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## - Akuma no Machi, Japan –

Read Bold Font

The year is 1613 in Ezo Honshu, an island just to the North of mainland Japan. Western foreigners have encountered the Japanese people for the first time. In fact, the name Ezo actually means “foreigner”, and refers to the island in question. For one reason or another, the drifters here have been spending time in this mysterious area and are returning to the mainland this evening. On the long and wide-open air boat you see an older skinny man on tall wooden sandals with baggy black shorts and a white tank top. Sugu ni Shino, the ferryman, lifts his head a bit to reveal his face from beneath his long circular rice hat. With the last of the sun’s grace, you see the faded color in his eyes above his long white beard. “Good evening. I am called Sugu ni Shino. My eyes aren’t so good, who do I have the pleasure of currying?”

<Character Introductions>

“I bet you’re all excited to return to Japan. I’m really looking forward to my wife’s Tsukemono pickles, she makes them better than anyone. I’ve been peddling people back and forth for days now, eating only rice balls, fish I manage to catch, and donations.” While he’s obviously blind, it feels like he eyes each of you, and for the first time you notice the empty jar clanking around by his feet. <Pause for player reaction> *Regardless of what happens, he stops to reach into the bowl, “Arigato!” The bowl of course may be empty in which case he looks “sad and surprised. Whatever else it is he attempts to eat. He says, “Delicious.” Though the tone may change depending what it is.*

A light fog begins to roll in around the boat. “It’s getting a bit chilly out here. Would one of you steer the boat while I put on my jacket?” he says as he begins to drop the oar in the general direction of the group. He bends down and pulls open a little chest from which he first starts pulling out a long baggy skirt like material and putting it on. “Don’t worry, just steer toward the land,” he says as he continues to pull more clothes out of the chest. You look through the fog, but there’s no land in sight. He begins to wrap a shirt tightly around himself. <Pause for player reaction>

“Nani!? Oh no we’re off course,” Sugu prostrates himself on the ground expressing his deepest apologies which in turn rocks the boat around. You blindly travel a bit further into thicker fog until you abruptly crash. Sugu goes flying off the boat and you hear a loud thud. “I’m alright, I feel dry land”

At this point players may decide what they’re doing, but options are limited. The fog directly around the boat is thick. The sun has faded away and the waters behind them are difficult to see. Should the players move toward Sugu you hear the roar of a bear echoing. In the clearing Sugu is majestically whirling his hands through the air. It’s mesmerizing and in the darkness, you aren’t sure if you can see blue waves of energy. He holds out his palm into the black bear who is subdued. “Nothing to fear, he’s asleep now. Come hand me my...” suddenly out of nowhere some strange bird like creature snatching Sugu and flies off at a high speed. Sugu’s final cry, “Oooooaaarrrrr!!” <Allow players to track down oar>

**Now in the distance you can see a single red flame appear floating in the air like from a lantern. Then another to its left and then in front of it making a pattern like road approaching you. <Pause for Players>**

The person approaching is in fact known as Gatekeeper. His job is to patrol the border of the town. He will eventually make his way fairly close to the players. **It's notable that this man is dressed in perfectly clean noble attire. "It's dangerous in the woods. Please join us within the safety of village. The light should keep them at bay." The man walks slowly and carefully to the town entrance and points toward the Inn. "I must resume the lamp lighting, but please make yourselves comfortable."**

The town is beautiful and organized. It's becoming clear with lanterns lit in front of every home. A central street goes from one end of the town to the other with a slight curvature. Wood dominates the designs here. Smooth beautiful wood without blemish or paint makes up the majority of the structures before you. They look especially natural amidst the trees, grass, and mountains on the far side. The houses look very similar in size and design as if one grand architect planned out every detail of the ideal home and everyone replicated it. From the looks of it, shops are part of the homes, and very few are actually independent. Walking down the middle of the street it's clear which are distinct - the inn, the fortune teller's shrine, and the art gallery.

The players will have never heard of the town, it's not on the map, and the landscape is not recognized. After allowing players to explore the town and perhaps after resting for the night The Sage will explain the "truth" of the matter.

**The entire town is suffering a curse. As I'm sure you know by now, you won't have heard of our town. You've also probably noticed there are no children. You see we've actually been trapped here by 5 Great Oni, which are demonic spirits. They've created a barrier that we can not cross and while we're trapped inside, they drain our life force. We've also been cursed with immortality. We've lived here for so long we've forgotten our own names. Every year one of us is selected to be their food. We used to number in the hundreds and because of our bleak existence we no longer have children. Now that our population is getting low, they're weakening and ee believe that's how you were able to find our town lost to the world. If you are able to defeat the Oni at each pillar, we can finally be free.**

### **Fire**

The Sage will give a player a compass that directs them to the next pillar. This of course will guide them to fire. (If players wait until sundown, the shrine is weaker). When arriving at the shrine a mirror sits atop the tall metallic shrine with carvings that appear like fire as well as actual faded paintings of fire decorating it. There are lit candles in a star shape far outling the structure, like 50 feet between each one. Getting close to the candles will ignite a massive fire barrier. The fire "oni" shall reveal itself above the shrine and point the mirror toward a candle to relight it. The Mizu can extinguish a candle for longer than any other means. To get within the barrier, 2 candles must be unlit and the wall between them fades. They can be relit though and put the barrier back up.

Inside, the oni will target players with the mirror, which can be broken. if it is it will neee to defend the shrine with close quarters. If some manages to destroy the shrine somehow, which they probably can't, that's a way to win. The only other way to defeat it is the player using the oar. Things can weaken it or distract it, but true death comes from the Slaying Sword. As it fizzles out the word *Kasai* puffs into the air.

Whoever says Kasai first will obtain the true Slaying Sword for fire. The blade is a hot orange glowing shade. The hilt forms a sun and the sheath is a brilliant dark red pattern with golden threads and a black

bottom. The true powers of the sword are to be discovered, but its magnificence can be seen through the streaks of fire that quickly trail it as it swings.

### Earth

Heading back to town the players are attacked by a rock golem. This can be taken down or fled from as seen fit, but is a preview of the powers to come of the earth oni. If the players research the paintings or scrolls or books they can learn new techniques for the swords. Water must meet full potential first. Fire can learn to cleave boulders clean in 2.

Players can interact with the townspeople or head right out to the earth shrine. Now heading toward the mountain, the earth oni is a master of traps. There will be a swinging boulder, quicksand, tar pits, and spike traps. Once they finally reach the shrine it's inside a cave leading into the mountain. There suddenly 30 clay golems rise from the earth and look exactly like the 3 players without Kasai. They will mimic anything their counterparts do while touching the ground.

Eventually there is a cave in and the earth Oni hunts the players by sensing walking on the ground. Cutting down the Earth Oni is easy with the sword, but someone may take hard damage first. *Chikyu* escapes its breath. Once again the one to claim it will have an extra wide jagged sword that's shade looks like a collection of mixed soil. The hilt molds freely with the user's subconscious to be perpetually make holding it and using it easier.

Earth user can now learn to pierce the ground and become an immovable statue.

### Wind?

While the players are leaving the cave, the wind Oni has learned of their quest and blows them off the cliff by surprise. Even if the new immovable one uses the ability, the rest will be sent clear of the cliffside. Down below is nothing but watery expanse. After getting their bearings, players will be attacked by a *Mitsukurina owstoni* also known as the "Goblin Shark". For those unfamiliar with one of these creatures, it's HIDEOUS. Imagine a pinkish shark with a comically weird pointed nose, but then there's this alien-esque sub mouth that actually moves around and is held by thin flesh or something. Ew. <Players Reaction>

### Water

Now out in the water there is a small structure that looks damaged and overgrown with algae. Whoever has the oar will notice that it flashes a vibrant blue like a flickering light. Deep beneath the surface is the wreckage of a shrine that probably once looked quite imposing. At its center a beautiful mermaid figure weeps. Well, you don't see tears, but you hear the wailing. Going down deeper you can see these huge clams around her with various treasures in them (that would tempt the PCs). If anyone goes for one, they'll have to make a check or be clamped. Which then the mermaid will barf out black ink and reveal herself to be a giant elemental octopus. The real challenge here will be getting to fresh air. If the players can lure the octopus to land, it'll be easy to fight, but out in the sea it will be challenging. After its defeat, like before, *Mizu* escapes and the oar slowly disintegrates away to reveal a brilliant blue blade that looks like really slow moving liquid yet maintain the exact shape of a fierce blade. There is no hilt, the water flows from one end to the other.

The player may now learn "rising wave" which summons water in a quick spout that can also be used to launch oneself into the air and land safely. This is effectively how players can be pushed back up the cliffside.

### *Wind!*

The Air Oni has returned from the cliff to his shrine. Knowing the fate that has befallen his brethren, he summons forth his full powers and creates a hurricane with the shrine at its eye. The location is completely open with no trees around. Anything that hypothetically may have been nearby has been torn from the ground and hurled away. The Chikyu player will be the wind's bane though any player could kill him now. After the victory here, the last sword is grabbed with the word *Kuki*. The sword is white and constantly vibrating ever so slightly giving off a whistling sound. The hilt is circular and perpetually spins of its own accord unless sheathed. The sword grants the user the ability to fly.

### *Aether*

With the presence of all the Slaying Swords, the final shrine can be approached. The compass shows the way up the mountain in the distance. Along the way there are no traps, no guards, and no elements to battle. There is simply a plateau at the base of clouds. At the top is a simple shrine no more than foot from the ground. Meditating before it is a humanoid creature whose skin is like night's sky covered with stars. It wears simple samurai armor covered in black scales. **In a deep voice, "Ahhh, so here are the ones to break the spell. You'd best be ready for what is to come." He stomps the ground creating a small boulder before him which he palms at the group with rocketing speed. He then blows a fierce wind from his mouth immediately following it to push everyone off balance. He draws his midnight black blade and engages the party with incredible speed and swordsmanship.** <Players should have time to plan out an entire scene of what they'd like to happen and then go through the coin flips>

Should the players win, which is likely, he parts with these words, **"You are truly powerful. Return to Akuma no Machi and taste the fruit of your labor."** With that he fades into the air *Eteru*. Each player now has a jet black Wakizashi, which is the small side sword. Far off toward the town are cries of jubilation. Returning to the outskirts of town the Eteru swords react. A player should swing one through the air for the sword reveals illusions. **Before you a thin golden barrier begins to erode outward from the cut of the Eteru sword. Where once these exquisite fine wooden homes stood, now decrepit rot fills their space. Where the shrine stood, a dark monument reaches toward the sky, horribly twisted and disturbing to look at. Where the people are in their beautiful pristine clothing, now maniacally laughing demons dance about. The Sage floats in the air before the group and his mirage vanishes to reveal an ogre like brute flapping massive wings. "For a millennium we have been trapped by those cursed kami of the elements. As reward for freeing us, we shall spare you. Although perhaps that is more of a punishment."** He smiles one last sinister time and all the demons rocket away in different directions over the Earth.

Game.

## Appendix A - Places of Interest

**The Art Gallery** - There are far more sliding parts here keeping the sections exclusive and dimly lit. The curator is a slow walking woman with a tight round bun with thin strands falling just in front of her eyes. She dresses in all midnight blue with her hands hidden under sleeves. All the art is intense with paintings of demons terrorizing mountains, rivers, people's homes, etc. The people depicted look like real tears and fear. These are of course real people who are trapped.

**The Fortune Teller Shrine**- a strange bald woman dances about the shrine and offers to reveal the fortunes of the players. This is a trick because all players receive "Great Blessing" and everyone else in town receives "Great Curse"

**The Inn** - the building is larger than the others, presumably for travelers or due to added amenities. The Innkeeper is a short soft-spoken old woman. She is quick to greet and meet any needs of the travelers. There is a meditation chamber, hot springs, dining room, tearoom, entertainers, really anything required.

**The Smith** - a bit more open air due to the forge, which is well contained, he is quite rotund, but has beefy biceps. Katanas, Kunai, Kusarigama, Sai, 5 - 8 ft. samurai bows, shuriken, naginatas, staves, and spears. There is really a single type of bludgeoning weapon - the kanabo, a massive slender club with some spikes. Armor is also available in a variety of colors and samurai styles. The Smith notes the oar is a special "Slaying Sword". It has the ability to cut through the beyond.

**The Tea House** - Run by Mr. Tea, he has a tied top knot with shaved sides. He's muscular with more skin exposed than the other residents and quite intimidating, but he genuinely expresses in a calm voice, "I pity the fool who doesn't try my tea." This is of course brewed from the tree of souls, which gives supernatural regeneration.

**The Weaver** - a wild haired man with intense eyes, he works bamboo and spins cloth with frightening speed.

## Appendix B – Notable Characters

**Fortuneteller** – a bald woman with a monocle who sputters that the players may at last be the ones to free them! She is constantly performing odd dances saying it helps her interpret the spirits.

**Gatekeeper** – The patrolman for the outskirts of the town. He dresses in regal attire with a red motif and sports a traditional top knot. He is reserved and soft spoken despite his appearance.

**Innkeeper** – a short old woman who is very friendly and eager to please the players with whatever they may need. She commands a small group who keep the inn pristine.

**Sage** – the wise man who knows of all in the town. He is average size with a neat curled moustache and tiny pointed white beard. He wears a special long priest hat along with the rest of his robes.

**Smith** – rotund master smith with beefy arms, he has honed his craft for generations

**Sugu no Shino** – old ferryman who takes the character to the starting point. He is blind and a bit quirky. He is a master of Mizu (water fighting) and his oar turns into a special slaying sword with water property.

**Teamaker** – presumed old spouse of Innkeeper, he makes a red tea which invigorates any who drink it.

**Weaver** – incredibly intense and the flash with his hands, he weaves and spins with the fury of a thousand suns.

## **Appendix C – Swords of Slaying**

**Chikyu** – the earth blade, it can allow the user to pierce the ground and become an immovable statue

**Eteru** – the void blade, it allows the user to cut through illusions and grants true sight

**Kasai** – the fire blade, it's so hot it can easily cleave straight through stone or steel

**Kuki** – the wind blade, it allows the user to fly

**Miku** – once upgraded to its true form it sends out waves of honed water