

Yuki-onna - "The Woman of the Snow"

By Robert Kelly

Adapted from 'Kwaidan', Japanese mythology and inspired
by the 'Mr Vampire' films of Hong Kong cinema.

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FADE IN

EXT. SNOW FILLED FOREST, JAPAN - PM

Southern Japan, 1585. Tall trees in a snow-filled landscape. It is SNOWING HEAVILY. Carrying logs on backpacks are MOSAKU and MINOKICHI. Mosaku is about 60, Minokichi is about 17 here - both are woodcutters with hoods and cloaks made from straw.

NOTE: All dialogue is in JAPANESE (shown in *italics*) until noted, subtitles should be provided as this occurs.

SUPER IMPOSE: JAPAN 1585.

MINOKICHI (V.O)
*I am a woodcutter from Musashi
Province. Although many years ago now
I will always remember that night...*

They trudge along as the snow gets deeper and falls heavier.

MINOKICHI (V.O)
*Mosaku and I regularly went to the
forest a few miles from our village.*

Mosaku gazes up at the sky in despair.

MINOKICHI (V.O)
*On a very cold day a blizzard suddenly
overtook us, catching us by surprise.*

PAN TO SKY - shadows in clouds resemble a female face glaring down at them, her eyes hungry and menacing. This is the face of YUKI-ONNA - a pretty lady with long hair - a vampire.

Both men struggle onward until Mosaku stumbles. Minokichi turns and helps him up. Again they continue through the snow.

A STRANGE HOWL in the distance - like a wolf.

They abandon their logs and stagger onward - helping each other along. The forest seems endless, the snow relentless.

SNOW falls from branches and covers them both. Minokichi pulls himself out and brushes off the snow - he is unsure where his companion lays. He looks around, growing worried.

The STRANGE HOWL is heard again.

Minokichi backs nervously away, retracing his steps, alone.

MINOKICHI
Mosaku! Mosaku where are you?

Minokichi backs into a tree and stops. He gazes up - the clouds now resemble GIANT EYES of Yuki-Onna staring down. He stumbles onward again, shivering but determined.

Finally Minokichi half-stumbles and half-sinks to his knees, frozen, shivering, exhausted. He COLLAPSES in the thick snow.

CUT TO

EXT. FOREST AND BOAT HUT BY RIVER - EVENING

Snowy trees thin as they reach a frozen river, a boat hut and crude jetty. Minokichi is laying faced-down in the snow by a tree but clammers up and looks around. An ICY WIND whistles.

POV from Minokichi - icy trees and snow. A RED CLOTH catches his eyes as it flaps, tied to the jetty. (A boating signal).

BACK TO SCENE

Minokichi lurches towards the jetty as though it is his salvation. As he approaches he sees the hut and icy water.

MINOKICHI (V.O)
*Home was across the river but the
 boatman and ferry gone. And it was no
 day to chance a swim...*

Movement behind the trees - he is relieved to see Mosaku stumbling towards him. Minokichi hurries to help him and the two approach the hut together, both shivering and frozen.

CUT TO

INT. FERRYMAN'S HUT, BY FOREST AND RIVER - EVENING

The door opens as Mosaku and Minokichi stagger inside, half-frozen. Minokichi helps Mosaku get comfortable then closes the door - flecks of snow drift though gaps in the walls.

Mosaku pulls off his snow-covered hood, finds a blanket and wraps this around himself. He lays shivering and exhausted.

Minokichi removes his hood and begins to search the hut.

MINOKICHI (V.O)
*We had lost our wood, there seemed no
 way to build a fire. Poor Mosaku*

looked frozen, worse even than I.

The STRANGE HOWL is heard again outside in the distance.

Suddenly the door BURSTS OPEN from strong wind. Minokichi struggles to close the door against the wind and props a rock against it. He pants from exhaustion, pondering his next move as he looks over at sickly Mosaku. The old man NODS to him.

CUT TO

EXT. FOREST AND BOAT HUT BY RIVER - EVENING

The snow storm continues, growing more relentless. The red cloth FLAPS and waves in the icy wind.

Suddenly the HAND of Yuki-Onna reaches out and touches the flag - it FREEZES SOLID. Only her hand is seen here - she is a pale lady in white robes, long black hair - a vampire.

The HOWL is heard again - this time much closer.

PAN TO THE ENTRANCE OF THE HUT. The door CREEKS OPEN regardless of the attempts to blockade it from inside.

CUT TO

INT. FERRYMAN'S HUT, BY FOREST AND RIVER - EVENING

Mosaku and Minokichi sleep, their breath smoke in the cold. They have tattered blankets over them and shiver. Light comes from the open door and from moonlight outside.

PAN OUT from the door which sways in the wind. Both are unaware Yuki-Onna stands among them - finally fully seen but her back to the camera as she moves silently towards Mosaku.

She kneels to Mosaku and SUCKS THE BREATH from his mouth. He becomes deathly pale as she feeds, sucking-out his life.

Minokichi is awakened by the swinging door. He sits up and stares in terror - Mosaku is now a frozen corpse!

Yuki-Onna slowly turns to Minokichi, her eyes GLEAMING. She glides silently closer to him - he is unable to move. She crouches before him, moving her face close to his.

POV FROM MINOKICHI as Yuki-Onna opens her mouth to reveal a black void - as though she is really an empty husk.

BACK TO SCENE

Minokichi gapes, frightened and spellbound. Yuki-Onna speaks in a soft yet chilling and seductive voice.

YUKI-ONNA

I intended to treat you like the old man, but I cannot help pitying you. You are young and handsome...

Minokichi TREMBLES - but not from the cold.

YUKI-ONNA

Would you promise never to tell a living soul what you have seen here?

Minokichi NODS dumbly - too frightened to speak.

YUKI-ONNA

Then I will spare you... But... Tell anyone what you saw and I will know!

Yuki-Onna stands and straightens - Minokichi remains still.

YUKI-ONNA

I shall kill you at that moment!

The DOOR SLAMS SHUT so it is suddenly dark - the eyes of Yuki-Onna glow in the gloom. She glides towards the door. This is closed but she passes through like a ghost!

The door flaps open again - she is gone, no footprints or any sign of her. Minokichi scrambles towards Mosaku - he is a frozen corpse with wide staring terrified eyes.

SLOW FADE TO

EXT. FOREST AND BOAT HUT BY RIVER - MORNING

The snow is starting to melt - the sun shines in a clear sky. THE BOATMAN has arrived and is tying his boat at the jetty.

He removes the red cloth and is surprised to find it frozen.

He stomps through the snow towards his hut and is surprised to find the door blocked from the inside. He can't enter.

CUT TO

INT. FERRYMAN'S HUT, BY FOREST - MORNING

The Boatman is pushing the door from outside - the rock is still in place. After a few moments The Boatman moves to the

side of the hut and slides-back a loose panel and squeezes through. He is shocked to find the corpse of Mosaku here.

A shape SHUFFLES in the darkness, The Boatman is startled. The shape is Minokichi - under a blanket and barely alive.

FADE TO

INT. HOUSE OF MINOKICHI, RURAL JAPAN - DAY

A peasant cottage in rural Japan, the main room has a front door and sliding doors to bedrooms. A low table in the middle and stove for cooking. Minokichi lays in bed on the floor by the stove for warmth. He is poorly and seems troubled.

MINOKITCHI'S MOTHER is about 55 and she is carrying a tray of hot porridge to her son.

PAN OUT from Minokichi as he awakens and gazes around. He barely notices as his Mother puts the tray beside him.

MINOKITCHI'S MOTHER
*Eat your porridge while it is hot
 Minokichi. I'll be going out soon...
 We need to sell more wood.*

Minokichi barely nods but seems distracted.

MINOKITCHI'S MOTHER
*You won't be able to work for some
 time son, not until you're better.*

Minokitchi's Mother puts on her boots.

MINOKITCHI'S MOTHER
*Look after yourself, another spell of
 cold and you will not survive.*

Minokichi reaches for the bowl but is not hungry.

MINOKITCHI'S MOTHER
*You never said how it all happened?
 Not even a word to your own mother.*

She puts on a 'back pack' with logs and carries the heavy load towards the door. He looks sadly at his food and SIGHS.

FADE TO

EXT. FOREST AND BOAT HUT BY RIVER - LATE PM

Now autumn, no snow, the sun is setting. Minokichi is CHOPPING a tree with an axe, his backpack nearby. He seems recovered and has longer hair - about a year older.

MINOKICHI (V.O)
Months passed and I resumed work alone. Every morning I went to the forest and returned with more wood. It was there that I first saw 'her'.

Minokichi watches the tree fall with a degree of satisfaction and spots someone in the distance.

POV from Minokichi looking towards the river. O-YUKI is washing her feet. She is about 17, a pretty peasant girl.

NOTE : O-Yuki is Yuki-Onna in disguise as a human.

BACK TO SCENE

Minokichi approaches O-Yuki, surprised. She pretends not to notice as he approaches, rolling up her dress higher and droplets of water run down her shapely legs.

Minokichi STEPS on a branch which CRACKS under his foot.

She pretends to be startled and turns. He opens his mouth to speak but she pulls down her dress and hurries angrily away.

MINOKICHI
Wait Miss! I was not spying!

As she hurries away she glances back for a moment.

MINOKICHI
I'm just a wood cutter!

Minokichi SIGHS and returns to his trees.

FADE TO

EXT. THE ROAD BY RIVER BANK, RURAL JAPAN - AFTERNOON

A crude road by the river with a few trees. Minokichi is carrying bundles of wood on his back-pack as he walks.

MINOKICHI (V.O)
A week passed. Again, on a very cold day, I encountered the same lady...

O-Yuki steps out from behind some trees and heads towards him. Her voice sounds warm and kindly (and human).

O-YUKI
You again? Are you following me?

MINOKICHI
Following you? No Miss... I am heading home. Was it you I saw the other day?

O-YUKI
Yes - my uncle is a boatman. I wanted to say goodbye but he is not there.

MINOKICHI
I know him, he... Er... Helped me once when I had an accident near here. You are going somewhere at this hour?

O-YUKI
Yes, I am travelling to Edo.

MINOKICHI
A long walk for someone alone.

O-YUKI
I know, but the route is simple. Perhaps I might walk with you a while?

MINOKICHI
Yes of course - if you wish?

O-YUKI
My name is O-Yuki.

MINOKICHI
Pleased to meet you. I am Minokichi.

FADE TO

EXT. FURTHER ROAD BY RIVERBANK, RURAL JAPAN - LATE PM

A FORD across a stream up ahead. Minokichi and O-Yuki walk together. It is starting to snow. He glances up nervously.

MINOKICHI
 (concluding)
...and while I was unwell my mother had to work while nursing me.

O-YUKI
But you seem so young and healthy?

MINOKICHI
*It was... over-work. Nothing catching.
 I am much recovered since.*

O-YUKI
*You have no siblings, no brothers or
 sisters to help you?*

MINOKICHI
*No. Just me and my Mother. I was
 apprentice to old Mosaku, but he died.*

O-YUKI
*I am pleased you are better. As for
 myself when I reach Edo I hope my
 relatives can help me find work.*

MINOKICHI
I hear Edo prospers.

O-YUKI
I have no sponsor or referee though.

MINOKICHI
*Perhaps a lady is more lucky - she can
 marry and be looked-after.*

Minokichi pauses as O-Yuki has lagged behind a little.

O-YUKI
Are YOU married Minokichi?

MINOKICHI
*Me? No - I am too young and too poor.
 The girls of my village want educated
 men who can provide. I will never be
 rich, nor would I want to be.*

O-YUKI
*I am not married either. And I too
 care little for wealth. I think it is
 better to be healthy than wealthy.*

Minokichi and O-Yuki reach the ford - raised stepping stones.
 He moves across with ease but she struggles and sways.

NOTE: Spirits and undead struggle to cross water.

MINOKICHI

Here Miss! Take my hand... I'm so used to these I forget they are slippery.

He helps her across, holding her hand.

O-YUKI

Thank you Minokichi. I fear I could not manage without you.

They reach the far side and she stumbles deliberately - he catches her. For a moment she gazes into his eyes - he finds her very pretty. He steps away, embarrassed.

FADE TO

EXT. THE HOUSE OF MINOKICHI, RURAL JAPAN - EARLY EVENING

The exterior reflects the interior - a simple cottage with fields of millet and corn near, sprinkled with light snow. Minokichi leads O-Yuki to the front door but she hesitates.

MINOKICHI

Here is my home. You can rest here and continue tomorrow. I'd hate to think of you walking in the snow at night.

O-YUKI

You are very kind Minokichi. But you hardly know me?

MINOKICHI

It is no trouble - my Mother will be pleased to have company. Please come inside. I am man of the house now.

Now formerly invited O-Yuki is able to enter - she smiles somewhat deviously and follows behind him.

FADE TO

INT. HOUSE OF MINOKICHI, RURAL JAPAN - EVENING

Minokichi's Mother is serving stew into bowls. O-Yuki is setting the low table (spoons, chopsticks and cups).

MINOKICHI'S MOTHER

My son tells me you're going to Edo?

O-YUKI

Yes. It is a long walk, I know...

Minokichi's Mother carries the bowls of stew on a tray.

MINOKITCHI'S MOTHER
There are many dangers for a young lady travelling alone.

Minokichi enters from outside with a sack of grain and removes his soggy boots. O-Yuki NODS when handed her bowl but drops her spoon 'accidentally' and stoops to retrieve it.

MINOKITCHI'S MOTHER
Men are quick to offer protection, but not all are motivated by kindness.

POV from Minokichi as he gazes at Yuki-Onna. She is BENDING OVER with backside towards him as she retrieves the spoon.

BACK TO SCENE

Minokichi glances at his mother embarrassed - she smiles back.

MINOKITCHI'S MOTHER
Come my son - get it while it's hot!

FADE TO

EXT. FIELDS NEAR THE HOUSE OF MINOKICHI - SUNNY DAY

Now spring and the snow gone, fields growing fresh crops. Minokichi and O-Yuki are very cheerful and he is chasing her through a field as they LAUGH and play.

MINOKICHI (V.O)
My mother suggested O-Yuki stayed until the weather improved. Days became weeks, weeks months - and before I knew it spring was here.

O-Yuki lets Minokichi catch her. They roll in the corn as he tickles her, then they become more serious as Minokichi's hands wander. He is shy but she encourages him.

MINOKICHI (V.O)
We all got on well - and O-Yuki and I became close.

FADE TO

INT. HOUSE OF MINOKICHI, RURAL JAPAN - DAY

A BABY is being bathed by O-Yuki in a portable tub, the child

it is strangely pale but seems healthy.

MINOKICHI (V.O)

The years passed quickly and O-Yuki bore me three beautiful children. She was a good wife - hard working and kind. My mother loved her enormously. We became more prosperous and I mastered how to make simple sandals and sold these from time to time.

FADE TO

EXT. CEMETERY NEAR VILLAGE OF MINOKICHI - DAY

Simple graves in an enclosed remote area. A fresher grave - a mound with rock - is here. O-Yuki is walking past graves with her three children - RINI is a girl, 6, she holds her mother's hand. TARO is 9 and he is largest of the three. KENTARO is 8 and often grins mischievously. All are PALE.

They seem cheery and carry flowers, heading to the new grave.

NOTE : Being supernatural O-Yuki/Yuki-Onna never ages.

MINOKICHI (V.O)

Time flew by happily, the children grew up strong and healthy.

They reach the new grave and kneel and offer the flowers.

O-YUKI

Make an offering to Grandmother - let her see how much you've all grown.

All kneel with heads bowed in prayer.

FADE TO

EXT. RIVER BY OUTSKIRTS OF VILLAGE OF MINOKICHI - DAY

3 X WASHER WOMAN are washing laundry beside a path to a village outskirts. Taro and Kentaro rush ahead together and move from view. O-Yuki walks with Rini, holding her hand.

WASHER WOMAN #1

(calling)

Hello O-Yuki! Hello Little Rini. Have you all been visiting the Cemetery?

O-YUKI

Yes. Its the anniversary of my Mother-In-Laws death. A year gone already...

WASHER WOMAN #2

It must have been nice for her to see her Grandchildren. They are all growing-up so quickly.

WASHER WOMAN #1

I remember she praised the day she met you and always spoke highly of you.

WASHER WOMAN #2

Very rare for a Mother-In-Law.

O-YUKI

(smiling)

Thank you. And yes - we all got on very happily together. We still do.

WASHER WOMAN #1

It's nice to see a couple so happy after so many years.

WASHER WOMAN #2

Of course he is happy - he has such a devoted and pretty wife.

The Three Washer-woman TITTER and resume their work.

O-Yuki and Rini continue walking and move out of sight.

WASHER WOMAN #2

I wish my husband was as devoted as Minokichi. Goro is always out drinking and chasing women... Luckily he is too fat to ever catch them!

WASHER WOMAN #1

Have you noticed O-Yuki never seems to get any older?

WASHER WOMAN #2

You wouldn't think she has had three children or lives a peasants life.

WASHER WOMAN #1

I wonder what her secret is?

FADE TO

INT. POTTERS WORKSHOP, VILLAGE OF MINOKICHI - EVENING

A crude hut with a potters-wheel and a lit lamp. GORO is about 40, overweight and balding. O-Yuki gazing around shyly.

O-YUKI

I don't have long Goro - I need to cook dinner for my children soon. Are you sure we won't be seen here?

GORO

Don't worry - no-one is around this time of day. I've used this place before with a couple of other girls.

O-YUKI

But what of your wife?

GORO

Don't worry about her - she never 'puts out' - it's her fault I wander.

O-Yuki turns her back to Goro and slides down her clothing. He eyes her up from behind, grinning.

O-YUKI

Do you not feel guilty?

GORO

Not having second thoughts are you? Come O-Yuki, I have what you need...

O-Yuki closes her eyes for a moment then opens them - they are JET BLACK and yet somehow gleam in the darkness.

O-YUKI

As you wish then.

She turns to him and opens her mouth - it is JET BLACK. Goro GASPS and steps back nervously but she glides closer and SEIZES him by his throat!

FADE TO

EXT. WORKSHOP, VILLAGE OF MINOKICHI - EVENING

The exterior matches the interior - a light burns inside. Other workshops nearby are closed for the day. Light snow.

The lamp in the workshop GOES OUT and Goro SCREAMS briefly then falls silent. There is no-one around.

SPECIAL EFFECT - TIME FAST-FORWARDS.

Time passes quickly - the moon comes and goes. The sun rises. In a blur a PEASANT MAN wanders into the workshop and goes running out. Another blur as DOCTOR WANG and 2 x Male Peasants and 3 X Washer Woman arrive and enter the hut. A moment later the women exit together and wait outside.

The Doctor is from China, his attire more distinctive.

TIME RETURNS TO NORMAL

The CORPSE of Goro is carried out on a stretcher by the two Peasants - Goro is rigid and pale. Following behind them is the Doctor, who seems strangely irritated.

Washer Woman #3 looks at the corpse and WEEPS. Her companions are not as upset but watch the corpse being carried away.

WASHER WOMAN #2
*He was fine yesterday... Out drinking
 as usual. How can he look so drained?*

The Doctor opens his mouth to answer but is interrupted.

WASHER WOMAN #1
*I hope it's not plague. I remember a
 death just like this one last year...*

The Doctor opens his mouth but is again interrupted.

WASHER WOMAN #2
*Yes - Yuji the pickpocket! And another
 one the year before. Remember Yamato?
 Always chasing Masashi's daughters. He
 was found frozen by the lake one
 morning - rigid and drained.*

WASHER WOMAN #2
That's right... I remember now.

The Doctor SIGHS and hurries to catch up behind the two Peasants and corpse, leaving the ladies behind.

Washer Woman #3 WEEPS even more loudly.

WASHER WOMAN #2
*Oh shut up Amaterasu! He was my
 husband, not yours!*

Someone is watching unnoticed from a shadowy doorway of a

workshop opposite - it is O-Yuki. She observes silently.

FADE TO

INT. HOUSE OF MINOKICHI - EVENING

Minokichi is making SANDALS - 3 x child-sized and one adult. He is plumper, about 27, his attire better quality. Kentaro and Taro are glimpsed sleeping in their beds in the next room. O-Yuki is cuddling her dozing daughter Rini on her lap.

MINOKICHI

Poor Goro the potter is dead - found in his workshop. Doctor Wang thinks he dozed-off and froze but some say it's the plague. I think we should stay away from the village for now.

O-YUKI

As you wish Dear.

MINOKICHI

I know you and the children never get sick, but lets not tempt fate. I don't trust the village Doctor - he thinks all can be cured with an enema.

O-Yuki smiles and gently carries Rini through to the bedroom with the boys, lays her in a bed and covers her with a blanket. Minokichi continues talking.

MINOKICHI (O.S)

I heard Magistrate Tatsuo hired Ronin to seek out the bandits in the mountains. Apparently an inspector from Edo will be visiting.

O-Yuki smiles at her children then carries the candle-lamp out of their room and leaves it in the main room.

O-YUKI

Are you nearly finished my love?

MINOKICHI

Yes - all ready for spring. Here!

He proudly hands O-Yuki the freshly finished sandals with red toe-straps (the others are smaller with green straps).

O-YUKI

Red straps?

MINOKICHI
*Your colour I think - vital,
 passionate. You are as beautiful as
 the day we met, all those years ago.*

O-Yuki tries on her new shoes and seems delighted.

O-YUKI
A perfect fit! Thank you so much!

MINOKICHI
I am very pleased you like them.

An icy breeze blows outside, heavy snow taps on the window.

MINOKICHI
*Snow comes early this year. We will be
 in for another cold winter.*

O-YUKI
Might I brew you some tea my love?

Minokichi heads to the window, not hearing her question.

MINOKICHI
*I've not seen snow this heavy in
 years. It reminds me of a incident,
 about ten years ago...*

O-YUKI
An evening of heavy snow?

MINOKICHI
*Yes - it was strange and terrible. I
 remember as if it were only yesterday.
 I've never told anyone - not even my
 late Mother. I'm not sure if it was
 all real or part dream.*

O-YUKI
*You don't have to tell me if it
 troubles you?*

MINOKICHI
*It was the night Mosaku died... Frozen
 to death - as though the blood had
 been sucked out of him! I saw a woman
 in white stooping over him... I was
 numb with fear and cold - unable to
 move! Her eyes... Her terrifying eyes!*

O-Yuki puts her shoes by the front door, her back turned.

MINOKICHI

It was in the Ferryman's hut - your uncles - where we met. You thought I'd been spying on you, remember?

O-YUKI

Yes... I remember it well.

MINOKICHI

Now that I think of it, you remind me of her. She was very pretty too.

PAN TO O-YUKI, still her back is turned - she seems annoyed.

O-YUKI

It was no dream.

The window BLOWS OPEN and the candles go out - plunging the room into moonlight. O-Yuki is now Yuki-Onna! Her eyes gleam, her fingers become talons and she is in her white attire. Minokichi gapes - utterly shocked and unable to move.

NOTE: As a vampire Yuki-Onna's voice is cold and menacing.

YUKI-ONNA

(angry)

It was I! I! I!!

Yuki-Onna turns towards Minokichi, slowly and menacingly.

YUKI-ONNA

After so long you break our pact - the bargain made to save your life!

MINOKICHI

(shocked and upset)

But... But... But...?!

Snow blows in through the window - everything becoming icy. There is a DISTANT HOWL outside.

Yuki-Onna bumps into her new shoes and pauses to look at them, then glances at her sleeping children.

YUKI-ONNA

Were it not for these children I would drain you in a heartbeat!

Minokichi struggles to move - he seems spellbound.

YUKI-ONNA
*Should the children ever have the
 reason to complain of you, I shall
 return and treat you as you deserve!*

Yuki-Onna glides towards the front door and FADES through it.

Minokichi moves stiffly - he hurries after her and opens the door - outside is nothing but snow. He drops to his knees and WEEPS BITTERLY, she is gone without trace.

ZOOM IN on Minokichi as he blubbers, tears down his cheeks.

SLOW FADE TO

EXT. BANDIT CAMP IN MOUNTAINS - DAY

Tents in mountains around a bonfire that overlooks the sweeping Japanese landscape - very remote. Several BANDITS with mismatching armour and weapons are gathered.

THE BANDIT QUEEN, 25, has dreadlocks, a patched green dress and two axes. All are around Minokichi who kneels and concludes his strange tale. He is now skinny and haggard.

In the background is a cart loaded with bottles of sake. Also are several grazing horses, plus an old MULE.

ZOOM OUT from Minokichi who is upset and remembering events.

NOTE: dialogue is now IN ENGLISH for the duration - the original Japanese tale has ended.

BANDIT QUEEN
 Quite a story. But I do not believe in
 ghosts, only in fools I can plunder!

The Bandits MUTTER in agreement, a couple begin to examine the bottles of sake. Minokichi wipes his eyes.

MINOKICHI
 It's true - every word! I'm here
 searching for my wife, I've devoted
 the rest of my life to find her!

BANDIT QUEEN
 The rest of your life may be shorter
 than you realise.

The Bandits CHUCKLE and some move to stab Minokichi who closes his eyes and waits for death.

BANDIT QUEEN
(to bandits)
WAIT!

The Bandits back away, those with bottles return them.

BANDIT QUEEN
I am greatly moved by your tale... No simple wine-merchant could have invented a story like that, so I am inclined to believe you are who you say you are - a simple woodsman.

MINOKICHI
It is true! I'm not a rich merchant. The sake is for the wise monk of the mountains - the price for his aid.

BANDIT QUEEN
I know of the monk - and of his love of sake. So I have decided not to impede you further in your quest.

MINOKICHI
You... You will let me go?

BANDIT QUEEN
We need something to show for our efforts though. We keep half the wine, your horse and cart also.

MINOKICHI
But how can I transport the rest?

The Bandit Queen points to The Mule.

BANDIT QUEEN
You may have my mule. Hirohito the monk likes animals - perhaps you can offer him a new pet when you arrive?

MINOKICHI
You know of the monk?

BANDIT QUEEN
I know everyone in these mountains - for that is my business, how I live. I have decided to accompany you Minokichi - I am curious to see if there is any truth to your wild yarn.

MINOKICHI
But I've spoken truthfully!

The Bandit Queen draws one of her two AXES, spins it skilfully then holds the blade to Minokitchi's throat.

BANDIT QUEEN
Words are easily said - but should I find any hint of deception then I shall have your head and return with my mule and it's wares. Understood?

Minokichi carefully nods - too nervous to protest.

FADE TO

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL, RURAL JAPAN - DAY

A natural path through mountains. Minokichi rides the MULE with sake bottles attached to the saddle. The Bandit Queen rides a large impressive horse adorned with armour. She now wears green armour with no helmet, the duel axes on her belt.

BANDIT QUEEN
Remember - at the first sign of treachery I kill you. It matters not if others see - all respect me in these parts. You are a stranger.

MINOKICHI
I am no liar! And in truth I'm pleased to have company - even a bandit.

BANDIT QUEEN
Be careful when you speak of bandits - or I may cut out your tongue. Then no others will hear your strange tale.

There is a moment of silence as they proceed.

BANDIT QUEEN
I am curious though - what of your three children? Where are they?

MINOKICHI
With Yoshi and his wife - my cousin. They love children but are unable to start a family. They will adopt our children if I don't return.

FADE TO

FLASHBACK BEGINS

INT. HOUSE OF YOSHI, YOKANICHI TOWN - DAY

The entrance area suggests residents are well off. Minokichi is saying goodbye to Rini, Taro and Kentaro. YOSHI is about 35 and has a moustache, he is a merchant.

AUNT KARORI, 25, is his beauteous wife. She seems moved by this unhappy parting between Minokichi and his children.

MINOKICHI (V.O)

Cousin Watabe Yoshi is a food merchant at Yukanichi town. I rent a store from him there. The cart you took is his.

BANDIT QUEEN (V.O)

I know Yoshi - he and my gang have had dealings for many years. He is a good man, perhaps I will return his cart.

MINOKICHI (V.O)

I had no idea he...er...?

BANDIT QUEEN (V.O)

Associated with bandits? No - that's why he is so useful. He has your children in his care then?

Minokichi says goodbye to his children - they are upset and try to hug him but he pushes them away and heads to the door.

MINOKICHI (V.O)

Yes - I told them I would not rest until I'd found their mother. During my search I heard about a wise-man called Hirohito - the Holy Man of the mountains. He said he will help me.

Minokichi exits quickly, stifling tears. Yoshi holds the boys back and Aunt Karori hugs Rini as the door closes.

FADE TO

FLASHBACK ENDS

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL, RURAL JAPAN - DAY

As before - The Bandit Queen and Minokichi are travelling together through the mountainous landscape.

BANDIT QUEEN

The 'Drunken man of the mountains' more like. I'm surprised you agreed to bring Hirohito so much Sake - enough to feed a whole village.

MINOKICHI

That was his price. I sold almost all I own to buy it. I'm desperate! I cannot go on without 'her'...

MINOKICHI wipes a fresh tear.

BANDIT QUEEN

Don't start blubbing again! I promised I'd get you there didn't I? I suppose if you 'are' related to Yoshi then you can't be that bad. He is a good sort.

FADE TO

INT. SITTING ROOM, MAGISTRATE'S DOJO - DAY

Wealthy but sparse with sliding doors. Yoshi is cowering before THE MAGISTRATE - who is tall and slim with a long moustache. In the door is GUARD #1 - a retainer with armour and spear. A SERVANT is loitering nearby, she is a Geisha.

MAGISTRATE

You are a bad man Yoshi. VERY bad.

YOSHI

But Magistrate what have I done? I pay my taxes - I break none of your laws.

MAGISTRATE

Stolen goods have been traced to your business. Goods belonging to the surviving members of the gang of Ishikawa Goemon. You were seen speaking with them on more than one occasion. Do not deny it!

YOSHI

I am no rebel! I'm only a merchant - a business man, trying to make a living.

(takes a breath)

Sometimes I get 'cheap stock' from new sellers, I know I should ask more questions but the deal is too good to ignore. I'm just a trader! I have a

family to support and think of now.

MAGISTRATE

Then I suggest you start being more forthcoming. For their sake also.

(to Guard)

Take him away! He can contemplate his position further in the dungeon.

The Guard grabs Yoshi and drags him away.

YOSHI

No! Have mercy! I've done nothing!

The Magistrate CLICKS his fingers and The Servant hurries to refill his sake bowl, bowing her head politely.

FADE TO

EXT. TRAIL APPROACHING MONKS HOUSE, RURAL JAPAN - PM

The Bandit Queen and Minokichi are mounted and heading towards the distant house at the foot of a mountain overlooking another cemetery. A crude trail winds to both.

BANDIT QUEEN

You know he is always drunk? I've known him since I was a girl and only saw him sober once in all that time. With this much sake he will drink himself senseless.

MINOKICHI

He seemed 'jolly' when I found him at Yurashuka outpost, buying supplies.

BANDIT QUEEN

I know that outpost also - we often sell our booty there.

MINOKICHI

He said to bring all this sake over - else he would not be able to help. I was on the way when your men mistook me for a wine merchant.

BANDIT QUEEN

What happened before that - when you first 'lost' your wife I mean?

Minokichi begins to sniffle but wipes his eyes and takes a

deep breath. The Bandit Queen rolls her eyes.

FADE TO

FLASHBACK BEGINS

Sound in the scene is MUTED in favour of the VO.

INT. HOUSE OF MINOKICHI, RURAL JAPAN - MORNING

Minokichi is plumper here, standing before his three children who are very upset having just learned of their mother.

MINOKICHI (V.O)

I tried to explain to the children,
but hardly understood myself. O-Yuki
suddenly gone is like losing a limb
and I know I cannot face life without
her, nor bring up the children alone.

The children weep and hug each other - distraught.

MINOKICHI (V.O)

So I took the children to my cousin -
as I said - and began my search.

CUT TO

EXT. FOREST AND BOAT HUT BY RIVER - MORNING

Wintery but no snow - leafless trees seem like hands reaching upwards as Minokichi wanders, searching, upset. He is SKINNIER now and more scruffy.

MINOKICHI (V.O)

I returned to the boatman's shack
where I first saw her... Explored the
entire forest, asking everyone I
encountered if they'd seen her...

There is a distant HOWL and Minokichi turns eagerly towards it, he hurries through the trees - but sees nothing.

MINOKICHI (V.O)

A week passed - but no trace. I vowed
to devote the rest of my days to find
her - to reunite our family.

Minokichi wanders towards the hut, looking miserable.

BANDIT QUEEN (V.O)

Perhaps she can only be found on cold
days? Or during heavy snow? Or night?

Minokichi glances up at the darkening sky as he wanders. The clouds again seem to be the face of Yuki-Onna.

MINOKICHI (V.O)

I will climb every snow-capped
mountain! Explore the frozen lands of
Russia, go to the ends of the world if
I must! I even thought of harming the
children - just so she'd return...

FADE TO

FLASHBACK ENDS

EXT. TRAIL APPROACHING MONKS HOUSE, RURAL JAPAN - PM

The Bandit Queen has stopped her horse and is looking at Minokichi questioningly. They are closer to the Monks house.

MINOKICHI

I didn't though. I'd sooner cut off my
hand than strike my child! They are
all I have left now...

Minokichi wipes another tear. The Bandit Queen shakes her head and rides towards the house, he follows behind.

BANDIT QUEEN

The monk lives here, but sometimes
travels. I hope he is not in a stupor.
Should he not corroborate your tale
though - I will kill you for lying.

MINOKICHI

(quietly)

Then at least my suffering is over.

FADE TO

INT. PRISON CELL BELOW MAGISTRATES DOJO - PM

Yoshi is battered and bruised. MOANS from unseen prisoners in other cells are heard. A RAT scampers across the floor.

Suddenly a JANGLE OF KEYS and the door opens - Guard #1 enters and glares menacingly at him. Yoshi cowers away.

YOSHI
Please - no more beatings! Have I not
suffered enough? No more!!

The Guard steps closer and beckons.

FADE TO

EXT. COURTYARD AT MAGISTRATE'S DOJO - PM

The dojo is like a small castle around a courtyard with gate.

A riderless OLD NAG with cheap-looking saddle is here as is
The Magistrate, THE RONIN and 3 X SAMURAI.

Samurai #1 has an open-faced helmet and two swords.

Samurai #2 has a *no-dachi* bladed polearm instead of sword.

Samurai #3 has a short-sword and large ornate crossbow.

The RONIN has blood red armour, bigger than his companions
with an air of menace. He and the samurai are mounted.

Yoshi arrives from an internal doorway - shoved along by
Guard #1. The Magistrate smiles and turns to him.

MAGISTRATE
Speak of the devil! Yoshi meet Ogawa
Kenichi - a famed Ronin now in my
employ. You have a chance for
redemption - act faithfully as his
guide and you shall be given a pardon.

Yoshi drops to his knees and bows.

YOSHI
Thank you Magistrate! I will serve
Ogawa Kenichi faithfully!

MAGISTRATE
Good. If he is displeased or has any
reason to doubt your fidelity he will
behead you. I hope that is clear?

YOSHI
Yes Magistrate! I thank you for this
chance to prove my loyalty.

MAGISTRATE
Good. Then you may mount the steed I

have so generously prepared...

The magistrate points to the nag - the Samurai CHUCKLE. The RONIN never laughs, instead he trots closer on his horse and points menacingly at Yoshi. He has a DEEP GROWLING VOICE.

RONIN
Serve me well merchant - else you perish. Is that understood?

Yoshi bows nervously and hurries to the check his horse.

YOSHI
Might word be sent to my wife? How long will I be away for?

The Ronin SNARLS and dismounts. He draws his sheaved sword and savagely begins to BEAT Yoshi with it as his companions watch. Even the Magistrate seems a bit shocked.

MAGISTRATE
(to Yoshi)
I think you better stop asking him questions. It is important this errand is done quickly as The Inspector is visiting and I want good news to tell.
(To Ronin)
I suggest you refrain from killing your guide? At least until you have left the grounds of my dojo.

The Ronin stops beating Yoshi who lays whimpering. The Ronin turns silently to The Magistrate and bows.

FADE TO

INT. THE MONKS DOJO - LATE PM

A central room with main entrance and kitchen area and a few side-rooms. Scrolls, books and papers everywhere. Through windows a glimpse of the graveyard and mountains.

THE MONK wears robes and is face-down with a bottle - DEAD. He is being examined by The Bandit Queen and Minokichi.

NOTE: The Monks ghost is seen and heard later.

MINOKICHI
Dead!? How can he be dead?

BANDIT QUEEN
We will not be getting many answers
from him today... Or ever.

MINOKICHI
A wasted journey then. Yet another
dead end... No pun intended.

BANDIT QUEEN
Not for me - I will take your sake.
You are free to go. As far as I am
concerned your story ends here.

Minokichi picks up a scroll.

MINOKICHI
Perhaps there is a clue here? He was
adamant that he could help me - that
he knew where I should look.

BANDIT QUEEN
I bet he was, when you agreed to
provide him so much to drink.

MINOKICHI
I'm not sure he intended to drink it -
at least not all.

The Bandit Queen finds crumpled papers under the Monk - notes
on Yuki-Onna legends, written in Japanese.

BANDIT QUEEN
Notes about 'Yuki-Onna' - snow ghosts.
He was making notes when he died.

MINOKICHI
You can read?

BANDIT QUEEN
Of course - my father taught me. I may
be an outcast and bandit but I am not
some ignorant peasant.
(pause)
Meaning no insult Minokichi.

The Bandit Queen reads the notes.

BANDIT QUEEN
This mentions a place where Yuki-Onna
must return every decade... Else they
lose their powers and become mortal.

MINOKICHI
Perhaps I can find this place?

BANDIT QUEEN
There may be books and scrolls here
that will tell us more? Help me look.

MINOKICHI
But I cannot read?

The Bandit Queen points to a symbol on the notes.

BANDIT QUEEN
Look for papers that bear this symbol
- it means 'Yuki-Onna'.

They begin to rummage around and search the scrolls.

MINOKICHI
I can't believe he has so much stuff.
He must be a long way from 'nirvana'.

Minokichi finds a door to a side room - he peers inside. He wanders through and opens a blind for light - it is a bathroom with LARGE METAL TUB. He is out of view a moment.

BANDIT QUEEN
And I can't believe you were bringing
so much sake. What were you thinking??

MINOKICHI (O.S)
He said it will prove my determination
- and be a show of my commitment.

BANDIT QUEEN
A show of your foolishness more like?

Minokichi emerges from the bathroom.

MINOKICHI
I don't believe that. He seemed wise,
and it seems he was very comfortable
here. Have you seen what's in here?

BANDIT QUEEN
Visitors to the graves bring him
donations and offerings. He had quite
a nice thing going...

The Bandit Queen peers through the bathroom door - she STARES and gapes at the bathtub - suddenly horrified!

MINOKICHI
Is something wrong?

The Bandit Queen GAPES - her hands begin shaking, her eyes well with tears. Minokichi looks puzzled by her reaction.

FADE TO

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL, RURAL JAPAN - LATE PM

The Ronin, 3 X Samurai and Yoshi are proceeding on their mounts. Yoshi's face is swollen and bruised - he can hardly see out of one eye. The Ronin waits for Yoshi to catch up.

RONIN
This is the way to the trade-post?
Where the bandits often visit?

YOSHI
(speaking painfully)
Yurashuka Trade-post, yes.

RONIN
How far away?

YOSHI
An hour or a little less from here.

RONIN
You are well known there?

YOSHI
Yes. Although I might not be
recognised, looking like this.

RONIN
If you try to warn them of our intent
you will be the first to die. Then I
will kill your family, rape your woman
and burn your house down. Clear?

YOSHI
Very clear, Ogawa Kenichi.

The Ronin spurs his horse on. All follow behind.

FADE TO

INT. THE MONKS DOJO - LATE PM

The Bandit Queen is weeping and shaking as Minokichi tries to

comfort her. He fetches a bottle of sake for her.

BANDIT QUEEN
You must tell... tell no-one of my
weakness... I am... much troubled.

MINOKICHI
Try some sake. Don't worry, my lips
are sealed. Drink up!

The Bandit Queen grabs the bottle with a trembling hand and gulps it down. After a moment she seems more herself.

BANDIT QUEEN
I was caught off-guard... It was a
shock. A bad shock...

MINOKICHI
What happened? What upset you?

FADE TO

FLASHBACK BEGINS

EXT. COURTYARD, EDO CASTLE - DAY

Similar to the dojo courtyard but bigger. The Bandit Queen is cleaner and plainly dressed here. With her are BANDIT #1, BANDIT #2 and BANDIT #3. She and all bandits are unarmed.

Bandit #1 (aka 'Akira') is tall and slim.

Bandit #2 (aka 'Chihiro') is short and rotund.

Bandit #3 is very unkempt and hairy, with a beard.

The Bandits are among a crowd of PEASANTS watching an execution. Several GUARDS like those at the Magistrates provide security as ISIKAWA GOEMON (a mid 30's man) and his 5 year old son are being boiled alive in a GIANT METAL BATH.

BANDIT QUEEN (V.O)
My father - Ishikawa Goemon - was a
famous bandit, famed for taking from
the rich to give to the poor.

Goemon tries to hold his son up out of the boiling water as he expires, SCREAMING in agony. Tears run down The Bandit Queen's cheeks as all watch the terrible death.

BANDIT QUEEN (V.O)

After years of hiding in the mountains
he was captured by Toyotomi Hideyoshi
and put to death along with his infant
son - my brother. Boiled alive!

NOTE : 'Goemon Baths' are named after Goemon across Japan.

FADE TO

FLASHBACK ENDS

INT. THE MONKS DOJO - LATE PM

The Bandit Queen quaffs more sake and her hands are badly shaking. A tear rolls down her cheek as she remembers.

BANDIT QUEEN

More Sake! I need more sake!

Minokichi quickly finds another bottle and she gulps it down. She CHOKES for a moment then takes a deep breath.

BANDIT QUEEN

My Father believed the peasants would rise up and free him... That united in purpose peasants would take over and usher-in a new era for Japan.

(pauses - upset)

But they only stood and stared! After all he'd done - the blood he shed for them and their families! They just stood and watched him die!!

MINOKICHI

Peasants are not warriors - do not think us cowards. If injured our families suffer - our fields are not tended and our children starve.

BANDIT QUEEN

I continue my fathers work - I am now leader. All look to me, so I keep my nightmares and fears a secret.

The Bandit Queen sits and drinks as Minokichi sits nearby, unsure what to do or say to the troubled young woman.

FADE TO

EXT. TRADING POST, WILDERNESS - LATE PM

Tents and stalls at a crossroads. In the background MERCHANTS haggle with CUSTOMERS (local farmers and peasants).

In the foreground Bandit #1 and #2 are now armed and are talking to THE MERCHANT - a plump Japanese man at a stall.

Unknown to them The Ronin and Samurai are approaching, nipping to hide behind tents. Yoshi approaches openly.

BANDIT #1
(to Merchant)
We can throw in the cart too if you want? But we need the horses.

BANDIT #2
A very reasonable price. Right Akira?

The haggling bandits and merchant take no notice of Yoshi as he staggers closer - not recognising him initially.

BANDIT #1
Right. And its good quality sake.

All three turn to Yoshi as he arrives.

BANDIT #1
Yoshi - is that you?

YOSHI
(whispering)
You need to get away from here!

BANDIT #2
What has happened to you?

Suddenly The Ronin steps out followed by the 3 X Samurai - they advance as all hurriedly draw their weapons.

The Ronin SCREAMS and CHARGES - he SLICES Bandit #1 in two!

Yoshi cowers as the scene erupts into violence. Customers and Merchants begin fighting the Samurai - who are eager to slaughter everyone present. Yoshi cowers and gapes.

FADE TO

EXT. CEMETERY BY MONKS HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

As glimpsed before. A wooden pyre has been built and the body

of the monk on top. Minokichi has a fiery brazier.

The Bandit Queen is drunk, she sways and staggers but is no longer upset. She still holds a bottle.

BANDIT QUEEN
(slurred)
Thank you for helping with this...

MINOKICHI
The wood was no problem for me - lucky there are a few good trees round back.

Minokichi moves to light the pyre.

MINOKICHI
Should we say some words?

BANDIT QUEEN
(nods and thinks a moment)
I knew Hirohito for many years - a learned but troubled man who cared deeply about others. Farewell Hirohito - may you find the sake you loved so much in the afterlife.

The Bandit Queen NODS to Minokichi and he lights the prior.

FADE TO
EXT. TRADING POST, WILDERNESS - EVENING

Now ruins, tents torn and burning, carts and stalls overturned. Goods spilled - including many bottles of Sake. Everyone but Yoshi, The 3 X Samurai, The Ronin and Bandit #2 lay dead. The Ronin is holding-up Bandit #2 up by his ears.

BANDIT #2
(squealing)
Our leader is at the hills of Horoshiri! By the spring!

RONIN
(to Yoshi)
You know of where he speaks?

YOSHI
The spring is up a goat-path, less than an hour from here, easy to find.

Bandit #2 looks accusingly at Yoshi but GURGLES. The Ronin

has stabbed him with his short-sword and twists the blade. The bandit collapses, dying and gutted (literally).

RONIN
Mount up men - we end this tonight.

YOSHI
What of the sake? And the fallen? Some may live if given help?

The Ronin stomps menacingly towards Yoshi - who cowers nervously, expecting another beating.

RONIN
Bring all the sake you can carry - then we will celebrate later. As for survivors my men will ensure none are left to tell tales. Understood?

Yoshi bows nervously and begins to collect the bottles.

FADE TO

INT. THE MONKS DOJO - EVENING

The corpse gone, things tidied. Minokichi is preparing a meal, he turns as The Bandit Queen approaches with a map.

MINOKICHI
What do you have there? You are still hunting for clues?

BANDIT QUEEN
Actually I was looking for something to wipe with. I found something good and something bad - both by accident.

MINOKICHI
Something good and something bad?

BANDIT QUEEN
The good is a map that shows a place mentioned in the Monks notes. A mountainous area called Izumishiri. Where the Yuki-Onna dwell, in a haunted cave, if the legends are true.

MINOKICHI
Then I know where to go! Thank you Miss Ishikawa.

BANDIT QUEEN

I don't use my family name - it brings unwanted attention. Call me 'Kasumi'.

The Bandit Queen hands Minokichi the map and sways a little.

POV from Minokichi looking at map - this is Japanese in style and shows a lake surrounded by mountains and a cave location.

MINOKICHI (O.S)

I will climb a mountain to get there!

BANDIT QUEEN (O.S)

You won't need to, if you cross the lake there is a trail through. See?

BACK TO SCENE.

Minokichi is looking at the map and seems enthusiastic.

MINOKICHI

I thought you didn't believe me?

BANDIT QUEEN

The monk did - he seemed to want to help you. But now for the bad news.

MINOKICHI

If its about my cooking, wait at least until you try it?

She waves a scroll at him.

BANDIT QUEEN

This note says when the Yuki-Onna spend a month in the cave - between old and new moons - they forget all they meet in the world of men. So she will forget you and the children.

MINOKICHI

A month? But it is only 3 days until the new moon?! She will forget us??

BANDIT QUEEN

If the note is correct. And it's only two days, as today is nearly done.

She screws up the scroll and heads away.

BANDIT QUEEN
 In either case I'll be popping outside
 for a few minutes. Shout when dinner
 is ready, could you?

Minokichi is lost in thought and looks at the map.

FADE TO

EXT. BANDIT CAMP IN MOUNTAINS - NIGHT

The Bandits are sleeping in tents, a few have lamps on. There are many empty bottles about. Two Bandits pace about with spears. The bonfire gives light but burns low.

Suddenly a hand GRABS one of the bandits and pulls him into the bushes, where he is heard being STABBED.

The 2nd Bandit pacing realises his comrade is missing and hurries about looking for him, growing concerned.

AN ARROW THUDS into his neck - he sinks, gargling and dying.

The Ronin and The 3 x Samurai emerge from the darkness - Samurai #3 has his fired Crossbow. They ready their weapons as they walk into the camp unhindered.

RONIN
 Kill these vermin. Show no mercy!

The Samurai begin to stab and kill the sleeping bandits.

FADE TO

INT. THE MONKS DOJO - NIGHT

Lamps and a fire lit. The Bandit Queen has removed her armour. She and Minokichi finish their meal.

PAN OUT from knife stabbing meat - which the Bandit Queen is eating. This is the last part of her dinner.

MINOKICHI
 All done?

She nods, chewing. He takes her now empty bowl.

BANDIT QUEEN
 I did not think you would be much of a cook Minokichi, but I was mistaken.

MINOKICHI

I always enjoy cooking at home for my family. Or did...

BANDIT QUEEN

Thank you for agreeing to stay, I'm far too sleepy to return to my camp.

MINOKICHI

It's the least I can do for your help. The Monks bed is made-up for you.

BANDIT QUEEN

I'll take you to the lake in the morning, I know the way. After that though you're on your own.

MINOKICHI

Thank you again 'Kasumi'. I hope I get there in time.

BANDIT QUEEN

It's a days ride, the lake won't take long to cross assuming there's a boat.

Minokichi puts the plates in a bowl with washing-up items.

MINOKICHI

Oh - I have closed the door to the bathroom. Just in case.

BANDIT QUEEN

Sorry about before - I was caught off-guard. It will not happen again.

MINOKICHI

No problem. I too hate to see anyone killed... It's horrible.

FADE TO

EXT. BANDIT CAMP IN MOUNTAINS - NIGHT

Most tents are slashed and splattered with blood. All but 3 x bandits are dead - bodies are being stacked in a pile by Samurai #1 and Yoshi (Yoshi does most of the work).

The bonfire more built-up (the samurai are happy to be seen).

The bandits are tied and kneeling - including Bandit #3. The Ronin stands behind them with his sword raised.

KOMAKO is similar in looks to The Bandit Queen but more petit and dainty. She wears a silk nightgown. She struggles to pull free as Samurai #2 holds her from behind.

Samurai #3 is looking for loot and other survivors.

RONIN
(to first bandit)
Where is your Leader?

The bandit does not reply. The Ronin CHOPS his head off - this rolls along the ground. He moves to the next bandit.

RONIN
(to 2nd bandit)
Where is your Leader?

The next bandit does not reply - The Ronin CHOPS his head off and moves to the final bandit - Bandit #3.

RONIN
(Firmly - to Bandit #3)
Where is your Leader? SPEAK!

BANDIT #3
She went to the old cemetery at
Yamatani! To visit Hirohito - a monk
who lives there!

RONIN
(to Yoshi)
Do you know of this place?

YOSHI
Yes - it is a couple of hours ride
from here. A well known local place.

KOMAKO
(Yoshi)
Traitor! Why help this devil?

Yoshi turns to Komako - one eye is too swollen to see through and she gets a closer look at his injuries.

YOSHI
Look what they did to me Komako!

The Ronin CHOPS OFF THE HEAD of bandit #3. The head rolls towards Komako and the three Samurai all seem amused.

RONIN

You! GIRL! You know of this cemetery?

KOMAKO

I do. It is where my father is buried.

RONIN

(to Yoshi)

Then your service is done. Return to the Magistrate - tell him the bandits are dealt with and that we are to capture their leader at the Cemetery.

Komako seems puzzled but Yoshi bows to the Ronin.

YOSHI

Yes! I will do as you instruct.

Yoshi bows multiple times to all and eagerly hurries towards his old horse - happy to be released and leave.

KOMAKO

(whispering after him)

You coward!

FADE TO

INT. THE MONKS DOJO - NIGHT

Minokichi is asleep on the floor in his underwear in a bed of blankets, the embers of the fire provide light. He is awoken by a SPLASHING sound outside. He sits up and looks around.

There is another SPLASH - again from outside.

Minokichi opens the main door slightly and peers out.

POV from Minokichi looking through gap in door. The Bandit Queen is outside, naked and washing by a water barrel. She is surprisingly beautiful in the moonlight and doesn't see him.

BACK TO SCENE

Minokichi gapes for a moment, then takes a breath, pulls the door closed and returns to bed. He seems conflicted.

FADE TO

EXT. BANDIT CAMP IN MOUNTAINS - NIGHT

The heads of the 3 x beheaded bandits are on stakes at the

entrance to the camp. The Samurai are partly unarmoured and eating. Komako is tied to a tree and The Ronin approaches her menacingly - he is still fully armoured.

PAN OUT from the severed heads.

Komako stares defiantly at The Ronin. He pulls out his short-sword and waves it in her face a moment then cuts her free.

RONIN
(to all)
We will rest here this evening... Our
new guide will keep us entertained.

KOMAKO
I am no musician or story teller.

Samurai #2 rises and moves towards the Ronin - in case Komako makes a run for it.

RONIN
You will dance and remove your clothes
- my men have simple tastes.

KOMAKO
The hell I will!

Samurai #2 moves to strike her but the Ronin raises his hand and he obediently stops and steps away.

RONIN
What is your name woman? Are you a
whore servicing these bandits?

KOMAKO
I have nothing to say to scum like
you. When The Bandit Queen discovers
what you have done she will hunt you
down and kill you all!

The Samurai all LAUGH at this threat.

RONIN
(to samurai #1)
You have the spirit of a wild horse!
So I will ride you until you are
properly broken. Hold her steady!

Samurai #2 GRABS Komako's arms and holds her from behind. She struggles to no avail. The Ronin begins to pull off his armour as his men turn to watch. He moves closer to Komako

and removes his helmet - she GASPS and faces away!

The Ronin is hideously deformed - this face MELTED from burns and horrific scars, his few teeth like jutting tusks.

The Ronin pulls Komako's hair to make her look at him and moves his face closer to hers.

RONIN

I will take you girl! Long after you
scream in pain and beg for mercy I
will take you - again and again!

FADE TO

INT. MAGISTRATE'S COURTYARD - NIGHT

Yoshi has returned on his nag and is being helped down from his horse by Guard #1 and by GUARD #2. Guard #2 is dressed like the other guard but older, fatter and bearded.

The Magistrate exits an internal building and approaches Yoshi. He is fastening his attire and looks sweaty.

MAGISTRATE

Yoshi? You are alone?

YOSHI

I have news from Ogawa Kenichi! The Bandits have been put to the sword, come morning he will capture The Bandit Queen at the cemetery of Yamatanai where she is visiting.

MAGISTRATE

Excellent! You have done well.

YOSHI

Sorry for the lateness of the hour.
Were you going to bed?

MAGISTRATE

I'm often up late - I have many pressing duties as town Magistrate. So are you to return to The Ronin?

YOSHI

No, he has found another guide - a female bandit instead of myself.

MAGISTRATE

You shall remain here until I receive confirmation. Now if you'll excuse me I have important work to get back to?

YOSHI

But I have served faithfully! I just want to get home to my wife!

The Magistrate NODS to his Guards who GRAB Yoshi and escort him away towards the door leading to the cells.

MAGISTRATE

Don't worry about your wife Yoshi, she is in good hands...

The Magistrate smiles evilly and returns the way he came.

FADE TO

INT. SITTING ROOM, MAGISTRATE'S DOJO - NIGHT

Lamps flicker around the room. Aunt Karori is in her underwear and standing in the corner, a vacant expression.

The door slides open and The Magistrate enters - she does not move or react. He looks her up and down then closes the door.

CLICK! He snaps his fingers. Aunt Karori seems to awaken, she looks around confused and startled.

AUNT KARORI

Magistrate Tatsuo?! What happened?
Where am I? What's going on??

MAGISTRATE

Calm yourself Mistress Karori - as I told you before - I am in complete control of all that happens here.

Aunt Karori is shocked to find her clothes missing, then realises she has a strange taste in her mouth. She SPITS and wipes her lips, glaring accusingly at The Magistrate.

AUNT KARORI

What is this taste in my mouth? Did you drug me? Where are my clothes?

MAGISTRATE

You are my guest - as is your husband. Do you not remember? You have been

very helpful and compliant - very 'open' about your husbands dealings. A little more from you and you may go.

She approaches and kneels pleadingly.

AUNT KARORI
Please - release my husband! I do not care what happens to me, but spare him! I'll do anything that you ask!

MAGISTRATE
(smiling evilly)
Yes... I know you will.

FADE TO

EXT. CEMETERY BY MONKS HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

Barely sunrise. The Bandit Queen is scooping ashes from the monk into a bag. She is fully dressed and armoured. Standing nearby is Minokichi, also fully dressed but sleepy.

Behind them the horse and mule are saddled and ready.

MINOKICHI
You sure you should be taking those?

BANDIT QUEEN
At some point I will scatter these in the doorway of his favourite Sake House in Edo - he would like that.

Minokichi mounts his unimpressive steed - as before there are bottles of sake attached to the saddle. The Bandit Queen - to his surprise - begins to pull weeds from a nearby grave.

MINOKICHI
What are you doing now? Come on, we don't have much time!

BANDIT QUEEN
This is my uncles grave. I will quickly tidy the others as the Monk is gone. It is only proper the dead are respected - and only takes a minute.

Minokichi rolls his eyes and shuffles impatiently.

FADE TO

EXT. BANDIT CAMP IN MOUNTAINS - MORNING

STAKES with the heads of ALL dead bandits in the background. The camp BURNS along with headless bodies and dead horses.

In the foreground, armoured and mounted and proudly watching the blaze are The Ronin, The 3 x Samurai and Komako - she is on a bandits horse and her hands tied behind her back. She is now in a silk dress and is sore, tired and unhappy.

RONIN

Let this be a warning to any bandits that yet remain in these hills.

The Samurai nod - pleased with their work.

RONIN

Lead on girl - lest you crave more 'intimate time' with me?

Komako scowls at The Ronin and SPITS towards him (missing), then manages to get her horse trotting along the path. The Samurai and Ronin all follow behind her, seeming amused.

RONIN

See how well she rides, even tied? It seems I trained her well last night!

The Samurai all CHUCKLE.

FADE TO

EXT. DESOLATE LANDS APPROACHING LAKE - MORNING

This landscape is more desolate and eerie. Minokichi and The Bandit Queen are travelling on their horses, in more of a hurry now. The sky is darkening - a storm is coming.

NOTE: The Bandit Queen has the ashes - a POUCH on her belt.

MINOKICHI

Come on, can't we go a bit faster?

BANDIT QUEEN

There is no point exhausting our mounts. Our pace is good enough and we should treat horses with kindness.

MINOKICHI

You seem very odd for a Bandit.

BANDIT QUEEN

Really? How so?

MINOKICHI

Worrying about the horses, tending
those graves and cremating the monk.

BANDIT QUEEN

Well you seem unusual for a peasant.
Braver and more driven than most.

MINOKICHI

I'm just more desperate.

(pause)

Is it far to the lake from here?

BANDIT QUEEN

A good few hours - I know this region
but rarely come this way. There are
rumours this land is cursed. Haunted.

MINOKICHI

Haunted?

BANDIT QUEEN

Last year the peasants here fled,
abandoning their homes. I heard talk
of 'a monster' but pay little
attention to peasant superstition.
Present company accepted.

MINOKICHI

Thank you... I think.

FADE TO

EXT. TRAIL APPROACHING MONKS HOUSE, RURAL JAPAN - MORNING

In the distance the mountain with Monks house. The Ronin and
Samurai follow Komako who is still tied, all are mounted.

POV FROM THE RONIN - he admires how Komako's shapely legs
hold tightly around her horse, guiding it along.

RONIN (O.S)

You are a good rider, you have strong
legs and thighs.

KOMAKO

Don't you remember last night?

BACK TO SCENE

The Ronin trots closer to her on his horse.

RONIN

How you remained still and took it?
Well it is clear you are well trained
with horses at least. You are not a
mere slave or servant, are you?

Komako glances at him angrily.

KOMAKO

Very well. In truth I am Ishikawa
Komako - cousin of Ishikawa Kasumi -
The Bandit Queen of The Mountains.

RONIN

I suspected as much - from your
indignant squirms and gasps. A mere
slave would not be so offended.

KOMAKO

My cousin will kill you, regardless.

The 3 X Samurai all CHUCKLE.

FADE TO

EXT. DESOLATE LANDS APPROACHING LAKE - LATE MORNING

Minokichi and The Bandit Queen have stopped to rest and feed
their mounts, although Minokichi is pacing about.

MINOKICHI

More delays?

BANDIT QUEEN

The horses need to rest. Especially
your mule, it can hardly keep up.

MINOKICHI

And whose fault is that? I had a nice
cart until I met you.

BANDIT QUEEN

I can just leave you out here - let
you stumble about on your own? I'm
doing you a favour being here.

Minokichi looks at his mule for a moment.

MINOKICHI

Sorry - I don't mean to be stubborn. I was just thinking about the children. I hope they're all alright...

FADE TO

EXT. MAGISTRATE'S COURTYARD - LATE MORNING

The SERVANT is moving robotically as if hypnotised, she is opening the gate with a vacant smile.

The 3 x children - Rini, Kentaro and Taro - hurry past and she closes the gate behind them. She waits, dazed and vacant.

NOTE: It seems the children have powers from their mother.

The children hurry quietly through the courtyard.

RINI

Your sure Aunty Karori came here?

TARO

That's what she said - to plead on behalf of Uncle. Something must have happened to her to be gone so long.

KENTARO

With luck we will all be home from here before anyone notices.

Guard #1 approaches from an internal door and readies his spear. Rini looks worried but Taro and Kentaro CLOSE THEIR EYES and EXTEND THEIR HANDS towards him.

TARO

We are not here - you did not see us.

Guard #1 stops in his tracks and seems confused - he has forgotten the intruders. He shrugs and wanders away.

The children smile and head towards an internal door.

FADE TO

INT. CORRIDOR IN MAGISTRATE'S DOJO - LATE AM

This leads to a stairs both up and down, large urns and crates here. The children are exploring and searching.

RINI

Are you sure we should do this? Mother said to keep our abilities hidden.

TARO

First our parents, now Aunt and Uncle are missing - it's an emergency!

KENTARO

I feel them near - in this building.

RINI

Me too - uncle is underground I think.

There are FOOTSTEPS - someone coming downstairs.

TARO

Quiet - I hear someone!

RINI

Quickly - hide!

The three children hide behind the crates.

The Magistrate arrives, with Guard#2 and GUARD #3 at his side. Guard #3 is the fatter of the three seen so far.

The Magistrate nods and points to where the children are hiding, as if able to sense them. The guards GRAB the children and pull them out by their arms.

MAGISTRATE

Don't think 'beings' with powers like yours can pass my doorway unnoticed.

(to Guards)

Take them to my ritual chamber!

The guards nod and roughly escort the children away.

KENTARO

No! Let us go!

TARO

Get off me!

RINI

Help!

FADE TO

EXT. CEMETERY BY MONKS HOUSE - LATE MORNING

The Ronin, 3 x Samurai and Komako are arriving on their mounts. The Ronin turns to Komako (who is still tied).

RONIN
Is this the place?

KOMAKO
Well 'duh'!

The Ronin SLAPS her then turns to his men.

RONIN
Hiroto - wait outside with this
troublesome girl. Hiroshi - go around
the back. I will enter with Junichiro.
Kill all you find without mercy!

The 3 x Samurai nod and check their weapons and swords are loose in the scabbards. Komako SIGHS.

FADE TO

EXT. FURTHER DESOLATE LANDS APPROACHING LAKE - LATE MORNING

A few huts are falling to ruin - empty and abandoned. One is the FISHERMAN'S HUT (seen more later). It is beginning to RAIN and the clouds are stormy. The Bandit Queen is leading Minokichi along, both mounted again.

MINOKICHI
(shrugging)
Still no-one around? Abandoned?

BANDIT QUEEN
A year ago this place was thriving...
I think we should shelter in one of
these huts until the storm passes.

There is a RUMBLE OF THUNDER.

MINOKICHI
Can't we press on?

BANDIT QUEEN
I've no wish to be soaked. Don't worry
- we won't be delayed for long.

MINOKICHI
All this stopping... It's torture!

FADE TO

INT. MAGIC CHAMBER, MAGISTRATES DOJO - MIDDAY

Filled with both occult and torture devices. An X-shaped rack on a chain above a smoking pit. A desk and shelves full of books and scrolls. The 3 x children are in a ROUND CAGE suspended by a chain with wires. Outside it is STORMY. The Magistrate is CHANTING before a large ornate wall-mirror.

TARO
Let us out!

KENTARO
what are you doing?

RINI
I want my mummy!

MAGISTRATE
Silence brats! Or I shall siphon your life-energy and not just your power!

He pulls a goblet from a neice connected to a wire/pipe, swigs its contents then SPITS this out over the mirror.

MAGISTRATE
Your presence has given me a new option, but the ritual is complicated. Interrupt me again and die!

The Magistrate returns the cup and mutters more incantations - the reflection in the mirror becomes warped and distorted.

Kentaro plucks out Rini's hair-pin from her hair. He bends it and uses it on the lock on their cage - she seems annoyed.

Shapes in the mirror swirl and a shadowy figure forms. Suddenly its eyes open - these glow in the darkness.

TARO
It is a Shikigami! A demon!!

KENTARO
The Magistrate is an Onmyoji Master!

The shadowy form speaks with an ethereal raspy voice.

THE SHIKIGAMI
Yes my Master. I await your command.

The Magistrate CHUCKLES EVILLY as the children stare in horror at the demonic apparition.

FADE TO

INT. THE MONKS DOJO - MIDDAY

The Ronin, Samurai #1 and #2 and Komako are present. (She is still tied). The Ronin is examining the map and notes viewed previously by The Bandit Queen. It is stormy outside.

RONIN

Good of them to leave us notes...
Unless these are merely a decoy?

KOMAKO

My cousin is cunning - you will not find her so easily.

RONIN

She does not know I seek her. She will only learn when she dies by my sword!

KOMAKO

She is used to being hunted, disappearing from one moment to the next. That is how she survives.

RONIN

Then it is time for our other option.

The Ronin nods to The Samurai who pushes Komako to her knees and steps away. The Ronin draws his sword.

KOMAKO

What is the meaning of this?

RONIN

One bandit head is as good as another!

The two Samurai seem to approve of this plan and nod.

The sound of horses NEIGHING OUTSIDE - frightened horses.

The Ronin moves to behead Komako but pauses when a SCREAM is heard outside - Samurai #3 (off screen). All are surprised.

The door bursts open and a PEASANT ZOMBIE enters. This is a reanimated rotting corpse of one of the peasants in the cemetery, decaying and filthy.

The Peasant Zombie grabs Samurai #2 and BITES onto his neck and shoulder, holding him in a deadly embrace.

Komako SCREAMS and cowers away, still bound.

The Ronin HURLS his katana at the zombie like a spear - impaling it to the wall. It is still moving but now stuck.

Samurai #2 collapses, dying, Samurai #1 attends him.

KOMAKO
Are the dead rising to kill us?!

The Ronin draws his short-sword and examines the zombie - this SNARLS and tries to grab. He cuts off its head. The body falls - still twitching - as the Ronin recovers his katana. The zombie head snaps its jaws at him - still alive.

ANOTHER SCREAM outside (Samurai #3 again - in pain)

RONIN
(to remaining samurai)
Quickly - outside!

The Ronin cuts Komako's bonds.

FADE TO

EXT. CEMETERY BY MONKS HOUSE - MIDDAY (STORMY)

The horses are tied to a post outside the graveyard, NEIGHING and pulling to get away. Samurai #3 is being eaten by several ZOMBIES from the graves. A STORM with LIGHTNING above.

The Ronin, Samurai #1 and Komako exit the Monks house and gape as more zombies clawing out of graves, growling.

RONIN
Don't just stand there - attack!

Samurai #1 draws his swords and nervously attacks the Zombies as the Ronin and Komako watch. At first he does well, cutting and slicing, however more zombies begin to surround him.

KOMAKO
Aren't you fighting them too?

RONIN
I must know my enemy before I fight.

Samurai #3 is partly eaten but begins to twitch - becoming a

Zombie. He SNARLS and grabs at the ankle of Samurai #1 - distracting him. The zombies GRAB Samurai #1 and BITE him!

Suddenly Samurai #2 staggers out of the Dojo behind the Ronin, now a drooling zombie. Komako SCREAMS and cowers.

RONIN
Quickly - to the horses! It is
impossible to fight so many.

The Ronin decapitates zombified Samurai #2, who sinks to his knees as Komako flees to the horses.

Most zombies are busy eating Samurai #1 as The Ronin and Komako hurry away. The Ronin lets his prisoner go ahead.

From behind the horses ZOMBIE-DAD staggers out. He wears mouldering BLUE ROBES - a merchants attire. He SNARLS and lurches at Komako as she gapes in terror at him.

KOMAKO
It is my father! I know his clothes!
How can this be happening?!

The Ronin SHOVES Komako into Zombie-dad and both topple. For a moment they wrestle, Zombie-Dad trying to bite his daughter and she pushing him away SCREAMING!

The Ronin SWEEPS down his katana - beheading Zombie-Dad.

Komako is a blubbering bloody mess, distraught. The Ronin sheaves his sword, pulls her up and onto a horse and unties it. He frees the other horses which gallop away, save his own which he mounts calmly. He gazes over at the zombies.

RONIN
Be thankful I still need a guide.

The Ronin and Komako gallop away, she clings on and is upset.

FADE TO

INT. MAGIC CHAMBER, MAGISTRATES DOJO - EARLY PM

The Magistrate has dozed off at his desk, slumped over a spell book. The mirror seems 'normal' again.

The children have ESCAPED the cage and tip-toe towards the door. Rini holds her bent hair-pin up and seems annoyed.

All pause as the Magistrate SNORES loudly and shuffles - then

remains sleeping as before.

Taro puts his finger to his lips. The children continue creeping and Kentaro reaches up for the door-handle.

FADE TO

INT. PRISON CELL BELOW MAGISTRATES DOJO - EARLY PM

Yoshi is in the prison cell. There is the sound of persons approaching outside his door - with light footsteps.

YOSHI
Who... Who is there?

TARO (O.S)
(outside)
Uncle Yoshi - are you in there?

KENTARO (O.S)
It is us! Your nephews and niece!

YOSHI
You should not be here! Does Aunt Karori know you are here?

RINI (O.S)
She is missing! Have you seen her?

FADE TO

INT. CORRIDOR FOR CELLS, MAGISTRATES DOJO - EARLY PM

A corridor with stairs and cell doors. The WAILS of unseen prisoners. The children are here. Hanging above are KEYS.

YOSHI (O.S)
(from cell)
No - I haven't seen anyone apart from that fiendish Magistrate. There is something very strange about him.

TARO
(pointing)
The keys - look!

Rini and Kentaro reach up for the keys - they are too high.

KENTARO
I can't reach them!

RINI
I think we need a grown-up?

YOSHI (O.S.)
(from behind cell door)
Get away! It is not safe here!

The Magistrate and Guard #1, #2 and #3 approach.

MAGISTRATE
How right you are Yoshi. Take them!

The Guards corner and grab the children.

MAGISTRATE
But don't harm them - I shall need
them again for further experiments.

KENTARO
Not again?

MAGISTRATE
(to guards)
Lock them in a cell. I will deal with
them after my guest has been and gone.

FADE TO

INT. FISHERMAN'S SHACK - EARLY PM (STORMY)

Run-down and full of crates and fishing gear. The Bandit Queen is lighting a fire. It is dark and stormy outside. Minokichi is looking at some old fishing gear.

BANDIT QUEEN
I'll have this fire going in a minute,
then we can dry off.

MINOKICHI
This is good quality gear. My dad
taught me fishing but died before I
could learn, so I became a woodsman.

BANDIT QUEEN
Neither much of a skill, surely?

The fire is now lit, she warms her hands.

MINOKICHI
My skills keep me and my family fed. I
learned to select trees with care and

not harm wildlife. My teacher Mosaku was a Buddhist and taught me this.

Bandit Queen pulls off soggy armour and clothing and hangs these by the fire. Minokichi averts his gaze - mostly.

BANDIT QUEEN
You're a Jack of all trades then?
Perhaps you could join us? Its not just all fighting and plundering.

MINOKICHI
Are you inviting me to your gang?

BANDIT QUEEN
Yes - I suppose I am.

Bandit Queen - now in her underwear - notices Minokichi looking at her. He turns away, embarrassed.

BANDIT QUEEN
Should you grow tired of your quest you will be welcome with me and my men. With us you will never go hungry or be without a friend. It is a rough but happy life I offer.

MINOKICHI
Thank you - I know you mean well, but that is no life for me. I like trees.
(looking at nets)
Why abandon such fine nets?

BANDIT QUEEN
It seems they left in a hurry.

There is a ROLL OF THUNDER outside.

FADE TO

INT. RUINED BUILDING, DESOLATE LANDS - MID PM (STORMY)

The Ronin and Komako are sheltering in a ruined building with sliding door to next room - one wall has collapsed and they are still mounted but inside. It is raining heavily outside.

RONIN
Are you injured? Bitten?

KOMAKO
No - and no thanks to you!

RONIN
You're alive aren't you? Obey my
orders and remain so.

KOMAKO
Are you not planning to take my head
anyway? Why go through with this
mission now your men are dead?

RONIN
Now it is personal. I would not want
my men to die for nothing. I will find
and kill your cousin, this I swear!

FADE TO

INT. MAGIC CHAMBER, MAGISTRATES DOJO - MID PM

The Magistrate is speaking to the Shikigami in the mirror,
its eyes GLEAMING brightly and smoke swirls behind it.

MAGISTRATE
Have I not given you more power than
you need? What happened?

THE SHIKIGAMI
I took possession of the dead and
attacked... Two mortals have escaped
on horses. One was a woman.

MAGISTRATE
The Bandit Queen? She still lives?

THE SHIKIGAMI
I did exactly as you commanded of me -
but 'she' lives, as you say.

MAGISTRATE
I will punish you for this! But the
Inspector arrives any moment... Do you
know how to find her, Shikigami?

THE SHIKIGAMI
She heads north to a lake, I am
stronger at night but will need a
suitable host to confront her.

MAGISTRATE
Then go - seek and destroy! I will not
accept failure. Go!

The shadowy figure in the mirror fades - becoming the reflection of the magistrate.

FADE TO

INT. FISHERMAN'S SHACK - LATE PM

The rain outside has stopped, Minokichi is alone and rummaging around the abandoned fishing equipment, TUTTING.

MINOKICHI
(to self)
What a waste to leave behind...

MOVEMENT in shadows - as if someone hiding. A GLIMPSE OF THE EYES OF THE SHIKIGAMI gleam in the darkness. Minokichi notices and steps closer. The eyes vanish. As he moves nearer nervously he discovers a polished pan by a crate in a shadow, the eyes just his reflection. He SIGHS with relief and turns.

FADE TO

EXT. REAR OF FISHERMAN'S SHACK - LATE PM

Wet from recent rain and dark. The Bandit Queen is in her dress, squatting on an outside open-air toilet. She has her axe propped up nearby. Someone hiding nearby, spying.

She gazes around as she relieves herself. The sound of a FOOTSTEP on a branch. She slowly reaches for the axe.

Suddenly THE FERRYMAN springs out from behind a tree and kicks her axe away and aims a crossbow at her. He is about 70, scruffy with no teeth and his clothes patched many times.

She raises her hands as he tries not to ogle.

FERRYMAN
Don't move! Stay still.

BANDIT QUEEN
It seems you have me at a
disadvantage? Be warned - I am not
alone. A fearless bodyguard is with
me, so you'd better surrender!

Suddenly Minokichi exits the hut (having heard voices) - the Ferryman turns and aims at him - he raises his hands.

MINOKICHI
Don't shoot! I give up!

The Bandit Queen SIGHS and rolls her eyes.

FERRYMAN

What are you doing in old Tanaka's
fishing hut? Are you robbers?

MINOKICHI

I am no robber! Just a woodsman.

BANDIT QUEEN

Mind if I pull up my dress?

FERRYMAN

Sorry Miss... But I have not seen
another face - or anything else - for
many weeks. Lets go inside and talk?

The Ferryman waves his crossbow at the hut.

FADE TO

INT. FISHERMAN'S SHACK - EARLY EVENING

The rain has turned to sleety-snow. The Ferryman has his
crossbow and The Bandit Queen and Minokichi sit by the fire.

BANDIT QUEEN

My name is Ishikawa Kasumi - some call
me 'The Bandit Queen of the
Mountains'. You may have heard of me?

FERRYMAN

I don't get out much, sorry.

BANDIT QUEEN

I am daughter of Ishikawa Goemon -
have you at least heard of him?

FERRYMAN

Of course! A great man helping the
needy. I met him once, years ago... I
heard they finally caught him?

BANDIT QUEEN

He was put to death, just last year.

The Ferryman lowers his crossbow and seems unhappy.

FERRYMAN

I'm sorry to hear that, I much admired
him and his principals. A great man of

our age, if an old ex-Ferryman's opinion counts for anything.

MINOKICHI
Ex-Ferryman? Have you retired?

FERRYMAN
My boat is in need of repair and there is no-one to help me with repairs...
Then of course is 'the monster'.

BANDIT QUEEN
The Monster? What monster?

FERRYMAN
The Ikuchi of the Lake, of course!

FADE TO

FLASHBACK BEGINS

EXT. AT THE HAUNTED LAKE - DAY

A wide lake with icy forest and mountains north and a few huts and fishing jetties to the south (not yet abandoned).

A small fishing boat with a FISHERMAN is out with his net. Watching from the bank is the Ferryman, who is carrying out maintenance on his flat-bottomed ferry at the jetty.

FERRYMAN (V.O)
I saw it with my own eyes! It came up
from the depths after a fisherman!

The Fisherman has caught more than he expected - the water churns and splashes as his small boat lurches. The Ferryman stops his work and waves to the Fisherman to warn him.

SPECILA EFFECT - IKUCHI SEA SERPENT

An IKUCHI is from folklore - a giant multi-headed serpent like a Hydra with flippers. It's snapping heads surround the Fisherman and capsizes his vessel. The Fisherman SCREAMS and swims but is bitten and pulled under as The Ferryman watches.

FERRYMAN (V.O)
Like a sea-serpent with many heads,
rearing up from the water!

The Fisherman is gone and the Ikuchi returns to the depths, out of sight. Bits of the boat bob in the water.

FERRYMAN (V.O)

There was nothing I could do, it was over in moments! The monster struck again and again after, none were safe near the lake any longer.

BANDIT QUEEN (V.O)

Why not leave as well? Find somewhere where there are no monsters?

FADE TO

FLASHBACK ENDS

INT. FISHERMAN'S SHACK - EARLY EVENING

As before - the Ferryman is telling his tale.

FERRYMAN

I am too old to move, monster or not. My health is poor and I am not long for this world. So I stayed. As for the monster I've not seen it for over a month now - it may have left.

BANDIT QUEEN

Is the forest beyond the lake haunted?

FERRYMAN

So legends say, but those here would never venture far into its depths and we always stay well away at night.

MINOKICHI

I know a little of carpentry - perhaps I could try to repair your boat? If so might you take us across?

FERRYMAN

Ah, to be out on the open waters again... Very well. If you're happy to take a chance on the monster?

FADE TO

INT. RUINED BUILDING, DESOLATE LANDS - EARLY EVENING

A fire has been lit, the horses are resting. Komako is using a makeshift rolling-pin to flatten rice-cakes onto a sheet of metal by a fire and The Ronin is sharpening his sword.

POV from Ronin pausing to look up at Komako.

Komako is leaning back and forward as she rolls - offering a glimpse of her cleavage, her actions unknowingly sexual.

BACK TO SCENE

RONIN

The way you do that... It reminds me of my former wife. She made cakes.

KOMAKO

Did you brutalise her too?

RONIN

I have not seen her in many years. She fled when I returned home after my 'accident' and burns.

KOMAKO

I'm not surprised. Even a dog would run from the sight of you!

Komako moves the rice-cakes on the metal over the fire to half cook and half grill, trying not to burn them.

RONIN

I considered plucking out her eyes... But I have no need for the company of a woman. Or so I thought.

KOMAKO

Don't go getting ideas. I was with 'Esuko' - a bandit from the camp - until you murdered him. He was kind...

Suddenly the Ronin DIVES and CHOPS his sword beside Komako! She is startled. He reaches past and picks up a very long dead SNAKE that had been moving to bite her in the shadows.

RONIN

A Mamushi! Very poisonous. Like us it sought to keep out of the cold. A bite would kill you within an hour or at best leave you blinded.

KOMAKO

Well... Don't think this makes me dislike you any less.

RONIN

I don't care to be liked. And now we have something more to eat.

Komako rolls her eyes.

FADE TO

EXT. FERRY AT THE HAUNTED LAKE - EARLY MORNING

In the distance behind is the jetty where a red cloth is flapping. The far side is a dark icy forest. The ferryman is PUNTING his ferry. The Bandit Queen and Minokichi and their mounts are onboard (the mule loaded with the sake). Rolled in a bundle onboard is a net which Minokichi is examining.

BANDIT QUEEN

(to Minokichi)

You bring this? For the monster?

FERRYMAN

That won't stop it, if so?

MINOKICHI

No - it is fine quality, a wonderful net. Too good to just leave behind.

FERRYMAN

Tanaka will not miss it - he and his wife left for Edo last year.

MINOKICHI

(To Bandit Queen)

I am surprised you object to me taking something not mine, considering...

The Bandit Queen glares silently at Minokichi.

FERRYMAN

Why are you and your wife heading to the forest anyway? There are no settlements and very little game.

BANDIT QUEEN

I am not his wife! When I see him safely across I shall return alone.

MINOKICHI

It is my wife who I seek though. I heard she may be in the forest.

FERRYMAN

Be careful - lost souls and Yuki-Onna
are said to roam there at night.

BANDIT QUEEN

Have you had any lady customers
lately? Over the last few weeks?

FERRYMAN

My last passenger was a woman - also
heading to the Forest. I barely made
it back as the ferry was badly
leaking. Luckily no sign of the
monster though. I warned her of the
dangers but she just smiled.

MINOKICHI

How long ago was this?

FERRYMAN

A month ago. No, about three weeks...
She was pale and pretty but seemed
very unhappy. One odd thing though...

BANDIT QUEEN

What was that?

FERRYMAN

She said she was fearful of water and
insisted on holding onto my arm as I
punted across. Her touch was as ice!
But I didn't complain - I was glad to
have another customer after so long.

FADE TO

EXT. RUINED BUILDING, DESOLATE LANDS - EARLY MORNING

The fire has burnt out. Komako is asleep under a blanket in
her underwear, dreaming, a CHAIN on her ankle tied to a beam.

SPECIAL EFFECT - a shape from the shadows - the Shikigami.
Like a shadow itself it floats closer, sliding-up her blanket
and caressing her legs. She stirs as if having an erotic
dream. The shadowy form moves into her bed and glides up
under the blankets. Komako GASPS happily, dreaming.

The top of her blanket is pulled down as the shadowy form
moves above her - face to shadowy face. The demons hand moves
about her to strike, its fingers like opaque talons.

Suddenly an internal door opens and SUNLIGHT floods inside - dispelling the demon which fades to nothing. It is The Ronin, who glimpsed the entity for a moment. He tugs Komako's chain.

KOMAKO
(waking)

Oh it's you? I was having a wonderful dream, no villainous Ronin anywhere.

RONIN
Welcome back to reality.

Komako clammers up and the Ronin looks around the room, seeming a bit uncertain what he just glimpsed.

KOMAKO
Lost something?

The Ronin GRUNTS then pulls her bare leg up by the chain and runs his hand over her knee.

KOMAKO
Let me guess - you mean to rape me?

RONIN
Actually I need you to keep still. The lock on your chain is faulty.

The Ronin unlocks her chain and releases her.

RONIN
I saved you a rice-cake for breakfast.
I expect you are hungry?

Komako seems surprised but nods.

FADE TO

INT. COUNTING ROOM, MAGISTRATES DOJO - MORNING

An accounting office with lots of financial records. THE INSPECTOR is at the main desk, bent over paperwork, his ASSISTANT sits at another desk doing likewise.

The INSPECTOR is very fat and has a large nose.

The ASSISTANT is slender and willowy, with big bulbous eyes.

The Magistrate enters and bows to The Inspector.

INSPECTOR
Ah, there you are Magistrate...

MAGISTRATE
I trust everything is in order and
your accommodation is comfortable?

INSPECTOR
Actually Tatsuo I have a concern,
though not for myself...

MAGISTRATE
A concern Inspector? What?

INSPECTOR
My assistant and I took a look at your
cells and don't like what we saw.

The Assistant shakes his head.

MAGISTRATE
That, if I may be so bold, is the
point of such places. If they were
pleasant none would fear arrest.

INSPECTOR
I have seen children there - all under
ten. Surely children do not warrant
such poor treatment?

MAGISTRATE
Oh - them? Their uncle is associated
with bandits. They broke in and tried
to rescue him only yesterday.

INSPECTOR
But 'children' Tatsuo? Little kids? A
young girl? Can they really be blamed
for wanting to help their uncle?

MAGISTRATE
I suppose - putting it like that - it
does seem a little 'harsh'...

INSPECTOR
I have received a formal complaint,
the moment I arrived in town. About
prisoners being abused, detained with
no evidence, no trial. I have seen the
children for myself and am shocked
Tatsuo, shocked!

MAGISTRATE

An unfortunate oversight - nothing more. My guards are over-zealous at times. The children will be freed and I'll have the guards whipped.

INSPECTOR

Good. Toyotomi Hideyoshi is keen to win the hearts and minds of these peasants, not fuel their complaints.

MAGISTRATE

Other than my prisoners - I hope you have found the taxes are all accounted, down to the penny? I could even offer a little 'bonus' - if your report is to be a favourable one?

INSPECTOR

My report will NOT be a favourable one. Far from it!

The Assistant TUTS and shakes his head.

INSPECTOR

Your paperwork is barely legible, your accounts a shambles! I shall report this matter to the Daimyo in person. Even the food here is terrible! My poor assistant was most appalled...

The Assistant pulls a face of disgust.

MAGISTRATE

But the last of the bandits have been defeated, their leader currently being hunted. Surely a few disgruntled peasants are of no cause for concern?

INSPECTOR

The peasants seem more nervous of YOU than of bandits. There have been allegations of witchcraft - sorcery!

The Assistant shudders theatrically.

INSPECTOR

Stuff and nonsense I know, but we have to be seen to act. The Peasants here are superstitious and grow rebellious.

MAGISTRATE
 (whispers to self)
 She dares to point the finger then?

The Inspector looks questioningly at The Magistrate.

FADE TO

EXT. FERRY AT THE HAUNTED LAKE - MORNING

The horses, The Bandit Queen and Minokichi are on the ferry as the Ferryman punts them towards the forest.

MINOKICHI
 I'm glad we are nearly there.

FERRYMAN
 Sorry it took a while - my boat is not as it used to be. I can pop back to pick you up later if you wish?

Suddenly The Ferryman nearly loses his pole.

FERRYMAN
 Oh *Chikushou*!

NOTE: Chikushou means 'oh shit' in Japanese.

BANDIT QUEEN
 What is wrong Ferryman?

FERRYMAN
 I've drifted too deep - my pole cannot reach the bottom here. We will have to wait a short while and drift.

Something is moving in the water and all gaze at the ripples. The Horses STAMP and grow nervous.

SPECIAL EFFECT : a GIANT TENTACLE from a giant unseen Octopus beneath the ferry emerges and dangles above them.

MINOKICHI
 Is this the Ikuchi?

FERRYMAN
 It is the Monster! We are doomed!!

SPECIAL EFFECT: A 2nd TENTACLE wraps around the prow.

BANDIT QUEEN
It has us trapped!

The Bandit Queen draws her axes and CHOPS at the tentacle as a 3rd TENTACLE emerges and gropes for them.

NOTE: Ikuchi are really giant octopus - not sea serpents.

SPECIAL EFFECT - The GIANT OCTOPUS emerges, with a large eye and huge beak. It tips the ferry - the horses and loose items SPLASH into the water. The three onboard hang on, The Bandit Queen wraps her leg around a rope and grips her axes.

The ferry falls level again with a big SPLASH but another giant tentacle finds the mule of Minokichi - which is weighed-down by its heavy load in the water.

FERRYMAN
It's after the horses!

The tentacle pulls the mule into the creatures giant beak. The other horse is swimming frantically for the bank.

MINOKICHI
My poor mule! And my sake!

The giant octopus CRUNCHES the mule and bottles.

The Ferryman drops to his knees and mutters prayers, The Bandit Queen continues chopping tentacles - to little avail.

After chewing and swallowing the monster it becomes 'relaxed' - its tentacles grow floppy and its giant eye glazes.

FERRYMAN
(opening his eyes)
The tentacles grow limp!

BANDIT QUEEN
The Sake - the sake has effected it!

Minokichi GRABS his net and quickly unfolds it.

MINOKICHI
Help me with this net! QUICKLY!!

All throw the net over the monster - it pulls and thrashes, causing the Ferry to rock wildly - but cannot pull free. As Minokichi and The Ferryman hold the net The Bandit Queen grabs the punting-pole and chops the end into a point. She moves the spear ready to stab the giant eye.

BANDIT QUEEN
Now we have a spear!

To everyone's amazement the giant octopus speaks - it has a strange monotone voice that gurgles in the water.

THE OCTOPUS
WAIT! Do not kill me.

All stop and stare - amazed.

FADE TO

INT. MAGIC CHAMBER, MAGISTRATES DOJO - MORNING

Aunt Karori is chained to the rack, her clothing torn. The Magistrate works the pulley to move her rack over a STEAMING PIT. Guard #1 is exiting, having just delivered the prisoner.

MAGISTRATE
You brought this on yourself. I let you go out of kindness and you run off to spin wild yarns about me.

AUNT KARORI
How dare you treat me like this?! Let me go, or...Or...

MAGISTRATE
Or what? You'll tell The Inspector? He is already heading home with that obsequious assistant of his. And not before dismissing half of my guards! He said he couldn't stand to remain here another minute!

AUNT KARORI
Then you'd better release me and throw yourself on his mercy.

MAGISTRATE
He will not reach Edo alive, your allegations die with him. You and your husbands disappearance will not be investigated either.

AUNT KARORI
Our disappearance?

MAGISTRATE
You two don't matter. Tell me

where your children are? Tell me!

AUNT KARORI
The children? Never!

The Magistrate lowers the rack and prisoner into the steam.

MAGISTRATE
TELL ME!

AUNT KARORI
I cannot tell what I do not know.

The Magistrate grins and lowers the rack further - causing Karori to gasp and struggle. SWEAT drips down from her.

MAGISTRATE
Perhaps you won't be so stubborn if I torture your husband before your eyes?

AUNT KARORI
Why not use your evil powers again - then you will see I speak true?

MAGISTRATE
My powers need time to 'recharge'...
Once I have the children I will be restored and my powers increased.

AUNT KARORI
I don't know where they are. I only realised they were gone one minute and the next I was being arrested!

MAGISTRATE
Disappointing... But perhaps I will find consolation in your screams?

The Magistrate lowers Karori further into the steamy pit.

FADE TO

EXT. FERRY AT THE HAUNTED LAKE - MORNING

As before, but now the horse of The Bandit Queen has reached the shore safely. The Ferryman remains gaping at the monster.

THE OCTOPUS
Don't scream - I am a 'Kitsune'. I have been in this form so long now I have forgotten how to change back.

Spare me and I will aid you?

NOTE: A Kitsune is a shape-changing mythical monster.

BANDIT QUEEN
You promise not to attack us?

THE OCTOPUS
I promise! I feel too light-headed and
weak anyway, what was it I just ate?

BANDIT QUEEN
Lots and lots of sake - and a mule.

MINOKICHI
Let us release this creature?

BANDIT QUEEN
Are you sure it can be trusted?

MINOKICHI
I do not like to harm any animal - let
alone ones that talk back.

Minokichi is already removing the net and the others assist.
When free the sea-monster submerges and the ferry rocks.

FERRYMAN
(stammering)
W-w-will it keep its word?

After a few moments the Giant Octopus resurfaces, a short
distance away from the bobbing ferry.

THE OCTOPUS
I will help you reach the other side
of the lake if you wish?

MINOKICHI
Yes Kitsune - thank you!

A tentacle emerges and gently pulls the ferry along.

THE OCTOPUS
How else may I help you?

MINOKICHI
I am searching for my wife, O-Yuki. It
seems she is a Yuki-Onna. Have you
seen such a person in these parts?

THE OCTOPUS

There are many such beings that dwell
in the forest. But be warned - only
protection from a friendly spirit or a
great holy man will a mortal be safe.

BANDIT QUEEN

(to Minokichi)

Perhaps we should turn back?

MINOKICHI

Drop me off at the bank - I shall go
on alone from there.

THE OCTOPUS

As you command...

Another tentacle appears as the ferry is pulled along by the
giant octopus more rapidly towards the shore with trees.

FADE TO

EXT. ROAD BY RIVERBANK - LATE MORNING

The Inspector is in a RICKSHAW with his Assistant, carried
along by 2 x BEARERS - lightly armed male retainers.

The Inspector and Assistant can be seen in the window.

INSPECTOR

(to Assistant)

Don't worry about your tobacco pouch -
you can get a new one in Edo. The
Peasants here will pinch anything!

The Assistant nods sadly and SIGHS. The Inspector leans out
and calls to the Bearers.

INSPECTOR

Hurry up - get a move on! I want to
reach that inn by lunchtime...

The Bearers exchange unhappy glances and trot faster.

FADE TO

INT. WOOD SHED, YOKANICHI TOWN - MIDDAY

A mostly empty woodshed at the town outskirts. The children
(Taro, Kentaro and Rini) have made camp here, with supplies
and bedding and a few toys. Rini peers outside.

RINI
They are still searching for us.

KENTARO
I think that Inspector can help. The man who we saw in the prison.

KENTARO
But he's gone - I saw him in his Rickshaw leaving town with his 'Aid'.

TARO
Perhaps we can compel them to help?

RINI
Use our magic again you mean?

KENTARO
Mother told us not to draw attention. Besides - what can we do stuck here?

Taro waves a tobacco pounce, on this is a netsuke bauble with a carving of The Assistant - with big staring eyes.

TARO
We can use this - if we work together.

FADE TO

EXT. JETTY AT THE HAUNTED LAKE - MIDDAY

The Ferryman's boat is moored and he is making some repairs and bailing-out some water during the conversation. On the Jetty stands The Ronin and Komako, their horses nearby.

FERRYMAN
You wish to travel across the lake?
Business is booming today!

RONIN
You have had other travellers? I see your ferry looks a little damaged?

FERRYMAN
We had a run-in with the local lake monster. I scarcely believe it myself, yet I was there and saw it up close! The heads though are really tentacles.

RONIN
How many were crossing before?

FERRYMAN

A man and a woman... The man was a woodcutter, he helped repair my boat. The woman was a warrior I think, she seemed rather haughty.

RONIN

Good! Take us across as soon as you are ready. We will wait.

FERRYMAN

I'll be ten minutes - might I offer you or your wife a drink? I have been given a couple of bottles of good sake, the last that the woodsman had.

KOMAKO

I am not this devils wife - I am his prisoner! His victim!

RONIN

Silence woman!

The Ronin PUNCHES Komako in her stomach - she falls to the ground GASPING. The Ferryman gapes, shocked.

RONIN

Get the boat ready Old Man. Quickly!

FADE TO

INT. BATHROOM AT INN - MIDDAY

Communal, with items of men's and ladies clothing, including a kimono. A dressing table with pots of makeup. The Assistant is looking into a mirror, in his underwear about to make use of the steaming bath. As he gazes his eyes glaze and he suddenly grins childishly. He speaks with the voice of Rini.

RINI (V.O)

(Speaking from Assistant)

Look everyone - I am so big!

(giggles, looks down)

Oh - and I am a man?

NOTE: The Assistant is now possessed and controlled by Rini.

The Assistant springs up happily and blinks his eyes.

RINI (V.O)
 (from Assistant)
 Ooh and here is some makeup! And a
 lovely kimono dress too!

The Assistant uses a power puff and gazes into the mirror.
 The voices of the other children echo around the room.

KENTARO (V.O)
 Don't muck about Rini! We need to tell
 the Inspector what is happening.

TARO (V.O)
 Yes - there is no time for silliness.

INSPECTOR (O.S)
 (from outside door)
 Hurry up Fumihito - don't let the
 water get cold! I want a turn too.

The Assistant GIGGLES and pulls on the kimono and dances
 about childishly, looking at 'himself' in the mirror.

KENTARO (V.O)
 Stop being so silly!

INSPECTOR (O.S)
 (from outside door)
 Are you talking to someone in there?

The door opens and The Inspector enters - he gapes as the
 Assistant turns to him in his makeup and dress.

INSPECTOR
 By the Buddha's Fundoshi! I thought
 you were strange, but this is a new
 low Fumihito, even for you!

FADE TO

EXT. IN THE HAUNTED FOREST - MIDDAY

An overgrown trail through huge ancient trees topped with
 snow, mountains overlooking all. Minokichi and The Bandit
 Queen share her horse, she sat at the front and him behind.

BANDIT QUEEN
 Hold me tight - I don't want to fall.

She smiles as Minokichi puts his arm around her waist.

MINOKICHI

Why are you still with me? You said
you'd get me to the lake and leave.

BANDIT QUEEN

I want to see this through now. And
I've never known such strange things
until I met you. Besides - this may
make a useful location for our camp if
people are afraid to come here.

MINOKICHI

Perhaps they are wiser than we? Are we
heading the right way?

BANDIT QUEEN

Yes, just follow this trail north.

They trot along - not seeing a pair of eyes gleaming in the
darkness - watching from shadows between trees.

FADE TO

EXT. FERRY AT THE HAUNTED LAKE - EARLY PM

On the ferry is The Ferry Man, The Ronin and Komako and their
horses. The Ferryman uses his punt-pole with pointed-part up.

RONIN

Your pole looks like a spear?

FERRYMAN

We were to use it on the monster
earlier. As monsters go though it
didn't seem as bad as I expected.

RONIN

Until recently I did not believe in
monsters.

KOMAKO

I did not believe in them either,
until I met YOU!

The Ronin clenches his fist and considers more violence. The
Ferryman looks away as he punts. Komako stares defiantly.

RONIN

You may not believe it Komako, but I
was not always as I am now...

KOMAKO
A devil you mean?

RONIN
There was a time when all who knew me
praised my honour and held me in high
regard. I was even thought handsome.

KOMAKO
You're right - I do not believe it. So
what happened?

ZOOM IN on the masked face of the Ronin.

FADE TO

FLASHBACK BEGINS

INT. CHAMBERS AT HONNO-JI TEMPLE - DAY

Simple rooms in a large temple being attacked from outside -
the SOUND OF BATTLE. The Ronin is several years younger, his
red armour new and his helmet under his arm. He is handsome.
With him are a few SAMURAI-RETAINERS and LORD ODA NOBUNAGA.
Nobunaga is 47 with part shaved head and flowing robes.

CLOSE UP AND PAN OUT from the handsome Ronin.

RONIN (V.O)
In my youth I was a retainer for Oda
Nobunaga, a powerful Lord who united
many provinces under his banner. I
worked hard and was proud of my
position. I married a beautiful girl
named Matsu and was very happy.

PAN OUT FURTHER - parts of the temple are ON FIRE and someone
is trying to break through the door.

The Ronin puts on his helmet.

RONIN (V.O)
Oda Nobunaga was betrayed by Akechi
Mitsuhide - a schemer whose men
besieged the temple he visited while
his forces were away on campaign.

ENEMY SAMURAI burst into the room and advance. Lord Oda, the
Ronin and his men ready weapons and begin to FIGHT.

RONIN (V.O)

I did my duty - I fought with the last
of the men - proud to die protecting
my lord as the walls burned around us!

Outnumbered the Retainers are overwhelmed but the Ronin keeps
fighting as his comrades fall. The fire spreads and a few
SAMURAI ARCHERS enter and FIRE at the Ronin, peppering him
with arrows. Somehow he fights on - defending his master.

RONIN (V.O)

I fought with all my strength, until
overcome by arrows and left to burn...

The Ronin sinks to his knees - overcome. He collapses.

FADE TO

INT. THE MONKS DOJO - DAY

The Monk is treating a few INJURED SAMURAI who rest in
makeshift beds, aided by a NURSE/NUN. The bandaged Ronin sits
and the Monk begins removing his facial bandages...

PAN OUT from the Ronin's eyes as they FLICK OPEN.

RONIN (V.O)

Somehow I survived. I was restored by
monks and nuns who treated the few
survivors... But I was left scarred.

The Monk GASPS and steps back - The Ronin is as he looks now.

RONIN (V.O)

And I was dishonoured - I had outlived
the lord I was sworn to protect with
my life. I was a Ronin! My wife fled
when I returned - fearful of my face.
I was shamed, hideous and forced to
live as a common mercenary. As I
endured my shame my skills seemed to
grow daily, as did my bitterness.

FADE TO

FLASHBACK ENDS

EXT. FERRY AT THE HAUNTED LAKE - EARLY PM

As before, The Ronin concludes his tale.

RONIN

My speciality became hunting bandits.
I even had a hand in the capture of
Ishikawa Goemon and killed many of his
best men with my own hands!

The Ferryman seems a little shocked at this news.

KOMAKO

He was my uncle. He only wanted a
fairer and more equal Japan for all.

RONIN

He was a rebel and a bandit! It is a
shame I did not get to fight him in
person... I'd have enjoyed his death.

The horses seem to become nervous and the ferry bobs.

RONIN

In truth I long for a worthy death -
perhaps in him I'd have met my match.

The ferry rocks from side to side, the water choppy.

SPECIAL EFFECT - the Giant Octopus surfaces, its large
tentacles first and then its head.

Komako cowers behind the Ronin - afraid of the monster.

THE OCTOPUS

Might I help you again, Ferryman?

FERRYMAN

(pointing to Ronin)

This man is our enemy! Help us defeat
him! He plans to kill the woodsman!

The Giant Octopus GURGLES ANGRILY and attacks - focussed
solely on the Ronin with its tentacles.

RONIN

Traitor!

Before the first tentacle strikes The Ronin draws his sword
and CUTS DOWN the Ferryman. For a few moments tentacles sweep
at the Ronin who severs them before they grab him.

Komako attends the Ferryman who lays dying, a mortal wound.

FERRYMAN

Don't worry about me... Swim for shore... The water becomes shallow...

A giant tentacle curls around the Ronin's leg as he chops at others - being overwhelmed and splattered by oily blood.

Komako gazes nervously at the nearby forest then back to the Ferryman - he is dead. She moves to dive over the side.

FADE TO

INT. SECURE CELL, JAPANESE HOSPITAL - EARLY PM

The equivalent of a padded cell in an experimental mental hospital outside Edo. The Doctor and The Inspector are observing The Assistant who has fallen asleep and he wears an early type of straight-jacket.

SPLASH! The Doctor throws water over the Assistant.

The Assistant awakens and looks around - then blinks his eyelashes effeminate (he is still possessed by Rini).

INSPECTOR

Oh Fumihiito - to think things would come to this. You're just lucky this new hospital was so near the inn.

RINI (V.O)
(from The Assistant)
Let me go! I'm not mad!

INSPECTOR

I hope you have your best enema ready Doctor Wang?

The Doctor grins evilly and waves what looks like a set of bellows in the air. The Assistant GULPS nervously.

FADE TO

EXT. IN THE HAUNTED FOREST - PM

Minokichi and The Bandit Queen share the horse riding together as before - it is darker and is starting to snow.

BANDIT QUEEN
I feel we are being watched.

MINOKICHI

I am used to forests, but this place
is darker than any I've seen before.
We seem to always be in the shadows of
the mountains and trees, no sunlight.

Suddenly the STRANGE HOWL in the distance. Minokichi seems pleased and spurs on his nervous horse.

BANDIT QUEEN
Is that wolves?

MINOKICHI
Maybe... I remember hearing howls when
I first encountered my wife.

BANDIT QUEEN
(disappointed)
Well... Keep on our guard, I have a
bad feeling about this place.

There is a DISTANT SCREAM from behind - Komako!

MINOKICHI
Someone is in trouble? A woman?

BANDIT QUEEN
It came from behind! Let's see?

They about turn on their mount and gallop the way they came.

FADE TO

EXT. CLEARING IN THE HAUNTED FOREST - PM

Komako is restrained with back to a tree as SNOW VAMPIRE #1 and SNOW VAMPIRE #2 pin her. They are similar in looks to Yuki-Onna but #1 is white-haired, #2 is bald yet pretty.

SNOW VAMPIRE #3 is crouched over Komako - she has feline facial features and big gleaming eyes. She is sucking Komako's life out from her mouth to hers (like smoke).

As being 'sucked' Komako GASPS and GRUNTS - as if a sexual act and somehow pleasurable.

NOTE: Trees provide SHADOWS for the vampires, if touched by a beam of sunlight they recoil quickly - slightly smouldering.

Komako looks paler and weaker as Snow Vampire #3 feeds.

Minokichi and The Bandit Queen arrive on their shared horse and hastily dismount. The horse NEIGHS nervously.

BANDIT QUEEN
It is my cousin - Komako!

The Snow Vampires release Komako who is too weak to move - they turn and glide menacingly towards the new arrivals.

The horse BOLTS AWAY through the trees, terrified.

The Bandit Queen swings her two-axes as Minokichi cowers behind her. The axes do not cause much harm to the vampires - any cuts rapidly heal. Minokichi and The Bandit Queen back into a tree - surrounded. He closes his eyes.

Suddenly Snow Vampire #1 staggers and looks down - a short-sword sticks through her chest - stabbed from behind. She oozes black blood and seems somehow hollow.

The Ronin has arrived and just threw his short-sword. He is covered in oily blood and draws his main sword.

RONIN
Now I will teach you devils fear!

In a whirl of action the Ronin SLICES and HACKS down the Snow Vampire. BLACK SMOKE comes from their wounds as he hacks - until they shrivel like empty bags and crumple.

The Bandit Queen and Minokichi help Komako up to her feet.

BANDIT QUEEN
Are you alright Komako?

Komako nods weakly but is struggling to breathe.

The Ronin turns to the survivors and raises his sword.

KOMAKO
(gasping weakly)
The Ronin... He is here to kill you!

The tired Ronin steps closer but behind him the 3 x Snow Vampires rise - they reinflate and wounds rapidly heal. He turns but they pounce on him and wrestle him to the ground.

The Ronin is overpowered and dying but makes a point of not screaming as the vampires suck out his life.

Snow Vampire #3 rises and turns towards the Bandit Queen.

The POUCH of ashes on The Bandit Queens belt begins GLOWING.

MINOKICHI
Your belt? Is it on fire?

The Bandit Queen pulls off the pouch and throws it down - it EXPLODES into a cloud of GLOWING ASH. A strange ghostly figure forms, of light and sparkling ash. It is The Monk.

The Snow Vampires stop and stare at the ghost in wonder.

MINOKICHI
The monk! But how??

The Monk calmly extends his palm at Snow Vampire #3. White light shines from his hand - blinding and repelling. He positions himself between the survivors and vampires.

BANDIT QUEEN
Hirohito?!

The Monks voice is rich and reverberates all around.

THE MONK
You treated my remains with honour. In so doing prevented my body being taken by the Shikigami - a demon which seeks you harm even now, with the power to re-animate the dead.

KOMAKO
You can protect us from these devils?

THE MONK
Not for long - my power wanes. By nightfall you will be in great peril.

BANDIT QUEEN
They hate sunlight?

THE MONK
When they have fed they can resist its rays a while, else it burns them.

MINOKICHI
I'm sorry I never reached you with all that sake you wanted.

The 3 x Snow Vampires lunge forward but are again repelled by the ghostly Monks light from his hand.

THE MONK

The Sake was never for me - it was to placate the monster of the lake.

MINOKICHI

Ah... But what do we do now?

THE MONK

Follow the path past the bubbling brook - water is impassible to them and most of them are forever trapped.

The Bandit Queen helps Komako up and they begin to retreat.

MINOKICHI

Thank you Monk! Sorry you died.

THE MONK

Don't worry my friend, just go. NOW!

The Snow Vampires lunge again but are again repelled by the ghostly Monks light. The survivors hurry quickly away.

FADE TO

INT. MAGIC CHAMBER, MAGISTRATES DOJO - PM

Karori's silk clothing has shrunk in the steam and she is bathed in sweat. The rack is repositioned upright by the pit and The Magistrate is face-to-face with her. He is winding a mechanism that makes SPIKES stick into her from all sides.

MAGISTRATE

(gloating)

Whats wrong? Does it hurt??

AUNT KARORI

Of course it hurts! How would you like a spike up your backside?

MAGISTRATE

Well - there's no need to be rude.

AUNT KARORI

No need to be rude? You've steamed me, groped me and even stole my underwear! I have every reason to be rude!

MAGISTRATE

Your underwear is part of an important ritual. Something far beyond a mere

peasants understanding.

Karori seems unconvinced and rolls her eyes.

MAGISTRATE

Anyway - you will be pleased to know I now believe you - that you DO NOT know where the children are hiding.

AUNT KARORI

Thank merciful Buddha!

MAGISTRATE

So now I'm going to have some fun instead. It seems rude not to.

The Magistrate begins to remove Karori's shrunken clothing. She SIGHS wearily.

FADE TO

INT. WOOD SHED, YOKANICHI TOWN - PM

Rini, Kentaro and Taro have crude occult paraphernalia and a hand mirror used to 'project'. Rini is clutching the stolen tobacco pouch and seems in a trance. Taro is drawing a picture of The Inspector which shows his distinctive nose.

KENTARO

Well that didn't work, did it?
Everyone just thinks he is mad.

Rini takes a deep breath and drops the pouch.

RINI

Don't blame me - I tried.

Taro points to his crude picture.

TARO

Lets try another target instead?

KENTARO

You want to try again? Really??

TARO

Yes - we know what we're doing now.
But this time I take control.

Rini SIGHS and nods, then KICKS the tobacco pouch away.

FADE TO

EXT. BUBBLING BROOK, HAUNTED FOREST - LATE PM

A rocky area with HOT SPRINGS where the path ends - a narrow BOILING POND in a gully. Among trees fronting this are BAMBOO. The Bandit Queen, Minokichi and Komako approach.

BANDIT QUEEN

How will we get past THIS?

The Bandit Queen stares in horror at the bubbling water. Minokichi observes her fear but looks around at the trees.

KOMAKO

The Monk won't hold those fiends for long - I think I hear them coming.

MINOKICHI

Kasumi - lend me your axe! You can help too - QUICKLY!

FADE TO

INT. SECURE CELL, JAPANESE HOSPITAL - EARLY PM

The Assistant is himself but is being STABBED in his bum by giant acupuncture needles by Doctor Wang and The Nurse/Nun.

The Door opens and The Inspector enters. He now speaks with the voice of Taro instead of his own.

NOTE: The Inspector is now possessed by the child Taro.

TARO (V.O)
(from Inspector)
Let my assistant go!
(clearing throat - deeper)
That is - 'let him go'! We must return to the town and...er... Arrest that troublesome Magistrate.

All turn and look at The Inspector - puzzled.

TARO (V.O)
(to Assistant)
As for you, you'd better watch your step! No more nonsense, got it?

The Assistant looks confused but doesn't argue.

FADE TO

EXT. BUBBLING BROOK, HAUNTED FOREST - LATE PM

As before but now all wear STILTS from bamboo with sticks for support. Minokichi leads the way over the bubbling water. Struggling behind is The Bandit Queen and last is Komako.

MINOKICHI

I made such things many times for my children. Use the sticks for balance.

The Bandit Queen STUMBLES and whimpers, terrified. All proceed carefully just above the steaming water.

KOMAKO

Be careful Kasumi! Don't slip.

MINOKICHI

This part becomes shallow... Komako - how is it you found us out here?

KOMAKO

That Ronin - he was hunting my cousin. He and his men attacked our camp and killed everyone there!

The Bandit Queen is now more focussed on the conversation.

BANDIT QUEEN

Killed? Our gang was killed?

KOMAKO

A few may have escaped, I didn't see Akira or Chihiro among the dead.

The Bandit Queen stifles a whimper and stomps onward.

MINOKICHI

I am sorry Kasumi. I did not see much of your gang, but as bandits go they didn't seem such a bad bunch.

The Bandit Queen grits her teeth and presses onward, now catching up with Minokichi and moving more speedily.

There is a HOWL somewhere in the distance.

FADE TO

EXT. SMALL CLEARING IN HAUNTED FOREST - LATE PM

Darker and more snow. The Ghostly Monk shines his light on the 3 X Snow Vampires as they creep closer, trying to pass.

The Ronin rises behind the vampires - now with GLOWING EYES. He grabs his sword and makes a gesture over the blade - for a moment runic symbols appear as the sword GLOWS with power!

NOTE: The Ronin is now controlled by the Shikigami demon.

The Monk and vampires turn as The Ronin STOMPS closer.

The vampires HISS and lunge but The Ronin CHOPS them down - this time they do not smoke or rise. The Ronin stomps towards the Monk, his eyes and enchanted sword glowing.

THE MONK
You will not pass me Shikigami!

In a flash the Ghostly Monk is chopped through his middle by the Ronin. The Monk looks startled as his upper body falls one side and his legs the other. The Monks FADES TO ASHES as The Ronin stomps past - pausing to STAMP on the monks ashes.

FADE TO

EXT. FAR SIDE BUBBLING BROOK, HAUNTED FOREST - EARLY EVENING

Dry land the far side at the foot of a rocky gorge and cave entrance. Komako, The Bandit Queen and Minokichi are untying their stilts. The Bandit Queen gazes back at the water.

BANDIT QUEEN
I think I'm going to faint... Or
vomit... Or both.

MINOKICHI
You did very well Kasumi. Don't worry
- it seems we're at the cave now.

Komako looks at the cave and points.

KOMAKO
What is this place?

All turn and look closer at the strange cave.

SPECIAL EFFECT/CGI - the cave looks like a giant mouth, the rocks carved to look like Yuki-Onna's face. The cave is part of a mountain that has numerous caves at various levels above

- all have shadowy figures inside - HUNDREDS OF SNOW VAMPIRES with GLEAMING EYES - hungrily at the humans.

MINOKICHI

The Monk didn't mention all this?

A few Snow Vampires try to exit their cave but are BURNED by the sunlight and retreat back inside.

KENTARO

They don't like the sun?

MINOKICHI

But it's nearly sunset!

The humans and vampires study each other.

BANDIT QUEEN

This Ronin then - it was me he wanted?

KOMAKO

Yes - but I'm sure he is dead now. No man can overcome a sea monster, vampires and a ghost monk.

There is a LOUD SPLASH and they turn to look.

MINOKICHI

How sure?

The Ronin has arrived the far side and has jumped into the steaming water (not feeling pain - like a zombie). He holds his sword above as he wades through towards them - sinking deeper and submerging into the bubbling water.

KOMAKO

The Ronin!

BANDIT QUEEN

I could do with some sake about now...

MINOKICHI

I gave the last to the Ferryman.

The hands and sword of the Ronin get closer and begin to rise from the water as The Ronin emerges, steaming and dripping.

None notice the Vampires getting bolder and creeping closer, nor do they see clouds forming a female face above them.

BANDIT QUEEN
 Komako - are you well enough to fight?

The Bandit Queen hands an axe to Komako and raises her other. Minokichi readies a stilt to use as a staff.

KOMAKO
 Perhaps I can reason with him? I got
 to know him a little on the way here.

The dripping Ronin STOMPS CLOSER. Komako moves towards him.

KOMAKO
 Ogawa Kenichi! You told me you were a
 man of honour. Wait - let us speak.

NOTE: When speaking the Ronin's voice is the Shikigami.

THE SHIKIGAMI (V.O)
 (from the Ronin)
 Ogawa Kenichi is no more!

The Ronin CUTS Komako down and The Bandit Queen GASPS. The Ronin's eyes PULSATE with unnatural light. He grins.

MINOKICHI
 He is no man - he is a demon!

BANDIT QUEEN
 But how? He crossed the water?

MINOKICHI
 Maybe demons can - if in another?

They glance at the vampires - they are less burned by the setting sun and edging out of the caves, SNARLING.

BANDIT QUEEN
 We're out of time!

The Bandit Queen CHARGES at the Ronin, frantically chopping. He skilfully blocks and parries then KICKS her over.

Minokichi charges with his pole but The Ronin CUTS it from his hands and shoves him over. The Ronin stomps above The Bandit Queen who is crawling away on her front. He stands over her with sword raised to strike.

She turns suddenly and CHOPS his leg - the axe gets embedded. The Ronin does not react - instead he SLICES The Bandit Queen - a mortal wound. He tugs out the axe painlessly and discards

it then raises his sword again to finish her.

MINOKICHI

NO!!

Minokichi dives at the Ronin but is knocked down again. The Ronin turns to Minokichi and raises his sword to kill him.

The face of Yuki-Onna forms in the clouds above and she SCREAMS DOWN! Her voice echoes all around. The GROUND SHAKES.

YUKI-ONNA

(from clouds)

STOP!!

The three gaze up at the clouds - rather startled. The vampires stop also - it seems they obey Yuki-Onna.

FADE TO

INT. MAGIC CHAMBER, MAGISTRATES DOJO - EARLY EVENING

The Magistrate is waving his hands and muttering an incantation at the mirror. Aunt Karori is tied to the now tilted rack in a spread-eagle position, naked and sweaty.

AUNT KARORI

I'm not complaining you stopped... But what are you doing now?

MAGISTRATE

(to mirror)

Return! I command it! RETURN!!

Ignored Aunt Karori TUTS and shakes her head - ignored.

The shadowy Shikigami appears in the mirror - its gleaming eyes like that of the undead Ronin. It seems annoyed.

THE SHIKIGAMI

Why summon me back? I was about to complete my task! Now the perfect vessel I was using is destroyed!

Aunt Karori GASPS and gapes with terror at the demon.

MAGISTRATE

Silence demon! Do not question your master. I have a more pressing errand, one that must not be bungled.

The Shikigami glowers angrily at The Magistrate.

FADE TO

EXT. TRAIL APPROACHING MONKS HOUSE, RURAL JAPAN - EVENING

The Inspector is in his RICKSHAW with his Assistant, heading past the distant Cemetery and house carried by the Bearers.

They slow and stop. The Inspector (still possessed by Taro) leans out of the window and calls angrily to them.

TARO (V.O)
(as Inspector)
What is this delay?

The Bearers WHIMPER and back away, abandoning the Rickshaw. Ahead of them is Zombified Samurai #1 - last seen in the cemetery and a bit more decomposed. He is standing in the road ahead of them with his sword drawn.

The Inspector exits the Rickshaw, followed by his Assistant as the Bearers flee, SCREAMING.

TARO (V.O)
(through Inspector)
The Shikigami - he has found us!

The Assistant GAPES as the zombie Samurai approaches. He SQUEALS in terror, waves his arms dramatically then FAINTS. The Inspector glances down at him, unimpressed.

FADE TO

EXT. FAR SIDE BUBBLING BROOK, HAUNTED FOREST - EVENING

Minokichi is cradling the dying Bandit Queen in his lap. Yuki-onna is in physical form and looks at Komako - who is also dying. The Vampires from the caves crouch closer but Yuki-Onna waves them away. The Vampires retreat, obeying.

YUKI-ONNA
(to Minokichi)
You and your friends came all this way
to find me? Facing all these dangers?

MINOKICHI
Yes - but I did not know so many
others would be harmed along the way.

BANDIT QUEEN
(gasping, dying)
You are a good man Minokichi - you've
done so much... To find your wife...

MINOKICHI
Kasumi - do not die!
(to Yuki-Onna)
Can't you use magic to save her?

YUKI-ONNA
My kind cannot heal or save life...
But there may be an option.

FADE TO

INT. MAGIC CHAMBER, MAGISTRATES DOJO - EVENING

The rack upright and Karori's legs tied apart. She is naked
and The Magistrate is between her legs, fumbling his attire.

MAGISTRATE
I received word about that meddling
inspectors location. Where were we?

The Magistrate thrusts himself forward and Karori GASPS.

AUNT KARORI
You are a sick sad little man. All you
do is black-magic, torture and rape.

MAGISTRATE
Everyone needs a hobby.

Neither notice the door opens and The Servant enters. She
creeps closer and puts her finger to her lips as Aunt Karori
glances at her. The Servant raises a VASE in the air.

NOTE: The Servant is possessed by Rini and acts childlike.

MAGISTRATE
And don't pretend you are not enjoying
this. I've seen your husband, he isn't
what you'd call 'big'.

To the Magistrates pleasant surprise Karori becomes co-
operative and thrusts back (but wary of the spikes).

AUNT KARORI
I can't resist you any more... Don't
stop - you're so good!

MAGISTRATE

I am?

AUNT KARORI

I was a fool before. Oh, that's good!
Here - do you like these thrusts?

MAGISTRATE

Oh yes! Lovely... Lovely!!

The Magistrate is very distracted, the Servant SMASHES him with the vase from behind. He slumps down - unconscious.

RINI (V.O)

(through Servant)

It is me Auntie! Little Rini!

The Servant begins to untie Karori.

AUNT KARORI

Rini? That is your voice - but I don't understand? How can you be Rini?

RINI (V.O)

I'll explain all later. I know where Uncle Yoshi is kept. The Guards have mostly gone now so we can get away.

Karori's hand becomes free and she helps with other straps.

RINI (V.O)

What was the Magistrate doing on top of you like that? More torture? He was gasping much more than you?

AUNT KARORI

Don't worry about that, just get these straps off. Then help find my dress.

FADE TO

EXT. TRAIL APPROACHING MONKS HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

The fainted Assistant lays by the Rickshaw. Zombie Samurai #1 attacks The Inspector who stretches both hands and causes the zombie to be 'frozen' for a moment, then he backs away. The zombie recovers and attacks and this repeats - a stalemate.

THE SHIKIGAMI (V.O)

(from the zombie-samurai)

I know you are the child 'Taro'. But

know I am bound to destroy this mortal
coil you use.

TARO (V.O)
(from Inspector)
And I know you are a Shikigami - a
demon that misuses the dead!

THE SHIKIGAMI (V.O)
You will soon tire child - then you
will join the dead also.

The Zombie-Samurai lurches forward but again is countered by 'The Inspector' and made to 'freeze' for a moment.

The Assistant recovers and staggers up to his feet. The Zombie-Samurai SNARLS at The Assistant who GASPS and faints again, collapsing theatrically. The Inspector rolls his eyes.

FADE TO

INT. MAGIC CHAMBER, MAGISTRATES DOJO - EVENING

The Magistrate has recovered, is dressed and has a head-injury. He is before the mirror, waving and chanting.

MAGISTRATE
Return.... Return... RETURN!

The Shikigami appears in the mirror and looks annoyed.

THE SHIKIGAMI
(angry)
Again you interrupt me? AGAIN?!?

MAGISTRATE
Do not question your Master! I have a
more urgent task - Kill Yoshi and his
wife! AT ONCE! They are escaping!!

The hands of the Shikigami GRAB the Magistrate from the mirror and start to pull him inside!

THE SHIKIGAMI
I tire of you, 'Onmyoji Master'!

MAGISTRATE
No! Release me! LET ME GO!

The Magistrate grabs onto the frame but he is pulled through by the demon - into the swirling mists beyond the glass.

THE SHIKIGAMI
 YOU will be punished - trapped here
 with me - for all eternity!

Strange ENTITIES swirl around The Magistrate, BITING and CLAWING. The Shikigami LAUGHS as The Magistrate POUNDS on the glass - trapped inside! His screams fade and the Mirror returns to normal, the Magistrate and demons vanish. Silence.

SLOW FADE TO

INT. HOUSE OF YOSHI, YOKANICHI TOWN - EVENING (DAYS LATER)

Yoshi is healed and Aunt Karori has recovered, both wear fresh clothing. They answer the front door. It is snowing.

SUPER IMPOSE : SEVERAL DAYS LATER...

AUNT KARORI
 (calling in house)
 Children! Children! Come quickly!

YOSHI
 There is someone to meet you!

Taro, Rini and Kentaro - cleaned also - hurry into the room from a side room and GASP! Minokichi and O-Yuki stand at the front door. The children hug their parents, WEEPING with joy.

RINI
 Mummy! Mummy!!

O-YUKI
 Kentaro, Rini, Taro! I've missed you all so much!

Aunt Karori is very moved and hugs Yoshi - they cry too. After a moment of hugging Minokichi wipes his eyes.

MINOKICHI
 Luckily your mother was important at the...er... place she was visiting.

O-YUKI
 I believed your Father had betrayed me - but in fact had not told a 'living soul' when I flew into a rage. A silly misunderstanding, now made amends for.

There is A KNOCK on the door.

AUNT KARORI
Who could that be?

YOSHI
Ah! I forgot the Inspector is coming.

Yoshi opens the front door - The Inspector and his Assistant are here - recovered and 'normal' and themselves again.

INSPECTOR
Good evening Yoshi. Not come at a bad time, have I?

YOSHI
Not at all Inspector - please come in?

The Inspector and Assistant enter.

INSPECTOR
I see you're busy so won't stay long... Good evening all.

All bow to The Inspector and wipe their eyes.

INSPECTOR
Yoshi - I cannot apologise enough for the actions of the Magistrate - who is still in hiding somewhere. I have been rewarded for exposing his vile schemes - although I'm still a little unclear on some of the details. But my good fortune is your good fortune - and I have an idea how to compensate you.

YOSHI
Really I'd like to just forget the whole unpleasant business?

INSPECTOR
Understandable - but I'd like you to consider becoming the new Magistrate. Everyone in town sings your praises.

AUNT KARORI
The new Town Magistrate? My husband??

INSPECTOR
I'd help you get settled, though it's mainly just a figurehead really, but has many perks... And pays well.

YOSHI

(bowing)

Yes Inspector - I would be honoured.
Thank you for your faith in me.

MINOKICHI

Well done cousin Yoshi - I knew you'd
make good one day!

Aunt Karori rubs her stomach thoughtfully and steps towards Yoshi, looking a bit uncertain how to explain.

AUNT KARORI

Yoshi - I have some news too...

Before she can continue two shadowy figures approach behind the Inspector outside. The Assistant backs away nervously.

MINOKICHI

No need for alarm. Here are two
friends we made along the way.

The Bandit Queen steps out of the shadows, followed by Komako - both pale with GLEAMING EYES. They stand in the doorway.

BANDIT QUEEN

Pleased to meet you!

KOMAKO

Good evening.

INSPECTOR

What charming ladies! So pale and so
pretty... Perhaps I might stay a
little longer after all?

Komako and The Bandit Queen smile seductively at the Assistant and Inspector, they lick their lips.

INSPECTOR

As it happens both myself and my
assistant have been on the hunt for
new wives! Right Fumihiito?

The Assistant nods eagerly.

FADE TO

END CREDITS

THE END