Long ago, there was a *kappa*. A water goblin. It was about two inches tall, green, made of some sort of durable ceramic material, and it sat atop the small refrigerator in my studio apartment in California. It was just an inexpensive charm from a shrine that somebody must have given to me when I lived in Japan for the first time. Or perhaps I bought it myself. Either way, I had never actually given it much thought. But then one day, I was opening the refrigerator to get a beer and, for some reason, the kappa caught my attention. I began to inspect it carefully, turning it over in my hands. What was a kappa anyway? I knew that it was a little monster from Japanese folklore, a nasty, threatening creature that pulled people and animals into the water. But that didn’t really explain anything. The little goblin was inviting me on a quest to explore an otherworld of fantastic beings and to try to understand how this otherworld might also be part of our own world.

I was in graduate school at the time, in Asian studies, and I ended up writing my master’s thesis about kappa. I wasn’t able to answer all the questions the creature raised, but I did learn that in Japan such water
creatures fit into a larger category called *yōkai*, and the world of yōkai offers insight into the world of humans. Yōkai are an age-old part of belief and, simultaneously, at the cutting edge of knowledge and contemporary expression. In 1929, the physicist and writer Terada Torahiko (1878–1935) explained that the desire to understand yōkai is at the core of innovation because it inspires investigation within all sorts of fields. And this investigation never ends: the moment a mystery is solved, yōkai assume different shapes, evolving right alongside humans and inspiring us to keep asking questions.¹

The creature on my refrigerator guided me into the otherworld of yōkai, and I have been exploring it ever since. I went on to write a doctoral dissertation on yōkai, and in 2009 I published a book called *Pandemonium and Parade: Japanese Monsters and the Culture of Yōkai*, which is a cultural history of discourses of the weird and mysterious over the last four hundred years.

*The Book of Yōkai* is a very different endeavor. Although it builds on what I learned while working on *Pandemonium and Parade* and in the years since its publication, the present book focuses more explicitly on yōkai as forms of folkloric expression and communication that are simultaneously part of long-standing historical traditions and also very much alive and changing today. It also travels further back, into the earliest known texts in Japanese history, exploring a range of ideas and discussing some key individuals, from Abe no Seimei to Lafcadio Hearn, who contributed in different ways to shaping understandings of the supernatural world. *The Book of Yōkai* also introduces many of the yōkai themselves—some already famous beyond Japanese shores, and others almost unknown outside the small villages in which their legends developed.

Yōkai are part of folklore and popular culture in Japan, of course, but in recent years they have also started to garner attention elsewhere, including North America and Europe. In large part because of manga, anime, gaming, and the global influence of Japan’s “soft power,” more and more people have heard of yōkai and are interested in their folkloric roots. Although *The Book of Yōkai* does not focus explicitly on contemporary popular culture and media, I hope it will be useful to people engaged in these dimensions, as well as to anybody interested more generally in questions of belief, the monstrous, and the uncanny.
I wrote The Book of Yōkai while living in two very different locations in Japan: the city of Kyoto and the island of Shimo-Koshikijima in Kagoshima Prefecture. Kyoto, of course, is a historic capital and was a center of elite power and cultural production for much of Japanese history. In contrast, the island of Shimo-Koshikijima, with fewer than three thousand people, is far removed from the historical seats of power and, for that matter, from many of the amenities of urban life today. Yet both these places are entirely fitting locations to contemplate yōkai, because yōkai are equally at home in the metropolitan centers of the nation and in its rural peripheries. And in both places, my thinking about this project benefited immensely from conversations with friends and colleagues and teachers—though, of course, responsibility for any mistakes is entirely my own.

Kyoto is the home of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken), a research facility that houses one of the largest collections of material on yōkai in the world; the current director, Komatsu Kazuhiko, has been the leading academic researcher on yōkai for the last several decades. I finished drafting this book while in residence there in 2013 and was fortunate to have access to all these resources, as well as to the wisdom of Komatsu-sensei and the members of his various kenkyū-kai (research workshops). My profound gratitude goes to Komatsu-sensei and to Professor Yamada Shōji, who sponsored me while I was there as a visiting research scholar. I am also indebted to Nakano Yo-hei, Tokunaga Seiko, and the other denizens of the “yōkai project room,” to Egami Toshinori and the Nichibunken library staff, and to Hayashi Hiroko, Nishiyama Akemi, No Sung-hwan, Ted Mack, and Kasumi Yamashita for many hours of excellent company and conversation.

For the first half of 2012, I lived on Shimo-Koshikijima, in the village of Teuchi, in order to research a ritual that I have written about elsewhere. But while on the island, I also began writing this book. A few of the local yōkai made it into the pages that follow; but more important, the experience of living in a small rural community gave me a deeper understanding of the kind of village lifestyle that was, and still is, characteristic of many parts of Japan. My friends on the island, many of whom I have known for over a decade, helped me understand viscerally the intimate connection of people with place, and the living relationship between history and the present. I am indebted to too many people to name them individually, but
I am especially grateful to Hironiwa Yoshitatsu and Hironiwa Yasuko for many hours of insightful conversation and exquisite food (and imo-jo-chū). My deep appreciation also goes to my good friend Ozaki Takakazu and his family; to Shirasaki Hiroki, Shirasaki Sugako, Kawabata Tsuyoshi, Kawabata Yoriko, Hironiwa Hirokazu, Hironiwa Masako, Megurida Toshifumi, Megurida Chiriko, Hashiguchi Yoshitami, Hashiguchi Kyoko, Hironiwa Mamoru, Hironiwa Eiko, and their families; and to the fishermen of Aose.

Reed Malcolm, editor at the University of California Press, originally suggested this book—I am grateful to him and Stacy Eisenstark for their support throughout the project. My great thanks also goes to Chalon Emmons for her clear editorial guidance and to Bonita Hurd for her impeccable and perceptive copyediting. I also thank Makiura Yoshitaka for patiently assisting me with relevant aspects of copyright. Jon Kay and Hannah Davis of Traditional Arts Indiana graciously worked with me on last-minute technical issues as I prepared images, and Suzy Cincone provided careful (and bilingual) proofreading. Throughout this project it has been an honor to work with Shinonome Kijin, the illustrator who drew the original images in this book; he is not only a brilliant artist but also a true scholar of yōkai.

I am indebted to the Fulbright Foundation, which generously funded me in 2012 as the writing began to take shape; I particularly thank Jinko Brinkman and the other members of the JUSEC staff for their constant, good-natured support. I am profoundly grateful to my colleagues in the Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology and the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures at Indiana University, as well as to my graduate students there, for allowing me to escape campus duties for long enough to do a little yōkai hunting. In the United States and Japan, many people have supported my work, both intellectually and through pleasant distractions. There is no space to thank them all by name, but I would like to mention Ariga Takashi, Christopher Bolton, Dylar Kumax, Paul Manning, Steve Stuempfle, Denise Stuempfle, Suga Yutaka, Tsukahara Shinji, and the members of the Shingetsukai Research Society.

My deep gratitude also goes to my family. Adam Foster, Ann Ayton, Suzuki Tatsu, Suzuki Yumi, and Suzuki Ken’ichirō were all remarkably patient and supportive throughout the research and writing process. My
father, Jerry Foster, passed away in July 2014, while I was doing the final editing of the manuscript. Although he did not live to hold the finished book in his hands, for me every page is infused with his memory. His intellectual curiosity, encyclopedic knowledge, and extraordinary capacity to appreciate facts and ideas will always inspire me.

Finally, I am infinitely grateful to Michiko Suzuki, who has kept my work, and my life, centered. She has read all my drafts with crystalline perception and constantly challenged me to write more clearly and think more deeply. Without her, nothing would make sense.