



# *Strider*

*A Steamsclapes Adventure*

By Sean Tait Bircher



## 2 Author's Introduction to the Kickstarter Version

Thank you for backing *Steamscapes: Asia*!

It really means a lot to me that so many people were willing to back this project. I might only be the author of a single chapter in this setting, but it's still close to my heart. The chapter on Japan is my first long-form professional assignment—and probably the first work of mine that will be seen in print—and I couldn't be happier to be involved in something as heartfelt and ambitious as *Steamscapes*.

Eric Simon (Fairman Rogers) and gang are trying something very different with this setting; by emphasizing the science fiction of steampunk—by stripping away the dragons and faeries and Draculas that have become attached to steampunk RPGs through the influence of *Dungeons & Dragons*—*Steamscapes* is recovering steampunk as a genre instead of an aesthetic. It is my hope that this adventure demonstrates the fun possibilities of alternate history, “pure” steampunk.

by Sean Bircher

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### 3 Synopsis

The heroes are employed by expatriate entrepreneur Thomas B. Glover to guard the development of a “mechanical innovation” that he hopes will reinvigorate his fortunes: a walking tank he calls “the Strider.” The given reason for the Strider’s development is to protect Imperial Japan from Chinese airships, but the Republic of Ezo—a breakaway state of Tokugawa loyalists that occupies the island of Hokkaido—has suspicions that the Striders will be used in an attempt to retake Hokkaido. Development of the Strider has reached a standstill, and Glover hopes to enlist the famous inventor Tanaka Hisashige to correct the bugs in the design.

The heroes are employed to accompany Chocho-san—a beautiful geisha automaton that Tanaka considers one of his greatest works—from Nagasaki to Tokyo so that the automaton can persuade Tanaka to undertake the project. If they are successful, then they must escort Tanaka to the remote island of Hashima to oversee the construction of the first Strider.

What no one realizes is that Chocho-san intends to kill Tanaka.

#### ***Act I: Madame Butterfly***

The heroes arrive in Nagasaki, where their task is explained to them by Thomas B. Glover. They are to escort the geisha karakuri Chocho-san—one of Tanaka Hisashige’s greatest works—to his laboratory in Tokyo. Tanaka is reluctant to lend his genius to the Strider project and it is hoped that Chocho-san will persuade him to join the cause.

The heroes are tailed by a group of shizoku (ex-samurai) saboteurs who assault them and attempt to steal Chocho-san in the conflict. These samurai are partisans of the Republic of Ezo, warned of Glover’s intentions through a third party (secretly hired by Chocho-san). Assuming the heroes are successful in defeating the shizoku, then they may proceed to Tokyo.

#### ***Act II: Vagabonds***

The heroes escort Chocho-san to Tokyo. During this voyage, the Game Master should initiate the opportunity for one or more Interludes. One of these Interludes will actually be played by the Game Master, as Chocho-san shares some of her tragic background; this will allow the players a chance to deduce Chocho-san’s true intent. They will also confront Saitō Hajime and learn more about the complex politics of *Steamsapes: Asia*.

There are three ways the heroes may travel to Tokyo:

##### **By Land**

If the heroes are veteran *Steamsapes* characters with their own steam car, then they may proceed overland from Nagasaki to Tokyo. Since they’re actually on different islands, this will not be as easy as it seems. Traversing Japan’s hilly highways may very well persuade them of the necessity of the Strider’s legs. The heroes encounter an *Ee ja nai ka* protest that disrupts their progress and must choose whether or not to intercede when government troops come to break up the protest.

The heroes encounter similar difficulties if they choose to take the train. They quickly discover that the rail system is as yet incomplete, and find themselves hiking as often as riding. The same *Ee ja nai ka* interruption will occur.

##### **By Sea**

If the heroes choose to book passage by ship, then they will be buzzed by a Chinese dragon airship. The powerful Chinese vessel is interested more in intimidating the Japanese and their English allies than in engaging in battle, but it will not refuse a fight. The steamer is only lightly armed, however, so it is unlikely that the heroes will be able to offer much of a battle.



If the heroes have their own airship, then they may proceed by air. The airways over Japan are relatively clear, but they will have a scare with a Chinese dragon airship. The possibility of a dogfight runs much higher if the heroes have their own airship and might spell disaster for the heroes and the nation. Unfortunately, this would also give Chocho-san an excellent opportunity to disappear and enact her plot.

### Act 3: The God of Karakuri

The heroes arrive in Tokyo and proceed to the laboratory of Tanaka Hisashige. Depending on what the heroes have previously discovered about Chocho-san and her plans for Tanaka, the heroes may either be racing to the inventor to prevent his assassination or (wittingly or unwittingly) assisting his would-be murderer. If they have not already confronted Saitō Hajime, that scene may be inserted here. The act ends with the Strider project either moving forward (because Tanaka lives and has been persuaded to aid the Imperials) or abandoned (due to Tanaka's death or his refusal to join the research team).

### GM Advice

**Strider** relies on exploiting player expectations. It's a little bit meta, using familiar tropes (and familiar characters) to create sudden swerves in the story that will hopefully keep players guessing while still playing fair. **Strider** is essentially a murder mystery wherein the heroes get to stop the murder before it happens, but it's disguised as a straightforward quest.

The basic plot is the “get the princess from Point A to Point B” plot familiar from *The Hidden Fortress*, *Star Wars*, and numerous other stories. The difference here is that the princess is actually the villain, exploiting her presumed innocence to assassinate the kindly old man the players are trying to recruit. The players should have the opportunity to discover her motivation and deduce her intent; roleplaying notes are provided to assist the Game Master in portraying this murderous princess in a way that allows the players to solve this hidden mystery.

There are several red herrings to distract the players. The most notable is the inclusion of the legendary swordsman Saitō Hajime—a historical figure that has become practically a stock character in anime and manga set during this time period. He's best known in the English-speaking world as the rival of the hero of *Rurouni Kenshin*, wherein he plays the Batman or Punisher to Kenshin's Superman or Spider-Man, but in life he was one of the members of the original Shinsengumi (transformed in *Steamsapes: Asia* into a secret corps of spies and saboteurs). Players are likely to react to his presence with either paranoia or relief and Game Masters should exploit either reaction.

There are also feints to make the players question their own goals. One of the great strengths of Japanese fiction is in its portrayal of sympathetic villains; nowhere is the adage “The villain is the hero of his own story” more true than in Japan. Whether it's such villains as *Mobile Suit Gundam*'s honorable Char Aznable, *Inuyasha*'s wistful femme fatale Kagura, or *Ring*'s abused terror Sadako, the antagonists of Japanese fiction are often motivated by backgrounds and goals as understandable and relatable as the heroes. The villainess of **Strider** is named after the tragic heroine of the opera *Madame Butterfly*, and her story deliberately parallels that heroine's tragedy in several ways.

The trustworthiness and intent of the heroes' employers is called into question as well. The MacGuffin of **Strider** is a revolutionary new weapon intended to protect Imperial Japan from Chinese expansion. While China is a legitimate threat to Japan's independence, the central conflict in this adventure is between factions within Japan itself. Japan in *Steamsapes* is divided into the Meiji Era Imperial Japan familiar from history and the Republic of Ezo, a fledgling democracy founded by the survivors of the Tokugawa regime. The politics of choosing between a parliamentary monarchy backed by Great Britain and the American Consolidated Union (*Steamsapes*' version of the USA) and a republic founded on preserving samurai privileges (and backed by France) are obviously conflicting. Game Masters should allow players to make their own choices; there is no “right ending” to this story, and whatever decisions the players make can provide story seeds for an entire campaign.

## 5 Important NPCs

### *Chocho-san*

b. May 7, 1853 (age 18)

This beautiful clockwork geisha was built by the master craftsman Tanaka Hisashige. Chocho-san is a superior example of what was known before European-style automatons were introduced as a “karakuri hiko” or “clockwork person.”

*She is also the secret villain of this adventure.*

Chocho-san was built as a gift to Tokugawa Iesada (shogun from 1853 to 1858) from Nabeshima Naomasa, the daimyo of Saga. Nabeshima—though progressive-minded—attempted to remain neutral in the rivalry between the imperial court and the shogunate for as long as he could manage. Chocho-san was built under his orders in order to help persuade Shogun Iesada of the benefits of studying and adapting Western science.

Iesada was both mentally and physically weak. He was easily bullied by his retainers and westerners alike. It was only in his games with the clever karakuri that he really felt comfortable, and the shogun and Chocho-san developed a very close relationship.

The fall of the Tokugawa Shogunate broke Chocho-san’s clockwork heart. She was sent to attend Townsend Harris, the English ambassador, in the negotiations that led to the unequal treaties that opened Japan to the West. She saw firsthand the contempt that the Europeans and Americans held for her nation and her beloved shogun. She continues to hold a grudge because of that.

With the Meiji government not only overthrowing the shogunate, but also adopting the same pro-Westernization stance it attacked the Tokugawa for having, Chocho-san has decided to act. Like many, she believes that Imperial Japan is more interested in conquering the Republic of Ezo than in confronting China, so she believes the Striders will be used against the last remnant of the bakufu. She has decided to assassinate Tanaka Hisashige—her own maker—rather than let the Striders be built.

Chocho-san is acting on her own. She used third parties to reach out to the shizoku who attack the heroes as they leave Glover’s residence, but she doesn’t have any contacts within the Republic of Ezo or the Shinsengumi. Her plan is simply to get to Tanaka by any means necessary and then slay him. If she can get there with allies like the shizoku, then that would be best. If she has to go with the heroes, then she will do what she must.

### **Playing Chocho-san**

Tanaka Hisashige is a genius—an absolute master of mechanical design and programming. The karakuri was built to be the affectionate servant of Tokugawa Iesada, and Tanaka Hisashige did his job too well. The sympathy for that pathetic failure of a shogun that Tanaka built into Chocho-san transcended the boundaries of servant and master, machine and man, to become an undying love.



*The Flag of the Republic of Ezo*



Chocho-san is embittered. She hides her rage behind a façade of courteousness and solicitousness, but it occasionally peeks through. She is swift to correct errors—such as implying any relationship between herself and Townsend Harris (“No, no, Glover-dono. I merely assisted with translation.”)—and can be condescendingly precise. She always refers to Iesada as “Iesada-sama” and anyone else who is nominally her superior as “-dono.”

Chocho-san loathes Oni, the powerful soldier automatons that won the war for the Imperialists. She cringes from them and can barely tolerate their presence. This aversion to her fellow automata can be an early clue to her true disposition.

### Description

Chocho-san is an automaton of wood and metal constructed to resemble a Japanese geisha. She resembles nothing so much as a life-size bunraku puppet.

Her face was constructed without a mobile jaw or eyebrows, but she is able to achieve a remarkable degree of expression through the movement of her eyes and the tilt of her head. Her natural expression when at rest is shy and retiring, making her appear to be more demure and innocent than she actually is.

Her hair is a wig made of actual human hair and can be let down (when she wants to imitate intimacy and vulnerability) and restyled to let her stay fresh and fashionable. The entire wig section can be removed, allowing Chocho-san to style her own hair. Somewhat to her consternation, however, her kimono is part of her construction instead of a separate garment and cannot be removed. It is the membrane of her butterfly-like wings. The kimono is blue with white butterflies on the sleeves and “skirt.”

When her wings are extended, Chocho-san’s body is revealed. Scandalously, her body is carved with astonishing anatomical detail. She is painted all over with butterfly patterns resembling a full-body yakuza tattoo. The effect is somewhat obscene.

Her voice is lilting and singsong. While Japanese is commonly thought of as a language of precise, separated syllables, in practice certain syllables (especially those ending in “u”) are often contracted; it’s only when singing that each and every syllable is pronounced in full. Chocho-san’s obsolete mechanical programming is not capable of using such contractions. To the Japanese ear, it sounds like she sings every utterance.

### Chocho-san (Wild Card)

**強 Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Climbing d6, Fighting d6, Flying d8, Gambling d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d12, Persuasion d10, Stealth d8, Streetwise d10, Taunt d6

**Charisma +6; Pace: 4; Parry: 6; Toughness: 5**

**Hindrances:** Vengeful [Major], Death Wish, Loyal

**Edges:** Assassin, Charismatic, Flight (x2), Linguist, Strong Willed, Very Attractive

**Gear:** steel hairpin (as dagger/knife; Str+d4)

### Special Abilities:

- **Construct:** Karakuri add +2 to recover from being Shaken, don’t suffer wound modifiers, and are immune to poison and disease. Karakuri cannot heal naturally. To heal a karakuri requires the Repair skill—which is used like the Healing skill only with no “Golden Hour.”
- **Flight:** Chocho-san’s kimono is not a mere garment, but also the “membranes” of her wings. A quick tug on her obi allows the carefully compressed bamboo struts hidden in her kimono to spring into place. She can fly at a Pace of 8 with a Climb of 1.
- **Obsolete Technology:** Karakuri were built using earlier, less reliable technology than their automaton “cousins.” The phonautographs that give them their sense of hearing and the *camerae obscurae* that provide their eyes are much less sensitive than those of newer automatons. Karakuri suffer from the Bad Eyes (Major) and Hard of Hearing (Minor) Hindrances.
- **Slow:** The clockwork minds of karakuri are slower to process information than the Analytical Engine-derived programming of automatons. Karakuri draw two cards for initiative and act on the worse. They have a Pace of 4 and roll a d4 running die.

## 7 Supporting NPCs

The following supporting NPCs can easily serve as important contacts or mentors for the player characters in an ongoing campaign. With that stated, the Game Master should also be willing to follow the logical results of the players' actions and the results of the dice. If the progress of the story demands that one of these NPCs die, then allow it. It could be especially shocking for some players if the seemingly-invincible Saitō Hajime dies at Chocho-san's hands.

### *Thomas Blake Glover*

b. June 6, 1838 (age 33)

The mustachioed Scottish entrepreneur is one of the most successful Westerners in Japan. He was instrumental in the Meiji victory and has expanded his enterprise to railways and shipbuilding. He is not always cautious with his investments, however, and is recovering from going bankrupt last year. His cordial relations with the Meiji government and important officials in the Satsuma-Choshu alliance have prevented much disruption in his outward appearance of wealth, but he is hounded by creditors.

In an ongoing campaign, Glover can be an excellent patron for the heroes. His own need to restore his fortunes would propel him into hiring the characters to undertake all sorts of missions and negotiations. He currently has his eye on farming Hokkaido—he believes Japan is ripe to embrace Western-style beer, and Hokkaido would be excellent wheat country—but first the Republic of Ezo needs to fall.

Thomas Blake Glover is an active Freemason.



*Thomas Blake Glover*

#### **Thomas Blake Glover (Wild Card)**

**強** **Attributes:** Agility d6, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6  
**Skills:** Fighting d4, Gambling d6, Intimidation d8, Investigation d8, Notice d8, Persuasion d8, Repair d6, Riding d4, Shooting d4, Stealth d4, Streetwise d8, Taunt d6

**Charisma +2; Pace: 6; Parry: 4; Toughness: 5**

**Hindrances:** Overconfident, Greedy [Minor], Loyal

**Edges:** Charismatic, Combat Reflexes, Connections (Freemasons), Connections (Meiji government), Rich [formerly Filthy Rich]

**Gear:** formal clothes



## 8 *Saitō Hajime (AKA Fujita Gorō)*

b. February 18, 1844 (age 27)

This grim-faced young policeman hides secrets and pain behind his stoic demeanor—and frequent cups of sake. A former leader of the infamous Shinsengumi, the man formerly known as Saitō Hajime defected to Imperial Japan shortly after the conclusion of the Oni War. He realized that only a unified Japan could hope to stand against China and the West and turned his back on his companions to aid those he once called enemies.

Fujita Gorō is the name he answers to now as an agent of the Imperial Police. He exploits his knowledge of Shinsengumi allies and methods to foil the plots of former friends; few Tokugawa loyalists can believe that the former captain of the third unit of the Shinsengumi would betray them until he comes to arrest them.

He does not do this lightly. Every sting operation, every old comrade sentenced to jail or execution eats away at his soul. Saitō has taken to drink and it is slowly killing him.

### **Saitō Hajime (Wild Card)**

強

**Attributes:** Agility d10, Smarts d10, Spirit d10, Strength d8, Vigor d8

**Skills:** Fighting d12+2, Intimidation d10, Notice d8, Stealth d8, Streetwise d10, Taunt d6

**Charisma** -4; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 11; **Toughness:** 6

**Hindrances:** Bloodthirsty, Habit [Major; chronic drinker], Cautious, Loyal

**Edges:** Expert [Fighting], Improved Block, Improved Dodge, Improved First Strike, Improved Frenzy, Improved Level Headed, Improved Trademark Weapon, Martial Artist, Quick Draw, Saboteur

**Gear:** katana (Str+d6+2, AP 2, trademark weapon), police uniform



*Saitō Hajime*

### ***Tanaka Hisashige***

b. October 16, 1799 (age 71)

Modern real-world writers often call Tanaka Hisashige “the Edison of Japan”—which is pretty insulting considering that Tanaka achieved most of his successes before Edison even filed his first patent.

Tanaka invented a loom at the age of 14 and was building unprecedented *karakuri* by the time he was 20. After a successful career touring the country with his mechanical devices, he retired in his mid-30s to study astronomy,



hydraulics, pneumatics, and western science. He was eventually invited to reside in Saga and helped that domain develop some of the technology that would help the Imperialists win the Oni War.

He was behind the construction of Japan's first domestically-made steam locomotive and steam battleship—designs he invented by studying foreign reference books without ever having seen the originals in real life. He helped develop the modern field guns that aided the Imperial faction against the shogunate, and perfected the smelting process that allowed for the construction of the Oni.

And, of course, he built Chocho-san (and possibly more like her).

He is now in semi-retirement in Tokyo, experimenting with telegraphy and other means of long-range communication.



*Tanaka Hisashige*

#### **Tanaka Hisashige (Wild Card)**

**Attributes:** Agility d4, Smarts d12, Spirit d10, Strength d4, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Fighting d4, Gambling d6, Investigation d10, Mechanical Programming d12+2, Notice d8, Persuasion d6, Repair d12, Stealth d4, Steamsmith d12+2, Streetwise d6, Taunt d6

**Charisma** 0; **Pace** 5; **Parry** 4; **Toughness** 5

**Hindrances:** Curious, Elderly

**Edges:** Advanced Clockwork, Advanced Structural Engineering, Artillery, Basic Clockwork, Basic Structural Engineering, Clockwork Integration, Complex Joints, Connections (Meiji government), Decision Engines, Flexibility, Ironclads, Jack of All Trades, Leonardo's Legacy, Locomotion, Master (Mechanical Programming), Master (Steamsmith), Mechanical Intellect, Miniaturized Processing, Multiple Expansion Engines, Social Programming, Uncanny Humanity, Well Equipped

**Gear:** normal clothes, tools





## 10 ACT I: MADAME BUTTERFLY

### *The Proposition*

The players are in Nagasaki, where they are offered employment by Thomas Blake Glover and drawn into Chocho-san's revenge against the Imperialists.

**GMs:** Read or paraphrase red text to the players. If additional explication is needed for any NPCs, please refer to that chapter for more information.

The construct presents a fierce appearance. An Armstrong gun and a Gatling cannon are bolted to a steel deck with a sort of wheelhouse in between them. The whole sits upon two oversized, stout legs with “knees” pointing backward like a bird’s. It stalks along—easily surmounting the obstacles in its path—then halts. A match is touched to the cannon...

#### **Boom!**

The shell flies wide of its target and breaks a windowpane in the decorous French doors. The construct itself pitches backward and falls on its side. Your host curses and rights the foot-tall clockwork model, then apologizes for his language.

“And that’s why we need Tanaka,” he says.

The heroes sit in the study of Thomas Blake Glover, a Scotsman who defied English embargoes to help arm the Imperialist faction and win the Meiji Revolution. Since then, he has worked hard to bring industrialization to Japan, catapulting it into the modern age. He is undoubtedly one of the most famous and respected foreigners living in Japan, and he has reached out to the player characters to help him solve a problem.

“He’s the only one who could make this bluidy thing work,” Glover continues. [If there are any ladies present, he apologizes for his language again.] “Tanaka Hisashige is Japan’s greatest mechanical genius. We just can’t seem to get the balance right on the Strider, and we desperately need Tanaka to fix it. The Emperor’s eager to get production underway.”

He looks each of you in the eyes.

“The Emperor,” he emphasizes.

“The Chinese are eager to make sure the British and the Americans know that they won’t tolerate us colonizing their ‘friends’ in Japan. They fly their bluidy dragonships nearer and nearer to the coast, skirting past the towns and ports, making the Japanese feel like the sick men of Asia. The Emperor needs to do something to show his subjects that he’s got it all in hand.

“That’s where I came up with the idea for the Strider: a mobile field cannon capable of traversing Japan’s hills and mountains, capable of going wherever it needed to go. At their proper height, they’ll be faster than an airship and practically impossible for the Chinese to target—even with their rockets.”

A singsong feminine voice interrupts.

“And it will show the Republic of Ezo the Emperor’s strength as well, Glover-dono,” she says.

The voice comes from a wondrous automaton who kneels, Japanese-style, in a corner. She looks like a life-size bunraku puppet of a beautiful geisha. Her face is just a painted mask, but it somehow conveys humility and grace nonetheless.

“Yes, true enough,” Glover muses noncommittally. The automaton bows her head. He turns away and takes a sip from the glass of whiskey on his desk.

He gestures toward the doll-like figure. “This is Chocho-san. She is one of Tanaka Hisashige’s greatest masterpieces. If anyone can persuade the old man to return to arms manufacturing, it will be her. She helped Townsend Harris open Japan to the west, you know.”

“No, no, Glover-dono,” Chocho-san protests. “I merely translated.”



Glover harrumphs and lays out the assignment. For a \$300 reward per hero, they are to accompany Chocho-san from Nagasaki to Tokyo; they will receive \$100 up front and an extra \$10 *per diem* to cover travel expenses—or they can take berths on a tramp steamer called the *Lucky Dragon* that is shipping out that day (Glover is an investor in the ship and tries to persuade them to go that way since he doesn't have to pay for it). Once Chocho-san has concluded business with Tanaka, they can collect the remainder of their funds at the offices of the Mitsubishi Shipping Company (owners of the *Lucky Dragon* and Glover's silent partners—and yes, it is *that* Mitsubishi).

“There's an extra \$100 in it for you if you accompany Tanaka the rest of the way to the production facility—a little island called Hashima. There's... There's rumors that the Shinsengumi has gotten word of our plans.” Glover looks to Chocho-san, who nods her assent.

“The Wolves of Mibu,” she intones in her singsong voice. “The assassins and spies of the Republic of Ezo.”

“Loyalists to the Tokugawa regime,” growls Glover. “With the Imperialists curtailing the samurai's rights, there's more and more sympathy to the bluidy ex-shogunate. It makes me sick.

“I might be a Scotsman, and a good subject of Victoria, but I don't want to see Japan wind up a colony of another power. That's what's going to happen though, if the Republic doesn't lay down its arms. Japan must be whole again or it will fall to China.”

“Yes, yes! I agree, Glover-dono,” says Chocho-san.

Glover then allows the heroes to ask questions and make arrangements. He's in dire financial straits (though he won't admit that) and it will be hard to negotiate for him to cover the costs of shipping a steam cart or similar large equipment. He'll also be cagey about his government contacts; he's working with several out-of-favor ministers on the Strider project and they don't have nearly the backing he claims (that's one unspoken reason he's going to outsiders for help). In general, Glover is trying to project a façade of confidence and wealth that he doesn't quite have.

Assuming negotiations are concluded favorably and the heroes decide to begin their mission immediately, Chocho-san accompanies them from the house. Glover has a magnificent home on top of a hill looking down on Nagasaki Harbor. As they walk (or drive) down the hill, they pass some angry-looking Japanese men clad in that odd combination of western-style hats and scarves with traditional kimono that is such a rage amongst Japan's middle class. If asked about the men's identities, Chocho-san politely brushes them off as “just moneylenders.”

### *The Seven Samurai*

At the bottom of the hill (if the heroes are providing their own transportation) or down at the docks (if they are taking the *Lucky Dragon*), a scruffy-looking group of seven shizoku—displaced samurai—are waiting. They surround the heroes if the heroes are on foot or blockade the road with wagons if they are in a steam cart; they are suspiciously well-prepared.

The shizoku are Ezo sympathizers, and have been contacted by Chocho-san through third parties to steal her from the heroes and accompany her to Tokyo in their place. They will attempt to simply demand the players turn her over at first and only resort to violence if that fails. Chocho-san pleads that the heroes not endanger themselves, vowing to sacrifice herself if needed. If she has to translate Japanese for the player characters, then she attempts to make the shizoku seem as dangerous as possible.

#### **Shizoku**

Chiaki Minoru, Hashimoto Shinobu, Hiroshi Sugi, Kimura Isao, Oguni Hideo, Shimura Takashi, Takahara Toshio

**Attributes:** Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d8

**Skills:** Climbing d6, Fighting d6(+1 with katana), Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Taunt d6

**Charisma:** +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6

**Hindrances:** Code of Honor, Loyal, Poverty

**Edges:** Combat Reflexes, Quick Draw, Trademark Weapon (katana)

**Gear:** katana (Str+d6+2, AP 2), normal clothes, wakizashi (as short sword; Str+d6); note that though they wear two swords, these shizoku do not fight two-handed



There are seven shizoku. While skilled, they are meant more as a distraction—a red herring to throw the heroes off the scent of Chocho-san's plot—than an actual threat. They flee if they're getting beaten, carrying any fallen comrades if they can. If they can't escape, they attempt seppuku.

If the heroes actually find themselves threatened by the shizoku, then a pair of Oni porters (if in town) or dockworkers (if at the docks) intercede.

#### Dockworkers

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d4, Strength d8, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Boating d6, Fighting d8, Gambling d4, Intimidation d4, Notice d6, Taunt d4

**Charisma:** 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 5

**Hindrances:** Habit [Minor; Swearing]

**Edges:** none

**Gear:** boat hook (Str+d6, 2 hands, reach 1)

#### Oni ni Kanabō

Heihachi, Kikuchiyo

**Attributes:** Agility d4, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d10, Vigor d10

**Skills:** Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d4, Taunt d6

**Charisma:** special; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 11(4)

**Hindrances:** Code of Honor, Loyal, Poverty

**Edges:** none

**Gear:** molybdenum alloy spiked kanabō (Str+d10, MinStr d8, 2 hands, +1 against Disarm, may not be used with Frenzy)

#### Special Abilities:

- **Construct:** Automaton add +2 to recover from being shaken, don't suffer from wound modifiers, and are immune to poison and disease. Automatons cannot heal naturally. To heal an automaton requires the Repair skill, which is used like the Healing skill but with no "Golden Hour."
- **Shell of the Sazae:** Oni ni kanabō are tougher than other automatons. They are considered to have 4 points of armor in all locations. In addition, their armor is highly fire-resistant. Oni ni kanabō are immune to individual fire attacks. However, their internal workings are still made of less durable metals like copper, iron, and brass, and can therefore be damaged through prolonged exposure to high temperatures even though the armor is unaffected.
- **Horrifying Visage:** Oni ni kanabō have a Charisma of -4 at all times due to their demonic mask and horns, as well as their striking color (typically blue or red). However, they ignore this penalty and instead add a +2 whenever attempting an Intimidate roll.
- **Made for War:** Oni ni kanabō suffer a -4 penalty to all Common Knowledge rolls.

If the Oni are forced to intervene, the heroes will see an interesting reaction from Chocho-san. She is actually rude to the Oni, evading them and refusing any help from them. If one touches her, she begins trilling and thrashing. The heroes will realize after a moment that the trilling is actually her screaming; the same mechanical limitations that force her to pronounce every single syllable she speaks also turn her screams into a musical serenade.

The Oni are apologetic if the players accost them, but will defend themselves if attacked. Despite their monstrous appearance, they are self-aware automata just like those in North America. Battling the Oni could be a very foolish mistake for the heroes. Notably, Chocho-san does not try to stop them; she will happily find some other saps to help her get to Tokyo.

Assuming, however, that the players are successful in defeating the shizoku (with or without the help of the Oni), then they make their way to their conveyance of choice.



The heroes and their deceitful companion board the airship, steam cart, steamship, or train and begin their journey. As the act ends, the heroes notice a grim-faced policeman—incongruously armed with a katana instead of the usual western-style saber—watching them as they depart. This is the infamous former Shinsengumi captain Saitō Hajime. If they are leaving by ship or train, he boards at the last moment; otherwise he watches them enigmatically until they are nearly out of sight, and then swiftly and determinedly walks away.

The heroes depart knowing they are being followed.

Method	Cost	Time
Steamship	None if taking the <i>Lucky Dragon</i> (but they don't get the <i>per diem</i> ); \$25 per hero one-way if they employ a different vessel (including meals).	7 days
Airship	\$1d4+1 per hero per day to cover fuel, lodging, and meals; the heroes will have to take their own airship as commercial flights are not available.	1d4+1 days
Steam Cart	\$1d4+1 per hero per day to cover fuel, lodging, meals, and ferry fares (Nagasaki and Tokyo are on different islands); if the dice explode, interpret this as bribes to pass checkpoints. This option is only available if the players own their own steam cart as there are none for sale or rent in Nagasaki.	1d4+10 days
Train	\$1d4+5 per hero per day for tickets, lodging, and meals. The rail line is not continuous, so heroes will have to walk or take river ferries at some points.	1d4+7 days

## Act II: Vagabonds

The primary purpose of Act II is to give the players a chance to discover Chocho-san's intentions and make their choice whether to support her or thwart her. It really should be the players' choice about how to proceed; there are good reasons to both support and oppose the Strider project.

### Player Agency

Historically, Japan used its new-found industrial might to launch a campaign of aggression against the rest of the Far East. Korea, China, the Philippines, and other lands were invaded piece by piece, ultimately resulting in the horrifying atrocities of the Pacific War. The paranoia and ambition that fueled the excesses of the Pacific War can be traced directly back to the Meiji era; indeed, the first step in Japan's annexation of Korea began in 1876, when Japan imitated Commodore Perry and forced Korea to sign an unequal treaty at gunpoint.

Chocho-san and the Ezo sympathizers are correct in assuming that Imperial Japan would use the Striders to conquer the breakaway republic. The same territoriality that led historical Japan to fight—and beat—Russia in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904 could not possibly allow Ezo/Hokkaido to remain independent. It is only the lack of developed harbors on Ezo that prevent the Imperialists from attempting another landing right now (it having proved disastrous in the past to attempt to land an automaton infantry offshore).

(Britain and the ACU are staying out of the conflict because they don't want to risk a "world war" with Ezo's French allies.)

In the Imperialists' favor, however, is China's aggressive attempts to rebuff European imperialism. Their historical positions are almost reversed with Japan being the "sick man of Asia" that is threatened with European conquest and China standing strong as the new military and industrial power. China has always had a condescending, paternalistic attitude to the rest of East Asia; it's a natural extension of that sense of ownership to attempt to bring Japan into the fold and "protect" it.



The Japanese have never, ever forgotten the Mongol invasions of 1274 and 1281. They are proudly independent and willing to sacrifice their lives before submitting to foreign conquest—and that includes conquest from the rest of Asia. China is just as foreign as the Americans, British, or Russians. The Striders would provide an equalizer against the Chinese dragon airships, and no one in their right mind could fail to recognize that.

Chocho-san's desire to thwart the Imperialists is understandable but selfish. The Republicans fear of the Imperialists is justified but self-defeating. The Imperialist need to protect Japan is honorable but the means of doing so may lead to bloodshed. There is no right answer—except, perhaps, that it isn't really fair to murder Tanaka Hisashige to stop him from working on the Striders—and it should be up to the players to choose their path.

### *Whispers of the Heart*

Regardless of what method the heroes decide to take to get from Nagasaki to Tokyo, the trip will consist of Interludes and a not-so-random encounter. Game Masters may utilize the Savage Worlds Deluxe travel rules for random encounters if they wish to increase the trip's complexity and game time.

For those less familiar with Savage Worlds—or using older editions of the system—an Interlude is essentially a flashback narrated by a player to fill in holes in their character's history, explain motivations, and act as a more player-centric version of a montage. Imagine that instead of cutting to a map of the world and a line tracing out Indiana Jones' route, the camera zooms in on Harrison Ford's face as he tells us the story of how Indy and Marion fell into and out of love. That is an Interlude.

Also, anyone who tells an Interlude gets a Benny or an Adventure Card.

If your troupe of players has never done Interludes before, then this is an excellent way to sneak in some necessary exposition under cover of introducing a fun new mechanic. The GM can volunteer to tell the first Interlude, telling Chocho-san's sad tale and rewarding her with a Benny (which will certainly assist her if she actually engages in a fight with the heroes). After demonstrating the benefits of Interludes, the Game Master can then ask for a volunteer from the group.

The rules as written suggest drawing a card from the Action Deck and improvising the Interlude based on the results of the card draw. The Game Master's goal in playing Chocho-san's Interlude is to sow doubt in the players about Chocho-san's goal and trustworthiness without giving her a moustache-twirling villainous monologue. Approaches to take can include:

#### **Spades – Victory:**

“There is little victory I can claim in my few years. It is not the part of one such as I too seek to better myself. I was built for a certain role and I have tried my best to simply perform my function and please my masters...”

“But perhaps there is one victory I can claim...”

“As burdensome as the treaties your... government... forced upon my Iesada-sama, the months of negotiation did open your ambassador's heart to Japan—and I was part of that. There was a certain misperception amongst your delegation that Japan was a backward country because we did not outwardly show the technology that you possessed. They did not understand that we built in wood because the frequent earthquakes make stone houses inadvisable; they did not understand that we had abandoned firearms because we had achieved peace. It was decided that I—as an inarguable example of Japan's advanced learning—would spend time with Ambassador Townsend Harris.

“I served him tea. I sang for him and recited poetry. I danced for Mr. Townsend Harris. It broke my heart to be away from Iesada-sama, but I was victorious. It did little good in the negotiations, but when he left, Mr. Townsend Harris said that Japan was ‘more like the golden age of simplicity and honesty’ than he had seen anywhere else in the world.

“It is a pity that Japan has changed much in so few years. Perhaps this journey can be another victory for this humble entertainer.”



**Hearts – Love:**

“The way you humans live your lives seem so strange to me at times. It all seems so uncertain. You are born into ignorance and must suffer through years without understanding your world or even your own selves.

“I was born with certainty. I was born to serve one man, the shogun Tokugawa Iesada. My maker, Tanaka Hisashige, took all that he was told of Iesada-sama’s likes and dislikes, loves and hatreds, and made me to fit his tastes. I was born with with grace and beauty and charm; I was born with the desire to please and serve the Iesada-sama.

“I feared nothing at all through the long journey from Saga to Edo... I forget that it is ‘Tokyo’ now. It is hard to get used to the new name. It is Edo still in my heart...

“Forgive my foolishness. As I was saying, I feared nothing as we journeyed from Saga to... Tokyo. I was not a maiden bride going to the home of a man she had never met. I already felt that I knew Iesada-sama, that we were already... intimate.

“I think it surprised him. He was beset on all sides by enemies. Commodore Perry arrived with his fearsome Black Ships and his terrifying guns. The imperial court was demanding that he expel the foreigners while the learned samurai were arguing that Japan should learn from the west. Isn’t it odd how the Imperialists have embraced western technology now? Their guns and their Oni...

“Iesada-sama was surprised to suddenly have a friend—a companion—so close to his heart. Someone who enjoyed the same simple games and joys, someone who could show him how the heart can soar... He was the master I was made for, and I miss him still.”

**Diamonds – Desire:**

“I wish that my first master could see how much Japan has changed. He was an advocate of western learning. Indeed, the Tokugawa shogunate was originally the party that advocated for Japan to embrace the west, not the Imperialists.

“That must seem strange to you. All you hear these days is how quickly Imperial Japan is modernizing, while the Republic of Ezo is mired in the obsolete ways of the samurai. That is something of an exaggeration, of course; I am hardly the most informed of persons, but I understand that the Republicans have thoroughly modernized their military—except that they still wear katana, of course.

“Still, it is the Imperialists who are building the railroads and the steamships. It is the Imperialists who are installing telegraph lines and gaslights. It is the Imperialists who won the war by turning to their mechanical Oni and their Armstrong guns.

“And it is the Imperialists who will save Japan from China by building the Striders.

“My first master, Shogun Tokugawa Iesada, would perhaps not perhaps appreciate the irony that the Emperor has embraced the path the Tokugawa originally advocated, but he would certainly marvel at wondrous technology that Japan now overflows with. He was something of a gearsmith, you must understand. He maintained me himself whilst he lived; the hands of the shogun polished my limbs and lubricated my gears...

“Tanaka Hisashige must be very proud of all he has achieved. He has been so central to Japan’s technological growth. I have not seen him in years; I am so happy I will see my maker again after all this time...”

**Clubs – Tragedy:**

“I was born—made—to serve a single master, a man I have outlived by thirteen years. Indeed, I have lived without him for more years than I was with him.

“Do not believe them when they tell you Tokugawa Iesada was an imbecile. He was—perhaps—sometimes childlike in his innocence. He would laugh openly when others would hide smiles behind their sleeves; he would weep uncontrollably when others merely dabbed their eyes. He was... unfettered.



“This naked emotionalism shocked many in the court. That and his frail health were taken as signs that he was intellectually weak as well as physically frail. They did not trust him to make his own decisions. They took away his authority piece by piece.

“With his own courtiers against him, can you not understand that he would turn to an outsider to be his confidant? I was built to serve him—to fulfill his needs—and Tanaka Hisashige is a genius. Too much a genius, perhaps...

“My beloved master fell ill and the Tokugawa retainers began arguing over who would succeed him. They ignored him as he lay dying, arguing instead over who they could or could not control. The chief councilor—the man who sent me to Townsend Harris, the man who signed the unequal treaties the Emperor blamed the Shogun for—abandoned his dying master and instead conspired to find a new puppet to play with.

“The chief councilor was assassinated two years later, but then assassination seems to be the primary tool of Japan’s revolution.”

## *The Journey East*

While the trip from Nagasaki to Tokyo is intended mainly as an opportunity for the players to learn more about Chocho-san (and have a fair chance of divining her real intentions), it is also a chance to introduce the players to *Steamsapes*’ Japan.

Japan is a land in transition, and this is nowhere more apparent than on the road. Desperate shizoku search for their place in this changing world. Mendicant Buddhist monks—once respected by commoners and government alike—are now the targets of an Imperial campaign to purge Japanese philosophy of Chinese influence. Tattooed yakuza offer protection (both literal and Mafia-style) to the downtrodden. Merchants embrace western culture while also celebrating Japanese uniqueness. Thousands are abandoning the farms the old caste system forced them to work in order to seek new lives in the cities. Game Masters are reminded that *Yojimbo* and the *Zatoichi* series are set during the lawlessness and desperation of the late Tokugawa era—and it is only three years since the end of that age.

## *Encounters*

The travel rules outlined in *Savage Worlds Deluxe* (p. 97) suggest drawing a card from the Action Deck once per day to determine if there is a random encounter; if a face card is drawn, the suit determines whether the encounter is helpful or a hindrance. The Game Master could encourage the use of Interludes instead by offering the players the chance to have one player tell an Interlude (and gain a Benny) each day of travel in lieu of risking a random encounter. Encounters, after all, may cost the heroes resources—including their lives.

If the players run out of turns telling Interludes before their characters reach Tokyo—or if the Game Master and players simply prefer to stake their luck on a draw of the cards—the GM may insert some of the following suggestions. The encounters listed below have been designed to allow the players to see more facets of the tension between tradition and revolution in Imperial Japan.

### **By Land**

Journeying by land from Nagasaki to Tokyo is, frankly, a huge pain. The Tokugawa Era road system was designed to help control the population, not facilitate travel. The famed Tōkaidō that connected Edo and Kyoto was merely a broad dirt road for most of its distance, paved only on the steepest hills, and largely substituting ferries for bridges. Three years after the fall of the shogunate, it has not improved much.

Railways are not much better. Historically, Japan did not begin building railroads until 1872, but in the *Steamsapes* setting the efforts began earlier. However, these railways are still under construction, and direct service between Nagasaki and Tokyo is not possible. In fact, it is not even possible to ride the rails directly from Nagasaki to Fukuoka, the largest city near the Kanmon Straits that separate Kyushu from Honshu. Taking the train is speedier than walking (or driving) the whole way, but heroes riding the rails will still frequently be forced to walk.

The spotlight of the obstacles heroes may encounter while traveling by land is a social movement called **Ee ja nai ka**. The phrase roughly translates to “Why the hell not?” and was the rallying cry of a short-lived uprising in the



late Tokugawa era (that, in the alternate history of *Steamscapes*, still carries on) in protest against the foreign presence in Japan and the instability of the Japanese government. Essentially, agrarian and small town youth suddenly threw off the shackles of their daily work and held impromptu festivals. Everyone danced, sang, and enjoyed themselves; people wore costumes or cross-dressed or even went nude. Sacred Buddhist amulets supposedly rained from the heavens and everyone exulted in excess.

The movement started out peacefully, but eventually descended into violence. Foreign heroes will find themselves walking a thin line with the Ee ja nai ka cultists (for lack of a better word). Any encounter with them has the potential to be a peaceful party with some naked hippies, but things could easily turn ugly. Foreigners, after all, are what have driven these people to give up on the world.

#### Ee ja nai ka Cultist

**Attributes:** Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d8

**Skills:** Fighting d4, Healing d4, Intimidation d4, Notice d6, Stealth d4, Taunt d4

**Charisma:** -3; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 6

**Hindrances:** Clueless, Habit [Minor], Wanted [Minor]

**Edges:** Liquid Courage **Gear:** musical instrument, normal clothes (or not).

#### Clubs – Obstacle:

The way is blocked by an Ee ja nai ka festival. The road is crowded for miles with musicians and dancers, vagabonds and layabouts. The heroes must talk or force their way past the mob (possibly requiring a Dramatic Task or Social Conflict). *Alternates:* *Downed trees, flooding river, rockslide, unhelpful ferryman.*

#### Diamonds – Fortune:

The encounter with the Ee ja nai ka festival is a stroke of good fortune for the heroes. They are embraced as brothers by the protestors and shown a good time. If they play along, the heroes receive Buddhist sacred amulets that bestow on them a one-time use of the Connections Edge (Hospitable Peasants) when they reach Tokyo. *Alternates:* *Hired by some fellow travelers to act as bodyguards for them, too (covering their travel expenses), a desperate shizoku offers to sell them his katana and wakizashi.*

#### Hearts – NPCs:

While making their way through the Ee ja nai ka festival, the heroes are approached by an NPC who wants to join them on the road to Tokyo. This character can act as a sounding board for the heroes' own questions and doubts, echoing their concerns if they think Chocho-san is acting suspiciously or helping them deliberate between aiding the Imperialist or the Republicans. The NPC might be:

- Beniko, a blind traveling shamisen player.
- Daisuke, a mendicant monk having a spiritual crisis.
- Machiya, a European-obsessed youth with a Spanish guitar.
- Yuko, a geisha who has escaped the pleasure quarters.

Whether or not any of these NPCs are mere vagabonds or actually wandering swordsmen in disguise is up to the GM (see Appendix II).

#### Spades – Enemies:

Imperial Police are moving in on the Ee ja nai ka festival. Things are about to turn into an ugly riot between the vagrant protestors and the paramilitary police force. The heroes can join whichever side they sympathize with, try to negotiate peace between the groups, or simply flee. *Alternates:* *assassins attack the heroes, Saitō Hajime attempts to arrest Chocho-san.*

#### By Sea

While the encounters on the landward path tend to undercut faith in the Meiji government, the encounters available by sea (and by air) will tend to support it. At sea, the heroes will only have the opportunity to speak with

their shipmates; if they are taking the *Lucky Dragon*, then those shipmates will consist only of Chocho-san, the crew, and Saitō Hajime. If they have booked a different passenger vessel, then they may encounter all sorts of people. The Game Master may wish to adapt some of the NPCs and encounters described in the **By Land** section.

### *Lucky Dragon* Crewman

Hirata Akihiko, Honda Ishiro, Ifukube Akira, Shimura Takashi, Taira Kazuji, Takarada Akira, Takeo Murata, Tamai Masao, Tanaka Tomoyuki, Watanabe Hideo

**Attributes:** Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Boating d8, Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Piloting d8, Repair d4, Shooting d6, Taunt d6

**Charisma:** +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6(+1)

**Hindrances:** Arrogant, Loyal, Vow [Minor]

**Edges:** Ace, Strong Willed

**Gear:** heavy aviator's leather (+1 Armor), jian (Chinese sword; Str+d8), six-shooter (Range 12/24/48, Damage 2d6+1, RoF 1, Shots 6, Revolver)

The key encounter for both sea and air is a Chinese dragon airship. Encountering this physical reminder of China's air superiority and aggressive protectionism of Asia will probably persuade the players of the reasonableness of Imperial Japan's desire to build an effective anti-aircraft weapon. That the Strider might be used against Asia's first democracy is the regrettable price to pay for Japanese sovereignty.

The dragon airship's main weapons are its side-mounted batteries of fire arrows and its forward-mounted two-stage rocket launcher. The fire arrow batteries are primarily designed for air-to-air combat, while the two-stage rockets are used on land and sea targets. This makes the airship dangerous for sea travel but absolutely terrifying for air travel.

Vehicle	Acc/TS	Toughness	Crew	Notes
<i>Lucky Dragon</i> (tramp steamer)	3/10	13 (2)	10	Heavy Armor

### Chinese Aviator

Chang Chia-lu, Chen Kuo-fu, Cheng Hsiao-tse, Lai Yiu-fai, Leung Ka-fai, Yang Lu Chan

The crew of the dragon airship is cocky and high-spirited. They've exceeded their authority by quite a bit by coming this far into Japanese airspace, but they know they're more likely to be hailed as heroes than demoted for their arrogance. They're happy to toy with the heroes, but will lose their self-control if defeated and captured.

**Attributes:** Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Aeronautical Navigation d8, Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Piloting d8, Repair d4, Shooting d6, Stealth d4, Taunt d6

**Charisma:** +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6(+1)

**Hindrances:** Arrogant, Loyal, Vow [Minor]

**Edges:** Ace, Strong Willed

**Gear:** heavy aviator's leather (+1 Armor), jian (Chinese sword; Str+d8), six-shooter (Range 12/24/48, Damage 2d6+1, RoF 1, Shots 6, Revolver)

### Clubs – Obstacle:

The dragon airship looms over the horizon and the *Lucky Dragon* flees. The scene becomes a Chase; when the airship is in melee range, they attempt a Test of Will against the *Lucky Dragon* instead of actually firing upon the ship. The Chinese do not actually fire upon the heroes unless the heroes shoot first, and ultimately abandon the chase once they've had their fun. *Alternates:* *Rough seas*, *sea serpent (actually an oarfish)*, *tsunami*, *uncharted reef*.



Vehicle	Acc/TS	Toughness	Crew	Notes
<b>Dragon Airship</b>	10/60	16 (2)	6+20	Climb -2 (may increase to 0 with release of ballast or gas)
Weapon	Range	Damage	Accuracy	Notes
<b>Fire Arrow Batteries</b>	15/30/60	2d4	2d8	Small Burst
<b>Two-Stage Rocket</b>	100/200/400	4d8	3d6	24 Fire Arrows

*See Appendix I for weapon details.*

#### Diamonds – Fortune:

A drifting wreck is found floating on the sea. There are no hands on board, so there is no one to stop either the *Lucky Dragon*'s crew or the heroes from claiming what salvage they can find. This can be used as an opportunity for the heroes to scrounge some equipment they've been looking for. The damage to the vessel seems to stem from a rocket attack... *Alternates: The crew challenges the heroes to some gambling, one of Chocho-san's hair ornaments falls out and someone notices how sharp it is.*

#### Hearts – NPCs:

Saitō Hajime gets drunk and fesses up to the heroes. He's tailing them because some of the ministers working with Glover distrust his competence. After the attack in Nagasaki, he now thinks someone in Glover's employ wants the mission to fail. He's still Shinsengumi in his heart of hearts, so he doesn't actually suspect Chocho-san. *Alternates: Chocho-san attempts to seduce one of the heroes to join her, one of the sailors offers the heroes a place to stay in Tokyo.*

#### Spades – Enemies:

The dragon airship dives out of the clouds and fires on the boat with no warning. The heroes are in the unenviable position of defending the unarmed *Lucky Dragon* against an airship armed with fire arrows. Chocho-san is not going to volunteer to fly a bomb onto the airship. *Alternates: Saitō has figured out Chocho-san's plan and attacks her and fights any heroes who try to defend her, Chocho-san either wrongly suspects or deduces that the heroes are on to her and tries to kill them or flee the ship.*

#### By Air

Traveling by air from Nagasaki to Tokyo is certainly the quickest option. The distance between the cities is about 600 miles as the crow flies (accounting for some delays and detours in skirting mountains). It will take approximately 16 hours at the average speed of a *Steamscapes* airship; assuming the heroes land for the night (a wise choice, given the difficulty of night flying), then it will take two days if they leave first thing in the morning and three if they leave in the afternoon. Longer if they run into difficult weather or navigation errors.

With an average of three days needed to make the trip, the ability to wrangle in Interludes is greatly decreased. Admittedly, 16 hours of flight time and another 16 or so of mealtimes and other business is more than enough real-world time for everybody to have a chance to tell a story, but it may seem less dramatically suitable.

The Game Master is free to choose appropriate encounters from both the land-based encounter table and the sea-based encounter table. The heroes may find that the quiet village they landed in the night before has now erupted into a raucous festival, or they may find themselves engaged in a deadly game of cat and mouse with the airship. Draw as normal and choose the result preferred from either table.

## 20 *What if the Heroes Try to Stop Chocho-san too Early?*

The heroes should be free to draw their own conclusions and act appropriately. If they decide Chocho-san is a traitor right away and try to deactivate her right away, then she simply does what she can to escape.

On land, she will cry for help. This will likely result in an angry mob of Japanese attacking the foreigners; it could also result in Saitō Hajime jumping to the wrong conclusion and attacking the heroes. If she survives, Chocho-san will then fly to safety.

On the sea, Chocho-san will run to the sailors for help, probably resulting in a lopsided fight on a ship the heroes don't know how to sail. This could, again, lead to Saitō Hajime fighting on the wrong side. Chocho-san will again fly to safety.

In the air, she'll just throw open the carriage door and jump out. This could be a hilarious surprise if the players don't know she can fly. She will, wisely, wait until she is reasonably out of range before opening her wings.

### *The Chase is On!*

If Chocho-san escapes, then a race is on to get to Tanaka first. Resolve this as a Chase with each segment being a different day of the journey. On land, the Traits used will be the heroes' Notice versus Chocho-san's Stealth until they reach Tokyo. By air, it will obviously be Piloting vs. Flying. By sea, it will be Boating vs. Flying. Once everyone has reached the city, it will be Streetwise vs. Streetwise.

If traveling by land, the Game Master could make it a three-way race by having Saitō Hajime pursue the heroes.



*Tokugawa Iesada*



## 21 Act III: The God of Karakuri

At this stage in the adventure, the sequence of events will revolve around what the heroes have accomplished in the first two acts. As a wide range of choices and outcomes are available, this section will only sketch out a few likely scenarios. They will all involve—in some way—Tanaka Hisashige and his electronics laboratory.

### Tanaka Seisakusho

Tanaka currently resides in a disused Buddhist temple that he has converted to a laboratory and personal quarters; it is the headquarters of his fledgling electronics corporation, Tanaka Seisakusho (eventually the electronics giant Toshiba in the real world). This means, then, that he lives behind a tall, gated wall in a multi-building complex with decorative gardens. The gate will be shut, but there is a bell-pull rope that will alert the inhabitants. Since Tanaka is a beloved figure, they will be happy to let anyone in.

Tanaka lives with a small staff of assistants and a housekeeper. All of these people have more reason to be suspicious of the heroes than Chocho-san, but none of them can really put up a fight. (Unless the Game Master really wants to complicate things, in which case one of his assistants is an Oni named Tetsuo; see Act I for Oni stats.)

### Lab Assistants

Tanaka Daikichi (his adopted son), Nanbu Kozaburō, Tennō Umatarō

**Attributes:** Agility d6, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Electromagnetism d8, Fighting d4, Intimidation d6, Mechanical Programming d8, Notice d6, Repair d10, Steamsmith d8, Stealth d4, Taunt d6

**Charisma:** +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 5

**Hindrances:** Curious, Loyal, Vow [Minor]

**Edges:** Any four technological Edges as needed

**Gear:** improvised weapon (hammer, wrench; Str+d4), normal clothes.

### *If Chocho-san is Still with the Heroes*

#### **If No One Suspects Chocho-san**

If no one suspects Chocho-san, then she asks to speak with him alone and attacks him. This should be played fair as an actual attack on the old man, but the Game Master should give her the Drop as well as her other relevant bonuses. A player might be allowed to roll Tanaka's soak roll, spending the appropriate Bennies for a GM Wild Card. Tanaka cries out in pain when stabbed, so the heroes have a chance to drive off Chocho-san and save his life with a Healing roll.

#### **If They Accompany Chocho-san to See Tanaka**

Chocho-san will attempt to misdirect the heroes and then attack Tanaka at this first opportunity—even if the heroes are still in the room. Resolve the fight as normal. Allow players to declare their characters are on Hold if they wish.

### *If Chocho-San is Not with the Heroes*

#### **If They Beat Chocho-san to Tanaka**

If the heroes have gotten to Tanaka's home before the karakuri, then they may set guards and try to ambush her. Chocho-san is not foolish, so she will hire backup regardless of whether she has reason to think the heroes are ahead of her or not. She will try to approach Tanaka directly and get him alone, but if needed she will send her allies to attack the compound while she flies in from above. Depending on how great a challenge the heroes present, she will either hire komusō (shinobi) or wandering swordsmen (see Appendix II). She doesn't trust yakuza and despises Oni.

### If Chocho-san gets There First

The players arrive just in time to see the karakuri fly away after stabbing Tanaka. The heroes may attempt to save the old man's life with a Healing roll or pursue vengeance against Chocho-san. In the latter case they run into the backup that she hired.

### If Tanaka Survives

The heroes are free to either persuade Tanaka to accept the government's commission or turn it down. Tanaka Hisashige would prefer to turn his genius to more peaceful measures in his declining years, but he can also be persuaded of the necessity of defending Japan.

While not necessary, the Game Master may wish to run this as a Social Conflict. In that case, Tanaka's lab assistants can take the opposite view of the heroes (or the heroes might allow Chocho-san to speak her mind if she has not attempted to kill Tanaka yet or if she is a captive).

### If Tanaka Accepts the Commission

The heroes will bear the news of their success to their contact at Mitsubishi and be offered the chance to guard Tanaka on his trip to the secret research facility. This facility is on the small island of Hashima near Nagasaki, so it means going back the way they just came.

If they accept, then they receive their extra \$100 dollars apiece and can either fly or go by boat. If they did not encounter the Chinese dragon airship the first time, now is an opportunity to enjoy that part of the adventure.

### If Tanaka Declines the Commission

If the heroes have talked Tanaka into declining the commission, then he thanks them by offering them work at his laboratory. He might serve as a mentor or employer to the heroes in future adventures. He will seek aid in spreading more peaceful technologies across Japan. It is also possible that some of his other karakuri creations might have grudges or need aid.

If the heroes simply failed at persuading him, then he offers them a night's hospitality. He can also be paid to perform any needed upgrades on automaton player characters or help repair any damaged equipment.

### If Chocho-san Survives

She makes it her life's work to get revenge against the heroes...



*Traveling the Tokaido*



## 23 Appendix I: New Rules

### *New rule – Indirect Fire*

Most rockets of the 19th century are indirect fire weapons. They cannot be aimed in the conventional sense, and so they are typically fired as part of a battery. However, some rockets are more reliable than others, and this is reflected in their new Accuracy attribute. Accuracy is expressed as a dice profile, indicating how far the rocket may stray from its intended target.

When firing an Indirect Fire weapon, designate a point on the ground within the weapon's range. Roll either a scatter die (if playing without a grid) or a d8 (if playing with a grid) to determine the scatter direction. Then roll the Accuracy dice and shift the landing point that many inches or squares away from the designated point. Finally, place the appropriate burst template (size determined by weapon) at the scatter point. Roll damage once for all targets under the template.

When firing a battery of rockets, this process can be abstracted by making a Shooting roll for each target (taking cover and range into account as normal). Success means the target is hit once, and one or more raises means the target is hit by two rockets. This abstracted method may also be used when playing without a map.

### *Fire Arrow*

A simple cardboard-tube style rocket, the fire arrow does little damage by itself. Historically, they were intended to disrupt regiments or interrupt charges but not necessarily to cause significant casualties. In more recent times, they have also been used to great effect against airships. A well-placed volley can very quickly shred and ignite an airship's hydrogen bag. However, the limited range and erratic flight of the fire arrow means that the launcher must be very close to a flying target in order to be effective, which is why the Dragon airships of China use them as broadside weapons.

**Range:** 15/30/60

**Dmg:** 2d4

**Accuracy:** 2d8, Small Burst

### *Two-Stage Rocket*

Two-stage rockets such as the Huolong Chukongqi ("fire dragon out of the air") are much more rare even in China. The few styles developed so far all work similarly: a primary long-range rocket contains approximately two dozen fire arrows, which ignite as the primary rocket approaches its destination. When deployed from a Dragon airship, this weapon allows for an aerial assault on a troop position from a relatively safe distance. However, the time it takes to prepare and load such a rocket in the Dragon's forward launcher limits its effectiveness unless used in conjunction with several other airships. This weapon is primarily used for harassing and intimidating rather than causing significant casualties.

**Range:** 100/200/400

**Dmg:** none

**Accuracy:** 3d6

Deploys 24 fire arrows upon arrival, each of which scatters as if fired directly forward from that point.

### *New Race – Karakuri Hiko*

Even before the groundbreaking work of Charles Babbage and Augusta Ada King, Countess of Lovelace, made the modern automaton possible, the Japanese were interested in the possibilities of mechanical life. Hiraga Gennai's experiments in electric generators and batteries provided a source of power. The pioneering mechanical skill of men like Hosokawa Hazo Yorinao gave them form. The mad genius of Takeda Omi gave them life.

Takeda Omi opened his first karakuri theater in 1662—long before the technology existed to create sentient karakuri. These early clockwork puppets became the biggest hit in Edo era entertainment; when technology caught up, it was only natural that the first karakuri hiko were created to be actors and musicians.

The karakuri hiko were fashioned from lightweight metals and carefully-carved wood as works of art, not industrial machines. Their faces were beautiful painted masks that—like the bunraku puppets they so resemble—could show a wide variety of emotions. Karakuri soon became household mainstays for nobles and wealthy merchants.

Karakuri in the modern world do not suffer from the social penalties of automatons. Their origin as—essentially—toys means that they are seen as companions to humans instead of competitors. Even humans from other cultures find the karakuri's charm impossible to resist; after all, they're slow, silly, and made of wood. What's to fear?

Few karakuri are made these days. Their technology is considered obsolete even in Japan. Because many of them are decades old and built of frail materials, karakuri may take the Elderly Hindrance.

- **Construct:** Karakuri add +2 to recover from being Shaken, don't suffer wound modifiers, and are immune to poison and disease. Karakuri cannot heal naturally. To heal a karakuri requires the Repair skill—which is used like the Healing skill only with no “Golden Hour.”
- **Obsolete Technology:** Karakuri were built using earlier, less reliable technology than their automaton “cousins.” The phonographs that give them their sense of hearing and the *camerae obscurae* that provide their eyes are much less sensitive than those of newer automatons. Karakuri suffer from the Bad Eyes (Major) and Hard of Hearing (Minor) Hindrances.

**Slow:** The clockwork minds of karakuri are slower to process information than the Analytical Engine-derived programming of automatons. Karakuri draw two cards for initiative and act on the worse. They have a Pace of 4 and roll a d4 running die.



## Appendix II: NPC Archetypes

### Imperial Police

Clad in European-style uniforms and armed with sabers instead of katana, the Imperial Police are a jarring reminder of Japan's westernization. The police have broad-ranging authority and serve as a paramilitary force as often as they do peace officers. Thankfully, centuries of the samurai sword culture have inculcated a reliance on hand weapons instead of firearms.

**Attributes:** Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Stealth d6, Streetwise d6, Taunt d6

**Charisma:** +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

**Hindrances:** Vow [Major], Big Mouth, Stubborn

**Edges:** Strong Willed

**Gear:** baton (Str+d4) and saber (Str+d6), uniform



**Komusō (Real)**

A familiar sight in Edo era Japan was the komusō, a mendicant Zen monk who meditated by playing the shakuhachi (bamboo flute) rather than the more recognizable zazen style of sitting and chanting. They wore large, basket-like straw hats that covered their entire heads in order to efface their personalities in the eyes of others and therefore sever their earthly ties. Anti-Buddhist edicts from the new pro-Shinto government are driving komusō off the roads and into the shelter of temples.

**Attributes:** Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Healing d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d8, Stealth d6, Taunt d6

**Charisma:** +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 2; **Toughness:** 5

**Hindrances:** Pacifist [Major], Poverty, Vow [Minor]

**Edges:** Charismatic (respected by the common folk), Strong Willed

**Gear:** begging bowl, normal clothes, shakuhachi

**Komusō (Shinobi)**

Of course, big, face-concealing hats make great disguises for shinobi. Players familiar with chanbara films will remember many scenes of wandering komusō suddenly revealing themselves as assassins in disguise. Game Masters can exploit these expectations by giving the players a chance for a classic fight scene right out of the movies.

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d8

**Skills:** Climbing d6, Fighting d8, Notice d6, Stealth d8

**Charisma:** +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6

**Hindrances:** Vow [Major; pledge of service to whoever their masters are], Cautious, Loyal

**Edges:** Assassin, Quick Draw

**Gear:** begging bowl, hidden blade (possibly up sleeves, possibly in shakuhachi; Str+d6, -2 to Notice if hidden), normal clothes, shakuhachi

**Vagabond**

Perhaps an entertainer or perhaps a peddler; perhaps a rogue or perhaps an honest man. Regardless of origin and personality, the vagabond is one who lives on the edges of Japanese society, constantly wandering the roads. Vagabonds have friends in many towns, and enemies in just as many (but usually nothing worse than owing someone money).

**Attributes:** Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Fighting d4, Gambling d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d8, Stealth d8, Streetwise d8, Taunt d8

**Charisma:** +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 5

**Hindrances:** Curious, Enemy [Minor], Poverty

**Edges:** Charismatic, Connections (any two from Entertainers, Law Enforcement, Merchants, and Yakuza), Strong Willed

**Gear:** normal clothes, tools of their trade; some few might have a shikomi-zue (sword-cane or sword-parasol, Str+d8) OR tanto (Str+d4)

## Wandering Swordsman

Dangerous warriors straight out of a chanbara film, wandering swordsmen might be allies or enemies to the heroes. They might be assassins sent to kill them, undercover agents sent to aid them, or mysterious ronin in whose tragic stories the heroes are briefly entangled.

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8

**Skills:** Fighting d10 (+1 with trademark weapon), Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Stealth d6, Taunt d8

**Charisma:** +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 6

**Hindrances:** Code of Honor, Poverty, Vengeful [Minor]

**Edges:** Frenzy, Trademark Weapon, others per fighting style

- **Ittō-ryū** (One Sword School): Counterattack, First Strike, Sweep
- **Nitō-ryū** (Two Sword School): Ambidextrous, Florentine, Two-Fisted
- **Iaijutsu** (Quick Draw School): First Strike, Quick, Quick-Draw

**Gear:** katana (Str+d6+2, AP 2) and wakizashi (Str+d6) OR shikomi-zue (sword-cane or sword-parasol; Str+d8, -2 to Notice if hidden), normal clothes; note that though samurai of all three schools wear two swords, only those of the nitō-ryū style fight two-handed

## Yakuza

Members of Japan's burgeoning organized crime syndicates, yakuza make most of their muscle as gamblers and muscle-men. Few are thieves or assassins in the common RPG senses, instead being mainly thugs.

**Attributes:** Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

**Skills:** Fighting d6, Gambling d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Stealth d6, Streetwise d6, Taunt d8

**Charisma:** +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6

**Hindrances:** Code of Honor, Stubborn, Vengeful [Minor]

**Edges:** Connections (Yakuza)

**Gear:** loaded dice (+2 to attempts to cheat at Gambling), normal clothes, shikomi-zue (sword-cane or sword-parasol, Str+d8) OR tanto (Str+d4); some rare few are armed with six-shooters (Range 12/24/48, Damage 2d6+1, RoF 1, Shots 6, Revolver)

## Appendix III: The Strider

If the heroes leave it to non-player characters to complete the development of the Striders, then it will be years before they appear in-game. Players being what they are, however, may mean that they pitch in to help build themselves a new toy. In that case, the following statistics are presented as a rough guideline for the form a Strider might take.

Stealing the Strider plans and/or building their own would make the characters enemies of Imperial Japan and all available resources would be used to track them down.

Vehicle	Acc/TS	Toughness	Crew	Notes
Strider	4/8	16 (3)	1+4 (driver, two cannoneers, two machine gunners)	Heavy Armor (but may be bypassed with a Called Shot at -4)
Weapon	Range	Damage	RoF	Notes
Cannon	50/100/200	3d6+1	1	AP 4, Heavy Weapon
Gatling Gun	24/48/96	2d8	3	AP 2, 100 shots



# STEAMSCAPES

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