

NEON GAUNTLET

written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. JERSEY SUBURBS -- AFTERNOON, 1993

The troublesome Jaworski boys, CHIP and CHAUNCEY, walk down a busy street in their neighborhood--

CHIP

I don't know what you're worried about - high school's like prison, as long as you beat somebody up on the first day you're good.

CHAUNCEY

Oh no, I could never hit anybody. I'm a lover, not a fighter.

CHIP

See, only a virgin would say that.

Despite the insult, Chauncey stares adoringly at Chip.

CHAUNCEY (V.O.)

It wasn't easy being brothers with the coolest guy on earth...

Chip, 17, has flowing, feathered hair, like he just got off a motorcycle.

CHAUNCEY (V.O.)

No one even knew why he spent time with me...

Chauncey, 14, is overweight, his belly peeking out the bottom of his collared shirt. There's even a stain on the front of it. What is that - *pudding?*!

CHAUNCEY (V.O.)

But for as long as I can remember, we had the game. Neon Gauntlet was a sadistic, Japanese game show that pitted martial artists from around the world to decide who was the true samurai champion fit to run the gauntlet and unite all of Japan. The problem was it was filmed in Tokyo and you never quite knew when it would be on...

Out of nowhere, a NEIGHBORHOOD KID suffering from chicken pox throws his window open and screams--

NEIGHBORHOOD KID
Neon Gauntlet's on!

Double dutchers stop dutching, hop-sotchers stop hopping. The Jaworski brothers look at each other for a split second before taking off, running for home!

INT. JAWORSKI HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

As they sprint into the living room, their father DAVID is watching something on T.V. Chip rips the remote out of his hand. David lets it go with an eye roll--

DAVID JAWORSKI
Not again!

As Chip flips the channel, Chauncey dives for a spare VHS to tape the special.

DAVID JAWORSKI (CONT'D)
I'm telling you right now, do not
record over Wrestlemania again!

CHIP
Shut up, dad!

The T.V. finally settles on a darkened screen as the brothers breathe a sigh of relief -- they made it just on time.

T.V. SCREEN

The darkness gives way to a brutal, unforgiving landscape. The thunder of hooves can be heard in the distance as grim, kimono-clad men appear on horseback.

KENNY KAMIKAZE (V.O.)
Four families held sway in feudal
Japan, none more powerful than the
Taira clan. But when the
Chrysanthemum throne fell to eight
year-old Emperor Antoku, the
Minamoto clan saw their chance to
take over...

From a hilltop high above Taira village, the MINAMOTO look down on the valley below them with disdain. Their leader spurs his horse into a gallop and his men follow after.

Soon, the Minamoto have taken the village and the Taira general is waving his men on to retreat...

KENNY KAMIKAZE (V.O.)
 Forced to flee their homestead, the
 Taira took with them the three
 sacred treasures of Japan: the
 imperial regalia of their emperors.
 Symbols of their divinity...

(beat)
 Among them: the Jade Magatama...

A glowing, comma-shaped STONE pulses with *light*...

KENNY KAMIKAZE (V.O.)
 The Mirror of Eight Ta...

An ornate, BRONZE MIRROR closely resembling a warrior's
 shield...

KENNY KAMIKAZE (V.O.)
 And the legendary sword, Kusanagi.

A white, metallic BLADE dented like a fish's spine. In the
 driving rain, all three are packed into a chest and placed on
 a gurney for travel.

KENNY KAMIKAZE (V.O.)
 The Taira retreated to Nagato
 Province where they faced their
 pursuers in the legendary Battle of
 Dan-no-ura...

In the shallow Kanmon Straits, the Minamoto let loose a
 volley of long-range arrows. Using the tides they surround
 the enemy ships and board them, fighting with swords and
 daggers.

The Child Emperor finds himself on one of these ships and
 watches, terrified, as the Minamoto approach.

To avoid capture, his GRANDMOTHER throws herself, the boy,
 and the three imperial treasures into the sea. The boy and
 his grandmother float. But the prizes sink quickly to the
 bottom of the pacific...

KENNY KAMIKAZE (V.O.)
 The search began for a champion;
 someone who could recover the
 sacred treasures and unify Japan.

Suddenly, the SCREEN is taken over by a KAMIKAZE BANDANA and
 the host is screaming--

KENNY KAMIKAZE (V.O.)
 Ready, Gauntleteers?!

Hundreds of athletes, men and women from every country, shout their response--

GAUNTLETEERS

Yes, sensei!

With that, a massive GONG is rung. And the games begin as Chauncey's eyes glow with excitement.

CHAUNCEY (V.O.)

But now Chip was leaving for the entire summer to train with our Grandpa in California...

INT. CHIP'S ROOM -- DAYS LATER

As Chip packs a bag, Chauncey sits on his brother's bed, peppering him with questions.

CHAUNCEY

Is it true that Grandpa Joe actually trained with Bruce Lee up in San Francisco?

CHIP

Damn straight. Probably taught him all he knew too.

Chauncey flips through one of Chip's auto mags--

CHAUNCEY

Well by the time you get back I'll have mown enough lawns to afford this puppy.

He unfolds a semi-erotic fold-out of a sleek and sexy KAWASAKI NINJA.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)

Oh, yeah...

CHIP

You're ridiculous - you're not even old enough to drive.

He slaps the magazine out of his brother's hand, zips his duffel bag up, and heads out of the room with Chauncey in hot pursuit.

CHAUNCEY

You know it's a status symbol!

INT. JAWORSKI HOUSE, DOWNSTAIRS -- CONTINUOUS

Chauncey follows his brother down the hall, struggling to keep up. They're almost at the back door when Chip points into a sparse room with a yoga mat on the floor and punching bag in the corner.

CHIP

Whatever you do - never set foot in my dojo.

CHAUNCEY

You mean our garage--

CHIP

NEVER! SET FOOT!

With that final warning, he walks out to his parent's waiting car. Chauncey watches him go, a mischievous look in his eyes.

CHAUNCEY (V.O.)

I worked out in there every day that summer. If high school really was like prison, I was going to show up on day one... yoked.

INT. CHIP'S DOJO -- THE DAYS AND WEEKS THAT FOLLOW

A compilation of Chauncey's workout fails:

He hits himself in the head with a pair of nunchucks...

And a punching bag nearly knocks him out...

When he turns to stomach exercises, he doesn't so much "do crunches" as he does rock back and forth on the ground.

CHAUNCEY

Every day that summer I did 1,000 sit-ups. But all I lost was *two pounds!* The problem, I think, was the after exercise reward snacks.

INT. JAWORSKI HOUSE, LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Chauncey shoves a grilled cheese into his mouth as he loads the Nintendo version of Gauntlet into his Super-NES. It's called *Neon Gauntlet: Retribution* and has a sweaty, shirtless karateka bowing on the cover. Open palm to closed fist.

CHAUNCEY (V.O.)

The rules were simple...

As Chauncey speaks 8-bit representations appear on the screen before him.

CHAUNCEY (V.O.)

The first event was the Wheel of Destiny. Athletes would crowd onto a carousel marked with doors that led to different prizes. The prizes? Weapons each fighter could use in future stages of the tournament, ranging from sais and nunchucks to battle axes and bo staffs. Get a choice weapon and you could cruise through the rest of the game. Because so much was at stake during the spin, the wheel was without a doubt the bloodiest part of the entire game.

The hydraulics kick in and the mechanism tilts up into the air, rotating like a massive ferris wheel.

CHAUNCEY (V.O.)

The Gauntleteer that landed the coveted katana spot got to choose the first event. These ranged from breaking exercises to feats of strength and endurance, the winner of which claimed the famed Jade Magatama.

An 8-bit Gauntleteer breaks a stack of bricks and holds up his prize on a necklace.

CHAUNCEY (V.O.)

The Kumite was next, a no-holds barred mixed martial arts tournament whose winner received the Mirror of Eight Ta. The top four finishers proved themselves worthy enough to run the Neon Gauntlet, a brutal obstacle course that people often died traversing.

In the Nintendo game, dunce-capped rodeo clowns spray characters that fall off the gauntlet with a violent firehose, carrying unmoving victims off on a stretcher.

CHAUNCEY (V.O.)

Some athletes even set up replica Gauntlets in their backyard to train. But it didn't matter.

(MORE)

CHAUNCEY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The gauntlet was different every time, designed by the previous years winner. And last years was a doozy...

Time-life footage shows tape of Medics pulling a bleeding Swede from the ruins of last years Neon Gauntlet.

CHAUNCEY (V.O.)

Oleg Swenson claimed victory after abandoning his best friend in the gauntlet, ultimately losing his mind and being confined to an asylum. It was rumored that the architects corresponded with him during visiting hours...

INT. CHIP'S DOJO -- THAT NIGHT

Chauncey, dressed in a kimono like a Japanese lord, lights a pair of incense. He's taken his brother's samurai sword off the wall and brandishes it solemnly until his mother, DEBORAH, calls down to the garage:

DEB JAWORSKI

Chauncey, have you seen my nightgown?

Chauncey's eyes go wide.

CHAUNCEY

Uhhh, no ma--

He's wearing it right now. He runs to put it back.

EXT. NEIGHBOR'S LAWNS -- MORNING

Chauncey lugs his families fifty-pound mower around town, mowing lawns.

CHAUNCEY (V.O.)

I worked that entire summer to save up enough money...

The lawn he's currently on has a BEE'S NEST in some scrub brush that he just doesn't see. He mows right over it and they swarm him. He takes off, running for his life...

Later, he goes to collect for a job well done, covered in bees stings.

CHAUNCEY (V.O.)
*I learned very quickly that people
 were cheap.*

The homeowner lays a few singles on him. Chauncey stares at the money, offended.

CHAUNCEY (V.O.)
*But it was all worth it, for
 this...*

EXT. DOWNTOWN STOREFRONTS -- EVENING

After a day of hard work, with the sun setting, Chauncey gazes through a showroom window at his KAWASAKI NINJA just waiting for him to buy it...

He looks this way and that to make sure he's not seen, then plants a tender kiss on the glass.

INT. NEWARK INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, BAGGAGE CLAIM -- DAY

It's the end of summer and Chauncey and his parents are waiting for Chip to show up.

DEB JAWORSKI
 I don't see him...

DAVID JAWORSKI
 Then he clearly hasn't gotten off yet.

DEB JAWORSKI
 Well, where is he?!

CHAUNCEY
 How long are we gonna wait? I'm missing "American Gladiators."

DAVID JAWORSKI
 --*There he is!*

Chip emerges from the gate, the picture of relaxed confidence: a shit-eating grin on his face, his hair slicked back and tucked up into a samurai top knot.

DAVID JAWORSKI (CONT'D)
 The hell is wrong with his hair?

DEB JAWORSKI
 I like it - very Benihana! *Hi,
 honey!*

Stepping off the escalator, Chip spreads his arms wide for his parents.

CHIP
Hello, mother.

He hugs David and Deb, then turns his attention to Chauncey.

CHIP (CONT'D)
Hey scrub, you miss me?

CHAUNCEY
No. It's the finals of Gladiator and I'm missing it.

CHIP
Just be the water.

CHAUNCEY
What the hell does that mean?

Chip smiles, confidently.

CHIP
If you have to ask... then you'll never know.

He walks off, his arms around his parents as they fawn over him. Chauncey watches them go wondering what the fuck that meant.

INT. JAWORSKI HOUSE, DINING ROOM -- THAT NIGHT

Chip regales his family with tales of his grandfather.

CHIP
Now of course, the kitchen staff didn't take too kindly to that, him being new and all. And they told him as much, out in the alleyway after work.

DEB JAWORSKI
Dad, was always getting into or out of trouble, but he was so damn charming you couldn't stay mad at him.

She sighs, remembering him fondly. Chauncey though, hasn't taken his eyes off his big brother.

CHAUNCEY

Hmm, that sounds a lot like the plot of Dragon: A Bruce Lee Story to me.

Chip looks down in disgust at the mountain of ketchup on his brother's plate.

CHIP

Do you know how many calories are in that? A fuck-ton.

CHAUNCEY

Is that a lot?

Deb starts to gather up everybody's plate.

CHIP

Oh, let me clear, ma. You cooked.

She sits back down so damn proud, ruffling his hair as he passes.

DEB JAWORSKI

I can't get over how much he's grown up over the summer!

CHAUNCEY

I clear the plates every night!

DEB JAWORSKI

And I appreciate it, but from your brother this is big. By the way, you mister are not leaving this table until you finish that broccoli.

CHAUNCEY

But it's cold!

DEB JAWORSKI

Whose fault is that?!

INT. JAWORSKI HOUSE, KITCHEN -- SOON AFTER

As Chip does a half-assed job of rinsing the dishes, Chauncey remains at the table staring at his broccoli like it's liable to kill him.

CHIP

I need that plate, little man.

CHAUNCEY

Don't rush me.

CHIP

Just throw it in the trash - Mom's not gonna know.

CHAUNCEY

She'd know. She always knows.

CHIP

You can't do it, can you?

CHAUNCEY

I knew you hadn't changed!

He puts a finger to his lips and whispers:

CHIP

Shhh, don't tell anybody.

He turns back to the dishes, laughing, as their parents come back into the room.

DEB JAWORSKI

Honey, you can leave the rest of those, your father and I have something we want to show you. Chauncey you can come too, just leave the broccoli until after.

EXT. JAWORSKI HOUSE, BACKYARD -- CONTINUOUS

Having covered Chip's eyes, Deb leads him out the back door. She stops a few feet from a tarped surprise and starts counting.

DEB JAWORSKI

Three... two... one... *Surprise!*

Deb pulls her hands away as David rips the tarp off his son's gift -- a brand new *Kawasaki Ninja*.

CHAUNCEY

This is some bullshit!

The words are out before he could stop them, but no one seems to have heard him.

CHIP

I can't believe you did this!

DEB JAWORSKI

I mean we had to, you were going on
and on about it! Do you like it?

He sits on the bike, beaming from ear-to-ear.

CHIP

Like it? *I love it!*

He gives both his parents massive bear hugs as Chauncey looks
like he's about to have a conniption fit.

INT. CHIP'S ROOM -- MINUTES LATER

Chip is changing for bed when Chauncey lets himself in and
slams the door shut.

CHAUNCEY

*They gave you a Kawasaki Ninja twin-
speed bike with dual thrust
capabilities?!*

CHIP

Dude, why would they get you one?
You can't drive for two years!

CHAUNCEY

Status symbol!

CHIP

Aw, you're just nervous for your
first day of high school tomorrow.

CHAUNCEY

That has nothing to do with this.

CHIP

Listen to yourself, you're tired.
Do you need a nap?

CHAUNCEY

Do not talk to me like that. I am
not a child.

CHIP

The key is not showing fear.
Remember when I said high school
was like prison? Go in there with a
couple bruises and a mystique will
form around you.

CHAUNCEY

And just where am I supposed to get
bruises from, huh?!

As if on cue, his brother punches him square in the face.
Chauncey goes down like a sack of potatoes.

CHIP

I really thought you'd see where I
was going with that.

EXT. JAWORSKI HOUSE, DRIVEWAY -- THE NEXT MORNING

In his Z Cavaricci's and Reebok pumps, Chip sits on his brand
new Ninja, impatiently waiting for Chauncey to come out.

CHIP

Come on, we're gonna be late!

Chauncey takes his time emerging from the house, the shiner
on his face now a deep, dark blue. He's about to climb on
behind his brother when Chip points at his shoes:

CHIP (CONT'D)

Good God, what in the hell are
those?!

Chauncey's shoes... they *light up*.

CHAUNCEY

What? My L.A. lights? They're so
people can see me at night.

CHIP

You are not wearing those to
school.

CHAUNCEY

Whatchu talkin' about Willis, these
are in right now.

CHIP

Hey, it's your funeral...

He pulls out of the driveway as Chauncey yells over the roar
of the engine:

CHAUNCEY

I think you're underestimating
people.

EXT. BILLY CARTER HIGH SCHOOL -- MINUTES LATER

They're a good block from school when Chip pulls over.

CHIP
Okay, get off.

CHAUNCEY
What are you talking about?
School's right there.

CHIP
And I refuse to be seen with you
while you're wearing those
sneakers. They're like something a
retarded kid would wear!

CHAUNCEY
Nuh-uh!

Chip peels away, revving his engine to make sure he's seen
arriving. And seen he is...

TRACEY YOST, with big frosted hair and a woman's body, stands
with her two best friends, HEATHER and... HEATHER.

TRACEY YOST
Look who got scrumptious over the
summer.

Chip pulls his helmet off and shakes his hair free. He winks
at the girls as he passes them.

HEATHER #1
I thought you were dating John
Reddick...

TRACEY YOST
Who's talking about dating? I just
want to sit on his face.

When Chauncey reaches the parking lot, he sees the way people
respond to his brother; the high fives, the fawning over the
new bike. The looks from the girls...

When Chip finally catches sight of his brother staring, he
points to his shoes and mouths:

CHIP
So gay!

Chauncey points to his ears -- I can't hear you.

SMASH CUT:

INT. BILLY CARTER HIGH -- MINUTES LATER

The second Chauncey steps inside, kids start laughing at his shoes. Which makes him hurry down the hallway...

Which makes them light up even more...

By the time he makes it to the school PAY PHONE, he's a laughing stock. He pops a quarter in and dials quickly.

CHAUNCEY

Mom, you have to bring me my other sneakers!

DEB JAWORSKI (O.S.)

Chauncey, you begged me for those shoes!

CHAUNCEY

I was wrong! *So very, very wrong!*

DEB JAWORSKI (O.S.)

You'll just have to make do--

She hangs up on him. Chauncey listens hopelessly to the dial tone blare, before slamming the phone back into its cradle.

As he does he notices some graffiti etched into the wall. It reads "Beware the Mendell! Beware the F.A.W!"

He runs a finger over the grooves as the bell rings suddenly, making him jump. He swings his backpack onto his back and reluctantly heads for class.

INT. LOCKER ROOM -- SOON AFTER

First period is gym. Chauncey sits on the bench, fully dressed, as his classmates - most of them with grown men's bodies - change into their jock straps and workout clothes.

INT. COACH'S OFFICE -- MOMENTS LATER

COACH FOSTER, 54, sits across from Chauncey who's clutching his backpack in front of him.

COACH FOSTER

I understand that you don't want to shower in front of the other men. I mean, who would...

(beat)

But trust me, no one is looking at your penis.

Finally, reluctantly, Chauncey nods.

INT. LOCKER ROOM -- BACK TO SCENE

Chauncey slowly begins to get changed when the STONED JUNIOR next to him yells:

STONER

*Oh my god! He doesn't have any
pubes!*

Chauncey turns bright red, grasping desperately for an excuse--

CHAUNCEY

No! I just shave them is all!

STONER

Everybody! This kid shaves his
pubes!

Chauncey grabs his clothes and runs out of the locker room.

STONER (CONT'D)

Hey man, his shoes light up!
That's pretty cool...

INT. BILLY CARTER HIGH, CAFETERIA -- LUNCH TIME

By the time Chauncey finds the cafeteria and gets his food, most of the tables are taken. He looks around for a friendly face, but sees none.

Mercifully, he catches sight of Chip in a far corner and goes to join him. He tries to takes a seat, when--

CHIP

What the fuck are you doing?

CHAUNCEY

I have nowhere else to sit.

CHIP

You are a freshmen. Eat your lunch
in the bathroom like the rest of
them.

CHAUNCEY

You're really not going to let me
sit here?

CHIP
--I will scream!

Chauncey retreats, fed up with everyone and everything.

INT. SOCIAL STUDIES CLASS -- AFTERNOON

Chauncey wanders into his next class, wondering what fresh hell high school has in store for him.

Unbeknownst to him, he's seated himself next to a cute, Japanese girl named JEN TONG, 15.

She's got a *Hello, Kitty* backpack that Chauncey recognizes. He's about to bring it up when he thinks twice.

JEN TONG
Are you looking at my backpack?

Chauncey had no idea she was even aware he was alive.

CHAUNCEY
It's *Hello, Kitty*...

JEN TONG
(ready to fight)
So?

CHAUNCEY
Did you watch "Furry Tale Theater"
when it was on?

JEN TONG
Yes... why? *Did you?!*

CHAUNCEY
Maybe...

She laughs, so he goes for it.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)
I liked Tuxedo Sam and the
"Phantom" episode but I'm more into
anime.

JEN TONG
Oh, like Akira?

Chauncey's eyes go wide. She said it before he could.

CHAUNCEY
You know Akira?!

He might be in love. He's about to say more when the TEACHER enters.

TEACHER
Alright, settle down class.

As the students return to their seats, Jen Tong leans in towards Chauncey.

JEN TONG
I like your shoes, by the way.

CHAUNCEY
You're the only one.

EXT. BILLY CARTER HIGH, PLAYGROUND -- AN HOUR LATER

Chauncey walks out of class in mid-conversation with Jen Tong.

JEN TONG
Isn't that the show where people die?

CHAUNCEY
Not in years! No, you're more likely to get maimed in Neon Gauntlet.

It's a free period so they steer themselves out onto the playground. That's when Chauncey sees him...

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)
Oh, Jesus Christ.

JEN TONG
What?

CHAUNCEY
It's my brother.

Jen looks where he motions. Chip is shirtless and has found a patch of grass that he's stretched a yoga mat out on.

Next to his book-marked copy of *"Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance,"* he practices a couple impressive martial arts poses with his eyes closed.

JEN TONG
That's your brother?

She smiles, bashfully.

JEN TONG (CONT'D)
He looks like he works out a lot...

Chauncey's happy to burst this bubble.

CHAUNCEY
You know that's not sweat, right?
He just covers himself in baby oil.

As they're talking, Tracey Yost sidles up to Chip, smirking.

TRACEY YOST
Looking good. You need a spotter?

He smiles, knows exactly who it is, but won't open his eyes just yet.

CHIP
It's called reading a kata. You're supposed to visualize your enemy's attacks and react accordingly. With enough practice, I should be able to respond to an adversaries blows without thought or hesitation.

TRACEY YOST
Oh my god, I love to read!

He opens his eyes.

CHIP
Me too! Wow, we have so much in common...

He's not kidding. He's completely serious. Chauncey fake barfs. He's too busy watching his brother act the fool to notice he's about to run into a mullet-haired velociraptor of a teenage girl--

LESLIE
Watch where you're going, ya light-up sneaker queer!

But Chauncey's had just about enough of this school. And no one - *no one* - is going to tell him off in front of Jen Tong.

He sees the trapper keeper in the girl's hands - it's a Lisa Frank binder with a day-glo unicorn on the cover.

CHAUNCEY
You made fun of my L.A. lights and you've got unicorns dipped in LSD on your TK?!

Jen tries to warn Chauncey, but it's too late. LESLIE stops in her tracks and slowly revolves around to face them.

LESLIE
What did you say to me?

CHAUNCEY
I said, you're one to talk!

Students have quietly formed a circle around them and begun chanting:

CROWD
Faw! Faw! Faw!

Chauncey finally gets what they're saying.

CHAUNCEY
Wait, faw?! Does that mean you're
Les Mandell? *Leslie* Mandell?!

Her eyes bulge.

LESLIE
No one calls me Leslie!

The CROWD goes on chanting for *blood*--

CROWD
FAW! FAW! FAW!

With Chauncey occupied, Jen leans over to ask one of the chanters:

JEN TONG
What's a faw?!

Leslie reaches down Chauncey's pants and comes out with a handful of underwear as the guy next to Jen responds--

KID #1
Frontal...

Leslie pulls Chauncey's fruit of the looms violently upward, lifting him off the ground--

KID #1 (CONT'D)
Atomic...

Chauncey's feet kick helplessly in the air as a high-pitched shriek escapes his mouth--

KID #1 (CONT'D)
...Wedgie.

Chauncey looks over at Jen Tong and sees the disgusted look on her face, just as his underwear snaps at the band and he falls to the ground.

CHIP (O.S.)
That's enough!

The crowd parts and Chip steps forward.

CHIP (CONT'D)
Leave my brother alone.

Leslie steps backwards, instinctively.

LESLIE
Chip Jaworski...

She looks frightened. And maybe, just maybe, a little turned on...

LESLIE (CONT'D)
Shoulda known this was your brother. Ever since school started you been pretending like you're top dog Miyagi and that don't sit well with me.

CHIP
You're right, I've been too passive aggressive. From here on out, you can deal with me directly from now on.

He holds her gaze, giving her back a psycho look of his own. Leslie's the first to break, wheeling around on Chauncey.

LESLIE
One day your brother's not gonna be around to protect you!

She stomps off as the booing crowd begins to depart. Chauncey *hisses* at his brother:

CHAUNCEY
What the hell was that?!

CHIP
You're welcome is what that is.

CHAUNCEY
You've ruined me!

On the periphery of the crowd TWO SUITS, one *man*, one *woman*, have wordlessly watched this entire exchange. They lean over to talk to one another, but what is said isn't heard.

INT. JAWORSKI HOUSE, KITCHEN -- THAT NIGHT

It's dinner time and Chip and Chauncey are still going at it.

CHIP

Next time I'll let her finish you off, how's that?

CHAUNCEY

You made me a laughingstock!

CHIP

You were always a laughingstock.

DAVID JAWORSKI

What's this about?

CHIP

Chauncey got beat up by a girl.

Deb smiles at her husband.

DEB JAWORSKI

Maybe she was just flirting...

DAVID JAWORSKI

Yeah, sounds like somebody has a girlfriend!

CHAUNCEY

She's a dyke!

DEB JAWORSKI

Chauncey! Language!

CHAUNCEY

You're right, Mom. I have no idea what her home life is like. She could be going through some heavy stuff right now...

CHIP

Are you seriously defending your bully right now? How lame are you?!

DEB JAWORSKI

I think it's cute.

CHIP

Not if you saw her, ma. You know
Billy Ray Cyrus? Same hair.

DAVID JAWORSKI

Oooh, sorry son.

INT. BILLY CARTER HIGH, AUDITORIUM -- THE NEXT MORNING

The morning bell rings for school, but instead of class, the entire student body is gathered in the auditorium. Chauncey manages to find a seat near some other freshman, asking the kid next to him:

CHAUNCEY

You know what this is about?

The boy shrugs as PRINCIPAL GENE, 49, taps the school's one microphone and raises his hand above his head.

PRINCIPAL GENE

Come on gang! When the hand goes
up--

The STUDENTS finish it for him:

STUDENTS

--the mouth stays shut!

PRINCIPAL GENE

That's right. Now I know most of
you should be in period one right
now. You may be asking yourself -
Principal Gene, what's up with the
pullin' us outta class? Well, you
may have noticed a few of these
gentlemen around school...

Behind him on the dais, sitting in folding chairs, are the
SUITS from yesterday.

PRINCIPAL GENE (CONT'D)

They're executives from a
Production Company called "Gauntlet
Enterprises."

Chauncey's eagle eyes find his brother in the crowd -- *is
this really about to happen?*

PRINCIPAL GENE (CONT'D)
 They're in town because our school
 has been chosen out of all the high
 schools in America to represent our
 country in the Japanese competition
 show...

He clearly has never heard of this and reads the name off of
 a note card.

PRINCIPAL GENE (CONT'D)
 ...Neon Gauntlet.

It's not everyone's favorite show, but for the ones who call
 it their own, their shrieks are electric. The rest of the
 school claps because for once something is happening.

PRINCIPAL GENE (CONT'D)
 To tell us more about this exciting
 opportunity, please welcome Sharon
 Nieberg and Aaron Katz-Levine.

The applause continues as the EXECS make their way to the
 podium and shake hands with Principal Gene.

SHARON NIEBERG
 Hey gang!

AARON KATZ-LEVINE
 Thank you to Principal Gene and the
 rest of the teachers here at Billy
 Carter Magnet High. My colleague
 Sharon and I have spent the past
 week with your permanent files in
 addition to observing you all on
 day one. I have to say there is a
 lot of talent in this school which
 made our decision very difficult.
 In fact, I think we were both
 perplexed until we saw a little
 human drama unfold yesterday that
 changed our mind. An older brother
 standing up for his younger brother
 against his tormentor...

Chauncey turns all kinds of shades of red and sinks down low
 in his chair.

AARON KATZ-LEVINE (CONT'D)
 It was this selfless, heroic action
 that made our decision for us.
 Your first gauntleteer - Senior,
 Chip Jaworski!

The cheers are deafening. Despite the embarrassment, Chauncey is on his feet, as well.

Chip soaks in the applause, as if he always knew something like this would fall into his lap.

When the clapping subsides, Aaron Katz-Levine hands the microphone over to Sharon Neiberg.

SHARON NIEBERG

Your second gauntleteer... the
current dead-lift champion of Billy
Carter High, Leslie Mendell!

Chauncey's head drops into his hands. What started out as the best day of his life has turned into *the worst*.

The children chant "Faw!" as Leslie makes her way to the stage, arms raised triumphantly.

She takes her place next to Chip who holds a hand out to shake in congratulations. Leslie reluctantly goes to shake it when Chip pulls it away, running a hand through his hair - too slow.

As the kids laugh, Leslie lunges for Chip, but the execs pull them apart.

AARON KATZ-LEVINE

Save it for the gauntlet, fellas!

EXT. BILLY CARTER HIGH, FRONT LAWN -- DAY

As the publicity machine roars to life, Chip and Leslie are dolled up in front of cameras for first interviews.

Chip takes to it like a fish to water, but when an ASSISTANT tries to put make-up on Leslie she darts out of the way and throws a wild haymaker at the girl.

When everything's settled, the NETWORK ANCHOR brought in to interview them asks:

NETWORK ANCHOR

What does it mean to you being
chosen to represent your country?

CHIP

This is bitchin! It's always been
my dream to win Gauntlet and bring
home Kusanagi.

He leans forward, confidentially.

CHIP (CONT'D)

Plus, I hear if you come home with a piece of the brass gong, you're a legend. You can finger bang any girl you want...

There's some murmuring off camera...

CHIP (CONT'D)

What do you mean I can't say that?!

The interview shifts towards a clearly uncomfortable Leslie.

NETWORK ANCHOR

What do you say to those who characterize you as an underdog? Who say your lack of an established martial art puts you at a decided disadvantage?

LESLIE

Barbara, that couldn't be further from the truth. I study Chun Kuk Do, it's a martial art created by Chuck Norris. Because when doing martial arts it's important not to send jobs out of the country, but to keep them right here.

The Anchor nods, a bit confused. She turns back to Chip, hoping for some semblance of reality.

NETWORK ANCHOR

You and Miss Mandell seem to have a bit of a rivalry going. We were very impressed with how you stood up for your brother like that.

Chip sends a smile Leslie's way.

CHIP

Well, what can I say... I hate a bully.

NETWORK ANCHOR

How do you think you'll take to being overseas, away from your family for the next several months?

CHIP

Oh, very well, I enjoy the culture of Japan...

(elaborates)

Sushi, etc...

They cut to B-ROLL of him doing splits. Splits in nature. Splits on plastic chairs.

The b-roll of Leslie is less impressive; just a couple shots of her crushing kid's lunches.

NETWORK ANCHOR

In closing, what would you like to say to your fellow students?

Chip thinks about this solemnly for a moment before yelling straight into the camera--

CHIP

Party at the peak!

EXT. THE PEAK -- SATURDAY NIGHT

Most everybody has accepted Chip's invitation. Hundreds of drunk kids, high off their parent's liquor, are dancing and playing their car radios way too loud.

The only reason the cops aren't here yet is that they're on a desolate mountain stretch high above the city.

Chauncey follows his already drunken brother through the crowd.

CHAUNCEY

You sure freshmen are even allowed at this party?

CHIP

Oh my god, have you heard yourself speak? Here--

He steals a beer from a passerby and shoves it into his brother's hand.

CHIP (CONT'D)

This is beer. You drink it.

Chauncey takes a tentative sip.

CHAUNCEY

Tastes funny.

CHIP

That's because yours has cigarette butts in it, but just imagine how much you'll enjoy the next one when it doesn't--

Chauncey spits out what's in his mouth and pours out the rest.

CHAUNCEY
You're an asshole!

CHIP
No. I'm a GAUNTLETEER!

He yells it at the top of his lungs and the party salutes him right back. Like a heat-seeking missile, Tracey Yost finds him.

TRACEY YOST
There you are...

CHIP
Hey, you!

They kiss. Lots of tongue. Neither really looks like they know what they're doing. Only after they separate does Tracey seem to notice Chauncey.

TRACEY YOST
Who's your fat friend?

CHIP
That's my little sister.

TRACEY YOST
Really? But his shoes aren't lighting up?

Chip laughs aloud, but the rev of a souped-up engine cuts through everything. An orange trans am rolls into view driven by senior bad boy JOHN REDDICK, 18. He's a father's worst nightmare with a scar down his left eyebrow -- a true Cobra Kai.

REDDICK
Get in, Tracey.

TRACEY YOST
Go away, John - we broke up.

REDDICK
You with this loser now?

CHIP
You want to say that to me, Reddick?

REDDICK

Don't get all defensive over your new girlfriend, Jaworski. We just broke up this morning - so enjoy my sloppy seconds.

CHIP

That's it! My bike against your Trans Am!

REDDICK

Hey, if you want to take on Orange Julius, it's your funeral. To the kegs and back. Last one to stop before the cliffs wins.

TRACEY YOST

No Chip, Dead Man's curve is suicide!

CHIP

Shut up, Tracey.

EXT. DEAD MAN'S CURVE -- MINUTES LATER

As Van Halen's "Ain't Talkin' Bout Love" blares, everyone lines their cars up parallel, headlights facing out - so that a runway is formed. And at the center of that runway are Chip and John Reddick...

Reddick sits revving the engine of his Trans Am, while Chip makes his way to the Ninja. As Chip puts his helmet on, Chauncey hurries over to talk him out of this.

CHAUNCEY

This is insane! Don't do this!

CHIP

You kidding me? This is the ninja we're talking about! It can smoke anything this guy can throw at it.

CHAUNCEY

I've got a bad feeling about this. What if mom and dad find out? I mean, you have been drinking--

CHIP

And who's gonna tell them, huh?
You--

He pokes his brother angrily in the chest. Chauncey takes a step back. He doesn't even know this guy.

Chip flips his helmet visor down as Tracey steps between the two vehicles, strangely exhilarated. She lives for this shit.

TRACEY YOST
Ready... Set... GO!

She whips her arms down and they take off. With the pedal to the metal, Reddick takes an early lead.

As he passes Chip, he chugs his beer, which just makes Chip angrier. Jaworski bears down on the throttle and makes up ground before the kegs.

The Trans Am has a smoother turn, kicking up dirt, but Chip's bike isn't far behind. He throws it into overdrive as the cliff approaches.

Reddick's confident smile evaporates when Chip doesn't make any show of slowing. What is wrong with this kid?

At the last possible moment, Reddick slams on the breaks and the Trans Am scuttles to a stop just feet from the edge.

Suddenly, Chip is airborne, gravity lifting him free from the bike...

Tracey screams. There's a crash of steel on the rocks below and everyone runs to see what became of Chip.

Except for Chauncey who falls to his knees, unable to stand.

INT. EVENING NEWS REPORT -- LATE NIGHT

A somber NEWSCASTER recaps a now familiar story.

NEWSCASTER
Just several days ago, the body of seventeen year old Chip Jaworski, America's pick for entry into this years upcoming "Neon Gauntlet," was found in the early morning hours at the foot of the Green Hill Mountains.

The scene shifts to footage of the wrecked Ninja.

NEWSCASTER (CONT'D)
In what has been described by witnesses as a "drag race scenario," Jaworski tumbled off this desolate ledge during a high school party.

(MORE)

NEWSCASTER (CONT'D)

No word yet on whether alcohol was involved. A popular student, his funeral was attended by some six hundred guests...

Amidst the mourners stands Chauncey, next to his inconsolable parents. He's got tears running down his face. The cameraman focuses in on him, just as the image *pauses*...

INT. GAUNTLET PRODUCTIONS -- CONTINUOUS

In an editing bay, Aaron Katz-Levine is showing recorded footage of the evening news to several other execs.

AARON KATZ-LEVINE

Just look at the emotion.

The HEAD of DEVELOPMENT who's job it is to poo-poo such things, does just that--

HEAD OF DEVELOPMENT

He's barely a freshman. Think about the class of people we're supposed to recruit.

AARON KATZ-LEVINE

I am! You cannot buy audience sympathy like this. Remember those character intro videos I pedaled to the brass? *This is it!* I can sell this to L.A.

SHARON NIEBERG

But can he win?

AARON KATZ-LEVINE

Since when has that mattered?

INT. JAWORSKI HOUSE, KITCHEN -- SEVERAL DAYS LATER

Chauncey returns home from school and finds the lights in the kitchen off. He's about to turn them on when he sees his mother sitting alone in the dark.

CHAUNCEY

God, you scared the crap out of me!

She doesn't say anything. Doesn't even move. Chauncey's about to leave when she barely speaks.

DEB JAWORSKI

Why didn't you watch out for him?

Did she really just say that?

CHAUNCEY

Why didn't *I* watch out for him?
Because it wasn't my job. He's the
one who'd do anything to win. He
was the stupid one that went and
got himself killed!

Deb glares at him, knowing he's right, but hating him for saying it. She looks Chauncey over; he's lost so much weight since the funeral.

DEB JAWORSKI

Eat something so people don't think
I'm a bad mom...

She hears her words echo back and starts crying. Chauncey can't bear to watch. He backs down the hallway in retreat.

INT. JAWORSKI HOUSE, FRONT HALL -- CONTINUOUS

He's about to head up to his room when he sees the mail and digs through it quickly to see if anything's for him.

Among the trash mags and bills he finds a SILVER ENVELOPE with his name in calligraphy on the front.

He takes it into the dining room and opens it. Almost immediately though, he throws it down on the table and backs away several feet--

CHAUNCEY

No. *No... no... no!*

He shakes his head furiously back and forth until we finally see what the letter says:

The Neon Gauntlet has you.

INT. JAWORSKI HOUSE, LIVING ROOM -- SOON AFTER

Chip stands pacing in front of his parents.

DAVID JAWORSKI

Are you sure they meant to send it
to you?

CHAUNCEY

Don't worry, I'm turning it down.

DAVID JAWORSKI
Haven't people died running the
course?

CHAUNCEY
Not in years...

Deb lights a cigarette.

DEB JAWORSKI
But it is dangerous.

CHAUNCEY
It was safe enough for Chip.

DEB JAWORSKI
Why would you go halfway around the
world just to embarrass yourself?

Chauncey finally realizes what she's saying.

CHAUNCEY
You don't think I can do it.

DEB JAWORSKI
Chip was the athlete.

CHAUNCEY
Not anymore.

DEB JAWORSKI
It doesn't matter. You can't do
this without our permission.

CHAUNCEY
Yeah well, I don't think you'll say
no.

DEB JAWORSKI
And why's that?

CHAUNCEY
Because I don't think you want me
here.

DAVID JAWORSKI
That is not true!

CHAUNCEY
Then let her say it.

But Deb only turns her back on the two of them and smokes her
cigarette.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)
That's what I thought.

INT. NEWARK INTERNATIONAL -- ONE WEEK LATER

Chauncey's father takes him as far as he can, the security checkpoint.

DAVID JAWORSKI
You got everything you need?

Chauncey nods.

DAVID JAWORSKI (CONT'D)
Your mom wishes she could be here.

CHAUNCEY
No, she doesn't.

David sighs.

DAVID JAWORSKI
She just needs time, son.

Chauncey looks at his watch.

CHAUNCEY
I gotta go, dad. Flight's gonna board soon.

DAVID JAWORSKI
I know.

They stand in awkward silence for a moment before David throws his arms around his son.

DAVID JAWORSKI (CONT'D)
I never got to tell your brother...

He trails off unable to say the words.

DAVID JAWORSKI (CONT'D)
Just take care of yourself.

Chauncey nods, fighting the tears that threaten to fall. He hitches his bag onto his shoulder and heads for security.

INT. TWA AIRLINER -- MINUTES LATER

Chauncey's counting rows, trying to find his seat when he spots Leslie already buckled in, chowing down on complimentary peanuts.

CHAUNCEY

Of course, the studio sat us right next to each other...

LESLIE

Hey, don't we go to school together?

CHAUNCEY

Don't do this.

Chauncey stows his bag and sits in the aisle seat. He closes his eyes and feigns going to sleep so that Leslie might get the idea. She's quiet until--

LESLIE

Lot of Asians on this flight.

CHAUNCEY

We don't *have* to talk to each other.

LESLIE

But you're the only person I know. It's something to think about. I mean, we have to protect America's legacy abroad. We're carrying the cold war crown...

CHAUNCEY

You're aware no one actually won that, right?

LESLIE

Then why did Russia change their name, huh?

Chauncey tries to shut his eyes again.

LESLIE (CONT'D)

Did you get your welcome packet?

Leslie holds up a hot-pink, Neon Gauntlet binder. Chauncey nods.

CHAUNCEY

Yeah.

LESLIE

Vegas odd-makers are saying you have no chance. You're a 1,000 to 1 underdog.

CHAUNCEY

Yeah, I read that too.

LESLIE

They got my ranking all wrong.
Cause I'm gonna win this whole
thing.

Chauncey settles in for a long flight.

CHAUNCEY

Well, good luck. You're gonna need
it...

(beat)

No American has ever made it to the
Neon Gauntlet.

EXT. NARITA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, TOKYO -- HOURS LATER

When the plane lands, Chauncey looks through the window at
the ominous Tokyo city skyline.

Exiting the plane, he tries to walk by himself, but finds
Leslie following closely behind.

As they take the escalator down to the first level, a
fastidious and compact Asian man in a suit stands waiting
with a piece of white card stock. It reads: Mr. and Mrs.
America. Chauncey points to the sign.

CHAUNCEY

I think that's for us.

EXT. TOKYO NEIGHBORHOODS, VARIOUS -- SOON AFTER

The limo takes them through Harajuku Station, the electric
art and fashion district...

Through Joyopolis, the amusement park and arcade...

Past landmarks Tokyo Stadium, Yasukuni Shrine, and the
Tsukiji fish market...

Into the Kabukicho red light-district...

INT. PARK HYATT, LOBBY -- MINUTES LATER

Declining help from a bellboy, Chauncey carries his bag
inside, looking about the *five-star* lobby, the weight of this
thing finally landing on him.

Getting his room key, he heads for the elevator.

EXT. PLAYER'S FLOOR -- MOMENTS LATER

On his designated floor, spooky men in suits stand guard in the hallway like Asian secret service. They're as silent and still as Buckingham palace guards.

Chauncey stares at one of them and, getting no response, heads for his assigned room.

INT. CHAUNCEY'S ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Chauncey walks in to find a Viking in his room. BERIT CANUTE, 18, has taken the lower bunk. He turns around, smiling through his thick beard.

BERIT CANUTE

I am Berit Canute from Jan Mayen.

CHAUNCEY

Come again?

BERIT CANUTE

Berit Canute... from Jan Mayen.

CHAUNCEY

Still not gettin' it.

BERIT CANUTE

It is a Norwegian, volcanic island in the middle of the arctic ocean.

Chauncey shakes his new roommate's hand.

CHAUNCEY

Chauncey Jaworski - from the Highlands of New Jersey.

Berit returns to unpacking, flipping open his suitcase. Inside among the clothes, he has hundreds of *condoms*--

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)

Whoa, someone's gonna be busy!

Berit smiles, conspiratorially, elbowing Chauncey in the ribs.

BERIT CANUTE

You know what these are for, yes?

CHAUNCEY

I do, but why do you have so many?

BERIT CANUTE

I am told zat Neon Gauntlet housing is like the Olympic village - a veritable fuckfest, yeah?

CHAUNCEY

They never showed that part on cable...

BERIT CANUTE

So? Who is your female counterpart?

CHAUNCEY

Define female.

BERIT CANUTE

You have a very funny way of talking. We will be friends.

There's a commotion in the hallway, followed by a fist hammering on their door. Soon after, an authoritative Asian voice bellows:

KENNY KAMIKAZE

Orientation meeting - five minutes!

INT. TRAINING CENTER -- HALF HOUR LATER

As they walk down to the meeting, Berit is talking Chauncey's ear off:

BERIT CANUTE

In Scandinavia, they teach Glima in primary school. You are trained in it from a very young age.

Chauncey's busy pretending to listen when he sees it: the Neon Gauntlet. They've wandered into the arena. Even Berit knows the weight of what they're looking at.

BERIT CANUTE (CONT'D)

They say the previous winner went mad after the last gauntlet.

CHAUNCEY

I heard.

BERIT CANUTE

Can you imagine seeing your best friend die and having to return to design next year's course?

CHAUNCEY

It makes you wonder what's inside...

They stare at it for what seems like an eternity before Leslie walks up behind them suddenly.

LESLIE

What do you think this meeting's about? I just want to go to sleep, I'm jet-lagged as hell! Who's this?

From the moment Berit lays eyes on Leslie, he's in love.

BERIT CANUTE

Oh my, you are a very strong woman. Built like a bear!

LESLIE

That's not a compliment in my country.

BERIT CANUTE

Oh, it is in mine! You would love Norway. Every year we compete in the Íslandsglíma for the Grettisbelti. You should come visit. Whale blubber lights our lanterns in the spring and keeps us warm come the vinter.

LESLIE

What is he saying?

CHAUNCEY

I never know.

Chauncey catches sight of a moody, overly-serious karateka heading for the meet.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)

Holy shit! That's Kaito Hirohito!

LESLIE

So?

CHAUNCEY

So his father was Ueshiba Hirohito!
The greatest Gauntleteer to ever
play the game!

LESLIE

Never heard of him.

CHAUNCEY

Most people haven't. He won the
very first Gauntlet, back when it
was in black and white.

Chauncey nods, psyching himself up.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)

I'm gonna talk to him.

He joins the line of Gauntleteers that have queued up for
Orientation and taps KAITO on the shoulder. The young man
turns to him, keyed up, as if Chauncey's touch is an affront.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)

Hi, you're Kaito Hirohito. It's
great to meet you. I was a huge fan
of your father's.

Kaito looks Chauncey up and down - THIS is a gauntleteer?!

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)

He was the best to ever run the
course.

Kaito smiles and turns his back on Chauncey.

KAITO HIROHITO

You haven't seen me run it yet.

Kaito has a posse with him - an ominous pair of Chinese Twins
that say nothing and a Korean taekwondo artist who fancies
himself a comedian and is always running his mouth.

PARK SOON CHAN

Hey, you... Canadian!

Chauncey knows when he's being teased, but pretends he
doesn't hear the Korean. Leslie though, can't help but get
involved.

LESLIE

What did he say?!

(to Park)

Hey! We're not fuckin' Canucks!

The Korean elbows the twins, who seem to be enjoying this.

PARK SOON CHAN

Oh, my mistake... you Swedish? You from Norway?

LESLIE

We're neither!

CHAUNCEY

(points to Berit)
He is.

LESLIE

Fine, he is. *But not us!*

PARK SOON CHAN

I'm sorry you all look alike to me.
You South Africans are sooooo
tense, you need relax!

His buddies fall about themselves laughing. It even brings the smallest of smiles to Kaito's face.

LESLIE

That's it!

Leslie makes to run at the Korean, but with a whoosh his foot is high-kicking an inch from her face. He leaves it there taunting:

PARK SOON CHAN

Nuh, uh-uh!

Leslie puts her hands up, as in "hey man, I'm no trouble." Eventually, the Korean lowers his leg and walks off with the twins. Kaito follows after, in no hurry to be anywhere.

INT. TRAINING CENTER, QUEUE -- MINUTES LATER

When it's Chauncey's turn, he steps up to the front of the line he's waiting in only to see a familiar face: Sharon Neiberg, one of the execs that announced the Gauntleteers.

CHAUNCEY

Oh hey, I remember you, you visited my high school.

SHARON NIEBERG

That's nice. Sign and date this...

She drops a 200-page LIABILITY RELEASE in front of him.

CHAUNCEY

It's gonna take a while to read
this--

SHARON NIEBERG

You don't have to read it, just
sign and date the last page.

CHAUNCEY

Well, I'm under eighteen and
haven't even read this thing I
don't know how well it's gonna hold
up in court--

SHARON NIEBERG

This is just for the first event.
There'll be others. Sign and date
the last page.

CHAUNCEY

You know what? I'm gonna sign and
date the last page.

Chauncey does as promised and hands the stack of paper over.
Sharon points behind her without looking up.

SHARON NIEBERG

Through the double doors.

CHAUNCEY

You want me to go through the
double doors?

Sharon sighs loudly; it's been a long day. So Chauncey just
does as told.

INT. ROOM OF THE ELDERS -- CONTINUOUS

Inside the room with the double doors, there's a lone
spotlight. Chauncey goes and stands in it. He tries to peer
out from the stage, but can only barely make out a table of
aged Japanese men. These are the COUNCIL OF ELDERS.

ELDER #1

Name?

CHAUNCEY

Chauncey Jaworski.

ELDER #1

Discipline?

CHAUNCEY

Excuse me?

ELDER #1

Tutors are assigned based on discipline.

CHAUNCEY

I don't understand...

Another of the sensei's tries a different tact.

ELDER #2

What is... your martial art?

The seconds tick by. Chauncey might be the only fourteen year old with flop sweat.

The silence is deafening. He has to say something. Finally, he just blurts out:

CHAUNCEY

Ninjitsu!

The judges look from one to another, confused.

MASTER ELDER

The art of the ninja?

INT. FUMIKO'S DEN -- SAME TIME

Aaron Katz-Levine stands in a richly-appointed office in front of dragon-lady FUMIKO TAOKA, 58.

FUMIKO

We have already compromised on your American host...

AARON KATZ-LEVINE

And we are grateful for that, but when Kazuo-san brought us in to produce, he gave up certain rights as to the what the presentation would look like. There's bound to be difference in opinion. You've just got to work with us a little on this--

Behind him, the office doors swing open and a young biker named SHINOBU, 24, enters. He's dressed loudly in a leather military jacket with tall boots, round sunglasses, and a long hachimaki headband that holds back his greaser's pompadour. He stands rudely in front of Fumiko expecting an audience.

AARON KATZ-LEVINE (CONT'D)

I can come back later.

FUMIKO

No please, Mr. Levine, I'd like you to see this.

She motions to her senior advisor, TANAKA, who barks orders to a couple of underlings. They wheel in a shipping crate, popping open the top with a crow-bar.

Inside are dozens of Kusanagi replicas; merchandise to sell worldwide. Fumiko walks over and fishes one out.

She brandishes it for a moment before snapping the handle in two. White powder rains down.

Levine's eyes go wide. He's unsure what it is he's watching. Fumiko walks silently up to Shinobu.

FUMIKO (CONT'D)

What do you have to say for yourself?

SHINOBU

It works for the dojin-kai.

FUMIKO

We are not dojin-kai.

SHINOBU

Come now, Ane-san--

FUMIKO

You call me by my name! My husband took you in when you had nothing. He found you on the streets. And this is how you repay him? If my husband always vetoed this than why would you try when it was just me?

SHINOBU

I thought if I could show you how successful it would be...

FUMIKO

You never would have done this when he was alive!

SHINOBU

It has been some time since Senpai Kazuo passed on and many of us are wondering when you will name a successor--

FUMIKO

When I find someone fit for the job! Kazuo got us into merchandising. Instead of harassing small businesses, we now call the shots at stockholder meetings. He took our million dollar profits and turned us into billion-dollar investors in art and real estate. Kazuo gave us legitimacy. And you're what? Using the smaller gangs to peddle coke for you? And what's worse...

(beat)

Keeping the profits for yourself?

SHINOBU

I have your cut, of course--

FUMIKO

I don't want money.

SHINOBU

Then what do you want?

She thinks on it for a moment. Finally, a smile spreads slowly on her face.

FUMIKO

Yubitsume.

Tanaka has rounded the desk with a dagger that is beyond sharp.

SHINOBU

Please, no...

Aaron Katz-Levine stands.

AARON KATZ-LEVINE

You know what, I can come back--

FUMIKO

--*Stay right where you are!*

Tanaka forces Shinobu's hands onto the table, waiting for Fumiko to approach. She makes her way slowly to them, but addresses only Levine.

FUMIKO (CONT'D)

Yubitsume is a form of penance or apology.

(MORE)

FUMIKO (CONT'D)

The transgressor must cut off the tip of his left smallest finger and present it to his master.

She takes the blade from Tanaka and slides it into Shinobu's hand.

FUMIKO (CONT'D)

It is a very old tradition going back to the days of the samurai. It came from the way they held their swords. The bottom three fingers of each hand being used to grip the handle tightly, while the thumb and index fingers hang slightly loose.

She spreads his fingers out and lets him get on with it.

FUMIKO (CONT'D)

Thus the removal of digits starting with the little finger and moving up the hand with each infraction progressively weakens a person's sword grip.

She watches impassively as Shinobu slices his pinky finger off.

FUMIKO (CONT'D)

They must now rely on the group for protection.

Levine looks like he's liable to faint at any moment.

INT. TRAINING CENTER, UPPER BALCONY -- THE NEXT DAY

Chauncey stands on a ledge high above the gauntlet arena floor. The other athletes are training for the upcoming "Wheel of Destiny."

There's a 7-foot tall Russian bench pressing a keg, a West African butcher throwing knives at a wall, and a barrel-chested Hasidim grappling with several attackers.

Chauncey watches them train, his heart sinking. The worst among them would thump him.

He's so down he doesn't hear the man approach. HACHIMAN wears a pauper's robe with only a length of rope to act as his belt.

HACHIMAN

Chauncey Jaworski?

CHAUNCEY

Jesus, you guys really know how to sneak up on a person! Who are you?

HACHIMAN

You may call me Master Hachiman. You were to be assigned a mentor?

Chauncey looks the squat, unimpressive man up and down.

CHAUNCEY

You're... a ninja?

HACHIMAN

I can't remember the last time they called me in for this...

CHAUNCEY

You speak the language very well.

HACHIMAN

What? You were expecting Miyagi and his broken *ing-rish*?

CHAUNCEY

I don't know what I was expecting.

He motions to the competition below.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)

Definitely not this. Be honest with me... can this even be done?

HACHIMAN

I've trained others in less time. But you must realize you're up against body-builders, martial artists that have been training since they were in the womb. The Asians alone are sponsored and trained year round. You're not going to win, you can't win!

CHAUNCEY

Well, I don't know--

HACHIMAN

I do. You cannot win! So put it out of your mind.

(beat)

But we may be able to make it so that you don't embarrass yourself.

INT. TRAINING CENTER, UPPER BALCONY -- SOON AFTER
Hachiman wheels a Janitor's Trashcan and Mop over.

HACHIMAN

Give me a student who hasn't learned any bad habits and I'll take an amateur anytime. This exercise is called "pushing hands." In aikido, it is the joining of energy. You must match your opponent in order to defeat him.

He stands face-to-face with Chauncey and puts his hands up. Chauncey does the same.

HACHIMAN (CONT'D)

No matter what bizarre movements I make, follow my fists with your own hands. But never touch.

He starts off slowly, but when Chauncey keeps up with him, Hachiman begins to speed his shadow-boxing up.

HACHIMAN (CONT'D)

A clash of force may result in a mutual kill, but that is not aiki. Aiki's main purpose is avoiding a direct clash of force. We achieve this by joining with the motion of the opponent, then redirecting their motion and intent.

As Hachiman throws punches and kicks, he keeps asking the same questions:

HACHIMAN (CONT'D)

Where am I going? What is my intent?

But Chauncey's become hopelessly lost. He keeps getting tagged, and the hits are adding up.

MINUTES LATER

Not getting anywhere with pushing hands, Hachiman moves on to the next lesson.

HACHIMAN

Goton-Po. Improvisation. To make something out of nothing using the natural elements.

(MORE)

HACHIMAN (CONT'D)

Ninjutsu will not teach you limitations, but will focus instead on adaptation. To face every situation under its shifting circumstances. Use whatever is on hand.

He grabs a stray broom from the Janitor cart:

HACHIMAN (CONT'D)

You see a broom stick, I see a weapon.

He jabs the dirty bristles into Chauncey's neck and the boy sputters. Hachiman drops it back on the cart, then grabs the next closest thing.

HACHIMAN (CONT'D)

You see an umbrella, I see a distraction.

Hachiman charges at Chauncey, opening and closing the umbrella. His pupil has no choice but to turn and flee.

Feeling foolish, Chauncey glances at the other Gauntleteers training far below.

CHAUNCEY

Shouldn't you be teaching me roundhouses or something?

HACHIMAN

You have to defend from existing positions until you are capable of advancing.

CHAUNCEY

Come on! Don't you know any moves?!

HACHIMAN

(mocking Chauncey)

What moooves?! I don't know any moooves! Hitting your opponent is the easiest thing in the world, knowing when is the hardest! The goal is to defeat your adversary without harming them.

CHAUNCEY

No, you don't understand - *I want to harm them!*

HACHIMAN

If karate is for self-defense then not injuring one's opponent is the highest expression of that art.

CHAUNCEY

Then why do you keep hitting me?!

HACHIMAN

I'm just keeping you on your toes.

CHAUNCEY

Well, it's not working.

HACHIMAN

I can see that. Hmm, maybe you're a visual learner. Grab your things and come with me.

EXT. TOKYO PIER -- SOON AFTER

Hachi and Chauncey are on a pier high above Tokyo harbor. It's a bright sunny day but from the way Chauncey cringes from the light it's clear he'd rather be indoors.

CHAUNCEY

I preferred the other place.

HACHIMAN

Fan of air conditioning, are you?

(beat)

Well... what are you waiting for?

Get in.

CHAUNCEY

Get in, what? The water?! I didn't bring a bathing suit--

Before he knows what's happening, Hachi launches Chauncey over the rails and into the surf below. He screams all the way down and comes up sputtering for air.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)

Are you crazy?! What if I couldn't swim?!

HACHIMAN

Can you?

CHAUNCEY

Yes!

HACHIMAN
Problem solved.

CHAUNCEY
Hachi, it's pulling me out.

HACHIMAN
That's because it's high tide.

Chauncey resorts to dog paddling.

CHAUNCEY
Help, help--

He tries to stay afloat but keeps choking down sea foam.

HACHIMAN
Stop struggling. This is what I
was teaching you. You cannot fight
the surf. But if you go with it--

Chauncey interrupts choking for air--

CHAUNCEY
--I'm drowning and you're trying to
teach me a lesson?!

HACHIMAN
Depends. Is it working?

CHAUNCEY
Get me out of here, you psycho!

HACHIMAN
Get yourself out.

Hachi starts walking down the pier. Chauncey watches him go, aghast. Spitefully, he starts front-stroking towards the shore.

By the time he gets there, Chauncey has never been so tired. He crawls out of the ocean, clothes dripping wet. He falls on his face at Hachi's feet.

HACHIMAN (CONT'D)
Imagine how less tired you'd be if
you'd just listened to me.

CHAUNCEY
You could have killed me!

HACHIMAN
You could have killed yourself.
You'll do better next time.

Chauncey gets to his feet, exhausted.

CHAUNCEY

You're out of your mind! How could I trust you after that?! I'm out of here. Find yourself another pupil.

HACHIMAN

The lesson isn't over.

CHAUNCEY

It is for me!

He leaves his sensei there and walks off.

INT. BUDOKAN ARENA -- NIGHT

"The Final Countdown" plays at a deafening volume as a camera crane swoops down onto the broad midwestern face of host TEX EVANS, 45. He stands next to the grumpiest looking Asian man you've ever seen: KENNY KAMIKAZE, 72.

TEX EVANS

Welcome to Neon Gauntlet! Alongside Kenny Kamikaze, I'm Super Bowl Champion Tex Evans coming to you live from Budokan Arena! Brought to you by Tab! When you don't want a Coke or a Pepsi - make it a Tab! Kenny, how about this capacity crowd?

Kenny stares dead-on into the camera.

KENNY KAMIKAZE

The energy is electric.

Tex was hoping he'd say more, but what the hell you make lemonade out of lemons.

TEX EVANS

And what a night it is! As always, each and every spectator acts as a high stakes bidder and our wall of odds is updated in real time. Billions of dollars are set to be wagered. Who will emerge victorious and ring that bronze gong? Well, that's anyone's guess--

The Japanese National ANTHEM starts up--

TEX EVANS (CONT'D)

And here-we-go!

The international crowd rises in camaraderie as a portrait of deceased Kazuo Taoka is unfurled.

IN THE STANDS

Fumiko maintains her composure when confronted with her departed husband's picture.

Several rows away, she watches as SATO MURAKAMI and his cronies find seats. Fumiko pulls her assistant aside.

FUMIKO

What are the Dojin-kai doing here?

TANAKA

They are bidders. You know how money talks for people here.

Catching sight of Fumiko, Sato gives a slight bow. Fumiko forces a neutral smile onto her face and nods back...

As does Shinobu, several seats down from Fumiko -- with his new prosthetic, WOODEN FINGER.

TEX EVANS (O.S.)

And the Gauntleteers have begun to emerge!

From a tunnel leading from the barracks at the Park Hyatt, the athletes enter the arena, draped in the flags of their home countries.

TEX EVANS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Who will be this years Gauntlet Grand Champion, taking home a cornucopia of prizes including a college scholarship, a beige Lincoln Continental, a Club Med vacation and a coveted promotion to Sumo Sentinel?

When the Americans step out of the tunnel and into the spotlight, the production cameras crowd them. Leslie scans the expansive layout, afraid to leave Chauncey's side.

LESLIE

This is probably where they organized Pearl Harbor.

CHAUNCEY

Again, we don't have to talk.

LESLIE

I don't know anybody else!

As they emerge from the tunnel, Tex gives a rundown on some of the favorites--

TEX EVANS (O.S.)

Competitors to look out for: it doesn't seem like it, but this Muay Thai expert is of royal birth. In Thailand, Muay Thai is generally practiced by the lower classes, but Prince Rama the 3rd has been studying it since he was a boy. Look for this Gauntleteer to have something to prove.

PRINCE RAMA, 17, shadow-boxes with the camera. He's followed by the twins we met previously. They enter the arena showing zero emotion.

TEX EVANS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

This year, China made history by submitting a pair of twins as their entrants to the gauntlet. Both study variants of Kung-Fu with Li-Jun taking the Shaolin style and his sister, Li Na adopting Wing Chun.

The crowd cheers at the next competitor. MURAT KHASANOV is a Siberian giant with a manic-smile on his gritted face.

TEX EVANS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Now we see the Russian bear, Murat Khasanov, standing 6'8" - a massive 245 lbs. An early favorite to win...

One-by-one, the Gauntleteers make their way to the Wheel of Destiny. A carousel without a top, its perimeter is lined with slots for each competitor to stand.

At the referees urging, the athletes step onto the carousel and brace themselves against the wall. Everyone seems keyed up, except for Japan's favorite native son...

TEX EVANS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Without a doubt the most curiosity surrounds, Kaito Hirohito, son of the legendary Ueshiba Hirohito.

(MORE)

TEX EVANS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

He's been in the running for Gauntlet the last few years but has only recently made the cut. And without a minute to spare Kenny, this Gauntleteer turned 19 just three days short of the cut-off point. It's safe to say that this is his final shot.

Above each competitor, hangs the weapon they'll be vying for. There are nunchucks, sais, polearms, maces, and long bows.

TEX EVANS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

If they fall out and onto the mat, the Sumo Sentinels will try everything in their power to keep them from climbing back on.

Sumo wrestlers dressed as *namahage*, demon beings, and wearing ogre-like masks wait patiently beneath the carousel.

TEX EVANS (CONT'D)

Remember the competitor who manages to claim the katana not only gets bragging rights but gets to call what the first challenge will be. There are no weight classes, people have died, and winner takes all!

The pace-setters hammer the war drums as the carousel slowly begins to turn. As it picks up speed, the hydraulics kick in, tilting the carousel to a 45-degree angle.

It resembles a ferris wheel in free fall or a giant hamster wheel. And the competitors are the hamsters, bumping into one another as they attempt to make their way to the car of their chosen weapon.

Chauncey remains in his hole, afraid to emerge. But that won't do. Murat Khasanov finds him and reaches a giant bear claw in to tear him out.

Chauncey goes flying, scuttling down the incline, pinballing off other unfortunate athletes. He cracks his head against the perimeter, coming up dizzy and bleeding, directly in front of Kaito Hirohito.

Kaito looks at the blood pouring down Chauncey's face, hesitates for the briefest of moments, then roundhouses him onto the mats below.

Suddenly, a SUMO SENTINEL in a demon mask is atop Chauncey, choking the life out of him.

Chauncey claws his way backwards, but the Sentinel catches him, and holds his face to the spinning wheel. Chauncey fights it, but the Sentinel outweighs him by at least 200 lbs.

Just when it looks like his face will be torn off, Chauncey sees an arm reaching out from the wheel above him and grabs for it, frantically.

Berit Canute pulls him free of the Sentinel.

CHAUNCEY

Thanks!

BERIT CANUTE

Don't thank me - *you've got ten seconds left!*

Chauncey spins, frantically looking for an open weapon. But most of them are taken...

Then he sees it. Several cars down, no one has claimed the bo staff. He runs the wheel only to notice he's not the only straggler left...

The twins have seen it too - and they're working in tandem. LI JUN dives for him, just as his sister, LI NA, sweeps Chauncey's legs.

Chauncey goes down hard, flipping end over end as the wheel keeps turning and the twins scamper into nearby holes.

By the time Chauncey gets his wits back, there are two seconds on the clock. He dives for an open cubby without looking at what it holds. The arena crowd groans their sympathy.

TEX EVANS

Oh no, Chauncey Jaworski drawing an unlucky Tai-jutso!

The athletes laugh as Leslie asks anyone willing to answer.

LESLIE

What does that mean?

Kaito is nearby.

KAITO HIROHITO

It means he cannot win.

TEX EVANS

That is a major blow - unarmed combat for the young hopeful.

(MORE)

TEX EVANS (CONT'D)

A fate no Gauntleteer has ever come back from. *But we do have a victor!*

The capacity crowd cheers as Tex makes his way over to Kaito who's standing victorious in the katana birth.

TEX EVANS (CONT'D)

Well done, Kaito Hirohito! What will it be, then? Brick breaking? Endurance tests?

The legacy looks into the camera and says two words:

KAITO HIROHITO

Castle Invasion.

TEX EVANS

A classic! Gentleman and Ladies, these are your weapons for the remainder of the bout.

The competitors pull their mounted weapons off the wall. Kaito with his katanas, Leslie with her nunchucks, Berit with his sea-axe...

And Chauncey, winded and exhausted...

...with *nothing*.

INT. TRAINING CENTER, COMMISSARY -- THE NEXT MORNING

Chauncey enters the cafeteria. He's bruised and the gash over his eye has been stitched up. When he sees Hachiman in the lunch line, he hobbles over to talk with him.

CHAUNCEY

You saw the Wheel of Destiny, I'm guessing?

HACHIMAN

Don't own a T.V.

CHAUNCEY

I need you to get me through this.

HACHIMAN

You don't need my help, remember?

CHAUNCEY

Please?

HACHIMAN

What is the point? You don't
listen to me.

CHAUNCEY

I listened... pushing hands...
improvisation...

Hachiman nods, deciding something.

HACHIMAN

We shall see.

He walks away.

CHAUNCEY

What does that mean?

HACHIMAN

(over his shoulder)
Nothing drives like anger.

He leaves Chauncey there in the breakfast line. Chauncey
shakes his head, bewildered, and goes to get some food.

Behind him though, Hachiman is whispering into Murat
Khasanov's ear. The Russian drops his fork loudly to the
table and stands up, making his way to Chauncey.

Fresh from the buffet line, Murat slaps the food off
Chauncey's tray--

MURAT KHASANOV

*My mother is saint! How dare you do
those things to her!*

CHAUNCEY

I didn't do anything with your
mother. I didn't do anything with
anybody's mother!

Murat growls angrily and flexes. Chauncey turns and flat out
runs from him.

As he passes Li Na, Hachiman tugs on her pony tail. She
spins around angrily and thinks it's Chauncey. She joins
Murat in running after him.

Chauncey's so frantic, he doesn't notice he's about to crash
into JAMES FIGG, the U.K.'s bare knuckle boxing champion.

Figg tries to sidestep Chauncey with his food tray, but
Hachiman kicks a chair under his feet and Figg's sausage and
eggs goes all over his shirt.

JAMES FIGG

Oy!!!

He drops the remains to the floor, always ready for a fight. As Figg tee's up to swing on Chauncey, Hachiman whispers to himself:

HACHIMAN

Think...

Chauncey watches the fist coming towards him, almost like it's happening in slow-motion. He hears Hachiman's words echo back to him:

HACHIMAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Improvisation. To make something out of nothing using the natural elements...

Before he knows what he's doing, Chauncey has grabbed a nearby LUNCH TRAY. Figg's outstretched fist comes up hard against porcelain.

He tears it back, wincing, as Chauncey turns swinging the tray on Li Na. She was unready for this and gets knocked out cold.

Hachiman watches all of this glorious mayhem with a look of hope on his face.

But Chauncey's luck has seemingly run out. Murat rips the lunch tray out of his hands and delivers a one-two to Chauncey's face that knocks him to the ground.

Soon everyone that got wronged in the last sixty seconds is pummeling Chauncey; kicking him on the floor until something makes them stop. They step back, *repulsed* looks on their faces...

Chauncey is *crying*, curled up in a ball on the ground. Hachiman pushes his way through the crowd, kneeling down to face his pupil.

CHAUNCEY

What was that?!

HACHIMAN

Randori training: defense against multiple attackers.

CHAUNCEY

They're laughing at me--

HACHIMAN
Then let them laugh!

CHAUNCEY
You have to train me.

HACHIMAN
You'll just end up quitting on me--

CHAUNCEY
No!!!

Chauncey props himself up, beaten to a pulp, his stitches re-opened.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)
There is no quit in me.

Hachi nods, a part of him proud.

HACHIMAN
Then get up. We start now.

INT. TRAINING CENTER, BASEMENT -- MINUTES LATER

Chauncey tries to keep up as Hachi leads the way.

HACHIMAN
You will be my sandal-bearer.

CHAUNCEY
You want me to carry your shoes?!

HACHIMAN
It was a high status position for samurai in training in feudal Japan. You will assist me, attend to my needs, wash my feet--

CHAUNCEY
I'm sorry, what?

Chauncey looks around, completely lost.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)
Where are we going?

HACHIMAN
You'll know soon enough.

He follows Hachiman through a labyrinth of tunnels as the old man chatters on...

HACHIMAN (CONT'D)

The samurai were experts in military tactics and strategy, the Emperor's preferred tool for putting down rebellions. Even though non-samurai were forbidden to carry weapons, there came a demand for men willing to commit disreputable deeds like espionage, assassination and guerrilla warfare. Spies, agitators, and arsonists... they were called Shinobi, but you know them by another name. Their methods were considered dishonorable and beneath the samurai, who observed strict rules about honor in combat, where one was expected to fight or duel openly.

CHAUNCEY

Meaning?

HACHIMAN

These men you are fighting. You cannot hope to beat them on the same plane - you must come at your opponent from a different direction altogether.

They arrive at the base of a long staircase. Hachi throws the door open and sunlight pours in--

EXT. COURTYARD -- CONTINUOUS

They find themselves above ground, in a secluded courtyard, in the center of which are two ELDERLY MEN in robes, staring at each other.

CHAUNCEY

Who are these guys?

HACHIMAN

These *guys* are karateka masters.

CHAUNCEY

Well, the masters aren't moving.

HACHIMAN

That's because they're waiting.

CHAUNCEY

For what?

HACHIMAN

An opening.

Hachi drags a chair over to watch and Chauncey does the same.

HACHIMAN (CONT'D)

They'll stand entirely motionless until the slightest opening is spotted. Only then will they launch as devastating an attack as they can. You accepted defeat because you think you deserve it. You cannot change the way people treat you, you can only change the way you react to them.

CHAUNCEY

How long are we supposed to wait?

HACHIMAN

As long as it takes...

Time ticks by interminably slow. Nothing happens for the longest time...

So long in fact, that Chauncey begins to fall asleep.

And juuuust as his eyes are about to shut -- *it happens*.

One of the masters is exhausted from standing. His lead leg *shutters* ever so slightly. It's all his opponent needs to see.

He kicks at the leg instantly and when the master tries to pull it back, his opponent knocks him to the ground with a well-delivered right hook to the chest.

All this occurs in less than a second. Chauncey shoots to his feet--

CHAUNCEY

Jesus Christ, what just happened?!

HACHIMAN

He left himself open.

CHAUNCEY

Can you teach me that?!

HACHIMAN

And more.

CHAUNCEY

Then let's get back to the training center!

HACHIMAN

Are you out of your mind?! And let them see how bad you are?! We practice here.

CHAUNCEY

But there are no pads, no mats!

HACHIMAN

What do you call those?

He points to a *tatami*, a thin straw mat draped over the cobble stones of the courtyard.

CHAUNCEY

You can't be serious.

EXT. COURTYARD -- MINUTES LATER

With the masters now gone, we see a compilation of falls as Hachiman teaches Chauncey.

MONTAGE

Each time, Chauncey seems to land harder on the ground--

HACHIMAN

When will you understand? I'm not saying it for my health! Where am I going?! What is my intent?!

Chauncey shrugs out of breath.

HACHIMAN (CONT'D)

Take a swing on me.

Chauncey throws up a half-assed jab, which Hachi easily catches.

HACHIMAN (CONT'D)

Receive the attack... slip past it... add force to the attacker's limb to unbalance him!

CHAUNCEY

Or her--

HACHIMAN
Are you listening?!

CHAUNCEY
 Yes! God! Then what?

HACHIMAN
 Breaking their balance is integral in defeating your opponent. Take advantage of everything they do. They push, you pull. They pull, you push! Recognize opportunities when they present themselves and do not create opportunities for the enemy. By using fakes and feints, the opponent may instinctively contort their body or jerk away, leaving them open to a strike--

CHAUNCEY
 What strike?! You keep talking about openings and I've got no idea what I do once I see one!

MOMENTS LATER

On a Mak Jong, a spinning, wooden dummy, Hachiman demonstrates.

HACHIMAN
 Atemi teaches us where to strike, the location of nerves and pressure points. The vital parts of the body: on the solar plexus, the temple, the knee, the nose, the eyes, the groin...

CHAUNCEY
 I know where this is going, you're gonna hit me in the balls, aren't you? Can't we be done for the day?!

Hachiman smiles.

HACHIMAN
 If you want...

EXT. TOKYO BATHHOUSE -- MINUTES LATER

In a water basin, Chauncey grimaces as he washes Hachiman's feet.

CHAUNCEY
This is so *degrading*...

HACHIMAN
You're the one who wanted to be
done for the day!

EXT. COURTYARD -- THE NEXT MORNING

Chauncey shows up for practice only to find a magnificent
breakfast spread.

HACHIMAN
First we drink tea.

But Chauncey balks at this.

CHAUNCEY
TEA?! Look, are we going to
practice or what?!

Hachiman sips his darjeeling, calmly.

HACHIMAN
Remember the moment you wanted to
skip this.

CHAUNCEY
Why, because I'll never learn
anything by skipping to the end?

HACHIMAN
No. It's just the least painful
part of the day.

We see another compilation of falls. Chauncey's learning, but
not fast enough. He crashes down on the tatami mats
mercilessly hard, time and time again...

HOURS LATER

Chauncey has headphones on as he practices moves on the Mak
Jong dummy.

HACHIMAN
What is that?!

CHAUNCEY
It's a Walkman--

HACHIMAN

I know what a Walkman is, we get technology 18 months before you do! I mean, what are you listening to?

CHAUNCEY

Hoosiers soundtrack.

HACHIMAN

Oooh, Gene Hackman! That's a good one - can I see that?

CHAUNCEY

Yeah, you wanna listen?

Hachi stomps the headset to the ground--

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)

Hey!

HACHIMAN

I know why you want to listen to music. So you can day dream while your body works. That is not how this works. If you ignore the pain you aren't understanding what it is trying to teach you.

CHAUNCEY

And what is that?

HACHIMAN

All kinds of things. If I strike you in the face like so, the sting on your cheek tells you "ouch, I don't like that - better not let that happen again." If your stomach hurts, perhaps you've eaten some bad clams, or... maybe you've been poisoned? If you're willing to listen, pain can tell you a lot.

CHAUNCEY

You could have just told me that, you didn't have to hit me...

HACHIMAN

Eh, many trainers feel it is important that karateka pull their punches, but I see no need.

CHAUNCEY

Why are you being so mean to me?!

Hachiman steps in close.

HACHIMAN

Because you can never forget the situation you are in. This is war. To pretend otherwise is futile. The sooner you get that through your stupid head the better.

INT. STOCKROOM -- THE NEXT DAY

Hachiman has assembled a table full of ninja accessories.

HACHIMAN

Whether you know it or not, Kaito did you a favor by picking Castle Invasion as the first challenge. They will beat you on the physical plane every time you meet. So we must make sure you never meet. You will become an expert of disguise and concealment.

CHAUNCEY

I spent my entire life being invisible to my family, so this should be a walk in the park.

Hachiman shows him ropes and grappling hooks, a collapsible ladder, and ashiko foot spikes for climbing...

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)

I thought I wasn't allowed a weapon?

HACHIMAN

You're not. These are considered evasion accessories. Even the Kayaku-Jutsu, the gunpowder and explosives introduced by the Chinese. You can use them all when you try to take the castle.

CHAUNCEY

Try and succeed.

Hachiman becomes deathly serious.

HACHIMAN

You still believe somewhere deep down that you somehow have a shot...

(MORE)

HACHIMAN (CONT'D)

if you have any hope of surviving
this competition you'll put it out
of your mind completely.

Chauncey finally hangs his head and nods.

HACHIMAN (CONT'D)

Now get some sleep. You've got a
big day tomorrow.

Chauncey heads for the door when Hachiman *coughs*.

HACHIMAN (CONT'D)

Aren't you forgetting something?

Chauncey turns back, exhausted - *what now?!*

INT. TOKYO BATHHOUSE -- MINUTES LATER

At the end of a hard day, when all he wants to do is go to
bed, Chauncey once again cleans his master's feet.

Hachiman cackles aloud while catching up on his daily
crossword puzzles.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. BUDOKAN ARENA -- NIGHT

The Wheel of Destiny has been cleared away. In its place is a
feudal castle surrounded by a moat. And at the far end of
it, await the first group of Gauntleteers.

TEX EVANS

We have learned what became of the
Jade Magatama. It has come into
the possession of the Minamoto
clan, kept in one of the tallest
towers of their castle. In groups
of five you will lay siege to the
castle. The faster your time, the
better your berth is in the Kumite
tournament. Finish too slow and
there's no telling how many
competitors you'll have to face
before moving on to the Neon
Gauntlet.

With SUMO SENTINELS standing sentry high above the moat, we
see the different ways the competitors try to cross it...

Li Na wears *mizugumos*, wooden shoes whose wide-bottomed surface distributes the wearer's weight, allowing them to walk on water.

She moves with a speed and a quietness that all but assures she won't be seen.

TEX EVANS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Li Na choosing a pair of *mizugumos*, named after the infamous Japanese water spider. Makes it across with ease...

At the water's edge a figure slips into the water. Underwater cameras pick up Kaito breathing through a tube that feeds into a container of some kind...

TEX EVANS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Wow, this is a very old technique. That skin is most likely an animal stomach of some kind, probably a sheep's. Not the kind of air I'd like to be breathing, but it seems to work for him.

Kaito swims quickly by a mass of *duckweed*, thinking nothing about it is out of the ordinary. In the center though, we find a pair of lips breathing in air...

TEX EVANS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Chauncey Jaworski using an even older ninja ploy by draping *duckweed* over a water's surface so that no movement can be seen.

Slowly but surely, Chauncey makes his way towards the castle wall undetected.

He emerges from the *duckweed*, dark ninja robes clinging tightly. He scales the wall, back of the pack, but still moving...

TEX EVANS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

With the moat behind them, our Gauntleteers move onto what is perhaps an even more difficult challenge. None of them are aware that the roofs and turrets have been outfitted with countermeasures to repel invading forces.

The key now is avoiding the Sumo Sentinels and some are more successful than others.

When Berit makes it to the top of the wall, he knocks several stones out of the crumbling edifice. They hit the ground loudly, bringing TWO SENTINELS running over.

Berit struggles to get the sea-axe off his back as the Sentinels advance, spears drawn. Just as they're about to lunge, Berit swings it free, chopping the spearheads off their sticks and sending the Sentinels tumbling end-over-end into the moat.

As Kaito clears the wall, he's about to hop down and continue on when he sees what awaits him: *trip wires* attached to *alarm bells*. He silently clears them and moves on.

But James Figg isn't as stealth. His stretch of ground is furnished. And he doesn't realize it in the dark...

The nightingale floors rest on metal hinges and when he steps on them they emit a *harsh chirping sound* like an un-oiled swing set.

JAMES FIGG

Aw, shite!

He's quickly surrounded by Sentinels. But maybe he wanted that. All smiles, he cracks his knuckles and starts swinging.

While all this is happening, Chauncey makes it over the wall, safely. Unfortunately, he finds himself right in front of a Sentinel.

The Sumo smirks as Chauncey fumbles for his satchel. He's about to be thrown over when he stumbles backwards through a *trap door* built into the castle wall...

INT. MINAMOTO CASTLE -- MOMENTS LATER

Chauncey's trap door shoots him out into one of the upper hallways.

Collecting himself, he moves slowly along, passing under a portrait of a samurai lord whose *eyes seem to follow him*...

There's a Chinese staircase at the end of the hall. Chauncey starts to jog towards it wholly unaware that there's a blind spot in front of him with another Sumo waiting for him.

As he passes, the Sentinel seizes him from behind. But something happens -- the hours of exercises Hachiman put him through have turned into muscle memory.

Instead of fighting the hold, he moves with it, rolling the Sumo over his back. The big guy lands in a heap in front of Chauncey.

But Chauncey's celebrating is short-lived. The Sentinel sweeps his leg, rolling on top of him and choking him, just like the other Sumo did.

Chauncey rips the Namahage demon mask off and comes face-to-face with last years winner, OLEG SWENSON, 19. Chauncey croaks out:

CHAUNCEY

It's you--

OLEG SWENSON

I tried to tell you at the Wheel of
Destiny - you cannot win! They
won't let you!

Sand falls from the ceiling above them, footsteps from the Gauntleteers that are lapping him. Oleg smiles.

OLEG SWENSON (CONT'D)

See?! You're too late!

INT. MINAMOTO CASTLE, PRINCESS TOWER -- SAME TIME

Kaito kicks the door of the keep open as a nude PRINCESS rises from the bed, the Jade Magatama on a string around her neck.

She screams as Kaito steps forward to ravage her, but instead just snaps the Magatama off her neck.

INT. MINAMOTO CASTLE, UPSTAIRS HALL -- SAME TIME

As the Princess cries out, Chauncey knees Swenson in the gut and dashes for the staircase.

By the time Chauncey makes it to the Princess tower though, Kaito is just about to jump out the window.

He sees the American and winks. Then he lets go, falling in a magnificent swan dive into the moat.

Chauncey grits his teeth and growls silently. He was so damn close.

Now he's got to make it out of here. He runs for the door, coming back briefly to look at the naked girl one last time.

The Princess's scream roused much of the castle. Outside her room, a coup of SUMO SENTINELS advance on Chauncey.

He goes reaching for his satchel, only to come out with a *happo*, a small eggshell filled with blinding powder used for escape.

Chauncey reaches back to throw it, but fumbles, dropping it directly in front of himself.

As the dust settles and he comes to, a dozen spearheads necklace around him threatening to finish him off...

Resigned to the loss, he finally puts his hands up.

INT. BUDOKAN ARENA -- MINUTES LATER

The lights from the Minamoto castle set come up once all the players have finished.

TEX EVANS

The winner, with a time of seven minutes and forty-nine seconds - hailing from Kyoto, Japan - Kaito Hirohito!

The crowd cheers and starts to chant his name.

TEX EVANS (CONT'D)

And just a reminder, for the first time this year, once the imperial regalia has been claimed ANY ONE of our Gauntleteers can take it back from the winner AT ANY TIME!

Kaito, covered in sweat and toweling off, looks up surprised at this news.

All the athletes who didn't win slowly turn to face him.

EXT. TRAINING CENTER -- SOON AFTER

As Kaito walks back to the hotel, he gets into a fight every twenty feet. The Gauntleteers who felt cheated, who're looking for a short cut, keep jumping out of the shadows to take on the king.

James Figg throws deadly rabbit punches that Kaito manages to duck and side-step. He leaps into the air and lands on Figg's chest, moving quickly on...

When Berit takes a go at it, Kaito throws a punch center mass. Berit catches it, but that was Kaito's intention. He bends Berit's hand at the wrist and the big guy collapses before the bone can break.

Li Jun tries to join in, but Kaito just throws the Jade Necklace into his hands. Li Jun looks at the prize, speechless, as Kaito sidekicks him in the face. When he goes down, Hirohito reclaims his necklace back from a comatose body.

INT. PLAYER'S FLOOR -- MOMENTS LATER

The Gauntleteers bring the fight to the dorms as Kaito struggles to make it to his room.

With the hallway blocked, he runs up the nearby dry wall and superman punches Leslie out of the way. Big trees fall hard and she lands atop Murat Khasanov who was waiting for his opportunity.

After watching her brother take a fall, Li Na picks her moment and kicks the Magatama out of Kaito's hand. It goes flying, skittering to a stop at Chauncey's feet.

Bruised and battered and angry, everyone stops and stares, daring him to pick it up...

Instead, Chauncey punts it down the hallway.

INT. FUMIKO'S DEN -- NIGHT

Fumiko walks into her office only to see Shinobu sitting on her desk. He's got a special guest with him: Sato Murakami of the Dojin-kai.

Sato has chosen to sit in Fumiko's chair. He waits for her, picking his fingernails with her letter opener.

FUMIKO

What is he doing here?!

SHINOBU

He's here on my invitation.

FUMIKO

He what?!

SHINOBU

Just listen to him.

FUMIKO

Listen?! I don't think even you know where your allegiances lie anymore.

SATO MURAKAMI

Fumiko-san.

FUMIKO

Hello, Sato.

SATO MURAKAMI

Go easy on Shinobu here... he's only doing what he thinks is right. You have done well with the gambling, but drugs are inevitable.

FUMIKO

We've gotten along fine without them.

SATO MURAKAMI

But how long can you keep it going for? How long will the men report to a woman? You don't hear what I hear; the whispers, the half-told secrets that say your days are numbered...

FUMIKO

I'll take my chances.

SATO MURAKAMI

Look Fumiko-san, we all miss Kazuo but is this really what you saw yourself doing when he died? Running back room casinos and playing pimp to missing teens? I think not. You should leave before the men require a show of commitment.

FUMIKO

You mean irezumi?

SATO MURAKAMI

They poke the tattoos with bamboo shoots. They go all over your body. You don't want that.

(beat)

It's not for a lady...

FUMIKO

You're right.

Fumiko unties her robe and lets it drop to the floor. The full-body irezumi process was finished on her long ago, her skin a brilliant mosaic of dragons and fire.

Sato is stricken silent. He stares at her naked body as she approaches him.

FUMIKO (CONT'D)

By the time I'm finished with the gumi, we will absorb every other crime family in the country. Until then...

(beat)

Get the fuck out of my chair.

EXT. COURTYARD -- SAME TIME

Chauncey hangs his head in shame.

CHAUNCEY

I kicked it...

Hachiman laughs and shakes his head.

HACHIMAN

And what would you have done with it if you had picked it up?

CHAUNCEY

I would have had it, that's all I know.

HACHIMAN

Well, that is not winning. It's the person who has it in the end that is the winner.

CHAUNCEY

What's the use, Hachi? I'm not getting better.

HACHIMAN

You're lucky I have a soft spot in my heart for cowards. Come with me, there's something I want to show you...

INT. TRAINING CENTER, UPPER BALCONY -- SOON AFTER

They're in the rafters of the training center once more, looking down on the other Gauntleteers as they train.

HACHIMAN

You have something the rest of them don't.

CHAUNCEY

What? Debilitating suck syndrome?

HACHIMAN

Intelligence. It is said, if you don't know yourself or your enemy, then you'll endanger yourself every time. If you only know yourself, but not your opponent - you may win or you may lose. But if you know yourself and your foes, then you are truly invincible.

CHAUNCEY

Nice words. But what good do they do me?

HACHIMAN

Head to head you will lose every time... but a Ninja never fights head to head. Our actions take place in the shadows, our identities unknown. To be truly superior, we need to combine the best elements of each discipline.

CHAUNCEY

You want me to steal from these people?

HACHIMAN

What could be more ninja than that?

INT. TRAINING CENTER, FLOOR -- SOON AFTER

Hachi and Chauncey case the other fighters...

MONTAGE

A Brazilian dance-fighter, ALANYO BENITEZ, 18, rocks back and forth on the fronts of his feet.

HACHIMAN

It's called the ginga and it's fundamental to capoeira. Keeps you in a constant state of motion, so that you're not an easy target.

(MORE)

HACHIMAN (CONT'D)

Also, it allows you to launch into movements faster than someone who isn't moving...

The twins, Li Na and Li Jun, train near one another. Li Na practices with her chosen weapon, the IRON FAN. Starting in horse stance, she comes alive, tumbling end-over-end over her sparring partner.

HACHIMAN (CONT'D)

Watch how uncommitted the attacks are. If one fails, she flows easily into the follow-up. The goal is not executing one major attack, but rather breaking the opponent down gradually...

In an effortless throw, Li Na plants the Iron Fan dead center on a target.

Behind her, Li Jun is more internalized; inhaling and exhaling over a stack of bricks.

CHAUNCEY

Why doesn't he just go for it?

HACHIMAN

He's harnessing chi, the life force said to animate all living things.

Li Jun keeps breathing in and out, slowly extending and retracting his striking hand.

HACHIMAN (CONT'D)

He's trying to focus it into a single point--

Without warning, Li Jun comes down hard on the bricks. But instead of them all crumbling, a single brick has exploded, two rows down and four over. Chauncey stares at it, dumbfounded.

CHAUNCEY

How did he--

HACHIMAN

Americans know it as Dim Mak, the touch of Death. I know it as acupressure.

He walks off. Chauncey follows after, mouth agape.

CHAUNCEY

That didn't impress you?!

Hachi has made his way to Prince Rama's training area. The heir to the Thai throne is busy working a heavy bag, repeatedly kicking it with his shin.

HACHIMAN

If you try to break bricks without conditioning, you will shatter every bone in your hand. The body adapts to stress. It is called cortical remodeling. Because the foot contains so many fine bones and is much weaker, Thai boxers are trained to always connect with the shin. In this way, you condition it. The bone will, after healing, be stronger if injury is put to it.

CHAUNCEY

Okay, you're starting to sound like the Cobra Kai sensei.

HACHIMAN

There are three areas a fighter can force their body to adapt to: their bones, their skin, and their muscles. We don't have time to build muscle, so we'll focus on the first two.

INT. COURTYARD -- SOON AFTER

Chauncey trains again on the Muk Jong, the spinning wooden dummy. At first his punches make him wince and he goes home with black and blue knuckles, soaking them in ice baths...

COMMISSARY

Exhausted from training, Chauncey has piled enough steak and mashed potatoes on his plate to feed North America. Hachi finds him in line and dumps the food right into the trash.

HACHIMAN

Absolutely not! Ninjas ate a strictly vegetarian diet to avoid body odor. Try this--

He scoops up a bowl of broccoli and presents it to Chauncey, whose smile disappears. His one kryptonite...

COURTYARD

The next day, as Chauncey punches the Muk Jong, Hachi circles.

HACHIMAN

Adrenaline and shock will take you far. If you take a great blow, do not stop to think about it. Keep going. And you will find that you can take another... and another...

Catching his knuckle on the wood, Chauncey groans loudly, frustrated with himself.

HACHIMAN (CONT'D)

Are you through?!

CHAUNCEY

I'll tell you when I'm through.

He goes back to the Muk Jong with renewed purpose.

HACHIMAN

We must focus on what to do when you are hurt, or beaten, or hopeless - because you will be.

CHAUNCEY

I may not be the strongest or the fastest or the one most likely to win, but I promise you - I can take more pain than anyone in this competition.

COMMISSARY

He's the last one in the cafeteria, having a staring contest with the broccoli.

COURTYARD

Hachi circles his pupil, almost taunting--

HACHIMAN

Draw them into errors. If they make contact with you, pretend you've suffered a great injury and favor your other side. When your enemy goes to re-injure you, you'll know exactly what to do.

CHAUNCEY
Isn't that cheating?

HACHIMAN
I told you - all warfare is based on deception. When we are able to attack, we must seem unable; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away; when far away, we must make him believe we are near.

CHAUNCEY'S ROOM

Chauncey walks in from a long day of working out and collapses onto his bed, falling right to sleep.

Above him in the bunk-beds, Leslie lies in Berit's arms, frozen in fear.

LESLIE
(whispering)
Do you think he saw us?!

COMMISSARY

Chauncey eats broccoli by the bowl now when it used to make him gag.

The fat is, ever so slowly, dripping off of him...

COURTYARD

Hachi's hands are up, fending off Chauncey's attacks.

HACHIMAN
There will come a moment when your opponent thinks he has you on the ropes and is coming in for the kill. He is sure of it. There is no better time to strike. He's focused on a deathblow, not defense.

Hachi looks up at the clock and decides to call it quits for the day.

HACHIMAN (CONT'D)
It's late. You should go.

Chauncey grabs his equipment bag but stops on his way to the door.

CHAUNCEY

You still think I'm going to lose tomorrow, don't you?

It hurts to see, but Hachi eventually nods.

HACHIMAN

Yes.

CHAUNCEY

You're wrong. You don't know what I can do, you don't know what I'm capable of. All my life people have looked at me and decided what I'm gonna be. Don't I get a say? I know people think the wrong brother's competing. And it may have been his dream... but it was my dream first.

Hachi nods.

HACHIMAN

Then go get 'em.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. BUDOKAN ARENA -- THE NEXT DAY

"The Mirror of Eight Ta" is raised high above an elevated Lei Tai fighting platform.

TEX EVANS

Welcome to the Kumite! A full-contact event whose four winners go on to fame and glory in the celebrated "Neon Gauntlet!" Wins are decided by submission or by the first fighter to gain two ippon. What's an ippon, you ask? A decisive move which connects clearly and leaves little opportunity for the opponent to defend against it. Previous ippons have included kicks to the head and judo throws with a follow-up ground strike. Another new addition this year is the onscreen clock. If two minutes passes without a winner - both competitors lose!

The tatted-up James Figg enters the circular ring to cheers.

TEX EVANS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 My money's on James Figg. In the county where he trains, they're known to practice the "Irish stand down" which is a type of toe-to-toe strap fighting that consists only of punching and "taking" punches. Figg, of course, is the under eighteen, bare-knuckle champion of England.

COUNT PIERRE BARUZY, 18, a street tough merchant sailor, hops from foot-to-foot on the other side of the ring.

TEX EVANS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 His opponent, from the streets of Marseille, France - Count Pierre Baruzy!

As the opening gong sounds, the audience of high-stakes bidders rises to their feet. They applaud as the two fighters begin to square off.

Baruzy's the one to draw first blood with a back-handed slap that stuns James Figg but appears to be business as usual for Tex Evans.

TEX EVANS (CONT'D)
 Savate is, of course, known for its open hand slapping techniques as closed fists are considered a deadly weapon in France.

Figg takes a second to regain his bearings. If Baruzy's gonna slap then he's gotta even the score. Out of nowhere, Figg kicks the Frenchman in the shins.

TEX EVANS (CONT'D)
 Oh! And James Figg resorting to the strap fighting technique of shin-kicking but one that hasn't been seen in at least a century!

On the outer edges of the ring, Leslie awaits the outcome with her mentor, CHUCK NORRIS. Yes, that Chuck Norris.

LESLIE
 Leave it to the French to open hand slap somebody. Hey, why can't I fight a Vietnamese? They killed my uncle.

CHUCK NORRIS
You may get the chance.

In the ring, Baruzy limps off Figg's attack and shoots a quick high kick at the Englishman's head. It's unguarded and devastating. Figgs is out before he even hits the mat.

LESLIE
Ouch!

MINUTES LATER

Leslie nervously waits to take on the victor of the last round, Count Pierre Baruzy.

COUNT BARUZY
Don't worry, Mon Cherie - I will be gentle.

He winks at her as the match starts. Leslie shakes her head, disgusted, and begins to circle him. He throws a surprise right that clips her on the jaw. Tears quickly shoot to Leslie's eyes.

LESLIE
You hit a girl... *You can't hit a girl!*

Taken in, Baruzy drops his guard to see if she's okay. He's forgotten where he is...

COUNT BARUZY
Oh, I am so zorry!

Leslie lets herself be held. For a moment. The next thing Baruzy knows, he's being lifted off the ground in a merciless F.A.W.

The crowd goes wild as Leslie walks him over to the edge of the ring and drops him into the water. She raises her hands in victory.

INT. LOCKER ROOM -- AFTERNOON

Kaito is busy tying up his gi as Fumiko arrives. He smiles when he sees her.

KAITO HIROHITO
Hello, Auntie.

He gives her a kiss on the cheek that she returns.

FUMIKO

I wanted to wish you luck in the kumite. Though you won't need it...

KAITO HIROHITO

What are you talking about?

FUMIKO

Let's say, I wouldn't expect much in the way of competition.

KAITO HIROHITO

What did you do?

She adjusts his gi for him.

FUMIKO

Come on, you know how this goes... weaker seeds... favorable judges...

His smile fades.

KAITO HIROHITO

I don't want to win that way. My father didn't resort to that.

FUMIKO

You are so naïve. How do you think your father won? If it wasn't for my husband's intervention history would not remember your father as kindly.

Kaito's stricken quiet, his skin gone pale.

FUMIKO (CONT'D)

Listen to Morita-san and everything will work out just fine.

She leaves him there, alone with his thoughts.

SOON AFTER

Before his fight, Kaito argues with his handler, MORITA-SAN, 47.

MORITA-SAN

Before your father died, he put your training in my hands.

KAITO HIROHITO

I don't care. This is not in the spirit of aikido! It is not rule-based, it is not about competition!

MORITA-SAN

At least look at what we added to the scabbard.

He pulls out Kaito's sheathed sword. At the base of the handle, is a POD waiting to be burst.

MORITA-SAN (CONT'D)

Red pepper and iron fillings for when you pull your sword. You can blind your opponent--

KAITO HIROHITO

I don't need tricks!

Kaito takes his sword back from Morita-san and throws the blinding pod to the ground. He enters the ring.

On the other side of the fighting platform, Murat Khasanov gets his fists taped for the fight about to come. His team seals the tape with resin and wraps the finished product in barbed wire.

When they're done they slide his boxing gloves on over it. Murat smiles confidently as he steps into the ring to face Kaito.

TEX EVANS

This one is anybody's guess - will it be Kaito, son of Ueshiba? Or the Siberian Giant, Murat Khasanov? Despite Kaito claiming the Jade Magatama, Vegas odds are heavily in Murat's favor given that the last fight he had, the infamous "Mettle in the Shtetl," ended with his opponent dead in the ring. Either way, expect this one to go the full two minutes.

No sooner has the opening gong rang, than Murat's swinging one of those massive, barbed mitts at Kaito's head. Only Murat doesn't get there.

Because Kaito has cut him *in half*. Right across the stomach...

Knowing the fights over, Kaito turns and walks immediately back to the locker room.

He passes Chauncey on the way, who has turned a green shade of pale.

CHAUNCEY

Holy shit.

MINUTES LATER

They're still mopping the blood up when it's Chauncey's turn to fight. He stands ringside, his eyes wide and fearful, as Hachi drones on in his ear.

HACHIMAN

The Okichitawak are known for their smothering techniques and takedowns, so don't get flustered. The youths are always looking for a challenge to show they're worthy of admittance into the warrior's lodge and I think that's what they're treating this as. Alright, here he comes--

AMBROISE LEPINE, 17, a Canadian of Cree Indian extraction, steps into the ring across from Chauncey. In his hands he carries a Gunstock Warclub that he smacks menacingly against his open palm.

Behind him, his handler and grandfather, SAMOSET, beats an animal skin drum as he chants.

HACHIMAN (CONT'D)

Remember the capoeira, keep pulsing on balls of your feet, maintain minimal friction with the mat and you'll move quicker--

It's too much, Chauncey can't think.

CHAUNCEY

Would you please shut up?! I'm about to fight!

HACHIMAN

Are you annoyed?

CHAUNCEY

Yes!

HACHIMAN

Do you have a problem with authority figures?

CHAUNCEY
I'm starting to!

HACHIMAN
Good. Use it.

CHAUNCEY
Use it? *What do you mean, use it?!*

But the opening gong has been rung, and Hachi hops off the platform without answering. Chauncey repeats--

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)
What does that mean?!

Before he can get an answer, he finds himself face-to-face with Lepine. The warclub hits Chauncey upside his head and he goes sprawling out on the mat, seeing double.

The judges call an ippon as Lepine jogs around, staying limber while Chauncey gets to his feet.

Samoset's drum beat has a repeating cadence and Lepine seems to base his moves around it. He shoots in to the beat, swings a hard forearm on the beat.

Chauncey fends the attacks off, but some are getting through. The gash on the forehead isn't helping, he's got blood dripping in his eyes.

Somehow in the crowd, he catches sight of Hachi, who mouths:

HACHIMAN
Use it!

Listening to the drum beat, Chauncey finally gets what the Old Man is trying to tell him.

Keeping his distance from Lepine, he slides a shoe off, turns, and launches it straight at SAMOSET'S DRUM.

It goes shooting out of the elder's hands and without the beat, Lepine is thrown. It's just for a second, but it's all Chauncey needs...

He slides into one of his Muk Jong routines and drops Lepine hard to the ground.

The Canadian is stunned, enabling Chauncey to lock an arm bar into place to which Lepine quickly taps.

Chauncey screams ecstatically, jumping to his feet, as Hachi nods proudly from the crowd.

TEX EVANS (O.S.)

And the unarmed, Chauncey Jaworski,
pulls out a surprise win over
Ambroise Lepine to move on to round
two!

INT. LOCKER ROOMS -- MINUTES LATER

Chauncey enters the empty locker room and the deafening roar
of the arena dies as the door shuts behind him.

Now alone, the smile on his face only grows. He even starts
to well up.

KAITO HIROHITO

Congratulations.

Chauncey whirls around, surprised. Kaito is sitting in the
dark in his fighting clothes. Blood still stains his katana.

CHAUNCEY

God, you scared me--

KAITO HIROHITO

I saw you fight. Very clever what
you did.

He stands to leave Chauncey with his privacy, but stops at
the door to add--

KAITO HIROHITO (CONT'D)

But there are challenges coming up
that you won't be able to think
your way out of.

INT. BUDOKAN ARENA, FLOOR -- SOON AFTER

Chauncey and Hachi wait for his next opponent to be
announced.

TEX EVANS

From the Greek island of
Mykonos - Panos Nicodemus!

The grappler emerges from the locker rooms, but it looks like
he's forgotten something.

Namely, clothes. He's birthday suit-ing it.

CHAUNCEY

Hachi, he's naked...

Tex Evans speaks for all of us.

TEX EVANS

Uh, I was told to expect this, but it's still off-putting! In Ancient Greece, Pankration athletes competed naked and it appears that Panos, being a purist of the sport, is doing the same. Still, I think it would be a mistake to underestimate him. Panos has been collecting wins on the way to next year's Olympics and is clearly looking to extend his streak to Neon Gauntlet.

Amidst cheers and jeers, Panos strolls confidently to the ring.

CHAUNCEY

Got any tips?

HACHIMAN

You didn't want my advice last time.

CHAUNCEY

And I was clearly wrong, so I'm sorry!

HACHIMAN

Well, as long as you know...
(beat)
Pankration's built on submission techniques. Keep the fight off the ground.

CHAUNCEY

But what if it goes there?

HACHIMAN

If there's nothing to grab onto, there's no way he can make you submit.

CHAUNCEY

What are you saying?

MOMENTS LATER

Chauncey is taking his shirt off in front of an entire arena.

CHAUNCEY
This is so stupid.

He stands there, vulnerable.

HACHIMAN
Pants too.

CHAUNCEY
I'm not getting completely naked on
international television!

HACHIMAN
Then call your mother, because
you're coming home early.

Hachi has no way of knowing this, but he's hit on a sore subject. Chauncey grits his teeth and drops trow. The crowd loses their minds as Hachi continues on.

HACHIMAN (CONT'D)
One last thing...

He turns back to Chauncey with a clear bottle of *something*.

CHAUNCEY
That better not be baby oil.

He puts his finger up to object, but ends up shaking his head.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)
Just do it.

Hachi generously globs on the oil as the fight gong sounds.

TEX EVANS (O.S.)
And here we go, the censors are
gonna have a field day with this!

Panos and Chauncey go right into a clinch. Almost immediately, the Greek wrenches his fingers across Chauncey's face giving him a wicked eye gouge.

Chauncey stumbles backwards as Panos shoots for his legs. But the baby oil does as promised. Chauncey slips out of the hold...

No matter how tightly Panos tries to grab him, Chauncey slides free every time.

So Panos has no choice but to keep the fight off the ground. He attempts a straight kick to Chauncey's stomach, but Chauncey comes down hard on Panos's inner knee.

The Greek crumbles to the ground in pain. As he holds his aching leg, Chauncey pushes him over and plants a knee in the guy's back. Using all of his strength, Chauncey pulls back on both of the greek's arms, until Panos wails, screaming--

PANOS NICODEMUS

Maitta!

Chauncey drops him to the mat and pumps his fists to the heavens.

TEX EVANS (O.S.)

Do you believe in miracles?!
Chauncey Jaworski pulling out a
second come from behind victory!

The crowd roars in pandemonium--

TEX EVANS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

The New Jersey native and thousand-
to-one underdog defies the odds to
advance to the final eight!

SOON AFTER

Waiting to fight next, Kaito stretches near his mentor, Morita-san.

MORITA-SAN

If he insists on dancing, then let
him tire himself out...

He's referring to Alanyo Benitez, Kaito's next opponent. The Brazilian flips his weapon, a straight razor, open and closed as he stares at Kaito with insane eyes.

MOMENTS LATER

As the last competitor is carted away on a stretcher, Kaito stands to enter the ring. Before he can get there, Morita-san reminds him:

MORITA-SAN

Your sword.

He hands the katana over and Kaito takes it with him to face Benitez.

Immediately after the opening gong is rung, Alanyo wheels away with the straight razor.

Kaito draws his sword in defense and showers the capoeira expert with red pepper flakes. Benitez stops in his tracks, dropping the razor and clawing at his eyes--

Instead of taking the advantage, Kaito immediately wheels around to his corner.

KAITO HIROHITO

What did you do?!

He re-sheathes the sword and hurls it at his master.

Stalking the ring, he angrily waits for Alanyo's eyes to clear. When they do, Benitez angrily grabs for his fallen straight razor and runs at Kaito.

In a whirlwind motion, Kaito disarms Benitez and the fight is even once more.

With no weapon to focus on, Benitez goes into his ginga, the back and forth rocking motion that's the basis of all capoeira. It's impressive stuff; backflips and somersaults to mystify and intimidate...

Kaito calmly walks forward into all this pomp and circumstance, catches Alanyo by the heel in mid-air, and folds him in half with a slam to the mat.

PRESS BOX

With the first two rounds over, Tex Evans and Kenny Kamikaze, give a half-time report from high above the arena floor.

TEX EVANS

And we are down to the final eight! Only four matches left until we find out who has what it takes to take on the Neon Gauntlet! You know, Kenny, the big surprise for me has been fourteen-year-old phenom Chauncey Jaworski. I don't want to jinx the kid, but he's showed true ingenuity in his first two fights. And he's gonna need it too! He's drawn a third round bout against the Varma Kalai madman from Sri Lanka -- Mahout! And he's not the only American in contention either. Leslie Mandell, the fan favorite with her legendary finishing move the F.A.W, promises to hold her own against Berit Canute.

(MORE)

TEX EVANS (CONT'D)

But before you think the United states is here to collect all the glory, check out China whose two entrants are still in the mix! Sibling against sibling, Shaolin Kung-fu against Wing Chun - this oughta be one for the ages!

THIRD ROUND

China's entrants stare at one another, like the twins from the shining squaring off.

Li Jun's in a green sash with his deadly naginata SPEAR spinning at his side. Li Na's in a golden sash, the *iron fan* at her side. She crouches in horse stance as the opening gong clangs.

As if on cue, Li Jun swings his naginata out in front of him like it's an extension of his body. Li Na bends backwards at the waist to avoid it, using her iron fan to fend off the blade. Sparks fly each time they make contact.

Gaining some distance between her and her brother, Li Na launches her iron fan with such torque that when it narrowly misses her brother, it whips back to her.

She catches it handily, but this time when she throws it, Li Jun is ready. He bats it into the piranha pit, leaving his sister unarmed.

Trying to be a gentleman, he snaps the naginata in two and throws the lower half to Li Na. She furiously whips that too into the piranha pit.

Smiling, Li Jun does away with his half and suddenly it's unarmed combat.

Li Na rushes forward, a flying knee strike to bridge the distance. Li Jun tries to fend her off, but Wing Chun teaches quick strikes at close range. She throws elbows at her brother's face and chest, turning her hips to generate more power.

Just when he starts to defend himself, Li Na changes it up, bringing her foot down in a stomping kick that catches her brother just so on his ankle.

As he goes to clutch it, Li Na sweeps his leg out from under him, knocking him to the ground. She rolls him into a choke that he fruitlessly tries to get out of.

But Li Na is relentless. With no other options, and running out of air, her brother finally taps.

SOON AFTER

When Berit and Leslie's match starts, they clinch up, neither willing to hurt the other.

Locked together face-to-face, they have an urgent convo that only they can hear--

BERIT CANUTE
Take the win.

LESLIE
No.

BERIT CANUTE
Do it! Give me the f.a.w.

LESLIE
I won't do that to somebody I love!

Berit smiles from ear-to-ear.

BERIT CANUTE
You love me?!

LESLIE
I was afraid to say it before...
but I'm not now...

BERIT CANUTE
If you love me then it doesn't
matter if I lose. Take the win!

Leslie shakes her head, crying.

LESLIE
No, I won't do that to you!

BERIT CANUTE
You have to! One of us has to win!

She finally nods, reluctantly.

LESLIE
Okay, I'll do it...

BERIT CANUTE
Give 'em hell in the Gauntlet!

They kiss.

LESLIE
I love you!

BERIT CANUTE

I love YOU!

Reaching down, Leslie pulls hard on Berit's jock strap. He screams, the ref calls an ippon, and Berit taps.

On the sidelines, Chauncey watches all of this so very, very lost.

CHAUNCEY

What the hell did I miss?!

MINUTES LATER

In the moments before his fight starts, Kaito tapes his hands together.

MORITA-SAN

Please, don't do this!

KAITO HIROHITO

I wouldn't have to if you hadn't tampered with my sword!

MORITA-SAN

Take it out on me but don't handicap yourself!

The gong rings.

KAITO HIROHITO

It's too late.

He heads into the ring to face his final challenger, Prince Rama the Third of Thailand.

TEX EVANS

It's looking like Kaito Hirohito is showing off! In a show of bravado, he's taped his hands together! Kenny, I can't think of a worse time to do this - he's up against a Muay Thai master! And if there's anyone who can derail the unstoppable locomotive of success that is Kaito, it's Prince Rama the Third who famously raids his country's own coffers to train!

The royal enters the ring wearing a Mongkol headband and Pra Jiad armbands. He kneels at the edge of the platform to perform the Wai Kru, a ritual before matches.

When he finishes, his trainer takes the Mongkol off his head and places it in their corner for luck.

As the gong sounds, Prince Rama fastens the weapons he received in the Wheel of Destiny -- a pair of sharp TEKKEEN KNUCKLES that look to extend his reach.

As Rama comes out strong, Kaito plays it defensively, steering clear of the metal claws.

When he starts to get the rhythm of the punches thrown, Kaito ducks inside and runs up Rama's chest. The Prince looks up at him, dumfounded.

But he's not in the air for long. On his way down, Kaito hooks his taped hands around Rama's neck and uses his downward momentum to toss the Prince across the mat.

The royal is stunned. But there's no time for that. He gets to his feet and furiously tries to stab Kaito with his tekken.

Kaito stands his ground and puts up his taped hands. For all his bluster, the only thing the Prince has succeeded in is freeing his opponent.

Kaito puts on a goddamn clinic then, punching and diving clear of the tekken. He disarms Rama: first the left hand, then the right. He rains down elbows and fists, chopping at his tree trunk shins with his low kicks--

TEX EVANS (CONT'D)

Is that?... *it is!* Kaito is using the prince's own Muay Thai against him! *I have never seen anything like this--*

With a decisive and massive driving knee to the Prince's face, Kaito knocks the royal out cold.

TEX EVANS (CONT'D)

If his aim was to humiliate the Prince then mission accomplished! Your winner and third runner of the Neon Gauntlet -- Kaito Hirohito!

The crowd goes nuts.

INT. LOCKER ROOM -- MINUTES LATER

With only one fight left to go, Chauncey is back to nervously pacing.

CHAUNCEY

What can you tell me about him?

HACHIMAN

Don't know the boy. Know Varma Kalai though. Manipulation of the body's pressure points to cause harm. They strike nerves and tendons, veins or ligaments, organs and bone joints. Some are fatal, some will only paralyze you.

CHAUNCEY

So how do I beat it?

HACHIMAN

You don't. You can't.

Hachi laughs, hopelessly.

HACHIMAN (CONT'D)

Unless you can find some way to not react to the attacks...

Chauncey's head shoots up. What did he just say?

CHAUNCEY

No, but I may be able to delay the reaction...

MOMENTS LATER

Hachi has gotten Chauncey a bottle of JAPANESE RUM.

HACHIMAN

You sure you want to do this?

CHAUNCEY

Not really. The last time I drank my brother died.

HACHIMAN

Well, it's safe to say this goes against everything I've ever taught a student. But if you're going to have a shot of pulling this off, you gotta drink a lot of it. Be good and drunk. And finish the fight before he realizes what you've done.

Chauncey takes a pull from the bottle. With nothing to chase it with it goes about as well as you'd expect.

He sputters and coughs and runs over to the water fountain to clear his mouth. He looks up at Hachi for sympathy, but the old man has none.

HACHIMAN (CONT'D)

All of it.

Chauncey steels himself, forcing more down his throat. He uses the water to chase it, then goes again...

And again...

And again.

INT. BUDOKAN ARENA -- MINUTES LATER

Chauncey exits the locker room and heads for the ring. The bright lights of the arena seem bleary to him.

He makes it to the fight platform without much stumbling, but it's clear -- he's feelin' no pain. He's even sort of smiling when MAHOUT, 16, comes out...

He enters on an elephant, a slight and unassuming Indian boy. The elephant kneels at the foot of the fighting platform and Mahout walks down its trunk onto the mat.

Chauncey takes one look at the kid and starts roaring with laughter.

TEX EVANS

Interesting psych-out strategy on the part of Chauncey Jaworski. Not sure it's working though...

Mahout is humorless and undaunted. He stares at Chauncey with contempt. As the gong rings, he loads his weapon - a poisonous BLOW DART made of bamboo shoots - and *fires it*.

Instead of hitting home in Chauncey's skin, it gets caught in the American's thick ninja robes.

Chauncey pulls the dart out and stares at it dumbly, before letting it drop to the ground.

CHAUNCEY

That wasn't very nice!

He puts his hands up to fight and Mahout joins him, dispensing with his blow dart.

As Chauncey swings, Mahout delivers a devastating blow, an uppercut to his armpit. Even Tex Evans felt that one--

TEX EVANS

Ouch! Chauncey Jaworski falling victim to a classic Varma Kalai tactic, the armpit punch. What it does is makes your arm immobile and it can take a couple seconds for your brain to reboot...

Chauncey's left arm is indeed numb. It hangs limply at his side. So Chauncey swings with the other one, a wailing haymaker that Mahout is able to telegraph no problem.

He connects with Chauncey's other armpit and that arm too goes numb.

TEX EVANS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

I don't know how much more of this he can take--

With his body turned to rubber, Chauncey head butts his opponent. The crowd cheers as blood shoots from Mahout's nose.

Mahout grabs his broken appendage in pain and resorts to a hail mary. He delivers a double palm slap to Chauncey's ears.

It's devastating. Chauncey can't hear. Can't see. He can barely stand...

There are three Mahouts in front of him now, he's so disoriented.

But the feeling has come back to his arms...

He smiles through the pain, and swings at the middle Mahout. He connects hard. And the little man isn't used to that. He crumbles into a ball as he falls to the ground.

The crowd are on their feet before he even hits the mat because they know he's out. Joyous tears spring to Chauncey's eyes.

TEX EVANS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

He has done it! He has defied every naysayer, every handicapper who said that he wouldn't make it past the first round. Chauncey Jaworski takes the fourth and final spot in the running of the Neon Gauntlet!

Chauncey lifts his arms in the air, forever triumphant. He can't be sure who started it, but a chant has begun somewhere in the balcony. Soon the rest of the arena have picked it up. The people chant--

CROWD

Gai-jin Kin-tar-o!
Gai-jin Kin-tar-o!
Gai-jin Kin-tar-o!

Tex struggles to make out what they're saying.

TEX EVANS

You getting this, Kenny?

Kenny Kamikaze nods, impressed.

KENNY KAMIKAZE

Gaijin Kintaro... Superhuman
 Foreign Boy.

Tex smiles.

TEX EVANS

Well that fits quite nicely, don't
 you think?

INT. BUDOKAN ARENA -- MINUTES LATER

As the crowd cheers, Li Na, Leslie, Chauncey, and Kaito ascend the winner's platform.

TEX EVANS

As the judges deliberate over which one of our Gauntleteers deserves to win the "Mirror of Eight Ta," let's get a final round of applause for all our winners!

The audience obliges. When the votes are finished being tallied, Tex Evans walks over to the Council of Elders table. They hand him a folded note with the results. He opens it in front of everyone.

TEX EVANS (CONT'D)

Ladies and Gentlemen, the
 Gauntleteer that came down with the
 second regalia...

(beat)

From Kyoto, Japan -- Kaito
 Hirohito!

As the roof rattles, the Mirror of Eight Ta, lit by floodlight, lowers into the waiting hands of Kaito.

INT. GAUNTLET STUDIOS -- THE NEXT DAY

The four remaining Gauntleteers sit next to one another as they're interviewed on live T.V. by Tex Evans.

TEX EVANS

Kaito, I don't know if you know this, but you're on track to make Neon Gauntlet history. In its entire thirty-seven year history, no Gauntleteer has ever survived the Gauntlet with all three pieces of regalia. You have two, the Jade Magatama and the Mirror of Eight Ta. Only the sword, Kusanagi, is left to claim. What do you think your chances are?

Kaito answers, monosyllabically.

KAITO HIROHITO

Good.

TEX EVANS

Think you can take this guy on?

He points to Chauncey, who's grinning confidently. Kaito not so much laughs, as scoffs.

TEX EVANS (CONT'D)

Chauncey Jaworski getting off to a slow start but ending up a viewer's favorite by the end of the kumite. Both of you tragically lost someone close to you in the run up to this competition. Kaito, you lost your father, legendary Gauntlet Champion, Ueshiba Hirohito. And Chauncey, you lost your brother who was set to appear on this very show.

Kaito leans in close to the mic to make this very clear:

KAITO HIROHITO

We are not the same.

Leslie exhales slowly - that was cold. Chauncey can't help himself.

CHAUNCEY

He's right. I never would have cheated to win.

The other Gauntleteers laugh as Kaito fumes. Only Hachi watches from behind the camera, disgusted by the cocky way Chauncey is acting.

EXT. COURTYARD -- LATER THAT DAY

Hachi waits patiently for Chauncey to arrive. When he does, the pupil waves off an excuse--

CHAUNCEY

Sorry I'm late, the BBC wanted an interview. They said it would just be five minutes, but it was a whole thing...

Chauncey trails off. When Hachi doesn't respond, he seems to sense something's amiss.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)

Are you really mad that I'm a few minutes late? We won. Let it go.

HACHIMAN

I was wrong about you. You could never be a ninja.

CHAUNCEY

What does that mean?

HACHIMAN

Ninja aim to be invisible. All you desire is the spotlight.

CHAUNCEY

The hell I do! That was my brother's game!

HACHIMAN

Well you sound a lot like him. There's nothing more I can teach you.

CHAUNCEY

Yeah, I think that's right.

He starts to walk away, but can't hold it in.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)

You know what? I'm sorry if I take a moment and enjoy life for one second when things just happen to go my way for once!

HACHIMAN

We operate in darkness and all you want is to be seen by your family. Why?! When they treated you the way they did?!

CHAUNCEY

You don't know what you're talking about--

HACHIMAN

Face it! Your brother was your first bully--

CHAUNCEY

No!

HACHIMAN

You wanted him to die!

CHAUNCEY

Nooo!!!--

Chauncey jumps to his feet swinging on his master. As Hachiman rears back, he yells--

HACHIMAN

If you really want to hit me make sure you do it right!

Chauncey mirrors his master's movements, finds an opening, and splits his lip.

Hachi stumbles back a step or two, grabbing his bloody mouth. Despite that, there's a smile on his face.

HACHIMAN (CONT'D)

Not so stupid, after all...

Chauncey stands there, impudently -- was this all just a lesson?! He storms off, still furious.

Down the hall though, two Yakuza toughs are waiting for him.

TANAKA

Miss Fumiko would like to see you.

CHAUNCEY
What's this about--

Before he can finish his sentence, they're dragging him by the arms to comply.

INT. FUMIKO'S DEN -- MINUTES LATER

Chauncey is forced down into a chair across from Fumiko.

FUMIKO
Mr. Jaworski, thank you for coming.

CHAUNCEY
Did I have a choice?

FUMIKO
I'm sorry for my men. They can be quite assertive. Seeing as tomorrow is the gauntlet I thought I'd introduce myself and we'd have a quick chat. My name is Fumiko--

CHAUNCEY
I know who you are. Your husband was a great man.

FUMIKO
You didn't know him. If he was anything, he was an obese womanizer who left me with millions in debt.

CHAUNCEY
I'm sorry to hear that, but what does this have to do with me?

FUMIKO
There are many who believe you have a legitimate chance at winning. Can you believe that? An American taking home Kusanagi?!

She LAUGHS.

CHAUNCEY
I don't know. Doesn't sound so crazy to me...

Fumiko scoffs.

FUMIKO

You people, you come here and you expect to take - but what do you leave behind? You have no respect for our clothes, our culture... you take and you take until everything about it's true nature is distorted and trivialized. You are doing nothing more than playing dress-up. But in our country only children dress up...

(beat)

By chance, do you know what happened to the child Emperor Antoku from our opening credits?

CHAUNCEY

His grandmother threw him and the regalia into the--

FUMIKO

He drowned. We only stopped the story there to make it palatable to American audiences. But the Japanese know the truth. This is not your home. You pursue our culture because yours is broken.

CHAUNCEY

Why am I here?

FUMIKO

Because unfortunately, it is not up to me. Powers greater than myself have already determined the outcome of the Gauntlet.

CHAUNCEY

What do you mean they've already determined?

FUMIKO

There are too many parties interested in the outcome for me to leave any loose strings.

CHAUNCEY

It's all fake? This whole time?

FUMIKO

Cheer up, Mr. Jaworski. It's you that's been selected to prevail.

Chauncey's mouth gapes. It takes him a moment, but finally he shakes his head.

CHAUNCEY

No...

(beat)

I don't want to win like this.

FUMIKO

Too bad. It has already been decided.

CHAUNCEY

And if I refuse?

Fumiko laughs again.

FUMIKO

Then I will reunite your parents with your brother, Mr. Jaworski. I will see to it myself.

INT. TRAINING CENTER -- SOON AFTER

Chauncey walks numbly into the training center, hoping to be alone. But Kaito is there, using his katana to take his rage out on a punching bag. Sand flies with every nick and slash.

KAITO HIROHITO

Congratulations on your win tomorrow. Just got the news.

CHAUNCEY

It wasn't my idea. If it was up to me you'd take home Kusanagi.

Kaito doesn't look up from his sword-work.

KAITO HIROHITO

I will not be competing.

CHAUNCEY

Why not?

KAITO HIROHITO

A fixed competition is not a competition.

Chauncey nods.

CHAUNCEY

I'm sorry what I said at the interview.

KAITO HIROHITO
Why? You were right.

CHAUNCEY
Still...

Behind Kaito, Chauncey sees Leslie and Li Na sitting glumly on the training equipment.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)
They got to you too, huh?

LESLIE
She threatened Berit.

LI NA
She *threaten* my brother.

Chauncey's quiet for a moment until--

CHAUNCEY
Goddamnit! We came so far! This is so unfair. For me...
(to Leslie and Li Na)
For you guys...

Finally, he looks to Kaito.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)
But mostly to you. You could have won the whole thing. Three regalia and all.

KAITO HIROHITO
I had just as much chance as the three of you.

CHAUNCEY
That's bullshit and you know it.

KAITO HIROHITO
We'll never know now, will we?

He goes back to assaulting the punching bag. Chauncey watches him for a moment, parry and strike.

CHAUNCEY
I say tomorrow we let the best one of us win and leave it at that.

LESLIE
But she'll come after us...

CHAUNCEY
Not if we do it right.

His mind is sparking to something not yet fully formed. They look at him curiously, so he continues.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)
They changed the rules. And so can we.

KAITO HIROHITO
Even if you could move against her. The syndicate wouldn't allow it.

CHAUNCEY
The syndicate?

KAITO HIROHITO
Gambling syndicate. High stakes betters who pool their money for even bigger payouts. If Fumiko is fixing the Gauntlet they are the ones who will benefit.

CHAUNCEY
Let me worry about that.

KAITO HIROHITO
And we, what? Sit back and do as we're told? Where does this confidence come from? How can you be sure it'll work?

CHAUNCEY
Because I see an opening.

INT. GAUNTLET PRODUCTIONS, VIDEO VILLAGE -- THE NEXT DAY

In the production box, Fumiko's assistant, Tanaka, sits at a prehistoric computer as his boss enters.

TANAKA
Cutting it close. Five minutes until betting ceases.

She pulls a scrap of paper from her pocket and places it next to him.

FUMIKO
I need the balance of this account put on the American boy to win.

TANAKA
How many regalia?

FUMIKO
Just Kusanagi.

Tanaka raises an eyebrow, but starts to enter the information nonetheless.

FUMIKO (CONT'D)
And after you've done that, I need you also to place a second bet.

TANAKA
A second?

FUMIKO
A personal one. For insurance. The Dojin-kai have been sniffing around.

TANAKA
If the syndicate finds out you--

FUMIKO
They won't find out.

TANAKA
They bet early and they bet heavy and it funds our year, but they expect a winner come the Gauntlet and you diluting their winnings won't go over well.

FUMIKO
It's anonymous. And if there is a war coming, a war chest is needed.

TANAKA
Maybe. But if the others discover what you've done, they'll kill you and me and it won't matter how much money you have saved.

FUMIKO
Just do as you're told.

She walks away, knowing it's done.

INT. BUDOKAN ARENA -- MINUTES LATER

The lights come down and "The Final Countdown" blares as Tex stands high above the Gauntlet.

TEX EVANS

And-here-we-are! The final night of competition! Say hello to the Neon Gauntlet!

He motions like a ringleader at the behemoth behind him--

TEX EVANS (CONT'D)

An unholy labyrinth of twisting turns and booby traps, where the doors are all locked, only to be opened through physical tasks or mind-bending puzzles. Correct answers move you on, wrong ones make you hopelessly lost. Add to that, the halls of the Gauntlet are patrolled by our very own Sumo Sentinels who are armed with - *whoa! This oughta be a good one* - with metal tridents! The goal is to escape with Kusanagi, the sacred sword that has represented the authority of Japan's emperors since time immemorial. Once you have it, the entire Gauntlet starts sinking. And let me remind viewers that until a competitor has emerged with Kusanagi, it can be stolen at any moment. Like Yogi Berra said, "it ain't over 'til it's over!"

INT. BUDOKAN ARENA, FLOOR -- SOON AFTER

Three of the remaining four Gauntleteers line up at the starting line. Leslie, Li Na, and Kaito look nervous until Chauncey comes running up.

KAITO HIROHITO

You're late.

CHAUNCEY

I know, I'm sorry.

KAITO HIROHITO

Why are you late?

CHAUNCEY

In America, we have something called a Plan B.

He looks up into the stands and spots Sato Murakami of the Dojin-kai. He nods, ever so slightly.

Chauncey takes his spot next to Leslie. She's breathing heavily, nervous.

LESLIE

I got a bad feeling about this. I mean, people die in this thing!

CHAUNCEY

I can't believe you of all people are scared. Beware the Mendell?!

LESLIE

Oh please, I wrote that graffiti myself! You think anyone was scared of me?!

CHAUNCEY

I was.

LESLIE

Well now I'm afraid. And I want to go home.

CHAUNCEY

Whatever happens in there, just keep moving. You understand? You can't quit.

LESLIE

What are you planning?

He looks forward, to the task at hand.

CHAUNCEY

Just don't quit.

Across the floor, waiting in the wings, Fumiko watches the Gauntleteers talking to one another. Her spidey senses are going crazy...

She corners a few of the SUMO SENTINELS before they can take their positions in the Gauntlet.

FUMIKO

Give me those--

She snatches the tridents out of their hands and replaces them with live CATTLE PRODS.

FUMIKO (CONT'D)

You are my eyes and ears in there. If they aren't doing exactly what they're supposed to be doing...

She pulls the trigger on one of the tasers and a vicious horseshoe of electricity *crackles* between the prongs.

FUMIKO (CONT'D)

Then don't stop until they're dead.

INT. BUDOKAN ARENA -- MOMENTS LATER

The Gauntleers take their places on the starting line. Each has their own gate in front of them. When the opening gong is rung they rush to their given crank and rotate them like mad men to raise the portcullis.

When Kaito's spiked gate is halfway up, he abandons the crank and sprints underneath the closing.

He's the first to the hundred yard obstacle course of swinging, pendulous axes, swords that come up from out of the ground, and ominous, barbed maces.

Li Na is next up onto the platform, followed closely by Chauncey and Leslie. Kaito is patiently finding the rhythm of the swerving axes and maces, but Li Na has no such patience. She rushes out, narrowly missing a lance that shoots out from the wall.

To catch her balance she side steps away and ends up taking a running start over a balance obstacle. She trips on the beam, just barely managing to hold on. She makes the mistake of looking down...

Below her is a massive, roiling pit of COCKROACHES. Gathering her wits she gets to her feet and continues on.

The Gauntleteers have been watching her progress with baited breath. Once they see she's okay, Leslie heads out. She's not very graceful, so this is a chore.

She passes the swinging axes well enough, but the spinning maces at head and ankle level trip her up. She goes stumbling forward into the section of lances shooting out of the wall.

Chauncey's moving before even he knows why. Finding a hole in the rhythm of the axes and maces, he catches up with Leslie just as one of the spears takes a chunk out of her thigh. It would have been much worse but Chauncey pulls her back in time.

LESLIE

Ah, shit--

Leslie cups the wound, hobbling next to Chauncey.

LESLIE (CONT'D)

What do you think you're my hero or something?

CHAUNCEY

Yeah, don't mention it.

He helps prop her up but Leslie resists.

LESLIE

I can do it myself--

But the one step she takes knocks her flat on her face.

CHAUNCEY

I know you can but you don't have to. Come on, let's take it nice and easy.

Unfortunately, they've come to the balance beam.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)

It's okay I'll be right behind you. Just keep going--

Leslie makes it halfway across the beam when she sees the pit below her moving.

LESLIE

Is that...

When she realizes they're cockroaches and that some of them have crawled up out of the pit and onto her leg she starts to panic and lose her footing.

But Chauncey is there. He sees her wobble and using all his weight, tackles her safely to the other side.

Now through, the three Gauntleteers watch as Kaito makes his way. That "wait and see" method has paid off...

He knows the cadence of the swinging blades and jackknives through them. He's timed the rotating ledges that threaten to push him off. He doesn't even falter at the erratic mace swing and lance dodge.

He makes it across the balance beam and collapses safely to the floor breathing heavily like he was in some kind of trance. He looks from one competitor to another.

KAITO HIROHITO

Everybody okay?

They nod and make their way to the entryway of...

THE GREAT TEMPLE

There are several doors that lead inside, in front of which are stacks of different materials that need to be chopped: Oaken boards, cinder blocks, sheets of glass, bricks, and blocks of ice.

Kenny Kamikaze's head appears projected above the archway to explain the rules.

KENNY KAMIKAZE

Answer the trivia incorrectly and break the wrong stack, this could lead you to your doom. Starting with Emperor Jimmu in 660 B.C. How many emperors has Japan had?

Chauncey turns to Kaito.

CHAUNCEY

Well?

KAITO HIROHITO

Don't look at me, I failed history.

But Li Na is already stepping up.

LI NA

Fortunate for you, history was my favorite subject...

She knows the answer and approaches the stack of cinder blocks. Written on them is the number 127.

She breathes in and out, in and out, over and over again, gathering her chi. When she's ready she leaps into the air and comes down hard on the cinder blocks, cracking them all cleanly down the center.

But as they fall apart its clear she's made a grave mistake. A swarm of hornets engulfs her before she can get her hand out. She reels back, clawing at her face, screaming--

LI NA (CONT'D)

I'm allergic!

Chauncey and Kaito drag her clear of their wrath but get stung several times themselves.

As the hornets dissipate though, Li Na starts to swell up.

CHAUNCEY

I'll call for the air lift--

Before he can make a move, Li Na is gripping his arm.

LI NA
No! I can go on!

But Chauncey shakes his head.

CHAUNCEY
You don't have to, you've done more
than enough.

He screams for a medic and they wait as a removal crane
swings down to pull Li Na's body out of the game.

As she rises up, the Gauntleteers watch her go, now suddenly
down to three. They have no choice but to keep going...

Chauncey stares at the remaining stacks.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)
We still need to get past this.

KAITO HIROHITO
Any ideas?

CHAUNCEY
Maybe...

He rises to his feet to look the problem in the eyes.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)
I don't know Japanese emperors, but
I do know the Gauntlet. It's
sadistic almost to a fault. It aims
to hurt. The cinder blocks seem
like the hardest to break but most
martial artists train on brick so
how much harder could it be...

He trails off, his eyes finding the sheets of GLASS.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)
You want a Gauntleteer to get hurt?
Have him cut his hand trying to
break.

KAITO HIROHITO
Care to try out your theory?

Chauncey reluctantly nods. It seems only fair. He steps
towards the glass stack.

CHAUNCEY
Any advice?

Kaito points to the surface.

KAITO HIROHITO
 Most beginning breakers fail
 because breaking is their aim.
 When your aim should be moving your
 hand all the way *through* the stack.

Chauncey sighs.

CHAUNCEY
 Nothing to it...

Kaito leaves him there to prepare. Chauncey psyches himself up. He's about to go through with it, fear in his eyes, when Kaito gives him one final word of warning:

KAITO HIROHITO
 If you believe you will fail, then
 you will.

Chauncey truly hears him. The words cut deep. He jumps into the air and bring his arm down like a hammer. He doesn't stop until he's kneeling on the ground having broken through every last sheet.

When the stack collapses into an open doorway, he wails in excitement. That's when the blood comes, spilling out of a gash on his forearm.

CHAUNCEY
 Ah, dammit!

He grips his arm in pain as Kaito rushes over to examine it. He frowns for a moment, before concluding--

KAITO HIROHITO
 No veins. Make sure it's free of
 glass and then we go.

He helps Leslie to her feet and together with Chauncey, they enter the temple.

INT. GREAT TEMPLE, ANTECHAMBER -- CONTINUOUS

They're in a medieval dungeon but there are picture frames around the room. Of Li Jun... of Berit... of Ueshiba Hirohito...

Videos are projected onto the walls of Ueshiba's championship run... along with b-roll of Chip Jaworski's television interview...

On the ceiling, in what might be blood, are the words:

"Destroy that which you find precious."

From multiple sources around the room, sand starts pouring in. There's now a clock on this exercise...

A lone SPOTLIGHT picks up a *wrecked motorcycle* in the middle of the room. Chauncey stares at it, pale as can be.

KAITO HIROHITO

What is that?

CHAUNCEY

My brother died in a motorcycle crash.

KAITO HIROHITO

And you wanted the bike?

CHAUNCEY

No...

(beat)

I think I wanted to be the thing that killed him.

Chauncey steps forward and kicks the bike until it topples over. He stomps on it, shattering the broken headlights and visor and denting the already crushed frame.

Leslie and Kaito watch as he works out something primal and violent. He's a sobbing mess by the time he finishes.

Among the photos on the walls, Leslie sees a picture of herself. She stares at it for a moment before gleaning what they want her to do. She cries as she punches through the frame.

Now it's Kaito's turn. He removes his katana and stabs at the picture of his father. It puts a hole in the wall and only lets more sand in.

KAITO HIROHITO

I don't understand...

He looks at the weapon in his hands. He sheathes it and breaks the thing in half. Still the sand continues to pour into the room...

Chauncey sees the Mirror of Eight Ta, strapped to Kaito's back.

CHAUNCEY

Kaito - it's the mirror!

But Kaito shakes his head, adamantly.

KAITO HIROHITO
No, they wouldn't do that.

CHAUNCEY
Why? Because you'd have to admit that you want the perfect win more than anything? They know! And the only way that you... that any of us make it out alive... is if you break that thing!

The sand is up to their necks by now, but still Kaito shakes his head.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)
Maybe it's easy for me to suggest because I've never been perfect. But believe me - a win is a win!

The sand is threatening to cut off their air supply. With the last of his breath, Chauncey screams:

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)
Do it!

Kaito holds out as long as he can, then *smashes* the mirror on the ceiling.

The sand immediately empties from the room and the Gauntleteers crash to the ground. In the shattered remnants of the Mirror of Eight Ta is a small BRASS KEY.

Chauncey nods, grateful Kaito listened.

CHAUNCEY (CONT'D)
Told ya.

Kaito fishes the key out and fits it in the only door in the room.

INT. THE TEA ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

They enter a stark white room and find a Sumo Sentinel at the opposite end sitting at a small table. But unlike the other Sumos, this one is almost the size of the room. He weighs at least 600 lbs. but most of it is muscle.

CHAUNCEY
I'm guessing this is the Boss level.

It's almost galling when the Sumo speaks.

THE TEA MASTER
Make tea.

CHAUNCEY
You want us to what?

KAITO HIROHITO
It's a tea ceremony. I haven't
been to one of these since I was
six...

LESLIE
I wish Li Na were still here.

KAITO HIROHITO
She wouldn't be able to help.
Every country's is different--

The TEA MASTER interrupts them.

THE TEA MASTER
You are allowed two mistakes...
(beat)
Not three.

CHAUNCEY
What happens if he makes more than
three mistakes?

Kaito motions.

KAITO HIROHITO
I'm guessing he uses that knife.

There's a TANTO BLADE laying beside the tea box.

CHAUNCEY
Don't make a mistake then.

Kaito takes a deep breath and steps forward.

KAITO HIROHITO
What time of year?

THE TEA MASTER
Cool weather season.

KAITO HIROHITO
What time of day?

THE TEA MASTER
Noon.

Kaito thinks for a moment, then bows. After what seems like forever, the Tea Master bows in return.

Kaito crosses to a STONE BASIN. Terrified to make a mistake, he keeps sneaking peeks at the Tea Master as he rinses his hands. But the Master betrays nothing...

Drying off, Kaito removes his slippers and kneels on the tatami before the Tea Master. Chauncey whispers to Leslie:

CHAUNCEY

How're we supposed to know when he makes a mistake?

Upon reaching for the tea ladle, the Tea Master slaps Kaito across the face. He hardly saw it happen. Only felt the massive blow...

After a moment, Kaito gathers himself enough to mumble:

KAITO HIROHITO

Stupid mistake. I forgot to clean the utensils...

Kaito opens the tea box and ritualistically cleans the tea bowl, whisk, and tea scoop and places them down in front in front of the tea master.

Again, he doesn't see the hand coming. This time it sends him across the room, at Chauncey and Leslie's feet. They help him to stand.

KAITO HIROHITO (CONT'D)

I put them in the wrong order.

CHAUNCEY

It's fine, just don't do it again, yeah?

Returning to the table, Kaito switches the whisk and tea spoon. He's about to let it be when the Tea Master goes to raise his hand once more.

Kaito instinctively moves the tea bowl to the opposite end of the table though, and the hand returns to the Tea Master's side.

Kaito and the others breathe a sigh of relief as he begins preparing the tea. A bamboo ladle rests atop an iron pot inside a sunken hearth. He fills a tea bowl and with shaking hands, picks up the whisk.

The Tea Master doesn't move an inch.

When Kaito finishes whisking, he bows again and raises the bowl to his mouth, taking a sip. He cleans the rim and turns the bowl, then offers it to the Tea Master.

The Master stares at the bowl, blankly, before taking it from Kaito and sipping from it.

Finally, he speaks.

THE TEA MASTER

You may pass.

The door behind him opens. As Chauncey and Leslie celebrate, the Tea Master takes hold of the tanto blade.

KAITO HIROHITO

No--

Kaito grabs the Sumo's hand to stop him, but the Tea Master only switches hands.

He drives the knife into his soft belly and pulls it across, committing holy seppuku. The three Gauntleteers watch in horror as he bleeds out in front of them.

Just before dying, he speaks Japanese to Kaito, telling him:

THE TEA MASTER

The poison works quick.

Chauncey walks up behind Kaito.

CHAUNCEY

What'd he say?

Kaito shakes his head.

KAITO HIROHITO

I couldn't make it out.

He heads for the door.

KAITO HIROHITO (CONT'D)

Come on, there's no time...

Entering the next room, Kaito holds his stomach, the poison already kicking in.

CHAUNCEY

What the matter?

KAITO HIROHITO

I'm fine. I prefer coffee. We should go--

But suddenly their way is blocked by a crop of SENTINELS, tasers buzzing away, looking for a victim.

Chauncey steps forward, but Kaito holds him back.

KAITO HIROHITO (CONT'D)
No, let me.

He draws his katana and says one last thing to Chauncey.

KAITO HIROHITO (CONT'D)
Just get her to the finish line.

On the monitors, behind the scenes, Fumiko watches as Kaito steps forward to face the sentinels.

FUMIKO
What is he doing?! No! Get me down there!

The Sentinels give him a wide berth, unsure of what to do. But when Chauncey and Leslie move to get past they can't stay neutral forever.

The nearest Sentinel tries to tase Leslie. Kaito swats his prod away with his katana.

Thinking it's safe to move again, Chauncey and Leslie make a break for the door, but the Sentinels bar the way.

Kaito's been itching for a fight. He swings on each of them, drawing the fight away from the exit.

At first the sentinels try to avoid him, but when Kaito takes down one of their own it becomes a melee.

First one tases him, then another. Soon Kaito is on the floor being electrocuted to death. From his prone position on the ground, he screams to Leslie and Chauncey--

KAITO HIROHITO
Run!

They don't have to be told twice. They sprint through the doorway and into a ballroom with a checkered floor.

No time to take it slow, they're halfway through when they notice SHRUIKAN streaking through the air, mere inches behind them--

CHAUNCEY
It's the white blocks! Don't step on them!

They hopscotch their way through the rest of the room, crashing through the door at the end of the hall.

THE LAIR OF THE DRAGON KING

They've made it to the end and see Kusanagi, lit dramatically and planted in a stone. Leslie motions for Chauncey to go ahead.

LESLIE

It's your show, chief.

Chauncey steps up to it, worried for a moment that he won't be strong enough. But he pulls it clean in one smooth motion.

As he does, every locked door is now opened. The route out is clear.

Chauncey stares at the magnificent blade. He never thought he'd make it this far...

That's when the Gauntlet starts sinking.

He and Leslie lock eyes and run flat out for the exits...

Ignoring the white checkered boxes and the Shruikans that shoot from the walls and barely miss them...

Neither of them has run this fast in their lives. The sandy depths are reaching up to swallow them whole. No sooner have they cleared a room, then it's eaten alive by the earth.

As they pass Kaito, they scream for him to follow them, but he's too busy fighting the Sentinels to get free and the room quickly fills with dirt.

They cross the Tea Room, past the Master's corpse...

The path out is getting more and more precarious, but somehow they're jumping through the doorway over the broken panes of glass.

They're near the Gauntlet stretch when Chauncey realizes it's now or never. He trips, letting Kusanagi slide ahead of him.

Leslie turns back to save him, but all he yells is:

CHAUNCEY

Grab the sword! It's yours!

Leslie waffles on the precipice for only a moment. The wall of debris is moments behind her...

Reaching down, she scoops up Kusanagi and runs.

Chauncey barely gets to his feet before the wall hits him. The earth and sand overtake him, sending him end over end.

He's moments from drowning when a loud metallic gong fills the air, repeating each time Leslie strikes it with Kusanagi.

The sinking Gauntlet slows to a crawl, then over so slowly... begins to rise again.

TEX EVANS (O.S.)

What a stunning ending -- a nail-biter all the way to the finish! American Leslie Mandell comes down with Kusanagi and survives the Gauntlet! This is one for the record books! For all of us here at Neon Gauntlet, I'm Tex Evans alongside Kenny Kamikaze asking you - do you have what it takes to be a Gauntleteer?! Thanks for watching! We'll see you next time!

An ASSISTANT DIRECTOR waits for the okay through his headset--

1ST A.D.

...Aaaaand we're clear!

Fumiko comes charging out on the arena floor.

FUMIKO

No! Turn the cameras back on!

As Leslie celebrates, Fumiko storms up to her.

FUMIKO (CONT'D)

Do you have any idea what you've done?! They'll kill us all!

Tanaka catches up with his boss.

TANAKA

Why would they be upset? They bet on Leslie here...

FUMIKO

They what?!

Fumiko turns back to him, surprised.

TANAKA

I changed the bet at the last second. She did have the worst odds, after all...

LESLIE

Hey!

Leslie's excessive celebration dims somewhat at this news. But Fumiko's fury now has a slim glimmer of hope...

FUMIKO

They won?!

TANAKA

They put all their money on a long shot...

(beat)

But so did you.

A dark cloud passes over her. All the joy from the last few moments has been sucked away.

TANAKA (CONT'D)

Speaking of, the boys upstairs would like a word. It seems the syndicate has lost faith in you.

FUMIKO

But-but, I've made them so much money--

Sato Murakami arrives from the stands with Shinobu in tow.

SATO MURAKAMI

Correction - your husband did. In your first year of running the Gauntlet you narrowly avoided disaster. If this hadn't been brought to our attention, who knows what could have happened...

Fumiko reels around on the Gauntleteers. Li Na has an oxygen mask covering her face. Kaito has been found and placed on a stretcher with an I.V. administered. Chauncey stands dirty and bloody between the two of them.

FUMIKO

Who did this?! Which one of you did this?

Hachiman's words echo back to Chauncey:

HACHIMAN (V.O.)

Our actions take place in the shadows, our deeds in the darkness...

None of the Gauntleteers betray the secret.

FUMIKO

When I find out who's responsible,
I'll kill every last one of you--

SATO MURAKAMI

That can wait. Right now, the
syndicate would like a word with
you.

The curtain has begun to draw on Fumiko.

FUMIKO

Dear god, no...

Her former henchman, Shinobu, walks over and places his hand
with the prosthetic finger on her shoulder.

SHINOBU

Come now, Ane-san. It'll only hurt
for a little while.

A pall comes over her face. Dumbfounded, she lets herself be
led away.

Next to Chauncey, Kaito struggles to speak from his
stretcher.

KAITO HIROHITO

How did you know it would work?

Chauncey smiles as he watches his fallen adversary disappear
into a back room.

CHAUNCEY

They push... you pull...

He heads for the locker room, a silent champion.

The Original Gaijin Kintaro.

The one, true...

Ninja.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END