

Inside the names and flavor text of *Champions Land of Ten-Thousand Legends*

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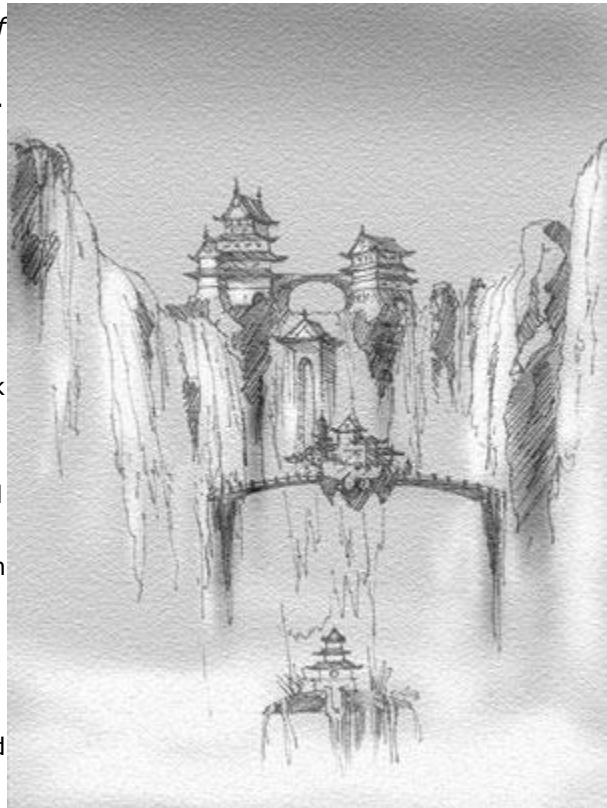


- [Jay Moldenhauer-Salazar Archive](#)

For a names and flavor text writer, *Champions of Kamigawa* was a dream come true. Recall that my first set as [a creative writer](#) was *Fifth Dawn*. For *Fifth Dawn* my goal was to learn as much about the metallic setting of *Mirrodin* as possible, to stay true to the world-building done in the previous two sets while trying to solve whatever creative puzzles I could find. In many ways, *Fifth Dawn* was about putting the (hopefully satisfying) finishing touches onto an already-detailed world.

Champions of Kamigawa, in contrast, felt like a blank canvas. The canvas wasn't blank at all of course, since Brady Dommermuth, Brandon Bozzi, [Jeremy Cranford](#), and the other creative folks at Wizards had done a lot to create a compelling Sengoku-era (late 15th and early 16th century Japan) fantasy setting in which Shinto had gone terribly wrong. By the time I and the other writers arrived on the scene, Kamigawa (initially called "Inrekai") was already a living, vibrant setting.

But what the creative folks had done was paint broad brushstrokes. They had provided a rendering and asked the artists, novelists, and creative text writers to turn this rendering into a blueprint. We were asked to populate the plane with colorful characters, tragic battles, and a deep history. Kamigawa, as Brandon explained it to us, was a land of ten-thousand legends. It was up to us to tell those legendary stories.



Speaking of "us," the *Champions of Kamigawa* names and flavor text writers, in addition to me, Brandon and Brady, were:

- Rich Amtower (Video-game writer, editor-for-hire, and self-described "Grammar Hammer")
- Doug Beyer (Web Developer for [magicthegathering.com](#) and Prismatic enthusiast)

- Shelley Bullock (Item-Master Developer and a warehouse of anime and manga knowledge)
- Jennifer Clarke-Wilkes (Editor who has been working on Magic creative stuff since 1997)
- Rei Nakizawa (Former WotC staff writer and Story Guy Extraordinaire)

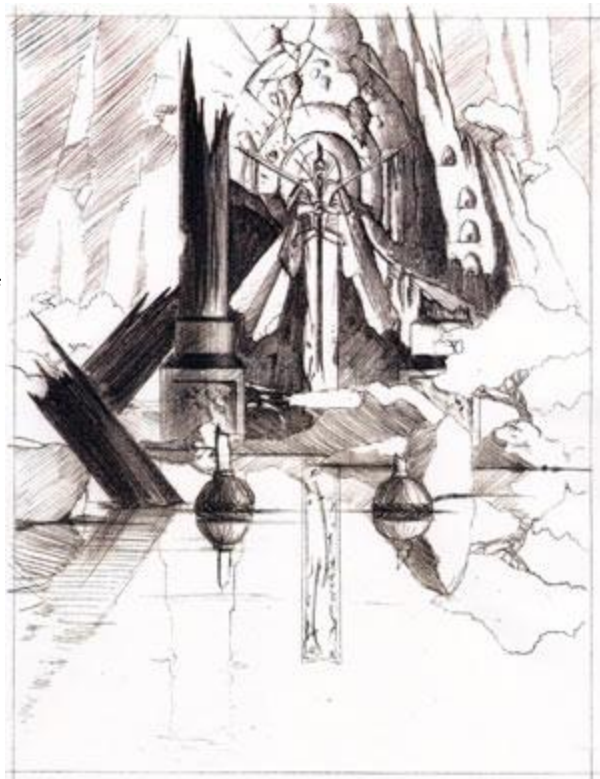
Apparently one of these things was not like the others. Namely me. See, I was thrilled to be asked back after my *Fifth Dawn* experience, but I think I was the only person on the team who wasn't a "manga" or "anime" guy. That is, at the time I was much more comfortable dealing with fantasy based on western than eastern mythology. I vividly remember reading the Kamigawa cosmology document and having beads of sweat start collecting between my shoulder blades. How could I stay true to a sense of Japanese history and culture when I barely knew either?

Brandon and Brady, thankfully, pointed me to study materials. Over the course of my three months working on the set, I read "Japanese Ghosts and Demons" by Stephen Addiss, "Myths and Legends of Japan" by Davis Hadland, "A Popular Dictionary of Shinto" by Brian Bocking, and "The Samurai Sourcebook; Samurai Warfare" by Stephen Turnbull. Thank goodness for the Public Library. I also watched every movie I could find by Akira Kurosawa (*Seven Samurai*, *Ran*, *Throne of Blood*) and Miyazaki Hayao (*Spirited Away*, *Princess Mononoke*) as well as the anime/manga series *Ninja Scroll* and *Inu Yasha*. Thank goodness for Netflix too. By the end of *Champions of Kamigawa*, I think it's fair to say that a new manga guy had been born.

In my [Fifth Dawn article](#), I described the process of naming cards and writing flavor text. That process was still in place for *Champions of Kamigawa* so no need to rehash old material. Instead, let's remember Brandon's words that Kamigawa is a world of ten-thousand legends. Today I'll give you some insight into how some of those legends were created, first with the general challenges of flavor text and naming in *Champions*, then via some specific stuff I wrote.

One Blank Canvas. Many Flavorful Writers.

One of the things we tried to do as a creative team was to approach *Champions of Kamigawa's* flavor text like that of *Fallen Empires*. That is, we wanted to have you all feel as if you were receiving scraps of documents and bits of history that all added up to a rich and textured setting. The trick was that we weren't sitting around a table doing this co-creation, we were all logging into Namebase and posting our ideas for each card without any direct interaction at all. As writers, we were constantly taking cues from each other and trying to build on each other's ideas to create something coherent and credible.



The best example of this sort of organic lore-creation comes in Kamigawa's historical texts. What you see in the flavor text now from "Great Battles of Kamigawa," the "Diary of Azusa," "Teachings of [Eight-and-a-Half-Tails](#)," messages from the Lost Battalion, "The History of Kamigawa," and "Observations of the Kami War" all exist because one writer offered up the idea in a submission and others liked it enough to follow suit. None of the flavor text referencing these texts comes from a single writer. I forget now who was the first to write something from "The History of Kamigawa" or "Observations of the Kami War," but these two were the first established texts that people used. I guess it was only natural for us to need some kind of "Encyclopedia Britannica" early on, which is why each book has a lot of flavor text associated with it. These two constantly vied for which was going to be *the* Kamigawa history text and, in the end, neither won out (though I give the slight nod to "Observations"). "Great Battles of Kamigawa," by the way, was something Brandon created after the first waves of writing to capture most of the stories we told about specific battles. Originally, each "Battles" quote was attributed to either "The History" or "Observations."

The same thing happened with Kamigawa's legendary people, places and weapons. If someone wrote something particularly cool about a character, place, or event, the other writers used this information in their own writing. Consider for example some of the flavor text submissions for [Marrow-Gnawer](#):
"My followers are so loyal, they would give their friends' lives to serve me." -- Marrow Gnawer

"Nature rewards only the strong." -- Marrow Gnawer

"Rats are scavengers. The nezumi-bito are thieves." -- Marrow-Gnawer

The nezumi-bito were a mere annoyance until Marrow Gnawer taught them strength in numbers.

Marrow Gnawer united three nezumi gangs when he slew their leaders in a single night. Now they call him their first lord.

Whichever was selected would shape who [Marrow-Gnawer](#) was in the world of Kamigawa and would be yet another bit of lore for the other writers to file away as part of their writing. As a result, what you see as [Master Dosan](#)'s contemplativeness and [General Takeno](#)'s obstinate resolve are both the direct result of a team of writers all iterating on each other's ideas as pieces of history slowly clicked into place. You can look at the number of quotations associated with each of Kamigawa's legends to see the characters with which we collectively fell in love. It seems we liked the "Mister Miyagi" characters like [Sensei Hisoka](#) and [Eight-and-a-Half-Tails](#) most of all.

Kami of the Arcane Name



For naming, there were a lot of puzzles in front of us. One initial question was how often we were supposed to use Japanese language in the names. After some pushing, prodding and feeling our way, these general rules emerged:

- Use Japanese-sounding names of the major races: Kitsune, Soratami, Nezumi, Oni, Akki, Orochi. (Examples: [Kitsune Blademaster](#), [Soratami Rainshaper](#), [Orochi Ranger](#))
- Use Japanese-sounding names of the major places: [Minamo School](#), Takenuma Swamp, Numai, Sokenzan Range, Jukai Forest. (Examples: [Numai Outcast](#), [Sokenzan Bruiser](#))
- Use Japanese for the major classes: Samurai, Jushi (wizard), Ronin, Budoka (fighting monk) (Examples: [Humble Budoka](#), [Jushi Apprentice](#))
- Use Americanized Japanese words and words that are evocative of Japan (e.g. Katana, Honor, Monk, Sensei...)

- Use Japanese names in place of made up words (Examples: [Silent-Chant Zubera](#), [Wicked Akuba](#), [River Kaijin](#))
- Use Japanese-sounding proper names of legends (Examples: [Takeno](#), [Samurai General](#); [Yosei](#), [the Morning Star](#); [Seshiro the Anointed](#))
- Use Japanese-sounding Orochi Tribe names: Matsu-Tribe (archers), Kashi-Tribe (warriors), Sakura-Tribe (shaman) (Examples: [Matsu-Tribe Decoy](#), [Sakura-Tribe Elder](#))
- "Yamabushi" (mountain-dwelling monk) was okay as long as it's linked to this mechanic: If a creature dealt damage by this card this turn would be put into a graveyard, remove it from the game instead. (Examples: [Kumano](#), [Master Yamibushi](#), [Yamabushi's Flame](#))
- Also, as a general rule, use Japanese words in conjunction with English words so that they're more approachable.

Another question that hit us right away was how to deal with names for Kamigawa's kami. I sent an e-mail on the first day of *Champions of Kamigawa* naming asking Brandon how to deal with kami names. If I had a kami associated with lava, I asked, do I name it: Lava Kami? Kami of Lava? Kami of the Burning Water? Kami of the Angry Volcano? Spirit of the Lava? Lava Spirit? Lavaswimmer? Soul of Magma? Seed of Anger? Blistering Wanderer? Lava Kaijin? Etc. etc. etc. You see the dilemma. With a whole new concept for creatures (and particularly bizarre, immortal creatures at that), we needed a way to characterize them that was both consistent across the set and that made sense.

I distinctly remember Brandon's response:

"Yes."

Followed shortly thereafter by:

"Okay, no Spirits in the name. Spirit is a creature type in Kamigawa but we want to keep it out of the kami names."

As a result, you can see kami names in *Champions* run the gamut in terms of creative flavor. There are [Brutal Deceivers](#), [Earthshakers](#), [Guardians of Solitude](#), [Hearth Kami](#), [Kami of Fire's Roar](#) and [Kami of the Waning Moon](#). Just as the kami were given really loose guidelines to the artists (the only real limitations being that they have floating objects around them and look bizarre), so too were the creative writers able to stretch their own imaginations. Kami look freaky and other-worldly in their art; the goal was to make their names similarly freaky and other-worldly.



Finally, the writers had to decide what "Arcane" [Kami of the Painted Road](#) art by Ron Spencer as a card-type meant. These were spells meant to originate in Kamigawa's spirit world, stuff alien to the mortals who had found themselves besieged by kami. How the heck do you get a concept like this across in a card name? Especially since few Arcane spells (and none with Splice) have flavor text, we needed to find a naming convention that separated Arcane Instants from regular Instants.

The solution for Arcane spells was to tie them to the world of the kami. [Call to Glory](#) is not an Arcane Instant. [Blessed Breath](#) is. Scanning the Arcane card names gives you an idea of their spirit-worldosity: [Hideous Laughter](#), [Otherworldly Journey](#), [Part the Veil](#), [Lifted By Clouds](#), [Strange Inversion](#), and [Unnatural Speed](#) have a very different feel to them than [Squelch](#), [Sideswipe](#), [Hold The Line](#), [Reciprocate](#), and [Yamabushi's Flame](#). Think of Instants as the spells cast by mortals against the kami during the Kami War and Arcane Instants as those cast by kami against the mortals. That's enough general trends. Now let's talk about some of the things of which I'm personally most proud in *Champions*...

Those Bloody Ogres

In the Kamigawa Style Guide, a guide of art and concept sketches for the setting sent out to creative writers and artists, I was really intrigued by the section on Bakemono, or Ogre-Mages. The ogres of Kamigawa not only looked fierce, but they were described as "wise and reclusive," which seemed to me like a nice twist on the typical **Magic** ogres (quite different from the tone of, say, [Drooling Ogre](#) or [Ogre Taskmaster](#)). It was this line that caught my eye, though: "These huge monsters...wield forgotten magic. They worship oni (Japanese demons) with strange rituals involving fire, smoke, and blood." That sounded cool, so I ran with it. I first submitted the flavor text for [Gutwrencher Oni](#) and [Painwacker Oni](#), which was an attempt to tie the oni worship to practices of blood-magic (smoke and fire references,



it seemed to me, were a lot more common in **Magic** than blood). When they were accepted, I went crazy, naming every ogre with "blood" in its name and having every bit of flavor text somehow tied to their bloody-blooderson rituals. [Blood Speaker](#); [Initiate of Blood](#); [Blood Rites](#); [Seizan, Perverter of Truth](#); and [Villainous Ogre](#) all explore the ogres' connection with oni through blood-magic.

What's particularly funny for me is that when the ogre-blood connection was established, Brandon then had to go back and revise some earlier submissions so that ogres had a monopoly on blood references. Thus Blood Before Dishonor became [Vassal's Duty](#). Bloodthirsty Ronin became [Battle-Mad Ronin](#). Bloodstained Koto became [Hair-Strung Koto](#). Impure Blood became [Ragged Veins](#). Drain Blood became [Crushing Pain](#). We flirted with a very bloody set for a bit there.

Of Bells, Silk, and Trees

[Order of the Sacred Bell](#) was an interesting card because it was so generic. Here's how it first showed up in Namebase:

R&D Card Name: [Pair of Monks]

Mana Cost: 030G

P/T: 4 / 3

Spell/Sub Type: Creature - Human Monk

Rules:

Art Desc:

Color: Green

Location: Forest

Action: Show a pair of muscular human budoka (monk martial artists) fighting back to back.

Focus: On the deadly duo.

Mood: We're ready for anyone

Notes: See the styleguide for monk reference.

Comments: Approx. Lines Available for Ftext: 5

Talk about a blank canvas! While it's easy to think of naming a card like this "Fighting Monks" or "Monk Disciples" or something, I saw it as an opportunity to do some world-building. What if an order of monks existed at the heart of the Jukai forest, keeping watch for some unknown danger on behalf of the rest of the world? That was the idea behind the name. When it was accepted, I decided to build one of the Kami War's key battles around this order and its mysterious bell. Thus the art for [Junkyo Bell](#):



Junkyo Bell art by Kensuke Okabayashi

...and the flavor text for [Time of Need](#):



I actually named all six of the Jukai Forests's monastic orders, at least in my own head. Thanks to a short story on [Kiku, Night's Flower](#) that was meant to provide some world-building for the other writers (no, you won't see it on the [Meet the Champions](#) site), I established five loosely-organized orders of monks whose mission was to safeguard the forest's oldest trees. These monks, called the Order of the Five Trees, would largely be wiped out in the Kami War, especially when the kami

associated with each Tree joined the war. As an aside, in the story I was also able to establish Kiku's magic as animating people's shadows against them, thus establishing the mechanic on her card. Anyway, after reading the story, Brandon brought the following two cards to my attention:

R&D Card Name: [Kami of Spring Burgeoning]

Mana Cost: o2oGoGoG

P/T: 6 / 4

Spell/Sub Type: Legendary Creature - Spirit

Rules: Trample CARDNAME can't be the target of spells or abilities.

Art Desc:

Color: Green

Location: Forest

Action: Show a huge, aggro kami of your invention that's immune to magic. This creature has some kind of forcefield that makes it invincible.

Focus: The Big Bad Green Kami Spirit

Mood: Nature's Grand Power

Notes: As you know there's a lot of creative freedom with what the Kami Spirit can look like but remember all Kami Spirits must have some kind of *energy objects* rotating/floating around them.

Comments: New Mechanic. Now legendary.

R&D Card Name: [Kami of Forgotten Wars]

Mana Cost: o2oGoG

P/T: 4 / 4

Spell/Sub Type: Legendary Creature - Spirit

Rules: Whenever you play a Spirit or Arcane spell, each other creature you control gets +1/+1 and gains trample until end of turn.

Art Desc:

Color: Green

Location: Forest location of artist's choice

Action: Show a green-aligned kami (spirit) of your design. The kami can/should be monstrous and weird, like all kami, but this one covers its "face" (or the place where its face might be) with a Noh theater mask. The idea here is that this kami hides its full form from those it attacks, as well as taunting its victims with the mask -- this links to a "bluffing" mechanic that's on the card.

Focus: the kami

Mood: Creepy, enigmatic, fierce like a hungry animal.

Notes: Non-flying creature, should be on the ground. This is a Spirit Creature so it must be surrounded by some kind of flying *energy objects* review the "Green" spirit world creatures in your styleguide. This will help you get on the right track.

Comments: Approx. lines available for : 4 - New Mechanic. He's legendary now. What's his name? What's his story?

Brandon asked if I thought these two cards could become two of the Tree Kami referenced in my story and gave me a homework assignment to come up with characterizations for the Five Trees. Here was my response:

Okay. I pictured Five Trees in Inrekai's great forest: North, South, East, West, and Center. Roughly speaking, I think of North as the Winter tree, South as the Summer tree, East as the Spring Tree, West as the Autumn tree, with Center being the Tree of All Seasons.

North - Slow, sleepy, non-emotive. The Spirit of the Northern Tree values survival above all else, and does not suffer fools lightly. Think of it as a "sleeping bear," a lump who wants to be left alone until provoked and then a deadly force of nature.

South - Happy, kind, lawful. The Spirit of the Southern Tree values community above all else, though a community with certain rules (sort of on the white side of green). Think of it as a "friendly lord," who cares about all living things in its forest and wants everything in its proper place.

East - Impulsive, headstrong, adolescent. The Spirit of the Eastern Tree values growth above all else, and lives with a blooming zest (sort of on the red side of green). Think of it as a "classic fey" who jests and pranks, seemingly everywhere at once in its part of the forest.

West - Gloomy, dangerous, feral. The Spirit of the Western Tree values the hunt above all else and lives by the creed "survival of the fittest." Think of it as a "shark of the forest," top of the food chain yet always on the prowl.

Center - Wise, ponderous, sheltered. The Spirit of the Center Tree is the oldest of the tree kami and values history above all else (not the written history of blue but the oral history of the soil, rocks, and trees). Think of it as the "hermit," who knows more than anyone else in the forest but is impossible to find and talk to.

After discussing these initial thoughts, we decided that the two generic kami best represented the [Kodama of the North Tree](#) and the [Kodama of the South Tree](#), which also spawned the names of cards like [Kodama's Might](#), and [Kodama's Reach](#). Will the other Kodamas make it into future sets? I guess you'll just have to wait and find out.



They All Fall Down

The last story element I'll bring up that ended up shaping a lot of flavor text was the Reito Massacre. Here, I thought, was where the mortal world really faced the reality of the power against them. I envisioned a human army assembled against a horde of kami and getting utterly destroyed. After Reito, I decided, the mortals would realize that they could never beat the spirit world in conventional warfare. Instead, they scrambled desperately for survival by seeking things like a) tomes for ancient secrets at the Minamo School, b) lost, ancient weapons in the Takenuma Swamp, c) Kumano, whose magic seemed particularly effective against the kami, and on and on. All of these ideas show up somewhere in *Champions* flavor text, but the specific importance of Reito is reflected in these cards:

*Destroyed in one of the first battles of the Kami War, the town of Reito still grieved. [Ghostly Prison]
"I can hear the shamans chanting in the hills. They say their magic will protect us from the kami, that our gold has bought our safety. But no one sleeps soundly tonight." —Scroll fragment from the ruins of Reito [Kami of Fire's Roar]*

"The Reito Massacre was a testament to the kami's unstoppable power. The human defenders might as well have been moths battling a forest fire." —Great Battles of Kamigawa [Rend Flesh]

"For a moment, Reito's defenders regrouped. Then wailing kami reappeared to send them scattering like flocks of frightened birds." —Great Battles of Kamigawa [Kami of the Waning Moon]

"When the rampaging kami at Reito had crushed the opposing militia, swarms of minor kami swept over the battlefield to consume all that remained." —Great Battles of Kamigawa [Befoul]

In fact, I decided that Reito was so significant that it deserved its own kami. So when I was confronted with writing for a [legendary black kami](#), I submitted this flavor text:



Hmmm... it just occurred to me that I contributed a bunch of blood references and the Kami War's biggest massacre to Kamigawa's world-building. Things at home and work are fine, really. Maybe I better lay off the caffeine and late-night horror flicks, though.

So that's a glimpse at *Champions of Kamigawa* from a card names and flavor text standpoint. I've been holding my breath since working on the set several months ago because when we were done I realized how different this set was from **Magic's** other expansions. You can only imagine my anticipation to unleash a world based on Japanese mythos upon you all. My hope is that you have as much fun experiencing a setting filled with samurai, otherworldly kami, strange races, and epic battles

as we did creating it. For me, *Champions of Kamigawa* was my first real opportunity to do some world-building in **Magic**. Let's hope there are plenty more in the future.

Enjoy your new theme decks,

-j

Jay's full *Champions of Kamigawa* credits:

Card names: [Akki Lavarunner](#) / [Tok-Tok, Volcano Born](#); [Akki Rockspeaker](#); [Blood Speaker](#); [Dance of Shadows](#); [Desperate Ritual](#); [Field of Reality](#); [General's Kabuto](#); [Gibbering Kami](#); [Glimpse of Nature](#); [Godo, Bandit Warlord](#); [Hearth Kami](#); [Horobi, Death's Wail](#); [Initiate of Blood](#) / [Goka the Unjust](#); [Kami of Lunacy](#); [Kiku, Night's Flower](#); [Kitsune Diviner](#); [Kumano's Pupils](#); [Nezumi Bone-Reader](#); [Nezumi Cutthroat](#); [Nezumi Graverobber](#) / [Nighteyes, Nezumi Bone-Master](#); [Nezumi Ronin](#); [Night Dealings](#); [Oathkeeper, Takeno's Daisho](#); [Oni Possession](#); [Order of the Sacred Bell](#); [Sachi, Daughter of Seshiro](#); [Sosuke, Son of Seshiro](#); [Struggle for Sanity](#); [Swirl the Mists](#); [Wear Away](#); [Konda's Banner](#); [Forbidden Orchard](#)

Flavor text: [Akki Avalanchers](#); [Akki Underminer](#); [Befoul](#); [Ben-Ben, Akki Hermit](#); [Blind With Anger](#); [Blood Rites](#); [Distress](#); [Earthshaker](#); [Gutwrencher Oni](#); [Hair-Strung Koto](#); [Hisoka, Minamo Sensei](#); [Horizon Seed](#); [Horobi, Death's Wail](#); [Kami of the Waning Moon](#); [Kiku, Night's Flower](#); [Kodama of the Northern Tree](#); [Kodama of the Southern Tree](#); [Lava Spike](#); [Marrow-Gnawer](#); [Midnight Covenant](#); [Nature's Will](#); [Nezumi Bone-Reader](#); [Nezumi Ronin](#); [Night of Souls' Betrayal](#); [Nine-Ringed Bo](#); [Numai Outcast](#); [Painwracker Oni](#); [Pull Under](#); [Rag Dealer](#); [Rend Flesh](#); [Seizan, Perverter of Truth](#); [Villainous Ogre](#); [Swallowing Plague](#); [Thoughtbind](#); [Time of Need](#); [Unatural Speed](#); [Waking Nightmare](#); [Ashen-Skin Zuberu](#); [Dripping-Tongue Zuberu](#); [Ember-Fist Zuberu](#); [Floating-Dream Zuberu](#); [Silent-Chant Zuberu](#)