

# CONNOR MacLEOD

Born in 1518 in the village of Glenfinnan, on the shores of Loch Shiel, Connor MacLeod grew to manhood in the rolling highlands of Scotland. As a youngster, he was headstrong and impetuous, a known rascal and thief of sheep. Kept from the worst of trouble by his kinsman, Dougal, Connor was a favorite of his uncle, the Clan Chief, Angus MacLeod. Here, he learned to wield a claymore and temper his rougher edges. A handsome man, he had no shortage of interested women, though he did not bring himself to marry as he could not find the right woman.

Tensions between Clan MacLeod and Clan Fraser continued to rise, with both clans launching attacks into one another's ancestral lands and stealing entire herds of cattle. Eventually, in 1536, when one of Angus MacLeod's prize bulls was killed by a Fraser huntsman, the warriors of both clans took their claymores from above the hearth-fires and marched to war to the tune of skirling pipes and beating drums.

The battle was fought on the far banks of Loch Shiel. The MacLeods had come seeking redress for the insult done to their clan chief, but Clan Fraser had an altogether more sinister motive. A towering warrior known as the Kurgan had joined their ranks, a dark-armored figure from far-distant lands to the east. With his skull helm and monstrous blade, he was a terrifying figure who gave Murdoch Fraser one command; no-one was to kill Connor MacLeod but him.

Battle was joined as a fierce storm broke, and Connor saw the armored form of the Kurgan on the hill. As the warriors of both clans fought to the death, none of Clan Fraser's warriors would fight Connor. When the Kurgan and Connor finally met, the giant warrior's skill was far greater, and he ran Connor through. His broadsword rose for a beheading strike, but Angus and Dougal crashed into him and saved their kinsman. At battle's end, Connor's body was returned to Glenfinnan, and the clan mourned his passing. But upon the dawn, Connor sat up and breathed again, his wound mysteriously healed. All who had seen where the Kurgan's sword had struck knew the wound had been mortal. His friends and even his sweetheart turned against him, believing him to be in league with the devil. Only the authority of Angus MacLeod saved him from a burning, and, still tied to the wooden beam, Connor MacLeod fled the village of his birth. He wandered the highlands for years, eventually finding love with Heather MacDonald, where their only real dissatisfaction was his and Heather's inability to produce a child. They lived a life of peace until the arrival of Juan

Sánchez Villa-Lobos Ramirez, who — before his murder at the hands of the Kurgan — taught Connor the truth of his immortal heritage and the ultimate goal of obtaining the prize.

Decades later, upon Heather's death, a heartbroken Connor vowed never to love again and left Scotland to travel the world. During this time, he lived many lives under many guises, forever on the move to allay suspicions of his immortal existence. He travelled to the Americas, fighting, drinking and dying his way across the newborn continent, before returning to Europe, where he saved — and later adopted — Rachel Ellenstein from Nazi soldiers during World War II. In the aftermath of the war, Connor and Rachel travelled to New York City, and, in 1985, he lives as Russell Nash, an antiques dealer specializing in ancient weaponry.



# THE KURGAN

The Kurgans were an ancient people from the steppes of Russia, but the warrior drawn to America for the Gathering was far older than even those tribes. He was raised with the name Vitor, and taught to be the perfect warrior, powerful, strong, and ruthless. Trained to be a killer from an early age, the tribe hardened its youngsters by hurling them into fighting pits with starving dogs. Only the strongest survived, and these were exactly the kinds of warriors the Kurgan tribe wanted.

In his tenth summer, Vitor was thrown by his father into the fighting pit with three of the tribe's most vicious dogs. Though grievously wounded, he fought his way out of the pit with the dogs all dead. This was but the beginning of his rise to fame within his village. Vitor willingly entered the fighting pits many times over the next few years to harden himself to pain and rid himself of any lasting trace of humanity.

He rode at the forefront of raids against other tribes, cementing his already fearsome reputation as a killer of men, women, and children. He left no survivors in his wake, relishing the screams of those who fell before his blade and bathing in their blood. Eventually his own father turned on him and poisoned his food at a feast to celebrate the defeat of a rival king. Wracked with agonizing pain in his belly, Vitor fell to his knees and was hacked to death by his fellow tribesmen and his body thrown to the dogs. Vitor awoke in agony, with hungry wolfhounds tearing at his flesh. Armed only with his teeth and bare hands, he killed the dogs and ate their flesh as terrifying hunger and immortal power surged through him. Once again, he climbed from the fighting pit with the shattered bodies of the dogs clutched in his fists. Dawn was just painting the horizon in light as he went from yurt to yurt and crushed the skulls of his former kinsmen with a jagged rock. By the time the sun had fully risen, he alone drew breath, sitting cross-legged in the carnage of his former home. Vitor fashioned the bones of the dogs and his people into a gruesome helmet and wove their pelts and skins into a patchwork cloak. Filled with a newfound sense of purpose in something greater than he could yet comprehend, Vitor burned his village to the ground and rode away, never to look back.

Over the centuries to come, Vitor — who now took to calling himself Victor — slaughtered his way through history, becoming a dark legend that haunted the nightmares of dozens of cultures. War drew him like a moth to a flame, and he plunged into the most heinous and bloody conflicts in search of ever-greater slaughters. He roamed the forests of Transylvania during the wars against the Turks, slaughtering both warriors and civilians to quench his inexhaustible thirst for blood. He fought against Napoleon's Grande Armée, leading an infamous company of head-takers known as the Yebegen. Finding much to like in the Russian character, he remained there for a century and a half, fighting in the Ostfront in World War II. He fought in the meat-grinder of Stalingrad and became the terror of the German troops sent to fight there. Wehrmacht troops spoke in whispers of the Nachtkrapp, a hideous raven demon said to tear people apart if they made a noise at night.

With the end of the war, Victor felt himself drawn ever westward as the number of immortals thinned and the pull on his soul carried him over the ocean to America. This was the destiny he had dreamed of fulfilling as he rode from his burning village all those centuries ago.



# IX-TLALLI

The daughter of a tribal leader of the Aztec peoples of Mesoamerica, Ix-Tlalli was born in the year 1504, and raised in a time of great strife for the people of the sun. The Aztecs were sorely pressed by the Spanish soldiers of Hernán Cortés, whose devastating weapons and communicable diseases (against which they had no immunity) saw entire tribes wiped out in ferocious battles and devastating plagues.

Ix-Tlalli's people adhered to the belief that every fifty-two years a sacrifice needed to be made to the gods to ensure that the universe would not collapse. Known as the New Fire ceremony, this ritual saw every fire extinguished throughout the tribal lands, and a sacrifice made atop the Great Pyramid of Choula. The people would then wait with bated breath to see if the sun arose with the dawn. When it did, a fire would be ignited on the chest of the victim, and this new fire would be carried through the city to honor the new cycle of the universe. This year, with enemies pressing in all around and his people beset by famine and disease, Ix-Tlalli's father was forced into making a sacrifice of immense worth to avert disaster. Thus, on her sixteenth birthday, Ix-Tlalli willingly climbed the steps of the temple-pyramid and lay down upon on the obsidian slab. Her father tearfully plunged the dagger down to take her life, and anxiously waited for the dawn. The sun duly rose and a fire was set upon the chest of his daughter. But no sooner had the flames caught than Ix-Tlalli sat up with a scream, all trace of her wound gone and very much alive. The priests were horrified and accused Ix-Tlalli's father of cheating the gods. He and his daughter were forced to fight their way clear of the wrathful priests and escape as the armies of Hernán Cortés finally captured the emperor Cuauhtemoc and seized Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital.

Ix-Tlalli and her father fled south, with hunters on their trail. The priests blamed the fall of the Aztec Empire on Ix-Tlalli's treachery, and sought to appease the gods with her death. She and her father moved from place to place to stay ahead of the hunters, but their luck ran out in 1555, during the Chichimeca Wars. Ix-Tlalli was by now a fearsome fighter, having been taught to fight with the macahuitl, a wooden, sword-like weapon with sharpened obsidian chips embedded in its edges. The Spanish claimed that such weapons could cleave a man in two with a single stroke, and Ix-Tlalli had had ample time to develop the skill to do just that. Her father, by now an old man, was murdered in an ambush, but Ix-Tlalli stood her ground and killed

the hunters one after another in a brutal battle that saw her pierced by arrows, shot by musketry, and stabbed repeatedly by blessed daggers.

With the death of her father and her pursuers, Ix-Tlalli carried on south to settle in the region that would later become the nation of Colombia. Again, she moved from place to place to hide her ever-youthful features, finding work as a mercenary during the tumultuous colonial period, before joining the forces fighting to secure Colombian independence in 1819. By now, Ix-Tlalli went by the name Talia and had become something of a legend among the people of Colombia. Her talent for brutal killing never left her, and she soon found employment as an enforcer and assassin with the emerging criminal cartels that ran the drug trade. She killed for Pablo Escobar's Medellín Cartel, and assassinated numerous rivals of her ruthless boss. At the height of Escobar's power, however, she felt the pull of the Gathering, and, boarding one of the cartel's drug planes to Florida, made her way north to New York City.



# NAMINAGA MINAMOTO

Born in 1174 to the Minamoto clan, Naminaga's earliest memories were of a conflict known as the Genpei war. In victory, her clan's leader, Minamoto no Yoritomo, took the title Shogun and established his capital in Kamakura. It was a time of war and rebellions, alliances forged and pacts broken. The defeat of Yoritomo's rivals at the Battle of Dan-no-ura in 1185 saw her clan finally consolidate its power, and establish the supremacy of the Samurai warrior caste. It also began what would grow to become Japan's feudal age.

The society around Naminaga was strictly hierarchical, and women were neither expected nor permitted to bear arms. Naminaga's tutor was a wounded Samurai named Shijo, and he knew that women and children died just the same as men in the aftermath of wars and rebellions. To fight as a Samurai was out of the question, so, in secret, he taught her how to use her slight build and swiftness to her advantage. Naminaga trained without armor and bore only lighter blades. She learned to fight with a bow and throwing daggers, to hunt in darkness and to strike from the shadows. Such covert means of fighting were anathema to the Samurai, but Naminaga excelled in such methods.

Her clan extended its power, fending off rebellions and sporadic attacks from Mongol raiders. At the turning of the century, while touring his estates in search of a husband for Naminaga, Yoritomo was ambushed by assassins. A killer leapt to finish the Shogun, but Naminaga leapt to his defense with expert cuts from her lightweight

uchigatana, a lighter forerunner of the katana. As skilled as she was, Naminaga was not yet a match for a trained assassin, and she fell with his blade piercing her heart. But she had kept the warrior at bay long enough for Yoritomo's Samurai guard to fight their way to their master's side and rescue him. Naminaga's body was taken back to Kamakura to be buried with honor in the family mausoleum alongside her ancestors.

That night, Naminaga awoke with a gasp, feeling for a wound that was no longer there. Shijo was there waiting for her, and he told her that he had sensed her immortal power many years ago and made his way to Kamakura to guide her. He too was immortal, but having lived for over two thousand years, had no desire to endure the Game any longer until the time of the Gathering. Knowing she could not remain in Kamakura, Shijo led Naminaga away, and they became wandering, masterless warriors known as Ronin. Together they travelled the length and breadth of Japan, honing her skills and learning the way of the Samurai. They fought alongside her family's descendants against the Mongol invasions of 1274 and 1281, helped those who could not help themselves, and became woven into the mythology of the countryside as the Red Samurai and the Grey Ghost, mythical warriors who could be called upon with prayers and good deeds. If a cause was just, it was said, they would lend their aid in the fight against injustice.

Naminaga and Shijo spent the passing centuries fighting evil wherever they found it. They held to the ancient ways, even as the Black Ships of Commodore Matthew Perry sailed into Edo Bay in 1853, forcing Japan to deal with the wider world. Despite this inauspicious beginning, Japan soon rushed to embrace modernity, and the days of the Samurai were numbered. Twenty four years later, in 1877, both Naminaga and Shijo fought alongside Saigō Takamori and the last of the Samurai in their doomed ride at Shiroshima. Shijo died in the final charge, his head blown from his body by a cannonball, but Naminaga survived. Frustrated with the fate of her country, she fled Japan and retreated to a remote temple in the vast land of China, to live out the rest of her days in isolation.

For a century Naminaga remained in self-imposed exile, honing her flesh and spirit, and training in the ancient martial arts practiced by the monks. And, for a time, she was at peace with the world. But as the last quarter of the twentieth century dawned, the Grey Ghost finally felt an irresistible pull to leave her homeland and travel into the West.



# JUAN SÁNCHEZ VILLA-LOBOS RAMÍREZ

Nearly a thousand years before the birth of Christ, the immortal who would one day go by the name of Ramirez was born Tak-Ne, a slave in Egypt. He learned of his gift at a young age when his life was cut short in an accident during the construction of the Pharaoh's tomb in the Nile Valley. A towering obelisk collapsed during an earthquake, and the slave was crushed beneath an avalanche of monolithic blocks. No effort was made to dig the man out, but days later, when the fallen blocks were salvaged for reuse, the slaves were astounded to find him alive and well.

He climbed from the rubble with a canny smile, unharmed by his ordeal, and was swiftly hidden by his fellow slaves, becoming a symbol of their hope for better times. Many believed him to be an earthly incarnation of Mot, the Canaanite god of death, and — for all he knew — perhaps they were right. He travelled the slave camps in secret, using his charisma and passion to foment. As proof of his divine truth, he would allow himself to be killed over and over again, and with each rebirth, his fame and following grew ever larger. In time, rumors of the Ikhemu-sek ("the one not knowing destruction") reached the ears of the Egyptian overlords, and soldiers hunted him with ever more brutal methods.

The slaves fought back as best they could, but they were malnourished, disorganized, and had few real weapons. The nascent rebellion was crushed and Ikhemu-sek dragged before the Pharaoh. A golden sword pierced the man's heart, but he yet lived. He was bitten repeatedly by snakes and survived. He was ritually strangled, but drew breath again within the hour. The Pharaoh was much vexed, but decreed that if Ikhemu-sek could not be killed, then he would spend forever gazing in wonder at his true master. Upon the Pharaoh's death, the following year, he was buried alive in the depths of a darkened tomb beneath his master's sarcophagus.

Almost four hundred years later, grave robbers plundered the tomb of the Pharaoh. They had come in search of treasure, but instead found a shambling, pallid ghoul shuffling from one chamber to the next. They fled in terror, and eventually, Ikhemu-sek emerged to find the world much changed. He was no longer a slave, but a free man, and with the Pharaoh's gold, he was swiftly able to establish himself in this new, very different Egypt. He had absorbed a vast quantity of knowledge from the many tablets buried alongside his former master, and once

his strength was fully restored, he travelled the world in search of others like himself.

He lived many lives and took many names, drawn by some unknown instinct to take part in some of history's most pivotal moments, as though fulfilling some ancient and unknowable task. He added to what he had learned in the pharaoh's tomb about his immortal heritage from forbidden books, raving lunatics, and ancient inscriptions carved into the pillars of lost desert cities. He met other immortals, and, for a time, sought them as companions. Most rejected him or sought his death for their own gain, and reluctantly, he was forced to kill them.

Over the course of his many courtships, Ramirez, as he would later call himself, had married three women, but each time brought intense heartache. In the end, after the death of his third wife, Shakiku, the daughter of the great swordsmith Masamune, he swore he would never again allow himself to fall in love with a mortal, for the resultant pain is too great. By 1541, he was living in Madrid, under the name Juan Sánchez Villa-Lobos Ramirez. Here, he was the chief metallurgist to King Charles V of Spain and it was said by many that the sharpness of his blades was matched only by the sharpness of his wit.

But immortal instincts drew Ramirez to the highlands of Scotland, where he was to meet Connor MacLeod, the immortal whose fate would forever be intertwined with his own.





# IMAN FASIL

The second son of a Gaspard of Aquitaine, the immortal who would later change his name to Iman Fasil eagerly followed his father and the Christian Knights of Frederick Barbarossa to the holy land in 1189. Devoutly religious to the point of mania, he squired for his father, and took part in the Battle of Iconium against an army loyal to the Muslim leader, Saladin. In the chaos and bloodshed of the heavy cavalry charge, he saw the very worst of humanity as thousands of mounted knights put the enemy warriors to rout. In the aftermath of the battle, he prayed for guidance and heard the sound of chanting voices from beyond his father's camp.

At the edge of a cliff, he found a group of crazed zealots whipping themselves with knotted ropes, wailing to the sky of God's coming vengeance and the doom that would fall on the heathens in Jerusalem. Man was a sinful creature, they proclaimed, and only in the cleansing torment of pain could such sins be washed away. This fiery brand of zealotry resonated with the young man, and he eagerly took up the whip and cause of these flagellants. He no longer squired for his father, and instead, trooped barefoot in rags with his fellow doomsayers.



As fanatical as they were, the flagellants feared nothing, believing the final wrath of God was upon the world. The frenzied madmen took part in the massacre at Acre, slaughtered Saladin's warriors at the Battle of Arsuf, and helped found a church in the newly captured city of Jaffa. When the armies of Saladin recaptured Jaffa in 1192, the flagellants' church was razed and the men within slaughtered by enemy warriors bitter at their past cruelties. He was stabbed to death by two Hashshashin killers and his body impaled on a lance atop the city walls. A day later, when he returned to life, he was freed by an old man and hidden from Saladin's vengeful men. The old man told him that he was an immortal and part of the Game that would see one of his kind inherit the Prize — a divine gift of unimaginable power. His worldview was shattered, and he spent the next thirty years in the Holy Land, learning the faith of, and fighting alongside, the men he had once been so eager to kill. When he returned to the west in 1212, he bore the name of the man who had opened his eyes to the wider world, Iman Fasil.

Fasil travelled the wilds of Dark Ages Europe for centuries in search of fellow immortals. In Fasil's twisted worldview, he must be the one to win the Prize and fulfil his grand destiny. He slew many immortals over the centuries, taking part in some of history's most notorious massacres simply to kill a single immortal living secretly amongst mortals. In 1535, Fasil fought against the Anabaptists in the German city of Münster during their brief and ill-fated rebellion. When the mad immortal, Jan Matthys, charged from Münster's gates with only thirty men at his side, it was Fasil who fought and beheaded him. Fasil later travelled to Spain, where he studied under the chief metallurgist of King Charles V, a charismatic and friendly immortal by the name of Ramirez, and forged his infamous Toledo Salamanca. The sword was a thing of beauty, with a gold plated hilt and pommel, ivory grip, and velvet ricasso detail inset with precious stones. As thanks for his help, Fasil promised that it would not be him that would kill Ramirez. Fasil was in Paris during the French Revolution and hastened many of the city's nobles to the guillotine, believing a few of the city's aristocrats to be immortals.

With the coming of new centuries and new technologies, Fasil slowly felt himself drawn to the New World and the promise of the Gathering. The number of immortals in the world had shrunk to barely a handful, and Fasil vowed he would be the one to claim the Prize.

# SUNDA KASTAGIR

From an early age, it was clear that Sunda Kastagir was no ordinary child. He willingly conversed with witch doctors and took pleasure in solitary bushwalks in the wilds of his native Ethiopia. Born in the early seventeen hundreds, Sunda was trained to fight from an early age, as internecine warfare was common between the various tribal groups of Africa. Sunda gained a reputation as a courageous, yet honorable, fighter, a man who would fight with a man one day and get drunk with him the next. Even as an adult, Sunda was fond of venturing far and wide across the continent in search of adventure.

On one such adventure in distant West Africa, he came across the corpses of some white-skinned traders on the banks of a fast-flowing river. Who had killed them was a mystery, but each of them had been decapitated with a single blow. One of the men still possessed a steel-bladed sword of strange and exquisite workmanship, and Sunda took it for himself. As he grasped the sword, a shadow fell across him and he turned to see a towering giant of a man armed with a vast, broad-bladed sword. The sight of this man terrified Sunda, and before he could even raise his new weapon, the giant's sword pierced his heart.

Sunda fell into the river as his lifeblood poured out and darkness filled his vision. Still gripping his sword, he was carried westwards down the river to the coast, where his body was eventually swept out to sea. He drifted on the ocean currents before being washed up on the Île de Gorée, a Portuguese slave-trading hub just beyond the main harbour of Dakar.

His body was found by stevedores in the process of loading captured slaves bound for Havana. The men dragged Sunda's body to the market square and hung him from a tree, then took his sword and rammed it through his belly. They left his body in front of the chained slaves as a warning of what would happen if they tried to escape. That night, life returned to Sunda's body and he freed himself from the noose, collapsing to the sand and gasping in astonishment as he pulled the sword from his belly. The wound in his chest had vanished and he knew there was no way he could have survived a second thrust, let alone his time in the ocean. As he prepared to flee, one of the chained slaves awaiting their turn to be loaded aboard a guineaman slave-ship spoke to him. Sunda recognized her as a Sangoma from the southern lands, a mystic healer and practitioner of magic. She spoke to him of his immortal gift and, though he knew he should run, Sunda listened until the dawn.

As the guineaman set sail for the New World, it had a stowaway clinging to its hull. The ship crossed the Atlantic, and with every slave corpse tossed overboard, Sunda's rage grew. As the ship sailed into the Caribbean, the sangoma's body was thrown overboard, and Sunda resolved to act. By now, he had learned all he needed from listening to the sailors and slaves. He knew every nook and cranny of the ship and made his move as the ship approached the port of Nassau. He slipped aboard the ship, slew the slavers and forced the surviving crew to sail north to Fort Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose, a fortified town near St. Augustine, Florida. Sunda had heard the slavers speak with disgust about its governor, a man named Manuel de Montiano, who granted citizenship and freedom to escaped slaves in return for their service in the Florida militia.

Sunda learned of the modern world here and taught himself how to fight with the sword he had carried all the way from Africa. He served Montiano until 1745, when he travelled north, eventually meeting Connor MacLeod in Richmond, Virginia, on the eve of the Revolutionary War. Recognizing kindred souls, the two became fast friends, fighting together during the many battles of that bitter conflict. They parted company after Connor's drunken duel on Boston Common, and would not meet again until 1985, when the pull of the Gathering drew them both to New York City.

