



## Introduction

*Ours is a time of both wonder and strife. Once distant, the worlds of mortals and spirits are now closely intertwined. We live in lands where spirits flourish in the ancient trees; where the soul of a sword can be as important as that of its wielder.*

*Unfortunately our era is not without its dangers. Open the wrong door and you could become spirited away into another world. Around the corner may lurk a creature that would eat you before you could blink. People hold tight to their charms and whispered blessings without the understanding of the miracles they bring. Fear not, where there are monsters, there will always be those who would protect you as well. While the wicked can come from any place, so too can exemplary guardians.*

*As the lines between worlds continue to blur, those who walk the realms in both the realms of mortals and spirits have become more commonplace. In this era of change, those with power be it mystical or mundane live with ever increasing responsibilities. Yet ordinary folk still treat them with apprehension. Their fears are justified, such power can be used to oppress those in need just as easily it can be used to protect them.*



#### A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Observant history buffs will find that there are quite a few things in *Mysteries of the Yokai* that do not follow the events of real-world history.

The game setting takes place in an alternate timeline that diverges after the Heian Era in the 12th century. This means players have some freedom to define the events of their stories for themselves.

## The Times

This is a time of upheaval. The islands of Nippon are changing, but the path these lands will take is not yet known. The capital has moved from the province of *Yamashiro* to its current home in *Seihara*. Although a new monarch, Emperor Akitsu, sits upon the Chrysanthemum Throne, the people remain uneasy about their leaders. The corruption and decadence of the previous era is not forgotten. Much of that indulgence remains despite the great shifts that have changed the nation. The populace worries that this new emperor will only perpetuate the attitudes of the Imperial Court and his predecessors.

Those who have met Akitsu in person, however, are beginning to feel a growing sense of hope. News of his deeds have yet to spread amongst the people, but the impact of his presence will no doubt resound through all of Nippon. The Emperor walks among his people and acts against traditions the nation has upheld for centuries. With the world

still recovering from the consequences of his grandfather's actions, there are many who would benefit from the young Emperor's downfall. Rumors in the capitol speak of the Shogun and nobles amassing power to take rule into their own hands and leave their emperor a mere figurehead.

While many factions of his government are prepared for a great conflict, Emperor Akitsu is winning the people over with the promise of advancement and stability. This has changed the status quo. Those who were ready for a war of ideals now fear the loss of their gained momentum. Many are disappointed at losing the chance to wrest control for themselves. Their power depends on a weak emperor and shaky faith in leadership. But tensions remain high, for if the young Emperor makes a great enough mistake, it will become an opportunity to undermine his authority. Many eyes watch their leaders to see who will be the victor once the first strike is dealt.

Not all changes are brought on by the actions of mortals. A great influx of mystical activity has brought about much change as well. Since legendary times, the gates between the mortal realm and those of the spirits have never been more open. More than ever the people need protection from forces they do not understand, many of which they cannot even see. While a large number of spirits are not inherently malicious, nearly all of them have the potential to be dangerous. The nation needs protection against vengeful apparitions that would seek to harm its people. Rumors speak of spirits forming alliances with mortal factions, or even coercing and controlling human leaders. Creatures lurk in the capital, but who knows of their intentions.

Change has come to the spirit realms too. The cultures of spirits and humans have begun to intermingle. With the bridges between the worlds open, the sacred Celestial Plain has begun to taint with the impurity and chaos present in mortal world. Likewise, places of demonic influence are swayed by the solidarity and empathy of mortal lives. Humans are straying into the spirit realms, and spirits are immigrating to Nippon. Items from the human world have become popular with spirits and the blending of mortal and spiritual cultures has opened up the both worlds to innovation.

Augmented by the gifts of spirits and kami, masters artisans have improved technology and brought forth advancements in farming, smithing and production. But not all cultural contact has been positive; much conflict has risen from culture clashes and territorial disputes. These quarrels are escalated by the Emperor's decree that places with great spiritual connection should be gifted to the spirits. Many of these lands are already claimed by people and Akitsu's declaration has become a major point of contention.





## The World

*In this era of spirits, the world has become a new frontier. Places that were once familiar have begun to change under the influence of shifting spiritual climates. Magical phenomena have become more frequent, causing apprehension among the populace. Once decried as superstition, traditions criticized as ungrounded have become indispensable for spiritual encounters.*

*The spirits and creatures known as yokai have always been prevalent throughout Nippon, but with the increase of spiritual energy they are growing in strength and numbers. More and more are sighted every day and their influence on mortal affairs grows with their power.*

*The numbers of mortals born with supernatural abilities have also risen and they are disturbing established systems of power. These people can upset*

*the livelihoods of those around them. The more that these spiritually attuned individuals gather, the less stable the nearby borders between spirit and mortal become. This leads to increased mystical activity around them, upsetting the daily lives of common people.*

*These changing times bring new discoveries that need to be documented, researched and studied. This has created a sudden demand for capable scholars to catalog these findings. Our world has always had its mysteries, but this era of change yields many new secrets waiting to be found.*

## The Mysterious Yokai

It is clear that the world does not belong to humans alone. People share this world not only with animals but also the spirits and the fantastical creatures known as yokai. Though they appear to be mostly unorganized and chaotic, the denizens of the spiritual realms are not without their own rules and compulsions.

For much of history, little was known about yokai due to a lack of spiritually-aware researchers. Currently, much new information is being discovered thanks to the rising numbers of people with attuned senses. Scholars hope that studying and documenting yokai will help inform people about how to live in relative harmony with them. By far, the most dangerous part about encounters with the supernatural is the lack of knowledge. What may be an acceptable way of dealing with one yokai could prove grave insult to another.

The number of yokai in the world is immense and unknowable. In an attempt to organize the chaos, researchers classify the apparitions into several broader categories: shapeshifters, spirits, monsters, and phenomena.

## Shapeshifters

A specific set of yokai that can easily change their shape and qualities. This kind of creature has a close relationship with mortals and it is common to see them intermingling with human civilization while disguised as another person or object.

## Yurei or Spirits

Hazy yokai that are the most difficult for common people to perceive. These are most often the restless souls of the dead, though spirits born from other means are also quite common.

## Monstrous

Yokai that have the greatest variety in both shape and size. These creatures have the largest physical presence and can often be perceived by even those with a low attunement. They can originate in either the spirit or mortal worlds, but they are always born from mystical influences.

## Phenomena

Manifestations that often do not have wills of their own. They are simply places or events that have puzzling or mysterious spiritual properties. Phenomena yokai can result when areas within the spiritual climate begin to manifest in the physical world.

## Ki: the Energy of Life

All things in the world have a degree of life. Even inanimate objects come into being, come to change, and eventually come to an end. This imbues them with the life force known as ki. Those with the knowledge of how to manipulate ki are able gain access to powers that transcend the capabilities of normal humans. People tend to use ki in one of three ways: manipulating their inner ki, manipulating the ki outside them, or using the ki of other beings.

## Internal Ki

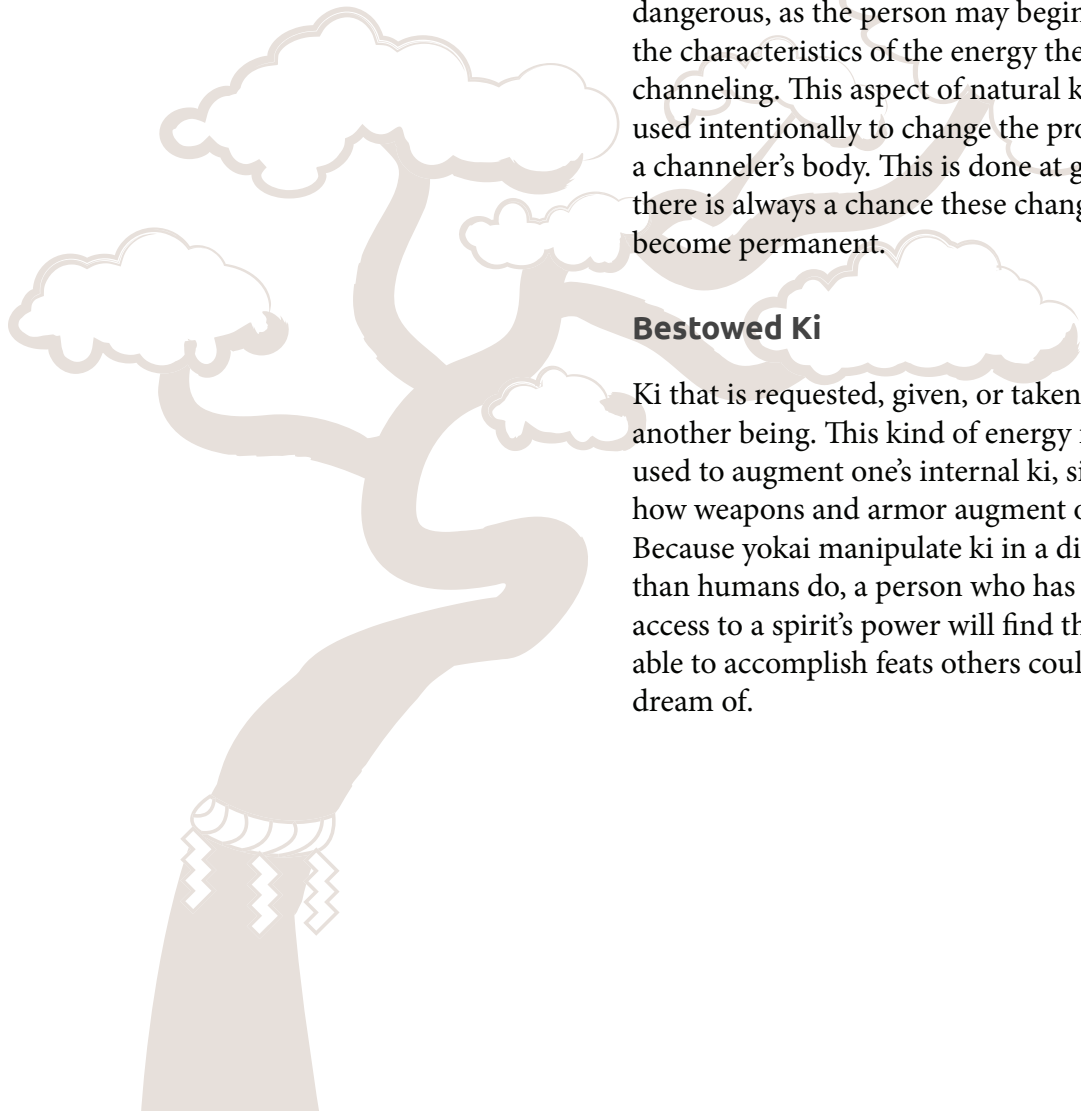
Energy that is generated from within an individual. It can be directly used to enhance a person's abilities or even be extended outside the body. More commonly it is used to channel the power needed to use magic. Internal Ki is the simplest ki to influence, but the most difficult to master. Even if most of one's power is channeled from an external source, one's personal ki is still used to shape that power into the desired effect.

## Natural Ki

A form of ki from sources around the user, typically from the terrain or atmosphere. Manipulating the ki of nature can allow a practitioner to create natural phenomena like minor storms and tremors. Manipulating natural ki is powerful, but incredibly dangerous, as the person may begin to exhibit the characteristics of the energy they are channeling. This aspect of natural ki can be used intentionally to change the properties of a channeler's body. This is done at great risk; there is always a chance these changes can become permanent.

## Bestowed Ki

Ki that is requested, given, or taken from another being. This kind of energy is often used to augment one's internal ki, similarly to how weapons and armor augment one's body. Because yokai manipulate ki in a different way than humans do, a person who has gained access to a spirit's power will find themselves able to accomplish feats others could never dream of.



## Kijutsu

Also known as *art of ki*, kijutsu provides the foundation all magic and martial arts. While those with magical affinities are rare, proper dedication and discipline can allow anyone to learn ki techniques. Ki can be harnessed through the mastery of mind, body, or soul. For centuries the world's master artisans and warriors have tapped into an instinctual ability to use ki without understanding the nature of ki itself.

Kijutsu is applied to abilities to improve their effectiveness. People with developed insight gain a more intuitive understanding of how to invoke ki. This allows them to focus on specific techniques rather than the fundamentals of ki manipulation. People capable of practiced kijutsu are uncommon, those who lack the insight or affinity for it have a difficult time developing the skill. Some study for years to gain the same instincts through discipline and experience.

Ki can be shaped, molded and directed. Ordinary people can use ki to achieve extraordinary effects. For example, many martial artists use the stabilizing characteristics of the earth's ki to maintain a grounded stance during physical combat. This stability is important, allowing the full force of the body to be used when dealing damage. Adept warriors are capable of extending their inner ki beyond themselves. They are able to punch and slice without physically contacting their targets.

Master calligraphists use ki to gain instinctual movements when making their swift brushstrokes. Martial artists use ki to stand their ground and respond to opponents. Swordmasters gain bursts of speed and power when channeling their ki. Adept sorcerers must use kijutsu to change the property and nature of ki to work their spells. Because of this, a refined and practiced understanding of kijutsu is integral to learning magic of any kind, even when spells are cast intuitively.

## Magic

By nature, the forces that drive magic are mysterious and much is unknown about them. There are many scholars that accept one model of magic, only to find that it completely contradicts another school's model. A discussion of magic often begins by finding a common viewpoint from which to launch a discourse. This is what defines the nature of a school of magic.

There are many schools of magic. They can range from established and methodical institutions to wild and instinctual sects. While most see magic as the manipulation of external phenomena, there are also schools that utilize internal magic to manipulate the ki within the body and enhance martial techniques.

While magic is an everyday occurrence, those skilled enough to willfully manipulate it are scarce. The mundane kinds of magic are subtle and not very perceivable because they affect the spiritual domain instead of the physical. Often, the discernible effects are so minimal that they are seldom recognized as magic at all. The ability to perform visible acts of sorcery is a rare talent, usually requiring innate qualities that are not fully understood. It is this visible usage of power that is commonly referred to as magic.

Magic is learned in many ways. Some learn their arts through diligent study, some practice with their intuition and innate feelings, while others are mentored by yokai, kami, or any being capable of bestowing gifts of great power upon students they find worthy. Most practitioners follow at least one form of tradition as a starting point. They use the knowledge of those who came before them to learn established methods of sorcery. No one knows the limitations of magic. Those who attempt to test its boundaries rarely survive their own experiments.

## Kijutsu Classifications

Because of the myriad of approaches to magic, it's easy to get lost trying study all the schools and their individual crafts. Instead, it can be more helpful to look at magical abilities by their how they are used. It is common for mystical researchers to categorize spells by their applications. For most spells, the line between one category and another is not clear cut.

Official research of magic is a fairly recent development. Many schools of magic have yet to be formally studied, documented, and categorized. New forms of magic are being discovered every day. Certain martial skills, once considered distinct from magic, are now understood to be kijutsu as well, making these skills their own kind of magic.

Many established forms of magic have yet to be documented due to their confidentiality. The Bureau of Spiritual Affairs uses a number of techniques in espionage and battle that would endanger its agents if made public. Influential mystic clans take pride in their mystical techniques. Keeping these secret is an important part of maintaining their reputations.

Today there are only a handful of documented magical categories. But tireless scholars continue to work and document more. It is in the Bureau of Spiritual Affairs best interest to collect as much data about magic as they can, to better respond to supernatural incidents.

### Protective

Magic classified as protective is primarily focused on the prevention and mitigation of harm. Spells that create barriers and divide areas are also considered Protective Magic.

### Martial

Physical abilities were once considered separate from kijutsu and magic. Recent research suggest this is not true. Many martial techniques still utilize ki to achieve their effects. Using ki is a natural outcome of any diligent training.

### Fate

A broad and confusing class of magics, it is also one of the most common. Fate Magic deals with prophecy, fortune, and destiny. It has been an indispensable tool of the Imperial Court for centuries.

### Bestowed

Unlike other categories, Bestowed Magic is named for the source of the magic rather than its effects. Magic that is sourced in bestowed ki often has interesting properties. For instance ki bestowed by sacred kami becomes sacred in nature. Sacred spells have the unique ability to purify spiritual corruption.

### Elemental

Magic that invokes the elements and affects the surrounding environment are classified under Elemental Magic. Elemental spells are invaluable tools for combat casters. These flashy spells are best known for their ability to efficiently inflict direct harm. Geomantic Techniques are sometimes considered Elemental Magic, but this is the subject of heated debate among scholars.



## The Spiritually Attuned

Throughout the ages, there have been those born with power beyond other mortals. Most common of these abilities is a great attunement with the spirits and the spiritual world. With the realms of the spirits closer to the mortal world than ever, there has been an influx these people with mystical power. Collectively, they are known as the spiritually attuned.

While anyone can become aware of spirits with experience, artifacts, or training, those who are spiritually receptive are born with a natural affinity with the spirit world. These traits are desirable for the practice of almost all schools of magic and even to many everyday skills. Many of the world's most masterful people have a degree of spiritual capability, learned or inherent. Though most are oblivious to the magical nature of their abilities, they unknowingly tap into the spiritual domain to gain mystical advantages. A master artist might do this to seek inspiration, or a great athlete might find a second wind past their point of exhaustion.

Unfortunately, those with mystical power do not necessarily have awareness of the spiritual world that lurks just beyond their perception. Without training, these souls are most vulnerable to spiritual dangers, especially ones that they might accidentally create. Most of them cannot easily defend themselves against beings they cannot perceive or sense. This leaves those with spiritual ability more enticing to the power-hungry. They are easy targets for greedy humans and yokai alike, who would try to take that strength for themselves.

Most people fear the unknown and associate the spiritually connected with the potential mayhem they can bring. Often, these magical individuals end up ostracized from their homes and loved ones. Such treatment only serves to worsen the dangers of their mystical abilities, leaving them open to corruption

from negative emotions or predatory yokai. Locating these individuals and providing them with supportive environments is incredibly important to the growth and mastery of their powers. With training, they can learn to at least prevent the potential mayhem their capabilities can cause.

In the past these powerful individuals often remained scattered and disconnected, occasionally forming groups centered around certain schools of thought or certain forms of magic. With the mortal and spiritual realms closer to each other, more people have become attuned to mystical energies while gaining only a passive awareness of spiritual activity. The task of finding these spiritual individuals has become monumental for groups seeking to protect them.

## Interactions Between Spiritual Powers and Yokai

Those with greater spiritual influence attract creatures that thrive and feed off their residual energy. Growing numbers of spiritually attuned people cause the surrounding populations of yokai to rise alongside them. To people who lack mystical power, those with high spiritual capacity present a potential danger. Their presence increases the chances of dangerous yokai encounters.

Paranormal abilities do not simply attract danger; they also create it. Because of their mystical abilities, spiritually attuned individuals have greater impacts on the spiritual world. They unintentionally manifest spirits using strong feelings such as rage or despair.

The yokai raised from such negative emotions, often referred to as *onryō* or grudges, are extremely dangerous as they specifically prey on mortals. These spirits cause much destruction and death, growing stronger through the energy they consume from their victims. Those with spiritual capability are especially desirable victims for grudges. Their energy can greatly increase the power of these malicious spirits if consumed.

When attuned individuals gather in large enough numbers the spiritual climate can become unstable. As most places lack proper magical infrastructure, the most powerful of these people are forced to roam for the safety of their loved ones and innocent bystanders. This is why many of the attuned become exorcists. Exorcism not only allows them to handle the yokai that would prey on them, but also allows them to manage the consequences of their spiritual power.

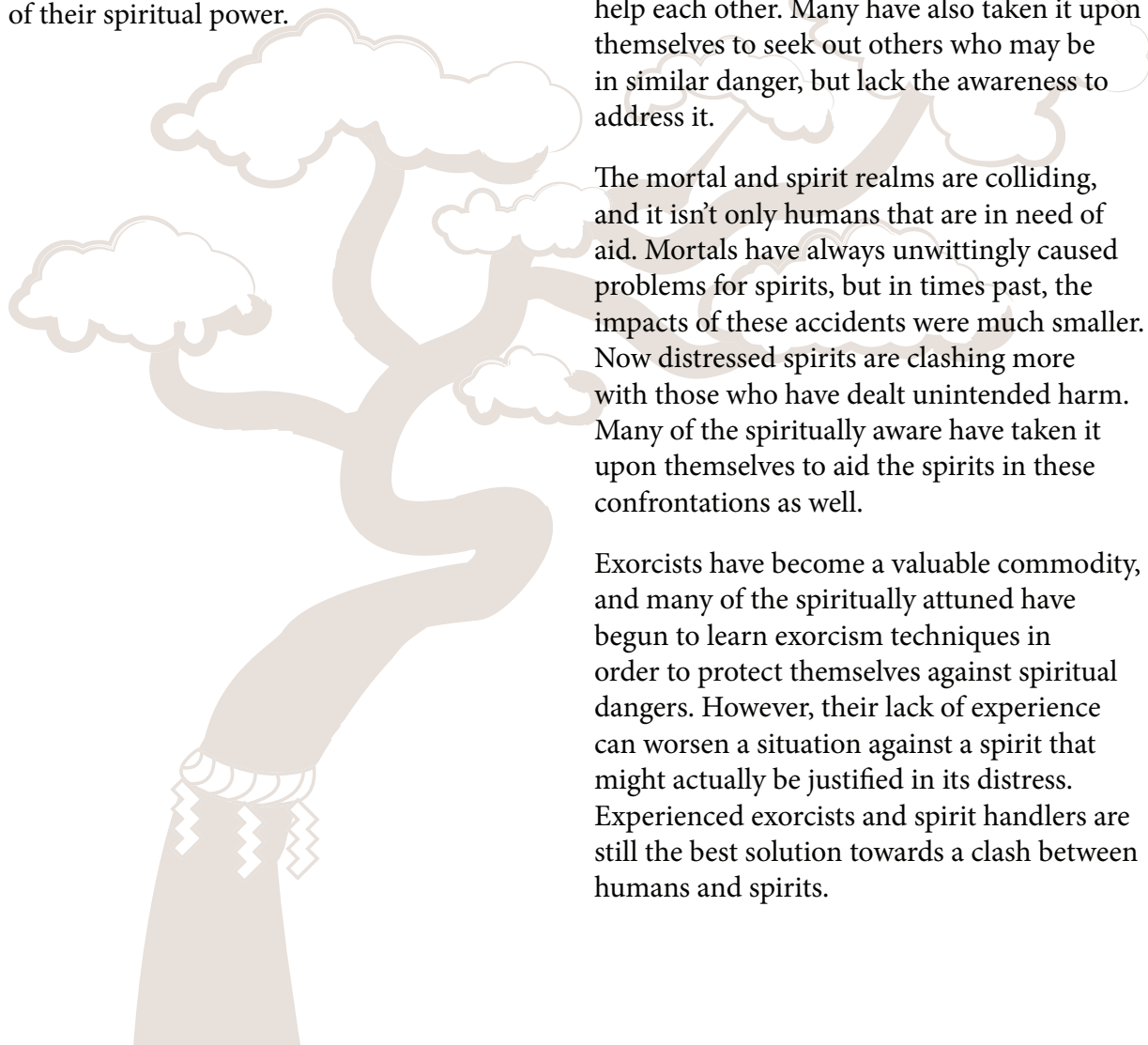
## Those Who Are Aware of the Spirits

In the age of spirits, those with awareness of the dangers of spirits have become a necessity. In earlier times, only large populous cities needed to protect their districts from dangerous spirits and supernatural forces. For small and remote villages, simple shrines and small rites were once enough to keep their lives more or less free of the spiritual dangers that lurked in the wilds nearby. Knowledge of the spirits was not a requirement for such people, and many of them could live their lives without ever coming into direct contact with yokai.

This is no longer the case. Paranormal incidents have been steadily multiplying. Those fortunate enough to be aware of spirits often have no choice but to band together to help each other. Many have also taken it upon themselves to seek out others who may be in similar danger, but lack the awareness to address it.

The mortal and spirit realms are colliding, and it isn't only humans that are in need of aid. Mortals have always unwittingly caused problems for spirits, but in times past, the impacts of these accidents were much smaller. Now distressed spirits are clashing more with those who have dealt unintended harm. Many of the spiritually aware have taken it upon themselves to aid the spirits in these confrontations as well.

Exorcists have become a valuable commodity, and many of the spiritually attuned have begun to learn exorcism techniques in order to protect themselves against spiritual dangers. However, their lack of experience can worsen a situation against a spirit that might actually be justified in its distress. Experienced exorcists and spirit handlers are still the best solution towards a clash between humans and spirits.



There are many approaches to dealing with yokai. Be it by exorcism, hard investigation, combat, diplomacy, or even training others to protect themselves, each of the spiritually aware have their own methods of managing the strange apparitions they encounter. Groups have begun to form around those who are skilled with handling yokai related incidents. These parties have begun to wander Nippon offering their services to people or spirits in need. While some do this for a price, many have personal motivations for their work, though it isn't rare to see others perform these services simply for fame or riches.

## The Common People

In the new era of mystical activity, the life of the everyday person has been greatly affected by the changes in their spiritual environments, but few of them are actually aware of the causes. Flourishing from the greater influx of energy, yokai have become bolder. While the most malicious or power hungry yokai would prefer to consume the energy of people who are more spiritually attuned, the ki of everyday people is often much easier to obtain.

Spiritual incidents are frequently blamed on illnesses or accidents, rather than the actions of vicious yokai. But there are still people able to recognize the signs of yokai activity despite being unable to directly perceive the apparitions. This creates a certain paranoia and superstition among ordinary citizens that can have a power all its own. Such feelings can actually form new yokai that fulfil the fears and strong sentiments of those who are impacted. There are many creatures that thrive in the spiritual environment created by these emotions. Without the intervention of skilled exorcists, these conditions can only lead to worsening paranormal incidents.

## PLACES OF POWER

Even if ordinary people have difficulty perceiving spirits, almost everyone can see spirits in places that are permeated with spiritual energy. These places of power, are attractive to all manner of spirits and yokai, which make them havens of spiritual activity. With the spirit realms closer to the world of mortals, these places of great spiritual connection have expanded, and a few continue to grow. New places of power are being discovered as well. There are places of power beginning to encroach upon the borders of human settlements, blurring the lines between mortal life and that of the spirits, causing clashes as vastly different worlds collide.

The everyday person fears the unknown, but many of them have an exceptional fear of dangerous spirits. Only a few of these ordinary folk have come into a direct visible contact with one, and almost all who live to tell the tale do so with distress. As spiritual activity becomes common, this attitude has hindered the acceptance of spirits as a part of life.

### **Magic and its Interaction with the Everyday People**

Most life has ki. This energy native to living beings allows even ordinary people to perform small acts of magic, often without being aware of the magical nature of their actions. While not impressive on a small scale, when done correctly, and with the right amount of people, these little acts can cascade into much larger effects. It is this interaction of ki and small feats of magic that can give everyday people a general and instinctual protection from the supernatural.

The average person doesn't have much ki compared to a yokai, but there is strength in numbers. This means that a town's border is not only a physical boundary, but also a spiritual one that offers them native mystical protections. The most resilient spiritual defenses often require people's coordination or the use of a focus. These can be as mundane as a festival, a ritual, or even a prayer. With the right conditions, especially with the involvement of the spiritually attuned, a town can gain a ki of its own. This allows the town to naturally grow into a place ideal for seating an established kami. This ki can even manifest into a brand new guardian kami, so long as the people remain and the conditions hold. While this protection serves townspeople well, travelers are still vulnerable to attacks while traveling the roads between settlements.

These native mystical protections in combination with the defense provided by guardian spirits causes most wild yokai to avoid human settlements in a manner similar to how most wild animals avoid civilization. This, however, does not affect all yokai equally. Similar to the existence of animals that thrive alongside people, there are many yokai that make their homes with and around mortal abodes. These spirits may even be harmful or malicious to the humans that live near them. Though most of them are only minor nuisances.



## The Factions

*The established systems of power cannot withstand the forces that now hold sway over Nippon. Shifts in the status quo have resulted in offsets in the balance of power. People have not trusted those in the ruling elite for a long time and abuses of power are no longer tolerated in silence. For many ambitious individuals this is an opportune time to vie for greater influence. But not all of them wish to do so for their own gain, others seek to improve the country for all.*

*This is a time of change, and social dynamics were impacted most. Every voice and every arm has a chance to shift the tides of power. A young emperor with idealistic ambitions has divided his government. Growing numbers of people with mystical abilities can no longer be easily suppressed if they ever choose to rise against the establishment. Influx of yokai populations and power have led to spirits having a greater influence on the decisions that affect all of the islands.*

## Emperor Akitsu

Enthroned at the young age of 17, the Emperor of Nippon is the focus of much attention. There are many factions vying for power over Nippon, and Emperor Akitsu sits in center of the coming storm. As the legitimate ruler of the land he has the greatest influence on the direction the nation will take, even if that direction is not one he has chosen.

Akitsu is honorable, generous, and assertive; he works hard for the improvement of his nation and its citizens. Traditionally, the Emperor is not meant to be seen or spoken to by any but those in his inner circle. Yet Akitsu often leaves the palace to follow his ideals of heroism and gallantry. He tends to the needs of his people personally and directly. As the

emperor he is to be nameless, referred to only by his title, yet he gives his personal name freely. Akitsu walks among the populace to show that the emperor's power can be used to serve his people and not just his ministers and nobles. In doing so, he hopes to build a future alongside the people of Japan.

To traditionalists, this is tantamount to sacrilege. Akitsu's disregard for their customs and history threaten the way society has been for centuries. Furthermore, his policies potentially threaten the social status of their clans, many of which have been in power for centuries. These clans see Akitsu as a wildcard, a factor that cannot be predicted or controlled. To them, this is far more frightening than any yokai.

Even amongst Akitsu's supporters, there are many who question his policies towards the spiritual domain. Having lived with the spiritual gifts provided by both his title and his heritage, Akitsu has grown up admiring spirits and their kind, believing them to be respectable citizens of the nation. People are uncomfortable with the yokai that Akitsu chooses to surround himself with. Even more are uncomfortable with the two that serve as advisors within his council.

No one knows if young Akitsu's ideals will be right for his land and those who live within it. To many, he is a sign of hope that things may get better in the future. Yet no matter how noble the Emperor is, his youth and naiveté must be addressed quickly. Even the purest of intentions without the experience and wisdom to temper them can lead to disaster.

## The Shogun, Utetsu Rinsei

Charged with the duties of national unification, the Tai-Shogun, often shortened to Shogun, is given military power to bring the regional clans under control for the sake of Nippon and the nation's unity. The title and military power of the Shogun is meant to be temporary. Classically the Shogun is just one of the branches of military power under the Imperial Court. The Shogun retains power until their duty is complete, at which time they are to relinquish their title and disband their military forces.

In the mayhem of events that led to Emperor Akitsu's eventual ascension to the throne, the Imperial Court appointed Utetsu Rinsei to the title of Tai-Shogun. She maintained her military force for the sake of keeping order in the nation. Now that Nippon has a new ruler these duties are no longer needed. But Utetsu does not wish to relinquish power. She disagrees with many of the Emperor's policies. Shogun Utetsu sees the nation falling into potential disarray from them. After working so hard to unify Nippon, she does not wish to watch her nation fracture further under the rule of incompetent nobles.

Now that Akitsu has been crowned as emperor, by all appearances, it seems that Shogun Utetsu is preparing to disband her military coalition of clans and relinquish the title of Tai-Shogun. Yet, whispers among the nobles and feudal lords claim the opposite. Instead of dissolving military power, Utetsu is secretly gathering allies. With the popularity and confidence in the Imperial Court at an all-time low, the Shogun seeks to maintain order and stability in the face of the petty squabbling of the Imperial Court. This is best time for her to seize control of the nation. The unpopular actions of previous emperors further serves to justify Shogun Utetsu's

activities against the current one. Those who support the Shogun believe the country would be better if the emperor were simply a figurehead and the people were ruled by military leadership. Though they would never speak with such sentiment in public, to do so is still considered treason.

In opposition to the Shogun's goals, the Emperor is instead growing in popularity. Akitsu's meager actions are beginning to leave positive impressions on the people he has helped. If the young Emperor were to regain the favor of rule, then the Shogun's political power might wane. Much to Utetsu's frustration, Akitsu's desire for visibility gives him an inadvertent shield from political danger. The young emperor's transparency along with a meager but growing number of supporters makes him a power that can no longer be taken down in silence.

## Clans and the Feudal Lords

The nobility, governors, and feudal lords make up most of the power that rules over the lands of Nippon. While the Imperial Court rules the capital and its policies, clans and their leaders are the bulk of power that rules over the citizens of the nation. Clans can range from small and unknown to large and powerful. The most prominent clans are related by blood to the Emperor's family. There are clans that function much like large businesses, while others wield powers akin to a kingdom within the territory of Nippon. Many of these clans are very large, with a great number of people under their leadership.

Clans are frequently masters of a certain trade. The pass down techniques and skills through their family traditions, drawing great pride from the masteries of their craft. There are clans that specialize in just about any kind of profession, from blacksmithing to divination. Schools of swords and martial techniques are built around and named for the clans that developed them. One does not need to be a blood member of a clan to serve them, learn from them, or affiliate with them. Indeed, they could begin as a student and eventually marry into the clan, becoming a full member with all the benefits and disadvantages that carries. Clans also tend to employ laborers to assist with the more menial tasks associated with their businesses, which makes clans the greatest source of employment in the nation.

Clan leaders can affiliate themselves with the Imperial Court. Doing so gains them the ability to have sway in the institutions that run the country overall, though it comes at the cost of involvement in the court's political games. While all clans purport to serve their emperor, they each have their own agenda to look out for. Their concerns are largely focused towards the betterment of their clans.

## Nobles of the Imperial Court

The Imperial Court is the main governing body of the nation. With the political tensions dividing the capital, no one knows which faction will end up with control of the government and its power. The ruling elite are mostly concerned with maintaining their influence and compete to ensure it will be maintained regardless of the victor. This means that the political game is at its fiercest. Someone has to win but no one can know exactly who that will be. The support of a noble, clan, or feudal lord could lead one faction to victory or another to failure, creating a great amount of uncertainty. Furthermore, few among the nobility are above the betrayal of their allies so long as they aren't caught.

Familiar with the occult, the members of Imperial Court have been making use of magic as a tool for centuries. By hiring powerful sorcerers, the courtiers use the occult to further their agendas, they often use magic to perform criminal acts that cannot be easily traced back to them. The use of the occult has become established among the nobility. Certain uses of magic are in essence state sanctioned through corruption and loopholes.

A consequence from dabbling in the forbidden has been the infiltration of yokai into the Imperial Court. While expressly illegal, the Imperial Court has slowly let them into their politics in exchange for occult services. There are rumors of yokai that have compromised the leadership of established clans through manipulation, insurgency, and contracts based on dirty bargains. Under new policies, Akitsu has given the government agency known as "The Bureau" jurisdiction over these cases in hopes of bringing the perpetrators to justice under the enforcement of the law.

## The Bureau of Spiritual Affairs

Once under the control of the Imperial Court nobles, the Bureau has only grown since its establishment in the previous era. Originally focused only on supernatural advisory and mystical sabotage, the Bureau has had far-reaching influence on the Imperial Court. Today the institution has gained jurisdiction over most mystical affairs. It manages everything from supernatural incidents and occult research to spiritual defense.

The Bureau is a divided establishment. It was once commanded by small number of elite magical clans. Its rising prominence has left the office a target of political infighting. Even as nobles fight for official management over the institution, the Bureau has developed internal factions of its own. These factions were formed around Bureau departments, each led by their own department head. This inner leadership has managed to resist most political changes, and remains well established. The department heads thrive in the chaos and bureaucracy of the Bureau's management. In this environment, they are free to follow self-serving interests. Some have even pursued occult power in the shadows while politicians bicker over official control of the institution.

Under Emperor Akitsu, the Bureau now serves the public at large and not just the elite. It is now responsible for managing and protecting against spiritual incidents and occult crimes for all citizens, regardless of social status. Spirits and sorcerers who were once above the rules have now become subject to the laws that govern Nippon, and are held accountable for their actions against citizens.

Originally allowed to manage its own business, Emperor Akitsu has appointed his own Chief of Supernatural Affairs to lead the Bureau in its new direction. By appointing



a leader, the Emperor has upset the fragmented status quo. Self-serving divisions now have an clear appointed manager to hold them accountable. The Bureau can no longer officially hoard their secrets and accomplishments and no longer tolerates any illegal actions or research.

These changes have resulted in a more polarized Bureau. Attempts to make the institution more accountable has simply caused department heads to resort to illicit means to hide the true extent of their ill gained powers. Divisions that once shared a heated rivalry now have a common enemy. They band together in secret to undermine the authority of imposed on them.

New divisions to the Bureau added by the Emperor have been working well so far. But they may fall prey to sabotage from the rest of the factions within the Bureau. Many people question if the newly appointed chief is capable of reforming such a mired institution to meet Akitsu's goals.

### **The Bureau as a Supernatural Enforcement Agency**

Emperor Akitsu's new policies have made the Bureau responsible for the protection of his citizens from supernatural crimes. To fulfill these responsibilities, the institution requires agents trained with skills to handle spiritual incidents. In its current state, the enforcement division of the Bureau is greatly understaffed and unable to perform this duty alone. This forces the office to request help from outside groups with supernatural enforcement while it seeks out and trains new agents.

These outside groups and their methods aren't subject to much scrutiny. It is not uncommon to have the Bureau send out requests to available groups for aid with spiritual incidents that it lacks the infrastructure to address. The quality of such aid varies because

the groups who answer the postings are often mercenaries or con-men. This sours the reputation of the experienced exorcist groups who provide legitimate aid and protection to those in need, leaving most of the populace apprehensive about calling upon the Bureau of Spiritual Affairs for help.

