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Opening extract from

Ninja: First Mission

Written by

Chris Bradford

Published by

Barrington Stoke Ltd

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NINJA

FIRST MISSION

by

Chris Bradford

Illustrated by Sonia Leong

For Stella, a little fighter

All proceeds from the sale of this book are being donated to help fight her cancer battle

www.forstella.org

For more information on Chris and his books visit:

www.chrisbradford.co.uk

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Chapter 1
Floor-boards

Japan, Year 1580

I wait under the floor-boards.

I've been hidden here for over an hour, lying still as a stone.

My name is Taka. This is my first mission as a ninja and I must not fail.

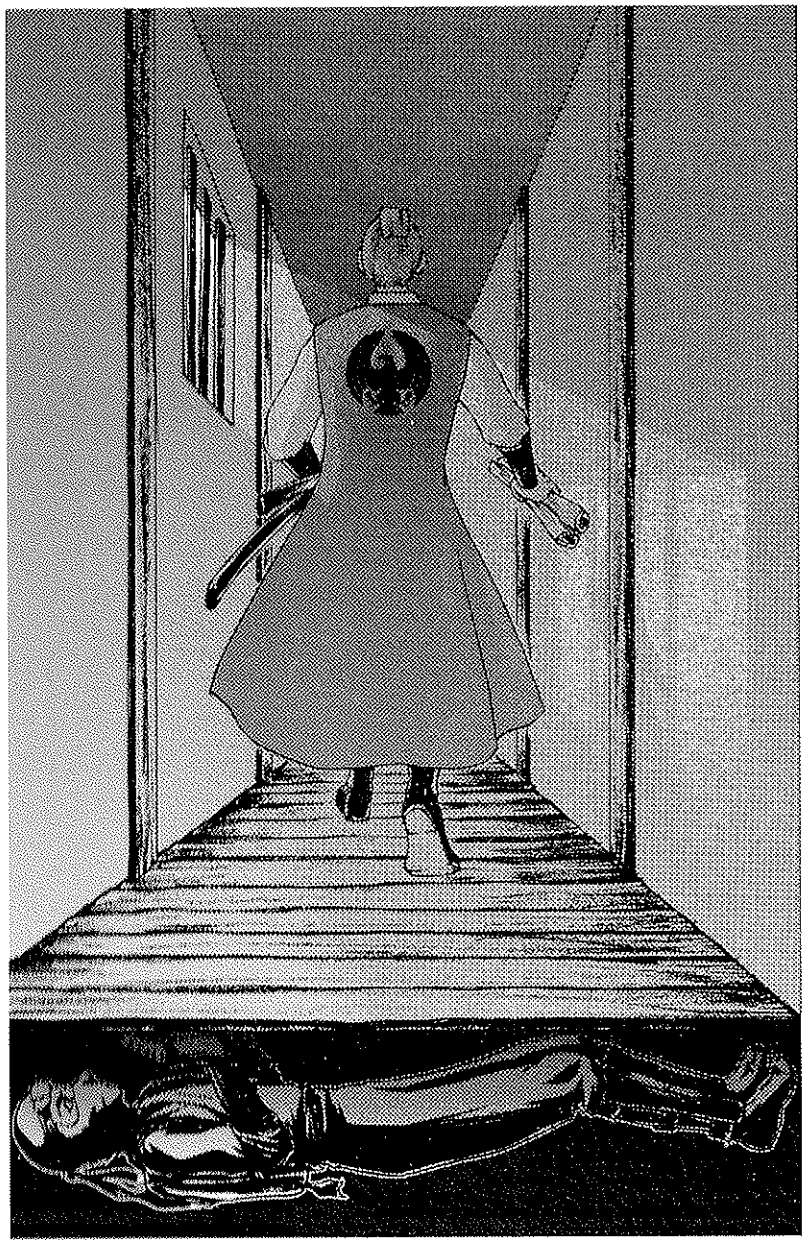
I hear a door slide open and look through the crack in the floor-boards. I watch as a man crosses the room; his feet pass close to my face. He wears a gold silk robe with the crest of a black eagle on his back. He carries two samurai swords on his hip. Across his right cheek is a long red scar.

It's Lord Oda – the samurai warrior I've been waiting for.

The war-lord doesn't know I'm here. He can't see me under the floor. He sits down on his bed. In his hand, he holds a scroll of paper. He begins to read it.

"I never dreamed such things were possible," he mutters to himself.

After a few minutes, he puts the scroll into a wooden box by his pillow. He lays his swords beside his bed, blows out the candle and goes to sleep.



Outside, a full moon has risen over the castle. Its pale light shines through a small window and onto the cruel face of Lord Oda. Lord Oda is the sworn enemy of the ninja. My task is to stop him destroying our clan.

Now is the time.

I push softly at the loose floor-board above me and climb out of my hiding place. Using my ninja stealth skills, I cross the room without a sound. In the darkness I'm almost invisible. My black clothes and my hood turn me into a shadow. Only my eyes show.

As I draw close to the samurai lord, I see my hands are shaking.

Can I really do this? I ask myself.

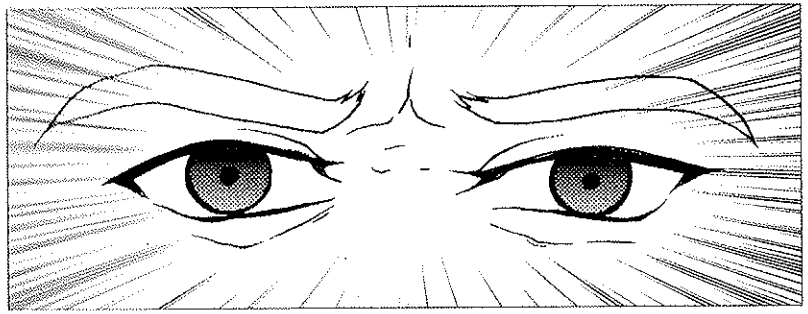
I've been training to be a spy and an assassin all my life. But I'm still only fourteen. Have I learnt all the skills I need for this mission? Perhaps I *should* have waited for Cho. Can I save our ninja clan all on my own?

I have to prove myself. Tonight.

I'm now so close to Lord Oda, I can hear him breathe. As I reach out, my arm blocks the moonlight shining onto his face.

A small but fatal mistake.

Lord Oda's eyes snap open. For a moment, we stare at each other in shock.



Then he screams, "GUARDS!"