

Manga

Kanjincho

Naka Masato



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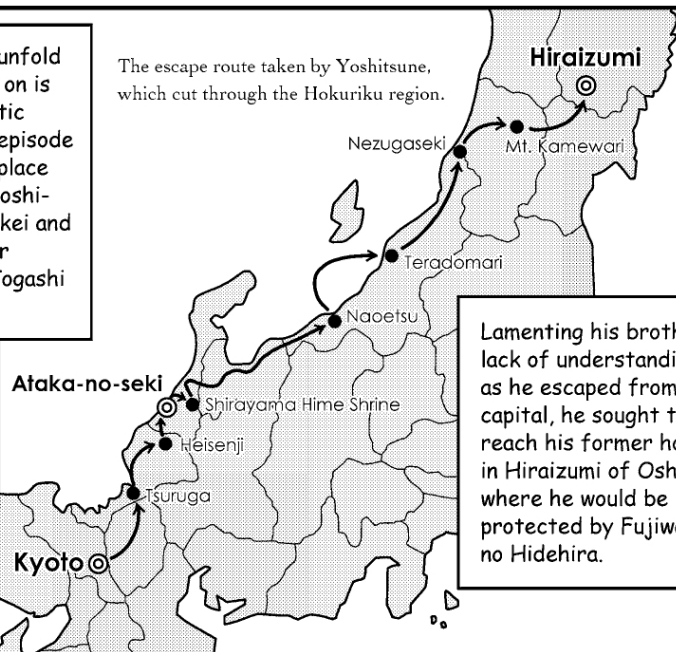
To avenge his father, Yoshitomo, who had been defeated during the Heiji Rebellion, Yoshitsune had subdued his Taira enemies in both the Battle of Yashima and Dan-no-ura, earning military glory. Alas, his desire to live freely clashed with that of his brother, Yoritomo, who aimed to reconsolidate military power in the form of the Kamakura bakufu government. He thus found himself on the run.

Could there be anyone more pitiful than Minamoto no Yoshitsune?



What will unfold from here on is the romantic historical episode that took place between Yoshitsune, Benkei and the barrier guardian Togashi Saemon.

The escape route taken by Yoshitsune, which cut through the Hokuriku region.



Lamenting his brother's lack of understanding as he escaped from the capital, he sought to reach his former home in Hiraizumi of Oshu, where he would be protected by Fujiwara no Hidehira.

Set in Komatsu, it is a tale of human empathy transmitted up until today.

Character

Musashibo Benkei

A monk who lived during the late Heian period (1100s). He began serving the military commander Minamoto no Yoshitsune as the latter's vassal since their meeting at the Gojo Bridge in Kyoto.



Naka Masato

Profile

Born 1970 in Komatsu City, Ishikawa Prefecture. Resolving to become a manga artist, he left for Tokyo at age 20, where he learned the basics of manga techniques over 3 years under the tutelage of Araki Hirohiko. Upon receiving an honourable mention for the "Young Jump Newcomer Award", he became the chief assistant of Kutsugi Ken-ichi. "Boryoku no Miyako", written by Toda Yukihiro, was the first manga series he illustrated. He also wrote the educational comic books, "Noguchi Hideyo" and "Walt Disney", donating them to all elementary, middle schools and libraries in Komatsu. His diverse accomplishments extend beyond work as a manga artist, including designing the official fan T-shirt for Olympic gold medalist Yoshida Saori, as well as helping to organise local events in Komatsu City. Recently, he has even dabbled in traditional crafts, creating designs for Kutani ceramic.

Togashi no Saemon


A warrior who lived between the late Heian period to early Kamakura period. He had been under orders to guard the Ataka-no-seki barrier and capture Yoshitsune's party, who were trying to escape in disguise.



Minamoto no Yoshitsune

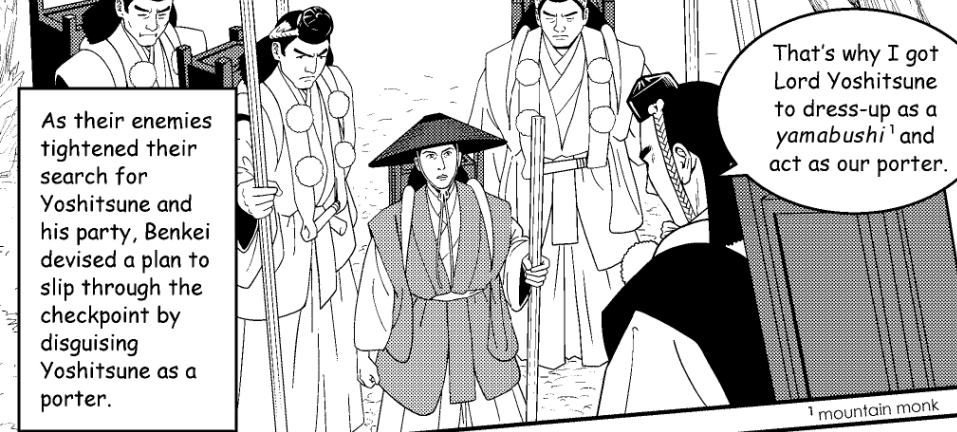
A military commander of the late Heian period and half-brother of Minamoto no Yoritomo, the founder of the Kamakura military government. He played a vital role in subjugating the Taira clan in the Genpei War between the Minamoto and Taira clans, yet...



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As their enemies tightened their search for Yoshitsune and his party, Benkei devised a plan to slip through the checkpoint by disguising Yoshitsune as a porter.

That's why I got Lord Yoshitsune to dress-up as a *yamabushi*¹ and act as our porter.

¹ mountain monk




Well then, let's go!



Understood.

Ok, you can take charge here. You all follow Benkei's plan as well.



Hear me, Benkei, reaching Oshu is going to be tough if we keep running into checkpoints like this.

It is the year 1187 in the Kamakura period.

Yoshitsune is escaping from Kyoto to Oshu with Musashibo Benkei and other loyal subjects. Along the way, they approach Ataka of the Kaga Province.



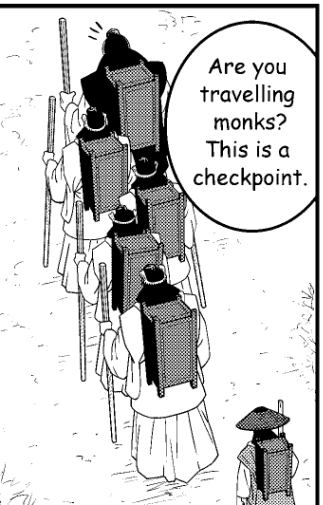
Musashibo Benkei



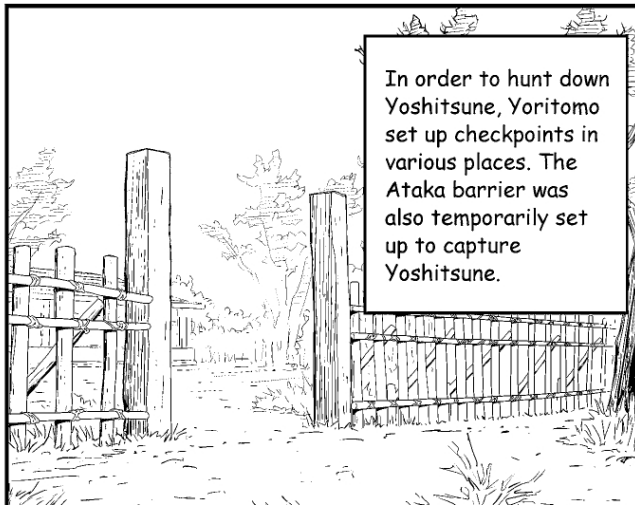
Minamoto no Yoshitsune

FWP

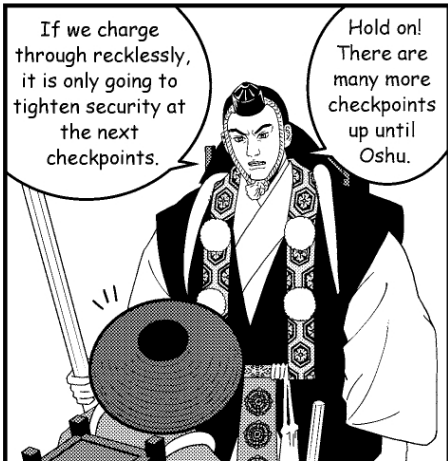
If futile escape is only going to get us killed by some random soldier, I rather take my own life with dignity.



Are you travelling monks? This is a checkpoint.



In order to hunt down Yoshitsune, Yoritomo set up checkpoints in various places. The Ataka barrier was also temporarily set up to capture Yoshitsune.



If we charge through recklessly, it is only going to tighten security at the next checkpoints.

Hold on! There are many more checkpoints up until Oshu.

That's what we carry our swords for!

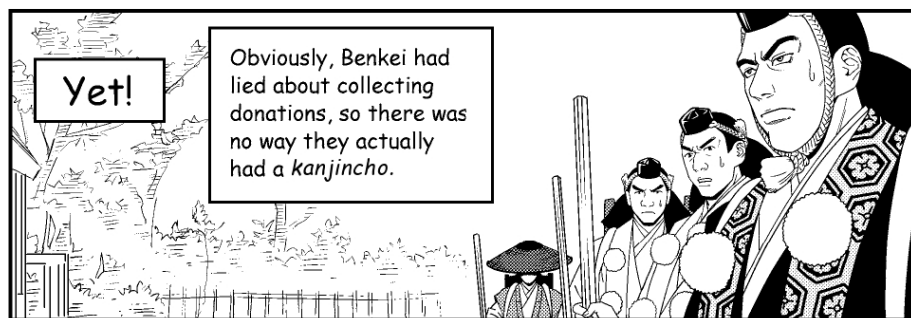
Indeed! Since we've come this far, let's just barge through the checkpoints!



Well?

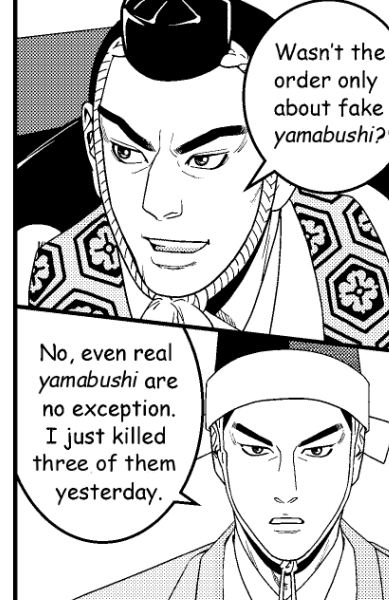
Seriously?
Asking me to
read the
kanjincho?

I see. Then you must
possess a *kanjincho* scroll,
with the written pledges
of donors.
Will you not read it
for me?



Yet!

Obviously, Benkei had
lied about collecting
donations, so there was
no way they actually
had a *kanjincho*.

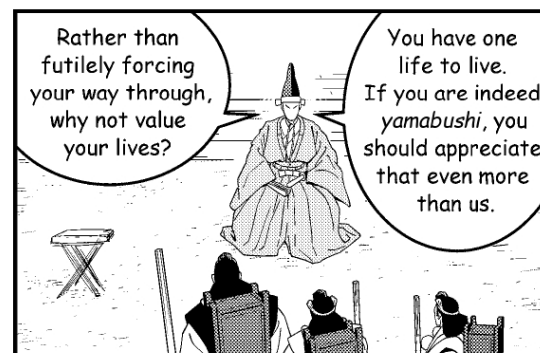


Wasn't the
order only
about fake
yamabushi?

No, even real
yamabushi are
no exception.
I just killed
three of them
yesterday.

Well, are you
not a whole lot
of *yamabushi*?
I cannot let
anyone pass.

Togashi no Saemon

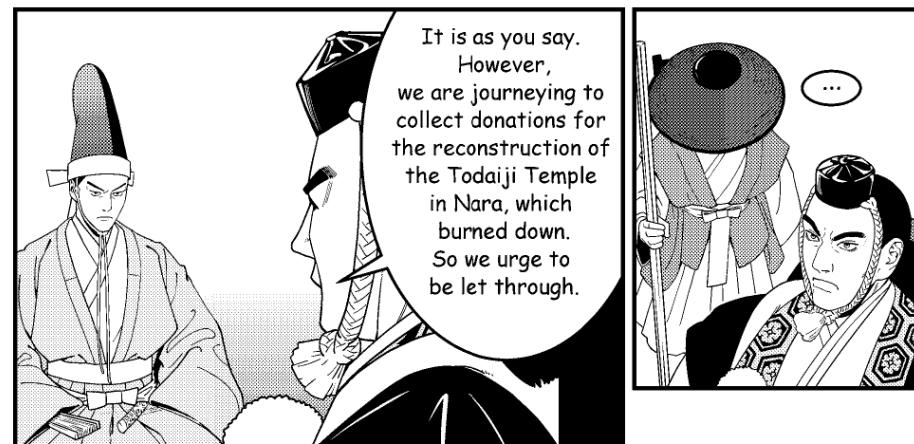


Rather than
futilely forcing
your way through,
why not value
your lives?

You have one
life to live.
If you are indeed
yamabushi, you
should appreciate
that even more
than us.



How awful...!



It is as you say.
However,
we are journeying to
collect donations for
the reconstruction of
the Todaiji Temple
in Nara, which
burned down.
So we urge to
be let through.

...



Understood.

KRCH

Benkei retrieved
a fake scroll.

!?

Resolved to do whatever it
took to get them through,
Benkei "recited" confidently
from the fake scroll,
giving nothing away.

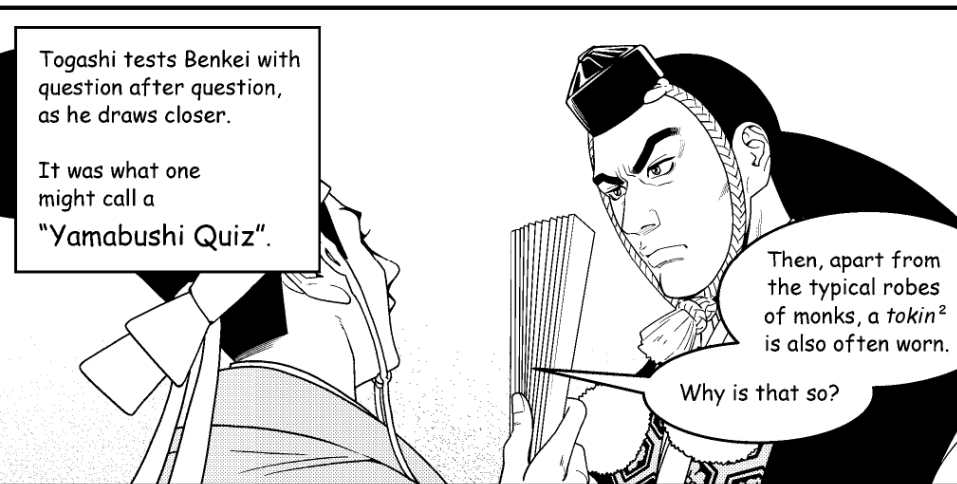


We also rid evil spirits and souls of bad emotions, so that they may enter Nirvana...

The doctrine of us yamabushi is to create a safe world where civilians can sleep in peace, by creating paths through treacherous mountains and passes, and exterminating dangerous animals and snakes.



Our great teacher is an autumn moon hidden by Nirvana's clouds. With no one to arouse us, we remain in the long slumber of life and death...



Togashi tests Benkei with question after question, as he draws closer.

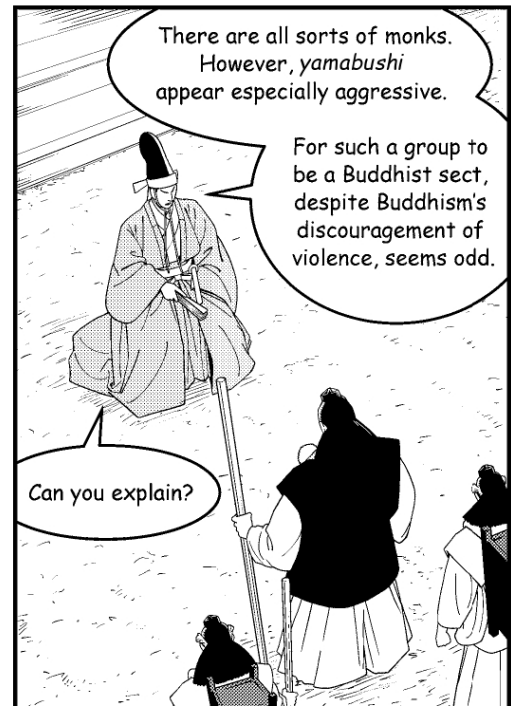
It was what one might call a "Yamabushi Quiz".

Then, apart from the typical robes of monks, a *tokin*² is also often worn.

Why is that so?



...in your honour, Namaste!



There are all sorts of monks. However, yamabushi appear especially aggressive.

For such a group to be a Buddhist sect, despite Buddhism's discouragement of violence, seems odd.

Can you explain?



Hearing you recite, it seems that you are indeed real yamabushi.

Then let me hear about the Way of the yamabushi too.



And why were such staffs introduced?

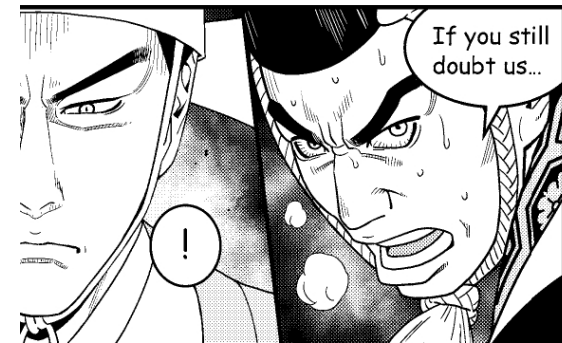
Although killing should be forbidden, why do you carry tachi swords?

And what is the significance behind your special attire?

I hear that yamabushi use staffs for self-defence. How did that come about?



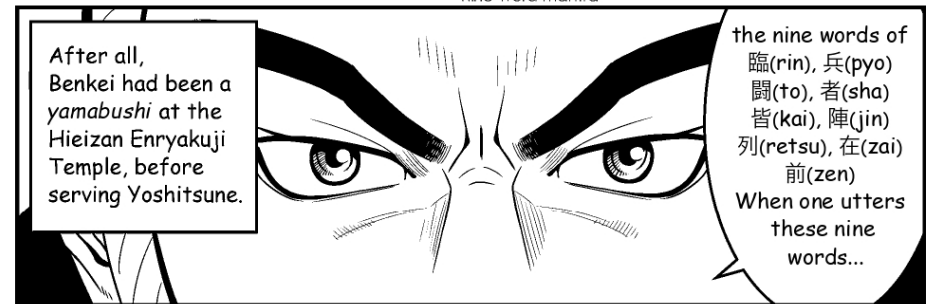
Argh!
How infuriating!
How can you lag
behind when you
are only carrying
one case! That's
why they're
suspicious!



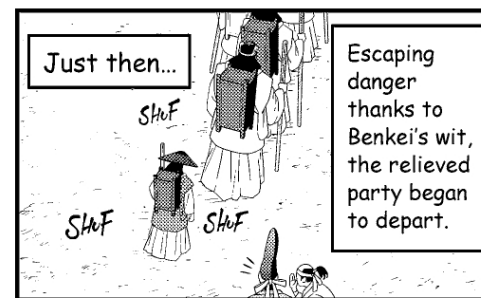
In short, the
Kujishington is...



³ nine-word mantra



the nine words of
臨(rin), 兵(pyō)
鬪(tō), 者(sha)
皆(kai), 陣(jin)
列(retsu), 在(zai)
前(zen)
When one utters
these nine
words...

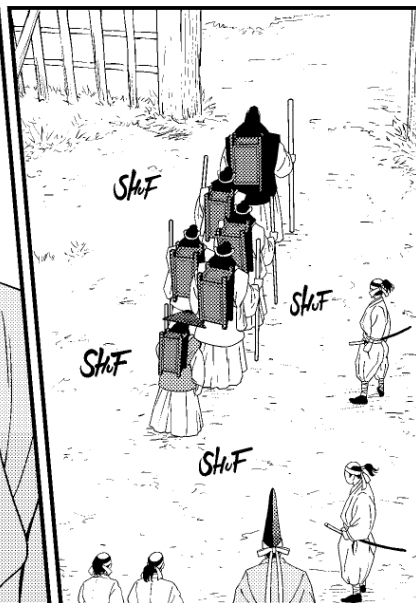


Escaping danger
thanks to
Benkei's wit,
the relieved party began
to depart.

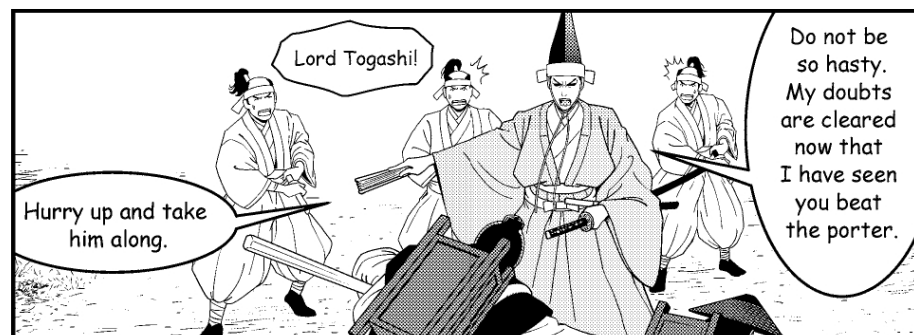


Since your
suspicions
have cleared,
we shall pass.

...please reach
Oshu safely



I will kill this
porter right
here!



Lord Togashi!

Hurry up and take
him along.

Do not be
so hasty.
My doubts
are cleared
now that
I have seen
you beat
the porter.

Togashi's actions enraged
Yoritomo,
but there were rumours
that he was spared death
by *seppuku*⁴, and dismissed
from his post as the
Ataka-no-seki guardian.



⁴ ritual suicide by disembowelment

We owe you...



Watch out not to
cause such trouble
again!

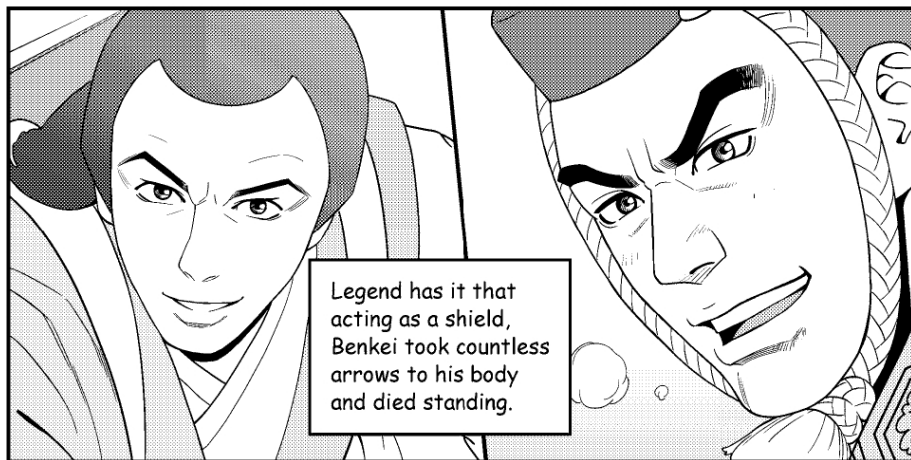
It seems the
deities have
spared your life.

If not for the
barrier guardian's
words, I really
would've beaten
you to death.



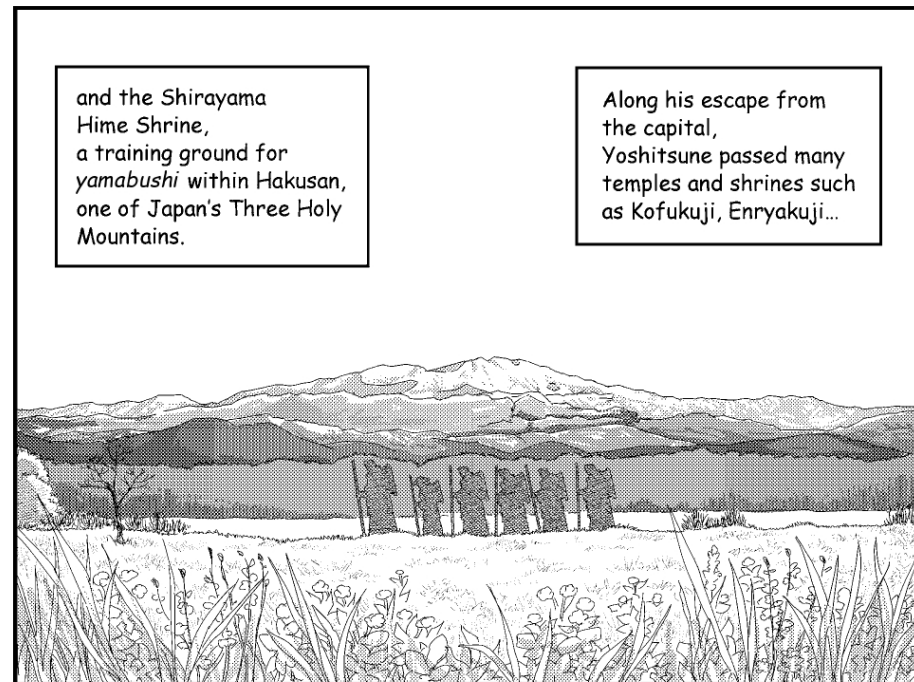
The ones protecting Yoshitsune as he withdrew into a temple, were Benkei and just a few loyal subjects.

Although Yoshitsune reached Oshu safely, he was later ambushed by the Hiraizumi army, who had succumbed to Yoritomo's pressure.



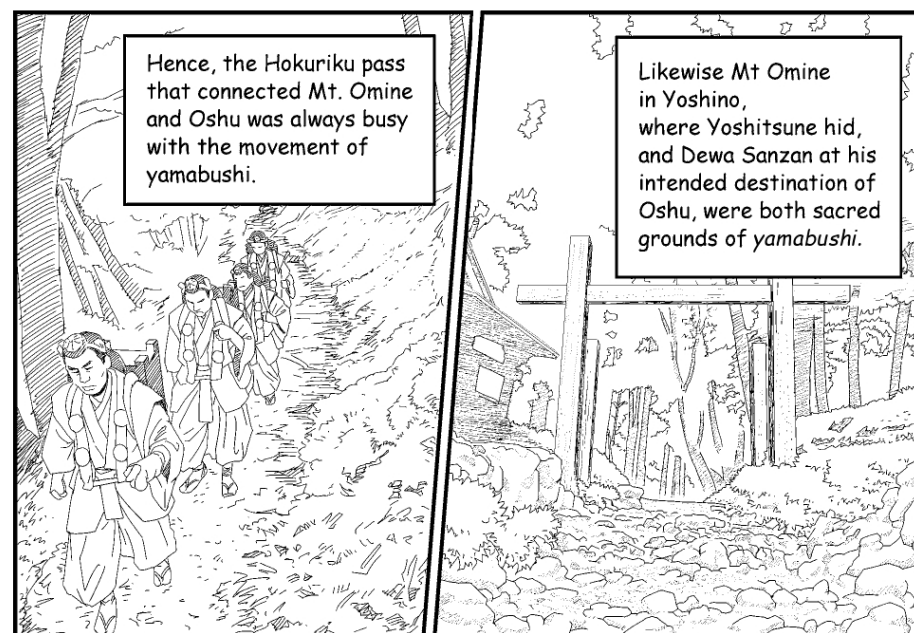
Legend has it that acting as a shield, Benkei took countless arrows to his body and died standing.

And with that, the legend of Yoshitsune and Benkei, that accompanied the chaos of the late Heian period, comes to an end.



and the Shirayama Hime Shrine, a training ground for *yamabushi* within Hakusan, one of Japan's Three Holy Mountains.

Along his escape from the capital, Yoshitsune passed many temples and shrines such as Kofukuji, Enryakuji...



Hence, the Hokuriku pass that connected Mt. Omine and Oshu was always busy with the movement of *yamabushi*.

Likewise Mt Omine in Yoshino, where Yoshitsune hid, and Dewa Sanzan at his intended destination of Oshu, were both sacred grounds of *yamabushi*.

Timeline: Yoshitsune and the Genpei War

Year	Events concerning Yoshitsune	Key events in Japan and the Kaga Province	
1159	Yoshitsune is born. His father, Yoshitomo, falls to Taira no Kiyomori.	Genpei War (between Minamoto no Yoshitomo and Taira no Kiyomori)	Heian period
1160	Yoshitsune's life is spared after his mother, Tokiwa Gozen, pleads for Taira no Kiyomori's mercy		
1167		Taira no Kiyomori becomes Daijo-daijin (Chancellor)	
1169	Yoshitsune is initiated into Kurama-dera Temple in Kyoto		
1174	Yoshitsune is placed under the care of Fujiwara no Hidehira in Hiraizumi, Oshu Province.	Hotoke Gozen from the Kaga Province enters the capital and becomes a shirabyoshi (court dancer), earning the affections of Kiyomori	
1176		The Yusenji Temple in Komatsu is burned down by a Kaga governor	
1180	Yoshitsune leaves Hiraizumi to meet his brother, Yoritomo.	Yoritomo raises an army to fight the Taira clan.	Kamakura period
1183		Minamoto no Yoshinaka (Yoshitsune and Yoritomo's cousin) launches an attack on the Taira and invades Kyoto.	
1184	Yoshitsune defeats Yoshinaka. Emperor Go-Shirakawa, who had been held captive by Yoshinaka, appoints Yoshitsune as a general.		
1185	Yoshitsune demolishes the Taira clan in the battles of Yashima and Dan-no-Ura. Kajiwaru Kagetoki, Yoritomo's spy, reports to Yoritomo that Yoshitsune acted against authority. Yoshitsune heads to Kamakura, but is denied entry by Yoritomo. Yoshitsune attempts to hunt down Yoritomo, but abandons the plan. He heads for Saigoku, but is shipwrecked in a storm. An official decree to hunt down Yoshitsune is issued.	The Taira clan is completely obliterated during the Battle of Dan-no-Ura. Yoritomo assigns governors to various domains.	
1187	Yoshitsune heads for Fujiwara no Hidehira's base in Hiraizumi.		
1189	Yoshitsune is ambushed by Fujiwara no Hidehira's son, Yasuhiro, and takes his own life		
1192		Yoritomo becomes shogun (military ruler of Japan)	

A Timeless Tale: Ataka-no-seki Barrier's "Kanjinchō"



Minamoto no Yoshitsune played a big role in paving the way for the age of the samurai. Yet, his actions received unfair judgement, leading to his early death at 31 years old. There has been so much sympathy for Yoshitsune's plight that it gave rise to the expression *hangan biki*, referring to strong partial sympathy felt for an underdog or tragic character.

Together, Minamoto no Yoritomo and Yoshitsune had quelled the chaos of the Genpei War and opened the doors to a new era. What exactly could have happened to tear them apart and lead to the tragic killing of the younger brother by the older?

Upon hearing that his older brother, Yoritomo, was raising an army to defeat the Taira clan and avenge their father, Yoshitsune rushed down from Hiraizumi, with Musashibo Benkei and other loyal subjects, to join forces and lead the fight.

Yoshitsune engaged in battle after battle, eventually wiping out the entire Taira clan. After the war ended, Yoshitsune made his way towards Kamakura, yet Yoritomo did not permit his entry into the capital. That was because Yoritomo had received reports of Yoshitsune's disregard of authority. As Yoritomo's distrust of Yoshitsune grew, a great divide began to separate the two brothers.

And eventually, they came to oppose one another.

There are several theories about how this conflict came about, one of them being that Yoshitsune, who had been used to acting independently, despised being confined by social structures and had somewhat of an individualistic mindset. However, to his brother Yoritomo, who sought to establish a new era of samurai rule, such a mindset might have seemed outdated.

No matter the era, there will always be times when people feel stifled by society and seek liberation. That is perhaps why so many people hold admiration for Yoshitsune as a tragic hero, for being true to himself and living by his principles.

As the setting for the moving tale of *Kanjinchō*, the Ataka-no-seki Barrier conveys an important message to all of us living in the present. That is, the brilliant spirits of "wisdom, compassion and bravery", as exemplified by Benkei, Togashi and Yoshitsune respectively, that are so valuable precisely because life is fleeting.

2 Ataka Sumiyoshi Shrine

The shrine within which the Ataka-no-seki Barrier Ruins lie. The kami (deity) enshrined here is said to grant devotees safe travel at sea and success at overcoming obstacles.



3 Former Shinohara Battlefield-Sanemori Burial Mound

The old battlefield where the armies of Taira no Koremori and Minamoto no Yoshinaka fought. Although the Taira army lost this battle, their veteran general Saito Sanemori refused to retreat, and it is said that he even fought with his hair dyed black so that he would not be taken lightly as an old warrior. However, the valiant fight was in vain, as Sanemori was ultimately killed by Tezuka Mitsumori. It is said that his remains were buried within these grounds.



1 Ataka-no-seki Barrier Ruins

A key transit point between water and land transportation that occurred along the old Hokuiku highway. It is known as the setting for the Noh song "Ataka" and Kabuki play "Kanjincho". Located within a pine forest overlooking the sea, statues of Benkei, Togashi and Yoshitsune can be found standing nearby.



4 Former Shinohara Battlefield-Kubiarai Pond

The pond where Saito Sanemori's decapitated head was said to be washed after he fell to Minamoto no Yoshinaka's forces. Although Sanemori fought with his hair dyed black, his real greyed appearance was revealed to Yoshinaka once his head was washed. Yoshinaka is said to have wept upon seeing that, as Sanemori had in fact been Yoshinaka's childhood saviour.



5 Birthplace of Hotoke Gozen in Haramachi

The neighbourhood of Haramachi in Komatsu holds a historical site with connections to Hotoke Gozen, a character appearing in "The Tale of the Heike". The remains of Hotoke Gozen's former residence and grave found there served as a place of retreat for Hotoke Gozen when she returned to her hometown. Today, a stone hall and memorial tower stand within an area believed to have been the cremation grounds, and serve as places of worship.



6 Kabuto Helmet of Tada Shrine

A helmet believed to have belonged to the Taira general, Saito Sanemori. During the Edo period, Matsuo Basho passed by the Tada Shrine while on his journey that produced the famed text, "The Narrow Road to the Deep North". Upon seeing the helmet, he dedicated a poem to it.



7 Neagari Pine

As written in the "Genpei Seisui", Inoue Jiro Norikata, who had been on the Minamoto side, was defeated by the Taira forces at this spot. According to "The Chronicle of Yoshitsune", Yoshitsune's party also visited this spot on their way to Hiraizumi in Oshu.



Sites Associated with the Genpei