



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

JOZO.

TOMOE

FORMER GENTLEWOMAN,
IMPOVERISHED WANDERING NUN (*BIKUNI*).

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

TOMOE THE BIKUNI

A former gentlewoman, now an impoverished Buddhist nun (*bikuni*), Tomoe seeks her salvation walking the pilgrim trails to the many temples of the Sacred Mountain.

Her voice is so beautiful it is almost lonely, almost sad.

The first impressions are of a slight figure, thin, very pale skin, those striking eyes filled with energy and curiosity: such a rarity in a *bikuni*. A degree of tranquillity in her demeanour: gift of either her upbringing or her practice.

Her age is uncertain, though she still retains her youth. She is comely and seemingly modest.

You are drawn to her shaven head, of course, token of her nun's vows. You observe the filthy, threadbare robe, rough sandals, soiled straw raincape (*kasa*), dome shaped hat tied to her back, the sandalwood prayer beads that hang about her neck. Her simple pack no doubt contains the implements of her vocation: printed sutras, goō amulets for warding off evil, wooden clappers (*binzasara*) to accompany her chanting.

Her movements are constrained and cautious. She favours one side. So skilful and practiced is her disposition, however, and so voluminous her billowing robes, that it is some time before you notice her withered right hand, legacy no doubt of some childhood illness. Unsuitable as a bride then, despite her obvious gentle birth. Perhaps that is why she became a *bikuni*.

THE PILGRIM'S PATH IS
PURPOSEFUL, UNLIKE THE PATH
OF THE WANDERER.

LYING ON THE ROUGH
MATS OF THE RICE-HARVESTERS
IN THE AUTUMN FIELDS,
I FIND THE SLEEVES OF MY ROBE
WET. IS THE DEW SO HEAVY?

Look closely again at those eyes: do they perhaps not betray a hint of loneliness and despair? In her sudden silences and introspections, are there not tokens of spontaneous tears?

She appears to be chaste and pure. But what dwells with, unperceived by others? Do jealousy, hatred, cruelty, or other depraved passions pass—however faintly—through her heart? Is outward sign ever given, or is her entire life lived inside herself?

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

This one awakens from a fevered dream: A fox licking at my foot.

The worst of the fever has broken, I can take food again, walk unassisted. I have lost precious time to my illness, and the moon will not cease in its progress as it waxes towards fullness.

I am hungry. I am always hungry.

Just a few days left. I must return to Osaka.

There is a woman there to help me, Otaki is her name, and her master, Koyosuke, a merchant with horse and pack animals. Of all the starving and stricken who lay beside the pilgrim road, they have chosen to assist me, for good or for ill I cannot yet say. They are kind, which is a blessing, for if they turn upon me I have little strength to fight.

They invite me to travel with them to Koya-san and then on to Osaka. The merchant's horse is large, and the pilgrim side-saddle allows three to ride together.

They share my journey, but they do not understand my shame.

What bond from a former life has caused me this suffering? I am certain to be reborn in hell anyway, for I have heard that women are sinful creatures. Yet the Buddhas in their compassion offer solace and hope.

If I reach Osaka by the full moon, I can at least fulfil my duty to my family, a duty in which, to my eternal shame, I have been sadly remiss.

Namu Amida Butsu. 'I surrender to the compassion of the Buddha.' May I awaken in the Pure Land.

It is the most beautiful sound in the universe, the Nembutsu. *Namu Amida Butsu.*

FEELING MY ALONENESS,
I GET UP, LEAVE MY DWELLING, GO,
LOOK AT MANY THINGS.
EVERWHERE IT IS THE SAME,
DUSK AT THE END OF AUTUMN.

My family were once samurai, but like so many in this Age of the Final Dharma, lost their wealth and position in the tumult of the Tokugawa wars.

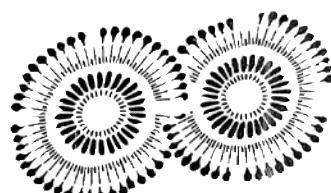
In their poverty they desired a son: their three daughters were a curse and a misfortune, and I, Tomoe, was the youngest and least loved.

By all accounts I was a familiar, knowing child, who set herself apart from others. Despite my withered arm—or perhaps because of it—I joined in the play of boys with sticks and wrestling until beatings stopped such unnatural behaviour. I was given to stealing food—so warm, so sweet—and to lying about my crimes. I was always so hungry. Such was the shame my parents endured.

As I grew, a marriage was arranged to the second son of minor daimyo official. Such a match offered hope to my parents, who were deep in poverty and clinging desperately to the last shreds of respectability.

I refused, impetuous wretch that I was. Thinking only of myself! Raising a family had no interest for me, and already I was taken by a sense that *someone* was fated for me, if only I could find him. I did not know who he was, but he was not a tax officials' son from Osaka, clinging to his gold and ledgers

I sometimes glimpse him—then as now—in my dreams, his presence quite palpable. I touch him, he touches me. I imagine his face, his body. Such things we carry from former lives, the evil deeds and passions we cherish from the beginningless past!



A woman does not refuse her parents, of course. It was my sisters' husband who took to correct my selfishness, with harsh words, harsher blows and evil intentions.

Despite my sickly body and wasted hand, I was able to fight back, and with incredible determination! I struck him, left him lying bleeding upon the tatami mats of our home. It was if some greater power intervened, to protect and defend me.

My shame was complete, my dishonour absolute. I could no longer face my family. Being worthless, having nothing, to spare them further shame I fled. After long and empty days wandering, starving and alone, I took the tonsure, shaved my head and recited the lay vows of a *bikuni* (nun). I sought refuge in the Buddha. In the Dharma. In the Sanga.

|| **IN SETTSU PROVINCE
ANYTHING AT ALL
BECOMES DHARMA
EVEN FLIRTING, CARNAL PLAY
- YES, SO I HEAR.**

The *Kumano no bikun*, the nuns of Kumano, are wanderers, walking the pilgrim trails to the holy temples and sacred mountains.

We survive as we can, begging, singing, selling amulets, casting oracles, and sometimes to offer other things as well. I am always hungry. Often we walk together, sometimes we walk alone. My *bikuni* sisters are many, and of diverse callings. Are not all cats the one colour in the dark? Some are holy, many are lost, or cast out, or stricken by madness. Some come from brothels and will bare their breasts in the pilgrim lodges, others are former courtesans (*yûjo*), Shinto mediums (*mikko*), or puppeteers who worship the crossroads deity. Some are devoted to the Buddha, but few have spent any time in a monastery, or can read the sacred scriptures. We are wanderers surviving on our various arts, the *uta bikuni* (singing *bikuni*), dependent on the compassion of the Buddha and the coins of villages and pilgrims.

Every day I try to set aside a few copper coins for the monastery at Kumano, and everyday one of the sisters borrows it for some urgent need.

It is said that in the cities such as Osaka, the name '*bikuni*' has come to mean a certain type of prostitute. These are dark times. Perhaps this is why Koyosuke-dono (for such is the merchant's name) first befriended me.

The road is harsh, and as the year deepens, sickness and freezing rain take their full toll. Winter travel is misery, and *henro* (pilgrims) are few. It is not uncommon to find bodies by the side of the road.

In this late season, the remaining *henro* are deserters, criminals, outcasts... and the truly pious—just like the inhabitants of Koya-san, the holy mountain!

It is often dangerous, for *henro* can be urgent in their needs.

More than once I have been attacked by some thief or worse, and each time I have managed to fight him off. I, a crippled nun! What is this power that intervenes to save me?

I believe it is Blessed Jizô.



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

Ojizô-sama, the great bodhisattva who vowed not to achieve Buddhahood until all the many hells are emptied. Jizô, protector of pilgrims, of children, of the unborn.

Ojizô-sama watches over my journey.

My life is harsh, but not without its consolations. Mine is the contemplation of the ten realms of the living and the dead. There are times of deep tranquillity and the peace of deep silence. Knowing how ignorant and sinful I am, I surrender to the compassion of Amida Buddha, reciting the sutra that may awaken me to the Pure Land.

*Namu Amida But
Namu Amida But.
Namu Amida Buts
Namu Amida But.*

THE AUTUMN WIND IS BLOWING
WE ARE ALIVE AND CAN SEE
EACH OTHER,
YOU AND I.

HOW HEAVY THE RAIN
ON THE KASA I STOLE
FROM THE SCARECROW!
KYOSHI.

Though I dress as a *bikuni*, I do not often feel that I truly am worthy of the calling. Perhaps one day I can leave the dust and mud of the world behind, and take my full vows. Until that time, I trust that Ojizô-sama will guide and protect me.

PILGRIMAGE

Word is received that my father is dead; taken by illness, the sorrows of years, the disappointments of daughters.



When the message reached me, he had already passed to the realm of ghosts. I, who had failed him so badly in life, had also failed him in death. Now I can never prostrate myself and beg forgiveness for the sorrow and shame I have caused to him and to our ancestors.

There is but one hope. The ceremonies of *shiju-kunichi* are conducted on the forty ninth day after death. The family together offers final prayers to speed the ghost on its journey to the lands of the dead. With our prayers he is assured of the Pure Land; without them he risks hell, or rebirth as an animal, insane, or to sorrow again as a human.

IT IS EVENING, AUTUMN
I THINK ONLY
OF MY PARENTS.

I must reach Osaka by the night of full moon. And like the sun and the moon I must never halt upon my journey.

Yet the year is deepening, and I am weak and stricken by fever. My amulets cannot ward off this evil, and I have no money for

an ishi's potion, nor time to delay my journey to beg. I eat little, sleep little, push myself a little further each day.

The rains are cold, the frosts bitter. My clothes are poor, and few: I have been forced to steal a raincape (*kasa*) from a scarecrow in a field.

I ascend the holy road to Koya-san, climbing slowly into the sacred mountains. My fever deepens, I walk in a daze.

In my sickness, memories of Koya-san give me strength and hope.

I remember the temple avenues, the graveyards, the great Ojizô-sama temple. I recall the painting of the great monk, the bear with an arrow in its chest: mysteries of the temple's founding. In the dawn temple, the sliding walls are cast aside to reveal, with new eyes, the high peaks of the gods.

Etched in memory, Mandara paintings, where holy beings descend on luminous tinted vapours. Rainbows and iridescent clouds reveal the radiant energies of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, kami.

To walk for an hour among the temples, to pray at the most holy shrines—surely this will give me strength to complete the road to Osaka!

But then comes a day I am too weak to move. I shiver in a muddy gutter, soon to be another *henro* corpse. Fever takes me, I have no concept of the passing of time.

And I awake from a dream of a fox licking at my feet.

A HOWLING WIND
AT THE DEEP ACHE
A BROKEN BONE

A MERCHANT AND HIS SERVANT

Her name is Otaki. His is Koyosuke. Their exact relationship is difficult to fathom, though he clearly regards her as his servant. She acts otherwise.

They offer kindness and help: potions to heal, a warm blanket, food, a nights' shelter in an inn. They are journeying to the coast near Osaka, and offer me a ride on their great horse with its pilgrim saddle.

He is talkative, eager to please, almost fawning. His chatter indicates a simple and unfocussed mind, his eyes otherwise. He clearly loves the sound of his own voice, and is eager for any affirmation of his status and standing. His hands touch you kindly, but linger a little too long.

She is the complete opposite. She is direct, forceful, and lacking in the manners of a servant. There is something familiar in her face and bearing, a familiarity beyond conscious recognition that brings with a certain suspicion, and also a fascination. Her kindness is obvious, but also measured. Appraising you. In her eyes there is resentment, hatred even.

Uncovering your naked soul.

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, and greater loss, an intensity of love and bewilderment that will leave you utterly breathless, a glimpse into what it means to be whole, to be complete, to be one. You will lose control. Your world will lose all certainty.

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.

YOU DO NOT COME
ON THIS MOONLESS NIGHT.
I WAKE WANTING YOU,
MY BREASTS HEAVE AND BLAZE,
MY HEART BURNS UP,
ONO NO KOMACHI.



BECAUSE THE RIVER
SWIFTLY POURS OVER THESE ROCKS,
IT DIVIDES IN TWO;
YET IN THE END THESE FRAGMENTS
WILL RUSH TO MEET EACH OTHER.
SUTOKU-IN.



OJIZO-SAMA

Jizô is a popular Buddhist bodhisattva. He vowed not to achieve Buddhahood until all souls are free from hell. His famous vow, recited by many Buddhists, is "Not until the hells are emptied will I become a Buddha; Not until all beings are saved will I pass to perfect enlightenment"

Usually depicted as a monk with a nimbus around his shaved head. He carries a *shakujo* (jingle staff) to force open the gates of hell, and a wish-fulfilling jewel to light up the darkness.

Ojizô-sama as he is respectfully known, is one of the most loved of all Japanese divinities. His statues are a common sight, especially by roadsides and in graveyards. Traditionally, he is seen as the guardian of children, particularly children who died before their parents, and of *mizuko*, the souls of stillborn, miscarried or aborted foetuses. It is said that the souls of children who die before their parents are unable to cross the mythical Sanzu River on their way to the afterlife because they have not had the chance to accumulate enough good deeds and because they have made the parents suffer. It is believed that Jizô saves these souls from having to pile stones eternally on the bank of the river as penance, by hiding them from demons in his robe, and letting them hear mantras.

Jizô statues are sometimes accompanied by a little pile of stones and pebbles, put there by people in the hope that it would shorten the time children have to suffer in the underworld. The statues can sometimes be seen wearing tiny children's clothing or bibs, or with toys.

As he is seen as the saviour of souls who have to suffer in the underworld, his statues are common in cemeteries. He is also believed to be the protective deity of travellers, and roadside statues of Jizô are a common sight in Japan.



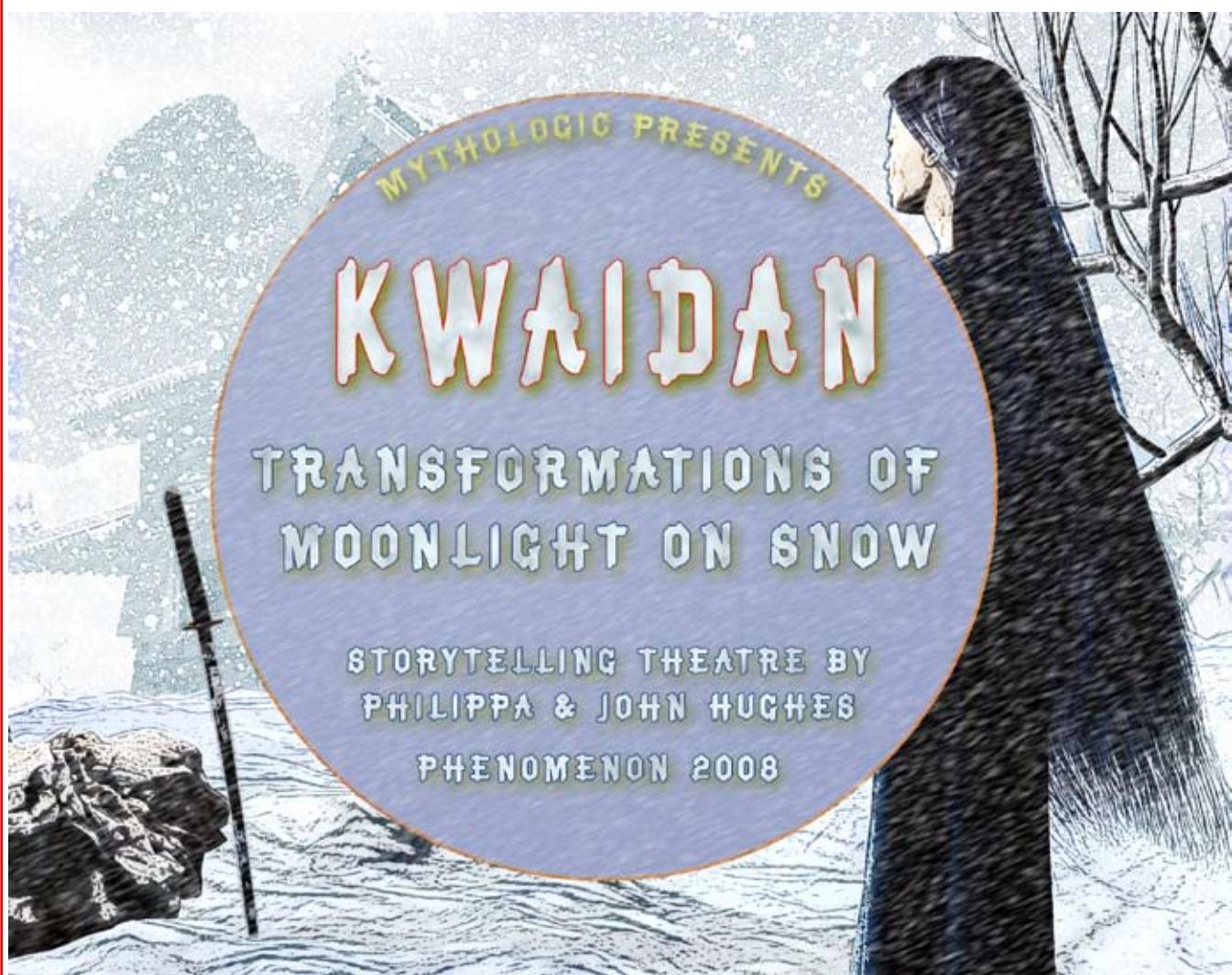
A KWAI DAN FOR YOUR TELLING

The story below is one of Tomoe'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.

THE LOVERS OF THE MILKY WAY

- Princess Shokujo Boshe, the Weaving Princess Star (the star Vega), lived with her father, the Celestial Emperor Tentei, the Pole Star.
- They lived on the east bank of the River of Heaven, *Amanogawa*, which is also known as the Milky Way.
- The princess used to weave beautiful cloth for the many gods of her father's mansion. She worked ceaselessly. However, she became sad, realizing she was too busy to fall in love.
- Her father felt sorry for her, and arranged a marriage with Kengyuu Boshe, 'the Ox Puller' (the star Altair), who ruled west of the River of Heaven.
- Their marriage was one of great sweetness and happiness. But so great was their joy in each other that Skokujo began neglecting her weaving, and Kengyuu's oxen became thin and weak.
- The gods became angry because Shokujo was no longer weaving cloth. Tentei decided to separate the couple, so he placed them back in their original places, separated by the River of Heaven. On only one night of the year would he allow them to meet.
- Every year on that day, from the mouth of the river (the Milky Way), the boatman of the Moon comes to ferry Shokujo over to her beloved Kengyuu. But if Shokujo has not done her weaving to the best of her skills and ability, Tentei may make it rain. When it rains, the boatman will not come. However, a flock of magpies may still fly to the Milky Way to make a bridge for the princess to cross.

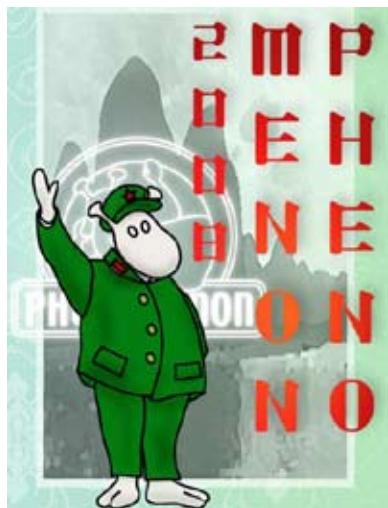




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Phenomenon 2008

Queen's Birthday long weekend
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