



THE RUINED EMPIRE

AN ANIME-INSPIRED CAMPAIGN
SETTING & RESOURCE GUIDE

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THE RUINED EMPIRE

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PREFACE

I was asked to write this campaign setting by Andy Kitkowski back in 2012 as a backer reward for the Kickstarter of the English translation of *Tenra Bansho Zero*. Originally, this was done as work-for-hire, which meant that I got paid for my work and Andy was to retain the rights for future publication. The original intent had been to get this illustrated and published as an official *Tenra* supplement. However, for a variety of reasons, that fell through until now.

Many game publishers, upon abandoning a project done as work-for-hire, just say “to hell with it” and consign it to the scrapheap of history, leaving the work to languish without hope of ever being published at all. Sad to say, I know fantastic game designers who have seen their work die without ever seeing the light of day this way, and tragically they no longer even have the right to publish that work independently.

Thankfully, Andy was generous enough to release the text of the *Ruined Empire* campaign setting Creative Commons (Share and Share Alike). The text is freely available for anyone who wants to use it, but it also means that I “got my rights back”, as it were. This wouldn’t have been possible without Andy’s generosity, and I owe him many thanks.

What follows is an expanded version of that original campaign setting. *Ruined Empire* was originally written to be used with the *Tenra Bansho Zero* system, but the setting itself is a pretty accessible mashup of common anime tropes and *Final Fantasy*-inspired themes, and would work well in a variety of game systems.

The names of specific *Tenra* classes have been left as is, as the classes themselves are no more than generic anime tropes. An introduction has also been provided to explain some of the more obscure tropes and references.

There are some instances where the original setting makes specific reference to the default *Tenra* setting itself—these have been altered to be more generic so as to allow for play with systems other than *Tenra*. Lastly, some suggestions and hacks for using this setting with common “settingless” game systems have been included, in the hopes that this will help you apply this to your own games.

INTRODUCTION: THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE YOU READ

A (VERY) BRIEF OVERVIEW OF JAPANESE RELIGION AS PERTAINS TO THIS SETTING

Japanese religion and philosophy plays a large part in the Ruined Empire because it is baked into the Tenra system itself. As such, it was impossible to write a setting for Tenra that didn't have that as a large component.

One of the core conflicts of the setting is between the Phoenix Sect Buddhists, a fictional radical sect of Buddhists, and the Shinto priesthood. But it's important to make the distinction that the conflict between the groups is one of politics and not of religion. As Andy explained it to me:

The Shinto priesthood follows the core doctrines and practices of Shinto, but even most Shinto priests and agents would say that they believe in or follow the precepts of Buddhism. Shinto and Buddhism live side by side in every person with no conflict, perhaps because the differences in their outlooks and practices are complementary: Buddhism spreads among its followers and requires faith to practice, yet Shinto is a set of practices and knowledge which requires no devout believers. Shinto knowledge involves appeasing the gods and spirits and living in harmony with the land while being aware of the celestial order of things, and has no real drive to cure people from suffering or their everyday woes, other than purifying the land and praying for good weather for crops.

The size of the conflict between the Phoenix Sect Buddhists and the Shinto priesthood is an open question to be answered by your group. Is the Phoenix Sect a small, highly radical and unsanctioned offshoot? Are they an emerging movement within Buddhism? Or do they, in fact, represent the views of the majority? All of these are interesting possibilities.

The other major theme that must be addressed is *onmyodo*, referred to in the Tenra system as *Onmyojutsu*. *Onmyodo* is a real tradition of Japanese spell-casting that arose from the gradual absorption of Taoist practice into both Buddhist and Shinto traditions, with its practitioners being called *onmyoji*. In the Tenra system, *Onmyoji* primarily practice magic by summoning *shiki*—or spirits—to perform various tasks. Thus a character who is an *Onmyoji* may be aligned either with Buddhism or Shinto.

If all of that is a little too confusing, don't feel like you need to incorporate this level of detail in your game if you are using this setting with a non-Tenra system. It is sufficient to know that the Shinto priesthood in this setting is large, organized, powerful, and corrupt—with many technological and magical secrets that make them a force that people fear to cross. It is the corrupt nature of the Shinto priesthood that makes the Phoenix Sect Buddhists determined to cast down the Shinto priesthood as a dominant force. And Taoist magicians—the *onmyoji*—might be aligned with either side.

CHARACTER TYPES AND TROPES

Many of the character types referenced from the Tenra system are self-explanatory to anyone with a passing familiarity with anime. For example, Shinto Priests and Shinto Agents are aligned with the Shinto priesthood. Buddhist monks are aligned with Buddhism. Samurai are a warrior class who might be in the service of a particular army, or may be a *ronin* (a drifter not in the service of a particular general). Shinobi are ninjas and adhere to the most commonly expected tropes regarding ninjas.

However, a few of the character classes or types referenced in the setting that are part of the Tenra setting are not so straightforward. So here is a brief explanation:

ANNELIDISTS

In the Tenra system, Annelidists are people who voluntarily become living hosts to hyper-intelligent insects with alien ways of thinking. This gives them supernatural powers, but the use of those powers results in horrifying human/insect transformations. Annelidist characters struggle to retain their humanity: the more insects they host, the more powerful they become, but there is always the risk that they will lose hold of their humanity and the insects will take over.

ARMOURS AND ARMOUR RIDERS

This is another standard anime trope, but with a bit of a twist. Armours are giant weaponized robots with human pilots. Think Escaflowne, Gundam, Evangelion, or any number of other mecha anime. The Tenra system has Armours--single-pilot mecha--and Great Armours, super-giant robots that require two pilots to operate. Piloting these Armours is taxing, and some Armour Riders go insane on the field of battle, inflicting tremendous devastation to both sides before they can be taken down.

The other important fact about Armours in the Tenra system is that they can only be operated with something called a heart gem, which has to be taken from the corpse of a dead Oni. This is something that is not critically examined in the Tenra system, however, it is addressed explicitly in the Ruined Empire.

KONGHOKI

Konghoki are a bit of a mash-up of a few anime tropes. Konghoki look like Armors, but are human-sized and faster. Because they have no human pilot, they require the permanent implantation of a disembodied human consciousness to be operational (think Ghost in the Shell), as well as an Oni heart gem to store the consciousness.

The process of implantation blocks the memories of the Konghoki's past life so that the Konghoki can be easily controlled. Stories of Konghoki characters often revolve around trying to regain lost humanity, coming to terms with their monstrous nature, or rebelling against their masters.

KIJIN

Kijin are involuntary cyborgs. Often war veterans who were severely maimed, they have body parts replaced with machinery. Like the Annelidists, Kijin can get more powerful implants, but they risk their humanity by becoming more machine-like.

The Tenra system is written around a world where every nation is continually at war with every other nation. The Ruined Empire is less extreme, but there will still be plenty of casualties of war who could become Kijin.

KUGUTSU

Kugutsu in the Tenra system are artificially-created, sentient living dolls. They also have the ability to enter people's dreams. In terms of analogous tropes, Kugutsu are a bit of a mashup of android meets sword princess. In the default Tenra setting, Kugutsu are actually owned like slaves. In the Ruined Empire, Kugutsu characters might be slaves, or they might be free, as the player chooses.

ONI

The name Oni might imply that Oni characters are monsters, but they are in fact crypto-Native Peoples with a few non-human traits (most notably horns) and magical powers called Resonance. In the Tenra system, Oni heart gems are required to construct the most devastating weapons of war. In the Ruined Empire, this is still true, but the ethical implications of this are one of the central conflicts of the setting.

AVOIDING STEREOTYPES IN YOUR CAMPAIGN

This setting is written for a game system that is heavily inspired by Japanese culture, Japanese religion, and specifically Japanese anime. Given the demographics of tabletop gaming, it's very likely that some or all of your group will be composed of non-Japanese or non-Asian players, so it's worth noting that you should try to avoid falling into using unfortunate stereotypes in portraying your characters.

There are concrete benefits to doing so, beyond the benefits of simply being a considerate human being. Not only will offensive stereotypes make some players uncomfortable, but often such stereotypes are based on lazy thinking and can actually get in the way of a good story.

You needn't go into any lectures to broach the subject with your group. Something as simple and low-pressure as "and we'll play without the racist stereotypes" can be enough to get everyone on the same page without sounding overly judgmental.

If you'd like to read more about the subject of stereotypes in games, you can look up some material I've written on my blog: <http://tinyurl.com/game-stereotypes>, <http://tinyurl.com/game-asia-stereotypes>



WORLD MAP

JAHGA

NIL

RINDEN



Azumi

HOROM

A LAND IN TURMOIL: TWO EMPIRES AT WAR

Once the land held many nations, but recent decades have seen two great empires arise, each locked in a struggle to the death for supremacy. In the east lies the Imperial Dynasty of Azumi, the Iron Empire. Expanding ever westward, it absorbs all nations that lie in its path as it hungrily devours the resources of the land to fuel the engines of industry. In the west lies the Jahga Republic of Enlightened Peoples. Expanding eastward, it seeks to bring civilization and self-determination to nations that have not yet embraced the principles of enlightened rule that govern their empire. As it stands, only a handful of resisting nations remain even nominally independent, forming a scant buffer between these two implacably expanding forces.

On Jahga's doorstep lies the Rinden Kingdom, a provincial monarchy devoted mostly to farms and herd land. Fiercely jealous of its independence, its citizens struggle against an occupying force they have no hope of defeating. The Jahgan Republic's occupational forces crack down harshly on the rebels whenever they can, frustrated by the resistance of Rinden's citizens to the improvements that the republic has brought to the small, backward nation. The rebellion, however, seems undaunted in the face of monolithic opposition.

To the Kingdom of Rinden's east, in the shadow of the Imperial Dynasty of Azumi, lies the Independent State of Horom. Horom is a wealthy trading nation, with cosmopolitan cities full of wonders from all over the world. Nominally ruled by the Grand Council of trade guilds that have ordered affairs in the small nation, the truth is that the Grand Council has no real authority. The Imperial Dynasty is the real power responsible for the day-to-day rule of Horom, with the Grand Council paying handsomely to be permitted to retain the illusion of sovereignty. In this way, the Grand Council retains its dignity and Azumi reaps considerable sums in wealth and resources as tribute.



THE IMPERIAL DYNASTY OF AZUMI: THE MECHANICAL REALM

Nervously, Kotaka pulled his collar up against a sudden chill that had nothing to do with the weather, unable to shake the sudden feeling of being watched. Sternly, he admonished himself to relax. Above all, it was important not to look suspicious. Schooling his face into a neutral expression, Kotaka stuffed his hands into his pockets to hide the sudden trembling, resisting the almost overwhelming urge to quicken his pace. Surely he was just being paranoid. The rumors about what had happened to Zenta couldn't be true, could they?

At last he reached the safety of his small shop. For several long moments, he fumbled with his keys, cursing under his breath at fingers gone suddenly nerveless, before he managed to unlock the door and slip, all but sobbing in relief as he closed the door behind him. His relief did not last long, however. A soft chuckle sounded behind him, making his blood turn to ice. He whirled to see a young woman wearing the unassuming robes of a minor civil servant sitting on the stool behind the counter. She watched him calmly, her head in her hands and a half-smile quirking her lips.

"Wh—who are you?" he stammered.

The woman smiled, widely—a smile that touched only her lips. Her eyes were steely and cold as she removed a small, hand-bound leather volume from her pocket and placed it on the counter. "My name is Maris, and I'm here to talk to you about your curiously unpatriotic choices in reading material of late."



**SET YOUR CAMPAIGN IN
AZUMI IF YOU WANT TO
TELL STORIES...**

- ...in a high-tech setting with futuristic technology
- ...that feature mecha and their pilots
- ...about ghosts with amnesia trapped in lethal killing machines
- ...about the intrigues of an insular imperial court and the sometimes violent struggle over succession
- ...set in an authoritarian regime that leaves little room for individuality
- ...about the dangers of trying to advocate for freedom in a totalitarian state
- ...about ordinary military officers attempting to survive a coldly impersonal war with their humanity intact

The Imperial Dynasty of Azumi is an empire built around industry and technology. Imperial society is largely urban and is highly organized, militaristic, and rigidly codified. The majority of Imperials live in one of the empire's many cities, which are methodically plotted out and organized along simple grids. The standardized layout of Azumi's cities makes it easy to find your way around no matter where you might travel within the empire.

Because of the primacy of the military in imperial life, the majority of Azumi's citizens are employed in serving the needs of the army. Mechanized farms dot the countryside, with complicated machines helping the farmers produce the massive quantities of food needed to sustain Azumi's vast armies. Those country-dwellers not employed in farming tend to be laborers employed in the mines that produce the special ore needed for munitions.

The cities, too, are highly mechanized and organized around supporting the needs of the military. Large munitions factories draw on centralized urban populations to quickly produce the weapons needed by the army. The cities are also where one may find the workshops used by the master craftsmen who make the most advanced weaponry: Armours, Konghoki, and the like. Some of the largest cities, especially the capital, contain a small but thriving merchant and artisan class, given over to supporting the elite circles of government, military, and the imperial court.

Imperial citizens might not have much freedom to choose their own path, citizenship does come with its own rewards. Azumi is a place of technological marvels not to be found in other lands, this technology being a by-product of the perpetual weapons research that goes toward maintaining the supremacy of the empire's armed forces.

And while there are few opportunities to amass great wealth for those born outside the empire's elite inner circles, there is also little of the poverty you might expect in such a large and urban empire. Everyone in the empire has a role, and while the penalties for trying to step out of that role are harsh, there is comfort in having security of a sort. So long as you serve the empire as well as you can, the empire will ensure that you have the necessities of survival. All in the name of efficiency of course.

THE MACHINERY OF GOVERNANCE

Academic excellence is one of the few ways out of obscurity for citizens of the empire. All children in the empire, be they children of common laborers or members of the imperial court, receive a basic education and are tested at the age of fifteen. The best and most promising young people are selected for further education either as a member of the Imperial Dynasty's civil service, an officer in the military, or an elite craftsperson.

THE CIVIL SERVICE

While the emperor has ultimate authority, most of the day-to-day administrative decisions are handled by a large, highly organized and efficient civil service. Azumi's civil service is a well-oiled machine with an established hierarchy. The hierarchy's is to observe and regulate all activity within the empire according to the dictates of the emperor.

Members of the Azumi's civil service are well-compensated for their work; as deeply as the government regulates the lives of its citizens, the empire could not hope to function with an inept or discontent administrative staff. But there is not much opportunity for advancement within the civil service, and only a handful of senior officials who have managed to distinguish themselves are appointed as administrators to the imperial court.

As one might expect, the maneuvering for these positions can get rather intense. However, the most junior ranks of the civil service which comprise most of the government are expected to stay as neutral as they can.

THE OFFICER CORPS

The officer corps of Azumi's military holds more potential for the ambitious to achieve success and wealth, especially given that the the most senior officers receive a portion of loot taken in battle as part of their salary. However, as Azumi's armies are perpetually in the field, life as a military officer is considerably more risky than the life of a government official.

MASTER CRAFTERS AND ARTISANS

Most valued of all are the handful of master artisans who run the workshops that turn out the advanced weaponry used by the military elite: Armours, kongohki, and other high-tech weaponry. More basic gunpowder armaments are left to munitions workshops staffed with inferior craftspeople. Only a very few have the talent and skill needed to produce the living machines that are the foundation of Azumi's martial might.

THE IMPERIAL DYNASTY AND THE SHINTO PRIESTHOOD

The Imperial Dynasty of Azumi is an authoritarian empire that stretches back centuries, its rule passed down through the generations in an unbroken hereditary line. The emperor of Azumi is more than just a mundane ruler and has been declared a kami by the Shinto priesthood, as have all of his predecessors for the last two hundred years.

The cynically minded might point out that this is hardly surprising, given that the Shinto priesthood has enjoyed a very close alliance with Azumi's rulers these past two centuries. With the alliance comes a privileged place at court, and Shinto priests are some of the few individuals outside the government that can be said to have any influence over the emperor. As such, is it surprising that they would be complicit in using their power to maintain the status of the emperor as an object of worship?

Cynicism, however, is a dangerous sentiment to express in the Imperial Dynasty, and those who harbor any skepticism as to the divinity of the emperor have learned by example to keep their mouth shut. So the emperor maintains his status as an object of reverence, maintaining loyalty among the subjects of the empire with a combination of fear, brutality, and worship.

On the surface, an outside observer might see the alliance between the Shinto priesthood and the emperor as being a simple exchange of influence. But the truth of the matter is that Azumi has tied its interests to those of the priesthood far more closely than that. All of the technological advances that have made Azumi's recent expansion possible have been based on technology given to the empire by the Shinto. The vast armies of Armours, kijin, and kongohki, not to mention the technological marvels that power Azumi's cities: none of it would have been possible without the assistance and support of Shinto priests.

Which begs the question: is the Shinto priesthood gaining more than just influence at court for its magnanimity? Are they setting up the empire to grow so dependent on their assistance that the emperor will become nothing more than a puppet who serves their interests? Do they feel threatened by the widespread anti-Shinto movement that has started to gain traction outside of the Imperial Dynasty? Or does the empire have some hidden leverage over the Shinto priesthood that has been kept secret?

CONCERNING OPEN SECRETS

There is a group of elites within Imperial society that is never spoken of, a branch of government that recruits equally from the ranks of the civil service and the military: the emperor's intelligence service. The military is left to conduct its own intelligence gathering against enemies outside the empire; the emperor's intelligence service exists solely to keep watch on Azumi's citizens and root out dissent and discontent. Left unchecked, such sentiments inevitably lead to widespread disaffection, which would only be a distraction from the empire's larger goals of conquest.

Those individuals who are seen as potential problems often find themselves visited in the night by representatives of the intelligence service and encouraged to direct their energies in more positive, patriotic directions. Often one such visit is enough to remedy any such unsocial tendencies, as most citizens of the empire would not willingly see their family and the livelihood of those they care about threatened.

However, it is not unknown for incorrigible discontents and those attempting to actually foment discord to disappear entirely. In such cases, the family and associates of the vanished are universally tight-lipped. There are rumors, entirely baseless of course, that the army's kongohki are created largely from the ranks of these incorrigible dissenters. But even if that were the case, would it not be better to be purged of malcontent in service of something greater than oneself?

CONCERNING SUCCESSION

In theory, rule of the empire passes to the eldest child of the emperor. In practice, it's rare that the eldest child would survive to inherent rule of the realm. They would have to be canny indeed to survive the machinations of younger siblings and their political allies.

Emperors, as kami, are largely protected from such machinations. Even would-be assassins are reluctant to accept contracts against kami; how do you kill a force of nature? The emperor's children do not enjoy such protections however, as the heir is not proclaimed a kami until after a successful accession to the throne.

PERSONAGES

EMPEROR AMABERAN

The emperor is a vigorous man well into his forties with several grown children, the eldest of whom, Prince Koushin, is old enough to start chafing at the enforced inactivity of the imperial court. The watchful eyes of his sire, however, have been enough to keep his ambitions in check. Emperor Amaberan is famed for his ruthlessness and few would be surprised at the idea that he might dispose of his own child if he felt his rule was threatened.

The emperor is also a notable recluse. The imperial court is always full of hangers-on, desperate to gain the favor of the emperor in some way, but Amaberan's appearances at court are few and far between. For the most part, he meets only with his closest retainers and a few chosen advisors. When he does deign to appear at court, he almost never accepts audiences, holding himself apart from his subjects.

It wasn't always that way, however. When Emperor Amaberan was a young man, he was once quite the socialite and took great delight in mingling with the members of his court. That changed quite abruptly a decade or so into his rule, however. Some whisper that he suffered a terrible accident, perhaps an incident while visiting the front, or perhaps an assassination attempt, that left him terribly maimed and forced him to become a kijin. How else could one make sense of his sudden secretiveness unless it was



born from a desire to hide the scandalous fact that he is no longer entirely human? Of course, these rumors are entirely impossible to verify.

MARIS THE SILENCE, HEAD OF THE EMPEROR'S INTELLIGENCE SERVICE

Maris is surprisingly young to hold such an important post. Top in her class, she rose effortlessly through the ranks of government, the machinations of the civil service hardly a challenge for her keen and incisive mind. It was for that insight that she was recruited into the ranks of the intelligence service, where her rise to power was similarly meteoric.

Despite Maris's youth, there was no protest from the intelligence service when the former head of the service tapped her as his successor, for Maris possesses both incredible charisma and a true talent for inspiring the loyalty of those who serve her. That charisma has enabled her to extend the reach of her intelligence operations. It is said that she has a network of informants that penetrates every level of society, and that she is the reason for the recent increase in mysterious disappearances of supposed malcontents. Whether this is the truth is hard to know, but what is undoubtedly true is that having Maris the Silence take interest in you is usually not a healthy thing.

KENROH KARETSU

Kenroh Karetsu is one of the preeminent artisans in all of Azumi, famed for the beauty and lethality of the armor that she makes to be the frames of the empire's most deadly kongohki. A true artist, Kenroh lives to create works of beauty in a land that values only brutality. It pains her, though, to know the use that her creations are put to. She tries not to dwell upon the idea that her work is responsible for trapping innocent souls and causing death and destruction. Such disloyal thoughts, if discerned, could see her powering one of her own creations if she is not careful.

JAHGA REPUBLIC OF ENLIGHTENED PEOPLES: THE NAMESAKE REALM

Dahj-en glanced at a nearby timepiece with impatience, scowling out at the night sky. The palace gardens were particularly lovely this evening; the smell of fragrant flowers hung heavy in the air and a gentle breeze helped dispel the last of the day's heat. But the emperor-consort was too distracted to enjoy the garden as he usually did, aggravated that the small window he had to meet his contact was rapidly closing.

At last, he heard the sound of a soft footstep on the paving stones ahead of him just before a tall, slender man walked around the bend in the garden path. Dressed in the luxurious robes of the indolent sycophants of the republican elite, the sword at his hip seemed entirely at odds with his appearance. But as Dahj-en had come to discover, the kugutsu was a study in contradictions.

"My humblest apologies, emperor," melis said, bowing deeply. "My... employer's dreams were troubled and not easy to soothe." Though his face remained serene, his voice dripped with disdain at the euphemism.

Dahj-en waved a dismissing hand. "Never mind that. I haven't much time." Reaching into his robes, he pulled out a small envelope, which he pressed into the kugutsu's hands. "These travel documents will see you safely anywhere you need to go within the republic. Though --" the emperor paused, raising one eyebrow. "You may want to dress less ostentatiously."

melis bowed, slipping the envelope into a voluminous sleeve. "My emperor's generosity is boundless. Would that I had some way to thank you."

"Thank me by not getting caught," Dahj-en snapped more harshly than he meant to. Then, glancing at the timepiece once more, he swore. "I must go," he sighed. "Be well, melis."

The kugutsu bowed once more, then disappeared back into the night as quietly as he had come.



SET YOUR CAMPAIGN IN JAHGA IF YOU WANT TO TELL STORIES...

- ...in a high fantasy setting where magic is commonplace
- ...in a Roman-style republic about the struggle for power between Senate and sovereign
- ...with a large diversity of humans and non-human fantasy-style races
- ...about the tension between a militarized society and democratic ideals
- ...about what happens when an oppressed group becomes the elite and how they treat the weakest members of society
- ...about the clash between magic and technology

The Jahga Republic of Enlightened Peoples indeed calls itself a republic rather than an empire, though the truth is that in terms of territory and conquest there is little distinction to be drawn between Jahga and rival Azumi. The real difference lies in outlook and governance.

Unlike the Imperial Dynasty of Azumi, the Jahga Republic relies on magic rather than technology to run its vast empire. The western half of the continent is not as resource-rich as the east, and for the most part Jahga has learned to do without the technological advances that are so relied upon in Azumi. Necessity breeds creativity, and it is here in Jahga that Onmyoji and Buddhist magicians have elevated Taoist magic almost to a science in its own right.

Another striking difference between the two empires is the freedoms that are granted to each of its citizens. While citizens of Azumi are expected to know their place and serve without question, Jahga is built on principles of individual freedom and self-governance. Loyalty to the republic is expected of all Jahga's citizens, but for the most part citizens are free to choose their own path. Jahga's rulers have relied on the creativity of its citizens in overcoming their lack of resources, and have passed laws to protect the freedoms that they see as essential to that creativity.

The last major point of difference lies in the structures of government. Instead of a supreme emperor who rules his citizens like a god-king, Jahga's emperor is chosen by an elected Senate, which holds power equal to the emperor's own. And while

Azumi's emperors ultimately are a law unto themselves, Jahga's emperor can be held to account by the Senate for any crimes they commit. In the past, there have been emperors who were stripped of their position for abuses of power, a concept that would surely baffle any citizen of Azumi.

Why then, if the Jahga Republic of Enlightened Peoples places such value on freedom and self-determination, do they engage in wholesale conquest? Isn't such a policy at odds with their principles? The two ideals seem hard to reconcile, but the fact is that their policy of expansion is driven in large part by enlightened self-interest. Centuries ago, many small wars were fought for every reason imaginable: land, resources, money, cultural differences, perceived insults – just to name a few. Jahga's past rulers grew tired of devoting so much of their scarce resources to defending themselves at the expense of improving the lives of Jahga's citizens.

With no end to the continuous petty wars in sight, Jahga's rulers decided that if peace was to return to the land, they would have to be the ones to bring it. And so they made war on their neighbors, conquering them one by one and absorbing them into the republic. As part of the republic, the nations they conquered were prevented from warring with each other. Furthermore, citizens of conquered nations were encouraged to speak their minds and contribute to the governance of their lands. Because of this and the magical conveniences that the republic brought to newly conquered lands, Jahga came to see itself as a bringer of enlightenment and civilization to the lands that it conquered.

The Jahga Republic of Enlightened Peoples' emphasis on cultural tolerance was similarly born of pragmatic concerns. By honoring the cultural diversity of the lands they absorbed, the subjects of those conquered lands came to see themselves as loyal citizens of the republic, rather than oppressed members of an occupied population. Honoring the freedom of new citizens to live as they chose, so long as their choices did not harm the interests of the republic, was vital to integrate a diverse patchwork of cultures into a unified whole.

Today, Jahga's rulers see their drive to expand their borders as being in the best interests of everyone. Where the Shinto priesthood has failed to use their power to maintain order, they

will bring peace to the land by force. And, truth be told, they have come to see the lands outside the republic as backward and uncivilized. They see conquest as being as much a mission of enlightenment as it is a mission of peace. By bringing the principles of freedom to the lands they conquer, they are liberating their neighbors from tyranny. And if those that Jahga seeks to add to the empire try to resist their conquerors, well, people can't always be trusted to make decisions that are in their own best interests.

EMPEROR REIUS'S HISTORIC ALLIANCE WITH THE ONI

It was close to three hundred years ago when Reius was appointed to the post of emperor by the Senate. At the time of his appointment, most of their country's scant resources were being devoted to defending against their neighbors' continual incursions. Emperor Reius knew this could not continue if Jahga was to survive, for the citizens were growing discontent at being left to suffer while the army consumed all the food and wealth that they managed to produce. With revolt by the general populace a very real possibility, action needed to be taken.

The emperor knew that Jahga could not hope to gain an advantage through arms alone; they would never be able to out-produce their neighbors. So Reius did the unthinkable. He made an alliance with the Oni, who were widely seen at the time as nothing more than backward savages, granting them status as full citizens of the republic. Even more radically, his decree extended that protection to any Oni who wished to come live in the republic. In exchange, the Oni who came would be expected to use their powers in service of the republic, either by serving in the army or in service to the government.

At the time, the decree seemed like madness. To secure this historic alliance, Emperor Reius had to ban the construction of new Armours and outlaw the Oni hunt. Possession of a heart gem was made a capital offense, as was any connection to the trade of Oni heart gems. And all so that the republic could gain the service of a handful of unreliable, unstable Oni?

When the alliance was declared, there were those who wanted Emperor Reius stripped of his position and executed

for treason. Without Armours, how could Jahga hope to compete on effective terms with neighboring armies? Weren't they just making themselves a target? The emperor was quickly vindicated, however, when it became quickly apparent how effective Oni Resonance was when combined with Onmyojutsu.

Nor was there a shortage of willing volunteers wishing to sign on for military service. When it became clear that the Jahga Republic meant to honor its promise to outlaw the Oni hunt, Oni migrants flooded into the country, most very eager to volunteer for the chance to fight against the armies who had hunted them. Before long, Jahga had gone from a minor power to a major power with a military to be reckoned with.

All of this helped serve as a base for the beginnings of Jahga's policy of expansionism, which is which helped gain the Oni acceptance as valued citizens. The resources that were captured helped to improve the lives of Jahga's civilians, which went a long way to helping overcome old prejudices. The dedication of the Oni migrants to the republic and the very real difference that dedication made in the lives of the average citizen ultimately earned them acceptance by Jahga society as a whole.

These days, the population of Oni within the republic have increased such that direct service to the realm is no longer mandatory. Indeed, Jahga's reliance on magic has made the Oni something of a privileged class in Jahgan society; their inborn magical abilities ensure are always highly in demand by all segments of society. However, the majority of Jahgan Oni still do choose to serve either in the military or as part of the government. There are perhaps no more devoted citizens than the Oni, who want nothing more than for the republic to conquer the entire land and put an end to the Oni hunt once and for all.

PERSONAGES

EMPRESS REINA

The empress is the youngest to have ascended to the post in almost two centuries, and is almost universally beloved by the people of Jahga. As a highly popular Senator, Reina's canny grasp of politics and genuine compassion for Jahga's citizens were highly intriguing to the previous emperor. In the old

THE PHOENIX SECT: FOMENTING DISCONTENT AGAINST THE SHINTO PRIESTHOOD

The various Buddhist sects are very popular in the Jahga Republic and enjoy near universal adherence. With their emphasis on political liberation and personal freedom, the Phoenix sect is especially popular, as they are seen as very much in sympathy with the republic's goals of being a force for civilization and unity.

Jahga's citizens still honor the Shinto priesthood and adhere to its practices in their daily lives, but the Shinto priests themselves are seen in an increasingly negative light because of their refusal to intervene directly in armed conflict. This opinion has only increased since the marriage of the empress to the new emperor-consort, as he is an ardent public supporter of the Phoenix sect. Many people have come to see serving the republic, or even the Buddhist temples, as a more worthy pursuit than serving the Shinto priesthood, which has gained a public reputation of being self-serving, old-fashioned, and corrupt.

Still, as unpopular as the Shinto priesthood and its policies may be, Jahga's Senate is careful never to make any policies that might look like official disapproval of the Shinto priesthood and its methods. They are ever conscious of the support that the Shinto priesthood enjoys in rivaling Azumi and don't want to push the Shinto priesthood into actively supporting Azumi's domination over the Jahga Republic.

emperor's last years, he took the young Senator under his wing, ensuring that all knew that she had his favor.

Consequently, upon the emperor's death, few were surprised when Reina was appointed as the new empress almost unanimously by the Senate. She was already a figure much beloved by the public, and the emperor's preferences regarding succession assuaged the doubts of those in the Senate who were reluctant to confirm one so young to such an important post.

In the ten years since her appointment, Empress Reina has managed to retain much of her idealism, though it has been tempered by the trying reality of ruling an empire as vast as the republic. Reina still cares deeply about the lives of her people, but has come to accept that occasional sacrifices have to be made for the greater good of the republic. Still, she has never let herself become complacent about the decisions made in the interest of the republic. The policies that have been pursued in the occupation of newly conquered provinces like Rinden are something that still trouble the young empress greatly, although she trusts her loyal advisors when they tell her that more lax policies would simply lead to more bloodshed.

More than anything, Reina dreams of seeing peace in her lifetime. Having lived with the reality of war her entire life, she wants nothing more than to see a generation that can live their lives free from the spectre of war. It is this dream that keeps her fervently committed to



CONCERNING THE REPUBLIC'S POSITION ON KUGUTSU

Many of the most famous kugutsu makers call Jahga their home; as a place that values magic, the peculiar skills of the kugutsu are often highly in demand. There is also very little patience for kugutsu makers in Azumi, where it is seen as a waste of time and resources to spend years crafting something which might decide that it doesn't wish to comply with its owners wishes as to how it is to be used. In Azumi, kugutsu are seen much the same way as sculptures - beautiful, restful, but ultimately useless.

There are, however, a number of citizens in Jahga who have never cared for the practices governing kugutsu. Citizens of the republic are taught to value personal freedoms, and the lot of the kugutsu—being owned by a person who may or may not choose to dictate how you are to live your life—seems no more than slavery. Even if the kugutsu are made, they are still alive, and that would tend to imply that they deserve some choice in their lives.

conquering the rest of the continent. It is a task that she does not know if she has the strength to complete, but she is determined to give everything she has to the effort in the name of peace for all peoples.

EMPEROR-CONSORT DAHJ-EN

Dahj-en and Reina were wed not long after she was appointed empress. Their wedding was an occasion for much celebration, not only because of the people's love for their empress, but also because this made Dahj-en the first emperor-consort of the republic who was also an Oni. Originally a refugee who fled to the republic as a small child to escape the Oni hunt, Dahj-en volunteered for service in the republican guard. His dedicated service and unusual prowess with Oni Resonance saw him rise to prominence as commander of the Oni magicians serving in the army.

It was Reina who proposed marriage, with the marriage itself being handled almost like a business transaction. The marriage was meant to increase cultural unity with the Oni and add an additional layer of protection for the empress; who better to protect the empress than a powerful magician versed in combat sorcery? Neither of them anticipated that they would become sincerely attached to one another after the marriage was completed.

The empress' marriage has been a mixed blessing as far as the Senate is concerned. The Senate supported the marriage proposal, but having their influence over

the young Empress undermined was not part of their plans. Dahj-en's sometimes revolutionary views have also come as a rude surprise, especially with regard to the legal status of kugutsu within the republic. The Emperor-Consort's ardent devotion to the Phoenix Sect and public criticism of the Shinto priesthood has also made things difficult for the Senate, which continues to try to walk a middle path between subservience to the Shinto priesthood and outright rejection of policies and practices.

MYO-ON, ABBESS OF THE PHOENIX SECT MONKS

Myo-on is a matronly looking lady who has led the monks of Jahga's Phoenix Sect for many years. Those foolish enough to be put off their guard by her kindly appearance have discovered to their regret that her cheerful demeanor belies a will of tempered steel.

Truly committed to the Phoenix Sect's mission of saving the people, Myo-on has been behind a long and subtle campaign to discredit the Shinto priesthood in the eyes of the republic's citizens. It is her eventual goal to see the republic throw off the influence of the Shinto priesthood entirely. In her view the republican values of tolerance and freedom are inherently at odds with the greedy, self-serving nature of the Shinto priesthood and its agents. The republic cannot be said to be truly serving its citizens so long as they continue to kowtow to the Shinto priesthood and its agents.

Recently, there have been attempts backed by representatives of the Oni and the Buddhist sects to pass a law mandating that the practice of owning kugutsu be ended. Given that the Senate is comprised of some of the most wealthy and influential members of the republic, in other words those most likely to patronize the kugutsu makers, the resulting law that wound up passing the Senate was no more than a token measure. The new law dictated that all kugutsu were to receive salaries for their service to their "employers", though no provisions were made in the law for those kugutsu that might wish to leave their "employment" entirely.

Still, there has been widespread protest among the wealthier elements of Jahgan society to even this watered down measure. The kugutsu makers have always been unhappy about this change in the law; the prices that they can command have been diminished by the new expense introduced by this law. The patrons who commission the kugutsu are no longer willing to pay top dollar for something that has become a considerable ongoing expense.

THE RINDEN KINGDOM: A PROVINCIAL MONARCHY UNDER OCCUPATION

Lokus Regona glanced around warily, scowling in suspicion at the people who walked past. Despite the fact that it was broad daylight in the middle of the crowded marketplace, she had learned that these mad provincials would take any opportunity for an ambush, no matter how foolish. As commander of the republican garrisons, she didn't have to give herself a regular patrol rotation. But Lokus Regona had never been the type of commander who wasn't willing to put herself in harm's way along with the soldiers under her command.

An old woman walking the opposite direction paused to give them a black scowl before hurrying off and all of a sudden she felt an overwhelming sense of wrongness. Barking a curt command to the other three guards on patrol with her, she stopped, looking around for anything out of place, just in time to spot a Shinobi smoke bomb sail over the top of a nearby stall and land at their feet.

The Kingdom of Rinden is a nation seen as largely rural and unsophisticated by its neighbors. A large portion of its lands are rocky hills suitable only for herding, with the rest of its lands being devoted to farming. There are only a handful of cities possessing anything resembling civilization, and only the capital is anything more than a glorified trading market for farmers and herders to sell their wares.

Previous to the invasion by Jahgan forces, Rinden had remained largely neutral in the perpetual conflicts that raged among the other nations of the land. They maintained a small



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...about the clash of empires and the
plight of those trapped between two
overwhelming forces

army, large enough to defend against raiders and mobilize in the event of emergencies, but for the large part they kept a policy of neutrality, trusting to the fact that there wasn't much to conquer aside from farmland to keep them safe from invasion. It was a policy that was successful until Jahga's armies showed up on their doorstep.

The war with the Rinden Kingdom has officially been over for nearly two years, but the republican troops of Jahga know better than to make any strong declarations of victory. The kingdom is still under heavy occupation, and looks to remain that way for quite some time to come. There has been reluctance to adopt the improvements that Jahga has brought to Rinden and outright resistance to accepting the social changes that have come with being subjects of the republic. Despite the imperial decree that all Oni are to remain unmolested, they are not safe outside of the capital, and even then, Oni living in the capital often find themselves the target of hostility and harassment.

THE INVASION, OCCUPATION, AND RESISTANCE THAT FOLLOWED

The invasion was brief but bloody, with many casualties among the Rinden Kingdom's defenders, who were scarcely a match for the superior forces at the Jahga Republic's command. The fighting was especially hard during the invasion of the capital, which took several weeks of house-to-house fighting for the republican army to subdue completely. It left the capital badly damaged, its buildings in a state of disrepair and its surviving citizens wounded and badly traumatized.

The loss felt most keenly by citizens of the kingdom, however, was the loss of their rulers: King Keiharu and Queen Kiseri. Determined not to ask anything of their subjects that they were not willing to face themselves, the King and Queen took up arms against the invading army in defense of the palace. They succeeded in repelling the invaders for a time, but the final push proved too much to resist and devastated much of the palace. The King and Queen were killed, and their two daughters taken by force into the custody of the republican army. The resistance didn't last long after that. Their leadership broken, Rinden's army held out another week before surrendering.

Two years later, rebuilding efforts continue, aided in large part by the occupying republican forces. Governor Feigon Marown, a loyal republican and lifelong diplomat, now governs affairs in Rinden, managing rebuilding efforts and commanding the republican garrisons stationed in and around the capital.

The Jahga Republic's forces are hardly new to dealing with resistance in the wake of conquest, and Rinden isn't the first nation they have conquered that has been resistant to the idea of abandoning their national identity. None of the nations conquered by Jahga in recent decades, though, have been as intransigent as Rinden.

In rebuilding the damaged and destroyed sections of the capital, the Governor has been scrupulous about rebuilding to leave things better than they were in both form and function. The republic has also brought many improvements to the daily lives of Rinden's citizens, including technological advances and magical conveniences that all citizens of the republic are entitled

THE TWO YOUNG HEIRS

The Rinden Kingdom's two former heirs, still young girls, have been made wards of the republic. They remain under heavy guard at the palace, watched over by a governess and a profusion of tutors, all of whom have been hired to instill loyalty to the republic in their young charges. Governor Feigon Marown has announced that, should everything proceed according to plan, rule of Rinden will be handed over to the former princesses when they are of age - as a loyal province of the republic of course.

Speculation as to how the republic intends to ensure the loyalty of Princesses Nakesha and Lokora has run rampant among the citizens of the capital. Does the republic intend to hire Shinobi to watch over them to ensure their cooperation? Others suggest that the Governor has hired kugutsu to brainwash the two princesses through nightly use of their dream manipulation. The most commonly held belief, however, is that Feigon Marown has replaced Princess Nakesha and Lokora with kugutsu who have taken their place and will have no choice but to act in accordance with the wishes of the republic.

to access. But willingness to adopt these advances has been fairly limited as yet, an attitude which perplexes the occupying republican forces.

Resistance to an occupying force and new form of government is something that the republic is used to dealing with, something they are practiced in responding to. Resistance to conveniences that improve daily life is something that Feigon Marown finds illogical and endlessly frustrating. Jahga has always succeeded in integrating the nations it conquered by demonstrating that it cared for the lives of its new citizens and seeking to improve their situation. But how can they hope to achieve this desired integration when their newest subjects reject even the most simple conveniences, just because they originated outside Rinden?

Given the unusually obdurate nature of Rinden's populace, it is no surprise that the republican garrisons still face widespread armed resistance by multiple underground resistance groups. Surprisingly well-organized, these groups operate both in the capital and out in the countryside using a variety of guerilla tactics. Patrols often find themselves ambushed, shipments from the republic destined for garrison troops get stolen or destroyed, and even rebuilding efforts in and around the capital have been affected by sabotage.

Having to be continually on guard against an actively hostile populace has put the republican garrisons on edge. The Governor has attempted to keep a

tight rein on the soldiers who make up the occupying force, but the army is often swift and decisive in dealing with those it suspects of being members of the resistance, employing harsh and sometimes brutal punishments in the hope of deterring other potential resistance members from acting against republican interests.

Governor Feigon Marown has reluctantly condoned these harsh tactics, as the tactics employed by resistance groups have often placed Rinden's citizens at as much risk as the occupying forces. Much as the Governor would wish to avoid using tactics that might incur the anger of Rinden's populace, he is obligated to make the welfare of his troops and the safety of the civilians he governs his first priority. Still, he intervenes when he can on behalf of those the army takes into custody to push for more lenient punishment, something which frustrates the garrison commanders to no end.

It is this last rumor that Governor Feigon Marown has found most baffling and has done his utmost to quash outright. How could anyone believe that he would condone of disposing of the young princesses merely because it might be politically expedient to do so? Still, despite his attempts at transparency aimed at quashing these rumors, the rumors have proved to be remarkably persistent.

PERSONAGES

GOVERNOR FEIGON MAROWN

The republican governor is an old man with many decades of loyal and distinguished service to the empire. Chosen for the role primarily for his skills in diplomacy, he has had to draw on everything he has learned throughout his career to try to make any sort of headway with integrating the newest addition to the republic.

Rinden's resistance to republican ideals has driven Feigon Marown nearly to despair, for he is a man who truly believes in the aims of the republic and that their mission of conquest is ultimately in the best interests of all of the peoples of the land. He is a man with a genuinely caring heart and takes his obligation to improve the lives of those he governs very seriously. As such, he is tortured by the fact that he has allowed violent crackdowns to take place against resistance leaders—even though he is doing his best to protect the safety of Rinden's populace and republican troops alike. But while this may have tested his resolve, it has not broken it. He is determined to succeed in what is doubtless the most difficult assignment he has ever faced in his long service to the republic.

MARUIHANA, LEADER OF THE RESISTANCE AND ROYALTY IN HIDING

Maruihana was Queen Kiseri's younger sister and, with the two young princesses in the custody of the republic, is nominally the next in line to the throne. After the fall of the palace and the capture of the princesses, Maruihana went into hiding for a brief time so as to avoid capture herself. But it soon became apparent that Rinden's nascent resistance would need a leader. Determined not to let the republican forces take control without a fight, she stepped forward into that role.

Maruihana is still young, and very angry about the death of her sister. That anger has made her brash, but a brilliant tactical mind has enabled her to make do with scant resources and turn a seemingly insurmountable position to their advantage. The republican forces can't watch all of Rinden's citizens at once, a fact she takes ruthless advantage of.

Her biggest success to date has been hiring a large number of Shinobi to aid in the resistance effort, using profits from large-scale smuggling operations to pay for their services. With the assistance of these Shinobi, the resistance has been able to step up its use of guerilla tactics against republican forces. She knows that use of these tactics will only lead to more violence, but Maruihana is committed to a future where the citizens of the Rinden Kingdom can live their lives as they please. More importantly, she wants her young nieces to be able to live their own lives, free of the influence of the republic.

LOKUS REGONA, COMMANDER OF THE REPUBLICAN GARRISON

Lokus Regona is the Commander of the soldiers stationed in the republican garrison, and as such the unenviable task of leading the occupying force falls to her. The hardened veteran of many a campaign, she would much rather be on an active battlefield than engaged in this sort of long, slow stalemate, preferring to battle an enemy she can see rather than one that refuses to stand and fight. Most especially, she has grown frustrated with the Governor and his idealism and makes continual appeals to be allowed to be more forceful in putting down resistance activity when it is uncovered.

She has learned from hard experience that permissiveness with such violent radicals only encourages further violence. If the republic is to succeed in its mission, Lokus Regona is of the firm belief that the populace needs to learn their place as citizens of the republic. Only when they accept their fate will they begin contributing to the greater good of the republic as a whole. Still, Lokus Regona is nothing if not loyal and will continue to follow orders, even if she thinks the orders are misguided. Much as she wishes to have had free reign to deal with the rebels, the task of governing the newly minted republican province is hardly one she wishes to take on herself.

THE INDEPENDENT STATE OF HOROM: COSMOPOLITAN TRADING NATION AND VASSAL STATE

Ken the Black Wind put on one last burst of speed, vaulting easily off the roof and over the wall, smiling at the sound of cursing in the street below. He landed lightly on his feet next to a garbage pile at the end of the filthy alley, retrieving the rags that he had stowed there for safe-keeping. It was the work of a moment to throw the rags on over his thieves' garb, with some mud from the gutters rubbed into his hair for verisimilitude. Then, checking one last time to ensure that the parcel was securely hidden, he slipped out of the alley into the narrow streets of the necropolis.

It didn't take long for his pursuers to catch up. The loud clanking of the heavy armor gave him plenty of warning as the guards shoved their way through the narrow streets of the necropolis. By then he was already on his usual corner, wooden bowl clutched tightly in one hand as he stared fixedly off into space in the guise of a blind beggar.

One of the guards paused, staring intently at Ken. "Here, isn't that—"

Another guard, one whom Ken recognized from many previous encounters, grunted in disgust. "That's just Old Naru," he snapped. "Now come on. He went this way."

Behind him, the lame beggar who lent Ken his corner on such occasions, chuckled to himself as he hobbled around the corner, leaning heavily on an old wooden crutch. Ken grinned and flipped the old man a gold coin before slipping off into the crowds once more.



The Independent State of Horom is a country built on trade. Its many ports make it a popular destination for merchants and traders, and over the centuries it has developed a reputation for being a place where one can acquire just about anything one desires. Goods from all over the world wind up in the markets of Horom—technology and weapons from Azumi, works of art and magic from Jahga, livestock and breeding stock from Rinden, just to name a few.

The capital city, home to the largest markets, is a city beautiful beyond imagining, with art and architecture to rival even that found in the republican capital of Jahga. The city itself bustles with all manners of visitors that would surely overwhelm anyone more accustomed to life in the rural provinces. It is not unusual to see merchants brush elbows with paupers, to see samurai and Annelidists prowl the markets alongside Kijin and kugutsu. The most supreme law in Horom is the law of the marketplace, and the neutrality of Horom's markets is recognized even by the most powerful.

THE OCCUPATION OF HOROM

The Independent State of Horom has never been one of the foremost military powers of the land, despite its status as an influential power in its own right. Horom's power was built on trade and gold, preferring to buy off its enemies rather than fight them. The encroachment caused by the determined expansion of the Imperial Dynasty of Azumi was something new in its history, something they had never faced before — an enemy with no price to be met.

Once Horom's leaders realized that their foe could not be bought off, the war that was fought was brief, largely bloodless, and almost entirely for show. Negotiations were entered nearly as soon as the fighting began to permit the rulers of Horom to save as much face with their people as possible and to permit them to curtail a costly and profit-destroying war.

Before the invasion, Horom was ruled by a Grand Council of trade guilds. This system was nominally democratic in that each guild was permitted to elect its own guild master

from within the ranks of its trades people. In practice, though, the system was hopelessly corrupt, favoring the richest over those with the best interests of the average citizen at heart. The Grand Council concerned itself only with rule of the rich by the rich, and those who were less monetarily advantaged were left to eke out a meager existence with little thought or concern from their rulers. As a result, there is a large underclass of peasants to be found in each city, kept in their proper place out of sight of the patrons of the markets by the few soldiers in Horom's standing army.

Since Horom's surrender to the Imperial invaders, things have been different for the upper class. Where once the rich elite of the trade guilds controlled every decision of import, these days the Grand Council exists solely to rubber stamp the decisions made by their imperial overlords. The Council exists now to permit Horom to maintain the illusion of independence as a "valued ally" of the empire. But decisions regarding policy in Horom are now based entirely on what best serves the interests of the empire. This represents an interesting reversal for the Grand Council—which is not much accustomed to not getting their own way.

Still, despite the loss of influence, there is no real resistance from the citizens of Horom to imperial rule. The upper classes are mostly content to have avoided a costly war they could never

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...in a Final Fantasy-style setting where magic and technology are equally prevalent

...featuring a wide variety of character types that wouldn't come together anywhere else

...with thieves, smugglers, merchants, and captains of trade and industry

...about a society where the rich grow richer and the poor struggle merely to survive

...about the assimilation of a rich and artistic culture by a conquering nation that values only production, efficiency, and war

THE PLIGHT OF THE UNDERCLASS

Some among the underclass in Horom were hopeful that capitulation to their new imperial rulers would improve things for the poor. After all, even the most impoverished of Imperial citizens can be assured a source of income and a roof over their head so long as they serve the empire with loyalty and efficiency.

This hope, unfortunately, has not borne out. The imperials have so far been content to accept the tributes paid them by Horom's upper class and to overlook the social inequalities, citing empty platitudes about the need for cultural tolerance. So long as Horom's rich and powerful continue to line the pockets of the empire, the empire is content to continue to allow the upper class to dominate the poor underclass.

Many of the poorest of Horomii society have taken up residence in the capital's necropolis, the vast city of tombs and mausoleums constructed by the wealthiest Horomii elite to honor their dead. The city guard make periodic forays into the necropolis to clear out the squatters, but they always return, having little choice in where to go.

have hoped to win, a war that would have frightened people away from their ports and ruined profits. Meanwhile, the poor are living too hard scrabble an existence to care about the affairs of the rich. And those few in the middle have only to look to Rinden as an example of what happens to those who try to go against an entire empire. The citizens of Horom are resigned to their fate, for the most part, and have accepted their role as a vassal state of the empire.

PERSONAGES

LINA TANATO, HEAD OF THE MERCHANTS GUILD

In the Independent State of Horom, money is power, and prior to the invasion, Lina was the most powerful member of the Grand Council. A shrewd and canny businesswoman, she owned an estate that rivaled the grandeur of the Grand Council building itself.

These days, money doesn't mean as much as it used to, and Lina's influence has largely vanished. This is a fact that she keenly regrets. Still, she is a pragmatist and continues to make the required payments to the empire; she knows these payments are ultimately cheaper than the cost that rebellion would exact. But Lina does worry that becoming part of Azumi will spell the end for Horom's thriving guild of artists and artisans, of which she has always been a prominent patron. To her mind, there is little point in wealth if one does not use that wealth to enjoy

things of beauty. It worries her that this is a viewpoint that the imperials do not seem to understand at all.

KEN THE BLACK WIND, HEAD OF THE THIEVES' GUILD

The Thieves' Guild has been around nearly as long as Horom itself, though the name is mostly a joke—they take no part in the doings of the Grand Council. Rather, they exist to prey on the wealthy and elite by divesting them of some of their excess wealth.

Ken the Black Wind is the current leader of the Thieves' Guild, and has held the post longer than any other in recent memory. The life of a thief is a hazardous one, and it has certainly left Ken marked. His scarred, often scowling visage is a familiar sight to the denizens of the necropolis. But beneath that rough exterior lies a genuine commitment to the needy and destitute.

The other members of the guild are free to do with their takings as they see fit; it is not unheard of for an exceedingly daring thief to amass enough wealth to quit the guild altogether and establish a comfortable new life as one of Horom's middle class. But Ken himself rarely keeps more than a very small portion of his profits, giving the rest to care for those too old and sick to earn a living for themselves. As a result, though the reward on the Black Wind's head is many thousands of gold, there is not a soul among the necropolis that would ever consider redeeming that reward.

NIL: THE DESOLATE WASTE

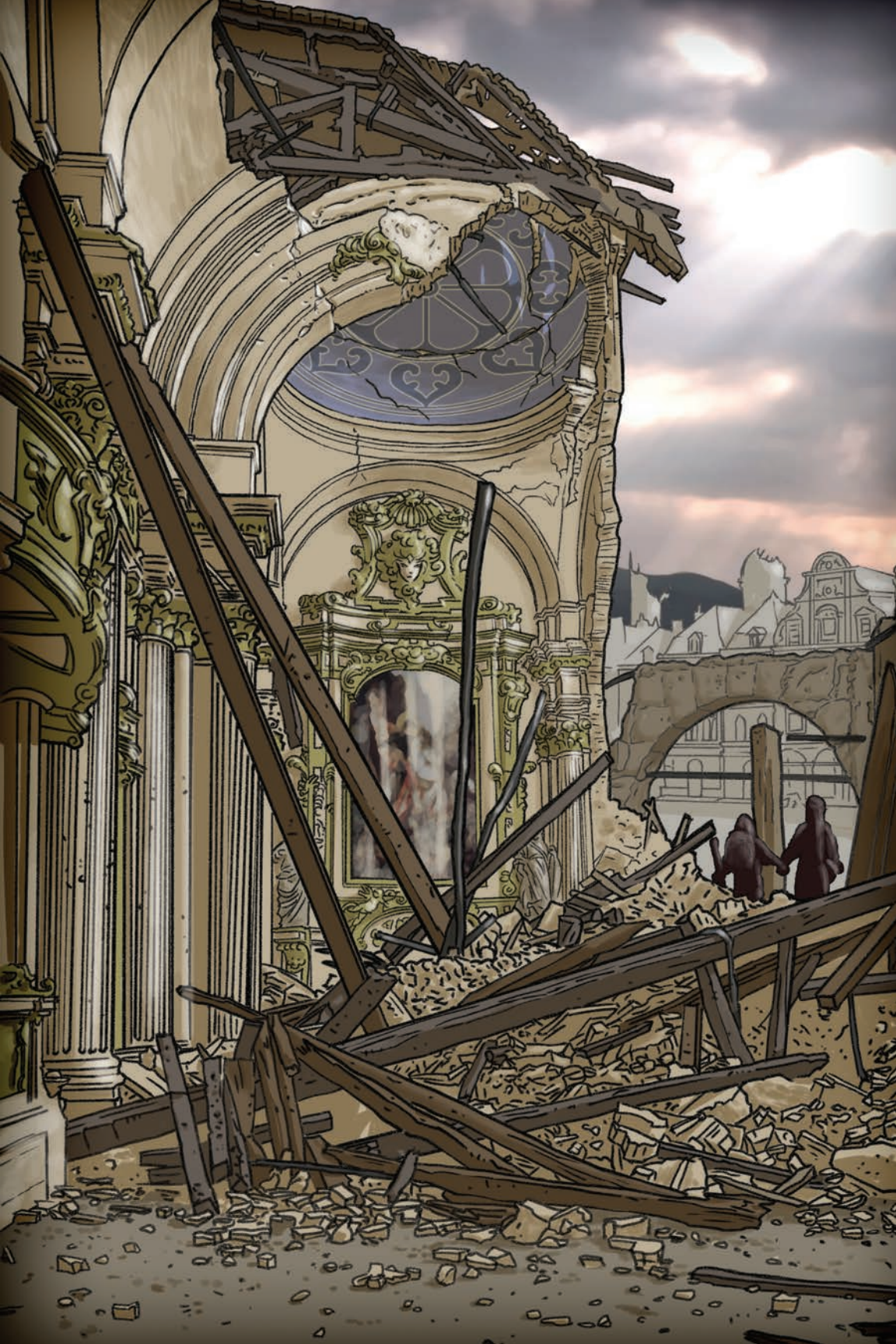
It had been a nerve-wracking journey through the city until she had managed to slip through the front lines, though Metasanduro didn't breathe easy until she was well away from the city outskirts. Wearing her robes of office, she was careful to stick to the middle of the road—wanting to travel openly. While the armies of Jahga and Azumi might have no qualms about civilians getting caught in the crossfire, Agents of the Shinto priesthood still commanded the respect they deserved.

Or at least they did most of the time. Of late, the fighting had been coming closer to the grand shrine than Metasanduro and her fellow Agents liked. There was also the matter of supplies, which were hard for anyone to acquire in a city under siege. When the call had come for volunteers to travel to shrines outside the city to request badly needed food and medicines, Metasanduro had volunteered, eager for the chance to get away from the fighting for a few days.

A sudden flash of light stopped her in her tracks. Blinding in its intensity, she could almost feel the pressure of the light against her skin. Before she could react, the ground bucked underneath her, throwing her off her feet as the air rushed around her with a terrible roaring sound almost agonizing in its intensity.

And then it stopped.

She had no idea how long she lay in the road, stunned, before she recovered her senses sufficiently to stagger to her feet, where she stood staring in disbelief. The city was gone.



**SET YOUR CAMPAIGN IN NIL IF YOU
WANT TO TELL STORIES...**

- ...set in a post-apocalyptic wasteland with
no order and very scarce resources
- ...with samurai, bandits, refugees, and
opportunistic scavengers
- ...about the struggle to impose order on a
lawless society
- ...about refugees who have escaped
slavery, fled the law, and are trying to build
a home for themselves
- ...about the recovery of traumatized
civilians from the horrors of war

Once a proud and rich trading empire in its own right, Nil is now nothing more than a desolate shell of its former self, a cautionary tale that has made Jahga and Azumi hesitant to push toward a more decisive and final conflict in their mutual war of expansion.

It was in the Dangoro Trading State that Azumi's imperial army and Jahga's republican guard met on the field of battle for the first time, each army determined that they would conquer Dangoro as their own. The fighting was fiercer than anything yet seen in the conflicts of expansion the two powers had engaged in, and the casualties were terrible. And then something terrible happened, a cataclysm that utterly destroyed Dangoro's capital city and decimated the invading forces of the two great powers.

To this day, there are so many conflicting reports of the event that it's hard to say for sure what actually happened. Some say that it was the work of a legendarily powerful shiki. Others blame the Annelidists. Still others claim that the destruction was wrought by the pilots of a Great Armor going berserk. Most think that it was some combination of factors, some fatal reaction of magic and technology that caused the devastation.

Whatever the cause, the damage has been done. The capital city remains all but destroyed, with the center of the city a giant crater. Only the slums around the outskirts remain, their ruined buildings barely standing. The countryside, including much of the farmland, was

just as scorched in the fighting, leading to widespread famine. This once regarded domain is now simply called Nil, the Desecrated Lands.

The remnants of both armies have withdrawn, neither quite willing to commit further resources for fighting control of what now remains. This has left Nil effectively ungoverned, as the country's entire government was destroyed in the cataclysm. Many of the survivors have emigrated to other lands as refugees. Those who stay are the truly desperate, those searching for something or someone lost in the cataclysm, or those determined to rebuild what was lost in the brief war.

Among those who remained, many have become scavengers. Mostly working in the capital and surrounding villages, they pick through the ruins looking for valuables that they can sell. Left without a means of supporting themselves, others have turned to banditry, terrorizing outlying villages. Others who stayed behind have devoted themselves to rebuilding what was lost, restarting farms and rebuilding businesses, but the obstacles to restoration are so vast that there are few who feel up to the challenge.

Nil's plight has attracted a few outsiders, mostly the very bold and enterprising. A handful of merchants have come from Horom, looking to capitalize on the desperation of survivors, though profits have been hard to realize in an environment where people are struggling just to survive.

THE INFLUX OF KUGUTSU REFUGEES

Refugees have fled from the Desecrated Lands to surrounding lands in great waves since the cataclysm, but despite the devastation there has also been a small influx of refugees that never could have been anticipated. Since the disappointing failure of Jahga's senate to pass meaningful reform regarding the legal status of kugutsu, Kugutsu from Jahga have been stealing across the border to join a small but growing enclave of their brethren who want to be free from their lives of indentured servitude. Though the influx of kugutsu refugees was small at first, the numbers of refugees have been growing as word spreads of the existence of a safe haven.

The kugutsu have established several small settlements in the wilds of Nil, taking advantage of the lack of a government to protect them from organized reprisals. The bandits that roam the wilds pose a far more immediate threat, but the skills of those trained as sword masters and body guards have been sufficient to prevent any depredations.

Of course, kugutsu caught fleeing their service can expect extremely harsh reprisals. The law of the republic does nothing to protect kugutsu who attempt to leave their employment, and the nobles who own kugutsu are desperate to set precedent to protect their investment.

The other growing threat to the kugutsu enclaves is the growing samurai corps hired by the Shinto priesthood to restore order to the lawless wastes. Some samurai, especially those ronin who have fallen into poverty, are sympathetic with the plight of the kugutsu. There are just as many who view the refugees with suspicion and would see the kugutsu shipped back to their “rightful owners”. As such, the samurai can be very inconsistent in their dealings with the kugutsu and the refugees have learned to avoid attracting their attention as much as possible. The last thing they want is for the powerful Shinto priesthood to decide that they are a threat that needs elimination.

Still, there is one thing that all of the refugees can agree on. Even an uncertain fate in Nil, where they can be their own masters, is preferable to a life of security without freedom in the Jahga Republic of Enlightened Peoples.

PERSONAGES

METASANDURO, FIRST PRIEST OF DANGORO

Metasanduro was formerly a mid-level Shinto agent assigned to serve one of the capital's many shrines. It was nothing more than sheer luck that found her outside the shrine the last day of the invasion. She found herself watching in horror as her shrine and those she had served with were destroyed in the cataclysm.

Although there are higher-ranking Agents left in Nil, Metasanduro was the only one with the will to try to piece together some semblance of order from the wreckage left behind by the invading armies. When she stepped forward to take leadership of the reconstruction efforts, none challenged her. The task was so large and so impossible that the other agents were relieved to have someone who would lead willingly.

For Metasanduro's part, she throws herself into the work of rebuilding because it is all she has left. Her single-minded devotion to the restoration of her home is all-consuming. She may not be able to replace the people that she has lost, but she is determined not to let the beauty of the home she loved be lost forever.

A RELUCTANT RULER AMIDST CHAOS

Since the departure of the two armies, the Shinto priesthood has been desperately searching for someone, anyone, even marginally qualified to rule to take up the role of Nil's ruler. Not surprisingly, even the most ambitious of power-seekers doesn't find the prospect of a nation in ruins that has fallen into anarchy the most attractive of prospects - especially not when any degree of success in rebuilding the shattered country would only make Nil susceptible to renewed invasion. Since no one has stepped forward to accept the role, the Shinto priesthood has reluctantly become what passes for authority in those few areas where settlements remain, but large portions of the country remain lawless wastes.

In an effort to attempt to restore at least a small portion of order, the Shinto priesthood has drawn upon its resources to hire ronin as part of a nascent samurai corps to combat the growing bandit threat.

There have been many samurai that have flocked to the Desecrated Lands for the opportunity for secure employment. Just as many of the ronin who have come are eager for a chance to use their skills in service of something other than mindless conquest. Still, the Shinto priesthood has done their best to keep the samurai they hire at arm's length, viewing them as a potentially unstable resource, which has not done much to inspire loyalty in the forces they have hired.

BLACK GLOVE MOL, COMMANDER OF THE DESECRATED LAND SAMURAI CORPS

The irony of the Black Glove's service to the Shinto priesthood is something he considers daily. While he was not part of the invading force that laid siege to Dangoro's capital, his previous service was with Jahga's armies in the outlying provinces of old Dangoro as they scouted the land and sought to uproot Imperial invasion forces. After the destruction of the capital, the order came to withdraw and Black Glove and many of his fellow samurai who had signed on as contract soldiers found themselves released from service and abandoned in a country that was rapidly descending into anarchy.

Shortly thereafter, when Metasanduro put out the call for samurai to form a new corps that would deal with the increasing lawlessness, Mol the Black Glove responded eagerly. The opportunity to serve honorably was a welcome one—the idea of becoming a ronin or, worse, a bandit, was an unappealing one. Much to his surprise, he found himself appointed commander of the newly formed corps—a group of samurai that has grown slowly as ronin from other lands have come in hopes of earning a permanent place in service to the shrines of Nil.

The Black Glove has made a point never to discuss his past, lest his new employers in the Shinto priesthood decide to take a sudden interest in avenging themselves upon him for his part in the destruction of their home. In fact, many know him only by his title of Black Glove, and not his name.

MELIS, LEADER OF THE KUGUTSU REFUGEES

While it wasn't melis's idea to escape enforced servitude by fleeing to the Desecrated Lands, without his instigation it never would have become a reality. It was melis who spread the word among many of the kugutsu employed by Senators and the Jahga Republic elite of their goal of creating a refuge where kugutsu could be free. With the help of a few well-placed Oni allies, Empress-escort Dahj-en most notably, he was able to orchestrate the escape of himself and twelve companions across the border into Nil.

Since that initial escape, the community of kugutsu refugees who now call the Desecrated Lands home has grown from a mere handful to several hundred. The newest arrivals especially regard melis with awe, and daily the pressure grows on him to take up a leadership role over the other refugees.

So far, however, melis has resisted—insisting that the refugees remain in small separate enclaves with separate leadership. He never wanted to be a leader for his people, he simply wanted to live in freedom and has been unprepared for the reverence that many of the newest refugees seem to hold for him.

There is also the matter of the Shinto priesthood. The last thing melis wants is to be seen as challenging the authority of the Shinto priesthood to rule affairs in Nil. He is all too aware how vulnerable the position of the refugees is to risk having the refugees lose their freedom should bad luck befall him.

CAMPAIGN IDEAS

After reading the setting, your group may already have ideas for a campaign that they'd like to play. If not, here are some sample campaign ideas to help get you started.

AZUMI

IMPERIAL INTRIGUE

PLAYER CHARACTERS: High-ranking Azumi officials in or closely connected to the Imperial Court

STARTING SITUATION: There have been whispers recently that someone in the Imperial Court is selling military secrets to the Jahgan Republic; someone previously unconnected to you gives warning that your names have been given to the intelligence service by persons trying to frame you as traitors.

DUTY AND HONOR

PLAYER CHARACTERS: Mid-level soldiers in the Azumi army, on the front lines of battle

STARTING SITUATION: After the catastrophe in Nil, the army pulled back. Your unit was lucky enough to have been away from the front lines, and thus avoided the brunt of the disaster, but it left many soldiers as *kijin*. You were supposed to be recalled home by now, but after several weeks of silence from the capitol, you've been given orders to prepare to mobilize once again, and you know that you're not ready.

JAHGA

ASSASSINATION THREATS

PLAYER CHARACTERS: Members of the Republican Senate, their staff, or Republican security forces

STARTING SITUATION: A failed assassination attempt is made against Empress Reina and is blamed on Oni extremists who want to see an Oni on the Imperial throne. Shortly after the attack, however,

you receive an anonymous note claiming that the assassination was actually a ploy by some in the Senate seeking to weaken the position of Emperor and grab more power for themselves.

IN THE NAME OF FREEDOM

PLAYER CHARACTERS: Members of an underground network of people who help smuggle kugutsu away from their owners and out of Jahga

STARTING SITUATION: Your group has been hearing rumors that the government is set to crack down on kugutsu smugglers, when a kugutsu named emone turns up in one of your safe houses, asking for help in escaping his owner, whom you know to be one of the leaders of the mostly corrupt anti-kugutsu-rights faction of the Senate.

RINDEN

RESISTANCE GUERRILLAS

PLAYER CHARACTERS: Members of the underground resistance to the Jahgan occupation of Rinden

STARTING SITUATION: Despite the grumblings of the Republican occupying forces, Governor Feigon Marown has invited the resistance to mediation talks. Maruihana and her lieutenants are still debating how to respond when your cell receives intelligence of a security gap that could possibly allow you to liberate Princesses Nakesha and Lokora in three days' time.

OCCUPYING IMPERIAL FORCE

PLAYER CHARACTERS: Soldiers in the Jahgan republican military force occupying Rinden

STARTING SITUATION: Recently, there has been an increase in resistance attacks against Jahgan soldiers, and your unit has seen more than its fair share of casualties. Shortly after the invitation to the mediation is made, you discover that your commanding officer has been meeting secretly with some other officers to arrange Feigon Marown's assassination, in the hope that his replacement would be more amenable to a hard-line military stance.

HOROM

COVERT MACHINATIONS

PLAYER CHARACTERS: Members of the merchants guild or Azumi intelligence officers

STARTING SITUATION: Azumi's oversight of Horomii affairs is still unnervingly intrusive; the tribute paid by the Horomii elite is being used to rebuild the armies lost in the Nil cataclysm. Recently you've heard whispers that there is a faction within the merchants guild seeking to depose their Azumi masters in favor of Jahgan rule. And now you've received an anonymous note, written in Jahgan script, inviting you to a midnight meeting.

HEIST HIJINX

PLAYER CHARACTERS: Members of the Thieves' Guild

STARTING SITUATION: You and your cohorts made a comfortable living for yourselves and avoided higher-risk jobs. Until now. You thought you were being hired to steal documents. Instead, you've landed an Azumi energy weapon that you know is classified military tech. Being caught with one of these weapons would get you executed, no question. But your employer says that he will pay you only if you agree to steal more weapons for him.

NIL

KUGUTSU REFUGEES

PLAYER CHARACTERS: Escaped Jahgan kugutsu

STARTING SITUATION: You risked much, giving up everything you had and knew to escape your owner and flee Jahga entirely. It's a hard life here in Nil: few kugutsu in your village know how to survive in the wilderness, and the Nil survivors resent sharing resources with foreigners. Add in the dangers of bandits, roving samurai, and the need to placate the Priesthood, and you can only hope that the high cost of freedom won't be your ruin.

REBUILDING A KINGDOM

PLAYER CHARACTERS: Agents of the Shinto Priesthood

STARTING SITUATION: Limited resources, decimated infrastructure, mass emigration, banditry and lawlessness, an influx of refugees and grifters; these are just some of the problems you'll have to deal with in rebuilding your country. This was not a job you asked for, but you're stuck with it now.

CUSTOM HACK #1: SAMURAI IN THE WASTELAND

(SYSTEM: DOGS IN THE VINEYARD BY D. VINCENT BAKER)

KINGDOM: Nil

PLAYER CHARACTERS: Samurai, instead of Dogs

YOU WILL NEED: 1 GM and 2-4 players, a lot of dice of sizes d4, d6, d8, and d10

GENERAL STORY AND SYSTEM CHANGES

- You will play samurai in the service of the Shinto priesthood. You are part of a small band of samurai who has been sent out from the ruins of the capitol to impose order on the lawless chaos that has descended.
- Stats and traits work as the base system. Conflict types change slightly: Gunfighting instead becomes Swordfighting.
- The role of the demons is filled by the *onryo*, restless spirits of the vengeful dead. Tens of thousands of innocents were killed in the cataclysm that devastated Nil. Unable to rest, they want only to make the living suffer.
- Sorcerers are those living who allow themselves to be possessed by *onryo* in exchange for magical power and the favor of the *onryo*
- *Onryo* can only be defeated through pious observance (either of Buddhism or Shinto)

TO QUOTE THE COVER COPY:

"In Dogs in the Vineyard by D. Vincent Baker you play God's Watchdogs in a West that never quite was. You stand between God's law and the best intentions of the weak. You stand between God's people and their own demons. Sometimes it's better for one to die than for many to suffer. Sometimes, Dog, sometimes you have to cut off the arm to save the life. Does the sinner deserve mercy? Do the wicked deserve judgement? They're in your hands."

Dogs in the Vineyard is a fantastic system for players looking to explore messy issues of morality, power, and community. It's also a tremendously fun system to GM, because the players never do what you think they will. Never. The outcome is always a delightful surprise.

More information here:
[theunstore.com/index.php/
unstore/game/1](http://theunstore.com/index.php/unstore/game/1)

SPECIFIC SYSTEM CHANGES

BELONGINGS

When you are hired on by the Shinto Priesthood as a samurai, you are provided with basic provisions as well as a horse and a badge marking you as being in the employ of the Priesthood. You already own your own armor and sword, and may choose to own one item of religious significance.

USING CEREMONY

Onryo are vulnerable to elements of ceremony as listed here:

Calling by name (d4s) ; Invoking the kamis/ the Buddha (d4s) ; Recitation of sacred texts (d4s) ; Use of a religious token, charm, or symbol (d6s) ; Application of ofuda* (d8)

*An amulet or talisman invoking the name of a kami and the kami's representative

CHARACTER CREATION: INITIATION CONFLICTS

During initiation conflicts, each player will frame a scene in which they faced a conflict during the war, before the cataclysm, and say how they hope that situation was resolved. For example, "I hope that I was able to keep my nerve in the face of an overwhelming assault". Or, "I hope that I was able to exercise mercy toward a hated enemy". Or, "I hope that I was able to save a comrade's life".

CHARACTER CREATION: CONVERTING THE “I’M A DOG” TRAIT

In the original game, every character is required to have either a trait that says “I’m a Dog” or a relationship with the Dogs as a group. Similarly, every samurai character is required to have a trait stating that they are a samurai of the Priesthood. If you choose to have a relationship instead of a trait, that relationship will be with the Nil Samurai Corps as a whole.

SINS, DEMONIC ATTACKS, AND FALSE DOCTRINES

In the original Dogs system, the code of morality is very much based on conservative frontier-era Mormon theology. As that wouldn’t make much sense in a Japan-inspired setting, disregard the hierarchies of sins as written in the original game text.

Instead, consider that *onryo*, like the demons in the original system, are attracted to those who engage in “evil” or antisocial behavior. The shattered communities that remain rely on everyone in the community contributing toward the survival of the group. In this context, sin can be anything that harms the community or the community’s ability to survive. With that in mind, the hierarchy of sins shifts to become:

1. Pride
 - 1a. Pride leads to injustice, which leads to
 2. Sin (anti-social acts or acts damaging to the community as a whole)
 - 2a. Sin leads to *onryo* attacks, which lead to
 3. Toxic false beliefs
 - 3a. *Onryo* attacks cause toxic false beliefs to gather adherents, which leads to a
 4. Dangerous ideological cult
 - 4a. A dangerous ideological cult leads to direct *onryo* possession of the cult leader and *onryo* influence over its followers.
 5. Direct *onryo* possession leads to hate and murder.

The seven deadly sins are a great place to start when creating the core conflict of your scenario. Greed could be hoarding food that no one else knows about. Sloth could be neglecting a duty that was entrusted to you in such a way that will cause a disaster if left unattended. Pride could be a refusal to believe that you should have to work as hard because of a societal station that was held before the cataclysm.

Demonic attacks are simply any action—either overtly supernatural or seemingly mundane—taken by *onryo* to further weaken a community already damaged by sin.

As for false doctrines, these are not going to be so much “doctrines” as false beliefs that allow *onryo* influence over you: the *kamis* will smile on me if I destroy a certain person, personal survival has to come before group survival, etc.

If this false belief gathers enough support to form a false “priesthood”, that simply means that the leader of the group has opened themselves enough to the influence of the *onryo* to allow themselves to be possessed. Treat *onryo* possession exactly as demonic possession.

SAMPLE STARTING SCENARIO (ESTIMATED PLAY TIME 4-6 HOURS): SHINSHINOTSU VILLAGE

Shinshinotsu Village is a tiny village several days outside the capitol. Though there was an initial influx of refugees, many in the village have since fled Nil entirely, leaving behind around two hundred people.

PRIDE

Ochifusun used to be a high-ranking Agent in the Shinto priesthood, but left, traumatized, after the cataclysm and found his way to this village. The village was in bad shape when he arrived and Ochifusun, accustomed to taking positions of authority, slowly came to be a sort of village elder. Now he is the defacto leader of the village.

Ochifusun blames Jahga for the devastation of Nil; he hates Jahgans and magic in general. So when a small band of refugee kugutsu recently started a settlement nearby, Ochifusun was

determined not to let them taint the village with more magic and has forbidden the other villagers from interacting with the kugutsu in any way.

INJUSTICE

Trained by their masters to be valuable servants, the kugutsu refugees may have a wide variety of skills, but as the pampered servants of the rich and elite, farming isn't one of them.. They wanted to settle with the humans, but because of human prejudice were forced to form a separate settlement about half a day's walk from the human village.

As a result, both communities suffer. The soil is poor and domesticated animals rare, so many more hands than are available are needed to work the land. There are also too few warriors to defend the villagers from bandit incursions. Meanwhile, the kugutsu are also hungry and are fearful that the humans, driven by prejudice, will incite the Priesthood and its samurai law-keepers against them.

SIN

- Tomiko, Keitai's daughter, is having an illicit affair with ryllis, a kugutsu, and has been stealing small amounts of food from the village's already meager stores so that her lover doesn't starve.
- Keitai has been swayed by Ochifusun's anti-kugutsu rhetoric and, with several young accomplices, is planning a violent attack against the next kugutsu trading party to leave the kugutsu settlement.
- Natan-jo is native to the village and resents that the villagers let an outsider take control. She is quietly sowing dissent, trying to increase dissatisfaction with Ochifusun so that she can seize power for herself.

ONRYO ATTACKS

- Bandits have started visiting the village once a month to demand food as a “protection fee”. They leave the kugutsu settlement unmolested, as many of the kugutsu were sword masters in their former lives and took their arms and armor with them when they fled Jahga. However, the villagers assume that the kugutsu are using magic on the bandits to keep them away, which only increases their resentment.
- A pack of wolves has started plaguing the village, attacking anyone who leaves the village after nightfall. The pack is growing increasingly bold, venturing closer to the village each night. It is always led by a monstrous snow-white she-wolf.

TOXIC FALSE BELIEFS

- Ochifusun, Keitai and accomplices: the kamis will smile on them for eliminating the kugutsu blight.

DANGEROUS IDEOLOGICAL CULT & ONRYO POSSESSION

- Ochifusun, Keitai, and accomplices form a cult, with Ochifusun as its head. Ochifusun is directly possessed by the *onryo*, while the others in the cult are under his influence.

WANTS: WHAT DO THE MAJOR NPCs WANT?

OCHIFUSUN: wants the samurai to agree the kugutsu are evil and to assist the villagers in getting rid of the kugutsu menace. He also wants them to grant him an official position that would confirm his authority over the village and allow him to drive Natan-jo out of the village if she won't recognize that authority.

TOMIKO: wants the samurai to condone her relationship with ryllis. She also wants the samurai to force the villagers and the kugutsu refugees to work together, although she doesn't want anything to happen to her father.

RYLLIS: wants the samurai to condone her relationship with Tomiko. She also wants the samurai to leave the kugutsu refugees alone.

KEITAI: wants the samurai to make his daughter renounce her relationship with ryllis and to assist the villagers against the kugutsu refugees.

NATAN-JO: wants the samurai to depose Ochifusun as the village leader and grant her leadership.

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THE SAMURAI NEVER CAME?

Keitai and his cronies attack the kugutsu and are killed. Enraged, the human villagers rise against the kugutsu settlement, resulting in a bloodbath for both sides with very few survivors. The few kugutsu survivors scatter, fleeing to other, farther settlements.

The *onryo* wolf pack gains strength from the bloodshed and by feasting on the dead, and slaughter the few surviving humans. With no inhabitants left in the valley, the bandits move on, leaving behind a valley inhabited by only the hungry, vengeful dead.

INTRO

You are part of a group of mercenary samurai that has been put together by the Shinto Priesthood to travel out to the villages to deal with bandit incursions and impose law and order. The Priesthood has given you a map with an assigned route and basic supplies. Village A37--the only designation on the map you have been given--is the first village on your route.

You and your companions are no more than half a mile outside the village when you spot a small group of kugutsu approaching, traveling back toward the capitol. They look uphappy to see you and pointedly avoid looking at you, obviously wanting to be left alone. You're still about thirty feet away when a group of ragged looking humans erupts from hiding and attacks the kugutsu travelers.

It's obvious, given their state of disrepair and lack of real weapons, that the humans are not bandits. It's also obvious that they are totally outclassed by the kugutsu, half of whom carry swords and obviously know how to use them.

What do you do?

Onryo influence starts at 4d10. If the kugutsu are allowed to kill any of the villagers, Onryo influence immediately increases to 5d10, as this immediately pushes things into hate and murder.

SOLAR SYSTEM/ THE SHADOW OF YESTERDAY

While Solar System is a very easy system to use in play, it can be difficult to get a foothold when trying to start a new game, even for veterans of The Shadow of Yesterday. The Solar System is adaptable to any setting you might want to play, but the abundance of options and lack of example templates can be very overwhelming.

As such, here is an adaptation of Solar System to the world of The Ruined Empire. Presented here are a selection of basic abilities, culture-specific abilities, and example character templates with keys and secrets to help your group get started.

BASIC ABILITIES

These abilities are shared by every culture.

ATHLETICS [V]: Athletics represents raw physical power and fitness.

It is used to perform various tasks like breaking down a door, climbing a wall, leaping a gap, swimming a long distance, or any other task requiring both strength and endurance.

COMBAT [V]: Combat is the skills and experience needed to fight and survive as part of a large army.

MARTIAL ARTS [V]: This represents years of highly specialized training with one martial art form (which may or may not include weapons use), be it Kendo, Karate, Kung Fu, Shinobi-jutsu, or another art form. When taking this ability, characters must specify which martial art they learn.

DECEIT [R]: Deceit is used to lie to another character, cover up a truth, or create legitimate-seeming forgeries

MEDICINE [R]: The skills and training to heal injury, disease, and other ailments

ONMYODO [R]: Onmyodo is the magical ability, training, and mental discipline needed to summon shikis that will obey your will.

RELIGION [R]: Religion is not just the knowledge of a religions practices and precepts, but also knowledge of the major political players within a sect as well as contacts within the sect hierarchy. When choosing this ability, characters must choose to specialize in the Shinto Priesthood or the Buddhist Sect (not both).

SMUGGLING [R]: The contacts, knowledge, and ability to move illicit goods within a realm or across borders without detection by governmental representatives.

CHARM [I]: The ability to charm, schmooze, or otherwise persuade someone to do what you want.

COMMAND [I]: The training in tactics and strategy possessed by any military commander. It is used to plan military encounters as well as to command to subordinates.

CREATE [I]: This ability is used to create a work of art that is tangible and concrete (i.e. painting, sculpture, etc).

PERFORM [I]: This ability is used give an engaging performance in a given art form (theater, music, oratory) and represents talent and ability to engage an audience's emotions.

STEALTH [I]: Stealth is used to sneak up on or past somebody, evade detection by someone actively looking for them, or to conceal something on their person.

THE SHADOW OF YESTERDAY: CLINTON R NIXON

SOLAR SYSTEM: ADAPTED FROM TSOY BY EERO TUOVINEN

The TSOY system has two main features that make it distinct from other systems. First are Keys. These represent your character's motivations and desires, and are also how your character earns experience. Players gain experience for exploring their character's motivations, and GMs don't have to guess what stories the players are interested in following.

Second, characters in the TSOY system are very much informed by the culture they inhabit. A character's culture determines their background and abilities.

It's also worth noting that TSOY is much more tolerant of "PVP" than some other systems. It is doable to have PCs whose goals are at odds with one another, provided the players keep things friendly at the table.

MORE INFORMATION HERE

Shadow of Yesterday:

<http://zork.net/~nick/loyhargil/tsoy2/book1—rulebook.html>

Solar System:

<http://www.arkenstonepublishing.net/solarsystem/>

CULTURE-SPECIFIC ABILITIES

JAHGA	AZUMI	RINDEN	HOROM	NIL
Academics [R]	Academics [R]	Animal Handling [I]	Academics [R]	Academics [R]
Artisan [I]	Politics [R]	Bargain [I]	Artisan [I]	Artisan [I]
Politics [R]	Technology [R]	Guerrilla Warfare [I]	Bargain [I]	Bargain [I]
Streetwise [I]	Tech Weaponry [R]	Riding [V]	Politics [R]	Riding [V]
	Streetwise [I]	Survival [V]	Streetwise [I]	Scrounging [I]
	Cyborg Tech [R]		Technology [R]	Survival [V]

RIDING [V]: Riding is the ability to successfully ride a horse. This ability is used to control unfamiliar mounts, as well as to perform normally simple tasks while mounted. (In advanced societies like Jahga and Azumi, Riding is mostly seen as an obsolete skill.)

SURVIVAL [V]: is the ability and knowledge to survive in the wilderness or other uncivilized areas. This skill would be used to find food, make shelter, or otherwise secure the necessities of living rough.

ACADEMICS [R]: Academics represents a knowledge of research techniques, contacts within local academic institutions, as well as the general knowledge accumulated by a scholar with esoteric interests. It is used to discover the answers to difficult, arcane, or obscure questions.

CYBORG TECH [R]: The ability to work with cybernetic implants without damaging the implant or the implantee. This can be used to either install or repair cybernetic implants, although if those implants are weapons (i.e. a gun arm), that character would also need to possess skill in Tech Weaponry.

POLITICS [R]: Success in politics requires not only charm, but a near-encyclopediaic memory of past scandals, a network of

contacts, and the ability to call in favors. This ability is used to manipulate enemies and arrange circumstances in your favor, in situations where the stakes of failure are high. When taking this ability, choose whether you are specializing in Jahgan politics or Azumi politics.

TECHNOLOGY [R]: Technology is used to make or repair technological items with non-military applications.

TECH WEAPONRY [R]: Tech Weaponry is used to make or repair technological weapons. It's worth noting that this knowledge is very closely guarded by the Azumi Imperial government. Any character taking this skill can expect close scrutiny and even surveillance by the Azumi government.

ANIMAL HANDLING [I]: This ability is used to work with animals, both domesticated and wild, though the complexity of the commands you can issue using this ability will vary by whether the animal is domesticated, feral, or wild. You could use this ability to persuade a plow horse to ride into battle; you could not use this ability to convince a wild bear to pull a wagon.

ARTISAN [I]: This ability represents the skills, training, and expertise of a particular skilled trade, such as a blacksmith, clock-maker, architect, mechanic, technologist, or any other advanced trade. When taking this skill, the character must choose a trade. This ability can then be used to create or repair items that are in keeping with the skills of that trade.

BARGAIN [I]: While Azumi and Jahga conduct all of their business in cold, hard currency, barter is the dominant form of trade outside the two empires. This ability is used to evaluate the worth of an item or service or to get the best price for something.

GUERRILLA WARFARE [I]: This skill represents intimate knowledge of a superior enemy force, a network of underground or resistance contacts, and the stealth needed to infiltrate enemy strongholds. This ability would be used in the planning or execution of an attack on a vastly superior military force. Characters taking this skill must be trained by a willing member of an existing resistance group.

SCROUNGING [I]: Scrounging is the ability to take the remnants of a civilized society and adapt them to an uncivilized life. This ability is used to do things like jury-rig repairs, to adapt a tool or machine to something entirely different from its intended purpose, or even just to know where to find hidden stockpiles of food.

STREETWISE [I]: is used to know basic information about an urban criminal underground, find contacts who can assist in committing a specific crime, or to buy or sell stolen goods. When taking this ability, choose whether this applies in Jahga, Horom, or Azumi.

EXAMPLE CHARACTER TEMPLATES

ANNELIDIST

KEY OF ALIEN INTELLIGENCE: You have been hosting annelids for so long that you struggle to retain your grasp on humanity. **GAIN 1XP:** When you use your annelid abilities around normal humans; **2XP:** When use of your annelid abilities isolate you from human society; **5XP:** When use of your annelid abilities terrifies or traumatizes someone close to you; **BUYOFF:** Either: choose to stop hosting annelids and renounce your past as an annelidist or surrender your humanity to your annelids completely.

SECRET OF UNNATURAL HEALING: You can use your annelids to accelerate healing far beyond natural speeds. You may spend Vigor dice 1-for-1 to gain bonus dice on Medicine [R] checks when attempting to heal someone.

SECRET OF CHITINOUS ARMOR: In battle, you can call upon your annelids to shield you from harm. When this secret is activated, chitinous plates erupt from your skin, providing +1 protection from harm.

COST: 1 vigor.

SECRET OF HORRIFIC TRANSFORMATION: By temporarily relinquishing control to your annelids, you can transform yourself into a hulking insectoid behemoth. While in this form, you do not incur penalty dice for being bruised in Bringing Down the Pain. However, you may only take Vigor-related actions, and should you reach harm level six (broken), you immediately lose the conflict as the transformation reverses itself, leaving you confused and disoriented. **COST:** 4 Vigor

KONGHOKI

KEY OF LOST IDENTITY: Once you were human, but now you are a ghost in a machine and all that remains of that human life are small, meaningless fragments of memory that are starting to re-assert themselves. **GAIN 1XP:** When you remember an inconsequential detail of your old life; **2XP:** When you are in danger and are distracted by a memory of past events; **5XP:** When you uncover a memory of a defining moment in your past life that causes you to reverse your current course of action; **BUYOFF:** Recover all memories of your former life.

KEY OF THE KILLING MACHINE: You have been conditioned to be the perfect killing machine, capable of intelligence but without emotion. **GAIN 1XP:** When you defeat another character in battle; **3xp:** When you defeat someone of equal or greater skill in combat; **BUYOFF:** Surrender to an enemy in battle.

SECRET OF AUGMENTED STRENGTH: Your new body far exceeds normal human limits. You may spend Vigor pool dice 1-for-1 to increase the damage of a successful hit in combat.

KUGUTSU

KEY OF THE CAPTIVE SERVANT: Your character is defined by their service to their master. **Gain 1 xp:** Obey an order given by your master; **2XP:** Suffer minor harm in service to your master; **5XP:** Save your master from great danger; **BUYOFF:** Escape your master's service.

KEY OF THE REFUGEE: Your character has sacrificed a life of comfort and safety for a hardscrabble life where they can be free. **GAIN 1XP:** When your former life comes up; **2XP:** When your outlaw status brings you harm; **5XP:** When the separation from your old life causes great suffering; **BUYOFF:** Return to your master's service.

SECRET OF DREAM-WALKING (KUGUTSU ONLY): Gain Dream Walking [I] as an ability at mediocre when taking this secret. If a Kugutsu has time and uninterrupted access to a sleeping subject, they can enter the subject's dreams. Each night the ability is successfully used, the subject gains a mark. Four marks will allow the kugutsu to re-write some key aspect of their personality, imposing a new key on them, forcing them into advance debt if needed. These marks do not diminish or disappear with time. (Captive kugutsu may not use this ability on their masters.) **COST:** 1 Reason per use.

ONI

KEY OF THE ONI (ONI ONLY): 1xp: have a scene either with another Oni; **2XP:** argue or have a conflict with another Oni; **5XP:** make personal sacrifices for the Oni as a whole; **BUYOFF:** turn against your people

SECRET OF HIDDEN SPEECH (ONI ONLY): If you do not already possess the ability, gain Resonance [V] as an ability rated at mediocre. By making a successful Resonance [V] check, you may project your thoughts into someone's mind, causing them to hear your voice. Another oni or someone of mixed human-oni heritage may choose to respond mentally, if they wish. You may also use ability on humans, though the communication will be one-way.

COST: 1 Vigor

SECRET OF DISRUPTING RESONANCE (ONI ONLY): You have learned how to use your thought projection to confuse and distract your enemies. Make a successful Resonance [V] check to spend pool dice [V] 2 for 1 to assign penalty dice to target(s) within sight. These dice may be assigned to one or more targets. You may not gain this secret if you do not already have the Secret of Hidden Speech.

COST: 2 Vigor per penalty die assigned

SECRET OF TELEKINESIS (ONI ONLY): If you do not already possess the ability, gain Resonance [V] as an ability rated at mediocre.

You have gained the mental fortitude to move objects with your mind. In order to use this secret, make a successful Resonance [V] check. For each success, you may move or levitate an object up to your approximate size and weight. If you have multiple successes, you may move multiple objects, or you may combine successes to move one very large object.

If you choose, you can use complete and total concentration to maintain the effect; taking any other action will cause the effect to end immediately. This ability causes Bringing Down the Pain to end immediately, with no clear resolution of intentions.

COST: 2 Vigor

ONMYODO PRACTITIONERS

KEY OF ONMYODO: GAIN 1XP: Onmyodo appears in the scene; xp:2 use onmyodo to solve a problem; **5XP:** your magic/spirit goes wild and causes great harm; **BUYOFF:** renounce onmyodo and its use

SECRET OF ONMYODO: Gain Onmyodo [R] as an ability at mediocre when taking this secret. You can use onmyodo to summon a shiki by rolling your Onmyodo [R] ability. The ability check result is used to create a secondary shiki character. When creating a new shiki, give it a role keyword by describing what kind of spirit it is - ie "air shiki", "water shiki", "tree shiki", etc. Depending on how great the margin of success, the GM will give it a pool of between 3 (marginal success) and 8 (great success) dice. Shikis do not have keys. **COST:** summoning check result in Reason pool dice

When the shiki attempts an action that seems logical for its role keyword, roll its keyword like an ability using dice equal to the check result used to summon the shiki. Using an ability exhausts one die from the shiki's pool; when the shiki's pool is exhausted, the shiki disperses.

Shikis summoned with 2 or fewer successes will obey your commands without question. More powerful shikis are more likely to have their own ideas and agendas. Once a shiki is summoned, you must make a second Onmyodo [R] check to determine how closely it follows your commands.

EXAMPLE SHIKIS

AIR SHIKI (MINOR): POOL 3

EXAMPLE TASKS: fly, carry message, gather intelligence, temporarily distract a target, extinguish a small flame

FLAME SHIKI (MINOR): POOL 3

EXAMPLE TASKS: start small fire, frighten, heat, destroy small object, injure a target

WATER SHIKI (MODERATE): POOL 5

EXAMPLE TASKS: locally affect currents, extinguish large fires, drown a target, make terrain more difficult to cross, capsize small-to-medium boats

TREE SHIKI (MAJOR): POOL 8

EXAMPLE TASKS: force immediate and rapid plant growth, destroy barricades, wreak havoc on non-mechanized armies

SECRET OF SHIKI CONTROL: You have mastered the art of controlling shikis and receive a +1 to all checks to control a shiki (even one you have not summoned)

RANDOM NAMES BY CULTURE

Here are some lists of random names you can use during play.

Only Azumi names are presented as gendered. That is because Azumi's naming convention uses real, albeit old, Japanese names.

If your group wishes to decide on gendered naming conventions for a culture based on these lists, that could be interesting. Otherwise, choose a name that appeals to you in the moment. The other lists were either entirely made up or, in the case of the Priesthood, a greatly embellished form of Japanese.

The names provided for Buddhist priests are taken from actual lists of names given to teachers and students of Zen Buddhism. While there exists a tradition of Buddhist "nuns" or amas, they are not well documented, and so treat this list of names as gender-neutral.

AZUMI (M)

Ajari	Tameie	Chikuami	Sho En
Kaneie	Yutai	Yoriuji	Nobutora
Keitai	Moritake	Shigemasa	
Ojin	Fuhito	Yoshihisa	

AZUMI (F)

Shikibu	Jingo	Nariko	Jokei
Saisho	Michiyo	Tomiko	Jufuku
Abutsu	Gemmei	Tsubone	
Himiko	Teruko	Sen	

PRIESTHOOD (BOTH)

Asuhishimin	Ukuwayun	Onokotaru	Fushichihe
Imomeshin	Esosanun	Eruyuhoku	Uhetsufuno
Ochifusun	Ihisemuwo	Omemiyura	Muhemuko
Amawahomi	Oshiyuhinu	Arukutayu	Amorose
Ekoramumi	Ekanuron	Kekemimon	Mukemunu

ONI

Chaj-tomi	Aj-olos	Kal-ende	Ja-jende
Etz-elja	Cha-jende	Ajo-jak	Cha-jal
Cha-jin	Ka-binek	Etzo-jal	Gah-nek
Ix-yesal	Jo-lal	Kacho-jek	Aza-lak
Etz-enak	Chaj-ana	Kab-toma	Lan-elja

BUDDHIST PRIESTS

Ansui	Genun	Meikyo	Onko
Bankei	Heiki	Neisui	Ryuko
Chinsho	Isshin	Ryosen	Seiko
Eisho	Jakugen	Tosetsu	Senko
Fugan	Kansho	Tetsuko	Jakuko

JAHGA

Tsumun	Lansu	Jakura	Shunaja
Dankin	Aru-ki	Areni	Takari
Ki-me	Esse-to	Bedare	Shuyare
Romosu	Taiende	Sadiru	Natan-jo
Sa-joru	Sojaru	Na-joka	Heniru

RINDEN

Kotun	Tachor	Ilwen	Ennan
Tulor	Palil	Palarn	Firon
Kagarn	Eran	Lamil	Ilan
Chakoch	Yaril	Farmol	Ardon
Krolan	Lamon	Indan	Firil

KUGUTSU

amaran	rysan	atris	nemone
meria	erem	assin	mara
ryllis	denia	lisian	zalea
emone	elico	thoalu	egoni
lurum	iolus	tatis	mellias

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Will Hochella
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THE RUINED EMPIRE

ONCE THE LAND HELD MANY NATIONS, but recent decades have seen two great empires arise, each locked in a struggle to the death for supremacy. In the east lies the Imperial Dynasty of Azumi, the Iron Empire. Expanding ever westward, it absorbs all nations that lie in its path as it hungrily devours the resources of the land to fuel the engines of industry. In the west lies the Jahga Republic of Enlightened Peoples. Expanding eastward, it seeks to bring civilization and self-determination to nations that have not yet embraced the principles of enlightened rule that govern their empire. As it stands, only a handful of resisting nations remain even nominally independent, forming a scant buffer between these two implacably expanding forces.

The Ruined Empire is a system-neutral campaign setting and source book set in a land of five nations in conflict, ripe with adventure and danger and contains:

- An original campaign setting, inspired by *Final Fantasy* and common anime tropes, written with an eye toward social issues
- Campaign creation hooks
- Conversion guides and system hacks for use in starting campaigns with non-Tenra systems