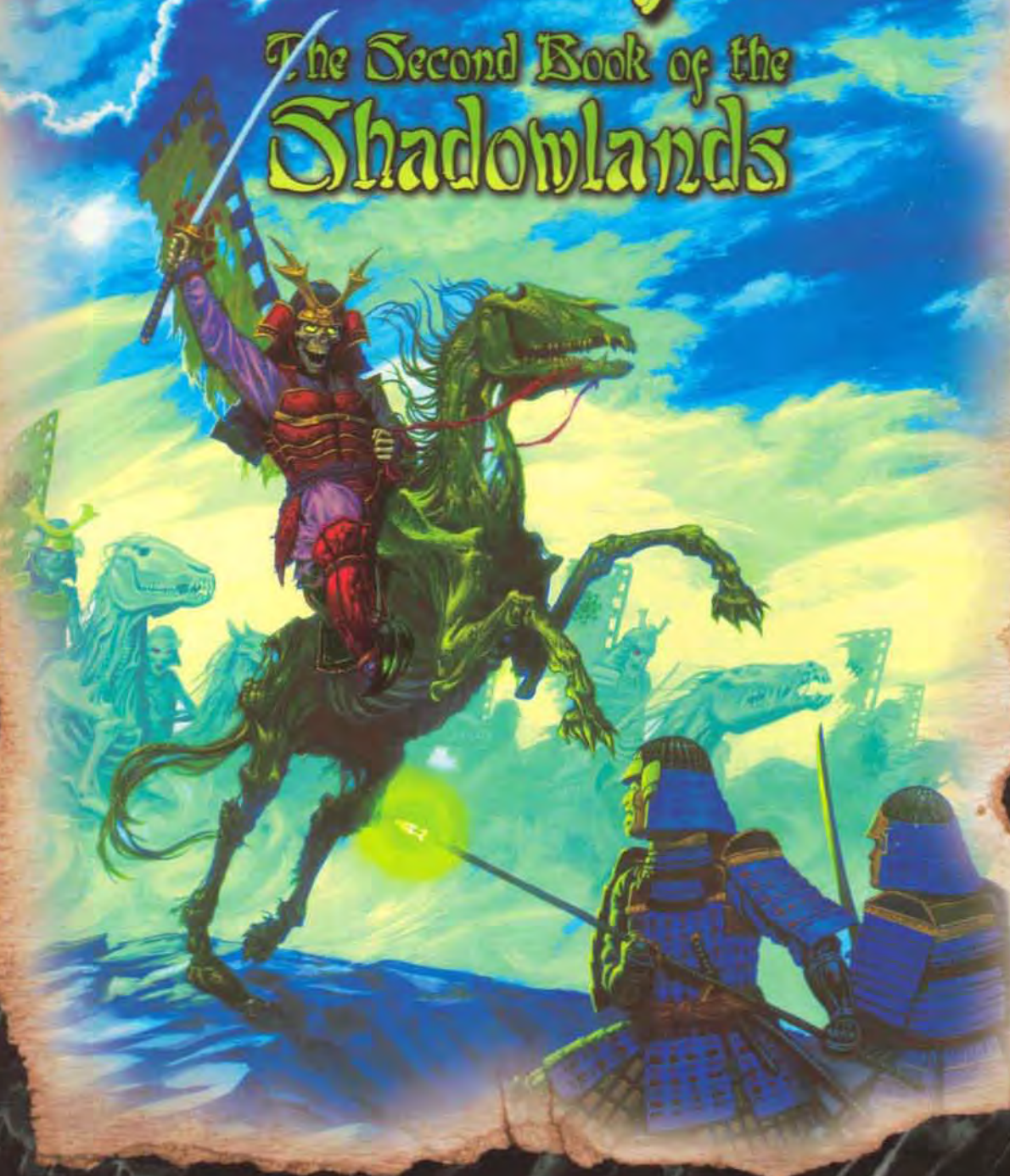




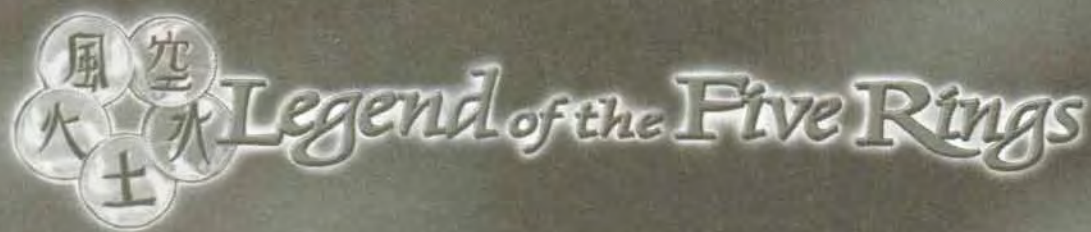
Legend of the Five Rings™

Beaters of Jade™

The Second Book of the
Shadowlands



Translated by Chris Mepler and Jennifer Brandes



Bearers of Jade:

The Second Book of the Shadowlands

Compiled and Presented by Seikansha

Translated by Chris Hepler and Jennifer Brandes

"Look at my face and you will see the future of Rokugan."

-Moto Sada

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Dedication:

To those rare souls who have restored our faith in a hobby and industry that repeatedly seems past saving.

John Wick and the design team, for creating a fantasy game that actually reads like a fantasy novel, Ree Soesbee for being a developer who still talks about her game for fun, and Rob Vaux and D.J. Trindle for recommending us (though they did insist we cut down on the cannibalism). We ronin don't thank people for doing their job; we thank them for doing it well.

Zach Bush, whose dedication was cut out of our last book.

Jeremy Newburg-Rinn and David Burt, for a time long ago when a long-haired freak once found two more, bashing skeletons on the front steps of a high school.

The third-round "Saturday Night Hive," and "Unnamer" tournament teams, and most of all to our playtest group who have yet to leave a session unhappy: Jeff "Honor Monkey" Gilmour, Ashley "Goblin Jiffy Pop" Johnson, Zeshan "Excuse Me, Stewardess, I Speak Monk" Rajput, Randy "Iuchi B. Goode" Johnson, Karl "Wasn't There A Small Tattooed Guy Around Here?" Hsu, and especially Rob "Eastern Culture is Dead" Shibata for the kanji help, killing Moto Tsume, and the Rokugani Xena who figured out what cute Cranes and carp ponds were really good for.

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From Hiruma Nabuko's Play "Closing Night"

ACT V, SCENE VII

(Isoko, Nichiko and their mother Tomono are the only ones left on stage. There is a violent BEATING on the outer door, stage left. They freeze.)

VOICE: Isoko? Nichiko?

NICHIKO: Father! *(She runs towards the door. Isoko grabs her.)*

ISOKO: You idiot! Stay still! *(to her mother)* Can you walk?

TOMONO: I don't know. *(Isoko gently probes the gash in the kimono.)* Aaaahhh!

VOICE: Nichiko...open the door.

(A moment.)

ISOKO: Is it the bushi, mother?

(Another moment: a dreadful one.)

TOMONO: No.

(More violent BEATINGS on the door. Nichiko draws back behind her mother.)

ISOKO: It could be them... couldn't it?

VOICE: Isoko? Aren't you in there? It's all right, my cherry blossom, we've won. The Hida came, and the Hida do not fail.

NICHIKO: It is Father!

TOMONO: That thing out there is not your father.

NICHIKO: *(getting hysterical)* But they said they've won!

TOMONO: The bushi would douse the smoke from the outer towers first. *(pause)* Isoko...hand it to me. *(Isoko picks up the naginata and hands it to her, and Tomono uses it to struggle to one leg.)* Nichiko-chan...

you know what must be done. *(Nichiko stares in disbelief at her mother and sister, then...)*

NICHIKO: I can't! I'm not a bushi! I can't fight, I'll die!

TOMONO: Are you a Hiruma?

NICHIKO: You said I wouldn't have to have my gempukku until I was thirteen!

TOMONO: This is the inner tower, Nichiko. We are the last.

NICHIKO: Stop looking at me! STOP IT! I can't! *(She is crying.)* Sensei said I was the worst. I can barely lift it. He said if you have doubt in your mind you'll fail, and... and I'll just hit myself again. I can't.

ISOKO: *(quietly)* Nichiko... she's not talking about that.

(We think at first she didn't hear...then she looks up. Her sister nods. She looks at her mother. Another nod. More BEATINGS on the door shock Nichiko, but the other two are as cold as porcelain. Splintering sounds. Tomono's hands slither down the naginata.)

TOMONO: All you have to do is bow. *(No reaction.)* Please... face the portrait.

(Another long pause before Nichiko makes her decision.)

NICHIKO: Faaaaaaaaathher! *(She sprints to the door.)*

TOMONO: IYE! *(It doesn't work, and the eight-year-old dashes through the inner door and slams it just as Isoko wedges her fingers in. Nichiko bites them and as her sister draws back, she slams the door and bars it, lying against the foyer wall.)*

NICHIKO: Father...

VOICE: I heard them, darling. They want to kill you. They have the Taint.

ISOKO: You liar! You black tarry-blooded spawn! I hope you eat jade and it burns your intestines all the way down!

VOICE: Open the door, Nichiko-chan. I won't let them hurt you.

ISOKO: Don't you dare! Nichiko, it's only wearing his skin!

TOMONO: *(weak, but never showing it)* Isoko... turn to face the portrait... if you please...

ISOKO: I can't, mother. If you take mine, who will take yours?

TOMONO: My other daughter is lost. He will never have both of you.

ISOKO: Together, mother. With... with no doubt in our minds, we can do it together.

VOICE: Nichiko-chan... open the door.

ISOKO: (soft) It's just like cutting bamboo. (She picks up the other naginata.)

TOMONO: You are a Hiruma.

(They raise the naginata. Tomono tries to control her labored breathing. She limps forward, testing the range. They touch each other's necks with the blades. Isoko closes her eyes, once, a long blink. They draw back. The BEATINGS and Nichiko's crying are constant now.)

ISOKO: Just a moment. (composed again) On san.

TOMONO: On san.

(Isoko takes a few breaths.)

ISOKO: (practically a kiai) Ichi!

TOMONO: (trying, but with no breath) Ni!

(The BEATINGS are intermittent, stopping before they swing. The stagehands douse the lanterns. Both of them hit the floor heavily. A pause of at least twelve beats before a candle is lit. Blood is all over the stage, and Isoko lies headless. Tomono groans and rolls over, holding her blood-matted temple.)

TOMONO: You... doubted. (She feels her own neck. It's still there.) I will look for Hida.

VOICE: Nichiiiiiko-chan... please.

TOMONO: (lucid) Don't open that door.

(Her eyes relax, wide and staring. Nichiko holds very still and quiet.)

VOICE: Nichiko... it's all right. I'm here. The Hida do not fail.

NICHIKO: They're dead.

VOICE: You don't have to be, Nichiko. They were very sick.

NICHIKO: They're all dead.

VOICE: I can take you away, Nichiko. There is a secret place I know.

NICHIKO: Crabs don't have secrets.

VOICE: It is a wonderful place where no one has to commit *seppuku*. One of the kami showed it to me. Don't you want to honor the kami?

NICHIKO: No! I hate the kami, I hate this stupid castle, and I hate you!

VOICE: I'm sorry, cherry blossom. Because I love you. Please... Nichiko-chan. Open the door. For your father. You know fathers must love their little ones. Always.

(Stagehand douses the final candle. There is silence for three beats, then in the darkness, we hear fumbling at one of the door bars. It draws back with a rasp. There is a growl and a child's scream that lasts for ten seconds. It is cut off by the sound of a body being slammed against the stage. The scream continues on a second breath, until it turns into a gargle. More slams: four of them. Stagehands tear meat.)

(CURTAIN.)





Introduction



HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Bearers of Jade is part of a series of books designed for the L5R RPG Game Master. It is a collection of Rokugani scrolls of lore on the Shadowlands and minions of Fu Leng, sent by the ronin Seikansha to the Master of Earth, Isawa Tadaka. However, what is written is not "what is," only "what is written." Most rules, GM tips, adventure hooks, and other solid game information occur in the sidebars, so that gamemasters can photocopy the documents to use as handouts if their characters get into Tadaka's library or speak with other Shadowlands scholars.

Because a little knowledge can mean the difference between life and death for a player character, we introduce a new statistic for the creatures and items in this book: the Target Number for a Shadowlands or other Lore skill roll to identify it, abbreviated "Lore TN." Raises reveal more specific information about the subject, such as the limitations of its powers or the ever-popular "how do I kill it?"

To My Most Esteemed Colleague, Kancho Isawa Tadaka of the Isawa Tensai Tsuchi-Ryu, Kyuden Isawa, in the Thirtieth Year of the reign of the Son of Heaven Hantei XXXVJJJ:

I write regarding our meeting in the Kuni lands, in which we discussed our researches at length. It is not often these days that I speak to one as educated in the ways of the Shadowlands as you, and rarer still when I meet with approval of my methods. You said we were perhaps like roots; tunneling through the earth, never aware of each other's presence, but from the same tree, seeking the same water.

I agree with what you said that day; it is essential for our shugenja to know what weapons they need in the war against the Little Dark Brother of the kami. It is necessary for us to seek the truth. However, I must respectfully take exception to the statement that "any" further information I could provide on the Shadowlands would be held in esteem by your students.

For though you deduced correctly that my satchel was stitched by the craftsmen of the Agasha, and the tsuba of my grandfather's wakizashi symbolizes the marriage of a Kitsuki to that honored family, I could see your concern when I turned our talk away from my name.

You know we all lose pieces of ourselves when warring with the Shadowlands. Search for lost things, not for what no longer exists.

Those who lived these stories bore no hope that their words would live forever after their deaths. Indeed, I believe few of them would deign to associate with one another were they alive today. I bring you the words of daimyos, of historians, of ronin, heimin, hinin, eta and those corrupted by the Taint. Many here are the victors — many are the fallen and forgotten. Some had the courage of legends and some lived only by the virtue of their sandals.

They have nothing in common but this: they approached the minions born of the Festering Pit, and they came bearing jade.

You alone among the Phoenix would know that I do not send these, intentionally or unintentionally, as an affront to your station. And you alone, I think, would not only read the pages, but see them for what they are.

Words.

The Scorpion say that among the blind, even the honest lie about the color of the sky. I have found this wisdom useful, and I repeat it here for your edification. The accounts from centuries ago may be our best source for information, a colorful exaggeration by an artisan, or a mere rumor started by some long-dead courtier. The greatest hero may have been a fool in his own time, for when honor is at stake, the scribe's brush often falls before the sword of the samurai. If that is an ugly truth in the court of Rokugan, I invite them to come with me beyond the Kaiu Wall, where we can discuss the subject with the appropriate decor.

*It is with this same forewarning that I tell you of the scroll you shall find at the bottom of this box, which I must request you never show to those who have not earned your trust. You asked that I tell you the source of the rumor of the flying demon-sorcerers that gain strength for every living samurai they cut down. Of them, I have only two accounts. One, as you know, is from the infamous novel *Meifumado*, which I reprint as a matter of public knowledge in the first scroll. The other is on the last, which I found placed on my doorstep when the spirits of fire screamed to awaken me in the night. I suspect the nature of its origins.*

It has the information you asked to know.

If you are willing to open the door.

*Respectfully,
Seikansha*



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Seikansha is a ronin shugenja who travels through Rokugan, often making friends among peasants and samurai retainers. He seems easy-going, but those who know him discover he is cautious and sometimes ruthless. He follows groups of small-time magistrates, watching and researching them before approaching to chat about the dangers of the Shadowlands. He offers bits of his expansive knowledge in return for news and rice, then excuses himself before they pry about who he is.

If things get hairy, Seikansha runs. He hides. He heals his wounds and learns more about his eternal foes. He blasts them with shugenja fire and runs again. He's an honorless dog who needs to stay alive because he has to keep helping.

A few Scorpions at court suspect the truth of who he is, but really, why does it matter? He's just another ronin now, and no one in their right mind would suggest giving him his old life back. It would insult the competency of dozens of high-ranking people.

You see, when Emerald Magistrates achieve their new status, they are expected to uphold the noble offices to which they are assigned. They thank the Champion profusely for the glorious position and smartly get to work.

They are not expected to look for Taint among their superiors, or to continue looking after the initial tests were negative.

And never are they expected to find it.

Or run in the face of danger.

Or fake their deaths.

Or murder Emerald Magistrates in the name of the Throne.

And live.

Seikansha means "survivor."



Chapter 1:
Life at the
Mouth of Hell



From Ide Tadahito's Novel, Meifumado

Rare indeed is the year the Emperor holds his court under the mighty skull that guards Kyuden Hida. Only by the whim of Hantei XXXI were the great daimyos brought to the charred edge of the Shadowlands, to silence their squabbles of land and know that they were equals atop the Carpenter's Wall.

Three daimyo and I were to sleep in a well-furnished guardsman's chamber, for asking for special treatment from the Hida was inviting insult, and humility is an essential quality of the finest leaders. So this night, our entourage stayed by a roaring fire among the lowly retainers of the Crab.

Each daimyo went to the window one by one, peeking out at a lone figure encased in black steel. He watched for movement in the Shadowlands, as the Crab ever do, leaning on his yari in the long night.

"He does not seem to have so difficult a task this evening," Bayushi Sashiko opined, gesturing outside with a delicate hand, softer and perhaps colder than the snow. "The wind is silent. The wall is high. The bushi who claims such vigilance could well be Dragon, or Crane, or Scorpion."

"I would not begrudge the Crab their duty," added Kakita Toshimichi, "but my own soldiers have guarded walls in winter frost, similarly unflinching."

"Forgive me if I speak of fighting styles," Kitsuki Masakatada contributed courteously, "but the Kakita and the Mirumoto have ever argued over the most skilled yojimbo. If it is the value of a guard we debate, then I cannot fail to nominate my own."

"Why, let us have a contest," Sashiko concluded, with a smile. "A contest of yojimbo. And we shall see how the Crab guard Rokugan."

The daimyo summoned three yojimbo each, and all of us soon crunched ice beneath our feet as we went to talk with the lone bushi.

"Rest inside by the fire a while," Sashiko suggested, "for you have been out here many hours in the cold, and there are no oni about."

The Crab made no motion to bow or even look at her. "I will be in the cold for many hours more. The snow falls

thick and fast tonight, and the akutenshi will surely attack under its cover. I must refuse, for you are not my lord."

A few glances passed among the daimyo.

"Samurai," Kakita Toshimichi tried, "how can you fight when you are frozen to the spot, weary for lack of sleep? Here are nine fresh guards to relieve you, and each of them have fought oni before in our own lands." At this the daimyo smiled to one another, for he had slighted the guard in the process of revealing a truth.

"I will guard your lives better than any of your finest yojimbo," the Crab growled back. "I must refuse, for you know nothing of my post."

Kitsuki Masakatada held up a hand. "Then let us test it. Let us sleep in this place tonight and each leave three bushi at the walls to aid you. If an oni attacks, we shall see who slays it first." He began pacing, turning to the assembled yojimbo. "To the samurai who strikes the mightiest blow, before the court I will bestow a suit of armor laced with jade and gold." There were many looks among his Mirumoto retainers, for surely this was a great prize.

"For my part, I give a wakizashi," Toshimichi drew his own, for in the house of the Crab one kept his weapons on at all times. "This one was forged by the Kakita artisans." At this the Kakita retainers nodded, so hard pressed were they not to show their anticipation.

"I..." the lovely Bayushi paused. "I can think of little I would offer to equal such gifts but perhaps a gentle hand upon his cheek as I fit him with his new gear of war." And here all the retainers kept respectfully silent, though their hearts jumped at the most lovely prize of all.

The Crab only scowled. "Your bushi will be too slow," he said, "and they will die. None of you know how fast the akutenshi strike."

The Kakita and Bayushi destroyed his insult with laughter.

"At dawn," Masakatada snorted, "if you live, I shall speak with your daimyo, and you shall duel our bushi in turn." He turned to command his yojimbo. "Dip your swords in jade powder, and keep them unsheathed on your shoulders. Guard the western wall, for the oni may flank us."

Kakita Toshimichi admonished his men. "Dip your swords in jade powder," he said thoughtfully, "but dip your spears, too, for oni blood tarnishes blades. Guard the eastern wall, for it may indeed try to flank us."

"Dip your arrowheads in jade powder," Bayushi Sashiko ordered, "and shoot any oni you see, for they fight harder

than any man. Guard the northern wall, and look to the roof, for the oni will no doubt appear the last place it is expected."

And with that, we came inside and warmed ourselves before retiring.

A hellish scream from the south wall gouged the night, shocking us awake. I grabbed for my wakizashi, only to find the Dragon one step ahead of me. The oaken door flew to kindling, and one of the spawn of the Dark Brother floated before us as if made of freezing wind itself.

I thought surely it was a Fortune or the ghost of a god, for it was the most beautiful man I have ever seen. The witch-fire of its eyes lit the room, turning the stone green and the blood on its katanas black. Its skin was the white of Lord Moon, and it slid through the air on slim ankles, stepping on the gusts that blew towards Lady Bayushi.

Toshimichi struck without thought at its blades, almost in time. Its steel deflected into the wall and Sashiko's thigh. She lacked the presence of mind to cry out before the Kitsuki brought his katana and wakizashi together into the creature's elbow.

The blades stuck, and the room was paralyzed. We realized as one that all the jade powder was outside.

Masakatada fell back in a storm of swords that fanned and whistled and clashed with painful sparks. Just as the door behind me became splinters and I fell to the ground, his hand split down the middle and broke at the forearm. But a burly wall of hellish metal lunged directly into the fray and knocked the demon down with a sound like a smashed palanquin.

Hida Shonojo, daimyo of the Crab, had come at the scream, and he swung a bloodstained iron tetsubo welded with jade and crystal points. The glowing weapon crashed against its body like a tsunami. Yet it stood even after its katana snapped under his first blows; ten more only kept it off him. Its black claws screeched as it



THE LITTLE CRABS' CLAWS

At the Wall, heimin may keep peasant weapons, both for self-defense and as back-ups for samurai in need.

The Crab train and fight with anything handy. They still lose Honor when using peasant weapons, but this is the Wall. It's better than touching the enemy.

Manjisai: A sai with one quillion pointing up and one down, the central spike serving as the handle. Like the sai, it used to be a fork for hay baling or impaling poultry. Damage: 1k2.

Nunte: This is a bo staff with a *manjisai* on one end, making a spear. Use the Polearm skill. Damage: 3k1.

Yawara: A six-inch stick held in the fist to reinforce a blow, used mostly to hit pressure points. Use

Hand-to-Hand. Damage: 1k1.

Kai: Thick oaken oars, found all along the Wall, well away from water, due to their use as practice tetsubo.

Damage: 2k1. It does not ignore armor, or give any bonus to Initiative.

strove to tear the ancestral armor from his body, and he wedged the tetsubo between them, trapping the creature against the stone wall.

Just then, his yojimbo arrived, wedging their yari blades into its ribs. A black-clad Kuni screamed words of power, calling upon the Earth in a spray of greenish sunlight that tore its flesh. As the akutenshi fell to its knees, Shonojo rose like a mountain on end, drawing the glowing-hot blade of Chikara, and brought it down in tireless arms. Once. Twice. Two more times, forcing the night to silence once more.

We stood in the echo of those terrible blows, looking at the silk-like ghost that had twisted the tetsubo with its flesh and bone, and none of us would speak.

"These are indeed terrible creatures," Bayushi Sashiko admitted as the Kuni shugenja tended to her wounds. The smell of her blood was in the air, and it washed away the remaining haze of sake.

"They are," admitted Toshimichi. "And I would say that the Crab have their warriors as well."

"What of the contest?" Masakatada asked, composed with the shock that lets a man feel no pain. "And of our bushi?"

At this Hida Shonojo gave only a single word. "What?"

Quickly, the other daimyo told him. He shook his head.

"You should have known better. This is no place for games."

The Scorpion daimyo burned like the sun. "I am not ungrateful, Hida," said the Bayushi dangerously, "but in this *test*, you saved my life, not your arrogant man. Let us see where the fool is now." And we walked into the pre-dawn cold that turned our breath to crystalline wind.

By the north wall, the Bayushi bushi were dead, torn asunder and covered in black ichor. The Hida retainers decapitated them, gathered their armor, and flashed the codes down the wall that an attack was over. The eta put them in the signal fires, and the corpses were soon sheathed in flame.

By the east wall, the Mirumoto bushi were dead, necks cut from behind in slashes just deep enough to break the spine. They, too, were given the Crab's last rites, and their flesh took a long time to burn.

By the west wall, the Kakitas' swords were speckled with frost and their faces were withered with unnatural age. Maggots burrowed in their veins and it was all I could do to look upon them before they were gone.

By the south wall lay one final armored corpse, his body swarming with flies. They tore bits of his skin off in strange, serrated mandibles, a group venturing as far as his eyes. His ears and lips were already picked away, leaving him grinning in the morning light.

Kitsuki Masakatada wrapped a blanket about his kimono more tightly, and shook his head before bowing. "I believe I understand the lesson, Crab."

"As do I," the Kakita said quietly. "We are all equal before the Shadowlands."

"I have no sympathy," Bayushi Sashiko spat. "There is no winner to my contest. I will never say that man was equal to my yojimbo, for he fought no harder and no better. In truth, I see no sign he fought at all."

The Hida daimyo tunneled through her with a stare.

"Scorpion," he said gravely, "that man's job is to scream."

From Kakita Nanmaru's Collected "Letters From the Wall."

**TENTH DAY, MONTH OF THE OX, FIFTH YEAR OF HANTEI
XXXVI**

Where am I, sister?

I have joined the cackling madmen.

If there is a lesson here, it is that one can get used to anything. Four months ago, I knew that my life at court was over. Slight one Shosuro, and you might live. Slight three, and they won't be kind enough to give you a duel.

They have a nickname for us here. Ponies. It is from the old Yasuki practice of sending lame ponies as gifts to the Hida rather than killing them, to be tethered and used as bait when the ogres seek fresh flesh.

Only the Yasuki, my sister. And only the Crab.

I began my first day running in full armor, which I was late putting on, though the servants did their best they could. I expected the jibes and my placement with the retainers, and I expected my fainting and vomiting from exertion. I did not expect the hellish wind atop the Kaiu Wall, making the largest Crabs sink their stances while running and convincing me I was about to die when we took our exhausted legs down its rain-slick steps as fast as we could. I did not expect the pitifully screaming goblin captives to be released into the Shadowlands to be shot in the back for kyujutsu practice.

And the suspicion! A bushi blundered into me, apologizing. At first I thought him clumsy, but I saw he had palmed an arrowhead of jade and touched my skin with it, expecting I might burn at the touch! Routine, they call it!

Today in the barracks they told the *hohei* a tale. A Kuni shugenja goes into the Shadowlands in search of his lost Hida cousin, and finds him living in a cave, with wild

THE TRAPS SKILL

Constructing traps requires time, laborers and (for anything more complex than a covered pit) the resources of a daimyo to get the appropriate metal and stone. A Kaiu engineer attempting to design, construct, or re-set traps uses the skill of Traps. The base TN is determined as follows:

0 - Confining trap (pits, locking doors or portculli, etc.) or traps with a DR of 1 (characters with the skill don't need to roll unless they are adding Raises)

10 - Traps with DR 2

20 - DR 3

30 - DR 4

40 - DR 5

The TN can be changed by other factors; Raises are not limited by the designer's Void. Good trap construction usually takes days to weeks.

Damage: One Raise results in two extra dice rolled (not kept) for damage.

Accessibility: The designer gets a Free Raise if the trap must be re-set each time or must be triggered by a willing party (maximum one raise).

Concealment: To detect a trap when specifically looking, a character rolls Perception + Investigation or Traps, base TN 10. This TN can be raised by 5 for each Raise the trap's creator takes for this purpose.

Speed: If a character is generally wary but not specifically expecting a trap, they make a Simple Roll with the lower of their Intelligence or Reflexes, TN 10, to jerk away in time. The TN for this roll can be increased by 10 per Raise taken for this purpose during the trap's construction. When the TN for this roll is greater than 40, do not roll: the trap works, period.

Other situations can modify the TN for detecting or avoiding traps, e.g. darkness, being rushed, and especially running.



hair and eyes, surrounded by goblin skulls and armed only with a tanto. The Kuni checks him and incredibly, the man is free of Taint.

"How did you live, my cousin?" asks the Kuni. "You had no food or water."

"It was terrible," the Hida whispers. "But I remembered you said the Earth within living creatures resists the Taint longer than food. So I scrambled among the rocks until I found a fat little scorpion. I severed its legs and sucked at the stumps, and that served for water."

"You have learned my lessons well." The Kuni smiles. "The other men will want to know. How does scorpion taste?"

"Not so different from phoenix."

The young Crabs in the room all laughed.

The older Crabs did not.

ELEVENTH DAY, MONTH OF THE OX, FIFTH YEAR OF HANTEI XXXVI

"I am under orders to carry weapons," a heimin told me today. "These are yours if you please, but the bakemono

come after us sometimes, because we are easy." Her hair brushed the floor as she showed me her sai without looking at my face. Her friend had a kama.

"You think you can defend yourselves?" I asked.

"Oh, no, no, Kakita-sama, the samurai defend us. We cannot be samurai. But the bakemono, the ogres...if they get food, they can stay some time. So..." She shrugged.

"But they only give you small weapons for small enemies, so all is well?" I was being sarcastic.

Her friend gave her a glance, and they showed me where they keep the nunte. "Please, Kakita-sama, it lets us reach them before they reach us."

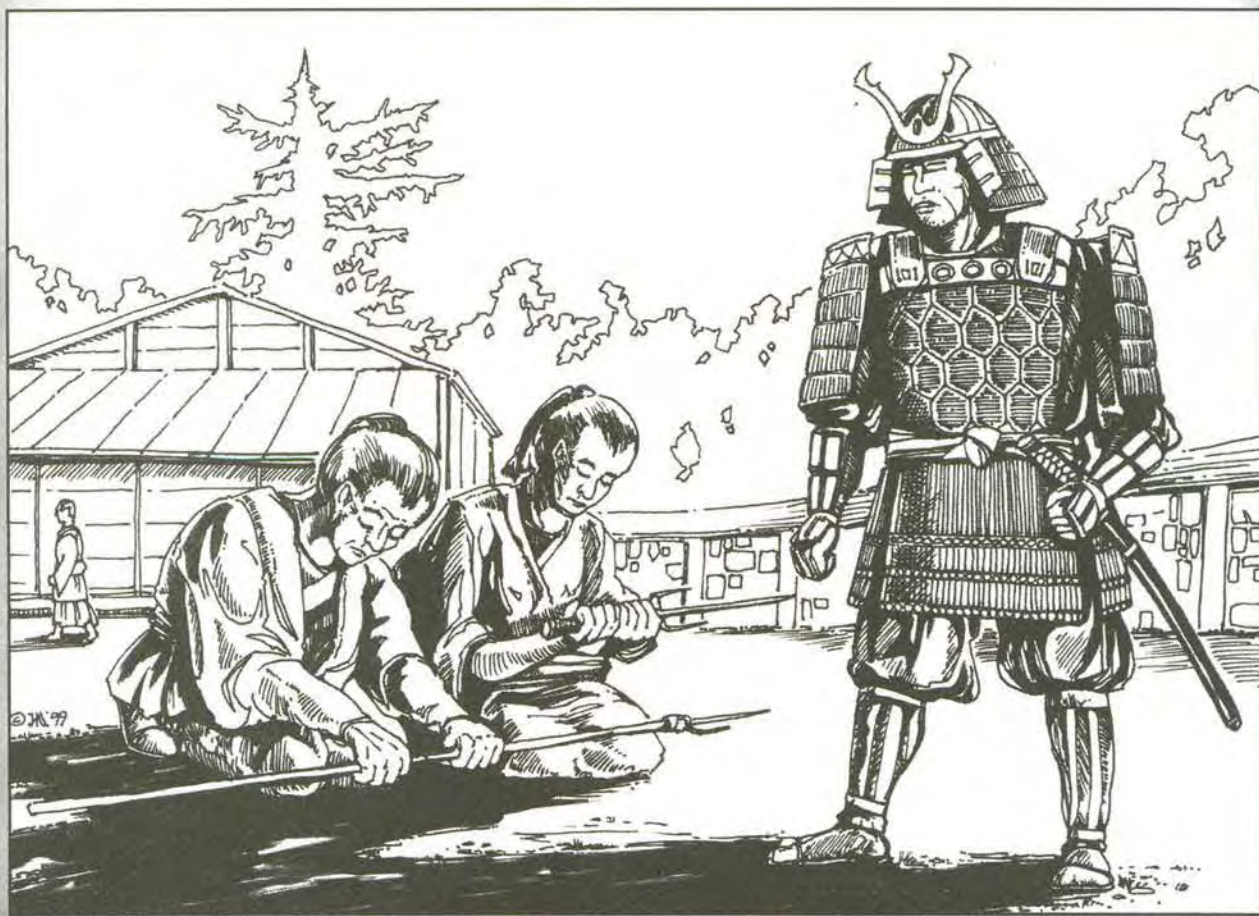
I could not believe it. There is no law here. The Crab would pluck the stars from the sky if they thought they could burn the Fallen God with them.

"You don't think of anything else?"

"Never."

She stared in my eyes. This heimin woman has killed before.

Yet she spoke the truth.



TWELFTH DAY, MONTH OF THE OX, FIFTH YEAR OF HANTEI XXXVI

I am on the second shift. They have three here: from the Hare to the Horse, from the Goat to the Dog, and from the Boar to the Tiger. I guard the work crews.

The tunnels require constant vigilance. When goblins flood in, the traps must be reset or next time they will not be slowed. If too many creatures know about a tunnel, it is sealed up. If the Crab need another, they open an old one and hope the creatures have forgotten. Or they open an old one and put in twice as many traps.

This practice is more businesslike than imaginative. Most traps are variations on spiked pits and locking chambers with murder holes. Ground glass or crystal is sometimes worked into the mortar to discourage creatures from climbing up. Poison has little or no effect on Shadowlands creatures.

They said this without shame.

We ran drills for when they burst through. "Know where the stone is," my sempai ordered. His name is Seiki. "Stone doesn't stop oni, but it gives you time. Never trust wood."

"There is no room to fight," I said.

He put his fist to my face, opened it, touched his fingernails to my eyelashes.

"This is room enough."

I finished the drill on the wrong side of a closing portcullis.

FOURTEENTH DAY, MONTH OF THE OX, FIFTH YEAR OF HANTEI XXXVI

"Be careful," I told Seiki, "The softest thing cannot be snapped. I have been taught to use your strength against you."

Hida Seiki smiled. "What makes you think I will give it to you?"

I bled on the floor and I did not know how.

"Soft things," he snorted. "Fighting like water. Fighting like wind. You are not an element. You are a man, with joints and sockets and weight."

He showed me. What they use is not a way. It is a school, kobo ichi-kai. Jujitsu, but not like ours. Seiki spoke of ranges, centerlines, circumferences of circles, facing the point of contact, weight distribution in terms of commitment, time in heartbeats.

"Imagine we are ogres," Seiki offered.

They surrounded me, until I learned how to fight a crowd.

I put my gaze on one, and they struck me from behind.

I tried to throw one, and they fell on me until I was on the ground in their midst.

I spun like the whirling Dragon, and they struck my back as I turned.

I watched the ground, and I could see all their feet. As soon as one moved, I leapt on him to kill him. Though he was in armor, I could still shove him into the others. The rest struck me from behind and knocked me to the ground.

I watched the ground, and as soon as one moved, I ran from him, forcing him to chase me, striking down his opposite who was not expecting it. I ran through them, and then I ran back, knocking them down, not meeting their eyes.

I will not be reborn as a peasant.

I am one already.

CRAB SLANG

For characters who did not grow up in "Wall culture," it takes Crab Clan Lore, TN 10, or Shadowlands Lore, TN 20, to understand the following coded slang. This can save lives.

Maru: the minimum time it takes an invulnerable oni to kill an armored man; approximately two seconds. Usage: "These guards will give us maybe ten maru."

Koma (pony): Non-Crab sent temporarily to the Wall to be taught a lesson.

Iye, dozo, osakini: "No, please, after you," a phrase used around annoying koma.

Mami! (deceiver): "There is a body-possessor or shapechanger among us. Take up standard positions."

Dairyo! (big catch): A multitude of goblins, ogres, and oni are coming.

Kanashiki! (anvil): The oni is only hurt by jade.

Banjaku! (big rock): The oni is only hurt by crystal.

Saiganki! (rock crusher): The oni isn't hurt by crystal or jade.

Suihi! (liquid manure): The oni is insubstantial or can go through walls.

Rutsubo! (melting pot): The oni gets stronger the more it eats.

Yamijiai: "Fighting unknown assailants; the situation is a mess." Equivalent to the American military term "FUBAR."

Tsuta (ivy): "The teahouse we are in is staffed by Shadowlands creatures in disguise. All the women around you are demons. They don't suspect I'm on to them. Say nothing. Grab your weapons. Meet me at the front door."

Yasha! (demon women): As above, but "the game is up; fight your way out."

LIVING WITH TAINT

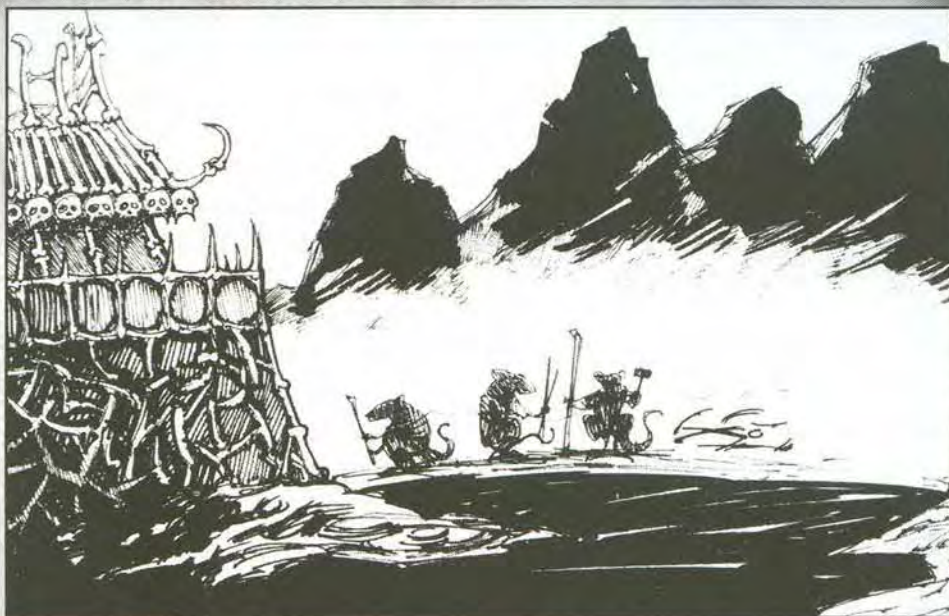
If a Tainted character with just a few points goes far from the Shadowlands, the involuntary spread slows, and they have a chance for a relatively normal life. However, they must make periodic Earth rolls to see if it gets worse. Tea of Jade Petals, if taken daily, prevents any spread. If a day or two is skipped, add 2 to the character's Earth for the roll. If taken sporadically (less often than the unmodified interval) it permanently loses effect.

A successful regimen of acupuncture, meditation, pure water, plenty of sun, and a monastic lifestyle such as at the Order of the Fallen Blossom gives one extra die to roll.

Earth Ring	Check Interval
1	14 days/Rank
2	30 days/Rank
3	90 days/Rank
4	180 days/Rank
5	360 days/Rank
6+	Earth in years/Rank

The checks are Simple Earth Rolls against a TN of 5. The TN increases by 5 at each subsequent interval until the roll is failed and the victim takes 1 Shadowlands Point. The TN then resets at 5. Void can be spent on these rolls. Shadowlands ranks of less than 1 do not spread.

Tainted people may not marry, since intimate contact (kissing included) may spread the corruption. To avoid infection during such an act requires an Earth roll with a TN of the number of Taint points (not ranks) the infected has. In Crab lands, exceptions have been granted for marrying another Tainted person, but the children are often small, deformed, evil from birth, or never spoken of again.



SEVENTEENTH DAY, MONTH OF THE OX, FIFTH YEAR OF HANTEI XXXVI

Blows today. We took off the armor, and after an hour of strangling and breaking, they made me stand. They waited until I tried to breathe and they hit me again. With fists.

"We start off light," Seiki announced. "Breathe in, breathe out, but stay tense. The muscle makes the shock go through the body, the body to the legs, the legs to the earth."

"Wouldn't it be better to get out of the way?"

"Of course it is," he said. "This is training for when you fail."

"I will not fail." Let him eat the motto of his family.

"Then you've never been asked to do the impossible more than once."

He hit me with a boken, and I doubled over. My abdomen was water and my limbs were heavy as gold. They laughed at me, but I stood up again.

"I am no courtier," I said to Seiki later in the halls. "Use the boken from now on. Give me hard blows."

"That wasn't hard," he said, wagging his tetsubo. "This is."

NINETEENTH DAY, MONTH OF THE OX, FIFTH YEAR OF HANTEI XXXVI

I killed last night.

They gave me a bow.

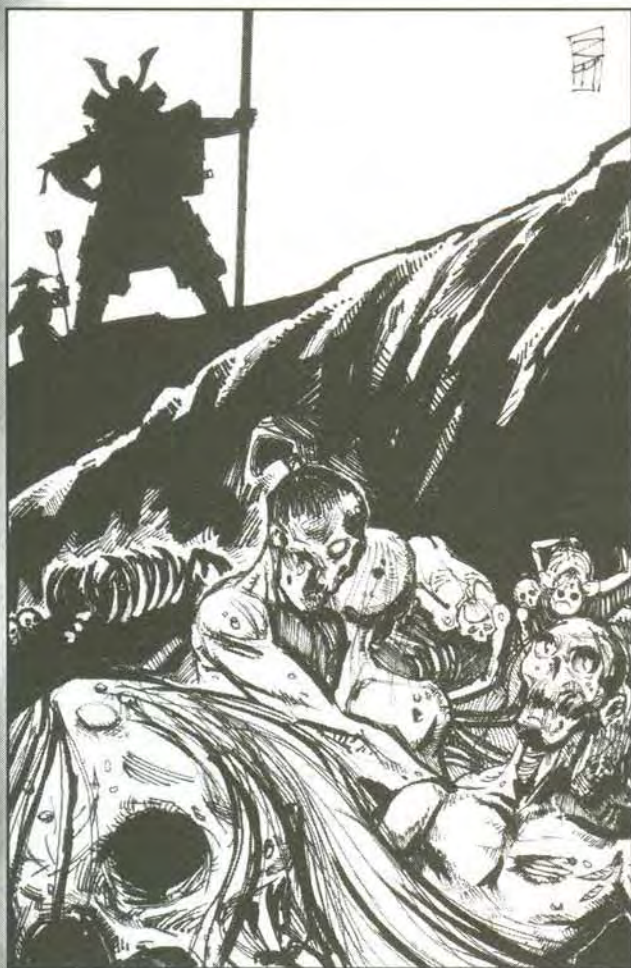
I awoke in armor as he came screaming down the length of our beds. Goblins had burst through to murder us in the night. They said to follow him as the others charged to the catacombs.

The floor exploded, and my sempai fell to his death. The keening little things swarmed over the dead, jabbing blades. We turned our bows on them through the smoke and fire. Follow the screamer, they said, while the bodies were breaking. Follow the screamer. I held one of them, like a cracked bowl, and all the soup leaked down my armor. He was hugging me. His name was Nanashige.

Something with nine heads rose beneath us and pulled on a samurai-ko. She had no breath, she was clay stuck together with red paint. The arms came off, and the paint just

stayed there. I kept shooting, and it stumbled like a drunk bushi, like the arrows made it stupid, and men died telling me to follow the screamer.

I followed him. Into the halls. The candles blew out with his passage and I ran in the dark. I heard him screaming they were coming from below, get the jade below. Then he ran and screamed to the top of the wall while everyone died down in the stone pit. I ran along the wall in the wind behind him and our Crabs charged down the steps and I was going to turn once we reached the third tower, but he just kept running. And I looked back and something with wings was behind me and they were taking the jade below and I remembered it had nine heads, not ten, because she'd cut it, she'd cut it before she died and they were taking the jade below and the thing with wings was chasing me and not making a sound and I stood my ground and shot it and it flicked the arrow away and the shadows were all over the moon, shadows with wings and crawlers with nails that could climb stone and the arrows all flicked.



I shot the screamer.

My new sempai says I did the right thing.

I didn't want to know his name. He told me anyway. It is Muneru.

"Your eyes aren't steady," he said this morning.

"How can you stand it?" I asked. "I hunted for three years for the man who killed my cousin. One man. And last night the distraction alone killed fifty. Yet I..."

I could not say it.

I only looked at my tea.

We line up at breakfast for it. The Hida are so polite to us. To me. They turn their backs as we walk to the line. They know. And we all know they know. There are no secrets here. Secrets are for Scorpions and oni. Not for us. But they are polite for this.

I leave the petals for Iso, who cannot afford it. Iso has no mouth, but he pokes a hole where it used to be, and sempai helps him swallow.

"I have lost two cousins," Muneru said, "a grandfather, an uncle, and two of my friends. I command men who will live the rest of their lives drinking tea like yours. In the barracks at night, I hear them crying in the dark because now they will never be married. But they must look strong for those who need them." His gaze probed the rough futon, and I knew he saw the stains of my eyes.

"They come to me," Muneru held up his arm. "And I ask them, 'You ever fight with knives?'"

I shook my head. Either I had my swords or I was in the house of someone who held them for me. "It's not like kenjutsu," he said softly. "It's messy. Both hands are threats; feet too. The knife kills you, but the free hand hits you and drags you into the blade. The legs kick yours to hold you still."

I watched as he pulled off his kote. "When everything happens quickly," he said, "you'll be cut and you'll get scars. But you can wear them here with muscle and bone," he ran a finger down the outside of his wrist, "or you can wear them here."

Muneru held his thumb over the tendons and arteries on the inside of my arm. I knew a man who'd been cut there once. He can no longer close his hand.

"A Crab wears his scars on the outside."

They must look strong for those who need them.

I understood more than he knew.

SHINSEI ON THE FIRST GREAT WAR

Patient men and lazy men make
terrible weapons.

Is there hope? Corruption
corrupts.

The lion likes the taste of wolf
until he meets the pack.

A friend only fools you once.

You see a man murdering a child.
The child is you. Know what you
would do next.

A courageous man has no need of
weapons; a sensible man wants all of
them; an ambitious man has plans for
the sensible one.

Be kind to the weak, the old, and
the ignorant. During your life, you
will be all of them.

Mirrors can kill by degrees.

There are three strong men who
look for weapons; the bodyguard, the
soldier, and the parent.

The hungry scorpions crawl across
the battlefield. The sated scorpion
sleeps in your boot. Which do you
fear?

Of the Shadowlands, Taint, and The Life Beyond, From the Lectures of Isawa Ichiro and Kitsu Bantaro

While I am sure you are familiar with Shintao doctrine on the corruption of souls, I have rarely seen anyone make as direct use of it as the Inquisitor Isawa Ichiro and his assistant Kitsu Bantaro. I am including the text of their lecture to the Tainted bushi currently seeking aid at the Monastery of the Fallen Blossom.

I do not believe you have been to the Fallen Blossom. They are a monastic order in the western Yugure Mountains seeking ways to deal with Taint other than jade treatments and magic. Most monks are Phoenix and Dragon, hoping to balance the Tainted's chi flow through acupuncture and medicine, ingestion of minerals and herbalistic wisdom. These methods are outstanding in intention, but questionable in effect.

Wall Crabs with discipline problems are often sent to the Order for a tranquil interlude, while retired bushi often stay to keep the peace among the rot-infested monks. An inglorious position to be sure, but it is a stronghold of honor on the edge of the Wastes.

-Seikansha

"Am I damned?" you ask, when you see the mon of the five elements and the lotus badge of the Inquisitors upon my sleeve. Everywhere, I have met men like you, seeking my answer to your haunting questions. When the Dark One's Taint touches your flesh, is *seppuku* the only option, or is this merely another adversity to face in the name of your lord?

It is well that you ask this, for I have no simple answer.

Shinsei teaches us everything is born, dies, and lives again. But the Taint eats at both body and soul. What becomes of such a one in the karmic cycle?

To understand this, you must understand that the fall of a kami created a sixth element, out of balance with the other five. This is the element of Taint, of corruption in all its forms. Your pain and tenebrous urges come from Corruption creating an imbalance of the other five elements in your body, mind, and spirit. When this reaches a critical point, you will give in at one of them. If it is the body, you will die of disease. If it is the mind, you will go mad. Only if it is the spirit will your soul's status in the Celestial Order change.

Were all those weak of body put down, the Empire would have lost many of its greatest thinkers. Those of you with corruption in your flesh can still serve your lord and clan with words and thoughts and actions. The weak of mind may yet have moments of lucidity, and their bodies might remain strong enough to hold the front lines. It is the weak of spirit we must all watch for and eliminate.

No doubt some of you have felt the Dark One testing you, felt the temptation to revel in his strength. Do not.

For just as those who call their magic with blood may deny their allegiance to the Emperor of Lies yet strengthen him with their prayers, so too do any who take joy in what

he gives. If the call becomes too much to resist, take your first opportunity to fall on your sword and maintain your honorable name, for otherwise you risk your place in the Order.

As for whether Taint will stay with you into the next life, few can say. No Kitsu has yet journeyed to Jigoku from south of the Kaiu Wall and lived. However, my own experience has shown that the Taint strikes the spirits of man as well as his flesh, for shiryo may be harmed if accompanying their descendants into corrupt areas. Though they are within the protection of any jade their descendant carries, my own haunted brother once found the spirit of my grandfather in pain sooner than he himself was once the jade was gone. The ghost-skin twisted, and a translucent black blood beaded in the ribs, yet he refused to leave my brother's side.

I can only conclude that the Fallen One can taint all things in the material realm, and no doubt corrupts the primal matter of Jigoku itself. If hearing of his power frightens you, I can only say this is good, for if you ever look lightly on what has happened, you open yourself to his

torture. Be ever vigilant, for he is always waiting. Waiting for you to lose patience, to panic at being weak or ugly or diseased, and to ask him for help.

The one note of hope I can offer is that my apprentice Kitsu-san joined my school after many years spent questing in the other world for lost souls with the Taint. And while they bear dark scars, he has seen them there, fulfilling their duties.

Though the Dark God can fill your skull with a kansen and twist the body into a zombie, he cannot upset the kharmic wheel. He cannot take your living soul without your consent.

While Isawa-sama went among the bushi finding the corrupt of spirit, I spoke with Kitsu-sama. Watching another man's tears as he hears for the second time that his life is over is a sight I have seen too often; I hoped to grant them a modicum of privacy as they sought their kaishakunin among the other condemned. Those who were cleared by the Inquisitor joined us, asking Kitsu-sama the questions they had been longing to hear answered. What did Shinsei himself think of the Tainted? Did the wisest man have a cure for those who fell prey to corruption? Why could he find no way to kill the Dark God, but only to bind him? I paraphrase his answers below.

-Seikansha

In the days of the First War, few had the strength of will to stand against the unbound power of the ninth kami. Those who were Tainted died swiftly, or gave their lives in service of darkness. Because Shinsei never encountered a survivor of Taint, every shugenja school and monastic order in Rokugan teaches of it differently. Trust Isawa-san when he says what is and is not a danger, for the Phoenix Inquisitors do not err on the side of leniency.

Though the Tao of Shinsei contains many of Hantei's questions about his brother's armies and whether Shinsei saw any peaceful solution, it has no direct answers. The most famous question and reply – Hantei asking why the kami could not go and Shinsei saying Fortune favors the mortal man – scholars interpret as a “no.”

Shinsei's beliefs in this field have been extensively debated, and many scholars have asked why Shinsei chose to bind the Fallen God rather than kill him. In every family and every generation, a different answer is put forth.



My own school says simply that killing the Dark One would send him to Jigoku. We teach our third-year students to walk out of parts of Jigoku; why then could our greatest enemy not do the same?

The Agasha school have focused their attentions on Shinsei's first response when Hantei asked if he knew his brother's tactics. "A man sees the threads of the kimono, asking them why they are so coarse. A weaver asks another weaver of the pattern." The Asahina school instead quotes Shinsei's words to Shiba that "one must bow to offer aid to a fallen man," and asks their students if perhaps the greatest teacher used twelve Black Scrolls to teach a lesson to the unteachable.

The Isawa look at the writings of their ancestor, knowing that Shinsei used Isawa's knowledge to create the scrolls, and suggest that they were a calculated risk. Killing the Fallen One and sending him to Jigoku could lead to corruption there, destroying the world's energies in ways we have yet to fathom. At the border between worlds, his taint could touch the Celestial Order, our ancestors, the Great Cycle, or even the Void to permeate everything that was or will be.

The Iuchi family has spent little time on the question. For them, even Shinsei was only a man, and his wisdom an improvisation which made the best use of what was available at the time.

The Kuni note that Akodo died fighting the Dark One's servants, and no one knows the fate of Hida...or Shinjo...or Shiba...or Bayushi. As a Kuni of my acquaintance once said, "Shinsei knew that ripping Fu Leng into twelve pieces and binding each with scrolls of eternal torture was the only way to distract him, and still, he retains the power to Taint the entire Shadowlands, to create oni, and to grant powers like Iuchiban's to his servants. Now do you have an inkling of what it is I fight?"

Of the Scorpion schools, I know little. When I asked a Soshi sensei why he thought Shinsei had created the twelve scrolls, he smiled without humor and asked me: "The wisest man on earth addresses himself to Ikoma regarding the destiny of Rokugan. Matsu arrogantly strikes Ikoma down and takes his place, and you debate why the results weren't perfect?" The one Yogo I have met simply walked away, saying the answer to the question was too dangerous to discuss.

Hantei himself asked Shinsei if his brother was irredeemable, and Shinsei replied, "A master teaches. A student learns. If there were time enough in every world, there would be no decision."

I can give you no clearer statement than that.

Of the Superstitions of Rokugan's Half-People, by Yasuki Masahine

Yasuki Masahine was, by all accounts, a helper to all, a lover to some, and an enemy of none. "The friendly little Crab" – a curious appellation for a woman who idolized her Kuni mother – has a legacy at court as a confidante who stopped a potential war between Crab and Crane.

Though not a shugenja herself, in her later years she devoted her time to recording peasant superstitions for the Kuni school, convinced that some of them had basis in fact. "A lord never worries in front of his samurai," she once said, "but the table-maid knows who is eating."



Regrettably, her tests led to her death by an oni in Lion territory, but some of her notes survive in draft form. The ronin still speak of her as one of the otokodate - brave heroes who stand up to injustice.

-Seikansha

I had thought Phoenix peasants might be better educated than most, but this is not the case at Holy Home Village. They know no glass or crystal and cannot afford jade, so they make do with copper. The so-called "copper test" pierces a body part with a wire which is supposed to tarnish if Tainted. The practice is common among women who pierce their navels to make sure their children will be born free of dark influences.

The tea plantation workers of the Crab bear more burn scars than most. It is said when children are born with birthmarks, it is a sign of their potential for evil. The mark is burned off and rubbed with chalk when they can get no sea salt.

A Tainted geisha in Crane lands took small amounts of *kirei-ko* eye powder in her sake, keeping her pale and preventing tumors from growing.

A large stock of "tea house stories" reveal dozens of ways to detect if a client is a shape-changed oni or maho-tsukai.

If a samurai has particularly white teeth and looks in the mirror often, he may be an oni checking that his human form is worn correctly. If his toes are hairy, he may be an ogre. If he seizes upon the first girl the oka-san offers, make certain he does not look only at her heart or eyes, for oni eat those first.

If he tries to touch too soon, he may be trying to spread the Taint. Salt water burns oni with its purity, so prepare his bath with salt.

Most oni breathe noisily through their noses.

If he takes her walking, she should turn left and distract him until they make a wide circle. Once she returns to her starting point, his true nature will manifest.

Decline if he insists you come to his castle, for he will take you off to be eaten.

While these stories are most common in Crab holdings, I found almost as many near Yogo Shiro and among the eta of Ryoko Owari. This was flabbergasting, for I found few reports of Shadowlands activities there. In nearby lands such as the Matsu and Iuchi, the geisha are at least as cultured, but lack these prohibitions.

Curiously, the traditions do not mention oni taking the shapes of samurai-ko, only samurai, predominately of the Crab and Scorpion clans.

A most disturbing story regarding an oni arose near the Iron Rings Cascade. It is said that faithless men struck it with pure jade and nothing occurred. A Phoenix shugenja consulted the Oracle - in some tales the Oracle of Water, in some the Oracle of Air - and it said that only a samurai who killed before he could walk could slay the oni. It was finally vanquished by a bushi just past his gempukku whose mother had died giving birth to him.

A cremator in Toshi no Inazuma tells me that once in a burned village, the cremators found the body of a woman who died in childbirth. Yet the infant lived inside the coffin,

ADVANTAGE: HEISHO (2 POINTS)

Every day of his life, the character expects to die. This is similar to the Death Trance advantage in that it grants immunity to the Fear power. In addition, the character gets a Free Raise for noticing traps, concealed weapons, and other dangers.

The problem is, the character is numb and tends to accept what comes rather than planning ways out. They have a +5 to all TNs to detect lies or convince another of their sincerity.

DISADVANTAGE: RANSHIN (1-5 POINTS)

Your character has been traumatized beyond the point of nightmares. Casual acquaintances may not realize you are unstable, but it is soon evident. Memories of war are everywhere: sudden movements look like attacks, a cough reminds you of Tainted victims, playing children sound like goblins.

The GM can call for a Simple Willpower roll, TN 20, a number of times per session equal to the cost of the disadvantage. If this roll is failed, the samurai goes into post-traumatic stress disorder, fearfully lashing out, fainting or having full-sensory flashbacks. Conversely, the urges could mean you are the sort of samurai who leaps into oni mouths believing you can carve your way out. You are uncontrollable in Rokugani society; you have emotional outbursts, cackling laughter, and make snap decisions which cause a steady loss of face.

**DISADVANTAGE:
A HOME IN ASHES
(1 POINT)**

Your immediate family lies dead, butchered by Shadowlands creatures.

Besides having no kin to speak for you or to call on for aid, you cannot use the Kharma rule with this character, and have no lands or savings to attract a spouse.

**DISADVANTAGE:
SCARRED (1 POINT)**

Unhealed wounds in the Shadowlands that were not infected by Taint still leave disgusting, visible marks. Common scars whiten the skin, twist and blacken it or turn it green and oozing. These subtract one die on all social interactions and two for seduction.

nursed by her ghost. One of the samurai adopted the child for his own and named it Yorei-ke, "ghost hair," for its translucent hair.

Years later, an oni arrived, and demanded the flesh of all the children in the village, one at a time. The samurai were no match for it, except Yorei-ke, who substituted himself for another child. When the oni bit him, it screamed in pain. He dipped his sword in his own blood and slew the thing easily.

I suspect this to be a devolved re-telling of the previous legend besmirched with the idea that ghosts can be hurt by weapons with human blood on them.

Among the peasants of the Dragon and Phoenix, sixth sons are considered unlucky, for the Fallen One was the sixth son of Heaven. Often parents of six sons will give the sixth to another family to raise in the hopes of sparing them from the Dark One's fate.

The palace at Otosan Uchi has a number of Tainted supplicants seeking audience with the Emperor in the hopes that his forgiveness can cure them. The guards drive them away, but some beg at the four Hub Villages.

The merchants in Mura Sabishii say that every spring, an enormous ogre called the *namahage* descends from the mountains, dressed in a grass hakama, carrying a boken. While completely resistant to arrows, spears, and prayers to the Fortunes, he is incredibly foolish, and terrified of oni, so they have an annual festival to drive off the ogre by wearing oni masks and beating on drums.

The farmers of Friendly Traveler Village speak of *onigo*, demon children born with teeth in their mouth. The mother is usually cast out in shame and is expected to walk into the sea carrying the demon until they both drown.

The eta of that same village call their young men by unpleasant names (such as "dung" or "animal flesh") or by girls' names so oni listening from the spirit world see their sons as worthless and do not attack them.

The folk of the Plains of the Golden Sun collect live silkworms and keep them in cages by their bedsides or around their necks. The silkworm, protected in its cocoon, can protect its charge from evil thoughts, and sleeping under silken sheets is said to prevent baku (q.v.) and gaki from eating dreams.

The Twists of False Madness by Kuni Mataemon

Kuni Mataemon was the first tsukai-sagasu allowed among the Unicorn after their return. I include his short work on how to deal with madness in those who must face the Shadowlands every day. These lessons are still taught in the Iuchi shugenja schools, so that more samurai can recognize early signs of the Taint and avoid future diplomatic incidents with bushi at the Kaiu Wall.

-Seikansha

KNOW WHAT THEY FEEL

I have fought the Shadowlands in Rokugan and in their home. I returned from over sixty forays and after my last one you asked how I alone of thirty Crabs survived.

I am not alive because I am a righteous or good man rewarded by destiny. I am not alive because I have skill and technique superior to the men who died around me, or because I obeyed or disobeyed orders. I am not alive because I knew I would win.

I am alive because I walked to the left of a tree stump and not the right.

THE MAD MOMENT

We all have moments of unrestrained, certain action: the void. The mind analyzes only after the moment, saying "I did not know how or why I did that," or "I command that power." In the moment of analyzing, we may twist one statement to look like another. With that twist is a self-lie, and that begins madness.

THE LYING OF ACTIONS

You can lie with your words, but this can be remedied by actions; you say a thing is so, but when I act, I see it is not so, and you are wrong.

The lying of actions causes madness. When I know the dead do not walk, and you know the dead do not walk, and we see a walking dead man, we can be wrong and the universe is right, or we are right and the universe is wrong. The self-lie – saying "we are right" in the face of the universe – makes us mad.

When you think my words are actions, my words can drive you mad.

Words can rest unspoken in your head, and they are still words.

What drives a man mad is the feeling that the world is a trap that never ends.

THE WORLD AT THE WALL

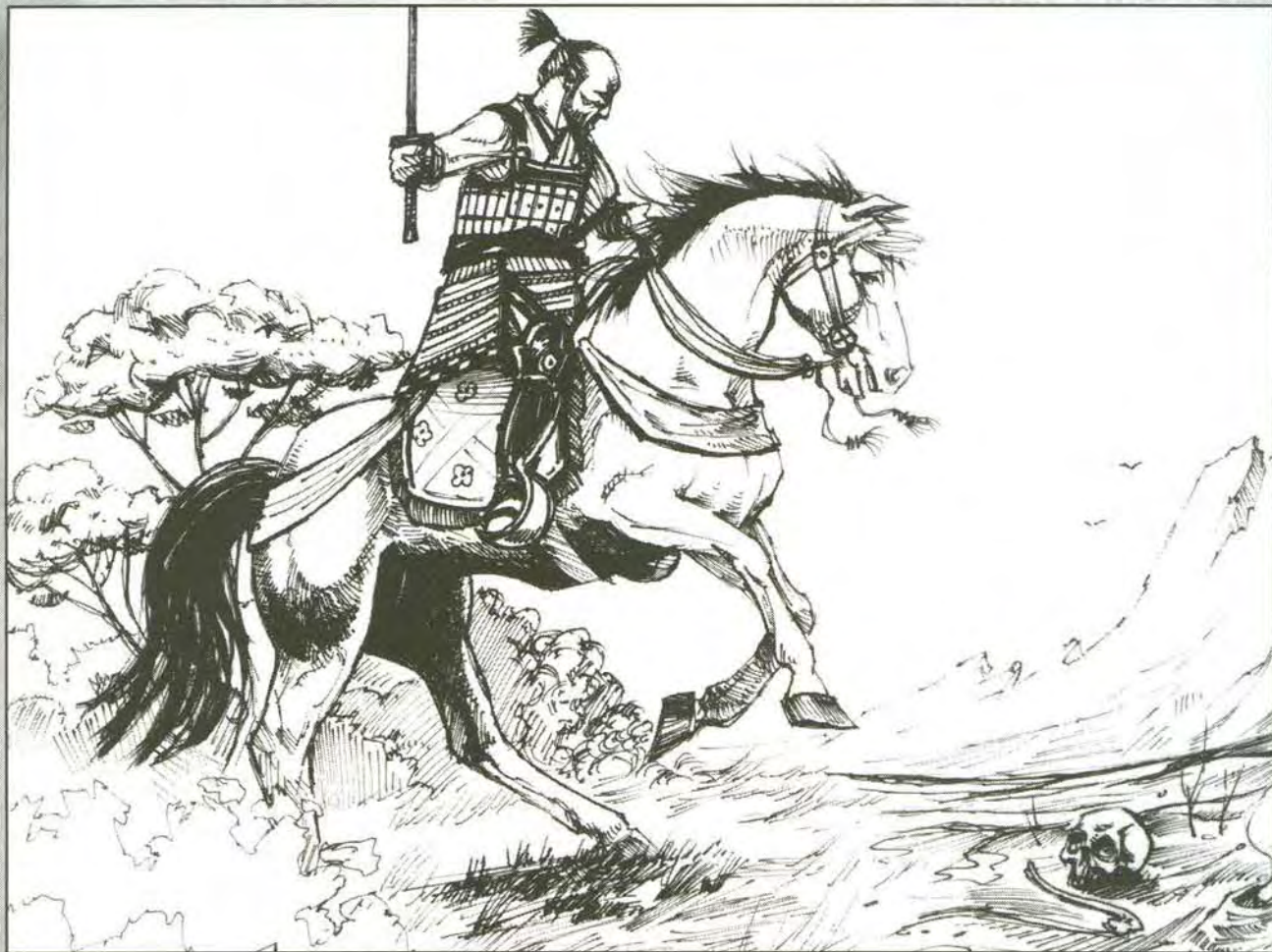
Is loyalty to your lord is the highest virtue? Yes. Is loyalty to an oni in the body of your lord the highest virtue? Answer with the speed of no-thought or die.

The world changes every night on the Wall. In Rokugan, it stays the same for a thousand years. When you jab your futon with a knife each morning to ensure it is not an oni in disguise, you are not in Rokugan. You are on the Wall. To say otherwise is a self-lie.

On the Wall, a samurai must train until the body gives out. His body must know what to do when the mind is not there. He must fight in water, fight when knocked to the ground, fight with a broken arm, fight in the dark against ten dead men that an hour ago were called friend. The moment something seems amiss, he must break bones as if walking through grass. If he cannot, he will soon be the food or the slave of the enemy.

When you wake a Crab, use a stick.





THE POSITIONS OF FALSE MADNESS

Men dream of the Dark One far more often than the Dark One appears in dreams. Madness may happen with or without his help. I speak not of the touch of Lady Sun, who deems at birth that a child will stay simple or believe himself emperor of the cuttlefish. I speak of the false madness of Lord Moon, from the clash of war and the sight of the unnatural hordes of the Little Brother. Watch for the nine types.

The one weak in Air cannot loose himself of habits. He may check to see if the door is barred twenty times in a night, or cleanse himself hourly with baths and salt.

The one too strong in Air cares too much for himself. "Look at me!" he brags, like an actor on the stage, overplaying everything in the face of death.

The one weak in Water fears one thing more than all others. He may see a pair of lanterns and think them oni eyes, or collapse at the presence of a high wall like the Kaiu. The one too strong in Water sees too much and knows

everything is a threat. He cannot judge, and believes other men plot his death.

The one weak in Fire becomes as one dead or deep in mourning. He cannot care for his family, his comrades, or even his lord. He does not move or eat and barely breathes.

The one too strong in Fire is extremely rare: he outsmarts himself, sunders his being like the Phoenix and becomes many people at once.

The one weak in Earth cannot be still. He becomes cheerful, energetic, yet when left alone or ignored can be hateful. His demeanor swings like the ends of a staff, for hours or days, between the passionate and the vengeful.

The one too strong in Earth believes he is destined to rule the world.

The one too strong in Void knows things we do not. He hears whispers, smells scents he cannot control, and speaks in a language no man speaks. He lives in a world of his own that may make no sense to us. Such men are to be watched.

ON TREATMENT OF THE MAD

The false madness is of Lord Moon. To kill oneself under his influence is spilling blood in his name. This must never be done. If a man kills while mad, he must die bloodlessly. Drown him. Question his family about his crimes. They may commit *seppuku* if necessary.

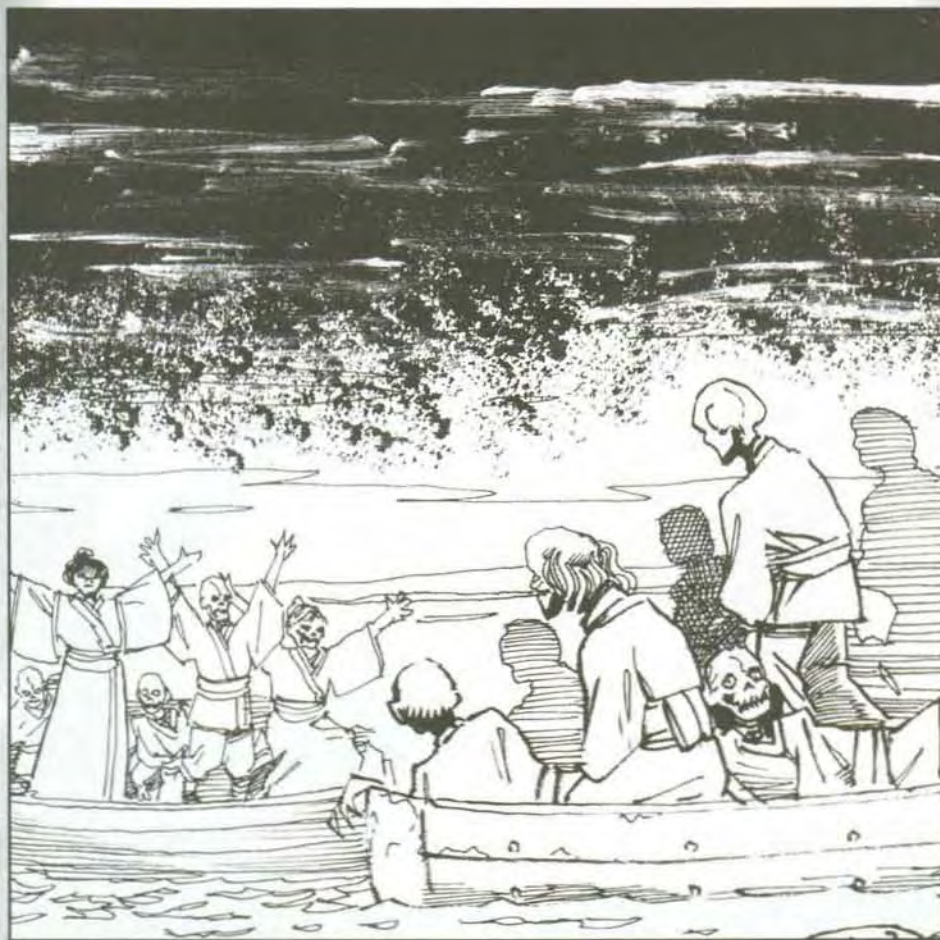
When you find a samurai you cannot trust, ask for his swords. Bind him and hang him from a tree for three days. Get a man who is willing to starve with him until he understands and let them converse, but never alone.

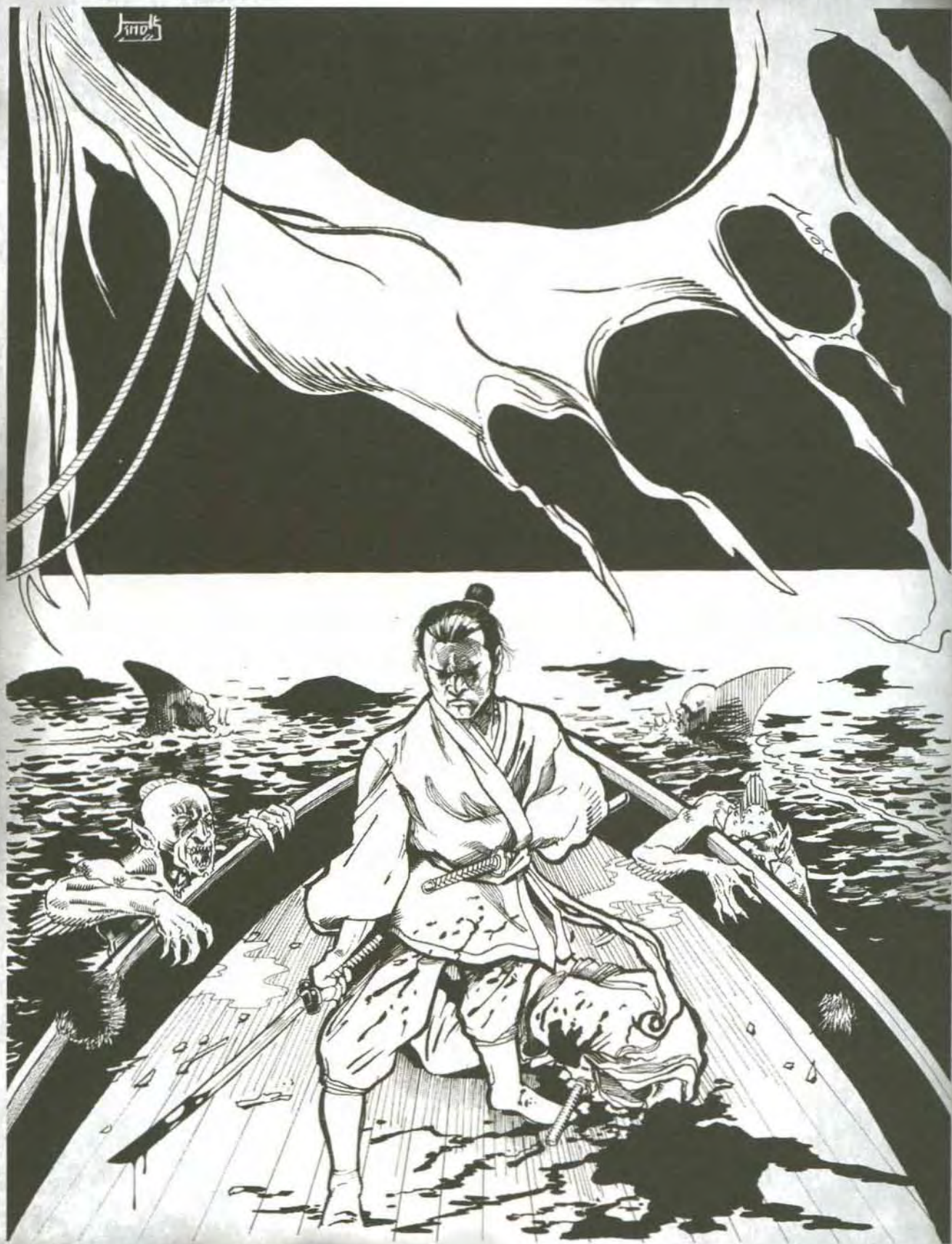
If the madman looks dangerous, build a cage of iron, four tatami mats long and two tatami mats wide. If he has shamed you already, place it in the garden where he is exposed to the elements. If it is to be within the family, leave it inside.

It is good for your daimyo to have at least two cages for his magistrates' use. They should be small enough to be disassembled and put on a two-horse cart. Among my brethren, they are used when cuffing is not enough and execution is not desired. The cage is ideal for madmen who may have accomplices, since without the key, even Tainted samurai cannot get through the bars.

Sons and daughters who bear unreasoning passions for heimin, hinin or Scorpions can be put in the cage to ensure the safety and honor of the family line. Better still, their lover may try to flee with them, allowing both to be caught and mercifully punished for their sickness.

When the prisoner knows he will never be in a trap without end again, let him free from it, but no sooner.





Chapter 2:

The Tarnished Lands



USING THE TARNISHED LANDS

The Shadowlands is a vast wilderness where the sun doesn't shine, fires don't burn, and wounds don't heal. The trees are dead, the earth is muck, and the water is poison. But even this won't impress jaded players unless the descriptions stay fresh.

This chapter details specific places in and around the Shadowlands to set scenes, from initial investigations to climactic showdowns. There are also thousands of Shadowlands sites we'll never have room to describe, so run wild. The only rule is that Fu Leng's lands will warp all that Rokugan holds dear. He will have shrines which turn offerings to blood, villages where men are strapped down like bonsai to twist their growth, even zombie peasants served hand and foot by fawning samurai. This place's very existence is a deliberate insult to the Son of Heaven.

I know that your new duties on the Council of Five have reduced your opportunities to explore the dark realms personally, and your importance to the empire must keep those journeys you do make far from the interior. The following documents may aid your search for the oni lord Akuma, or at least give insight into specific locations both to avoid and examine.

-Seikansha

To Bayushi Shoji, Scorpion Clan Daimyo, From Soshi Neota, Magistrate and Visitor in the Lands of the Crab

Though peripheral to the Shadowlands, the Crab jade mines seemed of sufficient importance to warrant inclusion. An acquaintance found this document on the dead body of a Scorpion messenger (the usual result when one is suddenly revealed as a spy in the middle of a teahouse full of Crab). Its code was simple to break.

- Seikansha



Greetings Bayushi-sama, and hopes that all is well with your family and home. I certainly would prefer the perfumed air of Kyuden Bayushi to my present surroundings. The Yasuki attempt to cover the coarseness of a Crab with the feathers of a Crane, and prove only that they are both boors and fools. Yet when so much of their land bears the Dark One's curse, the hand of the fool with the purse strings is powerful indeed.

But while I am certain my lord has no interest in common mercantile matters, I would be honored to remind him of the Yasuki's great role in the Crab's war with the Shadowlands. It is true that few take up katana and tetsubo to join the Hida at the Wall, but something of theirs has gone with every bushi who ever laid down his life at the Cresting Wave River.

Jade.

Though the Mantis collect no small profit from the stone, and our own merchants' activities are on schedule, the Yasuki cartels show no sign of slowing production. The Wall Above the Ocean mountains, I have found in my stay here, are dotted from foot to peak with the tents and carts of miners. Though my poor horse could hardly carry me to all of them, and the mountains are large enough that not even the spirits of earth could answer how many there were, I detected over a dozen on the western slopes alone.

These are located far back from the road, in strips of land the peasants may not leave, for the Hida do not wish anyone to know their mines' locations. Indeed, they have kept their secret well, for the Yasuki see no profit from the trade. Rather than sell the mined jade, Yasuki Taka (yes, that foul peddler is truly the family daimyo as he claims... if only he would take lessons from a venerable Shosuro who might teach him that disguises are only useful when they can be abandoned) has ordered shipments four times a year directly to Hida Castle, taking his reward in protection and favors.

To further confuse potential bandits, the system is decentralized; each Yasuki family mine receives its ordered shipping time, determined by a complex Kaiu formula involving the rotation of the stars and the number of times it has rained this season. A well-timed assault could stop one shipment from one mine, but never the entire stream.

Any robbers would be in for quite a surprise, for I was shocked to learn that the "merchants" driving each wagonload of stone are Hida-trained Yasuki samurai, hitching carts like commoners. Only the most trusted Hiruma accompany them as guards, with orders to charge to draw off an attack and buy the caravan's escape. The reports of progress from each mine are sent by disguised scouts, who will slit their own throats rather than face capture.

I mentioned that Crab paranoia about their jade is... significant, did I not?

The daimyo of the Crab families travel between the mines, but it is not certain whether even they are permitted by to talk about their finds. Only Hida-sama himself and his most trusted yojimbo have visited every mine in Crab territory, and I hope you will forgive my impertinence if I say it seemed imprudent to look closely into his sojourns. Upon leaving Zanrui mine, the largest of the Yasuki mines, the expression on his face was a trifle... displeased.

Should Yasuki jade supplies run low, it might give our own merchants the bargaining tool needed in any future conflicts with the Crab. However, I strongly caution against hastening such circumstances.

Though I know in the past my knowledge of the elements has proven of less worth to you than my knowledge of politics, I must speak on this matter as your shugenja no

Challenge: The forces of Fu Leng erupt into a character's home province (preferably one with Great Destiny). Oni are everywhere, and their daimyo's forces only have enough jade to hold out for a week before the creatures destroy everything. They need allies, and fast.

Focus: While the bushi fight, the courtiers dash off to seek allies, but even together, the combined army is swamped in a horrid defeat. The critical news hits: there isn't enough jade among the Clans for an invasion like this.

Their only hope is the mysterious Dragon, who may have secret stores they could share. After a hellish climb, the PCs must convince Yokuni himself to aid them.

Strike: In return for his aid, Yokuni asks that they enter the Dragonlands to retrieve... a ceramic urn. Their virtue is tested to the utmost, and if they return successfully, Togashi refuses to help further, saying what they need lies within.

The heroes return to the battlefield, where they can open the urn to release a wispy cloud, a preserved memory of Amaterasu of a time when Onnotangu hurt her. The sky darkens as She turns her face away. The oni howl in triumph. Castles fall. Daimyo die. Even the Emperor's forces falter as disaster looms.

Then light breaks through the eclipse, Lady Sun cries, and for as far as the eye can see, it starts raining jade.

FINDING JADE

In the PCs' own lands, merchants will be happy (on pain of death) to donate a finger or three of jade for the daimyo's business. Outside their lands or on short notice, magistrates or their servants may have more difficulty. When PCs are running through town looking for jade and dramatic necessity is optional, roll one die with the following (cumulative) modifiers. On a 1-5, there is no jade; it will have to be shipped. On a 6-10, some is available.

Modifiers:

- Crab Lands: +3
- Crane Lands: -1
- Dragon Lands: No modifier.
- Lion Lands: -3
- Phoenix Lands: -2
- Scorpion Lands: No modifier.
- Unicorn Lands: +1
- Minor Clan Lands: -2 (Mantis +2)
- Major City: +1
- Tiny Village: -1

Merchants generally hold an unworked finger of jade's value at 2 to 4 koku, and a bowl of jade powder at 1-2. Crab bushi prefer to keep the jade supply to themselves, and non-locals may need Sincerity or Commerce rolls to convince a merchant to sell it to them.

less than your servant. Think on this: Jade is all that protects us when we face the forces of the Dark One. If it is removed, what will protect the land itself?

My lord, I cannot stress this point more strongly. I myself have discovered the lost Dorui mine, an old source of family fortune in the Kuni Wastes. It ran dry, mined until the last traces of green had been yielded from the rock, then abandoned, in the confidence that more would arrive in time.

I have been there, my lord, and I dug into the rock to serve you. The Taint goes deeper than a crew of heimin can dig in a day.

Dozens of such empty mines pepper the Kuni and Hiruma lands, the original source of the clan's jade stores, and I fear that when they were emptied, it allowed the Taint to eat away at the lands' foundations, setting the course for their fall to the Maw. As the Master of Secrets, you have doubtless heard of the mountain trolls found as far north as Unicorn lands, and the suggestion of an underground network of caves leading straight to the Shadowlands. And I am certain you have noticed how often these reports occur near an exhausted mine.

It is with this in mind I come to my recommendation, Bayushi-sama. The council has suggested selling both jade and greenstone to Kyuden Hida this fall, so our own supplies are little depleted. I cannot advise this. The only thing worse than an angry Crab is a dead one. Kindly do not sell them false jade, and do not sell them ours.

I have, however, drawn up a plan for negotiations with the Shinjo that I would be honored to submit.

I hope I serve you well, Bayushi-sama.

Your Humble Servant,
Soshi Neota



The Creeping Earth, From the Papers of Hiruma Furososhi

A former associate from my studies in Kuni lands allowed me to examine a few scorch-marked scrolls dated shortly after the Unicorn's return. This one particularly horrified me, for its ideas were so logical, yet never discussed. His papers have generally disappeared from most fields of study, but some Hiruma sensei still acknowledge his theory as the only answer to their own experiences.

-Seikansha

This is the fourth time I have read the maps, and I fear I am not mistaken.

The discrepancies I see have always been blamed on the confusing effects of Taint and hunger, differences in style or the featureless nature of the Shadowlands' terrain. It is easy to argue that one patch of desiccated tree trunks looks much like another, and a few degrees more or less east are nearly impossible to tell when mist blocks all sign of sun or stars, but I have followed as Kaiu taught: reports are like flour, and must be sifted. I did so and found a common occurrence: Once past the fork between the Black Finger River and the River of the Dark Moon, there has never been a single detail of landscape preserved from account to account.

It is beyond belief that no scout was able to muster even the most basic skills of observation. My own students Yakoshi and Mareiko, two of the most promising of their generation, entered the lands not six weeks apart on the exact same route, yet returned respectively with a map of a fetid swamp and the detailed description of a parched wasteland. I could no longer believe any explanation save the one so obvious no one wishes to credit it.

The lands move.

It is the only reasonable explanation. The Kuni know the most heavily Tainted soil becomes a swampy, liquid mass, and the strongest Taint leaks up from its master. Imagine, then, the layers of rock and soil float on this liquid like flower petals in a wide bowl of tea. Now stir the tea. As these lands are drawn to the Fallen God, they orbit, slowly but definitely, around their master. This explains why even the bravest warriors sometimes do not return from the shadowed realm. Even victorious, they can still be beaten by the connivance of the land itself, leaving them wandering until starvation or death. The areas to the north seem not to have succumbed to the pull (perhaps they are still tied to the bedrock of Rokugan), but I believe the rate of rotation increases the closer one gets to the center.

While this movement is far too slow to detect on a scouting mission, it becomes clear that the features of the Shadowlands have rotated: hills, forests and valleys ever shifting. I believe the Kaiu could calculate its center if only we could measure the journey to the southernmost edge. The Unicorn strangers do not say if such a thing exists, but I have heard stories of ivory and bone towers on the far side of the dark lands, where strange men pray for their own deaths.

My suspicions were confirmed not one month ago, when Geiku, a man of no small reputation, returned from a foray to the Black Finger's edge. Though he had been there once before and told of a flat plain cut by the dark waters, this time he brought back a

NAVIGATING THE SHADOWLANDS

Furososhi's stirred tea analogy is not quite right; the actual pattern of the changing lands is less like a whirlpool and more like ripples in a pond fed by a dozen underground sewers that frequently spit up rocks.

The lands begin changing at the Black Finger River. They rotate irregularly, a given spot averaging half a mile per day. Though nearly imperceptible while traveling, this can mean a "perfectly safe" route home now takes characters through quicksand, oni dens, or in a direction other than north. PCs must roll Intelligence + Shadowlands Lore, TN 20, to know of this phenomenon.

Characters trying to leave the Shadowlands roll Perception + Navigation, TN 15, +5 for every day they are in the changing lands, to detect the correct direction. (Characters without Navigation may use Hunting, but at a TN of 20.) Raises make the route safer, faster, or come out in a specific location.

The Way of the Land (Shadowlands) advantage does not automatically prevent characters from getting lost, but gives two Free Raises to the roll.

NEW SKILL: NAVIGATION (INTELLIGENCE/ PERCEPTION)

The Unicorn, Crab, and Mantis occasionally find it necessary to go to unexplored places without roads, maps or townsfolk they can ask for directions. Using stars, triangulation, and memory, a character can use this skill to plot journeys through uncivilized terrain with Intelligence or find their way with no stable reference point (e.g. left blindfolded in an unknown forest) with Perception.

This is a Merchant Skill.

tale of a forest, trees grown so thick they could not fit a grown man between the trunks. They were gray and twisted, with leaves the color of dried blood. Precisely what Mareiko saw six months before... much further south.

My son is out near the Dark Moon at this moment. He carries with him the finest blade of the Kaiu and our most thorough maps. He has found his way out of pitch-dark labyrinths relying on nothing but his own sense of direction. Now I only pray he does not fall asleep.

I do not ask that you retrieve him, or change the scouting schedules to try to know the unknowable. Many more bushi will follow him, and they, too will die. But let the reason for their deaths not be that we are afraid to accept the answers we find.

From the Journals of Hohei Hiruma Katsuhito

You mentioned you had not been to the Hiruma ruins, but with the recent sighting of Oni no Akuma among the abominations there, I thought you might be interested in this account of their failed retaking. Katsuhito's journal, recovered from a rice urn after Hiruma Naomike's famous battle for the castle in 819, has made him widely known at Crab dojos, where sensei find his writings useful for keeping their brash students from charging into the Shadowlands unprepared.

-Seikansha

THE FIRST DAY.

I can call it no other, for without sun or stars, or holidays to honor our ancestors, the only meaningful time is how long since we left, how long we can hold the unholdable. I have been here before. We all have. We showed we are iron bars that cannot break, and they chose us to strike the Fallen God.

We left Kyuden Hida at dawn. The second column leaves tomorrow from Shiro Kuni, where Aunt Shihime is stationed. I was told I can write that down. Goblins cannot read.

Something crunches beneath my heel, buried in the muck. We don't look down. Far better to watch a hundred Hiruma heels strike the ground than to think of the thousands that lie beneath them.

It has been too long without attack. It is nearly dusk already, yet we have seen nothing. Do they know our plans? Have they withdrawn into the castle? It would make it simpler perhaps, to have them all in one place. But how many are there?

I know what the crunching is now. The stones underfoot are softer than sulfur, like old grease, marking our route with a black ribbon that stretches beyond the range of vision. The Trail of Dark Jade, the gunso calls it, discarded by all those who have been here before us. Our boots are caked; they leave stains on our soles.

I preferred to think they were bones.

I can't believe that we arrived only this morning. We seem to have been fighting for days, but we cannot rest. They cannot be starved out.

The second column has our food. When they arrive, we can eat for days four and five. Then the supply train will catch up, and we can eat for days six and seven.

The castle is as our paintings show it. Demolished on the south and the northwest corner, small, because we have never been a large family, and rectangular. Four stories of granite. Not as beautiful as the Yasuki's perhaps, and small indeed compared to the Hida's, but above the iron doors the mon is still visible. The peasant houses and stables around it have long since rotted away, but I have found the occasional cooking pot or iron bit, half-buried in the mud.

From a distance, I thought the walls were thicker on the bottom floor, but as we drew closer, I saw them move. The flesh of ogres, hardly distinguishable from the gray granite, shoulder to shoulder. Four deep on each side. They'd known we were coming. The screaming began and they answered with bellows.

We drove forward, katanas at our sides, for ogre flesh did not call for jade. Tetsubo, naginata, yari, all tore through boot-leather skin. I did not count how many fell, not then, but with no fire to burn the bodies, we will learn each corpse by name soon enough. When it grew too dark to see, we pulled back. It is never this easy.

We pried the mon from above the door to clean it. It is ours forever.

The screamer squad slept in the valley, the rest of us on the slopes. We have not found the second column.

All night, while we cut heads, the gunso told me stories of the old days. Here was the river where servants cleaned the rocks so the clothes they washed would be properly trim; here the regent Tadateru threw Kaiu Shio in the pond for daydreaming through kenjutsu practice; here the hunting falcons swooped into thickets on summer days of riding.

He showed me the shrine of the ancestors. I saw no arch, no markers.

Exactly, he said.

I promised I would kill them all.

We have it.

Something still holds the lord's bedroom. Its feet had grown into the floor. We drew jade-smeared katana and cut out what we could, but no one wants to enter a room where the tatami mat screams and its tentacles quest toward any footfall. The shugenja finally kept a fire going long enough to burn it; the seared flesh poisoned a man with its stench.

We went from room to room, breaking the arms and knees of the goblins we found. They had defecated on a pile of katana, so two of us held the prisoners while the others cleansed the blades in their stomachs. My throat is hoarse, for I told each one when they see the Dark One, tell him his mistake was touching this family.



Their skulls ring our walls, their meat in piles on the floor. Fortunes forgive us, there is not enough salt to purify them, much less ourselves, and there is worse on the walls, where the blood and pus of oni still drip. Many have stopped reciting the blessings of purity. We grind fingers of jade to powder, and that's all we need.

There is space enough, at least. No paper walls any more. A hundred rooms have become a single hole. The armory is impenetrable. Something melted the weapons inside, and the metal sealed the door into a solid mass. No sign of a tunnel in.

Two hundred and forty-two of us remain. The twenty-five fastest left this morning, carrying the mon. They bowed to all of us. If all goes well, they will be back in five days with jade and supplies. In the dark, it is hard to tell the difference between a maggot and a grain of rice.

The slug came for us again, a mammoth thing that drools scorching acid. It has tried to mount the walls twenty times, and each time we fill it with arrows. Still it will not die.

It was simple. They knew we had armor, and they knew we had walls, but the forest disgorged goblins like a swarm of poison flies. In the heat, we were soon exhausted, and with no arrows left and no fire for pitch, we could only hold on while the shugenja shook the earth. Hiruma would not fall. But the dust was blinding.

A shugenja entombed an oni with jade and chipped off pieces for us. We glued it to our armor with pitch, for when the anvils come, they come in companies. Still, we broke many tetsubo on a headless oni. I shoved it off the wall and it bit my hair off at the root. At the southern breach, they had no more powder, so two men stuffed a corpse in its mouth to jam it with his haramaki, and three others held it down while a fourth beat it. We got three squadrons of oni before the jade ran out. Then the corpses were our only option.

I try to think that this is home, but I can't tell where our lands end and the Shadowlands begin. The sky is no less gray because it is seen from the battlements where Jikomi walked, and the stench smells no sweeter when you sit in Kutsuko's hall. The rows of stakes with skulls and bodies are ten deep on the plain. I can barely clench my hands, but they seem afraid now.

I forget the Crane poet who wrote about a hero's blood fertilizing a battlefield, giving his death meaning by

nourishing the rice beneath him. He should try living where nothing grows.

DAY THIRTEEN?

We couldn't drag the bodies far enough from the wall to matter. They use them as stairs. We could not hold the wall, so we took its parts into the third floor. First is gone. Second is gone. We are sleeping in shifts. There is not room for more than twenty to lie down at one time.

We hide the wounded inside rice urns while we fight. My left arm is still good. I stab goblins through a window. The view of our heads on the battlements outside is annoying. The fools didn't turn half of them around correctly.

The new oni are sticky. I have only a tanto left.

Today I saw a ray of sunlight. I would not look away, and now I cannot see.

The floor is thin. We can hear the space below with every step. We throw the dead down to crush them, then jump on top, so we only have to fight ten at a time. When the corpse starts to twitch, I hurl it from the window. It pulls itself off the spike and comes for the door. But we have no swords, and it is better they rise outside.

I don't know what the oni are using on the floor, but it gets thinner each day. Sawing from the bottom up.

We have held Hiruma for sixteen days. It is better than most. There are worse ways to die than in pursuit of our ancestors' homeland.

I cannot think of one right now.

Lady Sun cry for us.

The Kokai-Nisshi of the Ship Metora, as Written by Anju

This ship's log was found tied to the leg of a half-dead courier pigeon, so rotted by Taint it could no longer fly. The other pages were torn and illegible, but the last speaks eloquently enough of what he faced. The author has never been heard from again.

-Seikansha

decide to come here? Only a fool would have let a half a bottle of sake and a beautiful heimin force him into such a mission. If I could see the sun again I would swear off drink forever. Great Fortunes, I will shave my head, I will join a monastery, just please let me see the stars!

No wonder she laughed at me, waving those white hands. No wonder it was the Crab she went to, with the oni's blood still staining his saya. At least he knew what he was getting into. What a child I was.

Go around the Shadowlands, I told them. See what's on the other side.

It's been tried, they said.

Ah, I told them, but never by a Mantis.

I can no longer believe I trusted my own words. Experience means nothing out here. Our ships are still wood, our sails still canvas and our hearts still all too human. I sailed through the Coast of Dark Mists, so close to shore we could smell the rot. We were not three days down the coast when my crew began fighting. I can't blame them. The smell gets to you after a while. The sweet, thick air that clings to the throat and aches deep in the lungs. It makes you long for any other scent. Fresh steaming blood makes a welcome change.

Two days later, the wind stopped.

Have you ever tried to get men to row through water so thick you can feel it suck your oars? It's worse when the oars get light, the paddles thinner each time you lift. When the drops scald holes in your skin to match the wood, that's near impossible.

As long as we turn around, they told me. If we turn around now, we might make it home before the food runs out.

Of course, I said to them, certainly, I completely agree, but for the love of the Fortunes will anyone tell me which way is home!? You should see this mist. You can't see the coast. And stars? I remember once I took for granted that when darkness fell there would be stars to follow. Perhaps if I had thanked Amaterasu more, she would not have hidden from me like this.

There are more faces in the water now. As long as I look at my brush I don't have to see them. I have saved one pigeon. No one knows I have her. When was the last time you met an insane man with a pigeon? See? I am still sane.

We don't have enough men to row back even if we knew the way. There may be fewer now. I tripped in a pile of guts this morning. Anyone who still has a friend he can trust to behead him is committing seppuku. It's inconsiderate, really. Don't they know what the smell of blood brings for the rest of us?

They won't have my pigeon.

Soon now. The waters are nearly solid with waiting oni. Some have spines like terrible blowfish which part the waves, while others' tongues rasp against the boat, prying like badgers searching for honey. The sharks are the worst. Their fins are as tall as a katana blade, with the face of a child at their base. They stare, and sometimes, when the light is right, you see your reflection in their eyes.

The sea trolls have hands, and we try to slice them off to keep them from climbing, but it doesn't always work. I think there is one on board now. I have blocked off my cabin, but that won't fool anyone. They can smell us, I think, even over the stench. I tried rolling in oni blood to disguise it, but that only burned and they came quicker—

Oh great fortunes I am saved!

There is a ship on the horizon, a whole fleet.

I can see the clouds through their sails. They are coming for me! Oh please please please please please home home home home

Water Hazards in the Shadowlands

There are probably as many varieties of creatures in the oceans and rivers of the Shadowlands as on its shores, but these are some of the most common.

UMIBOZU

Lore TN: 15

These sea trolls resemble normal trolls, though their skin is rippled and slimy like an eel, and they have probing, ant-eater-like tongues rough enough to saw planks of wood. Their fore-claws are powerful, but their webbed legs are shrunk and vestigial.

EARTH: 4

FIRE: 3

WATER: 2

Strength: 6

AIR: 2

Attacking: 5k3

Damage: Teeth 4k3, Shock 4k2

TN to be Hit: 15

Armor: 4

Wounds: 10: -1; 20: -2; 40: -3; 60: Dead.

Special Abilities: When touching a character, or sharing any conductive surface with them, the Umibozu may make a simple Fire roll, TN 20. If successful, this delivers 4k2 electrical damage. In the water, this has a range of five yards.

ONI NO JADOKU

Lore TN: 25

Man-sized blowfish with foot-long poisonous spines which they use to hunt, Jadoku sneak close to prey, inflate, then follow the poisoned creature until its death, to feed at their leisure.

EARTH: 3

FIRE: 2

Agility: 3

WATER: 2

AIR: 1

Reflexes: 4

Attacking: 5k3

Damage: 2k1 plus poison (*see below*)

TN to be Hit: 20

Armor: 10

Wounds: 20: -1; 40: -2; 60: Dead

Special Abilities: Stealth 4

If the Jadoku does more than one Wound to a target, it has successfully poisoned them. The target must make an Earth roll, TN (5 x number of Wound Ranks) to resist the effects or take an additional Wound for every minute without magical assistance.

ONI NO WANIZAME

Lore TN: 25

These oni resemble giant hammerhead sharks, but at the base of their dorsal fins is a distorted human face with milky gray, reflective eyes.

EARTH: 4

Stamina: 6

FIRE: 2

WATER: 4

Strength: 7

AIR: 3

Attacking: 7k3

Damage: 8k3

TN to be Hit: 10

Armor: 15

Wounds: 60: -1; 80: -2; 100: -4; 150: Dead

Special Abilities: Fear 2

If the Wanizame's human face makes eye contact with a character, he makes a contested Air roll at the sight of his own reflection. If he fails, he is frozen in place for six rounds, minus his Water.

FUNA-YOREI

Lore TN: 20

Funa-yorei are ghostly boats which approach ships sailing near the Shadowlands. Each is staffed by gaki, usually commanding other types of ghosts (*L5R RPG, p. 192-193*). They appear to those who are already near madness or death and offer safe passage. If mortals board the ship, all color fades from their body. If they share food with the other ghosts, they die and rise to join them. The gaki charge six Wounds of blood a night for the journey, and always ask the living passengers to select the one who pays.

The Account of Ranpo Temple, by Kuni Shiki

There are five copies of this tale in the Empire. One is filed in Kyuden Hida. Three others are held by prominent Kuni shugenja. The fifth was left in the temple itself, and ends differently than the other four. That is the copy I have worked from.

You requested truth.

-Seikansha

I am Kuni Shiki, shugenja of Kuni-ryu, trained under Kuni Hitaru, son of Kuni Ushihida, grandson of Kuni Chimitsu, great-grandson of Kuni Hohochi, the nephew of Kuni Gokuren, head priest of the Ranpo temple to Bishamon. For ten generations, our family have served the Fortune of Strength, using the elements of earth, flame and water.

Our fields were once parted by a wide road of wheel-ruts and footprints. Nearly every bushi in the Hida army walked that path to ask a prayer that they might strike with the power of ten men and buy glory with their kills instead of the valor of their deaths.

It was seven hundred and fifty-one years after the First War when my father said it was time to take the temple back. Two generations of Kuni had grown up behind the Kaiu miracle, watching goblin droppings turn their fertile soil to green muck and the blue fire of oni mouths burn through their houses for days at a time.

The ground was still warm when my father took with him a dozen Hida bushi, his brother, wife and my sister. No one recorded how many they slew, nor how many



THE SHITO DAMA OF RANPO TEMPLE

Bishamon protects Ranpo temple, determined to never again allow corruption within his walls. Shadowlands creatures are hurled away by unseen hands if they try to enter, and inside, magic functions normally.

When humans enter the temple, the *shito dama* appears at the center, weighing their worth. Tainted characters with Honor lower than 2 must roll Willpower, against 10 x their Shadowlands Taint Rank, or run in fear. Tainted characters with higher Honor roll Willpower against 5 times their own Taint rating or suffer the same effects. Characters with Death Trance are not immune to this effect.

Characters who stay in the temple overnight experience horrid nightmares. Roll 1 die + 5, minus the character's Honor (do not reroll tens). On a 1-5, there is no effect the next day. On a 6-9, the character must drop his highest die for all actions the next day. On a 10 or higher, he must drop his highest die for all actions for 5 days minus his Honor. If characters stay for more than one night, effects are cumulative.

THE JIKINIKI

Lore TN: 15

Priests or shugenja who die with a Taint rating higher than their Honor are sometimes reincarnated as jikiniki, corpse-eating goblins.

Resembling hunched, four-foot-tall humans with torn, dirty claws, blunt, widely spaced teeth and pale, hairless skin, jikiniki cannot bear sunlight and only appear in shadows. Though they usually scavenge for freshly-killed bodies, they also prey on the weak, wounded, and Tainted.

The most well-known jikiniki, Hakirei is mystically bound to the temple, tormented with the guilt of his deeds every night. Though he cannot enter, he always returns to its grounds after every excursion, where he swings between blessing the honorable and eating their companions' bodies; he is quite mad.

EARTH: 4

FIRE: 2

Agility: 3

WATER: 2

AIR: 2

Attacking: 3k2

Damage: 3k2

TN to be Hit: 15

Armor: 0

Wounds: 16: -1; 24: -2; 32: -3; 48: -4; 64: Dead.

Special Abilities:

Anyone touched by the jikiniki must make a simple Earth roll, TN 15, or get 1-5 points of Shadowlands Taint. If touching something the jikiniki has had prolonged contact with (its clothing, its nest), the character must roll at TN 10 or take a single Taint point.

Characters striking jikiniki cannot roll more damage dice than their Honor.

zombies were laid to rest as they became the first human eyes to see what would become known as the Kuni Wastes.

With cautious hearts they opened the temple door, expecting a Tainted ruin, but found that the stone altar bore the marks only of dust, not depravity. The statue of Bishamon still stood, its skin glistening with a thousand bleeding cuts. Though Ushihida brushed the figure with jade, it did not darken, and he felt only a warming peace at its touch.

But light did not penetrate the windows, and even at mid-day, the doorways remained black. As my father and his bushi stepped over the threshold, an orange-red flame sprang to life in the center of the room. Quivering with their steps, it floated a ken-an above the floor, then, as if blown with a gentle whisper, it drifted closer, wavering.

It settled over the head of the third bushi, turning his black eyes to orange. The man trembled, as if trying to shut out the sight, but his eyes remained open. With a squirrel's cry, he dropped his tetsubo and ran. The flame disappeared with him.

That night, those who stayed lay down in the priests' quarters despite their uneasiness. Before the sun had risen, all fifteen awoke terrified from identical dreams. A lone priest. A tanto with a handle of human bone. A victim whose screams pierced the night air like a sickle. And the oni, as tall as the ceiling, with a raven's wings, skin as black as its feathers, taloned feet and a single massive beak perched on its thin neck, a clacking, all-consuming mouth. I know this dream well, for I have had it myself, as have all who sleep within Ranpo's walls.

My father left the next day. Until I came thirty years later, no one stayed more than a single night within its walls. I admit that I myself could not face the nightmares all at once, and it took three journeys there before I knew the whole story. It is a story that shames my family, but it must be known.

Kuni Hakirei, apprentice to Gokuken, had visited his ailing mother on the night the Maw was first seen. Running back to the temple, he found it abandoned. A minor oni from the Maw's army discovered him cowering behind the shrine. Hakirei begged for his life and, amused, it granted the plea, as long as the young priest brought him a fresh meal each day. Hakirei sacrificed his honor along with the first victim, cowering and serving his new master like the lowliest eta as the oni wallowed in the poor man's blood.

But the second night, as Hakirei lowered his tanto to his new victim's neck, a strange thing happened. Though the skin parted beneath his blade, there was no blood, and when he pulled the knife away, the flesh was intact. He tried again and again, with no result, until he turned and saw that each place he cut opened a wound on the Fortune's statue, leaving the terrified sacrifice untouched.

Even when the oni itself turned its claws on the helpless man, nothing happened, and at last the two were forced to release him. For one week they tried another victim each night, but every innocent was protected by the strength of Bishamon. At last, the oni grew impatient, and turned its hunger on Hakirei.

He was not protected.

Indeed, he shall never have the Fortunes' protections again, for after his death, Hakirei returned as a jikiniki to forever haunt the grounds where he sinned. I pray I shall never again see a priest fall so low.

I have left Ranpo temple to him and all his kind. There are too few petitioners who care to feel the Fortunes' touch so closely. But the pure of spirit can find a refuge there, in the heart of the Wastes, where they need fear only their own corruption rather than the forces of the Fallen God.



Shinjo Naohide and the Eternal Corpse

The most unusual and possibly the most dangerous Shadowlands landmark I have heard of comes from a story told to me by an elderly Unicorn blacksmith. I have tried to preserve the narrative of this amusing heimin intact, but if his story is true, it is no laughing matter.

-Seikansha

Used weapons, yes. But I don't strip the dead. Ronin like you come in here, they need money, or the lord says they only use sword and yari. What can they do? Sell all the rest. Tragedy. They stare so long before they give weapons up, they tell me stories. Every time, I have to persuade them to leave behind.

Kusari-gama there, that was Shinjo Naohide-sama's. He didn't want anything for it, just told me its story and left. Money cheapens the weapon, he said. This sickle drew blood from the biggest oni in the world.

He always was riding with my lady, Shimiko-sama. Little samurai-ko, with beautiful hair, like Cranes. She was always here, asking "What about this weapon? What about this

one?" Ide family sent her to Shinjo, and Naohide-sama taught her everything about bushi. So they set out one week to see Shadowlands, because she has to be a tough bushi. They travel for three days when food goes bad, but they can't find the way back, and they go further and further in.

The other bushi start arguing, they're scared, and Naohide-sama sends them ahead to scout for trails while he and Shimiko-sama practice with kusari-gama near a cave. If they can't find path, maybe they spend the night there.

They hear a scream, and they run forward and see bushi tossed in the air by a huge oni, other one torn apart by twenty goblins. This oni... ten ken-an tall, with head like dung beetle! He sniffs the air, and he says to goblins, "I smell more. Fetch them." Goblins run forward.

Naohide-sama knows they can fight goblins or oni, but not both, so he says to lady Shimiko, "Into the cave. Oni won't fit, and we can fight goblins." They run inside, kicking aside litter and big beams. Whole place stinks to heaven. Naohide-sama says, "Oh, no. It's a nest. Come on, maybe there's a nook." Cave gets smaller after maybe fifty feet, and they crawl down a long tunnel. Oni says to goblins, "Get them out!"

So they look for another exit. Tunnel gets wider and now they're in a huge cave, so Shimiko-sama has room to take

LAVA TREES

Lore TN: 20

EARTH: 5

FIRE: 1

Agility: 5

WATER: 4

AIR: 1

Attacking: 5k3

Damage: See below

TN to be Hit: 5 (it's a tree)

Armor: 5 (10 on main trunk)

Wounds: 60: -1; 100: Dead.

Special Abilities:

This organism looks like an upside-down reddish tree with flat gray leaves and roots which extend 15 feet into the air. The "leaves" are sensors, alerting the root-tentacles to grab for prey. The tree rolls its Water, TN of 5 x the approaching character's Stealth skill (automatic if they have no Stealth), attacking anything it finds before the first round initiative is rolled.

If its attack is successful, the target has been entangled in a root, requiring a Contested Strength roll to slip free. The following round, the tree hoists the target into the air, strangling him for 1k1 damage per round. Enzymes in the roots break the body down over several weeks as the plant feeds, and it is not uncommon to see half-digested bodies dangling from the top.

If cut, the trees leak lava-like sap.

The attacker must roll Agility + Weapon Skill, TN 15, to avoid being splattered for 2k2 damage. The trees ignore fire attacks.



out a little crystal to glow so maybe they see where they are. Suddenly the earth dance, and they fall to the floor.

Behind them, all the goblins scream. "Kusatte Iru! Oni no Kusatte Iru!" Shimiko-sama looks for it, but sees nothing. They keep walking, find the wall pushed through with huge hole, like mountain hit with lightning. And they find river of blood, up to their ankles, walls glistening everywhere.

Shimiko-sama says, "Oh, no...this is blood. We're in a vein. That was lungs, and that was throat, and we must have come in through his nose! We in the biggest oni in the whole world!"

Naohide-sama say, "Calm down. Must think. Well...this big vein, but blood only up to here. He must be almost dead. If we crawl to the wound, we can get away." So they search, but all they find is rock, because he fall face down. But they step on nerve this big around, and whole mountain shake. Blood come pouring down...ewww.

Then they hear dung beetle oni roar. It comes in through the mouth, and Shimiko's crystal gets dim again. They hear it sniffing, "I want your blood." Naohide-sama cut himself and throw bloody kimono away to throw it off the scent. But oni just bring in other bushi, say, "Come out, or we kill them." Naohide-sama knows they dead already, and says nothing. Goblins slit bushi's throats, splash their blood into Kusatte Iru's veins, praying for it to wake up.

"Oh, no," say Shimiko-sama, because there are more now, and they are in the throat, only way out. So she and Naohide-sama talk, and plan, and then they take their kusari-gama and tie the chains to their obi.

And they charge and kill two goblins. Chop! Chop! Blood everywhere. Throw the heads at the others, and run straight for the heart. Oni chases them all the way, but only goblins fit in the vein, and blood gets too deep for them in the heart. They run in, and kick the side of its heart, and kachunk, the room gets small. They kick it again, and kachunk, the room gets big, and the blood nearly wash them away.

"Hang on," Naohide-sama say. She put her hands through his belt, and he take both sickles, and he raise them up.

THUNK! AAAAAA... whole room fell down to half its size! They climb with both sickles, and blood come pounding down the artery and send those goblins all the way to the toes and back again. They flow by screaming again, one hour later.

They run out the other nostril, and see big beetle oni, stuck in a little vein. Take out the sickles. Whack! Whack! Dead oni. So they walk out and thank Lord Moon they can see his face again. And Shimiko-sama look back and see mountain with eyelashes knocking over trees, and huge eye, and houses of oni on his back, and my lady wonder, "What if he gets enough blood to wake up?"

"Whole world going to end."

She say, "You think he come looking for us?"

Naohide-sama nod. "I sell kusari-gama."

You real brave hero, you buy that weapon.

In Enemy Lands, by Ikoma Daikaji

Daikaji-sama was, shall we say, a bard of more enthusiasm than perception. When his tale of "the valiant Akodo Keikyo" included mention of the bushi's drunken geisha-chasing, his sensei thought that the Crab might be more amenable to such an honest chronicler. Daikaji spent a year following Hida Kirenai through the Shadowlands. When, much to his superiors' surprise, he returned, he had a thick scroll of the Crab's



THE FIELDS OF HAIR

Lore TN: 25

These fields appear where large numbers of warriors died and were not consumed by goblins or flesh-eating oni. Eventually, a section of the shifting lands sucked them beneath the liquid earth, leaving their hair floating on the surface, like a lily pad.

DIRT-DROWNED DEAD

EARTH: 3

FIRE: 3

WATER: 3

AIR: 2

Attacking: 4k3

Damage: 4k2

TN to be Hit: 10

Armor: 0

Wounds: 50: Dead.

Special Abilities:

These vicious zombies take quarter damage from piercing weapons and half from crushing. If someone walks over their field without specifically grabbing the hair, the zombies make a Fire roll, TN 20, to see if they detect the intruders. The zombies use hands and sticks to club intruders unconscious, then drag them under the earth to join them. They have no masks.

THE SIXTY-YEAR CHASM

Lore TN: 55

(Shadowlands or Crab Clan Lore)

Long ago, a minor Hida daimyo named Renchi noticed that oni frequently impersonated honored elders, relying on samurai's reluctance to question their parents. To solve that problem and rid his lands of the burden of hundreds of people too old to fight, Renchi ordered that all people over age sixty be thrown into this chasm.

Hida Shuhai, an aged but still crafty bushi, hid from Renchi's troops, then followed them into the Shadowlands, where he watched an oni kill them, then returned to tell his son of the oni's appearance and weaknesses. Together, they slew the creature, and Renchi rescinded the order and committed seppuku. Though records of this policy were stricken from the Kaiu histories, the angry ghosts still haunt the chasm, now twisted from Taint.

When a character of Hida blood stands within ten feet of the cliff edge, the voices begin calling him to share his youth. He must make a Willpower roll, TN 15, to resist their call, or walk over the edge. If he steps within two feet of the edge, the ghosts attempt to physically pull him down; roll Strength, TN 20, to resist.

exploits. The Ikoma sensei thanked him politely for his efforts, immediately foisted the fool off on the Unicorn, and filed his documents in the back of the library, seal unbroken. Though his work did little enough to enhance poor Kirenai's reputation, his honesty at least serves us well in his descriptions of the Shadowlands' hidden terrains.

-Seikansha

Hida Kirenai stands as tall as a young tree, though perhaps not so straight of back or thick of limb. His eyes, black chips of coal, ever scan to each side, passing over all who block his view. In his hands, twisted and scarred with the marks of stone, any object can become a weapon and he reaches for all with equal fervor when the horizon fills with an oni's silhouette.

His footfalls slowed as we neared the Lava Forest, though he did not flinch at the foul tendrils of steam which licked his cheeks. The smell was nearly unbearable: sulfur and ash and rot.

It is wrong, that place, like a copper mirror. The trees are red and grow upside-down, their flat leaves blanketing the ground and tangled roots making a hard-edged canopy overhead. They seem to thrive on the lava which flows among them in liquid orange and gray, not unlike soy sauce in rice.

Kirenai took a step, intent on the bog hag he had tracked to the forest's edge. But though his sword was swift, these foes were quicker still. As soon as his boot touched a leaf, it quivered as if with terrible joy, and the inert roots sprang to life, diving for the noble samurai like striking snakes. Kirenai lopped through a branch with a single stroke, and his bellow when the plant's scalding sap hit his skin was purest battle rage.

A wise leader indeed, Kirenai allowed his men to destroy the first tree, showing his trust in them to untangle his sword from the retreating root even as they pulled him from its clutches. Recognizing that the bog hag had been likewise attacked and consumed, he wasted no time returning to the Wall for more pressing duties.

Undaunted, Kirenai returned to the Shadowlands the next day, proudly fulfilling his lord's command that he go where he could do some good. This time he chose a flat, apparently empty plain on which to take up lookout, obviously guided by his ancestors to see danger even in so innocuous a setting.

The waving fibers which looked from a distance like clumps of grass were in fact fine black strands of human hair, covering the cold earth like a pelt. Unable to contain his fury at the sight, Kirenai pulled one up, releasing the long-dead corpse of an ancient warrior, foully buried here for centuries despite Hantei XXVII's dictate of cremation.

Gleefully, Kirenai fell upon the man, driven by his passion to free the trapped soul. And truly, my respect for him grew as more rose around him, yet even in crisis he remembered his tactics and ran far from each until they gave up in despair.

It was nearly another week before the great Kirenai returned to the Shadowlands, this time entreated to seek a unit of Hida bushi who had left many days before and not returned. Following their footsteps, he came at last to a vast chasm, sliced into the earth like a cut from Akodo's own katana.

On the bottom, barely visible, were hundreds of skeletons, dashed to pieces against the hard rocks. Those on top wore fresh armor and robes with the Hida mon, and Kirenai felt

a great ache in his heart at the thought of what had driven them to such an honorless suicide.

"Hiiiiidaaa," something moaned, and he whirled upon the voice. Nothing. "Whooo have you brought us noooow?"

"Share."

"Give us your grandfathers."

Though nothing stirred below, the cries seemed to come from the abandoned corpses; Kirenai wisely employed Kakita Merao's strategy, allowing the Earth to fight for him. As he strove to roll a great boulder over the edge to crush the wailing voices, the wind blew fiercely against his legs. Kirenai struggled violently, waving his arms in wide swaths as the boulder toppled and he sought to maintain the perfect balance of body and soul. And obviously such harmony was achieved, for with remarkable understanding of Shinsei's philosophy of forgiveness, Kirenai allowed the spirits to maintain their home unmolested.

On his return, Kirenai thought to investigate the great cave mouth which shadowed the chasm from the other side. Tetsubo in hand, he stepped forward with no thought of fear in his heart. As his toes touched the stone floor, however, his retainer Sheiku grasped his lord's armor. Unconcerned with his own safety, Sheiku cried out, "No, Hida-sama! Remember your lessons. The caves in this place are certain death."



THE TUNNELS TO THE CENTER OF THE WORLD

Lore TN: 10

Crab bushi learn early never to enter the caves along the south side of the River of the Dark Moon, for no one has left them alive. No one truly knows what is inside. Those who wait outside quickly lose sight of their companions, though their cries are audible for hours, screaming that no matter how they turn, the tunnels only point down.

Most shugenja think the caves are projections of the demon-realm. Others think it the entrance to an underground oni city, an ancient Kuni trap, or a simple curse of madness on those who enter.

GMs may decide what they want incautious players to find. Once inside, they may escape if they manage to break a hole through the ceiling and tunnel straight up. This requires a total of 200 Wounds delivered to the stone with an armor-ignoring weapon, then a Strength + Athletics roll at TN 20 to wriggle up through the cracks and emerge in the midst of the Changing Lands.

THE ONI GRAVEYARD

Lore TN: 30

This is where Fu Leng's creatures honor their dead, an immense graveyard two days' walk on a side, filled with polished skulls, all pointing southwest toward the Festering Pit of Fu Leng. It is utterly silent. Nothing attacks, threatens, or even approaches. If characters disturb the skulls, there is no immediate consequence. The Funeral Master of Fu Leng is a 215-year-old akutsukai (see *Appendix One*) who is devoted to his duty. If any skulls go missing, he sends ogres or oni to bring him ten more to replace it, ending with the culprit, whose head joins other heretics' on the inside of his cloak. Returning the skull will satiate him, though he eats any offender he sees. Servitors who fail to retrieve the culprit's head pay with their own.

Doubtless Sheiku did not mean to slight the great Kirenai's bravery; rather the thought of his own life continuing without the guidance of such a valiant figure made him continue. "No one has ever returned who sets foot inside. All that their companions are left to carry home is the sound of their cries, screaming with their last breath, 'there's no way out!'"

Kirenai, knowing the shame that would await him should he return from the Shadowlands with no kill to his name, continued to search for an oni of appropriately impressive proportions. Passing up several towering brutes, Kirenai conserved his strength for a more worthy opponent, and at last his swift footfalls took him before a sight which shocked even so stoic a man.

The ground stretched flat and strangely silent. No goblin calls echoed, nor the sound of a footstep in mud, and even the wind had fallen still. At Kirenai's feet lay row upon row of skulls, their empty eye-sockets staring straight ahead, all at the same distant point. Some skulls still bore broken tusks, loosely fit in jaws as large as a man's arms. Others bore claws from their sides, wings from their temples, or lacked eyes, noses, ears. All had mouths, still open, frozen in their last, slaving prayers to the Emperor of Shadows.

It seems even oni honor their dead.

"This is my kill," Kirenai told me. "It is an old one of mine never recognized." I did not argue with such a man, for his gaze told me he could slay anything if he so chose. He plucked the largest skull from its resting place and returned with it promptly, announcing his victory to the assembled bushi of Kyuden Hida.

After many weeks of noble duty guarding the castle pantries from Taint, Kirenai returned to the Shadowlands. Honored by Lord Hida Barishu himself with the care of the cursed inventory Kuni shugenja had brought from all over the empire, Kirenai strode



Lore TN: 30

In a time before trolls became scattered to the winds, they had a civilization far more decadent than Rokugan, glorifying personal pleasure, wealth and power. Unlike weak goblins, and rare oni, trolls could have fielded a true army had they wished, so Osano-wo began a campaign to destroy them.

Decimated by his surprise assaults, the trolls sought escape by opening a hole into Jigoku, and were driven out by the spirits of human ancestors. Returning, they tried to flee Osano-wo's armies, and the survivors scattered to the sea and marshes.

The city still stands, abandoned and stripped of most valuables. Though goblins occasionally camp in the ruins, they are driven away by spirits still lurking in the area. The hole to Jigoku remains open, straddling the realm of ancestors and the realm of demons, and its very presence causes unease in those who approach.

The ghosts which emerge from the hole have no faces, and cannot remember who they were in life, or how they got here, though they do recall having once been in the afterlife with other shades. They warn characters away from the hole. No one foolish enough to enter has been heard from again.

bravely into the bleak, swirling mist, under orders to drop the wretched things as close to the Dark One's own prison as possible.

After a week's travel south, defeating the many goblins who wished to relieve him of his burden, Kirenai came to the shores of an immense lake. Dark red liquid lapped against the shore, mixing with mud. The heat from the water was tangible, coating Kirenai's face with sweat. Drops of scarlet mist condensed on the plates of his armor and helm, turning his own form to that of a fearsome creature, dripping with human blood.

In the center of the lake, a castle rose from the waves: six stories high and built from the bones of thousands of ogres, their skin stretched tightly over the windows and doors like rice paper. Through the cracks, a green light showed through, and in its glow, Kirenai could see hundreds of nezumi, linked together with steel chains, scurrying to build something for their master, just out of sight.

Wily Kirenai left the cursed nemuranai on the lake's shores to trick the castle's masters, and made great haste in his return.

But though he turned straight around, his footprints had vanished, and the way back was strange to his sight. Instead of the flat trail he had wisely chosen, Kirenai found the way blocked by a mat of writhing brambles that erupted from a field of green grass. Drawing his wakizashi, Kirenai lay about him to left and right, cutting the vines with ease. Even as they grew until they were thicker than a man's thigh, Kirenai gave no thought to the tanto-long thorns which tore his skin like a wildcat's claws. He continued to scream his hatred of the Fallen God as the branches closed over his head, while I, in my cowardice, took the clearer path.

At last, the darkness was pierced by the faint shadowed light, and Kirenai cut with renewed frenzy, at last reaching the tangle's end. We had arrived on the edge of a strange ruin. A building of stone and clay rose in great tiers from the ground, walls smoothed with the labor of hundreds and painted with greens and reds.

It depicted, of all things, trolls, dressed in robes of bright colors and patterns, drinking from golden flagons and watching oni claw one another in a great pit. Animal skins lay on their floors and they stuffed their futons with feathers and propped them on wooden frames. Their pictures showed them eating, drinking, and doing other activities best left unmentioned in documents meant for cultured nobles' eyes. Their cities deliberately wasted space; single streets grew and shrank, gardens stretched behind every house, and their bath houses - again, I will refrain from describing a place of such shocking purpose.

Generations of goblin droppings and detritus lay waiting, but no living creature met Kirenai's eye as he cautiously approached the city's center, drawn by a strange wailing noise. A cylindrical building of many high archways held a wide theater, floors covered with sand rather than wood.

At the entrance to a tunnel lay a great statue of a troll in armor.

We could not see the tunnel's end, but only a black, roiling, churning mist and a thousand tiny stars past it. A ripple in the wind and a soft glow alerted us to the presence of a ghost, crying in misery.

"Who are you, honored ancestor," he asked it, "that I may tell your descendants to grant you peace?"

It turned to us, tearing its hair. It had no face.

"I don't know."

Kirenai turned from it and commanded we retreat. I must note my respect for his eloquence in giving such an order without words.



Chapter 3:

Lost Relics



USING LOST RELICS

This chapter gives gamemasters the big golden plot hook to send PCs into the Shadowlands. Ronin characters who want to (re)join a clan may also be interested in finding these; bringing back a family's lost *nemuranai* or heirlooms is a great way to earn favors. It's also more Glorious than actually fighting the Corrupted.

Some items are unharmed, but others have acquired Taint, oni and curses during the years. Most of the *nemuranai* in previous books are already claimed. These aren't, and Fu Leng's minions love spreading cursed items around to make samurai lives miserable.

I thought it might interest you to know what items of legend are lost to the Tainted Lands, and which bear the Fallen God's curse. Though some of these treasures could be of great use, I urge caution when handling anything touched by the Shadowlands.

Yet for many who take the dark walk, the chance to discover their ancestors' lives gives them hope. Perhaps they are right. Of the tens of millions dead in this eternal war, no one can count how many bore powers which could yet save us.

I have listed first those items which might prove worth the risk of retrieving them, and second, those believed cursed. Though it would take more magistrates than exist in all Rokugan to hunt down every tainted tanto, it might be wise to confiscate anything matching these descriptions.

-Seikansha

From the Journals of Hiruma Uchiki

FOURTEENTH DAY, MONTH OF THE OX, 755

Sokokai's funeral was this morning. Only a dozen people came, a sad showing for the last student of the Hiruma-ryu. Perhaps they are tired of having their friends die.

We burned fifty-two sticks of incense for him. One for each year he lived in the world, then three more for the precious years he spent studying with Master Otokogi. Our dojo burned in those sticks.

Sokokai was the last to see Otokogi, fighting with the spirit of Hiruma himself, striking a path through a sea of dying ogres to charge closer to the Maw. He told Sokokai to lead the students out, but he would not turn. "To leave my dojo, I must bow," he said, "and I shall never bow to these."

Sokokai took what he could, but it was not enough, and today, that is lost to us, too. I was almost ready, he told me. Together, we might have learned and remembered the old techniques.

All rests on me. I shall teach the kata I know.

FIRST DAY, MONTH OF THE CRANE, 770

I do not understand the meaning of Flowers on Unattainable Heights. Why is there no long stance, no bow-and-arrow stance, but only these tiny shifts of the feet? I have listened to the Kaiu and tried Hummingbird Wings with two swords rather than empty-handed, but the hilts tangle. The hummingbirds of the mountains are no help. The wings move in two loops each, but to do so with swords leaves the body open.

Masamori died yesterday in a challenge match with the Bayushi. It was a fair duel, and he used what I taught him to strike while entering, but still they were too fast. Yet Otokogi once defeated a dozen Bayushi in a day. What secrets are buried beneath his bones?

SEVENTEENTH DAY, MONTH OF THE BOAR, 772

A new student came to me today. He wore flat gray. He said there were no craftsmen in his town who knew the Hiruma mon, and looked me in the eye as he asked what I knew. There will be war soon with the Scorpion, for we need homes.

His brothers went to the Hida-ryu. They fight with tetsubo and heavy armor, and defend the too-late miracle. His sister is a dead-eye. She knows no technique and cares

for none, only the death of as many abominations as her sword can find.

I told him to do the same.

I have studied Sokokai's teachings my whole life. I know them all by memory.

I can teach him nothing.

TWENTY-SIXTH DAY, MONTH OF THE DRAGON, 773

Kuni Sagiri has been helping me. I spent thirty hours in a shed this week watching him pull the finger joints from goblins. Their screams were shrill and hardly noticeable. The first pile knew nothing, but the last wept tears of Taint and blubbered for mercy.

There were Hiruma who survived, it said, those who hadn't had anyone to take their heads. It slandered them, screeching its lies, claiming they turned to treason and alliance with the Dark One. It said they had gifted the Fallen's servants with the *okuden* Otokogi left in his house.

I cannot believe them. But how would a goblin even know what an *okuden* is unless it had been near one? What in the Shadowlands would care to learn the secret techniques? Oni have no need for schools. Goblins have no patience. Zombies are dead.

But I cannot help longing.

SEVENTH DAY, MONTH OF THE OX, 774

I know where it is now. I have seen the ghosts who guard it. They wait in the clearing of what was Udekura-Mori, the forest where students would prove their skills in a trial of strength. The scrolls are there, I am sure of it. The ghosts still practice. You can watch them spar with blades of air.

We can convince them that the zombies they guard are not truly their descendants. We are the Hiruma. I'm certain we can make them understand. We will have our school back. We will have our clan back.

And I will know the meaning of Hummingbird Wings.

The Lost Hiruma Bushi School

The secret techniques of the Hiruma bushi school were recorded on a scroll now lost to the Shadowlands. If the PCs recover and study it, they can try to decipher its illustrations to recreate the fighting style. They must take the Multiple Schools advantage (see Way of the Crane, p. 52), get permission from their sensei and the Hiruma daimyo, and make Intelligence + Hiruma Bushi School Rank rolls once a month at a TN of 10 x the School Rank they are trying to learn. When they succeed six months in a row, they have learned the technique. Failure means they have learned bad habits, and if they try to use the technique, their TN to Be Hit drops by 10. The newly-minted Hiruma Bushi must make these rolls every time their Insight goes up enough to learn a new School Rank.

The Hiruma bushi emphasized speed and defensive movements in their style, understanding that the difficult part of swordplay was not inflicting damage, but surviving untouched. Hiruma spent much time watching the animals he hunted and many of his techniques were drawn from nature.



Benefit, Skills, Honor and Equipment: There is no school per se, so determine these by the bushi's ability when beginning study. No one may take this at character creation.

Historically, it benefited Willpower, and taught Archery, Athletics, Battle, Kenjutsu, Stealth, Shadowlands Lore, and a choice of Heraldry, Navigation or Hunting. Servitors of Fu Leng have sometimes fought using techniques unknown to Rokugan, and no one can say that an old and wise *akutenshi* (see Appendix One) could not decipher the text based on what they saw centuries ago.

TECHNIQUES

Rank 1: Torch's Flame Flickers

The Hiruma learns to focus his strikes even while protecting himself, perfecting the penetrating quality of his blows without sacrificing his defense. As long as he is not making a Full Attack, the Hiruma adds his Fire to hit and damage roll totals.

Rank 2: Wolf's Little Lesson

Hiruma bushi learn to dash in and out in a single motion, increasing their TN to be hit by 5 + their Athletics skill rank for every raise they make on their attack. This does not apply to a Full Attack.

Rank 3: Hummingbird Wings

Hiruma know how the hummingbird can move in any direction. Once a round, the bushi can make a contested Agility + Defense roll vs. the opponent's attack roll total to dodge it outright. They do not have to declare Full Defense to do this, and can attack once in the same round, although with a +5 to their TN. This cannot be used with a Full Attack.

Rank 4: Shark Smells Blood

No animal waits to see the effect of its first attack before pressing its advantage. At this rank, Hiruma can make two attacks a round. If they prefer, they may sacrifice one attack for a second dodge (see Rank 3: Hummingbird Wings).

Rank 5: Daylight Wastes No Movement

The Hiruma learns to use no more energy than is precisely needed to kill his opponent. If the bushi delivers more Wounds than necessary to kill his target, he may apply the excess Wounds to the next target he hits. The carry-over effect does not last beyond the end of the current skirmish. This may be done once for each of the Hiruma's attacks.

The Accounts of Daidoji Chutei

The young nephew of Daidoji Uji sent me this story of his search for his ancestral yari, shortly before retiring to a monastery. Though he still longs to see the weapon retrieved, he offers the following warning to all who would brave the waters southwest of the landbridge.

-Seikansha

Few heroes of the Crane are respected by more clans than Daidoji Masashigi, who gave his life and the lives of his men to help Hida Bokaru hold the landbridge against Oni no Kinjiro's forces. Indeed, among the Crab, he is held in greater esteem than Kakita himself. A shrine to his spirit sits on the landbridge border, holding his helm, the only possession which ever washed ashore. His yari, the ancestral weapon of the Daidoji, is still missing beneath the waves. And foolish indeed is the one who would try to retrieve it.

I was that fool.

As the younger son of Daidoji Tekigun, nephew and second in the line of inheritance from the Daidoji daimyo, it was not difficult for me to believe that fortune would favor me a second time and allow my name to be mingled with the great Masashigi's as the retriever of his armor, his katana, and most of all, his spear.

On the evening of my *gempukku*, the pain of my new tattoo burning fervor into my brain, I stood before my relatives and announced my name. "I am Daidoji Chutei," I said. "My name means loyalty, and though I am not *daimyo*, I swear these vows: to protect the Crane clan, to study its history, never to betray the secrets of the Daidoji house, and to retrieve the yari of Daidoji Masashigi."

And though I am sure now that there was much laughter behind the raised fans and stoic faces, no one spoke out, and my heart was light with pride as I began my research.

It was a simple thing to sit on shore and watch the tide recede, day after day, recording the patterns of retreat the water made on the sand, always to the southwest toward the tarnished beaches. Over and over I read the tales, the accounts of Bokaru's lieutenants, the Kakita scholars' interpretations, until I knew just where our great

commander had fallen, how deep his spear would be buried in silt, how far the tides would have dragged it over four hundred years.

For three months, I practiced diving, until I could hold my breath like a peasant pearl-hunter and swim farther than any Mantis. And on the sixteenth day of the Dragon, after paying my respects at the shrine of the Iron Crane, I made good on my promise.

I had not dived more than fifteen feet into the waters of the Coast of Dark Mist, when they began to thicken against my skin. Cold and slick only heartbeats before, the waves were as hot as rice gruel and thicker than boiled dye. It was not so far below Amaterasu's light, but the inky liquid closed over my head, leaving me in blackness.

Sightless, I knew my heart would guide me, for I was Daidoji Chutei, and I would not break my vow. Deeper, I swam, struggling against the heaviness which slowed my strokes and would have trapped a lesser man. My skin was numb, but I ignored it, concentrating on the tips of my fingers as they dug through the slippery ooze. I seized the shaft and tore it free.

Lungs burning, I got a *ken-an* further, two, then suddenly my breath left and there was only tar. My scream made no sound as pain tore through my shoulder. I have trained as a bushi all my life, I have earned scars in iaijutsu duels, and I once drank a poisoned cup meant for Lady Doji Ameiko; this was the most searing agony I have ever experienced. Yet I could not let go.

With no air left, I yanked on the rope my clansmen held far above, and clawed back to the surface, needing the taste of air and Lady Sun's honest warmth. It was much longer coming up, and the darkness stayed with me all the way to the top. I sucked in a breath of tar. I had no choice. Though it choked me with its foulness, my head soon broke the surface. The air was sweet, and for a moment, even the pain was less.

And it did not matter, for I held my ancestor's weapon in my hand.

KOTOKU, THE DAIDOJI ANCESTRAL YARI

Lore TN: 10 (Crane Clan Lore)

The yari's eight-foot shaft ends in a two-foot blade, with the Doji mon on one side and the Kakita on the other (forged by Yasurugi before the Daidoji existed). It is only slightly tarnished from its years underwater, and a master weapon polisher can restore it in days.

Kotoku creates a protective zone around the bearer, preventing more than one opponent from attacking him a round, and stores an additional number of Void points equal to the wielder's Honor plus Daidoji School Rank. While these do not increase the Void Ring, they can be spent on skill rolls and techniques just like normal Void.

The yari is currently underwater, protected by the half-dead Oni no Kinjiro (see next page).



ONI NO KINJIRO

Though too far from Fu Leng to reanimate fully, and pinned to a rock with Masishigi's spear, Oni no Kinjiro consumed the energies of its dying army and kept itself alive.

Permanently trapped beneath thirty feet of tar and with no mind to speak of, Kinjiro's body is nearly liquid, much like a gigantic man-o'-war jellyfish with tentacles hundreds of feet long. Hitting a vital spot on the oni is difficult, but nearly every swipe will sever its poisonous feelers, setting them drifting through the tar.

Lore TN: 10 to have heard of it, 30 to know its current state of being.

EARTH: 3

FIRE: 1

WATER: 4

Strength: 6

AIR: 1

Attacking: 8k3

Damage: Special

TN to be Hit: 30

Armor: None

Wounds: 30: -1; 45: -2; 60: -3; 90:

Dead

Special Abilities: Invulnerability

When Oni no Kinjiro detects flesh, it attaches dozens of cable-thick stinging tentacles and secretes strong acid to sever the caught portion and suck the nutrients from it, leaving a driftwood-like husk.

Before Kinjiro attacks, the intended victim may make a Reflexes + Investigation roll, TN 15, to feel the tentacles around them and try to rip away (Agility + Athletics, TN 20), though they must drop their highest die due to the numbing water. If Kinjiro succeeds in an attack, the victim must make an Earth roll, TN 15, or be paralyzed and almost certainly drown. Once attached,

Kinjiro does 3k2 damage a round. When it exceeds the target's Earth x 5 for arms or head or Earth x 6 for legs, the part is gone permanently.

This process is *extremely* painful, giving characters a +10 TN modifier to any actions.

I raised my arm to break the surface with the spear, and knew my failure. For though it never left my hand, the yari still lies on the ocean floor. At my shorn shoulder, where white bone and red, bleeding skin should have shown, was only a dull pitted brown, the color and consistency of driftwood.

I have given my life over to Shinsei. I can never serve my clan again.

An Excerpt From the Famous Novel "Masiko," by Hida Nareiko

It is unfortunate that Hida's decree to never speak the name of his first wife has led the Crab to ignore Nareiko's impressive account. Nevertheless, Nareiko was a great samurai-ko and explorer before she wrote her novel, and I believe the events in it are the literal truth as far as she could discover, though couched in fiction in a vain attempt to avoid her lord's displeasure.

-Seikansha

The armies were coming.

Every day, Masiko told herself that. Even now, it didn't seem real. The castle was empty, the panic of the refugees far behind her, and still she could not believe. The armies of the dark kami were here. The armies of her husband's brother.

They frightened her, his family, warriors all, proud and brightly colored or cloaked in deepest shadow. Even the lovely Doji wore her eerie radiance with a soldier's confidence. Together, they seemed to hold the entire world. She had never thought that there had been another, never guessed they might abandon one of their own.

She checked the door again. The stout oak wedged in the frame could not buy her more time than the lives of all her subjects, but its strength comforted, reminded her of a time when all she needed was the touch of his hand to cure all worries. When Hida looked at her, all he saw was perfection and that was all he spoke of: the perfect beauty that had captured the heart of the strongest kami, the perfect son they had borne, the perfect world they had created for his home.

Though many questioned their match, Masiko knew he could make no other. He needed his opposite - soft of voice, delicate of hand and skin, small and polite, with a laugh like tinkling bells. With her, he did not live each moment in the shadow of his work. In her arms, he could forget the horror of his duty.

There is so much ugliness in what I do.

Her tears fell, darkening the fine grain of the wooden floor. She did not watch, wondering if these were the first tears shed in the palace he had built her, or if the servants had been unhappy some time in the past. The shoji behind her showed the smoke-colored image of a bird in flight, graceful, quiet, delicate, and she wept at the care he had taken to paint it for her.

I want never to come home to ugliness.

The empire's greatest warrior had spent every spare moment overseeing *heimin* cart the stones of rose-marble which guarded the entrance. Her own touches showed in the sandalwood incense which scented each room, and the silver-blue cloth which draped the shrine, but this was Hida's home, and Masiko never wished it to be any other.

Nothing on this earth will dare attack you.

He would not teach her his way, or speak of what happened when he returned in armor still rust-brown from the blood of the battlefield. Each time he left, a hundred of his strongest bushi stayed behind to guard the low wall and green gardens of Kyuden Masiko.

She counted their screams, now, separating each man's voice from the ululating howls outside. None begged for mercy nor cried out with anything but hatred. Her husband had chosen them well, true samurai all, for what good it would do them.

The incense stick was almost ash, doing nothing to mask the reek from below. Masiko watched calmly as the red ember traveled the last of its journey, the small offering all she could make for the souls of those who would die to fail to save her.

She prayed, wherever Shinsei had taken him, that the incense did not burn for Atarasi as well.

She pulled the ivory-handled *kaiken* from its sheath. It had been a wedding present from an unknown blacksmith, and Hida had demanded that she throw it away, for he saw the hard-edged blade as an insult to his strength, and yelled until the walls shook that she would never need to fight. But she loved the care the man had taken to carve her beloved palace on the handle, and would not allow such artistry to go to waste.

She thanked the Fortunes for his skill.



THE KAIKEN OF HIDA MASIKO

Lore TN: 25 (Crab Clan Lore)

Non-samurai-ko noblewomen often keep a *kaiken*, a long, slim aiguchi, to defend their honor and body. It is usually used against assailants, but when besieged by a superior army, many loyal wives and daughters use it to perform *jigai*, a less painful type of *seppuku* done by slitting the throat.

Hida Masiko committed *jigai*, saving her spirit from the ravages of Fu Leng's armies, but Crab women ever since have preferred beheading by *naginata*, for legends say her mortal shell serves Fu Leng even today. Her last act was to set her palace aflame, and only a few scattered stones still remain after ten centuries.

Masiko's *kaiken* is a small silver-and-ivory-handled Kain blade. It does 2k3 if used as a weapon, but its greatest power is to remove Taint from an infected person, physically cutting out the rotten areas to prevent further spread.

The wielder must make an Intelligence + Medicine or Advanced Medicine roll, TN 25, to detect where the Taint lies. Knowledge of how the Taint was acquired ("A plague zombie clawed me on the left thigh...") gives one Free Raise.

Cutting out the Taint is an Agility + Medicine or Advanced Medicine roll, TN 10 x Shadowlands Rank, minimum 10. This process permanently reduces the recipient's Wound points by the number of Shadowlands points removed. It is also extremely painful without medicinal opium, and thrashing may raise the TN for effective surgery. It takes a number of Willpower rolls, TN 20, equal to the number of Taint ranks removed for the subject to stay still and not cry out. Failing this roll does 3k3 Wounds in addition to the surgery.

THE EIKISAKU BELL

Lore TN: 30

No one is certain when this relic was created, and few Kuni have even heard of its existence. Most likely, oni recognized the bell's power and dragged it deep into the Shadowlands where it could not be used again.

The bell is twice as large as a person's head, and carved from a single piece of jade with walls so thin they are nearly transparent. If struck with a small rock or rock hammer, the bell screams to be taken to Eikisaku temple. It cries unceasingly for a Rokugani hour, then shuts up and does not speak unless hit again. Hitting it with other substances has no effect.

If the PCs can find Eikisaku temple (the bell does not answer questions), and rehang the bell in its proper place, they receive one Honor point. Striking the bell now produces a single pure note, lasting for a number of minutes equal to the striking character's Honor. All Shadowlands creatures within earshot (or vibration, for earless snake-oni) take (Striker's Honor)k1 damage a round, and must resist a Fear effect equal to the striker's Honor or run in terror.

The blade glowed green with the light beyond the windows, stretching from her wrist to the tip of her middle finger. There were no more screams now, no more clangs of steel on shell. All she heard, beneath the howls, were a hundred thousand footsteps.

He would not come. He should not. He owed his life to Rokugan, to the armies he led fifty miles to the south, to his youngest brother whom all had sworn to protect.

The tears made a pattern on the soft gray silk, dark crows spreading their wings on her knees. One hit the *kaiken* and was sliced in two, half a drop running down each side of the blade, as if to bless it.

I want never to come home to ugliness.

They were almost at the door.

Masiko wound the rope around her knees tightly. She would not shame her lord by thrashing and kicking. Let the first person to view her body see her composed as a lady, not a woman.

The tip kissed her throat, and Masiko kept her eyes open, fixed on the floor as her hands plunged in and down. Warmth coated her fingers, dripped down her kimono, over her legs. She tried to gasp at the pain, but could not until she freed the blade. Her mouth remained sealed in a crimson smile as she breathed her first new breath.

Sight glazed silver-red. All she heard was blood thrumming in her ears, drowning their sounds for the first time in days. With her last strength, she lay down by the candle, starting her kimono burning. She folded her hands neatly.

A proper end.

No worse than any could hope for.

He would be proud.

The Bell of Eikisaku Temple

This account was found in the collection of Daidoji Nazoko, supposedly acquired by her teacher Kuni Mokuna. Nazoko-sama never made the story publicly known, for anyone skilled in speaking with elements would find that the scorch-marks and damp spots bear the Taint of an oni's touch. It seems that Mokuna's curiosity overcame his honor on this matter (and perhaps others), if he took to summoning such a creature simply to interrogate it on its homeland.

-Seikansha

It was a man, walking. His sword dripped blood, and his flesh too. It was long that he was there, and he was already starting to smell one with the land. But not enough. In the mud, he was obvious, gray-purple-blue cloth. So many little pictures on his clothes, so many crabs, but not a single one to help when he was chased.

Many, many chased him, for the hunt was in them and they knew that hot blood and bone awaited. The mud meant little to them. Their claws spread and skin held them up, too many legs to fall. But the man was slow. The ground grabbed his boots, and he fell, scrabbling with hands and feet, long pretty kimono covered and trailing.

These were lands with spells and spirits and blight, and they had already taken it back, but it was not all theirs yet, and when he saw a temple, no one waited. But inside was safer, he thought, and ran behind paper walls. The trail was left easy, steps of blood for the horde to follow.

He could call help, he thought, with the bell. Jade, it was, green and thin to strike, with a stone hammer next to it and crossed claws carved in front. The man wanted to bring saviors, and he put down his sword and picked up the hammer and struck it.

It rang softly, but no howls were loud to stop it. He struck it only once, but it kept crying, louder and louder. Screams rose from outside as claws flailed in the air to stop the noise, but there was nothing to attack and they fled from it.

The man smiled with jade in his eyes, and knew he had found the reason he walked here, for he had wanted a weapon without blood. He pulled down the bell and stuck it under his arm and walked out. All that saw him stayed away because the bell was heard for a great distance and no one wanted to hear it again.

"It is amazing," the man said with pride-words when he was home with other samurai. "Oni run in fear at the sound." And all smiled and thanked the Fortunes and made ready to celebrate with war.

So the day came and they brought a thousand legs onto the battlefield with katana and tetsubo and arrows and they ran and chopped and shot and yelled, and waiting back with the bell in a wagon was the man. He smiled wide as he struck hammer to jade, waiting for the pain-sound of the ring.

But the bell voice was only a scream, yelling like claws on stone, "Take me back! Eikisaku temple! Eikisaku temple! Take me back!"



KAKKO-FUDO

Lore TN: 15 (Crab Clan Lore)

Kakko-fudo was designed to aid Kuni on his research in the Shadowlands, preventing its bearer from acquiring Taint as long as he carries the sword. Though the 5k3 katana of unrotting jade may be used by anyone, its powers are geared toward shugenja. After using Kakko-fudo, the bearer may take two Wounds to "regain" one cast spell of each Ring as if he had meditated for two hours.

KISHU

Lore TN: 35 (Crab Clan Lore)

Hiruma's katana gives a cruel sting indeed; studded with unrotting jade, it ignores oni Invulnerability and all armor, with a DR of 5k2. It is tuned to the wielder's subconscious, allowing him to spend up to all of his available Void points on damage. In addition, the sword's bearer gives off no scent (ever) and always can see as though in full daylight.

However, Kishu's contentious nature subtracts 2k1 from all Meditation rolls made to regain Void, often putting the bearer in serious trouble during an extended mission into the Shadowlands.

Researchers rolling Crab Clan Lore may recognize another way to tell Kishu from fakes: the pins in the hilt are positioned for the sword to be used left-handed.

KAIU HORUKO'S SOROBAN

Lore TN: 25 (Crab Clan Lore)

A simple wood frame with a sun and moon design on opposite sides, the abacus is strung with copper wires and set with small coral beads. Remarkably, has not decayed despite years in the Shadowlands, for its magics calculate and adjust to keep its elements in perfect balance.

It gives any user a Free Raise on all calculations – engineering, astronomy, strategic battle sessions, etc. In addition, for members of the

Kaiu school, it allows its user to substitute any one school skill and technique bonuses for any other.

Lastly, there is a code wheel in the frame, giving the user an additional two dice to roll and keep when using the Cipher skill to encode or decode passages.

And with anger happy that the bell did not hurt, claws flew and tore and teeth bit steel until the samurai screamed in retreat and hunger was satisfied. The man grabbed the bell and ran with it, screaming that the Fortune was no more and he was cursed.

He did not reach the temple or come back, and still today, the bell does not scream, and the temple stands empty and safe without protection.

From Kam Hochi, Shihan, Kam-Saku-Ryu, to Kuni Yori, Family Damyo

Yori-sama was of great assistance in the preparation of this volume, and allowed me to peruse a number of letters he had not the time to address. It seems the Crab often ask him about lost heirlooms, relatives, or anything else they believe he might have come across in his journeys into the Dark One's realm, and he grows tired of such questions.

-Seikansha

May this spring see blossoms on your trees and grass in your fields, and the blessings of Amaterasu on yourself, Kuni-sama. I hope your recent forays into the realm of He Who Must Not Be Named have met with full success, for I wish to inquire whether you have come across certain ancestral katana in your journeys. I understand this is akin to



searching for a hoofprint on a Unicorn battlefield, but it is a matter of great potential for both your work and ours.

Kakko-fudo, the katana used by your own ancestor Kuni, remains lost to the Dark One, as I am certain you already know. However, word has recently come from Hiruma Kisaru that he has seen it in the hands of the former Moto daimyo. Though he had but a moment's look, the blade's markings are unmistakable. Forged by both Kuni and Kaiu, its layers of purest jade and darkest obsidian are bound in steel, still gleaming with the purity of the snow and blessed salt the blade was quenched in. The *tsuba* he saw was gilt with silver, with the symbols of the five elements ringing it, and the black teak *saya* was decorated only with burnished iron.

While we understand you would certainly wish to take immediate possession of such an heirloom were it discovered, my school asks a chance to study the blade, for many of Kaiu's techniques were lost with his death and few of our students have studied a weapon made at the peak of his skills. (Our opportunities to borrow the great *Chikara* have been minimal).

In more unexpected news, I have been reading of a small Hiruma fortress unearthed in a recent foray into the lost lands. It is truly unfortunate that these histories have lain so long forgotten, for their accounts of Hiruma's deeds are among the most accurate I have found.

The ceremony is well-recorded where Hiruma presented Hida with the blade that killed Oni no Hatsu Suru, the blade later known as *Chikara*. Some time later, Hiruma journeyed into the Dark Lands to do his part against his lord's brother, and his own sword was left embedded in an oni.

But curiously, though no one argues this account, no one can say how *Hiko* was recovered, not even the Hiruma daimyos. Their family histories state only that a blade was lost, and that *Hiko* was handed down by Hiruma to his son, surely a curious lack of detail for such a famous katana.

If these new documents are correct, however, *Hiko* was *never* given as a replacement for *Chikara*, but for Hiruma's own blade, made by Kaiu before the two ever swore their allegiance to Hida. This original blade is what was lost to the Shadowlands, and lies there still!

There are few descriptions of the weapon, though the histories agree that it did not bear Kaiu's stamp, and the only Crab symbols on it were the golden hilt pins presented by Hida after the First War. It is usually called simply "Hiruma's sword," though I suspect one reference to his notorious "surprise attack" may in fact be the weapon's name – Kishu.

Though Hiruma had nothing but praise for the sword, Kaiu apparently remained dissatisfied with his early work, calling it "quaint" and "structurally imperfect." Unlike the katana most plays and poems portray, the sword used the archaic method and has nearly no curve. Its blade is steel, later reinforced with jade.

Naturally, we would not presume to ask favors of you, and we understand you have many prior obligations. However the recovery of such fine weapons could mean only the best for our clan and families, and we hope this information allows your inquiries among the *nezumi* to bear sweeter fruit.

Respectfully yours,
Kaiu Hochi

Cursed items should never be easy to get rid of. Samurai can rarely, if ever, simply smash the darn things with their *die tsuchi* and walk off. At best, the blow will bounce off. At worst, it will free the resident oni and release clouds of Taint onto innocent bystanders.

Unless specifics are given, assume cursed items can only be destroyed under a particular circumstance: buried in a jade tomb, dropped into the Festering Pit of Fu Leng, dipped in pure spring water by a Hantei, and the like. The Crab usually send their lowest-ranking members south with sacks full of the things to dump in the Shadowlands, but among other clans the samurai who first acquires the item is often stuck guarding it forever, passing it down from father to son until it reaches the PCs. Thus, the strange Heritage Table circumstance of acquiring a *nemuranai* which the character is told to guard, yet "never, ever use."

NAGORI'S CHRYSANTHEMUMS

Lore TN: 25 (Scorpion, Crane, or Crab Clan Lore)

Only one of the original bushes survives, donated to the Asahina temple as a sample of Nagori's work. The bushes roll their Perception at TN 20 minus the target's Shadowlands Rank (10 for Shadowlands creatures). If successful, they form a number of guardians equal to the number of blossoms on the plant (1-19), with the following abilities:

EARTH: 2

FIRE: 2

Agility: 3

WATER: 4

AIR: 2

Attacking: 4k3

Damage: 5k2

TN to be Hit: 15

Armor: 5

Wounds: 8: -1; 12: -2; 16: -3; 20: -

4; 28: Dead

The guardians look like three-foot-high bushi in armor made of white blossoms, carrying small, wooden, thorn-studded tetsubo. When killed, they dissolve into scattered petals. The plant itself can only be destroyed by

burning, though it takes 1 die of months to recover its first blossom when all its guardians are killed.

The Tainted descendants of the original plants can be found all over the Shadowlands. Though no longer able to animate, the plants automatically show a number of blossoms equal to the number of un-Tainted humans inside a dwelling.



The Wondrous Soroban of Kam Haruko

The following account is my own. I asked many bushi on the Kaiu Wall what spectacular nemuranai have been lost to the Shadowlands and took care to record the conversations when I had returned indoors to brush and ink. The three bushi I met that day have since passed over, but I believe that the Kaiu whose name I never learned may still live.

-Seikansha

I spent today among the *hohei* atop the wall. It was cold; too bright for oni, too still for goblins, and so we held our own "winter court." They played daimyo, and I played Kakita.

"Of all nemuranai lost to the Shadowlands," I asked, "which is noblest?"

Hiruma Sensaichi whipped her tanto across her left arm, and the fine blade snapped off. "You see this armor?" she asked. "This is garbage. My family's other suit went with my great-grandmother to the south. It had crystal shards all down the sleeves."

There was an impressed murmur from the gathered bushi, then Hida Rairaku lay his tetsubo against the wall's edge. "True, your family is great," he said, "but I would respectfully say the armor of Doji Komatsu, the lost Emerald Champion, would be a far greater prize were I to return with it. The insult to our Emperor would be avenged at last."

"Still," interrupted Yasuki Kaiseiki, a small man who takes much abuse for his merchant ancestry, "I would say the possessions of the Seven Thunders would be more valued still." And here they all agreed, though there was debate between Isawa's scroll satchel, Atarasi's tetsubo, and anything touched by Shinsei. Then a small figure, huddled in the darkness by the stairs, spoke up. His voice was light, and somehow frail, but his hand was steady as he held up a wooden frame, strung with porcelain beads and wires.

"The Thunders needed no great magic," he said as he came into the light, "other than that in their souls. The device that did the greatest good for our Empire is the *soroban* of Kaiu Haruko that preserved us all against the Maw."

Rairaku's eyes narrowed dangerously. "The Lady Osaku preserved us then."

"True." The nameless man's voice was as unruffled as though he were instructing children at court, not insulting a Hida a bowshot away from the Shadowlands. "During the Battle of the Cresting Wave Osaku's magic kept the Dark One's forces at bay. But it was Haruko who designed this Wall."

At this we all let the point be addressed.

Kaiu Haruko had laid out her counting sticks before Hida Banuken, and swore the task he asked for could not be done. He ejected her from the meeting before she finished, for they could afford nothing less than success.

But Haruko knew no one else could accomplish this. The task was enormous. In sixty days, she had to come up with a plan for half a million people to build an effective rampart. She had to determine the precise angles of each stone support to withstand the strongest earthquake, to become the foundation for a larger wall, yet never be dismantled for a moment of weakness and never allow creatures an easy climb. By her design, hundreds of shugenja teams would work in tandem, timing their rituals so one would take off at precisely the moment the last one ended. From her estimates of terrain and Shadowlands strength, the guard posts would be set, and traps built as often as the wall could structurally stand. Her numbers determined the amount of rock the peasants quarried, how fast and how many tons could get to the proper section of the wall, and set the food ration they would need to work at such a grueling pace.

And this she could not do with counting sticks arranged on a mat.

Seizing upon a pile of nuts, she pierced them in groups on her counting sticks, laying others across them and putting all in a wooden frame: the first *soroban*. After four terrifying days of clacking nuts, shells, and beads while Osaku grew older and bushi died by the hundreds, she emerged with a plan, hands too stiff to hold a calligrapher's brush. She spread her calculations among the Kaiu, who copied them precisely and prayed they were right. Fifty-six days later, when the oni attacked, the miracle was not only that the wall held, but that it existed at all.

Haruko disappeared in the fighting, but three of her students had taken up the use of the device and kept the copper and coral *soroban* she used for most of her work. It was lost at Hiruma Castle some two hundred years ago, brought along to aid future fortifications once it was retaken.

THE MASK OF SHOSURO ITODE

Lore TN: 30 (Crab or Scorpion Clan Lore)

The shining gold mask is most likely to be found in the nest of an ogre or nezumi. The words "be as you like" are embroidered on its silk lining. Its years in the Shadowlands have imbued it with evil magic; if worn, it gives the wearer the appearance and voice of whatever they are thinking about. Anyone within eyesight when the character first puts on the mask sees and hears this new persona.

Characters outside the vicinity, however, see the wearer as a monstrous insectoid oni, with six clawed legs, two lizard-like heads and three scorpion tails. This is an illusion, but it will still cause chaos ("Why yes, you see, I found this Tainted mask in the Shadowlands... oh, no, don't worry, it's harmless. Harmless, I assure you").

Wearing the mask inflicts one point of Taint per use.

ANCESTOR: SHOSURO ITODE

914-940

1 POINT

(Available to Scorpion and Crab characters)

Though he had no children, Shosuro Itode remains an ancestor to two families, both of which share his determination and persistence in the face of almost certain failure. They receive a Free Raise to all Willpower rolls. However, his decision to leave his blood relatives for his adopted ones still has repercussions today, and characters of either clan with this ancestor receive a +5 TN penalty for all social rolls to gain favor with the Scorpion Clan.

ISAWA YASUKO'S INKBRUSH

Lore TN: 20 (Phoenix Clan Lore)

This inkbrush still looks like the simple twig and grass it was made of, requiring a Perception + Investigation roll, TN 25 (20 if actively looking), to notice it. Its years in the Shadowlands have not physically damaged the brush.

When a character wishes to use the brush, she must make an Air + Meditation roll, TN 15 (raises increase the prediction's clarity). If successful, the user falls into a trance, and the paintings come out with great skill, always containing a clouded vision of the future, couched in symbols of the Fortunes.

Unfortunately, corruption has permanently warped its predictions; now it only shows negative futures of *oni* and *maho* striking the painter. The paintings still invariably come true, however, for the pictures act as a beacon to Shadowlands creatures, attracting them to attack the artist.

A Letter From Bayushi Meibuko, Wife of Scorpion Clan Daimyo Bayushi Dokata, to Hida Zempai, Crab Clan Daimyo

Greetings my lord Hida-sama. I hope this winter finds you in a better humor than last. Please forgive my husband for not sending an invitation to this year's court. While I would never intimate that you were less than the perfect guest, and while your comments on the functionality of our little political games were quite enlightening, I am certain that your devotion to your duty often keeps you close to home.

Instead, please accept the following gifts as a token of appreciation for the fine service the Crab clan performs in protecting our southern border. Perhaps with this assistance, you may someday rejoin our winter festivities, though we shall certainly understand if such exceptions cannot be made.

The retainers accompanying this letter bear four chrysanthemum cuttings. While I well remember your disdain for frivolities such as flowers, I implore you to find a gardener who will properly care for such bushes, for they may be of more use than either you or your enemies would predict.

These chrysanthemums were bred and designed by one of my court's humble shugenja, Yogo Nagori, son of Yogo Tunago and Asahina Nateko. Combining his father's gift for wards with his mother's *tsangusuri*, Nagori awakened the spirits of these four chrysanthemum plants (though his explanation of the method was enough to make my



head spin), and primed them to notice approaching enemies, particularly those touched by the Shadowlands.

When in such presence, the flowers animate, becoming plant-guardians which fight to protect their lord. I myself have seen a demonstration of their tenacity. As long as the main bush remains protected, the individual guards may be struck down, only to rise again at full strength when the next blossoms appear.

I sincerely hope such a paltry gift might impart some small service to your great battle. Please remember the Scorpion clan as fondly as we remember you. May Amaterasu favor your footsteps.

With utmost sincerity,
Bayushi Meibuko

Meibuko's letter and gifts were sent the year following a lengthy, publicly embarrassing outburst by Hida Zempai, during which the Crab daimyo made clear his disdain for the Scorpion, their castle, their gardens and even the lovely Meibuko's looks. Tied up in a war with the Lion, the Bayushi had no men to spare to avenge the insult, and preferred to buy the Hida's support through a unique gift. Though Zempai was impressed with the chrysanthemum guards and by all reports used them heavily among his defenses at Kyuden Hida, his gratitude did not stop him from declaring war on the Scorpion the next year and taking a good portion of their southern land for displaced Hiruma.

The flowers themselves were later uprooted and stolen by a maho-tsukai who disguised his Taint long enough to bypass the flowers' wards. Though Yogo Nagori's safeguards prevented anyone Tainted from gaining his creations' loyalty, several Crab explorers have reported seeing similar bushes growing outside the dwellings of oni, apparently alerting the creatures to human presence inside.

-Seikansha

A Letter From Hida Binuboku to Shosuro Ijin

This letter was given to me by Ijin's great-granddaughter, along with a request to retrieve her family's heirloom from the Shadowlands. I have had little time or inclination to search for so mundane an item, but those who found it would certainly receive the family's gratitude.

-Seikansha

To the family of Shosuro Itode:
Your son is dead.

I do not know what you have heard of his life here, for if he had any communications with you he did not speak of such distasteful subjects among his friends. I write this now only out of respect for him and because you should know that his final resting place will not be among you.

THE BUTTERFLY HAIRPINS

Lore TN: 30 (Maho-tsukai Lore)

Man-etsu was actually a *maho-tsukai* who took the guise of a geisha to seduce a Shosuro lord, intending to kill him and assume his position with shapechanging magic. She was undone by her own plans when she fell in love, and gave up her dark magics to live with him. Her oni escaped her weakened control, and when it attacked her family, she sacrificed herself to save them.

The hairpins she left her daughter are one of several similar cursed items (including an origami crane, a kimono embroidered with dragonflies, and a fan decorated with a hummingbird), which turn the user into the represented creature.

The user must wish strongly to be elsewhere, then make a Void roll; the result is the number of minutes the effect lasts. Unknown to the user, each activation causes three points of Taint, though this has no immediate physical effects. Track this on a separate sheet, only revealing it if the character takes steps to find out. When the user's Shadowlands Rank equals her Void Ring, she permanently becomes a pony-sized version of the creature. If Void is not her highest Ring, she retains consciousness within the new form, but when her Taint exceeds her highest Ring, her sentience disappears and she becomes the creature in every way.

**ONI NO CHOCHO
(BUTTERFLY DEMON)**

EARTH: 3

FIRE: 3

WATER: 3

AIR: 5

Attacking: 6k4

Damage: 2k2 (6k2)

TN to be Hit: 25

Armor: 0

Wounds: 20: -1; 30: -2; 40: -3; 50:

-4; 60: Dead

Special Abilities: *Fear 2*

When attacking, the butterfly attempts to extend its three-foot proboscis into its victim, sucking out blood and viscera and leaving them a dried husk. Attacks which succeed marginally do only 2k2 damage as the creature beats its target with club-like wings. Any attack which exceeds its target number by 10 or more has penetrated and does 6k2. Wounds done in this manner heal at half normal rate, and the loss of fluids adds 15 to the Target Number for Path to Inner Peace.

Itode has lived among the Crab since his fostering at five years old, and a Crab he has become. Though he arrived as a hostage to insure peace on our northern border, it did not take many years before he looked upon his sparse memories of the Scorpion courts with only scorn.

None would have treated him as anything but the brother he and I were raised as, except that he insisted on still wearing that foppish red-gold mask. The kabuki diamonds over the eyes and drawn lashes of onyx made him a beacon for every goblin war party. Though I insisted for years that he discard the thing, he refused, saying that wearing it honored his ancestors.

While he trained as a Hida bushi, his classmates and sensei bore no sympathy for him. Still, your son proved his strength when needed and stood by them against enemies, and earned honors under our harshest instructors. For fifteen years he trained with our men and it was with our men he died.

Some seventy trolls came over the side of the wall, and Itode was at the front of the platoon that slowed their ascent. His mask caught the sunlight, even from behind the parapet, and a hail of slung stones caught him long enough that his defense faltered and the first got through.

Though they tore his arms from his body, Itode miraculously still lived when the battle ended, long enough for him to know he had won us a victory.

Our shugenja blessed him, and Itode shouted his final words loudly, asking that his ashes be buried in the soil he had died to protect. Few others in history have been honored to rest forever with our ancestors, and never a Scorpion. But when my father spoke, no one questioned his decision.

"You shall," he said, "if you die as a Crab."

He was smiling when we tore the mask from his face and flung it over the wall, and by the time we returned, he was dead. But he died an honest man, his face open to his brothers and to Amaterasu's light, and we will honor his final wish.

May you be strong in the face of your grief.

Hida Binboku





A Request From Shiba Fukade to His Lord, Shiba Ikkyoku

This letter comes from the records of your own clan, Tadaka-sama, but as it concerns a Shiba yojimbo who failed his charge, I suspected it might have been kept private by the family. I certainly have no wish to unearth old shame and make strife in your clan, but foretelling magic is potent, and I thought the Council must be informed.

-Seikansha

My lord, I beg that you grant me permission to clear my family name. I have failed you, I have failed my lady Isawa-sama, and I have failed the pact that our revered ancestor made eight hundred and fifty years ago.

When you honored me by offering my services to the Mistress of Air, I spent the entire night at the shrine of my ancestors, giving thanks for their guidance and asking that they bless my actions, for surely there is no position more worthy than to guard the life and honor of an Elemental Master. I wanted nothing more than to serve under the woman who, at seventeen, had already earned her place on the Council of Five.

And never in my fifteen years at her side has Yasuko-sama fallen short of my expectations. Her understanding of the element of wind and breath is stunning; from the howling tempest to the softest whispered word, she controls them all without needing to lay down her biwa or brush.

The Fortunes themselves smiled on her, as I am certain you have heard. It was I who waited at the bottom of the hill when she went for her famed meditation and returned with a handful of grass wrapped around a twig, and the landscape painted across her own kimono. She was so moved by the Fortunes' grace in creating such beauty that she had to return their gift. She offered the painting at a shrine that night, and since that day, her brush has been blessed with true sight, and all that it paints comes to be.

Obsidian weapons are relatively easy to manufacture, since they require only primitive shaping rather than elaborate folding, but deposits are rare. Use the rules for finding jade (page 32) to determine whether obsidian weapons or powder are available. Most swordsmiths categorically refuse to soil a daisho with obsidian, but other weapons can be custom-made. Such weapons have the same Damage Ratings as other weapons of that type, and they cause normal damage to creatures with Invulnerability.

All obsidian has a 3 in 10 chance of being cursed. Roll secretly when the character acquires the weapon: the madness is triggered when it first hits Tainted blood. The bearer must make an immediate Willpower roll, TN 5, to resist its effects. This roll is repeated every full moon at +5 to the difficulty. Each time they fail, they fall into a blind fury, seeking to commit barbaric atrocities against their closest friends and kin. Gamemasters should tailor these to make sense to the character in her maddened state, though she will regret her actions later.

Discarding the obsidian reverses the process: each month the Willpower roll grows easier until they are free of its effects. If the samurai fails five rolls in a row, the lunacy becomes permanent.

THE BAG OF THE WALKING FOREST

This is a good item for PCs to receive from Heritage Table rolls: an innocuous-seeming bag of rice which they are told to never cook, eat, plant, or burn.

The "rice" is in fact thousands of oni eggs which remain inert under most conditions, but if planted (or spilled on the ground), take root and grow in 1-10 hours into rice plants as tall as trees. When full-grown, the "trees" pull themselves from the ground and walk away, laying more insidious eggs everywhere they go. If burned, crushed or boiled, the egg shells crack prematurely, releasing tiny (rice-grain sized) baby oni, which run for the nearest soil to plant themselves (Perception + Investigation rolls, TN 35, to find every grain before it escapes).

If eaten, the baby oni take root in the body, doing 1k1 damage the first day, 2k1 the next and so on, for ten days (not to mention bloating, bloody vomit, and shortness of breath). By the fourth day, branches start to break through the skin, and by the seventh, they reach roots through the victim's feet or back, pinning him to the ground. There is no easy way to get rid of them once swallowed without killing the host, though eating large quantities of jade powder can slow their growth.

Evil Ward or other Shadowlands-targeting magic has no effect on the eggs. Any such magics aimed at swallowed babies does the spell's damage to the host.

It is my fault that we did not see its warnings when Hida Chomen asked Yasuko-sama's services. Her paintings showed no danger, only the peace of sleep, and she accepted his plea. I followed blindly, senses dulled, for I could hardly imagine anyone wishing to harm the Mistress of Air. The shame is mine. I should have known the only sleep that awaited her in Crab lands was eternal.

It was not the Crab's fault, my lord, so do not mass your troops to avenge the insult. Yasuko-sama's spells were of great use to Lord Hida, for she could hear the plans of the dark armies and defeat them with their own words. I can only think that they learned who was responsible, for it happened only two days past the great battle.

Yasuko-sama was painting, myself kneeling at her feet as the ink came to life. Two downward slashes, four quick strokes to the side; the picture shaped into a monstrous six-armed oni, rending the helpless form of the fortune Tenjin.

Even as she dipped her brush a final time, the wall shook beneath us, and though I sprang instantly alert, I was too late. The precise being Yasuko-sama had just painted leapt the wall, its claws closing over her lovely face.

With the help of the Hida bushi, I slew it, but the Mistress of Air will never open her eyes again. The Kuni physicians say she will die in four days.

Please, my lord, allow me to be there waiting for her.

The Collected Ensho of Shosuro Hojiako

I acquired these love letters when investigating the disappearance of Shosuro Tokazu and Shosuro Hojiako. The pair were never found, and their crime, if there is one, remains unsolved to this day. Most likely, they simply fled together, but the nemuranai described within is sufficiently unusual that I wonder if it is in some way responsible. I apologize for the unbecoming content.

-Seikansha

22ND DAY OF THE MONTH OF THE CRANE

Tozaku-chan,

My brother brought me the terrible news, for you know my father does not share such things. Your parents have rejected your proposal of marriage, for they learned of my origins several nights ago. I had not realized there were still Shosuro who had not heard, else I would have known not to be so encouraged.

I am samurai, my love. Lord Shoji and the Emperor, may his name be blessed, have seen to that, but the stigma of my birth remains. My father was not so fortunate as us, to have found love within his clan and caste. Though he married dutifully, his heart belonged to the gentle music of his favorite geisha, Man-etsu.

My brother and I are the product of their love.

My father's wife had turned a sightless eye to his indiscretions, for she knew she could ask only for his name and home, never his heart. For ten years, they were childless, and when she learned of my mother's state, my father's wife bought her contract and my brother and I were raised as servants within our father's home.

When I was four years old, Man-etsu proved that kindness given means kindness repaid, for she was the only one to awaken when a half-dozen oni stormed the courtyard, and she died holding them off while the guards to armed themselves with jade. In honor of his lover's sacrifice, my father petitioned to adopt her children as full samurai. Their request was granted and since that time, we have lived as a daimyo's heirs.

I was the last one to see my mother alive, and she gave me her most valued possession, the jeweled hairpins she had worn for her customers. Though the pins are brass and the butterfly decorations only lacquer and paste, to me they are treasures, for despite her station she was truly a noble woman.

I only hope that you can change your father's mind, for I cannot live with the thought of you married to another.

Hojiako

14TH DAY OF THE MONTH OF THE DOG

I was married tonight, Hojiako-chan. I could not go against my parents' wishes. She is a Bayushi: beautiful, well-bred, with skin like ivory and hair past the backs of her knees. Her voice was soft when she spoke my name, and she would not meet my eyes even as I lay with her.

You were all I could think about. I miss the way your lips curve, the scent of jasmine and honey you leave in your wake. The touch of your sleeve on my palm was more sensual than a thousand of this girl's caresses, and the soft whisper as you called me "love," the most perfect of all.



ONI NO MOREI (GRAIN DEMONS)

The Oni no Morei's "branches" are tipped with pus-oozing claws, and their "leaves" constantly drop eggs wherever they walk. Numbers in parentheses are for the "baby oni" form.

Lore TN: 20

EARTH: 2 (1)

FIRE: 1

WATER: 2 (1)

Strength: 3 (1)

AIR: 2

Attacking: 3k2

Damage: 2k2 (1k1)

TN to be Hit: 20 (30)

Armor: 0

Wounds: 8: -1; 16: -2; 24: -4; 32:

Dead (4: -1, 8: Dead)

Special Abilities: The most frightening thing about Oni no Morei is simply their numbers. Adults lay over a thousand eggs a day, and any soil in which their offspring grow remains barren for the next three crop seasons, making them perhaps the most devastating oni for Rokugan's overall economy.

The best way to dispose of Oni no Morei is before they hatch – boiling the rice-eggs in liquid crystal (i.e. glass), killing them as they emerge.

THE PERSISTENT BOKEN "Uke"

Lore TN: 20

These boken are often made by *maho-tsukai* and sold to unsuspecting bushi. Uke hosts a small oni which animates the sword each dawn and fights the owner in the guise of a practice match. The next morning, it revives again, stronger than before. It does not wait until its owner is awake to begin.

On the first day, the oni starts with Reflexes 1, one Wound Rank of 10 points, and attack and damage of 1k1. The TN to hit it is 5. The following day, its attack and damage increase to 2k1; then 3k1, 4k1, and so on. At the beginning of the second week, it gains a ten-point Wound Rank, a Reflexes point, the TN to hit it becomes 10, and its attack and damage keep another die: 1k2 (effectively 1k1) the first day, then 2k2, 3k2, etc. This pattern continues for seven weeks. When it has reached the fifth week, the oni starts to become visible as a shadowy form gripping the boken's hilt.

The cursed, indestructible boken plagues its owner until the seventh day of the seventh week: at a Reflexes of 7, TN 35, with seven Wound Ranks of 10 points each, and 7k7 attack and damage. The boken's wound penalties beyond the second week include one free Rank, so at the seventh week, it is 10: 0; 20: -1; 30: -2; 40: -3; 50: -4; 60: -5; 70: Dead. If slain on this day it remains inert until activated again. The oni can be sated with the name of its owner, which it can take only after the fifth week; once named, it is freed. If its victim dies, it begins again at its current stats with the next person to draw a katana in its presence.

It was strange, dearest, so strong is your presence in my heart, I almost thought you were there tonight, at the window. Had I dared, I would have called to you, but when I looked, it was not your face which hovered there, but a scarlet butterfly.

I thought my heart would break.

I must see you again. I cannot bear this life without you.

Tozaku

28TH DAY OF THE MONTH OF THE DOG

Tozaku-chan,

Your heart was not alone on your wedding night, for truly I was there with you. This will sound difficult to believe, but if my mother's birth has kept us apart, her dying gift can bring us together.

I had heard from my brother of your hasty marriage (no doubt your parents feared the strength of our passion), and was deep in tears that night, wishing, though it forever condemn me, that I could tear the mewling kitten from your arms.

Suddenly, I smelled scalded hair and felt a pain in my scalp. I grabbed my mother's hairpins, but they were too hot to touch, and I thought at first I was mad with grief, for I felt the butterfly wings flutter against my fingers.

Frightened, I recalled my mother's last words, "use them cautiously, for they have great power when needed," and the hope grew as swiftly as the thought of your touch. Daring to trust my intuition, I put the pins back in.

The pain was immediate, but when it passed, I found myself in the body of a crimson butterfly, no larger than my hand, but swift enough to reach your castle before the moon could rise.

It was I in the window, my love, while that woman lay in your bed. Make room for me tonight.

Hojiako



3RD DAY OF THE MONTH OF THE BOAR

I cannot believe I truly held you in my arms. Each day I wake, knowing it was only a dream, that you are still behind your father's walls, but then I see the trail of red kisses you have left down my shoulders, and I ache with longing for night to fall.

There is no sight more beautiful in all Rokugan than the beat of your wings against my window. You were modest in describing your magic, for I have rarely seen an insect wider than my face. The form certainly suits you, my love, for with your pins and long kimono sleeves, you could pass for the most beautiful butterfly of all.

I shall miss you terribly this week, but I understand that you must travel to court with your father. In my selfishness, I hope there is no man there whose parents are more forgiving than mine, for I cannot stand the thought of another's hands on your skin or name on your lips.

Dream of me, as I will of you.

Tozaku

15TH DAY OF THE MONTH OF THE RAT

Tozaku-chan,

I cannot come to you tonight. I am frightened.

When I returned home this dawn, I lit upon the futon as usual and waited for the change to come over my body. But nothing happened, and I fought the instinct to simply flap my wings and flee the confinement. I caught sight of myself in the mirror and I cannot believe we have not been discovered before this, for the butterfly is growing. It is larger than a hunting dog now, and barely able to fit through the window.

I don't know what is happening, my love. I finally returned to my shape, but barely before the maids arrived with breakfast. I can still feel the wings beneath my back, and more than once today I have been surprised to find I still have hands. Perhaps we have used the gift too often in our passion.

I will see you again only when I can bear to be alone no longer.

Hojiako

The Power and Curse of Obsidian

I include the following notes of the notorious researcher Kuni Mokuna, for they were found separately from the rest of his journals and may not have been given to you by Yori-sama. Though any casual scholar knows of Tainted creatures' vulnerability to jade, few turn their studies to the effects of obsidian, and I found Mokuna's comments enlightening. My apologies for allowing the Fallen's name to see print; I thought it important to preserve the authenticity of Mokuna's work.

-Seikansha

Though we have yet to find any substance of the purity and sheer effectiveness of jade, my family has conducted extensive experiments on the properties of other materials when exposed to the Taint. Many natural crystals and the "glass" of the Unicorn clan can be used to good effect, as can obsidian.

The effect of obsidian on denizens of the Shadowlands is similar to that of jade; once it has penetrated it can cause death to those impervious to normal weapons. For this

THE ARMOR OF THE LOYAL SON

Lore TN: 25 (Dragon Clan Lore, information in the main story only)

This fine heavy armor has a blank mon on the back, which becomes the family mon of the wearer. The armor is effectively invulnerable – though it does not affect the character's TN to Be Hit, damage simply does not penetrate. Techniques such as Way of the Lion or three Raises can get past the armor, but without such precision, the wearer is simply immune to blade and spell alike.

However,

As all shugenja learn, everything summoned or banished by magic comes from or goes to another place. The damage done to the "loyal son" is given a new target. Any Wounds stopped go to his or her children, then parents, siblings, grand-parents, aunts and uncles, and so on through the family and if necessary, the Clan. A samurai wading blithely into battle may come home to find his entire castle dead of the wounds that should have killed him.

Though no one in Rokugan knows how this works, characters can figure out that "invulnerable" armor has to have a catch. Intelligence + Shugenja Lore (or School Rank for shugenja), TN 40, lets characters know that the damage will go somewhere, and an Intelligence + Calligraphy roll, TN 15, shows the kanji for "family," "blood" and "kin," worked into the scrollwork. Truly loyal sons will give it to their fathers; wise sons will wear their family suit.

reason alone, I believe it has potential. Yet when merely carried upon the person, obsidian has few beneficial properties. Though superior to jade for its ability to retain its potency even after long contact with the Shadowlands, it is not divinely pure, rendering it incapable of absorbing Taint or protecting its bearer.

Much as the poets call jade the "Tears of Amaterasu," obsidian is seen as the "Blood of Onnotangu," spilled across the earth when Hantei cut his brothers and sisters from his father's belly. Where the blood mixed with the tears, mankind sprang up, but elsewhere it remained as deposits of stone, scattered throughout Rokugan. I believe there is much truth to this tale, for the obsidian hand with which Shosuro returned after binding Fu Leng is likely none other than Lord Moon's own, severed and dropped to earth along with his eighth child.

From what little I have read of Scorpion artifacts, the hand carries a curse of madness, which my own studies of obsidian would seem to confirm. Though most obsidian is harmless to use or hold, certain deposits seem to bring a

slow-progressing derangement, not unlike the Taint itself. Those who carry weapons of this stone find themselves becoming short-tempered and jealous, wildly possessive or bitterly paranoid of their closest friends and family. Such people often direct their anger at their own children, and on occasion their outbursts have ended in cannibalism, which supports the idea that the curse comes from Lord Moon.

I believe the cursed variety comes from that blood spilled not from Onnotangu's stomach, but from his severed hand. Touched with the cruelty of both Lord Moon and Fu Leng, it can hurt oni and man alike. Though such obsidian still has value for the harm it does to Shadowlands creatures, its touch may destroy a samurai's life, and I advise that it be used only under dire circumstances.

Fortunately, such effects eventually fade if the weapon is discarded, and the former owner may gradually return to his normal duties. The Scorpion lords foolish enough to attach a piece of Onnotangu to their bodies receive no such reprieve, and I have never heard of a case in which a user of the obsidian hand ended his life peacefully.



The Bag of the Walking Forest

When I lived in Dragon lands, the retainer of a far-off lord asked me for a night's shelter on his way to the shrine of Osano-Wo. He carried a large sack, and I asked if it contained his offerings. He sighed and related the following tale of his great-great-grandfather.

Shinsei spoke correctly when he said that evil need not taste of poison or honey; bland flour is more common than either.

-Seikansha

Agasha Oroscha was a good samurai who had served his lord faithfully in all things. He cared for his wife well, and raised his daughters as virtuous women who followed the laws of the Emperor and the teachings of Shinsei.

One night, when his wife had taken the children to visit her parents, Oroscha was preparing to spend a quiet evening in meditation. His calm was splintered by a gasping yell and rustle from outside. Fearing bandits had been at the village again, he threw open the door. But no mere bandit could have done what he saw.

An old woman, gray hair shorn off below the ears as if in mourning, lay on the flat stones of the path. Her clothing was torn as if by the claws of some great cat, and her wrinkled skin dripped with foam. Pus oozed from wounds still fresh enough to bleed, but festering as if from weeks of infection. As she tried to gather her knees beneath her, placing her face on the ground in a polite greeting, Oroscha had to swallow hard to keep his supper from rising. Though he had seen men grievously injured in war, nothing could compare to this woman's suffering.

He waved for her to ignore the formalities and to his horror, she tried to rise. Kneeling beside her, he eased her to the ground, though he knew he could not save her.

"Please..." she said in a wavering voice; he wondered that her lungs could still hold breath to speak. "Please, guard...it must never..." Her hand fluttered and he noticed for the first time that she had a canvas sack beside her, the coarse cotton peasants used for carrying rice and flour.

"What is it?" he asked. "Do you have family? Someone I should tell?" Even a peasant deserved to know of the passing of his ancestors.

"Go inside!" Her voice was louder, terrified, and after a second, he realized why. There were noises in the distant woods, strange rustling wails, like wind through uncountable branches. "They are coming. Please." Her hands fluttered against the flour sack. "No one must free them. Ward against evil." Her words collapsed in coughs, and the man took the bag from her weak fingers.

At her nod, he opened the top. Inside was only the speckled whiteness of dried rice. "This?" he asked. "What is there to free?"

She trembled, and the red on her lips was dark internal blood. Oroscha knew she was dead even before she stiffened. Soon he knew the truth of her words, and began the wards against evil, for the forest was getting closer. And there had never been a forest in his rice fields before.

That is the way my family tells it.

A Letter to Lord Akodo Tehon From His Vassal Akodo Riawa

While the Crab retainer who gave me this letter (I chose not to ask how he found a private communication between two Lions) laughed himself into a fit over Riawa's predicament, I must warn you the threat posed by this item is very real. I have heard accounts of at least three others, and I believe the Fallen One's forces enjoy using them to tempt and torment overconfident samurai.

-Seikansha

My lord, I have failed you again.

The shame has burned within me since my kenjutsu proved insufficient to wipe that insolent Crane's smile off each of his faces, and I had thought to use my time at Mura Sano Eiyu ni Suru to practice my swordsmanship. I am a Lion after all, and a Lion who cannot use his claws is not worthy of the name. However, with so few other bushi at the shrine, and with those present less experienced than myself, it became difficult to judge my skill. Though Akodo said each man should know his own measure, he knew also that the measure of a man is best tested on the mettle of enemies; with no worthy partners, my kata grew to be more decorative than useful.

When a peddler stopped at the shrine claiming to have a magical boken which would fight by itself, I was immediately intrigued. Though naturally I was skeptical of such a wonderful device (and woe that my caution did not prevail), the peddler simply laid the boken on the ground and asked that I take up a stance before it. As soon as my hand touched my katana, the boken rose from the ground, pointing level at me.

I swung and it ducked my strike, slicing at my head so that I had to whip my own blade back to block it. Not wishing to damage my grandfather's sword, I resheathed it and the boken settled to the ground. I admit that my failure was here, for although Akodo said that any victory that seems too simple is too simple, I forgot his wisdom and believed my problems answered. I ordered my servants to pay the coin the man demanded and went home.

From the hour of the Goat to the hour of the Rooster I practiced, first running through my kata movements, gradually working up to sparring. The boken, which I called "Uke" for it was my only partner, was versatile, but I defeated it readily. To my disappointment, once it had been knocked aside and I had struck for the "kill," it remained inert on the ground.

Furious, I sought the peddler, but he was long gone down the western road, and my duties did not allow me to follow. The next morning I was glad I had not (the more fool I), for when I awoke, Uke was hovering beside my futon, waiting to begin morning practice. I threw myself into the routine with good will.

For the next two weeks, I awakened each day to my persistent partner. Each time, we worked until the sword fell beneath my blows. And each morning, I felt the boken's strength and skill grow with my own.

It was not until I had owned it nearly a month that I began to realize the problem. I confess that the previous evening my new sword skills had stood me in good stead against a wandering ronin, and several village girls were more than willing to toast my success. The next

morning, having drunk more sake than I should have, I had intended to skip my morning session. Uke had different ideas.

It found me somehow (for I had not lain the evening in my own bed), and I awoke to a sharp tap on the shoulder. Not expecting the boken, I drew my sword instinctively, and morning practice was on, ranging through my unfortunate companion's cottage and the village streets.

At first, I believed my ancestors were watching to keep me from disgracing myself again, but the following morning, unimpressed by my defeat of their leader, the ronin's gang attacked at dawn, hoping to ransack the rich offerings of the Zocho shrine. Though I woke swiftly and leapt to battle, Uke had different ideas. Interposing itself between me and the bandits, the boken went into its usual morning routine, attacking from behind when I tried to ignore it in favor of my true targets. And by this time it had grown quite strong indeed.

We subdued both boken and bandits, but a few escaped with valuable goods. I guessed that whatever magic guided my partner was not of the Fortunes and tried to burn the cursed thing, but fires left it untouched.

The next day, I buried it deep in a grave and sought the aid of my fellow guards, for even Akodo knew he needed assistance to fight the forces of his brother. But all of our



efforts only sped the thing's temporary "death," and the next morning it woke me with strikes up and down my body. My six doshi pulled at it and tackled it, and if they had not, it would not have stopped short of my death.

I write to you requesting the aid of what bushi and shugenja you can spare, for today I saw the shadowy outline of the monster guiding the sword. Its hands are clawed like an eagle, and covered with a carp's golden scales. It has a lizard's tail and two fox-mouths, with red eyes that laughed as it broke my katana. My lord, I will commit seppuku with my wakizashi if you desire, but my arms are so numbed my servant now feeds me. Nothing I have done so far has hurt it; the Fortunes only know if anyone else will. My lord, do what you can.

Your Obedient Servant,
Akodo Riawa

The Armor of the Loyal Son

The following is an apocryphal story often told in Dragon lands. Though most dismiss it as a tall tale, my studies have shown that even the most far-fetched rumors accrete around a grain of truth. I cannot say whether the armor described would be of greater use to us or our enemy; it would certainly be worth studying should it be found.

-Seikansha

Once there lived a Mirumoto lord who had overseen many battles and survived a dozen duels. He ran his lands well and was loved and respected by all, from his *karo* to his lowliest *eta*. As he neared retirement, he called his son home from training, wishing to make certain that his heir was as capable and loved as himself. For a month, the man watched and guided his son, gradually giving him more and more duties: hearing petitions, meeting with diplomats, and preparing his tithe for the Emperor.

Though the boy always obeyed his father without question, the lord paid close attention to what his men said about their future ruler. What he heard worried him, for it seemed that the boy did not mirror his father's kindness to his subjects nor his reluctance to use war as a solution to diplomacy.

When alone with his retainers, the boy treated them coldly, caring only for what service they could provide him. He had begun amassing an army against his father's directives, for he was young and aggressive and wished to expand his lands into the Unicorn holdings on his western border.

The lord called his son and spoke of all he had heard. "Why do you go against me?" he asked. "I have ruled here for thirty years, and I do not make my decisions lightly." His son did not answer, and he softened the words. "You are my son," he said. "Tell me the reason you want this war, and if it is sound, then I shall support you."

His son assured him that he had no such plans, but the lord saw past the boy's eyes and knew he spoke lies. Distraught, he went the next day to a shugenja of his acquaintance, and asked if there was any magic which could insure his son's loyalty.

"No magic changes a man's heart," the shugenja told him, "but give me three days and a hair from your son's head and you shall see with whom his allegiance lies."

The lord agreed, and three days later he returned to find a beautiful suit of armor, carved with pictures of each animal of the calendar, intertwined with black calligraphy, shaped into twisted vines and lightning. In the dragon-horned helm was written "The Armor of the Loyal Son."

"Give this to your son," the shugenja said, "and you will soon see his loyalties." The lord agreed happily, and returned home with his beautiful prize.

Two days later, there was a battle with the Unicorn. At the end, the entire family lay dead, sequestered in their rooms. The son was found with his guts spilled across his own wakizashi, sprawled before his father's dismembered corpse. No one has ever been able to explain what happened.

Some scholars believe the shugenja used *maho* to create armor which intensified the son's disloyalty, driving him to kill his parents. Others argue that the son truly was loyal and committed *seppuku* only when he found himself too late to save his family from the Unicorn marauders. Still others think the armor itself disemboweled him when his thoughts did not prove pure enough, and without the young lord the family was at the mercy of their attackers.

The only thing anyone agrees on is that the armor was never found.



Chapter 4:
Fu Leng's
Army



ONIKAGE

(DEMON-HORSES)

Lore TN: 20

EARTH: 4

FIRE: 2

WATER: 4

Strength: 6

AIR: 3

Attacking: 5k2

Damage: 6k2 (claw-hoof), 6k3
(bite)

TN to be Hit: 15

Armor: 5

Wounds: 16: -1; 24: -2; 36: -3; 72:

Down; 84: Dead

Horses that die in the Shadowlands rise again as onikage, creatures with scaled, horse-shaped bodies, long fangs, crocodilian tails, glowing eye-sockets, and clawed hooves. They range from dark green to bruise-purple, with tentacle-like manes of contrasting color. Those stripped of flesh by other onikage rise as skeletal versions with identical statistics. Beheading prevents this. Undead Moto use onikage as steeds.

Onikage can theoretically be ridden by living samurai. First, the rider must mount it: an Athletics, Jiu-jutsu, or Horsemanship roll, TN 25. As it rolls, jumps in the air, and twists its spine like a cat, they make three Agility+Horsemanship rolls at TN 30, 35, and 40. Failure in any one means the rider is dislodged and the onikage attacks while he lies prone.

If successful, the rider can control it, for a price; forever after, the onikage's psychic mark follows him, giving him the 2-point Disadvantage of Onikage Stink – all normal horses and ponies refuse to get near him. The onikage, meanwhile, makes every effort to return to the Shadowlands, but it smells like a human to other onikage, and is eaten if it rejoins its herd. Most lost Moto have the Onikage Stink Disadvantage.

I recently became aware of an illicit annual festival in Crab territories, called the kankai kijitsu. It is supposedly frowned upon by Hida Kisada due to its promotion of virtues unbecoming a samurai, which would say quite a bit about the character of its revelry. I think perhaps Hida-sama disapproves only when directly asked by members of the Imperial Court.

The bushi gather at Jadoku Toshi, a valley town near the Razor of the Dawn Castle, to recount the greatest oni slain that year and famous victories from centuries before, a list eerily reminiscent of a Matsu naming his ancestors. The festival is sometimes raucous and sometimes somber, for with each oni comes the inevitable list of their victims.

From these accounts, one can get an idea of the variety and weaknesses of oni; thus I have asked Kaiu Narumi, one of the Crab's historians, to assemble selections from previous years' records.

-Seikansha

Onikage

AN ACCOUNT BY HIDA TERUO, 988

I had thought it easier going when we reached the blasted plains. The dry rock gave off a dust that made us vomit when we stopped to eat, but it was better than the muck. You may know the muck. It's like the bile of a stomach that dissolves food, and you soon learn not to walk in it as your *tabi* melt. But we were riding, and we thought the horses were only spooked from the chase. We'd heard hooves and circled to see if it was another scouting party, but they'd circled, too.

So it was on through the muck. When we reached the plain, we saw our horses' hooves. Dissolved. Stripped red. Maiko wouldn't trot again.

The snuffling came at the blood, a whiny, dog-like sniff that carried for hundreds of yards. Then the hoofbeats got louder, and we dismounted to coat our arrowheads with jade, as out of the twilight rode a lone Moto, driving six demon-horses in front of him like a pack of hunting dogs. Their eyes were bulging and yellow, and I didn't realize they had claws on their hooves until they ran Maiko down and leapt on her like lions while the other mounts fled. She was screaming the whole time, and they cracked her bones and disjoined their jaws to strip parts from her and swallow her bleeding organs.

But they were distracted by the arrows. The Moto fell, and when the onikage charged, Eiichi was there cutting their legs off with a *no-dachi*. Three of the things scattered, it seemed, until we realized they only sought easier prey. We chased after our remounts, but the onikage were faster, and we arrived to find our horses, our traveling packs, and our spare weapons torn to bits.

By the time we made it back to Maiko, her skeleton's teeth were lengthening, and her mane was starting to become tentacles. Eiichi took her head before she rose again.

We turned back. Had we continued on foot, the jade would have gone soft before we'd gotten a day past the River of the Dark Moon. We were lucky not to get the Taint by the time we made it out.

At least this time, no one tried to ride the onikage home.

Oni no Tobehifu

THE STORY OF HIDA TETSU-KINTAMA, AS TOLD BY HIDA MASAO, 967

I will speak for my brother here, for he wishes his deeds screamed to the heavens, and his lungs are not what they were! He is a great bushi still, and no oni walking can kill him! Even now six of them live in his body, and he burns their parts each morning to keep them silent! How do you wish me to begin, brother?

He says he sought the Festering Pit of the Great Fallen Coward, who even now does not dare to face him! His story begins in the River of the Dark Moon, from which no man has fallen in and returned alive... until now!

When our boat overturned, he fought the monsters underneath the water's surface, until we both washed ashore in a dead forest, where Kintama dragged the creature to land and hewed it in half. Our family no-dachi has eaten the blood of thirty-two oni and twenty Moto, and this was like walking through dung for a man such as he!

Our men saw strips of stitched skin in the trees which quavered as they came near. They tasted the air, and then as angry bees in summer, flew on our samurai. Where each landed, they became a scar, up to a *ken-an* long. And though the rest of us ran, my brother feared nothing so small. He plunged ahead to find its master, a short, tusked demon, which pulled its own flesh from its bones, and knitted it with stiff hair to give each piece flight.

It thought he was defeated when ten of its flying scars landed on him and his blood turned the black earth to red, and his arms and legs became useless. The fool! Kintama waited for it to get close as it shook more onto him, then bit its throat with his teeth, and the scars fell in his face and mouth! Kintama slew it, and to spite the dog, he peeled off the rest and swallowed them, laughing at the Little Rotting One!

As you can see, even now the stitches on his skull try to part, the spawn struggling to hatch and wedging their eyes against the cords that restrain them, but Kintama-sama will not so much as cry out! Tetsu-Kintama can never be defeated, nor can the clan of the Crab!



ONI NO TOBEHIFU (DEMON OF FLYING SKIN)

Stats in parentheses are for individual skin-pieces.

Lore TN: 20

EARTH: 3 (1)

FIRE: 3 (1)

WATER: 2 (1)

AIR: 3

Attacking: 4k3

Damage: 3k2 (4 points)

TN to be Hit: 15 (20)

Armor: 5 (None)

Wounds: 30: -1; 50: Dead (4 points: Dead)

Oni no Tobehifu is a grotesquely fat, tusked demon with long, bristly hair down its back. To feed or reproduce, it peels off whips of skin with its tanto-sharp nails and stitches them together with hair. The skin then animates and flies in search of blood. A single oni can create up to 50 such strips in a day, and typically has 2-20 ready to fly. They can throw three ready strips a round, and ready another one at the same time.

When attacking, the strips wriggle under clothing to become long, stitched scars on the victim's flesh, doing 4 Wounds. If feeding, they peel off again after an hour (1 extra Wound) and fly back. If reproducing (all try to reproduce if the oni is killed), the scars contain a seed-like nugget that feeds on blood, growing into a skinless baby oni and preventing healing. After the time it would have taken to heal 12 Wounds (e.g. 6 days in an Earth 2 character), infant oni split the stitches and emerge, doing 12 Wounds each. The host can keep them in with very tight bandages or an Earth roll, TN 50.

Removing the spawn through surgical cutting or jade requires an Agility + Medicine roll, TN 50. Failure means the oni crawls deeper, doing 1 additional Wound.

Path to Inner Peace has no effect on the baby oni.

ONI NO KOMMEI (DEMON OF CONFUSION)

Lore TN: 35

EARTH: 5

FIRE: 3

WATER: 4

Strength: 6

AIR: 5

Attacking: 6k3

Damage: 6k1

TN to be Hit: 25

Armor: 10

Wounds: 10: -1; 25: -2; 50: -3; 75:

Dead

Special Abilities: Fear 2.

Shapechanging: Oni no Kommei can alter its body and clothing to look like any human it has seen. Its back half resembles the front of the last human it imitated, so it prefers shapes with bulky kimonos, armor, or long, concealing hair. The oni does not have its forms' memories, but is an avid researcher, a smooth talker, and understands etiquette. While undetected, it imitates people higher and higher up on the social ladder. A simple Awareness roll, TN 25, can detect something amiss.

Spirit Trading: If Oni no Kommei's attack is successful, it may breathe on victims to draw out their spirits. To avoid breathing, roll Willpower + Athletics, TN 10. Each round the TN rises by 5, to a maximum of 25 – the fog dissipates after five rounds – and Wounds may accrue from its steady clawing. Failure means the spirit is drawn out, leaving the body a lifeless husk.

If it simultaneously grasps two victims who fail, it cannot consume them, but sends their spirits into each other's bodies and runs off cackling.

In game terms, two people whose bodies are switched take the physical Traits of their partner, but retain their mental Traits, school techniques, skills, and any supernatural advantages or disadvantages. Recalculate Rings appropriately. This state can be reversed by a shugenja who can lift curses, but most people believe the oni's touch causes madness, not the switching of spirits.

For added effect, take the two players out of the room, tell only them what occurred, and tell them to roleplay each other's characters in "their" body. The potential for roleplaying is vast indeed, since in Rokugan appearance is everything.

Oni no Kommei

THE STORY OF YASUKI TAIRA (OR POSSIBLY DOJI NOTSUKE). 956

Many among us speak of the Shinjo, and the potential wisdom to be learned among them. I have found two problems with this; the first, that their Crane allies visit during winter, and the second, that when an oni is in the court, all eyes turn to the Crab.

I wanted to tell them I wear the katana for my grandfather and not the Wall, but I am a mediator, not a coward, so we searched for the oni in pairs. I, of course, somehow found Doji Notsuke on my sleeve. He would converse with our suspects as I observed his mastery of the greatest Crane combat technique: boring the enemy to death.

After a night of jibes and his questioning what I was good for, we found a lead. There were bodies stuffed in cellars – a sure sign it could take men's shapes – and mad Otaku bushi, raving that they were lords, and demanding the Kakitas kill the Shinjo guards for their dishonor. The Shinjo and I locked them up before they could assault more men, and ordered their seppuku when they could not control their rages and brawling.

Regret is a sin. I do not regret.

At dawn, we stalked down a Shinjo samurai-ko and Notsuke drew his blade, demanding she take her true shape. Her nails grew like sai prongs, and she was at him. As he fell, bleeding, I leapt for her back through a cloud of hair as she flew to the ceiling, and I saw she had a man's face on the back of her head. Her knees bent backward to let her chase me, slashing my leg, arm, and gut, dragging Notsuke behind her.

"Let us see you without your shell, Crab," it hissed, and her mouths spat yellow fog upon both of us. I tried not to breathe, but she choked me until my throat opened and the world drained away. But I could not yield, and summoning a strength I did not know I possessed, I cut it with the wakizashi at my belt in a single flawless draw and strike. Its body fell, yet it laughed cruelly as it died, and I soon realized why.

The strength was not my own.

The oni's claws still clutched the dead body of Yasuki Taira.



Baku

AS RECOUNTED BY HIRUMA IKU, 785

I do not accept duels from traitors, Kenichi-san. Before the rest of you cut me down, listen to what I have to say.

The creature this man associates with is no relation to the Fortune of Mercy. It is no wild beast or harmless trickster spirit. It is the Baku, drawn from the depths of Jigoku by Kuni Kenichi himself!

It first appeared in Kuni Satoshi's dreams: a creature with the face of a lion, the body of a horse, paws of a tiger, tail of a cow, and forelock of gray hair. Yet it did not trouble him, for the dreams were peaceful, and he thought perhaps the creature's strangeness represented the enigmas of his work. Still, he awoke each morning restless and aching.

We did not connect this with our investigation at first. But when Satoshi could not remember the names of our witnesses, I reminded him. When he could not remember how to wear his sword, I aided him. And when he began to grow weak, I feared for him and would not leave his side. It was fortunate I did not, for that night, I saw a ghostly shape pass through the wall and sit upon his chest.

It put its mouth through his forehead and began to graze.

I threw a coin of jade, to pin it as one would a ghost, but it sparked as it hit the creature, which galloped away. I cut through the *shoji* screen, but it was gone.

The next night, as Satoshi lay pale and weak, I braided my jade into the strands of my rope, and as it came to nourish itself in his dreams, I fastened my noose around its neck and held tight. It rode through window and wall, choked by my snare, until I was dragged into the stable, where my noose fell limp as the baku entered the body of a horse that hid among the others.

But the honest Kuni were at work, and one blessed the air with misty droplets to make a lone stallion glisten with magic. Discovered, the creature assumed its true form, and it was only by force of arms we persevered.

Satoshi is not dead, Kenichi. And he still remembers, despite your efforts, who went scouting ahead on that trip to the tarnished lands, and which shugenja signed the order denying his brother jade petal tea. Surrender, and a merciful death awaits.



THE BAKU (EATER OF DREAMS)

Lore TN: 20

EARTH: 4

FIRE: 3

WATER: 4

Strength: 7

AIR: 4

Attacking: 6k3

Damage: 7k3

TN to be Hit: 20

Armor: 10

Wounds: 10: -1; 25: -2; 50: -3; 75:

Dead

Special Abilities: *Invulnerability*
(ghost form only)

Shapechanging: The baku may change forms to appear as any of the animals it resembles: lion, tiger, horse, ox, or rhinoceros. While all of them use the above combat statistics, each form gets a Free Raise for actions appropriate to the body: the lion leaps, the tiger swims, the rhino batters down doors, the ox pulls, and the horse runs.

Ghost Form: The baku sends out a weightless ghost form to feed, which walks through solid objects such as people and walls, though jade or crystal are solid to it and energy (such as Wounds) transfers through them normally. For example, if it charged through a person wearing a jade ring, their hand would be slapped aside, but they would remain standing. Tracking the ghost through a city is Intelligence + Hunting (TN 35). If attacked several nights in a row, the baku finds other prey.

Mind Eating: The baku searches out sleeping victims and eats their nightmares, turning them to bland dreams of the baku grazing. It then eats their memories, at the rate of 2 skill points a night, beginning with coarse Low Skills and working up to tasty High Skills. Once those are gone, it starts on the victim's Void Ring, lowering it by 1 point per night. When her Void reaches 0, the victim dies.

During this time, the victim forgets many things; her sensei's name, that day's commitments, how to tie an obi. Eventually, just waking up is overwhelming. Re-learning an eaten skill or Void Ring is half the usual cost to go to its former rating, rounded down.

DOKUFU, THE MOUNTAIN SPIDER

In its natural form, an adult dokufu is a cottage-sized, seven-eyed, clawed spider with a rocky exoskeleton and toothless mouth. Statistics in parentheses are for spawn.

Lore TN: 20

EARTH: 8 (2)

FIRE: 3 (1)

Agility: 4 (3)

WATER: 3 (2)

Strength: 9 (3)

AIR: 3 (1)

Reflexes: 5 (4)

Attacking: 8k4 (3k3)

Damage: 9k6 (4k2)

TN to be Hit: 15 (20)

Armor: 20 (5)

Wounds: 40: -1; 80: -2; 120: -5;

160: Dead. (10: -1; 20: -2; 30: Dead.)

Special Abilities: *Fear 5*

Shapechanging: A dokufu may take human form, though it always appears to be the dokufu's actual age.

Webs: The dokufu (in either form) can spin webs, sticking down a single victim on a successful attack roll. Breaking free requires one turn and a Strength + Athletics roll, TN 25.

Ovipositing/Vomiting Offspring: The Dokufu seeks out human victims which it immobilizes with webs, then implants with an egg sac. It then swallows the implanted human as food for the eggs which incubate in its stomach, attaching it (and later the infants) with long black umbilical cords.

It can vomit 1 die of young in a single round if attacked, reswallowing them, along with any human victims, when the fight is over. It cannot eat Tainted meat and must hunt outside the Shadowlands.

Dokufu

AS DECLARED BY THE TSUKAI-SAGASU KUNI CHOJUN, 956

I am Kuni Chojun, and I owe my life to my sensei's teachings. This winter, I traveled through the Spine of the World Mountains, where I found a moribund gathering of Bayushi ronin at a crossroads. At first their words were threatening – I, a Kuni, in Scorpion lands with only traveler's temporary papers – but I looked for the motive and not the robes, and discovered the cause of their alarm. Travelers had been dying, and it was their assignment to search the freezing rain for oni.

I joined them, and retired at twilight to an inn hosted by a woman so stooped and wizened she seemed two hundred and ninety years old. I requested a hot bath, and, despite her protestations, kept my daisho near, as my sensei had taught. Rust is better than blood.

My ronin compatriots wanted more than fire to warm them, and scrambled to boisterous diversions of gambling and opium. Mindful of oni, I followed only long enough to verify their new associates and bottles were free of Taint.

But without the cold to cloud my thinking, I realized something was wrong. An oni would not hunt in the snowy darkness; it would go where there was prey. Barefoot and with a blackened blade, I dared accusations and crept into the hallway. Though the only sounds were those best not disturbed, I knew I could not simply turn away, for oni thrive on secrets. I spied through a hole I cut in the shoji.

The old woman had pulled a tube from her distended stomach and thrust it into the mouth of the ronin wedged beneath her in the bath. His arms were glued to the tub by a slime-slick cobweb, and his jaw was broken and choking on the egg sac she pumped down his throat.

And as my sensei had taught me, I walked away.

Woke the other bushi.

And charged her.

She screamed at the blades, bled stinking milk on the floor, and leapt through the walls. But she gave no thought to her trail, and we surrounded the dank cave in the hillside where she disappeared. The next dawn, she emerged, a spider made of the mountain itself.

We fell upon her, fighting the brood she spewed on us. With fire and jade and the lives of thirty men, she was no more. One thousand, one hundred and ninety human skulls lay in her intestine. That is the cost of surrendering your sword at the bath.

Oni no Ryokaku

AS TOLD BY HIDA YASUNORI, WHO CRAWLED, BLEEDING AND EXHAUSTED, INTO THE FESTIVAL, 890

I return from the sunless world with grievous news for Hida Naoyoshi. One week ago, his daughter was to be married to the acclaimed Hida Toshiro, son of Hida Toyotomi, veteran of the northern campaign against the Shinjo, inheritor of the Nandan tea plantations, and lord of two hundred bushi.

ONI NO RYOKAKU (DEMON OF MARRIAGE)

Lore TN: 20

EARTH: 4

FIRE: 4

WATER: 4

AIR: 4

Attacking: 8k4

Damage: 8k3

TN to be Hit: 30

Armor: 7

Wounds: 16: -1; 32: -2; 48: -3; 64: Dead

Special Abilities: *Invulnerability*

Form of Dark Wind: Oni no Ryokaku can turn themselves and a single victim into black fog in one turn. They surround their chosen with their own ghostly shape and make a Contested Air roll. If successful, they fly off with them at the speed of the wind (about ten miles an hour in valleys, thirty in mountains or the Wall, and significantly faster in a storm). In this form, the oni can only be hurt by magic, and if it dies, the abductees remain fog (usually acting as ghosts which haunt their "rescuers").

Test of Virtue: The oni may drop an article of the victim's clothing into a cauldron of boiling blood to divine the Honor Rank, Ancestors, and any Dark Secrets of the victim (including ones unknown to them). Ryokaku will kidnap any samurai (male or female), but only weds those of pure body and unblemished lineage: untainted virgins with Honor 3.5 or higher. Others go in the soup pot. During the ceremony, Ryokaku are usually surrounded by troll guards (minimum 10) and possibly other oni and Shadowlands creatures.

Dueling Mind: If challenged to an iaijutsu duel (verbally or through body language), the oni is magically bound to duel fairly. It has the equivalent of Void 4 for purposes of focusing.

I guarded the front entrance the day Chizuko removed her armor, and wished her the brightest of destinies with Toshiro, for we have known one another since her *gempukku* and often talked of the time she would wear red. I must apologize, for I was too poor to give her a gift of jade that might have saved you grief.

When the inky cloud descended upon her, I threw Toshiro my wakizashi that we might strike it down together, but it was not solid, and as he held on to Chizuko her body dissolved into smoke until her fingertips vanished from his hand and her shouts were lost to the wind.

We gathered weapons and pursued it outside, where we tracked it across the sky. The chase ended that night when we lost sight of it and our horses could run no further. We were deep in the Shadowlands, without food or water, and Toshiro ordered that we turn back to the Kaiu Wall, to mount a more forceful expedition at dawn.

I must apologize that my horse was so swift, Naoyoshi-sama, for I did not hear his order.

I judged the oni would tire and float with the prevailing wind, and tracked it to a fortress of sharp, black rock, surrounded by a rotted grove of trees. I took refuge in a filthy puddle of dead carp as it approached, a cloud no longer, but an armored warrior with two mouths.

With a gentlemanly tone, it spoke to its troll servants of purity and her stubborn refusals and they brought it her veil, which it dropped in a boiling vat of rotting blood, which turned red at its touch. It licked the veil with both tongues, and announced, "She is suitable."

My lord, I had no way to report back to the column, so I stole into the fortress like a thief. Chizuko was bound into a black outer kimono, attended by trolls who held her bodily as she struggled.

But she had given up her swords, Naoyoshi-sama, and there were dozens of trolls, lighting incense and parading her forth with prayers. She would become part of the family of the Fallen God, who had approved their unholy matrimony himself.

I apologize for my brashness, my lord, for I interrupted the proceedings by challenging it to a duel. I knew it would violate the rules of bushido and etiquette, but I was in a place where hope lay dead. And I saw its stance and knew its skill and technique were better than mine.

So I must apologize that I am sworn to complete honesty in my reports of battles, my lord, for I wish I might soften my bitter news.

Chizuko is safe, and awaits you in a village not far from here.

She remains free of the Taint.

But it is not Toshiro she wishes to marry.



ONI NO TSUKAKORO (ONI OF SQUEEZING DEATH)

Lore TN: 25

EARTH: 5

FIRE: 1

Agility: 5

WATER: 6

AIR: 1

Reflexes: 4

Attacking: 8k4

Damage: 6k2 or 8k1/round

TN to be Hit: 25

Armor: 9

Wounds: 20: -1; 40: -2; 80: Dead

No Eyes: Tsukakoro hunt by smell, vibrations in the ground, and heat-sensitive pits. Accordingly, spells that interfere with sight do not bother them. However, fire and smoke increase their TN for

attacking/detecting opponents by 5 to 10. If damaged by fire, they receive TN penalties equal to half the amount of Wounds taken (i.e. +10 to the TN for 20 points of fire damage), in addition to normal dice penalties.

Ricochet: Tsukakoro jump around in combat, bouncing off opponents to attack up to three per turn. They cannot attack the same person twice in a row. They roll 6k2 for damage. The opponent must roll his Strength with a TN equal to the Wounds taken or be knocked down.

Squeezing: If Tsukakoro successfully attacks a prone opponent, he is caught in its lattice, and gets constricted, taking 8k1 Wounds per round. In addition, it begins slowly digesting him. The victim must roll Earth, TN 25, or take two points of Shadowlands Taint. While this method of killing is slower than bashing, escape is nearly impossible: more than twenty tentacle-tendons and a cage of armored bone hold the victim immobile.

Oni no Tsukakoro

FROM KUNI HITOMI'S HISTORY OF THE BATTLE OF THE MAW, 716

Of the types of oni mustered by the Maw, the multitudes of deceased were classified into seven orders: the family of additional anatomy, the family of missing anatomy, the hags, the beasts, the bodiless, the sorcerers, and the oni of forms similar to the elements. A specimen of great debate was the "rolling cage of bones" that had been seen bouncing on the battlefields and discovered still living in the waters created by Kuni Osaku.

This oni appears to be a lattice of chitin-covered bone struts, creating a roughly spherical shape, joined at each nexus by a coil not unlike a protruding tendon, with a stinger or perhaps a fang at the end. The oni rolls after prey, trapping individuals inside its structure, where they are seized by the hooklike fangs and tendons, and pinned in place as the oni injects a foul digestive liquid into their veins.

The entire cage then stops moving and compresses down to half its previous size, bone struts forming an impenetrable ball of spikes that keep it nearly invulnerable while feeding. As far as our experimenters could discover, the victim is battered and choked by the constricting bones, then dissolved by the oni's injections and absorbed into an opening in the air at the creature's center. We have verified that this is not merely an invisible mouth, for striking that area in its larger form does not inconvenience it, and we could find no other digestive organs.

The creature appears to have no weaknesses save steel and patience, for only by destroying enough of the connecting joints could we render it immobile. The classification of this oni may take some time. It is fortunately uncommon, and we have detected no related variants. Several of my superiors have suggested it may be the deliberate invention of a maho-tsukai, for its form is extremely unusual for a creature of the Shadowlands.



Yamauba

RECOUNTED BY KAIU YUKIO, 602

I have ended the Month of Dead Children.

I have slain the deceiver that killed my son, Kaiu Hiroshi. I have slain the demon which killed the three children of Hida Toyo, the son and daughter of Hida Yoshitaka, the son of Kaiu Yutaka, and the infants of Hida Yasushi, Hida Haruye, Hida Gidayu, and Hida Takeshi. And there will be no more commands of *seppuku*, for the daimyo has realized his mistake. Never must we forget.

It is called Yamauba.

She has a second mouth on the back of her neck.

No matter who looks at her, she appears to be their mother.



YAMAUBA (THE MOUNTAIN OGRESS)

Lore TN: 20

EARTH: 3

FIRE: 3

WATER: 3

Strength: 5

AIR: 4

Attacking: 5k3

Damage: 6k2

TN to be Hit: 20

Armor: 5

Wounds: 20: -1; 40: -2; 80: Dead.

Special Abilities: *Invulnerability*

Shapechanging: Yamauba have one very powerful visual illusion. To everyone who sees them, they look and sound just like their mother (or whatever woman raised them), dressed cleanly and appropriately for the occasion. They are passable actresses, with ready excuses for their presence. They try never to be seen by more than one person at once, and frequently retreat to the mountains.

A Yamauba's skin, if touched, is cold. And, of course, there's a tell-tale mouth on the back of their necks. In their true form, their hair is eyeless snakes and they fight with six-inch claws. But most of the time, they leave armed bushi and shugenja alone and make themselves useful around the castle. They just want to baby-sit. And they look shocked and hide their face and cry "Oni!" as loud as anyone else.

ONI NO HAINO
(DEMON OF WATER
DRAINAGE)

Lore TN: 20

EARTH: 3

FIRE: 3

WATER: 2

AIR: 4

Attacking: 5k3

Damage: 4k2

TN to be Hit: 20

Armor: 4

Wounds: See below.

Special Abilities:

Shapechanging: Oni no Haino resemble bald, twisted hags with oversized mouths and insect-like eyes, but they can reshape their bodies to the form of attractive young street-walkers. This is their preferred form, for it lets them move among eta while corrupting samurai.

Viscera Sucking: Oni no Haino's fifteen-foot, thread-like tongue secretes a local anesthesia to painlessly slip into a sleeping victim's orifices to siphon their Water. The victim must make a Perception + Defense roll, TN 25, to wake up from the process.

It takes five minutes for a Haino to drain a point of Strength or Perception from its victim, which will usually sate it for the night. It continues to visit and feed, draining saliva, blood, and other bodily fluids, until both Strength and Perception are brought to 0, killing the victim. A character with 0 Strength cannot move, and one with 0 Perception is comatose. Lost Attributes can be restored in a week with two experience points times the original level of the Trait.

Haino have a base Earth of 3 and wound levels identical to samurai of that Earth. However, whenever they drain a full point of Water, increase their Earth by 1. This effect lasts for one week, so most Haino which have just killed a victim have Earth 5. Earth 10 is their upper limit.

Oni no Haino

AS TOLD BY HIDA RENKO, MAGISTRATE OF HIDA ATSUSHIGE, 533

I led one hundred bushi into the city during our show of might in Ryoko Owari, and I led one hundred bushi out.

I did this by never forgetting my duty. The subhuman seductresses of that city remind us of all the temptations that lead samurai into stupor and wretchedness. Bribes, shochu, sake – my men never touched these, for I policed them as I policed the Wall. And as the purity of jade balances its elements, the purity of honor kept my bushi safe.

The fifth day, a few began to stray. They had a geisha in their barracks. I beheaded her in front of them.

No more geisha.

This is how you kill oni. You kill them by living to fight them, even when they cannot be seen. When one of my Kuni grew sick, I knew something was wrong. He became red in the eyes and pale in the tongue, but it wasn't Taint. I found his friends hiding shochu in his building. I destroyed it in front of them and beheaded the man who sold it to him.

No more shochu.

When he continued to get sick, I watched him carefully. The shugenja tried prayers to Jurojin, but Jurojin doesn't answer fools. He wasn't sleeping in armor – he said it was too warm and humid in the lowlands. I told him to do so; this place was full of Scorpion poison. The next day he looked better.

Tired, he took it off the next night, and in the morning he was vomiting, drinking as much water as he could get his hands on, eating desperately. It worsened. He had no spit. Nothing came from his nose or lungs when he coughed.

I waited in his room that night, and patrolled in bare feet, sword and face blackened. I found her on the rooftop. She looked like every two-zeni eta-pillow in the city: the perfect disguise. Her tongue was sharp, threadlike, and flexible as a monkey's tail, five ken-an long and protruding through the bamboo slat rooftop of the cheap house.

I shot her with jade arrows and strangled her with her own tongue.

No more oni.

Mamono

AS RECOUNTED BY KUNI KAJI, EMERALD MAGISTRATE, 991

My heart warms at the words of Hida Renko and the wisdom they hold even today. My students ask me if oni truly hide within the luxury of other Clans.

They do.

However, saying this to their faces strains alliances. If you follow several simple practices, you can keep yourself and perhaps three other people alive. Always remember that in other lands, you are yojimbo as well as shugenja.

I was at the Soshi court this year. They smiled and gave me gifts and offered me friendship, but they were shocked when I asked to sleep in the basement and place wards against evil in my room, the garden, and the castle gateway each night. The Soshi gossiped and looked insulted and asked why I wished to do such a thing.

"Because there are no wards there now," I said.

"Oh, and how many invisible oni are you expecting?" They laughed, as if this were a jest. That night I was introduced to several visiting Daidoji and I was on my best behavior, for you can cut up only so many Cranes in duels before the court expels you. So to be polite, I put up my wards after they had entered, bathed in my room, and showed up late to dinner. Several of them had heard of my position, and claimed to be men and women with estates and trade agreements and other things to speak of.

This was talk. Talk is air.

I humored them, and took them to the garden one at a time. The second one – I don't remember what he called himself, but the ward knew the truth – burst into flame. His skin burned away and a bloody creature of muscle and fat stood in his place, with a single eye and spider's fangs protruding from its stomach. Its hands were serrated blades of bone.

And then it vanished.

Had I paused, it would have gone among the crowd and started killing. So I did just what Hiruma did in a similar situation. I charged directly into the smoke, knocked it further into the ward, and spit on its face.

I could feel its fury, though my eyes still saw empty ground. And I ran, just like Hiruma. I knew where it would be for the rest of the night – it would chase me to the ends of the earth. So I sprinted straight for the castle gateway. I slowed when I heard its footsteps behind me, and it burned to death on the second ward.

I invited the one Daidoji I trusted to stay with me in my chamber. Neither of us slept, for the time you are most likely to die is after your first battle. I waited for the *maho-*

MAMONO

Lore TN: 25

EARTH: 4

FIRE: 2

WATER: 4

AIR: 5

Attacking: 5k4

Damage: 4k4, or as weapon

TN to be Hit: 25

Armor: 5

Wounds: 25: -1; 40: -2; 60: Dead

Special Abilities: Fear 2

Invulnerability

Shapechanging: The mamono can appear as any other human, but the process is difficult, taking fifteen minutes, so they prefer to establish identities rather than replacing existing people. Mamono usually travel the countryside, preying on travelers, peasants, dogs, cats, horses, and even hunting hawks.

Body of Air: The mamono can cast the Body of Air spell in one round.

Taint: If struck or bitten by a mamono, the victim must make a simple Earth roll, TN 20, or take two points of Taint. Because of their spider-like digestive apparatus, mamono generally kill their prey with weapons or their bone hands, then use the mouth in their stomach to dissolve the eyes, liver and other soft tissues, leaving the rest of the body (a significant clue for investigators).

Resurrection: The mamono, if killed at night, will reawaken in two hours, completely healed and very angry. The only reliable way to kill them is to cut them into three or more parts and bury them separately. They lose the regenerative ability in direct sunlight and take 1k1 Wounds per turn of exposure.



ONI NO SATSUJINKO (ONI OF THE MURDEROUS RAYS)

Lore TN: 25

EARTH: 5

FIRE: 3

WATER: 4

AIR: 2

Reflexes: 5

Attacking: 4k3

Damage: 7k2

TN to be Hit: 25

Armor: 0

Wounds: 24: -1; 48: -2; 96: Dead.

Special Abilities: *Invulnerability*

Taint Contagion: Oni no Satsujinko is a force of pure Taint. Unenchanted jade rots at its touch, doing no damage, and jade-related spells do only half. After one minute of touching an item, it can rot through thin wooden doors or permanently Taint metal or stone. If its blood gets into a water supply or food storage bin, all who come in contact with it get 1-10 points of Taint. If the oni is burned, the smoke gives one Taint point per turn to everyone breathing it.

Taint Cloud: The oni is perpetually surrounded by a twenty-foot wide cloud of its Tainted breath. Plants and insects wither and die as it walks by, and animals become misshapen. Entering the cloud requires a simple Earth roll, TN 20, every round or the victim takes 1-10 points of Taint. (Jade will absorb 10 points per finger.) Casting spells in this cloud adds a +10 TN penalty for all but *maho* spells.

tsukai who summoned it to come after us in revenge, but when I heard a scream outside my door, it was the same burned body, running in terror as it touched the third ward. I grabbed my jade and chased it to the kitchen where I struck it down. The yoriki soon surrounded me, dripping with questions and gratitude, while the corpse busily put itself back together. I ignored their words and struck it down again.

Bleeding, burning, and jade apparently did little, so I cut the body in two, impaled each part on a sai, gave them to two bushi and told them to bury them under a huge rock, staked to the earth. I took the head myself, and laid it in its grave face-down, so it dug itself deeper as it tried to crawl with its teeth.

And though I still do not know how the creatures are slain, the Soshi assure me it has bothered no one since.

Oni no Satsujinko

AS RECORDED BY YASUKI KOMADORI, 855

I am Yasuki Komadori, and I tell you the cause of our greatest trouble at the Wall this year was a single creature summoned by a *maho-tsukai* in the ranks near Tunnel 22. The Kaiu traps did not slow its progress, and the Kuni investigators who came to help believed all that was required was jade. But the Kuni became nauseated at their first step into the hall and could not enter to purify it.

After its attack from within the Wall, it retreated across the Seigo river. Our scouts found its trail even through the water, for the jade they carried rotted from a single splash. No doubt it crossed upstream to nurse the small scratches our bushi had inflicted.

We believe it pursued the eta next and hid in the kitchens for at least two days before moving down the Wall, for the Taint there is so strong no one can enter. We have been unable to clean the walls with water, sand or jade, and many Tainted Kaiu have volunteered to disassemble it and carry the stones deep into the Shadowlands.

It was spotted north of Shiro Kuni by the trail of dead trees and bushes, yet had we known more of it than its presence, our army might have saved the village rather than condemned it. Our rotted jade was useless before it hit flesh, but when our crystal weapons pierced its skin, we thought the fight was over.

Let it be known that the Oni no Satsujinko appears as a skeletal ogre with four clawed arms and wings, with a dark field like a storm cloud where its eyes should be, and a black mist of corruption that seeps constantly from its mouth. The gray light that shines from those eyes must be avoided at all costs, and those touched by the cloud cannot inhale, for its breath can kill through Taint alone. Somehow, its body must be banished to Jigoku, for it seems to have been summoned from there.

I am the one thousand, two hundred, and twenty-first to be killed by a dead oni. My family shall do their duty in providing the necessary clay and lime and laborers for the pit. I shall be the last to be sealed in.

I gave the order to burn the corpse.

My only request is that you never forget my mistake.

The Shuten Doji

AS TOLD BY KUNI KANEO, RENSHI, KUNI SHUGENJA-RYU, 654

Tonight I tell you of the Chuda, a noble family whose only service was to the Emperor. Their lands lay on the Dragon Heart Plain, surely the sweetest place on earth other than home. Though they trained in the arts of war, they quarreled with no one. The daimyo Chuda Choro had two loyal brothers, a faithful wife, a castle of courageous bushi, and a son and daughter who loved him more than the world.

They thought themselves safe.

They are no more.

Hear me, and remember the Clan of the Snake, for the creature that killed one Clan will not hesitate to kill another.

My story begins long ago, when the Tarnished One struggled beneath the earth. It is said three men journeyed into that chasm with mercy in their hearts, and he ate their bodies to gain the strength to return to our world.

"Fortune had no mercy for me," he cried, "so I shall create my own Fortunes." He dripped his blood on them and bound an evil wind to their empty skulls, and called upon the Sins of Fear, Desire, and Regret. And to this day, these twisted Fortunes require blood to be shed and a prayer made in the name of one of the Three Sins, and in return, they can grant power like you and I never wish to see.

The Tarnished One named these three the Shuten Doji, the three Spirit Kings, the true sensei of *maho*.

Fear has the power to paralyze us, to keep us from taking action. It grants the wish to change our future and makes it what it would not be were we stronger men.

Desire has the power to cloud our minds. It changes our present by letting us pretend we know all there is to know, and we are justified in evil. It grants wishes of corruption and licentiousness.

But the most cunning Sin, that tortures the most successful and loyal men, is Regret. As our memory fails, as our father's memory fails, Regret brushes by past good deeds and makes evil ones stronger. It is the Sin of the victorious who wonder if they still failed. The power of Regret is to change the past.

I do not know which Shuten Doji killed the Snake Clan.

I know that Chuda Choro was ill, and his son Tamihei sought the mysteries of the universe at the Isawa school to aid him. But prayers to Jurojin and the lifting of curses did no good; as he was strengthened, so was the disease. Tamihei saw his father's suffering and breathed half of a forbidden prayer: out of fear his father would die, out of regret he could not help him, and out of desire to be recognized as a powerful shugenja. In his frustration, Tamihei struck an *eta* with his sword.

That night, the Shuten Doji appeared and promised him the power to save his father, if he would only complete the prayer. It was trapped between this world and the next, and for seven years, on the first of each month it offered him something new. It offered him his life. It offered him its forgiveness. It offered him lands and good marriages. It boomed and screeched and begged for mercy and spoke soft words and yet every night ended the same. It asked him to complete his request, and he refused.

For seven years.

THE SHUTEN DOJI'S MORTAL FORM

Lore TN: 50 (20 with Phoenix Clan Lore)

EARTH: 8

FIRE: 5

WATER: 5

AIR: 8

Attacking: 5k5

Damage: 8k3

TN to be Hit: 25

Armor: 10

Wounds: 25: -1; 50: -2; 75: -3; 100:

Dissipated

Special Abilities: Fear 2 (6 for the Shuten Doji of Fear)

Invulnerability (only crystal/jade/obsidian hurts Desire/Regret/Fear)

Shugenja Ability: The Shuten Doji are Fu Leng's sensei of *maho*. If they want it, they can cast it in a round, and they don't go easy on the special effects.

Summoning: To attract a Shuten Doji's attention, a character must pray to the Fortunes for an action motivated by one of the three sins (Gamemaster's call) and inflict a mortal wound. Once the Shuten Doji arrives, it takes the sacrifice of a noble to grant the summoner its powers: a clan daimyo, his children, or anyone with the Ancestor advantage of one of the Kami suffices. If a member of the Hantei line dies for this to happen, all three Shuten Doji are loosed.

(continued)

THE SHUTEN DOJI (SPECIAL ABILITIES CONTINUED)

Possession: For the Shuten Doji to see through the eyes of many bodies as with the Snake Clan, they must first be willingly invited into the summoner. Then their control is spread by sound (Regret), touch (Desire), or sight (Fear). Each time, the *maho-tsukai* makes a Contested Void roll with the target; if he succeeds, the Shuten Doji possesses the target. Void may not be spent on this roll. A failed possession attempt feels like an odd, frightening adrenaline rush. Another roll occurs every round (3-5 seconds) the victim is within the appropriate sensory range.

Those possessed by the Shuten Doji suffer three points of Taint, and are held prisoner in their bodies, aware but helpless as it directs them to unspeakable acts. Possessed people fight with their normal skills and Traits. Only the summoner, the Shuten Doji's own form, and any possessed maho-users can cast maho. The Shuten Doji of Fear and Desire are dispelled once their mortal shells die, returning in scattered essence to Fu Leng. To kill Regret, all its victims must be killed. They cannot be summoned for a number of years equal to their slayer's Honor.

Snuffing the Candle: The Shuten Doji can deliver 8k3 Wounds (internal organ ruptures) to any possessed victim over any distance. Such Wounds count as a blood sacrifice for maho-casting. Sometimes it relinquishes control just enough for the possessed victim to commit *seppuku* so they power its spells unwittingly.

Then, one night, his father summoned him. Choro had grown light of body and his skin was so thin even the sheet covering him caused pain. Choro asked his son to be merciful and finally grant him peace.

"I will do everything I can, Father," Tamihei promised, and completed his prayer.

The Shuten Doji took him to a cave for seven days to teach him the secret. When he returned, his father had died, and Tamihei, now daimyo, swore that the dark knowledge he had called for would not go in vain. He would become immortal and learn the true secrets, the ones that would bring his father back from the dead, and complete his promise. He told his sister Shinobu of his plans, and because they knew it would be evil to kill another for these reasons, she volunteered to be the sacrifice.

He stabbed her with his wakizashi and as her heart's blood fell on him, asked if she could still hear. With those words, he became a part of her spirit. When the eta heard him order her body taken to the funeral pyre, he became a part of the eta. When the eta told a guard what he was doing, Tamihei heard it all, and became part of the guard.

He traveled on speech.

By morning, Tamihei was part of almost every samurai, heimin, and hinin in the village. And the Shuten Doji, of course, was part of Tamihei.

For it had never been trapped at all.

The one exception was a young hinin boy who served the monks at the temple by ringing the bell each morning and night. Every day, the boy would pray to Jizo, the Fortune of Mercy, to let him hear the bell for once and not just feel it ring; for he had been born stone deaf.

On that morning, after his prayer, a woman he had never seen before handed him the hammer, and he heard the bell.

So did all five Elemental Masters at Kyuden Isawa. The Master of Water scried in a frozen pool of purest rainwater from a winter storm, and he saw a terrible vision: the world that would occur if the Masters did not act now.

In three days, the Shiba army marched on the Dragon Heart Plain, where a group of merchants rode from the village around Shiro Chuda. As a single bushi rode ahead to detain them, the Master of Earth swept them with a gaze of magic and saw the signs of Taint upon them.

The Master of Fire commanded Osano-Wo to deafen them all with his thunder, and ordered the Shiba around him to *kiai* as loudly as they could to drown the coming screams. He called lightning from the heavens on the merchants and the bushi who had heard their voices.

Before they reached the city, they saw the banners of the Snake army, every man marching in step without the beat of a drum to drive them. And as the Phoenix's herald rode forward in greeting, the Master of Air sensed their minds and felt the touch of their words already upon the herald. Just before they let out a battle yell, he stifled the air in their lungs and surrounded them with silence. In the awful quiet that followed, he drew a sword and charged, the armies behind him. Three thousand samurai died without a sound.

The Phoenix Champion conferred with the Elemental Masters, and their forces surrounded the village. They sent a foray in to see if there were innocents to save, plugging their ears as they entered, aware that even a breath could make them one of the tentacles of Tamihei.

Only one returned. He had burst his own eardrums.

They pinned his lips together and forced him to write down his report. The Shiba had paused in shock in the city as the eta looked them in the eyes... and marched in step, surrounding them.

"Every soldier that enters there must have no fear," urged the Master of Void, for he had been speaking with oracles, and remembered the Shuten Doji which had felled Isawa Arimihime and nearly leveled Gisei Toshi. "And no desire, and no regret, for each glimmer of those makes the Shuten Doji stronger."

What followed is called the Five Nights of Shame, for they attacked at night, when the Shuten Doji stalked the halls of the castle. And what they did proved that every samurai among them lived without sin, until each of them died.

They knew the enormity of their task, but they had no fear.

They had no mercy and committed no *seppuku* afterwards, for they had no regret.

They had no desires, but only followed orders.

I learned this from something that looked like a young deaf boy who would not tell me his name.



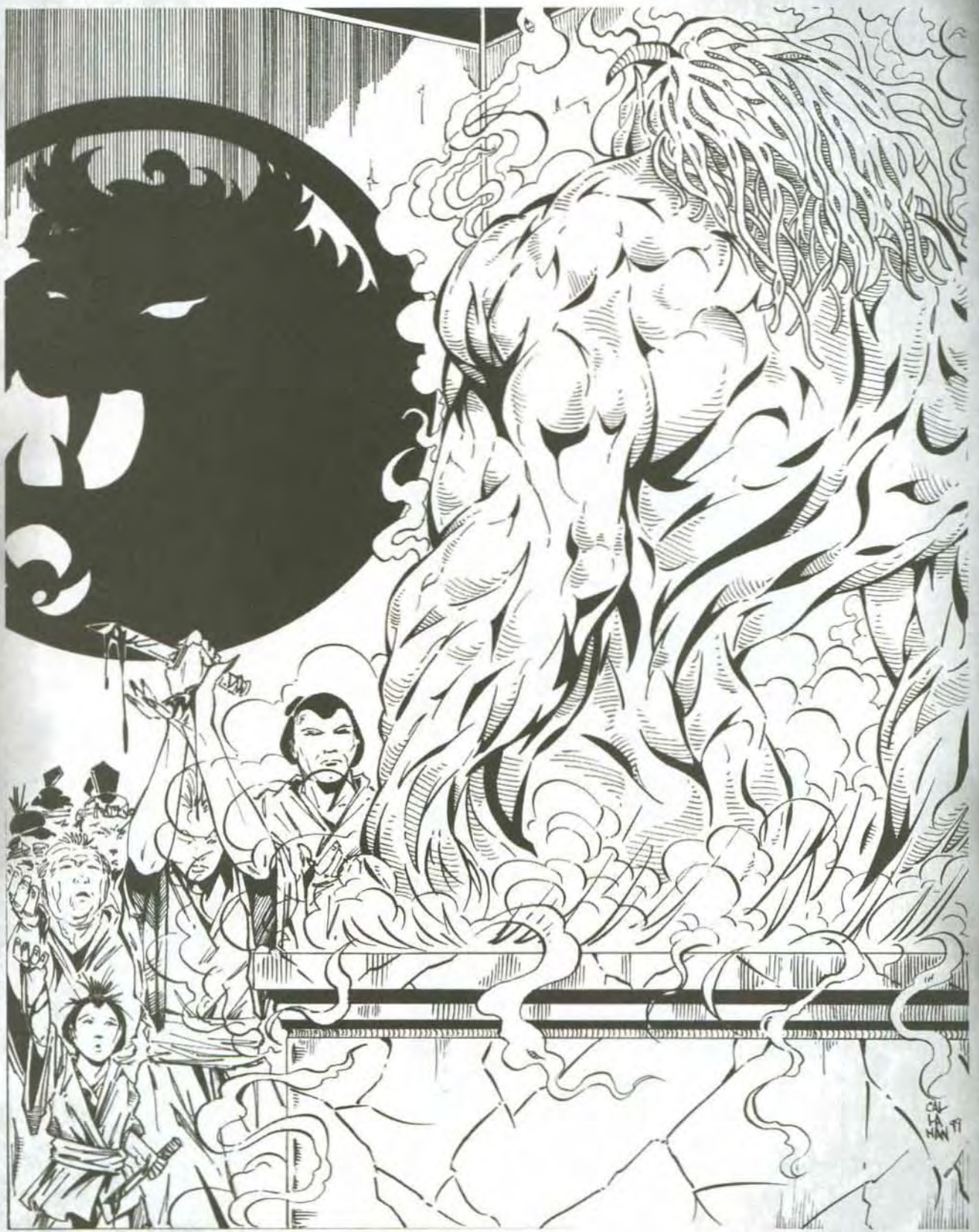
THE SHUTEN DOJI STAGING TIPS

Once in control of an area, the Shuten Doji teaches its bodies to use *maho* and makes them break every taboo civilized Rokugani hold dear. Sneaking into an area held by a Shuten Doji is like walking into a world in which Fu Leng has won. Describe anything that can get your players to say "Ew."

If it's Fear, they are walking into Hell... blindfolded, or they make Void rolls every single time they see an infected person until they get the merciless point. Yet how do they fight an army blind?

If it's Desire, it appeals to everything they've secretly wanted to do. What harm is really done if it just makes its victims loosen up about all those stuffy rules? They can live here with their true love and never go back to their heartless daimyo, right?

Regret's possessed victims scream for their lives and innocence, crying, prostrating themselves, showing their children, sobbing or writing "there must be another way..." and if one escapes (infected player characters, too) it starts all over again. To kill it, the samurai must become monsters.



Chapter 5:
Workers of
Maho



HONOR, GLORY, AND TAINT

Naturally, when accusations of *maho* start flying, Honor and Glory plummet, or soar for those who root out a threat to the Empire. Though Honor is usually subjective, Fu Leng is the Rokugani standard of evil, and

Honor loss from using *maho* is absolute. The following guidelines should help. Losses are cumulative.

Getting the Taint: Lose Honor (and Glory if made public) points equal to Shadowlands points gained.

Increasing Taint: -1 Honor/Glory per 5 points gained.

Consorting with known Tainted people: Lose Glory points equal to the highest Shadowlands rank among companions.

Using *maho* spells: -1 Honor Rank. Lose Glory points equal to the combined Glory ranks of all who saw it or definitively know it occurred. This is the case when a character uses *maho* spells such as Banish Oni for a good cause.

Becoming a *maho-tsukai*: Deliberately praying to Fu Leng drops Honor to zero permanently.

Convicted of *maho*: Expect to be tortured for the names and deeds of your accomplices, denied *seppuku*, and beheaded while your deeds are erased from family histories.

Family member convicted: Your blood is suspect. -1 Glory rank.

Being accused of *maho*: Lose 1 Honor point and Glory points equal to the accuser's Glory rank unless your good name is defended.

Wrongful accusation of *maho*: Lose Honor and Glory points equal to the Glory rank of the accused. Repeating rumors counts; it is not something one discusses in polite company. False rumors of Taint cost a single point.

Unknowingly defending *maho*-users: Lose Honor and Glory points equal to the *maho*-user's Taint rank. *Seppuku* allowed but not necessary.

Successfully rooting out *maho*: Gain Honor and Glory points equal to the Glory or Shadowlands rank (whichever is higher) of the accused. This award is halved the second time, and may not occur by the third or fourth charge.

You know, no doubt, that Hantei XVII decreed after the Battle of Stolen Graves that all matters of maho be kept secret. Were people to learn of maho-tsukais' powers, dishonorable men might seek such sorcerers out, and honorable ones would panic. In this matter I believe the Son of Heaven was not wise enough.

The very misconception that "there hasn't been maho here in three hundred years" allows these twisted shugenja to flourish. Most samurai worry little about maho, believing it rare, restricted to far-off provinces and quickly corrected by a civilized magistrate. My own experience has led me to eight blood sorcerers in the last seven years.

If you do not believe this is a matter of concern, I ask this, Master of Earth:

Know you of the bushi who use maho?

I trust you see my point.

The Taint is involuntary, and a man may still do good under its influence. Maho is a prayer to the eighth kami and only evil can come from blood spilled in his service. Maho-tsukai deserve no mercy, for they show none to the world they would destroy.

Enclosed are the few accounts I found of past sorcerers and several letters the tsukai-sagasu have received in recent times. Use caution if you investigate these matters, for sorcerers rarely act alone, and it is all too easy for the most perverted doctrine to find followers. Even the long-dead may have descendants lingering still.

-Seikansha

From Asako Seisha's Novel "Burning Stones"

Few Isawa read the works of Asako artists, and fewer still care for stories where men of their own name turn to evil. However, Seisha studied history with both the Asako and Ikoma before turning to literature, and I believe there is more truth to these events than they would claim. I myself have seen the walls burning with tainted fire even today.

-Seikansha

Snow fell, effortless, from the black sky, drifting untouched and unmelted through the azure flames. For five days, the monastery's granite walls had burned, their fires colder than the snow, though hot enough to sear men's souls from their bodies.

Shiba Sakazu's hand was on his sword, its heat melting the ice on the tsuba. Around him, frost gathered across the sode of his soldiers' armor, fading them to shapeless ghosts.

Each pale face held a samurai, prepared to kill and die to fulfill Shiba's promise; but what awaited them now could be fought in no way they understood, and even the bravest simply stared at the smokeless flames and awaited their rikugunshokan's command.

Sakazu turned away, looking at the flat terraces of the hill behind him. Dozens of acres that should have been lush with rice now showed sharp brown corners through their frosty blanket. His own supply wagons were nearly empty, he knew, and no horse could cross the snow-clogged trails.

Two hundred bushi, half that again in auxiliaries, and who knew how many peasants waited below, begging silently for their share of the grain they had not been able to provide him. He wondered how many had already succumbed to the monastery's Tainted food and false promises.

ELEMENTAL MAHO

Lore TN: 30 (Phoenix Clan or *Maho-tsukai* Lore)

Most *maho* spells manipulate the element of Corruption, but the monks of the Blue Stone monastery could turn normal elements into Corruption, making them very dangerous indeed. Elemental *maho* spells are associated with one of the normal four elements (any knowledge of Void *maho* has fortunately been lost), and are cast using the appropriate Ring + Shadowlands Rank. Most often, these are offensive, damaging spells which roll against the victim's opposing Ring x 5.

Spells which change the elements within a target to Taint, rather than using outside force, Taint their target as well as their caster. In addition to suffering the spell's effect, the victim must make a Simple Earth roll against 5 x the Mastery of the spell or get one point of Taint.

The spells Tomb of Earth, No Pure Breaths, and Ward of the Eighth, in Appendix Three, are elemental *maho*. For others, simply go through the L5R book and look at how a Tainted person might twist the spells to their own ends. Think: "Taint Strike," "Befoul the Mind," "Katana of Corruption," "The Path to Inner Pain," and so on.

"It builds, my lord." He did not turn to acknowledge Urachu's comment. "If we do not strike soon, this land with never again bear fruit"

"So you have said." Sakazu's voice was even, though he had spent enough time among shugenja to know what it meant when Urachu told him the *maho-tsukai* among the Blue Stone monks retained their Isawa talents. Most blood sorcerers gave up the elements in favor of the Dark Kami's corruption, but the men who awaited him had used their Taint to gain even greater mastery over the world.

Retired *Ishiken* and Isawa shugenja, turned somehow by the Lost One's lure. There was nothing in land, sea, air, flame, void or shadow that they could not control, and no respect for the Fortunes or Celestial Order to keep such awesome power in check.

"How will you stop them?"

The silence grew as Sakazu stared at the play of blue light over his advisor's face. Five days ago, he had assembled an army large enough to slaughter five hundred men.

Four days ago, the Isawa led them in an attack of magic, and were turned back by the flames that sprang from the walls. Shugenja and bushi alike fell from its touch and the skies filled with snow.

Three days ago, they tried with strength, throwing line after line of men against the impenetrable fire, watching without fear as they screamed and fell and died, and their corpses burned too quickly to climb.

Two days ago, they tried with cunning, using the tricks of spies to sail on kites from the trees, and tunnel through the collapsing earth. But the *maho* spells turned the intruders' elements against them, entombing their bodies in earth and using their air to tear them apart from the inside.

Last night, they had tried with prayer, attacking no one and asking the Fortunes' mercy to grant them the courage or cleverness needed. But there was no answer, and this morning the walls still burned.

Tonight, Sakazu decided, he would try with thought.

The stronger his men's attacks, the stronger the sorcerers' magics burned in protection, and he had lost half his forces against the simple strength of fire and earth, which cost the *maho-tsukai* almost nothing. In fact, with the power of blood, his men's deaths only fueled their enemies.



ANCESTOR: SHIBA SAKAZU
881-922
4 POINTS

Though no one knows how Sakazu met his end, his descendants have inherited his confidence in their abilities to prevail even when naked, alone and emptied of thought. Characters with Sakazu as an Ancestor roll an additional number of dice equal to their Void for all bare-handed attacks.

He took a deep breath, swiping a hand through the air to clear the snow from his vision. But the weightless flakes only danced aside, untouched.

Just as the flames did not touch them.

"With snow," he answered Urachu finally. "Their spells do not protect them against that which is no threat." He could feel the questions in his men's eyes as he stripped away his armor, but he did not answer, focusing his fingers on the task at hand. Helmet first, then *kote* and *do-maru*, laid at his feet. The daisho went to Urachu to take to his son. Shivering, Sakazu unwound his obi, letting his kimono fall open. He unlaced his boots, then pulled off his socks, his *hakama*, his *shitagi* and *fundoshi* until he stood, naked, in the frigid air, hands and mind empty of all threat.

With legs that shook from cold but not fear, he crossed the fifty steps to the monastery gates, and though the heat stripped the wind from his skin and breath from his lungs, his flesh was untouched as he disappeared between the burning stones.

The novel ends here, though several playwrights have tried to continue the story. Each version has a different conclusion, for no one actually knows what happened inside, only that Sakazu entered unscathed, and since then no one has seen anyone enter or leave the monastery. Though some argue he failed, for the monastery is still lost, the land and elements recovered and thus many hold Sakazu as a great hero.

-Seikansha

From the Play "Virtue" by Ikoma Tijo

This play is one of the Lion's homilies on the evils of lust, vengeance, and the Crane, not necessarily in that order. The Crane characters are caricatures, of course, but I have evidence the events described are true (though I would not say so to a Kakita duelist). Be warned: a certain Crab we both know claims Doji Nashiko's beauty was so great as to stop age itself, and she spreads her Tainted favors still.

-Seikansha

SCENE: IN THE COURT OF THE EMERALD CHAMPION.

(Doji Komatsu, the Emerald Champion, stands before the gathered women of the court, including Doji Nashiko, a plain-faced, richly-dressed courtier, and Kakita Nenko, a beautiful girl in a plain kimono. Komatsu's retainers follow his every step.)

KOMATSU: Enter, my friends, my court now welcomes all
Who seek my favor. Brides in deepest red,
You stand before me, each a silken thread
In an artist's softest weave, the best your Clan
Can offer. Who shall share my heart and bed,
I, Komatsu, the right arm of Hantei?

(to First Girl) Your eyes are dark as jade, as deep as night,
Beautiful, modest, demure, the perfect wife.

(turns away) Your father hoped those lips would kiss away
My justice, and forgive his crimes. Be gone!

(First Girl weeps and slinks offstage.)

(to Second Girl) Your fan is trimmed in blue and silver, but
Your heart is red with treachery and lust
Just as the Scorpion who gave you birth.

(Second Girl pouts and slinks offstage.)

Will no one here prove worthy of my touch?

NASHIKO: Great lord, I greet you with my father's name
Doji Osenshi, and I, Nashiko.
My years since we last met have all been spent
Under the charge of Enshei, mastering
The rules laid down by Doji long ago,
Learning the ways of honor and of gift
The art of sweet persuasion. In my hands
Biwa sing to charm a crowd, and not
A single face in court is strange to me.
All that the perfect wife would need I know.

(Komatsu stares at Nenko, smitten.)

My lord, I have run my father's house for years
And cared for my sister's children like my own.
All that you need or want, *(louder)* my lord, I do.

(Nenko simpers and hides behind a fan.)

KOMATSU: *(to Nashiko)* Your words are true, your grasp of women's arts
Is unsurpassed, but how sad for a man,
Returning to a home that's ruled with honor
And with skill, but cold, without a wife
Whose charming splendor warms the eye and heart.
Beauty is its own reward. White hands,
Delicate as a lily stem. Dark eyes,
With lowered lashes, and waterfalls of hair.
The highest virtue, the one worth fighting for.

(to Nenko) From this day forth, *you* are my wife.

(Smiling, all but Nashiko exit. She falls to her knees.)

NASHIKO: What worth is there to life with beauty lost?
All thought, all skill, all effort sacrificed
Before the simplest lack-wit elegance.
Never shall I remain content in shadow,
Eclipsed beneath another's empty smile.
(She draws her kaiken.)
Their beauty paves their way; I must cut mine,
Hewn from the rock with hands not delicate
Enough to touch his flesh. I say so be it.
If he says beauty is virtue, let me be
The most virtuous woman in Rokugan.
In life, in honor, nothing won or gained.

DOJI NASHIKO

The war Doji Nashiko started was omitted from the Ikoma histories. After seducing over half the men of Doji Komatsu's court and giving their names to oni, Nashiko fled to the Shadowlands where she still lives as an *akutenshi*, an immortal human servitor of Fu Leng. She is devoted to the Dark God, some say in love with him, and is rumored to have borne him over a dozen children in the last five centuries.

Once in a great while, Nashiko enters Rokugan under a carefully crafted false identity, spying for Fu Leng and gaining favors for his servants. She has two flaws which usually prove her undoing: she remains as vain as she was in life, and she underestimates male opponents, whom she considers beneath respect. She seeks to be acknowledged as the loveliest woman in Rokugan, now and forever, and will snub, disgrace, disfigure or kill anyone who stands between her and that honor.

Lore TN: 25 (Crane, Lion, or *Maho-tsukai* Lore)

EARTH: 6

FIRE: 4

Intelligence: 6

WATER: 4

Perception: 5

AIR: 8

Skills: Acting 5, Courtier 5, Defense 4, Etiquette 5, Kenjutsu 3, Lore: *Maho-tsukai* 5, Lore: Shadowlands 5, Manipulation 5, Mimic 3, Political Maneuvering 5, Seduction 6, Sincerity 5, Torture 4, All High Skills 3

School: Doji Courtier 4, *Mahobujin* 3 (see p. 113)

Spells: All Air spells and most *maho* spells. Touch of Death, Summon Oni, Dancing with Demons, Sinful Dreams, and Truth is a Scourge (see *Appendix Three*) are innate.

(Continued)

DOJI NASHIKO

(CONTINUED)

Akutenshi Powers (see Appendix

J): Armor of Death, Blood Shouting,
Body of Damned Time, Command the

Taint, Calligraphy of Thought, Disrupt

Chi, Eyes of Hell, Fear, Flight,

Invisibility, Invulnerability, Sense

Purity, Shapechanging, Soul Drinking,

Undead Strength

Advantages: Benten's Blessing,

Dangerous Beauty, Voice, most others

Disadvantages: Vanity, Phobia

(Disfigurement)

Shadowlands Taint: 9

Wounds: 96: Dead

Note: Nashiko has Seduction 6
because she sold her soul for it. She
has been practicing for the last five
hundred years on Fu Leng himself.

She wears only a Mists of Illusion
spell, her kimono turns to clinging
smoke at a thought, and she will do
things Rokugani don't even have
words for.

I now choose death.

*(She holds the kaiken to her throat, then reverses it to slit her arm lengthwise.
Blood spills to the stage. Stagehands wail.)*

NASHIKO: The death of honor. This is my sacrifice.

Her beauty is now mine.

*(Thunderclap and smoke. She walks away, leaving her old mask on the floor. Enter a
group of court men with talking noises. Silence as Nashiko enters, wearing a spectacular
new mask. The men stare.)*

MEN: What have I done that Fortune smiles so?

There is no art that makes such loveliness.

Skin like new snow, and hair of cobweb silk,

Fallen in shining folds across her knee.

Would that I were that knee to simply feel

That gentle touch. Oh, Heaven grant my prayer,

And part your doors.

(to Nashiko) My lady, my life, my honor, all are yours.

NASHIKO: *(to audience)* What fools men are. Like flitting butterflies,

Chasing the brightest flash of colored wings,

A pretty face their prize, still they don't know,

The coin they pay is forged of souls.

(She minces up to one man and drops her fan. He picks it up and follows her exit.)

MEN: Woe that it is not I who feels those lips

Upon my skin, those fingers through my hair,

In candlelight that keeps the night at bay

Just long enough for love. Who will be next?

(Nashiko returns and leads another off.)

Jealousy spreads. Where have the favored gone?

No longer do they stand beside their lord.

Instead of swords, their hands hold scroll and brush;

(She returns and leads out a third.)

Lines of haiku, netsuke of pure gold.

Behind their eyes, her smile burns, and blood

Spills on the stones for every word she grants.

(She leads off a fourth.)

Why am I left alone? Are not my looks

As good as any other's? Are my gifts

Not chosen with more care, my honor wrapped

In paper, offered on a silver tray?

(She returns, considering the remainder.)

Take me!

(They fall to their knees before her. Nashiko turns to the audience.)

NASHIKO: There's only a single gift which gains my hand,
 A single, simple price which I demand,
 The perfect tithe, to buy my love, my lovers.
 The thing I ask does not have gems nor gold,
 Nor silver plates, nor springtime's freshest bloom,
 Nor music, dance, nor verse of admiration,
 Nor moonlit walks, nor promise, pledge or vow.
 Only a single word, I ask, remembered
 And called in the throes of passion, when our bodies
 Twine like ropes. Your name is all I ask.
 Say yes, and all desires shall be yours.

(One by one, the men call their names while she slices her right arm, beckoning masked oni from backstage. As each man speaks, the oni stands behind him.)

MEN: Hirao! Roka! Kango! Ajimi! Shosuke! Naoji! Yone!

KOMATSU: Komatsu.

NASHIKO: Though someday even you will understand
 The pleasure my touch brought you at what cost,
 I need not wait. All that I want from you
 Is done. Only your pain. My love is elsewhere
 Bound to me in blood, and not in beauty,
 And to him, I shall return.

(She gestures, and one by one, the oni carry off the screaming men.)

Hold well your memories, let them remain,
 To comfort you when arms and souls are bare.
 Come to me, lovers, when your beds are cold,
 And give me the final gift to make you mine.
 I will be there.

(She takes the final oni's hand and walks off stage.)

(Exeunt.)



The Brief and Tragic History of the Shimizu Family, From the High Histories of the Ikoma Library

Few outside the Lion have seen this shameful portion of their histories, but I believe the text speaks for itself on its importance. That maho could pass through families as an inheritance is frightening indeed. No longer can our battles cease with the death of the sorcerer, for all who bear his name may share his evil ways.

-Seikansha

In the seven-hundred and forty-third year since the First War, four years and seven months into the reign of Hantei XXII, the assembled daughters of the Doji and Kakita filled

ONI NO TAMAYU

Oni no Tamayu possessed Agasha Enshoku/Kakita Edako in the hopes of destroying the Hantei line. When Shimizu thwarted its plan, the oni became obsessed with corrupting the righteous man, and though it took generations, it finally succeeded. By conditioning its Shimizu vassals, the oni built a private army of *maho-tsukai*, and had gotten close to the numbers it needed for another attempt against the emperor...until Giri ruined its plans. Since then, Oni no Tamayu has determined to retake what was "rightfully" its, though Giri's descendants have proven incorruptible so far.

Lore TN: 30 (*Maho-tsukai* Lore),
25 (Lion Clan Lore)

EARTH: 6

FIRE: 5

WATER: 3

Strength: 5

AIR: 5

Attacking: 8k4

Damage: 7k3

TN to be Hit: 20

Armor: 15

Wounds: 40: -1; 60: -2; 80: -3; 100: -4; 130: Dead

Oni no Tamayu is unique in that it can take many names at once, forming dominant links to dozens of *maho-tsukai*. The victim's name must be offered up voluntarily (often when they're too young to know better). The oni then makes an Air roll against the victim's Earth x 5. A success with four raises makes the victim a walking shell, living only to please his master. A lesser success still establishes the bond, though the victim retains independent function. Tamayu has a number of arms equal to its number of bonded victims. The oni teaches its victims *maho*, which it can enhance through its bond, adding its Earth in dice (to roll, not keep) to any *maho*-casting the victim does.

Otosan Uchi like a garden of blue and silver flowers, awaiting the Emperor's choice. But in every crowd, his eyes sought a single face – Kakita Edako, whose green-eyed beauty had charmed the whole court. Even General Akodo Gunhiko approved of his bride.

Before the announcement could be made, an urgent message arrived for Gunhiko. Akodo Shimizu, his most trusted magistrate, had returned from assignment unsuccessfully, and wished his lord's permission to commit *seppuku*. Gunhiko allowed the fallen man to enter and make his request before all, for a Lion who could not fulfill his duty deserved no mercy, especially one charged to track and destroy the *maho-tsukai* who had terrorized the towns of the Osari Plains.

Shimizu entered the room with measured steps and threw himself to his knees. "Gunhiko-sama, I have failed–"

His eyes widened as Edako walked into the room, and without a breath Shimizu drew his katana and sliced her head from her body. The room froze as thirty-one swords left their scabbards, only held back by Gunhiko's raised hand. He spoke one word. "Explain."

"I have completed the task you assigned me. I have slain the *maho-tsukai*, Agasha Enshoku. If my effort has displeased you, my wakizashi waits." Shimizu did not flinch from the blades as he placed his hand on his hilt.

As the witch's magic faded with the heat from her body, Hantei realized the service done him by this simple magistrate, who had seen through the pleasant words that hid her evil heart from his most trusted advisors. Handing the kneeling man the emerald obi he had meant for Edako, Hantei declared that from that day forth he would no longer be Akodo Shimizu, but Shimizu Gochoku, for his integrity had saved the Imperial line.

Until the fourth generation, the Shimizu family lived peacefully on the land granted them by the Emperor, serving their clan court quietly and well. But in 827, daimyo Shimizu Tamayu grew jealous of the great riches and prestige accorded the Akodo and Ikoma over his small family.

Was not my name honored by the Emperor himself? he thought. *By what right are their lands so vast and mine so meager?*

Gathering his retainers and what ronin he could hire, he led an army against Ikoma Kuniomi, his nearest neighbor. The larger army defeated him easily, and vengeance blackened Tamayu's heart. When the Fortunes did not answer his prayers for victory, Tamayu turned elsewhere, spilling his blood in a plea to the Fallen.

Summoning an oni to strengthen his soldiers' arms, Tamayu promised his name for its aid. Spurred by black magic, his troops fell once more on Kuniomi's armies, annihilating them down to the last standard-bearer.

The blood strengthened Oni no Tamayu, but it bided its time, knowing Tamayu would turn to it again, for though his new holdings satisfied him at first, the flame of jealousy is not easily quenched.

When Tamayu next sought its assistance against Akodo Oko, the oni demanded another price, another name. Tamayu gave it his eldest daughter, then his youngest, then his wife and sons, selling their souls to pay for his own ambitions.

The Shimizu holdings grew until they encompassed the holdings of Akodo Nage, Akodo Kitako- *[I have edited out the property records and genealogies which the Ikoma feel obliged to include in every history. –Seikansha]*

For five generations, the Shimizu family served their oni. Their children were nursed on Tainted milk and learned prayers to the *kami*'s dark brother before taking their first

steps. They learned to read from scrolls of blood magic, and swore loyalty to their dark master long before they spoke the same words to their lord and Emperor.

And for five generations, their *maho* gave them victory in nearly every battle, though their cunning overruled their aspirations and kept their attentions to small provinces, so their unnatural victories lay unnoticed.

But the leadership of Akodo Miyawa, schooled under Akodo Jigo in the eight hundred and seventieth class of the Akodo War College, proved superior even to their enchantments. Though Miyawa's armies could not defeat the Shimizu forces, neither could Shimizu Otori overcome Miyawa's defense and reach his castle.

Each summer for ten years they fought to a standstill, drenching the Shireki Plain with blood and burning the rice fields on each side. And each winter, the Shimizu replaced their stores with summoned grain and Miyawa called on his allies to feed his people, though he would not accept their help in battle.

Shimizu Riko, Otori's wife, was pregnant when the war began, and Otori sent her to stay with a cousin until the child was safely born and the war had ended. Their fourth son, Ohoshi, was born in Akodo lands, fifty miles from his Tainted home.

Every summer, Riko tried to return to her husband, but the battles between Otori and Miyawa raged so ferociously she feared to travel. Ohoshi grew up as an Akodo, out of the grasp of the oni, who did not know of his existence. Raised with the honor and loyalty of a true Lion, Ohoshi had already begun training as a bushi when word arrived that Otori and Miyawa had called a temporary truce.

Riko rejoiced at returning home, and she and Otori immediately began plotting to dedicate their new child to the oni, and ensure that his Akodo influence did not spark goodness in him. But even at ten Ohoshi had absorbed his training well, and he knew at once that something terrible lurked within the house his mother had longed to see again.

Creeping downstairs, he saw the glittering outline of the oni, taller than a man with a smooth, faceless head, and dozens of arms with mouths in each hand. His parents and brothers knelt before it, and it placed one toothed hand on each bowed head.



MAHO AND PEASANT REBELLIONS

Peasants frequently yearn for a better lot in Rokugan, and many accept witchcraft as a way to get back at a cruel lord, especially if taught by an oni disguised as the village wise woman so they don't know they are using Shadowlands magic. Samurai rarely pay attention to peasants as long as the crops come in and the bodies go out, so an oni can raise considerable armies in secret, teaching them *maho* in underground revolutionary cells.

AVERAGE PEASANT MAHO-USER

EARTH: 2

FIRE: 2

WATER: 2

Strength: 3

AIR: 2

VOID: 1

Skills: Battle 1, Craft: Variable 2, Defense 2, Nofujutsu 2

Spells: Curse, Summon Revenant, any one other maho spell

Shadowlands Taint: 2

TN to be Hit: 10

Attacking: 4k2

Damage: 5k2 (bo, kama or nunchaku), 4k2 (tonfa), 4k1 (sai)

Armor: None



Taking only his thin kimono, the child left instantly, and walked fifty miles to his cousins' house. When he arrived and told what he had seen, the family wished to attack the monstrosity immediately, but acquiesced to Ohoshi's fervent claim for the right to blood feud, for it was his future they had ransomed for power.

For six more years, Ohoshi trained among the Akodo, excelling in the arts of war. On the morning of his *gempukku*, he took the name Giri, meaning "duty," and joined Akodo Miyawa to lead an army against his ancestral home. Protected by Kitsu magics, they fell upon the Shimizu family and slaughtered them down to the youngest child.

Swearing his fealty to the Akodo, Giri abolished his family name. The cursed Shimizu were no more, and Akodo Giri burned the ancient holdings to the ground, building his own castle for his new wife, Usako, Miyawa's daughter.

The Yogo Rebellion

The following was transcribed by my retainer from a conversation I had with the residents of Hobokuchi Mura when investigating possible maho presence on the Yogo/Unicorn border. Though few Scorpion histories

mention trouble in this area, their peasants tell a different story... after some persuading.

-Seikansha

Oh, no, honored *daikan-sama*, there has never been anything like that here. (Mass agreement) We are very loyal, my lord. Do you need rice? Your sword shined?

No. No. I understand you are loyal. Your daimyo has no complaints on your behavior. I am just asking for stories. Has your grandmother ever said anything about maho happening here a long time ago?

Oh, yes, my lord. There was *maho* here, but Lord Yogo-sama, he fought against it. (Another chimes in.) Yes, he protected us. All who were part of it are dead, *daikan-sama*, I swear it.

Yes, Lord Yogo said that not a single descendant of anyone in Kaido's army was left alive, and I am certain he was quite thorough. But there must still be stories. Do you know how Kaido got so many people to join him, or where he learned to summon oni? You will not get in trouble for saying so.

(Much hesitant looking around. One man finally comes forward, bowing rapidly.) Please, sir, I remember, my grandfather, he said that his grandfather knew Kaido.

Yes. Go on.

He said Kaido was big, very strong. He could lift a samurai in armor all alone, with no help, so Lord Yogo-sama wanted him to work at the castle. To carry the bodies out when the samurai got in fights. *(Ducks head, looks guilty)* For good reasons, I am certain, *daikan-sama*.

Of course.

One of Lord Yogo-sama's shugenja, he came back from the Shadowlands *(All make gestures to ward off evil)*, and committed *seppuku* the next day. My grandfather served *sake* there. He says there were maggots already in the guts when they hit the mat. Kaido carried the mat and corpse. He was not afraid of Taint. He was... not wise, *daikan-sama*.

Do you know when he first showed signs of having the Taint?

(Conferral) Later. A few months. He was angry all the time. He said that samurai have two faces. They kill, but don't like to think about the death they give. *(Frightened head-shakes)* He was crazy from Taint. *(Mass agreement)* He said this to Yogo Haigu-sama, but when the bushi raised his hand to punish him, Kaido hit back. He was terrible, my grandfather says, like a mad wolf, mouth foaming even. He tore Lord Haigu's skin with nails and teeth, and he smiled after, my grandfather says, because now he could get back at the samurai who hurt him. *(Pause)* Only for what he deserved, of course—

What happened then? How did he learn maho? Did someone teach him?

(Terrified) I don't know, *daikan-sama*. My grandfather did not know. Please forgive my ignorance— *(Another speaks up from back)* I heard it was an oni that found him. He liked to be strong, Kaido, and he did not know what it did to ask for strength from evil. *(Warding signs again)* The oni saw him. *(They all nod)* It was the oni. No one here could teach *maho*. There was no *maho* here before. Never.

Do you know what the oni looked like? Did anyone ever see it?

Big, my lord. *(Another)* It had four heads, each with a mouth that could swallow a horse whole. *(Another)* No, my lord. There were only two heads, like locusts, and it breathed flame. *(Another)* It was taller than three houses and two of its heads pointed behind it. *(Too many voices to record)*

Did you get this information from the trials of the Black Watch?

We were not allowed in.

How many hinin were tried and executed for conspiring with him? *(A pause)* I see. *What about the army? When did Kaido establish his army?*

Many men saw what he had done to Haigu-sama and lived. They wanted to do that too. They came and asked to be like him.

And the oni taught them maho, too?

Yes. *(Another)* All of them. *(Another)* Not much. They needed too many people for blood. The rest of the village, they hid. My grandmother said they asked Yogo-sama for protection, but he did not think that *eta* could hurt anyone. *(Village leader looks at him)* The oni was... "clouding his judgment," my lord. That is what my grandmother says. Over a hundred men joined Kaido. They lived in the woods, and the oni hid them and protected them. *(Another chimes in)* They got strong enough to attack the castle. They killed many Yogo. *(Another)* Samurai did not know how to fight oni.

But they didn't just go after the samurai who mistreated them, did they? They went past the main castle, to the back building of the school. Who told them to do that? What were they going after?

ANCESTOR: KITSU ICHIOSU

566-598

-5 POINTS

Descendants of Ichiosu automatically suffer from the Haunted disadvantage, for Ichiosu keeps track of all of his grandchildren for Fu Leng. He whispers to them of the blindness of Rokugan's beliefs, saying the karmic wheel is a lie and that death only leads to a prison of mediocrity; that the way to rise above your station is to leap off the bridge and gain immortality as a servant of the Dark One. This constant demonic encouragement is the equivalent of a Compulsion: *Maho* disadvantage. The character must spend one Void point per day to resist the temptation, or seek out scrolls of *maho* for "just a little peek."

Ichiosu also interferes with other samurai's karmic ancestors. No one with an Ancestor with an absolute point value less than 5 gains the benefit of their spirit when within fifty feet of Ichiosu's descendants.

Ichiosu had children among Rokugan's nobles and peasantry alike. His descendants may lead *hinin* armies or be in the service of a PC if you want to bring him into your campaign without driving your player characters mad.

MATSU TANEJI

Taneji went bad shortly before his *gempukku*. Knowing he was unlikely to survive the Matsu initiation rites, Taneji sought the aid of a sorceress, who granted his requests, then took him on as a private student.

Now in his mid-thirties, Taneji has served Fu Leng for over half his life, growing from a weak-willed and selfish boy to a coldly scheming and ruthless man. He finds other Matsu's unquestioning honor simple-minded and easy to manipulate, and has wormed his way into becoming the chief advisor of Matsu Orono, a mid-station daimyo, and is well on his way to marrying her heir.

Taneji glories in mass destruction and particularly likes to see honorable men die for pointless causes or under false accusations. He has kept Orono in one petty war after another, and used his higher position to accuse and dispose of loyal or pious retainers. Once he is the daimyo's regent, he intends to turn these tactics on Rokugan as a whole.

EARTH: 4

Willpower: 5

FIRE: 3

WATER: 3

Perception: 5

AIR: 3

VOID: 4

Skills: Athletics 1, Archery 2, Battle 4, Courtier 3, Etiquette 3, Hand-to-Hand 1, History 2, Iaijutsu 1, Kenjutsu 3, Lore: *Maho-tsukai* 4, Lore: Shadowlands 4, Sincerity 5.

School: Matsu Bushi 1

Spells: *Blood of Midnight, Corruption of the Earth, *Curse, *Dark Charisma (see *Appendix Three*) Dark Divination, Stealing the Soul, Summon Oni.

Glory: 4.9

Advantages: Innate Ability (starred spells above), Voice

Disadvantages: Dark Secret, Meddler

Shadowlands Taint: 4.4



(Long silence, then the village leader stares directly, serious) Oh, daikan-sama, I am certain we do not know.

All of a sudden, I was very conscious of how many peasants there were.

The Confessions of Kitsu Ichiosu

This transcript comes from the Ikoma records library. Unlike the finished histories which are, shall we say, carefully phrased, the records library retains the original confessions of criminals in their own words, often far more useful for our purposes. This confession was made only after ten days of torture, and Ichiosu still revealed only the barest surface of his plans.

I am uncertain how familiar you are with the Kitsu practice of dealing directly with the spirits of ancestors. While many shugenja classify any dealing with jigoku as forbidden simply on principle, the Lion accept it and Kitsu children who can reach the spirit realms are highly valued.

-Seikansha

What do you want to hear? That my mother agreed when she married a Kitsu that any children with the gift would become *sodan-senzo* rather than following her into the Matsu school? That she came to regret her decision when her only son showed talent for both the ways of war and the ways of spirits? Perhaps that she raised me in secret vengeance against my father, taught me to lose myself in the fury of battle and warped

my soul against the true magics forever? Does that make a good story for your "histories?" Another failure to blame on the Matsu-

Please, not the rat! Last time it nearly reached my lung.

What shall I tell you, then? I hated the Kitsu school. I saw no point in memorizing genealogies as though I were no better than a Crane matchmaker, when the full lives of ancestors were there for the asking. Oh, my teachers had pretty words for it. Eagerly they nurtured my gifts with parables and tales to enslave me to the Lion Clan, and washed them down with compliments for the power of my technique.

But you look bored, *eta*. Maybe I should entertain you. Have you ever heard a priest tell of the little bridge that crosses into the realm of the ancestors? They say it as if you are taking a summer stroll. As if you might casually weave a mask and stop by to visit an old friend. They forget how near they lie to the realm of demons.

No one ever mentions that their "bridge" is a single thin cord stretched taut over a cavern of screaming souls, or how near to your heels the oni howl, or the smell of damned so thick you cannot walk for breathing it. And they never tell you what to do when you fall off.

Yes, I, Kitsu Ichiosu, defied my teacher's warnings and tried to reach Jigoku on my own. There's your confession. Was that truly so difficult?

Shall I say more? Perhaps I should expand your education, *eta*. Those shugenja you serve spend their lives tiptoeing through some pale, deathly Rokugan, even blander than the real one, when a single step to the right could take them into the glow of Fu Leng. Death is only a simple ward to keep out those who don't have the strength of spirit to go further. Would you join me there?

What was that for? I tell you what you want, do I not? Is there more I have to say? It takes time to know the demons' lessons.

I don't know how long I spent in Lion lands afterward. I never counted. But I do remember the homes I stayed in. Each had a shrine which received the blessing of my touch. They were even grateful for it when they thought I had summoned the dead. Imagine! They thanked me for bringing my friends into their homes!

You ask why I am laughing? I laugh at you, both of you, who think your tortures made me speak. Your fear makes my lord stronger.

You think when the Kitsu "trapped" me between themselves and armies of their ancestors, I could not have escaped? You are a fool, and your masters worse than you. I know parts of Jigoku where you would scream until you had burst your own throat. I am here because I wish it, and no punishment you can devise will touch me. The worst you can imagine is death, and I have been dead for years.

With those words, Ichiosu simply dropped dead. Most Kitsu believe he voluntarily abandoned his body, returning his spirit to his dark master. His descendants frequently report feeling his presence, and more than one has gone mad from the attentions.

Rumored Maho-Tsukai

The following letters were collected for me by Kuni Norichika, senior sensei of the Kuni tsukai-sagasu. Though the witch-hunters receive hundreds of summons each year asking their help, most accusations turn out to be only ignorance and fear writ large

AGASHA ICHIRO

The culprit behind the Dorachi family's bad luck is its young heir, ten-year-old Ichiro, who foolishly summoned an oni while trying out his father's spell scrolls (used for research; his father does not admit their existence). While a small portion of Ichiro's spirit remains intact, the oni is so bonded to him that the two cannot be separated without killing him. Convincing Agasha Dorachi that his only remaining son is a *maho-tsukai* requires delicate roleplaying and several high-Glory accusers with solid evidence.

At the oni's command, Ichiro cursed his mother and siblings, causing them to waste away and die, leaving him the sole heir. Characters can find locks of their hair among his possessions. He has also cursed many of the castle's potions to cause chaos and throw investigators off his trail.

Ichiro can silence spirits by rolling his Earth + Shadowlands Rank, TN 15. This lasts for a number of months equal to his Shadowlands rank. For each raise, he can silence an additional spirit within the same area. All the spirits in the castle are already affected, so investigating PCs will have to find a different way.

The stats below are for Ichiro; stats in parentheses are for when the oni actively inhabits his body.

EARTH: 1 (4)

Willpower: 2 (4)

FIRE: 2 (4)

Intelligence: 4

WATER: 1 (3)

Perception: 2 (3)

AIR: 2

VOID: 2

Skills: Calligraphy 2, Defense 1, Etiquette 1, Hand-to-Hand 1, Kagaku 2, Lore: *Maho-tsukai* 5, Lore: Shadowlands 1, Lore: Shugenja 3, Lore: Dragon Clan 2, Mizugusuri 2

Spells: Sense, Commune, Summon, Transform, Animate the Dead, Blood of Midnight, Corruption of the Earth, Curse, Dark Divination, Summon Oni, Touch of Death

Glory: 6.1

Advantages: Social Position (Daimyo's son)

Disadvantages: Dark Secret, Small, Vain

Shadowlands Taint: 3.2

ONI NO ICHIRO ABILITIES

Attacking: 7k4

Damage: 7k3

Special Abilities: Fear 3.

Invulnerability, Armor 8, Multiple Attacks (2).

Oni no Ichiro is a semi-ethereal spirit permanently linked with its summoner. Damage done to either hurts the other, making the oni extremely possessive of the child. If threatened, it pulls itself into Ichiro's body, making the skin swell like a balloon. If cut (eight or more Wounds), the skin ruptures, spraying Tainted blood outward. Anyone within ten feet must roll Reflexes, TN 15, or get splattered. Splattered characters must roll their Earth at TN 15 or receive 1-5 points of Taint.

and applied to neighbors. These five, however, worried Norichika, so be cautious if you send retainers into these areas, and be alert for any further signs.

-Seikansha

FROM MATSU KOKANSHI, YORIKI TO MATSU ORONO

Though the Lion Clan claim great vigilance in pruning the unworthy from their ranks, they seem to have as many, if not more, members who turn to the Fallen One as any other clan. Perhaps it is as Akodo said: anything too strong will certainly break.

-Seikansha

Great sensei Kuni-sama, I write to you on a subject of no urgency, for my lord has assured me nothing is wrong. Her newest advisor, Matsu Taneji, is a shugenja of an undisclosed school, though he has certainly been effective in winning the loyalty of much of the court. My lord has ordered that I never question or criticize her most trusted retainer, so it is with the utmost respect that I write of his unique style, which I am certain would interest a scholar of the elemental arts such as yourself.

Indeed, I immediately thought of those particular interests which you were so kind as to share with us on your visit last year. Though you found nothing to occupy your time upon that occasion, I am certain that should you return now, you would find Taneji-san most willing to perform opposite you. He has, in fact, been rehearsing such a part for many of the last thirty nights, and I'm certain a visit from you would come as a great surprise.

When with my lord, Taneji-san comports himself with perfect decorum, but it is when he is alone that his true talents are seen. I have been honored to have the rooms next door to the ever-vigilant shugenja. Truly, he is devoted to his duties, for at the darkest part of each night I hear him approach the shrine across the hall. I have seen him there as well, and I can assure you that it is with the utmost care that he slits the skin on his upper arms while reading from a scroll he does not use in daylight.



I would certainly not suggest that his motivations are less than honorable, for his service to my lord has been exemplary. On his advice, my lord went to war against Akodo Kyukei: certainly a sound decision, for though she lost a hundred men, she gained a rice field enough to feed one-tenth that number. And Taneji-san's urging my lord to execute her most pious retainer, only moments before evidence was found showing that he had not stolen a sword as he had been accused, was surely an honest mistake made in zealous pursuit of justice.

Truly he is all that a samurai might strive for. Even his singing voice rings through our halls with unearthly harmonies, and his lyrics calling for the Dark Lord to grant him powers bring an exotic and unexpected rhythm to many a winter evening. I would never question the purity of his actions in letting blood, for he is a far better trained physician than I, and cares well for his own health and safety. Indeed, even the maggots squirming within his veins look plump and well-fed.

If you might arrive for a casual visit, I am certain Taneji-san will be able to spare a moment from courting the lord's daughter to speak with you. I would recommend bringing a small welcoming gift representing the craftsmen of your lovely Crab lands – a bracelet of jade, perhaps. I will be sure not to tell him of your coming, so the surprise will warm his heart and none of those with whom he regularly takes his company might prepare for you larger but less heartfelt gifts of their own.

I hope this letter finds you well, and interested in a short trip north. Once again, I appreciate your discretion and speed in this purely incidental matter.

Your Obedient Servant,
Matsu Kokanshi

FROM AGASHA CHUEISU, YORIKI TO AGASHA DORACHI

Honored sir, please forgive my impudence in contacting you directly, but my lord Dorachi-sama has been indisposed for some time. Though his grief is understandable, I believe something more sinister than mere misfortune lies behind the plague of bad luck that has hung over this castle for thirteen months.

I do not wish to cloud your judgment (for I admit to a certain lack of objectivity brought on by my concern for my lord), so I shall begin where I first noticed things amiss.

It began with the death of the lady Rieko. Though she has suffered from the sickness of the lungs since the birth of her first son, the *mizugusuri* my lord prepared has long kept off the worst effects. Indeed, since her fifth child's birth early last autumn, she coughed less frequently and had even taken to traveling again.

Then as the first blossoms began to show, she grew suddenly despondent, retiring early each night, and taking no interest in anything which used to please her. Even seeing her children only brought more weeping. Only the eldest, Ichiro, brought her any comfort, and even he was not enough, for on the first day of the month of the Horse, her maidservants heard her cry out once. By the time they entered the room, she was dead, her features frozen in anguish.

My lord tore his hair, for all his magic had not been able to predict that her melancholy might have a physical effect. But though he examined her body and possessions with an eye well-trained for both spiritual and worldly observations, he could find no indication what killed his beloved.

Yuki-Oro always felt Rokugan's inequality keenly, and longed for the luxury the samurai had. When faced with poverty, she didn't hesitate to try the magic she always wanted to use. She neither knows nor cares what *maho* does to her soul. It has served her well, and that's good enough. Her husband's death to fulfill her blood sacrifice was a small price to pay.

Yuki-Oro is a true sociopath, unconcerned with anything outside herself, and her cruel games would certainly have led to her discovery except for one thing. The Kolat representatives in the City between the Rivers now control her, and they are far more cautious and meticulous. They wish to learn the secrets of her techniques and decide how dangerous they really are. Once they know, they'll kill her as they do all *maho-tsukai* in their organization; black magic is an enemy, no matter what form it takes.

EARTH: 3

FIRE: 2

WATER: 2

Perception: 3

AIR: 3

VOID: 1

Skills: Acting 2, Commerce 3,

Craft: Woodworking 3, Etiquette 1,

Lore: *Maho-tsukai* 2, Lore: Shugenja 1

Spells: Blood of Midnight, Curse,

Summon Oni, Summon Revenant,

Stealing the Soul, Gift of the Kansens

(see Appendix Three)

Advantages: Luck (6)

Disadvantages: Dark Secret, Social

Disadvantage (Heimin), Vanity

Shadowlands Taint: 3.8

THE SERVANTS OF HEAVEN (SEE P. 108)

While most supplicants at the shrine of Tenno Heika are good Rokugani citizens, the upper levels are some of the most dangerous individuals in the empire. Yaeko was once Moto Yaeko, a shireikan under

Moto Tsume during the ill-fated charge against the Shadowlands. After a century living as an *akutenshi* (see Appendix One), Yaeko returned to Rokugan and founded the temple, gathering the priests and monks who live at the shrine to become a core following of *maho-tsukai*. The cultists recognize that they must be very cautious, and only one or two members disappear a year, too few to notice unless forewarned. These recruits are initiated into *maho* and soon transferred to the Shadowlands to become *akutsukai*.

Moto Yaeko's statistics are in the facing sidebar. The statistics in parentheses are for other priests of the cult.

And though he enlisted the help of every trained shugenja, we could not stop the same fate from seizing each of his children in turn. Jiro, Saburo, Sanko, each died in their father's arms, each with that same terrible scream, as if they were yanked from the world while trying still to hold onto it. I only hope that their ancestors can give them comfort, for we could do nothing.

Dorachi-sama has only his eldest son left to carry on his name, and he has placed the boy under a dozen guards day and night, surrounded him with wards and treated him each morning with elixirs to ward off poisons. My lord cannot bear to see the child himself, for he feels his own sins have brought such misfortune to his family, and he does not want to harm his last son by caring too much for him.

On other days, he blames the Scorpion, saying only their terrible assassins could kill so unstopably; it has been all I can do to keep him from gathering his few bushi for a foolish attack on the Bayushi castle which lies just over the rise from us. Though I have no love for the Scorpion clan, I do not believe their hand lies behind our woes. Rather, I sense the efforts of the ancient foe your school knows all too well.

The elements themselves suggest a shugenja living within our walls, for we have questioned every spirit of fire and air: but the castle walls are silent and the water dark. Something has commanded them to reveal nothing.

We have tested every guardsman and visitor with jade, and found no sign of Taint, but I cannot help but suspect the stink of *maho*. I have woken twice this month to the sound of crying, only to hear it silenced by a terrible grating voice, like steel on slate. Others heard it as well, and I assure you, no human mind could imagine so dreadful a sound.

There is far more I could tell of the "accidents" which happen with increasing frequency in our foundries, and the nightmares which have kept my lord from sleep for weeks at a time, but I would prefer to do so in person. Without your aid, I fear the ancestors of Dorachi-sama will soon have no one left on earth to remember them.

Agasha Chueisu



FROM "YOGO TOKUMA", A DONATED TRANSLATION

Norichika-sama shared his doubts about the validity of this particular scroll. It was sent by an admitted Scorpion spy, who seemed to expect the Witch-Hunters to believe that the document was not his, but in fact the translation of a coded scroll stolen from a diplomat's papers. Supposedly, the code was commonly used by some multi-clan conspiracy, a group which does not hesitate to use murder, maho and worse to fulfill their aims. Norichika was skeptical, but I believe caution may be in order.

-Seikansha

I have begun my business in the merchant quarter of Toshi no Aida ni Kawa only recently, but already I have noticed an interesting new magic it would be much to our advantage to harness. The night of my arrival, I witnessed a local lord receiving a gift from a visiting Ide diplomat. The Ide presented the *netsuke* in the proper manner, and I had no sense that he was lying or concealing anything when he said it was a token of the great esteem in which he held the daimyo.

However, when the box was opened, it contained no rice paper or prayer beads. The air rippled slightly, and the lord suddenly flung the box to the ground. Growling, the daimyo leapt at the Ide, tearing at his throat like a maddened beast, lapping the blood from his lips and rolling like a dog in carrion. Five strong bushi grabbed for their frail lord, and it took all of them to hold him back from killing again.

The frenzy passed, but the lord committed *seppuku* as soon as the extent of his shame hit him. Though his family raised the question of whether the Ide had used foul magic to induce such fury, the man was favored in the court of Shinjo Yokatsu and above reproach. The cursory investigations performed on his staff in the wake of the double funeral found no signs of shugenja or *maho*.

My own research, to my surprise, also found nothing among the Ide. They were as honest and simple as they seemed. Indeed, the only thing of use they said was where the gift was purchased, a small shop slightly away from the city's main road, called Yuki-Oro, or Snowy Wind, after its proprietress.

The magic came from this simple merchant. My examinations of the many *netsuke* she kept in stock found several which had felt the touch of *maho*. The watching eyes I summoned later showed the rest of the story, for though the woman had a remarkable grasp of *maho*, she took few precautions against others of similar ability.

While her overall technique is poor, she can summon *kansen*, even in areas untainted by the Shadowlands, and induce them to bind other spells inside boxes to be released when opened. A remarkable ability, and one she has used to good effect to rid herself of competition; several larger shops have closed due to what can only be described as bad luck.

I have approached her myself. Her will is rudimentary and her ambition large, an admirable combination for so talented a peasant, I'm sure you'll agree. She was once a maid to an Iuchi shugenja, perhaps the source of her strange knowledge. When her husband's business began losing money, she tried to magically sabotage her competitors. Failing, she remembered the Iuchi's warnings about blood's capability to enhance magic by drawing on the Dark One. She made the requisite sacrifice without fear and now seems drunk on power.

MOTO YAEKO

Lore TN: 40 (Unicorn Clan Lore, Courtier 20 to have heard of her persona)

EARTH: 6 (4)

FIRE: 5 (2)

WATER: 5 (2)

AIR: 6 (5)

VOID: NA (2)

Skills: Acting 4 (2), Battle 3, Defense 5 (1), Etiquette 5 (3), Forgery 3, History 4, Horsemanship 5, Investigation 4, Kenjutsu 5 (1), Law 3, Lore: *Maho-tsukai* 5 (4), Lore: Shadowlands 5 (4), Shintao 5 (5), Sincerity 4 (2), Stealth 4, Theology 5 (4).

School: *Maho-bujin* 5 (none)

Spells: Ward of Divine Peace [see Appendix Three], all maho spells. (Dark Divination, Summon Oni, Animate the Dead, Ward of Divine Peace)

Akutenshi Powers: (See Appendix One) Breath of Taint, Command the Taint, Consume Chi, Eyes of Hell, Fear, Flight, Invisibility, Invulnerability, Shapechanging, Soul Drinking.

Shadowlands Taint: 7.1 (3.5)

Glory: 2.9 (0)

Advantages: Magic Resistance [6], Higher Purpose, Voice (Higher Purpose)

Disadvantages: Dark Secret, Onikage Stink (Dark Secret)

KAKITA YUCHIHI TO

Yuchihito once enjoyed showing up overbearing samurai and haughty courtiers, but his carefree attitude led to an addiction to opium and cheap *eta shisho*. For a while, he juggled his double life, but when his gambling debts and reputation ran him ragged, he took the first escape he was offered – a spirit which called itself his ancestor offered him anything he wanted as long as he targeted the people it ordered. His demon aims to use *maho* and Kakita artisan *maya* to keep the important families of Rokugan too concerned with petty politics and personal vendettas to pay attention to the Shadowlands. Yuchihito doesn't especially like the damage he causes, but he's learned not to mind. When he does what he's told, he gets plenty of opium pipes and all the sake he can drink. And as long as the court stays too self-centered to band together for Rokugan's protection, his evil guardian angel lets him keep breathing. He lives in constant fear that one day soon, his jests will no longer amuse.

Indeed, I believe she likes the thought of serving the Fallen God, for what other merchant can claim such a distinction? All her spells take the form of direct prayers to the *kansen* and the eighth *kami*.

How she induces the spirits to wait within *netsuke*, I do not know, but I am certain you can see uses for such gift boxes, with magic untraceable to the caster. Already Yuki-oro has entertained herself by humiliating local nobles, but she fails to understand the consequences of inducing chaos. I have offered to teach her a greater variety of spells and provide a stipend in return for using the *netsuke* on targets I select, and she has been pleased with the arrangement.

I await further instructions.

From an Anonymous Source Regarding the Organization Called "The Servants of Heaven"

I was with Norichika-sama as he acquired this letter, and he was visibly stunned. The tsukai-sagasu are hardly welcomed in the Emperor's city, for no one doubts that the Imperial Guard do any but the most careful screening of those allowed into The Presence.

Tadaka-sama, if this cult exists, find it for us all. If it is merely a lie to distract the Kuni, I will kill those responsible.

-Seikansha



I write this because I have no one else. I am sending copies to the four men who might believe me. Perhaps they will not intercept them all.

I dare not give my name, but know this. Until last year, I was a bushi of good standing, with both my sensei's and my lord's recommendations to travel to Otosan Uchi as our clan's contribution to the Imperial Guard. Now I am no one. I sleep each night beneath the city's walls, outside, alone, hiding. Winter is coming, but I will find some way to survive. I must.

My arrival in court was marked with no fanfare, for the Imperial Guard receive a dozen

candidates a day, most of whom are turned back at the gates. But I wore my school's *mon* proudly, and the guards checked my name and stance, then sent me straight to the training barracks. For six months I trained just inside the front gates, kept far from the eye of the Emperor and his family, may Amaterasu protect them.

For six months I suffered the abuse of my new sensei without question, for to be entrusted with the Emperor's safety is the greatest honor and responsibility a man can bear, and it was his duty to make certain I was strong enough. However, I could not help but feel the sting of pride as others received praise for swordplay and vigilance far less than what I was criticized for, and when the third of these passed out of training and into the lower ranks, I took it upon myself to find out what set them apart.

To my surprise, it was quite simple, for they did not conceal their status. Each of the favored wore an obi marked in back with an overlapping sun and moon, the symbol of their membership in the Servants of Heaven. The same sash my sensei wore.

Those I asked were eager to tell me of the great temple by the back gate, where the faithful worship at the Shrine of the Tenno Heika, praying to and for the Emperors. Their meditations so near to the holy light of His palace gave them peace, the members told me, and the Imperial captains respect their piety and trust their clear devotion to the living god.

I must admit to the ambition which touched me, for an Imperial guard's title could bring great fortune to my sister in marriage, and keep my parents comfortable in their age. And for the first months that I prayed there, I found the same benefits as many others. My sleep was untroubled by dreams, and I woke each morning with fresh eagerness to serve. Though my reflexes were not dulled, I found my own problems no longer bothered me, for I simply solved them and moved on without worry. In the arms of the Son of Heaven, I had found the peace Shinsei urged all men to achieve.

The head priestess, Yaeko, is a soft-voiced elderly woman, with the wide cheeks and big eyes that show a hint of Unicorn ancestry, though no one doubts her soul is tied to Rokugan. She is the adopted daughter of the temple's founder, who joined her ancestors over fifty years ago. Yaeko has dedicated her life to spreading the peace of Heaven throughout Otosan Uchi, and few in the city do not love her for it. I have seen Crane maidens kneel on dirty floors for a whispered blessing from her lips. Her aura of divine power is tangible; I myself bear a white scar like a sunburn from too long spent in her presence.

For six months, her approval was my life, and my mind was empty of all concerns save when I might once more rest in the temple's peace.

But I thank the true children of the Sun and Moon that I came home for my sister's wedding. Away from the temple, my normal self re-emerged, and I realized my newfound peace was only the lack of feeling, as though I were living a waking dream. When I returned, I made certain to keep my mind filled with worldly concerns, though I still prayed, wishing to know under what influence I lived.

I do not know if it would have been better to die ignorant.

The worship of the Servants indeed strengthens the Son of Heaven, the only child of the Sun and Moon still living.

Fu Leng.

There are over two hundred members in Otosan Uchi. They gain more every day.

KAKITA YUCHIHI TO (CONTINUED)

EARTH: 3

Stamina: 4

FIRE: 4

WATER: 2

Perception: 3

AIR: 4

VOID: 2

Skills: Acting 4, Athletics 3, Bard 5, Calligraphy 2, Courtier 4, Dance 4, Defense 1, Etiquette 3, History 2, Jesting 5, Lore: *Maho-tsukai* 1, Lore: Myths and Legends 2, Manipulation 4, Mizu-do 2, Music 3, Noh/Kabuki 3, Political Maneuvering 5, Shintao 2, Sincerity 4

School: Kakita Artisan Rank 4

Rank 1-3 Jester, Rank 1 Theater

Spells: "Curse, Summon Garegoso no Bakemono, Heaven Has No Justice", Dark Charisma*, Truth is a Scourge* (see Appendix Three)

Glory: 2.3

Advantages: Patron (Bayushi Kachiko), Allies (many), Ambidextrous, Innate Ability (starred spells above).

Disadvantages: Dark Secret, Haunted, Chemical Dependency (Opium), Compulsions (women, gambling)

Shadowlands Taint: 2.5

Note: While Kachiko has noticed Yuchihito's ability to manipulate people's reputations, and hopes to use it for herself, she is not yet aware of his true master.

**REGARDING THE MAN KNOWN AS KAKITA
YUCHIHITO, FROM THE FORMER DOJU
NARUTO**

I am not certain what to make of this. While my first instinct is to dismiss the man's accusations as merely passing blame for his failures, that gives him little reason to turn outside his own clan, much less to the hunters. That he brought his concerns to them suggests he honestly believes in Yuchihito's guilt.

-Seikansha

"A thin, clear line. Is it blood? Is it wine?
The voice of honor, what does it speak?
What harm can there be in a touch on the cheek?
Or a quiet embrace, or a passionate word?
What does it matter she's married your lord?
When *sake* runs clean, who can say what they mean?
All men play games, but most know the rules:
Wise men never ask questions of fools."

These were the words that killed me.

The court was full and lively, as only the first week of winter can be. My lord Kichi-sama was there, and Akodo Haruo. Kachiko-sama spoke to Yoshi-sama across the room, and I cannot recall the dozens of faces which filled the walls between.

The Mantis trade routes were the item of concern that day, but my lord's holdings are far inland and the topic concerned him little. Instead, we found ourselves watching the antics of Yuchihito. I had seen the jester often around court, though my tastes run more to watching the young ladies than a costumed miscreant who wasted the privilege of the Kakita Academy to tell bawdy jokes and misquote the Tao. I hardly listened to his prattle, more interested in learning who would be favored with Yoritomo-san's wealth.

I turned and bowed when I heard my name, for I expected my lord to ask for my services. Instead, I found myself staring at the sallow, white-painted face of Yuchihito,



close enough to smell his sweet, heavy breath. He smiled, and his teeth were clean and even, a strange contrast to his artfully tattered kimono.

That was when he taunted me with that strange, lilting rhyme, his eyes distant, as if the words were fed to him from somewhere else. I was prepared to laugh at first, but with each syllable, my fury rose further.

Drawing my wakizashi with hands clenched and shaking, I hurled myself at that murmuring voice to slice his painted face from his skull. Though I had not raised a sword in anger since before my *gempukku*, it now took four of my lord's retainers to hold me down as I bellowed with angry tears that he would die for revealing my secret.

When my vision cleared, my lord had taken my sword from me. And my name. I could not expect the mercy of *seppuku*, he said, for so betraying the trust he put in me. If I had no morals than an animal, then let me live as one.

His wife, at least, he allowed the mercy of the *kaiken*. I weep for her.

I have never met her in my life.

I begged my lord's forgiveness for my outburst, and pleaded that I had done him no wrong, but it was too late. The court laughed at Yuchihito's comments as Kichi-sama stripped my honor away, applauding as if it were all part of his act. I do not know what came over me to behave so at an insult that should have been turned aside with another comment in kind. Only magic could have fed such anger as I felt at his words, and I know little of what that could be.

But I am afraid you may, for I have gone back through my memories of other men and women who were driven from court on the heels of Yuchihito's derision, and I believe you would find many familiar names. Kuni Nobuyoshi, Hida Sangoro, Yogo Masumi, Inquisitor Isawa Otoka. All who might recognize the workings of *maho*, or turn the court's thoughts to the threat of the Shadowlands.

I do not know where I fit into Yuchihito's scheme, for I know no more of the Fallen One than my sensei taught, and I can bring no power bear against Yuchihito or whatever dark master pulls his strings. But my lord's wife's father, Akodo Yuzo, is furious indeed at his daughter's death, and his troops have been practicing quite visibly just across the border from where my lord Kichi-sama has called in his favors with the Daidoji army. I do not know how to stop their war.

There is a method to Kakita Yuchihito's victims, my lord, a far greater purpose than simply entertaining the queen of

Scorpions. He is the most dangerous *maho-tsukai* in the Empire, I say. He stands within striking range of the Son of Heaven, and the Emerald Champion merely laughs when his name is mentioned.

Wise men never ask questions of fools.

FROM THE DOSSIER OF GINSO BAYUSHI SEIJURO

Though there have long been rumors of bushi whose unnatural prowess in battle comes from the Dark One, their existence has been all but impossible to prove. Their abilities require no blood sacrifice, and the signs of their Taint likely remain hidden and internal: the dead do not rise at their command, nor do honorable samurai become maddened vessels of rage. Rather, they fight with the skill of a dozen men, and their swords feed on the blood they spill, lashing like vipers to fell their most honorable opponents first.

Unfortunately, if such creatures exist, a pile of mutilated corpses is most often all that is left to give the account, and such tales as they tell are somewhat lacking in detail. This dossier, however, records a Bayushi legion's experience with what Kuni Yori calls "maho-bujin," warriors of dark magic. Though one can never be certain when dealing with Scorpion, my instinct is to believe. The Fallen One is no fool. If he has made no bushi to serve him, then the only question is, what does he have which is worse?

-Seikansha

Activity Six: Successful. Presence uncompromised. Ransom possible.

Losses incurred: 33 fatal, 1 wounded, 16 unaccounted.

Losses inflicted: 1 probable.

Report:

The Agasha blade is in my possession.

Initial information proved accurate. We needed no verification of our papers at the gate, nor did anyone question that we were an unfamiliar unit. The only check was for Taint. All were clean at the point of entry.

Our records stated that Mirumoto Gempin fell some distance from the Seigo no Kamae river searching for his ancestor's lost body. The corpse we found wore torn armor, corroded with Taint, but with bladed-dragon *mon* still visible, confirming the identification given by Hiruma Chodai.

We found no blades with the top half of the body. Drag marks led us to the riverbed, and we followed it east, where tracks and some discarded bones indicated a troll burrow. One man was injured in the altercation, but we retrieved Gempin's swords, and boxed them carefully to stay clean of Taint.

Our scouts noted movement in the swamp and reported two bushi approaching, wearing Crab armor. We hailed them using Hida practices, thinking our disguises were sound. They approached.

They were no more Crabs than we.

The first identified himself as Hiruma Masatsugu, and let us surround him as his companion removed a troll skull with his sword. He handed it to *hohei* Sadako, who kept her persona long enough to joke about the creature's death. She was a fine actor. Her laugh was cut off with her head.

I struck the silent one immediately, and it twisted from my blow, blade skating across its shoulder. Its blood was yellowish and thin, resembling dark urine. As my men interposed themselves between us, the silent warrior whipped its katana from its sheath and ripped through *hohei* Keian's armor to his heart. As the blood drenched its hand, I clearly saw its cloven shoulder wrench and the skin seal as it assumed its normal position. As one soldier fainted, our enemy followed, and three of my men fell on it from behind; though he killed the first, he fell with hoarse cries beneath their blades.

I cannot explain the other one. My *nikutai* caught the tetsubo intended for me, and my most loyal men closed the gap left by his death, katanas

flickering against the bushi's bare skin as harmlessly as grass in wind. Feinting to keep him from my throat, I struck back. My blade landed on soft skin both times, but gained only a dark scratch for my efforts, which closed as his tetsubo landed. I did not see this clearly, for he broke my arm at that moment.

From the ground, I saw two men fall beside me, their skulls crushed. Blood sprayed through the air, that I saw. What I did not see were the swings.

You know the Hida teach to take a crushing blow and cushion it with earth. But when cut with katana and fought



by thirty bushi, they still tire. They slow. They bleed. Masatsugu did none of that, but howled like a wolf, to drown the beat and crash of steel on flesh. My men fought valiantly, but as the tops of tall weeds fall to the feet which crush their base, that is how my bushi joined me in the mud.

I knew I must complete my mission and ran to the Wall, leaving your loyal servants clustered around him, saving me with their bodies. Maintaining my disguise, I begged the aid of a Crab search party, that the men would not rise for the Enemy. When they returned, they had beheaded thirty-three bodies of the two squadrons. None of the others have returned.

I have since talked with the Crab sensei and searched for records of the traitor Masatsugu. Their papers list a shameful history of brawling and gambling, and a routine patrol south of Shiro Kuni from which he returned with the Taint. He was arrested for robbery and assaulting a merchant. The arresting magistrate said he was too drunk to resist. His daimyo would have demanded *seppuku*, but he invoked the Crab custom of allowing the dishonored to go "looking for Hida."

Stripped of his daisho, carrying a hatchet and wearing only a white robe, Masatsugu walked into the Shadowlands, to redeem himself by returning with the heads of eight or more zombies. This was thirteen years ago.

What hit me was no ghost.

And he was not drunk.

I hope the favors we exchanged at court for this blade are worth the price.

Maho-Bujin

All infected characters can use Taint to increase their physical Attributes, making them dangerous warriors. But the powers of darkness have far further potential.

Bushi whose Taint exceeds their highest Ring feel an irresistible urge to travel into the Shadowlands, often walking until their feet bleed and slaughtering anyone in their way. Most are killed by Crab patrols, traps or marauding creatures.

Those who survive are met by an *akutsukai*, semi-human servants of Fu Leng, who test the new recruits for skill and loyalty. Failures are fed to oni; those who pass are trained as *maho-bujin* and learn these techniques.

Since these techniques can only be learned by those bushi whose Taint exceeds their highest Ring, PCs may perforce never learn them, since the GM takes control of any PCs to whom this happens.

MAHO-BUJIN TECHNIQUES

Rank 1: Carve the Crimson Road

Maho-bujin must prove themselves on a path of blood. They receive a number of additional attacks equal to the highest Honor Rank among their opponents. This ability replaces any previous school techniques granting additional attacks.

Rank 2: Corruption Rewards

The weapons of the *maho-bujin* do not aim, but hear blood and leap for it. They may use the Wounds they inflicted in their last strike as their initiative total for the following round. This replaces any previous Initiative technique, and the Quick advantage has no effect, although the Daidoji Bodyguard initiative technique still trumps this one.

Rank 3: Devourer of Purity

Maho-bujin draw sustenance from the deaths they cause. They may recover a number of Wound Ranks equal to the Honor of anyone they bring to Down, Out, or Dead. This takes effect immediately. Any ranks beyond the *maho-bujin's* injuries are lost.

Yes, *maho-bujin* may indeed torture someone near death and let them heal a little each day to keep regaining Wounds.

Rank 4: Corruption Has No Bounds

The *maho-bujin* unblocks the barriers Rokugan placed in his mind and lets his emotions loose. His body is no longer twisted from resisting the Taint, but flows with it freely. He rolls (not keeps) an additional number of dice equal to his Shadowlands Rank for all Bugei Skills; he may still only roll a maximum of ten dice.

Rank 5: Even Steel Lies

The *maho-bujin* corrupts the Celestial Order, twisting the spirits of men and weapons alike. He gains the oni power of Invulnerability, and can only be hurt by jade, crystal, obsidian or magic.



Chapter 6:
Lost Souls



DEATH IN THE SHADOWLANDS

The rate at which characters who die in the Shadowlands return depends on how Tainted their body was at the point of death, as well as the ambient Taint in the area. Generally, bodies rise 6 Rokugani hours after death, minus their Shadowlands Rank, including fractions (i.e. a character with Taint of 3.5 will rise again in two and a half hours). This time is reduced by half in heavily Tainted areas (e.g. the middle of a battle with oni powers and maho flying wildly).

Characters who have been decapitated but whose heads are not buried separately from their bodies roll one die and add their Taint rating. On a 20 or higher, the corpse becomes a headless zombie (same stats as normal zombies, but with a death rating of 40 instead of 60). Unless they carry their heads with them, these zombies are blind, and have +10 to the TN to hit anything. In addition, characters whose Taint exceeds their highest Ring make this roll *wherever* they die. They are so connected to Fu Leng they can reanimate even when far from the source of his power.

This final scroll was passed to me by unknown parties in the middle of the night. I have few facts regarding its veracity or origin, but I believe the following:

This is not a fictional document. None would gain by deceiving me, for my power is limited indeed, and writing it to deceive you would be impossible, since I received it two years before our meeting by the waterfall... which itself was a coincidence.

The package arrived at the end of one of my journeys to Unicorn lands, in which I entered many shugenja libraries. In one of them, I was discovered by a man I never saw, for he snuffed the light and kept his back to me.

"What are you doing here?" he asked in a cracked voice that sounded like his throat had been struck.

"I need to know about the lost ones," I whispered. "I need to know everything."

"Why?"

I thought of a hundred answers, but I searched my soul until I spoke the truth.

"Because the Dark One must be destroyed," I said, "and I will never do it."

He was silent for some time before he turned around. His eyes were the flame-red you and I know too well. I heard the slightest breath of air, the snort that comes before a smile, and I could not help but feel there was some test I had just passed.

It was not long thereafter that these documents appeared in my quarters. And I conclude that the man I spoke to that night could say no more, but wished to help. Why not speak directly? Because then I would know his identity, and could shame him with malice or oversight. He felt no fear of a strange ronin shugenja, and no need to report me to his superiors. Therefore, the one I spoke to was powerful in the family. He had obviously been to the Shadowlands, but he was no servant of evil, for an oni would have killed me without thought when we were alone in the dark.

There is one probable answer. This is the story of the Iuchi daimyo's nephew Karasu.

If this seems at first like mad ravings, please be patient, for I believe this narrative tells more about the Shadowlands than the rest of these pages combined... if one can untwist the riddles in it. It seems to jump back and forth between his time in the Shadowlands, afterwards and possibly before, further confused by his tendency to refer to his father, Kuni Yori, his captor, and the Dark God himself all as "he," without further clarification.

There are stories in here which will shock, disgust and perhaps frighten you, but I ask that you read anyway. Whatever is said is only the words of one man, whether Karasu or his adversary, and I am certain the dark ones invent their own tales to mock the efforts of our heroes. They have no devotion to truth, and I would not trust their words as more than a possibility.

In the end, I believe only Karasu truly knows what happened. And Fortunes grant that it remain so, for we may all find out soon enough.

-Seikansha

I am awake again.

I think it was the tears. They burn my skin, mixing with the blood, kindling it. They run into the corners of my mouth, and my tongue rakes the salt. It is a familiar taste, thick and sweet and metallic. My stomach growls, and I silence it with shaking hands, grabbing the skin between my fingers and squeezing.

I will not eat!

The meat they hold before me still drips. I smell salt, warm moisture that licks at my face like a lover's breath. There is not enough water in my mouth to salivate, but I do

anyway. I cannot count the days since I tasted anything but sweat and skin peeled from my lips. I threw away my rice cakes when they wept the Tainted ooze which forms on everything. I will not eat that. I would rather die.

"Die?" he asks, and I see the laughter in his eyes. They sparkle, red as embers or white as distant stars, lighting the darkness. Blood pools between his knuckles. He doesn't lick it off, and I admire his restraint. I could not have stopped myself. "Die?" he says again, and his voice is softer than a geisha's sleeve. "Cousin, what do you think that would solve?"

I take the meat.

The servants bring chopsticks, but I have already swallowed. My face is slick with blood, and I run my tongue over it like a hound, sucking at the drops that remain. The servants wait, expressionless behind their masks. They have no eyes.

I eat, because the flesh is not Tainted yet, and every meal keeps me from joining them, for there is no one here to grant me peace. If I die, I shall serve them forever. Twelve hours is too short a time to rest, and most corpses rise sooner than that.



HORSES AND THE SHADOWLANDS

Horses and all normal animals refuse to go *near* the Shadowlands. Characters trying to ride into the Shadowlands must roll Willpower + Horsemanship, TN 15, each hour they are there. Unicorn horses grant a Free Raise. Even if they succeed, the horse is jumpy, skittish, and hard to control. At night, it must be tied to something solid (most trees in the Shadowlands are rotten and can be pulled down by a determined horse), or they will bolt toward the nearest fresh air. Given the mutable nature of the Shadowlands, horses which bolt generally lose their way and are never seen again.

If they encounter any Shadowlands creatures, the rider must make an immediate Willpower + Horsemanship roll, TN 25, to control (and stay on) his wildly rearing mount. The PC must make two Raises to do anything else at the same time (such as fight the creatures).

Riding a normal horse within scent of the Shadowlands (*i.e.* at the Wall or in the Kuni wastes), is a +5 TN penalty to all Horsemanship rolls. Crab horses can be used without trouble in these places, but even they will not go more than three days south of the Wall. Average horse stats are as follows:

EARTH: 3

FIRE: 3

WATER: 1

Strength 6

AIR: 2

Attacking (Kick): 5k2

Damage: 6k5

TN to be Hit: 10 (15 while at a gallop)

Wounds: 12: -1; 24: -2; 36: -3; 60: -4; 72: Down

AVERAGE MOTO SOLDIERS

Moto squads usually only number four or five *akutsukai*, occasionally backed up with zombies. This is more than enough to take on most Rokugani squads of 20 or more. Only in full-scale warfare are PCs be likely to encounter more than six at once. Scouting parties of one or two plus goblin and ogre servants are common.

See Appendix 1 for details on *akutsukai* powers and abilities.

Lore TN: 15 (Heraldry, History, Shadowlands, or Unicorn Clan Lore)

EARTH: 5

FIRE: 5

Agility: 4

WATER: 4

AIR: 2

Reflexes: 5

Skills: Athletics 3, Battle 3,

Defense 3, Hand-to-Hand 2, Iaijutsu 2,

Kenjutsu 4, Horse Archery 4,

Horsemanship 4, Hunting 4, Lore:

Shadowlands 4, Stealth 4, Subojutsu

or Yarijutsu 3

School: *Maho-bujin* 3-5

Spells: Animate the Dead,

Corruption of the Earth, Stealing the Soul, Touch of Death

Powers: Fear, Spellcasting, Undead Strength, one or two others

Shadowlands Taint: 6

Damage: 7k2 with katana, 6k2 with bow, 8k2 with yari, 6k2 with tetsubo

Wounds: 80: Dead.

"So why am I still alive?" My lips crack. It is dry today, and I can breathe without gagging. My own filth runs down my leg constantly now. No one seems to notice. My armor has split into paper-thin sheets that peel when I move.

"Because you are weak." Their faces are stretched too tight for smiles, but I feel them anyway. A hundred hundred teeth that glisten without breath to dull their shine.

Those teeth! So many teeth! They are longer than my *sai*. They flash, crack, like stone, like steel. The metal splinters, but I force it further down its mouth. If I must die, at least it will suffer too. Its breath thunders past my ears, too loud to hear, but its heart pounds louder still, until the ground shakes and moans beneath me.

Hoofbeats! I am saved. The Crab are here! They have come for me. The Hiruma! Their horses are swifter than the oni and they will carry me away.

I pull back, leaving the *sai* in its gums like a hair-pin, and wave my arms. Over the hill, they ride, leaping the trunks of rotted trees. A company, a legion of them.

I recognize the formation first. Only Unicorn ride like that. Heavy cavalry, *yari* held down and forward, a wave of violet armor and fish-scale barding. But the horses' hooves leave claw marks in the earth and the scales continue across their skin and their eyes glow yellow like the moon and then I see the banners and I cannot weep anymore because the tears were spent ten generations ago.

Red on purple. The chrysanthemum looks like a kiss of blood.

The banner ripples in the wind of their passage. "*Die*," I see before it is ripped away. "*But cannot yield*."

The oni bows its head before them, and they tear it to shredded meat with their spears. I wait, head bowed, for them to do the same to me. But their fingers on my shoulders feel like my mother's, soft and white, and the demon horses have muscles like knots of wood which bulge and surge and buck between my thighs.

She will not step forward, and I drum my heels against her side. Her nostrils flare and I slap her hunched shoulder and lean back, pulling at her mouth to keep her balanced. She cannot move except to prance backwards. But when I release her, she still refuses, and with gentle words and the steady pressure of my heels I get her to step. Once. Twice. Then she rears again and I fight her to a standstill.

The smells scare her, and her sides heave and pulse like a squid as she tries to clear her lungs of the gray air that hangs on our skin and turns her hair from bay to black. We are both sweating.

I was invited to bathe with my cousins tonight. They assure me the water is fresh and free from Taint, so I agree... if there was ever a choice.

He is there, and I almost run, but there are too many behind me, and they have thrown themselves on their faces in the muck. I do as well. It is no worse than the stink of my own waste, and I shall be clean soon enough.

His armor shimmers with the polish of two hundred years. His face is so gentle, skin almost too soft for a soldier. He has one crooked tooth. You could not mistake him for any but a nobleman, for his shoulders sit square against the wind and his hair flows back from a high, regal forehead. He has no beard.

His retainers kneel beside him. Their wings have ripped through their armor, and trail in the dirt like a woman's sleeves, red as the bloody mon on their shoulders, with white bones showing through. His *yojimbo*'s six arms are empty. I am no threat to them.

No one tells me to rise, and I fix my eyes on his feet, but I cannot close my ears. A scream, and someone groans in pleasure. I hear the slap of skin on skin, hands in sweat. I do not want to see. I know too well what they do to captives.

No one touches me, and for that I am grateful, groveling beside the ivory claws on his toes. He lets them show, I know, for he wants all to know his control. He can be anything. A child. A kitten. A beautiful woman. But he prefers this one, the mark of his master imprinted

on his head and hands, shining through his eyes, speaking with that beautiful voice.

"Watch," he tells me, and I do. Three dozen girls lie bound on an altar. Their hair is loose over their shoulders and wet with tears. The oldest cannot have yet reached her *gempukku*. The screams get louder as skeletal hands bend back their heads. Knives flash and the granite tub fills.

"No claws," he says. "I promised you there would not be Taint."

I bend my head. "Thank you, Tsume-sama."



ANCESTOR: HIDA ATARASI
BIRTH AND DEATH
UNKNOWN
-5 POINTS

When Hida Atarasi left with the Seven Thunders, his wife was pregnant, and his twin sons were born the very day his mother killed herself. The boys grew up to be the chief retainers of their uncle Osanowo, then disappeared into the Shadowlands some time during the troll wars. Though no one knows it, they were the first humans Atarasi recruited after he rose from the almost-dead to drink Fu Leng's blood. Unlike most Ancestors, Atarasi is not yet dead, but his descendants remain tied to his spirit, and bear his curse. Those with Hida Atarasi as an Ancestor are doomed to eventually go over to Fu Leng. They may fight it for years, and do a lot of good in the world first, but eventually, no matter how they try to get around it, they will join the forces of the Shadowlands.

"Do we really need thanks between us, cousin? All I've done is to give you what you wanted." His hands hold me steady as we stare over the edge together. From here, I watch the lands spinning, slower than my breath, riding their watery floats like ships in a harbor. I can even see the sun out here. Through the clouds. It is black and deep and dark, and it goes on for such a long way.

"The great explorer." The air is calm, but still his voice is ripped from his throat, and I cannot hear. But I know what he will say. "The steeds and hearts of the Unicorn are strong. The four winds cannot part us, nor seas turn us back. We carry our homes in our hearts, for the best of Rokugan lies within us."

How empty that sounds now.

"No," he tells me. "It was always empty. You just let the echoes hide it." His smile is so kind. I rest my head on his shoulder and he strokes my hair. "There are so many echoes in Rokugan, aren't there? So many..."



So many cuts I've made already. My throat bleeds from screaming, and I gag at the salt, but he only nods. "Again." My hands shudder, but I use them both and the knife stays steady. I slit the skin, and work the point under, then out again, starting at the topknot, then down, across the nose, over the lips and chin, down the throat. One finger joint wide, long as a wakizashi blade. I grind my teeth to keep from screaming, holding my lips as still as stone. If it is less than perfect, I must begin again, on muscle this time.

The strip joins the others. I do not know what he wants them for. I begin the next.

They hurt! The pain burns through muscle and skin and bone, and I can't stop screaming. I kick and twist and try to run, but he holds me down. His hands are white and large, and they rub my face with aloe and jade, and he stares.

His eyes are so dark! Like the sky without stars. They have no light in them. No flame. Everyone is like that here. It frightens me, but he holds my hands and tells me my name. I have not heard it in so long, but it is my own. I recognize that finally, and sleep.

It is my punishment that I must still wake.

Why?

"Because you are weak," he tells me. "Because you do not have the courage for *seppuku*." He is right. I have shamed my ancestors. They would not want me. "You will live," he says, "and you will tell them what you've found, explorer. Be proud. You have seen the world. The only one which matters."

Just for a moment, he lowers his face and I see what waits beneath.

He smiles, that beautiful, terrible smile, and his eyes are lava and ash, and where there should be skin is only wind and void. "What do you see?" he asks.

"Death," I say. "Destruction. Annihilation. All that is terrible in mankind."

His answer is a stinging slap. "What do you see?"

I bow. "My lord. My master. He whom I shall serve in a hundred ways."

"What do you see?"

I shudder as his fingers turn me towards him and his eyes meet my own. "I see the future," I whisper. "I see my destiny."

"Will you join us?"

We stand before a *zashikiro* cage built of ogre bone. Three men and a woman writhe on the floor inside, and at first I think that's all, but then I see their skin shift and change. Pink first, then green, lumps rise from within and move across the surface like hidden creatures tunneling. Sometimes they disappear. Sometimes they grow. On the woman, one sprouts a second face which screams once like an infant before flesh closes over it again. On others, they become wings, tails, arms. Golden sweat, thick as tree resin, pours from one man's skin and hardens like armor.

I cannot answer.

It is offhand when he hits me. I do not think he expected more. "They are waiting," he says. "They are waiting to be offered what I would give you freely. Ascend to the *akutsukai*."

I harden my heart. I have bathed in the blood of innocents and eaten their flesh. These people are murderers, servants of Fu Leng, whom I would have cut down with a single prayer had I found them outside. I cannot care about their suffering.

"Which one should we take?" he asks me. "Only one thing can cure them. They must feel the blood of Heaven in their veins. It will save them. It will give them eternity."

I will not choose. Let them all die.

Everyone in Rokugan has heard of the reviled daimyo who led his family against the Shadowlands, only to fall and become Fu Leng's general. Those who face him in battle see only an implacable commander with the strongest grasp of psychological and mobile warfare in Rokugan – a terrorist in the purest sense of the word. He finds troop movements and logistics intuitive, and reserves his real planning for "treats." "Treats" include assassinating Kuni daimyo and spelling out threats with their Tainted intestines on the Kaiu Wall... the black marks stay on the stone for years.

He frequently takes prisoners to break emotionally, and recruits many of them into his armies, holding a special grudge for Unicorns and those who have escaped him before. Much like an abusive parent, Tsume can be loving and sweet at times, which only makes the evil parts worse. A good summation of his treatment of most captives is, "If you say you love me, I'll stop hurting you." He tries to gain his prisoners' trust, then grant their requests in the worst way possible. Though he would never admit it, his sadism is only an attempt to heal his own guilt. If he can prove that everyone in Rokugan will break under pressure, maybe someday he can forgive himself.

(continued)

MOTO TSUME (CONTINUED)

EARTH: 7

FIRE: 5

WATER: 5

Perception: 6

AIR: 6

Skills: Archery 5, Athletics 4, Battle 5, Defense 5, Hand-to-Hand 4, Heraldry 3, Horsemanship 5, Hunting 5, Iaijutsu 3, Kenjutsu 5, Lore: *Mahotsukai* 4, Lore: Shadowlands 6, Shintao 3, Sincerity 2, Subojutsu 2, Stealth 4, Torture 5, Yarijutsu 4.

School: *Maho-bujin* 5

Spells: All *maho* spells

Powers: (see Appendix One)

Armor of Death, Blood Shouting, Breath of Taint, Calligraphy of Thought, Command the Taint, Consume Chi, Death Never Stops, Disrupt Chi, Eyes of Hell, Fear, Flight, Invisibility, Sense Purity, Shapechanging, Undead Strength

Advantages: Absolute Direction, Great Destiny (Fu Leng's General), Higher Purpose, Kharmic Tie (Iuchi Karasu), Way of the Land: Shadowlands.

Disadvantages: Onikage Stink, and "Bad Reputation" is an understatement.

Shadowlands Taint: 8

Wounds: 102: Dead

Note: Tsume has Shadowlands Lore 6 because he has lived in the Shadowlands for two centuries, and knows things no normal human possibly could.



He takes them all.

He shows me the scar at the base of his throat where the Dark God dripped in. It is open still, a window into his veins, showing the sparkling galaxy of power.

"What are you?" I ask.

Akutenshi.

Evil angels.

They have drunk his blood, flesh of his flesh, life of his life. *Akutsukai* serve their master. They buy his victory with their lives and wear his marks on their skin and tongues. *Akutenshi* join him in his court. His lovers. His children. His destiny.

He laughs as he drags me beside him, limp as an empty *furoshiki*. In the field ahead, the Moto armies ride. Two hundred strong, colors bright as the day they left. Others have joined them. I see Hida gray dotting their ranks. A flash of blue here, a stripe of gold there. We watch from the hill as they ride down the Crab scouts. The fight ends in a storm of hooves and steel, but their screams echo for days. I did not know how long a man could live while his flesh was stripped and his bones cracked for marrow.

Were they looking for me? I pray to my ancestors they were not.

"Do you pity them?" he asks. "You should not. Their deaths please their lord."

He takes me where the plains shake and the mountains scream with clashing steel. Two men block the clouds, shoulders like oxen and legs as large around as an open fan. Their swords meet in a shower of sparks and holes open in the earth where the embers land. They step back, eyes locked, oblivious to all but each other.

"Atarasi-sama," he says and bows. "He was the first," he explains. "When each of the Thunders died, it was Hida's son who struck the heads from their shoulders." He smiles and I think for a moment that the grim warrior mirrors it, but it is only the breath before he charges, to clash a blade with a thousand tiny teeth against another. "There was no one left to do so for him."

The ground shakes too much for us to stand as they rush each other, their sweat running to the ground where a stream already flows. "Though he fought until he had passed one foot into Death, the Great One commanded his servants to stay far from his brother's son, and left Atarasi there, mind bathed in the same pool to which he had condemned my master. And when he healed, he knew he had fought for the wrong side."

"I don't believe you!" I scream, but he doesn't pause.

"My master opened his arms to his nephew. He finally had a family of his own. Atarasi knew how his father cared for the people who served him. No *kami* could live content without people to rule and teach. He created us for his uncle, bringing the ways of *maho* to his kin, and teaching the best in Rokugan what lord they should serve."

"So who fights him?" I cry. "No one living could stand so long against the son of a *kami*."

"Hida entered the Shadowlands to search for his son," he says. "Has no one guessed that he has found him?"

Their struggle has raged for over nine centuries, perfectly matched. The Moto say when one of them wins, it will begin the next great war.

I pray that Hida's arm remains strong.

He is so strong. His arms seem carved in bronze, for he wears no armor to hide his form, and his skin is bright with the sun of two centuries. For a moment, I cannot tell where his arm ends and the glowing steel begins. He pulls the rod from the fire, still crimson with heat, and hands it to the weeping peasant. "Go on," he urges gently, "Touch... then push." The other Moto laugh as the woman stops gingerly beside my *yojimbo*. He screams as his flesh is violated.

I cannot turn away, for it is my turn next and the ropes hold me, burning my bare skin as I twist and writhe, eyes closed against the sight as the peasant starts to laugh.

"I bother you, cousin?" he asks me, and I cannot answer, desperately sucking at the foul air to still my sobs. He asks again, and still I can say nothing, hear nothing but my blood, pounding like the surf. He sighs, softer even than the hiss of scalded flesh.

"Eyes," he says, and for a moment I am grateful. Let me be blind. Without light, I could see my father's face as he wished me Shinjo's speed on my journey. Without eyes, perhaps I can go somewhere that is not here.

Their knives are dull, freckled with rust, and the poison from their claws stains my skin as they grasp a fold of flesh. It is over before I have drawn breath to scream.

They took the lids.

There is no escape.

"Why would we want one?" he answers. "What does Rokugan hold that we cannot have here?" A dozen men lick steaming meat from their fingers as bushi slaughter each

ANCESTOR: DAIDOJI YOHKO BIRTH AND DEATH UNKNOWN -3 POINTS

Hayaku returned from the Shadowlands leaning on the shoulder of a tall girl in gray armor, who spoke for him when words were needed. After returning the blade, Daidoji Hayaku began planning their wedding. One of his father's retainers expressed doubt about a girl he met in the Shadowlands and demanded to know her family's name.

The voiceless Hayaku wrote, "Her name is Daidoji Yohko."

Moto Tsume is wrong about Hayaku never asking her crime. As all Daidoji daimyo learn, Hayaku knew very well that his beloved was thrown out of the Hida for using *maho* to defend her family during the First War. He also knew that she despised Fu Leng to the bottom of her soul. For a thousand years, the Daidoji have hid the secret of their founding mother's Taint and name.

Characters with Daidoji Yohko as an ancestor inherit her devotion, and cannot be affected by fear as long as they are aiding someone else. However, they can never knowingly abandon someone who needs their help. This includes championing courtiers in duels (whether or not you agree with them), always being the last to leave a battlefield of retreating men, and pursuing friends lost to the Shadowlands.

other for their entertainment. "A lord to bow to? Clans who call us barbarians, then beg for our skills? Lovers we cannot touch and food we cannot eat? Words no one wants us to say or hear?"

His fingers move down my spine, tracing each rib with short nails. "We have never wished an escape, cousin. We came here because it is where we want to be."

I have read the histories. I remember the vows of Moto Tsume to destroy every Shadowlands creature that saw his blade.

He says they are a lie, that what is now is all that could ever be.

I will never believe him.

"Your faith is touching, cousin, but your beliefs matter not. Only the truth can affect the world."

My needle is white against my hand. It is harder than

bone, and softer than metal. I think it is a tooth. It is longer than my arm.

I thread it with another strip of skin. I recognize the scar from the first time a pony threw me. It used to be above my eyebrow.

"Hantei," he says, and the word stings like salt. "So many believe he was emperor, that their 'contest' meant more than the evening it wasted. So many are wrong."

I push the needle through the strips. Over. Under. The skin on the frame is still wet. I watched him peel it from his chest and legs not three hours ago. Not a scar shows.

"Of what significance could their tournament be, when not a single one had the courage to face the only brother stronger than them all?" I cringe at the black anger that turns each word to arrows. "He returned, when not a single one had thought to aid Him where He fell. He returned and wore a mask of porcelain to conceal his face at their



court. 'I am a stranger to your land,' he said to Hantei. 'Why is it you rule?'

"We faced one another in a contest," was the answer. "Each of these fell because of their flaws. I alone triumphed."

"Then there is no man that can defeat you?"

"I am no man, but the Child of the Sun and Moon," declared Hantei.

"Then I see you have a flaw," said the god as he hurled aside the mask, and they fell back in disgust from his face. "You are a child still. Face me, if you call yourself emperor, for I am your brother, and I challenge your claim."

The tatami is halfway done. I have cleaned the blood as well as I can, but still it is patched with red and brown, blending one strip into the next. I can no longer tell which is mine and which his.

"You cannot," Doji answered. 'Hantei is emperor, and we have sworn to uphold him.'

"Shiba stood beside her, ever searching for compromise. 'We will not break our vows. Choose one of us to fight instead.' Akodo only growled." His hands clench, and I see the hole in his throat tighten. Blood rushes underneath, not daring to spill out. "He saw they were afraid to let him face Hantei, and that was why they had left him for so long. And He remembered that once before, one brother's cowardice had nearly destroyed Him and turned to that traitor now.

"I choose Togashi."

I take another skin from the pile. When I am finished, I will have somewhere to sleep.

"Pick a weapon, brother. This time you will learn what I know about destiny." His skin shifts and warps as his tone darkens. The nubs of horns break his scalp and his



eyes lengthen, narrow, the swirling black of whirlpools and constellations. "The others protested, but He would hear none of it. 'You deny my right to fight Hantei. You cannot deny me this.'"

"Togashi spoke then, still waiting by the side, not looking. 'You ask my weapon. I choose all that lives in Rokugan.'"

I have missed a stitch. I unwind the skin from my needle, and pick at it with my nails. It comes free, and I begin again. Under. Over. Under.

"He had been tricked, but the deception would be on them, for in falling to earth, the others had lost their right to Heaven. They were mortal, and the war Togashi called for could destroy them. He had only touched Jigoku. 'It

begins,' he told his brother, and no one challenged their decision."

His face is normal again and I stop weaving when he looks at me. "Think of that, cousin, if you question again why we serve. Togashi's cowardice brought the kami's war down on their people, and not one of those you so revere spoke to stop it."

I wish I could forget.

The mat is stiff against my skin. Fifteen years and still the blood stains remain. I pound on it, claw with my nails, scrape it against the rough stone floor, but it does not tear.

It holds my memories, he tells me. I can be free of them.

But I do not dare.

They will let me go, he says, to spread word of what I learned here. If others know, they will fear what awaits them. They will long for the death of the darkness, and their desire will bring war. And when they lose, they will regret their choices.

I cannot do what he asks.

I cannot bear this alone.

I am never alone. I recognize faces, and the touch of fingers on my scars, still raw and wet. This one licks with a tongue like a cat, rough with barbs to pull flesh from bones. Her skin is hard and copper-colored, and her hair falls in a curtain around us. Her stomach touches me from behind as she lowers her head between my

shoulderblades and her teeth meet through the skin. She laps at the blood, delicate still.

My father strokes my hand with trembling fingers and I pull away with a scream so loud his yojimbo runs in from the other room. I am shaking. I cannot let him touch me. He dies without my saying a word.

I stand by his pyre and all I smell is roast meat and too-sweet incense. I wish it were me. How peaceful the flames look. How bright.

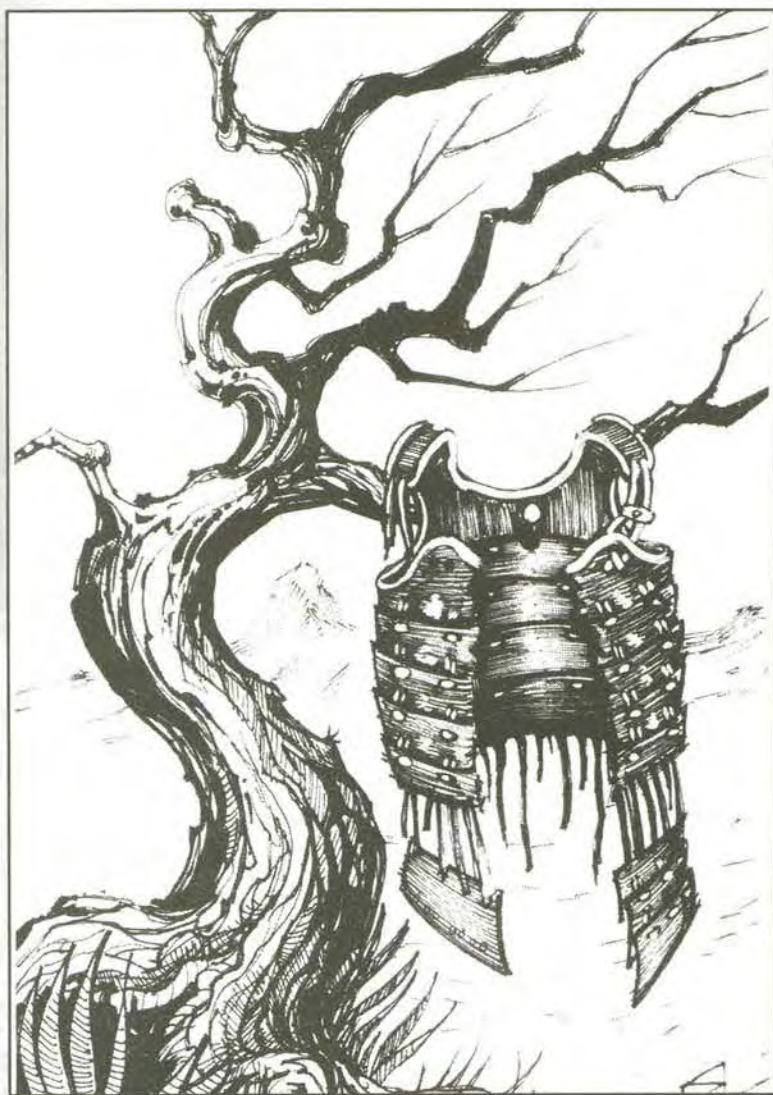
Too bright to see. I keep the cloth tight around my face, for the sun can burn. I must get acclimated slowly, he tells me. I can look at him, all in black; he is soothing. Someday, the pain will stop, he says. I clutch my tatami and say nothing. I like to walk with him on the wall. The air there doesn't make me gag. I think he understands.

People turn away when we walk past.

We walk past a rotted tree trunk which claws the sky like a hand and I whimper, thinking it is his hand, reaching up from where the Thunders bound him.

But it is only a tree, and he laughs at me.

A *haramaki-do* hangs from an upper branch, bound with iron chains that pierce the sleeves. It is split up the front, precise as the emperor's chef, but no bones lie nearby.



He tells me the story as if it means nothing.

Hayaku, son of Doji, followed the same trail, between the desert and the plains of soot. For over a month, he fought what was left of Fu Leng's army. They were few and far between, their leader bound and sleeping, Atarasi not yet risen to take his uncle's command.

The blood of his mother staved off the Taint in his veins as he ate rice ground with jade powder and drank water from a crystal jar. He sought his sister Konishiko, the lost Thunder, for it was said that only her voice could stop Lady Doji's tears. He followed her trail to where Atarasi still lay, but thought him dead, and though he considered returning to tell his uncle where his firstborn had fallen, his sister's voice drew him on and he left his cousin there.

For that, Daidoji, I hold you worst of all villains.

The voice came from Jigoku itself, for when she died, Konishiko's soul joined her brother's in the sword he had forged, fallen into the hole Isawa struck in the earth. With his cleansed tanto, he took his own throat, and journeyed after them.

The edges of the cut are still clean on the armor, and even the cloth has not yet rotted. It is quiet here and the air is clear of the stink of goblins. I do not wonder that Hayaku chose here to return.

When he freed the sword from the demon realms, Hayaku's spirit could not leave without a body to carry it, and when he returned, it was here. The body of a samurai-ko was chained to the tree, spirit nearly gone. Hayaku took her, and the feel of his spirit startled her awake. She fought back, but he wrapped her hands around the sword and sliced her body free of the armor that bound her.

She listened rather than struggling, and they returned as one person to where his corpse still lay, and she called on the spirits to return him to himself. And he had grown to love her so that he never asked where she had learned such craft, or why her clan had imprisoned her so.

And that is when he laughs, as he says this, for her powers were *maho*, before there was a name, and her soul was Fu Leng's. And he brought her with him from the Shadowlands, and made her his wife, and passed the stain to their family forever.

And for that, Daidoji, I do not revile you at all. I have done far worse.

"Worse than what?" His lash streaks my back like a snapped branch, but no tears fall, for my eyes are filled with light.

"It will destroy us all."

The blaze is so bright. I cannot see.

I wish I could not see.

The words twine and coil with the flames and I can almost read them.

His claws are slick and stink of Taint. They creep closer. He cannot control it.

"What?" They tighten on my throat, the poison building at the tips. "What will destroy us all?"

I have never heard him scream before.

"Words," I whisper, or perhaps something else. I cannot tell, for all I hear are the words that wrap my thoughts and body like a feeding snake. The living flame that stretched to the horizon.

"Words? You dare escape, and all you bring to show for it is words? What did you see out there, cousin?" His voice changes mid-sentence, sweet and wet as a rotten plum. "Was it my master? His bride?"

The heart of the flame is dark and bright, like a hole through the sun, and I open my mouth to breathe its heat and it rushes inside, filling me. It comes out now, I cannot stop it, and I rake my fingers across my cheeks to open the scars, for if I cannot cry, I owe our people tears of blood.

"One who shall save the world." The words coat my lips like his poison.

"Who?"

"One who shall destroy it."

My head reels, and my jaws snap together as his palm meets my cheek. But the blood is salty and fresh and almost enough to quench the fire, and I meet his eyes, so narrow that the glow makes a single line, for I have not defied him before.

"You will tell me, cousin, or everything I have done to you will seem a cheerful fantasy. Who will destroy the world?" I am silent through his next strikes, and I hear his breath between his lips, fast and pained as a birthing woman as his anger strives to escape. "I will ask one final time, cousin. What did you see out there?"

It takes a long time to find the courage to answer.

"Nothing," I say.



Appendices:

The Shadowlands Campaign



Appendix I: The Servants of Fu Leng

While Fu Leng can create as many goblins and zombies as he wishes, they are merely reflections of his own mind. They have little will of their own, and they cannot fulfill a god's basic need – to be worshiped. What Fu Leng wants most is what his brothers and sisters always had: human families who pray to him, and a chance to become emperor. He has tried to achieve this in many ways. Thus, once-human servants of Fu Leng come in many varieties.

Zombies

There are three major types of zombies in L5R: those which form naturally from the corpses of samurai who die in the Shadowlands; those formed by the *maho* spell *Animate the Dead*; and those animated and controlled by Tainted artifacts, such as porcelain masks. All three ultimately function in the same manner: a *kansen* inhabits the skull and controls a body whose soul has fled. All have the same game statistics, with some variation in skills. None can animate without a spiritual connection between *kansen* and body; beheading and burying the skull in earth stops the flow, destroying it.

Shadowlands zombies are mindless killing machines which pursue and strike anything without Taint. They cannot understand or make speech, and will not take orders from *maho-tsukai*. However, oni (even dim-witted ones) and *akutsukai* with the appropriate powers can control them enough to shape them into a passable army.

Spell-made zombies are created by Kuni Nakanu's original process; if the spell to awaken the zombie fails, the corpse animates and attacks the caster. If successful, the zombie is covered by a mystically appearing porcelain mask; the zombie is destroyed if its mask is removed. They remain animated for one month, plus an additional week per Raise made on the spell. Their intellect is limited, and they can understand simple commands ("carry me," "attack

any intruder"). They obey only their controlling shugenja, and do not act except on his command. They will let themselves be destroyed unless told to fight back.

The porcelain mask fetishes used by the Blood Speakers focus dark energies and allow creation of zombies who follow the mask's enchanter, but understand more complex instruction ("build me a palanquin"). They have a self-preservation instinct, and will fight to defend themselves without specific orders. Masked zombies may retain 1–10 points of physical skills (e.g. Stealth and most Bugei Skills) from their original body. These should be factored into appropriate rolls.

Any shugenja who simply puts an enchanted mask on a corpse may attempt to command the resulting zombie, but this requires an Awareness + Shadowlands Lore roll, TN 25, to convince the spirits they created the mask. Characters trying to figure out how the masks work must make an Intelligence + Tsangusuri roll, with no more skill dice than their rank in Maho Lore, TN 30. Creating the masks is even more difficult and requires drops of the caster's own Tainted blood for each one.

Both masked and spelled zombies are rendered inert upon the death of the controlling shugenja. Zombie bodies are capable of screaming, swallowing, and other functions as long as the necessary body parts are not fully rotted.

The Tainted and Workers of Maho

Tainted people can draw on Fu Leng's powers to strengthen themselves (adding to their physical Traits), but retain freedom of will, and often continue to actively fight the forces of the Shadowlands.

Maho-tsukai are detailed on pages 10–15 of the Gamemaster Pack. They learn their abilities from another *maho*-user, from an oni, or in rare cases through a spontaneous blood sacrifice and prayer to Fu Leng. Not all *maho-tsukai* need be shugenja originally; however, non-shugenja can only cast *maho* spells. Shugenja who turn to the dark side retain their original spells, which must be cast in the usual manner and cannot be strengthened with blood sacrifice.

Maho-bujin are those Tainted bushi who allow their Taint to exceed their highest Ring. As detailed in Chapter 5, pages 111–113, *maho-bujin* train in the Shadowlands with

Fu Leng's generals, learning techniques equivalent to normal bushi styles. They cannot cast spells.

Both types of *maho*-user retain their original School Ranks and abilities, though they cannot progress any further (close inspection during training would immediately give away their new status). They can also no longer increase their Void Ring. When their Taint exceeds their Void ring (automatic for *maho-bujin*), they can no longer spend Void points. Techniques which require Void can be activated by taking a number of Wounds equal to the rank of the Technique +1 (e.g. the Rank 2 Mountain Does Not Move requires 3 Wounds). They may also take four Wounds to receive an extra 1k1 to any action, just like spending Void. Techniques which allow a character to spend multiple Void on a single action require the blood sacrifice for each "Void point" they wish to spend.

Nemuranai which allow extra Void or require Void to activate no longer work, and all normal and decent Ancestors immediately abandon *maho*-users.

While all *maho* use Taints the user, many *maho-tsukai* do not realize that their actions serve Fu Leng. Iuchiban himself did not believe his prayers went to the Dark God. Such self-

deception is possible because their Taint does not manifest outwardly, but shows only through insanity, rage, and terrible dreams. Only if split open or brought physically into the Shadowlands do the sores, bloody pus, internal limbs, and other bodily signs of corruption show. *Maho-bujin* train in the Shadowlands and are always aware who they serve, though their Taint is also internal.

MAHO-BUJIN (AVERAGE / EXPERIENCED / RARE PRODIGY)

EARTH: 3/4/4

AIR: 2/2/4

FIRE: 2/4/5

Agility: 3/3/5

WATER: 3/3/4

VOID: 3/4/4

Schools: Hida 2, *Maho-Bujin* 1 / Hida 2, *Maho-Bujin* 3 / Akodo 4, *Maho-Bujin* 5

TN to Hit: 10(20) / 20(30) / 25(30)

Bugei Skills: Rank 2 / Rank 3 / Rank 4



Most *maho-bujin* have Archery, Battle, Defense, Kenjutsu, Hand-to-Hand, Horsemanship, and Hunting. Some also have Stealth, Yarijutsu or Subojutsu, Iaijutsu, Athletics, and one to two High or Merchant Skills.

The Akutsukai

When a *maho*-user's Taint rating reaches twice his highest Ring, he undergoes a horrible transformation, as his body can no longer contain the corruption. For several weeks, they undergo continuous mutation, with limbs growing and disappearing inside their organs, sores opening across their bodies, and so on, alternating between catatonic pain and frenzied rage. If this somehow occurs outside the Shadowlands, the person usually dies.

In the Shadowlands, their superiors find and cage them to watch their transformation, judging their worthiness for the Dark One's army. If they pass, they are taken to the edge of the Festering Pit and undergo a lengthy ritual, unique to each person, which ends with them pouring the foul blood

of Fu Leng directly into their veins, creating a black wound which never closes.

Such a person becomes an *akutsukai*, literally a "servant of evil." The character's body stabilizes, generally with new, inhuman features such as wings, arms, or glowing eyes, and binds him forever to Fu Leng. Untainted characters may also be actively recruited by Fu Leng or his servants and made directly into *akutsukai*, as the Moto armies were. These undergo the same blood-ritual, and are identical to those formed from *maho*-users, though they are often more mentally stable. Because of the effect that a large amount of Taint has on an unprepared body, normal humans who become *akutsukai* often experience severe flesh and muscle degradation, becoming skeletal or nearly so.

Akutsukai are closer to oni than human in many ways. They have no Void Ring, and cannot use any mortal School Techniques. They do not age, and no longer acquire Taint, subsisting on the corrupted food and water of the Shadowlands. For purposes of *maho*, their Taint is considered one higher than their highest Trait. If they sleep for one hour per night, they may heal (without scarring) any



Wounds not done by jade or crystal. Akutsukai retain all *maho-tsukai*/*maho-bujin* abilities and gain 1-5 of the powers below.

POWERS OF THE AKUTSUKAI

Blend with Darkness: The akutsukai's skin grows black and mottled, allowing him camouflage in deep shadows (not very effective when combined with Eyes of Hell, unless the glow is concealed beneath a broad hat or other device). People trying to detect the akutsukai in the dark roll Perception + Investigation, TN 25.

Chitinous Armor: The akutsukai's skin hardens to a chitinous plate, armor rating 10. This acts like oni armor; subtracting from Wounds rather than changing the TN to hit.

Claws: The akutsukai grows inch-long claws which do (Strength)k2 Wounds, and force the victim to make an Earth roll at a TN of 5 x the akutsukai's Earth or gain 1-5 points of Taint.

Command the Taint: The akutsukai can make a contested Willpower roll to command lesser Shadowlands creatures (goblins, ogres, zombies, and oni) to do his bidding. This can be used against Tainted humans as well, though humans get a Free Raise if their Taint is not their highest Trait, and two Free Raises if it is their lowest Trait.

Eyes of Hell: Most akutsukai's normal eyeball tissues burn away, leaving an empty socket that glows green, red, yellow, white, or blue, allowing them to see in darkness. They cannot be blinded.

Fear: As the oni power, rating 4.

Increased Attributes: Akutsukai can raise their attributes above 5 without knowledge of Shintao.

Invulnerability: As the oni power.

Maho-bujin Techniques: Former *maho-tsukai* can now use *maho-bujin* techniques.

Multiple Arms: The akutsukai has up to three more pairs of arms. When holding weapons, extra pairs grant +5 to the akutsukai's TN to be hit, as per the rank 1 Mirumoto technique.

Sense Purity: The akutsukai may roll Perception + Investigation, TN 15, to detect unTainted humans within a one-mile radius (plus a half-mile per raise).

Spellcasting: Former *maho-bujin* can now cast *maho* spells.

Tail: The akutsukai has a club-like lizard tail, which he may fight with using his hand-to-hand skill. It does Strength + 1k2 Wounds.

Undead Strength: The akutsukai ignores Wound penalties. He no longer has "Down" or "Out" ranks, and can fight until dead.

Wings: A pair of bat-like wings jut from the akutsukai's shoulderblades, and he may fly at four times his walking pace. He suffers a +5 TN penalty to all actions while on the ground, but his TN to be hit while in the air is at +10.

The Akutenshi

The most feared and least known of Fu Leng's human servants are the *akutenshi*, the commanders of the akutsukai, masters of oni and the generals of Fu Leng's army. Akutsukai who are specially honored by Fu Leng (in a process so foul we won't print it) join the elite corps of the "evil angels."

They can take any appearance and pass readily for human, some going so far as to re-learn Techniques lost to them during the akutsukai process. Detecting their Taint using School Techniques or a Sense spell has a TN of 5 x the *akutenshi*'s Shadowlands Rank, which is always frozen at 1 higher than their highest Trait to allow them control of their bodily corruption. To preserve the suspense, GMs should never reveal this target number.

There are currently around five hundred akutsukai, primarily Moto, and less than fifty *akutenshi*, most of whom rarely leave the Festering Pit. The loudest voice in the *akutenshi* as long as Hida and Atarasi are engaged is Moto Tsume, though most answer only to Fu Leng. The Kuni suspect many *akutenshi* are in fact the Fallen God's children by Doji Nashiko, Moto bushi (male or female), or unfortunate abductees.

Akutenshi have been known to kill entire platoons of prepared Crabs single-handedly, so it is best to reserve them as behind-the-scenes or climactic villains. They retain their akutsukai powers, plus as many of those listed below as the GM deems appropriate.

POWERS OF THE AKUTENSHI

Armor of Death: The *akutenshi* has an armor rating equal to the number of Wounds inflicted on its previous strike. This acts like oni armor, subtracting from Wounds rather than adding to the target number. Tetsubo and die-tsuchi do not ignore this armor.

Blood Shouting: The *akutenshi* can form links to other people or creatures which taste her saliva. When struck, the

akutenshi screams, and if the target can hear it, he takes the Wounds in her place, bleeding as if from the same cut. *Akutenshi* often fool enemies into kissing them, or spit into their drinks long before fighting.

Body of Damned Time: For the cost of six Wounds, the *akutenshi* can turn its shape to an inky void filled with stars. All who look upon it see their own death, turning their hair white. The *akutenshi* makes a contested Shadowlands Taint vs. Void roll. For every point by which he exceeds each victim's total, they age one year.

Breath of Taint: The *akutenshi* breathes clouds of pure Taint on its victims; anyone within ten feet must roll Earth, TN of 5 x its Air, or take its Air Ring in Taint points.

Calligraphy of Thought: The *akutenshi* can read its victim's surface thoughts by making a contested Awareness roll vs. the victim's Awareness + Defense. It takes two Raises for the *akutenshi* to read something the victim is deliberately trying to hide.

Death Never Stops: The *akutenshi* receives a number of Free Raises to her attack equal to the number of Wound Ranks inflicted on her last blow.

Disrupt Chi: By making a contested Awareness roll against the opponent's Awareness + School Rank, the *akutenshi* can force him to add his lowest Trait to all skill rolls. This lasts for one round, plus one round per raise.

Flight: Unlike *akutsukai*, who can only fly if they have wings, *akutenshi* step through the air at will, and suffer no ill effects or penalties from fighting upside-down, running in horizontal circles around an opponent, and so forth. This adds +10 to their TN to be hit.

Invisibility: The *akutenshi* can take a single action to become invisible, adding +20 to her TN to be hit. She still leaves trails in sand or water unless flying, and can be seen through crystal or thin sheets of jade.

Shapechanging: The *akutenshi* has complete control over its shape. It takes a single round to change to something similar (a human of similar size and gender), two rounds for something slightly different (a human of a different gender), three for something of significantly different size and shape (a pony, a small child), four rounds for extremely different size and shape (a mouse), and five rounds for something of impossibly different size and shape (a swarm of flies).

Soul Drinking: The *akutenshi* may suck out a dying person's final breath to consume their soul, preventing the person from reincarnating for as long as the evil angel lives.

Victims' faces appear in miniature inside its gastrointestinal tract, where they can sometimes be heard wailing in tiny voices. *Akutenshi* torture the faces by drinking boiling *sake* or jabbing them with needles.

Appendix 2: Battles Against the Shadowlands

One day soon in your horror campaign, one of the players will stand up and shout, "All right, guys, to Jigoku with walking in and beating down fifty zombies to get at some unstoppable courtier-ko. This tower's lost, but I've got Battle 4 and Glory 5, and if I tell my daimyo we've got *maho* on the outbreak, we can get a thousand bushi and a shugenja squad over the border in three hours: I say we kill anything that doesn't bathe!"

Here's what you do.

Mass Combat and the Shadowlands

Battles against Shadowlands armies are more lethal than those against bushi. For starters, the dark forces laugh at any pretense of honorable combat. Add to this the incredible number of goblins, the endurance of ogres, the fact that zombies don't feel pain or hunger, the Taint, *maho*, and oni, and you have an army that can kill two or three times its weight in Lions. On the other hand, goblins have no organization, most oni stop to eat enemies rather than fight efficiently, and zombie squads are as about as maneuverable as, oh, elk.

A human general has to understand the Shadowlands' weaknesses before he can exploit them. In mass battles with Shadowlands creatures, the general and human forces on the field cannot use the Battle skill at a rating higher than their skill in Shadowlands Lore. Combatants without Shadowlands Lore treat their rolls as if they had no Battle skill.

If that rule doesn't make you worried about the future of Rokugan, read it again.

The generals of Shadowlands armies are usually either intelligent oni, *akutsukai*, or *akutenshi*. Because oni do not have skills per se, they roll Perception. *Akutsukai* usually have Battle skills of at least 3, and *akutenshi* even higher. In mass combat without an opposing general (i.e. a pack of goblins or undirected zombies), roll 2k2 for the Shadowlands' side in the Tides of Battle.

WHO'S WINNING?

In the initial Tides of Battle roll between generals, the terrain and number or quality of standard troops may alter the roll significantly, giving penalties or Raises as appropriate. Raises can be used to save troops, expend fewer

supplies (e.g. food, jade, arrows), or make a victory look more decisive or Glorious. Some examples of modifiers:

Defensive Emplacements: Traps and stone walls extend the number of times in row beyond three an attacking general must win the Tides of Battle roll to triumph. The broken-down Hiruma Castle, for example, would extend it to four, while the Kaiu Wall makes it nine or more.

Goblins: Goblins are stupid, predictable, and easily killed. The opposing general gets a Free Raise in the Tides of Battle roll. However, if there are more than two goblins for every human, the roll is normal, and if there are more than four goblins for every human, give the goblins' general a Free Raise.

Zombies: The fearless walking dead ignore tremendous amounts of arrows and other trauma, but practically every modern general knows their weakness, and they are good

for little but attacking in a straight line. Give them a Free Raise if they attack at night (zombies barely need to see) but their general has a +5 TN penalty if trying anything more complex than a frontal assault.

Ogres and Trolls: Big, canny and fearsome, these armies get a Free Raise.

Oni or Maho-bujin: Any army composed primarily of these troops gets three Free Raises. If the opponents do not have access to jade powder or at least a third as many shugenja as there are oni/*maho-bujin*, add +10 to their TN as well.

Battle Chart Modifications

Halve the Glory (round down) awarded in all battles against the Shadowlands unless otherwise noted. It's more dangerous, but it's also unclean.

DEATH TOUCHES YOU

Because oni do not duel, the "exciting" part of fighting the Shadowlands involves a character stuck in a situation where she is about to die. Replace all "Duel" results with "Death Touches



ANCESTOR:
HIDA AKEMI
120-168?
4 POINTS

Akemi was the fifth daimyo of the Crab, and today at Kaiu Shiro, she is still venerated as the protector of Crab women. However, at the Hida, Ikoma and Asako libraries, she remains relegated to the back shelf of early samurai-ko history, due to her colorful and somewhat eccentric character.

The Shadowlands rarely attacked on the battlefield during her reign, and the Crab lost ground both times, for Akemi was a far better fighter than a general. In her personal life, she was justifiably paranoid, for she frequently had to defend herself and her position in her loveless marriage to the Clan Champion, Hida Kugen.

Too small to wear more than the breastplate, skirt and helmet of the enormous clan ancestral armor, she deliberately left it open in the back during her pregnancies to tempt assassins.

You," and go to the skirmish level of detail. If the character does not think quickly, she is lost. Some examples:

First In, Last Out: You are stranded alone. If at the Kaiu Wall, a portcullis or collapsing ceiling may have slammed down in front of you, leaving you in a pit or on the side of the hallway filled with Shadowlands creatures. If on a battlefield, you are surrounded by enemies and must run through them, find cover, or play possum in the hopes you are overlooked.

He's Mad Now: You whack an ogre or an oni in the face... and it just stares at you. Begin a fight alone against this creature, with help arriving in 1-10 rounds.

The Taint: It's time to make an Earth roll, TN 20, to see if those cuts got infected or if you got spattered by spraying pustules and tarry blood. Failure means 1-10 points of Taint.

Kichigai: You are hit by a Blood of Midnight spell and start killing everything and everyone around you, tasting their blood and screaming. Roleplay.

Overpowered: You got knocked down, and something got you. Six goblins could be holding you, a Ryokaku could have turned you to smoke, flying oni could have snatched



you off the Wall, or a Kommei could have put you in the body of an ogre. If you don't get out of this mess soon, a fate worse than death awaits.

Nobody's Side: You're in the path of a frothing berserker wearing your colors. He does not seem amenable to conversation.

No Witnesses: Your commander just shot one of his troops in the back. Or is it your commander? Or was that man not one of your troops? Do you turn your back on him or the charging ogre?

Dishonor Calls: A bushi waves you down into a pit where you can hide underneath a few corpses until this all blows over. Well?

Trapped: A hand, pincer, trap or weapon chain has wrapped around your foot. You are inches away from being dragged off the Kaiu Wall or falling on a nasty spike while the enemy closes in. Will you beg, fight, or cut off your own leg?

HEROIC OPPORTUNITIES

The pay-off of "heroism" against the Shadowlands is usually in terms of thankful living friends and the knowledge that these things can actually be defeated. Some of the regular Heroic Opportunities can still be used, such as getting a shot at the general or Digging Two Graves. Others are more unique.

Behead Your Doshi: A man in your unit fell, gave you a last request, and told you where his family lived. You beheaded him. If you bring his armor and daisho to his family and honor his request, gain +3 Glory points.

Behead Your Sempai: You watched for signs of possession, and when your commander was taken by an oni you struck him down, probably saving the lives of your entire squad. Gain an experience point to spend on Shadowlands Lore.

Burn the Corpses: When the levers broke, you hurled the cauldron of burning pitch over the wall with your own hands. It splattered the zombies and you kept your head enough to throw in the fallen bodies of your comrades before they rose. Gain an experience point to spend on Athletics.

Kaiu's Retreat: Your unit broke and ran, and you screamed for them to follow you, because you knew where the traps were. Weaving among pits, spring-loaded steel and Evil Wards, you ran the enemy to destruction. Gain an experience point and lose a point of Glory.

Fend Off the Horde: When the wave of enemy hit, you got surrounded by ten of them and were certain you were going to die. As soon as you slew one, another replaced it, but you kept hacking...and hacking...and somehow, they just kept falling until you broke out to rejoin at a rally point. Gain an experience point to be spent on Defense.

Fire Makes it Grow! You realized something was critically wrong with an oni that just wouldn't die, and thought of the solution. Troops rally around you. Gain +1 Glory and add +2 to your Battle Chart rolls for the rest of the battle.

Never Yield the Dead: You fought over the body of a noble commander and kept the Dark Brother from having him. He will be burned with honors, and his family and troops are grateful. Gain a Minor Ally in his Clan.

Persistence: Even though you couldn't hurt it, you rallied a pack of archers and swordsmen to lay into an oni with mighty cuts and arrows. Eventually, after so many arrows it looked like a porcupine, the thing fell over. Gain a loud cheer.

ANCESTOR: HIDA AKEMI (CONTINUED)

At night, she slept blindfolded beneath a sword hanging by a silk thread to keep herself constantly alert, and refused to drink water, preferring ginseng, green tea, and energizing Kuni concoctions. She survived twenty-one assassination attempts by Tainted and possessed bushi, and put down an "oni-inspired" coup with the deaths of thirty-one samurai in a two-week period.

Akemi was suspected of improper conduct with Kuni Jisso, for he was alone with her frequently, supposedly to stave off her asthma attacks with prayers to Jurojin. After his death, her own soon followed; she was playing in a pile of leaves with her grandchildren when an asthma episode led to heart failure. She stabbed a nearby tree with her tanto, hissed, "Execute the traitor," and died. The tree was executed.

Those with Hida Akemi as an Ancestor receive two extra damage dice to roll against any opponent more than twice their weight, and +2 to their Initiative if fighting in an enclosed space such as a corridor, privy, or bath-house.

Ride the Dark Wave: You leapt onto an enormous beast and whacked it in the head, blinding it with pain and riding it, running down its own troops. Make an Earth roll against TN 15 or get 1-5 points of Taint, but gain +1 Glory.

Shield the Tears: You kept the all-important jade powder flowing to the archers when the carrier got killed, and because of you, they killed an oni before it did any more damage. You walk out plastered with powder down your right side.

Turning Movement: There's only one thing that will make zombies retreat, and that's their cowardly master. You led a charge into the *maho-tsukai*. He called on his zombies for assistance, and as they turned, the front lines surged forward, cutting them down from behind. You receive full Glory for this Heroic Opportunity.

Skirmish Techniques in the Shadowlands

Rokugani sensei whose teachings lean toward self-defense and warfare rather than genteel duels teach techniques for fighting off a crowd of dishonorable attackers. The Crab call this "running like Hiruma," though Shinjo and Akodo are also credited with its invention. The bushi must have space to charge, either on foot or horseback.

When a character is surrounded, he runs, breaks through the mob, and strings them out chasing him. He then either flees (as the Kuni school teaches) or turns and cuts them down one at a time. If he is still surrounded after the first dash, he does not stay stationary (he could still be mobbed), but reverses his charge to kill the ones who were chasing him and puts their bodies in the path of those chasing him now.

At the beginning of the round, the character can take one Raise to his TN for all attacks that round and make a Perception + Defense roll, TN 20. If successful, a maximum of four opponents can attack him that round. For each Raise on the roll, this number is reduced by one, to a minimum of one attacker (not necessarily the same opponent the bushi gets to strike on his Initiative).

Bushi who minimize their opponents by fighting back-to-back or as part of a squadron use identical rules, though in descriptive terms they make a wall of weapons and cover for each other rather than running.

Carrying Fallen Comrades

While L5R is not a game that frequently worries about the weight of everything a PC carries, it often occurs that a bushi with Strength 2 will try to drag or carry an unconscious 150-pound friend to safety while both are wearing 20-50 pounds of armor. This is possible...just unkind to the body.

A Down, Out, or Dead character being moved must make a simple Earth roll, TN 15, or suffer an additional two Wounds. They make this roll again if they are carried for over a hundred yards, and a third roll if they are carried for more than a day's walk.

The carrier must spend Void (or take Taint) to increase his Strength to the necessary level (i.e. 2 points for a Strength 2 character to carry the equivalent of Strength 4) at the same intervals as above. Running back and forth between bodies requires points for both. Loyal Crabs sometimes collapse exhausted on their friends and rise again hours later with the energy of new Taint to see them through.

Trying to fight or run while carrying a body is extremely difficult. Treat a bushi in such a situation as if his Reflexes and Agility were 1. For every Strength point above the necessary level for carrying the body, allow him one point of Agility back, then Reflexes.

When trying to drag rather than carry a great load, consider the PC's Strength 1 higher. The problem with dragging becomes obvious near sharp rocks and waist-deep fetid swamps. Increase the victim's Earth TN to 20 and add one Wound to any damage suffered.

Kobo Ichi-Kai Jujutsu

In the reign of Hantei III, the famous monk Togashi Kaze taught an unarmed fighting style called "hands and feet" to the peasantry of Rokugan. A number of brutish Hida were, of course, on the receiving end of his throws in altercations, and the young Hida daimyo of the time, Tekien, respected any man with the self-discipline to achieve such power.

"That man is a weapon against the Shadowlands," he told Hida Shinmen, his most trusted yojimbo. "Learn from him."

Hida Shinmen approached Kaze, but Kaze would not show him anything, for he refused to teach samurai. Shinmen's inquiries brought Kaze before the Emperor,

where he died, never showing a samurai a single technique. Shinmen returned in failure.

"You are a disgrace," Tekien declared. "You have failed me utterly and you are denied *seppuku*. At my order, you are no longer a Hida."

His yojimbo was aghast, until the daimyo leaned very close to him, his breath hissing out from the grinning mempo of the Armor of the Shadow Warrior. "Also at my order," he growled in a very low voice, "you are a peasant who is very angry at me."

The yojimbo handed over his swords, and thirty years passed.

One day, an old rice farmer named Shinmenko came to Hida castle and requested permission to speak to the daimyo. After a day-long demonstration of unarmed

techniques, he was named Hida Shinmenko, and he began teaching jiujutsu to the samurai.

But something went wrong. Shinmenko's students were asked to give a demonstration for the Emperor. They fought hard, and they painfully defeated a group of monks chosen for the match. But the fourth Hantei was skeptical of jiujutsu's battlefield use and ordered it demonstrated on a captured troll, which promptly killed one of Shinmenko's students. Shinmenko was granted permission for *seppuku*.

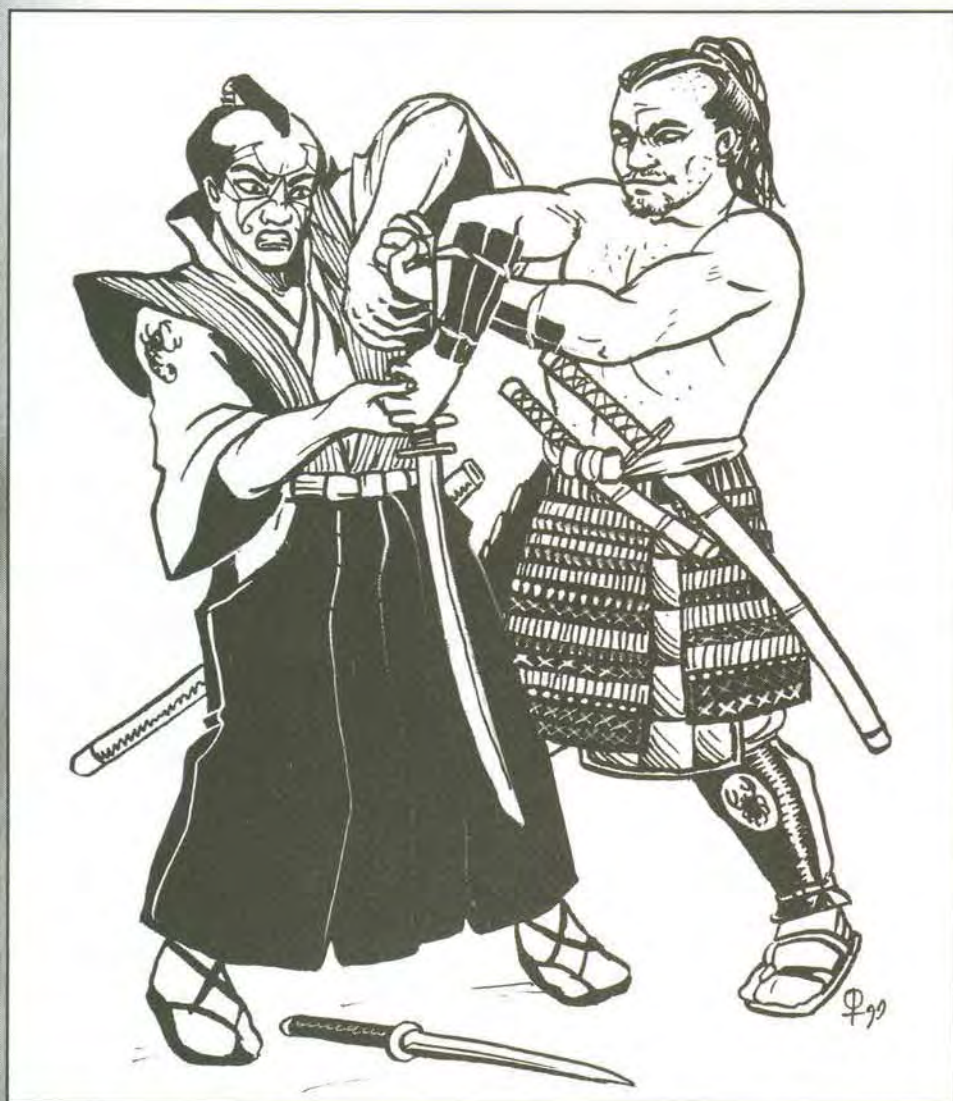
Tekien was ashamed. "I will not fail," he told the Emperor. "I do not care if it takes one hundred years, I will never quit until my bushi can use every weapon in Rokugan against your enemy."

It was Kaiu Dokushojin, Shinmenko's student, who hit upon the answer. "The deepest truth," he quoted Shinsei, "is that everything I have taught you is wrong!" Kaze's students,

he concluded, had taught Shinmenko flawed techniques that worked in stylized form but not actual combat.

With that in mind, he took Hida Kakki, Kuni Jisso, and Hiruma Jotaro throughout Rokugan, storming peasant jiujutsu schools and dishonoring themselves by brawling. Kakki and Jotaro fought, while Dokushojin watched match after match, seeing the structure of the body at its strongest and weakest, finding a way to fight using economy of motion. Jisso nursed the defeated, or dissected their corpses to find out which techniques were fatal.

It took them sixteen years, and they returned missing teeth and eyes and fingers. Tekien, now gray with age, demanded they choose a fearsome bushi for a demonstration before the Emperor. Dokushojin looked throughout the castle, reviewing the hordes of armored Hida bushi, and the four chose as one, bringing forth Hida Akemi,



Tekien's shy, asthmatic, fifteen-year-old granddaughter, who stood perhaps five feet tall.

In sandals.

They took her into a cave in the mountains and no one heard from them for two years. When they emerged, they held a match at Kyuden Hida before the Imperial Court. The Kuni brought forth another captive, an ogre that had torn through two iron cages and bellowed its rage from a very deep pit. Eyes downcast in the presence of the Emperor, Akemi took off her sandals, put aside her fan, and descended. She blinded and killed the ogre.

And three samurai.

From each Clan.

The court was disgusted, stunned into silence at the ears and other pieces she had torn from their soldiers. She had not even wiped the black ogre blood from her fingertips before driving them into the bushi's eyes and throats.

The Emperor turned and spoke without speaking. Hida Tekien, who had watched the proceedings silently from inside his metal shell, stood, throwing aside the tetsubo he had been using as a crutch. "There is a final test," the daimyo said to the four creators of the style, and he stepped over the bodies of the fallen warriors to the center of the pit, where his granddaughter still stood in her casual combat stance.

Slowly, Tekien drew *Chikara*, the ancestral katana of the Clan, its blade glowing hotly as it neared the dead ogre. He stared her in the eyes and the only sound was beating hearts. At last, the daimyo made the first movement.

"Teach that to my bushi," he ordered, and handed her the sword.

KOBO ICHI-KAI JIUJUTSU (REFLEXES OR AGILITY)

Kobo ichi-kai jiujutsu, also called "Kaiu-ryu," "Morote-kai," or simply "kobo," teaches that the physical principles of armed and unarmed fighting, whatever the weapon, are one and the same. It was

designed to train the largest number of bushi as fast as possible, as well as possible, against multiple competent opponents twice their size and weight. It blends hard and soft styles, and is the hand-to-hand system taught at the Hida and Hiruma schools.

Kobo ichi is the Crab martial principle that all defenses should inflict damage, making defending and attacking one and the same. "Kai," like "ryu," means "house" or "school." Kobo teaches eight principles: commit only after the opponent commits; reduce the number of weapons facing you; straight force must be turned aside and round force blocked; straight lines are faster than arcs; surprise comes



in the changing of range and altitude; the second joints (elbows and knees) control the balance; disrupting balance creates time; touch reflexes are faster than visual reflexes.

In practical application, this means Crab bushi do not use committed movements such as leaps in the air or sacrifice throws where they drop to their back. Such moves would get them killed on the Kaiu Wall against multiple opponents. "Blows should be felt and not seen," is the kobo motto.

While kobo can theoretically be used by captured and disarmed bushi to fight off goblins and ogres, Crabs prefer weapons when dealing with Shadowlands creatures. Phoenix historians state that kobo's most common actual application is on other samurai in brothels, opium dens, and the back corridors of the Kaiu Wall after somebody just gambled away ten koku.

While technically a Bugei Skill, many other samurai disdain this style of jiu-jitsu: the Crane and Dragon because it's cruel, the Phoenix and Lion because it lowers reverence for the sword, and the Scorpion because it makes Crabs harder to assassinate (most Unicorn think it's pretty useful). A kobo practitioner loses one point of Honor for every rank they have in the skill; when he or she learns a new rank, the Honor continues to drop. Thus, a character with Kobo 1 drops 1 Honor; when experience takes it to Rank 2, she loses 2 more Honor. However, this does not decrease further simply by using the skill, and may be regained over time. (Brawling in tea houses still drops Honor.)

Many of kobo's teachings have found their way into the general jiu-jitsu practiced by other samurai, though the Crab reserve several "secret teachings" for themselves. When a character purchases the Hand-to-Hand skill at creation, she may throw, sweep, kick, and punch as detailed in *Way of the Dragon* – but if she has served on the Kaiu Wall, she should record the skill on the character sheet as "Hand-to-hand (Kobo)." This allows her to choose two of the following techniques with which to start play. Each successive rank of the skill allows an additional technique. Those characters who learn kobo after character generation learn only one at the first rank, and one per rank normally thereafter.

JIUJUTSU TECHNIQUES

Any character with Hand-to-Hand can perform these techniques, though they are frequently taught to Crabs and others fighting at the Kaiu Wall.

Shove (Agility)

Shoving may be done with or without a weapon, which appeals to Crabs since the bushi doesn't necessarily touch a Tainted opponent. The bushi rolls Hand-to-Hand at normal difficulty and declares he is shoving. This technique does not work on opponents who weigh more than what could be lifted with the character's Strength +1. Armor does not add to the TN.

If successful, the opponent backs up one yard for each point of the bushi's Strength. For each Raise, the bushi can add a yard, choose to knock the opponent down, choose the direction of the shove, or increase their effective Strength by 1. Being shoved or colliding with a shoved person prevents one of a target's attacks.

Shoves do no Wounds, but: tumbling down stone steps does 3k2. Plunging into a twenty-foot-deep spiked pit does 4k4. And falling off the south side of the Kaiu Wall does 10k10. Just so you know.

Hadaka Jime (Agility)

Hadaka jime, or the "naked strangle," is so called because it is not one of the many choke holds that uses the victim's own tough-collared Rokugani kimono. The bushi gets behind his opponent, wraps one arm around his neck, and squeezes, using the bicep to cut off the blood in the carotid artery, depriving the brain of oxygen. Their other arm can reinforce the technique (a "sleeper hold") or keep track of the victim's weapon hand. *Mizu-do* and *kaze-do* refer to this choke as "Autumn Leaves," since the victim's face reddens as it progresses.

To apply the choke, the bushi attacks with Agility + Hand-to-Hand with one Raise. If successful, the opponent is considered grappled and cannot attack with a weapon. The victim may make contested Strength or Agility + Hand-to-Hand rolls to escape.

At the end of each round of choking, the victim's Stamina drops by 1, though Wound Ranks do not change. When it drops below zero, he falls unconscious. A successful Intelligence + Medicine roll, TN 10, can wake him up again. If the choke is broken off, Stamina returns at 1 point per minute. If it continues, the bushi does 1k1 Wounds every round.

Hadaka jime is greatly valued at the Wall; though not good for general melees, it can bring down goblins and ogres for later Kuni research, or subdue insane bushi. Oni

Invulnerability, bushi using Mountain Does Not Move, and zombies ignore choking.

KOBO TECHNIQUES

After achieving Rank 3 in *kobo ichi-kai*, a bushi may no longer choose to keep any but his highest dice when delivering damage without spending a Void Point or taking a Raise specifically for that purpose. Lethal responses are automatic.

Break the Bones (Agility)

When fighting enemies who are already dead, the only sure way to disable them is to literally break them apart. The bushi hyperextends an opponent's joint and either cranks it beyond its capacity or braces and smashes it. This requires two Raises to the attack when unarmed or using paired weapons, three with a single weapon. If successful, the damage roll adds an extra die and does a minimum of 12 Wounds, either crippling the wrist, elbow, or shoulder, preventing future attacks, or the knee, rendering the target effectively motionless. This allows normal damage to zombies; even they can't fight very well with two broken arms. This can be done during Contested grappling rolls if the bushi exceeds the opponent's roll by the necessary Raises.

Invulnerability stops crippling damage completely.

Drunk Bushi (Reflexes)

Samurai use the Drunk Bushi technique to grab an enemy's swinging katana at the hilt and overextend its arc to disarm and strike the wielder in one movement. This requires two free hands, and takes the user's attack for the round, but takes effect at the opponent's Initiative rather than his own. Drunk Bushi can also be used against any one-handed, non-flexible, single weapon.

The bushi makes a contested Reflexes + Defense roll, with a TN of 5 x the opponent's Agility + Weapon Skill, with one Raise. If the bushi fails, the opponent's attack succeeds normally. If he succeeds, he has hit the attacker with his own weapon. The bushi rolls his Strength + weapon damage, but drops the highest die, and any armor the original wielder is wearing subtracts directly from the Wounds inflicted (e.g. -5 or -10). No further Raises may be made to increase this damage.



Note: Scorpions with Strike at the Tail may do a similar maneuver at their normal TN (Weapon Skill x 5) with three Raises.

The technique's nickname comes from the standard report given by Yasuki magistrates the morning after a brawl. ("Drunk bushi! Fell on his own katana!")

Hida's Lesson (Reflexes)

This technique allows a bushi to stop an opponent's grab by striking him. If an opponent attempts to grapple or throw the character and she has not yet acted that round, she may declare she is using Hida's Lesson, and make a reactionary roll of her Reflexes + Hand-to-Hand against the opponent's Agility x 5, doing damage and Raises normally.

In addition, if the bushi wishes to attack a target she suspects will counter with a throw (i.e. a Crab attacking a Kakita dancer who just gave a *mizu-do* demonstration), she may declare she is using Hida's Lesson and take one Raise on the attack. This raises the TN for the opponent's reactionary roll to (Reflexes + Hand-to-Hand) x 5. Such an attack does damage normally.

This technique can only be used if the bushi has empty hands or a weapon tanto-sized or smaller. If the bushi wishes to drop his larger weapon in order to do so, he may, but few Crab recommend this.

Slam the Gates (Fire)

The bushi traps the opponent's limbs to cut off future attacks, pinning the elbows or stomping on the knee or foot. This attack does no damage, but for each Raise, the bushi's opponent is at -2 to their Initiative (dropping it for that round if they have not yet gone, or the following round if they have already had their action). In addition, for each Raise, the bushi may either get a Free Raise on his next attack on that target, or add 5 to his opponent's TN to hit him that round (or next round, if the opponent has already acted).

If the bushi can attack more than once a round, he may use this technique more than once (getting a progressively better position). Bonuses or penalties are cumulative.

Example: Hida Takuan is ignoring all precepts of an honorable duel. He wins Initiative, and takes two Raises on his attack to stomp on Mirumoto Matahachi's foot and slam a hand on his arm so he can't back up or draw his sword.

The roll succeeds, dropping Matahachi's Initiative by 4 for this round (useful if Takuan has friends dishonorably helping out), and giving Takuan the choice of either getting two Free Raises on his next attack, or giving Matahachi's attacks this round a +10 TN penalty. If Matahachi had already acted, the TN penalty and -4 Initiative would have applied the following round.

Unfortunately for the Dragon, Takuan knows the Two Pincers, One Mind technique, and immediately uses the two Free Raises to try Break the Bones on Matahachi's arm.

Tear-Giving (Agility)

This technique is a secret technique, and is only taught to Crab samurai. It was invented due to a serendipitous side effect of coating weapons with jade powder and oil - one's fingertips become covered with the tears of Amaterasu. When her weapon was lost, such a bushi could still flick her fingertips out and drive them into an oni's eyes to do unhealable Wounds.

ACCUSING SOMEONE OF MAHO

So what happens when the players catch on that the helpful little old shugenja is really a blood-drinking demon-worshiper? Performing *maho* is high treason, of course, but getting such an accusation to stick against someone of high Glory is tough. In Dragon and Crab lands, where truth and *maho* are both taken seriously, any evidence of blood magic ensures a serious investigation, but elsewhere it takes finesse to avoid duels at the first hint of an accusation.

The best evidence is a high-station eyewitness, though circumstantial evidence and the word of three or more lower-ranking but honorable magistrates may do in a pinch. Often, the only way to ensure justice is to kill the sorcerer now and explain later. This is why witch-hunters without the backing of the Kuni or Isawa school frequently end up in Seikansha's shoes.

In a *maho*-centered campaign, characters must make tough choices between disposing of evil or following the law, and sometimes sparing a lesser evil to catch a greater. Not to mention sticky questions: what exactly would they do if their lord was accused of using *maho*... and they were called on to defend his honor... and the evidence they later find points to his guilt... *but* the evidence "found" by his Scorpion buddy now provides a perfect scapegoat?

You get the idea.

FULL METAL KIMONO

If you really want to give your PCs the full, wrenching Shadowlands experience, don't just send the party to the Wall – put them in command there. After they prove themselves on an oni or two, promote the characters to magistrates in charge of a squad of Hida hard cases, addicts, cowards, and the Tainted. These guys are not reasonable. Or cooperative. If the PCs ignore their problems, they get worse. They'd better clean them up before the next big push, or they're all getting implanted with oni larva.

Try these nightmare scenes:

- The siege begins, the signal fires bring no help, and the runner they sent for reinforcements hasn't returned. Who's going out alone when they need every bushi here?

- The new commander realizes he's alone on a back stairway with five Hida wearing mempo masks... the morning after his incompetence got one of their brothers killed.

- They find a recruit beaten or strangled the day after he made an honest mistake which lost the squad's jade powder, but every Hida in his barracks says "nobody saw a thing."

- A friend, love interest, or PC gets dragged off by an oni during the siege. If they abandon post right now, they could track it; otherwise they're lost forever.

If already grappling an opponent, this technique can be done with one Raise to hit one eye and two Raises to hit both.

In normal hand-to-hand, this requires two Raises for one eye, three for both eyes.

Without this technique, it is still possible to target eyes with hands or weapons, but it requires three to four Raises.

As long as the attack does at least one Wound, the opponent is in pain, adding 10 (one eye) or 20 (blinded) to all TNs for a minimum of one minute. If the target has more than two eyes, halve the penalty. Delivering more than three times a target's Stamina in Wounds destroys the eye(s) permanently for oni and human alike.

Throwing a cloud of jade powder in the eyes of Shadowlands creatures requires one or two raises on an Agility + Athletics attack and gets the same reaction, but with no actual damage.

Wearing Down the Mountain (Reflexes)

This is a secret technique, and is taught only to Crab samurai.

The bushi learns to unload a stream of short, rapid hand techniques on the opponent the moment she has a clear shot. While the target pauses in shock from one blow, she hits it again and again. The movements are too small to use with any weapon larger than a tanto. This takes two Raises, and grants an additional two dice of damage, with the following effects: It adds 10 to the TN of a target trying to use Mountain Does Not Move and does 3 Wounds to an invulnerable target rather than 1. The target also subtracts the bushi's Reflexes from his Initiative every round they are hit by such an attack.

Appendix 3: New Maho Spells

Starred spells are unique to the *maho-tsukai* in Chapter 5; others may be used by any sorcerer. The first three are elemental *maho*, a rare form usually only known to those formerly from the Isawa schools or the most privileged of Fu Leng. The rules for elemental *maho* may be found on page 93. The rest use the *maho* rules as given in the *Gamemaster Pack* and the first *Book of the Shadowlands*.

TOMB OF EARTH

Base TN: Target's Air x 5

Casting Time: 3 actions

Duration: Variable

Mastery Level/Wounds Required: 6

Concentration: None

Raises: Casting time, Number of Targets

Effect: Much like Tomb of Jade, Tomb of Earth replaces the target's Earth with the caster's own Tainted elements. If successful, the spell turns a target to stone, starting on the outside (i.e. armor, then clothing, then flesh). Every turn, the target must make a contested Air roll against the *maho-tsukai*'s Earth or suffer DR 2. The spell ends when

the target dies (becoming a statue) or the first time the target succeeds in her Air roll. The stone remains for the next 1-10 days before crumbling to dust.

Because of the blood sacrifice, Tomb of Earth does not weaken the caster like Tomb of Jade.

NO PURE BREATHS

Base TN: Target's Earth x 5

Casting Time: 2 actions

Duration: Instantaneous

Mastery Level/Wounds Required: 5

Concentration: None

Raises: Damage, Casting time, Number of targets

Effect: The caster summons the Air within a target and forces it out, like popping a paper bag. At its most successful, the target literally explodes; more often the spell simply ruptures lungs and stomachs, causing internal bleeding.

The spell has a base DR of the caster's Shadowlands Rank. The target receives a +10 TN penalty until magically healed, from the pain of breathing corrupted air.



FULL METAL KIMONO (CONTINUED)

• Scouting in the Shadowlands when a blood eel cripples somebody's ankle. An akutenshi sniffs and the Moto fan out, searching for the sobbing victim. How do they shut up the guy in pain?

• A crippled, Tainted bushi is bleeding all over the place, screaming for help, but no one wants to touch him, fearing infection.

• A cowardly bushi who doesn't want to die because he has a family and life away from the Wall comes up for performance review. What do they say to his daimyo?

• A samurai-ko comes to our trusty Scorpion and tells him she needs a mild poison. She's with child, and unless she does something now, her shame will soon be evident. She's a good bushi and mediator, and to cast her out, take her off duty, or demand *seppuku* would be quite a loss.

• One of the best fighters is Tainted, and his rages are getting uncontrollable. He's gaining Taint at two points a week. When do they interfere?

• Alas, poor yoriki: the scouting or rescue mission where they arrive at the oni fortress too late. Here's Otsu, now a paralyzed incubator for oni eggs...here's the skull of old snaggle-toothed Takezo...and here's Koetsu, now with his new Moto friends.

WARD OF THE EIGHTH KAMI

Base TN: 10

Casting Time: 5 actions

Duration: See below

Mastery Level/Wounds Required: 6

Concentration: None

Raises: Area of Effect, Damage, Duration (see below)

Effect: This spell takes the form of cold blue fire encasing a location (radius of ten yards per *maho-tsukai* in the ritual). This fire has a DR equal to the highest Shadowlands Rank of the participating *maho-tsukai*. The spell lasts for twenty-four hours, plus one year for every person killed in the casting.

The spell is triggered by armed or hostile opponents, and can be bypassed by walking through without weapons, armor, or aggressive thoughts. Keeping one's mind blank enough to fool the spirits takes a Void + Meditation roll with a TN of 5 x the Shadowlands Rank of the ward's caster.

DANCING WITH DEMONS

Base TN: 5 x cost of Advantage

Casting Time: 1 hour

Duration: Permanent

Mastery Level/Wounds Required: 8

Concentration: Total

Raises: None

Effect: The *maho-tsukai* enters a complex dance with the *kansen* summoned by this spell, increasing the tempo until her body is re-forged by the fires of Jigoku. The caster must make an Awareness + Dance roll at the same TN as the spell-casting TN to cast this spell.

If successful, the caster can permanently gain any personal physical or mental Advantage affecting them alone. For example, they could gain Dangerous Beauty or Magic Resistance, but not an Ancestor, Kharmic Tie, or Social Position. Failure in summoning or dancing means the *maho-tsukai* burns horribly, taking 1k1 Wounds for every point of Advantages sought.

The spell can also grant Advantages to other willing, present targets. In this case, the Taint is divided between caster and target.

A variant of this spell allows the caster to instead convey a like Disadvantage on an unwitting victim. The *maho-tsukai* must be within one mile of the target and have one of the target's personal possessions to offer the *kansen*.

SINFUL DREAMS

Base TN: 5 x target's Awareness

Casting Time: 5 rounds

Duration: 1 hour

Mastery Level/Wounds Required: 4

Concentration: Total

Raises: Duration, Effect, Intensity

Effect: The caster sends herself into the target's dreams, creating pleasant fantasies and awakening a deep longing for her. She receives one Free Raise to her next Seduction attempt on that character plus one per Raise during casting, or half that number of Free Raises for any other social interaction with the target. These Raises can be "stacked" over a number of nights of casting, up to a maximum of the caster's Awareness.

People under the effects of this spell often walk and talk in their sleep, acting out portions of the dream. This can be inconvenient for samurai sharing rooms.

TRUTH IS A SCOURGE

Base TN: 5 x Target's Air

Casting Time: 4 actions

Duration: 1 hour

Mastery Level/Wounds Required: 4

Concentration: None

Raises: Duration, Casting Time, Number of targets

Effect: This spell forces the target to say *exactly* what is on his mind. About everything. For the duration of the spell. The character narrates his every thought, be it about his painful itch, his fantasies about the daimyo's wife, the memory of an old murder, or the out-of-character snappy comeback a player always has ready but never utters. While this may be comedic at first, in Rokugan it will often get a samurai killed. The spell lasts one hour, plus ten minutes per Raise. It takes two Raises to affect each additional target.

DARK CHARISMA

Base TN: 10

Casting Time: 3 actions

Duration: Shadowlands Rank in hours

Mastery Level/Wounds Required: 5

Concentration: None

Raises: Duration, Casting Time

Effect: The caster can roll and keep an additional number of dice equal to her Shadowlands Rank for any social interaction. Each raise increases the duration of the

spell by a half hour. Characters with Honor higher than the caster's Shadowlands Rank may roll Honor against a TN of 5 x the caster's Taint the first time this spell is used. If they succeed, they are unaffected, and the caster keeps one fewer die in all future social interactions with that character.

* **GIFT OF THE KANSEN**

Base TN: 5 x Mastery of Spell

Casting Time: 1 hour

Duration: See Below

Mastery Level/Wounds Required: 6

Concentration: Total

Raises: Spell effect

Effect: Gift of the Kansen essentially traps another spell inside a gift box, holding it inactive until the box is opened, at which time the spell takes effect on the opener.

Raises increase the trapped spell's results. For example, if preparing a gift of The Fury of Osano-Wo, the caster would have to roll a base target number of 25; for every +5 to the TN, he can increase the spell's damage as usual. The spells can remain trapped for an indefinite amount of time, and are only released by opening the gift box.

Once released, roll for spell effect normally, using the caster's Traits and rank, but the spell takes effect instantaneously. No Raises can be made at this time.

* **WARD OF DIVINE PEACE**

Base TN: 20

Casting Time: 1 hour

Duration: Two days

Mastery Level/Wounds Required: 7

Concentration: None

Raises: Area of effect

Effect: This spell creates a sphere with a diameter of ten yards per participant in the ritual. Each Raise adds an additional two yards. Everyone other than the casters who enters the area of effect is overcome by a sense of peace and well-being. In game terms, they roll one fewer die in all rolls that require a sense of paranoia (primarily Perception- and Reflexes-based rolls).

The spell lasts for two days from a single exposure. Additional exposures increase the duration and have a cumulative effect (e.g. someone walking in and out twice will subtract 2 points for four days; if they walk in again, it will be 3 points for six days). Constantly exposed people pay little attention to anything after a few weeks. People who lose



more than five times their Perception from their rolls become extremely suggestible, easy to manipulate, and useful to an evil cult.

Attempting to sense the Taint of this spell is at double normal difficulty.

HEAVEN HAS NO JUSTICE

Base TN: Target's Honor x 5

Casting Time: 5 rounds

Duration: Caster's Taint Rank in hours

Mastery Level/Wounds Required: 4

Concentration: None

Raises: Casting Time, Duration, Number of targets

Effect: The *maho-tsukai* realizes only idiots believe in karmic order, and uses the foolish beliefs of others to manipulate them. He increases a mental Trait of his choosing when interacting with a target, gaining an additional number of dice to roll and keep equal to the target's Honor. This lasts for a number of hours equal to his Taint Rank, plus ten minutes per Raise.

Appendix 4: Horror Roleplaying in Rokugan

So, you've got those Author and Storyteller hats on and you're setting up all these monstrous creatures to torment your PCs and bring them to that pitch of feverish terror like in the best horror stories, right? Good start, but you can't stop at reminding people of stories they've already seen, even if they loved them the first time. You need to know why those stories worked and how to replicate the feelings they created, and better, exceed them. In a roleplaying game, the horror is personal and all the more memorable for it.

However, two common problems can get in your way before your campaign gets up to speed: it stops being horror, or it stops being roleplaying. Watch out for both.

CREATING DREAD

Okay, you've turned down the lights, you have your full-sensory descriptions down pat, you've got disgusting demons that can shred characters like their sheets, and the samurai are dashing around trying frantically to figure out some way to kill it as its minions rise everywhere. Finally, they hit upon the one bit of ancient knowledge that can stop the rift from opening and draw their blades...

You've created an action movie.

What you want is horror.

The stereotypical idea of a "horror movie" these days, the slasher film, does not cut it except at a very basic level. If you're twelve years old and used to situation comedies, watching cheerleaders get hacked up in slasher films can be pretty scary, because it runs counter to your expectations. This sense of reversal is what's frightening.

Take the success of the shower scene in the original horror flick, *Psycho*. Simply put, audiences loved it. They were shocked and amazed. Why?

It wasn't because there was a dead body on screen. People got shot in westerns and war movies all the time. But before *Psycho*, people didn't die in cold blood in movies. They died because they were evil, or because a tragic flaw kept them fighting in an unwinnable situation, or because they were making a climactic, heroic sacrifice.

Death sure as hell didn't happen to a defenseless naked woman 45 minutes into a two-hour movie, *especially* not when she's the protagonist.

The audience sat there, watching Marion Crane remain blissfully unaware of her impending doom...and kept waiting for a John Wayne rescue, because back then, that's how movies worked. But they had the terrible feeling that this time, *Psycho* was actually gonna go through with it. And when she died, they knew they had no idea what would happen for the rest of the show.

That's when they're hooked. The reversal. One minute, they're someplace familiar, and the next, they realize that's not where they were at all, and now they're trapped in the middle of the unknown with no idea what's coming next. *That's* frightening.

"But wait," you say, "didn't the first *Book of the Shadowlands* say to create looming dread by letting the samurai know all about the enemy?" Yes. If the PCs don't know the Shadowlands are dangerous, they don't get scared until it's too late and they're dead. But fear of known and unknown go together in horror, like hard and soft

techniques in martial arts. You need to mix them to do it well.

Knowledge is power; the unknown creates the fear of being powerless. However, simply taking power away from your players is cruel and arbitrary, and they'll react by going out of character rather than suffering through what you have planned. The best horror comes from allowing them to think they have control, and letting *them* make the decisions that take them into your trap. Only once inside do they realize that they didn't have critical information...but now it's too late to back out.

Don't start them off with an assignment to track down a monster; that gives the game away and makes it a mystery or a battle. Instead, start with the opposite. Take them to court for a few sessions. Have them play around with romance and chivalry and secrets and they will develop outrageously stupid habits. Like walking alone at night with an NPC who says she needs to talk.

In a horror campaign, this is stupid.

But they don't know they're in a horror campaign...do they?

No, tonight the samurai is out walking in beautiful Rokugan. He's with his mother, talking about his future and how he liked the sumo match at lunch and his plans about getting married and the rough choice between the girl who loves him and the girl who'll bring him more Glory and *then* he sees the mouth on the back of her neck.

Now you let him roll Shadowlands Lore. Now that he's had the heart-stopping moment of powerlessness, you tell him exactly what he's up against.

He's alone. On a dark road. Chatting with an invulnerable oni that preys on lone travelers and eats their hearts. And the second it suspects he knows its true nature, it's going to come down to the dice and he will die. Not like a Kurosawa hero, but like a cheerleader who gets gutted before the opening credits.

Fear of the known.





But maybe, just maybe, it's only maintaining its cover. Maybe he can keep it talking until there's a cluttered street he can run down, but what he knows he *doesn't* know is how fast this thing can run. Nobody wrote that down in the Crab manual.

Now you start getting intense. All those gamemastering tricks for running combat smoothly, like counting down from ten and roleplaying in real time, you apply here. Horror is in the details. Shut out the distractions and take everything he says seriously.

Then he sees his lady love up ahead, and she waves and comes over... completely fooled. And they start chatting on this lightless, lonely road, a half mile from the guardposts burning signal fires in the distance. The Yamauba, always polite, asks him if she can have a word with his darling privately... about how soon she'll be wearing red.

What does he say?

That's horror.

HORROR ON THE WALL

"Okay," you say, "but how do I work that on the Kaiu Kabe? My Crabs sleep in armor, in closets, with one foot propped against the door, powdered wakizashi drawn." For smash-em-up oni, there's a simple suspense trick that works great: describe signs of what is to come exactly as their characters find out, with no extra information, no matter how critical. What was the scariest part of Jurassic Park? Not the tyrannosaur chasing the other dinosaurs around in broad daylight. Sure, it was the size of a truck and could smash things, but the real horror was in anticipation: watching those puddles vibrate and hearing the THOOM far off in the distance. And another one. THOOM. You knew it was getting closer. You knew what a human's chances were against thirty-five tons of hungry reptile.

But you'd never seen it before.

And you didn't know where it was.

Same thing with monsters running loose in the catacombs beneath the wall. Sure, maybe the heroes have a map that lets them know where the traps are, but can they still read it after their burning lamp oil gets knocked onto it? One second of inattention and THUMP. They're not dead...but they will be soon unless they come up with a plan.

For more long-term horror, samurai and players can get pretty jaded within a couple game sessions. How scary is an oni, after all, if they're constantly prepared for death, get threatened with *seppuku* twice a day, and believe they'll be reincarnated no matter what happens?

And that's fine. Good samurai don't fear death. They fear *failure*.

On the Wall, a samurai's duty is clear...but not clear. They have to be right about every snap decision they make, or someone else dies, or is Tainted, or is driven mad. Even a squad of Rank 1 ponies consigned to the catacombs have a rough decision when the tunnel collapses and five ogres run one way and four run another. If our heroes split up, their chances are low...but one pack's going for the jade powder bucket squad and one's going for the unarmored heimin. And a wave of oni is coming right here, right now. Maybe invulnerable. Maybe not. What do they pick?

Life at the Wall is the Rokugani equivalent of the American intervention in Vietnam. Characters must be constantly alert, fight in ways they were never trained to deal with, commit and witness atrocities on a daily basis and when they return home again, they are shunned for what they have done. It is grim, disgusting, and far more horrific than any little "horror" movie could be. And it's lasted a thousand years.

TEMPTATION TO THE DARK SIDE

In many stories about Good and Evil, the most intense moments are where the heroine is almost tempted to go the wrong way, or a lost soul who served evil finally redeems himself. *L5R* is no different.

A real victory for Fu Leng is not another corpse to keep the oni fed, but a samurai who joins him. But while it's easy to come up with a hundred reasons an NPC gets tempted to the dark side, players are quick to resist. If the players know the GM is trying to tempt them, they'll dig in their heels or have their character provoke a confrontation, and that's usually the end of it. After all, it's only their characters, not them, who get the benefit if they give in, or take the pain if they resist.

Again, *if* the players know.

Though oni and *maho-tsukai* are incorrigibly evil, they don't have to appear that way at first. Fu Leng's minions use many strategies of the Scorpion Clan. They're helpful. They're wonderful. They let the characters get away with what they've always wanted but their sensei, daimyo, and society

told them not to have. They'll sit alone with them. They'll touch them. They'll be honest as a Crab, admit little shames and joke, because their purpose is to distract samurai from the world of right and wrong.

They can be anyone. Merchants. Sensei. Your daimyo. Emerald Magistrates. The Inquisitors testing our heroes for Taint. And what they can offer is spectacular. Look at the Dancing with Demons spell, above. How many times have your players wished for more Advantages? Or secretly thought, "Ooh, I wish that Kachiko trollop would wake up one day with Can't Lie, Gullible, and Chemical Dependency. Dishonor *my* lord, will she?"

Really, it's not selling out. It's buying in.

Still, PCs can be pretty wary of anyone offering help, so you have to vary the timing of the delivery. Start off with something unrelated.

Say there's a charming and independent shugenja the PC has been courting through all sorts of *Romeo and Juliet* tribulations. At last, she says to hell with her Clan, she'll defect to his. She'll become a ronin and do his clan a great service – showing up on his doorstep with her family *nemuranai*, the plans to her castle, and evidence for the Imperials that her family (that not three days ago he was trying to impress) has been using *maho* for generations. She



tells her tale of woe and horrible noises she heard in the night as a young girl. The two of them are determined to lead his family to war against hers as soon as the Emperor approves the order.

He tries to get her out of the castle before the battle. It goes wrong and they're attacked as they're escaping. While he's carving through the evil bushi, *she* uses *maho*.

To kill her family.

For him.

It's okay, right? It's the last time she'll ever use it, she promises, and it was only to banish oni and kill people Tainted far worse. She has the Purification spell and she'll drink her tea. And she loves him. Who couldn't love such a dedicated wife in return?

Jason, for one. The PC has just married Medea.

MADNESS, HUMILIATION AND DEGENERATION

Be warned. When you try your hardest to make a campaign horrific, you very often succeed. And here's where you might run into that "forget it's roleplaying" problem, because if it gets uncomfortably intense, one player reaction is to shut off, pull back, and remind themselves "it's just a game." Often that is good, because staying in character through scenes of torture and violation can be a lot more traumatic than fun.

So be careful. And tasteful.

While nothing characterizes bad guys in a book or movie quite like an intense torture scene, it's a lot nastier when it's your alter-ego on the rack. And fighting the Shadowlands is a lifelong torture scene. Even one comical little goblin changes demeanor if it gets into the nursery with a sharp tanto.

Before using Shadowlands creatures, think. Most of them are more than big stats. They're disturbing creatures of evil which go after the characters' peasants, lord, beloved, sensei, Honor, kids, horse, body, and soul. Watch the players carefully. Some nights, the R rating works, and some nights it doesn't. If a player gets uncomfortable, *stop*.

One thing to remember for horror campaigns more than any other: mediocre players, or even good ones who are having an "off night", may *not* rise to the occasion and overcome the incredible odds you've set for them. In a Shadowlands campaign, this can end up with characters dead, Tainted, implanted with oni eggs or worse.

And yes, the players want to be scared, and want to have stories to tell of the revolting demons they fought and the strings their lives were hanging by... but they don't really want their characters to die or get driven mad or be coughing up peanut-butter-like phlegm for the rest of their life. They don't wanna go to the Kaiu Wall, because... well, because you told them nobody wants to go to the Kaiu Wall.

And, sheep or samurai, they're your players.

So you can tone it down by going out-of-character, remembering it's a game, and getting campy. That works, but it's hard to get back the suspense once the discomfort is gone.

So try it Rokugani style. Like Musashi said, "there is imitation (or infection) in everything." If one player gets in a bad mood, you can watch helplessly while it spreads, or you can try to change it. Take the unhappy or out-of-character player away from the group for a five-minute serious conversation with an NPC, and they'll snap into character faster than four hours of casual game time.

Remind them that the reason they're suffering is that they're the protagonist. And they're resilient like a protagonist. They are on-duty. Even if they're courtier cast-offs, they're still samurai, right? They have an important job: keep the bushi sane.

Bring in tons of likable, human NPCs. Show them who they're fighting for. Even at the Wall, you can have all the faces of Rokugan: commanders, sensei, spunky Hida sidekicks, a few inevitable jerks, the distant, eloquent Kuni they go to with their problems, the awkward ponies new to battle.

Now kill them whenever the players aren't vigilant. Slather them with Taint, but have them survive and bunk next to the player characters. Drive them mad while the players watch. Nothing shakes up samurai like finding their last unTainted Hida berserker hanging from the ceiling by his own obi with a note saying he couldn't take it anymore.

But the heroes, they're made of stronger stuff.

Aren't they?



Bearers of Jade™

In the contaminated wastes of the Shadowlands, the nightmares of samurai come to unholy life. More dangers lie here than the Crab dare describe: fields grown of human hair, corpses of demons a thousand feet tall, and oni who hurl scars like spittle. Two-headed sharks swim the waters while rolling cages of bone race the demon horses of the undead Moto family.

And they do not stop at the Kaiu Wall.

Within these pages is the work of the wanderer Seikansha, whose life was rent asunder by servants of Fu Leng hidden within the very heart of Rokugan. He knows the viscera sucker that might be your bride, the forbidden teachings of bushi damned by the Emperor, and the oni who snatch spirits away from their bodies. Collecting letters, confessions, orders, and accusations from all the Clans of the Emerald Empire, Seikansha shows where the most terrifying evil waits... right beside you.

No one is safe.

Not even the bearers of jade.

The second Book of the Shadowlands has what you need to sustain a Shadowlands campaign with the most battle-hardened bushi, including:

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