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Opening extract from

Ninja: Assassin

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In honour of three dedicated ninja,
Aidan Bracher, Matthew Maton and Charlie Harland

For more information on Chris and his books visit:

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Chapter 1
Snow Patrol

Japan, Year 1580

I peer over a mound of snow. Between a gap in the trees, I spy Lord Oda.

I am Taka, a ninja – and this man, with the red scar across his cheek, is my mortal enemy.

Lord Oda sits huddled in thick blankets in a sedan chair carried by four porters. The porters struggle with their heavy burden as



they hurry down the road to the gate of Black Eagle Castle. The winter sun is setting over the mountains and the porters look nervous, in spite of the samurai soldiers that protect them.

Lord Oda's bodyguards are at the front of the line – ten warriors with the crest of a black eagle on their chests. A troop of heavily armed samurai in blood-red armour follows close behind. They wear a different crest – a roaring tiger's head. This is the emblem of Lord Kujo, the Regent of Japan.

I did not expect these samurai, and their presence here is worrying. But all I care about is that Lord Oda has at last returned home to his fortress, Black Eagle Castle. After three long months of waiting, the time has come to avenge my murdered parents.

Just as I'm about to make my move, I hear voices.

"It's so cold my eyelids are freezing together!" the first voice says.

"Stop complaining, Genzo," another man growls.

I look to my right and see a patrol of four samurai marching through the forest. I'm wearing my all-white *gi*, the ninja uniform used for winter missions, so the patrol hasn't spotted me yet ... but they are headed my way.

"Why do we have to patrol so far out from the castle?" asks the one called Genzo. He is a stick-thin man, and he hugs himself for warmth.

The leader is shivering too, but he ignores the cold as he replies. "Now our lord is back, his adviser Kenji fears a revenge attack by the ninja. So we must be on high alert. Spread out!"

The patrol splits up. Genzo passes around a snowy rock and now he is only a few paces away from me. If he keeps coming, I'm sure to be discovered.

I reach into my bag and pull out a *shuriken* – a ninja throwing star. I'm careful to hide the star's gleam from the eyes of the approaching samurai.

A pine cone drops in the snow beside my face.

I glance up. My best friend Cho is in the tree above me. Her long black hair is tucked inside her white hood and she's invisible among the snowy branches. Cho notices the *shuriken* in my hand and shakes her head at me.

Don't attack, she warns me with a glare.

But Genzo is so close I can see the dirt under his toenails. One more step and he'll be standing right on top of me.

I grip my *shuriken*, ready to leap up. I will let nothing stop me in my mission.