

TENRA BANSHO ZERO PLAYSET: AGAINST THE TIDE

INTRODUCTION

Tenra Bansho Zero: A game of hyper-asian fantasy. A game with an open, "no canon" setting by design. Rather than tons of pages of made-up countries, characters and events, designer Junichi Inoue wanted GMs to create their own setting with their players, "their own Tenra", and share their vision with each other. That's why the maps are unblemished with place/landmark markings, the world data in the book vague (mostly just inspirational lists of country and leader names), and the "important events" of the setting limited to just two: The Fall of Jinrai and the Makuu-Nindo Revolt. What a wonderful idea, and powerful suggestion in a creative industry where it can seem at times that many of the books produced for roleplaying games are piles of (otherwise creative) setting fluff meant to be read, rarely brought to the table.

...while creation of a setting based in feudal-era drama is not a problem for Japanese people (who have been exposed to samurai-era TV dramas, books, history, and the like all of their growing lives), it presents a problem to Westerners who haven't grown up in Japan, or seen more than an anime or movie or two. It can take a bit of research to get things "right". It could otherwise be a lot of stress for new GMs and players.

To that end, I commissioned the talented RPG author Todd "TS" Luikart (a friend whose writing I loved) to come up with a detailed "starter setting for Foreigners Like Us", based on a few simple ideas ("two nations at war, with a third nearby; and lots of interspersed questions which might be answered in play") and the vague descriptions of a few locations in the book. I then got another friend, map artist Tony Dowler, to draft some original maps to go with the setting.

While this was sort of going against those initial wishes of the author to his original Japanese audience, he was very excited by the idea ("Ahh, indeed! It'd be hard to 'just come up with a setting' like I suggest if you didn't grow up in Japan..."). Consider it as it was intended: Feel free to play in it. Feel free to change it all around. Feel free to suck out some ideas and put them into your own totally original setting. And if inspired, feel free to make your own!

"ONE TENRA"

This playset comes directly from the pages of the rulebook (namely pages 266-283 of the "text only" PDF version of the rulebook set). As stated numerous times, it's only one vision of the setting of Tenra. There is no "canon" here, just one author's vision of one area in the great land of Tenra.

PLAYSET

If you end up making your own vision of Tenra, feel free to post it on the net! Or send it our way, I'll host it on the website!

Get setting feedback from the community over on the [Google Plus Kotodama Heavy Industries community page!](#)

THANK YOU

...for your support!

-Andy Kitkowski
Kotodama Heavy Industries

ONE TENRA: AGAINST THE TIDE

PLAYSET INTRODUCTION

As mentioned elsewhere in *Tenra Bansho Zero*, the real setting behind Tenra is painted in broad brush strokes, with almost no details given to countries, people, or history. The point is for you, the player, to make Tenra your own: come up with your own domain, your own conflicts, and drop your players right in the middle. Or work together with your players to quickly design the framework of a region, or a domain, or even just one town that the game will take place in.

However, not everyone grew up in Japan watching samurai dramas, movies and history segments on Japanese TV. Some of us need a helping hand, here a is small well-defined setting consisting of notable places, people and conflicts to help get us started. That's what this chapter is for: It is a defined game setting to be read by the game master and players. It is a "playset" to be used as a framework to tell stories of Tenra. From there, the GM can decide where to set her game, which parts to use, which locations and people may appear, and then fill in the blanks with her own creative content.

None of this setting below represents "the one and true official Tenra setting" or canon material: Use it all, use parts of it, or just pick and choose what you like and ignore the rest. If there's something that doesn't appeal to you, change it. If none of it appeals to you, ditch it all and create a setting and characters of your own.

If you're ready to make your own setting, or your own Tenra, then do so. Make your own Tenra come to life.

CONCEPT: SUGGESTIONS

At the end of every small section are a number of highlighted suggestions for the reader or potential GM. As you read the material, try to find ways to possibly use the elements in your own game. These suggestions are meant to help you get started. Think about them or ignore them as you see fit.

BACKGROUND

In the east of the mountainous province of Ryurinshu there lies a forest old beyond reckoning. The oni name it Naira-door "Eldest" in their tongue and declare that it was ancient long before the coming of Humans to Tenra. While the majority of Yashima has been claimed and settled by mankind, Naira-do represents one of the last great wild hold outs of the Central Continent. So it may have remained for ages more, if not for a chance discovery: A peasant recently uncovered a massive soulgem mine deep in the forest where the earth had split from the destruction caused by the fall of the Phantom Star.

Buren, the legendary Warlord of the realm of Hakusen, needs as many soulgems as he can acquire to supply his mighty army as he prepares to make war on the Priesthood itself. Already the forces of the Dragon of Hakusen have begun to mobilize...

While Naira-do is technically an unclaimed land, it officially lies within the domain of Torigoe, to the east of Hakusen. The regent of Torigoe is but seventeen years of age and newly come into his regency. The forest and its denizens are beyond his control, yet he too needs the resources the mine can provide and he cannot afford to appear weak before the eyes of his many enemies. Now, he must stand, untried, and untested against one of the greatest warlords that Tenra has ever known.

Will he stand alone?

- Set a story in Torigoe, where the forces of Hakusen are encroaching on their land.

ONE TENRA: AGAINST THE TIDE

- Set a story in Hakusen, in the service of Lord Buren or one of his vassals.
- Set a story in the places between the two provinces, where the war is changing the physical and social landscape.
- Set a story in the mysterious forest of Naira-do.

THE DOMAIN OF TORIGOE

Torigoe was once considered the gem of the domains of Ryurin-shu. Blessed with great mineral resources, magnificent waterfalls, vast fertile fields and abundant forests, Torigoe was a kingdom to be envied. The powerful Kitan family have ruled Torigoe unchallenged for over twenty generations and many believed that the scions of that powerful house would rule uncontested for as many more.

What changes a year can bring.

Torigoe lies at the northern edge of the domains shattered by the fall of Mount Jinrai and the Phantom Star. More than half of its arable land was lost to tsunami, flooding and earthquakes. As the terrain shifted, the entire holy mountain Ihara slid into the ocean, pulling nearly a fourth of Torigoe with it. Now Torigoe lies nearly in ruins. The once powerful Kitan family was all but destroyed during the devastation. The bulk of the family's trusted advisors were cut down by the former regent's bodyguard as he fled, a kongohki named Golden Tiger who, rumor has it, regained his memories as he watched the destruction of the land about him. The last Kitan is the former regent's scholarly nephew Kagetora, a young man who has dutifully, if reluctantly, taken up the burden of regency.

Kagetora's first year as Regent was spent trying to repair his broken domain with what few resources he could muster. Yet now word has recently spread of a rich soulgem mine within the forbidden forest of Naira-do, a land that lies within Torigoe yet has always stood apart. To the west the Dragon of Hakusen is stirring, for the whispers of riches to be had have reached Buren as well and he eyes

Torigoe's weakly defended border with interest. Kagetora looks down from the walls of his mountainous palace to his ruined capitol below where his loyal subjects ceaselessly strive to rebuild their beloved homeland with worn-out tools and knows what he must do.

- What happened to Golden Tiger? Perhaps he is still rampaging around the wilderness of Torigoe or Naira-do. If the characters chance to meet him, will they find Golden Tiger a ruthless villain, a loyal servant, a misunderstood soul, or even a fall-guy for some strange conspiracy?
- Some or all of the characters could be in the direct service of Kagetora. It might be interesting to play out his first few weeks as acting regent.
- One of the characters could even be Kitan Kagetora, using his nascent leadership skills to enhance the domain while protecting it from attack.

A Patchwork Land

Torigoe's once scenic landscape was rent asunder mainly by the fall of the Phantom Star, though the water displacement caused by Mount Jinrai's collapse was surely catastrophic to the many farming villages that lined its southern coast. Many fields took months of dredging to clear the salt out. Some villages seemed all but lost until Kagetora employed several armours to assist with removing and replacing the spoiled topsoil, an unorthodox use of a usually military asset that set a few of his vassal lords against him, but gained him a great deal of support amidst the peasantry. Torigoe's heavily forested mountain range which dominates the bulk of the realm once had a fair number of easily accessible passes running through it, many of which lead to a popular pilgrimage location, the holy mountain Ihara, which dominated the southwestern border adjacent to the sea.

At one time or another, members of all three branches of Buddhism as well as the Priesthood had blessed Ihara for a variety of reasons. Ihara was once a picturesque mount with an eternally snow-clad peak and miracles supposedly happened on its

ARMOUR INTO TRACTORS

Kagetora's decision to use armours to dredge salt from the ruined fields of Torigoe was more than merely unorthodox; it was unprecedented in Tenra's history. The peasants of Torigoe were originally uncertain about their young new daimyo regent, but they have since embraced him with enthusiasm. Indeed, Kagetora is the most popular Kitan with the common folk in ten generations. His newly acquired vassal lords, however, were not equally thrilled. Their sons and daughters pilot the armours of Torigoe - the perceived dishonor of shoveling mud is thus theirs. Those with the strongest feelings on the matter can barely suppress their tongues in public, and they now carry a grudge against the unorthodox regent.

wide slopes. Many of the natives of Torigoe believe that even as Ihara was destroyed, it passed the last of its blessings onto their poor land. One of these "blessings" caused by the collapse of Ihara into the ocean was the destruction of the high mountain passes. When Buren's forces march from the west, they will find no easy roads left into Torigoe. Ihara's fall also opened many previously unknown veins of scarlet steel, as well as a few modest soulgem deposits. Ihara's final great blessing is known to few, though Kagetora and a few of his trusted advisors are well aware of it; a number of rare and never-before-seen annelids emerged from the rich soil that the holy mount's fall exposed. The exceptional annelids have drawn an unusual number of annelidists to the area and a powerful new nest has quietly opened in the mountains with the young regent's blessing.

Many of Torigoe's legendary waterfalls remain, though the great River Hatsue changed her course far enough to create several brand new ones along the southern ranges of the land. The once-great trading town Shirata had to be abandoned after the river completely deserted it. Dark creatures are said

to have since inhabited the forsaken township...

- A character might come from one of the villages struck by famine after the fall of Jinrai, now fiercely loyal to the Kitan family for aiding their village after the disaster.
- What is Ihara like? What mystical properties do people attribute to it? What would a pilgrimage to Ihara entail?
- The local annelidist nests will want to investigate, capture and cultivate the new strains of annelids. An entire story might revolve around acquiring some and the dangers in doing so.
- Mines of soulgem and scarlet steel certainly mean a cold war between domains, or even within a domain. The discovery, capture, and development of a mining town, as well as the risks of keeping it hidden from other domain regents, backstabbing local provincial lords, yakuza clans and mysterious onmyoji might be an interesting tale.
- Perhaps the Bright Lotus Buddhist sect have abandoned the region. Why would that be?
- A secret Phoenix sect training center might exist near Ihara. Who would be trained there, and what for? Would the local lords or regent know of the existence of such a place?

NOTABLE PLACES

Tengaishi—The capital of Torigoe was formerly well regarded as an architectural marvel, a perfect blending of form, function and aesthetic beauty. The Grand River Hatsue flowed through the western quarter, bringing wealth and trade. The craftsmen of Tengaishi were especially famous for their beautiful glasswork and intricately skilled engraving. Quiet parks and small streams were prevalent throughout the city. No longer. The destruction caused by the fall of Mount Jinrai and the Phantom Star nearly broke Tengaishi in two. The partial rerouting of Hatsue River caused the western half of the city to be flooded, and the loss

ONE TENRA: AGAINST THE TIDE

of so many of the surrounding fields forced many to leave the area for fear of starvation. Tengaishi's populace is now less than half of what it once was, and many buildings still lie abandoned. Trade has been painfully slow in returning, but Kagetora's efforts over the last year have recently resulted in traveling merchants visiting the city once again. The engravers of Torigoe have found that their talents are in high demand for the creation of mass-produced kimenkyo mirrors. Indeed, with the technological secrets that the Northern Court has let slip, a few of the amazingly skilled engraving masters have supposedly been able to produce mirrors almost the equal of meikyo in quality.

- Keeping one of these master kimenkyo crafters safe from Priesthood assassins might be at the heart of a story.
- The Northern Court may favor Torigoe with additional technology, blueprints and skills. A mission for a few Northern Court priests and miko might be to deliver sensitive technology to Kagetora's retainers, avoiding Southern Court machinations.
- The Southern Court may try to buy provincial leaders with amazing meikyo technologies (armour and kongohki). Getting them to the right leaders while keeping their objectives hidden might make for an interesting story.

The Ashen Palace—Known as the House of Glorious Mists until recently, the Ashen Palace has been the home of the regents of Torigoe for many generations. Designed by the onmyoji Aburai over a thousand years ago, the Ashen Palace sits on a low mountain peak overlooking Tengaishi, which sits below it to the east. Sheer cliffs protect its southern and western sides, while the beginnings of the untouched southern edges of Naira-do lie immediately to the north. The onmyoji designed the castle to seem as if it was floating on the fogs that perpetually blanket the southern shores of Torigoe, hence its original name. Fog still regularly rolls down the halls of the Ashen Palace at both dawn and twilight, giving it an otherworldly air. It was

Kagetora himself that renamed the palace, to honor the many people of Torigoe that died during and after the destruction. The once tranquil edifice now rings with the raised voices of Torigoe's many vassal lords who openly vie for concessions of power from their inexperienced new regent.

- The Ashen Palace may actually sit on the ruins of an ancient onmyoji summoning site. Once every few generations, the sha gathers into a concentrated pool right underneath the site of the palace. A cult of secretive onmyoji wish to utilize this to perform a grand summoning of a creature so powerful it will allow them to take control of the fragile domain. Will the characters find and stop them? Or will they themselves be sorcerers in the cult?

Hisano's Gate—The site of many historic battles that shaped the domains of the Ryurin region, Hisano's Gate is a naturally formed mountain pass that allows access to the realms north and west of Torigoe. Hisano's Gate is a long zigzagging valley with slopes that range from steep to sheer which stretches for many miles. The new capital of the Northern Court of the Priesthood is a four day march north of Hisano's Gate, and the forest of Naira-do partially borders it, stretching off to its southwest. A large force once garrisoned Torigoe's end of the pass, but Kagetora has been forced to reduce it to a remnant of its former strength.

- This is still a grand checkpoint at the Torigoe end of the pass, and the characters will require travel passes to bypass the checkpoint. Because of the nature of the valley, they will certainly be spotted if they try to go around the pass.

The Copper Monkey—One of the most famous (or infamous depending on your point of view) drinking joints in all of Tenra, the Copper Monkey rests in one of the nameless mountain villages that line the way to Hisano's Gate. A seemingly ramshackle affair of numerous creaking stories, including an inn, a brothel, and a gambling den run by the Mako Yakuza clan, if your money is good, the Copper Monkey caters to all comers. The Copper Monkey is most famous, though, for

ONE TENRA: AGAINST THE TIDE

its ground floor bar staff and the establishment's proprietor, the renowned onmyoji Last Call. The bar is staffed almost entirely by Last Call's shiki, which he changes with great regularity—but the bulk of the patrons come to gaze at the Monkey's Kugutsu bartender Ten Thousand Winters—a phenomenally beautiful girl with hair resembling sheets of shimmering ice and a dazzling smile for all but the most lecherous drunkards. Where Last Call's loyalty lies (beyond his bar) is anyone's guess. Many of the patrons who stay at the Copper Monkey have come to take in the Sunaro Springs, a series of natural hot springs renowned throughout Yashima for their medicinal properties. While the destruction caused by the fall of the Phantom Star slowed business in the area for a time, commerce has been on the upswing as of late. Folk of all descriptions (and allegiances) regularly come to discreetly enjoy the soothing waters in an area where few questions are asked, which makes it a perfect area for all sorts of clandestine meetings.

- The group might be regular patrons of the Copper Monkey. When Buren sends his army through the region, they'll certainly tear through this area, leveling everything. Can a few well-meaning drunkards, gamblers, performers and other low-lives turn the tide of an invasion?
- The Mako clan may know the whereabouts of a new kugutsu, one of the infamous War Brides, those kugutsu so valuable and sought after that lords go to war over the chance to possess them. The characters might be members of the yakuza, sent to find her. What motives will each member have to find her, and will success for one member's goals mean failure for another's? What if there is a spy amongst them?

Thousand Bridges—The calm resolve of the peasants of Torigoe to make the best of their changing fortunes is easy to see in this strange little town. Originally a quiet fishing community sitting along the Hatsue River a few hours northwards from the capital, Thousand Bridges was shattered along with the rest of the countryside. The land originally about the village was particularly unstable though and the village literally fell to pieces, resulting in

large portions being swept away or permanently drowned by the raging Hatsue as the terrain settled into a new form. A Thousand Bridges now consists of a series of fifty or more earthen and stone outcroppings of various sizes, some of which hold a building, many of which merely serve as the anchor for another small bridge, hence its new name. From a distance, the town resembles nothing so much as the top of a needle-filled pincushion. Though still a fishing village, Thousand Bridges has also begun dabbling in mining as small deposits of scarlet steel have been found within a fair number of their newly formed mesas. The resulting prosperity, as well as its location, has made Thousand Bridges a popular way station village for those traveling through the broken landscape of Torigoe, which includes everything from ronin, to foreign agents, to traveling Ebon Mountain and Bright Lotus monks.

- Deep under Thousand Bridges lies a group of peaceful oni exiles who have moved into the area under the cover of night. It is only a matter of time before they are found. Depending on the characters' actions, it could be the difference between a peaceful coexistence or a heart gem goldrush.
- Thousand Bridges may eventually turn into a strategic travel point. A lot of rumors and truths might find their way here. If some of the characters come from this town, how will they deal with this massive influx of travelers and social change?

Ihara's Fall—A newly founded village sitting along a plateau overlooking the former site of Ihara, this town is in fact the home of a majestic new nest of mushi-tsukai who have come to study the strange new annelids emerging from the ruins of the holy mountain. The people of Torigoe felt all but abandoned by the Priesthood after the widespread destruction caused to their land and the annelidists' willingness to help them when few others would has recently gained the worm-users far more respect and trust than they normally enjoy in most domains. For their part, the members of the new nest are uniformly exceedingly grateful to the young new regent and are always swift to send their most skilled members in answer to requests for aid from Kagetora.

ONE TENRA: AGAINST THE TIDE

- A rampaging annelidist threatens Ihara's Fall. How will this change how the people view the local annelidists and their nest?

Shirata— Once a center for trade throughout Ryurin and the first stop for merchants traveling from the province of Ki to the east, Shirata sat along the banks of the Hatsue River near the base of the mountain pass that leads to Hisano's Gate. After the Phantom Star caused the Hatsue to shift her course and destroyed large portions of the town, Shirata was abandoned. The peasants of Torigoe believe that the ghosts of the dead or the spirits of the surrounding mountains have claimed Shirata and now all shun the place. In a sense, they're right. A ninja clan loyal to the Kitan family seized the remains of the town and made it their own after the destruction of their original mountain base. The 100 Falling Shadows Sect has protected the Kitan clan since its foundation. Their actions and timely warnings have saved Torigoe from destruction countless times, yet change may be on the wind. The sect is sworn to the Kitan family, not the regents of Torigoe, a fact that the ruling family used to its advantage many times down the long years, but one that the Vassal houses of Torigoe are unaware of. There is but one Kitan left and should he fall, the 100 Falling Shadows Sect is free to either become mercenary or seek a new master. Such a situation brings thoughts that ninja are often unaccustomed to and Norio, the master of the sect, has had his hands full keeping the younger trainees in line.

- The 100 Falling Shadows is falling apart from within. Will the characters be able to keep the clan together, or will they be more interested in the natural split into sub-sects? Perhaps the characters work towards different goals.
- The ninja have not received orders in some time. It soon becomes clear that another ninja clan, under the guidance of a vassal lord, is intercepting all messages, or killing the messengers. Who could be behind this, and what does this mean for the future of the clan?

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The following characters might make not able appearances in the game. Alternatively, the GM could create a story by having the character actually play some or all of the characters below (drafting up their abilities as normal, as the player sees fit). Don't feel constricted in your use of these characters. They are simply anchors in the world. Kill them off as you need. Portray them however you want, or give their roles to players to use as their own characters.

Kitan Kagetora—The Regent of Torigoe

If the weight of your entire world should suddenly fall on your shoulders, how well would you bear it? Just over a year ago, Kagetora was a carefree second son looking forward to a long life of scholarship and simple pleasures. Now, he is the last of his noble house, beset on all sides by deadly enemies and uncertain allies. His domain was passed to him in shambles. When representatives of the Priesthood finally showed up after the Two Month Night, during which Kagetora had buried the bodies of his family and countless numbers of his people, and tried to prevent the bulk of his living subjects from joining them due to starvation, they offered no immediate assistance but demanded his fealty. While he was considering his response, a second delegation arrived, also declaring that it belonged to the Priesthood and likewise demanding his fealty; however, they at least brought food, medical supplies and a sample kimenkyo mirror. The choice was a simple one, though Kagetora's loyalty to the Northern Court is definitely founded more on necessity than desire. Undeniably, that theme is visibly running through the young Regent's life. The war that is clearly looming with Hakusen and the Forest Realm of Naira-do is not of his choosing. Indeed, he secretly admires Buren's uncompromising stance against the Priesthood and would rather not break the vows that his ancestors made to the Forest Lord. Still, his people need the wealth the soulgem mine represents and he will do whatever he must to acquire it.

Kagetora is a brilliant young man, though far more inclined towards scholarship and diplomacy than

ONE TENRA: AGAINST THE TIDE

fighting. Correspondingly, he has managed to stay ahead of his political enemies even as he garners useful, if unorthodox, allies. He is well aware of what an asset a hive of annelid-users can be and so allowed them to stay in his realm. He has already carefully employed the 100 Falling Shadows Sect to eliminate one or two of his more over-zealous detractors, though he strongly monitors his own actions for fear of becoming a tyrant. He hasn't appointed a Minister of the Right as of yet because there is no one that he trusts enough to relinquish control of Torigoe's military to. He purposefully allows an agent of the Southern Priesthood to attend his court, telling him that he has no choice but to suffer the presence of the Northern representative as they are so close to his domain, even as he quietly complains to the Northern Court representative how little he can do about the Southern Court's minder without bringing their wrath down on him. He graciously allows the Mako Yakuza to operate in the open because he doesn't wish to spare the resources that it would take to deal with them in any other fashion. He regularly sets various tasks for his vassal lords in order to keep them occupied even as he searches for ways to secure their loyalty or undermine them.

He could definitely use some help though.

Kagetora is seventeen years old, though his near perpetual tiredness makes him appear older than his years. He frequently dresses in kimonos with alternating patterns of blue and gray. On the rare occasions on which he gets to discuss something academic, his eyes light up and his cares briefly flow away, revealing the once enthusiastic scholar that still lurks beneath the weary regent. Kagetora doesn't regularly carry any weapon bigger than a wakizashi. His samurai bodyguard, Half-Smile, is ever present when he is in public.

- Kagetora is young and intelligent, but underneath it all he is still an adolescent. Who knows how much longer he will be able to stand the immense pressure of ruling a domain on the edge of disaster?

Nekoda Shiga—Minister of the Left

Nekoda Shiga is a greatly respected retainer, an eloquent statesman, and a skilled swordsman. With Kagetora's intellect and Shiga's renowned organizational skills, Torigoe has been pulled back from the edge of destruction. Shiga has a big problem though—he has grown to greatly respect the young man he was ordered to kill. Shiga is one of the last surviving members of the former regent's inner circle, and choosing one of the men that his uncle had greatly favored seemed logical to Kagetora. What Kagetora is unaware of though, is that the Nekoda Clan has long sought the regency of Torigoe. The head of the Nekoda family, Unryu, convinced that his clan's long thwarted destiny has at last arrived, has ordered his eldest son Shiga to eliminate the last of the Kitan as soon as Kagetora's usefulness came to an end, a state of affairs which Shiga has been able to successfully argue to his Father has not occurred...yet.

- Shiga's heart wars with his duty, which fights with his intellect, and Torigoe's future may well rest on the outcome of his inner struggle.

Kakari-Rank Shibuki Akemi—Northern Court Agent

Akemi was the senior member of the delegation that first brought aide to Torigoe and as a result of her successfully convincing Kagetora to join the Northern Court, she was appointed as the Priesthood representative to the domain. In part because of the devastation caused to Torigoe, she felt that the post was an honorable one where she would truly be useful, but her joy has been greatly muted by her counterpart from the Southern Court, Sogo. While Akemi's original intention was to travel the countryside helping the beleaguered peasants of Torigoe, she presently feels such an imposing need to keep an eye on what Sogo is up to that she is unwilling to leave the Ashen Palace if he is not elsewhere as well. Akemi is a beautiful and earnest young woman in her early twenties. The mask she chooses to wear resembles a thin veil and barely hides her lovely features.

- Akemi may be interested in having Sogo dealt with—then again, the charming rogue might be

ONE TENRA: AGAINST THE TIDE

getting to her, in which case they would both need some cunning friends to help them out.

Kakari Rank Irohara Sogo—Souther Court Agent
Sogo's mission in Torigoe is a relatively simple one; without appearing to do so, whenever possible, he is to encourage Kagetora to attack Buren. Since that appears to be the young regent's plan already, Sogo is pretty much free to do whatever he pleases. This has resulted in two different, but equally dangerous, dilemmas. As he watched Akemi's attempts to spy on his own activities with amusement, he found that he likes watching her far more than he should. He now owes a dangerous amount of gambling debt money to the Mako Yakuza, one of the few groups who couldn't care less whether or not he's a member of the Priesthood. In love with the wrong woman and indebted to the wrong thugs, the Southern Court may be in need of a new agent soon. Sogo is a well-built man in his early thirties who perpetually covers his face with a metallic (with touches of white) grinning demon mask.

- Sogo needs help in several areas of his life. His connections can certainly make him a useful, if dangerous, ally.
- Sogo might travel in disguise amongst the common people of the capital. His nature probably changes when the mask comes off, in a way in which no one would ever guess at his true identity.

Norio—Shinobi Master of the 100 Falling Shadows Sect

One of the great paradoxes of the way of the ninja is that a ninja can have no honor, yet honor is everything to a ninja clan. Kagetora is the last of Kitan, the line to which the 100 Falling Shadows are sworn, and Norio will honor that allegiance, even if it means that all his clan will fall to the Dragon of Hakusen's army. Already, he has had to harshly punish a few promising students who suggested that if they were simply to look away and allow Kagetora to die, they would be free to do as they pleased. He knows he is getting soft as he only broke two limbs a-piece on those who dared to speak so, but it comforts him greatly to reflect

that he instantly killed the few that suggested they should assassinate Kagetora themselves—after all, no knife should ever contemplate murdering its wielder. As to what he and his sect will do if Kagetora dies, he truly doesn't know. He probably won't bide his time idly until that fateful day arrives, if ever. Norio regularly emerges from the shadows of the Ashen Palace to discuss matters of import with Kagetora before returning from whence he came. Norio is a shinobi—he looks like whatever he needs to.

- Norio is a practical, unassuming man. Who can tell what he has in mind? Will he protect Kagetora in the last battle or will he act as the venomous viper that strikes him down?

Liya-Yi—Kikoku Ambassador

When Torigoe's need was greatest, one of the few neighboring domains to offer any vital aid was the oni land of Kikoku, which lies to the immediate east. Several shipments of foodstuffs and grain were offered freely to help the people of his beleaguered land, but what Kagetora found most indispensable was the thoughtful advice offered by the oni woman who brought the goods. The young Kitan formally requested that she be posted to his land as an ambassador, a move that surprised many of the new regent's observers. The folk of Kikoku acceded to his appeal and Liya-Yi quietly joined his court. A slight oni woman who typically wears earthen toned kimonos, the representative from the domain ruled by the oni has proven herself on numerous occasions to be a sharp witted ally—a sharp contrast to the bestial image that many try to force upon the oni. Indeed, she uses the typical prejudices against oni to her advantage so that she is often underestimated by all but Kagetora, who knows better.

- The ambassador from Kikoku is interested in keeping Torigoe stable to serve as a buffer between her country and the fiercely martial realm of Hakusen. Any agents acting for her, such as one or more player characters, would always take on missions with that goal in the back of their minds.

ONE TENRA: AGAINST THE TIDE

- What if Liya-Yi finds that she has fallen in love with the young regent?

Kashira Emerald—Leader of Ihara's Fall Annelidist Nest

Emerald was chosen as the new nest's leader from among her peers, as she was judged both a meticulous researcher and the best able to talk with those outside their ranks without unduly disturbing them: She bears few visible mushi. Emerald is presently being very careful about keeping a tight reign on the younger members of the nest—only the older well-traveled members who have suffered the standard prejudice all annelidists face elsewhere are aware of just how good of a deal they've gotten in Torigoe: A choice location in which to study fascinating new annelids, peasants who try their best to be civil and a young regent who admires scholarship? Heaven! While it is the usual position if annelidists to tend to the wounded and leave fighting to others, the Ihara's Fall Nest is firmly committed to standing with Kagetora on the battlefield should he have need of them. Emerald appears to be in her forties, though her face has an ageless quality to it (lent by her annelids) that makes telling her exact age difficult. She is plain spoken and tends to favor simple loose robes, the better to hide the potential squirming of skin underneath.

- Emerald will do anything to maintain the balance that they have with Kagetora and the other lords of Torigoe, even resorting to brash action and cunning far outside of the nest to make sure the order is kept.

Kae the Kugutsu-Maker

In the foothills to the northwest of the Ashen Palace, there is a modest house that sits on the outskirts of the far southern border of Naira-do. There, in a valley squarely placed between the otherworldly forest and the earthly Torigoe lies the house of the famed Kae the kugutsu-maker. He has labored on his latest work for nine long years and is almost ready to present her to the world. Some believe he will buy peace for Torigoe with her, others say his newest work will surely plunge all into war. Kae refuses to answer what his intentions are.

- One or more of the characters may be interested in finding or acquiring Kae's latest creation. Alternatively, one of them may be the Kugutsu-maker's latest work.

Brazen Kite—The Tireless Merchant

Travel the roads of the domains of Ryurin-shu long enough and you will eventually come upon an extraordinary sight: A wandering trader so thickly swaddled in robes that his shape is nearly indiscernible, carrying a pack so enormous that it greatly resembles a small hillock. Within that mammoth pack lie wonders undreamt of: mechanica toys, fresh fruits, good seed, candies, the finest rice wine and much more... but no weapons, no weapons of any kind, for the pack belongs to the kongohki Brazen Kite who once was lost, but found himself again and swore to never again deal in death. Now Brazen Kite is a friend to all he meets along the road, a jolly merchant with the tinny yet warm voice of an old man, who regularly carries interesting news from afar along with his many excellent goods. He takes no sides in the many conflicts across the province, though he generally favors peasants with better deals, knowing they truly have little to offer right now.

- What's the story behind Brazen Kite? What better way to find out than to play him as a character, at a time before he adopted his common name and traveler's backpack.

The Great Ryoushu Houses of Torigoe

While there are over a dozen lesser vassal lords that report to Kagetora, the three most significant houses/fiefs belong to the Nekoda, the Omoro and the Ishikawa. The Nekoda easily hold the most power, but seem content to wait till the time is ripe to make a move on the regency. Their fief, Spring Lake, lies to the east, near the border of Kikoku, and was mostly undamaged by the recent calamities, which has greatly enhanced their position. The lord of the Nekoda, Unryu, feels that Kagetora's forcing of his son, Nekoda Riku, to dig mud in an armour like a groveling peasant is an unforgivable insult. He constantly searches for a way to topple the young regent—The fact that Riku

ONE TENRA: AGAINST THE TIDE

had a grand time doing it (and adores Kagetora) is irrelevant. Finally, Omoro Ikuo, a well-regarded general and head of a powerful military family, regards Kagetora as a bold thinker. While he is not yet entirely convinced that the young regent is the right man to lead Torigoe, he has chosen to remain silent for the moment. The general watches his new lord with carefully judging eyes, hoping to discern some sign of the last Kitan's fate and what it will mean for the Omoro. It is anyone's guess as to how the minor family of Ishikawa change the balance of power in the internal strife.

- The Nekoda are famous for their well-trained armour riders. What do the Omoro specialize in? The Ishikawa? How might this affect the balance of power?

The Mako Yakuza

The Mako Yakuza control the majority of the crime throughout the province of Ryurin-shu and their influence is felt in many of the other provinces of Yashima. While the Mako existed long before the fall of the Phantom Star and Mount Jinrai, their power has increased significantly with the splitting of the Priesthood. They can now move illegal Northern Court technologies into areas controlled by the Southern Court at great profit, which has increased their fortune significantly.

After the civil unrest caused by the Fall, the Mako Yakuza acted as a sort of ad hoc police in many of the areas hit worse by the destruction, which gained them a great deal of respect with the peasantry. They proved to be so good at catching thieves (the ones not affiliated with them at any rate) within Torigoe that Kagetora asked to meet with some of their representatives. The Mako, expecting to be harshly sanctioned for their temerity, were thus relieved and delighted when he rewarded them for their courage. The young regent granted them licenses to operate their gambling houses openly in Torigoe as well as several brothels, all of which send needed tax money into Kagetora's coffers. The Mako still act as the fire department and police in many places within the domain, including Tengaishi itself.

The Mako are swiftly coming to a crossroads. They have a good thing going in Torigoe and they know it, but few that fight within a war profit by it. To stand against the Dragon of Hakusen is suicide, yet Buren's complete intolerance for their kind is well known. Some Brothers believe that the time has come to leave Torigoe. Others speak of the potential gains to be found on the far side of the upcoming struggles, and a few have found, often to their own great surprise, that they've become so dedicated to their charges that they haven't the will to abandon their posts, even should their Elder Brothers order it.

- The Mako, like most yakuza, are always torn between their role as the supporters of the nameless and downtrodden (they do the jobs in cities, like putting out fires, that no one else will), and their criminal activities which hurt the people. "Gangsters with heart" makes for compelling drama.

- A decision on whether to support Kagetora, to leave Torigoe, or to remain and serve whomever remains, might very well tear apart the clan.

- Another yakuza group, the cold-hearted Ejimaya family, has recently been grabbing turf due to their lucrative gambling operations. A turf war is inevitable.

THE KINGDOM OF HAKUSEN

When Mount Jinrai fell from the heavens and the Phantom Star annihilated the entire northern half of the province of Sunai-shu, there was one man who rejoiced while countless others wept: the Warlord Buren, Master of the House of Thunder, the renowned Dragon of Hakusen. Not once in his long life had Buren ever kowtowed to the Priesthood or accepted the title of "Regent". As the period now known as the Two Month Night fell across his domain, the Dragon of Hakusen's long-in-place plans were swiftly set into motion. When the sun finally emerged from the dust and the two factions of the Priesthood declared their respective returns, Buren was ready. Even as the Northern Priesthood announced the accession of the new

ONE TENRA: AGAINST THE TIDE

empress Genshi Daigo, the Lord of Hakusen openly declared war on all the Priesthood.

Buren's ongoing defiance of the Priesthood was already a legend throughout Tenra and the faction that was soon to be known as the Northern Court decided to make an example of the insolent Lord of Hakusen in order to prove their power. They did not reckon on the Dragon of Hakusen's cunning, or the powerful ally he had cultivated in his newly appointed Minister of the Left, a woman known as Radiant Deception—an ex-Priestess who joined his cause. Little is widely known of what occurred in the terrible battle that followed save two indisputable facts: for the first time in the history of Tenra the kami turned against the Priesthood and the Warlord Buren's forces triumphed over those of the Northern Court. Since that time, Hakusen has steadily built up its already formidable forces as it mobilizes for war. Now all of Tenra waits breathless for the Dragon's next move.

- A group of characters in the service of Hakusen might lead the charge into Torigoe, or they might do whatever they can to keep the domain free of bloodshed.

Scarlet Steel and Veiled Thunder

Hakusen lies within the province of Ryurin, a region known as the Dragonscale Territories due to the unique shape of its harsh mountain range. The mountains stretch all the way to the sea and much of Hakusen's southern border consists of towering cliffwalls surrounded by jagged reefs, made more deadly still with the devastation caused by the fall of Mount Jinrai. Hakusen's location is especially galling to the Northern Court since their newly declared floating capitol Genshikyo hovers above the former Ryurin-shu domain Ouga, less than a three day's march to the north—the Dragon is too close by far for their comfort, yet they dare not show weakness by withdrawing elsewhere. Hakusen's treacherous mountain range holds large deposits of scarlet steel, which Buren has steadily exploited for many years, and vast mining operations with accompanying villages cover large portions of the realm's highlands. The people of Hakusen are hard

and proud, like their lord, and whether they are peasants or soldiers, they have little tolerance for fools.

- The Northern Court might be playing up the idea that they cannot control Hakusen for some mysterious reason. Buren pushing away from them might bring his domain under their influence.

NOTABLE PLACES

The House of Thunder—Carved from a massive granite promontory that thrust far out into the ocean, the House of Thunder is Hakusen's mighty capital. Legend says that it took the strongest shiki of one hundred onmyoji a year and a day to shape the palace and integral surrounding city to the satisfaction of Hakusen's lord. Supposedly named for the sounds of the sea crashing into its razor-lined sea walls, many declare that it was in fact named for the clangor of arms that rings eternally about the palace's titanic staging grounds. As much a fortress as a seaport, the House of Thunder sprawls about and through the cliff of the promontory from which it was carved. Thousands of fishermen work the ocean about the port, with merchants regularly passing through under close scrutiny by Hakusen's soldiers. It is no great secret that Buren pays successful Moguri-ya, the daring rogues that wrest Priesthood salvage from Soratsuzumi Sea's depths, extremely well if they bring him useful technology. Many believe that the House of Thunder only allows a glimpse of Hakusen's real might. It is widely rumored that one or more of the mountains surrounding the capital have been all but hollowed out to make room for forges and armour workshops.

- How does Buren keep his kimenkyo armour-smiths up to date with the latest technology, despite the fact that he has no ties to the Northern Court? There may be a story hidden in there.
- There is one fatal flaw to the architecture of the House of Thunder that, if discovered, could lead to the destruction of the domain's military stronghold. What could it be, and what would someone pay for that information?

ONE TENRA: AGAINST THE TIDE

Steel Valley—A magnificent city sprawling along the walls and forested base of a high-altitude gorge in the heart of the mountains of Hakusen, Steel Valley has become one of the centers of Buren's fiscal might, though it started out as a controlled experiment. Hakusen's borders were closed for many generations, as Buren's ancestors often refused to acknowledge travel passes. When Buren came to power, he felt that the isolated nature of his kingdom was doing more harm than good, so he created a place where outsiders could freely mingle with the people of Hakusen. Passes are not required to travel to Steel Valley. Indeed, bearing an Amafuda travel pass can get you deported in Hakusen, though a traveler that claims to be headed there at the border will have their name logged and sent on to ensure arrival. Steel Valley has become a raucous mining town filled with bustling miners, soldiers, kongohki, merchants, samurai, prostitutes, onmyoji, monks, farmers and many, many spies. It is a city that never rests. Buren deals generously with those who find and report new veins of scarlet steel or other valuable minerals, and constant expeditions into the surrounding mountain range are commonplace. Many that journey to Steel Valley do so to leave their past behind—it is a place of great secrets where few dare ask questions openly.

- Steel Valley is seeing a huge influx of refugees lately, from people escaping ravaged war-torn domains and seeking protection. Will these people be a source of strength, or will they hinder the Dragon's machinations?
- Steel Valley is a sprawling city with many sights, drawing in people looking to change their lives. Stability in chaos is what makes this city thrive. Will the regional lord of this most prosperous city stand up to Buren when the war drums are sounded?

The Arch—On the northern border of Hakusen stands a monument to Buren's many victories formed from the bones of dead enemies melded with the Scarlet Steel of armours that the Dragon and his armies have destroyed. The Arch spans nearly half a kilometer and with each year, it only grows

larger as Hakusen's artisans continually expand it with newly acquired trophies. A sizable garrison, including a single great armour, stands watch over it at all times, as it is the single most commonly used entry to the Kingdom of Hakusen. A small horde of highly skilled craftsmen live in the village that sits just below the arch in a mountain valley. While they are frequently employed to work on the Arch, many of them find the time to accept commissions for Scarlet Steel weapons of various kinds. Hisano's Gate is a hard two-day's travel over rough terrain East / Northeast from the Arch.

- The arch is a national monument to some, and a most horrible landmark of human suffering to others. In secret, the Phoenix sect wants it destroyed for reasons known only to them.
- The arch serves as more than a monument. It is a secret project concocted between Buren and his trusted onmyoji and geomancer vassals. It serves to protect the domain, and perhaps all of Tenra, from something worse than most people could imagine... something worth going to war for.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Lord Buren—The Dragon of Hakusen

Buren has dedicated his entire being to a single truth: For war to finally end on Tenra, the Priesthood must be utterly destroyed. Every single action that he takes is weighed against this one overriding and seemingly impossible goal; yet, incredibly, he is determined to win. Those that meet him begin to suspect, with no small amount of awe, that perhaps he can... To be in Buren's presence is a near overwhelming experience for most beings. So solid of spirit that all who come near him are soon pulled into his orbit, Buren passionately speaks of the harmony that lies on the far end of his great struggle, of the world that will rise and the glory that shall be Tenra's when the Priesthood is no more. Those that listen to him go forth to fight harder for this man that claims to seek peace than ever they would for a mere warmonger. Buren publicly supports the Bright Lotus sect and his coffers have built several Bright Lotus schools.

ONE TENRA: AGAINST THE TIDE

Cynical observers are quick to point out that the Lord of Hakusen is doubtless well aware of the value of troops who will willingly sell their lives in this world for salvation in the next. Buren despises crime and absolutely loathes yakuza, seeing them as nothing more than parasites that feed off his soldiers' needs. He is thought to be somewhat sympathetic to the oni people...but his armours still need powering.

Buren knows that he needs massive resources to combat the Priesthood and he is always looking for any advantage that will assist him in his struggle. He has recently seized several islands that belonged to the former domains of Sunai-shu, though the great Itokawa Yozo of the domain of Suma has lately stymied his advance. A lesser man would probably be frustrated—the Dragon of Hakusen is delighted to have found an opponent worthy of matching wits and strategies against. Buren appears to be in his late 40s, with graying hair and piercing dark eyes. He frequently wears heavy armor adorned with the Hakusen *mon* (seal) cradled in the claws of an elaborate carved coiled dragon. When he speaks, his voice is always rich with meaning. He is widely considered to be the greatest tactical mind of his generation and has never been defeated on the battlefield.

- Playing as the Dragon of Hakusen might be an interesting roleplaying challenge, and might lead to a really cool story.
- Why is Buren so opposed to the Priesthood? There may be hidden reasons known only to him and his advisors. Those reasons might form the core of a longer story set in Hakusen.

Radiant Deception—Minister of the Left

Little is known of Hakusen's Minister of the Left other than that she is a beautiful woman who is widely rumoured to have once been a Bu-ranked member of the Priesthood. Radiant Deception is thought to have many agents both in Hakusen and abroad, including one or more ninja clans, as she always appears to be well informed of important events across Yashima and frequently beyond. Many

whisper that she is Buren's lover, though they have never been seen to be intimate in public. She favors flowing kimonos of black and white silk, which contrast sharply with her golden eyes.

- Why did she leave the Priesthood? What does she actually want?
- One of the player characters could be one of Radiant Deception's secret agents. Or Radiant Deception herself, in charge of keeping the stability of the region.

Distant Thunder—Minister of the Right

The fierce samurai General Distant Thunder is both Buren's oldest companion and the weapon with which the Dragon smites his most fearsome foes. Hakusen's Minister of the Right is an implacable enemy capable of routing whole battalions of un-augmented soldiers by himself. He leaves subtle strategies to his beloved liege lord, preferring to act as the sledgehammer that he is. His presence in the highest echelon of Hakusen's government has helped assure many Samurai that they will be well treated by Buren's government and the armies of Hakusen boast thrice as many samurai as most other domains. Distant Thunder is a massive warrior, there are many that believe that he is always at least partially transformed, as his heavily tattooed form stands well over seven feet tall. In battle he wields a colossal, wickedly curved axe-like gemblade that he affectionately refers to as his "rabbit skinner". It is widely known fact that Distant Thunder has single-handedly destroyed five armours and one great armour, the Relentless Fist, with his mighty weapon. Distant Thunder disdains kijin, loathes kongohki, and firmly believes armour riders are almost blasphemous in their ignorance of what they do; to the Samurai Minister, war is religion. He keeps quiet about the latter belief around Buren though.

- Distant Thunder fears that Buren is beginning to favor armour and technology over samurai and warrior-vassals.
- Distant Thunder's gemblade is highly sought after

ONE TENRA: AGAINST THE TIDE

by a sect of onmyoji sorcerers, to the point that they might openly kill him in order to attain it. What secrets does this curved weapon hold?

The Weaponsmith-Cartographer Yorimitsu

Steel Valley's most (in)famous resident is a man wanted for execution by the Southern Court of the Priesthood for the crime of exceedingly accurate map-making. Yorimitsu's blades have long been famous for their beautiful and intricate engravings, carvings that have recently been revealed as concealing elaborate codes that accurately depict the history or secrets of many of Tenra's domains. Yorimitsu has been producing weapons for over 40 years while traveling across Tenra from province to province, village to village. Many lords are now scrambling to find various Yorimitsu blade-maps in the hope that they will reveal weaknesses in their opponents' territories that they can exploit. Yorimitsu is now a wizened old smith with a razor sharp mind who frequently plays the dotard to catch others unaware.

- A character realizes that the blade given to her by her clan is actually a sought-after Yorimitsu blade. There are three sources now pursuing that character that will do anything to get their hands on it.
- Yorimitsu leaves on one more grand excursion to the new oni land of Kikoku for research. A character can play him, and the other characters might be traveling companions.

Takara and the Fallen Sun

The Fallen Sun is the most famous of Hakusen's three known great armours, not because of its heroic exploits against monsters, but due to the identity of its main pilot: Buren's daughter Takara. The Dragon's daughter rapidly approaches the age at which her growing awareness of what she does will prevent her from piloting the Fallen Sun, but for now she still easily commands the potent war machine.

- Takara is on the verge of turning 16 and a potential love interest for a younger PC. Whether she will turn against her father or join him when she

realizes what she has done in his name will shape the destiny of Hakusen (and perhaps all of Tenra!) forever.

- Takara is so gifted that she is able to both pilot and man the weapons of Fallen Sun by herself, though she has not revealed this secret to anyone yet.

Shining Resolve

The highest-ranking monk in Hakusen, Shining Resolve is a Bright Lotus sect priest who runs the Open Tide, a Bright Lotus school funded by Buren that sits on the outskirts of the House of Thunder. Shining is well loved by the people of Hakusen and personally taught many of the present generation of the Dragon's warriors in classes at the Open Tide. That any man other than himself should have such a great influence over his soldiers doesn't seem to bother Buren... at least in public.

- Is Shining Resolve the honest priest he seems, a spy for the Phoenix sect, or even an agent for one of the Courts of the Priesthood?

The Great Ryoushu Houses of Hakusen

The majority of Hakusen's fiefs are military encampments nestled amidst the mountainous terrain and their vassal lords are all warriors of one stripe or another, save one. The vassal house of Miyabe is lead by the great onmyoji lord named Withering Storm, a master armour-smith famed across Tenra. Withering Storm is privy to many of Lord Buren's innermost thoughts and among the most trusted of his retainers. After the Miyabe, the Kanamori are held in the highest esteem, not only in Hakusen, but also throughout the province of Yashima. The warriors of the Kanamori are second to none, each one striving to outdo the others in martial feats. Kanamori-no-Ryosuke, leader of the house, is widely known to be a soul of honor and—after the samurai Distant Thunder—he is Buren's most trusted general. The Ryogoku are a family of warriors who wear purely functional, almost entirely unadorned armor. Their house's colors are similarly plain, consisting only of a black field with three silver lines. Since the fashion in Tenra is for warrior

ONE TENRA: AGAINST THE TIDE

houses to mark themselves with bright and distinct colors or patterns, their leader Ryogoko-no-Hachibei was once questioned why his house eschewed such. His answer, “We would rather be known by our deeds than our displays”, is oft quoted and considered by many to be the perfect answer for a true warrior house.

- With three warrior-houses, conflicts of interest or honor might resolve themselves... messily.

NAIRA-DO

When humanity first came to Tenra, they found that the ancient places of the world had more than oni to defend them. Ayakashi and spirits of such numbers they were countless roamed the deep wilderness, and many of them did not look kindly upon the newcomers from the stars. Many terrible battles were fought against the Lords of the Trackless Forests and other, stranger beings. The tales of those days, along with their implicit lessons, are remembered now only in the oldest stories, the bulk of which have been passed down for many, many generations.

One of the stories still told within the domains of the province of Ryurin-shu states that as humans advanced across the continent of Yashima, the one place from which the ayakashi refused to budge was the sacred forest called Naira-do, or “Eldest” by the oni tribes. Representatives from the tengu clans of the mountains, a few of which have always been sympathetic to humanity, declared “One of Tenra’s hearts dwelled within the forest”. They would not explain what they meant; they only made it clear that humanity would regret it if the issue was forced. The generals of the day politely disregarded the tengu, who soon left the tents of the men shaking their metallic beaks in disgust.

Soon thereafter several large Human armies marched into Naira-do—they never came out again. Soon after children began to disappear en masse from villages throughout Yashima, their absence unexplained, plagues without cure rained down upon the land, and the majority of crops

throughout the continent dried up in droughts or were destroyed by floods in a single season. Nature itself turned against the people of Yashima and for all the Priesthood’s efforts, nothing could be done to stop it. Nothing that is, until a single brave monk (some tales state that he was the region’s first onmyoji), whose name has long been lost to history, travelled without weapons into Naira-do...

And the attacks stopped.

It is unknown exactly what the monk did. Perhaps he offered himself freely to the forest. Perhaps he begged for forgiveness. Perhaps he struck a terrible bargain. Perhaps the monk had nothing to do with the troubles’ ending.

Who can say?

Since that time, Naira-do has been declared sacred and inviolate by the Priesthood. The Regents in charge of controlling the land on which the massive mountainous forest rests have changed many times, but the prohibition against using the forest in any way has ever been clear and not one has ever breached the (presumed) ancient peace accords...

...Yet.

- Naira-do is filled with so many secrets, so many questions, that each place, each personae, can offer a dozen new questions and answer none. Feel free to use, manipulate, play or discard the elements of Naira-do as needed.

One Forest, Many Hearts

Naira-do is not truly one, but many forest realms of wildly varied spirits that operate almost entirely outside of the understanding of Humanity. While some human refugees have become adept at following the rules of the forest, even the best err on occasion; a practice that can have all manner of “interesting” consequences. Naira-do is truly ancient and it shows; only the eastern continent Hidakami can boast trees as massive or mountains as fierce. None but the extremely wise or the incredibly foolish travel the forest lightly.

ONE TENRA: AGAINST THE TIDE

NOTABLE PLACES

The Restless Temple—The wandering sanctuary of the Forest Lord, the Restless Temple is a marvel. Crafted by a small army of onmyoji with the blessings of many powerful ayakashi, the Restless Temple meanders over the mountains and trees of Naira-do in no particular pattern, though many of the more powerful spirits always seem to know where it can be found at any given time. The top of the Restless Temple appears to be an engraved wooden dome, while the underside is covered with hundreds of human-looking arms seemingly carved from lustrous marble. Glimpses of crystalline and gold veins shine forth as the arms seize the ground or branches to haul the temple onward over the varied terrain of Naira-do. A fair number of onmyoji and a variety of monks call the Restless Temple home.

The First/Last Tea House—At the base of the Mountain Itama, near the center of Naira-do, there is a picturesque valley of surpassing loveliness. At the center of the valley, perfectly placed at the end of an ancient well-traveled path, a magnificent tea house rests amidst a charming garden. The tea house appears to be traditional in every way, except for its massive scale. Even so, its entrances are low so that all visitors must stoop to enter. The tea ceremony is held to be sacred by both spirits and men. The First/Last Tea House is a place of absolute neutrality and it supernaturally reinforces peace. All grievances are set aside within and beings as wildly varied as oni and samurai, ayakashi and mushi-tsukai, kongohki and dragons, can sit together at the tea ceremony, discussing their grievances rationally for a time before (likely) going elsewhere to slaughter one another. The few humans that know of the First/Last Tea House use it as a meeting point in order to broker with the spirits of Naira-do.

The Place Where the Earth Touches the Sky—After the destruction wrought by the humans on their people, this isolated village is one of the largest collections of oni left on Tenra outside of the oni country Kikoku. When an oni comes of age

here, they are expected to travel outside of Naira-do for a time, both to learn news for the village of what is going on in the outside world and to discover how blessed their lives actually are in comparison to what the bulk of their people face. What their youths have learned in the last few years has greatly divided the community on what they should do. One faction believes that they should send forth armed pilgrims in order to bring other oni safely to the forest, while another argues that they should all remain within the safety and secrecy of Naira-do, leaving the rest of their people to tend to their own affairs. If war truly comes to Naira-do, the decision may be made for them.

The Dancing Courts—A series of fiefdoms ruled over by notably human-seeming ayakashi, the Dancing Courts are scattered about throughout the whole of the forest. Each court has slightly different rules, some of them contradictory, which makes it difficult indeed for a human to know which rules of etiquette to follow. The Dancing Courts are as varied as their rulers on their positions regarding humanity. For example, the Court of Arai the Glorious is a pleasant place that offers comfort to a weary traveler in exchange for the martial tales of the outer world that Lord Arai favors. The Court of Ikiyo the Ill-wind, on the other hand, welcomes humans by day so they can be hunted and slain for sport the following night. Likewise, the appearance and location of each Court varies with the nature of its ruler. Some resemble the forest around them; others are centered in grand palaces at the bottom of lakes, or carved into the snow along one of the mountain summits. The Dancing Courts hold a great deal of the power of Naira-do, but they are generally fractured and opposed to one another. The Courts regularly ask the Forest Lord to mediate disputes between them. It takes a large-scale invasion of humanity to get the various ayakashi lords to willingly work together without outside intervention.

Tambo—The only human settlement in all of Naira-do is the mobile village known as Tambo (“the rice field”), the ancient training village of the Sharpened Leaves Ninja clan. The Sharpened Leaves

ONE TENRA: AGAINST THE TIDE

train by pitting themselves against the denizens of the forest, and though they are few in number due to extreme attrition they regularly endure, they are without doubt some of the stealthiest and deadliest ninja in all of Tenra. The fireside tales that speak of them hold that each of the Sharpened Leaves is as deadly as a Shinobi of a lesser clan and that their legendary Shinobi are like unto forces of nature, scattering whole armies before them with ease. The Sharpened Leaves are known to be a mercenary clan, though few know how to hire them. The small number of Regents willing to speak of such matters whisper that the long years spent in Naira-do have greatly affected the Sharpened Leaves and that they have ceased fighting for mere material wealth, but even the boldest Regent falls silent and will not speak when asked what it is that they will fight for...

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Forest Lord Yasuko—Keeper of the Promise

Yasuko was born in a small peasant village within the country of Kagari, far to the south of Naira-do. At the age of eight she was assailed by visions that drove her north until, close to a year later, the nearly feral girl collapsed under the boughs of the forest where she was found by agents of the Restless Temple and swiftly determined to be the reincarnation of the former Forest Lord. Yasuko has held the title of Forest Lord ever since. The Forest Lord does not rule Naira-do in any conventional sense, certainly not as Humans would understand. Rather, she is known by the powerful human-form ayakashi of the forest as the “Keeper of the Promise” and is directly responsible (in their eyes) for keeping the bulk of humanity out of Naira-do. To that end, every Forest Lord has traditionally employed a wide variety of agents both within and without the forest, Yasuko being no exception. They are also frequently called upon to mediate disputes between the various human-seeming ayakashi lords when quarrels arise, or to communicate with the more elusive Great Spirits.

However, no amount of planning or preparation can account for a cataclysm the magnitude of the

falling of the Phantom Star, and Yasuko’s visions have returned in earnest. In her dreams she sees an awe-inspiring dragon with scales of polished copper fighting a small but magnificent silver crane amidst flaming trees as Naira-do burns about them. The smoke always rises to obscure the battle, but it matters little to the Forest Lord, for she can clearly see that the fire the combatants started swiftly sets all of Tenra ablaze. Yasuko will not let that happen.

Yasuko is both a Buddhist monk/priestess and a powerful onmyoji, which is traditional for those bearing the title of Forest Lord. She appears to be in her thirties, though her face has an ageless cast to it which makes it difficult to be certain. Her eyes, though, are deep wellsprings of wisdom and sorrow in equal measure. The Restless Temple is her headquarters and she frequently plans her operations from there. Due to Yasuko’s preferences, many of the actions her agents undertake on her behalf are quite subtle. They are frequently designed to redirect aggressors from Naira-do harmlessly, with assassination only being employed when all else has failed. Considering the magnitude of the oncoming crisis, though, the Forest Lord fears she is running out of time for restrained tactics.

Glass Rain Weeping

Many ayakashi find humans to be endlessly entertaining creatures, and the spirit in human/henge form known as Glass Rain Weeping is one such being. Indeed, the way they scream and bleed bright red has never failed to produce wild joy in him. Their death throes invite hilarity and laughter of the first order. Glass Rain Weeping enjoys humanity and wishes to sample as wide a variety as he can. Therefore, the present restrictions on his existence and his inability to leave Naira-do for amusements elsewhere are unacceptable, leading him to dedicate quite a bit of time to undoing the work of the Forest Lord. Restraining himself and sparing a human long enough to lead it to a soulgem mine was exceedingly difficult, but Glass Rain Weeping prides himself on his long-range vision and the delights he’ll have when the Promise is broken at long last.

ONE TENRA: AGAINST THE TIDE

Arul-Tas—Spirit Man

Not a name, so much as a designation of his place within the tribe of oni that dwell in The Place Where the Earth Touches the Sky, Arul-Tas is not the eldest within the village, but he is the oni that most clearly hears the voice of Dii-Go. Arul-Tas believes that his people must do something other than simply live in Naira-do hoping that the rest of the world will pass them by unnoticed. He is near desperate to find a way to reach out to Humans and be listened to, but he is uncertain of how to proceed and Dii-Go does not speak of such things.

- Arul-Tas has heard whispers of the warlord known as “The Dragon of Hakusen” and his quest to destroy the Priesthood. Perhaps if the oni were to support the Dragon in his great war, he would assist them in return? Arul-Tas would need brave couriers indeed to convey such a message, if he doesn’t just go himself.

Falling Tree

Which is greater: strength of will or strength of soul? This is the question the Bokusen monk called Falling Tree seeks to answer as he wanders the dangerous paths of Naira-do searching for individuals, spirit or otherwise, capable of responding to his satisfaction. It is of little consequence to the monk that many of the forests denizens consider him to be the strongest being within the domain, for he would argue that the very might that they perceive in him is merely martial and therefore fleeting. As ephemeral as Falling Tree deems his physical might to be, he can still easily rout an army if he’s of a mind to do so.

- As one of the most admired disciples of the Bokusen way, many seek out Falling Tree, though few have the courage to walk after him into Naira-do.

SUMA

Suma is of the last remaining domains of the province of Sunai-shu. The famous Regent-General Itokawa Yoichi—commonly known as “Yozo”—leads the domain. An enormously rotund man,

Yozo was born with a gland defect that has caused him great weight troubles his entire life. Since most physical activity was impossible for Yozo in his youth, he became a great student of military history and eventually, a gifted general. Yozo’s most famous phrase, “I must plan well—My legs aren’t strong enough to help this great body flee from a defeat!” is quoted throughout Tenra.

Yozo has recently been taking a great deal of pleasure in matching his wits and skill against the Dragon of Hakusen. The two Regents’ forces have been fighting over the islands left between Sunai-shu and Ryurin-shu in the Soratsuzumi Sea. Buren, too, has been invigorated by the challenge and the two men are swiftly becoming “Battle Friends” as they send a continual stream of messages to one another, alternatively complementing and chiding the other’s victories and mistakes. Yozo may well play a key supportive role in the events unfolding within Ryurin-shu if correctly approached. He will readily bolster Kagetora in order to help the young regent become a greater thorn in the Dragon’s side, though he would certainly never lend enough aid to make Torigoe a threat to Suma.

- The nature of Itokawa-sama’s aid has purposefully been left up to the GM’s needs. It may be as simple as advice on how to defeat Buren or as meaningful as an army backed with armour.
- Suma itself is a vast domain as well, with as many secrets and notable characters as Torigoe, Hakusen or other domains.







