

Hateshinai-Kumori

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Endless-Shadow

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1 - Jomaku - Prologue

Kuro Arashi. In Japanese it meant Black Tempest. He did not know that until he was 16. At birth his parents sent him to a monastery in China to be raised by monks of the Tai-Lo order. Unusually these monks spoke both the Cantonese dialect and Japanese so he was taught both. At age 8 he began his instruction in Eagle style kung fu. He mastered everything that could be taught by others and on his twelfth birthday he embarked on a journey seeking Tao (Enlightenment). He returned shortly after he turned thirteen to discover a message from his parent's village. He eagerly awaited news but it ended in despair as he discovered that his parents, and their village had been destroyed and he was needed to help the survivors. He wondered why they needed him and not someone older.

For another year he stayed at the monastery teaching the younger monks Kung-Fu, until another message arrived saying that if he did not go to the village the survivors would all die. His compassion drove him to help them and so he abandoned the monastery and returned to Japan. The ship arrived in Japan just before sunset three days after he received the message. Upon arrival however only devastation was there to greet him. As he cleared the peak that hid the village his eyes glowed with reflected fires, his ears rang with screaming of women and children, his skin tingled as fear caused adrenaline to rush through him, but worst of all was the cloying smell and metallic taste of blood and bile that battered down upon his nose and mouth. Doing his best to avoid the multiple corpses littering the ground he swiftly maneuvered his way to the temple that was clearly the centre of the village. As he reached it however an armoured horseman charged at him from behind. As the horse reared up, its deadly razor-like hooves pawing the air, he drew back his hand curling his fingers into a perfect eagle claw and struck out at the animal's ribs, crushing its lungs effortlessly. The beast fell, its rider trapped beneath it. The rider swiped with his spear but Kuro was too fast, grabbing the weapon and twisting it from the man's grip before using it to pierce the mans jugular killing him instantly. He left the spear where it was to stop the blood from spraying and continued into the temple.

As he approached the altar at the opposite end, he noticed a small man sitting cross-legged on the floor with his back turned. Before he could get the man's attention however, he spoke.

"Kuro-san I was wondering if you would come."

Kuro was surprised. *How does he know my name?* he thought to himself whilst drawing his arms up and shifting his weight back into a classic Eagle defensive stance.

"My name is Fusao, you must have many questions, but this is niether the time nor the place. I will do my best to answer you in the fullness of time. But now, let us flee this place." Rising to his feet Fusao took off, running faster than Kuro would have thought possible, and he had difficulty keeping up with him. Together they flew from the temple, past the lifeless figure of the horseman and sped to the gates. From there Fusao looked towards the mountains and, without warning, began sprinting towards the foothills. As they hurtled through the streets, the old man stopped and threw out his arm. Kuro almost fell is his attempt to halt.

"What...?"

Fusao shook his head and motioned for him to come closer. As Kuro peered around the building he saw another armoured guard, similar to the man who had attacked him. As he was preparing for a fight, a black-clothed figure detached itself from the twilight and landed without a sound behind the guard. Kuro was not sure what happened next. The figure appeared to touch the man on the shoulder, but the guard

collapsed almost instantly, quite unmistakably dead. *How did he do that?* thought Kuro, and then became instantly alert as he realised that the figure was moving toward them. He was sure it was a man, and thought that he was friendly or he would not have let himself be seen. Fusao, on the other hand walked out and he and the man pressed their palms together and bowed to each other. The man turned to leave, but in doing so he saw Kuro's face clearly and his eyes widened in almost reverence. He dropped to on knee bowing low before Kuro, before Fasao pulled him up fixing him with an angry glare and speaking quickly and quietly to him. A smile lifted the man's face mask. He turned, leapt into the darkening sky and vanished into the night.