[Fatsumo]: Horses? GAH! How can I lead a horse?
[Kong]: You will ride with me.
[Fatsumo]: Ah so!
The men depart and start down the road, lead by the Chinese guides accompanying Fatsumo. After several days, the men entered the plains just east of the Gobi desert.

[Agador]: Are we there yet?
[Fatsumo]: The guide says its about 2 more days march from here.
[Miso]: I see nothing. There is nothing as far as the eye can see...
[Fatsumo]: Patience, my young warrior. Soon, your voyage will bear fruit.
[Miso]: Fruit? I could use some fruit right about now... beats the sand we've been chewing on since we entered this plain...
[Fatsumo]: Soon, we will be in the great Gobi desert. Hence the sand...
[Kong]: Is it me... or does it look like there are some riders up ahead?
[Miso]: I bet they are Mongols...
[Kong]: Oh no! You know how I hate Mongols!
[Fatsumo]: I once wed a Mongol princess...
[Miso]: I bet she smelled of lavender too...
[Fatsumo]: Right you are!
Minutes later, the riders reach the travelers and surround them, with bows drawn.

[Warrior #1]: Gah! Look at these silly peasants! What odd clothes they wear!
[Agador]: We are...
[Warrior #1]: SILENCE!
[Agador]: Uh...
[Warrior #1]: SILENCE I SAID! Do you not know to whom you are speaking?!?
[Kong]: No... we are travelers...
[Warrior #2]: Seems these petty peasants are trying to escape their duties in the rice paddies of the Great Khan...
[Warrior #3]: Lets take their heads.
[Warrior #2]: He he. [Points to Miso] He looks like a feisty one...
[Warrior #1]: Feisty ones are more fun to kill. [Laughs out loud]
[Miso]: You insolent...
[Warrior #1]: [Aims bow at Miso] You want to die right now, you worthless rice paddy slave?
[Agador]: Please, noble lord, may I speak?
[Warrior #2]: Oh my! He wants to address a Mongol warrior! I can see even from here his ancestry is subhuman! Not even half Mongol!
[Agador]: [Bows before Warrior #1] Please... we are en route to the monastery at Manchu Kwo to...
[Warrior #1]: WHAT? Manchu Kwo???
[Agador]: Yes... Manchu Kwo...
[Warrior #2]: [Laughs out loud] Only crazy people go there...
[Warrior #1]: Why do you go to Manchu Kwo?
[Agador]: We have been invited there by the monks...
The warriors all fall silent. A stern look comes over their faces. After a brief pause...

[Warrior #1]: You go now. You want to walk over there and die, its fine by me. Those monks are lunatics. We will have nothing to do with you. GO!
[Warrior #2]: A word of caution... there are roving bands of brigands in these areas... be wary of strangers up ahead...
The Mongol patrol rides off into the distance, leaving the travelers

behind.

[Kong]: That was odd...

[Agador]: Looks like these monks are fanatical too...

[Miso]: I hope I didn't come this far just to chop some monk heads off...

[Kong]: Those Mongol pigs were going to kill us for sport, guys! Don't you think its weird they heard the name Manchu Kwo and they just picked up and left... they almost even apologized to us!

[Fatsumo]: That is weird. Perhaps they are fierce fighters...

[Miso]: Great! Maybe I can get a real workout one of these days...

Two days later, the travelers arrive at the dusty temple at Manchu Kwo. Upon approaching the compound, they were greeted by a pair of mounted warrior monks.

[Monk #1]: Who comes seeking the solace of Manchu Kwo?

[Fatsumo]: We come seeking your prodigy, Ping Ho...

[Monk #1]: Why do you seek our great prodigy?

[Fatsumo]: We have been sent by the Emperor of Japan to...

[Monk #2]: Enough! Your presence is awaited inside...

The guard monks lead the travelers into the temple compound. They gaze at its massive stone walls...

[Kong]: Those walls... are big...

[Miso]: Bigger than those on any citadel I've ever seen in Japan...

The guards lead them into a room, where they are introduced to the head monk...

[Egg Shan]: Welcome... to Manchu Kwo.

The men bow before the monk.

[Egg Shan]: [Snaps his fingers and in walks a muscular monk] This here is our prodigy, Egg Pan. He will go with you back to Japan to solve your crises with the Horseman.

[Agador]: Excellent.

[Egg Shan]: You will leave tomorrow, as there is a sand storm heading in today. My servants here will set you up in a room until then.

[Agador]: Much thanks. May Buddha's compassion go with you.

Later, in their quarters...

[Agador]: That wasn't so bad.

[Miso]: They were quite nice, indeed.

[Kong]: We still have to get back to our ships...

[Agador]: Ah, Kong... you worry too much...

[Kong]: Those Mongols didn't look so friendly... and they did stink... I could smell their funk all the way from where I was standing...

[Miso]: I heard they never dismount their horses...

[Agador]: What?

[Miso]: True. So my father told me...

[Agador]: Nonsense... How would they relieve themselves?

[Miso]: From the horse's back...

[Fatsumo]: Well... thank Buddha our journey has been a success so far...

[Miso]: Hey... you guys hear that chanting...?

[Agador]: Yeah...

[Kong]: Sounds unlike anything I've ever heard before...

[Agador]: Shall we go check it out?

[Miso]: You can't see shit in that sand storm out there...

Some faint yells are heard... drowned by the howling winds of the sandstorm. The men all gaze into each others as they hear the muffled blood-curdling cries in the distance.

[Kong]: This place... scares me...
[Agador]: Maybe that is why the Mongols seemed afraid of it...
[Fatsumo]: As long as this Egg Pan can kill the horseman, then I say let them have their little dance...
[Miso]: That doesn't sound like a dance... sounds like they are killing somebody down there... We should go check it out...
[Agador]: Lets not... in the morning we will be gone... we can ask Egg Pan about it then...
[Kong]: You think he will tell us??
[Agador]: Why not? From one Buddhist to another, he should have nothing to hide...
[Miso]: Would you build a fortress out in the middle of the desert and call it a temple if you didn't have anything to hide?
[Agador]: Get some sleep. Tomorrow, we will return to Japan.
[Kong]: If that sand storm ever lets up...
The men drift asleep... the howling winds fading into the background as they become accustomed to it. The muffled cries of terror continue on throughout the night... dulled by the sands of Manchu Kwo...

Chapter 4: In the Shadow of the Monk

Agador and his men start their return journey at sunrise. The monks at Manchu Kwo provided them with provisions and a crew of slaves to carry them. Over the course of the night, the sand dunes had shifted during the storm, and the road to the temple was buried. Slowly, the caravan treaded across the hot sands... inching their way toward the plains to the east that lead to the rugged borders of Korea...

[Kong]: So... Egg Pan... what made you decide to devote your life to the cause of facing the horseman?

[Egg Pan]: My master chose me as his apprentice.

[Kong]: You had no say in the matter?

[Egg Pan]: It is the greatest honor to be chosen for this duty.

[Agador]: So... how do you prepare to face an enemy that can't be killed?

[Egg Pan]: You learn the black arts of the shaolin martial techniques. But mere physical skills can only prepare you to defend against his attack.

[Miso]: GAH!

[Egg Pan]: You seem to disagree?

[Miso]: You should attack! That is the best form of defense...

[Egg Pan]: You cannot just open up and attack, for that is the fastest way to become an ornament on his necklace...

[Kong]: What else do you do?

[Egg Pan]: Study the works of Buddha. He defeated the first horseman, you know...

[Miso]: Recitals will not stop a man from chopping your head off.

[Egg Pan]: You must know when to strike... and how. This is the great mystery we study. And the ancient texts are our best guide.

[Miso]: So... how do you kill him?

[Egg Pan]: The texts are very ambiguous...

[Kong]: Great.

[Agador]: One thing that was not ambiguous was those cries we heard in the monastery over night...

[Egg Pan]: Oh... those... [Smiles]

[Kong]: Why you smiling?

[Egg Pan]: Some hooligans attacked some of the monks that were sunbathing in the sands that afternoon. We captured them...

[Agador]: What did you do to them...?

[Egg Pan]: We showered them with Buddha's compassion.

[Miso]: They didn't seem to be having fun...

[Egg Pan]: To end suffering, you must instill suffering so that those that suffered will pursue its total eradication from their lives.

[Agador]: What?

[Fatsumo]: Ah so! So you say to end suffering, one must first suffer... that way he knows what it is he is trying to end.

[Egg Pan]: Indeed.

[Fatsumo]: Ah! But some suffering galvanizes the soul...

[Egg Pan]: Tell that to the horseman. His suffering is great.

[Fatsumo]: Ah so!

[Egg Pan]: His presence is the epitome of suffering. Suffering so great it has

darkened his soul with the greatest evil. His presence has disturbed the natural balance of the universe.

[Agador]: So... you saying that you are the one that will bring balance to the world?

[Egg Pan]: And Buddha said "I shall shine a great light into the abyss and cast out the darkness that drowns us all"...

[Fatsumo]: Is that what you intend to do when you see the horseman? Fight him with a candle?

[Kong]: [Starts laughing... but is interrupted by a troubling sight] Look! Mongols! EEK!

[Egg Pan]: Those are not Mongols. Just mere ruffians...

[Miso]: [Draws sword] I will get my Mongol trophy after all...!

[Egg Pan]: Only fools rush in.
Soon, the ruffians spot the caravan and surround it. Their leader, a scruffy, smelly Mongol rebel with a patch over one eye emerges from the hostile ranks...

[Chieftan]: HA HA! Look at these clowns in their funny clothes. Why is a monk playing with these silly slaves?

[Egg Pan]: These are my friends...

[Chieftan]: GAH! We are not afraid of you silly toga-wearing zealot bald clowns. [Holds up a porcelain orb] This here is more powerful than all your skills and zeal...

[Kong]: What is that?

[Egg Pan]: A thunder bomb. A weapon of the unskilled.
The Mongol ruffians laugh madly.

[Chieftan]: You silly monk [ignites the fuse on his bomb] Today you will sleep with Buddha!

[Miso]: SHIT!
The Japanese men all jump to the ground as the Mongol ruffians hurl a volley of thunder bombs down onto them. With great poise and grace, Egg Pan leaps and draws his naginata. He performs a perfect triple toe loop while he spins his weapon around. Swift as the wind, he lands in gracefully amidst thunder balls hitting the ground... with their fuses cut off!

[Miso]: [Looks up] Damn! You cut the fuses off those things in mid air?!?

[Egg Pan]: [Faces the Mongols] May Buddha's compassion go with you...

[Chieftan]: GAH! You silly monks! Damn you! Damn you to hell!
The chieftan charges in at the monk, who again leaps effortlessly in the air and with a swift stroke of his naginata, chops off the Mongol's head. When he lands, the monk stretches out his hand and catches the chieftan's head. Outraged, one of the other ruffians fires an arrow at Agador, as he intends to kill at least one since the monk seems untouchable. But, Egg Pan performs a quick roll after which he lunges forward and plucks the arrow from midair with his bare hands mere inches from Agador's stunned face. Shocked by this display of sheer skill, the remaining Mongol ruffians turn and flee.

[Agador]: [Catatonic] Impressive...

[Miso]: Indeed...

[Fatsumo]: What happened?

[Kong]: [Pulls head out of the sand] Where did the Mongols go?

[Egg Pan]: I showed them the error of their ways.

[Agador]: Where did you learn those moves?
[Egg Pan]: I have trained in the black arts of the shaolin monks since early childhood...

[Miso]: Well... just keep that sissy weapon away from my neck.
[Egg Pan]: A naginata --
[Miso]: In Japan, women use naginata...
[Egg Pan]: ... is a highly efficient weapon... more so than a sword.
[Agador]: Well... I'm impressed.
[Egg Pan]: We should move on before they gather their composure and decide to exact revenge upon us for killing their leader.

[Kong]: Wise words.
[Miso]: GAH! You step out the walls of your temple and have already collected a head. I still haven't got my first... [shakes his head]

[Egg Pan]: Worry not, my budding warrior... every dog has its day.
[Miso]: [Grumbles] You calling me a dog?
[Egg Pan]: Its merely an expression... your time of atonement will present itself one day...

[Miso]: AH...! Say... maybe we should gather up these bomb things and take them with us. Maybe they will come in handy in a time of need...?

[Agador]: Excellent idea! And Egg Pan can teach us how to use them.
The journey to the Korean coast is uneventful the rest of the way. Upon arrival, they are unable to locate their fleet. After waiting for several days, the ships finally come into view...

[Captain]: Ahoy!
[Agador]: Its about time! We've been hiding in the bushes for 3 days now.
[Captain]: Sorry, my Lord. We were chased off by some Mongol ships a couple days back. We didn't want to risk your extraction so we moved to the open seas and evaded them.

[Miso]: Well... lets get back to Japan.
[Kong]: The Emperor will be delighted that we have the monk...
[Captain]: Excellent. We shall be in Kawachi in a couple of days.
[Agador]: Superb!
After boarding and departure, the men rest on the deck... sunbathing.

[Miso]: So... why do the Mongols fear you so much?
[Egg Pan]: We have defended our temple successfully for hundreds of years. Perhaps the fact they have never subdued us drives their fear... Our fortress has never been breached.

[Agador]: Amazing.
[Kong]: Well... enjoy the ride... once we land, we will likely be amidst a torrent of suffering... as you Buddhist monks would put it...

[Miso]: [Laughs] I'd say. We're going to have to escort you to an audience with the horseman.

[Kong]: Now that is one meeting I wish I could skip.
[Miso]: There is no honor in dying to become an ornament. But dying to save the world... well, that is a battle every samurai aspires to... and death in such a battle is the highest honor...

[Egg Pan]: Honor is a concept alien to the horseman.
[Kong]: And to Lord Eivel...
[Agador]: Craziess... I still can't believe the Emperor wants to show mercy to a defeated Lord Eivel.
[Egg Pan]: Suffering is at the core of our journey through Buddha's garden.

[Miso]: Gah! Soon enough Honshu will be overrun in the banners of Shimazu.

[Kong]: We must find a way to get Shimazu to join the Emperor. We need his army to defeat Lord Eivel.

[Agador]: Maybe not...
The fleet sails into the sunset headed for Kawachi. The calm seas are in stark contrast to the anticipated battles that lie ahead. But for now, the gentle sea breeze and warm sun sweeps away anxiety that has swelled in their hearts.

Chapter 5: The Road to Edo

The Japanese flotilla approaches the harbor at Kawachi, where the mighty river empties into the sea. As they approach, a gentle breeze from the islands sweeps over the ship...

- [Agador]: Japan at last!
- [Kong]: Thank Buddha!
- [Miso]: Now the fun begins!
- [Egg Pan]: I don't know... something seems odd...
- [Agador]: I don't see anything wrong. All seems normal at the port.
- [Egg Pan]: I sense a disturbance...
- [Miso]: Sorry. I had too much beans and goat milk last night...
- [Kong]: Didn't I warn you about that combination?
- [Miso]: GAH!
- [Egg Pan]: Where are we headed once we land?
- [Agador]: We will march inland to meet the Emperor at his palace at Edo. Its only about 2 days march.
- [Egg Pan]: I see.
- [Kong]: Its actually a nice walk. Rolling meadows... colorful forests... sparkling water...
- [Fatsumo]: Flowers... and tulips... and...
- [Miso]: You and flowers. You blind bastard! You just want to pollinate somebody... [Laughs]
- [Fatsumo]: I'm not blind... I can see my inner beauty.
- Agador and his army disembark once the ships arrive. They waste no time and start their march towards Edo. No developments were reported to him by the garrison's commander when he arrived. That night...*
- [Agador]: By tomorrow evening, we will be enjoying the splendor of Edo.
- [Egg Pan]: The shadows hang dark from the forest to the west...
- [Miso]: Don't worry about the forest. The road follows the river. We don't need to go into the trees...
- [Kong]: Are you afraid of the forest?
- [Egg Pan]: Something lurks therein...
- [Agador]: Lord Eivel's armies are at war with the Emperor and his allies. Perhaps you are just nervous about being in a country at war...
- [Egg Pan]: War is something we monks at Manchu Kwo are used to.
- [Kong]: No offense... but I didn't see any trees over there in Manchu Kwo... I think you are scared of the trees...
- [Egg Pan]: Tomorrow we shall see the Emperor, right?
- [Agador]: Count on it.
- The following day, as the men are marching towards Edo, they spot an Imperial patrol headed their way from the direction of the Imperial Palace...*
- [Agador]: [Salutes the patrol]
- [Kong]: Its probably just a routine patrol...
- The patrol, having spotted Agador and his army, head towards the men...*
- [Patrol Captain]: Ah so! Thank Buddha I found you! The Emperor is under attack and we need a force to cover his retreat! Your presence is a miracle!

[Agador]: What?!?
[Kong]: Is the Emperor alive?
[Patrol Captain]: Yes, he is alive and well. But, he was forced to abandon the citadel and is fleeing in this direction. The remnants of his garrison are under pursuit by Eivel's forces.
[Miso]: How come you didn't send a courier to Kawachi and ask for reinforcements from the garrison there?
[Patrol Captain]: We have tried. Many times. But our patrols never returned. And I think they never made it to Kawachi either...
[Agador]: We just came from Kawachi. All seemed normal. The garrison was quite at ease...
[Patrol Captain]: How did you manage to get this far? Have you seen anything?
[Egg Pan]: I sensed a presence in the trees...
[Patrol Captain]: The forest? But the road does not run through the forest...
[Agador]: Ah so! But look... the forest can be seen from here. A short gallop and an enemy would be right on top of you...
[Kong]: True.
[Miso]: So... why would they just let us march to the Emperor's aid?
[Agador]: So that we can unite with his forces and they can eliminate us all in one sweep...
[Egg Pan]: Your army is not very large. You are probably right.
[Kong]: Damn!
[Miso]: Looks like we're going to party tonight! [Caresses the hilt of his sword]
[Agador]: What was the composition of the enemy forces... do you know?
[Patrol Captain]: Lots of crazy Ashigaru supported by some Ikko-Ikkei monks and some cavalry...
[Kong]: Do you know who is the enemy taisho?
[Patrol Captain]: I heard it is one of Lord Eivel's sons... I don't know which. All I know is that it is not Lord Eivel himself...
[Agador]: On a more personal matter... I have some friends that were trapped in the besieged fortress in Mutsu... any news from that front?
[Kong]: Oh yeah... Jotito...
[Patrol Captain]: Last I heard... they were still holding out. About 1,000 portuguese soldiers have joined the garrison there and are helping the garrison.
[Agador]: [Sighs] Super!
[Miso]: You know... if they can hold out indefinitely, they can become a thorn in Eivel's side...
[Agador]: True...
[Patrol Captain]: Anyway... the Emperor and his hatamoto are not far behind...
[Agador]: What are his plans?
[Patrol Captain]: To reach Kawachi and board a ship to Tosa. He will move to his winter castle there.
[Miso]: Tosa?!?
[Kong]: What? He is running?
[Patrol Captain]: Is will regroup there and plan his counterattack. Unfortunately, Lord Oda was ambushed enroute from Owari and most of his forces were annihilated. Oda managed to escape the slaughter with but a few hundred men. And Lord Mori was killed in Wakasa a few days ago. But he was ill anyway... and his lands were torn apart by the rivalry between his sons...

[Agador]: Damn. Like I said before... Shimazu is our only hope now...
[Kong]: Well... Hojo is holed up in a castle somewhere in the East...
[Agador]: Don't count on him venturing out to face the fanatics...
Moments later, the Emperor and his hatamoto arrive on the scene. As the gallops toward them, it become evident that he is injured since he is slumping over his horse... with an arrow lodged in his back...

[Hatamoto #1]: Quick! You must set up a defensive perimeter! The enemy is on our heels!!

[Agador]: Uh...?
[Kong]: Damn! Hey! There was a little knoll not far from here... a very nice defensive position. It had rocks on the side and a bend in the river guarded its rear...

[Miso]: I know the one you are talking about...!
[Agador]: OK then! Lets get there! Now!
Agador marches his army the short distance to the knoll, which they had passed less than 20 minutes before spotting the imperial patrol.

[Miso]: Look! I see the banners of Lord Eivel emerging from the North and West!

[Kong]: ... from the forest! And from Edo!
[Agador]: Damn! It looks like we won't have the luxury of falling back from this position... I think we will have to stay and fight this one out to the end...

[Emperor]: Agador...
[Agador]: Yes, your Highness?
[Emperor]: You must... get the men... to Tosa...
[Agador]: [To Imperial Hatamoto] Put the emperor in a tent in the rear. I will need every man you have...
As Agador organizes his forces, his men warily contemplate the buildup taking place before their eyes. Soon, night will fall... and Egg Pan's nerves grow brittle once again...

Chapter 6: The Day of the Sword

As dawn broke, Agador's sentries spotted the enemy formations advancing towards their position. Agador ran through his lines making sure all his men were in position for the assault...

[Agador]: OK. This is it. Let them get in close before unleashing your volleys. The sentries say they are Ashigaru... hopefully our guns will break their fanaticism...

[Miso]: I'm not worried about the peasants. When they send in the monks, then we have to worry...

[Kong]: Remember Mutsu? The peasants there were vicious...
The arquebusiers, lined up in two-deep formations spread across the entire hill patiently watched the Ashigaru formations of Lord Eivel's army approach in a steady march. On the order of their unit commanders, they took aim and kept their arquebuses trained on the enemy...

[Agador]: I have an idea... [Walks over to the unit commander of his Yari Cavalry] Take your cavalry into the river and cross to the other side. They will think you are running for help. Instead, head upstream, cross back to our side, and see if you can find their flank. When the time is right, you will know when to launch your attack.

[Miso]: But make sure you sell them the idea you are headed to the port for reinforcements.

[Kong]: Actually, wouldn't that be a good idea?

[Agador]: Yes... but surprise is a great advantage in battle.

[Cav Captain]: So it will be done.

The cavalry commander leads his yari cavalry force across the river and heads towards the coastline. No enemy units seem to go after them and instead focus on the infantry left behind.

[Agador]: On my command... unleash Buddha's compassion!

[Kong]: What about Egg Pan?

[Agador]: I don't see why he shouldn't help out. [To Egg Pan] Just don't die on us...

[Egg Pan]: Of course I will help.

[Miso]: He he. [Draws sword and polishes its shiny blade with a rag] Oh yeah... It's happy hour and the sushi bar is open!

As they Ashigaru ranks enter the kill zone, Agador gives the command to fire and a thunderous volley erupts from the entrenched Arquebusiers. Many enemy Ashigaru are seen falling to the ground through the thick billows of smoke.

The arquebusiers let loose a second volley into the oncoming formations soon thereafter. The Imperial Arquebusiers grew wary of the bravado of the Ashigaru, for they had never witnesses such bravery from the common man in battle.

Two more volleys were unleashed onto the rushing peasants, who by now were running full speed, before they clashed with the defenders. Agador's yari samurai formations stepped up to greet

the chewed up rabble as the Arquebusiers retreated behind them.

In the center, a gap developed between the two spearman blocks, and Agador ordered his No-Dachi shock troops to smash their way through the opening and into the rear echelons of the enemy attack in an attempt to precipitate a rout. The No-Dachis chopped up the hapless attackers in their path with great ease; their massive swords cleaved the poorly armed Ashigaru into quivering, bloody lumps of sushi.

Miso and Egg Pan were among the No-Dachis as they stormed the breach; they were gracefully dancing through the crowd... Miso swinging his sword like the wind, and Egg Pan doing his naginata acrobatics... both lopping off heads left and right.

While the samurai ranks were busy cutting up the peasants, Agador had the Arquebusiers reform at the flanks and fire a pair of volleys into the exposed flanks of the enemy. Faced with a veritable wall of steel up front and a lead hail from the sides, the Ashigaru panicked and fled back to the safety of the forest.

[Miso]: That was fun!

[Egg Pan]: I barely even broke a sweat.

[Kong]: We held them off very well... looks like our losses were quite low.

[Agador]: Thank Buddha they chose to flee...

[Egg Pan]: Don't call victory yet... look. I see they are preparing for a second wave.

[Miso]: From here, we can cut them up all day. And look... more Ashigaru!

[Agador]: Well... get the men to reload their primary and backup weapons. I want the No-Dachis to use the bows we have to fire arrows into the rushers as well while the Arquebusiers are doing the same.

[Miso]: Hey! We have those bombs from the Mongols...

[Egg Pan]: Yes we do...

[Agador]: Yes. But we must not waste them on peasants. Lets save them for when they decide to send the monks at us.

[Egg Pan]: Monks fight battles here? How odd... They are not supposed to take the side of any faction...

[Agador]: Those damn Sword of Buddha lunatics...

[Egg Pan]: Sword of Buddha? They have been extinct for 1,000 years...

[Agador]: We thought so to. The Emperor believes their Daimyo is the High Priest...

[Egg Pan]: It is theorized that the horseman typically appears during times of unparalleled evil. Perhaps the revival of this sect prompted his return...?

[Agador]: No... some crazy Jesuit set him free...

[Egg Pan]: Buddha's agents appear in many forms...

[Miso]: Nice talking to you... but here they come again...

[Agador]: Positions everybody! Lets send them home to their mamas screaming like whipped dogs!

The second wave of Ashigaru smashed into the defensive perimeter after absorbing 5 volleys from Agador's Arquebusiers. This contingent of Ashigaru were far more virulent in their attack

as they pressed on with reckless abandon. The yari samurai soon found themselves bogged down, and the No-Dachis were surrounded on the flank. In a desperate attempt to break their encirclement, Agador ordered his Arquebusiers to draw their swords and attack the enemy rear. Eivel's fanatical peasants were surprised by the boldness of this move and quickly found their encircling force itself surrounded. Soon, the No-Dachis got the upper hand in the center, and with the masterly assistance of Miso and Egg Pan, utterly butchered the enemy Ashigaru. Not a single fanatic escaped the trap alive. However, the death toll on Agador's men was much heavier from this wave – all units reported losses around 25%.

From the crest of his hill, Agador could see the enemy taisho galloping around madly... clearly upset at the destruction of his second wave.

Tired and bloodied, Agador's men return to their battle lines to await the inevitable 3rd wave.

[Miso]: Whoa! I think somebody nicked my hand...
 [Egg Pan]: Your peasants fight like masters. You must be a race of super warriors!
 [Miso]: Peasants don't usually fight so well...
 [Egg Pan]: They must be possessed then...
 [Kong]: Fanatics.
 [Agador]: Get some rest, guys. Every second counts.
Several minutes later, as noon approached, the sentries warned Agador of the assembly of the 3rd wave.
 [Agador]: More Ashigaru?
 [Kong]: No... their banners are different...
 [Miso]: Ikko-Ikkei!
 [Egg Pan]: The monks?
 [Agador]: Damn! Where is our cavalry? I hope they were not intercepted...
 [Miso]: We should prepare the bombs...
 [Egg Pan]: Absolutely.
 [Agador]: Brief the Arquebusiers. I don't want them fleeing from the sight of our own weapons!
 [Miso]: That would be a tragedy...
 [Agador]: Have the No-Dachis hurl the bombs. Egg Pan: you lead them.
Egg Pan and the No-Dachis crouch behind the Arquebusiers with their Mongol thunder bombs in hand. Each man carries a single bomb with him, and they have a total of 22 bombs.
 [Egg Pan]: They must be almost on top of us when we release them. Then, after they detonate, rush in with your swords while they are confused.
 [Miso]: Woohoo!
The monks wither 5 volleys of Arquebusier fire before they reach the bomb perimeter. The No-Dachis stand up and throw the ignited bombs onto the unsuspecting monks. 22 explosions erupt amidst the monks with thunderous blasts. Almost half of the monks in the rushing formation die in the blasts. Dazed and covered in ceramic splinters and debris, the monks soon find themselves in close quarters with Agador's No-Dachis, who cleave

them apart with ease.

But, the enemy taisho anticipated having their frontal wave stopped. Just as the No-Dachis were rejoicing as the last few monks fled, a massive wall of Ashigaru and monks descended on their position. The No-Dachis retreated to their defensive position in the hills under cover from Arquebusier fire. However, the massive 4th wave collided with Agador's depleted samurai contingent and a brutal melee ensues.

Agador, Kong and a few other Arquebusiers were sniping at the enemy from the crest of the hill. They were aiming for the monks wherever they could spot them.

[Agador]: I don't know if we will be able to hold on...

[Kong]: Looks bad...

[Agador]: Where are those damn cavalry?!?

A seam started to develop in the enemy lines. Miso and Egg Pan were obliterating the enemy before them. It seemed as if they alone were able to occupy an entire enemy unit. Egg Pan's acrobatic naginata maneuvers were highly effective, especially on the less skilled Ashigaru ranks.

Slowly, Miso and Egg Pan worked their way through the enemy lines.

[Agador]: Guys... its just a few of us up here that are not engaged. Give Fatsumo a sword. We are rushing into the breach to support Miso and Egg Pan!

Fatsumo, with sword in hand, is lead by Agador and the others into the breach. Once there, they push him into a crowd of Ashigaru and tell them to chop anything that moves.

Fatsumo swung the sword madly. Amazingly, he managed to kill a few Ashigaru and not get killed in the process. Agador and the others, meanwhile, rushed forward to protect Miso and Egg Pan's backs.

But the Ashigaru facing Fatsumo were disheartened when their unit commander laughed at them for running from a blind man with a blade. Facing certain ridicule, the Ashigaru panicked and started to rout. And behind the flood, stood Fatsumo waving his sword in the air, for all the enemy around him had run away!

With the rout in center, the Ashigaru elsewhere decided to run as well. Soon, a massive exodus ensued. Miso and Egg Pan, now behind the enemy lines, stood in the way of their escape route to the forest. They collected many kills as they attacked the panicking peasants.

Only the monks remained behind, undaunted by the flight of their commoner backing. However, with their support eliminated, they soon found themselves surrounded. Before long, every last monk in the 4th wave lay dead on the battlefield, having fought on to the

last man.

[Agador]: [Panting] I don't know if we can take any more of this...
Agador looks around and sees that only a fraction of his men are still standing. Most of Arquebusiers are still alive, but his samurai contingents are well under 50%. Weary from the prolonged battle, the survivors regroup at their base camp on the hill to await the next wave.

[Miso]: I have not fought so hard for so long in a long time...
[Egg Pan]: Apparently, the 5th wave is preparing. They seem to be wasting no time.

[Agador]: It will be dark soon... this will likely be the last wave of the day...
[Kong]: Lets hope so.
[Fatsumo]: Can I fight again? Please?
The enemy formations comprising the 5th wave approach the hill where Agador's remnants are encamped. However, this time, they pause half way there and draw their bows. Within a minute, the first volley of arrows rains down over the hill.

[Agador]: SHIT! Spread out and take cover!
The Arquebusiers return fire and a slugfest ensues. Within a couple of hours, many enemy soldiers can be seen littering the grassy meadow in front of the forest. So too are many of the Arquebusiers lying dead around the hill.

Egg Pan is hit by an arrow in his shoulder. But, he pulls it out and tends to his wounds with amazing efficiency.

[Miso]: You going to be alright?
[Egg Pan]: Oh yeah. This is nothing. A mere flesh wound...
As the archers wrap up their salvo, the enemy infantry is seen gathering behind them in preparation for a final assault. The colorfully dressed taisho is at the lead of the enemy lines. The black feathers on the top of his horned helmet are a grim reminder of the reason they are all here as they are the symbols of Eivel's influence.

[Agador]: Everybody up the hill! We shall hide behind the crest and attack them when they get near. This way, we force them to climb all the way to the top.

[Miso]: You know... we can roll some of the boulders that are up there onto the climbing enemy... That ought to slow them down a little...

[Agador]: Excellent idea!
The enemy lines, comprising mostly Ashigaru and a few monks storm up the hill. Agador and his men roll some of the boulders down at the attackers, disrupting the integrity of their units. Taking advantage of this, Agador ordered his men to charge down at the climbing attackers, and ordered all his Arquebusiers to snipe at the enemy as best they could.

Amidst the melee, Agador felt a loud ping on his helmet. He realized that one of his creative Arquebusiers had used it to score a kill off the ricochet. This delighted him greatly.

As the battle dragged on, losses started to mount throughout

Agador's ranks, who by now were totally exhausted from the previous waves. Slowly, they retreated by the hill. However, the river was at their back, and Agador soon realized there was no escape.

Just then, a group of cavalry was spotted emerging from the trees. At first, Agador thought they were part of the assault. But, he soon realized that they were his returning Yari Cavalry! The cavalry smashed into the rear of the unsuspecting enemy and triggered a massive rout. They chased the fleeing enemy all the way to the treeline.

By now, the sun had almost sunk beneath the horizon, with just the upper edge of its orange disc still visible of the distant mountains.

[Miso]: I need some sake!
[Egg Pan]: We must use the night to try to escape.
[Agador]: I agree... We won't survive another day if we stay here.
[Cav Captain]: While we were circling around the enemy, we spotted some isolated units from the Edo garrison. They are hiding in the forest behind the enemy lines.
[Miso]: That is great! We again have the element of surprise on our side.
[Agador]: Their army is massive in size. The fact that we have chosen this narrow bulge to defend has magnified our force greatly... they just can't stuff all their men into these tight quarters. That is the only reason we are still here... An open attack from the rear will be certain death...
[Miso]: Maybe so... but they might buy us enough time to cross the river and get Egg Pan back to the port and off to safety...
[Fatsumo]: Most of the men I hear have injuries of some sort or another. How do you intend to get them across the river?
[Agador]: The yari cavalry will carry them over one by one. We'll leave the Arquebusiers behind to provide cover fire should any patrols venture near us overnight, and to provide a diversion in the morning.
As the moon rose over the cold night, the yari cavalry started carrying the injured warriors over to the other side of the river. However, many of the men had serious injuries, which slowed the process down considerably. Moving the supplies they had left from the wagons also proved burdensome and inefficient.

Agador, Miso and Egg Pan remained on the hill with 50 Arquebusiers and the remnants of the Imperial Hatamoto while the last men were carried across as dawn broke the following day.

Agador's orders were simple: the infantry was to start the march west to the port, while the yari cavalry would stay behind to assist Agador and those left behind.

[Miso]: Shouldn't we just cross over too now?
[Agador]: Start sending over the Arquebusiers... 10 at a time.
Agador watched on as the enemy taisho was preparing his troops for the first wave of the day.

[Egg Pan]: This day... seems odd... perhaps we should stay here just a little
bit longer... I think a great victory is at hand...

Chapter 7: Clash of the Titans

As the sun rose over the tense battlefield, the regiments of Ashigaru in Eivel's army assembled for an opening assault on Agador's battered army. With less than 50 Arquebusiers left on the west side of the river, Agador prepared to make a token display of force before racing to cross the river and join the remainder of his forces, who had crossed overnight...

[Agador]: Make every shot count, lads!

[Kong]: It would be nice to pick off their taisho. That large black plume sure would look good on my headgear...

[Miso]: But, you wear the standard Ashigaru head gear...

[Kong]: So?

As they prepared to open their first salvo on the slowly approaching line of enemy Ashigaru, Agador's Arquebusiers found themselves in trouble as a handful of ninjas appeared from behind and started carving them up. Miso and Egg Pan raced over to fend off the attackers. By the time they dispatched the ninjas, about half of the Arquebusiers lay dead.

[Agador]: Damn! We didn't need that!

[Miso]: Perhaps we should just get out. They are marching forward slowly and tentatively.

[Kong]: Yeah! That gives us time to make a run for it!

[Egg Pan]: Look! A commotion in their midst...

[Agador]: [Pulls his hand over his eyes as a blinding light erupts from the treeline behind Eivel's advancing formations] What the heck...?!?
As the light advances, the blinding light fades, until Agador and his men from their hilltop can see what is causing it...

[Agador]: Looks like some rider is racing up behind the enemy with a sword drawn...

[Miso]: I've never seen such a bright sword... it must be immaculately polished to give off a reflection like that...

[Kong]: He's cloaked in all black... perhaps one their scouts? I hope they didn't find our men on the other side of the river...

[Egg Pan]: That is no ordinary soldier...

[Agador]: Wha--

[Egg Pan]: The horseman! Its him!

[Agador]: SHIT!

[Miso]: CRAP!

[Kong]: Alright! He's attacking the enemy from behind!

[Miso]: [Gets up and taunts Eivel's Ashigaru] YEAH! Take THAT, you pigs!

The horseman races up into the middle of the formation, where his horse recoils onto its hind legs. Startled by the sudden appearance of the horseman, dressed in black with a hole-pocked black cape and brandishing a large, polished curved blade, the peasantry panicked; all the folk tales they had been told during their infancy to scare them into blind obedience that had been dismissed as mere fiction suddenly erupted in their feeble memories. Some of the Ashigaru were so terrified by the mere sight of the horseman that they soiled their pants where they

stood... petrified.

The horseman wasted no time after his grand entrance into the battlefield. The moment his horse landed back on all fours, he went about swinging his sword with great skill... lopping of heads left and right. Within minutes a flood of Ashigaru could be seen racing towards the forest.

[Agador]: We should get out of here...

[Egg Pan]: No! This is what I have trained for all my life! [Grips naginata firmly in his hand and stands up] We should go forth and attempt to end this now...

[Miso]: You can't win... you said so yourself! Let him kill the enemy for us and lets get out of here...!

[Egg Pan]: Silence, you fool! I know my place in the world just fine!
Egg Pan runs down the hill towards the carnage up ahead. But Agador notices that the monks in the enemy army had not routed and were in fact, pressing on. The enemy taisho himself moved in to fend off the horseman as the monks charged the hill in an attempt to finish off Agador's army.

Seeing Egg Pan in imminent danger, Agador ordered his men to support him. Miso raced after Egg Pan and the Arquebusiers opened fire on the inbound monks. Fortunately, the monks numbered very few, and faced with the volley of lead, they too decided to flee.

In the center, Lord Eivel's son bravely battled the horseman. But, his skills proved no match for his immortal foe. Moments later, the enemy taisho lost his head. The horseman gripped it in his hand and raised the severed head of Eivel's son high as he chased the routing remnants of their once mighty army off the field.

But, the horseman spotted Egg Pan and Miso racing towards him and changed direction to intercept the incoming challengers.

[Agador]: That idiot!

[Kong]: He's just really gung-ho. I bet he has been dying with anticipation for this very moment...

[Agador]: Lets move in after them. With any luck, we can pull him back and get the heck out of here...

The Arquebusiers, no longer challenged by Eivel's army, race down the hill in pursuit of Egg Pan and Miso.

By now, the horseman is almost on top of Egg Pan. He raises his sword and takes a big swing and the brash monk. But Egg Pan, foreseeing the move, leaps into the air, flips over the horseman's blade, and hooks the tip of his naginata on the horseman's cape. When he lands back on the ground, he pulls on his naginata and unseats his immortal foe from his muscular black stallion.

Miso stops in his tracks in amazement at the sheer skill required by Egg Pan to complete his daring move. The horseman picks himself up off the ground and goes after Egg Pan on the ground.

Miso, closes in on the horseman's rear to give him another foe to concentrate on.

The trio battle it out with grace. Egg Pan and Miso both attack the horseman from different directions. But, the horseman, blessed with skills and agility unlike those of any man, fends them both off and makes it look easy. The countless shrunken heads on his legendary necklace, each shrunk to the size of a golf ball and threaded through the ears, bounce around like dust in the wind.

Agador and his Arquebusiers arrive on the scene and settle into a stance around the combatants.

[Agador]: OK... take careful aim. We can't kill him, but maybe we can knock him down or shoot his sword out of his hands.

[Kong]: That will be tough... he moves swiftly... swift like the wind...
Agador and his men train their arquebuses on the horseman. But, his agile movements prevent them from opening fire. Too often, Egg Pan or Miso are in their line of fire.

[Agador]: Nobody fire. I will take a single shot here...
After careful aiming, Agador waits his moment. Several minutes later, the opportunity presents itself and he fires his shot. The bullet sails over the horseman... hitting nothing.

[Miso]: Damn! Watch it there! I heard the buzz fly by my ear!

[Agador]: Ooops! Sorry!
Agador sets up for another shot. This time, when he takes it, the bullet hits the horseman in the chest. A small billow of dust erupts, but the shot has no effect on him.

[Agador]: Forget that! One more time now...
While Agador sets up for his 3rd shot, the horseman swivels, drops to the ground and kicks Miso's feet out from under him while Egg Pan swung his naginata high. With Miso on the ground, the horseman rolls over, leaps to his feet and thrusts his shiny sword through Egg Pan's belly.

For a moment, the world seems to come to a halt. The bright pale metal the horseman's sword is made of can be seen in all its ornate detail. A large inscription runs down the blade, carved in a language alien to Japanese warriors. On the hilt, a lavish counterweight in the form of a two-headed Shih-Tzu... with ivory teeth and firey bright sapphire eyes glares intensely at the opponents of its master, the headless horseman.

Miso, seeing Egg Pan clutching the horseman's blade right before his eyes, breaks free of the trance-like stasis and leaps to his feet, then lunges at the horseman swinging his katana wildly. The horseman pulls his sword out of the paralyzed Egg Pan and blocks Miso's attack with his sword as he pushes him to the ground again.

[Agador]: SHIT!

[Kong]: GAH!

Egg Pan falls to his knees, clutching his wound. Blood is oozing

out of his mouth. Sensing his failure, he just looks up at the horseman, who now is about to finish off Miso.

Egg Pan, with all his remaining energy, picks himself up and raises his naginata. He takes one last breath and lunges for the horseman while letting out a blood-curdling cry.

The headless horseman swings around to face Egg Pan, thus allowing Miso to roll out and escape the blade. But, Egg Pan's fate is sealed when the horseman reaches out and grabs his naginata with one hand and lops off the monk's head with his sword in his other hand. Egg Pan's limp, lifeless body falls to the ground without a head.

[Miso]:

GAH!

[Agador]:

Lets... get... out... of here!

By now, the men are so shocked that the mere idea of flight seems like a good idea. Agador, Kong and Miso, along with the rest of the Arquebusiers run towards the river as fast as their legs can carry them.

[Agador]:

Shit! Don't look back! Just run!

[Kong]:

GAH!

[Miso]:

GAH!

The horseman chases after his stallion, which buys Agador and his men enough time to reach the river. When the horseman finally mounts his horse and starts to give chase, they are starting to cross over to the other side, where the yari cavalry waits patiently to whisk them away.

As they are crossing, Agador looks back and sees the horseman on the top of the hill they so valiantly defended from Eivel's relentless attack.

[Kong]:

Buddha! Have mercy on us!

The horseman simply watched them as they waded across the frigid waters. When they reached the other side, Agador, Kong and Miso turned and gave a last look at the horseman.

Acknowledging their shocked looks, the horseman raised Egg Pan's head high in the air... a grim reminder of their failure here in the grassy meadows along the banks of the Kawachi river...

[Kong]:

We are so doomed...

[Agador]:

GAH!

[Miso]:

What now? What can we do?

[Agador]:

Lets just get to the port and get on a ship to Tosa. We must collect ourselves and plan our response.

[Kong]:

We are so doomed! Egg Pan was our only hope! And his head will soon decorate the horseman's necklace!

[Agador]:

Stop whining and move out! We have a long road ahead...

Chapter 8: Escape from Kawachi

Agador and his battered and cleaved men entered a scene of chaos when they arrived at the port in Kawachi after a grueling day's march. Panic-ridden citizens were running amok through the streets. Vandals were looting merchant wagons and kiosks left and right. Fires burned out of control in some of the quarters, leaving a hanging cloud of smoke choking the city. And amidst the anarchy... soldiers of both the Imperial garrison and from Eivel's routed army could be seen running around oblivious to each other's presence.

[Kong]: What the --
[Miso]: What is going on here?
[Fatsumo]: Sounds like the city is under attack!
[Agador]: Quick... we must get to the port and board our ships!
[Miso]: Shouldn't we try to restore order first? It would be the civilized thing to do...
[Agador]: We don't have the manpower! We have about 100 men left. And about 80 of those are injured. And half of those will probably not live to see Tosa! Plus, we don't even know what is going on here!
[Fatsumo]: Focus not on the surface of the chaos, but on the path you must take...
[Agador]: Thanks for that life-changing teaching, Fatsumo...
Soon after entering a market square, Agador's men found themselves besieged by a panicked mob. The men were forced to defend themselves against the lunatics with their weapons. After a short scuffle, the unarmed citizens turned and fled the other way...
[Agador]: Stay together! And stay alert!
[Kong]: Gah!
[Fatsumo]: How far to the ships?
[Agador]: I think we are not too far... just a couple of streets down from here... a big market square and the docks...
[Miso]: Piece of cake. The most these wretches can bring is a spoon!
[Kong]: Ninjas sometimes use razor-sharp spoons...
[Miso]: I have never seen a peasant with one of those.
The men march down the streets. Their progress is slow as they proceed in formation. Occasionally, an occasional passer-by will throw something at them and run away. After their slowest march ever, the men entered the large square adjacent to the docks where the ships await.
[Miso]: GAH! Look! There is only ONE ship in the harbor!
[Kong]: Where did the others go??
[Miso]: I don't know if we can fit all the men into that one ship! GAH!
[Agador]: We have no choice. Lets go!
As the men start to cross the large market square, a commotion breaks out in a far corner close to the docks. Panicked peasants are seen fleeing in all directions. Then, from out of the street behind the mob, emerges the headless horseman!
[Agador]: We are in DEEP...
[Kong]: SHIT!

[Miso]: Run for the ships!
[Agador]: We won't make it! The men are weak and can't move fast enough! We need a diversion!

[Miso]: [Draws sword] I will try to entertain are immortal foe.
[Agador]: Don't make the same mistake Egg Pan made. He was well trained, but too impetuous for his own good. Just hold him off long enough to allow the men to board that ship!

[Agador]: Make them move it! I can't promise I can keep him at bay for very long...
Agador leads his men towards the ships as Miso races towards the horseman.

[Miso]: GAH! How did I get myself into this mess...?
Soon, the horseman spots Miso approaching and breaks free from the sportless beheading of panicked peasants. Miso, it seems, would be a more entertaining challenge.

To Miso's astonishment, the horseman stops his horse 20 feet in front of him and dismounts. The sapphire eyes on the counterweight of the horseman's sword glared intensely at Miso as the horseman raised his broad blade.

After a brief pause, the horseman attacked Miso with a series of swift jabs and cuts. Miso countered as he retreated, mindful of not letting himself get into a jam.

[Agador]: [Looking towards Miso] Move it! Move it! Move it! Miso is buying us time. Lets not let him down!

[Kong]: Damn these arquebuses are getting heavier on me each minute...
Miso fended off the horseman's furious attack in the square. Tired and outmatched, Miso dived behind a merchant kiosk for cover only to see the silver blade of his foe slice through it like butter. The horseman moved in and the two tangled blades again.

As the sword fight raged on, Agador and his men reached the ship and started boarding. But the men moved eternally slow, it seemed...

[Agador]: Captain! Where did the other boats go?!?
[Captain]: They were boarded by the Kawachi garrison and took off for Tosa.
[Agador]: Why? Your instructions were to wait for us...!
[Captain]: And here I am! The other ships were overpowered by panic-stricken soldiers... [sighs]

[Agador]: How did you protect your ship?
[Captain]: I took it out into the harbor. When I spotted you entering the square, I moved back to the docks.

[Kong]: Ah so!
[Captain]: We can't fit all these men! Your men's horses will have to be left behind...

[Agador]: We must fit everybody... even if they must sit in each other's laps the whole way to Tosa. And if we can, we will get the horses on board too...

[Captain]: The ship will be too heavy...
[Agador]: Damn it, Captain! I need more room!
[Captain]: I'm giving it all I can, Lord! I'm a sailor, not a magician!

In the meantime, Miso's clash with the horseman took a sour turn. With a swift twirl of his blade, Miso's katana went flying out of his hand. Disarmed, Miso ran from the horseman, who wasted no time and chased him down.

Miso stopped at an abandoned produce kiosk. He stumbled around desperately searching for something he could use as a weapon. With the horseman now a mere few paces away, Miso grabbed the first thing he could get his hands on and turned to face his immortal foe.

Miso raised his hand but was shocked to see he was holding a cucumber! Immediately, he threw the vegetable at the horseman, who, with a few short, swift cuts with his mighty sword, sliced the cucumber into a dozen slices in mid-air and flung them back at Miso with each cut. The sliced cucumber hit Miso square in the face. Shocked, but not deterred, Miso grabbed a tomato and threw it at the horseman. But the same thing happened and Miso found himself covered in tomato slices.

[Miso]:

Oh yeah? Well... take THIS...!

Miso starts throwing vegetables at the horseman as fast as he can. He even throws handfuls of them at a time! But the horseman's speed and dexterity proves too great, and the tide of vegetables is returned to Miso finely chopped and diced.

[Miso]:

Gah!

[Agador]:

Yo, Miso! Stop fooling around over there! I didn't ask you to teach him how to cook!

[Miso]:

[Running from the horseman] GAH!

[Agador]:

The men are on board! Get over here to the ship fast!

Those welcoming words had never sounded so good to Miso. He ran towards the ship as fast as he could. But, a piece of onion dropped into his eye. As he tried to remove it from his eye, Miso lost his concentration and ran into a wall face first.

Miso finally got the onion out of his eye. He looked up just in time to notice the horseman's sword descending on him. He quickly rolled to his side – just in time to avoid the strike. But the horseman was relentless. Miso rolled several times back and forth to dodge the horseman's blade.

[Agador]:

Gah! Miso is in trouble!

[Captain]:

Leave him! He is already dead...

[Agador]:

No! I will not leave him!

[Captain]:

You leave... and the ship departs... with you or not...

[Agador]:

I am going to go get him. And you WILL wait for us... [To Kong]

Make sure he waits for us... just give me a few minutes...

Agador grabs his trusty Arquebus and races towards his beleaguered friend. At about 100 paces, Agador stops and takes aim, then fires a hasty shot. The bullet whistles over Miso's head. But the noise broke the horseman's attention on Miso just long enough for Miso to roll far away enough that he could get on his feet and start running. Miso ran as fast as he could towards Agador. And the horseman was hot on his heels.

[Agador]: Hurry!
[Miso]: Thanks!
[Agador]: Don't thank me yet... we must reach the ship!
Agador looked back while he ran toward the ship to see how far their lead on the horseman was. He was relieved to see that the horseman was nowhere to be found.

[Agador]: Ah so! He left us!
[Miso]: To the ship! Waste no time! Move! Move! Move!
[Agador]: No hurry now...
[Miso]: Trust me... we ARE in a hurry...
Agador and Miso continued to run towards the ship. As the approached, they could hear the clear sound of hooves smacking stones... quickly approaching...

[Miso]: [Turns to look back] Gah! Duck!
[Agador]: Duck! I don't see no stinkin' ducks around here...
Miso dives into Agador, propelling them both to the floor just as the horseman rides by... his blade swinging right about where their necks were just at a second ago. Now, the horseman was between them and the ship...

[Agador]: Kong! Fire a couple of shots at him!
[Kong]: It won't do anything... we can't kill him!
[Agador]: GAH! Just DO it!
Kong and the other Arquebusiers on the ship take aim and fire a volley at the horseman. The bullets rip through his black, flowing robe. As the horseman turns to face the new threat, Agador and Miso pick themselves off the ground and run past him toward the ship. They dive onto the ship's deck safely.

[Agador]: Quick! Yari Samurai! Hold him at bay while we leave the dock!
Use your spears! Just hold him away!
Several yari samurai rush to face the docks and point their long spears down at the horseman. They poke and jab at him, and occasionally push at him with their sharp weapons. Finally, the ship departs and leaves the docks behind. Some of the spearmen are relieved, for their spears had been chopped up by the horseman.

[Kong]: Damn, that was close!
[Miso]: [Wipes diced vegetables from his forehead] A minute more and I'd be puree too!
[Agador]: At least you still have your head!
As they sailed into the sea, Agador looked back at the harbor. There stood the horseman... the city behind him burning... the population dead or fleeing... Then, the horseman turns his horse around and rides into the chaos once again...

[Agador]: Poor bastards... we couldn't save them all... But we did manage to get all our men and horses on board...
[Miso]: And Egg Pan is dead too... we have failed in our mission...
[Kong]: We are doomed.
[Miso]: Maybe it would have been better to die back there...
[Agador]: Lets just get to Tosa... there, we will regroup and determine our next course of action...

[Fatsumo]: We must get Shimazu to join our alliance. Only he now has the manpower to defeat Lord Eivel...
[Agador]: The Emperor is wounded... Oda has no army... Shimazu will want

the throne now... What do we have to offer him?

[Fatsumo]: You are the last Imperial taisho left. All the others are dead... at least, that is what I have heard from some of the voices I have heard...

[Agador]: Damn! If I go... he will take my head, since I am the last taisho if what you say is true. Can't send Miso... he's too head-strong...

[Miso]: Hey!

[Fatsumo]: Offer him the position of Shogun.

[Agador]: Oda will never allow that...

[Fatsumo]: Oda cannot challenge you.

[Agador]: And the Emperor?

[Fatsumo]: He is incapacitated by his injuries.

[Miso]: What? You saying this Ashigaru is regent?!?

[Fatsumo]: He is the only one with the power to act!

[Agador]: You call this power? A ship crammed with injured men... numbering a measly 100?

[Kong]: Bickering will lead us nowhere... we have time to sort this out... we won't be in Tosa until tomorrow...
The crammed ship, burdened by more weight than it was designed to carry, lumbered across the calm seas as the blood-red sun sank in the horizon. An eerie calm prevailed over the deep blue sea. Perhaps a sign of the ominous future they warily anticipate...

Chapter 9: A New Hope

The winds howled over the massive walls at Manchu Kwo. Several weeks after the hasty retreat from Kawachi, a messenger arrived at the gates of the mighty fortress in the Gobi asking for an audience with Egg Shan...

[Egg Shan]: What message do you bear for me?
[Messenger]: News from Japan. Your spy has trailed Egg Pan's movements as you requested. He has sent me this letter... for your eyes only. It concerns developments there...
The messenger hands the monk the sealed letter. Egg Shan opens and reads it... his face remains expressionless throughout...

[Egg Shan]: Thanks. You may go now.
[Monk #1]: What news has arrived from Japan, master?
[Egg Shan]: This is a dark day... Egg Pan has been killed...
[Monk #2]: No! By who?
[Egg Shan]: He was beheaded by the headless horseman...
[Monk #1]: But... he trained his entire life for that battle... If he lost, then we are all doomed!
[Monk #2]: His apprentice is too young... and is not ready to face this threat!
[Egg Shan]: [Sighs] It was never Egg Pan's destiny to defeat the horseman... only to face him. And that he did.
[Monk #2]: What are you saying? You sent him into certain death?
[Egg Shan]: No... I sent him to face his destiny.
[Monk #1]: But... in so doing, you have doomed us all! Why?
[Egg Shan]: It all became clear when Egg Pan departed these very walls that have insulated him from the world for his entire life...
[Monk #2]: I don't follow...
[Egg Shan]: [Turns and gazes out a window into the great emptiness of the desert] The hopes of the world did not die with Egg Pan. There is... another...

The End