



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

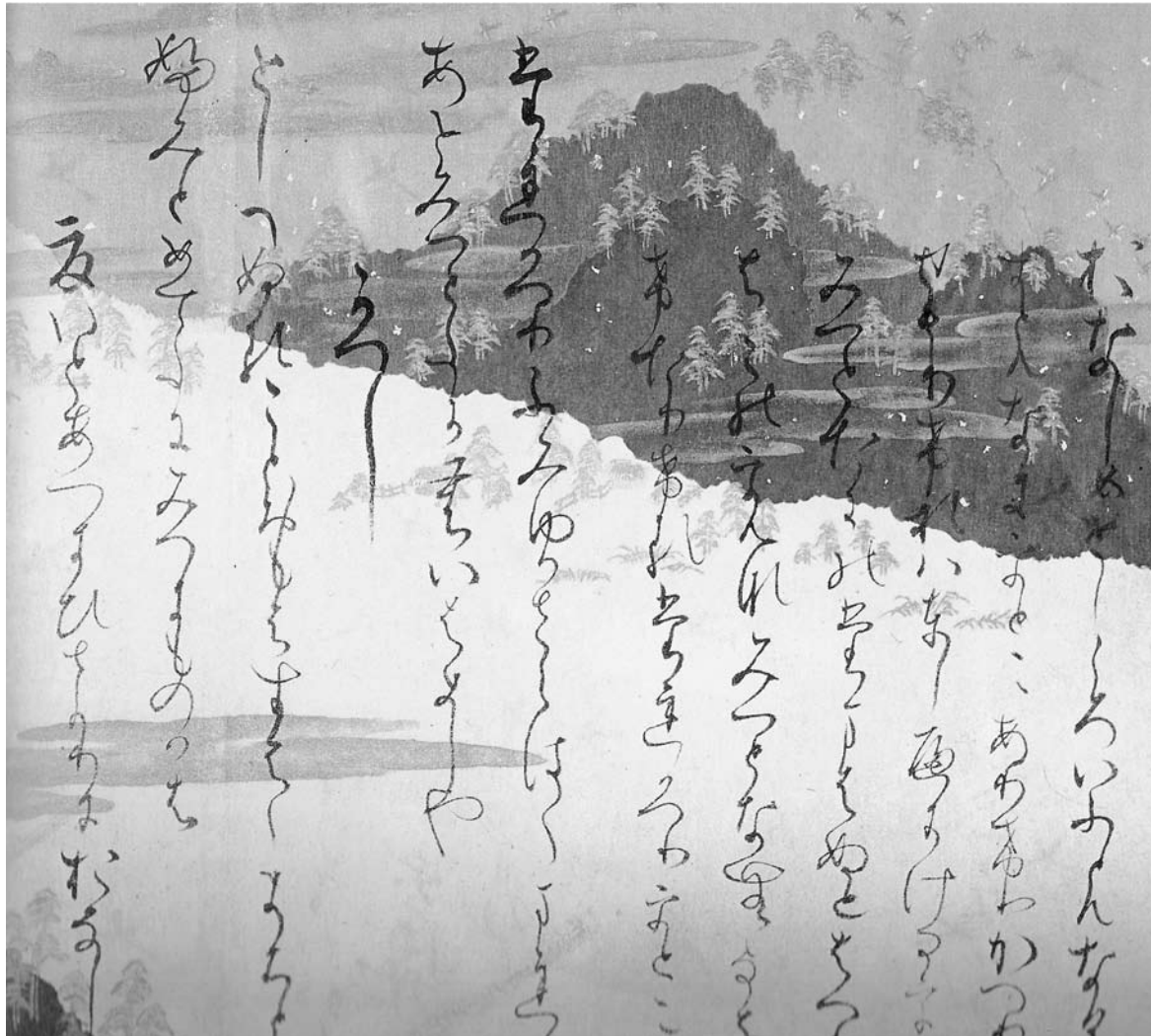
JOSO.

KUMANO

SURLY AND SOLITARY MOUNTAIN
PRIEST (YAMABUSHI) AND PILGRIM GUIDE.

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

KUMANO THE YAMABUSHI

A solitary wild priest (*yamabushi*) and mountain guide, it is said that Kumano defends the Sacred Mountain and its temples from demons and dark powers.

Kumano is a large man, aged but ageless, seeming impassive, a great oak on a high mountain.

He carries with him the smell of autumn rain.

Taller and burlier than most, his air of power and command is unmistakable. His long white hair and beard fall across his shoulders and chest like the billowing smoke from a mountain inferno. A great scar is carved across his face from some ancient blow.

Kumano dresses as a typical *yamabushi*, in a dirty white tunic signifying purity, with a strip of deer hide hanging down in back, a Buddhist hood (*token*) and surplice (*kesa*). He carries a Buddhist pilgrim staff (*shakujo*) topped with a metal finial with six rings, which represent the Six States of Existence—the cycle of *samsara*, of suffering and reincarnation.

When travelling, Kumano carries an *oi*, a portable altar in the form of a backpack filled with scriptures and other religious artefacts. It contains a statue of Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion. He also carries an axe (*ono*) and a *horagai* conch-shell trumpet.

ICHIRO THE GATEKEEPER

Once there lived a man called Ichiro.

Humble was his rank though vital his office: Gatekeeper of Koya-jo, the mountain castle of the Momiji (Maple) clan.

Though a one time *ashigaru* (common soldier), Koga Ichiro's dedicated service entitled him to the position and a stipend of twenty *koku*. And proud he was to bear the *mon* of the Momiji.

Though born a *bonge* (commoner), having risen to the rank of senior *ashigaru*, Ichiro-sama was now considered a member of the *buke* (warrior) class, and might aspire, in the next life, to be reborn a true samurai.

In service to Lord Sai the Golden Eagle, *daimyo* of the Momiji, Ichiro had earned his promotion during the siege of an enemy castle. He had not been the last man to force his way into the blazing ruin of the Kishu fortress; there were perhaps one of two behind him. However, he had done well in quelling the struggling mass of halt, maimed, and blind, for the armed defenders

of the castle were already dead at the hands of Momiji samurai. Despite his modest courage, he was able to present to his lord a reasonable number of his own company with heads still on their shoulders; and a larger number of heads (minus shoulders) of all ages and sexes—men, women, and children—of the castle inmates.

I BEGIN TO SEE
THAT IN THE WHOLE WORLD
THERE ARE
ONLY PATHS TO GRIEF.
EVEN HERE DEEP IN THE HILLS
I HEAR THE WILD DEER CRYING.

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.

The victory over the Kishu bought new lands and a new wife for Lord Sai, a bride to seal the new peace between ancient enemies. Her name was Otaki *Hime*, Princess Otaki.

Ichiro also found himself a wife, called Haru, whom he adored. Indeed it was said he loved her more than a man should love his wife, and all were soon to pay dearly for his passion.

It was a time of great strife, and at Osaka castle the forces of the Tokugawa were arrayed in battle against those of the Toyotomi. The victor would control all of Japan.

With the snows of winter approaching, most of the clan's forces were quartered at Osaka. Koya-jo remained defended by a small force under Lord Sai. An arrow had disfigured the daiymo's face at the siege of the Kishu castle, slicing off his nose, and he now seldom ventured beyond his private chambers above the castle compound. There was little affection between Lord Sai and his wife, the princess Otaki. It is said she took comfort in the arms of the castle quartermaster, a scoundrel who knew all the hidden ways of Koya-jo, from its deepest storage caves to the secret doorways of the womens' quarter. (There were whispers, too, of darker secrets). Increasingly, Lord Sai relied upon his young retainer and long-time lover, the samurai Tombae, for whom he shared *dandoshi*, the bond of love between warriors, forged in court and battlefield.

Ichiro and his small watch fought boredom and lethargy as the autumn deepened into winter. As an isolated hold high in the mountains, the castle held little of value to the enemy.

A terrible snowstorm fell suddenly upon the mountain fastness. Ichiro's wife was absent when the storm struck, and did not return when the wind and snow finally ceased. Half mad with grief, Ichiro ordered his men to search the surrounding mountains, neglecting his first duty to the Lord of the clan.

And the enemy struck. In the dead of night the gates of Koya-jo were breached—by craft or treachery it is

**SOON I SHALL CEASE TO BE,
WHEN I AM BEYOND THIS WORLD,
CAN I HAVE THE MEMORY
OF JUST ONE MORE MEETING?
IZUMI SHIKIBU**

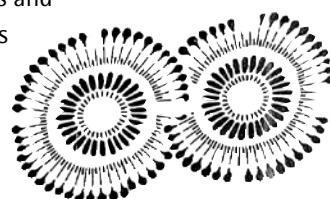
not known. With the garrison twice depleted, the invading Kishu samurai met with fierce though sparse resistance. The flames leapt high, and all within were slaughtered—warrior and servant, old woman and child, mother and son.

No, not all. It is shameful to speak of, but all know that Lord Sai and his lover Tombae fled

the final battle, taking with them the sacred Tama Yanagi—the Jewel Arrow Talisman, root of the clan's strength. They neither faced the foe in battle nor took the warrior's cut. Their heads were not taken, their bodies never found. Nor was Princess Otaki rescued by her clansman: to their enduring shame and sorrow. She too vanished that night from the realm of men.

Oh great dishonour of the Momiji! Oh greater shame that their lord fail them so! In the long months that followed, as the defenders of Osaka fell and the Tokugawa confirmed the brutal power of their rule, the remaining Maple clansmen were hunted mercilessly. Some were forced to commit seppuku, others fled into exile, or became mere slaves on the Kishu estates. Despite a long search by friend and foe alike, nothing was discovered of Lord Sai and his lover.

And what of Ichiro? Helpless on the mountain as his castle burned in flames and his comrades were slaughtered, he sought shelter a while in the monasteries of Koya-san. Not even the Shogun himself dared to intrude upon the warrior monks of the sacred mountain. Grief overwhelmed him, for he carried knowledge of his complicity in the destruction of the Maple clan. As a mere commoner, suicide was not an honourable option: nor would



any blade cut restore the dreadful weight of shame that had settled on his shoulders.

Ichiro fell into utter dissolution: he became ronin, one of many landless and masterless warriors who roamed the land as mercenaries and brigands.

**GRIEF
HOURS ALONE LIFT OUR FEET
FROM THE KNOWING**

In war a warrior
regards neither
heat nor cold.
He drinks from
the puddle on

the field, and cooks rice straw for food in his helmet. Honour, loyalty and courage sustains. But a ronin has only himself, and the terror of his victims.

In time, utterly depraved, Ichiro returned to the Kii mountains of his homeland. He begun to systematically murder and terrorise the Kishu. Single-minded, utterly heartless, he was fearless in his passion. The rage and shame directed inwards for so long was directed to his ancient enemy.

Once there lived a man called Ichiro.

That man is no more.

MOUNTAIN HEALER

**MORNING MIST FILTERING OUT THE
ILLUSIONS OF LIFE,
HERE HIDES TRUTH BRIEFLY GLIMPSED,
RAIN SPARKLING GREEN, SMELL OF LIFE,
SMELL OF DEATH, INCENSE CLEAN.**

Kumano the yamabushi sits in power astride the holy mountains of the Kii. His is a mountain spiritscape of mystery and awe. Kumano knows the wild country, the hidden ways of the seven mountains, the animal tracks and mountain passes to the coast and

Osaka beyond. A guide to pilgrims and a healer, he is revered as an *oshimnodoshi*, a queller of demons.

Long decades ago, a wretched ronin lay wounded in the mountains beyond Koya-san. Pursued by his enemies of the Kishi clan, and consumed by shame and hatred, he sought escape in death.

That man was found by a mountain *sensei*, who knew the secret ways of Fudo-Myo-o, the fire god of the mountain. The ancient yamabushi gave him shelter, and over long seasons, bought healing for his wounds and his soul.

**AN AUTUMN EVE
THERE IS JOY TOO
IN LONELINESS.**

'This is the place to set down a little of your burden. This is the place.'

Ichiro the ronin died on the mountain. Another man was born. He became yamabushi, and set out on the long ascent of the seven sacred mountains, where the mountain gods held out the promise of healing and wisdom. He took a new name, as do all seekers, calling himself Kumano, after the mountain region that had bought him healing.



Though still tortured by the shame and horror of his past, he began to burn away the chaff of his former deeds, and learned to keep at bay the worst of his shame. He glimpsed the secret of compassion: that all things are rooted in the suffering of the human heart.

Over long years, Kumano learned the secrets of the mountain faith. Separated from human company, subjected to relentless physical trials and deprivations, he experienced transformative and terrifying visions, was forced to face profoundly disturbing aspects of his inner self. Through exercises of Taoist longevity, he learned to strengthen the subtle body. In deep meditation and study, he penetrated cant to find the beginnings of true wisdom.

THE MISTS RISE OVER
THE STILL POOLS AT ASUKA.
MEMORY DOES NOT
PASS AWAY SO EASILY.
AKAHITO.

WINTER SECLUSION
IN THE INMOST MIND
THE MOUNTAINS OF KOYA.
BUSON.

At times, recurring madness and torturous shame led him to abandon his practice, descending to the temple city of Koya to seduce pilgrims, to take a temporary wife from among the *bikuni* nuns, or to play at the yamabushi—casting out demons, performing auguries and pretending to find lost goods in return for coins or wine.

Yet always he returned. Over decades, he sought peace. Knowing how to set a bone, draw a wound, cut out the fragment of a blade—skills honed in another lifetime on the fields of war—he combined this with his knowledge of mountain herbs and healing plants and began to minister to pilgrims. Intimately experiencing the pain of the sick, of those who sought him out, he found new insight into his own life, and into the root of sickness in shame and suffering, and in *sabishisa*, the deep loneliness that pervades all the worlds. He saw little sign of demons without, but learned the ways of demons within.

Kumano grew to become a healer and pilgrim guide of considerable renown. But there is always one place he cannot face, one mountain he cannot ascend.

DEEP AMONG THE HILLS
PUSHING THROUGH FALLEN RED LEAVES
I HAVE TO LISTEN
TO THE VOICE OF A LONE DEER
CALLING FOR HIS MATE, ALSO.

THE SEVENTH MOUNTAIN

She has come down from the mountain. She is here, always. Watching me.

Calling me to lay beside her.

She calls me 'Ichiro.' She makes me remember.

Three days beneath a freezing waterfall in deepest meditation, seeking to cast aside the pain, the yearning, the memory. The woman is there always, watching, a ghost from days gone by. Whether vengeful spirit or phantom of your mind, it makes little difference.

Haru. She makes me remember.

Finally, a vision. A golden arrow across the sky at sunset, striking into the heart of the sun, issuing from the pilgrim lodge at the gates of Koya-san. The arrow wounds the sun, turning it a bloody red as it sinks into western sky. A silver full moon dominates the sky as the bleeding sun sinks below the mountains.

A sign, a call. True freedom eludes me, just as there is one mountain I cannot climb, the seventh mountain. A mountain with a castle called Koya-jo, deserted and full of ghosts. A mountain called the Horse Crown, high above Great Bodhisattva Pass.

But now the ghost has come to Kumano.



Stand up, gather your *oi* and pilgrim staff, let forth a throaty blast on the couch shell trumpet. Begin the slow descent to the pilgrim road, to the simple lodge at the gates of the temple city.

Perhaps I will find answers. Perhaps I will find peace. Perhaps I will fail. Perhaps I will find dissolution.

The good divinities and the bad divinities walk together on the sacred mountain.

**OUT OF THE DARKNESS
ON A DARK PATH,
I NOW SET OUT.
SHINE ON ME,
MOON OF THE MOUNTAIN EDGE.
IZUMI SHIKIBU.**



YAMABUSHI: POWER OF THE MOUNTAIN

Yamabushi (Literally: "One who hides in the mountains") are Japanese ascetic hermits and warriors widely believed to be endowed with supernatural powers. They dwell on sacred mountains. Yamabushi follow the secret path of *shugendô*, a search for spiritual, mystical, or supernatural powers gained through asceticism.

**FROM ANCIENT TIMES, THE SAYING COMES,
'THERE IS NO DEATH, THERE IS NO LIFE.'
INDEED, THE SKIES ARE CLOUDLESS,
AND THE RIVER WATERS CLEAR.**

Shugendô is an integration of esoteric Buddhism and Shinto. It teaches that each man has the ability to obtain and experience enlightenment first hand.

Enlightenment is to be gained through isolation, and the study and contemplation of self, as well as nature, and esoteric images called *mandara*. It is a mystery religion, with beliefs and rituals being passed on in secret from master to disciple.

Yamabushi seek power through a discipline of meditation, fasting, Taoist ritual, special diets such as pine leaves, and feats of ascetic endurance such as standing under cold mountain waterfalls or in snow.

Mountain worship is central to yamabushi practice. In ascending the sacred mountains in each of the four seasons, they strive to 'become the mountain' in themselves, seeking vision and power, rousing the Buddha nature that lies within. Every journey is a path of spiritual transformation.

大坂安部之合戦之圖



The mountain is speaking. Listen. Learn to see what it is showing you.

Feel the Mountain.

Much yamabushi practice is also centred on the fearsome deity Fudo Myo-o, a destroyer of demons and master of augury who dwells on the mountain peak. He is lord of many calamities—war, earthquake, epidemics, and above all, destructive fire.

Yamabushi are not monks. They do not practice celibacy, and wear their hair long or untrimmed. For the most part solitary, they at times form loose confederations, and participate in war. Their weapon of choice is the *naginata*. Yamabushi are renowned for their magical abilities and occult knowledge, and are sought out as healers and as *sendatsu*, or pilgrim guides. Others, less disciplined, play at augury for gullible pilgrims, or make passes of their hands over the body in false healings.

'Enlightenment' and 'Nirvana'? They are dead trees to fasten a donkey to. The scriptures? They are bits of paper to wipe the shit from your arse. The four merits and ten steps? They are ghosts in their graves. What can these things have to do with you becoming free?



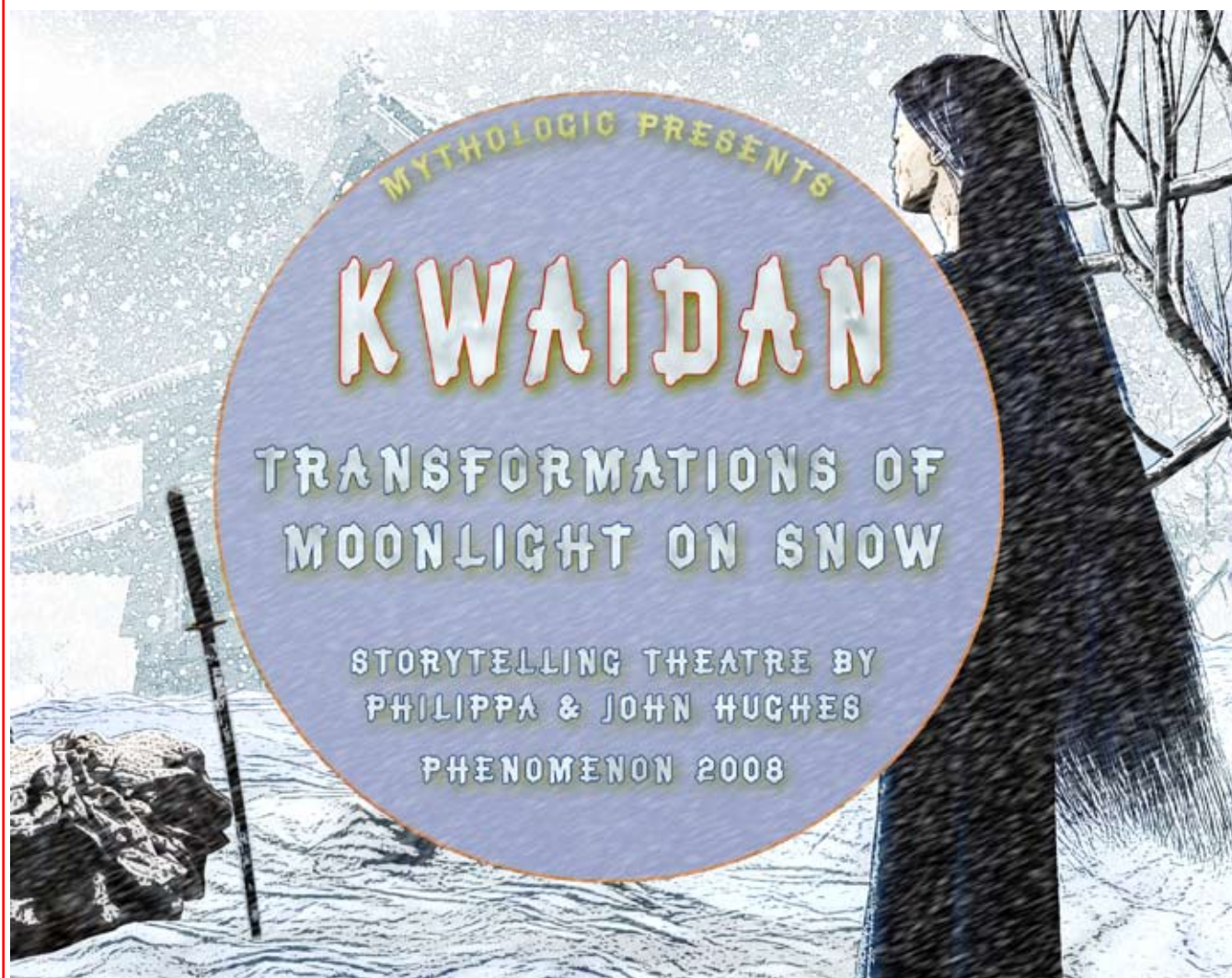
The pure person of old slept without dreams, and woke up without worries. They ate with indifference to flavour and drew deep breaths. For true people draw breaths from their heels; the vulgar only from their throats. Out of the crooked, words are retched up like vomit. When people's attachments are deep, their divine endowments are shallow.

The pure people of old did not know what it was to love life or to hate death. They did not rejoice in birth, nor strive to put off dissolution. Unconcerned, they came and unconcerned they went. That was all.

Mountains and streams are the process of the earth, of all existence... They are what they are, we are what they are. For those who would see directly into essential nature, the idea of the sacred is a delusion and an obstruction: it diverts us from seeing what is before our eyes: plain thusness.

The mountains and rivers of this moment are the actualization of the way of the ancient Buddhas. Each, abiding in its own phenomenal expression, realizes completeness. Because mountains and waters have been active since before the eon of emptiness, they are alive at this moment. Because they have been the self since before form arose, they are liberated and realized.

—Mountains and Rivers Sutra.



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