



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

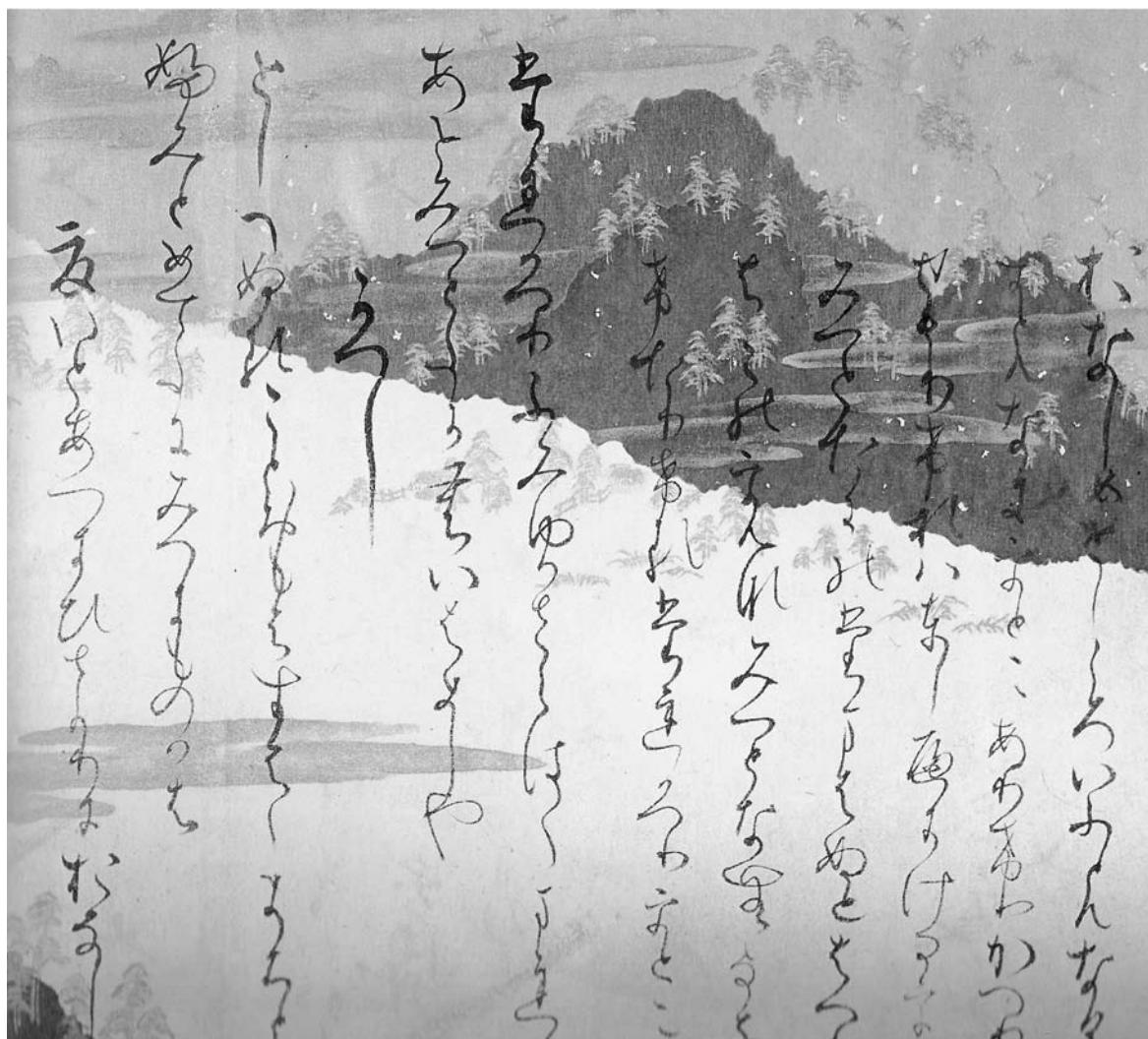
JOSO.

OTAKI

PEASANT WOMAN, SERVANT,
KAMISAMI MEDIUM

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

O TAKI THE KAMISAMI

A peasant woman, a servant and a wandering medium, Otaki has been touched by terrible powers since birth. She does what she must to survive, and prays to the kami of the land.

Her hair glows like some heavy black stone. Her face is tired: it has known poverty and deprivation, the extremes of the elements. But there is dignity, too, and more than a trace of beauty.

She carries herself with poise and self-control: something seldom seen in a road-scarred wanderer.

Her face is narrow with close-set eyes, thin eyebrows, and high cheekbones. Her eyes seldom rise, seldom meet yours. It is as though she would keep the world at bay.

There is silver in her voice. But when she laughs there is a snappy nasal sneering in the sound, most unpleasant, savouring faintly of derision. And desperation. And fear.

|| **WINTER CLOUDS**
SUMMER DREAMS
TURNING TO ICE

Look closely, observe the scratches on her arms, the many tiny amulets and talismans she wears about her body, the long, wicked *kansashi* pins she wears in her hair.

In quiet moments, watch as she plays, perhaps a trifle obsessively, with the tiny silk and wood dolls she carries in her travelling bag. Glimpse further therein, see the wooden blade, the amulets; the implements of a medium, a *kamisami*.

A woman of strong feelings then, which might sometimes erupt into violence and cruelty.. What jealousy, hatred, cruelty, or other depraved passions pass, however faintly, through her heart? Why is this so?

|| **HARD TO BELIEVE**
THE SOMEONE TOUCHING THE ROOF
IS ONLY RAIN

Here is a woman who lives in fear, yet meets that fear with anger and defiance. Here is a woman who lives in two worlds: the world of the living, the world of the dead.

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.



KARMA

The horse ascends patiently upon the mountain road, leading a small train of pack donkeys. It carries an obese merchant, and slung from pilgrim chairs on either side of the saddle, two tiny women. One, wrapped in threadbare nun's robes, dozes listlessly, her face pale with the ravages of a fever but recently passed. The other draws her tunic against the growing chill, lost in reverie. Remembering ...

Tenshin Otaki was a happy child. Raised by her mother and an aunt amidst a bustling crowd of cousins, she was seldom cold or hungry. It was her aunt that ran the household. Otaki's mother was sickly, but always by her side, patient, loving attentive. The young girl was never alone.

As she grew, however, an aura of fear descended upon the household. Those around her became distant and afraid. Little was said.

Finally, the deep shame was revealed. Her uncle, in a terrible outburst of anger, demanded that Otaki cease the childish games and pretensions that were bringing deep shame upon them all.

For Otaki's mother had died giving birth to her.

Yet still, she was there with her child. Loving, Watching. Judging. A *yurei*, a ghost.

And she was not alone.

'Born in the grave of her mother' Otaki could at times see *muen botake*, the restless spirits of the dead.

It was a terrible curse, borne at heavy cost. For the dead cluster about people and places of import to them: the young, the oppressed, the pregnant, the dying; and at scenes of death or violence or joy. They may be voyeuristic, angry, violent or totally impassive.

They may be empty shells. They may be demons. But always they always make demands.

And they terrified Otaki.

The constant presence and provocation of the shadowy dead led the young girl to outbursts of hysterical anger, cruel violence and terrifying bouts of madness.

||| **PEOPLE ARE FEW
A LEAF FALLS HERE
FALLS THERE.
ISSA.**

Cast out by her family, Otaki fled to the highways, eking out a meagre survival as a prostitute and a thief. Her stomach turned to stone. Her girlish laughter ceased.

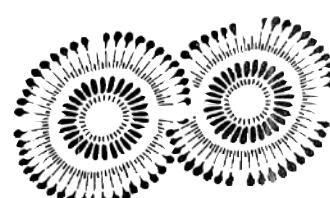
And through all her suffering, she carried the deep shame of failing in her duty to family and ancestors.

The Buddhist priests she turned to proclaimed that it was her karma, a chance to burn away the indolence and evil that had marred a previous life. She must be strong, and resist the passions which threatened her.

Through terrible adolescence, Otaki learned a small measure of control. She could – through wine, through will, through sheer intensity of living, keep her visions of the dead at bay.

Eventually wandering mediums recognised her curse, which some of them shared, and they taught her both measures for survival and ways to derive reward from her ability.

With their help Otaki became a *kamisami*, a spirit medium, or to use the insulting term, a *gomiso*. For ordinary folk fear mediums, and to deal with the dead is the greatest pollution of all.



|| **ALIVE
THE DEAD GO WALKING
IN MY FEET,**

Otaki learned the use of ritual protections and avoidances to keep the dead at bay. She learned the arts of a marketplace medium: part theatre, part performance, part healing, part deception.

She first learned to perform *kuyü*, a simple ritual in memory for the dead which afforded healing for the living. She learned *kuchiyoso*, the rite of calling down the dead, acting out the voices of departed family members, repeating simple lies that the living wished to hear for reassurance. With her carved wooden blade she would dance and gyrate to 'cut away' unhealthy spirits. With her tiny *oshirasama* dolls, carved from mulberry wood, clothed in silk and straw and cloth, she would trade secrets and healing lies in return for coins and offerings of food.

Finally, with the arts of duplicity mastered, she learned true possession, the most powerful and terrifying art of all. She was taught the secrets of the Chinese princess and her horse lover, killed for their love. She learned to enter trance, mime the divinities sexual union, surrender to their power, re-enact the murdered beings' journey to heaven.

|| **THE TABLE OF THE SPIRITS
DEW, AND TEARS
THESE ARE THE OIL,
RANSETSU.**

She learned to open herself to be a true channel for the dead, and other even more terrifying things beside.

True possession—as opposed to the false, theatrical performances of the marketplace—is a dangerous, sometimes deadly ordeal. Otaki has no control, no memory of the forces she embodies. The ordeal is exhausting, and temporary blindness can often follow a possession state. And sometimes, the dead do not wish to leave.

Yet mastery of the spirits brought Otaki a measure of sanity and reassurance, the confidence that comes from having power.

The wanderer's laughter returned. It contained a hint of cruelty in its ring, and sometimes needed to be suppressed.

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

And mastery brought temptation. Darker arts of magic, deception, and manipulation now lay open to her, arts that might take her far from the violence and poverty of the highway.

So far, Otaki has resisted them. Yet she is very aware of the harsh nature of her karma, the way in which ambition and the search for comfort are always thwarted. But blessings are the gifts of the deities, granted or withheld at their whim.

|| **THE REELING, LOLLING FIGURE OF THE MEDIUM,
HER EYES ROLLED BACK, HER THIN KIMONO
SOAKED WITH SWEAT, HER FLAT BREASTS ARE
STUCK TO THE COTTON.**



A MERCHANT AND A NUN

Then came Koyosuke (pronounced KOY-OS-KAY).

Koyosuke-kacho needed a servant, a companion, a bodyguard, a spy. You proved yourself more than capable in all these areas.

||| **WIND
IN THE WATERFALL
WHITE GHOSTS**

Koyosuke-kacho, an obese paper merchant: insecure, talkative, vulgar, given to petty lusts and obscure fantasies, often lost in dream worlds. He is stern with you in public, fawning and obsequious to everyone else. His chatter would seem to indicate a simple and unfocused mind, but his eyes reveal otherwise. He clearly

loves the sound of his own voice, and is eager for any affirmation of his status and standing.

At first you thought it was easy to control and direct him, even given your status as a seeming servant. Now you are not so sure.

The mutual trust, however, is growing. Your alliance, though tentative, is secure. But there are many secrets still, on both sides.

For there is much more to this man than his public face. He is no mere paper merchant. His wares are full of mystery. There is considerable gold stitched into the lining of his saddle bags, and from his careless boasting, more hidden elsewhere. And he guards his night pillow like a purse!

And now he is in a great hurry to reach the coast.

Then came Tomoe. A wandering nun, feverish and near dead, collapsed by the side of the mountain road. To see her there was a great and terrible shock. Not that the dead and dying are rare on the pilgrim highways at this time of year, but because she was so familiar in her face and bearing, a familiarity beyond conscious recognition that brought with it a certain suspicion, indeed a lingering revulsion, a hatred, but also a terrible fascination. Your lives are linked in some fundamental way.

It was Koyosuke who offered kindness and help: you did not need to persuade him. With potions to heal, a warm blanket, food, a nights' shelter in an inn, Tomoe-sama made rapid recovery. She will accompany you to Osaka, where she has funerary obligations to her dead father.

You have perhaps three days to understand the mystery.

PILGRIMAGE

Haunted by the dead, Otaki seeks a proper place among the living, to restore the balance of her life. Yet to find peace, she must first understand the nature of her curse. Tomoe is a clue, and perhaps Koyosuke as well. But to what end?



||| **OUT IN THE MARSH REEDS
A BIRD CRIES OUT IN SORROW,
AS THOUGH IT HAD RECALLED
SOMETHING BETTER FORGOTTEN.
KI NO TSURAYUKI.**

||| **STARING, STARING
AT THE GATHERS OF
THE PILLOW;
LONG IS THE NIGHT.**

THERE WILL BE A MOMENT

A Note to the Player:

At a certain point in the module, there will be a moment of recognition, of utter transformation.

You will recognize a face, a face utterly familiar, yet one you have never seen before.

The moment and its accompanying emotion will be profound, shocking in its force. It will evoke feelings of great passion, of intense lust and intense hatred as well, an intensity of bewilderment that will leave you utterly breathless.

Prepare yourself for this moment. Listen for the GM's phrase, "as if you awaken from all the dreams of the floating world". That will be the moment.

BLACK HAIR
TANGLED IN A THOUSAND STRANDS.
TANGLED MY HAIR AND
TANGLED MY MEMORIES
OF OUR LONG NIGHTS OF LOVE MAKING.
YOSANO.

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 crueler 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.



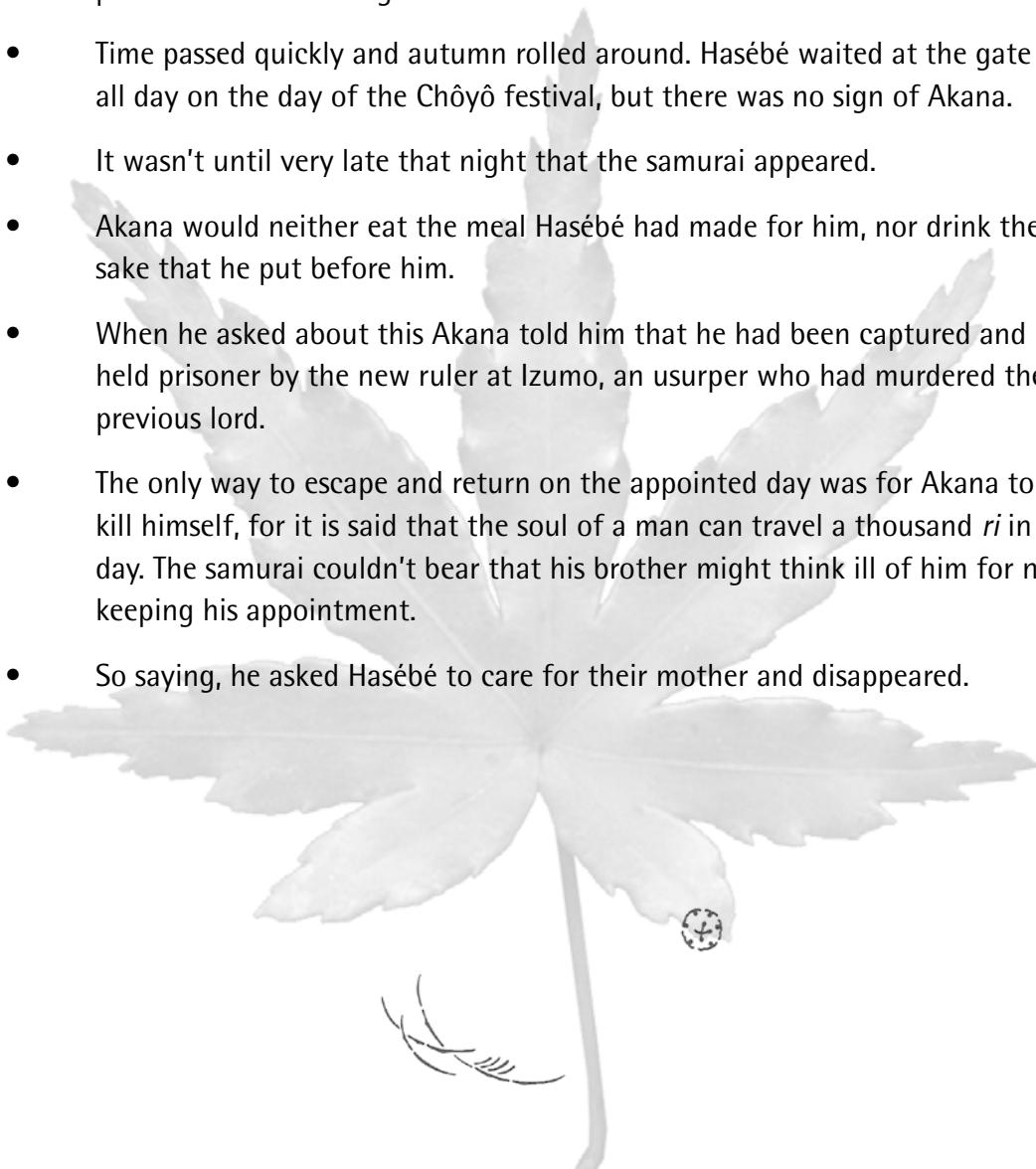


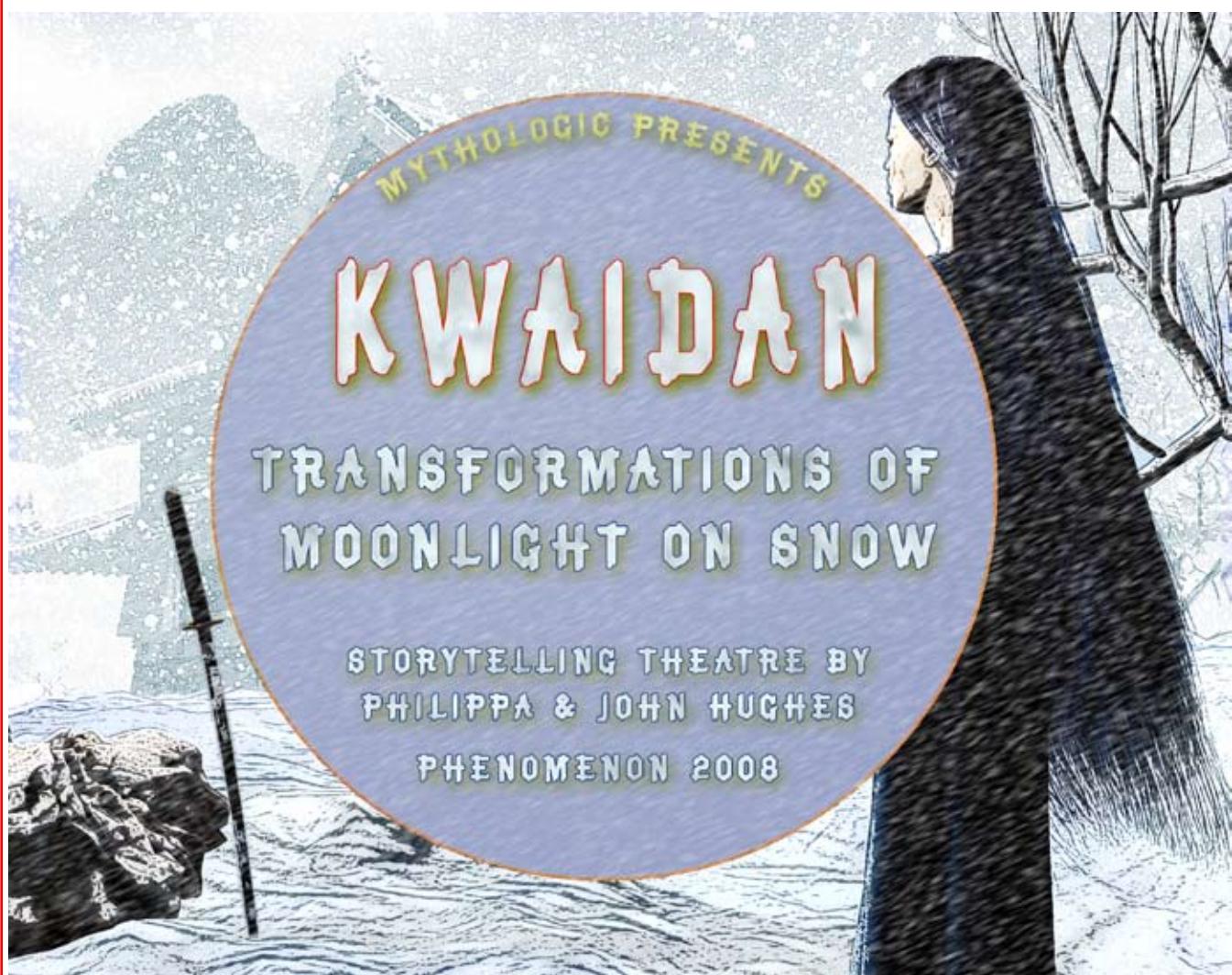
A KWAI DAN FOR YOUR TELLING

The story below is one of Otaki's favourite *kwaidan*, or weird tales. Make an opportunity to tell the tale in character in the course of the module. Evenings before sleep are a perfect time to tell stories.

OF A PROMISE KEPT

- It was spring. Soyēmon Akana of the village of Kato promised his brother Hasébé he would return home in autumn.
- For Akana was an Izumo samurai; and he wanted to visit his birthplace. Izumo was over an hundred *ri* away.
- Hasébé asked Akana to name a day so that he could prepare a welcome. The festival of Chōyō was the day Akana decided he would return. His brother promised to be at the gate to meet him.
- Time passed quickly and autumn rolled around. Hasébé waited at the gate all day on the day of the Chōyō festival, but there was no sign of Akana.
- It wasn't until very late that night that the samurai appeared.
- Akana would neither eat the meal Hasébé had made for him, nor drink the sake that he put before him.
- When he asked about this Akana told him that he had been captured and held prisoner by the new ruler at Izumo, an usurper who had murdered the previous lord.
- The only way to escape and return on the appointed day was for Akana to kill himself, for it is said that the soul of a man can travel a thousand *ri* in a day. The samurai couldn't bear that his brother might think ill of him for not keeping his appointment.
- So saying, he asked Hasébé to care for their mother and disappeared.

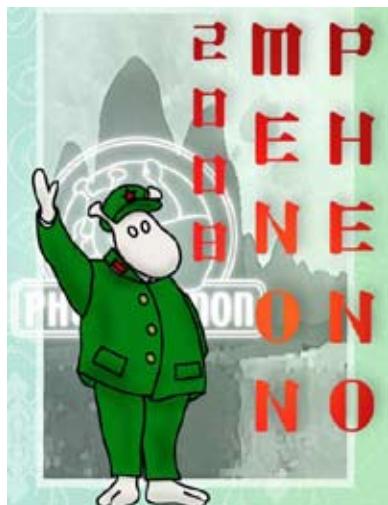




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LOYAL DEMOCRATIC RANDOM INC PRESENTS, A PEOPLES'
PHENOMENON LABS SOCIALIST GAMES CONVENTION

Phenomenon 2008

Queen's Birthday long weekend
06 - 09 June 2008
Daramalan College
Dickson, Canberra
ACT, Australia

<http://pheno.org.au/2008/>