

A few words from Simon Barber, a fur afar.....

Greetings! Well, a new millennium dawns, and it's time for a larger than usual slice of Good Resolutions. More work from me – and even the occasional comment ! First off, here's something that's been asked for a few times over the years, a character breakdown of the (large) cast of Toho Academy, with the statistics their Toho report cards currently give them (Marks out of 20) . Hope it helps matters !

Suzuko Hohki. Vixen (Vulpes Sapiens) , Japanese Homeland Citizen. (Strength 11, Constitution 11, Appearance 14, Intelligence 16, Dexterity 19, Wisdom 18. Currently aged 20, in final year of her 3 year Historical Engineering Course. (She takes occasional modules in Phenomenology).

Special Abilities: Weirdness Magnet.

Appearance: standard red-brown vixen, digitigrade legs, though remarkable for the lack of black “sock” markings on hands and feet. Slim figure, in fact underweight (she works too hard.)

Suzuko has one main aim in life – that she could just get on with her work, without waves of strange events always seeming to catch her at the worst possible times. Anyone using a Fortean Compass in the area will quickly spot that Suzuko is the strongest Weirdness Magnet on Toho. A fanatically hard worker, she has yet to gain any actual reward for her dedication.

Although a Homelands Citizen, Suzuko was actually born in Korea – fortunately for her, on the grounds of the Japanese Embassy, which is sovereign soil (her parents are diplomats.) Various folk have found out about this, and take delight in making life miserable for her – which rarely succeeds in the long-term, as Suzuko has a knack of making them regret it. She has a sharp wit, a uranium-cored Katana, and a Fighting Spork with monomolecular edge that can do to a mechsuit what an oyster-knife does to an oyster.

Significant Property:

1 heavily reworked Lippisch N13 ramjet fighter, converted from coaldust burning to heavy oil – basically, cheap heating oil. 1 part-built King Tiger heavy tank variant (officially Academy property till she finishes that part of the course.) Major shareholder in 2 freelance submarines, and nominal owner of secret Pacific base.

Cash rating: Poor ! (See above white elephants for major cash drains.)

Kazuko Leclerc. Human (H.Sapiens Animemorphous), Japanese Empire Citizen. STR 10, CON 12, APP 17, INT 17, DEX 17, WIS 2. Aged 19, in final year of Historical Engineering course.

Special Abilities: “Shojo Mallet”, Immune to Psionic/Magical attack.

Appearance: fairly standard Anime human, blonde hair worn in a bob cut.

Kazuko is a living example of why 10-cm eyeballs are not designed to fit in an almost standard sized skull. None of her relatives have a forebrain quite the same as the other species, which explains a lot about Anime behaviour. Kaz likes loud music, cheerful explosions, giant robots and Eldritch Things ® With Tentacles ™ which tend to – “interact” with her whenever she can make it look like an accident. She's actually quite bright, bright enough to get some quite insanely bad ideas working (see her INT vs. her WIS statistics, you'll get the picture...)

Significant Property:

1 Heavily reworked Bachem Natter point-defence fighter, recently stretched to attain orbital altitude (but not orbital velocity).

1 Maus 2 Ultra-heavy battle-tank

1 Honda 50 moped, upgraded with Mk.22 Merlin aero-engine. Nobody else dares ride it.

Collection of Unspeakable Books, generally in pop-up editions.

1 dimensional portal, “Party-sized”. Generally tuned to worlds containing natives possessing tentacles and inquiring dispositions.

Large collection of home brewing and distilling equipment.

Cash rating: Medium.

Mae Tzuko, Feline (Felis Sapiens), Japanese Homelands Citizen. STR 9, CON 11, APP14, INT 16, DEX 17, WIS 13. Aged 19, final year of split Historical Engineering / Military Microbiology course.

Special Abilities: Telepathy, Telekinesis, Psychothermal Powers. Stops clocks and bends spoons.

Appearance: Grey-furred feline, digitigrade, slim figure.

Mae, generally known as “Mae The Psychic Kitten”, is at once blessed and cursed with her psychic “Talent”. She can read minds to a limited extent, teleport small (200 gram) objects within visual range, and even directly affect other creatures' nervous systems. For reasons that have never been adequately explained, these abilities are extremely frowned-upon in the Japanese Empire, though greatly sought-after in the rest of the world (Mae has donated DNA to the Greater Liechtenstein Reich, who have offered her full Citizenship any time she likes.)

Significant Property:

1 Junkers 287 medium bomber, updated with modern engines and wings (the old engines were liable to explode, and the forward-swept wings too liable to twist off at high speeds.)

1 TOG 2 heavy tank, in construction.
 1 Mitsubishi Mechsuit, commercial standard type.
 300 hectares of slightly radioactive land in the Ukraine, which she's never been to yet.
 Cash rating: Medium to good. (rich family)

Mangana Kohaki, apparently Human (H.Sapiens Animemorphous), Japanese Empire Citizen. STR 13, CON 14, APP 12, INT 17, DEX 15, WIS 18. Aged 20 (or possibly 21, depending on which planetary clock used) in final year of split Arcaneology/Historical Engineering course. (Occasional modules in Weird Science and Medicine).

Special Abilities: Shojo Mallet, Genetic transformation.

Appearance: Anime human, black hair worn in a bob-cut. Since becoming Horst Graben's partner, she has started to acquire various pig-like attributes, which she is quite proud of. For instance, at the present rate of transformation, she will soon need 3 bikini tops to wear on the beach ...

Despite being Kazuko's cousin (a relationship she isn't wholly proud of) and a Japanese Empire Citizen, Mangana is less human than she looks. Her Mother is from an entirely different, magic-rich world, and has the ability to gradually adapt to become more compatible with her mate (an ability Mangana inherited and is putting to good use).

Mangana is a paramedic at Toho, where hazardous events are regularly taking place. She gets a LOT of practice.

Significant Property:

1 Fokke-wulf "Triebflugel" VTOL fighter
 1 Russian T-10 heavy tank (in construction)
 Large first-aid kit, carried at all times.
 Cash rating: Medium

Horst Graben, Boar (Sus Scrofa Sapiens), Neuropean Citizen from an alternate timeline. STR 19, CON 20, APP 11, INT 16, DEX 13, WIS 18. Age 22, studying Arcaneology, with classes in Medicine.

Special Abilities: None (none that work at Toho, anyway)

Appearance: grey-furred wild boar male, plantigrade, muscular build. Large tusks.

Horst is a quiet, reserved individual, who can mentally and physically be best classed as "rock-solid." He is dedicated, hard-working, and often downright stubborn. An excellent friend to have, and a faithful mate to Mangana (they plan a long engagement.) Horst's main mystery is his background, having come from an alternate timeline of Earth, where the 20th century diverged quite considerably from the history as taught at Toho.

Significant Property:

Large first-aid kit, identical to Mangana's.
 Large alpenhorn, gas-turbine driven.
 Cash rating: Poor.

Hiroshi Leclerc, Anime human, Japanese Empire citizen. (H.Sapiens Animemorphous). STR 7, CON 8, APP 18, INT 14, DEX 8, WIS 1. Age 14 (actual, it says 17 on her hacked dossier) studying Phenomenology and Weird Science.

Special Abilities: Shojo Mallet, Inhuman Luck, Cause Collateral Damage.

Appearance: platinum blonde Anime human, blue eyes, slender.

Hiroshi is Kazuko's little sister, who has decided Toho sounds such fun she simply can't wait till scheduled to go there. Her best description is "A little knowledge is a Dangerous Thing." She is quite staggeringly carefree, mostly because she has (so far) wandered through a life of disasters just missing her. How far her luck will stretch at Toho, is a question that would never occur to her to ask...

Significant property:

1 Dimensional Portal (not working yet.)
 Collection of trans-dimensional "Spicy romance Novels".
 Portable Karaoke and Bulky Disc player, called "Mr. Twirly"
 Cash rating: Poor

Cthuline, Deep One (Xenobathus Lovecraftii) aristocrat of Nagh'cht'kikk'Vah'rhl (Honorary Japanese Homeland Citizen). STR 13, CON 20, APP 19, INT 14, DEX 10, WIS 18. Age unknown, studying Arcaneology and Cultural Studies .

Special Abilities: Transformation, probably others. Has mentioned once calling for and getting Divine Intervention.

Appearance: green-skinned froggy biped, gills, plantigrade, short tail, rather hippo-like facial features with large eyes on top of her head. Her actual shape has altered since meeting mammals, due to her innate Transformation abilities, and a keen interest in novelty.

Princess Cthuline comes from what can best be described as an Old Family. She is several centuries old herself, which makes her a young adolescent by her home town standards (her home town being about 150 kilometres off Ponape, and about 4 km down). An adventurous sort, she made contact with the surface world 6 years before arriving at Toho, having climbed a seamount and “fallen off the top of the ocean”, as she puts it.

Cthuline is a friendly type, fun-loving and widely admired as the prettiest girl on the island (squamous and ichthyitic features are all the rage in the Japanese Empire). While possessing a strict sense of dignity amongst her own kind, she can be easily persuaded on the surface world to take part in Dry T-shirt competitions and the like.

Significant Property:

Collection of nice gold Tiaras, to fit a head of fashionably ecliptical outline.

Cash rating: Extremely rich – Very long-established family.

Mariko Itziki: mouse (Mus Sapiens), Japanese Homeland Citizen. STR 11, CON 11, APP 15, INT 16, DEX 9, WIS 15. Age 24, studying Weird Science (specialised Trans-Spatial Math) and Interactive History.

Special Abilities: none.

Appearance: grey-furred mouse, digitigrade, partial Anime features, head fur worn in long “quiff” fashion. Wears large, old-fashioned spectacles.

Mariko is one of the older students at the Academy, taking time off between courses to work on various projects of her own, and raise her family. Her own family is so wealthy she doesn't really need qualifications or a job, but she finds Toho a pleasant place to be, and likes (most of) the people there. Mariko works part-time for the official travel company in the “town” of Shahaguo Island, and acts as a “first-in scout” for adventure holiday companies outside term time.

Significant Property:

Bren-gun Carrier, Merlin-engined (bought from Kazuko, who thought it was too underpowered)

Collection of leather suits – Horst calls her “Die Ledermaus”.

Fine-mesh crib and accessories for her daughter, Dracanaea.

Cash rating: Extremely rich.

Rashke Erikkson, direwolf, (Lupus maximus Sapiens), Canadian (naturalised Citizen, refugee status). STR 19, CON 17, APP 14, INT 13, DEX 12, WIS 12. Age 22, studying Arcaneology and Political Science (Enver Hoxha school.)

Special Abilities: none.

Appearance: Large, grey furred, digitigrade, muscular build.

Rashke is staying at Toho as part of a refugee resettlement program, having fled his native land after some trouble with the government (the Preacher-Kings of Idaho aren't noted for religious or other tolerance.) He initially entered on a sporting scholarship (track + field) and is working hard on earning enough money to stay at Toho for the rest of his course.

One piece of luck, is that there are very few direwolves in the Japanese Empire – but those are highly regarded, having provided various legendary heroes in historical and legendary times. Hence he is better received than he might be, and occasionally takes work as an “escort” to wealthy females of his species. None have asked for their money back yet...

Significant Property:

Second-hand mechsuit, JSDF surplus, one none-too-careful previous owner.

Cash rating: Extremely poor !

Broohilda Marn, hybrid (Capricephalos Chaosii), non-Earth resident with honorary Japanese Empire Citizenship. STR 19, CON 20, APP 13, INT 10, DEX 10, WIS 11. Age 19, studying Phenomenology and Religious studies (practical and Applied).

Special abilities: Immune to disease, pan-species genetic compatibility. Neurotoxin glands on claws and teeth, quite deadly.

Appearance: slender digitigrade goat-like form, small (2 cm) horns, hooved feet. Currently furless, purple-black skin.

Broohilda is a unique specimen. To outward appearances, she is an Enterope, one of the hordes of Chaos infesting Mangana's homeworld. However, she was ritually cleansed of these tendencies at birth (don't ask) and is as honest and upright a person as you'll find at Toho. Though naturally furred, she lost her fur in an incident awhile ago (don't ask) and has yet to show any sign of regaining it.

A gentle soul, Broohilda suffers from something of an inferiority complex, mostly due to the fact that the rest of her species actually are things to be exterminated at maximum range – a sentiment she agrees with. Currently she is Rashke's mate, and shares his room at Toho.

Significant Property:

None! Broohilda literally owns only the clothes she stands up in, and Mangana gave her those.

Cash rating: Extremely poor. Mangana pays her Toho bills.

Granita Wong, hybrid (Rhino/Gargoyle), Japanese Empire Citizen. STR 20, CON 18, APP 6, INT 10, DEX 15, WIS 11. Age 20, on a sports scholarship at Toho.

Special Abilities: None.

Appearance: Plantigrade, hugely muscular, looking more like a Triceratops than a Rhino. Her skin is tough, ridged with hard silica-rich nodules, looking like crocodile hide. Her tail is muscular, and equipped with a heavy, bony “club.”

Granita is exactly what she appears to be – the world wrestling champion in her class, and cares little about anything else. She heads the Toho branch of the S.D.A. (Society Of Destructive Anachronism – don’t ask, you don’t want to know) and works part-time as a Martial Arts instructor. She travels widely, touring the amateur Wrestling circuits (summer holidays) and follows the main sponsored football riots (Winter holidays.)

Significant Property:

Large collection of wrestling trophies and memorabilia.

Collection of classical weapons, (Lochaber Axes, Voulges, Glaive-Guisarmes, Bohemian Ear-Spoons).

Cash rating: Rich. She’s one of those happy folk who make money out of their hobby without spoiling the fun.

Toemi, Hybrid (unnamed and probably Unnameable Elder God / Anime human), Japanese Homeland Citizen. STR 15, CON 19, APP 19, INT 13, DEX 16, WIS 10. Age 19 (estimate), studying Historical Engineering, Arcaneology and Phenomenology.

Special Abilities: Unknown, but with her ancestry she’ll probably discover some.

Appearance: Broadly humanoid, pale skinned, long blonde hair worn in two bunches – but with definitely “Other” features from the other side of her family. Strong, thick tail, two prehensile back tentacles (can reach the floor when she stands) and a set of smaller tentacles, up to finger-length on her front. The larger of these are said to have rudimentary feeding organs, but apart from a “party trick” she once performed drinking a glass of vodka in a non-standard way, details are not publicly known. Feet large, webbed, taloned, large patches of scaly green skin on the inner sides of her arms and legs, and the underside of the tail.

Despite her odd ancestry and family history (she spent her early years at the bottom of the ocean, metamorphosing several times to reach vaguely humanoid form), Toemi is a surprisingly “standard” student, good at her classes, liking the usual things and avoiding taking sides in the various factions on the island. She and Granita are fast friends, and occasionally wrestle (Toemi is the only one on the Island to master Granita’s “Tail-slam” move, having a tail substantial enough to be useful.)

Significant Property:

1 Cthulhu Mythos Cycle, pedal-driven. The pedals are turned in a direction not easy to describe.

Cash rating: Poor to Medium.

Shiitake Tabi, Canine (pug), Japanese Homeland Citizen. STR 13, CON 12, APP 8, INT 14, DEX 14, WIS 11. Studying Political Science (Enver Hoxha School) and Cultural Hygiene.

Special Abilities: none.

Appearance: brown/mottled grey furred pug, medium build. Short tail, exceptionally “punched-in” snout, as a result of several disagreements with other students.

Shiitake is (in his own opinion) a forthright and patriotic student, taking no nonsense from Foreigners or other undesirables. He heads one of the main factions at Toho, who would dearly like to be studying in the Home Islands, but for various reasons ended up stuck on a very low-class rock in the Pacific. He is a hard-working and capable student, so there is probably a reason for having to leave the Home Islands to study – but he’s definitely not talking about it.

Significant Property:

1 Mitsubishi “Shinden” fighter aircraft.

1 brand-new Mechsuit, custom-built.

Cash rating: Rich.

Gen Yakitori, canine (crossbreed), Japanese Homeland Citizen. STR 12, CON 11, APP 13, INT 15, DEX 17, WIS 14. Studying Military Microbiology and Cultural Hygiene.

Special Abilities: none.

Appearance: red-brown, long sharp muzzle, rather fox-like ears. Slender build, and tail-fur usually cropped short.

Gen is another of the Home Islands faction, who is looking forward to graduating and putting his degree to immediate use. His main interests are traditional Art, radical Mecha (he owns a battlesuit) and trying to get one step ahead of Suzuko and her friends. He has yet to realise that managing this won’t just mean getting up early in the morning – he’ll have to give up sleep altogether !

TOHO ACADEMY – extracts from the official History.

Rain washed the Pacific skies, mingling with the sour taste of smoke from the burning wrecks of a platoon of Japanese Self-Defence Force vehicles, that had spectacularly failed to stop the thing that had stormed ashore, disturbed by oil-drilling activity on the remote island chain. Fortunately, they were quite used to this sort of thing by now.

Far out at sea, a huge ripple was the only sign of the Entity that had wreaked havoc, as it swam out towards the designated island that was being used as an Extremely WildLife Refuge for its kind, the various species of Giant Monster that explorations throughout the 1950's had been turning up all across the Pacific. This time round, a lone Professor and his daughter (castaways for ten years) had saved Tokyo, having designed and built a telepathic communicator in record time from a ludicrously small selection of raw materials.

On the beach, the Lost Scientist and his daughter stood looking out over the water. The debris of four abandoned radios, a radar set, an abandoned World War 2 Theramin and an experimental pop-up toaster showed where they had frantically worked to build the communicator that had persuaded the Entity not to stamp the distant Home Islands into blazing ruin again. With them stood the film crew who were tasked with recording the Giant Wildlife, in films that would later be released to the world thinly disguised as fictional to avoid mass panic.

Blinking into the setting sun, the girl followed the view of the tracking cameras until the producer signalled to switch off, and make ready to return to the seaplane and to Japan, along with the rescues.

“OK,” she nodded, looking around the island she had grown up on. “So NOW what do I do ?”

Sitting for a minute's rare rest in his Tokyo office, the Producer frowned. All around him were film awards from the viewing public, and classified citations for wildlife photography that never would be made public. Dozens of films shot on scores of islands had brought fame and fortune – but his conscience still troubled him.

“Has anybody worked out,” he said slowly, looking around his film crew, “just why we always find the same things, on islands a thousand miles apart ? One or two Monsters, of a size biologists can prove can't exist, let alone form a viable ecosystem – that, we might explain somehow. But how, how is it that on every single rock there's some lost Archaeologist, Missionary, Scientist or such, and his castaway Daughter ? Why is it never a castaway fisherman and his son, or a marooned Travel Agent exiled for crimes against his Charter ?”

Zero-san, his cameraman, nodded. “I noticed that, too ! It's a problem. My cousins are fishermen, they could make their living anywhere they wash ashore. But you know what the schools are like over here – if you miss a week, you'll never catch up. All these kids we're finding, are bright as anything – some of them are world-class – but they've grown up on remote islands, taught out of Encyclopaedias and such. No qualifications at all – so the colleges and Universities just don't want to know.”

The Producer shifted uncomfortably. “If we hadn't gone in there and rescued them, I'm starting to think they'd be better off. It's our responsibility – we've made all the money, and they've got nothing but trouble out of it.” He waved at a map of the Western Pacific. “But we can't just put them back there on an empty island – they need social company, and they need an education.”

Zero-san's eyes gleamed. Slowly, he stood up and walked towards the map on the wall. Turning round, he looked at his Producer, a slow smile spreading across his face.

“I think I just might have an IDEA.”

The rattle of concrete mixers and the rumble of bulldozers fell silent on evening fell on Shahaguo Island. The island had been evacuated in the Pacific War to make way for a garrison, and its few inhabitants had resettled less remote islands, never to return. For more than twenty years a few rotting huts and a short airstrip of crushed coral were the only signs that civilisation had ever been here – but that was about to change.

The JSDF officer scratched his head, looking nervously across the water to the Other island, the one he was trying not to think about. “Are you sure you want to build here, of all places on the planet ? We’re grateful you’re taking over the job of monitoring it, but – is this what a University’s meant to be doing ?”

Zero-san grinned. “This isn’t going to be an ordinary University.” He looked around, and waved at the small party of sailor-suited students happily clearing away the decaying concrete huts with a state-of-the-art disintegrator cannon they had thrown together from scrap materials. “We’re not enrolling ordinary students, and we’re not teaching ordinary courses. I’m not sure if we’ll find enough suitable applicants, after the current lot get through, but I’ve had some very – Interesting applications already, and we’re not even officially open till next year.”

The officer froze in fear, at the sound of something huge bellowing across the water, the sound carrying in the still evening air. “I’ll be glad to leave you to it ! You’re going to be resupplying the place by air, I take it ? There’s some – rather aggressive marine life in these waters, bigger than most boats.”

“Seen it, filmed it, built film plots around it,” Zero-san waved offhandedly. “We’ve had experience living alongside beasts like that. There are advantages – the rent for the whole island’s about the same as for a telephone booth in Tokyo, and we’re saving a fortune on building insurance.”

“You ARE ?” The young lieutenant felt the familiar signs of panic building, as the roaring from the other island increased.

Zero-san nodded. “There’s no insurance bills to pay at all – nowhere on Earth will insure us, when they hear where we’re located !”

The celebrations for the fifth birthday of Toho Academy were being cleared away, as the Producer finished his tour of the island. He nodded appreciatively, listening to the receding engine notes of the seaplane carrying the first graduates back towards the Home Islands.

“You’ve done well, Zero-San,” he commented to his former Cameraman, now the first Principal of the Academy. “Next year, the youngest rescuees we found, start classes here. In five more years – what do you think you’ll do?”

Zero-san brushed a greying strand of head-fur out of his eyes. The past five years had been a struggle, a bitter struggle at times to get the Academy and its unorthodox courses acknowledged by an ultra-conservative Education system. That had taken far more of a toll on him, he reflected, than the little matters of coping with a location that could be the textbook example of “A Rough Neighbourhood.”...

He stirred, looking around at the still-expanding Academy. “Oh, we’ve no shortage of applicants. I’ve had to hire extra staff – I had to hire half a dozen female lecturers just this term to handle our Arcaneology course, full of “Things That Man Was Not Meant To Know”. It’s an interesting feedback effect – we started with strange students, designed strange courses to suit them, and now the courses are pulling in Interesting people from all over the world.” He waved down to a trio of ice-white direwolves. “That pack down there, claim to be from some community from under the Antarctic icecap – obviously they’re faking it, and those holiday snaps of theirs could be produced by anyone with a major photo Dirty Tricks budget and a film studio. But you see the idea ?”

The Producer nodded. “And you’re starting to turn a profit, even, despite all the building repairs ! Most impressive. I take it you’re willing to stay on as Principal ?”

Zero-San smiled, nodding. “This,” he said, “Could be the start of something big.”

