

Young Samurai: The Way of the Sword

By Chris Bradford

Exclusive Extract

CH 4 A GRAIN OF RICE [EXTRACT]

‘Come here! You too, Yamato-kun.’

Jack and a startled Yamato stepped out of line and approached Sensei Hosokawa.

‘*Seiza*,’ he ordered and the two of them knelt down. ‘Not you, Jack-kun. I need you to understand what it means to carry a *katana*. Withdraw your sword.’

Jack unsheathed his *katana*. The blade gleamed, its edge so sharp that it appeared to cut the very air itself.

Uncertain as to what Sensei Hosokawa expected of him, he fell into stance. His sword was stretched out in front of him and he gripped the hilt with both hands. His feet were set wide apart, the *kissaki* level with the throat of his imaginary enemy.

Masamoto’s sword felt unusually heavy in his hands. Over the course of a year of *kenjutsu* training, his own *bokken* had become an extension of his arm. He knew its weight, its feel and how it cut through the air.

But this sword was different. Weightier and more visceral. It had killed people. Sliced them in half. And Jack suddenly sensed its bloody history in his hands.

He was starting to regret his rashness at bringing the sword.

The sensei, noting the visible trembling of Jack’s *katana* with grim satisfaction, proceeded to remove a single grain of rice from his *inro*, the small wooden carrying case attached to his *obi*. He then placed the grain on top of Yamato’s head.

‘Cut the grain of rice in half,’ he ordered Jack.

‘What?’ blurted Yamato, his eyes wide with shock.

‘But it’s on his head –’ protested Jack.

‘Do it!’ commanded Hosokawa, pointing at the tiny grain of rice.

‘But . . . but . . . I can’t . . .’

‘If you think you’re ready for such responsibility, now is your chance to prove it.’

‘But what if I hurt Yamato?’ exclaimed Jack.

‘This is what it means to carry a sword. People get hurt. Killed. Now cut the grain.’

‘I can’t,’ said Jack, lowering his *katana*.

‘*Can’t?*’ exclaimed Hosokawa. ‘I command you, as your sensei, to strike at his head and slice that grain in half.’

Sensei Hosokawa grabbed Jack’s hands and brought the sword into direct line with Yamato’s exposed head. The miniscule grain of rice perched there, a white speck among the mass of black hair.

Jack knew that the blade would slice through Yamato’s head as if it were little more than a watermelon. Jack’s arms quivered uncontrollably and Yamato gave him a despairing look, his face completely drained of blood.

‘DO IT NOW!’ commanded Hosokawa, lifting Jack’s arms to force him to strike.

The rest of the students watched with dread fascination.

Akiko looked on fearfully. Beside her, her best friend Kiku, a petite girl with dark shoulder-length hair and hazelnut-coloured eyes, was almost on the point of tears. Kazuki, though, was apparently relishing the moment. He nudged his ally Nobu, a large boy with the build of a mini-Sumo wrestler, and whispered in his ear, loud enough for Jack to hear.

‘I bet you the *gaijin* chops off Yamato’s ear!’

‘Or maybe his nose!’ chortled Nobu, a fat grin spreading across his podgy face.

The sword wavered in the air...

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