

Adventures in the Blasted Lands

by Ed Green

Notes for a Ruins & Ronin (© 2009 Mike Davison) science-fantasy campaign

The Long Night

Know this, my Prince: Nothing lasts. Thirty years ago the prosperity and tranquility of the Empire was shattered. In a single night, the progress of humanity halted: the end of a great age and the beginning of a diminished one.

For nearly a week the world was shroud in darkness, blackest magic unleashed by that necromancer, the evil clone of Go Fen. Unimaginable energies were unleashed that night, scorching cities, warping the land and, indeed, ripping open the very gates to the Nine-and-Forty Hells.

All manner of foulness strode the land. Demons, vat oni, evil spirits, even the restless dead. Inhuman kaijin swept down from the mountains, cutting a swath of rapine and murder through the heart of the Empire.

Unnatural fiends were not alone in their atrocities, for the black hearts of men were exposed that night, too. The streets were as rivers of blood. Battles raged, scores settled, slights avenged, forbidden lusts sated.

The Battle of the Field of Black Grass

The drums of doom reverberated across the Empire. Go Fen's army, an unholy alliance of all those foul things, united by powerful magic, stormed through the provinces, never ceasing, never resting, showing no mercy, and destroying every settlement, every temple, every fortress in their path; a dread procession checked only by the combined might of the Emperor's Golden Host and the remnants of the Daimyo's forces at that eternally tainted place we today call the *Field of Black Grass*.

On that vast field the battle of all ages took place, upon which all hope rested. Against this tiny seawall of humanity crashed an endless tide of darkness. As the spirits of our honored ancestors watched from the

Heavens, the two hosts crashed together. Blaster bolts lashed out, jade fire against the dark horde, bolts of cobalt blue and blackest night against the Emperor's array. In the center of the field they met in a clash that, it is said, rang out over a hundred leagues. Claw and fang pitched against flashing laser katana, with blood and screaming death enough to last a man one hundred lifetimes.

In the center of his army fought the Emperor in his gold hued powered armor, flanked on each side by his honorable Golden Host, deadly court shugenja and enlightened sohei. He sought out the enemy's center, where he knew Go Fen would command. Slay the necromancer-clone, and the enemy would break.

At last the Emperor spied Go Fen, momentarily exposed. Exultant, he leapt forward to strike, quickly closing the distance. Too late did Go Fen realize his error; he could only recoil in horror as the Emperor's golden laser katana sliced through the necromancer with a single effortless cut. Thus mortally wounded, Go Fen's evil clone fled the field. His magic broken, the enemy host faltered, then routed. Pitched battle turned to remorseless slaughter. To this day those fields are stained black with the blood of all the unholy creatures slain during the legendary *Rout of Ten Thousand Demons*.

The Blasted Lands

What now remains of the Empire? Its physical integrity exists only in word. Though defeated, and night's hold over the Empire broken, much damage had been inflicted by the forces the dark clone unleashed. Millions upon millions killed, communities shattered, many clans utterly destroyed, untold knowledge lost, and the relics of ages destroyed, looted or buried in rubble. In places the very land itself is tortured and warped, turned against the Empire that claims it.

And despite the Emperor's impossible victory, to this day the unnatural host still plagues the Empire. Greatly weakened, the Emperor and the Daimyo's lacked the necessary force to fully reclaim the overrun provinces. There are still many corners of the Empire controlled by demons, oni, inhuman kaijin and, not least, evil men.

The Emperor's Golden Host suffered irreplaceable losses. The ancient facilities used to mass produce androids were in turn overrun and destroyed. A few sages yet exist who can build such constructs by hand, but even their best efforts are not enough to replace all the Emperor's losses these three decades later.

The vacuum in Imperial authority provides ample opportunity for the Daimyo to pursue self-interest and mischief against the Emperor. Instead of marshalling their forces to reclaim the Empire, the Daimyo scheme and plot against one another, squabbling over what remains instead of rebuilding what was lost.

Now the Emperor is secluded in the Eternal Palace on the Island of Contemplation, largely a figurehead. He exerts what authority he can through diplomacy and intrigue, lacking sufficient military might to bring the Daimyo into line. Imperial favor is still enough to grant legitimacy to upstart rulers; disfavor can sometimes tip the balance of power between Daimyo. By playing the Daimyo against one another, and through an intricate web of debts and favors owed, the Emperor aspires to reassert Imperial hegemony. But there is also one final, greater, tool at his disposal.

Danger Breeds Opportunity

Your father is a wise man, and you would be wise in turn to take his heed. While we live in dangerous times, your father knows that danger also brings with it opportunity. Opportunity for scheming Daimyo's certainly, but also opportunity for the lower classes, and through them the Empire as a whole.

The great irony is that the chaos created by the Daimyo's selfishness will bring about the thing they fear most of all; the upward mobility of their subjects: the middle class heimin, the peasantry and, yes, even the lowest class, the hinin. In our age, with fortune, talent and determination, even the lowliest might become a great lord.

These are the people who will brave the Blasted Lands, reclaim them from evil, purge them of taint, and rebuild the lost shrines, temples, castles and settlements. The established clans will plot to steal their hard won

bounty; as a Prince, and as Emperor, you must do all you can to protect them. Imperial favor can legitimize their rule, and these new lords and ladies will rally to the Imperial banner when the time comes. Shun not the outcasts, nor even the monstrous half-ogres, for they exhibit great honor in their struggle build a better future for themselves, their followers and their descendants.

They are the Empire's future.

Dissertation of Kambei, Arithomancer and tutor to His Royal Highness, Prince Kojai the 9th

The Empire and the Blasted Lands

Before the Long Night

Even before the Long Night the Empire was a land in technological, cultural and social decline, a stagnant feudal system clinging to the glory and technological wonders of an earlier age. Once, the Empire was a vibrant, prosperous nation. All citizens held equal standing under the law; one's achievements came from hard work and talent, not station or birth.

In time the Empire came to stagnate. Those who had achieved positions of wealth and authority felt threatened by the drive and ambition of those below them. They endeavored to slowly create barriers against upward social mobility, as well as to slow, and eventually halt, the technological progress they felt might undermine their status. Eventually their descendants came to be the Daimyo of the noble clans.

The nobility had one advantage over the masses: most of them were wealthy enough to afford the gene therapies that prolonged their life span by hundreds of years (a treatment the Emperor still benefits from, as do certain powerful Daimyo). Thusly equipped they could guide their plans to fruition with the perspective of generations and centuries.

After the Long Night

The Long Night hastened the decline of the Empire and, worse yet, of Imperial authority. The Empire is in turmoil, a state of low-simmering civil war. The Daimyo plot and intrigue against one another, which occasionally erupts into open conflict, squabbling over the few remaining wonders of an earlier age.

The clan provinces are like islands of stability in a sea of chaos. Parts of the Empire are a twisted wasteland, deformed by black magic. Other regions are controlled by bandits, kaijin, oni and other evils. Indeed, in areas the Emperor's own subjects are kept as slaves by inhuman barbarians.

But this chaos provides an opportunity for the common folk to break free of the shackles that bind them. Many have given up the relatively safe and certain life of a peasant to seek fortune and glory in the Blasted Lands. The most talented of them may yet become lords and ladies in their own right.

State of the Provinces and the Blasted Lands

The Empire spreads along a vast coastal plain. To the east is a great ocean. Most of the major clans control

provinces along the coastal plain, though there are large swathes of territory between that are poorly patrolled and quite lawless.

The Island of Contemplation lies a few miles off the coast. The Eternal Palace is a virtual city, home to thousands of humans, mostly administrators and technicians, and tens of thousands of android servants and bodyguards (the remnant of the Golden Host).

Hundreds of miles to the west are the Red Mountains, a long mountain chain that separates the coastal plain from the Empire's western provinces (little is known of their fate) and the barbarian kingdoms even further west. The Red Mountains were once a vast reservation for kaijin races subjugated by Emperors past. During the Long Night, the kaijin swept out of the mountains at the behest of Go Fen's evil clone.

Also in the Red Mountains is a secret fortress that once housed the Emperor's clone army. The legendary arithomancer Go Fen created a clone army for the Emperor as a secret weapon to wield against any threat to the Empire (foreign or domestic).

Go Fen cloned himself first, to test the process, and then invested all his knowledge and trust in his clone. This proved to be a tragic miscalculation. It is presumed that Go Fen was killed by his clone just before the Long Night, but no one knows for certain what transpired.

In the steaming jungles and fetid swamps of the south lies the Naga Empire, a land of proud and honorable Lizard Samurai. The Naga hold no special regard for humans, but they did sign a non-aggression pact with the Empire centuries ago, which they still abide despite the Empire's current vulnerability--perhaps out of honor, or perhaps because they have greater concerns. There is little contact or trade with the Naga Empire.

In the frigid north are the fractious Nezumi Kingdoms. The ratlings build their city-kingdoms under hills, mountains or under the ruins of ancient human cities. When the Long Night began, Go Fen's clone invited the Nezumi to join his army, but they demurred, figuring the two sides would be so weakened they could sweep in afterward and win all for themselves. And well they might have had they been better organized and united in purpose. Currently, the Nezumi launch occasional raids on Imperial provinces, and some have moved into abandoned regions to claim as their own, but they are not an existential threat to the Empire, even in its weakened state.

Getting Started

Start by creating a character as you would for any game of Ruins and Ronin. All four classes, Bujin, Shugenja, Sohei and Half-Ogre are available.

Further, roll 3d6x10 for starting gold pieces and purchase equipment from the standard Ruins and Ronin equipment lists. Advanced technology and relics will have to be found in adventures or perhaps purchased (at great cost) when the player-characters have accumulated some wealth.

Rule Revisions

These are recommended revisions to the standard S&W:WB and Ruins and Ronin rules.

Armor Piercing Arrow: This is a *highly* recommended change. Instead of inflicting +2 damage, armor piercing arrows receive +1 to-hit (even against unarmored opponents; the difference is minute).

Two-Handed Melee Weapons: Instead of inflicting 1d6+1 damage, roll two six sided dice and use the higher of the two for damage.

Light Melee Weapons: Instead of inflicting 1d6-1 damage, roll two six sided dice and use the lower of the two for damage.

Ranged Attacks in Melee: A character engaged in melee combat cannot conduct ranged attacks, not even with a blaster pistol.

Fighting Styles

When it comes to a real life or death fight, there are only four basic styles one need consider: Two-Handed, Two-Sword, Sword-Blaster and Two-Blasters techniques.

With *Two-Handed* style, the character wields a two-handed weapon, usually to great effect. Simple and direct. The characters Strength damage bonus is doubled.

Two-Sword is a more flexible style, involving the use of a katana wield one-handed in the main hand and a smaller blade in the off hand, usually a wakizashi though a tanto is equally effective. At the beginning of each combat round the player declares whether they will use the off-hand weapon to parry (opposing melee attack rolls receive -1 penalty) or feint (character's melee attack roll receives +1 bonus).

Sword-Blaster technique is popular with those who possess a blaster pistol. A one-hand melee weapon wield in the main hand, ready to engage foes in close combat, while the blaster is wield in the off-hand, to engage enemies at range or as they close to melee range. Thus, the character can readily switch between ranged or close combat.

Two-Blasters technique, the use of a blaster pistol in each hand, is optimal for ranged combat. The off-hand pistol allows one additional attack (for a total of three per round). However, once the character is engaged in melee combat, the two blaster pistols become useless. At least one would have to be dropped to draw a melee weapon.

Technically, any class can use any technique, though class restrictions on permitted weapons still apply.

Magic

What is Magic?

Magic is, simply put, a highly advanced field of mathematics and science, usually referred to as the forgotten art of Arithomancy. However, one might as well call it 'magic', 'witchcraft' or 'sorcery' now, as that is how the vast majority of the superstitious and ignorant population of the Empire understands it.

Though the foundations and principles behind Arithomancy are long lost, the demonstrable effects of the art survive through rote memorization and disciplined study of the complex formulae and intricate rituals which produce the desired results. This applies to both 'arcane' magic and 'divine' magic; they are two sides of the same coin.

New Spells

Compel Oni

Spell Level: So 2, Sh 3
Range: 30 feet
Duration: See below

An oni or demon of lower level than the caster will be compelled to answer the caster's questions to the best of its ability and knowledge. The caster may ask one question for each point the caster out levels the oni or demon (i.e. an 8th level Sohei could ask 3 questions of a 5 HD Oni), one question per round. While so compelled the creature may not attack or move. Attacking or harming the creature breaks the spell. Once the spell ends the creature will attack the caster.

Drums of Heaven

Spell Level: So 3
Range: See below
Duration: See below

This spell requires a drum of some sort to cast. When the sohei beats the drum, the player may attempt to turn (but not control) oni and demons as if they were undead. Oni and demons not turned still receive -1 on attacks and saves as long as the sohei continues to play the drums.

Jade Fire Bolt

Spell Level: Sh 1
Range: 150 feet
Duration: Immediate

A bolt of dark green fire shoots forth from the caster's pointed finger, striking the designated target with unerring accuracy, up to 150 feet away. The bolt inflicts 1d6+1 damage. Damage is doubled against demons, oni, spirits and the undead.

Recharge

Spell Level: Sh 3, So 4
Range: Touch
Duration: Immediate

When this spell is cast, all blaster weapons held in the caster's hands are immediately recharged. Re-roll the number of charges for each blaster. The new result replaces however many charges the weapon may have had prior.

Boiling Blood

Spell Level: Sh 5
Range: 60 feet
Duration: 5 rounds/concentration

The caster selects a single target. The spell rapidly boils the target's blood and organs, usually resulting in a messy gore-splattering explosion.

On the first round the target takes 1d6 damage; on the second round 2d6 damage; on the third round 3d6 damage; 4d6 damage on the fourth round and 5d6 on the fifth round. A save is permitted at the beginning of each round after the first for ½ damage; also, the target may only writhe and scream in excruciating pain unless the save is made each round.

The spell lasts for five rounds as long as the caster concentrates; the spell ends after the fifth round or if concentration is broken.

Monsters

Androids

Ancient tradition decrees that human eyes may not rest upon the flesh of the most holy Emperor. Therefore, an army of android servants was created to attend to the Emperor's needs. After a time, an army of android samurai were built to serve as bodyguards and as an unparalleled military force.

Androids have golden hued skin and gold eyes, with jet black hair. Most lack freewill, serving the Emperor's every command and whim. However, over time, a few have gone 'rogue', striking out on their own. The Emperor's magistrates hunt down rogue androids to return them to the Imperial fold, if possible, or destroy them if not.

Some Daimyo secretly defy the Emperor by giving sanctuary to rogue androids. Androids are incredibly capable, and some are ancient, their memory banks receptacles of much lost knowledge.

As machines, android are immune to mind affecting effects and poisons. Cobalt based weapons inflict double damage against them.

Android Assassin

AC/AAC: 3 [16]
Hit Dice: 7+3 (45 hit points)
Attacks: 2 (1d6 by hand, or by weapon)
Special: See below
Move: 15
HDE/XP: 8/800

Assassins are the most advanced, and rarest, android in the Emperor's service. They are deployed sparingly, in part due to their limited numbers, but also to avoid antagonizing the Daimyo. They *do not* have golden hued skin or gold eyes, and in fact their appearance is modified before each mission. Geisha model assassins are a particular favorite of the Emperor's Master of Sincerity.

Android assassins have thermal vision to 120', may jump vertically and horizontally up to 30', are capable of great stealth (opponents have a 1-4 in 6 chance of being surprised), and they have several retractable blades and hidden compartments containing laser katana hilts, blaster pistols, exploding shuriken, smoke bombs, climbing rope and grapple, etc.

Android Samurai

AC/AAC: 5 [14] (unarmored); 0 [19] (O-yori)
Hit Dice: 8+2 (50 hit points)
Attacks: 1 (1d6+1 by hand, or by weapon)
Special: Thermal vision; jump 20' vertical or horizontal
Move: 15
HDE/XP: 8/800

Android Samurai are the Emperor's soldiers and bodyguards. They usually wear full O-yori (AC 0[19]) and use blaster pistols and laser katana. Android samurai possess thermal vision up to 120' and may jump vertically or horizontally up to 30'. Due to their great strength they receive +1 damage with melee weapons and unarmed attacks.

Android Servant

AC/AAC: 5 [14] (unarmored)
Hit Dice: 5 (30 hit points)
Attacks: 1 (1d6 by hand, or by weapon)
Special: Thermal vision 60'
Move: 12
HDE/XP: 5/240

Though not specifically designed for combat, android servants are all programmed to protect the Emperor in an emergency. Also, their powerful and sturdy construction mean even rogue servants are quite capable in combat. Android servants are well versed in all matters of protocol and etiquette. They have thermal vision up to 60'. Some are programmed as geisha pleasure models.

Cyber-Oni

Armor Class: 0 [19]
Hit Dice: 8
Attacks: Claw or weapon (1d6+3)
Special: Fear, leap, cybernetics
Move: 12
HDE/XP: 11/1,700

Some oni have availed themselves of advanced cybernetic technology while they inhabit the real world. When they return to the Nine-and-Forty Hells they lose all their cybernetic enhancements.

Cyber-oni appear as other oni, but with bits of chrome and technology imbedded in their flesh. Most have some form of dermal implants improving on the natural toughness of their skin. They also have some form of mechanical locomotion, such as wheels in place of legs, to increase their speed.

They use enhanced melee weapons or alloy coated claws (1d6+3 damage) and they usually have at least one blaster pistol attached to a forearm or shoulder mount (providing an additional attack each round).

They do pay a price for these upgrades, losing invisibility, illusion, and polymorph abilities. They still retain fear and can leap twice as far or high as a normal oni.

Vat Oni

AC/AAC: 9 [10] (unarmored)

HD: 5

Attacks: 1 (1d6+1 by weapon)

Special: Regeneration, Leap

Move: 12

HDE/XP: 6/400

The Arithomancer Go Fen (not to be confused with his evil clone by the same name) created for the Emperor a vast army of clone soldiers to make war on the Naga Empire to the south, the Nezumi kingdoms to the north and the western barbarian kingdoms (or even the Daimyo, should the need arise). Vast legions lay suspended in special flesh vats. During the Long Night, thousands of lesser oni released from the Nine-and-Forty Hells inhabited these clones, using them as vessels to enter the world.

Vat Oni superficially appear human, but closer inspection quickly reveals their true nature. Their eyes possess no pupils, instead being soulless black orbs. They often desecrate the flesh they inhabit with cuts and piercings. Corpulence is common. Though they speak the common tongue, their voice is unnaturally low and guttural. Vat Oni frequently attempt to infiltrate human lands in order to cause maximum chaos and destruction.

Vat Oni regenerate 1d6 hit points at the beginning of each combat round (disintegration, acid and fire damage is not regenerated). They can leap up to 10' vertically or horizontally. They usually wear armor of some sort and favor slim, wicked blades with which they inflict +1 damage. They are also sometimes called Clone Oni.

Ancestral Relics

A armor

In ages past, armor was constructed of lacquered metal plates. Now, instead of simple metal plates, armor is constructed of laser-resistant ceramic, alloy and composite plates salvaged from the battlefields of the Long Night (these advanced materials resist decay quite well). Full O-yori is still quite rare.

(Note: Use standard armor and costs from Ruins & Ronin, page 10).

Powered O-yori

Powered armor was rare even before the Long Night. A few masters might yet remain who know how to construct this arcane armor, though it would be extremely expensive. The armor is typically designed to look like O-yori, but is completely enclosed and sealed against the environment.

Powered O-yori: AC -2 [21]; Wt: 300 lb [effectively 0 lb. when worn]; thermal vision 100'; fully sealed against gas; +2 on all saves; Strength 18 when worn

The Emperor's Gold Hued Powered O-yori: As above, but with AC -3 [22] and +4 on all saves; may leap up to 20' vertically or horizontally; unique, cannot be purchased

Relic Blasters

Blasters were produced in abundance in the years prior to the Long Night. Blasters are technically restricted to the samurai class, but many specimens have fallen into the hands of adventurers and the criminal element.

Note: All blasters are pistols; for damage, roll 2 six-sided dice, using the higher result; weight of 2 lbs, range increments of 50' and ROF 2; treat as magic weapons; usable by all classes except Half-Ogres; blasters start with 3d6 charges:

Brass Blaster: +1 to hit and damage; Cost: 500gp for a broken one which could be repaired by a master weaponsmith at considerable expense

Chrome Blaster: +2 to hit and damage; Cost: Cannot be purchased

Stainless Steel Blaster: +3 to hit and damage; Cost: Cannot be purchased

Jade Blaster: +1/+4 vs. Oni, Demons, Spirits and the Undead; fires a bolt of dark green energy that inflicts double damage against Oni, Demons, Spirits and the Undead

Obsidian Blaster: +1/+4 vs. living beings; fires a bolt of blackest night that inflicts double damage against living beings; considered an illegal and taboo weapon

Cobalt Blaster: +1/+4 vs. Androids, Robots, Machines and Constructs; fires a bolt of brightest blue that inflicts double damage against Androids, Robots, Machines and Constructs

Golden Raygun: Range is 30'; ROF: 1; fires a narrow ray of golden light that heals living beings for 1d6+1 damage per 'shot'; has no effect on machines or constructs; damages the undead for 1d6+1 damage

Ebon Raygun: Range is 30'; ROF: 1; fires a shadowy ray of energy; save vs. Death or lose one level; no effect on machines or constructs; a shot animates one corpse to create a skeleton or zombie (depending on available remains); considered an illegal and taboo weapon

Bronze Lightning Rifle: Weight: 8 lbs; ROF: 1; Dmg: 3d6; +2 to hit; fires a 60' bolt of lightning; a save vs. Death is allowed for ½ damage; requires two-hands to fire; starts with 2d6 charges; usable only by Bujin and Half-Ogres.

Laser Katana

Though metal katana are still widely used (especially by poorer bushi), most prized are the brilliant, flashing laser katana. Laser katana can be used one-handed or two-handed. As with blasters, they are technically restricted to members of the samurai class, but some specimens have fallen into the hands of adventurers and criminals.

There exist also examples of this technology adapted to other weapons, including Tanto, Wakizashi, Nodachi, Masakari, and even Yari and Naginata.

Note: Laser katana use standard katana damage, plus their bonus; the hilt weights 3 pounds; treat as magic weapons; though they are energy weapons, they do not use charges; most laser katana radiate light up to 10', excluding Voidblades; laser katana may only be used by Bujin and Half-Ogres, though other laser melee weapons can be used by Shugenja and Sohei:

Relic Laser Katana: +1 or +2 to-hit and damage

Jade Laser Katana: +1/+4 vs. Oni, Demons, Spirits and the Undead; inflicts double damage against Oni, Demons, Spirits and Undead; dark green blade

Voidblade: +1/+4 vs. living targets; inflicts double damage against living targets; blade of blackest night; illegal and taboo weapon

Cobalt Laser Katana: +1/+4 vs. Androids, Robots, Machines and Constructs; bright blue blade

Silver Laser Katana: +3 to hit and damage; allows two melee attacks each round; bright silver blade

The Emperor's Golden Laser Katana: +4 to hit and damage; roll 2d6 for damage; Demons, Oni, Spirits and the Undead must make a save vs. death or be destroyed immediately; once per day heals the wielder for 3d6+6 damage; bright gold blade

Grenades

Useful devices designed to be armed and thrown. There are also grenade launchers, which increase the effective range of these weapons. All grenades weight 1 pound each.

Fragmentation: An explosive grenade with a blast radius of 20'; 5d6 damage; save vs. death for ½ damage.

Sleep: Radius 20'; save vs. magic or fall into a deep slumber, per the Sleep spell.

Smoke: Radius 20'; obscures vision within and through smoke field (-4 to-hit); dissipates after 1 turn outside, or 3 turns indoors; a strong blast of wind will dissipate the smoke in a single round

Void: Radius 20'; 5d6 damage; save vs. death for ½ damage; inflicts double damage on living beings

Jade Fire: Blast radius 20'; 5d6 damage; save vs. death for ½ damage; inflicts double damage against oni, demons, undead and spirits.

Grenade Launcher: Increases range increment to 100'. Weight is 8 pounds. Holds a single grenade, requiring a full round to reload. Requires two hands.

Explosive Shuriken: Small aerodynamic shuriken-like grenades that explode on contact, inflicting 1d6+3

damage to a single target. Same range as normal shuriken. Cost: 30gp each

Air Cars

Few air cars remain, all in the hands of powerful interests (i.e. the Emperor and the Daimyo). Most were destroyed or exhausted during the Long Night. Considerable expense and effort is required to maintain the few remaining specimens (roughly 1,000gp per hour of use, including parts, wages for mechanical specialists and fuel).

Air cars ferry up to a dozen passengers, plus at least one ton of cargo (some are specialized cargo carriers). They have a range of 1,000 miles and travel at a top speed of 250 mph. Most of the remaining air cars are adapted for combat, possessing built-in blasters and auto-loading grenade launchers.