

## THE WAR THAT BROUGHT PEACE

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### Prologue

The castle was supposed to be impenetrable. It was the strongest castle in Japan, yet an army was trying to attack it. It was unbelievable that anything could disturb Sanada Ykimura from his rest. The arrow soared through the air like an eagle, the cold metal beak flew through the hole in the wall and nose-dived into the desk, reverberating as it stuck there. The figure in the room sat up in shock. His eyes gazed at the arrow for a moment. Slowly, his hand grabbed the arrow, and carefully took the crumpled piece of paper off. The hand was quickly joined by another one as they opened the package, revealing a letter. It read:

*Sanada-san,*

*It would be greatly appreciated if you would accept our money and join our side of this war. If you do not accept our offer, we will send them to hunt you down.*

*You know what to do.*

### Chapter 1 – Infiltration

Kage Washi crept along the plains outside Osaka castle with a few other ninja, spread out. He was wearing his white shozuku<sup>i</sup> cloak, which concealed him in the snow. His body flew along the ground like a dove in a snowstorm, quickly approaching the impregnable fortress. He was a few metres away from the partially frozen moat. He spread out his weight and snuck across the ice like a water strider. He had his katana<sup>ii</sup> on his back, shuriken<sup>iii</sup> in his pocket, and a grappling hook around his shoulder. Washi scuttled across the ice, and made it onto the wall. He threw the grappling hook at one of the guards, who let out a short squeal and fell on the floor. Blood splattered over the snow as the grappling hook stuck on the wall. He climbed up. Once he was on the snow-covered ramparts, Washi changed out of his shozuku, which would have stood out in the night like a white beacon, and changed his clothes with the samurai he had left sprawled on the floor. The armour was a bit big on him, and the joints rattled as he threw the limp body down into the moat. The thick ice below cracked as Washi walked from the ramparts to the honmaru<sup>iv</sup>.

### Chapter 2 – Preparation

Naifu no Gekido was galloping across the slushy snow on his horse, drawing near to the army. The Samurai were in a frenzy of activity, anticipating the upcoming combat. The enemy forces were waiting outside Osaka castle for the inevitable battle. Members of the cavalry were getting into formation, as were the Ashigaru<sup>v</sup>, who didn't have horses. The commander, Tokugawa Ieyasu, was giving a speech, outlining what was at stake for his forces during this battle. He was shouting:

*“Fellow Samurai, this battle is to end the war. If we win, we will rule Japan, and finally be at peace!”*

The Samurai cheered raucously as Tokugawa acknowledged them, nodding in reassurance.

*“We will fight to the last man, not stopping until this castle is taken from that little boy's grasp!”*

The Samurai cheered as Tokugawa lined up the army. There was a moment of quiet before the shout came ringing out towards the soldiers.

*“CHARGE!”*

### Chapter 3 – Assault

Washi looked out towards the town from Osaka castle as he saw two armies clash near the plains. The commander of the troops in the castle was charging towards Ieyasu's army. There was a lot of smoke from the arquebus<sup>vi</sup> shots, and a lot of arrows flying through the air. He could hear the clashing of swords from in the castle. Washi walked down into the sanomaru to look at the mechanics of the door. The doors were made out of metal, and had a strong wooden beam acting as a lock. He knew this would be easy to open, as he had done it many times before.

\* \* \*

Naifo no Gekido was charging with his army, which was attacking the castle. He was charging at the opposition with a group of cavalry, flanking the other army's footsoldiers. When he stood up in the stirrups of his mount, he could see another group of cavalry on the other side of the field doing the same thing. The brunt of the army, made up of mainly Ashigaru, was running towards Hideyori's army, ready for the bloodbath. Gekido's group of horses was turning, ready to approach Osaka's defenders from behind. The cavalry charged at the back of the footsoldiers, first drawing their bows and firing a few arrows, then drawing their katanas for combat.

The horses reached the rear of the enemy, and blood flew. The swords sliced through both the air and necks, decapitating the Ashigaru. Blood sprayed Gekido's chestnut coloured horse, giving it a few droplets of dark brown. The infantry were suffering as the Osaka cavalry was about to cut them to ribbons.

*“RETREAT!”*

### Chapter 4 – Persuasion

Kage Washi had just missed the fight. The attackers had lost the battle, almost being slaughtered, but escaped and marched off to the capital, Kyoto, down one of the five great roads that linked the island nation together. Washi didn't know when they would reach Kyoto, but he guessed about two days, since there were 150,000 men or so and the wounded would be slowing them down. The walk was along a road, but if it wasn't, it would maybe take about 5 days. His job now, since Tokugawa wanted vengeance, was to soften the armistice deal his commander, General Ieyasu had sent to Hideyori, the general trapped inside the walls of Osaka.

The deal right now was that Hideyori was going to fill in the moat but Washi was going to get him to give Ieyasu land outside the castle. He was walking inside the ninomaru, trying to come up with ideas to get to Sanada Yukimura, Ieyasu's second in command, not to battle and to make sure that the arrow letter had had the desired effect. Washi walked to the accommodation of the samurai he just usurped. He sat at his desk and started a forged letter, from Hideyori to Yukimura.

*Yukimura,*

*It may not be necessary to fight in the summer. We have signed an armistice deal with Tokugawa Ieyasu. You could leave and see your wife and children.*

*Toyotomi Hideyori.*

'This looks good', thought Washi. He had heard Hideyori talk at the beginning of the battle in front of the castle, and that was his style of speech.

## Chapter 5 – Enlightenment

*Gekido was walking around his garden. He was a young boy then, playing with his bokken<sup>vii</sup>. He was practising sword moves with it, and his movements had sakura trees dancing to the wind around him. The garden had a small stream oscillating through it. His black hair was floppy and wavy, racing the wind. A tanuki was drinking water from the stream, its majestic brown hair undulating in the wind. He was in Kyoto, in his family house. His father was in Korea, fighting in the siege of Pyongyang, across the eastern sea. His older brother was teaching him the way of the sword with wooden sticks. Gekido challenged his brother to a duel. The wooden swords clashed like a hurricane in the beautiful serenity of the garden. Gekido was holding on, but a stray sword slash by him had removed his guard. His brother's sword was closing in. The brown blur was at his legs, coming up to his face ...*

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*Kage Washi was running around in his village, which was in a forest. The trees were a great setting for his ninja training. About 30 other people lived here. They all knew the way of the Ninja, and he wanted to know it as well. He was playing hide and seek with a group of other boys. He ran to the fringe of the clearing and climbed up one of the trees. He disguised himself as a branch and hung there. One of his friends ran below him, climbing up the tree to his right. The seeker came through the centre of the village and looked up at the trees on the fringe. "I found you!" he exclaimed with joy, after looking for about 30 seconds.*

*"How did you find us?" Washi asked, intrigued.*

*"You're so predictable, you always hide up there. I can always find you," the other boy said.*

*Washi thought about this, and came down the tree. Washi ran through the fields on the outskirts of the village and went to the barn, where he practiced throwing shuriken. He kept them under the hay in the barn. He got the shuriken out and threw it at the wall. It made a sharp indent, almost cutting through the wooden walls. He retrieved this and did it a few more times, aiming at the original indent.*

*He went back to his house, where his parents had prepared dinner.*

## Chapter 6 – Kyoto

Naifu no Gekido was walking around Kyoto, where he and the rest of this army had been sent to prepare for the next siege, where they would take Toyotomi Hideyori by surprise. He was strolling around his family home, in the garden. The tanuki from years ago was still there, and it drank from the same stream. He remembered from years ago when he was playing with his brother, and when he was learning the way of the sword. His father never came back from Korea, dying at Pyongyang. His family had collapsed in on itself when they heard the news and he was sent to a sword school when his mother could not cope with the grief. Here he learnt most of the ways to fight, even without a katana.

He sat down next to the tanuki and watched it, like he did before he went to sword school. The stream was very clear, and he could see his reflection in it. He had changed a lot since he last saw

the tanuki; his wavy black hair had been styled into a topknot, his nose was sharper, and his cheeks were less round. His parents were gone, and his brother owned a castle somewhere in north Honshu, so this was his house now. He could see Nijo castle from here, where Ieyasu lived. He dreamed of being a daimyo one day, living in a castle, ruling over samurai.

## Chapter 7 – Summer

Kage Washi was standing on the walls of Osaka castle as he watched the army amass on the plains outside of it. The moat had been filled in, and Hideyori had given Ieyasu some land outside of Osaka. The army had come back in the dead of night, and Kage needed to get back to them, and get his shozuku back on. He needed to know the plan of action, and how they would win this siege. He had spread discord among the generals, especially Sanada Yukimura, and given Ieyasu some land. He went back to the spot on the ramparts where he had first entered the castle, found his shozuku under one of the stones, and changed back his clothes. He then abseiled down the wall, and dragon-ran<sup>viii</sup> back to the army. He saw some other ninjas race, in their black cloaks, some along the rooftops, to get back to Ieyasu. Kage and the other ninjas got back just in time to hear the battle plan for tomorrow.

*“Just before dawn, our ninja, who have just arrived here, will go and kill the samurai guarding the gate. When they see us outside the castle on the plains, they will open the gates to the castle. The cavalry will then charge through and kill the samurai in the maru. The Ashigaru will then come in and clear out each maru for the archers to shoot the people down from the walls. While the ashigaru are doing this, the archers will shoot at the people over the exterior walls. Once the cavalry are through to the honmaru, they will dismount and raid the keep, eventually finding Hideyori and killing him. We have superior numbers, like last time, but we have a better plan and are utilising the ninjas. We must be victorious, or you will bring shame on yourselves and your families!”*

This was a grim ending to a master plan. He and his fellow ninjas were desperate to win, while the samurai did not want to lose – it would be bloody. They were huddled up in a square, while Ieyasu was in front of a fire. The ninjas were waiting on roofs, waiting for sunset.

An hour later, a glint of sunrise came over the horizon. The ninjas ran to the castle. They jumped up onto the side of the wall and climbed up. They ran to the gates, swiftly killed the guards, removed the wooden barrier and opened the gate. Next, they ran to the ninomaru, and opened the gate while killing the guards. There were more guards by the honmaru, so they took them out with poison darts. They opened the gates. The keep door was locked, so they climbed up the building, and went through the windows on the first floor. They crept towards the stairs. The floor started squeaking. A guard around the corner heard the nightingale floor and came, shouting a warning to the other guards. Kage got out his katana. The guards rushed at him. Kage slashed at the first guard. The torso fell to the floor with the separated legs following it. The guard behind him was covered by blood, making the katana coming from him even more ominous. The man parried the katana blow, but a shuriken struck his neck. The sharp edge impaled his windpipe, suffocating him. The next guard jumped up as he came, so Washi slid under him, then drove his katana through his spine, piercing his heart. As Washi turned around, a blur of metal came at him. He raised his arms at the blow, but it cut him below the elbows. He felt a sharp pain by his armpit. The sword had missed the main bit of the body, but it had cut him. Washi quickly dispatched the guard with a shuriken before falling on the floor, bleeding. He called for help, and a ninja came round the corner, and down the corridor. He lifted him up, and abseiled down the castle with him. They ran out of the castle gates as they saw the approaching cavalry on the plains, closing in on the castle. He turned the corner, and hid behind the walls where the moat should have been. The guardian angel took off Washi's mask, and gasped in recognition. “Washi, is that you?” enquired the ninja. “Yes,” Washi

groaned in pain. His shozuku was damp and his cut was exposed to the cold air. The other ninja revealed himself. Kage recognised him. He was the boy who he had played hide and seek with, the one who said he was 'so predictable'. He cut a piece of his shozuku off and used it to cover up Washi's bleeding. The cavalry rode through the gate, glinting in dawn. A loud whistling noise came through the air. Washi looked up and saw cannonballs.

## Chapter 8 – Combat

Gekido was charging through the gate. He saw a couple of ninja next to the gate; one of them was lying in pain while the other was bandaging him. His horse rode through the gate, followed by artillery fire. The artillery was wrecking the walls, blasting holes in them and any attacker that was on top. Some arrows aimed at the defenders flew, some of them hitting the walls while others fell short. They rode through to the homaru, and dismounted at the keep. They ran through the doors with their katanas drawn.

## Chapter 9 - Seppoku<sup>ix</sup>

*A few minutes before ...*

Toyotomi Hideyori was watching the battle from his room, at the top of the keep of Osaka castle. He saw that the gates were open and the guards near them had been killed.

*"That lying cheat!"* Hideyori muttered as he saw the cavalry ride through the castle. They approached the keep, dismounted and entered the castle. After a few seconds, he heard noises on the stairs. Tokugawa Ieyasu had made an armistice deal, and Hideyori had given him some land to pay him off. The noises were getting closer. They were on the floor below him. Hideyori drew his ritual knife.

*"Peace for Japan, after almost 200 years, will come by my death."*

He held the knife out in front of him. Hideyori said his death wishes, and he drew the knife in. The short shaft cut through his chest. It pierced his heart.

*Hideyori remembered everything. A glint of light came through the window. The noise of the cannons was muffled as he grew tired. Blood was squirting out of his chest, spraying the floor around him. The carpet turned from clean white to pink, to dark red. His knife was sticking through his chest. The light was turning darker. His vision was dying.*

One of the samurai opened the door, and came into the room.

"It seems that our job has been done already."

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<sup>i</sup> A shozuku is a ninja cloak.

<sup>ii</sup> A katana is a Japanese curved sword.

<sup>iii</sup> Shuriken are ninja throwing stars.

<sup>iv</sup> Maru were parts of a Japanese castle that slowed down attackers. The honmaru was where the keep was situated. The ninomaru was where most of the samurai's accommodation was situated. The sanomaru was the third circle out.

<sup>v</sup> Ashigaru were samurai footsoldiers.

<sup>vi</sup> An arquebus was a Portuguese style musket which was introduced into Japan by Portuguese people.

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<sup>vii</sup> Bokken are wooden training swords used by a samurai's children.

<sup>viii</sup> Dragon-running was a supernatural type of ninja running that allowed them to run very fast.

<sup>ix</sup> Seppoku is ritual suicide. Samurai don't want to be captured because it was against their honour, so they killed themselves instead.