

## HOW TO SLAY A BANDIT ~山賊を殺す方法~

by Rawle Nyanzi

Hanazono Teruko kicked and screamed as a mountain bandit carried her away over his broad shoulder. The town burned all around her as the bandits' dragons ravaged every street. Everyone surrendered whatever valuables they had, and much rice found itself strapped to dragons' saddles.

Mighty Bai-an Province had felt the bite of flying raiders.

"You're a real beauty! I should come here more often," the bandit said as he slid his hands up and down Teruko's legs. Like many women of means in Bai-an Province, Teruko did not wear the kimono typical throughout the land. Instead, she wore a garment of barbarian origin that fit tightly on the upper body, yet flared out at the waist and gave the legs great room to maneuver. The people of Bai-an Province called this clothing the "dando."

"Put me back, you animal!" Teruko said. The bandit threw her to the ground, then bound her wrists and ankles.

"Shut your mouth. Bai-an's warriors tremble before our dragons. You belong to us now," the bandit said. He laid Teruko across the saddle of his dragon, then tied her to a pommel on the front. He mounted the great beast and signaled to his comrades to gather up their loot and follow him back to their mountain lair. Teruko screamed as the dragon took flight.

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Teruko was placed in a room with an older but still attractive woman who wore her brown hair long and wore only a short red kimono. Teruko didn't even get that -- only a long white cloth around her chest and underclothes that showed far too much of her.

The older woman got up and glared at Teruko. "So I've got a student, now. Let me warn you, girl -- I'll be far scarier than any of the raiders!" she said.

"Please, teach me everything you can!" Teruko said with a deep bow.

"Don't try to play polite -- you're getting the worst of it no matter what," the woman said.

The woman forced Teruko to a low table and bent her over it, slamming the younger woman's chin against the unpolished wood. The woman then climbed onto Teruko and put her mouth to the younger woman's ear.

"You're Hanazono Teruko, right?" the older woman whispered.

Teruko beamed. "Yes I am!" she whispered back. The younger woman relaxed herself, figuring that her ordeal would soon be over.

"My name's Chika. I remember visiting your father's medicine shop once," the older woman said. Chika wrenched Teruko off of the table and held her upright, arms around her neck and abdomen.

"What do you want with me?" Teruko asked.

"To help you. I can get my hands on some scaleweed," Chika answered. Now Teruko paid close attention, for only the scaleweed plants of the mountains could secure her escape.

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Over the course of the afternoon, Teruko received scaleweed plants smuggled in by Chika. Together, using a mortar and pestle, they made a powder that dragons would find irresistible. To keep up the appearance of slave training, Chika carried Teruko to the dragon stables due to alleged disobedience. Once inside the dank and smelly stables, a guard watched as Chika faced Teruko forward and pushed her toward a rather annoyed dragon.

"This is what they do to girls who didn't obey: they feed them to the dragons!" Chika said as Teruko faked a struggle. She was careful never to look down at her chest, where she put the pouch full of powder. In mock frustration, Chika called for the guard to loosen the dragon's restraints and open its gate.

At that moment, the dragon's jaws gripped the cloth covering Teruko's chest, then tore the cloth away -- and swallowed the pouch. The guard became so enamored with Teruko's breasts that he didn't notice the dragon's anger.

Delirious with rage, the dragon snatched up the guard and swallowed him, but the two additional pieces of meat before him didn't escape his notice. Teruko and Chika ran out of the stables with the dragon in hot pursuit.

"Stop that dragon!" the bandits yelled, but the creature just fried them with a blast of fire. Teruko and Chika used the opportunity to head for the pass leading out of the bandits' compound, but armed men quickly blocked their path. A dragon rider arrived shortly after to back them up.

"Get back to the boss's quarters!" a bandit with a naginata spear shouted. Without weapons, Teruko and Chika had no chance against the men.

However, Chika had other options.

She took a pouch of scaleweed powder out of her kimono, then tossed it at the dragon rider. The powder flew everywhere, and the dragon took a deep breath to inhale it all.

The dragon roared, and the two women jumped away from its stream of fire just in time. The armed men took the blast head on, and the rider was thrown from his mount as it bucked and shook. However, the bandits -- all dead at this point, for their numbers were few -- had failed to subdue the first dragon.

Which meant that both drugged beasts now focused on Teruko and Chika.

The dragons had them cornered now. With no more weapons and no more powder, the winged monsters had the women at their mercy. Despite the situation, Teruko strained her mind, thinking of a way that even one of them could escape. After a tense moment, something occurred to her.

Teruko slowly knelt and gathered up dirt in her hands. As she

collected her courage, Chika did the same. Teruko gathered all her hopes in the fistful of dirt she held, then threw it in the dragon's eyes.

The dragon let out a fearful cry and, unable to see clearly, struck the other dragon with a blast of flame. And just like that, the dragons turned to fight each other, and a way out opened up. Teruko dashed at the pass, and Chika followed close behind.

Though ill-clad and barefoot, Teruko and Chika escaped the mountain lair and, after a long and arduous trek, found shelter. In a week's time, they finally returned to civilized Bai-an Province, their freedom secured.