

Inside the names and flavor text of *Betrayers*. A Flavorful View of *Betrayers*

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Let me tell you, it just doesn't get any better than [Hero's Demise](#). It's not the only gem in *Betrayers of Kamigawa* though. [Reduce to Dreams](#) is as elegant as [Tallowisp](#) is clever. [Yomiji, Who Bars the Way](#) is brilliant. To me, these cards are some of the finest of their kind and represent one heck of a set.

Oh. What? You thought I was talking about what the cards *do*? Do-shmoo, bucko... I'm talking about flavor text!

In my [first article](#) on **Magic** names and flavor text, I introduced the process behind how cards get their names and flavor text via my experience as a Creative Writer for *Fifth Dawn*. In my [second article](#), I looked at how that process applied to the new and wonderful world of Kamigawa, paying particular attention to some of the stories in the flavor text.

The hard question for me was, what now? The creative process was the same for *Betrayers of Kamigawa* as it was for *Fifth Dawn*. The world for *Betrayers* was the same as in *Champions of Kamigawa*. In fact, that world hadn't changed significantly, just spiraled from bad into worse, plunging forward into the Kami War. Unlike, say, the second-sets of *Planeshift* or *Darksteel*, there wasn't a particular event that marked *Betrayers* as distinct from *Champions*, or at least one that was communicated to the Creative Writers (ninjas were cool, of course, but they didn't constitute a story development). In many ways, the experience for me as Creative Writer for *Betrayers* was a *further* exploration of Kamigawa, not something wholly new.

As a sidenote, I only now realize a missed opportunity in *Betrayers* for me as a writer. I see now that the set's overall flavor was about blurring the well-defined sides of the Kami War established in *Champions*. In the first set of the Kamigawa block, we are dropped into an epic war between the



mortal world and the world of the kami. *Betrayers*, as the set's title suggests, allows us to (among other things) peek in on those kami who may be fighting on the mortal's side and vice-versa. This distinction wasn't clear to me at the time, though I see its evidence in the sorts of names and flavor text that Brandon Bozzi and Brady Dommermuth selected.

Anyway, in looking back on the response from my *Champions of Kamigawa* article, it seems people are most interested in the stories behind the cards' flavor text. As a result, my tactic today is to dive into a few of the cards with my flavor text on them, explaining why I wrote what I wrote.

Keep in mind that several people contributed to the flavor behind *Betrayers*. In addition to Brady and Brandon, there was Rich Amtower, Doug Beyer, Rei Nakazawa, Brian Tinsman, Alex Smith, Justin Webb, and myself. Today you'll only get stories from my perspective on cards with my writing on them. No doubt that rich stories exist from all of the Creative Writers, all weaving together into the tapestry of what makes Kamigawa such a flavorful block.

That said, let's peek at what sort of contributions I made to *Betrayers'* creative text...

The Fate of the Order

As I said in my *Champions* article, I was the fellow who created the [Order of the Sacred Bell](#) and the Battle of Silk as seen in [Time of Need's](#) art and flavor text. The nice folks at Wizards even let me explore both in my [web-story](#) on [Jugan, the Rising Star](#). In the story, I described the outset of the Battle of Silk and the siege upon the Order.

Emboldened by my contributions in *Champions*, I found myself wanting to explain the rest of the Battle of Silk in *Betrayers'* flavor text. I intended to write a small handful of pieces recounting the Order's fate, sprinkled throughout the set. The problem was that, by chance, not a lot of green and artifact cards had space for flavor text, so the opportunities to do storytelling with characters from the Jukai Forest were few and far between. I jumped at what I could find, including this card from Namebase:



R&D Card Name: [Gnarled-Root Kami]

Mana Cost: oloGoG

Spell Type: Creature -

Creature Type: Spirit

Power/Tough: 3/3

Rules Text:

Art Desc.:

Color: Green

Location: deep forest

Action: Show a kami that represents deeply set roots. This spirit-world creature is rooted deep in the earth and can't move across the ground. It's like a living, animate barrier that reaches high into the sky.

Focus: the kami of roots

Mood: the forest as a living barrier

Notes: All kami have strange objects orbiting them. See your styleguide for Kami references.

[Gnarled Mass](#) is the only card from *Betrayers* with any mention of either the Order or Battle of Silk in its flavor text. Right in line with *Betrayers'* story themes, the Order's situation is a desperate, hopeless one. It seems Rokuan's fears were well founded, and that Kazuki's months of bell-ringing may have brought on more harm than good. Bummer, eh? If there is one glimmer of solace, it's that we know from [Time of Need](#) that the Battle will last six years so I guess there's a small hope the monks can pull it out in the end.

Poor, Poor Numai

R&D Card Name: [Dependant Demon]

Mana Cost: 030B

Spell Type: Creature -

Creature Type: Demon Spirit

Power/Tough: 4/4

Rules Text: At the beginning of your upkeep, you lose 2 life if you don't control an Ogre.

Art Desc.:

Color: Black

Location: your choice

Action: Show an evil, badass oni (demon) of your design. It must have two horns and a third eye in between its other two, but the rest is up to you.

Focus: the oni

Mood: I want to mutilate everything I see.

Notes: Oni are spirit-world creatures and therefore need orbiting objects around them of your design.

Man, I love sowing misery! The Reito Massacre from *Champions'* flavor text was such a complete slaughter of humanity that it spawned its own kami ([Horobi, Death's Wail](#)), and now I set my sights on crippling an entire town with demons! Muhahahaha ha ha ha ha heh... ha... hee... wooo...
Ahem.

It was always my belief that the rotting muck of the Takenuma Swamp expanded during the Kami War, swallowing up the surrounding terrain. Certainly the Takenuma became darker and more dangerous, as described in the flavor text of [Pull Under](#) and [Swallowing Plague](#), and Oni ran rampant, as described in the flavor text of [Blood Rites](#) and [Deathcurse Ogre](#). Well, I mused, what would happen if the swamp engulfed an entire town at its edge, corrupting it with its vileness? Thus came about the idea behind [Scourge of Numai](#)'s flavor text...

"Where a once-proud human city once stood, now only the ruins of Numai remain, deep amidst the rotting bamboo and crawling with oni." -- *The History of Kamigawa*



By the way, I found the Oni to be some of the hardest cards to name in Kamigawa, largely because their art descriptions were almost identical. Since we as Creative Writers didn't see the artwork when writing, it was always tough to figure out what made a particular Oni distinct over its brethren. The tactic here, as you see, was to tie the Oni to a particular place, the ruined city of Numai.

The Green Samurai

R&D Card Name: [Yasahiro Kubota]

Mana Cost: 020G

Spell Type: Legendary Creature –

Creature Type: Human Samurai

Power/Tough: 2/1

Rules Text: [CARDNAME] can't be countered. Bushido 2 (*When this blocks or becomes blocked, it gets +2/+2 until end of turn.*) {02}: Regenerate target Samurai.

Art Desc.:

Color: Green

Location: Green forest location of artist's choice

Action: Show Yasahiro Kubota, a human warrior. Yasahiro was born a samurai and trained in kendo, but decided to turn away from bushido and Konda's court at age 16 and fled to the forest, where he seeks communion with the kami. He has since continued to train and has become the embodiment of an enlightened warrior. He wears no armor and fights with a magical katana of your design (preferably with a blade made of stone or gem).

Focus: Yasahiro Kubota, the samurai-turned-nature-warrior

Mood: I'll show you the true path. Either that or I'll kill you without breaking a sweat.

It's inevitable as a Creative Writer that you sometimes fall in love with a card, working extra hard on its name and/or flavor text as a result. [Isao, Enlightened Bushi](#) was such a card for me. I thought the idea of a Green Samurai was cool, especially the samurai-turned-nature-warrior angle. I also thought the mechanics were pretty darned kick-ass, and envisioned it being a card I would enjoy playing. No wonder, then, that Isao is one of the only two cards in *Betrayers* I both named and flavor texted (yes, I'm making up verbs now).

Interestingly, [Isao, Enlightened Bushi](#) is one of those cards where the other writers' submissions helped me figure out my own angle. Here were some of the submissions for the card already entered into Namebase before I arrived on the scene (note that some of the names are different than Yasahiro or Isao... we never believe a name in [] is real, so you see writers often trying out their own names):

"He turned from Konda's court to seek enlightenment. [Cardname] is now the Jukai's best defense against the kami." -- Master Dosan

"I was the first to turn my back on Konda and his erratic ways. I must now be certain that I am not the last."

"The strength of the Jukai was in his hands." - [Binriki the Exile]

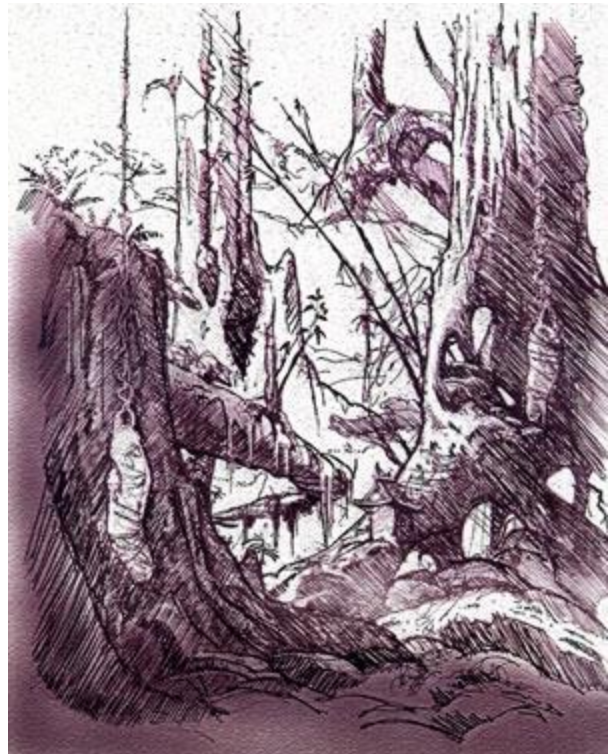
"Is the general who obeys the orders of a madman honorable or foolhardy?"

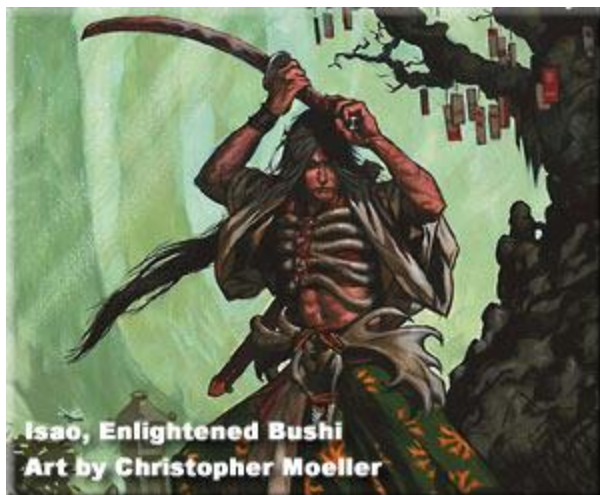
"Nature's strength is limitless, but I give it a sharpened edge."

"My sword no longer belongs to any man, lord or pauper. It swings in defense of all of Kamigawa."

"Only one path leads from this place. You will follow it with me--or you will rest here forever."

"Most deserters fled to the swamps and disappeared. He embraced exile in the forest and there grew strong."





As often happens in flavor text writing, these submissions sort of defined Isao's character for me. Even though none ended up on a card for *Betrayers*, they painted a consistent and compelling character in my mind. Did I have to stick to other writers' interpretation of the samurai outcast? No, definitely not. But I liked what the others had put together, and one of the difficult jobs of a creative writer is to build on other writers' ideas without talking with one another. As a result, I found myself "getting to know" Isao through the other submissions, and simultaneously I found myself less concerned about having Isao describe himself than how other established characters would view him. I wrote some

flavor text from the perspective of [Master Dosan](#), but (as you know by now) it was thinking about [Lord Konda](#)'s likely desperate search for this great warrior who abandoned his army that ended up as the card's flavor text:

"I do not care if he claims no allegiance in this war. Find him, Takeno." -Lord Konda

Again, if I had recognized *Betrayers*' theme of blurring the lines of the Kami War, I likely would have submitted more pieces of flavor text along these lines. Ah well, hindsight is 20-20, no?

Those Chanting Ogres

R&D Card Name: [MS Mind Blanker]

Mana Cost: o4oBoB

Spell Type: Legendary Creature –

Creature Type: Demon Spirit

Power/Tough: 6/4

Rules Text: Whenever you play a Spirit or Arcane spell, target opponent removes a card in his or her hand from the game.

Art Desc.:

Color: Black

Location: doesn't matter

Action: Show a really big, truly terrifying oni (Japanese demon) of your design. Must have the oni horns and vertical third eye.

Focus: the demon

Mood: You'll go insane with fear just looking at it

Notes: Oni are spirit-world creatures, so they should have strange objects orbiting them. There are all sorts of oni. Attached are a few good examples.

Once again, you see the difficulty in figuring out a name for Oni based on the art description. Having it be legendary, though, made it a bit easier since I could play around with titles, actions, and other sorts of "legend tags" that often define legendary cards. (Note by the way the "MS" in the R&D name... Arcane was first known as "Mystic" during design, so "MS" refers to Mystic/Spirit.)

In fact, it was precisely this card's name that led me to its flavor text. I tried [Dogu], Eater of Minds as a way of describing the card's mechanics. Then I thought maybe [Dogu], Corrupter of Thoughts sounded cooler. Sometimes I think of discard as inducing insanity, so I then went with [Dogu], Bringer of Madness and tried [Dogu], Lord of Fear. I then experimented with the idea that this Demon had somehow aided in the destruction of the Minamo School, leading me to [Dogu], Scourge of Minamo. That was a lot of submissions for names, and as I looked through the other submissions I thought some of the others were cooler and might get picked. For fun, then, I combined all of my name submissions into one slice of flavor text:

"[Dogu], Eater of Minds, Corrupter of Thoughts, Bringer of Madness, Lord of Fear, Scourge of Minamo. Return, by our blood, and walk again." -Ogre chant

In a block focused on legends, I figured this sort of flavor text was acceptable if used sparingly. Besides, I have a thing for ogre chants (I wrote the flavor text for both [Painwracker Oni](#) and [Gutwrencher Oni](#)), and apparently so do Brandon and Brady since they selected this "title heavy" piece to represent [Kyoki, Sanity's Eclipse](#) (see? cooler title).



Goatrider Extraordinaire

R&D Card Name: [Chuk-Rok, Akki Marksman]

Mana Cost: 010R

Spell Type: Legendary Creature -

Creature Type: Goblin Warrior

Power/Tough: 1/1

Rules Text: Whenever an opponent plays a



Spirit or Arcane spell, [CARDNAME] deals 2 damage to that player.

Art Desc.:

Color: Red

Location: rocky, dusty mountains outside of goblin cave complex (upper left of styleguide p. 17)

Action: Show a goblin shaman sitting on a small mountain goat, swinging a sling over his head, getting ready to let the bullet fly at an out-of-frame target. The sling bullet is ablaze and throwing off magical sparks.

Focus: the akki goatrider

Mood: kinda funny, but that bullet will really hurt somebody pretty bad.

My submission for [Chuk-Rok] (a brilliant R&D name if there ever was one) followed the same sort of cadence as my submission for Kyoki. This time, though, the idea was to make the list of titles more funny than intimidating. You've probably realized by now that Goblins tend to have jokes in their flavor text more often than not, which usually means that Goblins receive more flavor text submissions than any other sort of card. [Chuk-Rok] , for example, received almost thirty flavor text submissions!

For some reason, I thought the funniest thing about [Chuk-Rok] was that he rode a goat. Goats are funny, at least to me, and riding a goat is funnier still. Here are my three contributions to the pile of [Chuk-Rock] submissions:

"Astride his faithful goat Yuki, [Chuk-Rok] vowed to make the mountain kami fear his battle cry: AIAAAIIIIKIKIKIKIII!!!" -- Observations of the Kami War

"I tell you this, goat dung is the most miraculous substance in Kamigawa. It is fertilizer, kindling, breakfast, and a flaming weapon of terror!"

"Here fell [Chuk-Rok], King of the Flaming Pebbles, Scourge of the Mountain Kami, Lover of Goats. May his shell never burn." -- akki cave inscription

It's nice for me that both [Kyoki](#) and [Ishi-Ishi](#)'s flavor text appear in the same set because, side by side, I think they make good counterpoints to one another. Speaking of which... I wonder what the heck [Kyoki](#) rides?

Card-Name Quick-Hits

Before I go, let's remind ourselves that Creative Writers don't just worry about the stories embedded in flavor text. They also sit back and think up ways to dazzle you with card names.

To be honest, I tend to offer up fairly staid and conservative card names. Why call a card Coagulated Fistcracker when you can be a bit more straightforward with [Ogre Marauder](#)? This tactic of simply describing what's there and not getting too fancy has thus far served me well, and names like [Budoka Pupil](#), [Hired Muscle](#), [Call for Blood](#), and [Crawling Filth](#) are my contributions to *Betrayers*.

On the other hand, straightforward names don't make for the best anecdotal stories. Below are a few brief looks at cards I named in *Betrayers* that provide a bit more insight than, for example, [Baku Altar](#).



[Kodama of the Center Tree](#) - *Champions of Kamigawa* brought you the Kodamas of the [North](#) and [South Trees](#). As you may recall, though, five Kodama trees exist in Kamigawa (or at least I hope there are five, since the "Poem of the Five Trees" in the Kodama's flavor text would otherwise be confusing at best). When *Betrayers* cards started rolling through Namebase, Brandon asked me to keep an eye out for any that looked like they might make good Kodama. [Body of Jukai](#) had the right stats, but wasn't exactly legendary, which was also true for [Forked-Branch Garami](#) and [Scaled Hulk](#). That left only this card as a possible Kodama, and we thought the Center Tree was appropriate enough given the thing's mechanics.

[Pus Kami](#) - Every now and then, I think it's fun to test the boundaries of what makes an acceptable card name. I wasn't sure if the word "pus" was too gross to use in a **Magic** name, but when [Bile Urchin](#) was selected in an earlier wave of writing, I thought it would be cool to have "bile" and "pus" both make their **Magic** debuts in the same set (little did I know that [Bile Urchin](#) would get pre-empted in *Unhinged*). Ew.

[Stir the Grave](#) / [Clash of Realities](#) - I mention these cards only to point out that I'm a sucker for wanting Instants and Sorceries to have names that invoke verbs, while also wanting Enchantments to have names that invoke nouns. In other words, **Magic** permanents tend to be "things" in my mind, while non-permanents tend to be "actions." These aren't perfect distinctions ([Roar of Jukai](#) and the Shoals, for example), but I've found myself becoming increasingly persnickity the longer I'm a creative writer.

[Mark of Sakiko](#) / [Horobi's Whisper](#) - Similarly, I've become more and more aware of when I think it's okay to attach a character's name to a card. On one hand, I subscribe to the **Dungeons & Dragons** convention of naming a spell after its creator, a la Bigby's Crushing Hand (for better or worse, I think of [Urza's Rage](#) as less a moment of the story and more a powerful spell he invented). More commonly, though, I look for cards that a) have a block-specific mechanic so that they're not likely to be reprinted in future sets, and b) seem like the sort of effect the legendary character would use. [Horobi's Whisper](#) and [Mark of Sakiko](#) are two good recent examples. If an artifact, enchantment, or land is legendary and tied to a particular character--such as [Umezawa's Jitte](#)--this is obviously also fair game for proper nouns.

Flavor Thee Well...

I know everyone gets most excited by first a card's mechanics and second its art. Rightfully so, too. The mechanics are what defines gameplay and the art is what you first see when picking up each new card. My hope with these articles, though, is that you can begin to appreciate how much cards' names and flavor text are windows into a painstakingly-crafted fantasy world. I also hope that by calling attention to the cards' flavor that they begin to define your experience with Magic as well. We creative writers work hard, and I know I speak for all of us when I say we hope you enjoy the outcome.

I'll be back when *Saviors of Kamigawa* debuts, so be sure and log your opinions on the Message Boards to let me know what creative rocks you'd still like overturned. Until then, may you love goats and give those mountain kami hell! AIAAAIIIIKIKIKIKIIII!!!

-j

Jay's full *Betrayers of Kamigawa* credits:

Card names: [Baku Altar](#); [Blazing Shoal](#); [Budoka Pupil](#); [Call for Blood](#); [Child of Thorns](#); [Clash of Realities](#); [Crawling Filth](#); [Disrupting Shoal](#); [Genju of the Cedars](#); [Genju of the Falls](#); [Genju of the Fields](#); [Hired Muscle](#); [Horobi's Whisper](#); [Isao, Enlightened Bushi](#); [Kira, Great Glass-Spinner](#); [Kodama of the Center Tree](#); [Lifespinner](#); [Mark of Sakiko](#); [Ogre Marauder](#); [Pus Kami](#); [Roar of the Jukai](#); [Sakiko, Mother of Summer](#); [Stir the Grave](#); [Umezawa's Jitte](#); [Ward of Piety](#); [Yukora, the Prisoner](#)
Flavor text: [Ishi-Ishi, Akki Crackshot](#); [Nezumi Shadow-Watcher](#); [Mark of the Oni](#); [Scourge of Numai](#); [Ogre Marauder](#); [Kyoki, Sanity's Eclipse](#); [Gnarled Mass](#); [Psychic Spear](#); [Isao, Enlightened Bushi](#); [Three Tragedies](#)