



The Tao of Ato

Or

“Would you like Noodles with your Tanuki?”

The GagMen Podcast Episode 15

An Asian Fantasy Adventure

Suggested level for Player Characters 4-6

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2	Time to cut the Cheese	8
Adventure Summary.....	2	Let’s Put A Bow On This!.....	9
Setting/Theme	3	The Super Happy Fun Ending (and bonus gore) ...	9
Tengoku.....	3	The Cliffhanger	9
The Great Makudo-Maru	3	Dreaded Evil Lame Ending.....	9
The Village of Hokai.....	4	Some points to consider.....	9
The Hwang-Tang-Ba Monastery.....	4	Characters.....	10
Ginka Palace	4	Cho-Lu	10
Plot.....	5	Yama.....	10
“We need your help!”	5	Tanuki Warriors.....	11
A most humble offer	5	Tekazi	11
That’s a big boat	5	Fortress Guards	11
Riding a turtle into trouble.....	6	Ato.....	12
Where everybody knows your name... ..	6	Abuzo	12
Tanuki to the Rescue.....	6	Ogre Henchmen	12
The Mission Position	6	Shinobi Assassins.....	12
“Are we on the Guest list?”	7	Details	13
Conflict.....	8	Oni.....	13
Crashing the Party	8	Foo Dog Statue	13
		Tanuki.....	14





Introduction

Welcome to Tengoku, a beautiful and exotic Asian themed locale. This Adventure is meant to have an East Asian feel, so as you work with the campaign, consider consulting the *Advanced Dungeon & Dragons: Oriental Adventures*. If you like to use music to establish mood, go to Pandora and try the “Yoshida Brothers.” The band itself will work perfectly for the theme, as will the other music played afterwards. If you really want to sell the atmosphere to your group, you can go the extra mile: Decorate the game space with bamboo, or order some Chinese/Japanese food to be delivered during the game! This Adventure can also be played as a follow up to our previous D&D campaigns set in the World of Brattleburg. At the end of the story you could have the players return to their homeland with all kinds of Asian themed gear and items. While this adventure could most certainly be stretched into a full campaign, it was written as a one or two session game, with *Basic Fantasy RPG* rules by Chris Gonnerman. But, as is the “GagMen Way (trademark pending),” we encourage you to be a creative and enthusiastic GM; create new content, throw in your own twist or flair, and polish up any parts of the game where you think we took a wrong step. As the GM, YOU are a co-writer, so make it your own!

Adventure Summary

The Party is asked to escort a cricket to a monastery located in the exotic land of Tengoku, though the journey itself is fraught with peril (and Shinobi). Once in Tengoku, however, the party finds more than they bargained for. With mad Ogres, an enslaved nation, transformed princes and heroic Tanuki, the plot becomes complicated quickly! Can the heroes navigate the Dangers of the Tengoku? Are they a match for the Evil Warlord Tekazi and Abuzo, the strange Blue Oni? Be wary; for in Tengoku, danger lurks on the wind, mystery follows your footsteps, and every challenge asks: “Do you know the Tao of Ato?”





Setting/Theme

Tengoku

A small island continent that can be difficult to reach due to the treacherous waters that surround it. Even the most experienced sailors have a difficult time navigating their way to the island, and even then only with the sturdiest of ships. In fact, the Makudo-Maru is the only ship able to make the trip safely; as such all trade, travel, and commerce relies on the huge vessel. While the waters around Tengoku are home to sea monsters, most have learned not to interfere with the voyage of the Makudo-Maru; the ship's defenses and armaments make it more than a match for any serpent.



Tengoku is known for its many herbs and spices used for anything from medicinal purposes to getting your chicken just right. There's even an old legend that tells of a time when an overreaching Colonel came for Tengoku's chicken recipes, but was repelled by a great Tengoku General.

The island has a variety of environments, such as the Tien-Zo Mountains and their snowcapped peaks, which serve as home to the great Hwang-Tang-Ba monastery. The land is cut by the Sweetwater Rivers, of which the people say that the water is so sweet and pure that one drink will quench any thirst. The rivers feed the lush forests and fertile farmlands, which provide some of the most delicious vegetation ever grown.

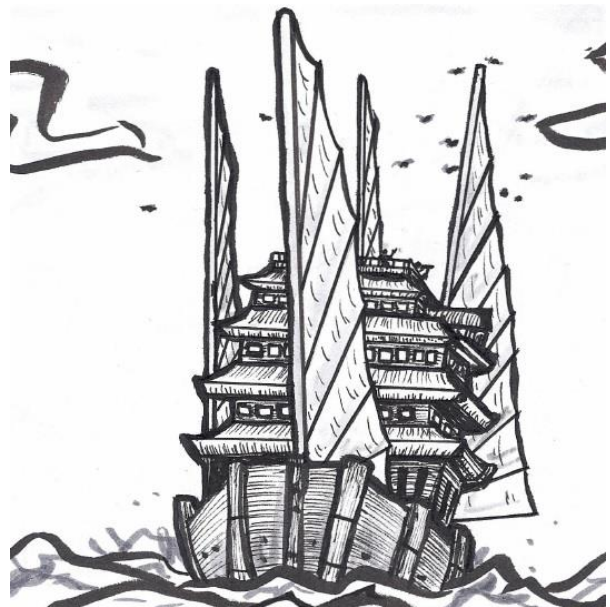
The people of Tengoku tell of the legend of the great and terrible Oni spirit "Kimon." He was an evil spirit that tormented the people of the world until he was sealed behind a demon gate. Kimon was so powerful that many feared he would eventually break free. The land of Tengoku was placed over the gate to constantly sap the power of the evil Oni and keep him weak. Some say that is why the waters surrounding the land are so violent: They manifest the anger of Kimon

himself. Don't worry, though, it's just a silly legend to tell children so they don't sail too far out to the sea.

When the PCs arrive in Tengoku, they will find that the island has turned from a sea side paradise to a police state overrun with Ogres. The current ruler Daimyo Tekazi has brought in an Ogre militia to control the populace. Ogres can be seen everywhere bullying the people into submission. Daimyo Tekazi initiated a coup on the rightful heir to the kingdom ten years ago, and has forced his rule through the ogre presence ever since.

The Great Makudo-Maru

The Great Makudo-Maru is a huge tower ship used by the people of Tengoku to transport people and goods. Designed much differently from traditional vessels, the ship looks as though someone built a pagoda on top of a freighter. *The Makudo-Maru* does not have sails, but uses an immense paper like canvas made from woven and pressed bamboo. Armed with over fifty cannons, the *Makudo's* size and armament is usually more than enough to warn away the casual pirate attack.





Plot

“We need your help!”

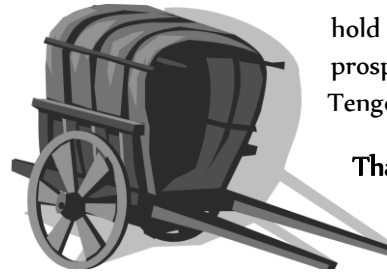
Fresh from recent Adventures, our heroes are approached while they are passing through a market by Cho-Lu. Cho-Lu asks if they are the group he was told about by his friends, the ogres, Gnawt and Happi (from The Pride of Brattleburg). Cho-Lu may mention some of the party’s previous feats, and urge them to come with him to talk about a job. If the Party is hesitant, Gnawt and Happi can happen along and encourage them to trust Cho-Lu.

A most humble offer

Once the introductions are out of the way, Cho-Lu will ask the players to help him, and if necessary offer a large sum for their service. Cho-Lu will bring them to the local inn where he is staying and introduce Yama and little Ato.

Yama is a twenty year old woman of subtle beauty, while little Ato is a small cricket in a wooden cage. At this point Yama won’t speak much, and may shy away from players if they try to interact with her. She will be holding Ato’s cage and pay a lot of attention to him. Cho-Lu will explain that he and Yama have been traveling the world and it’s time to return home to Tengoku.

They will claim that they are returning the cricket to the Hwang-Tang-Ba monastery. Little Ato is sacred to the monks and nuns and must not be harmed on the journey. Some less reputable persons have noticed little Ato’s importance, and have made past attempts to kidnap him for ransom. Fearing that he would not make it back to Tengoku without another such incident, Cho-lu is willing to promise a hefty sum for protection, once they make it the monastery safely. If the players become curious about Cho-Lu’s story, he will tell them that little Ato is a luck cricket believed by the monastery to

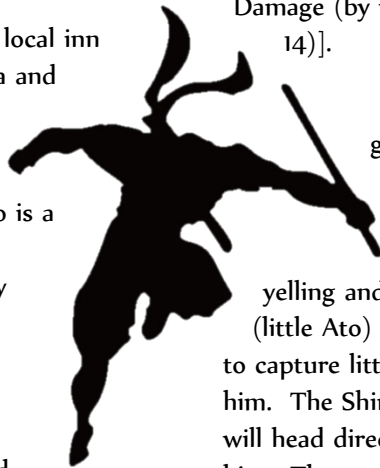


hold the key to the prosperity of the land of Tengoku.

That’s a big boat

Once the players agree to help Cho-Lu, he will tell them that he has booked passage on the return voyage of *The Makudo-Maru* to Tengoku. The players could have a day to prepare for the trip before they head to the ship. When the players decide to head to the ship, there should be no issues with boarding and they should begin their four to five day voyage.

During a night on the voyage, the party will be attacked by Shinobi assassins sent by Tekazi [see “Shinobi Assassins” (AC 15, Thief 5, #AT 1, Damage (by weapon), Mv 30’, Sv T5, MI 7, HP 14)].



They will attack anyone that gets in their way, but will be focused on capturing little Ato. The Shinobi shouldn’t be too difficult to defeat, and they should be yelling and demanding the key to the gate (little Ato) during the fight. The Shinobi want to capture little Ato, and will avoid hurting him. The Shinobi can sense Ato’s location and will head directly to wherever Yama is hiding him. The scenario could be interesting if the players don’t have a solid strategy for guarding little Ato., If the Shinobi make it past the players undetected, have Yama scream out for help.

If the players question Cho-Lu once the Shinobi are defeated, have him play dumb and explain that the Shinobi must have boarded as passengers and planned their attack during the voyage. As for why they wanted little Ato, he will claim he has no idea. Yama should be very relieved and grateful to the players for saving little Ato, and may even let it slip that Ato means the world to her.





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Riding a turtle into trouble

The rest of the trip should go smoothly, but before reaching port Cho-Lu will tell the players that he also chartered a small turtle ship to the small village of Hokai, as it is closer to the monastery than the port. When the turtle ship arrives, it is a square ship with a spiked roof, powered by oars and square sails and a dragon head at the bow. One short trip and the players should reach the docks of Hokai. When they walk into the village they will receive a few curious looks from the villagers (as the town doesn't get too many visitors), nevertheless the people should still be friendly.

Where everybody knows your name...

Cho-Lu will direct the players to a local izakaya (a sake shop) for refreshment while he arranges transportation. Once the players get comfortable, a group of three ogres enter the izakaya and demand to speak with the owner. When he comes out they will demand tribute, and the owner will hand over a small pouch of money. The ogre will be angry, however, as he expected a larger sack. The owner will say "That's all I have, another patrol cleaned me out just a few days ago!" The ogres will angrily declare "If you can't pay then we'll take it out of your customers!" The ogres will start demanding the customers hand over their valuables.



If the players don't get involved right away, have the ogres walk towards Yama and ask if they know her. One of the ogres will agree, saying "I think I know who this is." Yama will attempt to leave, but will be stopped and grabbed by the ogre, who will then try to leave with her. The players can intervene at any time, but as soon as they do the ogres will react violently and start a brawl. {Ogre Henchmen (AC

15, #AT 1, Damage 2d6, Mv 30', Sv F4, MI 10, HD 4D+1)}

Once the ogres begin losing the fight, one of the ogres will run outside, where Abuzo is waiting by a wagon. Seeing the trouble, Abuzo will pull a tarp from the wagon to reveal two Foo Dog statues. He will then place two rectangular scrolls on the Statues, which imbues them with spirits; Abuzo will then order the statues to attack the players. {See Foo Dog Statue (AC 16, #AT 3, Damage Claw/Claw/Bite (2d6/2d6/1d10), Mv 40', Sv Fighter 5, MI 12, HP 38)}

Cho-Lu will return just in time to see Abuzo summon the statues. He will rush past the ogres to help the group defend Yama and the cricket. As Cho-lu passes, Abuzo will recognize him and slash at Cho-Lu with a poisoned blade, cutting his side. Seemingly unhurt, Cho-Lu will help fight the statues while Abuzo leaves to warn Tekazi.



Tanuki to the Rescue

This should be a tough battle, and if the players need help, the Tanuki can be brought in to finish off the statues. When the fight ends, Cho-Lu will fall to the ground, overcome by the poison. The Warriors will immediately rush to Cho-Lu, see his wound, and urge the players to follow them. The Tanuki will take Cho-Lu and the group to the monastery for medical help. The Tanuki will treat the players kindly and tell them that they will explain later.

The Mission Position

When the players have arrived at the monastery, the Tanuki will rush Cho-Lu to Abbess Minay. She will do all she can to help him,





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applying herbs and singing to him lovingly. While Cho-lu is being treated, Yama will explain that Minay and Cho-lu were very close many years ago, but destiny would keep them apart. Minay would follow the path that would lead her to becoming the abbess, and Cho-lu would leave to care for Yama. Despite all her efforts, Abuzo's poison will be beyond her ability to heal. Minay and Cho-Lu will embrace, and she will kiss his forehead before summoning the players. Cho-Lu will weakly plead "You must... Restore... Ato... or all... will suffer..." With this, Cho-lu will die, and Yama and Minay will be visibly upset.

After a few moments, Minay will approach the party and explain how Daimyo Tekazi came into power.

"Many years ago two cousins of the royal family, Lin and Tekazi, vied for the affections of a beautiful maiden by the name of Daiyu. Daiyu had a difficult choice, but chose Lin and married him. Tekazi became enraged and vowed to get revenge on Lin for taking the love of his life. Unexpectedly the Daimyo Fang died without an heir, leaving Lin next in line to be the Daimyo. This further enraged Tekazi and so he laid out a plan to not only get revenge, but also become Daimyo."

"Tekazi finally employed ogres to murder the royal family; he also had the help of a very powerful Oni Abuzo. Oni don't really care much for the political affairs of men, so Abuzo must have had another reason to get involved. Abuzo cast a spell and separated the majority of Ato's spirit and put it in a ruby crystal, Ato's body was turned into a cricket, and it was the Tanuki warriors that grabbed cricket Ato and Yama before Abuzo could do anything else to them. They gave Yama and Ato to Cho-Lu, who was loyal to the family; he took them to a land where no one has ever heard of them. It was decided that after ten years they would return to Tengoku, where they planned on undoing the spell on Ato and retaking the throne."

Still mourning her caretaker, Yama will kneel and bow before the party, then ask forgiveness for not telling the whole truth. She will beg them to help her and Ato. If the players need coaxing, remind them that they will be compensated once the goals have been met.

"Are we on the Guest list?"

Minay will have a plan for the players to be guided by the three Tanuki, known as Hu-Li, Du-Li, and Lu-Li. As masters of stealth and path finding, they know of a secret path into the Daimyo's Forbidden Fortress. When the party gets in they will have to find a secret chamber above the throne, where sits a ruby crystal. All they have to do is place a magic spell scroll on the ruby, and the spell will be broken, reuniting Ato's spirit and body.





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Conflict

Crashing the Party

The anniversary party of Tekazi taking power is taking place on the ground floor. After restoring Ato to his human form, the group will sneak him to the party, where his appearance will get the attention of the crowd and Tekazi. Tekazi will immediately challenge Ato to an honor battle for the right to rule. Tekazi will choose Abuzo and two lesser Oni to represent him. Ato will take the players aside, and ask them to represent him. Tekazi, overhearing the request, will offer the players money and power to side with him.

Time to cut the Cheese

If the player accept Ato's request, they will face Abuzo. The Mystic Oni will summon the gifts of the four winds the arena, lifting the duelists off the ground. All participants in the battle will move at three times normal movement rates, but characters will need to make dexterity checks to avoid overshooting or undershooting their landing spot. The winds will throw random items into the air, every turn each participant should roll 1d6. If the result is an odd number, roll on random flying item (below) and the item flies up and strikes the character. The struck player gets a free defensive attack on the item, if they strike the items AC or better than the item is destroyed or knocked out of the way before striking the character. If the character is struck then apply damage based on the flying item. The Oni suffers no penalty from the four winds effect or the flying items.



1d10	Random Flying Items	AC	Damage
1	Banana	12	1
2	Mango	12	1
3	Pineapple	10	1d2
4	Vase	12	1d4
5	Watermelon	10	1d4
6	Plate	15	1d4
7	Apple	12	1
8	Coconut	16	1d4
9	Kiwi	16	1
10	Cheese Wheel	12	1d4

When the players defeat Abuzo, an earthquake will be felt throughout the island, and a loud voice will bellow "I'm free! Finally free!" No one knows where the sound came from, but everyone on the island heard and felt it.





Let's Put A Bow On This!

The Super Happy Fun Ending (and bonus gore)

If all goes well, then Tekazi's champion will be defeated and, and Tekazi must perform seppuku to avoid the dishonor and shame he has brought to his family. Ato is the new Daimyo. The players will be celebrated as heroes rewarded handsomely by the new Daimyo, allowing the sun to shine in Tengoku once again.

The Cliffhanger

As an optional ending that could lead to further adventures, the loud voice the players heard was the great Oni "Kimon", who was somehow released when Abuzo was killed. When the players return to Brattleburg the land is laid

to waste and Kimon must be defeated in order to end his reign of terror on the world.

Dreaded Evil Lame Ending

If the group decides to take Tekazi's offer and join him, the Tanuki will volunteer to fight for Ato out of respect for Cho-Lu. If the Players defeat them, then the "Dreaded Evil Lame" ending can be as dark as you would like.

Some points to consider: The main goal is to return Ato's spirit and body, if Ato is killed, then the next in line is Tekazi, it's possible to end with Yama taking the throne, but it would make the story a little sadder since it means that Ato is dead.





Characters



Yama (AC 14, Fighter 2, #AT 1, Damage S. Sword (1d6), Mv 30', Sv F2, MI 8, HP 14)

Yama is a true daughter of the Daimyo, sheltered her whole life out of fear that there would be no hope for Tengoku. She is a little timid, but will stand up for Ato or Cho-Lu if needed. Cho-Lu has trained her in several combat styles, and she is an accomplished martial artist and tactician. Because of her extensive studies, she considers Tengoku as a single entity in which all the people, creatures, and treasures are all intertwined and bound together. Her empathy is strong for the suffering people of her homeland; she hopes to restore order by placing her brother Ato properly into power.

Cho-Lu (AC 13, Fighter 4, #AT 1, Damage Staff (1d6), Mv 30', Sv F4, MI 9, HP 26)

Cho-Lu has been a humble servant of the royal family for a quarter century and has become a beloved father figure to Ato and Yama. Long ago Cho-Lu was a trusted guard of the Daimyo, but time has since weakened his strength of body and added to his strength of mind. He no longer carries a sword, but in its place he wields a staff and is just as adept in its use. Long ago he was deeply involved with Minay, but the complications in their lives prevented them from having time for each other until it too late. The care and protection of Ato and Yama are his first concern. Though they may think of him as a father, he has never wavered from his service to their true father.



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Tanuki Warriors

Hu-Li (AC 14, Fighter 3, #AT 1, Damage Staff (1d6), Mv 30', Sv F3, MI 9, HP 18)

Du-Li (AC 13, Fighter 3, #AT 1, Damage Wakizashi (S. Sword) (1d6), Mv 30', Sv F3, MI 9, HP 20)

Lu-Li (AC 15, Fighter 3, #AT 1, Damage Rimankyu (S. Bow) (1d6), Mv 30', Sv F3, MI 9, HP 17)

Hu-Li, Du-Li, and Lu-Li. These great warriors live in the monastery, and can often be silly and lighthearted, but they are fierce combatants. As Tanuki they stand only three and a half feet tall and are covered in fur. The three warriors have sworn a life debt to Minay and they will protect her and the monastery to the death. They have dedicated their lives to training and preparing to remove Tekazi from power.



Tekazi (AC 17, Fighter 6, #AT 1, Damage Katana (1d8), Mv 30', Sv F6, MI 9, HP 38)

Tekazi is an angry man who has stolen power and will do whatever it takes to keep it. He has been blinded by his original anger that led him to become Daimyo. While not skilled as a warrior, Tekazi's tactics are devastatingly effective, especially with the help of Abuzo's magic. He is a coward, however, and follows the Bushido code. When Ato appears, he will hesitate in disbelief for a few moments, not understanding how he could have been mistaken. He is clean and neat in appearance, because of his etiquette training as a youth.

Fortress Guards (AC 15, Fighter 3, #AT 1, Damage Yari Spear (1d10), Mv 30', Sv F3, MI 8, HP 18)
Equipment: Chain Mail and Yari





Ato (as man) (AC 12, Fighter 1, #AT 1, Damage Hand (1d4), Mv 30', Sv Fl, MI 8, HP 8)

The rightful heir to the throne, he is largely silent until he is restored to human form, then he is brave and ready to take on the mantle of Daimyo. He is a young man with brown eyes and fair skin. He ages just the same as a cricket, but he will have little memory of his life as an insect. While in cricket form he chirps when danger is near, making him "lucky."



Abuzo (AC 17, Fighter/Mage 6/4, #AT 2, Damage Yari (2d6), Mv 30', Sv Fighter 6, MI 10, HP 46)

Spells: 1st Level Spells - Sleep, Magic Missile; 2nd Level Spells - Web, Mirror Image

Magic Items: Displacement Cloak, Ring of Protection + 1, Wand of Illusion (11 charges), Potion of Healing, Scroll (Fireball)

Abuzo has promised to help Tekazi to secure his power with the help of ogre enforcers and insight into what the future may have in store for him. Abuzo is a dangerous Oni that has plans beyond helping Tekazi, which involve a greater threat. He has little regard for life outside of his master.



Ogre Henchmen (AC 15, #AT 1, Damage 2d6, Mv 30', Sv F4, MI 10, HD 4D+1)

Equipment: Axe, Club, Sword, and Bamboo Armor.

Shinobi Assassins (AC 15, Thief 5, #AT 1, Damage (by weapon), Mv 30', Sv T5, MI 7, HP 14)

Equipment: Katana (1d8), Throwing Stars (1d2), blowgun (darts 1d2), poison vial (save vs. poison or unconscious 1d6 rounds), climbing hook and rope, caltrops (damage 1d2, movement by half), smoke bombs (3)





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Details



Oni

Armor Class:	18
Hit Dice:	5
No. of Attacks:	2
Damage:	2d6 or by weapon
Movement:	40'
No. Appearing:	1d4
Save As:	Fighter: 5
Morale:	10
Treasure Type:	C
XP:	635

Spell Abilities: Each Oni casts spells as an equivalent level 3 Magic User.

The Oni is "much more smart" than their cousins, the ogres. They appear as eight feet tall ogres, with blue skin and two heads. The two heads often do not get along and become confused by each other's actions. Oni will usually wear fine silk clothing or a light-weight and ornate armor.

Foo Dog Statue

Armor Class:	16
Hit Dice:	6
No. of Attacks:	3 (claw/claw/bite)
Damage:	2d6/2d6/1d10
Movement:	40'
No. Appearing:	1d3
Save As:	Fighter: 5
Morale:	12
Treasure Type:	None
XP:	780

This construct will only come to life when they are summoned, and will fight with blind loyalty. Once they come to life they stand close to the height of a horse at the shoulder and as wide as two horses. The stone-like skin protects these creatures from many forms of attack, the most effective attacks against Foo Dogs involve blunt force. They are very large statues and cannot be carried easily by a normal human. These special statues are made by Oni in the land of Tengoku.



THE TAO OF ATO



The Party is asked to escort a cricket to a monastery located in the exotic land of Tengoku, though the journey itself is fraught with peril (and Shinobi). Once in Tengoku, however, the party finds more than they bargained for. With mad Ogres, an enslaved nation, transformed princes and heroic Tanuki, the plot becomes complicated quickly! Can the heroes navigate the Dangers of the Tengoku? Are they a match for the Evil Warlord Tekazi and Abuzo, the strange Blue Oni? Be wary; for in Tengoku, danger lurks on the wind, mystery follows your footsteps, and every challenge asks: "Do you know the Tao of Ato?"

The Tao of Ato

Or

"Would you like Noodles with your Tanuki?"

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An Asian Fantasy Adventure

*Suggested level for Player
Characters 4-6*

Written By The GagMen

*Illustrations by GagHouse
Productions, with Polish by
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