

Kuraijikan

Dark Times



NIPAJIN

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Kurai Jikan was created using free software and fonts:

Atom, FontForge, GIMP, Inkscape and $\text{L}^{\text{A}}\text{T}_{\text{E}}\text{X}$.

Kaushan Script, www.impallari.com/kaushan

PT Sans, www.paratype.com/public

NIPAJIN Dingbats, github.com/ludus-leonis

Thanks go to:

Planet Harry for the cover (www.planetharry.at);

the 8. Vienna Fantasy Gaming Convention for 1st place;

Isthar-art for the template the background image is partially based on;
my loyal testers Chris, Flanf, Jan and Jens

All places and characters appearing in this work are fictitious.

Any resemblance to real places or persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

No dice were harmed in the making of this game.

The Game Master should read the following text aloud before play:

Prologue “Kurai Jikan”

Five hundred years ago, the island kingdom of **Hinokuni** was the theater of an epic war. The native Akariko, followers of the Sun Goddess, fought against demonic Oni, who plunged the land into darkness.

Despite their bravery, the Akariko were no match for the Oni's powerful magic and their sheer endless numbers. One day, the Sun Goddess gazed out of a window in her celestial palace. Deeply moved by this sight of the almost lost war, she shed bitter tears. They rained down on the land, turning into shining crystal shards upon touching the ground. The Akariko took this as a sign, collected the shards and carried them as a banner of arms into battle. Using the force of the divine light, they finally expelled the Oni and restored peace to Hinokuni. The Akariko celebrated victory for 100 days and 100 nights and each village was given one shard as a memento. The largest shard, however, was brought to a holy place in the mountains on the southernmost island, **Nantō**. There it was worshiped in the sanctuary of **Yamamura**.

Centuries passed. The present became the past, the past became legend. Hardly anyone remembers what happened during the time of the war, and fewer yet pay tribute to the deeds of past heroes and make a pilgrimage to Yamamura. There, the descendants of those pious folk still guard the huge shard, its divine light slowly fading as time went by.

You are villagers and guardians of Yamamura. In the center of your small, forgotten village, protected by a wooden stockade, the **Shrine of the Sun Goddess** hosts the Goddess' gift. The huge tear, rising above the shrine's sweeping roof, still has the power to illuminate the night like a bonfire. About half a dozen priests take care of the shrine, about two dozen peasant families cultivate the land and feed the village. Yet, this idyllic sight deceives, for the villagers know that the Oni will return one day to take revenge. So they prepare for this day, strengthening their body and mind, practicing martial arts and meditating in prayer.

Nobody knew when the Oni would return – until two weeks ago. When you awoke on that ill-fortuned morning, the countryside was covered by a **fog** that transformed the land: Serene woods turned into clusters of darkness, green meadows into barren land, clear lakes into tar pits. Eerie shadows attack those who enter the fog. Even the Sun Goddess can't penetrate the fog, her powers barely sufficient to turn day into gloomy twilight. She also has not spoken to the priests in their dreams in the last two weeks as she usually does.

So far, the light of the divine tear keeps the fog and the shadows at bay – but it grows weaker each passing day. Together, you and the villagers pray at the shrine to strengthen the remaining light. But you are too few and your prayers not strong enough. The priests estimate that your guarding light will succumb to the fog within days ...

Starring ...



“Ori – gami – ha!”



“Aaarrggghhh!”

Mahōshi, the Origami-Mage

♥ 4

Heir to an ancient family of magicians, Mahōshi draws his powers out of Origami – the art of folding paper. He can fold objects up to the size of his fist (e.g. a key or a bird), that, for a brief time, become real and behave like their counterparts in all regards.

Origami magic: Mahōshi folds a paper object as quickly or slowly as he wants (preparation time ☺) and makes a roll (Ⓞ4). On a success, the object becomes real for a duration 🕒 that equals the ☺. If the object is used as a weapon, the roll is considered to be the attack roll, e.g. if a dart was created. Improvised paper (e.g. leaves) modifies the roll by -1.

Appearance: 172 cm tall, 43 years old. Slender. Long white hair. Wears loose white clothing that resembles folded paper.

Equipment: 20 sheets of paper

Skills: Lore+1, Athletics-1

Kumo Giant-Blade

♥ 8

On his deathbed, Kumo's father appointed him successor by handing him *Omoken*. This ancient sword is 2 m long, 40 cm broad and weighs 100 kg. Luckily, the sword is possessed by a spirit that serves Kumo and grants him the power to reduce the weight of iron to one hundredth.

Omoken's gift: Only Kumo can wield *Omoken*. For him the sword behaves almost like an ordinary weapon. Kumo can also ask the spirit to possess another objects of iron (PersuasionⓄ3). If successful, the spirit will reduce that object's weight accordingly.

Appearance: 171 cm tall, 21 years old. Athletic. Blond hair. Green clothes.

Equipment: *Omoken* (Attack-1, 3 damage)

Modifier: Athletics+1



“Lah-dii-daaah!”

Lady Shamisen



Of noble descent, Lady Shamisen is as deadly as beautiful. Nobody knows her true name, thus she is known for her instrument: the shamisen, a three-stringed lute. In her hands, this instrument not only plays sweet music, but is also a weapon.

Shamisen-do: Also known as “Three Stringed Path”. Lady Shamisen can use her lute to shoot deadly scores at her enemies. On a roll of 1 however, one string breaks. As long as there is at least one string intact, she can continue to use the instrument. It takes 10 minutes to repair a string. If all three strings are intact, the lute has a range of 40 m. The range drops to 20 m with two strings and 10 m if only one string remains.

Appearance: 166 cm tall, age unknown. Graceful appearance. White painted face and red lips. Black pinned-up hair. Flowing ruby gown. Seems to float, but actually makes many tiny steps.

Equipment: Shamisen (1 damage), 10 spare strings

Modifier: Art+2 (except combat), Running-1



“Nyu? Nyuuuuh!”

Sotto Nyu



Sotto's father was rumored to have mistreated cats and thus was cursed by their god: His only daughter was born with a cat's tail, ears and paws. Cast out by her family, she wandered about until she found a new home in Yamamura.

Except for her catlike features, Sotto is an ordinary woman. Only in Yamamura is she accepted for who she is and can say “Nyu!” without fear of getting beaten.

Cat's Reflexes: As long as she shouts “Nyu!”, Sotto always lands on her feet when falling.

Appearance: 158 cm tall, 19 years old. Delicate figure, cat's tail, ears and paws. Wears customized clothes that looks like a Nyunja's – er, Ninja's black garb.

Equipment: Claws (1 damage), Camouflage clothing

Modifier: Stealth+1, Listen+1, Strength-1, Intellect-1

Due to her paws, Sotto cannot use most tools.



“I’m getting too old for this!”

Yojimbo, the Mercenary

♥ 8

Yojimbo can’t remember for how long he made money by solving other people’s problems forcefully. At some point he grew weary of war and retired to Yamamura in hope of finding peace. He became a simple gardener, converting his spiked throwing shield into a sun hat and using his Tekkokagi – iron claws – to weed. At least, until the fog arose ...

Shield throw: Yojimbo throws his shield like a discus, harming several enemies at once (multiple actions, 20 m reach). The shield returns to his hand after the attack, unless a 1 is rolled.

Appearance: 173 cm tall, age unknown. Stoutly built, scrutinizing eyes, gray hair. Dark one-piece suit with a blue cape. Black lace-up sandals. Oversized spiked metal hat that seconds as shield and discus.

Equipment: Tekkokagi (1 damage), Spiked discus hat (1 damage)

Modifier: Parry+1, Discus+1, Wisdom+1, Socializing-1



“Is this ... just a dream?”

Umeko

♥ 6

Sixteen-year-old Umeko always dreamt of strange lands and creatures. Her classmates at the Hakui-no-tenshi Nursing School in Tokyo often made fun of her stories. One day, she was involved in a car crash and fell into a coma. While her body is bound to a hospital’s bed, her spirit was drawn to Nantō, where she has been looking for an exit ever since. Meanwhile, in a dimension far, far away, her relatives desperately hold her hand.


The connection between coma and Nantō cause Umeko to turn invisible whenever she closes her eyes. The fact that her appearance flickers every time she blinks tends to confuse friends and strangers.

Comatose Reality: Umeko turns invisible if she closes her eyes. She can still interact with her environment, but all (re)actions suffer a -2 modifier. She does not truly blink out of existence and thus can still be perceived by other senses, can be touched and harmed.

Appearance: 16 years old, 164 cm tall. Student’s uniform.

Equipment: First-aid kit.

Modifier: Healing+1, Empathy+1, Fighting-1



This role-playing game makes use of the NIPAJIN rules found in the Appendix (◆ 19).

Information for Game Masters

– Overview –

Kurai Jikan (“dark times”) consists of three acts.

During the first act, the characters need to bring help to Yamamura. The village needs more people to pray at the local shrine to power the large tear of the Sun Goddess, as only its divine light keeps the fog and the creatures that lurk within at bay.

During the second act, the characters attempt to help those inhabitants of Nantō who were trapped by dark powers. During these support missions, they also find clues that point at the source of the invasion: the Oni Kirinozako. Depending on available playing time, this act can vary in length and can easily be expanded with your own ideas.

During the third and last act, the characters approach the Oni and his fog tower to bring an end to the dark times.

Tip:

This PDF uses layers. You can print the text without the background images.

– Nantō Primer –

This scenario is set in **Hinokuni**, a realm inspired by Japan. **Nantō**, its southernmost


island, is shaped like a drop, measuring 9.000 km² in size, 130 km north to south and 90 km east to west.

Society

About 100,000 people live in Nantō, calling themselves **Akariko** and resembling an Iron Age culture. Most Akariko live near the coast, while the mountainous interior is sparsely settled. Yamamura is one of the few inland villages. Pristine woods, rivers, mountains, volcanoes and lakes dominate the island.

The prologue (◆ 3) describes the island's **history** as far as it is of concern for this scenario. A divine emperor, said to be the long arm of the Sun Goddess herself, rules over all of Hinokuni. His palace can be found on one of the larger, northern islands. Local administration of the provinces, which include **Nantō**, is delegated to priests of the Sun Goddess.

Villages consist mostly of pit-huts and wooden structures, elevated slightly off the ground, with tiled or thatched roofs and thin walls. Only major buildings feature curved roofs which are considered so archetypal for Hinokuni's architecture. A typical village centers around an open gathering place, surrounded by a series of huts with the most important building – a shrine or the village leader's house – in the middle. Other houses follow according to their rank, forming a sickle-shape. Most



villages are small, hosting only a handful of families which farm rice fields and keep a bit of livestock. Travelling from village to village is exhausting and takes about a day.

To simplify matters, inhabitants of Nantō only bear forenames, most common are:

Names

Male Daichi, Hiroki, Kenzo, Kouki, Riku, Ryo, Shiro, Tsubasa, Yuto, Yuuki

Female Akemi, Chiyo, Emi, Haruka, Kazumi, Megumi, Miu, Noriko, Rin, Yoko

Trade and **economy** is at its very beginning, peasants usually rely on themselves. For trading, rice is used as currency. The unit “sack” represents the amount of rice one adult needs to survive a year. Coins, called “Kōn”, are rare and used only for larger transactions, ten kōn making one sack.

The monotheistic **religion** of the Akariko centers around the nameless Sun Goddess. By day she watches over her followers from her celestial palace. By night she sends them their dreams. According to Akariko belief, those dreams constitute their souls, and have to be returned to the goddess after death. She will then bestow them to other mortals. Akariko gather in the village shrine on special occasions, mostly to celebrate the harvest, birth, marriages, but also when they fall on hard times – generally, when good or bad dreams come true.

Beside the Sun Goddess, myriad **spirits** shape daily life. Evil spirits lie in wait way-side or under bridges, tempt naïve Akariko or cause other shenanigans. Usually, they are not interested in or aware of harming their victims, but just want to have some fun.

The return of the Oni

Two weeks ago, an alliance of several major Oni (demons) conquered Hinokuni and divided the isles among them. Nantō fell to Kirinozako, who now rules it from atop his stronghold, the fog tower at the center of the island: a giant stalactite he ripped from the netherworld.

Originating from the tower, blue **fog** enshrouds all of Nantō and absorbs most light, turning midday no brighter than a full moon’s night. Some Akariko fear the fog might corrupt them, but it only taints plants and animals. Yet, there are **shadows** hiding in the fog that steal human dreams and carry them to the fog tower – see “*Kage (Shadows)*” (◇ 17). Without their dreams, Akariko don’t die, but lose every motivation and obey any command.

Kirinozako placed **lesser demons** or foul Akario in charge of various villages, who are to control the dreamless. They are ordered to suppress any opposition and destroy any tear they can find. Several evil spirits took the opportunity to lead some unlucky, dreamless Akariko into their misfortune, too.

Tears and the Mikoshi

The glowing drop-shaped crystal shards that fell from the sky five hundred years ago are called **Tears of the Sun Goddess**. Most of them are fist-sized and were distributed among the villages for worshipping long ago. The remaining shards, one among them 6m tall and weighing several tons, were brought to Yamamura.

As the tears’ importance for daily life diminished, many villagers forgot about them and they now lie around in bags or

crates. Those villages who found their tear in time had at least a chance when the fog came: Their inhabitants now hope for rescue in its slowly dwindling aura of divine light. Kage attacked everyone else and took their dreams.

As protection against the fog, the party receives a portable shrine: a **Mikoshi**. This amply decorated wooden box, about one cubic metre in size and with a curved roof, has openings on all sides and is carried on two large bamboo sticks. It is not too heavy, two persons can carry it and safely put it down at any time. A pedestal inside the Mikoshi holds five fist-sized tears.



A single tear illuminates a radius of about 1 m. This range is amplified if multiple tears are brought together: 2 m for two, 3 m for three, and so on. Tears shine even brighter in sacred places: the total range is multiplied by 5 while the tears are kept in the Mikoshi, or by 10 in a village shrine. Thus, the fully loaded Mikoshi illuminates a radius of 25 m

The characters might not know it yet, but the tears have another practical use: their divine light harms demons. This is why they are so eager to destroy them all. But the fragile tears shatter on a successful

hit into numerous tiny, harmlessly glowing splinters.

Yamamura and the heroes

For centuries, the inhabitants of Yamamura readied themselves to fight against the darkness should it ever return. Thus, even apparently plain farmers and priests command great powers: Among them one finds specialists of martial arts, espionage and deception, magicians and clerics. It is up to the players whether or not the characters possess supernatural abilities like in many Mangas or Animes. If so, those can be implemented as “Powers”.

Kurai Jikan takes place during the Iron Age; weapons and equipment should be chosen according to this period. Armor is unusual. There are no carts or draft animals in Yamamura, as it is impossible to move them along the steep path from the valley to Yamamura.

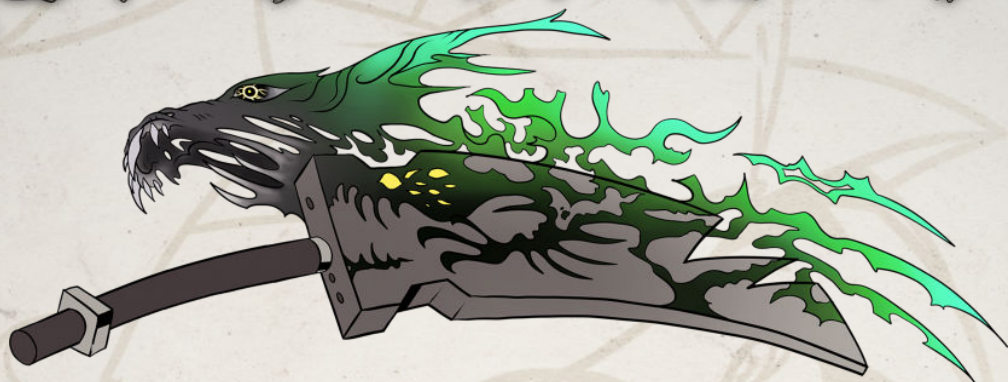
There are ready-to-play characters in the front of this booklet (◊ 4).

- Development -

Once the players are aware of the information in the prologue and have chosen or made a character, the game starts with the first act in Yamamura.

Act II

High priest Tetsuo summons the characters and assigns them a mission: *“It is time to act! Descend into the valley and search for survivors in the other villages. Escort them to Yamamura as soon as possible, so they can join our prayers and strengthen the tear. Take*



this Mikoshi. It contains five tears of the Sun Goddess that will protect you from the fog. Now go, for you are our last hope.”

With two characters carrying the Mikoshi and thus a small sphere of safety, the party enters the fog. The inhabitants of Yamamura wave them goodbye before returning to their prayers.

Tetsuo (Human)

♥ 2 🗡 4 🛡 4

👤: 34, 167 cm. Pale skin, short black hair. Concerned look. Multi-layered robe: light blue interior and dark blue exterior garment, carefully folded. Floor-length broad sash.

🗨️: Friendly and open minded visionary, at the moment deeply concerned for Yamamura and Nantō.

⚙️: Religion+2, Knowledge+1

The GM can pick any village (📍 11) to be visited first or can leave the decision to the players. The inhabitants of Kōkō, Ueno and Yagi need to be rescued, those in Akamori will gladly return with them as soon as the characters ask.

All villagers escorted back to Yamamura will join the prayers. At least 15 additional people are needed to restore the great tear's powers. While dreamless villagers

can be ordered to pray, they do so half-heartedly and thus count only as half a prayer.

Once there are sufficient people present, the divine light amplifies and extends into the surrounding woods. While this does not yet save Yamamura, the fog is no longer an immediate problem for the village.

Act II

High priest Tetsuo is still worried about the neighboring villages, especially those without tears. He sends the party on another rescue mission. If the Mikoshi lost tears or was damaged, it will be fully repaired and restocked. During this act, the group should visit those villages they did not liberate in the first act.

The group will find **clues** that point to Kirinozako and his fog tower. At the end of each location's section, the GM finds a list of hints he should drop to his players while they investigate. If the clue cannot be integrated as part of play, a saved villager might point it out. If the players missed any clues in the first act, high priest Tetsuo will convey this information before the party departs again.

Act III

The clues finally point to Kirinozako's **fog tower** (🔍 16). On the second floor, Kirinozako resides on his throne, drinking dreams while looking through a magic, eye-shaped window and rejoicing on the Akariko's suffering.

On the ground floor, Kage continually come and go in all directions and pour captured dreams into a large basin. There are usually at least three to four dozen Kage found here at any time. Characters should be careful not to be overwhelmed by superior numbers. Unless the party is exceptionally powerful, a more discrete approach might be in order:

- ☒ The **masks** of monster-hunter Kunio from Akamori (🔍 13) allows them to pass the Kage unnoticed.
- ☒ The **tear's** light keeps the Kage at range, but alarms Kirinozako.
- ☒ If the characters rescue enough Akariko, they could organize an **assault** to take the tower. While the villagers distract the Kage, the group can rush to Kirinozako's throne room.

Once the characters manage to come head to head with Kirinozako, they need to overcome him:

- ☒ It will be a hard fight to beat Kirinozako in battle. With the help of smith Tankō from Kōkō (🔍 14) the party can enhance their weapons and increase their chances.
- ☒ Exposing Kirinozakoi to the **large tear's light** from Yamamura will blind him and expel him to the netherworld. However, he will try to flee as soon as he becomes

aware of its proximity. Under no circumstances he approaches it willingly – the characters will need to either deceive or restrain him.

- ☒ With the help of monster-hunter Kunio from Akamori (🔍 13), the characters could build a giant **Oni trap**.

Golden rule: Reward your players' creativity, if they try something different, e.g. somehow poison Kirinozako's "*drink*"!

Once defeated, Kirinozako will dissipate while roaring wildly.

– Locations –

There are four villages within a day's march from Yamamura. They can be used in the first and second act. A general description how they are structured can be found under "*Society*" (🔍 7).

The omnipresent fog distorts the landscape, thus the deliberate lack of a **map**. Journeys are handled in an abstract manner. Reaching any target requires a successful teamwork roll (Orientation🌀4). On a failure, the party risks a random encounter (🔍 16) and needs to try again once it has been dealt with.

Dreamless Akariko are usually controlled by some kind of creature (Oni, evil spirit, ...). Characters can try to take over control by issuing orders on their own: In this case, the conflict is not fought with weapons, but with words. Unless otherwise stated, villagers use the following stats:

Peasant (Human)

♥1 🛡4 🗡6

👤: Simple peasant clothing.

🗨️: Will-less: Obeys all orders.

⚙️: No special features.

At the end of each location description, the GM finds a list of clues he should convey to the players while/after overcoming the obstacles in a scene.

Akamori (Village)

Akamori is one of the few villages still keeping a tear in their shrine. So far, this prevented the fog from overwhelming the whole settlement. Like in Yamamura, the protective aura shrinks daily and hardly extends outside the shrine, which currently shelters all remaining 28 villagers.

The inhabitants are afraid but otherwise unharmed. They will gladly follow any reasonable advice the characters offer. Their **village leader Hisao** wears loose robes to conceal his pudgy build. He mentions that monster-hunter Kunio left the village for the woods a day ago, to “... *lure shadows into the light.*” All villagers know and can describe Kunio.

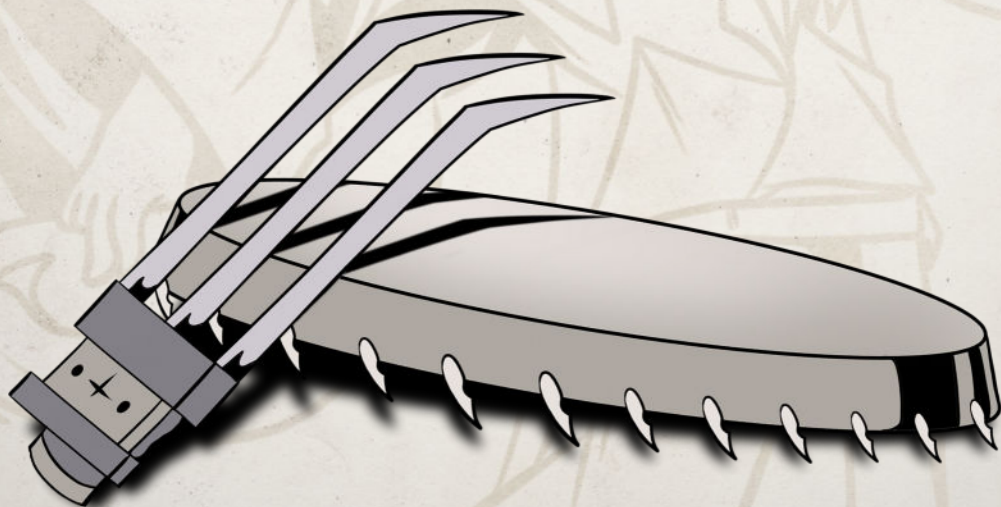
If the party visits **Kunio's lodge**, the characters find what looks like ordinary hunting gear. If they succeed in a Mystics@4 check, they recognize the gear as more likely to be designed to hunt monsters and demons.

Clues: Monster-hunter Kunio went into the woods and has not yet returned. Rumor has it that the smith in Kōkō can enhance weapons against the Oni.

Akamori (Woods)

Akamori Woods are right behind Akamori Village. Monster-hunter Kunio entered it recently, hoping to catch and study Kage with his **shadowtraps** – converted bear traps with dark violet shadow crystals as bait.

Despite attracting Kage, **shadow crystals** have an unpleasant side effect: They neutralize any light within a 20 m radius – including the protective aura of the Mikoshi. If a shadow crystal comes into close contact with a tear, both start to vibrate before



they finally explode (radius 5 m, ☹ vs. 3 damage). The shadow crystal's "anti-light" can be covered easily using a cloth, but this does not prevent the explosive interaction.

To find Kunio, the party needs to succeed in teamwork Tracking④ three times. Each success leads to one of three shadowtraps Kunio set. On a failure, they have to deal with a random encounter before they find the target. Each trap is surrounded by a zone of anti-light and there is a 50% chance a Kage has been caught in the trap.

Close to the third trap, they find Kunio himself. He slipped and fell down a slope, losing his mask that concealed him from the Kage. Kage found him unconscious and took his dreams (he currently is at ♥0), but were themselves captivated by the shadow crystals that fell out of his pocket. Six Kage surround will-less Kunio, two of them carry his dreams in their chest – see "Kage (Shadows)" (📖 17). Once the Kage are defeated, the dreams automatically return to Kunio.

Kunio (Human)

♥2 🍷4 🍷4

👤: 23, 171 cm, scrawny. White hair. Dark tight leather dress with decorative silver rivets formed like monster skulls. Black mask.

👤: Curious. Prepared to take risks, but not reckless. Likes his work being appreciated.

⚙️: Traps+1, Monster Lore+2, Mask crafting+1, Strength-1

If the party saves Kunio, he explains the traps he invented. The shadow crystals are a weapon from the war against the Oni 500 years ago. They have been given from hunter to hunter for generations. Each time Kunio catches a Kage, he can try use its essence to **craft a mask**, but so far he only succeeded once. To do so, Kunio

needs to transport a "living" Kage to his hut, where he can try to banish it into a mask (Crafting④). However, village leader Hisao will strongly object against the procedure, fearing for the safety of his village.

Clues: Existence and functionality of shadow crystals and hunter masks. Dreams can be returned to their owner.

Kōkō (Village)

Kōkō sits at the bottom of a cliff and is famous for its **iron mine**. Beside the usual buildings, the town has an ironwork and a smithy. Kōkō's shrine does not possess a tear.

When the fog appeared, the inhabitants voted what to do. The majority, 25 villagers, decided to hide in the extensive mine. Only five stubborn peasants remained in the village, where eventually Kage stole their dreams. Afterwards the enthusiastic **gambler Shūsaku**, an evil spirit, took them under his wings. He wants them to entertain him by playing games of "Go". Because the will-less peasants play neither well nor pleasant, Shūsaku laments loudly about the matches.

Shūsaku (Evil Spirit)


♥4 🍷6 🍷4


👤: Child-sized humanoid with fox head and tail. Oversized stuffed green trousers and jacket with yellow hemline. Auburn fur.

👤: He just desires to play, but puts his joy above other peoples sorrow. Fair player who complies to agreements and rules, but expect others to do the same.

⚙️: Gambling+2. In fox-shape additionally: Running+2, Fighting+1, ♥8, 🍷8, 🍷6

As an evil spirit, Shūsaku is immune to the tear's divine light. He is willing to tell

the party anything they wish to know or free the peasants – if they defeat him in a game of Go. He expects the party to wager one of their possessions, for example a tear or a weapon, per game. Shūsaku plays against the whole party as once, which may try teamwork. Each time the party wins, Shūsaku suffers trauma. Once his  drops to zero, he runs off angrily, complaining about his performance.

If the characters attack or cheat, Shūsaku turns into a wolf-sized fox and orders the five peasants to protect him. He flees forever if the fight turns against him ( drops to 0).


The remaining inhabitants of Kōkō hide in a secret, barred tunnel within the complex network of mines. The five peasants know where to find the tunnel, but need to be freed from Shūsaku's control before they will lead the party there.

Tankō the smith hides with other villagers in the tunnels. He is a muscleman with a filthy blacksmith's apron. He offers to enhance the party's weapons with tear splinters, which would double their damage against Oni. It will take about one hour per weapon and the party needs to protect his smithy against the Kage during this time. He also needs tear splinters. If the party does not have any, the group will have to smash one of their tears.

Clues: Weapons can be enhanced with tears. Evil spirits are immune to divine light.

Veno (Village)


Another evil spirit, puppeteer Ninkō, established a tyranny in this village. He tied the villagers to nearly invisible strings and


controls their every move with his hands and fingers. Those strings do not adhere to natural laws: Ninkō can control his puppets around corners, through obstacles and from any direction. Each time a character interacts with a villager, he has a chance to notice the strings as glittering lines (Perception 8) and well as their origin.

Ninkō linked 24 villagers up, but can only control as many as there are characters at any time. However, he can switch between his “puppets” at the start of each round. If a villager is forcefully overcome, he dies and one hears a string snap and the body falls lifelessly to the floor. If he is overcome peacefully, he will try to free himself from the ties.




Ninkō (Evil Spirit)

6 8 10

: Faceless man-sized wooden jointed doll. White doctor's coat, disproportionate large fingers.

: Ninkō sits silently on one of the roofs. He just wants to fool the group and order his “puppets” to walk behind door or walls, hoping the characters will follow them. He will only resort to fighting if he is attacked. Ninkō can also be overcome peacefully.

: Will+2, Roping-in (+1 vs.  or victim is trapped and controlled by Ninkō)

Ninkō can try to tie the characters to his invisible strings (see boxed text). If he succeeds, he controls this character. The player chooses  and  normally, but when it is his turn, he must first attempt to escape the bonds (4). If that succeeds, he is freed and can immediately act on his own. If not, Ninkō decides what the Character does this round.

As an evil spirit, Ninkō is immune to the tear's divine light and shows no interest in them either. He flees if he runs out of

“puppets” or is overcome by deeds or words. Ninkō won’t act himself except to catch a character, but will try to escape harm by unnaturally jumping from roof to roof. Villagers he controls attack using to their own stats.

Clues: Evil spirits are immune to divine light. From the peak of Ōyama Volcano one can make out the whole island.

Yagi (Village)

The villagers of Yagi were enslaved by **Maggot-Oni Ujiwaku**. He controls their actions through little maggots placed on their spinal cord, overriding the host’s brain activity. The control is rather rough, therefore villagers act rather rugged and cannot be overcome peacefully. Ujiwaku cannot defend himself and needs his slaves to protect him, but he is aware of anything any of his slaves perceive.

Upon entering the village, the villagers will stagger zombie-like toward the characters. The controlling maggots are not obvious (Perception or Empathy Ⓞ4). Two or three try to distract the party by speaking very slowly and awkwardly, while the remaining villagers try to destroy the Mikoshi and the tears inside.

Ujiwaku (Lower Oni)

♥10 🐛6 🗡-

👤: 3 m maggot worm, slimy.

🗡: Devoted to Kirinozako and always acting in his lords best interest. Tries to destroy all tears.

⚙️: No 🛡. Takes one wound per round if exposed to divine light. Tries to roll over characters who get to close (🐛, 1 damage).

From behind, one can easily spot the controlling maggot on the neck. If removed or killed, the host dies immediately. The

only way to save the villagers is by overcoming Ujiwaku: Without their master, the maggots fall off.

Clues: Demons are harmed by divine light. Rumor has it that a monster-hunter lives in Akamori. Most likely, the Kage have a center of operations.

Ōyama Volcano

This volcano offers an excellent **vantage point**, from which one can make out the whole island. The crater rim rises above the fog and is bathed in sunlight, but can be reached only by a steep path. While the fog encompasses the whole island, one can make out a spire at the center of the island which, according to the characters’ knowledge, should not be there. The fog seems to be even thicker and turbulent there than elsewhere on the island, as if it originates from that spire.

The crater rim offers an excellent emergency shelter still being exposed to full sunlight. Anyone sleeping here will be contacted by the Sun Goddess, who informs her faithful that Kirinozako is responsible for the evil that befell the island.

Clues: The existence of Kirinozako’s fog tower. From the Sun Goddess: Intense divine light will blind Kirinozako, who is responsible for the fog.



- Kirinozako's Tower -


the skewered corpses from his spear and attacks.


Kirinozako resides in a large stalactite made from netherworldly dark stone. At the base, it has an diameter of 40 m, but widens toward the top at several hundred meters high. Except for a large, blue eye at about 20 m high, the structure is windowless. The uppermost part breaks through the fog, but can only be seen from Ōyama Volcano. Four large openings, one in each cardinal direction, allow entrance on the ground floor. Only two of the tower's levels play a role during this scenario, the entrance hall and the throne room.

The ground floor's entrance hall is a plain stone room, dominated by a giant pool. Within, the Kage collect the stolen dreams that shimmer in all colors of the rainbow. Hectic ado fills the hall, as Kage enter, pour the dreams into the pool, and leave again.

A giant spiral staircase leads up to Kirinozako's throne room on the second floor. There, he sits on his throne, enjoying the Akariko's suffering by looking into the magic eye he can make to show any desired spot within the fog. He sips dreams from a goblet that is steadily refilled by a giant Kage. Bad dreams Kirinozako spits out in dustgust.

Kirinozako (demon) 30 10 8

: 6 m tall, flame red skin, antlers, beard bristly hair. Tiger skin loincloth. The skewered remains of his last victims remain on his spear.

: Presumptuous and overconfident. Wants to see the Akariko suffer.

: Strength+4, Spear+2 (2 damage)

If confronted, the Oni will cry in a deep voice: "Mortals? In my throne room? I will swallow you whole!" He then carelessly flips

- Encounters -


The GM can use the following random encounters to see if the party stumbles over roaming monsters. There is a limitless supply of Kage, but the other encounters should appear only once during the scenario. It is not necessary to include all of them during play.


D6 Encounter	Amount
1 Akaritabe	1
2 Kage	3 per character
3 Poyo-Poyos	2 per character
4 Takuya	-
5 no encounter	-
6 no encounter	-


Akaritabe (Devourer of Light)

The ground begins to tremble as a giant subterranean worm approaches the Mikoshi. An Akaritabe tries to devour the tears.

Akaritabe (Monster) 12 8 8

: 5 m long earthworm, mouth that spans the whole face.

: Feeds on light and tries to eat the tears.

: Counter-attack: Every time the Akaritabe takes damage, even if it is not his turn, he will counter by swinging his tail at all characters in reach (multiple-action).

During the first round, it is noticed by a tremor. The next round, it attempts to knock over either the Mikoshi or one of the bearers. If it succeeds, the tears fall from the Mikoshi and the range of the divine light is reduced immediately. Next, it will try to gobble the tears. Once it eats at

least two of them, the Akaritabe will try to escape by digging into the ground (three rounds). Tears can easily be recovered from the defeated Akaritabe's stomach.

Kage (Shadows)

Kage provide the bulk of Kirinozako's army. They can only exist in darkness and avoid the tear's divine light. If Kage are rolled as a random encounter, they will trail the group in the shadows beyond the divine light (Perception@6 to detect) and wait for a favorable opportunity to strike. Unprotected traveler risk running into Kage each 15 to 30 minutes.

On a successful attack, Kage steal dreams: they absorb a rainbow-colored compound from the victim and store it in their chest. A Kage that obtains two dreams attempts to return to Kirinozako's tower. Their speed is similar to that of a running dog.

Kage (Monster)

♥ 2 🐾 4 🗝 4

👤: Pitch-black upright shadows that can take any form imaginable. They have height and width, but no depth. If overcome, they groan and dissolve.

👂: Stupid minions, trying to fetch the Akariko's dreams. They approach sideways as they are barely noticeable as thin line (Perception@6 to detect). Once they surround their victim, they turn and attack.

⚙: Dreamcatcher: Each successful attack steals one dream (1 damage).

Dreams carried by a Kage are released when it is overcome. They return to their owner rightful owner within a radius of 100 m, otherwise they fall to the floor. ♡ lost from a Kage's attack will be restored if the corresponding dream is returned.

Takuya

Dimly lit, the travelling salesman Takuya appears in front of the characters, pulling his cart. It is filled with lamps and paper lanterns.

Takuya (human)

♥ 3 🐾 6 🗝 6

👤: 32, 167 cm, dark hair, athletic build. Inconspicuous traveling coat covering fine, loose yellow-blue clothes.

👂: Greedy merchant who takes advantage of the needy as long as this does not immediately threaten their life.

⚙: Bargaining+1

Years ago, Takuya bought tears from villages that forgot their purpose. Now he earns a fortune by selling them as neat lanterns. Even though his lanterns are not sacred and thus do not shine very far, they are often the only means for the average villager to survive the fog.


Takuya bought all tears honorably and considers himself a businessman: Only those who pay obtain divine light. He demands five Kōn per lantern.

He will attempt to sell lanterns to the party and has 21 small tears left. He won't be willing to help them "for the poor farmer's sake", but would be interested in an escort or any deal beneficial to him.

Poyo-Poyo

On a failed teamwork check (Perception @6), the party stumbles into Poyo-Poyo territory.

Before the fog, Poyo-Poyos hopped slowly by the grass, being trusting and affectionate like cats. The fog corrupted them and they mutated into aggressive, bloodthirsty beasts that attack intruders



on sight. If left alone, they fight among themselves instead.

– *All's well that ends well?* –

Poyo-Poyo (Animal)

♥ 2 🐾 4 🐾 6

🐾: Cute, furry, waist-high beings with big round eyes, looking like a mixture of rabbit and guinea pig.

🐾: At first they peep from their burrows and approach the characters sniffing. Once they get closer, they bare their teeth and attack!

⚙️: No special features.

With Kirinozako defeated, the fog will clear within a couple of hours. The group can return to Yamamura and celebrate their victory.

If the players enjoyed *Kurai Jikan*, the adventure can go on, too:

– *Don't forget!* –

The following things the GM should not forget when running this scenario:

- ☒ The fog causes an eerie mood. The Mikoshi grants only a small and fragile zone of safety.
- ☒ Dreamless Akariko are will-less. Demons and evil spirits order them around, but do not control their mind. Resolute new orders can override earlier ones and thus overcome controlled villagers peacefully.
- ☒ Kirinozako's tower contains several other levels which hold manifold secrets and dangers.
- ☒ Many Akariko lost their dreams, which still need to be returned. The group could transport barrels full of dreams through the island, trying to find their rightful owners. Bad guys might try to prevent this, because they need the dreams for something else.
- ☒ Some evil spirits might have remained and still terrorize other remote villages.
- ☒ Even though Nantō was liberated, the Oni still control much of Hinokuni. The group could lead a campaign to free other islands.

NIPAJIN (v1.8) offers more rules than are necessary for Kurai Jikan, for example the Bestiary. They can be used for creating your own scenarios in other genres.

Appendix I – Player's Rules

Each **character** starts as a blank sheet of A4 or letter landscape-sized paper. A straight line splits this **character sheet** in a left and a right half. The right half is subdivided into an upper and a lower area.

Players write a basic description of their character into the left area: name, ethnicity and appearance, followed by a **background**. It is not important whether this is done in points or as prose. However, the description should focus on the character's history, not what he can do well – the game master will decide that later on. The background would rather state “worked as a remover” instead of “is strong”. Players and game master agree on **equipment** (🎲 20) and **powers** (🎲 20) as they see fit.

Now a d4, d6, d8, d10 and d12 are placed on the upper right area of the character sheet. The player picks one as a **hit die** (🎲) and moves it, highest number up, into the left area. If this die is ever reduced below 1, the character drops out of the game.

– Task resolution –

As long as everyone agrees on the outcome, the plot moves along freely between players and game master. When the (timely) outcome of a **task** is unclear, the player picks an **available die** from the upper right area of his character sheet and rolls it. On a natural one, the attempt is an **automatic failure**. Otherwise, a **modifier** is added to the roll, derived by the game master from the character's background.

<i>Background suggests</i>	<i>+/-</i>
<i>veritable flaw</i>	-4
<i>inexperienced, clumsy</i>	-2
<i>out of training</i>	-1
<i>average</i>	0
<i>trained, hobbyist</i>	+1
<i>few years of practice, professional</i>	+2
<i>vast experience, veteran</i>	+4


The task succeeds if the total equals or exceeds a **target number** (🎯), set by the game master based on the task's difficulty. There is no automatic failure on a total of one, but that will rarely be sufficient.

<i>Difficulty</i>	<i>🎯 Example</i>
<i>simple</i>	2 -
<i>favorable circumstances</i>	3 <i>good tools</i>
<i>average</i>	4 -
<i>hindering circumstances</i>	5 <i>darkness</i>
<i>hard</i>	6 <i>juggling knives</i>
<i>masterly</i>	8 <i>walking a tightrope</i>
<i>legendary</i>	12 -

After the roll, the now **exhausted die** is placed into the lower right area of the character sheet. If the game master derived a new a modifier, it should be written down to avoid having to do that again, e.g. “Run+1”.

Dice without any chance of success may not be used and thus not be exhausted. A character might repeat a failed task of his own or from others, but 🎯 raises by 1 for each attempt.

When all dice of a character are exhausted, he can't accomplish any more tasks. The character has to **take a deep breath** and pause for a short period of time, as defined by the game master. After that, the dice become



available again and are put back into the upper right area.

- Conflicts -

Conflicts are held in **rounds**, their length being determined by the game master. Each round, each character can attempt one action, e.g. attack, and may react to each of his enemy's actions, e.g. parry. Enemies can be overcome by reducing their **W** below 1, either with or without violence.

At the start of each round, each player simultaneously chooses an **action die** (Ⓜ) and a **reaction die** (Ⓢ) out of his available dice. Those dice are used to resolve all actions and reactions this round. Players may choose to forgo either die if they wish. Surprised characters must not get a Ⓜ during the first round. Only players without any available dice left may skip a round to let their characters take a deep breath.

The Ⓜ also defines the **order** within a round. Dice with fewer sides go first (e.g. a d6 acts before a d8), ties are resolved randomly.

During an attack the defender rolls the Ⓢ first. On an automatic failure, or if the defender does not have a Ⓢ this round, the Ⓢ for the attack is 0. Otherwise the roll is the Ⓢ, but at least 1 – whatever is higher. The attacker rolls the Ⓜ now as usual. A successful attack results in a **wound** and reduces the enemy's **W** by 1. Non-violent actions also help to overcome enemies. If successful, they result in **trauma**, which is represented by game tokens placed on the character sheet.

Characters can neglect their defense by not choosing a Ⓢ. If so, they are allowed to announce **multiple actions**, up to half of the maximum value of their Ⓜ (two for a d4, three for a d6, ...). This includes, among others: two-handed attacks, double-shots, area attacks like sweeping blows or fireballs, intimidating groups of enemies or a timed sequence of other tasks. *All* tasks are modified by -2 per

additional action or target beyond one. Each action triggers its own reaction.

Finally, characters may **defend others** if they did not choose a Ⓜ and react on behalf of others, up to half the maximum value of their Ⓢ. The defended character must be in reach and the defending character risks all the damage on failure.

If a character's **W** drops below 1, or if the number of trauma tokens reach its current value, the character is overcome (dead, intimidated, ...).

- Equipment -

There is no equipment list. Ordinary weapons cause one wound per hit, special or magical weapons cause two, fire and explosions cause three to four. Improvised equipment results in a -1 modifier when rolling the Ⓜ. Armor offers a +1 or +2 modifier to the Ⓢ.


- Healing -

After a **full night's rest** all player's dice become available again. Character's wounds may also heal. Their players roll the Ⓢ – if the result is higher than the original value, it becomes the new value, otherwise the **W** remains unchanged.

The game master decides how and when **trauma** heals. Psychological damage from being threatened or intimidated might last no longer than to the end of the encounter. Phobias, curses and such might haunt the characters for days or even weeks to come.

- Powers -

Magic spells, miracles, PSI, super powers or other supernatural abilities are called **powers**. Players define their character's powers during character creation. Usually each scenario that features the supernatural will have its own



rules, but they might refer to the following NIPAJIN default mechanism:

To unleash a power, a character needs to concentrate or gesture for a **preparation time** (☺). If the ☺ is **variable**, the player can define it as needed, right before using a power, e.g. “one minute”. At the end of the ☺ the player makes the roll, taking the usual -2 per additional target into account. Each victim may react to avoid the power entirely. For objects and powers without victims, the game master defines the ☺. On a success, the power lasts as long as its indicated **duration time** (☹).

Melee attack powers behave like ordinary weapons, e.g. *icy touch* or *ghost sword*. Each hit results in one wound. ☺: 1 round; ☹: permanent

Ranged attack powers behave like ordinary ranged weapons and consume a physical resource of some kind per use, e.g. a *magic missile* might need powder or a small gem, *fireball* an alchemical grenade. ☺: 1 round; ☹: permanent

Knock-out powers prevent victims from acting, e.g. *sleep*, *petrification*, *fear* or *banish*.

☺: variable; ☹: invested ☺

Support powers help a living being or improves an object in one facet, e.g. *fire resistance*, *featherfall*, *barrier* or *light*. ☺: variable; ☹: invested ☺

Transformations slowly change or move dead matter or feelings, e.g. *water-to-wine*, *charm* or *telekinesis*. ☺: variable; ☹: invested ☺

Illusions deceive a single sense on a specific detail, e.g. *fool's gold*, *phantom sound* or *invisibility*. ☺: variable; ☹: invested ☺

Divinations unearth hidden facts, e.g. *detect magic*, *clairvoyance* or *danger sense*. ☺: one minute for the present, one hour for the past, one day for the future; ☹: -

Healing powers cure illnesses, poisons, or close wounds. ☺: one hour per wound, one day per illness; ☹: permanent



Appendix II – Game Master's Rules

– Backgrounds –

A player character's (PC) background is of special importance in NIPAJIN. A good background includes childhood, education and what the PC did the last few years. A dramatic life experience or two completes the picture. The PC's age and looks should also be written down.

Your group decides how formal the background description needs to be. In any case, it should offer sufficient information to derive a PC's strengths and weaknesses, as the game master (GM) has to base the decision, how easy or difficult a task is, on that. Gaps in the

background should be closed as soon as possible, preferably during character generation. Scenarios usually suggest a few modifiers for pre-generated PCs – they may of course be amended.

– Teamwork –

Occasionally, some or all PCs will try **teamwork** to increase their chances to succeed in a task. Their players each choose an ☹. They then agree on a leader. The leader rolls first and decides whether his result counts for the team. If the leader decides that a better result might

be achieved by another player, leadership is handed over, the next player tries, and so forth. Each roll supersedes the previous one. A rolled natural one at any point means that the group's attempt has ended in failure. Only dice that actually were rolled become exhausted.

If PCs try teamwork during a conflict, their combined order in a round is that of their slowest member. Any opponent has to defend against the final result with a single roll of his . If he loses, he takes the wounds each team member would have inflicted individually. You can't combine teamwork and multiple actions.

Long-term tasks require high target numbers, e.g. "repair@20". The PCs have to work multiple rounds to reach this number. Each round, which has a length set by the GM, e.g. "a day", all participating PCs do teamwork as described above. The result is added up, round after round, until the @ is reached. A rolled natural one only foils one round, not the long-term task itself.

- Non-Player Characters -

The game master will represent friends and foes the group is going to interact with. Those non-player characters (NPCs) use simplified rules. In addition to their appearance and motivation to interact with PCs, they are only given a , a single , and a single , based on their danger level. Those dice might include half-dice like d2 or d3.

/ Danger level

d2 *dangerous in large numbers*

d3 *raw recruit*

d4 *novice*

d6 *average*

d8 *old hand*

d10 *dangerous*

d12 *very dangerous*

d20 *epic*

In addition, each creature might get predefined modifiers, e.g. "Fight+1" or "Agility-2". However,

don't mix good dice and high modifiers or NPCs will get too tough.

NPCs have the advantage to never run out of / and thus never need to take a deep breath. In return, they should be made slightly less powerful. Also, trauma is not as important for them and is deducted directly from their .

- Bestiary -


The following example creatures should not be taken as an indication that NIPAJIN is limited to classic fantasy.

Creature				Abilities
Rat	1	2	3	Run+4, Hide+2
Goblin	3	4	4	Perception+1
Ork	6	6	6	Intimidate+1, Fight+1, Smarts-1
Troll	10	8	6	Fight+1, regenerates one wound/round
Giant	20	8	8	Fight+2, Strength+4
Dragon	40	12	10	Dragon-Breath+4, cannot be knocked out


- Experience -

NIPAJIN is not designed to see PCs grow over the course of a long campaign. Should a significant period of time pass in the game world, the GM nonetheless might raise the modifier of a PC if that sounds reasonable.

The PCs' skills usually define the power level of the setting. If the group consists of typical fantasy heroes, the bestiary contains NPCs with suitable competence. If PCs are goblins, a typical human hero running havoc in their lair would be already as powerful as a troll. The GM therefore should compare PCs and NPCs relatively to each other. If PCs become superheroes overnight, this should not be reflected by advancing the characters – the GM should change the world and degrade the NPCs instead.



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The island kingdom of Hinokuni is in danger: Evil Oni and their minions conquered the realm and covered it in a thick fog. A small band of heroes, equipped with the shining Tears of the Sun Goddess, which already lighted this darkness before, may thwart their evil plans ...

This booklet contains a complete role-playing game. It includes not only the scenario itself, but also sample characters and the full, universal NIPAJIN ruleset. Using those rules, you can write your own scenarios in Hinokuni – or any other genre.



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