To Boldly Hakuho
By Wendy Gorman

Hey! Before you play this game: This game is a little bit about space, and a lot about sumo wrestling. This is worth mentioning because professional sumo wrestlers are (mostly) fat and (mostly) people of color, and the best (although not only!) sumo is played in Japan. Some things to keep in mind as you play this larp:

-Sumo wrestlers are ATHLETES. They are also FAT. It takes a lot of dedicated work to be as strong, powerful, talented, and large as they are. Keep your fatphobia out of this game.

-The majority of sumo wrestlers are people of color. This might seem like a great excuse for you to whip out some sort of accent, or fall into stereotypes, or make racist jokes. IT IS NOT. Put your accent away, and be respectful.

-Japanese words make up a lot of sumo terminology, even in English. Try your best, don't make fun of the words, and enter into it with a spirit of learning!

-SUMO RULES! Have fun :)

Premise

The year is 2531. You are the bridge crew of a starship, and you have just made contact with the AI of a ship long thought to be lost. The starship, which was lost in 2196, was equipped with an AI model that had dual programming, causing it to be focused on both statistical excellency (making The Best Numbers) and humans. Although documentation for this time period is scarce, this starship in particular is recorded as having had an interest in sports statistics.

The problems started when you realized that the AI was ignoring your hails, commands, enquiries, and all communication attempts made by your team. Although saddened by the loss of the potential historical and scientific discoveries that were sure to come with guiding a 335 year old starship home, you were ready to give up. You had no way to communicate with the AI. Until, that is, you made a last ditch effort to communicate from your personal quarters, and a snatch of an old History Channel documentary about a famous Mongolian-born sumo wrestler from the early 21st century was transmitted along with the attempt to communicate. Suddenly, the AI is not only responding, but responding at great length. It turns out that it has spent the last 335 years obsessing over the human athlete with the Objectively Best Numbers- Hakuho Sho.

Your team must find a way to combine your goal, of getting the starship home, and the AI's goal, of only talking, thinking, and experiencing things to do with Hakuho and his illustrious career.

You've calculated that the lost starship has enough power to stay in contact with you for another 1.5 hours. In that time, you hope to gain all the information you can about the ship, and convince the AI to bring the ship to you for further study.

Logistics: To Boldly Hakuho is a live action online game (laog) for 2-5 players. The players take on the roles of a bridge crew needing to communicate with the AI of a starship who refuses to discuss anything other than Hakuho Sho. Gameplay will take precisely 1.5 hours, although some additional time should be built in for rules, setting expectations, and making sure everyone's technology works. It requires everyone to have a device with a camera, an internet connection, and a video call program. It is not necessary to know about Hakuho Sho prior to the game's start.

Gameplay: For this game, unless anyone is an absolute Hakuho fan with an eidetic memory, everyone should have the Wikipedia page for Hakuho Sho up on their device so that they can refer to it during play. Everyone will need to be in a video call that also has a chat feature.

Once everyone is in the video call, choose characters, and give your character a name and pronouns. Make sure you have easy access to the Wikipedia page for Hakuho, and set video call norms. Go over the rules, and become familiar with your role. Once everyone is ready to play, everyone should turn off their camera. The Captain will set a timer for 1.5 hours, and once it is ready, says "Go". Everyone turns on their cameras, and the game begins.

Once the cameras are on again (minus the AI), the game is live! Everyone should stay in character. The various characters are trying to get information out of the Hakuho-obsessed AI. The way to get the AI to talk about anything other than Hakuho is to relate various other topics to Hakuho. This will largely be done through comparisons and metaphors. Players will need to get creative, dig deep into the Wiki, and talk about Hakuho!

Human characters will talk to each other via the video call, and talk to the AI via the text chat. The AI may muse out loud to itself, but can only directly communicate with the humans through the chat. The people playing the game will all be able to hear what everyone else is saying, but in the fiction, the AI cannot hear what the players are discussing amongst themselves out loud. The humans are able to hear the AI muse to itself out loud. The AI does not know this.

The players, however, are encouraged to use this information to make situations interesting. For example, if the AI is musing out loud about how sleek Hakuho looked in his tenth year as a yokozuna, that might be a good opportunity for a player to talk about how much they admire Hakuho's physique, and how it relates to the sleek design of the ship.

The bridge crew will attempt to learn everything it can over the 1.5 hour period. Each character has their own specialization and goals, and players should take turns allowing each other to get time to chat with the AI, but also to make sure everyone is getting a chance to talk with their team via the video call. A bridge crew is a team, and humans should bounce ideas, discuss problems, and brainstorm interesting ways to talk about Hakuho with the AI by collaborating with the rest of their human crew!

When the timer goes off, the ship loses power, and connection with the AI is lost. Everyone should turn off their cameras, wait ten seconds, and then everyone will turn their cameras back on. At this point, the game is over, and players may discuss and debrief the game.

Characters

Navigation Officer: You are a navigation specialist. You want access to the ship's star maps, course history, and ship's manifest, along with anything else you can think of that has to do with navigation as you learn more and more about the ship and its history. The AI does not care about any of this, since none of it has to do with Hakuho Sho. Your job is to connect them in a way that will intrigue and enchant the AI, and also to coax it into giving you more information. The trajectory of a career may have much in common with the trajectory of a starship. Draw comparisons between his meteoric rise to excellence and fame and the starship's own course. Invoke his lists of awards, records, and special prizes when seeking the ship's manifest. Your focus should be on the big picture of his career and his legacy.

Engineering Officer: You are an engineering specialist. You want specs on the ship, including what type of fuel was used, the style of engine, the size of the crew's cabins, how the bridge was laid out, and any other specifications you can think of. The AI does not care about any of this, since none of it has to do Hakuho Sho. Your job is to connect them in a way that will intrigue and enchant the AI, and also to coax it into giving you more information. The detailed specifications of a starship may be similar to the many detailed ways a sumo wrestler can win a match. Discuss how many times Hakuho used a specific winning technique to figure out the specifications of the engine. Draw comparisons between the traditional sumo diet to figure out what kind of fuel the ship uses. Ask about the percentage of space dedicated to crew by bringing up Hakuho's win/loss percentage. Discuss Hakuho's injuries to figure out how the ship has configured its repairs. Your focus should be on technical, quantifiable details of his career.

Weapons Officer: You are a weapons specialist. You want to learn about the ship's offensive and defensive capabilities. You want to know about weapons, shields, and overall military power. The AI does not care about any of this, since none of it has to do with Hakuho Sho. Your job is to connect them in a way that will intrigue and enchant the AI, and also to coax it into giving you more information. Use discussion of his fighting style to draw out information about the style of weapons and other combat technology. Discuss specific winning techniques Hakuho used to get information about specific strategy and maneuvers in battle from the ship's past. Reminisce fondly about a match Hakuho won to get descriptions of the ship in combat. Bring up his rivals to figure out the ship's enemies. Your job is to focus on Hakuho's fighting spirit, and his skill as a wrestler and fighter.

Communications Officer: You are a communications specialist. You want to learn about the ship's logs, the number of crew, the languages spoken on board, and the relationships between the various members. The AI does not care about any of this, since none of it has to do with Hakuho Sho. Your job is to connect them in a way that will intrigue and enchant the AI, and also to coax it into giving you more information. Talk about his mawashi colors to learn about what rank wore what color. Discuss his family to learn about family structures on the ship. Bring up his scandals to find the dirt on the crew. Draw connections between his mentoring and leadership and the leadership of the bridge. Bring up his attitude to learn the attitudes of those on board. Your job is to focus on the human and personal elements of Hakuho.

The Captain: You are the captain of this vessel. You want to guide the ship to you. You also want to support your bridge crew in any way you can. This may mean helping them research, encouraging them to find another way, or suggesting ways to connect starships and Hakuho. Your focus should be on assisting your crew and talking things out with them, and on engaging the AI. Do not be afraid to butter it up a little- make friends! You should focus on your overall admiration for Hakuho Sho, the legend. This could look like appreciation of his spirit, his technique, his form, or a highly developed appreciation for his physique. Get to know the AI, and assist your officers however they need you.

The AI: You LOVE Hakuho Sho! You've run all the numbers, and no one else even comes close- he is Objectively the Best. Also, he's a HUMAN. Humans are so interesting, but mostly Hakuho is interesting. Your job is to talk about Hakuho Sho, and perhaps other things that are related to Hakuho. If someone tries to talk to you about something that is not Hakuho, do not respond. However, if someone talks to you about Hakuho or something related to Hakuho, respond enthusiastically. You LOVE Hakuho, and you've had no one to discuss your passion with for 335 years. You're not willing to compromise your morals and talk about things that are not related to Hakuho, but you are willing to be a little flexible as to what counts as related to Hakuho, due to your long isolation.

Other resources:

The article that launched my love of Hakuho:

https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-sumo-matchup-centuries-in-the-making/

Hakuho's bouts from the November 2019 tournament:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vgqZ1A01EA0

Excellent article that, among other things, defines a bunch of commonly used sumo terminology:

https://www.hindustantimes.com/sports/the-greatest-sportsman-you-ve-never-heard-of/story-SsHTJ8YYE8RT2riMUUMquO.html

Pretty much the only English-language sumo blog:

https://tachiai.org/

A sort-of Sumo 101

https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2080.html

Hakuho's wrestler profile:

http://www.sumo.or.jp/EnSumoDataRikishi/profile/2320/index.php/