



FIELDS AND MOUNTAINS —
THE SNOW HAS TAKEN THEM ALL,
NOTHING REMAINS.

JOSO.

KOYOSUKE

ITINERANT PAPER MERCHANT,
SMUGGLER AND FOOL.

AS CERTAIN AS COLOUR
PASSES FROM THE PETAL
IRREVOCABLE AS FLESH
THE GAZING EYE FALLS THROUGH THE WORLD.

—ONO NO KOMACHI.



THE SLEET FALLS
AS IF COMING THROUGH THE BOTTOM
OF LONELINESS

KOYOSUKE THE MERCHANT

An itinerant merchant with a ready eye for opportunities in both trade and women, Koyosuke deals in paper and 'grass pamphlets' (cheap books) between Osaka and Mount Koya. He is a worshipper of Inari the fox god.

Koyosuke [pronounced KOY-OS-KAY] is not fat. No! He is short, thick necked, sturdy, with a barrel-like roundness, his chest and back covered with a fine russet down. Owing to his drinking propensities, he is endowed with legs the thinness of which finds the conveyance of the upper massiveness no mean task.

For Koyosuke has the virtue of never drinking alone.

But mere physicality has never proved an obstacle. To observe Koyosuke is to see an idea in motion: chatty, excitable, curious, and indefatigable.

Crude, yes; over-familiar, of course; acting beyond his station, scandalously, yes; the merchant is as amoral and lecherous as a courtier.

What can one expect from a mere trader? Master Kung rightfully disdained merchants, who produce nothing themselves but rather profit from the labour of others. And this one is indeed a miserable wretch, worthy of complete disdain.

Which may explain his unwavering ability to cringe, to humiliate himself completely before any person of rank; be it the purposes of ingratiation or to save his well-padded neck.

And those eyes! Set in a round face, small and dark, darting hither, resting on this, on that, lingering *here*, *there*, missing nothing.

**BEING AWAKE
HE SAYS HE IS ALREADY ASLEEP.
AUTUMN CHILLY NIGHT.**

**TILL NOW I THOUGHT
THAT DEATH BEFELL
THE UNTALENTED ALONE,
IF THOSE WITH TALENT TOO
MUST DIE
SURELY THEY MAKE
A BETTER MANURE?**

For Koyosuke is always excited and engrossed in his particular lusts, yet an instinct for self-preservation is always at work, leading, so far, to a surfeit of good luck. Even his weaknesses can be a way of thwarting his enemies.

For this merchant, life is a game, a marvellous fantasy to be played out. He often does things for reasons he cannot enunciate even to himself. In his mind, he plays the great lover, plays the majestic samurai, plays the Inari fox. And sometimes he acts on these fantasies, knowing that the actions springing from these wild ideas could well lead to summary execution.

'I would very much like to be a *tanuki*, a trickster racoon-dog', he might muse aloud to some drunken companion or way station prostitute. 'Or a *kitsune*, a fox. *Tanuki* know how to enjoy themselves, they have such enormous scrotums. A fox, yes, a fox perhaps, magical messenger of the god of wealth. I would make a fine old fox ...'

Don't be overwhelmed by the Japanese terms used in this description. They are included for depth and colour, but are not necessary for play. Some key concepts are explored further in notes at the end of this character sheet.

Koyosuke has a weakness for pretty women and good food, a lust often beyond his abilities to actually partake. For he has an eternally weak stomach, an embarrassing proclivity to *onara o suru* and *unko*.

PARP! 'Pardon! *Gomen nasai!* Could you please direct me to the squat pit?'

And other eccentricities as well. Koyosuke hates dogs, samurai, border officials and monks—as long as they are not likely to be customers. He has little time for religion beyond the formalities of the family shrine, but is devoted to Inari, the kami

goddess of wealth and success. He craves for rice or sweet red beans. He also craves company, and is fearful of being alone. Ever listless, he can growl softly like a fox when agitated. *Kitsuuuuuu, kon kon*.

Is he a complete fool? Perhaps. The able falcon hides his talons.

And kami, it is said, walk in strange shapes.

**LOCKED IN MY ROOM
MY DREAM GOES WANDERING
OVER BROTHELS.**

KARMA

Here follows the fall of Koyosuke from the grace of good behaviour.

**IN THIS WORLD OF OURS,
WE EAT ONLY TO SHIT,
SLEEP ONLY TO WAKE,
AND WHAT COMES
AFTER ALL THAT
IS SIMPLY TO DIE AT LAST.**

The autumn road to Koya-san, where the afternoon sunlight flows thick like honey. The merchant nods his ruddy face, half asleep upon his great horse, a leather switch swinging by his side. His companions, two women, sit upon pilgrim chairs, slung either side of the saddle. They laugh together, singing. Three loaded pack mules follow obediently behind.

Just a few *ri* more ...

Koyosuke is a familiar sight on the mountain road between Osaka and Koya-san, well known to the way station soldiers, innkeepers and temple monks. The guards wave him through the roadside barriers; the innkeepers prepare his favourite dishes and might point out a particularly winsome pilgrim. The monks are eager to buy his paper wares for their temples: pilgrim and rosary cards, pilgrimage passports, offering paper.

Dig a little deeper into his myriad satchels and there are wares for the more discerning connoisseur: hand-coloured *ukiyo-e* prints in the *shunga* (erotic) style.

Deeper still, for *special* customers only, carefully hidden between bound almanacs and lives of the saints you might find some *kusa-zoshi* ('grass pamphlets') railing against the crimes of the Tokugawa *bakufu* (military dictatorship).

And deeper still, carefully sewn into the lining of some satchels, gold bars, part of a larger horde to finance rebel forces in their struggle against the Tokugawa dictatorship.

Did we mention that Koyosuke was no ordinary merchant?

For all his eccentricities and passions, Koyosuke is happiest in the mountains, content with the simple pleasures of the road. He carries little beyond his clothes: a paper coat to keep him warm at night, a light cotton gown to wear after the bath, a rain cape, writing equipment, ledger, and purse. And for good luck, a ball of nine fox tails that he hides within his pillow, together with tiny pottery figurines of Inari. He carries no weapon, trusting to his wits and the blessings of the highway deities, the *sae-no-kami*.

**SLEEP ON HORSEBACK,
THE FAR MOON IN A
CONTINUING DREAM,
STEAM OF ROASTING TEA.**



PILGRIMAGE

On the night of the full moon, a pearling lugger will approach the coast of a small bay near Osaka, using the spring tide to navigate the otherwise treacherous rocks. That lugger will have Dutch *nanbanjin* ('southern barbarians') on board, and the hold will be full of matchlock rifles and gunpowder.

The gold in Koyosuke's saddle bag and a larger cache already buried in the sands will secure payment for these weapons. (The merchant has had to move it in parts, for the Tokugawa have banned all wagon transport under their military laws).

SHITTING IN THE WINTER TURNIP FIELD THE DISTANT LIGHTS OF THE CITY.

Koyosuke must return to Osaka coast by the night of full moon. It is but a short journey.

MEETING SOMEONE - HOW FEARSOME THE AUTUMN MOUNTAINS!

The weapons will go to rebel samurai that Koyosuke will meet by night on the beach, that they may continue to fight against the tyranny of the Tokugawa.

TWO WOMEN

The priests of the many Buddhas most mercifully teach that no attachment should last forever.

Rejoice in those glad words! Women are a great pleasure in conversation and pillowing, but the prospect of wife is a terrible weight upon a man. Koyosuke would rather drift from woman to woman, taking them as servants, companions, courtesans, or spies as circumstances permit. But now he has two of the pitiful creatures in his care.

Otaki has been Koyosuke's servant and road companion for several weeks now. At first he took her for a *shukuba-joro*, a simple pollstation trollop, but she has already proved resourceful and competent to an astounding degree. Otaki-chan has many gifts, and more than a few secrets, but has proved her worth, mending his torn trousers, applying moxa to his aching legs to strengthen them, distracting over-curious poll station guards.

She is a scoundrel, to be sure, and a moor girl, and no doubt a thief if the opportunity presents itself, but Koyosuke is confident (rightly or wrongly) that he has won her loyalty.

He already feels as if they have known each other for many, many years. Otaki-chan does not know the full extent of Koyosuke's interests, but is surely beginning to suspect. Soon she will be admitted to his full confidence. And she has such a pretty face.

Tomoe is a *bikuni*, a nun, one of the pious ones if you can believe it. The travellers found her by the side of the road, half dead with exhaustion and fever. Usually Koyosuke has little time for such trifles, but something about the woman compelled him to offer assistance. It seems she is journeying to Osaka for a funeral ceremony, and it is no great hardship for her to ride with you. Tomoe-sama is comely enough, in her way, but has a withered hand that no doubt caused her family to cast her out. She babbled some strange nonsense in her fever, but is pleasant enough company with a little food in her belly. Otaki is obviously fascinated by the nun as well, yet there is suspicion when they talk, and the servant woman seems like a wolf about to strike.

Such pleasant company!

AN AUTUMN NIGHT -
DON'T THINK YOUR LIFE
DOESN'T MATTER.

INARI

Inari is the Japanese *kami* of fertility, rice, agriculture, foxes, luck and worldly wealth. The deity is represented an old man carrying rice, a young female food goddess, or an androgynous bodhisattva, and is a popular figure in both Shinto and Buddhist belief. Inari's foxes, or *kitsune*, are pure white and act as her messengers.



Because of his close association with *kitsune*, Inari is sometimes portrayed as a fox, though both Shinto and Buddhist priests discourage it. Ordinary worshippers know better.

The fox and the wish-fulfilling jewel are prominent symbols of Inari. Other common elements in depictions of Inari, and sometimes of her *kitsune*, include a sickle, a sheaf or sack of rice, and a sword.

Many Buddhist temples have designated Inari as their resident protector kami. The deity is also the patron of blacksmiths and the protector of warriors—for this reason, many castle compounds in Japan contain Inari shrines.

The entrance to an Inari shrine is usually marked by one or more vermilion *torii* (sacred gates) and some statues of *kitsune*, which are often adorned with red *yodarekake* (votive bibs) by worshippers out of respect.



KITSUNE

Kitsune is the Japanese word for fox. Foxes are a common subject of Japanese folklore, where they are depicted as intelligent beings possessing magical abilities that increase with their age and wisdom. Foremost among these is the ability to assume human form.

The more tails a *kitsune* has—they may have as many as nine—the older, wiser, and more powerful it is.

Kitsune are believed to possess superior intelligence, long life, and magical powers. They are a type of *yōkai*, or spiritual entity, and the word *kitsune* is often translated as *fox spirit*.

In some stories, *kitsune* have difficulty hiding their tails when they take human form; looking for the tail, perhaps when the fox gets drunk or careless, is a common method of discerning the creature's true nature.

Jewels are a common symbol of Inari, and representations of sacred Inari foxes without them are rare.

Kitsune are often presented as tricksters, with motives that vary from mischief to malevolence. Stories tell of *kitsune* playing tricks on overly proud samurai, greedy merchants, and boastful commoners, while the crueller ones abuse poor tradesmen and farmers or devout Buddhist monks. Their victims are usually men; women are possessed instead. For example, *kitsune* are thought to employ their *kitsune-bi* or fox-fire to lead travellers astray in the manner of a will o' the wisp. Another tactic is for the *kitsune* to confuse its target with illusions or visions. Other common goals of trickster *kitsune* include seduction, theft of food, humiliation of the prideful, or vengeance for a perceived slight.

Kitsune keep their promises and strive to repay any favour. As *yōkai*, however, *kitsune* do not share human morality.

TANUKI

Tanuki is the Japanese word for raccoon dog. The legendary *tanuki* is reputed to be mischievous and jolly, a master of disguise and shapeshifting, but somewhat gullible and absent-minded.

Tanuki is often mistakenly translated as raccoon or badger.

Statues of *tanuki* can be found outside many Japanese temples. These statues often wear big, cone-shaped hats and carry bottles of sake in one hand, and a promissory note (a bill it will never pay) or empty purse in the other hand. *Tanuki* statues have large bellies and even larger testicles.

Tanuki may be shown with their testicles flung over their backs like travellers' packs, or using them as drums.

大坂安部之合戦之圖

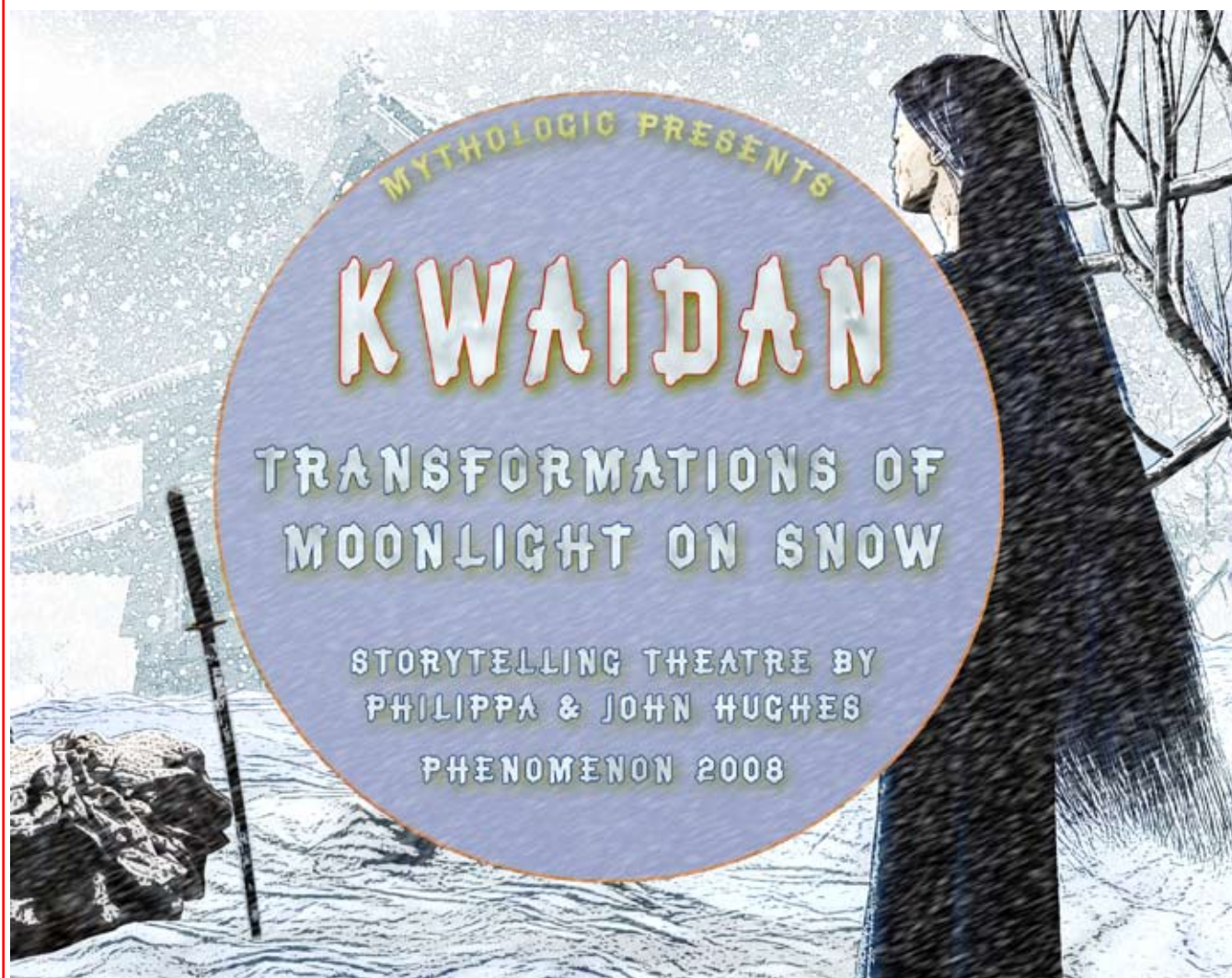


A KWAIDAN FOR YOUR TELLING

The story below is one that Koyosuke tells often. While not necessarily a favourite, it proves to be very effective in eliciting reactions, which can be as dangerous as it is instructive. Make the opportunity to tell the tale in character in the course of the module.

THE FALL OF THE MAPLE CLAN

- The Maple clan guard the high passes of the sacred mountains against the demons who mass on its borders.
- Their greatest treasure was the Tama Yanagi—the Arrow Talisman, Carved from the living bone of a mountain *kami*. This Tama (jewel) has great powers against demons.
- Lord Sai the Golden Eagle, daimyo of the Maple Clan, loved his young pages. His greatest love was his retainer, the samurai Tombae. He followed in the way of the Han Emperor Ai, who cut off the sleeve of his robe rather than awaken the boy at his side.
- Lord Sai lost his nose in an attack on the castle of his ancient enemy, the Kishu clan. The attack was successful, and Lord Sai gained lands and a wife to seal the peace. The wife's name was Princess Otaki.
- Shamed by his wounds, Lord Sai retreated to his inner chambers, relying more and more on his retainer Tombae. Sadly, he ignored his new wife completely.
- The Kishu planned revenge for their defeat, and attacked the Maple clan castle, called Koya-jo, by night during a winter storm.
- By courage and force of arms, the brave Kishu took the castle and slew all the defenders within.
- Lord Sai and his lover fled the castle, taking with them the Arrow Jewel and also Princess Otaki. They were never seen again. Such cowardice! Such dishonour!
- The brave Kishu claimed the Maple lands, but without the power of the Jewel, ghosts and monsters took control of Koya-jo. It remains deserted and haunted to this day.



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