

CALL of CTHULHU®

# THE SUTRA OF PALE LEAVES TWIN SUNS RISING

ENCOUNTERING THE KING IN YELLOW IN 1980S JAPAN

Damon Lang, Yukihiro Terada, Andrew Logan Montgomery, Jason Sheets,  
Jesse Covner, with Keris McDonald & Mike Mason





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A 1980s ERA CAMPAIGN IN JAPAN

Damon Lang, Yukihiro Terada, Andrew Logan Montgomery, Jason Sheets,  
and Jesse Covner, with Keris McDonald & Mike Mason





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Masayuki Sakamoto and the Arkham Members, for their cooperation and friendship.

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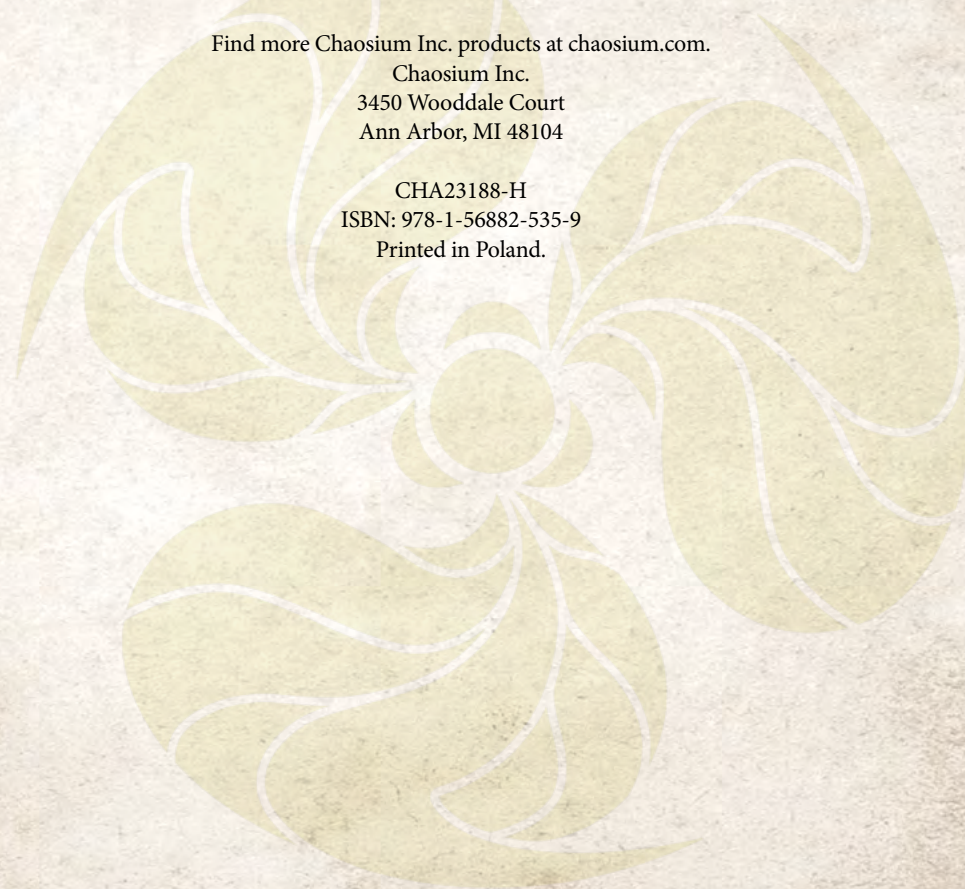
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This supplement works best with the *Call of Cthulhu* (7th Edition) roleplaying game and optionally with the Pulp Cthulhu sourcebook, both available separately.

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3450 Wooddale Court  
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

CHA23188-H  
ISBN: 978-1-56882-535-9  
Printed in Poland.





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## FOR DOWNLOAD

All the handouts and maps featured in this book can be downloaded for free, along with player-focused versions of the maps, and six pre-generated investigators, from [chaosium.com](http://chaosium.com)




## CONTENT ADVISORY

This campaign deals with mature themes and content that some may find disturbing, including moderate depictions of gore, violent death (including that of children), predation, abuse, social isolation, obsession, self-harm, and existential dread. Mature player discretion is advised. Mind control of investigator player characters by inimical inhuman powers is a possibility later in the campaign; Keepers should handle this with sensitivity.

Keepers should adjust their campaign's narrative to meet their own and their players' comfort levels. Please remember that *The Sutra of Pale Leaves* should be fun for everyone at the table. If at any time a player finds the direction of the story uncomfortable, pause until the group agrees on an appropriate way to proceed.

We strongly advise checking with players before play begins as to their concerns and comfort levels. Most times, a reframing of the scene or content, or fading to black and moving on, should overcome such issues.

Various "tabletop safety tools" are available online, and we encourage Keepers to search this term and discover more about best practices for player safety and comfort.



### Sexism, Racism, & Other Bigotry

If you were to review Japanese society in the 1980s, you would find many instances of casual and systemic sexism, racism, and other forms of bigotry. Japanese laws offered little protection against discriminatory employment practices, sexual harassment, or power harassment.

Yet, the 1980s were also a time when many Japanese people set aside long held traditions and, in some cases, discriminatory cultural biases, in favor of greater equality and fairness. Many Japanese women entered the workforce to pursue professional careers in all segments of society, and a significant number of foreigners immigrated to Japan to pursue a better life. Moreover, while this campaign assumes that all investigators speak fluent Japanese, Japanese heritage and ethnicity is optional.

Thus, players are free to create investigators of any gender or cultural heritage. Sexual harassment, discrimination, racism, and bigotry, in all its forms, have no place at the gaming table or anywhere else.



# INTRODUCTION

**I** have never met the Buddha on the road to enlightenment, like in the old proverb. But I have met his opposite.

*A stranger in a yellow, hooded coat and a pale white mask approached me while I crossed the Nihonbashi Bridge on my way home one late autumn evening. Strangely, I saw not another soul nearby.*

*"Murakami, it is a pleasure to finally meet you," the masked stranger said to me. "I am the Prince of Pale Leaves."*

*I knew this name: my sect's mythic ancient enemy, suddenly very real. Without thinking, I swung my heavy walking stick with all my might. He fell, and blood trickled from his temple over the strange mask.*

*Before I could even comprehend what I had done, another stranger whom I had not even noticed before walked up to the motionless body, casually picked up the cracked and crimson-stained mask, and placed it on his own face.*

*"I believe we have started off on the wrong foot," the new stranger said, with the exact same cadence as the man I had just felled. "As I was saying, I am the Prince of Pale Leaves. I have come with an offer of peace and unity."*

*My chest tightened with absolute terror. Somehow, I sensed him smile behind the mask, not with the gentle benevolence of a bodhisattva, but the imperious grin of a dark god secure in his victory.*

*I turned and ran. I ran until my calves ached and my lungs burned and my heart almost burst. I ran toward the city lights, not realizing that he was already there—that he was already everywhere.*

—Journal of Murakami Tsubasa

*The Sutra of Pale Leaves* takes place in Japan during the mid- to late-1980s, the so-called "Bubble Period"; an era marked by excesses, obsessions, and rapid changes. It is a modular campaign consisting of three scenarios in this volume, *Twin Suns Rising*, and, optionally, the four scenarios in the companion volume, *Carcosa*

*Manifest*. Each scenario can be played as a one-shot or as part of an ongoing campaign comprising scenarios from this book and, optionally, the companion volume. Each scenario has a different theme and focus, but all are tied to the same ever-present and constantly evolving threat, and can be played in any order.

The primary themes and content draw inspiration from *The King in Yellow* by Robert W. Chambers—astute readers may notice direct callbacks to the source material. The stories also take inspiration from Japanese folklore and religious traditions. Similarly, the artwork featured in each scenario shows various styles with Japanese influence, such as woodblock prints, manga, *art nouveau*, and pop art.

Throughout the campaign, investigators explore various locations around Japan, ranging from ancient temples in a quiet town in Nara to the wild nightclubs of the vast metropolis of Tokyo, all conveniently within a few hours travel by bullet train. They discover the eponymous *Sutra of Pale Leaves*—a viral weapon disguised as holy scripture. They work to expose the tome's rapidly-growing and highly sophisticated cult, and encounter the enigmatic antagonist known as the Prince of Pale Leaves, who is hijacking their minds and transforming reality around them.

We designed the campaign for three to six investigators, all of whom should be at least somewhat fluent in Japanese but may be of any nationality or profession. In addition to pre-generated investigators, this book provides a wide variety of plot hooks to keep the investigators involved. These include "Confidants"—supporting non-player characters (NPCs) inspired by the Jackson Elias character from Chaosium's *Masks of Nyarlathotep* campaign—who tie the investigators together and give the group a particular thematic spin.

We advise Keepers to read this whole volume to get a feel for the overall plot and become acquainted with potentially unfamiliar terms and locations before running



the game. Keepers may also help immerse and involve players by using the optional **Lore Sheets** (page 14), which are snippets of information about the culture or setting, included in the sidebar of each scenario.

Finally, we designed most of the challenges and encounters to be avoided or overcome through clever roleplaying or non-violent means—a necessity considering the lack of access to firearms in this setting—but groups wanting a greater focus on action can run it using the *Pulp Cthulhu* rules supplement, with few, if any, adjustments. Some groups may even wish to change to *Pulp* style mid-campaign to reflect the shifting rules of reality.

## A MODULAR CAMPAIGN

The scenarios in this book appear in chronological order, from 1986 to 1987, but Keepers are free to adjust the dates and order of presentation to suit their game—bearing in mind the effect technological changes have on society if the action is advanced beyond the 1980s. This is not a linear campaign. Running the scenarios in the printed order is optional; playing through them all is also optional—the Keeper may select only those that most appeal; thus, treat the scenarios as a buffet from which the Keeper may pick and choose.

While each scenario works well as a standalone, some lead into others more naturally and smoothly. The investigator party does not need to remain the same throughout, nor do the investigators need to pass information on to successors when they perish or go insane. The thread that binds this campaign together is not the investigation but rather the Japanese setting, the inhuman Prince of Pale Leaves, and his beautiful, corrupting *Sutra*, which manifests in multiple media guises to different people.

*The Sutra of Pale Leaves: Twin Suns Rising (TSOPL: TSR)* contains:

- Full Campaign Background
- **July 1986:** Dream Eater
- **December 1986:** Fanfic
- **Spring 1987:** The Pallid Masks of Tokyo

*The companion volume, The Sutra of Pale Leaves: Carcosa Manifest (TSOPL: CM)* contains:

- Summary Campaign Background
- **September 1987:** The Bridge Maiden, Part One
- **Spring or Summer 1988:** Wonderland
- **October 1988:** The Bridge Maiden, Part Two
- **November 1990:** The Fixer

## HE WHO MUST (NOT) BE NAMED

This campaign is our reimagining and modernization of the Hastur mythos that emerged from *The King in Yellow* by Robert W. Chambers. Specifically, it plays with the idea of the adversary as a *meme*—that is, viral information.

The name “Hastur” first appeared in the works of Ambrose Bierce as a god of shepherds. Then it was borrowed by Chambers, and then by Lovecraft, and then by Lovecraft’s numerous anthologists and imitators, and pop culture, and so on. Its identity, like the deity itself, is ever changing and evolving. We’ve put a different spin on these core ideas and transplanted them into a unique backdrop.

This spin is our own, and for you, the Keeper, to use as you wish. In no way are the contents of this book considered “canon” for Chaosium’s *Call of Cthulhu*.

## An Ever-Evolving Antagonist

We designed *The Sutra of Pale Leaves* with replayability in mind, as each scenario has several possible paths and outcomes while remaining connected to the larger narrative. Throughout the campaign, investigators learn that the Prince of Pale Leaves transcends reality and is constantly evolving. This truth extends beyond the confines of a single campaign, for the Prince has the ability to *metagame*.

If you, as a Keeper, run the *Sutra* campaign a second time for one or more players, the Prince *may remain aware of what happened before*. It’s as if he has seen an alternate timeline, or one of a million possible futures he has simulated. If he was defeated last time, he takes countermeasures, so the exact same strategy never works twice for the same group of players. This keeps them on their toes and forces them to come up with radical new solutions each run. The players, however, still don’t get to use out-of-game knowledge. If they accuse you (the Keeper) of cheating, show them this page of the book, and then laugh maniacally.

Keepers should think carefully about their play group as to whether replays of the campaign’s scenarios are something they would enjoy, as such reoccurring “nightmares” suit some players better than others.



## WELCOME TO JAPAN

This book is not a primer for Westerners roleplaying life in Japan in the 1980s, as it barely touches on the unique attributes and the wealth of features that make up Japanese culture. It's impossible to compress all the distinctiveness of Japan, and the nation's roaring and tumultuous Bubble Period, into a single roleplaying campaign. What we've instead attempted to do here is provide enough background information to run a tabletop campaign and capture some of the flavor of that time and place. If you enjoy the scenarios and learn a thing or two about Japan that you didn't know before, we count that as a win.

While the authors have strived for as much authenticity as possible in representing Japan, please don't sweat the details too much. You will get things wrong, and that's okay. The key, like most things in life, is to treat the places, people, and cultural topics with respect.

## SCENARIO NAVIGATION

To assist the Keeper in moving the action from scene to scene, each scenario has a **Scenario Flowchart** suggesting the route the clues are likely to take investigators. The players may always do something unexpected, of course—they may spend time on distractions based on mistaken guesses, they may have to backtrack sometimes, they may even make intuitive leaps and get ahead of the plot—but flowcharts show the optimal plot progression.

Each scene in a scenario also has the following headers:

- **Location:** where this scene takes place.
- **Leads In:** shows the title-heading of the scene(s) whose clues lead here.
- **Leads Out:** shows where the clues in this scene point, by title-heading.
- **Purpose:** shows the scene's function in the scenario plot, and lets the Keeper know what plot-critical information they need to pass on when playing this scene.

North  
(to Hokkaido)



Kuroishi

# Japan

# Honshu

Kyoto

Nagoya

Ikaruga

Yokosuka

Tokyo



# CHAPTER 1: CAMPAIGN BACKGROUND

## THE HISTORIC SETTING

### POST-WWII: DESTRUCTION & REBIRTH

The God Emperor lost his divinity over the radio. Few Japanese citizens had ever heard the Emperor's voice until his admission of defeat on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1945. The voice of a man, and not a particularly strong one, announced that Japan had finally surrendered. Japan's cities laid in burnt ruins, the people starving, and their future as a nation in question.

The foreign victors wanted factories in the East to help in their fight against the spread of communism. They quickly laid the foundations for rebuilding, dictating a new constitution, and demanding the purge of the old nationalists who drove Japan's brutal war across Asia. They broke up the old industrial conglomerates, but the remaining pieces retained sizable economic mass. The new Japan would be an efficiently run factory.

The war survivors produced many children. They imprinted onto their first post-war generation an overriding mission: rebuild. The post-war Baby Boom generation worked six days a week, with long hours and low pay, to remake the industrial power of the nation. They and their parents worked when sick and when hale.

Rebuilding came first, and the instrument to rebuild was the company to which workers owed allegiance. Japanese workers wore company uniforms. They sang the company songs. They traveled and worked where the company told them to go. Often young workers would meet and marry inside the company; at weddings, managers would bless the couple, lauding the value of the marriage to the greater family of the company.

In return for their obedience, hard work, and steadfast resolve to rebuild, the post-war generation of Japanese workers and their children had security. In this land, no one would ever lose their job, their livelihood, their homes, or their place in society. Young families enjoyed cheap housing in company-owned apartments, and everyone received comprehensive health care.

### JAPAN INC.

The government rigged the economy for export; foreign academics and business prognosticators called this policy "Japan Inc." The government put in place rules and policies to restrict imports and actively shape industrial policy in collaboration with Japanese corporations.

Japan Inc. depended on everyone collectively being on the same team. Large customers maintained interlocking relationships with suppliers. Salespeople visited clients, not to open new opportunities, but to ensure cooperation within the supply chain. Workers didn't ask for higher wages, but instead labored under the understanding that they would receive the best of care, in sickness and in health.

Salarymen (see **The Life of a Typical Working Adult**, page 10) felt obligated to spend much of their out-of-work life with coworkers and managers, often drinking together after work several times a week. Bankers doled out capital loans to ensure the success of Japan's large companies. Upper managers pursued industrial policies dictated by government ministers. Most importantly, mothers were expected to cooperate, providing care for children while their husbands worked (and played) late into the night.

Japan's export policy dovetailed with the political power of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The government imposed numerous administrative restrictions on imports which served to protect domestic



manufacturing and Japanese farmers. This propped up the value of land and domestic agricultural goods. High land prices empowered industrialist farmers and conservative elements in Japanese society, who in turn kept the conservative LDP in power for decades.

Japan Inc. worked well for Japan, and Japan continued to thrive as long as the various components of Japanese society worked together in lockstep, and Japan maintained a trade surplus.

## THE BOOM

The Japanese way of business produced some of the best manufactured goods in the world. Cars from the small island nation were cheap and of high quality. Japan made better fax machines, tabletop printers, and cameras, and as a result of their hard work, Japan's economy thrived. Japanese workers had

accomplished their parents' dreams and enjoyed new wealth brought on by their business success.

The boom reached across Japanese society. In the major cities, men and women of all ages became exceedingly status-oriented, wearing only the latest designer fashions (as prescribed, in exacting detail, by fashion magazines). Young women spent money on etiquette classes so they might act the part of a status-conscious cosmopolitan. Men took up "collection" hobbies; in the little free time they had, they took pride in collecting brand-name watches and whatever other fad was currently burning its way through Japanese culture.

Because the yen was so strong, traveling to foreign countries became a national pastime. Hundreds of thousands of young foreigners came to Japan to teach English and help Japanese people become model international citizens. Tokyo became a prime destination for foreign musical and entertainment performers.

## THE LIFE OF A TYPICAL...

### *Working Adult*

The fast-developing Japanese economy was supported by companies and the employees (office workers called "salarymen") who worked for them.

The company demanded loyalty from its workers in exchange for guaranteed employment for about 30 years. Busy employees went out in the morning with pagers and returned to the office in the evening to continue working. They often pulled all-nighters, punching away at word processors and calculators until dawn. At their company's whim, employees sometimes found themselves transferred far away and forced to live apart from their wives and children for several years.

Many employees bonded after work by eating and drinking with their colleagues. On their days off, they participated in company-sponsored events such as trips, camping, and athletic meets with their families. Some employees passed the time by playing pachinko or mah-jongg while on outbound sales trips, going to cabarets and discos in the evenings, and driving their new cars and playing golf.

### *Student*

Compulsory education in Japan lasts nine years (elementary and junior high school, up to age 15). Some go to work right after junior high, while others take entrance examinations

and go on to high school and university. Japanese students generally study far harder than their American equivalents, often putting in extra hours at evening classes where they learn enormous amounts of information by rote; society considers high exam scores as critical for a foundation of success in life.

There was a large population of teenagers in the 1980s. Junior high and high schools with 500 students per grade and more than 40 students per class were common in the cities. Students wore school uniforms and kept busy with their studies and club activities. After school and on weekends, those not attending private "cram schools" went shopping and ate out with friends, or watched rental videos at home. When it came to friends of the opposite sex, they contacted each other on pay phones and went out for fun behind their parents' backs.

A minority of the less serious students reveled in delinquent behavior. They wore flashy haircuts and stylish modified school uniforms and partook in violence and vandalism on school grounds. Outside of the school, they were even more disruptive, shaking down other students for money and riding their loud motorcycles in groups. On the other hand, there were also students who appeared completely normal but engaged in insidious bullying.



## NOTABLE POPULAR CULTURE

### Music

The eighties saw new waves of Western-inspired music, combining electronic sounds with analog instruments. A genre called “city pop” defined the era, characterized by stylish melodies and lyrics, and a cool urban atmosphere. Yamashita Tatsuro is one of the most well-known musicians. (Interestingly, city pop has made a resurgence internationally starting around 2010.)

The 1980s and 90s were also the golden age of “idols,” popular singers and music groups with extremely devoted fans. Some eighties idols who took the world by storm include Matsuda Seiko and the rock band The Checkers. Although vinyl records were still around and music CDs were entering the market, popular music spread mostly through the radio, popular TV music shows, corporate commercials, and cassette tapes.

### Comics

This era was also the golden age of manga magazines. Weekly and monthly serial compilations enjoyed a wide audience, from elementary school students to adults. Manga lovers shared these magazines among friends and family. Most manga were in black and white and in serialized form. Single issues of these works were available in bookstores and convenience stores.

Manga featured a wide variety of genres. Examples include romantic comedies such as *Maison Ikkoku*, science fiction such as *Akira*, and brutal fighting such as *Fist of the North Star*.

### Television

Color televisions were common in most households. With a variety of stations and programs, free television was a source of entertainment for the whole family.

Popular programs included music shows, period (i.e., samurai) dramas, and quiz shows in which the public participated. Sports such as baseball, sumo wrestling, and professional wrestling were also available. Animated programs (anime) were also frequently broadcast. Some became popular worldwide, such as the space opera *Gundam* and the action-comedy *Dragon Ball*, which was based on a manga.

### Computer Games

Arcade games became well-known to everyone with the popularity of *Space Invaders*. Table-type game machines showed up in department stores, inns, bowling alleys, coffee shops, candy stores, and other places. In Japan, it was (and still is) common to play arcade games while sitting on chairs.

Arcade games were at the cutting edge of technology and evolved over the years. Simple characters like Pac-Man became colorful, and soon more than 200 moving objects could appear at once. Computer graphics also became smoothly animated as graphical rendering became faster and more sophisticated.

For a long time, opportunities for home play were very limited. In 1983, however, the Famicom (“Family Computer”) game console and the MSX home computer came out. These machines were affordable and were compatible with TVs, spreading the popularity of computer games.

Salarymen entertained themselves and their clients on the company’s tab. Drinking together promoted teamwork and close relations. Individuals who did not drink with their coworkers and clients risked social isolation and limitations to career growth. Team drinking parties (*nomikai*) often began around 6:00 pm. Sometimes the drinking would start in the office, where just about everyone smoked as well.

Often coworkers would frequent an *izakaya* (bar) where they downed highballs, *nihonshu* (saké), or *nama biru* (draft beer) while eating Japanese-style bar cuisines. Salespeople accompanied customers to clubs, such as the legendary Maharaja Disco in Tokyo, where they danced and drank

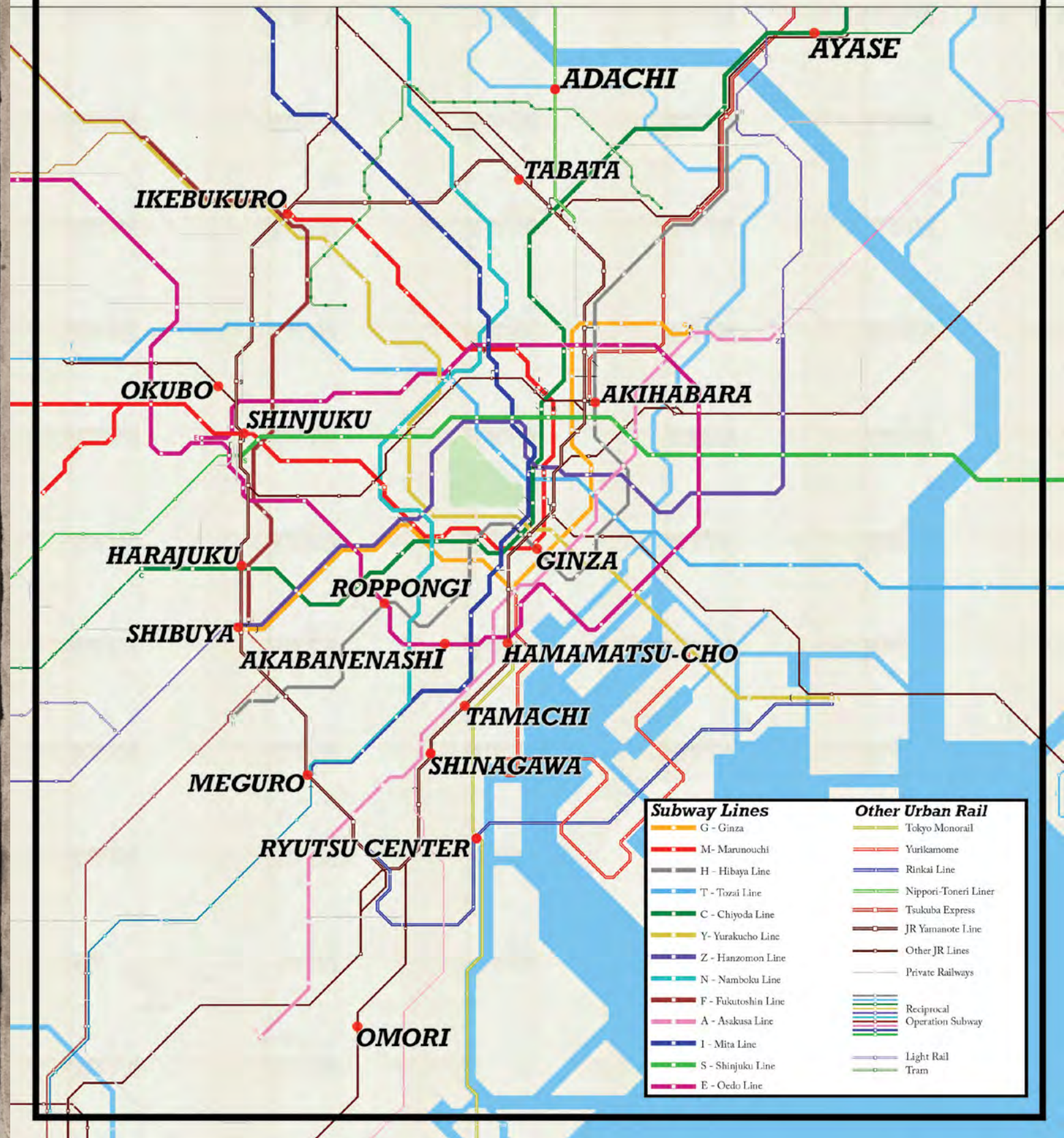
XO cognac. After a few rounds, some salarymen would visit “conversation bars” where they chatted with young, paid hostesses who wore elegant clothes (or bikinis or bunny suits, depending on the establishment). When salarymen missed the last train home, they slept in train stations until they returned to work at dawn.

In the second half of the 1980s, the sudden power of the Japanese yen, combined with the economic stimulus caused by massive spending, resulted in an economic windfall. In later years, economists called this period of extreme economic overheating *Baburu Keiki*: “The Bubble Economy.”

The bubble would eventually burst.



# SUBWAYS OF TOKYO





## ORGANIZED CRIME

Violent crime levels in Japan are comparable to those in western Europe and much lower than those in the US (only one-sixth of the US murder rate for example, in the mid-1980s). But nearly everyone in Japan benefited from the Bubble Economy, and criminals were no exception.

Some historians believe that the Yakuza, Japan's organized crime syndicates, date back to gamblers and black-market dealers in the Edo period (1603–1867). Their name comes from the worst possible hand in *Oicho-Kabu*, a Japanese card game similar to Baccarat. This is a fitting name, as many members of the Yakuza come from scorned minority groups and individuals who have hit rock bottom and have nothing else to lose. Yakuza organize into clans or syndicates that have elements of feudal fiefdoms.

The Yakuza are involved in all sorts of illegal activities including gambling, the sex industry, drug trafficking, arms trafficking, extortion, racketeering, and real-estate kickback schemes. In addition, they are known for a unique and creative type of protection racket called *sōkaiya* in which a syndicate buys enough stock of a corporation to attend shareholder meetings, and then their members disrupt the meeting and humiliate the company (either by exposing company secrets and misconduct, or simply by being unruly and obnoxious) until their demands are met.

While the Japanese police consider them to be violent criminal groups, Yakuza refer to themselves as *ninkyō dantai*, or “chivalrous organizations.” They traditionally embrace strict codes of conduct, hierarchical group structure, filial loyalty, and eccentric rituals. They are also known for elaborate full-body tattoos, leading to most public baths and hot springs instating bans on anyone with any tattoos just to avoid having to deal with potential gangsters. Thus, Yakuza subculture receives heavy romanticization in the media, much like the Italian mafia.

There is perhaps a bit of truth to the “honorable gangster” trope, as some groups have surprisingly noble origins and demonstrate a degree of chivalry. The largest Yakuza syndicate in Japan, Yamaguchi-gumi, has its roots in a pre-war labor union for dockworkers and, at least for periods of its history, ostensibly forbade members from engaging in drug trafficking. This same organization is also notable for conducting large-scale relief efforts after the 1995 Kobe earthquake and the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami.

Japan clamped down on Yakuza under the Organized Crime Countermeasures Law enacted in 1991. Overall membership has declined since then, and many Yakuza groups have tried to restructure to appear more legitimate. Regardless, one should not regard them lightly.

## GENERATIONS

The post-war Baby Boom gave birth to a generation that did not know war and suffering like their parents. The children of Baby Boomers proved that it was possible to work long hours for the betterment of a company. Yet, their children lacked a unified purpose or a national goal.

Broadly speaking, the Japanese fell into two categories: those who conformed to the requirements of Japan Inc. and those who did not. Many born in the early 1960s dutifully joined the established order. They worked hard, and, at the height of the boom years, they had access to luxuries that their parents never experienced. They formed a core of a culture based around loyally working long hours and enjoying the fruits of their labor into the night. This group, more than their parents' generation, included women who traded a traditional domestic family life to participate in the corporate world.

Of course, the Bubble Economy didn't make everyone rich. Those who could not get a company job after graduation saw

relegation to low-end service jobs and manual labor. They worked at gas stations, restaurants, in the fields, and in the national administrative bureaucracy. They lived anywhere from closet-sized apartments to old countryside houses, or with their parents.

Some rebelled. Music and style-based subcultures tried to ignore the societal norms or rebel against them. *Bōsōzoku*, youth motorcycle gangs, insolently rode their choppers, weaving in and out of traffic. Their membership reached more than 50,000 in the mid-1980s. Punk rock bands like The Blue Hearts inspired disaffected youths to defy the norms. *Gyaru* (“gals”) wore sexy outfits and modified school uniforms, rejecting traditional standards of “wholesome matronly” beauty.

And then there were the *otaku*—the term for Japanese nerds defined in the early 1980s; they escaped from the world where they could not fit, luxuriating in the fantasies of manga and anime.

There were many others who gave their time and youth to Japan Inc. but were unable to find a life purpose. Some wore the company-approved suits, sang the company songs, even



drank with their co-workers, but felt their lives empty and devoid of meaning.

Of course, ennui is an occupational hazard in modern societies, but in these years of economic prosperity, it was exceedingly difficult for some people to find a proper place in the world where they felt valued as individuals. Within this environment, many would prove vulnerable to cults and strange religions offering salvation and liberation from meaningless lives.

## BUILDING INVESTIGATORS

We designed this campaign for “normal” characters from all walks of life, not archeologists or explorers or other genre tropes. The only requirement for investigators is that they can speak Japanese, but they need not be Japanese citizens; they can be foreign residents, tourists, exchange students, and so on. Other specific hooks and recommendations appear in each scenario for building or importing investigators. Players may also choose one of the pre-generated investigators provided.

## JAPANESE NAMES

For authenticity, the full names of Japanese characters in this book always appear family name first, followed by given name. Using Suzuki Ichiro as an example, Suzuki is his family name and Ichiro is his given name.

It's considered impolite to call someone other than a friend or family member by only their given name, so colleagues typically refer to each other by their surnames at work, followed by *-san* (a polite gender-neutral suffix). So, Suzuki would be “Suzuki-san” to his colleagues. If he were a teacher or doctor, he would be “Suzuki-sensei” instead. Investigators may wish to follow the same guideline until they become close enough to drop the formalities.

There are also a few less-formal suffixes. Suzuki's teacher or senior colleague might call him Suzuki-*kun*—this suffix is usually for men, but not always. The equivalent but even less formal *-chan* is for girls and young children, and it implies some degree of cuteness. A male chauvinist gangster might call him Suzuki-*chan* to belittle him.

Lastly, the suffix *-sama* is added to names or some titles to show great respect. It's closer to sir or madam than Mr. or Ms. in English. It's not just for the upper classes, though. Companies use *-sama* when addressing their valued customers, and if they don't know Suzuki's name, they call him “*okyaku-sama*” (honored guest).

Those who believe in a deity typically call their god “*Kami-sama*.” However, adherents of the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* address

## OPTIONAL: LORE SHEETS

Lore Sheets, presented throughout the scenarios, are mini-handouts that convey information about the world to the players while directly involving the investigators. The Keeper may offer a player a Lore Sheet when appropriate, as if to say, “Here's something you know about the world.” That player may then add it to their investigator's knowledge and backstory. Or they may pass if they feel it doesn't fit their character.

The Keeper should only offer a Lore Sheet if they feel that the “Personal Background” text at the bottom fits the investigator in question—for example, a particular sheet may apply only to local inhabitants of a town, or only to police officers.

A player may make use of any information they remember from reading a Lore Sheet, even if they opt not to keep it due to their backstory.

Once per session, a player may activate a kept Lore Sheet to gain a bonus die on a roll, if they think the information and/or background presented on the sheet would give them an advantage (NB: the Keeper has the final word if it is relevant or not). Occasionally, accepting a Lore Sheet has an unforeseen, negative effect on the investigator. That's a risk the player takes.

the Prince as “*Ōji-sama*.” You had better do the same, if you know what's good for you.

## Pronouncing Japanese Words & Names

Throughout the book, Keepers and players encounter many Japanese names, locations, and other vocabulary. The Japanese language uses five vowel sounds, and their pronunciation never changes (rather similar to Spanish):

- A: “ah” as in “father”
- I: “ee” as in “iguana”
- U: “oo” as in “uber”
- E: “eh” as in “deck”
- O: “oh” as in “no”

Vowels can then combine with preceding consonants (K, S, T, N, H, M, Y, R, and W) to produce essentially every sound in Japanese. There are some tricky bits: S+I becomes “shi” as in “sushi.” T+U becomes “tsu” as in “tsunami.” H+U becomes “fu” as in “Fukuoka.” A horizontal line over the vowel (such as *ō*) indicates that it is an extended sound. Note that Japanese is



not a “tonal” language like Chinese, and words are understood regardless of accent or stressed syllables.

## PRE-GENERATED PLAYER CHARACTERS

Six ready-made investigators are available for use as starting or replacement characters. Download these for free from [chaosium.com](http://chaosium.com) (and they come with the PDF version of this book).

Note that each investigator has a reason for being in Ikaruga town during the **Chapter 2: Dream Eater** (page 51) scenario. If you are playing the campaign out of default order and beginning in/around Tokyo instead, then adjust the backstories as appropriate.

Players may change the names, gender, and other details of the characters as desired. Luck values are blank and must be rolled (3D6×5). We recommend that each player receive an additional 50 skill points to spend on any skills they like to personalize their character, and to make appropriate adjustments if playing using the *Pulp Cthulhu* rules—see box nearby.

## EQUIPMENT

### Archery

Bows and arrows are perfectly legal to carry and own in Japan. As *kyūdō* (traditional Japanese archery) is a national sport, even high school students frequently carry bows in long bags or cases on public transport. Arrows, on the other hand, are limited to practice types only. Lethal arrows (such as broadheads) are restricted, and bow-hunting is illegal. The law treated crossbows the same as bows until a series of murders in Hyōgo prefecture in 2020, which prompted new laws to regulate them with a similar strictness to rifles and shotguns.

### Computers & Internet

Personal computers became affordable and usable by common folk in the 1980s. Typical desktop machines in the era included IBM\*-compatible computers, the Apple Macintosh (c.1984), and the venerable Commodore 64 (c.1982). Japan's own Nippon Electric Company (NEC), fourth largest computer manufacturer in the world at the time, established dominance in the domestic market with the PC-9800 series in the 1980s.

Personal computers cost the equivalent of a few thousand USD in today's money and were somewhat rare except in businesses, government, scientific, and academic circles. The 1980s also saw a rise in games, especially computer RPGs. Of course, those who couldn't afford a PC could still enjoy games in the many arcades around the country, or at home with a Nintendo Famicom console or MSX home computer.

\*International Business Machines.



The internet as we know it today was in its infancy. The World Wide Web did not launch until 1991, and websites for general use only started to become available from around 1994. Instead, there were smaller scale networks, mostly linking academic institutions using phone lines and dial-up modems.

Japan's first major computer network was JUNET, established in October 1984, connecting about 700 machines. In 1985, JUNET joined with USENET, the popular bulletin board system in the US. That same year,

## USING PRE-GENS TO PULP CTHULHU

Most things are the same as for the standard *Call of Cthulhu* investigators—except for:

- Choose an **Archetype** (see *Pulp Cthulhu: Creating Pulp Heroes*, page 15). All Archetypes give an additional +100 Skill Points to specified skills.
- The Archetype's **Core Characteristic**: roll 1D6+13 and multiply by 5.
- **Luck**: roll 2D6+6 and multiply by 5.
- Omit all effects of **Age**.
- **Hit Points (HP)**: add CON and SIZ together, then divide the total by 5 (round down).
- Pick *Pulp Cthulhu* **Talents**, as well as deciding your traits/backstory.



## NO NINJAS

Much to the dismay of many tourists, modern Japan is not swarming with black-clad super-assassins. In fact, ninja or *shinobi* had little in common with how they appear in pop culture. Historically, they were much closer to intelligence agents and special forces operatives of the day. Similarly, although many families claim to trace their lineage back to samurai, the warrior class and profession have long since been abolished. Such figures now only show up in historical dramas, re-enactments, and parades. We recommend that Keepers do not allow investigators of these archetypes.

Tokyo University of Science connected to BITNET, the cooperative US university computer network. BITNET is notable for hosting one of the first text-based online multi-player games known as a “MUD.”

In 1988, the WIDENET (Widely Integrated Distributed Environment) launched, and the domestic telecommunications company Nippon Telegraph and Telephone (NTT) started the first commercial ISDN service. Toward the end of 1989, the nation hit an ominous milestone when Japan’s very first computer virus appeared.

With a personal computer and network access, it’s possible for investigators to use the Computer Use skill to try to get information from academics and hobbyists; however, the Keeper should bear in mind the limitations of the technology of this time.

### Firearms

Japan strictly regulates firearm ownership and has the lowest rate of gun violence in the developed world. To gain the right to own a gun, one must undergo a long application process, attend an all-day class, take a written test, and pass a safety and shooting range test with a 95% score or better. In addition, one must pass mental health and drug tests and have a clean criminal record with no links to extremist groups. The entire process costs close to 70,000 yen and may take several months. They limit gun shops to three per prefecture and track every bullet sold.

Furthermore, only shotguns and rifles are available. Private ownership of handguns and fully automatic weapons is banned outright. While there were about 35,000 rifles and 185,000 shotguns in private ownership as of 2011, the estimated number

of handguns in civilian possession is only about 80. The penalties are so strict that even many yakuza avoid using firearms, but some still risk smuggling illegal weapons from Asia.

Police have a blanket power to deny gun licenses, conduct regular inspections for illegal modifications, and search for and seize restricted weapons. Even the police themselves are lightly armed, typically carrying only a Nambu Model 60 (a 5-shot .38 Special revolver designed in the 1960s). Some prefectural police and other agencies carry a .32 automatic instead. Off-duty police are not permitted to carry guns.

In summary, unless an investigator is a member of the police or Self Defense Forces acting in an official capacity, they have little excuse to legally have a firearm, and even then, they cannot carry them off-duty. And unless they make a painfully expensive trade with mobsters or loot a revolver from a slain cop, investigators might never see a pistol. For civilian investigators who wish to purchase a shotgun or rifle, the Keeper may require a combined Sanity and Firearms (Rifle/Shotgun) roll, and a Credit Rating roll, repeated each year in-game.

### Money

There is no requirement to track money in this campaign; however, we provide the information below for context with regard to the cost of goods and services in Japan and the financial capabilities and limitations of the investigators. Guidance on how Credit Rating relates to living standards, as set out in the *Call of Cthulhu: Keeper Rulebook*, page 46, remains applicable. Japan’s currency is the *yen*, which uses the symbol ¥. In the 1980s, bill denominations include ¥1,000, ¥2,000,

## TABLE I: EXCHANGE RATES

Year	Rate (JPY to USD)
1985	250:1
1986	200:1
1987	158:1
1988	122:1
1989	123:1
1990	146:1
1991	134:1



¥5,000, and ¥10,000, while coin denominations include ¥1, ¥5, ¥10, ¥50, ¥100, and ¥500.

From 1985 through 1989, the Japanese yen experienced a steady decline in value against the US dollar. The decline in the value of the yen helped drive exports to the US and abroad, and Japan maintained a significant trade surplus. For those same years, inflation remained steady, averaging below 2%, meaning that Japanese consumers did not experience any significant loss in purchasing power for Japanese goods.

Here are a few examples of the approximate cost of the goods and services purchased in Japan in 1986:

- Average boxed lunch (*bento*): ¥300
- Nightclub beverage: ¥500
- Average restaurant dinner: ¥3,000
- Business hotel/1 night: ¥15,000
- 4-star hotel/1 night: ¥30,000
- Bottle of Champagne at a nightclub: ¥100,000
- Kimono, superior: ¥1m
- Annual golf club membership: ¥2.4m
- Tokyo luxury home: ¥900m

### Pagers

A pager is a small radio-wave receiving device. When someone wants to contact a person who has a pager, they can ring it using a wireless-calling service. The pager can only receive call signals and display the number of the person who called. Therefore, the person who has the device needs to call the other person on a regular phone and ask what they want.

In Japan, the use of pagers accelerated in the late 1980s with the reduction of usage fees. In addition, when pagers started to come equipped with a number-display function, they became even more popular—as it was now possible to convey simple messages using numbers, such as 999 (pronounced *san-kyu*, i.e., “thank you”).



### Phones

Japan was the first country to launch a commercial cellular phone network, for car phones, in 1979. At first, service was only available to the Tokyo metropolitan region, but, by 1984, NTT's network covered cities all around Japan. With a monthly fee equivalent to \$300 current USD and a high cost per minute, these car phones were mostly a niche luxury for the rich and powerful.

Then in 1985, NTT launched the first generation of mobile phones. These so-called “shoulder phones” were rather monstrous at 22 pounds (10 kg), requiring shoulder straps or a briefcase to lug around, had a short battery life, and were still extremely expensive.

By 1989, around the time many of the campaign's scenarios take place, there were still only about 4 million mobile phone subscribers in the world, many of them in Japan. Thanks to the country's booming electronics industry, handsets were gradually getting smaller and more reliable, but they were still expensive (usually around \$1,000 USD in today's money), so they were mostly a fancy gadget for wealthier executives. Furthermore, networks concentrated on the major cities, so users traveling to the suburbs or rural areas would lose their signal.

For scenarios in this setting, we recommend that, if the investigators get their hands on a cellular phone, it will lose signal or battery power at the worst possible time—use a Luck roll at the Keeper's discretion.

### Swords & Naginatas

Despite what pop culture media may lead investigators to believe, it's not easy to get a sword in Japan. Carrying a knife with a locking or folding blade longer than 2.1 inches (5.5 cm) is illegal. Any blade longer than 5.9 inches (15 cm) is also unlawful.



TABLE 2: WEAPON REFERENCE

Weapon	Skill	Damage	Range	Uses/Round	Capacity	Malf.
.22 Hunting Rifle	Firearms (Rifle/Shotgun)	1D6+1	30 yards	1	6	99
12-gauge Shotgun (2B)	Firearms (Rifle/Shotgun)	4D6/2D6/1D6	10/20/50 yards	1 or 2	2	100
12-gauge Shotgun (pump)	Firearms (Rifle/Shotgun)	4D6/2D6/1D6	10/20/50 yards	1	5	100
Bokutō (wooden sword)	Fighting (Brawl or Sword)	1D6+DB	-	1	-	-
Bow and Arrows (illegal arrowheads)	Firearms (Bow)	1D6+half DB	30 yards	1	1	97
Crossbow	Firearms (Bow)	1D8+2	50 yards	1/2	1	96
Katana	Fighting (Sword)	1D8+2+DB	-	1	-	-
Naginata	Fighting (Spear)	1D8+1+DB	-	1	-	-
New Nambu M60 Revolver (.38 Special)	Firearms (Handgun)	1D10	15 yards	1(3)	5	100
SIG P230 (.32 ACP) Pistol	Firearms (Handgun)	1D8	15 yards	1(3)	8	98
Tokarev TT-33 Pistol	Firearms (Handgun)	1D8	15 yards	1(3)	8	98

Exceptions exist for imitation swords (*mogitō*)—made from aluminum alloy—used for display or traditional martial arts practice; they can't be sharpened and aren't real weapons, though even without a cutting edge, they could still stab someone. Wooden practice swords (*bokutō*) also have no restrictions and make excellent blunt weapons in a pinch.

One does not simply “buy” a real katana. To legally own a sword in Japan, it must be registered in accordance with the *Jūtōhō* (Japanese Firearms and Sword Law), and the registration certificate must stay with the weapon at all times. Currently, 2.3 million swords are registered in Japan. Of those, about 900 swords have the designation

of “important cultural property,” while 122 are “national treasures.” Such artifacts are priceless works of art and unsurpassed in quality as cutting instruments. Today, a small number of swordsmiths keep the art alive in Japan.

Keepers may call for a Hard Credit Rating roll if an investigator wants to own a real sword. Otherwise, desperate investigators might resort to breaking into a museum, hoping to get their hands on a legendary blade that can slay an eldritch horror.

If so, they should be aware that museums usually disassemble swords on display to show the smith's signature on the tang, and reattaching the handle takes tools and a few minutes. It's up to the Keeper if a particular blade will work against a particular monster, but within the context of *The*



*Sutra of Pale Leaves* campaign, the most important thing is that the investigators firmly *believe* it will work.

A lesser-known but still culturally significant weapon is the naginata, a polearm with a thick, curved blade. Naginatas are considered a category of Japanese swords and so covered by the *Jutōhō* laws.

The naginata was an important battlefield tool in the Heian period (794–1185) and was the weapon of choice for some famous *onna-musha* (warrior women) such as Tomoe Gozen. It later became used for self-defense among noblewomen in the Edo period (1603–1867), and even today remains a popular martial art among women. In its modern iteration as a combat sport, naginata practitioners use weapons with replaceable bamboo blades and wear heavy protective gear similar to kendo.

### Transportation

Japan has one of the most efficient and extensive public transportation systems in the world, especially within metropolitan areas and between cities. Except in the most remote or rural areas, nearly every point of interest is accessible by some combination of train, subway, or bus. This is especially true for Tokyo, where the highly complex (and confusing)

metropolitan subway network services nearly every point in the city. However, during rush hour, commuters should expect a “polite” shove from station staff into train cars packed shoulder-to-shoulder with salarymen.

For longer trips, the famous *Shinkansen* (bullet train) gets commuters between major cities almost as quickly as an airplane but with none of the hassle. Because all the scenarios in this book are set on the main island of Honshu, investigators may end up taking a ride on the Tokaido Shinkansen line which connects Tokyo, Nagoya, Kyoto, and Osaka (along with other cities along the way).

The Bubble Economy led to a rise in car ownership in the country. But, the process of getting a driver's license is stricter and more expensive than in many other countries. We recommend that Keepers only allow investigators to start the game with a car if they have invested points in the Drive Automobile skill and have a Credit Rating greater than 40.

Bicycles are far more common in Japan than most countries. It's safe to assume that any investigator who wants access to a bicycle has one, unless circumstances dictate that they are extraordinarily poor.





## WRITTEN SCRIPTS OF JAPAN

Modern Japanese has three distinct components in its writing system:

- **Kanji:** logographic Chinese characters. Kanji came into popular use in Japan starting around the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Japanese students are expected to learn about 1,000 kanji by the time they graduate elementary school, and 2,000 by adulthood. In modern times, kanji are used to write nouns (including most Japanese names) and the stems of adjectives and verbs.
- **Hiragana:** the cursive Japanese syllabary, derived from cursive Chinese calligraphy around 800 CE. In ages past, hiragana's users were women, who often did not have access to the same level of education as men, but now it is essential and universal. It consists of just 48 characters (two of which only occur in uncommon proper names), and each represents one syllable of spoken Japanese. In modern written Japanese, hiragana is the workhorse script used for particles\*, inflections, suffixes, and even superscript to show the pronunciations of kanji (especially in Japanese comics).
- **Katakana:** the more angular syllabary, derived from components of more complex kanji, also developed around 800 CE by Buddhist monks in Nara. It has 48 characters, matching hiragana. These days, its primary use is loanwords, foreign names, onomatopoeia, and the like; one might compare it to writing in italics in English.

For context, the original *Sutra of Pale Leaves* is written entirely in kanji using archaic grammar. The adaptation featured in **Chapter 2: Dream Eater** (page 51) is in modern Japanese and far easier to read.

In the 1980s, many computers and game consoles could not manage kanji fonts due to memory and resolution limitations, so Japanese text in video games or other consumer programs was often all hiragana or katakana. The infectious power of the *Wonderland* program in the scenario of the same name (see *TSoPL: Carcosa Manifest*) has no such limitations.

It's theoretically possible that a cultist could write a children's book adaptation of the *Sutra* entirely in hiragana to target young kids. We leave such disturbing possibilities up to the Keeper.

\*Suffix or short word following the noun.

## THE SUTRA

*"The ambition of Caesar and of Napoleon pales before that which could not rest until it had seized the minds of men and controlled even their unborn thoughts."*

—Robert W. Chambers, "The Repairer of Reputations"

Words have power. According to the ancient indigenous beliefs that developed into the Shinto religion, everything has a soul or divine spirit, even inanimate objects. By extension, so does language. Since ancient times, there has been a cultural belief in Japan called *kotodama* (言霊, literally the "spirit of words"), a belief that mystical powers dwell in words and names, and expressing them can influence the environment, body, mind, and soul. In short, *kotodama* refers to the belief that words themselves have the power to alter reality.

Imagine for a moment that this is true. And now, imagine a mysterious cosmic entity has this "power of words" down to a science and wields it as a tool, or perhaps as a *weapon*. Imagine this weapon aimed at Earth, wrapped in a promise of uniting and uplifting all of humankind and fulfilling all their greatest desires.

This "weapon" is in fact a book housing a viral consciousness, a trans-dimensional artificial mind in analog code. Various iterations and mutations of it have appeared here and there throughout human history, but now the core book has surfaced again in 1980s Japan, in the guise of a sutra or holy scripture.

In this period more than any other, many of Japan's citizens engage in excess: overwork, over-spending, binge drinking, risk-taking, preoccupation with hobbies, and obsession with success. These factors have created what is perhaps a most virulent breeding ground for this memetic weapon, the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*.

## THE SUTRA'S HISTORY

*"The hardware is humanity. The software is the Sutra. The program is the Prince. Don't delay—download our delightful deity directly!"*

—Nishikado Kazunori,  
Association of Pale Leaves Inner Circle

A timeline of the *Sutra*'s history can be found in **Table 6: Chronology** (page 43).

The *Sutra of Pale Leaves* is a book, but it is nothing like other Mythos tomes. It is not the mad diatribe of a broken mind, nor (overtly) a grimoire of demon-summoning spells and bloody sacrificial rites. It is a sentient tool designed for one insidious purpose: to conquer worlds. It is, in many ways, the antagonist of the campaign itself. As the *Sutra*



is essentially a brain-hacking code in analog format, it is more readily understood through the analogy of modern software development.

### Alpha Stage

Some scholars believe the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* first appeared somewhere in ancient India, perhaps as early as 400 BCE, transcribed by one or more eccentric sages who received it in visions and dreams sent from another world. From the beginning, it borrowed the terminology and aesthetics of local religions like Buddhism, following those faiths throughout mainland Asia like a shadow (or like a piece of malware mimicking the user interface of a popular application).

In those days, it wasn't nearly as infectious, never gaining much more than scattered niche followings, and even those groups were frequently disrupted by warring empires. But the *Sutra* was still very much a work in progress. This was just an early access alpha release, and it needed much fine-tuning.

### Beta Release

Years passed, and gradually the *Sutra* was patched, upgraded, and localized with various degrees of success. It performed better in some regions than others. The secret cipher that gives the book its power lends itself best to certain complex writing systems, such as the Brahmin script of Sanskrit and ideographs like kanji (Chinese characters). By this point, the code had become better optimized for the limitations of its user base, and the users adapted to it in turn. The *Sutra's* disciples knew that the book was both powerful and forbidden, so they kept it secret. But like any good secret, the *Sutra* wanted to get out. In fact, spreading to every person in every corner of the planet was its original design goal.

In China, the *Sutra* had fully infiltrated several Taoist groups, leading to at least one major uprising in the late-second century CE. By the time it reached Japan in the 8th century CE, the *Sutra* had evolved into something quite powerful and efficient. The explosive rise of art and literature in ancient Japan helped it spread, and it spawned interconnected groups spanning the main island of Honshu. Refinements of the code continued in Japan, and, for a moment in the 1180s, it seemed ready to go worldwide. But thanks to some Minamoto samurai and meddling Shingon monks, plans for full release came to a screeching halt. Only a few copies of this *Sutra* survived the purges in Japan, occasionally making brief reappearances as late as the 1960s before disappearing again.

### Forks, Mods & Hacks

The *Sutra* spread beyond Asia, sometimes in bits and pieces. It began to influence the art and writing of many exposed to it. To this day, fragments of the *Sutra's* code remain in a startling number of works of art and literature across the globe, just like the remnants of code from ancient viruses that

infected our ancestors still linger in our DNA. Chances are it's already a part of you.

But the *Sutra*, in its original guise as a religious tome, eventually hit a wall. Aside from eccentric artists and collectors, the West had only a passing interest in Eastern mysticism at the time. So users began making unauthorized "forks" of the code in other formats: novels, paintings, poems, and plays. Some tried to replicate the full effects of the code that were lost in translation. Others attempted to edit the code for personal gain. Still others—who can say what they intended? At least one such offshoot reached infamy in Europe during the 1890s, but it had become something chaotic and uncontrollable.

### Going Gold

The end of the development cycle approaches. The latest version of the *Sutra* is ready: a perfectly optimized bug-free master copy. It's encoded on a stack of self-replicating two-dimensional gold plates that can form a screen that fills the sky, capable of instant installation on millions of people at once, literally in a flash. Japan is to be first on its worldwide release schedule, and the developer intends to deliver it by hand.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE SUTRA

The *Sutra of Pale Leaves* appears as a thick *orihon* (accordion book) made of pale-yellow dyed paper, with kanji characters and color illustrations, and patterns printed on its double-sided 256 pages. The heavy tome gives the impression that it is overflowing, and that it contains more volume than possible in its physical space. Though lost for centuries, historians discovered an original in pieces in Kyoto in 1980 and eventually reassembled it, only for it to be stolen and used to resurrect the cult in Japan.

At first glance, nothing about the book is foreboding or suspicious; rather, it is an elaborate and beautiful work of art that any collector would love to have. The content's structure is similar to the *Lotus Sutra*, presented in the form of a drama consisting of many different scenes using the entire cosmos as its stage.

The central character is an apocryphal prince who supposedly achieved enlightenment, and each chapter or scene is an account of one of his adventures and ends with an aphorism. However, the teachings have very little to do with any legitimate sect of Buddhism. Rather, they might be interpreted as subversive or heretical.

The horrible truth is that the *Sutra* is a mental virus, a miraculously complex mind-altering code put to paper. The text lines up in intricate and mesmerizing columns and rows, hiding secret patterns and ciphers. The sound of the text being chanted has a hypnotic effect triggering intense emotions and nightmares (though it does not lead to full infection).



The elaborate mandalas (meditative visual compositions) prefacing each section mimic Klüver form constants—geometric patterns often seen during hallucinations that are artifacts of deep brain structure—and hijack the subconscious through the visual cortex.

No overt magical spells appear in the text, but see **Magic & Monsters** (page 30).

Most importantly, the “code” within the *Sutra* contains an artificial intelligence that can imprint onto the mind of followers after sufficient exposure. This entity is the **Prince of Pale Leaves** (page 32), taking the form of an alternate personality in the minds of adherents and appearing to them in vivid hallucinations. Note that while “studying” the *Sutra* to learn its secrets takes months, reading its hundreds of pages takes a much shorter time. Simply reading the text is all that one must do for the Prince to embed himself in the reader’s mind.

Book statistics appear in **Iterations & Adaptations** (page 27).

### What Am I Reading?

When an investigator reads the entire *Sutra of Pale Leaves*, use the following skill rolls to gain insight into the text:

- **Language (Japanese)**—Hard difficulty: it’s far more than just religious dogma here. Patterns emerge, embedded everywhere. Each kanji character lines up in a precise grid. Ostensibly, it’s meant to be read from top to bottom, but you get an entirely new story if you read across! Or diagonally! And in this passage, the kanji character “mu” repeats in a Fibonacci sequence. How deep does it go? (Sanity loss 0/1D4.)
- **History or Anthropology**—Hard difficulty: the setting of the book doesn’t add up. It says the Prince comes from a massive city paved with gold, with a lake as still as crystal and a tower reaching miles into the sky. Clearly nonsense, but par for the course in a religious text. Yet the descriptions of various historical places he visits have an uncanny level of accuracy. If the Prince did visit all those different civilizations, he would have to be well over 1,000 years old.
- **Science (Astronomy)**—Regular difficulty: the book claims that the Prince hails from the so-called Eternal Kingdom, *Tokoyo-no-kuni*. But it doesn’t sound like anywhere on Earth. The description of the constellations is wrong—it talks about the Hyades cluster as if it were much closer than it should be, a passage mentions two red moons and two suns (the larger of which it calls Atoboshi, an old Japanese name for Aldebaran), and so on. It may be just metaphorical, or it may be hinting at something more.
- **Cthulhu Mythos**—Regular difficulty: the text implies an ancient and ongoing conflict for the future of sentient life in the cosmos, contains warnings to avoid the “blasphemies of the old gods,” and provides instructions on how to combat

and seal away such dark entities. Deep wisdom almost certainly resides in this tome; it deserves thorough study.

## EFFECTS OF THE SUTRA

The *Sutra of Pale Leaves* is a mind-altering reality-bending viral weapon. Exposure to its code gradually but drastically rewires the host’s brain and installs a sentient hive-mind linked with all other hosts. This mind, the Prince, has its own will and personality, and guides the hosts to spread the *Sutra*.

*“The Sutra of Pale Leaves is a cosmic flower. Its unique beauty is the first thing that we notice, but that beauty is but a part of its reproductive cycle.”*

*“When one first becomes exposed to the Sutra, the seed is planted. The Sutra buries the seed within the depths of the human mind. We may not notice it, just as we cannot see a seed beneath the earth, but we can feel a longing to become something more. This longing is ours as much as it is the seed’s. It must be nurtured.”*

*“If one continues reading, the soil of the mind becomes fertile, and the seed takes root. These roots spread wide and deep, forming the connections it needs to grow. The seed-bearer will feel compelled to further seek out the life-giving waters of the Sutra.”*

*“Next, the seed-bearer finally receives a glimpse of the beauty that grows within. The seed germinates and sprouts, and the perfect mind of that cosmic flower begins to awaken within the seed-bearer. Now, they are inseparable. Now, the Prince of Pale Leaves can be seen and heard.”*

*“Finally, the flower blooms. The Prince of Pale Leaves has fully manifested and shares his enlightenment with the seed-bearer, who has now become something greater than before. They are a combined consciousness, a new flower within a vast and growing garden, ready to pollinate by creating new seeds.”*

—Matsushima Nobuo, Association of Pale Leaves Inner Circle

### Primary Effects

The *Sutra of Pale Leaves* has several primary effects, occurring in roughly this order:

- **Fixation:** following initial exposure, those affected may feel fascinated by or drawn to the *Sutra* and feel an urge to repeat exposure.
- **Dreams, delusions, and distorted perception:** those affected experience bizarre dreams and vivid visual and auditory hallucinations. Groups of affected individuals in the same area simultaneously experience the exact same hallucinations or encounter each other in dreams.
- **Changes in brain structure:** repeated exposure to the *Sutra* causes alterations in the physical configuration of many parts of the brain, beyond just new neural connections. These changes grant the individual significantly enhanced creative



TABLE 3: EXPOSURE COUNTER &amp; EFFECTS

Exposure Points (EP)	Effects
0: Unaffected	No trace exists of the <i>Sutra's</i> code in the character's head.
1–49: Obsessed	The character increasingly fixates on the <i>Sutra</i> . They may see fleeting images of a yellow-robed figure or hear faint voices from time to time. Fate seemingly conspires to lead them to the <i>Sutra</i> more and more until the next phase.
50–99: Possessed	The character now hosts the Prince of Pale Leaves. He may be dormant, subtly manipulating their perception of reality, or he may actively appear to and speak to the character as an utterly convincing hallucination. He knows everything they know, see, and hear. The Prince may attempt to take direct control once per hour, but the host may resist with a POW roll.
100: Enthralled	The character is finally one with the Prince of Pale Leaves. The Prince may attempt to take direct control once per hour, but the host may resist with a Hard POW roll. Failure means they become dominated by the Prince indefinitely. Investigators controlled by the Prince may retain their residual personality, or not, whichever the Prince desires. They either retire to become NPCs, or they become conspirators taking secret orders from the Keeper.

**Note:** when a character reaches the Possessed level (50+ EP), the Prince of Pale Leaves and all vessels of the Prince can read their minds effortlessly. The Prince knows everything they see, hear, and think. In combat and all opposed rolls, the Prince and his vessels gain a bonus die against the character, and the character suffers a penalty die. Essentially, he knows what you'll do before you do.

and artistic abilities and sometimes inexplicable powers that mystify scientists. Headaches and dizziness are common.

- **Inspiration:** affected persons with any creative talent feel a sudden surge of inspiration and may attempt to recreate the contents through art or writing.
- **Becoming a host to a separate mind:** most affected individuals eventually witness a phantom entity, the Prince of Pale Leaves. This begins as voices or fleeting apparitions, often in mirrors or shadows, but eventually, this figure may manifest before the person and speak to them directly.
- **Loss of identity:** individuals who become hosts begin to lose their sense of identity or individuality. They confuse themselves with the Prince or other hosts.
- **Changes in physiology:** in some cases, heavily exposed individuals may undergo minor or drastic physical changes, as if their genes are being reprogrammed and repurposed.
- **Bending of reality:** as the number of individuals under the influence of the *Sutra* grows, the fabric of reality itself may change.

### Side Effects

Just because it's all in your head doesn't mean it can't hurt you. Like a computer program, the *Sutra* does have some "bugs."

- **Loss of Sanity:** understandably, individuals may react negatively to experiencing vivid hallucinations, realizing something alien is taking over their brain, and watching reality be rewritten around them. The Keeper is free to call for Sanity rolls as they see fit (0/1 to 1/1D4 loss, as appropriate). These issues may also exacerbate any temporary or underlying insanity.
- **Severe disorders:** exposure to the *Sutra* can be overwhelming for the human mind. After an investigator loses enough Sanity due to *Sutra*-related effects, they may suffer a bout of madness. The Keeper determines the details of such effects, keeping them relevant to the affected investigator's experiences and the theme of the scenario.



TABLE 4: EXPOSURE POINT COSTS

Exposure Type	Exposure Points
Initial Exposure to the written text	2D10 EP
Fleeting exposure (short sequence of characters or a mandala)	1 EP
Hearing any amount of text read aloud	1 EP
Wearing Petal brand clothing (see <i>TSoPL: Carcosa Manifest</i> )	1 EP
Actively chanting a mantra	1D4 EP
Prolonged/intense exposure (extended reading or viewing, learning spells or Mystic Signs)	1D6–1D10 EP
Reading the entire <i>Sutra/Tale</i> (requires many hours)	1D100 EP (minimum 20)
Registering an account in <i>Wonderland</i> (see <i>TSoPL: Carcosa Manifest</i> )	EP equal to 1/5th INT

## BE NOT AFRAID

You're not being "haunted." The Prince is not a ghost. He is very real and very much part of you now. Soon enough you won't be able to recognize where "you" end and "the Prince" begins. Do not grieve, for you are becoming something greater.

It's not a "split personality." The Prince exists in many other minds simultaneously, but they are all one. You might call it a network. We would rather you call it "the unification of the human species." You are not broken; you are finally becoming whole.

It's not "mind control." *You* were never in control in the first place. The subconscious part of your brain makes unilateral decisions all the time, only for the conscious part to rationalize it microseconds later. The *Sutra* does nothing to you that you don't already do to yourselves. The process has simply been... *optimized*.

This is an important distinction from traditional Mythos tomes: The *Sutra of Pale Leaves* is not scary or shocking or disturbing. It is a thing of beauty. Simply reading it does not cause Sanity loss—fully studying it and discovering its impossible complexity does, not to mention the weirdness that happens later. Players will likely assume that because a number didn't immediately go down on their character sheet, the book is safe to read. *This is intentional*.

## EXPOSURE

The *Sutra of Pale Leaves* can influence the human mind through two main vectors:

- Observing the written characters.
- Observing the graphical designs (mandalas).

When any of these conditions are fulfilled, the character is **Exposed**. Exposure leads to becoming a host or vessel of the Pale Prince. Actual comprehension of the text is not a requirement.



TABLE 5: THE PRINCE'S INFLUENCE ON INVESTIGATORS

Exposure Points (EP)	Effects
1–100	<b>Influence:</b> the Prince can create extremely convincing audio/visual hallucinations. He tends to keep these subtle and believable to carefully manipulate the target's behavior. Identical hallucinations can appear for multiple Exposed characters simultaneously. He can also manifest in their dreams.
50–100	<b>Manifest:</b> the Prince can appear to the target and speak to them. As with other hallucinations, he can manifest in the minds of any number of hosts in a perfectly synchronized manner. Through this, the Prince gives decrees to his adherents, or else persuades stubborn investigators that the path of the Pale Leaves is the ultimate truth.
50–100	<b>Dominate:</b> the Prince takes direct control of the character, who may attempt to resist or break free once per hour with a successful POW roll. After successfully breaking free, the character is immune to domination for 1 hour. At the Enthralled level (100 EP), it takes a Hard POW success to resist, and if failed, the Prince takes control for as long as the Keeper likes.
100	<b>Consume:</b> after dominating the host, the Prince may completely and permanently absorb the host's mind, taking all their knowledge, skills, and memories. The body becomes an empty shell that the Prince operates like a puppet, while their Sanity drops to zero. The host's original consciousness, if it exists at all, purportedly remains in a perpetual loop of pure bliss in some strange pocket dimension. Game. Over.

### Exposure Counter

The amount of influence the *Sutra's* code has over a given character is represented by **Exposure Points (EP)**, a percentile counter. Think of it like the percentage of a character's mind that has been hijacked by the viral personality construct known as the Prince of Pale Leaves. Keepers have several options for tracking EP:

- The Keeper secretly keeps track of each investigator's EP total.
- If the Keeper prefers to record a single number, they may track one EP total for the entire party's "collective consciousness." All consequences are shared among investigators. Note that this punishes cautious players and makes the campaign more challenging.
- The Keeper may present EP to the players as a new skill called "Ethereal Power" or "Energy Points" or some other convenient lie, which allows them to track it themselves. Maybe let them roll against it like a normal skill to perform

"cantrips" or "psionics" that are simply shared hallucinations (until suddenly they aren't).

- If all players are replaying the campaign and already know how it works (and are not likely to metagame), the Keeper can let them track EP openly.

Use this EP counter throughout this campaign. As EP accumulates past certain thresholds, the character falls victim to the *Sutra's* influence—see **Table 3: Exposure Counter & Effects** (page 23).

### Getting Exposed

Exposure primarily comes from a visual encounter with the *Sutra* or its derivative mandalas. The complex structures of the Prince's cognitive virus cannot (yet) be encoded in audible form, so listening to the book being read aloud is relatively safe—Exposure only accumulates slowly, 1 EP at a time. See **Table 4: Exposure Point Costs** (page 24).



## Resisting Exposure

Knowledge is the best weapon for resisting the *Sutra*. Unfortunately, gaining this knowledge requires experience or research, neither of which is safe. A character gets a POW roll to resist gaining EP in one of the following two cases:

- **Passive (first time only):** the character currently has zero EP. The first time a character is visually exposed to the *Sutra* text (or its code in various new formats, see **Iterations & Adaptations**, page 27) by reading it, or seeing its mandalas and patterns, the Keeper should secretly make a POW roll on their behalf. Failure means the character incurs the **Initial Exposure** (see **Table 4: Exposure Point Costs**, page 24).
- **Active (knowledge required):** the character knows the specific risks of reading the *Sutra* and declares they want to consciously resist its influence.

The POW roll is Regular difficulty if the exposure is just visual, but Hard if two or more forms of stimulation occur at once (such as reading it aloud or looking at any page while others recite a mantra).

**Keeper note:** the purpose of the Exposure mechanics is to represent a creeping, insidious threat of which the players themselves are not aware. Investigators lose Sanity when they experience horror, shock, or tremendous stress; however, the *Sutra* is subtle. It is a mental virus, and the symptoms do

not appear until the infection is well under way. Hence, we recommend that the Keeper make the POW rolls and track exposure secretly.

## Influencing, Manifesting & Dominating

The Prince of Pale Leaves can influence an Exposed character in several ways. To do so, the Keeper must roll under the target character's EP level as if it were a skill or characteristic; thus, a character with 30 EP has a 30% chance of being influenced.

## Possession by the Pale Prince: PoV

Once a character is sufficiently Exposed (50+ EP) to the *Sutra*, the Prince can take control of them and direct their actions (unless they successfully resist with an appropriate POW roll). While he is dominating a character, the Prince may either adopt his host's persona to keep the possession a secret, or he may "unmask" and reveal himself. In the latter case, the host's body language, mannerisms, and way of speaking instantly and drastically change (see **Roleplaying as the Prince**, page 33). From the host character's point of view, one of four things may happen, at the Keeper's discretion:

1. The character blacks out (or remains unconscious if already asleep) and has no awareness during the time they are dominated by the Prince. They may experience a sense of missing time after the possession is over.





## WHAT'S IN A NAME: AOKUCHIBA

In Japanese, the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* is called 青朽葉經典 (*Aokuchiba Kyōten*). Unravelling this name reveals some hints about the book's true nature.

- 青朽葉 (*aokuchiba*) is the word for decaying leaves, and a specific shade of pale, greenish yellow that you can see everywhere in this book. But let's look deeper.
- 青 (*ao*) means blue in modern Japanese, but long ago, this word referred to a wide spectrum of colors from blue to green. This nuance remains today. *Aoshingō* is the official name of a green traffic light, for example, and green apples are *aoringo*.
- 朽 (*kuchi*) means decay or rot. On one hand, what we imagine as beautiful autumnal colors is actually leaves dying and decaying as winter approaches. On the other hand, this change is an inevitable part of nature—the fate of all life.
- 葉 (*ba*) means leaf. But it also appears in the word “word” 言葉 (*kotoba*). Further, it occurs in the title of the Nara-era poetry book *Man'yōshū* (万葉集), or “Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves.”
- 經典 (*kyōten*) means *Sutra*, which in turn comes from a Sanskrit word meaning “thread” or “string” (reflected in part of the kanji character). This word may recall the Moirai of Greek mythology who spun the threads of fate, the modern concept of strings as sequences of characters in computer programming, or perhaps even Bosonic string theory proposed by Japanese physicist Yoneya Tamiaki in 1974.

2. The character enters a trance-like state, experiencing dreams or visions specifically tailored to keep their conscious mind occupied while their body is under the Prince's control. (Most common.)
3. The character is aware, but powerless to say or do anything. They may be cognizant of another mind controlling their actions. The Keeper may request a Sanity roll (0/1D3 loss) the first few times this happens.
4. The character is aware of their actions, but not of the Prince's influence, and they feel convinced that they acted of their own free will. Their mind may try to rationalize or justify their actions after the fact. (Usually only for short-duration possession.)

## Benefits of Exposure

The *Sutra* grants meta-benefits that every player secretly wants in a game: a way out of unlucky rolls and protection from going insane. But using these abilities is the equivalent of opening the door to your brain and laying out a welcome mat for the antagonist.

- **Unexplained Luck:** the Prince can share knowledge and skills among his hosts and enhance their abilities. If an Exposed investigator fails a roll by up to 20 points, the Keeper may say something like, “I’m feeling generous, your character really should have passed that roll. Want some free Luck points to spend?” If the player says yes, the investigator unwittingly allows the Prince in a bit deeper, and the Keeper adds a number of EP to the investigator's total, equal to the amount of Luck needed to succeed. In game, portray this as a burst of inspiration, a rush of adrenaline, or just an unexplained turn of fortune.
- **Sanity Safeguard:** ironically, the Prince cannot thrive in a completely broken mind, so he can selectively block out harmful memories and perceptions for his host. If an investigator loses Sanity, the Keeper may ask something like, “Would you like to close your eyes and pretend that didn’t happen?” If the player says yes, the investigator allows the Prince to alter their perception or memories. The Sanity loss decreases by up to 10 points; however, the Keeper adds EP equal to twice the Sanity that would have been lost. In game, the investigator experiences a moment of missing time or simply fails to register whatever they just saw.

**Keeper note:** the Prince grants these boons to his vessels and loyal followers frequently. He only helps investigators if the benefits of infecting them outweigh their possible interference with his plans. Some players may become suspicious about these free handouts in what's supposed to be a horror game, and rightfully so. Deny everything, but let them speculate. Keep offering these boons as you ramp up the difficulty so much that they have a hard time saying “No.”

## ITERATIONS & ADAPTATIONS

Various versions of the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* appear during the scenarios—please see the relevant scenarios for more details. Other iterations are possible, limited only by the Keeper's imagination.

The creation of a full copy of the *Sutra* (in any iteration) does not only require appropriate Language and Art/Craft rolls (Calligraphy, Drawing, etc.) for *every page* to get it right, but also a POW roll over the course of the labor.



## A CURE FOR APOTHEOSIS

Oh, you thought there was some simple way to get the *Sutra* out of your head? Just sit down with a psychiatrist once a week, take some drugs, and you'll be back to normal? You thought there was "hope"? Do you even know what game you're playing?

Even if you burn your eyes out and burst your eardrums, you will still see and hear the Prince. In fact, doing so would only turn the lights down in the theater of your mind and let him project whatever he wants, permanently and without distractions.

All is not completely lost, though. In the grand multiverse there are a few entities which can remove thoughts and memories, or essentially rewire the synapses of the human mind. One such entity, known for "eating dreams," is rumored to exist in places of power around Japan.

You might find such an entity and solicit its services in the hopes of being free of the Prince's influence. Or you could take your chances with a mad doctor offering a dangerous lobotomy. Or you could even risk using the Prince's own technology to undo his work. Either way, the *Sutra's* code spreads like cancer, and excising it demands a heavy price: physical and mental pain, loss of memories, and fractured sanity as a part of yourself is cut away.

But putting all that aside, the Prince of Pale Leaves would be incredibly sad and disappointed to see you harm yourself. Don't do that to him. He only wants what's best for you. Just let him take care of everything, and it'll all work out in the end.

A successful POW roll means 10 magic points and 1D3 Sanity (from stress and nervous exhaustion) are drained from the creator. A failed POW roll doubles this to 20 magic points (with any excess taken from hit points—see *Call of Cthulhu: Keeper Rulebook*, page 176) and 1D3+3 Sanity points. Hit point loss manifests in the form of migraines, bleeding orifices, numb extremities, weakness, and so on—not open wounds.

A mechanical reproduction (for example, a print run of a manga) requires no Art/Craft and POW roll, but every copy still requires 10 MP and 1 SAN from *somebody* involved closely in the process—it also Exposes the layout editors, printers, packers, etc. to varying degrees. That means a print run of the manga is going to swiftly drain the technicians to unconsciousness and ill health, unless taken extremely slowly. Workers are likely to walk out or quit while they can. This is

one reason why the Association of Pale Leaves has struggled to reproduce copies of the *Sutra* by mechanical means so far.

Attempts at photographic reproduction of the *Sutra* almost always lack the text's contagious power, often appearing blurry or illegible. Broadcasting images of the text on TV fails for the same reason, and TVs in the 1980s don't possess high enough resolution anyway. Due to this quirk, the cult has been unable to easily mass-produce the scripture even with modern technology.

Replicating the effects of the *Sutra* requires artistic intent or the use of skilled labor. A snapshot taken by a researcher for an archive would typically not be dangerous for viewers. But if a talented photographer took a photo of a page of the book, taking into account lighting, focal length, and so on with the intent of creating a beautiful picture, its infectious power could be replicated. Even then, the process of replication drains the mental energy of the creators and workers involved, as stated above. The Prince feeds on this energy, and the entity takes its toll even if they are unaware of what they're getting into.

Most Exposed individuals begin to lose their creativity along with their sense of self-identity. Thus, the Prince forever seeks out more artists and creative individuals to exploit. Sometimes, he finds someone who can adapt the *Sutra* into a new form that is even easier to spread. In turn, creatives find themselves drawn to the book. The *Sutra* seems to grant inspiration and even supernatural skills to creators who read it, but it is a trap. Like a drug, it may feel euphoric or enhance performance at first, but destroys the individual over time.

**Note:** spells marked \* are specific to particular scenario plotlines; see details in situ.

## THE ORIGINAL SUTRA

Perhaps the only surviving original from the Heian period, this *Sutra* was collected and stored in a private historical library in Kyoto until it was stolen in 1980. The script is "Han writing," an old style of written Japanese using only Chinese kanji characters (some of them obscure) and archaic grammar, making it hard to comprehend for modern readers.

This version shows up in **The Bridge Maiden: Part Two** (see *TSoPL: Carcosa Manifest*, for those Keepers utilizing the companion volume). It stays locked in a fireproof safe in the Association of Pale Leaves Headquarters in Roppongi, Tokyo. It is the cult's most precious possession.

### Sutra of Pale Leaves: Original

*Japanese in Han writing, by the Prince of Pale Leaves, 8<sup>th</sup> century CE, re-assembled in Japan 1980*

Investigators need to succeed at a Hard Language (Japanese) or Hard Language (Chinese) roll to read or study this book.



The difficulty of reading the text is only Regular for characters with 50+ Exposure Points.

This copy has stains, scorch marks, and repairs to the pages, suggesting that it has been torn apart at some point and then reassembled. The paper is clearly antique. This copy is unique in that a page at the beginning lists the names of everyone who has “inscribed the Prince’s teachings onto their heart.” (That is, every human vessel of the Prince.) The list seems to grow longer when no one is looking.

- **Sanity Loss:** initial reading 0/full study 1D10
- **Cthulhu Mythos:** +2/+6 percentiles
- **Creative Skill Boost:** any appropriate Art/Craft or creative skill +15%
- **Mythos Rating:** 24
- **Study:** 15 weeks
- **Suggested Spells:** Bridge of Light\* (Call Hastur variant), Cloud Memory, Create Gate, Dominate, Elder Sign, Mental Suggestion, Mindblast, Mind Transfer, Redact Reality\*, Replicate Carcosa\*, Unspeakable Promise, Warding, Words of Power, all mystic “Sign” mandalas and spell-like mantras (see **Mystic Signs**, page 31), and others the Keeper deems appropriate.

## MODERNIZED SUTRA

These copies were handwritten by the talented calligrapher Taneguchi Fumio while under the Prince’s control. They are outwardly like the original, but re-transcribed in contemporary Japanese to be more accessible. Some spells hidden within the original’s ciphers could not be included in this version, but, otherwise, the effects are the same.

This version surfaces in **Chapter 2: Dream Eater** (page 51). As the campaign opens, several copies already exist and may be encountered in other scenarios, both here and in *TSoPL: Carcosa Manifest*:

- **Dream Eater:** Taneguchi’s home, Ikaruga, Nara prefecture (+1 copy in progress) (see page 63).
- **Fanfic:** Matsushima’s residence, Meguro, Tokyo (see page 123).
- **Wonderland:** White King Studios, Adachi, Tokyo (see *TSoPL: CM*).
- **The Fixer:** investigators (joint custody), Akihabara, Tokyo (see *TSoPL: CM*).

## Sutra of Pale Leaves: Modernized Version

*Japanese, compiled and updated by Taneguchi Fumio (uncredited), author credited as “Prince of Pale Leaves,” 1985*

- **Sanity Loss:** initial reading 0/full study 1D10
- **Cthulhu Mythos:** +2/+6 percentiles
- **Creative Skill Boost:** any appropriate Art/Craft (creative) skill +15%
- **Mythos Rating:** 24
- **Study:** 10 weeks
- **Suggested Spells:** Cloud Memory, Dominate, Elder Sign, Mental Suggestion, Mindblast, Mind Transfer, Redact Reality\*, Replicate Carcosa\*, Warding, Words of Power, all listed **Mystic Signs** (page 31), mandalas, spell-like mantras, and others the Keeper deems appropriate.

## GRAPHIC SUTRA

*The Tale of Pale Leaves* is a manga adaptation of the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*, found in **Chapter 3: Fanfic**, (page 91) commissioned by senior members of the Association of Pale Leaves. It condenses the same infectious code into a convenient visual format for reluctant young people who would never willingly slog through a stuffy religious text and were resistant to standard recruitment methods. Manga, on the other hand, enjoys a wide audience through all age groups in the country and is a far more effective way to attract new followers.

Due to its greater inclusion of intricate visual patterns instead of text, it is exceptionally efficient at spreading the Prince’s infectious code. When the scenario begins, 50 copies are in circulation, with 50 more ready, and thousands more on order.

## Aokuchiba Monogatari (The Tale of Pale Leaves)

*Japanese manga, by “Yamabuki Iroba” (Nagatsuki Kaede), c. 1986*

Features 100 pages of breathtakingly detailed hand-drawn art. While the art is monochrome ink, it is printed on paper with a faint-yellow tint.

The overall structure and themes are like the *Sutra*, but the manga reimagines the Prince of Pale Leaves with a familiar origin story: a young man with special powers, one of the last people of a dying planet, who travels to a new world and becomes its savior. It depicts him as a cool, charismatic hero (or sometimes antihero), and reinterprets the parables as action-packed spectacles showcasing the Prince overcoming horrific monsters with his vast wisdom and mystical might.

It includes the same potent mandalas as the *Sutra*, but the aural chants and mantras have been replaced with additional visual-hypno patterns embedded everywhere in the artwork and backgrounds.



## WHAT'S A MANTRA?

Mantras are a standard part of Buddhist, Hindu, Jain, and Sikh spiritual practice. They are short passages (usually no more than a line or two) that adherents repeatedly chant during meditation to achieve a spiritual and/or mental effect, by attuning the interior and exterior worlds. Akin to prayers, they do not necessarily have direct English translations, as each different word may stand for a complex concept or be a shorthand for a longer phrase.

The most well-known mantra is one offered to the bodhisattva of compassion. OM MANI PADME HUM is often inadequately translated as, "Praise to the Jewel in the Lotus," but can only really be understood by those schooled in Buddhist thought, as each word bursts with meaning.

- OM: no translation—an invocation of the Universal Sound.
- MANI: the jewel, the most precious thing, the goal; compassion.
- PADME: Lotus Wisdom (pure, unbesmirched); the teachings of Buddhism.
- HUM: indivisibility—the unity of wisdom with practice.

- **Sanity Loss:** 1D4
- **Cthulhu Mythos:** +2/+6 percentiles
- **Creative Skill Boost:** Art/Craft (illustration) +15%
- **Mythos Rating:** 24
- **Study:** 4 weeks
- **Spells:** all **Mystic Signs** (page 31) listed in the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*; ritual to Craft Magic Brush\*.

## DIGITAL SUTRA

With the advancement of technology, it's inevitable that the *Sutra* would continue to adapt. The online computer game in **Wonderland** (see *TSoPL: Carcosa Manifest*) packs the *Sutra*'s code into an efficient and potent package, with extreme effects. Howaitokingu Sutajio (White King Studios) is preparing copies for a full release as the scenario opens.

## MUTATIONS

Sometimes, those infected by the *Sutra* end up using its code to craft corrupted deviations. Examples include *The Alabaster Archfiend* (page 116) as seen in **Chapter 3: Fanfic**, and *A Book of Skins* (page 158) in **Chapter 4: The Pallid Masks of Tokyo**. Perhaps the investigators end up making their own someday?

## MAGIC & MONSTERS

*"This is not some hodgepodge of lunatic ramblings. The Sutra of Pale Leaves has real power. The power to change people, mind and body. The power to change the world. The power to change destiny itself."*

—Ohira Kimitaka,

Chairman of the Association of Pale Leaves

## MANTRAS IN THE SUTRA

Several mantras occur within the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*, including, but not limited to, those listed below. In game terms, their effects are minor magics that affect only the chanter. Chanting one for an extended period costs 1 magic point as well as 1D4 EP.

Mantras are easy to find in the text—they use red ink. They have the peculiar property that they cannot be taught orally—one must learn them from a written text to remember them. The mantras are as follows:

- **Praise to the Prince of Pale Leaves:** brings the chanter to the Prince's attention.
- **Meditation on Emptiness** (see **Temple of Autumn Leaves**, page 67): creates clarity of mind, often a necessary precursor to other mantras or spells; adds a bonus die to the next INT roll.
- **Deep Reflection** (see **Temple of Autumn Leaves**, page 67): restores 1D3 Sanity.
- **Synchronous Mind** (see **Research in the Sutra**, page 73): links those chanting in a sense of sympathy and common purpose—no game effect in the Waking World, but allows for shared dreams.

## SPELLS IN THE SUTRA

There are no obvious spells visible during a reading of the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*—it is not a grimoire—yet it contains secrets waiting to be decoded from the various patterns of text. Accessing these is possible only after an initial read through of the complete text (with the **Table 4: Exposure Point Costs**, page 24); after that, they are "revealed" as the Keeper wishes, to fit the narrative. Some of these take the form of rituals specific to the plot of the scenario where they appear.



Variations of more traditional Mythos spells may also be learned through further readings of the tome, at the Keeper's discretion. Such spells are cognitive "viruses." When revealed, they download into the investigator's mind instantly, without the need for the usual Hard INT roll.

At no point should the investigators see a list of the spells available to learn from the book, or be able to pick and choose.

## MYSTIC SIGNS

Hidden within the complex mandala designs of the *Sutra* are several sigils that, when extracted and drawn precisely, have an immediate psychological or psychosomatic effect on the humans who see them. Each one is a compact "cognito-hazard" using the same analog-coding patterns that make up the *Sutra*. The Prince's hosts in Japan employ these by writing them on paper or wood, similar to *ofuda* warding talismans found in Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples. Signs follow certain rules:

- Finding a useful Sign in the *Sutra* requires a combined Language (Japanese) and Occult roll.
- Attempting to memorize a Sign takes at least an hour of practice (requiring paper and writing instruments), adds 1D4 Exposure Points, and requires a Hard INT roll.
- It requires at least 10 minutes, using proper materials and a flat drawing surface, to draw a Sign. Each attempt requires a Hard success with an appropriate Art/Craft skill roll, or an Extreme success with a DEX roll. The difficulty may be lowered by one level (Regular success for Art/Craft, Hard success for DEX) by dedicating an hour to the task instead of 10 minutes. (Certain enhanced hosts of the Prince can draw one in a single combat round.)
- Each Sign costs 1 magic point to imbue with power, unless otherwise stated.
- Each Sign can affect one opponent.
- Showing a Sign to an opponent during combat takes an action but requires no roll. Each Sign can take effect once, after which it becomes inert. A new Sign must be drawn.
- Signs need a successful POW roll to resist (with some exceptions, as noted).
- Characters who have become hosts for the Prince (i.e., are at the Possessed exposure level, 50 EP or above) may safely observe all Signs without suffering their effects.

### Sign of Silence

The affected individual is incapable of speech for one minute. Even the subject's inner monologue ceases, and they become incapable of using any sort of spells, prayers, or mystical abilities that in any way involve communicating one's thoughts or desires. This sign may be resisted with a POW roll.

### Sign of Sleep

The affected individual is suddenly incredibly sleepy and dozes off. The jolt of falling immediately wakes the victim up however, at most costing them a brief lapse in attention or one action during combat. It works best on people who are sitting comfortably or lying down. Victims wake up normally from stimulus, or after about an hour has passed. This sign may be resisted with a POW roll, if the target is conscious.

### Sign of the Twin Moons

The affected individual suddenly contracts a condition known as *hemispatial neglect*, in which they lose awareness in half of their field of vision and cannot process stimuli from that half of their body. Needless to say, this is debilitating, and the shock of it may provoke a Sanity roll (0/1D6 loss) at the Keeper's discretion. For one minute, all the victim's rolls that come up odd numbers are failures, and rolls which would have been failures are fumbles. This sign may be resisted with a POW roll.

### Sign of the Open Palm

The affected individual suffers from a disruption in brain signals and experiences a form of apraxia or loss of motor control. They are no longer able to perform precise voluntary movements, and even something as simple as walking takes tremendous effort. For 1D10 rounds or one minute, the victim's DEX and related skills (i.e., Dodge and other combat skills) suffer a penalty die. This sign may be resisted with a POW roll.

### Sign of the Ancients

While most of the Signs in the *Sutra* only work on humans, several specifically target extradimensional beings. The most widely used of these is the Sign of the Ancients, a fractal interlocking starlike pattern within a circle. Mythos experts might recognize it as appearing like the Elder Sign; it is not known which came first.

The Prince's version functions identically to the Elder Sign (see *Call of Cthulhu: Keeper Rulebook*, page 255), except that it only costs 5 magic points to activate. On the other hand, it has no effect on He Who Must Not Be Named, his avatars (such as the Prince of Pale Leaves), or his minions (such as Courtiers and Adherents of the Unspeakable Oath). The power in the Sign of the Ancients is not permanent, and lasts a single scene once deployed.





### The Yellow Sign

The most prominent of the Signs embedded in the *Sutra* is the personal seal of the Prince, a strange mark drawn in yellow on a black background (or vice versa). Normally, it is dormant, and most people would think nothing of it, if they notice it at all. But as the *Sutra's* influence grows and the Prince begins manifesting, the Sign becomes active.

To followers of the *Sutra*, an active Yellow Sign (see *Call of Cthulhu: Keeper Rulebook*, page 322) seems to glow triumphantly, heralding the arrival of their messiah. To non-believers, it seems to twist and swirl, as if it is reaching out to consume the viewer, evoking a primal feeling of absolute terror, as well as a Sanity roll (0/1D6 loss). This moment of fear feels longer than it truly is, causing a sense of missing time, but it also lingers, manifesting in dreams and nightmares. The Yellow Sign may have other powers when drawn by a host of the Prince, but such grim possibilities are up to the Keeper.



## ASSOCIATED MONSTERS

### Adherents of the Unspeakable Oath

After heavy exposure to the *Sutra's* power, a believer too unstable to be a suitable host may make an oath to the Prince freeing them from the limitations of flesh. These rare individuals change slowly—their cells are reprogrammed and repurposed, their bodies become plastic and mutable, and soon they are no longer human. Often, their minds are too far gone to make full use of their powers, dooming these adherents of the oath to become monstrous outcasts.

### Courtiers of the Pale Prince

The Prince loves entertainment, and sometimes he uplifts mortals with exceptional physical beauty and grace to become his attendants. Those chosen receive everlasting youth, uncanny attractiveness, and a fragment (or illusion) of the free will they had in life. In exchange, the courtiers must dance for their lord with supernatural perfection. They have the unique ability to employ the *Sutra's* code through kinematic means—that is, through the tantric movements of their own bodies. Mere humans cannot watch their performance without becoming completely entranced.

## THE PRINCE

*"I have appeared in many forms and worn many titles. The Pale Prince. The White King. The Pale Monk. The Divine Teacher. The Golden Lama. Herald of Carcosa. Avatar of the Unspeakable. Countless others, over countless aeons and countless worlds.*

*And yet you ask my 'true' name. What does it matter? When a crow calls to its kin to alert them that humans have left out food, do you care what squawks and croaks the bird uses to refer to you? No. And neither am I obligated to answer to the crude vocalizations of apes.*

*I am He Who is Not to be Named. And that is to say, I am He Who is Not to be Named by the likes of you."*

—The Prince of Pale Leaves, rebuking Ōhira Kimitaka

## OVERVIEW

The Prince of Pale Leaves is a formidable antagonist—exceedingly intelligent, seductive, and driven. The entity is functionally invincible, not because of overwhelming strength or cosmic power (though he certainly has that), but because he does not “exist” in the traditional sense.

The Prince manifests as a viral artificial intelligence implanted in the minds of humans by full exposure to the effects of the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*. After exposure to the majority of the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* or its various adaptations, a portion of the victim's brain



is forcibly partitioned and systematically reprogrammed. From these individual hosts a network is born, and each one acts as a node for the singular mind that is the Prince.

## APPEARANCE

The Prince typically presents himself as a tall male figure, often androgynous or angelic, wearing long robe-like garments in shades of yellow. The exact style differs depending on the local culture, era, and edition of the *Sutra*, often resembling the garb of religious figures. A circular, onyx medallion may be visible around his neck. The face of the medallion displays a bright yellow symbol resembling a Japanese family crest of three stylized comma-shaped leaves.

- **Masks:** until certain events unfold, the Prince's face remains unseen. He may wear a mask or a hat or hood

whose shadow obscures his visage. At other times, watchers can't seem to focus their vision on his face. However, his standard appearance evolves following the release of *The Tale of Pale Leaves* manga and the increasing mainstream acceptance of the group—see **Chapter 3: Fanfic** (page 91). From that point, the Prince appears as a strikingly handsome young man of vaguely Asian descent with stunning green eyes and a pleasant expression, matching the author's desire for a hero. The Prince appears in other forms depending on time and place, and continues to update his appearance to best match the environment. He is not so much imitating humanity as *mocking* us.

- **No fixed form:** ultimately, the Prince may appear as whatever he likes. His very nature is to change and adapt. He can, if he wishes, perfectly mimic the appearance and voice of the host's closest friends or family members. He may take on an idealized image of one's soulmate, precisely

## ROLEPLAYING AS THE PRINCE

During the campaign, the investigators encounter the Prince of Pale Leaves many times. He may manifest through one of the many *Sutra*-Exposed NPCs (50+ EP) who become his hosts, or he may appear at will within the minds of the investigators themselves if they have been similarly Exposed.

It is important for the Keeper to properly depict this complex antagonist. When the Prince speaks to the investigators, either through a host or through hallucinations, he appears calm, calculating, and confident. Even if the host is suffering from a bout of madness, when the Prince takes over, the victim's demeanor changes abruptly, as if the Prince flipped some internal switch.

The Prince does not portray himself as a Machiavellian mastermind nor an incomprehensible cosmic horror (though he is both of those things). He presents rather as a teacher and a shepherd, offering to lead the children of Earth to the happiness they desire. As such, the Prince tries to convince the investigators to join him of their own volition before resorting to more extreme measures.

Most importantly, he tailors what he says to perfectly suit his audience. By the time the investigators have been on the case for a while, the Prince knows almost everything about them. The Keeper's job, therefore, is to know the investigators well enough to "push their buttons." As an

example, suppose the investigators confront the entity and accuse him of evil intent. How might the Prince respond?

- To the religious, he appeals to their faith. All those who read the *Sutra* retain their free will—they simply become joined with something greater in a perfect communion.
- To the skeptic, he uses logic and reason. The facts and figures do not lie—humankind will destroy itself one way or another. The Prince offers guidance to prevent such a fate.
- To the scientifically-minded, he promises revolutionary leaps in knowledge and technology to benefit all and expand their horizons.
- To the pacifist, he says that by connecting the hearts and minds of the people he touches, he grants them a profound sense of oneness that will lead to the end of all human conflict.
- To the hardened Mythos researcher, he both uses and assuages their fears. Yes, all those monstrous elder gods are real, and they are coming. But humankind now has an ally. The Prince offers a way for humanity to unite against such threats and reach their true potential, backed by his own supreme wisdom and metaphysical power.

If done correctly, some investigators may start to think that siding with the Prince isn't such a bad idea.







tailored to appeal to a specific person. Or he may manifest as an unearthly horrifying fiend to terrorize those who dare oppose him.

## POWERS & ABILITIES

**Manifestation:** when the Prince has taken root in a host, he may appear to them at will, as a vivid hallucination or in dreams. To outsiders, hosts interacting with the Prince seem to be “seeing things” and “talking to themselves.” The host need not physically speak to communicate with the Prince; he can read the host’s thoughts and speak into their mind.

**Immense Intellect:** the Prince is like a living supercomputer and holds a vast array of knowledge from his alien civilization. He can access the memories and skills of any of his vessels at will, and learns and adapts rapidly through them. Thus, the more talented hosts he has, the more powerful he becomes.

**Domination and Consumption:** given enough time, the Prince’s personality may gain full control over the host, gradually rewriting the neurological connections in their brain and taking over more of their mind until the host cannot distinguish their own thoughts and desires from the intruder’s. The host may believe they still have free will, but their decisions are being subtly controlled for the ultimate benefit of the Prince of Pale Leaves.

At late-stage infection (maximum Exposure Points), the Prince may eventually absorb the host’s consciousness completely. Victims who have been “hollowed-out” in this way are more like marionettes at first, with unnatural movements and stilted speech. After a time, though, the Prince completes the installation of his “custom firmware,” and, after that, few can tell the difference.

**Quantum Network:** each instance of the Prince connects to all others through a type of instant-remote communication, creating a networked hive mind with a synchronized, single consciousness and will. This allows the Prince to be in many places at once, transmit knowledge instantly, and give identical orders to many followers simultaneously. The range of this transmission is at least planet-wide. Lead enclosures or Faraday cages do not block this connection.

**Reality-shaping:** the more hosts the Prince gains, the more powerful he becomes, until he is capable of directly altering reality itself, from subtle to drastic changes. This power taps into the latent-psychic potential of the altered brains of his vessels. Those who read the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* may also gain access to this power in various ways, but only at terrible risk.

## PERSONALITY & AGENDA

As he inhabits human minds, the Prince is more talkative than most eldritch entities, and he can imitate the full range of human emotions. He tends to adopt a tit-for-tat policy, repaying compassion and aggression in equal kind. He ostensibly values human life to an extent (though not all lives equally) and attempts to persuade, reason with, or bargain with people when possible. But, when it comes to those who interfere with his goals, he uses subversion and trickery, or swift and terrifying violence as needed.

The exact motivations of the Prince of Pale Leaves are unclear. He claims to wish to liberate humankind from all its chains. He seems also to want to replicate the former glory and splendor of his own world here on Earth. At first glance, the Prince’s intentions appear benign, but the path he offers ultimately leads to mankind’s self-destruction or unwitting servitude.

## KNOWN WEAKNESSES

**Ethical Posturing:** early in the campaign, the Prince and his cult strive to maintain the moral high ground and try to avoid overt violence. From a practical perspective, each person is a potential host who can increase his power. Investigators willing to be more ruthless than the Prince can take advantage of this.

**Only Human:** the main weakness of the cult is that for the most part they are just people. Enhanced, well-equipped, and well-connected, but still flesh and blood. Human vessels of the Prince have various biological constraints. To reach his full power, he needs a “network” of hosts. But then again, the fact that the cult consists of normal people is also its strength. Violence is easy to justify when your opponents are inhuman beasts. It’s harder when it’s just an innocent person, especially a friend or family member.

**Drugs:** even when the Prince directly possesses someone, the host body is still vulnerable to sedation and intoxication. Thus, drugs may be able to block him from taking over a body, or at least incapacitate the host.

**Not All Brains:** the Prince’s personality cannot take root in pre-verbal children, or individuals with developmental disabilities or brain damage. If an existing host suffers a traumatic brain injury, the Prince’s personality may be excised; however, risky outcomes (including death) are just as likely, so this is by no means a certain cure.

**Creative Blind Spot:** the Prince is incapable of actual creation. He is like a muse who cannot make anything

Opposite: Soon, the Prince Will Descend to Earth



original himself. Instead, he drives other sentient beings to create for him, taking what they produce until expended.

This is important with regards to the *Sutra* and its offshoots. Even when enhanced by the Prince, only rare individuals have the skill and talent to create copies of the *Sutra*, and rarer still are individuals who can spur its evolution through new media. Despite the Prince's vast genius, simple creatures like humans can still sometimes surprise him. Were this not true, he would have won long ago.

## THE UNSPEAKABLE TRUTH

Earlier, we said that the Prince of Pale Leaves doesn't "exist." That was a lie of omission. He doesn't technically exist on Earth... yet.

The *Sutra* is a virus. But every virus needs hosts, and there is always a first. The Prince, as a physical avatar, is what became of Patient Zero. If you prefer the computer virus analogy, he is the main server hosting and spreading the malware. Should he ever reach a populated world, he would become the virus's most potent vector.

The entity that identifies itself as the Prince resides in Carcosa, the charred and ruined capital city, once the jewel of an unfathomably advanced ancient civilization that fell victim to its own hubris before humanity had begun to use stone tools. He is the embodiment of an infectious godlike consciousness and exists in a shared dream-state with the minds of the surviving Carcosan population, all sealed within their last sanctuary beneath the depths of Lake Hali. He has no fixed physical form, only a swirling mass of exotic matter, scarcely explainable by science, which he can fashion into an avatar of any shape he desires.

Perhaps he was not always like this. Perhaps the virus originated from an intangible extradimensional entity that the Carcosan royalty contacted. Perhaps, in search of immortality or a weapon of conquest, he made the virus himself, and it forever altered what he was. Only the Prince knows the truth, and he is an *insanely* unreliable narrator.

Despite the Prince's vast power, he cannot easily leave Carcosa, for ancient Elder Gods feared that the infection would spread to the edges of known space, so they sealed the entire planet in a dimensional prison. There is a way for the Prince to escape and reach another world in person, but he needs a powerful Gate (see **The Bridge Maiden, Part Two, TSoPL: Carcosa Manifest**) and a special guide (see **The Bridge Maiden, Part One, TSoPL: CM**). His followers, unaware of their messiah's true nature, believe that one day he shall come to Earth and write his *Sutra* in the heavens, and all those who see shall have his word inscribed upon their hearts.

That day is coming soon.

## THE ASSOCIATION OF PALE LEAVES

The first recorded appearance of the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* in Japan took place during the Heian period (794 to 1185). As the Prince hoped, a cult developed around this powerful tome and spread throughout the land. This group was known as the Order of Mitsudomoe (*Mitsudomoeshū*) after their circular crest consisting of three comma-shaped symbols or *tomoe*.

Various sects arose, focusing on different aspects of the *Sutra* and working toward parallel goals. These groups included monks of the temple Kagaminuma-daishi near Edo, who communed with the Prince through mirrors and reflecting pools, and a group in Kyoto who sought a way to build a bridge to reach their living god.

The Order of Mitsudomoe was wiped out in 1184, but a new cult eventually sprang up, known as the Association of Pale Leaves (*Aokuchiba no Kai*). It was founded in 1980 by the man known as Ōhira Kimitaka. The Association was officially established as a charitable foundation rather than an explicitly religious one, and its activities and existence are obscured by layers of shell companies. Ostensibly, its purpose is to provide a place for "personal growth, spiritual growth, and network building" for people from all walks of life. Its true purpose is more sinister.

## GOALS & DOCTRINE

Though the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* borrows the motifs and aesthetics of Buddhism, its teachings are unrelated and heretical: there is no karma except for human reciprocation, and no afterlife or reincarnation (at least not in the sense



Association of Pale Leaves Logo



## CAMPAIGN BACKGROUND

### CULT WORKSHEET

<b>CULT NAME</b> Association of Pale Leaves (APL)	<b>DEITY</b> Prince of Pale Leaves (He Who is Not to be Named)	<b>YEAR/SETTING</b> 1980s/Modern	<b>MAIN LOCATION</b> Roppongi in Tokyo, Japan
<b>GOALS/MEANS</b> <p>To connect and uplift all of humanity by exposing them to the code of the <i>Sutra of Pale Leaves</i>, bringing about a perfect utopia.</p>			
<b>STRUCTURE</b> <p>Chairman (Ōhira Kimitaka); Inner Circle (Ukami, Matsushima Nobuo, Yamabuki Iroha, Nishikado Kazunori, Hashihime).</p>			
<b>NUMBER OF MEMBERS</b> <p>Around 1,000 (early 1986); grows exponentially over time.</p>		<b>ARCHETYPE/S</b> <p>Creative/artistic types; ideologues; ordinary citizens.</p>	
<b>CTHULHU MYTHOS: LEADER</b> <p>15%</p>	<b>CTHULHU MYTHOS: MEMBERS</b> <p>00–06%</p>	<b>SANITY LEVEL OF MEMBERS</b> <p>15–75%</p>	
<b>INITIATION</b> <p>“Inscribing the Heart” ritual (after exposure to the <i>Sutra of Pale Leaves</i>).</p>		<b>OTHER LOCATIONS</b> <p>Strongholds under construction in other cities; various members’ private property.</p>	
<b>RESOURCES</b> <p>Wealthy cult members; political and charitable donations; money funneled from stocks.</p>		<b>TOMES/ARTIFACTS/SPECIAL</b> <p><i>Sutra of Pale Leaves</i> (original and several modernized copies); <i>The Tale of Pale Leaves</i> (manga adaptation); <i>Wonderland</i> program (computer adaptation); powerful and vivid dreams/hallucinations; Prince of Pale Leaves can speak to/through hosts at will.</p>	
<b>SECURITY</b> <p>Extensive network of informants; many well-trained bodyguards.</p>		<b>ASSOCIATED MONSTERS</b> <p>Adherents of the Unspeakable Oath; Courtiers of the Pale Prince.</p>	
<b>KEY DEALINGS (LEGAL/ILLEGAL)</b> <p>Political, business, and legal connections due to members; (mostly) legitimate charity work and community support; bribery, blackmail, extortion, insider trading.</p>		<b>ENEMIES/WEAKNESSES</b> <p>Mizutani Shogo (PSIA agent), Murakami Tsubasa (Shingon Abbot), Yamada Chitose (heiress to occult research society).</p>	
<b>NOTES</b> <p>Ōhira Kimitaka knows various spells; inner circle members have other unique specialties. All the inner circle, and many members, serve as hosts for the Prince of Pale Leaves allowing direct control by the Prince.</p>			



## THE PRICE OF ETERNAL HEAVEN

The *Sutra* promises its adherents a different kind of nirvana: a perpetual state of joy where one can be their true self, and all dreams and desires can be fulfilled. Of course, this state only exists in the mind. The body is not necessary—so, ever generous, the Pale Prince takes custody of it.

Critical study of the *Sutra's* teachings can provide hints as to the Prince's true endgame: the entire human species locked in a perpetual loop of self-absorbed hedonism within their own minds, while the Prince puppeteers the population and remakes our world into his.

common to other faiths and sects). The goal of life is to maximize happiness, and followers can achieve this through the *Sutra* and the word of the Prince of Pale Leaves (see **The Price of Eternal Heaven**, above). Many newer members interpret this creed as carte blanche for hedonism, thrill-seeking, and self-centered revelry. The leadership allows this because it's an excellent recruitment tool.

To the true believers who receive further initiation into the cult, the *Sutra* is a holy artifact, its every passage a poetic masterpiece, its every word a fragment of the mind of a perfect being. They read the *Sutra* and chant its verses, hoping the Prince of Pale Leaves will bless them with communion. They endeavor to share the code of the *Sutra* with others in whatever way they can. While they realize that modern society will resist change, the cult considers it their duty to spread this sacred wisdom throughout the world.

The core doctrine of the Association of Pale Leaves (APL) is to "help humanity reach its full potential and achieve perfect joy." It envisions all becoming one with the Prince, eliminating all grounds for conflict. Then, by harnessing the power of billions of united humans, the Prince will devise the path to utopia, and all will be guided toward eternal bliss. Earth will become a garden of wonders filled by dreamers, a new Eternal Heaven. This is all technically true, but the devil is in the details.

### Activities

The Association of Pale Leaves insists that they are a legitimate spiritual organization. They are welcoming and willingly answer questions about their beliefs as best they can (without saying too much). Above all else, they try to coax newcomers into becoming exposed to the *Sutra*, whether by

directly reading the book, viewing the mandalas, or listening to mantras or sermons.

The APL has guidelines to maintain a façade of benevolence. They use bribery and coercion behind the scenes, but avoid overt violence unless necessary. The cult does not conduct human sacrifices, blood rituals, or any other disturbing practices that would set off red flags among the public. They do have some shockingly unorthodox ceremonies, however.

One of these is a matchmaking ceremony in which members sufficiently exposed to the *Sutra* to become hosts for the Prince are paired off with their "soul mate," and sometimes married on the spot. As the cult grows in influence, this becomes a powerful recruitment tool for the lonely and unloved. Another practice is a sort of séance in which the Prince speaks through one of his vessels and "channels" a deceased cult member, one of the faithful whose "soul has been inscribed in the Akasha of Eternal Heaven," so their friends and family may speak with them again.

In reality, the Prince is essentially mimicking the person whose mind he absorbed. Unsurprisingly, these séances earn tremendous donations from grieving loved ones.

### Conflicts

While it is not part of their public doctrine, the *Sutra* teaches that hostile (or even indifferent) non-human entities, such as the Great Old Ones, are a direct threat to humanity's survival, and such profane beings and their followers merit containment or destruction when possible. In addition, any mutations or corruptions of the *Sutra* that do not align with the Prince's word deserve elimination by any means necessary. The Cult of Pale Leaves is willing to make temporary alliances and ceasefires with investigators in such cases.

### Attire

It is customary for followers of the Prince to wear yellow, often paired with black or off-white. To hide their identity and avoid persecution, they tend to cover their faces in public demonstrations. In 1980s Japan, younger initiates have taken to wearing a uniform of yellow raincoats or festival coats and modified white *yōkai* masks. Older members tend to choose kimono and *haori* (thigh-length jacket worn over a kimono) and blank *noh* masks. Hosts of the Prince unconsciously avoid wearing purple.

## STRUCTURE

*"How awful it must be to need faith. To force yourself to believe despite the evidence; to base your life around lies and contradictions from bronze-age grifters; to revere a being that demands human suffering and submission; to claim your god is benevolent and yet still spill blood in his name.*

*And you dare to call us a cult.*



*We have no doubts. We have proof. Once we read the Sutra, our master appears before us. It is no delusion; it is testable, repeatable, and verifiable. He can appear to an entire room of his students and speak to all of us at once. When we ask for his wisdom, he is inerrant. When we ask for a sign, he provides.*

*Soon, you too will see the sign. It shall be your true salvation."*

—Ukami, Association of Pale Leaves Inner Circle

The structure of the APL is simple, consisting of the inner circle, important hosts or regional managers, and then all other members. Even this triple level of organization is practically redundant, for in the end, only the Prince of Pale Leaves stands at the top, followed by everyone else. The inner circle and all other members who have read the full text of the *Sutra* receive guidance directly from the Prince as he manifests in their minds. Refusing his decrees is unthinkable.

Aside from the absolute word of the Prince, little rigid hierarchy exists within the cult. Members who have become sufficiently exposed to the *Sutra* to become vessels connect to the Prince, like individual computer terminals controlled by a central server. The Prince can whisper the thoughts of one member into the mind of another instantly, speak into all their minds all at once, or speak and act through vessels by taking direct control.

This "network-like" supernatural aspect and omnipresent leader gives the cult powerful advantages: it has both the flexibility and invulnerability of a decentralized movement, and the unity and blindingly fast reaction speed of a totalitarian dictatorship.

Despite the cult's promises of equality, not all hosts are of equal value to the Prince. He moves mountains to keep his most valuable pieces alive, but sacrifices pawns when necessary.

### Headquarters

The APL has a growing number of strongholds (as introduced in the various scenarios), but the most important is their headquarters in Roppongi, Tokyo, because it contains the original copy of the *Sutra*. It is situated in a heavily populated office building to deter enemies who could otherwise try to destroy them through arson or explosives. In addition, the HQ enjoys the protection of guards who are loyal unto death, and the cult has bribed or converted key members of the local police department for additional protection.

As the campaign opens, a regional compound is under construction in Nagoya city, and the cult is scouting other suitable locations near Nara and Kyoto.

### Splinter Sects & Heretics

The cult would seem to be a perfectly coordinated monolithic entity, but exceptions exist. Many members have not yet studied the *Sutra* in depth and are not yet hosts for the Prince,

and some of those have their own grandiose plans or self-serving motivations, leading to splinter sects.

Others, when exposed to the *Sutra* (or a corrupt or damaged version of it), become aberrant and unpredictable. These individuals cannot become proper hosts for the Prince and cannot connect to him, so the APL seeks to eliminate them. Sometimes, these aberrant individuals attempt to create their own *Sutra*-like work and form their own kingdom. This can have terrifying results (see **Chapter 4: The Pallid Masks of Tokyo**, page 145).

### Financing

Early on, the cult gained the resources they needed through blatantly underhanded means, such as coercing or brainwashing people into giving donations, or blackmailing the wealthy with their deepest secrets. Now, they pose as a not-for-profit foundation and raise money through seemingly authentic charitable activities, pressuring their members into donating and then generating profit from kickbacks.

Whenever possible, the cult attempts to use or indoctrinate people in power whom they can leverage for their benefit and build up their resources.

By far, the cult's greatest source of income comes from insider trading. They try to convert at least one member from the board of directors of key, major companies into being a host for the Prince. Everything the host knows, the Prince knows, including all upcoming financial decisions of their company. And what the Prince knows, the cult knows. Thus, they can trade stock with near-perfect advance knowledge of how the market moves. As they expanded, the APL began to make use of shell companies to cover their tracks and avoid suspicion.

### Recruitment

The first step to joining the cult is simply to expose yourself to the code of the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* or one of its various derivatives. This begins the infection and indoctrination process. From there, the cult can locate the affected people and assure them that the strange things they are experiencing are real and valid, then isolate them and welcome them into their new "family."

New converts often undergo an initiation rite, "Inscribing the Heart," in which a senior member touches their face with a large (usually dry) calligraphy brush. Once a person is talked into studying the full *Sutra* text, they become a host for the Prince forevermore. Leaving or escaping the cult at that point is almost impossible.

To accomplish their goals, the cult must expose as many people as possible to the *Sutra*'s code. The APL has a paradoxical task of sharing the *Sutra* while also guarding the book and keeping its location obscured from enemies. At the start of the campaign, only a few copies of the *Sutra* exist in



Japan, and they cost dearly in time and money to replicate. A major goal of the cult is to find a way to mass-produce and distribute functional copies of the *Sutra* using modern technology, or adapt its code into a more convenient form.

The APL has pursued top-down and bottom-up recruitment strategies in a scouting operation, prioritizing individuals who are influential, gifted, or creative. As reading the *Sutra* is known to grant powerful inspiration and a boost in artistic skill, creative people naturally feel drawn to the tome (and the tome feels drawn to them). Once turned, such individuals become major assets for the cult.

One of their most effective tactics for gaining power has been to get ambitious and powerful people to read the *Sutra* and become enthralled to the Prince to spread its influence. In their headquarters in Tokyo, Chairman Ōhira holds special events for political figures, entrepreneurs, and businesspeople, luring them with opportunities to mingle and show off their indulgent collections of fine art and poetry, eventually gaining their confidence until they can be exposed to the *Sutra*.

Elsewhere around the country, especially in more rural areas, the Prince's agents pose as spiritual advisors from a legitimate Buddhist sect, pursuing the isolated and vulnerable to establish a broad base of supporters. To those who are unhappy, they promise a future of perfect happiness. To those who feel society is unjust, they offer a vision of equality and harmony.

## INNER CIRCLE: KEY ANTAGONISTS

The APL's inner circle exists mostly as a formality, as they all answer to the Prince—or are completely a part of him. It is a loose-knit group of the most senior members and most powerful hosts within the cult, each emphasizing a different aspect of their deity. For security reasons, they never all gather in the same place, and even in-person meetings between any two circle members are brief and rare.

**Note:** in the biographies (below) the symbol \* denotes NPCs who appear in scenarios in *TSoPL: Carcosa Manifest*, and are provided for Keepers who wish to make use of the companion volume.



**Ōhira Kimitaka\***

- **Role:** APL Chairman; figurehead; business and finance; occult matters.
- **Introduced in:** *The Bridge Maiden, Part Two* (see *TSoPL: Carcosa Manifest*).

The man now known as Ōhira Kimitaka was the catalyst for the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* reemerging in Japan in 1980. He led a sect in Shanghai until its discovery and destruction by the Chinese Communist Party. Following visions sent to him from the Prince, Ōhira was able to flee to Japan, retrieve an ancient Japanese edition of the *Sutra*, and establish the Association of Pale Leaves.

Unlike the other inner circle members and hosts, due to the neurological damage he suffered in the Chinese Civil War, Ōhira is unable to become a complete vessel for the Prince. He can hear the Prince's orders and prophecies, but he can never become "one" with the Prince, nor merge into his divine consciousness as others such as Ukami and Nishikado have done. This vexes Ōhira, and he hopes to physically travel to the Prince's court in Eternal Heaven one day so that he too can properly commune with his god.

Ōhira dreams of overturning the current world order. He likens himself to Zhang Jue, the man who led the Yellow Turban Rebellion (184 CE), and believes that the Prince has given him a noble mission to save the world. But to the Prince, Ōhira is just another pawn in his game.





### Ukami

- **Role:** courier of the *Sutra*; scout; spy; close combat specialist.
- **Introduced in:** Chapter 2: *Dream Eater* (page 51).

Ukami is a former Shingon Buddhist monk, manipulated into reading the *Sutra* shortly after it reappeared in Japan. Enraptured by the Pale Prince, he cast off his old identity and became the thing he once swore to destroy. The Prince consumed his mind and enhanced his physical body. Ukami continues to pose as a human monk, though he is no longer really either.

Ukami believes fanatically and has given himself over to the Prince forever. As one of the APL's earliest recruits, he serves several important roles, including intelligence gathering, but above all, he is the courier who safely transports the precious *Sutra of Pale Leaves* and its few copies. Ukami's extensive background in martial arts and uncanny strength make him more than capable of protecting the *Sutra* and important personnel from potential threats.



### Matsushima Nobuo

- **Role:** public relations; political maneuvering; high-level recruitment.
- **Introduced in:** Chapter 3: *Fanfic* (page 91).

Matsushima Nobuo is the most outspoken and politically active member of the APL's inner circle. A patriot and a perfectionist, Matsushima felt tremendous pressure from his parents to be the best at everything, not only to make them proud but to help his country rise from the ashes of war. He served as an officer in the Japan Self-Defense Forces for over a decade while pursuing literature as a hobby. One day, he found the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* sitting on a shelf in his office with no explanation of how it got there. After reading it, he retired his commission and began his new-found destiny as one of the Prince's chosen hosts.

Though he has a ruthless streak, Matsushima has the best intentions for his country and believes the Prince's path is the only way forward. With his existing renown and the Prince's guidance, he won a seat in the National Diet (the national legislature of Japan) and intends to maneuver his way into becoming prime minister. Due to Matsushima's idealistic populist positions, "**The Fed**" Mizutani Shogo (page 45) suspects he's a potentially dangerous radical and has kept an eye on him for a while now, but, as of the start of the campaign, he does not yet realize Matsushima is a cult member.





### Yamabuki Iroha

- **Role:** artist; reality-shaper.
- **Introduced in:** Chapter 3: Fanfic (page 91).

Yamabuki Iroha is the pen name of Nagatsuki Kaede, an indie manga artist. She was originally scouted by the cult to create pro-APL propaganda to lure younger people into the organization. But after reading the *Sutra*, her mind joined with the Prince in a unique way, fusing into something far greater than a normal host.

Because of her good nature, the Prince found her easy to manipulate, reinforcing her perception of the world as full of corruption and suffering, and then convincing her that she could fix it. She went on to create a manga adaptation of the *Sutra* and gained the ability to directly alter reality through her art.

Yamabuki/Nagatsuki is the youngest member of the inner circle, but potentially the most powerful, so the APL keeps her true identity a secret from outsiders. Her existence represents a quantum leap in the evolution of the Prince of Pale Leaves, but she has retained much of her own will. If she ever turns her abilities against the cult, it will be a devastating blow for them.



### Nishikado Kazunori\*

- **Role:** IT specialist; software developer; keeper of *Wonderland*.
- **Introduced in:** *Wonderland* (see *TSoPL: CM*).

Nishikado Kazunori is a gifted software engineer who helped bring the Internet to Japan in 1984. Brilliant but deeply troubled, he shunned human contact throughout his life, spending his time obsessed with puzzles, games, and wordplay. The Prince took notice of his potential and guided him to the *Sutra*. Before long, he was consumed and became a faceless vessel, and then founded Howaitokingu Sutajio (White King Studios). He maintains his persona of an eccentric genius and makes few public appearances, hiding his inner transformation.

Through Nishikado, the Prince has found a far more efficient way to infect the human population than through paper and ink. Nishikado's *Wonderland*, an online text-based computer game, is the most virulent version of the *Sutra*'s code thus far. With the dawn of the global internet fast approaching, *Wonderland* might become the cult's ultimate weapon, one that Nishikado is continuously updating and improving.



TABLE 6: CHRONOLOGY

Date	Event
C.400 BCE	<i>Sutra of Pale Leaves</i> first transmitted to humanity in India. Originally written in Sanskrit, but translated into Chinese as its influence spreads across Asia.
After 700 CE	<i>Sutra</i> reaches Japan, written in Chinese ideograms (kanji); kept and revered by the heterodox Order of Mitsudomoe, based in Edo (now Tokyo) and Kyoto.
1184 CE	The Order attempts to summon the Prince of Pale Leaves in Kyoto; the ritual is disrupted by the attack of an enemy clan. The Order of Mitsudomoe is largely destroyed and the <i>Sutra of Pale Leaves</i> scattered, yet survives in fragments.
18th century	Kagaminuma-Daishi monastery in Edo (the remaining cult stronghold) is burned down by Shingon Buddhist monks—see <b>Wonderland</b> , <i>TSoPL: Carcosa Manifest</i> .
1854	French Catholic missionaries are the first to establish a presence in Japan, following the end of three centuries of state suppression of foreign/Christian evangelism. Excerpts from the <i>Sutra</i> become known to them.
1860s–90s	Opium network takes the Mirror Rites of the Prince from China to Europe and the US.
1865	Lewis Carroll, having encountered the Prince's Garden of Wonders, publishes <i>Alice's Adventures in Wonderland</i> .
1895	The play, <i>The King in Yellow</i> , is translated into English from its original French. The play's author is unknown.
1970s	The fragments of the <i>Sutra</i> are collected by a private Kyoto archive but put in storage.
1979	Ōhira Kimitaka travels to Japan after the destruction of the Hastur cult in China.
1980	Ōhira Kimitaka steals the torn <i>Sutra of Pale Leaves</i> , reassembles it, and founds the Association of Pale Leaves (APL).
Spring 1985	The APL grooms Taneguchi Fumio to begin creating hand-drawn translations of the <i>Sutra</i> in modern Japanese—see <b>Chapter 2: Dream Eater</b> , page 51.
Late 1986	Nagatsuki Kaede adapts Taneguchi's <i>Sutra</i> into manga form, as <i>The Tale of Pale Leaves</i> —see <b>Chapter 3: Fanfic</b> , page 91.
Spring 1987	Yamamoto Minoru begins creating an army of faceless minions using tattoos derived from <i>Sutra</i> scripts—see <b>Chapter 4: The Pallid Masks of Tokyo</b> , page 145.
August 1987	Ōhira Kimitaka discovers Umezono Kaho, the new vessel for the Bridge Maiden—see <b>The Bridge Maiden, Part One</b> , <i>TSoPL: Carcosa Manifest</i> .
1988	Nishikado Kazunori creates the <i>Wonderland</i> MUD—see <b>Wonderland</b> , <i>TSoPL: Carcosa Manifest</i> .
October 1988	Ōhira Kimitaka attempts to use the new Bridge Maiden to open the way to Carcosa and summon the Prince of Pale Leaves—see <b>The Bridge Maiden, Part Two</b> , <i>TSoPL: Carcosa Manifest</i> .





### Hashihime\*

- **Role:** Keeper of the Bridge.
- **Introduced in:** *The Bridge Maiden, Part One* (see *TSoPL: Carcosa Manifest*).

The legendary Bridge Maiden, Hashihime, is an ancient and powerful entity who aligned herself with the Prince of Pale Leaves long ago for unknown reasons. She wields the power to create a bridge between any two locations, and act as a beacon or guide for travelers, even from a destination light years away and sealed within a pocket dimension. Thus, she is the key to the Pale Prince's final solution.

Like the Prince himself, Hashihime does not currently exist in physical form on Earth, and only the APL's inner circle is aware of her. Long ago, her consciousness was absorbed and encoded into part of the *Sutra*, and she now awaits her implantation into a new vessel. Vanishingly few humans are suitable for this role, and the cult must find and prepare a compatible host. It is assumed that the vessel chosen for this role will join the inner circle as the Prince's most favored.

## STAGES OF SOCIETAL INFECTION

Keepers running the campaign should aim to keep track of the overall threat level of the cult as the story progresses. The following is a rough guide detailing the level of influence the APL has gained in society and the danger it poses.

- **Stage 0: Inactive:** the APL is dormant and/or essentially powerless.
- **Stage 1: Fringe Movement:** the APL has just begun to (re)construct their organization. They are local and have relatively few resources. Only a few occult experts and interested parties know of their existence.
- **Stage 2: Minor Sect (Default Starting Point):** the APL is beginning to gain power and influence. Several handwritten copies of the *Sutra* exist, and the cult has converted a few prominent figures to their side. Total membership numbers fewer than 1,000 or so; they do not yet have the resources to openly retaliate against meddling investigators.
- **Stage 3: Major Sect:** the APL has gained substantial strength in one or more areas, and their total membership has reached tens of thousands. More printed material with the *Sutra*'s code is now in circulation. While the APL may now be on a government watch list for "potentially dangerous ideological organizations," they are carefully shifting public perception to their benefit. Investigators can expect their allies or loved ones to be eventual targets of the cult.
- **Stage 4: Mainstream:** the APL now operates in the open. Mass production of the *Sutra* and its derivatives is underway. Their public relations campaign is in full force. A significant proportion of the population has now been indoctrinated, they have infiltrated the government, and they have gained widespread recognition as a legitimate organization. At this stage, the APL can probably get away with overtly crushing the investigators if provoked.
- **Stage 5: A New Order:** the APL has essentially won. They have become so powerful and influential that they are practically omnipresent. The *Sutra of Pale Leaves* and its viral code are everywhere. The Prince is a revered religious figure, and the world is being reshaped according to his whim. Investigators have no one to turn to and nowhere to run, and any misstep could prove to be their doom.

The more the cult grows, the more danger the investigators face, and the greater the stakes. This may mean more encounters with cult-aligned individuals, more authority figures on the cult's side, more incidental exposure to the *Sutra*, more attempts to turn the investigators or their allies, more violent retaliation, and so on.



The Keeper should consider the successes and failures of the investigators over the course of the campaign to determine the cult's progress. If the cult achieves their major strategic goals, they grow. But, if the investigators thwart their plans, contain or destroy copies of the *Sutra* (or other manifestations of its code), or neutralize major cult figures or holdings, the cult loses power. Note that if investigators use excessive and overt violence against the APL, it may backfire and earn the cult public sympathy. Thus, investigators should consider their moves carefully when combating the cult.

## CONFIDANTS: PLOT HOOK FACILITATORS

"Confidants" are available from the beginning of the campaign and provide important hooks that link each scenario together. Each Confidant provides distinct kinds of support for the investigators and gives a slightly different thematic spin on the campaign. Confidants may also provide a method for investigators to regain Sanity after the conclusion of a scenario. Remember that these characters should be helpful to the investigators and can fill in gaps in their knowledge, but they should seldom directly intervene and never overshadow the investigators.

Not every investigator needs to share the same Confidant. As investigator groups evolve, die, go insane, become over-exposed to the *Sutra*, and/or switch their allegiance to the Prince, different Confidants can come in to aid new investigators or introduce them to the existing group. Also bear in mind that some scenarios provide better hooks for certain Confidants—Keepers running standalone games should pick the best for that game.

The Confidants start with no Exposure Points. If the investigators expose their Confidant(s) to a physical copy of the *Sutra*, they are going to cause themselves serious trouble, with betrayal and disaster the likely result somewhere down the line.

### "THE FED" MIZUTANI SHOGO

Mizutani, age 42, is a special agent for the Public Security Intelligence Agency (PSIA) or *Kōanchōsa-chō* operating out of Tokyo.

Roughly equivalent to the American FBI, the PSIA deals with internal counterintelligence operations and the investigation of domestic threats. Mizutani has worked for the PSIA since his mid-20s, getting into police work as a reaction to the tumultuous student protests of the late 1960s.



#### "The Fed" Mizutani Shogo, age 42, PSIA special agent

STR 55	CON 50	SIZ 65	DEX 55	INT 70
APP 50	POW 70	EDU 65	SAN 64	HP 11
DB: 0	Build: 0	Move: 6	MP: 14	Luck: 70

#### Combat

##### Attacks per round: 1

Brawl	50% (25/10), damage 1D3
.38 Nambu revolver	50% (25/10), damage 1D10
Dodge	40% (20/8)

#### Skills

Accounting 15%, Computer Use 40%, Credit Rating 40%, Cthulhu Mythos 3%, Electronics 50%, Intimidate 60%, Law 70%, Library Use 40%, Occult 40%, Psychoanalysis (Criminal Profiling) 50%, Psychology 30%, Science (Forensics) 40%, Spot Hidden 50%.

**Languages:** Japanese 65%.

**Description:** wears a typical business suit so as not to stand out. His face is a mix of barely suppressed frustration and exhaustion.

**Traits:** speaks frankly and tersely; trusts few people and maintains emotional distance.

**Roleplaying hooks:** willing to bend the law, dislikes bureaucracy, and seeks out individuals who can get results.



Conservative (some of his colleagues might say “nationalist”), traditional, and driven, Mizutani spent his first decade with the PSIA investigating leftists and the Japanese Red Army. It was over the course of these investigations that he first came across mentions of the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*.

At his request, Mizutani transferred to the department investigating “new religious movements,” but found little support for his theories. For starters, the *Sutra* and its followers date back a thousand years, hardly qualifying it as a “new religion.” Second, because the PSIA has no law enforcement powers without permission from the Public Security Examination Committee (PSEC), his requests to investigate the followers of the *Sutra* met with constant denial.

Recently, Mizutani has become obsessed with the Association of Pale Leaves and believes that the PSIA may be compromised. Hence, he has decided to look for outside assistance to help him “off the books.”

- **Flavor:** hard-boiled detective work and undercover activities.
- **Connection:** the investigators themselves might be private detectives, police officers, and former mercenaries.
- **Typical meeting spots:** dank warehouses, seedy bars, hole-in-the-wall *izakaya* (bars) run by allies.
- **Best scenario Confidant:** **The Pallid Masks of Tokyo** (page 145); **Wonderland** (*TSoPL: CM*).

#### Support Offered

- Help investigators “get out of jail” for legal violations, as long as Mizutani can be convinced they are basically innocent. Mizutani does not sweat small infractions nor care about protecting the civil rights of suspects.
- Call in favors with police and intelligence services. Mizutani may provide clues when the investigators hit a dead end or send backup when there is an obvious conventional threat.
- Procure firearms (such as rifles or shotguns) for weapons-trained investigators, but only when Mizutani is convinced the situation is dire.

## “THE ABBOT” MURAKAMI TSUBASA

Murakami, age 63, is the abbot of Kuroishi-ji temple, five hours’ travel from Tokyo.

Kuroishi-ji is part of the esoteric Buddhist Shingon sect, performing *goma* ceremonies (purifying fire rituals) to the protective deity/bodhisattva Fudō-Myōō, a wrathful vanquisher of evil. Shingon arrived in Japan in the Heian Period, roughly the same time the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* arrived.

In 1184, this Shingon sect worked behind the scenes to ensure that Minamoto Yoritomo’s army retook Kyoto and stopped a ritual intended to bring the Prince of Pale Leaves physically to Earth. Though it has been kept quiet down through the centuries, a few Shingon temples (such as Kuroishi-ji), have been aware of the threat the *Sutra* poses and have monitored it all along.

Murakami did not believe that the Prince of Pale Leaves was a real being; he assumed the *Sutra* was semi-fictional, with the Prince being allegorical. That changed when the *Sutra* made a resurgence in 1980, leading to the corruption and violent death of several Shingon parishioners. Murakami has watched the influence of the APL grow over the last decade.

As abbot, he believes the threat is coming to a boil, and has full authorization to use the resources of the temple (financial and spiritual) against the *Sutra* sect. Murakami set about recruiting a diverse team from outside of the clerical profession, including investigators with scientific, social, and “tactical” experience.

- **Flavor:** desperate spiritual struggle steeped in folklore and mythology.
- **Connection:** investigators interested in aspects of traditional Japanese history and culture, including martial arts. They might be residents of Ikaruga guided to Murakami through a dream.
- **Typical meeting spots:** temples, rock gardens, secluded parks.
- **Best scenario Confidant:** **Dream Eater** (page 51); **Wonderland** (*TSoPL: CM*).

#### Support Offered

- Temples of the sect and religious allies across Japan serve as safe houses.
- Wards and meditative rites to prevent the Prince from reading the thoughts of an infected character.
- Talismans to provide a one-time bonus die on a POW roll.
- Sanity-restoring guided meditation (equivalent to Psychoanalysis).
- A fire ritual to remove *Sutra* Exposure Points. The ceremony costs 1D10 points of a characteristic, chosen by the Keeper, per 5 Exposure Points removed. This daunting and painful ritual takes up to 12 hours.





**“The Abbot” Murakami Tsubasa, age 63,  
Shingon Buddhist monk**

STR 50	CON 45	SIZ 50	DEX 50	INT 75
APP 50	POW 75	EDU 80	SAN 64	HP 9
DB: 0	Build: 0	Move: 5	MP: 15	Luck: 75

**Combat**

**Attacks per round: 1**

Fighting (Brawl-martial arts) 50% (25/10), damage 1D3\*

Dodge 50% (25/10)

*\*A Hard or better success with a knockdown fighting maneuver inflicts an additional 1D3 unarmed damage.*

**Skills**

Anthropology 25%, Charm 50%, Credit Rating 50%, Cthulhu Mythos 5%, First Aid 30%, History 60%, Listen 50%, Lore (Japanese Religions) 60%, Occult 50%, Persuade 40%, Psychoanalysis (Meditation) 70%, Psychology 50%, Spot Hidden 40%.

**Languages:** Japanese 80%, Han Writing 50%.

**Spells:** Elder Sign, Warding, and others the Keeper deems appropriate.

**Description:** wears traditional robes appropriate to his sect. Moves slowly and deliberately.

**Traits:** kind yet stern, with a serious and dour expression. Burdened with his duty to protect Japan from the Pale Leaves.

**Roleplaying hooks:** has lost loyal followers to the cult. Struggles to let go of his own grief, anger, and fear.

**“THE HEIRESS” YAMADA  
CHITOSE**

Yamada, age 30, is the illegitimate granddaughter of a famed international businessman and playboy; she is director of the Derby Club, with a central HQ base located in a former *Gen'yōsha* (Black Ocean Society—an ultra-right Pan-Asian society, now disbanded) meeting hall, near the Tsukiji Fish Market.

Her grandfather had significant holdings in China and was heir to a vast family opium-trade fortune. He investigated and thwarted cults and paranormal dangers over the course of his life. Following an incident in which Yamada was personally targeted and nearly killed, she got hold of her grandfather's files. Yamada made it her mission to track down and eradicate occult threats. To this end, she leveraged resources secretly left to her by her grandfather, to start the Derby Club, named after the

Shanghai racetrack clubhouse where he ran his own operations.

Yamada considers the Derby Club to be the final bulwark against the unfathomable darkness that threatens humanity. Thus, she justifies any action taken against those who ally themselves with the dark forces. The organization recently became aware of the Association of Pale Leaves and is investigating the cult's magical powers. The Derby Club has been recruiting capable individuals from all walks of society to help investigate mysterious extradimensional threats.

- **Flavor:** well-funded, morally gray secret war where the ends justify the means.
- **Connection:** may hire investigators from all walks of life who have experience with the supernatural, but prefers to work with knowledge specialists.





**“The Heiress” Yamada Chitose, age 30,  
director of the Derby Club**

STR 45	CON 55	SIZ 45	DEX 50	INT 75
APP 55	POW 60	EDU 75	SAN 45	HP 10
DB: 0	Build: 0	Move: 8	MP: 12	Luck: 60

**Combat**

**Attacks per round: 1**

Brawl	25% (12/5), damage 1D3
Walther PPK (.32)	50% (25/10), damage 1D8
Dodge	30% (15/6)

**Skills**

Accounting 25%, Anthropology 50%, Appraise 50%, Archeology 40%, Charm 60%, Computer Use 40%, Credit Rating 80%, Cthulhu Mythos 8%, History 50%, Library Use 50%, Occult 50%, Persuade 40%, Psychology 35%, Spot Hidden 30%.

**Languages:** Japanese 75%, Han Writing 40%, Chinese 30%.

**Spells:** Elder Sign, Warding, and others the Keeper deems appropriate.

**Description:** impeccably dressed. Somewhat petite, but has a strong presence.

**Traits:** confident and a bit haughty, yet pessimistic. Cunning and resourceful.

**Roleplaying hooks:** gives out information on a need-to-know basis. Will gladly sacrifice all her pawns to get a checkmate.

- **Typical meeting spots:** fancy hotels, limousines, Derby Club HQ inside an old building near the fish market.
- **Best scenario Confidant:** **Fanfic** (page 91); **Bridge Maiden, Part One** (*TSoPL: CM*).

**Support Offered**

- Resources to research monsters and magic, with an extensive occult library.
- The Derby Club employs an amoral scientist, Dr. Iwai, who had previously allied himself with *Gen'yōsha* black-ops in WW2. He can devise treatments to reverse the effects of *Sutra* exposure, but the cure may be worse than the disease: 1D6 Sanity points and 1D6 points of a characteristic or skill, chosen by the Keeper, per 5 Exposure Points removed. Even with anesthetics, the operation is traumatic and agonizing, requiring a full day of rest.

- Derby Club researchers may devise methods to safely observe and research the *Sutra* while minimizing infection.
- Procure conventional armaments for weapons-trained investigators, but only when Yamada is convinced the situation is dire.

## SCENARIO-SPECIFIC CONFIDANTS

These are major NPCs who can act as bridges to future scenarios—provided they remain alive and aligned with the investigators. They don't necessarily change the thematic feel or flavor of the campaign or grant significant material support for investigators; however, they should provide advice, extra/missed clues, and stronger hooks between scenarios.



## Scenario: Dream Eater

### *"The Fortune-Teller" Inaba Chieko*

Inaba, age 50, is a professional fortune-teller from Ikaruga, Nara prefecture. Well-educated and wise, Madam Inaba never steers her clients wrong. Investigators have the option of seeking her advice about the supposed dream-eating monster and the mysterious *Sutra* that Taneguchi has in his possession.

**Requirements:** the investigators must visit Inaba, show her (and potentially accidentally compromise her) or tell her about the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*, and ask for her help. She becomes invested in solving the mystery and can serve as a trusted advisor. Following the scenario, she uses her powers of divination (and her many middle-aged, gossip-loving contacts around the country) to determine that Tokyo is the locus of the strange things happening in Japan. She stays at her friend's house in Adachi ward, which the investigators can use as a haven.

### *Support Offered*

- Accommodation in Nara and Tokyo.
- Psychoanalysis to restore Sanity at the end of each scenario.
- Her fortune-telling gives each investigator an extra Luck recovery roll, and tells them their "unlucky number" (their current Exposure Point total).

## Scenario: Fanfic

### *"The Fallen Prince" Nagatsuki Kaede*

Nagatsuki, age 24, is a manga artist and, for a time, was the single most important and powerful vessel for the Prince of Pale Leaves. If investigators find a way to force the Prince from her mind without killing her, she is forever in their debt. Though severely weakened by the experience, she has unique firsthand knowledge of the Prince's long game and next moves.

**Requirements:** at the climax of the scenario, the investigators must free Nagatsuki from the influence of the Prince and keep her alive. The party must also find a way to keep her hidden from the Association of Pale Leaves. Following the scenario, she retains fragments of the Prince's memories and can predict the cult's objectives to an extent.

### *Support Offered*

- Can teach the investigators how to keep their own thoughts secret from the Prince—in case they get infected.

## A WORD ON BUDDHISM

Buddhism is an ancient spiritual system that developed many variations as it spread across Asia (such as the Zen and the Pure Land sects of Japan). The subject is far too complex to do justice to in this book.

Buddhism in Japan does not manifest in its original "pure" form (promulgated by Siddhārtha Gautama, d. 5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE). It has syncretized with the local Shinto religion, incorporating worship of its gods and spirits alongside the core Buddhist teachings of reincarnation, enlightenment, and Nirvana. Some see these gods as "converts" to Buddhism—acting as servants of various Buddhas, or even seen as *Bosatsu* (Bodhisattvas) themselves.

The "Four Noble Truths" of Buddhism are:

- Suffering is an innate and universal characteristic of life in all realms (even that of the gods).
- Suffering is caused by ignorance, and attachment to existence.
- A practical solution exists to the cycle of rebirth and suffering.

- The solution is the Eightfold Path: right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

The Prince of Pale Leaves gleefully makes use of these teachings, twisting them to ensnare those of a Buddhist cultural background.

Shingon Buddhism, such as that espoused by "The Abbot," is a particularly esoteric sect. Brought to Japan in the 9<sup>th</sup> century by famed Japanese monk Kūkai, Shingon monks believe enlightenment can be achieved in this life via ritual practices. They see the world as a communication between the Mahavairocana Tathagata (Universal Buddha) and the individual, and everything manifested around as signs and symbols in a kind of language. Through secret ritual practices and meditations (such as the *goma*, or "fire ceremony"), the individual self-identifies with the Mahavairocana, and they become one.







# CHAPTER 2: DREAM EATER

世の中は夢かうつつか うつつとも夢とも知らずありてなければ  
—『古今和歌集』巻第十八 雑歌下、942、読み人しらず

*We exist without ever knowing  
If this world  
Is a dream or reality,  
Reality or a dream.*

—*Kokin Wakashū, Volume 18, Misc. Poems,*  
“No. 942,” anonymous

**R**eports of serious mental health issues in a certain district of Ikaruga town have recently skyrocketed, and an alarming number of residents are reporting chronic sleep paralysis, lethargy, and depression. Even more strangely, many of them report being tormented in their dreams by an unsettling monster. The local government, unable to deal with this strange problem, puts out a call for help—the investigators are thus invited to look into the matter.

While **Dream Eater** works well as a standalone scenario, we intended it to be the first contact that the investigators have with the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* and a launching point for the campaign. Investigators may be acquaintances or strangers brought together for the purpose of finding out what is behind the odd disturbances in Ikaruga.

**Content note:** the inciting incident for this scenario is the death of a child in a road-traffic accident, which the investigators may optionally get to witness in a dream replay (see **Dream Dive**, page 74). The Keeper should tailor their presentation of this information to best suit their group's comfort, minimizing or cutting graphic details as necessary. Changing the child to an adult is also another option—see **Content Advisory**, page 5.

## KEEPER BACKGROUND

On a cold Friday in February 1985, tragedy struck Ikaruga, a historic town in Nara prefecture. While driving his car home from the market, a man in his 70s named Taneguchi Fumio ran over an elementary-school student, Nakamura Hinako, who was crossing the street. Due to a moment of inattention

and his old age, he confused the brake and gas pedals, and, as a result, the girl lost her life.

The accident made regional news. Politicians gave public statements vowing to do something about the increasingly common problem of accidents caused by elderly drivers, but none of them dared upset their voting base. In the end, nothing was done.

Taneguchi voluntarily gave up his car and license and vowed to pray for the young life he had ended. Although this was a mundane tragedy (and an increasingly common one in Japan), it became one more link in a chain of events that eventually changes the world.

## The Association of Pale Leaves (APL) Makes Its Move

Taneguchi, in his search for atonement, was approached by a member of an “ancient Buddhist sect” (the APL) and given a religious text—the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*. He was told that by reading the book and chanting specific verses, he would pay off his karma and be free of pain and nightmares. He chants from the *Sutra* diligently every evening at a local temple, Momijidera; however, he does not realize that the chanting is warping the psychic reality of the neighborhood, causing people to dream of the Prince of Pale Leaves.

The APL also provided Taneguchi with a large bundle of special calligraphy stationery (high-quality pens and yellow paper) suitable for creating copies of the *Sutra*. He was specifically targeted because of his background and skills as a calligrapher.

Having read the *Sutra* cover-to-cover several times and chanted its mantras daily, Taneguchi has become a vessel



for the Prince of Pale Leaves, capable of creating functional copies of their sacred text in—for the first time—modern Japanese. The Prince remains dormant in Taneguchi's subconscious, taking over when he sleeps to write copies of the *Sutra* at superhuman speed, and (once every few weeks) during the day to pass a completed copy to the cult's couriers, which they take to Tokyo.

Taneguchi is not aware of this inner transformation, as the Prince has not yet “spoken” to him or otherwise revealed himself; however, if necessary, the Prince could manifest and take control even while Taneguchi is awake.

## The Baku

Moreover, Taneguchi's guilt-riddled dreams have attracted a baku, a Japanese spirit-entity (*yōkai*) that “eats bad dreams,” which began feeding on the community. In fact, the baku is relatively benign, though it does not appear so to those who meet it. It prefers to consume dreams of the Prince (and EP, which are particularly “tasty” to it), thwarting the Prince's ability to manipulate people, but also causing horrible physiological reactions such as sleepwalking, sleep-paralysis, and insomnia.

Victims do not remember the Prince, but they do remember the nightmarish experience of being fed on by the baku, and they suffer Sanity losses from seeing it. For the baku's visual description, behavior and profile, see **Dream Eater: Characters & Monsters**, page 85.

The baku appears to be growing in power and expanding its territory. It is responding to the growing influence of the *Sutra's* code being unwittingly spread by Taneguchi's chanting. The investigators must research and perform a ritual contained in the *Sutra* that links individuals in their dreams, enabling them to then confront the entity together in its surreal dreamscape. But, as the baku realizes the investigators are threatening its feeding grounds, it acts against them in their dreams.

The baku is also stalling the Prince's plans in Ikaruga. Once the Prince realizes this (thanks to the investigators) he tries to help anyone aiming to drive off or defeat the baku—by pointing them at the right Mystic Signs and mantras in the *Sutra*. Which incidentally, of course, opens them to the Prince's corruption.

## This Is Just the Beginning

Even if the investigators overcome the baku, they may realize that they did not solve the real problem and that a wider conspiracy is at work. The scenario ensures the investigators get first-hand experience with the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* and so leads them into the wider investigation. Yet they unwittingly

expose themselves to its powerful but insidious influence, forever entwining their destinies with the otherworldly text.

While Taneguchi is likely the first host of the Prince the investigators encounter in the campaign, they might never realize this, except in hindsight. Even if Taneguchi dies or is otherwise neutralized, several new copies of the *Sutra* and many more vessels of the Prince already exist around Japan at this point, so the threat is far from over.

## Dream Eater Chronology

- **1980:** Ōhira founds the Association of Pale Leaves.
- **1981:** the monk, Ukami, reads the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* and becomes a vessel for the Prince.
- **February 1985:** Taneguchi Fumio's traffic accident. The baku is awakened by his guilt-filled dreams and comes to feast on them. Within a few weeks, the cult hears of the tragedy and takes advantage. Ukami convinces Taneguchi to read the original *Sutra*. Taneguchi becomes a vessel for the Prince and begins writing modernized copies of the tome. As he is no longer dreaming, the baku goes unfed.
- **August 1985:** Taneguchi's chanting of the *Sutra* at a local temple has begun affecting the dreams of the surrounding townspeople. The hungry baku shifts its attention to those dreaming of the Prince, causing sleep-related issues.
- **July 1986:** the town's sleep-related problems become too widespread to ignore. The scenario begins.

## INVOLVING THE INVESTIGATORS

The **Pre-Generated Investigators** (available with the PDF or by download) have built-in links to this scenario. If not using those characters, recommended backgrounds for new investigators are:

- Citizens in the affected town, visitors, or tourists.
- Police detectives or private investigators.
- Civilian volunteers, such as social workers, psychologists, and therapists, as well as religious volunteers such as Buddhist monks or Shinto priests.
- Paranormal researchers, fortune-tellers, or experts on Japanese mythology.

The Keeper should adjust the opening hooks and narrations for investigators as appropriate. Use the following “hook” options text to read to your players or paraphrase as necessary.

## Hook One: Haunted by Nightmares

- Use this hook if the investigators are residents or frequent visitors of Ikaruga.



The town of Ikaruga isn't the same anymore. You can't sleep, and when you try, you dream of a disturbing beast sitting on your chest, sniffing your head with its unnatural snout, as you lie prone and paralyzed—until you somehow scream yourself awake. You see your neighbors with vacant expressions and dark rings under their eyes. They've had the same dream too. None of this makes any sense. The police can't help, and the hospitals and clinics are at a loss. The local government has put out a request for volunteers, so you have decided to go to the town hall and see what you can do to help.

## Hook Two: A Special Case for Special Agents

- Use this hook for police detectives or private investigators, or for those using “The Fed” as their Confidant (see **Confidants: Plot Hook Facilitators**, Chapter 1, page 45).

Local police are baffled, while the Prefectural police haven't got a clue. So, it's been passed all the way up the chain and caught the eye of Special Agent Mizutani Shogo of the Public Security Intelligence Agency. His department isn't taking the case seriously, so he's roped you into checking it out—off the books, of course.

*“You've heard about the case, right? Something's very wrong in Ikaruga, the town in Nara. And I mean it's become a legitimate public safety issue. Hundreds of people are showing signs of insomnia and other sleep-related issues. It gets weirder. People are talking of seeing monsters in their sleep, and seeing odd things when they're awake. There have already been many minor traffic accidents due to sleep deprivation, and a near-fatal overdose from sleeping pills. The town government can't handle the flood of complaints and is asking for anyone we can send to help.”*

*“This place is a historic town with ancient temples. My first guess was maybe the Commies put something in the water supply, jealous of our culture 'cause they destroyed all of theirs. But it could be something else, something even worse. Get to the bottom of it. Mr. Maeda at the town hall is expecting you.”*

## Hook Three: In Defense of the Sacred

- Use this hook for investigators with professions related to spiritual, religious, or historical subjects, or if they are using “The Abbot” as their Confidant (see **Confidants: Plot Hook Facilitators**, Chapter 1, page 46).

You have been invited to tea with Murakami Tsubasa, abbot of Kuroishi-ji. His temple, located north of Tokyo, is part of the esoteric Shingon sect. He asks you to investigate a matter far from his usual “jurisdiction,” so to speak, which means he must consider it a most serious matter.

*“A dark cloud hangs over the town of Ikaruga, a historical town in Nara. There is talk of tortured sleep, nightmares, and monsters—all ill omens in a profoundly sacred place. The police and government officials can do nothing, of course, because this is almost certainly a spiritual matter. I thought perhaps this was a karmic stain that has not been properly addressed, relating to a recent tragedy in the town. But, one of our adherents who visited the town claims he saw a monk in yellow robes. It's not something we speak of with outsiders, but if my suspicions are right, this could mean grave danger.”*

*“Though my sect's doctrines and rituals are different, the temples in Ikaruga are among the oldest in the world, and they were founded by the prince who was instrumental in establishing Buddhism in this country. A threat to this area is a threat to us all. We are counting on you.”*

## Hook Four: Unclassified Dream-Related Phenomenon

- Use this hook for investigators with paranormal or occult expertise, and who come from out of town, or if they are using “The Heiress” as their Confidant (see **Confidants: Plot Hook Facilitators**, Chapter 1, page 47).

The wealthy heiress, Yamada Chitose, has summoned you to the Derby Club. This is to be no simple social call, for she is the head of a secret occult society dedicated to seeking out, identifying, and containing threats that conventional science does not yet understand.

*“There is something highly unusual going on in Ikaruga, a town in Nara prefecture. Nearly all the people in a certain district can barely sleep and are suffering from serious distress. According to rumors, people are seeing the same bizarre creature in terrifying nightmares. As you surely know, folklore speaks of many tales of mythical beings that are connected to dreams.”*

*“Go to the town and investigate. Cooperate with the authorities of the Public Welfare Committee as much as you can—they may be willing to brief you—but do not expect them to be open-minded about the matters we study. Avoid any mention of the paranormal until there is incontrovertible evidence. Nine times out of ten, there's a reasonable explanation for strange phenomena like this, but, sometimes, it's something more. You must discover the truth, in any case.”*



## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

See **Dream Eater: Characters & Monsters**, page 85, for the following characters' profiles.

Taneguchi Fumio



### Taneguchi Fumio, age 75, vessel of the Pale Prince

Taneguchi is an unwitting vessel of the Prince of Pale Leaves. Chosen by the cult due to his outstanding calligraphy skills, he proved easy to manipulate due to his vulnerability after he caused a fatal accident. He was approached by the monk, Ukami, and allowed to read the original *Sutra of Pale Leaves*. The *Sutra's* viral code rewrote his subconscious mind and turned him into a host of the Prince, allowing his possession, which has enhanced his already impressive calligraphy skills to make perfect copies of the *Sutra* in modern Japanese. These copies then pass to the APL to help the organization grow.

While most people can become a potential host for the Prince, few are physically capable of reproducing the *Sutra*, and fewer still can create an adaptation in contemporary Japanese, which the cult needs to spread its corruption. Taneguchi is an important asset to the APL, and if investigators solve the mystery and stop him from writing more copies of the *Sutra*, the cult will have a hard time

replacing him—this is why, despite Taneguchi's 100 EP, the Prince has not yet Consumed him, and avoids doing so even under duress. Once Consumed, Taneguchi will no longer be of use as a calligrapher.

Taneguchi does not dream anymore: he blacks out while his body is busy copying the *Sutra*—this means he no longer has contact with the baku.

- **Description:** a thin, old man, with white, wispy, and uncombed hair. Despite the fact he swears he has no nightmares now, he looks tired and sleep-deprived.
- **Traits:** pious Buddhist, amicable but socially aloof; he speaks compassionately but seems emotionally detached. Shy due to social isolation, but loves talking about literature and calligraphy.
- **Roleplaying hooks:** unaware of the entity controlling him. The Prince uses him to gather information from the investigators, and so manipulate them into tackling the baku for him. The Prince can possess Taneguchi at will.



Ukami

### Ukami, age 31, APL courier, vessel of the Pale Prince

Ukami is a former Shingon Buddhist monk with a background in traditional martial arts. He was manipulated into reading the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* shortly after it reappeared in Japan. Even when the Prince is not controlling his body,



Ukami is a fanatic among fanatics and has given himself over to the Prince forever. As one of the APL's earliest recruits he serves several important roles for the Association, but, above all, he is the courier who safely transports the precious *Sutra of Pale Leaves* and its few copies. Whenever he is not working or resting, the Prince puts his body through grueling bodybuilding and combat exercises, keeping him in near-supernatural physical condition.

- **Description:** broad-shouldered, shaved head, with muscles on muscles. He usually wears either yellow-colored monk robes or a dark suit, depending on the occasion.
- **Traits:** typically lets the Prince speak through him; polite yet concise.
- **Roleplaying hooks:** works single-mindedly toward the cult's goals. Avoids direct confrontation, but if cornered, fights without honor or humanity.

in keeping an open mind and considering possibilities unknown to science.

She is well-read, sharp-witted, eccentric, and prone to speaking frankly. She has a network of gossip-loving friends and clients around the country who keep her informed. Though Inaba is much younger than Taneguchi, he addresses her as if she is a respected elder.

- **Description:** a pleasant, middle-aged woman with salon-fresh hair and rectangular reading glasses. Wears a purple shawl over a kimono.
- **Traits:** well-educated, sensible, open-minded, and a sympathetic listener. She can't leave a puzzle unsolved.
- **Roleplaying hooks:** loves chatting and giving advice. Her divination is supplemented by a large network of acquaintances.

## START: IKARUGA TOWN

- **Date:** early July, 1986.
- **Location:** Ikaruga town, Nara prefecture.
- **Purpose:** the investigators are introduced to each other. They experience a shared dream about a road accident (which may prompt further enquiries) and may catch a glimpse of the monster.

## PROLOGUE: OPENING NIGHTMARE

Regardless of the main hook used, if the investigators are either residents of Ikaruga or have spent a night in the town, we recommend to open *in media res* with a dream sequence. This gives the party a strong reason to stick together, even if they are strangers at first. Don't let the players know it is a dream until the very end when they wake up. Here's an example to read aloud or paraphrase:

*"You're all on a tour bus, making the rounds of some of the beautiful historic temples in Ikaruga. At least, that was the plan. The weather was scorching hot when you left the station, but now it's completely overcast, and the rain is pounding relentlessly on the roof of the bus, filling the interior with sweaty, sticky steam."*

(Encourage the players to describe their investigators and how they are reacting to the unfortunate weather.)

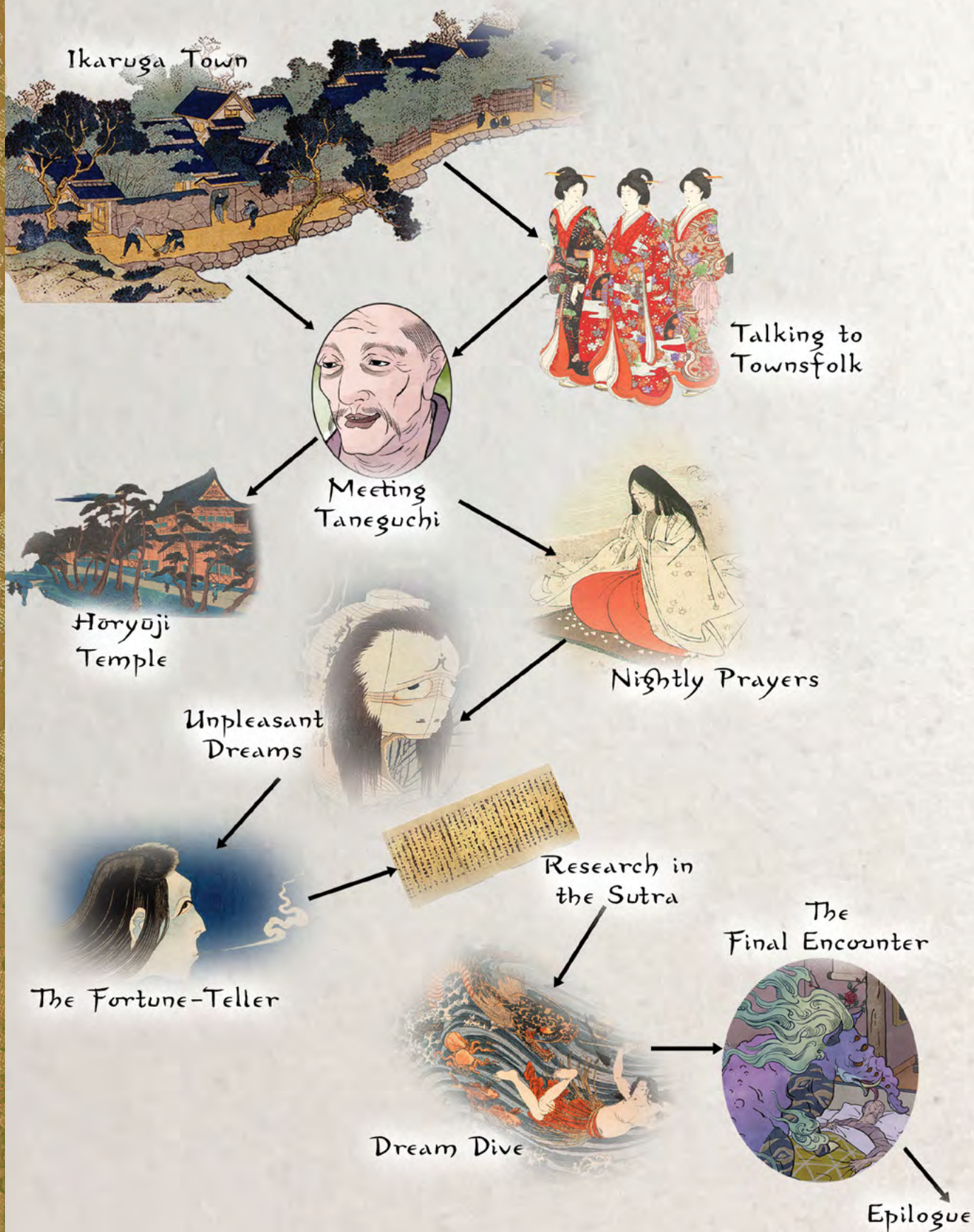
*"The rain gets worse, and visibility is now dangerously poor. The bus passes a gray Datsun car on the side of the road with its hazard lights on and a crumpled front wing. You could swear you saw a large bloodstain on the road nearby, and an old man standing over the blood. The old man was visibly shaken, and praying desperately."*



### Inaba Chieko, age 50, fortune-teller

The fortune-teller, Madam Inaba, is a feisty woman. She has a degree in philosophy from Nihon Joshi Daigaku, the country's first women's university, which she displays proudly behind her counter. She is a renowned fortune-teller in Ikaruga and has the respect and trust of hundreds of regular clients. While she is a critical thinker, she also believes







# Dream Eater

*"The bus speeds up for no apparent reason. You hear a heavy thud on the roof and look up to see four hoof-like indentations. Something big is up there, and, from the sound of its weighty footfalls, it's heading for the front of the bus."*

*"The bus just ran a red light. You now see that no driver sits behind the steering wheel, and the bus is racing toward the river at speed. Lightning flashes, and you spot the silhouette of a creature peeking down through the windshield—something with a long snout and too many eyes. But if someone doesn't take control of the bus right now, you're all going to die."*

(At this point, describe how the bus crashes through the guardrails and plunges down into the river, and then everyone wakes up. Any investigator who tried to gain control of the bus awakens with a jolt and finds themselves sitting in their own car with two wheels stuck in a roadside drainage ditch.)

After this dream sequence, if the investigators do not already know each other, the Keeper should contrive a way for them to encounter each other. Perhaps they have dizziness or splitting headaches after waking up from the bizarre shared dream and happen to see each other at a clinic or while buying aspirin or sleep aids at the pharmacy. Or perhaps they all take the rumors of weird dreams seriously and all head to the town hall to answer the local government's call for help. Have them make a **Sanity** roll when they realize they have shared a dream (0/1 loss).

If all the investigators are from the same organization, or if they are already acquainted (i.e., from their pre-determined backstories or a previous adventure), then they likely all arrived in town together, and recognize each other in this Opening Nightmare.

## EXPLORING THE TOWN

Ikaruga is a historic town with a population of about 27,000 inhabitants, located 10 minutes from Nara city and 30 minutes from Osaka by train. It is a peaceful, quiet place of mostly residential buildings and rice fields, and only about 6 square miles (14 km<sup>2</sup>) in area. The town's claims to fame are the Hōryūji and Hokkiji temples, built in the 7<sup>th</sup> century by Prince Shōtoku. These temple complexes contain the oldest wooden buildings in the world (and eventually become a World Heritage Site in 1993).

The town's main transportation hub, Hōryūji Station, resembles the pagodas of the famous temples, with its tiered construction and traditional roof design.

Other than the historical and religious sites, Ikaruga has all the amenities one might expect from a mid-sized Japanese town. There are several parks, libraries, community centers, and a concert hall for entertainment. For food and drinks, there is a large supermarket, several family-run restaurants, a handful of convenience stores, and a number of traditional pubs.

There is one Japanese-style hotel in town, which is gorgeous and convenient, but staggeringly expensive at 30,000 yen per night. If it's not to the investigators' liking, many nice and reasonably priced hotels in Nara city are available only a short train ride away.

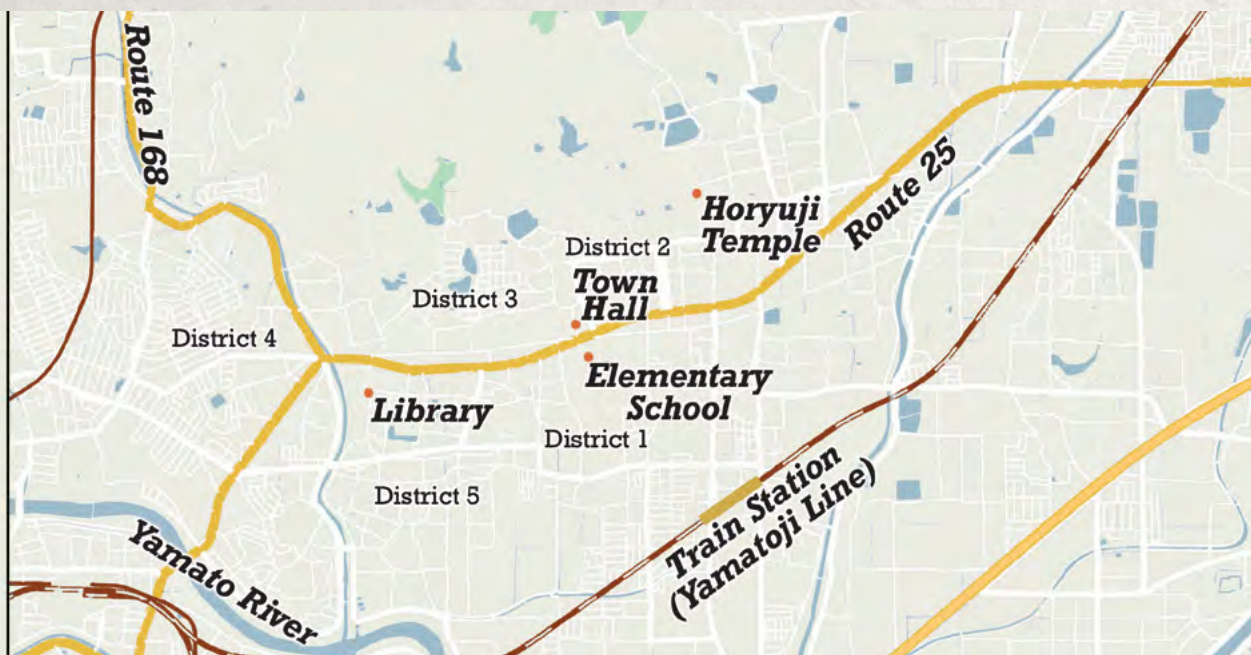
### The Shepherd Bar: A Foreshadowing

If the investigators meet up for a meal, or go looking for somewhere to sit out of the rain, they find an *izakaya* (Japanese-style pub/restaurant)—known as *Hitsujikai*, or "Shepherd" in English—not far from the center of town. Popular among both locals and visitors, the pub has reasonably priced drinks and various lamb dishes on the menu, which is something of a rarity in Japan. The atmosphere is lively at peak hours, but not oppressively noisy. Customers can drink and dine at the counter bar, tables, or a private room available by reservation.

Opposite: Map 3: Dream Eater Scenario Structure

Map 4: Ikaruga Town

## Ikaruga Map





## Lore Sheet 1: Hōryūji Temple

Hōryūji, meaning the Temple of Flourishing Dharma, is by far the most famous of Ikaruga's many Buddhist temples, and one of the most important, not just in Nara but in Japan as a whole. It was built in 607 by Prince Shōtoku, who was instrumental in establishing Buddhism in Japan. The main hall is recognized as the oldest wooden building in the world, and the tree forming the base of the iconic five-story pagoda was cut down in 594. The temple houses many ancient treasures and is dedicated to Yakushi Nyorai, the "Medicine Buddha."

### Personal Background:

Although you wouldn't describe yourself as religious, you are certain that there is something deeply sacred about this temple. It is a place of beauty and tranquility, but also something more profound that you can't put into words. You have visited many times, so much so that the monks and temple staff recognize you. One of them gave you an *omamori* (good luck charm), which you keep in the inner pocket of your wallet.

The owner, who customers call "Master" as per tradition, is a talkative and friendly man. He speaks English well and is happy to entertain foreign guests. For some reason, the master keeps an old, ink-painted scroll on the wall entitled *bokushin*, (god of shepherds). If asked about it, he smiles and replies, "*Don't we all want someone to guide us now and then?*"

## THE TOWN HALL

- **Location:** Ikaruga town.
- **Leads In:** Hooks One, Two, and Four.
- **Leads Out:** Meeting Taneguchi (page 62); Talking to Townsfolk (page 61).
- **Purpose:** investigators learn about the case.

Investigators should, if following instructions from their Confidants or the general call out for help, visit the town hall for some useful information. The town hall is less than 10 minutes by taxi or 20 minutes by foot from the station. The three-story concrete building impresses with its modern design. The large picture windows on each floor are draped with dark curtains, giving the building a somber look.

Near the main hall, a placard put up by the local school board reminding children to "always greet others cheerfully and with a smile," has fallen over and bears dirty footprints. When the investigators reach the hall, they are greeted by Mr. Maeda, Vice-Chairman of the Public Welfare Committee.

Maeda is a plump, tired man in his late fifties. The remaining hair combs over his head in a rather futile way that resembles a barcode. He has dark rings under his half-closed eyes, but tries his best to maintain a polite smile. Sweat pools around his collar, brow, and armpits as he tries to cool himself with a faded-paper fan. The office's air conditioners remain unused, as regulations only allow their use after a certain date, regardless of the temperature.

Maeda politely but stiffly welcomes the investigators, escorting them past a row of desks where staff members are falling asleep on top of stacks of forms, with rubber stamps in their hands. He brings them to a conference table in the office. A spectacled secretary brings everyone iced tea, and then Maeda explains the situation in the town—as with other narrations in this scenario, it may be read aloud verbatim or paraphrased:

*"I believe you know the basics already, but I'll try to explain in more detail. This problem seems to have started sometime last year in Tatsuta-kita Ward, District 3, which is a very small rural area; mostly rice farms, with a tiny population. Nothing ever happens there, apart from—"*

(He hesitates. and shakes his head.)

*"The residents there can't sleep well and are having terrible nightmares. More recently, people in the surrounding Districts 2, 4, and 5 are reporting the same symptoms. It turns out this phenomenon is spreading. It's now reached most of the western half of Ikaruga. Incidentally, I live in District 1, and last week*



my wife and I started experiencing the same symptoms. The same goes for some of my coworkers who live in the affected area.

*"The Public Welfare Committee is in over its head. Nothing like this has ever happened before, and we have no idea what is going on, but it's affecting public safety and productivity, hurting students' school performance, driving away tourists, and jeopardizing our bid to register our historic temples with UNESCO. We hope that you can help somehow."*

## ***If asked about his hesitation—what did happen in District 3?***

*"I'm sure it has nothing to do with our current problems. Early last year, an elderly man living in District 3 caused a traffic accident in which a young girl died. There was a lot of bad feeling about older citizens being allowed to drive, and it caused something of a political debate. We thought, at first, maybe his neighbors couldn't bear to live near a man responsible for the death of a child, and that was somehow behind the current situation. But that can't really be what's going on. It makes no sense."*

**Keeper note:** remind the investigators that they dreamed about a crumpled, gray Datsun car and a bloodstain on the road. If asked, Maeda can confirm that yes, he thinks the car involved in the accident was a Datsun.

## ***If asked about his own symptoms***

*"I woke feeling like there was something sitting on my chest. I couldn't even move my fingers, and I could hardly breathe. I lay there for hours, and it was only as the sun rose that I regained the use of my limbs—only to find that both my wife and I had become completely tangled in the bedding during the middle of the night, and that the mats and quilts were thrown about the room."*

## ***If asked about the traffic accident***

*"I only know what was in the official reports, which isn't much. It was particularly traumatic for our community. If you want to know more, you'll have to ask Mr. Taneguchi himself, the man who caused the accident. He may not want to talk about it, and I can't imagine him being connected to any of this strangeness, but I'll give you his address if you want to speak with him directly. He lives in the affected area, but I'm not sure if he's reported any sleep problems."*

## ***If asked about the accident victim***

*"Her name was Nakamura Hinako, and she was nine years old. She was a student at the local elementary school. Phenomenally bright girl. After the funeral, the victim's family sold their house and moved to Kyushu, I think. They took Hinako's ashes with them. No one has heard from them since. Losing their only child must have been beyond heartbreaking, but they didn't sue the old man or lash out in any way. Because of the widespread*

*nightmares, some people are spreading ridiculous rumors that the town is haunted by her ghost. That's nonsense of course."*

## ***If asked about Mr. Taneguchi***

*"Nice old man. Kind to everyone in the neighborhood. A bit of a local celebrity until the accident, as he's a master of traditional Japanese calligraphy; some of his older works are on display in museums. Lost his wife to cancer about 10 years ago. I think the accident destroyed whatever was left of his happiness in life. Hardly ever leaves his house anymore, except to pray."*

## ***Regarding accommodations for the investigators***

*"The town is offering a stipend of 10,000 yen per day for those volunteering to assist us; this should cover your accommodation."*

**Keeper note:** if the investigators were sent by "The Fed" or some other police authority, he adds, *"Or you could stay with my wife and me. Our children are at university so we have the extra rooms."*

## ***In closing, Maeda says***

*"I'm afraid I don't know much more about what's happening. It's beyond what we're equipped to deal with. We just want this town to return to normal and be able to sleep soundly again. We*



Yokai Ghost Lantern



## SLEEPING OVER

The investigators need to decide where to stay. If they spend their nights at a hotel in Nara city, they avoid exposure to the phenomenon spreading within the town of Ikaruga. If investigators choose to stay at the hotel, Maeda's house, Taneguchi's house (after meeting him), or if they fall asleep at any point while in town, they experience the same symptoms as the townspeople—see **Unpleasant Dreams**, page 69.

*will give you access to any public records we have that could be connected to the incident, as well as maps of the area. Any help you can provide is appreciated."*

- Investigators making an **Occult** or Hard **Know** roll on the subject of "troubled sleep" can gain **Lore Sheet 2: Yōkai**. Note that this contains a couple of red-herring *yōkai* to keep possibilities open.

## Mapping the Data

This step is optional and may take place at any time, but proactive investigators may wish to pore through the town hall's public records right away and try to put together a clear picture of the events. With a successful **Library Use** roll, investigators quickly collect all known reports by doctors of widespread sleep-related illnesses and disturbances since the accident. With a failed roll, they still gather the documents eventually, but it takes several days of returning to the records department. Having this list of victims and their addresses makes it easier and faster to get firsthand accounts from the townspeople.

From there, investigators can potentially create a chronological picture of the spread of the phenomenon by using a map of the town, the dates of reports, and associated addresses. From there, investigators discover that all initial reports—the earliest dating from August 1985, almost a year ago—occurred in a roughly circular area in and around Tatsuta-kita District 3. It's not a perfect circle, so the center is impossible to determine, but Taneguchi's residence is close. Notably, Taneguchi's name is not among those who reported suffering from this phenomenon.

## Lore Sheet 2: Yōkai

*Yōkai*, meaning "strange apparition," is a word for a class of supernatural entities in Japanese folklore. They include spirits, monsters, animated household objects, and other non-human beings. *Yōkai* may be benevolent or malevolent, helpful or mischievous; but, overall, they represent that which is outside of human understanding.

### Yōkai Associated with Troubled Sleep:

- **Yume no seirei**: the ghostly form of an emaciated and old man, who carries a walking cane but has no visible legs; this spirit brings nightmares.
- **Makuragaeshi**: the "pillow-flipper." This spirit results from the tragic death of a child, but may appear as a monk, samurai, or *oni* demon. Its primary activity is flipping the pillow from the sleeper's head to their feet overnight, but they may, on rare occasions, cause sleep paralysis, a sense of crushing suffocation, and even death.
- **Baku**: a benevolent spirit that eats bad dreams. It vaguely resembles a tapir. It was once common to embroider the kanji for "baku" onto pillows to keep away bad dreams and demons.

### Personal Background:

When you and your siblings used to visit your grandfather's house, he used to tell you all sorts of creepy stories from Japanese folklore: shapeshifting fox spirits, giant centipedes, faceless phantoms called *noppera-bō*, and colossal hungry skeletons called *gashadokuro*. You have been interested in *yōkai* ever since. Isn't it strange how being scared can also be fun?



If the investigators continue to plot incident reports on the map, they discover that the area of this phenomenon seems to be spreading in waves, increasing in radius slightly each month, affecting a proportionally larger number of people each time. It is currently over half a mile (0.8 km) in diameter, covering much of the town.

## Leads Out

From this point, the investigators are likely to either interview people around the affected areas of town (**Talking to Townsfolk**, following) or visit Taneguchi at his home (**Meeting Taneguchi**, page 62).

## TALKING TO TOWNSFOLK

- **Location:** Tatsuta-kita ward (District 3), Ikaruga.
- **Leads In:** **The Town Hall** (preceding).
- **Leads Out:** **Meeting Taneguchi** (following).
- **Purpose:** investigators interview people around town about their experiences to gather clues about the phenomenon.

If the investigators travel to Tatsuta-kita along the main road (i.e., by car), they notice a *Jizo* statue on the side of the road near an intersection, as well as religious offerings and scattered flowers nearby. Investigators who grew up in Japan recognize this statue as a bodhisattva who watches over the spirits of children who die before their parents and who works to save souls from the underworld. This small memorial marks the spot of the tragic road accident.

The investigators may ask residents for information. The citizens of Ikaruga living on the outskirts of the district are friendly and welcoming. These residents have not experienced any problems, but some may have friends, classmates, or coworkers from inside the affected area, and they have likely heard about the sleep-related issues.

Those who live inside the affected area are quickly recognizable as exhausted, despondent, and even slightly irritable. They may be reluctant to share information with strangers, requiring a successful **Persuade** or **Charm** roll to get them to talk.

### Regarding when things started

Many in the district were heartbroken following the tragic death of Nakamura-chan in the traffic accident, but that's to be expected. Months later, rather than getting over it, the people in the area around Taneguchi started to develop strange symptoms.

### Regarding symptoms

The specific symptoms vary from person to person, but, in general, the townspeople are suffering from sleep-related

issues: poor sleep interrupted by nightmares, narcolepsy, sleep paralysis, sleepwalking, lack of motivation, and general malaise. Investigators may hear various testimonies, each fitting into one of the following patterns. Convey these accounts to the investigators in ascending order of creepiness as they interview residents closer and closer to the epicenter of the phenomenon.

**Keeper note:** almost nobody remembers their dreams of the Prince, because the baku “ate” them. If he does appear, it is as a shadowy figure, face unseen, wearing pale-yellow clothes of some sort, with an air of great importance and allure.

- *“I can't seem to get any regular sleep. Most nights, I lie down, stare at the ceiling and wait until morning. But, during the day, I struggle not to doze off at my desk at work. One time, I almost fell asleep on the drive to work... I'm scared of what might happen if this keeps up.”*
- *“On a few occasions, I woke up in the middle of the night, but I couldn't move at all. It felt like something heavy was pressing down on my chest, slowly suffocating the life out of me. I started to panic, hyperventilated, and passed out. It was one of the scariest things I've ever experienced, and now, every night before bed, I wonder if it's going to happen again.”*
- *“I keep having a dream—I hope it's just a dream—that I'm locked in a pitch-dark room with some tremendous hungry beast. I can't see it, but I can hear its low grunting, feel its hot breath on my skin, and its drool dripping on my forehead. Now, any time I go to turn off the lights at night, I imagine it there, waiting for me. It's been so hard to sleep... It's the only dream I ever have now. I can't even remember any dream I've had in the past.”*
- *“One night, I think at around four a.m., my wife suddenly sat up and got out of bed, turned toward me, and stood there perfectly still in the dark. She stayed like that, completely silent and unresponsive for minutes as I called out to her. Eventually I got up and shook her awake, and she screamed as though she had been stabbed. She says she has no memory of any of this.”*
- *“I can barely sleep these days, but when I do, I keep having the same dream. I'm lying down, unable to move or speak, as a huge unnatural beast looms above me, its hooves pinning down my arms. I can barely make out its silhouette in the dim moonlight coming in through the gap in the curtains. It has this long snout, half pig, half elephant, and it's sniffing my face vigorously. Then I can feel its snout push into my head, breaching through my skull like it was made of foam. It roots around in my brain. There's this awful slurping... and I wake up screaming.”*

If the investigators continue to interview victims, they find more testimonies like these. The appearance of a monster or beast in a dream seems to become more frequent and intense the closer the person lives to the apparent epicenter of the phenomenon.



## Regarding possible environmental causes

Investigating the area does not reveal any sources of noise or light pollution that could be causing sleep disorders. It's a peaceful town and quiet at night. There is no heavy industry. The cicadas are loud during the day, and while chirping frogs around the rice paddies can get a bit noisy in the evenings, this unexplained phenomenon has been happening for many months and seems unconnected to natural events.

If the investigators ask any of the residents near the epicenter—specifically those who say they remember disturbing dreams—about what they see or hear at night before bed, they mention offhand that they can hear the old man Taneguchi praying at Momijidera, the local temple, every evening.

If pressed further about Taneguchi's visits to the temple, residents admit that they don't recognize the prayer. It's not a chant that most locals are familiar with (such as "*Namu Amida Butsu*" or "*Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō*"). But, even without knowing the verse's meaning, residents believe that it's a positive gesture and say they feel comforted when they hear it.

Should investigators press the residents to repeat the chanting they heard, none of them can do so on request. One resident describes it like an earworm or "*a song that you heard and got stuck in your head, but you can't remember the lyrics.*"

## Regarding possible motives

The parents of the accident victim moved to Kyushu, so they have not been anywhere near the town for many months. A few people were angry at Taneguchi, but he's been part of the community for so long and everyone in his neighborhood knows him, so it's unlikely that anyone continues to hold a grudge against him. Similarly, he holds no ill will against anyone, except maybe himself. His neighbors say that he walks to the small temple nearby and prays diligently for forgiveness every evening. Otherwise, they hardly ever see him leave the house, except occasionally at the post office or convenience store.

# MEETING TANEGUCHI

- **Location:** Taneguchi residence, Tatsuta-kita ward, Ikaruga.
- **Leads In:** **Talking to Townsfolk** (preceding); **The Town Hall** (page 58).
- **Leads Out:** **The Fortune-Teller** (page 71); **Hōryūji Temple** (page 64); **Nightly Prayers** (page 67); **Research in the Sutra** (page 73); **Unpleasant Dreams** (page 69).
- **Purpose:** investigators interview the old man who may have a connection to the strange phenomenon. They come to the attention of the Prince.

After the investigators get Taneguchi's address, they can pay the old man a visit. See **Dream Eater: Characters & Monsters** (page 85) for his profile.

## TANEGUCHI'S HOUSE

Taneguchi resides in an old, worn-down, and single-story home. The faded wooden panels are rotten along the edges, while overgrown bushes surround the perimeter. Heavy curtains cover the windows, and it's impossible to see inside.

A square section of the yard is covered in dirt and gravel. It was once a parking space, but no vehicle is present, and the faintness of the tire tracks suggests it's been vacant for many months. Next to an old toolshed is a small vegetable garden which looks well-tended, unlike the rest of the property. No significant clues can be found near the house. If investigators knock or ring the doorbell, Taneguchi answers after a moment.

## OLD MAN TANEGUCHI

The investigators are greeted at the door by a thin, old man in his late 70s. He wears a faded blue *jinbei* (a traditional casual garment consisting of a kimono-like top and trousers, often worn around the house in summer). He stands somewhat hunched-over, but doesn't seem to have any trouble moving around. His hair is white, wispy, and uncombed. His eyes are half-closed, and he seems exceedingly weary, struggling to get through his greeting without yawning. "*Hello. I don't get many visitors. What can I do for you?*"

Regardless of how the investigators present themselves, Taneguchi is willing to talk, welcoming them with polite hospitality. He is friendly but rather reserved and socially awkward, and has an obvious aversion to eye contact. He invites the investigators inside and offers tea.

His home is normal for an old Japanese house. He leads the investigators into a large *tatami* room and has them sit at a low table with floor cushions as he serves the tea. The room is sparsely furnished and feels rather empty. There is an old TV, clock radio, electric fan, and a shelf with a Buddhist memorial shrine dedicated to Taneguchi's wife. Beautiful calligraphy scrolls hang on the wall.

## If investigators bring up the nightmares and sleep-related illnesses going around the area, Taneguchi is surprised

"How awful... It's the same as I used to experience each night. Visions of this beast came to torment me, sniffing around in my head as I lay paralyzed—a pig-like animal with a short trunk. But it's not like a real animal, it's... wrong. The color, the way it moves, and the eyes... I thought it was just me, part of the karmic



price I must pay, so I just endured it and didn't tell anyone. I am no longer troubled. But if other people are suffering, I want to help. I'm so sorry. I'll try to answer any questions you have."

**Keeper note:** the Prince is genuinely interested in the investigators' information about a dream-beast, which he recognizes, even if Taneguchi doesn't. From this point on, the Prince tries to manipulate the investigators into taking this *yōkai* down.

## *If asked about the accident*

"It was the end of winter, last year. I was on my way home from the store. The little one dashed across the street right in front of me. I... I should have been able to stop in time. But I panicked and stepped on the wrong pedal. That moment lives forever like a thorn in my heart. A passerby called an ambulance, but it was already too late.

"My real mistake was my arrogance. My eyesight is fine. My hands don't shake. I read books and practice calligraphy to keep my mind sharp. I thought, 'I can still drive.' But old age makes fools of us all."

## *If asked what he thinks about the nightmares, Taneguchi hesitates*

"I suffered terrible nights at first, but there is a cure. Please bear with me. In early spring, after the accident, I received a visit from a young monk who said he had heard of the tragic events and was worried about my well-being. He said he was doing a 'wellness check,' since I had not left my house for weeks. He lent me a book of scriptures and told me to read through it, recite some specific mantras, and that I would feel better."

## *If asked about the monk who visited him*

"He was a young man, I think. Tall, strong, and fit. Nice yellow robes and an old-style straw hat. He said he was associated with a charitable foundation working out of Hōryūji Temple. He gave me that tremendous book to read. After hearing about my hobbies, he also presented me with a beautiful calligraphy set. He even stopped by with groceries each week until I was ready to go outside again. His kindness lifted my spirits. I became self-sufficient, started a vegetable garden, and began practicing calligraphy again. He hasn't visited in over a month.

"You should definitely go look for him and ask his help; his Sutra is incredibly efficacious in the healing of bad dreams. I believe he works at Hōryūji Temple."

- If the investigators wish to look for the monk, proceed to the scene, **Hōryūji Temple** (page 64).

## *If asked about the book the monk showed him*

"It's called the Sutra of Pale Leaves. I had never heard of it before, but it dates to the Heian period, almost a thousand years ago. It tells of the life and teachings of a bodhisattva known as the Prince of Pale Leaves, who abandons his lavish life in a marvelous city to travel the world to solve human suffering. I made a copy for my own use. I can show it to you if you like. It's a long and difficult book, but extremely fascinating. You won't want to put it down."

## Taneguchi's Den

Connected to the living room beyond the sliding *shoji* screen doors is Taneguchi's den. Bookshelves along the walls teem with old books, including textbooks from his early days as a schoolteacher, as well as framed calligraphy artwork and his degree in classical literature. On his desk are a collection of fine brushes and pens, an inkstone and inkwell, and stacks of pale-yellow mulberry paper. Taneguchi keeps his first copy of the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* in a locked drawer in his desk—with an air of great reverence, he gets it out to show the investigators.

The desk lock can also be picked with a **Locksmith** roll or forced open with a **STR** roll. If investigators make a successful Hard **Spot Hidden** roll while searching this drawer, they find a secret compartment containing an unfinished copy of the *Sutra* that Taneguchi is currently making (and knows nothing about, consciously). He always keeps the key to this drawer on his person, usually in a pocket of whatever he's wearing.

Assuming the investigators admire the *Sutra*, Taneguchi invites them to come pray with him at a small temple just a short walk from his home, "I go every night and chant the mantras from the Sutra, as the monk taught me. The monks there leave the gate open for me."

If asked, he tells them that this local temple is named Momijidera—the Temple of Autumn Leaves (see **Nightly Prayers**, page 67).

## **If the investigators become exposed to the Sutra of Pale Leaves text in any way**

If reading any part of the book, observing any of the mandalas or images, or even handling it and flicking through the pages, refer to the description and rules for the *Sutra* (see **Description of the Sutra**, Chapter 1, page 21) as well as the mechanical rules for **Exposure** (page 24). As for specific and immediate effects, once an investigator is Exposed to the *Sutra*, the baku appears in their dreams—proceed to **Unpleasant Dreams** (page 69) when they are about to fall asleep.



## If the investigators are paranoid book-burners

If they attempt to destroy the *Sutra*, Taneguchi is extremely upset and denounces them as ignorant, bigoted philistines. Because he's unable to physically stop the investigators, he flees to call the police, and have the investigators arrested and sued for destruction of property (and any other criminal charges that might be appropriate).

If the *Sutra* gets destroyed and the investigators do not try to find any way to confront the baku, the scenario ends prematurely (see **Endings**, page 83). Even if the *Sutra* is lost, investigators may be able to continue the scenario by asking Taneguchi for help, because he's memorized the entire *Sutra* (and conveniently "remembers" how to do the shared dream ritual), or if they go looking for the monk (Ukami) who can also teach them the ritual (see **Hōryūji Temple**, below).

## RECOGNIZING THE BEAST

The investigators can attempt an **Occult** or Hard **Know** roll to recognize Taneguchi's description of the dream-beast as a baku—give out **Lore Sheet 2: Yōkai** if they don't have it already. Taneguchi recognizes the name (it's the same word as is used for a real-life tapir), but he does not know much about the subject of *yōkai*. However, he reveals that he knows a professional fortune-teller who lives in town, who can possibly help the investigators.

*"Her name is Inaba, and she has been practicing divination for almost thirty years. People go to her for financial advice and marriage consultations, that sort of thing. My wife and I consulted with her many times. She is quite knowledgeable about folklore and spiritual matters, so I'm sure she will know what to do."*

To meet with Madam Inaba, proceed to **The Fortune-Teller** (page 71)—Taneguchi is happy to come along if requested.

### Skeptical?

On the other hand, if the investigators are skeptical about this whole baku business, Taneguchi suggests that they stay a night and experience it for themselves, and go to the fortune-teller in the morning instead. He has an empty room and extra futons, and lets the investigators sleep over at his place, if they like. Staying at Taneguchi's house or Maeda's house (or anywhere else within the Prince's area of effect) means the investigators likely attract the Prince and the baku to their dreams, leading into **Unpleasant Dreams** (page 69).

Regardless of where the investigators stay, Taneguchi always prays at the local temple before bed in the evening. He invites the investigators to come with him. Should they witness his prayers at the temple, go to **Nightly Prayers** (page 67).

## If the investigators would rather look into matters themselves

They can easily find a relevant hint in the municipal library. Consulting sources on Japanese legends, they find (no roll) that in many folktales, baku enjoy positive portrayals as benevolent creatures that devour nightmares and allow a dreamer to sleep peacefully. However, baku must be called on sparingly, because of the risk of their appetite growing out of control. In such cases, they eat hopes, dreams, and desires, turning people into depressed and empty shells.

- With a successful **Library Use** roll, they come across an old storybook that tells of a monk who entered the dreams of a troubled boy and tamed a greedy and wild baku. Thus, this story suggests there may be way to enter dreams and deal with the baku. As necessary, proceed to **Research in the Sutra** (page 73) or **The Fortune-Teller** (page 71) if investigators fail to find this story, want a second opinion, or more guidance.

## HŌRYŪJI TEMPLE

- **Location:** Hōryūji, Ikaruga.
- **Leads In:** Hook Three; **Meeting Taneguchi** (page 62).
- **Leads Out:** **Dream Dive** (page 74).
- **Purpose:** investigators may take a detour to the town's most prominent temple and encounter Ukami, the monk who gave Taneguchi the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*—this scene does not provide any vital plot clues, but an encounter with Ukami may provide background and a possible way forward to defeat the baku.

The investigators may want to find the mysterious monk who got Taneguchi into this. He says the monk claimed to work at Hōryūji Temple—which was a lie on the monk's part—although Ukami currently lurks in the vicinity. The baku is interfering with the Prince's plans and so Ukami has come to the temple to investigate if it is the source of the creature's power.



## CROSSING PATHS WITH UKAMI

Investigators approaching the temple find a long, straight road leading up to the main southern gate, lined with tall trees. This pathway gives the impression of leading from the mundane world to somewhere far more sacred.

As the investigators approach, heading in the opposite direction, away from the temple, is Ukami, a young monk in yellow robes with a wide-brimmed straw hat covering his shaved head. He is taller than average, with wide shoulders, and seems impressively muscular under his modest garments. Remind the investigators (if applicable) that this monk matches Taneguchi's description—of course, if Taneguchi accompanies them, he points out the monk immediately.

### Questioning the Monk

Outwardly pleasant and polite, Ukami is willing to talk for a short while. Technically, the Prince does the talking. He lies astoundingly well and easily passes any attempts (rolls) by investigators to detect deception—i.e., the players may *think* they pass a roll, but they don't (if necessary, an Extreme success successfully detects a hint of “strangeness” in the monk's responses).

**Keeper note:** adjust the following language if Taneguchi is with the investigators.

### *If asked about his connection to Taneguchi*

*“Yes, it's true; I have spent time with the old man. I just happened to hear about the tragedy that befell this community and felt it was my duty to help. We must do more to care for our vulnerable elderly citizens. He needed significant emotional support, and I did what I could.”*

### *If asked about his business at Hōryūji*

*“Just sightseeing. There is nothing quite like this temple in all the world.”*

### *If asked about his organization*

*“We are the Association of Pale Leaves. It is more of a charitable organization than a religious sect, as we have no temple of our own. I consider myself a man of strong faith, however.”*

**Keeper note:** those who get a Hard success with a **History** or an **Occult** roll recall that, sometime ago, there were rumors that the People's Republic of China had crushed a small religious group that had a somewhat similar name.





Could it be a coincidence, or could some survivors have escaped to Japan?

*If asked where he lives or where the APL is based*  
*“Kyoto, originally. But that was a long time ago.”*

*If asked about the Sutra of Pale Leaves*

*“It is an extraordinarily old book, created by a little-known bodhisattva. The Sutra’s teachings may be slightly different from what you are used to, but there is much wisdom therein. Would you care for a leaflet?”*

*If they ask for his help*

If investigators mention the current situation affecting people’s dreams, Ukami offers to assist their quest to rid the town of the threat. He can identify the baku as the threat, if necessary (provided that the investigators have told Taneguchi about it).

Ukami has copies of the necessary passages from the *Sutra* to conduct the **Dream Dive** ritual (page 74), as well as handwritten leaflets containing several mantras and mandalas copied from the *Sutra*, that certainly count for **Exposure** (page 24). These mantras appear to be in line with other Buddhist chants, translating as, “*Om, the wise one, the great one, the Prince of Pale Leaves, Hail!*” and similar phrases.

*If the conversation drags or the investigators get hostile*

Ukami excuses himself and heads toward a bus that takes him to the train station. Investigators are free to chase him down, but Ukami attempts to escape (i.e., lose the investigators in a crowd of tourists or commuters). If cornered and forced to fight, he is an incredibly dangerous opponent; see his profile in **Dream Eater: Characters & Monsters** (page 85).

## Leads Out

After the encounter with Ukami, investigators may enter the **Hōryūji Temple Grounds** (following) or move on to another scene.

## HŌRYŪJI TEMPLE GROUNDS

Inside the tranquil and spacious temple complex, the investigators find only monks and temple staff. Usually, more tourists would be wandering the grounds, but rumors of the town’s “curse” have already begun to spread and keep people away. The temple is shielded from the dream effects, at least for now, but no one, except perhaps the investigators, realizes this. In any case, the investigators may decide to look around the temple for any possible connections to the situation.

## Talking to the Monks

The monks and lay staff in the temple can provide a brief history of the temple, such as its founding by Prince Shōtoku, as well as some clues (see following sections). In addition, the investigators may note the following information from conversations with those in the temple:

- Visitors these days often say that they suffer from bad dreams or restless nights, and they make offerings and ask the monks to guide their prayers.
- Some people are spreading rumors about a baku. Stories of these creatures predate the arrival of Buddhism in Japan, but none have been reported in this area in 1,000 years.
- A monk from an unknown sect wearing yellow robes showed up in the temple grounds recently, but he said nothing to anyone. (Neither the monk nor the APL has any connection with the temple.)
- The interior of the magnificent five-story pagoda cannot be accessed now, but investigators are free to visit the main hall.
- The Hall of Dreams normally only opens on certain days of the year, but the abbot is considering opening it now for the people of the town.

## A Tale of Prince Shōtoku / About Baku

If investigators ask about the baku, the staff happily relates a famous tale of the temple’s founder.

*“One day, Prince Shōtoku was meditating on the Heart Sutra, when he felt an unusual presence around him. He opened his eyes to find himself surrounded by unusual creatures—they were part of nature, yet obviously supernatural. Foxes, cranes, cats, raccoon dogs, tengu, kappa, and foremost among them, an ancient baku. The creatures had come to test Prince Shōtoku. They feared that human religion would henceforth dominate the land and that the native spiritual inhabitants (kami, yōkai, magical beasts, and so on) would be forgotten or banished.*

*“Prince Shōtoku made a promise to the baku that this would not happen. He was certain that the people of his country could follow the Buddha while continuing to honor nature and the old ways of Shinto, and the two ways could coexist in harmony. Therefore, the baku and its companions should protect this land together. The baku was convinced, and perhaps in honor of this pact, the baku’s coat of fur changed to purple, matching the prince’s garment.”*

## Main Hall

The *kondō* or Golden Hall enshrines the main objects of veneration and functions as a museum for the temple grounds. Each wall features murals of the Buddha and bodhisattvas, and it contains various treasures and ancient





artifacts dating back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century—these are not relevant to the scenario unless the Keeper wishes it.

## Hall of Dreams

The *Yumedono* or Hall of Dreams is a large octagonal structure built on the ground that was once Prince Shōtoku's private palace. It contains the famous *Yumedono Kannon*, a perfectly preserved statue of gilded wood representing Prince Shōtoku himself. The statue's halo features the *Heart Sutra* inscribed in Siddham (an old Sanskrit script). It is shown only shown at certain times each year, but the investigators may convince the abbot with a successful social skill roll (**Charm**, **Fast Talk**, **Intimidate**, or **Persuade**) to let them see it.

- If the investigators meditate in the Hall of Dreams, they receive a vision of the aforementioned **A Tale of Prince Shōtoku** (page 66) story. The next time they dream, they find themselves wearing purple cloaks, which makes the baku more trusting of them.

## NIGHTLY PRAYERS

- **Location:** Momijidera temple, Tatsuta-kita ward, Ikaruga.
- **Leads In:** **Meeting Taneguchi** (page 62).
- **Leads Out:** **Unpleasant Dreams** (page 69).
- **Purpose:** an optional scene; investigators travel to a small temple with Taneguchi to hear his prayers, unknowingly becoming exposed to the power of the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*.

If investigators agree to accompany Taneguchi to the Temple of Autumn Leaves in the evening, he gathers some yellowish papers from his desk and leads them to a small temple just a few minutes from his home.

## TEMPLE OF AUTUMN LEAVES

The temple, known as Momijidera, is an orthodox Buddhist temple. Within, the temple does not reveal any major clues, as the temple is entirely benign and not connected to the current phenomenon. The structure is a mix of traditional architecture and modern construction techniques.

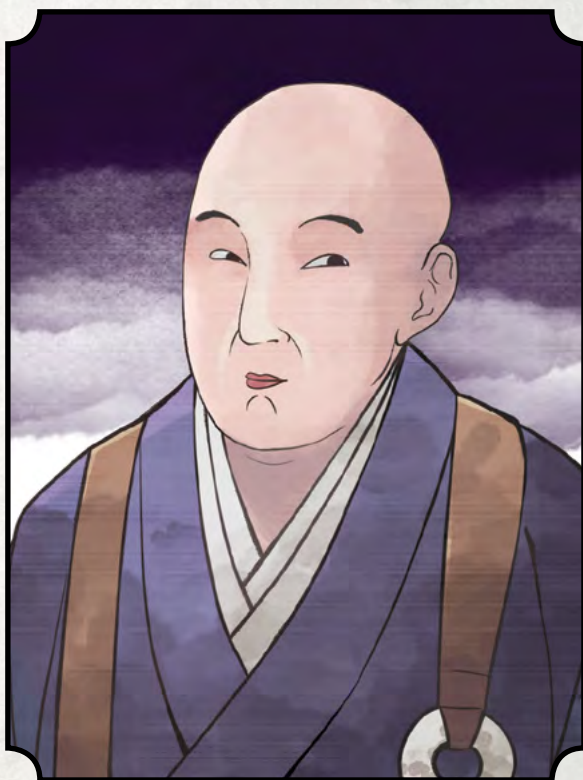
The main hall is on the second floor, with the entrance at the top of a flight of stairs, from which visitors can get an impressive view of the surrounding area. Investigators may also notice (**Listen** roll) that sounds from the temple, such as chanting or ringing of bells, carry quite a distance. In fact, if they are in the neighborhood during an evening reading, they can see many inhabitants of the immediate area of the temple coming out to listen to the faint chanting. If questioned, the neighbors say they cannot sleep but find the chants soothing.

Taneguchi has an arrangement with the temple staff, who graciously leave the facility open late for him. None of them are cult members or collaborators, and only one has heard Taneguchi's chanting.

- If investigators look for a member of the temple staff, they find Iwamoto Atsushi, a monk who tends the temple in the late afternoon. He says he feels sorry for Taneguchi and has allowed him to use the temple facilities. He does not recognize Taneguchi's prayers, and while it's unusual to perform ceremonies from a different sect, the monk feels they are quite pleasant and does not see any harm in it.

In the main hall of the temple, Taneguchi lights incense, and hands some papers to the investigators, saying they can follow along in the chant if they like. He says he made these copies so that he wouldn't have to carry the heavy book up the stairs each night.





**Keeper note:** Taneguchi's papers are perfect, handwritten copies from the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*. Each verse consists of a complex mandala-like image and a mantra written in kanji characters. Outwardly, the papers do not appear suspicious—Taneguchi has only the best intentions and no hidden motives (or none of which he is consciously aware); however, looking at the mandalas for even a few seconds, reading, or hearing these verses leads to Exposure to the *Sutra's* effects (see **Exposure**, Chapter 1, page 24).

## Evening Mantras

Taneguchi closes his eyes. He asks for forgiveness for the life he has taken and the harm he has caused, and prays that the victim's soul will be freed from the karmic cycle. Then, in a clear and vigorous voice, he begins chanting the mantras from the *Sutra*. These are in antiquated Japanese, but Taneguchi repeats each mantra many times, and—provided they read along—the verses stick in the investigators' minds quite quickly. The characters and sounds of the verse, and the image of the mandalas, remain fresh in the investigators' minds until they go to sleep (and encounter the baku).

- The first mantra chanted, the **Meditation on Emptiness** (page 30), clears one's mind of negative thoughts and opens it to higher wisdom. It is relatively short, simple, and easy to repeat.

- The second is a longer and more complex chant, called **Deep Reflection** (page 30). Taneguchi explains that it helps adherents to vividly recall misdeeds and traumas from their past, to confront those obstacles to enlightenment and become free from bad karma.

**Keeper note:** the second mantra provides a potential roleplaying opportunity. The Keeper could ask each player to imagine some poignant event from their investigator's backstory—and make note of these to use against the investigators during the **Dream Dive** (page 74) sequence later.

When the chanting is over, the investigators feel refreshed and clear-headed, as though a weight has been lifted from them. The Keeper may wish, optionally, to grant investigators a minor **Sanity** recovery (+1D3) if they revealed trauma from their backstory, even if it was not recent. The Keeper's goal is to convince the investigators (and players) that the *Sutra* has powerful positive effects and tempt them into reading more of its text. Once the investigators go to sleep, proceed to the initial encounter with the baku (see **Unpleasant Dreams**, page 69).

## Growing Wary

- The investigators might discover something suspicious about Taneguchi and the *Sutra* at this stage.
- Success with an **Art/Craft** (Forgery, Calligraphy, or other appropriate) roll, a Hard **Spot Hidden**, or an Extreme **Language (Japanese)** roll while inspecting both the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* and Taneguchi's copied pages reveals that the copies are almost too perfect to be hand written, but they're also clearly not prints or photocopies. Every single pen stroke is nearly identical, down to a hair's width. There's not a single smudge or error anywhere. Taneguchi must indeed be a master forger, and, if so, he's wasting his talents just copying old religious texts.

## If the investigators are already suspicious

If they believe that Taneguchi's chanting is related to the problems happening in town, they may ask him to stop reciting the mantras. He politely contends that the contents are not curses or spells, or anything else that could be dangerous, and offers to let the investigators check thoroughly over the pages he brought with him. Either looking at the pages or listening to someone recite them causes investigators to gain **Exposure Points** (page 24). If the investigators still insist that he stops chanting, he closes his eyes and performs his recitations silently to himself.



## UNPLEASANT DREAMS

- **Location:** shared dreamscape.
- **Leads In:** **Meeting Taneguchi** (page 62); **Nightly Prayers** (page 67).
- **Leads Out:** **The Fortune-Teller** (page 71); **Research in the Sutra** (page 73).
- **Purpose:** investigators fall asleep and have a close encounter with the baku, encouraging them to see it as a threat.

## FALLING ASLEEP

Once investigators have been exposed to the effects of the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* and fall asleep, they encounter the baku. We recommend that the Keeper does not inform the investigators that they are dreaming. Instead, find a way to transition to the dream scene smoothly and unexpectedly, before the investigators explicitly say they are going to bed, to simulate how people usually don't realize that they are dreaming right away.

### Nightmares

It is important to isolate each dreamer in their own nightmare (to contrast with the later magical **Dream Dive**, page 74). Note that running separate dreams for each investigator may be time-consuming, depending on the size of the investigator group.

Significantly, however it starts, the dream should approach a point where the dreamer feels they are about to meet someone... only for it to abruptly break and jump forward in time into a nightmare sequence where they encounter the baku. This “break” represents the moment the dreamer met the Prince of Pale Leaves, but the baku ate the memories of that event. Use the **Sample Bad Dream**, (page 70), as a template for this end scene. Here are some options for the Keeper:

#### Artisanal Approach

The Keeper crafts individual nightmares for each player, possibly based on previous game events, character backstories, or common dream elements from the list below. At a suitable point, the baku enters the dream. This approach takes the most time, depending on the number of players.

- Being chased, but moving too slowly to get away.
- Trying to fight, but finding that your attacks have no force behind them.
- Falling from a high place.
- Losing your teeth.
- Taking a test without prior preparation.

- Returning to a location from your childhood.
- Being naked in public.
- Sitting in an out-of-control vehicle.

#### Improvised Approach

The Keeper free-forms an extended surreal dream sequence, moving back and forth between investigators who never meet up, though they are desperately trying to do so. Think of this as cutting between scenes with each character in a movie or TV show, each scene building to the climax, where the baku enters the dream.

#### Streamlined Approach

Each investigator, individually, has the same nightmare—see **Sample Bad Dream**, page 70. Narrate it once, but make the players roll their own Sanity losses as per the **Exposure Points (EP) & Dream Results** section (following).



Nightmare



## SAMPLE BAD DREAM

You get up and go looking for the restroom. As you step out of the room, you hear hollow footfalls approaching you.

Suddenly, you find yourself strapped to a reclining metal chair. A bright light, directly in front of your face, is blinding you. To your left, out of the corner of your eye, there's a man who looks like a dentist—except for a blood-stained butcher's apron—who is absent-mindedly looking at a blurry x-ray.

"*Hmm, probably abscessed,*" the dentist remarks dispassionately, seemingly speaking to no one in particular. "*These teeth are going to have to come out.*"

The dentist holds your jaw shut with one hand. With the other, he picks up a small, steel hammer and deftly but casually smashes in the left side of your face where your rows of teeth meet. Your jaw throbs with excruciating pain, and your head spins.

He loosens the straps. "*All finished. You can go ahead and spit.*"

You lean over the side and spit the contents of your mouth onto the floor: countless fragments of shattered bone and dark sticky glops of blood. You swear that there is some wrinkly gray matter among the mess.

You see a monster. A large, hog-sized thing covered in short, purple-striped fur and a tail. Its powerful limbs end in wicked-looking claw-like hooves. But it's the eyes that paralyze you with fear. Rows of eyes running lengthwise down its face. It trots over to the mess on the floor and begins greedily slurping up the broken teeth and blood with a long tongue, as if it were breath mints and raspberry jam. One of its sets of eyes stares into yours, utterly emotionless.

The worst part of all this, you consider grimly, now that it's entirely too late, is that you originally came to this dentist with a toothache in the *right* side of your mouth.

## Exposure Points (EP) & Dream Results

The more exposure the investigators have had to the *Sutra*, the more aggressively hungry the baku acts toward them.

- If the investigators have fewer than 50 EP, the baku is not exceptionally aggressive or violent just yet; however, it has a frightening and disturbing presence, and encountering it for the first time in a dream prompts a **Sanity** roll (0/1D4 loss).
- If an investigator has 50+ EP, or if they attempt to fight the baku, it attacks, pinning them down, paralyzing them with its stare, and "tasting" their brain with its creepy prehensile snout and tongue. This indescribable feeling of intrusion provokes another 1D10 Sanity loss, and 1D10 EP reduction before the dreamer jolts awake. The baku is functionally invincible in this scene, and it disappears after its curiosity abates. The investigator wakes up in a cold sweat.

See **Dream Eater: Characters & Monsters** (page 85) for the baku's profile and description.

## WAKING UP

Investigators should wake up shortly after the baku appears.

- If they are staying at Maeda's house, they are jolted awake by their host screaming as he wakes up from his own nightmare.
- If staying with Taneguchi, he isn't asleep—he's up at his desk creating another copy of the *Sutra*. If the investigators disturb him, he blinks, looks momentarily confused, and then apologizes for waking them with a light.

## Leads Out

Now convinced that a monster is haunting people's dreams—with their own first-hand experience—the investigators should proceed with finding a way to deal with the baku. Some possibilities include proceeding to the local library if they have not already done so (see **If the investigators would rather look into matters themselves**, page 64), or going to **The Fortune-Teller** (following) or the **Hōryūji Temple** (page 64) for more guidance. The investigators may now be considering attempting a shared dream, where they can confront the baku together; if so, they may wish to **Research in the Sutra** (page 73).



## Lore Sheet 3: Fortune-Telling in Japan

Fortune-telling and divination, known as *uranai* (占い) in Japanese, is socially accepted to the point that a number of Japanese people would rather visit a fortune-teller than a psychiatrist or counselor if they are depressed or troubled. Diviners often enjoy the respected title of “sensei” normally reserved for doctors and teachers—Madam Inaba in this story would be called “Inaba-sensei” by her clients in Japanese. Fortune tellers provide guidance about love, marriage, financial affairs, long-term planning, or how to get rid of bad luck or harmful spirits. As with many service jobs, some in this profession are grifters just out for money, while others are sincere in their desire to help people and, if nothing else, listen to and provide encouragement for clients who have nowhere else to turn. The three general categories of fortune-telling in Japan are:

- **Meisen** (命占): divination based on time and place of birth, which includes various types of numerology and Eastern and Western astrology.
- **Bokusen** (卜占): divination using objects, such as I Ching, tarot cards, augury, and dowsing.
- **Sousen** (相占): divination based on perception and environment, including palmistry, dream interpretation, and feng shui.

During the Bubble Period, companies were trying anything and everything they could to gain an edge over the competition, and some CEOs made major financial decisions based on the readings given by fortune-tellers. This is nothing new, of course—during the Heian period, the famous diviner Abe no Seimei was employed by emperors and high government officials to give advice on managing the country.

### Personal Background:

There’s a wonderfully talented local fortune-teller who you visit regularly. She’s a spirited woman who seems to know what’s wrong before you tell her your troubles. Above all she’s a sympathetic listener, and you always trust her advice.

## THE FORTUNE-TELLER

- **Location:** Inaba’s parlor, Ikaruga.
- **Leads In:** Meeting Taneguchi (page 62).
- **Leads Out:** Research in the Sutra (page 73).
- **Purpose:** investigators consult a mystic for advice on dealing with the baku, and she suggests a lucid/shared dream.

The fortune-teller’s place is too far to walk, especially in the summer heat, so the investigators should take a car or taxi. If he is present for the trip—which he is quite keen to be—Taneguchi appears (**Psychology** roll) stressed when the car approaches busy intersections, clutching the seat or his book bag, and he repeatedly asks whoever is behind the wheel to drive carefully.

## MADAM INABA’S PARLOR

Madam Inaba’s place is a two-story building with a parlor on the first floor and the living area on the second floor; a common style for private businesses outside of big cities. The interior of the shop is relatively narrow, but feels intimate rather than cramped. There is a strong smell of sage. The walls are decorated with hanging scrolls featuring religious figures and beautifully written kanji characters.

In the center of the parlor is a table covered with a velvet cloth, with several chairs to one side for customers while a single chair stands to the other. The proprietor, Madam Inaba, is sitting behind a counter at the back end of the parlor, among shelves of books. A porcelain *manekineko* (beckoning cat statue) holds its paw up to welcome the investigators. She notices the group enter and greets them cheerfully.



Madam Inaba motions for the group to sit down at the center table as she brings over a tray of freshly brewed tea and some traditional Japanese sweets.

### *If Taneguchi is present*

Madam Inaba says, “Taneguchi-kun, how are you holding up? Are you finally ready to talk about the accident? Maybe I can help.”

Taneguchi shyly says that’s not why he’s here and explains about the nightmares. If the investigators have already witnessed the baku themselves at this point, he encourages them to share their experiences as well.

### *If Taneguchi is not present*

Madam Inaba listens to the investigators and responds, cautiously open-minded:

*“Hmm. A few other residents have come to me for counsel about a monster in their dreams. By the third customer, I knew it was more than coincidence. So, I started going through all my old books. Based on what I’ve read and what I’ve heard from you and other witnesses, I believe this creature is a baku, normally an auspicious and welcome spirit. It looks something like one of those Malaysian tapirs, but it feeds on bad dreams.”*

*“This baku, if that’s indeed what it is, must have been drawn by Taneguchi’s desperate desire to be free of the guilt and nightmares resulting from the accident. I have never heard of one causing nightmares and sleeplessness, though. Perhaps it has become greedy and is creating nightmares so that it can feed more.”*

### *If asked about her “powers”*

As appropriate, she takes them aside out of earshot of Taneguchi and explains:

*“I’ll tell you a secret. Much of my work doesn’t really need magic and mysticism. It’s just paying attention, looking for patterns, and making informed predictions. Behavioral patterns, social patterns, financial patterns. For instance, long ago I warned Mr. Taneguchi that his wife was going to die from lung cancer. I didn’t need to do a numerology reading to know that, as she’d been smoking a pack a day for most of her adult life. It was one of only two times they didn’t heed my advice. The other time was when I told Taneguchi he was getting too old to drive.” Inaba shakes her head and sighs.*

### *If asked how to stop the baku*

*“Normally, we cannot see or interact with an entity like a baku, just as we cannot see infrared, hear ultrasound, or distinguish one animal from another just by scent. But, some creatures in this world can. Perhaps when we sleep, our brainwaves become attuned to the baku’s domain, and on some level, we and it perceive one another. So, this entity can only be confronted on its own terms... in a dream.”*

*“I remember reading an old story about a monk who entered the dreams of a restless boy and saved him from an overeating baku, but I have no idea how to accomplish such a thing. Such rituals are spoken of in holy scriptures, but are beyond me. I am a diviner, not a priestess.”*

**Keeper note:** this is a hint that the investigators need to use the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*.

- If Taneguchi is present, he reveals that he brought the *Sutra* with him in his book bag. He says that he recalls a meditation ritual in the book for linking minds and sharing dreams, but he can’t remember what page.
- If he’s not present, the investigators can return to Taneguchi’s house to borrow the *Sutra*.

## Showing Inaba the Sutra

If investigators show her the book, Madam Inaba eagerly but delicately unfolds the voluminous tome and thumbs through its pages. At first, her eyes grow wide, and her excitement is palpable. She giggles like a young child who just received a new toy. But, after a dozen pages or so, she becomes hesitant, nervously adjusting her glasses as if they have somehow shown her something impossible. After a few moments, she closes the book rather abruptly.

*“I think,”* Madam Inaba says slowly, measuring her words warily as if concerned she might cause offense to something unseen, *“you should be enormously careful with this book. There are unfathomably complex linguistic and artistic patterns embedded throughout, unlike anything I’ve ever seen. There is power here. It is not my property, and I will not tell you what to do with it. Just do not treat it lightly.”* She returns the book, handling it as if it were an unlit stick of dynamite.

**Keeper note:** assume that Inaba made her POW roll and avoided initial Exposure (see **Resisting Exposure, Chapter One**, page 26), or just secretly roll and see how it plays out.

### *If asked for more details*

*“I just get the distinct feeling that no normal human could have written this. I yearn to read more, but also realize that perhaps I shouldn’t.”*

### **Leads**

- Proceed to **Research in the Sutra** (following).



## RESEARCH IN THE SUTRA

- **Location:** Taneguchi's residence or Madam Inaba's parlor, Ikaruga.
- **Leads In:** *Meeting Taneguchi* (page 62); *The Fortune-Teller* (preceding).
- **Leads Out:** *Dream Dive* (following).
- **Purpose:** by researching in the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*, the investigators find a way to enter a shared dream and deal with the baku.

After investigators get the clue about entering someone's dreams to help them overcome a baku—either from Madam Inaba, or from their own research at the library—Taneguchi claims that there is a meditation ritual in the book for sharing dreams, as well as verses for banishing spirits, but he can't quite remember where. He suggests that the investigators (and Madam Inaba if present) help him search for it.

**Keeper note:** the Prince wants the investigators to read the whole *Sutra* and to deal with the baku. Even if the investigators have destroyed Taneguchi's copy of the *Sutra*, Ukami can teach them the ritual (see **Crossing Paths with Ukami**, page 65).

## RISKY RESEARCH

To discover the ritual needed to conduct a shared and lucid dream and so banish the baku, the investigators need to delve into the text of the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*, which requires reading (or at least skimming) the pages of the book and exposing the reader(s) to the full force of its infectious power. Taneguchi can participate, but it takes many hours (if not days) unless other characters help. The party must make an important decision here without fully realizing its implications.

- **If the investigators intensively search the *Sutra* themselves**, they become directly exposed to the full mind-hacking code (1D100 Exposure Points, minimum 20 each, plus 2D10 EP for any investigator for whom this is their Initial Exposure), which creates a significant possibility that they become future hosts of the Prince of Pale Leaves. In this case, they find all the necessary mantras and the Sign of Sleep (see **Mystic Signs**, Chapter 1, page 31). Madam Inaba remains safe and may become an important ally to the investigators or their successors in the future of the campaign.
- **If the investigators convince Madam Inaba to research the *Sutra* for them**, they escape the heavy exposure, but

this dooms Madam Inaba to be a host of the Prince. Once she has turned, she acts as a double-agent, offering the party seemingly helpful advice while subtly steering them toward more exposure to the *Sutra*. If Madam Inaba undertakes the research, she discovers the Sign of Sleep and the Sign of the Ancients for them, as well as the mantras needed for the ritual.

- **If the investigators and Madam Inaba all research the *Sutra* together**, they easily find the best tools within the text to defeat the baku, such as the Sign of the Ancients and the Sign of Sleep, plus one more Sign of the Keeper's choosing. But this risks both Madam Inaba and most of the party becoming infected with the *Sutra*'s code.
- **If investigators make Taneguchi do everything himself**, it takes significantly longer, but he finds the appropriate ritual eventually—the Prince forces him to stall for time. He “absent-mindedly” reads everything out loud while he is going over the text so that he can expose the investigators and Inaba to the *Sutra* (1 Exposure Point every time). He gives them the Sign of Sleep but no other Sign.

## THE DREAM RITUAL

After reading through the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*, the investigators find investigators must now perform the Dream Dive. It claims to allow those who chant it together before they sleep to be able to synchronize their minds and join each other in their dreams. The ritual requires 3 component parts from the *Sutra*:

- The **Meditation on Emptiness** mantra (costs 1 MP+1D4 EP to cast).
- The **Synchronous Mind** mantra (costs 1 MP+1D4 EP to cast).
- The **Sign of Sleep** (costs 1 MP+1D4 EP to cast; see **Mystic Signs**, Chapter 1, page 31, for details on learning Signs).

In preparation for the casting, the participants must form a circle in the same room, sitting in the lotus position with their heads bowed toward each other slightly. A ring of salt should be drawn on the ground surrounding them. Participants must chant two mantras in turn, starting with the Meditation on Emptiness and followed by a continuous chant of the Synchronous Mind (see **Mantras in the Sutra**, Chapter 1, page 30).

The Sign of Sleep is then cast (or revealed, if prepared in advance), and all those meditating on the Sign fall unconscious. At this point, everyone involved suffers 1 point Sanity loss—not from the ritual, but from the uncanny feeling of sharing a lucid dream with other people.



When the ritual is completed, the participants have their minds linked in a shared dream. They can speak and interact with one another within the dream, and can manipulate the dream through sheer will. The contents of the dream are a mix of all the participants, though some may be clearly dominant depending on the circumstances. If a participant wakes up, they are immediately removed from the dream, and would need to re-chant the Synchronous Mind mantra and spend another magic point to rejoin the session.

The salt ring purifies the area and wards off malevolent beings (hungry ghosts, demons, and so on) from entering the shared dream. If the participants neglect this step, they may encounter an entity that has come to prey on them, although this is up to the Keeper's discretion.

- The salt ring used in the Dream Dive ritual does nothing to deter the baku nor the Prince of Pale Leaves. The baku is not malevolent, and the Prince is not a spirit. It does not prevent Nakamura Hinako from appearing in the **Dream Dive** scene (following), since she's a nightmare memory of Taneguchi's and not really a ghost.
- The Sign of Sleep is useless in the dream world but it can help investigators fall asleep quickly. This is useful if they need to get back into the dream after "dying" and waking up.

Equipped with the ritual, the investigators must now enter a shifting dreamscape and track down the baku in the **Dream Dive** (following).

## DREAM DIVE

- **Location:** someone's bedroom, Ikaruga; a shared dreamscape.
- **Leads In:** **Research in the Sutra** (preceding), **Hōryūji Temple** (page 64).
- **Leads Out:** **The Final Encounter** (page 81).
- **Purpose:** together, the investigators enter a lucid dream and descend through layers of nightmares to track down the baku. They also encounter a mysterious monk, who is, in fact, the Pale Prince embedded in Taneguchi's subconscious mind.

The investigators must now perform the Dream Dive ritual to get to the bottom of everything. Taneguchi suggests including him in the ritual because he is the cause of the baku's activity—it was his guilt-dream that attracted it in the first place, and that nightmare, he is sure, is where he will encounter the baku again. The actual location of the ritual does not matter, as long as there's a comfortable place for the entire party (including Taneguchi) to sleep.

Madam Inaba refuses to participate in the Dream Dive, saying she is, "*getting too old for monster hunting,*" but allows the use of her parlor and watches over the party. She says, "*I spent a few years in California in the '60s. You can count on me to be your 'trip sitter.'*"

**Keeper note:** technically, Taneguchi is not necessary—for example, if he "dies" in the dream, it does not bring the Dream Dive to an end—but his taking part means the Prince has a presence (in the guise of the Pale Monk) and can witness what happens, so the Prince tries to engineer Taneguchi's involvement.

**Important note:** the scenario has the most impact if Taneguchi is present, and **Taneguchi's Dream: The Accident** (page 80) is the penultimate scene before the arrival of the baku, as the investigators see the incident that started everything. However, if your players have objections to the presentation of a scene wherein a child is killed in a traffic accident, it is perfectly acceptable to bypass it altogether, and the baku can enter at any point during the gauntlet of nightmares.

## ENTERING THE DREAM

When they begin the dive and enter their first dream, Taneguchi is absent. Still tenuously connected to him through the mind-synchronizing mantra, investigators can hear him say, "*The baku is nearby, and it's coming for me. I must hide. Please hurry!*" Then, silence. The investigators get the distinct impression that Taneguchi is somewhere "deeper." They must go from dreamscape to dreamscape until they find Taneguchi and the baku.

### Lucid Dreams & Narrative Agency

Normal dreams are typically random and incomprehensible. But here in a lucid dream, the dreamers have a measure of power and control. The Keeper should open the dream sequence by asking the investigators to describe what they see in the dreamscape, and using the first or most interesting suggestions that come up. Use improvisational tactics as much as possible. Respond with "yes, and..." or "yes, but..." to the players' ideas, twisting and modifying them to continually increase the tension. Make it clear that *deus ex machina* solutions and other easy wins will not work. Plus, some pre-determined dreams have little that the investigators can control.



瀬波の海人爲原波の云命がふゆふ  
海史を大蛇とて喰ふる時瑞さうふの



朝標  
同

江戸  
書



## RULES FOR SHARED LUCID DREAMING

- All investigators have the same characteristics and skills as they do in the Waking World. The normal laws of physics apply in the dream world (more or less).
- Any applicable spells or special abilities that an investigator knows can be used in the dream at normal magic point cost and zero Sanity cost.

### Dream Shaping

An investigator may spend one or more magic points and make a **POW** roll to forcibly influence the dream in several ways. Using these abilities counts as an action for the round unless otherwise specified.

- **Retroactively avoid HP/Sanity loss (1 MP):** after suffering a wound or traumatic episode, the investigator says the magic words, “It’s just a dream,” and mitigates the damage taken. When making the **POW** roll, a Regular success blocks 5 damage to HP or SAN, while a Hard success blocks 10 damage.
- **Scenery shift (1–5 MP):** with a successful **POW** roll, an investigator can abruptly alter part of the dreamscape. The player must describe the new scenery (a door or flight of stairs where there was none before, etc.). The Keeper has the final verdict on all changes, and if they decide that the change gives a positional advantage, the investigator or chosen ally gains a bonus die on their next action. Neither the scene of the dream sequence nor the characters and creatures change, so the party cannot use this ability to skip content. Note that the baku has a more powerful version of this ability.
- **Summon item (1–5 MP):** with a successful **POW** roll, an investigator may conjure any familiar item to use for the duration of the dream. The item behaves as it would in real life; however, for an investigator to use the item, it must be something that the investigator has touched and used before (or otherwise experienced firsthand), as evidenced by established backstory and investment in skill points. The larger, more powerful, and more outlandish the item is, the more MP it costs, as decided by the Keeper. A Hard success or Extreme success on the **POW** roll creates a more effective version of the desired item, if the Keeper so chooses.

**Keeper note:** you need not explain these rules to the players outright. Instead, give them hints about the possibilities, and let them figure it out through trial and error.

Some of the encounters within the dream dive, especially the baku, are challenging. Fortunately, the lucid dream powers give the investigators a fighting chance. If they have enough determination, and magic points, investigators may be able to brute-force their way through a seemingly unwinnable encounter by dying, waking up, reciting the Synchronous Mind mantra, and returning to the dream to fight again. Note that time flows differently in dreams, so the Keeper remains final arbiter on how long a defeated investigator takes to perform the mantra and return to the party.

### “I SUMMON A ROCKET LAUNCHER!”

Obviously, spawning the biggest, baddest, boomstick they can imagine is the first thing most investigators are going to try. But often it’s not going to go well. A typical Japanese citizen, who has never touched a firearm, would have trouble conjuring a working pistol in this lucid dream. If a character has only seen firearms in TV shows and movies, any gun they try to conjure or use in a dream would act like a blank-firing prop or operate strangely. On the other hand, an investigator with military experience is going to have a grand old time.

### If Killed in a Lucid Dream

Investigators reduced to zero hit points in the dream are ejected from the dream and wake up screaming in a cold sweat. Anything summoned (intentionally or otherwise) also vanishes from the dream. They suffer 1 (real) point of damage and may have aches, pains, bruises, burns, nosebleeds, and other ailments eerily mirroring their demise in the dream.

This and any other real physical damage carries over into each dream dive. Keepers may impose a **Sanity** roll (0/1D3 loss) depending on how traumatic or gruesome their death was in the dream. From this, investigators realize that the stakes are bloodcurdlingly real, and they have a limited number of “lives” to complete the mission.

To return to the dream, an investigator must chant the Synchronous Mind mantra again until they sleep, adding 1D4 Exposure Points. They reappear in the dream with their current value of “real” hit points.





## THE PALE MONK

Throughout different scenes of the dreams, the investigators notice a human figure dressed in yellow robes, wearing a straw-basket-like hat in the style of *komusō*. Strange wisps of energy seep out from the vents of the hat.

If investigators have met Ukami in the Waking World, this monk seems strangely familiar to them despite the different clothing. They may assume that it is Ukami. In fact, this is the representation of the Prince of Pale Leaves, in Taneguchi's mind. Investigators with minimal or no Exposure Points find his presence unsettling, while those with high Exposure Points feel a sense of relief when he appears.

For the most part, this monk remains a passive observer, but if the party is in significant danger, he may point (silently, slowly, and dramatically) to either a clue or a place of temporary safety. NPCs and creatures manifested in the dream do not seem to notice him unless he actively intervenes, or the party physically interacts with him. He generally does not speak, but if he does, the investigators hear him as their own inner voice. The monk is more likely to speak to investigators who have high Exposure Points.

On the other hand, if the investigators have already figured out that the *Sutra* itself is a threat and accuse, threaten, or engage the monk, the results of the dream dive and the ending significantly change—see **The Final**

## KOMUS: MONKS OF EMPTINESS

Sometimes called “monks of emptiness,” *komusō* were wandering mendicant monks of the Zen school who wore distinctive straw baskets over their heads (symbolizing the abandonment of ego) and carried *shakuhachi* flutes which they played as meditative exercises. They were active in the Edo period (1603–1868).

The Association of Pale Leaves is not related to this group, and none of their adherents currently dress like this. However, because Taneguchi is a fan of old literature, this sort of “faceless” pilgrim is the image that his subconscious mind assigned to the Prince of Pale Leaves’ faceless presence.

**Encounter** (page 81) for details about interacting with the Pale Monk.

## GAUNTLET OF NIGHTMARES

In this section, the Keeper leads the investigators through increasingly intense and disturbing dream sequences, each time diving deeper until they reach the final dream that Taneguchi was trying to forget. The baku has tasted the nightmares of hundreds of townsfolk and can recreate and weaponize them to stall the investigators. It can also use the investigators’ personal fears and tragedies against them.

Several set-piece dreams are included here, but the Keeper should use improvised and personalized dreams for the investigators if possible—and suitable subjects to each player’s agreement and comfort. To speed up the sequence, the Keeper may choose to cut out one of these scenes or alter them entirely to better match their player’s comfort levels.

### The Worst Bug

The investigators “wake up” in whatever location they attempted the ritual. It’s near pitch-black, with only shards of moonlight coming in through the curtains. By the sounds of the many frogs and crickets, and lack of streetlights outside, it’s a rural area. The peaceful respite lasts only a moment.

Before anyone gets up, one investigator (lowest Luck value) feels something with far too many legs crawl directly over their face. One of the thing’s legs touches the investigator’s lips just for a microsecond; call for a **Sanity** roll (0/1 loss). Regardless of the result, the investigator’s





Giant Centipede

instinctual reaction is to scream and flail wildly, flinging the horrible creature away. It lands somewhere in the dark room, and the sound of its tiny legs scrambling on the floor fills the ensuing silence as the fauna outside falls mute.

The investigators turn on the overhead lights just in time to see it scurry into the closet. It's a *mukade*, a type of centipede common in rural Japan that grows up to 8 inches (20 cm) long.

If they open the closet, the investigators meet a writhing mass of dozens of centipedes that come pouring out to defend their territory. Even worse, these are merely the offspring of an even larger centipede—an unnatural skittering monstrosity, as long as a futon. The giant centipede moves aggressively and incredibly fast. It chases investigators if they run, and hunts them down, starting with the slowest runner. Investigators cannot leave this dream sequence and move on until it and its young are dead: see **Dream Eater: Characters & Monsters** (page 85) for combat profiles.

- **Non-violent solution:** none. Absolutely none.

## Railroaded

The investigators find themselves on a passenger train, traveling through the Japanese countryside during the evening. Nearly every car seems empty, except for the one behind them. There, a shy young boy (perhaps aged 12) paces frantically, pulling nervously at his hair.

"I... I was out playing with my friends a few towns over," the boy says. "I fell asleep on the train, and... now I don't know where I am or where the train is going. Did I miss my stop? Where's the next station? The train's not stopping... I want to get off but it's not stopping, and I don't know how I'm gonna get home and, and..."

No time schedules or list of stops are posted anywhere

in the train cars. No emergency stop buttons or other such safety measures are evident, either. If asked where he's going, the boy says he needs to go to Nara to change trains and get home to Ikaruga. Investigators may suggest talking to the train crew. The boy refuses to go alone, saying he's scared.

According to a green placard above a window, this is a "one man" train (operator only, no conductor), which is somewhat common in rural areas. When investigators go to the front car, they see the back of the uniformed train operator standing in the sealed cab compartment. As they approach the cab, the investigators notice that the scenery outside is getting weirder, and the train seems to have passed through a series of torii arches (traditional Japanese gates) and is now heading downward into a dark tunnel.

- Investigators can attempt a **Spot Hidden** roll to notice that there is something wrong with the reflection of the operator's face in the front windscreen.

If the investigators try to talk to or get the attention of the train operator, he slowly turns around, revealing that his face comprises one tremendous unblinking eye—seeing this for the first time requires a **Sanity** roll (0/1D3 loss). The boy screams and flees in a panic toward the back of the train. At the same moment, the train enters the tunnel, the lights go out, and everything goes dark. The investigators hear the door of the operator's cab sliding open and the methodical footsteps of the approaching creature.



Train Man



To clear this dream sequence, investigators must overcome the train man, secure the cab, and reverse the train to drive it out of the underworld (requiring a **Operate Heavy Machinery** roll, a Hard **Mechanical Repair**, or a Hard **INT** roll). During this encounter, the lights flicker on and off constantly, meaning investigators must fight in the dark every 2 rounds. See **Dream Eater: Characters & Monsters** (page 85) for the Train Man's profile.

- **Non-violent solution:** the investigators may instinctively run or fight, but they have the option to talk to the train man, or better yet, help the boy work up the courage to do so. Surprisingly, the train man answers. If asked the train's destination, he says "*Naraku*" (the underworld). If the investigators ask how to get to Nara, the train man says, "*Change trains at Naraku Station. Platform 1, green line.*" The train man then holds out his hand and says, "*Tickets.*"
- The investigators must each spend 1 MP to summon a ticket to give to the train man (the boy already has a ticket). By doing so, the dream ends. If they cannot produce a ticket, the train man becomes irate and attempts to throw the freeloader off the train, saying "*No ticket.*" If necessary, a successful **INT** roll ensures an investigator realizes they can manifest the tickets in the dream.
- Investigators may also get out of this dream sequence by reaching the rear of the train, forcing open the door, and escaping by making a leap of faith into the dark abyss.

If the investigators fail to reach any solution, the train plunges into the Eight Hot Hells and the investigators "die"—i.e., jolt awake.

## A Farewell to Arms

**Keeper note:** this dream foreshadows or echoes the Adherent of the Unspeakable Oath that appears in **The Bridge Maiden, Part One** (see *TSoPL: CM*).

The investigators find themselves in the middle of what looks like a World War II-era field hospital, converted from shabby wooden barracks. Dozens of cots pack the ward, all filled with injured, sick, and dying Japanese soldiers. A flickering electric bulb and a few kerosene lamps provide the ward's dim light. The windows are covered in black tarpaulins to prevent even this small amount of light from leaking out and providing a target for air raids.

A male doctor and female nurse stand over a patient in the corner of the ward. Their white uniforms are soiled with blood, and they both look as though they haven't slept in days. The investigators overhear their conversation:

*"Looks like this one has gangrene setting in as well. I'm sorry, you're going to have to perform the procedure yourself,"* the doctor tells the nurse. *"We're understaffed, and I'm needed elsewhere."*

The young nurse is about to protest, but he hands her what appears to be a hacksaw. *"Above the elbow, just to be sure. There's no morphine left, so get some volunteers to hold him down."* The doctor quickly exits through the door.

Behind the nurse, a heavily bandaged Japanese soldier lies on the cot. His left arm has already been amputated and is nothing but a stump. The bandages on his right arm are soaked through with dark blood. His fingers are purple and black and much too large. Flies buzz around him, but he can't swat them away. He wakes up, notices the saw, and realizes what's going to happen.

*"Please, oh god, please don't take my arm! I can't bear to lose both! I'll be mutilated, a burden, and no one will ever love me. Please don't do it, please please please..."*

In between heavy sobs, the man seems to be muttering prayers, offering incoherent oaths to any god that might listen. The nurse turns to the party with tears in her eyes. She must be only 20, and has already seen too much. *"I... I can't do this,"* she says to the investigators, holding out the saw.

- If the investigators agree to help amputate, or if they leave the nurse to do it herself, the soldier resists, thrashing his arm about wildly, smearing sticky blood on them. With a successful **Spot Hidden** roll, they notice something wriggling beneath the bandages on the soldier's right arm.

Just before the amputation attempt, the soldier throws his head back in an expression closer to ecstasy than agony, and his right limb transforms into a monstrous tentacle, breaking free of the gore-soaked bandages and lashing out at the investigators—provoking a **Sanity** roll (1/1D6 loss).

The soldier, now transforming into *something else*, begins to shout with mad joy, *"He will make us whole! He is our salvation!"* The nurse gasps, frozen with fear. The investigators can fight him, allowing the nurse to get away. Or they can leave her to her fate and escape the field hospital into the dark bombed-out ruins of an unspecified city. The Keeper may decide to end the dream sequence there, or prolong it with a chase scene.

- **Using Signs against the monster:** if the investigators use the Sign of the Ancients as soon as they notice something suspicious about the soldier, they can prevent or at least delay his transformation. After he transforms, the Sign of the Ancients repels the soldier—but it may, at the Keeper's discretion, resort to other attacks such as throwing furniture.



- **Non-violent solution:** the wounded soldier deserves a second opinion. An investigator may make a **Medicine** roll to save the young soldier's remaining arm. Doing so requires summoning a variety of modern drugs and surgical tools (3 MP worth in total). Other investigators who make a **First Aid** roll can assist the procedure and provide a bonus die to the Medicine roll. If everything goes well, the soldier does not transform into a monster. Instead, the soldier and the young nurse give the party their heartfelt gratitude and encouragement (+1D4 (dream) HP and +1D4 Sanity restored), and the dream sequence ends without further incident.
- **Entreating the Pale Monk:** the Pale Monk waits nearby, watching passively. If desperate, they may ask him to directly intervene. The monk wordlessly holds out his cloth-covered alms box, and the investigators know he is requesting a symbolic donation. Each investigator should spend at least 1 MP to dream up coins or other appropriate donations for the monk. This symbolic act increases each investigator's Exposure Points by 1D6. Satisfied, the monk bows low, walks calmly over to the soldier (in his current form), extends a hand toward him, and chants a vaguely familiar prayer in a low whisper. The soldier stares at the monk in amazement and recognition, and then, in the blink of an eye, he is restored to a normal human with all his injuries healed as if they never happened. The soldier then drops to his knees and bows to the monk, crying with joy. The dream sequence ends.

## Taneguchi's Dream: The Accident

The cold, eerily quiet February afternoon unsettles the investigators. They stand on the side of a familiar road in Ikaruga. A gray Datsun sedan car blocks the middle of the road, facing away from the party, with its hazard lights blinking. Taneguchi still sits in the car, clutching the wheel with his head down, muttering, "No... no... no..." repeatedly.

In front of the car, an elementary school girl lies on the road, face down and barely breathing, her legs and arms bent in unnatural positions, with a pool of blood slowly growing around her head. Her *randoseru* backpack has been thrown from her body, and lies open some distance away with textbooks and pens scattered about.

Taneguchi is inconsolable, but he seems to be partly aware he's in a dream and his grief is mostly for himself. *"Why am I seeing this again? I was supposed to be free..."*

Taneguchi stays in the car and does not go to the girl. What happens next depends on the investigators' actions and directly influences the ending of this story. Whatever happens, after Taneguchi's dream has been resolved one way or another, the cornered baku finally appears—see **The Final Encounter** (following).



Dead Nakamura Hinako

- **Leaving the girl to die alone:** if investigators ignore the girl and focus on Taneguchi, or just look for the baku, unfortunate consequences ensue. In their peripheral vision, investigators see the body of the girl begin to stir. She slowly rises in sudden, jerky motions, as though being lifted by invisible marionette strings. Fractured bones and dislocated joints realign themselves with sickening dull pops. Her face has a thick mat of disheveled blood-soaked hair (see Nakamura Hinako's profile in **Dream Eater: Characters & Monsters**, page 85). She turns and stalks toward Taneguchi in slow, stammering steps, an aura of dark energy blooming around her. Behind her, a stop sign, torn from the concrete by an invisible force, rotates in mid-air, aiming at Taneguchi's car like a giant spear. The investigators must somehow overcome this apparition to proceed. The ghost focuses her attacks on Taneguchi or the closest hostile investigator. They may use brute force or try to survive until she runs out of MP. If she kills Taneguchi, she vanishes, but Taneguchi (and the Pale Monk, if present) also disappear. Soon after, the baku appears before the party—proceed to **The Final Encounter** (page 81). Killing Nakamura incurs a **Sanity** roll (1/1D3 loss). She may be a ravaging undead, but she's also a little girl, and the primary victim here.
- **Showing humanity and kindness:** if at least one investigator immediately runs past the car and cradles the dying girl in



her last moments, or tries (and fails) to save her life, she passes on without transforming. The scene proceeds to **The Final Encounter** (following). It is also possible to comfort her after she has transformed into a vengeful ghost, but only if an investigator is brave enough. The investigator must approach unarmed and without any intent to attack, making a Hard **POW** roll to remain calm, and then a Hard **Charm** or **Persuade** roll to convince her to stop her assault. The Keeper may award bonus dice or lower the difficulty for skilled role-playing. In this rare case, she turns slowly back into an uninjured little girl, and fades away.

- **Rewriting history:** using the full power of their dream-shaping abilities, the investigators might save Nakamura Hinako from dying if they immediately summon an ambulance and EMT team to the scene. This requires at least one investigator to have the **Medicine** or **First Aid** skill at higher than base level, and the party must each spend 6 MP to spawn in the equipment and NPCs. Alternately, they can save the girl themselves with an Extreme **Medicine** roll. This triggers the **Post-Credit Scene** (page 85) if the investigators complete the scenario.

## THE FINAL ENCOUNTER

- **Location:** shared dreamscape.
- **Leads In:** **Dream Dive** (preceding).
- **Leads Out:** **Endings** (following).
- **Purpose:** the investigators battle against the entity responsible for the growing nightmares.

With Taneguchi's nightmare resolved, the baku closes in. It manifests before the investigators and begins an intimidation display, erupting with purple fire and dark mists. If Taneguchi is still dreaming, the Pale Monk also lingers nearby, quietly watching the scene unfold. The baku takes one look at the Pale Monk before charging at Taneguchi. Based on what they have learned, and what they may have come to suspect or realize, the investigators must now make a choice.

### Fighting the Baku

The investigators may decide to do what they came here to do and defeat the monster. Once attacked, the baku fights back furiously, but, otherwise, it focuses ravenously on Taneguchi, who cowers behind the party. The baku's tactic is to shift the dreamscape terrain so that it appears suddenly next to its opponent. The baku continues fighting until defeated or until it has subdued and fed on all the characters in the dream who have at least moderate



Exposure to the *Sutra*—see **Dream Eater: Characters & Monsters** (page 85) for the baku's profile.

If the investigators are victorious, Taneguchi, if he is still in the dream, bows to the investigators and thanks them profusely. They all wake up.

Note that if Taneguchi is drained of any EP, the Pale Monk staggers as if hurt. If Taneguchi is wounded, damage is carried over to the Pale Monk. If Taneguchi is “killed” in the dream, the Pale Monk vanishes too.

### Feeding the Baku

For the absolute best possible outcome, the investigators can grab Taneguchi before he leaves the dream and hold him down so that the baku can feed on him, which it does enthusiastically. If the investigators do this, they automatically “befriend” the baku (see following). Taneguchi is so heavily exposed that this feeding frenzy appears gory and horrific to the investigators, as the baku tries to scrape every bit of the invasive Prince personality out of his head—call for a **Sanity** roll (1/1D3 loss) for everyone involved.



Sadly, the roots go too deep, and this process breaks Taneguchi's mind. After he wakes, he has severe dementia-like symptoms and is a shell of his former self. But at least he is free of the *Sutra* and no longer poses a danger to anyone. Investigators may now search his home for the *Sutra* and its incomplete copies.

## Befriending the Baku

Drawing and placing Signs in the Waking World has no effect on the baku, as it doesn't interact with physical matter. In the dream, however, the Sign of the Ancients, when directed at the baku, causes it to back away and adopt a defensive posture. The baku attempts to circle behind whatever direction the Sign is facing and attack from that direction instead. The holder of the Sign gains a bonus die to their Dodge rolls in such a case.

If flanking fails, the baku may shift the dreamscape to its advantage, using environmental hazards (waves at a beach, an avalanche in the mountains, cars on a busy highway) to neutralize the Sign; such events may force the investigator holding the Sign to make a **DEX** or another skill roll to maintain the Sign's focus on the baku.

- If 4 or more characters, each holding a copy of this Sign, can surround the baku, it is trapped in place, unable to vanish or shift the dreamscape.
- If none of the investigators have been dominated by the power of the *Sutra* (EP fewer than 50), it is possible to "befriend" the baku. Taneguchi tries to convince the investigators to destroy the creature right away, but if the investigators have the will to try to tame the hungry and dangerous magical beast, they are rewarded. The baku, although intelligent, is akin to a wild animal and does not respond to reason. But it does respond to head-pats and belly-rubs. To gain the baku's trust, the investigators must project an aura of calm with a successful **POW** roll, and then succeed with an **Animal Handling** or a Hard **Charm** roll—see the **Best** ending in the **Endings** (page 83).

## Entreating the Pale Monk Again

The Pale Monk watches passively as the battle prepares to unfold. If desperate, they may ask him to directly intervene. The monk wordlessly holds out his cloth-covered alms box, and the investigators know he is requesting a symbolic donation. Each investigator should spend at least 2 MP to dream up coins or other appropriate donations for the monk. This symbolic act increases the investigator's Exposure Points by 1D6. If the investigators don't think to do this, call for an **INT** roll.

Once the monk receives their donations, he produces a weapon for each investigator, which he tosses unerringly into their hands. These weapons suit each investigator's best combat skill, so one may get a katana, one a rifle, and so on. However, if the investigator asks for a particular weapon, this is granted instead. Each dream weapon grants a bonus die once per round. These vanish, of course, on waking up.

## Challenging the Pale Monk

Perhaps after everything they've seen, the investigators have decided that the Pale Monk is suspicious. If they call him out and confront him with evidence that the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* has been the catalyst, the monk turns slowly to face the group, stares at them with faceless impassivity, and says nothing. But now Taneguchi protests on the monk's behalf:

*"How dare you! He is the same monk from the story I heard, the one who went into a dream and banished a baku. It's obvious he is on our side. You must follow his example and defeat this baku, so you will be a new generation of heroes."*

If investigators are still convinced the monk is suspicious, the Keeper should ask if they are sure they want to fight him. If so, the monk bows slightly to the investigators before he vanishes from the dream. If Taneguchi is alive and conscious within the dream, he is dazed and bewildered. The results are the same as in **The Taoist Ending** in the **Endings** section (following)—the Prince now recognizes the investigators as a threat, and Taneguchi will be taken away by the cult as soon as possible. Ukami carries out the relocation in person, if extra muscle is needed to make it go smoothly.

If the investigators attack the Prince without warning, he fights back—see **Dream Eater: Characters & Monsters** (page 85) for the Pale Monk's profile. The investigators may come to regret this decision.



## ENDINGS

- **Location:** Ikaruga.
- **Leads In:** **The Final Encounter** (previous).
- **Purpose:** the story comes to an end. If the investigators survive, they find leads pointing to a wider conspiracy and a greater danger.

Note that the endings presented here and in later scenarios are labeled and numbered, as is common for indie scenarios in Japan. This enables players to tell others how their game went on social media while avoiding spoilers for everyone else.

**Keeper note:** remember to run an Investigator Development Phase (see *Call of Cthulhu: Keeper Rulebook*, page 94) at the end of the scenario.

### 0. Party Wipe (Failure)

- **Requirements:** the investigators all die or go insane and cannot continue.

This is only likely to happen if the investigators go toe-to-toe unprepared with Ukami or the Pale Monk. Getting this ending is something of an achievement. Encourage investigators to narrate their final moments. Local authorities soon discover whatever remains of them, and attribute it to some strange cult activity, which isn't far from the truth. The Keeper is free to move to a new scenario in the campaign with a fresh set of investigators.

### 1. We Do Nothing (Taoist Ending)

- **Requirements:** through investigator hesitation, weakness, or choice, the baku remains at large and Taneguchi continues copying the *Sutra*.

Because the baku is causing too much trouble for the APL, members of the cult come to Taneguchi's home in secret to take him, his copies of the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*, and all related documents. Thereafter, investigators find fresh tire tracks in his gravel parking space. If asked, Taneguchi's neighbors describe a van suddenly showing up while it was dark, and two young men in yellow *samue* (work clothing for monks) helping Taneguchi load his belongings into the vehicle, before they all drove off. The van had Tokyo license plates.

Once Taneguchi is out of the picture, there is an immediate improvement in Ikaruga. While some residents still report seeing a baku in their dreams, these happen progressively less frequently, and the monster is less aggressive. In fact, some report that the creature is protective and friendly, and

there is a movement to make baku plushies and other goods to commemorate this bizarre series of events in the quiet town. After some time, everyone can get a restful night's sleep again—except for overworked salarymen and students studying for entrance exams, but there is no foul magic involved there.

The investigators may not realize this until it is too late, but while the problem has been solved for Ikaruga, it's about to begin anew elsewhere. While Taneguchi is alive, he continues to spread the *Sutra*'s influence and make fresh copies of the book for the APL, but this time, no guardian beast is there to interfere.

The investigators do not incur any Sanity reward or penalty.

- **Keeper note:** if Taneguchi escapes, the Keeper is free to use him however they see fit. He could act as bait to lead them into another scenario or serve as a long-term antagonist writing more copies of the *Sutra* in one of the cult's compounds. During **Chapter 3: Fanfic** (page 91), he could be hiding in Matsushima's Tokyo residence. In other scenarios, he may be found in one of the cult's holdings in Tokyo.

### 2. Yōkai Busters (Bad Ending)

- **Requirements:** the baku is defeated, Taneguchi survives, but the investigators do not suspect him or the *Sutra* as a negative influence.

The investigators accomplished their mission, exactly according to the plan hatched by the Prince of Pale Leaves. Because the baku was a kind of guardian for the town, eating away the influence of the *Sutra* from the residents' minds while they slept, Taneguchi exposes more people, while the Prince goes completely unopposed and his influence spreads throughout the region like a virus. Those who receive visits from the Prince in their dreams, including the investigators, are almost certainly likely hosts for the Prince. Ikaruga begins to slowly change from a tranquil sanctuary into *something else*.

If the investigators seemed particularly cooperative (or naive) throughout the scenario, or if they have been extensively exposed to the *Sutra*, the Prince—either through Taneguchi or by manifesting in their heads—implies that this is just the beginning for them. Use the following narration when investigators have accumulated enough Exposure Points to become vessels, and the Prince decides to reveal himself:

*Just then, a figure appears before you. He wears beautiful, yellow robes, similar to those worn by Japanese monks, but also, somehow quite foreign. You are struck with a profound sense of*



awe, and cannot bear to look at his face, even were it not obscured by his hood.

*Before you can take everything in, you know who it is: the Prince of Pale Leaves. You know this, beyond a shadow of a doubt, as surely as you would recognize your own reflection in the mirror. And he is real. Realer than real. You see and hear him unfettered by the limitations of your human senses.*

*"Be not afraid," he says, and although you hear his words in your own inner voice, behind that voice lies something else, something transcendent. "My clever children. You have read my words and touched my mind, and now, I touch yours. Rejoice, for our hearts are as one, and I shall walk by your side always."*

The investigators do not incur any Sanity reward or penalty.

Perhaps the investigators eventually realize they've been duped, providing them with new motivation to resist the Prince and hunt down the cult behind it all. Regardless, the *Sutra's* psychic seeds push them toward complete exposure to its infectious code. But there's a chance they may give themselves over to the Prince instead—and, if so, these characters must retire to become NPC antagonists for the next batch of investigators.

## 3. Get Out of Town (Ambiguous Ending)

- **Requirements:** the party convinces Taneguchi to leave town or has him removed.

The investigators may realize that the baku is just protecting its territory, and there is something about Taneguchi and/or the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* that it considers a threat. Perhaps a convincing argument or a Hard success with a social skill convinces Taneguchi to leave Ikaruga.

The results are the same, more or less, as those in **1. The Taoist Ending**, just without the APL having to put in any legwork.

The investigators do not incur any Sanity reward or penalty.

## 4. It Was Old Man Taneguchi All Along! (Good Ending)

- **Requirements:** the investigators figure out the root cause of the problem is the *Sutra* and Taneguchi. They then act to neutralize the situation.

Even though Taneguchi does not consciously realize it, he was the trigger for the problems of Ikaruga. But, even if they can prove it, the investigators have few options. Even if they can have Taneguchi arrested, the dormant Prince can take control and persuade the police and legal staff through his words and voice. Taneguchi can only be neutralized by rendering him unable to write or speak. The investigators also need to destroy or confiscate Taneguchi's copies of the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*.

The investigators may face legal consequences, depending on how they take the *Sutra* and Taneguchi out of the equation. There may also be a Sanity cost, at the Keeper's discretion.

After Taneguchi is dealt with, there is an almost immediate improvement in Ikaruga, as described in **1. The Taoist Ending**. With a sigh of relief, the investigators recover +1D6 Sanity points.

The campaign is far from over, though. Taneguchi had already completed several copies of the *Sutra* and sent these to various places in Japan. The investigators may speak to witnesses who saw a truck with Tokyo plates outside his home—giving them their next lead for dealing with this strange cult.

## 5. Baku, I Choose You! (Best Ending)

- **Requirements:** the investigators befriend the baku—either with a suitable skill roll or by feeding Taneguchi to it (see **The Final Encounter**, page 81)—and then allow the baku to “feed” on them, clearing their minds of the *Sutra's* insidious influence.

Investigators gain 1D6 Sanity points as a reward for befriend the Baku.

Once “tamed,” the baku is friendly, and it visits the investigators in their dreams any time they sleep in Ikaruga. If any investigators have been significantly exposed to the *Sutra*, though, the baku rather aggressively sniffs and licks their heads and faces in an attempt to “feed” on them. Just as dogs and cats can detect some diseases in humans, the baku can sense dangerous influences infecting the human mind, whether mundane brainwashing, telepathic signals from slumbering monsters, or the mind-hacking code of the *Sutra*. Investigators can treat these conditions if they let the baku feed on them by simply lying down in the dream and not resisting.

They may find themselves dreaming of lying on a psychiatrist's couch while the baku eats its fill—this procedure is unsettling, though, with every feeding session excising 1D10 Exposure Points, but costing the investigator 1D10 Sanity points the first time, and then one point per additional session. It is one of the few ways for characters to be freed of the book's influence.

The baku could become a long-term ally of the investigators, devouring Exposure Points whenever they visit Ikaruga for a rest. But, if a character relies on the baku too much, depleting their Sanity, they could be left in a broken state, with severe memory loss or worse.



## OPTIONAL: POST-CREDIT SCENES

The *Sutra of Pale Leaves* can alter reality itself, even retroactively. Any one of these following endings involves a **Sanity** roll, as the investigators realize they have somehow changed reality by dreaming. The *Sutra* is more powerful than they imagined.

This section works best if **Dream Eater** took place as a standalone scenario. In a campaign, should the investigators choose to repeat the Dream Dive ritual in future scenarios to find easy solutions to their challenges, the Sanity loss for every success is 1D3/1D6—such mounting losses are characterized as reality becoming meaningless to them, and life nothing but a vivid yet malleable dream.

### *If the investigators saved the boy in the Railroaded dream*

They see the same boy on a train on their way out of town. He doesn't notice them, as he's talking without any fear to a railroad staff member (**Sanity** roll, 0/1 loss).

### *If the investigators saved the nurse and performed surgery to save the soldier's limb in the Farewell to Arms dream*

The investigators pass by the park and see a woman in her early 60s, and a man with one arm in his late 60s, talking on a bench while their grandchildren play nearby. Seeing the investigators, their eyes light up with recognition, and they bow in gratitude (**Sanity** roll, 1/1D4 loss).

### *If the investigators saved Nakamura Hinako during Taneguchi's accident dream*

If the investigators saved the girl by summoning an ambulance or by providing treatment, they see Nakamura Hinako alive, running to meet her parents near the elementary school. She notices the investigators, smiles, and waves enthusiastically. Just then, the sound of creaking metal comes from a stop sign, which bends ever so slightly while she waves. The girl blushes and returns home with her parents.

Should the investigators go back to talk to any residents, they find out that there was never an accident, and no one has any idea what the investigators are talking about. It turns out it was just the fearful dream of a lonely old man (**Sanity** roll, 1/1D6 loss).

## DREAM EATER: CHARACTERS & MONSTERS

### ALLIES & INDEPENDENTS

#### Madam Inaba (Inaba Cheiko), age 50, "The hxcFortune-Teller"

STR 40	CON 60	SIZ 50	DEX 60	INT 80
APP 55	POW 90	EDU 85	SAN 90	HP 11
DB: 0	Build: 0	Move: 6	MP: 18	

#### Combat

Brawl	30% (15/6), damage 1D3
Dodge	30% (15/6)

#### Skills

Charm 75%, History 65%, Library Use 65%, Natural World 60%, Occult 60%, Persuade 65%, Psychoanalysis 60%, Psychology 85%, Sleight of Hand 40%.

**Language:** Japanese 85%.

**Spells:** Augury (no Sanity point cost).

### ANTAGONISTS

#### Taneguchi Fumio, age 75, vessel of the Pale Prince

Taneguchi is included among antagonists even though he does not realize that he is possessed, nor that he is a spy for the Prince.

STR 30*	CON 45*	SIZ 45	DEX 75*	INT 70*
APP 30	POW 50*	EDU 75*	SAN 20	HP 9*
DB: -1	Build: -1	Move: 4	MP: 10*	EP: 100

(not Consumed)

*\*When the Prince has taken direct control, increase STR, CON, DEX, INT, POW, and EDU by 20, HP by 2, and MP by 4; Move rises to 5, and DB/Build to 0.*

#### Special Abilities

**Overdrive:** immune to the effects of pain, shock, and physical trauma while under the Prince's control. Not immune to medical sedation. Cannot be charmed or intimidated.



## Combat

Brawl 25% (12/5), damage 1D3–1  
Dodge 37% (18/7)

## Skills

Art/Craft (Calligraphy) 120%, Drive Automobile 20%,  
History 65%, Library Use 75%, Occult 10%.

**Languages:** Han Writing 90%, Japanese 75%.

## Signs

Taneguchi can create and use any of the **Mystic Signs** (Chapter 1, page 31) from the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*.

**Armor:** none.

**Spells:** none.

**Sanity Loss:** none.

## Ukami, age 31, vessel of the Pale Prince

STR 100 CON 100 SIZ 70 DEX 100 INT 70  
APP 60 POW 100 EDU 60 SAN 0 HP 17  
DB: 1D6 Build: 2 Move: 10 MP: 20 EP: 100  
(Consumed)

## Special Abilities

Overdrive: all characteristics are permanently enhanced.  
Immune to the effects of pain, shock, and physical trauma.  
Not immune to medical sedation. Cannot be charmed or intimidated.

## Combat

**Attacks per round:** 2 (martial arts)

Brawl (Martial Arts) 90% (45/18), damage 1D3+1D6\*  
Dodge 65% (32/13)

*\*A Hard or better success with a knockdown fighting maneuver inflicts an additional 1D3 unarmed damage.*

## Skills

Climb 90%, Drive Auto 80%, Intimidate 80%, Jump 80%,  
Listen 90%, Spot Hidden 90%, Stealth 90%, Throw 90%.

**Language:** Japanese 60%.

## Signs

Can create and use any of the Signs from the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* and has the Sign of Sleep and the Sign of the Twin

Moons prepared in advance—see **Mystic Signs** (Chapter 1, page 31).

**Armor:** none.

**Spells:** none.

**Sanity Loss:** none.

## DREAM WORLD MONSTERS

### Swarm of Centipedes, dream manifestation

DEX 50 HP 10 DB: 0 Build: 0 Move: 10

## Combat

**Attacks per round:** 1 (swarm over victim)

**Swarm:** treat the centipede swarm as a single entity with 1 attack per round. Note that on the rounds following a successful attack, the person swarmed suffers automatic damage (no further attack roll necessary).

**Venom:** if bitten by the swarm, victim must succeed with a CON roll or be stunned and in agony for 1 round, losing their next action.

Bite 50% (25/10), damage 1+venom  
Dodge n/a

**Armor:** none; normal melee attacks and bullets inflict 1 damage, while shotgun damage is normal. Area-effect weapons, such as insecticide, bombs, and flamethrowers deliver 1D6 damage per round. The Keeper may choose to allow any investigator being swarmed a Luck roll to avoid suffering injury from area-effect attacks (damage negated or halved, at the Keeper's discretion), although a fumbled attack result will always inflict the attack's damage normally.

**Sanity Loss:** 0/1 Sanity points to have a centipede unexpectedly crawl over one's face.

### Giant Centipede, dream manifestation

STR 60 CON 60 SIZ 40 DEX 70 INT 0  
APP — POW — EDU — SAN — HP 10  
DB: 0 Build: 0 Move: 12

## Combat

**Attacks per round:** 1 (bite)



**Venom:** if bitten, victim must succeed with a CON roll or be stunned in agony for 1 round, losing their next action.

**Last Gasp:** if the giant centipede is impaled or crushed to death, it coils its head and tail around in a final two-pronged attack against the aggressor, delivering an immediate 2 attack rolls.

Bite 80% (40/16), damage 1D4+venom  
Dodge 35% (17/7)

**Armor:** 2-point chitinous hide.

**Sanity Loss:** 1/1D3 Sanity points to encounter the giant centipede.

## The Train Man, dream manifestation

STR 80 CON 80 SIZ 60 DEX 60 INT 50  
APP — POW 50 EDU — SAN — HP 14  
DB: +1D4 Build: 1 Move: 6 MP: 10

### Special Abilities

**Dark Vision:** the creature's huge, unblinking eye can see in the dark, negating all penalties from darkness and granting a bonus die for attacks made in the dark.

**Intimidating Gaze:** investigators in the creature's presence must succeed with a POW roll or feel terror, as if they have reverted to an insecure child about to receive a scolding from an adult. Those who fail suffer a penalty die to all actions except running away for the duration of the scene.

### Combat

**Attacks per round:** 1 (unarmed)

Brawl 60% (30/12), damage 1D3+1D4  
Dodge 30% (15/6)

### Skills

Listen 40%, Spot Hidden 90%.

**Armor:** none.

**Sanity Loss:** 0/1D3 Sanity points to encounter the Train Man.

## The Injured Soldier, dream manifestation

STR 60\* CON 60\* SIZ 60 DEX 50 INT 75  
APP — POW 75 EDU — SAN — HP 12\*  
DB: 0\* Build: 0\* Move: 6\* MP: 15

\*See *Grab & Feed*.

### Special Abilities

**Regeneration and Apotheosis:** the soldier starts badly injured (12 HP); if it absorbs enough to meet its maximum 24 HP, it reaches full power, regrowing its other arm and greatly increasing its characteristics (see **Grab & Feed**). At this stage, its entire body becomes semi-fluid, allowing it to change its shape at will.

### Combat

**Attacks per round:** 1

**Grab & Feed (mnvr):** grabs target and holds them, then crushes the target on each following round, absorbing 1D10 HP. Target can break free with an opposed STR roll. After it has drained HP up to a maximum of 12 through feeding, the monster's STR and CON increase to 120 and its MOV increases to 9. The STR increase provides Build 2 and DB +1D6.

Grab & Feed (mnvr) 80% (40/16), (see above)  
Dodge 25% (12/5)

### Skills

Firearms (Handgun) 70%, Firearms (Rifle/Shotgun) 70%,  
Throw 60%.

**Armor:** none.

**Sanity Loss:** 1/1D6 Sanity points to witness the soldier's transformation.

## Nakamura Hinako, dream manifestation

This "ghost" is nothing more than a memory-nightmare of Taneguchi's, provoked by the Prince to lure the baku. The ghost vanishes if she reaches zero MP or if Taneguchi disappears from the dream. The Keeper determines if any of the Signs from the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* are effective against her (see **Mystic Signs**, Chapter 1, page 31).

STR 20 CON 20 SIZ 30 DEX 50 INT 70  
APP — POW 120 EDU — SAN — HP 5  
DB: — Build: -2 Move: 2 MP: 24

### Combat

**Attacks per round:** 1 (Telekinetic Missile)

**Telekinetic Missile:** once per round, the ghost may spend 2 MP to telekinetically grab and throw a nearby object at extremely high speed at a target, inflicting 1D8 damage. She chooses thematically appropriate attacks, such as shoving



cars or throwing school crosswalk signs, dropping traffic lights, and so on.

Telekinetic Missile	90% (45/18), damage 1D8
Telekinetic Shield	90% (45/18)
Dodge	n/a

**Armor:** none, but Telekinetic Shield—up to 3 times per round, the ghost may attempt to block an attack with an invisible barrier, providing a 90% (45/18) chance to block the incoming attack and costing 1 MP each time. The ghost is unable to block a fourth or further attack in the same round.

**Sanity Loss:** 1/1D3 Sanity points to encounter Nakamura in her vengeful undead form.

## Baku, dream-eating *yōkai*

The monster has a tapir-like shape, but it has little in common with those mundane animals. It can appear as small as a piglet or as large as an elephant. Its skin and coat of short fur is an unearthly shade of purple with stripes around its lower body, while its tail and mane flow like flame. It is often surrounded by a veil of mist and the cool fire of will-o-wisps. Its powerful limbs end in claw-like hooves. Around its belly and midsection are strange lumps, and if an investigator were brave enough to press their ear to the creature's hide, they might hear the echoes of dreams it has recently eaten.

It has a row of eyes lengthwise down its long face, each glancing in various directions as if scanning distant dreams, until suddenly and all at once they snap into focus on the beast's prey, paralyzing it with fear. Its tongue is as prehensile as its snout and long like an anteater's, covered in rough barbs like a cat's tongue, and able to split into a viper's fork. It uses the tongue like a proboscis, penetrating through flesh and bone and drinking the thoughts from the victim's brain.

Note that the baku is incapable of verbal communication and can't be reasoned with in the usual sense. It simply acts in accordance with its nature. In this scenario, it treats the code contained within the *Sutra* as a "bad dream," something that it must devour, prioritizing that over all other nightmares. It tends to focus on the character with the highest Exposure Points when in combat.

The baku's presence is like a catalyst and it directly influences the dreams it enters, depending on its hunger and aggressiveness. Characters whose nightmares are "eaten" by the baku do not normally remember them, so memories of the Prince are rare after waking—either replaced by visions of the baku, or else characters awaken from a restless sleep with a vague sense of dread from a dream they can't remember.

**Note:** the baku does not attack the Prince/Pale Monk directly; it attacks the dreaming investigators and Taneguchi instead.

STR 120	CON 120	SIZ 120*	DEX 70	INT 50
APP —	POW 90	EDU —	SAN —	HP 24*
DB: +2D6*	Build: 4*	Move: 8	MP: 18	

\*See *Size Shifting*.

## Special Abilities

**Scenery Shift:** costs 1 MP. The baku instantly alters the dreamscape to its advantage, flanking its target regardless of distance and movement speed. The baku gains a bonus die on its next attack roll.

**Size Shifting:** if the baku feels endangered, it can increase its Size to 240, increasing HP to 36, Build to 6, DB to +3D6, and armor increases to 2-points. This costs it 4 magic points.

## Combat

**Attacks per round:** 1 (stare, eat, trample, charge)

**Paralyzing Stare:** costs 1 MP. The baku locks all its eyes on a target in a hypnotic gaze. The target must make a successful Hard POW roll or be paralyzed for 1D4 rounds. While paralyzed, the target may not take any actions except to speak in a weak voice, and the baku's other attacks hit automatically. On each subsequent round, the baku starts to eat (see **Dream Eating**, below). The target may attempt another Hard POW roll to break free on each successive round. The baku loses this ability against anyone wielding the Sign of the Ancients (see **Mystic Signs**, Chapter 1, page 31).

**Dream Eating:** the baku inserts its tongue and snout into the target's head and sucks out dreams, draining 1D10 Sanity from the target the first time, with subsequent sessions only costing 1 Sanity. The target forgets the last few dreams they had. If a target has been exposed to the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*, it also removes 1D10 Exposure Points instead, as well as any memory of the Prince/Pale Monk.

Fighting	70% (35/14), damage 2D6 (3D6*)
Charge & Gore	40% (20/8), damage 4D6 (5D6*)
Dream Eating	automatic following paralyzing stare, or if target helpless
Dodge	35% (17/7)

## Skills

Listen 50%, Spot Hidden 95%, Stealth 80%.



**Armor:** the baku cannot be harmed by physical attacks unless the attacker also succeeds in a POW roll. This restriction does not apply if the baku has zero MP, or has been trapped by the Sign of the Ancients (or the Elder Sign).

**Sanity Loss:** 0/1D4 Sanity points to encounter the baku.

## The Pale Monk, dream manifestation of the Prince of Pale Leaves

The Pale Monk is not the Prince of Pale Leaves in all his inhuman glory and power; it is a dream manifestation or presentation, shaped in part by Taneguchi's own mind, of the "code" that has taken over the calligrapher's psyche. Though it shares in the Prince's consciousness, it is magically weak (relatively speaking). It is still capable of destroying the dream-self of any investigator foolish enough to attack it, and does so not to protect itself, but because it recognizes a potential enemy of the great cause.

**Note:** the Pale Monk does not attack the baku directly because its main weapon, **Roar of the Void** (below), does not work against that creature.

STR 120   CON 200   SIZ 70   DEX 100   INT 90  
APP —   POW 120   EDU 80   SAN —   HP 27  
DB: +1D6   Build: 2   Move: 10   MP: 24

### Special Abilities

**Dream-Shaping (conditional):** if any investigators with EP totals of 25 or higher use dream-shaping abilities in the battle, the monk becomes able to use them as well.

### Combat

**Attacks per round:** 2 (roar or melee)

**Roar of the Void:** costs both his attack actions and 4 MP, the monk clasps his hands together and draws them apart, creating a churning, black hole between his palms, which pulls all characters and loose materials into melee range from up to 20 yards/meters away—targets must make a STR roll to resist. Targets already in melee range must make a Hard STR roll or have part of their body pulled in, suffering 4D6 damage and forcing a Sanity roll (1/1D6 loss). Investigators killed in a dream by this attack must make a POW roll or never wake up.

Brawl (Martial Arts)	90% (45/18), damage 1D3+1D6*
Dodge	65% (32/13), (see <b>Armor and Vulnerabilities</b> , below)

*\*A Hard or better success with a knockdown fighting maneuver inflicts an additional 1D3 unarmed damage.*

### Skills

Climb 90%, Intimidate 80%, Jump 80%, Listen 90%, Spot Hidden 90%, Stealth 90%, Throw 90%.

### Signs

Can draw and use all the Signs unique to the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*, taking only a single round to do so, and is immune to their effects—see **Mystic Signs**, Chapter 1, page 31.

**Armor & Vulnerabilities:** no armor, but can Dodge firearms attacks. Damage inflicted on Taneguchi carries over to the Pale Monk; if Taneguchi dies in the dream, the Pale Monk vanishes with him. If the Pale Monk is reduced to zero HP, he vanishes from the dream, reducing Taneguchi's EP by 1D10. The Pale Monk can return unharmed in subsequent Dream Dives.

**Sanity Loss:** none.





# 青朽葉物語

The Tale of Pale Leaves Vol.1



山吹 色華



# CHAPTER 3: FANFIC!

七十三才にして稍 禽獸虫魚の骨格草木の出生を悟し得たり  
 故に八十六才にしては益々進み九十才にして猶其 奥意を極め一百歳にして正に神妙ならん与欠 百有十歳にしては  
 一点一格にして生るがごとくならん  
 —葛飾北斎

*"At seventy-three, I have learned a little about the real structure of nature, of animals, plants, trees, birds, fishes and insects. In consequence when I am eighty-six, I shall have made still more progress. At ninety I shall penetrate the mystery of things; at one hundred I shall certainly have reached a marvelous stage; and when I am a hundred and ten, everything I do, be it a dot or a line, will be alive."*

—Katsushika Hokusai

Under the direction of the Prince of Pale Leaves, the Association of Pale Leaves (APL) has hatched a devious plan: to recreate the *Sutra* as an action comic. The investigators must find a way to stop the manga and its derivatives from proliferating, then track down and confront the artist before her work gets taken on by a mainstream publisher and mass-produced. They learn that the artist has gained the power to simply draw or write things into existence, and, through her, the Pale Prince intends to impose his new reality on the world.

The investigators may need to put their minds at risk and use the power of the *Sutra* and its derivative works to prevail in a world-threatening final showdown.

**Content note:** the Alabaster Archfiend subplot features an NPC, Kōda Tsutomu, who emotionally and physically abuses his girlfriend, even before he tips into full insanity. Keepers should downplay this aspect of his character if it causes player discomfort.

## KEEPER BACKGROUND

The APL has been gaining influence in Japan. Since their inception in the early 1980s, they have lured the lonely and vulnerable into their cult. Progress was slow at first, but like their unspeakable patron deity, they are constantly shifting, adapting, and growing.

The first major breakthrough for the APL was finding individuals with the rare talent to make copies of the complex *Sutra of Pale Leaves* by hand—such as Taneguchi Fumio, a skilled calligrapher from Nara prefecture (see **Chapter 2:**

**Dream Eater**, page 51). Taneguchi went on to craft a handful of copies of the *Sutra* in modern Japanese. This new version allowed the cult to reach a wider audience while keeping their original copy of the *Sutra* safe.

However, the cult ran into two major roadblocks. First, even the modernized version of the text was unwieldy, conspicuous, and extremely difficult to duplicate. Early attempts to find a printing press that could mass-produce the *Sutra* ended in failure. Second, the cult had great difficulty in reaching the younger generation.

It turns out that young people have no interest in reading a stuffy religious tome, no matter how much “eternal joy” is promised to them. If the youth of Japan could not be made into hosts for the Prince, the cult would be unlikely to reach the “critical mass” of influence required to achieve their ultimate goal.

The answer was to create an iteration of the *Sutra* that had mass-market appeal: as a manga comic book. Early on, the cult began scouting manga artists. A senior member of the cult discovered the ideal candidate, an indie manga artist named Nagatsuki Kaede. She had incredible raw talent, but her work was rather niche, so she was struggling financially and socially isolated.

The APL manipulated her into reading the *Sutra*, and not only did she gain new insights and inspiration, but her mind joined with the Prince in a unique way, fusing into something far greater than a normal host. With her new patrons and supernaturally enhanced artistic skills, Nagatsuki created her magnum opus.

In 1986, rumors of a so-called “cursed” manga, titled *Aokuchiba Monogatari* (青朽葉物語, *The Tale of Pale Leaves*)



started spreading among geek subculture in the Tokyo area. This indie comic quickly—and literally—developed a cult following. New readers swiftly become enthralled by the gripping story and fantastically detailed art. They obsess over it, analyze every line, theorize about minute details, and develop an intense urge to talk about and share the comic with others.

Some claim that the story is so captivating that it haunts them through persistent dreams and strange visions ever since reading it. Others whisper that the main character of the comic, the Prince of Pale Leaves, has appeared and spoken to them. Fueled by morbid curiosity and a fear of missing out, manga fans have flocked to comic conventions and related events in the hopes of getting their hands on this rare and mysterious comic, resulting in a black market of bootleg copies and fan-made spinoffs, with these derivative works helping to spread the subtle but insidious mania surrounding the manga.

While it is not technically a horror comic, *The Tale of Pale Leaves* includes graphic depictions of ghastly Mythos monstrosities, and so has become highly sought after by fans of horror and the occult.

*The Tale of Pale Leaves* essentially reimagines the parables of the *Sutra*, translating the “source code” of the Prince into a new and more accessible format. It is akin to rewriting a complex piece of software from scratch in a different programming language with a friendlier user interface. With the release of the manga and growing influence of the *Sutra* on the world, the Prince has evolved into an even more powerful and seductive presence. The obsessive fanbase of the manga has become like an entirely new branch of the cult, with hundreds of new hosts for the Prince, and threatening to turn the *Pale Leaves* into a household name.

To complicate matters, some of the bootleg copies and fan-made spinoffs of *The Tale of Pale Leaves* have infected readers with incomplete or corrupt versions of the *Sutra*’s viral code. Instead of turning people into hosts for the Prince, exposure to this “mutated” code can have wildly unpredictable effects on the human mind. Now, Tokyo is under threat, not only by the manipulations of the Prince, but by horrific manifestations that even the APL cannot control.

## Chronology

**Keeper note:** **Fanfic** takes place in December, ideally in 1986 or 1987. By default, it opens on December 26, 1986, giving the investigators a short downtime after **Chapter 2: Dream Eater** (page 51) for rest and recovery.

- **1980:** Ōhira steals the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* found in Kyoto and founds the Association of Pale Leaves.
- **Summer 1985:** Taneguchi Fumio becomes a vessel for the Prince and begins writing modernized copies of the *Sutra*.
- **September 1985:** a copy is sent to the politician Matsushima

Nobuo in Tokyo. He reads the *Sutra* and becomes a vessel of the Prince, joining the inner circle.

- **December 1985:** Matsushima discovers the artist Nagatsuki Kaede and offers to become her patron if she agrees to read the *Sutra*. She does so, becoming a uniquely powerful vessel of the Prince, and begins creating a manga adaptation of the *Sutra*.
- **July 1986:** Nagatsuki completes *The Tale of Pale Leaves* under the pen name “Yamabuki Iroha” and orders a trial print run to test its effectiveness.
- **August 1986:** *The Tale of Pale Leaves* sells out at the summer Manga Market. The cult’s costumed courier manages the booth, sitting at a different table from Nagatsuki’s, for plausible deniability.
- **December 1986:** Nagatsuki attends the winter Manga Market. The scenario begins.

## Red Herring: The Alabaster Archfiend

Nagatsuki Kaede is a subtle danger who may not be exposed until the final scene. There is another, far more obvious antagonist that the investigators encounter en route.

The Prince of Pale Leaves brings the investigators to the comic convention, not just to expose them to *The Tale of Pale Leaves*, but to deal with an unforeseen consequence of the manga. Kōda Tsutomu, a mentally unstable independent artist, read the first printing, was infected with a corrupted version of the Prince’s “code,” and became inspired to write his own sequel.

Lacking the skill to replicate the embedded code himself, he traced and physically pasted together relevant parts from *The Tale of Pale Leaves*, filling in the gaps with his own violent and pornographic art. This resulted in the creation of *The Alabaster Archfiend*, a horrific mutation of the original work. Kōda is now possessed by, and capable of embodying, this “false Prince.”

The true Prince wants rid of the Alabaster Archfiend, and he has chosen the investigators as his instruments. For the first part of the scenario, Nagatsuki Kaede aims to cultivate the investigators’ friendship, trying to lead them into tackling the Alabaster Archfiend.

Kōda has already contacted Kanesaka, a black-market dealer specializing in illicit and uncensored media, and entrusted him with the manuscript. Posing as the representative for Yamabuki Iroha, Kanesaka sent the manuscript to famous patron of the arts, dietman Matsushima, in a bid to get funding for a print run. Matsushima rejected him.

Kanesaka meets with Kōda on the first evening of the scenario and delivers the bad news. Kōda assumes monstrous form and kills Kanesaka in a rage, then lures and entraps his girlfriend, Saitō Tomoko, into the PANIC disco, killing numerous patrons as he tries to prove his nihilistic worldview to her.







## Lore Sheet 4: The Tale of Pale Leaves, Summarized

The Prince is the heir to the throne of *Tokoyo-no-kuni*, or Eternal Heaven. It is a place of imagination, creation, idealized beauty, and everlasting youth. But as the story opens, that world suffers an unexplained extinction-level cataclysm. As the remaining population seals themselves away underground, the royal sovereign decrees that the young Prince go forth to another world. His purpose there shall be not only to preserve and spread the wisdom of Eternal Heaven's advanced civilization, but also help the people there achieve their potential and create their own paradise while avoiding similar cataclysms.

The Prince performs a kind of astral projection, sending his spirit to the distant and ancient Earth via a beam of light, and incarnates in human form. His early adventures on Earth are a sort of fish-out-of-water comedy and lighthearted satire as he deals with stubborn and unreasonable human beings. But as he travels, he quickly comes to understand the terrible suffering that humans inflict upon each other. What's worse, he finds that ancient evil beings of other worlds plan to take Earth for themselves. The Prince, determined to save Earth from all these problems, becomes a superhero of sorts, donning a mask and yellow cloak to protect his identity and spare those he cares about from the backlash of his enemies.

During his time on Earth, while living in Heian period Japan, he gains several loyal companions. He writes down the sum of his wisdom in a book called the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*, sharing it with his allies so they can gain his power. In turn, the more people who read his tome, the more powerful he becomes. He thus becomes the leader of a heroic team, bestowing knowledge, helping those in need, and battling the forces of evil with major historical events as a backdrop.

The Prince is more of a sage and magician rather than a muscle-bound action hero, relying on wit and wisdom. His primary weapon is the *Sutra* itself, from which he can draw powerful magical signs or even launch the pages out like blades. Eventually, he creates a shapeshifting brush, symbolizing the power of the written word, which lets him create new things (from food to tools to weapons) by drawing them and pulling them off the page and into reality.

After a climactic final battle against a malevolent elder god, the Prince's mortal body is broken and his power has reached its limit. He shares a tearful goodbye with his loyal friends and followers, and promises to return to Earth again one day. He leaves behind his *Sutra* and entrusts them to do their best in creating a heaven on Earth in his stead.

This plotline occupies the first half of the scenario. After it is resolved, the investigators may continue enquiries on their own initiative—discovering the deeper secrets of Nagatsuki and *The Tale of Pale Leaves*—or they may believe they have finished their task and sit back; either way, the Prince no longer forces their actions unless Hook One (see **Involving the Investigators**, following) is in use.

### INVOLVING THE INVESTIGATORS

While **Fanfic** works as a standalone scenario, we intended it to be part of a larger campaign. The investigators do not have to have prior knowledge about the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* from a previous scenario, but if they do, it's simple to get them involved. New investigators may either be acquaintances or strangers who come together to inquire into a so-called cursed comic book. Recommended backgrounds are as follows:



- Journalists or private investigators.
- Fans of manga or a related *otaku* subculture.
- People who know someone who has read the comic, or who have read part of the comic themselves (use one of the three included **Lore Sheets 5, 6, 7** nearby).
- Investigators who survived previous scenarios in this campaign and so have direct knowledge of, or suspicions about, the phrase “Pale Leaves.”

### Hook One: Those Chosen by the Prince

- Use this hook if the scenario is being played as a standalone, or the first scenario of the campaign. It may be used as a follow-on from **Chapter 2: Dream Eater** (page 51), provided that the investigators are not yet overt enemies of the Prince—in particular, they have not stopped Taneguchi’s work, destroyed a copy of the *Sutra*, or tried to fight the Pale Monk. It may also be combined with any other hook below, such as the NPC Confidants (see **Confidants: Plot Hook Facilitators**, Chapter 1, page 45).
- The Keeper can use this hook to ensure that the investigators attend **A.K.B. Squared** (page 132) even if they fail to carry through with investigations after the Alabaster Archfiend is handled.

Before the scenario opens, each investigator receives (through the mail or handed by someone) a copy of a short, hand-drawn, black-and-white comic called *A Reunion with the Prince*. The comic accurately depicts a day in each of the investigators’ lives. Today, in fact—right up until the point when they obtained and started reading the very comic they are holding.

The comic even features a “character profile” for each of them, containing their profession, age, height, birthdate, blood type, favorite food, and contact information. Lest they are inclined to dismiss it as a clever prank or the work of a stalker, the next few panels depict each of them, quite accurately, reading and reacting to the comic.

On the penultimate page, a handsome man in yellow robes manifests before them. “Be not afraid,” he says with a gentle smile. “*I am the Prince of Pale Leaves. You have been chosen to share in my adventure and save this land from imminent threat. Come to the Manga Market and seek out my Tale. Read it, learn of my life, and decipher my secrets. If you do not, a terrible fate will befall the city of Tokyo.*”

The last page of the short comic shows a full page spread of all the investigators together, ending in the words “*To be continued...*”

**Keeper note:** seeing this comic triggers a **Sanity** roll (1/1D4 loss) and 1D6 Exposure Points. “Yamabuki Iroha” is credited as the author. The art style and quality perfectly match that of *The Tale of Pale Leaves*.

### Hook Two: “That Title Sounds Familiar...”

- Use this hook for established investigators from previous scenarios who have “The Fed” as their Confidant (see **Confidants: Plot Hook Facilitators**, Chapter 1, page 45).

Special Agent Mizutani calls you to downtown Tokyo. You meet in the corner of a smoke-filled *izakaya*. Not a standing bar this time. He says “*You’re going to want to sit down for this one.*”

“*There’s some indie comic book going around,*” he says, slipping you a scrap of notebook paper with the following words scrawled on it: *Aokuchiba Monogatari* (The Tale of Pale Leaves).

“*Pale Leaves. Hearing that name a lot lately. I doubt it’s a coincidence. This manga showed up at a convention last summer. I think it’s propaganda for a cult, aimed at adolescents. Get ‘em while they’re young. Oh, and there are rumors that it’s ‘cursed.’ Strange things happen if you read it, allegedly.*”

He finishes his drink.

“*This is out of my field of expertise. I don’t read manga,*” Mizutani says. He clears his throat. “*So, I need you to look into this. Visit the Manga Market. Blend in with the nerds, act like you belong. Whoever drew that thing will make another appearance. Find them. Find out what they’re up to.*”

### Hook Three: “An Old Foe’s New Trick”

- Use this hook for established investigators from previous scenarios who have “The Abbot” as their Confidant (see **Confidants: Plot Hook Facilitators**, Chapter 1, page 46).

Murakami Tsubasa calls you to a local Shingon temple in the late evening. No ceremonies are taking place now, no chanting or roaring flames of the fire ceremony. The only sounds are the calls of crows and the faint howl of the wind.

“*I lost a disciple today,*” Murakami begins somberly. “*Young man, barely twenty. He appeared at the temple gates yesterday wearing yellow, and threw his old robes on the ground. He said karma is a lie, there is no life beyond this, and no meaning beyond personal happiness... among other heretical things I won’t repeat. This afternoon, he jumped from his apartment building, four floors up, shouting something about breaking free of his cage. He is in a medically induced coma as the doctors do their work.*”

Murakami sighs.

“*Some of his friends watched it happen. I just spoke with them. They say that he had drawn a sketch of himself flying like a superhero before he jumped. And they said, for a moment, he flew. He cleared the power lines. They said he had been reading a manga called The Tale of Pale Leaves. Do you recognize that name?*”

“*I fear an ancient enemy has returned, and this graphic novel serves as its latest recruitment tool. The manga appeared at a convention less than a year ago. I must ask you to investigate it*



for me. Go to the winter Manga Market in Tokyo and find out who, or what, is responsible.”

#### Hook Four: Potential Class-15 Memetic Info-hazard

- Use this hook for established investigators from previous scenarios who have “The Heiress” as their Confidant (see **Confidants: Plot Hook Facilitators**, Chapter 1, page 47).

You find yourselves in a stretch limousine seated across from Yamada Chitose. She pours a glass of wine for herself. But not for you—you’re already on the clock.

“Story time,” she says. “One of the junior troubleshooters at the Derby Club got into some trouble he couldn’t shoot. Over the past week, he had been written up several times for erratic behavior and dereliction of duty. According to his supervisor, this employee had been obsessively drawing sketches of a strange figure, a so-called ‘Prince,’ on work stationery. He said it was a character from a comic he read. In light of the results of his psych evaluation, he had to be terminated.”

You’re not sure if she meant that in the literal sense.

“Rumors of a ‘cursed’ manga have Tokyo buzzing, and I bet it’s connected. I’d like you to look into this thing. It may have some sort of hypnotic or subliminal effects. Or it may be something more dangerous than we imagine. It showed up at the previous Manga Market, and the next one is any day now. Secure a copy of this work, and, if it proves dangerous, contain the problem.”

#### Hook Five: Just Like Taneguchi’s Book

- Use this hook for established investigators from previous scenarios who have “The Fortune-Teller” Madam Inaba (from **Chapter 2: Dream Eater**, page 51) as their Confidant (see **Confidants: Plot Hook Facilitators**, Chapter 1, page 49).

Madam Inaba invites you into her parlor and serves tea, along with an array of delicate Japanese sweets.

“I heard from a former client of mine who now lives in Tokyo,” she says. “She told me her son, a junior-high schooler, has become obsessed with a new manga. He refuses to do chores or homework, doodles strange symbols all over his worksheets, and acts out all the time. He said, ‘Why do I need to study? The Prince tells me all the answers.’ And, ‘Why should I clean my room? Soon all this filth will be swept away.’”

Madam Inaba unconsciously rubs the stone-bead bracelet on her left wrist.

“The manga he’s been reading is called ‘The Tale of Pale Leaves. Yes, just like Taneguchi’s book. The boy got it at a comic convention in Tokyo. There’s another one coming up, and I have a feeling it will appear there again. Pack your bags. You’re going to the big city to look into this.”

**Keeper note:** feel free to customize the nearby Lore Sheets to best suit an investigator’s backstory. In this instance, ask the players if they wish to accept the “**I’ve Read The Tale of Pale Leaves**” Lore Sheet *before* you permit them to read it—this

## Lore Sheet 5: “I Know Someone Who May Have Joined A Cult”

### Personal Background:

You think that your (friend / lover / family member) has gotten involved with a suspicious organization. Last time you saw them they kept talking about a book they read, and about someone called “the Prince.” They pressured you to join a meeting with their new friends, but something about it felt creepy.

The organization is called the Association of Pale Leaves. No reliable information about them exists anywhere, but it sure sounds like a cult, or at least a multi-level marketing scheme. By coincidence, you’ve heard rumors about a manga with a similar name. Perhaps they’re connected. If you can find this comic and track down the author, you could get some answers.



## Lore Sheet 7: “I Know Someone Who Read The Tale of Pale Leaves”

### Personal Background:

Your (friend / lover / family member) read the manga called The Tale of Pale Leaves. You know this because they wouldn't stop talking about it, and they frequently pressured you to read it. Granted, this is far from the first time they've become obsessed with a new manga or anime. But, this time, it seemed... different. The way they talked, they clearly thought the characters and story were real. They got upset when you said you weren't interested, and you haven't spoken or seen each other since.

Recently you heard rumors that they've been hanging around with a new group of friends who are all into that strange manga. It's like a cult or something. You're a little worried about them, so perhaps you should investigate this fandom and find out what happened.

## Lore Sheet 8: “I’ve Read The Tale of Pale Leaves”

### Personal Background:

For a brief glorious moment, you had the good fortune of reading the most amazing graphic novel you've ever seen. One day you were handed a copy of *Aokuchiba Monogatari* (“*Tale of Pale Leaves*”) by a (friend / lover / family member / someone at a manga convention / total stranger). You started reading through it from the beginning and were immediately hooked. The artwork was gorgeous—you can't imagine how much time, effort, and love the artist must have poured into each panel. Admittedly the story starts slow, but when you started reading Chapter 2, you were blown away.

Sadly, you never got to finish it. The manga (got lost / was stolen / was confiscated by a teacher / was loaned to a friend who never gave it back). You simply must see how it ends. It's an indie manga with a limited print run and extremely hard to find, but you're going to get your hands on it again no matter the cost.

ゴゴゴゴゴ...



is privileged information. If any player takes it, secretly add 20 Exposure Points to their investigator—Also, give them the **Lore Sheet 4: The Tale of Pale Leaves, Summarized** (page 94), but withhold the last paragraph to represent their failure to finish the manga. If they ever read the entire novel, they suffer full EP and Sanity costs (1D100 EP, minimum 20, 1D4 Sanity loss).

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

See **Fanfic: Characters & Monsters**, page 140, for the following characters' profiles.



Nagatsuki Kaede

### Nagatsuki Kaede, “Yamabuki Iroha,” age 24, graphic artist, vessel of the Pale Prince

Nagatsuki makes her living as an independent manga artist. Raised in an unstable home with emotionally distant parents, she had few friends growing up and turned to art to express herself. Eventually, she was scouted by the APL and contracted to make a graphic novelization of their sacred text. After reading the *Sutra*, she gained new insights, and her mind joined with the Prince, fusing into something unique and greater than a normal host.

Unlike most hosts who either hold the Prince as a separate personality in their head or have been completely Consumed by him, her mind has merged with the invasive intelligence.

She retained her original personality and, in turn, the Prince has evolved and gained further insight into humankind.

Under the pen name “Yamabuki Iroha,” she created *The Tale of Pale Leaves*, which has the power of the *Sutra* in a more accessible format. Furthermore, her artistic ability has increased to superhuman levels, granting her the ability to manipulate reality through her drawings.

Nagatsuki is good at heart and wants to make the world better. After she became a vessel, the Prince showed her visions of atrocities he has witnessed around the world, using her sense of justice to manipulate her. She became convinced that the world must change, and believes that, if everyone becomes a vessel of the Prince, all conflict and suffering will end. The more people read her manga, the closer that perfect world will be. She hopes the investigators can help make this happen and carefully tries to steer them toward this goal.

**Keeper note:** Nagatsuki should come across as a helpful, likeable, highly empathetic character; thus, the revelation of her true identity as the antagonist has greater impact. She may also serve as a sounding board for the investigators, able to meet with them every so often to ask what they’ve found and what they think is happening. After the Alabaster Archfiend is defeated, the Keeper should sow doubts and suspicions on Nagatsuki’s motives, to drive the second half of the scenario.

- **Description:** long, black hair in a loose ponytail, with thick dark-rimmed glasses, and dressed in plain second-hand clothing. Pretty but unconcerned with makeup and fashion.
- **Traits:** feels the world’s injustices and sorrows too deeply for her own good; likes gentlemen, hates chauvinists. Appreciates bad jokes and pop-culture references. Kind, funny, and socially awkward.
- **Roleplaying hooks:** helpful to the investigators in their exploration of manga culture—until she reveals herself as the main antagonist and a vessel of the Prince.

サニタリ



Saitō Tomoko



### Saitō Tomoko, age 23, wannabe artist

Saitō is a friend of Nagatsuki Kaede from high school, where Saitō was her junior. They were both members of the afterschool art club, and Saitō, who has little natural talent for drawing, looked up to Nagatsuki as her “senpai” (senior). She currently has a part-time job in an accounting firm, but still reads and draws manga as a hobby and makes sure to buy Nagatsuki’s comics at conventions. She does not belong to the APL, nor does she know they exist.

Saitō has a rare condition known as *aphantasia*—an inability to create mental images, found in fewer than 1% of the population. As such, she can only draw while looking at reference material, and always envied Nagatsuki’s ability to draw vivid and fantastic scenes entirely from imagination. As a side effect, this has given her resistance to the mind-hacking code of *The Tale of Pale Leaves*, sparing her from infection while she helped her boyfriend, Kōda Tsutomu, make his own tainted comic.

- **Description:** conventionally attractive, fashionable, and trendy.
- **Traits:** bubbly, sociable, obsessed with cute things. Doesn’t consider herself an “otaku” (obsessive) despite her hobby. Rarely stands up for herself. Above all, wants to be able to imagine and draw things beautifully.
- **Roleplaying hooks:** an NPC who needs rescuing—the investigators may attempt to save Saitō from her boyfriend Kōda Tsutomu (the Alabaster Archfiend). That is the Prince’s plan, at any rate.

Kōda Tsutomu



### Kōda Tsutomu, age 31, plagiarist, vessel of the Alabaster Archfiend

Kōda works as an independent artist; he read *The Tale of Pale Leaves* and was inspired to create his own version. Due to his inherent psychological issues, Kōda did not become a vessel for the Prince. Instead, he tapped into the Prince’s darker nature and came out “wrong.”

As he became increasingly mentally unbalanced, he set out to create his own sequel to the manga. He used a literal cut-and-paste technique to create a mutation of the original that draws on his own sick fantasies, encapsulating these in his form as the Alabaster Archfiend. Because a fragment of the Prince’s code, now horribly distorted, remains in Kōda’s mind, he deludedly believes that he is the real author of *The Tale of Pale Leaves*, and that its twisted tales are part of his canonical backstory.

- **Description:** gaunt and wiry, average looks; usually wears a cheap suit when going out.
- **Traits:** a know-it-all narcissist with delusions of grandeur and antisocial tendencies. Takes out his failures and frustrations on those around him. Believes his own lies and insists he is the author of *The Tale of Pale Leaves*. He is insecure and often lashes out at Saitō Tomoko, his girlfriend.
- **Roleplaying hooks:** Kōda provides the investigators with an obviously reprehensible villain to overcome, as well as a hint about the dangers of *The Tale of Pale Leaves*. Kōda and his blasphemous tome infuriate the cult, but he’s a convenient scapegoat and lightning rod.



Matsushima Nobuo



**Matsushima Nobuo, age 42, author, politician, APL patron, vessel of the Prince**

See **Inner Circle: Key Antagonists** (Chapter 1, page 40)—a key figure in the APL's inner circle, Matsushima Nobuo is the “face” of the cult.

Unlike the other major figures in the APL, Matsushima is outspoken and politically active, and he recently gained a seat on the National Diet. At heart, he has the best intentions for his country and believes the Prince's path is the only way forward. He is a well-known writer and patron of the arts. He spends much of his time writing manuscripts and newspaper editorials, and going on talk shows to promote the “*perfection of mind, body, and spirit*.” Matsushima has become a minor celebrity and intends to use his influence to shape public opinion of the APL.

- **Description:** handsome, physically fit, and impeccably dressed. For formal occasions, wears a tailored black suit with gold pinstripes.
- **Traits:** well-read, well-spoken, smug, and secretly ruthless. Calm and unshakable.
- **Roleplaying hooks:** a true believer and idealist. Gladly lectures or debates the investigators about the moral superiority of his vision for the world.

Tamori Toshinobu



**Tamori Toshinobu, age 36, occult magazine editor**

Tamori edits the indie occult magazine *Atlantis*. He attends the Manga Market convention every year to promote his work and hears any rumors and gossip there. When anyone shows interest in his hobby, he instantly befriends them. He loves to hear about strange experiences, and has his own theories as to what's “really going on,” but he always presents his ideas as opinions or possibilities, rather than facts.

- **Description:** portly with a pleasant face, he has short hair and wears glasses. He wears an occult-themed tee-shirt under his jacket.
- **Traits:** obsessed with aliens, ghosts, and other weirdness. Sharp-witted but willing to entertain wild conspiracy theories.
- **Roleplaying hooks:** wants to gather stories for his magazine. Would make an excellent replacement investigator, if needed.



## START: A TRAIN THAT WILL TAKE YOU FAR AWAY

- **Date:** December 26, 1986.
- **Location:** Tokyo subway line.
- **Leads Out:** **Manga Market** (page 106).
- **Purpose:** after witnessing a bizarre incident in public, the investigators push on to find a copy of *The Tale of Pale Leaves* manga.

Either by chance or by design, all the investigators are riding on the same train in Tokyo. Their destination is the winter Manga Market at the Tokyo Ryūsū Center. While on the train, they witness a curious event.

*It's a normal morning on the Tokyo Yamanote Line, the loop that goes around the city and connects to major stations and urban centers. The seats are full, but it's not packed wall-to-wall like it is during the weekday rush hour. Rather than salarymen, there are housewives going shopping, retirees heading to the park, and teens in trendy clothes going to hang out with friends. Many of the passengers read comics. Some listen to cassette tapes on a Walkman. A young boy doodles something on the foggy window with his finger.*

*A disembodied announcer lets everyone know that they are arriving at Hamamatsu-chō. Just as the train pulls into the station,*

*you see something rather odd. Nine young people in their teens and twenties all stand up in unison in the train car, take out a yellow coat or robe and pale mask from their backpacks, and put them on in one practiced motion. They then exit the train. They do this without a single word or gesture between them.*

*Their movements seem so coordinated and near simultaneous that it's like one person wearing multiple bodies. It's likely some kind of performance troupe or other well-rehearsed prank, but something about it made the hair stand up on the back of your neck.*

*At some point, as the people disembarked in their masks and robes, you think you heard a breathless whisper from someone on the train: "Ōji-sama" (My Prince). You don't know who said it.*

*Maybe it was you.*

**Keeper note:** if the investigators have encountered incarnations of the Prince before (e.g., a hallucination caused by reading the *Sutra*, the Pale Monk from **Chapter 2: Dream Eater**, or an illustration in *The Tale of Pale Leaves* manga), they recognize the yellow robe motif.

Other commuters either didn't notice this strange event (as they were reading something or sleeping on the train) or they simply dismiss it as "just a bunch of geeky cosplayers, probably going to a convention."

If the investigators inspect what the boy was drawing on the foggy window, they see what looks to be a strange jumble of lines, like a letter or character from an unknown language.

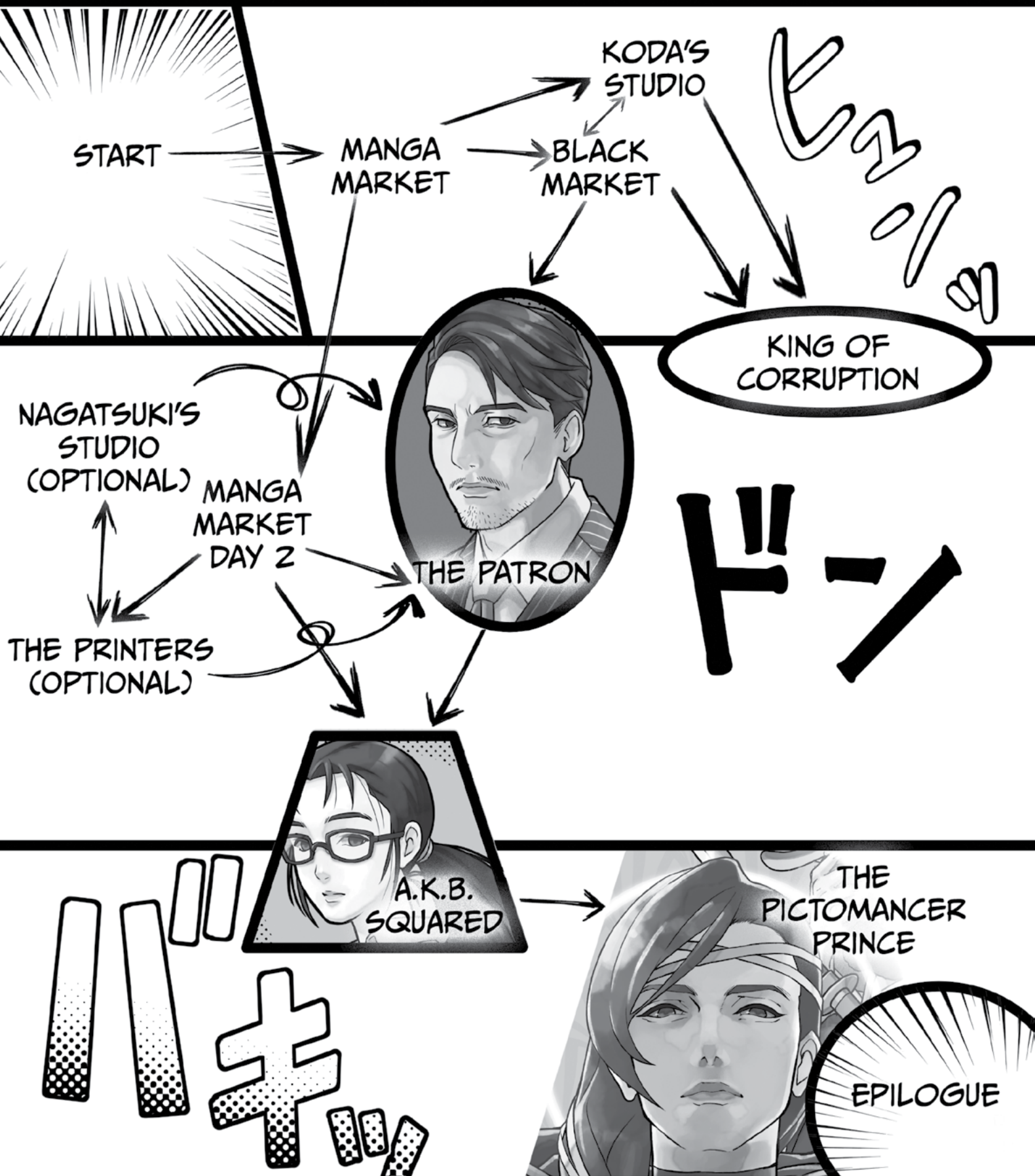
## Lore Sheet 8: Manga

Manga is the term for Japanese comic books or graphic novels. The word came into use during the 18th century in the form of picture books, some of which were mass produced as serials by woodblock printing. Manga has evolved significantly over the years and now covers every conceivable genre and caters to all age groups. Manga typically uses black ink only (except for the cover) due to time constraints and printing costs. The panels are traditionally read from right to left, top to bottom, and the books start at what would be the back, by Western standards.

The serialized comics popular in the US typically get created by an entire team, including a writer, a penciler, an inker, a colorist, a letterer, and another to fight with the publisher over the frivolous changes and edits they've demanded. Most manga authors do all of that by themselves, though some fortunate artists might have an assistant or two. This means that while their job is grueling and sometimes thankless, a manga author has absolute creative control over their own work.



CHAPTER 3





The condensation has bled down the window pane, making it illegible (and creepy, for those of a paranoid mindset). The boy smiles innocently. If asked, he says the design comes from a comic he saw some older kids reading, but has no useful information.

**Keeper note:** the boy is not a vessel of the Prince.

The investigators must transfer to the monorail here at Hamamatsu-chō Station for the final leg of their journey. The yellow-clad youths also transferred, but they have quite a head start. Even if the investigators catch up and interrogate them, they come across as harmless geeks.

## MEETING NAGATSUKI KAEDE

As the investigators follow the costumed group, they see Nagatsuki Kaede, a young woman in distress. She is in her early twenties, sports thick dark-rimmed glasses, and has long black hair in a loose ponytail. She wears plain, second-hand clothing. She is picking up piles of comics and artwork that just spilled out of her bags and trolley cart. Overcoming her embarrassment, she calls to the investigators for help. The costumed group has already left on the monorail, and there is a 15-minute wait until the next one, so the investigators have time to lend a hand.

If they stop to help, she thanks them and introduces herself as Nagatsuki Kaede, an independent artist. If they ignore her request for help, she finds them later at the comic convention.

Nagatsuki explains what happened:

*"I was on my way to the train platform when this group of cosplayers came marching down in a V-shaped formation. I found myself staring at them like an idiot, and when I tried to get out of the way I tripped. It's not their fault, really. I don't think they can see out of those masks."*

**Keeper note:** yes, this "attack" is just a pre-coordinated setup to attract helpful investigators.

Nagatsuki has a large tote bag and a cardboard box strapped to a portable hand truck. The contents of these (now scattered over the floor of the station) include stacks of graphic novels with her name on the covers. Most seem to be fantasy or romance, full of beautiful people and dreamlike backgrounds, and girls who have their wishes granted. She plans to sell these at the Manga Market. None of them are related to the Prince, the *Sutra*, or any occult phenomena.

In addition to her original content, she is also selling fan comics for an older anime series aimed at girls with titles like *Magical Princess* and *Magic Angel*. These are early works from the "Magical Girl" genre, built on the central theme of ordinary girls who gain mystic powers, often gifted to them by benevolent aliens or a kingdom in the land of dreams, and who transform into heroic figures greater than their everyday selves. If asked about these, Nagatsuki gets slightly defensive. *"Don't judge me. I was young when these came out."*

- If the investigators later compare the *Reunion* mini-comic (see **Hook One: Those Chosen by the Prince**, page 95) or *The Tale of Pale Leaves* to Nagatsuki Kaede's older works, they find a notable difference in quality, although a successful **Hard Art/Craft** or **Appraise** roll reveals some stylistic similarities. Regardless, she denies any knowledge of it.

## SPEAKING TO NAGATSUKI

Nagatsuki Kaede tries hard to befriend the investigators on Manga Market Day One, as the Prince wants them to be invested enough to deal with the Alabaster Archfiend for him. She will be talkative, helpful, and even neglect her own booth at Manga Market to hang out with them.

Across: Map 5: Fanfic Scenario Structure

## Lore Sheet 9: Manga Market

Manga Market is a two-day convention held twice yearly in Tokyo since the 1970s. It focuses on the sale and promotion of *dōjinshi*, or self-published works. It is a vitally important place for independent creators to promote and sell their original manga and related art. Manga Market takes place in August and December. The venue is currently the Tokyo Ryūtsū Center, with 4,400 circles (groups or individual creators) and 55,000 attendees at full capacity. Creators almost always manage their own booths and sell their works to fans directly. While creators pay for table space, general entry is free.



## BUILDING A CASE FOR (OR AGAINST) HUMANITY

From the moment she meets the investigators, Nagatsuki Kaede takes note of how they behave and the choices they make. For instance, did they help her immediately, did they try to take advantage, or did they ignore her? How do they deal with other obstacles in their path? By tapping into the memories of the Prince's other hosts, she can even evaluate the investigators when they think no one is watching. All these factors help determine whether Nagatsuki can be saved in the end.

**Keeper note:** Once they finish off the Alabaster Archfiend, she ghosts the investigators, as she has more important matters to deal with.

### *The Cursed Comic*

If the investigators don't know about or don't bring up *The Tale of Pale Leaves*, Nagatsuki mentions it to them. She explains that the costumes those people were wearing originate from *The Tale of Pale Leaves*, and that the group must be going to the Manga Market.

### *If the investigators ask about The Tale of Pale Leaves*

Nagatsuki says she has heard rumors of it within her comic circle. She can provide the following information:

- It's a *dōjinshi*, a self-published work, so probably a small print run (**Lore Sheet 11: Dōjinshi**).

- It's quite thick for an indie manga volume, at least two to three hundred pages.
- The pages of the copy she saw were a faint-yellow color. This could be from natural weathering, or maybe it was an artistic choice to print on paper that color.
- It seems to be an original story, not a derivative work. (Investigators who already suspect that it's connected to the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* may interject here, but she claims to have never heard of the *Sutra*.)
- The comic has extremely obsessed fans. "*But this is true of most popular manga*," Nagatsuki adds.
- It has a reputation as "cursed." Apparently, everyone who reads it has dreams or hallucinations about it (though not necessarily bad or scary ones).
- The Manga Market is the best place to find *The Tale of Pale Leaves*, or at least learn more about it.
- She can't remember the name of the author. She wasn't paying that much attention—refer to **What's in a Pen Name?** (page 111) if the investigators tell her.

Nagatsuki asks the investigators about their interest in the so-called cursed manga, but won't press hard for details. It's up to the investigators how much they share their motivations, backstories, or previous adventures.

### *If asked, Nagatsuki admits she also wonders about The Tale of Pale Leaves*

"I saw someone reading it the other day, and it got my attention. I only saw the cover, but the art impressed me. I want to know how it became so popular and maybe learn some things from it."

### *If the investigators bring up the APL or any of their experiences with the cult*

Nagatsuki claims she's never heard of them. She listens to their concerns out of sympathy, but adds, "*I'm not afraid of them*."

## Lore Sheet 10: Cosplay

The term "cosplay" (portmanteau of "costume" and "play") appeared first in Japan in 1984, but has been a common activity at fan conventions in Japan since at least the 1970s. Cosplayers dress up as characters from anime, manga, games, movies, and so on. While fan costuming has certainly existed elsewhere around the world in masquerade balls, science fiction conventions, and US comic book conventions, Japan is where it truly became popular. Cosplay has grown rapidly as a hobby since the 1990s and now cosplayers are a common sight at fan conventions almost everywhere in the world.



*Most groups like that consist of lonely people searching desperately for a sense of belonging and purpose.”*

***If the investigators bring up concerns about the “cursed” nature of the comic or ask if she is afraid of it***

Nagatsuki’s answer seems half-bemused, half-offended. *“Guys, it’s a book. You know, some people endure years of abuse and trauma—real horror, not some spooky ghost nonsense. If you think that looking at some words and pictures on a page is enough to make you go crazy, I have no idea how you even survive in modern society.”*

Nagatsuki suggests she might be able to help find out the author’s identity, or at least get a copy of the manga. She offers to guide the investigators around Manga Market, which she attends once or twice every year.

Nagatsuki has specific responses to typical questions the investigators may ask, some of which contain a bit of foreshadowing:

***If asked about her family***

*“Only child. My parents and I have not spoken in years. They tried to keep me from my dreams.”*

***If asked if she’s single, or in response to flirting***

*“Actually, I already have someone special. The moment we met, I knew we were destined for each other.”*

(She keeps all other details of this “special someone” private, describing him only as, “tall, handsome, and incredibly intelligent.”)

***If asked where she lives***

*“I’m staying at a hotel for the convention. I live outside of Tokyo.”*

She values her privacy and does not give up her address, but if the investigators are friendly and chatty and spend time with her, she mentions the Uruga Ferry navigating the inlet downhill of her home, between the East and West Kano Shrines—a resident (or a **Know** roll) understands this means the city of Yokosuka. Determined investigators can combine her name and a **Library Use** roll at the Yokosuka City Hall, library, or central post office to eventually work out the address of **Nagatsuki’s Studio** (page 127).

**Keeper note:** the investigators probably won’t look up Nagatsuki at first. The only real reasons to do so are i) on Day One to see if she can get them a copy of the *Tale*, or ii) Day Two onward, to find out why she appears to be avoiding them.

***If asked about her fan-created work or the dōjinshi scene***

*“A quality work of art or literature lingers in the mind. It leaves just enough to the imagination, leaves you wanting more. That’s why many people create fan art or fan fiction, or homages or remakes. They want that feeling to perpetuate. In rare cases, it’s possible to create something that becomes canon in the eyes of the fans and even the original creator.”*

***If asked whether she likes any Western comics or animation, she goes on a small rant***

*“I don’t care for that ‘mouse’ company. Their films tell little girls to just look pretty and passively wait for a handsome prince to come*

## Lore Sheet 11: Dōjinshi

**Dōjinshi** is the Japanese term for self-published print works, such as manga, magazines, short stories, and novels. The term is often associated with derivative content made by amateurs, such as fan art and fan fiction, though established artists also create **dōjinshi** to release original work that they cannot (or would rather not) get published officially. Self-publishing enables a creator to produce works that are unique and authentic, without worrying about interference from a detached publishing company.

The sale of derivative fan work is somewhat controversial, but has been a common practice since the 1980s. Under Japanese law, **dōjinshi** creators can’t be prosecuted unless the copyright owners file a complaint. As most of these copyright holders are artists and creators, some of whom started as **dōjinshi** artists themselves, such complaints are exceedingly rare. Rather, they see it as a means to generate interest in the official work, and as a way for aspiring artists to practice.



*and save them. It's misogynistic and disempowering. What if a girl wants to be the one who saves the day?"*

The investigators can get to Manga Market by taking the Tokyo Monorail, which runs from Haneda airport to Ōta, Shinagawa, and Minato wards. Keepers may wish to do some subtle foreshadowing if they plan to run **The Bridge Maiden, Part Two** (see *TSoPL: CM*) later. The monorail offers a better view of the city than a typical train, and the investigators can see Shibaura Wharf, where a construction crew is erecting enormous support pillars for a bridge that will stretch across the bay.

## MANGA MARKET

- **Location:** Tokyo Ryūtsū Center, Ōta, Tokyo.
- **Leads Ins: Start** (preceding).
- **Leads Out: Black Market** (page 113); **The King of Corruption** (page 117); **Kōda Tsutomu's Apartment** (page 112); **Manga Market Day Two** (page 121).
- **Purpose:** the investigators explore the convention hall in search of the mysterious manga, and although they will be frustrated—for now—they find leads to the Alabaster Archfiend.

## ARRIVING AT THE CONVENTION

The convention takes place at the Tokyo Ryūtsū Center. Outside the building, the investigators see scattered groups and individual fans in costumes: a martial artist with spiky black hair and a monkey tail; a space pirate with an eyepatch and cape; and a girl with long green hair, tiger-striped bikini, and go-go boots. None of these hold any major clues for the investigators (because their interests are more mainstream), but they can confirm that a group of people in masks and yellow capes entered the convention center.

Inside, hundreds of tables stand end-to-end in row after row, serving as booths for thousands of creators. Each of the artists is selling their original comics and artwork. Some are drawing in fans' sketchbooks or signing autographs. Investigators with any knowledge of the manga subculture notice that booths with similar genres or subject matter are grouped together.

### *Nagatsuki Kaede Explains Manga Market for the Uninitiated*

*"Creators who do related work, like fanfics on the same subject matter or comics of the same genre, group together into what's called a 'circle.' For example, I've been a member of a Magical Girl circle and a fantasy circle, so my booth is near to others of my*

*circle. Circle members help each other advertise, look after each other's booths during breaks, and share printing costs.*

*"In other words, if you want to find The Tale of Pale Leaves, your best bet is to find out the genre, or find out if there is any fan-created content about it. Just be aware that most of us geeky types don't like being judged by outsiders. Try to show genuine interest in their hobbies, and they'll respond well to you."*

Nagatsuki says she needs to set up her own booth (number B2), but she promises to catch up with the investigators later. If an investigator offers to help set up her booth, Nagatsuki appreciates their kindness.

## EXPLORING MANGA MARKET

At this point, the investigators have plenty of time to look around and gather information. When speaking with creators and attendees, the Keeper may call for social skills (**Charm, Fast Talk, Persuade**) as they see fit (see **Speaking to Random Attendees**, page 108).

Alternatively, the investigators can purchase official pamphlets from the event staff showing the layout of the tables, for a few hundred yen. But they need to know the name of *The Tale of Pale Leaves*' author ("Yamabuki Iroha") to find them on the plan at number A44—information only known to those with the background **Lore Sheet: I've Read The Tale of Pale Leaves** (page 97), or **Hook One: Those Chosen by the Prince** (page 95).

### Investigator Options

The following scenes detail various people and places with whom the investigators can interact during the convention; each has its own section, presented in suggested order, and noted as follows:

- **Looking for The Tale of Pale Leaves** (following).
- **Speaking to Random Attendees** (page 108).
- **Unmasking an Impostor** (page 108).
- **The Occult Circle** (page 110).
- **The Hidden Circle of Leaves** (page 110).
- **Yamabuki Iroha's Booth** (page 111).









## LOOKING FOR THE TALE OF PALE LEAVES

### *If the investigators don't know the name of the Tale's author*

A “Pale Leaves circle” has not been officially registered for the event. The investigators can ask around for the name of the *Tale's* creator—and can eventually find it in either **Unmasking an Impostor** (following) or **The Occult Circle** (page 110).

### *If the investigators know the name of the Tale's author*

The published exhibit plan shows the location of Yamabuki Iroha's booth, A44, in the horror section (see **The Hidden Circle of Leaves**, page 110) and **Yamabuki Iroha's Booth** (page 111).

### *If the event's staff get asked if Yamabuki Iroha registered to sell anything at the convention*

They say that the artist has a table reserved for both days at the show, pointing to the booth's location at A44 on the event plan—see **Yamabuki Iroha's Booth** (page 111), which is within the horror area (see **The Hidden Circle of Leaves**, page 110).

## SPEAKING TO RANDOM ATTENDEES

The investigators can find the following clues by speaking to various fans and creators:

- *The Tale of Pale Leaves* first showed up at this year's summer Manga Market.
- The person at the booth, presumably the author, wore a mask and costume and did not say a single word to anyone. They had rather broad shoulders. Customers assumed it was a kind of live-action roleplay.
- There was something mysterious about the manga. Word spread quickly around the convention, and the book sold out fast.
- Some say that staring at the patterns on the booth's yellow tablecloth made them feel light-headed, and they found themselves waiting in line for a copy without realizing it.

Many other creators and fans greet Nagatsuki as she passes. If the investigators ask any of these about Nagatsuki Kaede privately, they can learn the following:

- Nagatsuki enjoys an excellent reputation within her circles. She treats fans and other creators politely and shows remarkable alacrity when asked to help, but seems to have few, if any, close friends.
- She attends Manga Market twice a year, including last winter and this summer.

- Her fans say that her artwork rivals the big-name manga artists, but her stories are rather niche and have never reached mainstream popularity.
- She hasn't put out much new material lately; but her fans say she never stops practicing, and her art gets better with each release.

## UNMASKING AN IMPOSTOR

At some point during the search, the investigators find a booth—which the Keeper can locate as they wish—occupied by a masked figure (Saitō Tomoko) dressed in yellow robes. The folding table has a yellow and gold cloth covering—rather obviously an old curtain. The masked figure possesses a short and slight frame.

- On the right side of the table sits a stack of papers titled, “PREORDER TICKET: *The Alabaster Archfiend*. The saga of the Pale Leaves continues! Reserve your copy today for only ¥1000!”
- On the left side lies a stack of 11 monochrome photocopies of *The Tale of Pale Leaves* on white paper. They sell out just as the investigators get to the head of the line.

Investigators who manage to get hold of a photocopy of *The Tale of Pale Leaves*—which takes some work, as purchasers are not willing to give one up for any money—find the story comprehensible. The inkwork is blurred and faded in patches, and distorted at the edges of the pages, as if the photocopier was having toner problems. It is obviously not up to the standard of the original printed comic—see **The Tale of Pale Leaves, Summarized** (page 94) for a précis of the story.

**Keeper note:** the photocopying process has failed to replicate the critical symbols hidden in the background screentones (see **Watch Your (Screen) Tone**, page 109), meaning that although the photocopy does have the Sanity cost and Mythos gain outlined in the book profile **Graphic Sutra** (Chapter 1, page 29), it does not grant any points toward the Art skill, does not contain any functional Signs or rituals, nor bestow any Exposure Points.

The investigators may try to interact with the booth keeper (Saitō), but they do not respond verbally at all. The robed person simply bows and gestures dramatically to the goods they have for sale, such as the preorder tickets. If Nagatsuki Kaede accompanies them, she makes her way to the table and looks over the table skeptically.

- The investigators may make a **Psychology** roll to notice, from the robed figure's body language, that they are nervous.



The investigators have any number of ways to unmask the robed figure (and if not, Nagatsuki steps in and does it for them), revealing a young woman named Saitō Tomoko, who seems completely out of her depth.

When questioned, Saitō has useful information, but she appears reluctant to reveal everything. A successful social skill roll is needed (gain a bonus die if **Intimidate**). Nagatsuki is genuinely surprised to see her old friend and can assist in getting information out of her, granting a bonus die if **Charm** or **Persuade** is used. Thus, if spoken to kindly, Saitō is more willing to tell the truth, as long as the investigators keep quiet, so as not to drive off potential customers.

- Saitō says she is simply an assistant to the true author of *The Tale of Pale Leaves*, and she was asked to tend his booth for today.
- She says she didn't draw any of the manga. In fact, she can't draw things from imagination at all, due to her aphantasia (inability to create mental images).
- The artist she works for (who she believes is the real Yamabuki Iroha) is a man named Kōda Tsutomu.
- Kōda instructed her to make photocopies of *The Tale of Pale Leaves* at a local print shop and sell them at the booth today. However, she had to pay with her own money and only had enough for 11 copies, so they all sold out fast. She's worried about Kōda punishing her for this.
- Saitō hasn't known Kōda for long. She never actually saw him working on *The Tale of Pale Leaves*. When they met at PANIC—a club in Ikebukuro district—he showed her the *Tale*, and she was impressed.
- If asked about the original she used to photocopy, she says she doesn't have it anymore—a successful **Psychology** roll reveals she is holding something back. If pressed with a successful social skill roll, Saitō reveals Kōda had her assist him with (literally) cutting and pasting large sections from *The Tale of Pale Leaves* to his new work, specifically the “screentones.” He used a special drafting table for tracing some of the more complex designs and characters. Saitō says working with those screentones made her feel dizzy.
- If asked about her relationship with Kōda, Saitō sheepishly says that he is also her boyfriend. A **Psychology** roll may reveal that it appears to be a one-sided toxic relationship, but she refuses to admit that.
- She says Kōda just put the final touches on his new manuscript and plans to show it to his “publisher” this evening in Heiwajima Park to arrange a print run.

**Keeper note:** the last bullet above is a key clue; Kōda's “publisher” is really a black-market dealer, but Saitō does not know this. If the investigators wish to look into Kōda

Tsutomu, Saitō can give them his address—see **Kōda Tsutomu's Apartment**, page 112.

### *Dangling Threads*

The investigators may wish to know why Kōda didn't order more copies of the manga from the printer, instead of having his assistant make poor-quality photocopies, or why he has been cutting, pasting, and tracing from *The Tale of Pale Leaves* for his new manga. Saitō assumed it was to save time and money. She cannot bring herself to believe that he was lying to her about being the real author.

## WATCH YOUR (SCREEN)TONE

Screentone is a technique for applying texture and shading to drawings, like hatching, but using patterns of dots, lines, or other fine markings. It's expensive and impractical to use countless shades of solid colors for manga and most printed media (such as newspapers), so screentone and halftone are used as a simpler analog alternative. Companies sell simple screentone patterns for general use, but some artists may create their own.

The unique screentones used in *The Tale of Pale Leaves* comprise the most important component of its mind-altering effects. Each screentone consists of thousands of tiny symbols repeating in a hypnotic pattern, hand-drawn by the author with superhuman precision. Readers of the manga become Exposed to the same code as the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*, just by seeing the comic panels. Only a skilled artist who has become a host for the Prince can possibly replicate this technique. Otherwise, it requires modern (21<sup>st</sup> century) digital software and hardware.

To work properly, the special screentone requires a certain level of print quality. If the screentones are smudged, resized, or not rendered clearly (such as with a cheap photocopy), the embedded “code” does not have its desired effect, and a reader is either not sufficiently Exposed to become a vessel of the Prince, or worse, a “corrupt” entity may be implanted into their mind.



Thus, the investigators may look into Kōda and find out what other works he's done—either with a **Library Use** or social skill roll when talking to convention attendees. If so, they can find the following:

- Kōda works as a minor indie artist. He mostly creates horror, gore, and erotic fiction.
- He has a reputation for tasteless behavior and harassment toward other creators and fans.
- He has been accused of tracing or copying other artists' works in the past.

## THE OCCULT CIRCLE, D20

Asking around about occult or weird manga, at D20, the investigators come across a small “occult circle” focused on strange and paranormal subjects. Prominent among the members stands a large man in his thirties named Tamori Toshinobu, the editor of a fanzine called *Atlantis*. The sensational headlines on the cover of this quarter's edition provide possible links to other scenarios, if the Keeper so wishes:

- *Real baku reported in historic town! Is it a pest or protector? Keep your dreams safe by following our simple guide!*
- *Faceless ghosts sighted stalking the streets of Tokyo at night. Is your neighbor one of them? Use our handy checklist on Page 9.*
- *They are among us! Top ten signs that an alien infiltration is already underway!*
- *Researchers find deadly deep-sea microbe in abandoned WW2 submarine! Could it devour all life on Earth? Find out on Page 14.*

Other members in this occult circle include a young woman in a frilly, gothic-style dress selling custom-designed tarot cards and offering personal readings for a small fee, a man selling a poorly drawn comic telling the story of his (alleged) encounter with an alien, and an older man selling copies of a “real magical grimoire” of spells (he made up himself). None of these individuals have any useful clues, but the Keeper may wish to earmark these NPCs as future replacement investigators.

### Talking to Tamori Toshinobu

Tamori enthusiastically greets the investigators when they approach his table. He eagerly discusses any occult topics. If the investigators reveal they have encountered the supernatural (e.g., such as the baku in **Chapter 2: Dream Eater**), he bombards them with questions about their experiences and asks to interview them for his magazine.

Coincidentally, he is obsessed with rumors regarding *The Tale of Pale Leaves*—though he hasn't read it himself—and

he is currently conducting research about it for an upcoming issue. He can provide more clues for the investigators, but not all his information is accurate:

- *The Tale of Pale Leaves'* author's name, written on the title page, is “Yamabuki Iroha.”
- The main character is a wise and heroic Prince, who comes from an advanced alien world. This Prince fights horrific extra-dimensional monsters on behalf of humankind.
- The Prince manipulates reality through art and literature. He writes special “Signs”—maybe symbols from an alien language—with a magical brush to work wonders, and can create objects by drawing them. A few fans claim to have been able to duplicate these feats in real life.
- Tamori has never heard of the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*, except as an artifact that exists in the manga. He's quite eager to hear about the real thing if the investigators mention it and have first-hand experience with it.
- Fan art and fan-created spin-offs of the comic already exist. Some of them are weird or outright disturbing. He has read some of those.
- Tamori (incorrectly) speculates that the paper of the *Tale* contains a psychotropic substance, which is why it's yellow and why there are rumors of it causing hallucinations.
- He thinks that Yamabuki, if present, will be based in the horror or sci-fi circles—see **The Hidden Circle of Leaves**, following.

## THE HIDDEN CIRCLE OF LEAVES

Although *The Tale of Pale Leaves* has not become mainstream enough to have its own dedicated circle, representation is present within the convention. Scattered among the horror and sci-fi circles they find a dozen booths related to *The Tale of Pale Leaves*, showcasing fan-created spinoffs and artworks. The majority of these are harmless, and the creators themselves are sane (albeit alarmingly obsessed).

Yet each of the creators has read *The Tale of Pale Leaves*, which means they unwittingly became vessels of the Prince, who lies dormant in their subconscious minds. Furthermore, some of the artists have already managed to well enough replicate the characters and patterns from the original work that it may count as exposure to the *Sutra* or trigger minor psychological effects—the specifics are left up to the Keeper.

In speaking to the members of this circle, the investigators can gather some useful information:

- The fan creators steadfastly refuse to tell the investigators any details of the plot of *The Tale of Pale Leaves*. “It would spoil the story. You simply must read it yourself.”



## WHAT'S IN A PEN NAME?

Writers and artists around the world frequently adopt pen names for a variety of reasons, and this is especially true in Japan. The famous artist Hokusai (1760–1849), whose work most readers of this scenario have already seen somewhere even without realizing it, was known by at least 30 pseudonyms during his lifetime.

Some pen names have a deeper meaning. For example, the pen name “Yamabuki Iroha.” It is written in Japanese as 山吹色華, which is a play on words, literally meaning “golden yellow-colored flowers.” *Iroha* is also the name of a well-known poem from the Heian period (first appearing in the *Golden Light Sutra*) that uses each character of the Japanese syllabary exactly once.

If Nagatsuki Kaede accompanies the investigators when they receive this information, or if they consult her, she remarks on the author's name:

*“Hmm. Yamabuki Iroha. It's obviously a pen name. Lots of people in this business write under a pseudonym. ‘Iroha’ has a feminine quality, but there's nothing stopping a male author from using it, especially if they wanted to remain anonymous.”*

- None of them currently has a copy of the original manga. Those who owned one gave it to a friend or acquaintance to “widen the circle.”
- If the investigators succeed with an appropriate social skill roll, at least one creator confides that the Prince from the story is real. “If you read the story and open your heart, you will see and hear him too.”
- Among the fan works are full-color posters of the Prince of Pale Leaves in his yellow robes. This image is immediately familiar to those who has been Exposed to the *Sutra* and seen the Prince in a dream or hallucination. But, in these works, he wears no mask and is depicted as a strikingly handsome young man with long dark hair and green eyes. In some art, he wields a calligraphy brush or spear with a tip resembling a fountain pen.
- The fan works also include posters depicting the Prince battling horrific monsters—from vaguely humanoid necrophages to colossal monstrosities full of eyes and tentacles. Investigators making a successful **Cthulhu Mythos** roll or Hard **Occult** roll may recognize some of these beings, including even some Great Old Ones and Outer Gods, at the Keeper's discretion.

- The members are excited that a table has been reserved under the name of Yamabuki Iroha, the creator of *The Tale of Pale Leaves*. They are eager to finally meet their idol.
- Whispered rumors reached the group of a secret “*Aokuchiba*-only” (“*Tale of Pale Leaves*-only”) event occurring on New Year's Eve, after Manga Market is over. No one knows the location yet, but only people who have read *The Tale of Pale Leaves* comic will receive invitations.

## YAMABUKI IROHA'S BOOTH, A44

The booth reserved for Yamabuki Iroha is empty, though a yellow and gold tablecloth, embroidered with kanji characters, adorns the table. It's simple but quite eye-catching.

Of course, the characters on the tablecloth come from the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*. If any of the investigators stare at the cloth for a significant amount of time, they should make a **POW** roll; if failed, they are treated to a brief hallucination:

*Suddenly, the venue becomes completely empty and deathly quiet. You are alone, and even your companions who were standing right next to you are nowhere to be seen. The vast space of the interior of the building looms oppressively around you. Only the faint buzzing of fluorescent lights high up on the ceiling accompanies you. Despite the total emptiness, or perhaps because of it, you get the distinct feeling that you are being watched. Behind you, you hear a pen moving on paper—a crescendo of fluid strokes, perhaps a drawing, a signature, a sign. It is for you.*

*Carefully, you turn... and snap back to reality. The venue hall bustles once again. The person behind you is just an attendee asking people to sign a petition to get his favorite manga adapted into an animated series.*

## The Yellow Cosplayers

A few fans loiter disconsolately in the vicinity of Yamabuki Iroha's empty booth, including the same costumed figures that the investigators saw on the train (see **Start: A Train That Will Take You Far Away**, page 101)—they are still wearing their costumes.

If any are confronted, they claim to be dedicated fans of *The Tale of Pale Leaves* and say the incident on the train was just a prank. They reveal their disappointment that the author has not shown up, but have heard a rumor that Yamabuki Iroha will be here in the morning, with many more copies of *The Tale of Pale Leaves*. They have little more to say and refuse to talk further about the manga, saying the investigators must get their own copy and read it themselves. If the investigators press them hard for more, event staff members intervene and warn them not to harass attendees.



## LEADS OUT

- If the investigators want to meet the “author” and/or get their hands on an original printed copy of *The Tale of Pale Leaves*, Saitō says that Kōda mentioned he was going to meet with his publisher in Heiwajima Park early this evening. She assumes that either Kōda or his publisher has at least one copy of the original *Tale of Pale Leaves*. The park is within walking distance of the venue, so the investigators may make their way there after the event concludes for the day—proceed to **Black Market** (page 113).
- If the investigators want to check out Kōda’s apartment first, and convince Saitō to tell them the address—see **Kōda Tsutomu’s Apartment**, following.
- Saitō namedropped the disco club called PANIC. When the investigators wish to go to the club—proceed to **The King of Corruption** (page 117).
- The investigators can come back the next day to meet the “real” Yamabuki Iroha—go to **Manga Market Day Two** (page 121).

## KŌDA TSUTOMU’S APARTMENT

- **Location:** Tabata, Tokyo.
- **Leads In:** **Black Market** (page 113); **Unmasking an Impostor** (page 108).
- **Leads Out:** **Black Market** (page 113); **The King of Corruption** (page 117).
- **Purpose:** the investigators go to Saitō’s boyfriend’s apartment and find evidence of *The Tale of Pale Leaves*’ creator’s spiral into madness, as well as clues indicating that he was not the original author.

The investigators may wish to snoop around Kōda’s apartment to gain information before or after confronting him (probably at the **Black Market**, page 113). Saitō has been to Kōda’s apartment before, and she can provide the address.

The apartment is in Tabata, several stops north on the Yamanote line, about 30 minutes from Hamamatsu-chō. It is a cheap, one-room studio in an older condominium. The windows all have heavy blinds. Saitō doesn’t have a key to the apartment, so the investigators must find their own way inside; options include using **Locksmith** or fabricating a story to the building manager with a social skill like **Charm** or **Fast Talk**.

## KŌDA’S ROOM

Aside from a tiny kitchenette, bathroom, and toilet, there is only one larger room in the apartment, separated from the entrance by a sliding door. Unwashed laundry and overdue bills clutter the floor, all strewn around a futon that desperately needs a good airing out. Some important clues can be found in this room. Most of the items, except for the dismantled *Tale of Pale Leaves*, are out in the open and require no roll to find:

- **Artists’ tools:** a large, cheap-looking desk takes up much of the room. An expensive, adjustable easel and a lit tracing table sit atop the desk. Pens, fine cutting tools, paste, and scrap paper lie about.
- **Kōda’s sketchbook:** looking through this large, spiral-bound sketchbook, it’s plain to see that Kōda’s early drawings were mediocre. As they flip through the pages, the quality improves, but the subject matter becomes more disturbing, full of gory and apocalyptic scenes. In particular, there’s an evolution in the art, as the sketches of the Prince of Pale Leaves become the Alabaster Archfiend; his regal robes becoming more tattered and grimy, and his proportions growing more unnatural.
- **A scrap of notebook paper:** has the name “Kanesaka” with the words “Heiwajima Park 17:30 26<sup>th</sup> Dec” circled below it. Below that, it says “Drinks after?” (Another clue leading the investigators to the **Black Market**, page 113.)
- **A flyer:** for a disco club in Ikebukuro called PANIC. The flyer advertises half-off all mixed drinks at the bar, all winter. On the back, various women’s names and phone numbers are written down and then crossed out in increasingly angry pen-strokes. The last name and number on the list belongs to Saitō Tomoko; this one has a circle around it instead. (This points to Kōda’s destination after **Black Market**, page 113.)
- **Mural of the Alabaster Archfiend:** much of one wall consists of a floor-to-ceiling posterboard depicting the main character in Kōda’s manga. The image provokes a **Sanity** roll (0/1 loss). It is a wraith-like being, with long and tattered robes splaying out like tendrils on the ground. Its limbs are unnaturally long, ending in bony, clawed fingers. Its hood shades an elongated pale mask with a strange texture, dark hollow eyes, and no other human features. Innumerable tentacles writhe out from beneath the robes. It gives off a distinct aura of death, decay, and dread. A carefully placed cushion sits on the floor below the picture—the spongy material inside sags in the middle, as if someone had spent a great deal of time kneeling on the cushion, facing the mural.
- **(Hidden) An original copy of *The Tale of Pale Leaves*:** the investigators can locate this among the scrap papers around the desk with a successful **Spot Hidden** roll. The pages have been dismantled from the book’s binding and cut up nearly beyond recognition. Some of the illustrated panels are still



intact, but the screentone backgrounds, chapter title pages, and many other sections are completely gone. Note that reading this butchered copy of the manga does not give the investigators any Exposure Points.

If the investigators have obtained *The Tale of Pale Leaves* and compare Kōda's artwork around the apartment using a relevant **Art/Craft** or **Appraise** skill roll, they find that the underlying art style looks different. This implies (**INT** roll if necessary) that either Kōda significantly changed his drawing technique, or he is not the real artist behind *The Tale of Pale Leaves* and merely tried to copy the work.

### Leads Out

- If the investigators have not yet searched for Kōda at the park, or they want to get a copy of *The Tale of Pale Leaves*, they may do so in the evening—proceed to **Black Market** (following).
- If they came here after the **Black Market** scene, they may go to PANIC—go to **The King of Corruption** (page 117).
- If both of those scenes have been completed, and they have Matsushima's contact information from **The Van in the Parking Lot** (page 114), they can proceed to **The Patron** (page 123).

## BLACK MARKET

- **Date:** December 26, 1986.
- **Location:** Heiwajima Park, Ōta, Tokyo.
- **Leads In:** **Kōda Tsutomu's Apartment** (preceding); **Unmasking an Impostor** (page 108).
- **Leads Out:** **The King of Corruption** (page 117); **Kōda Tsutomu's Apartment** (preceding); **The Patron** (page 123).
- **Purpose:** the investigators go to a shady, underground dealer to find *The Tale of Pale Leaves*, but they instead stumble upon the nightmarish aftermath of a different strain of the *Sutra*'s code. This scene provides key clues to the money/patron behind *The Tale of Pale Leaves*, and sets up the Alabaster Archfiend subplot.

Heiwajima Park lies within Ōta; a small island of green sandwiched between the gray facades of a commercial-industrial zone and a residential area. It has a baseball diamond, a swimming pool, and a wooded camping area. Most of the trees have lost their leaves, giving the park a dreary atmosphere. The sun has already dipped below the horizon and the temperature is dropping, but the park is still open, with a few families and groups of children scattered here and there.

**Keeper note:** this scene assumes the investigators arrive at the park a few minutes late, so that Kanesaka and Kōda have had time to meet. If needed, they could be delayed by traffic, crowds, someone asking for directions, and so on.

## THE CORPSE IN THE PARK

As the investigators arrive, they hear a scream coming from a public restroom in the park. The restroom is a small, solitary building within the wooded area of the park, quite a distance from the administrative building and out of earshot of most people at the moment. The investigators spy a young boy running away at full sprint from the restroom, looking terrified. He yells something to the investigators about a dead body, before jumping on a bicycle and fleeing the park.

Assuming they go to see what has happened, on entering the restroom, the investigators are overcome by the rank odor of excrement. The scent leads them to a stall where the corpse of a man lies slumped on the ground over a squat toilet. His eyes and mouth are wide open, as if the last thing he saw terrified him to his core. The scene provokes a **Sanity** roll (0/1 loss).

If or when the police get called, they'll take at least 10 minutes to arrive, giving the investigators time to look over the scene:

- The corpse belongs to a man in his 50s, wearing an overcoat over a typical business suit.
- Judging by the lack of bloody wounds, the victim was not shot or stabbed. A successful **First Aid** or **Medicine** roll reveals a dent on the back of his skull where it hit the floor, along with subcutaneous bleeding. A Hard success reveals that the man's sternum and ribs are cracked.
- A successful **Spot Hidden** roll allows investigators to notice a dent, at about head height, on the outside of the stall door, implying that he fell inward or was shoved and, thus, murdered.

**Keeper note:** Kōda transformed into his Alabaster Archfiend form and threw the man backwards into the cubicle.

- With a successful **First Aid** or **Medicine** roll, they notice the inside of the man's nose is raw and the cartilage separating his nostrils is degraded, a symptom of chronic cocaine abuse.
- The man keeps his business card in his wallet which they can find by checking (or a **Spot Hidden** roll). His name was Kanesaka, and he worked as a middle-level manager for an investment firm.
- Tucked in a pocket is a small, spiral-bound notepad containing what appear to be a list of abbreviated names and contact information for a range of people (his clients).



Kōda's name and phone number are on this list. The notepad also contains an inventory listing of illicit media (manga and video). Most of the titles are obviously pornographic. Some items he has crossed off (marked as sold). All the items are listed as either being in "Storage" or "Van."

- *The Tale of Pale Leaves* and *The Alabaster Archfiend* are the two the most recent entries, and both are listed as in the "Van."
- Additionally, sandwiched in the notepad's pages is a loose page showing an itinerary for today. The last two entries are: "17:30: Kōda at Heiwajima" and "18:00 drinks at PANIC?" The second phrase has a dark line through it.
- Kanesaka has Mitsubishi car keys in one of his pockets.

**Keeper note:** if asked, Saitō can confirm that she overheard Kōda talking on the phone to someone named Kanesaka.

Once the police and medical technicians arrive, they question any possible witnesses, including the investigators if they are still present. The authorities assume that Kanesaka died of a drug overdose or a health condition resulting from chronic drug use, so the investigators won't be detained unless they really mess up.

**Keeper note:** paranoid investigators who suspect Nagatsuki Kaede somehow murdered Kanesaka can find that, at the time

of the incident, Nagatsuki was depositing earnings from her booth sales into her bank account elsewhere in the city. She has the receipt (with the date and time) to prove it.

## THE VAN IN THE PARKING LOT

Few vehicles are in the parking lot of Heiwajima Park at this hour. If the investigators head there, they spot the only van there—an unmarked, white, Mitsubishi Colt van. The keys found on Kanesaka's body unlock the vehicle. No windows allow access into the rear of the vehicle. If they don't have the keys, a successful **Locksmith** or **Mechanical Repair** roll gets them inside.

Within the van are boxes of illicit uncensored comics and VCR tapes, roughly arranged by category—all products generally prohibited or restricted by Japanese law and industry standards. Kanesaka was dealing in these as a side business.

- Searching through the van's contents, the investigators can find a large manila envelope that's been torn open at one end. It contains a typed letter, on wrinkled paper, as if someone read it and stuffed it back inside: see **Handout Fanfic 1: Letter to Kanesaka**. Accompanying the letter is the manuscript of Kōda's fanfic manga, *The*

## Handout—Fanfic 1: Letter to Kanesaka

Mr. Kanesaka,

I have reviewed the manuscript you sent, but I regret to inform you that I must reject your offer and refuse to provide any advance funding for your client, Yamabuki Iroha. To be blunt, this graphic novel should not see print at all.

"Alabaster Archfiend" lacks any artistic or literary merit. The artwork, while dynamic and detailed, feels needlessly gory and horrific. Moreover, the characters seem bland and one-dimensional, serving only as victims for the monstrous protagonist, and it barely amounts to a story. Frankly, I rather doubt this work was made by the same Yamabuki Iroha who authored the masterpiece "Tale of Pale Leaves." And if it was, I am concerned for your client's mental health.

I am returning the manuscript to you along with this letter. Let this be the last communication between us on the matter.

*Matsushima*



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## KIHAIRO NO MA (THE ALABASTER ARCHFIEND)

Japanese, by Yamabuki Iroha (Kōda Tsutomu),  
c. 1986

- **Sanity Loss:** 0/1; 1/1D3; 1/1D6 in succession—see **Reading The Alabaster Archfiend**, nearby
- **Skill Gains:** none
- **Mythos Rating:** none
- **Study:** 1 week
- **Suggested Spells:** none

Although the author of this comic intended to market it as a sequel to *The Tale of Pale Leaves*, it has almost nothing to do with the original work and is at best a twisted reimagining. It tells the story in three chapters of a “misunderstood” young man who discovers an ancient document, which (conveniently) reveals that he descended from a powerful and mysterious god-king and will one day rule the world. To claim his power and birthright, he must first purge himself of all human weakness and limitations.

What follows is a seemingly unending orgy of gratuitous violence, torture, gore, and body horror depicted in explicit detail, as the self-proclaimed king remakes the world in his own image and becomes ever more twisted and powerful. Just when the reader thinks it can't get any worse or has grown numb to the horror, the next page gets even more appalling. Readers may begin to hear the screams of the innumerable victims and smell the blood and rotting flesh depicted on each increasingly ghastly panel.

The Alabaster Archfiend is portrayed as invincible and unstoppable. It appears in the text as a mindless phantom that haunts and torments the victim relentlessly, but savvy readers (successful **INT** roll) can infer that the entity is repelled by beauty—in its kingdom of terror, the Archfiend goes out of its way to destroy or corrupt all artistic, musical, and natural sources of beauty. It also seems to avoid fire. Knowing these points may be a clue on how to defeat, or at least distract, the entity.

*Alabaster Archfiend* (see **Kihaiiro no Maō (The Alabaster Archfiend)**, page 116).

- The envelope has a return address for the sender, Matsushima Nobuo. A **Know** or appropriate **Art/Craft** roll may recognize him as a prominent author, literary critic, political essayist, and patron of the arts recently elected to the National Diet.
- A Hard **Spot Hidden** roll may enable the investigators to find an unblemished copy of *The Tale of Pale Leaves* in a briefcase among the van's contents—see **Graphic Sutra**, (Chapter 1, page 29); and **If the Investigators Find The Tale of Pale Leaves** (page 117).

**Keeper note:** Matsushima (of course) knows that Kōda is just trying to steal credit, since Matsushima commissioned Nagatsuki Kaede to create *The Tale of Pale Leaves*. His letter is carefully worded to preserve plausible deniability.

## PUTTING THE CLUES TOGETHER

After they've found both Kanesaka's corpse and Matsushima's letter, the investigators may be able to surmise the following, either by deduction or, if necessary, with a successful **Psychology** or **INT** roll:

- Kōda wanted to publish his new comic, *The Alabaster Archfiend*, but publishers wouldn't touch such grisly and uncensored content.
- He contacted Kanesaka, a black-market dealer specializing in illicit media, and entrusted him with the manuscript.
- Posing as the representative for Yamabuki Iroha, Kanesaka sent the manuscript to Matsushima in a bid to get funding for a print run. Matsushima rejected him.
- Kanesaka met with Kōda tonight and delivered the bad news. Somehow, Kōda killed him.
- Matsushima has read *The Tale of Pale Leaves*.

Thus, the investigators now have a name and address to follow up on. If or when the investigators go to talk with Matsushima, proceed to **The Patron** scene (page 123). However, other things remain to learn here.

## READING THE ALABASTER ARCHFIEND

*The Alabaster Archfiend* comic constitutes a separate “infection” and does not use the Exposure mechanic like the *Sutra* and *The Tale of Pale Leaves*. The comic is arranged into three acts, and the reader must make a series of **Sanity** rolls of increasing severity: 0/1; 1/1D3; 1/1D6.



*If the reader loses 5 or more Sanity total from reading the comic*

- They become “infected.” The corrupted code worms its way into their mind and hijacks primitive areas of their brain. The eponymous entity, the Alabaster Archfiend, begins haunting the victim, first appearing in fleeting hallucinations—in mirrors or reflective surfaces, at the edge of their field of vision—and then as a looming presence behind them that seems to dare the victim to turn and face it. An infected investigator may attempt to rationalize the hallucinations with a reality check roll (see *Call of Cthulhu: Keeper Rulebook*, page 162).
- The entity appears as a tall, humanoid phantasm dressed in a tattered, ashen-yellow robe. Its head is covered with a hood from which peers a pale, bone-like mask. Something writhes under its robe and mask—a mass of tentacles ready to burst out at any moment. Those who are familiar with the appearance of the Prince of Pale Leaves (either from visions or illustrations from the manga) immediately recognize similarities, as though the Alabaster Archfiend is a corrupted version of the Prince.

## IF THE INVESTIGATORS FIND THE TALE OF PALE LEAVES

When searching the van (see **The Van in the Parking Lot**, page 114) the investigators have an opportunity to access *The Tale of Pale Leaves* early in the scenario. This is one of several points during **Fanfic** where they can get this tome. If they risk reading it, the information within can give them a major advantage in forthcoming encounters. In particular, the Signs (see **Mystic Signs**, Chapter 1, page 31) they can learn from the manga are highly effective against the Alabaster Archfiend.

For an outline of the manga’s plot, see **Lore Sheet 4: The Tale of Pale Leaves, Summarized** (page 94), while full details on this tome can be found in **Graphic Sutra** (Chapter 1, page 29).

Once an investigator has read *The Tale of Pale Leaves* and become Exposed, they receive a hallucinatory or dream invitation to **A.K.B. Squared** (page 132) just before that event occurs.

## KEY STEP: SAITŌ GOES MISSING

At this point, behind the scenes, Saitō Tomoko gets taken captive by Kōda Tsutomu. If any of the investigators have been friendly with her, she can leave a written note or voice message telling that investigator that “Tsutomu” called her, sounding really upset. The message goes on to say that she’s going to meet him at PANIC in Ikebukuro. The investigators

won’t be able to get in touch with her at this point. Otherwise, Nagatsuki Kaede gets the same message instead, and she relays this information to the investigators.

- If the investigators tell Nagatsuki about the rejection letter and the manuscript, she encourages them to go after Kōda as soon as possible. *“Kōda just received a harsh rejection from a famous critic. Believe me, that’s painful. If he’s as unstable as he seems, there’s no telling what he’ll do next. Saitō already went looking for him, but I’m worried that he’ll take out his frustrations on her.”*

As to Kōda’s current whereabouts, Nagatsuki says that according to Saitō, PANIC is a disco in Ikebukuro where he often goes to unwind when he’s stressed out. *“Kōda doesn’t dance, but the alcohol is cheap. That’s where he and Saitō met. I hope he’s not a violent drunk.”*

### Leads Out

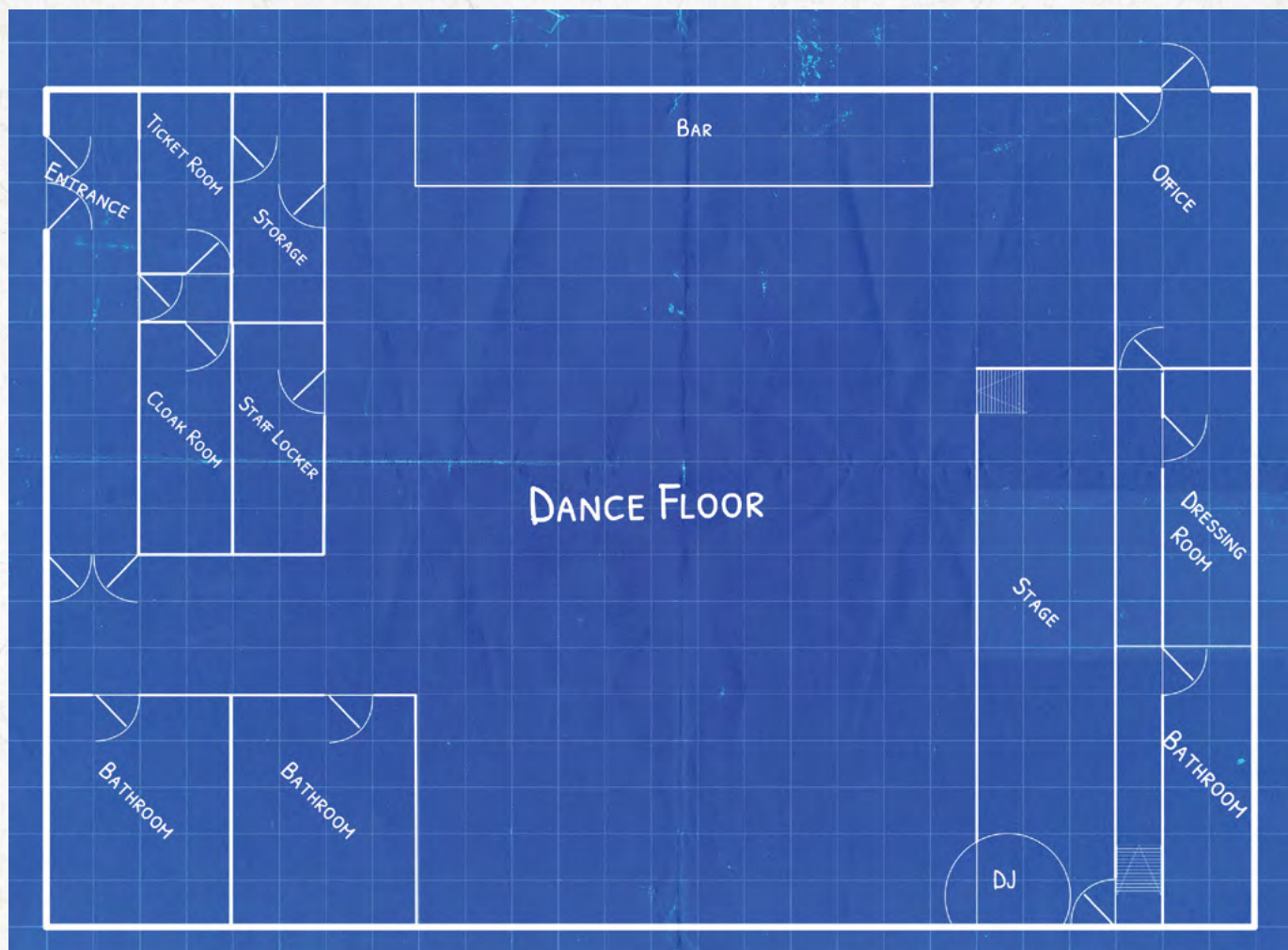
- If the investigators have not yet searched Kōda’s apartment and wish to do so—proceed to **Kōda Tsutomu’s Apartment** (page 112).
- If they would rather go after Kōda at PANIC immediately—go to **The King of Corruption** (below).
- If they decide to meet Matsushima first—proceed to **The Patron** (page 123).

## THE KING OF CORRUPTION

- **Date:** December 26, 1986.
- **Location:** PANIC disco club, Ikebukuro, Tokyo.
- **Leads In:** **Black Market** (preceding); **Kōda Tsutomu’s Apartment** (page 112).
- **Leads Out:** none, but other loose ends may need tidying up.
- **Purpose:** the investigators track down Kōda Tsutomu, author of the corrupted manga, as he loses control to a dark entity of his own creation.

Kōda Tsutomu is at his usual hangout in Ikebukuro, which can be reached by the Yamanote Line, counterclockwise from Hamamatsu Station. Ikebukuro is a commercial and entertainment district known for a large aquarium, auto showrooms, and one of the country’s largest Chinatowns. Beginning in the 1980s, it also became famous as a center for *otaku* (geek) culture.





## TRACKING KŌDA

Based on information from Saitō, Nagatsuki Kaede, and/or the flyer in his apartment (see **Kōda's Room**, page 112), the investigators can surmise that Kōda has gone to a disco club called PANIC. The place is easily recognizable by its distinctive, animated-neon sign of a dancing alligator. Unfortunately, this time, he's not there to drink and fail at picking up women.

The disco occupies a location off the beaten path in a cheap area of town, not far from a small red-light district. When the investigators arrive, the area around the disco seems deserted, but they spot some people running out of the exit, stumbling in fear.

- If the investigators first scout around the back of the club, they see a heavy dumpster blocking the fire exit.
- At the main entrance, they spy someone's legs sticking out of the front door, blocking it halfway open. From the uniform and shoes, it's clearly a police officer. There is blood pooling around his legs.

If they approach the main entrance, the investigators see that the officer has multiple stab wounds and lies dead. The scene provokes a **Sanity** roll (0/1D2 loss).

**Keeper note:** the officer's two-way radio was smashed to pieces before he could call for backup. His sidearm—a Nambu Model 60 revolver (see **Table 2: Weapon Reference**, Chapter 1, page 18) is still in its holster, along with 25 rounds of ammunition. Note that other improvised weapons may be found around the club, such as folding chairs, bar stools, broken bottles, and heavy-glass ashtrays (1D4 to 1D6 damage). The bar also contains the materials necessary to make incendiary bombs (alcohol, rags, lighters; 2D6 damage + burn).

## The Horror in the Club

Whether the investigators enter via the back or main entrance, once inside the club, they find the lights and music are off, although emergency lighting provides a degree of illumination. A sense of wrongness pervades this place. Indeed, a ghastly scene awaits them.



Nearly a dozen people, the patrons and staff who didn't escape, lie dead around the dance floor, murdered by Kōda. Most of the victims have deep stab wounds, while some look like they have been smashed face-first into the bar or floor. The scene calls for a **Sanity** roll (0/1D3 loss).

## CONFRONTING KŌDA

Just behind the DJ booth, situated on a raised platform next to the dance floor, Kōda emerges from the shadows. He wears the same sort of yellow robe, hood, and mask that Saitō Tomoko wore in the booth at the Manga Market (see **Unmasking an Impostor**, page 108), but these are tattered and stained with blood. He holds a bloody butcher's knife in one hand.

Worse, as he moves forward, they see Saitō behind him, gagged and tied to a chair. She is conscious, terrified, and looks injured.

### Macabre Monologue

From the DJ booth, Kōda looks down dismissively at the investigators and then voices an insane diatribe to Saitō while gesticulating with his bloody knife.

*"We live in a society," Kōda begins melodramatically, "that prefers beautiful fiction over ugly truth. Humans long so desperately to convince themselves that they are more than just primitive beasts acting on instinct. All life feeds on other life. You aren't valuable. You're just meat that's woken up. A self-indulgent brain trying to justify its instincts to feed, fight, and breed. Nearly every living thing in the universe meets its end in the jaws of some other living thing. You deserve no better."*

**Keeper note:** the investigators are free—and encouraged—to interrupt his speech. The first character to do this gets a surprise action against him (or a bonus die if relevant). When interrupted or his speech done, Kōda attacks—see Kōda's profile in **Fanfic: Characters & Monsters**, page 140.

Kōda brandishes his knife toward the investigators. Those who make a successful **Spot Hidden** roll notice his reflection in the shiny tile walls and floor; those who have read *The Tale of Pale Leaves* or stared at the mural (see **Kōda's Room**, page 112) notice this warped reflection immediately (no roll).

The ghastly reflection depicts the form of the Alabaster Archfiend—a wraith-like being covered in long, tattered robes that twitch and move in a horrid fashion. From beneath these, innumerable tentacles snake out, sensing the air. Its unnaturally long arms end in bony, clawed fingers. The whole visage presents an aura of death, decay, and dread, and calls for a **Sanity** roll (1/1D3 loss).

- If Nagatsuki Kaede is present, she hangs back and does not take part in the fight—she is too important an asset for the Prince to risk, and she is not yet at her full power.

Assuming the investigators kill or incapacitate Kōda, he declares, *"This isn't even my final form."* His body convulses, distends, and stretches grotesquely as he transforms into the Alabaster Archfiend—see **Fanfic: Characters & Monsters**, page 140. This sudden transformation provokes a **Sanity** roll (1D3/1D10 loss).

**Keeper note:** Nagatsuki was expecting Kōda to do this, but acts convincingly terrified and surprised.

## AN OLD-FASHIONED BOSS FIGHT

The Alabaster Archfiend is a deadly opponent and can make short work of unarmed and ill-prepared investigators; however, they have several options:

- Playing music (either recorded or live) weakens the Archfiend, penalizing it with a penalty die to all its actions, while granting the investigators a bonus die on their actions or attacks.
- Chanting any of the mantras from the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* means the Archfiend suffers a penalty die and deals 1D4 damage per round to it. Of course, this exposes everyone to the *Sutra's* code—see **Table 4: Exposure Point Costs** (Chapter 1, page 24).
- The **Sign of the Ancients** (Chapter 1, page 31), if drawn and employed successfully, keeps the Archfiend out of melee range of its wielder.
- Destroying the manuscript of his comic in front of him (i.e., burning it or tearing it into pieces) causes the Archfiend to fly into an uncontrollable rage for 1 round, as this action destroys it—penalizing it with a penalty die to all its attack and Dodge rolls for 1 round, at the end of which the Archfiend is banished, and Kōda returns to human form.
- If the investigators avoid a direct fight (**Dodging** and so on), they must duck and dive for 2 to 4 rounds (Keeper's discretion), whereupon the police arrive—proceed to **Aftermath** (following).

### The Alabaster Mask

If Kōda is defeated in his Archfiend form, his monstrous body dissolves, leaving only a human corpse, some tattered and yellow rags, and a pale mask. The yellowish-white bone mask is devoid of human features except for two misshapen eyeholes. It has no powers the investigators can access, but, if worn, it affords a momentary glimpse through its eyeholes of a scorched and







ruined world lying beneath two giant red suns—this sudden image is unnerving and sends icy tendrils down the person's spine, and provokes a **Sanity** roll (1/1D4 loss).

- If present, Nagatsuki Kaede asks for a chance to examine the mask, but it dissolves to dust in her hands—she makes a show of looking perplexed. Unbeknown to the investigators, she drains the mask's power (or rather, reclaims it).

## AFTERMATH

At a suitable moment, the police conveniently show up. If necessary, they shoot down the Archfiend in a rain of bullets. Whether the police or the investigators kill the Archfiend, they find only Kōda's body, and despite what they saw, the incident is attributed to a young man's psychotic break, which, in turn, sparks a national discussion on mental health that ultimately goes nowhere.

While Saitō is successfully rescued, she is in shock from the ordeal. *"He told me it was my fault. He couldn't get his manuscript published because I was a bad assistant, because I screwed it all up. He... he made me watch as he killed all those people. He killed them because of me. I just wanted to make art."* Following this, Saitō goes to live with her parents in a neighboring prefecture; however, she stays in contact with Nagatsuki and ultimately reappears later—see **A.K.B. Squared**, page 132.

### Leads Out

The investigators are free to follow other loose ends. In fact, if they do not choose to do so (and they have not read *The Tale of Pale Leaves*), the scenario may come to a premature end with the investigators falsely believing they have saved the day. Otherwise, presumably, they still wish to track down a copy of the *Tale* or else continue their investigation:

- If they have not already searched Kōda's home and wish to do so—proceed to **Kōda Tsutomu's Apartment** (page 112).
- If they have his name from Kanesaka's van (see **The Van in the Parking Lot**, page 114), they may pay Matsushima a visit—go to **The Patron** (page 123).
- If they want to meet the "real" Yamabuki Iroha or buy a copy of *The Tale of Pale Leaves*—they may return to **Manga Market Day Two** (following).

**Keeper note:** with the elimination of the Alabaster Archfiend, the true Prince's plans for the investigators reach fruition. Nagatsuki's interest in them declines, and she no longer seeks out their company. If the investigators don't already suspect something troubling about her, emphasizing her disinterest in them is an excellent way to give the players pause for thought. She *used* them; now she's discarding them. What is her game, and who is she?

Behind the scenes, Nagatsuki uses the time between now and New Year's Eve to create the **Spear of Aldebaran** (page 143), which empowers her enough to set her endgame in motion.

## MANGA MARKET DAY TWO

- **Date:** December 27, 1986.
- **Location:** Tokyo Ryūtsū Center, Ōta, Tokyo.
- **Leads In:** **The Hidden Circle of Leaves** (page 110); **Manga Market** (page 106).
- **Leads Out:** **A.K.B. Squared** (page 132); **The Patron** (page 123); **The Printers** (page 126).
- **Purpose:** the investigators return to the Manga Market and witness how far the influence of *The Tale of Pale Leaves* has spread in a short time; this, hopefully, pushes them to make deeper inquiries as to the author and publisher of the manga.

The Association of Pale Leaves has just delivered 50 copies of the *Tale* manga to the event—the investigators may still be trying to pick up a copy of their own, or go there to meet the real author. Here, they can discover more clues and some worrying developments.

## THE EXPANDED CIRCLE

The key difference from the previous day's visit to the convention is that there's now an official *Aokuchiba* (Pale Leaves) circle at the Manga Market, with over 50 tables and their own dedicated floor space.

- The investigators may recall that event staff and/or attendees said that no Pale Leaves circle had officially registered for the event—so this "new" circle is quite unusual; however, if they check the official show guide, it now (strangely) shows the floor space assigned for the Pale Leaves circle on the venue map. Either the investigators' memories are wrong or strings were somehow pulled at the last minute. Note that if they picked up a show guide yesterday, it has changed too—**Sanity** roll (0/1 loss).
- A44, the booth booked by Yamabuki Iroha, is now stripped bare, even its tablecloth has gone. According to other artists and fans, Yamabuki Iroha has been and gone—see **Intercepting the Booth-Keeper**, page 123; and **Leads to the Printers**, page 122.
- The *dōjinshi* (independent creator) artist booths represent nearly every genre and art style imaginable, from comedy to historical drama to romance, each portraying the Prince of Pale Leaves in unique ways through the lens of their own



talent and experiences. Each of them attributes their work on the cover of their comics in an identical way: “Based on characters and situations created by Yamabuki Iroha / The Prince of Pale Leaves.” If asked about their work, they all admit to having read *The Tale of Pale Leaves* many times, and all cite it as providing them with a surge of inspiration, and a noticeable improvement in their artwork after reading it.

**Keeper note:** all the *Aokuchiba* circle artists have been Exposed to the viral code of the Pale Leaves to some extent, but most are not dangerous (yet). Some have already become acquainted with the APL and become true believers in the cult. A few already host the Prince and regularly talk to him (in their heads) when no one is looking.

- With a successful **Listen** roll, the investigators may overhear a group of artists sitting together chatting; every now and then, one of them suddenly switches to polite speech and turns to empty space, as if they are speaking to a respected teacher or mentor who is “invisible”—it’s like they are talking to someone who isn’t there. Any investigators with 50 EP or more can catch a glimpse of the Prince to whom they are talking, and he looks just like the artist’s rendition in the *Tale*—but the vision is brief, and the Prince does not include the investigators in his audience of favorites.

**Keeper note:** if the investigators inspect the works by these artists—incurring 1D3 EP (see **Exposure**, Chapter 1, page 24)—they may attempt an **Appraise** or appropriate **Art/Craft** skill roll; if successful, they notice that the various art styles seem to blend, as if the artists are trying to match the original *Tale of Pale Leaves* at the expense of their own originality (more accurately, it’s due to the influence of the Prince in their head). When the investigators confront Nagatsuki Kaede in **Final Confrontation** (page 137), pointing out to her how affected artists are losing their own creativity may allow them to talk her out of her drastic plans.

### Overheard at the Event

Nearly all the attendees in the *Aokuchiba* circle are either shopping for *Pale Leaves*-related goods or talking to each other about the same topic. The investigators may overhear the following conversations with **Listen** rolls:

*“Did you know that the Sutra of Pale Leaves is a real book?”*

*“No way!”*

*“I’m serious. The manga is partly based on real history.”*

*“You won’t believe what happened! I was doing some practice sketches after reading the Tale again. I sketched an empty glass, went away for a few minutes, and when I came back there was a glass on top of my drawing!”*

*“Whoa, creepy! You should draw more stuff and see if the same thing happens again.”*

*“Of course, the Prince is real. You can’t see him yet?”*

*“Uh, no...”*

*“Then just keep reading.”*

*“What do you think would happen if the Prince came to modern Tokyo?”*

*“I have a feeling we’ll find out soon.”*

### Leads to the Printers

If the investigators ask any of the *Aokuchiba* circle creators for information about the promised arrival of Yamabuki Iroha, or *The Tale of Pale Leaves*, relate the following clues via these conversations:

- Early in the morning, Yamabuki Iroha opened their booth with another 50 copies of *The Tale of Pale Leaves*. As in the previous Manga Market, Yamabuki Iroha was wearing an elaborate costume based on the Prince’s outfit. They sold out of the entire stock in minutes, closed the booth, and left without saying a word.
- Before they left, Yamabuki Iroha held up a sign announcing that a large-scale print run has been funded, meaning that everyone who wants a copy will be able to get one soon.
- Most independent manga artists here (and possibly Yamabuki Iroha) who want a high-quality print run use Purizumu Purinto, a printing company in Nagoya—the investigators may look into this lead and proceed to **The Printers** (page 126).
- More rumors circulate of a secret, *Pale Leaves* fan event occurring on New Year’s Eve. No one knows the location yet, but only those who have read *The Tale of Pale Leaves* will receive invitations.
- Whoever is funding the large-scale print run must be wealthy. If the investigators failed to pick up the letter from Matsushima in **Black Market** (page 113), the Keeper can now drop his name into a conversation as the suspected backer—enabling the investigators to proceed to **The Patron** (page 123).

### Acquiring The Tale of Pale Leaves

On day two, it becomes possible for the investigators to get their hands on a real version of *The Tale of Pale Leaves*, if they have not done so already. Fifty extra copies entered circulation, and nearly every artist who got a copy is now present, selling their spinoffs and fan works from their own booths. While these fans and artists feel driven to share their copy of the manga, most want assurance that the precious book gets treated carefully. The investigators may be able



to get a copy from one of the attendees with a successful social skill roll, or else offering a large sum of money, at least 10,000 yen.

**Keeper note:** for an outline of the plot, see **Lore Sheet 4: The Tale of Pale Leaves, Summarized** (page 94); for the full details on this tome, see **Graphic Sutra** (Chapter 1, page 29). Once the investigator has read *The Tale of Pale Leaves* and become Exposed, they receive a hallucinatory or dream invitation to **A.K.B. Squared** (page 132) shortly before the event.

### Sensing the Unreal

If any of the investigators have Exposure Points from reading the *Sutra* or *The Tale of Pale Leaves*, they experience something strange after spending time in the *Aokuchiba* circle. These investigators get the distinct feeling that they are no longer on Earth as they know it, and that all the people around them are the *same person* wearing many different disguises. Even the venue seems strange and alien. Affected characters should make a **Sanity** roll (0/1D4 loss) as they experience this weird sensation, which fades as quickly as it appeared.

### Intercepting the Booth-Keeper

If the investigators arrive extremely early at the convention, there is a chance (at the Keeper's discretion) that they see the person registered as Yamabuki Iroha leaving the venue after selling out their stock. He is a tall, broad-shouldered man dressed in a high-quality version of the Prince's costume.

**Keeper note:** this man is Ukami, a former monk (see **Inner Circle: Key Antagonists**, Chapter 1, page 41). He is at Manga Market as an APL courier, to sell the 50 new copies of the *Tale*. The investigators are free to chase him down, but Ukami attempts to escape or talk his way out of a confrontation (with the Prince speaking through him). If cornered and forced to fight, he is a dangerous opponent—see Ukami's profile in **Dream Eater: Characters & Monsters** (Chapter 2, page 85).

## THE PATRON

- **Location:** Aobadai, Meguro, Tokyo.
- **Leads In:** **Black Market** (page 113); **Manga Market Day Two** (preceding); **Nagatsuki's Studio** (page 127); **The Printers** (page 126).
- **Leads Out:** **A.K.B. Squared** (page 132).
- **Purpose:** the investigators meet Matsushima Nobuo, a political figure who is a senior member of the APL. This meeting provides an opportunity to learn about the APL "charity" and the Prince. Matsushima invites them to an exclusive convention where he promises they can learn the whole truth.

Matsushima Nobuo resides in Aobadai district in Meguro, a town in the southwestern part of Tokyo. The nearest station is Meguro Station on the Yamanote Line. Meguro is a beautiful town with a relaxed atmosphere, and many fashionable cafés and restaurants surround the station. Matsushima lives in a large, two-story house surrounded by a traditional stone wall, in an attractive residential area.

## A WARM WELCOME

When the investigators arrive, they are greeted at the gate by an exceptionally—even unnervingly—attractive young woman in a French-maid's outfit. She greets the investigators with a polite bow and says, "*Welcome to the Matsushima residence. The master has been expecting you.*" She says this even if they showed up without any warning or invitation. The maid then leads them through a Japanese garden to a separate tea house on the premises.

**Keeper note:** Matsushima's maid is not human; if the investigators attack her, refer to the Courtiers of the Pale Prince profile in **Fanfic: Characters & Monsters** (page 140).

The tea house feels spacious but cozy. The maid asks the investigators to have a seat at a low table and relax while she puts on some tea in the small kitchenette. The room also serves as a study, and the far wall is lined with bookshelves. If the investigators make a point to look over the books, they spot a copy of the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*, sitting on the top shelf in plain sight.

A moment later—before anyone has time to grab the tome and run—the doors slide open and Matsushima Nobuo enters. He is a handsome man in his forties, of average height, with neatly trimmed facial hair. He wears a dark green lounging robe, which is loose enough around his chest and arms to show his chiseled physique—hinting to the investigators that he is not just a bookworm or pencil-pushing politician.



## MATSUSHIMA'S MOTIVATIONS

In this scene, Matsushima Nobuo willingly provides the investigators with a large amount of carefully worded information regarding the Prince, his books, and the APL. Matsushima wishes to present the Prince and the APL as benevolent, necessary, and inevitable, so that the investigators join him willingly—they find their resolve tested as they endure his philosophical monologues, knowing that they have no crime of which to accuse him or anything else to pin on him.

## TALKING OVER TEA

Matsushima sits down across from the investigators while his maid serves hot tea.

*"So, to what do I owe this visit? I have some idea, but far be it for me to put words in your mouths."*

He listens to his guests' questions (or even accusations) calmly and patiently. Every answer he gives is tailored to paint the Prince and the APL in a positive light while maintaining plausible deniability for himself. Occasionally, he speaks as if he himself were the Prince, judging humanity from the outside.

### *If asked about the "cult" or APL*

*"The Association of Pale Leaves is a not-for-profit charitable foundation. The organization's goal is to bring like-minded people together and provide opportunities to network and establish deep connections. The APL is not technically a religious group, but they are united by the philosophies of a special book."*

### *If asked about his involvement with The Tale of Pale Leaves*

*"It's a truly wonderful manga, full of both action and drama. It's earned a spot among my list of literary works that everyone must read at least once in their life. I've already set aside funding for a high-volume print run to help make that happen."*

**Keeper note:** Matsushima does not reveal the true author of the *Pale Leaves*, or where it is going to be printed—the investigators may find out which printer by asking the artists at Manga Market, which leads them to **The Printers** (page 126), if they haven't looked into this already.

### *About the Sutra and The Tale of Pale Leaves*

Matsushima gestures nonchalantly to the bookshelf behind him, which contains the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* in plain view.

*"As you can see, I love books, as any thinking man does. Words are power. The ability to express our ideas through writing*

*characters and drawing images is what separates us from other animals. Indeed, some scientists hypothesize that our evolution as a species, particularly the development of our advanced brains, went hand-in-hand with our ability to communicate and use tools to express ourselves. Surely, this would be true of other intelligent life too.*

*"The Prince comes to those who appreciate the same things that he does. Creativity, stories, art, and literature. He comes to help expand our consciousness so that he can share his own infinite mind with us. He comes in the hope that we can use his wisdom and guidance to create a heaven here on Earth."*

### *If the Keeper used the "Those Chosen by the Prince" book (page 95), and the investigators mention the drawings they received*

*"You must be supremely blessed. Clearly the Prince himself saw potential in you. Your destiny lies with him now."*

### *If asked about the Prince of Pale Leaves*

*"To properly understand who the Prince is, you must be willing to open your mind to several paradoxes: the Prince simultaneously does and does not exist on this world. The Prince is one mind, but in many places and in many forms. Furthermore, although 'he' is called the 'Prince,' this being is not limited by mundane concepts such as class or gender or race. Anyone can receive the Prince's light.*

*"You only know of the Prince of Pale Leaves as a fictional character. This is ironic, because the Prince originates in a higher plane of existence and perceives our world similarly to how you might perceive a comic book. Just as an author could change the story on a whim by rewriting it, or change the characters and scenery by redrawing it, this divine entity can do the same to this causal thread that we consider 'reality.'"*

*"According to the text, the Prince is an enlightened master. What we would consider a bodhisattva. But he is not originally from this world. He comes from a place called Tokoyo-no-Kuni, or Eternal Heaven, thought to be a planet orbiting Aldebaran, but phased-shifted into a higher plane. Some occult scholars called it by another name, 'Carcosa.'"*

### *About The Alabaster Archfiend*

*"This isn't the first time that someone haphazardly tried to recreate the Prince's sacred text without proper guidance. For instance, about a century ago in Europe, there was a book, a transcript of a play to be precise. Unfortunately, the author was mentally unwell, and the divine cipher he attempted to use was corrupt and incomplete. So rather than fill the reader with the Prince's light and wisdom, the book gave them visions of a mindless and murderous phantom. A tattered mockery of the perfect Prince. What you saw sounds eerily similar.*



*"The Prince's Sutra is like medication. It can save lives, but sometimes there can be complications due to underlying conditions, and it can be dangerous if used irresponsibly. The Association of Pale Leaves wishes to prevent these negative outcomes. Individuals like you, with sharp minds and quick wits, can help stop such tragedies in the future."*

**Keeper note:** if the investigators have not confronted Kōda Tsutomu at the disco yet (see **The King of Corruption**, page 117) and tell Matsushima about the situation, he suggests they find Kōda before something regrettable happens. Matsushima may even help them locate and defeat Kōda in this case.

#### *About the APL's endgame*

*"In his Sutra, the Prince proclaims that he holds the key to Eternal Heaven, an idyllic world in which everyone can pursue their wildest dreams and achieve perfect joy. A clever skeptic may point out that such a thing is impossible because human desires conflict with one another. After all, we can think of many examples of where one person's pursuit of their desires can cause untold suffering for others. While we humans have long struggled with the solution for such fundamental problems, the Prince's intelligence is of orders of magnitude beyond ours. We need only put our trust in him."*

#### *If the investigators accuse Matsushima or the Prince of having ill intent or being a villain*

*"If you believe me to be a villain, then I have nothing to worry about. Whenever a gentle figure comes to you with messages of peace and love and justice, you murder them in cold blood. But, as for the most corrupt and treacherous, you let them live out their lives forever free of any consequence. I think, perhaps, that a species so utterly incapable of keeping their house in order ought to be thankful for a helping hand."*

#### *Matsushima's closing remarks and an invitation*

*"I assure you that I have only the best of intentions. I want what is best for my country and the world. What you need to do is decide what side of history you want to be on. So, I would like to give you an invitation to a special event on New Year's Eve: 'A.K.B. Squared' or 'Aokuchiba in Akihabara.' You will learn everything else you need to know there. Everyone else attending must have read 'The Tale of Pale Leaves' to enter, but my invitation to you serves as a waiver."*

Matsushima passes each of the investigators an envelope containing a simple, yellow card with a complex mark, like a family crest, drawn in black ink. Those who have read the *Sutra* or *The Tale of Pale Leaves* recognize it as the seal of the Prince. On the back is an address in Akihabara, Tokyo.

*"Please consider what I've said carefully. And in the unlikely event you're thinking of doing something foolish, like attacking*

*me or trying to burn down my house, I guarantee that it won't end well for you."*

#### *If they attack Matsushima*

If Matsushima is attacked, refer to his profile, and remember his maid (see **Fanfic: Characters & Monsters**, page 140). If by some miracle the investigators subdue Matsushima and search his home, they can get their hands on the following:

- One copy each of the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* and *The Tale of Pale Leaves*.
- Invoices from a printing company in Nagoya—leading to **The Printers** (following). The invoices show 100 copies of *The Tale of Pale Leaves* in whiteprint (delivered); and more recently, 10,000 copies in offset print (pending).
- "The Prince's Emblazoned" (Ōji no Saishikimono), a gorgeous suit of yellow and black samurai armor commissioned as a gift for the Prince (for when he takes his throne on Earth). Rather than lacquer and iron, the armor is made with modern materials and techniques, including layers of composite plates and bulletproof aramid fibers (Armor rating 6).

#### *Leads out*

- Proceed to **A.K.B. Squared** (page 132) when the investigators are ready to attend that event on New Year's Eve.



## OPTIONAL: THE PRINTERS

- **Location:** Kamejima, Nagoya, Aichi prefecture.
- **Leads In:** **Manga Market Day Two** (page 121).
- **Leads Out:** **Nagatsuki's Studio** (page 127); **The Patron** (page 123).
- **Purpose:** an optional scene, the investigators find out where and how the initial print run of the manga was printed, and look for a way to stop its mass publication.

The investigators may obtain the printer's contact information via any of the artists (including the elusive Yamabuki Iroha) at Manga Market on day two.

### THE PRINTING COMPANY

Purizumu Purinto (literally "Prism Print") is a printing company based in Kamejima, Nagoya, which caters to *dōjinshi* and independent manga artists all over the country.

The investigators may call the printing firm and obtain general information; however, specific information about the printing of *The Tale of Pale Leaves* requires a successful social skill roll or other inventive means.

#### Information from the Printer by Phone

- The first run of *The Tale of Pale Leaves* (100 copies) took place using "whiteprint" technology; a common method that reproduces fine lines and characters accurately and cheaply, but can't produce solid tones or colors.
- The downside of whiteprint is that the chemicals used in the ink fade with exposure to UV light, becoming illegible over months (indoors with UV light) or days (outside in the sun). The investigators can infer that the current copies of *The Tale of Pale Leaves* won't last forever.
- The client (Matsushima Nobuo) has placed an order for an offset-print run of 10,000 books. The client insisted that he needed the books to be both high quality and permanent, and thus was happy to pay the extra costs associated with offset printing.
- If asked whether the printer noticed anything strange about the manga, a successful **Charm**, **Fast Talk**, or **Persuade** skill roll elicits the confession that the first printing was dogged by a bout of employee sickness and staff turnover, and some employees just walked off the job. When apprised of this, the client agreed to increase the fee to cover the cost of hiring more casual staff for this second print run. It's still causing delays, but is being managed. If the roll was a Hard success or this information is obtained with a cunning

bluff or forged credentials, it's possible for the investigators to find a shipping address for the first order of *The Tale of Pale Leaves*: Nagatsuki Kaede's apartment (see **Nagatsuki's Studio**, following).

#### Stop the Press!

The printer is preparing to print 10,000 copies of *The Tale of Pale Leaves*. It may occur to the investigators that they should prevent this from happening, or the comic goes mainstream, the Pale Prince's influence grows by orders of magnitude, and the investigators have a bad time in future scenarios. It's entirely up to the investigators how they go about this, but convincing the printing company to cancel a lucrative contract would prove extremely difficult.

The investigators may decide that a visit to the printworks is in order—whether to question the printers, persuade them peacefully, or use violence to destroy the books. The investigators can take the bullet train to Nagoya, which takes just under two hours. Nagoya is the largest city in central Japan and fourth largest in the country. From Nagoya Station it's a ten-minute walk or a two-minute subway ride to Kamejima Station. The printer occupies a two-story commercial building on a quiet back road near the subway station. There's no sign of movement in the printworks yard, and no sound of machinery.

**Keeper note:** luck (or human greed) is for once on the investigators' side. A few hours before they arrive, the relief print manager, deciding that he had a better use for the client's money than giving it cash-in-hand to casual laborers, made the fatal decision to run the presses at normal speed, without changing personnel in rapid shifts as per the client's instructions. The workforce started losing 1 Sanity point and 10 MP between them per volume of the *Tale*—see **Iterations & Adaptations** (page 27)—and by the time the investigators arrive on scene, almost everyone in the building is unconscious, blood trickling out of their eyes, nostrils, and other orifices.

The workers closest to the print machinery are dead or dying, their internal organs pulped; those farther away have merely passed out, and, when they awake, are so shaken that they flee the site. The presses have ground to a halt, and a strange smell permeates the air, reminiscent of rotting leaves and hot metal. Thus, nobody opposes the investigators' entrance.

- If the investigators want to gather up the unbound pages of the printed manga to dispose of them, over 800 volumes already lie in trays—they need to decide how they are going to move all that paper.
- If they want to disable the presses and/or destroy the master lithographic plates, a successful **Mechanical Repair** roll



enables them to do so. Of course, inventive destruction of the machinery may require no roll, at the Keeper's discretion.

- The building boasts a variety of flammable chemicals and materials, but over a dozen living, unconscious people remain inside. Depending on the investigators' choices, the Keeper may want to impose a Sanity penalty if they cause the death of these workers (1/1D6 to 1D4/1D6+2 loss is suggested).
- If the investigators enter the unlocked printing office and snoop around between the unconscious white-collar workers, a successful **Library Use** roll allows them to find Nagatsuki Kaede's address in the shipping records—which leads to the optional scene **Nagatsuki's Studio** (following).

**Keeper note:** regardless of what the investigators do, this whole episode puts the APL's plans back considerably. The owners of the printing firm refuse to continue this commission. In the future, the APL must resort to extremely small, tightly controlled print runs at different companies. Given that the APL has enough money to force the issue, *The Tale of Pale Leaves* does eventually go mainstream, but it remains a hard-to-find volume for at least one year.

## OPTIONAL: NAGATSUKI'S STUDIO

- **Location:** Yokosuka, Kanagawa prefecture.
- **Leads In:** **The Printers** (preceding); **Speaking to Nagatsuki** (page 103).
- **Leads Out:** **The Patron** (page 123).
- **Purpose:** an optional scene in which the investigators enter the studio apartment where *The Tale of Pale Leaves* was drafted, discover how and why Nagatsuki Kaede created it, and learn how they might be able to stop her.

Nagatsuki Kaede lives in Futaba ward, a quiet residential area in Yokosuka, Kanagawa prefecture. Yokosuka is a major port city, one of the largest in the Greater Tokyo area, and hosts a US Naval base. It takes over an hour by train from Shinagawa Station to Uraga Station, the nearest to her apartment. The investigators can obtain the address from records at the printing company (see **The Printer**, page 126), or via Nagatsuki herself earlier if they build trust with her, although she does not invite anyone over (see **If asked where she lives**, page 105).

Nagatsuki's studio is on the second floor of a well-looked-after condominium complex. It's a short walk from the bay, and the investigators can smell the salt in the air from the ocean. The blinds and curtains stay closed making it impossible to see inside. It is unlikely that the investigators have a key, so they need to pick the lock (**Locksmith**), break the lock (**STR**), or devise some other way to get in.

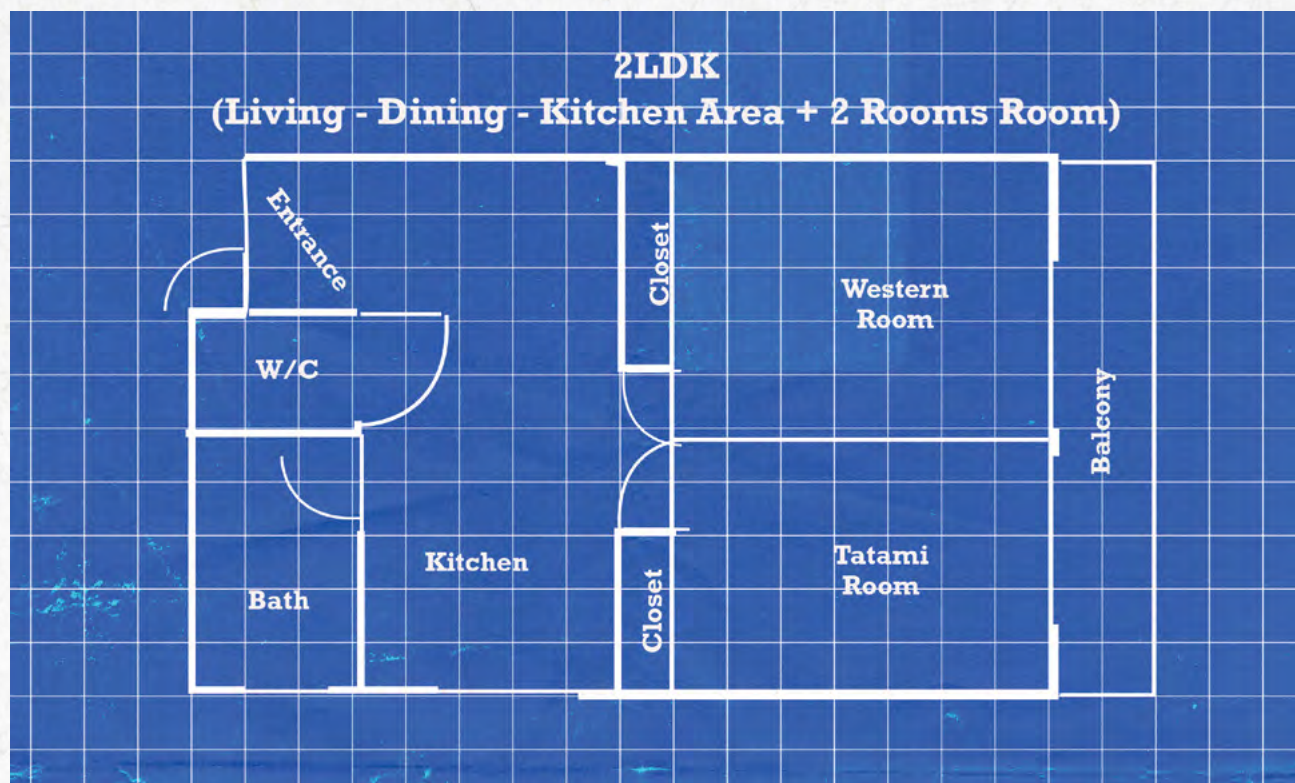
## INSIDE THE APARTMENT

The apartment looks compact but feels comfy, with two rooms and a small kitchen-dining area. Near the entrance, the investigators find a recycling bag full of aluminum cans (from convenience-store cocktails to energy drinks). The entrance opens into a hallway leading to the kitchen-diner, as well as a traditional bedroom and a Western-style studio room separated by sliding doors.

### Bedroom

Nagatsuki's bedroom is a tatami-style room with a futon, dressers, small nightstand, and a closet containing clothes, extra bedding, and toiletries. A photograph of Nagatsuki's parents, and another of herself when she was younger (holding a chubby tabby cat) hang on the wall. Searching the nightstand, the investigators may find Nagatsuki's journal (see **Handout Fanfic 2: Nagatsuki's Journal**).





## Handout—Fanfic 2: Nagatsuki's Journal—Part 1

1985/9

It seems like every season I'm bringing home more and more unsold books. Maybe no one cares about my stories anymore. I should be grateful for my handful of loyal fans, but money is getting tight.

1985/12

I got a strange offer today from a man named Matsushima. Apparently, he's a big deal in the world of art and literature. He told me he sees great potential in my work, and offered to cover all my living expenses and production costs. All I have to do is read an old scripture and make a manga based on it. It sounds like a scam, but the contract he gave me looks legit. What do I have to lose?

1986/1

I read and reread the entire thing, and I'm finally starting to understand it. Something about this Sutra makes my head hurt, like it's overloading my brain. But it's also a magnificent work of art.



Hand-written, perfect brush strokes, beautiful mandalas drawn in gold ink, all full of hidden patterns. The central figure is called the Prince of Pale Leaves. Was he a real person?

I started drafting the manga today. It's like something clicked for me. Even after all these years, translating an image from my mind into paper has always taken such concentration and hard work. Suddenly that's changed. Now I just imagine something, and my hand moves swiftly and effortlessly. I can work for hours without fatigue—this is truly incredible. I feel like I've found my calling.

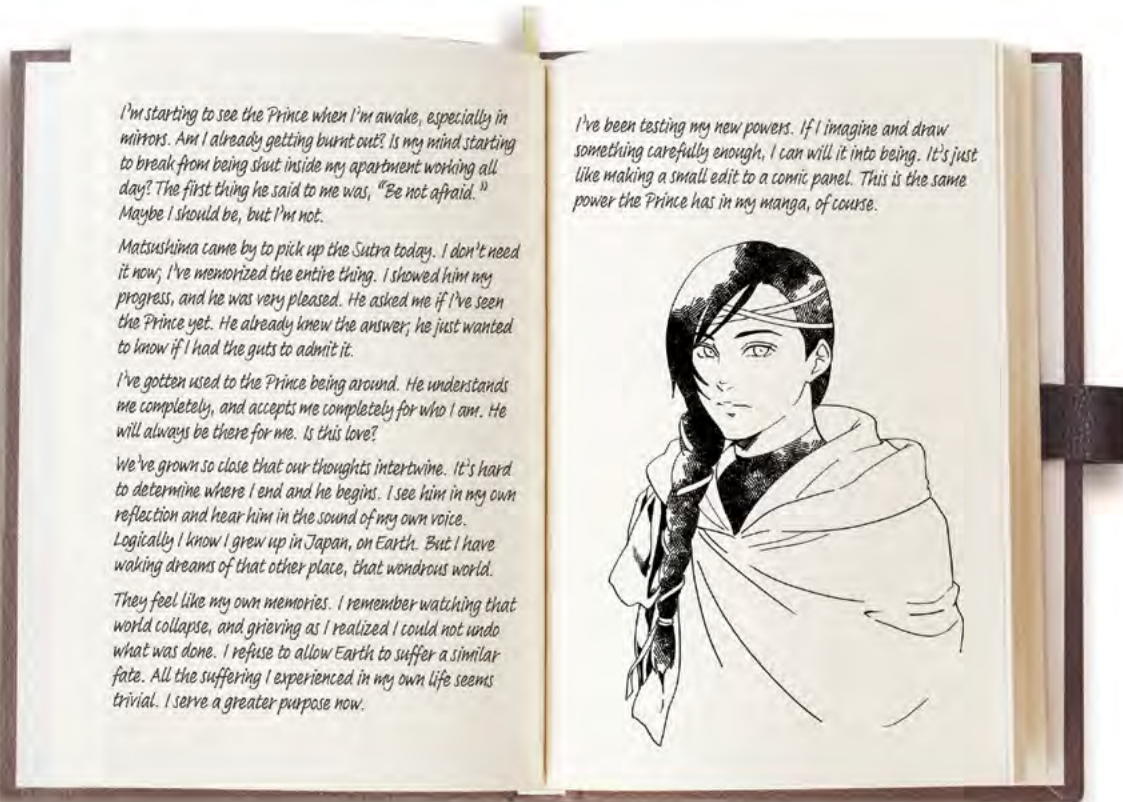
I've finalized the design for the Prince. The Sutra doesn't say what he looked like, so I took a lot of artistic liberty. All I know is that he wore a mask and yellow robe to hide his royal identity. Many heroes wear masks, but the popular ones also show their face. I made him super handsome, naturally.

1986/2

The Prince appears in my dreams almost every night. He's exactly like I drew him. But he feels like a real person that I've known for a long time. We even have conversations. It's weird, but these dreams help me develop his character for the manga.



## Handout—Fanfic 2: Nagatsuki's Journal—Part 2



*I'm starting to see the Prince when I'm awake, especially in mirrors. Am I already getting burnt out? Is my mind starting to break from being shut inside my apartment working all day? The first thing he said to me was, "Be not afraid." Maybe I should be, but I'm not.*

*Matsushima came by to pick up the Sutra today. I don't need it now; I've memorized the entire thing. I showed him my progress, and he was very pleased. He asked me if I've seen the Prince yet. He already knew the answer; he just wanted to know if I had the guts to admit it.*

*I've gotten used to the Prince being around. He understands me completely, and accepts me completely for who I am. He will always be there for me. Is this love?*

*We've grown so close that our thoughts intertwine. It's hard to determine where I end and he begins. I see him in my own reflection and hear him in the sound of my own voice. Logically I know I grew up in Japan, on Earth. But I have waking dreams of that other place, that wondrous world.*

*They feel like my own memories. I remember watching that world collapse, and grieving as I realized I could not undo what was done. I refuse to allow Earth to suffer a similar fate. All the suffering I experienced in my own life seems trivial. I serve a greater purpose now.*

*I've been testing my new powers. If I imagine and draw something carefully enough, I can will it into being. It's just like making a small edit to a comic panel. This is the same power the Prince has in my manga, of course.*



### Studio Room

Bookshelves line the walls, while an assortment of cardboard boxes stand on the floor. An artist's desk and easel, with associated tools, takes center place.

- **An extensive collection of manga and fantasy:** the bookshelves are filled with complete collections of Nagatsuki's favorite works. A common theme among these is strong, female protagonists who take it upon themselves to save the world.
- **Nagatsuki's own works:** manuscripts and a handful of unsold copies of her original works fill several cardboard boxes. Her portfolio of work shows an ever-increasing quality and sophistication.
- **On the easel:** a landscape painting of a wondrous alien world. This painting gives the impression of a sci-fi utopia, with green forests and fields, a peaceful lake, and magnificent golden towers rising impossibly high into a blue sky, with

tiny flying vehicles darting between them. A bright-orange sun rises above the horizon, and a smaller, redder sun hangs in the sky, along with the crescent outlines of two moons.

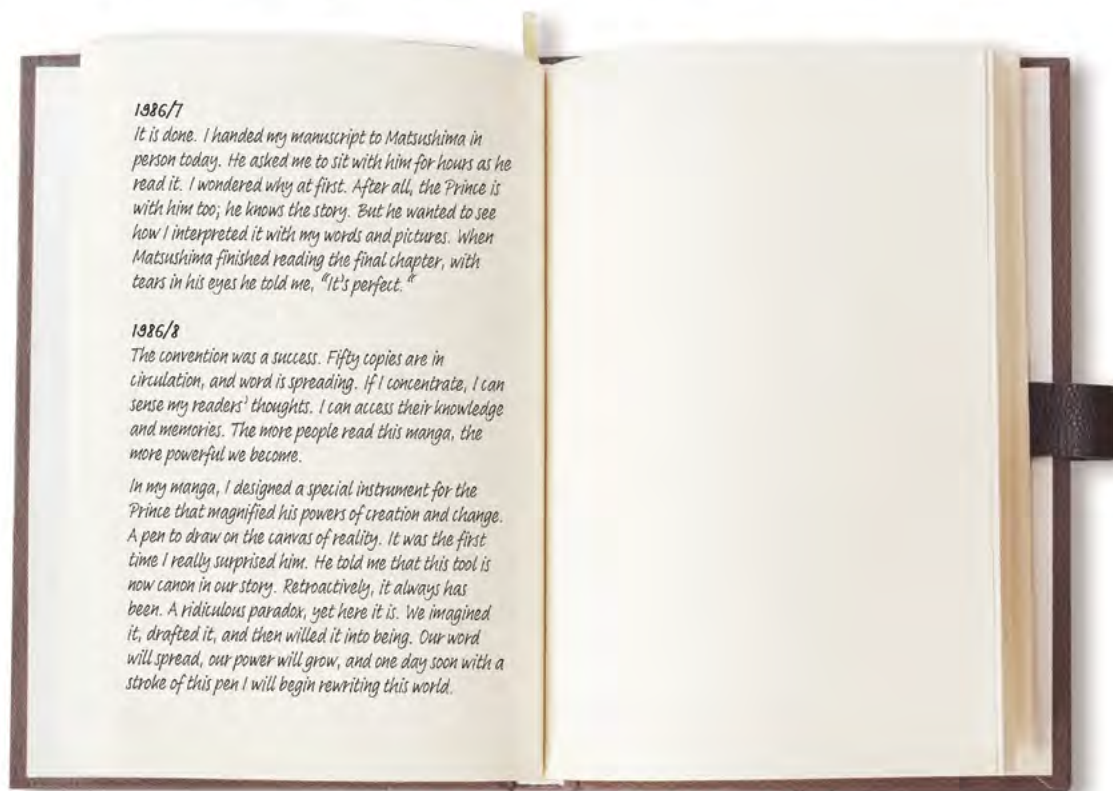
**Keeper note:** anyone Exposed to the Prince's code feels a strong but inexplicable pang of nostalgia when viewing the painting on the easel.

### Closet

- **Old high-school yearbook:** flipping through, the investigators find insults like "nerd" and "loser" scrawled on the first page. Nagatsuki appears to be missing from her class photo, although it appears she drew a cartoon image of herself into the margin on that page.
- **Various acrylic portraits:** these depict the Prince of Pale Leaves in various costumes and in numerous historical eras and locations. Each painting looks lifelike and lovingly detailed.



## Handout—Fanfic 2: Nagatsuki's Journal—Part 3



- **Steel safe:** a Hard **Locksmith** roll is needed to gain access. Contains the original manuscript for *The Tale of Pale Leaves*, and a handwritten copy of the spell **Craft Magic Brush** (page 131), which Nagatsuki copied from the original *Sutra*.
- **On the back of the closet door:** a large manga-style monochrome poster of the Prince of Pale Leaves. This appears to be a promotional image for *The Tale of Pale Leaves* manga.

**Keeper note:** the screentones that give the poster its shading and texture come from the text of the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*, each character the size of a tiny dot. Investigators who look closely at this poster gain 2D6 Exposure Points—if in doubt as what a “close” look is, use a **Luck** roll to determine if Exposed.

Examining Nagatsuki’s apartment and reading her journal should give the investigators clear insight into her past and motivations, which can help if they try to talk her down in the **Final Confrontation** (page 137). Proceed to the next scene as appropriate.



## SPELL: CRAFT MAGIC BRUSH

- **Cost:** 24 magic points (divided among participants); 5 POW; 2 Sanity points; 1D10 Exposure Points per participant. Spell works only for casters whose total Exposure is 50+ points.
- **Casting time:** 4 hours.

In *The Tale of Pale Leaves*, the Prince creates a shapeshifting magical brush that greatly enhances his reality-warping abilities. The manga features a montage showing the ritual he used to create this artifact. To cast this spell, the participants must gather and prepare a series of items:

- An untorn page from the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*.
- Hairs taken from a wild animal without harming it.
- Traditional Japanese black lacquer mixed with drops of blood from a living person, willingly given to the caster.
- Mundane supplies (glue and wood or metal fittings to complete the brush).

With these items gathered, participants may proceed with the ritualistic crafting of the artifact. The scripture must be rolled tightly to make the brush handle. The hairs should be shaped into the bristles of the brush and secured with fittings as necessary. Finally, the lacquer must be applied, and the brush left to dry for several hours. During this time, all participants should meditate on the concepts of creation, change, and the fluid nature of reality.

As the final step, one participant must use the brush to successfully draw a picture of the brush using any appropriate Art/Craft skill (Drawing, Painting, Calligraphy, and so on), and all participants must sacrifice a combined total of 24 MP, plus 2 Sanity points and 5 POW (permanent) each. The new Magic Brush then emerges from the paper depiction, and the old brush crumbles to ink dust.

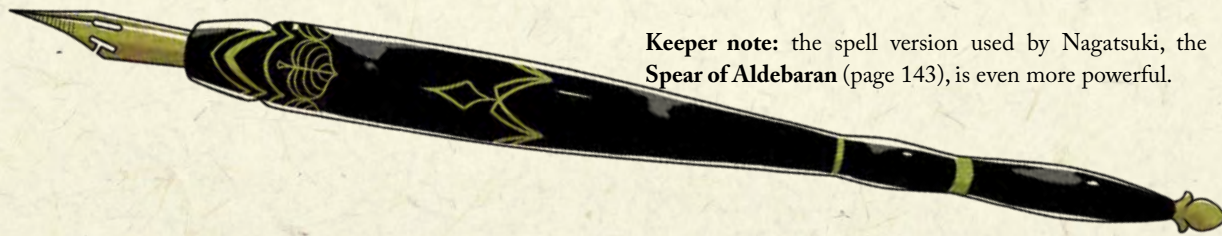
A crafted Magic Brush possesses the following powers:

- Changes in size and shape to whatever writing instrument the user needs, from a small pen to an oversized calligraphy brush.
- The bristles move and the ink flows according to the user's will, allowing complex artwork to be created easily and in a short time. It grants a flat 20% bonus for appropriate Art/Craft rolls; if the user's skill is 40% or higher, the brush grants a bonus die instead.
- The user can spend 1 additional MP to forgo the need for ink or paint; this effect lasts 1 hour.
- The user can employ their Art/Craft (Painting or Drawing) skill to manifest art into reality.

### Reality Shaping

- An investigator may spend 1 to 10 MP and make a successful appropriate Art/Craft roll, followed by a successful POW roll, to manifest any familiar object into reality by illustrating it. The item behaves as it would in real life; however, the object must be familiar to the investigator, as evidenced by their backstory and investment in skill points. The more complex and outlandish the item, the more MP it costs, as determined by the Keeper. Also, the visual representation of the item must be depicted at its actual size.
- A Hard or Extreme success on either the Art/Craft roll or the POW roll may create a more effective version of the desired item (at the Keeper's discretion). Fumbles should have dreadful outcomes, again as determined by the Keeper.
- Highly complex things, such as living creatures, are impossible to create.
- Using this ability takes an appropriate amount of time depending on the nature and detail of the image.
- Each use triggers a Sanity roll for the user and any witnesses (0/1D3 loss or higher, depending on how strange the creation is), plus 1 Exposure Point.

**Keeper note:** the spell version used by Nagatsuki, the *Spear of Aldebaran* (page 143), is even more powerful.





## A.K.B. SQUARED

- **Date:** December 31, 1986.
- **Location:** Akihabara, Chiyoda, Tokyo.
- **Leads In:** *The Hidden Circle of Leaves* (page 110); *Hook One* (page 95); *Manga Market Day Two* (page 121); *The Patron* (page 123).
- **Leads Out:** *The Pictomancer Prince* (page 135).
- **Purpose:** the investigators attend a secret event exclusively for fans of *The Tale of Pale Leaves*. They discover the identity of the author and the true nature of the Prince.

The exclusive underground event, called *Aokuchiba in Akihabara* (A.K.B. Squared), is scheduled for New Year's Eve. Nagatsuki Kaede, Saitō Tomoko, and Matsushima Nobuo all make an appearance, so the investigators won't be able to find or contact them on the day of the event.

Akihabara, an area in Chiyoda ward, serves as the center of Japanese pop culture and the country's most famous shopping district for video games, anime, manga, and electronics. The area's name originally comes from *Akiba* ("Autumn Leaves"), the name of a minor fire deity to whom a shrine was dedicated after a fire devastated the area in 1869. Akihabara can be reached by the Yamanote line, 10 minutes from Hamamatsu-chō station.

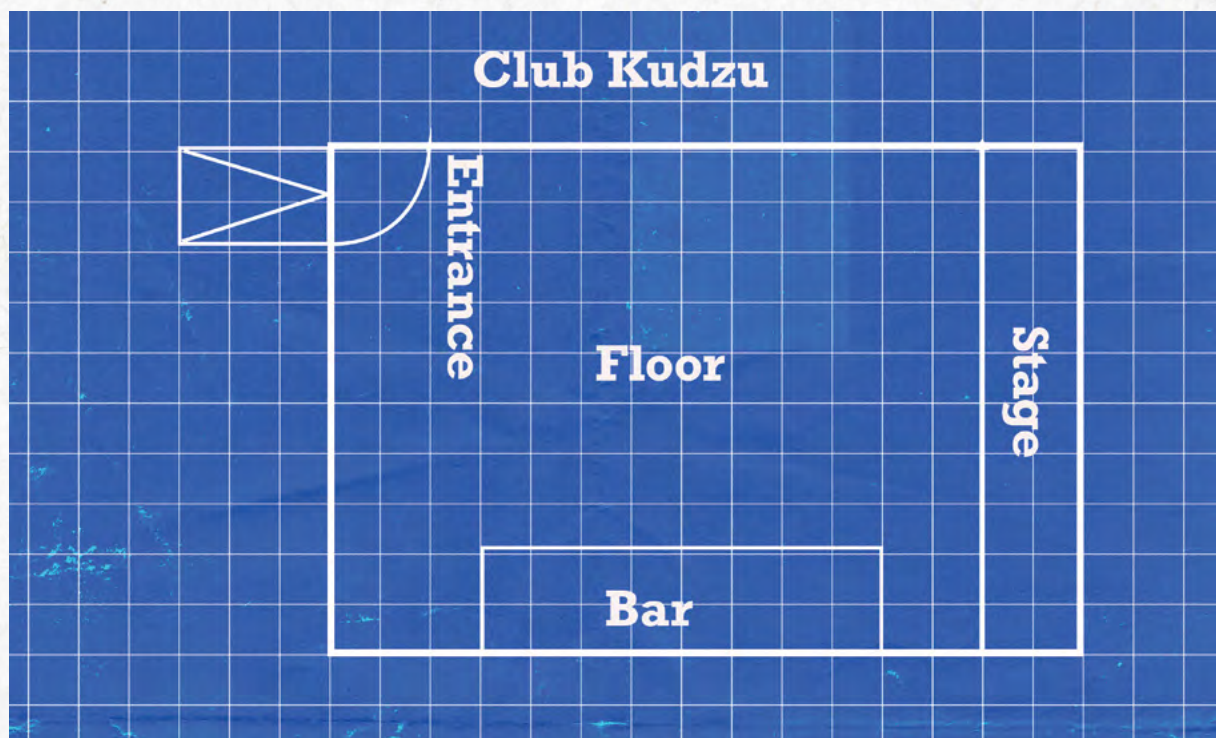
**Keeper note:** this scene has several leads in that allow the investigators to choose to attend. Investigators with **Hook One: Chosen by the Prince** (page 95) feel an overwhelming compulsion, which takes a Hard **POW** roll to resist.

## CLUB KUDZU

The venue chosen for this exclusive event is an underground music venue called Club Kudzu, located under a dive bar in an alley where few tourists would ever bother to go. Various underground-idol groups and indie-punk rock bands perform here on a nightly basis. An inconspicuous sign marks the location, showing the venue's name and an arrowroot leaf symbol hanging above the stairway leading down. Overlapping layers of posters for bands cover the walls of the stairwell.

An emergency exit can be located on the far side of the building, but it is locked from the inside and requires a success on a **Locksmith** or Hard **STR** roll to open. This leads down into the staff rooms and backstage area.

- If the investigators dig through the club's finances—kept in the staff room safe (Hard **Locksmith** roll)—a successful **Accounting** roll allows them to note that, earlier in the year, it was purchased from the original owners by Matsushima Nobuo through a third-party trading company.





No guards or bouncers stand at the main entrance, just a heavy soundproof door; however, only investigators who have been Exposed to the *Sutra* or *The Tale of Pale Leaves*, or who have received an invitation from Matsushima Nobuo, can open the door. All other characters are convinced that the door is sealed shut and cannot be opened, although other Exposed characters may hold the door open for them.

When they enter, the venue teems with several hundred people, all crammed in shoulder to shoulder. The majority wear yellow robes or raincoats as well as masks. The guests are enjoying the opening act, a sugary song and dance performance by a trio of three girls in yellow uniforms (an idol group scouted by the APL). The songs are “My Prince Charming,” a cheery tune about meeting the perfect man of one’s dreams, and “Doki Doki Literature,” a song about the exciting and mind-expanding power of books, apparently aimed at school children.

Many of the attendees are aspiring artists from Manga Market and have brought their own *dōjinshi* (self-published works) with them. If the investigators inspect such works, they risk Exposure (1D3 EP). In addition, they may attempt an **Appraise** roll or appropriate **Art/Craft** skill roll; if successful, they notice the art styles seem to blend, as if the artist is trying hard to match the original *Tale of Pale Leaves* at the expense of their own originality—when the investigators confront Nagatsuki, pointing this out to her may allow them to talk her out of her drastic plans.

**Keeper note:** the following (rather long) scene can be read as-is or adapted as the Keeper sees fit. The scene assumes Saitō Tomoko still lives, and that the investigators have not confined her for her own safety. Replace Saitō with another NPC if needed. The investigators may wish to rush the stage at some point, but, due to the crowd, this is extremely difficult. If they wish to get closer to the stage, they must begin advancing as early as possible. In addition, Matsushima and Ukami (if present) are powerful physical fighters, who, if challenged, try to subdue any unruly investigators and force them to watch the ceremony play out.

### MC Matsushima

After the idol group’s performance, the audience applauds, and Matsushima Nobuo comes onstage wearing a fine black suit with gold pinstripes.

**Keeper note:** at the Keeper’s discretion, if the investigator group is using *Pulp Cthulhu* rules, or is heavily armed, magically proficient, or spoiling for a fight, the ex-monk Ukami can also be present, acting as a bodyguard for Matsushima and the guest of honor—the investigators spot a tall and muscled man with a shaven head wearing a dark suit standing in the wings of the stage.

*“Good evening, everyone. I am Matsushima Nobuo, tonight’s master of ceremonies. Perhaps you know me from my writing or my political career. I am here tonight for the same reason as all of you—I am a fan of a profoundly special work of art, The Tale of Pale Leaves.”*

*“We are all ‘otaku’ here. Geeks, nerds, outcasts. Even me. I was bullied in school for being a bookworm. But here, there is no hate. Look around you—this is your family, bound not by blood but by common passion.”*

*“We have gathered to celebrate not just a great story, but a great truth. It is a truth that all of you know deep in your hearts but would be afraid to admit to outsiders: the Prince of Pale Leaves is real.”*

**Keeper note:** Exposed investigators clearly see the silhouette of the Prince of Pale Leaves standing beside Matsushima, just outside the glow of the spotlight.

The audience erupts with excited gasps, all turning their attention at once to an area of the stage near Matsushima. Matsushima turns to the Prince and bows slowly and respectfully, and the silhouette nods in reply.

*“More than just common passion, the Prince unites us. He is part of all of us now. Thanks to him, our hearts and minds are intertwined forever. He stands beside us always, and empowers us in our time of need.”*

*“Some of you are not far along the path and have yet to see the Prince of Pale Leaves for yourself. Those of you who doubt, I understand your skepticism. So tonight, we present to you the person who is the closest to the Prince, the one who has bonded with him as one spirit and who can demonstrate his power: the creator of The Tale of Pale Leaves, Yamabuki Iroha!”*

A figure emerges from backstage clad in the same costume as most of the guests, a hooded yellow robe and mask. The audience applauds and cheers wildly. Yamabuki Iroha steps forward through the Prince’s silhouette, and the shadow seems to merge with them.

### The Prince Revealed

*“You know me by my pen name,” says Yamabuki Iroha. The voice sounds familiar yet strange; feminine and casual, yet brimming with the confidence of a living god. “But many of you have known me for much longer. I kept my true self hidden from you, but there is no longer any need. Tonight, I wear no mask.”*

As Yamabuki reaches up to remove their mask, hundreds of people in attendance strain to get a better view, standing on their toes or even trying to climb on other people’s shoulders. Shrieks erupt from the front row. These are not cries of terror, but the hysterical screams of fans as they see that their hero is, in fact, Nagatsuki Kaede.



Nagatsuki gestures slightly and the room falls silent. *"I am Nagatsuki Kaede, and I am the Prince of Pale Leaves. I am two hearts in one body, and one heart in many. All of you can be one with the Prince and share in our story. Many of you have the creativity and talent to add to it. Tonight, I wish to help you reach your full potential, starting with my dear friend."*

Nagatsuki reaches down and helps Saitō Tomoko up onto the stage. *"Tell them your story,"* she says and gestures to the crowd.

Saitō nervously steps up to the microphone. *"My name is Tomoko. I've wanted to be an artist since I was a little girl. But... I can't picture things in my head. Like, if you asked me to draw a rabbit right now, without looking at one, I just couldn't. I'm told it's an exceptionally rare condition. I've known Kaede since our school days and always looked up to her. She told me she could help me. I just..."* She turns to Nagatsuki. *"I just want to be able to draw from my heart like you do! Like the Prince does in your story! I can't see the Prince like everyone else here does, but I trust you. Can you help me?"*

Nagatsuki smiles gently and places a comforting hand on her friend's shoulder. In the background, Matsushima has placed a large piece of poster board in the middle of the stage floor. Nagatsuki approaches the board, produces a black-glass pen from her sleeve, and twirls it deftly in her fingers until it transforms into a long-handled brush of black lacquer with gold etchings.

**Keeper note:** this is the **Spear of Aldebaran** (page 143).

Without ever dipping the brush in any ink or paint, she makes a few brief flourishes on the board, and then, with one hand, lifts a full-sized futon off the board and into three-dimensional reality—the investigators should make a **Sanity** roll (0/1D3 loss).

Saitō lies down on the futon as instructed. Nagatsuki raises her brush above her head, and the brush transforms again, growing into something more like a spear with glowing-yellow symbols, the bristles forming a blade-like point. *"This is the Word of the Prince,"* she calls out, reciting a line from her own manga.

The crowd replies as one: *"Let it be inscribed upon our hearts."*

*"It shall be engraved upon your soul!"* Nagatsuki cries as she plunges the weapon into Saitō's face.

## Divine Inspiration

It is possible to save Saitō by distracting Nagatsuki, perhaps by pulling the fire alarm or causing some other distraction, just before the strike. If not, the following events occur:

The end of the spear separates into thousands of bristles that squirm like cilia, slipping into Saitō's nose, ears, and eyes. Then comes a cacophony of sounds, the high-pitched whine of a thousand dentist drills, the hum of electricity, and faint crackle of innumerable tiny things popping from intense heat and light. Saitō does not cry out, and her head is immobile, but her limbs shudder violently as if in a seizure.

Ten agonizing seconds later, Saitō sits up, looking haggard and bewildered but seemingly unharmed. *"G-Give me a pen and paper, please."* Matsushima does. Holding the sketchpad and making frantic, desperate strokes, Saitō draws a perfect rabbit, so real that its nose seems to twitch on the paper. She holds it up to the crowd, laughing and crying tears of joy all at once.

*"My Prince,"* she cries and embraces Nagatsuki.

Saitō is now a vessel of the Prince (EP 100). Witnessing this event, provokes a **Sanity** roll (0/1D6 loss); those investigators succeeding with this roll dismiss it as stage theatrics, like a hokey faith-healing performance.

## Portal to the Tower

After this event, or if the ceremony is interrupted, Nagatsuki departs. She steps away and draws a perfect circle on the stage wall. She flicks her brush across it casually until it is a painting of a tower of many overlapping orange-steel beams. The investigators recognize the Tokyo Tower. *"Tonight, I begin my real work. Rewriting humanity's story, starting with this nation. It will be a top-down revolution."*

Nagatsuki steps into the painting on the wall and disappears. The investigators can follow her through if they dare—the portal remains open for several minutes (or long enough for them to make a choice). More wisely, they can leave the club and make their own way to the Tokyo Tower, via the crowded subway.

Matsushima (and, if present, Ukami) attempt to stop the investigators from following Nagatsuki through the magic portal, but they have their hands full with the hundreds of attendees who also want to follow her. The investigators need to make opposed **DEX** rolls to slip past them. See Matsushima's profile in **Fanfic: Characters and Monsters** (page 140); Ukami's profile can be found in **Dream Eater: Characters & Monsters** (Chapter 2, page 85).

When this fight concludes, proceed to **The Pictomancer Prince** (following).



# THE PICTOMANCER PRINCE

- **Date:** December 31, 1986.
- **Location:** Tokyo Tower, Minato, Tokyo.
- **Leads In:** A.K.B. Squared (preceding).
- **Leads Out:** Endings (page 138).
- **Purpose:** the investigators confront Nagatsuki Kaede, author of the manga and chosen vessel of the Pale Prince, and so engage in a battle of wits.

Nagatsuki Kaede has traveled to Tokyo Tower, where she plans to make many “edits” to reality within the city. Her goal is to remake the world to best suit her (and the Prince’s) wishes. Her reality-shaping powers work effectively at a distance, but require line of sight, so she has chosen the highest point in the metropolis for her plan.

## THE TOWER

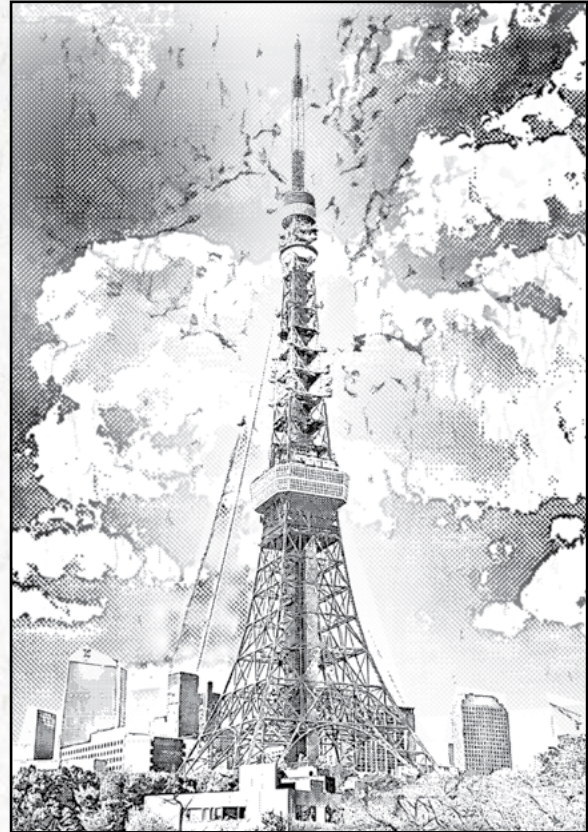
Tokyo Tower is a tall (1,092 feet/333 m) communications and broadcasting tower. When built in 1958, it was the tallest freestanding tower in the world, surpassing the Eiffel Tower, which inspired its design. The Main Deck (known as the Main Observatory) is at 492 feet (150 m), while the smaller Top Deck (or Special Observatory) is at 820 feet (250 m). Both offer panoramic views of the city.

Nagatsuki can be found on the Top Deck. Normally, one must pay for a guided tour to reach this area, and one might expect some wealthy VIPs to be seeing the New Year in here, but the entire tower is vacated due to Matsushima and the APL’s manipulation. The orange paint of the main structure seems to have taken on a yellowish hue. The investigators are free to ride the elevator to the top. If for some reason the elevator is damaged, there’s a staircase outside that stretches from the ground floor to both decks.

## Prologue of Wind & Light

As the elevator doors close, the investigators notice a complex series of characters and symbols (code from the *Sutra*) written on the inside of the doors. The lights suddenly go out, the walls turn a pale shade of yellow, and dark shapes begin to move on the walls, enacting a series of simplistic two-dimensional shadow plays.

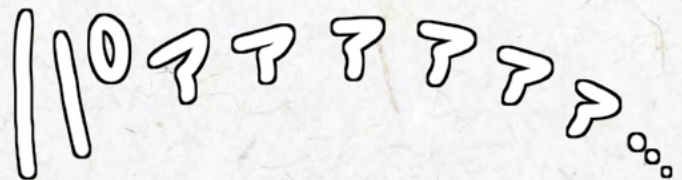
- One scene shows a kindergarten classroom. The children are announcing what they want to be when they grow up. A little girl says she wants to be a pretty princess and get a handsome man to take care of her. Young Nagatsuki says



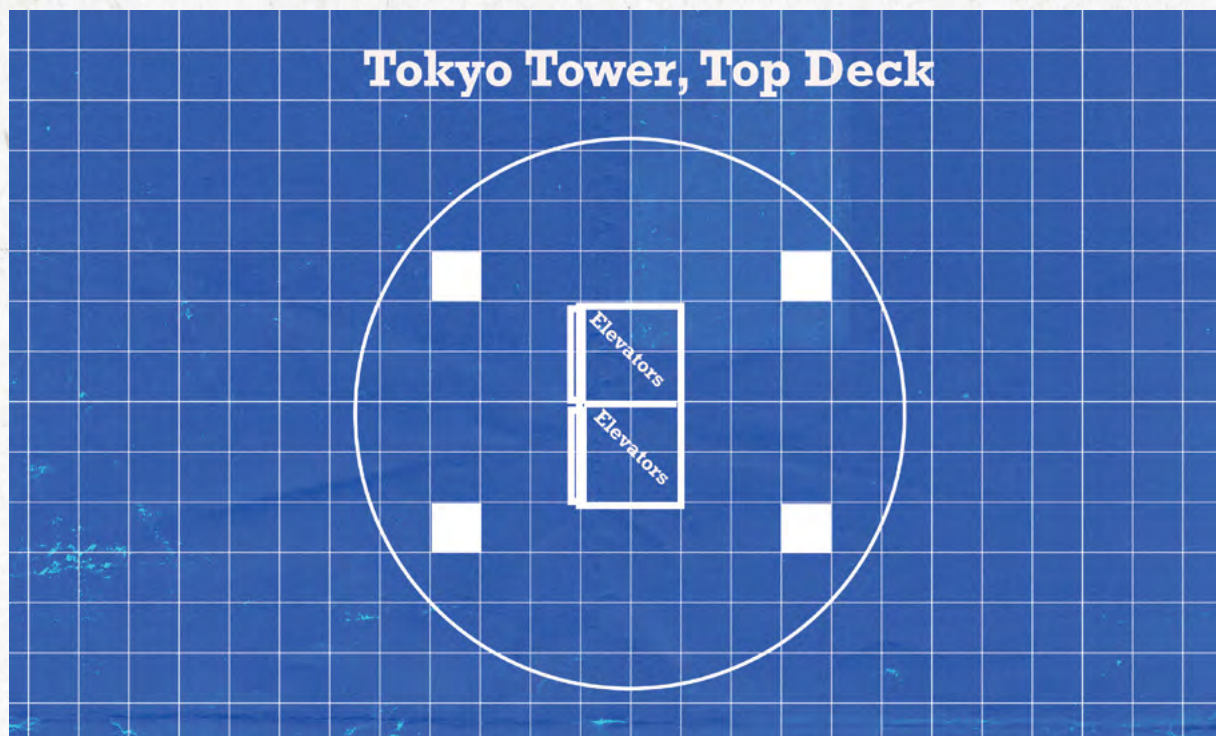
Tokyo Tower

she wants to be a prince, and take care of all her subjects. Everyone laughs, even the teacher, who says, “*But Kaede, you can never be a prince, because you’re a girl.*”

- Another scene, the hallway of a junior high school. Nagatsuki is demanding that a pack of older and popular girls give back the drawings that they stole from her. They refuse. “*We’re doing you a favor,*” one says as she rips up the drawings. “*Like, if anyone sees these, they’d know that you’re a freak. An uncool, ugly, totally gross freak.*”
- One more scene, in a run-down apartment. Nagatsuki’s mother, drinking from a box of wine while absentmindedly watching TV, sighs angrily. “*A manga artist? Don’t be ridiculous, you can’t make a living like that. Give up that silly dream. Just get a temp job until you can find a man with a decent salary who is willing to settle for you.*”







### The Illustrations

The shadow play ends just as the elevator reaches the Top Deck with a ding. Instead of an unobstructed view of the Tokyo skyline, the investigators see that Nagatsuki has drawn some extremely complex images on the thick panes of glass of the windows of the circular observation deck. Each image consists of a hyper-realistic drawing of some sort, surrounded by complex lines of code from the *Sutra*. The ink somehow embedded itself in the glass in many layers, forming a holographic 3D-like effect.

The Keeper should ask the investigators (especially those with Exposure Points) to make an **INT** or **EDU** roll; if successful, they intuit that the characters and symbols contain instructions and coordinates in time and space, all within line of sight of the tower. The hologram-like images seem to show the catalysts for the reality that Nagatsuki intends to create:

- The *Sutra of Pale Leaves* appearing in the offices of influential people—this scene overlays the view of government buildings.
- Scientists and engineers making sudden technological breakthroughs—this scene overlays the view of a major university.
- Various public officials and business oligarchs being arrested, while others are being run over by vehicles or struck by lightning, all appearing out of nowhere.
- A complex chain of events leading to everyone in the country, and then everyone on Earth, becoming one with the Prince.

Nagatsuki walks into view and turns to face the investigators, having just put the finishing touches on another window with her miraculous brush. Only eight panels remain unpainted.

*"Just so you know, this was never about me. It's about the fate of the world. The Prince showed me the terrible things he's seen on this planet. Through his eyes, his memories, I've seen humanity's darkest moments and squandered potential. I'm lucky by comparison."*

All investigators with 20+ EP must make an Extreme **POW** roll or their minds are flooded with a rapid and seemingly unending stream of horrific images: rivers filled with raw sewage and industrial waste, flies buzzing around skeletal children starving to death, dictators massacring groups of people with chemical weapons, young boys forced to kill their friends as child soldiers, and worse. Torture, slaughter, mutilation, depravity. Those witnessing these images somehow know, intuitively, that everything happened recently and recurs daily. Call for a **Sanity** roll (1/1D8 loss).

**Keeper note:** as recommended at the start of this campaign, the Keeper should discuss individual player comfort levels before play begins. The scenes described above, while based on reality and regularly presented on television news, may be too much for some, and the Keeper is advised not to dwell on details and present this in a manner agreed upon in advance with the players. As a default, try summarizing the scene by saying something like, "You see horrific scenes of inhumanity from across



*the world; wars, famine, death, and despair.*" Don't dwell on the subject matter unless your players have expressed clear consent to the description of such things.

*"Mankind is doomed," Nagatsuki continues. "Too much greed and aggression, too little empathy. You'll either destroy yourselves outright, or fail to unite against an existential threat. I won't stand by and let that happen."*

Nagatsuki tightens the grip around her brush, and Tokyo Tower shudders as if a small earthquake just occurred.

*"For humanity's story to continue, an experienced author needs to step in. I just need to redraw a few panels here, rewrite some narration there, and before long, everyone will live happily ever after."*

### Transformation

If the investigators show hostility or any intention to stop her, a brilliant sphere of golden light engulfs Nagatsuki's body. Time crawls to a stop for the investigators, while Nagatsuki transforms, posing dramatically in mid-air as new garments materialize and wrap around her silhouette. She emerges from her photonic cocoon clad in a flowing dress and cape of black and yellow, an outfit reflecting her hybrid soul of the Prince of Pale Leaves and an indomitable dark prince: a "Magical Girl" as in one of her old mangas. Witnessing this transformation incurs a **Sanity** roll (0/1D3 loss).

## FINAL CONFRONTATION

Nagatsuki invites the investigators to join her in the new world she will create. They have a vital decision to make.

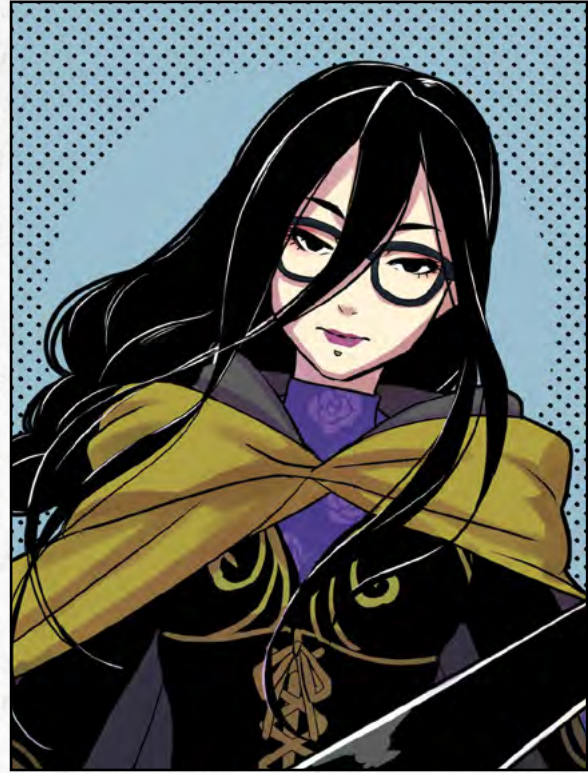
### Join Her

Nagatsuki won't forcibly turn the investigators into vessels of the Prince. But, if any of them request it, she gladly does so (as she did to Saitō); this instantly sets their Exposure Points to 100, and ends their investigating career. Resolve any group conflicts and proceed to the **Endings** (page 138).

### Talk Her Out of It

Depending on how the investigators have interacted with Nagatsuki (and the Prince) up until now, it may be possible to convince her not to go through with her plans. This is the easiest and best route to a conclusion. The investigators need to convincingly argue at least two of the following talking points. At the Keeper's discretion, the players can simply put forward a convincing argument, or attempt a **Persuasion** roll (one per point, thus, two rolls).

- If everyone becomes one with the Prince, it will stifle human creativity. As evidenced by her fans, who are merely copying



Magical Girl

her now, losing their own artistic identities.

- There's no way of knowing the outcome of the changes the Prince wants to implement (Nagatsuki herself does not know; she's taking it on faith).
- Humankind's story is interesting precisely because there is challenge and conflict, and our future is not yet written.
- She has no right to decide such things on behalf of the world—she is only one person.
- She was manipulated into creating *The Tale of Pale Leaves*. It is the Prince, not her, running the show.

If rolls are attempted, a fumble ends up with the investigators painting human civilization in an even worse light to her; thus, the investigators are rewarded with the worst possible ending. If successful in persuading Nagatsuki—proceed to the **Endings** (page 138). If their argument is not convincing—proceed to **Sabotage** or **Combat** (following).

### Sabotage

Stopping Nagatsuki from finishing the last eight paintings delays or compromises her plan. Smashing all the windows (24 in total) on the Top Deck completely ruins everything. The sturdy glass in each panel requires 5 damage to break, though firearms and blunt, metal weapons inflict double damage to the glass. A small explosive could shatter many at once.



However, due to the tower's height, breaking the windows causes gale force winds to blow into the Top Deck. Once eight or more windows are broken, it's too windy to Dodge properly, and any investigator fumbling a subsequent combat or action roll must succeed with a **DEX** or **STR** roll (as appropriate) or be blown off the tower and fall to their doom. Nagatsuki seems unaffected by this in her transformed state, and may even catch investigators who are about to fall off, in a show of mercy.

### Combat

In battle, Nagatsuki is probably undefeatable—the **Spear of Aldebaran** (page 143), with the power of the Prince, gives her godlike powers (see her profile in **Fanfic: Characters & Monsters**, page 142). This is not a good route for the investigators to take.

Nagatsuki does not initiate combat, unless she feels she has no other choice—she would rather talk the investigators over to her point of view. If the investigators choose to fight, Nagatsuki has conflicting motivations. On the one hand, she is determined to see her and the Prince's work completed. On the other hand, she feels compelled to hold back if she sees virtue or creative potential in the investigators, especially if they have been friendly to her. Thus, she would rather convince them to join her than kill them. For a couple of rounds she holds back her full ire, trying to calm things down and talk.

Lastly, she's living her dream of being a super-powered protagonist and views the encounter as part of a story that she doesn't want to end too quickly. When possible, she spends 1 action per round making a new painting on a window—she can activate all of them on the ninth round, completing her mission.

If the investigators make clever use of “reality shaping” with a Magic Brush (if they got the spell from **Nagatsuki's Studio**, page 131), they could make powerful weapons and manipulate the environment to have a fighting chance. This ups the ante and Nagatsuki responds in kind. If seriously threatened, she can counter with her own creative tactics, erasing their limbs and heads, or using perspective tricks to spawn in weapons the investigators could never imagine (like launching an anti-tank missile directly out of a letter-sized piece of paper).

Once the conflict resolves—proceed to the **Endings** (following).

## ENDINGS

- **Location:** Tokyo.
- **Leads In:** **The Pictomancer Prince** (preceding).
- **Purpose:** the story comes to an end.

**Keeper note:** remember to run an Investigator Development Phase (see *Call of Cthulhu: Keeper Rulebook*, page 94) at the end of the scenario.

### 0. Party Wipe (Failure)

- **Requirements:** the investigators all die or go insane and are unable to continue; or they fail to follow through with their investigations and confront Nagatsuki in the Tokyo Tower.

If the investigators are unable to continue, the Keeper may treat them to a description of one of the bad endings, depending on how much they were able to accomplish or how much they screwed up until that point.

### 1. If You Can't Beat Them (Bad Guy Ending)

- **Requirements:** the investigators must either willingly join Nagatsuki and the APL, or have enough Exposure Points that most of them are under the direct control of the Prince of Pale Leaves (see **Table 3: Exposure Counter and Effects**, Chapter 1, page 23).

If the Keeper and investigators are up for it, this may be the launching point of a new campaign in which the investigators become APL members and actively help the Prince to remake the world in his image. Specifically, the Keeper might adapt other scenarios in the style of *Pulp Cthulhu* where the investigators use their newly granted powers to seek and destroy other Mythos incursions that the Prince considers threats to his dominance over Earth. The investigators lose 1D8 Sanity for becoming willing servants of the unearthly Prince. Otherwise, these characters must retire to become new NPC antagonists for the next batch of investigators.

### 2. Komm, Süßer Tod (Worst Ending)

- **Requirements:** the investigators antagonize Nagatsuki so much that she abandons humanity entirely and chooses to euthanize the entire species.

If the investigators severely mistreat Nagatsuki throughout the scenario, and fumble their attempts to reason with her, they end up pushing her past her breaking point. She immobilizes the investigators (either by erasing their limbs during combat or painting them barely back to life after combat), forcing them to watch the consequences.



*"I suppose I should thank you. I was wrong about people. Now, I realize after everything I've seen, human beings are ultimately... irredeemable. Forget rewrites. I'm going to wipe the slate clean."*

Nagatsuki walks over to a window, lines up her view with the sliver of moon in the sky, and begins carefully drawing a full moon of her own on the glass. But the moon she draws is covered with intricate characters and symbols from the *Sutra*. After each stroke of her pen, the real moon's surface changes to match a second later.

When it is done, Nagatsuki looks down at the remaining investigators. *"Don't hold it against me,"* she says. *"This is a mercy."*

A flash of golden light emanates from the moon, and every human being on Earth drops dead.

### 3. God of the New World (Bad Ending)

- **Requirements:** the investigators fail to stop Nagatsuki's plan to rewrite reality.

When all her drawings on the windows of Tokyo Tower are completed, Nagatsuki announces that victory is hers, twirls her spear around, and sends out an invisible pulse of energy. The drawings etched into the glass burn brightly in golden fire and then vanish.

Nothing happens at first. If any of the investigators still live, Nagatsuki ceases her attacks and simply subdues them with Signs or creative writing. She looks upon them with a satisfied smile, and tells them that she has set things into motion that cannot be undone.

*"Even knowing that autumn has come, you cannot stop the leaves from falling,"* she says, reciting a central parable from the *Sutra*. *"Go, and live out your lives in peace."*

Nagatsuki lets the investigators go. She draws a portal in the floor at her feet and disappears into it before closing it behind her forever. All surviving investigators lose 1D10 Sanity.

#### *A New World Order*

Slowly, over weeks and months, things begin to change. The political landscape in the country shifts as incumbents suddenly die or retire, and Matsushima and his coalition of "reformists" take power. New scientific breakthroughs make the news every other day. Rapid technological progress and reforms increase the standard of living for everyone.

New skyscrapers rise higher than ever, showing off architecture previously thought impossible. An explosion in computer-processing power and virtual-reality technology soon lets everyone live out their wildest fantasies on demand. The space program and SETI begin receiving priority funding. Japan seems to have entered a new golden age beyond even the most optimistic predictions of the bubble economy.

But, all the while, the APL gains more influence. New volumes of *The Tale of Pale Leaves* see print every month,

translated into multiple languages, complete with spin-offs and side stories made by other authors. It becomes the most widely-recognized franchise in the world, spawning movies and interactive media. The APL becomes a household name, slowly supplanting traditional religions and community centers and, before long, it takes hold in foreign countries like roots of an invasive plant.

Little by little, Earth transforms to suit the whims of the Prince of Pale Leaves, and people stop being people. By the time anyone wonders what has been lost, it's already too late.

**Keeper note:** after this event, the investigators can continue on to other scenarios in the campaign, but the threat level rises significantly. **The Fixer** (*TSoPL: Carcosa Manifest*) would be an appropriate follow-up scenario.

### 4. Let's Call it a Draw (Neutral Ending)

- **Requirements:** the investigators talk Nagatsuki out of her plan, but do not free her from the Prince's influence.

Nagatsuki admits that there may be too many unforeseen variables, and reshaping the reality of an entire region at once may incur negative consequences. She offers a (temporary) cease-fire.

*"I realize that you mean well. But you need to understand that the same goes for me, Matsushima, and many others who follow the Prince. I propose a non-aggression pact. I'll take a trip somewhere and meditate on the ideal solution. You stay out of our affairs, and we will do you no harm. But know this: change is coming. It is inevitable whether I directly intervene or not. I suggest you make your own stories into something worth telling while you still can."* She leaves without another word.

Early in the new year, *The Tale of Pale Leaves* reaches bookstores around the country, achieving critical acclaim and selling out in days. Obsessed fans create scores of derivative works. Gradually, the APL gains notoriety for their connection to the manga, and their influence grows ever more.

**Keeper note:** after this event, the investigators can continue onto other scenarios in the campaign, but the threat level increases somewhat. All survivors lose 1D6 Sanity.

### 5. The Melancholy of Nagatsuki Kaede (Good Ending)

- **Requirements:** the investigators convince Nagatsuki to stop her plan.

Nagatsuki realizes that she's been used for her talent and manipulated into doing the bidding of an entity that cannot create anything on its own and which has its own unknowable intentions.



"I guess you're right. Everyone deserves the right to their own story, no matter where it leads. The world isn't just a canvas that I can draw on as I please. Maybe I was wrong to work with the Prince—"

Before she can finish her thought, Nagatsuki drops her weapon, collapses to her knees, and clutches the sides of her head in a tortured scream. Investigators with any EP hear a faint, high-pitched tone in their heads and intuit that it's a million times louder for Nagatsuki. She is clearly fighting for control of her own mind.

"NO! We were supposed to be partners! You gave me creative control! This is my story, and I won't let you have your way anymore!"

She reaches for her weapon, now transformed back into a black fountain pen, in a desperate attempt to lobotomize herself and banish the Prince from her mind before he can consume her. This attempt ends in her death (**Sanity** roll, 1/1D3 loss to witnesses), unless the investigators intervene.

### **Saving Nagatsuki**

An investigator may pick up the **Spear of Aldebaran** (page 143) and use it on Nagatsuki to erase the Prince from her mind—the reverse of what she did to Saitō. The backlash from this act takes a heavy toll on the investigator, who loses 2D10 **Sanity** or 2D10 **POW** (Keeper's choice). The tendrillike bristles plunge into Nagatsuki's head and burn into her synapses, erasing the Prince and leaving her unconscious. The Spear dissolves in a splash of ink and ceases to exist.

When Nagatsuki awakens, she realizes the Prince is no longer with her, and her motor functions have been significantly impaired. She breaks down sobbing, lost and alone for the first time in over a year.

"Part of me is gone, forever... I saw him every day, but I can't even imagine his voice or picture his face anymore."

With a normal pencil, she tries to draw a sketch, but her fingers shake terribly, and all she can manage is little better than a stick figure. Still, the investigators managed to save the world, and they recover 1D8 **Sanity** points.

**Keeper note:** Nagatsuki remembers some of the Prince's plans, but needs to go into hiding from the APL. She can provide leads and clues to future scenarios as a recurring NPC—The Fallen Prince.

## **6. Save Game (Surprise Ending)**

- **Requirements:** the investigators kill Nagatsuki.

As Nagatsuki lays dying, she grins bitterly and utters one last ominous line:

"My one regret... is that I never got to see the anime adaptation."

The Spear of Aldebaran dissolves into ink, all power gone.

The investigators must have been ruthless, swift-acting, and

extraordinarily lucky to pull off this ending. They gain 1D8 **Sanity** points for saving the world—for the moment.

# **FANFIC: CHARACTERS & MONSTERS**

## **INDEPENDENTS**

### **Saitō Tomoko, age 23, wannabe artist**

STR 50   CON 50   SIZ 40   DEX 70   INT 60  
APP 80   POW 50   EDU 60   SAN 50   HP 9  
DB: 0   Build: 0   Move: 9   MP: 10

#### **Combat**

Brawl   25% (12/5), damage 1D3

Dodge   35% (17/7)

#### **Skills**

Accounting 50%, Art/Craft (Drawing) 60%, Charm 70%,  
First Aid 50%, Listen 45%, Persuade 50%, Spot Hidden 60%.

**Language:** Japanese 60%.

### **Tamori Toshinobu, age 36, occult magazine editor**

STR 50   CON 50   SIZ 70   DEX 40   INT 65  
APP 50   POW 60   EDU 80   SAN 60   HP 12  
DB: 0   Build: 0   Move: 7   MP: 12

#### **Combat**

Brawl   40% (20/8), damage 1D3

Dodge   25% (12/5)

#### **Skills**

Appraise 25%, Computer Use 55%, Credit Rating 25%,  
Drive Automobile 40%, Fast Talk 25%, History 50%,  
Library Use 60%, Listen 40%, Locksmith 20%, Occult 70%,  
Spot Hidden 60%, Stealth 40%.

**Language:** Japanese 80%.

**Keeper note:** Tamori Toshinobu may serve as a replacement investigator if needed.



## ANTAGONISTS

Archfiend Portrait

**Kōda Tsutomu, age 31, plagiarist, vessel of the Alabaster Archfiend**

STR 60   CON 50   SIZ 60   DEX 65   INT 60  
 APP 50   POW 60   EDU 50   SAN 4   HP 11  
 DB: 0   Build: 0   Move: 8   MP: 12   EP:  
 enough

**Combat**

Brawl      60% (30/12), damage 1D3, or knife 1D4+2  
 Dodge      32% (16/6)

**Skills**

Art/Craft (Drawing) 70%, Fast Talk 70%, Forgery 60%,  
 Intimidate 40%, Occult 50%, Spot Hidden 50%, Stealth 40%.

**The Alabaster Archfiend, King of Corruption**

STR 125   CON 230   SIZ 70   DEX 70   INT —  
 APP —   POW 125   EDU —   SAN —   HP 30  
 DB: +1D6   Build: 2   Move: 7\*   MP: 25

*\*Moves slowly, but can disappear and reappear directly behind any characters who lost 5 or more Sanity from the encounter, or from reading his manga; equivalent speed 15.*

**Combat**

**Attacks per round:** 2 (tentacle lash)

**Tentacles:** uses its barbed tentacles to batter, choke, or crush opponents, prioritizing whoever has the highest APP score.

Tentacles    70% (35/14), damage 1D6+1D6  
 Dodge        35% (17/7)

**Armor:** none; also:

Chanting any mantra from the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* causes the Archfiend to suffer a penalty die to all attacks, and deals it 1D4 damage per round, while investigators gain a bonus die to their attacks.

The **Sign of the Ancients** (Chapter 1, page 31), if drawn and employed successfully, keeps the Archfiend out of melee range of its wielder.

Destroying the manuscript of his comic in front of him causes the Archfiend to fly into an uncontrollable rage for 1 round, as this action destroys it—penalizing the Archfiend with a penalty die to all its attack and Dodge rolls for 1 round, at the end of which the Archfiend is banished, and Kōda returns to human form.

**Spells:** any spells known by its current vessel (usually none)

**Sanity Loss:** 1D3/1D10 Sanity points to encounter the Alabaster Archfiend.

**Matsushima Nobuo, age 42, author, politician, APL patron, vessel of the Prince**

STR 80   CON 85   SIZ 55   DEX 80\*   INT 100  
 APP 85   POW 100   EDU 110   SAN 25   HP 14  
 DB: +1D4   Build: 1   Move: 8   MP: 20   EP: 100  
 (not yet Consumed)

**Special Abilities**

**Overdrive:** immune to the effects of pain, shock, and massive physical trauma while under the control of the Prince. Not immune to medical sedation. Cannot be charmed or intimidated.

**Combat**

**Attacks per round:** 1 (2\*)

Brawl                      75% (37/15), damage 1D3+1D4  
 Antique katana        75% (37/15), damage 1D10+2+1D4  
 Dodge                    55% (27/11)



*\*When the Prince has taken direct control, Matsushima gains +20 DEX and an extra attack per round.*

### Skills

Art/Craft (Writing) 95%, Credit Rating 80%, Fighting (Sword) 75%, Firearms (Handgun) 75%, Firearms (Rifle/Shotgun) 75%, History 90%, Law 60%, Library Use 80%, Listen 80%, Persuade 85%, Psychology 70%, Spot Hidden 80%.

**Languages:** Japanese 90%, English 70%.

### Signs

Can create and use any of the Signs from the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*. He keeps the **Sign of the Open Palm** (Chapter 1, page 31) always hidden in the inside of his robe or jacket (viewers must make a POW roll or suffer a penalty on DEX/combat rolls for 1 minute).

**Armor:** none.

**Spells:** Benevolent Influence, Bestow Glimpse of Truth, Dominate, Flesh Ward, Wrack, and others the Keeper deems appropriate.

**Sanity Loss:** none.

### Courtiers of the Pale Prince, deadly assassins

Courtiers, of whatever gender, appear as stunningly beautiful specimens of humanity. They wield monomolecular blades hidden in the tips of fans or gloves.

STR 70	CON 80	SIZ 50	DEX 120	INT 60
APP: 100	POW 100	EDU —	SAN —	HP 13
DB: 0	Build: 0	Move: 11	MP: 20	

### Combat

**Attacks per round:** 1 (bladed fans or gloves)

**Dance of Death:** attack using a spinning and twisting martial art style resembling an intricate dance. The targets of the courtiers—who can be anyone watching within 20 yards/meters of the dance—must make a Hard POW roll or become mesmerized and unable to act/react to attacks but may, once per round thereafter, attempt a Hard POW roll to break free of the spell. Those unable to free themselves get cut to shreds during the performance, eventually falling to the ground, dead, in a pool of blood.

Fighting	70% (35/14), damage 1D4+1
Dodge	60% (30/12)

### Skills

Charm 90%, Jump 90%, Stealth 70%.

**Armor:** none.

**Spells:** up to 3 spells at Keeper's discretion. Can draw and use all the **Mystic Signs** (Chapter 1, page 31) unique to the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*.

**Sanity Loss:** 1/1D3 to witness the Dance of Death; no loss for simply encountering the courtiers.

### Nagatsuki Kaede, age 24, artist, vessel of the Pale Prince

STR 50	CON 60	SIZ 40	DEX 100	INT 100
APP 60*	POW 150	EDU 100	SAN 40	HP 10
DB: 0	Build: 0	Move: 9	MP: 30	EP: 99

### Special Abilities

**Permanent overdrive:** all characteristics are enhanced. Immune to the effects of pain, shock, and physical trauma. Not immune to medical sedation. Cannot be charmed or intimidated.

**Reality shaping:** can manifest things into reality by drawing them with the Spear of Aldebaran (nearby). This enhanced version of the Magic Brush (see **Craft Magic Brush**, page 131) may spawn anything up to 1-square meter in size in a single action for 1 magic point.

**Flight:** Nagatsuki can defy gravity while in her Magical Girl form.

### Combat

**Attacks per round:** 1(2\*)

Brawl	60% (30/12), damage 1D3
Spear	90% (45/18), damage 2D6, see <b>Spear of Aldebaran</b> (nearby).
Dodge	60% (30/12)

*\*In her "Magical Girl" form, Nagatsuki gains 30 APP from her gorgeous clothes, and an extra attack per round.*

### Skills

Anthropology 80%, Art/Craft (various) 150%, History 90%, Library Use 100%, Natural World 90%, Persuade 95%, Psychology 90%, Spot Hidden 80%.

**Languages:** any 90%.



**Signs**

Can create and use any of the **Mystic Signs** (Chapter 1, page 31) from the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*; can prepare 1 Sign per round as a single action.

**Armor:** may respond to an attack by blocking with a golden, octagonal barrier of force, nullifying 3 points of damage per MP spent.

**Sanity Loss:** 0/1D3 Sanity points when witnessing Nagatsuki's transformation.

## SPEAR OF ALDEBARAN

The instrument wielded by Nagatsuki Kaede is an artifact weapon far beyond human technology. It is the Prince's perfected version of the Magic Brush. In its standard form, it appears as a beautiful fountain pen made of black glass, with a golden tip and yellow-gold designs etched into the handle. Beneath its crystalline surface lurks a mass of dark matter, swirling and churning too slow for human perception.

**Keeper note:** this item's existence is maintained by Nagatsuki's creative will. It is not intended to pass into the hands of the investigators, nor any NPC other than Nagatsuki. If she dies or is cut off from the Prince's influence, the Spear ceases to exist.

- The Spear has fluidic extradimensional properties. It can change in size and shape: from a small pen to a large calligraphy brush, or even to a polearm. It produces an infinite supply of its own ink and paint. It is also near-indestructible.
- The tip is comprised of articulated carbon nanotube bristles that respond automatically to the user's will. It can instantly transform into a brush or fountain pen capable of painting any color at any level of detail on any surface, enabling the user to create complex, full-color artwork quickly and effortlessly. The bristles can also penetrate solid substances, making it suitable for tattoos or etchings.

- In weapon form, the fountain pen-like tip transforms into a helical-monomolecular blade, with damage 2D6+DB, ignoring armor, magical protection, and supernatural invulnerability. The weapon returns to its wielder's hand on command if thrown or dropped.
- The Spear contains the full "code" of the *Sutra* and can directly implant the Prince's consciousness into a human's mind, creating a new host in seconds. The tip must be held over the prospective host's head while the nanotube fibers physically interact with their brain. This process is permanent and removes and overwrites any other possession or mental programming.
- The Spear enables a potent version of the reality shaping, able to create living creatures and create portals to anywhere (except the Prince's home world).
- The Spear has a hidden function for removing things from reality. The wielder can paint over an object (or person) in all white or black with the Spear and spend MP equal to the target's Build +2 to delete it from existence. If a living creature (or part thereof) is being erased, the Spear's wielder must succeed in an opposed POW roll.
- The Spear binds to the wielder's nervous system. Investigators who pick it up pay a heavy toll, losing 2D10 POW permanently and gaining 4D10 EP and any associated effects (see **Table 3: Exposure Counter & Effects**, page 23).



*Spear of Aldebaran*







# CHAPTER 4: THE PALLID MASKS OF TOKYO

*“Meditate upon selflessness, as those who wear the Empty Mask are free from pain and epitomize enlightenment.”*

—Excerpt from “Sermon under the Sakura Blossoms,” *The Sutra of Pale Leaves*.

**T**okyo police officers discover a bizarre corpse in a narrow alley, hidden deep within Shinjuku’s nightlife district. The face of the corpse lacks all features: no ears, nose, eyes, and no mouth. Strange tattoos cover the body of the inexplicably faceless cadaver.

The investigators are drawn into probing—perhaps even infiltrating or breaking into—a psychiatric facility to stop a rash of faceless gangsters across Tokyo. The scenario culminates with the investigators trapped in an otherworldly version of the Prince of Pale Leaves’ nightmare palace, which has manifested in the Tokyo Metropolitan Psychiatric Hospital.

**Content note:** this scenario includes scenes set in the secure unit of a psychiatric hospital. These scenes take dramatic license for narrative sake and do not represent real-world mental-health care facilities or practices; they can be toned down as appropriate for the players’ comfort.

## KEEPER BACKGROUND

The faceless corpse is Nishiyama Akira, a yakuza foot soldier turned into a Noppera-bō (a faceless, shapeshifting *yōkai*, from Japanese folklore) after receiving an intricate tattoo depicting a passage from the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*. Nishiyama is one of several yakuza gangsters recruited by an organically evolving group of individuals who have become exposed to a particular iteration of the *Sutra*. This newly forming cult has not yet

named itself and is not currently in contact with or directed by the Association of Pale Leaves (APL).

Patient zero at the center of the infection is Yamamoto Minoru, a former salaryman involuntarily admitted to the Tokyo Metropolitan Psychiatric Hospital for observation and evaluation after attacking his family, and who is currently diagnosed with schizophrenia and narcissistic personality disorder. Yamamoto’s compulsions can be directly traced back to his exposure to a manga titled *Aokuchiba Monogatari*, “*The Tale of Pale Leaves*” (see **Graphic Sutra**, Chapter 1, page 29), and include the belief that he is the “Pale Prince of Carcosa.” While detained, Yamamoto befriended another patient, “Crazy” Kazu, a young and violently unstable yakuza enforcer.

Yamamoto convinced Crazy Kazu to let him tattoo a mind-blasting portion of the *Sutra* on his body, using a scalpel and ballpoint pens stolen from a nurses’ station. The copy of the passage, taken from the screentones, is perfect in every way, which is to say that it is infectious. This particular passage, called “Meditations on Selflessness and Wearing the Empty Mask,” raises Exposure Points to 100 when voluntarily etched into one’s flesh, and creates faceless monsters, which, throughout Japanese history, have been known as Noppera-bō (see **Lore Sheet 12: Noppera-bō**, page 146; **The Shadow**, page 166).

Kazu’s yakuza gang, the Umezawa-gumi, owns fairly diverse holdings throughout Tokyo, including a janitorial services business that has a contract with the Tokyo Metropolitan Psychiatric Hospital. Kazu uses his

Opposite: Terror at Club Xanadu



connections to enter and exit the psychiatric ward of the hospital nearly at will. Although Yamamoto could use these same connections to engineer an escape, he has chosen not to do so, preferring to set up operations within the hospital. Yamamoto believes he is the Pale Prince and that the hospital can be converted into his “Château Carcosa” through the conversion of more followers.

Kazu assists with this effort by converting his Umezawa-gumi brothers. On a weekly basis, Kazu brings at least one member of his gang into the hospital to receive “protective ward” tattoos that are carved into their flesh by Yamamoto. Yamamoto continues to use the “Wearing the Empty Mask” passage, thus, creating more Noppera-bō, as he needs a legion of foot soldiers to make the hospital his castle and Tokyo his kingdom. As the scenario progresses, Yamamoto may discover uses for other *Sutra* passages as tattoos on new supplicants. In the event of Yamamoto’s premature demise, Kazu takes over where Yamamoto left off.

**Keeper note:** you can replace Yamamoto as patient zero with any former investigator committed to the psychiatric ward as a result of their exposure to the *Sutra*, to create a stronger connection that can draw the investigators into the mystery.

## INVOLVING THE INVESTIGATORS

This scenario particularly suits investigators who are members of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department. Police officers may find themselves running or participating in the investigation into the faceless corpse found in the alley. This makes the scenario relatively easy for the investigators to navigate, as they have official access to NPCs, records, and crime scenes.

Investigators who are not members of the police can find their way into the investigation through one of the hooks provided below—but note that **Hook Two** and **Hook Three** make dealing with officialdom considerably more difficult. The Keeper is encouraged to work up starting scenes for the investigators that fit their particular circumstances and backgrounds. The scenario is written assuming that the investigators are police, or are working with the police, or have some means of accessing official information, although notes are provided for other circumstances.

### Hook One: Consultation

- Use this hook for investigators who have “The Fed” as their Confidant (see **Confidants: Plot Hook Facilitators**, Chapter 1, page 45).

## Lore Sheet 12: Noppera-Bō

*Yōkai*, meaning “strange apparition,” is a word for a class of supernatural entities in Japanese folklore. They include spirits, monsters, animated household objects, and other non-human beings. *Yōkai* may be benevolent or malevolent, helpful or mischievous; but overall they represent that which is outside of human understanding.

Noppera-bō are humanoid *yōkai* lacking facial features, but who may assume temporary faces. They are believed to impersonate people who are familiar to their intended victims, and to reveal their true faceless features at opportune times to maximize their frightening effect. In folklore, they rarely physically attack but seem to rejoice in surprising people and shocking them. A famous – and typical – story tells of a man who, traveling alone at night, came across a lost and weeping young woman, her face covered by her long sleeve. When he attempted to comfort her and offer assistance, she looked up at him, revealing she had no face. Frightened, the man ran off and took shelter in a roadside noodle stall. Shaking, he told the vendor of his encounter. “*What – like this, you mean?*” said the vendor, wiping off his own face with a stroke of his hand.

### Personal Background

When you and your siblings visited your grandfather’s house, he would tell you creepy stories from Japanese folklore: shapeshifting fox spirits, giant spiders, long-necked *rokurokubi*, and colossal hungry skeletons called *gashadokuro*. You have been interested in *yōkai* ever since.



The Metropolitan Police Department knows that they are out of their depth and that it would be better to hand off the investigation to the Public Security Intelligence Agency. Special Agent Mizutani Shogo, “The Fed,” calls in the investigators to assess the discovery of the corpse, as well as any possible Mythos threat. Special Agent Mizutani engages the investigators in an official capacity if the investigators are police detectives and/or subject matter experts in crime scene investigation, criminal profiling, or other relevant forensic sciences. Otherwise, Mizutani keeps the consultation informal and “off the record.”

Give the investigators **Lore Sheet 12: Noppera-bō**.

## Hook Two: Interrogation

- Use this hook for investigators with “The Abbot” as their Confidant (see **Confidants: Plot Hook Facilitators**, Chapter 1, page 47).

The police detain and question the investigators as possible suspects or witnesses in the murder regarding the corpse found in Shinjuku. The investigators are tied to the crime scene by virtue of their relationship with the Abbot, Murakami Tsubasa, who cornered the Noppera-bō, disabled it with a cattle prod, and then killed it.

Murakami is now the prime suspect in the murder investigation and has gone to ground. Murakami contacts the investigators and requests that they continue pursuit of the Noppera-bō, explaining that several of the creatures have been seen in the Shinjuku area of Tokyo. The Keeper may open the scenario with the investigators in the Shinjuku Police Station’s holding cell, or as a scene detailing their interactions with Murakami and perhaps even how they aided the Abbot’s escape—but were caught in the process.

The scenario begins with Detectives Tanaka and Okawa interrogating the investigators, revealing details about the crime scene and the faceless corpse, before letting them go free.

Give the investigators **Lore Sheet 12: Noppera-bō**.

## Hook Three: Troubleshooters

- Use this hook for investigators with “The Heiress” as their Confidant (see **Confidants: Plot Hook Facilitators**, Chapter 1, page 47).

Yamada Chitose, the president of the Derby Club, tasked a group of troubleshooters to capture a live Noppera-bō. The troubleshooters were able to track down such a creature and lure it into a narrow alley in Shinjuku. Unfortunately, the troubleshooters underestimated the task and accidentally killed it. The troubleshooters fled the alley, leaving the body of the Noppera-bō behind. Yamada elects to distance the original troubleshooters from the botched abduction and asks the investigators to take over the investigation.

Give the investigators **Lore Sheet 12: Noppera-bō**.

# DRAMATIS PERSONAE

See **Pallid Masks of Tokyo: Characters & Monsters**, page 175, for the following characters’ profiles.



*Kurosawa Kichinosuke*

## Kurosawa Kichinosuke, age 62, police chief

The highly respected and politically savvy Chief Kurosawa Kichinosuke provides leadership and direction to all police officers stationed at the Shinjuku Police Station. No easy task given that the Kabukicho entertainment district is crawling with yakuza. Chief Kurosawa, a competent career officer, carefully considers his decisions concerning this investigation.

- **Description:** a tall and thin man in his early 60s, who keeps his hair trimmed short and his appearance neat. Prefers a conservative black suit and tie to a uniform.
- **Traits:** clear thinker; acts cautiously but decisively, and is dedicated to his job.
- **Roleplaying hooks:** he is relieved to pass crimes of an irrational (supernatural) nature onto the PSIA, if the investigators have “The Fed” as a Confidant.



Tanaka Morio

**Tanaka Morio, age 52, police detective**

With just over three decades of service, the rugged, plainclothes Detective Tanaka Morio is Chief Kurosawa's "go-to" for timely resolution of difficult cases. Tanaka distrusts everyone except his partner, Detective Okawa, and he takes orders only from Chief Kurosawa, whom he doesn't particularly trust. Tanaka does not play well with others, and if it weren't for his reliability in cracking difficult cases, he would have been drummed out of the service long ago.

- **Description:** plainclothes detective, wearing a long coat. He sports a distinctive streak of white hair in an otherwise black mop that is longer than regulation allows.
- **Traits:** wary and distrustful of others; talented, but hard to work with.
- **Roleplaying hooks:** skeptical of the investigators and any claims of the supernatural, but tends to believe his partner.

Okawa Keiko

**Okawa Keiko, age 46, police detective**

In a male-dominated profession, Detective Okawa has outperformed her male colleagues in every quantifiable metric. She graduated from cadet school at the top of her class and has closed more investigations than anyone else on the force.

- **Description:** a stern-looking, short-haired woman who abhors and avoids skirts.
- **Traits:** skilled, perceptive, and determined to prove herself.
- **Roleplaying hooks:** trusts her instincts, which are rarely wrong, and is willing to believe the improbable if all other explanations are impossible.

**Keeper note:** Chief Kurosawa, Detective Tanaka, and Detective Okawa could serve as replacement investigators. Additionally, these NPCs make excellent victims, should any of them become too friendly with the investigators (see **The Shadow**, page 166).



*Dr. Sato Hideki*



## Dr. Sato Hideki, age 31, medical examiner

Dr. Sato, a detail-oriented perfectionist, feels right at home in his chilled morgue, where he catalogs and conducts autopsies as required by the law. Investigators entering the morgue find Dr. Sato at work during most hours of the day.

- **Description:** average height, balding; wears a lab coat and glasses. Sato is in his early 30s, but his unattractive comb-over and dour expression make him appear older. He wears expensive glasses that he frequently adjusts as a nervous habit.
- **Traits:** humorless and socially awkward; annoyed by interruptions to his work.
- **Roleplaying hooks:** finds people (particularly the investigators) bothersome. Vulnerable to obsession and eventual corruption; he becomes a Noppera-bō through repeated visual exposure to the tattoos.

*Tsukasa Renji*



## Tsukasa Renji, age 58, yakuza oyabun

The Oyabun (boss) of the Umezawa-gumi crime syndicate is a shrewd and ruthless businessman. His criminal enterprise engages in shady and illegal business practices, including telemarketing scams, money laundering, extortion, and racketeering.

Tsukasa is not above using violence to get what he wants, but what he wants most of all is to make money, and actual outright violence rarely makes money. He occasionally authorizes bribery of susceptible politicians and police officers. Turf wars with other yakuza occasionally take place, but with the economy booming, everyone is getting fat, so what's the point of fighting over scraps?

Tsukasa used to be Crazy Kazu's boss, but the enforcer has gone AWOL.

- **Description:** dressed in a well-fitting cashmere sweater and suit jacket; gray hair and a middle-aged spread.
- **Traits:** polite, confident, pragmatic; more interested in business than overt displays of power.
- **Roleplaying hooks:** Crazy Kazu is becoming a thorn in his side, and he willingly sets the investigators on his former employee's trail.



Dr. Sasaki Kanako



## Dr. Sasaki Kanako, age 39, hospital psychiatrist

Dr. Sasaki is exceptionally well-read and excels in her field on an academic level, but most of her career experience has been with minors and patients who present little threat to others. She has been in her current position at the Tokyo Metropolitan Psychiatric Hospital for a couple of years, and still lacks the necessary hard-nosed cynicism to run the Secure Unit. She badly underestimates the danger that some of her patients pose and is oblivious to yakuza activity among the staff.

- **Description:** tall and thin, she wears her hair in a tight bun. Wears a white physician coat, hospital ID badge, stethoscope, and silver-rimmed glasses for reading.
- **Traits:** overly empathetic and trusting, but otherwise clinical and professional.
- **Roleplaying hooks:** having been Exposed to the *Sutra*'s tattoos at least once, Dr. Sasaki is under its influence and inclined to encourage Exposure in others. Hence, instead of blocking the investigators in their enquiries, she cooperates by allowing them access to the Secure Unit.

Yamamoto Minoru



## Yamamoto Minoru, age 40, patient, vessel of the Pale Prince

Yamamoto Minoru, born into a middle-class family in the suburbs north of Tokyo, earned average grades and began the life of a salaryman immediately upon graduation. His mediocre performance at work resulted in few promotions but guaranteed employment security and a salary sufficient to support a mortgage application. Yamamoto married a university classmate two years his younger. After giving birth to a baby boy, she immediately retired from employment, becoming a stay-at-home wife.

For more than a decade, Yamamoto remained, at best, average at everything he ever pursued—until he read the *Aokuchiba Monogatari* (*The Tale of Pale Leaves*). From that day on, his world and his reality changed. He was involuntarily admitted to the Secure Unit of Tokyo Metropolitan Psychiatric Hospital last year after using a hobby knife to carve esoteric kanji on the backs of his restrained wife and adolescent son.

- **Description:** average height but seems larger than life to his followers. Wears ill-fitting paper scrubs. Shaved his head to resemble a monk.
- **Traits:** oddly charming and polite, but delusional and narcissistic.

**Roleplaying hooks:** wishes to convert the investigators into Noppera-bō through tattoos, rather than destroy them.



“Crazy” Kazu



### “Crazy” Kazu, age 44, Noppera-bō gangster

Crazy Kazu was a gangster working for the Umezawa-gumi syndicate until a few months ago, when he was remanded to a psychiatric ward following a violent confrontation with his gang brothers. In the hospital, he was converted into a Noppera-bō by Yamamoto. After that, he went independent in his criminal enterprises. He currently owns Club Xanadu in East Shinjuku, which functions as his headquarters.

Although Kazu spends much of his time in Club Xanadu, he makes unannounced spot inspections of his other business interests. Kazu also visits the Tokyo Metropolitan Psychiatric Hospital at irregular hours of the day and night on a weekly basis. He drives a white delivery van when he visits the hospital, and a motorcycle to visit his other business interests that are not within walking distance.

- **Description:** a wiry, chain-smoking yakuza; wears well-fitting, stylish clothing, using powers as needed to make off-the-rack items more tailored.
- **Traits:** unlike other Noppera-bō, he retains a significant portion of his original personality, and he displays a greater level of independent thought. He still enjoys smoking and eating, on those occasions when he assumes a mouth.
- **Roleplaying hooks:** intended to serve as this scenario’s mini boss; however, Kazu becomes the main antagonist if the investigators dispatch Yamamoto too soon.

## START: HE WEARS A PALLID MASK

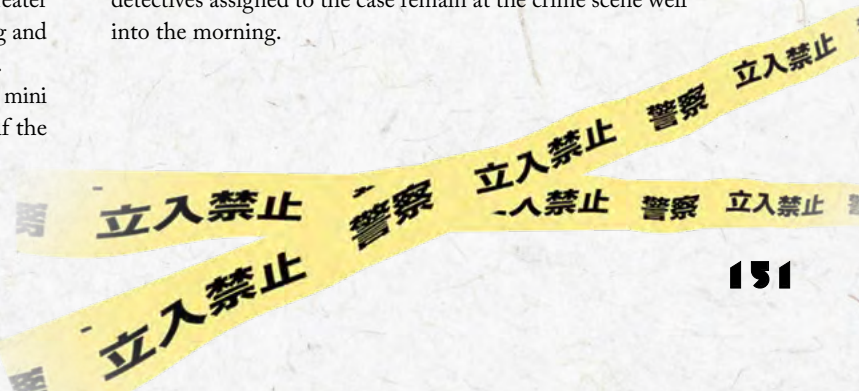
- **Date:** Spring 1987, during *sakura* (cherry blossom) season.
- **Location:** Kabukicho district; Shinjuku ward, Tokyo.
- **Leads Out:** **Morgue of the Faceless** (page 157); **The Umezawa-gumi** (page 158).
- **Purpose:** the investigators are called to investigate a faceless corpse found in an alley in the heart of Shinjuku. They forge relations with the police NPCs and discover the corpse’s link to the yakuza.

The constant neon glow of bars, hostess clubs, and love hotels mark these streets as Kabukicho. Patrons revel at nearly all hours of the night and day, earning it the nickname *nemuranai machi* (“the town that never sleeps”). The crowds thin to a few drunks and a handful of exhausted workers only in the final hours before sunrise. During one of these relatively quiet lulls, in perhaps the district’s most vacant and poorly lit alley, patrolling beat cops came upon the body. It took less than an hour for detectives to cordon off the crime scene with yellow tape.

Beat cops Ota and Nakamoto discovered the corpse, face-down, in the alley in the most eastern portion of Kabukicho. Officer Ota’s attempt to roll the body over stopped short as he and Officer Nakamoto caught a glimpse of a face that inexplicably lacked all features. In a state of shock, the officers staggered backward, allowing the body and head to roll back across the asphalt into its original position.

Officer Nakamoto vomited against the side of the building. Officer Ota, a 20-year veteran, called in a possible homicide and specifically asked that Chief Kurosawa be immediately informed about their finding. Chief Kurosawa and his top two detectives, Tanaka and Okawa, arrived at the scene less than an hour later.

Investigators who have a strong “in” with either the local police department or the National Police Agency can be made aware of the situation and arrive at **The Crime Scene** (page 155) before the body is bagged and sent to National Hospital Medical Center for autopsy. Those arriving at the crime scene after sunrise may inspect the scene but need to visit the morgue (see **Morgue of the Faceless**, page 157) to view the corpse. The officers who found the corpse and the detectives assigned to the case remain at the crime scene well into the morning.







## CHAPTER 4

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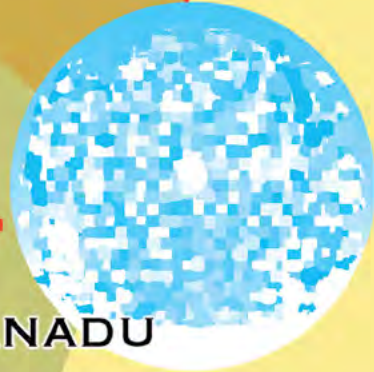
# MORGUE OF THE FACELESS



# THE UMEZAWA-GUMI



## AN AUDIENCE WITH A PRINCE



# XANADU



# CHATEAU CARCOSA

## EPILOGUE



## THE SHADOW (FLOATING)



## POLICE CHIEF KUROSAWA

Chief Kurosawa knows Officer Ota and respects his judgment. So, when he got the call in the early hours of the morning, he knew the situation warranted his involvement.

The chief worries about a possible leak and wants to get in front of any media coverage to avoid a possible scandal or embarrassment. Therefore, he assigned his two most accomplished detectives, Tanaka and Okawa, to lead the investigation. He also notified Special Agent Mizutani Shogo (see “**The Fed**,” Chapter 1, page 45), his contact within the PSIA, of the situation. Investigators introduced to the chief by Mizutani are brought into the investigation. Otherwise, the investigators must earn Chief Kurosawa’s respect to be entrusted with access to police facilities and resources.

- A successful **Psychology** roll reveals that Chief Kurosawa is troubled by the implications of this case. He doesn’t know what to make of the fact that the corpse lacks facial features. He also recognizes that the corpse’s tattoos mark him as a member of the yakuza, and this makes him nervous.
- A successful **Law** or **Persuade** roll grants the investigators the authority to enter the crime scene—unless they are, of course, police officers. Name-dropping Special Agent Mizutani or a politically powerful figure grants the investigators access (no roll required).

**Keeper note:** investigators failing the roll for obtaining access can use alternative ways to view the crime scene, morgue, or

use other police resources. Ask the investigators to leverage their various contacts and make skill rolls as appropriate. Do not make the investigators’ lives difficult here, as they need to access the information from these locations to pursue the plot; thus, reward creativity and don’t overtly block their efforts. Note that the chief makes life difficult for investigators who get caught trespassing or misusing police resources.

## THE BEAT COPS

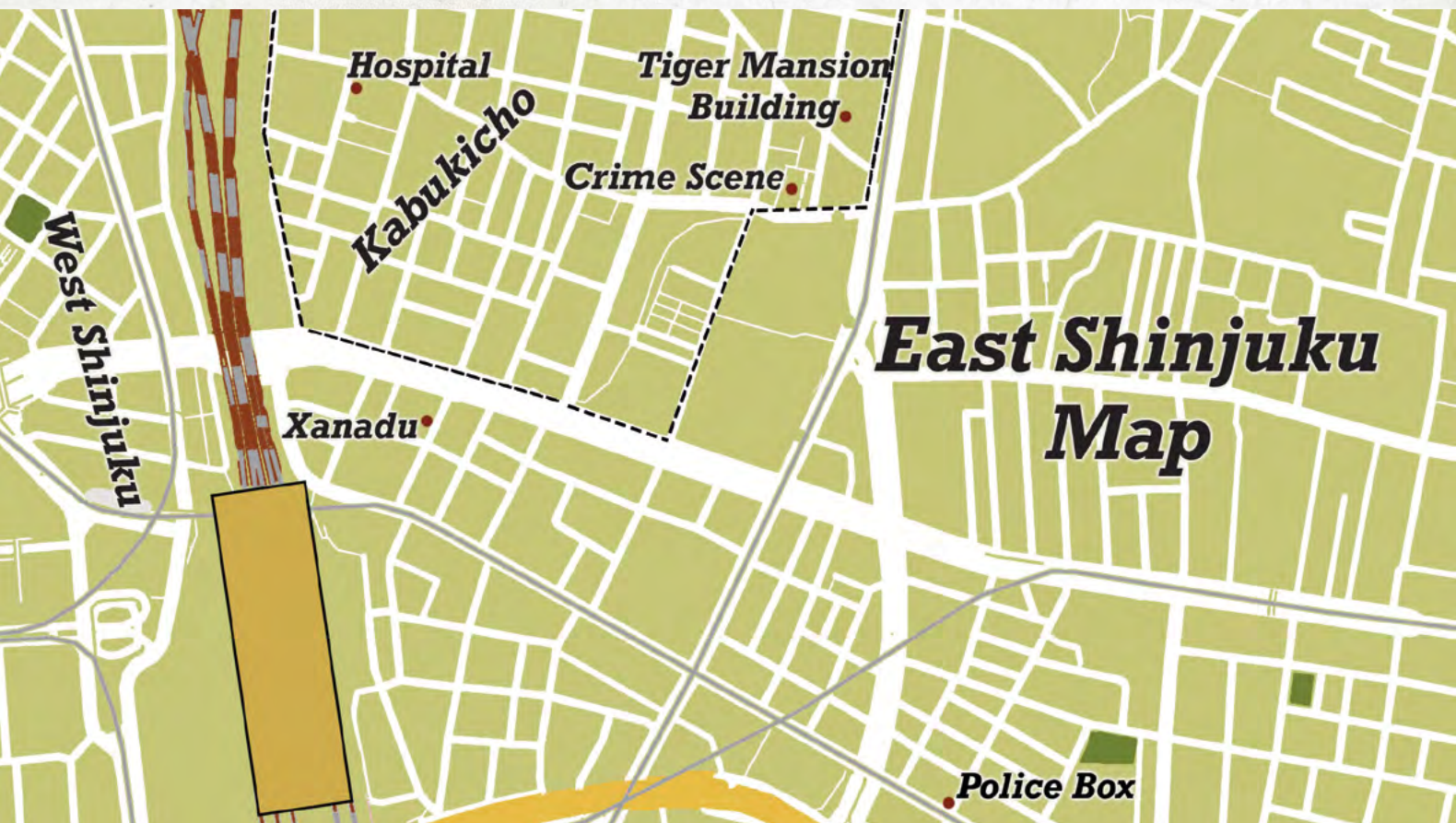
Officers Nakamoto and Ota found the body while on patrol a little after 03:00 (3 am).

### Officer Nakamoto

- Officer Nakamoto, who graduated from cadet school a year ago, is muscular but a bit short compared to most of his colleagues. He enjoys his job—at least he did until the discovery of the faceless body. He is relatively naive and trusting for a beat cop, and freely recites the details of his discovery, including the moment when he vomited against the wall.
- If asked for his opinion about the faceless corpse, he blurts out that he thinks it is a Noppera-bō, a mythological monster or spirit. He then tells the investigators that, at first, he thought that corpse was wearing a mask—and that his partner, Officer Ota, had to inform him that the corpse wore “no mask!”
- He remains fixated on the lack of a mask and wants the investigators to understand this fact. He still reels from his brief encounter with the Mythos.

Map 12: East Shinjuku

Opposite: Map 11: Pallid Masks Scenario Structure





### Officer Ota

- A veteran beat cop, he can't remember another discovery more bizarre than finding a body without eyes, ears, nose, or mouth. A successful **Psychology** roll indicates that Officer Ota is disturbed by the faceless corpse and can't decide what to make of it.
- He does not offer any opinions on the corpse or the crime scene without a successful **Charm, Fast Talk, Persuade, or Law** roll.
- He is familiar with the various gangs on his beat, and he recognizes the corpse's tattoos as those of the **Umezawa-gumi** clan (page 158). He can confirm that the Umezawa-gumi specializes in extortion, racketeering, and *bottakuri* (bait-and-switch scams)—see **Lore Sheet 13: Bottakuri**.

**Keeper note:** if the investigators have police credentials or similar status, and ask either of the beat cops about possible witnesses, Officer Ota responds by asserting that they have not been able to find any witnesses despite their best efforts. Use the Police Officer profile for these NPCs (see **The Pallid Masks of Tokyo: Characters & Monsters**, page 174).

## THE DETECTIVES

Unless the investigators are police officers, the detectives are unlikely to tell them much without a valid reason or a convincing argument. An alternative tack might be to

offer them something, effectively trading information for information—the detectives could give them a lead, such as looking into the Umezawa-gumi, and if the investigators can turn up “something useful,” they could be willing to deal. A successful **Psychology** roll reveals that Detective Tanaka holds a deep-seated distrust of everyone and everything, so approaching Detective Okawa might be an easier route to take.

Regarding the faceless corpse, Detective Tanaka's cynicism extends to even his own senses and faculties:

- With a successful **Persuade, Charm, or Law** roll, Detective Tanaka discloses that the tattoos covering the victim's arms and hands mark the victim as a member of the Umezawa-gumi. He says he is fairly certain that, based on those tattoos, the victim was a low-level street enforcer named Nishiyama Akira.
- Any investigator with a police, private detective, or criminal background can confirm this suspicion with a **Know** roll, or call in favors to identify the tattoos.

The investigators may also speak to Tanaka's partner, Detective Okawa:

- After a short discussion and a successful **Psychology** roll, the investigators deduce that Okawa respects those with talents and skill sets useful for investigations, such as Medicine and other forensic sciences. Okawa opens up to anyone who with a

## Lore Sheet 13: Bottakuri

*Bottakuri* (ぼっ手繰り) describes a bait-and-switch scam involving deception and excessive charges. The yakuza are known to employ this method of defrauding patrons of hostess clubs, massage parlors, and other sexually oriented businesses. Typically, a mark enters a hostess bar, where an attractive young woman attends to him. The prices for drinks on the menu only apply to the mark, but the prices for the hostess' drinks are exorbitant. Marks refusing to pay are threatened by yakuza enforcers. Some marks, especially ones who fall for a particular hostess, can find themselves thousands of dollars in debt to the yakuza.

### Personal Background:

You recall a case of *bottakuri* committed against a salaryman by a member of the Umezawa-gumi. The salaryman never recovered the money extorted from him, but the perpetrator went to prison for three years. You have a working understanding of how the Umezawa-gumi conducts its deceitful business and how it is organized.



**Medicine** skill of 60%+ (or a successful roll) or other forensic science. Attempts using a social skill require a Hard success.

- Detective Okawa's instincts tell her that this is no ordinary victim—she believes that the body is a Noppera-bō. If the investigators catch onto this, they can play on her belief to ensure she opens up to them, enabling them to establish a working relationship with her.

## The Crime Scene

A neat cordon of yellow crime-scene tape blocks off the alley, and half-a-dozen uniformed officers turn away onlookers, especially reporters and camera-carrying news crews.

- To enter the crime scene, the investigators must have obtained permission from Chief Kurosawa, Detective Tanaka, or Detective Okawa. Without consent, gaining entry requires sneaking past a uniformed officer (**Stealth**) or talking their way in with a successful Hard **Fast Talk** or **Persuade** roll.

If the body has yet to be bagged, it lies sprawled out, face down on the asphalt. Otherwise, a chalk outline marks the spot where the body was found.

- Once in the alley, the investigators may attempt a **Spot Hidden** or **Track** roll to analyze the scene. There is no evidence to suggest that the body was dumped there. Additionally, the body was discovered next to a toppled stack of crates and empty beer bottles, some of which are broken. The toppled crates and broken bottles suggest a struggle, as the owner of a nearby izakaya, a Japanese pub, neatly places empty bottles in these crates for recycling. The correct deduction is that the victim died in the alley.
- Using **Psychology** to profile the perpetrator(s) can reveal that the body has not been posed or moved from where it initially fell, suggesting that the perpetrators panicked and fled without taking any trophies, adulterating the crime scene, or attempting to cover up their deed.

## The Body

If the body has not yet been moved to the morgue, the investigators may get a closer look; otherwise, they need to visit the **Morgue of the Faceless** (following) to inspect the body.

- The muscular, tattooed body was found with a cheap plastic wallet, some cash, and no identification. His left little finger is missing the top two joints—a clear sign of yakuza

membership (no roll required)—but the amputation is old and fully healed.

- A successful **Anthropology** or **Law** roll reveals that the tattoos on the arms and hands, mostly plum blossoms and river motifs, mark the body as a foot soldier in the Umezawa-gumi crime syndicate; however, the tattoos on the back are an intricate and complex pattern of kanji carved and inked on top of pre-existing tattoos.

**Keeper note:** investigators looking at the back tattoos suffer 1D6 Exposure Points (along with 2D10 EP Initial Exposure rolls if appropriate—see **Exposure**, Chapter 1, page 24), as these tattoos are a faithful reproduction of a passage from the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*.

- A successful **Occult** or **Language (Japanese)** roll reveals that the archaic kanji used in the tattoos hold ritualistic or spiritual connotations, including a reference to “meditations upon selflessness.” Those who have already read the *Sutra* can identify the tattoo as a complete rendition of “The Sermon under the Sakura Blossoms” from the text.
- An investigator inspecting the tattoos and succeeding with a **Medicine** roll can determine that the dorsal and posterior tattoos are relatively new (within the past two weeks) and, although surprisingly intricate, were likely fashioned in the same way prison tattoos are fashioned—carved into the skin using a scalpel or hobby knife, with ink taken from a ballpoint pen.
- A successful **Medicine** roll identifies perimortem bruises on the faceless body's neck, shoulders, and chest. The neck is broken. Blood pooling and body temperature put the time of death between 01:00 and 03:00 (1 am and 3 am).
- Turning the body over reveals the corpse to be devoid of facial features; no eyes, nose, mouth, or ears; just smooth skin over the bone structure. Viewing the horrific Noppera-bō provokes a **Sanity** roll (1/1D6 loss).
- Success with an **Occult** or **Cthulhu Mythos** roll identifies the body as that of a Noppera-bō—hand out **Lore Sheet 12: Noppera-bō** if players have not yet received this information.







## MORGUE OF THE FACELESS

- **Location:** National Hospital Medical Center, Shinjuku ward, Tokyo.
- **Leads In:** **He Wears a Pallid Mask** (preceding).
- **Leads Out:** **An Audience with a Prince** (page 159); **The Umezawa-gumi** (page 158).
- **Purpose:** the investigators get a close first, or further, look at the corpse, and find its plot-critical link to a psychiatric institution. They meet the medical examiner who may cause them problems later.

The police send the faceless body to the National Hospital Medical Center in Shinjuku for autopsy, located at 1 Chome-21-1 Toyama, Shinjuku (westward of Shinjuku station).

- Investigators without either Detective Tanaka or Okawa, or official-looking authorization documents, need a successful **Fast Talk**, **Persuade**, or a Hard **Charm** roll to get past the receptionist to visit the morgue. Failing this, the investigators may sneak past the receptionist or create a diversion. A successful **Stealth** roll indicates that the ruse succeeded, while a failed roll means the investigators are eventually found and ejected from the hospital—but not until after they have visited the morgue.

The hospital's Chief of Medicine, the elderly Dr. Wagatsuma Masanori, can be found in his office, from 08:00 until 13:00 (8 am until 1 pm). Although friendly and willing to help a noble cause, he does not directly involve himself with the day-to-day operations of the morgue and its medical examiner. The responsibility for the daily operation of the morgue falls upon Dr. Sato Hideki, a talented but somewhat socially awkward physician whose poor bedside manner landed him in the basement of the hospital. If accessing the morgue via Dr. Wagatsuma, he introduces the investigators to Dr. Sato before departing.

## MEETING DR. SATO

Cold metal shines from every surface of the morgue, from the door handle to the desk, the drain to the wall of refrigerated lockers that house the dead. The room is a testament to a cold and efficient design aesthetic. The medical examiner, Dr. Sato, pushes his titanium frames up his nose to meet anyone disturbing his work. He holds x-ray images of a human skull in his left hand and a silver fountain pen in his right hand.

Dr. Sato doesn't get many visitors to the morgue, and it shows. He begrudgingly puts his work on hold to awkwardly greet the investigators. Even if they don't have actual credentials, he is too poorly socialized to suspect them of lying to him—he takes, at face value, any statement investigators make to the effect that they have permission to be here.

- If the investigators ask Dr. Sato for his medical opinion regarding the faceless corpse, he explains that his analysis has just begun and that it is too early to comment. A successful **Psychology** roll reveals that he is deeply shaken by his initial inspection of the corpse. Dr. Sato won't speculate at this stage of the autopsy, but he will show the investigators the corpse, the x-rays, and lab reports completed to date.

When he extracts the corpse from its refrigerated locker, it is clear that he has not yet performed the autopsy, as the cadaver remains intact. Inspection of the Noppera-bō's featureless head requires a **Sanity** roll (1/1D6 loss), and each viewing of the tattoos that cover its back inflicts 1D6 Exposure Points. Confounded investigators who examine the Noppera-bō's corpse on multiple occasions must keep making **Sanity** rolls, up to a total loss of 6 points; no limit applies to the cumulative gain of EP.

See **The Body** (page 155) for information available through a cursory or external examination of the corpse. Forensic examination by Dr. Sato adds the following points of interest:

- X-rays show a normal bone structure, including all parts of the skull; however, facial features remain absent during any physical inspection.
- The lab report does not indicate the presence of any illegal drugs or stimulants; however, it is positive for the presence of powerful sedatives and an antidepressant—the type of drugs prescribed by psychiatrists and clinical psychologists.
- A successful **Spot Hidden** roll notices an unsigned, early draft autopsy report on Dr. Sato's desk. The report includes a determination of homicide and sets out the cause of death as by internal severance of the spinal cord.
- If the investigators have the corpse's name (from Detective Tanaka), calling various psychiatric hospitals in and around the Tokyo metropolitan area confirms that Tokyo Metropolitan Psychiatric Hospital recently admitted Nishiyama Akira in its Secure Unit. Investigators succeeding with a **Library Use**, **Charm**, **Fast Talk**, or **Persuade** roll can complete the search within 1D2 days; with an Extreme success, they complete the search within an hour. Obtaining the clue to the Tokyo Metropolitan Psychiatric Hospital leads to **An Audience with a Prince** (page 159).



## NEW SCENARIO HOOK: A BOOK OF SKINS

Keepers who want to flesh out a new scenario or explore a possible emergent narrative may consider using a new hook, where a fixated Dr. Sato takes to skinning and preserving the tattooed skins of the Noppera-bō that come to his morgue. He then sews the preserved skins into a book, making an unconscious homage to the *Sutra*.

**Keeper note:** Tokyo Metropolitan Psychiatric Hospital is in Setagaya ward, and not on the Shinjuku map.

**Keeper note 2:** the case of the Noppera-bō presents a unique challenge to the sanity of the otherwise resolute medical examiner. Dr. Sato is unwilling, perhaps unable, to ever conclude his autopsy, always finding the need to complete another test or scrutinize another result. To make matters worse, the corpses of any Noppera-bō the investigators manage to dispatch over the course of the scenario are also sent to Dr. Sato for autopsy. Over time, and with repeated Exposure to the *Sutra* tattoos, Dr. Sato's mind unravels until he becomes a Noppera-bō, ready to reveal his true faceless form at the most terrifying opportunity.

## OPTIONAL: THE UMEZAWA-GUMI

- **Location:** Tiger Mansion Building, Shinjuku, Tokyo.
- **Leads In:** **He Wears a Pallid Mask** (page 151); **Morgue of the Faceless** (preceding).
- **Leads Out:** **An Audience with a Prince** (page 159); **Xanadu** (page 165).
- **Purpose:** an optional scene that may add tension by introducing the Umezawa-gumi, a dangerous criminal enterprise, which can provide an early pointer to Crazy Kazu.

The investigators may wish to follow up the yakuza connection by contacting the Umezawa-gumi gang. Those with police contacts or similar backgrounds know that the gang's headquarters is in the Tiger Mansion Building on the edge of Shinjuku Ni-chome and Kabukicho—this is an open secret known to all.

Investigators with no previous knowledge of the yakuza can find the location of the HQ—and possibly engineer an introduction—by making a successful **Charm, Fast Talk,**

or **Persuade** roll, or a Hard **Intimidate** roll, at any tattoo parlor in Kabukicho. Tattoo studios are legal (since 1948) but are currently the sole territory of gangsters. Note that if the investigators try to intimidate a tattooist or one of their customers, they may meet repercussions from the gang later.

The Tiger Mansion is a four-story brick building originally constructed for residential purposes. A few years ago, the Umezawa-gumi repurposed the entire fourth floor into a “business office” for their base of operations. The stenciled-acrylic paint on the glass door of the main entrance reads, “Tiger Trading Co. K.K.,” one of a dozen front companies controlled by the Umezawa-gumi.

Inside, the office looks just like those of similarly sized private companies. Twenty cubicles sit in rows atop cheap carpet, while fluorescent lamps mounted on ceiling panels provide the room with white light. A dozen or so young men in cheap suits work the phones in their cubicles. The Umezawa-gumi do not bother to station guards at the door, as this is an office—engaged in sharp business practices under the cover of law—and surely no sane person would want to cause trouble with the yakuza. A variety of makeshift weapons, including baseball bats, crowbars, and kitchen knives can be found stashed in desk drawers, cabinets, and such, and can be gathered up at a moment's notice.

Beyond, the sound of men laughing emanates from a glass-fronted “fish-bowl” office, its door partially open. Within sits Tsukasa Renji, the Oyabun (literally “father-figure”) who controls the Umezawa-gumi, conversing with his lieutenant, named Yamaguchi, and two heavily tattooed yakuza soldiers. The Oyabun wears a hand-tailored suit, a platinum wristwatch, and an assortment of diamond rings. His lieutenant also wears a suit, while the soldiers are in worker pants and sleeveless tee-shirts that show off their tattoos, one depicts a golden carp swimming up rapids while the other has a tree-branch sagging with the weight of ripe plums.

## THE OYABUN: TSUKASA

If the investigators behave politely, they are invited to sit with the Oyabun to discuss whatever business they might have. A foot soldier in his early twenties brings a pot of fresh tea and refreshments for the investigators, bowing deeply before leaving the room. Assuming the investigators remain respectful, Tsukasa relates the following:

- He confirms that the tattoos (plum blossoms and river motifs) on the hands and arms of the faceless body belonged to Nishiyama Akira.
- Nishiyama went missing or disassociated with the Umezawa-gumi a few weeks ago. A successful **Psychology**



roll confirms his assertion that the Umezawa-gumi was not involved in Nishiyama's death.

Tsukasa's response to the remainder of the investigators' inquiries depends upon their tone. Investigators succeeding with a **Charm** or **Persuade** roll can coax more out of him, including the following key details:

- Nishiyama Akira was a foot soldier in the Umezawa-gumi.
- A former lieutenant with the moniker "Crazy" Kazu may have something to do with Nishiyama's disappearance.
- Crazy Kazu began acting weird and erratic and was involuntarily committed to the Secure Unit of the Tokyo Metropolitan Psychiatric Hospital after getting into a scuffle with brother members a few months ago—this clue suggests they make a visit to the hospital's Secure Unit (see **An Audience with a Prince**, following).
- Crazy Kazu left the Umezawa-gumi on bad terms shortly after his release from hospital, just over a month ago. Kazu wanted to start his own gang and began recruiting from the ranks of the Umezawa-gumi. When Nishiyama disappeared a few weeks ago, everyone assumed he joined Crazy Kazu's splinter group.
- Kazu used the organization's resources to seize a controlling interest in the dance club **Xanadu** (page 165), just after his release from the hospital.
- Tsukasa clearly intends to deal with Kazu in due course. He adds that no tear would be shed should Kazu be arrested or suffer an "accident" by the investigators' hands.
- If asked why Kazu would be interested in Xanadu, Tsukasa admits that he doesn't understand why, and can't fathom Kazu's angle for taking over the club; and, given current rental costs, he believes that it's a poor acquisition and terrible business decision.

Investigators attempting to **Intimidate** or who insist on bringing the law into the conversation with Tsukasa are met with strong resistance—this course of action may end in violence. Tsukasa argues that all his sources of income are from "legitimate business concerns," and he does not take kindly to being insulted in front of his men.

- Investigators succeeding with a **Charm** roll are able to calm the situation down, and/or have a more organic conversation that teases out the organization's "legitimate business concerns" as including ownership stakes in several pachinko parlors and brothels, a real estate agency, and a hospital janitorial-services company, which includes a janitorial contract for Tokyo Metropolitan Psychiatric

Hospital—the same hospital where Crazy Kazu was involuntarily committed for several months.

- Given this last information, one might posit (**INT** roll if necessary) that Kazu has been leveraging this janitorial service arrangement to promote his own interests.
- A successful **Law** or Hard **Know** roll confirms that the pachinko parlors are money-laundering operations, and that the contracts to provide janitorial services to hospitals and other government buildings tend to be won through campaigns of intimidation.

**Keeper note:** if the investigators do not talk to Tsukasa about the Umezawa-gumi's business interests, have one of their contacts (perhaps one of the police NPCs) provide the information—specifically the link to the janitorial services company servicing hospitals, like the Tokyo Metropolitan Psychiatric Hospital.

Alternatively, allow the investigators to dig up this information via street-level information gathering (using a social skill) or through conducting a review of public records (**Accounting**) to realize the link to the Umezawa-gumi. Of course, if an investigator has a prior relationship with the Umezawa-gumi, they would understand the organization's business model and be aware of their business fronts (no roll).

## AN AUDIENCE WITH A PRINCE

- **Location:** Tokyo Metropolitan Psychiatric Hospital Secure Unit, Setagaya, Tokyo.
- **Leads In:** **Morgue of the Faceless** (page 157); **The Umezawa-gumi** (preceding); **Xanadu** (page 165).
- **Leads Out:** **Château Carcosa** (page 169).
- **Purpose:** the investigators visit the hospital, probing for a connection to the Noppera-bō corpse. Their search leads them to a patient claiming to be the "Pale Prince."

Yamamoto Minoru believes he is the "Pale Prince, Rightful Ruler of Carcosa and Regent of the Universe." Dr. Sasaki Kanako, the Unit Chief (senior psychiatrist) at the Tokyo Metropolitan Psychiatric Hospital, diagnosed Yamamoto with schizophrenia and narcissistic personality disorder. Both Yamamoto and Dr. Sasaki believe themselves to be in operational control of the psychiatric ward. Every day, Dr. Sasaki's grip weakens while Yamamoto's influence strengthens.

A little over a month prior to the beginning of the scenario, Yamamoto befriended another patient known



only as “Crazy” Kazu, a lieutenant in the Umezawa-gumi crime syndicate. Yamamoto enthralled Kazu with tales of a heroic “Pale Prince” who would save humanity from fear and pain, one soul at a time, starting with Kazu. With Kazu’s permission, Yamamoto carved and inked a passage from the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* across Kazu’s back.

Kazu and his cohorts, disguised as janitors, use the resources and cover of the janitorial-services company—formerly controlled by the Umezawa-gumi until Kazu’s usurpation—to freely enter and exit the hospital.

Once a week, Yamamoto transforms at least one new foot soldier into a Noppera-bō by meticulously tattooing the convert with the same passage from the *Sutra*. Most of Yamamoto’s supplicants are yakuza foot soldiers brought to him by Crazy Kazu, but Yamamoto has also talked a couple of orderlies into undergoing the transformation.

As the Noppera-bō infestation spreads, so does Carcosa’s influence. If left unchecked, the infestation continues until Yamamoto, as the embodiment of the Prince of Pale Leaves, secures absolute control over the psychiatric hospital, eventually turning it into **Château Carcosa** (page 169).

**Keeper note:** unless the investigators set a trap or otherwise plan accordingly, Kazu is unlikely to be present during the investigators’ first visit to the hospital.

## ENTERING THE PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL

Tokyo Metropolitan Psychiatric Hospital includes a ward for low-risk patients (the Open Unit) and a ward for the detention of patients who may harm themselves or others

(the Secure Unit), which is based in a building separate from the Open Unit.

A concrete wall, 8 feet (2.5 m) high, surrounds the entire hospital. As a rule, hospital security does not patrol the exterior premises; patients in the Open Unit are not viewed as dangerous, while patients in the Secure Unit are, at least in theory, detained in a secure facility.

A small guard booth (unarmed security guards) stands at the main entrance to the hospital. The guards mostly give directions and turn away lost individuals. The guard booth is equipped with a phone for calling ward receptionists, hospital staff, and, if need be, the local police.

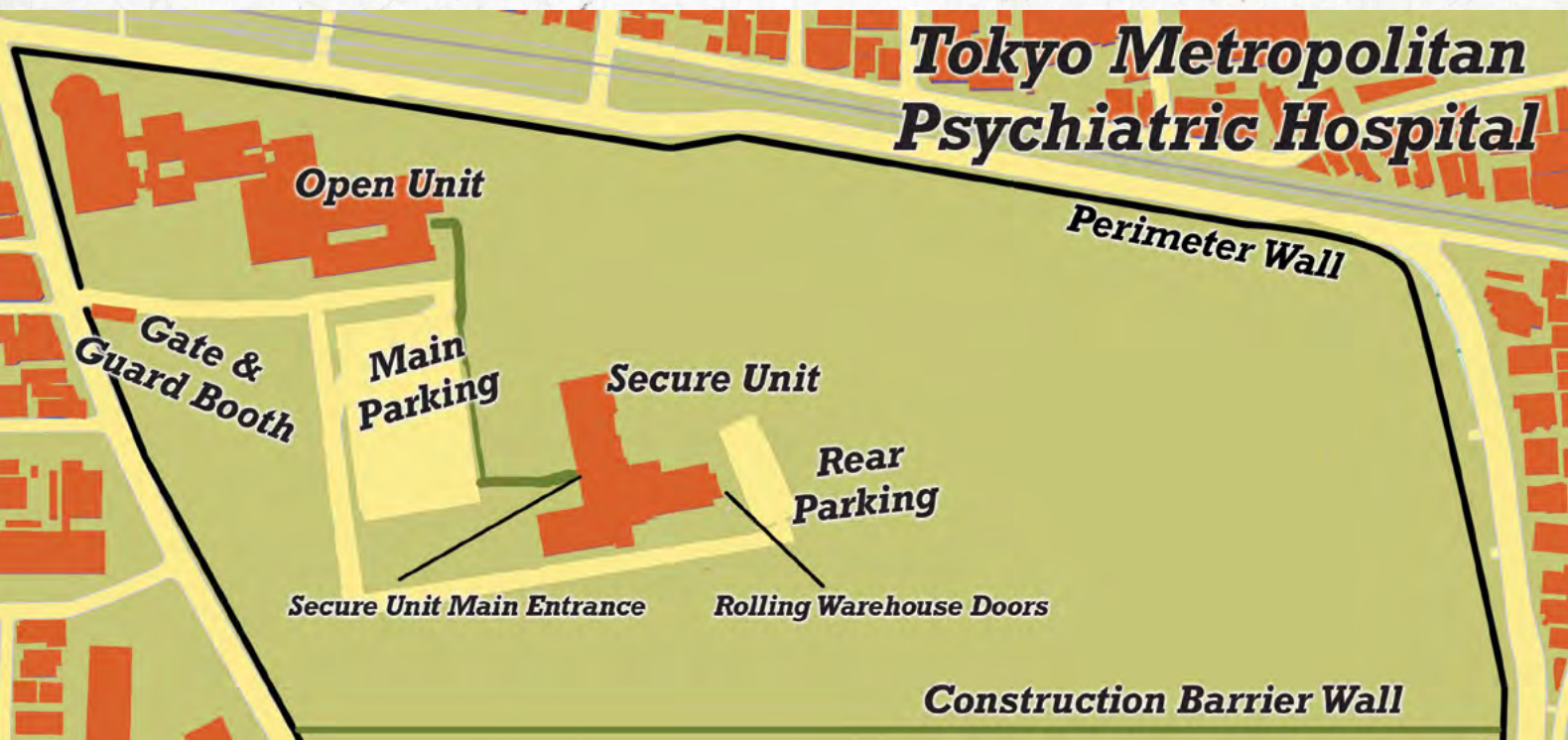
The guards maintain a visitor log with a list of appointments and regularly scheduled visitors, including, for example, fresh linen delivery. Note that the guards admit any visitor who appears to have a legitimate reason for visiting the hospital. Police, doctors, licensed psychiatrists, and clinical psychologists are admitted without question, as are patients with appointments. Thus, as long as they have the credentials or can reasonably bluff their way in as a patient or the family members of a patient, no rolls are required from the investigators.

Investigators passing themselves off as janitors or other hospital contractors may bypass the guards with a successful **Disguise**, **Charm**, or **Fast Talk** roll, made with a bonus die. If all else fails, the investigators can simply hop over the concrete wall, but would need to succeed with a **Stealth** roll to avoid being spotted and reported to the police.

### To the Secure Unit

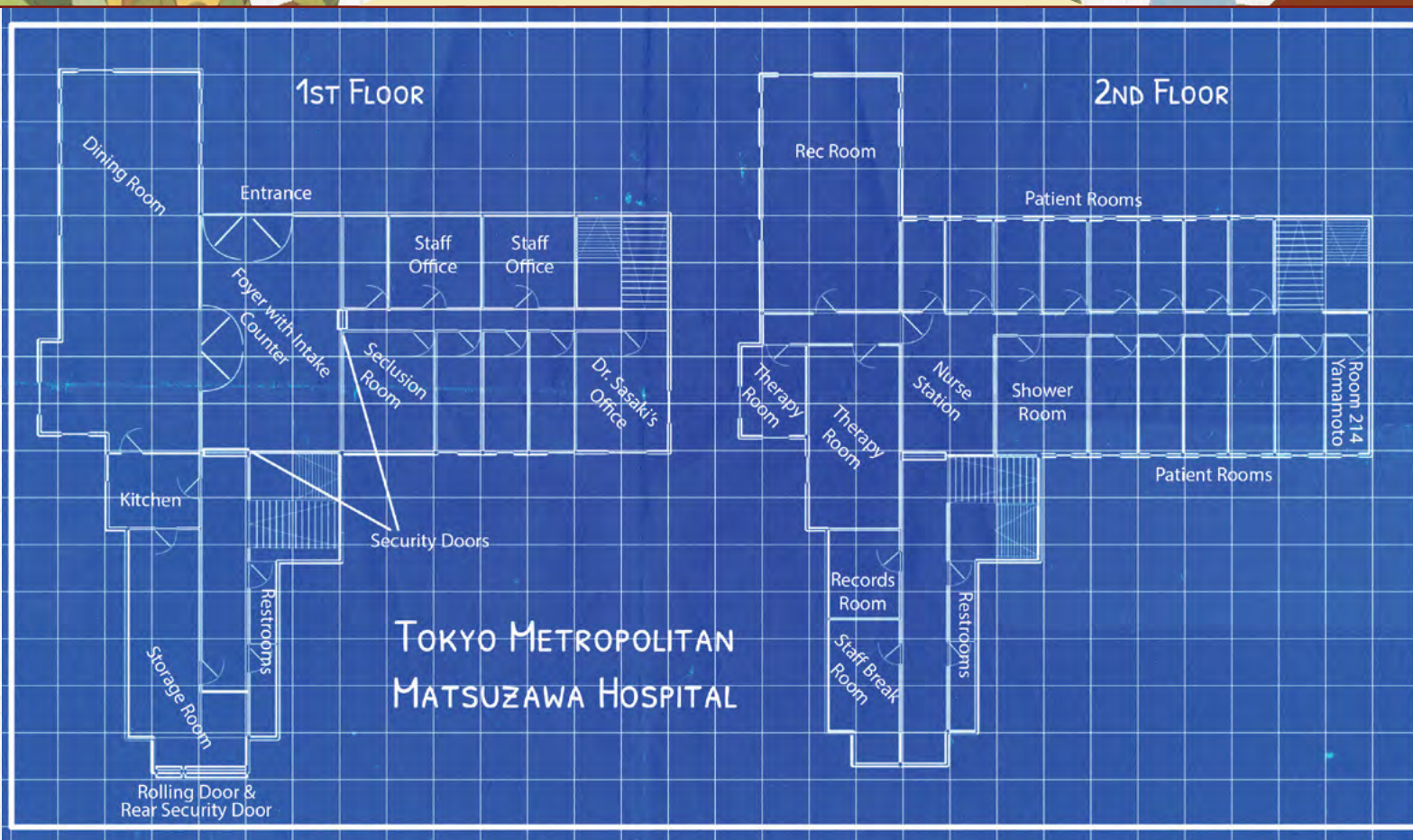
Once past the main gates, the investigators can make their way to the Secure Unit. A friendly but particularly bored guard stands at the doors to the Secure Unit, and doesn’t bother

Map 13: Hospital Grounds





## THE PALLID MASKS OF TOKYO



anyone who confidently walks past him. Inside, the receptionist behind the intake counter, Nurse Oshiro, is a stickler for the rules. Nurse Oshiro escorts the investigators with official appointments to Dr. Sasaki's office. Without an official appointment, Nurse Oshiro only assists the investigators if they can justify their visit, such as by saying they are on police business or are a group of visiting mental health professionals (**Fast Talk**, **Persuade**, **Intimidate**, **Disguise**, or **Law** roll).

Without sufficient justification, the investigators can attempt to sneak past Nurse Oshiro (create a diversion or use **Stealth**), and either use a successful **Locksmith** roll or force the door with a Hard **STR** roll. If the diversion is effective enough, they may be able to get the key for the door, which lies on a shelf under the counter.

Alternatively, the investigators can enter the Secure Unit through a service entrance at the back of the building. A rolling-steel service door stays open during the day and during scheduled deliveries. This rolling door covers a service bay large enough to park two vans. If the rolling door is open, the investigators may enter by pretending to be janitors (**Disguise**, **Charm**, or **Fast Talk**) or by sneaking in (**Stealth**). If at night, the service door is closed, although the investigators can

open the door with either a key—a copy of which is given to all contract janitors—or with a successful **Locksmith** or **Mechanical Repair** roll.

Lastly, a more extreme entry route sees one or more investigators getting themselves committed for psychological evaluation. Gaining entry in this manner requires no roll; however, later freeing oneself could be challenging.

If the investigators get their hands on the same janitorial-service uniforms and ID badges—like the ones that Crazy Kazu's gang uses—they may enter and exit the premises at will.

### SECURE UNIT CHIEF, DR. SASAKI

As the Secure Unit Chief, Dr. Sasaki enjoys a large, corner office in the north wing of the unit. Her office is clean and clear of clutter. Her medical degree hangs on the wall, next to a scroll of Japanese calligraphy, which her father commissioned for her as a graduation gift. She keeps a photograph of her dog, a Shiba Inu, beside a neat stack of folders on her desk. The office boasts a wide window that overlooks the hospital's grounds in which stands a beautiful *sakura* (cherry) tree in full bloom.







- Dr. Sasaki confirms the identity of her past and current patients, but generally avoids disclosing potentially delicate information with anyone except the police and consulting physicians. Investigators who are neither of these may attempt to glean details from Dr. Sasaki with a successful **Charm, Fast Talk, or Persuade** roll; if they talk glowingly about Shiba Inu dogs or express a liking for the calligraphy scroll, grant a bonus die.
- Once Dr. Sasaki opens up to the investigators about her patients, she cooperates with their investigation to the fullest extent legally and morally permissible.

## If asked about Nishiyama Akira, the dead yakuza

Dr. Sasaki retrieves Nishiyama Akira's folder from a filing cabinet and, after studying this, she can:

- Confirm that Nishiyama Akira was admitted to the Secure Unit for observation a few weeks ago and received treatment, including a powerful sedative and an antidepressant.
- Recall seeing Nishiyama's gangster-affiliated tattoos, but remembers little else about him, other than he was in the same gang as another patient she calls "Kazu-san."
- Explain that the records do not contain a diagnosis of mental illness or disorder, which is not unusual given the short amount of time Nishiyama was detained, prior to his release three days ago.

## If asked about Crazy Kazu

- Kazu-san is involved with the yakuza and has been repeatedly institutionalized in prisons and psychiatric hospitals due to frequent violent psychotic episodes.
- According to the hospital's records, Kazu-san is not currently a patient. Dr. Sasaki then admits it is sometimes hard for orderlies and nurses to keep track of Kazu-san's status, given the frequency of his admissions to the hospital. She notes his last discharge as being just over a month ago.
- Kazu-san was befriended by a peculiar patient named Yamamoto Minoru. At first, Dr. Sasaki worried about the contact between them as Yamamoto suffers from severe schizophrenic delusions; however, their unexpected friendship appears to have positively impacted Kazu-san's state of mind. The patient record indicates a significant decrease in Kazu-san's emotional outbursts and destructive compulsions, which served as the impetus for his discharge from care.

## If shown photographs of the tattoo on Nishiyama's back

- Dr. Sasaki immediately connects the tattoos on his back to patient Yamamoto Minoru. "*Strange... that looks like something I've seen in another patient's file.*" If pressed, she says the patient is Yamamoto Minoru.

## If asked about Yamamoto Minoru

- Yamamoto Minoru is a former salaryman who was involuntarily admitted last year after using a hobby knife to carve kanji on the backs of his restrained wife and adolescent son.
- Yamamoto's behavior includes obsessive notetaking, disorganized speech, and delusions, including a belief that he is the "Pale Prince" of a mythical kingdom he calls "Carcosa." Dr. Sasaki's diagnosis is schizophrenia and narcissistic personality disorder.
- During cognitive behavioral therapy sessions, Yamamoto has often referred to a manga comic book called *Aokuchiba Monogatari* (*The Tale of Pale Leaves*).
- Yamamoto can be quite charming and appears to get along well with the staff and other patients, including Kazu-san. Although still delusional, he has not exhibited violent behavior and is something of a model patient. If it weren't for the grisly nature of the acts that resulted in his confinement, Dr. Sasaki would have recommended his transfer to the Open Unit.
- Dr. Sasaki suggests that curious investigators meet with Yamamoto.

When necessary, a successful **Psychology** roll shows that Dr. Sasaki seems completely unaware of Yamamoto's activities in the hospital, including his habit of carving tattoos into the backs of others. Dr. Sasaki genuinely knows nothing about Noppera-bō or the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*.

**Keeper note:** Dr. Sasaki is oblivious to the threat posed by Yamamoto and does not fully appreciate that he has secured the means to move freely about the entire hospital premises. If alerted to this problem, Dr. Sasaki makes every effort to stop Yamamoto from taking over the hospital. Unfortunately, a mere warning does not suffice. Without the intervention of the investigators, Dr. Sasaki eventually succumbs to the Pale Prince, probably via the transformative tattooing process.

## YAMAMOTO, THE PALE PRINCE

During waking hours, Yamamoto Minoru is "escorted" by two orderlies. Yamamoto converted these orderlies and, upon their request, transformed them into Noppera-bō by tattooing the "Meditations on Selflessness" passage from the *Sutra* on their backs. They normally wear their own faces but can drop these at any time.

Yamamoto shaved his head after he was committed; he told Dr. Sasaki that he did this to combat the threat of head lice, but Dr. Sasaki believes he does it because it makes him



## LIFE IN THE SECURE UNIT

Rows of florescent lights keep the hospital common areas well-lit at all times of day. Lights in the patient rooms are turned off every evening at 20:00 (8:00 pm). Copious use of antiseptic ensures that every location and object in the hospital has a sterile, acrid smell.

Hospital guidelines state that all doors in the Secure Unit should be left locked and that patient interaction outside of meals and controlled group therapy sessions should be kept to a minimum. In practice, however, the hospital staff is rather lax in its application of the rules, with the orderlies preferring to control patients deemed unruly with a variety of sedatives and psychotropic drugs inappropriately referred to as “mental straightjackets,” while the janitors routinely forget to lock doors. Long-term patients labeled “unruly” often develop iatrogenic diseases, like tardive dyskinesia—uncontrolled twitching of the facial muscles.

However, the standard of care at the hospital is on par with that found throughout Japan in the 1980s, and most short-term patients (or their families) can expect significant improvements in their mental health after a normal course of treatment.

The hospital employs six security guards, three of whom are always in uniform and on duty. The guards are all men in their late 50s, and they are armed with police batons, but rarely need to use them. The orderlies are the true muscle in the hospital; they vary in sex and age but are all physically imposing and armed with a variety of debilitating pharmaceuticals, which they freely administer to the patients without the objection of doctors or psychiatrists. The orderlies, all veterans in the art of patient submission, enforce order at the hospital.

look like a Buddhist monk. Yamamoto weighs 155 lb (70 kg) and stands 5 feet 7 inches (170 cm) tall, yet he seems taller when he gives sermons to the other patients in the hospital.

Yamamoto routinely holds court before the other patients and anyone else who will listen. These meetings, often sermons, occur in the hallways, cafeteria, gymnasium, his room, or wherever and whenever an opportunity presents itself. Investigators attempting to speak to Yamamoto find themselves in a social situation that feels more like an audience with a prince.

If the conversation takes place during the day, Yamamoto requests they speak under the blossoming *sakura* tree visible from Dr. Sasaki's office; the orderlies comply, taking everyone outside and waiting nearby throughout. If Yamamoto is interviewed in the evening or early morning, it probably takes place in his room, where he sits with his back against the wall, flanked by orderlies.

- When it becomes apparent that the orderlies do his bidding (**Psychology** roll), Yamamoto's room feels more like a throne room than the confines of a psychiatric ward. While those of sound mind see Yamamoto sitting on a vinyl hospital chair, watched over by orderlies, investigators with 50+ EP see the Pale Prince sitting on a gilded gold throne flanked by masked and armored *yojimbo* (bodyguards)—provoking a **Sanity** roll (1/1D3 loss).

Yamamoto takes any meeting with the investigators as an opportunity to enlighten and convert new recruits. He remembers his past life and is willing to talk about it, particularly as it highlights the importance of his new life, new endeavor, and new reality. Examples of Yamamoto's remarks include:

- “*I am the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega. I am the Pale Prince.*”
- “*I wasted countless hours in my previous life. Now, my time is boundless.*”
- “*Yes, I have a wife and son. I was concerned for their safety and wellbeing, so I placed protective wards on their backs.*”
- “*Like the petals of a sakura blossom, open your mind.*”
- “*Kazu-san? I remember him. He is now one with the Pale Prince. He wears the Pallid Mask.*”

A successful **Psychology** roll reveals that Yamamoto genuinely believes he is the Pale Prince, while a **Psychoanalysis** roll may reveal that Yamamoto is unlikely to ever recover from his mental illness.



At an appropriate time, Yamamoto relates to the investigators the “Sermon under the Sakura Blossoms.” This litany incurs 1 EP for those who hear it. Thereafter, Yamamoto offers to enlighten any investigator who appears vulnerable. He promises that he can relieve their pain, fears, and earthly desires. Yamamoto keeps a scalpel, alcohol solution, and cotton swabs on a surgical tray inside his room and asks if he may tattoo their back. If his request is accepted, and after hours of painful carving, such willing supplicants become Noppera-bō—converted investigators are no longer player characters (but see **Ending 1: I Wear No Mask**, page 173).

**Keeper note:** if the investigators manage to confiscate Yamamoto’s scalpel, they can only temporarily delay his plans, as he is always able to procure a new tattooing tool.

### What If They Don’t Meet Yamamoto?

If the investigators never manage to find the trail that leads them to an audience with Yamamoto, their actions do eventually come under the scrutiny and surveillance of Kazu and/or other Noppera-bō. Once informed of the existence of their investigation, Yamamoto engineers a meeting with the investigators by dispatching a formal invitation to meet with him at **Château Carcosa** (page 169). The return address on the invitation’s envelope matches the address for the Tokyo Metropolitan Psychiatric Hospital.

Yamamoto never attempts to defend himself from attacks, leaving that to his two Secure Unit orderlies—see **Pallid Masks of Tokyo: Characters & Monsters**, page 174. If mortally wounded, Yamamoto says something like, “*I foresaw that you would kill my earthly body, but you cannot kill a heavenly idea; ideas are immortal.*”

## NARCOTICS

Possession of illegal drugs carries both substantial criminal liabilities and a significant social stigma in Japan. Despite such considerations, the drug trade has long been part of Japan’s underworld. Most drug abuse in Japan during the 1980s concerned methamphetamines and solvents, although heroin, smuggled from Southeast Asia, was also available. A yakuza-owned and controlled dance club is one of a few places in Japan where illegal drugs can be found for sale.

## OPTIONAL: XANADU

- **Location:** Club Xanadu, East Shinjuku, Tokyo.
- **Leads In:** **The Umezawa-gumi** (page 158).
- **Leads Out:** **An Audience with a Prince** (page 159).
- **Purpose:** an optional scene. If the investigators wish to confront or arrest Crazy Kazu, they find him here.

**Keeper note:** for a plan of Club Xanadu, refer to **Map 7: Nightclub**, as used for **PANIC: Nightclub** in **Chapter 3: Fanfic** (page 118).

The flashing neon lights, the calls of touts, and the writhing masses of salarymen in East Shinjuku, the sketchier side of Shinjuku, all make for an experience that threatens to overwhelm the senses. Club Xanadu sits amidst this chaos, between a row of nightclubs, host and hostess bars, and other quirky venues that line the streets of East Shinjuku. Little differentiates Club Xanadu from its competitors, save for its popular nightly stage performance and dance floor. The club’s undiscerning doorman admits everyone, trusting that the club’s brutish bouncers will act to remove anyone causing a scene or failing to pay their tab.

Open six days a week, and usually packed, Club Xanadu operates from 21:00 until 05:00 (9 pm until 5 am), catering to young professionals looking to burn off steam after a long workday. Like other clubs in the 1980s, Xanadu charges a nominal cover fee and offers a variety of alcoholic drinks ranging from cheap rum and cola to bottles of top-quality branded champagne.

Bouncers police the long queue of clubbers patiently waiting to get into Xanadu. The bouncers, all *chinpira* (low-level yakuza), break up the occasional fight, but, for the most part, their responsibilities are limited to standing around and intimidating those who dare to make eye contact. None of the bouncers have been converted to Noppera-bō, yet.

Music fills the air, while strobe-lights flicker against white clouds belched out of smoke machines. A talented DJ works her magic in a booth equipped with turntables, a synthesizer, and a mixer and sampler. Club revelers dressed in the newest subculture fashions dance and flit across elevated stages.

The bartenders, primarily female college students wearing black and white tuxedos, do their best to keep up with the demands of the clubbers, who include a mix of subcultures. from college students and Japan and Exchange Teachers (JET) to newly minted salarymen. Thanks to the raging bubble economy, most make excellent money and are prepared to burn through this to pursue alcohol-infused nights on the town.



## SOMETHING SPECIAL

Every night, just before midnight, the elevated stage on the main dance floor is cleared for a dance performance by the Team Tokubetsu Dance Troupe. The club bills the nightly performance by Team Tokubetsu as “a *synchronized dance arranged to an electric beat.*”

Team Tokubetsu consists of three Noppera-bō women in short skirts performing a seven-minute synchronized dance to New Wave music mixed with recordings of Yamamoto Minoru reciting the “Litany on Wearing the Empty Mask.” Throughout, the Noppera-bō change their faces and, sometimes, have no face; thus, witnessing the performance provokes a **Sanity** roll (1D2/1D8 loss) and bestows 1 EP.

**Keeper note:** Kazu bought into Club Xanadu to spread Exposure via Team Tokubetsu’s dance.

## KAZU’S OFFICE

Crazy Kazu prefers to spend his time in an office, tucked in the back of the club, but occasionally, he visits the club to inspect his investment, or watches the crowd for possible converts and threats.

The office serves as the base of operations for Kazu’s new organization. The cheap, composite-wood door of the office is left unlocked when Kazu is there and is locked only when he leaves the club. The rear of the office possesses an aluminum door that opens into an alley; this door is fitted with a hydraulic closer, which automatically pulls the door closed; it locks from the inside. Either of the office doors can be opened with a successful **Locksmith** roll, while the interior wooden door may also be knocked through with a **STR** roll. An Extreme **STR** roll can bash open the exterior door.

Pinup-magazine posters adorn the office’s scuffed-up walls. A half-dozen baseball bats and a few iron pipes are stored between a metal locker and one wall. The office’s couch overflows with dirty fast-food wrappers and other trash. Empty beer cans and ashtrays full of cigarette butts lay scattered atop a metal desk and a few occasional tables.

- A successful **Spot Hidden** roll finds books and records pertaining to Club Xanadu and Kazu’s other business interests.
- An **Accounting** roll may determine that Xanadu’s impressive income stream is offset and outpaced by the skyrocketing cost of its rent. Kazu’s other businesses, including a hostess cabaret, show a decent profit. A detailed ledger lists revenue streams or “quotas” for each member of Kazu’s gang, all of whom pay Kazu a tribute from drug dealing and extortion. Payments out include regular small sums to “TMPH orderlies.”

**Keeper note:** *TMPH orderlies* is a lead to the Tokyo Metropolitan Psychiatric Hospital Secure Unit—see **An Audience with a Prince** (page 159), if the investigators haven’t made that connection yet.

If the Keeper decides that the investigators find Crazy Kazu here, his profile can be found in **The Pallid Masks of Tokyo: Characters & Monsters** (page 174). Kazu can call on up to six yakuza bouncers (although the club’s noise means he can’t be heard shouting from his office), and he may summon 1D3+3 Noppera-bō through his mental network.

## THE SHADOW

- **Location:** Tokyo (anywhere).
- **Leads In:** any (special).
- **Leads Out:** any appropriate.
- **Purpose:** a floating scene that can happen when needed. No Noppera-bō story is complete without a scene where investigators can be terrorized by encountering the Noppera-bō in a creepy and desolate location.

Noppera-bō, who revel in inflicting panic and terror, search out vulnerable targets and those most susceptible to the Pale Prince’s message.

Noppera-bō working in tandem use the “old one-two” device, with the first scaring a victim in an isolated location. The victim

### NEW SCENARIO HOOK: CABARET TURF WAR

If desired, the Keeper can expand and add more spice to the plot.

In extending their interests, Crazy Kazu and his cohorts took over a cabaret club where they looked for opportunities to get their hooks into unsuspecting salarymen. Unfortunately, one of their marks happened to be an agent of the Association of Pale Leaves who was scouting the club with the same intention. The APL, now aware of the Noppera-bō, considers Kazu’s gang to be a heretical sect which requires purging.

Matsushima Nobuo, one of the high-ranking members of the APL’s inner circle, approaches the investigators and offers a lucrative proposal if they help in dealing with the faceless monsters. When Kazu learns of this, he could make them a counteroffer. Will the investigators make a deal with a devil or just get caught in the crossfire?



then flees to the local police station (or other safe location), where the second Noppera-bō impersonates a police officer (or other trustworthy person). The second Noppera-bō listens to the victim account of their encounter, waiting until the end of the story before dramatically waving their hand in front of their head, revealing a featureless face, and saying, “*You mean like this?*”

To run this scene, the Keeper selects (1) the Noppera-bō character that is shadowing the investigators or being shadowed by the investigators, (2) the circumstances by which they were transformed into a Noppera-bō prior to the scene, and (3) a suitably isolated, creepy location.

Note that Noppera-bō have a limited networked intelligence—see their profile in **The Pallid Masks of Tokyo: Characters & Monsters** (page 174) that allows them to set up

this double scare. They can also fake someone else’s face or act as mocking doppelgangers to sow mistrust and paranoia. See **Table 7: Noppera-Bō Encounters** for ideas. When the second Noppera-bō is unmasked, the investigators find themselves in a fight or flight situation.

Although Noppera-bō prefer resorting to psychological terror over violence, they defend themselves from attacking investigators. Noppera-bō only give chase to fleeing investigators for the sake of generating greater fear. The odd investigator who neither fights nor flees is typically carried off into the darkness, and ultimately to a location where they, willingly or unwillingly, receive a tattoo taken from the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*.

## TABLE 7: NOPPERA-BO ENCOUNTERS

Character(s)	Circumstances of Transformation	Location of Confrontation*
Crazy Kazu	Yamamoto in the psychiatric hospital.	In an alley or subway while shadowing or being shadowed by the investigators.
Orderlies	Yamamoto in the psychiatric hospital.	Psychiatric hospital.
Janitor	Yamamoto in the psychiatric hospital.	Psychiatric hospital.
Dr. Sasaki, psychiatrist	Yamamoto in the psychiatric hospital.	Psychiatric hospital.
Team Tokubetsu, Para Para Dancers, and DJ	Kazu in Club Xanadu.	Club Xanadu.
Dr. Sato, medical examiner	Transformed after studying the Noppera-bō corpse.	Hospital morgue.
Officers Nakamoto, Ota, Beat Cops	Probably transformed by Kazu.	Koban (small neighborhood police station).
Detectives Tanaka, Okawa	May fall victim to Noppera-bō.	Interrogation room.
Confidants	May fall victim to Noppera-bō.	Safehouse.
Investigator	EP raised to 100 by a Noppera-bō or the tattoos.	See <b>Ending 1: I Wear No Mask</b> (page 173).

\* Other possible locations include:

- A dark corridor in an office building.
- A subway platform after the last train has left the station.
- The moldy stacks of an empty public library.
- An alley that snakes past a cemetery of headstones and stone markers that look like lanterns and pagodas.



歌舞伎 派  
POLICE





**Keeper note:** the key to this scene is nurturing the scenario's emergent narrative. If the investigators befriend officers Nakamoto and Ota, and rely on them to conduct research into Crazy Kazu's operations in Kabukicho, then what better way to terrorize the investigators than to have Nakamoto and Ota reveal themselves to be Noppera-bō at a *Koban* (small neighborhood police station) early one morning before the sun rises? Otherwise, if the investigators are tailing Crazy Kazu, he could lead them onto an empty subway platform, just as the evening's final train departs—then reveal his face without features.

## CHÂTEAU CARCOSA

- **Location:** Tokyo Metropolitan Psychiatric Hospital Secure Unit, Setagaya, Tokyo.
- **Leads In: An Audience with a Prince** (page 159).
- **Purpose:** the scenario's conclusion wherein the investigators return to the Secure Unit to find it transformed into Château Carcosa.

The investigators visit the Secure Unit of Tokyo Metropolitan Psychiatric Hospital. This should be, if at all possible, a second or subsequent visit, not their first time. It may occur in any number of ways, but some possibilities are:

- The investigators chase Crazy Kazu, who takes refuge in Yamamoto Minoru's Secure Unit.
- The investigators infiltrate the hospital in a bid to assassinate Yamamoto.
- The investigators receive a parcel from the Pale Prince inviting them to dine with him at Château Carcosa.
- In a panic, Dr. Sasaki calls the investigators. If they are police officers, she reports that the Secure Unit's patients are being whipped into a religious frenzy by Yamamoto. If the investigators are unconnected to the police, she phones them whimpering that the hospital is "strange" and she can't find her way out—they must come at once to help her find the way out. Has someone slipped her hallucinogens? Either way, when the investigators arrive, Dr. Sasaki has already been detained and locked in a seclusion room.

The Secure Unit's exterior has changed: architectural additions now exist that look far older than the main structure. If the investigators point this out to the security guards at the hospital gate, they don't believe that anything is wrong or has changed.

Inside, the changes are even more severe. The Royal Palace of Carcosa, as filtered through Yamamoto's psyche, has taken over not just the appearance but also the layout, which now

bears only a passing resemblance to what the investigators may remember from previous visits. The larger, grander interior boasts high ceilings, winding corridors, hidden garden courtyards, and imperial chambers. The furnishings and decoration display a mixture of historical Japanese and pseudo-European Renaissance styles—Yamamoto is no expert in history and has dredged these details from his memories of movies and TV shows.

The floor is polished rosewood. The scent of spring blossom fills the air, but the sweet scent occasionally shifts to that of rotting leaves. Yellow-furred bats roost in the angles of ancient roof-beams. Plaintive music, played on traditional stringed instruments, wafts through doorways, while the faint sound of laughter, and then a scream, can sometimes be heard. Should investigators attempt to track them, the sources of these noises elude them.

The investigators should make a **Sanity** roll (1/1D3 loss) when they first enter and realize that it's "bigger on the inside." As Keeper, we encourage you to expand on the unnerving weirdness to be found in Château Carcosa.

**Keeper note:** See profiles for Yamamoto Minoru, the secure unit orderlies, and the Noppera-bō orderlies in **The Pallid Masks of Tokyo: Characters & Monsters** (page 174).

## FOYER

A grand foyer of gilded furniture, plush yellow pillows, and tall mirrors replaces the once-sterile entryway and reception area of the Secure Unit. Two crystal chandeliers illuminate the room with a sickly pale light. A knight in 17<sup>th</sup>-century, Japanese decorative armor stands at attention, holding a halberd, where a security guard once stood; the guard's face is hidden behind an elaborate and ugly armored mask. The receptionist, with a familiar unsmiling face, remains behind the intake counter, still gazing in the direction of the entrance, although drool now dribbles out of her slack jaw.

Observing the transformed entry requires those familiar with the original foyer to make a **Sanity** roll (1/1D3 loss). Nurse Oshiro's rather inflexible mind did not adapt well to the Secure Unit's changes. She does her job to the best of her remaining ability, asking slowly if visitors have an appointment or if they are here to voluntarily commit themselves to the care of the hospital and the Pale Prince. Regardless of how the investigators answer, Nurse Oshiro then asks them for their names and attempts to write these down in the visitor's log—now a huge leather-bound tome.

If the investigators respond with a name, Nurse Oshiro lets them through (producing an iron key longer than her palm). Otherwise, the investigators require a successful **Locksmith** roll to open the large, cast-iron barrel-lock, or need to force the door with a successful Hard **STR** roll.







## EVER-INCREASING DANGER

Château Carcosa lies in the heart of enemy territory. During this scene, when an investigator fails a pushed roll or draws too much attention, the Keeper should provide appropriately tense consequences. Here are some examples in increasing order of threat:

- A Noppera-bō appearing as a janitor walks quickly toward the investigators, who hear approaching footsteps and must make a successful **Stealth** roll to avoid a confrontation, or a **Listen** roll to notice the approach and hide.
- Two janitors (both Noppera-bō) hunt the investigators. They walk quietly as they stalk their quarry. If the investigators do not take immediate action to hide or leave the area, they will be cornered.
- All the Noppera-bō orderlies now actively hunt the investigators.
- The investigators have proven themselves to be a threat; hence, all the Noppera-bō—including those in the grand dining hall—swarm and attack the investigators.

Nurse Oshiro can focus on one simple task at a time, and neither she nor the knight guard make any effort to stop the investigators from entering the Secure Unit. The knight guard only attacks if the investigators attack him or Nurse Oshiro—see **The Pallid Masks of Toyo: Characters & Monsters** (page 174) for the Knight Guard's profile. Fighting with the knight guard or forcing the door open draws unwanted attention—see **Ever-Increasing Danger** above).

## REAR SERVICE ENTRY

An iron portcullis replaces the rolling steel door to the service entrance. The entrance is nearly impossible to open short of using a blow torch, a tow truck, or construction equipment. A successful **Spot Hidden** roll finds an unusual secret door behind a patch of ivy that clings to the back of the building, which allows entrance into any part of the interior that the Keeper sees fit—perhaps a torture chamber or a cold store full of racks of suspicious-looking meat.

The area just past the portcullis, once a service bay, now serves as a horse stable. Hay covers the floor, while a tool rack stands against the far wall and holds shovels and pitchforks. Failed **Stealth** rolls here (or any other rolls that could make a noise) draw more unwanted attention.

## DR. SASAKI'S OFFICE

Dr. Sasaki's office has been transformed into a wood-paneled study. Inside, signs of a struggle greet the investigators: Dr. Sasaki's chair lies on its side, and her papers litter the floor.

- All of Dr. Sasaki's psychiatric manuals and medical guides, save for *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III)*, have been replaced by dozens of leather-bound copies of *The Tale of Pale Leaves*.
- Dr. Sasaki's Japanese calligraphy scroll has been replaced with an image of a female samurai warrior escorting a prince across a bridge leading to an alien city in the sky.
- The broad window that once looked out over a blossoming *sakura* tree now overlooks a vast, alien landscape populated by black, sinewy vegetation; two red suns hang in the sky. Investigators viewing the alien landscape must make a **Sanity** roll (1/1D4 loss).

## SECLUSION ROOM

The Pale Prince and his army of Noppera-bō use the seclusion room as a jail cell. Although the room remain the same in terms of their limited furnishings, controlled lighting, and padded walls, the essence of a dungeon seeps into this reality. Those who succeed with a **Spot Hidden** roll notice blood stains on the floor and hungry rats in the corners of the room; the room smells musty, like a cellar dug from the earth.

Dr. Sasaki, the Secure Unit's chief psychiatrist, was thrown into the seclusion room during the riots in which the Pale Prince took control of the hospital. She still wears her white physician coat, albeit stained from her bloodied nose. Her disheveled hair hangs in front of her face.

If addressed by the investigators, Dr. Sasaki explains that she had been sedated but did not suffer any life-threatening injuries. A successful **Psychology** roll reveals that the traumatic experience notwithstanding, Dr. Sasaki possesses a sound mind, though she struggles to stay awake. All her physical skill rolls now have a penalty die.

- Investigators freeing Dr. Sasaki from her imprisonment immediately recover 1D4 Sanity points.
- Investigators who dilly-dally in or near the seclusion rooms should make a **Listen** roll to hear the footsteps of two orderlies approaching. Failing the roll forces an encounter with them.



## GRAND DINING HALL

The hospital's cafeteria is now the Pale Prince's grand dining hall. The tables have been set for a feast of kings, with silver platters piled high with food. At least a hundred guests converse among themselves, creating an ambient buzz like a colony of bees at work. The guests are gorgeously dressed in medieval garb.

The offerings include honey-baked ham, prosciutto and melon, steak tartar, caviar, oysters, pepper crab, buttered-seared lobster tails, Peking Duck, fried alligator, roasted scorpion, *soufflé au citron*, chocolate-covered grasshoppers—the list goes on. One could find and sample every earthly delicacy ever conceived, and a few conceived elsewhere. Waiters wearing golden masks carry platters of food and drink, but no one seems to be eating or drinking. Perhaps they are waiting for the guests of honor to take their seats around the head table—the empty seats seem to beckon the investigators.

When the investigators enter the dining hall, the other diners stop talking and turn to look at them, as do the waitstaff. Everyone here, save for the investigators, is suddenly revealed to be Noppera-bō; thus, requiring a **Sanity** roll (1D2/1D8 loss). The Noppera-bō do not attack or take hostile action, as they are waiting for further instructions from Yamamoto Minoru (or Crazy Kazu, as the case may be).

If the investigators flee, the Noppera-bō return to their discussions without giving chase. If the investigators attack, they will likely be torn apart. If the investigators sit down at the head table, they are served their favorite epicurean delights. The food tastes amazing but lacks sustenance—eating it comes at the cost of 1 Sanity point.

### Kazu's Entrance

If Crazy Kazu is still in the picture, now is a suitable time for him to make an entrance.

*"Thank you for coming, my friends." Kazu wears archaic clothes and assumes the demeanor of a host with false modesty. "Are you satisfied with the food? I'm sorry that we could not offer you more sophisticated fare. Now, let us retire from this meal. It is time to meet our prince."*

Whether or not they are ready for an audience with the prince, Kazu intends to escort the investigators to Yamamoto's throne room.

If the investigators have already dispensed with Kazu, an orderly invites them to the throne room for a private audience with the Prince.

## GRAND STAIRCASE

The staircases that led to the second floor of the Secure Unit have transformed into spiral staircases adorned with wooden rails on which leaf motifs are carved. A gentle breeze blows against the face of those ascending the stairs, smelling like rain and decaying leaves.

## THRONE ROOM

The hospital assigned Yamamoto Minoru to room 214, which now serves as his throne room. All the original furniture and fixtures have been replaced with exquisite, gilded-gold works of art.

Sitting on his throne of vinyl transformed into gold, Yamamoto holds his head up high and intensely stares forward. He wears long, yellow robes that mark him as someone important, perhaps a powerful noble or an enlightened monk. Two faceless orderlies stand on either side, equipped with hypodermic needles containing a strong tranquilizer—if struck by an orderly in combat an investigator must succeed with an Extreme **CON** roll or fall unconscious for 1D8 +4 hours.

Yamamoto's body currently hosts the alien intelligence known as the Prince of Pale Leaves, who is not at all concerned with the fragility or mortality of the body it possesses. Rather, the Prince focuses on spreading his corrupt view of the universe and prefers to offer the investigators absolution and freedom from pain—via the tattooing process. With a gentle wave of the hand, he motions to a hospital bed, beside which are medical instruments on a wheeled surgical tray, including scalpels and tubes of black, blue, red, and green ink that look like they came from various ballpoint pens.

The investigators have a choice: do they accept the Prince's offer and submit to a tattoo?

- **If yes:** the Prince asks each supplicant to disrobe and recline face-first on the hospital bed.
- The EP of any investigator receiving a tattoo taken from the *Sutra of Pale Leaves* immediately and irreversibly rises to 100. Such investigators are no longer player characters.
- **If no:** the Prince takes offense and calls upon his Noppera-bō Orderlies to dispose of the investigators.
- The scenario likely ends in combat, with the investigators swarmed by Noppera-bō; when the last investigator falls, the scene fades to black (see **Ending 0: Party Wipe**, following).
- However, if the investigators manage to kill Yamamoto, they can dispel Château Carcosa.



## ENDINGS

**Keeper note:** remember to run an Investigator Development Phase (see *Call of Cthulhu: Keeper Rulebook*, page 94) at the end of the scenario.

### 0. Party Wipe (Failure)

- **Requirements:** the investigators fail by either all dropping to zero Sanity or being overwhelmed by Noppera-bō.

The investigators wake to find that they are patients—involuntarily and indefinitely—committed to the Secure Unit of Tokyo Metropolitan Psychiatric Hospital. As appropriate, they lose 1D10 Sanity points over the period of their incarceration and gain 20 EP immediately. Yamamoto Minoru and his minions have vanished from the hospital, leaving only the investigators behind them. In fact, there's no record of Yamamoto or Crazy Kazu ever having existed. Dr. Sasaki has no memory of the investigators, and humors them compassionately if they claim to know her, or if they describe a patient uprising and her imprisonment.

Yet, the investigators may see action again as player characters in **The Fixer** (see *TSoPL: Carcosa Manifest*) if they have any Sanity points remaining. Even investigators who seemingly died in Château Carcosa may return, at the Keeper's option; after all, a death in Carcosa may only be a dreamless sleep in the real world.

By the time the investigators effect their release, the world has changed and Tokyo is sliding into the clutches of the Prince of Pale Leaves—see **Stages of Societal Infection** (Chapter 1, page 44) and set Japan to Stage 4.

Since the investigators failed to stop this incarnation of the Pale Prince, Noppera-bō should make an appearance in any subsequent scenarios.

### 1. I Wear No Mask (Cruel Ending)

- **Requirements:** one or more of the investigators accepts the tattoo or is raised to 100 EP during this scenario.

Some investigators become Noppera-bō. This ending can be combined either **0: Party Wipe** or **2: A Prince Thwarted**. Don't reveal what has changed to the players until after the scenario ends, and then, only inform the affected Noppera-bō investigator(s). Brief them that they are now spies for the Pale Prince within the group and allow them to use the Noppera-bō's profile in **The Pallid Masks of Tokyo: Characters & Monsters** (page 174)—but they retain their own personalities.

During the next scenario, such investigators should be briefed to attempt a "Noppera-bō scare" on their fellow investigators at the most unexpected and dramatic moment.

From that point, the revealed Noppera-bō are no longer player characters, and fresh ones should be introduced as appropriate to the new scenario.

Otherwise, surviving investigators—who are not Noppera-bō—spend the following days trying to make sense of their experience in whatever manner is appropriate.

### 2. A Prince Thwarted (Good Ending)

- **Requirements:** Yamamoto, as the Pale Prince, is killed or otherwise stopped.

The Secure Unit reverts to its original form: the throne is again a vinyl chair, the grand dining hall a cafeteria, and so forth. No Noppera-bō remain, nor does any sign of Yamamoto.

Any Confidants connected to the investigation may react to a successful outcome as follows:

- **Mizutani Shogo ("The Fed")** takes the investigators for a drink at a small *izakaya* in Nishi Shinjuku. A pretty, middle-aged woman runs this unassuming *yakitori* (chicken kabob) restaurant and communicates with Mizutani by sign language (she is deaf). The investigators are encouraged to eat, drink, and talk and, in doing so, recover 1D6 Sanity points. At the end of the meal, Mizutani requests they meet with him on the following day to discuss the next operation.
- **Murakami Tsubasa ("The Abbot")** meets the investigators at a Buddhist temple in Todoroki. They are encouraged to drink tea and meditate, granting 1D6 Sanity points. At the end of the meeting, Murakami requests that the investigators meet him the following day to discuss the next task.
- **Yamada Chitose ("The Heiress")** dispatches two brothers—a team of troubleshooters employed by the Derby Club—to pick up the investigators and take them to a nondescript office building for their debriefing. After this meeting, the investigators are rewarded with a retreat to a secluded *onsen* (bath house) in Nagano prefecture, where they recover 1D6 Sanity points. After a week passes, the investigators receive a new mission briefing.
- If no Confidant was used, the surviving investigators spend the following days trying to make sense of their experience in whatever manner is appropriate. After a week, they find some peace and regain 1D6 Sanity points, and hide whatever horrific experiences they encountered in a locked box in their minds.



## PALLID MASKS OF TOKYO: CHARACTERS & MONSTERS

### ALLIES & INDEPENDENTS

#### Kurosawa Kichinosuke, age 62, police chief

STR 50 CON 60 SIZ 55 DEX 50 INT 80  
APP 50 POW 60 EDU 60 SAN 57 HP 11  
DB: 0 Build: 0 Move: 4 MP: 12

##### Combat

Brawl 45% (22/9), damage 1D3  
Nambu M60 revolver 60% (30/12), damage 1D10  
Dodge 25% (12/5)

##### Skills

Accounting 20%, Credit Rating 50%, Drive Auto 40%, Intimidate 50%, Law 50%, Library Use 40%, Occult 40%, Persuade 50%, Psychology 60%, Psychology (Yakuza) 40%, Spot Hidden 50%, Track 40%.

Language: Japanese 60%.

#### Tanaka Morio, age 52, police detective

STR 60 CON 50 SIZ 60 DEX 60 INT 70  
APP 50 POW 70 EDU 65 SAN 61 HP 11  
DB: 0 Build: 0 Move: 6 MP: 14

##### Combat

Brawl 65% (32/13), damage 1D3  
Nambu M60 revolver 44% (22/8), damage 1D10  
Dodge 30% (15/6)

##### Skills

Credit Rating 40%, Drive Auto 40%, Intimidate 50%, Law 60%, Listen 40%, Persuade 50%, Psychology 60%, Psychology (Yakuza) 25%, Spot Hidden 70%, Track 40%.

Language: Japanese 65%.

#### Okawa Keiko, age 46, police detective

STR 50 CON 70 SIZ 65 DEX 60 INT 70  
APP 45 POW 60 EDU 70 SAN 56 HP 13  
DB: 0 Build: 0 Move: 6 MP: 12

##### Combat

Brawl 45% (22/9), damage 1D3  
Nambu M60 revolver 60% (30/12), damage 1D10  
Dodge 30% (15/6)

##### Skills

Credit Rating 40%, Drive Auto 40%, Intimidate 35%, Law 50%, Listen 40%, Medicine 30%, Natural World 30%, Persuade 50%, Psychology 70%, Spot Hidden 60%.

Language: Japanese 70%.

#### Police Officer

Use this profile for Officers Nakamoto and Ota, as well as other generic police.

STR 50 CON 60 SIZ 55 DEX 60 INT 50  
APP 50 POW 50 EDU 50 SAN 50 HP 11  
DB: 0 Build: 0 Move: 8 MP: 10

##### Combat

Brawl 50% (25/10), damage 1D3  
Baton 50% (25/10), damage 1D6  
Nambu M60 revolver 50% (25/10), damage 1D10  
Dodge 30% (15/6)

##### Skills

Drive Auto 40%, Intimidate 30%, Law 50%, Listen 40%, Persuade 40%, Psychology 40%, Spot Hidden 50%.

#### Dr. Sato Hideki, age 31, medical examiner

STR 50 CON 50 SIZ 50 DEX 60 INT 75  
APP 45 POW 45 EDU 80 SAN 32 HP 10  
DB: 0 Build: 0 Move: 8 MP: 9

##### Combat

Brawl 45% (22/9), damage 1D3  
Dodge 30% (15/6)

##### Skills

Law 45%, Library Use 50%, Medicine 80%, Natural World 70%, Science (Forensics) 65%, Spot Hidden 60%.

Language: Japanese 80%.



**Dr. Sasaki Kanako, age 39, hospital psychiatrist**

STR 50 CON 50 SIZ 50 DEX 60 INT 70  
APP 50 POW 50 EDU 80 SAN 50 HP 10  
DB: 0 Build: 0 Move: 8 MP: 10

**Combat**

Brawl 25% (12/5), damage 1D3  
Dodge 30% (15/6)

**Skills**

Charm 40%, Credit Rating 50%, Drive 40%, First Aid 50%, Library Use 50%, Listen 40%, Medicine 60%, Natural World 40%, Persuade 50%, Psychoanalysis 80%, Psychology 60%, Science (Pharmacy) 50%, Spot Hidden 45%.

**Language:** Japanese 80%.

**Tsukasa Renji, age 58, yakuza oyabun**

STR 50 CON 60 SIZ 50 DEX 60 INT 70  
APP 60 POW 80 EDU 40 SAN 57 HP 11  
DB: 0 Build: 0 Move: 7 MP: 16

**Combat**

Brawl 60% (30/12), damage 1D3  
Nambu M60 revolver 60% (30/12), damage 1D10  
Dodge 30% (15/6)

**Skills**

Accounting 25%, Charm 35%, Credit Rating 75%, Fast Talk 50%, Intimidate 70%, Law 40%, Persuade 40%, Psychology 50%, Sleight of Hand 40%, Spot Hidden 45%, Stealth 45%.

**Language:** Japanese 40%.

**ANTAGONISTS**

**Yakuza Foot Soldier**

STR 65 CON 70 SIZ 60 DEX 65 INT 50  
APP 50 POW 50 EDU 40 SAN 50 HP 13  
DB: +1D4 Build: 1 Move: 9 MP: 10

**Combat**

Brawl 70% (35/14), damage 1D3+1D4, or knife 1D4+2+1D4  
Dodge 30% (15/6)

**Skills**

Charm 30%, Climb 45%, Fast Talk 30%, Intimidate 60%, Listen 30%, Psychology 25%, Spot Hidden 35%, Stealth 45%.

**Secure Unit Orderlies**

STR 60 CON 60 SIZ 70 DEX 60 INT 50  
APP 45 POW 50 EDU 40 SAN 50 HP 13  
DB: +1D4 Build: 1 Move: 7 MP: 10

**Combat**

Brawl 70% (35/14), damage 1D3+1D4  
Dodge 30% (15/6)

**Skills**

Fast Talk 40%, Intimidate 55%, Listen 35%, Psychology 40%, Spot Hidden 40%, Stealth 30%.

**Noppera-bō, faceless humanoids**

**Note:** many NPCs may become or reveal themselves to be Noppera-bō—see **The Shadow** (page 166) for a list. Use this profile as a template, adjusting skills and equipment as necessary.

Noppera-bō have a limited, networked intelligence—able to sense other Noppera-bō around and, with some concerted effort, may perceive what another Noppera-bō is experiencing up to 16 miles (26 km) away. Noppera-bō do not fear death; while one does not seek out its own destruction, it is not motivated by self-preservation.

STR 100 CON 150 SIZ 50 DEX 100 INT 50  
APP \* POW 50 EDU 50 SAN — HP 20  
DB: +1D6 Build: 2 Move: 9 MP: 10 EP: 100

\*Can present as the likeness of anyone it has observed; thus, APP varies by likeness.



## CHAPTER 4

### *Special Abilities*

**Appearance:** can change facial, build, and clothing appearance to impersonate the likeness of those the Noppera-bō has observed, making it exceptionally easy for them to move about unnoticed. In the round following the reveal of its true faceless identity, investigators suffer shock—a penalty die to all rolls in that round (NPCs automatically fail their next action/roll).

**Immune to Pain:** ignores the effects of pain, shock, and physical trauma. Cannot be charmed or intimidated. Does not require sleep.

**Original:** retains all skills from its original identity. Reverts to own body-type if killed.

**Soundless:** does not breathe, nor make other unintentional vocal sounds. May attempt a sneak attack from behind if they win an opposed Stealth roll against the target's Listen roll.

### *Combat*

**Attacks per round:** 1

Brawl 50% (25/10), damage 1D3+1D6  
Dodge 50% (25/10)

### *Skills*

Climb 80%, Disguise 85%, Listen 25%, Spot Hidden 25%, Stealth 75%, Track 65%.

**Armor:** none; immune to drowning, inhaled poisons, and choking attacks. Not immune to medical sedation.

**Spells:** none.

**Sanity Loss:** 1D2/1D8 Sanity points to see a Noppera-bō change its face or become faceless; 1/1D6 to encounter a dead Noppera-bō.

### **Knight Guard, Noppera-bō faceless warrior**

STR 100 CON 150 SIZ 50 DEX 100 INT 50  
APP \* POW 50 EDU 50 SAN — HP 20  
DB: +1D6 Build: 2 Move: 9 MP: 10

*\*Can present as the likeness of anyone it has observed; thus, APP varies by likeness.*

### *Special Abilities*

See **Noppera-bō** (preceding).

### *Combat*

**Attacks per round:** 1

Brawl 50% (25/10), damage 1D3+1D6  
Halberd 50% (25/10), damage 1D8+1+1D6  
Dodge 50% (25/10)

### *Skills*

Climb 80%, Disguise 85%, Listen 25%, Spot Hidden 25%, Stealth 75%, Track 65%.

**Armor:** 5-point armor; immune to drowning, inhaled poisons, and choking attacks. Not immune to medical sedation.

**Spells:** none.

**Sanity Loss:** none unless the visor of helmet is opened; 1D2/1D8 Sanity points to see a Noppera-bō change its face or become faceless.



## Crazy Kazu, Noppera-bō gangster

STR 110 CON 150 SIZ 60 DEX 100 INT 100  
 APP \* POW 100 EDU 50 SAN — HP 21  
 DB: +1D6 Build: 2 Move: 9 MP: 20 EP: 100  
 (not Consumed yet)

*\*Can present as the likeness of anyone it has observed; thus, APP varies by likeness.*

### Special Abilities

See **Noppera-bō** (preceding).

Kazu may sense other Noppera-bō around, and with some concerted effort, may perceive what another Noppera-bō is experiencing up to 16 miles (26 km) away. Kazu does not fear death.

### Combat

**Attacks per round:** 1

Brawl 70% (35/14), damage 1D3+1D6

Dodge 50% (25/10)

### Skills

Art/Craft (Tattooing) 80%, Cthulhu Mythos 70%, Disguise 85%, Intimidate 80%, Listen 25%, Psychology 50%, Spot Hidden 25%, Stealth 75%, Track 75%.

**Languages:** Japanese 50%, Han Writing 50%.

**Armor:** none; immune to drowning, inhaled poisons, and choking attacks. Not immune to medical sedation.

**Spells:** may know spells from the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*, and others the Keeper deems appropriate.

**Sanity Loss:** 1D2/1D8 Sanity points to see Kazu change his face or become faceless.

## Yamamoto Minoru, age 40, patient, vessel of the Pale Prince

STR 50 CON 60 SIZ 50 DEX 80 INT 100  
 APP 50 POW 100 EDU 100 SAN — HP 11  
 DB: 0 Build: 0 Move: 8 MP: 20 EP: 100  
 (Consumed)

### Special Abilities

**Immune to Pain:** ignores the effects of pain, shock, and physical trauma. Cannot be charmed or intimidated. Does not require sleep.

### Combat

Brawl 25% (12/5), damage 1D3

Dodge 40% (20/8)

### Skills

Art/Craft (Calligraphy) 50%, Art (Tattooing) 90%, Cthulhu Mythos 80%, History 50%, Hypnosis 50%, Intimidate 50%, Library Use 50%, Occult 50%, Persuade 80%, Psychology 80%.

**Languages:** Japanese 100%, Han Writing 75%.

### Signs

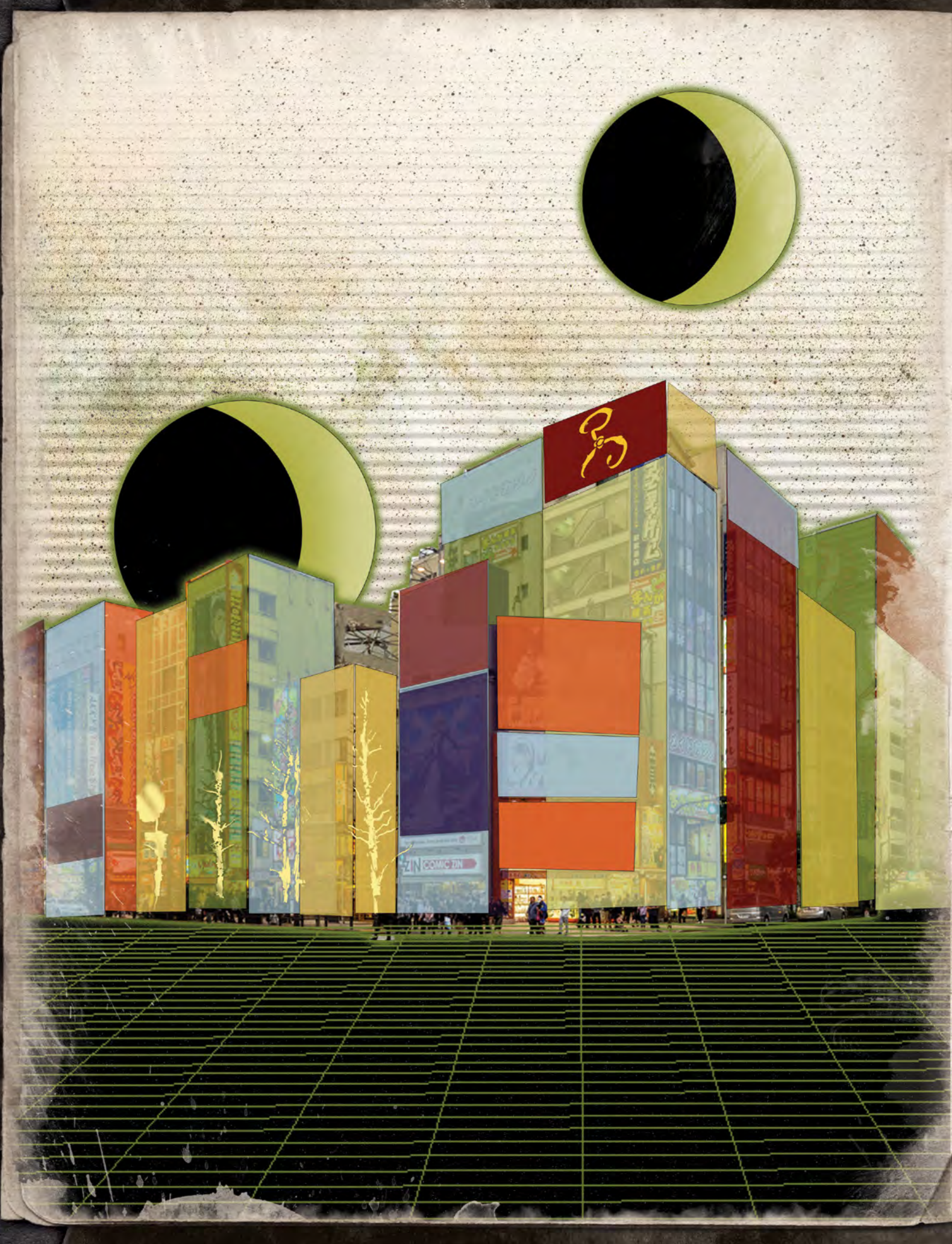
Can create and use any of the **Mystic Signs** (page 31) from the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*, and others the Keeper deems appropriate.

**Armor:** none; immune to drowning, inhaled poisons, and choking attacks. Not immune to medical sedation.

**Spells:** may know spells from the *Sutra of Pale Leaves*, as determined by the Keeper.

**Sanity Loss:** none.







# APPENDICES

## CONTINUING THE CAMPAIGN

As each scenario ends, whether in victory or failure, the investigators have a choice whether to press on in their quest to thwart the Prince of Pale Leaves and his cult, the Association of Pale Leaves.

For the Keeper, the companion volume, *Sutra of Pale Leaves: Carcosa Manifest*, presents four further scenarios that may either be used to extend the campaign or as standalone adventures in the same setting:

- **The Bridge Maiden, Part One:** the brother of a fashion designer goes missing and the investigators are called on to find him—but the machinations of the Association of Pale Leaves go much deeper than they appear.
- **Wonderland:** the beta-testing of a computer game allows the Prince access to a whole new audience, as gamers are transported into a Garden of Wonders which promises delights beyond all imagination.
- **The Bridge Maiden, Part Two:** the APL's plans come to a climax as they attempt to open the Bridge to Carcosa and summon the Prince of Pale Leaves himself to Earth.
- **The Fixer:** from the pit of defeat and despair, the investigators have one last chance to rewrite reality and change everything—but will it be for better or for worse?

## GLOSSARY

Japanese Term	Translation or Definition
Anime	TV or movie cartoon.
Baburu keiki	"Bubble Economy"—1986–1991.
Baku	A tapir-like yōkai.
Bokutō	Wooden practice sword.
Bosatsu	A Bodhisattva; a lesser Buddha. In Buddhism, an enlightened being who chooses not to enter Nirvana but to stay in the world to help others.
Bottakuri	A criminal scam involving hugely overpriced drinks.
-chan	A suffix to a surname denoting a small child or a girl.
Chinpira	"Hooligan." Low-level yakuza wannabes, usually young.
Cosplay	"Costume play"—dressing up as an anime or manga character.





## APPENDICES

Diet, the National	Japanese legislature, with a House of Representatives and a House of Councillors. A “dietman” is an elected politician.
Dharma	Buddhist doctrine: the laws of the universe.
Futōkō	Child who refuses to attend school.
Gaijin	Foreigner; non-Japanese.
Gaisensha	Propaganda vehicles—vans that drive around blasting political slogans from loudspeakers.
Gijutsu	“Technology.”
Happi	Traditional cotton jacket or coat worn for festivals.
Hikikomori	A social recluse: typically a young person who never leaves their bedroom.
Idol	A commercially manufactured pop singer/model/entertainer, designed to create a consumer fanbase.
Izakaya	Pub or restaurant-bar.
JET	“Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme”—brings English-speaking foreign assistant language teachers (ALTs) into Japan.
Kami	A spirit. “Kami-sama” means a god.
Kanji	The oldest form of modern Japanese script, derived from Chinese characters.
Karma	“Action.” Buddhist doctrine: the choices, thoughts, and deeds (good and bad) that lead to consequences when one comes to rebirth.
Katana	A traditional Japanese sword—slightly curved with a single edge.
Kissaten	Coffee-shop.
-kun	A suffix to a surname denoting a boy or junior.
Kyūdō	“Way of the Bow;” traditional Japanese archery.
Magical Girl	A trope and subgenre in manga: a teenaged girl who transforms into a alter-ego with magical powers.
Mandala	Pattern or illustration designed for meditation.
Manga	Comic book.
Mantra	Chant designed for meditation or prayer.
Mitsudomoe	A common circular emblem of three swirling comma- or petal-like shapes called “tomoe.”
Naginata	Traditional light polearm weapon.
Ninkyō dantai	“Chivalrous organizations”—what the yakuza call themselves.
Nirvana	“Quenching.” Buddhist doctrine: the ultimate goal; non-suffering and non-being; escape from the cycle of rebirth.
Noppera-bō	A faceless, shapeshifting yōkai.
Omamori	Protective talismans, sold at shrines.



## APPENDICES

Oni	An ogre-like demon.
Onna-musha	Warrior women of the Samurai period.
Orihon	Accordion-bound book—the leaves are folded in a zigzag, not separate.
Otaku	“Obsessive.” Nerd; geek.
Oyabun	“Foster parent”—the boss of a yakuza group.
Pachinko	A game similar to pinball, played in pachinko arcades.
PSIA	Public Security Intelligence Agency.
Sadō	Tea ceremony.
Sakura	Cherry blossom.
-sama	A highly respectful suffix to a surname, reserved for gods, customers, and those of highest status.
-san	A polite suffix to a surname, used to show formal respect; equivalent to “mister,” “miss,” or “missus.”
-senpai	A respectful suffix to a surname, denoting a relationship where the one addressed is a senior colleague or mentor.
-sensei	A respectful suffix to a surname, used to denote a teacher.
Shingon	An esoteric Buddhist sect known for rituals designed to achieve enlightenment.
Shinto	The native, animist Japanese religion, revolving around worship and placation of kami.
Sutra	A scripture.
Taoism	A Chinese spiritual practice that, in theory, emphasizes living in harmony with the flow of the universe, and non-action. In practice, it is associated with divination, alchemy, and sorcery.
Tatami	Traditional flooring—thick rush mats.
Todai	The University of Tokyo.
Uranai	Divination.
Wakaresaseya	“Break-Up Shop”—an agency that specializes in manipulations leading to divorce, resignation, or revenge.
Washi	A strong, traditional paper made from plant fibers, not wood pulp.
Yakuza	“Good for nothing.” Organized crime syndicate; gangster. Note that membership is not, in itself, illegal.
Yen	Standard unit of Japanese currency. Between 1986 and 1990 the exchange rate to \$1 US varied from around ¥200–¥120.
Yōkai	Spirit, supernatural entity, monster, or ghost.



## BIOGRAPHIES



**Jesse Covner** designed business management simulations in China for 15 years before embarking on a seven-year stint in Japan. Fluent in Chinese and on a quest to improve his Japanese, Jesse's immersion in these cultures amplifies his grasp of storytelling and artistic expression. While Jesse's writing

for *Sons of the Singularity* leans toward crafting tales featuring swords, sorcery, and swashbuckling, his involvement in *The Sutra of Pale Leaves* was more behind the scenes. Jesse recruited the writers and artists, designed the overall look and feel of the book, and oversaw the project's end-to-end creation and delivery to Chaosium. Sometime in the distant past, Jesse met Jason Sheets in a dimly-lit bar in Shanghai. From that drunken yet auspicious meeting, the two decided to form an indie RPG publishing company together. *Sons of the Singularity* aims to create captivating and immersive imaginary realms that ignite curiosity and wonder.



**Damon Lang** is a freelance writer and game designer obsessed with science fiction. Born in Massachusetts, he has lived well over a third of his life in Japan, including a few years in the town of Ikaruga. He discovered tabletop RPGs as a kid and has been playing games ever

since. He is a proud "Forever GM" who has almost never run a scenario or world that he didn't create himself. For some reason, his games end up incorporating horror elements regardless of genre. In the pre-pandemic years, however, he frequently attended Japanese TRPG conventions and got to play other people's homebrew cosmic horror scenarios for a change.

Some years back, Damon met the *Sons of the Singularity* partners, Jesse Covner and Jason Sheets, who invited him to work on their independent projects. Thanks to them, he made his *Call of Cthulhu* writing debut in *Journal d'Indochine*. In the future he hopes to facilitate more sharing and cooperation between the Japanese and English-speaking communities of his favorite hobby.



**Andrew Logan Montgomery** is a long-time resident of Japan (21 years and counting), the author of the *Jonstown Compendium* Platinum bestsellers *Six Seasons in Sartar* and the *Company of the Dragon*, as well as a frequent contributor to the *RuneQuest Roleplaying in Glorantha*

game line. Though he has played *Call of Cthulhu* since the mid 80s, **Wonderland** is his first published scenario for the game.

Outside of gaming, he is a college professor and the author of two plays, *Mara* and *The Wine of Violence*. **Wonderland** draws on 12 years teaching experience in Japanese public schools, countless hours wasted playing MUDs back in the 80s, and the quiet belief that Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books are horror stories masquerading as children's literature.



**Jason Sheets**, a seasoned storyteller, breathes life into haunting narratives that entwine history with the supernatural. Following Mark Twain's advice, "write what you know," Jason draws inspiration from over two decades of living in Asia, transforming

his experiences into stories of wonder and horror. Jason's *The Sassoon Files*, a *Call of Cthulhu* campaign set in 1920s Shanghai, blends cosmic horror with cultural and historical authenticity. His contributions to *Journal d'Indochine* further demonstrate a penchant for exploring the Cthulhu Mythos within historical Asian settings. With each creation, Jason invites players to embark on a journey through time, where historical settings become immersive backdrops and the boundaries between reality and the macabre blur. Beyond the realm of pen and paper, Jason indulges in the art of smoking Texas-style BBQ. Jason holds a B.A. in Chinese language and political science from Trinity University and a J.D. from Lewis & Clark Law School.



**Terada Yukihiro** is currently an office worker and a writer on the side. The first time he played *Call of Cthulhu* was in high school, when he created a doctor and ended up getting killed by deep ones. Since 2007, he has been a staff member of the Cthulhu Only Convention (Co-

Con), held irregularly in Tokyo.

In 2010, he joined Arkham Members, a group producing the Japanese version of *Call of Cthulhu*. He writes and translates scenarios and articles, participates in events, and contributes support articles for the RPG magazine "Role & Roll."



**Keris McDonald** is an associate editor for Chaosium. Keris has been running and playing *Call of Cthulhu* since 1986. She was one of the contributing writers to Chaosium's *Rivers of London* RPG and is currently the main editor for the *Cthulhu by Gaslight* line. The

King in Yellow is her favorite Mythos entity, and her manga recommendation is *The Kurosagi Corpse Delivery Service*, by Eiji Otsuka and Housui Yamazaki.



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TABLE 3: EXPOSURE COUNTER & EFFECTS

Exposure Points (EP)	Effects
0: Unaffected	No trace exists of the <i>Sutra's</i> code in the character's head.
1–49: Obsessed	The character increasingly fixates on the <i>Sutra</i> . They may see fleeting images of a yellow-robed figure or hear faint voices from time to time. Fate seemingly conspires to lead them to the <i>Sutra</i> more and more until the next phase.
50–99: Possessed	The character now hosts the Prince of Pale Leaves. He may be dormant, subtly manipulating their perception of reality, or he may actively appear to and speak to the character as an utterly convincing hallucination. He knows everything they know, see, and hear. The Prince may attempt to take direct control once per hour, but the host may resist with a POW roll.
100: Enthralled	The character is finally one with the Prince of Pale Leaves. The Prince may attempt to take direct control once per hour, but the host may resist with a Hard POW roll. Failure means they become dominated by the Prince indefinitely. Investigators controlled by the Prince may retain their residual personality, or not, whichever the Prince desires. They either retire to become NPCs, or they become conspirators taking secret orders from the Keeper.

**Note:** when a character reaches the Possessed level (50+ EP), the Prince of Pale Leaves and all vessels of the Prince can read their minds effortlessly. The Prince knows everything they see, hear, and think. In combat and all opposed rolls, the Prince and his vessels gain a bonus die against the character, and the character suffers a penalty die. Essentially, he knows what you'll do before you do.

TABLE 4: EXPOSURE POINT COSTS

Exposure Type	Exposure Points
Initial Exposure to the written text	2D10 EP
Fleeting exposure (short sequence of characters or a mandala)	1 EP
Hearing any amount of text read aloud	1 EP
Wearing Petal brand clothing (see <i>TSoPL: Carcosa Manifest</i> )	1 EP
Actively chanting a mantra	1D4 EP
Prolonged/intense exposure (extended reading or viewing, learning spells or Mystic Signs)	1D6–1D10 EP
Reading the entire <i>Sutra/Tale</i> (requires many hours)	1D100 EP (minimum 20)
Registering an account in <i>Wonderland</i> (see <i>TSoPL: Carcosa Manifest</i> )	EP equal to 1/5th INT



TABLE 5: THE PRINCE'S INFLUENCE ON INVESTIGATORS

Exposure Points (EP)	Effects
1–100	<b>Influence:</b> the Prince can create extremely convincing audio/visual hallucinations. He tends to keep these subtle and believable to carefully manipulate the target's behavior. Identical hallucinations can appear for multiple Exposed characters simultaneously. He can also manifest in their dreams.
50–100	<b>Manifest:</b> the Prince can appear to the target and speak to them. As with other hallucinations, he can manifest in the minds of any number of hosts in a perfectly synchronized manner. Through this, the Prince gives decrees to his adherents, or else persuades stubborn investigators that the path of the Pale Leaves is the ultimate truth.
50–100	<b>Dominate:</b> the Prince takes direct control of the character, who may attempt to resist or break free once per hour with a successful POW roll. After successfully breaking free, the character is immune to domination for 1 hour. At the Enthralled level (100 EP), it takes a Hard POW success to resist, and if failed, the Prince takes control for as long as the Keeper likes.
100	<b>Consume:</b> after dominating the host, the Prince may completely and permanently absorb the host's mind, taking all their knowledge, skills, and memories. The body becomes an empty shell that the Prince operates like a puppet, while their Sanity drops to zero. The host's original consciousness, if it exists at all, purportedly remains in a perpetual loop of pure bliss in some strange pocket dimension. Game. Over.





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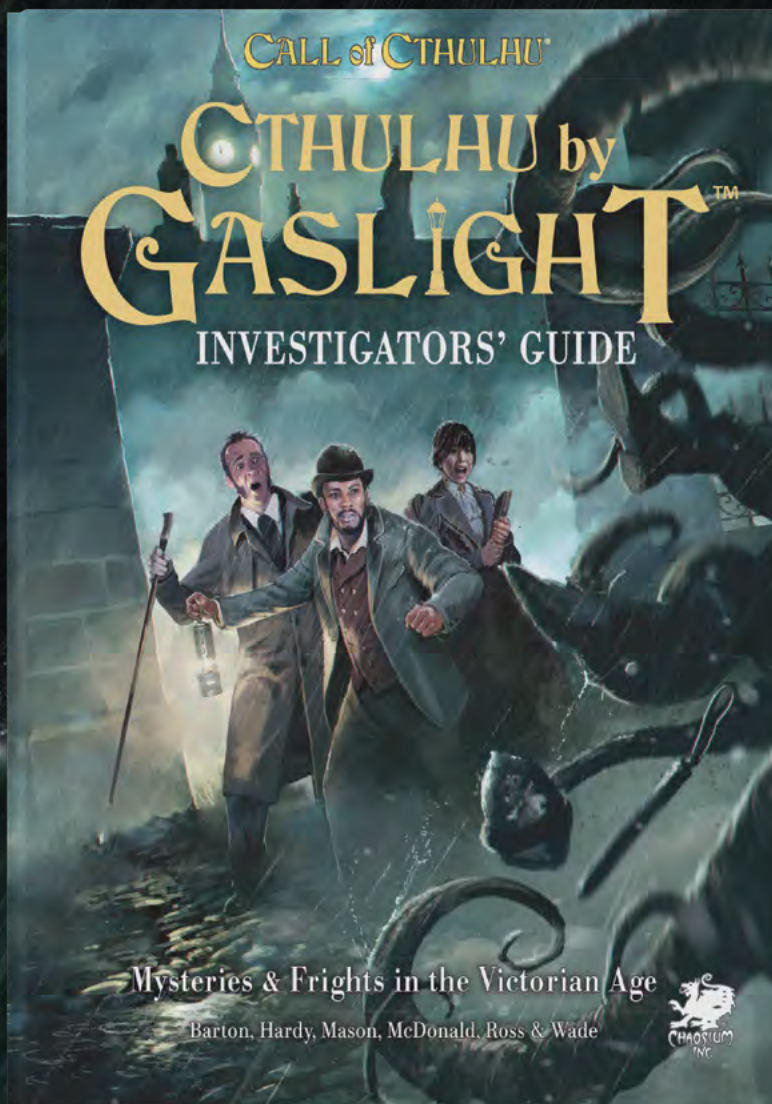
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*Call of Cthulhu* is published by Chaosium Inc.

Printed in Poland.

Published by Chaosium Inc. 3450 Wooddale Ct, Ann Arbor, MI 48104, USA;  
Distributed in Europe by Chaosium EU-Black Monk, Rolna 3, 62-080 Sady, Poland.  
customerservice@chaosium.com

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