

LOTUS BLOSSOM'S BRIDAL PATH

A Scenario for "Tenra Bansho Zero" by Albert Hwang

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INTRODUCTION

Toki wa Sengoku – an age of warring states. The world is stained by hundreds of years of continuous war, with no end in sight. This is but one tale of many in the land called Tenra. . . a tale of war, loss, and struggle. . . a tale of pain and bravery. . . the tale of Lotus Blossom’s bloody bridal path.

The Ayanokoji and Takatsukasa clans have been at war for many decades. It is a war that has cost the lives of many men, destroyed many rice fields, caused much pain and suffering. It is a war that has cost Lord Ayanokoji the life of his son. It is a war that must end.

Lord Ayanokoji is so convinced of this fact that he has made a decision to sacrifice one of his most precious treasures: the kugutsu named Lotus Blossom. He is sending this priceless treasure to the lands of his long-time enemy to marry the young lord of the Takatsukasa: the dashing Lord Shinji. It is the hope of Lord Ayanokoji that this gift will serve as such a gesture of goodwill that the heart of his enemy will be softened, and that this bloody war may be brought to a final conclusion.

But there are those who wish to see the war continue. Bandits who prey upon the dead and dying. Neighboring kingdoms rightfully fear a possible alliance between these two powerful nations. Samurai and warriors who have given themselves to hate and cannot let go of their swords. Even the inscrutable Shinto Priesthood have their own reasons to oppose the coming peace.

Lotus Blossom’s bridal path will be paved in blood.

Synopsis

Lotus Blossom’s Bridal Path is a scenario for Tenra Bansho Zero in five acts, plus a Zero Act. It is intended to be played over the course of four to six hours, with each Act representing about an hour of gameplay.

The scenario is written for three to six players, but four or five are the optimal number. Six pregenerated player characters are included with this scenario, but you can use your own characters if you and your players so desire.

How to Use This Scenario

A traditional roleplaying game “module” generally resembles either a series of maps or a movie script. The Gamemaster is presented either with a bunch of locations and monsters to challenge their players, or a series of events for them to experience.

Lotus Blossom’s Bridal Path is written a little differently. Rather than a hard-and-set series of directives, think of them more as goals to be reached and guidelines to spark the imagination. You will notice that many of the Big Questions do not get definitively answered here. Instead, the scenario will bring up the question, and perhaps provide a few possibilities.

Over the course of the scenario, you and your players will find those answers out for yourself. Most likely, the answers you come up with will be far different than the ones that another group might, playing the same scenario. That’s okay. There is no right or wrong answer.

Feel free to ignore or change anything in this scenario to better fit your personal play style and that of your group. If your group doesn’t like combat so much, then turn down the number of times that flying cyborg ninjas¹ show up to ruin their day. If they prefer more combat, then add more encounters with the enemy. If they come up with an idea that’s better than this campaign, then toss this entire document out and play something completely different!

After all, this is your game of Tenra Bansho Zero. Not mine.

¹ I know they’re not really ninjas, but “Flying Cyborg Ninjas” has such a nice ring to it, don’t you think?

Regarding Names and Places

You may notice that there are few physical descriptions of places, persons, or things. I'll leave that to you and your group to decide.

Same with distances and times: in general, things should travel "at the speed of plot," or at a speed and pace that best fits the drama of the situation. If your group is fine with that, then that's the only answer you need to give.

However, if they prefer more concrete numbers, tell them it's 120 km between the castles, and that the Floating Butterfly travels at around 7 kph. This allows for a decent distance between the two castles, while still allowing for a single messenger to be sent back home in a reasonable time if the group decides to go for that option.²

The Scenario Structure

The Scenario is divided up into five Acts. Each Act consists of between two to five scenes focusing on one or more player characters.

The **Zero Act** will introduce the player characters. The focus of the Zero Act is to introduce the important players in the story, to give a bit of exposition about the world, and to drive home the pain and suffering that has been endured by both kingdoms during the course of this long war. Six suggestions for Zero Act scenes (one for each pregenerated character) are included with this scenario.

²This distance and speed were calculated on the assumption that you are using the pregenerated characters, particularly "Chie the Scarlet Blade." The Blackhawk's Shadow ninjutsu allows one to travel at 132 kph, or 2.2 km per minute. With 6 Spirit and 20 Soul, Chie can keep this up for 54 minutes, for a total of 118.8 km.

Why Chie doesn't just carry Lotus Blossom over to the Ayanokoji in the first place is a question best left to those persons who can figure out why Gandalf didn't just ask the Giant Eagles to help deliver The One Ring to Mount Doom.

Act 1, "**A Gathering of Flowers**" sets the stage for the rest of the story. During this act, the player characters will gather at Ayanokoji Castle in preparation for their mission of peace.

Act 2 is called "**Things Fall Apart.**" During this Act, the player characters will set out from Ayanokoji Castle on the kingdom's fastest and most luxurious airship, the "Floating Butterfly." At the end of this Act, the airship will be attacked and shot down, causing it to crash.

In Act 3, "**The Pursuit,**" the party has been separated. Lotus Blossom has been taken from her protectors and is alone, beset by bandits. This Act ends with the party rallying once more and proceeding to Takatsukasa Castle

Act 4 is called "**Under Siege.**" During this Act, the players will discover Takatsukasa Castle under siege, and will make plans to finish their mission.

Act 5 is called "**The Bride.**" This is the climax of the story, when we find out the final fates of our heroes. . . and the kingdoms of the Ayanokoji and Takatsukasa.

Scene Format

Each Scene is organized in the following manner:

- The name of the scene.
- Player characters (from the pregenerated characters list) that the scenario can focus on.
- Any important antagonists or NPCs
- A short description of the scene itself. In particular, the description focuses on how to begin and end the scene, as well as how to transition into the next one.
- Some suggestions for the gamemaster on different ways to play out the scene, as well as different ways to prompt players for roleplaying or world suggestions.

At the end of each Act, some suggestions are provided for alternate scenes or variants thereof, as well as some suggestions on what to do in case the scenario derails from the pre-written structure.

A Word on Pregenerated Characters

There are six pregenerated characters included with this scenario. These are based on the original six characters that ran the scenario the first time it was played. However, they aren't the only characters that can be used. Feel free to alter or replace them as you wish.

That said, it's my opinion that two characters should be used in this scenario if at all possible: **General Kaneyori** and **Lotus Blossom** herself. General Kaneyori serves as a solid foundation upon which the rest of the scenario can be built: he in particular embodies the themes of war, loss, and a yearning for peace that this scenario seeks to explore (between robot ninja battles).

As for **Lotus Blossom**, this is a character that, in most scenarios, would be presented as an NPC. I can think of several ways that this scenario could be played without her (for instance: the PCs could simply be traveling to Takatsukasa as peace envoys), but I feel that it loses something if you do so. She's a good choice for players who don't really like combat, but enjoy soap-opera style drama.

Emergencies

The first rule of Gamemastering is that your campaign will never survive first contact with your players. In most cases, I recommend that you go with the flow and keep playing, rather than trying to railroad your characters back onto the path: It's more fun, your players will feel empowered, and you might find that their journey takes them back to the place where you were intending to go anyway.

There are, however, a few decisions your players might make that could cause the campaign to end early or in an unsatisfactory manner, if not handled carefully.

- Lotus Blossom's player may decide to abandon her responsibilities and run away. If the other players decide to pursue her, then step back and let it play out. If, however, she escapes or they decide to let her go, then you might have a slight problem. One option is to have Lotus Blossom leave the campaign, give her player a stock character and have the group continue onwards. Another is to follow Lotus Blossom as she explores her new freedom. There might come a moment where she may decide to continue her original mission, and that could be a moment of high drama in itself.
- A player character may end up killed during an early battle: the most likely one where this will happen is the pivotal fight at the end of Act 2. This usually isn't too bad, except that it might cause the player to feel left out. I recommend giving them an "emergency character" (one of the stock characters from the Tenra Bansho Zero rule book) and have the group press on, (after an appropriate interlude to mourn and reflect on their loss).
- The party may simply lose an early battle. In that case, I recommend having the bad guys abduct Lotus Blossom and play out the rest of the scenario as either rescuing her from their evil clutches or rallying the troops to do so. Meanwhile, skip back every once in a while to Lotus Blossom herself being menaced by the bad guys. If possible, try to have the bad guys bring at least one other player character along so that her player will have at least one other player to interact/plan an escape with. Chie, the ninja disguised as her maidservant, would be a good candidate for this.
- The group might decide to suddenly and inexplicably murder one of your key NPCs, like Lord Ayanokoji. They might even decide to murder each other. In that case, you're no longer playing **Lotus Blossom's Bridal Path**, but **The Hunt for the Murderers of So and So**. I can't really help you there, but I hope you have fun playing your new story.

KEY NPCs

Lord Ayanokoji

Lord Ayanokoji is the leader of the Ayanokoji clan. He is the one who has ordered the party to escort Lotus Blossom to the Takatsukasa.

- Lord Ayanokoji could be a tired old man who has seen too much war, and sincerely wishes for the war to end.
- Lord Ayanokoji could be a conniving monster who is sending Lotus Cloud to secretly assassinate Lord Shinji.
- It could even be that Lord Ayanokoji is sending the PCs to their deaths, so that he can have an excuse to escalate the war even further with the blessing of the Shinto Priesthood.

Lord Takatsukasa

Lord Takatsukasa, also known as Lord Shinji, is the young leader of the Takatsukasa Clan. He is pledged to marry Lotus Blossom as a sign of reconciliation between the two kingdoms.

- Lord Shinji could be just a young lord who also sincerely wants to see the war to end. His personality could be anything from quiet and bookish to boisterous and loud.
- Lord Shinji could be an evil, calculating bastard who has ordered Lotus Blossom murdered so that he can have an excuse to escalate the war with the Ayanokoji.
- Lord Shinji could be a kugutsu himself, masquerading as the (murdered? lost?) Takatsukasa Clan heir to prevent the Clan generals from attempting a play for the throne.

Flying Razor

The main villain of the story, Flying Razor is a Kongohki who wields two cursed blades. He is a master of Dragon and Tiger-style swordplay, and the leader of the Kijin and Kongohki army that seeks to kill or capture Lotus Blossom.

- Flying Razor was hired by the neighboring Kusanagi clan (who fears an alliance of their two strongest neighbors) to disrupt peace talks between the Ayanokoji and Takatsukasa.
- Flying Razor was hired by the Shinto Priesthood to maintain a state of war between the Ayanokoji and Takatsukasa, for their own mysterious reasons.
- Flying Razor was secretly hired by either Lord Ayanokoji or Lord Takatsukasa to disrupt the peace talks and place the blame on the other kingdom.
- Flying Razor was hired by someone to kidnap Lotus Blossom and make it look as if she died. Perhaps he is being hired by a kugutsu collector who wants her for his own, or just a greedy young nobleman who wants to make her his bride.

In addition to his motives, Flying Razor's identity is also up for grabs.

- Flying Razor could be the soul of a person one of the PCs knew in life, turned Asura and returned from the grave to live a life of chaos and killing.
- Flying Razor could be the soul of a person who was wronged by one of the two clans, and could be seeking to disrupt the peace talks as an act of revenge.
- Flying Razor could be a member of the Hyakki Swarm. All of this could simply be collateral damage from their campaign of death and destruction.

THE ZERO ACT

General Kaneyori

General Kaneyori walks through a battlefield littered with the dead and dying. His army is broken and shattered, his men dead or dying. And now, in this place, in this time, his Lord, Lord Ayanokoji, comes bearing congratulations. . . or perhaps censure.

- Focus: What happened at the Battle of the Lake of Fire that caused General Kaneyori to give up his sword?
- Emotion Matrix: Lord Ayanokoji

Soujiro, the Steel Viper

Soujiro is a monster, a shinobi assassin who was deliberately infested with hellish creatures to give him bizarre and terrifying powers. How came he to become this monster, and what are his feelings towards those who turned him into one?

- Focus: What sort of thing could cause a man to become a monster? And what sort of man turns a human being into a weapon of war?
- Emotion Matrix: Lord Ayanokoji, Chie

Lotus Blossom

Lord Ayanokoji commissioned Lotus Blossom as a gift for his son, young Lord Hiroyuki. However, Lord Hiroyuki was killed in battle before the two could marry. What was their relationship like? What was it like on the day that Lotus Blossom got word of his death?

- Focus: What is life like for a kugutsu who was created and lived her early life pledged to a purpose that was suddenly taken away from her?
- Emotion Matrix: Lord Ayanokoji, Chie

Akizuki Nobutaki

Nobutaki was not always a samurai. He made the decision to become one, and then came into the service of Lord Ayanokoji. How came this young samurai into the service of his lord, and what are his feelings towards his master?

- Focus: Why does Nobutaki follow Lord Ayanokoji? How deep are the bonds between samurai and master?
- Emotion Matrix: Lord Ayanokoji, Ryuunosuke, General Kaneyori.

Chie, The Scarlet Blade

Chie is a kunoichi, a shinobi who kills by deception and deceit. She was assigned to guard Lord Ayanokoji's son, the young Lord Hiroyuki. She failed in this mission. What happened?

- Focus: What was the cause of Chie's greatest failing, and how has it changed the way that she views the world?
- Emotion Matrix: Lord Ayanokoji, Lotus Blossom

Ryuunosuke

A mercenary lives off of war. What is it like for a man such as this to serve an honorable lord? And what are his feelings now, on the verge of peace?

- Focus: When killing is what you do, how do you feel when peace is drawing near?
- Emotion Matrix: Lord Ayanokoji, Nobutaki, General Kaneyori.

ACT ONE: A GATHERING OF FLOWERS

In which we are introduced to our cast of characters as they set out on a mission of peace in a time of war.

The Lion In Winter

Cast: General Kaneyori, Nobutaki, Ryuunosuke

Lord Ayanokoji sends an envoy to General Kaneyori, the hero of the Battle of the Lake of Fire. He requires his services one more time, in a mission that could help end this war forever.

- What do Ryuunosuke and Nobutaki discuss on their way to General Kaneyori's home?
- What are their opinions of the General? This is another good chance to use the Emotion Matrix, if they haven't already.
- What is General Kaneyori doing when the envoy arrives? What has he done since he put down his sword and ended his life of war?
- What is his reaction to being told that his Lord requires his services once more?

Return to the Castle

Cast: Everyone

The envoy returns. General Kaneyori has returned to Ayanokoji Castle for the first time in many years. He will meet up with Lotus Blossom and the other members of the peace envoy, who are nearing the end of their preparations.

- What was the journey back to Ayanokoji Castle like? Did Ryuunosuke and Nobutaki have a chance to converse with the Great General?
- What are Lotus Blossom's feelings when she first meets the man who will escort her to her new husband?
- What are General Kaneyori's feelings when he returns to the castle for the first time in many years?

An Audience With Lord Ayanokoji

Cast: Lotus Blossom, Chie, Soujiro

Lord Ayanokoji sends for the kugutsu, Lotus Blossom. He tells her that he has pledged her to marry the young Lord Takatsukasa and end this war.

- What was Lord Ayanokoji's relationship with Lotus Blossom after his son's death? Romantic? Parental? Distant? Open dislike?
- How has the war and the death of his son affected the Ayanokoji Lord?

The Night Before

Cast: Anyone

It is the night before the peace envoy sets out on their mission. . . what do our heroes do on the night before their quest begins?

Some ideas you might suggest:

- Does anyone go for a quiet walk in a moonlit garden? Perhaps they meet another person under the stars or the falling cherry blossoms?
- Does anyone go out drinking or carousing with friends?
- Any last-minute trysts with lovers? Any final nights spent with loved ones or family?

- Any preparations for battle? Swords to be sharpened? Armor to be cleaned? Any clothes to be mended or wills to be written?
- Maybe some of the more martial characters decide to spend some time practicing their techniques? This could be a good chance to introduce the combat system with some short sparring exercises.

The Departure

Cast: Everyone

The Act ends with the Ayanokoji skyship “Floating Butterfly” setting out for the Takatsukasa lands. This is a perfect chance for player characters to give some introspective speeches, or perhaps make some dire predictions as to what the coming journey will be like. . .

- The nature of the Ayanokoji skyship is up to you and/or your players. It’s probably going to be the fastest and the most luxurious of the kingdom’s vessels. It should not be heavily armed or armored. Aside from that, it can be anything from a steampunk-style propeller-driven zeppelin to a massive shiki-powered vessel, to a magical boat rowed by servants.

Intermission

In the next act, the skyship “Floating Butterfly” continues on its journey towards the Takatsukasa lands. The PCs will encounter a dangerous and mysterious new foe, and the “Flying Butterfly” will be shot down and crash.

Before your players make their Kiai rolls, make a note of their Aiki totals. Write this down and make a note of it going into Act 2.

Notes and Advice

This first Act is intended to introduce the player characters, get the group together, and set them off on their mission. It’s short on action, so focus mostly on character development. Keep the pace slow and relaxed: things will pick up soon enough.

This first Act is a good time to get the players rolling on the Emotion Matrix towards each other. Look for opportunities to hand out new Fates involving the other player characters.

Try to make sure that everyone has a fairly good number of Aiki going into intermission. They’ll need the Kiai in Act 2, which is the first of the major set-piece battles. If you see a player who is a bit short on Aiki, try to draw them into a conversation with someone else in “The Night Before.” You can then give them an Aiki chit for being in the scene, and give them a chance to earn more by good roleplaying.

One idea that worked well for me was to intersplice “The Lion in Winter” with “An Audience With Lord Ayanokoji.” I started The Lion In Winter with Nobutaki arriving at General Kaneyori’s home. When the General asked why Nobutaki had come, I then cut to “An Audience With Lord Ayanokoji” as a flashback. After that scene was over, we cut back to General Kaneyori’s home and played out the rest of that scene.

Be sure to give plenty of character development to Lord Ayanokoji. After this Act, he kind of disappears from the campaign, so you want to make sure that he leaves an indelible impression.

ACT TWO: THINGS FALL APART

In which darker forces emerge, the mission is intercepted, and the skyship destroyed.

The Journey Continues

Cast: Anyone

It's been about a day or so since the skyship set out from Ayanokoji Castle. The journey has been peaceful since then, and things are calm.

Choose the player who had the fewest Aiki chits at the end of Act One to start off: Have them give a brief description of what they have been doing, then play off of that. Try to draw characters who were low on Aiki at the end of Act One into this scene as well. Use this scene as a means of handing out Aiki to players who may not have had very much so far.

Feel free to stretch this out to two or even three scenes if you want, but if things start to feel dull, that's the time to move on to the next scene and attack everyone with flying cyborg ninjas.

- **Suggestions:**
- The ship's crew are playing a game of dice, and invite one of the player characters to join in.
- The ship's captain asks Lotus Blossom if she will sing a song or dance for the crew's enjoyment.
- The ship overflies an area of land that has been ravaged by the war, which sparks reminiscing and discussion.
- One of the player characters may want to hold a tea ceremony or a poetry reading or some other stereotypical Japanese pastime.
- And, of course, simply having a conversation between player characters is good too.

Flying Cyborg Ninjas

Cast: Everyone

Antagonists: 2x Kijin Assailants for each player character, attacking in two waves.

The attack can happen in daytime or nighttime, whichever you feel is more appropriate. Nighttime is better if you're going for a sneak attack, whereas daytime is better if you want a brutal frontal assault.

However it happens, a black skyship, faster and smaller but more heavily armed than the "Floating Butterfly," will rapidly close in. Once the two ships close to around 200 meters³, two waves of Kijin will fly over to the Floating Butterfly and attempt to take it over. Send over half of them in the first wave, then the other half one or two rounds later (depending on how quickly the players dispatch the first wave).

To keep things interesting, try to split the party: It could be as simple as one group of kijin attempting to disable the ship's engines, while a second group attempts to capture Lotus Blossom. In the case of a nighttime sneak attack, it could just be that the party is split up to begin with: some of them are below decks sleeping, others were awake when the attack began. Another idea is to have the enemy fire a cannon volley that blasts several holes in the "Floating Butterfly's" hull: the enemy kijin can then climb in through the hull breach to reach the lower decks, while another group attacks the top deck.

If any players think of flying over to the black skyship, let them do so: Flying Razor will be standing on the deck of the other ship, ready to fight them. At this point in the game, with the amount of Kiai they have, it should be difficult to impossible for them to actually defeat

³ The distance the Kijin can fly in one round.

him. If, however, it looks like that's going to happen, that might not be a bad time to move on to the next scene. (Or you could let the PCs kill Flying Razor and roll up a new Big Bad Evil Guy for the final battle. Your call.)

If you feel that the battle is going too quickly, feel free to send a third wave of kijin. If the battle turns out to be too hard. . . well, keep in mind that the kijin are not trying to kill the player characters. They have two goals in mind:

1. Bring down the "Floating Butterfly"
2. Capture Lotus Blossom.

Having a few of the Kijin break off from the battle to go rig explosive charges on the engines, or try to drag off Lotus Blossom, might not be a bad idea.

In any case, don't drag out the combat too long. Keep things exciting and moving quickly. If

Things Fall Apart

Cast: Everyone

The battle ends with the skyship "Floating Butterfly" being shot down.

How it happens is up to the GM. If the battle with the Kijin is going badly for the good guys, it could be as simple as the enemy blowing up the ship's engines and bringing it down. Alternatively, Flying Razor could pick up a ZAKT-8 sword that happens to be lying around, leap over, and cut the "Floating Butterfly" in half. Or the black skyship could fire a second volley of cannon fire to bring the ship down when the battle starts going badly for them, abandoning any hope of capturing Lotus Blossom in favor of destroying the evidence.

It could even be that the players' own actions will cause their ship to crash, especially if one of them gets it into their head to ram the other vessel.

When the crash happens, everyone passes out. (If you want to be really mean, you could make it an arbitrarily

large amount of Vitality damage, and kill off everyone who has checked off their Dead Box.)

Intermission

In the next Act, the survivors of the crash will gather together. They will evade the patrols of their new enemy and complete their journey to the Takatsukasa lands. . . where they will discover a new threat to the peace between the two nations.

As in Act One, make a note of the Aiki totals going into the next act.

Notes and Advice

The scene structure for Acts 2 and 4 are rather more loose than the other three: this is because, in my experience, combat tends to introduce a lot of randomness, and it's difficult to predict what will happen next. Just go with the flow and improvise.

One thing to watch for is that the Kijin may succeed in abducting Lotus Blossom. If Lotus Blossom is an NPC, then that's fine: it will change the arc of the next Act somewhat (as Lotus Blossom will need to be rescued), but that's not necessarily a bad thing.

If Lotus Blossom is a PC, then you have a few different options. You can run with it and interject a few scenes into the next act of Lotus being menaced by her captors, perhaps as they are in the middle of carrying her off somewhere. Or you can choose to have Lotus get flung free from her captors when the "Floating Butterfly" gets shot down. Either way, it's not necessarily the end of the campaign.

ACT THREE: THE PURSUIT

In which the mission goes on, and those who survive struggle to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat

Beset by Bandits

Cast: Lotus Blossom, Others

If Lotus Blossom is a PC, start with her. Otherwise, begin with the player who had the lowest Aiki total going into Act Three.

The skyship has crashed, and the player characters are among the survivors. Among the rest of the crew, those who are alive are in no condition to continue the journey.

Meanwhile, a group of bandits has seen the skyship go down, and have descended upon the wreckage to loot the dead.

- What does Lotus Blossom do? Does she take this moment to try and escape? Does she care for the wounded?
- Are there any wounded survivors among the enemy? What do the PCs do when they come across a dying man who had recently been trying to kill them?
- How do the PCs respond to the bandits?
- If any player characters died during Act Two, now is a good point to bring in a replacement character: a good-hearted bandit, maybe, or a soldier from the besieged Takatsukasa Castle who comes to the aid of the crash survivors.

The Escape

Cast: Anyone

The enemy is still near, and the party must move quickly. The ship's crew will remain behind to care for the

wounded. The PCs must continue on to Takatsukasa Castle on foot.

Give the players a few minutes to plan their escape. Listen carefully and jot down ideas on how to play out the upcoming pursuit.

- How does the party plan to evade their pursuers?
- Do they plan to evade their pursuers? They may decide to stand and fight instead.
- Now is a good time to establish the identity of Flying Razor. Have one of the players do so, and award them an Aiki and a 2 point Fate relating to Flying Razor.

The Chase

Cast: Anyone

Antagonist: Flying Razor, Kijin Assailants. **The total number of antagonists should be equal to the number of people in the party.**

At some point after the party leaves the wreck, they should see that Flying Razor has picked up their trail and is now following them. If you are feeling sadistic, wait until the PCs get far enough away that they can't run back in time to help, then have the enemy descend upon the wreck and begin murdering the survivors they just painstakingly rescued.

After establishing that Flying Razor is in pursuit, play out the rest of the pursuit. The scene should take place as a series of opposed skill checks, dependent on how the party plans to evade the Kijin. For example, if they plan to try to outrun their pursuers, have them make Body:

Movement checks. If they try to evade them by stealth, have them roll Agility: Stealth vs. Senses: Pursuit.

Add up the total number of successes for each group, and use these totals to judge how to adjudicate the rest of the scene. If the party is heavily outstripping the pursuers, then they should easily evade and escape. If the enemy quickly defeats the players, then they should catch up, resulting in another battle.

The exact margins of success and/or failure are left up to the GM to decide, but a good rule of thumb is that a margin of 2 successes per party member is sufficient to immediately lose their pursuers. The reverse (a margin of 2 failures per party member) will result in the party getting caught. Don't let the pursuit go on for more than three or four rounds at most: at the end of that time, whoever has more successes will have an advantage (you decide what) going into the next scene.

If the party tries to hide, remember that Flying Razor has a 900m "Lifepulse" range. That's something they'll have to deal with if they want to evade their pursuers.

The Arrival

Cast: Everyone

In any case, the rest of the journey passes without incident. They arrive at Takatsukasa Castle (or a nearby town overlooking it), only to find it under siege.

- Who is besieging the castle? What do the armies look like? What are they doing? Are they simply camped outside, or are they actively attacking the castle walls?
- What is their relationship to the Kijin that have been pursuing the party thus far?

Intermission

In the next Act, the player characters have rallied together and regrouped. Now they face a new challenge. . . to find a way to break the siege of Takatsukasa Castle and rescue their erstwhile nemeses.

As usual, make a note of player Aiki totals before any Fate Rolls are made.

Notes and Advice

The trickiest part of this Act to adjudicate is The Chase. You're going to have to walk a fine line between making it seem too short and insignificant, and letting it drag too long. Simply put, if it's not fun for you and your players seem distracted, it's time to end the chase and move on.

If a battle ensues and goes badly (either because the party chose to stand and fight, or because they failed to evade the patrol) you may want to end it by having the cavalry (in the form of two Armour-Riders and some soldiers from Takatsukasa Castle) come to the rescue (a bit *deus ex machina*, but certainly genre-appropriate). This would also be a good chance to introduce replacement characters, to make up for any PC deaths.

If Lotus Blossom was captured in Act Two, then Act Three is going to be very different. It could be that the PCs are the ones doing the pursuing, rather than the enemy. If so, Flying Razor will not stand and fight to the death: once the battle starts to turn against him, he will attempt to escape and fight another day. It could be that the players even end up failing to catch up to Lotus Blossom's captors. In which case, instead of breaking the siege of Takatsukasa Castle, they may instead have to besiege a castle themselves.

ACT FOUR: UNDER SIEGE

In which a castle is besieged, a battle is begun, and the final fight for peace begins.

Battle Lines

Cast: Everyone

Takatsukasa Castle is under siege. The siege must be broken if the alliance is to take place. But the enemy numbers in the thousands. How can a few stand against so many?

- The players may decide that they want to send a messenger back to Ayanokoji Castle and ask for reinforcements. Chie should be able to run back to the castle and deliver the message in about an hour's hard running, using all of her ninja skills (though she may need to rest up and recover some Spirit first. They could also dispatch an NPC or try some other means such as Onmyou-Jutsu.
- The players may decide to break the siege themselves. I recommend against letting six heroes kill the entire besieging army, mostly because if these few guys could have killed an entire army by themselves, the war would have been over long ago! But one or more of them might be able to fight their way through and make it into the castle. (Of course, that means they still need to deal with the army outside. . .)
- They could try seeking allies elsewhere. Maybe they can rally the local bandits, or maybe there is another neighboring kingdom they could turn to for help.
- Whatever they come up with. . . **There Has To Be a Boss Fight.** Take a moment to think of how Flying Razor could get involved in their plans, and come up with a way to introduce him for the final confrontation.

The Hour of The Wolf

Cast: Anyone

Whatever is decided, take a moment to catch your breath before jumping into the action. In the calm before the storm, give the heroes some time to reflect on the challenge to come.

- Were any PCs killed in the prior Acts? How does this make the survivors feel? Are there any oaths of vengeance taken, or promises made?
- What final preparations do our heroes make on the eve of this great battle that they may not survive?
- Do any PCs have personal connections to Flying Razor? What are their thoughts, considering the fact that they are almost certain to face that monster in battle?

Engage

Cast: ????

Antagonists: ????

Execute on the plan. Play it out.

Since I don't know what your group will decide to do, I can't really give you any scene names or directions here. All I can really do is wish you good luck, and have fun!

The important thing is to keep up a decent pace, but try not to escalate too hard. Try to alternate between moments of frenzied excitement and eerie calm, to give people a chance to catch their breaths.

If the plan involves pitched battle, begin with a wave of mooks equal in number to your player characters. Make the second wave twice as large, and toss in additional waves as needed. Also try to include one or two “elites” with each wave to spice up the combat.

Make sure that combat doesn’t come down to everyone just swinging randomly at generic bad guys for too long. Try to add at least one complication to keep things from degenerating into just rolling dice. Some suggestions:

- The Bandits of the forest join the battle: either on your side or the enemy’s.
- Lord Shinji emerges from the castle at the head of his personal bodyguard, in full battle regalia, and joins the fight. The reinforcements are appreciated, but now Lord Shinji is in danger!
- A powerful siege engine arrives and must be dealt with: it will open fire in two turns, causing something bad to happen (the castle walls will fall, a bunch of people will die) unless someone manages to deal at least thirty points of damage to it.
- A person who was thought dead suddenly shows up again, bearing a grudge.

It all Ends Now!

Cast: ????

Antagonist: Flying Razor

Once this Act has gone on long enough, it’s time to introduce Flying Razor.

Now is the time for any last-minute exchanges of words, any pleas for reason. Now is the perfect time to say things like, “I know you’re in there,” and “This ends now!” Make sure that anyone who has a Fate related to Flying Razor has a chance to say their piece.

End the Act with the very first attack being made. Do not roll dice yet, though. . .

Intermission

It all ends in the next Act. The fates of the player characters will be decided. The final fate of Flying Razor will be revealed. And we will finally answer the question: Can peace truly come in the midst of so much bloodshed?

Notes and Advice

This Act is going to be a real challenge for the GM to adjudicate, because it is so player driven. Hopefully your players are now at a point where they feel comfortable enough in their characters that you can sit back a bit and let them drive it.

There are two traps that a Gamemaster can fall into when dealing with player-driven plans. The first is to allow everything that they have planned for to happen. Try to come up with at least one or two unforeseen complications that the players will have to deal with in order to carry out their plan.

On the other extreme are the Gamemasters who stymie everything the players try to plan for. If players feel like anything they plan will end up never happening, they’ll eventually stop bothering with making cool plans altogether, and that’s boring.

A good rule of thumb is the “Yes, and. . .” or “Yes, but. . .” rule. Basically, if you can’t think of any obvious reason why a plan should fail, let it succeed. . . but add a complication. For instance: the players decide to send a messenger back to get help. You might say, “Yes, but they’ll have to evade Flying Razor’s patrols to get to Ayanokoji Castle.”

In general, let the players take the initiative in setting the terms of the final battle. The only time you should have the enemy actively attack is if their plan involves sitting around and waiting a lot. In that case, have Flying Razor track them down to wherever they are hiding and launch his attack. But if the players are being proactive and coming up with interesting ideas, you should reward them for it by having their plans come to fruition.

ACT FIVE: THE BRIDE

In which it ends.

Flying Razor

This is it. The boss fight. The final battle against the guy that's been pursuing the party since at least Act Two.

Take off the kid gloves. Don't hesitate to kill player characters. Force them to spend their Kiai. Make them flirt with falling over the edge to Asura. Make them burn their Dead Boxes. Make it a fight to remember.

(Now's a good time to introduce the "Moment of Truth" rules, if the players don't know about them yet. You should also remind them about things like Aiuchi Strike, which can help to offset Flying Razor's significant dice advantage.)

Use a few mooks to keep things from turning into everyone surrounding Flying Razor and just beating up on him. Remember, this duel is just one piece of the battle: there will probably be other elements of the enemy forces who are still trying to carry out their mission.

Play off of your player characters' actions. If they break his swords, have him pick up new ones (so your players can break those too!) If they try to turn a cannon on him, have them make Body checks to wrestle the huge gun around. If they try to crash a skyship into him, have them fight some mooks for control of the ship, then make some skill checks to steer the ship into its collision course.

If at any time your players come up with a plan really awesome (but the dice don't agree) don't let it fail outright just because of one bad dice roll. Maybe their idea to collapse a house on top of Flying Razor doesn't work the first time, requiring the Samurai to burn tons of Kiai and draw upon deeper reserves of strength or something.

It's likely that someone is going to try to talk Flying Razor down. There are really no rules for that in Tenra Bansho Zero, so I recommend having them make a (whatever skill they choose) roll against Flying Razor's Spirit: Willpower. There are two ways you can adjudicate this:

- For every success, reduce Flying Razor's dice pools by one. Once Flying Razor reaches zero Spirit, he puts down his swords and stops fighting. This is suitable if you're playing Flying Razor as a lost soul who can still be redeemed, and you want someone to be able to fully talk him out of fighting.
- For every success, you can "bank" one die that can be subtracted as penalty dice from the next combat roll that Flying Razor makes. This is better if you feel that Flying Razor is a hardened killer who can't be talked down, but you want to reward good roleplay by giving your PCs a brief advantage.

Wrapping Up

Rather than instructions on how to play out the ending, here are some questions that you may want to address.

- Was the mission successful? Will there be peace between the Ayanokoji and the Takatsukasa? Or will Lotus Blossom's Bridal Path be just another bloody chapter in a story of endless war?
- If the mission was successful, the lords of the two realms will almost certainly wish to reward these brave and faithful subjects. How would they do so?

Some suggestions if you are using the pregenerated characters:

- General Kaneyori's mission of peace has turned into yet another battle. How does this affect his hatred of war, and how does he now view his decision to retire from the battlefield?
- Chie once failed in an important mission. Has she redeemed herself from that failure now? How has her relationship with Lotus Blossom changed? What will she do now?
- Has Soujiro come to accept the worms he hosts? Has he come to appreciate their power? Or will he now take the opportunity to rid himself of them forever?
- Nobutaki wished to prove himself to his lord. Has he done so? How has his opinion towards Lord Ayanokoji changed? Does he wish to remain in the service of his lord. . . or will he move on?
- Ryuunosuke has made a living off of war for all his life. Can he make a new life in an era of peace? Or will he leave the lands of the Ayanokoji and seek new battlefields?
- Finally. . . Lotus Blossom. The woman who has inspired so much hope, and so much bloodshed. Will she carry through with her wedding to Lord Takatsukasa? Or will she vanish into the pages of myth, never to be seen again? What will she choose? Duty? Freedom? Love? Something else?

In the end, it's all up to you. . . and your players. . . to decide.

Continuing the Adventure

"Lotus Blossom's Bridal Path" is intended to be a single-shot campaign. However, it doesn't necessarily need to be the end for these particular characters.

One possibility: the events that occurred here have revealed new enemies to fight, and new threats to deal with. Certain characters could end up rallying an army to fight against whoever was besieging Takatsukasa

Castle, or to track down and punish those behind the kidnapping of Lotus Blossom.

You could also follow the lives of any heroes who chose to leave the service of Lord Ayanokoji. Perhaps Nobutaki becomes a ronin, or Lotus Blossom herself goes on the run. Perhaps they go off in search of happiness somewhere else. . . or perhaps they end up evading Lord Ayanokoji's soldiers, who are sent to bring them back.

A third possibility might even involve switching perspectives to the enemy. Who are the Kijin who attacked the skyship, and what do they do after the events of this campaign? What were their motivations? Perhaps we can even follow Flying Razor himself (if he survived).

You could even try going into the past, and looking, at the events that turned these characters into the persons that they are. You could play out the Battle of the Lake of Fire, when General Kaneyori laid down his sword, or the death of Lord Hiroyuki, or the beginnings of the decades-long war between the two clans.

At the very least, make the events of this scenario part of the lore of your "personal" Tenra. Maybe a barkeeper in some far-off land in a future session repeats some gossip about "some bandits that tried to kidnap a kugutsu near Takatasukasa." Perhaps a character from a future campaign would have been a witness to these events. Lord Shinji or Lord Ayanokoji could make an appearance in future campaigns as antagonists or patrons. If there's one thing that can make a campaign world feel alive, it's encountering the consequences of choices from a prior session.

CONCLUSION

The Original Campaign

The original RPG.NET thread about “Lotus Blossom’s Bridal Path” can be found here:

<http://forum.rpg.net/showthread.php?666677-Tenra-Bansho-Zero-Lotus-Cloud-s-Bridal-Path>

You may notice some key differences: the most obvious being the name of the main character, and several others. They were changed for various reasons: in the case of Lotus Cloud, her name was changed because I realized that I had directly stolen it from Barry Hughart’s excellent novel *Bridge of Birds*.

(Side note: If you have not read *Bridge of Birds*, do so. It’s excellent. The sequels aren’t quite as great, but still very good reading.)

Most of the differences between my original scenario and this revised version is in the pacing. I originally had the party set out from Ayanokoji Castle immediately after General Kaneyori arrived: in retrospect, that was much too rapid, and the game really needed a moment for everyone to get to know each other better before the mission began. Secondly, I had a battle at the end of Act Three against a pair of Armour Riders that I cut from the actual game: on the heels of the skyship crash and subsequent desperate chase, it just felt like too much.

Final Thoughts

I originally set out to write up “Lotus Cloud’s Bridal Path” as a refined version of the very first Tenra Bansho Zero adventure I ever ran for my friends. It didn’t work. The essence of Tenra (some would argue the essence of all roleplaying games) is changing it and making it your

own. Telling other people exactly how to play things out the way I had didn’t feel right.

That’s why I’ve chosen to write up the scenario as a set of questions and possibilities instead. If you need more detail, feel free to fill in the blanks on your own. If you dislike anything I’ve written, feel free to ignore it and come up with your own ideas. As I have said over and over until you’re probably sick of it: this is your session. Take ownership of it.

If you run “Lotus Blossom’s Bridal Path,” I would be interested to hear your thoughts on it. You can respond to the RPG.NET thread for the original campaign, or send a private message to “**themocaw**” at the RPG.NET forums. You can also try emailing me at albyhys (at) hotmail (dot) com, but there’s a good chance that it will be filtered as spam, so sending me a PM at RPG.NET is probably the best idea.

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Special thanks to Larry and Candace Byers for many long years playing host to long nights of dice-rolling, arguments over arcane rules, and miniatures-slinging.

Last but not least, a big bro-fist to Andy K, not only for spending the time to translate and localize this fantastic game for us *gaijin*, but for putting in a ton of work building a community around it. The pretty-looking font used for the section headers was provided by him.

Albert Hwang

January 21, 2013

Appendix A: Generic NPCs

Kijin Assailants

Your generic bad guy mooks. They aren't much of a challenge and die really fast.

Physical 5; Non-Physical 5; Station 3

Combat 3, Evasion 2, First Aid 2, Notice 2, Pursuit 2, Willpower 3, Information 2

Spiked Knuckles: +2 (+5) Damage⁴, Melee Weapon

5-Barreled Gatling: +3 Damage, ROF 5, Range 20m, Ammo 30 (gunpowder)

Flight: A Kijin Assailant can fly 200 meters per round for 2 rounds.

10 Vitality each.

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Kijin Elite

A slightly tougher bad guy mook. Suitable if you need a lieutenant or leader type, or as mooks at the end of the campaign.

Physical 7; Non-Physical 7; Station 4

Combat 3, Evasion 3, First Aid 2, Notice 3, Pursuit 3, Willpower 3, Information 3

Grudge Blade: +5 (+8) Damage

5-Barreled Gatling: +3 Damage, ROF 5, Range 20m, Ammo 30 (gunpowder)

Flight: A Kijin Elite can fly 200 meters per round for 2 rounds.

14 Vitality each.

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⁴ Numbers in parentheses include Melee Damage bonus for Mechanica Limbs

Bandits / Soldiers

Use these if you're looking either for generic bandits to menace people, or as enemy or allied footsoldiers. A bit tougher than Kijin Assailants, but not as tough as Kijin Elites.

Physical 7, Non-Physical 7, Station 4

Combat 3, Evasion 2, Notice 2, Willpower 2, Information 2

Katana: +3 Damage

Bow and Arrow: +3 Damage, ROF 2, Range 100m.

14 Vitality each.

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Bandit / Military Leader

Suitable for representing a generic leader of either a bandit gang or enemy army, or as an allied military sergeant.

Physical 9, Non-Physical 7, Station 6

Combat 3, Evasion 2, First Aid 2, Notice 3, Strategy 3, Willpower 3, Information 3

Greatsword: +5 Damage

Bow and Arrow: +3 Damage, ROF 2, Range 100m.

18 Vitality each.

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Kimen Armour-Rider

A generic Kimen Armour-Rider (enemy or ally).

Physical 7, Non-Physical 7, Station 5

Interface 3, Notice 3

Longspear: +8 Damage

Long Cursed Lancer: +9 Damage, ROF 1, Range 400m, Ammo 10 (soulgem)

Heavy Repeater: +3 Damage, ROF 5, Range 50m, Ammo 30 (gunpowder)

22 Vitality Each (8 on the Armor, 14 on the Rider)

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Appendix B: Flying Razor

Flying Razor is a monster. A kongohki soaked in blood, with a demonic face and cruel, scarlet eyes, he is a master of the Ryuuko-Itten-Ryu “Dragon and Tiger Under One Sky” style of swordplay (**TBZ Rules, p310**). He is fond of taking the swords of his slain foe and adding them to his collection, and regularly marches into battle carrying a dozen swords slung across his back.

At least one player character should have a personal connection to Flying Razor, whether from before he died or during his days as kongohki. Aside from that, I leave the details up to you.

Try to use up Flying Razor’s Overdrive turns evenly: you should probably reserve around half of them for the final confrontation, but use the rest early. This serves both to demonstrate his power and might to the other players, and to give them fair warning for when he starts using it in earnest in the final battle.

Modifying Flying Razor

Flying Razor’s stats are included at the end of this scenario. Feel free to modify them in order to better fit your version of Lotus Blossom’s Bridal Path.

One modification is mandatory: the Vitality total for Flying Razor needs to be adjusted for the size of your group. Add 5 Vitality for every player character in the party to get the final amount.

The next most obvious change is to alter Flying Razor’s Attributes. Per the “Tenra Bansho Zero” rulebook, I recommend keeping them between three to five dice higher than the player characters, in order to force them to spend Kiai against him.

If your party includes multiple characters who have Level 5 War Arts, you may consider raising Flying Razor’s War Arts skill to 5 as well. If you’re not trying to kill your player characters, I don’t recommend using Dragon Strike, Tiger Storm against players who have not yet checked off their Dead Box: this technique is almost

invariably lethal given the power levels of the pregenerated characters. If you *are* trying to kill your player characters, then use it often, and have Flying Razor draw new weapons or pick them up off the battlefield as a Half-Action every turn to replace the ones that he shatters using this technique.⁵

You could also consider changing Flying Razor’s War Arts skill to something different. “Fist of the Celestial Kongohki” (**TBZ Rules, p312-313**) is a good one, as is “Crescent Moon Blade Tactics” (**TBZ Rules, p310-311**) and “Ancient Style Lightning Strike” (**TBZ Rules, p314-315**). If you want to make a statement about “guns vs. swords,” you could even trade out Flying Razor’s swords for gem pistols and give him “Black Wing Gun Style” (**TBZ Rules p319**), although in that case, you may also wish to change his name to something else (Hail of Bullets? White Dove of Death?)

Flying Razor doesn’t even need to be a kongohki. A kijin or Armour-Rider could easily fill this role as well. An Onmyouji could be an interesting take if you want a more supernaturally-oriented campaign. A rogue Samurai is also a good choice, and could provide some decent drama if the villain’s past turns out to be related to Lord Ayanokoji in some way.

⁵ You bastard.

Appendix C: Notes on Pregenerated Characters

General Kaneyori

General Kaneyori was inspired by “old general” characters like Shimada Kambei (both from the original “Seven Samurai” movie by Akira Kurosawa and it’s “Samurai 7” anime reimagining), and Toshiro Mifune’s character “General Makabe” from Akira Kurosawa’s “The Hidden Fortress.”

Mechanically, he is intended to be a less physical combatant, relying on old age and cunning to make up for his lack of youth and speed. He is also the only character with the “Strategy” skill, which allows him to provide bonuses to other party members.

Optional Rule: The Path of Death

General Kaneyori is a man who has rejected war in search of inner peace. If you want, you could reflect that struggle mechanically as well.

If General Kaneyori chooses to sublimate or alter his Fate “Emotion: Hatred of War,” he loses all of his ranks in “Clarity of Heaven Style” (**TBZ Rules p307-308**) and replaces them with an equal number of ranks in another combat style. I suggest “Southern Seas One-Blade Style” (**TBZ Rules p306-307**), “Empty Mind Style” (**TBZ Rules p309**) or even “Dragon and Tiger Under One Sky Style” (**TBZ Rules p310**).

If this new style replaces Agility with a different Attribute at Skill Level 2, then swap Kaneyori’s Senses with whatever that Attribute happens to be. Otherwise, swap Senses with Agility.

Whether or not Kaneyori can go back to “Clarity of Heaven” style by once again rejecting bloodshed is up to the Gamemaster and the player.

New War Art: Clarity of Heaven Revised

Clarity of Heaven Style has a slight problem: it wasn’t designed to interact well with the NPC rules. Namely, two of its ranks focus on allocating damage to Wounds or to Vitality. However, NPCs don’t have Wounds, only a Dead Box.

If you choose to use my revised version of Clarity of Heaven style, add the following paragraphs to Skill Levels 3 and 4:⁶

Advanced Rank (Skill Level 3): Four Limb Strike

Add this paragraph at the end:

If fighting against an NPC opponent with no Wound Track, first check to see if the amount of damage inflicted is greater than or equal to their Physical dice pool. If so, then the opponent begins to bleed out, losing one Vitality point every round until they are defeated or flee.

Master Rank (Skill Level 4): Critical Chakra Pierce

Add this paragraph at the end:

If fighting against an NPC opponent with no Wound Track, check to see if the amount of Vitality they have remaining (after damage is dealt) is equal to or less than your rank in Clarity of Heaven style. If so, then the opponent loses all their remaining Vitality and is knocked unconscious for a number of minutes equal to twice your Melee Weapons skill.

⁶ I make no guarantees as to whether these new abilities are balanced, or even good.

Lotus Blossom

Lotus Blossom is the “innocent” of this scenario. She is inspired by characters such as Princess Leia from the original “Star Wars” trilogy, the Princess from “The Hidden Fortress,” and a vast number of female leads from action-oriented anime series who are not trained fighters, but have great strength of personality and will.

Lotus Blossom is intended to be a social character, with very high levels in Empathy and its related skills. Her physical stats are low, making her vulnerable in close combat, but she does possess certain talents in archery, allowing her to at least participate in combat.

Variant: The Aikido Courtesan

Lotus Blossom was originally trained in Unarmed Combat and “Empty Fist” (**TBZ Rules 317-318**) style martial arts. If you prefer to have Lotus Blossom beating up people with her bare hands rather than coolly firing arrows, you can swap out her ranks in “Centered Soul Archery” with “Empty Fist,” and replace her ranks in “Marksman” with “Unarmed Combat”

New War Art: Centered Soul Archery

As there is no real “Zen Archery” War Art in Tenra Bansho Zero, I’ve taken the liberty of writing up one of my own.⁷

Skill used: Marksman

Archery is one of the oldest and noblest war arts, sadly neglected in this age of gunpowder and soulgems. The “Centered Soul” school of archery treats the bow and arrow as an extension of the user’s inner self. Rather than training the eye and the hand, it focuses on training the mind and soul. This is exemplified by its motto: “When the soul sees truth, the arrow strikes true.”

Skilled Rank (Skill Level 2): The Inner Eye

Centered Soul Archery relies on inner peace and calm. Practitioners often blindfold themselves to train themselves to rely not on the eye and the hand, but on their inner senses to see their target.

With this technique, you can choose to use Spirit when rolling to hit with a Bow and Arrow.

Advanced Rank (Skill Level 3): Distant Lightning

The first step to mastering Centered Soul Archery is seeing the target using the inner eye. The second step is seeing the path of the arrow in flight. An adept of Centered Soul Archery can now predict the path of the arrow through the air, giving it much greater range and power.

When you use a Bow and Arrow in combat, its range is now 150m, and its Damage Rating is goes up by 2 (to a base rating of +5).

Master Rank (Skill Level 4): Rapid Lightning

Your mastery of Centered Soul Archery has now advanced to the point where the bow and arrow is now an extension of your very soul. When you use this technique, your ROF with a bow and arrow is increased to 5, but its range is reduced by 100m (to 50m in combination with Distant Lightning).

Supreme Rank (Skill Level 5): The Soul Strikes True

It is said that the greatest of all Centered Soul Archers, the legendary “Lightning-Beyond-The-Mountains,” could fire a single arrow from the back of his horse and strike the enemy general in the chest from across the entire battlefield.

When using this technique, you may spend any number of Soul points before rolling to hit with an attack. Each Soul point spent increases the range of the attack by 10m, **or** its damage result by +1. There is no limit (aside from the expenditure of Soul itself) to the amount of Soul that can be spent on this technique.

⁷ Again, I make no promises as to whether this is balanced or any good.

Chie, the Scarlet Blade

Chie is a ninja maid. She serves as a confidante to Lotus Blossom, and (along with Soujiro), as a foil to the more straightforward, honorable characters like General Kaneyori. She is inspired by every single female ninja character in pop culture.

Chie is a stock Shinobi with some skills moved around and reassigned. She is intended to be a skirmisher: although not quite as able as some other characters in a stand-up fight, she is one of the better hit-and-run combatants. Her ninjutsu abilities can also help her serve a key role as a messenger and scout for the rest of the party.

Variant: Changing Chie's Ninja School

Chie was originally built using the School of Shadow (Kage-Ryu) school of ninjutsu for two reasons: first of all, Kage-Ryu has access to the "Four Fold Shadow Form" power, which is useful to a ninja whose main job is to act as a disguised bodyguard. Secondly, it has the "Blackhawk's Shadow" power, which is useful if the party needs a messenger to race back to Ayanokoji Castle when they discover Takatsukasa Castle under siege. Thirdly, its Paths increase Pursuit and Movement, both of which can come into play during Act Three, when the party has to evade Flying Razor.

"True School of Shadow" (Shin Kage-Ryu) has access to Blackhawk's Shadow as well, although it sacrifices the disguise powers in favor of more combat-oriented powers like Wind of Menace. "School of Dream (Oboro-Ryu) could be an interesting choice for someone who wants to be more of a seductive kunoichi rather than a speedy ninja. "School of the Shore" (Migawari-Ryu) doesn't have Blackhawk's Shadow, but it does have Shadowflight, which is almost as good, and you can have a lot of fun leaping around and flinging tons of shuriken.

Most of the others I can't recommend for this scenario, but don't let that stop you.

Soujiro, the Steel Viper

Soujiro is one of the more "Tenran" characters, and really emphasizes some of the more bizarre aspects of the setting. In the grand tradition of the body horror genre, he's also a good character for anyone who wants to emphasize battling the "monster inside."

Soujiro's primary asset is the "Demon of Battle" annelid he possesses. Make sure the player understands exactly how that works, including the fact that the "wormcharm" skill is used for most combat skill checks.

Soujiro is one of the more challenging characters to play, as the player will need to understand how both Annelidists and Shinobi work. I recommend him for players who are either quick to pick up the system, or for veterans of Tenra Bansho Zero.

Variant: Original Soujiro

Soujiro was originally built as primarily a shinobi, as I thought the entire concept of an Annelidist would be too strange for my group. It turned out I was wrong, so he's been rewritten as a full Annelidist with only minor Shinobi powers.

If you want to use the original Soujiro, here are some guidelines:

- His archetypes were Shinobi, Annelid-Infested, and Assassin, for a total of 80 Karma.
- He used a variant of Oboro-Ryu ninjutsu, swapping out "Path of the Kunoichi" for "Path of the Falling Leaf."
- The "Venom Eater," "Annelid Body," and "Rain of Blood," powers were fluffed as side effects from the poisonous annelids living in his body.
- His starting Fates were "Hatred of Annelids" and "Keeper of a Cursed Sword."
- He possessed the Feyblade Katana "Poisoned Fang" (+7 Damage Rating).

Akizuki Nobutaki

Nobutaki is a stock samurai straight out of the book. He can end up being either a young hero who matures and grows throughout the scenario, or a scrappy young sidekick to the older or more experienced party members.

Nobutaki is the best stand-up combatant in the party. He is the only one with a soulgem sword, and (especially in Samurai Form) can blast apart large numbers of enemy mooks with ease. He is somewhat weak against ranged attacks, especially those that can only be dodged with Evasion, so if you want his character to worry, start using cannons and gatling guns against him.

Variant: A more thoughtful Nobutaki

If you want a samurai who's more of an introspective martial artist than a loud-mouthed warrior, you could try this alternative build:

- The Archetypes are Samurai, Paragon, and Vassal Servant for a total of 70 Karma
- There is a fair amount of skill overlap. I recommend the final skill set be: Etiquette 3, First Aid 2, Art of War: Ki Manipulation 4, Willpower 3, Notice 2, Movement 2.
- I recommend spending at least one Attribute point to buy Nobutaki a 3 in Melee Weapons. I'd also considering spending some Attribute points and Karma for a gemblade Greatsword or Katana.
- His starting Fates will be "Other: Seeking Death" and "Goal: To Know What is True Strength."
- Since he starts off the game with his Dead Box checked off, be sure to have a backup character in case things go badly, and let the player know that character death is a real possibility.
- Consider spending 10 Karma and an Attribute point on a gemblade or other customized weapon.

Ryuunosuke

Ryuunosuke is intended to be a foil to all of the other pregenerated characters in the group. Unlike the others, Ryuunosuke is motivated less by intangibles such as honor and duty: he fights for a living. He's the epitome of the "cynical mercenary" archetype.

As a gunlancer, Ryuunosuke has the possibility for exciting sniper battles against the antagonists. He has the single longest-ranged weapon in the party, and one of the most powerful. If he is present in the party, it does mean that any scenes involving pursuit or evasion could turn into a stalemate. Keep in mind, though, that even Ryuunosuke's sniper rifle isn't THAT long ranged: your average Kijin Mook can close the distance within two turns. . . if they find out where he is. In addition, ammunition for the gun lance is expensive and difficult to find. The best sniper can still be overwhelmed by sheer numbers until they run out of bullets.

Variant: The Hard-Boiled Killer

Let's take Ryuunosuke and turn him from a cold-eyed sniper to a two-guns-and-rifle wielding badass. This will make him less useful at long range, but a much more capable combatant at close to medium range.

- Archetypes: Mercenary, Soulgem Rifleman, and Paragon. Add on two Soulgem Pistols for a total of 75 Karma and 2 Attribute points.
- Consider adding on "Hard Lunk," "Kabukimono," or "Playboy" archetypes if you want to give him a little more character.
- Give him Black Wing Gun Style (**TBZ Rules 319**) as his War Art style.
- His starting fates are "Emotion: Ambition" and "Goal: Attain Ultimate Skill."

Stock Characters

Some thoughts on using the Sample Characters from the Tenra Bansho Zero rules in this scenario:

- **Armour Rider:** Probably not suited for a starting character, but could be useful as an “emergency character” starting in Act Three. For an interesting twist, the Armour Rider could be Lord Shinji himself.
- **Onmyouji:** Could take on the role of General Kaneyori, as a former war-mage who has retired from the battlefield. Alternatively, could play as Lotus Blossom’s creator, or as yet another vassal of Lord Ayanokoji.
- **Samurai:** Nobutaki is a stock samurai. Adding a second could be fun in a buddy-cop sort of way.
- **Buddhist Monk:** Again, could take on the role of General Kaneyori, after he’s retired from battle and decided to take up meditation.
- **Kijin:** Although most of the bad guys are Kijin, it’s not impossible to have one as a player character. Perhaps one of the enemy decides to defect and help Lotus Blossom out. Or perhaps you could just have one of the players take on the role of a sympathetic enemy in the scenario where Lotus Blossom gets kidnapped. Or they could just be a kijin in service to Lord Ayanokoji.
- **Kongohki:** Again, the main villain of this scenario is a Kongohki. You could use this one as a variation of Nobutaki, or even for Chie: imagine if Lotus Blossom’s protector weren’t a ninja, but a terrifying Kongohki.
- **Shinobi:** Chie’s basically just a stock Shinobi with some skills and powers moved around. Like Samurai, two Shinobi could be an interesting take on the scenario.
- **War Maiden Kugutsu:** Here’s another interesting twist on the Chie role: Lotus Blossom’s protector could be a kugutsu herself, but one trained for battle. She may even secretly be the kugutsu that has been pledged to marry Lord Shinji, rather than Lotus Blossom: the mission could be a double blind!
- **Annelidist:** This could be an interesting variation on Soujiro: a battlefield healer rather than an unwilling killer.
- **Oni:** What if the bandits who come across the crashed skyship in Act Three are not humans, but Oni? What if one of them decides to help these humans in their quest in exchange for. . . something?
- **Miko/Gyoshi:** The Shinto Priesthood could be interested in the results of Lotus Cloud’s journey. This agent could be acting to hinder the rest of the group, or she could be acting to help them.
- **Armour Hunter:** Can easily fit into Ryuunosuke or Nobutaki’s roles as the combat character.
- **Ayakashi:** Again, a useful stock character to toss in during Act Three if you need a replacement character: a curious Ayakashi who comes across the crashed skyship and decides to help out for their own reasons.

Appendix D: Stats

General Kaneyori

A former general who seeks to put down the sword and live a life of peace.

Archetypes: Swordmaster, Paragon, Elder, Tactician

Attribute Cost: 0

Karma Cost: 90

Attributes: BOD 4, AGI 4, SEN 7, KNO 6, SPI 6, EMP 6, STA 7

Vitality/Wounds: 10 Vitality, 4 Light, 2 Heavy, 1 Critical, 1 Dead

Soul: 24

Skills: Melee Weapons 4, Information 3, Strategy 4, Etiquette 3, Art of Rule 3, War Arts (Clarity of Heaven Style) 4.

Weapons:

- Weathered old Katana (+3 Damage)
- War Fan (+2 damage)

Fates: Emotion (Hatred of War) 3, Emotion (Times are Changing) 2

Destiny: Goal (Bring Peace to the Land) 2.

Possessions: Brush and ink, seal of office, secret martial manuscripts, katana, war fan, old clothing, formal kimono, portrait of wife and child.

Clarity of Heaven Style:

- Use Senses instead of Agility when rolling to hit in combat, both in attack and defense.
- Can assign all damage to Wounds and choose where to assign the damage.
- Can also choose to assign damage to Vitality as well as wounds.
- See optional revised Clarity of Heaven rules in this pamphlet.

Lotus Blossom

A kugutsu, pledged to marry the daimyo of a neighboring kingdom

Archetypes: Kugutsu, Princess, Concubine

Attribute Cost: 1

Karma Cost: 60

Attributes: BOD 3, AGI 4, SEN 5, KNO 5, SPI 7, EMP 8, STA 6

Vitality/Wounds: 10 Vitality, 3 Light, 2 Heavy, 1 Critical, 1 Dead.

Soul: 24

Skills: First Aid 3, Marksman 3, Information 3, Persuasion 2, Pillow Arts 3, Perform 3, Etiquette 3, Art of Rule 3. War Arts (Centered Soul Archery) 3.

Weapons:

- Masterwork Bow and Arrow (Damage +7, ROF 2, Range 150m)

Fates: Emotion (Loyalty to the Ayanokoji) 3, Emotion (Loneliness) 2

Destiny: Goal (Choose between freedom and duty) 2.

Possessions: Gold jewelry, makeup kit, masterwork bow and arrow, formal clothing, fancy silk kimono

Centered Soul Archery:

- Use Spirit instead of Senses when rolling to hit with a bow and arrow.
- +50m to range and +2 to damage when using a bow and arrow (already incorporated).

Butterfly Dream: Use Performance or Pillow Arts to pull a target into the Butterfly Dream.

Chie, the Scarlet Blade

A female ninja who serves as Lotus Blossom's handmaiden and bodyguard.

Archetypes: Shinobi, Thief

Attribute Cost: 1

Karma Cost: 80

Attributes: BOD 5, AGI 9, SEN 6, KNO 4, SPI 6, EMP 5, STA 4

Vitality/Wounds: 11 Vitality, 5 Light, 3 Heavy, 2 Critical, 1 Dead

Soul: 20

Skills: Unarmed Combat 3, Melee Weapons 3, Evasion 3, Stealth 3, Ninjutsu (Kage-Ryu) 4, Criminal Arts 2, Notice 4, Marksman 4.

Weapons:

- Ninja Sword (+3 Damage)
- Shuriken (+1 Damage, ROF 5, Range 10m, Ammo "a lot.")

Fates: Emotion (Hates Hypocrisy) 3, Misfortune (Owned by the Clan) 2.

Destiny: Misfortune (Failed to protect the Lord's Son) 2.

Possessions: Ninja stealth gear, maidservant's costume, merchant's clothes, ninja sword, 500 mon and 8 silver, Shinobi Dark Arts (4),

Ninjutsu:

- Use Ninjutsu in place of Movement and Pursuit.
- Ninjutsu powers include: Shadowflight, Blackhawk's Shadow, Smoke and Mist, Shadow Form, Mind's Eye, Possessed by the Inner Demon, Four-Fold Shadow Form
- Shinobi Dark Arts reduces Soul Cost by 4 to a minimum of 1.

Soujiro, the Steel Viper

A shinobi annelidist who also serves as Lotus Blossom's servant and bodyguard..

Archetypes: Annelid Hunter, Ninja Apprentice

Attribute Cost: 85

Karma Cost: 0

Attributes: BOD 8, AGI 6, SEN 5, KNO 4, SPI 8, EMP 5, STA 3

Vitality/Wounds: 14 Vitality, 8 Light, 4 Heavy, 2 Critical, 1 Dead.

Soul: 24

Skills: Unarmed Combat 3, Wormcharm 3, Evasion 2, Ninjutsu (Kage-Ryu) 2, First Aid 2, Willpower 2

Annelid Attacks:

- Clawed Hands (+8 Damage)
- Clawed Feet (+6 Damage)
- Acid Spit (+4 Damage, ROF 1, Range 10m, Acid 4)
- Electrostatic Cannon (+8 Damage, ROF 1, Range 18m, can only be dodged by Evasion).

Fates: Emotion (Hatred of the Worm) 3, Misfortune (Owned by the Clan 2).

Destiny: Goal: (Be rid of the Demon-of-Battle) 2.

Possessions: Ninja stealth gear, manservant's costume, Demon-of-Battle Annelid.

Ninjutsu:

- Use Ninjutsu in place of Movement and Pursuit.
- Ninjutsu power: Shadowflight.

Annelid: In order for the transformation to successfully take place, you must make a Spirit: Wormcharm (Diff. 3) or Spirit: Willpower (Diff 4) check. On a failure, you blindly attack anything perceived by the annelid as an enemy. Use Body: Wormcharm when attacking with the claws or Electrostatic Cannon.

Akizuki Nobutaki

A young samurai, and one of Lord Ayanokoji's most inexperienced warriors.

Archetypes: Hard Luck, Samurai, Kabukimono, Playboy

Attribute Cost: 1

Karma Cost: 85

Attributes:⁸ BOD 6 (9), AGI 8(11), SEN 5 (8), KNO 3, SPI 6, EMP 6, STA 5

Vitality/Wounds: 12 Vitality; 6 Light, 3 Heavy, 2 Critical, 1 Dead

Soul: 18

Skills: Evasion 2, Melee Weapons 3, First Aid 2, Notice 2, Marksman 2, Pursuit 3, Information 3, Willpower 3, Perform 2, Pillow Arts 3

Weapons:

- Gemblade Greatsword (+5 Damage, ROF 3, Ammo 12)
- Kunai (+2 damage, ROF 3, Range 10m, Ammo "a lot")

Fates: Emotion (Hatred of Weakness) 3, Misfortune (Loss of your Most Precious Thing) 2.

Destiny: Goal: (Prove Yourself as a Warrior) 2.

Possessions: Gemblade Greatsword "Willow-Cutter", damaged breastplate, garish kimono, 10 additional soulgems, jug of cheap sake.

Samurai Abilities:

- Costs 5 Soul to Activate, lasts 6 rounds.
- +3 dice to Body, Agility, and Senses
- Regeneration 1
- Soulfind, 10 meter radius

Ryuunosuke

A mercenary and gunlance sniper who works for the Ayanokoji Clan as a skirmisher.

Archetypes: Gunlancer, Mercenary

Attribute Cost: 1

Karma Cost: 90

Attributes: BOD 6, AGI 7, SEN 9, KNO 4, SPI 4, EMP 3, STA 6

Vitality/Wounds: 10 Vitality; 6 Light, 3 Heavy, 2 Critical, 1 Dead

Soul: 16

Skills: Stealth 2, Melee Weapons 3, Notice 3, Marksman 4, Pursuit 2, Information 3, Willpower 3.

Weapons:

- Gunlance (+10 Damage, ROF 1, Range 400m, Ammo 8)
- Explosive Spiker (+4/+6 Damage, ROF 1, Ammo 1)
- Short Sword (+2 Damage)

Fates: Emotion (Ambition) 3, Taboo (Disloyalty) 2.

Destiny: Goal (Live the Good Life) 2.

Possessions: Gunlance, 15 additional soulgems/rounds, shortsword, jug of fine quality sake, memento of a former love interest, 750 mon and 9 silver,

⁸ Number in parentheses represents stats when under Samurai Transformation.

FLYING RAZOR

The main antagonist: A Kongohki Hunter who seeks to capture Lotus Blossom.

Archetypes: Kongohki, Paragon

Attribute Cost: 0

Karma Cost: 100

Attributes:⁹ BOD 9 (13), AGI 11 (15), SEN 9 (13), KNO 7, SPI 6, EMP 6, STA 7

Vitality: 25 + 5 points for each player character in the party.

Soul: 26

Skills: Unarmed Combat 3, Movement 3, Stealth 3, Evasion 2, Melee Weapons 4, Notice 3, Marksman 3, Pursuit 3, War Arts (Ryuuko-Itten-Ryu) 4

Weapons:

- Gemblade Katana (+3 Damage, ROF 3, Ammo 6)
- Double-Edged Sword (+2 Damage, ROF 2, Ammo 6)
- Hooked Fang Dagger (+1 Damage)
- Shuriken (+1 damage, ROF 5, Range 10m, Ammo A Lot)

Lifepulse: Can detect all living things human-sized and larger in a 900m radius

Self Destruct: 30 damage, 15m radius

Overdrive: 13 times per session.

⁹ Number in Parentheses includes the +4 Meikyo Bonus for 100 Karma.