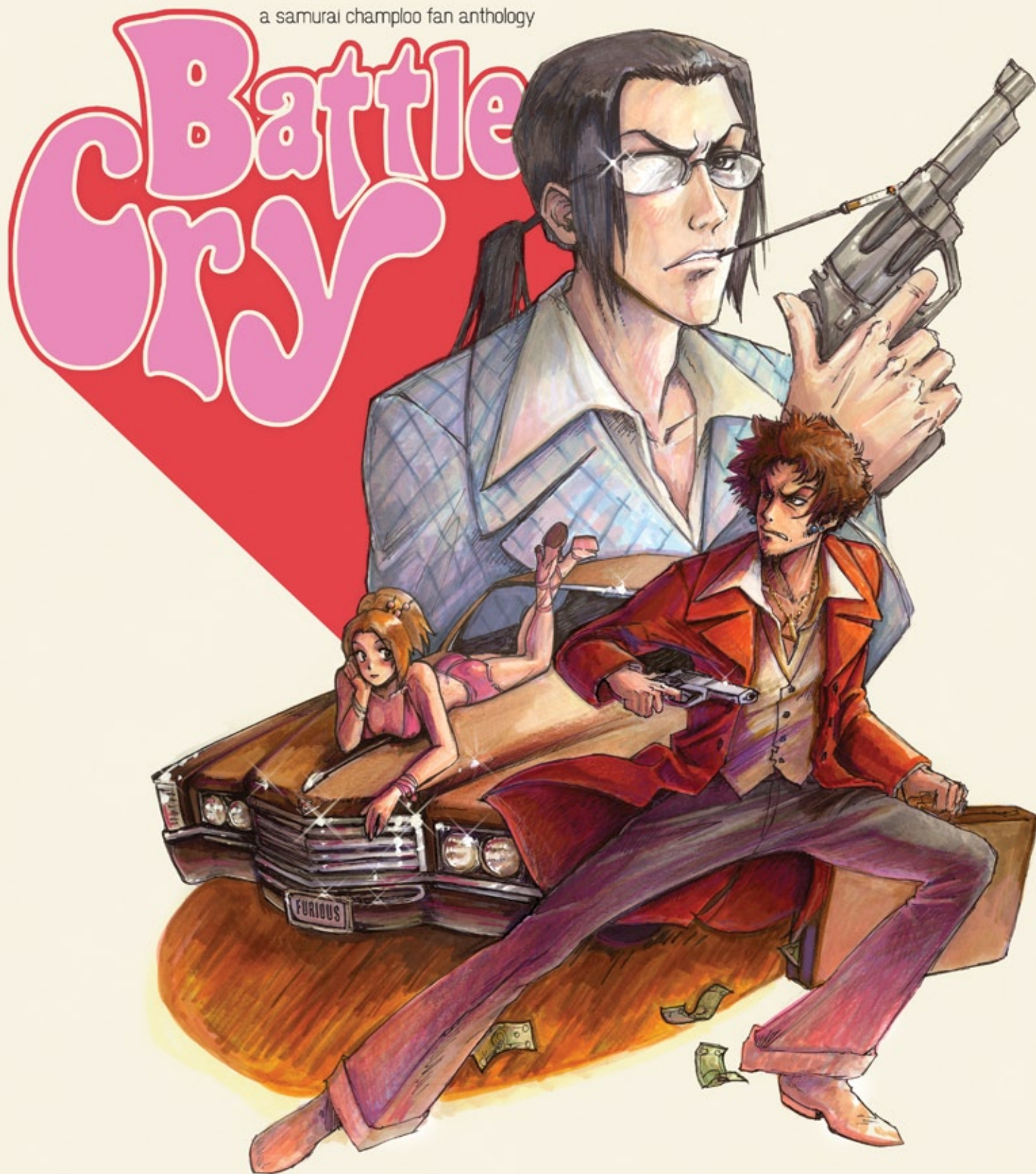


One sweet chick and two bad dudes
on the trail of the most wanted man in Japan!

a samurai champloo fan anthology



The SAMCHANThOLOGY Production "BATTLE CRY" Starring JIN, MUGEN, and FUU

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R

This doujinshi contains
depictions of violence and
sexuality and may be
inappropriate for children.

FOREWORD

WOW!

This project began almost on impulse - just a wild suggestion. Never could I have anticipated such a tremendous response! It has been a privilege corresponding with so many creative and talented artists and authors. Thank you all so much for your contributions. I am forever in your debt.

Thanks to Amalgam, the Swords & Sunflowers fan forum, the SunUpSunDown club at y!gallery, and the members of the Samchanthology Livejournal community for promoting this project.

Thanks also to my husband Brett, who in his limitless patience not only tolerated my fannish insanity but actually cheered it on.

And of course, many thanks to you, the reader, for downloading this doujinshi! I hope you enjoy it.

Love, peace, and yebli,
bigbigtruck
February 13, 2007

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DISCLAIMERS

CONTENT

The fan art, fan fiction, and manga in this anthology contain depictions of violence and sexuality. The guideline set for submissions was “if it can make it into an R-rated film, it’s good to go.” If material at this level offends you, please use discretion.

Please note that, as is the case in most fandoms, there are fan works that pair certain characters in a romantic or sexual context. This includes same-sex pairings. If you are offended by certain character pairings, please refer to the Table of Contents, where character pairings (when present) are designated next to the title of each work.



art by
basalt

PRODUCTION

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This doujinshi is purely a fan work. No money changed hands at any time before, during, or after its production.

All works contained in the doujinshi were made out of love for the show and/or as an expression of fandom and are not meant to substitute, promote, or tie into the anime or manga.

This doujinshi is absolutely NOT to be sold in any form, print, electronic, or otherwise.

CREDITS & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

SOFTWARE, IMAGES, AND FONTS

This doujinshi was built in Windows XP using Adobe Photoshop 7, Adobe Photoshop CS2, Adobe InDesign CS2 (PDF version), and Macromedia Dreamweaver MX (web version).

The foliage images that appear in the background are from a free-use brush set by Jason Gaylor of DesignFruit.com. Spot photos are royalty-free, free-use images from Stock Xchng.

Fonts: Headers are in LetterSoupMainz (PDF version only), Magnum, and NewMedia. Body text (PDF version only) is Humanist Light 52 I.

The titling in the front cover artwork is an homage to the film *Superfly*.



art by
bigbigtruck

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BUSINESS AS USUAL : SIDETRACK

BY LAURA BRYANNAN

Note: This story takes place in the modern alternate universe of Laura's fan fiction series *Business As Usual*, which can be read at: <http://www.homestar.org/bryannan/champloo/business.htm>.

(Explicit content; yaoi)

They were together on his couch, and she was happily snuggled in the shelter of his arm, head on his shoulder. The credits were rolling and it was getting late, but she did not want to go back to the dorm. All summer his behavior had been distressingly consistent. During the time they spent together he was his usual charming and affectionate self, but made no attempts to get closer. It was enough to make a gal doubt her charms.

"I've been here for six weeks and you still haven't kissed me," she complained. "I'm not just a little sister to you, am I?"

Jin cleared his throat. "No, Fuu, you're not."

"So why, then?" she asked. "I thought for sure this summer, now that I'm all grown up, we would..."

He sputtered. "All grown up?! Fuu, you're fifteen. You're just a baby."

"Were you a virgin at fifteen?"

"Well, no, but that's different. I'm a guy."

It was her turn to sputter. "That's totally sexist! Why is it different?"

"I don't know why it's different, but it is," he insisted. "I didn't make up the rules, I just know they exist. And besides, *himawari*, even though I don't think of you as a little sister, I'm not..."

"Stop!" she cried. "I know, I know, you don't have to say it. You and Yuki. I guess I grew up enough to get a clue about that. He's handsome, alright, but who cares? I don't understand what you see in him. He's so obnoxious and stuck-up, and I think he hates me, too."

"You dislike each other for the same reasons," Jin told her. "Besides, he only teases you because you give him such satisfying reactions. You're a smart girl, Fuu. You know that, and yet you still let him provoke you."

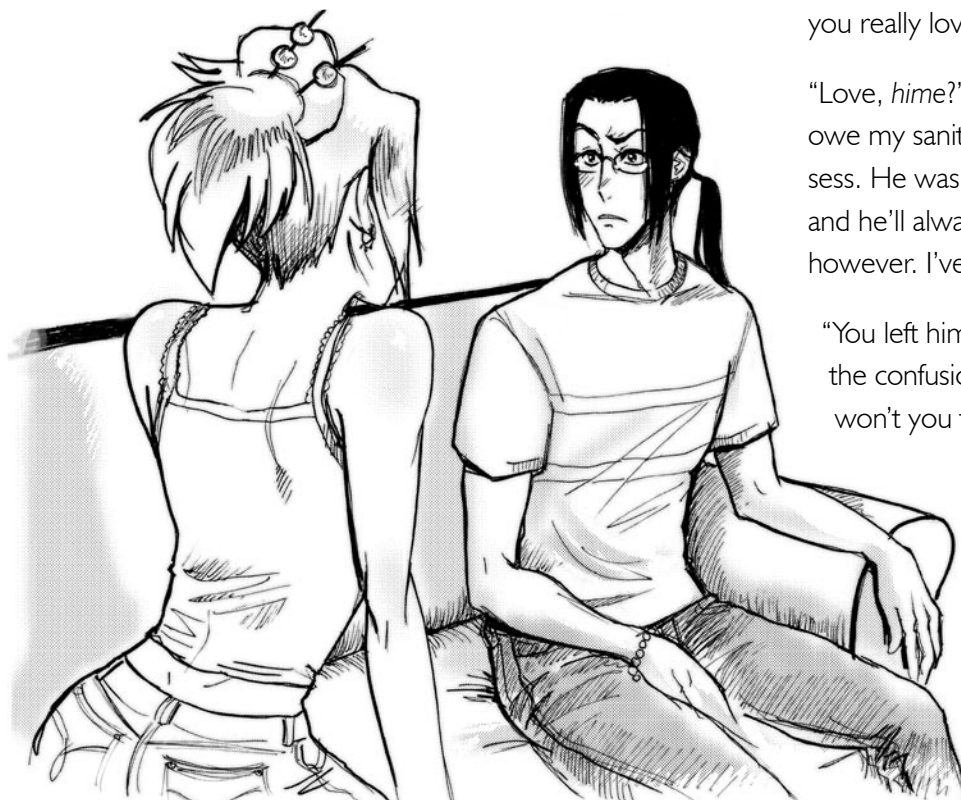
"Oh, pooh on Yuki!" she fumed, and then, more gently, "do you really love him, Jin?"

"Love, *hime*?" He sighed, smiling wistfully. "Yes, I love Yuki. I owe my sanity to him, as well as whatever social skills I possess. He was one of the most important influences in my life and he'll always be a part of me. We're no longer together, however. I've left him. It didn't occur to me to mention it..."

"You left him?!?" The hope she felt didn't quite drown out the confusion. "But if you're not with Yuki anymore, why won't you turn to me? Is it because I'm a girl?"

Jin gazed at her tenderly. "I don't believe so, but I honestly don't know. I'm still trying to understand it all myself. You will ever have my heart, *himawari*, but my body seems to pull me in other directions."

art by
bigbigtruck



She didn't care. Jin was hers. He'd been hers ever since she could remember, the beautiful, mysterious boy who was the most fascinating puzzle. She'd spent her entire life trying to figure him out and wasn't ready to give up, so she could be patient... and persistent. "I still want to give you my virginity."

"Why, Fuu?" he asked sincerely. "Knowing what you know about me, shouldn't you wait for someone who's passionate about you to come along?"

"Passion is for shoujo manga," she stated sensibly. "I love you, Jin. And I know you love me too, in the ways that matter, anyway. You've been there for me longer than anyone, my oldest and dearest friend, so I want you to be the first."

"First what, *hime*?" he asked gently. "Surely not your first kiss."

She looked down, blushing furiously. "Well, no... not that."

He chuckled. "You're far too cute for me to believe you've never kissed a boy." But then he turned to her, his tone a little more serious. "How many boys, Fuu?"

She met his gaze, eyes flashing. "How many lovers have you had?" she challenged.

"Touché," he laughed, amused as always by her spunkiness, and reflected for a moment. "I can count them on one hand," he replied honestly.

She looked relieved. "So can I!"

"Are you certain this is what you want, Fuu?" he asked. "I'd be proud to do it. You're sweet and fresh and very deli-

cious, I'm sure, and I have wondered what it might be like to be with you, but...."

"You have?!?"

"Yes, *hime*, of course I have, but you deserve better for your first time."

"I want my first to be with someone who loves me... who cares enough to be gentle and... um... make me ready." She was blushing again. "You meet all the criteria, mister, and then some. I know you'll teach me well, you always have. Please, Jin."

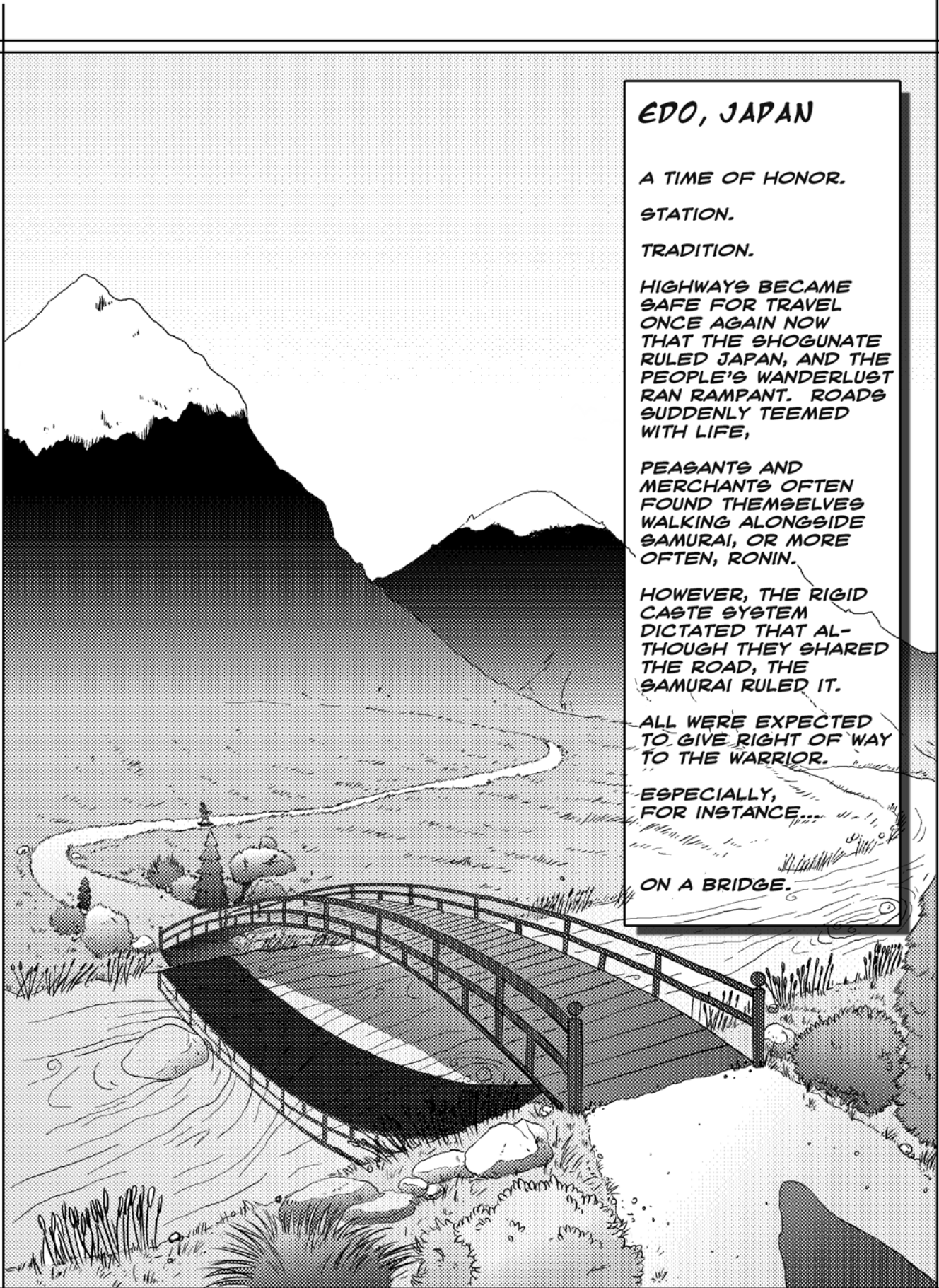
He looked thoughtful, eyes inward, then smiled mischievously. "If I add my name to your roster of kissed boys, can you still count us on one hand?"

"Yes!" she said proudly.

"Good." He hugged her closer, pulling out the old-fashioned sticks so that her hair tumbled to her shoulders. "Shall we begin, then?"

"Oh, yes!"

end



EDO, JAPAN

A TIME OF HONOR.

STATION.

TRADITION.

HIGHWAYS BECAME SAFE FOR TRAVEL ONCE AGAIN NOW THAT THE SHOGUNATE RULED JAPAN, AND THE PEOPLE'S WANDERLUST RAN RAMPANT. ROADS SUDDENLY TEEMED WITH LIFE,

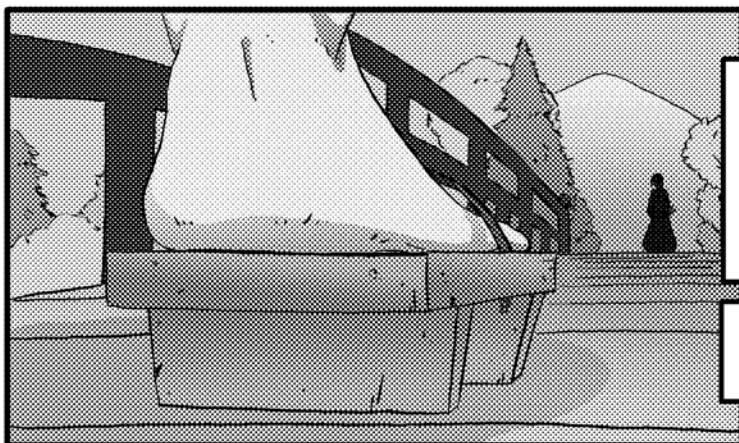
PEASANTS AND MERCHANTS OFTEN FOUND THEMSELVES WALKING ALONGSIDE SAMURAI, OR MORE OFTEN, RONIN.

HOWEVER, THE RIGID CASTE SYSTEM DICTATED THAT ALTHOUGH THEY SHARED THE ROAD, THE SAMURAI RULED IT.

ALL WERE EXPECTED TO GIVE RIGHT OF WAY TO THE WARRIOR.

ESPECIALLY, FOR INSTANCE...

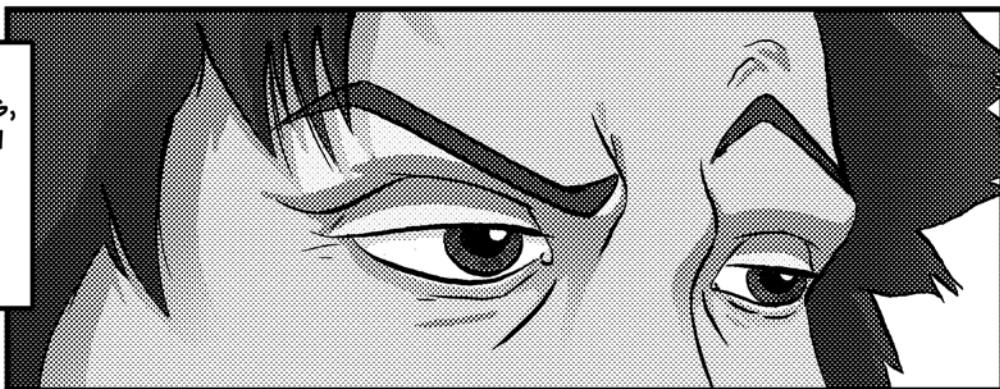
ON A BRIDGE.



THE PROBLEM WITH THIS
ARISES WHEN TWO
SAMURAI APPROACH THE
SAME BRIDGE AT THE
SAME TIME.

IT CREATES A SPECIAL
SORT OF CONUNDRUM.

OLD FRIENDS,
ARCH ENEMIES,
THE RULING ON
THIS KIND OF
SITUATION IS
ALWAYS
THE SAME:



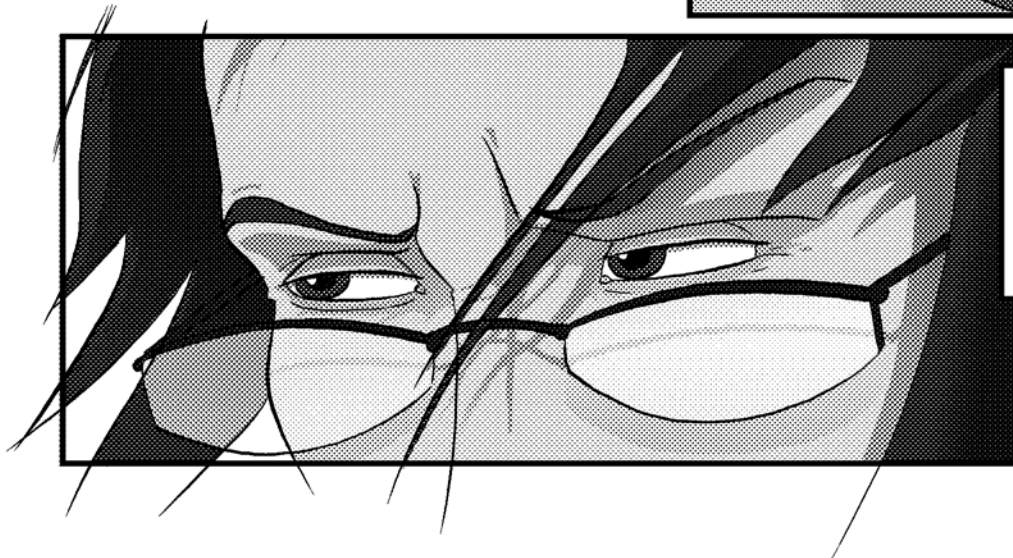
HONOR DICTATES THAT THE
LESSER MAN STEP ASIDE.

AS BOTH MEN ARE OF HONOR,
TYPICALLY NEITHER ONE YIELDS...



WHICH EVENTUALLY
RESULTS IN A FIGHT
TO THE DEATH, AS
THEY'VE BOTH
SLIGHTED THE
OTHER'S HONOR.

ESPECIALLY IF
THEY HAVE SOME...



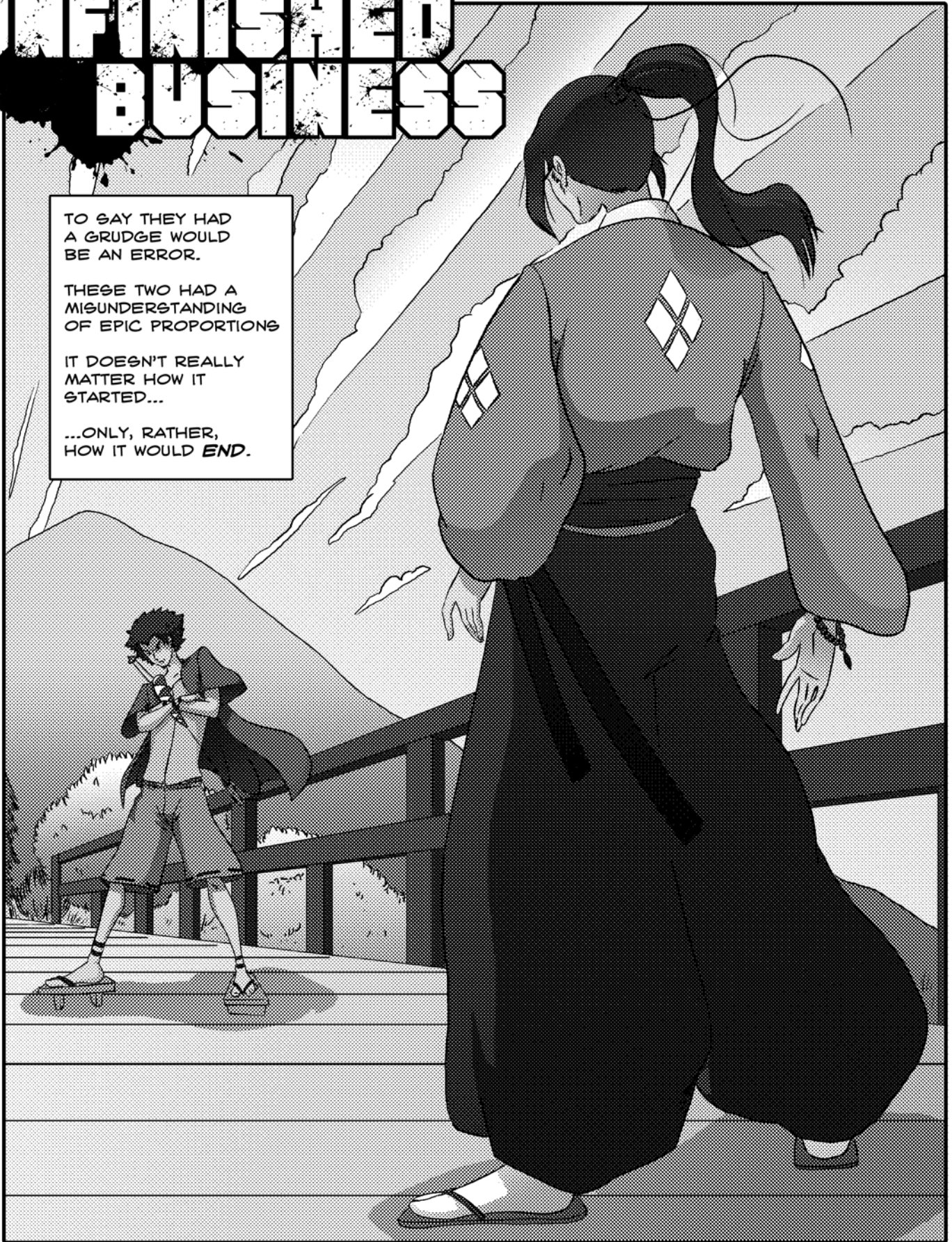
UNFINISHED BUSINESS

TO SAY THEY HAD
A GRUDGE WOULD
BE AN ERROR.

THESE TWO HAD A
MISUNDERSTANDING
OF EPIC PROPORTIONS

IT DOESN'T REALLY
MATTER HOW IT
STARTED...

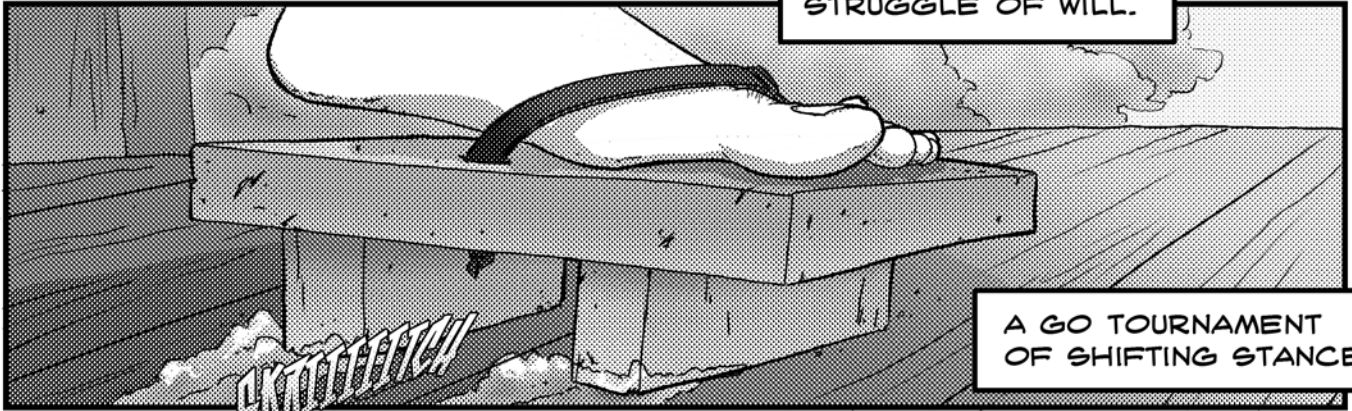
...ONLY, RATHER,
HOW IT WOULD *END*.



TO THE UNINITIATED,
THEY SEEMED AS
STILL AS STATUES.



BUT THEIRS WAS A
STRUGGLE OF WILL.

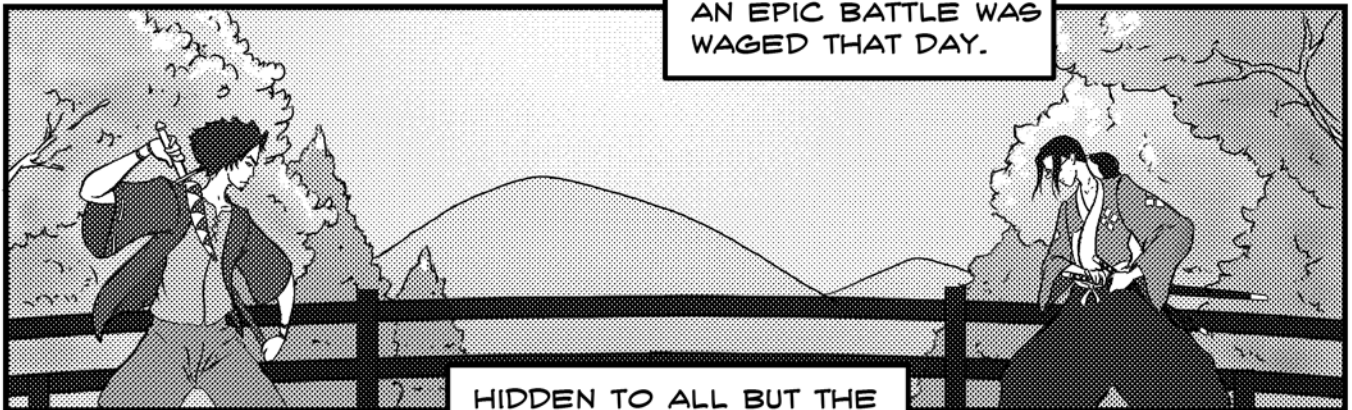


A GO TOURNAMENT
OF SHIFTING STANCES,

INTIMIDATION.



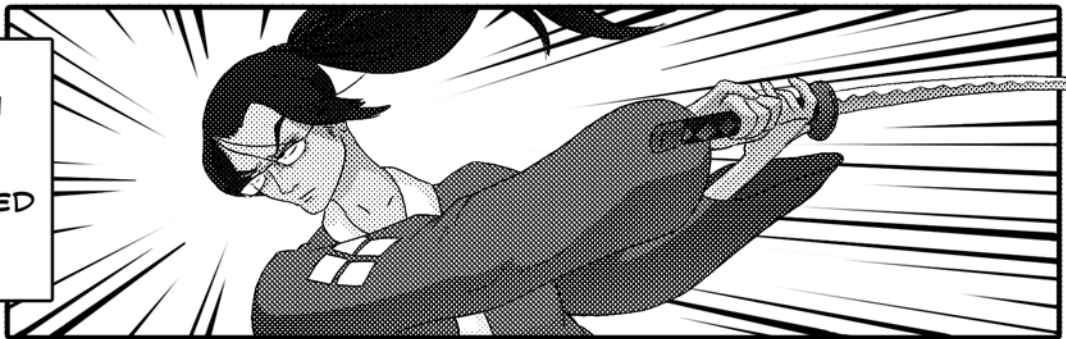
AN EPIC BATTLE WAS
WAGED THAT DAY.



HIDDEN TO ALL BUT THE
MOST PERCEPTIVE EYE.

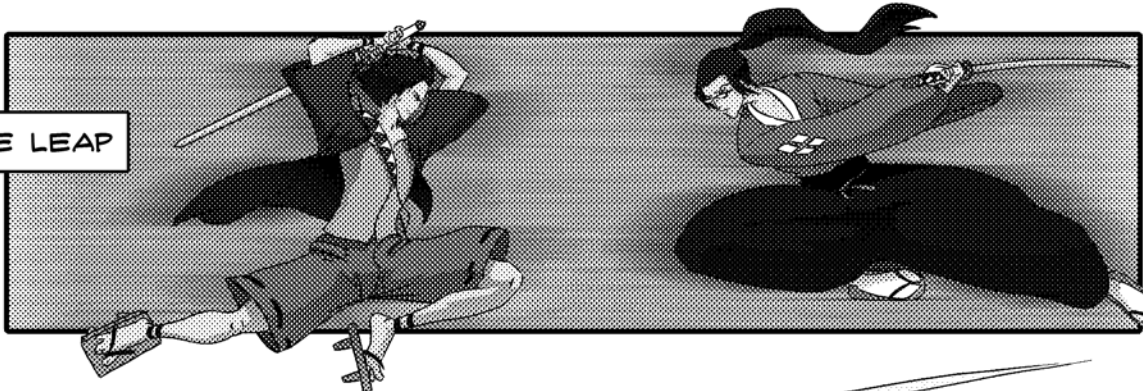


THE DUEL
BEGAN WITH
A CHARGE...

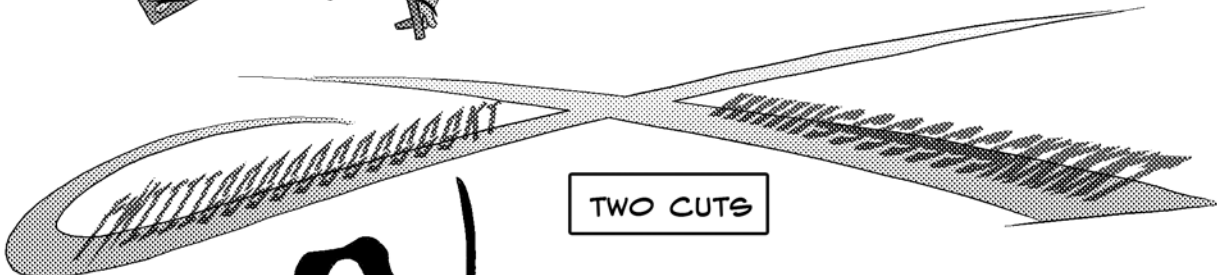


WHICH WAS
ANSWERED IN
KIND.

THEY MATCHED
MOVES STEP
FOR STEP.



ONE LEAP



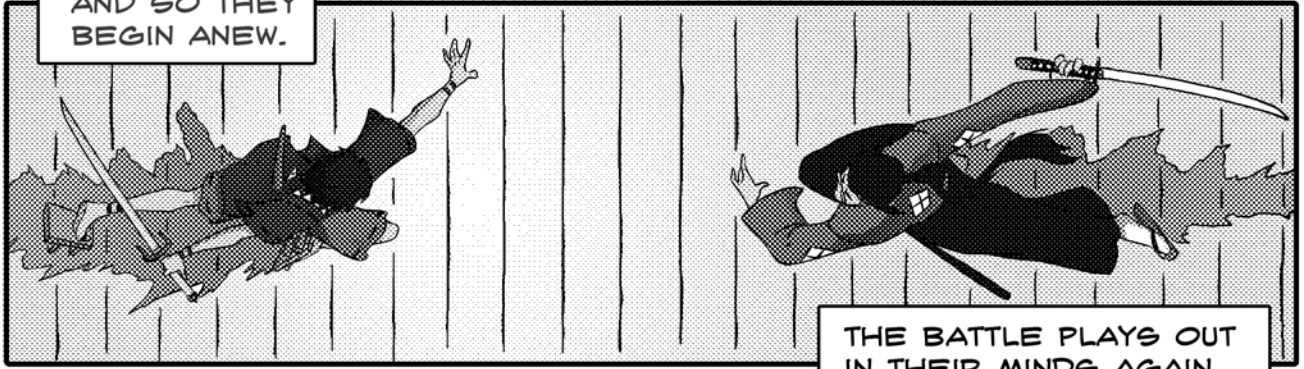
TWO CUTS



ONE OUTCOME.

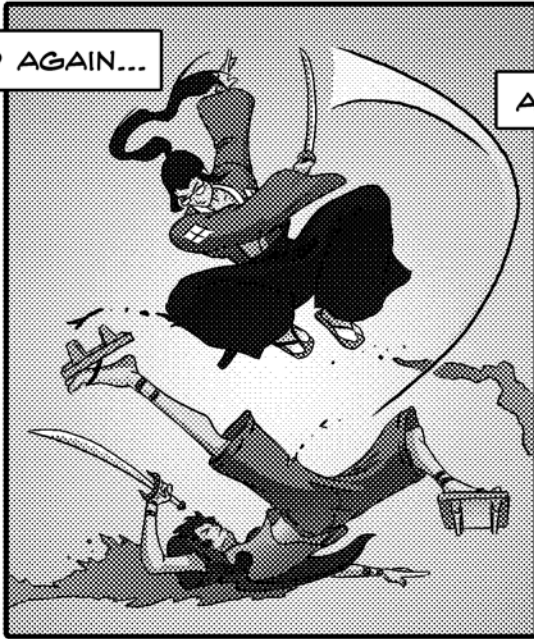


AND SO THEY
BEGIN ANEW.

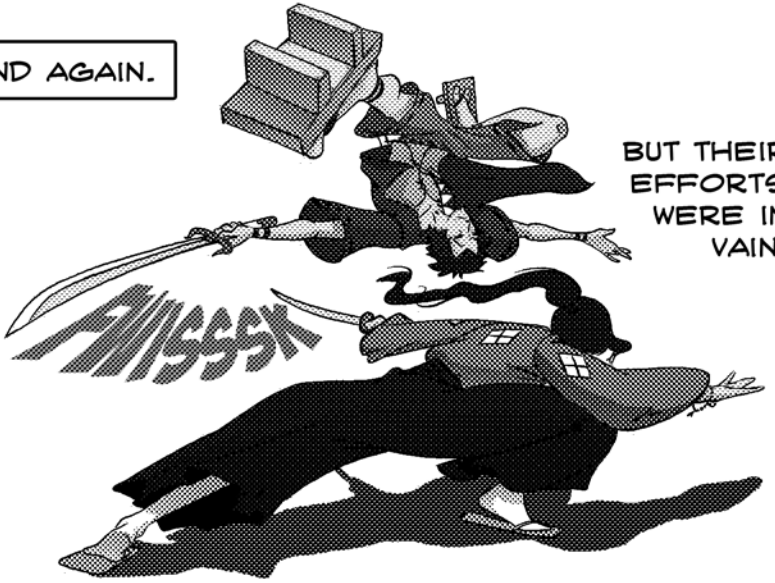


THE BATTLE PLAYS OUT
IN THEIR MINDS AGAIN...

AND AGAIN...



AND AGAIN.



BUT THEIR
EFFORTS
WERE IN
VAIN.

THE RESULT...



WAS
ALWAYS...



THE SAME.



IF THEY COULD JUST FIND ONE OPENING...

ONE CHINK IN THE ARMOR...

IF THEY COULD JUST--

STOP!!!



MAYBE IF THE TWO OF YOU WOULD STOP TRYING TO FIND REASONS TO DIE,

AND START FINDING A REASON TO LIVE,

I COULD TRUST YOU TWO TO PICK UP SOME FOOD!



YOU COULD AT LEAST ACT LIKE REGULAR GUYS AND TRY AND **BREAK** STUFF INSTEAD OF KILL EACH OTHER ONCE IN AWHILE...

Le FIN

STRANGELY MEANT TO BE

BY KENDRA LUEHR

His eyes were always unspeakably dark, the grays of his irises constantly coalescing into a wintry fog that never failed to penetrate one to the very core. Fuu had once heard a prostitute use the term "bedroom eyes", so this is what she decided he must have since they invoked such yearning and passion in just one fleeting glance.

Although Mugen's eyes were the only beautiful part of his anatomy, Fuu couldn't help but admire his hands, as well. Within these long, slender appendages laid such monstrous power and strength that they could effortlessly slay even the most brutal of beasts. Each finger was an intricately designed instrument of death, yet Fuu found that she could never be afraid of him. How could she be when she could discern his inner heart from his cruel exterior? She knew, after all, that he ran the gnarled knobs of his calloused hands through her hair when he thought she was sleeping, and she even knew that he was constantly trying to commit her body to memory by sight because of their inevitable departure.

And yet, in spite of all this it was his mouth that truly surprised her to no end. At a glance it was the foulest, most lewd part of his persona, yet it was this very mouth that had uttered the words that had granted her freedom.

With a simple "but in return, ya gotta let go-a the girl," she was allowed her desired liberation, her heart so heavy and swollen with shame that she knew she couldn't leave him there to die for her foolish mistakes. How could she when she knew he was willing to risk everything just so she could finally find her father? It was touching, and yet at the same time it was absolutely horrific due to the slight chance of his blood being forever stained on her hands.

When Fuu had finally left Mugen in accordance with his wishes, she silently vowed that one day, if they were to survive, she would eventually kiss that foul mouth of his and make it her own just like the rest of him. He was her bodyguard, and she his only anchor in his loveless life, both forever doomed to walk side-by-side in harmony to the inevitable dusk of their lives.



art by
Doven

end

WHY DID THEY SEND HER OVER ANYONE ELSE



THESE THINGS HAPPEN TO OTHER PEOPLE

Author's Note: "This was inspired by a scene in which it seems that Jin has asked a brothel girl to massage him with her feet. This led to me thinking of Jin as a possible foot fetishist, so I wrote a fic wherein Fuu's foot is bitten by a snake, and Jin sucks out the poison."

Fuu was trailing behind them when it happened.

It was yet another shortcut. Mugen promised a path, and produced one— with the aid of his machete. They were slogging through dank, brackish swamp-land. Jin now understood the wisdom of horses: their long tails flicked away flies. His own long hair was not so useful. Fuu had long since ceased complaining of insect bites. There was a splash, and a sharp cry of pain. Jin and Mugen turned. The girl held her foot. Two tiny, bloody points showed up on the flesh.

"Snake," Mugen said. His machete flashed in the air. "I'll kill it."

"Don't touch it!" Jin ordered. "It's probably a yamakagoshi. They live in the water. They have a poisonous sac on their backs—if you touch it, you'll release more venom."

"What do you know about snakes?" Mugen asked.

"More than you do," Jin said. "If—"

"It hurts..." Fuu said. She stood crane-like, on one foot. Her sandal had fallen into the mud. The flesh on the injured extremity was already beginning to swell. It bubbled up purple and green, dotted with red. "Jin, is it really poisonous?" She blanched. "Am I going to die...?"

Jin's eyes narrowed. He turned to their companion. "Mugen. Find firewood. Now." "It's a fucking swamp—"

"Do it! I'm taking care of this." Jin stepped forward, and looped Fuu's arm over his shoulder.

"Who elected you our fearless leader? I don't—"

Jin's face came up. He stared at the other man. Mugen shut up. Flies hummed around them. He felt Fuu's nervous heat radiating into him. Their sandals squelched in the heavy mud. "Is your sword sharp enough to cut off her foot?"

The mop-head took off without a word, scrabbling like a monkey among the verdant hills.

Jin maneuvered her to a dead, moss-covered log. Fuu sat and clutched her white-knuckled hands. Her voice was thin and reedy. "What is the firewood for?"

"We're going to cauterize your wound, after I remove the venom." Jin knelt and inspected the foot. Already it had swelled, and now felt hot to the touch. "Give me your hair-ribbon."

Reluctantly, Fuu pulled out the crimson silk and let her hair fall down. The sticks holding it in place fell behind her unnoticed. She handed him the ribbon. Jin began sliding her kimono up along her leg. "Hey!" Fuu gripped the edge of the fabric. "What do you think you're doing?"

"I have to tie this to your leg," Jin said. "It will stop the venom's progression." He smiled cheerlessly. "I've seen your legs before, at the ocean." He blinked. "Do you not trust me?"

Fuu colored. "It's not that." She folded her arms. "Just... ask me, next time."

"I'll tell you everything I'm doing, first. Now I'm tying the ribbon to your leg. I have to do it very tightly, like this." He cinched the knot shut. Fuu winced. Jin cradled Fuu's injured foot in his hands. It jerked there like a caught fish.

"Tickles," Fuu said.

"Usually I'm more skillful than that." He surveyed the injury.



art by
Wellow

He looked at Fuu's other foot, to compare. It was surprisingly white and slender, for all the walking they did. He would have expected corns and calluses, or toenails black with grime. But no, Fuu's feet were as pretty as they were the day he'd first seen them.

He knew about feet. They were more than modes of transportation. Feet could be used as weapons. If a man's hands were injured, he could still mold a pot with the soles of his feet, or hold a calligraphy brush between his toes. The shape of a foot told the way a person walked—heavily, nervously, in great long strides or tiny mincing steps. He never understood dirty or unkempt feet—feet were so important to daily life. They were also unimaginably sensitive. An injury to the foot was crippling. One tiny broken bone could throw someone's entire stride, could alter their speed and response. Well-loved feet were cooperative and supple. Like Fuu's.

"What's wrong with my feet?" she asked.

"Absolutely nothing." He held the injured foot. "I'm going to suck out the poison, now."

"Suck it out?" Her eyes were wide.

Jin nodded. "Otherwise, the flesh will die. Then we would have to take your foot."

Fuu's lower lip trembled. "You mean... amputate it?"

"Yes." His face bent closer to the skin. "May I?" She nodded mutely. "This may feel... unpleasant."

Jin closed his eyes, and sealed his lips over the wound. She flinched under him, but he held her fast. Gently, his tongue probed over the skin. He licked, further opening the tiny holes. He sucked, and Fuu whimpered. He tasted venom, and broke to spit it out. It splattered on the grass and mud below. When Jin's face came up, Fuu was watching him. It occurred to him that he'd never seen her hair down, before. She looked older.

"Does it hurt?" he asked. She shook her head.

Jin applied his mouth to the wound, again. He sucked steadily and slowly. Pebbles and twigs made impressions on his knees. With his nose so close to her skin he could smell her sweat, tangy and young. Her firm little foot and calf pressed into his hands. He massaged the leg and muscle sprang up under his palm, hard and round like an unripe peach. He spat venom and found the wound again. He sucked harder, this time.

"Jin..." Fuu's hand found his topknot. She clutched with an iron grip. Her fingernails scratched his scalp. Jin ran his tongue over the wounds and suckled, taking more of the flesh into his mouth. He imagined the venom like ink inside her veins; saw it draining down in his mind's eye. He rocked forward on his knees. Fuu's toes curled under his fingers. He tasted blood, salty and warm. It filled his mouth.

Jin spat. He still held Fuu's foot in his hands. They regarded one another. Her blush was bright, and her eyes were dark. "Jin, your mouth..." Her hand came down from his hair, and her thumb swept slowly over his lips. When it came away, it was smeared with her blood. Still staring, he licked away the rest, and swallowed.

"I'll take the ribbon off now."

Fuu nodded. Jin's fingers slid up her leg, and carefully undid the knot with a single, expert tug. He drew the silk down over her foot. It fluttered there, crimson on white. Jin was still kneeling when he offered it back to her, neatly folded. "Cauterizing the wound will be painful," he said.

Their fingers brushed. "I'm sure you'll be gentle," she said. Her smile was quiet.

Twigs snapped under Mugen's sandals as he crashed his way back to them. Leaves poked from in his hair. His hands sprouted knotty old branches. He was panting. "Is this enough?"

"That's enough," Jin said. He stood, and collected the wood.

Mugen squinted at Fuu. "Why is your hair down?"

"I needed to tourniquet the leg briefly, while I removed the poison," Jin answered.

"Removed the poison?" Mugen frowned. "With what?"

Jin merely stared at him by way of answer. Mugen's eyes bugged. He pointed between the other two. "He sucked on your foot?! That's so disgusting! Ugh! I can't believe you two! You primitive-"

"Fuu's a big girl," Jin said. "I knew she could handle it." He opened the tinder-box.

"Really, Mugen, it didn't hurt at all," Fuu said. She re-arranged her hair. "Jin is a very nice-"

"-Bloodsucking vampire pervert..." Mugen huffed and sat cross-legged, hunched over. "I can't believe you let him touch you."

"Fuu was very brave," Jin added. He unsheathed his sword, and let it rest over the new fire. He watched the tip begin to glow. He turned to her. The sword was warm in his hand. "Can you be brave for me again?"

"Of course!"

"You're sick, both of you." Mugen shut his eyes, and plugged his ears.

Jin crossed to the seated girl and knelt. "Are you prepared?"

Fuu nodded. Her hand found his shoulder, and squeezed lightly. "Let's count to three, together."

"Fucking get on with it!" Mugen shouted. "One!"

"Two," Jin murmured.

Fuu drew breath. "Three..."

Hot steel met soft skin, and Fuu's fingers curled deeply into Jin's shoulder. She whimpered. Mugen crouched in a tight ball, his fingers firmly planted in his ears. Jin watched her eyes. They were filling with tears. He counted off the seconds until he smelled seared flesh. Then he brought the sword away.

"Very good," he said. "You're quite strong."

Fuu smiled, and sniffled, and looked down ruefully at her foot. It was going to scar. "It's so ugly, now..."

Jin carefully removed his glasses, and looked at the foot anew. The wound seemed like a teenage boy's fervent kiss-bruise on Fuu's young flesh. He slipped the glasses back on. "Ugly is the wrong word."

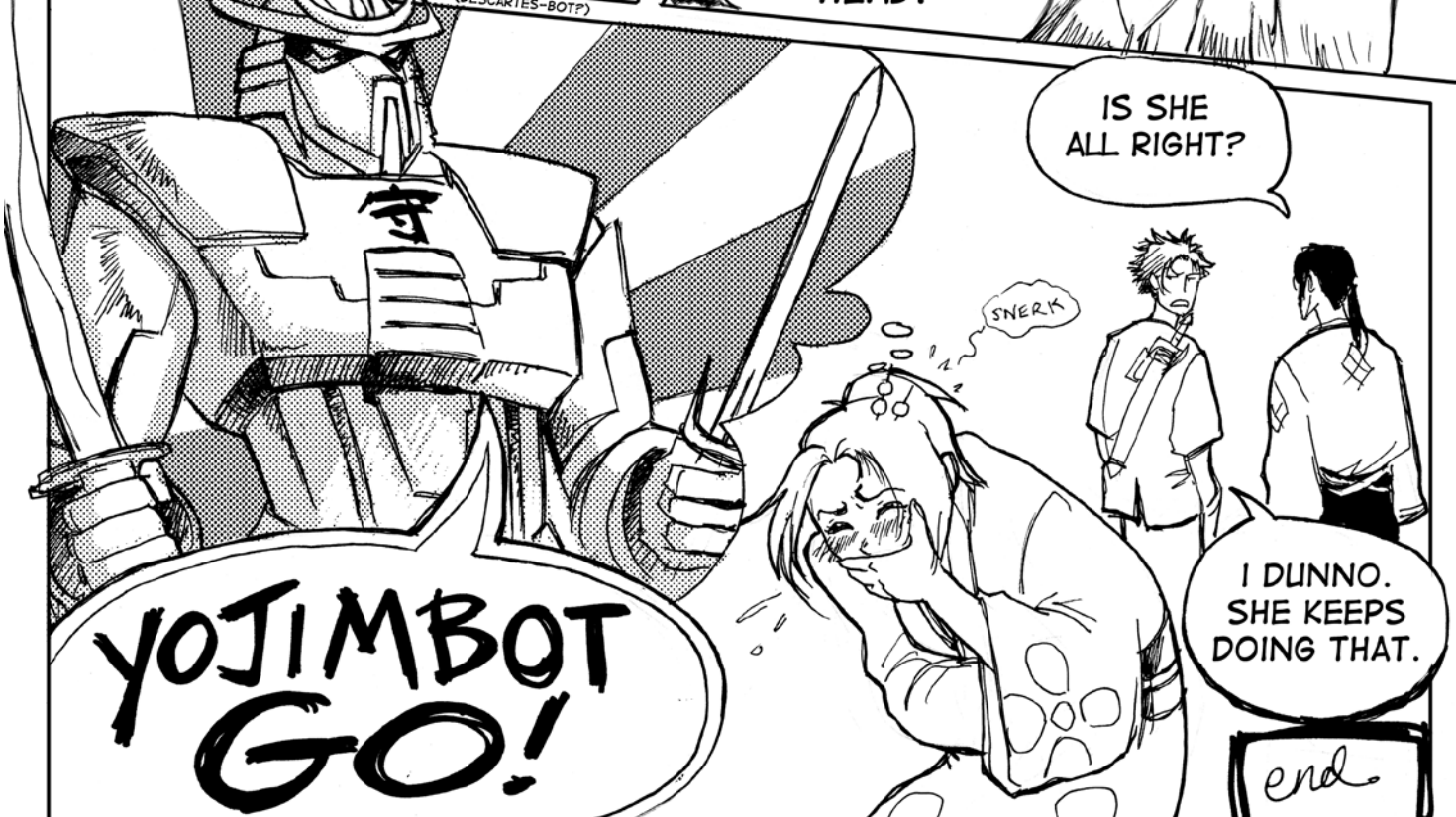
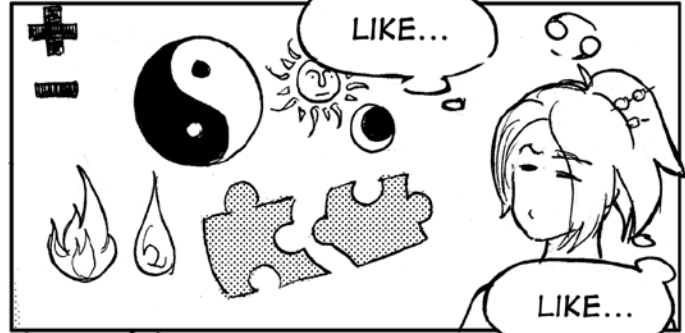
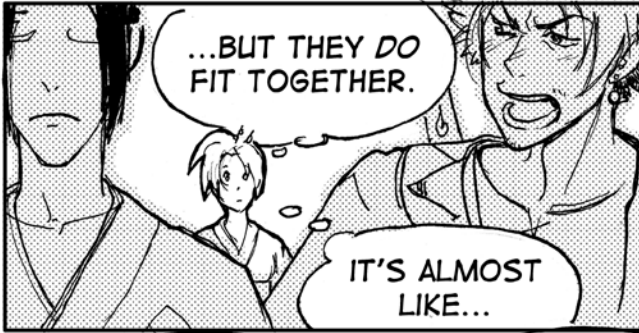
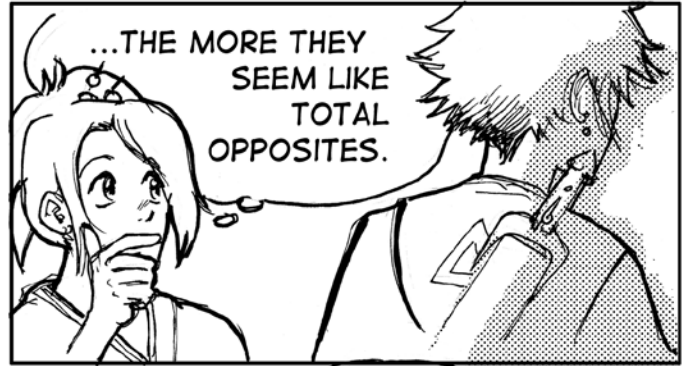
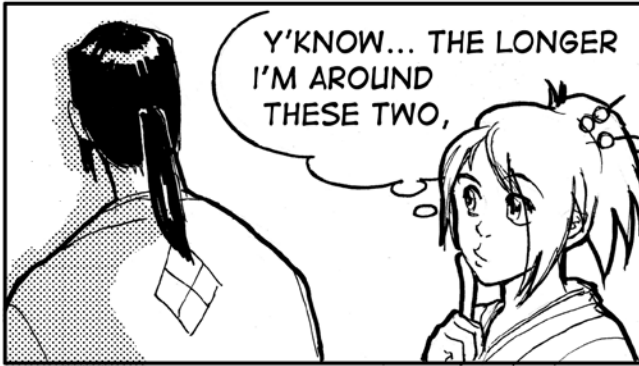
"He and I are both covered in scars," Mugen said. He was staring at the fire. "It's about time you got one, too." He twisted, and pointed at Fuu. "Knowing you, you'll be a princess about it, and demand to be carried everywhere for the next two weeks."

Fuu's hands met her hips. "Is that really so much to ask?"

"I'll get a wrap for the foot," Jin said, and began rummaging for bandages.

"I'm going fishing," Mugen said, and rolled up to his feet. "You can stay here with the vampire, princess." He stretched, and began strolling away. He paused mid-step and looked into a nearby puddle. The others watched him. Mugen's sword sheared the air, and the snake's two halves landed neatly on the fire. They crackled wetly. He left without a word.

end



FUU AND SHINSUKE

BY KENDRA LUEHR

Artist's Note: "This drawing was inspired after seeing the 7th episode where Shinsuke cares for his sick mother. At first I honestly thought he was a horrid little brat, but then he and Fuu got to talking and I fell in love with the idea of them as a couple. :) If he had actually survived, this is kind of how I picture their relationship to be: long walks, sunshine, and lots and lots of love."



WE TWO BOYS, TOGETHER CLINGING

BY FROG

*We two boys together clinging,
One the other never leaving,
Up and down the roads going—North and South excursions making,
Power enjoying—elbows stretching—fingers clutching,
Arm'd and fearless—eating, drinking, sleeping, loving,
No law less than ourselves owning—sailing, soldiering, thieving, threatening,
Misers, menials, priests alarming—air breathing, water drinking,
on the turf or the sea-beach dancing,
Cities wrenching, ease scorning, statutes mocking, febleness chasing,
Fulfilling our foray.*

-- Walt Whitman



It was hot - there was too much moonlight – he couldn't sleep. Yukimaru sat up, pushed off the thin quilt and wrapped his arms around his knees, resting his chin on them. The other boys who shared the room with him were dozing uneasily, too; the dim air was filled with small, soft sounds like a paper box of crickets. That wasn't what was keeping him awake, though – it was knowing that tomorrow they'd share the practice-hall with the senpai, and he'd get to see Jin.

Yukimaru wondered sleepily what moonlight would taste like if you could lick it off your fingers... then he closed his eyes and let his mind slip off to the place it liked to go in the dark. It wasn't always the same place; sometimes there was a waterfall, and a kind of misty light, or a battlefield, all noise and flags, or maybe a temple and incense smoke and the feeling of gods watching, and sometimes it was the trees along the riverbank, but it was always the same two people – himself, and Jin. And they'd be sparring, and Yukimaru would be better than he'd ever been, moving the way you only do in dreams, like dancing, like love, and gradually Jin would lose that look that made him seem so far away, and the long, black eyes would warm, gradually catching fire, until...

...tomorrow.

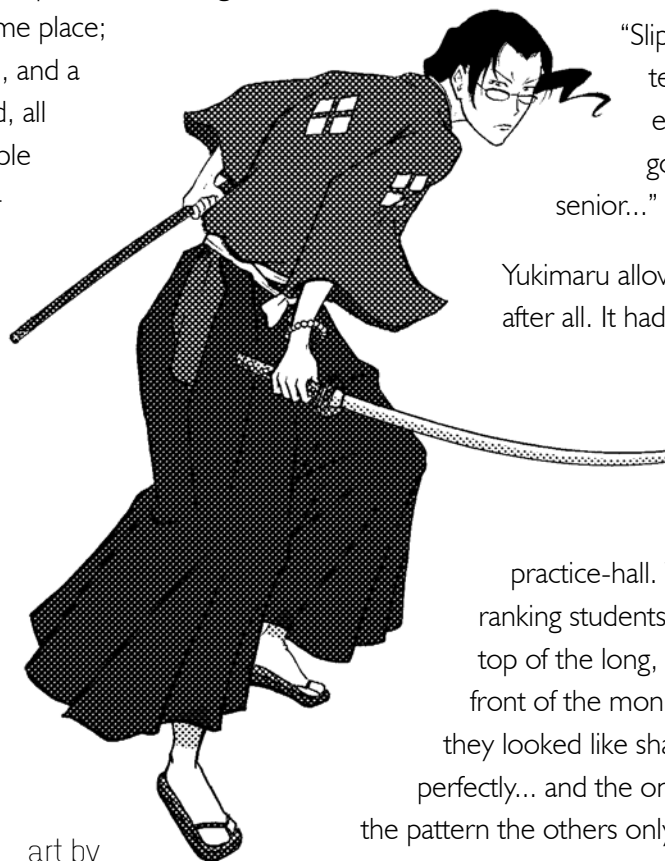
The sound of Tiger hitting the floor made a smile pull at Yukimaru's mouth; it was a kind of damp smack, like a big fish landing on the deck of a boat – or what Yukimaru imagined a big fish landing on the deck of a boat would sound

like, never having been directly exposed to anything so vulgar. Not that he would ever have let the other boy see his triumph – that would have been very bad form, and he quite liked Tiger – so he put away the smile for later, lowered his wooden practice sword and stretched out a hand to his sprawling opponent.

Tiger took it and scrambled to his feet, grinning, good-natured as always in defeat. “Hey, Snowflake, that was brilliant! I never even saw it coming...”

“You slipped,” Yukimaru said, studying his toes modestly. “There must be a wet patch on the floor.”

“Slipped nothing. You're just... better than I am. You're better than everyone, now. Shudo-sensei's going to have to move you up to senior...”



art by
**Catherine
Yen**

Yukimaru allowed a little of the smile to show after all. It had been a good move. Fast. Graceful. Unexpected. His trademarks. He flicked the damp hair out of his eyes, using the movement to disguise a quick sideways glance across the practice-hall. The half-dozen or so highest-ranking students were finishing their drill at the top of the long, high-raftered room, lined up in front of the monitor's bench. In their grey jackets they looked like shadows of each other, moving perfectly... and the one, the most perfect of all, making the pattern the others only followed – *Jin*...

Yukimaru realized he'd been holding his breath and let it escape slowly. “Come on, Tora-kun, let's go get a drink before Shudo sees we're not doing anything.”

They'd have to pass the seniors to get to the water jar. Yukimaru slid a surreptitious look at the monitor – Shudo always reminded him of a story he'd heard when he

was little, about a haunted pool – a beautiful pool with a smooth, dark surface, but if you went close to admire the reflection of the willows, something would break through from beneath the skin of the water, something with long arms and claws to drag you in... he fought down a superstitious shudder. Stop that; he's only a man, not a demon. Just don't catch his eye.

Letting Tora get a little ahead of him, Yukimaru re-tied his jacket, arranging the collar to reveal small suggestions of throat and shoulders – nothing obvious, just...

"Morinobu." Shudo-sensei's low, dangerous purr froze Yukimaru where he stood. He resisted the urge to pull his collar back up and duck; instead, he managed a proper bow, the wooden sword suddenly slippery in his hands.

"Sensei?"

"Since you appear to be idle, I am assuming you've beaten everyone possible in your own group. Perhaps you need a challenge, Morinobu-sama..." A taste of poison had crept into the purr, and Yukimaru tried not to meet the monitor's eyes, focusing instead on his fan as it moved lazily back and forth below the man's handsome face. Shudo turned his head with a studied precision that made even Yukimaru look clumsy, and eyed his seniors. "A challenge... Jin. Jin-kun, perhaps you'd like to amuse Master Morinobu a little?"

The tone in which Shudo said Jin's name made Yukimaru glance up, startled. It was like one of those kisses that ends in a bite... he dropped his eyes again hurriedly, feeling his face go hot. His particular friends had oozed a little closer to watch, and there were a few half-murmured protests that, good as Snowflake was, he shouldn't have to fight the best of the senpai –

"Be quiet, children," Shudo said, without looking at them. "Jin."

Jin said nothing, moving out into the open space at the center of the floor with the hard-edged grace that was so unexpected if all you looked at was the long limbs and the thin, delicate wrists.

Yukimaru thought he heard Jin sigh as the senior took up the opening position of a challenge bout.

"Morinobu. Your attention, please?"

"Go on, Snowflake-san!" someone called, and Yukimaru reminded himself where he was, what he was going to do. Wasn't this, after all, what woke him in the middle of the night, what made him breathe a little more quickly when he thought about it during practice, what made him stare into space during lessons... the two shinai met with a crack that echoed through the silent hall; Jin had attacked and Yukimaru had parried without thought... adrenaline shot through his veins and the bright cold settled over him like sudden snow; the perfect focus came... he found himself responding instantly, instinctively, even taking over the attack, driving his opponent back several steps with a combination he invented just that moment... watching Jin's eyes... *better than he'd ever been, moving the way you only do in dreams, like dancing, like...*

The impact of his body striking the floor drove the breath out of him; the view of the ceiling he suddenly had was unexpected, and his wrist hurt where it had got twisted under him somehow as he fell. He hadn't even felt the blow that knocked him off his feet. The blunt end of a shinai was pressing into the pit of his stomach, holding him down.

"Students may dismiss," he heard Shudo say through the beating of the blood in his ears, and the small rumble of feet on the echoing wood. Then silence. The end of the practice sword trailed up along his chest, his throat, under his chin until it was forcing his head back.

Yukimaru felt a sting behind his eyes and made himself take a hard breath. This wasn't how it ended...

"Don't cry," Jin said, so quietly Yukimaru could hardly hear him. The shinai was withdrawn and the senior was bending over him, pulling him to his feet by the front of his jacket.

"Tell yourself it doesn't hurt," the rapid murmur went on, the narrow hands passing over him as if checking for damage. "Make yourself believe it. Then no one can touch you."

Fingers closed around Yukimaru's jaw, moving his head back and forth.

There was an infinitesimal hesitation, then a moment's pressure of a finger against his lips, and the voice, barely a sound. "And don't... look at me that way."

Jin suddenly dropped his hands and stepped back, saying, "He's all right, Sensei-sama."

"Oh, good. I'd hate to think we damaged our little *hina-ningyo* warrior."

The monitor rose to his feet, flicking his fan closed and tucking it into his sash. He stepped down from the platform and moved towards the door, glancing at Yukimaru as he passed.

"Next time, you'll see it coming, won't you, *hina-chan*? Next time we take you off the shelf to play with you."

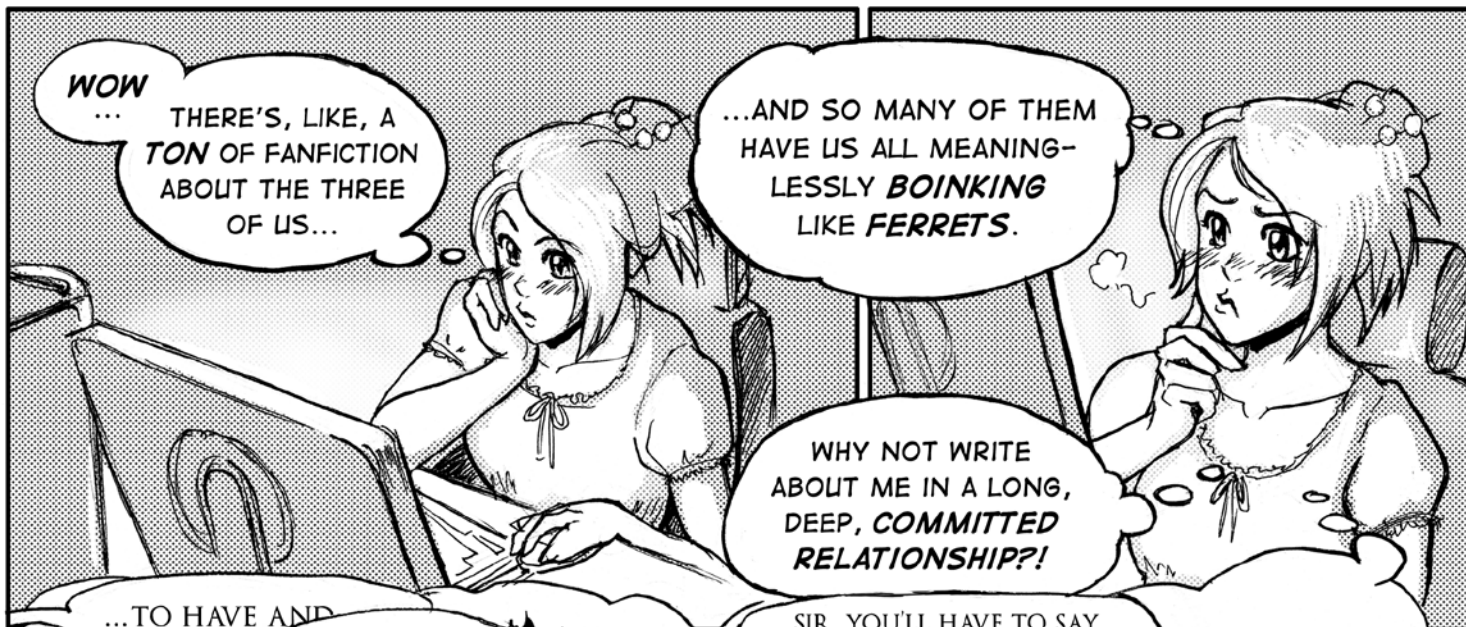
Yukimaru heard neither the threat nor the insult; didn't see Shudo leave or Jin turn at the door and look back, though he quivered as if he might have felt the brush of that last regard...

He stood wrapped in a darkness he'd woven himself, hair in his face and the taste of moonlight on his lips.

end



art by
bigbigtruck



WOW
... THERE'S, LIKE, A
TON OF FANFICTION
ABOUT THE THREE
OF US...

...AND SO MANY OF THEM
HAVE US ALL MEANING-
LESSLY **BOINKING**
LIKE **FERRETS**.

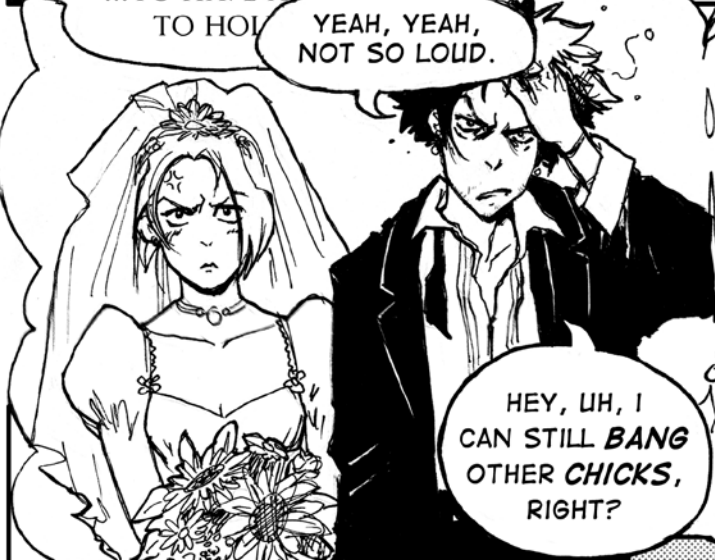
WHY NOT WRITE
ABOUT ME IN A LONG,
DEEP, **COMMITTED**
RELATIONSHIP?!

...TO HAVE AND
TO HOLD

YEAH, YEAH,
NOT SO LOUD.

SIR, YOU'LL HAVE TO SAY
SOMETHING OTHER THAN "HM"
DURING THIS CERMONY.

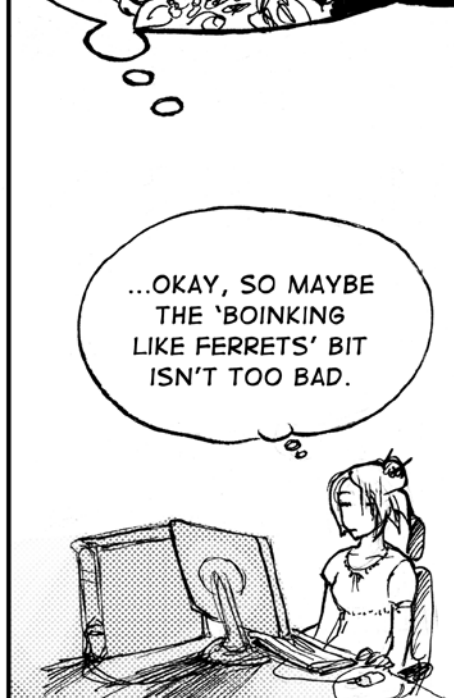
AH.



HEY, UH, I
CAN STILL **BANG**
OTHER **CHICKS**,
RIGHT?



THAT...
THAT DOESN'T
COUNT.



...OKAY, SO MAYBE
THE 'BOINKING
LIKE FERRETS' BIT
ISN'T TOO BAD.

**THIRTY
MINUTES
LATER**



HERE,
LOOK...

I CAN READ
MY NAME
AND **YOUR**
NAME...

BUT WHAT THE CRAP
DOES "N-C-ONE-SEVEN-
Y-A-O-I" SPELL?
...THAT SOME **STAR TREK** THING?

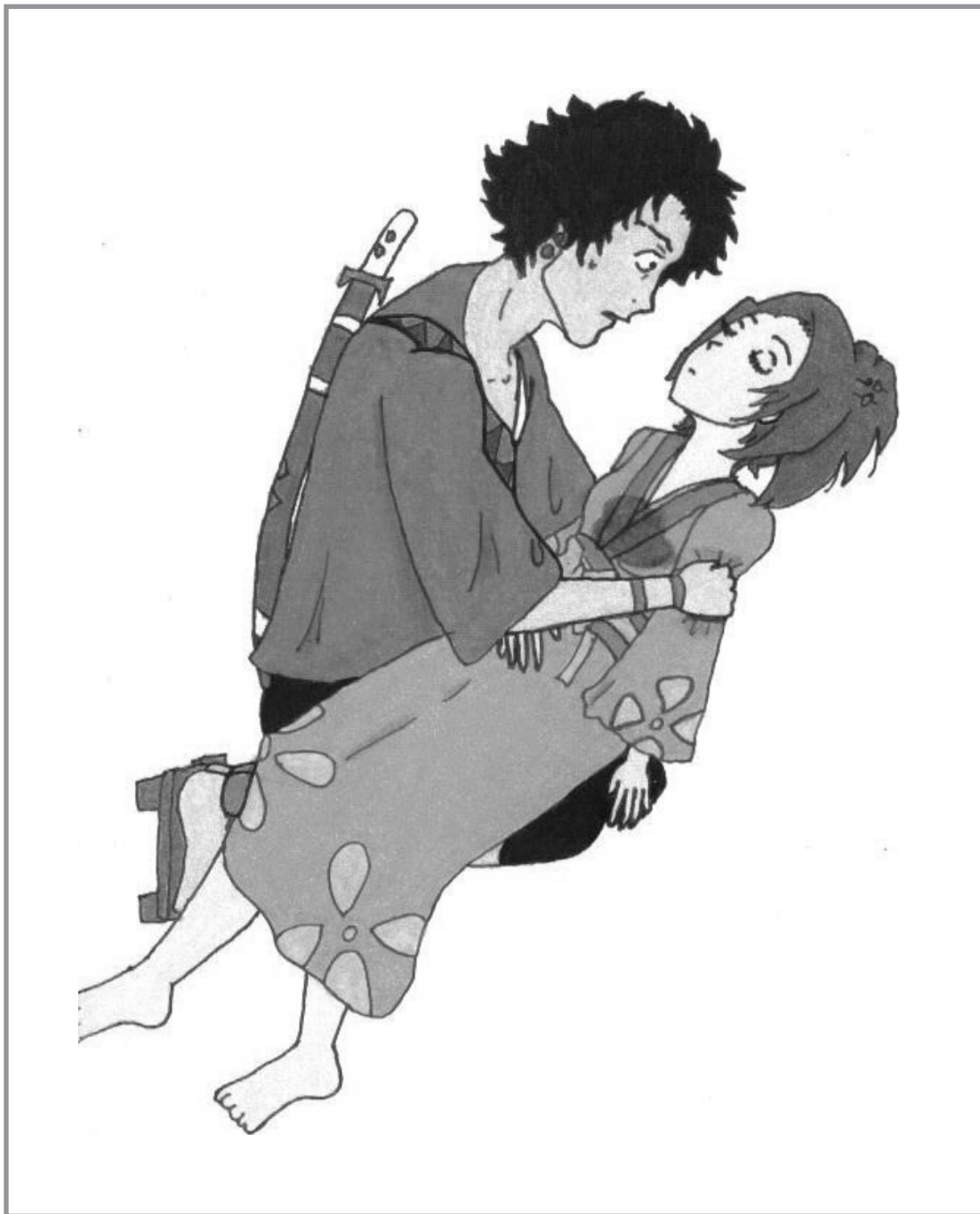
END. (FUU, DON'T LEAVE YOUR BROWSER OPEN.)

IT'S NOT SUPPOSED TO END THIS WAY

BY KENDRA LUEHR

Artist's Note: "This picture was inspired by DeathIsOnlyTheBeginning's fanfic *Can't Take It With You*. This is supposed to be the scene where Fuu tragically died in Mugen's arms after they both came to the realization that they were, indeed, very in love with each other."

Can't Take It With You can be read at: <http://www.fanfiction.net/s/3280408/1/>



UNTITLED (TANKA)

BY HOSHIZORA

戦へど
我が友死なば
我も死ぬ
なんて思つて
ねえよこのやらう

"TATAKAREDO
WAGA TOMO SHINABA
WARE MO SHINU"
NANTE OMOTTE
NEE YO, KONOYARO

"SHOULD WE FIGHT,
AND SHOULD THEN MY COMRADE FALL,
I, TOO, WILL DIE"
MY ASS
YOU MOTHERFUCKER



WAITING

BY SABSQUISITE

“Yo.”

“Sup.”

“This it?”

“Yep.”

“Been here long?”

“Kinda. Said I got some shit to make up for. Whatever. You?”

“Just got here. Sword.”

“Woman.”

“Not a bad way, though.”

“Was fun, I guess. ‘Cept for the vase.”

“Got a light?”

“Nah.”

“Just as well.”

“You see an annoying-ass girl in pink, or a tight-assed samurai?”

“Just how long *have* you been here?”

“Long ‘nuff. Well, have ya?”

“Nope. Just a light. And *them*.”

“Yeah, they’re cool. Mostly leave me alone. Used to visit me a lot back then.”

“Me too. Quiet bastards, though.”

“Mm.”

“You ever miss it?”

“Sometimes. Food, maybe. And fights. Not the girls, though. They say we gotta wait, then maybe we can leave.”

“I don’t miss it.”

“You will.”

“You see a woman come this way?”

“Sorry, buddy. Just me.”

“So we just wait?”

“We wait.”



ADRIFT FOR DAYS

BY BASALT





INTERESTING INTRODUCTIONS

BY SEMPAIKO

Azentaro wandered the small path. He didn't know why his parents walked so slowly. Well, it couldn't be helped anyway, they were always quiet and reserved, almost a typical father and mother; and he respected that.

The journey had been long. It was far too long in his opinion. He didn't share his father's patience. Staying at inns and sometimes the occasional shrine was okay, it wasn't anything thrilling or degrading; it was simply a place to sleep. Although, it would have been so much faster if they took another form of transportation other than their own two feet. But his father, being typical, had gone for the more frugal way.

Azentaro just didn't care for all the walking, especially because he was so much faster than his parents. He didn't stop and enjoy the scenery, rather found it boring and monotonous. He brushed a stray strand of black hair out of his face and looked down at his sandaled feet.

Lately, however, he couldn't shake the weird suspicion that something wasn't quite right with this whole situation. His father was always quiet and –to a sense– mysterious, but lately he could sense he was somehow up to something. The details of the whole trip were left out of conversations when he inquired, and all he had figured out was that they were visiting friends. The whole thing made him apprehensive.

Of course, his father left no clues for him to substantiate his suspicion, but that was almost expected. His father was just one big enigma sometimes, Azentaro thought; the man wore glasses and didn't even need them... oddness.

Azentaro shook his head idly, trying to clear his mind from wandering too much. He should be concentrating on the road...

Road...

He stopped and noticed he was in the middle of a small thicket of woods. Great. How'd he end up here? This had happened several times during their trip, but he always

managed to find his way back to his parents. He couldn't have walked that far away.

He began to try and retrace his steps and find the small road again. He walked for several more minutes until something caught his attention in the distance. He heard grunts and yelling. It sounded like a girl in distress.

He went towards the noises, which seemed to be in a small clearing. He reached the outskirts and saw a girl being attacked by a wild-looking man with a pony-tail and a tattered, gray kimono cut short at the sleeves.

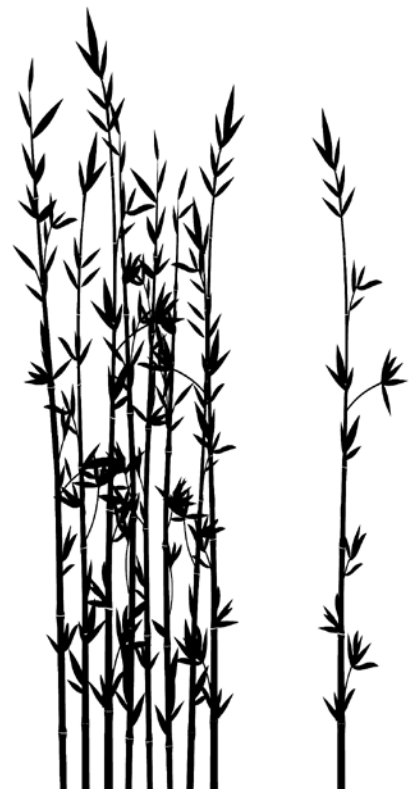
The girl was in red and didn't seem to be doing too well. In fact, it looked like she was losing. She backed away from the man and blocked a few blows he tried to hit her with. The man in gray did a weird cartwheel thing, and tried to kick the girl in the side.

She dodged by leaning to the side awkwardly, almost falling over. The man was quick though and started to swing his hands in to hit her face. She blocked and pushed back against his arms, but fell down into the low grass.

The man seemed to reach into his sleeve as if to maybe grab a knife.

Azentaro couldn't just let the girl be killed, so he jumped into the clearing to help her. He pulled out his bow and arrows that were attached to his back and pulled back and fired at the man's head.

Amazingly, the man seemed to sense it and leaned back almost in a perfect ninety degree angle. How that was even possible for the human backbone, let



alone an old man's backbone, was beyond him.

The girl screamed loudly and fell back, her figure now hidden in the grass. The older man whipped back up and turned to the source of the arrow, pointing a very annoyed finger at him.

"Hey asshole, watch where you practice, huh?!" The man exclaimed, glaring angrily at Azentaro. The man's eyes squinted as if he recognized him, but that was impossible since he didn't even know who this crazy old man was.

"I wasn't practicing." Azentaro replied smoothly, trying not to show any emotion.

"So you were aiming at me on purpose then?" The man growled dangerously, his feral voice full of dominance and anger.

"Hmm." Azentaro answered and they stared at each other as a cool breeze blew through the field.

Both opponents faced off, waiting for the other to make a move-

"Argh!" Azentaro choked as something lunged at him from behind. He barely realized it was the girl he had been saving... and she was choking him!

"You bastard! Why were you trying to kill my father you jerk!" The girl screamed as she struggled on his back. Azentaro fell to his knees, the girl still on him, strangling him to death.

"I... ga-was trying to... save... augh!" Azentaro managed before there was a slight shift of wind and he noticed a pair of familiar, sandaled feet in front of his face.

The girl had stopped and was face to face with a seemingly very sharp samurai sword. The gleam of the flawless metal shined into her hazel eyes. She followed the long sleek line of metal to a very stern-faced, pale man.

He was older, with long black hair that had two streaks of white on either side of his face. His dark eyes were framed

by delicate glasses sitting atop a slender nose.

She couldn't help but be mesmerized and intimidated by this man. He had a cocky placid look that just made her want to resist. She noticed as a tiny hint of a smirk twitched on the man's thin lips.

Just when she wondered where her delinquent father was to protect her against this samurai, she saw him idle up and put an elbow on the samurai's shoulder as if they were pals! What was going on?!

"You have a pretty rude son, ya know. He tried to put an arrow through my head." Her father said mockingly, pushing off his shoulder to fold his arms haughtily.

The samurai raised an eyebrow and lifted his sword away from the two and sheathed it. "That's odd."

He father scoffed. "Why's that?"

"That he missed," the samurai glared up coldly, giving a perfectly timed pause to add, "It is a rather large target."

"What was that, you stuck-up old geezer!" He narrowed his eyes and went to grab for his sword, and realized it wasn't there. He recovered quickly, however, and jabbed a finger at his chest. "You just be glad I left my sword at home today, or you would be dead."

"I highly doubt that." The samurai replied.

"Oh yeah? Don't push your luck, bastard! In a sword fight we all know I'd win!"

"Let's go to your house to retrieve it and settle this."

"Sounds good to me asshole!" They both turned and began to walk away at a brisk pace.

The two teens were left staring at the retreating figures. The girl was still perched against the boy's back, him on his knees, one of his arms rubbing his throat. It was when he noticed the warm body still on him that he began to feel strangely uncomfortable; well, that was the word he chose to describe his current, foreign emotion.

She realized it too and jumped up from him and put her hands on her hips as she stared after the fading figures. "Fathers are idiots." She huffed angrily. She looked down at the guy she had been strangling moments before. "C'mon, dummy, dinner's almost ready."

She began to walk away, her hands behind her head, trying to hide her blush. She hadn't missed the fact that he was quite handsome, almost a spitting image of the older man with the sword.

He paused a moment, still stunned. "W-wait! Who are you?"

The girl stopped and turned her head and glared at him with fierce, intense eyes that made him catch his breath. "The name's Aya. Remember that!"

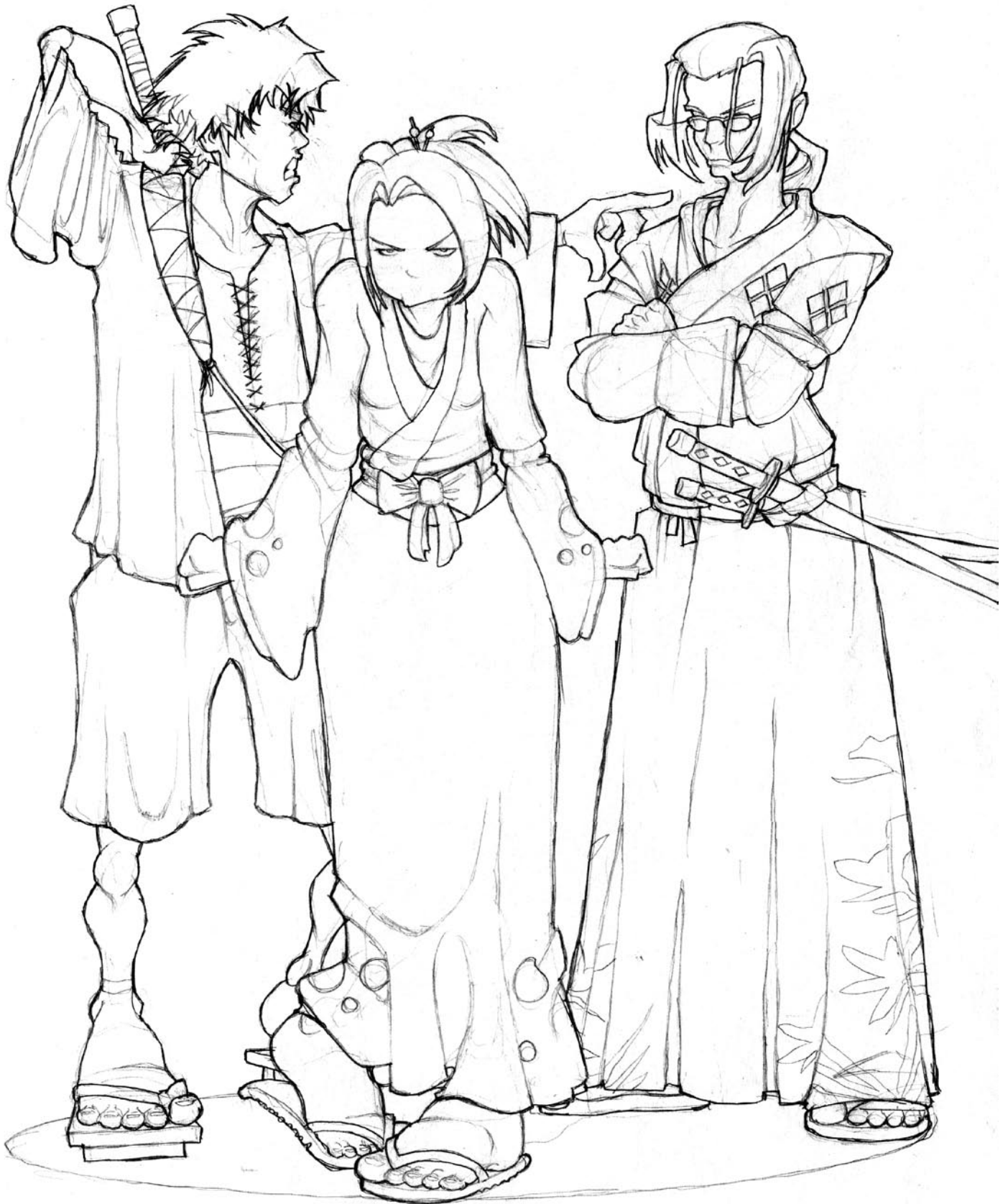
He stood and straightened up, fixing his collar, his own small blush veiled by the fading light of sunset. "Azentaro. You'd do well to remember mine too."

Their eyes met and they knew that this interesting introduction was only the preface to an even greater experience they would surely share with each other in the future.

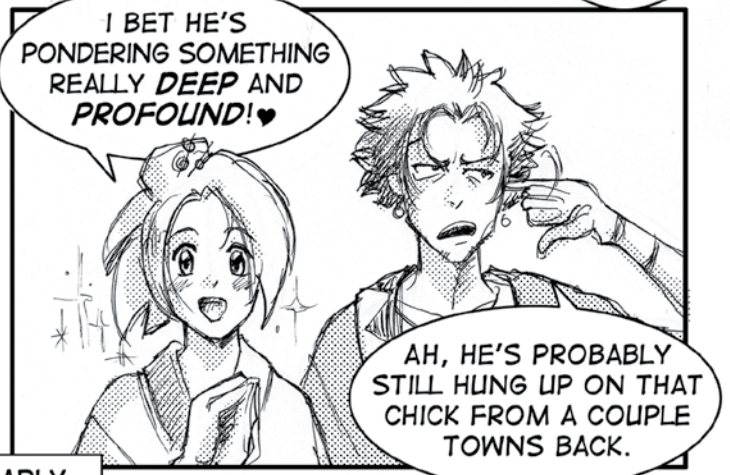
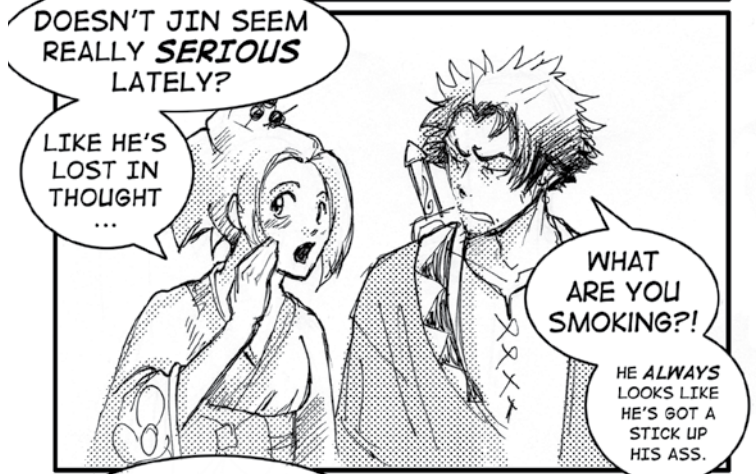
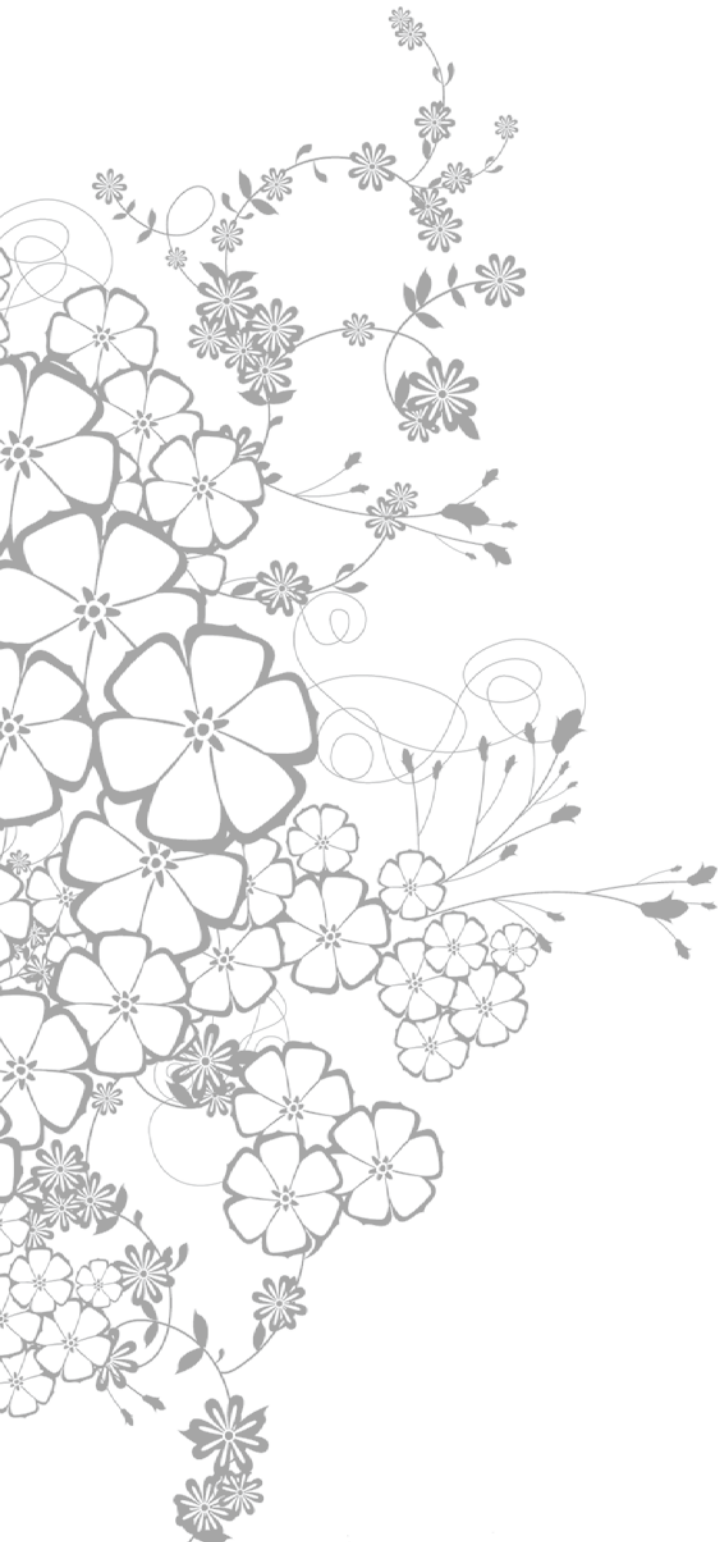
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art by
Sempaiko



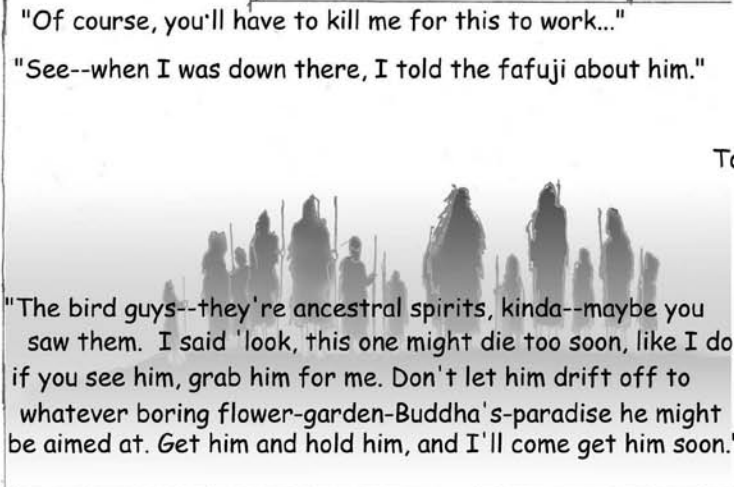
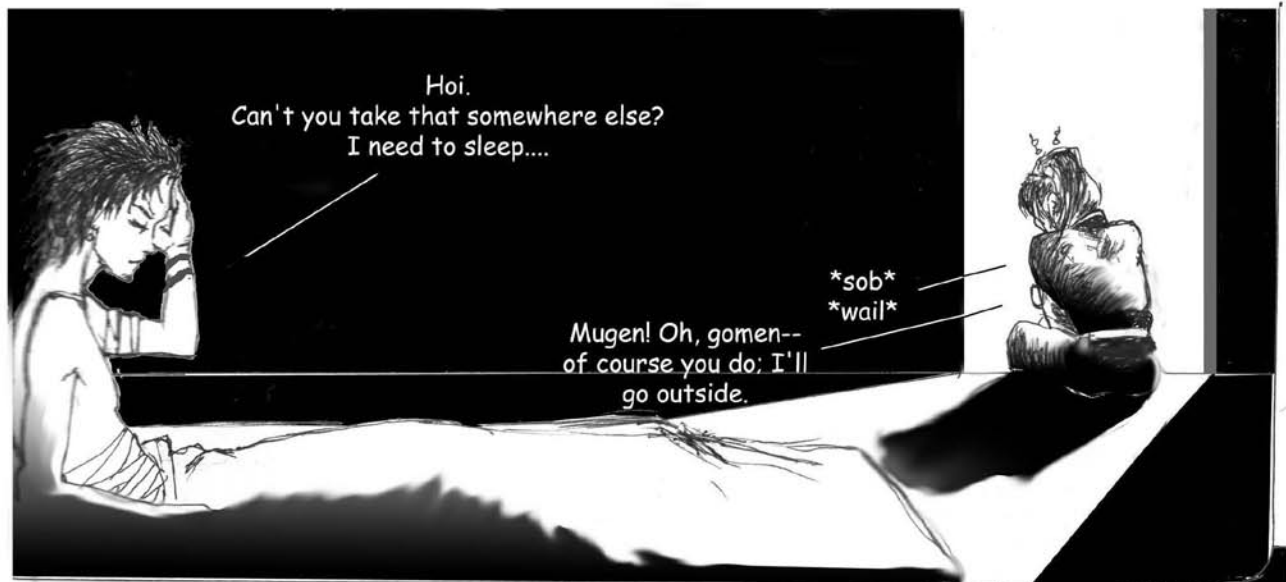
JIN'S REALLY DEEP THOUGHTS



HAMA-URII

STORY: MARIPHASA HECATENE
ART: JUDY RENEE POPE

In the dim light of pain and silence, Mugen has this dream...
He wakes up, because Fuu is still crying, and he doesn't know why.



They aren't, quite. 'Sides. they know me by now....

You'd really do a thing like that?

Course I did. Can't let him die for no reason--we have to settle things. And those ones've always listened to me, ever since I was a kid.

But anyway--I have to be dying to get there. So, here. Right under this rib--see? It's sharp; it'll be easy.

You're very sick. You need to go back to sleep

You think I'm just dizzy, right?

You must be, if you think I'd nurse you and worry about you all the time, and then...

I swear he's not really gone. He's sitting on the shore of Nirai-Kanai, poor bastard, no one there speaks Japanese and he has no idea what's what and he will be 'til I go bring him back.

..and then just... How could I do that? Aren't enough people dead? Aren't...

Fuu...

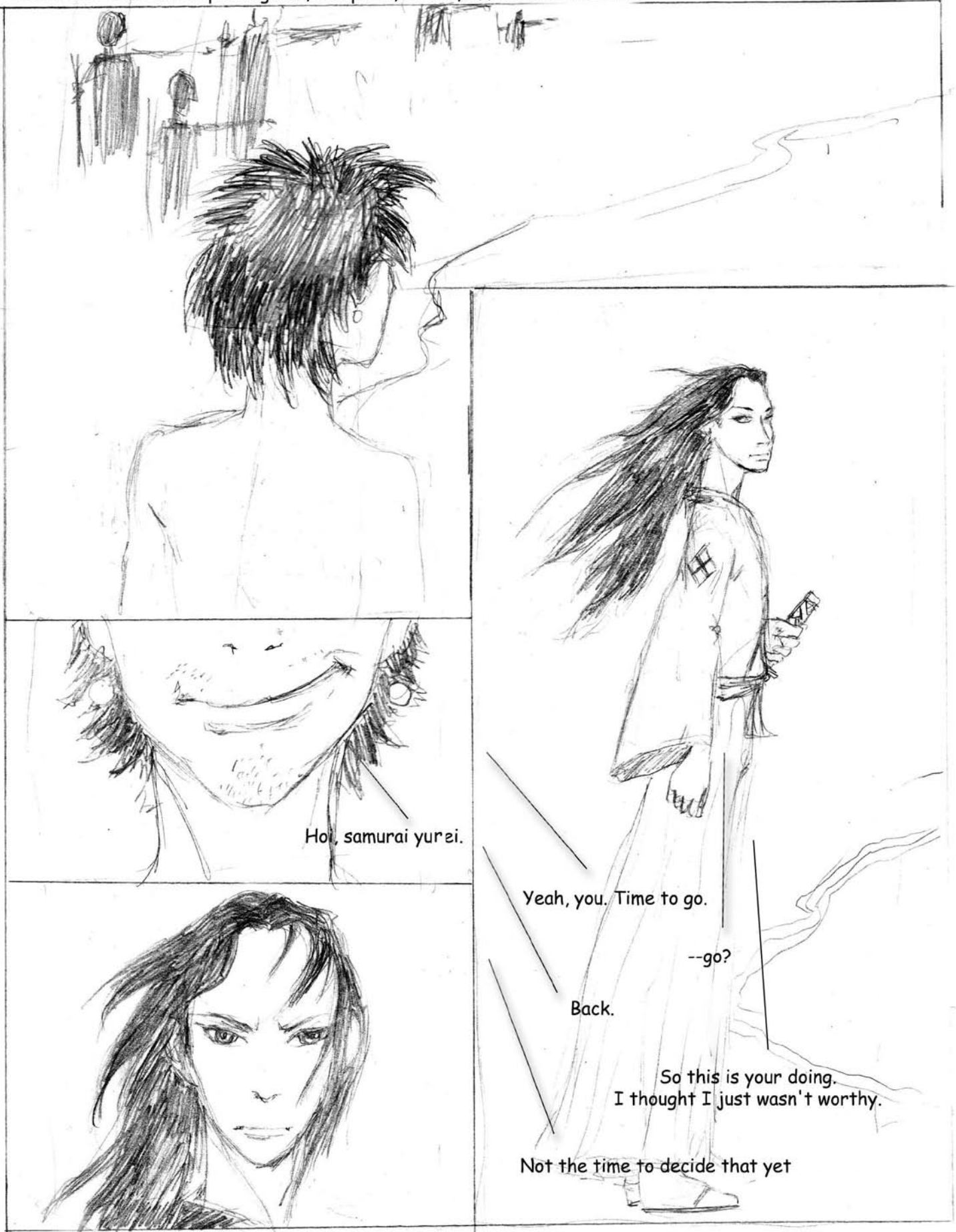
He's really in that place?

"Even if you're right, I can't do this."

"OK< OK. Give me back my knife, I'll do it myself.."

Nirai Kanai. The undersea island. Where the southern gods are. He's there, all right.

The Silent Ones are expecting him, and point, as one, off across the shore.



"c'mon..."



You did this on purpose, didn't you.

Yeah, well...
Only way she'd stop crying.

You know what I mean.



I did.
And you know why.

But your promise to me, and mine to you, that has got to mean more...



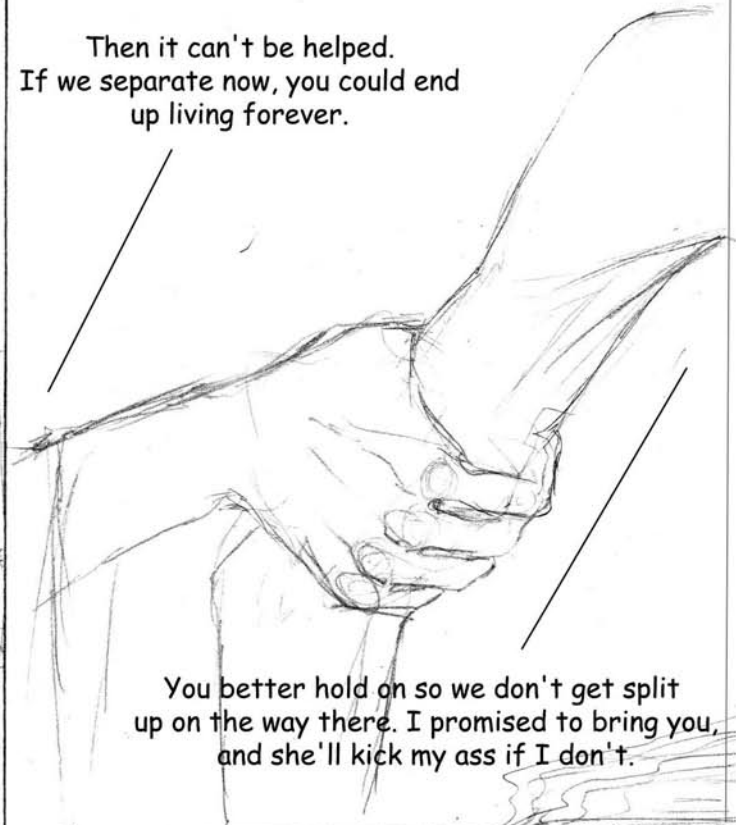
We'll have to walk straight out from here, if we're gonna go back.



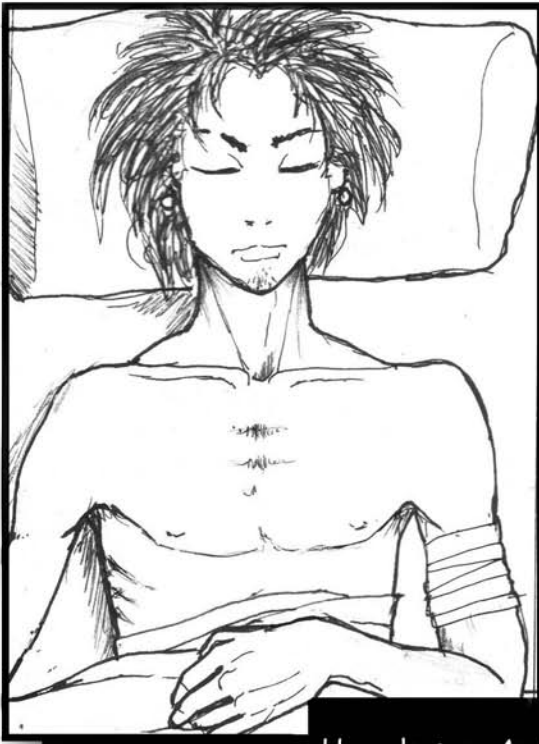
And they're letting you leave again?

Yep.

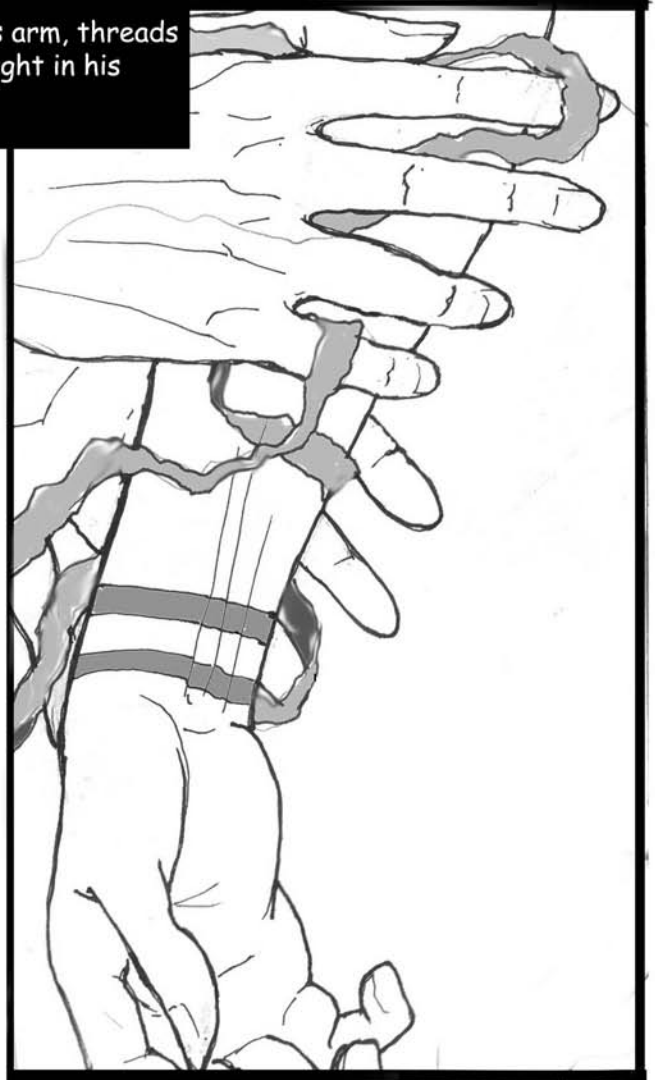
Then it can't be helped.
If we separate now, you could end up living forever.



You better hold on so we don't get split up on the way there. I promised to bring you, and she'll kick my ass if I don't.



He wakes up. And they're both there.
Salt water from ewet hair runs into
his eyes.
And Jin is still holding his arm, threads
of black seaweed caught in his
fingers.



A GIRL AND HER DICE

BY KIMPER

Watching the dice fly from her hand, she paused dramatically, waiting for them to return to her. She'd always had an affinity for playing dice it seemed. She remembered when they'd first made an appearance in her life.

She'd started as a way to fit in with the boys in her town. After her father had left, a lot of the other mothers had kept their daughters away from her, always conveniently busy when she wanted to play. There was always some excuse; some reason the other girls weren't allowed to come out.

At first she had moped around town, sad, lonely since losing her friends. They were girls she had grown up with, played with since she was old enough to walk. All of them had sworn to be friends always. Always apparently wasn't nearly as long in their books. Turning down a side alley one day, she'd found a group of boys playing a game with dice. They were throwing them, bouncing them, slinging this way and that, while always managing to catch them and continue whatever game they were playing. She had been fascinated from that first glance by the graceful way the dice flew, held captive by the way the roller acted dramatically throughout the entire event. Then and there she had discovered her desire to own a set of dice.

The boys though, they were much less picky. She had been a bit of a novelty to them. They hadn't known any other females that would roll in the dirt, spit, plays swords, and roll dice with them. She had never even touched a die before her abandonment, considering it a very unladylike endeavor. Only those loose women from the shady part of town played games of chance, or so she'd always been told. But as a

child, it seemed better to be slightly misbehaved than lonely, thus she'd chosen her path.

Over the years, she'd played on many occasions, the now young men making her their official dice roller as they grew older. They'd play against each other, applauding all her new tricks. She'd worked very hard to impress them, after all they were the only friends she had. It had gotten to the point where they would sit with her and help her create new tricks. As time progressed, she noticed them doing this more and more.

Wherever she went, one of her friends was with her - always talking to her, helping her, following her, something all the time. It had started to kind of bother her, as she really couldn't figure out what was different now than it had been a year ago.

At first, she'd really enjoyed the attention. The companionship she'd never received from anyone else. It had been nice to feel like somebody who was wanted, someone who was popular. She'd reveled in the attention for quite awhile.

That was before she'd overheard the neighborhood ladies talking one day. She'd been walking up the alley, lost in her own world, alone for once, thinking of new tricks to use in their next dice game. Right before she'd reached the end, she'd heard the ladies talking. What they'd said next, she would never forget. It was etched in her brain until the end of time.

"That girl, running around with the all the boys like that. Why, it's downright indecent."

"I always knew she was a bad girl, the little slut. What



art by
Catherine Yen

proper young lady goes around rolling dice for a bunch of young men. She's alone with them all the time now."

"Ever since her father left, she's been running wild. The mother's odd too though. She never visits with anyone. She's always alone. "

"Something must be wrong with both of them to have run the father off. He was always such a nice man, helpful and polite."

She'd fallen to her knees in the alley then, crying. So apparently that's what all the boys were interested in. Not her friendship, not her tricks, not her personality, only in one thing. After sobbing out her sorrows, she'd picked herself up off the ground, not bothering to wipe away the mud, and walked slowly back to her mother's. Turning up the path to their house, she'd stopped. She'd have to think of some way to keep this away from her mother. There had to be a way to keep her from being hurt, she just had to think of it.

Waking up the next morning, Fuu tucked her dice into the pocket of her kimono, tied her hair up nicely, and washed her face. She walked out into the main room, prepared to help her mother with breakfast. Determined to be the daughter she should have been all along. Not finding her mother, she walked out the door, hearing a noise coming from beside the small house.

She'd found her mother then, coughing and weak, collapsed upon the grass. She'd grabbed her hand, throwing her mother's arm over her shoulders and helped her inside. Taking her to her bedroom, she'd laid her mother down on the futon then ran to get the doctor.

It had been the beginning of the end. She'd waited too long and now it wouldn't make any difference how she dressed or acted, her mother would never know.

After her mother had passed on, she'd packed up what she could carry before she was forced to leave their house. She had nowhere else to store any of the things she wanted,

nor any friends with whom she could stay. She carefully wrapped up a small painting of her mother and father that was older than she was, and well worn from many years of being petted in place of the man who should've been there. She'd wrapped up her mother's comb and mirror, hoping to be able to keep that little piece with her always. And she'd packed her dice, twirling them with her hand in her pocket as she walked, figuring that she had enough tricks now to support herself if she had to.

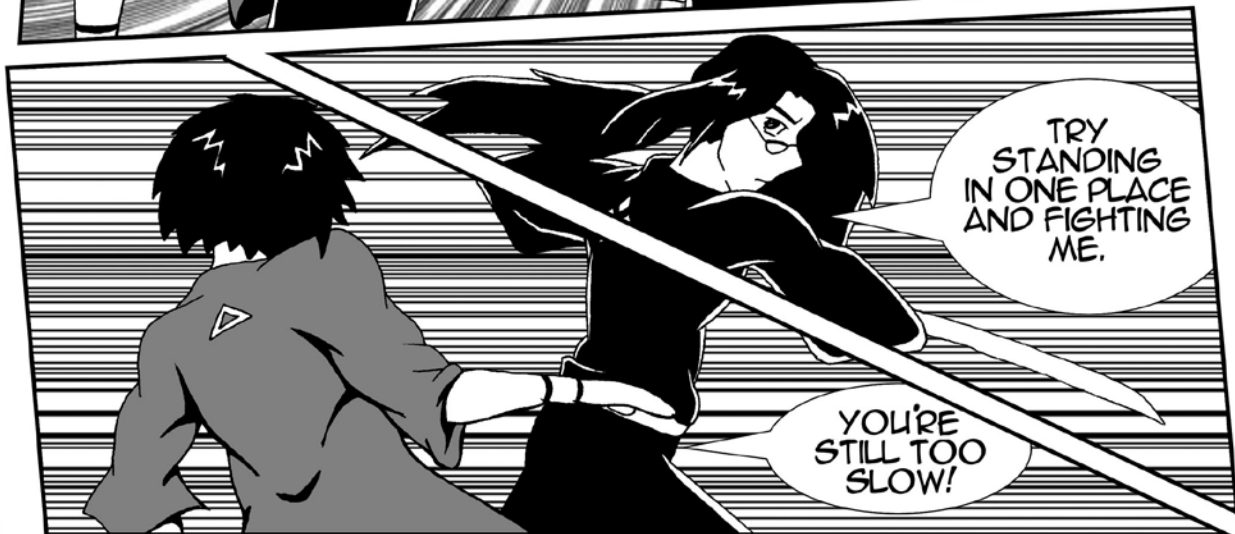
Bringing herself back to the present she slammed the now caught pair down on the table, waiting anxiously to see how the bet would play out.

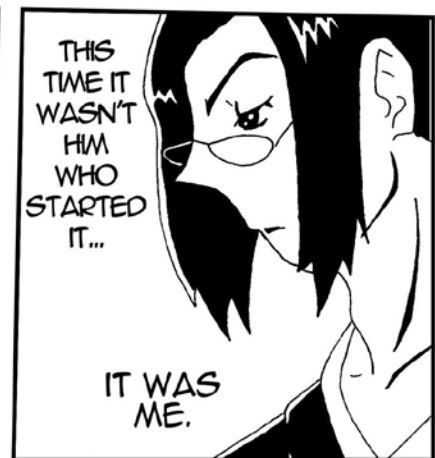
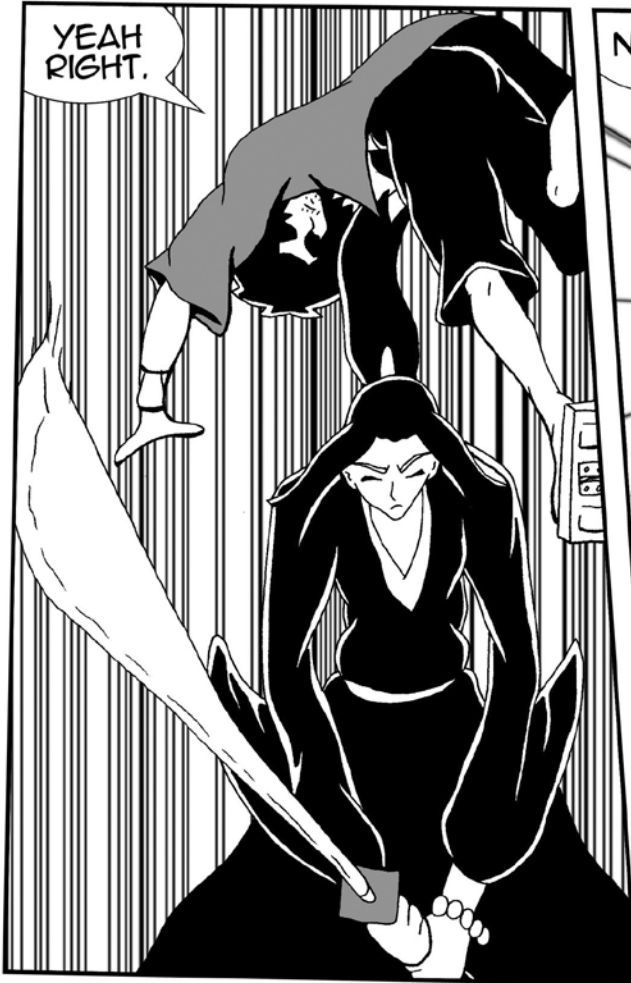
She'd certainly learned many, many things through those dice over the years. They had brought her friendship, truth, and change. Now hopefully they would bring her prosperity.

end









WANDERINGS REDUX

BY LAURA BRYANNAN

Note: This story is an offshoot of Laura Bryannan's *Wanderings* fan fiction, which can be read at <http://www.homestar.org/bryannan/champloo/> (explicit content; yaoi)

Author's Note: Written for a deserving friend who has bemoaned the lack of Jin/Mugen fluff in the world, here is a *Wanderings* What If. What if Jin returned to meet Mugen instead of going to Nagasaki alone? Probably OOC, but them's the breaks. Jin/Mugen shounen-ai.

Walking away from each other the next day almost felt like a game. I headed off to get something to eat and then went back to our tree. It seemed like the most obvious place to hang if I wanted to find him again...

...and damned if he didn't show up! Something inside me suddenly felt lighter, and I tried to keep from grinning but couldn't.

"Hey," he said, sitting down next to me, shoving his shoulder into mine.

"I was hoping you'd come," I admitted.

"I almost didn't. It would have been hard to discover you'd chosen Fuu."

"I thought about it, a lot even, but she didn't seem to wanna hang with me this past month so...." I shrugged and he nodded. I was pretty sure I knew the answer, but I needed to ask anyway. "Did you think about it?"

He gave me this bemused look like he knew I knew, but answered anyway. "No, Mugen, I didn't."

"Should we check out her father's place to see if she's waiting?"

"Yes."

So we did. I half expected her to be hanging in the doorway scowling cuz we took too long to get back, but she was gone. Nagasaki, they said. We followed, mainly cuz it was the logical place to start our journey too. Jin got a job

as a bouncer, I did my thing here and there, and we made enough to rent a place near the port.

We never talked about it, but I knew we were waiting for Fuu to show up again. I really thought she would. I stuck my nose in tons of different Fuu-type places and ignored the death glances I got in the swankier tea houses, but I never found her. Toward the end we even roamed the red light districts in case she got her crazy ass captured again, but we never found her whoring either.

Finally the urge got too strong. Winter was coming and I wanted to be back at sea heading somewhere warm, but not alone. Me and Jin were still too ripped up to fuck, but I could do my persuading as we lay together that night making out. I didn't start talking till he was all kiss drunk and sighing.

"I want to get outta this country," I announced. "Let's buy passage on a ship somewhere."

"Where do you want to go?"

"I don't give a shit. Anywhere there's not assholes trying to kill us, K?"

The pause was just starting to worry me when he finally said, "All right, I'll go with you." Something inside felt really weird, good maybe. I think I was happy. Even after all that horrible shit and losing Fuu, I wanted to laugh. It was great! I started giggling, but I had to make myself stop cuz it hurt like a sonofabitch. Then I had an inspiration.

"Hey, you remember when I stuck that damn cucumber up your ass?" Shit, I was giggling again. Ow!

He shot me a wary smile. "Yes, Mugen, how could I forget?"

"You said something to me that night that kinda freaked me out."

"I remember."

I could feel my face getting hot but I didn't care, figuring there wasn't enough light in the room to give me away. "So... I love you too."

Eyes wide, he looked stunned but pleased. "I'm glad my feelings are not unrequited."

"Huh?"

He chuckled. "Leaving Japan seems like the right thing to do. It's exciting to contemplate, especially with a partner by my side. I'm suddenly glad you were a pirate."

"You ever been on the ocean before?"

"No."

I snorted. He was in for a few surprises, and hopefully wasn't the seasick type. I waited a bit longer, but it looked like he was dodging the question. "So, you gonna say it back or what?" OK, I'm shameless.

He pulled me down, stopping just short of a kiss. "You're the other half of my soul, Ryukyu Mugen. I love you." And then he laid The Big One on me and my brain got fried. He fell asleep first, like usual, and I watched his expression soften into that angel face he has. Makes me shiver sometimes. He was curled into my chest and his breath was tickling my side, but I didn't mind. My hand lay on his wrist, and I wondered what kinds of prayers he chants when he holds his nenju. I can't imagine what comfort they could bring.

But as my fingers caress each bead in turn and I chant my own prayer, I begin to see the wisdom in it...
mine... mine... mine...

end



SPRING DURING FALL

BY KIMPER

Sighing, he looked over at her. The late afternoon sun falling on her soft, now slightly tanned skin, made her seem to glow. She was the most beautiful person he'd ever met, in body as well as spirit. Too bad she'd never notice how he felt about her. She was single-minded in her pursuit of the sunflower samurai.

Hearing the dried leaves crackling loudly under their feet he looked around the clearing they were entering. The forest was beautiful this time of year, almost ethereal. It was amazing to see, death all around, magnificent, wondrous in its own way. Come spring, the magic of rebirth would happen and be just as awe-inspiring. People, he firmly believed, were like the seasons of the year, resilient. Looking at the lifeless leaves on the ground, he admired and respected them. They did not fight and rail at their inevitable, inescapable destiny. Accepting their demise, they fell quietly to the ground, resigned to their fate.

Mother Nature was not sad as she watched her children fall, she knew that come spring, they would all be reborn and welcomed back into her fold. She would nurture them, nourish and provide what they needed to grow strong, delighting in her precious, fleeting time with them, all the while prepared for the next winter.

Fuu was like the leaves. She took what life handed her and went on, not wasting her time ranting; not protesting to the indomitable fates for all that had befallen her. She had no parents, no home, no money or food most times, but still she was one of the happiest, most optimistic people he had ever known. That was one of the many things that he loved about her.

Watching her from the corner of his eye, he saw her kneeling on the ground, smiling and playing in the crunching leaves with Momo, as if she hadn't a care in the world. He felt his heart swell as warmth rushed through his body, just watching her reassured him that everything was going to turn out okay.

He knew his companions would never leave him be if they knew what he was thinking. They thought him uneducated, rough and he preferred it that way. Anyone who'd ever know about his more intelligent, poetic side had used it against him. He wouldn't have survived on Ryukyu if the others had known he'd been educated. Smiling he thought back to the lonely, older woman he'd encountered one day when he'd been trying to elude the harsh realities of his life. She'd wanted, needed companionship and had taken him under her wing, teaching him as she'd taught her own son so many years before, inadvertently providing the escape he had sought. After she had passed on, he'd had no one to read the thought provoking poetry with, no one to share enlightened discussions of various literature with. He'd secreted away that part of himself, hiding it in order to survive the chaos, the uncertainty of his young existence.



art by
Wellow

Shaking his head to clear it of the disturbing thoughts intruding on the peace of this moment, he made a decision.

Walking over to the edge of the now dimly lit clearing, he heard the sound of water, rushing on its at the journey to meet the ocean. As an idea formed in his mind Mugen smiled.

"Hey Fuu," he called to her, "come here a minute. There's something I want to show ya."

He saw their other companion raise his eyebrows at this, pressing his lips tightly together and saying nothing.

"What is it Mugen?" she asked him curiously as she gracefully got to her feet among the crackling of the dead leaves.

"Just come on, it's a surprise."

Turning, he grinned, hearing her grumblings as she walked over. He grabbed her arm softly in his well worn palm and gently started pulling her toward the gurgling rush of the water.

"Let's go."

Out of sight of the disapproving ronin he let his smile grow even wider. It was now or never.

"Do you hear that?"

The sounds of the water were quite plain now. She looked off the side of the path as recognition dawned, joy at his discovery washing over her features.

"Look over here," he murmured, pulling her behind a tree. Wrapping his arms around her slight figure, he pressed their bodies flush together, glorying in the warmth of her delicate form, and lowered his head swiftly, giving her no time to protest. A faint sigh slipped unconsciously from him as he felt her soft, pliable lips under his. They were as warm and supple as he had imagined. Running his rough, callused hand through her silky hair, he pulled away, looking down at her nervously, almost afraid to see what her reaction would be. Either way though, he decided resolutely, it would be a relief to finally know what her feelings were.

Catching sight of her expression, his lips broke into a triumphant smile. She looked stunned... but happy.

Raising her hand she brushed her fingertips lightly across her slightly reddened lips and smiled.

He watched, caught off guard, as she slowly leaned forward, her lips brushing against his ear, sending immediate waves of electricity through his body, making him shiver. "What took you so long?" she whispered, turning to the path, tossing him a coquettish smile as she went to find the stream.

Although it was fall, Mugen mused to himself, taking a step to follow her, this was definitely the spring of their relationship.

end





Yukimaru, by Judy Renee Poe

You ruined me...
I went to bars and brothels,
but for whatever reason all I
thought about was you...
Damn you!
You ruined me for life!



'Cause I...



...Love only you





THE SPACE BETWEEN US

BY KIMPER

You're walking with him, laughing with him again.

I see the two of you, heads leaning together, sharing in some private thought that I will never hear. The closeness seems to be spreading, growing more between the two of you, sending me farther adrift.

I've tried distancing myself from you, pushing you away without hurting you. I know you don't understand how I feel about you, why I keep closing myself off from you; and I understand that you can't know. Telling you would only be painful for us both over the ever rushing passage of time.

If you cared for me, what would our life be? Constantly battling the next misled samurai wanting to end my life in what he falsely perceives to be justice. If they only knew, if I'd only known then I would have stayed, would have fought to clean the slate.

Now it's too late for me, I can never be exonerated, can never have you, hold you, love you. He's free to be with you, I'm a dead man walking with a woman waiting, secluded on an island. I wish I could take back the time I spent trying to drown out your image, attempting to erase you from my mind. That's all she was you know, my endeavor to escape, to wash you away, to make life easier for the both of us.

Instead, illusion gained speed, picked up momentum, and now I know she will be there waiting, hoping for my return when her time is up; when all I want is to forget that mistake, that lapse of judgment.

I'm sorry, Fuu, if only we mere mortals had the ability to change the past, to alter our fate.

I wonder if you would understand if I told you; although it would serve no real purpose. I'm a wanted man, a hunted criminal. While you, you're a young girl with your entire future ahead of you, a bright future of your own choosing.

Although, I really don't understand what you see in him, a pirate, a vagrant. I would choose, would hope better for you. Mugen does have his own twisted sense of honor, of loyalty. A better friend I will, in all probability, never have.

Only... he's not me.

It hurts to see, but there's nothing to be done. I'm not a stranger to pain, denial. I will survive, albeit I am getting tired of just surviving, of just getting by on the crumbs of life and never enjoying the meal.

I cannot expect, would never want you to sacrifice yourself so that I may satiate my hunger. I would rather starve on those damn crumbs than cause you pain.

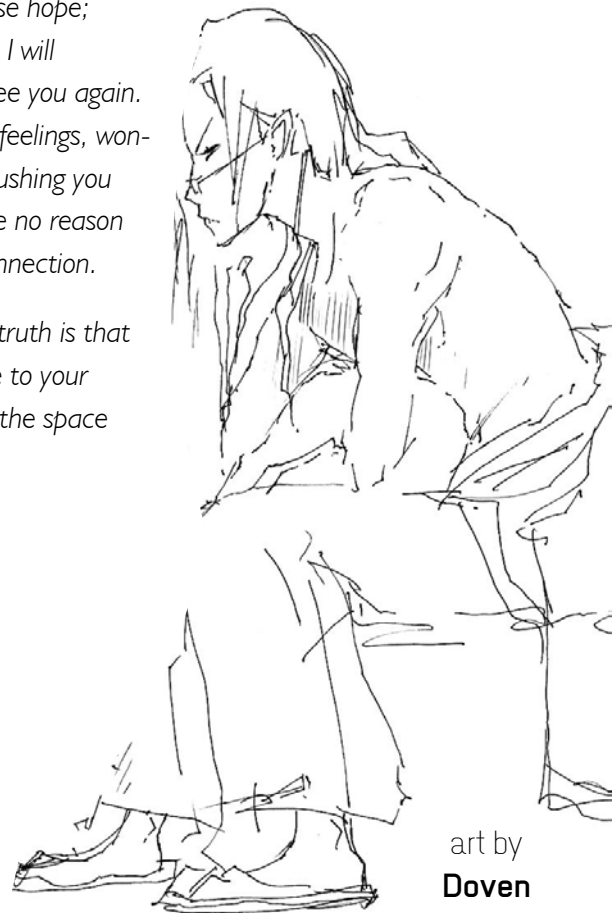
I don't know what I can do.

Occasionally, in my dreams, my hidden desires make themselves known. It's for the best if you never realize, but sometimes it leaks through the cracks in my frozen, aching heart. My soul begs, screams for you to choose me, want me, love me. Save me, Jin, the cold, unlovable, lost ronin. Hold me to you and guide me, be my map through this barren wasteland that is my life.

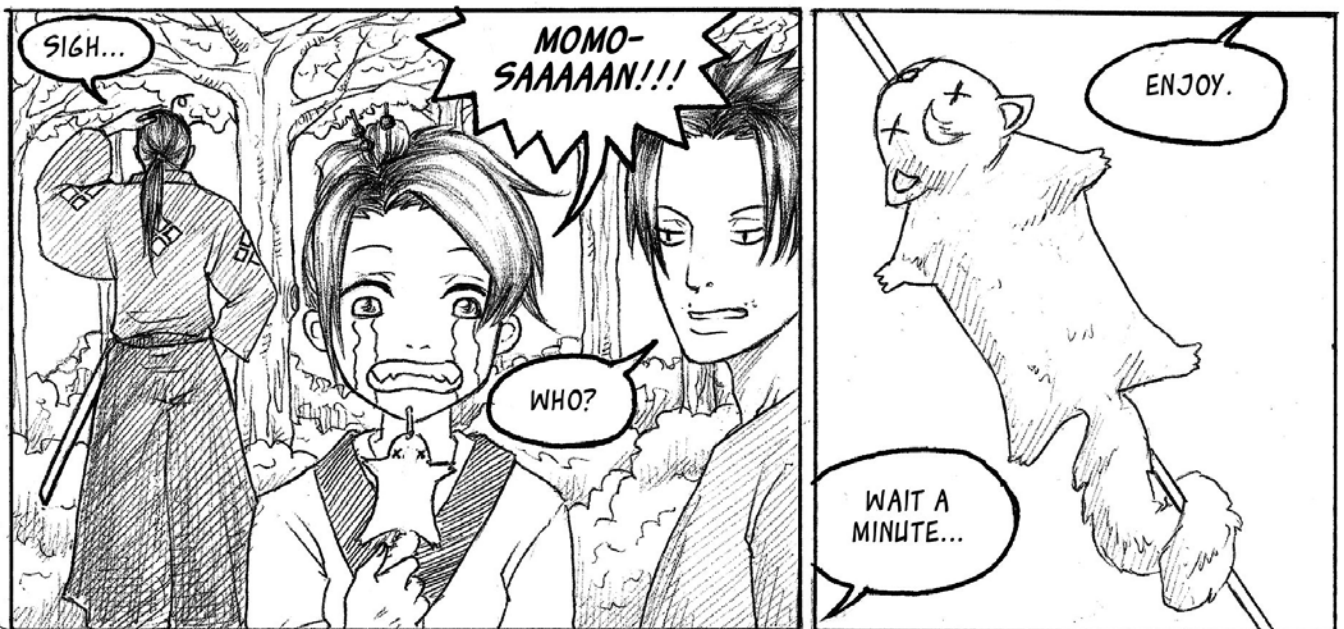
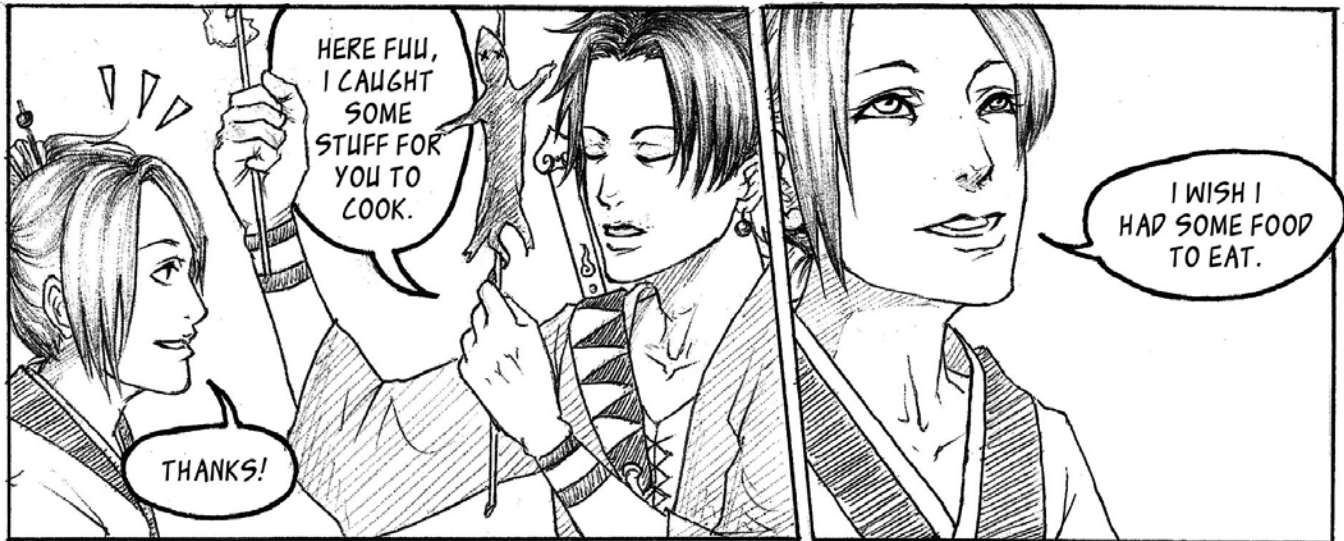
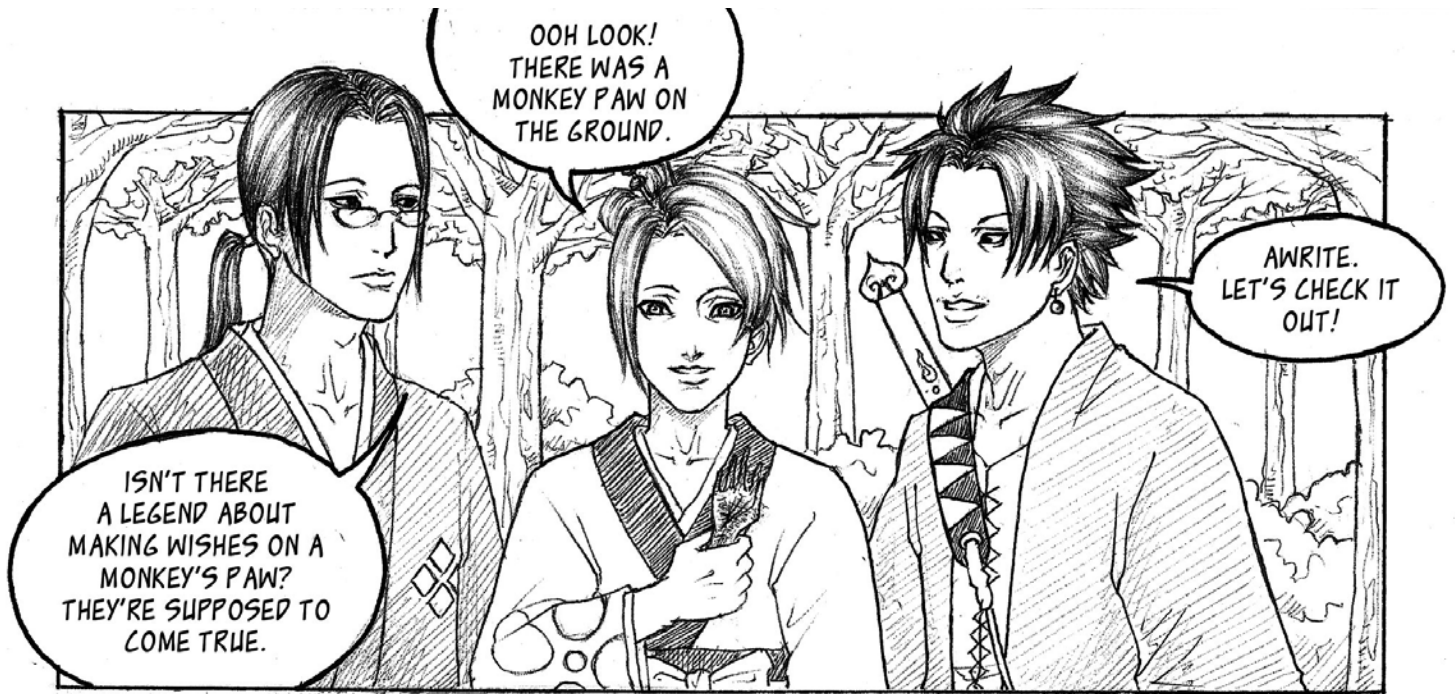
I should know better than to nurse false hope; after this journey I will probably never see you again. Not knowing my feelings, wondering why I'm pushing you away, you will see no reason to further our connection.

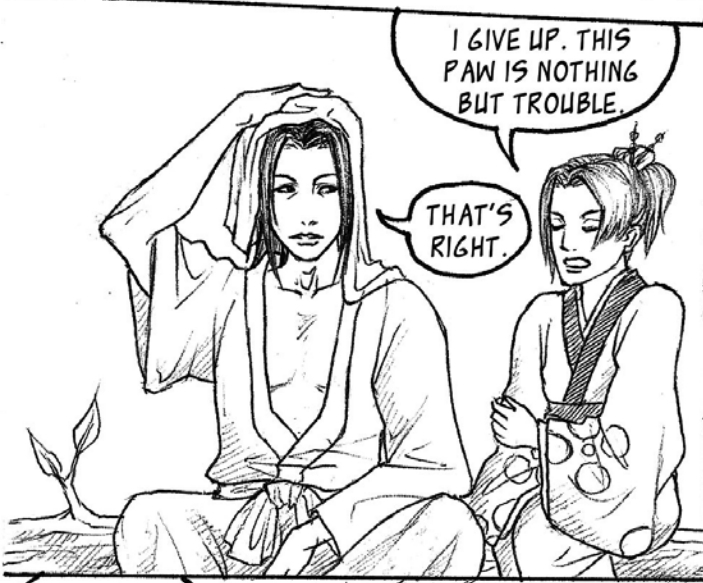
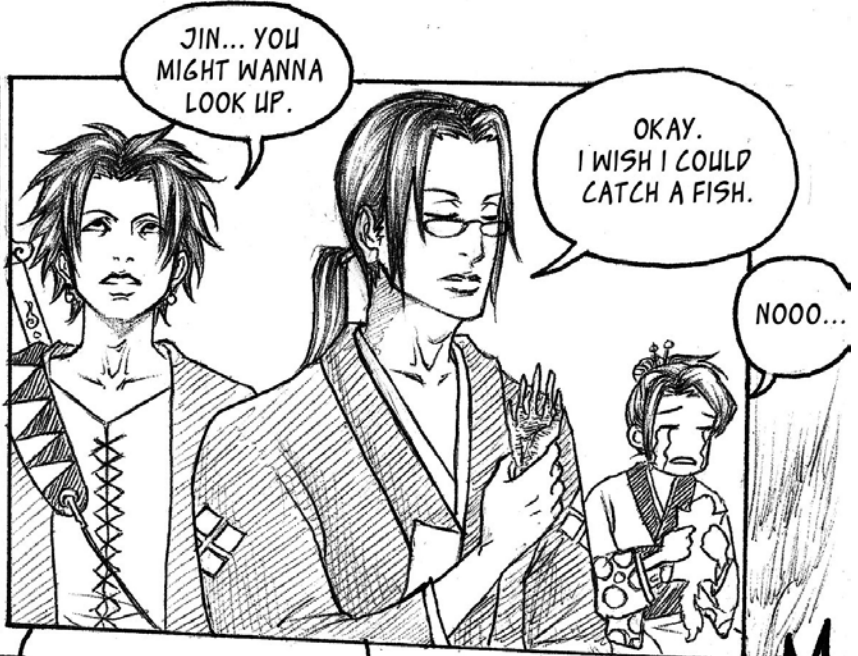
The honest, sad truth is that the closer we are to your goal, the further the space between us.

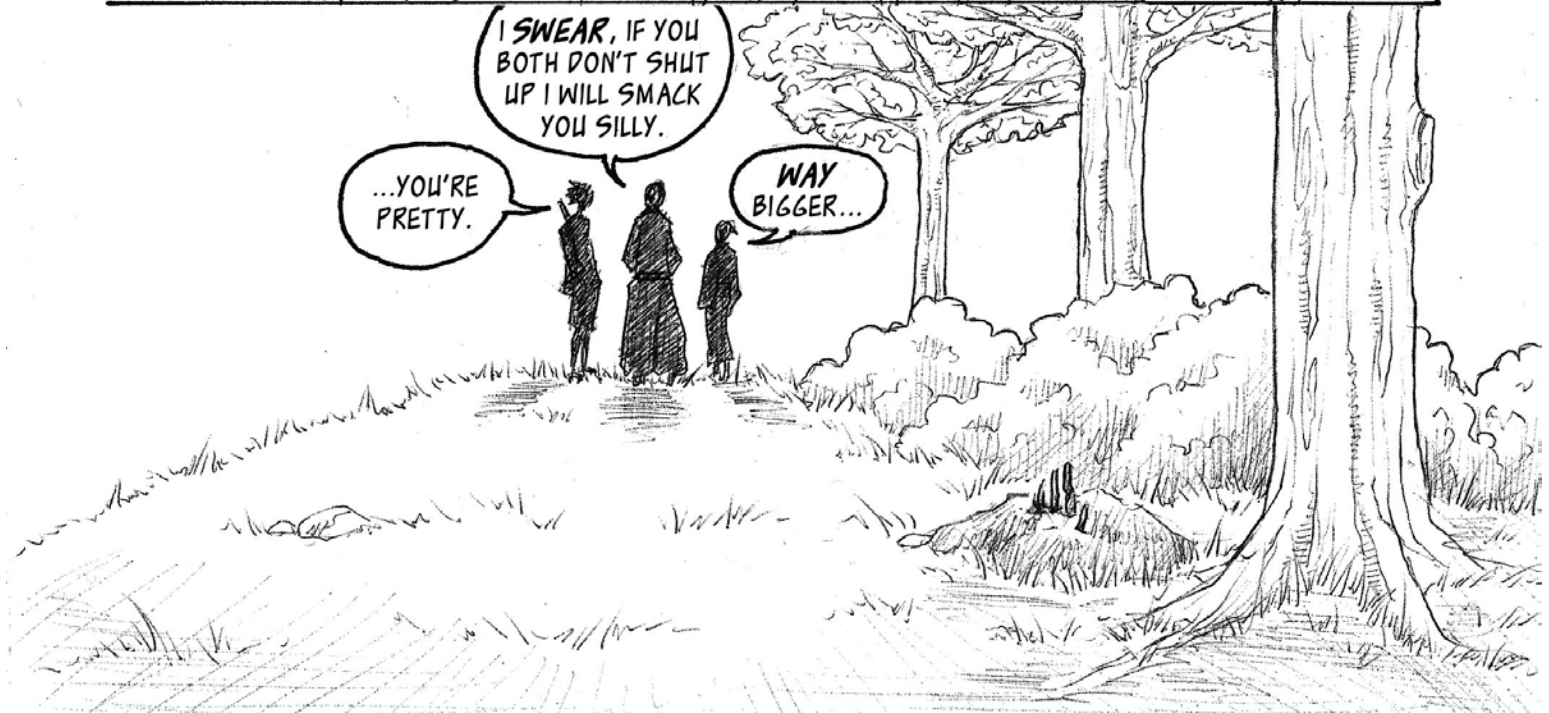
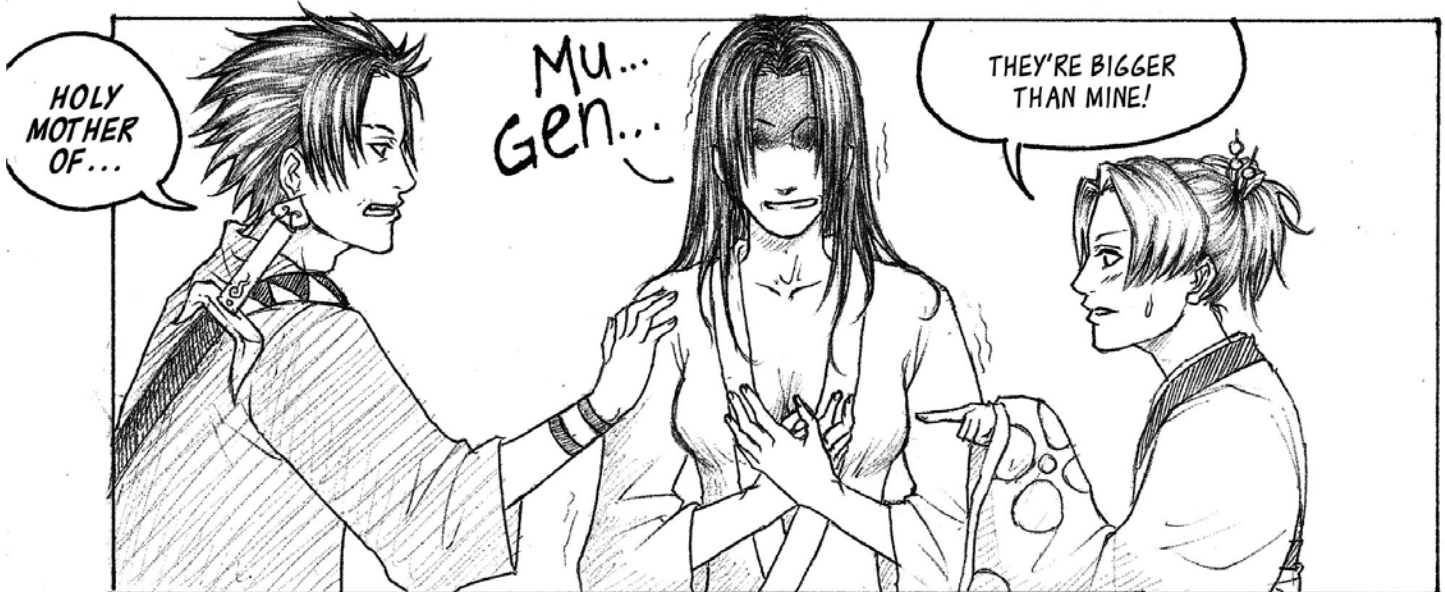
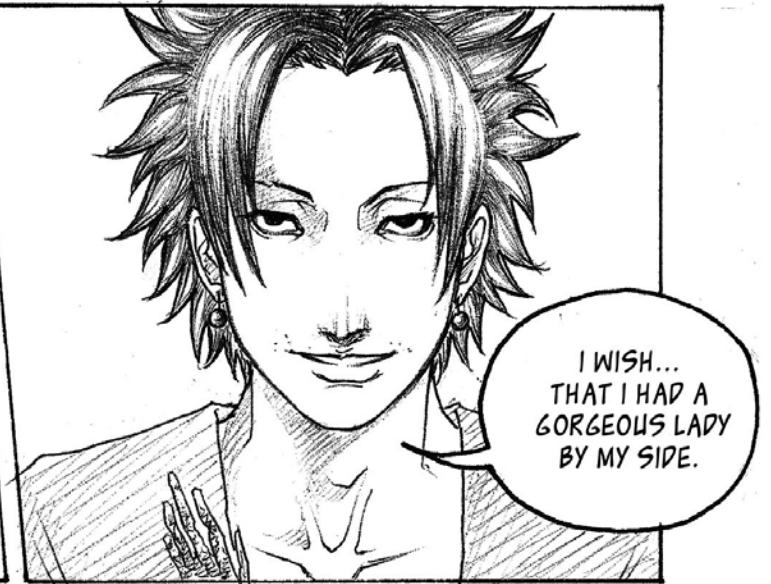
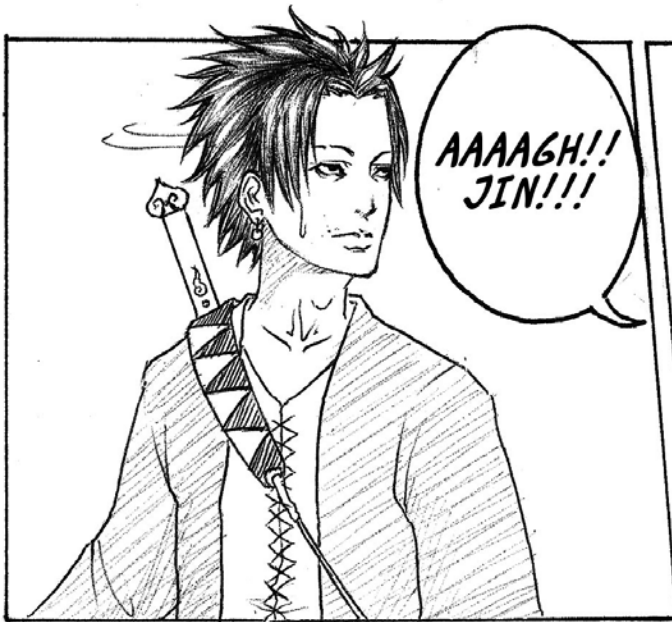
end



art by
Doven









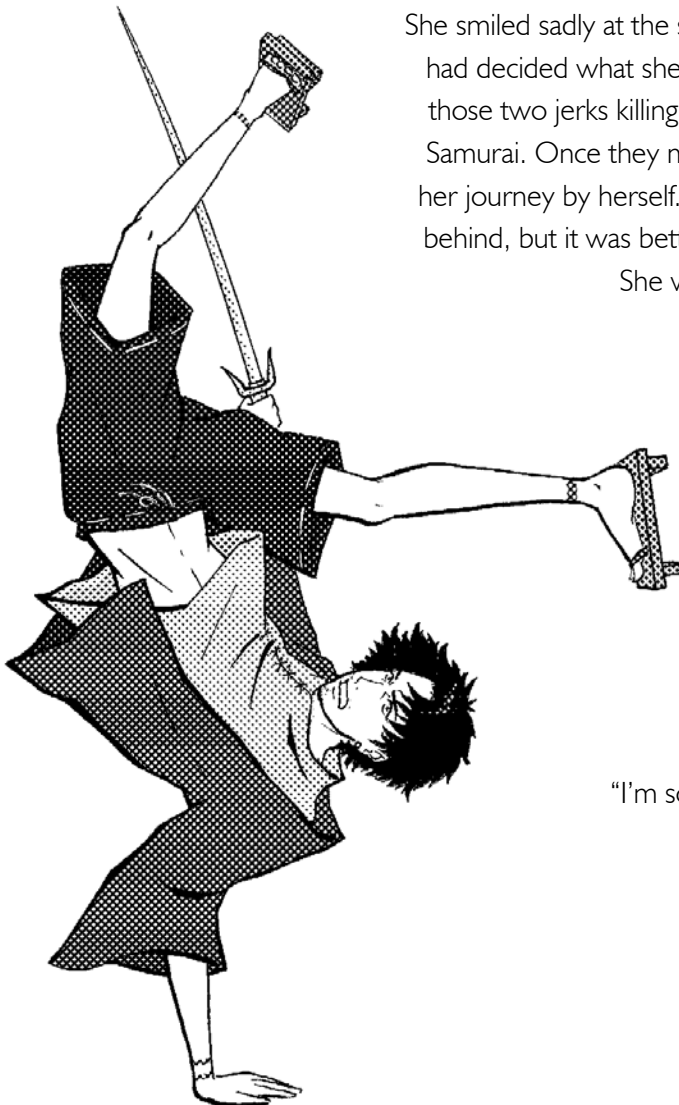
Fuu lay on her back, staring up at the stars, the tears drying on her face. She glanced over at Jin, who was lying across from her, sound asleep. Her mind went back to the conversation at the river. He had offered to stay with her after they had found her father. Even though she had wanted nothing more than to fly into his arms and tell him yes, she couldn't help but think of Mugen. Those two still had their own duel to settle, and as much as Mugen yelled at her, and made fun of her, she had found a friend in him. And if Jin was offering to stay with her, then that would mean that Mugen would be dead. And she didn't want to think about that. So she had apologized, and, her emotions got the best of her. She leaned into his body. Then, she realized what she had done, and she began to pull away, embarrassed. But then... he had placed his hand on her shoulder, and hugged her back. And they stood, together, and she wanted time to freeze at that exact moment.

She smiled sadly at the sleeping ronin. It was that at moment that she had decided what she had to do. She couldn't bear the thought of those two jerks killing each other once she had found the Sunflower Samurai. Once they made it to Ikitsuki Island, she would continue her journey by herself. It would hurt her to leave the two of them behind, but it was better than watching one of them killing the other.

She would rather remember the two of them the way they had been on this journey, than remember seeing one of them die. She reached out and gently touched Jin's face, and whispered her apology. Her apology for turning him away, her apology for not being brave enough to tell him how she really felt, her apology for what she was about to do.

"I'm sorry."

end



art by
Catherine Yen



UNLEASHED AND ALIVE
BY BIGBIGTRUCK

MUGEN

...

I WANT
YOU TO
LIVE.

JIN,
LOOK
...

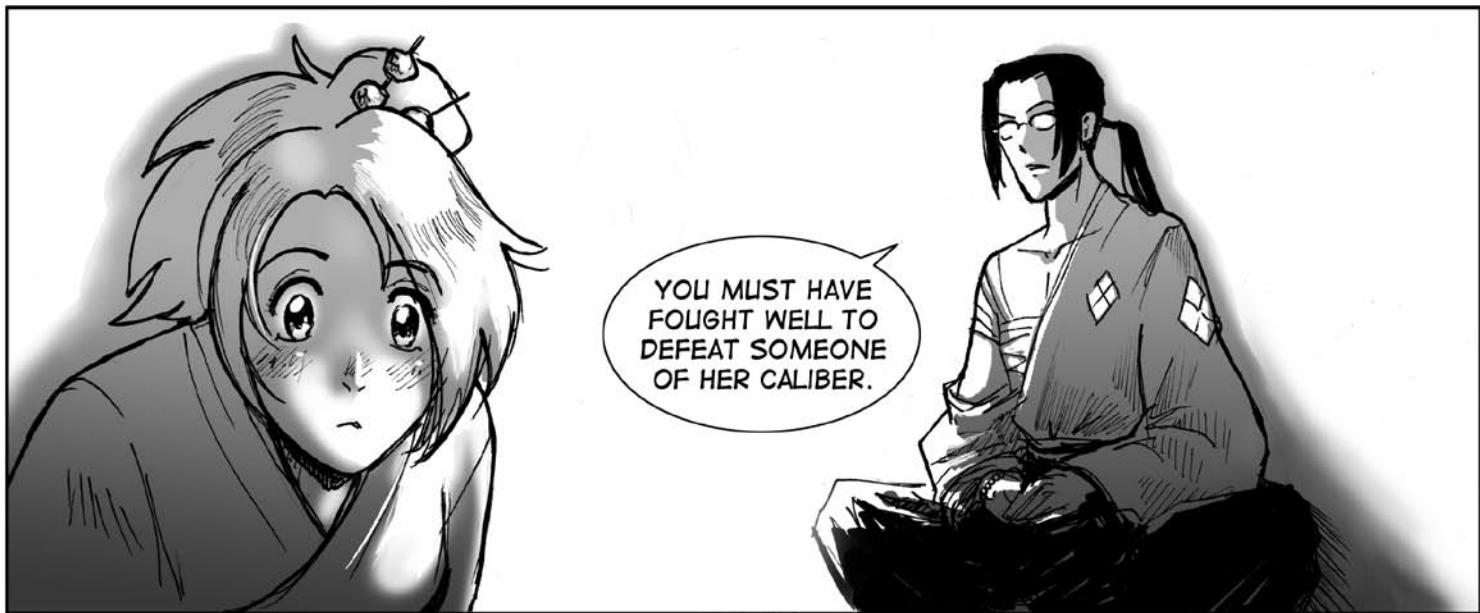
HE'S WAKING UP.

DNH...

YOU'VE BEEN
ASLEEP MOST
OF THE DAY.

DUMMY.

YOU REOPENED
YOUR WOUNDS
LAST NIGHT.



YOU MUST HAVE FOUGHT WELL TO DEFEAT SOMEONE OF HER CALIBER.



SARA...

JUST BEFORE SHE DIED ...

SHE SAID ...



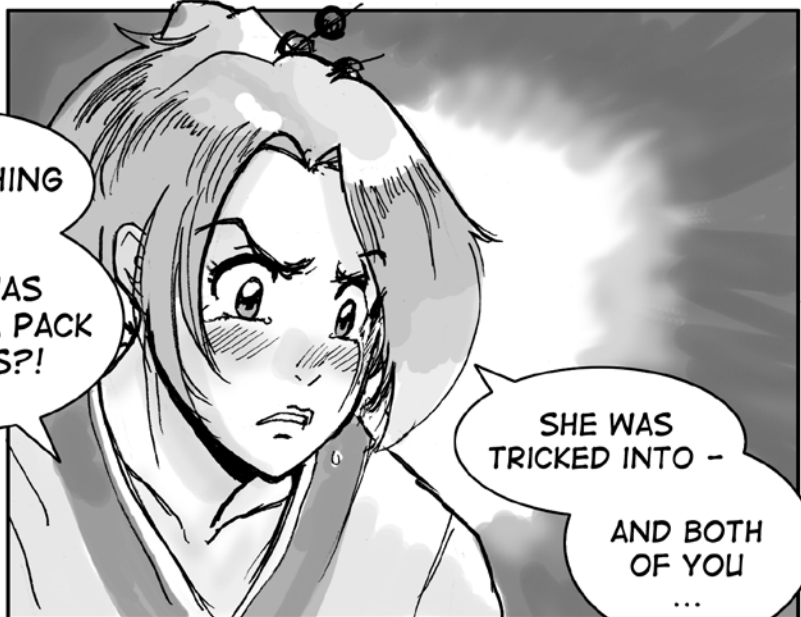
... SHE FOUND OUT HER KID HAD BEEN DEAD ALL ALONG.





SO
... SO
THIS WHOLE
TIME -

EVERYTHING
...
THIS WAS
ALL FOR A PACK
OF LIES?!



SHE WAS
TRICKED INTO -

AND BOTH
OF YOU
...



I...
UGH.



I- I'M
GOING TO
GET SOME
MORE
WATER.

JIN,
CAN YOU
TAKE CARE
OF THE
BANDAGES?



AH.





WHAT
ARE
YOU?



I
CAN
TELL
...

EVEN
WITHOUT
SEEING IT
...



SO MUCH
HATRED
AND ANGER
SWIRLING
AROUND
YOU
...



...
IT'S AS
IF YOU'VE
NEVER
BEEN
LOVED.

MUGEN?

ARE YOU
OKAY?

HA
...
HA
HA
...

HAHA
...

HA
HA
HA
- HEH.

HEY -

HEY,
WHAT'S
SO
FUNNY!?

...AH,
JUST
ANOTHER
DAMN
LIE.

HÜH?

HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
...

OW.

END

THE THREE FACES OF VIRTUE : REI

BY SJANE

Author's Note: *In bushido, rei is the virtue of respect.*

The girl and the man would be surprised (except that they wouldn't) to know, of all the things that Jin does not like, his swords are very nearly at the top of the list.

Very nearly, but not quite: he can scarcely remember a time without them, without the smooth curve of steel and silk at his side, without their presence at the head of his bed. And they are beautiful — made from iron, and fire, and prayer, by a lord among smiths, even before the Mujuu was born.

He should love them, but he does not. He should, he knows; over half his life has been given to them, and there is nothing to him except for what they are.

Jin, his shishou tells him in his grave voice, a warrior's sword is his soul, from the shogun to the ashigaru with dirt under his fingernails.

And so he cares for his daisho dutifully: he never forgets to keep his swords clean, to keep them sharp, to keep them with him always, and the smell of clove oil never comes off his hands, no matter how often he washes them. He knows the man and the girl don't understand at night when he brings out the whetstone and paper, even if his swords have stayed sleeping all day; he knows too he doesn't want them to understand, because to understand is to know and to know is to see him for what he really is.

(after it happened, he found blood whenever he washed)

He tells them, of course; they deserve to know, more than he deserves.

(after it happened, he found blood even after he washed)

He wonders, as the white-hot line kindles in his side, if this will be enough to wash his sword clean at last; then there

is a curve of sand along the water, and he is shattered into pieces — the girl's eyes swallow her face, as the dark slips over him.

He wakes, not expecting to; he swims back up to the surface, where the other man is awake and the girl is standing in the door with the sun behind her. She watches them, strangely silent as they eat, and later she comes to him when the other man is asleep once more.

I'm sorry, she tells him.

Don't be, he says. Was it enough?

Yes.

Good.

I have something for you. She fumbles nervously in a box, as he looks on: there is a heavy cloth in her hands, and he catches his breath as she pulls it away. *I know it's not the same —*

Reverently, he takes it from her, knowing whose it had been. *No, he tells her, and smiles.*

She looks at him, and his heart twists at how worn she looks.

It's better, he says, and she smiles back.

Maybe, he thinks as he feels the sword resting lightly in his hands, they have always understood.

end



MY NAME IS
WILLIE JIMENEZ
BUT ON THE NET I'M BETTER
KNOWN AS

WEST



WESTWOLF270.DEVIANTART.COM

Hey there. **DEBS** here.
Hope you enjoyed my silly
little tale about monkey
limbs. I'm sorry if it
lowered your IQ somewhat.
For more exploits in
inaneness go to
debingth.deviantart.com
moonset.enacre.net
ruination.comicgenesis.com

I SHALL GO
PRACTISE
PENMANSHIP
ON MY TABLET
NOW.
CHEERS! ♡ ♡



BIGBIGTRUCK - FREE TALK

Thanks so much to everybody who contributed! You guys ROCK.

Cut Chemist's "The Audience Is Listening" and Devandra Banhart's "Cripple Crow" albums pretty much kept me sane (this is debatable) while working on this behemoth. Oh, and speaking of music, the title "Unleashed and Alive" comes from the song "Doctors of Deliverance" by Crooked Fingers, and the text around the 'Angel' pinup comes from "She's An Angel"

by They
Might Be
Giants.

THESE DON'T
SMELL LIKE
ANYTHING!
WHAT A RIP-OFF.

(yes. I checked.)



WWW.BIG-BIG-TRUCK.COM/CHAMPLOO

Angelynx is Paula O'Keefe, Champlooholic since the series' original run in Japan. Runs sprawling English-language Champloo fan site, Amalgam, which has probably introduced countless American fangirls to the joys of smutty doujinshi; writes obsessively long fanfics; will wear the Jin scarf and winter hat Lotus made for her every winter until like forever. Though she's lived with artist **Gecko** more than 20 years, this is the first of her fanfics that Gecko has illustrated. w00t. =)



Sempaiko Studio ^ _ ^

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- Fanfiction "Sempaiko"
- Fictionpress "Sempaiko"

I am a college student and live on the east coast. I go every year to 'Animazement' in Durham, NC. You might see me there! I also sell art there too! I draw, write, and make amvs. I do it all! XD Hope you enjoyed!

Judy Renee Pope/Gecko Zero/Coyote13/Zantetsuken lives with a writer, a collector, two cats, and a horde of invisible characters who insist on their own reality. Some days it's a bit crowded....

She can be reached at coyote@spookhouse.net

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hay guyz

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HEY FOLKS. I HAD A TON OF FUN PARTICIPATING IN THIS DOUJIN, AND JUST WANTED TO SAY THANKS TO EK FOR THROWING A PROJECT AT ME THAT FORCED ME TO DRAW MORE.

I HOPE EVERYONE ENJOYS THIS THING, AND IF I WASN'T SUCH A GINORMOUS PROCRASTINATOR, YOU WOULD HAVE SEEN MORE GAGS LIKE THOSE CRAMMED INTO THIS SPACE.

FEEL FREE TO ~~CRASSIZE~~ LAVISH PRAISE ON MORE OF MY WORK WHICH MAY OR MAY NOT BE FOUND AT THE ABOVE WEB ADDY.



--BOWLER ☺ '07





SAMURAI CHAMPLOO FAN ANTHOLOGY PROJECT



OCT 2006 - FEB 2007



BACK COVER ART BY WILDARMSHEERO