

**LETHAL STRYKE ANNUAL**

*The Sword of Tama*

by

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**Page 1**

Stryke is leaping toward the reader, her arm swinging back as she's just sent three gleaming daggers out before her.

An off-panel voice says, "Your impressive reputation precedes you, Stryke. But reputation matters little to me.

"It is time, as they say, to walk the walk."

**THUK! THUK! THUK!** The daggers embed themselves into three humanoid dummies, one between the eyes, the second in the throat, the third in the heart. A few scattered crates are visible behind them, betraying the warehouse location in which the scene takes place.

Stryke continues through with her leap, landing a scissors kick to two of the dummies. "Hyaiiii!!!" she screams as they shatter into plastic shards.

She crouches on one of the crates behind the remains as a group of men approach her. They're dressed in black jumpsuits, masks, and gloves. The first carries a baseball bat; the second a chain; the third a section of pipe; the fourth holds a pair of nunchuks.

"Hey, boys!" She smiles and makes a beckoning motion with her finger. "Better keep those masks on after I'm done with you. You wouldn't wanna scare anybody!"

**SWISSSSSH!!!** She leaps up as the thug with the bat swings at her legs.

"A swing and a miss!"

**CHOK!!!** She devastates him with a kick on her way down.

"Uuunh!" he screams.

"Grand slam!" she exclaims.

She ducks under the pipe-wielding thug as he swings, creaming the chain-holder.

"Whoops!" she says, smiling.

"Aaaagh!!!" yells the chain-holder.

Pipeman offers a "Shit!"

Stryke lands a jump-spinning backfist to the back of the Piper's head.

"Hyaaaai!!!" she exclaims.

"Uuunf!!!" he says.

The man with the nunchuks goes through an impressive display of spinning his weapon.

"Party's over, bitch!" he growls.

"Oh, I'm shakin'!" she says. "C'mon, stud, let's see watcha got!"

**WHISSSSSH!!!** She narrowly dodges his first assault.

**SWHISSSSSH!!!** She deftly sidesteps his next attack.

**BRAK!!!** She stands him up with a front kick.

**BIFF!!!** Her inside-out crescent kick snaps his jaw to one side.

**CHUD!!!** A spectacular jump-spinning crescent kick knocks him flying, ass-over-teakettle.

**BRA-CRASH!!!** He smashes through a crate upside-down.

Still within the warehouse, we now see Mr. Tenzan and a pair of bodyguards, standing by an open limousine. All are wearing tailored suits. Tenzan is a trim, mid-thirties Asian man, with short black hair and dark eyes. Stryke is helping one of the thugs up as she turns to Tenzan.

"There ya go, buddy.

"Hey, Tenzan-san, whaddaya think? Did I 'walk the walk'?"

"Your performance was adequate."

She is standing before him now, her hands on her hips. One of his bodyguards is handing him a manila envelope.

"'Adequate', my ass. There's nobody better and you know it."

"Perhaps, but I hire no one sight unseen. An audition is always a prerequisite. We may now discuss the nature and terms of your employment.

"Are you familiar with the legend of Tama?"

Stryke is looking over the documents; atop the papers sits a topographical map, and an illustration of an ornate sword; the edges of the illustration are bordered with Japanese script.

"I've heard the stories. Tama was the right hand of the warlord Tojo in fourteenth century Japan. She was considered the greatest warrior of the period, maybe the greatest ever."

Flashback scene; the beautiful Tama is surrounded by a group of ninja in Tojo's courtroom. A regal woman stands at the head of the throne, holding a bloody dagger, with Tojo lying dead in the chair. Several of the ninja are already lying dead.

"Supposedly, she was betrayed by the Tojo's wife, who murdered him and hired ninja to take care of her. This allowed his brother to ascend to power."

Further with the flashback. Tama impales herself on her own katana.

"History indicates that she fell on her own sword, rather than give the ninja the satisfaction of killing her."

Tenzan crosses his arms.

"Yes, but according to the legend, her katana took on mystical properties. Others who attempted to use it met violent deaths. It--and her remains--were eventually taken from Japan entirely and entombed elsewhere, for fear of the curse."

"So let me guess. You want the sword."

"That is correct."

An amazonian blonde is stepping out of the limo. We don't see much of her here (probably a view over her shoulder).

"I'm not much of a tracker, Tenzan. You'd better have directions."

"I have that--and more. Allow me to introduce your guide..."

We now see Elena Quartermain, fully erect, clad in a sleeveless khaki halter top, matching tight shorts, white knee-high boots, and a white fedora with a leopardskin band around it. A whip is looped through one of the belt buckles to her right, and a pistol is clipped to her left side.

"...Elena Quartermain."

Elena and Stryke shake hands.

"Quartermain? I've heard that name before."

"I'm not surprised," says Elena. "I come from a long line of trackers. You might say it's our specialty."

Elena points to the map.

"Mr. Tenzan gave me his data, and I determined that the likely resting place of Tama's body is on the island of Hosaka, south of Japan. It's largely unpopulated, and the dense jungle affords little access.

"I believe that if we follow the main river, we'll find her tomb in this vicinity."

Stryke closes the folder, and looks at Tenzan.

"Sounds good to me. The usual rate applies--a hundred grand, plus expenses."

"Agreed," says Tenzan. "You'll receive fifty thousand now, and the remainder when I have the sword."

"Done," she says.

Elena crosses her arms.

"Well, now it just remains to be seen how we get to the island."

"No sweat," says Stryke. "I know somebody...."

Exterior view of a C-47 as it cuts through a bright blue sky.

Inside the cockpit, Elena sits sideways in the co-pilot's chair, facing George Tucker, the pilot. Tucker is a broad-shouldered, mid-fifties man, with a receding hairline and telltale wrinkling of his features.

"This is quite an aircraft, Mr. Tucker. Isn't it an older model?"

"Yeah, I flew this baby over Pleiku in '69. Charlie'd set up in the bamboo with 122 rockets, tryin' to bomb the radar installations, and we'd have ta smoke 'im out.

"The Company hired me on as a flier after my hitch. I made so much money selling hash for 'em in the Triangle that I bought 'er after Nixon pulled us out."

Elena is looking over the instrumentation.

"What were those cannons I saw mounted on the sides?"

"Those're Vulcan miniguns, they put out 6000 rounds a minute. Charlie hated hearin' us comin', we chewed his ass up--what the hell!?"

He stops as he hears a **VRRRRRR!!! VRRRRR!!!**

Stryke is manning a minigun, cackling as she chews up the underbrush below.

"YEEEE-HAAAA!!! Take that, you commie rats! You can run, but you can't hide!" **VRRRRRR!!! VRRRRR!!!**

Tucker yells back, "Dammit, Stryke! Cut that shit out! That ammo's friggin' expensive!"

Back in the cockpit, Tucker says,

"Jesus, that woman's about three aces short of a full deck! Look, you two better get ready--your jump's comin' in a few minutes. Double-check the 'chutes to make sure they're okay."

"I've done so twice," says Elena. "Anything else?"

He directs her out of the cockpit with his thumb as she walks out, smiling.

"Nope. I'm settin' down in a field twelve clicks north of your destination. Keep in touch on the designated frequency. If I get silence for three hours, I leave without you."

"Now scram, and good luck. And hey--keep Stryke outta trouble, y'hear?"

"Thank you...but I don't think that's possible."

The wind whips by Stryke and Elena as they descend toward the river, parachutes fully extended. To either side of the water is dense jungle. They control their descent through handles on either side of the chute assembly holding them. Stryke is wearing her usual garb, minus the trenchcoat.

"There's the river!" yells Stryke. "Make for the bank!"

"Got it!" responds Elena.

Stryke tucks and rolls as she hits the ground; off-panel, we hear a **SPLASH!!!**

"Three-point contact--perfect! Elena, are you--uh oh."

Stryke looks up, to see Elena, standing in thigh-deep water, detaching her chute. As the Steve Miller song goes, "Everything's better with wet."

"Just fine, Stryke. Not one of my better landings, though."

"Looks good to me. Better get outta the water before--"



**GROOAAARRR!!!** A crocodile rears up from the depths, lunging at Elena. She recoils, not in terror, but ready for action.

"SHIT!!!" yells Elena.

"Watch out!!!" screams Stryke.

Elena has it around its neck as they roll out of the water, locked in a vicious battle. Stryke stands by, daggers at the ready.

"Try to get clear!" shouts Stryke. "I don't have an angle!"

"Stand back!" Elena responds. "I've got it!"

Elena winds up astride its back, and grips its snout to either side.

"Die..."

She's got its head pulled against her, her heels digging into the soft earth of the river. She's pulling back, keeping its body anchored beneath her.

"...you..."

**CRAAAAACK!!!** Its neck snaps as she sits back at an impossible angle.

**"MONSTER!!!"**

Elena holds the dead croc idly by its snout as she rests, still seated. Her halter has become un-knotted due to the struggle, and her glorious breasts are in full bloom. Stryke stands nearby, a hand on her hip.

"Now I am im-pressed," Stryke says, smiling. "Those guys on Wild Kingdom never did stuff like that! You okay?"

"Yes, fine, thanks. I've dealt with *much* worse."

They've stepped off to a grassy embankment, where Stryke kneels behind Elena, helping her to pull off her sopped halter top. Elena's pack is on the ground before her, and she's pulling out her radio.

"Thank goodness we packed our gear in waterproof satchels," says Elena. "Tucker said to check in every few hours, and he needs to know we're down and safe, so I'll give him some word."

"By all means," says Stryke.

Stryke is seated closer behind Elena, wringing the water out of her hair as she adjusts the radio.

"Falcon One? This is Search Team. Do you read? Over."

"Loud and clear," answers Tucker. "What's your status? Over."

Stryke has brushed the hair away from the nape of Elena's neck, and is kissing it. Elena's eyes are half-closed.

"W-we're down and safe," she says. "We're...making final preparations for the trip. Over."

"Copy that. Make sure you report if you run into trouble. Over."

Stryke is tugging on Elena's ear with her teeth; she's pulling up on her shorts by a front belt loop, and is unzipping them with the other hand. Elena is letting the radio fall aside.

"Y-yes, we'll do that...Search Team over and out...."

"That's a roger. Falcon One out."

Stryke has lowered Elena to the grass, and is alongside her, as they kiss passionately.

"Mmmmmffff...."

From over the shoulder of a pair of shadowy figures, perched in the nearby brush, watching the scene.

Frontally on the shadowy figures, who are hooded as per ninja tradition, except that we see there are more behind them, and the lead figure has a dark blue headcover.

A black square can denote the passage of some time at this point.

Elena and Stryke trek through the jungle, machetes in hand, clearing a path. Elena's back in her halter and shorts.

"This appears to be an overgrown path. I think we're getting closer."

"Yeah..."

They stop to look at a skeleton that's been pinned to a thick tree by a spear through the forehead.

"...I'd say we're on the right track."

Elena and Stryke assume a more cautious posture as they make their way down the path. More skulls and bones are visible alongside the path as they walk.

"We'll have to be *extremely* cautious from here. The trap-makers of the Asian Pacific were the equals of any. The triggers are incredibly difficult to spot."

"I know, I grew up studying this kinda stuff. Watch where you step."

Elena and Stryke have emerged from the brush; behind them are still more scattered, broken skeletons.

Caption: "Later...."

Stryke says, "Looks like most of the traps've been tripped. Mighty polite of these treasure-seekers to precede us."

"No doubt. But that just means the tough work is ahead of us. And it starts..."

Elena points off-panel.

"...right there."

Full-pager of the tomb; it's an ornate three-story stone structure, sloping inward in pyramidal fashion on the sides and flattening on top. At each corner of the tomb is a statue of a snaking oriental dragon, raised back as if to strike. A ramp extends out from the front, leading to a stone doorway set into the front. The doorway is at least ten feet high.

"Wowwww...." says Stryke. "Indiana Jones, eat your *heart* out...."

Elena and Stryke move toward it cautiously.

"It's probably a bad idea to go up and knock," says Stryke.

"Extremely so," says Elena. "Follow me, and stay close."

They creep up the ramp to one side, approaching the door.

"Careful," says Elena. "Step only where I step."

"Sure," says Stryke.

Elena is feeling along the front of the tomb.

"The entry mechanism for such tombs is usually along this side. I'm looking for a hinge or a lever or--"

Her palm presses a brick inward, and it goes **CLICK!**

"Ah-ha."

The door **RUUUMBLE**'s out of the way.

"Out-standing," murmurs Stryke.

Ahead of them, down a short corridor, sits a sword on a samurai-shaped sarcophagus. A row of columns runs along the walls leading up to the tomb.

"There it is! The sword!" says Stryke.

"Yes, I see."

They've proceeded in about halfway; Elena has uncoiled her whip, and is poised to strike.

"Are we going further?"

"No. I think I can reach it from here. Step aside...."

She strikes out with the whip; it grips the sword in the middle  
(**THWIIIP!!!**)

She jerks it off it's stand, back into her free hand.

"Got it!"

They turn as a **RUUUUUMBLE** sound begins.

"What now?" asks Stryke.

"You know the drill. **RUN!!!**"

They sprint down the corridor, toward the closing door. Behind them, short spears burst from murder holes in the walls, narrowly missing them.

Stryke and Elena leap to avoid a section of spikes as it shoots up underfoot.

"Watch it!" yells Stryke.

They dive and roll under the door as it threatens to close on them; Stryke has Elena's hat in her hand.

The ramp is collapsing; Elena hooks the arm of one of the dragon statues.

"Hold onto me!" she yells.

As it gives way beneath them (**CRRRRASH!!!**), she swings.

They land in a heap back at the foot of the path.

"Ooof!!!" says Stryke; Elena's on top of her.

Still atop Stryke, Elena runs her finger along the sword.

"Wooo!" says Stryke. "We've got it! We've got--"

"Nothing, I'm afraid."

Stryke is unamused. Elena is examining the blade.

"Whaddaya mean, 'Nothing?' Sure looks like something to me!"

"Yes, but it's not the right sword. The illustration shows different demarcations along the haft, and the blade is of inferior quality. This is a decoy."

They're standing again. Stryke is looking up, off-panel.

"I should have reasoned that the whole temple was an elaborate ruse," says Elena. "The real entrance is going to be much harder to spot."

"Maybe not. Gimme your whip."



Stryke is poised with it, beneath one of the dragon statues.

"Something about this statue's different from the others. I'm gonna check...."

Stryke coils it around the lower jaw of the statue (**CRAAACK!!!**)

She pulls down; the jaw swings open (**CREEAK!!!**).

A few feet away, a stone panel slides aside (**SCRRRRRAPE!!!**).

"Bingo!" says Stryke.

They peer down into the opening; stone stairs leading inside are visible.

"Good thinking, Stryke. This is undoubtedly the real entrance. Let's proceed."

"Sure. But we better still be careful. I know we ain't outta the woods yet."

They creep cautiously down the corridor, feeling their way along the walls.

"We're nearly there. I see a doorway up ahead," offers Elena.

"Yeah. Just don't make any sudden moves, know what I mean?"

Elena's foot depresses a stone switch (**CLICK!!!**).

"Whoops...."

They leap forward as the stones beneath them collapse (**CRRRRRUMBLE!!!**).

"Jump!!!" yells Stryke.

They stare back down at the spiked pit they nearly fell into.

"This is gettin' real old, real fast," grumbles Stryke.

"Imagine doing it for a living," says Elena. "C'mon. We're at the door."

Elena swings the door aside. It's a simple stone portal, with scattered Japanese symbols around the frame.

"No lock. This should be...."

Big shot of the tomb, which is a wide, two-story room featuring ornate S-shaped dragon columns along the boundaries; a marble coffin sits in the center.

"...it."

Stryke and Elena tread toward the coffin.

"There don't appear to be any traps here," says Elena. "The designers probably wanted to ensure the safe exit of the builders."

"Mighty considerate of 'em," says Stryke. "Be careful, anyway."

They stand over the coffin, within which lies the skeletal remains of a samurai, still clad in the ceremonial armor. Lying across its body is a katana, under its crossed arms.

"Tama, I presume," says Stryke.

"Yes," says Elena. "And the sword. Let's take it and--"

"And *nothing*," comes an off-panel voice.

They turn; a group of ninja stand at the entrance, in the middle of which is the leader, with his dark blue hood. All are brandishing some form of weapon--sai, shuriken, nunchaku. The leader holds a katana.

"Ninja!" exclaims Elena.

"What the hell are you doing here?" asks Stryke.

The leader points toward them with his katana.

"Mr. Tenzan wishes to express his gratitude to both of you for locating the sword. Unfortunately, certain factions would react unfavorably if they knew he had defiled a sacred place of burial. In the interest of maintaining order, he prefers that there be...no witnesses."

Stryke and Elena have assumed a defensive posture. Elena has drawn her pistol. Stryke holds daggers in her hands.

"Shit!" says Stryke. "Tenzan used us to get by the traps--so his boys could wax us and take the sword! That bastard!"

"My sentiments exactly!"

The leader stands to one side as the ninja surround them.

"I can see that there is no possibility of your quiet compliance. You leave us no choice.

"Tora!"

(The following fight will be spread across three pages in dynamic fashion.)

Stryke rocks one ninja with a backfist (**BRAK!!!**).

"Come'n get it, assholes!"

Elena's gun is knocked from her hand by one assailant as she kicks another ninja in the chest (**THWOK!**).

"Son of a bitch!" she exclaims.

Stryke drives a dagger through the heart of an attacker (**SHHHUCK!**).

"Uuuuagh!", the ninja exclaims.

Elena sends a kneelift into an attacker's face (**THWAMM!!!**), flipping him up and back.

"PIG!!!" she yells.

Stryke does a split-kick, knocking two ninja flying (**BRAK! BRAK!**).

Elena whips a ninja toward Stryke.

"Stryke! Heads up!"

Stryke lands a jump-spinning crescent kick to the oncoming man, devastating him (**THWAMMM!!!**).

Elena holds two ninja in a crushing headlock.

"Stryke! I can handle them! Get the leader!"

Stryke lunges after the leader, pulling the katana out of the coffin.

"Good idea! Hey, baby--I'm comin' for you!!!"

Stryke yanks the sword out of its hilt (**SHHHHIING!!!**). The sword is crackling with energy.

"This should even things up a little--what the hell?!?"

The sword pulls away from her grip; energy seems to be draining out of it, as it hovers in mid-air. A form is taking shape behind it. It continues to solidify (**KRRRRACKLE!!!**), until...

...Tama stands before the leader now; she is a beautiful, sparingly-clad Asian woman, with a black bandanna around her forehead and around each arm. tight, black wrap-style garments cover her legs past her knees and elbows, and cover her breasts; a brief undergarment conceals her hips. Her expression smolders with fury, her lips pursed tightly together.

Stryke stares open-mouthed at the sight. Elena stands over a pair of unconscious ninja, holding one limp body by the collar of his shirt.

"Freaky," murmurs Stryke.

"My Lord," says Elena.

Tama easily parries the ninja leader's first attack (**KLANG!!!**)

"Haaaaai!!!" he screams

**SLASH!!! SLASH!!! SLASH!!!** Tama's first stroke opens a gash from his waist to his throat. Her second cuts neatly across his chest. The final stroke cleanly separates his head from his shoulders.

The remains of the ninja leader tumble to the ground (**SCHLUPP!!!**)



Stryke and Elena regard the remains of the leader with awe as Tama walks toward them.

"Good Christ...." murmurs Stryke.

Tama holds out the sword to Stryke.

"Oh...you...want *me* to take it."

Stryke takes the katana, holding it cross-ways on her palms.

Tama dissolves into energy, and reintegrates with the sword.

Stryke wipes down the blade with a section of black cloth as Elena hands her the hilt.

"H-how do you suppose that happened? I mean--"

"Beats me, babe. Save it for the X-Files.

"Let's get the hell outta here. We've got some business to take care of."

The skyline of Queen City teems with lights as night descends. A crescent moon sits to one side of the starlit blackness.

Chono Tenzan emerges from the elevator of his private penthouse, unbuttoning his Gucci suitcoat and speaking into a pocket cellphone.

"<Still no word from them? How can this be? Muta is my best assassin, the women should be long dead!>"

Caption: "Translated from the Japanese."

He steps into his study, flicks on a light--and freezes. A gun barrel is placed to his forehead to his right, and a hand snatches away the cellphone from the other side.

"<Have my private plane fueled and ready. On the outside chance that Stryke survived, I-->"

"Sorry, pal. Too late to make the great escape."

Elena holds him at gunpoint as Stryke tosses the sword to him.

"Ah, Stryke. It appears you are even more resourceful than I had anticipated."

"That's an understatement.

"Here's the friggin' sword."

Elena backs away as he savagely unsheathes the weapon.

"Fools! Do you realize you've just given a master swordsman the perfect weapon of--eh?!?"

The sword flies out of his hand.

**(KRRRRACKLE!!!)** The energy begins to take shape before him.

Tama now stands before him.

Elena and Stryke shudder as we hear **SCHLUP!!! SLASH!!! SLASH!!!** from off-panel, intermingled with his screams:

"Yeeaagh!!!" "Aaaaagh!!!" "Uhhhk--"

An exterior view of the penthouse, as we hear a final "UAAAAAGH!!!" Blood spews in a streak across the main window.

Later that evening, we join Stryke and Elena, reclining within the frothing waters of a Jacuzzi, toasting with a pair of champagne glasses. Both are undressed. Behind them, on the wall, is the sword; the top rung has the sword itself, and the lower rung has the sheath.

Caption: "Later...."

"Here's to a job well done, I suppose," says Elena. "Of course, it was a bust for me. I didn't ask for as much up front as you."

"Hey, no sweat. I got at least half a mil outta Tenzan's safe before we took off. You're welcome to half."

"I'm grateful."

Stryke and Elena have moved considerably closer.

"I guess we should be grateful to Tama, to," says Stryke. "She made all this possible, in a way."

"Yeah," says Elena. "I have a feeling..."

Close on the blade; a pair of Asian eyes stare out, as if reflected in the blade.

"...that our friend Tama is back..."

"...and that the world better beware."

**The End**